Nexus of Non-Traditional Security Threats and Conflict: (In) Vulnerability of Gilgit Baltistan's Societal Sector to Sectarianism

By

Yasir Abbas (Registration No: 00000401498)

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies Centre for

International Peace and Stability

National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST)

Islamabad, Pakistan(2024)

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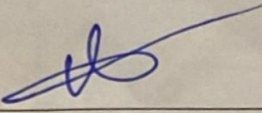
Supervisor: Dr. Najimdeen Bakare

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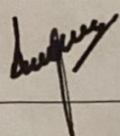
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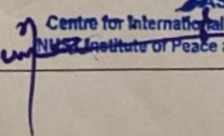
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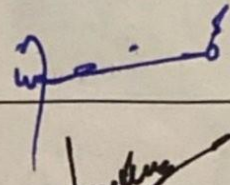# National University of Sciences & Technology

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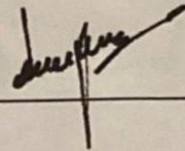### Examination Committee Members

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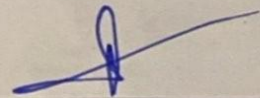2. Name: **Dr. Ansar Jamil**   Signature: _____

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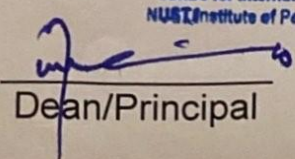Supervisor's name: **Dr. Najimdeen Bakare**   Signature: _____

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Student Name: <u>**Yasir Abbas**</u>   Signature:

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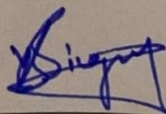Student Signature: ——————————

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to the people of Gilgit Baltistan. I hope that its findings inspire future generations from the said region to conduct further research on Gilgit Baltistan and pray that they succeed in developing an academic understanding of its various issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contents

ABSTRACT

Gilgit Baltistan constitutes the North and North-eastern part of Pakistan. The region has strategic significance to the country as it links the country with China. It is also abundant with diverse natural resources, chief among those is water. Gilgit Baltistan hosts the longest glaciers, outside the Polar Regions, in the world. It has around 7000 glaciers. Hence, the region is an important source of fresh water. Sectarianism has threatened the societal fabric of Pakistan's Gilgit Baltistan region. The region has been experiencing successive waves of sectarian upsurge since the 1970s. The worst incidents that stand out are: the '*Lashkar Kashi*' in 1988 and the chain of Sunni killings that ensued as a result of Agha Ziauddin's assassination in 2005. The study suggests that a gradual increase in sectarian incidents has the potential to generate a deadly conflict in the future. The purpose of this study was to find out the root causes of sectarianism in the region and it applies Copenhagen School's Securitization Theory to identify and emphasize upon the role of the securitizing actors and the relevant securitizing moves they have implemented or need to be implemented. The study explains why sectarianism needs to be securitized in and what important securitizing moves are vital for peace in the region. The study is interview-based and it has been complemented with secondary data. The interviews contained semi-structured and open-ended questions. Purposive sampling technique was employed for the sample size. The study is based on Case-Study research design. The time period for the case study was from 1970 to 2024. The study proved that sectarianism is indeed a threat to the peace and stability of the region and that securitization is indispensable for peace and stability.

Keywords: Sectarianism, Gilgit Baltistan, *Lashkar Kashi*, State-Subject Rule, Securitization

INTRODUCTION

Background

Insecurities have the potential to generate conflict in any society. If people are insecure about their lives, their livelihood and those of their children they take radical steps in this regard and most often these steps generate insecurities or dilemma in others which results in a continuous cycle of trying to one-up the other which ultimately leads to large conflicts. Apart from traditional military threats, people also have insecurities regarding non-traditional security threats. For example, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty etc. create feelings of desperation, marginalization, hatred towards others and these feelings can be exploited by opportunists for their own interests. There is a nexus between these non-traditional security threats and conflicts. To better understand this nexus we will consider the case of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The region, formerly known as the 'Northern Areas', was renamed Gilgit-Baltistan in 2009 during the government of Pakistan People's Party in an effort to grant it more autonomy and recognition within Pakistan. The region was formerly called the 'Northern Areas' due to its geographical location in the northern most part of the country where it borders Afghanistan, China and India. The Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip in the Badakshan Province of Afghanistan, separates Gilgit-Baltistan from Tajikistan. At its narrowest point it is only 16 kilometres wide (Dr. Muhammad Munir 2018) and you can see Tajikistan from Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

The region has been part of the Kashmir Conflict since 1947 and both India and Pakistan lay claims to the territory. Being a part of the Kashmir Conflict has not been beneficial to Gilgit-Baltistan as it hindered progress in the region and as a result it could not develop like the rest of the country. Since 1947, the people of the region have faced political and economic instability, and in some periods of its history it saw burning issues at the societal level as well, in the shape of sectarian killings – episodes of which reoccur every now and then. Moreover, recently, we have witnessed mass casualties in the region due to global warming and glacial lake outbursts (or flash floods) i.e. in the environmental sector. With the current wave of unregulated tourism in the region, it seems to be becoming a hotbed for all sorts of challenges and troubles up ahead.

The region's strategic location is significant because it provides the shortest route for Pakistan to Central Asia and for China towards Afghanistan and beyond. The famous Broghil/Broghol Pass (3798m) in Chitral connects the Badakshan Province of Afghanistan to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over the Hindu Kush Mountains. Gilgit-Baltistan also holds historical as well as contemporary strategic importance because the Great Silk Route passed through it and now the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passes through it, as it enters Pakistan through the Khunjerab Pass (4693m) in the Karakoram Mountains. The region is rich in metallic, non-metallic, and energy minerals like Gold, Platinum, Palladium, Copper, Iron ore, Antimony, Zinc, Cobalt, Lead, Arsenic, Molybdenum, and Bismuth. It also includes precious and semi-precious stones like Ruby, Emerald, Tourmaline, Zircon, Pargasite, Sapphire, Aquamarine, Topaz etc.

The region also feeds the crop fields of Punjab and Sindh with fresh glacial water. River Indus enters Pakistan in Kharmang District of Gilgit-Baltistan and flows through Baltistan, Diamer and enters Khyber Pakhtunkhwa around Kohistan. Then it enters Punjab and then Sindh and then into the Arabian Sea, and it feeds the crop fields along the way. The world's largest earth and rock filled dam, Tarbela Dam, is built on the Indus River. The current Diamer-Basha Dam is also being constructed on the Indus River. These dams alongside barrages like the Chashma and Guddu Barrages, constructed on the Indus River provide water storage support and generate electricity. Gilgit-Baltistan is also called the 'Third Pole' of the world, because it has the largest and longest glacial systems in the world outside of the Polar Regions. The Hisper and Biafu Glaciers merge to form a continuous winter wonderland that is more than a 100 kilometres in length. Other glaciers include Hopar, Baltoro Glacier, Siachen, Bilafond, Batura, Trango, Panmah, Khurdopin, Chumik, Rupal etc. These glaciers

feed different rivers like the Hunza, Ghizer, Shigar, Shingo-Shigar, and Shyok Rivers. These all are the tributaries of the mighty Indus because all of them merge in the Indus at one point or another. Hence, there are no doubts that the region, along with its resources, is vital to Pakistan.

It has been seen in many resource rich regions all over the developing world that if you lack efficient policies, sincere will and proper mechanisms to extract raw materials and put it to proper use, the resources become a curse for the indigenous people. The story of Gilgit-Baltistan follows a similar pattern: despite the richness in resources, people do not have a decent standard of life. Poverty is rampant across the region and most people in far flung valleys depend on domesticated cattle and small farms to make ends meet. In terms of infrastructure road networks the Karakoram Highway and the Baltistan Highway (Juglot-Skardu road) are the only ones which come at par with the national standard. Still, these two highways are affected by landslides multiple times across the year. Other than that land routes leading towards the many valleys are either in a dilapidated state which makes them dangerous to travel given that on one side is the mountain and on the other side is the river, or they are non-existent. For example, to reach Gultari, a village on the other side of Deosai Plateau, locals have to cross the Deosai Plans which is not possible during winters. This restricts movement of people in those 5, 6 villages alongside Gultari; they cannot even reach Skardu.

People have repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction over the road conditions in the region, to the government. The educational and health sectors are also a source of disappointment to the people. Two universities have been established recently but there isn't a single medical or engineering college in the whole region. Students have to come to other parts of the country to pursue their academic degrees which costs them extra besides the education fee. There isn't a single female gynaecologist in District Ganche. Women in labour have to be referred to Skardu District Hospital where most of them give birth during the journey or die due to complications during child birth because the journey takes 2.5-3 hours.

They have also expressed their anger, through peaceful demonstrations, over the political future of the region. Despite the fact that the region secured its independence from Dogra rule without external help and offered to join Pakistan, its constitutional status remains a big challenge for Pakistan. It does not have a setup like that of Azad Kashmir neither it is like other provinces of Pakistan. The 2009 "Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Ordinance" renamed the region to Gilgit-Baltistan and provided it with a Legislative Assembly, its members, and a cabinet led by the Chief Minister but what use it is when the region is financially dependent on the Federal government as there is no taxation mechanism.

Recent sectarian tensions in August 2023 have brought the region again into national focus and now thanks to Social Media Platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter) etc. people from all over the country are receiving regular updates from the region and are concerned about it.

Problem Statement
Sectarianism, once an alien concept to the natives, has become a curse for the region. Incidents of people being taken off buses, their identity cards checked, and killed on the Karakoram Highway, have made the road vulnerable, specifically, to Shia travellers. In retaliation, innocent Sunnis, who, unfortunately, happen to be in the wrong place, at the wrong time, are killed. It is negatively affecting the tourism industry which is the backbone of the regional economy. Its root causes need to be identified and addressed otherwise it will hinder what little developmental work is taking place in an already marginalized region.

Hypothesis
"Sectarianism has the potential to initiate armed conflict in Gilgit Baltistan."

Independent Variable: Sectarianism.

Dependent Variable: Conflict in Gilgit Baltistan.

Research questions
Question 1: Why did sectarianism rise in Gilgit Baltistan?

Question 2: What social, political and economic reasons strengthened its roots?

Question 3: What has been the response of the government, religious institutions, civil society and ordinary citizens to this issue and what further important steps should be taken to eradicate this menace from the society?

Research objectives
The objective of this research is to find out why did sectarianism rise in Gilgit-Baltistan and its nexus with potential conflict in the region. It will explore the underlying social, political and economic reasons that have strengthened its roots in the region. It will enlist the response of the government, religious institutions, civil society and ordinary citizens to this issue and also highlight what further important steps could be taken to eradicate this menace from the society.

Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need for security stems from insecurity — insecurities relating to one's life, children, wealth, health, mental health, environment, prestige, respect etc. But security, throughout history, has been observed from a state-centric view (Hama 2017). A State-centric view means from the state's perspective, like how would it affect the interests of the state – its economy, its territorial integrity etc. In monarchies as well, the monarch (king/queen/emperor) and the state were identified as the same; hence safety of the state meant the safety of the monarch and a threat to the state meant a threat to the monarch.

This definition of security ignored the fates of common citizens during times of both peace and war. It ignored the civilian casualties resulting from total wars. It ignored the fact that there can be peace — an absence of violence — but citizens can still be insecure in terms of their jobs or financial situations, or worried about their physical health due to hazardous industrial chemicals being released into fresh water resources. But is not state protection same as protection of its citizens? Is it not the case that by protecting the boundary and border the protection of everything inside is being ensured? The answer is no! It is just like asking a slave whether he felt secure given that his master is keeping him well-fed and protecting him from external threats. Because come day light, he will again be deployed on the fields or wherever his master wishes him to be. The question which needs to be asked here is not only about security from physical threats but about the security of human rights. A slave might be well-protected and well-fed but did he or she had any choice of what to wear, what to eat, or even whom to see (marry)? History tells us that their individual rights were crushed, they were treated unfairly; the working hours and conditions were inhumane, but the masters benefitted from it — the state benefitted from it. They had no right to question if their masters tortured or killed them (Morgan 2005).

This is the aspect of security that has been missing throughout history. All that mattered was that the ruling elite or the king (and also the royal family) be kept safe, well-dressed, well-educated, and well-fed, at the expense of the peasants and lower class. Other than the elite the other two classes (middle and lower) meant nothing. Rights and privileges only belonged to the elites, others were just insects which lived (and worked) to sustain the kingdom/empire or the state, therefore it can be said that security has only been defined as deemed fit for the state and threats have mostly been identified as military threats. This is known as the traditional understanding of security. What has been really missing about security, throughout history, has been its human aspect or human security or what is generally referred to as non-traditional security threat in the larger security framework. So what are non-traditional security threats? And what is 'human security'?

To securitise something means to take measures and steps to safeguard it from threats. Traditionally, securitisation has been primarily 'military' in nature. The state improved its military capability to ward off threats that were military in nature. This remained the traditional understanding of security throughout history. In contrast, non-traditional understanding of security also includes those threats which are by nature 'non-military'. Baldwin says that power dynamics in the military sector, alone, cannot comprehend the true strength of a nation. Military might is only a component of power which also includes other components like economic strength, technological innovation and the power to set international norms. Threats to components other than the military are what are termed as 'Non-Traditional Security Threats' (Baldwin 2016).

Scholars from the Copenhagen School such as Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jap De Wilde have enriched the literature of security studies with their significant contributions. Buzan says that security is a social construction and its agenda needs to be broadened to include non-traditional security sectors such as the economic, societal,

environmental and political sectors, respectively (Buzan et al. 1983). Buzan also sheds light on Regional Security Complexes like how states share the same security concerns and how they tackle it. These includes threats such as transnational terrorism, climate change related disasters such as floods, smog, tsunamis etc. States can securitize and de-securitize issues. The concept of securitization has received much attention in the works of the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al. 2003; Buzan et al. 1983). Securitization means framing an issue as a high level security threat which needs utmost attention. The process includes 'Speech Act' and securitizing agents/actors. One such example would be of politicians (securitizing agent/actor) framing an issue, such as migration, as an existential threat to the local culture, through public speeches and calling for an immediate blockade to the flow of immigrants. This act creates a sense of urgency in the public attitude, which in turn renders parliament to legislate accordingly.

Unlike the state as the referent unit of traditional security, scholarships on NTS have demonstrated how imperative NTS is as a serious concern for regional organisation or multilateral institutions such as ASEAN and SCO (Aris 2009; Knapp 2016). Similarly, the NTS as a strategic tool can facilitate regional organisations engage and make transition from low-politics to high-politics. At the same time, a focus on NTS by state and regional organisations can help reduce dependency, especially on a powerful neighbour state (Knapp 2016). These challenges transcend national boundaries, and are exacerbated by globalization and are a direct threat to the wellbeing of states that are primarily out of non-military sources (Kim 2012). The list includes climate change, transnational terrorism, ethnic violence, human rights abuse, unemployment, infectious diseases, organized crime like human and drug trafficking, irregular migration (Acharya 2009).

For example, global warming has drastically melted the glaciers in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These glaciers feed the Amu and Syr Rivers. Moreover, salinity in Khwarazm region of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan leads to winds carrying tons of salt to the majestic Tien-Shan and Pamir Mountain ranges resulting in further glacial melting. Almost 1000 Kyrgyz glaciers have been lost in the last 4 decades and 1/3rd of Tajik glaciers have also been lost in the last fifty years of the 20th century. Water shortage is extremely visible in the case of Kazakhstan as the country is highly dependent on its neighbours for 50 percent of its water requirement (Kim 2012). It results in scarcity which is one of the determinants and drivers of conflict (Homer-Dixon 1999).

"Non-Traditional Security Challenges transcend national boundaries; they go beyond the military sphere; their appearance is sudden and unexpected; yet they are interwoven with traditional security threats," General (R) Xiong Guankai (Khan 2009: 40). Dr. Raja categorizes NTS into three main categories: Natural Disasters – such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. He also places diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Swine Flu, HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis in this category. Next are the semi-natural threats which affect vital resources and economic workings of a state like water shortage, energy scarcity, poverty and unemployment etc. The third category is purely man-made. Examples are transnational terrorism, insurgencies, trafficking (of all kinds), and all sorts of environmental degradation including damages to ecosystems (Khan 2009). If we analyse the security situation in South Asia (between Pakistan and India), in view of the above quote by General (retired) Xiong Guankai of the People's Liberation Army, we can see that security dilemma is so high that government budgets are spent more on the military than at the societal sector (Imran 2023).

NTS can also develop as a result of the relationship between states. For example the Chinese government's meddling in the economic sector of Mongolia has had a huge impact on its environmental sector. It has disrupted the local ecosystem — this disruption has been aided by the post-cold war privatization of Mongolia as the country adopted capitalism. There is a big demand of animals and animal products from China; illegal animal/animal product trade amounts to $100 million annually. This has resulted in abrupt decline of animal

population. For example the Mongolian Gazelle, Ibex, Red Deer, Antelope, Yakut Moose etc. have seen rapid decline in their population due to Chinese demands (Reeves 2013).

