

Benish Khan¹

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Chawla²

Dr Aftab Gillani³

Dr Hafiz Zafar Ahmed⁴

Religion, Spirituality and Foreign Policy Dynamics: A Case Study of Relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia

Abstract

In matters related to foreign policy states act in pursuit of their interests but in the case of Pakistan religion and spirituality have also been playing a paramount role in determining its foreign policy which is an unusual phenomenon in modern times. The main argument of the study is that two of the key determinants of Pakistan's foreign policy are religion and spirituality. The two-nation theory and ideology of Pakistan were the driving forces behind the creation of Pakistan; therefore, Pakistan always preferred to ally itself politically with the Islamic block. The Muslims of Pakistan have a special religious and spiritual affinity with those countries which have been historical centers of Islam and are home to Sufis shrines and buildings. For such purposes, Pakistani pilgrims quite often go to Iran, Iraq, Syria, India and Central Asia, etc., for religious and spiritual reasons but Saudi Arabia is a country where all sects of Islam go to perform Umra and Hajj. Therefore, Pakistan-Saudia Arabia relations on religious and spiritual bases make it a perfect case study and thereby form the main theme of this paper. This study attempts to explore, investigate and analyze the religious and spiritual relation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Keywords:

Relations, Religious, Spirituality, Bilateral, Sacred Places, Islamic States

Introduction

Islam emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in roundabout 610 A.D. Islam sooner emerged as an emerging power and expanded up to the regions of Persia to Egypt and from there to Syria and India. The first Arab Muslim who captured the lower Indus valley was Muhammad bin Qasim. He opened the way for Umayyad Caliphs to enter in the region. But as their homeland was far off in Baghdad so it was not easy

¹ Benish Khan, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of History & Pakistan Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

² Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, Dean, Faculty of Arts & Humanities; Chairman, Department of History & Pakistan Studies; Director, Pakistan Study Centre; Director, Research Society of Pakistan, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

³ Dr Aftab Hussain Gilani, Associate Professor, Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, Islamia University Bahawalpur.

⁴ Dr Hafiz Zafar Ahmed, Associate Professor, Hailey College of Commerce University of the Punjab, Lahore.

to get assistance or any type of support from there and the empire could not bring effective results. After three centuries, the Seljuq Turks came from Central Asia in the 10th century, they got hold of the region as the Indians were neither organized nor had political integrity. Hindus were divided even in the caste system, having different gods for worship and social inequality.

The Muslims as compared to Hindus advocated for one God and the equality of all men, their simplicity and condemnation of caste system, polytheism, idolatry and ritualism became popular in the masses and most of the Hindus embraced Islam for the true faith, sincerity and purity of life which symbolized from the life of the Muslims. These were the reasons that facilitated Iltutmish, Balban, Khiljis, Tughluqs and other Muslim Sultanates were ruled over by the Turkish Mughals who came to India in 1526 under Babur rule.

Later on, the British Government took advantages of the political instability of Muslims Rulers and brought distinct new strands, indeed firmer edges, to Muslim identities. There was a sharpening of the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim, which was in part an outcome of the impact of British understandings of India and in part that of religious revivalism. The period of British rule, which eventually became the British Empire started after the War of 1857. British took revenge from Muslims and ruined them socially, Cultural and politically but not religiously. It was the Islam who Saved Muslims of India. It was not the Muslims who revive it. The Even of Khilafat Movement (1919-1924), showed they loved and respect for the Holy places. in which Muslims of sub-continent strived to preserve the power of the Ottoman sultan save but also the institution of the caliphate but also struggled to protect their control over the Holy cities of Makkah and Madina. It was the religion and a spirituality connection of Muslims of India which forced them to fight side by side British, on condition to save their Holy places.

Spirituality is the state of being divine or of being attached to or concerned with religious questions and values broadly perceived. The word is normally used in a non-religious sense to describe a preoccupation with the multi-dimensional questions, particularly concerning the nature of the self, meaning of life, the nature of one's mental awareness, and the opportunity of immortality.¹ According to the hadith, Gabriel delivered us with a depiction of the religion of the admirers of Muhammad (PBUH). In the Islamic vision, religion encompasses three main essentials. The first aspect in Islam is Acceptance, and it encompasses a **series** of happenings, **such as** bearing observer, prying and abstaining. Lastly, an act cannot be beautiful if it is completed without the consciousness of Allah and it is only Allah who is the measure for beautiful, the good and the right.²

In 610 CE Almighty Allah sent Muhammad (PBUH) in the unfertile city of Makah, to be His last Messenger to mankind. The message and religion that was presented through Muhammad PBUH was Islam and which entirely transformed the Arab society's culture and way of living into a pre- and post-Islamic era. Muhammad PBUH converted the ferocious and wicked Arabs into disciplined, refined and religious people. Muslims in the life of their beloved Prophet and even after his death kept on preaching Islam and in just a few years Islam reached far and wide and Muslims became the strongest world power of that era.

