

Sunni-Shia Relations in Pakistan: The Widening Divide

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Abstract

The sectarian divide between the Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan has widened since the 1980s. The rising tide of sectarian violence during Musharraf's rule (October 1999-till date), in spite of bans and restrictions imposed on sectarian outfits and elements by the administration, suggests that the two sects have drifted further apart. This paper seeks to trace the origin of the divide, dwell upon the sectarian politics in recent months and study the role of ideological and fiscal support from outside, the influence of the radical sectarian politics of the Taliban in the neighbourhood and the propensity of the security agencies to establish links with sectarian elements and divert them towards Kashmir, in contributing to this divide.

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Introduction

The Sunni-Shia division has been there in Islam since millennia.¹ The basic issue that divides the two sects is over the legitimacy of who should have succeeded Prophet Muhammad as the Caliph or the leader of the Muslim community. After the death of the Prophet in 632 AD, there was a section among the Muslims who believed that the mantle should have rightfully fallen on Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali. However, with Ali preferring to follow the early three Caliphs (632-656 AD), and with the selection of Ali as the fourth Caliph it seemed the controversy would wither away. But there was yet another controversy that raised its head with an influential section alleging Ali of deliberate negligence of duty over the case of bringing the assassins of the third Caliph, Uthman (644-656), to justice. Ali's efforts at renovating the system of administration by appointing new provincial governors also annoyed the then head of Ummayyad clan, Muawiya, who was the cousin of Uthman and then the governor of Syria. Ali's effort to attempt reconciliation with a rebel Muawiya resulted in widespread conser-

nation in Ali's ranks and culminated in one of his followers murdering Ali in 661 AD. Muawiya declared himself Caliph after Ali's murder and after Muawiya's death his son Yazid declared himself Caliph in 680 AD. Their usurpation of Caliphate is as much a contested theme as the claim of Ali's sons to Caliphate in the history of Islam.

The killing of Ali's sons, Hassan (allegedly by poisoning) and Hussein, who were designated as Caliphs by the followers of Ali, by Muawiya and his son Yazid, led to permanent schism between the followers of Ali and rest of the Muslim community. Hassan, Ali's elder son had indeed struck up a compromise with Muawiya and there was peace among the Muslims. But the killing of Ali's younger son Hussein in the battle of Karabala², by the forces of Yazid sealed the fate of any further conciliation between the two streams of thought that struggled to gain supremacy in the early days of Muslim history. On the one end were the people who would follow nothing but *sunna* — the sayings and acts of Muhammad and the *sahaba* (companions of the prophet which even includes Muawiya), while on the other there were those who would follow ahl-ul-bayt (or the house of the Prophet, which follows through Ali for 12 generations till Muhammad Al Mahdi who disappeared in 941 AD) and their own sets of *hadith* (sayings and acts of Prophet and his progeny through Ali). The first group, the more numerous (85-95 per cent) is called Sunni (after their adherence to *Sunna*) and the second is called Shia (after *Shia't Ali* or the party of Ali). The divisions between these two sects, in spite of the commonalities, have led to two different orientations within Islam³ and the adherents of these two sects have fought zealously for upholding the legitimacy of their separate views throughout Islamic history.

The Sunni-Shia Division in Pakistan

The history of Islam in South Asia shows that the Sunni and Shia sects lived side by side in perfect harmony and coexisted peacefully in the region till the 1970s. In fact, Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his pioneering work, *Modern Islam in India* said that he did not give Shias any separate treatment in his "study of the changes wrought in (Indian) Islam by modern social processes" because he did not consider the points of divergence "fundamentally relevant" to such changes.⁴ In fact, the unanimity of views among the Shias and Sunnis between 1950s and 1970s, over the issue of defining Islam in 'exclusive' terms (finality of Prophet) and declaring Ahmadiyahs non-Muslims gave

further credence to the view that the inter-sectarian harmony will remain a defining element of sub-continental Islam.⁵

But the passion for ‘exclusivity’ has a tendency to metastasise, sub-divide, emphasise inter-group differences and crystallise around ethno-cultural-religious identities in plural societies. Very often it derives power and incentive for consolidation from numerically preponderant groups, and through its emphasis on exclusivity, it also induces ‘exclusivity’ in the neighbouring minority groups. The Sunni-Shia consensus broke down soon after the 1970s and it was interesting to find the success of the anti-Ahmadiyya movement encouraging the Sunni sectarian leadership to apply the same principle of exclusion on the next relatively more numerous yet minority Shia community (nearly 20 per cent of the total population).

The zeal of Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88) to introduce Islamic Sharia— especially a Sunni Hanafi-Deobandi system of jurisprudence⁶— provided the context for such sectarian forces to emerge with greater force on the socio-political horizon in Pakistan.⁷ This was all happening against the backdrop of the successful Shi’ite revolution in Iran in 1979. Although Zia’s emphasis on Islam and the steps he took to usher Pakistan into an Islamic system preceded the Shi’ite revolution in Iran, its success certainly accelerated the pace of a state-sponsored Islamic revolution in Pakistan. However, Zia’s emphasis on Islamisation with a distinct Sunni flavour gradually brought the differences between the two sects out into the open. In fact, many Sunni political outfits like Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) of Mufti Mahmud, Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Pakistan(JUP) led by Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani, and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Ahle Hadith (JUAH) through their publications, openly indulged in the anti-Shia rhetoric after Zia’s coming to power.⁸ JUAH, known for its Saudi connections, had even gone to the extent of organising demonstrations against the Shi’ite revolution in Iran in 1979 denouncing Khomeini as enemy of Islam. These outfits which had inherited the legacy of Deobandi Seminary went to the extent of reiterating the Deobandi position of 1940 that Shias should be declared non-Muslims and Kafirs.⁹

