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SUMMARY

Sunni Muslim radicals, a violent and vocal minority, are responsible for the largest number of violent terrorist incidents in the world today. This trend is expected to continue for at least the next decade. South Asia, which is home to 28% of the world's Muslim population, has been particularly badly hit by the activities of these radicals with the number of violent incidents and deaths in this region ranking second only to Iraq and the Middle East. These radicals are also substantially responsible for the destabilisation of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They are now making a concerted effort to increase their influence Bangladesh, which along with the state of West Bengal in India, is home to 10% of the global Muslim population.

The first paper of this paper examines those Sunni ideologies which have caused violence. These ideologies owe their origins to Muslim thinkers and clerics in South Asia and in the Arab world (specifically, Saudi Arabia and Egypt). For taxonomic purposes, Sunni Islamic radicalism can be divided into two basic strands, viz., (i) Political Islamism and (ii) Neo-fundamentalism. The most prominent political Islamist organizations are the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan-ul-Musalmeen) in the Arab world. Neo-fundamentalists, known colloquially as *Salafis* or *Wahabis*, are represented in South Asia through the Deobandis and the *Ahle Hadithis*.

Political Islamists and neo-fundamentalists both see Islam as a conquering religion that is currently in eclipse. They believe that it is their duty to lift Islam from its Dark Ages, revive its "lost glory" and put it back firmly on the path of conquering all. To them, the glory of Islam is synonymous with the thousand years after the advent of the Prophet when Islamic empires ruled over much of Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. Radicals believe that the defeat of these great Islamic empires (Arab, Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid) was not so much due to the rise of the West and the scientific and industrial revolutions as it was to Muslims deviating from the "true faith".

Muslim radicals are therefore obsessed about becoming "good" Muslims, in rooting out whatever has corrupted the "true faith" and in propagating this "true faith". The "true faith" according to the neo-fundamentalists is the literal observance of the precepts of the Koran and the *Hadith*; and the adoption of a lifestyle similar to what the Prophet and his companions (the *Salaf*) are believed to have had. If the Prophet grew a beard, so must all good Muslims; if the prophet said that long robes are a sign of vanity, all good Muslims must wear short robes; and so on. Strict observance of these rules will purify the believers and provide them the collective strength that will revitalise Islam and set it back on the path of conquest. It is also the duty of all true believers to prevent the way of the *Hadith* from being corrupted by local influences and idolatry (e.g. veneration of sufi saints, religious music). They must also work towards convincing all (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) that theirs is the only way. This is to be done, preferably, through peaceful proselytism (*da'wa*); if that fails then force (*jihad*) is justified or even obligatory.

The political Islamists do not lay as much emphasis on literally following the *Hadith*. Theirs is a "grand" ideology drawn up by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb and Maulana Abdul Ala Maududi from India (and later Pakistan). Political Islamists, like the Marxists, views life as an evolutionary struggle. While the Marxist view of history is that of a struggle between the classes,

Islamists see it as a struggle between the forces of *Jahiliyah* (or non-Islam) and Islam. And like the Marxists who believe that struggle will lead to a socialist utopia, Islamists believe that the world is inevitably headed towards an Islamist utopia. The Islamist utopia will be a “theo-democracy”. It will be ruled by an *Ameer* whose purity and piety will make him an obvious leader (Mullah Omar is a proto-type). The *Ameer*’s job is to implement the precepts of the Koran which contains answers to every possible question on any topic that a human mind could possibly have. There will be no legislature as Allah has already laid down the law in the *Sha’ria*. There will be no nation-state and no foreign policy because the world will become a borderless *Ummah* ruled by the *Ameer*. Thus freed from the burdens of making choices, the faithful can spend their life in prayer and devotion.

Radicals are unable to accept divergent points of view. They feel particularly threatened by the West and western ideas such as democracy, secularism and liberalism. Their violent hatred of the west is matched by a hatred of Muslims who do not agree with the beliefs of radicals. Such Muslims are to be treated as heretics and apostates (the punishment for apostasy according to the *Sha’ria* is death). Shias and Ahmadiyyas both fit this description and are accordingly targeted. After them come the Muslims who are simply pious (but not radical) and the moderates or the easy-going. Not surprisingly, fellow radicals owing allegiance to other ideologies, even if they are similar, are also not to be spared since there can be only one true faith. Deobandi neo-fundamentalists believe that what the Jamaat-e-Islami preaches is not Islam at all. Political Islamists hold neo-fundamentalists in contempt. The practical manifestation of this intolerance can be seen in its most florid form in Pakistan. The country is wracked by internecine “sectarian” violence in which Shias and Sunnis are killing each other and Sunnis are killing other Sunnis.

Islamic radicalism in South Asia is not new and this paper looks at the key players who have worked to ensure its enduring appeal. Although the theoretical roots go back to the 18th century and the renowned Shah Waliullah of Delhi, it was first seen in its present violent and *jihadi* form about 160 years ago. A group of fanatics from Northern India (who were called “Wahabis”), reeling under the British onslaught that had decimated the Mughals, set up base in Afghanistan and declared *jihad* against the British empire. Their rebellion lasted intermittently for about 3 decades and claimed the lives of a Viceroy and Chief Justice of India before they were destroyed as an organization. Another section of Muslims adopted a more peaceful path to revitalize their faith. They set up a *madrassa* called the Dar ul Uloom in Deoband in 1866. Run entirely on charitable donations (without any government assistance from anywhere) by a highly-dedicated band of *ulema*, this school has produced over a hundred thousand graduates who have been trained to propagate the way of the Hadith. Deoband graduates, who have founded thousands of *madrassas* across South Asia, are not alone in propagating the true faith. They are aided by a Deoband off-shoot, the Tabligh Jamaat. This unique and secretive missionary movement, that can pull-in a million devotees to attend its annual conventions, has been silently and effectively spreading Deoband’s message across the world. A closely related strain of radicalism, *Salafism*, that developed independently but identically in Saudi Arabia (the *Wahabis*) and in South Asia (the *Ahle Hadith*) also worked tirelessly in this direction. *Ahle Hadithis* and Deobandis have seen a dramatic increase in profile in the last three decades due to the immense flow of petro-dollars made available to them by Saudi munificence.

Radical Muslims in South Asia took to violence in a big way after the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. They received encouragement and resources from state and non-state actors who found them useful covert tools to further strategic objectives. Flush

with enthusiasm, funds and weapons, these radicals turned to new targets after the Soviets had been ejected from Afghanistan. The Taliban (extreme Deobandis by ideology), and Al Qaeda (Islamists laying particular emphasis on *jihad*) who became the face of radical Islam during this period, soon found the new objectives. The West (India has always been seen as an enemy) and “un-Islamic” Muslim governments became targets. Afghanistan was overrun, 9/11 took place and radical Islam burst upon the international consciousness as a major destabilising factor in international political and security equations.

The paper then examines the influence that these events have had on Bangladesh, a country that was referred to as a moderate, Islamic democracy. Bangladeshis practice a liberal and tolerant form of Islam. They see themselves as Bangladeshis as much as Muslims and the first Constitution that the country adopted was secular and reflected the essentially liberal sentiments of the people. However, over a period of time Bangladesh has moved away from its secular beginnings. Its Constitution has been amended to make it an Islamic Republic and its Islamic identity has been accentuated by numerous measures. This Islamisation has been accompanied by an increased profile for radicals. Things came to a head after 2001 when two Islamist parties joined a coalition government. This was followed by a dramatic increase in violence attributed to radical Islamic organizations similar to those seen in Pakistan. The violence followed a pattern that clearly indicated a radical footprint. There were concerns that *Madrassas* were flourishing and even supplanting modern educational systems in parts of the country. There was an increase in displays of intolerance including organized campaigns against “heretics” such as Ahmaddiyas as well as non-Muslims who constitute about 10% of the population.

It is obvious, however, that although battle has been joined between moderates and radicals, it is far from over. Moderate and liberal Bangladeshis remain a strong force. In spite of the inroads of radical influence, popular culture (e.g. festivals, literature, music, behaviour patterns, etc.) retains its unique Bangladeshi flavour. Traditional religious networks remain extremely strong. The intellectual community has a strong and respected component that is avowedly liberal. Institutions such as the judiciary and media have gathered strength and remain by and large secular and moderate in their inclinations. The limited appeal of the “Islamists” is evident from the fact that the share of the popular vote of fundamentalist Islamic parties has in fact decreased significantly in the last two decades. Sectarian violence is so far absent. A flourishing civil society network active in promoting development has developed remarkable institutional capacities and has contributed to improvement of socio-economic indicators. Consistent economic growth has provided outlets for enterprising Bangladeshis. The Army, which is the single most important institution in Bangladesh, has so far kept away from openly allying itself with Islamic radicals (as in the case of Pakistan). The government recently executed a number of high-profile radicals. It has also made efforts to protect the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of Bangladeshi society.

The picture which presents itself is thus that of a country in which radical Islamic sections of society have been pro-active in pushing their agenda. They face opposition from the basically liberal ethos of the country and from a society and a state in which democracy and democratic institutions are trying to take root.

Countries such as India that have adopted democracy and liberalism and have been characterized as existential enemies of radical Islamists require to watch this struggle closely as it has a direct bearing on their security. This would require careful monitoring of a number of indicators such

as the tendency of the government to flirt with Islamism, implement *Sha'ria* or legislate on neo-fundamentalist concerns; the tendency of authorities to use radical terrorism to covertly further foreign policy objectives or be half-hearted in stamping out violent radicals; the protection of religious freedom, diversity and the multi-ethnic nature of society; the presence of outside influences through transfer of resources and movement of ideas from countries in the Middle East; the number of different types of *madrassas* and their curricula.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic terrorism is one of the major sources of violence in today's world. According to official US sources, Sunni Islamic groups were the single most frequent (known) perpetrators of terrorist incidents across the world in 2006.¹ This is likely to continue to be the case in the near future. The "2020 Project" of the US National Intelligence Council², says that the majority of international terrorist groups will continue to identify with radical Islam in the next decade.

South Asia in general and India in particular are amongst the worst victims of terrorism. South Asia has the second largest number of incidents and victims of terrorism in the world (after Iraq/Middle East)³. India is particularly badly affected. It ranks second only to Iraq in terms of the number of terrorist incidents and lethalties⁴. Radical Islam accounts for most of this violence.

Radical Islamic terrorists in South Asia, which is home to about 28% of the total Muslim population of the world, have worked tirelessly towards undermining security and peace in the region. They are substantially responsible for the destabilisation of Afghanistan and Pakistan. They have created an enduring low-intensity conflict scenario in Jammu and Kashmir state of India and have a growing profile in Bangladesh. Radical Islam also appears to have found adherents in Sri Lanka, already riven by conflict along linguistic lines.

What is it that these radicals believe in? What *inspires* them to violence?

Islamic radicalism this century has gone through two phases. The first phase was associated with what is now called "Islamism" or "political Islam". The best known amongst the organisations associated with this phase of radicalism are the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan ul Musalmeen*) in the Middle East and the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia. The attraction of these ideologies, is according to the French political philosopher and expert on contemporary Islam, Olivier Roy, on the wane. A newer form of Islamic fundamentalism is spreading around the world today.⁵ From "Pakistan's *madrassas* to Islamic bookshops in Paris or mosques in London, via hundreds of websites", a doctrine referred to by moderate Muslims as "*Wahabism*" (a reference to the official creed of Saudi Arabia) is being energetically propagated. Roy describes the *Wahabis* as *neo-fundamentalists* to differentiate them from the Islamists or "political Islam" radicals. Those practising this form of worship prefer to call themselves "*Salafis*" ('followers of pious ancestors'). Some (e.g. Tablighis) reject such appellations and refer to themselves simply as Muslims.⁶

For purposes of broad classification, *radical* Islamic ideologies – by which I mean strands of Islamic thinking that have produced violence – can thus be divided into:-

- (a) Islamism
- (b) Neo-fundamentalism

¹ National Counter Terrorism Center, Report on Terrorist Incidents, 2006.

² Mapping the Global Future, the report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project, December 2004

³ National Counter Terrorism Center, Report on Terrorist Incidents, 2006.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, 1995

⁶ Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam, The Search for a New Ummah*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004

90% of Muslims in South Asia are Sunni and this paper concerns itself only with Sunni radicalism. Within the South Asian context, the Islamist tradition is represented by the Jamaat-e-Islami. The neo-fundamentalist strand is represented by:-

- (a) The Deobandi Tradition
- (b) The *Ahle Hadith* Tradition

These traditions have certain common features. To begin with the Muslim belief that Islam is the final revealed religion on earth⁷ is carried to an extreme. The possibility of any other religion existing is a sacrilege; Islam must conquer all. Associated with this is the belief that Islam has fallen on hard times and that its “lost glory” must be revived. ” The concept of “lost glory” requires some explanation. To quote John Julius Norwich, “in September 622 the Prophet Mohammed had fled from hostile Mecca to friendly Medina, thereby initiating the Muslim era; and just *eleven* years afterwards, in 633, the armies of Islam would begin the advance that was to take them, in the course of a single century, to within 150 miles of Paris and to the very gates of Constantinople. Until the early seventh century, Arabia had been unknown to the West, while its inhabitants, where the Christian world was concerned, showed no interest, made no impact and certainly posed no threat. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, all was changed. In 633, they burst out of Arabia. After three years they had taken Damascus; after five, Jerusalem; after six, all Syria; within a decade, Egypt and Armenia; within twenty years, the Persian Empire; within thirty, Afghanistan and most of the Punjab. Then, after a brief interval for consolidation, they turned their attention to the West. In 711, having occupied the entire coast of North Africa, they invaded Spain; and by 732, less than a century after their first eruption from their desert homeland, they had crossed the Pyrenees and driven north to the banks of the Loire – where they were finally checked.”⁸

The Arabs remained in Spain for about seven centuries. This great Arab *empire* was succeeded, in the fifteen and sixteenth centuries, by a trio of equally great Islamic *empires* which ruled almost all of Asia and Eastern Europe and large parts of Africa for another three centuries. These were the Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid *Empires*. The territorial reach of these Islamic *empires* is hard to imagine today. Almost all of Eastern Europe was ruled by the Muslim Ottoman *Empire* for five hundred years. India had Muslim rulers for seven centuries. The Mongols (who converted to Islam) threatened Russia for centuries. For close to a thousand years, Islam was therefore a dominant imperial force.

This dominance did not last beyond the eighteenth century. The Muslim *empires* had been weakened by internal problems and by a combination of aggressive European imperialism and the scientific and industrial revolutions. The Turks, who had reached the gates of Vienna in 1529, were referred to as the “sick men of Europe” three hundred years later. The Mughal Emperor of India was little more than a British pensioner by the early 1800s. It was the turn of Europe and Western civilization to dominate the world.

In the minds of radicals this thousand years of Islamic predominance, that pre-dated the ascent of the West, was the “glory” of Islam. Today is Islam’s Dark Age.

⁷ David Selbourne, *The Losing Battle with Islam*, Prometheus Books, New York, 2005

⁸ John Julius Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium*, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1999.

Islamic radicals believe that Islam has come to this pass because Muslims deviated from the “true faith.” They also believe that this glory and expansionism are destined to be revived if Muslims revert to the same “true faith.”

Secondly, radical Muslims view the Koran as a complete guide that has all answers to all questions that the human mind could possibly conceive of. The Koran and Islamic scriptures are said to be a complete ethical, *spiritual*, political, legal, social, economic and cultural guide for all mankind that should govern all aspects of life universally. Radical Islamist ideologues (Sayyid Qutb and Abdul Ala Maududi) have derived their entire ideologies from the Koran. The core of Neo-fundamentalism is a belief that Muslims must literally adhere to the Koran in everything that they do. There can be no law other than the *Sha’ria*; a person cannot believe in anything (e.g. democracy, secularism, socialism) that is not explicitly mentioned in the Koran – let alone practice it; and, the only purpose that life can have is obedience to the Koran.

