

Sectarian Divisions of Pakistani Society: Role of Madrassa and Politics

¹Tahir Mahmood Butt and ²Intzar Hussain Butt

¹Government College, Gujranwala, Pakistan

²University of Education, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract: This paper is an enquiry into the sectarian division of Pakistani society and its relationship with madrassa system. It explores how sects came into existence within the realm of Islam and spread over Sub-Continent South Asia. It gives an analysis of discrete ideologies and characteristics of sects and their madrassas. The paper also examines the role of politics in promoting sectarianism in Pakistan.

Key words: Pakistan • Islam • Sectarianism • Madrassa • Politics

INTRODUCTION

Religious Sects and Madrassas: Religiously, Pakistani society is divided into four sects: *Brailvi*, *Deobandi*, *Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Shia*.¹ Each sect has its own chain of madrassas in Pakistan. Each chain is organized in the form of a federation. And each federation looks after educational affairs of its respective madrassas; like syllabi, exams and award of certificates etc.

Since each sect of Islam has its distinct version of religion, therefore, the people usually send their children to madrassas belonging to their own sects. People are also sect-conscious while making donations. They prefer to give donation to the madrassas of their own sect. It implies that the strength of a sect in society is positively associated with its number of madrassas and the number of students studying in these madrassas. In this regard, the distribution of madrassas on the basis of sect, in different areas of Pakistan, is presented in the Table (2):

Table 1: Madrassa Federations in Pakistan

Name of Madrassa Federation	Sect	Year of establishment	Headquarters
<i>Wafaq-ul- Madaris Al-Salfia</i> Pakistan	<i>Ahl-e-Hadith</i>	1955	Faisalabad
<i>Wafaq-ul- Madaris Al-Arabia</i> Pakistan	<i>Deobandi</i>	1959	Multan
<i>Wafaq-ul- Madaris Shia</i> Pakistan	<i>Shia</i>	1959	Lahore
<i>Tanzeem-ul-Madaris</i> Pakistan	<i>Brailvi</i>	1960	Lahore
<i>Rabta-ul-Madaris Al-Islamia</i> Pakistan	None*	1983	Lahore

Source: Khalid [2], Rehman [1], Ali [3] and Abdullah [4]

Table 2: Distribution of madrassas by Sect and Area, Pakistan 2013

Province/Area	<i>Ahl-e-Hadith</i>	<i>Deobandi</i>	<i>Jamat-e-Islami</i>	<i>Shia</i>	<i>Brailvi</i>	Total
Punjab	316	3457	113	222	3633	7741
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	25	2010	183	13	916	3147
Sind	47	1872	124	91	367	2501
Balochistan	5	746	21	14	130	916
AJK	—	160	64	4	160	388
Islamabad	2	108	8	7	62	187
Northern Areas	9	—	4	45	—	58
FATA	—	—	14	4	—	18
Total	404	8353	531	400	5268	14956

Source: Madrassa Federations in Pakistan [5-9]

¹ International literature encloses first three sects into one bracket and calls them 'Sunnies'. Therefore, usually, two main versions of Islam—*Sunny* and *Shia* are counted when scholars talk on sectarian division in Islam.

**Rabta-ul- Madaris Al-Islamia* was established by *Jamat-e-Islami* Pakistan and *Jamat* doesn't claim any sectarian identity [1].

Table 3: Student-strength by Sect, Pakistan 2013

Sect	Students	% of total
Deobandi	1,350,000	66.00
Brailvi	590,000	28.90
Ahl-e-Hadith	35,000	1.70
Shia	18,000	1.00
Jamat-e-Islami	50,000	2.40
Total	20,43,000	100.00

Source: Madrassa Federations in Pakistan [5-9]

Sectarian division of society is based on different religious interpretations by some jurists in Islamic history. A 'jurist', in religious terminology, is called as 'Imam'.² Imam Abu Hanifa (actual name Numan bin Sabit) is followed by *brailvies* and *deobandies*. Therefore, they are called *Hanfies*. Similarly, *Shias* attribute their beliefs to Imam Jafer Sadiq. So, they are called *Jafries*. However, *Ahl-e-Hadiths* do not follow any *Imam*. They take direct guidance from *Hadith*—the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The roots of sectarianism are so deeper in Islamic history that, without knowing them, it is difficult to understanding the phenomenon of sectarianism in contemporary society. Since madrassas function on sectarian lines; therefore, it seems worthy to present here a brief account on these sects; like, how these expanded to South Asia.

