

## *Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shi‘i and Sunni Identities*

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### **Introduction**

This essay is an enquiry into the context, nature, and significance of militant sectarian conflict in Pakistan. The parties to the conflict are the Sunnis, who constitute the majority of Muslims in Pakistan, and the Shi‘a, a small but influential minority.<sup>1</sup> Conflict between these two religious communities has deep roots in the history of Islam and of South Asia. In Pakistan, which aspires to be in some sense an ‘Islamic state’, sectarian conflict is part of, and interacts with, broader issues concerning the place of Islam in public life. This essay seeks to analyse some of factors which have contributed, especially in the past twenty-five years or so, to militant sectarian conflict in Pakistan and to assess the significance of this rather neglected form of Islamic radicalism.

While the history of conflict between the Shi‘a and the Sunnis extends over more than a millennium, I will try to show in this paper how a remarkable configuration of political, social-economic, and religious developments has given it a new significance in contemporary Pakistan. Sectarian identities are in the process of being not just

<sup>1</sup> There are no precise figures on the number of the Shi‘a: estimates about the size of the Shi‘i population range from as much as a quarter to less than 2% of the population of Pakistan! (For the lower figure, see anon., *Pakistan main maujuda Shi‘a abadi* [n.p., n.d. (c. 1980), 16 pp.]) Moojan Momen estimates the Twelver Shi‘i population of Pakistan to have been about 12,000,000 in 1980, i.e. about 14.5% of the population (82,952,000). See *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 278, 282. All discussion of the Shi‘a in this essay refers to the Ithna ‘ashari, or ‘Twelver’ Shi‘a. Though there are important, and often mutually hostile, subdivisions within the Sunnis of Pakistan, just as there are those (e.g., the Ahmadis) who consider themselves Muslims but are not recognized as such by either the Shi‘a or the Sunnis, this study is concerned only with the conflict between the Shi‘a and the Sunnis; and it is this conflict which, for want of a better characterization, is designated as ‘sectarian’ here.

revived but, in many ways, also constructed and redefined. Some of the means of imparting a sense of a sectarian identity are relatively new. With vast quantities of sometimes scurrilous polemics always ready at hand, a print culture makes it possible, for instance, to discover a sectarian identity by perceiving, or imagining, the existence of threats to it. In recent years, the production and dissemination of their own literature, and variously combating that of their rivals, have become major concerns of sectarian organizations in Pakistan. These organizations have emerged since the early 1980s and thus are themselves a new and powerful means at once of fostering sectarian identities and of expressing them, frequently with the threat or the actual use of violence.

Other influences on sectarian identities are not new: mosques and madrasas, or seminaries of traditional Islamic education, play a crucial role in this regard. But even these long-standing institutions often bear on matters of sectarian identity in new ways: mosques and madrasas not only have their own exclusivist sectarian affiliations, many of them are also intimately associated with particular sectarian organizations. Much of the leadership of such organizations comes from madrasas and comprises people who began their careers as preachers and prayer-leaders in their neighbourhood mosques. The establishment of new madrasas is likewise often sponsored by these organizations, and it is scarcely fortuitous that a remarkable proliferation of madrasas and the growth of sectarian conflict have tended to coincide in recent years.

Mosques, madrasas, the impact of print, and the emergence of sectarian organizations have all interacted in a milieu of considerable social and economic volatility to radicalize a long-standing but often dormant sectarian conflict. Though the purpose here is to trace the roots of sectarian radicalism, primarily in the Punjab, the most populous of Pakistan's four provinces, this study should also shed some light on the importance of sectarianism as a major vehicle of religious change. The effort of urban sectarian organizations to extend their influence in the countryside by sponsoring the growth of new madrasas and mosques and 'reforming' styles of religious life there signifies, it will be suggested, the growth of a new, urban, text-based and relatively standardized religious identity among people hitherto acquainted only with local forms of religious belief and practice.

At issue between the Shi'a and the Sunnis has historically been a dispute over questions of legitimate authority. To the Shi'a, most

of the Companions of the Prophet, the *Sahaba*, conspired after the Prophet's death to dispossess 'Ali (his son-in-law), and after him his descendants, the imams, of their divinely ordained right to the Muslim community's leadership. In the Shi'i view of history, these Companions, and their successors, were hypocrites and usurpers who never ceased to subvert Islam for their own interests. Conversely, the Sunnis revere the Sahaba, and especially the Khulafa' al-Rashidun, the four 'pious successors' of the Prophet (of whom 'Ali was the last), as second only to the Prophet in religious authority.<sup>2</sup> The hostility of the Shi'a to the Sahaba (especially the first three caliphs) is the single most important issue on which the Sunnis and the Shi'a have clashed, sometimes violently.<sup>3</sup>

### Aspects of Sectarian Discourse in Pakistan

Issues of sectarian significance were not prominent in the course of the Pakistan movement.<sup>4</sup> But it was not long after the creation of Pakistan that they forcefully surfaced. Of the factors which directly bear on issues of sectarian identity in Pakistan, two may be singled out here.

First, in the 'sectarian upbringing'<sup>5</sup> of several leaders of radical Sunnism in Pakistan, the Ahmadi controversy has played a considerable role. Anathematized by most Muslims for their belief that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadi community, was a prophet, the Ahmadis have been the target of several campaigns of religious violence as well as of governmental persecution.<sup>6</sup> In 1974,

<sup>2</sup> On the history of the emergence, growth and crystallization of Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, see, *inter alia*, W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973); Momen, *Shi'i Islam*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Etan Kohlberg, 'Some Imami Shi'ite Views on the Sahaba', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, V (1984), 143-75.

<sup>4</sup> W. C. Smith's justification for having little to say on the Shi'a in his study of modern trends in Indian Islam is worth quoting here: 'We have not given the Shi'ah group separate treatment in our study of the changes wrought in Islam by modern social processes, because there is nothing in the differences between Sunni and Shi'i fundamentally relevant to those processes. The two groups diverge over what answers are to be given to questions which to-day do not arise.' *Modern Islam in India* (Lahore: Minerva, 1947), 399.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase comes from Bryan Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 180.

<sup>6</sup> On the Ahmadis, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). For a description of the most violent agitation against the Ahmadis, see

the government capitulated to a long-standing demand of the religious parties to declare the Ahmadis a non-Muslim minority in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> Religious leaders have continued to agitate for further restrictions on the Ahmadis, some of which were imposed by the government in 1984. The Ahmadi controversy bears on sectarian, Shi'i–Sunni, conflict in Pakistan in at least two ways. First, though certain prominent leaders of the Pakistani Shi'a are known to have supported the persecution of the Ahmadis, the history of violence against the latter has supplied the *anti-Shi'a* front with some of its most vigorous leadership. Many of the leading activists of the Sipah-i Sahaba Pakistan, the militant Sunni organization which will be described later in this essay, began their political careers in agitating against the Ahmadis.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the constitutional definition of a Muslim so as to exclude the Ahmadis has led to demands, spearheaded by the Sipah-i Sahaba, further to define Islam so as to exclude the Shi'a too. In a state which professes to be guided by the fundamental principles of Islam, the Ahmadi controversy has contributed to sectarian discourse by forcefully raising, and keeping alive, such questions as who a Muslim 'really' is (irrespective of one's own claims in that regard) and what position he (and those who are not Muslim, or are not recognized as such) will have in that state.

Islamization, or the introduction of 'Islamic' norms and institutions through government policy or decree, is another factor which has often provoked and defined sectarian controversies in Pakistan. That Pakistan professes to be an Islamic state means, to the religious circles at any rate, that Islamic laws will be not merely observed in that state but enforced *by* it. Which school of Islamic law would hold sway, and how that would affect those who do not recognize its authority, are questions never adequately resolved in Pakistan; they were raised with unprecedented vigour and alarm, however, when a wide-ranging programme of Islamization was initiated in early 1979 by the government of General Muhammad Zia ul-Haqq (1977–88).<sup>9</sup>

*Report of the Court of Inquiry . . . into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: Government Printing, 1954).

<sup>7</sup> On these developments, see Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, 40–6.

<sup>8</sup> See Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat: Hazrat Mawlana Haq Nawaz Jhangavi Shahid* (Jami'a 'Uthmania, Jhang Sadar, n.d. [c. 1990?]), 29–31; *Khilafat-i Rashida* (Faisalabad), vol. 4, nr. 7 (December 1993), 5.