THE KORAN

Muslims believe that the Koran is the word of God revealed to the Prophet in ‘clear Arabic speech’ through the archangel Gabriel. The Prophet received the first revelation at the age of 40 in the year 610. The revelations continued to come for the next 23 years, in fragments and ‘at intervals’ ending 81/82 days before the death of the Prophet in 632. Muslim scholars know exactly when, where and under what circumstances each verse was revealed. The Prophet frequently recited the portions of the Koran till then revealed; and during the fasting of the Ramadan, shortly before his death, he recited the whole Koran during the special evening prayers. Several men and women knew the Koran by heart by the time the Prophet died. The language of the Koran is radically different from the language used by Mohammad in his everyday speech. The structure of the Koran is also different from that of other religious texts and is not “linear”, “chronological” or “logical” with a beginning, middle or end. The whole text containing 114 chapters or surahs, with a total of 6236 verses has lattice structure in which each word connects with every other word through rhythm, rhyme or meaning. The structure also ensures that not a single dot of its text can be changed, for even the minutest change throws the text out of sync. This structure with its interlocking structure, the eloquence and beauty of the language and the precision, economy and subtlety of its style ensures that the Koran is “inimitable”. It is believed that not only is it physically impossible to change or corrupt it, but also beyond human capability to produce a single verse of similar literary merit.⁹

Thirdly, radical Muslims are unable to accept alternate points of view. They are medieval in their belief that theirs is the only way and that all other points of view are antithetical to Islam and must therefore be overcome. Any person not agreeing with their particular interpretation of the Koran is a heretic [*kaffir*] and should be treated as an enemy. The ideas and the way of life that the “West” represents are subjects of particular hatred. Western civilization, as is commonly understood today, is supposed to be godless and tyrannical. India, with its indigenous Hindu and Buddhist cultures and its adoption of “western” political values is a close second. The intolerance is not restricted to non-Muslims. Muslims too must adhere to the radical beliefs of

⁹ Ziauddin Sardar and Zafar Abbas Malik, *Introducing Muhammad*, Totem Books, New York 1999

these extremists. Otherwise, they too are treated as heretics. Muslims and Islamic governments who do not accept neo-fundamentalism or Islamist ideologies are also seen as heretics. They require to be converted to the cause and if that does not succeed, eliminated.

Fourthly, they believe that it is incumbent upon them to propagate their faith. If this can be done by peaceful means, (*da'wa*) well and good. If not, the use of force is not only sanctioned but also encouraged. *Jihad* (in the sense of attacking the enemy physically) becomes a duty. Radical Muslim ideologies have all spawned groups that have used violence against those who are “non-believers” (non-believers being not just non-Muslims but also non-Sunni Muslims and non-conformist Sunni Muslims). This commitment to converting the non-believers makes Islamic radicals, like many radical minorities before them, dangerous. Along with the shared belief in the infallibility of their faith or their way, Islamic radicals also share their propensity towards using organized violence as a short-cut. This is a path that has been followed by the radicals of the left and the far-left and those of the right and far right. Some such radicals such as the Bolsheviks of the left and the Fascists of the Right have succeeded. Others, when they failed used turned into insurgents and created enduring security problems in their areas of influence or even beyond.

POLITICAL ISLAM: THE IDEOLOGY OF THE JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI

The Jamaat-e-Islami was founded by Maulana Abdul Ala Maududi, who along with the Egyptian Sayyid Qutub, is considered to be one of the most important Islamic thinkers in the past century. To Islamists their position is roughly analogous to that of a combination of Marx, Lenin and Mao in the Communist pantheon.

Maududi's thinking was fashioned by the political decline of Islam in Asia, particularly South Asia. Maududi grew up in a South Asia from which the Mughal *Empire* and its subsidiary political units (many ruled by Muslims) had been swept off the map and British rule had supplanted the seven-century long Muslim domination of India. This political eclipse contributed to a crisis of confidence among the Muslim community. It was felt that Islam was under assault from the seemingly invincible British as well as the ideas and beliefs of the West.

Muslims in India reacted to this in two broad ways. While one strand, that of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the so-called Aligarh movement tried to learn from the British and the new ideas, another strand (Shah Waliullah (1703-1753) is considered by many to be the original thinker] looked to Islam for a way to revive the fortunes of the community. The Deobandis and Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami are the two principal schools of thought that have emerged from this effort.

Maududi, like the Marxists, views life as an evolutionary struggle. While the Marxist view of history is that of a struggle between the classes, Maududi sees it as a struggle between the state of *Jahiliyah* (or non-Islam) and Islam. And like the Marxists who believe that struggle will lead to a socialist utopia, Maududi believes that the world is inevitably headed to an Islamist utopia. The *Kaffrs* or unbelievers (those who believe in democracy, socialism, etc.) will resist the movement towards Islamic utopia and therefore must be overcome. The west, capitalism and socialism had to be defeated before Islam could dominate the life and thought of Muslims.¹⁰The

¹⁰ The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution, The Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan Seyed Vali Reza Nasr

role of the Jamaat-e-Islami, founded by Maududi, is to be the vanguard of this Islamic revolution.

What will this utopia look like? How will it be won? The answers to these and other questions are all recorded in minute detail in Maududi's prodigious output recorded over a six-decade period.

The Islamic utopia will be a "theo-democracy" and would have a political, social and economic system derived by Maududi from the Koran. The state would be governed by a political system based on three principles: *Tawheed* (The perfection of Allah), *Risalat* (Prophethood) and *Khilafat* (Vice regency).

The principle of *Tawheed* means that sovereignty rests not with the people but with Allah. The concept of *Risalat* means that Allah has revealed his will and "his law" through a Prophet. The Prophet has also provided, through word and deed, the framework of a permanent Islamic state. The combination of revelation and guidelines is Maududi's Sha'ria. The concept of *Khilafat* or vice regency is difficult to grasp. According to Maududi it means that 'Man, according to Islam, is the representative of Allah on earth, His vicegerent. That is to say, by virtue of the powers delegated to him by Allah, he is required to exercise his Allah-given authority in this world within the limits prescribed by Allah.' Taken together it would appear to mean that Allah has delegated his sovereignty to the ummah (all of whom are his viceregents on earth). His viceregents must live in accordance with the divine precepts of the Koran and *Sha'ria* (divine law).

Maududi believes that Islam is superior to democracy. He believes that the concept of *Khilafat* ensures that "all individuals are equal. No one can deprive anyone of his rights and powers." Western democracy is based on the concept of popular sovereignty and people make their own laws. Islamic democracy vests sovereignty in Allah with mankind as his viceregent and laws (*Sha'ria*) that derive from Allah. Therefore Islamic democracy is superior. Another reason put forward by Maududi is that "western democracy is a kind of absolute authority which exercises its powers in a free and uncontrolled manner, whereas Islamic democracy is subservient to the Divine Law and exercises its authority in accordance with the injunctions of Allah and within the limits prescribed by Him." Interestingly, this was the argument used by Khomeini to declare that no Islamic regime could be dictatorial because the ruler governed according to divine law and not his individual will.

Key to the issue of governance is the method of choosing the ruler. According to Maududi, "the agency for running the affairs of the state will be established in accordance with the will" of the individuals living in the Islamic state, "their opinion will be decisive in the formation of the Government, which will be run with their advice and in accordance with their wishes. Whoever gains their confidence will carry out the duties of the caliphate on their behalf; and when he loses this confidence he will have to relinquish his office. In this respect the political system in Islam is as perfect a democracy as ever can be."

The executive will be headed, as in the Jamaat, by an *Ameer*. The *Ameer* will be elected by the people, presumably in a manner similar to the elections by secret ballot by which the *Ameers* of the Jamaat are elected. This may sound like sound democratic practice. The problem here is that Maududi believes that only "suitable" persons can become *Ameers*. A "suitable" candidate

would be one who is has “knowledge and grasp of the *spirit* of Islam.” An elected “*Shura*” “will assist and guide the Amir.” It would be obligatory for the Amir to administer the country in consultation with the *Shura*.

There would be no need for a legislature because the law has already been laid down by God.

How will this utopia be achieved? To being with, Maududi believes that mankind must accept that the theo-democracy outlined above is the Will of God. It must be accepted that the problems of the world¹¹ cannot be solved by any humanly developed ideology such as democracy and socialism or any other “ism”. There are limits to human reasoning, and hence of human ability to comprehend and resolve them. Islam, however, provided solutions to these problems. The solution consists of faith in Allah and total submission to his will as revealed by the Prophet Mohammad through the Koran and the *Sunnah* and as interpreted by Maududi.

Once this is accepted, good Muslims must concern themselves with obtaining political power. The ideology of the Jamaat is almost as much about how to capture state power as what is to be done after control of the state is achieved. “Maududi chided Muslims for having eliminated politics from religious life, which he believed to be the result of gradual deviation from Islam’s true teachings. His interpretive reading of Islam and its history began with denunciation of traditional Islam and its centuries-old institutions. He argued that Islam had no possibility of success as a religion or a civilization—which he argued was meant to be its fate and the reason for its revelation—unless Muslims removed the encumbrances of cultural accretion and tradition, rigorously reconstructed the pristine faith of the Prophet, and gained power. Politics was declared to be an integral and inseparable component of the Islamic faith, and the “Islamic state” which Muslim political action sought to erect was viewed as the panacea to all problems facing Muslims.”¹²

How is power to be captured? Surprisingly Maududi believed in “incremental change rather than radical ruptures, disparaged violence as a political tool, did not subscribe to class war, and assumed that Islamic revolution would be heralded not by the masses but by the society’s leaders. Revolution, in Maududi’s view, did not erupt from the bottom up but flowed from the top of society down. The aim of Islamic revolution, therefore, was not to spearhead the struggle of the underclass but to convert society’s leaders. During an election campaign in 1958, Maududi summed up the Jamaat’s plan of action in the following terms: “first of all it brings intellectual change in the people; secondly [it] organises them in order to make them suitable for a movement. Thirdly, it reforms society through social and humanitarian work, and finally it endeavors to change the leadership.”¹³

Once the leadership had been won over to Islam—the Jamaat taking power—the society would be Islamized and all socioeconomic maladies would be automatically cured. Education and propaganda were therefore singled out as the principal agents for furthering the

¹¹ These problems (according to the Jamaat’s literature) are the absence of a just and egalitarian social order; the absence of freedom and equality; the presence of exploitation; and the absence of cosmic social justice, and which is impartial and unbiased.

¹² *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution*, The Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan Seyed Vali Reza Nasr

¹³ *ibid*

revolutionary struggle. The Jamaat's efforts have always aimed at winning over society's leaders, conquering the state, and Islamizing the government. Its plan of action has been designed to augment its influence in the inner sanctum of power rather than to curry favor with the masses. Its notions of social action therefore have peculiar meanings and aims.

Maududi, in his writings, has systematically mixed religion with politics and reinterpreted concepts and symbols, giving them new meanings and connotations in order to fit his ideology within the framework of Islam. This political doctrine, masquerading as religion, is referred to as *din* (literally, "religion")—defined piety. Another prominent feature of Maududi's vision is the merger of the hankering for the pristine Islam of the Prophet with the modern. "He adopted modern ideas and values, mechanisms, procedures, and idioms, weaving them into an Islamic fabric, thus producing an internally consistent and yet hybrid ideological perspective." He tried to modernise the traditional conception of Islamic thought and life to make it relevant to contemporary realities.¹⁴

Maududi is anti-western. He believed that western influences and ideologies such as capitalism and socialism were, in part, responsible for the plight of the Muslims. Muslims, therefore had to free their souls from western influences. Secularism is a western concept that is subjected to particularly vehement criticism. A true Muslim state cannot possibly live in a secular state. Allegiance to secular state is tantamount to rejection of the paramountcy of Allah; this is equated with being god-less and is worse than heresy. Maududi had opposed the creation of Pakistan as its founding fathers did not make it a theocracy and wanted, in fact, to make it a secular state. Maududi also opposed the creation of Pakistan on the grounds that it amounted to a diminution of the ummah – the borderless space that Muslims inhabit. Any territory that a Muslim lives in automatically becomes a part of the Ummah and must automatically become "*Dar ul Islam*" or the "land of the pure" where Islam has to prevail.

At a superficial level, theo-democracy may actually look like democracy. The problem here is that the process of consultation is not defined. Would it be binding for the ruler to seek the ummah's advice and is he bound by the verdicts of those consulted? Another problem is the related Islamic concept of *fitnah* that strongly contradicts the freedom of expression in liberal democracies. It requires total submission to the ruler. Muslims must listen to their leader, be passive and obey. Revolt is not tolerated in Islam.

The key here is the definition of an Islamic order and who defines it. Maududi has reserved this right for himself and has also made it clear that disagreement with this definition would be treated as heresy. These are the ingredients of fascism.

Maududi's writings are in some way reminiscent of political ideology of medieval and pre-medieval Europe. They hark back to the role and influence of the Christianity and Christian values not simply as a religion but as guides to personal and political conduct. Maududi's borderless Ummah that would replace the nation state is reminiscent of the concept of *Christendom*. His *Ameer* would be a combination of Pope and Holy Roman Emperor. Maududi would like to undo the separation between religion and politics and the consequent emergence of democracy and liberal values.

¹⁴ ibid

On the rights of non-Muslims

“The life, property and honour of a non-Muslim are to be respected and protected in exactly the same way as that of a Muslim citizen. They would, however, on the basis of their not accepting Islam, be excluded from the process of governance – thus making them an underclass.

Islamism and Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda is composed of radical Muslims from all over the world (Saudis, Algerians, Palestinians and Egyptians are a majority) who fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets and with the Taliban. United by their shared experience of combat and the radical Islamist ideology of Sayyid Qutb, the group has a single objective, *jihad* . Destroying the enemies of Islam is the *raison d'etre* of Al Qaeda. Once Communism was overcome in Afghanistan this group turned its attention to the other enemies of Islam, viz., the West, Israel and India.

Traditionally *jihad* has not been considered to be among the five pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayer, fasting during Ramadan, the Haj, and *zakat*). Qutb however considered it to be permanent and individual duty.¹⁵ Osama bin Laden has, in his few writings, stated that *jihad* is a permanent and central duty of all Muslims.¹⁶

NEOFUNDAMENTALISM IN SOUTH ASIA: THE IDEOLOGY OF DEOBAND AND SALAFISM

The patron saint of neofundamentalism is Ibn Tamayya, a 13th century Middle Eastern Islamic scholar. The vital force that converted his beliefs into today's *Salafi* movement was provided by the teachings and actions of two great 18th century Islamic clerics, Mohammad ibn Abd al Wahab in Arabia (then under the Ottomans) and Shah Waliullah (in the waning days of the Mughal Empire) in India. Al Wahab is the founder of Saudi *Wahabism* . Shah Waliullah is considered to be the original creator of the *Ahle Hadith* , Deoband and Tablighi Jamaat in India. Charles Allen in “God's Terrorists: The *Wahabi* Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern *Jihad* ” has written that Shah Waliullah and al Wahab were not only contemporaries but may have studied at Mecca at the same time and under the same teacher.¹⁷ The beliefs of the *Ahle Hadith* of South Asia and the Saudi *Wahabis* are identical. The Deobandis and Tablighis have followed different paths but the similarities far outweigh the differences. Saudi Arabia and South Asia have been the twin incubators of neofundamentalism or *Salafism* . It is not surprising therefore that some of the worst excesses associated with *Salafi* radicalism are connected with Afghanistan and Pakistan today.

Ahle Hadith is an Arabic term meaning “people of the *Hadith* ” and is basically South Asian *Wahabism* . Like their Saudi brothers, *Ahle Hadithis* , who are usually referred to as *Wahabis* , dislike the appellation and would prefer to be called “ *Salafis* ” or “ *Muwahhidun* ” [Unitarians].

Wahabism was first preached by a radical Arab cleric Mohammad ibn Abd al Wahab in the mid-18th century in the Arabian Peninsula. The rise of *Wahabism* is inextricably linked with the rise

¹⁵ Oliver, *Globalised Islam*

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Charles Allen, *Gods Terrorist The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* , Little Brown, Great Britain, 2006

of the al Saud family. Al Wahab was accepted as their *spiritual* guide by the then obscure al Saud family in 1744. After a two century long struggle, when the house of al Saud finally succeeded in creating the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, *Wahabism* was firmly established as the state religion of the house of Saud and therefore of Saudi Arabia. By that time, Al Wahab's descendants, collectively referred to as Al ash Shaykhs, had become a major force in Saudi Arabia and a major factor in the Kingdom's polity. Intermarriage between al Saud and Al ash Shaykh was and remains common [Wahab's daughter married Mohammed ibn Saud, founder of the house of Al-Saud]. Virtually all the Grand Muftis of Saudi Arabia have been from this family¹⁸. The close links between the King and Grand Mufti have linked church and state in an extremely convenient arrangement for both. Al ash Shaykh have decreed that a Muslim must present a *bayah* or oath of allegiance to a Muslim ruler during his lifetime it ensures his redemption after death. The ruler is expected to lead the community according to the laws of God. Whether the ruler is doing so or not is to be determined by the *ulema* , who are, of course led by the Ash al Shaykh.¹⁹

The *Ahle Hadithis* first appeared in India as disciples of the charismatic Muslim cleric Shah Waliullah (1703-1762). Shah Waliullah hankered for a return to Muslim rule over India and believed that British rule over India had made it a *Dar ul harb* (land of war, a territory ruled by infidels that should be converted to *dar ul islam* or land of Islam). Since India was *Dar ul harb*, congregational prayers such the Friday jumma prayer and Id prayers could no longer be offered. More importantly, declaring India *dar ul harb* legitimized *jihad* against the British rulers in order to defend the cause of Islam.²⁰ The decline of the Muslims in India was attributed to their deviation from the Koran. It was preached that Muslims had to return to the way of the Koran as a first step in the direction of restoring Muslim rule.

