

The change is manifested in several different ways. Women, including the newly-wed, remove their jewellery, their bangles and flashy clothes:

The hair is unloosed . . . and allowed to flow in disorder about the person; the coloured pyjamaahs (loose trousers) and deputahs (long scarf) are removed, with every other article of their usual costume, for a suit that, with them, constitutes mourning—some choose black, others grey, slate, or green (Ali: 46).

Comfort, luxury and convenience are set aside. The *pallung*, the *charpoy* and the *musnad* are removed. Instead, women of all classes use a date-palm mat or simply sleep on a matted floor (Ali: 43). Men are equally abstemious, sporting white *angarkhas* (a combination of the *jama*, a collarless shirt and *bslabar*) or *achkans* in dark shades. Poets, accustomed to regaling large audiences with *ghazals*, switch to writing *marsiyas* (elegies) and *soz* (dirges). Their chief patrons, the *rajas* and *nawabs*, abandon their favourite pastimes to lead a pious and abstemious life. Their palaces, *havelis* and *forts* bear a sombre look during Mohurram.

Courtesans and their retinues in Chowk put away their musical instruments, their *ghungrus*, *payals*, and the *tabla* (a musical instrument). Umrao Jan Ada's *Khanum* commemorated Husain's martyrdom on a more elaborate scale than any other courtesan in Lucknow, decorating the place of mourning with banners, bunting, chandeliers, globes. Umrao Jan was herself an accomplished *soz-khwan* (reciter of dirges). The most celebrated professionals dare not perform in her presence. Her account finds resonances in Attia Hosain's description (1992: 64) of her visit down 'the forbidden street whose balconies during the first days of Muharram were empty of painted, bejewelled women when visitors climbed the narrow stairs only to hear religious songs of mourning'. There was the glass *tazia*, the miniature domed tomb, shining, gleaming, reflecting the light of many crystal lamps.

The city's black-clad men and women set aside their daily chores to sorrow for the martyred Imam. They marched through the lanes and bylanes of Lucknow in fervent lamentation, chanting 'Ya-Husain', 'Ya-Husain', rhythmically beating their chest, self-flagellating, carrying replicas (*tazia*) of Husain's tomb, his coffin (*taboot*), his standards and insignia (*alam* and *panja*) and his horse (*dul-dul*). One of the most impressive religious spectacles, commented William Crooke (1975: 263), was the long procession of *tazias* and flags streaming along the streets with a vast crowd of mourners, who 'scream out their lamentations and beat their breasts till the blood flows, or they sink fainting in an ecstasy of sorrow'. Notice, too, the following description:

Traditional Rites and Contested Meanings: Sectarian Strife in Colonial Lucknow

MUSHIRUL HASAN

The truth is that in those days the whole year was spent waiting for Muharram . . . After the goat sacrifices of Baq'Id the preparations for Muharram began. Dadda, my father's mother, started to softly chant elegies about the martyrs. Mother set about sewing black clothes for all of us; and my sister took out the notebooks of laments . . . and began to practice them. I don't know about Lucknow—I don't even know about Ghazipur—but I certainly do know that among the Saiyid families of Gangauli, Muharram was nothing less than a spiritual celebration (Rahi Masoom Raza, 1994: 9–10)

In Lucknow the deafening sound of crackers from Nakhaas and the loud and clear call for prayers from Shah Najaf mark the beginning of the holy month of Mohurram. Lakhnavis observe the next ten days with solemnity. They renew and reaffirm their unflinching devotion to those Islamic principles for which Imam Husain, grandson of the Prophet of Islam, and his seventy-two companions, laid down their lives on the banks of the river Euphrates in AD 680. Once more they would, in their imagination, rally round those gallant men at Karbala and share in their *karb* (pain) and *bala* (trial).

Come day one of Mohurram and life in Lucknow comes to a standstill. Perfume and tobacco shops wear a deserted look. Trade is no longer brisk. The busy and noisy bazaars of Aminabad and Nakhaas are subdued. The city is robbed of its buoyancy. Mrs Meer Hasan Ali (1982: 30), an English lady married to a Shia and living in Lucknow in the 1820s, contrasted the profound stillness of an extensively populated city with the incessant bustle usual at all other times.

The sun was high above the church steeple when we heard the distant chanting, 'Hasan! Husain! Hasan! Husain! Haider!' It came nearer and the measured sound of bare hands striking bare breasts, the monotonous beat of drums and cymbals made my heart beat with a strange excitement. Then the barefooted, bareheaded men came in view following *tazias* carried shoulder-high. There were *tazias* of peacock's feathers, of glass, of sugar, of bright-coloured paper, intricate, beautiful, arched, domed, some as high as telegraph poles, others from poor homes so small that they could be held on one man's head, all hurrying to join the main procession at the allotted time, for burial or consecration (Hosain, 1992: 72).

Such demonstrative acts in public were a small part of Mohurram ceremonies. The *imambaras*, many of which were symbolic of Lucknow's Shia past and present, served as the central organising spaces as well as physical statements uniting the populace of the city (Cole, 1988: 98; Freitag, 1990: 237). They also served as symbols of communitarian solidarity, and as platforms for articulating individual and collective experiences. Here the gatherings (*majlis*) were structured, adhering to a pattern laid down by the Shia Nawabs of Awadh. Beginning with soz-khwani (recitation without the aid of musical instruments), a *majlis* would be followed by either a sermon or *marsiya-khuani* (reading of elegy), a style of rendering inspired by the legendary Lucknow poet, Mir Anis (1802-75). It would normally conclude with the rendering of short dirges. As soon as the impressive and heart-rending notes of dirges were chanted by Mir Ali Hasan and Mir Bande' Hasan, wrote the essayist-novelist Abdul Halim Sharar (1975: 149):

Hundreds of men from elite families began to sing them, and then the women of noble Shia families also intoned them with their matchless voices . . . Matters have now reached the stage that during Muharram and on most days of mourning, heartrending sounds of lamentation and the melodious chanting of dirges can be heard from every house in every lane in old Lucknow. In every alley one will hear beautiful voices and melodies which one will never forget.

