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Changing Dynamics of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Historical Account

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Abstract

In Pakistan, sectarianism is generally taken as a conflict between the Sunni majority and the Shia minority. This narrative is vague, making it difficult to understand who is battling whom. Factually speaking, these two sects are not homogeneous; instead, they each have their sub-sects with different schools of thought. For example, the Sunnis are divided into several groups, including Brailvis, Deobandis, Wahabis, and Ahle Hadith. In contrast, the Shia sect includes Ithna Ashari, Zaidis, Isma'ilis, and Bohris. The paper explores a historical account of sectarianism (both inter- and intra-sect) in Pakistan with special reference to its changing dynamics over the years. The paper applies a historical approach to delineate this phenomenon thoroughly while using primary and secondary sources, i.e., archival records, original sources, books, research journals and magazines, electronic sources, etc. A key finding of this research is that Pakistan has been the victim of both inter- and intra-sect disputes and violence since its emergence, rather than considering it as the development of General Zia-ul-Haq's period and onwards. It is a significant historical truth that researchers and authorities on sectarianism and sectarian violence in Pakistan have not adequately acknowledged or highlighted so far. Thus, academic misconceptions in this regard led to the distortion of historical facts in the course of time.

Keywords: Sectarianism; Sectarian Violence; Islamization; Pakistan.

1. Introduction

In Pakistan, sectarianism is generally taken as a conflict between the Sunni majority and the Shia minority. This narrative is vague, making it difficult to understand who is battling whom. The matter of fact is that these two sects are not homogeneous; instead, they each have their sub-sects with different schools of thought. For instance, the Sunnis are divided into several groups, including the Brailvi, the Deobandi, the Wahabi, and the Ahle Hadith. In contrast, the Shia sect includes Ithna Ashari, Zaidis, Isma'ilis, and Bohris. In terms of identity, these two sects are politically and ideologically opposite to each other; however, the intra-sect differences among the Sunni are equally broader than those between the Sunni and the Shia. Furthermore, the sectarian violence that frequently

appeared is primarily seen between the Shia and the Deobandi; nevertheless, violence between the Brailvi and the Deobandi cannot be overlooked (Riikonen, 2007).

Pakistan has experienced both types of sectarian conflicts and violence, i.e., inter- and intra-sects, as security challenges. At the inter-sect level, the country has witnessed the -Brailvi -Shia –and the Deobandi –Shia violence. On the other hand, at the intra-sect level, this phenomenon refers to the Brailvi–Deobandi frictions. Initially, the inter- and intra-sect differences were less intense and rarer. However, over a period of time, these differences became more severe and violent. Historical sources reveal that during the first decade (1947 to 1960), conflicts primarily arose between the Brailvi and the Shia, but they were infrequent and notably erupted during the *Muharrams*[1]. Similarly, during the same period, evidence of clashes between the Deobandi and the Shia were also reported.

It is important to mention that relations between these two sects were comparatively appalling as Deobandi ulemas and leaders strongly demanded the banning and restriction of the Shia cult and its religious rituals. Gradually, sharp polarization based on sectarian hatred and biases caused significant bloodshed between them, particularly when the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), a militant Deobandi organization, was formed in 1985. Moreover, as sectarian violence intensified between the Deobandi and the Shia, the number of clashes between the Brailvi and the Shia decreased. Under the shifting paradigm, both the Brailvi and the Shia started viewing the Deobandi sect as their mutual enemy. Scholars have overlooked such facts, and academics have resulted in vague histories regarding the dynamics of sectarianism and sectarian violence in Pakistan.