There is another concept in security studies – other than Non-Traditional Security Threats – that stresses upon the need to look at security from a non-military perspective. It is called 'Human Security'. Even though the two concepts are not the same and each has its own characteristics, nevertheless they share a lot of commonalities that is why while doing a review of literature over non-traditional security threats, literature relating to human security is also consulted — the foremost similarity between them is that they both helped shifting the focus of security studies from a state-centric (traditional military approach) to a more people-centric approach (Newman 2010). The term was, for the first time, authoritatively coined in the 'Human Development Report of 1994' by Dr. Mahbub ul Haq (Gregoratti 2013). Human Security defined security from a human-centric perspective. There are 7 indicators of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, and community security, respectively (UNDP 1994) — It explained universal concerns like unemployment, drug addiction/trafficking, organized crime, pollution, hunger, poverty, terrorism, ethnic disputes, disease, and climate change etc. as deep matters of security. In other words, security is freedom from want and freedom from fear (Borgwardt 2008).

The second concept in this literature review is 'Conflict'. Researchers from different backgrounds like sociology, political science, psychology etc. have contributed to this concept. Charles Darwin said that all nature is at war against the other. One organism is in constant struggle against another one or with external nature (Deutsch 2006). It is for existence and the result ought to be the survival of the fittest. Karl Marx highlighted class conflict as a struggle between the rich bourgeoisies and the working proletariats. Marx concludes that in a conflict the latter group has nothing to lose other than their slavery chains (Deutsch 2006). Factual disagreements, conflicting goals and relational aspects are some sources of conflict. Factual disagreements stem from differences of opinion. Conflicting goals means conflicting interests. Relational aspects mean the state of the relationship between the conflicting parties like distrust, power struggle etc. (Mostert 1998) Erik suggests that for factual disagreements effective communication and joint research/joint fact finding should be encouraged and if a third party, on whose results both agree and trust, is incorporated, it will help in getting the facts straight. For conflicting goals there should be convergence of goals; there should be concessions, compensations for a win-win solution. Solving multiple issues instead of that one main issue or issue linkage will also help in solving this issue. For relational aspects a mediator should be consulted or 'improved communication and understanding' should be encouraged; because as long as you don't speak and act on your biased judgements about the others, it won't solve anything (Mostert 1998).

Justice and conflict have a bi-directional relationship – meaning that justice prevents conflict while injustice makes way for conflict and in turn conflict aggravates injustice (Deutsch 2006). Another important relationship is between power and conflict. Bertrand Russell says that power is to social science what energy is to physics (Russell 1938). Power is the central concept in social sciences and for us, in our current discussion, power is also important, as power has the ability to turn an unjust society into a just one and vice versa. Power is the universal currency (Milhench 2004). Deutsch says that power is of two types: primary and secondary power. Secondary power is the ability to use power in the conventional sense in an already given system while primary power is the ability to construct reality. In other words it is the ability to change norms and values (Deutsch 2006).

Another important factor in understanding conflicts is its relationship with communication. What is communication and why is it important? It is important because people – or parties to a conflict – have their own perceptions, preconceived ideas, and prejudices about others and they, most of the time, take action based on those prejudices and biases. Until there is communication and exchange of words, people won't be able to

understand the other's perspective – their fears, wants and needs etc. A good communication commences when there is 'active listening'. Active listening does not mean listening to reply rather it means trying to understand what the other party is trying to convey to you and when formulating a reply being considerate of what the other party might take your words for (Deutsch 2006; Fisher 1991). It is necessary to build an atmosphere that breeds cooperation which is necessary for communication to take place; the initial focus should be on this. And we should be always careful about misunderstandings and active listening can mitigate this issue.

Emotions have an inevitable relationship with conflict. Surely it is all the rage, the anger, the urge for vengeance that intensifies conflict. But is there more to emotion then just raw projection? "The voice of intelligence is drowned out by the roar of fear. It is ignored by the voice of desire. It is contradicted by the voice of shame. It is biased by hate and extinguished by anger. Most of all, it is silenced by ignorance," said Karl Menninger, an American psychiatrist (Deutsch 2006: 274). His description of emotions is flawless as it helps in describing how emotions workout during conflict. Human beings display a range of emotions and of all the species humans show the most variety of emotions ranging from anger, fear, sadness, suspicion, to excitement, joy, love, gratitude, and compassion. Emotions monitor our inner-self and the external world and help us to act, based on inner feelings and the external environment, and these actions happen in an orderly and coherent way (Warren 2015).

Emotions are both biological and cultural. Biologically, emotions are a result of physiological changes in different parts of our brain. Culturally, emotions are socially attached with good and bad behaviour – based on cultural constructs (Deutsch 2006). For example, from an early childhood we are taught to help others and whenever we do we feel a surge of positive feelings (Aronson 2018). Culture stands for language, norms, values, rituals, beliefs, and practices. Cultures are not homogenous because no population can be categorized as a single culture because culture is always situational, flexible and responsive to the exigencies of the world that the individuals confront (Brigg 2009). The nuclear bomb of emotions is humiliation. A chosen trauma, experienced as humiliation and not mourned, leads to feeling of entitlement to revenge and, under the pressure of fear/anxiety, to collective regression (Volkan 2014).

A conflict is a problem which initially seems to have no solution but conflict resolution is the process that redefines the system so that there is a solution to the conflict which was unsolvable in the previous system (Shakun 1981).

Morton Deutsch's theory of 'cooperation-competition' explains how we go about a conflict and what will be the consequences of taking the route that we took. While some have pursued peace, others have promoted violence as an alternative solution to human problem (Steele 1976). Cooperation is one of the two ways that we can choose to resolve a conflict. It includes communication, friendliness, coordination, agreement, recognition and respect, striving to empower the other, and defining and minimizing conflicting interests. Cooperation is constructive. It builds on the virtuous characteristics of people to resolve conflicts and most of the time it ends up in a win-win situation for the conflicting parties (Deutsch 2006). The other strategy in resolving conflicts is competition. It is destructive in nature. It lacks communication and the atmosphere becomes bitter. There is no coordination, no agreements just maximizing one's power resulting in power struggles and arms race. It leads to egoistic tendencies and mutual destruction seems more favourable than defeat or conceding to others (Deutsch 2006).

Culture also plays a key role in conflict resolution. Irene K. H. Chew and Christopher Lim describe conflict as a result of a process in which one party seeks to maximize its interests in relation to the other party. They explain the effect of culture on conflict and conflict resolution, with Confucian teachings as an example (Chew 1995). Confucian values are conformity, collectivism, harmony and trustworthiness. It argues that conformity and

collectivism prevents its followers from confrontation and its followers do so for the sake of their interpersonal relationships.

Roger Fisher and William Ury's 'Principled Negotiations' are a masterpiece in conflict resolution (Fisher 1991). Their four principles are: focusing on interests rather than positions, generating options, considering alternatives, and using objective criteria. Participants of a conflict are advised to understand their emotions and those of the other; to make them explicit and acknowledge those of the others. Letting others express their emotions also helps in letting off some steam which will make them more relaxed and easy to negotiate. It is best that we reconcile our interests and not our positions because sometimes behind opposed positions lie shared interests. And to identify the other parties' interests we need to put ourselves in their shoes. Most of the time, basic human needs are the most obvious interests like 'security of life, food and shelter'. Roger Fisher suggests that we should make our interests known so that the other party gets a better understanding of our part of the problem – again, communication is the key here. Conflict has both constructive and destructive potential. It depends on how it is managed (Coleman 2004; Deutsch 2006).

When two parties cannot resolve their conflicts on their own, then mediation is the most preferred mode of conflict resolution. Mediation is a process where the parties workout their problems on their own with the help of a mediator. A mediator intervenes non-legally and in a non-therapeutic way to restructure the relationship as per the future behaviour negotiated by the parties (themselves) in the structured setting provided by the mediator (Foley 1983). Mediation is more successful than, say arbitration, because it provides a comfortable atmosphere to parties to the conflict, saves the parties time and additional expenses like court and lawyers. The participants feel heard and make their own future rules, in the presence of a mediator. It is neither law nor therapy but we can say that it is a mixture of both.

Conceptual clarity has hindered conflict resolution processes at many times – in the case of 'terrorism', for example. Some regard terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives (FBI 1992); some say it is the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological (P. Wilkinson 2001). If terrorism is the destruction of public property and killing innocent civilians, the Israeli government has been doing that to civilians in Gaza for so many years but they call it self defence against Hamas – 'terrorists'. Now, Hamas is not considered by many Muslim countries as a terrorist group instead they call them freedom fighters – countries like Iran and its Lebanon proxy Hezbollah openly support it (Warrick 2023). That is why definitional clarity of a concept is of utmost importance if conflict resolution is to succeed at the international stage (Tidwell 1993).

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical framework

'Securitisation Theory' has been developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. The school's main proponents are Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap De Wilde. The Copenhagen School established that security studies should be expanded to include the political, economic, societal and environmental sectors, respectively (Buzan et al. 1983; Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan 2010). According to Barry Buzan securitization is "an inter-subjective process that is the most extreme or the highest level of politicisation in which the issue is presented as an existential threat to the referent object by a securitising actor through so-called 'speech acts' and requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure" (Buzan et al. 1998: 23). To securitize something means to take extra measures to safeguard an object of concern from a perceived threat. Another important point this theory makes is that it says that security is a socially constructed phenomenon and it can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Roe 2012). Securitization theory gained prominence at the international scene after the end of the Cold-War, when violence related to non-state actors began to rise. The proponents of the Copenhagen School were 'wideners' in the 'traditional versus widener' debate over the definition of security. The traditionalists disagreed with the newcomers on the view that widening the scope of security makes it vague in its approach. While the wideners defended their view saying that human lives are more endangered in the traditional militarised sense of security (Kaunert and Yakubov 2017).

Securitization theory comprises the following six components: speech act, securitizing actor, audience, issue framing, referent object/securitization sectors and desecuritization (Buzan et al. 1998; Kaunert and Yakubov 2017). Firstly, speech act is a concept in linguistics which demonstrates the power and use of speech or language to label a particular issue as of utmost importance (Lenz-Raymann 2014; Waever 2011; Song 2015). Speech Act advocates speaking to act − instead of just mere words. Secondly, the next component is the securitizing actor. The securitizing actor, through speech act, is responsible for labelling an issue as a serious threat to the referent object. Securitizing actors can be the governments of a sovereign state or provincial assemblies or even individuals who have legislative powers to devise policies in response to the perceived threat. Usually these are politicians or members of civil society organizations who securitize issues which need immediate attention (Kaunert and Yakubov 2017). Thirdly, the next component is the audience. The securitizing actor must convince the audience and take it on-board, while labelling an issue as a serious threat to the referent object. The audience can be the general public, or parliament i.e. it depends on the context and the referent object, for which securitization is targeted. The audience grants legitimacy to the process, which otherwise would be illegal (Lenz-Raymann 2014).

Fourthly, issue framing and referent objects are the next two components of this theory. Securitizing actors frame certain issues as existential threats to certain referent objects, which in turn produces a demand for extra measures to mitigate the threat (Waever 2011). For example, scientists and environmental activists consider global warming as a significant threat to life on earth and blame anthropological activities such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, increasing carbon emissions etc. as direct causes of global warming. Here the issue is 'anthropological activities' and the referent object is 'life on Earth'. The securitizing actors − scientists and environmental activists − are striving to spread awareness amongst the general public, that they must force their governments to pursue environment-friendly policies otherwise the world would not be a habitable place in the coming centuries.

After the 9/11 incident many European states enacted laws that granted more control to law enforcement agencies to deal with Muslim citizens and immigrants. For example, the 2001 Everyday Security Law in France, the New Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 in the UK and many others in Germany and other states expanded police powers to check over Muslim citizens and immigrants like stopping, checking vehicles, searching unoccupied places, deportation on committing public disorder, banning religious groups that threaten democratic order, and freezing bank accounts etc. (Cesari 2012). Politicians even went a step further and openly condemned Islamic values, for example, Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), a right-wing party, said that "Islam is a totalitarian fascist ideology" (Cesari 2012: 434). If we examine the above example through the lens of Securitization Theory we can see that the referent object to safeguard is the 'European society', the threat is 'Islam and Muslim immigration', the securitizing actors are 'politicians' and speech act is being done through public speeches, the securitizing moves are the enacted laws and the audience is the European population. Finally, the last component is desecuritization. It is the reverse of securitization. Securitizing actors usually go for desecuritization when they perceive no other extra measures are needed to secure the referent object or the threat has ceased to exist (Roe 2004).

Furthermore, the Copenhagen School divides the fifth component, which is the referent object, into five sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. First, security in the military sector represents protection from threats to territorial integrity and the sovereignty of a state, and the lives of its citizens and resources. It is also the traditional understanding of security (Okolie 2022). Second is political security. Buzan says, "Political security is about the organizational stability of the social order(s)" (Buzan 1998: 141). Political actions are about recognizing (or otherwise), supporting and legitimizing people or certain actions (Buzan 1998). Buzan said that at the state level, political threats stand for those that undermine the political fabric of a state, since states are political entities hence they are susceptible to political threats as much as they are to military threats (Buzan 1998: 142). At the individual level, political security means that their individual rights are recognized and granted by the state such as right to life, education, a decent income, right to vote and choose your leader etc.

Third, the economic sector describes threats such global financial crises, trade imbalances among regions or countries, income inequalities among states or individuals. It also includes production (industries). Buzan (1991: 230) says that the idea of economic security rests on the relationship between the political structure of anarchy and the economic structure of market. There are the mercantilists and neomercantilists who believe that the state should have more control of the economic activities in which case the economic sector just becomes a part of the wider national or state security. While liberals tend to believe that the market should be given more freedom and the state should only intervene when the market signals crashing (Buzan 1998: 95). The referent objects in the economic sector can be the state or non-state actors such as multinational and transnational corporations (MNCs and TNCs) such as Apple Inc.

But the question here is how securitization can be done in the economic sector? Like what could be an existential threat in the economic sector? The answer lies in the referent object. If the referent object is an individual, a decent income or employment is necessary for its financial security. If not the case, then securitization might be done in order to ensure that individual's economic security. If it is the case of a state, then the situation may be of it going bankrupt, which in turn can undermine its political security (Buzan 1998: 105). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank provide necessary funding to states that are facing financial crises.

Forth, societal security is about identity and threats related to it. It deals with threats endangering a specific community or individuals who identify themselves with that community (Buzan 1983; Buzan 1991). It differs from political security in the sense that communities or social groups are not confined to only one state rather

they are spread across national boundaries. The states in the subcontinent are classic examples because we have different ethnic groups spread across state boundaries. The Pakhtoons are spread across Pakistan into Afghanistan. The Punjabis cover both Pakistan and India and Bengalis do so with both India and Bangladesh, at their mutual borders respectively. These are just some examples of large ethnic groups otherwise there are also small groups who live on both sides of the border. These identities are often interlinked with the national identity of a state (political sector) yet they are distinct (C. Wilkinson 2007). Threats in this sector represent all those developments or policies which the community believes are a direct threat to their survival as a community. Health, food, and educational security also come under this domain. It also includes sectarian and ethnic violence. It intertwines with political security in the sense that that community be represented in the national legislature (parliament) or else it would be a breach of their political rights.

Fifth, insecurity in the environmental sector means global issues such as climate change, pollution, resource scarcity, floods and deforestation (Buzan 1983; Buzan 1991; Buzan 1998). The referent object in this sector can be a single state, a region or the whole globe. Environmental degradation, exacerbated by anthropological activities, can be a cause or consequence of violent conflicts (Græger 1996). For example resource scarcity can lead to conflict over the remaining resources. For example, a study of almost 70 years from 1930-2000 showed that competition over pastoral land and water has been a source of conflict in Darfur. Moreover, droughts, loss of arable land, demographic pressure on the available habitable land, and political lawlessness has resulted in the death of 300,000 and displacement of over 2 million people since 2003 (UNEP 2012).

The school emphasized that the sectors do not operate in isolation rather they are interdependent and any activity in one sector affects the others as well i.e. they are interconnected (Waever 2011; Buzan 1998). For example, during times of crisis such as wars, the military expenditure puts massive pressure on the economic sector. Waever (2011) says that in such situations, securitization ensures that the military sector stays well-funded at the expense of the general public or other sectors – people tolerate harsh economic and societal conditions which otherwise they would not. Reeves (2013) have also demonstrated the interconnectedness of the sectors. His study of the relationship between China and Mongolia demonstrates that China intruded in the Mongolian society through its economic sector. It certainly dominated the Mongolian economic sector through its attractive loan packages and foreign direct investment but this rendered the environmental sector of the country in ruins. This is due to popular Chinese demand of wild animals such as Mongolian gazelles etc. whose excessive hunting has brought many species on the verge of extinction (Reeves 2013).

