

Backgrounder

Evolution of militant groups in Pakistan (4)

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The sectarian divide is increasing in Pakistan, which manifests itself in three major forms:

1. Sectarian-related terrorism
2. Community- and tribal-level sectarian violence
3. Irregular sectarian violence

It is obvious that sectarian-related terrorism is a form of organized and structured violence in Pakistan, while the other two represent a non-structured pattern of sectarian violence, which mainly arise out of hate speech, increasing sectarian intolerance and attempt to secure sectarian interests at the community, tribal or group levels. All three forms of sectarian violence complement each other and if one is triggered by an incident there are chances of the other two getting activated as well. If triggered, the second type of sectarian violence has long-term impact and can activate the other two forms of violence. For instance, it took four years for the tribal sectarian tensions in Kurram Agency of FATA to return to normalcy (Rehman, 2011).

The third form is a new phenomenon. A sectarian incident taking place anywhere can trigger attacks on mosques, shrines and religious symbols of rival sects. A recent example are the sectarian clashes in Rawalpindi on November 15, 2013 amid a Muharram procession, which caused sectarian tensions and violence across the country (*The Express Tribune*, 2013).

An important factor in the growing sectarian divide and the associated violence is the rise and empowerment of sectarian groups, which are not only changing the socio-cultural patterns of the country but have also transformed the hate discourse in society. The hate discourse, which was historically nationalistic and regional in character and more precisely Indian-centric in its essence, is gradually being replaced by sectarian hatred. Discrimination based on sectarian identity is increasing in everyday life and leading to a trend of ghettoization. Various sects and sectarian groups are encouraging establishment of separate housing societies and localities (Rana, 2014).

Although sectarian violence is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan, sectarian groups are a major factor in triggering and exploiting sectarian tendencies. For instance, the first major anti-Shia riots in Pakistan took place in Khairpur district of Sindh during Muharram in 1963 (Abbas, 2002), but the government and religious scholars overcame the crisis through dialogue. Based on scattered sectarian incidents in the 1970s, a poster campaign was launched throughout the country inciting Sunnis to 'takeover' Pakistan with the slogan '*Jag Sunni jag, Pakistan tera hai* (Wake up Sunnis, Pakistan is yours) (Abbas, 2002: 18). The campaign failed to attract not only the people but also the major Sunni religious parties, since sectarian organizations were absent from the national scene. But when similar sectarian tensions rose in Karachi in 1983, it became a difficult task for the police to overcome the violence. By then not only the religious communities had become conscious about their sectarian identity but sectarian-based groups had also started to emerge on the national scene.

Foreign players moved in at that stage. In Karachi's sectarian violence of 1983, Deobandi Sawad-e-Azam Ahl-e-Sunnat, led by Maulana Samiullah and Maulana Asfandyar, was an anti-Shia movement launched in the city with financial support from Iraq (Ibid). However, the movement was overshadowed by the establishment of Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba (ASS), later renamed as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), by Maulana Haq Nawaz Jhangvi.

This fourth part of the backgrounder on the evolution of militant organizations in Pakistan looks at the emergence of Shia sectarian groups and how violent tendencies grew among them. An effort has been made to consult and depend on primary sources, particularly literature produced by different sectarian organizations and associated groups.

Shia activism in Pakistan

In 1977, before military ruler General Ziaul Haq imposed martial law, the following organizations of Shia school of thought were active in Pakistan:

1. All Pakistan Shia Conference, led by Nawab Muzaffar Ali Khan Qizilbash
2. Idara Tahaffuz-e-Huqooq-e-Shia (Organization for protection of the rights of Shias)

3. Shia Political Party
4. Wafaq Ulema Shia (United Shia Ulema), led by Mufti Jafar Hussain

Among these, Wafaq Ulema Shia was the most effective organization and was considered the representative Shia party in mainstream politics (Rana, 2002: 321). Other parties had less influence and preferred to be part of mainstream parties. Their role was confined only to being supportive groups for mainstream parties to mobilize the Shia community in their favor. When Ziaul Haq promulgated the Zakat and Ushr Ordinance in 1980,¹ Wafaq Ulema Shia came out and demonstrated against it. Imamia Students Organization (ISO), a pro-Iranian student organization in Pakistan, planned to occupy the parliament and organized a huge demonstration in Islamabad. They won the support of Wafaq Ulema Shia head Mufti Jafar Hussain and succeeded in mobilizing the Shia community and demonstrated for their demands in Islamabad. Eventually, the government had to accede to their demands. This was the first major victory for the Shia community.

