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Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan

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Foreword

The Background paper **Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan**, authored by **Mr. Muhammad Feyyaz** is an attempt to apprise audiences regarding the contours of the sectarian conflict in the strategically important region of Gilgit-Baltistan. In this peer reviewed paper, the author has tried to contextualize the conflict mentioning different variables that affect it and reasons why attempts to establish peace have failed.

The paper has been prepared to serve as a background for a conflict resolution simulation exercise for the benefit of members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly.

The paper highlights the relatively peaceful history of relations between the Shia, Sunni, Ismaili, & Noorbukhshi sects which inhabit the region. The paper focuses on the Iranian revolution and Afghan Jihad which led to hardening of sectarian identities in Pakistan, particularly in Gilgit-Baltistan due to its strategic importance.

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Disclaimer

The opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the British High Commission, Islamabad or PILDAT.

Profile of the Author

Mr. Muhammad Feyyaz holds a Masters degree in War studies from Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad and M. Phil in Peace & Conflict Studies from the Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad. He is a diploma holder in Conflict Management from the Modern Institute of Informatics and Management, Islamabad Pakistan and a certificate in an identical course from the Pakistan Institute of Management, Lahore. He was also part of a marketing strategy Course at the Lahore University of Management Sciences in 2008. Participates in international conferences and seminars on peacekeeping, terrorism and security issues and frequently writes for Pakistani and foreign research and academic journals.

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Sectarianism is bane of contemporary Pakistan. During British rule while the conflict had declined to communities' level, involving the general public and theologians alike in sectarian violence, yet the state was secular and largely unrepresentative and, therefore, the use of sectarian idiom was limited to the purpose of self-identification². Sunni-shia conflicts were mostly unknown before partition in the areas which form now Pakistan because of the influence of pirs and sufis. After partition and despite the migration to Pakistan of muhajirs belonging to areas with a strong tradition of sectarian conflicts, relations between sunnis and shias remained normal except for occasional riots or minor clashes during muharram ceremonies emanating from centuries old mistrust and suspicion against each other. The state was neutral and had no sectarian agenda³. The unanimity of views among the Shias and Sunnis between 1950s and 1970s, over the issue of defining Islam in 'exclusive' terms (finality of Prophet) and declaring Ahmadiyahs non-Muslims gave credence to the view that the inter-sectarian harmony will remain a defining element of sub-continental Islam⁴. There were small frictions between the two communities, yet the level of tolerance was maintained by the two sides⁵.

The real advent of the sectarian violence in Pakistan was sparked by the competing forces of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Islamization project of General Zia-ul-Haq. As Shias in Pakistan became emboldened by events in Iran [for an assertive role in state and society], a battle between Shias and the Sunni regime soon ignited into a larger clash between the Shia and Sunni communities⁶. Zia's emphasis on Islamization with a distinct Sunni flavour gradually brought the differences between the two sects out into the open⁷. In later years, role of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and other Gulf countries of promoting Sunni-Wahabi sect of Islam and the involvement of hard-line religious groups of Afghanistan in Pakistan's internal politics further

complicated the sectarian conflict⁸.

Zia-ul-Haq's pro-Saudi posture and his state-sponsored Islamization, which stipulated the payment of zakat to the government, created resentment among the Shia community in Pakistan and discomfiture in Iran. Since then, sectarian tensions within Pakistan have affected the relationship between Shiite Iran and Sunni Pakistan. One of the high profile incidents of sectarian tension was in the early 1990s, when an Iranian diplomat, Sadiq Ganji, was assassinated in Lahore⁹. Later, in 1997, five cadets of the Iranian Air Force were killed in Rawalpindi on the way to work.

Since early 1980s when sectarian violence got an impetus in Pakistan, unabated violence by both sides deepened religious schism, pursuing a policy of each other's annihilation, reaching a stage when some Sunni and Shia groups began to declare each other non-Muslims¹⁰. From 1989 until April 2011, sectarian violence has engulfed the entire country claiming nearly 7594 lives, mostly of Shias¹¹.

The Context and Structure of Paper

A distinguishing feature of sectarian violence in Pakistan is its variegated contexts characterized though by a uniform ideological idiom but differentiated by peculiar psycho-social and socio-economic conditions of different regions. For example, Jhang (Punjab), Karachi (Sindh), Quetta (Balochistan), Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu and D. I. Khan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Gilgit, Sakardu in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Parachinar (Kurram Agency), all are fed by distinctive sociological narratives emanating from their diverse social structures.

Less GB, all other have remained in sharp focus. Due to its remote location, somewhat visual dormancy and a benign geopolitical profile since Kargil war, unrest in GB has not found worthwhile attention in the literature and informed

- 1 This paper has been compiled by using a host of local and foreign sources. Also, assistance extended by the Police Department of GB Government as well as contributions made by Mr. Naveed Shahzad, a native peace activist, are gratefully acknowledged. The Author's personal knowledge consequent to two years stay in the conflicted areas of GB has also been helpful.
- 2 Mukhtar Ahmed, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang* (Colombo: Regional Center for Strategic Studies, 2001), p. 15.
- 3 Mariam abou zahab, *the regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan*. <http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/octo00/artmaz.pdf>, accessed 25 Apr 2011.
- 4 Ashok K. Behuria, *Sunni-Shia Relations in Pakistan: The Widening Divide*, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 28, No.1, Jan-Mar 2004 © Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, pp.157-176.
- 5 Moonis Ahmar, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Some Lessons From the Irish Experience*, *IPRI Journal X*, no.1 (Winter 2010): pp.50-76.
- 6 Nicholas Howenstein, *The Jihadi Terrain in Pakistan: An Introduction to the Sunni Jihadi Groups in Pakistan and Kashmir*, *Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) Research Report 1*, 5 Feb 2008, <http://spaces.brad.ac.uk:8080/download/attachments/748/resrep1.pdf>, accessed 26 Apr 2011.
- 7 Ashok K. Behuria, *Sunni-Shia Relations in Pakistan: The Widening Divide*, op.cit
- 8 Moonis Ahmer, *Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan*, *Pakistan Vision* Vol 9, No.1, Jun 2008, pp.1-19.
- 9 Kumar, Sumita(2008) 'Pakistan-Iran Relations: The US Factor', *Strategic Analysis*, 32: 5, 773-789
- 10 Ashok K. Behuria, *Sunni-Shia Relations in Pakistan: The Widening Divide*, op.cit.
- 11 *Sectarian Violence in Pakistan 1989-2011*, *South Asian Terrorism Portal*, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/sect-killing.htm>, accessed 26 April 2011.

