



Pakistan Journal of Criminal Justice

ISSN: 2958-9363 ISSN (E): 2958-9371

Volume 6, No.2, 2026, 01-09

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59075/pjcj.v6i2.204>

Journal Homepage: <https://journals.centeriir.org/index.php/pjcj>

Effects of Sectarianism on Family Institution in Tribal District Kurram: A Qualitative Analysis of Religious Dynamics

Muzafar Khan¹, Dr. Haji Rahman^{*2}, Salman Ahmad³

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar & Lecturer in Sociology, University of Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, Email: muzaffarkhan0346@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Management Sciences University of Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, Email: haji616@ubuner.edu.pk

³Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Sociology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

This study focused on the core objectives to measure the effects of sectarianism on religious dynamics of family institution and to examine familial support to sectarianism in the area. The study was carried out in the two most affected Tehsils of Alizai and Parachinar of Tribal District Kurram. For qualitative data collection, four focused group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, two each with Shia and Sunni participants with equal ratio from both sects, chosen from the categories of religious clerics, community elders, government servants, businessmen and farmers. The study ended with the following themes: sect-based division among Muslims is ill for Islam and unity of all Muslims. The familial structure of both Shia and Sunni is different from each other with respect of religious ideologies and practices. Further, both the sect strictly observe religious teachings and have their own holy objects such as mosques, madrassas and Imam-bargahs. In the area, religious leaders are trusted and there is a sense of security for those sending children to them. Their part in society was further enlarged following the last wave of sectarianism. Religious knowledge of the sect was acquired by both sect clerics in their sect related ideological institutions. Further, for getting higher religious education, Shia prefer Iran and Iraq, while Sunni enhanced their knowledge in institutions situated in Jordan and other Arab nations for which they are financially supported by Iran and Saudi Arabia, respectively. Moreover, Sunni prefer to perform Umrah rather to visit shrine while Shia most often visit to shrines in Iraq and Iran. Both Shia and Sunni avoid to facilitate militants through Zakat and Khums respectively as the same is given to poorest of their respective sect. Still, half of Khums goes to the inheritors of Prophet (PBUH). The study has implications on the true understanding and brining unity among the Muslims as the knowledge extends through this research endeavor.

Keywords: Sectarianism, Family Institution in Tribal District Kurram, Religious Dynamics, Sunni and Shia, Muslim Unity.



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Article History: Received: 20-02-2026 Accepted: 01-04-2026 Published: 03-04-2026

Corresponding Author: Dr. Haji Rahman (haji616@ubuner.edu.pk)

Introduction

Sectarianism is one of the most pressing problems in modern-day Muslim societies, particularly Pakistan, due to its impact on the society in terms of violence, sectarianizing and institutional disruptions (Abou Zahab, 2020; Riaz, 2021). Due to heavy sectarian conflicts in the tribal areas of Pakistan and especially the District Kurram in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province the social structure has been completely changed and family institution is the major victim of the conflicts (Hussain & Jamil, 2020). District Kurram is the unique case study to explore sectarian dynamics, which is an area of about 60% Shia and 40% Sunni population, having a history of violent clashes, geographic isolation and a strategic location along Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Shah & Shahid, 2022). The area has been home to various episodes of sectarian violence occurring during the Afghan-Soviet war (1979 to 1989), the rule of the Taliban (1996 to 2001) and the post-9/11. These have all modified collective life, familial dynamics, and religious life. (Khan & Ali, 2021). As Pashtun tribal society is based on the foundation of primary social organization 'family' which was traditionally a united family disregarding religious difference (Afridi & Fatima, 2020). But as sectarian tension continues to get worse, parallel family systems based on separate religious identities, educational tracks and external connections (Hassan, 2023) have emerged. By knowing these transformations one can be able to think of effective strategies for peacebuilding and social cohesion in areas affected by conflict within the tribal communities. Past studies have primarily explored sectarianism in Pakistan through a political, security, and theological lens with hardly any study having taken its effects at the micro level on family institutions in tribal areas. (Hashim, 2020; Nasr, 2020). This study fills this gap by examining the impact of religious dynamics related to sectarianism on the families and their style of religious education, religious authority and rituals in Kurram District.