It was also the first show of strength by the community. Before that, when the first Shia-Sunni clash took place in 1963, the Shia community was not organized. After those clashes, it had started organizing itself.

The ISO factor

The ISO occupies a central role in triggering Shia activism in Pakistan and the 1979 revolution in Iran was a major source of inspiration behind that. When the ISO was established the revolutionary movement in Iran was at its peak. ISO was the only Shia organization in Pakistan that first came out in support of the movement and provided it with human resource from Pakistan. When the Shia ulema supporting Khomeini were violently suppressed in Iraq, ISO initiated a protest movement in Pakistan and printed posters with the statement: 'There was a bloodbath there, and we were silent here' (Khan, 1996: 68).

¹ Under this law the government made compulsory deduction of 2.5% Zakat annually from mainly interest-bearing savings and shares. The ordinance was severely criticized by Shias. Even Sunnis were critical of the compulsory deduction and the way the deducted amount was distributed or spent.

In 1978, when Pakistan invited the Shah of Iran to visit the country, ISO printed posters with the statement, 'We do not welcome the Killer Shah.' In that year ISO established direct links with Khomeini in Paris, and wrote a letter to him supporting his movement. Khomeini replied: 'I had expected this from sons of Muslims. I appreciate your feelings, and hope that you will also root out the vestiges of colonialism from your country' (Ibid).

After this, ISO began a protest movement in Pakistan, supporting Khomeini and opposing the Shah. When the Islamic Revolution became a reality in Iran in 1979, the ISO declared that they must imitate Khomeini. During the Iran-Iraq war also, the ISO continued to support the revolutionary government in Iran. It sent several doctors from Pakistan to Iran and other delegations also continued to visit that country. In 1982, when Khomeini sent a message to the Shias of the world to join the military action against Iraq, several ISO delegations reached Iran.

The first Shia students' organization in Pakistan was formed in 1966 by Dr Syed Haider Husain Shamsi, a student of King Edward Medical College, Lahore but it had failed to attract Shia youth. The organization was confined to that college only. However, it inspired students in other educational institutions and a few other organizations emerged; the important ones included Jamiat Tulaba Asna Ashariya, Shia Students Organization, and Ja'fariya Students Organization. However, the networks of these organizations were limited to a few local colleges in Lahore (Khan, 1996). In 1967, these organizations had a general meeting in which all of them came together to form Shia Students Association (SSA). In 1969, the second annual conference of SSA was held in Lahore. It was presided over by Syed Mubarak Mahmud Ali Gilani and Madame Maryam Bahnam, director general of Iranian Culture Centre (Khana-e-Farhang Iran), was the chief guest (Ibid). The conference agreed upon a three-point program:

1. To unite Shia students on one platform
2. To help them in education
3. To inspire them to follow the ways of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the *Ahl-e-Bay'at*

Until 1972, this organization was not too active, divided as it was into different groups. In that year, Ali Reza Naqvi and Niaz Naqvi, students of

University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Lahore, Babar Naqvi of King Edward Medical College, and Dr Syed Majid Nauroz Abidi, a founder member of SSA, called a meeting of all Shia students' organizations at the UET. Once again, an organization called Shia Students Association was formed. On June 11, 1972, the leadership of the group met at the residence of Nauroz Abidi. Three Shia religious leaders—Maulana Syed Sadiq Ali Najafi, Maulana Syed Murtaza Husain, and Maulana Agha Ali Moosavi—also attended the meeting. In consultation with the three religious leaders, the association was named Imamia Students' Organization (ISO) and its cabinet was announced (Ibid).

