

Mullahs of the Pakistani Punjab: An Anthropological Enquiry into their Lebenswelt and Worldview

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Abstract

Sufis criticise, general public mistrusts and non-Muslim, especially the West, considers mullah as Muslim fundamentalist — a term which has been made tantamount to a terrorist during the last decade or so. Very little research has been undertaken to explore the social space mullah lives in and his views about the world. The author assumes that the worldviews are determined by the lebenswelt [German: self-evident image] of the persons concerned. The lebenswelt of the mullah has been divided into three main phases in this paper. The research has been carried out about the family background, education and the present working conditions of the mullah and finally his views about the world. For this purpose, a number of mullahs belonging to the four main maslaks [Urdu: religious denomination or sects] both in rural and urban areas were interviewed. The members of the mosque management committee, students and teachers of the madrassas [Urdu: religious seminaries] and general public were also interviewed. Islamabad was selected to represent urban areas whereas a village in the district Toba Tek Singh was chosen to represent the case for rural areas.

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Introduction

Mullahs have been criticised even ridiculed by almost every section of the Punjabi society. Sufis lead these critics of mullah. Bulleh Shah (1680-1757), a Punjabi Sufi poet wrote: “*Mullan te mashalchi donhan ekko chit, lokan karde chanana appe anehr wich*”¹ [Punjabi: mullah and torch-bearer come of one stock, giving light to others, themselves in the dark]. In another couplet he said: “*Khana shak shobe da khaween, dassein hoor te hoor kamawein, ander khoot baher sechar, ilmoon bas kareen oh yar*”² [Punjabi: schism is your meat and drink, beneath saintly garb you stink, saying what you do not intend, enough of learning, oh friend]. Many other Punjabi Sufis, for instance, Sultan Bahu (1630-1691), Baba Freed (1173-1266), Waris Shah (1722–1798) and Shah Hussain (1538–1599) have also expressed similar views about the mullah. The western educated section of Pakistani society considers him illiterate, conservative, fundamentalist, extremist and even terrorist. This is evident from the Pakistani English print media with titles like: ‘Ideologies for Sale’, ‘The Jihad Industry’ or that “The graduation clause should have been enough to ensure that only one or two mullahs could contest the last election...”.³ Or the sentence: “The extremists operationally defined as ‘bearded mullahs’”.⁴ Similarly, mullah is held responsible for Islamisation which is understood to consist of blasphemy laws, flogging and chopping of hands etc. There is a common saying: “do what the mullah says and do not do what the mullah does”. Mullahs are a subject of a lot of jokes. They are also criticized for being fat and given to eating *halva* and *kheer* [Punjabi: two popular sweet dishes of Punjab], having too many children, for being child abusers, and above all condemned for stirring sectarian differences.

1 Taufiq Rafat, *trans. Bulleh Shah: A Selection* (Lahore: Vanguard Publication, 1982), 153.

2 Rafat, *Bulleh Shah*, 119.

3 Kidglove, H. H. “Sitting Comfortably Numb,” *The News*, September 4, 2004.

4 S. M. Rehman, “Semantic Warfare,” *The News*, August 27, 2004.

Who are mullahs and why are they so despised? This paper is an attempt to answer both these questions focusing mainly on the regions of Pakistan mullahs come from; the section of society i.e. *biradari* [Punjabi: literally means brotherhood generally used to denote a group of people who believed to descend from the same ancestor] they belong to, the madrassa they received their education at, and finally their work place.

In Islamabad, the author interviewed a number of students and teachers from ten small and big madrassas belonging to different sects like Bareilwi, Deobandi, Shia and Ahle-Hadith. Around thirty mullahs of different mosques of Islamabad were also interviewed. The author supervised the thesis of two students, one did four months fieldwork in a madrassa in Rawalpindi, the other compared two mosques – one in urban and other in rural setting with a particular focus on their social role. Similarly, a number of students and employees of Quaid-i-Azam University belonging to different villages of the Punjab were interviewed to understand the dynamics of *biradari*, social position and change about the status of the mullahs living around. On the other side, two mullahs and a number of villagers hailing from different villages of Toba Tek Singh were also interviewed.

