

POLITICAL ISLAM
PARALLEL CURRENTS IN WEST ASIA
AND SOUTH ASIA

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AND SOUTH ASIA

Adil Rasheed



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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“I need the state to be secular, so that I can choose to be Muslim by conviction, which is the only way to be a Muslim. I am opposed to the notion of an Islamic state, which is conceptually incoherent, historically false and practically untenable.”

—Abdullahi An-Naim

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PREFACE

The rise of Political Islam or Islamism as a 20th century religious revivalist movement has deeply affected global geopolitics. This postmodern socio-political development has given rise to its more virulent offshoot in global jihadism, one of the most dangerous security threats to international peace. This book attempts to study not only the basic precepts, ideologies, organisations and methodologies of the many non-violent and violent Islamist movements and groups in modern times, but also explores their roots in Islamic history.

Starting from the time of Prophet Muhammad and his state in Medina, followed by the study of the Caliphate of the Prophet's Pious Companions (*Khulafa-i-Rashideen*) and the many subsequent Muslim empires and states in West Asia, North Africa and South Asia, the book seeks to better understand modern attempts at reviving historical political references of Islamist ideologues. In this process, the book has attempted to study the various sects, sub-sects, schools of Islamic theology, mysticism and philosophy, as well as historical events and personalities that influenced Islamist political philosophy and its diverse iterations.

In addition, the book juxtaposes the evolution of Muslim socio-political thought in West Asia (the region from where Islam originated) with simultaneous developments taking place in North Africa and South Asia (esp. from the 11th to 12th centuries onwards) and studies the Islamic interconnectedness and divergences between the regions. The study finds that the emergence of Islamic theological and socio-political ideologies, institutions and movements in South Asia did not merely borrow from West Asia but developed its own unique theological and socio-cultural sensibilities, philosophical interpretations and political nuances, deriving from the rich heritage of India's ancient spiritualism and culture.

The book posits that Muslim political thought in South Asia has historically evolved not always necessarily on identical but even divergent tracks from its West Asian sources. This difference has allowed both Islam and Political Islam in South Asia to hold their own and not get totally subsumed by West Asian or North African movements, giving Islam in the subcontinent a distinctive character, akin to ancient Indian cultural values and ethos.

In fact, the two regions have equally contributed to the evolution of Islamic religious and political thought and institutions. For instance, ancient Hindu spiritual and philosophical traditions of Vedanta profoundly influenced the development of Sufi thought in India and helped Mughal rulers like Akbar build a pluralistic and syncretic ethos. Conversely, it is also true that the school of Sufi Naqshbandi conservatism, associated with the philosophy of Ahmad Shah Sirhindi, played an influential role in the development of early Wahhabi movement in the 18th century, with teachers belonging to his school mentoring Muhammad Abdul Wahhab. Similarly, prominent leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood—Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb— have admitted to being influenced by controversial South Asian Islamist, the so-called Karl Marx of Political Islam, Abu Ala Al-Maududi.

Through its research, the book finds that Islam is a religion and not a socio-political revolutionary ideology, as Islamists would have us believe. Its core religious texts — Quran and Hadeeth literature — do not present any political philosophy or schema for establishing an Islamic state, nor do they exhort Muslims to find salvation through political or militaristic pursuits. However, it is also true that many Islamist thinkers and theologians have existed in pre-modern times, who often interpreted the sacred Islamic texts to build political constructs, whose references many Islamists and jihadists of our times cite profusely. To these thinkers, Islam is not merely a spiritual creed but a complete way of life, covering both the transcendental and the temporal, the religious as well as the political (*deen wa dawla*). This line of thinking has always corrupted both Muslim politics and faith, as is evident from the condition of many contemporary Muslim states that have followed an Islamist path.

The politicisation and instrumentalization of Islam by various political actors has produced several diverse and contradicting models of Islamic polity — ranging from dynastic despotism and kingship to tribal egalitarianism, modern theodemocratic states to reductionist and militant interpretations of a pristine caliphate, which has caused unnecessary chaos and confusion.

This book explores a large number of such political experiments in Muslim history, as well as some highly enlightening political theories of philosophers like Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun and India's own Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani. The book has not used diacritical spellings of Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Hindi words, while discussing Muslim history in West Asia and South Asia, as the borrowed words are often pronounced differently across diverse languages and regions. To avoid confusion, it has mostly resorted to the spellings understandable to a largely Indian readership.

ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress
HuT	Hizb-ut-Tahreer
JUH	Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind
JUI	Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam
INC	Indian National Congress
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MAO	Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (College)
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
TLP	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAR	United Arab Republic
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States

PART I
INTRODUCTION

1

How Political is Islam?

Islam is a “message not a government: a religion not a state.”

—Ali Abd Al-Raziq¹

God wanted Islam to be a religion, but people wanted it to be politics. Religion is universal, human and comprehensive. Politics is limited, tribal, local and temporary. To confine religion to politics is to limit it to a narrow scope, a specific territory, specific community and a specific time.

—Mohamed Said Al-Ashmawi²

Contrary to popular perception, neither Islam nor its modern offshoot Political Islam are monolithic. Like the religion itself, Political Islam is also not necessarily violent, nor is the mixing of politics and religion unique to Islam.

To modern political scientists, Political Islam is a distinctive aspect of an even broader modern movement that is often called ‘Islamic Resurgence’. In the words of John O. Voll and Tamara Sonn. “Not all Islamic Resurgence movements can be characterized as Political Islam... Many Sufi brotherhoods (have) displayed renewed dynamism in the final decades of the 20th century without advocating programs of Political Islam.”³

Thus, many Muslim political organizations would not qualify as being part of Political Islam. According to Muqatedar Khan: “Only those groups who believe that not only does Islam have a built-in political system but also that all Muslims are required by their religion to follow this system qualify as Political Islam.”⁴

Some political scientists have even identified the moment from which Political Islam began. Thus, Muqatedar Khan states: “The key moment when the decline of Muslim power was crystallized in the Muslim psyche was when the Ottoman Empire disappeared and the Islamic Caliphate as an institution was abolished in 1924. Many Islamic movements have since emerged with the explicit goal to revive the Muslim *Ummah* (community across the globe), reform Muslim societies and restore them to their past glory”.⁵

Those Islamist groups that resort to militancy are today called ‘jihadis’ in media and academia, while those who do not use force but actively promote their Islamist ideology through non-violent means (like *Hizbut Tahreer* and Muslim Brotherhood) are termed as Islamists. In his definition of Political Islam, Shahram Akbarzadeh a professor at the University of Melbourne, brings out the key ideological impulse that runs through most parties and groups identified with the movement: “Political Islam is a modern phenomenon that seeks to use religion to shape the political system. Its origins lie in the perceived failure of the secular ideologies of nationalism and socialism to deliver on their promises of anti-imperialism and prosperity.”⁶

To Guilain Denoëux, Islamism is a modern reimagining of concepts borrowed from Islamic tradition. Thus, it is “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.”⁷

Some Western scholars like Daniel Pipes and Bill Warner have often been criticised for conflating Islam with extremist ideologies associated with Political Islam. To Bill Warner, political Islam is that part of Islamic religious canon—Quran, *Hadeeth* (collected sayings of the Prophet) and *Seerah* (Biography of the Prophet)—that concern non-Muslims (*kafirun*).⁸ In stark contrast professor at *Freie Universität Berlin* Gudrun Kramer writes:

“Political Islam is not synonymous with violent, radical, or extremist Islamism, and it is not restricted to opposition groups. The spectrum ranges from advocates of an Islamic republic to sympathizers of an Islamic monarchy or a resuscitated caliphate, and from self-declared liberals to uncompromising conservatives. Some Islamists are commonly classified as moderate or pragmatic, others as radical, militant, or extremist.”⁹

Be that as it may, the view of this book is that although Islamic sacred texts

do not present any political ideology or system of governance on their own, the pursuit among Muslims to establish a mythical Islamic political system or state is not a modern phenomenon, as there have always been religious ideologues and political movements after the Prophet who have tried to devise different forms of so-called Islamic political systems based on their subjective interpretations of Quranic verses, analyses of the Prophet's political administration of Medinan state (*Nizam-e-Mustafa*), the caliphate of the first four Pious Caliphs (*Khulafa-i-Rashideen*) among Sunni Muslims and matters of Islamic law (*Shariah*). In addition, almost every Muslim political regime has sought to legitimise itself based on some religiously justifiable pretext, thus producing varied versions of a so-called Islamic polity.

Thus, many Islamic political theories and systems have been advanced over the centuries, influenced as much by the religion as by contemporary socio-political realities and socio-cultural influences even from non-Muslim sources. Many Islamists of today cherry-pick ideas from a wide variety of medieval scholarship that present interpretations of the Quran, *Hadeeth* (documented compilations of Prophet's sayings), *Seerah* (biographies of the Prophet) and *Fiqh* (schools of Islamic law) citations to support their ideal of an Islamic political system. However, there are great divergences in the political orientation and functions of this state, ranging from being authoritarian to theo-democratic. Thus, it is important to survey the pre-modern sources of Political Islam in order to better understand their modern manifestations. Like the many changes in Islamic theology (which is manifest in the currently large number of Islamic sects and schools), even Muslim political thought, has undergone constant innovation through the ages. Thus, neither the religion nor Political Islam has remained completely immune to change, nor is it any contemporary version an exact replica of its pristine past.

The Islamic Argument against Political Islam

The first Muslim state was established by Prophet Muhammad in Medina in 622 CE. Nearly a decade of Prophet's rule was succeeded by the reigns of his four best companions, the Pious Caliphs (*Khulafa-i-Rashidun*), who established the so-called Rashidun caliphate for a period of nearly 30 years (632–61 CE). Ironically, the egalitarian principles followed by these caliphs eventually proved incapable of controlling a rapidly expanding empire that needed more authoritarian power to exercise control. The political confusion and stress on a nascent Arab polity led to internal rivalries and civil war (*fitan*). The high ideals of public accountability led

to greater civic scrutiny and political controversy even of the later caliphs, causing increased public disorder and confusion. The puritanical Rashidun caliphate thus gave way to a more imposing, authoritarian dispensation under the Umayyad rulers (661–750 CE) and then under the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE). From the tenth century onwards, these dynasties also began to decline, bringing an end to a single caliphate controlling the entire Muslim world, as many smaller caliphates and sultanates started springing across a divided Islamdom.

Unlike the Islamist claim, the caliphate itself was not a religious institution as it was formed after the Prophet's death by his humble companions, none of whom claimed to possess any spiritual authority higher than that of the Prophet. In fact, the Quran and Hadeeth literature do not talk of any Islamic political formation like the caliphate, nor do they discuss matters of political ideology and institutions. Some scholars, like Qamaruddin Khan, argue that the term "Islamic State" (with its Arabic transliteration being *dawlah islamiyyah*) "was never used in the theory or practice of Muslim political science, before the twentieth century".¹⁰ According to Qamaruddin Khan, the claim that Islam is a harmonious blend of religion and politics is a modern misconception, which is not borne out in Islamic history. Barring the first thirty years of Islam, he asserts, the historical conduct of Muslim states cannot be distinguished from that of other states in world history.

