

CONSTITUTING THE "OTHER": A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SECTARIAN RHETORIC IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This paper studies how sectarian groups in Pakistan create the image of the "Other" through language. It shows that sectarianism is not only about religious differences, but a political tool used to gain power. The research explains how words and labels are used to show some sects as wrong, foreign, or dangerous. It also discusses how history, colonial rule, and global politics have shaped this pattern. The paper highlights key events like the Second Amendment, Zia-ul-Haq's rule, and the rise of extremist groups. It explains how laws and institutions support this divide. The study uses critical discourse analysis to understand how language builds religious hate. It finds that certain terms and speeches help create fear and mistrust in society. The paper calls for promoting unity, respect, and shared national identity. It argues that true peace will come only by ending these harmful ideas and building a culture of inclusion.

Key Words: Otherness, sectarianism, Pakistan, Orientalism, Islamization, Critical Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

The idea of "Otherness" is used in religion and politics to draw a line between groups. It helps people feel united in their own group. It is also used to support power and control. The word "Other" does not just mean someone different. It is a label used to show some people as outsiders or even dangerous. This idea makes the main group seem better and more right. Edward Said explained how the West used this idea to show the East as weak and strange. This helped the West to rule and control. In the same way, the idea of religious "Others" has also shaped the society and politics of Pakistan. How religion has been used as a tool to divide people and gain power. (Said, 1978; Connolly, 1991, pp. 64–66)

The use of the word "Other" is not new in Pakistan. It has been used in many places and times to get power. During British rule in India, the British called Indians backward and unfit to rule. This helped the British to stay in power by saying that they were helping the Indians. The West often showed the East as weak and in need of help. In the Cold War, the United States used the idea of "Other" by dividing the world into free countries and communist ones. After 9/11, the West again used this idea by calling Muslims terrorists. This helped them to spread fear and attack Muslim countries. (Dirks, 2001)

In South Asia, the clearest use of this idea was during the partition of India in 1947. The two-nation theory said that Muslims and Hindus were two separate nations. This was used to demand a new country for Muslims called Pakistan. But after Pakistan was made the same idea was used inside the country. Many groups within Islam were seen as outsiders. During the 1971 crisis in East Pakistan the Bengalis were treated as different and less Islamic. This led to war and the creation of Bangladesh. (Qasmi, 2014)

Sectarianism in Pakistan is not just a result of religious difference. It is part of a political plan. The state and media have helped to create fear and hate through language and laws. This was a big step in making some Muslims into outsiders. This plan grew stronger under General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988. His government supported one kind of Islam and ignored others. New laws were made that hurt minority groups. Many religious schools were also opened with help from outside countries. At the same time Iran's revolution led Shia Muslims to become

more active. This created a battle for control between Saudi Arabia and Iran inside Pakistan. (Lau, 2006; Khan, 2003)

New sectarian groups also started during this time. One group called Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan was formed in 1985. It targeted Shia Muslims. Later on, another group called Lashkar-e-Jhangvi was formed. It attacked Shia people and their places. Some Shia groups also became violent. These groups gained legitimacy with the image that they were fighting for religion, but they were really fighting for power. They wanted control in the country and support from foreign powers.

Words used by leaders and media have helped to spread hate. Some words are used to insult and isolate groups. This makes people afraid and angry. It also leads to violence. Cities like Quetta, Parachinar and Karachi have seen many killings. Often the state does not act strongly. Some groups are banned but they come back with new names. The use of terms like "unknown gunmen" hides the real cause of violence. (Abou Zahab & Roy, 2004; Rieck, 2016)

Sectarianism in Pakistan also shows who holds power. Some religious groups have strong links to politics and the state. Others like the Barelvis and Shias have less power even though they are many in number. Shias make up a big part of the country but still face attacks. Even leaders like Jinnah were from this group. Still, they are not treated fairly. Sectarianism is not just a religious issue. It is used to gain and keep power. One can see a clear plan by looking at the words and actions used over time. This plan makes one group seem better and others seem wrong. To stop this, we need to build a new story. A story of shared history and respect for all. (Zaman, 2012; Jalal, 2000)

2. Literature Review

Edward Said's book "*Orientalism*" was written in 1978. It explained how the West created false images of the East. These images showed Eastern people as weak slow and backward. Said said that these images were used to support Western control. Books art and school lessons helped spread these ideas. This helped the West rule over the East by saying it was helping. Even though Said wrote about the West his ideas help us understand what happens in Pakistan too. In Pakistan the state and society also create the image of religious Others. They do this to protect power and show one group as better than the rest.

