

Sectarian Strife in Pakistan: A Legacy of Nineteen Eighties

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Abstract

In religious and ethnic violence the human race faces ‘a moral collapse that leads to the most diabolical acts of cruelty’.¹ Sectarian strife took roots in Pakistan in the decade of eighties. Scholars have articulated two different views about the emergence of sectarianism in Pakistan. One school of thought blames General Zia’s Islamization policy for the emergence of this phenomenon that established a sort of state monopoly on religion and the majority Sunni sect became more overtly dominant than ever before. On the other hand scholars like S. V.R. Nasr claims that the sectarian violence in the eighties was the direct result of the unfolding Iranian revolution and the beginning Afghan-Soviet war in the end of 1979. Pakistan utterly failed to contain the impact of these developments on its domestic politics. In undivided India there used to be sporadic outbreaks of Shia-Sunni clashes particularly in Bengal, Awadh and northern India² but after the creation of Pakistan, sectarian clashes were not so common nor were they on a big scale.³

The history of Islam in South Asia shows that Shia and Sunni sects have lived side by side in considerable harmony and peace in the region. The first president of All India Muslim League, Sir Agha Khan III was the spiritual leader of Ismaili Shia⁴ and Quaid-i-Azam, the founder of

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¹ Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam under Siege* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2003), pp.159, 160.

² Phyllis K. Herman, ‘India’, in Kathryn M. Coughlin (ed.), *Muslim Culture Today: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), p.69.

³ Mariam Abou Zahab, ‘Sectarianism as a Substitute Identity: Sunnis and Shias in Central and South Punjab’, in Soofia Mumtaz, Jean-Luc Racine, Imran Anwar Ali (ed.), *Pakistan the Contours: State and Society* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.79.

⁴ Ishtiaq Ahmed, *State, Nation and ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1996), p.86.

Pakistan and undisputed leader of Indian Muslims, was also Shia.⁵ After the creation of Pakistan Shia-Sunni relations remained normal except for occasional minor clashes during Muharram.⁶ The Shia sect represents the second largest Muslim school of jurisprudence in Pakistan. The majority of Pakistanis belong to the Sunni sect. However, the Shia played a crucial role in the creation of Pakistan.⁷ Until the Iranian revolution, Shias in Pakistan were a politically moderate community, and their organizations had only limited aims, such as separate text books on Shiite Islam. Zia's Islamization policy and the Iranian revolution spurred them into political activism.⁸

The imposition of *zakaat* (a compulsory Islamic tax deducted by the government) in 1980 mobilized the Shia community against General Zia.⁹ The Shia wanted exemption from compulsory deduction of this tax.¹⁰

The Islamic revolution that overthrew the Shah in 1979 was one of the first popular revolutions against modern authoritarian political system in the final quarter of the twentieth century.¹¹ The conservative Arab states with monarchies and Sheikdoms perceived the Iranian revolution as a threat to the established order in the Middle East. To counter the new threat they tried to develop a Sunni fundamentalist pole of attraction outside their borders. The measure adopted by the Saudi Kingdom broadened the gulf between Shiites and Sunnis and led to a

⁵ Carollee Bengelsoorf, Margaret Cerullo, and Yogesh Chandran (eds.), *The Selected Writings of Iqbal Ahmad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.416.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Afak Haydar, 'The politicization of the Shias and the development of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafariya in Pakistan', in Charles Kennedy, *Pakistan: 1992* (Boulder: West view Press, 1993), p.72.

⁸ <http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/sectarianismin pakistan.pdf>. Retrieved on 12.07.2009.

⁹ Mariam Abou Zahab, 'Sectarianism as a Substitute Identity: Sunnis and Shias in Central and South Punjab', in Soofia Mumtaz, Jean-Luc Racine, Imran Anwar Ali (eds.), *Pakistan the Contours State and Society* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.79.

