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Struggle in the path of Islam: three moments

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ISLAM was not 'spread by the sword'. Yet, historically speaking, the conquests of the Prophet, the Rashidun Caliphs, the Umayyad and the Abbasid Caliphs defined the trajectory of the geographical spread of the religion. The historian David Cook, for instance, argues that without the conquests, 'the religion would not have had the opportunity to spread in the way that it did, nor would it have been the attractant that it was.'[1] In the wake of an Islamic conquest, even though the conversion was not forced on the conquered people, military victory created the necessary preconditions for Islamization.

Broadly speaking, with the exception of East Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia beyond Transoxiana (modern day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), Islam became the majority faith only in those territories that were militarily conquered. Thus, the conquests were crucial to the development of Islam. Because of this centrality, in the narrative representations of Prophet Muhammad's life, his military conquests are considered to be miracles, and the principle that guided these campaigns – *jihad* or to strive in the way of God – is considered to be a religious value of particular salience. In

fact, the Prophet in his lifetime led very few military campaigns, none of which were officially designated as jihads.

Unlike the Prophet's traditions and biographies, the *Quran* has been a remarkably stable text with very few variations. Yet, the exegetical tradition on the Quran has been characterized by robust internal debates. In her recent work, the scholar Asma Afsaruddin has excavated the multivalence of jihad as a Quranic term wherein the 'striving in the path of God' was coupled with the quality of *sabr* or patient forbearance. Patient forbearance was in fact, considered to be a component of jihad. However, in the classical juridical literature, formulated in the era of Umayyad and Abbasid imperial expansion, jihad was more often than not identified as military combat. However, she argues that 'conceptualizations of jihad as primarily armed struggle are relatively late and contested ones, and deviate considerably from its Quranic significations.'[2]

Since there is a voluminous literature on the evolution of the idea of jihad over the last fourteen centuries, it will be difficult to narrate the entire intellectual trajectory in this

1. David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005, p.13.

2. Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p. 5.

essay. The Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire were essentially monarchical forms of government and not a Sharia-centric Islamic Caliphate. In other words, both the regimes were examples of 'politics of kingship' (*siyasat-i sultani*) instead of 'politics for faith' (*siyasat-i imani*) in which, the concept of jihad as a governing theological principle. In the next section of this paper we shall deal with the Islamist critique of such a politics of kingship. We shall primarily deal with three key moments in the historical evolution of the concept of jihad. While the first two moments will be traced to the early and late colonial context of South Asia, the third is a brief analysis of the contemporary, or what is today known as the idea of 'global jihad'.

The British occupation of Delhi in 1803 created historical conditions for a rupture with the past tradition in Islamic political thought.[3] Shah Abd al-Aziz, the preeminent scholar of religion, had ruled that the country had transformed from the 'domain of Islam' (*dar al-Islam*) to the 'domain of war' (*dar al-harb*). However, he did not call for a militant jihad against colonial rule. Rather, his disciple, Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareli, organized jihad in the form of military campaigns against both the East India Company and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This rupture with the past that colonial politics had brought about provided the historical context for the radicalization of Islamic political thought and the articulation of a new form of 'politics for faith' in Muslim South Asia.

On 11 January 1827, Sayyid Ahmad was raised as the *imam* (leader) of the mujahedin. Sayyid Ahmad's *imamat* (leadership) was a novel insti-

3. This section draws on Rajarshi Ghose, Politics for Faith: Karamat Ali Jaunpuri and Islamic revivalist movements in British India circa 1800-73 (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012).

tution and it had no immediate precedent in the annals of Sunni Islamic politics. Thus, the Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah, the movement that Sayyid Ahmad had galvanized was under immense pressure to establish the validity of its political activities in the light of the Quran, the Sunnah, and Sunni jurisprudential thought. In this context, Muhammad Ismail's *Mansab-i imamat*, a treatise on Islamic leadership in general and Muslim institutional politics, in particular, provided theoretical scaffolding to the Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah's statecraft.[4]

In its own words, the Mansab-i imamat was an exploration of the 'essence of imamate' (*haqiqat-i imamat*), an explanation of the ontological basis of 'leadership' along with a discussion of several kinds of possible 'leadership'. Legend has it that Ismail was still working on it when his death brought the treatise to an abrupt end in 1831.