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circles. Besides, there is a general perception that sectarianism in GB is less explosive compared to other areas of Pakistan. This too may well have been a reason for not attracting focused attention. Literature on sectarianism in Pakistan by local and foreign writers abounds. Barring episodic driven media reporting or some piecemeal references in research work, GB somehow has eluded legitimate place in peace studies. This background paper is an attempt to fill this void by highlighting salient dynamics and variables generating sectarian conflict in GB. Significantly, the issue warrants particular attention of the budding Legislators. It has, therefore, been developed as part of a series of conflict resolution workshops initiated by PILDAT which aim to sensitize elected legislators on important national and regional issues, and in the process build their conflict resolution capacity and allied skills.

The paper begins by review of local sociology through recourse to anthropological formations of the area especially Gilgit which is gateway to GB. This is deemed essential to contextualize the entire issue as regards advent of Islam and spawning of its denominations in the region. The thesis then traces genesis of the contemporary conflict in a historical context. Opposing views of various stake holders engaged in social processes animating the issue are outlined here. In addition to role of various central governments in shaping the sociological environment,

external dynamics impacting local conditions have been discussed next. Care has been exercised in avoiding qualitative interpretation of various causal variables in order to retain a non-partisan flavour. The paper is also non-perspective. That however, does not imply that a deliberate restraint has been applied in incorporating controversial or unsubstantiated views and writings in the thesis; instead the contrary is true in order to engender an all encompassing synthesis.

Sociological Perspective - Gilgit-Baltistan

The Gilgit-Baltistan at present have an estimated population of 2.024 million. This population comprises a conglomeration of numerous ethnic groups and tribes who have been living together in perfect harmony despite lack of basic human amenities and in rough geographical conditions. All of them fought the war of independence against the Dogra and snatched their independence in 1947. Religious affiliations also vary across the region. There are few small towns, while 86% of the population is rural, and average land holdings are very small. Traditionally, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are peace loving. There are reports of many inter-ethnic and inter-tribe marriages in the region and ethnic ties and tribal loyalties conventionally surpassed sectarian identities¹².

Figure 1- Gilgit-Baltistan

¹² Seema Shekhawat, Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan, 18 Jan 2011, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume20/Article%204.pdf>, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

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Gilgit-Baltistan is administratively divided into two divisions which, in turn, are divided into seven districts, including the two Baltistan districts of Skardu and Ghanche, and the five Gilgit districts¹³ of Gilgit, Ghizer, Diamer, Astore, and Hunza-Nagar (Map 1).

According to Dr. Subroto Roy, historically, "Sargin" or "Sargin Gilit," later corrupted by the Sikhs and Dogras into "Gilgit," had an ancient people who spoke an archaic Dardic language "intermediate between the Iranian and the Sanskritic." Gilgit had been historically ruled by a Hindu dynasty called Trakhane; when they became extinct, Gilgit Valley "was desolated by successive invasions of neighbouring rulers, and in the 20 or 30 years ending with 1842 there had been five dynastic revolutions"¹⁴.

While Colonel David Lorimer published a version sent to him in writing by Muhammad Ghani Khan, the son of the Mir of Hunza, which placed Shri Badat at the head of the genealogy of the Mirs of Hunza¹⁵, Roy's accounts are contradicted by other sources both on rulers' identity as well as duration of their reigns. For example, authentic writings identify Shri Badat, as a Buddhist king of Gilgit and not Hindu¹⁶. Secondly, John Biddulph, the first in a succession of British Political Agents to reside in Gilgit, posits that all former pre-Islamic rulers of Gilgit were known as Shahreis who used the title Ra¹⁷. One of those kings was named Trakhane. The Muslim fighter who vanquished Shri Badat's rule (assumed to be around 13th century), adopted this name, hence his dynasty became to be known Trakhane. Interestingly, as opposed to assertion of John Mock, the rulers of Hunza and Nager claim origin with the Trakhane dynasty, and not with Shri Badat. They claim descent from a heroic Kayani Prince of Persia, Azur Jamshid (also known as Shamsher), who secretly married the daughter of the king Shri Badat¹⁸.

Subsequently, Gilgit was ruled for centuries by the local Trakhane Dynasty, which ended about 1810 with the death of Raja Abas, the last Trakhane Raja¹⁹. Compared to Gilgit,

Baltistan forms the west extremity of Tibet, hence also sometimes called as little Tibet. Its original inhabitants, the Balti-Tibetans, converted to Islam from Tibetan Buddhism in the 16th century. It is presumed that Gilgit and Baltistan remained geographically isolated for a long time accessible only from divergent avenues of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is substantiated by the date differential in advent of Islam in both the regions.

Islam came to the region in the 13th century and it was Ismaili Islam. (The Ismailis were rulers of Multan before persecuted by Ghaznavi and his successors). The sectarian strife in Gilgit-Baltistan is a recent phenomenon. The area was known as the most peaceful through all pages of history. The movement of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (1384-1314) a Persian Sūfī of the Kubrāwī order from Kulab to Gilgit was considered as watershed moment of conversion of population from Buddhist to the Islamic religion²⁰. But in the following years there was competition of sorts between the big sects, and clerics from other parts of the country introduced the Twelver Shia and Sunni faiths too²¹.

A partial explanation for the presence of a sizeable Shia population in the region, especially Ismailis, is the long historical period during which these groups were persecuted by the Sunni Caliphates and Sultans in the Middle East and India. This explains why Shias are concentrated in certain remote and difficult regions of Pakistan, as well as Afghanistan²². Occurrence of Noorbakhshi or Nurbakhshi in GB is also ascribed to Syed Hamadani who was adherent of the Kubrawiya order named after its 13th century founder Najmeddin Kubra. One of the branches, the Nurbakhshi Kubrawi lineage, embraced Shia Islam and hence the emergence of Noorbakhshis named after Muhammad Nurbakhsh²³. Under the British Raj, the Gilgit and Baltistan Muslims lived in complete isolation from the rest of Kashmir, administering themselves through their chieftains²⁴.