Research Problem

Although, Kurram District has history of sectarian strife for decades, there is a lack of systematic studies on its impact with regard to the impact on family institutions. The family as a primary institution of socialization plays a very significant role and they pass on the religious identity, however through an empirical investigation the way in which sectarianism changes within the family and how far the sectarianism changes the familial structure, decision-making and intergenerational relationships should be studied.

Literature Review

Sectarianism in Pakistan Historical Context

Sectarians are generally viewed as misguided individuals. However, sectarian tensions in Pakistan escalated in the 1980s for various inter-related reasons: the Iranian revolution of 1979, which boosted Shia activist groups; the Afghan jihad, which championed Sunni militant groups; and the encouragement of religious parties by the Pakistani state for geopolitical purposes (Abou Zahab, 2020; Riaz, 2021). The creation of parallel religious education systems (Malik, 2020) with sectarian ideologies perpetrated through a proliferation of 'real Islamic education', which is funded by Iran and Saudi Arabia. According to Candland (2008), the Afghan Soviet War and the United States' intervention in Afghanistan helped to spawn an extremist sectarian faction in Pakistan's tribal regions. Similarly in the study of Yusuf (2012), he termed Pakistan's status as an arena of proxy Saudi-Iranian rivalry, both countries sponsoring sectarian groups and madrassas to enable them to enact policies in Pakistan on their behalf.

Sectarianism in Kurram District

Kurram District is also a plagued by sectarianism. The sectarian history of Kurram District has its sporadic episodes of violence back to 1987 when clashes between Muharram processions in Sadda led to killing of hundreds of people (Gishkori, 2021). However, when the Taliban surfaced in Afghanistan, the issue got prickly, with major between-sect issues against the backdrop of those past conflicts, such as in 1997 and between 2007 and 2011, where thousands were displaced (Pakistan's Parachinar Problem, 2017; Shah & Shahid, 2022). Geographic separation of Shia and Sunni groups has led to parallel social, educational, and religious institutions in the two groups each having its own tehsils: Parachinar with a majority Shia population, and Lower Kurram with a majority Sunni population (Khan & Ali, 2021). This spatial divide is compounding the sectarian identities and reduces interaction between the community (Hussain & Jamil, 2020).

Sectarianism in Family Institution

The home is the most fundamental channel of religious socialization, identity development and values transmission (Ahmed & Khan, 2023). Families serve as spaces for the ideological reproduction of sectarian minorities within a sectarian discourse, as children are nurtured and groomed to take on a defined religious identity that highlights differences with the "other" (Hassan, 2023). Abbas (2011) interviewed madrassas regarding their activities of sectarian division using condemnatory procedures based on other sects' beliefs and propagation. Javeed (2010) noted about 40,000 registered and unregistered madrassas in Pakistan that teach different religious other than Hinduism and contribute to the polarization of the various sects within the country. In the context of Pashtun family system, the study found the traditional patriarchy system in which the families' religious role played a major part in the decision-making process (Afridi & Fatima, 2020). In conflict-affected zones, the increased influence by the clergy has increased the religious leaders' involvement in family life, marriage decisions and dispute resolution (Malik & Rana, 2022).