The decade of the 1980s and afterwards witnessed different dynamics with regard to sectarianism and sectarian violence in the country, especially as internal and external elements played a vital role in fueling this phenomenon. Internally, these menaces emerged due to the Islamization policies of the military ruler, Zia-ul-Haq, and sectarian organizations with their militant networks. External factors included the Shia's empowerment, as sense emerged after the Iranian Revolution (1979), the active role of Pakistan in the Soviet-Afghan war during the 1980s, and the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. All these factors left a far-reaching impact on Pakistan's sectarian landscape. Abbas (2010) believes that the consequences of these changes proved mainly disastrous for the Shia community in Pakistan. For example, they suffered a lot with regard to religious freedom, suspicions arose regarding their allegiance to the country, and different anti-Shia groups brutally targeted them. As a result, Pakistan witnessed new manifestations of sectarianism. Mumtaz Ahmad (2003) writes, “In Pakistan, Shi'ism has progressively become more centralized, clerical, and influenced by the Iranian ideology, and also aligning more closely with the global Shia community. At the same time, the Sunni sect had become increasingly Arabized due to the large-scale migration of Pakistani laborers to the Gulf countries, coupled with Saudi Arabia’s significant support for the Sunni madrasas and jihadi organizations in Pakistan” (p. 64). Over the years, the gulf between these two sects increased, and violence became a security threat to Pakistan's integrity. Furthermore, during the decades of the 1990s, 2000s, and after 9/11, sectarian violence further increased due to the rise of a nexus between sectarian militant groups and major political parties, particularly the Deobandi ones, including the Jamiat Ulema Pakistan Fazl ur Rehman Group (JUI-F). It is to be noted that frequent clashes and violence, at that time, were mainly noticed between the Deobandi and the Shia.

The paper explores the historical evolution of sectarianism in Pakistan, highlighting its changing dynamics, the progression of its nature, and implications over time. The phenomenon of sectarianism is categorized into three distinct phases. The first phase, from 1947 to 1979, covers the

[1] The first month of the Islamic Calendar is the month in which the Muslims, especially the Shia, mourn the martyrdom of Hazrat Hussein, the grandson of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him).

initial three decades of the nation's history and investigates the roots of sectarian discord and violence. The second phase, from 1980 to 1989, examines the internal and external factors that fueled the rise of sectarian militancy. The third phase, covering 1990 to 2001 and onwards, examines the intensification of sectarian violence during the democratic regimes of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. This phase also elucidates the nature of sectarian violence following Pakistan's involvement in the US-led "War on Terror" after the 9/11 attacks.

2. Theoretical Approach and Methodology

The current study employs a historical approach to explore the evolution of sectarianism in Pakistan, highlighting its changing dynamics, the progression of its nature, and implications over time. In this regard, data has been used from primary and secondary sources, such as archival records, original sources, books, research journals and magazines, speeches, etc. To conduct this study, researchers visited a few key archival repositories, including the Sindh Archives (Karachi), the archival section of the Liaquat National Library (Karachi), the Pakistan Navy Central Library (Karachi), and the archival section of university libraries, such as the University of Karachi. Moreover, digital sources like the South Asia Open Archives were also utilized. Searches were done using a targeted list of keywords to locate relevant documents. These keywords included: sectarianism, Sunni-Shia conflict, religious violence, Zia-ul-Haq Islamization, Deobandi, Barelvi, Shia protests, militant groups, Sipah-e-Sahaba, Tehreek-e-Jafaria, and sectarian policy. The selection of secondary sources was based on scholarly credibility, historical scope (1947–2001), and relevance to major sectarian shifts. In this regard, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, monographs, newspaper articles, and academic book chapters published between 1947 and 2017 were reviewed. On the other hand, ideologically biased works lacking academic rigor were excluded. This rigorous source selection approach ensured that both primary and secondary materials were historically grounded, thematically relevant, and methodologically appropriate.

