Growth of Religious Extremism in Pakistan: Implications for State and Society (1980-2020)

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Headings

Abstract   *This paper investigates the major trends and developments that are considered responsible for the rise of religious militancy in Pakistan. It also analyzes the impacts of this phenomenon. The research focuses on investigating the causes of its expansion and intensity in the recent past and how it has affected the society and state because religious extremism and religiously motivated violence has emerged as a serious challenge for the security and stability of Pakistan. The study is descriptive, and the mode of inquiry is qualitative though supplemented by quantitative data in the form of tables and graphs. Major findings suggest that wave after wave of violent religious extremism has grave domestic implications. The domestic implications range from social problems to economic and political issues. It is observed that growth in religious extremism and subsequent militancy at the domestic level can't be de-hyphenated from the foreign relations of Pakistan, especially with its immediate neighbors like India, Afghanistan and Iran, as well as major powers like China and the U.S.*

Introduction

Religious extremism and consequent violence have been ascending for the last few decades in Pakistan. The trend has especially been on rising in the first decade of the 21st century, featured by Intra-Muslim and inter-religious violence. The former mostly includes Sunni-Shia conflicts, while the latter has been characterized by violence against minorities like Christians, Ahmadis and Hindus (Talbot. 2007:147). This paper attempts to explore the evolution and growth of the said phenomenon in Pakistan. The latter part is intended to assess the effects and implications of religious extremism for the state and society. It also highlights various regional and extra-regional dimensions and implications as well.

Theoretical Perspective: Religious Extremism, Violence and Terrorism

Extremism is not something exclusive to religious beliefs and practices neither is violence as an outcome of lack of balance and tolerance in general. Religious extremism and religiously motivated violence, however, have come forth as serious challenges for human rights as well as the peace and security of the world.

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Similarly, Islam has not been the only religion on earth with individuals or groups having extremist or violent tendencies. The extremist groups may be found in various religious communities. Just like the case in Muslim communities, such extremist elements might have support among the masses and/or disliked/discouraged simultaneously. What has become alarming in various Muslim and non-Muslim countries is the mounting rate, support and activities of religious extremists among Muslims folks. Unfortunately, in recent years, the extremism in certain elements associated with Islam has grown in manifestation, practice, scope and magnitude. The religious extremists often perceive the use of violence as quite justified either as a service to God or their beliefs or for the protection and promotion of their particular ideology (Berman, E., & Iannaccone, 2005: 2)

The History and Evolution of Religious Extremism during the pre-partition era

Communal violence in Pakistan (and India) is not something nascent. Its roots can be traced back to the colonial era, too, during which various factors played a role in the widening of communal rifts and politicization of religion(s). However, it had been Hindu-Muslim most of the time and Muslim-Sikh towards the partition of the subcontinent. Muslim-Christian clashes, generally, had not been frequent. The sectarian clashes between Shia and Sunni Muslim groups were also negligible; evidences suggest a sort of ideological conflict with the Qadianis (called themselves as Ahmadis) community (Kamran, T., and 2015:4). The freedom movement run by Muslim League is often stated to have religious dimensions (along with political, economic or social). The (All India Muslim) League claimed to represent the Muslims of India vis-à-vis All India Congress claiming for representation of 'people of India'. Some scholars, however, do not deem that movement to be religious or communal for many reasons, primarily for being led by Jinnah, who would not fit into the ideal representative-cum-leader vision of a religious group (Murphy & Malik, 2009: 22-23). During the struggle for a separate state and later during the time of partition, many of the religious groups opposed Mr. Jinnah and the creation of Pakistan. (Javaid, 2011: 11)

The Post-Partition Growth of Religious Extremism and Violence

Ironically, religious intolerance became the outlook of the very state that came into being as a response to the often-stated oppression of a religious minority at the hands of a dominant majority and colonial rulers. The progressive and modern persona of the founding father could not keep Pakistan from becoming a religiously intolerant society (and state) in the coming decades. The proliferation of religious fundamentalism and violent extremism is often attributed to the growth of thousands of Madrasas and the Jihadi literature they have been yielding consistently across the years (Mani, 2019). This, however, does represent only one aspect of the multifaceted mechanism of religious intolerance and related violence.