In his book, *Islamic Leviathan* Vali Nasr showed how Muslim states use religion to stay in power. He said leaders use religion to show they are strong and right. They also use it to push away groups they do not like. In Pakistan this has happened many times. The state has treated groups like Ahmadis Shias and other Sunnis as outsiders. This was done to make one type of Islam seem like the only right one. Nasr's work helps us understand that sectarianism is not just about belief. It is used to control people and protect power.

Muhammad Qasim Zaman wrote an influential article "Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Mandatory Shia and Sunni Identity" in 1998. He explained how sectarian identity in Pakistan became stronger over time. He said many things caused this change. One was the revolution in Iran. Another was the influence of Saudi Arabia. He also said that many religious groups became active in politics. Zaman said that sectarian hate is not an old problem. It is a modern issue created by the state and powerful actors. His work shows how hate and division are built over time through words laws and actions.

In his book, *In the Islamist Network: Afghan-Pakistan Connection*, Abu Zhab and Roy studied how weak borders and global conflicts helped to break unity in Pakistan. They explained that the war in Afghanistan was supported by many international powers. This support helped to build a strong militant system in the region. The writers said that this system did not end after the war. Instead, it started to focus on local enemies. These enemies were often sectarian groups inside Pakistan. The writers showed how global jihad ideas mixed with local issues. This mix made religious hate grow stronger. The militant groups used these ideas to attack sectarian

others. The writers also said that the state played a role in this system. Some parts of the state helped these networks. They gave support in the name of religion and politics. This shows that sectarianism in Pakistan was not only a local problem. It was also shaped by outside forces and military help. This study helps us understand how sectarianism grew through global and state support.

Mujtaba Khan and Khan in their study from 2022 explained how communalism creates problems for Pakistan's progress. They said that it stops fair growth and keeps some people out of politics. Their case study showed how some groups are treated unfairly. These groups are pushed aside and not allowed to take part in society. This makes it hard to make fair laws and policies. The authors said that communalism is not just a small issue. It is a big problem that hurts the whole country. It breaks national unity and trust. The study showed how identity and politics are linked. When one group is favoured and others are ignored it causes failure in the system. This creates a strong feeling of who belongs and who does not. The authors said that this way of thinking makes others feel left out. It proves that communal division is a deep part of the system. It is not only about religion but also about power and control. To move forward Pakistan must end these unfair practices. Only then can there be true unity and equal progress for all.

Muhammad and others in their 2024 study on Quetta explained how the idea of making some people "others" leads to communal violence in Baluchistan. They said that people are divided by group identity in a way that makes some feel left out. Their study showed how Sunni and Shia differences are used to keep some groups outside the system. This creates a system where some are accepted, and others are pushed away. The authors connected local violence to bigger ideas about power and identity. They said that people are divided into "self" and "others" to make the mistreatment seem normal. This also helps explain why some groups are ignored by the government and not given equal rights. Their work is important to understand how these problems grow in cities like Quetta. It shows how space and belief are used together to support unfair treatment. Their study helps explain the deeper reasons for sectarian problems in urban areas of Pakistan. It shows that violence and exclusion are not random but part of a system. This system uses old ideas to keep certain groups in control and others out.