¹⁰ In Shia-dominated societies such as Iraq, Iran and Lebanon (where Shia constitute the majority in the Muslim community) a tax called *Khums* is voluntarily given by those who can afford it and this tax is given to a cleric of one's choice and eventually the sums collected end up with the Ayatollahs who spend it on what they consider a worthy cause.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

resurgence of a conservative neo-fundamentalist Sunni Islam.¹² The war in Afghanistan fanned religious feelings. Extremist parties conveniently exploited the sensitivities of Sunni and Shia Muslims and highlighted the differences. The Shias now became more organized and confident with the advent of the rule of the Ayalollahs in Iran. The war in Afghanistan also highlighted the Shia-Sunni divide for Afghan society itself was sharply divided along sectarian and ethnic lines and Pakistan and Iran were each supporting *mujahideen* on the other side of the divide.¹³

Inter-sectarian harmony in Pakistan 1947-1974

There was inter-sectarian harmony among the different sects of Pakistan since its inception. According to the sectarian division ninety-two per cent of Pakistan's population was Muslim of which the Sunni sect constitutes seventy-four per cent, Shia's eighteen per cent, Ismailis two per cent, Ahmaddiyas two per cent and other minorities four per cent.¹⁴

The Sunni and Shia sects share the fundamental principles of Islam. They believe in divine unity (*Towhid*), the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Holy Quran. The roots of differences lie in Islamic history, particularly succession and leadership of Muslims after the death of the Holy Prophet in 632 AD. According to the Shias the leadership (*Khilafat*) of the Muslims after the Prophet's death should have been passed on to his son-in-law and cousin, Hazrat Ali. They further claim that the Prophet had in fact designated Ali as his successor. However, the Sunnis contend that Islam did not uphold the principle of heredity and it was up to the people to elect a leader on the basis of their own judgment. Consequently Abu-Bakr Siddique, one of the closest companions of the Prophet, was chosen as the first caliph of Islam in Arabia.¹⁵ The Ahmadis believe that the founder of the sect, Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, was a prophet. The Ahmadis insist that he was not a 'law-giving' prophet and his job was only to propagate the laws enunciated by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).¹⁶ Before 1974 Ahmadis were officially accepted in the fold of Islam.

¹² Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p.107.

¹³ Mariam Abou Zahab, 'The Regional Dimension of Sectarian conflicts in Pakistan', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.115.

¹⁴ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-barelvi.htm>

¹⁵ Suroosh Irfani, 'Pakistan's Sectarian Violence: Between the 'Arabist Shift' and Indo-Persian Culture', p.4. www.Apcss.org/Publications/edited/20volumes/ReligiousRadicalism/Retrievedon12.12.2010.

¹⁶ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4319116.stm. Retrieved on 11/11/2010.

Anti-Ahmadiyya movement 1974

The Ahmadiyyas or Qadianis are the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1840-1908), who founded the sect in Qadian, India, in 1901. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed that he had received a revelation from God, this claim was rejected and ridiculed by other Muslims, for it violates a central tenet of Islam and the teachings of the Holy Quran that Muhammad is the last Prophet and the message has been completed through the revelations of the Holy Quran to him. Orthodox *ulema*, therefore, declared the Ahmadis as apostates.¹⁷ In pre-partition times the headquarter of the Ahmadis was in Qadian in India but after the creation of Pakistan it shifted to Rabwah (Punjab) in Pakistan.¹⁸

The Ahmadias like most other small communities are highly organized, literate as well as industrious. Through these qualities they became economically successful and achieved public prominence. For instance the first Foreign Minister of Pakistan Sir Zafrullah Khan (1947-1954) and Mirza Muzaffar Ahmad known as M. M. Ahmad, a prominent economic planner in Ayub Khan's cabinet were Ahmadis. As a result, the Ahmadis frequently have been the object of envy. In 1953 there were anti-Ahmadia riots in several towns of central and southern Punjab which resulted in the imposition of the first martial law in the country, though it was localized and temporary. Orthodox Sunnis demanded the dismissal of prominent Ahmadia officeholders and urged that the sect be declared non-Muslim. Anti-Ahmadia riots again broke out in 1974.¹⁹ In the same year Muslim scholars from 124 countries of the world met in Makkah al-Mukurramah under auspices the Rabita-Alam-al-Islami. They passed a unanimous resolution declaring Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani and his followers apostate, *kafirs* and out of the fold of Islam.²⁰ Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to appease the orthodox political parties and their followers made a second Amendment in the constitution of 1973, on 21 September 1974, and declared Qadianis non-Muslims.²¹ Declaring one minor sect non-Muslim provided the precedent for other sects to be declared non-Muslims as well making them feel vulnerable.

