

## Roots of Sectarian Identity: A Pestring Factor in Gilgit-Baltistan

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### Abstract

*Sectarianism has badly influenced the Northern Areas of Gilgit Baltistan. Although the character of society in Baltistan region is mainly heterogeneous, yet every section of the society has remained nonviolent and cooperative with each other. However, in post 1970s era, the world saw a frightful fracture in the fabrics of social structure, when peaceful throngs started to think and treat others on the sectarian lines. Modern history has witnessed tremendous increase in unpleasant occurrence. It not only produced a wave of fear and hatred in the society but also distorted the existing political commotions. The ominous categorization of political factions on sectarianism has not only accelerated the hostilities in Gilgit Baltistan but has also shaken the trembling economy. This economic disparity between local and national level has created a strong sense of deprivation among the inhabitants of the region. In fact, Baltistan has no bona fid representation in the Parliament of Pakistan. Similarly, Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly is incapable of legislation and judiciary of the region cannot exercise powers as compared to judiciary in other parts of the country. This situation is causing futile functioning of administration against sectarianism.*

**Keywords:** Sectarianism, Local Politics, GBLA, Judiciary, Social Relations, Deprivation.

### Introduction

A deep insight of Trans-Pamir, Hindukush, Karakorum and Western Himalaya reveals that the society of Gilgit Baltistan has originated from the Dyadic, Gandharans, Megalith builders, Alexander's remnants, Scythians, Kushans, Parthian, Tibetans, Huns, Tar Khans and the ruling elites of Khurasan (Robert, 2003). The region has been ruled over by most of the intruders of neighboring states for a long time but the amalgamation of numerous social cliques formulated a standard variety for the ages to come. Before the arrival of British imperialist forces, Gilgit-Baltistan comprised of a number of minute states united against any foreign tyrant. However, the regions of Diamer including Bunji, Chilas, Thalichi and Thore were small democratic regions under the suzerainty of local elders called "Jastero"(Sanjeeve, 2002). Gilgit and Hunza were ruled by Raja and Mirs and the areas of Nagar, Yasin, Ghizer, Punial, Ishkoman and Mastuj by the Raja and Wazirs. The

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region of Baltistan, at that time, comprised of eight principalities including Rondu, Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Kiris, Khaplu, Tolti and Kharmang (Ali, 2004).

By the end of 1890 the Sikh and then Dogras regimes marched the region and successfully occupied Gilgit, Astore, Bunji, Yasin, Punial, Darel, Chilas, Rondu, Shigar, Skardu and Khaplu (Jabir, 2001). However, during 1891-92, the British imperialist forces took over the control of Hunza and Nagar after a bloody war in Thol and Nilt. In order to run the administration, the new government declared Gilgit as an administrative unit with four sub-units including Gilgit, Ladakh, Skardu and Kargil. Yet the foreign affairs of the unit were conducted by the imperialist authorities and affairs of the region and the internal matters were carried out by the government of Dogra. In the year 1935, Kashmiri government handed over the entire region to the British authorities on a lease for a period of 60 years, however, with the partition of subcontinent in 1947, the agreement came to end and an era for freedom struggle once again started (Lorimer, 1976). It was mainly a joint effort of the nationalist elements, Gilgit Scouts, the group of Six Jammu and Kashmir Infantry divisions and the indigenous populace from various ethnic groups against the autocratic and tyrannical foreign regime.

Pakistan, after achieving independence, not only appointed a Political Agent in the region on the invitation of local people of Gilgit but also marked the Northern Areas Division to deal with the affairs of the region (Miller, 1988). The functions of Political Resident and Chief Advisor for Azad Kashmir were reassigned to the Joint Secretary of Kashmir Affairs Division in 1952. However, the administrative division of the area was restructured. The regions of Hunza and Nagar valleys were included in Pakistan and the administrative and bureaucratic system of the area was shaped on the sketch of the rest of the country (Dani, 2001).

By the end of 1985, after completion of the Karakorum High Way project, the northern regions of Pakistan got attentions of the entire world as an attractive tourist place (Wallace, 1996). The first ever physical contact with the other areas of world resulted in a tangible social change throughout the area. Political and social representatives of the region demanded for a political and administrative reform in both military and civil structure dealing with the local community. However, a little interest by the state authorities created a sense of deprivation among the people of the region. In fact, most of the government machineries were confined to the matter of law and order. It is believed that Pakistan People's Party, during its third term in office, took some specific steps enabling the local populace to reinvigorate the economy and fundamental rights. The Government of Pakistan along with a comprehensive reforms package announced the Federally Administered Northern Areas as the new province of Gilgit Baltistan in 2009. Yet, due to one reason or the other, a provincial setup has been created on the model of other provinces in Pakistan.

