

## **Sectarian Infrastructure and Sunni-Shia Parties in Punjab and their Links with Jihadi and Extremist Organizations**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite contemporary research on the religious infrastructure and Sunni-Shia parties in Punjab, including affiliated sectarian militants, there are very few studies connecting them with the Jihadi and extremist organizations. The available literature links the increase in sectarian infrastructure in Punjab to Sunni-Shia conflict; the state's narrative of Hindus and Muslims being different, religiously and culturally; the sacred or sectarian text provided by religious institutions; and successive governments' Islamization and Jihadi policies. However, this study aims to connect the sectarian infrastructure and Sunni-Shia parties to the Jihadi, sectarian, and extremist elements. The article answers the following questions:*

- *How does the presence of Sunni-Shia infrastructure and sectarian parties reinforce sectarian conflicts and violence in Punjab?*

- *And how they are connected to Jihadi, sectarian and extremist organizations?*

*The study applies the mixed method of research as it primarily uses data from secondary sources; however a few interviews conducted are also used. It highlights the presence of extensive sectarian infrastructure and Sunni-Shia parties' socio-religious and political activities in Punjab and establishes their link to sectarian, Jihadi and extremist elements. The study argues that the Sunni-Shia infrastructure, including affiliated sectarian parties and militant groups, in Punjab not only reinforces sectarianism but also provides leaders as well as foot soldiers to various sectarian, Jihadi and extremist groups operating at national and regional theatres.*

**Key Words:** Sunni-Shia Parties, Sectarian Infrastructure, militants, Jihadi, extremist, Punjab

### **1. Introduction**

In the decade-long rule of Gen. Ziaul Haq, Islamisation policies, the state introduced Islamisation policies as well as taking the decision to support the Jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran. During this period, Punjab experienced a considerable increase in the Sunni-Shia infrastructure as well as in the number of sectarian parties as money and other material support flew in from the Sunni Gulf countries and Shia Iran. For example, hate literature was produced by both sides as they tried to preserve distinct sectarian identities through ideological propagation, indoctrination and demonizing the 'other'. As time passed, the Sunni and Shia sects got involved in sectarian politics and violence against each other and against religious minorities. However, the scenario changed after the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America (USA) and Pakistan became a frontline state in the war on terror. As a result, various Jihadi and sectarian groups developed links with extremist (or terrorist) organizations, still operating at national and international level, and turned against the state and its law enforcement agencies.

This in turn compelled the state to outlaw the activities of some religious groups and declare them terrorists, while turning a

blind eye towards Jihadi groups operating in Kashmir and Afghanistan. Laws were passed to deal with extremism and sectarianism and military operations were conducted against terrorist elements in the peripheral parts of the country, e.g., Rah-e-Nijat in South Waziristan, Rah-e-Rast in Swat, Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan, and a military operation, Rad-ul-Fasad, was also initiated across Punjab. But despite the military operations and the new laws, many militant organizations continued to operation under new names even as their old names were in use on the ground. This is because the Jihadi and sectarian infrastructure was intact in Punjab and was providing the militant organisations with manpower and ideology.

The province of Punjab had become the state's ideological hub, as far as sectarian infrastructure (by which this paper means religious institutions such as mosques and madrassas) is concerned. The infrastructure, according to Fair, increased individual piety, hardened sectarian beliefs and inculcated sectarian hate in individuals.<sup>1</sup> Punjab became a nerve center of jihadi and sectarian militants and provided "a fertile soil for recruitment to radical Jihadist movements" in Kashmir and Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Hussain observes that sectarian and jihadi militants operating in Pakistan's peripheral areas and in the region would not survive if the manpower and ideology, produced by Punjab's sectarian infrastructure, is stopped.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a security expert said that "Punjab is the source of terrorism. The mainstream leaders of all major militant and jihadi groups are from Punjab that also houses the headquarters of these outfits."<sup>4</sup>

The available literature links the increase in sectarian infrastructure in Punjab to Sunni-Shia conflict which is connected to the state's narratives of Hindu-Muslim religious and cultural differences; the sacred or sectarian text provided by religious institutions; successive governments' Islamization and Jihadi policies. However, this study aims to argue that the Sunni-Shia infrastructure and sectarian parties feed into the Jihadi and terrorist elements. The Sunni-Shia infrastructure, including affiliated sectarian parties and militant groups, in Punjab reinforce sectarianism and provide leaders as well as foot

soldiers to sectarian parties and to Jihadi and terrorist groups operating at national and regional theatres.