In a nutshell, main argument of the paper is that mullahs do not differ in considerable terms from the rest of the society. Coming from the low socio-economic strata of the society, they struggle their way like their *biradari* fellows who try to ascend the ladder of social hierarchy using all means including changing their sects or religious denominations. In the first place, a vast majority of them joins madrassa in absence of any other options available to them. In their professional life they continue to be treated as *kami* [Punjabi: people belonging to the artisan groups who are considered of low social standing]. The criticism against mullahs could be explained as follows:

- a. A part of the criticism against mullah owes to universal human propensity to differentiate and construct hierarchies.⁵
- b. People criticise in mullah their self i.e. the despised self recognized in mullah. Mullahs as representative of Islam have to be above humanly mistakes and people criticise them when they see the same vices in mullah as in themselves.
- c. Mullah is used as scapegoat by government — mullah as extremist and Pakistan as a moderate state, extremism verses enlightened moderation.
- d. Furthermore, it is argued that criticism against mullah is a strategy to deal with ambiguities and contradictions in religion and society. Mullah represents Islam, the religion of nearly ninety seven percent of the people of the Punjab. Religion, Islam, cannot be criticised but mullah can be. By demonising mullah people save their religion or ambiguity in their beliefs.

William Sax, an American anthropologist, compared two regions of India to explain how people of these regions differentiate i.e. emulate and repudiate each other. He maintained that difference making is a human universal and an anthropologist – a scholar from afar, the student of the exotic, a disciplined analyst of differences – is especially well placed to understand and describe those differences. He disagrees with Edward Said that human beings have a universal propensity to construct hierarchies based upon perceived differences among themselves.⁶ Sax contends that difference making involves a double movement, where the other is simultaneously emulated and repudiated, admired and despised, and that the source of this ambivalence is the recognition of Self in Other. That is to say, the other represents a kind of screen upon which both the despised and the desired aspects of the Self can be projected, so that the dialectics of sameness and difference

5 William S. Sax, "The Hall of Mirrors: Orientalism, Anthropology and the Other," *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 2 (1998): 292-301. Also see, W. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

6 Said, *Orientalism*.

is resolved into a kind of difference in sameness, the culturally particular apprehended only against the background of the generically human.⁷

The author applied this strategy of analysis on the data gathered about mullahs of the Punjab. The common point between both the studies is the issue at debate – religion, Hinduism in case of Sax and Islam through mullahs for this study. In contrast to Sax who is a foreigner in India – anthropologist from afar – the author comes from Punjab the area of focus of the study. Mullahs are a marginal group criticised by the rest of the society. Very few people from the general public make friendships with them – it is more a relationship of distance and respect.

The Others of Mullah

Highlighting the fact that difference making and criticizing is not one sided, mullahs also emulate and repudiate others including mullahs of other denominations. Extracts from an interview with Agha Mubarik, a Shia mullah from Islamabad, is reproduced here to give an idea of how mullahs construct the category of other. The author introduced himself as a professor from Quaid-i-Azam University, interested in understanding the life and work of mullahs in Pakistan, and had barely completed the introduction the remarks came:

So you came from Quaid-i-Azam University. Can you tell me what Pakistani Universities were doing? They have not been able to invent even a needle for this country. Do you have any name in the world? Tell me just one thing that the universities in Pakistan have contributed to. Look at the universities of the USA or Europe.

Some of the questions-answers are reproduced here for demonstration:

- Q. Do you also have section for *hifz* [Urdu: learning Quran by heart] at your madrassa?
- A. Unlike Sunni madrassa where only handicapped, dull, lower class and poor children are admitted, we take brilliant and the best children of our community and provide them with excellent facilities. We make use of

7 Sax, "The Hall of Mirrors".

modern methods of teaching here. We make pairs of students who learn together. There are cassette players in their rooms repeating their lessons all the time. They listen before going to bed and when they wake up that page is being played again. Only one page is learned in one day. The students have that page in their memory like a photograph.

- Q. Why some Shias call your madrassa 'Wahabi' (a puritanical sect found mainly in Saudi Arabia) among the Shias?
- A. These are illiterate people of our community who say such things. They prefer beating their chest for getting their sins forgiven. They misinterpret the symbols like *alam* [Urdu: Shia flag] or *zuljinah* [Urdu: Hussain's horse] and worship them. When we tell them the truth they call us 'Wahabi'.