<sup>9</sup> On some aspects of this programme of Islamization see Anita M. Weiss (ed.), *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1987); S. Jamal Malik, *Islamisierung in Pakistan 1977–84: Untersuchungen zur Auflösung autochthoner Strukturen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1989);

A highlight of the military regime's programme of Islamization was the imposition of Zakat, an Islamic tax which, the government decreed, would be automatically collected from people's bank accounts. But Shi'i and Sunni schools of law differ quite markedly in their stipulations on Zakat, as in many other areas of law.<sup>10</sup> The government's decision to impose this tax according to the prescriptions of the Hanafi school of Sunni law thus created intense resentment among the Shi'a and proved to be a powerful stimulus towards their political mobilization in Pakistan. This development coincided with the spectacular success of the Iranian revolution of 1978–79, which has also had a profound influence on sectarian reassertion in Pakistan, and not just of the Shi'a.

### The Radicalization of Sectarian Identities

#### a. *The Shi'a*

Efforts to mobilize Shi'i opinion began soon after the government's programme of Islamization was launched in early 1979. In July 1980, the Shi'a from all over the country converged in Islamabad, the capital, and marched on the government ministries to express their grievances; this show of strength was unprecedented and was deemed sufficiently threatening to extract, even from a military regime, promises that the protestors' demands would be met. These demonstrations were led by a new but highly-organized 'movement', the Tahrik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Ja'fariyya (Movement for the Implementation of the Ja'fari Law [hereafter TNFJ]).<sup>11</sup> As articulated by the TNFJ, the principal demand of the Shi'a was that Zakat not be imposed on them by the state, or according to the stipulations of Sunni law. The Shi'a were to be left alone to regulate their religious life through their own leaders. The TNFJ also demanded 'effective' representation for the Shi'a at the highest levels of the state,

Rudolph Peters, 'The Islamization of Criminal Law: A Comparative Analysis', *Die Welt des Islams*, 34 (1994), 246–74, especially 256ff.

<sup>10</sup> On the differences between Sunni and Shi'i schools of law, see N. J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), 113–19.

<sup>11</sup> Formative developments in Shi'i law are believed to have taken place in the time, and under the guidance, of Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 765), the sixth imam in the reckoning of the Twelver Shi'a. Shi'i law (*fiqh*) is therefore often designated as 'Ja'fari'.

including representation in bodies advising the government on matters of Islamization itself.<sup>12</sup> Though the TNFJ was able to have the Shi'a exempted from Zakat, it soon came to represent a much more ambitious vision than is suggested by the principal demand which had brought it into existence (the manifesto of the TNFJ will be discussed later).<sup>13</sup> As its very name proclaimed, this was a movement for the *implementation* of Shi'i law. Opponents alleged that the TNFJ sought to have Shi'i law enforced on Sunnis too, and that this goal was only an extension of Iran's commitment to 'export' its Shi'i revolution. The TNFJ has always denied this,<sup>14</sup> though the allegation was damaging enough eventually to force a change of its name to the more politic 'Tahrik-i Ja'fariyya Pakistan' (Movement of the Ja'fari-Shi'a of Pakistan).

The TNFJ was founded by Mufti Ja'far Husayn (1916–83), one of the more prominent of Shi'i religious scholars of Pakistan. Born in Gujranwala in the Punjab in a noted Shi'i family, Ja'far Husayn studied in a local *Sunni* madrasa before proceeding to Lucknow and later to Najaf, in southern Iraq, for further studies.<sup>15</sup> Besides teaching at Shi'i madrasas in his native Gujranwala for most of his life, he actively represented the Shi'a in public life. He served on government committees involved in proposing Islamic provisions for Pakistan's first constitution (1956) and on the Council of Islamic Ideology, both in the time of General Ayub Khan and of General Zia ul-Haqq. Alarmed by the latter's Islamization, he resigned his membership of the Council in 1979 and was in the same year chosen as the 'Qa'id-i Millat-i Ja'fariyya' (leader of the Ja'fari [Shi'a] Community). The

<sup>12</sup> The demand for 'adequate' or 'effective' representation in the political system, irrespective of the actual numerical strength of the people on whose behalf that demand was made, was of course a familiar theme of Muslim political discourse in British India. See Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> See anon., 'Allama Shahid Sayyid 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni, az wiladat ta shahadat (Qumm: Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami, 1369 A.H), 36ff. and *passim*. Also see Munir D. Ahmed, 'The Shi'is of Paksitan', in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. M. Kramer (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), 281ff.; 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* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993), 75–93.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with 'Allama Sajid Naqvi, chief of the Tahrik-i Ja'fariyya Pakistan, in *Takbir* (Karachi: 30 March 1995), 27–35.

<sup>15</sup> On institutionalized Shi'i learning in Najaf, see Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'i International* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

TNFJ came into being the following year and was led by Mufti Ja'far Husayn until his death in 1983.<sup>16</sup>

His successor, 'Allama 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni (1946–88), was a young cleric from Parachinar in the tribal areas of the North-West Frontier Province. Unlike Mufti Ja'far Husayn, whose career until the beginnings of Shi'i activism had typified that of many a religious scholar coopted by the state, al-Husayni came of age in a markedly different social milieu. Najaf in the 1960s was much more than a major centre of Shi'i learning, as it had been for Mufti Ja'far Husayn. By the time al-Husayni went to study at the madrasas of Najaf in 1967, a new generation of Shi'i scholars was well-advanced along the path of drastically redefining their role as one of active social and political engagement in society, a role which was a conscious departure from the reclusive political quietism of the elder *mujtahids*.<sup>17</sup> Al-Husayni stayed in Najaf for six years, and, among others, came into contact there with Ayatullah Ruhullah Khumayni.<sup>18</sup> That he was influenced by some of the implications of what Chibli Mallat has characterized as the 'Renaissance' of the 1960s<sup>19</sup> is best attested perhaps by his being expelled by the Iraqi authorities from Najaf for political involvements (of which no details are known, however).<sup>20</sup> Al-Husayni later went to Iran and spent another four years in Qumm, which, like Najaf, was not only a major centre of learning but also of Shi'i political opposition.<sup>21</sup> He returned to Pakistan in 1978, on the eve of the revolution in Iran. Involved in the political mobilization of the Shi'a from the start, and with such impeccable credentials as studying at the premier institutions of Najaf and Qumm and, not least, counting Khumayni as a mentor, he was soon prominent enough to succeed Ja'far Husayn as the leader of the TNFJ in 1983. He led the Shi'a through 1988, in which year he was assassinated.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> On Mufti Ja'far Husayn, see Sayyid 'Arif Husayn Naqvi, *Tadhkira-yi 'Ulama'-i Imamiyya-i Pakistan* (Islamabad: Markaz-i Tahqiqat-i Farsi-yi Iran wa Pakistan, 1984), 73–6; anon., 'Allama Shahid Sayyid 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni, 43ff.

<sup>17</sup> Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law*, 1–58 and *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> 'Allama Shahid Sayyid 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni, 24–5.

<sup>19</sup> Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law*, 4ff. and *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> 'Allama Shahid Sayyid 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> On the life and career of al-Husayni, see 'Allama Shahid Sayyid 'Arif Husayn al-Husayni, *passim*; Naqvi, *Tadhkira-yi 'Ulama'-i Imamiyya*, 483–91; Maleeha Lodhi, 'Pakistan's Shia Movement: An Interview with Arif Hussaini', *Third World Quarterly* (1988), 806–17. Also cf. Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law*, 188f.

