



Historical Background and Causes of Sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan

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Abstract: Gilgit–Baltistan (GB) is a Shia-dominated province within a Sunni-majority country, having a cluster composition of diversified religious identities including the segments of Shia, Sunni, Noorbakhshi, and Ismailia populations respectively. It is located between the disputed regions of India and Pakistan and is a sensitive region to sectarian violence. Gilgit–Baltistan (GB) has always remained in the headlines of the news not because of its natural and scenic beauty landscapes, but because of sectarian unrest. Tension and a sense of fear prevailing across the region on the rise of the inflammatory statements made from both communities' lives in Gilgit Baltistan. . Before 1970, the region had no such eruptions and escalation of sectarian violence, all the ethnic and religious diversity segments had the sentiments, and cooperation, and lived in the coexistence with the amicable environment of brotherhood. The outbreak began to be executed with the development of the Karakoram Highway, the major transformative policies adopted by the regime of General Zia ul Haq, and foreign forces contributed their role to initiating the sectarian conflict in the 1980s In Gilgit Baltistan. The formulation of anti-Shia discourse and imposition of Sunni doctrine in propagating communal violence by neglecting the Shia segments, by having support from foreign powers such as Saudi Arabia, and the unneeded series of Afghanistan Jiddad all these have contributed their role in making the outbreak of sectarian conflict in Gilgit Baltistan.

Keywords: Shia ,Sunni ,History ,Conflicit ,Gigit Baltistan

1. Introduction

1.1 Origin of Sectarianism in Islam

The sad demise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad initiated sectarianism in Islam. The main difference between the two segments is that they relate to the true successor of Prophet Muhammad; the Sunni segment announced that Hazrat Abu Bakar was the next successor. Shia quarters started their notion by announcing their sentiments by calling Hazrat Ali the successor of the Holy Prophet. They are related it to a blood relationship with the blessed Prophet. Disagreement led to a significant attitude of division in two major Muslim sects. The unsettling dispute became a medium for providing irreparable damage to the whole Muslim world. (Leny Helton 2010). The disputed issue marked the escalation of the split between the schools of thought. It included space for the introduction of rifts and rivalry between these two sects of Islam, which have remained prevalent for centuries. Sectarian issues remained the bone of contention in Islam. Sectarian conflict has now become a regional issue of Pakistan and the region of Gigit Baltistan has also become a victim of this chronic violence. Still having devastating influence in every walk of life and enforcing irreparable damage. The same goes for Gilgit Baltistan, which proved to be a victim of this specter by its deep-rooted and calmative impact on the ground of Skardu.

1.2 Gilgit Baltistan is a land of diverse ethnicity

Gilgit Baltistan is a land of diverse ethnicity with a multilingual composition of cultural and ethnic diversity. Four

Muslim sects, the Shia, Sunni, Noorbakhshi, and Ismailis, live in Gilgit Baltistan. (Feyyaz, 2011). Variations in followers figure for 41 percent Shias, 30 percent Sunnis, and 24 percent Ismailis, and 6 percent Noorbakhshi. The agreements of this population identify the sense of the majority of Shia in the region. District Diamer, located south of Gilgit Baltistan, has a Sunni sect majority. North of Gilgit Baltistan Nagar and Baltistan division are mostly dominated Shia majority populations along with the limited number of Noorbakhshi followers segment of the Muslim sect. Hunza and Ghizer are primarily associated with the followers of Ismailis. (Chandrasekhar, 2015)

Table 1: Distribution of Population According to Sect in Gilgit Baltistan

Sect	Hunza	Nagar	Chilas	Astore	Skardu
Shia	Nil	100 %	Nil	10 %	98 %
Sunni	nill	nill	100 %	90 %	Few
Ismailia	100 %	nill	nill	nill	Nill
Noorbakhshi	nill	nill	nil	nil	2 %

Source (www.pildat.org)

Religious tolerance and sense of brotherhood was the characteristic of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan (Hunzai, 2013). All communities lived peacefully with communal harmony before the 1970s. Suddenly after the 1970s, due to change brought, the rise of sectarian violence in Gilgit Baltistan get uprising. This has become a significant cause of concern for whole region.

1.3 Gilgit Baltistan Geo -Strategic and Geo-political Importance

Gilgit Baltistan is known for its beautiful landscape and excellent geo-strategic and geopolitical importance. The world has always kept its eyes and remained intact in part of great games from earlier history. Being situated in the landscape of the world's highest mountains and mighty glaciers, the region attracts great powers and empires of the world. It occupies the neighborhood of two major world powers in the presence of India and China.

It also has significance because new heads are of virtual importance because of the most significant investment in the shape of the China-Pakistan economic corridor. The area of Gilgit Baltistan is about 72,971 square kilometers. The population is roughly 1.249 million (Feyyaz, 2011).