Securitization Theory provided an alternative perspective on security. It shifted focus away from the traditional understanding of security and addressed non-traditional security threats. Apart from securitization theory, the concept of 'Human Security' has also been instrumental in widening the scope of security studies. It did so by expanding the scope of security into seven sectors: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, and community security, respectively (UNDP 1994). Economic security stands for security regarding financial issues such as unemployment, poverty etc. Food security does not only mean excess to food but it also stands for the power to purchase food. Health security stands for safety from diseases and availability of health facilities. Environmental security means provision of a safe habitable environment and safety from environmental hazards. Personal security means physical safety from any harm and provision of rights to belief, expression etc. Community security means safety and security of the whole community from any perceived threat whether economic, political, or physical (Ogata 2005). Tsai believes that security studies have been influenced by norms and values as opposed to national security, which is evident in the emergence of human security (Tsai 2009). Kaldor further categorizes human security into three dimensions: security of individuals and their communities; freedom from fear and freedom from want; and human security means rule-governed security rather than war-based security (Kaldor 2011). The earlier two dimensions are already described under the seven sectors of human security as proposed by Dr. Mahbub ul Haq (UNDP 1994). The third dimension

means that the relationship between states should be based on rules rather than on the paradigms of war. In other words the non-use of force should prevail in the relations between states.

As for my research, applying securitization theory on the societal sector of Gilgit-Baltistan will unravel the complex interwoven issues and provide a clear and focused presentation of the said issues faced by the locals – in other words it will provide a clearer diagnosis of the issues in the societal sector. The application of the theory will surely clarify things because the issues are jumbled together and lack of clarity is hindering a proper understanding, which is needed for formulating efficient and practical policies. The sectors of securitization theory are analytical tools which help in determining what needs to be securitized and why. First, it will help establish the securitizing actors in the societal sector of Gilgit-Baltistan. Second, the referent object which needs to be securitized and the threat, which it faces, will be clearly pointed out. Third, efficient and practical securitizing moves will also be provided as part of recommendations (which is also the third objective of this research). These recommendations will be based on studies of similar situations in other parts of the world.

2.2 Research Methodology

This is a Qualitative research, based on semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Deductive Reasoning was used as the research is theory driven. The theory tested the given hypothesis and the relationship between the variables. For this type of research a basic review of relevant literature is necessary and it is qualitative if it is about determining 'what exists' as opposed to quantitative research which stands for 'how many exist' (Heyink and Tymstra 1993).

2.2.1 Research Design

The type of research design is case-study. This research strategy helps in an in-depth study of the concerned unit of analysis in contemporary settings and provides the option of using any type of data collection technique like questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and/or consult books and archival data such as audio-video records (Priya 2021; Ridder 2017; Yin 2018). Also, the form of case study research will be 'explanatory' which gives a causal explanation of how the dependent variable gets affected by changes in the independent variable (Priya 2021).

2.2.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling technique has been used in this research. In purposive sampling the researcher selects participants who have the necessary knowledge and expertise to respond to the research questions (Jain 1982). Snowball approach is another technique which helps in identifying and reaching relevant participants if the targeted ones are unavailable at the moment (Shively 2011). This approach complemented purposive sampling because the targeted participants helped in identifying more participants, who are qualified (as per the researcher) to respond to the research questions.

2.2.3 Data Collection

Primary source used for data collection is semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. Open ended questions led to more follow-up questions which helped in an efficient understanding of the situation. It gave the respondent more leverage on mentioning what he/she thinks is also important regarding the topic (Heyink and Tymstra 1993). Secondary sources include all relevant books, articles, and audio and visual recordings. The following table includes the names (otherwise anonymous) and designation of the interviewees and the date and place where they were interviewed:

Table 1

Serial no. code	Name	Occupation/Designation	Date & Place of Interview
P1	Anonymous	Shia Cleric	Skardu April, 2024

P2	Agha Mazahir Hussain	Shia Cleric	Skardu August, 2023
P3	Anonymous	Shia Cleric	Gilgit August, 2023
P4	Sheikh Mirza Ali	Shia Cleric	Gilgit April, 2024
P5	Anonymous	Sunni Cleric	Gilgit April, 2024
P6	Maulana Abdul Qadir	Sunni Cleric	Skardu September, 2023
P7	Anonymous	Noorbakshia Cleric	Khapulu May, 2024
P8	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Gilgit August, 2023
P9	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Hunza May, 2024
P10	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Nagar May 2024
P11	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Khapulu May, 2024
P12	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Astore May, 2024
P13	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Chilas May, 2024
P14	Anonymous	GB Public Services	Gilgit May, 2024
P15	Khakan Tayyab	President Gilgit Baltistan Student Organization	Lahore September, 2023
P16	Dr. Sajid Hussain	President All Baltistan Movement (Student Organization)	Skardu April, 2024
P17	Raja Kamran Khushwaqt	General Secretary GB Council, Quaid e Azam University	Islamabad April, 2024
P18	Kacho Mairaj Khan	Businessman (Travelling Industry)	Skardu March, 2024
P19	Nasir Abbas Zarqa	Businessman (Hoteling Industry)	Skardu March, 2024
P20	Anonymous	Pakistan People's Party	Shigar August, 2023
P21	Anonymous	Pakistan People's Party	Gilgit August, 2023
P22	Anonymous	Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf	Skardu August, 2023
P23	Dr. Salar Ali	Head of department, Environmental Sciences, University of Baltistan	Skardu August, 2023
P24	Anonymous	Former President GB Teacher's Association	Gilgit May, 2024

In total, 24 interviews were conducted which included 4 Shia religious scholars, 2 Sunni religious scholars, 1 Noorbakshia religious scholar, 3 politicians, 3 representative from different student organizations, 7 officers of the Gilgit Baltistan Public Services (Grade 17 and above), 2 Businessmen, and 2 from the academia. All are face-to-face interviews and the researcher had to travel to all districts of Gilgit Baltistan for these interviews. This was especially the case with government servants: they were all posted in different districts so the interviewer had to visit their respective stations to conduct interviews, and all of them were interviewed in the same month. For example, one participant was interviewed in Hunza valley, one in Astore valley, one in Chilas valley, while another one was interviewed in Khapulu. Now, anyone who is familiar with Gilgit Baltistan's geography knows the distance that somebody has to travel to reach Khapulu from Chilas and the difficulties which accompany that journey. Chilas is the western border of Gilgit Baltistan while Khapulu is its eastern border and it takes almost 7-8 hours to reach from one end to the other. Similarly, Astore valley lies at the southern border of Gilgit Baltistan – it borders Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir or the Line of Control –

while Hunza valley forms Gilgit Baltistan's northern border – it borders China. It takes almost 6-7 hours to reach Hunza from Astore.

Initially, the participants were asked the three basic research questions of this study, which also reflect the basic objectives of this study.

Question 1: Why did sectarianism rise in Gilgit Baltistan?

Question 2: What social, political and economic reasons strengthened its roots?

Question 3: What has been the response of the government, religious institutions, civil society and ordinary citizens to this issue and what further important steps should be taken to eradicate this menace from the society?

These questions were not meant to limit the scope of the participants' answer. Instead they were intended to generate various options for the participants to pick and choose from whichever they considered important. For example, for the second question, participants who thought that politics had more to do with the rise of sectarianism, only focused on that sector and considered other reasons less important. This resulted in relevant follow up questions which gave an in-depth understanding of the nexus between sectarianism and the political history of this region. Same was the case in all interviews. The participants were also free from time-restrictions. They were allowed as much time as they needed. The average interview time was 25-30 minutes. The longest one was 65 minutes while the shortest was 15 minutes.

2.2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the collected data. This sort of analysis identifies certain recurring codes or similar patterns (or themes) from collected data and builds on that. Researchers look for answers for questions like, "do the themes repeat in particular ways? Do certain individuals bring up those themes? Do different people discuss those themes in different ways? This enables researchers to provide a rich description of meaning and meaning patterns within data" (Atkinson 2017: 96).

2.2.5 Ethical Considerations

The interviews were conducted in a professional manner. Oral consent was taken from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality has been ensured i.e. all participants were asked for their approval regarding mentioning their names as interviewees and those who wished to remain anonymous have been kept so. All participants were clearly informed of why the questions were being asked or in what sort of activity their participation was being asked for. All sorts of cultural sensitivities were dealt with utmost care during the process. A comfortable setting was provided where the participants felt safe and comfortable during the interview – most of them chose the venue themselves and the researcher was invited to conduct the interviews there. Consent over voice recording was also taken. All participants, except two, allowed the interview to be recorded. Written notes were taken for the remaining two interviews.

Chapter 3

BACKGROUND TO SECTARIANISM IN GILGIT BALTISTAN

On January 8th, 2005, unknown gunmen opened fire on Agha Zia ud Din's car seriously injuring him. He was transported over helicopter to Combined Military Hospital Saddar, Rawalpindi, where he died five days later on January 13th 2005 (Dawn 2005). He was the prayer leader of the Shia Jamia Mosque in Gilgit. Violent clashes broke out after he was attacked and 15 people died (AlJazeera 2005). When news of his death reached Gilgit, his supporters attacked government officials and government building were set on fire. Curfew had to be imposed in Gilgit and Skardu. Telephone connections were cut and night time curfew continued for months (Feyyaz 2011). Zia's assassination was not an isolated incident rather it was only 'one' in a series of sectarian conflicts that have engulfed this region since the 1970s.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the societal sector of Gilgit Baltistan is a boiling pot which can explode at any given time. It has consequences for the Federal government, for the Kashmir cause and especially for the indigenous people. A brief overview of the different issues in the societal sector was given in the introductory chapter like problems in the healthcare services; in the education sector; cultural and identity dilemmas and sectarianism. As for the purposes of this research, we will exclusively focus on sectarianism: its history, causes and future in the region. The selected time period will be 1970s onwards.

The fact that it is the only Shia majority region in an otherwise Sunni majority Pakistan has always been a cause of concern for authorities in Pakistan (N. Ali 2010; Feyyaz 2011). District wise distribution of sects is as follows: Gilgit is 60 percent Shia and 40 percent Sunni; Hunza is 90 percent Ismaili and 10 percent Shia; Nagar is 100 percent Shia; Ghizer is 90 percent Ismaili and 10 percent Sunni; Chilas is 100 percent Sunni; Astore is 70 percent Sunni and 30 percent Shia; Skardu is 90 percent Shia, 5 percent Sunni and 5 percent Noor Bakshia; Kharmang is 100 percent Shia; Ganche is 96 percent Noor Bakshia, 3 percent Shia and 1 percent Sunni; and Shigar is 96 percent Shia, 3 percent Noor Bakshia and 1 percent Sunni (Bansal 2008; Holden 2019; Bansal 2005). The ten districts are categorized into 3 divisions. Gilgit division includes districts Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar and Ghizer, and the dominant sect in this division is Shia (Jafaria and Ismailia). Diamer division consists of Astore and Chilas and the dominant sect is Sunni. Baltistan division includes Skardu, Shigar, Kharmang and Ganche and Shia is the dominant sect in here. Shia is the dominant sect in Gilgit Baltistan. Sunnis only have a stronghold in the south of the region which connects it to Kohistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) (Feyyaz 2011).

The Gilgit Scouts, with support from locals, revolted against the Dogra rulers of Jammu in 1947 and were able to liberate around 73000 square kilometres of land. Unlike Azad Kashmir, no Pakistani military or the Mujahedeen were involved in Gilgit Baltistan's freedom struggle (Dani 2000). This revolt is infamously known as the Gilgit Rebellion, but for the locals it was a movement of independence against foreign (Dogra) rule which had been forcefully imposed on them. On 1st of November 1947, Gilgit was liberated, Dogra governor Brigadier Gansara Singh was arrested from the governor house in Gilgit and Subedar Major Babar Khan confiscated the governor's personal pistol symbolizing the end of colonial rule in Gilgit (Dani 2000). Baltistan was liberated a year later, on 14th of August 1948. The news was telegrammed to authorities in Karachi, and they were invited to take over the area under Pakistani control (Hussainabadi 2006).

For 15 days the area remained an independent state under Raja Shah Raees Khan until Pakistan sent 'Tehsildar' Sardar Alam Khan as Political Agent. He came and imposed the draconian Frontiers Crimes Regulation on the whole area. People were not happy, as they deemed it (both the appointment of a Tehsildar and his subsequent FCR law) humiliating and as a disgrace to the sacrifices they had made in gaining the territory in the name of

Pakistan (Hussainabadi 2006). They had liberated an area slightly smaller than the NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) but six times the size of Azad Kashmir and this is what they were getting. Even today, the power rests with the Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA), who is not even elected by the locals (Ali, et al. 2021).

Shia-Sunni feuds have its roots in the 7th century events surrounding the succession of leadership after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Sunnis uphold the Khilafat while Shias believe in the Imamate. Gilgit Baltistan's 70 to 75 percent population believes in the Imamate or in the Imam i.e. Shia, Ismailia and Noorbakshia, the remaining are Sunnis who uphold that Hazrat Abu Bakare (ra) was the first rightly guided caliph and so on (Stöber 2007; Bansal 2007). This issue has always engulfed the whole Muslim world but it did not have that much impact on Gilgit Baltistan till the 1970s (Mishra 2019).

During pre-partition era, the [British] Raj was able to almost completely uproot the Sunni-Shia confrontation during its tenure from 1857 to 1947. A refusal to recognise the jurisprudence of takfir or apostatization and a competent encoding of the Muslim Family Law – separating the two sects – almost buried the conflict (N. Ali 2010; Kreutzmann 2015). After partition, the years from 1947 till the 1970s did not see any serious clashes between Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit Baltistan. Part of it is attributed to Martial Law in the whole country. Gilgit Baltistan was a part of General Ayyub and Yahya Khan's consecutive Martial Law regimes from 1958 to 1971. Political activities and the window for dissent were non-existent. Moreover there was strict surveillance over a person's movements and any form of political gathering was prohibited. People had no rights as is the case in any martial law regime (Ali and Akhunzada 2015). On the brighter side these two martial law regimes were a blessing in disguise as no reports of any sectarian related issues were received during these regimes.

Another reason is the lack of a proper road network connecting the region with the rest of Pakistan. Babusar Pass provided the only access to the rest of the country which was accessible by jeep. But it only opened in late May/June and was closed by late September due to snowfall. There was no road which was accessible all year around (Anwar, et al. 2020). This continued until 1978 when the Karakoram Highway (KKH) was opened. The KKH remains open the whole year. The Highway eased travel to and from the region. It brought great benefits to local people. Such as ease of travelling, better health and educational facilities. But it also brought ideas which proved lethal against the soft social fabric the region had (Hunzai 2013). Before the Highway, the region remained aloof and there was less people to people contact, but now, for the first time in history, the region was fully exposed to major developments in the rest of the country.

The era before the 1970s is considered a period of relative calm and tranquillity (Hunzai 2013). Although Shia-Sunni differences existed but there was respect for difference of opinion. People prioritized belonging to a *Qom* or agnatic descent and kinship over sect (N. Ali 2010). For example, the *Dards/Dardic* (which is the ethnic community in Gilgit, Diamer, Ghizer and Chitral) are divided into 4 tribes: *Sheen, Yashkun, Dom* and *Kameen*. There are Shia *Sheens* as well as Sunni *Sheens*. Likewise there are Shia *Yashkuns* and Sunni *Yashkuns* and so on. The sects are dispersed among the four tribes of the Dard/Dardic community. If a Sunni *Sheen* had to choose between a Sunni *Yashkun* and a Shia *Sheen,* he would always go for the latter because the *Qom* mattered more than the sect. Another priority was *Ilaqiat* or regionalism. A Balti would prioritize the interests of another Balti over a Chilasi or Gilgity, no matter whatever his sect is. He would not care if the Gilgity has the same sect as him. He would only care for the Balti just because they belong to the same region and speak the same language. People never prioritized sects (Dani 2000; Hussainabadi 2006; N. K. Ali 2009).

3.1 1970s: Abrogation of State-Subject Rule
Sectarianism gained influence in the region after Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto made tremendous administrative changes in the region. He abolished the FCR, which the people welcomed. He also confiscated power for the local Rajas, which was also welcomed by the locals. He divided the area into three divisions and different districts,

just like in other provinces of Pakistan, which was also gladly accepted by the locals. He upgraded the Northern Areas Advisory Council (created in 1970) into the Northern Areas Council (NAC), members (16) of which were to be directly elected by the locals (Bodla 2014). But he also took another decision which changed the fate of the region for the worse: he abolished the State Subject Rule, which until then had protected the demographic composition of the region (Bansal 2008). This enabled outsiders like Punjabis, Pakhtoons and people from down-country (referred to the rest of Pakistan) to purchase land and settle in Gilgit Baltistan. Most of the immigrants were Sunnis. They were more educated, wealthy and skilled than the local population (Dad 2016). This disturbed the local demography as the population of Sunnis grew in certain constituencies of Gilgit. Shias, wary of their future, blamed the Federal government of conspiring to turn Shia majority into minority (Baig, et al. 2018). Regular scuffles over petty issues begin to be observed in a once peaceful region.

