

# Unbosom the Journey of Wahhabism: From Nejd to Pakistan

NAMITA SHARMA

M.A. Political Science, Delhi University

**Abstract-** This paper seeks to explain the rise of Wahhabism in Pakistan and how madrassah education played an important role in turning Pakistan into an Islamic state. Wahhabism was the state religion of Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is a Sunni-majority state. Saudi Arabia used Wahhabism as a tool to counter Shias and Ismailis. According to Wahhabism, Islam is the source of pride, and only those are the followers of Islam who followed the book, namely the Quran, and others are outsiders. General Zia has nurtured the Wahhabi ideology in Pakistan and shared a dream of pan-Islamization.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Islam has a long tradition of religious intolerance. Wahhabism is also a result of religious extremism in Pakistan. It was an ideology that took its roots from the Hanbali (*Sunni*) school of thought. The Wahhabi mindset is based on the idea that it is divided between east and west, i.e., *Mazlum* and *Mustakbiri*, where the former is oppressed and the latter is oppressor. We can say that there is a division of class where the oppressed want to eliminate the oppressor. Wahhabis want a bloody revolution called Jihad to create an Islamic society. Wahhabism took root in the subcontinent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it gained impetus at the time of Zia military rule in Pakistan when the Soviet Union interceded in Afghanistan. Zia, along with religious parties, detribalized Afghan Pashtuns and sponsored radical Islam to attain his political ends. Saudi Arabia has also provided economic and military support to Pakistan to counter the Iranian Revolution of 1979 by Ayatullah Khomeini, who overthrew the Shah of Iran. The result of Wahhabism in Pakistan was that it gave birth to sectarian conflicts in different parts of the country between Shias and Sunnis.

- Historical Background of Wahhabism: Tracing the Origin in Pakistan

General Zia-ul-Haq, the third military ruler of Pakistan, came into power in 1977 and nurtured Wahhabism in Pakistan. He supported the proxy war in India and Afghanistan. But the roots of Wahhabism can be traced back to the 18th century, when Wahhabism took birth in the Nejd region of Saudi Arabia. In Islam, there are four schools of thought. Wahhabism lies in the Hanbali jurisprudence, which was founded by Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal in the 19th century. They ignored *bida* (innovations in religion) and believed in strict adherence to the literal interpretation of the texts of Islam. It adopted a conservative approach and rejected speculation.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, an Arabian scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, believed in *Tawhid* (the oneness of God) and wrote the work *Siyasa Sharia*, in which he ascribed the rules according to Sharia. So, in 1703, Abd Ibn-Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula took ideas from Taymiyyah, revived the puritanical version of Islam, and opposed *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in religious texts. In the 20th century, when Saudi Arabia was founded by Ibn Saud, Wahhabism became the official religion of Saudi Arabia. This form of religion rejected Sufi mysticism, Shia mysticism, and Ismailism.

The credit for importing Wahhabism into the Indian subcontinent goes to Syed Ahmed Rai Barelvi in the 19th century. He found that India has become *Dar al-Harb* (a land of conflict). So, he performed *Hijrat* (pilgrimage) towards the western part of the Indus River, where Muslims were in majority, in order to establish *Dar-ul-Islam* (the country of faith). He deployed the Pashtun tribe of western India for Jihad against Sikhs. Madhuban Mountain in the NWFP has become *Dar-ul-Islam*. But Barelvi was killed by the Sikhs. After him, Wilayat Ali turned Wahhabism into a cult. He claimed that Barelvi was waiting for them in the mountains to continue Jihad. After this, fanatics of Syed Ahmed continued to mushroom in their area.

They tried to impose Sharia on the tribes in that region. But the tribals had their own conscience, and they tried to resist this. It went unnoticed by the British until 1852. The next insurgency took place against the British in the 1880s and 1990s, when three mullahs were fighting for their lands by using the concept of Islam.

