

Hate Speech in Mosques Versus Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: Causes and Recommendations

Raza Ullah Shah^{*}, Kashif Saleem[†], Azmat Ali Shah[‡]

Abstract

Language is a means of communication to convey one's message to one's fellow beings. In Pakistan, language has been symbolized as tool of hate, intolerance, and aggression which foment socio-political, economic-religious, and sectarian conflicts. Religious clerics (Imams) hailing from diverse sects play a very pessimistic role to utter such words from the pulpit in Mosques promote extreme hatred and prejudiced among their respective audience and followers which result in the intolerant society leading to sectarian clashes. This study aims at to highlight the hidden major causes of spreading syndrome of the hate speech phenomenon in Pakistani society. The study is based upon observation and interviews; and some prominent literature to address the research question. The observation of the Friday sermons in the selected mosques made it clear that the imams never got involved in hate speech against the other sects. The interviews with the stakeholders revealed that the uneducated masses, intolerance in the society, inefficient functioning of the security agencies and social media etc. are some of the main culprits for the pandemic of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. The government needs to educate the masses in various social, political and religious phenomenon, and have some sort of control over the curriculum taught in religious madrassas, Scholars from all the sects should be involved in the process of creating an interfaith harmony. The government should pass strong and stringent laws against the sectarian violence.

Keywords: hate speech, sectarian conflict, religion, religious clerics or imams, intolerance, interfaith harmony

Background of The Study

The term 'hate speech' refers to biased, hostile and malicious speech which promotes and incite ill sentiments by targeting a person or a group of people due to personal, social, ethnic, sectarian, or political affiliations (Jacobs & Poter, 1998). These characteristics include gender, race, color, ethnicity, origin, disability, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and will lead towards discrimination, intimidation, disapproval or other negative attitudes (Steiner & Alston, 2000). Hate

^{*}Assistant Professor Qurtuba University of Science and Technology, Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan. Email: razaulahphd@gmail.com

[†]Assistant Professor Qurtuba University of Science and Technology, D.I. Khan, Pakistan Email: kashifsaleem9212@gmail.com

[‡] Assistant Professor Qurtuba University of Science and Technology, D.I. Khan, Pakistan. Email: azmat@qurtuba.edu.pk

speech intends to injure, dehumanize, intimidate, degrade and victimize the individual or a group (Cohen-Almagor, 2011).

Historical evidences are available where hate speech resulted into mass violence. During the Colonial America, hate speech was a tool to promote slavery. It was used in the rise of the Third Reich and Bosnia aggravation of tension (Shaw, 2011). Hate speech aims at the ridicule and humiliation of the victims, and presentation of their grievances as less severe, although not in all cases hate speech result into an actual crime but they pave a way for the commission of a hate crime, in most of the cases hate crimes are the result of prior dehumanization and stigmatization of a targeted group (UNHRC, 2015).

Social peace is endangered by hate speech via creating an environment in which a slow acting poison in the shape of hate material is spread over all around, eventually compelling even a good member of the society to be biased and violent against the members of the opposing sects and thus to endanger public good (Waldron, 2012).

Irrespective of its ability to trigger violence in the society, hate speech incite negative and biased feelings and beliefs about an individual or a group of individuals (Shaw, 2011). This stereotyping and biasedness generates negative effects on the mental health of the targeted group. Various studies have proved that the persistent negative propaganda against the targeted group increase the stereotypes overtime against them which then need just a trigger event to erupt into violent actions against them. The post 9/11 incidents against the Muslims in USA are considered the results of the previous anti-Muslim propaganda (Williams & Burnap, 2016). In this case the event of 9/11 worked as a trigger materializing the negative propagandas wherein Muslims were presented as terrorists; creating a hostile environment for them.

Jeremy Waldron a legal philosopher categorizes hate speech into two kinds of messages exposing various groups to vulnerability. The first message targets the victims intending to degrade, ridicule and sideline them in the society (Waldron, 2012). Similarly, the overall effect of hate speech is to insult victims, stereotyping them, for example, as terrorists, advocating the exclusion of them from society, denying them human rights, holding them accountable for the actions of the other members of the group, applying double standards etc. (Jakubowicz et al. 2017). The second message, on the other hand, is aimed at the rest of society and intends to encourage people into thinking that there are some like-minded individuals who agree with the idea that the certain groups of society should be excluded and not tolerated (Waldron, 2012).