3. History of Sectarianism in Pakistan: Nature and Development

3.1 First Phase (1947 to 1979): From sectarian impartiality to sectarian prejudices

At the time of its inception in August 1947, Pakistan inherited sectarian diversity in the form of sects, sub-sects, and religio-political organizations. They represented their separate sectarian identities and tendencies and used them for their politically motivated goals (Khan, n.d.). There are two major sects in Pakistan, i.e., the Sunni and the Shia, who dominate the religious and political panorama of the country. According to one estimate, Sunnis comprise 80 to 85 percent of Pakistan's population, while Shias constitute 15 to 20 percent (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2014). Historical sources certify that since independence, sectarian violence has been posing as a security risk to the country's integrity due to sharp hostility between these two sects. Moreover, the escalation of violence in Pakistan can be attributed to several critical factors, including the enduring religious conflicts stemming from theological differences, the political and economic agendas of both civilian and military governments, and the strategic interests of external powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. All these elements have significantly strained Shia-Sunni relations in the country.

It is a fact that during the early years, Pakistan’s rulers followed the policy of sectarian neutrality in the country, which was inspired by the British, to sustain their rule (Ahmed, 2011). As the first Governor General of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah did not believe in sectionalism; therefore, he opposed it. For example, in a 1948 address in Dhaka, Jinnah (1948) stated, "If you want to build up yourselves into a nation, for God's sake give up this provincialism. Provincialism has been one of the curses, and so is sectionalism, Shia, Sunni, etc”. Jinnah's address explicitly ratifies that the

new state would be unbiased and would not have a sectarian agenda as a public policy (Zahab, 2002). On the other hand, Jinnah's speech demonstrates that factional divisions were exclusively present since the emergence and were viewed as critical internal challenges to the survival of the new country; hence, circumstances forced him to express his worries publicly. Second example of sectarian impartiality was seen when the first census was conducted in 1951, in which the government did not categorize population distribution on the basis of sectarian identity. In this census, overall Pakistan's population showed a notable increase in terms of Muslims and non-Muslims, instead of along sectarian lines. It was an indirect commitment made by the state to 'say no to sectarianism' in the future as well (Ahmed, 2011).

During the early phase, people, too, did not have concerns about the sectarian affiliation of their rulers. Even though there was no restriction from the administration to proclaim sectarian allegiance as Shia or Sunni while joining any public post (Haqqani, 2006). According to Vali Nasr (2006), "Many of Pakistan's leaders in the early years were Shias, including the country's founder and the first Governor General (Jinnah), three of its first prime ministers, and two of its military leaders (Iskandar Mirza and Yahya Khan)" (p. 88). Due to this liberal approach, sectarian confrontations between the Shia and the Sunni were extremely rare in the early years.

With Jinnah's death, unexpectedly sectarian prejudices came to the surface. Those religio-political parties, which the Muslim League marginalized during the Pakistan Movement, started to demand patronage of the Sunni school of thought as a state ideology. This act inculcated suspicions in the Shia community, being a minority (Waseem, Kamran, Ali, et.al., 2010). This majority-minority dichotomy marked the beginning of the rise of factional identities that fueled age-old sectarian hostility between the two sects and gave birth to sectarian politics in the country. As it is argued earlier that Pakistan has had both inter- and intra-sect divides in inheritance in 1947, however, this fact has not been emphasized by scholars or researchers so far. It is also worth noting that early Shia-Sunni sectarian conflicts arose predominantly between the Brailvi and the Shia, while intra-sect conflicts also equally prevailed between the Brailvi and the Deobandi schools of thought. In 1951, the first case of sectarian violence came to the surface. The Justice Muneer Report (1954) states, “Shia-Sunni divisions began to emerge and spread in several regions. A controversy arose over the construction of an *Imambara*[2]. In Krishan Nagar, Lahore, and Bhakkar, severe clashes were reported about a breach of the peace during a *ta'zia*[3] Procession. The Shia-Sunni violence broke out in Shahpur Kanjra, located almost seven miles from Lahore, in which two Shias were killed, a woman and a three-year-old child. This marked the first instance in which the Shia were the victims of communal violence” (p. 34).

