

Use of Religion as Rhetoric in the Inaugural Speeches of Pakistani Prime Ministers

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Abstract

Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, Islam has been the one thread creating a national identity in a state otherwise divided along ethnic, provincial, cultural, religious, class, and linguistic lines. Since then, governments have used Islam to gain legitimacy for their rule and as tools of state policy. It has caused religion to be a central theme in the national policy, election campaigns, and public addresses of political leaders. This research aims to analyze the use of religion as rhetoric in the inaugural speeches of three Prime Ministers of Pakistan who belonged to PPP and PMLN. For this purpose, the text of inaugural speeches was rhetorically analyzed for their various components.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Speech Analysis, Prime Minister Speech, Politics, Religion, Islam

Introduction:

Pakistan is a country that was based on Islamic identity, established to protect the religious, cultural, and historical values of the Muslims of Subcontinent when the British withdrew from South Asia. Therefore, Islam is still a very important aspect of Pakistan's ethos, identity, and national policy. Islam is the central theme in the constitution of Pakistan and different governments specially Gen Zia's regime 1977-1988 tried to reinforce the Islamic values. Though each member of the government represents the government, yet Prime Minister is the most crucial person of the government. So this research examined the use of religion as rhetoric in the inaugural speeches of Pakistani Prime Minister of two political parties PPP and PMLN. These two parties rule the country six times between 1988 and 2018 after Gen Zia. PPP is considered the left-wing political party while PML-N is considered the right-wing Party. Due to the spread of mass media and growing the role of different scholars and members of civil society on mass media, the issues of religion and secularism have become an important part of public discourse than ever before. The purpose of this research is to reveal the use of religion as rhetoric in the inaugural speeches of three Prime Ministers of Pakistan.

The inaugural address presents on the occasion of transfer of powers from one government to another. That's why it has its own genre. It reflects and represents the things that the Prime Minister or President finds important. If he or she expresses the ideas successfully, the address becomes the part of the history and stands up through the ages. The inaugural address is the part of a long tradition of democratic process, so the Prime Ministers cannot decide it by own. The genre of inaugural addresses is strictly defined when compared to the other genres used by the Prime Ministers. Researchers¹

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¹ Cohen Bell, Lauren, Connors, Joan L. and Theodore F. Sheckels. *Perspectives on Political Communication – a Case Approach*. (Essex: Pearson Education, 2008).

discussed eight characteristics those are normally found in an inaugural address of the American President.

(i) The unification of the people as one. This unification gives the president an opportunity to either redefine or remind the people who they are? (ii) An inaugural address praises the people's traditional values in epideictic style. (iii) The address illustrates the principles of the president's political philosophy that will be utilized by new administration. (iv) The president acknowledges the limits of his power. He realizes that he cannot succeed without congressional help or the help of people. (v) The president often includes biblical allusions mostly at the beginning and at the end of the address. The president acknowledges that there is an Almighty Which is more powerful than him and calls upon the Almighty to help and guide him and his nation. (vi) The use of historical likeness to show how the new administration's vision can succeed and assures the people that the nation has a bright future. (vii) The use of epideictic style to praise the constitutional system of the America. (viii) The inaugural address reflects a high style language, which is usually present in epideictic speeches. It contains several linguistic features such as metaphors, allusions, and quotable quotes.

The subject of rhetoric and religion is an area of scholarly interest and debated in the conference of *Rhetoric Society of America* in 1998 which amply seven different categories of the combination of religion and rhetoric.² The seventh category is related to the use of religion as rhetoric in social or power structures.

One of the researchers³ analyzed the rhetoric and religion in contemporary politics and examined how religious differences work in current political environment. He focuses on some issues for example separation of church and state. Another researcher examined the religious rhetoric. According to him, religious expression contains address about the gods and address to the gods, especially prayers and hymns.⁴ It is different from the use of religion as rhetoric.

The use of religious rhetoric by the politicians is determined by four considerations⁵: (i) the alignment between the speaker's and audience's religiosity, (ii) the acceptability of the speaker's denomination to the audience, (iii) the speaker's religious history, (iv) the speaker's party. They used 2012 presidential election as a case, paired county-level religion data with a content analysis of 264 stump speeches to examine how the religious aspects of candidate's rhetoric changed depending upon the religious frameworks of a community.