Even though it did address the questions of prophethood and spiritual leadership, the core concern of the Mansab-i imamat was the problem of political imamate. According to Ismail, *siyasat* or political power could be operated through two modes, the 'patriarchal' (*siyasat-i murabbiyanah*) and the 'imperial' (*siyasat-i amiranah*). These two modes of operation of political power characterized two distinct kinds of Muslim politics: 'politics for faith' (*siyasat-i imani*) and 'politics of kingship' (*siyasat-i sultani*) respectively.[5]

The Muslim imam practising 'politics of faith' modelled himself on

4. Muhammad Ismail, *Mansab-i imamat*, trans. Hakim Muhammad Husain Alwi. Makhzan-i Adab, Lahore, 1962. There is, however, no internal evidence to suggest that the Mansab-i imamat was an apologia for Sayyid Ahmad's politics.

5. Ismail, *Mansab-i imamat*, ibid., pp. 54-57.

the didactic exemplars of the prophets, sought to reform people, strove to serve Islam, and operated through the patriarchal mode of governance. On the other hand, the Muslim king, practising 'politics of kingship' followed the cold logic of self-aggrandizing kingship and operated through the imperial mode of political power. His government was not truly interested in the welfare of the people. Rather it wanted to use the people to achieve the carnal desires of its king like the conquest of territories, acquisition of wealth, etc.

Such 'despotic kingship' (*saltanat-i hukmiyah*) took four principal forms: 'just kingship' (*saltanat-i adilah*), 'tyrannical kingship' (*saltanat-i jabira*), 'misguided kingship' (*saltanat-i zalla*), and 'kingship of an apostate king' (*saltanat-i kufarriyah*).[6] In the Mansab-i imamat, Ismail provided elaborate criticism of all four forms of 'despotic kingship'. Ismail acknowledged the good that a 'just king' did to Islam and Muslims through his adherence to the external aspects of the *Shariah* (*qalab-i shar'*). That, however, did not restrain him from critiquing 'just kingship' as a political form. After all, a 'just king' fell short of the spiritual leadership that the 'rightly guided caliphs' exemplified. Thus, even 'just kingship' was immoral at a fundamental level.

In contrast, the 'tyrannical king' was the despot who, in spite of his impertinence and boldness, had some faith and thus performed some good works. He performed these works in a manner not permitted by the *Shariah* (Islamic law), but nevertheless, his motive was to win the favour of God. On the other hand, the 'misguided king' was the despot who did not have enough fear of God in his heart

6. Ibid., pp.104-110, pp. 154-201.

to perform the commandments of the Shariah with sincerity. Instead, he performed them as a matter of routine, or to earn a good name among his contemporaries, or to excel his predecessors. Thus, unlike the 'tyrannical king', the 'misguided king' did not even have the good intention of pleasing God. Finally, as far as the king whose politics had transgressed the limits of Islam was concerned, Ismail's plain and simple prescription to the common Muslim was either to raise the banner of jihad or to migrate (hijrat) from his territories.

Ismail's discussion on 'misguided kingship' included a trenchant critique of the political culture of Mughal kingship.[7] Outlining its trajectory of development, he argued that once 'misguided kingship' is established, 'its laws gradually take a form opposed to the laws of the Shariah, the decrees of the Sultan flagrantly contravene the ordinances of God, many things which are forbidden by the Shariah are permitted by the laws of the sultan and vice versa'. In the field of politics, the kings paid no more than lip-service to the Shariah. On the ground, they mixed rules of the Shariah with their own customs and traditions. The administration, thus, followed the laws of kingship and not the Shariah. Even though they nominally acknowledged the Shariah, they insisted that politics (siyasat) has its own logic and in politics, it was expedient to follow the 'Tura' or the law of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan rather than the Shariah.

On the whole, Ismail contended that 'the policies of such kings constitute a religion to themselves, and those who follow it are a community (millat) following a false religion (mazhhab), like the Hindus and the Magians.' Unlike the Shi'is and the Kharijis, the followers of this royal cult did not even claim any adherence to the Quran and Sunnah. Such despotic sultans according to Ismail were able to find 'masters of the art who write books in accordance with the wishes of the sultans and legalize everything.'

The Ain-i Akbari, Abul Fazl's book of regulations for Akbar's empire, was 'a very comprehensive book representing this art' and was based on the false religion of Din-i Ilahi. The religious cult of kingship, Ismail argued, was a school of scholastic philosophy (falsafa), and was not a part of Islam. However, since the 'misguided kings' maintained a façade of Muslim-ness and unlike 'apostate kings' did not claim prophethood for themselves, Ismail opined that the Shariah did not permit rebellions against them. And for this reason, according to the Mansab-i imamat, they too should be regarded as 'leaders of Muslims' (imam-i muslimin).