External influences Iran and Saudi Arabia

The sectarian divide has been fueled by the outside actors, mainly Iran and Saudi Arabia who have been supporting and training sectarians financially and ideologically to date (Hashim, 2020; Nasr, 2020). The competing religious education pathways arise from Iran's promotion of Shia religious education such as scholarships to Iranian seminaries, and Saudi Arabia's funding of Sunni *madrassas* (Malik, 2020). Butt (2012) stated that Sunni-Shia differences in theology on Imams are rooted in fundamental doctrine, in particular Sunnis believe Shia observance of Imams was in contradiction with Islamic monotheism. The theological differences are manifested in various ways, including the establishment of different educational institutions to showcase and confirm the lines of separation between different sects (Riaz, 2021). This unit focuses on the ways in which religion has been practiced and how religious affiliation has been experienced within the UK. Prayer, the observance of Muharram, and shrine visitation, are examples of religious activities that help to relay the sectarian identity (Australian Government, 2013). Shia pilgrimages to Karbala and Najaf are opposed to Sunni's haji and *Umrah*, which indicate the various theological stands of both communities (Abbas, 2010). The differing practices are handed down in families and so form differing religious cultures (Ahmed & Khan, 2023).

Theoretical framework - social identity theory

It is based in the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) adapted by Jesse and Williams (2011) to gain insight in how sectarian leadership cultivate and create strong ethnic-religious identity to mobilize and elicit opposition to the opponent groups. It is theorised that self-esteem results from belonging to a group, which makes it possible to explain in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination especially if groups are competing for resources, or recognition. In Kurram, religious education, marriage between sects and cross-sectarian participation in the community has become focal points of sectarian family identity, forming strict boundaries which restrict cross-sect interaction (Hassan, 2023).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted the qualitative approach with the technique of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect qualitative data that focuses on what people experience. The qualitative approach was chosen because it would enable a better understanding of the complexities of social phenomena, the contextual details and provide perspectives from those living in marginalised territories in the conflict zones (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

Study Proceedings

The study was carried on in Kurram District with particular focus on the conflict affected areas of Tehsil Parachinar (Upper Kurram) and Tehsil Ali Zai (Lower Kurram). In general, Tehsil Parachinar has mainly a Shia population while in Tehsil Ali Zai there is Shia-Sunni mix and a relatively greater Sunni population. The reasons behind selection of these areas were the fact that they once have reportedly seen recurrent sectarian clashes and continuous communal tensions (Shah & Shahid, 2022). The selected localities have experienced sectarian conflicts more or less directly, and the study population were the adult community members (aged 18 years and upwards) from both Shia and Sunni families. As the main data collection tool, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to gain deeper knowledge and insights on the social and familiar effects of sectarian violence.

Overall, four FGDs with the participation of 44 persons were performed. FGD participants comprised of 10 people of the Sunni sect from Bagan (Tehsil Ali Zai), 14 people of Shia sect from Bilyamin village (Tehsil Ali Zai), 10 people of Shia sect from Government High School Zeran (Tehsil Parachinar) and 10 people of Sunni sect from Para Chamkani (Tehsil Parachinar). A purposive sampling technique was used to select and recruit information-rich respondents who have something to say about their experiences and perceptions on sectarian conflict and its impact on the families and communities (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria were adults that lived within the selected area (18 years and over), individuals who experienced sectarian conflict, voluntary participation, and from Shia and Sunni backgrounds. While some efforts were made to ensure proper gender balance, gender diversification of participants could not be achieved because of the male-centered socio-cultural norms prevalent in the study area and access restrictions.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Profile of Participants developed a baseline demographic profile of the participants. Forty-six (24 Shia and 22 Sunni) members of the participating communities attended four FGDs. The participants were all adults aged between 25 and 65 years, with most being male (through limited cultural access), and having several different levels of religious and post-religious education ranging from just religious education up to a university degree. The majority of those present were either in agricultural service or those who were in trading service, government employees or religious studies.