While Waliullah had invited Ahmed Shah Abdali, an Afghan chieftain to invade India, in order to prevent the Hindu Marathas from decimating the Mughals, his descendants prosecuted a vigorous *jihad* against the British. The tactics used were familiar. Groups of mujahedeen went to Afghanistan, beginning in 1826, to liberate it from the Sikhs and then to use it as a base against the British. A guerilla campaign was launched against the British in the 1850s and the British Commissioner of Peshawar was assassinated. The British retaliated in a series of punitive campaigns that wiped out the mujahedeen militarily and launched a massive police and intelligence operation to uproot the "Wahabis" once and for all. A series of "Wahabi" trials were held from 1864 in which some of the senior leaders of the sect were found guilty of treason against the British Government. While the British succeeded in destroying the capacity of the *Wahabis* to undertake any military operation, it is believed that *Wahabis* were behind the assassination of the Viceroy and Chief Justice of India within five months of each other in 1870 and 1871.²¹

There are also accounts of thousands of fanatic *jihadis* who flocked to Delhi to fight under the banner of the "Last Mughal", Bahadur Shah Zafar against the British during the war of 1857. According to these accounts these *jihadis* were ferocious warriors who came to Delhi in search

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ "Wahhabi" from Global Security.org <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/wahhabi.htm>,

²⁰ Ahmed *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 A Quest for Identity*,

²¹ Allen *The Hidden Roots of Wahabism in India*

of martyrdom in the battle against the infidel British.²² These “*jihadis*” were in all probability *Ahle Hadithis*.

The tough British response to these movements generated a backlash against the “*Wahabis*” within the Muslim community. The backlash took the form of an effort by a section of Indian Muslims led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to join hands with the British. They promoted the concept of learning from and living with western concepts and ideas and generally “modernizing” the community

The central belief of the *Wahabis* and *Ahle Hadithis* is that it is the primary responsibility of every Muslim to live according to the *Hadith*.

THE HADITH

The life of the Prophet is known as the *Sira* and was lived in the full light of history. Everything he did and said, his important decisions, his instructions and his activities were recorded at his insistence by a group of 45 scribes. The minutest details of the Prophet’s life are thus available. How he spoke, sat, slept, dressed, walked; his behaviour as a husband, father, nephew; his attitudes towards women, children, animals; his business transactions and stance towards the poor and the oppressed; his engagements in camps and cantonments; his behaviour in battle; his experience of political authority and stand on power; his personal habits, likes and dislikes; even his private dealings with his wives have all been recorded. The daily utterances and discourses of the Prophet, from the day he received the first revelation till his death, are known as the *Hadith*. *Hadith* literally means “statement”. Together the *Sira* and the *Hadith* constitute the *Sunnah*. The word *Sunnah* means method, example, or path. The *Sunnah* tells Muslims what their ideal behaviour should be like. It teaches Muslims ritual and the *spiritual* aspects of their faith – how to pray, fast and perform pilgrimage to Makkah. The *Sunnah* is also, however, a guide in moral and social matters. Thus a Muslim seeking a pious life simply follows the norms and patterns established by the life and traditions of the Prophet – as laid down in the *Sunnah*.

Neofundamentalists believe that Muslims have deviated from the *Hadith* and that the faith has been corrupted over a period of time by contact with other religions and local customs and practices. These corruptions are referred to as *bi’da* (innovations) and are considered as heresies. Common examples of *bi’da* (also referred to as *shirk* or idolatry) include visits to shrines or veneration of holy men. Sufism, as commonly understood, falls in this category. The Shia faith is considered to be a “Jewish conspiracy” against Islam.²³ Neofundamentalists are obsessed by these heresies and the need to counter them.²⁴ They believe that this corruption has to be met by return to the pristine Islam followed by the Prophet and his immediate followers (*salaf as salih*,

²² William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal*

²³ “Wahhabism: State-Sponsored Extremism Worldwide”, Testimony by Alex Alexiev, senior Fellow, Center for Security Policy, US Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Homeland Security, June 26, 2003.

²⁴ Olivier, *Globalised Islam*

hence the appellation “*salafis*”) as laid down in authentic *Hadith*²⁵. Neofundamentalists do not accept scientific theology or any attempt to reinterpret Islam according to changing times. They endeavour to imitate the Prophet in all matters and believe that the path to salvation lies in literally following the *Hadith*. This has led to an excessive emphasis on ritual and modes of behaviour. Three fingers should always be used when eating, water is to be drunk in three pauses with the right hand while sitting. Punctual and ritually correct prayer is compulsory, modest dress is required, all intoxicants are forbidden, music and dancing have been forbidden as have loud laughter and demonstrative weeping, particularly at funerals.²⁶ A surprising amount of time is spent by neo-fundamentalist clerics on discussing mundane matters (hence a continuing debate on how to brush one’s teeth.)²⁷

Neofundamentalists believe that they represent the only path to salvation. They consider themselves to be the only “true Muslims”. Whether other Muslims should be declared infidels or not is another neofundamentalist obsession as is the method to be used to return deviant Muslims to the true path. Mainstream neofundamentalists advocate *da’wa*, while radicals enjoin upon their believers an obligation to wage *Jihad* against non-believers or apostates.²⁸

One such radical organization, the Markaz al-Dawa wal-Irshad, in a publication titled *Hum Jihad kyun kar rahe hain? (Why are we waging Jihad?)* declares USA, Israel and India as existential enemies of Islam. It lists eight reasons for *Jihad*: (1) to eliminate evil and facilitate conversion to and practice of Islam; (2) to ensure the ascendancy of Islam; (3) to force non-Muslims to pay *jizya* (a tax on non-believers); (4) to assist the weak and powerless; (5) to avenge the blood of Muslims killed by non-believers; (6) to punish enemies for breaking promises and treaties (7) to defend a Muslim state; and (8) to liberate Muslim territories under non-Muslim occupation.²⁹ The *Ahle Hadithis* believe that all these conditions exist in today’s world. This would make a state of permanent *jihad* inevitable.

Neofundamentalists advocate the strict implementation of the *Sha’ria* with no concession to man-made law. They consider that nothing positive could be borrowed from the West and that Muslims have nothing to discuss with Christians and Jews. Mainstream neofundamentalists believe, however, that non-belligerent infidels should be treated leniently.

The *Wahabi/Ahle Hadithis* believing in the centrality of *Jihad* have a rich tradition of producing terrorist organizations. Terrorists of this persuasion are known for their violence and their fanaticism. The first suicide bombers came from among their ranks. The Lashker e Tayba in Pakistan and the Jamaat-ul-Mujahedeen/ Jangrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh are the most well known *Wahabi/Ahle Hadithi* terrorist groups.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *Wahabi*” from Global Security.org <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/wahhabi.htm>,

²⁷ Olivier, *Globalised Islam*

²⁸ Olivier, *Globalised Islam*

²⁹ *The Ideologies of South Asian Jihadi Groups* by Husain Haqqani from “Current Trends in Islamist Ideology” published by Hudson Institute, Washington DC, 2005

DEOBAND

Deoband is a small town in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India that is home to the *Dar ul Uloom*, the second largest Islamic university in the world (after Al-Azhar in Cairo). It was founded by Maulana Mohammad Qasim Nanautvi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi in 1866. Beginning classes in an old mosque, the *madrassa* today has about 3000 students and 400 full time teachers. An estimated 100,000 students have studied at Deoband during the course of its existence.

Deoband is unique, not because of what it teaches (a neo-fundamentalist brand of Islam through a curriculum called the *dars-i-nizami*) but how it goes about it. Before Deoband, the education of Islamic priests, the *ulema*, was an informal matter. Those who wished to become *ulema*, went to *madrassas* that were adjuncts to mosques or family homes. Students would sit at the feet of one or more teachers in order to learn Arabic, the Koran, Koranic interpretation, *Hadith* and jurisprudence. There was no curriculum, no central library and no classrooms. After finishing with one teacher, students moved onto another *madrassa* and another teacher.

Deoband changed all this. It applied the principles of modern education to traditional Islam. In the words of Barbara Metcalf, it “was a distinct institution, not an adjunct to a mosque or home. As soon as possible, it acquired classrooms and a central library. It was run by a professional staff and its student were admitted for a fixed course of study and required to take examinations for which due prizes awarded at a yearly public convocation.”³⁰

Students came from all over the Islamic world for a fixed eight year course of study. Entrance was (and is) through a competitive exam. Once admitted, students were provided not only books and instruction, free of charge but a collection of necessities for each boy as well as accommodation and meals in a hostel, i.e. an all expenses paid education.

Students submit themselves to a rigorous programme of Islamic study with exacting standards. Traditional texts (some more than a thousand years old) are taught with the help of commentaries and super commentaries, much of which have to be committed to memory.³¹ High academic standards are maintained and examinations are tough. Exposure to “modern” subjects is minimal and not considered to be of much importance.³² After eight years of this kind of sustained study, students have a particular brand of Islam drilled into their minds.

In addition to academics, Deoband lays great stress on shaping the characters of its students. Erudite, principled and pious, *Dar ul Uloom* teachers set personal examples to their wards. Students lead closely regulated lives and “are expected to faithfully observe detailed rules of conduct or *adab*. Western clothes are frowned upon, and students must wear what is seen as “Islamic” dress- a long kurta and loose pyjamas and skull cap. Students are expected to grow their beards when they come of age in imitation of the Prophet. Students are encouraged to abide as closely as possible to the Prophetic model in their own lives, even eating, drinking, laughing and sleeping as he did. Likewise, they are expected to spend much time in prayer and remembrance of God (*zikr*).”³³

³⁰ Barbara D Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations, Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*, Oxford, 2004

³¹ Yoginder Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers, Madrassas and Islamic Education in India*, Penguin, 2005

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

Over the last 150 years, Deoband thus has produced an Islamic elite that numbers in tens of thousands. This cohesive group thinks similarly and has similar beliefs and aspirations. The way they live their lives is also inevitably shaped by the strict regime that they are exposed to during their formative years and the lifelong bonds formed between students and among students and teachers. Since students come from all over South Asia and the Islamic world, this is a transnational network that transcends ethnicity, speaks a common language, Urdu, and believes that the propagation of their form of Islam is a divinely ordained duty. Deobandi alumni have become *imams* in mosques, Islamic intellectuals, preachers and have gone on to found thousands of *madrassas* in South Asia. Their influence is enormous.

The *Dar ul Uloom* has also earned great respect and influence because of its *fatwas*. A *fatwa* is an opinion (with no legal validity) of a Muslim religious scholar in response to specific queries. *Fatwas* could be sought by Muslims on ritual, politics, personal behaviour, ethics and a vast range of subjects. *Ulema* derive the *fatwas* from the vast body of Islamic jurisprudence. A full-fledged department dealing with *fatwas* was established in 1892 in response to request from *fatwas* from all over South Asia and even from abroad. Tens of thousands of *fatwas* have been issued by this department. This is an indication of the esteem that the views of its *ulema* command in the Islamic world.

According to the website of the *Dar ul Uloom*, the *Madrassa* was founded at a time when “political decline had reduced Muslims to a state of helplessness and misery, distraction and anxiety”. In order to counter this, “a glorious movement for the revivification of Islam and the stability of the community” was created. It was meant to be “a centre of revolution and political, training” that would nurture “such a body of self-sacrificing soldiers of Islam and sympathisers of the community....;” that would give Muslims “equanimity, composure and stability.” The principal method selected for reaching this objective was educating (or indoctrinating) Muslims through a *madrassa*, the *Dar ul Uloom* (the sea of faith) has thus has been an unqualified success.

Dar ul Uloom also has a unique way of financing itself. It takes no money from any Government. Money is raised directly from the public through donations, annual pledges being most preferred. The *Dar ul Uloom* has fostered a constituency through a complex system of records. It has published an Annual Report from its very first year (itself an innovation at a time when printing presses were rare) where the list of donors, including the humblest, are noted. Deoband also encourages single gifts in cash and kind.³⁴ In the early days people donated books, food for the students and household items to furnish the school.³⁵ Groups of people also organized collection of hides of animals slaughtered on Id and sent the proceeds from their sale to the *madrassa*.³⁶ People were encouraged to designate their contributions as *zakat* (see below).

³⁴ Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations, Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *ibid*

Mohammad Qasim Nanautawi (founder) on donations

As long as the *madrassa* has no fixed sources of income, it will, God willing, operate as desired. And if it gain any fixed income, like *jagir* holdings, factories, trading interests or pledges from nobles, then the *madrassa* will lose the fear and hope which require submission to God and will lose His hidden help. Disputes will begin among the workers. In matters of income and buildings let there be a measure of deprivation.

The participation of government and wealthy is harmful

The contributions of those who expect no fame from their gifts is a source of blessing. The honesty of such contributors is a source of stability.

Some Deobandi Teachings

- Great importance is attached to the obligation of Muslims to undertake *jihad* and to propagate their faith. A Deoband Text “What Islam Is” [available on the *Dar ul Uloom* website www.darululoom-deoband.com] defines *jihad* as follows “The believers are required emphatically to do whatever they can towards popularizing, defending and keeping alive and flourishing, as the best and the truest way of life, the way of Islam This, in Islam, is called *Jihad*. It can take many forms” It also says that “The Muslims were, thus, superior to all other peoples and communities for the simple reason that they, in addition to adopting for themselves the path of faith and righteousness, were charged with the special duty of striving to bring others also to practice what was right and to avoid what was wrong.”
- There is also an enormous emphasis on the afterlife and the rewards that await those who have lived according to the tenets of the faith. To die in the defence of the faith and attain martyrdom is considered to be an “unparalleled honour and distinction.” According to the same text “Six rewards are conferred on a martyr by God: one, he is forgiven immediately and his abode in the Paradise is shown to him; two, he is spared the punishment of the grave; third, he is granted freedom from the acute fear and anxiety of the Day of Requital that will grip the heart of every one (‘Except of those on whom there will be the favour of the Lord’); four, a crown of honour will be placed on his head, a single ruby of which will be more valuable than the whole world; five, seventy-two celestial brides will be given to him in marriage; and, six, his intercession will be accepted on behalf of seventy kinsmen.”
- Deobandis do believe that a Muslim’s first loyalty is to his religion and not to his country. Secondly, they believe that Islam is a religion is not restricted by national frontiers. The Ummah therefore transcends nation-states.
- Deoband issued a *fatwa* in 2004 banning TV.
- Deobandis are vague about the status of women. *Dar ul Uloom* itself has no female students or teachers. Several Deobandi alumni have however gone on to found *madrassas*

for women.

It is important to note that in spite of the great importance attached to propagation of the faith, Deoband does not preach any political ideology. Politics is in fact, to be avoided by the *ulema* who are to mainly concern themselves with spiritual and practical guidance of their disciples. In fact, there is a school of thought that says that the *ulema* would not have any problem in a secular set-up where there they are left to themselves to practice their faith.

Deobandi *ulema* who wanted to join politics formed the Jamiat *Ulema e Hind* in 1919. A faction composed of those who favour the idea of Pakistan broke away to create the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami (JUI) in 1945. The JUI, which has a history of fragmenting is today a part of the MMA in Pakistan. The two main factions of the JUI are led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Maulana Samiul Haque. Politics and education are the main occupations of the JUI leaders and Samiul Haque himself heads a famous *madrassa* at Haqqania. The JUI is also credited with setting up hundreds of *madrassas* in Pakistan, mainly along the Afghan border and in Baluchistan.³⁷ These *madrassas* have become notorious because of their association with the Taleban. Samiul Haque's Haqqania alone had produced at least eight Taleban Ministers besides dozens of Taleban governors, bureaucrats, judges and military commanders.³⁸

Students from these *madrassas* regularly went off to do battle in Afghanistan, sometimes during vacations. Samiul Haque was a close associate of Mullah Omar and encouraged his students to join the Taleban. On numerous occasions he shut down the *madrassa* in response to Taleban requests for manpower during crucial battles and sent off all his students to fight. Other JUI *madrassas* behaved similarly.

