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*THE MOTHERS OF THE LASHKAR: A Review Essay*

The book is titled *Ham Ma'en Lashkar-e-Taiba Ki* ('We, the Mothers of Lashkar-e-Taiba'); its compiler styles herself Umm-e-Hammad; and it is published by Dar-al-Andulus, Lahore. Its three volumes have the same garish cover, showing a large pink rose, blood dripping from it, superimposed on a landscape of mountains and pine trees. The first volume, running to 381 pages, originally came out in November 1998, and was reprinted in April 2001. The second and third volumes, with 377 and 262 pages, respectively, came out in October 2003. Each printing consisted of 1100 copies. Portions of the book—perhaps much of it—also appeared in the Lashkar's journal, *Mujalla Al-Da'wa*.

Here is how the publisher, Muhammad Ramzan Asari, describes the book's contents and purpose.

The book at hand, *Ham Ma'en Lashkar-e Taiba Ki*, is a distillation of the tireless labor and far-flung travels of our respected *Apa* ('Elder Sister'), Umm-e-Hammad, who is in-charge of the Lashkar's Women section, and also happens to be an *Umm-e-Shahidain* ('Mother of Two martyrs').... [I could be misreading the text, for I found no reference to any of her sons except one, whom she described as a very much alive mujahid.] Her poems are on the lips of the mujahdin. Numerous young men read or heard her poems and, consequently, set out to perform jihad, many of them gaining Paradise.... Our workers should make this book a part of the readings for the ladies at homes to awaken the fervor for jihad in the breasts of our mothers and sisters. (I.13.)

In her preface, Umm-e Hammad describes her own conversion to the cause at some length.

Once I was among those who considered jihad the root of big trouble [*fasad*], and vociferously called it that. I hated the Markaz. I considered it to be the den of a gang that lured innocent boys away from their homes and schools only to throw them into the inferno of battle in Kashmir, making them a sacrifice to its own end of collecting Riyals and Dollars from foreign sources. Then I noticed that my husband, Asif Ali, whose organizational name is Abu Hammad, had grown closer to Hafiz Muhammad Sa'eed Sahib. He had known the latter fairly well for many years, but now he would often remark at home: 'I'm raising my children with prohibited money because I work in a bank.' I immediately knew that something was not right. Realizing that the man had fallen into the clutches of the so-called 'saviors' of Kashmir, I quickly took some counter-steps to protect my family. I took every loan offered by the bank to make the

man's burden of debt heavier. In brief, there was Abu Hammad, suffering because he felt he was earning an illegitimate living, and there was I, ensuring my own comfortable future by adding to the load he carried. I would constantly tell him, 'We eat of only what we actually earn. We work hard. We meet our duties.' But, while Satan helped me find arguments and excuses, Allah, the Almighty, was determined to open the doors of His help and guidance to one of his guileless, well-intending servants. And so, one morning that simple man left home for the bank as usual, and handed in his resignation. On the way out of the bank, he paused at the threshold and vowed never to cross it again. He then went to the Markaz, and from there proceeded directly to Afghanistan, to the very first training centre of the Lashkar at Jaji.

It was as if some monstrous calamity had hit the family. There was no abuse that I didn't throw at the Markaz and its director, and no crime I didn't charge them with. Still dissatisfied, I consulted with the family, obtained the address from Hafiz Muhammad Sa'eed Sahib, and showering curses on that 'gang of frauds' went to the Muzaffarabad office of the Markaz. What I did there must have pleased Satan a great deal. May Allah forgive my sin.

But after I had seen how the mujahidin lived—their hard training, their fervor, their deep faith—I soon began to examine my own ugly past, when I had lived as if I were blind, deaf, and mute. A deeply humiliating sense of remorse came over me. I listened to the lectures given by the teachers at the Markaz, and realized that I had been totally ignorant of *Jihad fi Sabil-allah* ('Jihad in God's Path'), which endows any Muslim with all the dignity and power in the world. I asked myself: how is it that Muslims everywhere are victimized by infidels? Why are they brutalized and humiliated despite the prayers, fasts and pilgrimages they perform? I now turned to the Qur'an. I read *Surah Anfal* (chapter 8), *Surah Tauba* (chapter 9), and other verses on jihad; I listened to discourses on these verses; and I came face to face with that resplendent aspect of Islam which in our history recalls the mothers of Salahuddin Ayubi, Tariq bin Ziyad, Muhammad bin Qasim, and Mahmud of Ghazna. All praise to Allah, for His great kindness. That was the first miracle of that journey in jihad. Our hearts were transformed.... May the Almighty forgive us the nineteen years of disobedience—our eating the bread of usury from the bank....