The sermon is at the heart of Mohurram rites. It is, in large part, an elegiac account of the episodes in the Karbala story, a moving narrative of the pain, anguish and agony of Husain and his companions. Year after year, speakers detail the same sequence of events, retaining the order in which members of Husain's family were killed. This is done to correlate the chain of events traditionally recorded with the leading martyrs. The commemorations are fashioned accordingly. Thus the sixth day of Mohurram is connected with Husain's young nephew, the seventh with his eighteen-year old son, the eighth with the brave and loyal brother

Abbas, the ninth with the six-month old son Ali Asghar and the tenth with Iman Husain's own martyrdom. Qasim, Ali Akbar, Abbas, Ali Asghar and Husain himself exemplified the enormity of the tragedy; so that days linked with their martyrdom convey deep meanings, special attachments and associations. Their sufferings, narrated by the man on the pulpit, move audiences (*azadars*) to mourn, wail and lament, beat their chests (*matam*) and participate in the sufferings of the martyrs by self-deprivation and mortification. Attia Hosain (1992: 68) captures the mood in Lucknow:

It was the ninth night of Muharram. On the horizon there was a glow as of a forgetful sun rising before moonset. The glow of a million lamps from the illuminated Imambaras where *tazias* and banners were laid to rest, lit the sky, and the city was alive, crowds forgetful in that bright beauty of the month of mourning . . . When he (Asad) read of the agonies of thirst of the children of the Prophet, cut off from the river by their enemies, the women sobbed softly. Ustaniji began beating her breast, saying 'Husain' softly, with a slow rhythm. Ramzano stared at her strangely and joined in. The others still sobbed softly.

Ten days of mourning ceremonies culminate on *yaum-i ashura* with the *Majlis-i-Sham-i Ghariban* at the famous Ghufraabaab Imambaras, the final mournful tribute to the *Sayyid-ash-Shuhada* (Lord of the Martyrs). The final curtain is drawn on *Chehnum*, the fortieth day. Sharar describes (149-50) his visit to the Talkatora Karbala in Lucknow on that day. He witnessed a procession of women approaching carrying *tazias*. All were bare-headed and their hair hung loose. In the centre a woman carried a candle. By its light a beautiful, delicately formed girl read from some sheets of paper. She chanted a dirge along with other women. He was moved by the stillness, the moonlight, those bare-headed beauties and the soul-rending notes of their sad melody. As the group passed through the gates of the shrine, he heard the following lament:

When the caravan of Medina, having lost all
Arrived in captivity in the vicinity of Sham
Foremost came the head of Husain, borne aloft on a spear
And in its wake, a band of women, with heads bared.

II

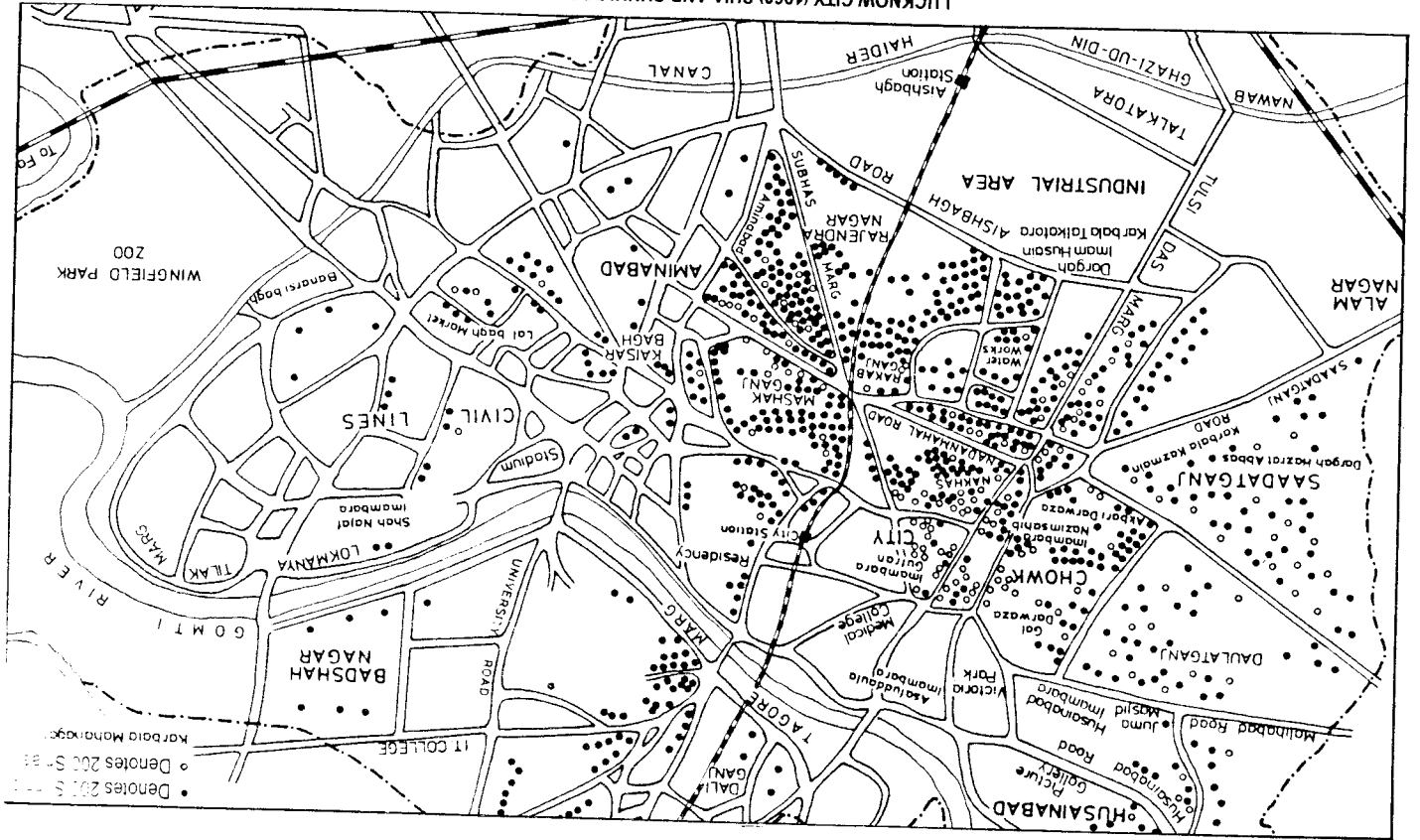
Mohurram, Husain and Karbala signified different things to different sections of Lucknow society. There was the potential for political mobilisation: the Khilafat leadership in India could thus employ the paradigm

