

Pakistan: And now Sunni vs Sunni

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The first bloody attack on a Sufi mazar, or shrine, was a suicidal assault on Imam Bari. With Kabul in Deoband hands, JUI gained a new political leverage in Pakistan. That JUI has been part of every government since 1990 reflects influence it enjoys in the echelons of power

If Pastor Martin Niemoller were alive today and living in Pakistan, he would have inserted few alterations in his famous statement about the inactivity of German intellectuals following the Hitler's rise to power and would still have sounded authentic:

THEY CAME FIRST for the Ahmadis,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't an Ahmadi.

THEN THEY CAME for the Christians,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Christian.

THEN THEY CAME for the Shia,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Shia.

THEN THEY CAME for me
and by that time no one was left to speak up [1].

The sectarian strife in Pakistan is assuming a surrealist character. The majority sect, Barelvis (a Sunni sub-sect), coming under Deobandis' (another Sunni sub-sect) attack. The attack on Data Darbar is second major assault in Lahore, in a year's time, on Barelvis for which the Barelvi leadership has blamed Deobandis. Last year, a leading Barelvi cleric, Mufti Sarfraz Naeemi, was killed along with seven others when a suicide bomber targeted his offices at Jamia Naeemia. If one goes by a recent newspaper report, the sect-wise composition of Pakistan's population is as follows: '60 percent Barelvis, 15 percent Deobandis, 15 percent Shias, 5 percent Ahl-e-Hadith, and the remaining 5 per cent constituting Ahmadis, Ismailis, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Parsis, etc' [2].

Paradoxically, Barelvis lent support to the movement for the creation of Pakistan. Deobandis, allied with Gandhi's Congress, were deadly opposed to the conception of Pakistan. However, soon after the creation of Pakistan the ruling class found it more useful to patronize Deobandis. Noted columnist Khaled Ahmed explains why: 'because the mazar-based Barelvi tendency to celebrate eclectic saint cults militated against two-nation nationalism and because it was no help in law-making, whereas the madrassa was' [3].

The state-patronage for Deobandis and pro-Saudi (Ahl-e-Hadith, Jamaat-e-Islami etc) outfits assumed new dimension in 1980s. The outfits imparted military training to wage 'Jihad', first in Afghanistan, later in Kashmir, were all affiliated to a freemasonry-with-Wahabist-bent (miniscule, ineffective Pir Panjal group in Kashmir was an exception).

When the former ISI-assets (Afghan Mujahideen), at present treasured US-assets, failed to strap up Afghanistan, a militia consisting of students (Taliban) from Deoband seminaries were unleashed on Kabul. With Kabul in Deoband hands, Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) gained a new political leverage in Pakistan. That JUI has been part of every government since 1990 reflects influence it enjoys in the echelons of power.

Shia-Barelvi response:

The Shias were the first victims (along with declared infidels: Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus) of Khaki assets. It was impossible by end-80s to find a public toilet, railway compartment, public buss or buss stop across Punjab that was not inscribed with a slogan declaring Shias infidels. Imam Bargahs, or Shia mosques, increasingly came under attack as Taliban came to power. Another favorite target was Shia professionals. A section of Shia community, in a bid to counter Deoband terror, built Sipah-e-Muhammad. Of late, it has been lying dormant. It did not prove very effective either despite some high-profile hits.

Barelvi parties have bluntly come out against Deoband-outfits terror only in the wake of recent attacks on the revered shrine, Data Darbar, in Lahore. The only partially-armed Barelvi outfit that emerged on scene was Sunni Tehrik (ST). There is also an impression that ST was in fact built with the help financial help by Karachi's trading community that wanted protection against city's major quasi-fascist party, MQM. Employing thug violence, MQM is notorious for extracting protection money from city's traders and rich.

In Karachi, where ST was mainly based, fought pitched battles with Deobandis for the control of mosque (mosques also mean economy). On 12 April 2006, a bloody attack on ST public meeting held to celebrate Eid Miladun Nabi (Prophet Muhammad's birth anniversary) eliminated entire ST leadership. Though the blame was conveniently pinned on MQM yet fingers were also pointed towards Deobandi outfits. Even Kamran Khan, widely believed as spokesperson for Khaki establishment, could not help pointing out (GEO April 12, 2006) that the killing of the Barelvi leaders of Sunni Tehreek in Karachi on Eid Miladun Nabi was a Barelvi-Deobandi conflict. This attack even reminded him of a clash between Mufti Shakir and Pir Saif ur Rehman in Khyber Agency in which many people had died. He said Karachi had seen wall-chalkings against Mufti Shakir with counter-chalkings from the other side of the conflict [\[4\]](#).

Khyber Agency clash:

Pir Saif was a Barelvi, Mufti Shakir a Deobandi. The two mullahs had been warring on the airwaves through FM radios since December 2005. On March 25, 2006, 19 followers of Pir Saif were killed. Ironically, neither Rehman nor Shakir came from Khyber Agency. Shakir had been expelled from Khurram Agency for stoking sectarian fires. He arrived in Khyber Agency in 2003. He lent support to Mangal Bagh, a dreaded warlord once lording over Khyber Agency. Pir Saif arrived from Afghanistan in the 1970s. After the killings and the hostage-takings of women and children at the end of March 2006, government forces began to leash in Mangal Bagh. He moved to another place. The day he left, state forces surrounded Shakir's headquarters. He surrounded without resistance. Shakir and Pir Saif were officially expelled from Khyber Agency by the political administration. Pir had already left in February, reputedly to go to Lahore. But the fighting between their followers continued. In April same year another five people were killed in a clash between warring factions [\[5\]](#).