As mentioned above, Islamism as a modern political movement came up with its theories of Islamic polity only in reaction to the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. It was also in this context that the famous dictum, "Islam is both a religion and a state" (*al-Islam deen wa dawlah*), was popularised.¹¹ It was first articulated by the Syrian-Egyptian theologian Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) in his book, *Al-Khilafa aw al-Imama al-Uzma* (The Caliphate or the Grand Imamate), published in 1924.

Abu Ala Al-Maududi (1903–79), a radical Indian Islamic scholar and founder of Jamaat-i-Islami movement, who migrated to Pakistan later in life, and Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–89) are considered to be the best proponents of this so-called concept of an Islamic state. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and ISIS claim to have respectively established Islamic states, but most of them pursue different schools and sects of Islam and do not recognise the other's claim of being Islamic polities.

For Islamists, politics is integral to the Islamic faith, which they aver is affirmed by Prophet Muhammad himself being a great nation-builder, head of the state of Madina, an astute politician and a brilliant military general. In fact, the Prophet

established the first Arab nation in history, expanding its territory that stretched across the Arabian Peninsula in his own lifetime. Therefore, Islamists argue that the spread of religion through political and military means is central to the Prophetic tradition and thereby incumbent upon the Muslim community to pursue.

Conversely, a sizeable section of Islamic scholarship holds the view that the Prophet never aspired for political power and that his becoming a nation-builder and statesman was a divinely ordained blessing, a gift from God, accorded to very few prophets before him. It is argued that had the Prophet been serious about political matters as part of his religious mission, he would have guided his followers not just on spiritual matters but political as well. Yet, he did not bring about any fundamental changes in the tribal form of governance prevalent in his time, and had no elaborate political institutions, no central court, council of ministers or any developed taxation system. There is no reference in the Quran or Hadeeth literature that may exhort Muslims to build an Islamic state or to even view the Prophet's own state as a model to be emulated for all times to come. The Prophet's divine mission was thus purely religious and not political.

Apart from delivering justice, the Prophet's own administration was characterised by the ideal of minimum governance and limited state interference in private affairs of the populace. The Prophet himself left no political treatise with his followers, nothing like an *Arthashastra* or Nizam Al-Mulk's *Siyasatnama*. On the other hand, great care was taken in the transmission and preservation of the sacred revelations of the Quran, which mainly deals with matters pertaining to spiritualism and ethics. Thus, the Prophet did not discuss, instruct or seek to preserve his political thoughts, policies and decisions. If his nascent state would have been central to his divine cause, he would have named a successor; but the Sunni majority does not even believe he ever named any person to succeed him. Therefore, political systems and institutions were apparently left for people to themselves devise in keeping with changing times and requirements.

In fact, there are several schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which have sought to codify the Shariah (Islamic law) based on their understanding of the Quran and Hadeeth literature. Even, these works of jurisprudence focus on mainly three subjects: *ibadaat* (forms of worship); *akhlāq* (morality and ethics); and *muamalat* (social conduct and commercial transactions). Matters related to politics cover only a small part in the texts of Shariah. According to *Risale-i-Nur Kulliyati*, written by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in 1909: "Ninety nine percent of the Shariah

is about ethics, worship, the hereafter and virtue. Only one percent of it is about politics.”¹²

According to the historian Antony Black, although Islam has a fairly developed theology, it does not provide any political theory.

The Reports (Hadith literature) are mostly about ritual, law, personal morality; few address political topics directly... There is hardly any *explicit* political theory in either the Reports or the early Jurists (founders of Islamic jurisprudence). This silence may lend a bit of support to the view of Abd al-Raziq that the Prophet’s priority was not founding a quasi-state, but using political power as required by circumstances for religious ends.¹³

As regards Quranic references to political issues during the Medinan phase, modern Islamic scholars like Mahmoud Mohammad Taha differentiate the two phases in the Prophet’s career (the Meccan and Medinan). According to Taha, the Meccan phase of the revelation was the phase of fundamental doctrinal enunciation, which announced universal Islamic values applicable to all times; while the latter (Medinan) phase is to be understood on the basis of specific political contexts that were forced upon the Prophet and his companions, which required provisional actions and time-specific decisions. Therefore, the Medinan verses are to be read in the context of political circumstances of their times, whereas the Meccan verses as the phase when the basic tenets of the faith and the core positions of the Shariah were originally established.¹⁴

Islamic Jurisprudence versus Medieval Muslim Polity

In this book, *Political Language of Islam*, Bernard Lewis states:

In Christendom the existence of two authorities of the church and the state go back to the founder, who enjoined his followers to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and to God the things which are God’s. Throughout the history of Christendom there have been two powers: God and Caesar, represented in this world by sacerdotium and regnum, or, in modern terms, church and state.¹⁵

However, the learned scholar contends that “[i]n westernized Islam, there were not two powers but one, and the question of separation, therefore, could not arise.”¹⁶ Perhaps, Lewis is referring to the fact that Islam never had formal and organised clergy to begin with. Therefore, there appears to be no competition

between religion and state as the two are mutually compatible in the Islamic context.

However, the reality is somewhat different. The absence of a formal church notwithstanding, Muslim society and polity have always been influenced by a highly revered community of religious scholarship (*ulema*). A careful study of Muslim history shows that the *ulema* representing the religion (*deen*) and state (*dawlah*) have, more often than not, had a contentious relationship. This tension has existed from the very time classical Islamic theology was in its formative phase. Thus, K.S. Vikør rightly observes:

...it (the Shariah) developed independently and often in opposition to the power of the state. The legal scholars...functioned quite autonomously from the ruler. In fact, the body of scholars, including the fuqaha', may well be considered to be the "civil society" of the early Islamic period.¹⁷

As would be reflected in the chapters ahead, some of the founders of classical schools of Islamic jurisprudence (who were mostly subjects of Umayyad and Abbasid empires) frequently faced persecution at the hands of their rulers. Thus, Imam Abu Hanifa (founder of the Hanafi legal school of Sunni Islam) was punished for refusing to become a judge in Baghdad and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (founder of the Hanbali school) was called before an inquisition (*mihna*) and flogged in captivity for not accepting a theological position backed by the Abbasid ruler Al-Mutasim. In addition, Shia imams were subjected to some of the most gruesome persecutions, mainly by the Umayyad and Abbasid kings. The martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the hands of the Umayyad ruler Yazid I, in Karbala in 680 CE, is a tragedy mourned by millions of Muslims of both the leading sects to this day.

In fact, the theological schools of Islamic jurisprudence (both Sunni and Shia), which sought to codify rules of the Shariah, remained mostly sceptical of political rulers and their interference in religious and even socio-political matters. These jurists—such as Abu Hanifa, Malik ibn Anas, Muhammad ibn Idris Al-Shafii, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Jafar Al-Sadiq, Sufyan Al-Thawri, Amr Al-Awzai, Ibn Hazm and many more—were careful in keeping political narratives of the contemporary rulers out of their legal texts.

Chase Robinson says that the Shariah, as codified by these legal scholars, was “more a discussion of how Muslims should behave” and not a constitution or legal framework of an Islamic state:

It defined the constitution of the Muslim community... (but) was never to be applied in full. For one thing it was impossible to enforce a system which included moral obligations as well as hard and fast rules. ...it would always be subject to the realities of political power. Rulers could not afford to permit the interpreters of the law a completely free hand...they were unlikely to think it wise, even if they had the power, to impose the sharia over local customary law.¹⁸

Even when some *ulema* and the ruling class colluded with each other and were partners in running state affairs, they often paid lip service to their adherence to the *Shariah* in politics, hiding their selective imposition of Islamic jurisprudence.

Ahmet Kuru states that over time changes were made to even Hadeeth texts to allow a rapprochement between the *ulema* and the rulers, particularly under the Abbasids, for greater social and political stability. Thus, one finds a Hadeeth text, resembling a Sassanid maxim which glorifies royalty: "Religion and royal authority are twins. Religion is a foundation and the royal authority is a guard. Anything that has no foundation collapses and that has no guard perishes."¹⁹ Many Islamic scholars suspect the validity of this Hadeeth text as the Prophet himself never claimed to be a royal, nor was there any kingdom in the Arabian Peninsula at his time, for the Hadeeth narration to seem true.²⁰ According to J. Horowitz, the adage that "kingdom and religion are two brothers; the one cannot do without the other" appears for the first time in Ibn Qutaiba's "*Uyun al-Akhbar*", a synthesis of Islamic and Persian political ideas in the 9 century AD.²¹ Thus, the idea that in Islam, state and church/clergy are not separate, is a superficial assumption derived from the study of only a few caliphates and sultanates in Muslim history.

Islam vis-à-vis Modern Nation State and Democracy

The evolution of Muslim political thought, as explored and discussed in this book, has been influenced by a variety of sources. Sometimes these sources were even of non-Islamic origin, but their ideas and narratives were cleverly incorporated into Islamic theological strands (as is evident from the political treatises of Ibn Muqaffa, Ibn Qutaiba, Nizam Al-Mulk and, to some extent, even Al-Mawardi). Some of the political discourse was also influenced by the Greek philosophical influences on *Kalaam* philosophers (*mutakallim*), like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun and others.

It is thus evident that political thought in Islam has never been static or monolithic, nor was it purely theological in its outlook, and continues to be in a

state of complex evolution. In modern times, there has been a debate on whether Islam and the Muslim community, which is spread out around the world, can be fully beholden to the ideals of a nation state. In this regard the several pertinent questions have been asked. How does Islam reconcile the sovereignty of God and his divinely ordained laws (the *Shariah*) if it contravenes or may even appear to contravene the will of a political sovereign or the ruler of a nation state?²² If Islamic law is divinely ordained, is there any room for public participation in governance, particularly in matters of legislation? How can Islamist politics be entertained or Islam itself be accepted if it does not accord non-Muslims the same rights as Muslims, nor are women accorded the same rights as men?

Curiously, these issue of compatibility between Islamic law and the modern nation state is faintly reminiscent of the contentious relationship between the *fuqaha* and despotic rulers of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates in the early Muslim centuries, albeit over different issues. In the words of Sherman Jackson:

”In the Muslim world, the problem begins with the fact that Islamic law historically precedes and transcends the State. This means that there is an entire universe of legal rights and obligations that are authoritative and deeply felt in the hearts and minds of people yet totally independent of the State. The political theory underlying the modern Nation-State is ill-equipped to deal with this. Consequently, modern Muslim States tend either to seek to co-opt the religious law or to suppress it. The result is almost invariably one or another form of Islamic “fundamentalism,” which at its core has nothing to do with “literalist interpretations,” but is a playing out of the conflict engendered by the modern State’s presumed monopoly over law in the face of large segments of the population’s recognition of other, prior and, in their view, ‘superior’ sources of law.”²³

A similar viewpoint on the question of Islam and the nation state has been argued by Wael B. Hallaq in his brilliant book, *The Impossible State*. Hallaq contends that the paradigms of “Islamic governance”, which developed over centuries of Muslim rule, and the modern nation state, as developed in the West, are incompatible with if not altogether contradictory to each other. Thus, attempts by modern Islamists to establish a so-called Islamic state is a non-starter as an “Islamic state” is a contradiction in terms. Like Sherman, Hallaq argues that the Muslim community has been governed around a culture of ethics and morality by Islamic jurists over the centuries, while the “political” domain remained confined to executive rulers of rotating dynasties.