Study results of religious dynamics associated with family institution at qualitative analysis revealed that all participants were agreed on the notion that they think that sect-based division among Muslims is harmful for Islam and unity of Muslims. In this regard, the people of Pakistan facing tough challenges of militancy which has divided the Pakistani society into two segments of Shia and Sunni. These militants were the products of Afghan revolution against the invasion of Russia on Afghanistan in 1979 and the USA attack on Afghanistan in 2001 (Candland, 2008). Further, they were also agreed on the statement that their family institution of both sects is different from each other's with respect to their religious ideologies and practices. In this regards, there are 97 percent population is Muslim in Pakistan which estimated almost 80 percent Sunni and 20 percent Shia Muslims. They have same God, same Prophet (Muhammad (PBUH)) and same book (*Quran*), still they have differences as well as flexibility and rigidity in the explanation of *Quran* and *Ahadid* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that divided Muslims into two types i.e. Shia and Sunni (Wikipedia, 2013). Furthermore most of the participants think that Sunni familial structure is more rigid and static towards observing religious teachings than Shia. Further, the participants revealed between the family institution and the statement that is it true that family as institution keep no check and balance on their members contact with religious clerics. Furthermore, the participants revealed about family institution and the statement that is it true that both sects have their own holy objects such as mosques, *madrassas* and *imam-barghas*. In this regards, Abbas (2011) revealed that increasing number of Madrassas exaggerated sectarian division through judgmental practices and ideologies of opponent sects focusing on the practices and beliefs of rival sects, highlighting religious differences and spreading propaganda among people that helping in series of sectarian clashes. Likewise, the participants agreed and revealed about the notion that the local people think that Shia-Sunni are different with respect of their prayers and practices in the area. Further, they also revealed about the statement between the family institution and the notion that they think that after the last wave of sectarianism, the role of religious clerics was enlarged in day to day affairs of the local people. Likewise, they revealed about the family institution and the notion that they think that Sunni religious scholars secured advance religious knowledge in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Arabs Sunni States. Furthermore, the participants confirmed about the family institution and the notion that is it true that Shia religious scholars obtained advance religious knowledge in Iraq and Iran. Likewise, they agreed about the family institution and the statement that is it true that Iran supported Shia population through awarding scholarships to students for obtaining religious education. Further, the participants revealed about the family institution and the notion that is it true that Saudi Arabia and Gulf nations assist Sunni population through awarding scholarships to students for obtaining religious education. Furthermore, the participants revealed about the family institution and the notion that they think that Sunni prefer to perform *Umrah* rather to visit shrine either inside the country or outside. Likewise, the participants revealed about family institution and the notion that they think that Shia prefer to visit shrine in Iraq and Iran rather to perform *Umrah*. Further, the participants confirmed about the family institution and the notion that they think that Sunni population not gives some share of *Zakat* to militants for safeguarding their communities. Furthermore, the participants revealed about the family institution and the notion that is it true that Shia population gives some share of *Hommas* to militants for safeguarding their communities. The sectarian clashes between Shia and Sunni are due to ideological differences that turned the religion of peace-Islam into extremism (Murphy & Malik, 2009). Likewise, the participants revealed about the family institution and the statement that is it true that Sunni residents of Parachinar celebrate *Shab-i-barath* after their repatriation in the area. Furthermore, the participants revealed about the family institution and the notion that the local people think that Shia families currently celebrating *Moharammulhram* with more religious zeal and enthusiasm after the last wave of sectarianism. Likewise, the participants confirmed about family institution and the notion that is it true that none of the sect participate in religious rituals of the opponent sect after the last

sectarian clash in the area.

Thematic Analysis:

Religious dynamics and Family institution

In the thematic analysis, six major themes emerged in relation to the effects of religious dynamics as they relate to sectarianism on family institutions, which are:

Theme 1.

