



Pakistan Study Forum
College of Defence Management



Pakistan's Internal Fault Lines

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THE POLITICIZATION OF ISLAM IN PAKISTAN

Dr. Ashok K Behuria

Islam was conceived as a powerful uniting factor when Pakistan was born. However, Islam is not monolithic, and the many sects all view their interpretation of Islam as the most authentic. Unfortunately, they also view all the other sects as non Islamic. Political games of one - upmanship over the years have benefitted different sects and given the clergy a political legitimacy. A tendency by politicians to blame all crises on dilution of Islamic values is encouraging ever increasing orthodoxy. Inability to curb this trend is driving the once liberal Pakistani society towards radical Islam and sectarian fissures.

Introduction

Pakistan was originally conceived as a state for the Muslims of the subcontinent, wherein they could practice their faith without any fear. During the movement for creation of the state out of British India, however, the Muslim elite seeking to mobilize the Muslim masses, projected the state as an Islamic state. In the process, the Islamist clergy acquired tremendous political legitimacy which only persisted with the success of the movement. While the political leadership sought to use Islam in a symbolic way, and came out with an overarching secular vision of the state where 'citizenship' would matter more than 'faith', the Islamist clergy consistently raised the banner of Islam and demanded that the state of Pakistan, originally built for the Muslims, should eventually become an Islamic state. This debate whether Pakistan should be a Muslim state or an Islamic state continues to this day even after 73 years of its formation, with the balance continually tilting in favor of the Islamists.

With an overwhelming 95-98 per cent of the people practicing Islam, one would have expected Islam to be a uniting factor bringing stability and cohesiveness to the state of Pakistan. However, the socio-cultural space in Pakistan today is fraught with ethnic and sectarian discord and violence of the worst kind. It is most surprising that over-emphasis on religion has in fact led to Islam acting as an agent of division and disruption. The article analyses the trajectory of politicization of Islam in Pakistan and its dangerous fallouts in the future.

Capitulation by Liberal Politicians

The Pakistani state has been under pressure from the right wing 'Ulema' (religious scholars) right since its inception to convert the western-style Pakistani statecraft to a Sharia-based Islamic system. The modernist elite in Pakistan has, over time, conceded space to the Islamists with a view to coopting their demands and stealing the thunder from their populist campaign. However, in the bargain Islam has gained tremendous political legitimacy.

Pakistan was carved out of British India for the minority 'Mussalmans' who felt insecure about the prospect of being marginalized in a democratic set up by the majority Hindu population. The leadership of the movement for Pakistan, mostly from northern India with an elitist and feudal orientation, used Islam in their mobilization strategy to attract the Muslim masses. During this movement, the bogey of 'Islamic culture in danger' was also raised to elicit stronger mass support. By the time of the creation of Pakistan, Islam had emerged as a binding principle, a natural adhesive to bind the Muslims together. However, once the state of Pakistan came into being, its main architect and its sole spokesman, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who claimed to have carved it with the help of a typewriter, underplayed the Islamic dimension and defined the core of the statecraft in liberal and secular terms. However, he died away exactly 1 year and 29 days after Pakistan was created, before the constitution was drawn up enshrining the principles he outlined in his address to the nation on August 11, 1947.



The leaders succeeding him were unable to contend with the Islamist forces that were encouraged during the movement for Pakistan. Some of the conservative right-wing leaders asked "What was the need of founding Pakistan if it was to be a secular state?" As the debate on the nature of the Pakistani state gathered momentum in the Pakistani Constitutional Assembly, it was noticed in the "Objective Resolution" of the Pakistani constitution in 1949 that Islam had entered the constitution as an unalterable frame of reference. Even secular leaders like Ayub Khan and Z.A. Bhutto had to insert 'Islamic provisions' in the constitutions enacted during their rule.

