

## The regional dimension of sectarian conflicts in Pakistan

Mariam ABOU ZAHAB

Sunni-Shia conflicts were mostly unknown before Partition in the areas which form now Pakistan because of the influence of pirs and sufis. After Partition and despite the migration to Pakistan of muhajirs belonging to areas with a strong tradition of sectarian conflicts<sup>1</sup>, relations between Sunnis and Shias remained normal except for occasional riots<sup>2</sup> or minor clashes during Muharram ceremonies. The State was neutral and had no sectarian agenda. Then Zia ul Haq attempted to implement the Sunni hanafi fiqh ; this became the starting point of Shia resistance. Zia used religion to acquire domestic legitimacy and counter Shia dissent which implied economic and political patronage to Sunni extremists<sup>3</sup>, strengthening them vis-à-vis their Shia opponents always viewed as « troublesome ». The ground was fertile for proxy wars : the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Irak war and the Afghan jihad were the enabling factors which gave scale and sustenance to the sectarian tensions so far latent and led to the internationalisation of sectarian politics. Religious parties radicalized by foreign influences started receiving foreign funds which they used to launch campaigns in favour of their programmes. Mosques and deeni madaris with sectarian affiliations were built everywhere, often on state lands, and a new kind of maulvi – the "donor funded maulvi" – appeared, moving around in a Pajero with armed bodyguards. Religious scholars started travelling to Saudi Arabia, Irak and Kuwait and their influence with the local administration became tremendous. Successive governments ignored their activities because the donors were friendly Muslim countries.

The Iranian revolution inspired Pakistani Shias and contributed to their politicisation but it had a backlash : to counter this influence, Saudi Arabia, Irak and Kuwait started patronizing Wahabis and other non-Shias. Pakistan became a primary battlefield : it shares a border with Iran, has a sizeable Shia population (15 to 20 %) and Zia had made it the centre of US sponsored Sunni islamism. Sectarian divisions are now militarised in a way not previously seen. Sectarian violence as we experience it now<sup>4</sup> is the legacy of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Ambala, Rohtak, Karnal, Patiala, Hisar.

<sup>2</sup> The only major anti-Shia riot took place in 1963 in Tahri, Khairpur district (Sind) during Muharram. Posters were published in 1970 which incited Sunnis to take over Pakistan with the slogan "Jag Sunni, jag, Pakistan tera hai" (Wake up Sunnis, Pakistan is yours).

<sup>3</sup> The (Un)holy Nexus ? Samina Ahmed. Newslines, September 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Between 1990 and April 1998, in the Punjab alone, 344 Shias and 212 Sunnis were killed in incidents of sectarian violence. 1997 was the most violent year with over 200 dead and 175 injured.

Afghan war and the result of the rise of the Taliban which has exacerbated pre-existent rivalries and may seriously destabilize the country.

*The transformation of the Shia community after the Iranian revolution<sup>5</sup>*

The Iranian revolution brought about a complete change in the Shia community and in the shape of Shia leadership which was before in the hands of zakirs who had followers through their control of majalis. Shia organisations were apolitical and concerned with rituals and the organisation of Muharram processions which had become a competition for status. Their successful resistance to Zia's islamization<sup>6</sup> and the Iranian revolution empowered Pakistani Shias : a new generation « saw a light coming from Iran ». After the revolution and during the Iran-Irak war – which was seen in Pakistan as a war between Sunnis and Shias – Iran funnelled large sums of money to the Pakistani Shias and opened cultural centres in every major town. Members of Imamia Students Organization (ISO)<sup>7</sup>, most of whom belonged to the lower middle class and came from a rural background, started studying Persian and got scholarships to study in Iran. They came back very impressed and saw Pakistan as « the mirror of Iran ». They translated the works of Shariati, Muttahari and Beheshti into Urdu and gave a new interpretation to the paradigm of Kerbala (kul yom Ashura, kul ardh Kerbala [every day is Ashura, the whole earth is Kerbala]). They wanted to rationalize religion and to be involved in politics in order to create justice and to empower the downtrodden (mustazafin) and they introduced panislamism in the Shia mosques<sup>8</sup>. The zakirs became irrelevant in the new atmosphere and a campaign was launched against them. At the same time, a new generation of clerics, belonging mostly to the Pashtun tribal areas and the Northern areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, studied in Najaf and in Qom<sup>9</sup> where they built up contacts with Shias from Middle Eastern countries and particularly Lebanese Shias. They came back to Pakistan in