The Shia disillusionment came immediately after Zia’s promulgation of Hudood ordinances (which provided for Islamic punishments for criminal acts) on February 10, 1979. The Shia cheerleaders of the anti-Ahmadiyya movement and advocates of Islamic system of governance in Pakistan were found dissociating themselves from the state-sponsored Council of Islamic

Ideology (CII). One of the most important among them was Mufti Jafar Hussein (1916-1983), a very famous Shiite scholar educated in Lucknow (India) and Najaf (Iraq), who resigned from the CII and founded the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Fiq-e-Jafariya (Movement for Implementation of Shi'ite Jurisprudence) on April 12-13, 1979 in the city of Bhakkar.¹⁰ On June 30, 1980, Zia went further and promulgated the Zakat and Ushr ordinance which stipulated compulsory collection of zakat tax from bank accounts. The Shia jurisprudence diverges widely regarding the percentage of income that is supposed to be paid as zakat (alms-giving). And there was a country wide stir among the Shias over the issue.

On July 6, 1980, the march of thousands of Shias on the streets of Islamabad was threatening enough to secure exemption of Shi'ites from Zakat ordinance and the agreement to this effect between Mahmood Haroon, then Minister for Religious Affairs and Mufti Jafar Hussain came to be known as the Islamabad Agreement. It is reported that some of the Shia flag officers close to Zia advised him to accept the Shia demands.¹¹ The impact of Zia's retreat was obvious. The movement was a success and it added new strength to TNFJ, which continued under a less assertive name Tehreek-e-Jafariya-Pakistan (TJP). The links between Shias of Pakistan and the Iranian government grew from strength to strength as Sunni militant assertion against the Shias grew in Pakistan in the 1980s and the 1990s.

The External Link

It would be useful to dwell briefly upon the prime causes of the proliferation of the Jihadis as well as the Jihadi culture in the post-1980 Pakistan. The Jihadi agenda promoted by US¹² in collaboration with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in the region during the days of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet forces as well as the Pakistani support to Taliban after the pull out of the Soviet forces, emboldened the Wahabites and it had had its inescapable impact on the sectarian situation in Pakistan.

Starting in the 1980s, four large Wahabi organisations — the World Muslim League (WML), the Al Haramain Foundation, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), and the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO) — became the main sponsors of Deobandi seminaries and jihadist organisations in Pakistan. Not to be left behind, the Iranians chipped in with their support for the Shias when the attack on Shias in Afghanistan and Pakistan became a favourite pastime of the Wahabite organisations in Pakistan

and Afghanistan. They started promoting Shia madrassas. While the madrassas, of both the variety, did provide an alternative system of education to the poor in Pakistan, the very fact that the state either approved of or rather hesitated to intervene in their affairs gave them an unhindered space to emphasise their separate exclusive world-views. These madrassas taught the students their separate interpretations of history of Islamic thought. Thus, the radical Sunnis brought out their 'Tarikh-i-Dastaaveez' (Historical Documents) in the 1990s to introduce the students in their madrassas to the presumed heretical Shia pattern of thinking. The Shias countered it with their Tehqiqi-i-Dastaaveez" (Researched Documents). All this provided the context for institutionalisation of different groups¹³ and politicisation and radicalisation of sectarian identities.¹⁴ Quoting American scholar Vali Nasr, Jessica Stern would also argue that the "theological differences between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims have been transformed into full-fledged political conflict, with broad ramifications for law and order, social cohesion, and government authority. The... Pakistani government has essentially allowed Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi'a Iran to fight a proxy war on Pakistani soil, with devastating consequences for the Pakistani people".¹⁵

The role of Saudi Arabian money in fomenting sectarian hatred in Pakistan right from the 1980s has been emphasised by various scholars in Pakistan and outside in recent years¹⁶ as has been the concern over the possible Iranian support to the radical Shia groups. The politicisation of the clergy during Zia-ul-Haq, rule and especially their access to the levers of power in the shape of collection of *zakat* as well as providing guidance to local level administration, has given the sectarian clergy a permanent base in the existing power-structure of the country and perpetuated their hold over the radical constituency.

Jhang: The Nerve Centre of Sectarian Politics

During the 1980s, some urban centres in Punjab like Sargodha, Muzaffargarh, Multan, Bahawalnagar, Chakwal and Jhang, emerged as potential areas for sectarian conflicts in Pakistan.¹⁷ Out of them the district of Jhang in Punjab — also the land of Heer-Ranjha, and the place of origin of the Nobel laureate Abdus Salam — emerged as the nerve centre of sectarian conflict in Pakistan. The economy of the district was largely controlled by feudal landlords, who were mainly Syeds (who trace their origin to Muhammad) and Shia — the Siyals, Rajoos and Shah Jewanis apart from

the famous Chiniotis, who had migrated from India during the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. For the apostles of the new Sunni movement the domination of the majority poor Sunnis by the minority Shias was an intolerable socio-economic deformity. The primarily economic move against the Shias assumed sectarian and cultural dimensions when the entrepreneurs of this Sunni movement like Haq Nawaz Jhangvi (1952-1990)¹⁸ emphasised on the cultural differences between the Sunnis and Shias and attributed the poverty of rural Sunni serfs to the cleverly manipulated socio-cultural order that the Shi'ite landlords had imposed on the poor Sunnis for their own benefit. The rumours of ongoing Shia proselytisation also contributed to Haq Nawaz's alarmist concerns.