In a second introductory note, Umm-e Hammad throws some light on the genesis of her book and of the Lashkar. The group, according to her, started its militant activities at Jaji, in Afghanistan, where it joined hands with the Salafi Afghans of Nuristan in their battle against the Soviet forces. (In the book itself, several 'martyrs' are described to have received military training and seen action in Afghanistan. In one account the future 'martyr' even describes how the Arab mujahidin made fun of the Pakistanis fighting beside them.) Subsequently, the Lashkar entered the Kashmir valley, with 'less than 700 mujahidin ranged against 700,000 satanic forces.'

After a rhapsodic paean to the mujahidin's alleged successes, Umm-e-Hammad continues:

Then the wielder of this broken pen noticed that the mothers and sisters, whose hopes and desires, dreams and wishes, provide the blood that colors the shattered bodies of the Lashkar mujahidin, live in purdah [and can't be seen]. And so this humble woman, considering it a duty to unveil [their feelings], presented the idea to Hafiz Muhammad Sa'eed Sahib, the *Amir* of the Markaz, who strongly encouraged me. A few days later, Zakiur Rahman Lakhwi, the *Amir* of the Lashkar, and Abdur Rahman Al-Dakhil, the *Amir* of the Occupied Valley, set out to meet with the families of the martyrs who lived in Punjab. When my son Hammadur Rahman learned about it he decided to be my *mahram*—[legitimate male companion]—and obtained the permission from [Hafiz Sa'eed]. [On 16 December 1995] our group set out for its first meeting, with the mother of the *Shahid* Imran Majeed Butt of Faisalabad.... After collecting the blood-drenched words and the stars-like sentiments of the mothers and sisters of more than one hundred martyrs of the Lashkar, our caravan returned home on January 11 1996. (I.19.)

Subsequently, Umm-e-Hammad traveled to Karachi and parts of Sindh in a similar manner. Again, while the men talked with the male members of the families, she met with the women to take down their recollections of their 'martyr' sons or brothers. Chiefly the book is based on her notes, but on occasion she fills in gaps from the files of the Lashkar's journal, *Mujalla Al-Da'wa*.

While the first volume of the book was clearly compiled by Umm-e Hammad, the two subsequent volumes, while carrying her name, seem to be the work of male party hacks. Particularly the third volume for it badly lacks all the little personal touches that Umm-e Hammad adds to the stories in the first volume; much of it simply brings together the overblown prose that first appeared in the *Mujalla*.

The first volume of the book describes 81 'martyrs,' the second 58, and the third 45. Taking into account a few repetitions and unlisted additions, the rough total of comes to 184. In this small sample—the Lashkar claims to have sacrificed many times as many—most of the families appear to be rural and not terribly well-off, and most of the 'martyrs' seem to have been in their early twenties or less. Most of them seem to have studied only up to the secondary or matriculation level. Only a few went to a madrassa.

Each chapter of the book consists of two parts. The first, longer, section delineates the life and character of the 'martyr,' mostly through the words of his mother and sister, though comments from the male members of the family are not necessarily left out. Here we learn about the youth's background, his family and his neighborhood, his life before and after the 'conversion,' ending frequently with some details of his death. The second, shorter, section presents the 'last testament' sent home by the 'martyr.' Stiffly formal and predictably formulaic, these statements nevertheless often reveal quite a bit about the individual mortal behind the generic 'martyr.'

Below I give a reasonably fair translation of one complete entry from Volume I. It is quite representative of the others in tone and narration, except for one feature: the ‘martyr’ does not have a jihadi name in addition to his own. (More on names later.)

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The Martyr Imran Abdul Majeed [Butt], May Allah’s Grace be upon him.

In the two-storied house in the neighborhood called Khalidabad in the city of Faisalabad, there is a room on the ground floor. It contains a bed, a table, and a chair. A pile of *jihadi* books and copies of the *Mujalla* lies on the table, also some ‘stickers’ inscribed with *jihadi* expressions and Qur’anic verses. There is an armoire filled with the *Shahid* Imran’s clothes and other possessions. This room is now the only abode of his parents. His mother says, ‘I sleep here, and I also say my prayers here. It’s here that my heart finds comfort.’