The Prophet of Islam, during his life, established an Islamic State of Medina. He was head of the State, with all executive and judicial powers. He was not only a spiritual authority for his followers, but also a chief commander of Muslim armies. He demised, in 633 A.D., without nominating his successor. Hence, the Muslims themselves had to choose a leader, as vice of the

Prophet, to run the affairs of the Islamic State. Abu-Bakar, Umer, Usman and Ali, respectively, were selected as *Ameer-ul-Momemneens*³ by the collective decisions of closest companions of the Prophet.⁴

The *Shias* believe that this order of selection of caliphs was wrong. They think that Ali had the first right to become the vice of the Prophet, because he was cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Thus, the Muslim community divided into two broad categories: one, who had no objection on the order of the caliphate after the Prophet, they were called as *Sunnies*; and the other, who don't agree with this order, they were called as *Shias*.

There is a further a sub-division within *Sunnies*. This division is on the basis of following the traditions of different Imams. The sectarian division among Muslims has been presented by a schema⁵ in the Figure 1.

Islam, initially, came into South-Asia through Muhammad bin Qasim and his companions. They came in Southern part of the region. It was purely an Arabic Islam. Bin Qasim soon had to go back due to political change in his country. So, this puritanical form of Islam could not get opportunity to flourish in India at massive level.

Three hundred years passed after the return of Bin Qasim that Islam again came to South Asia. But this time, it came through North-Western passes of India. It was *Hanfi* version blended with *Sufism*. It was the only version of Islam expanded in India in the beginning. Therefore, there was no question of sectarianism among Muslims of Sub-Continent South Asia.

The second school of thought emerged in India when Humayoon⁶, with the help of Persian armies, returned to get back his empire from Sher Shah Suri.⁷ He defeated Suri and again became the king of India. Naturally, Persians got influence in the court of the King; and many key

² Imam means a leader. That is why the person who leads a congregational prayer is also called as Imam.

³ Leaders of those who had faith (i.e. the Muslims). It is a substitute word for caliph. Muslims were supposed to obey the orders of caliph, thinking him a vice of the prophet.

⁴ The practice was that, next caliph was selected after the death previous one.

⁵ In this schema, *Muqalid* means those whose follow some Imam and *Ghair Muqalid* mean those who don't follow any Imam, rather they directly consult *Quran* and *Hadith*. They are usually called *Ahl-e-Hadiths*. *Hanfi* means the followers of Imam Abu Hanifa; *Hanbli* means the followers of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal; *Malki* means the followers of Imam Malik; and *Shafi* means the followers of Imam Shafi

Similarly, *Shias* are also called as *Jafries* after the name of Imam Jafar Sadiq. Imam Jafar Sadiq is actually 11th Imam of *Shias*

⁶ Hamayoon was the son of Baber and the father of Akbar the great. Baber moved from Afghanistan and conquered India and laid here a foundation of Mughal Empire. This Mughal Empire existed with full glory for next many centuries. And at last, it was demolished by British in 1857 A.D.

After Baber's death, Hamayoon, who was then a quite young boy, was made king of India,. But soon, Sher Shah Suri, who was ruler of a nearby State, defeated him in a battle and Hamahoon had to run away back to his origion-Afghanistan and Suri became King of India. Hamayoon, after some time, went to Persia. Persians King, Shah Tumaash, sent his army with Hamayoon to fight against Suri and thus helped Hamayoon to take back his empire. By this way, Hamayoon, after the interval of 13 years, again became the King of India.

⁷ Sher Shah Suri was a ruler of a State within India when Baber invaded into India.

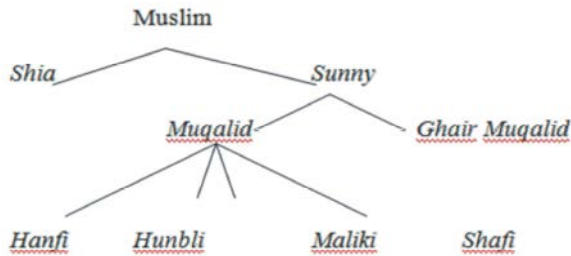


Fig. 1: The Sectarian Division among Muslims in the World

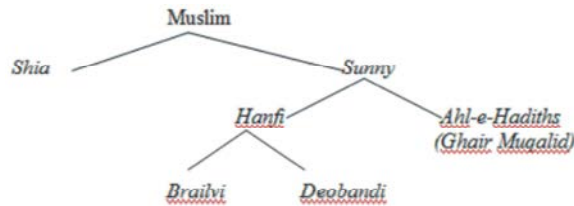


Fig. 2: The Sectarian Division among Muslims of Pakistan

posts went to the hands of Qazalbashes⁸. They were *Shias* by sect. Therefore, *Shiism* got importance in state-affairs of India. By this way, India had now two sects of Islam: *Hanfi* and *Shia*.