The Lebenswelt and Worldview

Worldview has been defined as: "... the sum of ideas which an individual within a group and/or that group has of the universe in and around them. It attempts to define those ideas from the point of view of an individual holding them, from inside the culture rather than outside."⁸ Worldview according to W. T. Jones is a set of very wide-ranging vectors in that individual's belief space (a) that he learned early in life and that are not readily changed and (b) that have a determinate influence on much of his observable behaviour, both verbal and nonverbal, but (c) that he seldom or never verbalizes in the referential mode, though (d) they are constantly conveyed by him in expressive mode and as latent meanings.⁹

This paper argues that the worldview is formed and influenced by the Lebenswelt (nearest English translation is environment) of the people. The major factors that have an

8 *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 15, ed. David L. Sills "World View," by E. M. Mendelson (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Company, 1968), 576-79.

9 Jones, 1972: 83.

impact on the Lebenswelt of mullahs in the Punjab¹⁰ have been divided into three main categories i.e., the family background, the madrassa education and the environment at the workplace. It is assumed that whereas the first and the third factors were important to understand the overall life and working conditions of the mullahs in Punjab, the major factor influencing their worldview is madrassa. Along with the knowledge from the books — the basic syllabus known as *dars-e-nizami* is taught in all the madrassas of different sects. A teacher has a central role in the madrassa education. He is said to be a *rohani peshwa* [Urdu: spiritual leader]. Through education, a lasting *rohani taulaq* [Urdu: spiritual relationship] between a teacher and a student is established. The teacher's emphasis on *tarbiyat* could be translated into character building.¹¹ Nasir Amin, who has done fieldwork in a madrassa, notes three important elements of *tarbiyat* i.e. *akhlaq* [Urdu: mannerism and ethics], *shirkat* [Urdu: participation in religious rituals/functions organised by the school] and *tanqid* [Urdu: criticism on the wrong interpretations of Islam]. The most important component of *akhlaq* is *adab* which may be briefly translated as respect. Some very visible manifestations of the *adab* could be; not showing backs to the teacher and the books, or kissing the books and teacher's hands, touching the books with forehead, placing them against the heart or not putting them on the ground, etc. The *shirkat* and *tanqid* become the central values in the transfer of the *maslak* as well the main aspect of madrassa education.

Lebenswelt of a Punjabi Mullah

This section explores family background, madrassa education and workplace circumstances of the Punjabi

10 I would just like to mention that the relationship between the lebenswelt and worldview for mullahs should not be misunderstood in the negative sense like since the mullahs come from and live in these circumstances therefore they have a different worldview.

11 Nasir Amin, "Madrassa Education and Transition of Maslak" (M. Sc. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 1998), 11-13.

mullah as his lebenswelt. In madrassa education the focus is on syllabi, teaching methods and especially the transmission of the *maslak*. Conditions at the workplace consider the different social set-ups in which difference is made between the rural and urban settings.

Family Background

The family background includes the entire circumstances a mullah comes from such as the area of origin, type and position of his family in the society. The data gathered from different sources about regional background clearly shows that the madrassa students came from the low opportunity or comparatively underdeveloped areas. These include rain-fed areas of Northern Punjab like Rawalpindi, Chakwal, Attock and Kashmir. This was where nearly all the madrassa students and mullahs interviewed came from. The other major pockets were districts of Multan, Bahawalpur and D.G. Khan in the Southern Punjab. These are characterised by large landholdings. The madrassa students and mullahs came from the families of small landowners or landless peasants. In addition, majority of students came from the rural areas as was noted by Jamal Malik who had done an extensive study of madrassas in Pakistan.

The main areas of recruitment in Punjab are the Bahawalpur division, and the districts of Muzaffargarh and D.G. Khan. There is also an increasing number originating from the Divisions of Rawalpindi and Gujranwala... the examinees of the Deobandi school of thought originate primarily from rural areas.¹²

He further observes:

The candidates for graduation are mostly sons of small landowner or landless peasants, who are numerous in the districts characterized by large landholdings such as Sahiwal and Multan, D.G. Khan and Muzaffargarh. Like the

12 Jamal Malik, *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan* (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd, 1999), 236.

