

## Impact of Globalization on the Changing Relations between *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims in Kashmir

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### Abstract

The Kashmir landscape, globally known for its beauty, has earned it the title '*Paradise on Earth*'. This feature has been given a face-lift by the tolerance, which people had been showing towards each other. Many scholars have mentioned that the inception of Sufism in Kashmir pressed upon the people to show tolerance, harmony and live together at peace. Thus, for centuries, the people of the valley have been known for their hospitality, warmth and generosity. However, the differences between the two sects of the Muslims i.e. *Shias* and *Sunnis* have also been running parallel to it which has led to many confrontations between these two sects on several occasions in past. Being minority, *Shias* have suffered persecution at the hands of majority community. The persecution has forced them to adopt a benign and docile approach wherein they preferred seclusion and non-interference in major socio-political issues. Their habitat and their work tells a lot about their apprehensions vis-à-vis majority community in Kashmir i.e. they adopted those kind of jobs like carpet-weaving and handicrafts which allowed them to stay indoors for months together. Meanwhile, on one hand, the fear of majority has lessened a bit either because of mobility or through the dissemination of information through books and digital networking and the *shias* on the other hand adopted the defensive approach to avoid any severe confrontation. The changing political scenario has also been one of the prime factors in decreasing the occurrences of these altercations. There are examples where people are vying to bring the communities together and bridge the gap. More efforts are made by those who are in minority like the religious get together, ceremonies etc. The *Shias* find it in their interests to have better relations with *Sunnis* because in the absence of continued communication, the myth making increases manifold to the chagrin of *Shias*. It is the fact that lot of demonization of *Shias* has happened in Kashmir which has badly dented the image of Kashmiri *Shias*.

However, with the advancements in almost all the social institutions by virtue of globalization, the religious fundamentalism also increased and the fruits of the seeds of the intolerance sown in one corner of the world can be clearly observed here in Kashmir. There is direct bearing of the ongoing global conflicts on these *Shia-Sunni* relations be it Palestine, Iranian Revolution, the ISIS upsurge, the Yemen war etc. This has gradually increased the polarity between these two Muslims sects which further increased with the introduction of the religious fanaticism.

The paper attempts to analyze this impact on the changing relations between these two sects in Kashmir. Employing both primary and secondary sources, the paper finds that there is growing polarization of relations between the *Shias & Sunnis* Muslims in Kashmir. The relationships have changed at an alarming rate vis-à-vis the exposure people are getting to the outside world. The socio-cultural practices have also witnessed a huge transformation when people are overtly directed to avoid any kind of socio-economic and political contact with the minority community. The results on ground also bear witness to the fact that the people are being asked to follow stay-away policy and refrain from any kind of drives to unity.

**Keywords:** *Shia* Persecutions Globalization, Religious fundamentalism, Changing Relations, Unity

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## Introduction

Muslims all over world are divided among *Sunni* Muslims and *Shia* Muslims. Numerically, while the *Sunni* Muslims constitute the majority, the *Shias* form the minority except in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain and Azerbaijan where they numerically outnumber the *Sunni* Muslims. Although, *Shias* constitute the largest minority community in the Islamic world ranking below the *Sunni* majority community, and both *Shias* and *Sunnis* constituting the fundamental sects of Islamic world, a very less scholarly attention has been given to this community. Islamic matters tend to focus on *Sunnism* (Nasr, 2007). It was only after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, spearheaded by Ayatullah Khomeini that *Shia* community received some attention from the scholarly world as driven by curiosity to know about this community, its culture and its relations with the majority community with the *sunnis*. However, the paper will focus on the changing relationships between them in the wake of globalization.