Like Sayyid Ahmad's proclamation against the Durranis, the Mansab-i imamat too did not make explicit references to the Mughals. However, the telling references to Chinggis Khan's 'Tura', Abul Fazl's Ain-i Akbari and Emperor Akbar's Din-i Ilahi leave no doubt regarding the historical instance that Ismail had in mind while deliberating on the trajectories of 'misguided kingship'. Several factors must have contributed to his decision to disallow religious rebellions against such political institutions.

Towards the end of the Mansab-i imamat, Ismail came up with an intermediate option between the two extremes, a 'rightly-guided caliph' and an 'apostate king'.[8] He argued that as long as a Muslim ruler adhered to the Shariah, subscribed to no religion other than Islam, acknowledged no law-giver and didactic model other than Prophet Muhammad, made political fortunes of Islam the sole consideration for his war and peace policy, it was imperative for all Muslims to recognize him as their imam and to respond to his call for jihad. He characterized such a ruler as an 'inviter' (sahib-i dawa') for his dominion represented the 'invitation' (dawa') to Islam, which itself was a part of the prophetic 'perfection' of 'guidance'.

Making 'invitation' the core purpose of Muslim politics, the Mansab-i imamat claimed the imam-as-inviter concept as its original contribution to Islamic political thought. Even though the Mansab-i imamat worked with an elitist vision of Islamic politics, in so far that it assumed the ruler to be the cornerstone of a political dispensation and his personal nature to be the defining characteristic of the government, in a unique democratic moment Ismail stated how a common Muslim too could instrumentalize 'politics of faith' and thus inherit some of the 'perfections' of prophethood, although in a limited manner. While his participation in a jihad made the common Muslim a legatee of the prophetic 'politics of faith', his practice of 'commanding the right and forbidding the wrong' made him a successor to the prophetic 'perfection' of 'guidance'.[9] In the light of that enabling moment, the Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah movement appeared as a participatory space where the common Muslim could earn his small but precious share of the 'perfections' of 'prophethood'.

The concept of jihad got a new meaning in the writings and speeches of Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi,[10] a disciple of Muhammad Iqbal in his last days and the founder of the Islamist

7. Ibid., pp.191-196.

8. Ibid., pp. 202-203.

9. Ibid., p. 96.

10. Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi has been spelt by various authors and publishers in numer-

party, the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia during the first half of the 20th century. For Maududi, jihad is not just a struggle within oneself but is an absolute duty for all 'true Muslims' to struggle for creating a Shariah centric Islamic state. Thus, like Ismail, Maududi highlighted on the traditional literature on the juridico-political concept of jihad for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, based on the practices of Prophet Muhammad and the four rightful caliphs. In contrast to the idea of jihad as sabr, like Ismail, Maududi assigned a political duty for all 'true and good Muslims' to participate in jihad. For Maududi, the concept of an Islamic State is one of central importance.[11]

To achieve the goal of an Islamic state, Maududi, like a fierce polemic, urged the entire Muslim *ummah* (community of Islamic believers) to his call of jihad that signifies 'total struggle, offensive or defensive as the need may be, against the usurpation of God's sovereignty, whether by pseudo-religious monarchists or westernized secular democrats.'[12] For Maududi, Islam is a 'revolutionary ideology which seeks to alter the social order of the entire world

and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals.'[13] In this respect, he considers that jihad has been accorded the dignity of 'The Best of all Prayers' in Islam.[14] Thus, according to Maududi, jihad is an eternal political strategy for realising the cause of a revolutionary political project.

As Maududi argues: '"Muslim" is the title of that International Revolutionary Party organized by Islam to carry into effect its revolutionary programme. And "Jihad" refers to that revolutionary struggle and utmost exertion which the Islamic Party brings into play to achieve this objective. …Islam purposely rejected the word "*harb*" and other Arabic words bearing the same meaning of "war" and used the word "Jihad" which is synonymous with "struggle", though more forceful and wider in connotation. The nearest correct meaning of the word "Jihad" in English can be expressed as under: "To exert one's utmost endeavour in promoting a cause".'[15]

Scholars argue that Maududi was among the first Islamists who constructed an 'Islamic political theory' whose core concept was based on God's sovereignty (*hakimiyah*) entailing that 'human beings can exercise power only in the name of Allah and in pursuit of His teachings and regulations.'[16] Scholars of Islamist discourses point out that for Islamic

thinkers like Maududi, four important political doctrines are of immense importance.[17] First, *paganism of the world*, signifying 'ignorance of non-Islam' (*jahiliya*) should be replaced with an Islamic order. Second, the *universalism of Islam* signifies submission of all people to God's sovereignty that encompasses every aspect of human life. This universality conceptualizes the inseparability of religion from politics and the role of Islam even in mundane everyday activities of life like eating, sleeping, trading etc. with proper Islamic instructions on how to function as a pious and righteous Muslim. Thus, the *universalism of Islam* comprehends Islam as a totality and a complete way of life.

