

Identity as Shiite Muslim: A Study of College and Madrassah Students of Baltistan

Abstract

The research discusses the Shiite-Muslim identity of college and madrassah students in Baltistan. The aims of the study are to understand structures and significant components of Shiite-Muslim, identity in college and madrassa students of Baltistan. Identifying points of conflict collision contradiction overlaps convergence in the Shiite Muslim identity in college and madrassah students. It also explores how cultural political and religious elite looked into identity issues and conflicts as well as takes their view of changes that have taken place in these identities over time due to the infrastructural changes and super-structural changes in society. Analysis of the data produced through focused group discussions and in-depth interviews were reduced to data reduction techniques. The differences between identities of madrassah and college students were identified along with the observation that these identities share a number of significant features. The identities of college students were found to be more fluid than their madrassah based counterparts

Introduction and Literature Review

Identity as a term has been a focus of not only contemporary societies but also of the research and theorizing tradition in social sciences for almost a few decades now. Judith A. Howard., (2000) reviewing the literature on social psychology of identities has commented that in earlier more stable societies identity was not only a non-issue but it also was assigned rather than selected or adopted (Howard, 2000). Identifying the increase in the pace of changes that are taking place due to a number of factor e.g. globalization, technological development of communication media etc it has

Mr. Salman Haider

Lecturer, Department of Gender Studies
Fatima Jinnah Women University

been identified that the need to answer the identity related questions has increased many folds. Verkuyten (2004) also appear to be in agreement with Howard when he claims that questions of identity are more profound and urgent in the late modern and global eras. Verkuyten (1997) also identifies that ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, a result of technological developments in means of communication and commutation, has increased the importance of identity questions not only for the society, in many countries, but also for the state. (Verkuyten, 1997)

Commenting on the changes that have taken place in these societies and resulting focus on the identity questions Gross Berg and Hall have also highlighted the changes that one can observe in the terminology that is used in the identity discussions and discourses. They claim that in past the words with connotations of stability, unity, essence and certainty were being used to discuss identity and that they have been replaced by the terms sharing the semantic features of variability, multiplicity, fragmentation and ambivalence. (Gross Berg, 1996; Hall, 1996)

It can also be argued that the complexity in defining the concept of identity has not only resulted from multiplicity of its use by various disciplines and faculties but the concept has also been obscured as it has been analyzed at various levels. Various distinctions have been suggested by several social psychologists (Duckitt, 1996). Three levels namely individual/personal, interactional/interpersonal and the third i.e. social can easily be identified by reviewing the available literature of various disciplines on identity. It has also been distinguished between these three levels. Cote & Levine has recently used the model in their study of identity formation (Cote 1996). The first level discusses personal characteristics and intra-individual processes and is usually studied in terms of self, cognitive structures and so on. The second level that is of interpersonal interaction refers emergence and maintenance of identity in everyday situations and roles. Political ideological and cultural features make the third level of analysis that is societal level. It is the levels of macro, social, and historical developments that are examined.

Examining the literature social psychology has produced about the identities one can identify various traditions of lines of research that have studied identities on various levels and in multiple backgrounds. Two of the important research traditions on identity are Social cognition and symbolic interactionism. These two prevailing perspectives in sociological social psychology provide the grounds of traditional understanding of identities. Discussing the key themes of both the traditions I will

move onto the current trends in and types of collective identities studied in sociological and psychological research on the issue.

Social cognition according to Fiske and Taylor (1991) and Augoustinos & Walker (1995) is a theory with roots in psychology that describes the way we process and store information. Most of the studies in this tradition are laboratory researches with minimal group paradigm. The basic assumptions that underlie the social cognitive theories of identity are that the cognitive capacities of human being are limited and therefore we process information in a way to optimize the use of these limited capacities. The optimization helps us in managing our everyday interaction and that the need of cognitive efficiency makes us categorize the information about people, objects, and situations before storing it in our memory or before employing any inferential process (Fiske & Taylor 1991, Augoustinos & Walker 1995).

The social cognition approach recognizes that the information received from the environment is grouped together to form the abstract packages of this information usually described as cognitive schema. Individual identity is conceived in the social cognition theory as one such cognitive schema consisting of the information about an individual's preferences, characteristics, goals and behavior patterns. Group schemas on the other hand consist of information about social position or status of a group in social map e.g. gender race age and class. Social cognition theory have identified that group schemas have immediate effects on our sense of self. There are both advantages and disadvantages of the processing of information in packages. The summarization that is an essential part of processing information for creating schemas for the individual and/or collective-self entails losing potentially important information. Another important aspect of these schemas is that they always have an evaluative component on the basis of which certain categories are judged as better than others. These schemas are not only devices of perception but they also are used for explanatory purposes and for justification of social relationships (Tajfel, 1981). Thus these schemas are grounded in sociopolitical circumstances.

The focus of social identity theory is the degree to which individuals identify themselves in terms of the group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The fundamental principle of the social identity theory is that the individuals define their identities along social and personal dimensions. The social facet of the cognition theory deals with the membership of an individual in a social group. On the other

hand personal facet of this theory refers to the idiosyncratic attributes of an individual. Social and personal identities are identified as two ends of a continuum. It is also theorized that both the identities become more or less salient depending upon their contexts.