¹⁷ Anita M. Weiss, 'The Society and Its Environment', in Peter R. Blood (ed.), *Pakistan: a country study* (Washington: Diane Publishers, 1995), p.130.

¹⁸ Aamer Ahmed Khan, Rare attacks on Pakistan Ahmadis, BBC News, Karachi. Retrieved from, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4319116.stm_on_2. 11. 2010.

¹⁹ Anita M. Weiss, in Peter R. Blood (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.130-31.

²⁰ <http://alhafeez.org/rashid/belief.htm>. Retrieved on 21/ 2/ 2009

²¹ General K. M. Arif, *Khaki Shadows: Pakistan 1947-1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.281.

From 1947-1977, the Shias enjoyed full religious freedom, and the community had hardly any reason to feel threatened by the government or fellow Muslims. Pakistani society was evolving to which sect the country's leaders belonged did not seem to matter. During this period three heads of state Muhammad Ali Jinnah 1947-1948, Iskander Mirza 1956-1958, and General Yahya Khan 1969-1970 were adherents of the Shia sect. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was also President for some time and later took over as Prime Minister came from a Shia background. Each Pakistani Prime Minister right from Liaquat Ali Khan to Bhutto had cabinet ministers who were Shia.²² Thus there was no discrimination on this ground.

Sectarian violence: an outcome of General Zia's Islamization policy

Ever since the creation of Pakistan a hotly debated topic was, and still is, whether Pakistan was meant to be an Islamic state or a secular one with a Muslim majority. Many writers are, however, convinced that it was the passage of the Objectives Resolution by the Constituent Assembly in 1949 that launched Pakistan on the path of Islamization. Nevertheless, Zia proceeded to Islamize Pakistan's laws, involved clerics in legislation and appointed scholars of Islam as judges. Zia-ul-Haq's brand of Islamization empowered the Sunni clergy and made the country's Shia minority feel vulnerable.²³ Probably General Zia's wanted the entire population to accept the official version of Islam but he failed to appreciate that Pakistan was a country where many schools of Islamic thought had flourished side by side, without any clash through the ages. It was obvious that General Zia's 'Islamization' policy would inevitably promote sectarianism. The Pakistani state had openly declared a theocratic mission, and that naturally provoked conflicts. Religion could now be used with impunity to muster support and undermine actual or potential rivals.²⁴ These aims were quite evident in General Zia's Islamization policy.

²² Afak Haydar, *op.cit.*, p.77.

²³ Hussain Haqqani, 'Weeding Out the Heretics: Sectarianisms in Pakistan Current Trends in Islamist Ideology', in Hillel Fradkin, Hussain Haqqani, Eric Brown (eds.), *Islam, Democracy, and The Future of the Muslim World*, Volume 4 (Washington D. C: Hudson Institute, 2006), pp.73, 88.
http://www.e-prism.org/images/CurrentTrends_4_-_Nov06.pdf.
 Retrieved on 15/ 1/ 2009.

²⁴ Eqbal Ahmad, 'The Conflict within', *Dawn*, 15 February 1998, p.13.