13 "Wrangling over new Astore district headquarters", Dawn Newspaper Internet Edition. <http://www.dawn.com/2005/08/01/mat13.htm>, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

14 Subroto Roy, A Brief History of Gilgit, Feb 18, 2009, <http://independentindian.com/2009/02/18/a-brief-history-of-gilgit/>, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

15 John Mock, Shri Badat The Cannibal King: A Buddhist Jataka from Gilgit, <http://www.mockandoneil.com/shrib.htm>, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

16 Ibid.

17 John Biddulph, Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh, op.cit.

18 Amar Singh Chohan, The Gilgit Agency, 1877-1935, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors 1984, p4.

19 Frederic Drew, (1875) The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories: A Geographical Account E. Stanford, London, OCLC 1581591, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

20 Shahab Mazhar Bhalli et al, Emerging Challenges of Law & Order in "Gilgit-Baltistan, March 2011, National Management College Lahore.

21 Editorial: Story of Gilgit deaths foretold, op.cit.

22 Muhammad Waseem et al, Dilemmas of Pride and Pain: Sectarian Conflict and Conflict Transformation in Pakistan, Religions and Development Research Programme, Working Paper 48-2010, http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/files/resourcesmodule/@random454f80f60b3f4/1293020787_working_paper_48_complete_for_the_web.pdf, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

23 For details on Kubrawi see : <http://www.kubrawi.org/>

24 Korbelt Josef, "Danger in Kashmir, 1966 Princeton University Press, United States of America, p.9.

Faith Map of Gilgit-Baltistan

Around 75% of the region's population follows some form of Shia Islam, almost an exact reversal of the norm in the rest of Pakistan. This makes the Northern Areas the only Shia majority political unit in Sunni-dominated Pakistan²⁵. There are four sects in Gilgit-Baltistan; Shia, Noorbakhshi²⁶ and Ismaili communities believe in the offices of Imam, according to them, runs after the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through Ali and his male successors. Whereas Sunnis believe in the office of the Khilafat and according to them Abu Bakar, Umar, Usman and Ali were the Caliphs after the death of Muhammad (PBUH).

- i. Shia is the largest sect in Gilgit-Baltistan. It possesses majority in Gilgit, Skardu and Ghanche Distt. The first two districts are more populous in the region. In Astore and Ghizer districts Shias are in minority.
- ii. Sunni is the second largest community in Gilgit-Baltistan. It possesses 100% population in Diamer District, they also live in Astore, Ghizer, Gilgit and Skardu.
- iii. Ismailis hold majority in Ghizer District and Sub-Division of Hunza; in Skardu they are in minority.
- iv. Noorbakhshi Community only resides in Skardu and Ghanche, they are in majority in the latter.

Sect-wise breakdown of Population

Barring negligible difference in case of Baltistan, in remaining areas sect-wise breakdown of population is as follows:

- i. Gilgit is 60 per cent Shia, 40 per cent Sunni;
- ii. Hunza 100 per cent Ismaili;
- iii. Nagar 100 per cent Shia;
- iv. Punial 100 per cent Ismaili;
- v. Yasin 100 per cent Ismaili;
- vi. Ishkoman 100 per cent Ismaili;
- vii. Gupis 100 per cent Ismaili;
- viii. Chilas 100 per cent Sunni;
- ix. Darel/Tangir 100 per cent Sunni;
- x. Astor 90 per cent Sunni, 10 per cent Shia;
- xi. Baltistan 96 (or 98)²⁷ per cent Shia; 2 per cent Noorbakhshi; 2 per cent Sunni²⁸

Area-wise sectarian spread is indicated on the Map 2. Some sources put overall demographics as Shias 41, sunni 32, Ismaili 17 and Noorbakhshis 10.

GB is politically administered by GBLA (Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly) whose members are elected through general election. Most mainstream Pakistani parties have branches in the Northern Areas and are represented in the GBLA. Members are elected on party

Figure 2: Sect/area wise population distribution

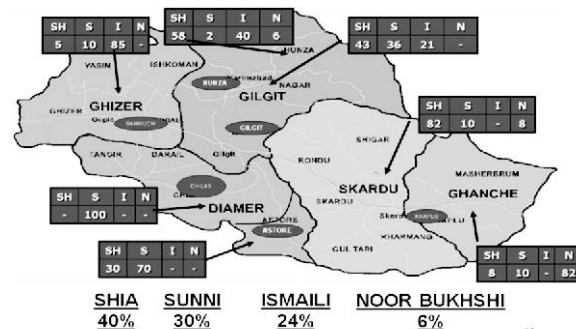


Table 1: Political Party Positions

No.	Seat	POL Party					Total
		PPP	PML	PML - N	Ind .	JUI	
1.	Gen	12	3	2	3	4	24
2.	Women	4	1	-	-	1	6
3.	T Echnocrats	2				1	3
Total:		18	4	2	3	6	33

25 Ali, Nosheen (2008) 'Outrageous State, Sectarianized Citizens: Deconstructing the 'Textbook Controversy' in the Northern Areas, Pakistan', South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal, Special Issue - Nb. 2, 'Outraged Communities: Comparative Perspectives on the Politicization of Emotions in South Asia. URL : <http://samaj.revues.org/document1172.html>.

26 Nurbakhshi and Noorbakhshi has been used interchangeably in this paper.

27 Dr Shabir Ch, Gilgit Baltistan past, present and future, 8 April 2010, http://www.australia.to/2010/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2031:gilgit-baltistan-past-present-and-future&catid=71:zach-jones&Itemid=124, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

28 Editorial: Story of Gilgit deaths foretold, op.cit.

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basis with a clear cut sectarian biased demarcation due to geographic location of different sects. Party wise position of GBLA is shown in Table below. Likewise, the regional administration has been influenced by sectarian feelings and interests.

Genesis of Sectarian Conflict

During pre-partition era, the [British] Raj was able to almost completely uproot the Sunni-Shia confrontation during its tenure from 1857 to 1947. A refusal to recognise the jurisprudence of takfir or apostatisation or and a competent encoding of the Muslim Family Law, separating the two sects, almost buried the conflict that had its seeds in the 7th century²⁹.” Sectarian conflict in GB is therefore essentially a post-independence phenomenon.

