

Impact of Sectarian Violence on Pakistan's Security and Politics

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Abstract

The sectarian violence got the moment during Zia's reign when the Deobandi sect created violent militant groups as Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. In contrast, the Shia sect created Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan under the banner of the Afghan Jihad. Both Deobandi and Shia sects had ignited the violent clashes, which led to many innocent people's massacre. This moment of violent clashes was continued during the reigns of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, wherein the governments had ignored the violent activities of both religious factions. However, the incident of 9/11 had changed the dynamics of this violent conflict when the Musharraf government banned all militant groups for overcoming the extremism. This paper explores the polarization among the Deobandi and the Shias and their influence on Pakistan's national security. This paper suggests that the government should scrutinize all madrassas' curricula by removing hatred materials from the scheme of madrassas' study.

Key Words:

Barelvi, Deobandi,
Intersect Harmony,
Sectarianism, Security
Risk, Shia, Violence

Introduction

Pakistan became the victim of violence at the early age of her inception in 1953 due to a clash between two groups (Ahmedi and Sunni) in Lahore ([Jones & Wale, 2007](#)). This clash led to the Ahmedi community's massacre and set the pattern of violence within the society. Since then, Pakistan has been facing a wave of violence in the interfaith and sectarian context that developed security concerns. The most threatening and challenging violence is sectarian violence, especially between Shia and Sunni. Although, the sectarian clash exists within Sunni Sect in the shape of the Barelvi and Deobandi. The Deobandi declares certain religious practices of Barelvi as unIslamic and Bedat ([Yusuf, 2012](#)). This stance of Deobandi has prompted violent incidents between Barelvi and Deobandi. However, the Shia and Sunni clash is more violent than Deobandi and Barelvi and damaging the social fabric, significantly threatening the state security.

The extreme rivalry between Shia and Sunni emerged during the reign of Zia. This extreme ideological clash between Shia and Sunni led both rival groups to create their sub-organization to fight and terrify each other on all fronts. The Sunni group created Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and the Shia group created Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP). The Sunni went further ahead and created a militant group by the name of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. However, the Shia sect responded by creating a political party Tehrik-i-Nifaz-Fiqh-i-Jafari (TNF). The creation of these sub-organization has witnessed a rise in the violent incidents between Shia and Sunni. The incidents of violence increased and heightened the frequency of brutality between the rival sects during the 1990s ([Montero, 2007](#)). The decade of the 2000s has observed an increase in violence between Sunni and Shia due to the Pakistani Taliban's rise. It is noticeable that 643 events of violence occurred from 2007 to 2011 within just four years (SATP, June 2012). The decade of the 2000s and 2010s had seen the brutal massacre of the Hazara community in Baluchistan. This rise in violent clashes between Sunni and Shia has created a severe threat to national security.

The violent incidents between Shia and Sunni rival groups have created a situation of insecurity for the society wherein the people are being massacred to quench the thirst for sectarian rivalry. The innocent people were brutally killed, which destabilized the internal security situation and gave way to terrorists to achieve their objectives. This sectarian rift between Shia and Sunni has become a significant security challenge for Pakistan because it provides sanctuary to terrorists to launch terrorists' activities and spread terror and insecurity among the people. This wave of violence has spread the fear and threat and distrust of security institutions, which is the major calamity for Pakistan's state to manage. This article explores the motives of divergence among the factions of Sunnis, particularly Deobandi, and the offshoots of Shias have an impact on the national security of Pakistan.

Historical Overview

Sectarian Violence in Islam has recently emerged as a chief global security threat. In Pakistan, religion has an active role among the political, religious, and military elite in gaining power. A sect is a group of people having a particular opinion in the same religion. Sectarian violence instigated disorder, unrest and also provoked target sectarian killings in a society. Sectarian violence in religion, particularly in Pakistan, shows how sectarian differences among Muslim majority states such as Pakistan have led to injuring and killing thousands of people who have been members of a different or rival sect. Many scholars argue that sectarian violence stances “an imminent threat to the ideological and political viability of the Pakistani state itself (Jones, 2011).

There are two prevailing sects (Shia and Sunni) in Pakistan. According to estimates, Sunnis consist of 80%, and Shia consists of about 20% of the Muslim population. The Sunni sect is a prodigious majority sect in Pakistan. It has four subsects: the Barelvi, the Wahhabi, the Deobandi, and the Ahl-i Hadith. However, the majority of Sunni factions follow the Hanafi school of thought. However, there are also violent sectarian clashes in Pakistan, among Sunni sub-sects, such as Barelvi and Deobandi (Lakhani, 19 August 2004).