From 'Islamisation' to 'Militantisation'

Article 2 of the 1973 constitution declares Islam as the official state religion and the preamble emphasizes the point that sovereignty belongs to Allah. Article 227 very clearly states that all "existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the holy Qur'an and 'Sunnah'... and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such injunctions (Article 227)". The Ulema have thus been allowed to play an officially recognized role in shaping the Pakistani polity, including the writing of legislation.

The clergy has also been accorded a constitutional place through the establishment of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII). The CII was first introduced by Ayub in his 1962 constitution and Ayub used his influence and discretion to select only conformist clerics who would adopt a modernist line and attest his policies. The constitution of 1973 also made constitutional provision for CII with a constitutional mandate to examine existing laws and recommend ways of bringing them into conformity with Islam's injunctions. The constitution had even promised to make all laws conform to the principles of Islam within ten years from the promulgation of the constitution. Though Z.A. Bhutto subsequently did not make any effort in this regard, the damage had been done, and CII has served as a body prescribing conservative steps to be taken by the governments from time to time. This has exerted unnecessary pressure on the government and at times various governments have made use of the recommendations of the CII to demonstrate their Islamic credentials.

During Zia-ul-Haq's rule, the CII worked most enthusiastically and served as Chief Advisory Council to the President entrusted with the responsibility of examining whether federal and provincial laws were in line with Islamic principles. So far, CII has recommended repeal of 829 federal laws passed till 1977. Many more laws are currently under review. As a result of their influence, Islamisation is, at least formally, the ultimate objective of the constitution and the basis of the state's legitimacy.

The attempt at Islamisation did not stop there. Zia-ul-Haq added 'Sharia' benches to Provincial courts and a Sharia appellate bench to the Federal Supreme Court to decide matters concerning Islamic laws. Zia's infamous 'Hudood' ordinances sought to introduce medieval forms of punishment like flogging, amputation, public stoning etc. It has since been very difficult to repeal these regressive provisions in Pakistan. All this, in many ways, signals a gradual Islamisation of the Pakistani state and society.

Islam has been successfully used by almost all the Pakistani rulers as a potent crutch for ensuring their hold on power. In times of crises, there is tendency to attribute all problems to the sinking standards of Islam in the society and an overwhelmingly illiterate populace is easily persuaded into believing that nothing short of a bold step forward to bring Islamic rule to Pakistan can reverse trend of decline. Islam has become so closely woven into Pakistani identity that it has assumed a life of its own.

Ritual invocation of Islam forms an inalienable part of Pakistan's identity. What could explain this extreme sense of insecurity about its identity and existence? Waheed uz Zaman says, "If we let go the ideology of Islam, we cannot hold together as a nation by any other means... If the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, God forbid, give up Islam, the Arabs yet remain Arabs, the Turks remain Turks, the Iranians remain Iranians, but what do we remain if we give up Islam?"

All through the history of Pakistan, civilian rulers with liberal credentials felt it necessary to invoke Islam. While the world outside may find the whole business quite farcical, for the people of Pakistan, however, this has falsely been projected as an existential necessity.



Once the debate on whether Pakistan should be an Islamic or secular-liberal state is resolved in favor of Islam, the next issue that begs examination is which version of Islam should be the official one. Islam is not monolithic and different '*madhahib/mazhahibs*' as well as sects advocate different interpretations of Islam. Most of these denominations within Islam consider their own version as the most authoritative and regard the rest as either non-Islamic or un-Islamic. Even within same sects sometimes there are major divisions like the one between the 'Deobandis' and 'Barelvis'. Even if Muslims belonging to these two sects might be following the same '*madhab*' (Hanafi in this case) their approaches to Islam vary widely to the extent that they regard each other as non-Muslims. While in normal circumstances, people with such ideological differences can coexist peacefully, in a situation where one of the sects seeks to dominate the statecraft in the name of Islam, the other is likely to revolt.