Pakistan took over the control of Gilgit-Baltistan on November 16, 1947. For considerable time afterwards, the constitutional status of the area remained undefined; in effect which continued until the announcement of Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009. Consequently, facing political vacuum, masses in the Northern Areas could not get generally organized on political lines. This however, made easier their division and organization on sectarian basis.

Over the next decades, the Sunni-Shia division became firmly established. Parties speaking for a sect assumed high importance³⁰. The history of the ongoing sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when the religious leaders of Sunni and Shia sects started a campaign of mutual invective³¹. Under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the country's democratically elected prime minister, major administrative changes were made. The agency system, along with the FCR and the rule of hereditary princes, was abolished in 1974, and Gilgit and Baltistan were transformed into districts like those in Pakistan's settled areas. The resident became a resident commissioner, while the political agents became deputy commissioners. A Northern Areas Council (NAC) replaced the Northern Areas Advisory Council (NAAC) in 1974, with members elected by direct adult franchise³².

Critics allege that it was only after Pakistan's annexation of

these regions in the 1970s that anarchy began. First, authorities abrogated the State Subject Rule, the law that until then protected the local demographic composition, and encouraged Pakistani Sunnis to settle in Gilgit town. This government-sponsored settlement scheme damaged the social fabric and provoked religious feuds that continue to simmer³³. It is consequently contended that the origins of the Sunni-Shia conflicts in Gilgit lie in the effects on the existing social order of the population movements associated with partition, Pakistani government policies and regional politics.

In Shia-majority Gilgit, which was directly administered from Islamabad, the state has attempted to change the demographic, social and economic balance of the town in favour of Sunnis, alienating Shias and fuelling violence. Nosheen Ali probes it in terms of regulatory processes of state-making. She observes, for a state that officially proclaims Islam as its *raison d'être* – Islam that is implicitly coded as Sunni – the Shia-majority Northern Areas thus constitute[d] a significant source of anxiety³⁴. She further states that it was the fear of this different Muslim, and of losing the strategic territory that s/he inhabits to India, to a broader Kashmiri struggle, or to local nationalist movements, that has driven the Pakistan state to establish authoritarian control in the Northern Areas³⁵.

It was as part of this project of control that the independent princely kingdoms of the region were abolished during 1972-1974, and replaced by a single administrative territory cryptically called the 'Northern Areas'. Thereafter, Nosheen asserts, state institutions – chiefly the army, intelligence agencies, and the KANA bureaucracy – embarked upon a divide-and-conquer project that aimed at creating disunity along sectarian lines, in order to thwart regional solidarity and secular-nationalist aspirations. This divide-and-conquer policy firstly entailed state sponsorship of Sunni and Shia religious organizations, which were required to spur sectarian animosity as a means to deflect political energy and agreement. Maulvis from both sects were paid by intelligence agencies to engage in de-humanizing tirades against sectarian others, through wall-chalking, mosque loudspeakers, and publications³⁶. An identical observation is advanced by a UK funded study group engaged in interfaith research

29 Khalid Hasan, Sectarian conflict looms over Pakistan, says study, Daily Times, May 14, 2007.

30 Northern Areas of Pakistan-Facts, Problems and Recommendations An RSP Report Policy Perspectives, Vol 1, No.1 (paraphrased).

31 Seema Shekhawat, Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan, op.cit.

32 Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas, Crisis Group Asia Report N°131, 2 April 2007.

33 Senge H. Sering, Talibanization of Gilgit-Baltistan and Sectarian Killings, 19 Oct 2009,

http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/TalibanizationofGilgitBaltistanandSectarianKillings_SHSereng_191009, accessed 29 Apr 2011.

34 Ali, Nosheen (2008) 'Outrageous State, Sectarianized Citizens: Deconstructing the 'Textbook Controversy' in the Northern Areas, Pakistan', op.cit.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

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programmes which claims that 'perceived dysfunctionality of the Shia majority in Gilgit-Baltistan and crucial position of this border region in the security calculus of the state engaged the latter in an ambitious project to reconstruct the social order on its own terms'³⁷.

After 1973 there has been perpetual tension between Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit-Baltistan. Gilgit remained the main centre of tension, where difference between both the sects were over the route of Ashura processions and illumination on Konodas hills by shias on different occasions. The Sunnis started objecting to this traditional route as their Jamia Mosque was enroute and illumination because of majority of Sunni population and their Dar-Ul-Uloom is in Konodas area. Sunnis at Gilgit are in minority. During tension, Sunnis from Chilas and Kohistan used to support them.

However, it was during Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime in the mid-1970s that the first reported sectarian clash in Gilgit-Baltistan took place, when Sunnis raised objections to the Shias making a stage in the middle of a road and delivering speeches. Acting on the objection, Bhutto prohibited the Shias from engaging in this practice. The consequent Shia resentment resulted in firing by the Police, injuring many³⁸, besides resulting into killings, protests, kidnappings and destruction of property. It is equally instructive to note that sectarian 'difference' in the Northern Areas did not always have the meaning and consequence that it carries today. In the Gilgit district of the Northern Areas, the time before the 1970s is remembered as a time of shared life-worlds, when religious identities were fluid and pluralistic. Though inter-sect skirmishes are acknowledged, people by and large respected and even participated in each other's religious rituals, and inter-marriage across sects was fairly common, with the result that several families in the Northern Areas today have members who belong to different sects³⁹.

Role of religion in fomenting sectarianism has remained at the heart of Shia-Sunni debate. Naveed Shahzad a native Sunni, during his field research on sectarian issue, observes⁴⁰:

"I interviewed many locals, according to the majority they believe that religion never played

active role in sectarian violence as Sunnis and Shias were living peacefully for more than centuries; if religion is to do with violence then it had to in past as well, but we have no evidence. Although there is evidence of altercations or verbal conflicts, and they too were between sub-sects of Shia on the animal slaughter issue."