Sectarian Division and Muslim Unity (12 Sunni participant) recognition from all FGD 1 and consistent responses from all other FGDs is for the fact that "sect based division among Muslims could be harmful for Islam and unity of Muslims". There was concern voiced by participants in both groups that: "Everywhere, either within or outside the country, Muslims have been divided and fought with each other, which is harmful for Islam, the unity and development of Muslims world. We have been divided and fighting against each other while the West, USA and others have ensured development in science, medicine, engineering etc..." (FGD 1, Sunni participants) This discovery serves to corroborate Candland's (2008) analysis that the sectarian differences that emerged are a product of the geopolitical interventions starting with the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan (1979) and the subsequent US invasion in the country (2001), that militarized religion based on identity and polarization in Pakistani society. This awareness of the negative impact of the sectarianism on the unity of the Muslims demonstrates a tension between the ideology of solidarity of Muslims and their experiences of sectarian conflict. Yet, while participants recognized the fact of such change with regard to the family, when such change was reported, it was the result of the sectarian restructuring of family institutions, indicating the existence of a disconnect between the use of sectarian restructuring to refer to practical reality and a normative aspiration for oneness. Evidence of this paradox can be seen in the fact that the ethnic-religious entrepreneurs build firm sectarian aboptions in the midst of general engg influxes as described by Jesse and Williams (2011).

Theme 2.

Different religious beliefs and families. All of the participants agreed that "family institutions of both sects differ from one another as regards of religious ideologies and practices. But they traced the differences, they said, not to the basics of Islamic beliefs but "cultural, traditional and practices with Muslim methods learnt and shared in different times and places of the past Islamic period. The participants said: "There were not any Sunni and Shia other than one Muslim in the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The historical context is a sign of an effort to invalidate sectionism and to recognize it in the present-day. Sub-theme 2a is "Rigidity in Religious Observance" which focuses on the difficulties that arise from steadfastness in religious practice. The families described 'religious teachings' as being 'more difficult to observe' for the Shia compared to the Sunni, and all participants labelled families as being 'more rigid and static towards observing religious teachings', something that Shia families were more so. This inflexibility is seen in: Obligation of prayer in accordance with religious sects and Muslim communities. • Only attend sectarian religious schools • Jaffna Magistral Public school, 2010 • Early childhood education that introduces children to sectarian values and national minorities' rights through a sectarian approach The finding is in support of the analysis done by Butt (2012) in which the Sunnis attribute divine qualities to the Shias, and believe that this contradicts Islamic monotheism and formulating theological boundaries which are transmitted across the generations. The constraint to religious performatory practices acts as a boundary maintenance device, as it enhances the sense of ingroup solidarity while also differentiating the outgroup— in line with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Role and Influence of Religious Clerics

Theme 3.

When asked about the influence of clerics, there were mixed emotions: Sub-theme 3a: Monitoring by the mother/parents in contact with clerks. Eight respondents pointed to families' lack of control and balance over interaction with religious clerics while four spoke of families' deliberate intention to send their children to Sunni religious clerics and mosques and madrassas by choice, whilst elders "maintain respectful relations with the Imam and madrasa teachers. The same result is observed in the variation, indicating either that the clerical person was more integrated into the family's life (some were more like teachers of the child than traditional religious figures) or that part of the family had active contact with the religious authorities and their personae. Post-conflict spread of the influence of the clerics was the third sub-theme that emerged from the data. Seven participants expressed that "after the last wave of sectarianism, role of the religious clerics was enhanced in the daily activities

of the local people" and five participants said that clerical role "declined and people not giving that much value to them as they admitted and followed in the past. This difference can be due to: Geographic variation Parachinar Ali Zai The clerical and authority structures of those with sectarian differences. Generational gap – relationship with the clergy. 4. Each family's unique religious stance in certain aspects this increase of clerical influence is consistent with Jesse and Williams' (2011) view that leaders were involved in creating strong ethnic identities to motivate people to support their elites and mobilize hatred against their opponents. To harness sectarian insecurities and augment their power in matters such as family decisions, dispute resolution and community governance, religious clerics as community leaders have taken advantage of this opportunity (Malik & Rana, 2022).