At that time, several Sunni ulemas urged that the Muharram processions be banned because they were anti-Islamic rituals. To avert additional sectarian violence, efforts had been undertaken to address this matter amicably. This demand gave a negative impression to the Shia, who thought that their identity and religious practices were imperiled (Katoch, 2014). In addition to Shia-Sunni tensions, intra-sect relations among the Sunni, specifically Brailvi-Wahabi, had also become strained. Justice Muneer's report (1954) further states that the sectarian violence flared between the Brailvi and the Wahabi in Gujranwala the same year. The difference erupted over the number of *travih*[4] Read throughout the holy month of *Ramadan*[5].

[2] An Imambara is a Shia Muslim congregation hall used primarily for mourning ceremonies during Muharram, particularly to commemorate the martyrdom of Hazrat Hussein.
[3] Ta'zia is a replica of the tomb of Hazrat Hussein, used in mourning rituals during Muharram by the Shia Muslims.
[4] Muslims perform a special prayer in the Month of *Ramadan*.
[5] A month in which the Muslims fast.

Comparatively, General Ayub Khan's period (1958-1969) is counted as more vulnerable than the preceding regimes in the wake of sectarian violence. Ayub came to power by a military coup and dismissed the civilian government; hence, his martial law regime weakened the democratic process in Pakistan. General Ayub appeared to be a reformist and progressive leader in the wake of religious schism and diversity; so, he restrained religious and political forces in order to address sectarian tensions (Abbas, 2010). According to A.S. Pirzada (1996), "General Ayub's military rule gave momentum to internal factionalism in the country; consequently, sectarian rift further sharpened. Despite its reformist rhetoric, the military government tactfully dealt with opposing forces as it attempted to co-opt the *mullahs*[6]. On the one hand, Ayub restricted political liberties in the country; however, on the other hand, he sought religious parties' feedback on his proposed constitution. Taking advantage of it, the Deobandi Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) demanded a ban on Shia mourning processions and other rites. The Deobandi ulema also attempted to utilize the [1962] constitution to confine the Shia [religious] activities within Imambaras" (p. 25).

Keeping in view increasing sectarian rifts, Ayub's regime fully turned down these demands. Conversely, the Deobandi clerics were softly treated, which provided them with the opportunity to use sectarian cards for political gains (International Crisis Group, 2005). This dual policy proved ruinous for Ayub's regime, as the first-ever ruthless, violent incident against Shias occurred during his rule. According to one report, in June 1963, a Muharram procession in Tehri (Khairpur, Sindh) was attacked by some Sunni extremists, in which more than 100 Shia were killed (Abbas, 2010). The International Crisis Group report (2005) states, "To call the 1963 killings a riot is not an apt description. It was an act of mass killing. The dead bodies were thrown into a well to cover the massacre. Had it not been for timely media exposure and strong intervention from police, the event might never have come to public knowledge" (p. 9). This case posed a significant challenge to General Ayub's regime in overcoming extremist elements. The military regime had to handle this matter tactfully so that further violence could be avoided. Besides this, luckily, Ayub's regime did not encounter such a major violent incident. Following the Tehri incident, the Shia community put forward their three specific demands, which included separate religious studies (dinayat), authority over their religious endowments (auqaf), and the freedom and protection of azadari (mourning rituals during Muharram) (Qureshi, 2016).

The tenure of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1971-1977) remained unaffected as no major Shia-Sunni confrontation was reported. He tried to appease both sects simultaneously. To gratify his Shia supporters, he accepted their long-standing demand for a separate religious studies program in schools. Similarly, the Sunni clerics were duped by Bhutto into believing that the Quran and the Sunnah would govern Pakistan. The Constitution of 1973 explicitly stated that all laws would be Islamized within ten years; however, Bhutto encouraged politics on secular lines. In practice, the Constitution did not guarantee religious rights; consequently, Sunni clerics became increasingly dissatisfied with him over time (International Crisis Group, 2005).