This paper comprises five sections. Section one is introduction. Section two maps the sectarian infrastructure in Punjab. Section three is divided into two sub-sections, which examine Sunni and Shia sectarian parties, including affiliated militant groups, their infrastructure and political and violent activities. Section four categorises militant groups and depicts the sectarian militants' link with the Jihadi and terrorist organisations and their dependency on the sectarian infrastructure in Punjab. Section five is conclusion. Using the mixed method of research, the paper is based on secondary source material with some primary source material.

## **2. Mapping the Sectarian Infrastructure in Punjab**

Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan, inhabited by a large number of Sunni and Shia citizens. It is home to 55.06 percent of Pakistan's population; 207 million, as per the 2017 census of Pakistan. All the sects (see figure 1) madrassas' education boards (which shape and propagate the sectarian ideology as well as prepare the curriculum and examination papers) are based in Punjab. Similarly, the sects' proselytization and political activities, as well as their Jihadi groups, are controlled from headquarters in Lahore. For instance, the Jamaat-i-Islami headquarter is in Mansoura, Lahore; Deobandi Tablighi Jamaat in Raiwind, Lahore; Ahl-e-Hadith, Dawa wal Irshad in Muridke, Lahore.<sup>5</sup> See figure 1 for sectarian education boards and headquarters in Punjab.

**Figure 1.** Sectarian madrassas’ education boards in Punjab

Sr.No.	Sect-based Boards	Education	Established in	Headc at
1	Tanzim-ul-Madaris		1960	Lahor
2	Wafaq-ul-Madaris Arabiya	Al-	1960	Multa
3	Wafaqul Salafiya	Madaris-ul-	1955	Faisal
4	Wafaqul-Madaris	Al-Shia	1959	Lahor
5	Rabitahul-Madaris-Al-Islamiya		1983	Lahor

Source:<sup>6</sup>

The presence of the sectarian infrastructure, sect-based education headquarters and a large number of sect-based religious institutions, and its affiliated supporters has made it possible for Punjab to lead the country’s sectarian, Jihadi and religious narratives. Amir Rana call Punjab the state’s “custodian of ideological and strategic interests,”<sup>7</sup> which shapes the state’s religious narratives and serves as the nerve center for sectarian-jihadist ideologies. No sectarian, jihadi or religiopolitical group can manage without Punjab’s manpower and finances. The province’s economic prosperity and the charity organizations, in terms of donation, is related to sect-based madrassas’ expansion and their parties and militant groups’ activities. All the major sects run chains of madrassas. Out of the total sectarian madrassas in Pakistan, 65 percent are situated in Punjab.<sup>8</sup> See figure 2 for detail of sectarian madrassas infrastructure in Punjab.

**Figure 2.** Division-wise sect-based madrassas in Punjab

Sr. No.	District	Deobandi	Ahle-Hadith	Barelvi
1	Faisalabad	566	108	675
2	Lahore	179	79	336
3	Sheikhupura	171	126	336
4	Rawalpindi	424	16	387
5	Gujranwala	369	95	633
6	Sargodha	442	32	461
7	Sahiwal	327	119	458
8	Multan	834	102	944
9	Bahawalpur	777	72	749
10	D. G. Khan	547	30	605
	Total	4636	779	5584

Source:<sup>9</sup> Ramazan uses the official figures of the government of Punjab, which means that unregistered madrassas are not included. Also, Jamaat-e-Islami madrassas are not mentioned in this figure.

These sectarian madrassas produce sectarian literature and ideologies which reinforce their distinct identity by employing exclusion. They publish hateful material to incite violence against the other. Some sectarian madrassas are almost equal to the rank of universities in terms of the ‘facilities’ they offer. For instance, Shia sect’s Jamia tul Muntazir, Deobandi Sect’s Dar-ul-Ulloom Jamia Naeemia Lahore and Ahli-Hadith sect’s Jamia Qadsia, situated in Lahore, have affiliated research libraries. They offer courses that promote one sect and downgrade the “other’s” denomination.<sup>10</sup> The majority of them interpret the Muslim and Islam history differently to challenge the other sect’s version. Each side doubts the “other’s” religious credibility and considers them out of the sphere of Islam or unbelievers. Even religious places are separate – Sunni followers

pray at religious places known as “Masjid” while the Shia adherents do so at “Imambarghs”. While they have occasionally attracted college and university students, sectarian organizations mostly recruit foot soldiers from mosques and madrassas.<sup>11</sup>

This sectarian infrastructure is spread across Punjab, spreading intolerance, extremism and militancy, as well as providing leadership and support to religious parties and affiliated militant wings. It provides safe sanctuaries to the sects’ affiliated parties and their militants, e.g., Deobandi sect groups: Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat (ASWJ); Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Jaishe Muhammad (JeM); Ahl-e-Hadith sect groups: Jamaat-u-Dawa (JuD), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT); Shias groups: Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqha Jafferia (TNFJ), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP),<sup>12</sup> Majlise Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM), etc.