of Karbala and harness the most evocative themes of Shi'ism to provide depth to their movement (Mushirul Hasan, 1991). At another level, Husain's martyrdom served, to the Shias of all times and in all places, as an everlasting exhortation to guard their separate identity and to brave their numerical inferiority in the face of firmly established and sometimes oppressive majorities. It made sense, according to Hamid Enayat (1982: 20), on two other levels: first, in terms of a soteriology not dissimilar from the one invoked in the case of Christ's crucifixion: just as Christ sacrificed himself on the altar of the cross to redeem humanity, so did Husain allow himself to be killed on the plains of Karbala to purify the Muslim community of sins; and second, as an active factor vindicating the Shia cause, contributing to its ultimate triumph. When one adds to all this the cathartic effect of weeping as a means of releasing pent-up grief over not only personal misfortune, but also the agonies of a long-suffering minority, the reasons for the popular appeal of Mohurram ceremonies become apparent.

Husain stirred the passions and sensitivities of several groups in India. On the ninth night of Mohurram, groups of women, mostly Hindus, moved about the villages wailing and reciting *dobas*, mostly improvised lyrics on the epic tragedy. Urban and rural Hindus venerated Husain and incorporated his cult into their rituals (Cole, 1988: 116-17). They offered flowers and sweets at local 'Karbala's', participated in processions, decorated and kept tazias and sought Husain's intercession in disease and calamity. The Imam's trials and tribulations inspired faith in a universal nemesis ensuring justice for oppressed souls. In popular belief he was Ram of Ayodhya carrying his crusade into the wilderness; his brother Abbas personified Lakshman, devoted, energetic and brave; his sister Zainab and wife Um-i Kulsoom were cast in the image of Sita, caring, dutiful and spirited. Yazid, the Umayyad ruler and Husain's persecutor, was Ravan, greedy, corrupt, ambitious, cruel and ruthless.

W.H. Sleeman found Hindu princes in central and southern India, 'even of the brahmin caste', commemorating Mohurram with 'illuminations and processions brilliant and costly'. In Gwalior, a Hindu State, Mohurram was observed with pomp, as in Baroda, where the ruler sent an exquisite prayer carpet of pearls to Mecca (Reeves, 1971: 158-9; Lawrence, 1928: 292-3; Fuller, 1910: 125-6; Blunt, 1909: 72). Hindus clothed themselves in green garments and assumed the guise of *fajirs* (Friedtag, 1990: 237; Shurreef, 1863: 123; Khalidi, 1992). A Hindi newspaper reported in July 1895 that Mohurram had passed off peacefully in Banaras: 'When it is Hindus who mostly celebrate (*sic*) this festival, what

LUCKNOW CITY (1960) SHIA AND SUNNI POPULATION
 Source: Census of India 1961 (Mograph No. 3 - Mohurram in two cities, Lucknow and Delhi).



fear can there be? In Lucknow 'thousands of Hindus' chanted *nohas* along with the Shias and Sunnis (Shatar, 1975: 149).

This was not all. Munshi Faizuddin's reminiscences, published in 1885 (pp. 63–6), described Mohurram rites in the court of the last two Mughal Emperors. So does Syed Ahmad Dehlawi's (b. 1946) *Rusum-i Delhi* (Rituals and Traditions of Delhi—pp. 178–80). The Sunni raja of Nanpara had Shia *ulama* read to him elegies for Husain (Cole, 1988: 105). Rural Muslims in 1897, Crooke (1975: 263) declared, joined in the Mohurram observances 'almost without distinction of sect'. In a small north Indian princely state, a British civil servant found that every Muslim guild—the painters, the masons, the carpenters, the weavers—had their own *tazias* and their own troupes of actors and mourners who reproduced scenes of the struggle at Karbala (Moon, 1943: 86–7). Here and elsewhere, Shia-Sunni relations were not structured around sectarian lines. Some people nursed sectarian prejudices, but most consciously resisted attempts to create fissures in the broadly unified and consensual model of social and cultural living. Regardless of the polemics of the *ulama*, and the itinerant preachers, bonds of friendship and understanding remained intact because Shias and Sunnis of all classes shared a language and literature and a cultural heritage. That is probably why Shatar declared (1975: 74–5) that no one in Lucknow ever noticed who was a Sunni and who a Shia.

Lucknow was, both before and during Nawabi rule, relatively free of religious insularity or sectarian bigotry. The Shia Nawabs took their cue from their Sunni overlords in Delhi and created a broad-based polity and a cosmopolitan cultural and intellectual ethos. They adhered to the policy of *sulh-i kul* (peace with all), pioneered by Akbar. Wajid Ali Shah is reported to have said that 'of my two eyes, one is a Shia and the other is a Sunni'. Sunni officials occupied important positions in the middle and lower echelons of government departments, and in Wajid Ali Shah's court the Vazir and Paymaster were Sunnis. Sunni officers also managed the Sibrainabad Imambara and the *Baitul-Baka* (House of Lamentation).

Shia-Sunni controversies did not plague most rulers of princely States. Several Shia families from Awadh, such as the Syeds of Bilgram, sought and secured lucrative positions in Hyderabad. There were several Shia-Sunni marriages, and literary and political associations. Sunnis and Shias acted in unison during the Urdu agitation against the April 1900 Nagri resolution of the government in the United Provinces. They shared the Muslim League platform. They were one in agitating over the

Kanpur mosque, the Aligarh Muslim University issue, and, much to everybody's surprise, on the Khilafat question.