3.2 Second Phase (1980 to 1989): From localized to Internationalized Sectarianism

Pakistan witnessed another Martial Law regime under General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), who ruled the country during the 1980s. Undeniably, his domestic and foreign policies contributed to a surge in sectarian violence. The sectarian confrontation during his rule was mainly between the Deobandi and the Shia, resulting in several instances of anti-Shia violence and killings. Many evidences show that during Zia's period, the country's sectarian ambiance became more susceptible because both sects continued to expand their links with extremist organizations (Ahmar, 2008).

[6] Muslim religious leaders.

Domestically, the Islamization policies of General Zia ensured that the country was governed according to the orthodox interpretation of the Sunni school of thought. These plans also included implementing Islamic rules regarding taxes and charity donations, regardless of the Muslim community in Pakistan. As Zia's regime was a strong proponent of the Sunni school of thought, the imposition of Islamic legislation based on Sunni fiqh grossly irritated the Shia minority. Under the question of survival, it started opposing Zia's policies (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2014). For instance, in March 1979, the Shia established their organization, namely Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh Ja'afria (the Front for the Defence of the Ja'afri Law, TNFJ), to protect the Shia community in Pakistan. As a prominent Shia organization, the TNJF organized a massive protest against the Zakat and Ushr Ordinance (June 1980) imposed by the Zia regime. Mufti Ja'afar Husain, a prominent Shia leader, demanded that the incumbent government plan to oversee Pakistan under the *Hanafi* laws[7], so as the Shia community should equally be allowed to practice their jurisprudence, i.e., *fiqh Ja'afria*[8], freely (Ahmar, 2008). The military regime did not pay attention to this demand and thought that it would encourage other sects to do the same. In July 1980, over 100,000 Shia demonstrators marched towards Islamabad to accomplish their demands (Yusuf, 2012). Under intense pressure, the Zia regime had to reverse its judgment and exempt the Shia community from paying Zakat according to the Sunni fiqh.

The change in decision left several misconceptions for the Sunni. First, the Sunni fundamentalists took this reversal as a significant favor to the Shia. Second, they thought that it would strengthen their Shia competitors. Third, they got the impression that the Shia were granted religious autonomy. Lastly, they also feared that the fiqh Ja'afria was going to equalize with the current Hanafi laws in religious paradigms. To counter the Shia's reluctance to pay Zakat as an Islamic tax, the Sunni fundamentalists used religious rhetoric to urge the government to label they be labeled as heretics and apostates (Yusuf, 2012). Furthermore, the extreme Deobandi factions became skeptical regarding Zia's regime, given that it was sabotaging their long-term effort to declare the Shia a non-Muslim sect.

After being disappointed by Zia's reversal policy, radical Sunni Deobandi factions mobilized themselves to use theological and political tactics. Consequently, Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangavi, the vice-president of the JUI-F, Punjab, established Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in 1985 in the district of Jhang, Punjab (Grare, 2007). It is held that Jhang's internal socio-economic factors influenced the foundation of the SSP. For a long time, there has been a conflict between Sunni businessmen and Shia landlords based on political and economic interests. It is noteworthy that Shia landlords also wielded political power in Jhang. Moreover, sectarian prejudices made the conflict more intense. Hasan (2011) writes, "Jhang is considered to be the birthplace of the Deobandi-Shia sectarian violence in Pakistan" (p. 82). Employing terrorist organizations to achieve desired results marked the origin of a new sort of sectarian approach and strategy in the country. Hence, changing dynamics in terms of sectarian confrontation posed a greater threat to the country's survival in the following decades.

As far as external factors are concerned, they also contributed significantly to the sectarian strife in Pakistan. Important among them included the Iranian Revolution (February 1979) and the Soviet-Afghan War (December 1979). It is widely believed that these two events had a grave effect on the sectarian activism in Pakistan. The Islamic Revolution in Iran gave the Shia in Pakistan great confidence in terms of their sectarian nationalism and identity. On the other hand, the Shia's political outfit, TNFJ, had already established itself as a pressure group to safeguard its political motives.