There were no visible Sunni – Shia sectarian differences after the foundation of Pakistan in 1947. However, sectarianism emerged after the 1950s and became massive in Pakistan from the 1980s onwards. Currently, "Sectarianism is a real threat to Pakistan's security. It has shaken the basic foundation of Pakistan and has created a disturbance, violence, hatred, and disorder in society" (Majeed & Hashmi, 2014, p.103). The Sunni-Shia conflicts are fragile and worsen the internal security threat to Pakistan as these antagonistic groups have been instigating suicide bombings against each other and target civilians. These violate aggressive groups also inculcate attacks against the security forces of the state. Such as clashes among Barelvi and Deobandi also instigate security threats. According to an analysis, the "intra-sectarian fault line is likely to widen further and add to the internal security problems of the Pakistan State in the days to come" (Behuria, 2008, p.59).

Sectarian Politics in Pakistan

The political parties' augmentation has meticulously provided the way for widening sectarianism activities in Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's sectarian conflict concerns political and economic problems, which provokes violent clashes over ethnic, linguistic, and other issues. Pakistan's political history is categorized by a rotation of civilian and military regimes. Political history can order by resilient concentration and centralization of power. It is evident that sectarian violence is due to transitional situations due to the collapse of an authoritarian political regime, so a particular socio-political order and factors accentuating the crisis. During this historical transition, the religious and ethnic components in conflict with each other resort to violence.

The era of the 1980s had triggered sectarian violence within the so-called due policy of Islamization. The narrative of Islamization by the Zia regime had legitimated the Sectarian tensions through patronizing the specific religious faction, which emerged rapidly on a political landscape which led contributed to the intensification of sectarianism in Pakistan. The military regime was responsible for uprising religious antagonism and sectarianism extremism just to legitimize its military regime by granting privileges to certain Sunni religious groups. These policies affected the radicalizing of the Shia population and also provoked Shia activist organizations.

The violent conflicts between the sects were to emerge during the mid-1980s, particularly in Punjab. The development of the political activist party Sunni Sipah-i-Sahaba, Pakistan (SSP), and Shia Sipah-i-Mohammad, Pakistan (SMP), was the chief dynamic escalating conflict among Shia and Sunni sects. The sectarian groups enlarged in the 1980s and 90s, and General Musharraf forbade them in January 2002. Zia tried to transform Pakistan into a Deobandi state grounded on Sunni fiqh, so Shia organizations responded by creating the Shia political party Tehrik-i-Nifaz-Fiqh-i-Jafari (TNF).

The Emergence of Sectarian Violence in the Zia Regime

Zia's frequent creation of a Sunni-based legal system shook the Shia community and caused an extensive challenge to the Shia community after Pakistan's outcome (Rieck, 2015, p. 197). Moreover, General Zia (1977–88) played a significant role in nurturing religious intolerance and influenced Islamic ideology for his regime stability. Sectarian violence was started during the Zia government, which mobilized the Shia community in Pakistan, and 100,000 Shias protested for three days in Islamabad. Zia's policy was beneficial for creating madrassas since these were partly financed through Zakat funds. So, the Shia community protests that Sunni organizations and Sunni madrassas would use the zakat money (Ispahani, 2017, p. 103). In the Afghan Jihad, however, many new madrassas were founded, and in Pakistan, above 5,000 madrassas were vigorously working for the promotion of sectarian narratives in 2002 (Waseem, 2000). First, Saudi Arabia started funding Pakistan for dual purposes to combat the anti-Soviet

Jihad and counter Shia mobilization. Oliver Roy also revealed that the "Shia-Sunni conflict got momentum from the Iranian revolution and the war between Iraq and Iran" ([Kazi, 2013](#)).

Jihad in Afghanistan

The incidence of the Afghan Jihad posed together an opportunity and a threat for Pakistan. Unfortunately, Afghan Jihad was to have massive concerns for terrorism evolving as Pakistan's main security threat. These impacts globally in Afghanistan and effects are still being in the current sphere. In 1979, shortly after the start of the Afghanistan war, Afghan jihad policy made easy access to small arms to people, which turned factions both Sunni and Shia militant and assassin of each other. Unfortunately, the abundance of weapons was accessible. Shortly after the Afghanistan war, billions of dollars in military aid flowed to Pakistan from the USA and Saudi Arabia. The USA wanted to stop the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan - but Zia took the opportunity to prepare the country for Jihad. In alliance with Pakistan, Afghan Jihad enabled the Saudis to project themselves as the global defenders of Islam ([Choksy & Choksy, 2015](#)).