So too with Urdu prose and poetry, the writings of Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98), Araf Husain Hali (1837–1914), Shibli Nomani (1857–1914), Maulvi Zakaullah (1832–1910), Maulvi Nazir Ahmad (1836–1912) and Abdul Halim Sharar were free of sectarian claptrap. In 1889, Sharar wrote *Hasan aur Anjalina*; Shia-Sunni relations was its theme. The great Urdu poet Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869) wore no sectarian badge, no sectarian colour. He was 'a pure Unitarian and a true believer'; suspected by some to be a Shia and by others as a *tafazzili* (one who, acknowledges the pre-eminence of Ali), Ghalib revelled in the ambivalence. In fact at his death there was some confusion as to whether his funeral rites should follow Shia or Sunni rituals.

Dakhni and modern Urdu poetry were both rich in *mangabat*, poems in praise of Ali, and in *marsiyas*, authored by both Shias and Sunnis. Husain is everybody's hero, the embodiment of Islamic virtues of piety, courage and commitment. He laid down his life but did not compromise with a bloody-minded tyrant presiding over a degenerate political and social order. His exemplary courage inspired Mohamed Ali (1878–1931), the volatile Khilafat leader. He believed that Yazid won on the bank of Euphrates, but Husain 'reigned and still reigns over the hearts of a faith of God's human creation, while the soul of humankind in its entirety applauds the victory and final triumph of the victims of Karbala and shall continue to do ...' (see Hasan ed., 1985: 301).

*Qatl-i Husain asl me marg-i Yazid hai
Islam zinda hota hai har Karbala ke baad*

Husain's assassination, in reality, symbolises the death of Yazid. Islam is, after all, rejuvenated with such tragedies

Mohammad Iqbal (1876–1938) echoed similar sentiments:

Nikal kar khaqqaon se ada kar rasm-i Shabbiri

Emerge from the confines of the *khaqqa*s and, re-enact the example set by Husain.

Yet by the end of the nineteenth century such representations of unity gradually gave way to symbols of discord. They served, in the hands of the politician-priest combine, to heighten sectarian consciousness, assert judicial and political rights and widen areas of competition and disharmony. Each side came to nurse profound grievances about the other based on mutually exclusive interpretations of history.

The first ominous sign surfaced around 1906 when some Sunni zealots constructed their own local Karbala at Phoolkatora on the northern edge of Lucknow, opposite the existing Karbala in Talkatora. The fires of sectarian unrest were then stoked by the public praise (*Madhe-Sahaba*) of the three Khulafa (plural of Khalifa/Caliph)—Abu Bakr, Umar and Usman, whom the Shias regarded as 'usurpers' of Ali's claim as successor to the Prophet. They retaliated with a villification (*tabarra*) campaign. Sunni preachers went a step further. Mohurrum observances were declared as acts of heresy. People were exhorted to avoid them scrupulously (selections from Native Newspaper Reports, UP, 1936–37). Zafarul Mulk, secretary of the Lucknow Madhe-Sahaba committee, struck a sharp note by declaring *taziadaari* 'deleterious to the spiritual and temporal well-being of the Muslims' (Zafarul Mulk, n.d.: 1). The nature of the Shia-Sunni engagement inevitably led to the appropriation of certain symbols and the rejection of others. Mohurrum was no longer a common symbol of veneration but an exclusively Shia concern not only in Lucknow but also in Bombay (Masselos, 1982) and Banaras (Kumar, 1988: 216). A powerful symbol of unity turned into a potent vehicle for sectarian mobilisation. In this way sectarian strife became much more common in north Indian towns than Hindu-Muslim riots.

Shia-Sunni disturbances were sparked off in Lucknow in the 1880s, 1890s and in 1907–8. 'The feeling of tension between the Sunnis and Shias of Lucknow has reached its climax', reported the *Gauhar-i-Shahwar* in April 1907. Allahabad, Banaras, and Jaunpur witnessed widespread violence. What began as small-scale skirmishes in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (many of which went unnoticed in official despatches because of their listing in the category of 'Native Societies and Religious and Social Matters' in the *Selections from the Native Newspapers*) escalated into bloody feuds involving scores of people and turning Lucknow and its adjoining districts into a cauldron of sectarian animus.

The lines of cleavage were sharply demarcated by the mushroom growth of sectarian organisations, such as the Anjuman-i Sadr-us Sudoor, floated by Maulana Syed Agha Husain in 1901, and the Anjuman-i Jafariya, established by the Syeds of Barha four years later. A Shia Conference was set up in October-December 1907, some months after the Muslim League came into being. There was much talk of 'Shias of light' leading the way, mitigating the economic and educational backwardness of their community. Some were keen to take their grievances to the Viceroy (*Surma-i Rozgar*, 1 February 1907).

The depth of sectarian feeling was apparent at the first Shia Conference. Delegates delivered fiery and intemperate speeches against the Sunnis. The atmosphere was so vitiated that Ghulam-us Saqlain (1870–1915), editor of *Asr-i Jadid*, left the meeting in disgust. The hardliners seized the initiative in renaming the organisation as the 'Shia Political Conference', petitioned the government in December 1909 to enumerate the Shia population separately in the census, and insisted on the separate and distinct identity of the Shias. The conference, initially formed to foster cultural and educational goals, turned into a platform for articulating sectional political aims.

In the mid-1930s the Shia Political Conference, now under the firm control of Syed Wazir Hasan (1874–1947), the architect of the Congress-League scheme of December 1916, rallied round the Congress and supported the Muslim Mass Contact campaign, Jawaharlal Nehru's brainchild. At the same time, it continued to clamour for separate representation in the legislative councils, a demand spurred by the defeat of two Shia candidates in the 1937 elections. The *Sarfaraz*, a Shia weekly from Lucknow, attributed their defeat (6, 7, 13 May 1939) to 'venomous' Sunni propaganda and called for safeguarding the Shia 'national and political rights'. The Anjuman-i Tanzimul Muminin had no faith in the Muslim League, a body controlled by the 'Sunni Junta'. Neither did Syed Ali of the Shia Student's Conference. The Majlis-i Ulama, held at Lucknow on 5 July 1945, reiterated the memorandum sent by Hosenbhoj A. Laljee to Wavell as well as the Congress High Command. The Shia Federation threatened to organise strikes, boycotts and demonstrations if its demands were not fulfilled.