In fact, one of the main aims of Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba(ASS), which was founded by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi during the 1970s was to fight the Shi'ite cultural influence at all levels and popularise the importance of the Sahaba, or the companions of the Prophet, who were run down by the Shias. Haq Nawaz started off with his arguments in favour of *tauhid* (unity of God) and *risalat* (concept or tradition of prophethood) but soon shifted his attention towards the role of the *Sahaba*. He argued that the Shi'ite disrespect (the *tabarrabazi* or calling names during Muharram processions and even outside it) for the companions of the Prophet should be effectively resisted. He sought to unite differing Sunni schools of thought to take up the issue and set up Tahaffuz-e-Namoos-e-Sahaba (Committee to protect the sanctity of the Sahaba) during the early 1980s. He renamed his ASS as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (Army of the Companions of the Prophet, SSP) on September 6, 1985.

The main aim of SSP, as Haq Nawaz gradually made it clear, was to fight cultural Shi'ism at all levels. He detested the eclectic influence of Shi'i, Sufi philosophy on Sunni Islam at local levels. Such eclecticism was branded un-Islamic, and the restoration of a Deobandi version of Islam, shorn of all ecumenical influence, became the chief motivating force for Haq Nawaz. This exclusive Deobandi reiteration, which was originally projected as a defence against the Shia influence gradually alienated the Bareilvi Sunnis and contributed to widening of the intra-Sunni divide. But that is beside the point here.

The assertion from the SSP side made the Shias, more militant, who came up with their outfit Sipah-e-Muhammadi (Army of Muhammad) Pakistan (SMP) to counter the SSP. There was also a Shia students' outfit

called Imamiya Students' Organisation which adopted an extremist position. The SSP later gave birth to a more radical Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in 1995-1996, which, in league with the Taliban in Afghanistan, made elimination of Shias its primary objective in Pakistan. Even if the LeJ has been banned since August 14, 2001 and its principal leaders, Riaz Basra, Akram Lahori and many others have been either killed or arrested, the organisation is still active and spreading its tentacles to many rural pockets. The SSP was renamed Millat-e-Islami Pakistan after Musharraf banned SSP on January 12, 2002.¹⁹

The Shia Alienation

The perceived official patronage of many of the target killings, ever since the infamous killing of Turi Shias during Zia's rule in the city of Parachinar (capital of Kurram Agency bordering Afghanistan) by the Sunni Afghan mujahideen in conjunction with the local Sunni population in 1988, as also the brutal killing of Shias in Gilgit over a minor issue of difference of opinion on moon-sighting during the month of Ramadan, have further alienated the Shias.²⁰

In early 1988, the Sunnis of Gilgit reacted when the Shias started celebrating 'Id' because Shia scholars had sighted the moon, when Sunnis were still fasting. Sunnis interpreted it as a deliberate offence and attacked the Shias. This led to a gun-battle but the situation settled down later. On the fifth day of the confrontation, a huge army of 80,000 Sunni extremists, allegedly sent by Zia-ul-Haq, attacked the villages inhabited by the Shias — Jalalabad, Bonji, Darot, Jaglot, Pari, and Manawar — and killed almost 700 Shias. Even their livestock were not spared. Such a huge armed group had travelled from Mansehra to Gilgit without the government taking care to stop it, which, the Shias argued proved the collusion of the government in the act.²¹

The SMP in turn killed many Sunni leaders. Even the death of Zia-ul-Haq, which followed the assassination of the famous Turi Shia leader Allama Arif-ul-Hussaini (who led TJP after the death of its founder Jafar Hussein²² and was murdered allegedly under Zia's instructions in Peshawar on August 5, 1988), is attributed by many to Shia militants. The then NWFP governor, General Fazle Haq, whom the Turis accused of complicity in the murder of Allama Hussaini, was ambushed and killed in 1991. Mehram Ali, the Shia terrorist who blew up the SSP leader Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqi at the

Sessions Court in Lahore (on January 18, 1997), was also reportedly trained in Parachinar, the birth-place of Arif-ul-Hussaini.

Sectarian Groups and the Present Establishment: Pro Sunni or Pro-Shia?

The fire that Haq Nawaz lit in early 1980s continues to burn till date and has consumed thousands of innocent lives from both the sects. The fact that the sectarian conflicts have surfaced with greater force in recent years is suggestive of the failure of the Musharraf government's efforts to contain sectarian clashes and it shows that the divides run deep. The alleged official tilt at the lower levels towards Wahabite sectarian organisations like SSP, LeJ, Jaish-e-Muhhammadi (all banned, but operating under other names)²³ has alienated the Shias from the system and largely convinced them that they have nobody to rely on but themselves. They cite the cases of official compensation for one of the Sunni attackers of the Mominpora massacre of 1998 as well as the deep links between intelligence agencies and Sunni militants as reasons for suspecting governmental collusion in anti-Shia violence. The Shia sense of alienation is so acute that many Shia leaders say that Pakistan may as well disintegrate if the authorities do not stop encouraging Sunni sectarian militancy.²⁴

Pro-Sunni?