Himself a Christian, Hallaq states that the Shariah takes “care of the self” of an individual Muslim who fashions the self as a moral being in accordance with the dictates of the Islamic law, which is in “contradistinction to the pitiable plight of the modern Western citizen whose subjectivity is fashioned by the state for its own selfish, utilitarian ends.”²⁴ Therefore, the establishment of the so-called Islamic state is not desirable as the ideals of a nation state lie beyond the pale of morality. Even prominent Indian scholar Asghar Ali Engineer states:

As far as the Quran is concerned there is, at best, a concept of a society rather than a state. The Quran lays emphasis on “*adl*” and “*ihسان*” (justice and benevolence)... It is thus debatable whether a state, declaring itself to be an Islamic state, can be legitimately be accepted as such without basing the civil society on these values.²⁵

It has also been argued that Muslims have lived under many religious and irreligious Muslim and non-Muslim sovereigns around the world from at least the tenth century onwards. Like most world religions, the “political” role of the state has not been questioned by Muslims, be it in its functions of collecting taxes, organising armies or other matters of governance. Even in non-Islamic societies, the Muslim community has found a way to morally fashion itself in line with the norms of the Shariah in organising its principles of life, while remaining loyal to the state. God is sovereign over nature, while a ruler tries to but is never able to fully extend political sovereignty over his people or territory, and thus the two cannot be compared to each other.

Besides, there are several interpretations of Islamic law—many of which are compatible with the principles of nation state. When it comes to democracy, Islamic principles like consultation (*mushwarah*), the rule of law, equality of people and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), as practised by the Prophet and most of the Rashidun caliphs, are in conformity with the ideals of democracy.²⁶ This is despite the fact that there are no democracies within the Arab world, about half of all Muslims live in democratic and semi-democratic states.²⁷

Again, many Islamist parties have successfully used parliamentary systems to their benefit and have even pushed for democratic reforms in their countries. Moreover, Islam accepts, in theory, the differences in religious beliefs and recognises that religious minorities have a right to live by their own laws, even if there is a difference of opinion among Muslims on the extent of political and religious freedoms non-Muslims can exercise.²⁸ If Christian Europe, in spite of its medieval history of totalitarian rulers, could yield democracies in the modern age, in time the Muslim world could also follow suit.²⁹

The Many Faces of Political Islam or Islamism

Today, Political Islam or Islamism does not refer merely to a radically extreme movement or jihadist groups resorting to indiscriminate violence in the name of Islam. It includes a whole host of Islamic political parties that are contesting in democratic elections, mostly in the Muslim world, with nuanced approaches on Islamist positions and issues of governance.

Moderate Islamism

A number of Islamist political parties have been participating in elections across various Muslim countries that abide by semi-democratic to democratic systems of governance, such as: Turkey (which is currently ruled by the Islamist Justice and Development Party [AKP]); Iraq (where the National Iraqi Alliance is made up of several Islamist parties); Bahrain (where the Shia Al-Wefaq and Sunni Al-Asalah parties are part of the national polity); Morocco (which has its Justice and Development Party); Indonesia (with its Prosperous Justice Party); Malaysia (with its Pan Malaysian Islamic Party, among others); the Maldives (known for its Progressive Party of Maldives); Jordan (with Islamist parties like Islamic Action Front); Kuwait (Hadas); Tajikistan (Islamic Renaissance Party); Tunisia (*Ennahda*); and Algeria (Green Algerian Alliance).

This so-called “moderate Islamism” is characterised by pragmatic participation within the existing constitutional and political framework of various countries; and even within the framework of democratic institutions around the world.³⁰ In fact, moderate Islamists make up the majority of the contemporary Islamist movements.³¹

A few broad categories of Sunni Islamist trends (covering both moderate and extremist versions) are listed next, although nearly similar gradations are also found in Shia Islamism.

Political Quietism

Political quietism refers to a trend among certain sections of the Muslim community which practise religiously motivated withdrawal from political affairs or are sceptical about the morally deficient modern Muslim being even capable of establishing a purely Islamic government.

A large number of moderate and even fundamentalist Muslims, such as the *Madkhali Salafis* in Saudi Arabia, either follow a complete withdrawal from political affairs or become loyal subjects of the ruling regimes. These loyal citizens

may believe in Islamist forms of government, but they never judge or critique the Islamic validity of their government's policies or actions.³² Extremely pious and devout followers of religion, these Islamists do not actively engage in political matters and are considered political quietists.

The so-called Salafi quietists in Saudi Arabia and other Arab states often cite the Quranic verse to justify their loyalty towards the regime: "Obey God, obey his Prophet and obey those of you who are in authority" (Quran 4:59).³³ Muhammad Nasiruddin Albani, Rabee Al-Madkhali and Sheikh Abd Al-Aziz ibn Abdullah ibn Baz are some of the noted scholars who are viewed as prominent advocates of political quietism.

In addition to Salafi quietism, almost all of *Ithna Ashariyya* Shia scholars of the Najaf Hawza in Iraq—including Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani—are considered to be "quietist", while many Sunni Sufi ascetic groups in other parts of the world are also considered political quietists.

Activists and Accommodationists

Some experts have categorised politically active but generally non-violent Islamists as activists, while those willing to be part of modern political processes and systems as accommodationists.

Non-violent Islamist groups often engage in political protests or demonstrations. In some countries, they even take part in democratic elections, at times forge coalitions with secular and socialist parties, and also form governments, such as the ruling AKP in Turkey.

Islamist activist parties and groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates, often engage in agitational politics against the entrenched monarchist leaderships in the Arab world. These Islamists sometimes are accommodative towards Western concepts, like democracy and socialism, and are not extreme or uncompromising as jihadist groups, such as the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS.

For instance, the *Ennahda* Party of Tunisia believes that democracy is compatible with its brand of Islamic political activism; and that there is no danger of diluting Islamic values and political approach in forging coalitions with secular parties over issues of common concern within a democratic framework or in accepting outcomes that entail a compromise on issues fundamental to the party's Islamist agenda.³⁴

Many of these Islamist accommodationists, like some moderate members of Muslim Brotherhood, are also known as contextualists. They believe that Islamic

norms must be considered in light of contemporary social, economic and political realities and that there is a need to study Islamic values in their historical and socio-political context. Rached Ghannouchi and to some extent former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi are cited as exemplars of the activist/ accommodationist approaches.

Radical Islamism

Some Islamist activists take a hard line when it comes to legislative issues pertaining to controversial interpretations of the Shariah, such as gender equality and rights of minority communities. More extreme political and militant groups completely shun Western ideologies and political systems, with some promoting or engaging in acts of violent extremism and terrorism. There are two categories among these radical groups, namely, legalist parties and violent non-state actors.

Legalist Parties

Some Islamists, like Qatar-based Yusuf Qaradawi, support democratic processes—for instance, elections—but remain sceptical about other aspects of Western political philosophy. Islamist legalists overtly participate in the democratic process, but often play an obstructionist role as they are unwilling to make any political concessions on even minor legislative issues on the basis of their hard-line legalist interpretation of Islam.

Violent and Non-Violent Radicals

As opposed to quietists, accommodationists or even hard-line legalists, the radical non-violent groups, like the Hizb-ut-Tahreer (HuT), or Salafi-jihadist groups, like the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS, are Islamist organisations that completely reject any form of modern political system—be it democratic liberalism, socialism or communism—and seek to establish a caliphate based on a literalist Salafi interpretation of Shariah.³⁵ The violent Islamists are generally termed as jihadists (which is an unfortunate misnomer as their violence is proscribed in Islam). These violent non-state actors are generally termed Salafi-jihadists, barring some Islamic militants in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region, like the Taliban that follow the Deobandi school, and Shia militias in West Asia, which are generally allied or supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Essential Constituents of Supposed Islamic Polity

Although there are no clearly defined constituents prescribed in the Quran for

any Islamic political system, Muslim theologians of the Middle Ages and Islamist ideologues in modern times have developed certain conceptual frameworks and features out of spiritual and ethical precepts based on: sovereignty of God and His Truth (*haq*); spirit of consultation (*mushawarah*); and the precedents of governance established by the Pious Caliphs who followed the Prophet. It should be noted that though these political concepts have been derived from religious principles, they have not been institutionalised in Islamic scriptures.

Islamic Sovereignty (Haakimiyya)

In cases of republican or democratic polity, people of a nation are the ultimate source of political power. For instance, in the case of the Republic of India, popular sovereignty is captured in the Preamble of India's Constitution, which begins by stating, "WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA," and ends with the clause, "do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION."^{36,37}

Thus, popular sovereignty in the Indian Constitution means that its citizens have the ultimate (legislative) power to make their constitution or propose amendments to it through their elected representatives to whom they delegate power.

For Islamists with a political model of an Islamic state, divine sovereignty or the "Will of Almighty Allah" and his divine laws have sovereignty over all things, including sovereignty of the state, and trumps sovereignty of the people. In theory, Allah's laws, as enunciated in Islam, are the ultimate source of (legislative) power and authority and supersede the will of the citizens in framing their own laws.³⁸

In practice, it means that laws made by a legislative body elected by the citizens would be subject to judicial review and possible invalidation if it is found to be against the "word of God" and his divine injunctions as established in the Quran. This adjudication itself may vary from one Islamic court to the other and based on the approach of the nation in interpreting divine laws (ranging from moderate to extreme positions). Thus, the rule of divine law would in principle remain incontrovertible and the foundation of the Islamic political system, albeit the scope of people's role in the legislative process may vary, based on an Islamic state's interpretation of political freedoms according by *Shariah*.

Caliphate for Sunnis, Imamate for Shias

A caliphate can be defined as a political-religious state, ideally of the entire Sunni Muslim community, with all its peoples and territories and ruled by one caliph

(who serves as the successor of the Prophet).³⁹ Thus, there can be no “caliphate” without its “caliph”, who holds both the temporal as well as the spiritual authority and leadership of the Sunni Muslim community, even though after the Rashidun Caliphs (that is, the first four successors of the Prophet) the title of caliph has been used only as a temporal leader and not in the capacity of a spiritual authority.⁴⁰

Unlike the Sunnis, followers of Shia Islam believe in an imamate and not a caliphate, and stress that that a Muslim should be an imam (religious as well as political leader) chosen by Allah from the Ahl Al-Bayt (the “Family of the House”, Muhammad’s direct descendants). However, there has also been one Shia caliphate, namely the Fatimid Caliphate of Islamili Shia rulers, in Northeast Africa (909–1171).