General Zia's Islamization program claimed to manifest a universal Islamic vision, but in fact it was based on a narrow 'Sunni interpretation of Islamic theology and law, and was unacceptable to the Shias'.²⁵ When he reconstituted the Council of Islamic Ideology, to show that he was free from prejudices and ready to accommodate all viewpoints, he brought on board representatives of various schools of jurisprudence and persuasions. Mufti Jafar Hussain (1916-1983), a well-known Shia scholar, was made member of the Council to represent the Shia viewpoint. General Zia announced his Islamization program in February 1979 which impacted upon the judicial setup, the penal code, economic activity and education. The imposition of *zakat* (Islamic tax collected for charity amounting to 2.5% annually on savings accounts) had a significant long term impact on highlighting sectarian differences in Pakistan and the domination of the Hanafi-Deobandi *fiqh* (sect). Mufti Jafar Hussain, the Shia cleric, resigned from the Council in protest against both reforms. The Shia community not fearing the backlash from the military regime refused to pay *zakat*, for they declared that this tax was voluntary and not mandatory. They declared that if the government insisted on imposing the Hanafi *fiqh* then the Shias should be allowed to follow the Jaafari *fiqh* after the sixth Shia Imam, Jaafar al-Sadiq.²⁶

A crisis situation arose with the resignation of Mufti Jafar Hussain from the Council. The Shia leadership met in Bhakkar, on 12-13 April 1979, to protest against the government's decision to enforce the Hanafi-Deobandi *fiqh* (sect) and was adamant that they would not bow to the interpretation in matters of religious conduct. In the Bhakkar meeting Mufti Jafar Hussain was elected to lead and organize the Shia community to uphold the rights of Shias. Mufti Jafar Hussain announced that a nation wide movement to be known as the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria (TNFJ) would take up this task.²⁷

On 30 June 1980, General Zia, promulgated the *Zakat and Ushr* (tax on agriculture) ordinance, ordering banks to deduct 2.5% of the holdings in all personal and corporate savings and fixed deposits accounts of Muslims. The Shias arose in protest against the imposition of the *zakat* ordinance and the other Sunni laws that the government intended to introduce. On 5 July 1980, massive protests resulted in a

²⁵ S. V. R. Nasr, 'Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.88.

²⁶ Hussain Haqqani, *op.cit.*, pp.73, 88.
http://www.e-prism.org/images/CurrentTrends_4_-_Nov06.pdf. Retrieved on 15/ 1/ 2010.

²⁷ Afak Haydar, in Charles H. Kennedy, *op.cit.*, pp.78, 79.

two-day siege of Islamabad by Shia demonstrators from across Pakistan.²⁸ General Zia had no choice but to meet the Shia leaders, including members of the TNFJ. On 6 July 1980 the government signed an agreement with Shias known as the 'Islamabad Agreement'. Under the agreement the government promised not to impose the laws of anyone *fiqh* (sect) on the followers of another *fiqh* (sect). The Shias thus did not have to contribute to the government's *Zakat* fund. The formal ordinance in this regard was issued on 29 October 1983.²⁹ There were apprehensions in the country that the Islamization moves of General Zia were radicalizing the community, which hitherto were quite comfortably settled in Pakistani society and polity. As the regime of General Zia increasingly emphasized Pakistan's Islamic identity in the narrow sense of the term, sectarian differences and theological arguments gave birth to sectarian political movements. In response to the creation of TNFJ, Sunni cleric organized two Ahl-e-Sunnat conferences. These were led by the Jamiat-i-Ulama-e-Pakistan (JUP) and Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam (JUI) and their aim was to counter Shia activism.³⁰ In 1985 the Sunni clerics and their followers established an organization called the Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba (ASS), later known as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan or SSP. They had a one-point agenda to contain the Shias. Mulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi (a Sunni cleric) and vice-chairman (*naibamir*) of the JUI in the Punjab started a campaign against the Shia feudal lords of Jhang. Jhangvi's party began to gain popularity outside his hometown and apparently quite successfully he spread the message of hate against the Shias all over the country. Jhang became the centre of organized sectarian militancy in Pakistan. It is said that Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries funded this organization and they received implicit support from the military regime, SSP also gained popularity across the country. They also used whatever democratic platform was available to further their cause.³¹ It is proved that sectarian strife spread after General Zia's Islamization policy, manifested in the establishment of different organizations and parties based on sectarian affiliations.