The official backing of Maulana Azam Tariq, a prominent Sunni sectarian leader, from 2002 till his murder in October 2003, has been cited by Shias as a big proof of Musharraf's government going soft on its anti-sectarian agenda. Tariq Azam's career graph lends credence to such views. Maulana Azam Tariq was born in March 1962 at Chichawatni, Punjab. He obtained an M A in Arabic and also majored in Islamiyat (Islamic Studies) from Jamia Islamia, a seminary in Karachi and came under the influence of Haq Nawaz Jhangvi since 1987. He rose to the top position of SSP in 1997 after the assassination of its leader, Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqui. He was elected to Pakistan National Assembly from Jhang thrice in 1990, 1993 and 2002, while in 1997 he was elected from Jhang to the Punjab Provincial Assembly. Sectarian to the core²⁵, Azam had wide appeal among Wahabite Sunnis. Such was his impact that despite being a Punjabi, the anti-Shiite Orakzai Pashtun tribes in the upper Miranzai Valley in Hangu and Tal had his and the SSP's name inscribed over hills around the town of Hangu. The area has seen much sectarian strife

since the SSP made inroads there in mid-1990s. Tariq had spent a total of six years in jail and had 65 cases registered against him. Of these, 28 cases fell under the various provisions of the Anti-Terrorist Act. He had contested the National Assembly Elections in 2002 from jail as an independent candidate and won comfortably.²⁶

The Millat-e-Islami Party (MIP) that Azam Tariq had launched in April 2003 from Khairpur (many believed with the blessings of the establishment) was meant to disguise his SSP identity. Azam Tariq had also pretended to adopt a non-sectarian approach to politics after he allowed himself to be groomed by the Pakistani authorities ever since he pledged open support for Zafarullah Khan Jamali's government as a trade-off for his release from jail. In his interview to *The Friday Times* in June, 2003,²⁷ Azam Tariq had said that he was willing to work for sectarian harmony even if he was supremely evasive when he was asked if he considered Shias as Muslims. Musharraf's men in intelligence were perhaps trying to usher in a more sophisticated version of Azam, Tariq to the political scene. The Shias of Pakistan suspect official patronage of Sunni sectarian groups right since the days of Zia-ul-Haq.

Pro-Shia?

The Sunnis in turn are accusing Musharraf of promoting and pampering the Shias. They would allege that during his rule since October 1999, Musharraf has sidelined most of the senior Sunni officials and appointed Naqvis, Tirmizis, Bokharis and other Shia officials in all key posts. They would also give examples to substantiate their claims: General Moeen Haider was holding the key ministry of Interior and was replaced by Faisal Saleh Hayat, who is known for his pro-Shia views; the National Reconstruction Bureau was headed by a Shia General, the Director-General of ISI was also shadowed by a Shia, General Zamir. Similarly, they allege that most of the ambassadors appointed during the Musharraf regime have been Shi'ites.

In fact, there were also talks of Musharraf — because he was constantly needed by the MMA regarding the LFO — trying to cobble together an alternative religious combine pledging support to him as well as his political agenda in Pakistan.²⁸ And there were reports that Musharraf's men had managed to cover some early grounds in this direction by reconciling MIP with Barelvi the Pakistani Awami Tehrik (PAT) of Tahir-ul-Qadri, who had

lost to Azam Tariq in Jhang in the October 2002 elections. The search was on for finding a Shiite leader, which was the most difficult job for the agencies, given the Shiite allergy for Azam Tariq and his agenda.

While these political permutations were on, both the SSP and LEJ were perhaps girding up their loins to strike on innocent targets. The 'blowback' effect of Pakistan's two-decade long involvement with extremist politics in Afghanistan was certain to affect domestic stability in Pakistan and the temptation to use Islamic radicalism in a calculated way to extend Pakistan's influence in the region has all along kept the radical fringe alive in Pakistan.²⁹ Some would also argue, Musharraf promise to turn off the Jihadi tap in Kashmir, at Camp David on June 24, 2003, diverted the attention of the surplus 'Jihadis' in Pakistan towards the sectarian issue.³⁰ The swiftness and the ease with which they operated in Quetta for almost a month in June, 2003 suggested that the authorities were caught napping and were really taken by surprise by the suddenness of the attacks and the choice of venue. If Quetta burnt, Karachi was not to be far behind. And once Karachi burnt, the whole of Pakistan had to take stock of the situation and one saw analysts churning out all possible causes and consequences of such sectarian violence.

The Spate of Violence 2003

Between March and June 2003 there was relative sectarian peace in Pakistan but the curve took an upswing in June and perhaps reached its climax in Azam Tariq's murder on October 6, 2003.³¹ The spurt in violence from June 6, 2003 came to a head with the killing of Syed Niaz Hussain, Vice-President of Imambargah, Sajjadia Sariab Road, Quetta. This was immediately followed by the killing of 12 Shia police cadets on June 8, again in Quetta. Then on July 4, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi carried out a suicide attack in a mosque, killing 53 Shias at Quetta during the Friday prayers.³² The venue shifted to Karachi from August 16, when a Shiite doctor, Ibn-e-Hassan, was shot dead near his clinic in Malir. Three days later, on August 19, another Shia doctor was killed near Aga Khan University Hospital. On October 3, just three days before Maulana Tariq's murder, six Shia employees of Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Council (SUPARCO) were killed in an ambush on Hub River Road. And close on the heels came Azam Tariq's murder, near a Toll gate on the outskirts of the capital, right on the day the US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, was meeting Musharraf a few kilometres away in Islamabad.

