

PAKISTAN: A CRISIS IN THE RENAISSANCE OF ISLAM

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It has been almost thirty years since Pakistan came into existence. Nevertheless, it is still being debated: What is the purpose of Pakistan's being? What motivated the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent to struggle for the creation of a separate State? Were these motives religious, economic, political or social? Are 'ulamā' alone entitled to legislate in an Islamic State? If this be so, then what is the position of the elected representatives of the people? These questions and many others have been debated for the last thirty years, but these debates, instead of clearing the mist, have created more confusion and people are asking questions: What is the *raison d'etre* of Pakistan? What should be the direction of their life? What should be their attitude in the face of the onslaught of Western knowledge, arts and technology? What should be the outline of Islamic character in the light of new psychological discoveries? What are the agreements and what are the differences between Islam on the one hand, and democracy and socialism on the other? Should the practical organisation, in this twentieth century, of political, economic and social system of Islam be the same as fourteen hundred years ago? If this be so, then what is the meaning of evolution? Is Pakistan a nation? If so, then what is the nature of its relationship with Muslims in the rest of the world? If Pakistan is a nation, then what is its national dress, language and culture?

It is a fact of history that Pakistan is an ideological State and is not the product of ethnic or geographic compulsions; otherwise all the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent would not have participated in the struggle for Pakistan when it was obvious that one-third of the Muslim population of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent would have to live in India and would remain deprived of the citizenship of Pakistan. If this reality is kept in view, then we shall have to look at the Pakistan Movement in the background of Islamic history, otherwise we shall depart from the fundamental directions of this movement and shall be entrenched in clichés, distorting the history of the Movement.

Islam is a religion, which, on the one hand, systematises the activities of both the individual and the society, and, on the other hand, encompasses both physical and spiritual aspects of human life. This fundamental point has to be kept in view for correct understanding of Islamic history. According to Islamic thought, there is no contradiction between spiritual values and this-worldly success; politics and religion cannot be placed in separate compartments. The principles of interpretation of history, which are prevalent in the West, will have to be modified and expanded to interpret Islamic history, because the Western mind is prone to divorce politics from religion. Historically also, we can appreciate this fundamental difference between Western and Islamic way of interpretation of history. Whereas Prophet Muhammad translated his concept of an all-encompassing religion through the establishment of an Islamic State, the Christian world has not inherited any such tradition from Jesus Christ. It is in the background of this Islamic tradition that, whenever Muslims suffered political or military defeat, their faith in Islam started faltering and they needed spiritual reassurance. Such events directly affected the evolution of Islamic thought through different periods of Islamic history.

In this brief paper, I shall only touch upon a few significant landmarks in the evolution of Islamic thought in order to analyse the problems facing Pakistan as an Islamic State.

By and large, the life style of the Arabs was tribal and pastoral. With the conquest of non-Arab lands, Arab Muslims were con-fronted with a different social structure based on agricultural system. With the change in the means of production, the dimensions of political and social structure of the new Islamic State extended beyond known tribal and pastoral system and there arose an impelling need to interpret the principles of Islam in order to cope with the new social and political situations. Fiqh is a compilation of such interpretations. This was a creative effort which opened new horizons of knowledge. But, with the passage of time, this creative effort was replaced with blind adherence to tradition. Rigidity and narrow-mindedness took the place of flexibility and broad vision. This closed the doors of intellectual creative effort. But this could not prevent the endless changes which were taking place in society on account of interaction with social systems prevalent in the conquered lands. This created a situation of perpetual struggle within the Muslim society. On intellectual level, Muslims were divided into two

groups. On one side were the 'ulamā' who practised rigidity in their adherence to tradition and preached an interpretation of Islam which was out of tune with the demands of time. They could not, therefore, offer any viable solution to the problems faced by the Muslim society as such. On the other side was the intelligentsia who encouraged an analytical and sceptical approach in the intellectual sphere. This attitude was bound to work against the interest of rulers and elite who sought the support of 'ulamā' in order to prevent any change in the status quo. The tradesmen, the peasants and the artisans, however, supported that intelligentsia who stood for free thinking, as their own prospects improved with change in the social structure. This situation was replete with perpetual struggle. The rulers and the elite committed atrocities on their opponents with the support of 'ulamā' with the result that the natural evolution of Islamic thought was stunted. Those very principles of Islam which, through their application, released immense intellectual and physical energies of Muslim society for creative effort, became moribund on account of rigidity and lack of a transcendental vision. This situation was responsible for the polarisation of vested interests, and led to frequent sectarian riots and civil wars. This also weakened the political and economic structure of the Islamic State.