Wahhabism gained footing in Pakistan in the 1970s under the Zia regime. This was the time when many events occurred at the geopolitical level. In 1979, a revolution began in Iran, led by Ayatullah Khomeini, who defenestrated the Pahlavi Shah of Iran. At the same time, in 1979, the Soviet Red Army invaded Afghanistan, and in the same year, the violent takeover of Kaba occurred in Saudi Arabia, led by Juhaiman Al Utaibi. There are many interpretations related to the rise of Wahhabism in Pakistan. According to Rasul Baksh Rais, the rise of Wahhabism was the result of the decay of a state's administrative and political capacity. He talked about the waves of Islamism in Pakistan. The first wave was only searching for its identity, which gave birth to a nation called Pakistan. In the second wave, the state gets itself involved with religious parties. General Zia's quest for legitimacy led to his involvement with religious groups. This has come to be known as the Mullah-military relationship. Pakistan chose to become the frontline of Jihad during the Afghan War. There is also a narrative that Islam is in danger, which has promoted fear among people. The Iranian Revolution happened in 1979, which led Pakistan to wonder why there wouldn't be a Sunni state. This narrative has promoted the people of Pakistan towards extremism. So there were domestic as well as international factors responsible for Wahhabism. Domestically, the state was facing political disorder. There was no morality among the people. Society was corrupted. In 2015, a report on fragile states ranked Pakistan as the 13th high-alert category state. There were no skills or quality of education in Pakistan. These factors pushed the youth of Pakistan towards extremism.

Following the events of 1979, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. government started funding Pakistan. The Saudi government provided them with humanitarian as well as material assistance during Jihad against the atheists of the Soviet Union. The Saudi government asked Zia for Arabs' access to travel to Pakistan. Zia has

liberalised visas for all the Muslims in the world. So, thousands of Arabs travelled to Pakistan to fight for Jihad. The fact that the rise of Wahhabism in the state was not universal. The region of NWFP currently in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan has suffered a lot of political violence. The Pakhtunkhwa region faced disruption and the arrival of around 4 million refugees from Afghanistan. So, state-sponsored Wahhabism became the objective of Pakistan's foreign policy. The emergence of the Taliban on the Durand Line in Afghanistan was also a consequence of Wahhabi ideology. The West also welcomes the change in attitude of Wahhabi because now there is no military confrontation between the West and Islam, but they are fighting within themselves.

- The Role of Saudi Arabia in Shaping Wahhabism in Pakistan

For a long period of time, Saudi Arabia has been interested in Pakistan. The relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia has been developed in different phases. Pakistan has provided military training to Saudi Arabia, and in return, Saudi Arabia has provided financial aid to Pakistan along with oil supplies. In late 1979, when the USSR invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan became the frontline state against the expansion of communism in Asia. Saudi Arabia has supported the mujahideen's campaign against the Soviets. As we know, Saudi Arabia is the host country of Kaba. There is the existence of a holy spirit and a shrine to the prophet. Saudi Arabia has used its religious position for political purposes. Many Saudi nationalists have to be transmitted to Pakistan with the support of the Saudi Royal Court and religious parties to promote Afghan jihad. Saudi Arabia has funded the Deobandis, who preach the ideology of Wahhabism. It was the worst and most violent image of Islam. Later, Pakistani ISI used the money that Saudi Arabia provided them to fund Afghan extremists like the Taliban.

Since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia has maintained its friendly relations with Pakistan. In the post-Mujahideen period, both countries provided recognition to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In 1998, when Pakistan conducted nuclear tests, the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia became tighter. Saudi Arabia wants Pakistan to make an Islamic bomb. When the US put

sanctions on Pakistan, Saudi Arabia came to rescue Pakistan. In recent years, the countries have pursued balancing strategies.

- Repercussions of Wahhabism in Pakistan

The support of Pakistan for Wahhabi extremism has multidimensional impacts. This Mullah-Military partnership has been favoured as a transnational jihad. It changed the character of the Pakistani state from the Republic of Pakistan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, or it has guided on theological lines. After the Soviets left Afghanistan, what would the Arab jihadi do? The agenda of the jihadi's was to spread fear, bomb people, and terror. It undermined the tribal structure, and the Taliban emerged in Afghanistan in 1994 and came into power in 1996, further creating a safe haven for Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda found Afghanistan a stateless society where they could survive by making alliances with the Taliban. Now the jihadi movement has started challenging the hegemony of the US. 9/11 was the result of Wahhabi activities.