²⁸ S. V. R. Nasr, in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.88.

²⁹ Afak Haydar, *op.cit.*, p.81.

³⁰ Mariam Abou Zahab, *op.cit.*, p.118.

³¹ Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2007), p.92.

Sectarian conflict in Pakistan: spillovers of the Iranian revolution and anti-Soviet Afghan jihad

Apart from General Zia's Islamization program there were two developments with regional and international connotation which also fanned sectarian strife in Pakistan. These were the Iranian revolution and the anti-Soviet Afghan *jihad*. The Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini inducted Iran's Shia clergy to power and gave Shias, all over the Middle East and the rest of the world, a sense of power. This was not a palatable development for the conservative Wahabi. Saudi Arabian monarchy and the Sunni rulers of the Gulf States who had been suppressing their Shia minorities ever since the emergence of contemporary Middle East. Pakistan borders Iran on the southwest and historically and culturally Iran and the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent have perhaps greater affinities than the Arabs and the subcontinent. General Zia's military regime preferred to develop close ties with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States rather than Iran.³²

The Iranian revolution and General Zia's Islamization policies began almost simultaneously in 1979 and this fateful year ended with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After the Soviet invasion Pakistan became the frontline state for the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan. The *jihad* needed new recruits that paved the way for the spreading of *deeni madrassahs* in Pakistan and millions of rupees from the compulsorily deducted *zakat* tax (promulgated in 1980) was spent on them. These *madrassahs* gave Islamic education under official patronage. Thus religious extremism got great encouragement during the Afghan-Soviet war, so that the *jihad* against the Soviet infidel could thrive. After 1979 the proportion of Afghan students increased in those *madrassahs*. Afghan students generally tended to join Deobandi *madrassahs* because of the historical links between the Afghan *ulema* and the Dar-ul-Ulum Deobandi *madrassahs* (in India). The Afghans participation in the *jihad* was often accompanied by Pakistani volunteers. They generally came from NWFP and Balochistan, and occasionally from Sindh and Punjab. Most Islamist parties in Pakistan had the Afghan *jihad* on the top of their priorities.³³ It is said that Pakistan's intelligence services channeled around two billion dollars in covert American aid to the *mujahideen*

³² Hussain Haqqani, *op.cit.*, pp.73, 88.

http://www.e-prism.org/images/CurrentTrends_4_-_Nov06.pdf. Retrieved on 15/1/2010.

³³ Gilles Dorronsoeo, 'Pakistan and the Taliban: State Policy, Religious Networks and Political Connections', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Pakistan Nation, Nationalism and the State* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002), pp.167, 168.

pitched against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States also injected billions of dollars in the fight against the 'infidel' Soviets. Thus the war was fought under the banner of Islamist ideology. On the other hand Pakistan under Zia maintained proper diplomatic relations with the Iranian revolutionary government, but there was natural mutual antipathy between the two regimes which were geographically, historically, culturally tied in a strong bond. Zia's closeness to Saudi Arabia also exacerbated it.³⁴

In the decade of the 80s, the US being a super power pursued a broad goal of 'dual containment' i.e. containing Shiite revolutionary Iran and the Soviet Union.³⁵ Iran previously ruled by the pro-West Shah had been a reliable ally of the West, acting as its policeman in the region. Saudi Arabia and Iran were regional rivals in the Gulf, Central Asia and Pakistan. Iran played the Shia card in Pakistan which was less effective among the Balochs who reside on both sides of the border for they are largely Sunnis. The Saudis played the Sunni/ Wahabi card. The relationship between these two brands of Islam has developed into one of mutual loathing. The general trend has been that the Saudis are more generous in funding their clients than their Iranian rivals. It has been pointed out that the Saudi-backed fundamentalist parties, particularly Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), have considerable support among the Pushtun population of Balochistan. Between late 1970s and early 1990s Saudi Arabia was a staunch supporter of the Afghan *mujahideen*.³⁶

