

History of Religious Militancy in Pakistan

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Abstract

The paper attempts to detail the historical context of religious militancy in Pakistan. The recent radical activities in Pakistan are in one way an outgrowth of the reformist/revivalist movements of the 17th and 18th centuries. Ideology was proved to be instrumental in the creation of Pakistan. In the post-independence period, various regimes incorporated religious injunctions in the legal and constitutional system of the state which has transformed socio-political outlooks of the society and nurtured militant mindset. The paper argues, involvement of Pakistan in the Afghanistan war in 1980s and the Zia's Islamization policies played primary role in the intensification of Islamist violence in Pakistan and ensured the establishment of religious militant organizations on the Pak-Afghan borderland.

Keywords: Religious violence, *Jihad*, Islamization, *Madrassas*, Militant Groups, *Deobandi*.

Introduction

Religious fanaticism possesses a profound threat to the state of Pakistan today. It has affected socio-economic and political facets of life. The only common apparatus was thought to be an ideology to unite the diverse ethnic, sectarian and linguistic communities, divided in urban-rural categories and two territorial halves. The disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 proved exploiting the religion ineffective. In 1980s, volatile regional security conditions coupled with the Zia's transformation of socio-political institutions on Islamist lines intensified religious violence in Pakistan. The state strategy of using faith-based policy tools can be reflected in its support to *Jihadists* in Kashmir and Afghanistan. The international scenario coupled with state sponsored *Jihad* altogether altered the nature of extremism in the state in the 21st century. The paper attempts to investigate that how does faith-based violence flourished in Pakistan. To answer the question, religious movements of pre-1947 period have been examined. In the post-1947 era, policies of various regimes supportive to Islamist radicalism have been analyzed.

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Literature Review

Juergensmeyer, M. (2000, p. 5) has argued that in the contemporary world the term 'terrorism' is frequently associated with the disenfranchised groups who commits violence to have power and influence, their intense dedication to cause and the dangerous unpredictability given them vast influence as compared to their meager resources. Abulafia (2001, p. xi) has noted that issues emerging from ideological systems of beliefs are as consistent as to the contemporary world in the 21st century as they were in the Middle ages. Religion is the primary motivation behind most of the terrorist acts from the last few decades of the 20th century including Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian. Social scientists have described terrorism as a violence by a group for political motives (Laqueur, 1987, p. 72) (Wieviorka, 1995, p. 599-600) (Bruce, 1998, pp. 33-44). In 1980, the US state department has listed hardly a single religious violent organization. After 18 years in 1998, the same department listed thirty most dangerous groups, more than half of them were religious organizations (Los Angeles Times, August 8, 1998). Bruce (1998, p. 91) has noted dramatic increase of religious motivated terrorist groups in the same period up to twenty-six. The former Secretary of State of the US Warren Christopher (1998, p. 446) believed that terrorism in the name of religion is a huge security issue we face in during the Cold War.

Al-Rasheed & Shterin (2009, p. xviii) explained that militant Islamic groups are political motivated in the 21st century which have become central issues in the 'war on terror'. Pape (2005, p. 22-3) has noted that the basic logic of suicide sort of religious terrorism involves political, social and individual levels. Religious discourses are not capable of triggering mass movement or mobilizing people on its own but is mere tool political and economic struggles (Al-Rasheed & Shterin, 2009, p. xx). The wave of suicide bombing in Pakistan originated from SWA in 21st century was a direct reaction to the penetration of the secular ideologies. The arrival of Pakistan Army into SWA immediately after joining the camps of the Western Powers made it easy for the native militant organization to frame the state as preacher of secular nationalistic ideology. The popular perspective was 'Islam is in danger' but the struggle was to attain territorial occupation, political power and promulgate parallel governance system. Religious violence in the contemporary Pakistan is more dangerous than ever because it upholds the theory of the survival of the fittest. It attempts to purify the ideas and beliefs of Islam through violent means thereby affecting others, violence committed by the militant groups against the other sects of Islam are best example in this context.

There are sundry versions of Islamic divisions in Pakistan such as *Shia*, *Barelvi*, *Ahle-Hadis* and *Ismaili*. The *Deobandi* group is one of the dominant

group in many parts of the state. This sect is a more rigid, fundamental in views and draws its principles from the Islam of 7th century and upholds the idea of *Jihad* (*Jihad* simply means to struggle, it might be a fight against the enemies of Muslims/Islam) as an indispensable principle of Islam. It disapproves all the modern schools of thoughts of Islam which makes it almost like that of the *Wahhabism* of Saudi Arabia (Monte Palmer & Princess Palmer, 2008, p. 126; Niblock, 2006, p. 157). *Wahhabism* defines purist Muslim in terms of extreme fundamentalist and pan-Islamist political outline (Kotia, 2010, p. 7).