The Deobandis are credited with more than providing manpower to the Taleban. There is a theory that the Taleban are extremist Deobandis.³⁹ This, however, has its detractors.⁴⁰ The thousands of *madrassa* students (*Taleb*) who overran Afghanistan in 1996, with liberal assistance from Pakistanis and Islamic radicals, established an Islamic regime with the "strictest interpretation of *Sha'ria* law ever seen in the Muslim world."⁴¹ This interpretation was however far more radical than classical Deobandism particularly in relation to the treatment of women and the attitude towards dissent. Their unique ideology was in fact an admixture of extreme Deobandism, *Wahabism*, radical *Jihadi* ideologies (Osama bin Laden and his ilk) and *Pashtunwali* (the code of the Pashtuns).

The JUI is also credited with incubating a large number of *Jihadi* organizations in Pakistan and at least one in Bangladesh. JUI workers began to form terrorist groups with the active encouragement of Pakistani authorities from mid-80s. Pakistan wanted to use these groups to counter what it felt was Iranian activism through the Pakistani Shia population. It also wanted to utilize these groups to strike at India. The first militant group that emerged was the Sipah-e-

³⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *The Taleban*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Rashid, *The Taleban*

⁴⁰ Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers*

⁴¹ Rashid, *The Taleban*

Sahaba. The Sipah-e-Sahaba like the JUI showed a tendency to splinter and today's list of Deobandi organizations includes Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami, Harkat-ul-Mujahdeen, Jaish-e-Muhammad and *al Faran*.

Another prominent spin-off from the Deoband movement is the Tabligh Jamaat, an evangelical organization. Pakistani strongmen Zia ul Haq and Pervez Musharraf are believed to have been strongly influenced by the Deoband movement.

An interesting side-issue relating to Deoband's ideology is its support for the secular Indian National Congress during the struggle against the British in undivided India and its opposition to the Muslim League who wanted to create a Pakistan based on religion (like Maududi). While much has been made of this as evidence of a moderate strain in Deobandism, the fact is that this position is based on the view that the whole of South Asia belongs to the ummah and should not therefore be divided.

THE TABLIGH JAMAAT

The reach and influence of the Tabligh Jamaat are visible at its annual *ijtemas* in Dhaka (Bangladesh), Raiwind (Pakistan) and Bhopal (India). An *ijtema* is a gathering of the devout which usually lasts for about 3 days. The Dhaka and Raiwind *ijtemas* attract at least a million devotees each while Bhopal gets about half that number. Low-profile and private, these enormous annual events reflect the nature of their organizer, the Tabligh Jamaat. The Tabligh Jamaat is one of the most remarkable in the Islamic world. Founded in the 1920s by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi in Northern India, the Tabligh Jamaat is today a world-wide missionary organization run out of Nizamuddin in Delhi. The organization has kept its bureaucracy to the very minimum, shuns publicity and works tirelessly through a superbly-organised network of volunteers to propagate the call of its founder "*Ai Musalmano! Musalman bano*" (O Muslims, become Muslim)

According to the lore associated with the organization, Maulana Ilyas began his activities among a semi-tribal group called the Meo, in the Mewat region of North India. He felt a need to respond to aggressive Hindu proselytizing movements which launched massive efforts in the early twentieth century to reconvert those Hindus who had converted to Islam. Meos had a history of moving back forth between Islam and Hinduism depending upon who held political power in the region they inhabited. When Ilyas started, most Meos were Muslim only in name. They worshipped Hindu deities in their homes and celebrated Hindu religious festivals. They could not recite *Shahadah* or say their daily ritual prayers. Their birth, marriage, and death rituals were all based on Hindu customs. Maulana Ilyas came to the conclusion that only a grassroots Islamic religious movement could counter this.⁴²

He began by establishing a network of mosque-based religious schools to educate Meos about correct Islamic beliefs and practices. But he found that this system inadequate as its functionaries were lacking in enthusiasm, and perhaps zeal. He then came up with a system that is unique in its simplicity and its effectiveness. He motivated Muslims to go in groups of ten to Meo villages.

⁴² <http://islamicindia.blogspot.com/2005/12/tabligh-jamaat.html>

The group would go to a village, invite local Muslims to assemble in the mosque and present their message. The message was, and is, very simple.⁴³

1. Every Muslim must be able to recite *Shahadah* (the profession of faith) correctly in Arabic.
2. A Muslim must learn how to say the *Shalat* (daily prayers) correctly.
3. A Muslim must learn the basic teachings of Islam and to do *zikr* (ritualized remembrance of God through Koranic recitations/prayer)
4. A Muslim must respect fellow Muslims
5. A Muslim must be honest and sincere while doing the above.
6. A Muslim must devote time to go forth and to spread the word of God.

A seventh point was added later. Muslims were asked to abstain from wasting time in idle talk and from sinful deeds. Maulana Ilyas belonged to a family of *Ulema* with close ties to Deoband. His teachings were based on the Deobandi concept of looking inward and living individual lives in accordance with the Koran and the *Hadith* in the expectation that this would defend and revitalize Islam. The crux of the Maulana's message is his sixth commandment. A Muslim MUST go forth to proselytize (it is *farzul ain*). Failure to do so would be held against him on the Day of Judgment.

The initial movement in Mewat was spectacularly successful and thousands of Muslims joined Maulana Ilyas. There efforts did lead to signs of Islamic religious revival in the area⁴⁴ and encouraged the Maulana to replicate it on a national and later international scale. The basic strategy is stunningly simple. Dedicated Muslims (it is not known definitively whether they undergo formal training as missionaries or not) are organized into groups of ten (called jamaats) under a designated leader. Groups are self-financing and intermingling of classes is compulsory.⁴⁵ They are asked to go out on missions that last typically, three days, forty days, four month (*chilla*) or one year. Shorter tours are in the close vicinity. A forty day tour would typically take the Jamaat across the country while forty day or year-long tours would usually be to destinations abroad. During these tours, the jamaat bases at a local mosque and starts proselytizing door-to-door amongst Muslim households. Individuals and families are asked to come to the local mosque for *maghrib* (sunset) prayers where they are exposed to the seven commandments and to Tablighi indoctrination.⁴⁶

At the end of each tour, each Jamaat is expected to submit a report on its mission; some of these reports (there is no definite information on whether these reports are kept or destroyed) that are available in the public domain provide virtually the only window into the movement. Participation in Tablighi activity is entirely voluntary. Members can leave at any time. The management of the activities of these groups is undertaken by a secretive central set-up at Nizamuddin, New Delhi. The leadership of the group, which is drawn mostly from the descendants of the founder, shun publicity and publish nothing. There is no reliable information about its organizational structure. It is believed that there is a network of *ameers* with specific responsibility for a designated territorial area. Nothing is known about its membership or the

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ ibid

⁴⁵ Marc Gaborieau, Transnational Islamic Movements: Tablighi Jamaat in Politics? ISIM Newsletter, 3/99

⁴⁶ Islamist Networks: The Case of Tablighi Jamaat by Nicholas Howenstein, USIP Peace Brief

number of full-time workers. Its finances are entirely opaque. It is only known that group has received substantial Saudi funding which may have gone to offset travel costs of missionaries and even to pay salaries of full-time Tablighis.⁴⁷

A remarkable feature of the Tabligh is its globalization. It began by establishing branches in West and East Pakistan following the partition of India. It then went to wherever an expatriate South Asian Muslim community existed. Large operations are known to exist in Africa and the UK. It is active in the United States and is known to have a presence in China, Central Asia and possibly, Japan.⁴⁸

The first question that is asked by the Tablighi when someone opens the door is “Are you being a good Muslim?” This is the general tone of subsequent interaction. Tablighis would thus generally appear to stay away from politics and socio-economic issues during their proselytizing. This is, however, a contentious issue. There is a school of thought that the Tabligh has a long-term political Islamist agenda and its evangelism is preparing an army of soldiers of Islam. Its secretiveness and its organization along quasi-military lines is also held against it. The fact that prominent Pakistanis including former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, former President Muhammad Rafique Tarar and former Intelligence Chief Javed Nasir have Tabligh connections is often adduced as evidence of its political clout.

Although Tablighis never talk of violence during their *da'was*, there can be very little doubt where it has proved to be a recruiting ground for terrorists. American Islamic radicals including some who fought in Afghanistan were inducted into Islamic radicalism through American Tablighis. Islamic radicals have also been known to be present during the *ijtemas* where they hand out recruitment pamphlets. There have also been reports that Tablighi Jamaats have, perhaps unwittingly, served as cover for movement of terrorists. The Tabligh, it may be noted, has never denounced radical violence.⁴⁹

A Tablighi's account extracted from “Travelers Tales in the Tablighi Jamaat” by Barbara Metcalf

A great task of revival of the *ummah* is going on at Raiwind, where there is a totally different atmosphere. People remains busy with *taleem* (teaching), *zikr*, *tilawat* (Koranic recitation) and briefings for the Tabligh missions. They are helpful and loving, leading simple austere lives, only concerned with the *Akhirat* (the world to come) and aloof from petty selfish concerns..... They arrange *ijtemas*, go out to different countries for a year or seven months and remain busy in the local mosques inviting people to participate in the missionary work among Muslims, who have become Muslims in name only and abandoned all religious practices. I went frequently to Raiwind on Fridays to attend the *dua* led by Haji Abdul Wahab. Maulana Ihsan led the Friday prayers. I would enjoy the company of Masihua Zaman Sahib and Bhai Matloob and also visit the enclosure for foreigners from Arab countries, Europe, Africa and Far East Jamaats would go on foot to the remotest parts of Pakistan and suffer hardships to win the pleasure of Allah *subhanahu Taala* A majority of our people do not understand the meaning of the

⁴⁷ Alex Alexiev, Tabligh Jamaat: *Jihad's* Stealthy Legions, Middle East Quarterly, Winter 2005

⁴⁸ Alexiev, Tabligh Jamaat: *Jihad's* Stealthy Legions,

⁴⁹ Islamist Networks: The Case of Tablighi Jamaat by Nicholas Howenstein

Kalama(the attestation of faith); prayers do not regulate our lives; and we fail to discharge our duties. Or rich do not pay *zakat* (obligatory charity) and accumulate wealth in safe deposits. [Others emphasise] education.....industrial development.....economic prosperity. These are really offshoots; the root lies in our *spiritual* and moral development. Without faith and submission to the will of Allah we cannot succeed. Tabligh is a world reform movement... It is mass moral education for drawing people closer and reforming their habits.... We have been warned..... Our faith is not complete unless we take up the *da'wa* .

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE RADICALS

These groups have complex interrelationships. The similarities in their outlooks have been outlined above. There are however important differences amongst the neo-fundamentalists and between the neo-fundamentalists and the Islamists.

Political Islamists owe their origins to a movement that was also called *Salafism*⁵⁰ that appeared at the end of the 19th century in the renowned *al-Azhar University* in Cairo. The movement was initiated by a South Asian Muslim, *Jamal al-Din al-Afghani* (1839-1897), who strove to reform Islam in order to adapt it to the challenge of westernisation and modernisation. Afghani's form of *Salafism* is very different from what goes under the same name today. Afghani called for a return to the tenets of Islam as a means to castigate the backwardness of the religious establishment. He did not mean to appeal for the implementation of the *sha'ria*. His beliefs are very different from that of Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban. Afghani's *Salafism* gave rise to the Islamist movement (Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami).

The scope of application of Islam in each ideology is different. Neo-fundamentalism is about religion, not politics. Neo-fundamentalist movements are essentially socio-religious movements that aim at enforcing a particular code of conduct in personal life and the importance of propagating it.⁵¹ The target is the individual. Political aspirations of neo-fundamentalists are usually limited to bringing down regimes that are perceived as anti-Islamic.

This is illustrated by the fact that Mullah Omar and the King of Saudi Arabia both owe personal allegiance to forms of Islam that are classified as neo-fundamentalist. The countries that each rule could not however be more different. The King of Saudi Arabia is a monarch of a kingdom that differs from other kingdoms only to the extent that Islam permeates the governance of the Kingdom. Mullah Omar and the Taleban's *raison d'être* was to overthrow a government that was seen as anti-Islamic. Once this objective was achieved, it became apparent that the Taleban had no coherent vision of the form of government that they would like to see established.

The Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other hand are classical dogmas. The target is power, which will be used to create a particular type of state. *They are dogmatic in the same sense that orthodox Marxists are, and believe that their dogma calls for a shift to "Islamism"* as an alternative to nation-states, democracy and socialism. This runs counter to the

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ Barbara D Metcalf , "Traditionalist" Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs, Social Science Research Council / After Sept 11

neo-fundamentalist belief that Muslims should not engage in Western activities like politics, "even by giving them an Islamic slant."⁵² Instead, Muslims should stick to traditional activities, particularly Da'wa.

Another important difference is that the leadership of the Islamists has usually received a modern education, is fully integrated into day-to-day life and is *au fait* with modern technology. In South Asia, the Jamaat leadership holds the traditionally educated *ulema* leadership of the Deobandis in contempt.⁵³

The Deobandis reciprocate in ample measure. The leading ideologue of the Deobandi-inspired Tablighi Jamaat, Maulana Mohammad Zakariya, declared that the Islam of the Jamaat was not in fact Islam at all but new religion called Maududism.⁵⁴ An essential part of the Deobandi curriculum is the art of disputation. Students are taught to counter the arguments of other schools of Islam which are seen as 'un-Islamic' or even 'enemies of the faith.'⁵⁵ Students at Deoband are taught that Jamaatis, the Barelvis, the Shiites and the *Ahle Hadithis* are actually Zionist creations and agents of the Devil that are trying to destroy Islam from within.⁵⁶

The *Ahle Hadith* are referred to as sources of "great strife" and as being virtually outside the Muslim pale. The Shias are described as *kaffr* and those who doubt this are called *kaffr* themselves.⁵⁷ The Barelvis are treated almost as idolaters.⁵⁸

Sufism and neofundamentalists

Deobandis differ from *Wahabis* in one important respect. Deobandis consider themselves Sufis. Sufism is Islamic mysticism that arose in Iraq and is almost as old as Islam itself. Major sufi orders (Qadiriyyah, Sanusiyyah, Tijaniyyah, Chistiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, etc) have considerable influence in the Islamic world. Sufism has on occasion produced severe reactions, particularly from *Salafis* and their religious forbears. They have objected to such aspects of Sufism as the overbearing role of the guide (the Shaykh), saint-worship, visiting of tombs, and music. Interestingly, this reaction has itself been led by other mystical orders. A famous example is that of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and the Naqshbandiyyah order who opposed the liberal policies of one of the most respected India rulers, Akbar the Great. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi strongly influenced Shah Waliullah and the subsequent emergence of the *Ahle Hadith* in South Asia. *Wahabis/Ahle Hadithis* consider veneration of Sufi saints, visits to shrines and sufi music to be *shi'rk* (idolatry). Sufi shrines and gatherings are targets of attacks by *Wahabi/Ahle Hadithi* terrorists.

Deobandi *ulema* regard themselves as Sufis in conduct.⁵⁹ They have incorporated sufi practices such as meditation, discipline and an exalted teacher-student relationship. Close bonds develop

⁵² *Globalized Islam : the Search for a New Ummah*, by Olivier Roy, Columbia University Press, 2004

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers*

⁵⁵ ibid

⁵⁶ Yoginder Sikand, A Day in Deoband, The Daily Times.

⁵⁷ ibid

⁵⁸ ibid

⁵⁹ <http://www.ahya.org/tjonline/eng/01/06chp1.html>

⁶⁰ "**Traditionalist**" **Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs**, Barbara D. Metcalf, Professor of History, University of California, Davis

⁶¹ Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, IB Tauris, 2000

between students and charismatic teachers who try to initiate them in the ways of the Koran and the *Hadith*⁶⁰ and replicate the close bond between the Prophet and his followers. They do not usually object to visits to the graves of elders though they object to certain practices. They are highly ambiguous when it comes to poetry or seeking the intercession of saints.⁶¹

The tendency of all radical Islamists and neo-fundamentalists to consider their way as the only way and that of other as heresy accounts for what is called “sectarian” violence amongst Muslims in South Asia. Pakistan has been particularly badly affected by this. Terrorist groups that have grown under the benign eye of the state, have stage murderous attacks on other Islamic groups.