Over years, there became a further sub-division within *Hanfies*: *Brailvis* and *Deobandis*.⁹ This division was not on the basis of some ideological differences: but just on minor issues, like, the extent of respect for Prophet; spiritual powers of Prophet and saints; and some religious innovation made by *Brailvies*. Hence, two new schools of thoughts came into existence in India.

Then, in late nineteenth century, a new school of thought '*Salfi maslik*'¹⁰ came to India, through Shah Ismaeel Shaheed. Over years, *salfies* took the title '*Ahl-e-Hadiths*'. And by this way, Indian version of Islam comprised of four sects. All these sects opened their madrassas, in India, to impart religious education according to their own sectarian bends.

Over time, a profession of *Maulvie* (priest) came into existence within each sect and sectarian smokes prevailed over society. However, in the words of a renowned religious scholar, "indeed, there is no space of such *maulviism* in Islam; instead, every muslim is supposed to have religious knowledge and be able to perform Islamic

duties: like, leading congregational prayers or funeral prayers for his parents" (Dr. Israr Ahmad, personal communication, July 2008).

The emergence of *maulviism* in society was a direct outcome of discarding religious education by general masses; particularly by well-off people, in chasing market compatible secular education. Since general people did not have religious education; therefore, *maulvi* took the charge to run religious affairs of their lives. People willingly bestowed their religious lives to the hands of priests of their respective sects.

After the partition of united India, Pakistan got the same situation: four sects (*Shia*, *Ahl-e-Hadith*, *Brailvi*, *Deobandi*), their *maulvies* and their madrassa. The sectarian division among Pakistani Muslims has been presented by a schema in Figure 2.

In order to have an understanding on sectarian identity of different madrassas, a brief account on the madrassas of different sects is given below:

Deobandi Madrassas: 'Deoband' is name of a place in India where *Maulana* Muhammad Qasim *Nanautawi* (1833-1877) laid the foundation of a madrassah on 30th of May 1866. The founder of this madrassa was intended to equip the Muslim students with religious as well as modern knowledge to cope with need of the day. But, it could not be possible mainly because of Muslims' attitude towards English language [2].

In later years, madrassa of Deoband became so popular in South Asia that it took the shape of a formal school of thought within the Indian Muslim community. A large number of madrassas were opened across India according to the instructional patterns of madrassa of Deoband. The people, who followed the teachings and religious interpretations of the scholars associated with madrassa of Deoband, were popularly known as *deobandies*.

Deobandies go after jurisprudence of Imam Abu Hanifa in religious rituals and their daily lives. The students in *deobandi* madrassas learn to believe in purity of religion, condemn the tendency of *Sufism*, emphasize on *taqwa* or piety and insist on preaching of Islam. The renowned *Tablighi Jamat* of Raiwind

⁸ Commanders of Persians forces were *Qazalbashes* by race

⁹ Name of these two sects became popular after the names of areas of their origin, Braili and Deoband. This division within Hanfi Maslik in India was caused by inclusion of some new ideas, initiated by Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan of Braili, in the Muslims' religious patterns. Respondingly, the religious scholars from madrassa of Deoband opposed this act of Raza Khan. By this way two school of thoughts emerge: both had large number of followers; even today in Pakistan situation is same.

¹⁰ Maslik means a school of thought or a sect

(near Lahore-Pakistan) follows *Diobandi* religious tradition. *Madrassa Arabia* of Raiwind had the students from seventeen countries of the world.¹¹

Brailvi Madrassas: ‘Braili’ is the name of a village in India. It is the birthplace of *Moulana Ahmad Raza Khan* (1856-1921), the progenitor of a new sect in Indian Islam. Since this new sect got stated its activities from Braili, therefore, the people associated with this sect were called as *brailvies*. This sect established a number of madrassas across India to promote their ideology among masses. Among others, the madrassa *Shams-ul-Aloom Islamia*, of Nagpur got a special fame in this regard.