The rhetoric of religious experience in the speeches of Barack Obama as candidate and as president showed that this rhetoric offers a way of directing the religious wish that is dependable with the ethics of a mixed democracy which makes possible of

² Boswell, Grant, Seven Ways of Looking at Religion and Rhetoric. In *Rhetoric, the Polis, and the Global Village: Selected Papers from the 1998 Thirtieth Anniversary Rhetoric Society of America Conference*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 27-29.

³ Lunceford, Brett. "Rhetoric and Religion in Contemporary Politics." *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 2, no. 2 (2012).

⁴ Pernot, Laurent. "The rhetoric of religion." In *New Chapters in the History of Rhetoric*. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 325-346.

⁵ Coe, Kevin, and Christopher B. Chapp. "Religious rhetoric meets the target audience: Narrowcasting faith in presidential elections." *Communication Monographs* 84, no. 1 (2017): 110-127.

collective overpowering.⁶ Moreover, the eight speeches of President J. W. Bush reflect the use of rhetorical devices such as anaphora, metaphor, religious and historical symbols in the speeches.⁷ As there are countless rhetorical devices, so religion and historical symbols can also be used as rhetorical devices. For example, when we say that God gives us this task.

In the same vein, all the inaugural addresses and annual messages by US presidents delivered between 1789 and 2000 demonstrate five significant changes in twentieth century presidential rhetoric that support the opinion of institutional transformation.⁸ These five changes are: (i) presidential rhetoric has become more anti-intellectual, (ii) more abstract, (iii) more assertive, (iv) more democratic, and (v) more conversational. Anti-intellectual means use of informal words. Abstract means more use of religious, poetic and idealistic words. Assertive means use of activist approach versus realist approach. Democratic rhetoric means use of words like legislation, constitution and democracy. Conversation means use a conversational style during speech.

Regardless of the political belonging and the different addressing styles, American Presidents tend to appeal Divinity, Christian and democratic values similarly.⁹ The researchers¹⁰ explored the ways in which presidential candidates respond when the news media frame their religious beliefs as dissident to American democratic values. Using John F. Kennedy's "Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association" and Barack Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech as case studies for analysis, we argue that Kennedy and Obama employed what Kenneth Burke referred to as familial and dialectical substance to overcome their respective controversies. While Kennedy reaffirmed his national allegiance by associating religious freedom with American values, Obama created dialectical tension to frame the controversy surrounding his candidacy from an alternative perspective, which simultaneously provided Americans an opportunity to interrogate the importance of religious pluralism. Kennedy and Obama's speeches provide a valuable framework for examining the rhetorical strategies that presidential candidates may use to transcend the "religious issue."

The cultural orientations significantly influence American political behavior. However, the impact of these divisions is almost always more important when cultural orientations are defined by religious traditionalism than material-post-material value priorities.¹¹

⁶ Crick, Nathan. "Barack Obama and the rhetoric of religious experience." *Journal of Communication and Religion* 35, no. 1 (2012): 1-15.

⁷ Andersson, Ingela. *American political rhetoric: a study of selected speeches by George W. Bush*. (Kiruna: Lulea University of Technology, 2005).

⁸ Lim, Elvin T. "Five trends in presidential rhetoric: An analysis of rhetoric from George Washington to Bill Clinton." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2002): 328-348.

⁹ Iancu, Ioana, and Delia-Cristina Balaban. "Religious influences in inaugural speeches of US Presidents." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no. 34 (2013): 101-125.

¹⁰ Anderson, Scott, and Jonathan M. Smith. "Transcending Media Framing of Candidate Religiosity: The Religio-Rhetorical Discourse of John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama." *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal* 34, no. 1 (2019).

¹¹ Layman, Geoffrey C., and Edward G. Carmines. "Cultural conflict in American politics: Religious traditionalism, postmaterialism, and US political behavior." *The Journal of Politics* 59, no. 3 (1997): 751-777.