Religious leaders started engaging in dehumanizing tirades against the sectarian other. This religious rhetoric soon captured political tones (N. Ali 2010). The Tanzim-i-Millat Party, formed in 1971, under the local leadership of Johar Ali Khan, demanded provincial status for the region. In direct opposition to the 'Tanzim', a Sunni-dominated Gilgit Baltistan Jamhoori Mahaz was formulated. The latter demanded that Gilgit Baltistan be integrated with Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) so that Sunni minority can be converted into a majority since AJK is a Sunni dominated region (Muhammad 2014). The first major clash broke out in 1974 due to ban over the Ashura procession in Gilgit by the Bhutto administration (Bansal 2007). There were reports of lives lost due to clashes between the law enforcement agencies and the general public and as a result Shia resentment grew against the Federal government. They felt deeply marginalized and discriminated against by the centre (Sökefeld 2014). The conflict escalated when in 1975 the Ashura processions were fired at from the Sunni mosque in Gilgit. The Sunni Qazi (religious leader) was arrested leading to protests in Sunni dominated areas of Gilgit. To support Sunnis in Gilgit, their brethren in the valleys to the South of Gilgit set off, but were stopped by the Gilgit Scouts before they could enter the city (Hunzai 2013).

3.2 1980s: Tragedy of 1988 (*Lashkar Kashi*)

Sectarian clashes became much more deadly during the 1980s. In 1988, a difference of opinion over the sighting of the Shawwal Moon (to celebrate Eid ul Fitar) turned into a full scale conflict (Grare 2007; Tariq 2020). The Shia Jamia mosque in Gilgit announced that the moon had been sighted and the coming day would be Eid day, while Sunnis maintained that there had been no sightings and another fasting day will be observed. On the next day, Shias offered the Eid prayer and were seen eating in public. This outraged Sunnis and a group of Shias returning from Eid prayers were fired at. Many lives were lost and Shias retaliated in kind and killed 10 Sunnis (Tariq 2020). Upon hearing that Sunnis were being killed in Gilgit, clerics in NWFP (now KPK) apostatized Shias as Kafir and made Jihad compulsory against them. A *lashkar* (as it is today infamously known for)/armed force of around 50,000 strong invaded Gilgit (Feyyaz 2011; Tariq 2020). They were mainly from Chilas, Mansehra, Kohistan and other areas of KPK. Shia villages leading to Gilgit like Jaglot, Bunji and Jalalabad were destroyed and their populations expelled. Jalalabad resisted and for that 700 Shias in the village were slaughtered (Sering 2010; Tariq 2020; Feyyaz 2011). The invaders did not even spare the livestock and set fire to houses. Today only Jalalabad has a sizeable Shia majority whereas Bunji and Jaglot have become Sunni areas because they filled the gap when Shias were expelled in 1988 (Kreutzmann 2015).

Local Gilgities, utilizing the mountainous terrain, successfully repelled the militant group. Upon sensing fierce resistance the militants turned towards Baltistan. They faced local Baltis and Haramoshis around Maqpon Das, in Sub-division Rondu (Hussainabadi 2006). Baltistan lost hundreds of lives but successfully deterred the militants who were forced to return. The police was practically useless in such a situation and even repeated backups did not help in calming the situation. Subsequently the Pakistan army and paramilitary forces were deployed in order to bring the situation under control. Maqpon Das only hosts the graveyards of the martyrs of

the 1988 sectarian conflict, also called '88 tension', otherwise it is an empty place on the right bank of river Indus (Hussainabadi 2006).

To organize and then mobilize such a large armed group requires prior planning and resources. And the fact that the militants travelling all the way from different parts of KPK, with arms, towards Gilgit Baltistan were not even stopped and checked – in otherwise an area with abundant military and police check posts – rendered Shias to suspect that the state is complicit in this incident and that they had to fend for themselves in future scenarios (N. Ali 2010). There was no official inquiry over this incident and Shias still demand accountability and compensation for their losses (Tariq 2020). This incited an arms race in the region. Today, the main religious centres in each major city across the region have sufficient small arms and light weapons. Nosheen Ali probes it in terms of regulatory processes of state-making. She observes, for a state that officially proclaims Islam as its raison d'être – Islam that is implicitly coded as Sunni – the Shia-majority Northern Areas thus constitute[d] a significant source of anxiety. She further states that it was the fear of this different Muslim and of losing the strategic territory, that this different Muslim inhabits, to India; to a broader Kashmiri struggle; or to local nationalist movements, that has driven the Pakistani state to establish authoritarian control in the Northern Areas (N. Ali 2010; Feyyaz 2011).

3.3 1990s: Tit-for-Tat Killings

On General Zia's death anniversary in August 1993 massive Shia-Sunni riots saw 20 people killed until the situation was brought under control by the army (Bansal 2007). The latter accused the Shias of amassing weapons at the religious centres and mosques and a widespread persecution of Shias begin in Gilgit which saw many arrests. They were accused of bringing weapons from Iran including mortar canons (Tariq 2020). Shias accused Sunnis of being complicit in these anti-Shia activities. Small skirmishes continued throughout the 90s until the Kargil War. The Kargil War saw an influx of battle-hardened mujahedeen in Gilgit Baltistan. Training camps for these mujahedeen were established in Chilas and Gilgit (Feyyaz 2011). In the two decades following the abrogation of State Subject Rule, people's understandings of their environment and their subsequent actions had been structured by sectarian affiliations. 'Sect' had become the primary identity over all other identities i.e. regional, ethnic, linguistic etc. (Karrar and Mostowlansky 2018). Funding from Iran and Saudi Arabia to Shias and Sunnis, respectively, further widened the gap between the two sects (Dad 2016). Shias, especially, had lost faith in the Federal government and looked more toward Iran for support, and this was based on two decades of persecution by the state and state-sponsored militant groups (Ali and Ullah 2019).

This decade acquired a new dimension in sectarian killings as there was indiscriminate firing on ordinary citizens who had no connection to sectarianism (Lambah 2016). Their only fault was to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Tit-for-tat killings between the two sects saw doctors, lawyers and traders killed just because of their association to one of the two sects (Bansal 2008). In 1991, 1992 and 1993 Sunnis objected to specific Shia practices such as creating geoglyphs which read Ya Ali, Ya Hussain and Ya Imam e Zamana (as) on the mountains surrounding Gilgit city. Shias maintained that they have always followed this practice to celebrate the birth anniversaries of different Shia Imams and that this practice should not be exploited to cause any further sectarian drift in the society. Negotiations over ending this practice did not prove fruitful and people from both sides (Shia and Sunni) were killed as a result (Tariq 2020; Kreutzmann 2015).

3.4 2000s: Assassination of Agha Ziauddin

The Musharraf regime, though secular in its outlook, created an unnecessary sectarian strife in Gilgit Baltistan when it introduced controversial educational curriculum changes (Stöber 2007). The changes were brought in early 2000 in 16 books altogether but the debate circulated around Islamiat, Urdu, Arabic, Social Studies etc. Shiites claimed that in these books Islam (jurisprudence and history) had been presented in a strict Sunnite way (Bansal 2005). They criticized that Islamic practices (like prayers) portrayed were strictly Sunni which Shias

did not subscribe to. Only those *Ahadeeth* (practices and sayings of the Prophet PBUH) which were acceptable as per Sunnite traditions were included while those taken from the 'Masumeen' (Shiite Imams of Ahlul Bait) were excluded (Stöber 2007). Yazeed was totally exempted from the tragedy of Karbala and the entire blame was put on Ibn-e-Ziyad (Stöber 2007). The first three Khulafa were glorified while Hazrat Ali was not given due respect (Muhammad 2014). Even Khalid ibn e Walid was more commended than Hazrat Ali, for his bravery and his battles. These books were to be used in schools across Gilgit Baltistan (Feyyaz 2011).

The leader from the Shia side was Agha Ziauddin (Zia-ud-Din) Rizvi. He negotiated with different Federal Ministers and other representatives from Islamabad: Abbas Sarfaraz, Nisar Memon and Aftab Sherpao, all of them Federal Ministers for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) (Bansal 2007; Karrar and Mostowlansky 2018). Despite assurances from the Federal government, no practical steps were taken and this further frustrated Shias (Bansal 2007). They increased pressure on the government and students boycotted classes (Stöber 2007). In 2001, Muhammad Ali Shehzad, the then Deputy Chief Executive of Gilgit Baltistan, a Shia himself, allowed Shiites to use other books, but this led to violent protests by Sunnis, in Gilgit and Chilas (Sökefeld 2014). The banned Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), later renamed as Millat e Islamia Pakistan, and the local Sunnite organization Tanzeem e Ahl e Sunnat Wal Jamaat (TASWJ) clashed, first, with the police and then the army (Feyyaz 2011). They had blocked the Karakoram Highway and the airfield in Gilgit. Normalcy only returned in the first week of July.

In October 2003, anti-Shia protests took place in Chilas and Gilgit over the killing of Azam Tariq in Islamabad, leader of the former SSP. This reveals how developments in down-country affected Gilgit Baltistan (Feyyaz 2011; Muhammad 2014). Skardu city was again in flames when Shia Sunni groups clashed during Ashura processions leading to deaths on both sides (Bouzas 2012). In May 2004, 300 students went on hunger strikes demanding the change in the education curriculum and Shia leaders set May 15 as the deadline for the government to change the books or at least remove the objectionable content from them. When the deadline passed, students protested in front of the Deputy Commissioners office, which turned violent and they attacked the office. The Frontier Constabulary opened fire and 5 students were killed (Bansal 2007). In October of the same year, Agha Ziauddin and several other Shia leaders were taken into custody and a curfew was imposed in Gilgit. Despite the curfew, anti-government demonstrations took place in Gilgit and subsequent arrests were made (Stöber 2007).

After three days, it was announced that a solution has been agreed upon: both Shia and Sunni students would be taught a single Islamiat syllabus, till class 10, in which teachings of both denominations would be included. In response Agha Ziauddin was required to put off any further protests on this issue until a Federal solution comes to pass. This, however, was a short-lived peace (Stöber 2007).

Agha Zia was assassinated in January 2005 and a full-fledged curfew was imposed in Gilgit (H. A. Malik 2005). The District Headquarter Hospital (DHQ) of Gilgit was (is) based in a Shia neighbourhood and as the news of Ziauddin's death reached Gilgit the local health departmental chief, who was a Sunni, was the first victim. Dr. Sher Wali was found trapped in his office and shot dead (Dawn 2005). Similarly some of the Sunni lower staff of the DHQ also got killed. However it is important to note that many of the Sunnis working at the DHQ were rescued by local Shias. Shias kept them in their homes and later provided them safe passages to Sunni neighbourhoods when the situation got eased (Varley 2015). People on the streets, were on a killing spree. A shoot-at-sight curfew was imposed in Gilgit and Skardu. Government officials, over loudspeakers, were telling people to stay inside for their own safety. Some unfortunate people, who did not heed to the official warnings, were killed in the streets by the angry Zia supporters (Varley 2014). The army was hardly able to control the situation.

Similarly in Skardu, a Muslim Commercial Bank (MCB) manager's house was surrounded by Shias. The manager was a Sunni from Jaglot. He was rescued by his assistant manager who was a local Shia (Wazir Ashraf Hussain) and his whole family was shifted to the latter's house where they remained for a whole week (N. K. Ali 2009). Others were not as fortunate as three Sunnis were burned alive in the same neighbourhood (Dawn 2005). In another similar incident in Gilgit, the District Forest Officer Taighun Nabi (Sunni), along with his five family members, was burned alive when the angry mob torched his house (Dawn 2005). The then Inspector General of Police (IGP) of Gilgit Baltistan, Sakhiullah Tareen was shot dead near Gooro Juglot, on his way to Hunza. He was a Sunni from Punjab (Dawn 2005). His driver (Shia) even warned him that with the prevailing conditions it was not safe to pass near Nagar but he did not listen. His car was ambushed but his son, daughter in law, the driver and personal guard survived. The escort vehicle carrying four police personnel got out of control and fell into the Hunza River killing all four on board (Dawn 2005).

Another incident involved the Punjab Rangers (paramilitary force) in Barmas neighbourhood of Gilgit. On account of curfew, and the fact that shoot-at-sight orders were in place, two women were shot dead by the rangers, when they could not identify them. In retaliation, a nearby ranger's check post was attacked by Shias and six rangers were killed. Resultantly, launched an attack on the Shia Jamia Masjid, as they claimed the attackers were hiding in the mosque. Both the main Shia and Sunni mosques were sealed in October 2005 (N. Ali 2010; N. K. Ali 2009).

Twelve leaders from the Shia and Sunni community, respectively, were arrested and put behind bars at the Adiala prison, Rawalpindi. Chief among them were the two heads, Agha Rahat and Qazi Nisar, of Shia and Sunni communities, respectively (Stöber 2007). An agreement, known as '*Zabta e Akhlaq*', was penned down and only those who signed it were allowed to go free. Despite the agreement, targeted killings continued. A politician, belonging to the Pakistan People's Party, Ramzan Ali Danish (Shia) was killed by unknown assailants while he was buying fruit in Kashrote (Sunni neighbourhood in Gilgit) (Dawn 2005). Two Sunnis were killed in retaliation. Ramzan's brother, Ehsan Danish, was also gunned down in Gulshan area of Karachi (Dawn 2015).

In 2006, a judge dealing with anti-terrorism cases was shot dead when he was on an evening stroll in City Park, Gilgit. Judge Jamshed Khan was a Sunni from Punjab (Dawn 2006). Top government officials received threatening calls. Even the government had to increase security for the then Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas Makhdoom Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat (Stöber 2007). In 2009, another politician by the name, Syed Asad Ali Zaidi (Shia) was brutally killed in Kashrote. He was pursued from his car into a bakery in Kashrote. The assailants then pulled down the shutter of the bakery and repeatedly hit his head with assault rifle butts. The bakery owner, who was trapped inside the bakery, was forced to watch this all and he reportedly fainted at this act (N. Ali 2010).

3.5 2010s: Chilas, Kohistan and Lulusar Tragedies

In 2010 a politician from subdivision Rondu (District Skardu), captain Sikandar (Shia) was injured in an assassination attempt. He survived but in retaliation, Shias killed Qazi Nisar's 'right-hand' man (Ali and Akhunzada 2015). Sunnis from Kashrote started targeting vehicles coming from Nagar valley on irregular intervals. They did this to divert the main route as they did not want Shias from Nagar to pass through their neighbourhood (Dad 2016). In retaliation Shias from Nagaral neighbourhood of Gilgit, in support of Shias of Nagar, attacked and captured Yadgar Muhallah, Kashrote. They kept the neighbourhood under siege for a whole day until rangers were able to liberate the area from Shia captivity (Dad 2016). Sunnis protested against such an attack at Attehad Chowk, Gilgit. During the protest, a grenade was thrown at the demonstration which resulted in multiple casualties (Dad 2016). This grenade attack resulted in three heinous attacks over Shias which escalated the conflict to the next level.

In February 2012, at Harban Nala, Kohistan (KPK), a Gilgit-bound bus carrying 25 passengers faced open fire by Sunni gunmen from both sides. They were forced to get off the bus and their national identity cards (CNIC) were checked and 18 of them (Shias) were shot at point-blank range (BBC 2012). On 3rd of April of the same year, at Gonar Farm, near Chilas, 6 buses were torched and 9 Shias were killed by Sunnis. They were reportedly forced to get off the buses, their IDs checked, hands tied around their backs and killed in similar fashion to the Kohistan incident (Shams 2012). One of them, a resident of Skardu, was bludgeoned to death. The protestors then chanted anti-Shia slogans (*Kafir-Kafir, Shia Kafir!*) and against the then Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan Syed Mehdi Shah (who is also a Shia). A Superintendent of Police and two soldiers were also injured who trying to save the passengers. The video of this incident still circulates on social media (Boy 2021).

The last of those three incidents happened in the same year in August, when people were returning to Gilgit for Eid ul Fitar. On 16th August, 2012, at Lulusar (near Babusar Pass) 40 gunmen wearing army uniforms stopped and entered three buses. The armed men checked the ID cards of 19 passengers (all Shias) forced them out, tied their hands around their backs and shot in similar fashion to the previous two incidents (Sadaqat 2012). The armed men had come from Neelum Valley, and officials said they spoke Pashto and Kohistani. Later that day the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility (R. S. Khan, Dawn 2013). In another, unrelated, incident, 10 mountaineers were killed in Diamer. In June 2013, the TTP rounded up 10 foreigners, including one Pakistani, on the basecamp of Nanga Parbat (8126 m), the ninth highest mountain in the world, blindfolded and forced them on their knees and shot them in the head (BBC 2013). Another climber, who was descending from the summit, heard bursts of gunfire. He was warned by locals to take cover and stay hidden on the mountain until morning (R. S. Khan, Dawn 2013). This incident, however not sectarian, further defamed Pakistan internationally, and put Gilgit Baltistan in the limelight of international news agencies, for all the wrong reasons (Fontana 2013; Craig 2014).