Deobandis, Brelwis also mostly originate from villages with less than 10,000 inhabitants.¹³

Hafiz Shabir, the *naib imam* [Urdu: deputy mullah] in an Islamabad mosque, said that the resident students of his madrassa came from Attock and Kashmir. He himself hails from a village in district Attock, so does the principle of this school. In his early school days, there was no government-run school in his village, and even now there is only one primary school. The other primary school was at a distance of five kilometers. There was no transport facility and his family could not even afford to buy a bicycle. The main source of his livelihood was agricultural land solely depended on rainfall. They were five brothers and two sisters. The elder brother of one of his friends was a student at a madrassa in Rawalpindi who assisted him to get admission there. Hafiz Shabir did not like that madrassa, so got admission in another, located in sector G-7, Islamabad. After one year of education at this madrassa, he started teaching Quran at peoples' homes to earn some money. Having acquired four years madrassa education, he became a Moazzan [Urdu: one who calls for prayers at the mosque] in Islamabad through the help of his teacher. He gets approximately seventy Dollars per month from the government and has a small apartment attached to mosque. He has performed Haj [Urdu: Pilgrimage] and is very happy. He has helped many young relatives and boys of his village to get admission to several madrassas in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The story of *khateeb* or *imam* [Urdu: who leads the prayer] of this mosque was very similar except that his inspiration came from meeting a mullah who came to give a sermon in his village. He joined madrassa after completing 10th grade in a government school. He got the present job directly after completing his madrassa education. In the meantime, he did Masters in Islamic studies privately. He is

13 Nadeem Malik, "Rs 5.7b Allocated for Madaris Reforms," *The News*, January 8, 2004, 245.

in grade nine (equal to a clerk) and gets approximately one hundred Dollars a month and also has a small house attached to this mosque. He is also the head of madrasa in this mosque. Getting madrasa education and becoming mullah has earned him a good name in his area of origin where a lot of his relatives still live. Maulana Hafiz Munsif said that he has established this madrasa to help people from poor areas like his to be educated and this way serve the people. He spends whatever time he could on the education of these students.

The question of *biradari* of the mullahs could not be placed directly so most of the information was collected indirectly and at random. If asked directly from those people who belong to the *kami biradari* they do not tell the truth and are offended by the question. Similarly, different areas have different meanings of the same *biradari*. Some people have changed their *biradari* when moving to the urban area. Very few people in the urban area know the *biradari* of their mosque mullah. The most commonly told *biradari* of the mullahs especially in the villages of the Central Punjab was *Kami*, Maulanee, Syeds, and Arains. Among the different *kami biradaris*, the most common was of weaver followed by potters, then oilmen and cobblers. Among the farmers, Arain *biradari* was more frequently attached to the profession of mullah. During the discussion, it was revealed that a lot of young mullahs came from the urban madrassas. Furthermore, the status of mullah and his education has also been improved over the last decade or so, as the number of farmers in this profession has been increased. These educated mullahs seem to get more respect. Besides, the traditional *sepi* [Punjabi: a system of the distribution of goods and services in the villages] system is on the decline. According to this system mullahs, like other artisans, were also paid from the crops occasionally. In many villages, mullahs are being paid monthly salary.

It is not only that mullahs came from *kami biradaris* but that they were treated like those. It was also confirmed by mullahs the researcher could talk to, for instance, Maulana

Syed Muhammad Sadiq Hussain Shah, one of the two mullahs in the village of our research, explained that the villagers change their mullah every two years or so like they do with their *kamis* if they do not like them. Every now and then he is made to appear before the *panchayat* [Urdu: council of village elders and respectables] by factions who were opposing his appointment. For a mullah to survive in a village is required to get involved in village politics which means favouring one or the other strong *biradari*.

As far as the question about the family of a mullah being religious or not was concerned, the information did not deviate strongly from the rest of the society. The mullahs shared future plans of their children (particularly sons) in a number of ways. Majority would like their children to attend both the religious and secular education, but not to adopt mullah as a profession. The mullahs repeatedly uttered: “no body likes to be a mullah or to be the son of a mullah”. From the cases interviewed there were examples where one of the sons took over mosque/madrassa from the father. In two cases in Islamabad the daughters of the mullahs having completed their woman madrassa education started female madrassas.