As the focus of the present research is to examine the use of religion as rhetoric in the speeches of Prime Ministers' inaugural addresses, this research analyzes the following inaugural addresses from 1988 to 2018¹². As six out of seven governments were made by PPP and PMLN in this era, so it is important to check their rhetorical strategies. These speeches are as follow:

1. Benazir Bhutto's inaugural address for her first term as PM on 2nd December 1988
2. Nawaz Sharif's inaugural address for his first term as PM on 7th November 1990
3. Benazir Bhutto's inaugural address for her second term as PM on 20th October 1993
4. Nawaz Sharif's inaugural address for his second term as PM on 23rd February 1997
5. Yousaf Raza Gilani's inaugural address as PM on 19th July 2008
6. Nawaz Sharif's inaugural address for his third term as PM on 19th August 2013

Methodology:

The study of use of religion in political speeches was part of various researches.^{13 14 15 16 17} From the American context, President Bush¹⁸ has employed the religious text in his speeches. He divides this text in certain categories which are as under: (i) Prayers; when prime ministers usually offer hope, (ii) Historic influence of faith on the country or the nation, (iii) Faith based welfare programs such as Zakat or Ushar, (iv) Literary analysis to scripture or divine knowledge, (v) Reference to providence. It is interesting that such studies are not available in the case of Pakistan which is not only a Muslim majority country but is officially called the Islamic Republic.

The research focused on speech analysis explained how President Bush has employed the religious text in his speeches.¹⁹ The speeches were divided in certain categories which are as under: (i) Prayers; when prime ministers usually offer hope, (ii) Historic influence of faith on the country or the nation, (iii) Faith based welfare programs such as Zakat or Ushar, (iv) Literary analysis to scripture or divine knowledge, (v) Reference to providence.

¹² Ali, L. *Tqareer Sarbrahan-e-Pakistan: Awaleen Khitabat*. Alwaaqar Publications, Lahore, 1997.

¹³ Aghazadeh, Jafar, and Reza Mahmoudoghli. "Religion and political engagement." *Cogent Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2017).

¹⁴ Gerson, Michael. *Religion, rhetoric, and the presidency: a conversation with Michael Gerson* event transcript, available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2004/12/06/religion-rhetoric-and-the-presidency-a-conversation-with-michael-gerson/#> (2004).

¹⁵ Grigoriadis, Ioannis N., and Esra Dilek. "Struggling for the Kurdish vote: religion, ethnicity and victimhood in AKP and BDP/HDP rally speeches." *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 2 (2018): 289-303.

¹⁶ Lövheim, Mia, Jonas Lindberg, Pål Ketil Botvar, Henrik Reintoft Christensen, Kati Niemelä, and Anders Bäckström. "Religion on the political agenda." In *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere*, pp. 137-191. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

¹⁷ Marchenko, A. (2018). Religious Rhetoric, Secular State? The Public References to Religion by Ukraine's Top Politicians (1992–2016). *Euxeinos—Culture and Governance in the Black Sea Region*, available at: <https://gce.unisg.ch/en/euxeinos/archive/24>, accessed, 10.

¹⁸ Ibid. 13

¹⁹ Gerson, Michael. *Religion, rhetoric, and the presidency: a conversation with Michael Gerson* event transcript, available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2004/12/06/religion-rhetoric-and-the-presidency-a-conversation-with-michael-gerson/#> (2004).

As this research focused on to find out the use of religion as rhetoric in the speeches of prime ministers, the researcher considered above mentioned categories as guide lines and tried to find out same or other ways of using religion as rhetoric in Pakistani scenario.

One of the model showed that for analysis of speeches consists in five levels of analysis:²⁰ (i) the analysis of the individual speeches, (ii) the comparative analysis of speeches of the same President from two different terms, (iii) the comparative analysis between discourses of the Democrat Presidents, (iv) respectively Republican Presidents, and (v) the comparative analysis between the inaugural addresses of the Democrats versus Republicans. Researcher considered this study in the analysis part of this paper.

One of the key foundational element in creation of Pakistan was two nation theory that discussed religious difference as the core distinguishing feature for the people residing in the part of the subcontinent that is now called Pakistan. The use of religion has been part of political discourse since the inception of the country. Therefore, it was pertinent to identify that how the Pakistan's prime ministers, in the last two decades, used religion to set the stage of their government. Therefore, the current research is focused on understanding the use of religious elements in the inaugural speeches. The study aims at:

- 1) Identifying the degree to which religious elements are used in the inaugural speeches of Pakistan's prime ministers who represent two major political parties in Pakistan.
- 2) To examine major distinctions with respect to religious elements used by each prime minister in Pakistan.
- 3) To determine the differences in use of religious elements by each prime minister of Pakistan.