---

<sup>5</sup> The analysis of the Shia community is based on personal observations and interviews with Shia intellectuals and office bearers of ISO and TJP as well as dissidents of these movements conducted between August 1996 and September 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Zia ul Haq introduced in 1980 the deduction of zakat from all saving accounts. The Shia rebelled against this measure and were finally exempted after huge demonstrations in Islamabad in July 1980.

<sup>7</sup> ISO was founded in 1972 in the Engineering University of Lahore. In the beginning, it was just organizing rituals in the universities and taking care of the material problems of the students. Cf. Safir-e Inqilab [biography of Dr Mohammad Ali Naqvi]. Taslim Raza Khan. Al Arif Publications, Lahore, February 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Palestinian clerics made speeches in Shia mosques asking for moral support and the ISO started celebrating Yom al Quds. There was also a mobilization in favor of Bosnian Muslims. The « new Shias » always emphasized the fact that neither Palestinians nor Bosnians were Shias which, in their eyes, demonstrated their commitment to the cause of Islam rather than to Shiism.

the early 80s and opened madaris with Iranian funding. These clerics soon took control of the community, they rationalized the rituals and utilized the old structure for political activism. The « ISO sponsored majalis », although very Iranian in style<sup>10</sup> and quite austere compared to the traditional Punjabi majalis, started attracting crowds and the speeches became more political. This created a rift between the « old Shias » led by the traditional ulama educated in Najaf for whom involvement in politics was a sin and the minority of « new Shias » under the influence of these younger ulama educated in Qom who were soon accused by the conservative of being « Wahabi Shias » who wanted to destroy the religion.

Allama Arif Hussain al Hussaini, a Turi Pashtun from Parachinar, who studied in Najaf and Qom was sent back to Pakistan after the Iranian revolution to organize the Shia community<sup>11</sup>. After the death of Mufti Jaafar in 1984, he became head of the Tehrik-e Nifaz-e Fiqh-e Jaafria (TNFJ) created in Bhakkar in 1979. Shia leaders who felt threatened by Zia's policy of Sunni islamization created this movement to assert their separate religious identity (Shia qaum), protect their rights and prevent the Sunni majority and the government to impose an interpretation of sharia contrary to fiqh-e jaafria. This religious movement was radicalized after the Quetta incidents of 1985 and Allama Hussaini decided in July 1987 to transform it into a political party to fight « American and Zionist imperialism » and to follow the path shown by Ayatollah Khomeini. The charter of the party (Sabiluna), inspired by Shariati's ideas, is very similar to the charter of Amal, the Lebanese movement.

The absence of marja-e taqlid in Pakistan had traditionally meant close links with Najaf which were now replaced with links with Iran where part of the money collected as khoms was sent. Shia leaders, who were boasting of their close contacts with Lebanese Shia clerics and political leaders, consistently denied receiving any funds from Iran despite evidence to the contrary. Iran stopped financing Pakistani Shias in 1996 because it was counterproductive and perhaps also because it feared a backlash of Sunni militancy fuelled by Pakistani Sunni extremists in Iranian Baluchistan.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Tazkira-e Ulama-e Imamia Pakistan. Syed Hussain Arif Naqvi. Islamabad, 1984 and Tazkira-e Ulama-e Imamia Pakistan (Shumali Ilaqejat). Syed Hussain Arif Naqvi. Islamabad, September 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Zakirs started going to Iran for training in order to impress their audience. The Iranian influence was also visible in the adoption of a new style of dress, black cloaks and black turbans became commonplace.