The manifesto of the TNFJ, formally issued in 1987, is a document of some interest and deserves a brief consideration.<sup>23</sup> It prescribes the Qur'an and *Sunna* as the fundamental sources of Pakistan's constitution and of all laws, but lays down that 'each recognized Islamic school of thought' is to be governed by its own interpretation of what the Qur'an and the *Sunna* mean.<sup>24</sup> All 'schools of thought' are to be given 'effective' representation in the Council of Islamic Ideology, a body charged by the constitution of Pakistan with the function of advising the government on all matters pertaining to Islam in public life.<sup>25</sup> The demand for religious freedom figures prominently, and it is stated to include the right to the unhindered observance of Muharram—when the Shi'a commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn, one of their imams—as well as the right to proselytize for one's faith.<sup>26</sup> There is no dearth of rhetoric on the need for a complete overhauling of Pakistan's economic, social, and political 'system'; and the lack of any true commitment to Islam on the part of the ruling elite and the state's subservience to the 'imperialist powers' are among the factors the manifesto emphasizes as the causes of Pakistan's problems. Finally, a significant aspect of the TNFJ's proposed mechanism for change is to create a 'Popular Islamic Army': based on compulsory military training for all able-bodied males, this army is seen as helping to reduce the distance between the military and the people (the military regime of General Zia ul-Haqq was still in power in 1987) and as reviving the spirit of holy war.<sup>27</sup>

The emergence of a Shi'i organization in Pakistan in the wake of the Iranian revolution caused considerable consternation to many Sunnis, and though the manifesto of the TNFJ is not explicitly sectarian it is not difficult to visualize how many a wary Sunni would interpret it. That Islam and its fundamental sources are to mean different things to different people is disquieting, for instance: it takes away the Sunni majority's ability to prescribe what the religious law of the land would be, and perhaps even more grievously, it suggests that 'Islam' can, and should, have several competing yet equally valid—

<sup>23</sup> For the text of this manifesto, entitled 'Hamara Rasta' (Our Path), see Muhammad 'Usman and Mas'ud Ash'ar (eds), *Pakistan ki Siyasi Jama'atain* (Lahore: Sang-i Mil Publications, 1988), 774–811.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 783.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 786.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 805.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 802–4.

because officially recognized—forms. The proposal concerning a ‘Popular Islamic Army’ can scarcely fail to raise suspicions about the militant ambitions of the Shi‘a; and though Sunni religious parties usually also compete with each other in denouncing the ‘imperialist powers’, the TNFJ’s condemnation of them is strongly reminiscent of Iran’s revolutionary rhetoric and, to many Sunnis, yet another confirmation of the Shi‘i party’s ideological indebtedness to Iran. Freedom of religious observance means, to those hostile to the Shi‘a, the freedom to vilify the Companions of the Prophet and hence to attack the Sunni view of Islam itself; the Shi‘a are known, after all, to vent their hostility towards many of the Prophet’s Companions in the course of the Muharram observances and it is during these that sectarian tensions have often turned into rioting. On the other hand, the right to propagate one’s faith is liable to be understood as the right to preach *Shi‘ism* in what is a predominantly Sunni country. There is in fact considerable evidence of Shi‘i proselytization especially in rural and small-town Punjab.<sup>28</sup> This activity predates the influence of the Iranian revolution but does certainly form part of the broader scene in which Shi‘ism is seen as threatening to undermine Islam in Pakistan.

An aggressive, confrontational style of politics was characteristic of the party under the leadership of al-Husayni. His assassination in August 1988 was a major setback to the party, and since then it has progressively moved towards a more moderate, pacifist stance. The aforementioned change of its name to Tahrik-i Ja‘fariyya Pakistan (TJP) is part of this development. But the TNFJ/TJP is not all there is to Shi‘i political activism. Even as the Tahrik-i Ja‘fariyya now cultivates an image of moderation, of trying to defuse sectarian tensions, several other Shi‘i organizations, which are associated with the TJP or are its splinter groups, do have a clear preference for militant activism. The most important of these is the Sipah-i Muhammad Pakistan.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Biographical notices of the Shi‘i ‘ulama’ of Pakistan are replete with claims of successful proselytizing; see Naqvi, *Tadhkira-yi ‘ulama’-i Imamiyya-i Pakistan*, 7, 9, 24, 26, 28, 33, 34, 38, 39, 41, 45–6, 48, 51, 53, 55, 56, 65, 69–70, 71, 94, 109, 118, 122, 123, 125, 131, 135, 150, 156, 159, 164, 170, 173, 199, 206, 209, 211, 213, 218, 222, 232–3, 246, 252, 262, 265, 278, 291, 298, 299, 305, 306, 310, 323, 324, 330, 343, 346, 349, 371, 400, 420, 422, 449, 463, 474–5.

<sup>29</sup> On the Sipah-i Muhammad, see Aamer A. Khan, ‘The Rise of Sectarian Mafias’, *Herald* (Karachi: June 1994), 27–37; M. Hanif *et al.*, ‘In the Name of Religion’, *Newsline* (Karachi: September 1994), 24–41. *Zindagi* (Lahore: 25 May 1995), interview with ‘Allama Murid ‘Abbas Yazdani, ‘Chief Commander’ (Salar-i A‘la) of the Sipah-i Muhammad Pakistan, 35–8.

Though not a 'youth wing' of the TJP, the Sipah-i Muhammad is very much a young men's organization. A rural or small-town background, some education in the government-school system, religious studies at madrasas in the Punjab or elsewhere in Pakistan and, not infrequently, in Iran,<sup>30</sup> and participation in the war in Afghanistan, is fairly typical of the leadership of the Sipah-i Muhammad. The organization is based in Thokar Niaz Baig, a traditionally Shi'i stronghold in the suburbs of Lahore. 'Allama Sayyid Ghulam Riza Naqvi (b. 1960), one of the principal leaders of the Sipah-i Muhammad, preaches in a Shi'i mosque, the Masjid-i 'Ali, there. Born in district Khanewal in the Punjab, he attended college in Jhang, studied at madrasas in Multan and Lahore, and then went to Iran for further religious education. He has fought in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, an experience to which he, like many Shi'i and Sunni militants, owes much of his military training. Naqvi later established a madrasa in Jhang and was involved in sectarian conflict there. Since 1993, he has lived, preached, and led his organization in Niaz Baig.<sup>31</sup>

Since its inception in 1991, the Sipah-i Muhammad has frequently been linked with much anti-Sunni violence in the Punjab, in Karachi, and elsewhere in the country. The organization is mildly critical of the TJP for what it sees as the latter's failure to protect the Shi'a from Sunni militancy.<sup>32</sup> For its part, the TJP had generally tended to maintain a discreet distance from the Sipah-i Muhammad, though without explicitly condemning its militancy. To Sunni radicals, the difference between the TJP and the Sipah-i Muhammad is only one of strategy, and both are taken to stand for undermining 'Sunnism' in Pakistan. Few Sunni or Shi'i militants would agree, however, that their own rival sectarian organizations exhibit considerable similarities with each other too. In its recourse to violence, the Sipah-i Muhammad's methods match those of the Sipah-i Sahaba, as does the social background of many of its leaders. Networks of mosques and especially of madrasas are crucial means for both Shi'i and Sunni radical groups to exert and extend their influence, and both have

<sup>30</sup> Ghulam Riza Naqvi of the Sipah-i Muhammad (see below) claimed in July 1995 that nearly two thousand Pakistani Shi'a were studying in the madrasas of Qumm alone: see his interview in *Zindagi* (20 July 1995), 21.

<sup>31</sup> On the career of Sayyid Ghulam Riza Naqvi, see M. Zaidi, 'The Godfather', *Newsline* (February 1995), 52-3; and the interview with Naqvi in *Zindagi* (20 July 1995), 20-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Herald* (June 1994), 37; *Newsline* (February 1995), 50-4.

profusely used the medium of print to disseminate their creed. Finally, and not surprisingly, each blames the violent activities of the other as the reason for its own existence.

b. *The Sunnis*

The Sipah-i Sahaba was established in September 1985 in Jhang, a middle-sized city in the district of the same name in the Punjab.<sup>33</sup> The founder of the organization, Haqq Nawaz Jhangawi (1952–90) was, as his name indicates, a native of the district. Born in a poor rural household, he attended a government school for some time but soon settled for a madrasa-education. In 1973, he began his career as a preacher (*khatib*) and prayer-leader (*imam*) in a Deobandi<sup>34</sup> mosque of urban Jhang, roles in which he was to continue till his assassination in 1990. That mosque is now known by his name, as is the town-quarter (*mahalla*) in which he lived. The Sipah-i Sahaba was founded in the same mosque.<sup>35</sup>

Like many of those who were later to play a leading role in the Sipah-i Sahaba, Haqq Nawaz had participated in the agitation which led, in 1974, to the Ahmadis being declared non-Muslims in Pakistan. Many Sunnis had all along regarded the Shi'a too as non-Muslims, and the precedent set by the excommunication of the Ahmadis was not lost on them; nor did Shi'i political activism in Pakistan in the wake of the Iranian revolution and Zia ul-Haqq's Islamization contribute to sectarian harmony. Militant confrontations of the Shi'a and the Sunnis began from the early 1980s.

<sup>33</sup> According to the Census of 1981, the total population of the district was 1,978,263, of which 22.6% lived in urban areas. The city of Jhang had a population of 195,558. Population Census Organization, Government of Pakistan, *1981 District Census Report of Jhang* (Islamabad: Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan, 1984), 5, 19.