Further assessing the family background of mullah, it would be interesting to mention some of the commonly cited reasons for sending the child to madrassa. Trouble child i.e. does not go to school, is not attentive to his studies, does not perform well, is not interested in school education, etc. is on the top of the list. There are parents who send their children to madrassa out of desire to achieve paradise. There were also cases that the parents who were deprived of children promised to devote their son to religious education if they get one. There were also children who decided on their own to go for religious education as they were impressed by a mullah’s speech or went to madrassa, later on, due to the poor economic circumstances of the family.

Transfer of *Maslak*

Nasir Amin¹⁴ who did fieldwork in a madrassa in the city of Gujrat (North Punjab) notes three important elements of the character building (*tarbiyat*):

- i. Mannerism known *akhlaq*
- ii. Participation called *shirkat*
- iii. Criticism called *tanqid*

The most important component of *akhlaq* or mannerism is *adab* which could be translated as “surrender”. It includes further manners of sitting, dressing, dining and *adab* for the Holy Prophet and religious rituals, etc. The mullahs were unanimous in their views that *adab* is the key to knowledge i.e. ‘no catch without surrender’.

Similarly, the other important element of *tarbiyat* is *shirkat* that is participation in different functions organised by the madrassa. These functions naturally differ from sect to sect like shrine visits by Barelwis, participation in the missionary activities of Tablighee Jamaat among Deobandis and mourning meeting (*majlis*) among the Shias. Nasir Ameen provided a long list of monthly celebrations at Jamia Qamarul Aloom, a madrassa belonging to the Chishtia Sufi order of the Barelwi Maslak. These included cooking and distribution of prayed food and recitation of *khatam-o-naat* i.e. memorial service on the death anniversary of the Chishtia Sufis or the birth day of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the visits to important regional shrines, etc.

Tanqid as the third constituent element of *tarbiyat* includes criticism of wrong interpretations of Islam with references from the Holy Quran, Hadiths, Imams or other religious authorities. Nasir Amin noted that the teachers criticise other religious sects while teaching and explaining different *surahs* and hadiths and that teacher and students sometimes collectively curse the other religious groups like Qadianis.

¹⁴ Amin, “Madrassa Education and Transition of Maslak”.

Ethnicity, Local Politics and Mullah in the Village

Kinship, *biradari*, local politics and face to face relations dominate village life. The mullahs are relatively well-paid in the local context, but are treated as *kamis* i.e. quite low on social hierarchy and that their jobs are insecure. The successful mullahs try to stabilize their position by exploiting the *biradari* divides through creating their own followings — very often among the young people — organizing madrassas, or even by changing their own *maslak*. A general shift could be noted from traditional mullahs which included even Sayyed [Urdu: descendents of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)] towards madrassa graduates who get fixed monthly salaries instead of *sepi*.

The Village Mosque

Since mullah and mosque are closely related, therefore, for a better understanding of the village mullah, it is important to know something about the views of the people about the mosque. People address the mosque in the village as *maie maseeti* [Punjabi: the mother mosque] as if a being with holy powers. People wish their desires to be fulfilled and promise something for the mosque in return, like on a shrine. In earlier times, people used to light lamps or send oil for mosque lamps. Most of the village mosques had corners reserved for the oil containers and the mosque earned from the sale of this oil. The women would wish to broom the mosque if their desires are fulfilled (women in villages generally are not allowed go to the mosques). The mosques are bigger, more beautiful and impressive constructions than any other house in the village. The tall minarets have loudspeakers that are used for *azan* [Urdu: call for prayers], and announcement of common village interests and the money donations to the mosque. Besides offering a place for praying, the village mosque also performs a number of social functions related to three important life cycles; rituals of birth, marriage and death. Birth, especially of a male child of an important villager, is announced on the mosque loudspeaker along with the donation to the mosque. Mullah may be requested to announce *azan* in the ears of the new born. In

a wedding ceremony, before proceeding to the bride's place groom visits the village mosque. The major ceremony i.e *nikkah* [Urdu: marriage contract] is also conducted by mullah. Similarly, he mainly performs the death rituals. The wooden platforms where dead bodies are given final bath and prepared for burial are kept in the mosque. The bed for carrying dead bodies to the graveyard is also provided by the mosque. Mullah also leads prayer for the dead and subsequent several death related rituals and ceremonies.