2. Historical Background of Sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan

Understanding the literature published in the context of Gilgit Baltistan indicates that the history of Gilgit Baltistan is long and old. Gilgit Baltistan has always been a place of diverse religious practices and peaceful coexistence. Preachers and followers of different faiths used to live here, creating a rich tapestry of beliefs, indigenous varieties. The traces of this region in the dimensions of calligraphy still identify significant historical sites containing a history of the mutual coexistence of various diversified regionalisms in the landscape of Gilgit Baltistan. (Lambah, 2016).

The issue of sectarian violence in Gilgit Baltistan is one of the outstanding issues. However, the fact indicates that sectarian violence has always been a tragic part of Gilgit Baltistan's history. Battles between the forces of regional politics and several religions bring irreparable and devastating impacts.

The prolonged conflicts between the local Balti region of Bon Chos and Buddhism clarify the violent clashes

between the old and modern religions. The protracted dispute between the native Balti religion of Bon Chos and Buddhism exemplifies the violent clashes between old and current religions. The conflict between these two led to civil war in the 8th century and continued into the 16th century. In the 8th century, Islam reached the region of Baltistan. The move made by the Arab invasion of Samarkand, Tashkent, and Farghana followed the same route to Kashgar, making it possible to invade central Asia, leading to troubling aspects for non-Muslim Turkish inhabitants.

Syed Ali Hamdai, a Sufi missionary, also arrived in the same century from Persia and introduced the spirit of Islam to the land of Baltistan. According to renowned philosopher Hassan Harsat, Islam in the region of Baltistan spread through the missionaries who came through Samarkand, Kashmir, and Gilgit Baltistan.

According to the Mapoon Dynasty, the land of Gilgit Baltistan remained under the rule of several native rulers. Skardu was in control of the Mapoon dynasty. In particular, the Skardu Mapoon invaded and formulated the series of unity in the landscape of Chirtal, Ladakh, and Gilgit Baltistan in the era of especially Ali Sher Khan Anchan and maintained a friendly and cordial relationship with the Mughal Dynasty.

The period of Anchan brings a new version of lifestyle modification changes. The collection of diverse arts and sports and new versatile architectural and entertainment methods are being introduced. Not merely this development but musicians selected from Chirtal to India were sent aboard to India to gain expertise in musical arts. Anchan influenced much of its existence until the 19th century. His legacy continues in Baltistan. The last ruler of the Mapoon dynasty, Ahmed Ali Shah, governed Baltistan from 1811 to 1840. (Hunzai, 2012).

2.1 The starting of sectarian violence in Gilgit Baltistan

After Pakistan's independence, the rift of difference among both segments did not remain safe. A severe problem was accelerating discrimination and blaming each other for having support from the state of Pakistan. Sunnis segments were of the view the Shias had more influence in government under the leadership of Shah Reaes Khan critical positions in government.

They were supporting the Shias in making power decisions and keeping them away from power corridors, facing severe problems of prejudices. The Shias were of the perspective that the Sunnis were gaining support from the federal government. In this way the series bone of contention gets hurts each other and leading to having rift among them.

2.2 Gilgit Baltistan having no sectarianism issue before 1970

Before 1970, the issue of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan remained controllable and having loosely impacted on society. Even having a considerable difference, among the segment of Shias and Sunnis the violent nature was having no tragic impact. With the passage of time the issue got to new heights in 1983 when the issue of moon sightings occurred in Gilgit.

The problem worsened with the opinions arising from the sighting of the moon and formulating disputes among both sects' differences. The situation was somewhat problematic in that the fasting Sunni attacked local fasting Shia celebrations at the peak of eid of Ramadan. From that event onwards, the series of conflicts has continued daily. Unrest began, and worrying issues damage the socio-fiber of society.

The state of Pakistan sent militants to curtail the rise of the Shia majority's concerns for the Sunni minority. IN the observation of Shehzad Qasier in Friday Times on the fifth day of clash in 1988, a massive lashkar of 80,000 Sunni extremists was moved by General Zia's Government to destroy the Shias. Villages inhabited by the Shias-Jalalabad, Bonji, Darot, Jaglot, Pari, and Manawar were utterly destroyed. Even their animals were slaughtered alive during this violence occurred.

Lashkar travelled long distance from Mansehra in order to reached Gilgit .The Government of that time did not imposed hurdles to reaching to Gilgit Baltistan .They only blaming it to the Raw and CIA both of these are intelligence agencies agency of two different country (Shehzad ,2003).

Sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan has formed for various reasons. Some of the reasons were being contributed to and formulated by domestic factors. International factors also played a dual role in spreading the waves of sectarianism to the corridors of Gilgit Baltistan. The flames of sectarianism are likely to keep expanding with intensity. Some developments that led to the start of Violence in Gilgit Baltistan are as follow.