This is not to say that there is no possibility of these groups working or even surviving together. Paradoxically there is a considerable degree of inter-group mobility.⁶² Many Deobandis have joined the Jamaat and many Jamaatis are neo-fundamentalist in their religious beliefs. Movement amongst the groups is fairly common. A person could begin life as a Tablighi and go onto join the Jamaat or a Deobandi group. *In Pakistan all these groups came together in 2002 under one political platform, the MMA; it remains to be seen that will be a lasting arrangement.*

Saudi *Wahabi* money has also flowed to all these groups. The Jamaat has been a beneficiary of Saudi money as have been the Deobandis and the *Ahle Hadithis*. Each Saudi Embassy abroad has a Department of Religious Affairs⁶³ that distributes money for Islamic institutions. Saudis regularly send Deobandis and Jamaatis on scholarships to study Arabic and Islam in Saudi universities. These graduates are often employed in Saudi Islamic organizations and charities. Saudi money funded the *massive expansion* of Deobandi and other *madrassas* in Pakistan. *Wahabi* support, however, comes at a price. Even though *Wahabism* may not be preached openly, there has been a concerted push to “*Wahabisation*” or “*Salafisation*” of teaching or preaching at the expense of the traditional schools.⁶⁴ The curriculum of *madrassas* receiving Saudi support has seen a contraction of the teaching of non-religious subjects and an increase in emphasis on *Hadith* and *fiqh*.⁶⁵ The long-term implications of this are not difficult to imagine.

Jamaat and Wahabis

(An extract from *The Islamist* by Ed Husain. In this extract, the author a Jamaat activist in UK describes the *Wahabis*)

“They spoke passionately about the idea of one God, *tawheed* in Arabic, and ceaselessly warned against *shirk*, or polytheism. We invited them often because they were mostly dynamic speakers, able to stir a crowd and plant genuine interest in Islam. Most impressively, they always referred directly to the Koran or the Prophet Mohammad’s wisdom, bypassing fourteen centuries of commentary and scholarship on Islam’s primary sources. They covered their heads with the red and white chequered Saudi scarf, often wearing it almost like women. They had huge, bushy beards and their trousers were very short, just below their knees. They looked like people from another era, austere in their ways, harsh in their conduct, and constantly reprimanding us for our

⁶² Oliver, *Globalised Islam*

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ *ibid*

own. Where were our beards? Why were our trousers worn long? Why did we listen to music? Why did we not condemn *shirk* or idolatry?

... they planted ideas among the Islamised students that led these students to reject us... some of the students that we had rescued from a life of crime were asking us why we were clean shaven. Why didn't we grow our beards in emulation of the Prophet? To them, the literal adherence to the scripture with no thought for the context, was of primary importance... their bluntness, ragged appearance, constant quoting of scripture, and browbeating did not endear them to us. Their womenfolk wore gloves, covered their faces and displayed a holier-than-thou attitude towards other women.

In addition to these outward differences, they prayed in a way I had not seen in any of Britain's mosques, standing in perfectly straight rows, touching ankles, constantly checking to see that their feet were touching one another, and holding their arms in a martial position on their chests, as 'prescribed' in Muslim scripture. This did not seem like prayer, but a cultish act.

ISLAM IN BENGAL

Bengalee speaking Muslims, who today number about 150 million and inhabit Bangladesh as well as the state of West Bengal in India, constitute about 10% of the total Muslim population of the world. This would make the Bengal Delta home to probably the single largest ethnic Muslim community in the world.

The fact that the territory of Bangladesh (erstwhile Eastern Bengal) is demographically Muslim majority was not known until 1872.⁶⁶ The 1871 Census of Bengal revealed that while Muslims constituted about 48% of the total population of Bengal, they constituted about 60% of the population of Eastern Bengal. According to contemporary accounts, this came as somewhat of surprise.⁶⁷ Social differences between Hindus and Muslims were minimal – they spoke the same language, lived together, and followed similar social and cultural practices. A British administrator during the period wrote that “They were Bengalis before they were Hindu or Mahomedans; as regards the world in general, the most important fact about them is that they belong the Bengali race.”⁶⁸

The form of Islam prevalent in Bengal at the time of the 1872 census thus was sufficiently *sui generis* for the ethnic identity to overcome the Islamic identity. Another British administrator wrote that the Hindu and Muslim communities were virtually indistinguishable except for the absence of inter-marriage and on eating together.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ “The Bengal Muslims: Problems in Social Integration” from *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 A Quest for Identity* by Rafiuddin Ahmed.

⁶⁷ *ibid*

⁶⁸ H.Beveridge, *The District of Bakargundj; Its History and Statistics* (London 1876)

⁶⁹ R.Carstairs, *Human Nature in Rural India* (London and Edinburgh 1876)

This highly localized form of Islam, which grew and prospered over a period of several hundred years within the semi-autonomous province of Bengal, also began to attract the critical attention of Islamic purists around the same time. From the middle of the 19th century onwards, “reform” movements arose in Bengal (as in other parts of India) that tried to emphasize a “return” to the Koran and to the *Hadith*. These “reformers” were contemptuous of the religious practices of the Bengali Muslims which they considered to be deviant and base. Average Bengali Muslims, according a commentator during the period observed “none of the ceremonies of its faith, worship at the shrines of a rival religion and tenaciously adhere to practices which were denounced as the foulest abominations by its founder.”⁷⁰

This was a reference to the fact that Bengalee Muslims laid great store to the veneration of holy men (*pirs*) and shrines of various kinds; used charms, incantations and amulets to ward off misfortune; celebrated festivals that appeared suspiciously like those of their Hindu compatriots; observed un-Islamic customs such as *Milad* and *fatihah*, celebrated *muharram* and *urs*; and depended on local *mullahs* to exorcise evil *spirits*. They were also under the sway of rural *mullahs* who were comparatively ignorant of Arabic and Islamic jurisprudence and theology and indeed derived much of their livelihood from these “un-Islamic” practices.

It is alleged that not one in ten Bengalee Muslims could reportedly recite the simple *kalimah*, or creed, considered indispensable for every Muslim⁷¹. James Wise mentioned that the inhabitants of several villages who had assembled to celebrate the festival *Bakr Id* (*Id uz Azha*) in 1874 could not find anyone in the entire locality who could lead their prayers.⁷² Bengalee Muslims were therefore considered by these “reformers” to be ignorant of the “true” faith, idolatrous and worse.

The reformers who tried to bring the Muslims of Bengal back into the fold of the Koran and *Hadith* were similar to the so-called “Islamic fundamentalists” of the 1990s and early 2000s. Personalities, ideologies, issues and the events of a century-and-a-half ago are uncannily similar to what is seen today. These “reformers” are the *spiritual*, and in some cases, the organizational ancestors of today’s radicals.

The two main movements of this period the *Faraizi* and *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* were both launched by clerics who were deeply committed to reviving the “lost glory” of Islam. The *tariqah* owed its origin to Shah Waliullah. Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur (Eastern Bengal) who founded the *Fariazi* movement spent two decades in Saudi Arabia where he was deeply influenced by the teaching of al-Wahab.

The efforts of these radicals to reduce local influences on Islam were not very successful. The old ways were too deep-rooted. The residents of Bengal also proved to be obdurate in their pride in their language and culture. They did not appear to be too enamored of the efforts to promote a trans-India Islamic polity based on vague conceptions of Middle Eastern values.⁷³ They continued to venerate their *pirs* and celebrate their festivals. Rural *mullahs* also resisted

⁷⁰ Quoted in Beveridge *The District of Bakargundj; Its History and Statistics*

⁷¹ Ahmed *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 A Quest for Identity*

⁷² James Wise in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1894

⁷³ Ahmed *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 A Quest for Identity*

when they found that the reformers' prescriptions about charms and other "un-Islamic" ceremonies would affect their livelihoods.

That does not mean the reform movements had no influence at all. Their influence proved to be political rather than religious. Their activities catalyzed the emergence of Bengalee Muslims as a political force.⁷⁴ This was harnessed by the Muslim League beginning during the early 1900s and led, finally, to the partition of India on religious lines and the creation of an Islamic state of Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 on the basis of language and culture and NOT religion, however, served to remind that Bengalee Muslims continued to see themselves as Bengalees first and Muslims second.

The "reformers" succeeded in another field. Bengal proved to be a recruiting ground for the *jihad* that they fought intermittently against the British Raj during the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ Bengal provided funds as well as manpower to the Islamists. Rafiuddin Ahmed in his authoritative account of this movement says "the organizers of *jihad* set up compact organizations in rural areas, which systematically levied men and money and forwarded them by regular stages to the *jihad* camps in the Frontier. *Kafelabs* (bands) of men marched regularly to the Frontier from Bengal and they actively participated in the holy war."⁷⁶

It has been stated earlier that the tough British response to these movements generated a backlash against the "Wahabis" within the Muslim community. The radical movements were forced to change tack and abandon their *jihadi* ambitions. They also splintered. Bengal came under the influence of what is called the "taiyuni" movement led by Keramat Ali. Keramat Ali refused to endorse the concept of Bengal being *dar ul harb*. He declared *jihad* against the British to be unlawful and denounced the extremism of Shariatullah's *Faraizis*. He favoured the peaceful propagation of Islam.

The radicals, whose influence amongst the Bangladeshi Muslims was marginal, disappeared temporarily from the scene. They were to appear about fifty years later in the writings of Maududi and through the Deobandi and *Ahle Hadith* movements.

Close to its fortieth birthday as an independent nation, the question today is whether Bangladesh and Bangladeshis remain loyal to their indigenous form of Islam. In other words, has radical Islam in its Islamist or neo-fundamentalist guises made more headway than it had in the past? The answer to this question is important because of worries that Bangladesh might go down the same catastrophic path that Pakistan and Afghanistan have traversed in their journey towards becoming victims and sources of political instability and violence. The influence of radical Islam has been a major contributing factor to the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan and the relative levels of influence of the indigenous and radical forms of Islam in Bangladesh are therefore of the greatest interest.

⁷⁴Sufia M Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh, Religion, Ethnicity and Language in an Islamic Nation*

⁷⁵W W Hunter *The Indian Musalmans*

⁷⁶Ahmed *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906 A Quest for Identity*,

CHANGES IN POLITY IN BANGLADESH

The essentially non-radical vision of Islam that pervaded Bangladesh was reflected in the first Constitution that Bangladesh adopted after its emergence as an independent nation in 1971. The Awami League, the party of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had committed itself to making Bangladesh a secular democratic republic. The Constitution as originally framed in 1972 explicitly described the government of Bangladesh as "secular." The Jamaat-e-Islami's opposition to the creation of Bangladesh and the horrific crimes that it committed during the Liberation War also weakened the influence of Islam on the polity during the initial years of nationhood. The Jamaat-e-Islami itself was banned.

Islamic influence was quick to reassert itself. Sheikh Mujib was keen to join the mainstream Islamic community. OIC membership was the ticket to this and he undertook a controversial journey to Pakistan less than 2 years after liberation to join the OIC at its 1974 Lahore meet. Following the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975, a military regime led by General Zia took over. General Zia shed his uniform in 1977 and ruled Bangladesh as its civilian President and leader of a party he created, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, until his assassination in 1981, a little less than a decade after Independence. Bangladesh had ceased to be a secular republic by the time of Zia's death. In 1977 an executive proclamation made three changes in the Constitution; the word "secular" was deleted and a phrase stating that a fundamental state principle is "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" was inserted. The phrase *bismillah ar rahman ar rahim* (in the name of Allah, the beneficent, and the merciful) was also inserted in the Preamble. Another clause which states that the government should "preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity" was added. Zia further removed the ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami and allowed its Amir, Golam Azam, to return to Bangladesh.

Zia's successor as military strongman, General Ershad, continued such changes. One of the reasons he gave for overthrowing a democratically elected government was that it had "lost sight of the Islamic nationalist goal previously set by Zia." He went on to declare that "Islam will be given the highest place in the country's future constitution and Islamic provisions where necessary." Not particularly pious personally, Ershad moved the Eight Amendment to declare Islam as the State religion in 1988.

These changes reflected an overt state policy that stressed the "Islamic intentions" of its government and at reinforcing international ties with other Islamic nations, including wealthy Arab oil-producing countries. They also reflect the attempts made by both Zia and Ershad to use Islam to legitimize the power that they had acquired through military coups.

INCREASE IN GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR RELIGION IN BANGLADESH

Successive governments in Bangladesh have also taken steps to strengthen Islamic culture and religious institutions as central symbols of nationalism. An Islamic Foundation, financed by the State, whose mandate includes "dissemination of Islamic ideals", training of imams and the running of a national mosque (the Baitul Mukarram), was established in 1975. Successive governments have also made efforts to increase Islamic symbolism in Bangladeshi life. *Public*

sale and consumption of alcohol and gambling were banned by Sheikh Mujib in 1974. Zia altered the working week was altered to make Friday (the day of the *jumma* prayer), and not Sunday, the main holiday. Sheikh Mujib introduced Koranic recitation on national radio. Zia attempted to introduce the call to prayers (*aqaan*) through radio and TV and decreed that Koranic verses should be displayed in offices. Ershad regularly visited Sufi shrines and mosques and introduced a system of giving subsidies to mosques. Both Zia and Ershad tried to project themselves as good Muslims and were shown praying regularly.

ISLAMISATION OF PUBLIC LIFE IN BANGLADESH

The so-called Islamic “reformers” have persisted in their efforts to reduce local influence on Islam and have had a measure of success. Arabic has acquired an increased salience – which is somewhat surprising in a nation founded on the basis of linguistic nationalism. Much has been made of the fact that the greeting “*Joy Bangla*” (victory to Bengal) which was seen as being un-Islamic has been replaced by the Arabic farewell salutation of *Khuda Hafez*. The decision by the Bangladesh Government to display the name of its main international airport, the Zia International Airport, in Arabic script, attracted much attention.

There is also an increase in overt displays of religiosity. The number of people attending prayers and keeping *roja* (fasts during Ramazan) has visibly increased as has the number of women wearing *burqa* (*burqas* in Bangladesh are reportedly a high-growth business) during the last three decades.

INCREASING INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC RADICAL GROUPS IN BANGLADESH

(a) RISE OF JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI

(The ideology of the Jamaat and its founder, Maududi, has been described earlier. This section discusses its activities *in Bangladesh*.)

The Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh is the visible face of radical Islam in Bangladesh. The first thing to remember about the Jamaat is that it is not just a political party. It is a movement with a long-term agenda to mould society according to its vision; its involvement in democratic politics is, for it, a tactical necessity. Vote share in elections is thus just one the criteria that can be used to judge its influence – or the lack of it.

The Jamaat stands out in Bangladesh because of its superb organization and discipline and its highly motivated and educated cadre. It also stands out because of the single mindedness and ruthlessness with which it has followed its agenda. These have ensured that the Jamaat has a profile and an influence that is probably disproportionate to its strength.

The Jamaat has twin objectives, capturing power and Islamising society. The two are intertwined. The Jamaat in power would help Islamisation; Islamisation would help the Jamaat to come to power. Islamisation is advanced by energetic *Dawa* and *Tabligh* (propagation and reinforcing the faith) and by *Islah –al –Ijtemayee* (social reform to promote Islamic values). This is akin to missionary activity and Jamaat activists are seen all over Bangladesh encouraging people to become good Muslims and live life according to Islamic tenets. They are particularly

active in universities and other educational institutions. Vast amounts of Islamic literature are generated by the Jamaat and its fronts and it organizes innumerable public events such as seminars and symposia on Islam.

Propagation of Islam and Islamic values goes hand in hand with *Islah-al-hukumat* (reform of government and administration). The Jamaat has systematically tried to build its influence in all national institutions of importance - the Army, the bureaucracy, educational establishments, media organizations, the legal world and the intellectual community. It seeks to “convert” people working in these organizations to their cause with the long-term objective of controlling the organisations. It also relentlessly lobbies the powers that be to Islamise the polity. Declaration of Islam as the state religion, introduction of *sha’ria*, “Islamic” social and economic legislation are some of the standard demands. In Pakistan, lobbying by the Jamaat was one of the factors that led to Zia ul Haq’s Islamisation. Many of the changes in the polity (see above) are credited either to the influence of the Jamaat or to the compulsions of leaders keen to demonstrate that the Jamaat did not have a monopoly on Islam.

Like their arch enemies, the Communists, the Jamaat lays enormous emphasis on *Tanzeem* and *Tarbiah* (training and organization).⁷⁷ It believes that it requires a trained and committed cadre to carry out its propaganda and to propagate and consolidate its influence. Jamaat members are recruited through a highly selective process⁷⁸ and are its greatest strength. As in the communist parties, an individual becomes a member (*rokon*) after an apprenticeship period (associate/candidate membership) in which the person’s understanding of the Jamaat ideology, his ability to live a public and private life in accordance with the Koran and the *Sunnah*,⁷⁹ and his willingness to work towards propagating it are tested. Aspiring members are expected to study a prescribed set of works, pray regularly, dedicate time to the movement and target other potential sympathizers. There is a strong group ethos and the process of indoctrination is monitored carefully (*taleemi jalsas*) by mentors and peers.⁸⁰

Jamaat membership is drawn from all sections of society. A majority, however, belongs to middle class/professional backgrounds. A premium is placed on education and most of its membership would have at least undergraduate degrees.