The province is home to the headquarters of 107 religious groups. Lahore, the provincial capital of Punjab, is recognized as the capital of religious groups. In Lahore alone, 71 groups operate, which is the highest number in South Asia. A second major hub in Punjab is Multan which houses 18 religious groups’ headquarters.<sup>13</sup> The majority of the jihadi, sectarian and terrorist groups (see in section 4) are affiliated with the sectarian madrassas, which provide them with ideology, operation facilities and other logistics.

See below Sunni, Shia sectarian parties and their affiliated militant groups.

### **3. Sunni, Shia Sectarian Parties and Affiliated Militant Groups**

The sectarian infrastructure produced the Sunni SSP and the Shia TJP parties and their militant groups, which are not only involved in tat-for-tat violence but also used against the other religiously and politically. At present, SSP and LeJ, which together operate under the name of Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jamaat (ASWJ), are generally seen to be responsible for Shias’ bloodshed,<sup>14</sup> while TNFJ and SMP, together known as Mujlise Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM), are seen to be behind Sunnis’ targeted killings. They have similar strategies, almost adopted in

action and reaction, to exploit limited dogmatic contradictions and incite violence.

This section is further divided into two subsections, i.e., Shia sect's and Sunni sect's parties and their affiliated militant groups.

### **3.1. Shia Sect's Party: TJP/MWM Affiliated Sectarian Militants**

Sectarian Shia parties existed even before the partition of India to preserve the distinct doctrinal and cultural entity within the Muslims and Islam. They increased in number in the new Muslim state of Pakistan and began resorting to violence during Gen. Zia's rule (1977-88). Earlier, the Shia sect parties had collaborated with the Sunni sect parties to not only declare the Ahmadi community as non-Muslim, but also to Islamize the country's polity and society. But under Zia, the effort focused more on protecting the Shia interests in an increasingly Sunni majority state. For example, the well-organised Wafaq Ulema Shia headed by Mufti Jaffar Hussain called the protest against the imposition of Zakat tax. In response, the Imamia Student Organization (ISO, Shia Student Wing formed in 1972) besieged Islamabad for two days in 1979.<sup>15</sup>

Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafria (which translates as Movement for Jaffaria law Implementation or TNFJ) was created due the insecurity in the Shia community; "the Zia's orthodox Sunni regime might declare Pakistan a Sunni state, and the Shia leadership felt the need to set up a platform to protect the rights of their community."<sup>16</sup> Mufti Jaffar Hussain called a Shia sect 'convention' to examine Gen. Zia's Islamization scheme and formed TNFJ in April 1979 in the district Bakkar of Punjab.<sup>17</sup> Later, Gen. Musharraf banned the party, after 9/11, as well as Sunni parties in 2002. But in the wake of massive killings of the Hazara Shia community in Quetta, Shia clerics led by Amin Shaheedi emerged with a new organization, Mujlise Wahadit-ul-Muslameen (MWM) in 2009.

In 2011, Amir Rana recorded 20 Shia-sect organizations involved in sectarian activities. Among these were 12 sectarian outfits, four political parties and one militant, while the rest were



educational, non-political and charity outfits.<sup>18</sup> However, the Shia sect's mainstream party is MWM, formerly TNFJ, which is situated in Jamia-al-Muntazir, Model Town Lahore, with offices in Karachi and Islamabad. In addition to a chain of sectarian institutions and research libraries, the party runs a Shia charity organization, "Shaheed Foundation" (martyr foundation), which provides compensation and support to families of those who fell prey to sectarian violence throughout Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

The party's basic aim is to safeguard Shia sectarian and cultural interests, to maintain a distinct Shia identity and unity, and to thwart the Sunni majority from enforcing their version of Islam in the country.<sup>20</sup> After the initial success of Shias' exemption from Zakat tax, TNFJ championed Shia's participation in Gen. Zia's Islamization project and the allocation of separate quota for Shias in state institutions,<sup>21</sup> such as Judiciary, CII (Council of Islamic Ideology), parliament, police, etc.