Most of the militant groups in Pakistan are affiliated in some form with the *Deobandi* sect (Ali, 2008. P. 125). The Saudi Arabian interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan is only possible due to the close resemblance of the *Wahhabism* and *Deobandi* versions. These two school of thoughts shares identical ideas with insignificant variations. There is no other school of thought in the sub-continent which has close connection with the *Wahhabism*. The Saudi Arabia provides funding to the militants, helps in the proliferation of *Deobandi Madrassas* and extremist literature, stimulating sectarian violence in Pakistan (*Madrassa*, an Arabic term means an educational institution, e.g. school, college or university).

Militancy: A Historical Perspective

The roots of the crisis of Islamic militancy can be traced back to the pre-Colonial period in South Asian history. Two of the prominent Muslim reformist/revivalist Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah attempted to preserve the Islamic model of life in 17th and 18th century respectively. These religious clerics were concerned about the amalgamation of the socio-cultural institutions of Hinduism and Islam. The former successfully tried to preserve the early Islamic model by discarding the adopted notions within the spiritual activities which is reflected in his popularly given name as Mujadid Alf Saani, the reviver of the second Millennium (Ashraf Zahid, 2009). The later carried out the mission of his predecessor with more vigor and enthusiasm. The Muslim theologians looked towards kingship and nobility to preserve the glory and grandeur of Islam. At the time of Shah Waliullah the Islamic Empire was scattered and lost its power and prestige in the sub-Continent (Hardy, 1972. p. 29-30). Consequently, he devised an association where scholars can be prepared to propagate the definition and reformist agendas of Islam in India (Robinson, 1998, P. 108). His writings on reformist agendas, formation of *Madrassas* coupled with sermons in the mosques and public spaces influenced students. These institutions produced many Muslim leaders who started the mission of glorification of Islam in the region. Some of these leaders travelled to Hijaz, former name of Saudi

Arabia, which brought drastic changes in their individual character and understanding of religion. These leaders included Haji Sharaitullah, Syed Ahmed Shaheed and Shah Ismail Shaheed who indulged in the radical undertakings focused on the ideological origins (Mehmood, Nasiruddin & Rizwan 2014. P. 1: Tahir 2010). There is limited literature available on the subject, it is still perplexing what elements or conditions in Hijaz led to the transformation in their individual characters. The emergence of the two most prominent Islamic schools of thoughts in the early 20th century, *Wahhabism* and *Deobandi*, have a historical relationship.

Some of the travelers of the Hijaz were involved in militant fighting at leadership level in the Battle of Balakot, currently a part of Mansehra District of KP province, in 1831, which was in fact a trendsetter for the forthcoming progression of religious aggression in the region (Jalal, 2008, p. 276). The battle and its aftermath scenario provide ideology of *Jihad* for the future Islamist movements in the region. The fight at Balakot gave the Muslims of the sub-continent memorials of inspirations in the form of most known freedom fighter in South Asia, Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly (1786–1831) and Shah Ismail (1779–1831). The graves of these freedom fighters are in district Mansehra. Many *Jihadist* camps were established in 1990s during the Kashmir struggle in the same region (ICG N°46, 2006). The freedom fighters in post 9\11 were mobilized in the inspiration of *Jihad* of the battle of Balakot and its martyrs (Jalal, 2008, p. 2). The suggested influence of the battle on the *Jihad* in Kashmir demonstrates the historical perspective of religious militancy. Moreover, the *Jihad* of Balakot and the violence of today aim at establishing Islamic *Sharia* (*Sharia* is an Islamic law composed of the documentations of the Holy Quran and the teachings (Hadith) of the Holy Prophet (SWA). Its application in the Modern nation-state system is a matter of dispute among various Islamic school of thoughts, specifically between the Muslim traditionalists and the reformists).