As discussed earlier, the society of Gilgit Baltistan is mainly heterogeneous, inhabited by different sects, *baradaris* (clans) and linguistic groups. However, majority of the district Ghizer is comprised of *Sunnis* and *Ismailies* which is almost 87 per cent of

total population in the area. They belong to the Brusho tribe and speak Shina, Khowar and Brushashki languages (Amir, 2002). Similarly, district of Hunza is a huddle of Imamia Isna Ashriya Shias (54 per cent of total population), Ismailies (45 per cent of total population), Brusho, Shin and Yashkun identities who speak Shina, Brushashki and Wakhi languages. Likewise, the population of Gilgit city is diverse in nature due to migration of the population of the region to lower areas of Pakistan for economic purposes. Yet Gilgit city is comprised of Ismailis (27 per cent), Ahle Sunnat wal Jamat (19 per cent) and Isnaye Ashria Shias.

Another affected area, the district of Diamar has a majority of Ahle Sunnat (100 per cent) of Shin, Yashkun, Kamin and Kohistani population who speak Shina language. Similarly, the district of Astore mainly comprised of Sunnis and Shia Muslims with relative proportion (Amir, 2002). The district Skardu, on the other hand, is abode of Imamia Shias (87 per cent), Nurbakhshis (10 per cent) and Sunnis (03 per cent). In district of Ghangche, Nurbakhshi are 96 per cent, speaking Balti language and known as Mongol, Mon and Hor tribal identities (Hilali, 1995).

In addition to the above, Kohistanis, Kashmiris, Pakhtuns, Gujars, Punjabis, Hazarawals and Afghanis also live in smaller number in different parts of Gilgit Baltistan as migrants, labourers and businessmen etc. It is believed that it is an exclusive feature of the area that being a heterogonous society, it is an exceptional instance of “unity in diversity.”

### **Impacts of Sectarianism on the Economy of Gilgit Baltistan**

The economy and the livelihood of the inhabitants of Gilgit Baltistan is mainly based on trade, transportation, mineral resources and communication. The region is famous for supplying of important minerals such as Cobalt, Nickel, Lead, Copper, Tin, Mica, Zircon, Quartz, Coal, Gold, Silver, Iron, Zinc, Marble, Sulfur, Granite, Calcite, Lime Stone, Fluorite, Arsenic, Topaz, Epidot, Moon Stone, Pargasite, Tourmaline, Aquamarine, Pyrite and feldspar (Hilali, 1995). As a matter of fact, the development in infrastructure has led to considerable investment in export oriented items. Similarly, the increase in hotel industry has brought a new vitality and affluence to the common individual in the region.

Undoubtedly, Gilgit Baltistan, a place of beautiful landscape, is capable of attracting the attentions of local and foreigner tourists and investors. Tourism shares a major part of annual budget in the entire northern region of Pakistan. In addition, Gilgit Baltistan produces a huge quantity of dry fruits famous in the country and abroad. This area has a potential to produce 60,000 mega watts energy with the help of hydro electric sector. Above all, the entire Gilgit region has remained a suitable junction for commercial pursuit with China and other neighbouring areas from ancient times. Being a hub of local, national and international tourism, majority of the population is attached with palatial rest houses and splendid hotels etc., but a number of sectarian conflicts in the region have hindered the flow of tourists to a great extent. Hence, economic disparity between local

and national level is rapidly increasing. The following table shows various social indicators which depict its backwardness as compared to national level.

**Table 1: Social Indicators in Gilgit Baltistan**

Characteristic	Situation in Gilgit Baltistan	Situation at National level
Per capita Income	US \$350	US \$1385
Population Doctor Ratio	1:4100	1:1183
Infant Mortality Rate	600/100000	272/100000
Total Fertility Rate	4.6 children per woman	3 children per woman

**Sources:** Economic Survey 2009-10, NIPS, Assessment of Socio Economic Trends in Gilgit Baltistan (AKRSP), Annual Plan 2009-10 (Planning Commission) & Gilgit Baltistan Government.