Iran on the other hand was supporting the Shiite *mujahideen* groups. While the Iranian revolution inspired Pakistani Shias and politicized them, Saudi Arabia as well as Iraq and Kuwait began patronizing the Sunni Wahabis puritanical groups. Pakistan thus became a primary battle field for both sects. Pakistan shares a border with Iran, and as pointed out earlier has a sizable Shia population (15-20%). These fault lines resulted in unprecedented militarization and sow the seed of sectarianism in Pakistani's society. The major source of arms and military training for Sunni Islamists was the *jihadi* outfits in Afghanistan.³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Saeed Shafqat, 'From official Islam to Islamism: The rise of Dawat-ul-Irshad and Lashkar-e-Taiba', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.134.

³⁶ Mehtab Ali Shah, *The Foreign Policy of Pakistan: Ethnic impact on diplomacy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), p.115.

³⁷ Mariam Abou Zahab, 'The regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan', in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.115, 116.

In the 80s, the *jihadist* culture gained great impetus owing to American and Saudi patronage. Wahabism strongly impacted upon the sectarian situation in Pakistan. According to a scholar, beginning from the 1980s four Wahabi organizations – the World Muslim League (WML), the Al Haramain Foundation, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), and the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) – sponsored the Deobandi seminaries and *jihadist* organizations in Pakistan on a massive scale. Iran took care not to be left behind in this race and began supporting the Shias and started promoting Shia seminaries in Pakistan. These seminaries (or *madrassahs*) of both varieties gave an alternative system of education to the poor and taught their students their respective interpretation of Islam that proliferated sectarianism, extremism and militancy. The state which should have been proactive in these matters most of the time desisted from intervening in sectarian affairs. Thus the sectarian organizations were free to disseminate their respective world views that were exclusionary.³⁸

NWFP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa): The first battle ground of sectarian violence

After the establishment of TNFJ in 1979 and ASS (Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba) in 1985, and the official and unofficial patronage of either sects, *madrassahs*, the first battle ground for Shia Sunni violence in 1986 was NWFP which had a heavy concentration of Darri (Persian speaking Pushtuns). The Afghan refugees who were allowed to freely move in the province (even in the country) also contributed to imbalances in religio-cultural demographics. In the northwest part of Pakistan there are the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) located between the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and the settled areas of NWFP.³⁹ FATA is divided into seven Agencies: Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. The Kurram, Agency was an idyllic valley in the northwestern part of Pakistan neighbouring Afghanistan but incidentally, Kurram was the only tribal agency among the seven that has a significant Shia population. The agency is divided into upper, lower and central Kurram. Upper Kurram is Shia majority

³⁸ Ashok K. Buhuria, ‘Sunni-Shia Relations in Pakistan: The Widening Divide’, Retrieved from <http://www.idsa.in/publications/strategic-analysis/2004/jan/Ashok%20K%20Behuria.pdf>. On 15/ 1/ 2010.

³⁹ <http://fata.gov.pk/>. Retrieved on 20/ 1/ 2009

area, lower Kurram is Sunni majority area and central Kurram is more or less equally inhabited by both Shia and Sunni population.⁴⁰

Kurram Agency's capital is Parachinar. It became the busiest route through which 40 per cent of the supplies for resisting the Soviets passed to Afghanistan. It was shortest way to Kabul.⁴¹ The Pushtun Turi tribe of Kurram Agency has a majority Shia population. The sectarian violence in Kurram during the 1980s was due to the real and perceived threats felt by the Turi Shias. The other Pushtun tribes of the FATA supported the Pushtun tribes across the Durand Line, unlike the Turis who had a different perspective.⁴² It is noteworthy that after the Mufti Jaffar (the founder of TNFJ) died on 29 August 1983, Allama Arif Hussaini, a Turi Pushtun from Parachinar, took over the leadership of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-Jaafria.⁴³