These were empty threats. The Congress was not prepared to complicate the scenario by introducing the 'Shia case' in negotiating with the British and the League. Likewise, the government did not recognise the Shias as a major political force. 'We cannot give them special help' was how an official reacted. 'We cannot contemplate', commented a senior member in the Home Department, 'treating a religious sub-division of Muslims as a new minority'. Inevitably, the future editors of the *Transfer of Power* documents ignored Shia petitions in their compilation. 'Not wanted: I don't think we need bother at all with those cables from the Shias'!

III

Lucknow was the scene of violent Shia-Sunni riots in 1938–39. These were a sequel to a protest movement, launched in May 1935 against an

official suggestion to forbid Madhe Sahaba on certain days. The agitation gained intensity a year later. It turned violent in May–June 1937, when frenzied mobs in Lucknow and Ghazipur went on a rampage. Trouble in Ghazipur was instigated by a party of Sunnis from Jaunpur. Enraged mobs burnt and looted property, and killed at will. Sectarian strife, hitherto dormant, had turned into a common occurrence in the daily lives of Lakhnavis.²

There was more trouble during the next two years, fuelled by a committee ruling against Madhe Sahaba in Lucknow.³ Husain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957), principal of the renowned seminary at Deoband along with other Jamiyat-al-ulama leaders, now jumped into the fray. He advocated civil disobedience. Thousands paid heed to his call and courted arrest. Though a fervent advocate of secular nationalism and a principled critic of the ‘two-nation theory’, he stirred sectarian passions unabashedly. He spoke at a public meeting in Lucknow on 17 March 1938 sharing the platform with the firebrand Maulvi Abdul Shakoor, head of the Dar al-Muballighin, and Maulana Zafarul Mulki, chief exponent of Madhe Sahaba in Lucknow.⁴ In other places, the Ahrars and the Khaksars developed common cause with the Jamiyat al-Ulama. The mercurial Khaksar leader, Allama Mashriqi, mobilised his followers from different places, though police vigilance made sure that not many sneaked into the city’s municipal limits. The Ahrars, fresh from their successful agitation against the Maharaja of Kashmir, organised bands of volunteers (*jathas*) in Lucknow. They came from neighbouring Malihabad, Kanpur, Delhi, Meerut and from as far as Peshawar. By the end of March 1939, hundreds were arrested. ‘Tension in the city’ wrote Lucknow’s deputy-commissioner, ‘has increased and is now nearing breaking point’.

On 30 March, the Congress ministry allowed Madhe Sahaba on Barawafat, the Prophet’s birthday. The Sunni leaders promptly called off civil disobedience and organised a 30,000 strong Barawafat procession to register their victory. This order, besides contravening established conventions in Lucknow, jolted Shia confidence in the Congress ministry. The Sarfaraz on 30 March chided Pant and his ministerial colleagues for its capitulation. An impression gained credence that the Congress had played a ‘double game’, sowed the seeds of Shia-Sunni dissension, stroked the fires of sectarian unrest to weaken the claim of the Muslim League to be the sole spokesman of the Muslim community. So too in an earlier period. The Muslim leadership in Allahabad, poorly integrated

into both the formal and informal systems of power, had become an object of attention for political orators to exploit sectarian fissures (Bayly, 1975: 130).

The next day a large crowd of angry Shias assembled at the Asaf-ud-daula Imambara, indulged in *tabarra*, and excitedly climbed the upper stories of the gateways. Some rushed towards the nearby Tila mosque, though the police blocked their onward march. The police opened fire, dispersed the mob and imposed curfew. The scholar S. Khuda Bukhsh (b. 1842) was anguished to see a posse of police with glistening bayonets in Lucknow:

The fabric of Islam is torn by dissensions, fierce and bitter; and that nobody was trying to restore peace, concord and harmony among Muslims. What a noble sight it is to see the police officers interfere at Mohurram between the followers of the Prophet to prevent a breach of peace (Khuda Bukhsh, 1912: 273–4).

As the lieutenant governor had foreseen, Shias assembled each day at the Asafi Imambara with stiffened resolve, recited *tabarra* on the Husainabad Road and then courted arrest chanting ‘Ya Ali’, ‘Ya Ali’. Tension mounted each day.

The Shia *mujtahid*, Maulana Nasir Husain, threatened to court arrest. So did the chairman of the All-India Shia Women’s Association, the wife of Wazir Hasan. Trouble spread to other areas as well. In early April, volunteers from Agra, Kanpur, Fyzabad, Barabanki and Rampur sneaked into Lucknow to assist their beleaguered brethren. Plans were set afoot in Rae Bareilly to congregate in Lucknow on Barawafat and participate in a planned Tabarra agitation. (Harper to Chief Secretary, 13 March 1939, Linnithgow Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library). A batch of *burqa*-clad women from Rae Bareilly turned up at Kazimain, a predominantly Shia locality, to court arrest, but the Shia *mujtahid* did not allow them to do so. In August, Shias of Kanpur observed hartal against police firing in Lucknow. They wore badges on their arms and black flags fluttered on their houses. Riots also broke out in Banaras.⁵ A report published in August 1941 suggested that the ‘attempt to find a solution of the Shia-Sunni dispute in Lucknow appears to have been abandoned’.⁶

Jawaharlal Nehru, who spent time in Lucknow to resolve the Shia-Sunni deadlock, felt that his colleagues had dealt with the dispute tactlessly. ‘I fear there has been much bungling about this issue’, he wrote to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who was not consulted before the ministry

executed a *volte face*. The matter was decided, he told the Maulana, 'without full consideration of the consequences' (Gopal ed., 1980: 9; 334-5). Rajendra Prasad, closely associated with some leading Shias of Bihar, was equally wary of the consequences. He observed:

I presume the Shias will continue civil disobedience and will be courting jail. . . . It must be very distressing to put nine thousand people in jail who are apparently not opposed to the Government and many amongst whom are widely respected for one reason or the other. What troubles me even more is the propaganda which is gaining ground that the Congress stands to create division amongst Muslims and what I apprehend is that after a time both will be more united against the Congress than they have ever been before.