Formation of TNFJ

Mufti Jafar was a member of the state-run Council of Islamic Ideology. He resigned in April 1979 following a disagreement with Gen Ziaul Haq over enforcement of Shariah laws in Pakistan according to the Hanafi faith. He started a movement against the government from the platform of Wafaq Ulema Shia. On April 13, 1979 in order to take a clear stand on the issue All-Pakistan Shia Convention was held in Bhakkar, where the foundation of Tehreek-e-Nifaz Fiqa-e-Jafaria (TNFJ) was laid and ISO was declared its youth wing. Mufti Jafar Husain and Allama Mirza Yusuf Husain Lucknowi were candidates for *amir* or head of the TNFJ. The overwhelming support of ISO led to Mufti Jafar Husain's victory, and ISO began to have much clout in TNFJ's affairs. This was opposed by many Shia scholars, which led to dissensions.

It is a fact that the ISO remained the main lever of power in TNFJ for a while. It drafted the 'constitutional structure' of the organization. In 1980, when Ziaul Haq promulgated the Zakat and Ushr Ordinance, the TNFJ announced its convention in Islamabad, on July 5, 1980. The ISO raised the manpower for this convention, and laid a siege of the federal secretariat in Islamabad. As a result, the 'Islamabad Pact' was reached and the government agreed to introduce separate Islamic studies courses for Shia students and keep the Shias outside the purview of the Zakat and Ushr Ordinance. Khomeini had played an important role in this pact and had got an assurance from Ziaul Haq about these measures. A message from Khomeini was also read out in the convention in which, he exhorted the Shias to keep a high morale (Khan, 1996).

After this convention, the TNFJ came to be regarded as the representative Shia organization on the national scene. It also received support from the government of Iran. When Mufti Jafar Husain died on August 29, 1983, the TNFJ was thrown into disarray. Maulana Hamid Ali Moosavi put his name forward as the candidate for *amir*; he was elected by an assembly of Shia ulema in Ali Masjid, Rawalpindi.

However, a group of TNFJ members who were not satisfied with the new developments called a conference on February 10, 1984 in Bhakkar and elected Allama Syed Ariful Husaini as the chairman of their faction of TNFJ. The leaders of Wafaq Ulema Shia, ISO, Asghariya Organization, and Asghariya Students Organization attended the conference. The last two organizations have considerable influence in Sindh and have been involved in sectarian clashes. Later, efforts to unite the two groups began and a convention was held near Rawalpindi. But Moosavi did not attend; it is alleged that he had entered into an understanding with the government whereby his group was recognized as the representative Shia organization (*The Herald*, 2000). Thus, the TNFJ was split into two parts, which sometimes came close to clashes. Both groups sought Iran's backing. Eventually, Ariful Husaini got the support of Khomeini and was appointed as his representative in Pakistan.

Tenure of Allama Ariful Husaini

During Allama Ariful Husaini's tenure as the TNFJ head, Iran's influence further grew among the Shia community in Pakistan. After receiving endorsement from Khomeini, Husaini's group emerged as the representative Shia organization in the country and spread its network everywhere. Husaini had the support of ISO whereas Maulana Moosavi had the backing of the majority of Shia ulema. ISO played a seminal role to project Ariful Husaini as the representative Shia leader. Husaini was opposed by a group of Shia ulema, known as Wafaq Ulema Shia, which had become active once again. Further, he and his TNFJ were also opposed by Shia *zakirs*, or clerics. But the incident that gave a new fillip to his support is known as the 'Quetta Incident'.

The 'Islamabad Pact' between Ziaul Haq and the TNFJ under Mufti Jafar Husain had not been implemented fully till 1985. The TNFJ led by Husaini decided to observe July 6, 1985 as a day to exert pressure on the government, and demonstrations and rallies were held in Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta. The demonstration in Lahore and Peshawar were peaceful, but the demonstrators in Quetta turned violent. The police resorted to firing in which 20 demonstrators died, and dozens were arrested. Quetta's Alamdar Road was blocked where TNFJ's big madrassa, Jamia Imam al-Sadiq, and the office of the organization were located. Following this incident, Shia youths entered the madrassa and began to manhandle the people there. They accused TNFJ of getting Shia youths killed. The TNFJ said that the youth who attacked the madrassa belonged to the rival group and were sent by the intelligence agencies (Khan, 1996). Ariful Husaini announced a long march on May 1, 1986 to get those arrested on July 6, 1985 released. The government released them before that date. Ariful Husaini himself welcomed them upon their release. As a result of this agitation, the majority of the Shia community began to support him.