While President Zia ul-Haq used the Afghan groups for waging *jihad* against the Soviet invaders, he had his favourites. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami received the most support in terms of funding and arms. Saudi Arabia too supported the Hezb, which had its bases in Paktia, Kunar and Jalalabad provinces. Support to and arming of the various Afghan *mujahideen* groups increased the sectarian cleavage. The bias of the Pakistani government in favour of the Sunni Pushtun groups, especially the arming of the Sunnis, alarmed the Shias in FATA, especially in Kurram and Orakzai agencies. The Turi Shias in Kurram agency declined the call to participate in the Afghan *jihad*, and were not keen to provide shelter to the Afghan *mujahideen*. However, the Turi Shias demanded that the Pakistani government must not discriminate against them in the matter of supply of arms. General Zia was not pleased by the demand. The Shias were also upset by the growing number of Afghan refugees coming into the tribal areas. They perceived the presence of the Afghan refugees, mostly Sunnis, as a deliberate move by Islamabad to upset the demographic balance in Kurram Agency. Tension that was already building up broke out into sectarian violence

⁴⁰ Baqir Rizvi, *Sectarianism, Insurgency and Talibanization: A Case Study of Kurram Agency* (Islamabad: Aryana Institute for Regional research and Advocacy, July 2009).

www.airra.org/documents/Howandwhywar_sectarianism.pdf. Retrieved on 12. 02. 2012.

⁴¹ Sectarian violence in Pakistan's Kurram Agency Suba Chandran, Retrieved from http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/PSRU_KurramAgency_SectarianViolence.pdf. On 9/ 12/ 2010.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Afak Haydar, in Charles H. Kennedy (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.81.

when, in 1986, General Zia allowed the Sunni *mujahideen* to attack Turis in Kurram. This is seen as first major outbreak of sectarian violence.⁴⁴ In this context, a Pakistani newspaper *Daily Times* wrote:

The trend to attack the Shia began under Zia in Parachinar in 1986, when the Mujahideen felt hampered by the Turis while marching into Afghanistan to fight the Soviet forces. It was in 1986 when General Zia allowed a ‘purge’ of the Turi Shias in the divided city of Parachinar at the hands of the Sunni Afghan Mujahideen in conjunction with the local Sunni population.⁴⁵

The Parachinar incident had repercussions across Pakistan with frequent out breaks of sectarian killing in Jhang, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar.⁴⁶ Sectarian groups, which emerged during the 1980s, had a one point agenda: annihilating the opposing groups. The horrific part of sectarian violence in Pakistan were the increasing attacks on each others mosques, *Imambargahs* and religious schools by extremist Shia and Sunni groups.

In 1986 there were serious anti – Shia riots in Lahore. Two subsequent events changed the dynamics of the sectarian violence in Pakistan. First in 1987 the murder of Saudi-backed Sunni clerics Allama Ehsan Elahi Zaheer and Mullana Habib-ur-Rehman Yazdani, along with six other Sat a meeting near the Minar-e-Pakistan.⁴⁷ The second event was a retaliatory strike by Sunni extremists, in which the leader of TNFJ Allama Arif Hussain-al-Husaini was killed in Peshawar on 5 August 1988.⁴⁸ Both events intensified the sectarian viciousness.

The Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), constitutionally not a part of Pakistan, were mainly populated by Shias. In 1988, the last year of Zia’s ruler, the entire area was enmeshed in bloody anti-Shia riots, resulting in the death of more than 700 Shias. Balochistan, which had previously never experienced religious discord, witnessed the worst forms of sectarian violence in the province after the

⁴⁴ http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/PSRU_KurramAgency_SectarianViolence.pdf. Retrieved / On 9/ 12/ 2010.

⁴⁵ Editorial, ‘Sectarian War in Parachinar’, *Daily Times*, 19 November 2007; http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/documents/PSRU_KurramAgency_SectarianViolence.pdf. on 9/ 12/ 2008.

⁴⁶ Dr. Iftikhar Malik, Religious Minorities in Pakistan. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/469cbfc30.pdf> on 10/ 12/ 2008.

⁴⁷ *Dawn*, Karachi, 31 March 1987.