<sup>34</sup> The Deobandis are one of the major sub-groups of Sunni Islam in the Indian subcontinent. They are so called on account of their association with the reformist principles and practices typified by a *madrasa* (established in 1867) at Deoband in the United Provinces. The other major groups of Sunni Muslims in India and Pakistan are the Barelawis and the Ahl-i Hadith. On the *madrasa* at Deoband, and on other nineteenth-century Muslim religious movements, see Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>35</sup> See Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*. The author of this book is the editor of the Sipah-i Sahaba's monthly journal, the *Khilafat-i Rashida*, and the brother of Mawlana Zia al-Rahman Faruqi, a former head of the organization. The book may therefore be considered as the Sipah-i Sahaba's 'official' biography of its founder.

Sectarian violence was not confined to Jhang, though it is not fortuitous (at least according to radical Sunnis) that the Sipah-i Sahaba emerged here. The following account comes from a biography of Mawlana Haqq Nawaz by one of his close associates. It is simplistic and tendentious, yet not without some factual validity; and in any case, it is revealing of this Sunni organization's own worldview:

Jhang was a backward district dominated by feudal lords (*jagirdars*) . . . They found license in Shi'ism for the life of pleasure and libertinism they desired, and so the rural gentry had become Shi'i. Under their influence, the peasants and other members of the 'lower castes' also went over to Shi'ism. But even those who didn't had remained neither Shi'i nor Sunni, and had no sense of shame at being devoid of religious identity. Sunk in ignorance, they retained some of their traditional customs in the name of Sunnism (*sunniyyat*), while in other respects they had become assimilated with the Shi'a. They knew nothing of their beliefs, nor of their religious orientation (*maslak*); they did not practise their faith, nor were they bothered about not practising it. All they had were certain rites of ignorance (*rusum-i jahiliyyat*) and nothing else. In all matters of happiness and grief in life, they were as one . . . If anyone tried to reform this situation and to indicate to them the differences between the Shi'a and the Sunnis, he was accused of fomenting discord, of being a sectarian; he would be deemed undesirable, and would never again be allowed in the area . . . Mawlana Haqq Nawaz, after he became convinced of what the truth was, began preaching; and he was defiant in the face of all opposition.<sup>36</sup>

The ignorance of 'true' Islam in the countryside has remained a major theme of much reformist literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and not just in Deobandi discourse.<sup>37</sup> The above account is of interest, however, for explicitly linking such ignorance to the influence of Shi'ism. Jhang is indeed dominated by rural magnates who profess Shi'ism, and the latter do wield considerable social and (as pirs) religious influence on the lower classes, as the above account suggests. In the Sipah-i Sahaba's view of things, this landed gentry not only exploits the peasantry in social and economic terms<sup>38</sup> but has also led them astray even in matters of the faith. The above account, and much else in the Sipah-i Sahaba's rhetoric, seems also

<sup>36</sup> Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 20–3 (abbreviated in translation).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, 68ff, 252ff and *passim*; this theme is strikingly conspicuous in the speeches delivered at the second annual convention of the Nadwat al-'Ulama' in Lucknow, 1895; see *Madamin-i thalatha* (Kanpur: Intizami Press, n.d. [c. 1895]), 25ff and *passim*. Also see n. 90 below.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Malcolm Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925); some of the themes in this description of the peasant's plight in the early twentieth century continue to resonate in the Sipah-i Sahaba's rhetoric.

to evoke the image, tendentious yet powerful, of an 'original' Sunnism: the people of the area were once committed to Islam and should, by being rescued from the influence of Shi'ism, be brought back to it. Religious reform must in this context mean making people aware of a sectarian identity ('the differences between the Shi'a and the Sunnis') they are presumed to have lost. They must, in short, be made (or re-made) Sunnis. Conversely, there is evidence too of Shi'i proselytizing in the countryside, in Jhang as elsewhere in the Punjab, and it is not just Sunni madrasas but also Shi'i ones whose numbers have grown dramatically.<sup>39</sup> It is tempting to interpret the allusion in the above account to people coming under the influence of Shi'ism as a recognition of some inroads Shi'i preachers may have made in the countryside.

Though the Sipah-i Sahaba's rhetoric necessarily equates local forms of religious belief and customary practices with the influence of Shi'ism (even as it equates Sunnism with 'high cultural', text-based, urban Islam), there seems little reason to believe that the rural audience to which radical sectarian organizations now address themselves have had any but the most perfunctory prior acquaintance with urban or literate Islamic traditions. Imparting a sectarian identity is therefore less a case of 'converting' rural peasants to Sunnism *from* Shi'ism (or the reverse) and much more of confronting local practices with the Islam of the urban religious scholars and institutions. It is this local Islam, combining 'Shi'i', 'Sunni', and 'sufi' elements, which the Sipah-i Sahaba sees, in part at least, as 'Shi'ism', and which it seeks to combat. This struggle is of course also a way of resisting the influence of pirs many of whom in the Punjab are not only rural magnates but also adherents of Shi'ism.<sup>40</sup>

The Sipah-i Sahaba's formal goals are easily defined: to combat the Shi'a at all levels, to strive to have them declared a non-Muslim minority in Pakistan, to proscribe Muharram-processions (which it regards as a major cause of sectarian riots) and to make Sunni Islam

<sup>39</sup> There were only 13 Shi'i madrasas in the Punjab in 1971 but 100 in 1994. On the other hand, Deobandi madrasas grew from 173 in 1971 to 972 in 1994 and Barelawi madrasas from 93 in 1971 to 1216 in 1994. I have compiled these figures from: Hafiz Nadhr Ahmad, *Ja'izah-yi Madaris-i 'Arabiyya-i Maghribi Pakistan* (Lahore: Muslim Academy, 1972), 693; *The News* (Islamabad: 7 March 1995), 11; *Zindagi* (17 February 1995), 38–9. Also see Table 1, below.

<sup>40</sup> I owe this suggestion to Professor David Gilmartin. On 'the structure of rural Islam' in the Punjab see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. 39–72.

the official religion of the state.<sup>41</sup> The ideal polity is taken to be that of the 'rightly-guided (Rashidun) caliphs' of early Islam, and it is that model which the organization pledges to emulate in Pakistan.<sup>42</sup> But it is not enough to draw inspiration from that golden age. As a mark of affirming symbolic commitment to it, the Sipah-i Sahaba would have the death anniversaries of the Rashidun caliphs (as well as of several other prominent Companions of the Prophet) instituted as days of national commemoration, and have the highest honours of the state designated by the names of these caliphs.<sup>43</sup> These are among the signs of a Sunni, hence truly Islamic state, a state whose commitment to Sunnism ought to be as visible as it is profound.

Though an unmitigated hostility towards the Shi'a defines the stance of the Sipah-i Sahaba, its own symbolism shows unmistakable signs of Shi'i influence. Zealous adoration of the Companions of the Prophet has manifest similarities with the Shi'i veneration of their imams. One may even detect a conscious effort here to claim for Sunnism its share of 'charismatic' leaders who will be the object of intense personal devotion—a tendency 'orthodox' Sunnism has traditionally resisted against both the Shi'a and the sufis.<sup>44</sup> Devotion to the Companions is inscribed, literally, on the Sipah-i Sahaba's multi-coloured flag, which features a tradition (*hadith*) of the Prophet ('My companions are like stars; you will find guidance in whomsoever [of

<sup>41</sup> In July 1992, Mawlana Muhammad A'zam Tariq of the Sipah-i Sahaba initiated a bill in the lower house of the Pakistani parliament which proposes to make any attack on the 'honour' (*namus*) of the Companions (Sahaba) of the Prophet and of members of his family (*ahl al-bayt*) a criminal offence punishable by death. The bill is yet to be debated. See *Khilafat-i Rashida* (the official monthly organ of the Sipah-i Sahaba), vol. 3, nos 9–10 (September–October 1992), 25. In July 1994, the same bill was moved, but defeated, in the upper house of the Pakistani parliament. For the text of this bill, and of the debate on it in the Senate, see *al-Haqq* (Peshawar), vol. 29, no. 11 (August 1994), 2–15. The bill does not say that the Shi'a are unbelievers for vilifying the Companions, only that to vilify the Companions is an offence punishable by death. The Sipah-i Sahaba's position has, in fact, been that this bill would *guarantee* sectarian harmony in Pakistan, because the cause of sectarian riots—vilification of the Companions—would be eliminated.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 245–6, on the fascination with this ideal polity especially in Pakistan's early years.

