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PERCEPTION-REALITY-VISION-SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

PROFILE OF SUNNI TEHREEK

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RESEARCH BRIEF



Introduction

The Sunni Tehreek (ST) is a Sunni religio-organization of Pakistan. The party follows the Barelvi school of thought. The organization was formed in 1990 to prevent what the ST describes as ‘the capturing of the mosques and madrassas of the Barelvi school of thought’ by Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith groups.

The concept of re-taking the mosques and madrassas defined their main motto, which was ‘Jawaniyan lutaaingai, masjidain bachayeingai [We will sacrifice our lives to protect our mosques]. It is part of the Sunni Ittehad Council, an alliance of Barelvi political parties. In 2009, the group’s leader, Muhammad Sarwat Ejaz Qadri, also formed the Pakistan Inquilab Tehreek as a political wing of the organization. In 2012, the party was converted into a political party with the name of Pakistan Sunni Tehreek (PST).

History

Salim Qadri, hailing from Karachi’s Saeedabad, started driving an auto rickshaw for livelihood after his matriculation examination. When Dawat-e-Islami (Del) was established in 1980, Salim Qadri became the leader of Del’s Saeedabad wing. His enthusiastic services soon offered him a position in Del and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP). In 1988, he stood as JUP’s candidate for PA-75 in the Sindh Assembly, but he was defeated. After the elections, Salim Qadri quit his previous occupation and started a business of fabric and poultry farm. The ST was established by Salim Qadri in 1990 after he quit the Del. In establishing the ST, Saleem Qadri was joined by Abbas Qadri, Iftikhar Bhatti, Dr. Abdul Qadeer, Akram Qadri, Abdul Aziz Chishti, Shadab Akmal, Waheed Qadri, and Saleem Raza.

Saleem Qadri was not educated in a Barelvi Mosque and was also not a religious scholar. He along with his other two successors were businessmen and were the disciples of the Ilyas Qadri, founder of Dawat-e-Islami. Therefore, the three ST’s leader belong to the Qadiriyya Sufi Order.

The ST appeared in response to the growing influence of Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi organizations. The group received support from Jamat Ahl-e-Sunnat, Anjuman Naojawan-e-Islam and the leaders of JUP. Barkati Foundation was funding the ST to safeguard the rights of Barelvis. Despite the support of various groups, the ST described itself as non-political organization and emphasized on the following four points:-

- To safeguard the interests of the Ahl-e-Sunnat
- To protect Ahl-e-Sunnat mosques
- To protect common people from false beliefs
- Handing over of the Ahl-e-Sunnat mosques and shrines by the administration to the Barelvis.

The ST complained of the monopoly over the administration, government posts, and religious and government institutions by the Ahle-e-Hadith and Deobandi. The group also complained about the minimal representation of the Barelvi sect. The organization was of the opinion that Ahl-e-Sunnat cannot achieve their rights till they adopt the same tactics as employed by Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith organizations.

The organization demonstrated its first show of strength on 18 December 1992 when it organized a rally at MA Jinnah Road in Karachi. The purpose of that rally was to exert pressure on the administration to handover Masjid Noor (Ranchorh Line) to it. The rally quickly turned violent and several cars were set on fire. Consequently, dozens of people were wounded and 34 ST workers were arrested. This incident brought ST in the public limelight. After this incident, the ST increased its attack on Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi Masjids in Sindh and Punjab. Moreover, armed ST members fought with SeS activities in different parts of Karachi including North Karachi and Baldia Town.

On 18th May 2001, the ST chief Salim Qadri was killed along with five other. The death of ST supremo resulted in the breakout of sectarian clashes in Karachi. Hundreds of young Barelvis, some of them masked, stormed into the streets of Karachi. They set on fire and threw stones at cars. SeS was also involved in the sectarian clashes and several Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith madaris and mosques were attacked. One of the killers of Salim Qadri was also killed in the cross-firing. The killer was later proved to be a SeS activist. Qadri’s funerals gathered around 20–30 thousand people.