Mullah and Biradarism in the Village Chack No. 547 GB

It seems to be a relatively simple village having a single *biradari* — all jats — and only one religious sect (Barelwi). But a closer study shows that the village is divided into a number of *goot* also known as *lall* [Punjabi: extended families]. In case of a conflict, new groups and coalitions are formed but almost always on *biradari* or *goot* lines. In some multi-*biradari* villages the different *biradaris* have their own mosques and mullahs and in some cases *biradaris* even adhere to different religious sects. *Biradari* plays an important role in making and supporting a particular mullah or mosque in the village.

Maulana Syed Muhammad Sadiq Hussain Shah¹⁵, 22 years old, is one of the two mullahs in this village. He has completed a tenth grade in normal school and did his four years of *dars-e-nizami* equivalent to bachelors from a Madressa. He says poems both on the worldly and religious topics. His father is a mullah in another village near Faisalabad. He has four brothers but none except him chose the profession of their father. His friends including his brothers make fun of him for becoming a mullah. He got this job two years back for which he was asked to deliver a Friday sermon. He is paid in kind from the crops at the time of harvest, monetary donations during Friday sermons and on the occasions of the two *Eids* [Urdu: main religious festivals of the Muslims]. Furthermore, he gets special donations on the occasion of marriage, completion of the

15 *Mullahs are famous for long names carrying different titles.*

Quran learning or other happy events like the returning of villagers from abroad. Then he gets food when people cook and distribute like on Thursdays, the 11th of lunar month or for the memory of the deceased relatives. He has been given a small apartment adjacent to the mosque. His duties include teaching Quran to the village children, leading the prayers, giving sermons on Fridays, writing charms for success; illness, evil eye, a buffalo not giving milk and a weeping child etc.

This is a divided village as far as the mosque and mullah is concerned. There used to be only one mosque in the village some five years ago. The mosque was comparatively simple and the attendance used to be low. Some of the families whose sons had gone abroad, especially one who was in America, sent a lot of money back home and part of it was dedicated to the mosque. The family also became more religious and regular visitor to the mosque. Another important person named Naji (Nazir from Chadhair *biradari*) who was known for drinking and adultery etc. turned his ways and became a very religious person. He grew a large beard, became regular attendant at the mosque and even took responsibilities like cleaning the mosque, calling *azan*, collecting mosque donations and making their announcements in the loudspeaker. Many of the old mosque visitors did not like his taking the charge of the mosque and playing the leading role.

Subsequently, it was decided to construct a new mosque which should be a better representative of the village status. During fund raising and construction activities the differences between various factions emerged. The final blow to the unity came with the local government elections. The mullah was accused of being involved in politics. Some blamed him for belonging to the Deobandi sect and one even accused him of giving shelter to dangerous people, wearing shuttlecocks, recognisable by their feet. He was even beaten up once by the member of one group and was asked to leave the village. A newly rich-turned-religious person — Hadayat, a trader who was also famous for using unfair

means — offered free place to mullah for a new mosque-cum-madrassa. He now advocates for new mosque and old mullah. He was supported by Azam and his group who was the candidate for the Union Council and mainly represented the artisan group and newly rich turned farmers. The other group mainly consisted of village farmers. The village was divided not on religious grounds rather on political and to some extent ethnic differences. One mullah and mosque came to be known by the name of the trader who allocated the place sometimes also called *wahabi* (actually *deobandi*) mosque. Interestingly, each mullah separately got more money individually than the one mullah in the united village. The active members of each mosque campaigned openly and asked the support of their relatives, *biradaris* and political affiliates for money. The number of mosque attendees also increased manifold. Some of the old mosque attending members stopped going to any of the two mosques blaming the newcomers to the mosque having a corrupt past. Several confrontations took place between the two mullahs.