Many Islamic texts, particularly Hadeeth texts, refer to the coming of a great Islamic leader (the *Mahdi* or the Guided One) before the end of times. He is supposed to be elected caliph and will rule over his caliphate. His successor will be Jesus Christ, who will fulfil his promise of Second Coming, although as a Muslim king. Many Muslim leaders have fancied themselves as “*Mahdi*”.⁴¹

Eligibility and Powers of a Caliph

Although the Quran is silent about the eligibility or the prerogatives of an Islamic ruler, many Muslim political scholars have suggested the capabilities and prerogatives of an ideal caliph or ameer. Theologians, like Al-Mawardi (972–1058 CE),⁴² Ahmad Al-Qalqashandi and Al-Sharani, have emphasised that the global Muslim community can only have one Muslim political leader called a caliph. In fact, Al-Nawawi and Abd Al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad declared it impermissible to give oaths of loyalty to more than one leader.⁴³ However, the establishment of several caliphate and sultanates in Muslim world from 10th century onwards found less insistence on these absolute standards.

Again, the standard Arabian practice during the early caliphates was for the prominent men of a kinship group, or tribe, to gather after a leader’s death and elect a leader from amongst themselves. The first four caliphs were chosen from the Quraysh clan. However, the Kharijis—who rebelled against and then assassinated Ali ibn Talib, the fourth caliph, due to his decision regarding arbitration with his opponent Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan to end a war—supported an independent choice of their own caliph, outside of the Quraysh bloodline. Since then, there have been two views on the matter among Muslim theologians on whether a caliph should be from the Quraysh clan or could be any pious and

competent Muslim. Ashari scholar Baqillani (950–1013 CE) held the view that since designation of a caliph is not determined by religious text, it is left to the choice of Muslims.⁴⁴

According to the celebrated theologian and polymath Ibn Hazm (994–1064 CE), any person who has the necessary qualifications and knowledge of Islamic principles can be a ruler and a caliph. The Khariji and Mutazila schools of thought support this view.⁴⁵ Imam Maturidi (*d.* 944 CE), a Sunni imam followed by Hanafi sect in India, holds that a caliph must be pious; capable of ruling the Muslim community in a wise manner; and apart from religious knowledge, should be capable of making right decisions in the political context. Some scholars like Al-Mawardi have set the condition that the election of a caliph or an imam should be a free and fair, wherein no pressure should be applied and no sense of negligence is to be ascribed. In his *Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah* (considered a textbook on Islamic polity by many Islamists), Al-Mawardi puts forward seven eligibility conditions for a prospective caliph or imam:⁴⁶

1. He should uphold and protect justice and should have all qualities that such responsibility entails.
2. He should have knowledge which equips a caliph for making a sound *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) for arriving at relevant judgments.
3. He should be in good health.
4. He should be sound in limb.
5. He should be capable of organising the people and managing the offices of administration.
6. He should possess courage and bravery.
7. He should hail from the Meccan tribe of Quraysh.

Thus, Al-Mawardi writes in *Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah*: “One who best fulfills the conditions (listed above) from amongst these persons (other potential candidates) and one whom the people would most readily accept obedience and to whom they would not hesitate in making the oath of allegiance” is fit to be the caliph or imam.⁴⁷

Among the duties of the caliph or imam, Al-Mawardi states that he must: guard the religion in its original form and keep it free of all errors; administer legal judgement; protect the territory of Islam and defend its religious sanctuaries; establish the punishment mentioned in the Shariah; strengthen and fortify the border posts against attack and defend them with force; wage war where necessary;

and collect *zakat* taxes from those on whom the Shariah and legal judgement has made it an obligation to pay.

In addition, he discusses the process of impeachment, arguing that it should be done on charges of lack of decency and physical deficiency. Al-Mawardi defines lack of decency as moral deviation which may occur in two ways: (i) resulting from personal lust and greed; and (ii) holding dubious views that are contrary to the religious truth. He also mentions three kinds of physical deficiency: (i) deficiency in the sense; (ii) incompetence of his team members; and (iii) deficiency in the mobility.⁴⁸

The famous Muslim historian Ibn Khaldun (1334–1406 CE) has argued that the issue of politics and the caliphate is related to representing God's justice among His servants, therefore whoever is capable of providing justice when ruling Muslims should be elected as a caliph.⁴⁹

During the time of the Prophet and the four caliphs, the Quraysh were not entitled to any special privilege. In theory, a caliph is bound by several legal constraints and may not be able to rule with immunity. He has to lead an austere life and draw the salary equivalent to that of a foot soldier in the military. In theory, he should rule according to the principles of justice and implement the law among citizens equally. The caliph has to ensure justice in the state and is supposed to run the public affairs in a harmonious manner. The state is to be governed through consultation in order to check unbridled authoritarianism of the caliph. Furthermore, citizens are to ensure that the caliph and the state are strongly associated with justice, and that they do not violate the rights of any person or any group. Therefore, they need to question the state and the ruler to see if they obey the Shariah law and act in line with the principles and objectives of a just system.

It must be noted here that many of the political prescriptions presented by aforementioned Muslim theologians were made centuries after the death of the Prophet and cannot be deemed as religiously authentic political theories.

The Shura (Institution for Consultation)

For Al-Mawardi, caliphate is a contract between the caliph or imam and the people. The *majlis al-shura* (literally “consultative assembly”) is a representation of this contractual relationship and institutionalises the idea of consultative governance.⁵⁰

Ibn Taimiyyah states that the establishment of this consultative body is an

obligatory function of the state. He cites verses of the Quran, where Allah endorses the importance of counselling in decision making:

Those who answer the call of their Lord and establish the prayer; and who conduct their affairs by Shura [are loved by God]. (Quran 42:38)⁵¹

...consult them (the people) in their affairs. Then when you have taken a decision (from them), put your trust in Allah. (Quran 3:159)⁵²

However, anti-democracy Islamist ideologue Syed Qutb accepts the shura only as an advisory body;⁵³ and Taqi Al-Din Nabhani, founder of radical HuT group, does not consider the establishment of this consultative body as obligatory.⁵⁴ However, some Islamist organisations, like the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, equate the concept of majlis-e-shura with democracy, which they claim was upheld by the Prophet even when he was receiving divine revelations to support his decision making.

Status of Non-Muslims in Islamic Polity

Islamists often make specious arguments regarding the status and treatment of non-Muslim subjects in Muslim empires and states in history as being comparable to the freedoms that citizens of different faiths enjoy in modern secular democracies. Some like Sherman Jackson even contend that whereas many Western states enforce uniform secular laws on all communities, Muslim societies have always had different Muslim sects and other religious minorities follow their own laws and traditions, thus allowing legal pluralism. Therefore, they have always objected to state uniformity of a civil code.⁵⁵

This may be partially true, but there is no denying that non-Muslims have faced and continue to face discrimination in Muslim countries (ranging from slight to severe forms) and have been always subject to numerous restrictions. It is also a fact that the status of a dhimmi has always been that of a second-class citizen and most non-Muslim communities in Muslim states are forced to live a secluded life in ghettos.

Under medieval Muslim rule, *Muahid* (“person of the covenant”) and *Dhimmi* referred to a non-Muslim subject whose protection was the responsibility (or ‘dhimma’, pronounced ‘zimma’ in Urdu) of a Muslim state. Thus, the word ‘dhimmi’ meant a non-Muslim subject, who under the Muslim state’s obligation under *shariah* was given protection of life, property, as well as freedom of religion, in exchange for loyalty to the state upon payment of the *jizya* tax, in contrast to the obligatory *zakat* tax paid by Muslim subjects.

Dhimmi were theoretically exempt from certain duties assigned specifically to Muslims if they paid the poll tax (*jizya*), but were otherwise equal under the laws of property, contract and obligation. In the words of Khaled Abou El Fadl:

According to the *dhimma* status system, non-Muslims must pay a poll tax in return for Muslim protection and the privilege of living in Muslim territory. As per this system, non-Muslims are exempt from military service, but they are excluded from occupying high positions that involve dealing with high state interests, like being the president or prime minister of the country. In Islamic history, non-Muslims did occupy high positions, especially in matters that related to fiscal policies or tax collection.⁵⁶

Islamic legal systems based on Shariah law incorporated the religious laws and courts of Christian, Jews and Hindus, as seen in the early caliphate, Al-Andalus, Indian subcontinent and the Ottoman millet system. However, Mughal rulers in India barring Aurangzeb did not impose *jizya*.

In this regard, Islamists often cite the Prophet's saying documented in Hadeeth texts: "He who tortures a dhimmi is like the one who has counteracted him (the Prophet). I shall counteract against him (he who tortures a *dhimmi*) on the Day of Judgment who has counteracted him."⁵⁷

In foreign relations, the early caliphates developed rules of state conduct (*al-siyar*) in war and peace. The major divisions in global geopolitics under Abbasid rulers were: *dar al-Islam* (literally, territory of Islam/voluntary submission to God), denoting regions where Islamic law prevails; *dar al-sulb* (literally, territory of treaty), denoting non-Islamic lands which have concluded an armistice with a Muslim government; and *dar al-harb* (literally, territory of war), denoting adjoining non-Islamic lands whose rulers are called upon to accept Islam.⁵⁸

Women's Place in Politics

Traditional Islamic scholars believe that women are not entitled to hold leadership positions and certainly not the topmost public office of a nation. The Quran asks of the Prophet's wives (*nisa an-nabi*) to stay quietly at home and desist from making dazzling displays of their beauty as was the norm in times of primitive ignorance (Quran 33:33). The oft-quoted Hadeeth regarding women's leadership is that the Prophet (S) is reported to have said: "Never will succeed such a nation as lets their affairs carried out by a woman' (Sahih al-Bukhari, 4425; Sunan of An-Nasai, 8/227)."⁵⁹

However, some contemporary jurists have questioned the authenticity of the aforesaid Hadeeth text on the basis of its weak chain of narrators, while others have said that the whole Hadeeth was spoken in the context of the daughter of a Persian king (Khusrau), who was made the queen but was not considered competent by many. They point out that the Hadeeth contradicts the Quran's praise for Queen of Sheba for her just rule.

It is also noteworthy that many Islamic jurists of the fiqh, such as Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam al-Tabari and Ibn Hazm, support the idea that women can hold the topmost judicial position. Ibn Hazm goes to the extent of asserting that there is no theoretical prohibition for women to carry out even the mission of prophethood and there could have been women prophets before the birth of Prophet Muhammad.

Curiously, Hadeeth literature provides numerous examples of women having public leadership roles. The Prophet's first wife, Khadija bint Khuwaylid, was a trader and businesswoman. His other wife, Aisha, was stated to be an authority in medicine, history and rhetoric. She even accompanied the Prophet to battles and led an army against Ali at the Battle of the Camel.⁶⁰

Therefore, the debate on women's role in Muslim politics is slightly more nuanced than is generally understood. According to Ibn Rushd, women could be warriors and even philosopher-rulers.⁶¹ Ibn Rushd opposed the subordination of women in his own society and believed it was wrong, based on ignorance, and contributed to economic backwardness:

The competence of women is unknown, however, in these cities since they...are placed at the service of their husbands and confined to procreation, upbringing and suckling. This nullifies their [other] activities...Women in these cities are not prepared with respect to any of the human virtues...Their being a burden upon the men in these cities is one of the causes of the poverty of these cities.⁶²

Among the modern Islamists, Maududi is among the most regressive when it comes to women's rights. Surprisingly, controversial Sudanese leader Hasan Al-Turabi (1932–2016) has championed equality for women in marriage, including monogamy and an equal right to divorce, and equality for women in education.⁶³ Many modern feminists have praised Islamic scholar Fazlur Rahman Malik's positive views on women.⁶⁴

Structure of the Book

Given the historical length of the evolution of Muslim political thought in two distinctive geospatial zones, West Asia and South Asia, which sets the full scope of this academic endeavour, the book has been divided into four parts.