[7] Hanafi Law is one of the important Sunni schools of jurisprudence, which is named after Imam Abu Hanifa.
[8] It is the Shiite fiqh named after the sixth Shi'a imam Jafar al-Sadiq.

Moreover, the Shia vigorously started reforming their sect, particularly under the supervision of those ulemas who were educated and trained in Iran and Iraq. It marked the beginning of the politicized and puritanical adaptation of the Shia faith in Pakistan, aligned with international objectives. Under a new sectarian outlook, the Shia community seriously started to ponder their religious practices that had been heavily inspired and evolved by the South Asian traditions (Qureishi, 1989). As a result of Iran's moral and financial support, the Shia are now more organized and united in their fight against their common adversary [the Deobandi]. (Grare, 2007).

On ideological grounds, Saudi Arabia and other authoritarian regimes in the Middle East became concerned about the growing power of Iran in Pakistan. Therefore, they made collective efforts to unite the Sunni states in the Muslim World. The aims were twofold. Firstly, they wanted to export Sunni-Wahabi Islam to Pakistan and other regions of the Muslim World. Secondly, they intended to counter the Iranian threat as an age-long adversary. This led to sectarian warfare regionally and internationally. Moreover, the ideological struggle between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia had a significant impact on Pakistan, as both sought to accomplish sectarian objectives by cultivating and supporting their sectarian organizations. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states concentrated on the NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Punjab regions, whilst Iran backed their supporters in Peshawar, Kurram Agency, Gilgit-Baltistan region, and Hangu (Afzal, Iqbal, Inayat, 2012).

The second external element thought to have sparked the rise of sectarian strife and violence in the country was the anti-Soviet Jihad launched by Afghan Mujahideens in December 1979 (Ahmar, 2008). In this backdrop, a nexus formed among the US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia that was said to have exacerbated the Shia-Sunni polarization on a high scale. The objective was to train the Afghan and Pakistani Sunni Mujahideens. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused negative impacts on Pakistan, too. It not only resulted in a massive growth of madrasas in the country, but also transformed their nature. It is reported that since the Soviet invasion, the number of madrasas in Pakistan has nearly doubled (Riaz, 2005).

Furthermore, these madrasas greatly nurtured and developed the concept of Jihad against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and produced a large number of Mujahideens. According to Talbot (2007), “The Soviet-Afghan conflict helped spread the 'Kalashnikov culture' in Pakistan due to the leakage of weapons for the Mujahideens. This empowered militant sectarian groups to adopt a character of paramilitary force. The firepower of these organizations significantly outweighed that of a police force maligned for its corruption and demoralization” (p. 153). This conflict also helped establish cordial linkages between militant groups and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), a premier intelligence agency of Pakistan. These insurgents not only received crucial training, but also enjoyed some exceptions if they moved away from Jihad and initiated sectarian bloodshed in Pakistan (Talbot, 2007). Furthermore, anarchy in Afghanistan produced conducive conditions to establish military training camps, which were initially used by the Mujahideens, backed by Saudi Arabia and the US. Subsequently, these camps were used by the Taliban, Jihadi groups, such as Harkat-ul-Ansar (which later became Harkat-ul-Mujahideen) and Lashkar-e-Taiba, and sectarian militant groups, such as SSP and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) (Talbot, 2007).

Moreover, due to this conflict, Pakistan hosted a considerable number of Afghan refugees. A CIA report (1984) reveals, “Pakistani Government registration figures indicate that about 2.8 million Afghan refugees were in Pakistan” (p. 3). The massive inflow of these refugees not only affected social life but also the economy of Pakistan. The Afghanistan crisis equally posed serious threats to the internal and external security of Pakistan. In the mid-1980s, Pakistan witnessed an endless surge of sectarian violence, causing the killings of ordinary people as well as leaders of both sects. The CIA report (1984) further asserts, “Violence has increased in Kurram Agency, where there have been

serious clashes between rival Shia and Sunni Pakistani tribes. Their dispute is centuries old, but the arrival of enough Afghan Sunnis to double the Agency's population has contributed significantly to sectarian tensions" (p. 4).