The Mongol invasions on the Islamic State dealt a final blow to whatever outward political unity of Muslims existed. This led to a rapid disintegration of the Islamic State. After the Mongol invasions, Muslims could not muster their political power unitedly and were divided into smaller sultanates and empires which remained at daggers drawn with each other.

In this period of political disunity, the leadership for spiritual unity of Muslims passed from the hand of 'ulamā' to those of Sufis. The main reason for the popularity of taṣawwuf was its flexibility and absorption of local influences. It emancipated Muslim thought from the rigidity, practised and preached by 'ulamā, and gave it a cosmopolitan outlook. But, in this process, so much of local and, to a certain extent, pagan influence was absorbed that Muslim thought lost its distinctive character and became a conglomerate of Islamic and un-Islamic elements.

This situation also prevailed in the Indian Muslim society during the period of Muslim rule. Traditional Islam was confined to mosques and religious madrasahs. Outside these mosques and madrasahs, the social spectrum

presented a cosmopolitan picture which was strengthened by ṭarīqat practised by Sufis. Muslims had absorbed Hindu influences both in their thought and in their culture and civilisation.

This was the shape of Islam in practice in India when some scholars rose to revive the pristine spirit of Islam. Maulvī ‘Abdul Ḥaqq Dihlavī, a disciple of Khwājah Baqī Billāh, reverted to the original sources of Islam, namely, Qur'an and Ḥadīth, to reinterpret its basic principles, to expunge extraneous matter and to restore Sharī'ah to its rightful place in shaping the Muslim society. In this movement, the name of Shah Walīyullāh stands out above all. His well-known book, Ḥujjat Allah al-Bālighah, is a revolutionary document to emancipate Muslim thought from the rigidity of filth and to reinstate ijtihād for the purpose of the interpretation of fundamental principles of Islam. He also took part in Indian politics and invited Aḥmad Shah Abeliān, the Afghan ruler, to invade India in order to reduce the emerging power of Marhattas at Panipat in 1761. This movement produced a soldier in the person of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahid Barelvī who undertook to translate the political goal into reality, namely the establishment of an Islamic State. It is interesting to see that Sayyid Aḥmad Shahid Barelvī chose, for the establishment of an Islamic State, that area which, later on, became part of Pakistan and was, at that time, under Sikh rule. The failure of the movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Shahid Barelvī was a great set-back to the attempted resurgence of Muslim political power in India. There were similar movements in Bengal and they also met the same fate.

Another disciple of Khwājah Bāqī Billāh, namely, Shaikh Aḥmad Sarhandī, known as Mujaddid Alif Manī, undertook the onerous task of ridding ṭaṣawwuf within the bounds of Sharī'ah.

He attacked the concept of waḥdat al-wujūd which had become the bedrock of ṭaṣawwuf and was instrumental in absorbing pagan influences and personifying God in the person of the inurshid.

Instead, he presented the concept of waḥdat al-shuhūd which was in conformity with the Islamic abstract concept of God.

With the failure of the War of Independence in 1857 and the annexation of India to the British Empire, the political climate in India changed to the detriment of Muslims. Muslims became victims of both the British and the

Hindus, and it was then the question of revival of Muslims as a separate social entity.