The present chapter comes under Part I, “Introduction”, and covers the defining characteristics and debates surrounding the issue of what the term Political Islam means in the context of the evolution of political thought in Muslim history. The chapter also tries to look into the models of so-called Islamic governance in medieval and modern times, as well as the status of non-Muslims and women in those formulations. It further seeks to explore some dialectical themes that have dogged Muslim political thought over the centuries, which are explored at length in the remainder of the book.

Part II, “History of Muslim Political Thought in West Asia and Africa”, covers 14 chapters under six subsections, covering over 14 centuries of political dialectic in the Muslim world, from the time of the Prophet and the caliphate to their dubious twenty-first century political adaptations by groups like the ISIS, and their criticism by both Islamic and liberal scholars.

Part III, “History of Muslim Political Thought in South Asia”, covers five chapters under two subsections dedicated to the journey of Islam in the Indian subcontinent, from the time of the advent of Muslim traders in south India’s eastern coastline to the political and strategic outlook of Turkic and Central Asian dynasties in India in medieval times and finally, the rise of radical reformist and fundamentalist Muslim political movements in the wake of British rule of India until the post-Partition twenty-first century South Asia.

Part IV, “Epilogue”, has one chapter titled, “Parallel and Distinctive Political Currents in West Asia and South Asia”. Based on the knowledge derived from earlier chapters, it surmises how Islam entered India not as a religion with its pristine egalitarian message, but as an imperialist power out to conquer a non-Muslim civilisation.

Still, Islamic polity in India grew from the eleventh to twelfth century onwards, virtually independent of any Arab sovereign—caliph or sultan—and was relatively less troubled by Mongol invaders, both non-Muslim and Muslims, than their West Asian counterparts following the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate. The killing of the last Abbasid Caliph with the sack of Baghdad in 1258 forced many Arab, Persian and Turkic scholars, savants, bureaucrats, artists and nobleman to flee these Islamic lands and seek the protection of the Delhi sultans. In fact,

Muslim conquerors of Central Asia applied a system of religious stratification and ethnic segregation of their own, even among members of the Muslim community in the country.

Thus, over a period of time, Islam in South Asia developed its own theological schools, such as Deobandi and Bareilvi, and even its own reformist and radical movements, like the apolitical Tableegh-i-Jamaat and the politically oriented Jamaat-i-Islami, founded by Maududi. In this way, Islam came into its own in South Asia and developed several strands, more independent from its Arab heartland. Today, South Asia has the world's largest Muslim population of about 600 million.⁶⁵ In fact, four out of the eight countries of South Asia, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan, have Islam as their state religion and have Muslim populations in majority.

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PART II
HISTORY OF MUSLIM POLITICAL
THOUGHT IN WEST ASIA, AFRICA

*THE PROPHET AND THE
“PIOUS CALIPHS”*

2

The Prophet and His Divine Mission

Muhammed, unlike the founders of other religions, triumphed during his lifetime. Moses did not reach the Promised Land, Jesus was crucified. Muhammed did not suffer either of these disagreeable things. He conquered the Promised Land and became its ruler.

—Bernard Lewis¹

Notwithstanding this laudatory appraisal by an eminent Orientalist academic, most Islamic scholars do not consider Prophet Muhammad's phenomenal political success as the right yardstick for measuring his greatness. For them, the Prophet is, first and foremost, the Messenger of God ('*Rasulullah*'), whose triumph lies in being the conveyor of God's immaculate revelation in the form of the Quran and for being the finest paragon of the scripture's teachings in its human form.

It is noteworthy that in times before Prophet's birth, the Arabian Peninsula did not have a major political state. At that time, as stated by Maxime Rodinson: "Arabs were bound by no written code of law, and no state existed to enforce its statutes with the backing of a police force. The only protection for a man's life was the certainty established by custom, that it would be dearly bought."²

Thus, Prophet Muhammad was not merely the founder of a religion but also a nation-builder, in that he united the many tribes of the Arabian Peninsula into a single nation for the first time in history. Earlier, the tribes had fought frequently with each other in the name of their respective tribal deities, but now, led by an

exemplary leader (the Prophet), they bowed to a single formless God and were guided by an Arabic scripture, namely, the Quran.

As Herbert Muller put it succinctly, “In Mohammed’s Arabia there was no state—there were only scattered independent tribes and towns. The Prophet formed his own state, and he gave it a sacred law prescribed by Allah.”³ By binding the Arab tribes together under a single faith, the Prophet established a nation, which went on to change the course of human history.

Although the Prophet ruled the city state of Medina, which eventually expanded to cover the entire Arabian Peninsula within less than a decade, he never held any formal political rank or position (as he only described himself as ‘*Rasulallah*'). Even when he ruled much of Arabia, he formed no cabinet of ministers or elaborate government apparatus working under him. He shunned walking with a large entourage around him and lived an abstemious life in a hut at Medina, with walls of unbaked clay and a thatched roof of palm leaves covered by camel skin. Indeed, when he died, there was little found in his humble abode, except for a few seeds of barley left from a mound of grain.⁴

In the words of Reverend Bosworth Smith:

He (Prophet Muhammad) was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without Pope’s pretensions, Caesar without the legions of Caesar: without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a palace, without a fixed revenue; if ever any man had the right to say that he ruled by the right divine, it was Muhammad, for he had all the power without its instruments and without its supports.⁵

More than establishing a state, the Prophet believed in establishing a community of equals, without differences of race, ethnicity, wealth or culture. Good conduct inspired by piety and consciousness of God, called *taqwa*, was made the measure of a person’s superiority over the others. Prophet’s companions used to follow his example in their conduct and were asked not to even stand up in reverence on his arrival, as he disliked it.⁶

While in Mecca, the Prophet forbade violence in self-defence; but in Medina, as the head of the city state, he engaged in conventional warfare to defend the city state. During war, he stuck to rules of engagement that barred killing of non-combatants (particularly women, children and elderly) as well as stealing.⁷ A great general who marshalled his forces in the battlefield, the Prophet never personally engaged in active combat.

Surprisingly, many of the Prophet’s remarkable political and diplomatic

accomplishments, as well as his genius to strike a compromise for the sake of greater peace and prosperity in society, could put many of the bigoted Islamist assumptions to shame. Some of these political positions and stances are detailed next.

Stateless Arabia: Hemmed in by Byzantine, Sassanid Empires

Before the coming of Islam, tribal culture of the nomadic Bedouin people dominated the Arab society. Scattered around the Arabian Desert, the tribe was the basis of all that existed with regards to political and social system. There were no written laws or constitutions, and latter-day Arab Muslims called this pre-Islamic time *Jahiliyya* (period of ignorance).⁸

Members of every tribe formed independent units, but were believed to have descended from a common ancestor and were bound by kinship ties. The patrilineal tribe was subdivided into clans, constituting members of the immediate family that, at least figuratively, lived under a single tent. People belonging to other tribes were treated as foreigners. The tribes zealously protected their members against people of other tribes and nomads. Thus, tests of strength, raids and skirmishes were frequent occurrences.

Each tribe was governed by a council of adult men (*al-mala'*) which selected a tribal chief, generally called a *shaykh* or *sayyid*, from a noble family, known for his bravery, generosity and wisdom. The duties of the tribal chief were to settle disputes between members of the tribe, lead it in war and make confederations (*alaf*) with other tribes when necessary. When there were disputes between tribes, attempts were made to resolve them by negotiations or by presentation to an arbitrator, *hakam*. The arbitrator usually did not belong to a particular class, and the parties were free to choose anyone to judge the issue. However, the problem was that there was no executive power that might effectively enforce the agreements among tribes, which led to a state of constant feuds and battles among the tribes.⁹

Owing to the difficult life in the desert, the Arabs never had a glorious history of civilisation, as the Romans and the Persians. Their nomadic lifestyle may not have allowed them to develop architecture, sculpture or painting, but they did conceive the art of poetry. Reasonably developed even before the coming of Islam, the Jahili poetry is still recited and appreciated for its literary merit by Arabic litterateurs, particularly the work of its great poet Imru' Al-Qays. In the words of Arthur Goldschmidt:

Pre-Islamic poetry embodied the Arab code of virtue, the "*muruwwa*":

bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge (the only justice possible at a time when no government existed), protection of the weak, defiance toward the strong, hospitality toward the visitor (even a stranger), generosity to the poor, loyalty to the tribe, and fidelity in keeping promises. These were the principles people needed to survive in the desert, and the verses helped them to fix the “*muruwwa*” in their mind.¹⁰

The empires neighbouring the Arabian Desert on the eve of the rise of Islam made the political situation even more complex. The peninsula was often ravaged by wars between three main tribes: the Ghassanids, the Lakhmids, and the Kinda tribes.¹¹

Although much of pre-Islamic Arabia was nomadic, new cities started coming up in the desert due to multiple reasons. The pirates in the Red Sea made maritime trade risky, giving way to overland trade between Syria and Yemen. The Byzantine–Sassanid wars also diverted trade towards Western Arabia. One such city was Mecca, set among the mountains of Hejaz. The city had religious sites, such as Mount Arafat and the Kaaba (a cube-shaped structure that housed 360 idols of various Arab deities), and an annual poet’s fair at Ukaz.¹²

Around the fifth century, the tribe of Quraysh rose in Mecca and became the dominant merchants and traders. During the sixth century, they joined the lucrative spice trade, and Mecca became more prominent as a trading centre that surpassed the cities of Petra and Palmyra in the north. Following the rise of Islam, the Kaaba in Mecca became the most sacred place in Islam. The other prominent cities in the region were Yathrib (later known as Medina) and Najran in Yemen.