<sup>11</sup> According to his « official » biography, he studied in Najaf from 1967 to 1973 then in Qom and he was expelled from Iran in 1978.

### *The Sunni reaction*

Pakistan practised an open door religious policy to foreign countries and soon became a battle field for a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iraq was also trying to mobilize Pakistani Sunnis in the context of its war with Iran and it invested much to fuel anti-Shia feelings. Radical Sunni groups exploited every sign of Shia militancy to ask for more money. Funds came from the CIA and anti-Iran Arab states and from private donors for widening the gulf between Sunnis and Shias by promoting a narrow extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam<sup>12</sup>. Armed groups emerged, the Afghan jihad gave them an easy access to arms and training and brought them into contact with Arab volunteers, some of them with Wahabi persuasions. Madaris — which were a recruiting ground for Sunni extremists and provided them material and moral support — were proliferating and became recipients of Arab money. Shia radicalisation caused a great deal of apprehension in Pakistan. After the creation of TNFJ, 2 Ahl-e Sunnat conferences were organized by Jamiat-e ulama-e Pakistan (JUP) and Jamiat-e ulama-e Islam (JUI) to counter the « move by this tiny Shia minority to impose its will to Sawad-e Azam » (i.e the great Sunni majority)<sup>13</sup>. The agencies sought out Haq Nawaz Jhangvi as a front to counter Shia militancy. This young Sunni extremist, who was naib amir (vice-chairman) of the Jamiat-e Ulama-e Islam (JUI) in the Punjab, created the Anjuman-e Sipah-e Sahaba (later Sipah-e Sahaba-e Pakistan, SSP) in 1985 with a virulent anti-Shia programme. Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who belonged to a poor Sunni family, launched a political campaign against the Shia feudals of Jhang. He wanted to defeat Syeda Abida Hussain in the elections and resorted to sectarian slogans. As his party gained popularity, he started receiving outside support to fight the Shias. The SSP remained associated with the JUI till 1989 when they split because of a completely different line of struggle .

### *The aftermath of the Afghan war : sipahs and lashkars and the intensification of sectarian violence*

---

<sup>12</sup>footnote\* Anti-Shia literature was promoted in Pakistan and the Iranian revolution was presented as a Zionist conspiracy to capture the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina. Allama Ahsan Elahi Zaheer, chief of the Jamiat Ulama-e Ahl-e Hadith, a Wahabi movement closely associated with Saudi Arabia, wrote in 1980 a book entitled Shias and Shiism which denounces Shia Islam as a heresy and accuses the Shias of being Zionist agents in Islamic countries. This book, translated in Arabic and English, was widely distributed by the Saudi government.

<sup>13</sup> Mumtaz Ahmad. Sectarianism and Zia. The News, April 15, 1998. A Deobandi anti-Shia movement called Sawad-e Azam was created in Karachi in the 80s with the support of the intelligence agencies.

Sectarian conflicts acquired a new dimension from 1988 and particularly when the jihad was "brought home" after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The assassination of Allama Hussaini in August 1988 — Iraq was most probably involved — was a turning point : it was the first of a long series of sectarian killings. Till 1995, killings were confined to leaders and activists of both sects then symbols of State authority, namely government functionaries, police officers and judges, were targeted. 1997 saw a change with indiscriminate gunfire on ordinary citizens who had no sectarian activity and whose only fault was to be Sunni or Shia and tit-for-tat killings targeting doctors, lawyers and traders.