The Objective Resolution of 1949 important for opening up the room for Islamization in the country, which later on contributed to sharpening the communal differences in the society. The Anti-Ahmadia riots of 1953 in Lahore came forth as the first noticeable manifestation of the religious divide in Pakistan. (Riffat, 2015:74). Later on, during Z. A. Bhutto's government constitutional declaration of Qadianis as non-Muslims set the pace for upcoming decades. Various policies and steps taken adopted during Zia's era played an important role in taking the country to another level of religious extremism, sectarianism and violence (Murphy & Malik, 2009: 24). Zia's process of Islamization, often described as a move to consolidate power, proved to be a blow to the cherished progressive vision of the founders of Pakistan (in the longer run). It led to far-reaching effects for religious minorities as well as contributing towards the growth of religious extremism (Malik, 2002:24-6).

While domestic factors fueled the religious extremism, the Afghan war and the Iranian revolution added regional dimensions to the communal and sectarian violence in Pakistan. This not only resulted in the sharpening of boundaries between various sects within Islam but also led to growing Saudi and Irani influences among Sunni and Shia communities in Pakistan, ranging from sympathies and support to funding

and financing. (Awan & Zain, 2012:517). The Afghan war not only had political, economic and strategic implications for Pakistan, but it also impacted Pakistani society and the social fabric in an unprecedented way. Pakistan's engagement with the Anti-Soviet resistance offered a significant role to/for the religious groups in the domestic as well as foreign affairs of the country; the influx of financial assistance and weapons further empowered them. They also got the opportunity to strengthen their influence home and abroad. In addition, the camps for Saudi and American-supported 'Mujahedeen' in Afghanistan and Pakistan equipped them with the necessary training as well. The cumulative effect of all of these factors resulted in the advent of influential armed groups representing various religious sects. Some of these focused on violent activities within Pakistan as well as within the region. Noticeable examples included (but not limited to) Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and other militant organizations like Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Harkat-ul-Ansar (renamed as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and some sectarian militant groups such as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) etc. Similarly, the Sunni extremism in Pakistan can also be associated with the ascent of the Afghan Taliban to power because they shared a similar legacy of Sunni orthodoxy and hostility towards Shias (and others). Hence, militarization and violence in Afghanistan led to extremism and terrorism in Pakistan as well as the entire South Asian region (Talbot, 2007: 151-4).

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 added to the insecurities of Sunni extremists. It also inspired certain Pakistani Shia groups to opt for the more pro-active role, often coming into clashes with Sunni groups for the sake of influence, power and representation (Yusuf, 2012:3). Pakistan, during the 1980s and 1990s, witnessed some of the worst cases of sectarian conflicts and violence (Firdous, 2009:113). The Sunni and Shia militants groups became involved in targeting and murdering activists of each other (Rais, 2004:14). The trend was revolutionized at the dawn of the new millennium.

Post-9/11 Trends: A Review

9/11 and the subsequent war against terror has marked not only a new era in the history of global politics but also had far-reaching implications and effects on the local religious, social and political terrain in Pakistan. Considering the regional and global politico-strategic calculations, Pakistan decided to support the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism and facilitated NATO's operations in Afghanistan. This policy unleashed a storm of antagonism from the militants inside (and outside) Pakistan, who in turn accelerated the violent and terrorist activities. They did not confine their attacks to the security personals; government institutions and installations, masses and other soft targets were also being attacked frequently and repeatedly. Minorities, especially Christians, along with their Churches, became more vulnerable. Other targets included NGOs, Consulates, missionary schools, hospitals and hotels. The number of terrorist attacks on media persons, foreigners, in particular, kept on growing. The killing of Wall Street Journalist Daniel Pearl became a highlight. (Talbot, 2007:157) The foreign citizens in Pakistan, other than the media persons, were also being hit. Notable examples were the ones killed in attacks on a Church in Islamabad's diplomatic enclave and French engineers in Karachi, showing the organized activities and power that the militant groups had.