Salim Qadri was succeeded by Abbas Qadri. Following the assassination of Salim Qadri, the ST continued to gain strength in the Karachi. The network of the organization spread rapidly over 14 districts of the country, but Karachi remained the operational hub of the organization.

In 2002, the ST leadership decided to participate in the 2002 elections to adopt a political stature. The ST also decided to participate in the elections in order to serve Ahl-e-Sunnat even in politics. The party started its political journey with tree planting campaign in Karachi.

On 11 April 2006, several top leaders of ST including chief Abbas Qadri and deputy chief were killed in a bomb attack during a congregation at Nishtar Park, Karachi. 57 people were killed and 125 persons were wounded in the attack, which was planned by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and SeS. The ST views MQM as the invisible behind the attack.

After the whole leadership of ST was killed, a six-member committee was formed which included:-

1. Shahid Ghauri
2. Engineer Abdur Rehman
3. Qari Khalil-ur-Rehman
4. Shahzad Munir
5. Sarwat Ejaz
6. Khalid Zia

Sarwat Ejaz Qadri becomes the new president of the organization. Ejaz Qadri was born in Quetta on July 14, 1961. He is a son of Pakistan Navy's civilian employee. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from the University of Karachi and a diploma in Mechanical Engineering from Government College of Technology, Karachi. Before joining the ST, he was a member of Del. He also went to Japan on scholarship, while working in the Japanese company Pak Suzuki.

Following the Nishtar Park attack, the organization becomes more visibly armed. Experts believe that the after the killing of its top leadership, the organization cannot be seen as moderate outfit anymore. On 28th February 2009, ST's chief Sarwat Ejaz Qadri announced the formation of Pakistan Inqilabi Tehreek, the political wing of the party. Qadri said that his party would continue its struggle for Muslims and Pakistan. He also criticized the forcible implementation of terrorists' interpretation of Shariah in Swat Valley. At the same time, he also condemned all terror activities perpetrated under the name of Islam and vowed for a stable Pakistan. He also went on to criticize Deobandi leaders, accusing them of being sponsored by Indian intelligence agencies and being involved in terrorism.

In following years, the ST was perceived as an ally by some political forces which opposed religious extremism and militancy. In 2009, then Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi claimed that ST was focused on preventing the spread of Talibanization. The organization has also arranged several demonstrations to condemn TTP and other terror groups. The ST's clerics have issued an edict stating that suicide attacks are not permissible in Islam. Dr. Sarfraz Naeemi of Darul Naeemia, one of ST's clerics, was assassinated in June 2009 because of the edict.

In April 2011, after resigning from the post of foreign minister, Qureshi visited the ST's headquarters and announced the creation of a working group of Ahl-e-Sunnat scholars to propose ways to counter terrorism.

Internal rifts

Muhammad Bilal Qadri, the son of ST founder Saleem Qadri, has formed his own faction after developing difference with Ejaz Qadri and others. Meanwhile, Ejaz Qadri heads the powerful faction of ST which has renamed itself as the Pakistan Sunni Tehreek (PST).

Central Secretariat

The central secretariat of the ST is in a building at the Baba-e-Urdu Road in Karachi. On the other hand, Ahl-e-Sunnat Khidmat Committee (ASKC), was also engaged in building new mosques and madaris in Karachi, Hyderabad and other parts of Sindh. The ASKC has additionally established a hospital on a 2000-yard plot in Saeedabad, Karachi. Several

departments were also established for the welfare of people, like ambulance centre, computer institute, students' assistance, jahez (dowry) fund, and food distribution programs under the supervision of ASKC. A mosque and a madrassa are also next to the secretariat.