Deaux (1993) on the other hand has argued that both the social and personal identities are not isolated but interrelated and thus inseparable. Social identities define the status of an individual and are found related with the self-esteem. As people are motivated to judge themselves in a favorable way so do they evaluate the group which they belong. This evaluation is in relation to another group so it does entail discrimination against the groups that are perceived as a threat to one's social position.

As mentioned earlier empirical support for this theory majorly comes from the laboratory studies done in minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1970). In these studies people are combined into distinct groups based on trivial and arbitrary characteristics under controlled conditions. These groups lack the other factors typically related with group membership. Under these conditions it has been observed that people allocate rewards to the in-group members and discriminate positively in favor of their groups.

In another research stream these traditional studies has been extended to socially meaningful circumstances and groupings. Simon et al (1997) exhibit that being in a numerically smaller group does not entail identification unless the categorization as in-group or out-group member is meaningful in social context. Demonstrating the relationship between categorization and evaluation of the categories generated during the process (Simon & Hastedt 1999), has stated that the more positive and individually significant features of self are expected to be the bases on which a person positions himself in terms of collective categories. This indicates that the ones in a socially dominant group are more likely to attain a positive social identity. The process is found to be a challenge for members of a negatively evaluated or stigmatized group. The members of such group either dissociate themselves from the group or tend to judge their group in more favorable light on other dimensions. They can also compete with the others or the out-group to change the status of their in-group.

Methodology

The objectives of the study were

To understand structures and significant components of Shiite-Muslim, identity in college and madrassa students of Baltistan.

Identifying points of conflict collision contradiction overlaps convergence in the Shiite Muslim identity in college and madrassah students.

Studying how cultural political and religious elite looked into identity issues and conflicts as well as taking their view of changes that have taken place in these identities over time due to the infrastructural changes and super-structural changes in society.

Sample

The 35 students of madrassas and college with an age range of 16-22 years took part in 4 focus group discussion arranged to achieve the objectives of study. Sample for this study was students from both formal and religious institutions. Students from madrassas were of rural background while students of college were from Semi urban and urban back ground. Students from madrassa were having formal education in humanities as private candidates while college students were from humanities and sciences but were not getting religious education in any formal settings.

Sample also included cultural, political and religious elite of the community. Researcher tried to bring as many perspectives as possible in the debate to have a fuller picture. Six in depth interviews were conducted.

Instrument

Group discussion schedule prepared after literature review and informal discussions with madrassa students and teachers. The discussion schedules contained various topics aimed at identifying definitions structure and boundaries of identities. Points of conflict and overlap were also identified and were discussed by the participants. Guideline for every interview varied according to the areas of specialization.

Procedure

Four focus groups discussions were conducted, two each from madrassa and college students separately. Maximum number of participants was ten while minimum was 8. The researcher moderated the discussion himself. Discussion usually took place in Urdu and if a Balti term was used it was noted by the researcher and was clarified

after or during the discussion. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in various settings of convenience for interviewees.

Analysis

Textual analysis was conducted using data reduction techniques and was used for theory building for structure of Shiite Muslim identity.

Analysis and Discussion

The college and *madrassah* students describe identity of Muslims in different ways. The focus of the *madrassah* students is on beliefs and rituals though a moral code is also discussed yet beliefs and rituals take precedence over it and are considered more important. The beliefs appear to be most prominent components of the identity on which all the structure of the identity is constructed. The list of beliefs contains, belief on one divine being, a lord of the world to whom the world belongs (Wahdaniyat), a belief that the divine being knows the world best and treats it accordingly (Adl), Belief in a series of messengers, Mohammad being the last of it (Risalat), on whom the divine being revealed the orders to be followed, belief in a series of infallible religious leaders who spent every moment of their life according to the divine beings orders last of whom was removed from the sight of the world to come again before the day of Judgment (Imamat), and a belief in the day of judgment (Qayamat).

“The person who whole heartedly believes in oneness of Allah and prophet hood of Mohammad is a Muslim... He should also believe in the Day of Judgment. We as Shiites additionally believe in a series of infallible religious leaders (twelve in number) and that Allah is Just (the divine being knows the world best and treats it accordingly) the others do not do so. ”

The list of rituals is long yet the primary are the prayers that are said five times a day individually or collectively, fasting performed for one month during every lunar year, pilgrimage that is obligatory for those who can afford once in their life time, certain holy taxes, and preaching the virtue and stopping from vice (Amar bil Maroof and Nahi Anil Munkir).

Not performing the rituals affects one's status as Muslims and he/she is not

considered as good a Muslim as a performing one but his non performance does not deprive one from his/her identity as the Muslim.

“There is a difference between not performing (the rituals) and denying them.”

The prominence of beliefs in the religious identity is underlined by the fact that the madrassah students described the rituals as established parts of the religion and claimed that the one who does not believe that these rituals are a part of the religion is non-Muslim.

“The one who denies (the rituals) is apostate. If one says there are no prayers or fasting, the ones which are established parts of religion, the ones that are usually performed, established parts are those which have always been performed, no one can deny them, the one who denies them is an apostate.”

The ethical code mentioned by the madrassah students broadly discusses the duties of the individual towards the other believers around him. The madrassah students mentioned, being at peace with others, as one of the primary duties of the Muslims and an important part of the moral code that constituted the religious identity.