The figures in the table clearly indicate that per capita income in Gilgit Baltistan (US \$ 350) is far behind the national per-capita income (US\$ 1385). A wave of grim sectarianism has deeply disturbed the economy of the region. In addition, the riots coupled with fragile law and order situation has badly influenced the tourism industry, consequently, the hotels and rest houses of Gilgit Baltistan have been affected to a great extent. Khalida Khan (2012) pointed out sectarianism as the major cause of downfall in tourist inflow:

*...the data from Foreign Registration Office Gilgit from 1998 to 2009 clearly indicates a rapid downfall in the number of tourists. The highest inflow of tourists was in 1998, followed by 2008, 2007, 2001, 1999, 2005, 2004, 2000, 2003, 2009, and 2002. Different countries not only prohibited their citizens from visiting Pakistan, but also quickly removed from Pakistan. The ratio further reduced to 8,976 in 2,000. In 2001, a little improvement to 15,685 tourists was observed; but in 2002, the number drastically declined to a number of 2,000 tourists only. The area analysis does not show any major sectarian conflict from 2,000-2002; however, it might be the September 11 incident at the end of 2001, which terrified the tourists all over the world. In 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2008, the number of tourists was 5,051; 9,191; 9,944; 33,218 and 61,988 respectively, showing gradual improvement despite the sectarian clashes in 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2008, which points that although clashes have bad impacts on tourism locally, other reasons such as war and terror, seem to contribute significantly to the decline in tourists' flow in 2009.*

In addition to this, the repeated disturbances have badly influenced the transport sector of the region at a larger scale. The government of Gilgit-Baltistan is spending handsome amount on the security of Karakoram High Way due to which spending on development and social sectors remained the least. Non-developmental expenditures on the maintenance of law and order in the region are resulting in a situation where the life standard of the common people is going down day by day.

The literacy rate of Gilgit-Baltistan is about 38 per cent as compared to national literacy rate 58 per cent of Pakistan. The educational sector of the region has also suffered badly because the schools and colleges remained closed during the crises. Moreover, there is lack of accessibility even to the primary school for the children of far-flung areas of the Gilgit-Baltistan. Low allocation of budget to educational sector is also resulting in an amateurish and depressed class. Similarly, scarcity of qualified teachers is another cause for illiteracy, which results in unemployment and dissatisfied generation, susceptible to be used by hostile elements. This academic shortfall ultimately resulted in a rigid and intolerant behavior among the majority of the people.

Health sector, is also appalling due to existing sectarian apprehensions in Gilgit Baltistan. The ratio of doctors (1:4100) in Gilgit-Baltistan is less than the national ratio, that is, 1:1127, which show the meager societal position of the area. Consequently, the infant mortality rate in Gilgit-Baltistan is 600/100000 which is higher than the national infant mortality rate of national 272/ 100000. There is also an acute difference of fertility rate between Gilgit-Baltistan (4.6 children per woman) and in rest of the country about 03 children per woman. As a matter of fact, the above figures clearly indicate that the social, economic and political backwardness of the area is mainly responsible for a common violent behavior in the region. It becomes a routine matter to see markets closed for couple of days, curfew is launched by the government and workplaces remain vacant. In addition, the prices of necessary food items rise, which results in adversity among the poor in the area (Hussainabadi, 2003). This situation results in a displacement of a large number of local populace to other parts of the country.

### **Local Politics and the Rise of Sectarianism**

The British Raj with the help of local monarchies deprived the people of Gilgit-Baltistan of their political rights. However, after getting independence, political activities rapidly started in the region. Gilgit Baltistan United Organization, Gilgit Baltistan Student's Federation, Ladakh Baltistan United Front, Central Organization of Students and *Anjuman Tahafuz Haqooq-e-Baltistan and Gilgit* and the Ulema Council emerged as major political actors for the rights of the local people (Begum, 2006). However, Pakistan People's Party of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the first successful political party in setting up its foundation in the area by introducing some political reforms. In this connection, the Federal Government formulated an Advisory Council for Gilgit Baltistan, consisting of eighteen members, which was to provide help to Central Government in closing down Frontier Criminal Regulatory (FCR) and feudal autocracy.