The counter-terrorism policy of Pakistan included ban and security operations against several militant outlets (e.g., Jaish-i-Mohammad, Sipha-i-Sahaba, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-ShariatMohammadi, Tehrik-i-FiqaJafriya, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Sipha Mohammad, and Harkat-ul-Mujahedin) (Firdous, 2009: 116). Despite such measures, TTP managed to exhibit itself as the major internal threat to Pakistan during the first two decades of the new millennium. (Abbasi, 2013:44)

Religious extremism in Pakistan took another shift in the second decade of the new millennium with the emergence of a new strand; the Bravelvi extremism. Previously, Brevilvis (a variant of Sufi Islam in South Asia) were considered as the moderate ones among Sunni Muslims. The Bravelvi extremism became noticeable with the ascent of Tehreek e Labaik to prominence in 2017. Initially, the leader of Tehreek gained popularity after the hanging of Mumtaz Qadri, who had gunned down the then Governor of Punjab in an alleged Blasphemy case in 2010. The group not only registered its power through violent sit-in(s) in

the capital territory but further promoted the prospects of using religious cards as leverage to incite masses for violence and to pressurize governments.

Implications at the National Level

The growing trend of religious extremism has resulted in serious implications for Pakistan. These range from political to social and economical and can be listed among the domestic sources of instability, problems of law and order, social unrest and anxiety and have been linked to further politicization of Islam or Islamization of politics.

Human Cost of Violent Extremism

The highest cost, undoubtedly, has been the human loss, attacks, killings and injuries. Religious issues and religiously motivated acts of violence and terror have been among the key sources behind humanitarian losses in the history of Pakistan.

Table 1. Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: 2002-2013 Year

Year	No. of incidents	Killed	Injured
2002	63	121	257
2003	22	102	103
2004	19	187	619
2005	62	160	354
2006	38	201	495
2007	80	521	757
2008	79	842	654
2009	152	446	587
2010	152	663	1,569
2011	139	397	626
2012	213	563	900
2013	74	421	551
Total	1,093	4,624	7,472

Source: PIPS security reports, South Asian Terrorism Portal, Data from National Crisis Management Cell (NCMC), Ministry of Interior

Terrorist attacks on public gatherings, schools, mosques and churches, government installations and organizations have killed more than fifty thousand people in Pakistan. Terrorist groups managed to hit many important places across the country ranging from Federal Investigation Agency's Lahore office, the Naval War College in Lahore, the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, the Wah Ordnance Factory, a police training school, the GHQ Rawalpindi and the Navy's Mehran base in Karachi. They have been serious harm in terms of causalities, injuries and displacement of thousands of people (Abbasi, 2013:44).

Table 2. Human Loss in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan (2002-2013) Year

Year	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
2002	56	102	311
2003	88	189	168
2004	159	863	412
2005	254	216	571
2006	675	907	1,543
2007	1,503	3,448	5,353

Year	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
2008	2,577	7,997	9,670
2009	3,816	12,632	12,815
2010	3,393	10,003	10,283
2011	2,985	7,107	6,736
2012	2,217	5,047	5,688
2013	911	4160	3,794
Total	18,634	52,671	57,344

(Source: PIPS security reports, South Asian Terrorism Portal, Data from National Crisis Management Cell (NCMC), Ministry of Interior, Government of Pakistan.

Shrinking Space for Minorities

Christians have been increasingly subjected to discrimination and violence in Pakistan. Apart from other cases, the Blasphemy issue alone has been responsible for targeting numerous Christians and Churches; a notable incident was the Khanewal Church attack and demolition in 1997. In a major series of backlash, nearly 1300 Churches, 700 households and a number of shops and other properties were destroyed by a mob, injuring and killing several as well (Malik, 2002: 26).

Musharaf's alleged pro-West policies and NATO operations in Afghanistan especially made Pakistani Christians more vulnerable to be attacked by militant outlets at one end. While on the other end, the use (or abuse) of Blasphemy charges against Christians have grown in practice either to settle individual grievances and disputes or to persecute them out of sheer hatred. Consequently, dozens of Christians have been arrested, charged, and sentenced in the recent past. Several others were attacked, injured or even killed (Mazna, 2017:11-12). In a high-profile case, even a Muslim politician, then-Governor of Punjab province, Salman Taseer, was murdered by his own gunman in 2010. Taseer was sympathizing and supporting Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, charged with blasphemy; hence, his support cost him his life.