The governments pretended for a long time that the sectarian organisations were a strictly local problem which could be dealt with at any time by arresting a few dozens extremists. The SSP and the TJP<sup>14</sup> both became mainstream parties : they entered into electoral alliances with the PPP or the PML, there were even two SSP ministers in the Punjab government of Sardar Arif Nakai in 1995 when the PPP needed the SSP support to have a majority in the province ; in return, the government freed the detained SSP leaders. Breakaway factions soon emerged either because some members disapproved of the « moderation » of the party leaders or just because they were expelled from their party. Some sources claim that the SSP and the TJP created the Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LJ) and the Sipah-e Mohammad (SMP) to have a militant wing independent of the political one. It would rather appear that the SMP was created for purely internal reasons, some Shia radicals thinking that the TJP politics of waging a political fight against the SSP had not brought anything to the Shias who were feeling more and more insecure and that an organization had to be created to safeguard the Shia religion. Although it had a very weak organizational structure, the SMP soon acquired a political dimension of its own. The ambitions of Ghulam Raza Naqvi, founder of the SMP, were more global than just protecting the Shias : he wanted to form a Quds force comprising both Sunnis and Shias to liberate Jerusalem. The LJ always remained closely associated to the SSP — despite many statements of the SSP claiming that it has nothing to do with LJ<sup>15</sup> — and was never political but purely terrorist. Almost the entire leadership of LJ is made up of people

---

<sup>14</sup> The TNFJ changed its name to Tehrik-e Fiqh-e Jaafria Pakistan (TJP) in 1993.

<sup>15</sup> « We parted ways because Lashkar-e Jhangvi's way of pursuing its policies was different from the SSP's. The Lashkar does not like our moderate policies » . Maulana Zia ul Haq Qasmi, Chairman of Supreme Council of SSP. The Nation, April 7, 1999.

who fought in Afghanistan. Riaz Basra<sup>16</sup> , who created the LJ in 1994 after he "escaped" from a Summary trial court, had been sentenced to death for the murder in 1990 of Sadiq Ganji, director general of the Iranian cultural centre in Lahore. The LJ rhetoric is much more anti-Iran than just anti-Shia : it keeps accusing the Pakistani government of being under the influence of a foreign government (Iran) and has claimed responsibility for the assassination of Iranian diplomats and military cadets<sup>17</sup>. The fact that only Ithna Ashari Shias are killed while Ismailis and Bohras have so far been spared tends to prove that it is in fact Iran which is targeted. In January 1999, 17 Shias were killed in Karamdad Qureshi, a village situated some 60 kms from Multan which had never known Shia-Sunni conflict before. The timing of this attack is highly significant : Pakistani foreign secretary Shamshad Ahmad was in Teheran trying to mend fences with the Iranian authorities the very day it occurred. Evidence of Arab private financing and of transfers of funds through American banks were disclosed after the arrest of several LJ activists responsible for the killing in May 1997 of Ashraf Marth, a high ranking police officer who had apprehended the killers of Agha Mohammad Ali Rahimi, Iran's cultural attache in Multan. Ramzi Yusaf's alleged links with the SSP and the HUA are also documented as well as the links between the SSP and the Iranian Sunni Baluchis. The SMP created in 1994 by Ghulam Raza Naqvi was funded and armed by Iran whose aim was to protect the Shias. It may then be argued that both the SMP and the LJ which are part of transnational networks are just tools for the perpetuation of a more global war between Sunni fundamentalism and Shiism on Pakistani and Afghan soil.

Since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, about 10 000 Pakistanis have received a military training in Afghanistan under the garb of the jihad in Kashmir or Afghanistan. Between 1990 and 1994, the camps in Afghanistan (Al Badr-1 and Al Badr-2 in Zawar, Paktia) and in the tribal areas of Pakistan were mostly training Jamaat-e Islami and Lashkar-e Taiba (LT, Army of the Pure)<sup>18</sup> members for the Kashmir jihad. After the

---

<sup>16</sup> Riaz Basra contested elections to the provincial assembly in 1988 from Lahore on a SSP ticket.

