

India

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### Roots of Islamic Reformism

The roots of Islamic reformism in the subcontinent can be traced to the eighteenth century and the decline of the Mughal empire and to the emergence of British colonialism. Central to these are the ideas of Shah Wali Allah (1703-63) and his son Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824). Their influence was felt through a variety of movements ranging from the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiyah of Syed Ahmed Bareilwi to the ulema who founded the great seminary of dar-ul-Uloom at Deoband. Though the school was initially politically inactive, many of its teachers and students became influenced by the call of pan-Islamism from Istanbul. Foremost among these was Maulana Mehmood-ul-Hassan (1852-1921). The main thrust of his movement was the declaration that India was *dar-ul-harb*; territory of war requiring a *jihad*. He was among the founders of the *Jamiat-ulema-e-Hind* (Organization of the Ulemas of India), which participated shoulder-to-shoulder with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress in the Khilafat movement, in support of the Caliph and the conservative Deobandis, who believed that India could remain united as a federation of communities, remained aligned with the Congress in the ensuing decades and opposed the formation of Pakistan. Many saw Pakistan as an idea put forward by westernized Muslims and many were not unaware that any scheme of partition would leave large numbers of Muslims in India. However, some Deobandis who founded the *Jamiat-ulema-i-Islam* (JUUI) at a meeting in Calcutta in 1945, supported the formation of Pakistan.

The idea of Pakistan was not acceptable either to Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi who, in 1941, founded the *Jamaat-e-Islami* who saw it as a Muslim state rather than the Islamic one he wanted. In all fairness, that is exactly how the Qaid-e-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah envisioned Pakistan. Maudoodi advocated the idea of the *Nizam-e-Mustafa* or a system, as he perceived it, to be ruled the way it was in the time of Prophet Mohammed.

### After Partition

With Partition, many organizations split. The entire JUUI went over to Pakistan while the *Jamiat-ul-ulema-i-Hind*, remained headquartered in India. The *Jamaat-e-Islami* split and the Indian branch came under the influence of the nationalist Deobandis and accepted and even lauded the secular ideal as a means of preserving minority culture and focused on education and social uplift of the community. *Jamaat-e-Islami* Kashmir had an ambivalent attitude towards politics. It participated in several state assembly elections, the last one being in 1987.

The Pakistani branch headed by Maudoodi, on the other hand, became active in what can be called 'Islamic' politics, beginning in the 1950s with the instigation of riots against the Ahmadiya community. In the past three decades, the organization has become the core of radicalism and fundamentalism in Pakistan. It played an important role in the campaign against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and then supported the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. The Pakistani dictator skilfully used his alliance with the *Jamaat* to strengthen his position.

### Turning on India

In the years after Independence, organizations of Indian and Pakistani Muslims kept a wary distance from each other. However, the sharp increase in the wealth of the Arabian Peninsula led to an enhancement of Wahhabi influence on Indian Muslims. This effort was spearheaded by preachers who collected funds from the Arabs to run *madrasas* (schools) and other organizations in service of the community. The US-supported *jihad* against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan led to the radicalization of Indian Islam as well through the enhanced interest of Saudi Arabia in the region and the

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activity of fundamentalist preachers in India and Bangladesh, many receiving funds from the Arabian peninsula. Quietistic movements like the *Jamiat-e-Ahle-Hadith* (Organization of those upholding Hadith to the exclusion of all juristic schools of Islam) and the *Tablighi Jamaat* became militant, spawning off organizations like the *Markaz Dawat-ul-Irshad* (Centre for Spiritual Guidance) and the *Harkat-ul-Ansar* (Movement of Helpers).

But the major impetus for external involvement in India came from Pakistan's external intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Under General Akhtar Abdul Rehman, the agency had perfected the technique of using religious fundamentalists to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. With the outbreak of the revolt in Kashmir 1989-1990 they decided to use them for the cause of Pakistan. General Akhtar was dead. He perished in the same plane crash as General Zia-ul-Haq, but his successors, Lieutenant Generals Hamid Gul and Javid Nasir, proved equal to the task.