However, by 1977 the Federal authorities reengineered the set up of existing local governments in the region by lessening the role of bureaucracy (Hussain Abadi, 2003). Similarly, the Martial Law government of President Zia-ul-Haq decided to extend the representation of Gilgit region in each house of Parliament of Pakistan (Dani, 2001). The new government supported Pakistan Muslim League against Pakistan People's Party in Gilgit Baltistan to eradicate its popular support. As a result, bigger part of Muslim

League and its allies could easily formulate the local bodies' government in Gilgit Legislative Council. Thus the popular hatred towards Martial Law regime later on paved the way for Pakistan People's Party to achieve its lost position in the region. In fact, prominent political parties exist in Gilgit Baltistan, developed mainly from 1990, i.e. Pakistan People's Party, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam), Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Pakistan Tehreek Insaf and recently emerged Muttahida Wahaddat ul Muslimin (Malik, 2008). In reality, the region has been represented by the above cited political organizations in and outside of Assembly. Undoubtedly, there have been sectarian based crises in Gilgit Baltistan since 1970 but the ethno-cultural assimilation in the area has developed tranquility and concord in general political behavior (Hussain, 2012). Almost all political parties in the region have unanimous vision about the constitutional position of Gilgit-Baltistan.

However, when majority of the national political parties have come closer to the administration of Gilgit-Baltistan, various interest groups and mafias have become proactive to create instability in the area for their own personal interest. In fact, under the shield of national political parties, the above cited elements preserved their vested interests and successfully got the support from the Center. The federal government with the bureaucratic support has kept away the nationalist parties of Gilgit-Baltistan from legislature and drew lines in the society on sectarian basis. Resultantly, the foreign forces might use the disappointed and unemployed youth of the region. In addition, popularly elected Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly is actually a rubber stamp in the hands of bureaucracy (Grare, 2007). The national government effectively props up certain groups as a remedy against any popular revolt in the region.

Above all, people of the region are deprived of their political rights and have no representation in the parliament of Pakistan. Similarly, the local leadership is powerless owing to emergence of sectarian incidents, tendency to preserve self-interest and sectarian approach in the regional issues. Similarly, the general population is more distrustful about their inexperienced and typical leaders who make promises but do not deliver as expected. Consequently, most of the people from each section of society used to cast their votes on the sectarian lines rather than party or ideological basis (Aziz, 2004). In this connection, the masses from all sections, nevertheless, have expectations from religious leaders for their general protection. The threatening political games and categorization among the political factions on sectarian and local basis are the main contributors to acceleration of the sectarian hostility in Gilgit Baltistan. Moreover, the political parties are also responsible for relaxing sectarian cliques and such tendencies have deteriorated the existing political situation in Gilgit Baltistan (Bansal, 2008). Voices have been raised to solve the long standing problems by the political parties of the region but are not effective due to sectarian based proclivities. Consequently, the people of the region have become less successful to attract the attention of Central Government and the international community towards their chronic and long standing issues.

Here, the people resorted to the religious clerics for their protection, owing to distrustful and weak position of political leaders. The region is deprived of constitutional

identity by making different excuses, administered through a bureaucracy by Federal Government and divested the populace of political rights. Consequently, the role of political organizations came to the lowest ebb. Sectarianism has also distorted the political behavior of the region. The political participation and voting behavior of the local people, is sect oriented at a large scale. As a matter of fact, the establishment has created a situation that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan possess no chance to put across their demands except by mean sectarian violence.

### **Twist and Turns of Federal Government on the Issue of Autonomy**

The increasing sectarian incidents have influenced the political scenario and perception of common man up to great extent. As a matter of fact, the inhabitants are split on the lines of *Baradaris* and sects. By taking advantage of the situation, both civil and military bureaucracy of the region, exercise solitary powers but without any involvement of the local political leadership. A military General of Force Commander Northern Areas actually exercises enormous influences over administrative affairs of Gilgit Baltistan (Basit, 2010). In addition to the above, a Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Division, being elected member of National Assembly of Pakistan, direct and enforce all the policies in Gilgit-Baltistan, including financial affairs sanctioned by the Federal Government. The Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Minister is the top most elected official of Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly, who works under the Federal Minister of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Division.