For example, when Zia-ul-Haq, known for his sympathies for 'Jamati-Islami' (closer to Deobandi thought but non-sectarian), sought to bring about 'Sharia' rule in Pakistan and introduced the system of compulsory collection and distribution of 'Zakat' and 'Ushr' in 1979, the Shia expressed their displeasure vehemently. There are differences in '*fiqh*' jurisprudence, in marriage and divorce, inheritance and wills and imposition of '*hadd*' punishments even in the same sect following different '*madhabs*'. This plurality is impossible to manage if the state were to subscribe to a particular version of Islam, which amounts to delegitimization of other versions practiced by many Muslims in the same state. Zia understood this well quite early in his tenure as Martial Law Administrator and later as President and all his Islamic ordinances were proclaimed during the first three years of his rule, while during the remaining eight years, he used Islam rather symbolically even if his bias for 'Jamati-Islami-Deobandi' version stood out in the shape of his patronization of 'Jamati-Islami' (JI) during the Afghan 'Jihad' years of 1979-1989.

During the subsequent years until the rise of the Taliban in 1994, the rot of sectarian politics had gone so deep that even the liberal left-leaning government of Benazir Bhutto was seen patronizing core Deobandi outfits like various splinter groups of 'Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam' (JUI), who had gained massively during the 'Jihad' years. While the non-sectarian JI of the previous decade (1979-1989) was in the driver's seat in the 'Jihad' in Afghanistan, this had resulted in mujahideens of different sects coming together to fight the Soviet forces. However, the circumstances led to the rise of Taliban propelled by Pakistani Deobandi groups like 'JUI-Fazlur' and 'JUI-Shami-ul-Haq'. The sectarian outlook of Taliban was manifest in the way the group dealt with the Shia Hazaras once they fanned out of Kandahar to establish control over whole of Afghanistan. The Afghan experience certainly attests to the ill effects of progressive Islamisation.

The concept of '*Takfir*', or excommunication, is central to sectarian thinking especially within Islam. In an environment charged with orthodox thinking, often actively promoted or passively tolerated by the state, there is a temptation to brand difference as apostasy. In Pakistan, such a spirit of excommunication gained currency immediately after the state was born. During the movement for Pakistan, a minority community calling itself Muslim 'Ahmadiyas' played a significant role in propagating the cause of a separate state for Muslims of India. One of the most trusted lieutenants, Sir Zafarullah Khan, played a significant role in advocating the cause of Pakistan at the international level. However, soon after partition other sectarian denominations of Islam came together to declare 'Ahmadiyas' non-Muslims and the infamous movement for '*Khatm-e-Nabuwat*' (Finality of Prophethood) was unleashed against them leading to anti-'Ahmadiya' riots. Justice Munir, who investigated into these riots found to his disbelief that despite their overwhelming consensus on the need to excommunicate 'Ahmadiyas' from the fold of Islam, the views of the Mullahs on "who-is-a-Muslim" were remarkably dissimilar and often contradictory. He famously wrote in his judgment:

"Keeping in view the several definitions given by the Ulema, need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given by any one of the ulema, we remain Muslims according to the view of that 'alim' but kafirs according to the definition of everyone else".

These are observations that have been repeatedly quoted over the years to acknowledge the sagacity of Justice Munir, but nobody has taken any cue from it to try to reform the society in light of such



brilliant remarks. It is quite another thing that Justice Munir himself was greatly responsible for setting off the tradition of military rule which undermined the process of consolidation of democracy which could have absorbed such sentiments and encouraged genuine pluralism and tolerance. In fact, such sentiments have survived because of failure of democracy and good governance because of regular intervention of the army in politics facilitated by judges like Munir, who referred to the clause of necessity to legitimize Ayub Khan's takeover. Ever since, all rulers have invoked Islam to lend legitimacy to their rule and perpetuation in power. In the process they have legitimized role of religion in politics to such an extent that it has divided people and set them at each other's throat—all for the sake of exaltation of one's own sectarian version at the cost of everyone else's.