The study used the method proposed by Iancu and Balaban²¹. The focus of the analysis based on the said model was categorized at three levels:

- 1) the analysis of the individual speeches by Pakistan's prime ministers,
- 2) the comparative analysis of speeches of the same Prime ministers or winning party heads from two different terms,
- 3) the comparative analysis between discourses of the Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N).

The identification of use of religious elements and comparison between the use of religious rhetoric is important to understand the religious orientation of each prime minister.

Results

1. Benazir Bhutto's inaugural address for her first term as PM on 2nd December 1988:

Benazir Bhutto used religion as rhetoric in various ways. While praying, she said: *We pray that oh Allah! Keep us on the right path.* While quoting Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah the founder of Pakistan, she revealed: *On the time of the establishment of Pakistan, Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said in the representation of the ambitions of Muslim people that Pakistan will rise as a modern state.* She used the concepts of Muslim people and the modern state in the same sentence to show that both concepts are the same and she will carry both these concepts

²⁰ Iancu, Ioana, and Delia-Cristina Balaban. "Religious influences in inaugural speeches of US Presidents." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no. 34 (2013): 101-125.

²¹ Iancu, Ioana, and Delia-Cristina Balaban. "Religious influences in inaugural speeches of US Presidents." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12, no. 34 (2013): 101-125.

simultaneously. She then presents Islam as a way of life and shows her pride in Pakistan as the Islamic Republic. She said: *This is our objective that we continue to keep trying for the rise of higher Islamic values of brotherhood, equality, patience, and forbearance. We are proud that we live in an Islamic republic. We should gain strength from our religion.* As Pakistan has a huge religious sentiment in its society, these techniques were used to engage such religious segments.

2. Nawaz Sharif's inaugural address for his first term as PM on 7th November 1990:

Nawaz Sharif frequently used the religious text in his address. He used to pray from Allah. He even started his address by thanking Allah on the successful completion of the electoral process. He then prays from Allah: *Give me the strength to serve my nation beyond the feelings of friendship and enmity.* This also shows his humble approach towards all segments of society.

He also prays from Allah to grant him strength for fulfilling his responsibilities. He also used the historical influence of faith in the country when he said: *This decision is the victory of Allama Iqbal's ideologies and Quaid e Azam's visions.* He also used religion in support of his welfare programs. He said: *Implementing the Islamic rules would not only a slogan from now onward. These rules will be implemented practically.* He further said: *My task is to serve Islam, Pakistan, and our people.* While discussing the women's rights, he said: *I want women to get all the rights that our religion has given to them.* Then he said: *Pakistan is a Muslim country. With the blessing of God, the condition of minorities is good here. It will be better in our tenure.* In this way, he links everything with Islam which has a core value in the life of a common Pakistani Muslim. He also preaches Islamic values like simplicity. He negates the ordinary traditions like dowry. He also announced: *Give the Zakat' fund to deprived persons is the part of my mission.* In this way, he emphasizes an Islamic system. While praising the Army, he said: *According to its role, it is the Army of Islam.* While discussing the foreign policy, he said: *Supporting and endorsing the rights of Muslims around the world remains our priority. Pakistan opposed the outer intervention on Afghan people.* Nawaz Sharif himself belongs to Muslim League, which is considered as a conservative party and he was also the part of an alliance in 1990 named IJI (Islami Jamhoori Ittihad), which also hold several religious political parties including Jamat e Islami, so use of religious text on such a large scale and connecting everything with religion is obvious.

3. Benazir Bhutto's inaugural address for her second term as PM on 20th October 1993:

She used to pray from Allah at the beginning of the address. She explains the purpose of democracy as to establishment of an Islamic welfare state. This is to sensitize an old demand of the majority of people in the country. While concluding the address, she said that all the powers belong to Allah, Who made us successful.