The Chief Minister, a popular elected member of Gilgit-Baltistan exercises only the powers exclusively delegated to him by the Chief Executive from Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Division. As a matter of fact, the local people are acutely unresponsive towards politics and the elected representatives of the area are entirely bypassed by Federal Government. Moreover, the Federal Public Service Commission with a quota reserved, carries out the recruitment of the civil servants for each of the four provinces on the basis of population. In this regard, Azad Jammu and Kashmir has a quota of 02 per cent in civil services but Gilgit-Baltistan neither has a separate quota in Federal bureaucracy nor a reserved seat. Instead it has been incorporated in the 04 per cent share of Federally Tribal Areas;

Without any substantial accountability here too the bureaucracy comes from other parts of the country and performs its duties in the area for a short period of time. In this way, they have developed no positive inclination to augment the capacity of local government. Consequently, the region is facing insufficient public sector capacity, weak service delivery and lack of accountability and transparency which led to disfigured governmental structure.

### **Ineffectiveness of the Baltistan Legislative Assembly**

Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly, a forum of total thirty three members in which twenty four are elected on the principle of adult franchise, six seats are reserved for women and three for technocrats. As per Federal precedents, the Chief Minister is elevated to the post by the Members of the House. The upper house of legislature in Gilgit-Baltistan is called Council, which consists of fifteen members. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Chairman of the Council, nominates six members from the Federal Parliament and six members are given representation on basis of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote system.

The Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly is a locally elected body. According to Gilgit Baltistan Order 2018, Assembly can exercise all powers which were previously exercised by other four provincial assemblies under schedule IV of the Constitution of Pakistan. As a matter of fact, the members for all the reserved seats for the Upper House or Council including women and technocrats must be nominated by political parties of the region but half of them are chosen by the Federal Government of Pakistan. The Kashmir Affairs Northern Areas division, under the Federal Rules of Business of 1973, has powers to make laws for Gilgit-Baltistan and has the authority to extend any law to the areas on discretionary power (Asia Report, 2007). Consequently, the real representatives of the people perform very limited role in both managing political and religious affairs of the region.

Previously, sectarianism badly influenced the judicial status of Baltistan. Owing to ineffective judicial autonomy, the courts of Gilgit-Baltistan have no power to ask the legality of any action approved by Kashmir Affairs and Northern Area division. As a matter of fact, unlike the judges in the courts of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan courts of appeal and Chief Court have been established by notifications of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Division that lack the validity and legality of Constitutional provisions (The Gilgit-Baltistan Reforms, 2009). The judges in Pakistan including Azad Jammu and Kashmir are selected under regulatory system whose term of office is predetermined. On the other hand, the judges of Gilgit-Baltistan are chosen by the Executive Order on the recommendations of a Federal Minister. Similarly, Deputy Chief Executive the locally elected Chief Minister and members of Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly are debarred from the procedure. In the same way, judges of secondary courts are selected by Federal Public Service Commission of Pakistan under the Constitution of 1973; Article 209 provides a Supreme Judicial Council comprised of Chief Justice of Supreme Court, two most senior judges of the Supreme Court and senior Chief Justices from provincial High Courts to control the judicial affairs. As a matter of fact, judges in Gilgit-Baltistan enjoy least job safety as awarded to their equivalents in the other provinces of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard, Azad Jammu Kashmir has its Public Service Commission to select the judges for subordinate courts.

In fact, the courts of Gilgit-Baltistan are also not autonomous as compared to the courts in other provinces of Pakistan. The verdicts of the courts of Gilgit-Baltistan are not

been applicable in other parts of Pakistan, such as the verdict that Geo and Jung Group was challenged in the Supreme Court of Pakistan because the area was not a territorial division of Pakistan under the Constitution of 1973. However, the judicial system in Gilgit Baltistan is nominal. It can make decisions for the region but have no universality like the other courts. Such types of weaknesses may also lead to encourage the sectarian oriented offences along with strengthening mafia in the region. Moreover, the political stakeholders and other responsible factors are busy in petty issues of sectarianism and never bother to pay to their judicial dependency and to raise voice for its perfection and uplift.

### **Crippling of Social Relationship and its Impacts on Society**

Gilgit city is the worst affected place of Gilgit-Baltistan by sectarianism as compared to parts of the region. Most of the Shiite sect is residing in Jalalabad, Haramosh, Nagar, Danyore and Barmas along with Majeeni Muhala. However, the areas of Joglote, Pari, Shamogar, Minore, Kashrote and Sakarkoi are abode of Sunnis sect of Islam. Similarly, Basin and Napur are mainly occupied by both Sunni and Shia population, whereas, Jutial and Khomar along with Sakawar are inhabited by Sunni, Shiite and Ismailies respectively. Undoubtedly, such level of residential segregation leads toward uncertainty and many families have migrated from the areas of the opposite sect.