Theme 4

. examines ways in which religious infrastructure has been divided. All participants confirmed that in the area "both sects have their holy places and objects including mosques, *madrassa's* and *imambargahs*. Shia Religious Infrastructure: • Three daily prayers (combining the prayers in the mosques) • Sending religious teachers to the China *imam/moulvii* system. The organization of *imambargahs* for prayers, religious education, theological instruction and for political activities (*Anjuman*) • Decision making forum/s in which elders and *Maliks* discuss on issues regarding the interest of community Sunni Religious Infrastructure: There are 5 daily prayers which are divided into mosques. • The *Quran* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *ahadith* (prophetic traditions) based *Madrassas* had a strong emphasis on Quranic recitations. Thus, interaction among different sects is comparatively restricted and this institutional separation produces parallel micro-socialisation processes, resulting in separate identities being reinforced among children from an early age on. Thus, this local infrastructure was part of a larger sectarian educational segmentation in Pakistan where Javeed reports the existence of around 40,000 madrassas in total—both registered and unregistered—which are based on certain religious beliefs. They constitute an exaggerated sectarianism in terms of judgmental practices (rig) fixation on a rival sect's beliefs and the spread of propaganda on the part of the madrassas; this is what Abbas (2011) proved to be true and similarly described by the description of the participants in the study of cursing through educational impacts. The exclusion of children from mainstream education and their education only in sectarian madrassas is being passed down to the next generation of families.

Theme 5.

External influences – Iran and Saudi Arabia Sub-theme 5a: Shia links with Iran and Iraq Nine participants reported "Shia religious scholars obtained advanced religious knowledge to be Mujtahid [religious jurist] in Iraq and Iran" and three commented "Some Sayyeds and Shia students are pursuing M.Phil/Ph.D degrees in various universities in Pakistan and abroad like Iran, Iraq. Eight participants agreed to "Iran was helping Shia population by providing them with scholarships for religious education in religious institutions and also reading in the universities of Pakistan in other Islamic countries and states. 4 said that before the sectarianism that emerged in the last few years there was no interference with Shia students and they were fully funded for religious education, whereas these were supported recently via scholarships. Sub-theme 5b: Sunni ties with Saudi Arabia and Gulf States Ten participants indicated that "Saudi Arabia and gulf nations supported the Sunni population by providing scholarships for students to receive religious education in its time, though not at present in the region. Two respondents explained that, "Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries are helping the Sunni people in their countries through offering scholarships, but it is very limited, it is merit-based, it is through the proper channels, if a Sunni student fulfils all the conditions, passes through all the procedures offered by them." Ten of the participants indicated that the "Sunni religious scholars are unable to amass higher religious knowledge in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and in other Arab countries under Sunni rule; students from abroad come and receive religious education and degrees from any religious institutions in Pakistan as compared to Shia countries. Two participants further considered that "Pakistani students have studied in Al-Azhar University and other religious educational institutes outside of the country; but very little students are studied from the study area. This reinforces us with the notion of Yusuf (2012) in which he termed Pakistan as a scene of Saudi-Iranian proxy sectarian conflicts as both the countries began to support sectarian groups and *Madarasas* through financial and logistic means. The educational channels that are established through such external scholarship opportunities also help to create transnational sectarian identities and loyalties, which are not bound by national borders (Hashim, 2020; Nasr, 2020). These scholarships indicate important social mobility and religious prestige for families and engender incentives for them to uphold sectarian divides and align themselves with external patrons (Malik, 2020). The differential patterns, namely, Iran's more clear-cut support for shia religious education and Saudi Arabia's more gradual shift to less supportive religious education in merit-based schools in Kurram also hint at the changing geopolitical landscape and priorities of the external actors. Sub-theme 5c: Distribution of *Zakat* and *Khums* All participants rejected the concept of Sunni population transferring *Zakat* money to militants for security of communities saying that the money of *Zakat* is for the poor and the needy people, and they give it to their poor relatives firstly, then to the poor people in neighborhood and thirdly to the poor people in the area. Two participants agreed in the same way that "they have

given their *Khums* to their *Imambargahs* and *Sayyeds* in Kurram” while ten participants denied that “Shia population gives some share in *Khums* (5% share of wealth) to the militants for safeguarding its own communities.” These answers may be a product of the social desirability bias in view of possible connections with militants. They also indicate that whilst the religious financial responsibilities (*Zakat*, *Khums*) are also mainly disbursed in the usual manner (through religious institutions and family ties) rather than militant organisations, contrary to some of the security discourse ideas.