## *Shias and Sunnis*

The curiosity driven primary questions to be answered about Shi'ites are; who the Shi'ites are? When did the Shi'ism start? And, how are they different from majority *Sunnites*? To begin with the answer for the first question that, who the Shi'ites are? The term "*Shia*" has Arabic origin meaning "follower". In the same context, the term "*Shia*" has appeared in Quran several times. For example, in chapter 28, verse 15, Allah, refers one the follower of Moses as *Shia*. Elsewhere, the prophet Abraham is introduced as a *Shia* of Noah (37:83) (Al-Quran). Also in the beginning of the history of Islam, the term "*Shia*" was used in its original or literal sense for followers of different people. For example, some hadiths speak of the *Shia* of Ali b. Abi Talib and others of the *Shia* of Muawiya b. Abi Sufyan. However, gradually the term acquired a secondary or technical meaning, i.e. the followers of Ali, those who believed in his Imamate (Shomali, 2003. p.14).

Ghulam Hasan Muharrami quotes Syed Muhsin Amin in *History of Shiism*, "After the murder of Uthman (the third Muslim caliph) ...the supporters of Muawiyah were called 'Uthmanis' as they used to love Uthman and be inimical to Ali(a)...*Shiah*, the followers of Ali(a) were also called 'Alawis' and this practice practiced till the end of Ummayyid rule. During the Abbasid period the labels 'Uthmani' and 'Alawi' were abrogated and only '*Shia*' and '*Sunni*' were used"(Muharrami, 2016:70). However, these days, the common lexical meaning of the terms is that *Shias* consider Ali as the rightful successor (Imam) of Prophet(s), where as *Sunnis* consider him as the fourth Khalifa (Caliph).

Shahrestani (d. 548 A.H), a *Sunni* historian who has written about different sects in Islam in his corpus compendium *Al-Milalwa al-Nihal*, describes *Shias* as, "The Shi'ites are those who follow Ali only. They hold that his Caliphate and Imamate were based on designation and appointment, either open or hidden. They maintain also that Imamate must remain in Ali's family; if it were ever to go outside of it, this would be either because of a wrong on the part of another, or because of dissimulation on the part of the rightful Imam. According to them the

Imamate is not a civil matter, validly settled by the will of the people appointing an Imam of their choosing; it is a fundamental matter and a basic element of religion. Messengers of God may not ignore and disregard it, nor leave it to the choice of the common people (Shahrastani, 1984. p.125).

### **Shi'ism in Kashmir**

The arrival of Shi'ism in Kashmir valley is shrouded in myth and mystery as is its arrival in other parts of India. Owing to the intricate nature of Shi'i history in Kashmir, complexities of its social evolution and the diversities of its religious traditions and popular beliefs, it becomes difficult to give the exact historical account of its arrival and spread in Kashmir. However, there is a general belief that Mir Shams-ud-din Araki, who came to the valley in the valley 1483-84 was the first to introduce Shi'ism in Kashmir (Hussain, 2017. p.155). Even Lawrence also credits Araki for introducing the Shi'ite religion in Kashmir in 1450 A.D. (Lawrence, 1895. p.284). However, owing to many available accounts recorded in various works, research articles and other documents in Kashmir, Shi'ism made its presence in the valley 14<sup>th</sup> century i.e. right from the time when Islam spread in Kashmir (Hussain, 2017. p.155).

### **Shi'a Population in Kashmir**

Although the official census is not carried on sectarian lines in Jammu & Kashmir, a rough estimate puts the *Shia* population of Jammu and Kashmir State at around 10 to 13 percent of the 67 percent Muslims which constitute majority in the State. Walter Lawrence had put *Shia* population in 1890 A.D. at around 5 percent of the total Muslim population in Kashmir valley. According to Census conducted by Tanzeem-ul-Makatib, see Ghulam Mohammad Mattu (Mattu, 2010. p.504), total *Shias* constituted 12 to 14 percent of the total Muslim population in Kashmir in 2002 A.D.

The community in the state is chiefly concentrated in District Budgam with 148615, Srinagar 136178, Baramulla 101139, Kargil 118683 and Bandipora with 44374 populations<sup>4</sup>. Although, being less in number, the *Shias* are not officially considered as minorities for they along with the *Sunni* majority are generally recognized as Muslims and thus Muslim majority in the state

Jammu & Kashmir is multi-ethnic and multi-religious state with 64% of Muslims. 33% of Hindus and 3% of Buddhist, Sikhs, Christians and others. There are three geographical regions. These are:

- (1) Ladakh with 58% of the total area of the state and 3% of the total population.
- (2) Jammu with 26% of the total area and 45% of the total population.
- (3) Kashmir with 16% of the total area and 52% of the total population.