Parties, Madrassas, Pressure Groups and the Urban Mullah

The urban setting, Islamabad, where the author conducted part of the interviews is different from rural settings with respect to its social structure and autonomy of mullah. In comparison to the kinship based and face to face society in the rural area, the urban population is anonymous with people hardly knowing their neighbours. They work in many different offices and professions. Many come to the mosque, say their prayers and leave afterwards without much interaction. Most live in rented houses and move to other area after sometime. According to Rana, there were 194 mosques/madrassas in Islamabad. A serious problem here is the illegally constructed mosques.¹⁶ A mosque once in operation is seldom demolished. According to a serious

16 Muhammad Amir Rana, trans. Saba Ansari *A to Z of Jehadi Organizations in Pakistan* (Mishal, 2004) 507.

survey more than 50 percent of the total mosques in Islamabad are illegally constructed — whosoever finds a suitable place free and is able to make a structure there has the mosque. There are many mosques in Islamabad functioning under Awkaf administration that is responsible for the construction and part of maintenance expenses. The mullah called khateeb and a deputy known as muazan [Urdu: one who calls for prayer] are awkaf i.e. government employees. Every mosque has a mosque committee consisting of three elected members i.e. the chairman, the general secretary, and a treasurer. The mullah is the honorary but the only permanent member and the *de facto* chief of the mosque. Like other government employees the mullah or the muazan cannot be dismissed or transferred without any valid reasons — this is one of the major differences compared with the village mullah. The elections for the committee are held every three years. This committee initially helps awkaf administration to identify the mullah and muazan for employment and later on for running the affairs of the mosque.

Mullah as Despised Other

Turning to the explanation of criticism given in the introduction of this paper, the first point was that part of this criticism is due to ‘...universal human propensity to differentiate.’ The author would like to point out that the mullahs as well as the general public focuses on the construction of differences. For instance, Mullah Agha's first attack was on the universities and on the government education system. He emphasised the differences between madrassas and universities. Perhaps this was unintentionally initiated by the author because he introduced himself as a university professor.

Agha, furthermore, distinguished the Shia madrassas from the Sunni madrassas by telling that Shias do not take handicapped and abandoned children and that Shias use modern teaching methods. The criticism of the other sects which is implicit in this statement was another important

point, common in the interviews with the mullahs. Furthermore, Agha distinguished Shia mullahs from the illiterate Shia public that takes symbols like *alam* and *zuljina* for the reality. This was also not uncommon with other mullahs who criticized the illiterate people of their own sect. Summarizing this point it could be said that it is not only others who criticise mullahs, but mullahs also differentiate; criticise and inferiorize others including mullahs.

The second point was that the general public criticizes the mullahs for not being able to match their religious ideals. The mullahs are criticized, as has been mentioned in the introduction, for changing *maslak*, being part of intrigues, telling lies and abuse of children etc. These menaces are despised but are not uncommon phenomena in the Punjabi society. The general public criticizes mullah for not matching with the ideals of society — the model of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) or the first four righteous Caliphs of Islam. In short, people expect that a mullah being a representative of Islam should embody the rules and values of Islam better than the society in general does.

The Worldview of the Mullah

In order to collect data about their worldview, mullahs belonging to four major sects in the Punjab (*Barelwi*, *Deobandi*, *Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Shia*) were interviewed on the following three issues:

- a. Relations between Muslim and non-Muslim countries,
- b. Jihad and the forced conversion of non-Muslims to Islam,
- c. Education of mullah's children.

These three questions were selected keeping in view the present national/international scenario. The first question was designed to understand mullah's views about the foreign policy. The question of jihad deals with what mullahs think about it and whether they aimed at the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam through jihad? The last question clarifies his views about the modern education. The last question relates to the debates of reforms in madrassa education. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to reproduce the

detailed answers to all these questions. The main points reproduced here should help initiate a discussion and give some idea of mullahs' views on these topics. The relations with the non-Muslim countries desired by the mullahs varied from absolutely no relations to cordial relations. Mullah Riaz, for example, said: "We should not have any relations with the West." Mullah Mushtaq was of the view that "Our first preference should be good relations with the Muslims and we should also have cordial relations with the others." Mullah Ishaq said: "We are clearly told that Jews and Christians cannot be our friends. Therefore, the problem is not whether we want to have good relations with the West but whether the West wants to have good relations with us. Look at America; what it has done with Iraq, Iran, and Palestine and what it did with Pakistan at the time of Indo-Pakistan War."