<sup>43</sup> For the goals of the Sipah-i Sahaba see Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 139–52; also see the following collection of speeches by the organization's founder: *Mawlana Haq Nawaz Jhangawi ki pandara ta'rikh-saz taqirrain* (Lahore: Idara-i Nashriyyat-i Islam, 1991), *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Following his assassination, Mawlana Haqq Nawaz has himself been given something of a saintly image: see Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, esp. 317–18, for dreams in which he is seen in heaven in the company of the Sahaba.

them] you follow'), with a crescent and five stars.<sup>45</sup> More generally, the Sipah-i Sahaba's symbolism is also interpretable as a response to the ceremonials of Muharram. In the past, and occasionally even now, such processions and ceremonies would be joined in by local Sunnis, both because the latter too revere the memory of Husayn, and because these processions have often provided colourful entertainment to the people. The Sipah-i Sahaba aspires to *substitute* a new set of commemorative occasions for the Shi'i ones. The counter ceremonies are intended not so much to attract the Shi'a as to prevent Sunnis from being attracted to Shi'i gatherings, and, more generally, to demonstrate that the Sunni tradition has no dearth of occasions to commemorate.<sup>46</sup> *Cultural* Shi'ism is in fact more of a challenge than Shi'i militancy, for many (putative) Sunnis are unsuspecting victims of it or exposed to its lure. In the Sipah-i Sahaba's worldview, nothing is more urgent, therefore, than to make people 'rediscover' their Sunni identity, and to define for them, in terms which are both negative ('Muharram processions are unIslamic') and positive ('The Sahaba must be rescued from Shi'i vilification, their honour guarded, their memory revived and revered'), what this identity consists in. The death anniversaries of certain Companions of the Prophet have sometimes been celebrated in the past as well, and the virtues of the Companions are known at times to have been symbolically extolled as a response to Shi'i vilification. What distinguishes the Sipah-i Sahaba's symbolism from earlier celebrations of the Companions' memory is the former's effort to appropriate the state itself to the cause of Sunnism. It is crucial, yet not sufficient, to make people conscious of their Sunni identity. Sunnism must suffuse the institutions of the state, and Sunni celebrations must

<sup>45</sup> Four of the stars have the names of the four Rashidun caliphs written on them, and on the fifth appear the names of Hasan, Husayn (two sons of 'Ali) and Mu'awiya. The latter, also a Companion of the Prophet, was the founder of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) which the Shi'a hold responsible for the tribulations of no fewer than six of their twelve imams (including 'Ali, Hasan and Husayn). Conjoining Hasan, Husayn, and Mu'awiya is of course not an initiative towards sectarian harmony, but only a vivid reminder that Mu'awiya is no less venerable to Sunnis than Hasan and Husayn, and that the latter, as well as 'Ali, belong properly with other figures revered by the Sunnis, not with the later imams of the Shi'a. For the Sipah-i Sahaba's flag as well as other symbolism, see Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 147–52.

<sup>46</sup> Muharram processions have been known to attract much Sunni, and even non-Muslim participation in the past. See J. N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* (London: Luzac, 1953), 177ff; Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 249–79.

become part of state ceremonial. The inspiration for this sectarian vision of an 'Islamic state' seems, ironically, to be indebted above all to post-1979 Iran, where Shi'i Islam enjoys a central position as the legitimating ideology and official religion of the state.

No event has indeed created a sense of greater urgency among radical Sunnis to combat Shi'ism than the Iranian revolution. Though the revolutionary regime was keen to forge ties with the (Sunni) Muslim world and to win the support of Sunni Islamists, its profoundly Shi'i character disillusioned and alarmed many Sunnis.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the spectacular success of the revolution encouraged the Shi'a outside Iran to assert a more active, even aggressive presence in their local communities. A major expression of this assertion was the massive production and dissemination of pro-Iranian and specifically Shi'i literature, in Urdu in case of Pakistan. Iranian cultural centres have had some involvement in this activity,<sup>48</sup> but more frequently, Shi'i scholars, preachers, and madrasas of Pakistan have taken the initiative in their own hands, producing works which—depending on the taste, audience, and level of the writer's education—can range from the scholarly to the most rabidly anti-Sunni and specifically anti-Sahaba.

While such works had, of course, been written and read in the past, their proliferation, not to mention the suspicion that the resources of a revolutionary Shi'i state were behind these, antagonized many Sunnis in Pakistan. To have such writings proscribed is a major concern of the Sipah-i Sahaba.<sup>49</sup> To mobilize Sunni opinion and bring home the horrors of the Shi'i threat, it has also ensured that lurid accounts of sacrilegious Shi'i writings on the Companions reach wide audiences,<sup>50</sup> and not just in Pakistan.<sup>51</sup> In 1994, Mawlana Zia al-

<sup>47</sup> E. Sivan, 'Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 21 (1989), 1–30; Werner Ende, 'Sunni Polemical Writings on the Shi'a and the Iranian Revolution', in D. Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World* (Boulder: The Westview Press, 1990), 219–32.

<sup>48</sup> Such centres have consequently been targeted for sectarian attacks. In December 1990, an Iranian diplomat who was the director of the Iranian Cultural Centre in Lahore was assassinated by militants from the Sipah-i Sahaba. *Newsline* (April 1991), 44. Also cf. Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 144–5.

<sup>49</sup> Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Jhangawi would often lace his fiery speeches with detailed quotations from Shi'i books to document such sacrileges. For some instances, see *Mawlana Haq Nawaz Jhangawi ki pandara ta'rikh-saz taqrirain*, 99ff, 122ff, 278–94. These speeches are also available on cassette.

<sup>51</sup> The Sipah-i Sahaba, as well as Shi'i organizations, now have branches in the Middle East, and even in Europe and North America. Cf. *Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 3, no. 4 (April 1992), 50, 52; and see n. 52 below.

Rahman Faruqi (d. 1997), the then head of the Sipah-i Sahaba and owner of the publishing house where most of the organization's literature is produced, announced plans, inter alia, to bring out a massive compendium of (selections from?) no less than one hundred and sixty-five Shi'i books. 'This will be something new in Pakistan, and indeed in the history of Islam,' Faruqi asserts, probably with some justice. 'We will take this document to jurisconsults (*muftis*) of fifty-eight [*sic*] [Muslim] states, and obtain, on the basis of it, the *fatwa* that the Shi'a are infidels. Obviously, when so many books characterizing the Sahaba as unbelievers and apostates are brought to the attention of the 'ulama' of every [Muslim] country, no *mufti* would any longer be able to consider the Shi'a to be Muslims.'<sup>52</sup>

The publications of the Sipah-i Sahaba, and especially its monthly journal, aptly called the *Khilafat-i Rashida* ('The Rightly-Guided Caliphate'), seek to forge a sectarian bond not only by informing their readers about what the Shi'a, or Iran, might be doing against them, but also what the Sunnis are, at last (!), doing for themselves. The *Khilafat-i Rashida* keeps its readers informed of the Sipah-i Sahaba's activities, often in minute detail: its combating the Shi'a and their influence in different parts of the country; its catering to the social and economic needs of the indigent Sunnis and, especially, the families of Sunnis killed, disabled, or imprisoned in sectarian violence; and the uninterrupted extension, in Pakistan but also abroad, of its organizational network.<sup>53</sup> All this has helped create an 'imagined community' of sectarian Sunnism in Pakistan,<sup>54</sup> a community united in devotion to the Companions but one brought together by much more than the symbolism of the Sipah-i Sahaba.

### Social and Economic Bases

Much of the support for sectarian organizations comes from the middle classes. Sectarianism is largely an urban phenomenon,

<sup>52</sup> *Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 5, no. 6 (November 1994), interview with Mawlana Zia al-Rahman Faruqi (part iv), 30.

<sup>53</sup> Mawlana Zia al-Rahman Faruqi, the head of the Sipah-i Sahaba, stated in late 1994 that 'about 14,000 party units' were then functioning in Pakistan and abroad, compared to only about 300 such 'units' at the time of Jhangawi's assassination in February 1990. See *Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 5, no. 5 (October 1994), 6.