Similarly, the Shiite populace has moved from Juglote and Gulaper. As a matter of fact, people become hesitant going to the areas of the other sect during turmoil and never go to the areas during night. Although the society of Gilgit Baltistan had been divided on the basis of sects and baradaris but amazingly the people were tied with each other on strong bonds of relationships. With the passage of time, these ties were stained owing to rising sectarian quandary. It is obvious that the affairs between Sunnis and Shiites in Gilgit city turned further tense owing to sectarian rituals. The nuisance of sectarianism tarnished the existing social set up; thousands of people have lost family members and friends. Likewise, daily lives of people have been disturbed. It is noteworthy that the sectarian violence has limited people's creativity in every sphere of life (Ali, 2010). The practices such as wall chalking, religious processions and sectarian hatred speeches are unfavorable towards developing relations in the community. Hence, it is generally believed that different mafias and smugglers are largely responsible for accelerating suffering and turmoil in the region.

Yet, the flag hoisting of both Shiite and Sunni also indicates nervousness of society in Gilgit-Baltistan. In fact, during sectarian clashes the markets also remain closed in the city for couple of days. Consequently, the prices of necessary commodities rise and the life of residents becomes worse. Workplaces remain vacant and the streets remain empty during sectarian tension. Similarly, the employees in various government departments i.e., doctors, professors or administrators etc., become reluctant to be posted in areas of opposite sect because a number of innocent employees have already become victims of sectarian crises and have lost their precious lives.

Gilgit-Baltistan is a place where numerous sports are played but polo is most famous and ancient game of the area. Sectarian crisis also badly affected the game schedules. The situations become further deteriorated when the bystanders sometimes show their support to a particular team on the sectarian basis. For example, during a match between the teams of Skardu and Diamer, the Sunni spectators showed their support to the team of Diamer and the bystander belonging to Shiite sect showed their support to the later team. Therefore, government ultimately decided to cancel the match in April, 2014. Similarly, the routine life of local people is also disturbed due the sectarian clashes on K.K.H from 1988 to 2012. These astringent incidents have disturbed the progress in education, health and social structure of community.

Sectarian clashes have also dotted the existing education system of the region. The overall literacy rate in Gilgit-Baltistan is about 65 per cent, which is more than 57 per cent of the rest of Pakistan. In reality, in some areas of Gilgit Baltistan, children do not have access to schools due to remote villages, disperse population and physical obstacles, children have to travel a long way to get education, which is almost impossible during winter and particularly during sectarian crises (Ali, 2010). The sectarian brutalities mold the generation without any positive voice or vision in all sphere of life. As it is seen, the sectarian ridden society cannot provide a suitable platform from where the people may articulate their wishes and ambitions. Here too, the young generation is dissatisfied as the local political and sectarian factors obstruct them to get enough opportunities to work positively and effectively (Israr, 2013).

Above all, the increasing sectarian riots in the region have led to the poor law and order situation, which has disturbed almost every sector of life. The consistant closure of markets, business centers or any other work places is causing serious economic deterioration in the region. This situation resulted in unemployment of skillful people and their shift to other cities of Pakistan. Consequently, per capita income in Gilgit-Baltistan (US \$ 350/US\$ 1385) is causing brutality and violence (Jamy, 2009). The ultimate narrow tribal approach has not only aggravated the delicate fabrics of society in Gilgit-Baltistan but also promoted a generation prone to be victim of unemployment and poverty. The youth, facing this problem, can easily be trapped in the hands of foreign elements, who utilize them to accomplish their ulterior motives in the area (Jamy, 2009).

Unfortunately, most of the governments did not pay any attention to generate social unity activities. There was a no trend to organize tournaments, debates or co-curricular events on the regular basis to keep the youth busy in the positive direction (Knopka, 1973). Moreover, the unproductive character of the Central Government to solve the most pressing problems of the area such as Constitutional dilemma, inadequate allocation of resources, absence of vision, lack of accountability, appeasing and conciliating the voiceless and helplessness society, are also responsible to a great extent. In addition to the above, many religious organizations are promoting the hard line of sectarianism one way or the other. In this regard, some of the Masajids, Imam Barghas and Jamat Khanas are playing negative role in dividing the society on sectarian lines. Consequently, most of the private and public organizations of the region like schools,

hospitals, community based organizations and NGOs have also been divided on the same lines i.e. where jurisdictions of one is a no go area or dangerous zone for the other (The Pamiir Times, July 29, 2013).