TJP/MWM uses agitational and political as well as violent retaliations strategies to defend the Shia community from the Sunni SSP/ASWJ's aggressive posture. Being a minority sect and scattered across districts and provinces, they politically allied with mainstream parties and other sectarian groups. The Shia sect traditionally supported Pakistan People Party (PPP, a Sindh-based party traditionally led by the Bhutto clan since it was formed in 1967) and remained part of anti-military movements such as the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), formed in 1983) and Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDA), formed in 1988, which was, according to some observers, the main reason it was targeted by Sunni SSP. However, TNFJ has even joined Sunni parties in religious alliances, such as the Mutahida Mujlise Amal (MMA), a coalition of six religious parties from all schools of thought, except the anti-Shia SSP in 2002.<sup>22</sup>

Besides politics, the party often resorted to street agitations whenever it needed to draw government, media, rights activists and public attention to anti-Shia violence. MWM organized countrywide demonstrations to highlight the Shia Hazara "genocide" on April 23, 2010. To stop anti-Shia violence in Quetta, Parachinar and other areas of Pakistan, the party

demanded the then Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yusuf Reza Gilani initiate across-the-board military action against terrorists. Likewise, on April 26, the party protested in front of the Punjab Assembly, and Shia leaders voiced grave apprehensions about the Punjab government under Shahbaz Sharif and its support for “the banned terrorist outfit SSP,” and condemned the “discriminatory policies against the Shia community.”<sup>23</sup> In a protest in October, the party openly blamed the military’s secret agencies for the killings of Shias.<sup>24</sup>

TNFJ/MWM is not only concerned about Shia interests in Pakistan, but is also aligned with regional sectarian interests. As the Shia militants are not tools for the state’s strategic interests, they frequently use “Iranian-style rhetoric and stick to the official Iranian views concerning international relations.”<sup>25</sup> Many Shias from various regions of Pakistan joined pro-Assad forces against Sunni rebels in Syria. Shia militants use Iranian channels to reach Syria to fight on Assad’s behalf, and those who die are buried in Iran; there is a separate graveyard in Iran for Shia from Parachinar who died in Syria.<sup>26</sup>

The Shia sect party has assigned violent tasks to splinter groups which have claimed responsibility for anti-Sunni violence. For violent actions, Sipah-e-Mohammad Pakistan (SMP), which translates into Mohammad’s Army, was formed in 1991,<sup>27</sup> in response to Arif Hussaini’s (TNFJ central leader) death in a targeted attack in 1987 for which the Shia blamed Gen. Zia. Since then, the SMP has carried out numerous attacks including bombings on the Sunni SSP central leaderships and targeted killings of their activists. Before the legal ban on the group in 2001, the SMP was considered the most well-armed and well-trained anti-SSP militant outfit in Punjab.<sup>28</sup> Between 1993-2001, the organization was involved in 250 attacks on SSP.<sup>29</sup> Other militant outfits involved in violence against Sunni SSP/ASWJ are Sipah-e-Abbass (SeP), Sipah-e-Ahl-Bait (SAB), Imamia Student Organization (ISO), etc. But, SMP is the most prominent group which often made headlines for anti-SSP violence.<sup>30</sup> Mostly, Shias from Bakkar, Jhang, Lahore, Toba Tek Singh, Multan and Faisalabad in Punjab joined the anti-Sunni SMP.

### **3.2.Sunni Sect's Party: SSP/ASWJ and its Affiliated Militants**

The Shia-sect party's very title of TNFJ (Movement for Jaffaria law Implementation) was offensive to the Sunnis who asked: "Why a Shia minority would demand the imposition of their fiqah [law] in a Sunni majority state."<sup>31</sup> Hence, to ward off "the move by this tiny Shia minority to impose its will to Sawad-e-Azam (i.e. the great Sunni majority),"<sup>32</sup> the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI, Sunni-Deobandi) and Jamiat-i-Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP, Sunni-Barelvi), both national level political parties, arranged two Ahl-Sunnat conferences. Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a famous anti-Shia speaker and JUI Punjab chapter naib amir (vice-president), founded an anti-Shia party, i.e., Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, Army of Prophet Companion) in 1985 to challenge the Shia political activism as the latter opposed the then military regime. Jhangvi had been at the forefront of the anti-Ahmadi agitations in 1974.<sup>33</sup>

In 2002, the SSP along with many other groups was proscribed. But it resurfaced under a new incarnation Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan (MIP) which was subsequently outlawed in 2003. The party re-emerged for the third time as Ahle Sunnah Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) which was proscribed in 2012. But ASWJ, (the old name SSP is also in use), continues to function by holding socioreligious and political gatherings and participating in national elections across Pakistan from its headquarters in Punjab.<sup>34</sup> At present, the party functions under the title of Pakistan Rah-e-Haq Party (PRHP, meaning right path party), which is registered as a political party under the name of a former SSP leader, Maulana Ibrahim Qasmi, as the head.<sup>35</sup>