Deobandi organizations such as the Harkatul-Jehadul-Islami intruded directly on sectarian violence in the 1990s. Moreover, in the 1980s, the Anjuman-i-Sipah-i-Sahaba (ASSP) in Azeem Tariq and Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi appeared Jhang district in central Punjab claimed that Pakistan would be a Sunni state. However, approximately 25% of the population of the Jhang city is Shia ([Kamran, 2009](#)). The faction of the Sunni school had channelized its militant group in Afghan Jihad, which not only provided them physical sanctuary but also as a training base wherein the members of militant got training to fight with Russian invaders but also to massacre the Shia community within Pakistan. Moreover, the government of Zia had permitted Sunni militant groups to assassinate the Shia community who were not allowing Jihadites to use their land against the Soviets in Afghanistan ([Irfani, 2004](#)).

Revolution in Iran

Shia's rise under the Ayatollah Khomeini regime has encouraged a more robust political and ideological rivalry between Shia and Sunni in Pakistan. Iranian revolution played a significant role in an emerging sectarian clash in Pakistan which provided momentum to the Shia community to be active within society and emerged as a risk for the Sunni community who, through the support of Saudi, started to curtail the risk of emerging role through creating a militant group. Other crucial causes of conflicts between sects: the Iranian revolution of 1979, furthermore the 1980 to 1988 war between Shia Iran and Sunni Iraq, and the struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989; As part of this struggle, Pakistan was inundated with weapons, dozens of Islamist activist groups sprang up, religious groups and parties militarized, and the culture of Jihad spread. The arrival of arms in Pakistan was because the war in Afghanistan delivered weapons to militant groups such as Pashtoons, Sindhis, and Mohajirs ([Thomas, 1993](#)). During the Afghan Jihad, billions of dollars in military aid flowed to Pakistan from the USA and Saudi Arabia. As American author Vali Nasr, Jessica Stern said, the "theological differences between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims had been transformed into full-fledged political conflict, with broad ramifications for law and order, social cohesion government authority. The Pakistani government has essentially allowed Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'a Iran to fight a proxy war on Pakistani soil, with devastating consequences for the Pakistani people" ([Stern, 2000](#), p.115)

Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam (JUI)

The Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam is a right-wing religious party founded in 1945, headed by Deobandi ulama ([Rizwan, Ahmed, & Gul, 2018](#)). The JUI, whose strongholds are in the Pashtun regions of Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), currently known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, has a fundamental connection to the Taliban of Afghanistan. Moreover, the JUI's madrassas gave the Taliban most of its leaders and activists in the early 1990s. Although viewed as a non-marginal religious party, the JUI and other religious parties failed to win parliament seats ([Pirzada, 2000](#)). In December 1998, JUI (F) activists started applying their version of Sharia (Islamic law) in Quetta, a city of some 1.2 million people near the Afghan border. JUI activists attacked video rental stores and destroyed VCRs and televisions; Since the local administration did nothing to protect store owners, prevent attackers, or charge them, attacks on video rental stores have become a common *occurrence*. JUI is of some interest because it serves as an inspiration to the Taliban, and at the same time, it is itself inspired by the Taliban; furthermore, it is of undeniable importance because it has given rise to at least 11 factions, the most violent of which is said to be the SSP.

Sipah-e Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)

The sectarianism posed a worsen threat when Sipah-i Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) was established in September 1984 as a JUI sub-organization in the Jhang city and became one of the major religious parties in Punjab. The purpose of the creation of SSP was to counterbalancing the Shia groups. The SSP was the most violently anti-Shia party known as the "mother of all jihadi militias ([Ahmed, 2011](#), p. 116). The head of the SSP, the JUI's provincial president, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, broke with the JUI soon afterwards the SSP's foundation. Although the JUI had relatively broad ideas around how an Islamic state would work, the SSP's primary goal was to transform Pakistan into a Sunni state ([Kamran, 2016](#)).

The SSP's objectives were to fight Shiism on all fronts, have the Shiites declared a non-Muslim minority in Pakistan, to ban processions as part of the Shiite commemorative ceremony of Muharram marches. To achieve these goals, the SSP launched a guerrilla war alongside the Shiites just after separating from the JUI. Shiite activist establishments responded by giving it back the change of the coin. Jhangvi himself was among the first victims of the SSP's violent methods: he was murdered in February 1990; Isar al-Haq Qasimi, his successor, was also murdered in January 1991. The SSP also propagates its sectarian ideas in its monthly organ, Khilafat-i Rashida (The Rightly Oriented Caliphate), printed in Faisalabad and many pamphlets. It reproduces what the party calls "unacceptable elements of the Shia history books" and impulses the public to dispose of blasphemers ([Rahman, 2002](#)).