In terms of religion, most Bedouin tribes practised polytheism in the form of idolatry and animism. After Emperor Constantine conquered the ancient city of Byzantium in 324 CE, Christianity spread to Arabia, and several Bedouin tribes embraced the faith. In the client kingdom of Byzantine, the Ghassanid tribe followed Christianity, while the Lakhmid tribe that served as a buffer between Central Arabia and the Sassanids converted to Nestorian Christianity.¹³

There was also a centre of Christianity in the southern city of Najran, which adopted Monophysitism. In addition, there were Arab Jews who spoke Arabic, as well as Hebrew and Aramaic, and had ties with Jewish religious centres in Babylonia and Palestine. There were 21 Jewish tribes during the Prophet’s rise, mainly centred in Yathrib, Khaybar and Tayma. Zoroastrianism also existed, mainly in the Najd region and south of the Arabian Peninsula. Reportedly, people also practised some version of Manichaeism or even Mazdakism in Mecca.¹⁴

Prophet's Community of Equals

Prophet Muhammad began his religious mission relatively late in life. He was 40 years old when he received the first revelation of the Quranic verses. Unlike Moses and Jesus, Muhammad was not born into a community of believers waiting for their saviour. The Quran states that God instructed the initially hesitant man to preach the revealed message, and to gradually build a religious community of ardent believers in a society whose beliefs were at variance with those of the new faith. An orphaned, uneducated man, who eventually married an elderly affluent widow, the Prophet's honest and impeccable character earned him respectability in Mecca. However, he did not hold any rank of prominence in the society at the beginning of his Prophetic mission.¹⁵

The Prophet called his religion Islam, which he said had the same teachings of earlier prophets, like Noah, Abraham, Moses and even Jesus. Islam called for the worship of only one transcendent God (whose name in Arabic is Allah), beyond human comprehension. It considered all of humanity, including its many races, ethnicities, nations, and the children of Adam—the first human as well as the first Prophet—as equal. Every human being was answerable to God for his/her deeds on the Day of Judgement that would come after the eventual end of the world.¹⁶ This universalism of Islam, which places ethical human conduct above racial, ethnic, financial or even intellectual sense of superiority, is one of the reasons for its continued appeal and makes it among the fastest growing religions in the world.¹⁷

After declaring himself Prophet, Muhammad preached in Mecca for thirteen years and built a community of disciplined followers, who were trained not to retaliate against any verbal or physical assault. During this early phase of non-violent preaching, the Prophet and his followers faced intense persecution. As each community strives to retain its core identity and sticks to its dogma and belief system, it comes into conflict—non-violent or violent—with the identity and dogmas of pre-existing communities. The subsequent political jostling for recognition and acceptance, if not outright domination, in the wider society is as typical to Islam as to any other religious community.

The more fundamentally divergent and antithetical the core differences in spiritual beliefs between rival communities become, the more viscerally contentious the ensuing power struggle is. Thus, religions, whose central premise is spirituality, almost invariably develop a political dimension. In the case of the Meccan elite, they opposed Prophet Muhammad because of his religion's egalitarian message

that threatened their sway over power and wealth. A new mass consciousness also questioned the significance of the old and anarchic socio-political order.

The Prophet began his religious mission by first preaching his message to his family members, with his wife Khadija becoming his first follower, while his 10-year-old cousin Ali became the first male to embrace Islam. Coming from different classes and tribes of Arab society, the early Muslims primarily belonged to the poorer sections of society, including slaves. There were also people from the upper to upper middle strata, such as the Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman.

Islam became the first religion to give women property and divorce rights (albeit the latter provision has been seldom used in Muslim history). The Prophet also encouraged the manumission of slaves as an act of piety and led by personal example by making Zayd ibn Harith (a slave gifted to him by his rich wife) a freeman and his son, declaring him to be the heir to his property. Thus, Islam introduced many humanitarian values in society ahead of time.

These steps were often taken incrementally; through a gradual approach to preparing the society for reforms. For example, the complete prohibition on the consumption of liquor only came after several Quranic verses warned against its use over some time. Likewise, the incremental steps towards better treatment of slaves (even their manumission) and greater empowerment of women proved necessary to avoid their outright rejection. Even the Age of Enlightenment in Europe and the US took a long and tortuous route to end slavery and accord equal status to women in society.¹⁸

Mithaq Al-Madina: Pluralistic Constitution of Medina

According to Muslim scholars, Prophet Muhammad did not seek leadership but was called to it. For one, the middle-aged unlettered merchant of Mecca had little wealth and status when he started his religious mission. Far from being sanguine on first receiving the divine revelation, his early biographers report that he was in a state of shock and was even sceptical about the veracity of the divine revelation, but was comforted and counselled by his wife, Khadija, who knew her husband was too righteous to be misled. It was only after a few more revelations over several months that Prophet Muhammad was convinced that the divine revelation asking him to preach the word of God was real. Thus, the Prophet appeared to have no personal ambition, nor any sound prospects of succeeding, while undertaking the divine mission.¹⁹

Even when the Prophet had built a strong community of followers in Mecca,

he refused to take political power from the Meccan elite (particularly the offer of Utbah ibn Rabiah), who asked him to compromise on his faith in exchange for becoming the ruler of Mecca. At that time, the Prophet responded by saying that God had not sent him for this purpose (that is, to become a political leader), but only to spread His message.²⁰

His migration to Medina, to avoid persecution and the various attempts on his life in Mecca, happened after most of his followers had left for Abyssinia and Medina as refugees. The delegates of two powerful feuding tribes of Khazraj and Aws in Yathrib (Medina) had invited the Prophet to migrate to their city and become their arbitrator (Second Pledge of Al-Aqaba). In the words of F.E. Peters, when the Prophet migrated to Medina, the population was “a mixture” (*akhlāt*) of many different tribes (predominantly Arabic and Jewish).²¹ These tribes had been fighting for nearly a century, causing “civil strife”, and it was for this reason that they assigned the role of an arbitrator to the Prophet. Thus, the Prophet never tried to grab political power, as many Islamists and jihadists claim is a religious injunction, but it came to him during his Prophetic mission.

On reaching Yathrib, the Prophet drew up *Mithaq Al-Madina*. Some Muslim historians, like Muhammad Hamidullah, claim that it was the first written constitution of the world.²² The document ensured freedom of religious belief for every community in Medina and established the rule of law, similar to the Magna Carta of 1215 CE. According to Robert Crane, a former foreign policy advisor to Richard Nixon, this written document was a covenant:

When the various tribes living in Madina invited the Prophet Muhammad to become their leader as a means to overcome their inter-tribal rivalries and bring peace, prosperity, and freedom, there was no such thing as a state in the modern sense. In fact, such a modern concept was not invented until more than a thousand years later, even though there were empires, like the Persian, Chinese, and Incas, based on the modern concept of might makes right. In the Covenant of Madina, the various autonomous tribes were incorporated in a single confederation with common rights and responsibilities. The Prophet called this confederation an *umma* or single community composed of different ethnic and religious *ummas* as sub-groups.²³

The word *umma* in the Medina charter referred to all the ethnic and religious tribes in Medina, including those who were Jewish and polytheists.^{24,25} This reflected pluralism, both in the content and the document’s history. As explained

by Peters, “the contracting parties, although they did not embrace Islam, did recognize the Prophet’s authority, accepting him as the community leader and abiding by his political judgments”.²⁶ The constitution established the collective responsibility of constituent tribes, including the population of *muhajir* (migrant) Muslims from Mecca, appointing Prophet Muhammad as the mediating authority between groups, and forbade the waging of war without his authorisation.

According to *Mithaq Al-Madina*, non-Muslims had the following rights on the condition they “follow” the Prophet as the arbitrator:

1. The security of God was equal for all groups.
2. Non-Muslim members had the same political and cultural rights as Muslims. They had autonomy and freedom of religion.
3. Non-Muslims could take up arms against the enemy of the nation and share the cost of war. There was to be no treachery between the two.
4. Non-Muslims were not obliged to take part in the Muslims’ religious wars.²⁷

Much has been made of the Prophet being harsh to three Jewish tribes in Medina—the Banu Qurayzah, the Banu Nadir and the Banu Qunayqa—because of their alleged betrayal and treasonous activity during the time of the Battle of Khandaq, as well as rebellion and attempted assassination of the Prophet. However, it should be noted that other Jewish tribes named in the Constituion of Medina, namely, Banu Alfageer, Banu Awf, Banu Harith, Banu Jusham, Banu Qudaa and Banu Shutayba, continued to remain in the city.²⁸ According to several Hadeeth renditions, the Prophet died while his armour was still pawned to a Jew in Medina in place of some food he received for his family. This shows that the community of Jews continued to thrive in Medina even at the time of his death.

Late in life, when the Prophet led the Tabuk campaign in 630 CE, he sent letters to four rebellious towns in northern Hejaz and Palestine to stop maintaining a military force, and instead ensure their security by paying taxes. It is in this context that the Quranic verse (9:29) was revealed.²⁹ Later, in the Abbasid era, these taxes (*jizya*) were turned into a poll tax levied on all non-Muslim subjects.³⁰

Prophet’s Endorsement of Non-Muslim Legislation: “*Hilf Al-Fudul*” (Pact of the Virtuous)

It is surprising that many extremist Islamist and jihadist groups either ignore or outright reject the *Mithaq Al-Medina* (particularly terrorist groups like the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS). Even traditional Muslim theologians do not accord

importance to this cornerstone of the Prophet's political achievements, even as they speak of establishing "*Nizam-e-Mustafa*" (system of governance under Prophet Muhammad).

Most radical Islamists despise international treaties and global institutions of peace, claiming that these institutions follow non-Islamic principles and are run by non-Muslims, which runs counter to the teachings of Islam. Perhaps, the Islamists need to be told about the Prophet's endorsement of the charter of *Hilf Al-Fudul*, which was ratified by pre-Islamic Arabs, for upholding the rule of law and social justice.

According to the early biographies of the Prophet, when he was about 20 years of age (around the year 590 CE), much before his mission of prophethood began, a Yemeni merchant from Zabid was wronged in a trade transaction by a rich and influential Meccan trader. On the plea of the wronged Yemeni merchant, Meccan and non-Meccan chiefs under Abdullah ibn Jada'an established a treaty and pledged to: (i) respect the principles of justice irrespective of the social or tribal status of the person wronged; and (ii) collectively intervene in conflicts to establish justice.³¹

This pact, generally known as *Hilf Al-Fudul*, was held sacred and inviolable and its document was hung on the Kaaba's walls. Although it was drawn by pre-Islamic polytheists, many of whom did not become Muslims even after the coming of Islam, Prophet Muhammad upheld the charter and its laws of justice and resolution of conflicts even after he became the Prophet of Islam.³²

According to a Hadeeth tradition reported as authentic (*sahih*), Talha ibn Abdullah reported that the Prophet said:

I witnessed a pact of justice in the house of Abdullah ibn Jud'an (the *Hilful Fudul*) that was more beloved to me than a herd of expensive red camels. If I were called to it now in the time of Islam, I would respond.³³

In another *sahih* Hadeeth text, Ibn Abbas reported that the Prophet said, "Every just pact from pre-Islamic times is not increased by Islam but in strength and affirmation."³⁴

Similarly, Husayn ibn Ali (the grandson of the Prophet) once asked the Madinan governor to take up his case to the members of *Hilf Al-Fudul* in order to get justice, which shows that this institution was respected much after the Prophet's death. Thus, it is evident that the institution established in pre-Islamic times continued much after the Prophet's death.³⁵

Modern Islamic jurists equate institutions related to international law and human and animal rights—such as the United Nations (UN) and other humanitarian international bodies—as legitimate organisations and urge Muslim states to participate as responsible members of such institutions in the spirit of *Hilf Al-Fudul*. For radical groups to reject the UN Charter due to it being formulated by non-Islamic powers and sources is disproved by the Prophet’s adherence to humanitarian non-Muslim treaties.