The students in *brailvi* madrassas internalize specific beliefs. Some beliefs are: love for Prophet is key to salvation; Prophet is made of divine radiance; he is still alive and invisibly present everywhere all the time; he knows the things even yet to be happened; Saints are the agents of God on the earth; they have been delegated with special spiritual powers to decide the fates of people; they are alive in their shrines and listen the requests of people and help them accordingly.

Brailvi students take the title ‘*Sunnies*’ and claim that no other sect is real *sunny* except them. They derive this term from *Sunnah*- the acts of Prophet of Islam. The claim of *brailvis* to be the real followers of *Sunnah* has never been honored by other sects- *deobandis* and *ahl-e-hadiths*. Rather, they think *brailvis* as violators of the path of the Prophet.

Brailvi madrassas celebrate events emotionally. And no event can be completed without serving of food. Food culture actually is a dominant feature in all *brailvi* madrassas. Eleventh day of every lunar month has a special significance in this regard. People also invite madrassa students on the deaths of their family members for recitation of Quran and serve them food. The third, tenth and fortieth day from the death of a person are also extraordinary in this respect.

Food culture in *brailvi* madrassas can be linked with economic conditions of madrassa teachers and their students. Still in the rural Pakistan, *moulvi* (madrassa teacher) goes to the homes of native people on every Thursday to recite some verses of Holy Book on the food articles placed before him for this purpose. As a result, he finds some food for him and his family. Similarly, some houses themselves send food items to madrassa on every

Thursday. In some cases, madrassa students go door to door to collect food for them and their teachers. Sometimes people call them without any especial event to recite the Holy Book to seek blessing over home. The end product of all such service rendered by the madrassa students and teachers is food to eat.

Ahl-e-Hadith Madrasas: The term ‘*Ahl-e-Hadith*’ means ‘the people acting upon the sayings of Holy Prophet’. The students in *ahl-e-hadith* madrassas are indoctrinated not to believe any addition in Islam. They are taught that Quran and Hadith are the only sources of beliefs for Muslims. Islamic jurisprudence in latter years is not to be followed according to this sect. Being the most puritanical form of Muslims, the students of these madrassas are confined to Islam’s earliest tradition and are passionate for jihad [3].

Since *Ahl-e-Hadith* students and teachers do not follow any particular school of thought like *Hanfi*, *Shafi*, *Hambli*, or *Malki*, therefore, they are also called as *Ghair Muqullad* (*non-followers*). They are also known as *Wahabies* after the name of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahab- a person in Saudi Arabia who had laid the foundation of this sect in eighteenth century. The influence of this sect came to India through Sayyed Ahamad who was murdered in the battle of Balakot- a hilly area in Pakistan.

It is also a wide spread perception that *Ahl-e-Hadith* madrassas have flourished in Pakistan by backing of Saudi funding. However, the less number of *ahl-e-hadith* madrassas in Pakistan can be an indication of a weak strength of this sect in society. It is noteworthy here that mostly the parents send their children to the madrassas belonging to their own sect.

Shia Madrassas: The literary meaning of ‘*Shia*’ is ‘supporters’. *Shia* is considered the first sect of Islam. *Shias* were emerged during the battle of *Safeen*, fought between the fourth caliph of Islam, Ali and his opponent, Muavia. *Shias* were emotional supporter of Ali. However, Ali was not an originator, nor responsible, for the beliefs they developed in later years [2].

Before the partition of India, *Jamia Al-Muntazir* of Laknow and *Karbla Gam-e- Shah* in Lahore, were the famous madrassas of *Shia* sect. Students in these madrassas were indoctrinated that Ali was the vice of the Prophet and thus, deserved for the first caliphate of

¹¹ The researchers themselves paid two visits to headquarter of *Tabligi Jamat* and interacted with the teachers of madrassa Arabia, in June 2013.

Islam.¹² They also mourn the battle of Karbla on 10th Muhharum every year. It is a memorial ceremony in the name of Hussain. Hussain was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and was murdered along with his 72 companions, by the armies of *Omeyyed* ruler Yazid.¹³

In fact, the rise of *Shiaism* is deeply rooted in the event of Karbla. *Shias* mourn many other days also, beside the 10th Muharram, but all of them, in some way or other, are connected with the families of Ali and Hussain.¹⁴ *Shia* madrassa are relatively less in number in Pakistan. [3] has also mentioned the linkage between Iranian government's funding and *Shia* madrassas in Pakistan.