In what can be termed as Shiite revenge killings, there was the killing of an activist of the banned Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP) Pakistan, Saadat Ali, in New Karachi on June 12, and the killing of five brothers of a Sunni family near Jamshed Quarters, Karachi on August 9 during this period. Since Musharraf's takeover, there have been almost 400 casualties, according to media reports in sectarian encounters, including 80 in Karachi alone.³³

It is useful to remember that during the Quetta Imambargha killings, the Shi'ite leader Allama Sajid Naqvi blamed the killings on the "blue-eyed boy of the establishment", Azam Tariq.³⁴ There were references, in some other quarters, to the possible involvement of the India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), but the Pakistani police investigating the cases underplayed this dimension and the Shia leaders interpreted such explanations as diversionary tactics.

Deflective Strategy

Against this backdrop, there was the statement of the Pakistani Interior Minister, Faisal Saleh Hayat — political rival of Azam Tariq from Jhang, having a massive Shia support base and almost confused by Sunnis as a Shia despite being a Sunni himself — on October 30, 2003, that the authorities had clear leads that suggested involvement of the RAW in Tariq's murder and the Quetta massacre.³⁵ But this strategy of deflection has been criticised by analysts in Pakistan, who are asking the establishment all kinds of uneasy questions. If at all RAW is/has been doing it, is it just to defend the Shi'ites by arming them and to deter Sunni attacks and only act reactively? Or is it waiting patiently to be courted by the Shiites in Pakistan to provide them with a sense of security through their invisible but powerful spy-wars?³⁶

The Pakistan authorities hope that by raising the bogey of RAW, they will manage to apply a magic balm on the sectarian divide on the one hand and effectively cover up their continuing links with the forces of terror on the other. However, any discerning observer of Pakistani politics would identify the links that keep sectarianism going — the proclivity of the agencies to hobnob with sectarian leadership and accord them a false sense of legitimacy and boost their morale, the propensity of religious parties to maintain tactical silence over sectarian killings, the cross-cutting affiliations of Jihadis and sectarian terrorists, official apathy towards the financial links that support their existence and the widespread public tolerance of the phenomenon of sectarianism.

Complex Network

Ever since Musharraf came to power in October 1999, increasing attention is being paid to the rising phenomenon of Kashmiri militant groups, the dregs of Taliban, the sectarian groups and Wahabi internationalists coming together and coordinating their activities against Western interests in Pakistan and elsewhere.³⁷ Reports in early 2003 suggested the concentration of Taliban in and around Quetta and as Taliban known for its sectarian outlook, it could be catalysing the activity of LeJ and others in Baluchistan. It is a gross oversight on the part of the Pakistan authorities for, as *The Washington Post* wrote in its editorial based on reports by its correspondents recently, “the Taliban leaders and their followers are not ensconced in remote caves or dispersed across trackless badlands but operate openly in a major city (Quetta), where they effectively control several neighborhoods”.³⁸

In another move, aimed at purging the Jihadi outfits (an euphemism for pro-Kashmir groups in Pakistan) of sectarian elements, the Pakistani authorities have reportedly asked pro-Kashmir groups to expel such elements. Thus, Masood Azhar, who had founded Jaish-e-Muhammad after his release from Indian prison in exchange of the passengers of the hijacked Indian plane in December 1999 and is known for his sectarian pro-Taliban outlook, was seen to be expelling as many as twelve front-ranking Jaish-e-Muhammad activists recently including Abdul Jabbar, his one time closest associate. Many of these have been subsequently arrested.³⁹ Similarly, many top leaders of the LeJ have been either arrested or killed. This has not gone down well with many groups who have sympathy for such elements. In a recent case, in spite of his closeness to the chief patron of the famous Binori mosque, Mufti Nizamudin Shamzai, Masood Azhar was not allowed to deliver his Friday sermon from the mosque premises. The Head of the rebel faction, Maulana Abdullah Shah Mazhar, also did not allow Masood to enter the Masjid-e-Bataha in Karachi’s Sakhi Hassan locality, which used to be fortress of Jaish-e-Muhammad.⁴⁰ In return for Masood’s compliance, the authorities have allowed him to raise funds for Jihad in Kashmir.

The Fractious Ban

People in Pakistan criticise the Pakistani government openly for its half-hearted approach to the issue of sectarianism. They would urge the government to crack down on local terrorist networks rather than just operate

under US pressure. The official ban (August 14, 2001, January 12, 2002, November 15 and November 20, 2003) has largely failed to carry any effect because the government has not evolved any mechanism to implement these bans. For example, there has been no check on clerics making inflammatory speeches against other sects in their Friday sermons even after the imposition of the ban.⁴¹ The traders of hate have been allowed full independence in churning out their hate material in audio-visual as well as print form, which are circulated openly and widely. The government has also boosted the confidence of the conservative constituency by retreating from its original plan of reforming madrassas in the face of stiff resistance from religious parties running seminaries who refused to get their madrassas registered and follow the curriculum proposed by the government.

The much-publicised country-wide tour undertaken by Masood Azhar to address jihad conferences in October 2003 (which started with his October 18 address in Karachi)⁴² has proved that the authorities are yet to diagnose the disease of sectarianism that Pakistan is suffering from. From Kuddam-ul-Islam, Masood has changed the name of his organisation to Pyam-i-Islam, and has been collecting funds openly for jihad in Kashmir. The government of Pakistan, through the promotion of Jihad-in-Kashmir agenda, perhaps hopes to turn the flow of all extremist elements towards such organisations on the one hand and divert the attention of potential Islamist subverters within the Army towards something which is so dear to the Army — Kashmir, the so called ‘sehrag’ (jugular vein) of Pakistan.