The SSP/ASWJ's, ideological centers were situated in two main Deobandi madrasas - Jamiat-ul-Uloom Eidgah and Darul Uloom Deoband - in Bahawalnagar city and Farqirwali in the Fort Abbas subdivision in Punjab. Its militant groups were previously managed from the command base in Jamia Faruqiya, Shadara, near Lahore, but they are now operating in small cells without an identifiable headquarter. The party's assets are not known because all transactions are made through non-banking channels. However, many sympathizers within the business circles of

Jhang, Chiniot, Faisalabad, Multan and Lahore, donate to the party.<sup>36</sup>

The party had an affiliated welfare trust, a student branch, and a chain of offices at local, district, provincial and national levels. The welfare trust's main office was in Jhang Sadar, Jamia Masjid Haq Nawaz. The trust was formed to help families of activists who died in sectarian conflicts, meeting the expenses of imprisoned members and supporting unemployed or poor activists. Before the party was banned in 2002, the trust had helped SSP activists, including those accused of murder, in 1500 court cases.<sup>37</sup>

SSP had 74 districts and 225 tehsils level sub-branches with a total of 100,000 listed members and 6,000 trained fighters and skilled squads. The SSP student wing surfaced in the 1990s on the model of Shia Imamia Student Organization (ISO). To offset the ISO's clout at College and University campuses, the SSP involved students and teachers in anti-Shia activities in schools and colleges which further widened the schism among the young population.<sup>38</sup> The SSP also ran madrassas and schools. In Punjab's districts of Jhang, Sargodha and Kabirwala, the anti-Shia SSP still runs many schools to provide free education to the poor and those who are affiliated with them.<sup>39</sup>

The party adopted a mixture of ideological, political, and violent approaches to confront the Shia sect. Through support from the established infrastructure (see section 2), SSP gained political clout by becoming a real contestant on a few electoral seats and their sizable supporters in other constituencies proved helpful in forming alliances with mainstream parties in Punjab.<sup>40</sup> By using anti-Shia slogans, SSP won many national, provincial and local bodies elections.

The SSP wanted to use political means to declare the Shia sect non-Muslim (as had happened in the past with the Ahmadi community), debar them from holding key positions in government offices, legally ban their outdoor events (such as the Muharram procession), protect the Sahaba (as the Prophet Muhammad's companions are known) from Shia vilification, etc.<sup>41</sup> In this regard, SSP's former chief Azam Tariq (who was

elected to the National Assmebly from Jhang) moved a Namooose-Sahaba (Honor of the Prophet's Companions) bill in the Assembly in 1993 which, if passed, would have declared the condemnation of the Sahaba and the Prophet's wives (who are often criticized by the Shia) as blasphemy. To get support for the bill, the SSP allied with other sectarian, religious as well as mainstream parties<sup>42</sup> in Punjab and across Pakistan.

In the 2013 elections, the ASWJ was part of Muttahida Deeni Mahaz (United Religious Front, a religious and sectarian parties' alliance) which put up at least 45 candidates to various national and provincial seats. The religious alliance failed to win any seats but it polled 350,000 votes in total.<sup>43</sup> The party leaderships participated in the 2018 elections from different constituencies throughout Pakistan. Two well-known ASWJ leaders, Aurangzaib Farooqi and Ahmad Ludhianvi, contested as independent candidates, while others contested from the PRHP platform. The party competed on 21 seats of the National Assembly.<sup>44</sup> Despite a legal ban on the party and its leadership, its members have directly and indirectly participated in all elections held so far in Pakistan, through electoral alliances with individual candidates, in coalition with other religious parties and mainstream parties, and at times as independent candidates.

Violent acts are carried out by its affiliate, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ, Jhangvi's Army) to keep the sectarian politics separate from the anti-Shia violence. This way, it also prevents government actions against the party, and also to protect the leadership from Shia militants' retaliation.<sup>45</sup> In 1996, the LeJ (Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Army of Jhangvi) was carved out of SSP and named after the party's founder, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, who was killed on February 23, 1990 by Shia sect militants.<sup>46</sup>