Husaini had stayed in Najaf with Khomeini who had appointed him his representative in Pakistan. He also had links with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and had sent several Pakistani youths there with the aim to build the ISO along Hezbollah's lines.

Husaini was assassinated at Madrassa Maraful Islami in Peshawar on August 5, 1988. Fazle Haq, a former military governor of what was then known as the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), was blamed for his murder. The TNFJ not only mentioned his name in the case it lodged for the murder, but also accused him in statements in newspapers and assemblies. Haq was shot and killed in 1991.

After Husaini's assassination, dissensions in the TNFJ triggered violent trends in the organization. Allama Sajid Naqvi was made the organization's chairman, but a big group did not agree with that decision even though it had to abide by the decision of the *Shura*. The same group later opposed several decisions by Naqvi, and factionalism began to affect TNFJ's functioning.

Throughout those years, ISO was the main source of strength for the TNFJ as its student wing. Both organizations had the moral and material support of

the government in Iran. Renowned writer Nazir Ahmad referred in his book titled *Iran: Afkar-o-Azaim* (Iran: Thoughts and Objectives) to a decision made by the Iranian cabinet in a meeting that Iran would use its influence to bring about a government of its choice in Pakistan.²

This hints at how foreign interests were at work in the growth of sectarian organizations and their violent clashes in Pakistan. It is also no secret any more that the Iranian government had provided financial assistance to Shia organizations, which had internal discord about the use of funds.

But this trend was not limited to Shia organizations alone. The organizations owing allegiance to Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi schools of thought had been getting funds from the Arab states. They used these funds to not only propagate Deobandi and Wahabi thoughts, but also strived to acquire power to implement their ideology.

Foreign interests—religious and political—have often come in the way of resolving sectarian tensions in Pakistan. Most sectarian organizations have showed greater loyalty to foreign interests and their own sect than to the nation. The situation gets more complicated when this attitude is not objected to in the name of non-interference in matters of faith. Khaled Ahmed, a prominent scholar, counts regional influences as an important factor but he considered internal dynamics more important as sectarian violence draws its strength from the past (Ahmed, 2011: xi).

Establishment of Jafaria Students Organization

TNFJ leader Sajid Naqvi secretly married a model, Shazia Qurban, in 1994. The marriage was kept a secret for a year, but the TNFJ leadership got wind of it and it added to difficulties for Naqvi. His supporters in Tehreek-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP), new name given to the TNFJ in 1993, opposed the actions of ISO and formed a rival student organization named Jafaria Students Organization.

² The book does not contain the place and year of publication. However, about the writer it is written that he was the manager National Press Trust, Islamabad, from 1981 to 1985. Besides, he was also a member of the cultural attaché office attached to the Pakistan embassy in Tehran.

Besides Naqvi's second marriage, another incident that rocked the TJP was the hanging of Mahram Ali, a man convicted for a bomb explosion in the sessions court, Lahore, in January 1997, in which Sunni sectarian group SSP's leader Maulana Ziaur Rahman Faruqi and 19 police personnel were killed. Various Shia organizations claimed that Mahram was not involved in the incident and demanded that Sajid Naqvi should come out in his support. But Naqvi declined to do that. Following the bombing, 25 Shias were killed in terrorist violence in Mominpura, Lahore on January 11, 1998. Shia activists were so upset that they did not allow Naqvi to attend the funeral rites. Ahead of his hanging, Mahram Ali stated in his will that Naqvi other TJP leaders and should not be allowed to join his funeral prayers.

Founding of Shura Wahdat Islami

In September 1999, a number of Shia ulema met in Islamabad. Led by renowned TJP leaders Allama Javed Hadi and Allama Abid Husain Husaini, the meeting decided to dissolve the TJP Shura. It concluded that in view of Naqvi's second marriage, his attitude that had hurt the community, and on account of the growing oppression of the Shias, the community needed new leadership. A 14-member preliminary search committee was formed to choose the new leadership on October 31. However, before that date, Sajid Naqvi was removed from office by the Shura and Allama Fazal Moosvi made the new leader. The new Moosvi-led group was named Shura Wahdat Islami. Both Naqvi and Moosvi groups claimed to be the real successors of TJP.