The advocates of manipulated use of religious narrative in GB articulate many reasons to support their assertion. Seema Shekhawat argues that since the region remains deprived of substantive powers and as all high ranking officials are from the Sunni sect, it is no surprise that the area has become a hub of sectarianism and that Shias are repeatedly and violently targeted⁴¹. Christine Fair contends that the Islamization by the government of General Zia-ul-Haq vitiated the general academic environment in Pakistan. He decided to establish madaris instead of modern schools in Afghan refugee camps. The refugees needed schools; the resistance needed mujahideen. Madaris would provide an education of sorts, but it was believed that they would also serve as a centre of indoctrination and motivation⁴². Ajai Sahni in Asia Times wrote that while seed of a sectarian polarization had been sown, the situation worsened dramatically under General Zia-ul-Haq, when the military Dictator encouraged cadres of the radical Sunni Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) to extend its activities to the Gilgit-Baltistan region. A local (Shiite) insurrection broke out in Gilgit in May 1988, with people demanding wider rights⁴³. Zia not only encouraged and facilitated the migration of people from the other areas of Pakistan to the Northern Areas, but also assisted the anti-Shia Sunni extremist organization SSP, then known as the Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba, to set up its presence in the area and start a large number of madrasas (religious schools) to impart religious education to the local Sunnis in the Deobandi-Wahabi ideology and military training through the ex-servicemen in order to resist Shia militancy⁴⁴.

Zia's rule fostered the growth of sectarianism in a number of ways, it is held. It created among the Shia community a perception that his government was moving rapidly towards the establishment of a Sunni Hanafi state in which the 'Islamisation' of laws was seen to reflect the

37 Muhammad Waseem el at, Dilemmas of Pride and Pain: Sectarian Conflict and Conflict Transformation in Pakistan, op.cit.

38 Seema Shekhawat, Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan, op.cit.

39 Ali, Nosheen (2008) 'Outrageous State, Sectarianized Citizens: Deconstructing the 'Textbook Controversy' in the Northern Areas, Pakistan', op.cit.

40 Naveed Shahzad, Sectarian in NAs, M Phil Thesis 2010-2011 (unpublished)

41 Seema Shekhawat, Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan, op.cit.

42 Fair, Christine.C, The Madrassah Challenge: United States Institute of Peace Press Washington D.C, first published 2008, p.xiii

43 Ajai Sahni, " Gilgit-Baltistan: Drama in a theater of Despair" Asia Times; (Wednesday, 16 September 2009).

44 B.Raman, "UNREST IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN," South Asia Analysis Group, (Paper no 1241.,Feb. 03, 2005), [Paper prepared for presentation at a seminar on India's Himalayan Frontiers at the School of International Studies of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, on February 5, 2005].

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'Islam' of the dominant community. The 1980 'gherao' (siege) of the government Secretariat in Islamabad by tens of thousands of Shias protesting against the Zakat and Ushr ordinance was a clear indication of their apprehensions regarding Zia's 'Islamization' project. The selective backing of the Afghan groups resisting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan again corresponded to a sectarian pattern of preferences that reinforced perceptions on both sides of the divide⁴⁵.

It is further reported that after coming to power, under the slogan of Nizam-e-Mustafa Zia imposed Sharia, in a largely anti-Shia interpretation, in order to legitimize his military rule and to promote jihad in Afghanistan and in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) with the help of Sunni Islamist parties and Deobandi groups⁴⁶. Some scholars opine that it is difficult to prove that Ziaul Haq's eleven years made Pakistanis more Islamic or nationalistic. Empirical evidence in such cases is generally inconclusive. Yes, the articulate sections of the middle class did express such views, right wing views, more forcefully and more often during and after his rule⁴⁷. It is no coincidence that the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-Fiqh-Jafaria, the SSP and the MQM all emerged during General Zia's rule.

The 1980s nonetheless proved significant in impacting sectarian milieu of GB. First, government-led Shia-Sunni and Shia-Nurbaxshi riots caused acute socio-political polarization in Skardu during the early 1980s⁴⁸. But more importantly, a watershed in the history of Gilgit-Baltistan causing permanent trust deficit was reached in May 1988. The sighting of moon and celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr by Shias while Sunnis were still fasting, because their religious leaders had not sighted the moon, became the trigger, resulting in thrashing those not fasting, later transforming into large scale attacks against different villages of Shia population by extra-regional forces comprising thousands of Sunni armed personnel. They burnt their houses and killed 93 personnel including 9 policemen. Shias also killed 10 Sunnis in retaliation. Independent sources put casualty figures of shias at 700. "The attack was entirely government sponsored, or how else could the invaders have been, first, allowed unhindered passage from NWFP right up to Gilgit and, secondly, permitted to commit the

carnage that they did?", asked a Shia religious leader from Jalalabad. Sunnis deny government complicity and insist both sides were at fault⁴⁹.

Although unverifiable but Senge Sering claims that the intention was to undertake demographic change by force in this strategically located region sandwiched between China, the former Soviet Union and India⁵⁰. In defence he cites for example, until a decade ago, voters from both constituencies (Gilgit city is divided into two constituencies – Gilgit-1 and Gilgit-2) sent Shia members to the local Council. The demographic change has turned the tide in favor of the Sunnis; in 2004, voters of Gilgit city returned Sunni candidates as winners. Shias in Gilgit-1 were further marginalized when the major Shia settlement of Nomal was transferred to Gilgit-4, thereby tilting the population balance. Since then, contests between Shia and Sunni candidates have remained neck to neck⁵¹. The tipping point is the vote bank in the Amphari neighborhood with a mixed Shia-Sunni population where sectarian polarization will help the Sunni candidate gain a lead. Likewise, in Gilgit-2, the settlement of Pathans and Punjabis has changed the demography and this one-time Peoples Party (PPP) stronghold supported Hafiz Rehman of PML in the 2004 elections, which he won by a small margin of 500 votes⁵².

The voters' list released recently shows more than a 80 per cent increase in voters' numbers in Gilgit-1 (from 28,146 to 47,835) and Gilgit-2 (from 34,517 to 62,048) in just five years. Another recent report suggests that as of January 2001, the old population ratio of 1:4 (non-locals to locals) has now changed to 3:4 (non-locals to locals)⁵³. The argument is somewhat diluted by Crisis Group Report which envisages that sectarian tensions had increased following construction of the Karakoram Highway in 1986 and the opening of trade through the China border, which resulted in Sunni settlers from NWFP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Punjab establishing flourishing businesses in Gilgit, altering its demographic balance and incurring Shia resentment.