Pakistan is a state facing severe blow of extremism and intolerance, damaging its peace and squeezing the vulnerable groups, such as religious minorities. The major contributor to this issue of intolerance is the presence of hate material in different forms like social and print media, text books or other forms of writing (South Asian Partnership-Pakistan, 2015). This issue of religious intolerance led the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to designate Pakistan as “country of Particular concern” in its 2002 report. Amnesty International also berated Pakistan for its ignominious record on the minority rights. The report says that “religious minorities continued to face laws and practices that resulted in their discrimination and persecution. The Human Rights Watch Report of 2015 states that the government failed in its most basic duty of the protection of its citizens and enforcement of laws.

According to South Asia Terrorism Portal during the last 26 years 5,239 persons have been killed and 9,905 injured in sectarian violence in Pakistan. Hate speech is considered the root cause for sectarian conflicts. Pakistan Penal Code explicitly forbids hate speeches through Section 153A and Section 295-298. Besides the fact that the National Action Plane has banned the hate speeches but still 58 incidents of sectarian conflicts have been recorded by SATP after The National Action Plane. This suggests the persistence of the problem in our society. This study intends to evaluate the prevalence of this problem and obstacles in the way of anti-hate speech laws.

Hate speech is any kind of expression advocating incitement to harm (discrimination, hostility or violence) where the victim is targeted because of his being the member of a particular social religious or demographic group. For some, however, the concept extends also to expressions that foster a climate of prejudice and intolerance on the assumption that this may fuel targeted discrimination, hostility and violent attacks (Gagliardone, Gal, Alves, & Martin, 2015). The hate material usually divides the society into two rival groups (Gagliardone, Gal, Alves, & Martin, 2015).

Problem Statement

For the purpose of this study the concept of hate speech was loosely defined as the previous researchers had done to protect the respondents and the researcher from being bogged down in questions of technicalities. This definition is “public statements expressing disapproval, hatred or aggression against ethnic, religious, and other social groups” (Ivanovo, 2013 & Bargad Organization for Youth Development, 2015)

Keeping in view the severity of the problem of sectarian violence in Pakistan and its ever intensifying situation the researcher tended to know if there is hate speech in mosques against the opposite sects or religions other than Islam. And if the answer is yes then how much is it responsible for the growing sectarian issue. But if the answer to the question is no then the researcher will interview field experts i.e. lawyers, judges and police officials to know the reason behind the problem.

Research Questions

1. Whether the hate speech in mosques is responsible for the prevalent sectarian conflicts in our country?
2. What are the main causes behind the problem of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan?

Research Objectives

1. To know the contribution of hate speech in the problem of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan
2. To investigate the major causes for the issue of sectarian violence in Pakistan

Research Methodology

During the first phase of the study Friday sermons of 12 mosques were observed and recorded for 1 month. These mosques as shown in the below given table included six main mosques of the Peshawar University and six mosques from the surrounding area of the University of Peshawar. Afterwards these sermons were analyzed for any content which can be declared as hate speech.

During the second phase of the study interviews were conducted with police officials and other concerned persons particularly from judiciary and legal fraternity. During these interviews the researchers strived hard to find out the main obstacles in the way of the implementation of laws against hate speech; pointed out by the field experts. Interviewees were asked for solutions to curb the problem.

Table No. 1 Names of the Mosques (where Friday sermons were observed

Name of the Mosque studied	Major Sect
Masjida Wosta	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjida Firdoss	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjid Umer	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjid Khalid Bin Waleed	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjid Siddique	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
KMC Masjid	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjida Wosta (Haji Khel Tehkal Bala)	Ahla Hadis (Ahla hadis wo ahla Sunnat)
Masjida Quba (Haji Khel Tehkal Bala)	Ahla Hadis (Ahla hadis wo ahla Sunnat)
Spin Jumat	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjid Bilal	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Masjid Muzafar Ustad	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat
Board Bazar Mosque	Ahla Sunnat Wal Jumat

during study)

Findings of the Study

The researchers started their observation in the month of October 2016. This month of October was very important because the Islamic year of 1438 Hijri was starting on 2nd October of 2016. The first month of Islamic year i.e. Muharam which is known for its controversies between the two main sects of Islam means Shias and Sunnis.

On the first Friday that was on 7th October 2016 the researchers observed the three mosques of Masjida Wosta, Masjida Firdos and Masjida Wosta (Haji Khel Tehkal Bala). Two of these mosques situated in the premises of the University of Peshawar while Masjida Wosta of Haji Khel was out of the University.