<sup>54</sup> For the phrase 'imagined community' and on the role of print in forging the ties which constitute it, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London: Verso, 1991). For wide-ranging observations on the impact of print on Muslim societies, see Francis Robinson,

though, as noted, it is part of the Sipah-i Sahaba's purpose to combat agrarian magnates (who are all too often also influential in the adjoining urban centres) and to bring an aggressive Sunni identity to the countryside. In Jhang, where the Sipah-i Sahaba was founded, much of the support for this organization comes from urban Sunni businessmen who are believed to handle a large part (nearly 80 per cent according to some estimates) of commercial activity in the district.<sup>55</sup> This Sunni bourgeoisie includes a substantial number of migrants from India, who came to settle in urban Jhang at the time of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947.<sup>56</sup> Jhang's predominantly agricultural economy is dominated by a landed elite which is believed to control nearly 65 per cent of all land in the district.<sup>57</sup> Though the Shi'i rural magnates are 'native' to the region, sectarian affiliations are not clearly drawn along urban/rural or native/settler lines: there are urban Shi'a (often with considerable stakes in business) and rural Sunnis too; and Mawlana Haqq Nawaz, the founder of the Sipah-i Sahaba, was himself a 'native'.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, a commercial (and, to a lesser extent, industrial) bourgeoisie<sup>59</sup> is clearly the most important source of support on which the Sipah-i Sahaba draws in Jhang, and in other urban areas. Associations of local traders (*anjuman-i tajiran*) are known to respond actively to the Sipah-i Sahaba's calls

'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27 (1993), 229–51; on the media other than print, see Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (eds), *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Newsline* (September 1994), 36.

<sup>56</sup> The most famous and successful of businessmen from Jhang are the Chiniotis, known as such by association with Chiniot, a town in the district. Chinioti business families had migrated to Calcutta and elsewhere, but returned (or migrated back) to the Punjab after the establishment of Pakistan to become one of the most important business groups in Pakistan's economy. See Stanley Kochanek, *Interest Groups and Development: Business and Politics in Pakistan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 23–4. For one early instance of the support of Chinioti businessmen for Sunni madrasas of Jhang (and elsewhere), see *Al-Jami'a* (the monthly journal of the Jami' Muhammadi), vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1948), 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Newsline* (September 1994), 36.

<sup>58</sup> Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 15.

<sup>59</sup> Mian Iqbal Husayn, a leader of the Sipah-i Sahaba, who was assassinated in Jhang in August 1991 owned a textile mill in Jhang. *The Muslim*, 14 August 1991; also cf. *The Herald* (March 1995), 57. On the Punjabi industrial bourgeoisie in general, see Anita M. Weiss, *Culture, Class, and Development: The Emergence of an Industrial Bourgeoisie in Punjab* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

for general strikes and protest marches, and the latter often originate in the main bazaars.<sup>60</sup>

Though urban Jhang is dominated by a Sunni bourgeoisie, the Shi'a too are part of the bourgeoisie in Jhang, as indeed elsewhere. In fact, the Shi'a probably comprise a much greater proportion of the urban middle class than they do of the Pakistani population as a whole. Some of the very prominent business families, especially of Karachi, are also Shi'i. Many urban middle class Shi'a profess to be 'secular', which is often interpreted as their response to the perception that Islamization in an overwhelmingly Sunni country must mean the privileging of Sunni institutions over the Shi'i.<sup>61</sup> Yet the proportion of 'secular' Sunnis is surely no smaller than that of the Shi'a, and much of the support for the Shi'i sectarian organizations comes from the middle class too.<sup>62</sup>

Though it is in places like urban Jhang, as well as in numerous small towns (*qasbat*) of the Punjab, that sectarian conflict has tended most often to take place, it is noteworthy that many urban supporters of sectarian organizations have a not too distant rural background. Many urban migrants bring with them memories of the highhandedness of the rural magnates, and it is not difficult to visualize them being attracted to calls for combating the latter's feudal oppress-

<sup>60</sup> News reports about protests and strikes on the assassination of Sipah-i Sahaba leaders Haq Nawaz Jhangawi and Isar al-Haq Qasimi, both in Jhang, in February 1990 and January 1991 respectively, provide much illustrative material in this regard. See *The Muslim* (Islamabad), 26 March 1990; *The Nation* (Islamabad), 10 April 1990; *Dawn* (Karachi), 12 January 1991; *The Muslim*, 12 January and 10 February 1991; *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Lahore), 12 January 1991; *The Frontier Post* (Lahore), 9 February 1991. (I am grateful to Shahina Shaikh of *The News* [Islamabad] for enabling me to consult some of these materials).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 208f.

<sup>62</sup> Keddie, *ibid.*, exaggerates the 'secular' attitudes of the middle-class Shi'a of Pakistan. To consider only the case of one of the most recent casualties of sectarian violence in Pakistan, Muhammad 'Ali Naqvi (d. 1995), the secretary-general of the Tahrir-i Ja'fariyya, was a professor and medical practitioner at a teaching hospital in Lahore. He is not typical of other middle class Shi'a in the extent of his involvement with Shi'i sectarian mobilization but may nevertheless typify middle-class Shi'i support for such organizations. On Naqvi, who was assassinated in Lahore in March 1995, see *The News* (8 March 1995); *The Herald* (March 1995), 57-8. The following statement by Ghulam Riza Naqvi of the Sipah-i Muhammad is also instructive: 'We do not need any [financial] assistance from other countries [read: Iran], for our own people are very generous in helping us. Indeed, if our people pay all the *Khums* [a Shi'i wealth-tax] they are obliged to, there will be so much money as to create a new Pakistan.' (*Zindagi* (20 July 1995), 23.)

iveness and to the ideological legitimation offered for it. In an urban milieu where administrative and judicial authorities are inefficient and corrupt, and are widely held to act in concert with the landed elite, the Sipah-i Sahaba's appeal to the interests of the 'common man' and its challenge to established but corrupt authority—rural magnates, pirs, urban administrators—also carries force. Mawlana Haqq Nawaz, himself a man of humble origin, had a reputation for being much concerned with the welfare of the poor and the helpless, and was known to spend time regularly at government courts helping out poor, illiterate litigants. As the Sipah-i Sahaba began to gain increasing prominence, and often came into conflict with the local administrators and the Shi'i gentry, the organization's heroic image steadily grew together with that of its leader.

Olivier Roy has remarked in another context on the role of the Shi'i clergy in resocializing Shi'i migrants from a tribal-rural milieu into an urban setting.<sup>63</sup> In Pakistan, such a function is not confined only to the Shi'a. Sunni 'ulama', madrasas, and especially an organization such as the Sipah-i Sahaba play a similar role. But it is not only to marginalized urban migrants that the Sipah-i Sahaba, and no doubt Shi'i madrasas and sectarian organizations, offer support and anchorage. They appeal as well to the upwardly mobile middle class and especially to the commercial bourgeoisie or those aspiring (often without success) to join their ranks. It is such people, often themselves of a rural background, who are the principal supporters of the sectarian organizations both of the Sunnis and the Shi'a.

The numbers as well as the resources of those who saw themselves as the middle class, especially in the Punjab, grew tremendously from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s. One of the principal reasons for this was the influx of Pakistani labour overseas during these years. This remarkable movement of labour, the dramatic changes in status and expectations it entailed, and, not least, the social and economic dislocations many labour migrants suffered on their return, are also part of the context in which radical sectarianism has emerged in Pakistan. According to one estimate, '[a]pproximately 10 million people or 11 per cent of the total population (a figure which includes dependants) have benefited directly from the exodus to the Middle East. The vast majority of the beneficiaries come from

<sup>63</sup>Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 187ff. Also cf. Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 185ff.

low-income households. On average, their salaries increased between 600 and 800 per cent.<sup>64</sup> Most of the labour migrants came with a rural background,<sup>65</sup> though a majority of them returned to settle in urban areas.<sup>66</sup> Such migrants, of whom the Punjab contributed about 70 per cent,<sup>67</sup> typically worked abroad for only four or five years, however; and by the mid-1980s, migration abroad was in decline, and the number of returnees was at its peak.<sup>68</sup>

Much work needs to be done to show a definite link (or the lack of one) between labour migration overseas and sectarian conflict. Yet the fact that the emergence of sectarian organizations dates to the same time as the return, in increasing numbers, of the labour migrants is probably not without significance. It is not far-fetched perhaps to suppose that the emergence of sectarian organizations has responded to the search of many people—including, but not only, returning labour migrants from abroad—for an urban religious identity which would accompany, and perhaps facilitate, their quest for a middle-class status. A shared sectarian identity not only cements other bonds—common business interests, rural or kinship ties, a shared experience of working in the Middle East and, on return, of experiencing similar problems of assimilation into a new urban milieu—but helps also in forging the sense of belonging to a new and distinct community. The bonds of this community are constantly reiterated: praying in the same mosques, behind a prayer-leader who may also be one of the leaders of the sectarian organization one supports; jointly bearing the financial burdens involved in the maintenance and growth of mosques<sup>69</sup> and madrasas (see Table 1) as well as in supporting families of those who have fallen victim to sectarian

<sup>64</sup>Omar Noman, 'The Impact of Migration on Pakistan's Economy and Society', in H. Donnan and P. Werbner (eds), *Economy and Culture in Pakistan: Migrants and Cities in a Muslim Society* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 83.