Post 1947 Era: The Fusion of Radical Notions

Attempts of the redemption of Islamic ideology in the first half of the 18th century gradually transformed in to obsessive actions. Chengappa (2001) argues that the struggle eventually rendered in to distancing from the Hindus in the shape of distinct homeland, Pakistan. The founder of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave emphasis on the narrative of separate identity for Muslims based on religious differences (Behera & Joseph, 2004, p.180). Interestingly Mr. Jinnah, a progressive leader and Western educated, used religion as a device to accomplish his goals before the partition. After the partition, Jinnah made it clear in his speeches that Pakistan is not supposed to be a theocratic state

(Ahmed, 2007, p. 22). This was significant because most of the forthcoming leaders followed the footprints of the founding father particularly in explaining and incorporating religious notions in the state policy at national level, however, they overlooked a vital piece in this background. The use of ideology in achieving Pakistan was exclusively a different issue compared to manage the state affairs in ideological scheme. The unexpected demise of the founder, a challenging situation arose for the then politicians. The secular leaders demanded a non-theocratic state, on one hand, the people affiliated with religious clergy emphasized on the *Sharia* in the state, on the other hand. The then Prime Minister intervened to handle the situation and presented Objectives Resolution in 1949 which resulted in the institutionalization of the Islamic concepts in the constitutional framework of the state.

In 1953, violent riots broke out in the city of Lahore over the issue of the religious status of *Qadianis* (the term *Qadiani* originates from Qadian, situated in the sub-Continent of Indo-Pak, a birth place of the founder of *Ahmadiyya* movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The term refers for a version of Islam from South Asia. Other terms refer to the same versions are *Ahmedi/Lahori/Mirzai*. The sect is the most excluded one among the Muslims. Some of the versions of Islam such as *Deobandi* and the *Wahabi* even consider the *Qadiani* as non-Muslims). The violence resulted in the imposition of first the Martial Law in the history of Pakistan. In 1962, muscle of the clergy was demonstrated in the streets when Ayub's constitution retitled the state by omitting the word 'Islamic' from the given name of the state in the constitution of 1956. The dictator was at the crown of his power, yet he was pushed to rethink his constitutional proposal. The *Ulemas* primarily from the *Deobandi* school of thought and the affiliated groups formed an alliance against the religious pluralism. Their victory was eventually illustrated by the proclamation of *Qadianis* as non-Muslims through a later provision in the constitution of 1973 (Ahmed, 2007, p.44). Z. A. Bhutto, leader of the moderate/secular political parties in power, made that decision about the *Qadianis*. The triumph boosted the cadre of the *Deobandi* groups and reinforced their confidence in attaining religious objectives through official state channels. Bhutto contributed in the radicalization of the state machinery and the general discourse in supporting Islamist *Jihadist* like Gulbadin Hikmatyar, Rasool Sayyaf and Gillani to intensify non-state activities in Afghanistan in 1975 in response to Sardar Dawood's clandestine efforts for *Pakhtunistan* (Javeed & Fatima, 2013, p .63) (*Pakhtunistan* is the idea of separate homeland for *Pakhtuns* living in Pakistan and Afghanistan by the *Pakhtun* separatist movements). Bhutto regime supported leaders like Burhanudin Rabbani, Ahmed Shah Masood to disrupt already fragile law and order situation in Afghanistan (Rahman, 2012, p.33).

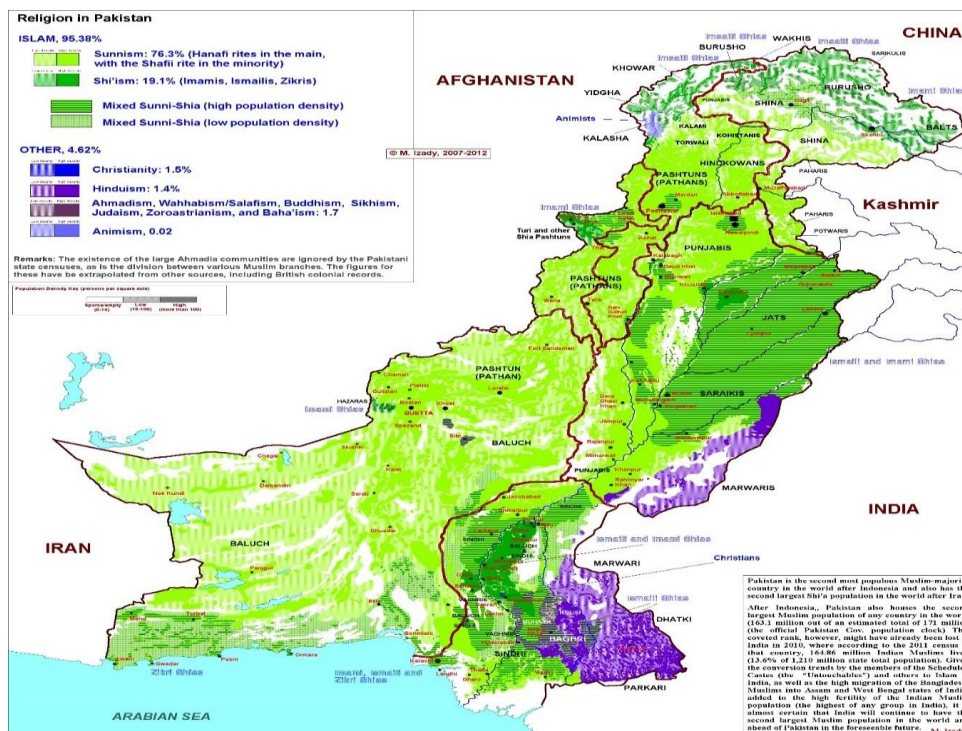
Impassionate study of history specifies that Bhutto is responsible for initiating *Jihadist* endeavors in Afghanistan. Such efforts inspired the Zia regime to provide support to Islamist *Jihadists* fighting against the Soviets, which resulted in giving rise to militancy in the region.