Regard for Makkah and Medina

The fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj; it is a series of religious practices performed by the Muslims who get together in the holy city of Mecca every year. It starts on the eighth and ends on the thirteenth day of the lunar month of *Dhu'l-Hijja* and Muslims must do once in their lifetime if they can afford it.³ Makkah was a place of sanctity for Arabs even before the advent of Islam. And by the time of the advent of Islam, the *Kabba* was being used as a place of pilgrimage.

The Holy Quran stated that,

Many a time have we seen you turn your face towards the sky. We will make you turn towards a qiblah 4 that will please you. Turn your face towards the holy mosque: wherever you be, turn your face towards it. (Quran2; 144)

Faster and safer means of travel like aeroplanes and buses were introduced in the past one hundred years but in earlier time Muslims used to travel on horses or camels in the form of convoys. Hajj was a problematic journey of several months for some of the Muslims. People stayed in *Makkah* and *Madina* for a few months to build up their strength to make their journey back to their home town and some even came to meet other Muslims came from across the globe, and to learn their culture, languages. Regularly they remained for several years, and some stayed there for the rest of their lives. Nowadays, it is easier to visit Makkah. It is a matter of a few hours from any place across the world. Religious practices performed at Hajj. For hajj, people take a break from all that keeps them busy in their daily life. They have to come to this holy site in response to Allah's call. It's kind of revival. Hajjis are viewed upon with great esteem, integrity, as people who are innocent and more religious. They are considered as models of pioussness and holiness.⁵

How Islam emerged and reached India

As Islam was introduced and had been established in an Arab culture, so all other peoples who accepted Islam, for them it was a new religion rather complete code of life. They could not help influence by the Arab civilization; as Islam was born in the desert, simple but not simpleminded. The transformation of culture is highly based upon a written description of the Quran and the Living style of Holy Prophet (SAW). This holds a centered importance in the Life of Muslim, it has a great impact on their education, In the Pre-Islamic period, *muallaquat*⁶ was one of the customs in Makkah in which poets and authors used to hang their poetry and literature on walls for others to read about the abilities of their particular societies. Their journeys from one place to another were how news, literature and their achievements would become known to the rest of the world.⁷ Quran is an illustration of the same tradition as it was first learned and transferred orally and then documented for coming generations.⁸ This popular expression of the Arab became part of Muslim culture. Even today Muslims quote and use Quranic references to explain their points of discussion and their importance.

. A trade between the subcontinent and the Arabian had existed even before Islam's arrival. Islam was initially conveyed to the coastal belt of southern India as it provides passage to the traders to the south and south East Asia. After the advent of Islam, Muslim Arab traders started preaching Islam in south Asia from these coastal belts. Initially, some locals settled in the coastal areas embraced Islam.⁹ Later Muslim conquest Persia and provinces of Kirman and Makran, took Islam into Sindh, and in the subcontinent, all the native rulers

were supporting Makran's king against the Muslims. In a trade trip, an eight-ship convoy of Arab traders happened to pass through coastal belt of Daibul. Sindhi pirates ransacked it and made the women and children as their prisoners. Hajjaj bin Yousaf who was selected as governor of Eastern provinces by then Umayyad Caliph Walid bin Abdul Malik, came to know about this attack. At that period, Raja Dahir, a Brahman, was the ruler of Sindh. Hajjaj asked Dahir to return Muslim prisoners and their looted objects. He also demanded that the culprits should be punished. Dahir regretted acting on Hajjaj's demand saying he had no control over these pirates so he won't be able to do anything for him in this regard. On his reply, Hajjaj made up his mind to conquer Sindh. Hajjaj selected his nephew and son in law Imad-ud-din Muhammad bin Qasim for this expedition and gave him 6,000 Syrian and Iraqi militias, a camel force of equal power and a luggage train of 3,000 to conquer Sindh in 712, He was just seventeen years of age and conquered Sindh after a fierce struggle. Somehow this did not bring a drastic change in India rather several saints and Sufis made determined efforts to spread Islam in the Subcontinent. During the Abbasid period (750-1258 A.D.) some religious centers which were also known for their pursuit of scientific knowledge, were begun. Thousands of mosques and schools were also established. Baghdad had around 300 schools in the 10th century. There were around 12,000 students in Alexandria in the 14th century. The formal concept of the Madrassahs (Schools) was developed in the 10th century in Baghdad.¹⁰ These Madrassahs had a proper course/syllabus and teachers full-time and part-time, most of them were women. Education was free for all. Madrassahs of this era were known for the development of several well-known *maktabat* and assimilation of foreign knowledge. The example of which are *Bait al-Hikmah* in Baghdad (ca. 820) and *Dar al-Ilm* in Cairo (ca. 998). Some universities like the Al-Azhar (969 A.D.) were established in this era.¹¹