2.3 Highway development and the rise of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan

The development of the Karakoram Highway marked new changes in the geographical balance of the region.

According to historical accounts, people of the area were supposed to live in a state of isolation because they had no communication medium or connection to the rest of the world and had no issues with the challenges of sectarianism (Lambah, 2016). Shia, Sunni, and Ismail communities in Gilgit Baltistan lived peacefully and collectively in harmony.

The development of this trading route linked the region with the whole country and the rest of the world. Having widely improved sources of communication allowed the people from another part of the country to settle their position in Gilgit Baltistan.

KKH has always remained a battleground for promoting Sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan (Khan, 2005). The route has tragic stories of killing innocent people on this route are unlimited. Eighteen Shiite pilgrims were killed in KKH in the Kohistani region in February 2012.

In accordance with the Express Tribune published in 2012, which is highlighting, eighteen innocent Shia pilgrims after returning from Iran, became victims of a brutal killing in the area of KKH in Kohistan on February 28, 2012. Apart from this attack, another massive tragic attack occurred in Chilas, resulting in the killing of 20 people by identification of a national identity card (Express Tribune, 2012).

The unstoppable accidents brought a sense of fear in various segments of Gilgit Baltistan. (Hunzai, 2013). The influx of people and fast movement of religious preachers from the rest of the country brought a sense of Islamist discourse. The spreading of illegal drug culture and weapons posed a threat to the stability of the region. With improved communication, local groups started to form links with international groups.

This route has become a lifelong connection of Gilgit Baltistan with the rest of the world. Tension appears on this route when sectarianism becomes a problem for travel. (Skhefoled, 2014). The problem started to accelerate when the trading route began to close, bringing huge losses to the trading route and causing irreparable damage to a whole segment of society. The closure of trading routes shut down the progress of local markets and other vital products in the region, causing the breakdown of mass movement across the country (Dad, 2013)

3. Elimination of State Subject Rule Changing Demographic Composition

The rulers of Jammu and Kashmir formulated the state-subject rule as a hereditary state subject. With the passage of time, this law has continued to be enforced, prevents acquiring the land for other people outside from the rest of Gilgit Baltistan.

A significant setback appeared with the state subject rule in 1974, when the regime under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto abolished the law to alter the demographics. And movement of the immigration of people from different parts of Pakistan to settle in Gilgit Baltistan (Singh, 2012). However, interestingly, both on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) as well as in other areas of Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), the 'State Subject Rule' are still in force. (Ismail, Khan, 2006)

This was one of the most pre planned weapon of Pakistan's federal government intent to change the region's demographic profile. This provides the way for having settling outsiders, mostly Sunni ethnic Pathans and Punjabis, in the Gilgit-Baltistan region. (Lambah, 2016). Every successive Pakistani government to bring people from various parts of Pakistan has created fear in the minds of the people of the region that the government is aiming at their break down their ethnic majority into minority in their traditional homeland.

Analysis of the data from 1998 to 2011, explaining on going large migration. The population in Gilgit Baltistan is begun settlement by outsider people up to 63.1 percent. Where in Mirpur –Muzaffarabad that is of 22.1 percent because of the having the enforcement of state subject rule which still continue in force of action. (Khan, 2012)

3.1 Zia Islamization Reforms Rising Sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan

Zia Government tenure accelerated the flames of violence in the whole of Pakistan. The policy changes introduced by his reforms did not lead Gilgit Baltistan to remain immune from changes. The reform of Islamization extended the support for making his rule to prolong it.

Policy by claiming it was a new method of state framework to make Pakistan an Islamic state and making it part of governance, claiming guiding principles from the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah (Knudsen, 2002). He supported Sunni Islam in maintaining the prolongation of his rule, obtaining support from a segment of the Sunni sect, and keeping in the corridor of power.

One of the major reforms of this process is to regulate the law regarding zakat, which is obtained from the public's financial records in banks by the government (Zaman, 1998). The difference between Shia and Sunni is also split on this issue of the imposition of zakat, as in other areas of law (Coulson, 1964).

3.2 The issue of Zakat and rising of sectarianism

Policy announcements and administration decisions to implement the Zakat and Ushr ordinances in with the ideological sect have led to deep concerns among segments of Shia quarters. During this development, they started to activate political mobilization in Pakistan.

The medium of implementation of the Sunni Hanafi approach became the point of Shia resistance in Pakistan. It led the movement to reverse the decision to review the policy of Zakat (Ahmed ,1998).They were chanting slogans and demanding exemption of the tax on religious grounds and restoring it with the teaching of the ideology of the Shia approach.

