

Reforming Jihad oriented Pakistani society through Sufi teachings

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Abstract

Pakistani society has traditionally been influenced by ideology of Sufi saints who taught the lessons of peace, harmony, tolerance and co-existence. However, in recent decades especially during the wake of recent terrorist attacks throughout the world, the Pakistani society has drifted towards extremism and fundamentalism. This change is due to increasing number of religious-cum-sectarian schools called *Madarssas* which are being funded by governments and non-state elements of Saudi Arabia, Iran and other Middle Eastern states. The growing sectarian divide of the Middle East has compelled Iran and the Arab world led by Saudi Arabia to expand their sectarian influence in various societies of the Muslim countries. Most of the Pakistani *Madaarssas* are *Sunni representing (Wahabi school of thought)* and Saudi funded and children along with religious education (*dars-e- Qura'an and Hadith*) are also being taught sectarian and religious hatred towards other religions and sects and also taught, brainstormed and motivated for Jihad in their early age against the societies related to other religions and sects. These *Madarssas* are at rise in Pakistan¹ which is overcoming the traditionally Sufi based Pakistani society. Since the Sufi teachings oppose such extremism and fundamentalism, therefore, the Sufi shrines, teaching schools and personalities have been targeted by terrorists throughout the country. Even these extremist groups are on rise and targeting peace, harmony and tolerance but still these groups are in extreme minority while the majority of Pakistani society is based on liberal thoughts of *Sufi teachings*.

Widening and encouraging Sufi teachings can reform the Pakistani society which is badly affected by extremist teachings and inspirational activities of *Jihadi Madarssas*. This paper will examine the role of the teachings of *Sufi* saints in reforming the fundamentalist and extremist society of Pakistan. This research will be based on secondary sources.

Introduction

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Pakistan came into existence in August 1947 after political struggle of Muslims of India and decided by Great Britain to dissolve its colonies in South Asia and decided to leave the subcontinent. Though the Indian subcontinent was divided into two separate nation-states India and Pakistan on the basis of the fact that Pakistan would represent Muslim dominated society with equal rights to the non-Muslim minorities while India would represent Hindu dominated population yet Pakistani state was under more liberal structured society than any other country of the South Asia. Non-Muslim minority was well represented in government as well as in autonomous semi-government organizations. Pakistan's first foreign minister Chowdhury Muhammad Zafarullah was from *Ahmedi* community who was the most influential member of Pakistan's first federal cabinet. Similarly Pakistan's civilian bureaucracy and military also had top brass officers from Christian, *Ahmedi* and Hindu communities.²

The liberal face of Pakistan was also visible in the roots of Pakistani society where no religious, sectarian and communal conflict ever reported till Pakistan government following the lines and pressure of its ally USA and other super powers opted for Islamization during General Zia ul Haq's regime of Marshal law (military dictatorship). General Zia's regime is widely known as a regime that empowered Muslim religious Clerks (*Mullahs*), *Madrasas* teaching jihad, hatred on line of sectarianism for Islamisation of the society. General Zia ul Haq as part of Pakistan's national security policy followed U.S. policy of supporting organizations which were involved in Jihad in Afghanistan. That decision though was not very much popular among Pakistan's liberal society but was considered necessary as part of country's national interest and the necessity of time.

From 1977 to 1988 during military rule under General Zia ul Haq the affairs of the government were run by military in close alliance with *mullahs* and hardcore religious parties. The Mullah-Military alliance used Islam to legitimize dictatorial rule of General Zia ul Haq. The other factor that was supporting General Zia's rule was U.S. policy of getting rid of Soviet forces from Afghanistan through the help of Pakistan. Pakistan's government and military supported *Jihadi's* to fight Soviet forces in Afghanistan without officially being declared as a direct participant in the war.³

During Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the Pakistani dictator General Zia ul Haq offered United States of America Pakistani territory to be a base for producing *Jihadis* who then would go to Afghanistan and wage a guerilla war against Soviet forces in the mountains. The U.S. Government of Ronald Reagan invested billions of Dollars via

Saudi Arabia in Pakistani *madrasas* who were set to produce *Jihadis*. Running such jihadi nurseries was not possible without forcing entire Pakistani society in to a hardline extremist religious culture. Thus every effort was invested to encourage hardliners to takeover Pakistani society and dominate liberal factions of Pakistani population. Even ruler had to be declared *Amir ul momneen* (the leader of the faithful - Muslims) thus counting all other religious minorities of Pakistan as irrelevant to the Pakistani state.⁴ In this whole process the liberal forces of Pakistani society ruined and encrypted by both U.S. supported extremist *jihadis* and state oriented establishment. Leaders of liberal and democratic parties were imprisoned and the cases were registered against them on political grounds.