<sup>17</sup> 13 Iranians including 2 diplomats have been killed in Pakistan since 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Lashkar-e Taiba (LT) is the militant arm of the Markaz al Dawat wal Irshad, a Salafi movement established in the early 80s by the Palestinian Muslim Brother Abdullah Azam and Hafiz Mohammad Saeed and based since 1987 in Muridke, near Lahore. It aims at establishing the supremacy of Islam all over the world and is fighting a jihad against Hindus and Jews. It founded a camp in the Kunar province in 1990 where both religious and military training were imparted. Along with Punjab governor and two Punjab ministers, Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Federal Information minister, visited their headquarters in Muridke in April 1998 « to bring them out in the mainstream and make them an ally in our fight against sectarianism [...] The idea was to neutralise the SSP and Lashkar-e Jhangvi by getting them on our side. » He added : « It is not a sectarian organisation and is not a source of domestic destabilisation. » The Friday Times. April 24-30, 1998.

emergence of the Taliban, the camps which belonged to Hezb-e Islami and Jamaat-e Islami were handed over to Harakat ul Ansar (HUA), a Deobandi anti-Shia movement fighting for the accession of Kashmir to Pakistan which appeared in October 1993 in Central Punjab after the merger of Harakat al Jihad al Islami (formed in 1980) and Harakat al Mujahideen, its splinter group which had separated in 1985. These two groups were getting CIA and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) backing to help the Afghan mujahideen. HUA is apparently supported, directly or indirectly, by rich businessmen from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf and it collects donations from Pakistanis and Kashmiris settled in Britain. According to former members of Pakistan's intelligence services, HUA is linked to Osama bin Laden and is provided « training, expertise and funding » by the ISI<sup>19</sup> HUA's office in Peshawar was inaugurated in July 1997 by Maulana Mohammad Ajmal Qadri of the JUI in the presence of Maulana Sami ul Haq, chief of his own faction of the JUI and head of the prestigious Dar ul uloom of Akora Khattak, often described as the center of gravity of the Taliban. Although it claims to be a non sectarian organization and insists on its affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat<sup>20</sup>, HUA is closely associated with SSP/LJ. It was alleged in 1995 that activists of the SSP in Karachi had taken shelter in HUA. One of the recruits was quoted as saying : « Both [SSP and HUA] are working for the same goals, except Harakat ul Ansar does not believe in launching a militant movement against Shias and believes that the Hindus and Jews are their biggest enemies. »<sup>21</sup> HUA provides training facilities and « Islamic teaching » and also a safe haven to SSP and LJ activists. Sanctuaries are provided to terrorists wanted in Pakistan especially those who were involved in the attack on the Iranian cultural centre of Multan in March 1997 and escaped from Dera Ghazi Khan jail in December 1997 before perpetrating the Mominpura massacre in Lahore in January 1998. Riaz Basra, absconding chief of the LJ who carries Rs 5 millions head money, is believed to take regularly shelter in HUA camps in Afghanistan After the US strikes, Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, leader of HUA, claimed during a press conference in Islamabad that 21 members of the group were killed in Khost<sup>22</sup>. A number of them

---

<sup>19</sup>footnote\* ISI provides funds to radical terrorists, says report. Dawn, May 17, 1999. This article refers to a report parts of which were published by the Sunday Telegraph (London).

<sup>20</sup> The Lizah camp near Khost was managed by Qari Saifullah — who succeeded as amir Maulvi Irshad Ahmed killed in Afghanistan — who has been absconding since a plot for a military takeover was foiled in September 1995. The HUA was involved in the plot and the existence of a faction of the Tablighi Jamaat advocating jihad bil saif was revealed at that time.