in his 2010 work, Niaz gives a clear historical view of how governance developed in Pakistan. He explains that the state used administration to control people. One important example he gives is the 1953 riots in Lahore. These riots were full of communal violence. Niaz shows that the violence was not just allowed but was also used for political benefit. He highlights how the state and its institutions used the idea of "others" to keep control. Bureaucracy played a big role in spreading stories that supported this division. The goal was to protect the power of the central state. This study shows how the system made communal exclusion look normal. It became a regular tool for ruling the country. In his earlier 2004 article Niaz also looked at the weak parts of Pakistan's laws and administration. He said that political leaders often used religion for their own gain. This damaged the chances for real democracy. Niaz again used the 1953 riots as an example. He said the use of religion in that time was not a one-time act. It was part of a larger plan. Religion was used to cover up failures in government. It was also used to make political power look strong. This use of religion hurt the growth of democracy. It put the idea of communal division into the heart of the state. According to Niaz these actions weakened the hope for a fair and united political system.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methods to explore how communal language in Pakistan creates religious others. It follows the method of critical discourse analysis. This method helps

to study how language power and ideas shape society. The study uses the models of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. These models show how language and power work together. The study looks at many sources. These include political speeches religious sermons newspaper editorials media broadcasts and state documents. These texts help show how exclusive identity is created and accepted in society. The study focuses on how state leaders religious scholars and political groups used such language. It looks closely at the time after 1980 which saw a rise in communal tension. Special focus is given to General Zia's rule. During this time communal identity became a deep part of state and public life. The study includes primary sources like parliamentary debates fatwas and policy papers. These were found in the National Archives and trusted online sources like JSTOR Dawn Archives and Pakistan's parliamentary records. The study also uses secondary sources like research journals history books and expert articles. All text data was coded and studied using thematic analysis. This method helps find repeated ideas and patterns. It shows common strategies like blaming others treating them as less than human showing their pain and dividing people into us and them. This helps to see how the idea of others is spread in both state and opposition stories. The study helps to understand how powerful groups create and use the image of others to control society.

4. Data Analysis Results and Discussion

4.1. Framing the 'Other': Sectarianism as a Strategic Discourse

This study revolves around an important question. How is the "other" manufactured in communal rhetoric in Pakistan and what social and political work does this construction perform. This is not only a general investigation into religious difference. It is the use of tools of trust to explain how exclusion is created. It also shows how politics of identity and power relations are formed. Dr Tahir Kamran has mentioned in his work on communalism and state formation that communal identity in Pakistan becomes active during political or institutional crisis. It becomes a powerful tool to collect support and gain public approval. The creation of others as separate sects, heretics or foreign agents is not by chance. It is carefully planned through language and discourse. It is used to make group identity stronger and to cover public frustration. This process is not neutral or soft. It creates a path for discrimination, social division and sometimes even direct violence.

Communal rhetoric in Pakistan uses harsh language against the other group. It also depends on strong emotional terms inside the religious community. Words like Kafir Murti Rafizi and Gali are not only religious terms. They are forms of violent language. Dr Muhammad Qasim Zaman explains that such words are used to push whole communities aside. These words turn their beliefs into threats to both Islamic and national values. This language of hate becomes part of a system of fear. It changes small religious differences into major national problems. It makes disagreement look like betrayal to the country. In this way, the other is not just different. They are made to look dangerous and are then watched silenced or attacked.

4.2. Sectarianism and State Power: Institutional Complicity and Historical Myopia

Dr Ilhan Niaz has explained about how the Pakistani state has used unchecked power. It often skips legal rules to join hands with religious groups. In such a system, communal speech does not only come from common people. It also comes from the top and is part of government planning. The state shows its role in this by using laws like blasphemy laws and anti Ahmadi rules. These laws do not solve conflict. They make sectarianism stronger by making one version of religion legal. Political leaders also often work with hardline religious groups to get votes. They show themselves as protectors of faith. But in reality, they help spread hateful words and actions. Dr Tahir Kamran says that the state of Pakistan often supports the main Sunni version of Islam. This puts not only Shia and Ahmadi communities in danger but also Sunni groups like Barelvis when they oppose the powerful Deobandi or Wahabi schools. This creates a one-sided version of history. It removes or weakens the histories of other groups.