Prior to 1988, sectarian tensions were rare and did not result in armed conflict⁵⁴. Inter-marriages were frequent, and the resultant ties of kinship took precedence over

45 Abbas Rashid, *The Politics and Dynamics of Violent Sectarianism*, http://www.tri.org/archives/books_pakistancrisisrashid, accessed 29 Apr 2011.

46 Seema Shekhawat, *Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan*, op.cit.

47 Tariq Rehman, *Language Education and Culture*, Oxford University Press Karachi 1999, p.83.

48 Senge H. Sering, *Talibanization of Gilgit-Baltistan and Sectarian Killings*, op.cit.

49 *Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas*, Crisis Group Asia Report N°131, 2 April 2007

50 Senge H. Sering, *Talibanization of Gilgit-Baltistan and Sectarian Killings*, op.cit.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Seema Shekhawat, *Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan*, op.cit.

54 *Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas*, Crisis Group Asia Report N°131, 2 April 2007.

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sectarian differences. Historically, too, ethnic ties and tribal loyalties were more important than sectarian identities. After 1988, however, Gilgit gradually changed from a peaceful tourist destination into a battleground for Sunni and Shia militants⁵⁵.

Sectarian conflicts acquired a new dimension from 1988 and particularly when the jihad was “brought home” after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. 1997 saw a change with indiscriminate gunfire on ordinary citizens who had no sectarian activity and whose fault was to be sunni or shia and tit-for-tat killings targeting doctors, lawyers and traders⁵⁶.

Larry Goodson therefore intuitively believed, the rise of militant religious right wing has combined the worst legacies of Pakistan's adventurist Afghan policy of the [1980s as well as of] 1990s to create severe disorder in Pakistani politics and civil society.... [in turn] narrowing the parameters of public discourse and focus on social policy⁵⁷. Hence, pre-1988 era never returned, instead both the sides started procuring arms and ammunition illegally. Reportedly both the parties have hundreds of unauthorized light and heavy weapons.

Shias perceive much of the violence as engineered by the state, to justify its resistance to political representation or full autonomy. Following escalating clashes between Sunnis and Twelver Shias, in 1988, a military operation to restore order was led by Brigadier (later President) Musharraf, who is also alleged to have encouraged (Sunni) Pakhtun and Afghan tribes people to migrate into Gilgit⁵⁸. According to Ahmed, the federally administered Northern Areas of Pakistan may take time to control the sectarian violence that has gripped the region since 1988.

The demographic balance in Gilgit is such that Shia and Sunni vote banks have polarised there like Iraq, but that is more owing to the government's refusal to allow the region to become devolved as a political entity. The army retains control of the administration of the Gilgit-Baltistan because of the region's strategic location next to Kashmir. During the Kargil operation in 1999, which was carried out from base camps in the Northern Areas, ground was provided once again for the sectarian violence that followed into the new millennium. The militias Pakistan used at Kargil were all

Shia-killers.

The status of the region – a change which is bound to lead to the diffusion of sectarian tension – will be difficult to “normalise” as long as the conflict with India over Kashmir is not resolved⁵⁹. Abbas Rashid writes that the present state of organised sectarian conflict can be traced to the murder of TNFJ leader Arif Hussain Al-Hussaini in 1988. Others date it to 1987, when Ahl-e-Hadith leaders, Allama Ehsan Elahi Zaheer and Maulana Habib ur Rehman Yazdani, were killed, along with six others, at a meeting near the Minar-e-Pakistan. Prior to this there were serious anti-Shia riots in Lahore in 1986.

In any case, the spiral of violence registered a sharp rise in February 1990 with the murder of Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, founder of the SSP. This was followed by violent clashes resulting in dozens of casualties and burning down of numerous houses and shops in Jhang. In December that year, Iran's Counsel General in Lahore, Sadeq Ganji, was killed and the phenomenon of sectarian violence in Pakistan began to receive international attention⁶⁰.

During the democratic interlude of the 1990s, Gilgit was not free from sectarian strife but representative institutions and responsive civilian governments still ensured an uneasy sectarian peace. Disillusioned with Islamabad and motivated by the need to unite on a common platform to ensure their collective survival, Shias in the region supported the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jafria (TNFJ), initially a religious organisation but transformed, through sheer numbers, into a formidable political force. The TNFJ, and the Shia community as a whole, boycotted elections to the Northern Areas Council in 1991, accusing KANA minister Sardar Mehtab Abbassi of re-drawing constituencies in Gilgit to favour the Sunnis. In 1994, however, soon after the passage of the LFO and concerned about Shia alienation, Islamabad held early elections in which the TNFJ won ten of 24 seats and was included in a coalition government although Islamabad's decision to make concessions to a local religious party, was criticized. Musharraf's rule however failed to find lasting solution of enduring friction between the sects. Kargil War is believed to have accentuated the process.

55 Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas, Crisis Group Asia Report N°131, 2 April 2007.

56 Mariam abou zahab, the regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan.

57 Larry Goodson, *Foreign Policy Gone Awry: The Kalashnikovization and Talibanisation of Pakistan, Pakistan 2000* / edited by Craig Baxter, Charles H. Kennedy Karachi : Oxford University Press, 2001. 270 p. 175.

58 Sectarian conflict and its aftermath in Jhang and Gilgit, Pakistan Religions and Development Research Programme Policy Brief 9 – 2011 http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/PDF/Outputs/ReligionDev_RPC/RaD_policy_brief_9.pdf, accessed 25 Apr 2011.

59 Khalid Hasan, Sectarian conflict looms over Pakistan, says study, *Daily Times*, May 14, 2007.

60 Abbas Rashid, *The Politics and Dynamics of Violent Sectarianism*, http://www.tni.org/archives/books_pakistancrisisrashid, accessed 29 Apr 2011.