Of the state's 64% of Muslims who reside in Kashmir region about 13% are *Shia* Muslims.

## **Shia Sunni Conflict Through the ages**

The conflict between these two communities is not a new phenomena but it dates back in the reign of Mirza Haider Daughat (1540-1550). From then on it was carried on by different kings and administrators in different capacities. The account of the prominent encounters between these two communities have been listed and discussed below:

### **Its Beginning**

History bears witness to the fact that during the reign of the *Chaks* there was comparative peace between the *Shia* and *Sunni* Communities but during the foreign rule, particularly under the Mughals, Afghans and the Sikhs rule, Kashmir witnessed *Shia-Sunni* conflicts, as it was the 'divide and rule' policy of these foreign rulers which intensified these differences (Hussain, 2017: 242). Thus, in 1540, with the reign of Mirza Haider Daughlat/Kashgari, this killing spree started. In *Shiyyaan-i-Kashmir*, Hakeem Ghulam Safdar Hamdani has given a detailed account as to how the Mirza Haider, a Hanafi school of thought follower, ultimately won over the *Shia* ruler, Kaaji Chek, after his demise. He writes that the *shia* holocaust started when "he ordered the killing spree of *shias* in 955 AH (1548 AD). This order saw widespread *shia* and *noorbakhshi* killings, looting and destruction of their property, even their mosques were lit up...His tyranny can be understood by the fact that he ordered excavation of the grave of a *Shia* saint Shams-ud-Din Araki and set it ablaze many time like a burning pyre" (Hamadani, 1970:45). This treatment, Mirza made with the grave is enough to visualize how he would have treated those living. His tyranny forced the people to convert or appear to be converted to the *hanfi* school of thought and thus no one could dare to declare one's association with other schools of thought.

### **Carrying on**

The trend was carried on during the reigns of many prominent kings and administrations. Some of these incidents are briefly explained below:

- 1586: when a contingent of Mughals headed by Sayyid Yousuf Khan entered the city and ransacked and burnt down the house of *Shia* Muslims in Zadibal area. This lasted for 3 days and even the *khanqah* of Mir Shams-ud-Din Araki at Zadibal was set ablaze.
- 1635: Maisuma incident where confrontation started after some indigent words by *Shias* about the companions of holy Prophet(s), which engulfed entire city in riots.
- 1686: initiated on a heated argument between a businessman and a resident of Hasanabad, which led to setting entire Hasanabad on fire.

Likewise 1719, 1741, 1762, 1801, 1830 and 1872 (Hamadani, 1970:247-51) proved deadly and disastrous for the inhabitants of valley. Imambara Zadibal was set on fire in 1719.

Meanwhile *Shias* has also been initiating the wrath for themselves e.g in 1762, they have passed few nefarious remarks against Kh. Habeebullah Nowshahri, which led to their self destruction. One way or other the differences crept up and at times led to large-scale violence and heavy bloodshed.

‘Throughout the later medieval period in Kashmir, one finds that the policies of different administrators had a clear impact on the relationship between these two sects. The greatest tool for Akbar or any other foreign ruler to strengthen their power in Kashmir, was the disunity among the local chieftains or ruling elites; as long as they were divided and busy fighting each other, one could not have expected any organised opposition to overthrow any imperial rule.’<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the political intervention can also be seen in these instigations when during the reign of Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1857-1885), when *shias* were attacked when had assembled near the *Khanqah*<sup>4</sup> of Madin Sahib for praying for their safety from the cholera outbreak. ‘One doesn't find any improvement in the *Shia-Sunni* relationship as the sectarian clashes continued to exist in the later period under Hindu Dynasty’<sup>5</sup>.

### **Shia: Employing Benign and Docile attitude**

Witnessing these gruesome incidents the *Shias* started to remain away from the socio-political and even economic relations with the majority community. They have started to look for those jobs/works that were supposed to be carried indoors. The carpet weaving, handicrafts etc are the results of such attempts and it kept them aloof from the majority community. In the words of Lawrence “in the city the *Shiahs* are chiefly shawl-weavers and they practically monopolize the paper-mache industry” (Lawrence: 1895). It kept them going and also to not indulge in these matters thus preventing the confrontations led persecutions between them.