Jafaria Alliance

The differences did not stop there. The erosion among Shia parties continued and some Shia scholars from Karachi and Quetta led by Allama Abbas Kameeli parted ways with other Shia groups and formed the Jafaria Alliance. Allama Kameeli enjoyed the support of the Shia community in Sindh and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a political party with strong support in Karachi and Hyderabad, got him elected as senator. The party is still active in Karachi and parts of Sindh.

On January 13, 2002, the federal government proscribed the TJP and Sajid Naqvi renamed his organization as Tehrik-e-Islami Pakistan (TIP). He also

made his party part of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) in 2002 and got two party members elected to provincial assemblies in the 2002 general elections. Sajid Naqvi also led Shia Uelma Council, a non-political body of Shia clerics.

Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen

In the 2008 elections, Shia organizations were divided into many factions and these groups failed to make electoral alliances with any mainstream political party. The MMA was facing crises and Naqvi had lost his influence not only in MMA but also among the majority of Shia scholars in the country. In these circumstances, ISO and its former affiliates once again intervened and tried to gather all Shia groups on one platform but these attempts failed.

Former ISO affiliates along with an alliance of Shia scholars later formed a new party called Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen (MWM) on August 2, 2009. Maulana Amin Shaheedi was nominated as its first president. With ISO's efforts, MWM became a mainstream Shia party within months and in the 2013 general elections secured one provincial assembly seat from Balochistan. At present, MWM is considered the major Shia party in Pakistan.

Violent trends in Shia activism

Formation of Pasban-e-Islam

Dr Muhammad Ali Naqvi, former president of ISO, founded Pasban-e-Islam (PI) in 1992 after becoming disillusioned with the TNFJ for its failure to respond to Shia scholars' killings. The PI was the first underground violent Shia group to counter the Sunni sectarian militant group SSP. Dozens of its activists had received armed training in the Parachinar and Muzaffarabad camps of Hizbul Mumineen, a Kashmir-based Shia militant group fighting in Indian-held Kashmir (Rana, 2002: 323).

Dr Naqvi organized the group on the pattern of the Lebanon-based Hezbollah, but he died in 1994 (Rana, 2002: 340). After his death, the organization split into two groups, one of which accepted the leadership of Sajid Naqvi. Rashid Abbas Naqvi, a former president of ISO, who committed that he and his group would promote Dr Naqvi's mission, led the second group. The PI received a severe setback when Hamad Raza, one of its

important members, was arrested by the police in Sahiwal district of Punjab in January 1996 along with a large quantity of weapons. He was charged with several counts of robbery. During interrogation, he gave the police information about the organization's network and about its active members who were involved in incidents of violence (Abbas, 2002). Based on the information supplied by him the police conducted raids and three leaders of the organization—Faiz Haideri, Shabbir Jafri, and Tauqeer Husain alias Bawa—were arrested. Haideri died in police custody in the Nawakot police station in Lahore. The police tried to paint it as a suicide. Buckling under pressure amid protests, they released the other two leaders who, the police had claimed, were involved in several incidents of terrorism. Hamad Raza was released for cooperating with the police, but he was killed in mysterious circumstances in 1997 (Ibid).

Both Pasban-e-Islam groups were beset by internal differences and tried to paint the other as a terrorist group. They informed the police on each other's leaders and a number of them were arrested and cases filed against them. Several cases were filed against Rashid Abbas, leader of Dr Naqvi group, and Imran Chaudhry, leader of the Sajid Naqvi group. Both absconded. In 1997, Sajid Naqvi disbanded the PI group allied with him (Ibid).

Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP)

In March 1993, during a Faisalabad Convention of Tehreek Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria the party was renamed as Tehreek-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP) and it was decided to launch it as a political party. The logic of changing the name was the word "*nifaz*" (promulgation), which indicated that the group wanted implementation of the Shia *fiqh*, or Islamic law, in Pakistan.