Flurry of shrine-bombings:

The first bloody attack on a Sufi mazar, or shrine, was a suicidal assault on Imam Bari, a revered mausoleum seated atop a lush green hill overlooking federal capital Islamabad. Imam Bari, like any

Sufi shrine, attracts Shia as well as Sunni devotees. However, Shias have a special veneration for Imam Bari. Hence, it was also considered an attack on Shia community. The Bareilvi groups, therefore, did not protest as was the case with Data Darbar. It was back in 200, Sufi mazars began to draw Taliban wrath in Pakhtoonkhwa province. Mainstream media chose to ignore it.

The first such incident in the provincial metropolis occurred on December 18, 2007 when militants exploded bombs in the shrine of Abdul Shakoor Malang Baba located at the GT Road. No casualties. The second attack on March 3, 2008 at a 400-year-old shrine of Abu Saeed Baba in Bara Tehsil claimed 10 lives. Shrine was set on fire. The shrine of Ashaab Baba, on the outskirts of Peshawar, was desecrated in 2008 by detonating explosives in it.

Meantime, police in Buner foiled a bid to demolish the shrine of Hazrat Pir Baba in December 2008 [6].

It was an attack on famous Sufi poet Rehman Baba in Peshawar March last year that made reluctant-headlines in mainstream press. Media is often reluctant to highlight Taliban atrocities. Partly out of fear, partly out of sympathy. Attack on Rehman Baba's mazar could not be ignored.

According to Dawn: 'The shrine's watchman had received a threat from suspected militants on his cell phone three days ago. He told police that the attack took place to crack down on the tradition of women making pilgrimages to the site of the grave of Rehman Baba; a 17th century poet, revered for his message of love and peace. The high intensity device almost destroyed the grave of the Rehman Baba and the gates of a mosque, canteen and conference hall situated in the spacious Rehman Baba Complex. Police said the bombers had tied explosives around the pillars of the tombs, to pull down the mausoleum' [7].

A day after the attack on the Sufi poet's shrine, militants struck at the shrine of Bahadur Baba in Nowshera. In May last year, Sheikh Omar Baba shrine in Peshawar was completely destroyed. The attackers fled from the scene when police opened fire at them. They, however, returned again to obliterate the shrine with heavy explosives. Eyewitnesses claimed that the militants shifted religious books and Qurans from the shrine to the nearby mosque before the explosion! [8].

Daily Times notes: 'Besides targeting shrines, militants had also launched drives to rid the society of "moral ills", killing "prostitutes", faith healers and other people after dealing a deadly blow to CDs business. Several leading actors left their profession due to the moral policing by the militants while a whole population of dancing girls was forced to flee the Bunrh locality in Mingora area of Swat district after the militants executed a dancer for refusing to their edicts.

Similarly, the first beheading case occurred in Peshawar was that of a faith healer Pir Rafiullah whose beheaded body was dumped near a road in the Mattani area after his kidnapping from Taru Jabba area in Nowshera district' [9].

As all these acts of mindless terror motivated by sectarian hatred go on unabated, Pakistan's Deobandi leadership conveniently blames foreign hand (read India) for all these attacks. A section of media further peddles this conspiracy theory. Khaled Ahmed remarks: 'Sectarian conflict is routinely denied by all concerned as if an admission of it would destroy Islam. All mullahs do it, but so do most citizens. This denial prevents information from being printed in the press. In the long run, the conflict is gaining in strength and no solutions are available. A kind of collective sickness then makes us blame sectarian violence on the US and India. More insidiously, denial also points to participation and that is a charge the clergy will never accept' [10].

Riaz ul Hassan

P.S.

* From Viewpoint:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/fullstory.php?t=And%20now%20Sunni%20vs%20Sunni&f=full-2-july-16.php&y=2010&m=july>

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Footnotes

[1] Pastor Niemoller delivered his famous statement in a January 6, 1946 speech before representatives of the Confessing Church in Frankfurt. The text has many versions. One famous one is as below:

"THEY CAME FIRST for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

THEN THEY CAME for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

THEN THEY CAME for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

THEN THEY CAME for me
and by that time no one was left to speak up."

[2] The sectarian face by Amir Mir, *The News*, July 11, 2010.

[3] Terror will go in a gradual process. Khaled Ahmed's interview with *The News* on Sunday, July 11, 2010.

[4] Deobandi-Barelvi war amid clerical lying by Khaled Ahmed, *Daily Times*, May 23, 2006.≥

[5] Pakistan: Mangal Bagh Badly Injured, But Alive by Azhar Masood, July 3, 2009.
<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2009/07/03/pakistan-mangal-bagh-badly-injured-but-alive/>

[6] Militant attacks on shrines are regular occurrence by Manzoor Ali Shah, *Daily Times* March 10, 2009.

[7] Pashtun poet Rehman Baba's mausoleum bombed by Ali Hazrat Bacha March 5, 2009
<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/pakistan/nwfp/pashtun-poet-rehman-baba-mausoleum-bombed--qs>

[8] ANI, May 8, 2009.

[9] Militant attacks on shrines are regular occurrence by Manzoor Ali Shah, *Daily Times* March 10, 2009.

[10] Deobandi-Barelvi war amid clerical lying by Khaled Ahmed, *Daily Times*, May 23, 2006