3.3 Third Phase (1990 to 2001 and onwards): From sectarian militarization to sectarian politicization

The decade of the 1990s also proved vulnerable to Pakistan in terms of sectarian riots and violence. The same factors mostly ignited this menace, based on the legacy left by preceding decades. As the war in Afghanistan ended, the sectarian groups grew their networks primarily by increasing their military strength and manpower. For example, sectarian militarization was seen in 1994 when Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), a Shia militant group, was formed. To counter the Shia's influence, Lashkar-e-Jhangavi (LeJ), a Sunni Deobandi militant group, came to the surface in 1996. The emergence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1994 further encouraged the Deobandi in Pakistan to raise their long-standing demand to declare Pakistan as a purely Sunni State. Moreover, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda became natural allies for the LeJ; therefore, it developed a strategic and political alliance with them. For instance, Riaz Basra, a prominent LeJ leader, fled Afghanistan in the same year and sought shelter. According to Mumtaz Ahmad (1998), "The SMP strongly believes in "Khoon ka badla khoon (blood for blood) and exhorts its activists to seek martyrdom by "eliminating the dushmanan-i-Hussain" (the enemies of Hussain)" (p. 26). Hence, the relationships between the two cults became more sever over the time due to this "tit for tat" policy.

In this decade, another new dynamic was added to the sectarian landscape of Pakistan, that is, the nexus between political parties and sectarian organizations. This collaboration greatly benefited the sectarian organizations. For instance, they were able to actively participate in the electoral politics. Secondly, they overshadowed political parties and held them captive. Thirdly, their close bond with mainstream political parties also enabled them to win elections and to achieve their desired objectives. Consequently, sectarian violence grew further. Over time, governments have repeatedly refrained from taking strong action against these militant sectarian groups out of fear that they would lose the crucial political backing that these groups provide. During this decade, the SSP enthusiastically backed candidates nominated by the PML-N and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) (Yusuf, 2012). For instance, Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan and Chairperson of the PPP, allied with Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman, head of the JUI-F, during her second tenure and appointed him as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee. It provided a free hand to the SSP about sectarian activities. It is important to note that the SSP leader, Maulana Azam Tariq, also a National Assembly member from Jhang, was not detained despite his overt involvement in anti-Shia violence (Ahmad, 1998). The compromise was made out of political interests to benefit each other.

In addition to inter-sect violence, the intra-sect violence between the Brailvi and the Deobandi also affected Pakistan internally. In response to acts of violence, provoked by the Deobandi SSP, the Brailvi also founded a militant organization named the Sunni Tehreek (ST) in the early 1990s. It was primarily centered in cities, and retaking the Brailvi mosques from the Deobandi was one of the primary goals of the ST. Failure to do so ignited violence on the streets of Pakistan. According to the International Crisis Group (2007) report on sectarian dynamics of Pakistan, "The Military Establishment's support for the militant Jihadi groups in Kashmir and the Afghan Taliban, who had formed their government in Afghanistan by the mid-1990s, was another interconnected component that fueled the fire during this period. The Deobandi school of thought was closely associated with Pakistan-based sectarian outfits that were linked to the violent Jihadi groups in both combat zones.

The military establishment's strategy of pursuing strategic depth in Afghanistan and using proxy groups to fight India in a low-intensity conflict in Kashmir was seen by the Sunni Tehreek (ST) as strengthening the Deobandi outfits at home, as the latter were crucial in supplying recruits for both war theaters. The ST aimed to break the connection between the Deobandi organizations and the Pakistani State. It is interesting to note that the ST has been more against the Deobandis and Ahle Hadith than the Shia" (p. 11). Moreover, it can be noted that the ST or other Brailvi organizations, like Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, never accepted the Deobandis' narrative that the Shia should be declared as a non-Muslim community.

