

men with Kalashnikovs and walkie-talkies. Everyone knew these men belonged to LeT, and soon their black and white banners with crossed swords were flying everywhere in the mountains and valleys. In the town of Muzaffarabad in Azad Kashmir the JuD even set up a large field hospital with X-ray machines, an operating theatre, a well-stocked pharmacy and a dental department. Doctors and surgeons offered their services along with thousands of young volunteers.

Earthquake victims praised the activists who had trudged up and down mountains and through shattered valleys carrying medical help to remote regions no one else had bothered with. They helped clear and rebuild destroyed villages as well as leading prayers and burying bodies. Even today, when most of the foreign aid agencies have gone, shattered buildings still line the roadside and people are still waiting for compensation from the government to build new houses, the JuD banners and helpers are still present. My cousin who was studying in the UK said they raised lots of money from Pakistanis living there. People later said that some of this money had been diverted to finance a plot to bomb planes travelling from Britain to the US.

With such a large number of people killed, there were many children orphaned – 11,000 of them. In our culture orphans are usually taken in by the extended family, but the earthquake was so bad that entire families had been wiped out or lost everything so were in no position to take in children. The government promised they would all be looked after by the state, but that felt as empty as most government promises. My father heard that many of the boys were taken in by the JuD and housed in their madrasas. In Pakistan, madrasas are a kind of welfare system as they give free food and lodging, but their teaching does not follow a normal curriculum. The boys learn the Quran by heart, rocking back and forth as they recite. They learn that there is no such thing as science or literature, that dinosaurs never existed and that man never went to the moon.

The whole nation was in shock for a long time after the earthquake. Already so unlucky with our politicians and military dictators, now, on top of everything else, we had to deal with a natural disaster. Mullahs from the TNSM preached that the earthquake was a warning from God. If we did not mend our ways and introduce *shariat* or Islamic law, they shouted in their thundering voices, more severe punishment would come.