The situation only started to improve after the Pakistani Army started country-wide anti-terrorist operations. Starting from 2009, Operation Rah e Raast and Operation Rah e Nijaat were launched in Swat Valley and South Waziristan, respectively, to clear the area of TTP and other militant groups (Dawn 2014). Swat had specifically fallen under the influence of Taliban and local state machinery was useless against them. After the success in these areas, Operation Zarb e Azab and Operation Khyber were launched in North Waziristan and Khyber Agency, respectively, in 2014 (Dawn 2015; Sherazi 2014). Afterwards, in 2017, a nationwide Operation Radd ul Fasaad was launched in order to target sleeper cells, financiers and terrorist facilitators across the country (Dawn 2022). These operations in the rest of the country did have a significant impact on Gilgit Baltistan as no major incident was reported in the region after 2013.

3.6 2020s: Assassination attempt on Agha Rahat Al Hussaini
In recent memory, three incidents have raised alarm among the locals of another possible wave of sectarianism in the region. The first among them is the Naltar incident. In 2021, a van carrying 18 people was attacked by gunmen. 7 people including a woman died on the spot – all of them Sunni. Reports said that the incident seemed to be a case of personal enmity because a boy (Shia) had been killed some days ago (Nagri 2021). Then a year later, in August 2022, an assassination attempt was made on the life of Shia leader Agha Rahat while he was hoisting the *Alam* (Flag) of Imam Hussain at Khomar Chowk at the start of Muharram (1st Islamic month of the Hijri Calendar). Shias and Sunnis clashed at Yadgar Chowk, Gilgit, which resulted in the death of two Shias and 17 others were also injured (Nagri 2022).

Then in 2023, the region was again in flames with protests from both the communities (Shia and Sunni). The incident happened in the last week of August when Agha Baqir (Shia) passed controversial statements against a religious and historical personality which hurt the sentiments of Sunni Muslims (Dawn 2023). In return, Qazi Nisar (Sunni) made sacrilegious comments on another religious figure sacred for Shias (Dawn 2023). First

Information Reports (FIRs) were registered against both the religious scholars. Sunnis in Chilas, Diamer, blocked the Karakoram Highway. Traffic on the Babusar Pass was also stopped. Additional sit-ins and protests were also recorded in Astore and Gilgit (Pamir Times 2023). The supporters of Agha Baqir pelted the police station in Skardu with stones and observed Shutter-down and wheel-jam strike in Skardu. They also blocked the Skardu-Jaglot road (Pamir Times 2023). The protestors threatened that the historic Skardu-Kargil road be opened and that if any unfortunate incident occurred on the KKH (with Shia passengers) then they would retaliate in kind (Sheikh 2023). Agha Baqir was later forced to issue an apology which he did over social media (Press, Facebook 2023). However Qazi Nisar was spared from any such action. This event is still fresh in the minds of locals and may prove recipe for future clashes.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

This section of the study is further divided into two parts: identification of major themes and application of securitization theory to the region.

4.1 Major Themes
Thematic analysis revealed five major themes from the interviews. The five major themes explained below are based on the 24 interviews, mentioned in 'Table 1' (see section 2.2.3 of the study).

4.1.1 Historical Reasons
The historical reasons were a common pattern identified in all interviews.

4.1.1.1 Afghan War 1979-1989
When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 it was met with fierce resistance from local Afghans. Fighters from all over the Islamic world came to Afghanistan to take part in this 'Holy' war against the 'infidels'. The fighters, known as the Mujahedeen, were funded by the United States of America, its allies and the Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia. They were trained by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan. With external support from Central Investigation Agency (CIA) and ISI, the Mujahedeen were successfully able to push back the Red Army, and the Afghan War ended in 1989, but this war radically changed the Pakistani society – it brought religious extremism (P2 2023). A chain of Madrassas was established along the Pak-Afghan border, where recruitment and training of these Mujahedeen was carried out. Children were brainwashed with a hard-line interpretation of Islam, which made them less and less tolerant towards anyone who did not subscribe to their version of Islam (P7 2024).

These 10 years saw a huge influx of drugs and the rise of the 'Kalashnikov' culture in Pakistan (P14 2024). The Mujahedeen later turned against each other after the Soviets left and the Taliban emerged victorious amongst them. They followed a strict Deobandi-Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. They publicly declared Shias as 'Kafir' (non-believer) and killed hundreds of Shia Hazaras in Afghanistan (P1 2023). A Mullah-Military alliance in Pakistan, which had earlier established these Madrassas, imported this sectarian ideology in Pakistan for political interests and starkly divided the society along sectarian lines. Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar e Janghvi (LeJ), Sipah e Muhammad (SMP) were some of the militant organizations that emerged as a by-product of the radicalization of the society (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024; P7 2024).

4.1.1.2 Iranian Revolution 1979
The Shah of Iran, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, was overthrown through a popular revolution in 1979 in favour of Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran became an Islamic Republic after the revolution. The neighbouring Gulf States feared that the revolution, carrying a Shia ideology, might spread into their territories and into those regions where they have political interests (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). Given that the majority of the population of the Arabian Peninsula consists of Sunni Muslims, their only major concern was Pakistan, where around 20% of Muslims are Shia Muslims; hence Pakistan became a proxy battleground between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). Both countries funded their ideological followers in Pakistan and this intensified the sectarian conflict. Some reports suggested that Iran stopped funding after 1996, but Sunnis reject this claim and say that it still provides necessary funds (P5 2024; P6 2023).

4.1.1.3 'Lashkar Kashi' (Militant Attack) on Gilgit Baltistan 1988

A militia comprising of 40-50 thousand strong militants launched an attack on Shias in Gilgit Baltistan in May 1988. They contingent included militants from Afghanistan, Kohistan, former FATA, and local Sunnis from Chilas (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024; P7 2024). General Zia had instructed Brigadier Pervaiz Musharraf to crush the supposed Shia revolt in Gilgit and the latter followed the General's orders in full spirit to teach the Shias a lesson (Bansal 2007). "It is astonishing how easily they reached Gilgit without anyone stopping them on the Karakoram Highway," a participant remarked (P8 2023). "There were no checkpoints (no police, no army, no rangers), which is suspicious as this road had (and still has) many of them." Upon hearing the news of their arrival, villagers from small villages on the outskirts of Gilgit city like Bunji, Jalalabad and Jaglot, evacuated and fled for their lives. Once Shia villages, they are now comprised of Sunnis. Only one village resisted, Jalalabad, but it faced the consequences and some 700 Shias were killed. Not even the cattle were spared (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024; P9 2024; P10 2024; P11 2024).

The militia was stopped at the gates of Gilgit city by locals, who sacrificed their lives. Upon failing to enter Gilgit city, the militia turned towards Baltistan. They were met with fierce resistance, at Maqpondas area, from locals (people of Haramosh and Baltis). Locals successfully pushed back the invasion and Baltistan, like Gilgit, was spared from the annihilation that Jalalabad, unfortunately, faced (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024; P9 2024; P10 2024; P11 2024). There are graves present, of martyrs of the '*88 Tension*', as locals refer to the massacre, and people from all over Baltistan visit this area to pay their respects (P1 2024; P2 2023; P11 2024; P16 2024; P20 2023; P22 2023).

The militia left Gilgit Baltistan following their unsuccessful 'Sunnification of Gilgit' project – to turn majority Shia population into Sunnis (Waseem, et al. 2010) . There were no inquiries made and no perpetrators were punished or even identified for this heinous massacre (especially of the people of Jalalabad) (P4 2024).

4.1.1.4 Development and Conflict Exacerbation (Karakoram Highway)

The last historical theme, identified throughout most of the interviews, was the opening of the 'Karakoram Highway' (KKH), and the subsequent opening of Gilgit Baltistan to the rest of Pakistan. Construction on the KKH began in 1962 and it was opened for the public in 1978 – notice the year? Gilgit Baltistan was kept aloof from major developments in the rest of the Pakistan, since 1947, because of its remoteness and, more importantly, its inaccessibility (P24 2024). The region did not have an all-weather road network that kept it continuously connected with the rest of the country. From 1948 to 1978, the only jeep-accessible road connection was provided by the Babusar Pass. This, however, was not an all-weather road. It opens in mid-June and by the end of September, it closes due to heavy snowfall (P23 2023).

This inaccessibility and remoteness kept the region's centuries-old traditions intact (P19 2024). There was far less people-to-people contact so social, political or economic developments in the rest of the country did not affect it that much. This changed with the opening of the Highway. The KKH made travel to down-country easier and quicker – it took 25-30 hours to reach Islamabad from Skardu and less so from Gilgit (18-20 hours) (P18 2024). Businesses and trade grew as local traders were given visa-free passes to Kashghar with an annual expiry date and it boosted the tourism industry of the region (P19 2024). But it had major social effects on the country. Religious and cultural exchanges increased and locals were exposed to various ideas from down-country (P18 2024).

Amongst the exchanges was the import of extremist tendencies in the region. People from diverse sects, who had peacefully lived side by side for centuries, became enemies and sect became the main source of conflict among the locals (P20 2023; P21 2023; P22 2023). *Takfeer* (apostatization) was the most lethal import in the region from down-country (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). Local Sunnis apostatised their Shia

counterparts, on the bases of religious decrees acquired from Sunni religious scholars from KPK, Punjab and Sindh. This intensified sectarian conflict in the region (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024).

4.1.1.5 General Zia Ul Haq's Islamization Policy

General Zia Ul Haq was a military dictator (and later President) of Pakistan. He ruled from 1977 until his death in 1988. He took an active and a direct part in the Afghan War of 1979 and his actions indirectly increased sectarianism in Pakistan (P8 2023). General Zia was under immense international pressure after staging a coup against the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and more so after hanging the said Premier (P20 2023). The Afghan War and Iranian Revolution gave his reign a breathing space as he garnered Western support for joining the Western Camp in the Afghan War. He imported the spirit of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam and armed Ahl e Hadith and Deobandi sub-sects of Sunni Islam (P9 2024; P10 2024). He established religious seminaries (madrassas) all over the country (especially along the Pak-Afghan Border). Those seminaries were in fact recruitment and training centres for the Mujahedeen who were sent to fight in the Afghan War against the Soviet Union (P13 2024; P14 2024). He received financial support from the United States and its Western Allies and also from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries (who were also interested in hampering influence, of The Iranian Revolution, on Shias in Pakistan and other neighbouring states) (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024).

General Zia had also become extremely unpopular in Pakistan owing to his handling of the Bhutto incident and his rule lacked legitimacy (P20 2023; P21 2023). In order to gain domestic support he favoured the conservative Sunni clergy (mainly Deobandi and Ahl e Hadith) (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). He empowered and gained support from Sunni Ulama through his 'Islamization of Pakistan' policy. Some prominent initiatives in this policy were: establishment of separate Sharia Courts (Federal Sharia Court and its benches), Hudood Ordinances (cutting off of hands for stealing, stoning for adultery and blasphemy laws), Interests in banking replaced by profit and loss margins, and compulsory Zakat (Islamic tax) payment to the government (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024; P5 2024; P6 2023). He empowered the conservative Islamic clergy and included them in the Council of Islamic Ideology (legal advisory body to the Government of Pakistan). He promoted the influence of the clergy and Islamic political parties. Members of the Jamaat e Islami (Islamic Political Party) were inducted in different government bodies and conservative Islamic scholars were frequently seen on television screens (P11 2024; P12 2024).

In his own vision, he was fulfilling the *raison d'etre* for Pakistan's existence, as the country came into being with the idea of a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia with Islam as its basis (P14 2024). In his quest for his own version of Nizam e Mustafa (Rule of the Prophet PBUH), he inflicted an irreversible damage to the country as his actions deepened the Shia-Sunni divide in Pakistan (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024).

The Zia administration faced one major domestic setback. The Shia community refused to pay the compulsory Zakat to the government and instead insisted that it already paid Zakat under the 'Khums' Tax under Fiqah e Jafaria Jurisprudence. Shia clergy mobilized Shias under the banner of the Tehreek e Nifaz e Fiqah e Jafaria (TNFJ) and tens of thousands of Shia Muslims protested in Islamabad in 1981 (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). The Zia regime had to step back. But this victory proved fatal for Shias in general, as Sunni religious leaders perceived it as a direct extension of Iranian Revolution (a Shia Revolution) in Pakistan. They countered it by forming the Safwad e Azam Movement, which called for an implementation of a strict Sunni interpretation of Islam in Pakistan (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). Shia seminaries and religious institutions were blamed for spying for Iran and the Soviet Union and this eventually led to the establishment of the Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) (P9 2024; P10 2024).

The SSP resultantly produced the deadliest sectarian group – Lashkar e Janghvi – Pakistan has ever known (P16 2024). The formation of SSP prompted Shias to form their own militant wing, the Sipah e Muhammad

Pakistan (SMP) (P15 2023). These groups were responsible for most of the sectarian violence throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Members of the SMP formed a new group called the Zainebiyoun Brigade in 2013 – Tehran's proxy (P5 2024). Recruitments for the Zainebiyoun are mainly carried out from Shias in Parachinar, Gilgit Baltistan, and other Shia majority areas in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan (P5 2024). A bomb blast in Parachinar killed over 23 Shias in Parachinar. It was claimed by Lashkar e Janghvi, stating that it was in response to killing Sunnis in Syria and warned that if Shias did not stop recruitments, such bomb blasts would continue in the future (News 2015). Zainebiyoun Brigade was banned by the Interior Ministry of Pakistan in March, 2024 (N. Khan 2024). Slogans like 'Shia Kafir' and 'Shia Gardi' were promoted and Sunni Ulama issued religious decrees condoning the slogans, and as a result thousands of (both) innocent Shia and Sunni Muslims have been killed till date (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024).

Islamization policy in Pakistan had trickle-down effects on Gilgit Baltistan (P8 2023). Sensing that the western front (Jihad against communists) was coming to an end, General Zia wanted to open the eastern front (Kashmir Insurgency begin in 1987), so he needed to relocate the militants to the eastern front (P14 2024). He also wanted to implement a uniform religious doctrine throughout the country, based on strict Sunni interpretations of the religious texts, and the only threats he felt were from the north. Hence, his next target was Gilgit Baltistan, which is the only Shia majority region in an otherwise Sunni dominated Pakistan (P12 2024). He wanted to Sunnify Gilgit: to convert villages on both sides of the Indus Valley – all the way to Khunjerab (in the North) and Kargil-Ladakh (in the North-East) – to Sunni majority areas so that any threat emanating from Shias, with support from Iran, can be nipped in the bud (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024). He orchestrated the 1988 massacre of Shias in Gilgit Baltistan. Sunni militants geared with army assault rifles and vehicles stormed Gilgit Baltistan with no one keeping an eye on their movements or no one to stop them. These Sunni militants had just finished off their fight with the 'infidels' in Afghanistan and they had no problem in returning home and fighting the 'infidel' within (p15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024). This can only be classified as a government sponsored massacre of its own population. In retrospect, we can say that the '*88 Tension*' was only one tragedy in a long list of sectarian incidents that wreaked havoc in Pakistan, but this incident had greater significance for Gilgit Baltistan because the region had never experienced anything like it (P17 2024).

4.1.2 Role of the Religious Clergy
"In the Holy Quran, God forbids us from insulting the deities of the non-believers, so that they do not insult our God. If God has forbidden us from insulting even the idols (who are sacred to non-Muslims), how can we insult each other and the religious personalities that are sacred to us." (P6 2023)

"Ayatollah Sistani says that a Sunni is not only your brother but your life," said another Shia religious scholar (P2 2023). It will be wrong to say that the clergy has always been a source of violence among the sects because they have been present in this region for more than half a millennia – Islam came to this region almost 650 years ago – but sectarianism is a post-1970 issue (P15 2023). Shias and Sunnis even agreed upon two agreements: one in 2005 and another in 2012, in which they accepted that no hate speeches would be delivered over mosque speakers, they will respect each other's historical personalities, and *Tabarra* and *Takfeer* will be done with. But how much have they honoured these agreements? (P14 2024)

Tabarra means to distance oneself from the teachings or personality of someone. It can be a scholar, teacher or historical figure. It is the opposite of following someone's teachings and commands and to hold them as sacred (P1 2024). For example, Shias have great respect for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and after the Apostle of God they follow the teachings of his family – The Ahlul Bait. In contrast, they distance themselves from the enemies of the Prophet (PBUH) and his family (*Tabarra*) and do not regard them as true leaders and guides (P1 2024). This is called *Tabarra*. Sunnis claim that under the garb of *Tabarra*, Shias curse and criticize the

Companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) (P5 2024). They specifically mention the day of Ashura, when Shias curse some selective Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) (P5 2024). Shias, on their behalf, maintain that the names of those selective Companions were not included in the 2005 Peace Agreement (P3 2023). However, Sunnis dismiss this statement and demand that all Companions deserve equal respect (P5 2024; P6 2023).