The *Shahid* Imran Majeed was older to his four sisters. There is also another brother, younger to the sisters. Imran’s mother is a college graduate. She is sober, patient, and uncomplaining. Lost in the memories of her son, she told us:

‘Imran always dressed well. He was also sober and refined. He would ask for nice clothes and pullovers, and make a point to get them. Not one to spend much time with friends, he was, however, very fond of cricket, and an all-rounder player himself. He was invited to every tournament, and always took great interest in them, playing with one team here then captaining another team some place else.

‘He was also a fine student. He studied hard, and got his B.A. degree with distinction. Then he started preparing for the ‘CSS’ examination. His relatives have much influence in Faisalabad. Imran got some nice job offers, and important people were willing to recommend him, but Imran declined. He wanted something much better.

‘Then a cricket match was announced between India and Pakistan. Imran said to me, “Ammijan, you must buy me a TV. I’ve got to see the match.” We have several relatives living nearby. I told Imran to go and see the match with them, .but he kept insisting. He wanted to watch the match on his own set. So eventually, we got him a set. Whenever there was a match between India and Pakistan, Imran would be so impassioned you’d think a war was about to start.’

As I listened to her, I realized that Imran had felt nothing but hatred for the enemies of Islam, but it found its true expression much later. He watched cricket matches to relieve himself of that hatred, and eventually God directed his feelings on to the paths of Truth and Honesty. Who knows how many young men there are who vent their disgust and hatred for India through these cricket matches? They would discover the path of jihad if only someone correctly guided them and their hatred. The storms raging in their breasts would sweep away all the Indian boasts like so much rubbish. But I digress. We were talking about Imran Majeed.

By now his three sisters had also joined us. The older sister described to me how Imran changed after finishing his B.A. Maulana Irshadul Haq, the Imam/Khatib of the nearby mosque, would often say to the congregation: 'There is a boy here whose devotion and fervor when he prays makes me very happy.' It was in the Maulana's company that Imran obtained his jihad consciousness. [During Ramadan,] when Imran would lead the *taraviah* prayers at home, his sisters would often exclaim, 'Mani Bhai, you make us stand too long in the prayers. We get tired.' But Imran would only smile and say nothing.

Imran's thinking had started down the path of jihad. Now there was only one step left to take. He asked his mother to let him go for the initial training of twenty-one days, and left for the Lashkar's camp when she agreed. From the camp he wrote a detailed letter. The spiritual refinement and firm faith he obtained there enriched him so much that now he was bent upon destroying the same TV set he had earlier insisted on buying. Faith is miraculous; when it finds its way into someone's heart, his breast shines with purity, his eyes see beyond this small world, and his thinking reaches the ultimate heights of action. Imran Majeed now demanded that the TV set should be smashed to bits, for Allah had now put the strength in his arms to pick up a gun, to enter the battlefield and destroy those who rejected Allah. That instrument of false delight now disgusted him. Blood ran faster in his veins, and his falcon spirit was ready to pounce upon its prey.

When Imran returned home, everyone was amazed: his face was adorned with the Prophet's *sunnah*. The family asked him, 'Is it for good, or just seasonal? You won't shave it off a few days later, will you?' But his decision was permanent. Then one day, Imran disclosed to his mother his intention of going to Afghanistan and taking part in the jihad. His mother became very upset. She had watched the revolutionary change happening in him, and knew what to expect. But she quickly recovered, and said to Imran, 'The road you have chosen for yourself is glorious, but I too have my responsibilities, and they hold me back.'

Imran had a tender heart; he couldn't bear to give the slightest pain to his mother, and so he fell silent. But he would often talk about jihad and its importance, and the great rewards that followed from it. Imran's mother told us, 'I always told him to raise his voice against tyranny and injustice. I too hate injustice.'

Then Imran Majeed went off to Afghanistan, and joined the Afghan jihad. He would return once in a while, stay with the family a few days then again disappear. The family never learned about the places he visited, except for his mother's sister Safia, who is the headmistress at the Government High School at Barki. She was Imran's confidante; she also continuously encouraged him.

Imran's mother had some idea of what Imran was heading toward. She tried to dissuade him, but only indirectly. She said to him, 'Imran, you have four sisters. They are growing up. You should first fulfill your responsibility toward them. Once you

have done that you may devote yourself to jihad.’ Imran would mostly remain silent, but if she persisted, he would say, ‘Ammi, your daughters live within the walls of your house—in peace and safety. Our relatives live nearby. And yet you worry about them so. Shouldn’t you also think of those “daughters” who are surrounded by enemies, who are in harm’s way and waiting for us to help them?’ His mother couldn’t give him any reply, for her heart told her he was right.