Though the short span of democratic governments after the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the end of Genral Zia's rule in Pakistan made an attempt to bring society back to interfaith harmony but the extremist and *mullah* dominated factor was strong enough in Pakistani civil and military bureaucracy to resist such attempt. The liberal forces of the country continued to struggle until Pakistan witnessed yet another military rule of general Pervez Musharaf followed by the incident of Nine Eleven (attacks on New York city and Washington on September 11,2001)

The Saudi government remained in touch with these *mullah's* and *madrasas* for decades and financed them for any future war in support of the kingdom and Saudi rulers.⁵ The rich financiers were financing these madrasas of mullahs as their noble cause of education of *Qura'an* and *Hadith*. Hence that the policy of abandoning such jihadi organisations were left with no agenda so they prepared their own agenda of jihad that put the whole civilized society in jeopardy. Thus Pakistani society continued to drift towards extremism and fiction of expanding influence of madrasa produced hardcore clerks continued to expand.

The Sufism was being practiced in the society in parallel to growing influence of religious and sectarian extremism but the portion of the society representing Sufi ideology was not organized, functional and strong enough to counter state backed and foreign funded religious clerks and madrasas preaching *Jihad*.

Religion in Pakistan

Pakistan came in to being on the basis of two nation theory of Sir Syed Ahmed khan who himself was Pro-British during the time of British rule in India and a liberal Muslim nationalist. Later on Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, based on his personal bitter experiences in the subcontinent, had become a patriot Muslim with strong Islamic

ideas.⁶ The two-nation theory brainstormed Muslim population of subcontinent to realize that the Muslims are not being treated on equal and fair basis in the subcontinent which was dominated by Hindu majority. It also educated the Muslims that they cannot enjoy freedom in a Hindu dominated nation-state of India. Some sources in the history also suggest that in order to counter uprising in Indian subcontinent British colonial establishment encouraged Muslim leaders to prepare Muslim society for separation from the struggle of people led by rigid political party Indian National Congress of the subcontinent against British rule. The Muslims were also brainstormed for demanding separate nation-state of their own in subcontinent based on the two nation theory.

Sufi Ideology

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ⁷

For you, is your faith, and for me, is my faith.

Sufism is not limited to the Islam. It is practiced in almost all liberal civilized societies and linked to all religions of the world. In Hinduism Sufism is synonymous to "vedant" which derived from writings of Shankar Acharya.⁸ In the old writings of Hinduism, "Upanshads" also resemble Sufi ideas. In Jewish writings "Essenes" sect is considered close to what is called Sufism in Sindhi literature. Such ideology is also visible in the philosophy of Meister Eckhart a German theologian, who advocated friendship with God. His writings also suggest that he was not a religious conservative but rather a believer of liberal religious face. Pakistani Sufis are also religious linked liberal philosophers who believe religion advocates tolerance not violence. Sufis also quote glorious *Qura'an* and believe that Allah's message is for safeguarding humanity. *Sufis* quote following verses from glorious *Q ura'an* in support of their ideology.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ⁹

For you is your faith, and for me, is my faith.

Sufis believe that above verse of the glorious *Qura'an* clears that there is no compulsion in religion Islam and Islam allows everyone to follow his or her faith.

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ¹⁰

The translation of above verse from glorious *Qura'an* is "There is not is not compulsion in religion". The *Sufis* on basis of *Quara'nic* verses conclude that Islam does not advocate killing of people from other faiths but rather advocate development of humanity through peace and tolerance.

Islam since its beginning is divided in to two types of the followers. There is number of the followers who follow God's 97 definitions out of 99 and those Muslims believe that God is great, kind and merciful. They worship God because he is loveable. Beside this, these Muslims showed their true love and affection for mankind because. This understanding made those Muslims to be role model human being in the society. These Muslims believe that religion is not the matter of society and people but its matter of God and a person, we shall love God and man simultaneously if one loves God must love man because he is best creation of God. With course of time, they derived themselves in deep ideology of loving mankind and purifying their own soul. To kill and throw their ego and hate from their core inside to be model human so God in its return love them. Their way of worship changed, they taught the people to love and if you love man, respect their Gods because they love and worship them because there is no force in religion. They left the attraction for properties luxuries and called themselves *Faqeers* (Beggars)

This faction of followers respected other religions, ideologies and people of other religions. They taught the people to live in peace on earth and do good. Do deeds and love others because everyone is created by that God which had created you. So the mankind became their individual love and God as their collective love. This was taught by saints and philosophers and they were known as *Sufies*. Religion is one's personal affair of the love for God. They also believe that Islam is religion of safety, brotherhood, coexistence harmony and peace.