Source: Spearhead Research. Harnessing intellectual resources for innovative solutions. Retrieved from http://spearheadresearch.org/index.php/maps_graphs/map-of-religious-distribution-in-pakistan

Post-1979 Era: Socio-Political and Cultural Transformation in Pakistan

To some scholars, religious extremism at the global level did not spread after the fall of the Soviet Union or after the incident of 9\11, in the case of Pakistan and its neighboring region. To them Islamist extremism at the transnational level was in progress even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Hashmi (2009, p. 13), for example, stresses that the foreign policy of Pakistan emphasizing brotherhood with the Islamic states, particularly with Saudi Arabia and Iran, is responsible for the evolution of religious extremism in the country. He argues that the notion in Pakistan foreign policy of brotherhood with Muslim nations, invited Saudi Arabia to indulge in the internal affairs of Pakistan. Hashmi, however, does not explain the regional setting and internal picture of the state in the context of security and ideological conditions before and after 1979.



These events had great impacts on the region and played significant role in the intensification of extremism in the region in general. The fight to counter the Communism for political motives on the transnational quarters was fused with the Islamic notion of *Jihad*, which resulted in the radicalization and destabilization of Pakistan (Ahmer, 2011, p. 48). Consequently, it led in the proliferation of arms smuggling and radical/sectarian groups in the Pak-Afghan borderland (Ashraf, 2010). The Iranian revolution of 1979 gave rise to intolerance amongst *Shia* sect in Pakistan. The influx of Afghan refugees predominately *Deobandi* Muslims troubled security settings in terms of sectarian context within the state. Some of the sectarian units, professing the *Deobandi* school of thought generally trained in the Afghan war, had affiliation with terrorist groups operating at international levels (Malik, 2008; Shah, 2014, p. 443). In the late 1980s Sipa Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Laskar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) were allegedly involved in the sectarian violence largely against the *Shia* sect (CGAR, 2009, p. 4). Initially these groups focused their activities in the Sothern and Central Punjab and some parts of KP province but with the passage of time their network feasted nationwide. Some of these militant groups served the state particularly in the Zia regime. *Laskar-e-Taiba* focused its activities in the Indian occupied Kashmir to serve state interest (ICG, 2009, p. 11). A violent *Shia* group known as Sipa-e-Muhmmad rose as a reaction to protecting interests of its sect from the domination of the *Deobandi* offshoots. The SSP and LJ are offensive, intended to attack assets of *Shia* community, the Sipa-e-Mohammad is largely a defensive, to protect *Shia* community from the radical *Deobandi* groups by attacking their personnel, radical group (Aslam, 2015). The categorization is made based on the operational outlooks of these sectarian groups.

The ideological revolution of Iran in 1979 influenced the activities of the *Shia* community in Pakistan to have more rights and share in power structure. The strength of *Shia* community was demonstrated in the huge appearance in public against the Zakat ordinance alarmed the *Deobandi* school. This led to the emergence of anti-*Shia* units in the state (Adnan, 2015). The *Deobandi* syndicate already grew powerful on the bedrock of *Jihadist* activities coupled with the *Madrassas* support with sponsorship of Saudi Arabia. At national level, the *Deobandi* approach was facilitated already. In the late 1980s sectarian chaos openly started. There were number of sects and varied versions of Islam, however, *Deobandi* school was embraced for the theoretical and practical explanations of Islamization processes in the state (ICG, 2005, p. 12).

The Saudi government invested enormous sums in the *Madrassa* project in FATA to ensure expansion of *Wahabi* Islam in the region. Ideological political parties in Pakistan wholeheartedly supported the new network of *Madrassas* and

got involved directly to make it a success. The afghan refugees, members of anti-Soviet groups and underprivileged adults were enrolled. These *Madrassas* were to serve displaced and poor as an alternate education institution. Most of the Taliban from Pakistan emerged from these *Madrassas*. The Taliban ended fighting among various *Jihadi* groups in Afghanistan and installed small establishments of extreme Islamic nature in 1994 (Gasper, 2001, p. 7).