Another religious minority, Hindus, have been suffering as well As if the bitter memories of partition were not enough to incite hatred or grievances against Hundues in Pakistani society, Pak-India rivalry and conflicts have been a major reason behind anti-Hindu sentiments in Pakistan (and of course anti-Muslim cause in India). Many cases of alleged forcible conversions, kidnapping of Hindu girls and property had been highlighted by human rights activists (Malik, 2002:24). Some sources allegedly reported that 20-25 Hindu girls are kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam almost every month. Another problem for the Hindu community is the abduction for ransom. Hindu traders have been abducted for ransom, and the trend has been ascending. Pitnaber Sewani, a minority MPA from Sindh, reportedly stated that during the span of two years, around 29 men from only Kandkhot (District of Sindh) area had been kidnapped". Forced migrations are yet another violation that Hindus have been facing in Pakistan. At the time of partition, Hindus are estimated to make up to 15% of the total population of Pakistan that has dropped to merely 2% in the second decade of the 20th century (Hadi, 2015:13).

Political Implications

Religion was one of the key factors behind the quest for Pakistan; not the sole one, though. Soon after the independence, the religious groups allegedly 'high jacked' both the history as well as the future of the country. It started to overshadow the vision of the founding father about liberal, progressive, democratic Pakistan. The politicization of Islam or Islamization of politics not only brought many of the religious groups into the mainstream politics but it made them so powerful that most of the democratic governments (e.g., Bhutto's) were compelled to appease them (M. Azam, 2014:144). It has been a key source behind political instability in Pakistan (Hussain, 2008:14). In the long run, the environment encouraged an unseen but critical role of extremist groups in issues related to security policies, foreign policy and international relations.

Pakistan's Afghanistan, India, and Kashmir policies are notable examples where successive democratic governments have failed to exercise any influence (Gregory, 2015:19). The democratic governments have even been compelled by religious groups to refrain from amending the notorious laws supporting the marginalization of minorities or promoting extremism in Muslims (Taj,2011:59).

Economic Cost

The rise of militancy responded with the military operations after 9/11 brought a serious blow to the economic activities in Pakistan. Despite receiving substantial foreign aid for its engagement in the war on terror, Pakistan merely got a temporary economic bubble that collapsed as soon as the assistance dried out. On the contrary, the loss of infrastructure, lack of secure environment for local or foreign business activities, the cost of operations and others put Pakistan at an obvious disadvantage. The cumulative cost of the war on terror from 2001-2002 to 2010-2011 has been estimated to be $ 67.9 billion (Khalid. A., 2020:411). Major areas of impact including but not limited to the increased cost of maintaining law and order, IDPs and refugees, flight of capital and investment and decrease in exports. Key sectors that suffered the blow range from agriculture and manufacturing to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and tourism (Arshad, 2010).
Table(s) 4 &5

Table 3. Summary of Losses Due to Terrorist Attacks (US$ Million)

S. No	Organization	Year		Total
		2015-16	2016-17	
1	Exports	0.503	-	0.503
2	Compensation to Affectees	13.82	8.06	21.88
3	Physical Infrastructure	777.83	150.92	928.75
4	Foreign Investment	1437.20	559.10	1996.30
5	Privatization	24.15	238.58	262.73
6	Industrial Output	17.49	11.89	29.38
7	Tax Collection	34440.00	2480.00	5920.00
8	Cost of Uncertainty	7.78	7.04	14.82
9	Expenditure Over run	768.58	428.53	1197.11
10	Others	1.15	0.75	1.90
Total		6,488.50	3,884.86	10,373.36

: Estimated on the basis of 9 Months data (July-March)
Source: M/o Finance, M/o Commerce, M/o Foreign Affairs, Joint Ministerial Group

Table 4. Estimated Losses (2001-2017)

Years	Billion $	Billion Rs.	% Change
2001-02	2.67	163.90	-
2002-03	2.75	160.80	3.0
2003-04	2.93	168.80	6.7
2004-05	3.41	202.40	16.3
2005-06	3.99	238.60	16.9
2006-07	4.67	283.20	17.2
2007-08	6.94	434.10	48.6
2008-09	9.18	720.60	32.3
2009-10	13.56	1136.40	47.7
2010-11	23.77	2037.33	75.3

Years	Billion $	Billion Rs.	% Change
2011-12	11.98	1052.77	-49.6
2012-13	9.97	964.24	-16.8
2013-14	7.70	791.52	-22.8
2014-15	9.24	936.30	20.0
2015-16	6.49	675.76	-29.8
2016-17	3.88	407.21	-40.2
Total	123.13	10,373.93	-

Pakistan was put in the grey list of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) from 2012-15 and then again in 2018 on suspicions of funding to/in Pakistan for militant and terrorist activities (Mukhtar, 2019:44-5). It will only increase Pakistan's economic problems since transactions and business with Pakistan would be going through strict scrutiny and observations that will discourage the trade activity.