<sup>65</sup>Jonathan Addleton, *Undermining the Centre: The Gulf Migration and Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 88ff. My discussion here of overseas labour migrants is largely based on Addleton's findings.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 190, 197.

<sup>67</sup>Noman, 'Impact of Migration', 90.

<sup>68</sup>Addleton, *Undermining the Centre*, 187–201.

<sup>69</sup>One residential colony of about ten thousand people in Jhang was reported in April 1991 to have thirty-five mosques, many of them of recent origin. See *Newsline* (April 1991), 45. A survey conducted in August 1994 reported the existence of 160 mosques in Okara city in the Punjab which belong to the Barelawis alone; there had been only *one* Sunni mosque there in the early 1950s: *Newsline* (September 1994), 33. The larger towns and cities can have several thousand mosques: *Herald* (March 1995), 71 (report on Faisalabad city in the Punjab).

TABLE 1  
*Growth of Madrasas in the Punjab, 1975-94*

Division	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994
Bahawalpur	278	417	598	795	883
D. G. Khan	153	217	297	363	411
Multan	45	102	179	212	325
Lahore	75	120	170	219	323
Rawalpindi	58	85	119	157	169
Sargodha	75	98	130	148	149
Gujranwala	52	66	96	131	140
Faisalabad	?	?	?	?	112
Total					2512

Sources: *Zindagi* (Lahore: 17 February 1995), 39; *The News* (Islamabad: 7 March 1995), 11.

violence; subscribing to the publications of madrasas and sectarian organizations, and, in case of businessmen, advertising in them too;<sup>70</sup> and being constantly made aware, through these publications, but also through the mosque-preacher, of how other members of this sectarian community elsewhere are engaged in activities similar to their own.<sup>71</sup>

The career of Mawlana Isar al-Qasimi (1964-1991), a leader of the Sipah-i Sahaba, illustrates some of the social and economic context of sectarian commitments. Isar al-Qasimi's family had migrated from Ambala in eastern Punjab to settle in a village in rural Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) at the time of the partition of India. His father spent many years in the Middle East, as have many activists and supporters of the Sipah-i Sahaba. After completing his education, which involved studies at three different madrasas in Lahore, Isar al-Qasimi tried to set up his own business but failed. In 1985, he began preaching in a mosque in Okara in the Punjab besides teaching in a madrasa he had established there. After the Sipah-i Sahaba

<sup>70</sup>A random sample of the monthly or fortnightly journals (each usually around 50 or so pages) published by madrasas, religious associations, or various sectarian organizations shows that almost all carry numerous advertisements from shopkeepers and small merchants, but also from larger businesses. My sample includes the following monthly journals: *al-Balagh* (Dar al-'Ulum, Karachi); *Al-Bayyinah* (Jami'at al-'Ulum al-Islamiyya, Karachi); *Al-Haqq* (Dar al-'Ulum Haqqaniyya, Peshawar); *Al-Sa'id* (Jami'a Anwar Al-'Ulum, Multan); *Zia-i Haram* (Lahore); *Misaq* (Tanzim-i Islami, Lahore); *Ishraq* (al-Mawrid, Lahore); *Khilafat-i Rashida* (Sipah-i Sahaba, Faisalabad); *Majallat al-Da'wa* (al-Da'wa wa'l-Irshad, Lahore).

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 77; compare the 'mechanisms of integration' in the making of Shi'i fundamentalism in Iran: Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion*, 160ff.

was founded, Isar al-Qasimi came to Jhang, on the bidding of Mawlana Haqq Nawaz, to preach in one of the market-towns (*qasba*) of the district. A fiery orator, Isar al-Qasimi soon came into conflict with Shi'i magnates of the area, denouncing them for their high-handed dealings with their peasants, especially with Sunni peasants, and mobilizing Sunni opposition against them. Many of those who rallied to the Sipah-i Sahaba's cause as represented by him were small peasants who doubtless felt empowered by the aggressive Sunni identity he helped them acquire.<sup>72</sup> But his supporters also included successful shopkeepers and businessmen. It was no accident that, in what became a familiar pattern, the Shi'i agrarian magnates of the area responded to his challenge by having shops owned by Sunnis attacked and burnt.<sup>73</sup>

After the assassination of Mawlana Haqq Nawaz in February 1990, Mawlana Isar al-Qasimi became the deputy leader of the Sipah-i Sahaba and, as the symbolic mark of his succession, also the prayer-leader and preacher at Haqq Nawaz's mosque in Jhang (Mawlana Zia al-Rahman Faruqi, the publisher from Lyallpur, was chosen to head the organization<sup>74</sup>). The same year, Isar al-Qasimi contested elections to both the National and Punjab assemblies; he won both seats, defeating, for the National Assembly seat, a powerful Shi'i rural magnate of the Sial family of Jhang<sup>75</sup> and becoming the very first member of the Sipah-i Sahaba to enter parliament. (Haqq Nawaz Jhangawi had contested elections to the National Assembly in 1988, but had lost to one of the most influential landlords of the area.<sup>76</sup>) It was not long, however, before sectarian tensions took their toll, as they had for many other leaders of radical sectarianism, and in January 1991, Isar al-Qasimi was assassinated in Jhang.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup>See Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 167ff. on the empowering of 'marginal peoples' in religious nationalism, inter alia, through the sanctification of religious violence.

<sup>73</sup>*Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1993), 20; *Mawlana Haq Nawaz Jhangawi ki pandara ta'rikh-saz taqirain*, 132, 136.

<sup>74</sup>It is worth noting that one of Zia al-Rahman Faruqi's brothers also works in Saudi Arabia; another is the editor of the Sipah-i Sahaba's journal, the *Khilafat-i Rashida*. See *Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 5, no. 3 (August 1994), 6.

<sup>75</sup>On the Sials of Jhang, see L. Griffin and C. F. Massy, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab* (Lahore: Government Printing, Punjab, 1940), II, 365-71.

<sup>76</sup>*Mawlana Haq Nawaz Jhangawi ki pandara ta'rikh-saz taqirain*, 166-79.

<sup>77</sup>This account is based on a biographical notice in *Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1993), 20.

TABLE 2  
*Sectarian Riots in the Punjab, 1989–94*

Year	Incidents	Persons injured	Persons killed
1989	67	102	10
1990	274	528	32
1991	180	263	47
1992	136	240	44
1993	90	247	38
1994	115	249	37
Total	862	1629	208

Source: *The Nation* (Islamabad: 1 September 1994).

Note: The figures for 1994 include incidents up to but not later than 17 August 1994. Note that these are official and thus probably rather conservative estimates; the actual number of casualties may have been much higher.

As is typical of radical religious movements, the fact that their leaders themselves frequently fall victim to such violence does nothing to dampen either the zeal of their followers or the attractions of the resort to violence. For the Sipah-i Sahaba, as indeed for the Shi'i organizations, violence by sectarian opponents only reinforces their perception of the threat from the 'other', and hence their *raison d'être* of 'safeguarding', often through violent retaliation, their sectarian kin from that threat. Like mosques, madrasas, print, a shared social background and common economic interests, religiously sanctioned violence and growing lists of martyrs<sup>78</sup>—comprising leaders no less than ordinary devotees—also contribute to the sense of community. Such sacrifices of blood seldom fail to reinforce and sanctify the shared sectarian identity and give it an added, and unrelenting, dynamic.<sup>79</sup>

Sectarian violence has exacted a heavy toll in the Punjab (see Table 2), but it is not limited only to this province. Though it is in the Punjab that the principal sectarian organizations (the Sipah-i Sahaba, the Tahrik-i Ja'fariyya, the Sipah-i Muhammad) are based, their activities also extend to other parts of the country. The social and economic contexts in which sectarian conflict takes place can, and often do, differ from one region to another. Yet the network of mosques and madrasas, the proliferation of sectarian

<sup>78</sup>As one example among many, see Balakoti, *Amir-i 'Azimat*, 72–4, for a list of 'the martyrs of Jhang' (till 1990?).