Rajendra Prasad added that the Shias were ardent nationalists and that the Shia Political Conference had consistently acted in unison with the Congress. For these reasons, it was imprudent for the ministry to allow anti-Congress sentiments 'to grow in any community and more so in a community sympathetically inclined' (see Choudhary ed., 1984: 3: 77).

IV

The Shias were few in number, not exceeding four per cent in any of the provinces in British India (see Tables I and II). They were most numerous in Lucknow and its satellite towns, where the imambaras and mosques stood as reminders of Shia domination under the Nawabs. Elsewhere in the United Provinces, as the district gazetteers show, they were unevenly distributed in Jaunpur where the Sharqis once held sway, in Machhlishahar, Bilgram, Allahabad, Jalali in Aligarh district (Hamadani, 1978), Jansath in Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad, Amroha, Sambhal, Badaun and Rampur areas. The rulers of Rampur and the Raja of Mahmudabad were Shias. Successful professional men were few, though some like Hamid Ali Khan, a Lucknow lawyer, Syed Raza Ali (1882-1949), Syed Ghulam-us-Saqain, Syed Wazir Hasan and his son, Ali Zaheer, Syed Hyder Mehdi, Congressman and chairman of the Allahabad Improvement Trust, occupied prominent positions in public life. Some achieved fame as writers and poets from the early 1940s, notably Syed Ehtesham Husain of Lucknow, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas (1914-87), a descendant of Altaf Husain Hali; Syed Sajjad Zaheer, son of Wazir Hasan and co-founder of the Progressive Writer's Movement; Ali Sardar Jafri of Balrampur State, an Aligarh student expelled from the university in the mid-1930s for his radical activities; and the poet Kaifi Azmi who spent years in Bombay in the company of socialists and communists.

Table I
Shia and Sunni Population in India

Provinces and Princely States	Muslim Population	Shias (in %)	Sunnis
Assam	22,19,947	nil	100
Baluchistan	7,73,477	1	96
Bengal	2,54,86,144	1	99
Bihar & Orissa	37,06,277	1	99
Bombay	46,60,828	3	88
CP & Berar	5,82,032	2	98
Madras	28,65,285	2	94
NWFP	20,84,123	4	95
Punjab & Delhi	1,29,55,141	2	97
Baroda	1,62,328	10	88
Kashmir	25,48,514	5	95
Rajputana & Ajmer	10,02,117	2	98

NOTE: Figures for Bombay, Baroda and Rajputana and Ajmer include Khojas, Bohras, and in some cases, even Memons.

SOURCE: *Census of India*, 1921, vol. I, p. 120.

Table II
Distribution of Shia and Sunni Population in UP, 1882

Division	Percentage of total Muslim population	
	Shias	Sunnis
Meerut	2.3	97.7
Agra	1.5	98.5
Allahabad	5.3	94.7
Rohilkhand	1.6	98.4
Banaras	2.0	98.0
Jhansi	0.8	99.2
Lucknow	10.7	89.3
Sitapur	1.7	98.3
Fyzabad	3.6	96.4
Rae Bareli	1.8	98.2

SOURCE: *Census of India*, NWFP and Oudh, 1882, vol. 1, p. 74.

Yet the success of such men was in no way illustrative of the prosperity of their Shia brethren, who were much more backward than their Sunni

counterparts. Shias were few in the professions and fewer still in trade and commerce. The substantial group of poverty-stricken *wasiqadars* clung to the crumbling remains of their ancestral environs. Most lived in ghettos or in the narrow lanes and alleys of the old city of Lucknow and Allahabad. In 1913, there were 1,661 *wasiqadars* in Lucknow, many of whom dwell very much in the past. Some held *durbars* even in the early 1920s (Ganju, 1980: 286). Their condition symbolised the decline of a class which owed its survival to *nawabi* patronage. They were unable to make good under the British, because they were so poorly equipped to seize the opportunities offered by newly-created administrative and bureaucratic structures.

There can be no doubt that Shia-Sunni estrangement was in some ways related to tangible material factors. The decline of the Shia aristocracy in the second half of the nineteenth century, the impoverishment of their less privileged brethren and the relative prosperity of some Sunni groups deepened Shia anxieties over their future (Ahmad, 1983; Ganju, 1980: 290-2). The British contributed insofar as they gave legal definition to the Shia-Sunni division. The approval or ban of religious commemorations, arbitration of disputes, and regulating religious procession routes transformed latent doctrinal differences into public, political and legal issues (Hjortshoj, 1987: 291).

An even more powerful current was however at work towards the end of the nineteenth century. It appeared in the form of religio-revivalism, affecting Hindus and Muslims, Shias and Sunnis, Deobandis and Barelwis. It threatened to undermine the structure of both inter- as well as intra-community relations. The Shia-Sunni schism in Lucknow, notwithstanding its local specificity, needs to be located in the context of such countrywide trends and tendencies.

It is widely known that cow-protection societies, Hindi Pracharni Sabhas and the Arya Samaj movement were designed to homogenise Hindu society through a set of common cultural and religious paradigms. Similar currents, some in response to the intellectual and cultural hegemony of the West, but most in reaction to Hindu revitalisation campaigns, gripped Muslims as well. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, in particular, the notion of a sharply defined communitarian identity, distinct and separate from others, had acquired much greater legitimacy among the north Indian *ashraf* Muslims. In the political and educational domain, Syed Ahmad Khan plotted his trajectory within a communitarian framework. The Aligarh College, the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference, the Urdu Defence Associations and the

Muslim League had well-defined communitarian goals. They were concerned to create a Muslim identity in Indian politics.

Such moves towards political 'separatism', exemplified in the activities of Syed Ahmad and Aligarh's 'First Generation', were matched by a concerted drive to create an ordered, unified and cohesive *religious* community within the Islamic paradigm. This was the goal of the founders of the Dar al-ulum at Deoband and the Nadwat al-ulama in Lucknow. The high priests at these institutions asserted their role as interpreters and guardians with much vigour and consistency. There was much confidence in their insistence, through sheafs of *fatawa* (religious decrees), on imposing a moral and religious code consistent with Quranic injunctions and free of accretions and interpolations. Not surprisingly, over 200 books listed in London's India Office Library Catalogue, compiled by J.M. Blumhardt in 1900, dealt with ceremonial religious observances. These included compendia of religious duties, treatises on lawful and unlawful actions, and collections on religious precepts. In a nutshell, the growth of the printing press, the proliferation of vernacular newspapers and the expanding educational networks served as powerful instruments for restructuring an *ideal* community that would conform to and reflect the Islamic ethos that prevailed during the days of the Prophet and his successors.