In Masjida Wosta and Msjida Firdos situated in the campus of University of Peshawar, the topics of Friday Sermon were almost the same that had importance during Muharram Ul Haram in Islam and award (Sawab) for fasting on the day of tenth of Muharram ul Haram which is well known as *Ashura*. During the sermon the Molvies (Religious Clerics) never said anything which can be named as hate speech and their total speech was about the teachings of Islam and importance of the month. To

the contrary the priest in Masjida Wosta of Haji Khel was not that unbiased and although he was not very fierce in this regard but he convicted Shias for passing insulting comments against renowned companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad PBUH and his beloved wife Hazrat Aisha.

On the Second Friday of the month, the researchers visited another three mosques; of which two were situated outside of the university naming as Masjida Quba and Spin Jumat while the third mosque of Masjida Umer was on campus. This Friday once again the Molvie in Masjida Umer as well as the Molvie of Masjida Quba restrained themselves to the teachings of Islam Ahadis and Sunnah along with importance of sacrifice which was the main teaching of Hazrat Imam Hussains expedition. On the other hand the Imam in Masjida Quba along with the teachings of Islam also touched the Shia, Sunni conflict and blamed Shias for following flawed concepts and Insult of the companions of the Holy Prophet PBUH. He also criticized the Hanfi Muslims for following their imam instead of the teachings of Quran and Sunnah.

On the third Friday of the month Masjida Siddique and Khalid Bin Waleed were observed from the university premises while Masjida Bilal which was out of the university premises. This Friday all the three mosques had different topics for speech. Imam in Masjida Umer discussed the importance of charity (Sadqa) in Islam. The sermon topic in Masjida Khalid Bin Waleed was teachings of Islam regarding good morality. While in Masjida Bilal the molvie (priest) discussed the topic of rights of parents in Islam. Although during this week the researchers could not find a single mosque indulging in the hate speech but they found some hate speech materials specifically against the Ahmadies. The two of these mosques had different pamphlets against the Ahmadies preventing Muslims from buying products of some specifically declared companies which according to them belonged to Ahmadies like Shazan etc.

On the last and fourth Friday of data collection the researchers visited KMC Masjid from within the university while two mosques of Masjida Muzafar Ustad and Board Bazar Mosque were observed from the outer areas. The priest in the KMC Masjid discussed the topic of tazkiyah al nafs (self-purification) in Islam. The priest never used anything which can be called as hate speech. Sermons topics in the other two mosques were although general topics regarding swalat and zakat but the priest in board bazar said some words about the beliefs of Ahla Hadis (subsect of Ahla sunnat wal jamat) which can come under the definition of hate speech while the Molvi in Masjida Muzafar Ustad remained silent in this regard.

The findings of the observation of Friday sermons in the 12 mosques for a month proved that although the Religious Clerks (molvies) sometimes used defamatory words against other sects or they even indulged in hate speech but that was not that serious which could be concluded as the sole responsible for the present sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. These results were against the findings of the previous studies like South Asia Partnership – Pakistan (2015) which blamed the religious scholars of spreading religious hatred against other sects and minorities groups. There can be several explanations for this difference of findings between the two studies. There is a possibility that priests in high tension areas like D I Khan, Hangu, and Parachinar may commit the crime of hate speech against their rival sects or they may be harsher than their counterparts in Peshawar which is the capital city of KP and where the religious scholars were not that harsh against the other sects or even other religions. Secondly after the involvement of the government of Pakistan in the war on terror, it has changed its policies against the religious fanatics. Hate speech has specially been declared as a punishable crime by the government; which proved effective in many cases specifically in the metropolitan cities like Peshawar etc.

Thus the findings of the observation answered the first research question as well as achieved the first objective. The first question of the research was that whether the hate speech in the mosques has any contribution in the prevalent problem of sectarian conflicts in our country. The findings made it clear that neither was there any hate speech in the mosques nor was it the result of the sectarian violence in the state.

Causes of Sectarian Violence

To further dig out the causes of the severe sectarian conflicts in Pakistan, the researcher considered it pertinent to conduct some interviews. For this purpose thirty persons were interviewed ten each from department of police, lawyers' community and the judges. When these field experts were asked about the phenomena and the unexpected findings of the study; they told that mosques and loudspeakers in the mosques are not the only reason behind the problem of sectarian violence in Pakistan. The respondents pointed out the below given causes of the existing sectarian violence.