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Two later incidents further deepened the intra-community cleavages, the murder of Zia Rizvi and the text book issue⁶¹. Agha Ziauddin's death in January 2005 caused widespread clashes leading to a six-month long curfew and emergency, and loss of more than two hundred lives⁶². Property worth millions of rupees was destroyed. Even more harmful was the long-term damage to social harmony. The 'textbook controversy' (2000-2005) that arose when the Pakistan state introduced new Sunni textbooks in the Northern Areas, and the local Shia population began to agitate for a more balanced curriculum. The conflict reached an acute stage during 2004-2005, as violent confrontations took place between Shia and Sunni communities, and a constant curfew paralyzed daily life in Gilgit for eleven months.

Some argue that the Shia mobilization against textbook Islam was not just a form of "sectarian" outrage; rather, it symbolized a broader political claim to inclusion in a context of long-standing regional subordination and religious suppression. It is thus emphasized that the politics of sectarian emotions in the Northern Areas must therefore be understood in relation to the regulatory processes of state-making, which are the very source and embodiment of 'sectarianism' and 'outrage' in the region⁶³. International Crisis Group Report in 2007 resonates almost identical message; if the immediate catalyst of the 2005 violence was a dispute over the Islamic curriculum in school textbooks, the real causes of sectarian conflict are to be found in six decades of Pakistani misrule⁶⁴. After sustained efforts, Sunni and Shia organisations in the Northern Areas signed a six-point peace agreement arranged by Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC) members during February 2005. According to the peace agreement, the Tanzim Ahle Sunnah wal Jama'at representing Sunnis, and the Central Anjuman-e-Imamia Northern Areas representing Shias, had agreed to immediately stop issuing resolutions (fatwahas) and counter-resolutions against each other, foster sectarian harmony and resolve other issues. Each accepted to ensure law and order during Ashura processions and each was to be held responsible for protecting minorities in their

majority areas⁶⁵. It is pertinent to note that while all sectarian organizations in Pakistan have roots in ethnic communities in GB, these are not as such represented as elsewhere in the country⁶⁶.

Since 1988 to December 2010, 117 sectarian cases (murder) have been registered, 74 were challaned, 15 cancelled, 10 remained untraced and 15 are pending investigation. This tally does not include attempted murder which has so far numbered 170. While the fatalities among various sects less Islamilis are fractionally equal; according to police records sunnis have suffered more in terms of injuries⁶⁷. Perhaps a thousand people were killed during the 1990s. The number of incidents, deaths and injuries peaked in 1990, 1994, 1998 and 2001. Since then, sectarian violence has occurred less frequently⁶⁸.

Specifically, since 2008, there has been 'peace', although Sunni attacks have targeted the offices and staff of the Ismaili Aga Khan Foundation, which operates successful non-sectarian rural development programmes in rural parts of the district. Since 2009, a PPP-led elected government has been in place and an uneasy calm prevails. Sniper shooting has remained the primary method of sectarian killings. In August 2009, when the leader of the banned anti-Shia political party SSP, Allama Ali Sher Hyderi was killed in Sindh, riots broke out in Gilgit leading to the closure of markets and heavy gun battle between Shias and Sunnis⁶⁹. Even though the principal actors are Shias and Sunnis, the Ismailis of the region have also been periodically targeted⁷⁰.

Impact of External Dynamics

Coupled with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian revolution brought about a complete change in the Shia community and in the shape of Shia leadership which was before in the hands of zakirs who had followers through their control of majalis⁷¹. After the revolution and during Iran-Iraq war—which was seen in Pakistan as a war between sunnis and shias – Iran funneled large sums of money to the Pakistani shias and opened cultural centres in

61 Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas, Apr 2007, op.cit.

62 Senge H. Sering, Talibanization of Gilgit-Baltistan and Sectarian Killings, op.cit.

63 Ali, Nosheen (2008) 'Outrageous State, Sectarianized Citizens: Deconstructing the 'Textbook Controversy' in the Northern Areas, Pakistan', op.cit.

64 Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas, Apr 2007, op.cit.

65 Sunni and Shia groups sign peace deal in Gilgit, Wilaya network, <http://www.wilayahnetwork.com/news/?id=1175>, accessed 29 Apr 2011.

66 Northern Areas of Pakistan-Facts, Problems and Recommendations An RSP Report Policy Perspectives, Vol 1, No.1

67 IG Police, Gilgit-Baltistan, Mar 2011.

68 Sectarian conflict and its aftermath in Jhang and Gilgit, Pakistan Religions and Development Research Programme Policy Brief 9 2011 http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/PDF/Outputs/ReligionDev_RPC/RaD_policy_brief_9.pdf, accessed 25 Apr 2011.

69 Senge H. Sering, Talibanization of Gilgit-Baltistan and Sectarian Killings, op.cit.

70 Flames in Gilgit, Express Tribune, August 28th, 2010. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/43464/flames-in-gilgit/>, accessed 25 Apr 2011.

71. Mariam abou zahab, op.cit.

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every major town⁷². Many students shia organizations especially belonging to lower strata of society went to study in Iran on scholarship and came back impressed.

At the same time, a new generation of clerics, belonging mostly to the Pashtun tribal areas and Gilgit-Baltistan, studied in Najaf and in Qom where they built up contacts with Shias from Middle Eastern countries and particularly Lebanese Shias. They came to Pakistan in the early 1980s and opened madaris with Iranian funding. These clerics soon took control of the community, they rationalized the rituals and utilized the old structure for political activism, an anathema with conservative shias⁷³. The Iranian influence was also visible in the adoption of a new style of dress; black cloaks and black turbans became commonplace⁷⁴.

'With Iranian financial backing and support,' they formed Shia militant organizations to counter the Sunni extremist groups. Retired Shia officials from the Pakistan Army also started training the Shia youth. The Iranian revolution inspired Pakistan shias and contributed to their politicization but it had a backlash: to counter this influence, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait started patronizing wahabis and other non-shias. Sectarian divisions were militarized in a way not previously seen before.

Sectarian violence as we experience it now is the legacy of Afghan war and the result of the rise of the Taliban which has exacerbated pre-existent rivalries and may seriously destabilize the country⁷⁵. Allama Arif Hussian al Hussian, a turi pashtun from parachinar, who studied in Najaf Qom, was sent back to Pakistan after the Iranian revolution to organize the Shia community. After the death of Mufti Jaafar in 1984, he became the head of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e fiqh Jaafria (TNFJ) created in Bhakkar in 1979. Shia leaders who felt threatened by Zia's policy of Sunni islamization created this movement to assert their separate identity (Shia qaum), protect their rights and prevent the sunni majority and the government to impose an interpretation of shariah contrary to fiqh-e-Jaafria⁷⁶.