There have been speculations in Pakistani and the international media about an influential Islamist section within the Army protecting Taliban dregs and Al Qaida elements and encouraging sectarian elements in Pakistan. The arrest of some Pakistani Army Personnel on August 31, 2003, which was confirmed by Army sources on charges of having links with extremist elements as well as rumours of Aziz Khan, Joint Chief of Staff, Pakistan Army, supporting these elements covertly, give further credence to such views. Quoting Afghan officials in Kabul, a *Time* Magazine correspondent reported in October 2003, “that some military officers from Pakistan, which backed the Taliban prior to 9/11, are providing funds, arms and sanctuary to help the Taliban regroup. The goal: to keep Afghanistan neatly tethered to Pakistan.”⁴³

In this context, the ban in November 2003 seeks to proscribe the activities of Islami Tehrik Pakistan (banned earlier as TJP), Khuddam-ul-Islam (banned

earlier Jaish-e-Muhammad) and Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan (banned earlier as SSP), Jamat-ul-Fuqran (splinter group of JeM), Hizb-ul-Tahreer and Jamaat-ul-Furqan and keeps Jamaat-ul Dawa (banned earlier as Lashkar-e-Toiba) under watch list.⁴⁴ The government, largely, chooses to be blissfully unaware of the potentially devastating capacity of these groups to widen the sectarian divide by operating under other names.⁴⁵ The daily *Dawn* (Karachi) reported on November 19, 2003 that four more groups, Hizb-ul-Tahreer, Jamiat-ul-Ansar and Jamiat-ul-Furqan and a welfare trust were going to be banned.

It is interesting to note that even before the ban, Khuddam-ul-Islam had conveniently changed its name to Payam-e-Islam and had started raising funds under the very nose of security agencies in Karachi as has been cited above. This isolated example as well as the benefit of doubt given to Jamaat-ul-Dawa proves the point that the Pakistani government is allowing itself to be misled by the militant organisations who would pledge to confine their activities to jihad in Kashmir.

The ban on Shi'ite Islami Tehrik and the move to remand its leader Allama Sajid Naqvi to 7 days' police custody on the other hand conveys the Government's effort to pander to the demands of the Sunni radicals that Sajid Naqvi should be arrested for he was allegedly behind the murder of Azam Tariq. The arrest of Sajid Naqvi may have attested the government's neutral approach to the sectarian issue, but it has certainly strengthened their continuing sense of alienation.

The Widening Divide

All efforts by the Milli Yekjheti Council (a Sunni-Shia combine, result of the efforts of Qazi Hussein Ahmad, leader of Jamiat-i-Islami in 1994) to bring the two sects together earlier failed because of the acts of the radical elements within both the sects who have almost become autonomous. It has been argued by many analysts in Pakistan that the sectarian militancy is confined to certain outfits and does not spread to the grassroots level. The sense of unease among the Shias however, tends to be relatively widespread and the renewed assault against the Shias in 2003 and early 2004 suggests that the embers of sectarian violence may continue to glow in spite of governmental measures to contain it. It may not disturb the peace permanently, but gradually drive a permanent wedge into inter-sectarian relationship. The

government's strategy of using terrorism as an instrument of its foreign policy, the inertia of Afghan Jihad, by militarising extremist groups of all hues, will continue to disrupt domestic peace.

One has to remember here that the years of Jihad in Afghanistan have made a strange network possible among Pakistani intelligence, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) and all shades of Sunni, Wahabite and sectarian extremist groupings in Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁴⁶ In the post-9/11 phase these elements have started demonstrating their disapproval of Pakistan's pro-US policy in violent ways. In many cases too, the Pakistan authorities have tried to co-opt them and initiate them into a more open and democratic political realm, both to serve their needs as well as to blunt their sectarian and extremist agenda. As has been discussed above, they have been allowed, in the bargain, the luxury of re-christening their organisations and camouflaging their agendas.

But this strategy will worsen sectarian situation in Pakistan. Most of the leaders of the Kashmir Jihad have promoted an overtly sectarian agenda and are known for their Sunni Wahabite leanings. With the establishment in Pakistan going soft on jihad in Kashmir they are likely to emphasise on their pro-Kashmir agenda while at the same time sectarian considerations will continue to guide their policy at the domestic level. The avowedly Sunni Islamic extremist agenda of Pyam-e-Islam, Jamaat-ul-Dawa, and Millat-e-Islam(which is very likely to come back under a different name) — even if they focus their attention on Kashmir — will continue to get translated into an explosive anti-sectarian creed that will very likely be the nemesis of a state nurturing terrorism to turn it outward. Pakistan has to understand that it is easier to nurture radicalism but difficult to limit its agenda. It tends to acquire all possible hues and like a chameleon, manages to escape the attention of the very forces that raise it. The strategy of permitting militancy at one level and banning it at the other is thus, likely to fail.

The attack on Youm-e-Ashur procession of Shias in Quetta during Muharram on March 2, 2004, as well as in some parts of Punjab, that led to death of almost fifty persons, in spite of best efforts of the Musharraf government to control sectarian situation during Muharram, shows the deep penetration of the sectarian sentiments and the autonomy of the extremist organisations in Pakistan. The sense of defiance and ease with which these outfits are operating seem to indicate the declining capacity of the Pakistani state to ensure sectarian order and peace in Pakistan. The sectarian situation

in Pakistan seems to have gone beyond repair at the moment. It remains to be seen whether the move towards peace between India and Pakistan which seeks to de-legitimise jihad and terrorism, can bring back some sanity into Sunni-Shia relations in the days to come.