“A believer never harms any other believer with his action or speech...a Muslim is like a mirror to the other Muslims...he meets and greets him in a polite way and supports him in the times of despair and is ready to help him when he is in trouble. A lot can be said about it. A believer is like a part of a body if one feels pain the others feel that too. Momin (a believer who acts upon Islam) means the one who gives peace and the one who takes care (of others)”

The madrassah students claimed that there is no specific dress and language that can be associated with the Shiite Muslims though certain guide lines for dresses are a part of religious code.

“No there are conditions for dress and there is no specific dress (associated with the religion). Loose dress is preferable that too for the ease of human beings otherwise wearing pants or even shorts does not matter...tight dresses are disliked but one cannot say they are religiously forbidden (Haram).”

Though the students claimed that no dress is associated with Islam but they also said that the trousers symbolized Christianity and the British and the association with the British experience and the religion associated with it was described as the reason for which the people of Baltistan do not use these dresses. It was claimed that the people of Baltistan do not wear the dresses associated with the British and despite the fact that trousers and shirts are the uniform of the biggest government college of the region where the community lives.

The observation that Mujtahids, religious leaders of higher order than the clerics of the community, wear trousers and shirts was presented as the rationale of it being in accordance with the religion. “*Shalwar Qameez*” the traditional dress of the region that the madrassa students used was described as *Sunnah* though the cultural elite claimed that the local dress was brought to the region from Central Asia and not from Middle East.

“They (madrassah students) are following this dress as it is *Sunnah* though we cannot say that wearing trousers and shirts is *bidah* (something new introduced in the religion). Mujtahids in Iran wear trousers and shirts. In Baltistan no one wears the dress as it is considered to be a symbol of Christians. The people hate the English tradition and avoid it.”

Arabic was described as the language that God prefers over other languages and the one that can bring one closer to the Allah though it was emphasized that reading the translation of scripture is also essential.

“The book was revealed in Arabic and Allah likes Arabic, it is source of closeness to Allah as reading in Arabic gives one more blessings, so we read (the scripture) in Arabic. As it is a source of guidance for the humanity so it is essential to read its translation so that one can understand what has been said.”

It was claimed that religion has a full fledged political system and a separation of religion from politics is not possible as the orders of the religion are not implementable without governmental powers.

“Islam and politics are inseparable they go together. The government power is needed to implement the orders of Islam. For example we cannot abolish the interest without government.”

Madrassah students said that there are chances of clashes between the current political system and the Islamic system and in such case following the Islamic system is a religious duty. Yet it was also identified that following the orders that are not in clash with Islam is essential.

“There can be differences. It depends on the orders of the government. If a government makes a law for example that you will drink alcohol three times a day. This law is clash with Islam and so is unacceptable. But other like paying taxes is no problem. It is according to Islam and you should follow it.”

The religion was described to have a political system different from democracy, described as the western system. The duties of a believer were of individual nature while living with in the imperfect system. These duties were described to have reformative nature and also had a moral color in them.

“The duty of a believer is to vote for the right people, the ones who get the rights of the poor.”

The madrassah students claimed that the current system which according to them was not truly Islamic should be changed and described the efforts for changing the system as one of the religious duties of Muslims but they also mentioned that the decision of challenging the current system, which they thought was a religious duty, should be made on rational grounds.

“There are duties of Muslims (towards changing the system with an Islamic one) but if the situation is like the one we have in Pakistan we don't think the religious scholars can do anything. If you have the people who can work you can get fruit of the efforts. And if you can get the fruit then it is all right. But if you will fight just for dying it is of no use. It depends on the situation...one should try his utmost to incline the people towards it (establishing Islamic system). He should try to tell people the reality and when they are inclined towards it he will get a chance to govern. ”

Identifying that there are no chances of a revolution, that can install Shiite system in Pakistan and that struggling for such revolution can harm the interest of the community, the madrassah students expressed their resolve to preach what was right according to them and to resist any steps against the community by the state.

“We can preach though we can't fight. It is impossible to bring a revolution like Khomeini here. But if government starts pushing you to the wall you can fight for your rights. I don't think you can try for revolution it will be destructive for us.”

Some of them expressed support for any non Shiite Islamic system on the grounds that it will be better than western democracy.

“It is not necessary to implement a system of Shiites. It is better if other systems for example Sunni system, their orders are implemented. Government is removing the veil. They are allowing everything that is forbidden and banning everything that is allowed. A government of Ahl-e-Sunnat will not be so harmful. ”

However changing the current system by force and fighting for the enforcement of true religious order under the leadership of the infallible religious leader was described as a religious duty for which one should remain prepared according to the madrassah students. The infallible religious leader would be the twelfth Imam of the Shiite order of religious leadership.

“We can do this (fight) in the leadership of an infallible Imam. Defense is our duty but for attacking it is necessary to have an infallible leader. Jihad is a duty when the religion is being destroyed. If they don't bother you then it is alright. In Pakistan we should try for reforms not for abolishing this system.”

As the discussion about the role of government in defining ones status as Muslims started madrassa students were unanimous in their opinion that the government has the right to declare its citizens as Muslims and non Muslims. The reason for governments having this power was introduction of something new in the religion i.e. sect or group.

“Government has the right. Otherwise there will be new sect every day. Government should find out the bases of such sect so it should have the right.”