While others who took way of violence in Islam. The emotional faction of the Muslims misunderstood the *Jihad* and was politically used by *Mullahs*, leaders and rulers of the different countries. They did not have any deep study of Islam. They were taught negatively by *mullahs* and brainwashed and sent to fulfill the political agendas.

On the basis of verses from glorious *Qura'an* and sayings of holy Prophet Muahammad (P.B.U.H) the Sufis preach their ideology with their own teachings mostly in the form of Sufi poetry, literature and music.

The Sufi teachings are more popular and impressive within most parts of Pakistan especially in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab. The ideology is confronted by hardcore religious extremists who believe Sufis by presenting misinterpretation of *Qura'anic* verses presenting different expression of Islam.

Conclusion

Pakistan society has become religious conservative and it needs to be cured by the ideas acceptable to it. Getting rid of extremism through western liberal change and western ideas would not be acceptable to the society which has been drifted towards extremism in the last many decades. Since *Sufis* ideology is derived from different religious interpretation and it also accepts core principles of religion therefore *Sufi* ideology would best serve to cure the extremist society.

Sufi ideology has been popular and practiced by most parts of Pakistan from entire Sindh province to southern Punjab and in some parts of northern and upper Punjab. The Sufi ideology has been inflectional in traditional Pakistani society. Most of the influential Sufi saints of Sindh and Punjab have preached Sufism and reformed societies of the time through their preaching, poetry, teaching, literature and music based on Sufi ideology. These Sufi saints are role models and heroes of the society, therefore, society would be open to accept such ideology to replace and reform the outdated hatred and extremist ideas based on fake interpretation of Islam which has harmed the nation. In fact, Sufism has already reformed society in the past centuries and it can serve yet once again if encouraged and implemented in true spirit.

Strengthening the environment where *Sufi* ideas can be preached and taught needs structural changes in education system of Pakistan. Contemporary educational system particularly at primary and secondary level is outdated. The *Sufi* teachings may be included in the courses taught at secondary and higher level. The institutes and centers

may be established within universities and higher educational institutes which can preach *Sufism* through scientific research on *Sufi* ideas and their implementation.

Along with strengthening Sufi establishment within Pakistani society and education system the extremist and fundamentalist school of thoughts may be discouraged. The *Madrases* teaching religious education may be closely monitored to ensure that no hatred is taught against different faiths. It may also be ensured that these *Madrases* are headed by reliable and qualified *Ulemas* (Religious Scholars). The qualification of the *Ulemas* running *Madrases* may be decided by a religious board formed by government. The international community shall also support the government and help it to overcome the decades old issue of terrorism

References

¹ Report says over 35,000 madrassas operating in Pakistan, *Pakistan Today*, July 31, 2015

² Zafrullah Khan served as President of the Lahore Chapter of Ahmadi community from 1919 to 1935 and served as Secretary to Khalifat ul Masih II, the second successor of Mirza Ghulam Muhammad as quoted in the Wikipedia Encyclopedia (www.wikipedia.org)

³ Amin, T., 1982. *Afghanistan Crisis: Implication and Options for Muslim World, Iran and Pakistan*. Islamabad: Institute of Policy Study.

⁴ Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Cradle of Terror*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 2003, p.11

⁵ Tahir Amin, "Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States" in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds), *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and Its Borderlands*, Indiana University Press, 1994, pp.227

⁶ N. Jayapalan, *History of India: From National Movement to Present Day including Constitutional development*, Vol. IV, 2001, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, p.110

⁷ Al-quraan, Surah Ikhlas No. 112 ayat 04 para No. 30 Page 548

⁸ *Shah Jo Resalo* compiled by Dr. Hotchand Molchand Gurbakhshani, p.31

⁹ Al-quraan, Surah Ikhlas No. 112 ayat 04 para No. 30 Page 548

¹⁰ Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat No. 256, *Al-Qura'an*