Theme 6.

Religious Practices: Sectarian Markers of Identity Sub-theme 6a: Sunni Preferences—*Umrah* Over Shrine Visitation A hundred per cent of the Sunni participants reported that anecdotally "Sunni of the area prefer to perform *Umrah* not visit shrines either within the country or northeast. They said that they visit shrines to pray and say "Sufis and Saints" but they "expect and have strong belief" in "Allah," not shrines. This mirrors Sunni emphasis on the importance of relating directly with Allah and a lack of veneration for intermediaries, as propagandized by Wahhabi influenced versions of the Quran, interpreted in madrassas funded by Saudi Arabia (Riaz, 2021). Sub-theme 6b: Shia preferences-Shrine visiting in Iraq/ Iran All of the participants in the Sunni community stressed the fact that the Shias prefer to visit the shrines in Iraq and Iran than *Umrah* in Saudi Arabia. They pointed out that the majority of Shia families "travelling to Iran and Najaf-Iraq enter the country through road buses and visit the holy places in Karbala and their shrines for 40 days and on returning home. On their return, "local Shia say welcome, Karbala (visit) Mubarak but not say *Umrah* Mubarak, and one could easily identify the fact on their wall writings in their areas. They are divergent pilgrimage practices which are used to assert an identity that is manifested by means of word and symbol (wall writings) and visual expression, which represent public manifestations of sectarianism. The Australian Government (2013) reported that both the Shia and Sunni sects visit important religious sites, with many Sufi shrines, but in different ways and for different reasons. For the Shia family, visit to Karbala is an experience of the religion which in particular underlines the martyrdom story of Imam Hussain, the key element of the Shia identity (Abbas, 2010). Such families pass this meaning of these journeys to their children, establishing emotional and theological bonds to Shia sacred geography, which is above Pakistan's nationality. This is sub-theme 6c of the theme, 'Religious Celebrations and Sectarian Boundaries'. All participants expressed that "Sunni residents of Parachinar could celebrate *Shab-e-Barat* after their return in Parachinar area because of interaction difficulties and problems with local Shias in Parachinar, but the Sunni families helplessly celebrate *Shab-e-Barat* in other residential areas. On the other hand, all the participants said that "all Shia families are presently celebrating Muharram with more religious zeal and enthusiasm without any problem faced by their Sunni counterparts in the tribal district of Kurram and that none of the three sects are involved in participating in religious activities of the opposite sect after the last occasion of the religious clash in the area. This is an sign of the power relations and the demographic distribution—Shia-majority Parachinar allows for more freedom in celebration of Muharram, though restricts *Shab-e-Barat* for Sunni families; in the mixed and Sunni-majority neighborhoods, a Sunni family has less restriction on celebrating *Shab-e-Barat*. However, the Pakistan's Parachinar Problem (2017) report found that the causes of the sectarian violence had been included since the 1980s as the first such incident took place in a Muharram procession in Sadda in 1987 when hundreds of people, both Shia and Sunni, were killed. Later, in 1997 and in 2007-2011, violence was further amplified by the subsequent conflicts. In the past, religious festivities were linked to violence which gave rise to sensitivities and restrictions that families must deal with. More pertinently, he/she reported that there is total social segregation between the two sects "none of the sect take part in the religious rituals of the opponent after the last sectarian clash. This is a stark contrast to previous eras where there might have been intermixing of the sects at a family and community level, and reflects the role of violent conflicts in strengthening sectarian lines (Hussain & Jamil, 2020; Khan & Ali, 2021).

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