<sup>79</sup>On religiously sanctioned violence and its place in religious nationalism, see Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War*, 153–70.

publications and of party-cells all ensure that a supra-local sectarian community now exists whose members can relate, and react, to the tribulations of their sectarian kin anywhere, irrespective of local context.<sup>80</sup> This network also provides members of the community with remarkable mobility. The career of Mawlana Muhammad A'zam Tariq (b. 1961), who has represented the Sipah-i Sahaba in the lower house of the Pakistani parliament, spans both the Punjab and Sind, for instance, and thanks in part to him, so does the influence of his organization. He was born in the Sahiwal district of the Punjab but studied at a madrasa in Karachi and later established a mosque for himself in that city. After the founding of the Sipah-i Sahaba, this mosque became its principal organizational unit. Beginning with his position as the prayer-leader and preacher of this mosque, A'zam Tariq rose to lead the Sipah-i Sahaba first in Karachi, then in the province of Sind as a whole, and finally, as the deputy leader of the organization, at the national level. On the assassination of Mawlana Isar al-Qasimi, he was elected from a constituency in Jhang to fill the latter's position in the parliament.<sup>81</sup> The sectarian community is supra-local even as it is constantly reinforced by local conditions and grievances.

Conversely, as the case of Karachi in particular illustrates, sectarian radicalism can also serve as one among several simultaneous forms of social conflict.<sup>82</sup> In this city of more than 12 million people, of whom nearly 2.5 million are illegal immigrants<sup>83</sup> and two million live in illegal squatter settlements,<sup>84</sup> various kinds of urban conflict

<sup>80</sup>Cf. Stanley J. Tambiah, 'Reflections on Communal Violence in South Asia', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 49 (1990), 741–60.

<sup>81</sup>On the career of Mawlana A'zam Tariq, see *Khilafat-i Rashida*, vol. 3, nos 9–10 (September–October 1992), 27–8. Also see the detailed interview with him in *ibid.*, vol. 4, no. 7 (December 1993), 5–8; *ibid.*, vol. 4, no. 8 (January 1994), 4–10.

<sup>82</sup>According to figures released by the government, a total of 1,134 people were killed and 1,705 injured in Karachi between the beginning of October 1994 and the end of May 1995 alone. Among those killed, there were 103 Sunni activists and 104 Shi'i ones. For these figures, see the report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *Karachi—Buhran ke hal ki talash* (Lahore: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 1995), 17–18.

<sup>83</sup>*Newsline* (February 1995), 95.

<sup>84</sup>Frits Selier, 'Family and Rural–Urban Migration in Pakistan: The Case of Karachi', in J. van der Linden and Frits Selier, *Karachi: Migrants, Housing and Housing Policy* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1991), p. 5; Jan van der Linden, 'Security and Value: Squatter Dwellings in Karachi', in Donnan and Werbner, *Economy and Culture in Pakistan*, 62–76.

and rioting have taken place since the early 1950s.<sup>85</sup> Sectarian conflict, since the early 1980s, is in large part explicable in terms of the same configuration of urban problems which also generates riots over ethnic, linguistic and other issues. The nature and background of urban conflict in Karachi, or the question of its resonance in other regions and contexts and vice versa, deserve a separate treatment, however, and must be left aside here.

### Conclusion

The Sipah-i Sahaba's effort to create a community of sectarian Sunnism, on the way to making Pakistan a 'Sunni state', is doubtless interpretable as a form of religious nationalism. In an important recent study, Mark Juergensmeyer has argued that 'Religious nationalism . . . may be viewed as one way of reconciling heretofore unreconcilable elements—traditional religion and modern politics.'<sup>86</sup> The question, however, is whether it is appropriate to think of the religion, or the religious commitments, of such people as support the Sipah-i Sahaba as 'traditional'? The differences between the Sunnis and the Shi'a have existed for more than a millennium. But professing to make Sunnism the ideology of a modern nation-state (a state which already declares itself to be 'Islamic'), celebrating the death anniversaries of certain early figures of Islamic history as national days, promoting a sectarian consciousness through highly organized parties, dexterous and profuse use of print, and the use of mosques and madrasas as media of recruitment and organization, do not conjure an image of a 'traditional' religion. One must be careful not to exaggerate the 'modernity' of sectarian radicalism: its leaders, the 'ulama', have been reared on styles of learning which are often centuries old, and the madrasa, where their intellectual formation takes place, is itself an institution of medieval origins. Yet radical sectarianism is no more a 'traditional' religion than the empowering, by Sunni and Shi'i preachers and scholars, of the middle class,

<sup>85</sup>For a brief review of the major instances of rioting in Karachi till the mid-1980s, see Fareeda Shaheed, 'The Pathan–Muhajir Conflict, 1985–86: A National Perspective', in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 194–214.

<sup>86</sup>Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War*, 191.

the rural populace, and, above all, themselves, in terms of a militant sectarian ideology, is a 'traditional' religious role.<sup>87</sup>

A combination of social and economic factors, ambiguities about the place of Islam in public life, and international developments such as the Iranian revolution have all contributed to the making of sectarian conflict in Pakistan. Yet the significance of sectarianism does not consist only in its being an expression of these (and other) developments, or even in its being a form of radical Islamism which has received rather scant attention from scholars interested in the latter phenomenon. Radical sectarianism is also a medium of religious change (not just an expression of it) and important for that reason. As noted earlier in this study, Sunni and Shi'i activists and scholars are alike eager to win adherents in the countryside. This activity in fact predates the radical sectarianism of the past quarter century, though it has no doubt contributed to it. Shi'ia tend to view their potential converts as rural Sunnis, while activists of the Sipah-i Sahaba define their goals in proselytism as rescuing people from the influence of Shi'ism to which they have been subjected by ignorance or by virtue of subservience to Shi'i rural magnates. The veneer of either Shi'i or Sunni religious traditions is extremely thin in the countryside, however, and both are usually components of a broader mix of locally accepted practices. The significance of sectarianism lies in bringing traditions of an urban, text-based Islam to the countryside in the form of an aggressive and self-consciously Sunni or Shi'i Islam.

As an agent of religious change, sectarianism is a medium not only for a revival of the 'ulama's influence but also for its *extension* in areas where previously such influence was minimal. The Sipah-i Sahaba's effort to bring a Sunni identity to the rural populace of the Punjab—whose religious attitudes have hitherto been (and, in large measure, continue to be) dominated by sufi influences, as the lives of many of them are dominated by Shi'i agrarian magnates—means introducing them to a very different form of Islam than what they are familiar with. The nerve centres of this 'new' Islam are not sufi shrines but madrasas and sectarian organizations; and the feudal pirs are no longer the guardians of rural Islam, but, in this worldview, the enemies of the true faith. Among Shi'i religious scholars and preachers

<sup>87</sup>Cf. *Mawlana Haq Nawaz Jhangawi ki pandara ta'rikh-saz taqirrain*, esp. 268–94, for Jhangawi's insistence that the 'ulama' must assume an aggressive political role in the 'defence' of Sunnism.

likewise, there are indications of the effort to acquaint rural or recently urbanized people, professing some devotion to certain Shi'i ceremonies and rituals, to an Iranianized form of Shi'ism<sup>88</sup> sustained by madrasas, sectarian organizations, and Shi'i literature.<sup>89</sup> Since 'Islam' is understood as an aggressive devotion to either Sunnism or Shi'ism to the exclusion of the other, but also as signifying the renunciation of local customs in terms of the literate cultural tradition of the 'ulama' and the madrasas, a sectarian identity is the vehicle through which whatever is taken to constitute an *Islamic* identity is imparted, acquired, asserted—in a word, imagined. This Islam has a starkly sectarian face, but it is the basis of a new community; and for all their mutual antagonism, the Shi'a and the Sunnis have shared roots in this community.

<sup>88</sup>On the 'Iranianization' of non-Iranian Shi'ite clergy in the Middle East (but also elsewhere), see Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*, 185ff.

<sup>89</sup>Cf. Naqvi, *Tadhkira-yi 'Ulama'-i Imamiyya-i Pakistan*, 291, 320, 340, 403, 411 for instances of Shi'i preachers striving to 'reform' local beliefs and customs.

An earlier version of this article was presented at a colloquium of the Triangle South Asia Consortium, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, in December 1995. I am grateful to the participants in the colloquium, and to Professors Charles J. Adams, M. Rafique Afzal, Arthur F. Buehler, Carl W. Ernst, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, and, above all, David Gilmartin, for comments on earlier drafts.