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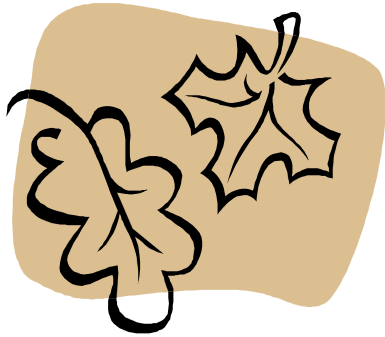
Khadim Hussain

Khadim.2005@gmail.com

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- HUMAN SECURITY
- SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
- REGIONAL COOPERATION
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The organization has been envisioned to remain independent, both ideologically and organizationally, and is meant to carry out scientific and rational studies for policy recommendations to countries in the region, international community and development organizations.

HOUSE NO. 1011, STREET NO. 22, SECTOR G-11/1, ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN.
Email: info@airra.org, airrafresearch@gmail.com, khadim.2005@gmail.com **web:**

www.airra.org

PHONE OFFICE: +92-51- 2220168, +92-333- 5568938

Demolishing the shrine of Sufi poet-- Cultural, Ideological and strategic implications

1. Introduction

As the dawn of March 6 2009 spread over the horizon of Peshawar valley, the people of Hazar Khwani, a village at a distance of 5 km to the south east of Peshawar, headquarters of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, heard a series of blasts in the final resting place of the great 17th century Sufi poet, Abdur Rahman, alias Rahman Baba. The blasts destroyed the outer walls of the shrine and with it a blow was given to the hearts and minds of the people not only of that area but also to almost all Pashtuns across the world. "May God the hands of those broken who tried to destroy the shrine", an old man of the locality said while shedding tears. Several men and women could not help crying after hearing the news of the terrorist attack on the mausoleum of one of the greatest Pashto poets of the 17th Century. The first time, "Rahman Baba's mausoleum was constructed by he Pakhto Tolena of Afghanistan in 1954 is in Hazarkhwani area close to Peshawar city in North West Frontier province (NWFP) of Pakistan¹" Later, the Awami National Party government constructed the complex of Rahman Baba in the 90s with a wide space and a library besides a resource centre for researchers and foreign visitors. Despite all upheavals in the Pashtun belt, the mausoleum of Rahman Baba had always remained a place of peace and tranquility. Poets, singers and artists would pay homage to Raman Baba every year on his anniversary.

2. Who was Rahman Baba?

Rahman Baba had been one the most influential saint poets remaining uncontroversial for the last 300 years in the Pashtun belt. The essence of Rahman Baba's message, as was understood by the people, was humanitarian values, tolerance and non-violence. He has been a symbol of the cultural continuity of the Pashtuns since 17th Century. He lived in the era of the Mughal Empire of the sub-continent and had shunned all worldly status and privileges to live among the common people and to express the soft feelings of a common man. If one wants to see the collective aesthetics of the Pashtuns in a single poet, the finger will surely be pointed at Rahman Baba's poetry. Being the epitome of universal human values, Rahman Baba has been translated in a dozen other languages including English and Urdu. Here is a poem by Rahman Baba that depicts universal human values:

*Sow flowers so your surroundings become a garden
Don't sow thorns; for they will prick your feet
If you shoot arrows at others,
Know that the same arrow will come back to hit you.
Don't dig a well in another's path,
In case you come to the wells edge
You look at everyone with hungry eyes
But you will be first to become mere dirt.
Humans are all one body,
whoever tortures another, wounds himself².*

¹ Abdullah Qazi. Available on <http://www.afghan-web.com/bios/yest/rahmanbaba.html>

² <http://www.afghan-web.com/bios/yest/rahmanbaba.html>

3. Cultural Implications

Rahman Baba is the reflection and symbol of humanity, pluralism, non-violence and collective aesthetics of the Pashtuns. All Pashtuns living across the world had an enviable link with the symbol of soft feelings, tolerance and non-violence through the poetry of Rahman Baba. Rahman Baba seems to be the only poet who all Pashtuns looked up to with unblemished reverence, love and veneration. Demolishing his shrine indicates that an effort has been made to destroy the collective cultural symbols of the Pashtuns. This also indicates that terrorists are out there to demolish all symbols of human values present in the Pashtun belt. Rahman Baba represented the continuity of these values and so the demolishing of his shrine indicates demolishing the continuity of Pashtun cultural heritage. The pluralistic, humanistic and non-violent secular identity of the Pashtuns are attempted to be converted into a Wahabi ideological Arab identity. Is it possible to keep the collective aesthetics of a whole population in shackles, is yet to be seen.

4. Ideological implications

According to Wahabi interpretation of Islamic scriptures, all symbols of the past, especially shrines, are to be destroyed because these symbols, according Wahabi interpretation, represent 'Shirk' or 'Kufr' (Infidelity). By destroying the shrine of Rahman Baba, the Pashtun pluralistic, humanistic identity is attempted to be converted into a Wahabi based Arab identity. This seems to be an attempt to create ruptures in the cultural and historical continuity of the Pashtuns. The extremists, militants and terrorists draw analogy from the breaking of the idols by Prophet Muhammad in Makkah, Arabia. Those who bring out contradictions in the analogy are instantly eliminated so that an artificial constructed identity of the Pashtuns is perpetuated. Most importantly, several militant ideologues have been making consistent efforts to bring about a shift in religious authority and to impose a single interpretation of their choice on the whole Muslim world. Where they are unable to push through their interpretations through theoretical debate, they resort to the use of force and impose their minority interpretation on the majority of the people living in the Pashtun belt. That is why they have started desecrating and destroying all those symbols in the shape of heritage, history, cultural values and personalities that would ultimately bring about a shift in the interpretation of religious authority.

5. Strategic implications

The militants and terrorists obviously intend to demolish the secular identity, pluralism and collective aesthetics of the Pashtuns to isolate them from the present march of the civilization on the one hand, and to strategically cut the Pashtuns off from the rest of Pakistan and the rest of the world on the other hand. This facilitates their agenda to bring the whole Pashtun belt under their unchallengeable control and use it a strong hold from where the Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists can launch strikes across the Durand Line and across the Eastern borders of Pakistan. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists have been making concerted efforts to isolate, control and disrupt the socio-cultural institutions of the Pashtun belt which they can use as a spring board. They have already created a vacuum which they can fill with their own ideological and strategic structures. They may start expanding the same paradigm to the neighboring states like India, Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asian Republics and the rest of the world.

6- Conclusion

It seems the Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists have started a campaign to shatter all those symbols, cultural values and icons which could be rallying points for the people living between the River Oxus and the River Indus. They have been using ideological discourse of the modern Wahabi Jihadism, execution of the socially influential and demolishing cultural and historical symbols to create a vacuum and to perpetuate the vacuum for their vested interest. The states in the region have to agree on a comprehensive strategy to deal with this ever increasing influence of the Wahabi Jihadist ideology on several fronts simultaneously. Firstly, the civil society and political parties in the states of the region have to start a vehement debate on the ideological content of the Wahabi Jihadism and identify the internal contradictions in the ideology. Secondly, all the states of the region have to reconstruct their social, political and economic institutions to be more responsive to the needs of the people. Thirdly, all the neighboring states have to coordinate their intelligence, military strategy and the security apparatus to break the network and command and control systems of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorists.