

## PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, Shi'a Muslims account for approximately 15-20% of a total population of 181 million. There has been sectarian violence and attacks against Shi'a Muslims since the 1950s. In more recent times violent attacks have intensified.

The targeting of Shi'a Muslims in the country is indiscriminate but the Shi'a Hazara community in the southwestern town of Quetta is singled out more than others. Since the year 2000, over 2000 Shi'a Hazaras including many women and children have been murdered or suffered heavy injuries as a result of sectarian attacks by religious extremists.

The attacks against the Shi'a Muslim of Pakistan reach out beyond the Hazara community. In many regular occurring instances families of Shi'a Muslim have been assassinated near the borders as they make their way to visit religious shrines in Iran and Iraq. The Shi'a Muslims in Pakistan are most vulnerable during the yearly commemorations of Muharram.

The incessant targeting of Shi'a Muslims, Shi'a gatherings, Shi'a intellectuals, and Shi'a places of worship has lead reputed international organisations and human rights groups such as Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour International Religious Freedom, Shi'a Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch to describe the prevailing and rising anti-Shi'a attacks as systematic. The authorities in Pakistan have done little to remedy the situation. Extremist groups such as the LeJ who target Shi'a Muslims have been allowed to operate under different guises with little impunity.

Recently, the authorities in Pakistan have added the name of Ayatollah Shaykh Mohsin Ali Najafi to the National Action Plan list of terrorists as well as having his citizenship revoked. Shaykh Najafi is a scholar of profound learning who has penned works condemning sectarianism, terrorism, and political violence. In a 2014 interview with a national Pakistani newspaper he described terrorism as utterly shameful and blameworthy to the extreme.

Shaykh Najafi has gone to great lengths to foster the spirit of dialogue in Pakistan as a response to the rising wave of sectarianism and militant violence.

Pakistani Shias and their religious places of worship are routinely and regularly attacked by violent extremists. Authorities in Pakistan have yet to curtail hate speech and incendiary sermons specifically targeting religious minorities such as the Shi'a Muslim community. The prevalence of theological and polemical literature condemning Shi'as as heretics worthy of death is widespread in Pakistan; in some cases the death Shi'a Muslim intellectuals has come by perpetrators who drew inspiration from the far-reaching anti-Shi'i sentiment and material in print.

## SRI LANKA

In the nineteenth many Muslim communities of Indian descent settled in Sri Lanka: the vast majority are Sunni Muslims. A few thousand, however, were Shi'i Muslims with links to Ismailism.

Today, Shi'i Islam plays a marginal role in Sri Lankan society with Shi'i Muslims comprising 5,000 of a total population of 22,000. Some generous estimates place the number of Shi'i Muslim Sri Lankans at 17,000.

The majority of Shi'is in Sri Lanka are located on the eastern villages of the country near Walachil and Calcuda in Batticaloa District; there are also some in Kandy and in Noorelia as well.

Few places of workshop in Sri Lanka cater for Shi'i Islam. One exception is the Az Zahra Association, a Shi'i organisation that offers religious schooling and communal workshop to Sri Lankan Shi'is.

As small as they are, the Shi'i community in Sri Lanka has received threats of attacks by religious extremists who view their branch of Islam as an anathema. In August 2015 a leading Sri Lankan Muslim cleric, Shaykh Imraan Hassan, delivered a fiery sermon called, "Beware of Shi'a in Sri Lanka," in which he demonised the Shi'i tradition and condemned its members in Sri Lanka as heretics.

The persistent danger is that religious clerics in Sri Lanka have failed to challenge anti-Shi'i sentiment stemming out from public fora. Small communities who are regularly demonised risk becoming the target of attacks by extremists. Certainly precedents exist in neighbouring countries such as India and Pakistan.