10 Year Peace Treaty with Polytheistic Mecca: “*Sulh Al-Hudaybiyyah*”

As Medina’s head, the Prophet often made bold conciliatory gestures towards his adversaries to achieve peace and harmony in society. Just after the Meccan forces lost the three battles they launched on Medina following the Prophet’s migration to that city, the Prophet offered an olive branch to the then polytheistic Mecca, the city of his birth.

Far from launching any reprisal attack on Mecca, he wore the *ihram* (single cloth garment worn to perform circumambulation of the Holy Kaaba) and as a pilgrim stood with his followers at Hudaybiyyah, a place close to Mecca, seeking the holy city’s permission to perform the *umrah* pilgrimage (“lesser pilgrimage” to Kaaba in any month other than the Dhul Hijjah month allocated for Hajj pilgrimage).³⁶

The leaders of Mecca denied him permission and instead forced him to sign an unfavourable treaty against his forces. The Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted it, much to the chagrin of his closest companions. Though the Prophet’s forces were numerically powerful and had emerged triumphant after the Battles of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq, he accepted the unfavourable conditions for the sake of peace. He struck out his title, Messenger of God, from the treaty document on the instructions of the Meccans as a gracious gesture. This treaty is known as *Sulh Al-Hudaybiyyah*.³⁷

He then peacefully retreated to Medina without performing the pilgrimage as per the requirements of the treaty document and agreed to perform the pilgrimage next year. Thus, the Prophet showed his great humility and strength of character in the pursuit of peace. Himself a courageous warrior, he demonstrated to the Muslims that it takes more bravery to follow the path of peace than war.

The Prophet is also known for extending his support to other non-Muslims, such as Christians. It is evident from the document known as “Muhammad’s Ashtiname”,³⁸ which he sent to the St Catherine Monastery in Sinai, present-day

Egypt. According to it, the Prophet granted protection and other privileges to the followers of Jesus worldwide. The document concludes by saying: “The Muslims must protect them (the Christians) and defend them against others. It is positively incumbent upon every one of the followers of Islam not to contradict or disobey this oath until the Day of Resurrection and the end of the world.”³⁹

In addition, the Prophet graciously accepted diplomats, envoys and leaders from various states and religious institutions, and accorded them respect and place of residence next to his own house and mosque. He invited many rulers to embrace Islam, such as the Byzantine ruler Heraclius, the Negus of Abyssinia and Khusrau II of the Sassanid Empire (Persia), some of which are still extant.

Prophet of Religion, not Politics

The Prophet was able to unite the feuding desert tribes of Arabia under the banner of Islam. His political life was subsidiary to his larger religious mission, and his state was not the conventional empire of his times, nor by any stretch the state as we understand it today. In a kind of religious republicanism, his rule brought everybody under God’s rule; and the latter’s divine decree. His was an egalitarian social and political order, where he used to consult with his companions on matters of governance and strategy when there was no divine revelation regarding the matter.

The spirit of consultation (shura), suitable to tribal and democratic societies and exhorted in the Quran, was a key feature of his rule. In the words of Barnaby Rogerson:

The Prophet scrupulously respected the legal basis of his position in Medina. If there was a campaign being sent beyond the oasis, the Prophet would exhort the people of Medina to volunteer for battle, he might even try to shame them, but he would never command them to go. His leadership over the men of Medina was inspirational, never absolutist, and was always the more powerful because of this.⁴⁰

Islamic literature concentrates more on theology than political aspects. Consequently, Islamic political thought has incorporated, modified and challenged Arab customs, Jewish law, Persian statecraft, Hellenistic philosophy, Christian theology and European and American culture throughout its long and tortuous journey. Apart from certain broad principles on the sovereignty of God, justice and rule of divine law (concepts that have been differently interpreted by Muslim scholars over the centuries), there is no clearly defined political theory or system.

Overview of Islam: Beliefs, Rituals and Worship, Sects and Schools

Prophet Muhammad never claimed he was starting a new religion. He called himself the last Messenger of the One and Only God (named 'Allah' in Islam's holy book, Al-Quran). The name he gave to his religion is Islam (which means 'peace', achieved through submission to Allah) and the followers are called Muslims. Belief in the oneness of God (or *Allah*) is central to Islam and is called *tauheed*, wherein nothing can be associated with *Allah* in belief, worship or suppliance, and associating anything with Allah or his attributes is considered the biggest, unpardonable sin (*shirk*).

According to Islam, the message of strict monotheism (doctrine that there is only one God) and righteous action was taught by Allah to mankind through his many human prophets sent by Allah down the ages across various regions of the world and Muhammad is the last of these prophets. Muslims have to believe in the institution of Prophethood (*Risala*). In fact, the first prophet was Adam (the first man) himself, who was guided by God during his life on earth to teach the religion to his children. Most of the prophets named in the Quran are also mentioned in the Bible, thus Noah in the Arabic Quran is called Nuh, Abraham is Ibrahim, Job is Ayub, Moses is Musa, David is Dawood, John is Yahya, Jesus is Eisa and so on. According to Islam, all these prophets were humans and not gods or angels, but as they were divinely guided every step of their way they remained sinless. None of the prophets had supernatural powers and even their miracles were in reality performed by the one and only God named Allah. Therefore, Islam forbids the worship of prophets as gods or deities. All the prophets are known as *nabi*, some of them held the additional rank of *rasul* (messenger). A 'rasul' is a special 'nabi', enjoying a higher status, as he comes with a new law for his people and even judgement against evildoers of his time from God.

Muslims believe in divine scriptures (*Kutub*) revealed to prophets by Allah. Thus, Moses being a 'rasul' was revealed the Torah or 'Taurat' by Allah, David was revealed the Psalms or 'Zubur', Jesus was revealed the 'Injil' and Muhammad the 'Quran' (the last, uncorrupted word of God). Muslims believe that all divine scriptures preceding the Quran have been corrupted, partially lost or burnt, altered or interpolated by humans, and thus only the Quran (the final, inerrant revelation of Allah that is still preserved in its pristine purity) should be followed by Muslims. In fact, the Quran is safeguarded in its uncreated, pristine and eternal form in the well-protected tablet '*Al-Lawh-Al-Muhfuz*' in the heavens, and its verses were only gradually revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by Angel 'Jibrail' (known to

Christians as ‘Gabriel’) over his 23-year-long prophetic mission on earth, beginning in 610 (when he received his first verses) and ending at the time of his death in 632 CE.

Muslims separate the verses which the Prophet received from Allah through the agency of angel Jibrail, and compiled in the Quran as divinely revealed verses, from the Prophet’s personal sayings, deeds and conduct, which are called Sunnah. The Sunnah traditions were orally memorized or better still imbibed in personal conduct by early Muslims, but were later written down and compiled as Hadeeth collections by several scholars known as *muhaddithun*. Thus, Quran is a sacrosanct divine text, while written Hadeeth records only supplement the Quran and help in better understanding the Quran’s intended meaning. Thus, while Quran has been assiduously memorised as well as preserved in its written form right from the time of the Prophet and the authorised version was issued in the rule of the third caliph, Uthman, Hadeeth literature only started getting collected, compiled and documented after over a century of the Prophet’s death by various compilers, with the Sunni and the Shia sects having different set of compilations.

Muslims believe in the existence of angels (*malaik*) that serve as agents of Allah and never oppose him. They also believe in jinns (which are another set of invisible creatures) that, unlike angels, exercise free will and shall therefore be judged on the Day of Judgement alongside humans. Muslims believe in ‘*qayamah*’ (the day of doom, followed by the day of judgement), after which both humans and jinn will either receive eternal reward for their godly and morally upright conduct in *Jannah* (Paradise) or shall suffer eternal damnation for their ungodly and immoral deeds in *Jahannam* (Hell). This belief in the Hereafter (*ma’ad*) is integral to Islam’s founding beliefs or articles of faith (*aqaid*).

Incumbent acts of worship in Islam include: profession of faith (shahada); offering of ceremonial prayer or *salat* (also known as *namaz* in Iran and in the Indian subcontinent) at least five prescribed times a day; *sawm* or fasting (known as *roza* in Iran and the subcontinent) during the holy month of Ramadan (pronounced as “Ramzan” in its Persianate form in the subcontinent); *zakah* (or alms for the Muslim needy); and the performance of the Haj pilgrimage to the Kaaba in Mecca and the Prophet’s city of Medina at least once in lifetime. *Dawah* (invitation to non-Muslims to join the faith) and jihad are not *fard al-ain* (incumbent at all times), with jihad becoming incumbent only when the ameer (or ruling authority) declares it so.

Over the centuries, Islam suffered from internal schisms and got divided into

Sunni and Shia sects. This split occurred following the debate over political succession after the Prophet's death wherein the supporters of the Prophet's household (*Ahl Al-Bayt*) claimed that Imam Ali ibn Talib (who was the husband of Prophet's daughter, Fatima bint Muhammad) and his sons were denied their legitimate right to become the leaders of the Muslim community by the first three caliphs — Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. While a large majority of Muslims (later known as *Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaat* or simply Sunni) believed that the Prophet had left Quran and his Sunnah as guidance for the community after him and regarded the first four Caliphs (including Ali ibn Talib) as *Khulafa-i-Rashidun* (Rightly Guided Caliphs), the *Shiatul Ali* (the Partisans of Ali) group, simply known as Shia, believed that the Prophet had expressly stated that the Quran and his own household (*Ahl Al-Bayt*) should guide and lead the community after him. Over a period of time, the two sects interpreted the Quran and the Prophetic tradition in their own separate ways, giving birth to distinct theologies and legal systems, although the core Islamic beliefs (the aforementioned aqaid of '*tauheed*', '*rislalah*', '*kutub*', '*malaik*', '*ma'ad*') of the two sects remained largely similar.

The formations of these sects coincided with the period of the collection of Hadeeth literature and codification of Islamic law by Muslim jurists, after almost a century of the Prophet's death. The process of interpreting and codifying Islamic law (*Shariah*) in a written and documented form based on the injunctions of the Quran and supported by the Prophet's precedents as found in the Hadeeth literature produced different schools (singular *madhab*, pl. *madhabib*) of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in Sunni sect (the four extant being Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki and Hanbali), while the Shia followed the Jafari school, and the ostracised Islamic sect of Kharajites developed its versions, culminating in the extant Ibadi school.

NOTES

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- 3 Herbert J. Muller, *The Loom of History*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958, p. 271.
- 4 "Abu Hurairah says: 'Allah's Messenger left this world without satisfying his hunger even with barley bread.'" *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, translated in English by M. Muhsin Khan, Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, Book 70, Hadeeth 42, 1997.
- 5 R. Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, US: Book Tree, 2002, p. 235.
- 6 "Anas ibn Malik reported: 'There was no person more beloved to the companions than the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him. When they saw him coming, they would not stand up because they knew he disliked that.'" *Jami Al-Tirmidhi*, translated by Abu Khaliyl, Darussalam, Riyadh, KSA, 2007.