Imran was trained in Communication and Action, as well as in other branches. A fast learner, he soon became an expert in every wireless technique. In fact, that was the reason he was selected to go into the Valley. In those days the mujahidin in the Valley couldn’t easily communicate with each other, and badly needed an expert’s help. And so Imran was chosen. As in cricket earlier, in jihad too he proved himself to be an all-rounder.

When, before going into the Valley, Imran came home to see his family, he appeared silent and withdrawn, and not relaxed and playful as he used to. In his mother’s words: ‘It seemed that all the sorrows of the Kashmiri victims had permeated his soul, and he had deliberately made himself indifferent to any kind of affection and happiness. That is how he was when he submitted his life to Allah.’

I then remembered what had happened when, only two or three days after Imran’s martyrdom, we had gone, with Imran’s aunt, Umm-e-Talha, and other women, to meet with Imran’s mother at Faisalabad. That day, when food was served, Imran’s mother invited us all to start by saying, ‘Please begin. It’s Imran’s *walima* [wedding] feast.’ We stared at her in amazement, but she calmly uttered ‘*Bismillah*’ and began eating. We had to follow her example. Now when I heard her remarks I realized that Allah had set aside special abodes in eternity exclusively for people like her, so accepting and so totally reconciled to His Will.

Besides Imran’s mother, his sisters, his father, and above all his Aunt Safia are worth all praise. The latter continuously encouraged him, and gave him much help. Then she improved the minds of his mother and sisters, and made them understand how superior Imran’s feelings and intentions were. Even now, after Imran’s martyrdom, she remains devoted to jihad, and whole-heartedly helps the mujahidin with money and with prayers. May Almighty Allah reward her greatly. May He make her a rightful claimant to the promised, unfailing intercession by the martyr on the Day of Judgment. Amen.

Imran Shaheed’s mother put her feelings into verse too. One can see in her poem an effective blend of Imran’s memory and her own feelings for jihad. Consider here only her emotions. Ignore the matter of artistic worth; consider only what her heart felt.

‘You, my son, were martyred, and I became a martyr’s mother.  
‘It was a gift from you, Allah, that fell into my humble lap.  
‘Let my courtyard be without a light; I accept, Allah.  
‘Please give the tyrannized people a night full of stars.  
‘Allah, a piece of my heart, my handsome youth, my martyr—

‘He fell down, cut to pieces, but it was only for your sake.  
‘His blood poured out, but only for your sake.  
‘My motherhood was bloodied, but only for your sake.  
‘I wait for the day, Lord, when You will call out:  
“‘Who is the mother of this blood-drenched rose flower?’”  
‘I would proudly respond: Lord, I am that martyr’s mother.  
‘It was a piece of my heart that was cut down for your sake;  
‘And it is my blood that is now makes this ground so fragrant.’

A shopkeeper Abdul Hameed told us that when Imran discovered that Hameed had not learned to read the Qur’an, he started instructing him. ‘He would take my seat in the shop and take care of the customers,’ Hameed said, ‘while I would sit in a corner and study my lessons.’ It was only after Imran’s martyrdom, that his family found out what had been behind Imran’s close friendship with the shopkeeper.

#### The final testament of the *Shahid* Imran Abdul Majeed Butt

Peace Be Upon You, and Allah’s Grace and Mercy:

Venerable parents! I hope both of you are well. I too am well here. Today, *inshallah*, I leave for the Occupied Kashmir in order to fulfill my duty. The groans and cries of the Muslim brothers and sisters living in Kashmir call out to me. The Kafir has challenged us today, and we must give the Kafir a shattering rejoinder. Today the Kafir tests our self-respect by humiliating us, by tearing down our mosques. The Kafir plays with the honor of our mothers and sisters while we silently watch. I find it intolerable. I want to cut open the Kafir’s jugular to quench my anger. I want to keep doing so until the day comes when my Master cools my breast and makes Islam victorious. Life and death are in Allah’s hands, but no death is comparable to the death that occurs on battlefield.

Ammijan and Abbujan! After I’m gone, please run the household in the Islamic manner. Make a special effort to maintain purdah. Teach my sisters about purdah and the distinction between a *mahram* and a non-*mahram*. Further, you should make the other members of the family recognize what Islamic values are, and make their minds inclined toward jihad. You should develop good ties with all relatives, distant or close, and bring to an end all disagreements. We shall meet when Allah gives us life again. I don’t owe anyone any money. To all the family members, Peace Be Upon You, and Allah’s Grace and Mercy.

Please forgive me if I had ever erred in any manner.

Your son,  
Imran Abdul Majeed (I.30–36.)