This continuation remained In 998, when Mahmud claimed sovereignty, he made many attacks against Jaipal in South Asia. According to most historians, Mahmud made seventeen attacks on India against those Hindu Rajas and Maharajas who indulged in conspiracies against him. Later on the brutality of the Mongols in Central Asia became a major reason for mass migration of Muslims in India. The destruction caused by Genghis Khan (1167-1227 AD), his grandsons and Timurlane in the Central Asian countries caused the relocation of an innumerable of people looking for asylum in India. Nowadays, 100% of the population in Afghanistan and 97% of Pakistan and over 14% of India's population are Muslim.¹² Islam spread from the land of Arabia that's why Muslims of the subcontinent are psychologically attached with the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. These were the Arab rulers who conquered the sub-continent and spread Islam in this region.

Pak-Saudi Arabia Relations

The southern part of the area of the subcontinent which is now called Pakistan was initially ruled by the Arabs during the 7th-9th century. Mutual relations between both the countries Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were established soon after Pakistan got independence in 1947. Quaid-i-Azam as a Governor-General of Pakistan promoted cooperation and links between both the countries Saudi Arabia accepted Pakistan open-heartedly as the nation founded for Muslims and became a brotherly friend and endless supporter.¹³ One of the vital reasons behind this friendly inception nonetheless was the Islam which shaped Pakistan Foreign Policy toward Islamic block.

On 27th August 1947, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah addressed for the Muslim World on the eve of Eid-ul Fitr,

*My 'Eid message to our brother Muslim States is one of friendship and goodwill. We are all passing through perilous times. The drama of power politics is being staged in Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir should serve an eye-opener to us. It is only by putting up a united front that we can make our voice felt in the counsels of the world.*¹⁴

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia started their cooperation and friendly collaboration soon after the inception of Pakistan. In 1951 both states signed a Treaty of Friendship. This was the first step which had been taken because of religion.⁵ This relationship was further boosted by the visit of King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz in 1954. Pakistan signed Baghdad Pact in 1954 that annoyed the Muslim World. But Saudi government felt the pulse King Saud wrote a letter to Ghulam Muhammad, the Governor-General of Pakistan in which he stated that,

*“We will be happy if Pakistan will be strong no doubt. Pakistan’s strength is our strength and if the Jew attacks on the Holy land then Pakistan will be in front of defenders of the Haramain”*⁶

Saudi Arabia stood firm with Pakistan during the war of 1965 and even supported Pakistan morally and materially against India. In early 1960s crises in Egypt and Yemen, Saudi Arabia asked for Pakistan’s support in strengthening its defense. Saudi King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz visited Pakistan in April 1966. In his visit, he re-assured support to Pakistan and a joint statement was delivered an occasion called for the implementation of the right of self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in agreement with the United Nations resolutions. Moreover, during the same visit, both countries planned to hold the First Islamic Summit. Many new opportunities for collaboration in defense sector and economy were opened.¹⁵

Due to the spiritual attachment in the time of trouble, Saudi Arabia provided political and material support in every time of distress to Pakistan in the wars of 1965 or 1971. KSA supported Pakistan on the Kashmir cause till today. Saudi Arabia showed sympathy with Pakistan after the 1971 war and in doing so they didn’t even recognize the new state of Bangladesh for quite a long time. Saudi Arabia even expressed deep sorrow over this partition during the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers at Jeddah.¹⁶ This reaction on the debacle of Dhaka was only due to the religious affiliations. Visit paid by the then King of Saudia Arabia, Khalid bin Abdul Aziz, in 1976 strengthened and promoted bilateral relations between these two nation-states and foundation of Shah Faisal Mosque was also laid during the same visit and even its construction/completion was financed by them. In the era of General Zia ul Haq once he came to power, both the countries grew closer in military ties and supported collaboration in defense sector. Saudia even supported the Islamization movement in Pakistan led by General Zia. Number of conferences held between both the leaders in President Zia’s tenure on international, strategic issues and on further strengthening and promoting bilateral ties.