It has also impacted Pakistan internally as well. The jihad has been turned against Pakistan. They viewed Pakistan as their enemy. The border region of Pakistan shares a geography with Afghanistan, which impacts their power structure. Zia Islamization also gave birth to the sectarian conflicts in Pakistan between Sunni and Shia sects. Zia announced the collection of Zakat, i.e., 2.5% of every person. The Shia population of Pakistan opposed the deduction of Zakat. The Zia government has also issued Hudood ordinances, which were criticised by the majority of the population of Pakistan, especially women's. The educational system of Pakistan also substantiates the military rule of Zia. In textbooks, there were apotheosized fantasies about Islam. They represented that Islam can't coexist with other religions. They sketch the USA and USSR as enemies of Pakistan.

#### CONCLUSION

The religious extremism in Pakistan was a failure of state capacity. Incongruity in security and development has created disparities in civil and military powers that have prevented the social and political system of Pakistan from functioning democratically. There were domestic as well as regional factors responsible for Wahhabism. National

security was the driving force that emphasised military support for religious parties. Wrong government policies, misplaced priorities, political disorder, or General Zia's quest for legitimacy make him indulge in religious groups. Later, the world witnessed a large number of Islamic extremist activities. Pakistan has also joined the US-led War on Terror. They saw the war on terror as a war against Islam. So, the state of Pakistan has now turned against those mujahideens whom it trained earlier. The Musharaff regime has taken military action against religious fundamentalists. The Pakistani government has adopted a selective strategy; it uses these groups for its national interests.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] H. Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*, Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, ch 4.
- [2] R.B. Rais, *Imagining Pakistan: Modernism, State and Politics of Islamic Revival*, New York: Lexington Books, 2017, ch.5.6.
- [3] F. Shaikh, *Making sense of Pakistan*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, ch.5.
- [4] A. Alishahi, E. Dashtban and Z.H.Pour.(2019). *Wahhabi Thoughts in Pakistan and the Challenges in Pakistan- Iran Relations*, Journal of Religion and Theology, 3(3). pp.19-31. Available: <https://sryahwapublications.com/journal-of-religion-and-theology/pdf/v3-i3/3.pdf>
- [5] C. Boucek (2010). Saudi Arabia, *Carnegie Moscow Center*. Available: <https://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep21096.8>
- [6] S.R. Valentine (2007). The Influence of Wahhabism in Pakistan. *PSRU*.
- [7] C.M. Blanchard (2008). The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya. *CRS Report for Congress*. RS21695.
- [8] C. Allen (2005). The Hidden Roots of Wahhabism in British India. *World Policy Journal*.
- [9] R.K. Mishra (2019) Islam in India and The Rise of Wahhabism, *India International Center Quarterly*.vol.46(2). pp.1-30. Available: <https://www.jstore.org/stable/26856495>

- [10] S.K. Mohanty and J.N. Mohanty. (2010). Military- Madrassa- Mullah Complex: Promoting Jihadist Islam in Pakistan, *India Quarterly*. vol.66(2). pp. 133-149.
- [11] Y. Guzansky (2016). Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: How Special are the “Special Relations”? *Institute for National Security Studies*. Available: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep08608>
- [12] R.A. Siddiqui (2019). Pakistan’s Evolving Relations with Saudi Arabia: Emerging Dynamics and Challenges. *Pluto Journals. Policy Perspective*. vol. 16(1). pp. 61-76. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/polipers.16.1.0061>
- [13] J.D. Templin (June 2015) Religious Education of Pakistan’s Deobandi Madaris and Radicalisation. *International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research*. pp. 15-21 Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26351354>
- [14] N.K. Puri. (October 2010). The Pakistani Madrassah and Terrorism: Made and Unmade Conclusions from the Literature. *Terrorism Research Initiative. Perspective on Terrorism*. Vol.4 (4). pp. 51-72 Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26298471>