It is obviously a book of propaganda, and as such presents a closed world. It deliberately excludes from its readers' sight huge areas of the experienced lives of the Pakistani people and the belief fields of millions of Muslims in South Asia, not to mention around the world. It is intensely focused. Its goal is to establish that jihad is the paramount purpose of Islam on earth, and in particular for the Muslims of Pakistan. The pages of this book do not contain any reference to the ills that plague all Pakistanis in such sites of public life as work places, schools, hospitals, and urban neighborhoods. It is not concerned with Pakistan except as the territory from where the Lashkar must obtain its recruits. Similar is its concern with Kashmir—to be exact, the Valley of Kashmir. The book shows no awareness of the Kashmiri people as impoverished and besieged human beings in two nation states. When it refers to the Kashmiris it is only to allege and denounce that Kashmiri mothers and girls were being raped by Hindu soldiers occupying the valley. What other injuries and pains the Kashmiris might be suffering is a subject totally excluded here, for doing otherwise would involve bringing into purview the Pakistani Kashmir, too. That is where the Lashkar has its camps, and where it unquestioningly collaborates with the authorities of the state. There is no indication in the book that the Lashkar supports an independent Kashmir in any manner.

Not to deny the alleged or reported cases of rape and other forms of violence against women in Indian Kashmir, but I must note that the jihadi concern with sexual exploitation of Muslim women by non-Muslims happens to have a history too. It is the obligatory motif in their literature in South Asia, invoked with reference to both Muhammad bin Qasim's attack on Sindh (8<sup>th</sup> century) and the jihad of Syed Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (19<sup>th</sup> century) against the Sikhs conducted on the border with Afghanistan. While it may be said that the movement led by Syed Ahmad also did something for the benefit of Muslim women who were not under Sikh domination—it urged widow remarriage, a major step against the practiced orthodoxy of the time—the Lashkar cannot make a similar claim. It encourages widow remarriage, but within the confines of the dead man's immediately family or the ranks of the Lashkar. The widows of the 'martyrs' are in no way encouraged to build a life of their own. In fact, several 'martyrs' expressly ask their parents to forego educating the girls in the family to any high level, and instead have them married quickly into good 'jihadi' families. Needless to say, neither the Lashkar nor any other Islamic extremist group has expressed any concern over the rampant violence against Muslim women in Pakistan in the form of honor killings, incidents of acid throwing, *karo-kari* (handing over a woman to be killed as a 'ransom' for a man), not to mention something as mundane as domestic violence.

Given that history, this celebration of mothers by the Lashkar comes somewhat as a surprise. To my knowledge there is no companion book about the fathers. In fact, in a great many narratives included in the book the fathers are mainly absent. Often literally so, toiling somewhere in the Middle East, providing nothing more than financial support to their families. The absence of the fathers probably helps the Lashkar in their recruiting efforts. The sons might briefly rebel against the female authority at home and/or seek to replace the missing father with the figure of a commando of the Lashkar. But the dynamics of such families in South Asia must also create a powerful emotional dependency between the sons and the mothers. That, apparently, is not lost on the leaders



of the Lashkar. They know they must have the mothers in Punjab and Sindh on their side in order to achieve their designs in remote places. Hence their jihad is claimed to be almost exclusively on behalf of Kashmiri mothers and daughters. Hence also this perverse effort to ‘honor’ bereaved mothers by showing them as only too willing to sacrifice their sons to the Lashkar’s bloody cause. The book is about women and is compiled and written by a woman, but its language and values are of that hyper-masculinized Islam which characterizes these militant/sectarian groups in South Asia.

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Though the Lashkar claims to focus its rage only on the Indian security forces in the Kashmir valley, its hatred of India as a whole—always referred to as either Bharat or India even in Urdu, and almost never as Hindustan—is manifest in many ways. As a part of their training the ‘martyrs’ appear to have been lectured on a particular *hadith* that many of them refer to in letters and ‘last testaments’. In that *hadith*, the Prophet is alleged to have said: ‘Two groups from among my *Ummah* [i.e. the Muslims] will be immune from Hell: one, the group that would wage the jihad in India, and the other who would stand beside Isa s/o Maryam [i.e. Jesus] and battle the Anti-Christ.’ (Incidentally, the quotation of that *hadith* is one of those rare occasions where the word ‘Hindustan’ is used instead of Bharat. Probably even the Lashkar’s editor felt that would be a bit too much.) The Lashkar believes and teaches that it is the vanguard of that prophesied first group. It doesn’t matter to it that the particular *hadith* is as disputed and doubtful as the one in which the Prophet allegedly said, ‘A fragrant breeze of spirituality comes to me from India,’ or the one that alleges the Prophet once remarked, ‘I saw my Lord in the shape of a handsome youth with curly hair.’ People of genuine piety have always gone to *hadith* collections for moral guidance, not for eternal marching orders. The back cover of the book advertises a few other publications of the Lashkar, including one titled *Ghazwa-e Hind* (‘The Battle for India’). Probably it expounds on that same *hadith*. But it is interesting that they use the word *ghazwa* instead of jihad. (*Ghazwa* is what Muslim writers generally use to refer to all the battles the Prophet took part in, with the understanding that all were ‘defensive’ actions.) It accords with their public posture that their actions in Kashmir are purely defensive, but it also reveals that their ambitions are not limited to the Valley.