The impact of persecutions over almost 300 years was that; to escape massacres, safeguarding the honour of their women, led the community either to go into voluntary religious dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) or merge into the majority community or migrate towards central and northern parts of Kashmir.

### **Sufism in Kashmir**

Sufism is defined by its adherence as the inner, mystical dimensions (*tasawwuf*) of Islam. Etymologically it means ‘purity’ or some define it as ‘wisdom’. Sufis are believed to be devoted to Imam Ali (a)- the fourth Caliph and the first Imam in *Sunni* and *Shia* Schools of thought. It was introduced in Kashmir by Shah-i-Hamdaan Mir Sayid Ali Hamdani in 1385. He brought up many of his disciples and spread them in many parts of valley. This movement was strengthened by Mir Shams-ud-Din Araki in 1484.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.isca.in/IJSS/Archive/v4/i4/10.ISCA-IRJSS-2014-322.pdf> retrieved on 01.01.2019

<sup>4</sup> A building where Sufis gathered for meditation

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.isca.in/IJSS/Archive/v4/i4/10.ISCA-IRJSS-2014-322.pdf> retrieved on 01.01.2019

This movement though helped the spread of *Shia* Islam and it also brought the communities together. Most of the Sufi saints had great reverence for local traditions, folklore, and language. The Sufi syncretic tradition of peaceful co-existence has all the more contributed in containing the violence against the *Shia* because it does not glorify the violent culture. Most of the strident *Sunni* denominations like Deobandi, Wahabi which have animosity against *Shia* sect was yet to emerge on the religious landscape of Kashmir. This is how the peculiar framework of a tolerant, secular local society emerged what has been crafted as *Kashmiriyat*.

### Global Impact on the relations

The execution of a *Shia* cleric by the Saudi authorities – and subsequent events, leading to the breaking of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran — has led to an alarming new high in sectarian tensions within the Muslim community. This was also manifested in Kashmir with protests against the execution leading to reports of inflammatory slogans from both *Sunnis* and *Shias*<sup>6</sup>. Many other international episodes had a huge impact on the relations between the *shias* and *sunnis* in Kashmir.

1. The plane crash of Zia-ul-Haq<sup>7</sup> and the rumor about his *Shia* pilot and a suicide attack conspiracy to kill the General.
2. The *Shia* killings and the blasts in mosques and Imambarghas in Pakistan by those who have been shouting for Kashmir freedom has also led the *shias* to say that,
 

“You want us to fight for making Kashmir a part of Pakistan where *Shia* are massacred? No way!”<sup>8</sup>

The things are believed to have made *Shias* the perceptible allies of India. They argue that it is better to stay with India than face the massacring with Pakistan.

3. *Shia* cleric and scholar Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr along with 47 others in Saudi Arabia triggered protests among Kashmiri *Shias* across the Valley. Some people saw Nimr’s execution by the Saudi authorities through a *Shia-Sunni* equation. The same emotion echoed across the Valley during the protests as *Shia* anger over the execution poured on the streets. As tensions rose, there were fears of a *Shia-Sunni* showdown. As *Shia* demonstrators raised slogans denouncing the Saudi rulers, sectarian disturbances seemed on hand. *Sunnis* also complained that some *Shia* youth raised objectionable and abusive slogans against some historical personalities who *Sunnis* revere. This fuelled further tensions with a looming threat of a clash. Following are the two versions of a *sunni* and a *shia* cleric.

Abdul Lateef al-Kindi, General Secretary of a prominent *Sunni* religious organisation Jamiat Ahli-Hadith, says the execution of Nimr by the Saudi authorities is not a sectarian

<sup>6</sup> <https://kashmirreader.com/2016/01/09/shia-and-sunni/> retrieved on 01.01.2019

<sup>7</sup> The then president of Pakistan, 1988

issue as 47 *Sunnis* were also executed along with him by the Saudis. “Those who came on streets to protest the killing of Nimr took it in a wrong way. They made it a *Shia-Sunni* matter when it was not,” says al-Kindi. He feels any counter protests by *Sunnis* in support of Saudi Arabia could have “stirred up a hornets’ nest.” al-Kindi is pointing to the polarization that often takes place in Kashmir between the two sects because of some local or global happening involving *Shias* and *Sunnis*.