Initially confined to northern India, the Islamic resurgence spread to other areas rapidly. Religious revivalism, conducted under the aegis of the Faraizis, had already swept the rural Muslims in the Bengal countryside. The dominant strain of the Islamisation drive was to reject composite and syncretic tendencies and create instead a pan-Islamic or a specifically pan-Indian Muslim identity. Rafiuddin Ahmed (1981: 184) has shown how religious preachers prompted the masses to look beyond the borders of Bengal in quest of their supposed Islamic past and attach greater importance to their 'Muslim' as opposed to their local or regional identity. This new emphasis proved crucial to the subsequent emergence of a measure of social cohesion in a diversified and even culturally polarised community.

In relation to the Hindu 'Other', the meaning of being a Muslim was translated through late nineteenth-century religious and political idioms. Shias and Sunnis, on the other hand, discovered new symbols of identification in the form of separate graveyards, separate mosques, schools, and charitable endowments (Oldenburg, 1984). These institutions defined the boundaries within which Shias and Sunnis were required to stay apart. They were to live as separate entities in a world

fashioned by the religio-political leadership. Attempts to disturb the *status quo* encountered strong resistance.

Sunni Islam was just as much 'corrupted' by the incorporation of Hindu beliefs and customs as by the adoption of Shia practices. So a campaign was mounted at the turn of the nineteenth century to question shared cultural, religious and intellectual paradigms and revive those controversies that had lain dormant for long. The Madhe Sahaba processions were, for example, organised with much greater fanfare in Fatehpur and Lucknow (see Zafarul Mulk, n.d.: 11).

There was, in addition, a concerted move to discourage Shia-Sunni marriages, to portray Shias as promiscuous heretics, and traitors. Frequently singled out as traitors were Mir Sadiq, *diwan* of Tipu Sultan, Mir Alam, *diwan* of Hyderabad, Mir Jafar, *diwan* of Siraj-ud Daula, and the Bilgrami family (Khalidi, 1992: 39–40). 'Among the people classed as Muslims', observed Zafarul Mulk (n.d.: 11),

The Shias and the Ahmadis are the two sects which have basic differences with Muslims and are a constant source of internecine trouble and discord . . . It would be a real gain to the health of the body politic of Islam if these two sects were lopped off and treated as separate minorities (emphasis added).

Mohurram practices were the chief target of attack. The central theme, underlined years later by an *alim* of Nadwat al-ulum in Lucknow, was the impropriety of giving 'vent to one's feeling of sorrow through wailing and lamentation' and crying over a past event (Nadwi, 1974: 65). Around 1933–39, considerable polemical literature surfaced against *azadari*. The Sunni press, in particular, denounced *taziadari* as *bidat* and *haram*. In February 1939, the Tahaffuz-i Millat sought permission to take out small processions to dissuade Sunnis by word of mouth from *taziadari*. Sharar, who bemoaned Shia-Sunni differences, observed how Maulvi Abdul Shakoor perfected the art of public debates (*munazirah*) with his Shia counterparts.

The indictment of Mohurram rites was by no means a new development; the severity with which it was done in Lucknow during the 1930s was somewhat unusual and had few historical precedent. It is true that orthodox Sunni treatises were critical of and averse to the Shias. In the sixteenth century, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, chief exponent of the Naqshbandi *silsilah* in India, began his career by writing a pamphlet against the Shias. Shah Waliullah (1702–63), one of the foremost original thinkers in the history of Indian Islam, discussed the question whether Shias

were *kafirs*, apostates or just immoral. Shah Abdul Aziz (1746–1824) wrote a highly polemical book in 1889 to prevent 'Sunnis from straying away from their faith in polemics with the Shias'. Deoband's Dar al-ulum, inspired by Waliullah and his disciples, was antithetical to Shia beliefs and practices. Syed Ahmad's invitation to Deoband's founders met with an emphatic refusal: they would not associate with a college that had room for Shias (Lelyveld, 1978: 134; Rizvi, 1982: 256; Metcalf, 1982; Sharar, 1975: 95). One of its foremost *alim*, Husain Ahmad Madani, shared this antipathy towards the Shias, though he was at the same time a major proponent of secular nationalism. Yet the diktat of an *alim* here or a theologian there did not undermine those values and customs that people had shared for generations. There were other schools of thought in Sunni Islam which advocated reconciliation and rapprochement. Many of the Shia mujtahids, including the renowned Maulvi Dildar Ali, were in fact products of the Firangi Mahal in Lucknow. And there were forces linked with Sufi Islam that cemented unity and integration.

Secularism in the 1930s, however, was of a distinct nature. The debates then were no longer restricted to the Khilafat. Nor were the age-old controversies confined to the learned and holy men on both sides. The energy released during the decade, spurred by newly started organisations wedded to separate Sunni and Shia world views, substantially altered the structure of social relations. They imposed severe strains on the overall consensus, achieved through long-standing social, cultural and economic networks.

The Shias were not far behind in fortifying their claims. They tried, first of all, to rejuvenate their educational institutions which had virtually collapsed in the absence of nawabi patronage. They regarded the M.A.O. College of Aligarh as a 'Sunni' institution, though Syed Ahmad Khan had, in recognition of Shia-Sunni differences, made a provision for teaching Shia theology. They had no theological seminary of their own. And because entry to Deoband or Nadwa was restricted to Sunni students, those Shias who aspired to become religious leaders received education not in India but in Iran and Iraq. Thus Syed Abul Qasim Rizvi (d. 1906) studied in Lucknow and Najaf in Iraq. Back in Lahore, he promoted *Usuli Shi'ism* in the second half of the nineteenth century, founding congregational prayer mosques and edifices commemorating Husain's martyrdom, and establishing an *Imami* seminary in Lahore (see Cole and Keddie, 1986: Introduction, 66–7; Cole, 1988: 288–9; Frietag,

1990: 263). Maulana Syed Ali Naqi (1903–88), a descendant of the learned Ghufraanmaab family, also studied in Iraq. He returned to Lucknow in 1932 and founded the Imamia Mission and a weekly magazine *Payam-i Islam*. He wrote over 300 books. Many of his writings in the mid-1930s were in defence of azadari (Rizvi, 1988).