Takfeer means to label someone as *Kafir* (non-believer) (P1 2024). The British Raj did not recognize the practice of *Takfeer* and had been successful in completely uprooting it from the society (P24 2024). After partition, this practice again appeared on the scene. At first against the followers of Ghulam Ahmed Qadiani (Qadianis), as they were labelled as non-Muslims under the 1973 Constitution, and they were barred from attaining the important high offices of President, Prime Minister, Chief Justice and Chief of the Armed Forces (Navy, Army and Air Force) (P22 2023). Then Conservative Sunni clerics pushed, the government, to declare Shias as non-believers under the same constitution, but failed in their endeavour (P22 2023). This failure prompted Sunni clerics to openly declare and issue religious decrees calling Shias *Kafir*. This led to minor Shia-Sunni clashes in small villages in Punjab and KPK (particularly in the Shia Majority city of Parachinar). Soon these minor clashes turned into full scale armed conflicts between the two sects after the Iranian Revolution and Soviet-Afghan War, both in 1979 (P16 2024). This phenomenon found its way into Gilgit Baltistan after the opening of the Karakoram Highway (1978) and subsequent import of extremist ideologies in the region (P7 2024).

Shia and Sunni religious scholars have played both positive and negative roles with regards to sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan (P21 2023). Politicians argue that after the end of bureaucratic rule in Gilgit Baltistan, the National Establishment willingly empowered the religious elite of Gilgit Baltistan to fill the power vacuum (P20 2023). They explained that since Ulama were more traditionally respected and obeyed by the masses, they were more useful to the establishment so the latter boasted their influence (P21 2023). The new regional bureaucracy, starting from the 1970s, carefully incorporated requests from the religious elite, in policies affecting Gilgit Baltistan, and the latter reciprocated by keeping the masses loyal to the Pakistani state even though the region was in a constitutional limbo (P22 2023). I, myself, had the opportunity to witness a glimpse of this rare relationship. I was interviewing one of the religious scholars and we came across the case of a senior civil officer who had been serving in the same district for the past nine years and had got three promotions, while working in the same district. He understood the hint and answered, "Well Mr X has been really understanding in our issues. He has helped us throughout the years, so much that I can call him 'our man', and we do not want him to go." (P1 2024)

That day I realised that there was more to the Ulama than the occasional blasting over the loudspeakers and spewing hate against each other: there is a nexus between the bureaucracy and the Ulama, if you will (P20 2023; P21 2023; P22 2023). Irresponsible statements and repeated violations of the 2005 and 2012 peace agreements, by the Ulama, spearheaded the rise of sectarianism in the region (P15 2023). Like in 2022, a leading Shia cleric, Agha Baqir Al-Hussaini, passed derogatory remarks against an Umayyad personality which caused uproar among the Sunni inhabitants of the region. I was in the capital, Gilgit, and I could sense the change in the atmosphere: people's faces started to turn pale and they started running towards their neighbourhoods (Shias and Sunnis have exclusive neighbourhoods in Gilgit). I was just fortunate enough to leave the city when roads were being blocked by members of both the sects (Nagri, Dawn 2023). Sunnis in Chilas blocked the KKH and demanded that Agha Baqir be arrested and tried under the Blasphemy Law. When the police marched towards Agha Baqir's house, his supporters, numbered in thousands, threatened that if anybody tried to arrest the Agha then they would be responsible for the consequences (Taj 2023).

Meanwhile, Qazi Nisar (leader of Ahl e Sunnat Wal Jamaat Gilgit Baltistan and Kohistan), in a public gathering, passed similar sacrilegious comments on the 12th Shia Imam (Imam Mehdi) and made fun of him.

This exacerbated the already tensed situation (Nagri, Dawn 2023). Shias started receiving death threats on the KKH and a group of Shia youth led by Wazir Hasnain (social activist) demanded that the traditional Skardu-Kargil road be opened. His exact statement can be seen on YouTube; they were, "Open our Kargil road, open our old Skardu-Kargil road. We do not want to come to your Pakistan; we do not want to go to Sindh and Punjab! We will go to Kargil, open our historical road!" (H. Times 2023) Seeing that his words were reflecting the feelings of the crowd, the government intervened, and later on, Agha Baqir was forced to issue an apology video, which was widely circulated over social media platforms (Press, Facebook 2023). However, Qazi Nisar did not meet the same fate and his case disappeared from the scene. Shias, however, have not forgotten his remarks against their Imam.

In one of the interviews, the Shia cleric criticized his Sunni counterpart, saying, "He is stubborn and a miscreant and mischievous person. If we request the government for a place to offer our Eid Prayers in one location, he is quick to criticize and challenge our request and put hindrances in our path." (P3 2023) In another instance, one Sunni cleric remarked:

> "The Gilgit Baltistan (GB) government holds a discriminatory attitude towards us. It is because the government has a Shia majority. Instead of taking care of sister communities (those in minority) like Sunnis, Ismailis and the Noorbakshia, the GB government serves the interest of only Shias and those who work for them. Even public services like the GB Police create unnecessary hurdles whenever our paths came across each other." (P5 2024)

Whether his remarks about the GB government are true or not but one can witness Ranger's check-posts guarding only Sunni neighbourhoods all over Gilgit city. It shows that Sunnis did not trust the GB Police services enough to ask for their protection and instead had to seek the protection of the Federal government (Rangers). The Sunni religious scholars were also fed up with the Shias making a scene at the roads on the day of Ashura (10th of Muharram; the second month of the Islamic calendar) and were critical of the practicing of *Tabarra* against the Companions in open streets (P5 2024). They questioned whether they did not have the right to protect the dignity of their sacred religious personalities.

Student organizations, academics, government servants and even members of the religious segment have criticized the negative role of the religious elite and blamed them for the propagation of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan. One cleric said, "Irresponsible Ulama play with your emotions. They are in fact one of the ignorant and do not deserve to be called an *Aalim* (scholar)." (P7 2024) He pointed out that there were negligible differences between the two sects and a lot was similar. Instead of focusing on the differences, he suggested that the Ulama should focus on the similarities to bring Shias and Sunnis together. "But they have their own agendas, and such closing of the gap between members of the two sects, harms their agendas. The clergy, like in all parts of the world, criticize each other over loudspeakers, delivering hate speeches and exciting the public, while in their private meetings they eat from the same plate." (P7 2024)

4.1.3 Role of Politicians

"Politicians play Shia-Sunni, Gilgity-Balti, and Sheen-Yashkun cards for political gains," said one senior civil servant of the GB Public Services (P8 2023). Like the Ulama, politicians have also played both positive and negative roles regarding sectarianism in GB. For example, Mr Nawaz Khan Naji, founder of the Balawaristan National Front – a local nationalist political party – believes that sectarianism has caused unprecedented damage to Gilgit Baltistan. At a public gathering he said:

> "Singaporean society is an exemplary society. There are Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus in Singapore, and they live peacefully side by side. You cannot find such exemplary society anywhere else. (Over here) you worship the same Allah, your Prophet (PBUH) is same, even your

Quran is same. The same Quran which has 6666 verses is present in a Shia house as it is in that of a Sunni. Does anyone have any doubt over this (the crowd loudly responded with a NO!)? Then what is the matter (with you)? I urge you to be united as one nation and move forward." (Naji Official 2021)

But politicians like him, are rare. In any society, politicians are the focal point of political organization. They are symbols of unity, and speak and act for the interests of the masses. They ensure consensus and are above partiality. They devise constructive and long-term beneficial policies. They are responsible for devising policies which ensure social and economic stability in their societies (Kaye and Richards 2015). They lead the nation. In Pakistan, the youth account for around 64% of the total population (S. H. Ali 2023). It also includes the youth of Gilgit Baltistan. They are getting increasingly frustrated over the constitutional status of the region, and about their own futures, and they feel that the politicians of Gilgit Baltistan are 'useless'. "They go to the Assembly (GB Legislative Assembly) only to collect their salaries, other than that they have no actual power. They are only good at rubber-stamping orders, issue by the Establishment," said member of a student organization (P15 2023). "The GB government is weak; it has no mechanisms for tax collection. Can a government function without taxes? Gilgit has been sold, so is Skardu, Astore, Phandar and Hunza. Our legislators should legislate in a way that our lands are not sold but instead leased." (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024)

"There is unjust distribution of resources. People argue about how much a Shia got, how much a Sunni got; how much was given to Baltistan, Gilgit, and Diamer. Such is the state of affairs. The government has failed to minimize the economic crisis in the region and economic vulnerability fuels sectarianism," said a member of a student organization (P17 2024). Politicians, like Ulama, have also been criticized by their own colleagues. A former member of the GB Legislative Assembly had this to say about practices of the past and present governments:

> "Sectarian messages were conveyed by the government through its own action: If a Sunni was killed, some Shias were immediately imprisoned and announced that the killers were caught – without any investigation. They were captured on the sole basis of suspicion, and it did not matter whether they actually did the act or not." (P20 2023)

In one of the interviews, a senior civil officer in the GB public services criticized the Ulama and politicians and blamed them for this tragic state of sectarianism in the region. He had this to say about the nexus between Ulama and politicians:

> "An announcement from a Shia mosque forbidding its followers to vote for Hafiz Hafeez Ur Rehman, a Sunni, in the 2015 elections backfired, and rendered Sunnis to vote for him, who were at first voting for his political opponent, Jamil Ahmad, a Shia. The announcement enraged Sunnis and it resulted in Jamil's defeat on the Election Day." (P9 2024)

There is an abundance of political immaturity and a lack of critical thinking among the masses. A politician makes fake job promises to the head of the families, or other influential personalities, who will then act as shepherds to the flock (general public), guaranteeing their allegiance (P17 2024). Votes are casted on kinship basis and tribal or sectarian affiliations, instead of critically analysing the manifesto of a candidate or the party to whom the candidate is attached, or their past record of how much they have delivered on their promises (P15 2023). The area is generally backward and people are not even aware of their political rights. They are content with the continuous wheat supply. They do not know that they can pressurize the legislators to carve out and implement fruitful policies which will provide long-term benefits, like investing in education and health. They only protest when they face electricity shortages or when the wheat subsidy is lifted (P16 2024). There is not a

single engineering or a medical college in the whole region. This lack of education and political awareness is an important reason for extremism in the society (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024).

Politicians of Gilgit Baltistan did play a huge role in bringing leading religious leaders of the two sects on board when the *Zabta e Akhlaq* and *Code of Conduct* agreements were signed in 2005 and 2012, respectively (P21 2023). Other than that they have failed to curb the menace of sectarianism. Even politicians themselves have been killed on sectarian grounds. For example, Ramzan and Ehsan Danish (both brothers were PPP ticketholders) were killed by unknown assailants in Gilgit and Karachi, respectively. Both belonged to the Shia sect (Dawn 2005; Dawn 2006). Syed Asad Zaidi, another Shia politician was killed in Gilgit in 2009 (Pamir Times 2009). In the 2012 Chilas incident, after killing Shia passengers and burning the buses, the mob chanted "death to Syed Mehdi Shah." Syed Mehdi Shah is a prominent Shia politician, hailing from Skardu and is also the first Chief Minister of Gilgit Baltistan (Boy 2021).

4.1.4 Role of Pakistan's Establishment and Intelligence Agencies
The Establishment generally refers to the top Politicians, Judges, Business Tycoons, and Civil and Military Bureaucracy of Pakistan (P22 2023). And, it is a well-known fact that among them, the military holds the reins of absolute power in Pakistan (P14 2024). The establishment is detested by the general Pakistani society, and the people of Gilgit Baltistan are no exception (P7 2024). People of Gilgit Baltistan are absolutely sure that sectarianism, in their region, is product of the Establishment and it was promoted in the region to suppress nationalist voices, which demanded constitutional rights (P1 2024).

Starting from 1947, some participants claimed that it was actually the same Major William Alexander Brown, alias Major Brown, of the British Army, who first sowed the seeds of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan (P1 2024; P4 2024; P24 2024). Major Brown was stationed in Gilgit and he assisted the locals in the '*War of Liberation*' of 1947 to overthrow the Dogra governor Brigadier Ghansara Singh, bringing an end to Dogra rule in Gilgit. However, he noticed that most of the local senior leaders/officers of the '*War of Liberation*' were Shia Muslims and he said, "They all are Shias, this will become a Shia state." (P24 2024) However, this did not cause a major rift between the two sects. Later on, Pakistan sent Sardar Alam Khan to act as Political Agent. Upon realizing that administering this region was proving much difficult, as people were demanding their rights in exchange for integration with Pakistan, Sardar Alam continued what Major Brown had planted (divide and rule) (P1 2024).

His administration increased hostility and mistrust between Colonel Hassan Khan (Liberation War Hero) and Qazi Abdul Razzaq (Sunni religious leader) by a false propaganda against Colonel Hassan Khan (P24 2024). Rumours were spread that Colonel Hassan Khan, Subedar Major Babar Khan and other war heroes wanted to establish Gilgit as a Shia state and that Sunnis, who were in a minority, would then be at the mercy of their Shia lords (P24 2024). Qazi Abdul Razzaq was the same person who had earlier issued a '*Fatwa*' (religious decree), declaring war against the non-believers (Dogra rule) and Colonel Hassan Khan was the same person, who had acted upon the decree and later thanked Qazi Abdul Razzaq for supporting the '*Liberation War*' with religious backing (P24 2024; P8 2023). But the propaganda succeeded and Colonel Hassan Khan remarks in his book '*Shamsheer say Zanjeer tak*' (From the Sword to Shackles) that one day he was sauntering in a neighbourhood (Kashrote) in Gilgit city when he saw his teacher (Sunni) coming up to him. His teacher confronted him and lamented that he had betrayed the 'cause' (*Liberation War*). Colonel Mirza Hassan Khan says that he figured out that day that the propaganda against him had succeeded (C. H. Khan 2010; P24 2024).

> "Pakistan imposed Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) in Gilgit Baltistan, which was used by the British to control Pakhtoons of the Frontier Region. We had no quarrel with Pakistan, neither was it our intention to join India or act against Pakistan's interest. We, willingly and without any help, liberated an area (73000 sq. km) slightly smaller than KPK and handed it over to Pakistan and

professed our devotion and sincerity to the newly formed Islamic Republic. But what did we get in return – Lawlessness, an authoritarian bureaucratic rule and the gift of sectarianism. This is how Pakistan has repaid us." (P10 2024)

During the 1970s, under the leadership of Premier Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the National Establishment brought major changes to the region. The Bhutto administration abolished the FCR; abolished the power of local rajas; formed the Northern Areas Council and also brought other administrative reforms (P20 2023; P21 2023). However, he also removed the Special Status that this region enjoyed owing to its connection to the Kashmir Issue. The removal of the Special Status resulted in an influx of Sunni immigrants from Kohistan, Mansehra, and parts of country. The immigrants were all Sunni and were more educated and skilful than the local population. They got better jobs and other employment opportunities and locals resented these developments (Sering 2009). Pakistan deliberately changed the demography of the region to make it a Sunni-majority region. One participant said, "Centre (Federal Government) has filled Gilgit with Sunnis." (P8 2023)

In the same decade, when the Tanzim Movement was demanding provincial status for Gilgit Baltistan, the establishment launched an all-Sunni Mahaz Movement demanding the region to be joined with Azad Kashmir (a Sunni majority region). These diverging political demands were a success for the establishment, as they insisted that political consensus was vital for required course of actions to be taken (P22 2023). Shias wanted one thing, Sunnis wanted another thing. Lack of consensus in political demands, meant no pressure on the establishment, which means an unhindered Federal rule on the region. Then we have the Zia Regime. He openly supported conservative and extremist elements in the society. He propagated the teachings of both Deobandi and Ahl e Hadith sects of Islam and was openly hostile to Shias in general (P1 2024). The *Lashkar Kashi* in 1988, on Gilgit Baltistan, was the first direct manifestation of the establishment's role in promoting sectarianism in the region (P1 2024; P2 2023; P3 2023; P4 2024; P24 2024). Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, the leading clergy was directly under the influence of intelligence agencies. "Even today, the Ulama often receive written notes, mentioning the things, that they have to deliver during Friday Sermons." (P10 2024; P11 2024)

Participants also mentioned the influence of foreign intelligence agencies (notably RAW of India) in the region. They added that it was not only Pakistan's establishment, which was responsible for promoting sectarianism in the region, but foreign intelligence agencies had exploited this fissure in the society as well. "There are somewhere between 100-130 intelligence agencies, operating in Gilgit Baltistan." (P8 2023) However the main responsibility falls on the national establishment and its intelligence agencies. Politicians claimed that intelligence agencies, still, actively interfere in the regional elections for the GB Legislative Assembly. One of the politicians, whom I was interviewing, requesting anonymity, had this to say about the interference of security agencies in electoral processes: "Our colleagues were called by the 'agency' (intelligence authorities in Gilgit Baltistan) and told to join a certain party or else they would be defeated in the upcoming elections." (P20 2023)

When I asked him whether it was possible that all leading politicians contest elections as independent candidates and form a government, which reflected a true representation of the masses, and not of their parties, he said:

> "It will prove disadvantageous as the Federal Government would not release funds – for a government that does not have its members in power – for developmental works and we do not have any of our own to pay for the said works. The political party that forms the government in the Federal arena also forms governments in Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. That has been the norm in Pakistan, even before the last martial law of General Musharraf. We (politicians) are

compelled to change our parties just in order to secure funds for Gilgit Baltistan and due to the unresolved Kashmir Issue; we hold no more power than that." (P22 2023)

A segment of the clergy has always resisted the interference of the establishment in the region's internal matters. For example, during the past couple of years, Syed Agha Ali Rizvi of the Majlis e Wahdat e Muslimeen (MWM) has repeatedly, but indirectly, exposed the role of security agencies in exacerbating the state of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan. Videos of him saying, "We know who the unknowns are; we know who is pitting the Shias and Sunnis against each other; stop this madness!" (P22 2023)

Discussing the military's role, in domains outside its constitutional limits, is a taboo in Gilgit Baltistan, just like in the rest of the country. Owing to the country's unfriendly neighbours and the prevailing regional security situation, the military has become the most powerful institution in the country. Uncertainty regarding the security situation in South Asia has made Pakistan a 'Security State' whereas for the general public to thrive and to achieve a quality standard of life, the presence of a 'Welfare State' is a requirement. A welfare state upholds the 'rule of law': justice, equality and fair play – vital for development, peace and stability. While in a security state every sphere of human life is undermined, and this undermining is justified by the presence of internal and external threats to the nation.