Rokons congregate at national conferences every three years to elect the *Ameer* of the organization and the *Majlis-e-Shura*. The *Majlis* is like an Advisory Council. The *Ameer* is assisted by a Secretary General, a Central Executive Committee and District *Ameers* who control a network of Branches.

Senior party leaders are extremely committed and competent individuals. They lead by personal example and usually command the loyalty and respect of the rank and file. They have a reputation for personal integrity and straight-forwardness. These are attractive qualities in the turbulent politics of Bangladesh.

⁷⁷ Santosh C Saha and Thomas K Carr, *Religious Fundamentalism in Developing Countries*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 2001

⁷⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁹ Talukder Maniruzzaman, Bangladesh Politics Secular and Islamic Trends, *Religion, Identity and Politics, Essays on Bangladesh*, ed Rafiuddin Ahmed, International Academic Publishers, Colorado, 2001

⁸⁰ Ed Husain, *The Islamist*, Penguin, 2007

The current number of *rokon*s is not known. However, it was believed to have had 425 full members and 40,000 associates in 1968-69. In 1981 it was reported to have had about 650 members and about 100,000 associates.⁸¹ In addition to its core membership, the Jamaat works through an extremely well organized network of affiliated and front organizations. Prominent among them are a women's branch, a militant student body known as the Islamic Chattra Shibir (Shibir in short) and a workers front called the *Sramik Kalyan* Federation.

The Jamaat, again like the Communists, also operates covertly through a number of public service institutions such as trusts, commercial organizations and publishing firms.⁸² It has a remarkable record in building institutions; its achievements would rival that of the best run missionary organisations. It is popularly believed that the Jamaat runs a chain of medical centres (named after Ibn Sina) and several educational institutes⁸³ (a chain of kindergartens and schools – Ideal; and two private universities - IUB and North-South).⁸⁴ According to the respected Bangladeshi academic, Talukder Maniruzzaman, “these schools providing modern as well as Islamic education, were serving as laboratories for the production of ‘modern soldiers of Islam’”. It runs a successful daily newspaper, *Sangram*. In a country faced with frequent natural disasters, the Jamaat has always been quick to respond to emergencies. In order to secure its financial independence, the Jamaat is supposed to have invested in banks (Islamic Bank, Arab Bangladesh bank)⁸⁵ and a number of other businesses.

Its organizational and ideological strengths have helped the Jamaat to overcome a number of setbacks that would have crippled other organizations. It began operations in East Pakistan in 1947 with only one *rokon* or primary member. It acquired strength and visibility under a dynamic Amir who assumed office in 1955, Golam Azam, and was able to become a significant political force by 1970 where it obtained a 10% share of a vote in an election totally dominated by the question of autonomy/independence. The Jamaat's greatest challenge, however, came after it opposed the liberation of Bangladesh. It actively collaborated with Pakistani authorities and Jamaat members formed militias to support the Pakistanis (the Razakars) and death squads (*al Badr* and *al Shams*) that committed horrific killings during the war. When it became apparent that independence was inevitable, Golam Azam fled to Pakistan and then to London. From there he tried to mobilize international Islamic opinion against secular Bangladesh and tried to prevent recognition of Bangladesh by Islamic countries. All this made the Jamaat a reviled organization and its leaders are till date commonly referred to with contempt and hatred as war criminals and traitors.

Sheikh Mujib detested the Jamaat. It was banned and Golam Azam's citizenship was revoked. Reeling under this setback, the Jamaat went underground. Sheikh Mujib's assassination and the military takeover by Zia led to the rehabilitation of the Jamaat. The ban was removed in 1976 and Golam Azam was allowed to return in 1978. It is a measure of the resilience of the ideology and the organization that in spite of the anti-national label affixed to it, the Jamaat was a part of a democratically elected ruling alliance (with the BNP as a senior partner) by 2001.

⁸¹ Maniruzzaman, Bangladesh Politics Secular and Islamic Trends,

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ <http://www.muktadhara.net/page80.html>

⁸⁵ *ibid*

The Jamaat's participation in war-crimes fits into a pattern of a violent activism. While it is difficult to link the Jamaat-e-Islami (the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan is the patron of the Hizbul Mujahedeen the largest and most well organized terrorist groups active in Afghanistan and Kashmir) itself directly to violence, its student wing, the Islamic Chhatra Shibir, more than compensates. In the volatile and turbulent world of Bangladeshi youth politics, the Shibir stands out because of its readiness to use violence, the extreme aggression that it displays and its fanaticism and organisation. It is the Jamaat's strong arm and its tactics and the links with the parent party are reminiscent of the links between the Brown Shirts and the National Socialist Party in the 1930s.

The Shibir is particularly active in universities. An organization like the Jamaat, which teaches its cadres that they are "soldiers of Islam", relies on indoctrination. It must accordingly lay great emphasis on "catching 'em young". There is no better place to do this than the Universities and the Jamaat/Shibir combine is at its most active there. It begins by helping applicants to gain entrance to universities (through a network of "coaching centres"). Thereafter every effort is made to win the "hearts and minds" of students. Shibir activists recruit new students by appealing to their religious and ideological proclivities. To those not so inclined, it tries to include them in networks that provide fellowship and a peer-group. Needy students are offered accommodation and even financial help.

Those it succeeds in co-opting become foot-soldiers in the larger effort to "control" universities. Control naturally rests with whomever the "balance of terror" favours on the ground. The Shibir with its organizational abilities and its ability to tap into the larger Jamaat network is wresting control of more and more universities from other national political parties. While it is still banned in the Dhaka University, it has taken "control" of Chittagong, Rajshahi and Shah Jalal Universities. It is extremely strong in Jahangirnagar.

The tactics used by the Shibir in ensuring a favourable balance of terror are horrific. It has ensured its dominance in the universities at Rajshahi and Chittagong through numerous student killings, general intimidation and extreme vindictiveness. The Shibir is known as the *rog-kata* (tendon-cutting) party, a reference to its favoured tactic of maiming opponents by slicing their tendons.⁸⁶ The Shibir is probably the only student organisation in the world that maintains a museum for its "martyrs" or casualties that it has taken in violence student politics.

"Control" has the added advantage of ensuring that students are not exposed to alternative ideologies. It has also helped the Shibir to infiltrate the academic community. Jamaat/Shibir activists are obtaining a significant number of teaching posts with obvious long-term implications.⁸⁷

The Jamaat's joining the government in alliance with the BNP in 2001 raised a number of troubling, even existential questions for Bangladeshis and for people in the region. Was this a confirmation of tectonic shifts in Bangladeshi society towards Islamisation? Or was it an effort by a relatively weak political force to introduce itself into the structure of power whence to

⁸⁶ Political Islam in Bangladesh: The serpent green rises, by Mahfuz Sadique The New Age/ September, 2006 <http://mahfuz.wordpress.com/2006/12/12/>

⁸⁷ ibid

influence it more? Would the taste of power whet the Jamaat's appetite for further Islamisation or would it moderate it? There was an underlying fear that the Jamaat's way was one that would inevitably lead to destabilization. It was a way of intolerance, of militancy and violence and regressive social and cultural beliefs. It becomes extremely important, therefore, to assess the impact of the Jamaat on Bangladesh.

The Jamaat and the Islamic Oikkya Jote

The Islamic Oikkya Jote is a Deobandi political party in Bangladesh. It was a part of the 4-party BNP led alliance that ruled Bangladesh from 200-6. It had one Member of Parliament and no representation in the cabinet. The IOJ has two factions. One is led by Maulana Fazlul Haque Amini and the other by "Sheikhul *Hadith*" Allama Azizul Haque, who has been linked with the terrorist group HUII.

Intramural relations between the Jamaat and IOJ mirror the Jamaati-Deobandi divide. While the two have made common cause on issues such the assault on Ahmadiyyas, the IOJ has called for a ban on Maududi's textbooks in Bangladesh.

The Jamaat's vote share in elections has been falling for the last two decades. It polled approximately 12% of the popular vote in 1991, approximately 8% in 1996 and most surprisingly, approximately 4% in the 2001 elections which it fought in alliance with the BNP. The declining vote share over three general elections sends a clear message - it is unlikely that the Jamaat will ever come to power by democratic means in Bangladesh. If it is to achieve its objective of paving the way for Islamising Bangladesh, it can only do so by influencing those in authority. It would be logical to assume, therefore, that it would try and form an alliance with one of the political parties. Since the Jamaat does not rest while democracy is suspended, it will also try and influence the Army.

Was the Jamaat able to use its tenure to significantly speed up the process of Islamisation? Bangladesh is no nearer having the *Sha'ria* than it was pre-2001. There was no "signature" Islamic legislation during the period. Socio-economic and cultural decision making did not appear to have Islamic impetus or content. Pet radical Islamic initiatives such as the segregation of sexes in schools and attacks on cable TV operators were not seen.

It is also moot whether the Jamaat was able to use its two Ministerships in the 2001-6 regime to infiltrate the bureaucracy. The popular belief is that the Jamaat chose two Ministries (Agriculture and Social Welfare) that had control over vast bureaucratic resources and, particularly in the case of the Ministry of Social Welfare, oversight over Bangladesh's vibrant NGO sector. Midway through the term of the government, the Jamaat *Ameer* Motiur Rahman Nizami was shifted from the Agriculture to the Industry Ministry without much ado.

What is, however, indubitable is that post-2001 the number of violent incident attributable to radical Islam increased significantly. What is also indubitable is that the Government did not investigate these incidents in any credible way. It did not adopt any aggressive counter-terrorism strategy and tended to look the other way. The targets of the violence that took place during this period are the classical targets of Islamic radicals. It was almost as if they had been drawn straight out of a textbook. The incidents include (indicative list at Annex A):-

(i) Attacks on sufi shrines and religious gatherings: - The *mazaar* of Shah Jalal in Sylhet, the holiest Sufi shrine in Bangladesh has been bombed as has been another *mazaar* at Tangail.

(ii) Attacks on cultural targets: - These include attacks on Bengalee New Year festivities. These festivities symbolize the Bangladeshi attachment to Bengalee culture. They are celebrated with much festivity in a manner that would be seen by radicals as un-Islamic. Major Bengalee cultural events have been attacked as have been centuries old traditional rural fairs where Bangladeshis gather on specific occasions. Cinema halls were a particularly popular target.

(iii) Attacks on “non-believers” include the attack on Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League leadership in August 2004. Judges have been killed on the grounds that they were subverting the *Sha’ria*. Former Finance Minister SAMS Kibria was assassinated. The Awami League, being a secular party, is hated by the extremists and attempts had been made to kill Sheikh Hasina other Awami League leaders. A judicial decision banning *fatwas* during the Awami League tenure infuriated the radicals.

Following the 2001 electoral victory of the BNP-Jamaat- IOJ combine, the minority Hindu community was subjected to a number of attacks on life and property. Some felt that this was merely retribution for the Hindu’s voting *en masse* for the Awami League. The fact that these attacks took place in an organized manner and selectively targeted Hindus (and not other Awami League supporters) indicated that these may not have been straightforward “revenge” attacks.

The Ahmadiyya community has been subjected to vicious attacks. The pattern of the attacks on them mirrors what happened in Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s where the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan and other radical organizations waged a successful campaign to have them declared as heretics. An organized movement in Bangladesh attacked Ahmadiyya’s and Ahmadiyya mosques and demanded that they be declared non-believers or worse, apostates (death for apostates is mandatory under the *Sha’ria*).

Prominent liberal intellectuals who are a bulwark against the radicalization of Islam in Bangladesh have been repeatedly attacked. Well known targets have been the national poet Shamsur Rahman and authors such as Taslima Nasreen, Humayun Azad. Journalists (such as Shariar Kabir) and newspapers who have not been flattering about Islamic radicals have been subject to multiple attacks, threats and systematic intimidation.

(iv) The “West” – Jamaat leaders in public speeches regularly criticize secularism and democracy as western concepts. The chief mullah of the national mosque, Baitul Mukarram, has openly criticized the west. In a particularly egregious incident, the British High Commissioner in Bangladesh barely escaped an attempt on his life in 2004.

(v) Communists/Leftists – Radical Islamist belonging to the Jamatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh systematically hunted down and killed leftist extremists in western Bangladesh (a stronghold of leftist sarbohara extremists). It is reported that they received tacit encouragement of the authorities in this.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ http://www.mukto-mona.com/news/bangla_bhai/ *The mysterious financiers of JMB* by A.H. Jaffor Ullah

(b) VIOLENT ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh did not have Islamic terrorism a decade ago. Other than the Jamaat-e-Islami itself, with its established record in the strong-arm department, the last decade saw the emergence of violent Islamic outfits in Bangladesh on the Pakistan-Afghanistan pattern. The first group that emerged was the Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami (HUJI). This was followed by the Jamaat-ul-Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB) and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB). (HUJI and JMB figure on the State Departments watch list). Other organizations that have appeared included shadowy organizations such as the Shahadat-al-Hikma, the Hizbut Towhid, Ahle *Hadith* Andolan Bangladesh (AHAB) and Islamer Dal.

The HUJI is known to be a Deobandi outfit. Its core membership have been educated in Deobandi *madrassas* (Gahardanga *Madrassa* seems to be a favourite) in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India⁸⁹ and have fought in Afghanistan⁹⁰. It was formed in Dhaka in 1992 (the founders clad in battle-fatigue addressed a press conference) and has close linkages with the Deobandi political forces in Bangladesh. Azizul Haque, leader of one of the factions of the IOJ (a member of the four party ruling alliance 2001-6) has openly associated with HUJI.

The HUJI ideology is extremist Deobandi (akin to the Taleban) and it wants Bangladesh to be declared an Islamic state. It came up with the memorable slogan, “*Amra shobai Taleban, Bangladesh hobey Afghanistan*” (We are all Taleban, Bangladesh will be Afghanistan). HUJI operations include the assassination attempts on Sheikh Hasina. HUJI activists have also been arrested by the Bangladesh authorities for the attacks on Shamsur Rahman and the British High Commissioner and on Bengalee New Year festivities.

The Awami League came down on HUJI with a heavy hand and it mutated in the fashion of Pakistani extremist groups. The new outfits where HUJI members were co-opted included the Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan and the Khatme Nabuwat.⁹¹ It has links to the eponymous group in Pakistan and also with the Harkat al Mujahedeen and presumably with the Harkat ul Ansar⁹². The Harkat ul Mujahedeen, Harkat ul Ansar, Jaish e Mohammad, al Faran and Harkat ul *Jihad* Islami are all linked Deobandi terrorist groups in Pakistan (see above).

According to the US State Department, HUJI receives funding from international NGOs including the South Africa-based “Servants of Suffering Humanity”. The HUJI operations chief⁹³ Mufti Abdul Hannan, who was arrested in October, 2005, said in his confessional statement that they received funding from abroad,⁹⁴ presumably from the expatriate Bangladeshi community.

There are no reliable assessments about the strength of the organization. HUJI has claimed that it has sent fighters to Myanmar to fight for the Arakense Muslim rebel forces.

⁸⁹ <http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2006/11/22/mufti-hannan-details-his-blueprints-of-militancy/>

⁹⁰ US State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2005, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65462.pdf>

⁹¹ <http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2006/08/20/govt-sits-idle-as-banned-huji-holds-open-rally/>

⁹² *ibid*

⁹³ <http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2006/11/22/mufti-hannan-details-his-blueprints-of-militancy/>

⁹⁴ *ibid*

Anatomy of an extremist

(see *BangladeshNews.com.bd*, November 22, 2006)

Mufti Abdul Hannan, a HUJI leader arrested by Bangladeshi authorities said in his confessional statement that he was by profession a *madrassa* teacher. He had been educated at a local primary school but then shifted to a *madrassa* at his village in Madaripur. He completed memorizing the Koran at Gahardanga *madrassa* in 1979. He also attended the Sharshina Aliya *Madrassa* before going to a Deobandi *madrassa* in India. Later he enrolled at the Aligarh Muslim University where he finished his MA in Islamic studies in 1987. He returned to Bangladesh the same year but proceeded to Pakistan for father studies. He got himself admitted to the Jamia Yusuf bin Nuria *Madrassa* at New Town in Karachi to study Koran, *Hadith* and Fiqh.

During a Ramadan vacation while in Pakistan, Hannan went to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets. After 15 days of training, he was sent along with a thousand other mujahedeen to join a battle at Khont in the Paktia province. He was wounded after two weeks and was sent to the Kuwait al Helal hospital in Pakistan. During his 10 month stay at the hospital he got acquainted with several other Bangladeshis who too had been injured in Afghanistan.