4. Nawaz Sharif's inaugural address for his second term as PM on 23rd February 1997:

Nawaz Sharif supported his various reforms programs by using religion. He said: *Quranic education will be necessary for secondary school students.* While talking about housing, he said: *Our Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, build new towns. So we will build new cities to stop the flow of the population towards big cities.* Supporting his argument by using religion is not only to strengthen his point but also to strengthen his support base among the people who have an emotional attachment with the religion. He said: *Pakistan is an Islamic ideological nation. Implementing an Islamic banking system is our constitutional and Islamic duty.* He said: *Our religion protects the social and religious rights of minorities. So we will completely protect their rights.* While giving

the argument on Sunday as a holiday instead of Friday, he quoted a verse from Surah Jumah of the Quran that *performs the Friday prayer and spread on earth to find the blessings of Allah*. So he argues that we should not waste this day in social gatherings. In this way, he supported his various arguments by the use of religion.

5. Yousaf Raza Gilani's inaugural address as PM on 19th July 2008:

Yousaf Raza Gilani hardly used religion in his address. He just prays from Allah for forgiveness, peace, and safety at the end of the address.

6. Nawaz Sharif's inaugural address for his third term as PM on 19th August 2013:

Nawaz Sharif hardly used the words related to religion in this address. Though he often prays to Allah for help in every matter. While talking about the flood-affected people, he appeals to the other people of the country that they should do help of their brothers according to great Islamic and national customs.

Analysis and Conclusion:

Benazir Bhutto used religion as rhetoric mostly in broader terms especially during her first inaugural address as PM in 1988. She discussed the conceptual beliefs of founding father regarding state and religion and expressed her trust on Islamic values i.e. brotherhood, equality, patience, and forbearance and according to her these are higher Islamic values. During her second inaugural address in 1993, she prays from Allah and declared Him the main power behind her success. But generally she focused on the wider concepts such as Islamic welfare state and did not support her arguments by using the religion as rhetoric for any specific policy or decision. These findings are in line with another study²² that stated in their study based on the inaugural speeches of American Presidents that they often include biblical allusions mostly at the beginning and at the end of the address. The president acknowledges that there is an Almighty Which is more powerful than him and calls upon the Almighty to help and guide him and his nation.

On the other side, though Yousaf Raza Gilani belonged to the family that has deep roots in religion but he hardly used religion as rhetoric during his speech in 2008. His use of religion was only limited to prayers. Nawaz Sharif's first two addresses, in 1990 and 1997, are stylized in the same way as US presidents structured their speeches in terms of their style²³ in his. He adopted a very humble approach, associated his success in elections with the ideology of founding fathers, presented faith based welfare programs and supported all his arguments and policy statements by the use of religion. But Nawaz Sharif also remained limited only to prayers in his third address in 2013. The scholars²⁴ discussed that president's use of historical likeness to show how the new administration's vision can succeed and assures the people that the nation has a bright future. Referring the founding fathers by Benazir and Nawaz Sharif validate this discussion.

Although Nawaz Sharif's use of religion as rhetoric during his speeches was far more than Benazir Bhutto but she also used religion as rhetoric during her speeches though she was arguably the leader of left wing politics as stated by Nawaz, H. The

²² Cohen Bell, Lauren, Connors, Joan L. and Theodore F. Sheckels. *Perspectives on Political Communication – a Case Approach*. (Essex: Pearson Education, 2008).

²³ Gerson, Michael. *Religion, rhetoric, and the presidency: a conversation with Michael Gerson* event transcript, available at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2004/12/06/religion-rhetoric-and-the-presidency-a-conversation-with-michael-gerson/#> (2004).

²⁴ Cohen Bell, Lauren, Connors, Joan L. and Theodore F. Sheckels. *Perspectives on Political Communication – a Case Approach*. (Essex: Pearson Education, 2008).

slogan of formulating an Islamic State and implementing Islamic rules and system in the country was raised in the era of Gen Zia ul Haq in 1977. It was a strong slogan that even a left wing and anti-Zia leader like Benazir Bhutto could not completely get rid of this. The slogan dies itself in 21st century when the issue of religious extremism emerged and being discussed in media around the World after incident of 9/11 in USA. This may be the reason that Yousaf Raza Gilani and Nawaz Sharif did not focus on using religion as rhetoric in last two speeches. So it can be said that the use of religion as rhetoric by the politicians is also depends upon their alignment with international political order.