After the 9/11 incident, the involvement of Pakistan in the US-led "War on Terror" altered the nature of sectarian violence as a new wave of religious militancy arose. So far, either Sunnis or Shias have been the victims of sectarian violence. The Sunni extremist elements have been forced to target state institutions, especially the Military and Police, as a result of Pakistan's U-turn toward the Taliban regime and suppression of religious militant groups, particularly Deobandi outfits. Honestly speaking, the threat of terrorism that Pakistan suffered a lot from was the fallout of the US military campaign in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. These insurgents first took refuge in South Waziristan before expanding their base of support throughout the other tribal agencies. Afterwards, they focused their activities on the settled regions of the country. Hence, it led to sectarian violence in an unprecedented way.

After 2001, patterns and dynamics of sectarianism in Pakistan underwent significant changes, influenced by internal and international developments. The U.S.-led War on Terror and Pakistan's alignment with it drastically changed the relationships of Pakistan with many militant outfits, having sectarian affiliations. Under the new regime of General Pervez Mushrraf (1999-2008) and onwards, a zero-tolerance policy was adopted, whereby a crackdown started against militant sectarian actors, i.e., Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). It is worth mentioning that these organizations were earlier operating with relative impunity, which helped them to promote their sectarian agendas freely. Despite such punitive measures, sectarian violence did not diminish; instead, it evolved with more severe manifestations. Consequently, Shia professionals, pilgrims, and the Hazara community, especially in Karachi and Quetta, have been brutally targeted in bomb blasts and target killings. Moreover, the rise of transnational jihadist networks, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the region further spoiled the sectarian landscape of the Muslim world in general and Pakistan in particular. In short, the post-2001 period has ignited a shift towards more transnational and networked forms of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

4. Conclusion

The historical account of sectarianism in Pakistan indicates that the battle between the Sunni and the Shia predates the nation itself. This refutes previous theories, put up by academia and researchers, claiming that the sectarian violence and disputes in Pakistan originated in the 1980s. Unquestionably, this threat has persisted since Pakistan's inception and has endangered its integrity as a whole. Historical sources reveal that Pakistan has been encountering both inter- and intra-sect tensions that contributed to the periodic violence. Since the nature and implications of this menace have varied throughout the nation's history, however, its strength and scale fluctuated from low to high levels in each decade. For example, throughout the 1950s, Shia-Sunni sectarian confrontations were primarily limited to religious experts or the general public; therefore, violence was uncommon. A few sectarian incidents have been documented throughout this decade. It is worth noting that throughout the formative years, sectarian confrontations primarily erupted between the Brailvi and the Shia, though the Deobandi and the Shia disputes were also reported. As regards intra sect relations, the existence

of Deobandi-Brailvi discords indicated that one after another new dynamics were added to the sectarian landscape of Pakistan. Such historical truths have not been adequately recognized and highlighted by scholars and experts on this subject matter.

Regardless of underlying disparities and confrontations, evidences also delineate that Shia-Sunni relations in Pakistan were largely cordial up to the mid-1960s. The sectarian divisions deepened in the late 1970s and later decades due to domestic political changes and international factors, as already discussed above. These developments provided an opportunity for political organizations to forge links with militant groups. The combination of internal and external variables has also played a very significant role in sharpening sectarian divides. Gradually, new manifestations of sectarian tendencies and dynamics emerged after the 1980s. First, sectarian disputes in Pakistan progressed from the local (public) to the national (state) level. Second, there was a new shift in the number of impacted areas/localities due to sectarian conflicts. Unlike previous decades, sectarian tensions and bloodshed shifted from rural to urban regions. The cases of sectarian violence that occurred in Jhang (Punjab), Karachi (Sindh), Peshawar (KPK), and Quetta (Baluchistan) are in point. Finally, the nexus between political parties and militant sectarian groups has made this phenomenon more intricate and fierce in the fabric of Pakistani society over time, causing security threats.

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