Structure

The party has 350 offices all over Pakistan and claims to have hundreds of thousands of people as its members. Despite having such huge membership, the party has failed to win even a single seat in the parliament. Pakistan Sunni Tehreek's main structure include:

- Ahl-e-Sunnat Khidmat Foundation (Trust) [ST's Welfare organization]
- Justice Islamic Front [Legal Wing]
- Pakistan Islamic Student Federation [Student Wing]
- Islamic Scholar's Board (Scholars' Board)
- Labour Wing
- Ladies Wing

Each new member of the party is first introduced to numerous speeches of Saleem Qadri, known also as the voice of the Ahl-e-Sunnat. Afterwards, the profile of the member is assessed and then he sent to any of the departments of the ST. The departments include:-

- Politics
- Welfare
- Preaching (Tabligh)

Preaching Department

The objective of the preaching department is to educate members in religious matters. The functions of this department include:-

- To Take Quranic lessons
- To know the commentaries (Tafsir) of the Quran
- To study the translation of the Quran in Urdu
- To organize religious events such as Milad-e-Nabi
- To organize for religious causes such as Tahafuz namuz-i risalat (The protection of the prestige of the Holy Prophet PBUH).
- To propose 15 days of religious education at the provincial and city levels.

Welfare Department

This department is constituted by the Service committee (khidmat), which is located in the premises of the ST's headquarters in Karachi. The finance for this department comes from almsgiving (zakat), charity, the sale of leather from sacrificial animals during Eid-ul-Adha and numerous other forms of charities.

The department also takes care of orphans. It has also created a computer institute. The department also established religious schools (madrassas) to educate poor children and has built a hospital in Karachi. The department is also responsible for paying the dowry of future brides, distributes wheat and rice to the poor.

Leadership

Name	Tenure
Salim Qadri	1990 – 18th May 2001
Abbas Qadri	May 2001 – 11th April 2006
Sarwat Ejaz Qadri	April 2006 - onwards

Objectives

The objectives of the party include:-

- Protecting the sanctity of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)
- Protecting the sanctity of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)
- Protecting the sanctity of the saints
- Protecting the mosques of Ahl-e-Sunnat
- Controlling the Department of Oqaaaf (Islamic Affairs)
- Protecting the rights of Barelvis
- Protecting the Two-Nation theory

Manifesto

In January 2012, ST's leader Muhammad Sarwat Ejaz Qadri announced the conversion of the party into a political party during a rally in Karachi. The party envisions to make a Pakistan an 'Islamic welfare state'. The party's chief has said that the party if elected, would work on the welfare of poor people and for extremism-rid Pakistan.

The party chief has enumerated four key points of his party's manifesto which include:-

- Education
- Faith
- Tolerance
- Equality

The party is determined to get Pakistan rid of

- Terrorism
- Sectarianism
- Foreign intervention
- Ethnicity
- Corruption
- Inflation
- Gas and Electricity Load Shedding

The party enumerates the following as its priorities:-

- Correct use of natural resources of the country
- Rid of foreign debt
- Revving the Railways, PIA, Steel Mills and other government organizations

The mission of the party includes:-

- A unified and qualitative educational system
- Immediate and low-cost justice
- Protection of the rights of labors, traders, industrialists and minorities

Financing

The affluent Memon and Gujarati communities of Karachi provide financial support to the ST. The finance for the party also come from almsgiving (zakat), charity, the sale of leather from sacrificial animals during Eid-ul-Adha and numerous other forms of charities. The party also accumulated funds through extortion.

Relationship with MQM

The ST has a strong connection with MQM because both organizations have common enemies. Many elements of ST were former MQM activists, who joined ST following the army's crackdown on the MQM in the early 1990s.

The strong connection between ST and MQM was of a shorter duration. The ST emerge as a challenger to MQM in October 2002 elections, following the decision of ST leadership to adopt a political posture after January 2002. Consequently, both parties were involved in turf war because both parties drew their support from the Urdu-speaking communities. The ST also views MQM as the invisible hand behind the 2006 Nishtar Park attack.