The President of J&K Anjuman-e-Sharie-*Shian*, Agha Syed Hassan Mosawi, says that Kashmiris didn’t take it as a *Shia-Sunni* matter. “The people came out on the streets to show solidarity with the family of Sheikh Nimr who was executed for no crime. “I don’t know why people are seeing it through sectarian prism when it is not. *Sunnis* too protested along with *Shias*. It is wrong to say that these protests were driven by sectarian zeal.” The global Impact is too evident in the statement as affirms that, “the *Shias*, too consider the Saudi King as the custodian of the two mosques but the Saudi King must behave like a king. “It doesn’t befit the Saudi King to muzzle dissentious voices by executing people.”

4. The active participation of Iran and Lebnonian *Shia* Millitia Hizbullah against ISIS<sup>9</sup> and its allies is alleged to maintain the status quo in Syria i.e. the Assad administration and killing of anti-Assad militia and civilians.
5. The emergence of the Wahabi ISIS that had the full support of America, Israel and its allies has succeeded in influencing the Arab world, the bastion of *Wahabi* ideology. This ideology was always anti-*shia* and even declares *shias* as apostates from Islam. In Kashmir too, some people had inclined themselves to it which essentially was harmful for the mutual cooperation. Although its flags have been displayed sometimes but Syed Ali Shah Geelani and many other prominent *sunni* scholars, after witnessing their activities, have declared that the ‘ISIS does not represent Islam’<sup>10</sup>.
6. The latest sectarian riots between the *shias* and *sunnis* of Kashmir occurred in 2011 leading to the plunder, loot of *shia* property in many villages of Budgam district and burning of whole *shia* village (*Tchayehoma*). One interesting observation is that in such violent incidences, *shias* prefer army to be deployed for their security rather than the state police whom *shias* allege playing favouritism against them.

The history of *Shia* and *Sunni* relations has been marked by more conflicts and rapprochement and less by unity and harmony. However, the history is also marked by some selected endeavours from both the communities, like Al-Azhar verdict and Ayatollah Khomeini’s efforts, in order to bridge the gap. One of such endeavour came in the form of the Landmark declaration of Egypt’s Al-Azhar chair of Excellency, as follows:

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/427844/Five-episodes-from-the-Shia-Muslims-of-Kashmir> retrieved on 01.01.2019

<sup>9</sup> Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: A militant a militant organization, often described as an offshoot of al Qaeda in 2014. It took control of large parts of Iraq and Syria, raising its black flag in victory and declaring the creation of a caliphate and imposing strict Islamic rule.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.indiatoday.in/latest-of-the-lot/story/isis-does-not-represent-islam-says-syed-ali-shah-geelani-302713-2016-01-07> retrieved on 05.01.2019

### Al-Azhar Verdict on the *Shia*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

His Excellency was asked:

Some believe that, for a Muslim to have religiously correct worship and dealing, it is necessary to follow one of the four known schools of thought, whereas, &quot;al-*Shia* al- Imamiyyah&quot; school of thought is not one of them nor &quot;al-*Shia* al-Zaidiyyah.&quot; Do your Excellency agree with this opinion, and prohibit following &quot;al-*Shia* al-Imamiyyah al-Ithna Ashariyyah&quot; school of thought, for example?

His Excellency replied:

1) Islam does not require a Muslim to follow a particular Madh'hab (school of thought). Rather, we say: every Muslim has the right to follow one of the schools of thought which has been correctly narrated and its verdicts have been compiled in its books. And, everyone who is following such Madhahib (schools of thought) can transfer to another school, and there shall be no crime on him for doing so.