⁴⁸ Afak Haydar, *op.cit.*, p.84.

rapid increase in the strength of *madrassahs* that were mainly managed by Deobandies of JUI and established in areas bordering Afghanistan.⁴⁹

The dominant figure of Pakistan's politics in 1980s was President General Zia who died in an air crash in 1988; the Afghan-Soviet war that altered the national and international priorities was settled after the signing of Geveva Accord in 1988, and the Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989,⁵⁰ but the sectarian hatred which emerged in Pakistan society because of Zia's Islamization policies followed by Iranian revolution and Pakistan's deep involvement in Afghan *jihad*, took unfathomable roots.⁵¹

The politics of Islamization of the Zia period continued its influence in the decade of democracy in the 1990s. It was difficult to absorb the *Mujahideens* in the civil society of Pakistan. They were, however, conceived as a tremendous force to oppose Pakistan's long time enemy – India in the most contested region of Kashmir. Pakistan's establishment applied the same methods that they had used against the Soviets, to support the Islamist groups to drive out India from Kashmir.⁵² In this unstable political situation during 1989-1999 the security agencies kept a blind eye on sectarian and ethnic violence. Even though democracy was restored but there was a frequent dissolution of elected assemblies and governments by the Presidents. Civilian government that was becoming too independent, especially in matters of foreign policy were dismissal on the grounds of their failure to handle the law and order situation.⁵³ On the other hand Pakistan's civilian leaders, Benazir Bhutto (PPP) and Nawaz Sharif (Muslim League), tried to placate or co-opt the Islamist rather than rein them in. Both leaders primarily focused on their own survival. Unfortunately the period of democracy ended in 1999 and

⁴⁹ Riaz Ahmed Shaikh, 'Developing Extremists: Madrasah Education in Pakistan', in Derrick M. Nault (ed.), *Development in Asia: Post-neoliberal, and Transnational Perspectives* (Florida: Brown Walker Press, 2009), pp.185, 186.

⁵⁰ Edward Willett, *Ayatollah Khomeini* (New York: The Rose Publishing Group, 2004), p.4.

⁵¹ Imrana Begum, *Impact of the Afghan-Soviet War on Pakistan (From 1979-1989)*, (Karachi: Area Study Centre for Europe, University of Karachi, 2010), p.154.

⁵² Dan Cladwell, *Vortex of Conflict U.S. Policy Towards Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq* (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), p.49.

⁵³ Ian Talbot, 'Religion and Violence: The historical context for conflict in Pakistan', in John R. Hinnells, Richard King, *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.148, 156.

Pakistan again came under military rule for the next nine years. General Pevez Musharraf was a moderate and secular minded person capable to promote rule of law and religious tolerance.⁵⁴ After the incident of 9/11 he banned five religious outfits and issued an ordinance for the regularization of *madrassahs*. Despite his claim to reform, those thousands of *madrassahs* across the country remained breeding grounds for religious extremism, fomenting sectarian violence.⁵⁵ From 2008 onwards the democratic government of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has also completely failed to crackdown sectarianism from Pakistan. The legacies of eighties are continuously haunting Pakistan's society and its aftershocks can be felt all around Pakistan.

During the last twenty three years, hundreds people have lost their lives, and thousands more maimed, in attacks by zealots of the two rival sects. There are no official statistics on this bloodshed for the period 1980-1989 but deaths by sectarian violence during that phase are estimated to be very high.⁵⁶ In current circumstances many Shia professionals are being compelled to leave Pakistan. Most problematic is the fact that the remaining Shia's have lost their faith in the state's ability to provide them security. If the second majority sectarian group of Pakistan loses faith in the state, then the very existence of the country is jeopardized. It comes close to being a 'failed state'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ A. Z. Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet invasion of Afghanistan* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), p.259.

⁵⁵ Zahid Hussain, *op.cit.*, p.168.

⁵⁶ Retrieved from http://www.e-prism.org/images/CurrentTrends_4_-_Nov06.pdf. On 12.02.12

⁵⁷ Ryan Clarke, *Crime----Terror Nexus in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.122.