4.1.5 Constitutional Vacuum and dependency on the Federal Government

Gilgit Baltistan is also referred to, in Urdu, as '*Sarzameen e Bay Ayeen*' (land without rules) (P24 2024). An agreement, known as the Karachi Agreement was signed between the Government of Pakistan, Government of the then Azad Kashmir and the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, on 28 April, 1949. Under this agreement, the Azad Kashmir Government ceded the territory of Gilgit Baltistan (then called Northern Areas) to Pakistan. It also gave Pakistan complete authority over the subjects of defence, foreign affairs and communication (P24 2024). This agreement is despised in the whole of Gilgit Baltistan as they claim that none of their representatives were present at the signing of this agreement and Kashmiris had no right to sign this agreement on their behalf (P24 2024). The United Nations Resolution on Kashmir considers Gilgit Baltistan a part of the Disputed Territory of Kashmir, while locals maintain that Gilgit Baltistan is not a part of the Kashmir Territory, rather, it is a part of the Kashmir Issue (P24 2024). They insist that there is a big difference.

Gilgit Baltistan has been ruled by independent princes throughout history. Dogras invaded this region in the 1840s and forcefully annexed this region into Dogra Kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir until the *Liberation War* of 1947 (P24 2024). Locals ask whether being under the control of a tyrant government, which did not have the legitimacy (approval of people), made it an actual part of the Jammu and Kashmir Territory (P24 2024).

> "Historically, we have never been part of Kashmir, we were invaded and our territories were forcefully added to the Dogra Kingdom and it remained so for at least a century. That integration did not have the approval of locals and we always wished to be independent of the Dogras but our voices were silenced by their guns. Our ancestors sacrificed their lives and liberated us from the tyrant Dogra rule and willingly opted to join Pakistan. That is the only agreement we know and recognize. The Karachi Agreement is a farce. Still we were told to submit to the larger Kashmir Issue and we stood in solidarity with our Kashmiri Muslim brethren for our vote would prove beneficial to the Kashmir Cause in the UN Referendum that was to take place under the latter's supervision to decide the future of Kashmir – whether its inhabitants wanted to join Pakistan or India (but has not been materialized yet). Instead of being grateful, the Kashmiri leadership has always resented any benefit that is granted to Gilgit Baltistan". (P17 2024)

Kashmiris are not well liked in the region. Since the Karachi Agreement, Gilgit Baltistan has been directly ruled by the Federal Government. Azad Kashmir got its Interim Constitution in 1974 and since then it is being

administered under the said constitution. On the other hand, Gilgit Baltistan has always been ruled by Executive Orders and not even the parliament has been taken into confidence while formulating policies related to Gilgit Baltistan. This constitutional vacuum has been filled by Political Agents, Federal Bureaucrats, the Military Brass, Religious Clergy, and finally by powerless politicians (P17 2024).

Skipping past executive acts, let us briefly discuss some main points from the latest Gilgit Baltistan Order of 2018: First is the Citizenship Clause. The Order states, "*Citizen means a person who has a domicile or resident of Gilgit Baltistan and who is a citizen under the Pakistan Citizenship Act, 1951.*" (Abbas 2022) This is confusing. Does this mean everyone, who is a Pakistani citizen, is also a citizen of Gilgit Baltistan? Or only those who have a domicile of Gilgit Baltistan or resides there, is its citizen? If the first is to be taken true then how come Pakistan criticize India for abrogating article 370 and 35A from the Indian Constitution? How can Pakistan claim that India is trying to change the demography of Indian-held Kashmir by allowing outsiders to purchase land and property, and increasing the Hindu population in Kashmir, when it has itself done the same in the following Order? In fact Pakistan has been doing it since Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's abrogation of the Special Status of Gilgit Baltistan, allowing outsiders (mostly Sunnis from KPK and Punjab) to settle and change the Shia-majority demography of the region (P14 2024). How can Pakistan cede parts of Gilgit Baltistan (Raskam and Shaksgam valleys or The Trans-Karakoram Tract), a disputed territory, to China under the Sino-Pakistan Agreement of 1963? "They call us a part of Kashmir yet they administer us differently than Kashmir? What are we to make of it? This is not just." (P8 2023)

Now, let us look at the article which gives the Prime Minister of Pakistan absolute authority over the matters in Gilgit Baltistan. Article 60 (4) reads, "*If any provision of an Act of Assembly is repugnant to any provision of any law which the Prime Minister is competent to enact, then the law made by the Prime Minister, whether passed before or after the Act of the Assembly, shall prevail and the Act of the Assembly shall, to the extent of the repugnancy, be void.*" (Abbas 2022) This makes the Legislative Assembly nothing more than rubber-stamping machinery (P8 2023). Laws will be made by the Federal Government and the local government will implement them. What is even the use of conducting elections for the Legislative Assembly if it cannot function independently? (P18 2024; P19 2024) The state of Gilgit Baltistan's Supreme Appellate and High Court is even worse under the 2018 Orders. Article 118 (2) of the Order reads, "*No Court, including the Gilgit-Baltistan Supreme Appellate Court and the Gilgit-Baltistan High Court, shall call into question or permit to be called into question, the validity of this Order.*" (Abbas 2022)

People protested against this Order and the regional government of Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeez Ur Rehman, of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz or PML (N), claimed that they were forced to sign this order (P20 2023). Former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh, Afzal Shigri, a Balti himself, strongly criticized this Order and said that it took back what little autonomy had been given under the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 (Dawn, Dawn 2018).

> "Indian actions in August 2019 (abrogation of Article 370 and 35A) were illegal under the UN Resolution on Kashmir but the Modi Government did it through its Parliament, and through a democratic procedure they amended their own constitution and mainstreamed Indian-held Kashmir with all other of its states. Pakistan has never even consulted its own parliament in matters relating to Gilgit Baltistan. It does not treat this region as part of Kashmir, and it does not treat this region like other provinces of Pakistan. It issues Executive Orders, one after another, and does whatever it wants to do with this territory. This is a dangerous path and will cause severe instability in the future and Pakistan will face severe backlash from future generations." (P9 2024)

This state of constitutional limbo has thrown the region at the mercy of the Federal government. I asked one of my interviewee, who is a senior officer at the Gilgit Development Authority, about the presence of natural

resources in this region and that whether those could help in elevating the status of the region and raise people's living standards. He had this to say to my question:

> "Yes we have great natural resources and God has blessed us with a vast variety of them. Chief among them is water. According to some estimates there are over 7000 glaciers in Gilgit Baltistan and it is called the 3rd Pole of the World. These glaciers provide water for domestic use and irrigation and they also feed the plains of Punjab and Sindh. But we are only able to exploit those which are easily accessible. They are small streams running down from the mountains or water-springs present in various locations. Other than this small body of water most of the glacial water flows into the rivers and the rivers are significantly lower (entrenched rivers) than the surrounding terrain and we cannot use them for irrigation, like in Punjab or Sindh. It is useless to us since we cannot put it to proper use, unless we have the capability and financial power to construct dams and barrages, which we do not have, unfortunately. We do not have the ability to exploit our natural resources on our own. We are dependent on funds from the centre and are at their mercy. The area is big but sparsely populated, in small pockets – spread all over the region. To facilitate and initiate developmental projects in such settings is much difficult. There is no taxation system in the region." (P8 2023)

When I asked him about the Diamer-Basha Dam and its advantages for Gilgit Baltistan, he said that Diamer-Basha Dam royalties can mitigate economic woes of Diamer, given that they are paid by the Federal Government. The economy is in a dire situation. He lamented that:

> "We do not have jobs for our young graduates, each year the Karakoram International University (KIU) is producing 5000 graduates but where will they go, the job market is extremely saturated. Some of them, if not all, are exploited by extremist factions in the society. Their futures are destroyed along with that of the region. We have always asked to be integrated with the rest of the country, and we still do. We have no desire to be an independent country. Our ancestors have made sacrifices so that the region can join a Muslim country. Our religious leaders issued decrees against Dogras because they were non-believers, and they instructed us to join and remain faithful to Pakistan, because it is a Muslim country, and we have remained so. In fact we are the only ones who, whole-heartedly, want to integrate with Pakistan while other communities have separatist groups who carry secessionist aims. The establishment considers them important but since we are offering our loyalty and our whole region on a plate, perhaps they have taken us for granted. Will they only lend an ear when we take up arms as well? This constitutional vacuum and lawlessness has rendered extremist factions to consolidate their power in the region, which has been a major source for the rise of sectarianism in the region. When people do not get justice from the government, they look towards their own communities for justice, and since the 1990s 'sect' is the primary source of identity for the people of Gilgit Baltistan – hence the rise in sectarianism." (P8 2023)

Differences in the Participants' attitude to Sectarianism

This is my personal observation about the tone and body language of participants as I was interviewing them and not a major theme. I have divided the participants into two categories based on their attitude regarding the historical development and future of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan. The first category consists of elders, those who were born before 1990 and the second category consists of the youth, those born after 1990. It was not my intention to categorize the interviewees based on their age rather it came naturally. When asked if they could cooperate with members of the opposite sect, the elders said yes but their body gestures suggested they did not feel safe and were reluctant towards cooperation with members of the opposite sect. The same question

received positive responses from the youth; they were optimistic and hopeful and seemed comfortable in cooperating with members of other sects. For them the only priorities were the region's peace and development. The elders did not trust members of the other sects but the youth were indifferent towards sectarian differences and even boasted about their friendships with members of other sects.

This is only due to the fact that the elders have seen the worst incidents of sectarianism and it has left a permanent mark on their psyche. Tragedy of the *Lashkar Kashi* and incidents during the 1990s and early 2000s are still fresh in their memories. It is hard for them to forget those memories. In contrast, the generation born after the 1990s does not have the burden of such memories. Moreover, it was generally deemed undesirable to talk about sectarian issues and such discussions were considered taboo and discouraged. The elders spent their youthful days in that era and this lack of discussion and debate on the issue widened the sectarian gap, making the issue even more lethal. They generally did not sit together because all it needed was one spark and all hell would break loose, so they avoided each other; the presence of different hospitals for Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit city is proof of this inhospitable environment that prevailed in the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s. The other group was born and raised in the age of communication and a major portion (if not all) of that group graduated from universities from down-country, where they lived together in hostels in Islamabad, Punjab, Sindh and other parts of the country. This brought them closer to each other. Even during childhood, they met each other in schools and made friends. Later on they had the opportunity to discuss steaming issues about their region in a friendly environment, away from their homes. They were exposed to major socio-economic conditions while they were away from their homes and even the internet significantly affected the thought processing of the ones that stayed in their home towns.

The elders were pessimistic throughout the interview but all of them were hopeful of their successors – the youth of Gilgit Baltistan. They seemed hopeful that the younger generation has the capacity to decrease the effects of sectarianism in the region. They understand that sectarianism was not native to Gilgit Baltistan because during their own childhood they had friends from members of the opposite sect. Things were normal then and it (sectarianism) only started to rise when they were teenagers. They regret that the energy and vitality of their youthful days were spent in fighting with each other but they were glad for the future generations.

4.2 Theoretical Perspective

The basic components of Securitization Theory are: Securitizing Actor, Referent Object, Existential Threat/Issue and the Audience. Securitizing moves and Speech Act come under the domain of the Securitizing Agent. The Referent Object is the one which needs to be securitized. The Existential Threat or Issue is the reason because of which securitization is being done – to mitigate its effects; to exterminate it etc. Lastly the Audience is the one whose approval is needed for securitization to succeed. They are the ones who legitimize the steps taken during the securitization process; therefore the Securitizing Agent must convince the Audience.

Before applying this theory to our own case study, it should be noted that Securitization has not been carried out in Gilgit Baltistan against Sectarianism and this research paper emphasizes upon the need and urgency to do so.

4.2.1 Securitizing Agents/Actors

The Federal Government, the Gilgit Baltistan Government and the Religious Leadership are the main securitizing agents in this scenario. The Federal government holds the reigns of absolute power in the region. It controls the region's internal and external policies and the region is financially dependent on it. The Gilgit Baltistan government reflects the will of the local population. It gives the natives a sense of representation and the fact that they come out to vote for their representatives (48% voter turnout in 2020 elections despite Covid-19) at each election proves that they are still valued by the inhabitants of Gilgit Baltistan and also that they are main administrative machinery in the region gives them a place among our securitizing agents. Lastly, but most

important of all, are the Religious Scholars of all sects. They are the most potent securitizing actor than everyone else. It is because they control the population of the region. People not only respect them, but they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of these Ulama. With just a gesture of the hand, they can turn people against others; make them vote for a politician; set them loose on a civilian population; and even declare and implement a full scale armed conflict against an army – Qazi Abdul Razzaq's *Fatwa* against Dogra rule and the subsequent overthrow of Dogra government proves the significance of the Ulama in this region. People will disobey both the above governments but will not disobey the Ulama. That is why the establishment tries to keep them under their own control.

Ulama are the centre of attention around which the society revolves. Their words and actions form the ultimate guideline and rules, and the locals faithfully follow them.

4.2.2 Referent Object
The Referent Object is the peace and stability of Gilgit Baltistan. Peace and stability are prerequisites for development and growth.

4.2.3 Existential Threat or Issue Framing
Sectarianism is the existential threat to the peace and stability of Gilgit Baltistan. In the past, it has caused death and destruction, in an otherwise peaceful region. The People of Gilgit Baltistan are not one community: they do not belong to one sect, one ethnicity or one culture. The area possesses unique and diverse cultures. There are many differences between the locals but it has never resulted in killings at such large scale. Yes there have been tribal enmities in the past (and some even now), but it has not pitted a whole community against the other at such a large scale that has the potential to destroy the social fabric of the region. However, sectarianism is the most lethal source of division and it always brings people at each other's throats. It does not matter if two guys, who belong to opposite sects, have even ever met each other (let alone have historical grievances against each other), they will see each other as enemies.

For example, there is a person who belongs to the Sunni sect and is a local of Chilas in district Diamer. And then there is another person who is a Shia and belongs to District Shigar in Baltistan. Now they, necessarily, would not have ever seen each other before, but because of the prevailing propaganda in Gilgit Baltistan that Chilasis are Shia-Killers, the guy from Shigar will never be comfortable to sit together with the one from Chilas. Similarly, two people, who are both *Dards*, and are both from the *Sheen Tribe*, will still not trust each other whenever a sectarian issue surfaces. Instead, they will be more trustworthy towards members of their own sect, regardless of their ethnicity or tribal affiliation.

4.2.4 Audience
The significance of the audience cannot be overlooked because the outcome, of securitization, depends on their acceptance/approval – of the process. Literature on sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan suggests that the issue is not native to the region, but it highlights that it attracted extremist groups in the society and that they embraced and promoted it – and they still do. The 'audience' of this study are, hence, those extremist groups. The group consists of a small – yet extremely influential – segment of Ulama and their followers.

It is true that extremist groups exist who promote sectarian conflicts in the region but a large segment of the population despises sectarianism and often laments about the region's recent sectarian past. This is a relief for the securitizing agents as they will have the support of the locals in implementing the securitizing moves. For example, locals of Chilas (Diamer district) are infamous for killing Shia travellers on the Karakoram Highway (R. S. Khan, Dawn 2013). In December, 2023, unknown gunmen, in Chilas, opened fire on a bus travelling from Gilgit to Islamabad, which caused the driver to lose balance and the bus collided with an incoming goods-truck, killing its driver as well. In total, around 9 people were killed and some 25 injured (Nagri, Dawn 2023).

Chilas made the headlines the next day but locals had had enough with being called Shia-killers and they came out to protest against the unfortunate incident. "We are not killers; we have nothing to do with Shia killings in Gilgit Baltistan. But whenever a sectarian issue surfaces in Gilgit Baltistan, the name of Chilas is always at the front. We condemn sectarianism and we are peace loving people. They (killers) are outsiders who come from somewhere else. We demand that they and their facilitators should be brought to justice."