It will be recalled, however, that almost all the main Shia religious groups such as Tehreek-e-Jafferia (TF), Passbane-e-Islam and Sipah Mohammad were formed in 1979, 1989 and 1990 respectively. The Sunni (deobandi and barelvi) and Ahle Hadit, mainstream sectarian organizations and their affiliates by and large came into being in response to these Shia outfits⁷⁷.

In 2006, too, Al Qaeda clearly chose Lashkar Jhangvi as its instrument, marking its own transformation. A fresh targeting of the Shia community was launched in the cities where they are found in large numbers: Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Multan, Khanewal, Layya, Bhakkar, Jhang, Sargodha, Rahimyar Khan, Karachi, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Parachinar, Hangu, Hyderabad, Nawabshah, Mirpur Khas and Quetta. During the ashura of 2007, some of these cities were actually attacked, killing and injuring state functionaries who had been forewarned. A kind of sectarian war of great intensity seemed to ha[d] taken hold of cities like Gilgit, Parachinar and Bannu, marking the "sectarianisation" of Al Qaeda⁷⁸.

It is for the external dynamics influencing domestic security scene of Pakistan that scholars contend that religious organizations in Pakistan are almost always sectarian in nature and also have ideological and financial links with the state and regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. Therefore, they cannot build bridges between rival communities⁷⁹. To counter the rising tide of Shia Islam in neighbouring Iran following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Zia also engineered a "dramatic shift towards extremist Sunni political discourse, orthodoxy and a heightening of anti-Shia militancy, early signs of the bloody sectarian conflict to follow"⁸⁰.

While commenting on Iranian support for Shias, Naveed Shahzad observes that this factor without any political motivation seems illogical, since Ismailis living in the region almost have same and in some matters even higher magnitude of differences with Sunnis, but both sects never confront each other violently, though there are minor

72 Mariam abou zahab, op.cit.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 For details see Appendix 2 of 'Dilemmas of Pride and Pain: Sectarian Conflict and Conflict Transformation in Pakistan', Religions and Development Research Programme, Working Paper 48-2010, http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/files/resourcesmodule/@random454f80f60b3f4/1293020787_working_paper_48___complete_for_the_web.pdf, accessed 28 Apr 2011.

78 Khaled Ahmed, Transformation of Al Qaeda.

79 Sectarian conflict and its aftermath in Jhang and Gilgit, op.cit.

80 ICG, The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan, Asia Report N°95, 18 Apr 2005.

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clashes between the two sects in some cases, but they never extended their clashes to such a higher level, where armed and violent conflict takes place, as we experienced in the case of Sunni-Shia clashes in the region. It may be because Ismailis as compared to Sunni (Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iraq) and Shia (Iran) have no centre of gravity for motivation. Secondly it is a fact that within Ismailis community in the region they are taught to be tolerant towards other sects, and there is no religious party from Ismailis side, thus the exploitation of followers in the name of religion is not possible for Ismailis, though Aga Khan (Spiritual Leader of Ismailis) and other NGOs, working in the area are discriminatory towards Sunnis and Ismailis.

Current Scenario – the Antagonists and the Issues

At present, uneasy calm prevails in Gilgit-Baltistan. The environment is, however, simmering hence deceptive. Ismaili and Noorbakhshi are relatively docile and peaceful. The prime cause of permanent sectarian tension is the evenly distributed population between both the two main sects. Being capital city Gilgit continues to be the hub of activity, where both sects are living next door to each other.

Organized crime is gaining ground evident from large seizures of arms, ammunition, drugs, etc. raising the threat and level of sectarian violence. Number of foreign tourists has considerably reduced due to simmering law and order situation. Only 3880 tourists visited the area during 2010 compared to 13548 in 2006⁸¹. Search operations for suspects involved in sectarian crimes are a regular feature of police operations. 44 cases of sectarian nature were registered between January to December 2010⁸².

Pathological behaviours are ingrained in the mindset of opposing factions lead by mainly the firebrand clerics and their respective sectarian party as earlier discussed. The major issues among the contending parties are summarized below.

1. The syllabus issue is a cause of concern. After hearing view point of both the sects, Federal syllabus Review committee held on March 14 2009 gave following decisions:-

i. Teachers of entire Gilgit-Baltistan will be told that

while teaching controversial issues, procedures practice by both the sect would be explained to the students.

- ii. Controversial question would not be asked in the exams.
- iii. Civil administration is making efforts to implement the decisions given by the Federal Review Committee.

2. Illuminations are being carried out by Ahle Tashee on the Birth anniversaries of Holy Prophet (PBUH), Hazrat Ali (A.S), Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S) and Hazrat Imam Mehdi in calendar year. In the past illuminations created law and order situation in Gilgit and resulted in losses of human lives. Code of conduct devised in this regard is not being implemented. The grand Jirga which was constituted during 2005 for conflict resolution has not been effective and has rather withered away.
3. On relocation of Alms and their removal, decision has not been fully implemented.
4. Provocative wall chalking has not ceased as was agreed during the peace treaty 2005.
5. A general assessment yields that the religious heads (Ulemas) and notables of both the sects are not visionary, instead of defusing the tension instigate the people for revenge. They want controversial issues to remain alive and exploit Juma prayers in criticizing each other with no stone unturned to create law and order situation. It was therefore, not unusual to hear of fatwas of "Jehad" on the fighting between Shias and Sunnis. There were also complaints against clerics coming from 'outside' the area and delivering fiery sermons based on sectarian hatred⁸³.

81 IGP Gilgit-Baltistan.

82 Ibid.

83 Editorial: Story of Gilgit deaths foretold, op.cit.

Conclusion

Owing to ecological potential, biodiversity and vital link with China, Gilgit-Baltistan is considered a strategic asset of Pakistan. The violence paradigm plaguing the region is deep seated characterized by pathological politics; conflict is now meaningfully manifest shaped by mistrust of communities, state's misrule and foreign dynamics. With the advent of current generation of Parliamentarians and the institutionalization of democratic institutions, it is hoped that the conflict will find due attention for enduring resolution.



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