It leads to the massive mobilization and demonstration of a series of acts of violence against this issue in Pakistan. However, this has sown seeds of difference that continue till the present. Moreover, sentiments and seeds of difference still exist in several segments of society

In 1974, Bhutto dissolved the local Rajgi/Miri system. He did not establish any other institutions by having alternative platform. Bhutto's unwanted move abolished the local tribe, the Miri system. After assuming office, Zia Ul Haq declared Gilgit Baltistan Zone C almost immediately after declaring martial law as an alternative. However, the Rule of Gen. Zia Ul Haq is significant in the history of Gilgit Baltistan. He declared Gigit-Baltistan Zone C almost immediately after declaring martial law (Are, 2002). The imposition of Zia Islamization had a minor role in executing the function of ulema, which was limited to the personal realm. However, the Zia Ul martial law was supportive of ulema, favoring his regime.

3.3 The Factor of Afghan Jihad and the Iran Revolution

The international factor also accelerated the monster of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan. The Shia community was politicized after the Iran revolution in 1980 under the influence of spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini (Jaffrelot, 2014). The Revolution of Iran became a medium for spreading awareness for the Shia population, a sense of maintaining their sense of identity and accommodating their political sphere by having both political and material support from Iran (Zahab, 2002).

Apart from that, Iran encouraged students of some sects, announced grants and scholarships to study, and distributed scholarships, allowing them to study at different institutions in Iran, particularly Qom (Jaffrelot ,2016). In the view of Mariam Abou Zahab, the Iran Revolution as a source of aspiration and process for their politicization' and rise for their identity maintained (Zahab, 2004).

Mufti Jaffar, Allama Arif Hussain al Husainini, the cleric, took the TNFJ. (Abbas, 2004)'.After taking charge, TNFJ started to chant slogans for the rights of the Shia community in Karachi and protest in different parts of the country (Hussaini, 1984). Saudi Arabia provided billions of dollars of financial assistance not only to Sunni militants fighting with the Soviets in Afghanistan (Bergen, 2001).

Saudi Arabia also donated much fiscal aid in the form of millions of dollars to madrasas to propagate anti-Shia teachings and demonstrations of literature, keeping the cycle of sectarian violence going. The primary recipients of this assistance were the Deobandi and Ahl e Hadith madrasas (Abbas, 2010). The government was of the understanding that the expansion of madrassas will help entrench the Sunni identity, and the student of madrassa education was essential in containing Shia activism (Nasr, 2005).

On the external side of the Iranian Revolution, Pakistani Shia youth made it an aspiration against the minority in Pakistan. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states started to support the Sunni as having the same religious afflation and therefore possessed by the Iran revolution. The sectarian Iran revolution and clashes between rival forces have also impacted the region of Gilgit Baltistan.

3.4 The increase of madrasa culture promoting sectarianism

The rapid development of madrasa culture increased sectarianism during the martial law regime of Zia ul Haq. The madrasas also had the support from the rest of the world, the Middle Eastern donors who contributed funding to expand the same ideology. That promoting the teaching to students the same sectarian beliefs against make other ignored the other sentiments. By .receiving funding from the Middle East and Religious political forces (Davis, 1999).That led the level of madrasas to begin to spread to towns and every corner of the region.

This development changed people's understanding. They started enrolling their students in madrassas compared to public schools in Gilgit Baltistan. This madrassa was teaching symbols related to theology. On the other hand, the sentiment of texts of dimension literature polluted the minds of youth. However, this medium became a helping

hand in taking a hard stance against a particular sect and making propaganda against each other. Madrasas have become grounded by encouraging the students to adopt the policy of sectarian militants in response to fighting for their organization. The approach of madrasas in counter-narrative against each other has provided the platforms for the rise of hate propaganda against each other, which has become a source of sharper and more aggressive sentiments of hate attitudes. (.Nayyar, Salim, 2005)

4. Conclusion

This chapter discusses various events that contributed to the rise of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan. The inflowing of the other people to settle on the land of Gilgit Baltistan has led to rise of non-local people from across country. With the inauguration of KKH began the rise of a rift between two sects of Muslims. This provided route of migration of people from the rest of the country. It allows the other people for rest of country to having their settlement in Gilgit Baltistan which becomes the threat for local people to convert them to minority in their homeland.

The policy of islamization introduces by Zia Ul Haq alters balance of Gilgit Baltistan peace order, by supporting ulema. Promoting the rapid development of madrassas and ignoring the Shias segments. The change of international politics has deep implications on the ground for rising violence in Gilgit Baltistan. Because of ideological battle among two forces also lead the Gilgit Baltistan to comes in this war

It triggered the Afghan and Iranian revolutions' elements and rapidly increased madrassa culture on both sides of thought. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia forced them to step down from their proxy wars on the landscape of Gilgit Baltistan. These factors proved to be the cause of the initiation of sectarian violence in Gilgit Baltistan.

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