2) The Ja'fari school of thought, which is also known as &quot;al-*Shia* al- Imamiyyah al-Ithna Ashariyyah&quot;(i.e., The Twelver Imami Shi'ites) is a school of thought that is religiously correct to follow in worship as are other *Sunni* schools of thought. Muslims must know this, and ought to refrain from unjust prejudice to any particular school of thought, since the religion of Allah and His Divine Law (Shari'ah) was never restricted to a particular school of thought. Their jurists (Mujtahidoon) are accepted by Almighty Allah, and it is permissible to the &quot;non-Mujtahid&quot; to follow them and to accord with their teaching whether in worship (Ibadaat) or transactions (Mu'amilaat).

Signed,

Mahmood Shaltoot<sup>11</sup>.

This verdict of recognition of *Shias* as one of the authentic Islamic school of thought from the seat of highest learning in *Sunnis* fulfilled the dream of Shite minority community who, till date were facing the recognition crisis from the majority community.

Similarly, to strengthen the brethren, several initiatives have been taken by the *Shia* central leadership of Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini then and by Ayatollah Khamenei now. The idea of Al-Quds Day and Hafta-e-Wahadat are Khomeini's brainchild, furthered and implemented by Khamenei after his demise.

On every Al-Quds International day<sup>12</sup>, the *Shias* in particular come out in streets with fierce denunciations of Israel, America, Saudi Arabia, Britain and the like-minds for their suppressive policies and oppressions on Palastine, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. The following sloganeering was witnessed during the field sudy:

- *La Sharqiyya la garbiyya: Islamia Islamia*
- *La Shiaa La sunniya: Islamia Islamia*

<sup>11</sup> The above Fatwa was announced on July 6, 1959 from the Head of al-Azhar University, and was subsequently published in many publications in the Middle East which include, but are not limited to:

1. Al-Sha'ab newspaper (Egypt), issue of July 7, 1959.

2. Al-Kifah newspaper (Lebanon), issue of July 8, 1959.

The above segment can also be found in the book &quot;Inquiries about Islam &quot;, by Muhammad Jawad Chirri, Director of the Islamic Center of America, 1986 Detroit, Michigan.



- *Marg Bar America :Marg bar Israel*
- *Ek se bad kar ek zaleel: America Israael*
- *Aye Gasibo, aye Jabiro: Falasteen humara chod do*
- *Iran se Khabar aaye: Shia Sunni Bhai Bhai*
- *Islam/Falasteen/Iraq/Iran/Lebnaon/Kashmir k Mujahido:Hum tumhare saath hain*

Furthermore, one of Ayatollah Khamenei's messages asking *shias* to celebrate the *Hafta-e-Wahadat*<sup>13</sup> i.e. from 12-17<sup>th</sup> *Rabiy-ul-awwal*; in which the entire week is celebrated as the auspicious arrival of Prophet Muhammad (s). The *Shias* mostly celebrate it on 12<sup>th</sup> whereas *sunnis* on 17<sup>th</sup> of the month. Nowadays, on both days, the people irrespective of their sectarian affiliations join the celebration processions, gatherings, *naat* competitions, talk shows, rallies, etc anywhere amidst these dates. However, it is pertinent to mention here, that this idea of bringing the two communities closer is yet to be embraced by the *Sunni* community at large.

The *Shias* also have received green signals from their present Supreme leader i.e. Ayatollah Khamenei in many of his sermons all throughout the decades after the Iranian revolution. Few of his important statements are mentioned below:

- i. *The issue of Kashmir is an issue of Humanity*<sup>14</sup> - May 25, 1990
- ii. *"For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the issue of Kashmir is an issue of humanity and Islam since the Muslim people of this region are clearly subject to oppression and tyranny and we have always expressed to the government of India our abhorance towards what is being done to the Muslim people of Kashmir and we will continue to express the same feelings in various circles."* September 11, 1994
- iii. *"We hope that the issue of Kashmir will also be solved in the best way which guarantees the rights and interests of the people living in this region so that they will be provided with peace and comfort".* April 12, 2001
- iv. *Helping the Palestinian nation and the besieged people of Gaza; sympathy towards and cooperation with the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Kashmir; selfless efforts and resistance against the aggression of the U.S. and the Zionist regime; safeguarding the unity of Muslims: these are great responsibilities that currently rest upon the shoulders of prominent figures of the Islamic Ummah.* November 15, 2010<sup>15</sup>
- v. *"U.S. officials do not have a plan for uprooting DAESH. Like the British-- who have kept the wound of Kashmir open since an era of colonialism on the Indian subcontinent, which has resulted in the discord of two neighboring countries, India and Pakistan, till today--the Americans desire to act, in regards to DAESH, in a way*