Besides LeJ, six other groups were also active; a) al-Haq Tigers, b) Jhangvi Tigers, c) Allah Akbar, d) Tanzeemul Haq, e) al-Badar Federation, f) al-Farooq. Except for al-Badar federation which was active in Karachi, the others were operating in Punjab's areas of Jhang, Faisalabad, Samundru and Chiniot.<sup>47</sup> These groups attacked Shia religiopolitical leaders, professionals such as doctors and lawyers, religious rituals, Muharram processions, Shia property such as Imambargh and madrasas;

there were also attacks on Iranian diplomats and Iranian cultural centers in Multan and Lahore.<sup>48</sup> The new incarnation of the LeJ surfaced with the Malik Ishaq group and the *LeJ-Al Alami* (LeJ-International) which are active in anti-Shia violence throughout Pakistan, but their headquarters are not known. *LeJ al-Alami* claimed responsibility for violent attacks on the Shia sect in Parachinar, Quetta and Karachi, which were more lethal than similar attacks in the past.<sup>49</sup> The group's young cadres are also linked to armed extortionists, drug smugglers, land grabbers, etc. Leaflets were circulated in Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab encouraging the youth to join SSP extortionist groups. It has networks in Jhang, Sargodha, Multan, Ahmedpur and Uch Sharif tehsils areas of Bahawalpur district.<sup>50</sup>

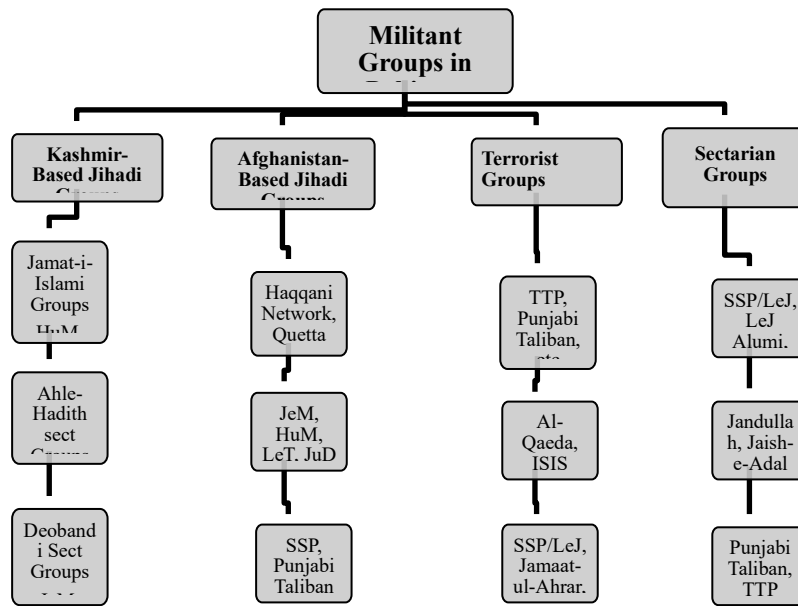
The presence of extensive Sunni and Shia infrastructure and sectarian parties as well as their religious gatherings in Punjab offers a conducive atmosphere to radical and militant forces to expand their clout. The next section discusses Punjab-based sectarian militants', particularly SSP/LeJ, connection with jihadi and terrorist organizations operating throughout Pakistan and the region.

#### **4. Sectarian Infrastructure and Sunni Parties Link with Jihadi and Terrorist Organizations**

Generally, four types of Sunni sect militant organizations are active in Pakistan. *The first* category of groups comprises those functioning in Kashmir, or anti-India groups, which include the Deobandi sect groups of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM); they also contain Ahle-Hadith sect outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jamaat-e-Islami- (JI, a political party) linked factions such as Al-Badr and Hizbul Mujahideen. *The second* set of Deobandi militants consists of those operating in Afghanistan such as the Quetta Shura of Mulla Umar (based in Quetta) and the Haqqani network (based in North Waziristan, Thal and Kurram), together called the Afghan Taliban. *The third* set consists of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella group of 40 factions including the Punjabi Taliban. The TTP's goals are "to enforce Shariah and to unite against the NATO forces in Afghanistan and do defensive Jihad against the Pakistan army." *The fourth* category is sectarian

outfits, which includes the Deobandi sect group of SSP/LeJ<sup>51</sup> (discussed in sub-section 3.2), which is engaged in violence against Shia and other religious and sectarian minorities in Pakistan. See figure 3 for categorization of militant groups in Pakistan.

**Figure 3.** Militant groups in Pakistan



Note: These are a few names of the four categories of militant groups operating in Pakistan and the region. They have fluctuating memberships, overlapping with each other, because these sectarian and terrorist groups were created and trained for Jihadi missions in Kashmir and Afghanistan. They all belonged to Sunni sub-sects. See Shia sect's militant groups in sub-section 3.1.