Soon after the Sunnis and the Shias forced the state to declare 'Ahmadiyas' as non-Muslims, it was the turn of the minority Shias (15-20%) to bear the brunt of the majority Sunnis in the 1980s. Militant Sunni outfits like 'Lashkar-e-Jhangvi', 'Sipah-e-Sahaba' and later 'Tehrik-e-Nifaz-Shariat-e-Muhammadi', came up propagating a militant Deobandi worldview. The Shias were progressively seen as non-Muslims and anti-Shia riots took place frequently in the late 1980s and early 1990s, forcing the Shias to set up their own outfits like 'Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafari' (TNFJ) and 'Sipah-e-Muhammadi' to protect themselves. Once Shia-Sunni encounters plateaued out, it was the turn of the Sunni Barelvi groups to suffer at the hands of their Sunni Deobandi cousins. Ironically, among the Sunnis, the Barelvis account for almost 70-80 percent of the population. Even then, leaders and places of worship of the Barelvis are being increasingly targeted since the 1990s by minority Deobandi militants. Many Pakistanis believe it is primarily because of the fact that the Deobandi Ulema had successfully defined the scope of Islam as advocated by the Pakistani state ever since partition. The state machinery, many would argue, has a distinct Sunni-Deobandi bias.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan's Islam Confronts Islam of the Pakistan State

The inter-sectarian as well as intra-sectarian clashes that take place almost on everyday basis have led Pakistani society to acute violence and destabilized the economy and politics of Pakistan. As Pakistan has journeyed through coups and self-aggrandizing politics, an overall environment conducive to orthodoxy and intolerance has replaced the liberalism and openness that characterized the first few decades of Pakistan's existence. Progressive incursion of degenerate and primitive thought process into the political mainstream has legitimized the role of religion in politics in a regressive manner. The situation has worsened to the extent that even the Deobandi State of Pakistan has been confronted with an even more radical constituency that seeks to impose even harsher and more orthodox near-Wahabi version of Islam on the Pakistani state. The assertive presence of Pakistan Taliban or Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) points to an extreme form of such degeneration. TTP regards Pakistan State and the army as un-Islamic, which need overhauling for a true Islamic state to emerge from its debris.

TTP's journal, 'Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad' in its November 2014 issue carried an article "Pakistani regime is an agent of the Satan", by Adam Yahya Gadahn. The Egyptian American Al Qaeda spokesperson called Pakistan "the lieutenant of the Satan (read the US)" and said that "Pakistani military and security agencies have been, for the past 65 years, dancing to the tune of Uncle Sam and the Bull Dog [Britain]", who have "control over all our 55 Muslim nations" with the help of Saudi Arabia, their "most wicked and Satanic partner". Gadahn even went on to exhort Pakistani people to rise in revolt:

"How many of us are ready to resort to extreme steps and dare to come forward to remind our puppet rulers that they are on the wrong path, which cannot be tolerated anymore? How many of us have come out in protests on roads with the resolve that we would not return to our homes until the puppet regime in Pakistan is replaced with Sharia laws!..... [Pakistan] has become an "ulcer" for the Muslim world! That is why I invite all my Pakistani brethren to revolt against the present rulers in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and thus perform your pious duty to serve your religion. We have to dislodge the present rulers and target US/Western interests, their officers, embassies, and this should continue till all the foreigners retreat to their own countries.....If this was not the right/opportune moment for removing them, then could there be a better time? Or should we wait until Pakistan is torn into further pieces and Uncle Sam takes over our atomic assets, or China and India plan attacks on Pakistan with



the help of their own local assets inside Pakistan? Have we not learnt our lessons from losing Bangladesh?"