There is, however, an obverse side to the Lashkar’s hatred of India, as is often the case in such almost pathological fixations. Indians, or rather Hindus, might be barbaric in the worst way in the Lashkar’s eyes, but they are allowed the capacity to appreciate exceptional valor. And so we read two or three times about some Indian army officer honoring the fallen ‘martyr.’ In one rather gruesome version, the Indian colonel orders his men to lift the corpse and make it stand, so that he, the colonel, could salute it in homage.

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In addition to the garish cover and the title that invoked ‘mothers,’ I was also intrigued by the name of the author, Umm-e Hammad (‘Mother of Hammad’), when I first saw the

book.. Propaganda books published by extremist Muslim organizations rarely carry a woman's name as the author. In fact, to my limited knowledge, only one woman, Maryam Jameelah, gained that dubious distinction. But she was an American convert from Judaism and wrote in English as a member of the Jama'at-e Islami of Pakistan. No indigenous female name, however, comes readily to mind, in either India or Pakistan and whether in Urdu or in English.

The Arabic style name reminded me of another time, when such names indicated a forward for the Muslim women of South Asia. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Muslim women seriously took to authorship in Urdu, it was common for them to adopt such *noms de plume*. They were path-breaking women; they made available the entire society, nay the entire world, to the eyes of their less fortunate sisters in purdah. Now, sadly, comes a woman who styles her name in that fashion but does exactly the reverse. While a Bint-e Nazrul Baqar ('Daughter of Nazrul Baqar') raised a daughter who gained fame and honor under her actual name, Qurratulain Hyder, the book at hand contains no suggestion that any mother or sister of these 'martyrs' could have an independent life of her own under any name. The world of the mothers and daughters of the 'martyrs,' the book repeatedly declares, must be confined to the limits set by the male theorists of the Lashkar, disallowing any say in the matter to both the state of Pakistan and the lived Islam of its people.

Names matter much to the Lashkar bosses. They give each mujahid or prospective 'martyr' a new name when he joins the ranks. Is it a senseless fetish? Is it another way to weaken existing filial ties of the initiate and let him be 'born' again into a new family of the pure and the elect? Be as it may, the new name or *kunniya* is always purely Arabic—apparently Arabic alone is 'Islamic' enough a language for the Lashkar. The new name is also always masculine in orientation. Though the book may celebrate the fortitude and courage of the mothers of the 'martyrs,' the names chosen by the Lashkar for its recruits never refer to any woman; they describe the 'martyr' only as the *abu* or father of someone male, mostly some legendary Muslim warrior of long ago Arabia. Only rarely does one come across a *kunniya* that actually refers to the child of a 'martyr.' The chief aim of giving new names, it would appear, is not a disguise as a way to link the contemporary with the past. It is also significant that the new Arabic name is never modeled on the equally common Arab fashion, Ibn-X ('Son of X'), for doing otherwise could leave some room in the recruit's mind for a filial tie with his father. The Lashkar's aim is to destroy every such tie and instead create only one binding relationship for the initiate—with the Lashkar itself.

The fetishism of any and every thing Arabic can produce pathetic consequences, as in the case of a bright boy named Muhammad Umar. Umar came from a well-to-do family; his father was the Principal of a school. He was creative as a child, and had several talents. He made paintings and toys, took interest in plants and flowers, and had an attractive voice that he used to call for prayers and sing jihadi songs. Immediately after matriculation Umar went off for three weeks of initial training, followed by a three-month course in guerilla fighting. On initiation Umar was given a new name: Abu Qa'qa'. His last letter home, to his mother, contained the following on his new name:

‘You asked about my *kunniya*, and think that it makes no sense to you. It was my teacher who chose it. For your information: Abu Qa’qa’ was a renowned ‘companion’ of the Prophet, and a most powerful warrior. The Prophet once sent him to fight against 70,000 infidels all by himself. In another tradition it is reported that he grabbed a horse by its tail and crushed it. I have tried a great deal, but the boys insist on calling me by that name alone. I spoke to the teachers too, and told them that I wished to change my *kunniya*. But they just start telling me more stories.’ Reading the letter I was reminded of my own childhood days when ‘*araq-e na’na*’, the Arabic word for distilled vinegar, was a big joke—we frequently used it to test the spelling skills of some victim of our teasing. I can well imagine how poor Umar must have felt under the burden of *Qa’qa’*. Umar fell down a mountain slope during his military training, and died of the injuries. He was barely 17.

One grieves for Umar still more when one discovers that the Lashkar propagandists used his story a second time, in the final volume, and changed his heartfelt last words to his mother to serve their own ugly purpose. The new version reads: ‘You asked about my *kunniya*. For your information, Abu Qa’qa’ was a renowned ‘companion’ of the Prophet, and a most powerful warrior. The Prophet once sent him to fight against 70,000 infidels all by himself. In another tradition it is reported that he grabbed a [running] horse by its tail and stopped it still.’

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Another perverse aspect of this book is the presence of immense amount of poetry in its pages. Umm-e Hammad, apparently, is a prolific poet herself. Her poems evidently appear regularly in the Lashkar’s journal and have also been collected in a book. We are also told that many of her poems are popular among the Lashkar cadre, who memorize and sing them. (There is indeed a website where such performances may be heard, but I shall not provide the link.) Throughout the book, Umm-e Hammad frequently laces her accounts with her own verses, including sometime an entire poem in praise of the ‘martyr.’ In several accounts one also comes across assorted verses or a short poem composed by some female relative of the deceased. While her own Urdu verse is of embarrassing quality, Umm-e Hammad does not hesitate to label the few Punjabi lines of a grief-stricken mother as not particularly good. Her own poetry is sloganeering of the worst kind, not different from her prose—and the prose of the anonymous male contributors—which turns as quickly to casting revolting invectives at all Hindus, Jews, and Christians as to expressing hyperbolic and fulsome adoration of her own ilk. Needless to say, poetry as a domain where imagination reigns supreme and where ambiguity and paradox play out to the full is not what any member of the Lashkar aspires to. The irony of this memorable verse by Mir Taqi Mir would be totally lost on the Lashkar’s leaders: ‘O gazelles of the Ka’ba, don’t strut around [in its safe confines]; come out, get pierced by someone’s arrow, fall down as someone’s prey.’

The latent elitism in their mindset is also suggested by the Lashkarites’ failure to express any sympathy or concern for the wretched condition of so many of their ‘martyr’ families while making much of the relative prosperity or high professional or educational level of some other martyrs. Partially it could be due also to their anxiety refute the accusation

that they mislead the poor and the illiterate with their propaganda of Jihad. But I suspect much of it comes from a basic lack of concern for systemic economic and social changes. The Lashkar's charity work—schools and medical clinics—does not lead it to champion democratic and egalitarian values. Authority, in its view, belongs not to the ordinary but to the select.

How manipulative the same people can be comes through in one telling anecdote, the only one in which the mother of the 'martyr' shows anger and resistance. Umm-e Hammad visits with the family of a 'martyr' named Muhammad Ashraf, who, in the narrot's words, 'had mostly served in the kitchen of the mujahidin.' She describes their house as a one-room hovel in a lane in Multan, where live Ashraf's 'sick mother, old decrepit father, and two younger siblings.' Ashraf also has an older brother, working in Saudi Arabia, and an older married sister, who teaches in a local school. When Umm-e Hammad enters the house and introduces herself by saying that she had come from the Markaz to enquire about the family, the mother flares up, 'Why have these Markaz people come to my house? What more do they want? The Markaz has already caused the death of my young, tiger of a boy killed.' Ashraf's sister also glares at the visitor, who responds, 'Do you know what blessings lie in martyrdom?' At which the mother tells her to shut up. 'Don't talk to me about martyrdom. Why don't you markaz people send your own sons to seek martyrdom? You come to tempt us with Paradise. Don't you feel any need for it yourself?' When the mother finally falls silent, Umm-e Hammad says to her, '*Bahan-ji*, you know how far I've traveled. I've come all the way from Lahore only to obtain the bliss of being in your presence [*ziyarat karne*]. But you haven't even offered a little hospitality [*chae pani ko bhi nahin pucha*]. That's no way to treat a guest.' At that, Umm-e Hammad triumphantly writes, 'She [the mother] immediately looked abashed and glanced at her daughter, who went away and then returned with a cup of tea and some oranges.' After that Umm-e Hammad had no trouble winning over the two women to her side by telling them that her own son was a mujahid and that they could come with her to Muzaffarabad to allay their doubts about the work the Lashkar was doing. (The family remained in Multan, but the local Lashkar people increased the help they had been providing.)