As the discussion went further the idea of exclusion of Shiites crept in and it was said that an Islamic government should have the right and not the every other government.

“I don’t think that every government should have the right or every (government) body will create a new definition. If the government is divine, real Islamic scholars are there they can fix the definition. For example Mujtahid scholars, government should decide under them. Other wise we can be excluded from the definition in Africa and at some other places. Every government should not have the right.”

It was further argued that there is a permanent definition of Muslim according to the Koran and the Hadith and every government even a Non-Muslim can and should judge its citizens according to this definition.

“Which government it is and where it is are irrelevant. There is a comprehensive definition as presented by the Holy Prophet that this and this condition is necessary and if somebody does not agree to it he or she is Non-Muslim. Any government that agrees to this definition holds the right to define who is a Muslim and who is not. If a Non-Muslim government implements it, it is right because the definition is the right one.”

When the sectarian differences among the governments, that present themselves and their interpretation of the scripture and the sayings of Prophet Mohammad as Islamic, were introduced in the discussion by the moderator the response was that the status of Shiites as a Muslim is divine thus permanent and cannot be altered.

“No one can expel us from the folds of Islam. If the people say Shiites are infidel and we have been listening to this fro long. Various religious decrees have been issued but we cannot be expelled just because they have said so. We are in the fold of real Shariat and any decree or statement cannot expel us from Islam.”

The answers of college students of Baltistan contained both the beliefs as well as the socio-moral code of life when the question, who is considered to be a Muslim was, asked. Personal character of the individual under scrutiny for being Muslim or not appeared more important to them.

“For being Muslim one’s deeds and character are seen. How he acts religiously. First of all it is important to recite Kalma (Arabic sentence claiming oneness of God) and Bismillah (The Arabic

sentence used for starting something with the name of Allah) and second is that a Muslim cannot be called a Muslim if he lacks anything that is there in a civilized man.”

The quality of a Muslim underlined by the college students of Baltistan as most significant part of a Muslim identity was Peaceful coexistence.

“I would like to add one thing there. Our prophet said that a Muslim is one from whose action and speech other Muslims are safe. People here are leaving Islam and becoming infidel these days. So the Muslims should act upon the sayings of holy prophet.”

The college students also differentiated between an ideal Muslim they designated as *Momin* and a regular Muslim. The major difference between the two according to the madrassah students was that an ideal Muslim performs religious rituals regularly while the others ignore them.

“As I just said the people who believe in Allah and his prophet yet do not say prayers of keep fast are Muslims but not the ideal ones. If some one fears Allah and keep away from sins and his deeds are good he says prayers and keeps fast than he is an Ideal Muslim.”

Elaborating upon the characteristics of an Ideal Muslim the college students identified polite manners and acts of community welfare as the qualities that an ideal Muslim should possess.

“An ideal Muslim possesses a number of qualities. Among them are polite manners, helping the poor, supporting others in difficult tasks, etc. there a number of other qualities that can be there in an Ideal Muslim.”

The college students of Baltistan agreed that an ideal Muslim can belong to any sect including though they hastened to add that people should be wise enough to decide which sect is right.

“It depends upon deeds. Who ever is pious is close to Allah. Being Shiite does not mean that one possesses a good character. Every person is an ideal Muslim in his own right if he is doing good deeds. Either he is Shiite or Sunni. If he performs good deeds his character is good he is an Ideal Muslim.”

The beliefs are also the most significant boundary makers of the religious identity though they added the term character to differentiate between Shiites and other Muslims,

“There are certain sects in Islam, Shiites are one of them they believe in Allah his prophet and after that they believe that Hazrat Ali was the (rightful) successor of the last prophet. They are identified by their character. They follow Ahl-Bait (the family of Prophet). Ahl-e-Bait has shown such a character in Karbala that even Sikhs respect them (for it). So Shiite is character.”

Another important part of the Shiite Muslim identity for the Shiite college students of Baltistan was a set of cultural cum religious festivals and rituals is known as *Azadari*. The term *Azadari* denotes observance of mourning ceremonies in remembrance of the third of infallible religious leaders, a grandson of Prophet Mohammad, his family and friends, killed by the forces of *Yazid*, the second of the Umayyad Kings. The ceremonies consist of religious gatherings where the incident is narrated by religious clerics and orators to the public. During the religious festival processions are also taken out in the remembrance of the incident. In these processions people carry the symbols signifying various aspects of the war between Yazid and Imam Hussain and replicas of the tombs of Imam *Hussain*, the religious leader, and the flag of his group and the horse he used during the war, with them. Poems narrating the incident and describing the murder and imprisonment of Imam *Hussain* his family and friends, are recited during such processions and gatherings.

Various rituals are performed during the festival. One of the significant rituals is called *Matam*. In this ritual Shiites beat their chest back and head with their hands as well as with knives and blades. Certain forms of this ritual, especially use of blades for beating oneself, are criticized by others and are debated among the Shiite community.

“Some people are using Azadari for propaganda. They do strange things in the name of Azadari. Though Azadari is the real identity of Shiites.”

The Shiite clerics though try to stop these rituals yet they have not got much success in it. The traditions of Matam with knives and blades gets strength not only from its age but also the emotional attachment of the people from it.