Establishing Shariah-based system of government in Pakistan is a lasting refrain with most TTP and jihadi writers. In the March (2015) issue of 'Nawa-i-Afghan' Jihad also this rhetoric is very obvious:

"....there is a religious and moral obligation upon every one of us to stop Pakistani fauj (military) and government from hatching malicious intrigues and plans to disturb our jihad! On the one hand, the purpose of Pakistani jihadi groups is to oust an infidel government and establish a Shariat regime, while on the other hand, there has been full-fledged popular support for Sharia regime in Afghanistan, and its stability and security!"

Clarifying the TTP position on what they meant by Islamic state, Fazlullah said in a video message that if Muslims lived peacefully in either a Muslim or non-Muslim majority country, where only their religious freedoms were guaranteed, they were not being true to Islam. They would have to work towards imposing Sharia rule in their countries through jihad. This shows the resolve of the TTP leadership to impose Sharia rule in Pakistan by all means. He said:

"I want to tell my countrymen that our people have made great sacrifices for this nation. Hundreds of thousand people have sacrificed their lives just because the essence of Pakistan is "La ila ha Illallah". They wanted la ila ha illallah to be our system, otherwise it would have been better to live with the Hindus. We did not fight for this country so that we will pray, fast, go for Haj and open Madrassas. I want to inform you that when we were under British rule nobody was stopped from praying, fasting and going to Haj. Namaz is allowed in America and Europe. If a country becomes Islamic just by allowing its citizens to offer prayers and go to Haj then India is also an Islamic country; so is Europe and America. Unless and until Islamic principles are collectively implemented a country cannot be called 'Islamic'".

Surrender of the State?

The entire society is concerned about it, but does not know how to contend with it. In fact, the elite in Pakistan forget that TTP's violent advocacy is a result of blind championing of the Islamist cause over the years. Today, it is the TTP which has set the terms of the discourse often forcing the judiciary, the army and other institutions of the Pakistani state to pledge their commitment to true Islam. According to a Pakistani analyst: "Islam in Pakistan... has ceased to be a religion and worldview; it has become an obsession, a pathology. It has been drained of all ethics and has become a mechanism for oppression and injustice." Even the former army chief, Gen Kayani went on record saying that: 'Pakistan was founded by our forefathers in the name of Islam and we should work to strengthen the country and make committed efforts to achieve the goal of turning it into a true Islamic state'. A few days later, while responding to a suicide attack claimed by TTP, on a mosque in Rawalpindi on December 4, 2009, he repeated: "Pakistan is our motherland. It is the bastion of Islam and we live for the glory of Islam and Pakistan... Our faith, resolve and pride in our religion and in our country is an asset, which is further reinforced after each terrorist incident".

Conclusion

The power elite of Pakistan have thus succumbed to the Islamists and allowed the latter to dictate the terms of popular discourse. Rather than encouraging moderation, they have invoked 'Islam' to convince the masses that they too are ardent exponents of Islamic principles and Islamic state. The elite does not realize that it is indirectly legitimizing the demand of the radical elements for the establishment of an 'Islamic state' in Pakistan. They cannot contest the rhetorical competence of a mullah to sell his point of view as more apt and genuine in a theological debate. On the whole, it does not realize that it is fighting a losing battle and is ultimately left with the choice of being coopted by the orthodox section.

The inability of the elite to define Pakistani nation in non-religious geo-cultural terms has allowed Islam to endure as the most important marker of the Pakistani identity. This sense of identity-crisis persists even after almost seven decades of its sovereign existence as an independent entity in the



comity of nations. Ironically, as long as Islam remains the most potent referent, it is certain to emit strong Islamist impulses which will indirectly legitimize the operation of radical Islamic groups in Pakistan.

Rather than leading to a consensus, the increasing accent of the state on Islam has hardened the boundaries between different sects and groups within Islam. Each of these groups have tried to define Islam in narrow and exclusivist terms and sought to impose their world-views on others in militant ways. If one goes by their separate versions of Pakistan, one will find 'many Pakistans within Pakistan' competing for influence and legitimacy. Rather than fighting them or trying to transcend such fissiparous trends by promoting a progressive version of Islam, the state apparatus has collaborated with the Islamists and even granted them their mini-emirates in far-flung areas. Inevitably, the Islamist discourse has been dominated by sectarian and regressive *maulanas* of all shades, pushing the resultant vector in the direction of growing Islamisation of Pakistani society with each passing day. The trend is too obvious to be ignored and appears irreversible in present circumstances.