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According to the Lashkar, a perpetual, universal jihad for the greater glory of Islam is the *sine qua non* of being a Muslim. In other words, the Lashkar's manichaeian thinking rejects both the accepted legalistic position—that certain specific conditions should be met before any jihad is launched—and the accepted pietistic position—that the greatest jihad is waged against one's own lower self (*nafs*), and instead sees the humanity in terms of 'us' and 'them.' With all their devotion to God's word, in practice the Lashkar leaders seem to find no purpose in the astonishing diversity on God's earth that God declares in the Qur'an to be deliberate and purposeful.

The Lashkar's thinking, as natural to rigidly sectarian groups, also puts great emphasis on form and ritual. (Several stories of conversion in the book refer to some formal detail. 'His *namaz* was wrong earlier but now he does it correctly.' 'Men wear their shalwars above the ankles.') In doing so the Lashkar basically reverses a core feature of traditional Islam wherein every act has two aspects: a *batin* ('inner') and a *zahir* ('outer'). And the

*batin* is always considered superior to the *zahir*. Going by the fruit of the Lashkar's labors—the last testaments of the 'martyrs'—it would appear that only the formal act matters. In these statements, the 'martyrs' urge their family members to perform the prayers 'correctly,' throw out TV sets, grow beards, and enforce purdah on the females. (They also ask their mothers and sisters to read the Qur'an with the help of a translation. An excellent idea, but I assume they have only some 'correct' version of their own sect, Ahl-e Hadith, in mind.)

One feature common to all 'last testaments' I found very moving. It is the expressed promise every 'martyr' makes to intercede with Allah and bring 70 members of his family into Paradise—as promised in a *hadith* popular in all jihadi literature. Often that promise comes with a rueful note about failing to do the 'right thing' with the family in this world. It is a promise to make up for what they could not deliver—as socially demanded and as also keenly desired by them—on earth. In a similar vein, married 'martyrs' always assure their widows that they would be made mistress over the houris of Paradise when they die and join the husbands. The family that is falling apart on earth for reasons seemingly beyond the comprehension or control of its members will be united for eternity in Paradise by his death here—that is the tacit promise every 'martyr' makes to his mother, in particular, and to the rest of the family in general.

And that leads to my final observation, to what I found most moving and most honest: an almost desperate concern for *izzat* ('dignity') on the part of the families of the 'martyrs.' Again and again the mothers and sisters—even a few fathers—state how from being a nonentity they became 'someone' after their son or brother died. 'Now everyone honors us.' Or, the death saved them from something worse. 'What could have I done if my son had a longer life but then died a heroin addict?' Reading such statements one feels sad for these women and families. All they want is a bit of respect, a prospect to hold on to their dignity. How tragic that they get it only when they lose a brother or son. What an indictment of the state and society allowing it. The Lashkar leaders, on the other hand, are aware of this need, and meet it in full. When a 'martyr' is killed in Kashmir, they go to his house in Pakistan, even in the remotest part, and create a spectacle. Several jeeps full of men in uniforms and holding automatic guns; big name urban leaders from Muridke or the regional headquarter; hundreds of people brought over from other locations for the burial prayers; sermons on jihad and martyrdom; and a formal visitation by the dignitaries of the Lashkar. Subsequently, they also provide unstinting financial and other support to the bereaved family. This cry for a little *izzat*, for a chance to preserve not just the body but also a bit of self-respect, must be heard and responded to, not only in Pakistan but also abroad, before there can be found any solution to the problem that plagues us now. We must remind ourselves that no matter how low we might hold some people in our esteem through our own ignorance and complacency, all people demand and deserve a little bit of respect—a fair chance to hold on to their dignity even in the direst circumstance.

(December 14, 2008)

*Postscript:* Since writing the review I have received information about two important articles on the subject.

1) Farhat Haq, "Militarism and Motherhood: The Women of the Lashkar-i-Tayyabia in Pakistan," *Signs*, Summer 2007, vol. 32, no. 4.

2) Mariam Abou Zahab, "I shall be waiting for you at the door of paradise," in *Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence* by Rao Aparna, Michael Bollig, Monika Bock.