In these unfavourable circumstances, Sayyid Aḥmad Khan undertook the task of rehabilitation of Muslims in the new political climate. In order to dispel any doubts of disloyalty of Muslims and to assure the British rulers of complete acquiescence of Muslims, Sayyid Aḥmad Khan presented a picture of apologetic Islam and advised the Muslims to acquire and practice the values of Western culture and civilization, which, he claimed, were in accordance with the teachings of Islam. This produced a section of Muslim intelligentsia who looked to the West for inspiration and who adopted the Western way of thinking and life-style. They viewed Islam as represented by the fundamentalists and relegated the role of Islam to the sphere of prayer and worship in order to have the freedom to restructure their society on Western values. The concept of Islam, presented by Sayyid Aḥmad Khan, weakened the movement of Shah Walīyullāh for the renaissance of Islam. But the Pan-Islamic Movement of Jamāluddīn Afghani again germinated the idea of political power of the Muslim world. On the intellectual plane, Allāmah Iqbal gave a new impetus to the movement for the renaissance of Islamic thought which had suffered a set-back due to the compromising attitude of Sayyid Aḥmad Khan.

Iqbal had imbibed the pristine spirit of Islam and also had an intimate knowledge of Western thought. Iqbal appreciated the social, political and economic changes taking place in the twentieth century and realised the need for a reinterpretation of Islamic thought to meet the new demands of time. He emphasised the importance of ijtihād and conceded the right of lima' to the legislative assembly.

In the meanwhile, a new development took place. Successful Communist Revolution in Russia set in a new chain of thinking in a section of the Indian Muslims, who propagated an atheistic society structured on Socialism. Previously, Islam was faced with a non-Shar'ah taṣawwuf which taught that the Shar'ah was not necessary for spiritual experience. Now, Islam was faced with an atheistic system which claimed that religion was an obstacle in the way of organising a truly moral and ethical society.

This was the intellectual scene which the Muslims of Pakistan inherited. They followed the Western model which ran counter to the aspirations of the

people. Although Pakistan was proclaimed as an Islamic State, the 'ulamā' considered that this was only in name and exhorted the people to reshape this State on the traditional concept of Islam. This conflict between Islam and modernity has continued to this date since the birth of Pakistan. People are allured by modernity—this age of science and technology, but are also devoted to Islam. They swing between the Westernised elite and the 'ulamā'.

Ill-luck would have it that no substantial work has been done on the reinterpretation of the principles of Islam and their application in the present-day Muslim State, with the result that tension and conflict have continued. There has, however, been some change in the stand taken by the 'ulamā'. After the birth of Pakistan, the 'ulamā' demanded that a supreme body of highly qualified 'ulamā' should be created to ensure that no law repugnant to the Qur'an and the Sunnah was enacted and that no law should be enforced unless approved by this supreme body of 'ulamā'. In practice, the 'ulamā' wanted to deprive the representative national assembly of the right to legislate and did not concede to it the right of *ijmā'*. With the passage of time, the 'ulamā' have realised that they were going against the tide on this issue and have recognised the supremacy of the National Assembly. They, themselves, are now seeking membership of the National Assembly as elected representatives of the people. Thus, they have de facto conceded the right of *ijmā'* to the National Assembly. We have to see whether they will also move to the position of permitting *ijtihād* and conceding that *fiqh* is not the only and final interpretation of Islam. On the other hand, a section of the Westernised elite has realised the imperative of application of the principles of Islam, but they have yet to discover these principles. There is still a large section of Westernised elite who still cherish the Western model. The breaking of a section of Westernised elite from secular position to Islamic way of life is an interesting development and may be a precursor to the ultimate renaissance of Islam in the twentieth-century Pakistan.

To sum up, we are living in a triangle. On one side are the Fundamentalists, the rigid tradition-bound 'ulamā' who do not recognise that there is any need for the reinterpretation of Islam. On the second side are the Westernised elite for whom Western democratic Nation-State is the model and who are prepared to re-cognise Islam to the extent of religious ritual only. On the third side are the Socialists who consider an atheistic society as their model. Muslim masses are encircled within these three sides of the triangle. Some

intellectuals are standing on the three corners trying to work out some compromises on the superficial level. But there are few who are committed to the cause of reinterpretation and renaissance of Islam. Nevertheless, I can see clearly that Islam is the only destiny of Pakistan. Otherwise, there is the deluge. Islam has been a moving force, to whatever degree it may have been, in our Muslim society for the last fourteen hundred years. Psychologically speaking, it is an archetype embedded in our psyche. We can only destroy ourselves to get rid of this archetype.