“When we do Azadari our blood is lost. The on looker thinks that if I embrace this religion I will have to perform it. So the people (who are against us) make them fear us. Clerics will never ask them to stop it as they will become sentimental and will never accept it (ban on Matam).”

The college students constructed Azadari as a protest against oppression and preaching.

“Azadari I think is raising your voice against oppression. Supporting the oppressed. Azadari is preaching. It refreshes the sacrifice of Imam Hussain in our hearts. We get our identity from it. Karbala is our School.”

The ritual also faces criticism from the clerics of other sects for being Un-Islamic and from certain critics on humanitarian grounds. Though the rituals are performed to full fill divine orders and for strengthening the link between the man and the God yet the ones debated in the community are contested on rational grounds. All the rituals performed by the community are focused on creating the link between the physical and the metaphysical world and are considered an important part of the order.

Discussing the political duties of a Muslim the college students said that there are certain political duties of a Muslim and that Islam is inseparable from politics. Yet their response revolved around criticizing democracy for the corruption of leadership and did not mention any political duties of a Muslim other than the good citizenship behaviors.

“Politics sans religion is brutality. If we keep religion away from politics we will become Zardari (then President of Pakistan notorious for his corruption). As the politics (here) is democratic and they keep blowing trumpets of democracy. They have a democratic system but they do not full fill the requirements of Islam. They have separated religion and politics...An ideal Muslim should enters politics keeping the orders of Islam about running politics in mind. He should be a good citizen and should know about running his country. The politics should remain in the confines of Islam.”

The Shiite college students of Baltistan believed that religion should be spread by preaching and not by force. They agreed that use of force to defend oneself is acceptable.

The political system of Islam was described as a conservative system of consultative nature. It was kind of a consultative theocracy. The changes that the proposed Islamic system should introduce, according to the college students, included circumscribing the legislative powers of people's representatives and limiting the liberty of forming political associations.

“It is a consultative system, different from the democracy. As in democracy you can do anything, make your own party group and organization. Islam has not given such a system. In Islam you can do this in a smaller circle. Because (in Islam) you have to believe in Allah and his Prophet and you are not allowed to believe in any other thing. In democracy you can do anything. Every thing is controlled by people.”

The system described as the Islamic system differs not only in cultural terms i.e. making laws that differ from religious code of ethics but also in political terms. The repository of power in the Islamic described the college students were clerics and not the people. The power is deposited in Koran which then is interpreted by the clerics in the system discussed by the students as ideal Islamic system.

“The power of making a decision (of right and wrong) lies with the Mujtahids, and Koran.”

The approach towards use of power to resist or change the democratic system was same for the college students and madrassah students. The college students agreed that the current system should be resisted if it interferes with religion and it should be challenged if there are significant chances of installing a true Islamic system in its place. Otherwise it can result in disruption and become futile for the community.

“If it creates a problem for Islam or for people who are Shiites then opposing it is right. If one fears disruption and destruction one should not interfere with it.”

They did not see any chances of installation of an Islamic system headed by a Shiite scholar and described small numbers of Shiite population, ignorance of masses and

foreign interference as its reasons. With no hope of a Shiite Islamic system the college students were divided in their opinion about struggling for a religious revolution in Pakistan. Though the discussion started from system yet soon it was revolving around individual who should head the state.

“We should try for it (a religious revolution). It is not necessary that he (head of the state after revolution) is a Shiite. A good and a true Muslim who understands Pakistani people and their problems and can implement the Islamic system (should head the state). He should prove that Pakistan is an Islamic state.”

The discussants differentiated between a good human being and a good Muslim and identified that there are people from other religions that are good human beings but they were unanimous in their opinion that the head should not a Non-Muslim.

After rejecting the idea that a Non-Muslim can head the Muslim majority state the debate still continued. The question was should the head be a good human being or a good muslim. some the supported the idea that a person who is a good human being should head the state and the others claimed that we should struggle for an Islamic revolution and an ideal Muslim should head the state after that revolution irrespective of his sect claiming that an ideal Muslim will automatically have the qualities of a good human being in it. The supporters of the idea that the head of State should be a good human being underlined his a-religious qualities such as Justice, giving rights to every body, fulfilling his responsibilities while others contested that these qualities are part and parcel of an Ideal Muslim.

The moderator when pointed out the demographic dynamic of religious groups in Pakistan the group almost agreed that the community should support a good human being but the discussion about leadership and its religious status concluded as under

“We should look for a good human being. If a good human being becomes our president he will work for people. If he is a good human being he will be a good Muslim. If he does not perform good deeds he will not be called a good human being. If he works for people he will be called a good Muslim as well as a Good human being.”

Though the student agreed that Islam is inseparable from politics they analyzed the politics of the region and the country on rational grounds and said that Shiites should not take part in Pakistani politics as Shiites but as Pakistani.

“In Pakistan we should not do politics as Shiite or as Sunni...or it will create differences. It is not right. It will not be good for us.”

The college students also had mixed opinions about role of state in defining any group as Muslim or Non-Muslim. Some students opined that only the true Islamic state can decide upon ones status as Muslim while others said that the state should not have the power to decide the religious status of its citizens. While commenting upon the constitutional amendment of 1974 that declared the Ahmadis as Non-Muslims the students said.

“Government did this because Pakistan was made in the name of Islam sir.”