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References/End Notes

1. The view presented here has been culled from various reliable accounts of Islam and Islamic history. For detailed discussion tracing the roots of Shia-Sunni division see among others, John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*. 1998. Oxford University Press; Oxford. Rafiq Zakaria, *The Struggle Within Islam: The Conflict between Religion and Politics*. 1989. Penguin; New Delhi. Thomas W. Lippman, *Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Muslim World*. 1995. Meridian; New York. Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*. 2000. Random House; New York, and Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Today: A Short Introduction to the Islamic World*. 1999. I.B. Tauris; London.
2. The Shias commemorate — through matam or azadari (mourning rituals), majalis (collective lamentation) and zanjir jani (self flegellation) — the battle of Karabala and death of Hussein for the first ten days during the month of Muharram with the Shia congregation beating up their chest and bursting into a frenzy of tears. They seek to relive the agony and suffering that Hussein and his army of 70 including his wife and children experienced at Karabala during their journey from Madina to Kufa in 680 AD. Hussein and his group were confronted with a huge army sent in by Yazid who stopped the supply of water to Hussein and his forces and in the fight that ensued they were hopelessly outnumbered and all the men folk were slaugh tered. Hussein was wounded at several places on his body, and died slowly with his son in his hands. However, one of his infant sons, Ali survived and the Shia line continued. (For a graphic presentation of Shiite procession during Muharram in Pakistan and the role of these processions in dividing the sects, see David Pinault, *Shia-Sunni Relations in Contemporary Pakistan*. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*. Spring 2003, **26** (3) 62-84.
3. The Sunni and Shias share three core doctrines of Islam — the oneness of God, the belief in the revelations of Muhammad, and the belief in resurrection on the Day of Judgment. Both these groups have their different set of hadiths. Sunnis put far more importance on Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca, while Shias Islam has some other very important pilgrimages as well. Sunnis respect Ali, but do not consider him as the only true continuation of the tradition from Muhammad.

4. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, *Modern Islam in India*. 1963. S. Muhammad Ashraf; Lahore. p.399
5. For a very useful discussion emphasizing the shallowness of the views that harp on Sunni-Shia differences see Anwar H. Syed, *The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Pakistan*. In Hafeez Malik, *Ed. Pakistan: Founders' Aspirations and Today's Realities*. 2001. Oxford University Press; Karachi.
6. The Islamic religious seminary, Dar-ul-uloom, of Deoband, in Uttar Pradesh, India, was the nucleus of a puritanical revivalist movement that sought to purge sub-continental Islam of all its eclectic influences as opposed to the school of thought which flourished in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, which sought to accommodate them. The Deobandi Ulema were opposed to the idea of Pakistan for that would reduce the possibility of tabligh (proselytization) but emerged as champions of a thoroughly Islamic state of Pakistan immediately after it was established. Deobandi school is closer in its interpretations to the Wahabite school founded by Mohammad bin Abdul Wahab (1703-1793) which continues to be the ruling ideology of the Saudi Arabian state today.
7. For detailed discussion on the sectarian division in Pakistan in the 1980s see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shi'i and Sunni Identities*. *Modern Asian Studies*. 1998, **32** (3) pp. 689-716.
8. For a more elaborate discussion on the theme see Mumtaz Ahmad. *Revivalism, Islamization, Sectarianism, and Violence in Pakistan*. In Craig Baxter and Charles H. Kennedy, *Ed. Pakistan 1997*. 1998. HarperCollins; New Delhi. p. 108-109.
9. *Ibid*, p. 109.
10. For a detailed view of politicisation of Shias and the rise of TNFJ, see Afak Haydar. *The Politicization of the Shias and the Development of the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria in Pakistan*. In Charles H. Kennedy, *Ed. Pakistan 1992*. 1993. Westview Press; Boulder, CO. pp. 75-94.
11. Baxter, Craig, and Charles H. Kennedy, no. 8, p. 92.
12. For detailed discussion on how USAID sponsored textbooks in Dari and Pushtu, prepared by University of Nebraska-Omaha and its Center for Afghanistan Studies in the 1980s, contributed to the Jihadi mentality among the students in Pakistani madrassas see Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway, *The ABC's of Jihad: Violent Soviet Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts*. *The Washington Post*. March 23, 2001.
13. Malik, Jamal, *Traditional Islamic Learning and Reform in Pakistan*, ISIM Newsletter, No.10, July 2002, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden, Netherlands.
14. See for detailed discussion Alex Alexiev, *The Pakistani time bomb*. Commentary, Washington. March 2003 at www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/index.jsp?section=static&page=alexievpakistan.