Third, the doctrine of *Islamic revolution* aims at the total transformation of prevalent socio-economic and political systems of jahiliya (un-Islamic modern secular, liberal or socialist systems). For a successful Islamic revolution, Islamists adopt political strategies like jihad (struggle) and *da'wa* (propagation of or call to Islam). In this regard, there is a complementary relationship between jihad and da'wa as the former also signifies annihilation of any obstacle to Islamic da'wa. Finally, Islamists argue for true justice which would protect the weak from injustice by promoting good and forbidding evil. Thus, for Islamists, the revolutionary role of Islam does not end with the establishment of an Islamic state but to ensure that social, legal and international justice must be realized by displacing the

ous ways. Sayyid has been often spelt as Sayyed or Syed. Abul A'la has been spelt sometimes as Abu-l-'Ala' and Maududi has often been spelt as Mawdudi or Maudoodi. Moreover, before Maududi without Sayyid Abul A'la, sometimes a prefix term 'Mawlana' or 'Maulana' is used, signifying leader or a learned man in Islamic tradition.

11. Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*. I.B. Tauris, London, 2005, pp. 69-110. For a detailed overview of Islamic state see Sayyed Abul-Ala Maudoodi, *Political Theory of Islam*. Markazi Maktaba Jama' at-I-Islami Pakistan, Lahore, 1959. This is a translated version of an address delivered by Maududi at Lahore's Shah Chiragh Mosque in October 1939.

12. T.N. Madan, *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 142.

13. Abul A'la Maududi, *Jihad in Islam*. The Holy Koran Publishing House, Beirut, 1980, p. 5. Jihad in Islam was based on Maududi's speech on Iqbal Day, 13 April 1939, at the Town Hall, Lahore. It was an event in the memory of Muhammad Iqbal for his first death anniversary according to the Islamic calendar of Hijri. According to the English solar calendar, Iqbal died on 21 April 1938. The same text with a slightly different translation is available as Sayyed Abul-Ala Maudoodi, *Jihad in Islam*. Islamic Publications, Lahore, 1976.

14. Ibid., p. 5.

15. Ibid.

16. Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 'Introduction', in Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *Islamic Fundamentalism*. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1996, p. 10.

17. See Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1999, pp. 55-64.

prevalent forms of injustices of jahiliya in the whole world.

The contradiction of the so-called contemporary jihadi Islamists, who want to create an Islamic caliphate, are exposed in the fact that on the one hand, they strive to unite Muslims around the world with a call for the unity of the Ummah (Islamic community of believers cutting across class, gender and national citizenship) while on the other hand, it targets not only Muslims but also Islamic holy shrines like the Medina mosque premise or the terror attacks during the Eid gathering in Dhaka, killing innocent people, in the holy month of Ramadan. While in Islamic theology the month of Ramadan is considered a puritan month where Muslims are expected to remain calm and stay away from any violence or war, the Islamist extremists seem to disregard such theological injunctions.

In this respect, the Sunni Islamist extremists are Wahabism's own Frankenstein. They follow a distorted theology that has contributed to the formation of a destructive ideology where the enemy is omnipresent, harming both Muslims and non-Muslims. In this sense, contemporary jihadi extremism in the name of 'global jihad', is in effect, similar to an anarchist terrorist movement without any coherent set of demands but with an imagined goal of creating an Islamic caliphate. The issue is that the strategy of armed struggle against a conglomeration of several nation-states is difficult to follow for a considerable period of time because of the massive surveillance system and the humongous military power of modern states.

Except for the brief regimes of Hizbul Mujahideen and Taliban in the decade of the 1990s and the formation of an Islamic State in parts of Iraq and Syria in the last two years, there is vir-

tually no other instance of creating an Islamic state with a military strategy in the contemporary world. Although the Islamist extremists control small areas in Lybia, Nigeria, and Afghanistan, one is not sure whether they would be able to control those countries as a whole and establish a Shariah centric Islamic state with a military strategy.