1. Uneducated masses are considered the most important cause behind sectarian violence in the country. Education is considered of having the ability to enlighten the brains of the common masses and make them more civilized. Providing education to the people is a fundamental duty of the state which is neglected by almost every government in Pakistan.

2. Intolerance especially in religious affairs is growing since the last two decades in Pakistan. Every sect is intolerant towards the opposing sect. Various religious factions antagonize each other and mirror that their faith and belief set reflects an absolute religion. They are not ready to harmonize with the different views of the opposite sect and this state of intolerance leads to sectarianism. These findings were at par with previous research done by Razia and Sumaira (2014).
3. Government institutions particularly security agencies failed to function efficiently. These agencies could not work in coordination with one another which will enable them to have timely information against all kinds of threats. These findings were in consonance with Malik (2018).
4. Pakistan's involvement in Afghan Jihad against USSR and afterwards its playing the role of frontline ally with USA in war on terror gave birth to extremism and intolerance in the country (Fazal, 2012; Gulshan & Saeed, 2014; Kazi, 2013).
5. Social media websites like Facebook, WhatsApp and twitter have a huge share in this problem. Innocent people and minority communities are always targeted in social media. These websites provide higher level of anonymity to people where they can say whatever they want to say. Bargad Organization for Youth Development (2015) which conducted a survey of students about the hate speech had the same observations by concluding that that every second Pakistani has faced a kind of hate speech mostly on social media and sometimes in person.
6. Along with social media print and electronic media also have an equal share in the problem of sectarian violence.
7. The Politicians to win the support of a particular sect always indulge in sectarian conflicts Hassan (2010) and Gulshan and Saeed (2014) are of the same view about the politicians in Pakistan.
8. The governments instead of taking stringent actions against the culprits of sectarian violence always make political alliances with them. This was in consonance with Mahsood and Kamran (2017).
9. It will be wrong to think that the government has done nothing to resolve the issue; they tried to resolve the issue by repeatedly banning sectarian organizations but they failed to stop this menace of sectarian violence due to their inefficiency (Mehmood, 2012).
10. The respondents also considered the formal educational institutions along with the religious educational institutions responsible for creating intolerance in the society. They were agreed on the point that Biasness and prejudice is circulated and disseminated against opposing sect in

classrooms and mosques. The same view was concluded by Mahsood and Kamran (2017).

11. The respondents blamed the text books taught in our schools and some private journals for having a share in the issue. They said that our text books have many chapters of hate speech against Hindus and Christians which is in violation of articles 18, 20, 22, and 25 of the constitution of Pakistan.
12. These experts also declared wall chalking, posters flyers and announcements as a medium of religious and sectarian hatred. This observation is in accordance with Bargad Organization for Youth Development (2015).

This portion of study answered the second question and this enlisted all the major causes of the problem. The causes were nominated by the experts of the field and are noted in the order of priority as told by the stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. Illiteracy is always at the root of all social and political problems; therefore, the government should try to uproot this problem by educating the young minds. The government should focus the textbooks and teaching at schools on universal humanity, dignity of human beings and responsible citizenship.

The current curriculum and education policy should be reviewed to remove policies, teaching materials and practices that are discriminatory and inflammatory, especially against the religious minorities.

The teachers' training, school environment and co-curricular activities should be designed to maintain respect for all sects and religions; their traditions and values. Students should be specifically educated against hate speech.

2. In case of Religious Madrasas the Government should have some sort of control in their administration in the shape of the appointment of the imam for madrasa and curriculum of these madrasas should be through government.
3. Religious scholars from all the sects should try to eliminate the misconceptions regarding other sects by highlight interfaith commonalities instead of blaming one another with infidelity.

While the Government along with the civil society and journalist organizations should work on creating an atmosphere of brotherhood and interfaith harmony by arranging various Seminars, Majalis and other activities where religious scholars from all the sects are present to.

4. Government needs to pass strong and stringent laws against all forms of hate speech; whether it is through wall chalking, posters, flyers, social media, and announcements in the mosques or any other way.

Passing of laws is of no use unless these laws are implemented in their letter and spirit for which we need to have free and fair Judiciary who will ensure swift and quality justice to all the citizens of the state. They will also make it sure that a guilty could not escape from his fate.

5. Hate speech regulatory bodies should be strengthened so that they can take action against any person whether strong or weak who is culprit.

All the intelligence agencies should coordinate with one another in a way that they have detailed information about different suspect of extremist groups and monitor them. Military and Para Military forces should be specially trained and properly equipped to effectively fight extremists and those who are involved in the sectarian violence.