<sup>21</sup> Mohammad Mirza. Afghan jihad reaches Karachi. The Friday Times, February 16-22, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> According to the CIA, at least 7 members of HUA and 8 members of LT and Hizb ul Mujahideen (linked to Jamaat-e Islami) were killed in the US attacks.

belonged to South Punjab, namely Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Leiah, cities which are strongholds of the SSP. Some sources claimed that the three LJ activists involved in the Raiwind bomb blast<sup>23</sup> were closely associated with HUA and were trained at the HUA camps inside Afghanistan. According to intelligence reports « At Khalid bin Waleed camp in Afghanistan, 800 Pakistanis are under training, most of whom have linkages with SSP/LJ. The Mominpura massacre<sup>24</sup> was also executed by [these] HUA trained personnel ». It means that apart from its original objective of jihad in Kashmir, HUA is involved, though not directly but by providing an infrastructure, in sectarian activities and in takfir i.e to purge the community from the Shias<sup>25</sup>. According to the same intelligence report, « HUA is expanding its agenda, which now besides Jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir, includes terrorist activities in Pakistan and abroad. [...] HUA may attract more religious political parties within its fold and may attempt to initiate a Taliban like movement in Pakistan. » A large number of HUA militants attended the LT annual gathering in Muridke in November 1998. As early as 1995, an HUA militant was quoted as saying : « Ours is a truly international network of genuine Muslims holy warriors. We believe frontiers could never divide Muslims. They are one nation and they will remain a single entity. »<sup>26</sup>

The composition of the mujahideen in Kashmir seems to have undergone a change since 1993 which witnessed an « Afghanisation » of the struggle. Non-Kashmiri experienced militants, mostly Punjabis but also Afghans and some Arabs, joined the insurgency in great numbers. An Indian intelligence report released in August 1998 under the title Involvement of foreign Muslim mercenaries in terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir, contains a list of 99 « foreign Muslim mercenaries » arrested by Indian forces with about 50 photographs and rather stereotyped profiles of some of them<sup>27</sup>. The report also gives a list of 520 militants killed, many of them just referred to as « foreign national », and 500 other foreign militants « identified » in Jammu and Kashmir — more than half of them are said to belong to HUA. Apart from a few Arabs and British nationals from Kashmiri origin, most of the militants about whom details are given belong to Azad Kashmir or Central and

---

<sup>23</sup> which targeted the Prime minister on January 3, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> LJ claimed responsibility for this massacre in which 25 Shias were killed and at least 50 injured in a graveyard in Lahore in January 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ejaz Haider. Price of Kashmir-Afghanistan policies. The Friday Times, July 3-9, 1998 and Ejaz Haider. Have your cake and eat it too. The Friday Times, July 10-16, 1998 for more details about an intelligence report on terrorist groups in Pakistan and their links with Afghanistan and Kashmir

<sup>26</sup> John Ward Anderson and Kamran Khan. Pakistan Shelters Islamic Radicals. The Washington Post, March 8, 1995.

South Punjab, Pakistani Pashtuns and Afghans<sup>28</sup> being rather surprisingly underrepresented. The report also contains maps of training camps located in Afghanistan, Pakistan and « Pakistan occupied Kashmir ».

Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leader of the JUI, has been accused of trying to convert the Kashmir freedom movement into sectarianism<sup>29</sup>. It is undeniable that when Fazlur Rehman was chairman of the National Assembly standing committee on foreign affairs under the PPP government, he was in a position to influence policy on Kashmir and, under his influence, Afghan policy became more linked to militancy in Kashmir. Pan-Islamist movements, like the Lashkar-e Taiba, have carried out killings of Hindus in the Jammu region in an effort to communalise the situation. According to Indian sources, over 130 Hindus were killed in Jammu and Kashmir between January and October 1998<sup>30</sup>. The HUA even tried to prevent the Amarnath yatra, a Hindu pilgrimage.

On June 14, 1999, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, head of LT, said during a meeting in Lahore that the mujahideen were not working for the liberation of Kashmir alone : « We'll also work for the independence of 200 million Indian Muslims. We'll take a revenge for the Babri Masjid. » He added that jihad would continue till the independence of Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Hyderabad, Uttar Pradesh and Junagadh<sup>31</sup>.

Reuters press agency, quoting an interview with Abdullah Muntazir, information secretary of LT, reported on June 3, 1999, that more than 200 Afghans from Nuristan<sup>32</sup> were helping Lashkar-e Taiba militants in their « struggle against India » in Kargil.