Like other social activities, games and play grounds are also influenced by the current wave of sectarianism in the region. Annual tournament of polo, traditional game of the Gilgit region, is enjoyed by a huge number of spectators; however, such types of healthy activities have also been impeded by sectarian tensions. In addition, parks and clubs are also places of community interaction. Despite the presence of two famous city parks in Kashrote and Chinar Bag, most of the people cannot visit places because of fear. Similarly, in the sports complex in Jutial, art gallery, auditorium, gymnasium and hockey ground, access to the youth is made almost impossible during and after sectarian crises in the region.

In fact, the sectarian organizations have partially distorted the local culture which had been a uniting force in the society. There was a common practice of inter marriages and social ceremonies were attended by different sects without any considerations. Similarly, the funeral ceremonies of all communities were also attended fearlessly that was a best source of interaction among them. However, with the passage of time, people cannot dare to participate in such types of practices owing to sectarian hatred and emerging fissures in the structure of society. In short, most of the cultural ritual which existed and which were a source of social interaction have become a history (Israr, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the sect oriented organizations have tarnished the culture and societal relations in Gilgit Baltistan. These organizations, one way or the other, have promoted hatred in term of violence and sedition. The area is lacking incentives and opportunities owing to absence of industry to absorb skillful youth. In fact, people are keen to get advance education but due to poverty and lack of institution in the region, a small part of society can accomplish the ambition (Abbas, 2012). Although, Karakoram International University is striving to play its role in the development of social values, yet majority of people cannot afford the expenses of higher education. Moreover, repeatedly sectarian wave influences the academic activities of the only university in the entire region of Gilgit Baltistan.

## **Conclusion**

In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that for the last few years, from 1988 to 2012, sectarianism has acrimoniously tarnished the peace loving heterogeneous society of Gilgit Baltistan. For centuries, people from both Shia and Sunni sects remained nonviolent to each other. Before the advent of British Raj, the region was ruled over by different authorities including Rajas, Mirs and Jestaros (local elders). Despite inter-war situation, they fought the foreign invaders collectively. Similarly, the Dogra rulers emerged the most successful in taking the control of the area; however, due to strategic importance of the region, the imperialist authorities took the affairs of the region in their

own hands from Sikhs under an agreement on lease in order to contain possible intervention of Russia (USSR). In 1947, during partition of the Subcontinent, the local people announced independence and successfully liberated the area and annexed it with newly independent state of Pakistan unconditionally.

The history of region clearly shows that in spite of their religious and sectarian differences, the people of Gilgit Baltistan tried to reside peacefully. They contentedly used to take part in religious rituals of “the others”. Similarly, there were inter marriages between both sects of Islam by giving due reverence to the religious ideas of each other. Regrettably, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the tolerant and peaceful society turned into uncertain and dangerous abode. Ultimately, this paradise on earth became a no-go area. Consequently, an ideal hub for local as well as national trade and economy has been badly affected mainly because of growing sectarian trends in the region.

In spite of having incredible reservoir of natural resources, there is a lack of factories and industrial units to engage the young generation of the area; Resultantly, some of the local people move to other parts of the country but majority of them lead miserable a life. An already trembling economy of the region is affected by growing negative trends of sectarianism. Repeatedly the closure of markets and shops has become a routine matter. During sectarian conflicts, all necessary commodities usually disappear from the market places. Above all, the Karakoram High Way, the only route for supply in the region, gets blocked and the strategically important areas often remain disconnected from rest of the country.

Undeniably, the current wave of sectarianism has fractured the peaceful coexistence of the society in Gilgit Baltistan. It not only reformulated the social structure into conflicting groups but also made their places as dangerous zones for the other sect. Moreover, most of the social interaction institutions such as Masajid, Imam Barha and Jammah Khana in the region have become sources of dividing the society. Most of the political figures of the region have sectarian approach rather than ideological. Due to influence of the local leaders, who have least political acumen, their followers opt for the religious sphere of clerics who have strong influence in the society. In short, relentless wave of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan is rapidly shaping an “us” versus “them” syndrome.

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