He completed his studies in Karachi and returned to Bangladesh in 1993. On his return, he founded the Kotalipara Adarsha Cadet *Madrassa*. He also founded a *madrassa* for women, the Khurshidia Mahila *Madrassa* and an Islamic NGO the Al Faruqe Islamic Foundation. He remained in contact with other Afghanistan veterans and at their invitation joined HUJI in 1994. He served as the organisation's Publicity Secretary and travelled the length and breadth of Bangladesh to publicise its aims and objectives. He also became involved in its operations and procured the grenades that were used in the attacks on the British High Commissioner and on Sheikh Hasina.

The Jamaat-ul-Mujahedeen Bangladesh (JMB) arose in the 1990s from the *Ahle Hadith* Andolan of Bangladesh (i.e. the *Ahle Hadith* Movement of Bangladesh).⁹⁵ It is dedicated to the use of violence to achieve its vision of Bangladesh under *Sha'ria*. It pioneered suicide bombing in Bangladesh.

The JMB mutated into the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) in 2004. The whole top leadership of the JMB/JMJB (6 of its 7 member *majlis e shura*) was hanged by Bangladeshi authorities in March, 2007. The JMB/JMJB leadership were fanatics. They sang Islamic songs when the death sentence was pronounced on them and some refused to appeal. While on death row, the groups most notorious leader, Bangla Bhai, wrote a letter in which he termed the death sentence illegal as it had been issued under non-Islamic law. The judges themselves, according to Bangla Bhai, deserved the death sentence for implementing *Taguti* (non-Islamic) laws. He held that armed *jihad* to bring about *Sha'ria* was the obligation of every Muslim and that it was not a crime to kill Muslims who had deviated from the *Sha'ria*.

The JMJB terrorized north-western Bangladesh for about 2 years from 2004. Its cadres ran amok and created anarchic conditions. "Non-believers" were threatened and intimidated and gruesome punishments were inflicted on opponents after kangaroo courts. JMB/JMJB maimed and killed at

⁹⁵ US State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2005, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65462.pdf>

will and did so barbarously. Photographs of people hanging (upside down) from trees, disemboweled, began to appear in national papers in 2004. The JMB/JMJB were initially ignored, and even tacitly encouraged, by local authorities. Ultra-leftist *sarbohara* militants were a common enemy and the JMB/JMJB faced no opposition in the vicious campaign that it launched against them. Local politicians were not averse to using the JMB/JMJB to terrorise opponent. Two BNP Ministers, Aminul Haque and Rahul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu, sentenced to 31 and 8 years in jail for arson and rioting recently, were charged with cooperating with the JMB/JMJB.

Other JMB/JMJB operations include the 500 simultaneous bomb blasts across Bangladesh in August, 2005, the assassination of judges (using suicide bombers) in Jhalakathi, attacks on sufi shrines, traditional folk festivals, cultural groups and NGOs. Its leaders were arrested in a crackdown by Bangladeshi authorities in early 2006 and executed within a year.

The JM had built a country-wide network of training centers which it used to indoctrinate young men in its ideology. Arrested militants are thoroughly brain-washed and say that they are committed to bringing about the rule of Allah in Bangladesh through *jihad* if necessary. When interrogated, they apparently respond by saying “Allah-ho-Akbar” and reciting Islamic scriptures.

The JM is particularly active in the northern districts of Bangladesh (although it is represented in 57 of Bangladesh’s 64 districts). Members, who are recruited from among the students of these *madrassas*, are selected after tests of physical fitness (and also submission of a medical certificate) and are expected to go through a regular course of ideological indoctrination and physical exercises (some *madrassa* students are said to have run away from their families to join militant organizations). They are also given basic training in guerilla warfare and a special unit is trained in bomb-making techniques. Each training center, which usually consists of a barrack type building located in the vicinity of sympathetic mosques or *madrassas*, is expected to run a specified number of training camps in a year. The organization has its own flag and code of conduct and new members are not allowed to marry unless three years have elapsed since their joining. Members are expected to carry a *lathi* at all times for self-defence. The ideological curriculum is based mainly on books written by the Pakistani Maulana Masud Azhar whose works include “Armed Guard”, “Call for Armed *Jihad*”, etc.

The JMB had an elaborate structure with a *majlis e shura*, a three tier membership structure (similar to the Jamaat), and a nationwide chain of command. It would be safe to assume that the organization will attempt to regroup. It is reported that a new *majlis e shura* has been reconstituted and that a new chain of command has been put in place after the execution of its leadership. The names of the outfit change frequently and it is now known as Allahar Dal or Insaaf.⁹⁶

Sources of finance for the JMB/JMJB include the Bangladeshi expatriate community in Europe and the Middle East. The parent AHAB received assistance from a Kuwaiti NGO, the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society. All members and sympathizers are also expected to pay a monthly levy.

⁹⁶ BangladeshNews.com.bd, “Militants regrouping, three bodies unite under single banner”, May 5, 2007.

THE ROLE OF MADRASSAS IN BANGLADESH

Madrassas in Bangladesh have a long history and are an integral part of the education system. There are two basic kinds of *madrassas* in Bangladesh. The first of these categories is the *Aliya madrassa* while the second is the *Quomi madrassa*. *Aliya madrassas*, broadly speaking, are those which are recognised by the government while *Quomi madrassas* have no governmental affiliation or recognition. *Quomi madrassas*, which are also known as *Nizamia madrassas* were earlier known as *Kharizi madrassas*. Similar to the *Quomi madrassas* but much less common are *Forkania* and *Hafizia madrassas*.

There are about 7000 *Aliya madrassas* in Bangladesh that impart education at the post-primary level. It is estimated that there are another 15,000 *madrassas* operating at solely the primary level. Estimates of the total number of *madrassa* students vary between 1.6 million to 2.1 million. *Aliya madrassa* students constitute about 25-30% of the registered Muslim student population of Bangladesh.

They are state supported and regulated. Since the independence of Bangladesh it has been the official policy of the Government of Bangladesh to promote *madrassas* as a non-formal or alternative system of education. The curriculum in *Aliya madrassas*, which tries to exploit the strengths of the *madrassa* system, is based on supplementing the traditional *madrassa* curriculum with modern subjects. Their curriculum (available in the public domain) stresses Arabic and the Koran at the expense of science. It is set centrally by a *Madrassa Education Board* that also conducts exams.

The government has made an effort to integrate *Aliya madrassas* into the national mainstream and the equivalence of different levels of *madrassa* and general education have already been established. Students are allowed to move from one stream to another.

It is difficult to obtain any information (curriculum, number, enrolment, sources of finance) of any kind about *Quomi madrassas*. It is estimated that at least half a million Bangladeshis are enrolled in them. *Quomi madrassas* are based on the Deoband model, i.e. a curriculum emphasizing the Koran, the Fiqh, Arabic, and personal conduct; financial independence from government; and the development of close bonds between teachers and students and amongst students.

Aliya madrassas are eligible to receive government assistance, the bulk of which is in the form of a subsidy which goes towards paying teacher salaries. Through this grant, the government pays upto 90% of basic salaries. Allowances and grants from the government for repair of school buildings, for construction, teacher training at training institutes, and also stipends are also received by *madrassas*. Student fees and other sources of income (endowments, donations) are the sources of income for *Aliya madrassas*.

Madrassa education is not cheap. *Madrassas* receive a disproportionately high share of government grants, and per capita expenditure of government on *madrassa* students is about 10% higher than per capita expenditure on other non-governmental schools and colleges.

Quomi madrassas are financed on the Deoband pattern. Like similar *madrassas* in Pakistan they have received funding from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern Islamic countries.

Close to a third of all Bangladeshis are today being educated in *madrassas*. The impact of this on society is controversial. While one section of public opinion is quick to dub the *madrassas* as dens of militancy (citing the example of the Taleban), another section reminds us that *madrassas* are not traditionally associated with militancy.⁹⁷ According to this section, *madrassa* syllabi which have constant for about 200 years⁹⁸ do not encourage militancy. *Madrassa* teachers generally shun politics; radical Islamists, various studies have shown, do not have support in the *madrassas*.⁹⁹ While this may be the case, what cannot be doubted is that the large numbers of students emerging from the *madrassas* and into the labour market are a major force in favour of Islamisation of society.¹⁰⁰

THE FINANCING OF EXTREMIST ISLAMIC GROUPS

Islamic groups in South Asia (including Bangladesh) generate funds from within the country and from abroad. Internal funds usually come from *zakat*.

Zakat or obligatory alms-giving is a must for every Muslim who possesses a minimum of personal wealth. It is the third of the five pillars of Islam. *Zakat* is given annually and is calculated as a percentage of an individual's wealth (usually 2% of an individual's wealth). Muslims may also give voluntarily and spontaneously – *sadaqa*. *Sadaqa* or “gift”, usually in the form of money, is highly regarded as an act of piety. It is considered to be pious, private and often secret act of one's own free will motivated by an “inner feeling of responsibility” that will support the congregation of Islam. Wealthy Muslims often prefer to make private donations as *sadaqa* to charities or causes of their choice.

The payment of *zakat*, however, remains voluntary in practice in most parts of the Islamic world, including Bangladesh (It is obligatory in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Sudan). There is no consensus in the Islamic world about how *zakat* is to be utilized except for a loose understanding that it is meant for charitable purposes. There is also no consensus on how it is to be collected and distributed. In some states (e.g. Egypt), this is done by the State. In others, a *Zakat* Commission collects and distributes funds. A *Zakat* Funds Committee headed by the President of Bangladesh solicits annual *zakat* contributions on a voluntary basis. The revenue so generated is to be spent on orphanages, schools, children's hospitals, and other charitable institutions and projects.

Zakat and *sadaqa* have traditionally been a principal source of income of Islamic charities and organizations professing Islamic objectives across the world. Islamic organizations exhort the pious to give *zakat* to further the cause of Islam. This form of direct collection is probably seen at its most organized in the *Dar ul Uloom* in Deoband (see above). In other places, Imams of mosques, *Ulema* and *madrassa* students are regularly seen trying to collect *zakat* from Muslims outside mosques, during religious gatherings or by approaching individuals and families directly.

⁹⁷ Sikand, *Bastions of the Believers*

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ Olivier, *Globalised Islam*

Islamic radicals also collect funds directly from the public. A report in the Daily Star of March 2, 2006 quoting interrogation reports of JMB and JMJB activists states that they were funded by *zakat*. The Lashkar-e-Tayba in Pakistan believes that it has the right to appropriate *zakat*.

External financial support to Islamic organizations far exceeds domestic funding. The relative prosperity of South Asian expatriates working in the Middle East, Europe and the United States means that the Diaspora has become a major source of funding for Islamic organizations. Domestic *zakat* and *sadaqa* are dwarfed by that coming in from Saudi Arabia. Private Saudi donations fuelled by rising incomes from the oil boom, translate into an enormous source of funding for Muslim causes. This is supplemented by the funds available to the Saudi state and other wealth Saudi entities including the Saudi royal family. Saudi Kings have been celebrated for their generosity.¹⁰¹ This combination of private and public generosity means that Saudi Arabia pumps in billions of dollar annually to Islamic causes and organizations.

Funds flow through two routes. One route is direct donations by the individuals to the recipients through legal or illegal channels. The second route is through the medium of the Saudi Government and through large Islamic charities. These collect donations and forward them to causes and organizations of their choice across the world.

An individual is free to give their *zakat* to charities and organizations of their choice. This makes it difficult to assess what private donations are being used for and the quantum of donations. Saudi charities and government agencies are also opaque when it comes to the donations. From circumstantial evidence it appears that the bulk of Saudi money goes to construction of mosques and *madrassas*, printing of Korans, printing of Islamic literature, encouraging Islamic studies and in *da'wa* activities.

While donors give generously for humanitarian and religious purposes, there is no doubt that Saudi funding is a major source of income for Islamic terrorist organizations. Private and public Saudi money played a vital role in supporting Afghan resistance to the Soviets. Saudi princes and businessmen were extraordinarily generous in funding the various Arab-Afghan movements fighting the Russians.¹⁰² This method of funding *jihad* in Afghanistan through Islamic charities became entrenched and was used, unwittingly perhaps, to support radical organizations with very different agendas and sustaining terrorism.¹⁰³

Saudi organizations involved in transfer of funds include eight Ministries [Finance (through its Directorate General of *Zakat* and Income Tax), Education, Foreign Affairs, Health, Higher Education, Information, Pilgrimage and the Ministry of Islamic Endowments and Guidance Affairs]¹⁰⁴ and numerous NGOs. The more famous Saudi NGOs/Charities include the Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society, Muslim World League (Rabitat al Alami al Islamiyya), International Islamic Relief Organisation, Al Haramain Islamic Foundation, World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Al Wafa Humanitarian Foundation, and the Benevolence International Foundation (Lajnat al Birr al Islamiyya).

¹⁰¹ J.Millar Burr and Robert O Collins, *Alms for Jihad*, Cambridge, 2006

¹⁰² Burr and Collins, *Alms for Jihad*

¹⁰³ *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

In the Bangladeshi context, hundreds of Islamic NGOs are registered under the Ministry of Social Welfare (one of the two Ministries that the Jamaat held during 2001-6). While these are involved in religious and humanitarian activities, Bangladeshi authorities have established a link between a Kuwait based NGO (the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahedeen.¹⁰⁵

THE ARMY AND ISLAM IN BANGLADESH

The Bangladesh Army is closely related to the Pakistani Army. Initially officered exclusively by officers trained in Pakistan, the Bangladesh Army has a history of intervening in Bangladeshi politics. It played a peripheral role in the process of governance during Sheikh Mujib's time. Sheikh Mujib distrusted the army and in addition to marginalizing it in the process of governance, tried to develop a para-military force, the Rakshi Bahini as a counter-weight. The young Army itself, in any case, was trying to define itself, as it struggled to co-opt the freedom fighters and "repatriated" officers and soldiers within the same structure. The BD Army became a key player in the BD polity after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 by a group of disgruntled junior Army officers. Sheikh Mujib's killing was followed by imposition of Martial Law in Bangladesh. A number of bloody coups, attempted coups and counter-coups dominated the Bangladesh polity until General Zia, who was himself installed as Army chief by a soldier's mutiny, consolidated his position as strong man in the period 1977-78. General Zia ruthlessly suppressed unrest in the Army (executing thousands of soldiers in the process) and then became President. General Zia in turn was assassinated by an ambitious colleague in 1981 and was soon succeeded by as strongman by his successor as Army chief, General Ershad. General Ershad ruled under various guises until 1991 when he was overthrown by a popular democratic movement. During this period the Army, as can be expected, played a key role in the nascent Bangladesh polity. It was a power base, an arbiter and a source of leadership.

The Pakistani Army has a major contribution in bringing Pakistan to its current predicament. The effects of General Zia ul Haq's "Islamisation" are playing themselves out. His decision to arm and patronize radical Sunni Islamic groups and use them against Shias, Afghanistan and India has come full circle. The so-called "Military-Mullah" alliance has not been able to prevent the escalation of sectarian and religion based conflict in Pakistan is gripped by violence.

The Pakistani Army has had close relations with the Jamaat-e-Islami. In 1965 when Pakistan went to war with India, the Jamaat declared *jihad* and ran a public campaign to complement the Army's effort.¹⁰⁶ The Jamaat's role in support of the Pakistan Army during the Bangladesh Liberation War is well known. The Jamaat closely allied itself with General Zia ul Haq initially and although Jamaat Ministers resigned from his cabinet in 1979, it remained amongst the military staunchest allies in its adventurist foreign policy.

In comparison, the Bangladesh Army's flirtation with Islam can only be described as mild. The efforts by General Zia ur Rahman and General Ershad to "play the Islamic" card while moving from the army to civilian politics have been detailed above. There is a school of thought that the present military regime would also try and play some version of the same game in case it is determined not to allow a return to genuine democracy. If it does so, it is likely to find an able and willing ally in the Bangladeshi Jamaat.

¹⁰⁵ Terror-financing NGOs remain unscathed, The Daily Star, November 26, 2005

¹⁰⁶ Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military ICG Asia Report

One of the stated objectives of the Jamaat is the cultivation of the centres of power in society and it would be safe to assume that the Bangladesh Army is one of its key targets. To what extent it has succeeded is not known. Bangladeshi soldiers have an enviable record in UNPKOs where their discipline and excellent behaviour is often attributed to the positive influence of their pride in their religion. Bangladeshi military officers are not noticeably Islamic in their bearing or attitudes. There is however no definite information on this count. The Army has also acted decisively against Islamic radicals after coming to power and the decision to execute the JMB/JMJB leaders could not have been taken without the Army's approval.