<sup>12</sup> On the decree of Imam Khomeini, the founder of Iranian Revolution, the last Friday of every Ramadhan (The fasting month), on which there are worldwide denunciations and support for Palastine

<sup>13</sup> Unity week i.e. to be celebrated from 12<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> *Rabbiy-ul-Awwal* every Islamic calendar year, so as to incorporate both the *Shia* and *sunni* versions of the birth date of Prophet Muhammad (s) i.e. 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> respectively.

<sup>14</sup> <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/3653/The-issue-of-Kashmir-is-an-issue-of-humanity-Ayatollah-Khamenei> retrieved on 01.01.2019

<sup>15</sup> Ibid retrieved on 01.01.2019

*that this problem is ongoing in Iraq without ever being resolved.”* November 22, 2016

Similarly, another supreme *Shia* leader Ayatollah Sistani from Iraq says that, “the Sunnis not our brethren, but our souls”<sup>16</sup>. This shows that there exists a sort of unanimity amidst the decrees of these two present grand *shia* Ayatollahs. The point to ponder is that *shias* are never allowed to go against these decrees (wherein they both have mentioned that the desecration of revered personalities of *sunnis* are forbidden) and are obliged to follow that.

### ***Shias and Sunnis: Changing relations***

All the above mentioned incidents have left long lasting impressions between *Shias* and *Sunnis*. Earlier the communities enjoyed a very close relationship with each other. History has records of these united gatherings. Justice Hakim Imtiyaz Hussain writes that, “...the *sunnis* wholeheartedly participated in the mourning congregations held by *Shias* in memory of the martyrs of Karbala” (Hussain 2017:260). They even helped in carrying out the processions and in the distributions of eatables. There were organizations of the *majalis-e-hussaini* in every nook and corner of the valley. Even the respective religious heads have been stressing on the unity among the sections. They themselves used to visit each other’s shrines, *kahnqahs*, mosques, *Imambaras* which strengthened the *shia-sunni* relations. Even the *Sunni* scholars have been paying their devotional respects to the martyrs of Karbala.

### **The Discord**

This is a universal fact that the minorities everywhere live in prejudices and socially constructed accusations and stigmas. These accusations over period of time become consolidated and the forced identity of the minorities, preventing the members from the majority community to establish contacts and commensurate with the minorities. The *Shias* of Kashmir also have been the victims of these constructed accusations and stigmas. Some of the few such tacit and propagandist accusations that have become identity of Kashmiri *Shias* are as follows:

- ‘*Shias* are cannibals. They consider eating *sunnis* legal.
- *Shias* keep *indertul*/pointed metallic object used in *charkha*, to injure the *Sunnis*.
- The *Shias* have horns like animals do.
- *Shias* spit in any liquid offerings to *sunnis*.
- The touched food of a Hindu is better than the clean and untouched food offerings of *Shias*.<sup>17</sup>
- *Sunnis* must shed-off those clothes that come in contact with any *Shia*.
- Watching their *Muharram* processions invalidates the Marital Knot i.e. *Nikah*

<sup>16</sup> <https://lubpak.net/archives/279195> retrieved on 8.01.2019

<sup>17</sup> *Nidaay-e-Haq*, Munshi Mohammad Ishaq, page 69

- *Shias* openly curse the first three caliphs.