Involvement in criminal and terror activities

ST is one of the several groups involved in extortion and violence in Karachi. The activities of the group have been monitored for several years. In January 2002, the ST was being placed on the watch list by the then President Gen (R) Pervez Musharraf. The group was placed on the watch list of interior ministry through a notification issued in January 2007. Eversince, the organization remained under the watch of law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

According to US Consulate cable dated April 22, 2009, released by Wikileaks, the ST is military powerful because of the influx of MQM-Haqiqi gunmen into the party after the government crackdown.

In a report sent to police by intelligence agencies about extortionists, it was stated that out of mentioned 48 extortionists, 19 belong to the ST. During the hearing of Karachi law and order implementation case by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, it was mentioned several times that the ST was involved in targeting killings and extortion. In March 2013, a report submitted by Inspector General (IG) Sindh Police to the Supreme Court's Karachi registry included a list of 224 target killers arrested since 2011, 38 of which were affiliated with the ST.

In November last year, intelligence agencies prepared a list of 86 key suspects who have remained involved in criminal activities despite the start of Karachi operation. Out of the 86 suspects, 11 belong to the ST.

Brief Timeline of ST's involvement in criminal and terror activities

January 2002 - The ST was being placed on the watch list by the then President Gen (R) Pervez Musharraf.

January 2007 - The group was placed on the watch list of interior ministry through a notification.

30th June 2011 - Clash between ST and Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), formerly known as SeS, claimed three lives and wounded 12 others in Godhra area of Karachi.

1st July 2011 - A scuffle between activists of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and ST over a mosque in Karachi's Landhi area resulted in the death of a person and wounded almost a dozen others. Officials said that the mosque, Jama Masjid Ummul Qura, belongs to the Jamiat-i-Ahle Hadith and was held by JuD, an Ahle Hadith organization. Furthermore, activists of SeS and ST exchanged fire over the control of a hospital in Karachi's Godhra area killing seven activists and wounding seven others.

18th August 2011 - The armed clash between ST and SeS claimed two lives and wounded four others in Karachi's Godhra area.

11th September 2011 - Sindh Rangers seized arms of the police guards at ST's headquarters.

7th October 2011 - The ST's head office was raided twice in a day. Central leader Shahid Ghauri and a member of ST's rabita committee Mobin Qadri were arrested with six others. Sindh Rangers also raided ST chief's residence in the early morning.

14th October 2011 - Frontier Constabulary (FC) and the police destroyed an ST's office, used for terrorist activities, in

Karachi's Godhra Colony.

5th September 2013 – ST's headquarters was raided for the first time since the start of Karachi operation. Several ST activists were arrested but later released.

17th June 2015 - Sindh Rangers raided the ST headquarters and arrested several activists of the party.

19th June 2015 - Sindh Rangers raided the ST headquarters for the third time since the start of Karachi Operation and seized ST's records related to Fitra and Zakat collection.

22nd June 2015 – Sindh Rangers briefly detained ST's chief and central leader Shahid Ghauri. The leaders visited Sindh Rangers headquarters for the release of detained activists of the party.

23rd June 2015 - Rangers released details of accused criminals arrested during the 17th June raid. The spokesman of the paramilitary force issued their names along with a charge-sheet. [See Table 1]

6th July 2015 - The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) arrested three activists of the PST who have been involved in target killings and extortions.

26th March 2016 - Four ST activists attacked singer-turned-evangelist Junaid Jamshed in Islamabad.