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ)

The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ, or Jhangvi Army), a violent nonaligned group from Sipah-i Sahaba formed in 1996 and LJ, was created in memory of Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was assassinated leader of the SSP ([Zaman, 2018](#)). Pakistan has claimed responsibility for many Shia massacres and killings of victims chosen from among community Shia leaders and religious; sometimes, the victims were even Sunni officials ([Rafiq, 2014](#)). LJ sponsored a terrorist attack in Quetta, which massacred innocent people of the Shia community. This sectarian clash further ignited with the murder of a retired university professor, which convinced Quetta's civil society to launch a protest for the protection of innocent of the society ([Shah, 2014](#)).

Harkat-ul Ansar (HUA)

The LJ has close ties with HUA, which provided military training and small arms to fight with Shia. HUA was supporting LJ as being a follower of the same school of religious thought. When the Soviets had withdrawn from Afghanistan, the HUA moved its activities to Kashmir. Jihadis from Afghanistan produce sectarian tensions in Kashmir among the local resistance fighters who were non-sectarian and the Pakistan-sponsored sectarian jihadis ([Shaikh, 2011](#)).

Tehrik-i-Nifaz-Fiqh-i-Jafari (TNF)

The Shia community also created a militant group to counter the Sunni Militant groups but to provide protections to profess their religious rituals freely. TNF aimed to unify the Shia community and protect the Shia community's rights in a predominantly Sunni country to involve Shia actively in the political life of Pakistan. The TNF leader Arif Hussain al-Hussaini had close ties with Khomeini, and TNF adopted an aggressive and anti-establishment style of politics in the early years ([Shahid, Afzal & Yaqub, 2020](#)). In 1984, the TNF split into two groups, one moderate and traditional, and the other reformer and activist. In 1987, TNF or Movement for the Implementation of Shia Jurisprudence registered as a political party ([Rieck, 2015](#), p.198). When Arif Hussain al-Hussaini was assassinated in Peshawar in August 1988, the Turis held Zia responsibly ([Rieck, 2015](#), p.229).

Sectarian violence has emerged mainly in the small Hazara community, mostly descendants of Shia, who migrated from Afghanistan in 1980. Most Pashtuns and Baluchi in Baluchistan are Sunnis. Thousands of people belonging to the Hazara ethnic group, mostly Shia, were massacred by Taliban fighters belonging to the Pashtun ethnic group after the fall in August 1998. Lashkar-i Jhangvi stated that "All Shias are worthy of killing due to being impure and filthy in practising Islam and giving an erroneous image of Islam around the corner of Pakistan. Moreover, Lashkar-i Jhangvi's strategies were to "make Pakistan the graveyard of the Shiite Hazaras" ([Ahmed, 2014](#), p.17).

Proliferation of Madrassas

The proliferation of madrassas in the 1980s and 1990s also contributed to aggravate tensions among the sects. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Saudi Arab government provides approximately 700 million US dollars to build 20,000 new madrassas in Pakistan ([Hakimi, 2018](#)). The 2,500 registered *madrassas* in Punjab were providing training. Military service to students and directly participate in attacks against. Moreover, many students complete

their studies at these religious schools every year, and that most of them have few skills that would allow them to integrate into mainstream Pakistani society. Discipline in these schools is very severe, and students are taught the spirit of Jihad. The graduates of *madrassas* "are a crucial component of extremist religious parties and form most street activists in those parties" (Alvi, 2014, p.36).

These Islamic seminaries, often located in mosques or adjoining rooms, provide religious training to the children of poor families who can't afford to educate their children. These seminars are funded by the countries from the Middle East and had agenda to inculcate their political-religious agenda among the children of age group from 6 to 16 years. (Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, & Zajonc, 2010). Among the founders and leaders of these sectarian groups received religious teachings in the *madrassas* in their youth, especially in Punjab. Much of those who support Shia and Sunni sectarian organizations belong to the urban middle classes and are often rural people newly settled (Zaman, 1998).

These organizations publish vast amounts of literature on cults and, despite production costs estimated at thousands of rupees per month, they distribute much of this material free of charge. Almost all of the monthly and semi-weekly publications are full of sectarian literature and are placed at various shops and stores. In addition, to support their militant activities, these organizations also receive financial assistance from invisible protectors who are often extremist groups from the Middle East or Iran.