Azam Tariq, the jailed vice-chairman of the SSP, offered « to provide 50 000 men if the government announces jihad in the held Kashmir »<sup>33</sup> These militants believe that the example of Afghanistan can be reproduced in Kashmir and that, after the nuclear tests which have made Pakistan's defence « impregnable », the circumstances are right for liberating Kashmir from Indian occupation.

The Taliban who have close links with Pakistani society have « one foot in Pakistan and one foot in Afghanistan ». They played an active role in September 1996 and in March

---

<sup>27</sup> They are mostly described as semi-literate, drug peddlars or smugglers, belonging to very poor families and motivated by monetary considerations.

<sup>28</sup> According to the report, eight Afghans from a village of Baghlan province, arrested in October 1997, had left their home and come to Muzaffarabad (Azad Kashmir) in search of better job prospects...

<sup>29</sup> Alfaran organisation brain-child of Fazl. The Observer, October 26, 1995.

<sup>30</sup> 23 Hindus were killed in Vandhama (Srinagar) in January 98, 26 in Parankote (Udhampur) in April 98 and 25 at Chapnari (Doda) in June 98.

<sup>31</sup> Dawn, June 15, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> hence probably Wahabis.

1998 in the clashes between the Sunni Orakzai and the Shia Bangash tribes in Parachinar and Hangu which claimed over 300 lives. Those tribes lived in relative peace and did not have heavy weaponry before the arrival of Sunni Afghan refugees. The Shias of Hangu have no complaint against the local Sunnis, they hold responsible the Afghan refugees, many of whom have got Pakistani identity cards, and the Taliban administration. Land disputes degenerated in sectarian clashes as Sunnis managed to get the support of Afghan refugees. In 1987 in the Kurram Agency, Mangal Sunni tribesmen occupied, with the help of Afghan refugees, lands claimed by Shia Turis. Orakzai Agency is run by mullahs exactly on the lines of the Taliban sharia in Afghanistan. The Sunni population has also become strongly anti-Shia, the ulama who were previously affiliated to the JUI and who have joined the SSP consider the Shias as non Muslims.

The links between the SSP and the Taliban are well known. Since 1994, SSP activists have been trained in Afghanistan and thousands of them are fighting with the Taliban or administering the captured areas. They see the Taliban's victories as a victory of Sunni Islam and preachers in Pakistani mosques say that once the Taliban control the whole of Afghanistan, they will transform Pakistan into a real Islamic State purged from the Shias and the Barelvis<sup>34</sup>.

After the capture of Mazar-e Sharif by the Taliban in August 1998, hundreds of young Pakistanis went to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Taliban. Over 4 000 Pakistanis, most of them Punjabis, joined the Taliban after a meeting of representatives of 12 major madaris which took place on July 31, 1998 in Akora Khattak<sup>35</sup>. 400 hundred SSP members were apparently expelled from Kabul after the attack against UN personnel which caused the death of an Italian colonel in August 1998<sup>36</sup>. When the relations between Pakistan and Iran were very strained after the killing of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e Sharif and the reported massacres of Afghan Shias, Maulana Azam Tariq, head of the SSP who was detained in Attock military jail at the time<sup>37</sup>, announced that his party was « ready to send 20 000 militants to fight alongside the Taliban if Iran tried to impose a war on Afghanistan »<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> The Frontier Post, June 7, 1999. The SSP had already made exactly the same statement in February 1994.

<sup>34</sup> footnote\* Ejaz Haider. A pyrrhic victory ? The Friday Times, August 12-20, 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Frontier Post, August 12, 1998. The News, August 12, 1998 and August 14, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> Le Monde, October 8, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> He was later transferred to Faisalabad jail.

<sup>38</sup> The Pakistan Times, August 15, 1998.