The establishment of the Nadwat al-ulamā led to the founding of a Shia school in Lucknow. The Shia college was the brainchild of a landowner of Lahore and patronised by Nawab Hamid Ali Khan of Rampur (1875–1930) and the U.P. government. Rs 3,17,410 was raised by 1916 and the college opened in 1917.⁷

Shia societies mushroomed in every quarter of Lucknow, the hub of Shia intellectual and cultural life. Prominent amongst them were the Madrasatul-Wāzeen, organised on the lines of the Shibli Academy at Azamgarh and funded by the Raja of Mahmudabad; the Imamia Mission, set up by Maulana Ali Naqi; and the Tanzimul-Muminin, the Shia answer to the Tahafuzz-i Millat, which was patronised by affluent manufacturers of tobacco and perfume. These bodies were backed by an aggressive Shia-owned press—the *Sarfaraz*, an organ of the Shia Political Conference, *Shia*, published from Lahore, *Asad*, *Nazzara* and the *Akbar-i Imamia*, published fortnightly (Rizvi, 1988: Chapter 5).

With developments around the country heading towards greater Hindu-Muslim friction, sectarian competition began to resemble inter-community conflicts. Not surprisingly, the process structuring sectarian conflict paralleled that of Hindu-Muslim friction in other urban centres of the United Provinces. This was, in part, because Sunnis and Shias of Lucknow could draw on the reservoir of experiences and models developed in the subcontinent during that period. That is, the nationwide impetus to define one's community provided material that could be used by both groups of Muslims (Frietag, 1990: 249). Such tendencies were not countered by a parallel ideological crusade, though individuals like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad intervened to cement the divide, heal the wounds and keep the recalcitrant parties in check.⁸

The Congress in the United Provinces grudgingly tried to defuse the mounting sectarian tensions in Lucknow. But once Shia-Sunni riots flared up, its leaders assumed ambivalent positions. Most settled for a divide-and-rule policy, doling out concessions first to the Shias and then to the Sunnis. This strategy worked for a little while. Shia leaders, having rallied round the Congress in the past, expected to be rewarded for their loyalty. The bulk of Sunni leadership was, on the other hand, entrusted by Pant's gesture on 30 March 1939. But when the Muslim

League raised new hopes and expectations in the early 1940s, the Congress base among the Shias and Sunnis was eroded.

It turned out that both the context and the reference point of Shia and Sunni leaders were rapidly eroded by the powerful Muslim League drive for a separate 'Muslim nation'. The options were suddenly diminished, because the forces of an overriding and hegemonic 'Muslim nationalism' subsumed sectarian allegiances. Shias and Sunnis undertook their long trek towards the promised *dar al-Islam* (land of Islam). The ideological conflicts were, however, carried over to the new nation, where the inconclusive debates resumed with the same intensity and fervour.

NOTES

1. Syed Ali to Jawaharlal Nehru, 6 December 1945, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, vol. 4, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi; Hosseinbhoj Lajee's Cablegram to Wavell, 6 April 1945, in *Shia Muslim's Case* (Bombay: Jawahar Press, n.d.), pp. 1–2, 6–96; L/P & J/8, 693; Transfer of Power Papers, L/P&J/, 10/64, IOLR (India Office Library and Records, London). 43 18 February, 16 December 1946, 16 December 1974, *ibid.*, L/P7/J, 10, 64.
2. Shia-Sunni riots broke out in May–June 1937. The provincial government believed that they were provoked by the Shias to indicate that any change introduced in their past practices would be resisted. See Harry Haig to Linlithgow, 7 June and 4 July, 1937, 2–4 June 1938, 10 and 23 October 1939, L/PJ/5/264–6, IOLR.
3. The government appointed the Piggot Committee in 1907 to regulate Mohurram observances. This was followed by the Justice Allsop Committee recommendations of 15 June 1937. The High Court Judge endorsed the Piggot Committee's report on Madhe Sahaba. *Government Gazette of the UP, Extraordinary*, 28 March 1938, L/P&J file no. 265, pp. 139–50, IOLR.
4. G.M. Harper to Jasbir Singh, 18 March 1939, General Administration Department (GAD), file no. 65, box no. 607, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow. Harry Haig reported that Madani insisted that the Sunnis should be allowed to assert their right to recite Madhe-Sahaba. To Linlithgow, 23 October 1939, L/PJ/5/266.
5. *Pioneer*, 24 August 1939. Kanpur's superintendent of police reported the outbreak of a Shia-Sunni riot and the impending threat of the Ahrars to take out a Madhe Sahaba procession defying government orders. 10 June 1939, Diaries, Harold Charles Mitchell Papers, IOLR. For Banaras, see Allen (1981: 246–7).
6. L/P&J/5/272. See also, fortnightly report, 2nd half of March 1940, L/P&J/5/270. In 1943, the Sunnis in Lucknow tried to revive the Madhe Sahaba agitation and defy the ban on Barawafar procession which fell about the middle of March. This led to the extermination of some Sunni leaders from Lucknow. Fortnightly report, 2nd half of January 1943, L/PJ/5/272.
7. 'Establishment of a Shia College at Lucknow', 25 October 1917, UP Government

- (Education), file no. 398, 1926, UPSA; Fateh Ali Khan to Meston, 21 October 1915, file no. 136/15, Meston Papers IOLR. The Raja of Mahmudabad and Syed Wazir Hasan were the only two prominent Shias who were initially opposed to the Shia College. They believed that it would weaken the Aligarh Muslim University movement and accentuate Shia-Sunni differences.
8. Azad was deputed by the Congress High Command to resolve the impasse. His personal stature aided the process of reconciliation. The Shia ulama, in particular, agreed to suspend the Tabarra agitation at his instance.

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