One must acknowledge that the jihadi route was partly successful in the 1980s and 1990s in Afghanistan due to active support of the CIA as part of the Cold War and geopolitical strategy.[18] In contrast, the recent success of ISIS in parts of Iraq and Syria was a response to the militarist invasion of Iraq by the United States-led NATO forces in a context where there is a no credible political alternative like the lack of peaceful democratic change due to derailment of the Arab Spring uprisings and the Syrian civil war since 2011.[19]

The ISIS is part of the Salafi-jihadist family that gave birth to similar offspring in the last three decades, like the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Al Qaeda Central (AQC), Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).[20] The ISIS asserts its point of departure from other jihadist predecessors by its extreme violence, a spectacle that is carefully staged to deter enemies and inspire young recruits.[21] There is no doubt that Salafi-jihadism is not a mass

18. Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*. The Penguin Press, New York, 2004; Amin Saikal, *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003, pp. 42-68.

19. For a detailed analysis of the historical and socio-political conditions for the rise of ISIS, see Fawaz A. Gerges, *ISIS: A History*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2016.

20. Ibid., p. ix.

21. Ibid., pp. ix-x.

movement but it is certainly a violent social movement with transnational networks and an expanding social base among the youth.[22]

The ISIS is fundamentally different from the Al-Qaeda network in at least two important ways. First, the Al-Qaeda did not possess any territories of its own, and thus was a borderless, stateless, transnational terrorist movement during the height of its prominence in the late 1990s. While Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda's amir, was under the protection of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the ISIS is very much rooted in Iraq and Syria. Second, while the Al-Qaeda was primarily interested in targeting the 'far enemy' (US, Europe, parts of South East Asia and US embassies in Africa), the ISIS is relatively more inclined to attack the 'near enemy' (Middleeastern states) although of late, it has targeted the 'far enemy' in the wake of new losses in Iraq and Syria, which ensures continuous recruits by advertising the narrative of invincibility and triumphalism of ISIS.[23]

The jihadi doctrine is not the only road to political power for the Islamists. In contrast to the jihadi modus operandi, two alternative models exist for the Islamists. The first is a combination of armed militancy and participation in parliamentary democratic elections. Such a combined tactics of military operations and democratic political mobilization is being adopted by the Hamas in the Gaza strip and the Hezbollah in Lebanon. The second model for the Islamists is to only follow the path of democratic mobilization and participation in elections. For such a trajectory of following democratic mobilizations in the form of organizing public protests, rallies, and demonstrations by the Islamists, one could cite the example of the Iranian revolution in 1979.

35

22. Ibid., p. x.

23. Ibid., pp. 4-6.

On the other hand there are instances of electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party in Malaysia that governs several provinces in Malaysia, the gains of the Refah Party and subsequently the rise of the AKP in Turkey. Similarly, the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh regularly participates in elections and has often elected members to the Parliament. In the case of Bangladesh, the Jamaat-e-Islami was able to form a coalition government as a junior partner from 2001 to 2006 by adopting the parliamentary path and treating liberal democratic ins-titutions as a site of power struggle.[24]

The jihadi extremism has been often criticized by the *ulema* (Islamic scholars) on many occasions. In the last few years, the Deobandi ulema, the leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and the recently signed fatwa by more than one lakh Bangladeshi ulema have condemned extremist and terrorist violence in the name of Islam.[25] In the absence of a credible political alternative, the struggle between these three groups of parliamentary Islamists, militant Islamists and extremist Islamists[26] would continue over the meaning and use of jihad as a political strategy of mobilizing Muslims to challenge the status-quo in the Muslim world.

24. For a detailed discussion on Bangladesh Jamaat, see Maidul Islam, *Limits of Islamism: Jamaat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015.

25. See Islam, *Limits of Islamism*, ibid., pp. 143-147; Sahidul Hasan Khokon and Manogya Loiwal, 'More than 1 lakh Bangladeshi Clerics Sign Anti-Terror Fatwa', 19 June 2016, *India Today*, 19 June 2016. Available online at http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/more-than-1-lakh-bangladeshi-clerics-sign-anti-terror-fatwa/1/695764.html. Accessed 26 July 2016.

26. For three distinct Islamist groups in terms of operational strategies and attendant tactical questions related to the modes of capturing political power, see Islam, *Limits of Islamism*, ibid., pp. 6-7.