⁵ An Overview of Pakistan-Saudi Relation, *Dawn*, 18,02,2019

⁶ Pak-Saudi Ties: A History of goodwill, *Arab News*, 13,06,2019

New Trends and Ties

Even Pakistan kept on supporting Saudi in their time of need, Once Holy Kaaba was occupied by the extremists in 1979 President Zia showed deep concern and assured them the full support and cooperation in every way possible to resolve this issue.¹⁷ During this administration, both the nations signed an important pact on defense cooperation in 1982. Fifteen thousand Pakistani troops were posted and stationed for various assignments in Saudi Arabia during the Cold War. General Zia's backing of fundamentalist Sunni polices ingratiated him to Saudi leaders and the royal family and he visited Saudi regularly. According to ministry of education released in 2006, there were 5,459 madrassas in Punjab, 2,843 Madrassas in KP, 1,935 Madrassas in Sindh, and 1193 in Gilgit, 769 in Baluchistan, 586 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 135 in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas, and 77 in Islamabad, capital of Pakistan. Approximately 1.5 million students are attaining education in almost 13,000 madrassas around the country which directly or indirectly funded by the Saudi Government.

After 2008, Asif Ali Zardari (2008-2013) came to power and he tried to sort out the ongoing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, the majority of the population is Sunni, while Iran is a global leader for Shiites.¹⁸ After Zardari Government Muhammad Nawaz Sharif came to power in Pakistan (2013-2018). He stayed in Saudi Arabia with his family during his political exile. He was inclined towards Saudi Arabia and advanced personal relations. The reactivation of Iran-Pakistan relationship including the stalled Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline during the last span of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) rule under Mr. Asif Ali Zardari was not good decisions made by him and could have drilled a large hole in the Pak-Saudi strategic and defense relationship. After the general election of 2013 in which Nawaz government was established, a change in policy particularly in the context of the Saudi government was brought. The Saudi royalty not only viewed him as "their man in Pakistan," but also wished to extend relationship which had got strained owing to PPP Government's policies, decisions and inclination toward Iran. On 22 May 2013 The Saudi Government extended its ties with Pakistani amiable government and expected to extend a bailout package of 15 billion to meet energy crisis.¹⁹ It was the same sort of bailout package that had been given by Saudi Arabia to Pakistan in 1998 first in Nawaz Government when it faced economic sanctions. In response, the Nawaz government started reviewing the past government policies and reverted many decision which was taken in the PPP government.

This was also done because Mr. Nawaz Sharif felt personally indebted to Saudi Arabia's rulers for allowing him to stay in Saudi Arabia after the 1999 coup of his government by Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf. Mr. Nawaz Sharif was at that time deposed by Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf and he had to spend twelve years in exile in S. Arabia.

Subsequently, in 2018 once PTI came into power in Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan addressed on the Saudi National Day on 23 September 2019,

"Saudi Arabia has always stood with Pakistan in difficult times and the Pakistani government and its people highly acknowledge it".²⁰

Imran Khan has also followed the policy of “Saudi First” of his forerunners. After taking oath as 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan (PM) on 18 September 2018 boarded his first official visit to Saudi Arabia and met with Saudi King Salman in Jiddah.²¹ Recently in 2019 Prince Muhammad Bin Salman visited Pakistan and was greeted by Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) government. This visit will lead to further strengthening of ties between both states.²² After the elections that took place in the year 2018 and the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf took over as a ruling party in Pakistan, these strategic and political relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have taken a new turn towards betterment. Pakistan’s former army chief Gen. Raheel Sharif, who is now the Commander-in-Chief of Saudi-led military cooperation (IMCTC) after retiring in November 2016 as Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan army as mentioned before, brought a delegation of IMCTC to Pakistan²³. During this two days visit the delegation held meetings with Civil and Military leadership of Pakistan. When Imran Khan rose to power and became prime minister of Pakistan, he also chose Saudi Arabia for his first foreign visit. Invitation of this visit was sent by King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Sultan.