Zia's Islamization process and enormous support to *Jihadist* ensured the emergence of militant movements. The Afghan war trained more than one hundred thousand freedom fighters from around the world (Rashid, 1999, p. 78). The war produced a unique extremist movement in the appellation of global *Jihad*. Thousands of *Madrassas* were established with the financial support of Saudi Arabia and the United States to provide muscular support to the *Jihadist* (Gasper, 2001, p. 7-8) (Online Journal, 2014). After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and even after the incident of 9\11 in the borderland of Pak-Afghan, the *Jihadi* activities were continued unimpeded. Resolute training and prolong tactical experience turned the *Jihadists* into huge liability. Despite array of warnings from the experts, as these groups might become a threat even for the assets of the United States (US) itself in the future. The US desperate to counter Communism, disregarded the consequences, wholeheartedly supported religious groups in the Afghan war (Haqqani, 2004, p. 93). Consequently, sundry *Madrassas* in Pakistan were given assignment to create a *Jihadi* literature, activate and articulate general opinion of masses, recruit and train individuals. Bulks of the militants fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan are now fighting the US, the allied forces and the Pakistani military in the post 9\11.

General Zia used Islamic slogan for anti-Bhutto campaign appeared dedicated to the Islamization of the state (Abbas, 2005, p. 97). For this, Islamist political parties passionately supported Zia's regime. Usually, an unconstitutional government, military regime needs legitimization within the state. The support of religious parties was of utmost prominence; including Jamat-i-Islami which supported Zia's Islamization process. Islamization in the 1980s in Pakistan was based on the theoretical framework of *Deobandi* version of Islam. One of the purposes behind the proliferation of *Madrassas* was to garner public support to Zia's Islamization schemes. The constituency of religious political parties increased dramatically due to the increased numbers of the *Madrassas* and the students (ICG, 2011, p. 2).

Zia was keen to introduce a program of change that would affect all segments of the society. The inclusive radical enterprise was not limited to crafting a *Jihadist* or fundamentalist approach. The incorporation of harsh laws in the legal system ensured the rise of religious extremism. These laws are

responsible for the increase in violence against women in Pakistan, denying liberty thereby imposing legal penalties. In 1980, a circular was issued stipulating that Women will have a proper dress code in the work and in education institution (Ahmed, 2013, p. 238-239). The word 'Proper' defined the clothes of women not just in terms of appearance but in terms of fitting and stitching, allowing the already male dominated society to seize feminine liberties. Zia's implementation of doctrines was tricky and effective in shaping practical flavor to religious schemes. A unique way was adopted in the implementation procedures, fundamentalist *Mulvis*, religious clerics, were given tasks on local/national television and other communication channels to justify Islamic laws for women. Such policies promoted radicalism and provided opportunities to the fanatic mindset to nurture. It gave birth to a narrow-minded and intolerant society, violence and extremism is the ultimate way of expression. The introduction of *Haddood* ordinance and its scrutiny by the *Shariat* courts deprived women of their basic rights. For example, rape as a crime was made depended upon the presence of four male witnesses for the execution of the penalty, disapproving the former Anglo-Mohammaden law of evidence-based crime and undermining status of female witness. Moreover, protection of a girl less than fourteen years of age in the sexual and rape cases is not included in the *Zina* ordinance (Mehdi, 1994, p. 123). The ratio of honor killing and violence against women significantly escalated in the same period. The implications of such regulations are related to the current religious extremism in the state. It is difficult to raise the voice of reason, the appreciation of the cold-blooded murder of former Governor of Punjab has been celebrated in various quarters of the society. It has demonstrated the impact of extremist values on the social fabrics of life in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Since the inception of Pakistan religious groups struggled to give the legal system their own version of Islamic flavor, the desire was to inflict own description of *Sharia* over other Islamist groups. Instead of countering the struggle, state nurtured extremism and supported sectarian violence to attain short term objectives. The gap grew wider between different sects in-turn filled by the non-state actors. Its implications include the widespread sectarian violence in the state. It was ultimately, the Zia regime which openly and covertly supported and harbored Islamist militancy in Pakistan. The transformative policies of his regime coupled with regional instability influenced all sectors of socio-political and public-private facets of society. In the pre-1947 period ideological violence in its substance was focused against the non-Muslims. In the late 20th and early 21st century, the religious militancy was more focused against other Muslims.

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