The first two types of militants are known as Jihadis, which the state utilizes as a strategic assets or tools of foreign policy against Afghanistan and India. Jihadi factions have religious decrees from their religious institutions, which encourage holy warfare (or Jihad) in the said countries. For example, Hafiz Saeed of LeT (both he and the group are internationally banned terrorists)

claimed that the Prophet Muhammad said that “waging jihad in Hind (India) was ‘superior’ to all other jihadists and among the greatest martyrs,” whereas “militant activities in Pakistan do not fall in the category of Jihad.”<sup>52</sup>

The last two sets of militants (terrorist and sectarian groups) are commonly identified as terrorists due to their regular participation in violent acts domestically, targeting religious and sectarian minorities as well as the state and its law enforcement agencies. However, it should not be assumed that the sectarian and terrorist (the last two) elements have no connections with the Jihadis (the first two groups), or that the Jihadis are not participating in the domestic sectarian activities or not colluding with the terrorists. The Ahle-Hadith sect’s groups have traditionally supported Deobandi groups in their violence against Shia community.

The Sunni Deobandi sect’s militants, whether jihadi or sectarian-terrorist, are well-connected to each other, e.g., HuM has participated in anti-Shia violence. After Masood Azhar, a Punjabi, broke away from HuM (a Jihadi organization led by Fazal Rehman Khalil, a Pashtun) and formed the JeM, he enlisted cadres from the same socioeconomic background as the anti-Shia SSP. JeM is directly connected to anti-Shia SSP and to Al-Qaeda. After incursions into Gilgit (a district in semi-autonomous region of Gilgit-Baldistan), the SSP first invited the HuM, and then the JeM, to start activities and promote the Jihadi agenda for Kashmir in the area.<sup>53</sup> JeM chief Azhar is a former follower of the SSP founder, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi. A journalist explained the SSP as “the umbrella political group while [JeM] and LeJ represented the organization’s jihadi and domestic militant wings respectively.”<sup>54</sup>

Likewise, Amir Rana, citing a SSP leader, writes that “Jihadi organizations are fighting infidels on the external borders while we are fighting anti-Islam forces [Shia] from within the country.”<sup>55</sup> Stern, in her interview with a member of SSP, named Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Inqalabi, is told that “the same organizations that supply mujahideen [fighters] to Pakistan’s proxy war with India are producing sectarian killers.” Inqalabi added that the SSP are fighting side by side with other jihadi groups, in



Chechnya, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Kashmir. He confirmed that they are linked to jihadi groups, such as JeM, HuM and Taliban.<sup>56</sup>

The sectarian militants “exist in a networked structure composed of small 'cells' found in jihadist organizations such as Lashkar e Jhangvi (LeJ), as well as in 'clusters' of these cells within the larger Taliban umbrella organization.” LeJ, which was a ‘hit and run’ cell initially, expanded to sectarian attacks, by using the cover of Jihadists.<sup>57</sup>

SSP/LeJ and JeM, also collectively called as Punjabi Taliban, are the main component of Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Punjabi Taliban carried out attacks against the Shia and the state law enforcement agencies by using TTP’s name. The TTP itself, under the leadership of Hakim Ullah Mehsud, started a vicious drive of violence against the Shia sect.<sup>58</sup> Qari Hussain and Ehsanullah Ehsan (a TTP spokesperson who voluntarily surrendered to Pakistan Army and then escaped mysteriously) were former anti-Shia LeJ associates<sup>59</sup> and studied together in SSP’s madrassas in Faisalabad.

In addition, the anti-Shia SSP/LeJ together with the Afghan Taliban fought the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. In 1996, SSP helped Taliban seize the cities of Jalalabad and Kabul, and was ostensibly behind the Hazara-Shia massacre in Afghanistan. Following the Iranian diplomats’ killings in Mazar-i-Sharif, a Shia-dominated area in Afghanistan, SSP’s Chief, Maulana Azam Tariq, announced that SSP was “ready to send 20,000 militants to fight alongside the Afghan Taliban if Iran tried to impose a war on Afghanistan.”<sup>60</sup> For the attacks on Afghanistan, LeJ supplied ‘suicide bombers’ to Haqqani Network. SSP together with the LeT (Lashkar-e-Taiba) and Haqqani network attacked the Indian embassy in Kabul twice in 2008 and 2009.<sup>61</sup>

It was the Afghan war in the 1980s that connected the Punjab-based sectarian groups to Taliban and other terrorist elements in the region. In the Afghan war, Pakistan distributed money, training and other military aid only to Sunni-sect groups, while the Shia groups fighting against the Russian-military were sidelined.<sup>62</sup> Through the Inter-services Intelligence (ISI) and

involvement in the Jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir, the Sunni SSP established relations with other anti-Shia elements. SSP militants who attacked the Shia had often been trained in Jihadi camps run by the ISI.<sup>63</sup>

After 9/11, international terrorists' dependency increased on the sectarian infrastructure and parties in Punjab when the latter offered safe havens to Taliban (Jihadi) and al-Qaeda (terrorists) in the wake of their dislocation from Afghanistan by International Coalition Forces. The anti-Shia LeJ was at forefront in this regard. "Law enforcement officials described one of the anti-Shia SSP leader, Matiur Rehman, a resident of Bahawalpur district in Southern Punjab, as the 'public face' of this three-tiered alliance."<sup>64</sup> Over time, some top al-Qaeda activists were captured from sectarian parties' headquarters in Punjab.