It is also to be noted that Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud colloquially known as Muhammad bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia is serving as country’s deputy Prime Minister. He has been labelled as the power behind the throne of his father, King Salman, the prime minister. Muhammad bin Salman is also chairman of the council for Economic and Development Affairs, Chairman of Council of Political and Security Affairs, and minister of Defense of Saudi Arabia. He has taken several measures to change the centuries-old traditional culture of the country. Powers of the religious police were limited to a minimum by bringing new regulations and many more cultural developments like allowing women to drive etc. At the same time, he is being blamed for alleged torture of human right activists and even bombing of Yemen. It is estimated that war-induced famine in Yemen may cause up to almost 13 million civilians to languish in the coming years. He is also blamed of the escalation of Qatar Diplomatic crisis

Without MbS at the helm of the affairs in Saudi Arabia such a quick visit of a new Pakistani ruler, Imran Khan, would not have been possible and had Ge. Qamar Bajwa did not arrange a plane level field for him. Gen Qamar Bajwa had earlier visited Saudi Arabia very quietly and stayed for almost three days. Whom he met during this visit could not be ascertained as the only news of his meetings with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and to Commander of Ground Forces Lt. Gen. Prince Turki bin Abdul-Aziz came over the media. Of course, the later visit of Imran Khan is thought to be made in response to the invitation of Saudi Arabian rulers, but it is well known that Gen Bajwa cultivated the environment for such an invitation beforehand²⁴. The Prime Minister Imran Khan, therefore, went to his first foreign visit to Saudi Arabia in September 2018, where he was received by Governor of Madinah Prince Faisal bin Salman, Pakistan’s ambassador in Saudi Arabia Hasham bin Siddique, Saudi Authorities and other officials of the Consulate.

Conclusion

Pakistanis are spiritually attached to the land of Arabs because it is a birthplace of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Islam spread in the subcontinent due to the invasions of Arabs. All the religiously sacred places of Muslims are in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Every year

Muslims visit these places for the sake of purity and forgiveness. Since the birth of Pakistan ties between the two countries have remained amicable. Even before the inception of Pakistan, Saudi king maintained good relations with All India Muslims and Jinnah due to the religious bonding. Owing to the mystical attachment people on both sides are ready to help each other in their time of distress. Politically, different issues were generated between both the governments but spiritually and religiously relations have remained steady. Muslims are spiritually attached that's why relations between both states remained amicable and cordial. Politically, economically and regional jealousies emerged between the two but religion is the only factor which creates linkages between the two states. Religious aspects joined the Muslim's nation on one platform

Notes & References

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/spirituality>.

² Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*. 27. Lahore, Caravan Press, 1998, 27.

³ The month of Hajj

⁴ The qiblah, Arabic for direction is the direction in which Muslims pray towards Mecca. It is generally indicated by a Mihrab niche in the wall of a mosque that is oriented onward Islam holiest city.

⁵ Vision of Islam, 20.

⁶ Literally the hangings.

⁷ *Historic Cities and Sacred Sites: Cultural Roots for Urban Futures*. Washington DC: The World Bank, 2000, 22.

⁸ Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *The Elementary Study of Islam*. Tilford: Islam International Publication LTd, 2010, 43.

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¹² Shaykh Mansour Leghaei, The Spread of Islam, from its beginning to the 14th Century, <https://www.al-islam.org/articles/spread-islam-its-beginning-14th-century-shaykh-mansour-leghaei>.

¹³ Jinnah Papers, vol.vi, 170.

¹⁴ Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah speeches as Governor General of Pakistan 1947-1948, (Karachi: 1948), 156.

¹⁵ Khushbo Ahmed and Muhammad Faisal, "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Strategic Relations: An Assessment".

¹⁶ *Pakistan Horizon* vol.25, no. 2, 1972, 202.

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¹⁹*Dawn*, 23, 05, 2013.

²⁰ Arhama Saddiqa, Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations in the Khan Era: Naya Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: Old wine in a new bottle? *The Diplomat*, 25,09,2018.

²¹ *Ibid.*,

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ EconomicTimes.indiatimes.com,” Gen. Raheel Sharif-led IMCTC delegation arrives in Pakistan on first visit for talks”,11, 02, 2019

²⁴ “Two-days visit: Imran Khan in S. Arabia on first foreign trip as PM”, *The Express Tribune* dated 18, 09, 2018.