“The government should not have this right. Not at all.”

“True Islamic state has the right.”

“I believe that the state possesses the right of declaring any group as non-Muslim.”

“No person state or group can decide if one is Muslim or not. It is something internal to ones self.”

At a point in the discussion it was argued that Koran and Hadith have given the definition of a Muslim and the state should enforce this definition if needed. The argument was countered by some students by mentioning that different sects and groups interpret or misinterpret the scripture and the sayings of Holy prophet in a way that suits their purpose. It was also suggested that an agreed upon interpretation of the scripture should be prepared to avoid conflicts and disruption. The idea of avoiding conflict and disruption influenced the whole discussion of state politics and system and the college students from Baltistan remained concerned peace and security for the community. The argument about state’s role in defining the religious status of a group as Muslim or Non-Muslim also ended o the same point and an agreement was reached when a student said,

“Any body (Person, group or State) can decide the status of anyone if it does not result in disruption. The state should have this right to keep the Muslims united.”

Defining the Muslim the Shiite clerics identify beliefs, rituals and the social cum moral code of life. Hafiz Hussain Noori, organizer of a Shiite madrassah defines Islam as a collection of all the three,

“...So the one who accepts Islam whole heartedly is declared as Muslim. Islam can be defined in three ways. First with reference to the beliefs, the one who believes in oneness of Allah and the finality of the Prophethood of Mohammad and his teachings. Second with reference to ones actions, as there is a saying of Holy Prophet Muslim is the one whose action and speech do not harm other Muslims. Third is with reference to praying and obeying as the leader of the faithful (Ali ibn e Abi Talib, First of the series of Infallible religious leaders Shiites believe in) said Islam is accepting the orders of Allah whole heartedly. So the one who obeys orders of Allah and his Prophet is a Muslim.”

In social/moral code of life securing the religious status of the community and its members is the most important aspect of the identity for the clerics too. Elaborating upon the characteristics of a Muslim another cleric Mohammad Ali Tohidi claimed that the only thing which makes one infidel is, declaring a Muslim as infidel,

“There is nothing in the dealings (inter personal and social affairs), for example one relations get rotten or one does not pay others rights, that allows us to declare one as infidel. But if a Muslim declares another Muslim as infidel he himself becomes infidel. Otherwise even killing a Muslim does not make one infidel...at a number of places taking interest has been called as waging war against Allah and his Prophet at some places not praying has been described as infidelity but its not real infidelity...these things have been declared infidelity to stop people from them. ”

Emphasizing the peaceful coexistence as part of Islam another cleric Jawad Hafzi said,

“(The world) Islam is (derived) from Arabic word Salimah that means remaining safe. When a Muslim steps forward after establishing his beliefs he is called Momin. Momin is (derived) from

(the word) Aman. That means peace. It says that Islam is remaining peaceful and providing peace to others. This is the order of Islam and this is the order of Allah. Save yourself and save others.”

Stretching the code of conduct for the community Jawad Hafzi, one of the prominent clerics of Baltistan and spokesperson of the Imam of Friday prayers, included the rights of animals and the rights of the environment into the moral code of the identity.

Jawad Hafzi described that the duties of a Muslim individual are divided in three spheres, towards God, towards himself and towards the others. According to him the duties towards Allah are related to beliefs,

“Duties towards Allah mean that one should neither include any body nor one’s own self in one’s relation with Allah.”

The duties towards one self included not harming one’s own self and staying healthy. And the duties towards other included duties towards family community other unrelated human beings, animals, plants, natural resources and the environment,

“The duties towards one self mean that one should not harm oneself. One should know what is healthy or unhealthy for him. For example my hands are my own but I can’t cut them. I can’t enter drugs into my body as they will damage it. Then comes all that is around us... parents, siblings, animals, human beings, to an extent that the water should not be wasted. Earth (has rights upon us)...every human, animal, Muslim, ideal Muslim has his place (in it).”

The clerics agreed that only a true Islamic government can define the religious status of a community or an individual as Muslim or otherwise. All of them also agreed that the current government is Muslim but not a true Islamic government.

“The thing is that there are different governments. If we look into our present government, if in government the system is truly according to Quran and Sunnah, the government can define this. But in the present situation our rulers do not know Islam. They are Muslims but they cannot enforce religious laws... If the system as well as the ruler is Islamic he has the right (of defining the religious status). No one can declare somebody as Muslim (or non Muslim). It is there in Quran.

Believing in oneness of Allah and Prophet Hood of Mohammad...who so ever believes in it is Muslim and the one who does not is not a Muslim. ”

Discussing the Islamic system the clerics differentiated between two types of laws. The laws that are needed for welfare of this world and those needed for the welfare of the world hereafter.

“There is Iman (Arabic term expressing that higher levels of belief that include action upon orders of Allah and Prophet Mohammad) and there is Islam. The systems of Islam pertain to running this world. While Iman deals not only with this world but also the world hereafter.”

According to the religious clerics Islam allows any law needed to address the local issues and encourages adopting systems that address the needs of the people from certain region. They also commented that these aspects are often overlooked.

“ ... in this world there is political system a social system a collective order. Religious injunctions regarding these are very broad and open. The scholars in Islam and the law makers should concentrate on this... in religious jurisprudence Urf is very important. For example in a society there are a number of social laws. If there are these laws Shariat also gives importance to them. Not that if you have made these law Allah abolishes these.”