Role of Politics in Creating Sectarianism in Pakistani Society: Pakistan came into existence in 1947. Creation of Pakistan was based on political use of religion. Muslim politicians mobilized Muslim community around the demand of an independent state for Muslims, where they could be able to lead their lives according to their own religion. So, religion was an instigative force behind the demand of freedom.

Some Islamic movements (like Deoband and *Jamaat-e-Islami*) did not support the demand for partition of India, at that time. However, after independence, *Jamat-e-Islami* raised the slogan of Islamic constitution for the newly established State, with the plea that people had been promised during independence movement, for an Islamic State. Being then a non-political organization, *Jamat-e-Islami* could successfully gained the favour of many parliamentarians, most notably Shabeer Ahmad Usmani.

The demand of *Jamat-e-Islami* for the Islamic constitution was recognized and fulfilled, through a parliamentary resolution in 1949. The Parliament passed 'Objectives Resolution', in which Islam was declared as State Religion and the future legislation was ensured to be made in Islamic frame. It was a significant achievement of

Jamat-e-Islami, especially, in the era when, philosophically, State and Religion were perceived as two distinct entities.

Subsequently, *Jamat-e-Islami* took a turn and entered into practical politics by contesting election of provincial assemblies in 1951. Although, it could not win any seat; yet, it opened the doors of politics for many other religious groups. Accordingly, *Brailvi* and *Deobandi Ulema* began to take part in Politics: because they had a public base and close interaction with people, especially during the Friday-gatherings. Equally, *Ahl-e-hadith* and *Shia Ulema* also tried their luck from the constituencies where their respective sects were stronger.

In 1970, *Ulema* of different sects contested election against each other. They made public speeches against each others. In these speeches, they criticized the religious faiths (sects) of each others. The critical outcome of this process was emergence of negative feelings among different religious groups within Pakistani society. Since the literacy rate in the country was already low, therefore, emotional exploitation of general masses was easy for religious leaders. Hence, many people involved in controversial religious activities and became sectarian rivals to each others.

Madrassa being a religious hub in society could not save itself in this process of sectarianism. Madrassas of different sects became the base-camps of politico-religious leaders, in all later elections also. In fact, no religious leader contested election without the support of madrassa-chain of his sect. By this way, sectarianism prevailed in society and madrassa was pushed into this phenomenon.

REFERENCES

1. Rehman, T., 2004. Denizens of alien worlds: A study of education inequality and polarization in Pakistan. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
2. Khalid, S.M., 2008. Dini madaris ma ta'leem. Islamabad: Institute of Policy Study.

¹² Prophet of Islam died in 634 A.D. without designating his vice. Ali was his cousin and son-in-law, so, according to Shias, he deserved most for the first Caliphate (vice-ship of the Prophet as a ruler of the Islamic State), but he came fourth in order, which was not justice to him

¹³ Banu Hashim and Banu Umayya, before Islam, were two opponent Arab tribes: the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) belonged to the former. Banu Umayya embraced Islam when Islam came to power in Mecca. However, few years after the death of Prophet, previous rivalry between the tribes again came to the surface in the shape of the Battle of Safeen, fought between Fourth Caliph Ali and his Umayyad Governor Muavia. And again, there was a conflict between the son of Ali named Hussain and the son of Muavia named Yazid and thus, Hussain was murdered along with his followers in the desert of Karbla. Shias still morn this event very emotionally.

¹⁴ Muharrum is the 1st month of Islamic calendar; the event of Karbla held on 10th of this month.

3. Ali, S.H., 2009. Islamic education and conflict: Understanding the madrassahs of Pakistan. New York: Oxford University Press.
4. Abdullah, M., 2006. Madrassa curriculum: Problems and demands, M.Phil. thesis, Department of Islamic Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.
5. Rabta-ul- Madaris Al-Islamia Pakistan. 2013. Lahore.
6. Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Pakistan. 2013. Lahore.
7. Wafaq-ul- Madaris Al-Arabia Pakistan. 2013. Multan.
8. Wafaq-ul- Madaris Al-Salfia Pakistan. 2013. Faisalabad.
9. Wafaq-ul- Madaris Shia Pakistan. 2013. Lahore.