No	Name	Alias	Date of Detained	Charges
1	Muhammad Alam	Baba	17th June 2015	He was wanted in 15 murder cases. He is believed to be involved in armed clashes with MQM. He was also accused of extortion and land grabbing.
2	Muhammad Jawwad Qadri	Waja	17th June 2015	He was accused of 14 murders. He was also accused of involvement in extortion activities in Lyari with Uzair Baloch's gangs.
3	Zubair Ali		17th June 2015	He was wanted in 13 killings and three attempted murder cases. Zubair was also involved in street crimes, extortion and abduction cases.
4	Muhammad Sulam	Mirchi	17th June 2015	He was involved in 11 cases of killing. Apart from killing, he was also involved in kidnapping for ransom, extortion and torching properties.
5	Muhammad Akram	Akarmi Kala	17th June 2015	He was wanted in seven cases of murder, extortion and aerial firing.
6	Farhan	Papa	17th June 2015	He was involved in six murders. He was also involved in extortion and armed clashes with MQM. He had been jailed from 2008 to 2010 for murder.
7	Shakeel Ahmed	Fauji	17th June 2015	He was involved in target killing, extortion, torching vehicles and aerial firing.
8	Muhammad Arif	Mashoori	17th June 2015	They were involved in extortion and forcefully receiving Zakat
9	Imran Saadi	Noorani	17th June 2015	
10	Muhammad Noorul Aalam		17th June 2015	
11	Muhammad Rizwan	Guddu	17th June 2015	He was wanted in a murder case. He was also involved in illegal power connections syndicate. Rizwan was in charge of STs arsenal.

Table 1 - The details of activists arrested from the ST's headquarters by Rangers on 17th June 2015

Stance on Blasphemy Issue

The ST has been very vocal in expressing its stance on blasphemy issue. On the issue of blasphemy, the ST has also found common ground with like-minded groups like JUP. The ST sees the protection of the prestige of Holy Prophet (PBUH) as

one of its main objectives. The party led several violent protests during the Danish cartoon controversy and 2012 the blasphemous film.

In December 2014, ST registered a blasphemy case against singer-turned-preacher Junaid Jamshed. He was accused of making blasphemous remarks about the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his wife Hazrat Ayesha (RA). The party also launched sit-ins and demonstrations in Karachi to demand Jamshed's arrest.

Mumtaz Qadri Issue

Mumtaz Qadri was a bodyguard of Salman Taseer, the former governor of Punjab province. Qadri assassinated Taseer in Islamabad in January 2011. During his trial, he said that Taseer opposed Pakistan's blasphemy laws by supporting Christian woman Asia Bibi, who was charged with allegedly desecrating Islam's holy book, the Quran. In January 2011, while addressing a rally in Lahore, Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) Chairman Fazal Karim announced that ST would provide legal assistance to Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of former Punjab Governor Salman Taseer. The party even threatened Taseer's daughter.

The Anti-terrorism court (ATC) sentenced Qadri to death in October 2011. ST strongly criticized the verdict of the ATC and termed it as un-Islamic. The party was even willing to pay Rs. 200 million to Taseer's heirs as blood money. In following years, ST and other link-minded parties continued their protests over the issue of Mumtaz Qadri.

On 29th February this year, Mumtaz Qadri was hanged. Following his execution, the ST has taken to streets several times to protest the hanging of Taseer's assassin. On 27th March, around 25,000 people attended the chehllum of Mumtaz Qadri in Rawalpindi's Liaquat Bagh. After which more than 10,000 charged protestors, under the ST's organized rally, enter the federal capital, damaging buildings and setting fire to the metro station, containers and buses. The protestors, while staging a sit-in in front of Parliament, issued a list of 10 demands under the banner of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Ya Rasool (SAW). The demands include:-

- The unconditional release of all Sunni clerics and leaders booked on various charges, including terrorism and murder
- The recognition of Mumtaz Qadri as a martyr
- The conversion of Qadri's Adiala Jail cell into a national heritage site
- The assurances that blasphemy laws will not be amended
- The removal of Ahmadis and other non-Muslims who are working in government departments.
- The execution of blasphemy accused Aasia Bibi

More than 700 protestors were picked up from different areas of the federal capital and were sent to various jails in Punjab. Four cases were registered against 501 religious workers, including their leadership, under the Anti-Terrorism Act. The four-day sit-in ended after successful negotiation between the federal government and protestors.

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