4.2.5 Speech Act and Securitizing Moves

There are multiple steps the securitizing agents need to take to mitigate the effects of sectarianism and eradicate it from the society, in the long term. These steps have been formalized keeping in view suggestions from interviewees, and are divided into different categories and the role played by each securitizing agent is placed within that category wherever their role is relevant.

4.2.5.1 Speech Act

- *Condemnation of Sectarian Violence*

All three securitizing agents can play this role. The Federal and the GB Governments must condemn sectarianism in all its forms and discourage people towards this act. Federal Ministers and local Members of GB Legislative Assembly (MLAs) can take an active part in condemning this menace and include this (condemnation) in their public speeches whenever they have the opportunity to speak about the region. This will discourage and demoralize sectarian groups as they will feel that their actions are not welcomed and do not enjoy support from the government machinery (P1 2024).

The role of the Ulama is the most important as they have the most influence on locals. Condemnation of sectarianism from the pulpit during Friday sermons or Eid prayers will definitely have positive effects on the society. Shia Ulama can even use the platform of the Imam Bargah (a place or hall where people assemble to perform activities like discussing the life, teachings and martyrdom of all Shia Imams, and to commemorate the Tragedy of Karbala), especially during the month of Muharram, when people's emotions are the highest. Ulama should promote Quranic teachings in which the Book says that Muslims should hold fast to the rope of Allah (in unity) and be not divided among themselves (Surah Al e Imran, verse 103). In another verse (Surah Al Anfal, verse 46) Allah says, "And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute and [thus] lose courage and [then] your strength would depart; and be patient. Indeed, Allah is with the patient." (P2 2023)

- *Messages of Unity and Solidarity*

This can be actualized in the same public speeches by members of the two assemblies (National and Regional). They should stress upon the divisive nature of sectarianism and the uniting nature of Islamic teachings. The clergy's role is also crucial in this as well. An example is of Ayatollah Khamenei's and Ayatollah Sistani's statements where they call upon Shias to consider Sunnis not only their brothers in religion but also their lives. The Quran says, "The believers are nothing but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy" (Surah Al Hujurat, verse 10). Ulama should warn that sectarianism is condemned by the Quran, "As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least: their affair is with God. He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did" (6:159). Just like the Ulama, the political leadership can also benefit from Quranic verses and use them to unite the Muslims. The political leaders should explain that it does not have to be the case that all Sunnis should convert to Shias or Shias should convert to Sunnis but that their differences should only be academic and be resolved academically, instead of resolving to violence (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024).

- *Considering Shared Values and Prioritizing Reconciliation*

The Quran says, (3:64), "Say, O Prophet, O People of the Book! Let us come to common terms: that we will worship none but Allah, associate none with Him, nor take one another as lords instead of Allah. But if they turn away, then say, Bear witness that we have submitted to Allah alone." In this verse Allah instructs the Prophet (PBUH) to extend an invitation of peace to the People of the Book (like Christians and Jews) based on the commonalities between them and Muslims. The Ulama should stress that if we can come to terms with the Christians and Jews based on mutual things, then why not among ourselves. After all, we are all Muslims (P6 2023; P7 2024). Nawaz Khan Naji's speech, where he mentions the commonalities among the Muslims is a perfect example of appealing to shared values. All other politicians should follow his example (P14 2024).

4.2.5.2 Securitizing Moves

- *Organizing Seminars and Conferences on Inter-Sect Dialogues*

To complement speech act, the Federal Government should organize seminars where topics such as inter-sect harmony and inter-sect dialogue can be promoted. The GB Government also need to do the same in Gilgit Baltistan. Religious scholars and relevant personalities from all sects should be invited to speak at these gatherings. There, they should highlight the commonalities, as discussed above, encourage tolerance over sectarian differences. Tolerance over difference of opinion needs to be encouraged as well, as the Pakistani society in general has become extremely intolerant (P23 2023).

- *Awareness Campaigns and School Curricula*

John Locke said that the mind of a child is like that of a *Tabula Rasa* (blank slate) and it absorbs whatever is fed into it (William 2024). The GB Government, in coordination, with the Federal Government, needs to formulate the educational curricula in a way that it reflects inter-sect harmony and school children should be taught to be tolerant over differences of opinion. This will be long-term investment as it will produce such future generations who are kind, gentle and considerate in their behaviour, something the whole of Pakistan crucially needs at the moment (P23 2023; P24 2024).

Apart from this long-term investment the government machinery can utilize the power of social and traditional media to promote inter-sect harmony. Instead of inviting conservative clerics (like it was done during the time of General Zia Ul Haq), moderate and wise clerics should be invited on podcasts, and at programs on TV channels to talk about the importance of unity among Muslims and promote inter-sect harmony (P3 2023). The 'media' is often referred to as the fifth pillar of the state; hence the government should exploit its power for the benefit of the people, instead of banning social media websites like X (formerly twitter) (P13 2024). It is necessary for the governments (both Federal and Regional) to understand that suppressing voices will only increase the resentment which is already present in the minds of the general masses. Instead, actively listening to their grievances and resolving them is the only way forward.

- *Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Ensuring an Inclusive Political Process*

This securitizing move falls strictly under the domain of the Federal Government. The centre (Federal Government) needs to realize that the people of Gilgit Baltistan are continuously getting aware of their political rights, and with each passing day they are getting resentful – gone are the dark days and the age of ignorance (P20 2023). The age of social media has awakened them and made them realize how marginalized they are. So, the centre needs to stop running the affairs of this region through Executive Orders and give them their rights. This can be achieved by making Gilgit Baltistan the fifth (provisional) province of Pakistan (P15 2023). Last time, the GB Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution calling for the region to be integrated with the federation as the fifth (provisional) province of Pakistan. Providing provisional provincial status to the

region will not harm the larger Kashmir Question but it will definitely prove fruitful for the marginalized region (P21 2023).

Currently there is not a single mention of Gilgit Baltistan, or even the names of any of its areas, in the Constitution of Pakistan or even in the Constitution of Azad Kashmir. This state of lawlessness has put the region at a disadvantageous position, relative to other provinces of the country, including the autonomous state of Azad Kashmir (P20 2023). The executive needs to take parliament in confidence to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution of Pakistan and include Gilgit Baltistan as the fifth (provisional) province of the country. If this is not possible then, at least, the region should be given a constitution of its own, just like the one given to Azad Kashmir. In that case State-Subject rule (and Special Status) needs to be reinstated in this region, so that locals feel safe. This will stop people from all over Pakistan to purchase land, property and settle in Gilgit Baltistan, which has previously resulted in demographic changes in the region, exacerbating inter-sectarian tensions (P21 2023).

Only the Federal Government has the power to make these changes and if they are sincere they should not waste time, and energy, in making empty promises (like each contesting political party does) and give practical results. This will develop trust between the Shia population of Gilgit Baltistan and Federal Government and also improve the security situation in the region (P22 2023). The majority Shias, once feeling safe, will reciprocate this kindness by taking care of other sister communities of the region – a demand raised by one of the Sunni religious scholars I interviewed (P1 2024; P5 2024).

The second securitizing move includes the role of the GB Government. Once a strong legal framework is ensured by the Federal Government, or even without it, the GB political elite should provide an inclusive environment where people from all segments of society, regardless of their sects, can present their genuine issues (P7 2024; P8 2024; P9 2024; P16 2024). One politician, whom I interviewed, said, "It is not always because of sectarian differences that incidents of sectarianism increase in the region. Most of the times, it is because of genuine grievances like people not getting a stable source of livelihood or their legitimate demands not being met. Economic issues act as catalysts to sectarianism." (P22 2023) Unjust and unequal distribution of available resources is also one of the reasons of conflict in the region. Abraham Maslow's Pyramid of Needs theory can be considered to better understand this problem.

Maslow theorised that human beings are dependent on various needs and the inability to attain those needs renders them unable to function normally. These needs are shaped in a pyramid structure where the basic demands are at the end while latter ones are at the top. The most basic human needs, according to Maslow, are physiological needs like food, water, rest and shelter. Then are the safety needs which include personal and financial security. Next in line are the social needs which include friendships, romantic relationships, family or a common sense of belongingness. These are psychological needs and are as much important as physiological needs. Next are the esteem needs and self-actualization needs. The first one comprises of the need to be respected and recognized. The second one is the highest level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. It refers to the realization of one's own potential and the desire to become the best version of one's own self (Willingham 2023). If we apply this theory to the above politician's statement, then his words remain true. The people of Gilgit Baltistan do not have food security or financial stability. They lack proper education and are being brainwashed to become sectarian goons (P7 2024). How can they achieve the level of self-actualization when even their basic needs are not being met? To jump from one level onto the next, Maslow states that it is necessary that all needs in that particular level are met (Willingham 2023).

Another senior officer, whom I interviewed, had similar things to say about the rise of sectarianism in the region. He said, "Sectarianism has economic and political reasons. It is also caused by injustice and the inadequate role of the judiciary. When people are denied what is rightly theirs they follow the prevailing

medium of acquiring justice, which is killing the deniers of their justice, in the name of Islam." (P14 2024) His statement does have parallels in the Pakistani society. For example, there have been multiple incidents of 'mob justice' in Pakistan, like the killing of the Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana in Sialkot, Punjab. Priyantha was a Sri Lankan national and was working at Rajco Sporting Goods Manufacturing Company as the company's official manufacturer of the Pakistan Cricket Team's kit for the 2023 ICC World Cup. He was killed over allegations of blasphemy. Later, the Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore stated the charges against him were false and six people were awarded death sentences and others were given life imprisonment sentences (BBC 2022). In another incident a security guard of a private bank shot his manager over allegations of blasphemy. Later on, it was revealed that the guard had personal issues with the manager and the latter was innocent (S. Malik 2021). Pakistan's history is full of these unfortunate events and these actions have found their way into Gilgit Baltistan. Only a strong legal framework and an inclusive environment, where people feel heard, can mitigate sectarian killings in the region. Imam Ali (as) said, "A government based on the laws on non-believers can function, but one based on injustice cannot." (P7 2024)

- *Promoting Local Culture and Sports*

Gilgit Baltistan is like a vase containing different flowers (cultures) in it: there is Balti, Sheen, Wakhi, Burusho, Khwaar, Domaaki, and to a lesser extent Gujjari. Before the arrival of sectarianism, people prioritized culture and considered it a mutual source of convergence and unity in the region (P23 2023). A Balti person may not understand the poetry of a Shina song but the tune of the traditional '*Hareep*' or '*Suranaye*' (a traditional flute but with a different sound and structure) and the local drum does resonate with him, and he will dance to the tune with his Sheen brothers (P18 2024). The musical heritage of Gilgit Baltistan does not have any space for sectarianism (P19 2024). People from all sects participate in these events and do not differentiate among each other on the basis of sects. Music and dance has healing effects on the mind and local music can definitely bring communities together (P15 2023). Some famous dances from the mountains are the Sword Dance, the Flower Dance and the Pigeon Dance.

Apart from music, other events are also organized called '*Mehfil e Mushaira*'. These are literary events and are specific to poets but anyone can join to entertain themselves. Languages of Gilgit Baltistan are hundreds of years old (P24 2024). The lack of intra-regional communication due to the presence of high mountain ranges has resulted in the development of distinct cultures and languages (P9 2024). Take the Khwaar language for instance. This language is common to Chitral and Ghizer District of Gilgit Baltistan. The antiquity of this language can be deduced from the fact that there are folk songs present today, which were written by poets from the 3rd century CE (P17 2024). In these festivals people celebrate the writings of their ancestors, enjoy the present and train their future generations to become the torch-bearers of their literature in the future (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024).

Apart from music and literature, we have the sports category and chief among them is Polo, the 'king of the games and game of the kings'. A beautiful demonstration of unity, because of a Polo match, can be seen in the Shahi (Royal) Polo Ground Gilgit. On both sides of the ground, are the Shia and Sunni Grand Mosques of Gilgit where people of Gilgit are infused with sectarian ideologies – metaphorically speaking – and in the middle – depicting the essence of unity – is the Shahi Polo Ground (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024). Over there, you can see a Sunni Muslim cheering, clapping and boosting the morale of a Shia Polo player and vice versa (P15 2023; P16 2024; P17 2024). People forget sectarian differences when they are attached to culture. "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots," said Marcus Garvey (founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) (P23 2023). Paulo Coelho (Brazilian novelist) has this to say about the importance of culture: "Culture makes people understand each other better. And if they understand each other better in their soul, it is easier to

overcome the economic and political barriers. But first they have to understand that their neighbour is, in the end, just like them, with the same problems, the same questions." (P23 2023)

CONCLUSION

There exists a nexus between non-traditional security threats and conflict. Contemporary scholarship on security studies considers non-traditional security threats as equally threatening to the existence of a state as military threats (traditional security threat). The different sectors (economic, environment, political, social and military) of security, as proposed by Barry Buzan and the Copenhagen School, hold equal importance for the survivability of a state. The sectors are also interlinked. This means that threats in one sector affect the functioning of other sectors. For example, natural disasters such as floods and tsunamis are a threat to the environmental sector, but it also affects the economic sector of the state. Non-traditional security threats have the potential to generate conflict in a state. For example, grievances related to political and economic rights have always created problems for Pakistan in the shape of the 'Balochistan Conundrum'. The Balochis feel they are being ignored while their resources are being exploited, at their cost, for the benefit of the rest of the country. As Balochis are protesting over the conduct of the national establishment, the military's Media Wing, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), is still announcing the martyrdom of Pakistani soldiers, who are dying while fighting Baloch secessionists in Balochistan.

This study has endeavoured to shed light on the case of sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan. Sectarianism is a non-traditional security threat and it has the potential to generate a 'new' wave of conflict in the region. Sectarianism in this region can be traced back to the 1970s and the trend continues till date. People distrusted each other and an environment of anxiety and uncertainty prevailed in those years. People were not sure if it would be safe for them to go outside because if a Shia (or Sunni) was killed then anybody, regardless of whether he was involved or not, unfortunate enough to be present at the scene, was killed in retaliation – just because of his sectarian affiliation. Tit-for-tat killings between Shias and Sunnis have claimed hundreds of lives. This is particularly true of Gilgit city as it was the most affected area. Sometimes people were mistook for belonging to the opposite sect and killed by their own fellow sect members. You cannot easily distinguish between Muslims, because it is not necessary that only Sunnis keep long beards or Shias keep short beards. It is the Prophet's (PBUH) Sunnah which all Muslims follow, regardless of the sect they follow. Sectarianism has claimed hundreds of lives, and consumed businesses amounting to millions of rupees (PKR).

Sectarianism in Gilgit Baltistan is a recent phenomenon. This issue has no historical roots in the region and is clearly the result of actions of external elements – external to this region. People of this region have always lived side by side in peace and harmony. The issue only started to appear after the region joined Pakistan and it reached its peak during the 1980s during the Zia Ul Haq regime. Lately, sectarianism has found it difficult to maintain its roots in the region owing to the role of the educated youth and the emergence of a fresh wave of political and constitutional awareness. The people are steadily becoming restless due to the inability and reluctance of the Federal Government to grant the region its constitutional rights and they are becoming sceptical of the national establishment and consider it the source of their misery and marginalization. Looking at this issue through the lens of Securitization Theory has enabled us to diagnose the actual problems and the above given securitizing moves will definitely prove fruitful in remedying the enlisted problems. If the above mentioned securitizing agents/actors failed to implement these 'moves', and let the current state of affairs to continue, it will cause irreparable damage to the region. They rest of Pakistan will also suffer because of this destruction, owing to the significance of this region – both in terms of strategic importance and resourcefulness.

List of Interviewees

Serial No.	Occupation/Designation	Date & Place of Interview
P1	Shia Cleric	Skardu April, 2024
P2	Shia Cleric	Skardu August, 2023
P3	Shia Cleric	Gilgit August, 2023
P4	Shia Cleric	Gilgit April, 2024
P5	Sunni Cleric	Gilgit April, 2024
P6	Sunni Cleric	Skardu September, 2023
P7	Noorbakshia Cleric	Khapulu May, 2024
P8	GB Public Services	Gilgit August, 2023
P9	GB Public Services	Hunza May, 2024
P10	GB Public Services	Nagar May 2024
P11	GB Public Services	Khapulu May, 2024
P12	GB Public Services	Astore May, 2024
P13	GB Public Services	Chilas May, 2024
P14	GB Public Services	Gilgit May, 2024
P15	President Gilgit Baltistan Student Organization	Lahore September, 2023
P16	President All Baltistan Movement (Student Organization)	Skardu April, 2024
P17	General Secretary GB Council, Quaid e Azam University	Islamabad April, 2024
P18	Businessman (Travelling Industry)	Skardu March, 2024
P19	Businessman (Hoteling Industry)	Skardu March, 2024
P20	Pakistan People's Party	Shigar August, 2023
P21	Pakistan People's Party	Gilgit August, 2023
P22	Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf	Skardu August, 2023
P23	Head of department, Environmental Sciences, University of Baltistan	Skardu August, 2023
P24	Former President GB Teacher's Association	Gilgit May, 2024

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