Implications for Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Relations

Besides domestic turmoil and damage, religious extremism, militancy, and terrorism have been the key challenge for Pakistan's relations within the region and internationally. Some of the challenges and problems can be listed as follows.

The Global Image and International Standing

For years now, Pakistan has been considered among the states with serious security issues from within. Militancy and terrorism have long been the key factor in undermining the countary's image at the regional and global level. Despite losing the lives of thousands of its citizens, economic and infrastructure loss and increased expenditures on security, Pakistan has not been successful at convincing the world of the sacrifices in the war against terrorism. It has been alleged for having safe havens for militants who are capable of operation across the region, especially in India and Afghanistan. (Malik, 2013:47). Similarly, many of the militant organizations operating against India and responsible for attacks on Indian have been reported to be 'led, manned, and financed by native Pakistanis' (Tellis,2008:5). The militant activities, even after military operations to curb terrorism, have put questions on the credibility of counter-terrorism strategy. Some key incidents highlighted on international media included attacks near Danish Embassy in Islamabad. The killing of Alqaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan by the American forces in 2011 demonized Pakistan's image and fueled many controversies vis-à-vis the intentions and role of Pakistan in curbing terrorist networks. This particular incident stirred debates regarding the elements of Pakistani intelligence and military being aware or unaware of the presence of the world's most wanted terrorist inside Pakistan (Paul, 2014:1). Even after almost a decade, the use of the term 'martyred' for Bin Laden by current Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan instantly caught the attention (and criticism) of international media and reopened the debate. Lately, the Dutch Embassy has been reportedly at risk to be attacked by TTP or other militant groups in order to 'seeking revenge for blasphemous cartoons published in Netherlands'

Since being viewed as a state not safe for tourism and sports, Pakistan's tourism industry has been suffering a lot. Since attacks on Sri Lankan Cricket Team in Lahore in 2009, Pakistan could not host international sports events for years. (Abbasi,2013:50-1)

Managing the Nuclear Capabilities

Pakistan's nuclear program has long been subject to controversy and criticism. The growing trends for militancy and religious extremism fueled the concerns about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear facilities, especially after terrorist attacks on various critical cities in the country post-9/11. Many, including International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has been reportedly (and repeatedly) expressing fears of

Pakistani nukes ' falling into the wrong hands or the possibilities of some extremist or radical parties seizing power (Charnysh, 2009:6). The alleged connection and correspondence between Pakistani nuclear scientists and extremist militant outlets have made this hostility more acute is (Nayyer, 2008:4). Gary Samore, the coordinator of the National Security Council for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, in an April 2011 interview expressed concerns about nuclear safety and security in Pakistan in the context of militancy and violence. Over the years, Pakistan has shown its commitment to no-proliferation as well as nuclear safety and security measures. However, speculations over the safety of Pakistan's nuclear assets continued to come forth. Perhaps the biggest disadvantage that Pakistan has been facing is the least welcoming attitude by international institutions, bodies and community related to nuclear cooperation and assistance. This is especially evident when compared to India.

Though security measures and counter-terrorism strategy led to a decline in the frequency of terrorist attacks in the second decade of the 21st century, a growing tendency of religious extremism has been adding to the concerns centred on religious fanatics gaining power in a nuclear state. Hence, despite improved ranking in international indexes about nuclear safety and security, militancy and religious extremism have been haunting Pakistan for quite a long now.

Conclusion

Religious extremism, violence and terrorism have emerged as a major source of concern for the security, stability and progress of Pakistan. It has been affecting the social, economic and political spheres of life within the country. Moreover, it has become increasingly difficult to keep foreign relations isolated from domestic problems, especially the trend of violent religious extremism and radical fanaticism. Pakistan, the state as well as society, would have to review and revise (where necessary) its policy to deal with the phenomenon.

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