This decision was not unanimous. Some argued that the organization was shedding its religious identity in pursuit of power. This decision sowed the seeds of emergence of another Shia violent group, Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP). Allama Murid Abbas and Ghulam Raza Naqvi led the group. Many youths from ISO joined it immediately. Another view about the formation of SMP is that in 1992 when Sunni group SSP had threatened to kill former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's spouse Asif Ali Zardari, Murid Abbas had decided to form the SMP to confront it and supplied it not only with

money but weapons as well. He did not announce formation of the group until 1993, waiting for the proper time. The SMP held its first general meeting at Mochi Gate, Lahore, in which about 2,000 people participated, most of them armed. Dr Naqvi, the PI leader, also attended. After the meeting, the leaders of SMP called a press conference in which they stated publicly: 'we are weary of carrying corpses. God willing, we will settle all scores now. We will erase the name of the SSP from history' (Rana, 2002: 331).

Initially, the SSP leadership and the law-enforcement agencies did not take any notice of this new group. It attracted attention after claiming responsibility for an attack on SSP leader Azam Tariq in Sargodha. By 1994, it had already established its strong centre at Thokar Niaz Beg, Lahore (Ibid).

Violence by SMP

From 1993 to 2001, the SMP was involved in 250 incidents of violence. This was the only organization during that period that forced newspapers to publicize its stance. For example, in December 1994, its members attacked the office of *The Pakistan Observer* in Islamabad, saying that it did not give them sufficient coverage; it accused the newspaper's owner of close links with the SSP leadership, and also that the SSP published its anti-Shia literature from the newspaper's printing press. The management of the newspaper talked to the SMP leadership, but some SMP workers opened fire and destroyed furniture in the office. After this incident, SMP leader Allama Murid Abbas Yazdani came to apologize to the editor of the newspaper, calling the incident the work of a few impulsive youth. During his trip to Islamabad, he was arrested outside the Rawalpindi Press Club. The arrest followed a case lodged against him after the murderous attack on SSP leaders Ziaur Rahman Faruqi and Azam Tariq. The following day, Rawalpindi police arrested dozens of SMP members.

SMP's intimidation of newspapers was not confined to Islamabad. Immediately after this incident, some leaders of the organization addressed a conference at the Quetta Press Club and threatened that "the newspapers that do not give us sufficient coverage will have their offices gutted."

In December 1994, a police raid on the SMP headquarters in Lahore to round up its leaders resulted in a clash in which the police came under fire and five

police vehicles were gutted. After this, the police made an elaborate plan to eliminate the SMP. By the end of 1995, the SMP was divided into two groups. The cause of this break-up was Ghulam Reza Naqvi's active role in Milli Yekjahti Council, a platform to resolve sectarian tensions between Shia and Deobandis, and his consent to its program of ending sectarian violence. Allama Yazdani accused Ghulam Reza of compromising with the SSP and straying from his religious beliefs. A few months later, both groups came together, but the internal dissension continued. Finally, SMP pulled out of Milli Yekjahti Council (Rana, 2002: 332).

In August 1996, Yazdani was killed in Rawalpindi. Police investigations concluded that his assassination was the result of his disagreements with Ghulam Reza Naqvi who openly admitted to his crime (Ibid). The people of Thokar Niaz Beg locality in Lahore who had gave refuge to the SMP leadership turned against it and began expelling them. The police took advantage of the situation, raided the place and arrested Naqvi and dozens of SMP members (Rana, 2002: 332). On August 14, 2001, when the government banned the SMP, it was a very different organization from what it had been in 1996. Its strength had substantially diminished.

Reemergence of SMP

A separate group, also calling itself SMP, has been found involved in targeted killings of religious leaders of the rival Sunni sect in Karachi in recent years. Three factions of SMP, led by Baqar Zaidi, Mohsin Mehdi and the Balti group, have been active in Karachi and Quetta for the last few years. These groups have no direct link with the Punjab-based SMP, which has been dysfunctional since an effective police operation against the group in the late 1990s. (PIPS, 2013: 4).

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