Mullah Saleem compared international relations with that of relations among neighbours. "In Islam, distinction is made between three types of neighbours. The first category is of neighbours who are relatives and Muslim. The second are non-relatives but Muslims, and finally there is the non-relative, non-Muslim neighbour. Though the first two types are given preference in Islam but the rights of neighbours irrespective of relation and religion are very clearly marked in Islam."

In response to the question about jihad and forced conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, the mullahs collectively disapproved jihad and the use of force for conversion. It was very often said in conversations: "there is no compulsion in religion; in the sense nobody should be forced to change her/his religion." Mullah Sohail said that:

Jihad is of many types and the greatest jihad is against one's own self. It is also jihad to say the truth against the ruler in his presence. Jihad against non-Muslims is not to be based on aggression but defence. Jihad is a must for every Muslim, if attacked by non-Muslims or if there is a danger and evidence that the enemy is preparing an attack or if the enemy stops you from preaching and practicing your religion. It is jihad to fight against aggressors in Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya and Kashmir and wherever Muslims are being killed unjustly. But killing innocent people — children, women and

those who are in no way involved in any aggression — cannot be called jihad.

Mullah Shahid Nafees was of the following view: “Killing each other and killing innocent people is not jihad. If a mullah through his speech and emotions is able to convince a group of young people to go and fight foreigners and these people die there, they will not be martyrs, neither would they achieve paradise. We first need to become good Muslims and our deeds are to be for the sake of God alone.” Referring to the third question, not a single mullah opposed modern education. They quoted the famous tradition of the Holy Prophet (PBUH): “Get education even if you have to go to China.” The mullahs also referred to another well known event in which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) ordered the release of those prisoners of war who would teach Muslims how to read and write. Almost all mullahs told that their children were attending modern schools.

Sameness in Difference

In the analysis of the mullahs' responses to the questions, there was no difference based on their sectarian affiliations though sectarian differences were among the most important contents of madrassa education. The answers relating to relations with non-Muslim countries and jihad were very similar to the views held by the general public except that mullahs made specific references to the verses of the Quran and Hadith. Going through these responses, one felt like reading a popular Pakistani Urdu newspaper. Most interesting were the mullahs' statements about the education of their own children. Not a single mullah opposed modern education for his children. All those who could afford to do that even sent their children to English-medium schools. Like other people they want their children to become doctors, engineers and the like. The general public frequently criticizes mullahs for opposing reforms of the madrassa-curricula on one hand but sending their own children to secular schools

on the other. It is supposed that the mullahs fear losing control, jobs and income from these madrassas because they themselves are not trained in 'modern' subjects like English, Maths and General Science that are proposed by the reform plans.

Finally, one can say that the mullah may be different as far as his education (madrassa), family background and working conditions are concerned. But his views on important issues ranging from foreign policy to domestic matters like modern education are very similar to the rest of the society. Saying this, the author neither intends to maintain that mullahs are not extremists/fundamentalists nor affirms that the state, the people and Islam are not moderate. In fact, the mullahs interviewed, covered a broad spectrum, ranging from extremism to moderation. The same range of views can also be found in the general public.

Conclusion

Sax concludes his paper with an answer to the question "where does it leave us?" by saying "it leaves us stranded in the hall of mirrors, with no way out".¹⁷ He holds the view that difference making is something that all humans share. According to him, it is a matter of sheer convention and does not necessarily entail inferiorization of the 'Other', whether by anthropologists or by natives. In his views "the other represents a kind of screen upon which both the despised and the desired aspects of the Self can be projected, so that the dialectics of sameness and difference is resolved into a kind of difference in sameness".¹⁸

Agreed that the difference making is human, but the author tends to disagree with the proposition that

17 Sax, "The Hall of Mirrors," 299.

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difference making by natives and anthropologists does not involve the inferiorization of the other. Inferiorization is the most dominant aspect of othering/difference making as is seen in the case of mullahs of the Punjab. The mullahs were despised by Sufis, by educated persons and by the general public and so were never admired. Part of their being repudiated was certainly due to the universal human tendency to differentiate others and hence a matter of sheer convention, but a very significant aspect of this difference making was vilification leading to inferiorization. In a nutshell, inferiorization is one of the important — if not the most important — aspect of othering or difference making by the general public.