Continuity of Zia Legacy by Successive Governments

After the unexpected death of Zia in a plane crash had reinstated the democratic regime. Benazir Bhutto became the first women prime minister and expected to initiate rejuvenation to reject the moment of Afghan Jihad and sectarian extremism. But haplessly, she continued to follow the Zia regime's footprints by providing space to Deobandi militant groups to continue their violent activities freely. Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi got more momentum to launch their violent activities against the Shia community (Haleem, 2003). Even Shia started feeling more during Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif's reign in the decade of 1990s. The Shia community businessmen, doctors, engineers, clerics, professors, lawyers, and civil servants were mercilessly killed in Pakistan's major cities. However, governments became completely blind and provided full space to both Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi to be more lethal for Shia by killing them (Abbas, 2010). The Shia community had retaliated through her militant group Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan and made various violent clashes that led to many people's massacre. This wave of violent clashes continued throughout the 1990s while the government held the tone of silence.

The tragic event of 9/11 proved to be a blessing in disguise, and the Musharraf government put a ban on all militant groups. Musharraf government conducted operations to obliterate the trend of violent militant groups. During the Musharraf regime, the turning point was the establishment of Tehreki Taliban Pakistan, which conducted suicide attacks not Shia procession but also on Sufi shrines. The violent attack on Sufi shrines was at its peak during the reign of Asif Ali Zardari. However, the moment of sectarian violence, particularly with the Hazara community, goes on, and people of the Hazara community are inhumanly massacred (Olszewska, 2013).

Sectarian Impact on Pakistan Security

Sectarianism is a concrete hazard to the security and peace of Pakistan. Sectarian conflicts have traumatized the foundation of Pakistan, such as the last three decades. There has been growing and more prevalent sectarian conflict in modern Pakistan, which has increased bomb blasts, assassinations, suicide bombings, and terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Pakistan's response to sectarian groups has been erratic, inconsistent, and often rambling. The government measures to address the cult problem have usually been aimed at responding to the crises rather than preventing them. Even the successive governments have failed to take adequate measures to prevent young people from joining sectarian groups. The few legislative measures intended to curb violent conflicts between sects have not produced the desired results. The thousands of *madrassas* who preach sectarian hatred and have failed to develop coherent policies to deal with the problems caused by sectarian divisions or to increase religious tolerance. The explosion of violent conflicts between sects stems from the state's acceptance of bigotry. The problem lies in a certain way of thinking that offended religious feelings are more sacred than the right to a well-ordered civilian life. This mentality is reinforced by each new measure the government takes to contain violent conflicts between sects.

Conclusion

The decade of the 1980s has witnessed the change in Pakistan due to Islamization and Afghan jihad, which used the Deobandi sect as a factory to provide mujahadeen to fight Afghan Jihad as a militant force. This decade has also seen the rise in the number of Deobandi *madrassas*, which provide sectarian education and act as a factory to provide training to mujahadeen to fight. The Deobandi *madrassas* acted as a machine to create militants with sectarian-based teaching, which taught the values of hatred among Deobandi *madrassas* students. Orthodox

Deobandi's inculcation has inclined a fierce mindset, which challenged the Shia and Barelvi sects and declared them unIslamic. This stereotype mentality developed the space for a violent clash among Deobandi, Barelvi, and Shia, particularly between Shia Deobandi. Both Shia and Deobandi became arch-rivals and formed militant groups to encounter each other. Deobandi led Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi while Sipah-i-Mohammad Pakistan, led by Shia, made violent clashes with each other. Both Deobandi and Shia launched militant insurgent activities around Pakistan that created a security risk for Pakistan. The militant groups of Deobandi massacred the Hazara community (Shia minority) at different intervals of time. Deobandi sect's extremist ideological stance and militant groups have made society insecure for Barelvi and Shia community due to attacks launched by terrorists, particularly after the Pakistani Taliban's emergence. The state of Pakistan has taken the violent conflict among sects as a major security risk for society and launched preventive measures to overcome this debacle of insecurity. The state has banned all militant organizations and conducted operations to eliminate militancy's evil due to sectarianism in Pakistan. The state is promoting a moderate narrative of Islam to develop harmony and to overcome sectarian abhorrence. Musharraf's regime has changed the ministry of religious affairs to the ministry of religious affairs and interfaith harmony to encourage an environment of tolerance and peace. The government has taken all preventive measures to overcome sectarian militancy to develop Pakistan's society more harmonious and prosperous. However, the government should adopt a strict policy to scrutinize all madrassas' curricula to remove all hatred material from the madrassas' curricula. The government should implement madrassas registration around the corner of Pakistan and put a ban on content promoting sectarianism within society. There should be a penalty on the delivery of hate speeches and provocation of militancy in public.

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