The Pakistani strategy of using jihadi elements against India has strengthened the hold of the militant constituencies further and led to unintended internal consequences. The rising incidence of sectarian violence and the spread of Taliban into the hinterland amply demonstrate this trend. Pakistan is thus likely to countenance a prolonged period of chaos and turmoil. It will require a total transformation of Pakistani society to lift Pakistan out of the mess it is in today. Pakistan can arrest its decline and reverse the trend by de-emphasizing its Islamic identity, reconstituting itself as a liberal democracy, bringing about people-centric socio-economic reforms and defining itself in geo-cultural rather than religious terms.

References

ⁱIn his inaugural address on August 11, 1947, Jinnah promised equal rights for all citizens regardless of religion, caste or creed. He famously said: "If we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor... you are free- you are free to go to your temples mosques or any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state... in due course of time Hindus will cease to be Hindus and Muslims will cease to be Muslims- not in a religious sense for that is the personal faith of an individual- but in a political sense as citizens of one state". http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/Quaid/governor_g.htm accessed on August 18, 2007

ⁱⁱMaulana Maududi, founder of Jamiat-i-Islami had argued this way.

ⁱⁱⁱOn March 12, 1949, the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan adopted a resolution moved by Liaquat Ali Khan, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan. It was called the Objectives Resolution. It proclaimed that the future constitution of Pakistan would not be modeled on European pattern, but on the ideology and democratic faith of Islam. Liaquat called it "the most important occasion in the life of this country, next in importance only to the achievement of independence".

^{iv}An interesting analytical piece titled "Talibanization of Pakistan", by Rafi Aamer, came up recently in The Dawn (Karachi), August 12, 2008, which also argues out the same.

^vAyub had to include Islamic clauses in the 1962 Constitution. These could not be challenged in any court of law. The state was originally named the Republic of Pakistan, but the first amendment added the word "Islamic" to the name. The word "Islam" and not "Quran and Sunnah" was used in the Islamic clauses to give a liberal touch to the Constitution. The Advisory Council of Islamic Ideology was introduced whose job was to recommend to the government ways and means to enable Muslims to live their lives according to the teachings of Islam.

^{vi}ICG Asia Report N°49, "Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military", Islamabad/Brussels, 20 March 2003

^{vii}Quoted in Edward Mortimer, Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam, Faber and Faber, London, 1982, p. 216.

^{viii}Ibid. p.219.

^{ix}Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad, November 2014.

^xUstad Osama Mehmud, "Call for Support and Defence of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad, March 2015

^{xi}"Special Speech of TTP Chief, Haq Fazlullah Khurasani, to Suicide Commandos" Umar Media, June 23, 2015, at <https://umarmedia.wordpress.com/2015/06/23/>



ⁱⁱⁱIbid. Interview with Ziauddin Sardar, at <http://jang.com.pk/thenews/aug2010-weekly/nos-29-08-2010/spr.htm#5>.

^{iv}The Dawn, November 25, 2009.

^vForty people including a major general, a brigadier, two lieutenant colonels and two majors were killed in the attack. Report by Mohammad Asghar, "Carnage in Pindi army mosque as Taliban breach security", The Dawn, December 04, 2009.

^{vi}See report by BBC, "Pakistan buries victims of Rawalpindi mosque attack", December 5, 2009, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8397598.stm>

^{vii}Ashok K Behuria, "Many Pakistans within Pakistan: The Case of Sectarian Conflicts in a Talibanised Context", Omprakash Mishra and Sucheta Ghosh, eds., Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict in South Asian Region, New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2003

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