Nonetheless, there are many more things that have been observed during the field study. The advent of the Wahabism has severely dented the developing cordial relationship. Airing the above statements along-with many other allegations against the *shias*, the wahabi brand of Islam do not consider *shias* as Muslims. Even many incidents in the valley occurred wherein if any *sunni* scholar expressed his reverence to the *shia* school of thought, he was bound to be disrespected directly or indirectly. The incidence of the new Hurriyat Chairman Mohammad Ashraf Sehrai, praising Imam Khomeini in one of his statements<sup>18</sup> and getting castigated for the same is not new and he received open denunciations for that. Hence, these days the ground reality is different what the scholars at the global level has aimed for.

The global impact on the Kashmir locale can be observed while venturing in the ground. Although the attempts to keep the relationships growing have only been expressed and applied by the *shias* whereas the *sunnis* are mostly attempting to maintain a safe distance from the *shias*. They no longer participate in any *shia* ceremonies and functions which earlier was normal. The following few things are noteworthy:

- ❖ The *Shias-Sunnis* no longer participate in the religious events of each other. They now portray an attitude on indifference to each other. No or negligible *sunnis* are seen either in participating the Ashura Processions or in the distributions of drinks and food.
- ❖ Even the desecrations of each other's religious signs and symbols no longer affect them. They have developed a cold-blooded carefree attitude as if there exists no relation between these two communities.
- ❖ The socio-cultural activities that took place together are no longer preferred in that way. If at all some *sunnis* are forced to invites some *shias* for their wedding or any other pleasant event, the questions of the people who will give them company while eating is always a big question.
- ❖ At some places the *sunnis* have kept those utensils separate in which they have offered food/drinks to a *shia*. They do never use it for any of the family members.
- ❖ Sensing back lashing from their fellow brethren, the *Shias* and *Sunni* now-a-days never prefer to tie their nuptial knot with each-other.

Until few years back they used to have the food with each other on the marriage or on any such ceremony. However, these-days, a Kashmir-wide change has been observed that they no longer prefer inter-mixing in socio-cultural gatherings. The food to be served in such gatherings are preferably avoided if the hand that kills (butcher) and cooks (shaf) is *shia* the and all possible barriers are erected to prevent any such get together. The statement is supplemented by the following two field observations:

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-6zrdV79HY> retrieved on 15.01.2019

- I. Sofipora (a remote village of district Anantnag, Kashmir), has both the communities living there. They used to have cordial relationships with each other, until a *sunni* wahabi cleric preached them that this intermixing is wrong. This even divided the *sunnis* and two factions were born i.e. the supporters and opponents of the cleric's ideology. Among one of the supporters, he invited people from both the communities (*shias/sunnis*) on his entry in newly constructed home. But it was observed that there were separate rooms for each community to have their supper apparently in order to maintain the hassle-free atmosphere, which has never happened in the history of the area.
- II. Similarly, in the same area, a *sunni* slab workers guild refused to have any cooked thing from the *shia* master's home in whose house they had come for work. They asked him to rearrange for their raw materials separately and they will cook for them themselves rather than have the cooked food from his house.

However *Shias*, subjected to the decrees of the central leadership have always been in search for the moments that will/may foster their relations once again. The celebrations of *Al-Quds* International day, decree which forbids desecration of the revered personalities of *Sunnis*, *Hafta-e-Wahadat*, denouncing all form of oppressions during Muharram Processions, etc have been some of the efforts of this kind, which a true *shias* heartily follows. On one hand, Iran tries to glue these major sects together, whereas on the other hand, the monarch of Saudi Arabia is busy in pleasing their masters like America, Israel and Britain who have always projected their anti-shai or anti-Iran sentiments.

## Conclusion

The above discussion leads us to conclude that there have been ups and downs in the *shia-sunni* relationships all throughout the history. The *shias* have faced many problems by the larger community but even though they have been successful to a significant extent in maintain the harmony before globalization. The relationships changed altogether with the *shias* trying to abreast *sunnis* in all walks of life, the decrees and guidelines of which have been laid by their leaders like Ayatollahs, Khamenei and Seestani. The *sunnis* have been severely affected by the puritanical version of Islam in the form of wahabism, which is explicitly against *Shias* and any developing connections with them. The globalization has shown different impacts on *shias* and *sunnis* with *shias* ready to embrace them with open arms while *sunnis* mostly attempt to avoid any contact with *Shias*.

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