Dharb-e Momin, a weekly published from Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi by circles close to the Taliban, supports the HUA and LT. It also presents the Taliban as fighting for the survival of Pakistan. Dharb-e Momin regularly publishes reports about Pakistani mujahideen, most of them Punjabis and often belonging to HUA, having attained shahada (martyrdom) in Afghanistan or Kashmir.

Pakistani Sunni extremists are also active in Sinkiang and in Central Asia. The Chinese authorities regularly claim to have arrested suspected terrorists who, according to them, have been trained in Pakistan. Pakistani missionaries were expelled in 1998 from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan because they were disseminating pro-Taliban and anti-Shia propaganda in the mosques. Uzbekistan has repeatedly accused religious groups in Pakistan of training young Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyzs in camps situated near Peshawar. According to the Uzbek authorities, these militants are sent back through Afghanistan to carry terrorist activities in Central Asia, their main motive being to establish Islamic governments in Central Asia<sup>39</sup>

#### *The talibanisation of Pakistan*

The chicken are coming home to roost : talibanism has started spreading across the border. The Afghan war has left an indelible imprint on Pakistan's cultural, economic and political life, especially in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and even in the adjacent settled districts. Sectarian hatred has reached unprecedented level in NWFP : 21 Shias and 5 Sunnis were killed in Hangu in March 1998 and 7 people were killed in January 1999 in Orakzai Agency following a land dispute. The Tehrik-e Taliban-e Zargari launched in January 1999 a movement, on the Taliban model, in Hangu district for « the removal of all prime sources of social evils » (i.e television, dish antennae, music and unveiled women). The Tehrik-e Nifaz-e Shariat-e Mohammadi (TSNM) led by Sufi Mohammad in Malakand Agency continues to challenge political institutions and to demand a Sharia-based system, the government has yielded and a peculiar version of Sharia laws has been implemented in December 1998 in Malakand and Kohistan division. Baluchistan is also affected : a cinema was burnt down and videoshops attacked in Quetta during last Ramazan. The statements of the Prime minister praising the Taliban system of swift justice can only give legitimacy to such movements.

---

<sup>39</sup> BBC News. Pakistan's Islamists training Uzbeks ? February 17, 1998.

The situation in Kashmir shows that some military circles in Pakistan thought that the method which was successful in Afghanistan could be used to compel the Indian government to give up Kashmir under the pressure of militancy. There is obviously an Afghanisation of the struggle : the tactics used by the militants against Indian army are those taught by the ISI in the 80s for similar operations against Afghan government facilities.

Political parties keep quiet on the sectarian issue and successive governments have routinely compromised with sectarian groups who feel immune because they fight in Kashmir. After announcing in December 1998 his intention of regulating the operations and funding of deeni madaris, the government had decided to « go slow » because he was afraid of the reaction of religious parties and organisations<sup>40</sup>. More recently, the security agencies announced that 126 deeni madaris, none of which were located in the NWFP, were involved in activities against national interests and were sending their students for training in Afghanistan<sup>41</sup>. The federal government announced once again its intention to clamp down on madaris involved in fanning sectarianism and religious militancy. At the same time, as a warning to the government, the JUI organized a conference attended by more than 5 000 representatives of deeni madaris and denied involvement in such activities.

Sectarian forces have the potential to shake the foundations of the state and the society. Most of the volunteers for jihad belong to social classes more and more alienated from the power structure. There is no dearth of unemployed young people who are looking for a solution of their economic problems and who think that an Islamic revolution is long overdue in Pakistan. While the society seems resigned to violence and has learnt to cope with it, the government reacts by adopting strict laws and creating more antiterrorist and military courts. Such measures have no impact on militants who believe that they have a mission to complete and are ready to « die in the path of Allah ». If the present government does not succeed to take the country out of the economic, political and law and order crisis, those frustrated young people might, out of despair, resort to violence in the name of religion to obtain social justice and their rightful share in national resources.

---

<sup>40</sup> Govt to "go slow" on regulating religious institutions. Dawn, December 29, 1998.

<sup>41</sup> 126 Madaris involved in militant activities. The News, May 17, 1999.