Yet the clerics emphasized that there are certain universal laws, described above as laws of Iman that are to be maintained in every system. These laws pertain to the punishments associated with the religion, according to Jawad Hafzi, a prominent cleric,

“If Islamic scholars and law experts join hands to make a system that enforces the laws of Islam for example it includes laws that give one rights and Qisas and Dayat and enforcement of Haddood that Islam has given, that system can be implemented.”

The clerics see themselves at important powerful place in Islamic system and reject the idea that the representatives of people, majority of who happen to be Muslim in Pakistan, can implement Islam. And present Iranian governmental system as an

example of the Islamic system.

“the law made by law makers and others who do not know much of Islam can be a Muslim law but it cannot be an Islamic law...if you see Iran as an example there are governmental principles and Islam laws. The Governmental principles have been given a religious color. In that case the issues have been decided by Islam.”

Being complete is the significance and cause of superiority of Islamic system over other system according to religious clerics.

“By an Islamic system we mean that other religions and ways of life have restricted themselves to certain customs and rituals. They present the concept of religion just up to this level. On the contrary Islam is a complete code of life...it contains all the systems of life from cleaning oneself to a government system. With Islam we do not need any other system. It contains physical, moral political, all the systems. If Islam is enforced as an individual and collective political and economic system it will be the best system of the world.”

The religious elite do not see any supra or extra state political system of Islam though the belief in a just system spread over the whole world and governed by the last of infallible of Imams is a part of their religion.

“It is not possible to have one leader. There are 62 Muslim (majority) countries in the world. It is not possible to unite them all. But we believe that after the appearance of the Imam there will be one government in the world...but as far as state system is concerned the world is much dispersed. Some infallible Imam will govern the world, we believe in it and hope for it but it appears impossible.”

The clerics too are not hopeful about a Shiite Islamic revolution in Pakistan because of the Sunni majority and say that it is not possible to implement Wilayat e Faqih in Pakistan. They restrict the political duties of a Shiite Muslim to electing the most appropriate candidate for running the affairs of Government.

“First of the political duties of a Muslim is to elect the one who is most capable an Islamic government. If we do not elect the most capable and go for some body else it is the worst of the dishonesties

one can do with the system. Because it will bring an incapable man of low intellect and the system will be ruined.”

Sketching Khomeini as the example of a capable ruler the clerics say,

“It has not been written in any constitution that a ruler should be just, god fearing, pious, knowledgeable about the society and religion. It is only in the constitution of Iran. Khomeini in Iran has been such a ruler. He was not infallible, he was a scholar...we have seen an exemplary ruler in Iran, Khomeini.”

The clerics identified that Shiite clerics did not play a major political role in the regional politics as they did not have a plan of action different from others. Another reason identified for a lesser role of clerics in politic was the specific position of the region as the only Shiite majority region in country with over all Sunni majority. They also identified social influence of the religious leaders in the community and claimed that the region is peaceful in spite of its troubled neighbor hood only because of the influence of the religious leadership.

“Baltistan is the only region in the whole Islamic Republic of Pakistan where Muslim sit together and where there is unity. Crime rate is very low. And it is all due to the religious scholars though they have never been in power.”

The clerics identify that Muslims have not been able to develop a distinctly different economic system for themselves. Describing the reason of not developing an Islamic economic system the clerics said that the Islamic countries lack specialists in these fields. Quoting interest as an example they also identified that the religion has some issues with the western economic system yet most of the system is acceptable and can be adopted.

Though the economic system of the West was acceptable to the religious clerics many other things associated with the West were not acceptable to them. The champions of religious identity switched between the terms indicating religions, state, systems and civilizations while describing the others of Islam,

“The enemies of Muslims have been identified in Koran. There were numerous (other) enemies of the Muslims at that time but the worst

of the enemies are the Jews. Today the worst enemy of the Muslims at international level is the Jews...we do not count all those who believe in Judaism (as enemies). Zionist or the believers of Zionism are the enemies of Muslims.”

Another cleric describing the others said that world has been divided into two civilizations one of Muslims and others of all that are anti Islam.

“If we talk about the whole world there is a clash of civilizations going on...there are two civilizations in the world. One is Muslim civilization. Now as the Muslims say America is with us, it cannot be with us and it is with India if we talk about Pakistan. There can be some similarities but (how it can be with us) when it has a civilization of infidels. (It is not with us) with respect to its rituals and customs. Islam and Muslims should become united as Imam Khomeini said Muslims should unite and stand against Zionism in the current times. All the intellectuals who have conspired to divide the civilizations are Zionists. They have created a divide in the world. One is Islam and the other is not, means (it is) other than Islam. Now there are two types in the other civilization. One are the people of the book. Book is there for name sake only. It is not relevant to their worldly affairs. There is no difference between a Hindi a Jew and a Christian...they don't believe in the Day of Judgment. But it is there in the Muslims...Now you look at it. They try to end the religious harmony and prayers (rituals) where ever they are religiously observed. In Afghanistan, in Iraq, It is not only Judaism all the civilizations that are in conflict with Islamic civilization are against Islam and want to eliminate it. Islam is the voice of nature and it is the age of media...so (the people) accept it. That why these countries which are un-Islamic are cooperating with system of Taliban and Al Qaida to defame Islam. Beard has been defamed the one who says prayers is known as suicide attacker. It is all the effect of the conspiracy by non Muslims. Russia, Britain, America, Hindustan all are in one category. They may have different perspectives yet all are against Islam. They are against praying five times a day, keeping fast, performing Hajj and giving Alms.”

The reason for the enmity is described to have its roots in history and religion.

“I haven’t read much about it but the basic reason apparently is religion. The Jews hate Islam from the very beginning. The Muslims have been fighting the Christians. Muslims used to challenge them for debates had fought with them. The Muslims won against them in the debates, as well as in the wars. So the Past is what is in front of their eyes and revenge is what they want.”

The clerics also identify that the others have contributed a lot to the progress of this world though their contribution is focused on this world and not the world hereafter,

“Yes they have contributed positively. If we call someone as our enemy according to Islam we should accept what is good in him while telling what is bad about him...they are our enemies yet they have progressed a lot, in terms of economy.”

Another cleric highlighting the scientific development said,

“They have done a lot if we consider the apparent interest (of people) and progress of this world. They initiated the scientific and technological revolution. They have contributed a lot in the form of Industrial development. It is good even if the infidels did it. But they have given us here in this world. They cannot give the way (for the world hereafter). Our youth is astonished after watching the scientific development in the West. But action is not the important thing; it is the ideology (that matters). It is easy to take action for the one who has the ideology.”

The religious elite identify a three tier hierarchy in the religio-political organization of Shiite Muslims. All the clerics in Baltistan belong to the lowest level of this hierarchy. The second level is the Mujtahid and the upper most level is the Wali-e-Faqeeh. Mujtahids are the religious leaders while Wali-e-faqeeh is a religio-political leader. There are a number of Mujtahids in Iran and Iraq but there is only one Wali-e-Faqeeh who is the head of the state in Iran as no religio-political order controlled by Shiites is established in any other part of the world. Individuals in the community are required to follow a Mujtahid for religious practices. The two Mujtahids who are

mostly followed in Baltistan are Ali Khamnae and Seestani. Wali-e-Faqeeh is also a Mujtahid but at the same time he is a political leader of all the other Mujtahids in his country and his orders are binding on them. The clerics claim that the political orders of the Wali-Faqeeh are not binding for them as they are in Pakistan and not in Iran but the religious orders of the Wali-e-Faqeeh, if they follow him as a Mujtahid, are binding. The least powerful group of the hierarchy leads the Balti community. This group claim that they take guidance from Mujtahids they follow and cannot issue a decree themselves for various controversial issues e.g. religious status of local music yet the claim is contested by the cultural elite and they claim that the clerics have been snubbing various cultural expressions of the community especially music and dancing vehemently.

There are differences among college and madrassah students in defining the religious identity for them. The religious identity of the madrassah students focus more on beliefs and rituals where as the college students give more importance to the social cum moral code related to inter personal and community life. The religious identity is simple and idealistic for the madrassah students as compared to a complex realistic religious identity among religious elite as well as realistic but simple religious identity of the college students. The religious identity of the community has a color of victimhood in it for all the sub groups of the community. Cultural rituals related to religion are more important aspects of religious identity for the college students than the madrassah students and religious elite.

This socio-moral code of identity elaborates the do's and don'ts of community and family life in detail yet the political and economic life is discussed to a lesser extent though the terms system and all encompassing system are repetitively used. The religious code, cover the broadest of community as well as the individual life. It provides injunctions about interpersonal, social, and cultural, lives in detail. The boundaries of the code of are loose enough to accommodate various changes that have resulted due to its interaction with local social, political, cultural and economic realities. Yet the changes that are under way or are foreseen are usually resisted. Religious code due to fact that it is all encompassing comes in conflict with other identities as well as the political and social facts of the life and the religious elite as well as the students want it to override them.

The belief system of Shiite Muslims adheres to the presence of a meta-physical world. The Meta-physical and the physical world are owned and ruled by one God

known as Allah. Both the worlds are linked with one another in more than one ways. They are not only ruled by on God but the individual is accountable in the meta-physical world for his doings in the physical one. This belief increases the important of the meta-physical world than the physical one. These worlds are not only linked through accountability of the individuals in one world for their doing in the other but the other significant link is that of Prophets. Shiite Muslims believe in a series of prophets names of some of whom are known through the scripture and the sayings of the last and final of the series Mohammad. These prophets link the metaphysical and the physical worlds through the divine orders that were revealed to them from time to time. These revelations are believed to be the orders of God and sticking to these orders results in good for this world and the world here after. The Shiite Muslims believe that though all the prophets brought the orders of the God to the world yet all the orders were cancelled after the final version of the orders were reveled to Prophet Mohammad. These orders create the moral code for the Shiite Muslims that they try to follow for success in both the worlds. These orders are considered eternal and following these old, eternal orders and the order they create is considered not only desirable but also practically possible. The others as well as the self are considered responsible for the deficiencies in fulfilling these orders and the inability to attain the ideal order (by performing these orders) as envisioned by the clerics and the community. Individual and collective negligence of the community and the systematic hurdles created by the others are considered responsible for the short comings in maintaining the ideal order.

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