Their task was not too difficult. The *Jamaat-e-Islami*, Pakistan, and its counter-part group in the Valley were both for the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. However, the uprising was led by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, a secular formation, seeking independence. In 1990-1991, the ISI systematically starved the JKLF of funds and built up the *Hizbul Mujahideen*, a militant group created by the *Jamaat-e-Islami*.

To enhance the combat efficiency of the group, its members were trained alongside the Afghan mujahideen owing allegiance to the *Hizb-e-Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. After the fall of Najibullah, Hekmatyar sent a number of his fighters to fight alongside the Kashmiri and Pakistani cadres of the *Hizbul Mujahideen*. In 1993-1994 the Indian Army's tough response resulted in great setbacks to the Hizb and the ISI began to explore other options as well.

Principal among these were two groups who had been involved in the Afghan *jihad*. The *Harkat-ul-Jihad-i-Islami International* (HUJI) had been founded in 1980 by the *Jamiat-ul-ulema-Islam* and the *Tablighi Jamaat* of Pakistan to run relief camps for the Afghan *mujahideen*. It was led by Maulvi Irshad Ahmed and its support base lay in the Punjabi business community with JUUI and *Tablighi Jamaat* affiliations.

As the war developed, it established links with the ISI and was subcontracted to recruit and train the *mujahids* as well. The HUJI developed links with the Afghanistani *Hizb-e-Islami* (Yunus Khalis) faction. After the death of Maulana Irshad Ahmed, *shahid* (martyred) in the *jihad*, there was a poser-struggle within the organization. Fazal-ur-Rehman Khalil, the commander-in-chief of the group split with the new *Amir*, Qazi Saifullah Akhtar and formed a new outfit *Harkat-ul Mujahideen* (HKUM) which retained the connection with the Khalis faction of the *Hizb-e-Islami* and its military commander, Jalaluddin Haqqani located in the Khost area where they were permitted to retain training camps. These camps, many set up during the US-Saudi-Pakistani *jihad* against the Russians in Afghanistan, were destroyed by American cruise missiles in August 1998 as a reprisal of the bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania by a group owing allegiance to Saudi millionaire and now anti-American *mujahid* Osama bin Laden.

The HKUM sent a *lashkar* (war party) into Kashmir under Sajjad Khan, a Pakistani national, also known as Sajjad Afghani. He set up a training camp near Srinagar, but he was not able to establish effective links with the local groups and returned to Pakistan. The first HUJI *lashkars* began entering the state in early 1992. Later that year, Nasarullah Mansur Langaryal, its deputy chief commander and Afghan war veteran was sent in to head the *lashkar*.

In 1991 the Deobandi *ulemas* of Karachi asked the two *Harkats* to reunite so as to prosecute the Kashmir *jihad* more effectively. This was done and the *Harkat-ul-Ansar* was born in October 1993. The General Secretary of the new organization, Mohammed Masood Azhar was sent to India on a Portuguese passport to work out the details of the merger between the Langaryal and Sajjad Afghani's *lashkars*. Unfortunately for them, all three were arrested in quick succession. The arrest of their top leaders derailed the *Harkat*'s planning in the Valley. In the next year or so, they became involved in making efforts for their release through four separate incidents of kidnapping. In the first case, an Army road-building engineer was kidnapped and then executed when the government refused to trade him for the *Harkat* leaders.

The following year, Qari Zarrar, a Pakistani who was heading the *Harkat* in the Valley and Abdul Hameed Turki (from Turkey) an associate of Langaryal, decided to take matters into their own hands. They organized the kidnapping of five foreigners, of whom one, John Childs, managed to escape. Another, Hans Christian Ostro, was executed and his body left in a place where it could be found by the authorities. The four others- American Donald Hutchings, German Dirk Hasert, and Britons Keith Mangan and Paul Wells - are believed to have been executed following Turki's death in an encounter with the Indian Army in late 1995. This episode, and subsequent internecine quarrels affected the *Harkat-ul-Ansar*'s combat capabilities.