One of the sons (Kaifi) of the first Jamaat *Ameer* Golam Azam rose to general officer rank in the Bangladesh Army and may have been a senior official in Bangladesh's version of the ISI, the Directorate General Forces Intelligence (DGFI).

There is troubling evidence that the DGFI has its own version of an adventurist foreign policy. It has some role to play in assisting secessionist rebels in India's North East, particularly the Assamese group ULFA. The Indian experience shows that such groups usually change into criminal syndicates over a period of time and such decisions are likely, as Pakistan's example shows, to return to haunt those who commission them. Bangladesh is also being used as a route to send Islamic terrorists into India. The accidental seizure of smuggled consignments thousands of automatic weapons and hundreds of thousands of rounds of ammunition in Bangladesh in 2004 has never been satisfactorily explained and calls for greater vigilance on the part of the Army and DGFI to prevent Bangladesh from becoming another *jihadi* playground.

TIME magazine on DGFI

Al-Qaeda's links to the leadership of Jamaat or Islamic Oikkyia Jote may be largely rhetorical. But the DGFI, Bangladesh's military intelligence service, may have more to hide. Its agents maintain contact with their counterparts in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence and have a long history of supporting rebels fighting Indian rule across the border, including providing safe houses in Dhaka for the leaders of the United Liberation Front for Assam (ULFA). The HUJI source and the port workers who saw the *Mecca** arrive claim that the man who greeted the new arrivals was a major in the DGFI. The major checked the visitors in by name and led them to a fleet of SUVs lined up on the docks, add the port workers. A spokesman for the DGFI denied knowing that members of al-Qaeda had ever set foot in Bangladesh. He even denied that the major existed, although diplomatic registration records show the officer is a long-standing member of the service and was stationed in Calcutta in the mid-1990s. The HUJI source and a Bangladeshi military source maintain the major was the last link in an operation that began in Afghanistan. After leaving the Taliban's headquarters in Kandahar as the city fell in early December and crossing into Pakistan, the fugitives traveled to Karachi, hired the *Mecca* and made the sail around India.

(*A consignment of 1400 sub-machine guns; 150 rocket launchers; 840 rockets; 400 rifles; 100 'Tommy Guns'; 2,000 launching grenades; 25,020 hand grenades; and 2 million rounds of ammunition (reportedly of Korean, Italian, Chinese and American make) were accidentally seized in Chittagong when being offloaded of the *Mecca* on April 2, 2004)

A significant point to be noted is that the Bangladeshi Army has a number of officers belonging to the minorities. At least six Hindus have risen to General officer rank. A Buddhist officer rose to a similar rank in the Air Force. Major General C R Datta, a Hindu, is included amongst the legendary thirteen “sector commanders” who played a pivotal role in the Liberation war.

BANGLADESH - SIGNS OF HOPE

Moderate and liberal Bangladeshis remain a strong force. In spite of the inroads of radical Islam, popular culture (e.g. festivals, literature, music, behaviour patterns, etc.) retains its unique Bangladeshi flavour. The intellectual community has a strong and respected component that is avowedly liberal. Institutions such as the judiciary and media have gathered strength and remain by and large secular and moderate in their inclinations. Liberal Bangladeshi intellectuals have, at great risk to their own lives, fearlessly opposed Islamic forces. They have a wide audience and their views, which are representative of a broad cross section of Bangladeshis, are treated with respect and publicized. Popular Bangladeshi music is a rapidly growing industry and has a wide audience in South Asia and in the Bangladeshi Diaspora.

A flourishing civil society network active in promoting development has developed remarkable institutional capacities and has contributed to improvement of socio-economic indicators. The award of the Nobel Prize to Prof Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank has been a source of great encouragement to moderate and liberal Bangladeshis and a vindication of the path they have chosen.

Women are highly visible and do not usually wear *hijab* or observe *pardah*. Institutes of higher education and most schools are co-educational and women are a major part of the workforce. The neo-fundamentalist calls for segregation and restrictions on women are unlikely to find much favour amongst Bangladesh’s assertive womenfolk.

Bangladeshis draw a distinction between pious Muslims and radical Muslims. It is in the eyes of most Bangladeshis, possible to be pious and not radical. This attitude is fostered by traditional religious networks that remain extremely strong. Sufi shrines continue to be venerated by Bangladeshis and the *spiritual* power of the shrines of Shah Jalal at Sylhet and Nizamuddin and Ajmer Sharif in India remains a greater draw than the ideology of the *Wahabis/Ahle Hadithis* to most Bangladeshis. *Pirs* continue to be a force to reckon within Bangladesh and amongst the expatriate Bangladeshi community. There is no indication of a decline in the numbers of their followers or *murids*. Thousands of Bangladeshis continue to swear *ba’yah* (become initiates) to Sufi *pirs*. Their message that the Prophet preached a religion of love and their stress on peace, humility and inner tranquility, has not been drowned out. In addition to the *pirs*, many imams are moderate in their beliefs and actively oppose the radicals. Contempt for the radicals, particularly the Jamaat, is an article of faith for many Bangladeshis. The followers of traditional Islam even have a political party of their own, the Zaker party.

The Government is to be given credit for making a determined effort to project the multi-religious nature of Bangladeshi society. Textbooks of the first and second grades draw a distinction between religious and national festivals. National festivals are secular (viz. Victory Day, Independence Day and Martyrs Day). Religious festivals of all communities are named and

described and described in an even-handed manner. Equal space is given to the descriptions of the festivals of all religions. *Poila Baisakh*, which is a date in the traditional Hindu calendar is celebrated as the New Year and is a national festival. Baul music, associated with a mystic Hindu sect, is mentioned as one of the highlights of the new year.

In spite of the Jamaat and the Islamic Oikya Jote being a part of the ruling alliance for five years, *Sha'ria* is not even close to being implemented. The Government has also no record of persecuting minority communities. It did not, unlike its Pakistan counterpart, bow to pressure to declare the Ahmadiyyas heretics. Minorities are recruited into state employment. Government also makes an effort to support other religions. Minority institutions and religious festivals receive state funding and encouragement.

Another indicator of the limited influence of the radicals is the complete absence of Shia-Sunni violence in Bangladesh in living memory.

The Awami League, which still polls the largest percentage of votes amongst political parties (consistently around 40%), remains steadfastly secular. Its decision to enter into a MoU with an obscure Islamic political party the Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish disheartened many of its followers. Its decision to scrap the MoU within two months is an indication that the party will find it difficult to make concessions to Islamism.

Barelvi Tradition in Pakistan

Pakistan too has an indigenous Sunni Islamic tradition akin to the Bangladeshi tradition. This is called the Barelvi tradition, named after Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh state of India, which was the hometown of its founder Imam Ahmad Raza Khan (1856-1921). Ahmad Raza Khan considered Deobandism and *Wahabism* as “false” Islam. Barelvis who are particularly strong in Punjab constitute between 50 to 60 percent of Pakistan’s population. Barelvis’ venerate shrines, have a tradition of religious music (*qawali*) and have a strong *pir-murid* networks. Barelvis strongly supported the creation of Pakistan.

CONCLUSION/IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

In the context of Bangladesh it is proposed that while Islamisation is a major threat and that while radicals are increasingly active, the battle is far from lost. Bangladesh, it would appear, has decided not to go radical for the time being.

The world is coming to terms with the Islam becoming a potent political force in the last three decades. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 which ushered in the first Islamic theocracy in history was a watershed. It triggered of calls for the revival of Islam and Islamic values in politics and in the national life of a large number of Muslim countries. The mujahedeen victory over the Soviets in Afghanistan was another watershed as it catalysed the emergence of trans-national Islamic networks that were willing to use violence to protect and propagate their vision of Islam on a global scale. The 9/11 attacks brought home the capabilities of these networks. The Islamisation of Iran and Pakistan and Taleban rule over Afghanistan alerted to the world to the possibility of more Islamic theocracies emerging and the possible behaviour of these theocracies.

These developments have been a source of consternation and worry for democracies and pluralistic societies across the world. A fundamental premise of modern pluralistic democracies is the separation of religion and state. Such democracies also lay overwhelming importance to implementing policies that are based on liberalism. Radical Islam disagrees, often violently, with both these assumptions. The West and countries such as India (and Israel) along with the governments of moderate Islamic countries must also learn to deal with being characterized as the “enemy” by radical Islamists.

Islam as a religion has been around and has co-existed with other religions for centuries. Islamic rule in India resulted in the development of a composite culture and produced rulers of great tolerance and liberality of views. It has also been demonstrated unequivocally that Islam need not be inconsistent with the modern state. Its compatibility with democracy has also been demonstrated, perhaps with more equivocation.

What then is it that secular and liberal democracies are alarmed about? It would appear that there are three major issues here. The first is that Islamisation of societies tends to produce state policies that are viewed as regressive. Countries such as India which have made herculean efforts to implement liberal policies can hardly be expected to be comfortable with the *Sha'ria* and with a situation where individuals are denied religious freedom, women are relegated to second-class status, prayers and beards are mandatory, and barbaric penalties are inflicted for infringements of the law. The second issue pertains to violence. It is evident that Islamic radicals are a minority. It is also evident that they are fanatics. This minority of fanatics are very effective terrorists and their presence is inevitably correlated with sharply increased levels of violence and fear. The third relates to the presence of extra-national influences. Roy Oliver has pointed out that Al Qaeda is looking for national subcontractors or franchisees¹⁰⁷. A determined effort by particular groups that have access to petro-dollars to find new converts is a potent destabilizing factor at least in South Asia.

While a detailed examination of the causes behind the spread of these ideas is beyond the scope of this paper, it would appear that the forces propagating a “return to Islam” have been able to capitalize on the deep sense of resentment (particularly against the West) that seems to pervade the Islamic community across the world. Secondly, what Bertrand Russell has characterized as the triumph of science and liberalism over religion seems to have created an enormous *spiritual* hunger across the world. This has been accentuated in a globalized world that is phasing out the traditional moorings of societies. Societies and individuals react in unpredictable ways to these challenges. Islam, perhaps more than any other religion, has been able to tap onto this hunger and answer the queries of those who have been uprooted by the forces of globalization. Roy Olivier has argued that international Islamic terrorism is a pathological consequence of the globalization of the Muslim world. It is the violent reaction of a minority to the pressures of globalization.¹⁰⁸ The presence of poverty, illiteracy and poor socio-economic indicators contribute towards the development of fanaticism but are not decisive reasons. The Jamaat-e-Islami lays great stress on recruiting educated members. Al Qaeda terrorists tend to be well educated. Development and prosperity therefore will not wipe out fanaticism.

¹⁰⁷ Olivier, *Globalised Islam*

¹⁰⁸ Olivier, *Globalised Islam*

All these factors are and have been present in South Asia. Let us go back a hundred and fifty years and to the emergence of the *Wahabis* in India and Afghanistan and their *jihad* against the British. W.W. Hunter, an Indian Civil Service officer was commissioned to write a report on “*Whether the Indian Muslims were compelled by their faith to rebel against the British rule*”.¹⁰⁹ Hunter, who was given full access to secret official papers, published his report in 1871 under the title “*The Indian Musalmans: Are they bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen?*”

He discussed the teachings of Islam specially the concepts of *Jihad*, advent of Mahdi and Messiah, *Wahabism* and concluded that “The present generation of Musalmans are bound according to their own texts to accept the status quo, but ‘the law and the prophets can be utilized on the side of loyalty as well as on the side of sedition’, and the Musalmans of India are, and have been, for many years, a source of chronic danger to the British Power in India.”¹¹⁰ He further added: ‘It was hopeless to look for anything like enthusiastic loyalty from our Muhammadan subjects. The whole Koran was based upon the conception of the Musalmans as a conquering and not as a conquered people. The Musalmans of India could always be a source of chronic danger to the British power in India.’¹¹¹

He said, rather prophetically, that “No one can predict the proposition to which this Rebel Camp (i.e. the *Wahabi* bases in Afghanistan) backed by the Muslim horde from the Westward, might attain under a leader who knows how to wield together the nations of Asia in a crescentado.”¹¹²

There is every reason to believe that the struggle against radicalism will continue for the foreseeable future. What are the indicators that could be used to assess the state of play in this struggle? What are the “red lines” which if crossed, would indicate that the radicals are gaining ground? What can be done to contain further radicalization?

The Pakistani experience in injecting Islam into politics needs to be carefully scrutinized to answer this question. It is evident that the Pakistan’s experience following General Zia’s Islamisation and his decision to arm Islamic radicals has not been entirely happy. Flirting with Islam in government and politics is a bad idea and effort by the state to implement *Sha’ria* or legislate on neo-fundamentalist concerns is unlikely to have positive consequences for any country in South Asia. This would need to be carefully monitored.

Secondly, a decision to try and use radical terrorism to covertly further foreign policy objectives is bound to backfire. States in South Asia are already under enormous stress. Encouraging or even turning a blind eye to Islamic terrorists will create conditions which host governments will not be able to manage. Any evidence of half-heartedness in completely stamping out these groups is a danger signal.

Thirdly, religious freedom and diversity needs to be protected. The decline in the minorities as a share of the population always has a negative effect on diversity and pluralism and needs to be carefully monitored. Outside influences through transfer of resources and movement of ideas from countries in the Middle East that make a disproportionate share of resources available to

¹⁰⁹ F.H. Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter*, London 1901,

¹¹⁰ Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*

¹¹¹ *ibid*

¹¹² *ibid*

particular points of view should be discouraged legally. The presence of organizations known to further such objectives is a sign of danger. Charitable activities should be, by legal requirement, non-denominational.

Indoctrination needs to be countered. *Madrassas* of a non-regulated nature tend to be run by neo-fundamentalists and should be strongly discouraged. Any increase in their number is a negative development. By extension, the syllabi of existing *madrassas* need to be radically modernized and brought into line with the requirements of a knowledge society. Lessons on nationalism should, at the very least, be made compulsorily at such institutions.

How is radicalism to be contained? While an examination of strategies is also beyond the scope of this paper, it would be fair to say that a radical is defeated if his ideas are defeated. The traditional radical reaction to defeat in the battle for ideas is to make a grab for power either through opportunistic use of the ballot, through expedient alliances or through violence and anarchism.

How is the battle for ideas to be won? Either by force or by having a “better” idea. The case of Egypt where ruthless tactics have not succeeded in eradicating the legacy of Qutb indicate that force alone is unlikely to work. The success of liberalism and pluralism is therefore contingent upon their demonstrating that they are “better” ideas. An “idea” is better if it delivers results. In this context, it is essential to maintain the distinction between piousness and radicalism. The hands of those who are pious need to be strengthened. At a practical level this would mean constant focus on the moderate aspects of Islam and engagement with non-radical ulema and thinkers.

It would also be fair to assume that the battle for ideas would be won if democratic institutions and liberalism combined with a free-market economy are given time to deliver results in terms of nation-building. A radical therefore has every motivation to short-circuit this process. Hence, the propensity towards violence. An equally dangerous point is the skill of the radicals in abusing the freedom of a pluralistic society to work towards the destruction of the same pluralism. It follows that pluralism must be protected at all costs and that the tendency to abuse its freedoms should be dealt with most strictly.

Violence weakens pluralism. The ability to intimidate, to terrorize and to generate anarchy must be destroyed. The survival of pluralism is a defeat of radicalism and weakening or eliminating these abilities is essential for the survival of pluralism. As a case in point, the Bangladesh government’s decision to execute JMB/JMJB militants has immediately weakened radical organisations. The battle for ideas and the battle for protecting pluralism will need to be waged simultaneously. “Hearts and minds” must run along with a strong-arm. These together will buy the time that is needed for liberalism to deliver results.

Within the South Asian context, an additional complication is the development of “Islamic Emirates”. Chunks of territory, particularly in the North-Western province of Pakistan and in parts of Afghanistan, are declaring themselves Islamic zones and refuting state authority. The ideal solution would of course be to uproot them totally. However, this is not proving to be easy for a variety of reasons. In this context the British imperialist policy of containment of troublesome groups is an interesting model that deserves closer scrutiny.

Since it has been argued that neo-fundamentalists do not concern themselves with politics and would only like to be left to themselves to practice their faith in peace, it can be argued that it might be possible to “quarantine” or “partially exclude” them. In respect of such groups the British had adopted what was called the “Inner Line” policy. As long as sovereignty was unquestioned and peace prevailed, the British restricted themselves to maintaining a token presence and to ensuring that roads and other vital national installations were firmly under their control. Other than this, the residents of these areas were by and large allowed to manage their own affairs. This uncomfortable co-existence might have to be considered as an option till such time that the state feels itself able to integrate them fully or until the radicals become like the many fringe communities that dot the international landscape.