At present, the sectarian infrastructure and Sunni-Shia parties in Punjab also provides fighters to the war in Syria. For instance, LeJ activists are sent to Syria to confront Bashar al-Assad's government. A police officer in Punjab, who claimed to be the first to discover that Sunni-militants were going to Syria from Punjab, said that both Sunnis and Shias from different areas were fighting in Syria. The Sunnis are supporting ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and anti-Bashar ul Asad forces while Shias are supporting the Syrian government.<sup>65</sup>

## **5. Conclusion**

The presence of sectarian infrastructure (mosques, madrassas, sectarian education boards, sectarian missionaries and Jihadi militants headquarters, etc) in Punjab help mobilise the community on sectarian basis to push for the Islamisation of the state, polity and society as well as interpret history in a way that challenges the 'other' sect's version. Through ideological propagation and indoctrination, the sectarian infrastructure exploits the limited dogmatic contradiction to reinforce separate sectarian identifications within the Islam and Pakistan. Various sectarian communities ran chains of religious institutions which produced hate literature to incite violence against the other, thus spreading extremism, intolerance and militancy in the country.

Each side considers the “other” out of the sphere of Islam and doubts their religious credibility.

The Sunni and Shia parties have charity organizations, which run schools and hospitals, to help and influence their co-sect believers. Many sympathizers within the business and political circle contribute donations to their co-sect’s charity organizations. For instance, the Shia sect’s “Shaheed Foundation” (martyr foundation) provides compensation and support to victims of sectarian violence. Likewise, the Sunni SSP’s welfare trust helps the families of those who died in the sectarian violence, pursue imprisoned followers’ cases in the courts and helps unemployed or poor activists.

The sectarian parties and their militant wings, participate in politics by appealing to their co-sect voters. Due to the massive sectarian infrastructure, Sunni and Shia parties gained popular support bases and contested elections for the national, provincial and local elections despite legal bans on their socio-religious and political activities. The various sectarian parties, especially their youth wings’ religiopolitical activities, pose a serious threat to social cohesion in the society. They have branches at colleges and universities campuses to protect and facilitate students and teachers, which further widens the schisms among the young population. The sectarian groups’ young cadres are also linked to other crimes such as armed extortionists, drug smugglers, land grabbers, etc.

This article argues that there is a strong link between sectarian infrastructure and Sunni-Shia parties, including their affiliated militant groups, in Punjab with Jihadi (Kashmir and Afghanistan based groups) and terrorist organizations (read section 4). The Jihadi and terrorist groups are basically dependent on sectarian organizations and their infrastructure in Punjab which provide sanctuaries, ideologies, leaderships and foot soldiers to them. Establishing the link is important because the Sunni SSP has overlapping membership with Jihadi (JeM, HuM, etc.) and terrorist outfits (TTP, Al-Qaeda, etc), and is known as the mother of all Sunni sect’s militant groups in Pakistan. Despite operating in different war theatres, these groups converge and rely on the sectarian infrastructure in Punjab which reinforces not only

sectarianism, jihadism and terrorism in the country but also provides fighters to the sectarian wars in Syria and Yemen.

The sectarian infrastructure and Sunni-Shia parties, including their militants, socioreligious, political and violent activities made the Punjab province the nerve center for sectarian ideologies and provided a conducive atmosphere for the links with Jihadi, sectarian and terrorist organizations. It is said that if Pakistan has to be clear of all kinds of religious violence, then the state will have to take action against the sectarian infrastructure and affiliated militants in Punjab. This is because sectarian parties and militants' "networks and narratives they propagate are far more intricate and ominous" than jihadi and terrorist groups.<sup>66</sup>

The Sunni-Shia parties' activities are not limited to the society, but are further carried forward in citizens' (or sectarian communities and parties) competition for public power in the state's governing institutions through electoral alliances with individual candidates or religious parties and mainstream parties. This needs further research to determine how partisan interests of Sunni-Shia sects are transferred to the state's governing institutions, i.e., political institutions and law enforcement agencies.

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