4.3. Histories in Conflict: Constructing Sectarian Memory

Stories from history are very important in building group identity. Events like the tragedy of Karbala the early Caliph conflicts and old religious debates are often brought back and used in today's politics. Ali Usman Kasmi says that religious leaders use these sacred stories to gather support. They remove them from their real time and place and use them in current disputes. This leads to the making of false histories. Every sect creates its own world of good and evil. They use these stories to make their group stronger by showing others as wrong. These stories are not just remembered. They are shared through media sermons religious schools and public events. They give energy to the group. What makes this more serious is that there is no room for open talk in these stories. History becomes a place of battle not a shared space. The result is deep division. Differences are not talked about or debated. They are treated as final and unchangeable.

4.4. The Media Battlefield: Amplification and Normalization

Media plays a big role in spreading sectarian speech. Television and social media are strong tools that spread such messages. Dr Qasim Zaman says that new technology has made it easy for anyone to become a religious voice. This gives power to people who were not known before. But this also means there is less control. Hateful speech can now spread without checks. Social media works on attention. It rewards posts that create shock and anger. Sectarian leaders know this. They make content that causes strong reaction. This brings more followers and spreads the message faster. Bad language becomes normal. Violence is made to look acceptable. Now clerics with hate in their message can reach millions. Their followers repeat the same message in comments videos and memes. This creates a cycle of growing hate. Even, old media like television is involved. Many shows invite people who speak hate in the name of religion. They show both hate speakers and peace speakers as equal to get good ratings. This makes hate look like just another opinion.

4.5. Implications for National Identity and Pluralism

The making of the communal other harms the idea of a united Pakistan. The state says it supports Islamic unity and national brotherhood. But when it allows attacks on religious minorities, it shows the country is deeply divided. Dr Ilhan Niaz explains that Pakistan has always struggled between big Islamic ideas and narrow group politics. When only one group's voice is heard it breaks social peace. It also reduces trust in law and leadership. Minorities are pushed out of public life. They stop taking part in debates. They feel they are not full citizens. This is not only a theory. It leads to real problems. Minorities face fewer chances in schools and jobs. Their places of worship are attacked. They are not given space in government or politics. In the long run this weakens democracy. It replaces diversity with a weak unity that can break anytime.

4.6. Deconstructing Sectarian Rhetoric: Toward a Pluralistic Future

This article suggests that sectarian speech must be broken down. This should be done not only by scholars but also by teachers writers religious leaders and civil society. Critical Discourse Analysis is useful in this work. As shown in this article CDA can uncover hidden ideas and power behind language. When these things are shown they can be questioned and changed. Ali Usman Kasmi says that fighting sectarianism needs more than just laws. It also needs open minds and honest history. Schools should teach students many ways of understanding Islam. This helps in deep thinking and builds care for others. Pakistan should not try to be one single idea. It should become like a picture made of many parts. This new picture should be built on justice truth and respect for all kinds of people. Only then will the idea of other be replaced by respect and peace.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that sectarian rhetoric in Pakistan is not only about religious disagreements. It is deeply linked with power, politics, and control. The idea of the “Other” is created through language, history, and media. It is used to divide society and to support those in power. Leaders, institutions, and religious scholars have played a key role in building and spreading this mindset. The state has often supported one version of Islam and ignored others. This has made many citizens feel excluded from their own country. The use of emotional and harsh language has turned normal religious differences into dangerous divisions. People have been labelled as enemies not because of their actions, but simply because they belong to a different sect. These divisions have led to violence, loss of life, and broken trust in society.

Media and education have also played a major role. Instead of promoting peace and understanding, many media platforms have repeated hate-filled messages. This has made intolerance a normal part of public discussion. History too has been used unfairly. Sacred stories are taken out of their true meaning and used to create hate in the present. The school system often teaches a single view of Islam, leaving little room for dialogue and learning about different beliefs. As a result, young minds grow up learning fear instead of respect.

For a better future, Pakistan must face this challenge seriously. Laws alone cannot stop hate. There must be a cultural shift. Schools should teach the values of respect and difference. Media should be responsible and avoid giving space to hate speech. Religious leaders should promote unity instead of division. Writers, teachers, and civil society must work together to build a new way of thinking. One that respects all sects and allows space for every voice. The idea of the “Other” must be replaced with the idea of a shared nation. Only then can Pakistan move forward as a peaceful, fair, and united society.

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