6. State need to balance its policies towards both the conflicting sects of Shia and Sunnis, and provide security to the members of both sects. The government needs to curb all kinds of foreign support to the extremists in Pakistan by properly checking and monitoring all forms off foreign aid particularly for religious matters.
7. Fundamental rights given in the constitution of Pakistan should be ensured for all citizens

Conclusion

To conclude one can, say that hate speech is a major contributor to the problem of sectarian conflicts worldwide. But the government of Pakistan has resolved that issue, by taking strong action against the culprits and by making stringent laws against them. Besides the fact the problem of hate speech has been resolved by the state to an extant; but the issue of sectarian violence prevails in the country. The uneducated masses, intolerance in the society especially on the religious front, hate speech on social media, inefficiency of the security agencies and proxy wars are considered some of the main reasons behind the issue of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan.

References

- Bargad Organization for Youth Development, (2015). Hate Speech on Mass and Social Media in Pakistan. United States Institute of Peace.
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2011). Fighting Hate and Bigotry on the Internet, Policy & Internet, vol. 3, Iss. 3, Art. 6, p. 1.

- Council of Europe. (1997). Recommendation No. R 97 (20) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on “hate speech”, adopted on 30 October 1997.
- Fazal, R. (2012). War against Terrorism and its Repercussions for Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*. XXXIII.
- Gagliardone, I., Gal, D., Alves, T., & Martin, G. (2015). Countering Online hate Speech. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Paris.
- Gulshan M, Saeed, R. H. (2014). Sectarian Conflicts: A dominant threat to Pakistan’s Internal Security. *Journal of Political Studies* 21:103-118.
- Hassan, A. (2010). Shiism and Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: Identity Politics, Iranian Influence and Tit-for-Tat Violence. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.
- Huma, Y. (2012). Sectarian Violence; Pakistan’s Greatest Security Threat. Norwegian peacebuilding resource center.
- Hussain, H. (2008). Sectarianism in Pakistan. Pakistan politics forum.
- Ivanova, I. (28 Nov. 2013). Public Attitudes Towards Hate Speech in Bulgaria. Rep. Ed. Georgi Stoytchev. Open Society Institute Sofia, Web. 3 Jan. 2015. http://osi.bg/downloads/File/2013/Hate_speech_report_ENG_interactive.pdf
- Jacobs, J. B. and Potter, K. (1998). Hate crimes: Criminal law and identity Politics, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 11
- Jakubowicz, A., Dunn, K., Mason, G., Paradies, Y., Bliuc, A. M., Bahfen, N., & Connelly, K. (2017). Cyber Racism and Community Resilience: Strategies for Combating Online Race Hate. Springer, p.42.
- Kazi, A. M. (2013) Pakistan: implication of sectarian violence. South Asian analysis group.
- Mahsood, A. K, Kamran, M. (2017). Dynamics of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan: Recommendations to the Policy Makers. *Arts Social Sci J* 8: 283. doi: 10.4172/2151-6200.1000283
- Malik, H. (July 14, 2018). DI Khan police ‘divided along sectarian lines’. *The Express Tribune*.
- Mehmood, T. B. (2012). Social and Political Role of Madrassa: Perspectives of Religious Leaders in Pakistan. *South Asian Studies*.
- Qasim, M. Z. (1998). Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shia and Sunni Identities. *Modern Asian Studies*. Pp. 689-716.

- Razia, M., Sumaira, K. (2014). Terrorism and Politico-Religious Extremism in Pakistan Post 9/11. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*.
- Steiner, H. and Alston, P. (2000). *International Human Rights in Context: Law Politics Morals*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 749.
- Shaw, L. (2011). Hate Speech in Cyberspace: Bitterness without Boundaries. *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy*, 25(1), 279-304.
- South Asian Partnership-Pakistan. (2015). *Hate Speech and Hate Material: An overview of hate speech and material against religious minorities in Pakistan*. Lahore.
- Suba, C. (2003). *Sectarian Violence in Pakistan*. Institute of peace and conflict studies.
- UNHRC. (2015). Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues Rita Izsák - Hate speech and incitement to hatred against minorities in the media. A/HRC/28/64.
- Waldron, J. (2012). *The harm in hate speech*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2012, pp. 2-3.
- Williams, M. L., & Burnap, P. (2016). Cyber Hate on Social Media in the Aftermath of Woolwich: a Case Study in Computational Criminology and Big Data. *British Journal of Criminology*, 56(2), 211-238, p. 214.