With the *Harkat* coming apart, the ISI has now put all its bets on yet another pan-Islamic group, the *Markaz Dawat-ul-Irshad* and its military wing, the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Army of the Pure). Among the fundamentalist sects that backed the Afghan *jihad*, was the *Jamiat Ahle Hadith*, an ultra-orthodox grouping of organizations who accept the austere Wahabi practices of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi money channeled through Sheikh Abu Abdul Aziz helped set up the Markaz which is headquartered at Muridke, near Lahore in 1987. Its founders were three university teachers, Zafar Iqbal, Hafiz Mohammed Sayeed and Abdullah Azam. This organization has institutional links with the *Jamiat-ul-ulema Islam* of Pakistan headed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, a former Senator in the Pakistan's parliament and a political ally of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Its principal aims, according to its founders, are *jihad* and preaching. But while many are involved in preaching, the Markaz is one of the few that still stresses *jihad*. However, its main battle-ground is Kashmir. The first fighters were sent into Kashmir in early 1993 through the *Islami Inquilabi Mahaz*. Later it associated with the *Al Barq*, a Valley Kashmiri group. But since the beginning of 1994, it has been sending its fighters under the banner of the *Lashkar-e-Taiba*. Currently, of an estimated 300 fighters in the Valley, some 90 per cent are Pakistanis.

The *Ahle-Hadith* movement, stressing 'pure' Wahhabi Islam, has found support among some of the *ulema* in India. Nevertheless, the conservative mainstream Deobandis do not see India as a *Dar-ul-harb* since Muslim life is still run by their own Personal Law. The Indian Muslims suffer from many of the infirmities afflicting their Pakistani counterparts, primarily poverty and illiteracy. Some of them are falling prey to fundamentalist preachers and sects, many of whom had links with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Not surprisingly, the Pakistani intelligence agency has been using some of them as a cover for its activities.

The key watershed for the attitude of many Indian Muslims, especially in northern India, has been the the destruction of the Babri Masjid by a mob of Hindu fanatics in December 1992. They cited as their reason a belief that the mosque had been erected by the first Moghul Emperor Babur in the sixteenth century after razing a temple commemorating the birthplace of Rama, one of the most popular gods of the Hindu pantheon. The emotive campaign roiled the politics of northern India and set the stage for the collapse of the Indian National Congress. It also led to horrific riots in which the minority Muslim community paid a disproportionate cost in terms of loss of life and property. The worst occurrences were in Mumbai following the destruction of the Mosque in December 1992, followed by another round in January 1993. In retaliation, as it were, elements of the Mumbai's Muslim underworld, with the help of the ISI, carried out a series of bomb blasts across the city in March 1993, arguably the worst act of urban terrorism in recent history.

Pan-Islamic groups see all this as an opportunity. Both the *Markaz dawat-ul-Irshad* and *Harkat-ul-Ansar* (it has reverted to *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen* after the American proscription in 1997), make it clear that Kashmir is merely a gateway for a larger *jihad* in India. To this they have expanded their network across the country. Mosques and *maulvis* (teachers) owing allegiance to the *Ahle-Hadith* sect are a major link for an underground terrorist network run by the HUA and MDI in collaboration with the ISI. These stretch from Bangladesh, across West Bengal, northern Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Delhi. Both Nepal and Bangladesh have been used as a base by these groups and, across India, Debandi *madrasas* are a target of subversion and a source of recruitment. Information on this development has come through those arrested for the bombing campaign that saw nearly a hundred bomb blasts across northern India in 1996-97, taking the lives of scores of people.

Islamic fundamentalism and militancy are now a fact of life in South Asia. Whether or not forces of modernization will moderate their impact is difficult to tell. The steady decline of the State's ability to influence the every-day life of the citizens of the region is playing an important role in the growth of fundamentalism. Political parties, especially in Pakistan, take quick recourse to hoisting the flag of Islamization to handle problems. To compound things, there is a new factor that must now be taken into account - the success of the Taliban in establishing control over Afghanistan. ♦