- 15 Stern, Jessica, Pakistan's Jihad Culture. *Foreign Affairs*. November-December 2000, Washington.
- 16 See for example, Arnaud de Borchgrave, Saudi Mea Culpa. *The Washington Times*. July 16, 2003.
- 17 This is not to say that other areas remained immune to the sectarian virus. In fact, the network of JUI took it to all corners of Pakistan. The two factions of JUI (Fazlur Rehman and Sami ul Haq) as also Jamiat Ulama-i-Ahle Hadith, competed among themselves to transport this sectarian sentiments wherever they had some political dent. Maulana Salimullah and Maulana Afsandiyar of Karachi as well as Maulana Haq Nawaz of Jhang launched a madrassa-based movement against the Shias in the early 1980s after Zia's ordinances met with Shia resistance. For details see Mumtaz Ahmad, Revivalism, Islamization, Sectarianism, and Violence in Pakistan. In Craig Baxter and Charles H. Kennedy, no. 8, p.110.
- 18 Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi came from a poor, rural background in the district of Jhang and received his religious education at Darul Uloom, Kabirwala, and the Khairul madrassa of Multan in Pakistani Punjab. After his education, he began his career as a preacher in a mosque in Jhang, which was renamed as Masjid-e-Jhangvi after his assassination on February 22, 1990. For a better understanding of Haq Nawaj and socio-economic conditions of Jhang see Afak Hydar, The Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. In Hafeez Malik, *Ed.*, .no. 5, pp. 263-286
- 19 Maulana Ali Sher Haidri is the Patron-in-Chief of the outfit SSP later known as Millat-e-Islamia. Maulana Zia-ul-Qasmi serves as the Chairman, Supreme Council. Maulana Ahmed Ali Ludhianvi has been chosen as the leader of the MIP after the murder of Azam Tariq. Other important leaders are Qazi Mohammed Ahmed Rashidi, Mohammed Yousuf Mujahid, Tariq Madani, and Muhammad Tayyab Qasim. It is reported to have approximately 3,000 - 6,000 trained activists.
- 20 Shehzad, Mohammad, Textbook Controversy in Gilgit. *The Friday Times*. Lahore. July 4-10, 2003.
- 21 Allama Sajid Naqvi would argue that "unless the establishment in Pakistan abandons the politics of harbouring such forces "the country will disintegrate" and would go on to warn: "I am foreseeing a very horrible picture. People could revolt against the state and we might have a repeat of 1971. I am trying to save the country. Our people have kept their cool and prayed for the integrity of Pakistan. I have been urging my people to be patient." *The Friday Times*. Lahore. July 18-24, 2003.
- 22 This succession was not free from controversy and one faction of TNFJ held that Agha Syed Hamid Ali Shah Moosavi was elected by Shia religious leaders from all over Pakistan in Rawalpindi as the chief of TNFJ. The Moosavi faction, relatively less political and more quietist, was thus active too.
- 23 See Mubashir Zaidi, Back to the Drawing Board. *The Herald*. Karachi. September 2003.

- 24 no. 21.
- 25 The very fact that he was sectarian can be ascertained from the fact that he had named his sons after Muawiya one of the most reviled characters for the Shi'ites, who had opposed Ali's Caliphate as has been discussed earlier. (Information from Ghulam Haider, Foreign hand probability. *The Nation*. Karachi. October 7, 2003.)
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- 27 *The Friday Times*. Lahore. June 13-19, 2003.
- 28 Analysts like Stephen P. Cohen would argue this way in his paper, Jihadist Threat to Pakistan. *The Washington Quarterly*. Summer 2003, **26** (3) 7-25.
- 29 Stephen P. Cohen would argue that the blowback effect was indeed real and the army might be losing its grips on Pakistani politics. Ibid.
- 30 Saleem, Farukh, Quetta and Surplus Jihadis. *The News*. Karachi. July 13, 2003.
- 31 The data for the sectarian killings have been taken from the following Pakistani newspapers: *The News* (Karachi), *The Dawn* (Lahore) and *The Nation* (Karachi).
- 32 For a detailed coverage see Massoud Ansari, Valley of Death. Newline. Karachi. August 2003.
- 33 The media accounts differ widely from 230 to 500. This number takes into account the recent spate of killings in Quetta and Karachi between June and October 2003.
- 34 In his interview to *The Friday Times* July 18-24, 2003, Allama Sajid Naqvi, head of Islami Tehreek Pakistan (new edition of Tehreek-e-Jafariya-Pakistan, after it was banned by Musharraf on January 12, 2002), had clearly stated that Azam Tariq was behind the killings and he said he was the Bal Thackeray of Pakistan and he also implicated the intelligence agencies in the anti-Shia killings: "The Quetta carnage is absolutely an act of sectarian terrorism masterminded by Pakistani agencies. To blame it on external forces is shameful."
- 35 Reported in *Dawn*, Lahore, October 30, 2003.
- 36 Naqvi, M.B., Tackling Sectarianism. *The News*. Karachi. July 16, 2003.
- 37 The formation of Muslim United Army (MUA) — which claimed responsibility for attack on 21 petrol-pumps belonging to Anglo-Dutch company Shell on May 15, 2003 — is a significant pointer towards this. There were reports in October 2003 that JeM, Harkat-ul-Ansar, HUM, and HUJI, joined MUA. For more information see Hassan Mansoor, Intelligence Reports fear more Jihadi groups, *The Friday Times*. October 31-November 6, 2003, Lahore.
- 38 Haven for Taliban, Editorial, *Washington Post*. November 2, 2003, Washington, p. B06.
- 39 For details see Hassan Mansoor, Intelligence Reports fear more Jihadi groups, *The Friday Times*. Lahore. October 31-November 6, 2003.

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- 42 Shah, Zulfiqar,and jihad goes on. *The News on Sunday*, Karachi. November 3, 2003
- 43 Tim Mcgirk reported in *Time*. London. October 27, 2003.
- 44 *Dawn*. Karachi. November 16, 2003.
- 45 For an overview of how Afghanistan was acting as a training ground and hiding place see Rauf Klasra, Tale of lives sectarian terrorists lived in Afghanistan!, *The News*. Karachi. October 9, 2003.

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