- 7 “Set out for Jihad (militant version) only for the sake of Allah. Do not lay hands on the old verging on death, on women, children and babies. Do not steal anything from the booty and collect together all that falls to your lot in the battlefield and do good, for Allah loves the virtuous and the pious.” *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Book 15, Hadeeth 2614.
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3

Reign of Abu Bakr: The First Caliph

Those who worshipped Muhammad, let them know Muhammad is dead. Those who worship God, let them know God is always living and never dies.

—Abu Bakr, consoling Muslims on death of the Prophet¹

In early 7 CE, a new political order had evolved under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad, which spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula to regions of the Levant, Persia, Syria, Egypt and the Eastern Roman Empire. This political force defeated the two biggest superpowers of its time, the Sassanian Empire of Persia and the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Europe), thereby altering the world's political map. Under the leadership of the Prophet and the four Rashidun Caliphs who succeeded him, this Islamic political order created a new nation based on a new faith, Islam. The new religion did not recognise caste or aristocracy and was, in principle, egalitarian.²

However, the puritanical simplicity of Islam became difficult to sustain as new territories and more sophisticated cultures became part of a rapidly expanding empire. Islam's egalitarianism had more in common with the "muruwwa" (code of virtue) of the tribes dwelling in the Arabian Desert than with the more aristocratically stratified societies and class-conscious imperialist polities of Persia and Byzantine. The newly conquered territories exposed the Muslim Arab leaders to many practical, moral and religious conundrums, often leading to internal conflicts and dissensions, particularly the four *fitnas* (tribulations) that convulsed early Islamic history.

The absence of a divinely ordained political system or framework of governance in Islam (a religion dealing primarily with spiritual and ethical issues) posed a challenge for the politically inexperienced companions and successors of the Prophet. As mentioned earlier, the four leaders of the community after the Prophet, namely, Abu Bakr, Umar ibn Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Talib, came to be known as the Rashidun (or Rightly Guided) Caliphs.

The challenges faced by the successors of the Prophet were immediate and immense, and it is to their credit that they could establish and spread the Prophet's state despite overwhelming odds. Nevertheless, with time, the challenges of squaring religious ideals in a highly contentious and ever-expanding political sphere of influence became difficult even for the blessed companions. The Sunni theology believed that though the caliphs were all religiously devout, they were not divinely guided in their actions (unlike the Prophet) and thereby liable to err. In fact, some religiously overzealous followers (like the Kharijites) judged them harshly and mutinied, while other wily, politicking contenders carved their own relatively autonomous fiefdoms in the outer reaches of an expanding Islamic empire.

As long as Prophet Muhammad was alive, he performed the functions of the lawgiver, the religious head, the chief judge, the commander of the army and the political head of state. However, after his death, the challenge that confronted his followers, and had to be resolved swiftly, was who would assume the leadership position left by him for the sake of the religion and its followers.³

The death of the Prophet, although not unexpected, shocked many Arabs. It took a wise statement by the Prophet's old friend, Abu Bakr, to warn people of the consequences of bemoaning the loss while disregarding the problems at hand.

Successor of the Prophet

The question of the Prophet's successor (*khalifah* or caliph) in a religious and political capacity other than prophethood posed a significant problem for his followers. The Prophet had left no male heirs; and only one daughter, Fatima, survived him. Nor had the Prophet (as per the belief of the majority Sunni sect) clearly designated a successor, and thus the matter of his succession became a major issue. According to John Esposito, Muslims accepted very early on that leadership of the community after the Prophet should pass to the most qualified person, not through hereditary succession.⁴

Initially, the four closest companions of the Prophet (or *Sahaba*)—that is, Abu Bakr (reigned from 632 to 634 CE); Umar (reigned 634–44 CE); Uthman

(reigned 644–56 CE), and Ali (reigned 656–61 CE)—managed to smooth over their internal differences and put up a united front by forming the Rashidun (or Righteous) Caliphate, the first Muslim state that lasted twenty-nine years.

However, the political dispute grew big over time, when the Prophet's progenies became victims of political assassination, often to keep them out of competition for the position of the caliph. The ill-treatment and persecution of the *Ahl Al-Bayt* (particularly by the Umayyad rulers) led to Islam's most significant sectarian schism into the Sunni and Shia sects. Unlike Christianity, the cause for the community's schism was, at least initially, not on the basis of any major theological divergence but a purely political issue, with the followers of Imam Ali (venerated as the fourth Pious Caliph by Sunni Muslims also) insisting that he, as the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, should have been the first imam (or successor after the Prophet) and his able progeny should have continued to hold the highest political office of the Muslim community.

However, it was not Ali but Abu Bakr, a close friend of the Prophet, who became the first caliph; and Ali is said to have accepted Abu Bakr's caliphate after over six months of the latter's reign. In fact, Ali became the caliph following the deaths of Abu Bakr and his successors, Umar and Uthman.

Nonetheless, when Abu Bakr was appointed as caliph, he had to bring the community out of its state of shock on the news of the Prophet's death (in 632 CE), and then make it realise that despite the great loss, the religion would continue and so would the confederation established by the Prophet.

Initially, Abu Bakr was challenged by several Arab tribes, who argued that the death of the Prophet marked the end of their political allegiance to the Medinan state and the broader Muslim community. However:

Abu Bakr reminded the Arab tribes of the overarching message of Islam—that membership in and loyalty to the Muslim community transcended all tribal bonds, customs and traditions. Abu Bakr did not accept the argument of the Arab tribes that religion and politics are two separate and unrelated entities. Rather, he said, religion was intended to guide political decisions to provide legitimacy to a political system. All Muslims belong to a single community whose unity is based upon the interconnection of religion and the state, where faith and politics are inseparable.⁵

On this basis, Abu Bakr launched the Ridda Wars and recaptured territories of Muslim and non-Muslim tribes that broke away from the Prophet's state

following his death. The matter of religion and politics being co-dependent, as Abu Bakr put it, remained a subject of discussion among theologians for centuries, particularly after the rise of alternate Muslim kingdoms that rivalled the single caliphate of the Muslim community from the tenth century onwards and the dismemberment of the Abbasid Caliphate in the mid-thirteenth century.

Under the leadership of the first four Rashidun Caliphs, the Muslim state prospered and spread over the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Armenia and even parts of the Byzantine Empire in Anatolia. Most Sunni historians glorify this phase of Islamic history as the golden period, and many modern-day Islamists call on fellow Muslims to reinstate the caliphate based on the laws and principles espoused by the Rashidun Caliphs.

The majority Sunni Muslim sect highly reveres the Rashidun Caliphs. This is because these four Pious Caliphs were close companions of the Prophet, and even on becoming caliphs after his passing away, are said to have been the most religiously observant. Moreover, they are said to have performed the role of leadership of the Muslim community like the Prophet, with the apparent exception of not receiving prophetic revelations. Thus, they led the congregation in prayer at the central mosque in Medina as imams. They delivered the Friday sermons as *khatibs* and as *umara al-mumineen* (in plural, commanders of the faithful), they commanded the army.

For these reasons, the Rashidun Caliphs (although never deemed as ethically infallible) developed a religious authority in virtually all their actions, unlike other dynastic caliphs who followed them. The latter generally conducted themselves as political heads of state and not as people of religious authority.

However, the period of the Rashidun Caliphate was full of internal and external threats and challenges and was not an idyllic time for the state, as is often idealised by many Sunni Islamists in their radical propaganda material. Great external conquests and triumphs notwithstanding, this phase of Islamic history was mired by deep internal dissensions and conflicts. It involved even strong contestations and disputes among the companions of the Prophet, at times among the Rashidun Caliphs themselves, be it over political matters of succession or matters of public policy and governance.

It is important to note here that the Rashidun Caliphs remained preoccupied in bringing about internal stability and warding off external threats posed by the Sassanid and Byzantine Empires. They were also gradually evolving military, civil and financial institutions, as well as administrative rules and regulations, whose

approaches and measures varied from one caliph to another. Still, there was no consistent system or policy developed on matters of succession, which led to severe internal dissensions and battles. There was also not any form of redressal or impeachment of a caliph, a problem that led to the First Fitna in the reign of Caliph Uthman from 656 to 661 CE. Extreme stress on egalitarianism led to a general atmosphere of insubordination, and heightened accountability of the caliphs spurred much controversy and criticism of the third and fourth caliphs, causing their assassinations. The main reasons for these upheavals could have been the paucity of proper conventions, or a political constitution laying out the functioning of political institutions over matters of governance and political succession.

The period also laid the basis for the eventual split in the Muslim community into several sects, with the most prominent being the Sunni and the Shia branches of Islam. The Sunnis believed that the reign of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali was the legitimate chain of caliphal succession after the Prophet, while Shia firmly upheld that Ali ibn Talib was the only legitimate successor of the Prophet.

How Islamic is a Caliphate? The Three Views

Thus, it was after the death of the Prophet that the Rashidun Caliphs (translated as the Pious Caliphs [632–61 CE], namely, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali) instituted the caliphate. Under their rule, they developed a unique military and administrative machinery, bringing in vast territories of West Asia and Northern Africa under their control in the mid-seventh century.

Thereafter, the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphates held sway over the entire Sunni Muslim world of their times, following authoritarian stule of dynastic despotism. From the tenth century onwards, the caliphate as Islamdom's monolithic empire began to decline and disintegrate, with various new kingdoms and sultanates, like the Mamluk Sultanate and the Ayyubi Caliphate (founded by the Muslim general Saladin Ayyubi in his fight against the crusading European powers), beginning to contest with each other for sway over the Muslim world and beyond.⁶

The Ottoman conquest of Mamluk Egypt in 1517 saw the establishment of the Ottoman Caliphate (an empire which extended to much of the Sunni Muslim world in West Asia, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe), which lasted until its defeat to the Allied powers in World War I. The Ottoman Caliphate was finally abolished in 1924. The Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba in Iberia (929–1031

CE), the Berber Almohad Caliphate in Morocco (1121–1269 CE), the Fula Sokoto Caliphate in what is present-day northern Nigeria (1804–1903CE) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant in the 2010s are the other Muslim empires that called themselves caliphate.⁷

The contentious history of the Rashidun period has divided the views of Muslim scholars on the institution of the caliphate into three camps. According to the first group, the caliphate is a religious institution necessary for all Muslims' political protection and prosperity. This view is upheld by certain religious scholars, like Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869–1954); radical exponents of Political Islam, such as Taqi Al-Din Nabhani and Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi; and modern ideologues associated with violent extremist views.

The second and more mainstream view is that the caliphate was established in a particular period of Islamic history by the companions of the Prophet. Therefore, these scholars believe that the Rashidun Caliphate was ideal and lasted until the reign of Ali ibn Talib, the fourth of the Rashidun Caliphs.

The third view is that there is no religious injunction associated with the institution of caliphate in Islam, nor is there a need for it. Upholding this view are various scholars, like Ali Abd Al-Raziq, who argue that there is no recommendation for establishing the political institution of the caliphate in either the Quran or the Hadeeth literature. These scholars argue that the terms *khalifah* and *khilafat* (caliphate) were institutionalised only after the passing away of the Prophet, and the caliphs (although being companions of the Prophet) were not ethically or politically infallible as they did not receive any divine guidance or sanction for their political actions. These scholars even contend that there is no political system (be it tribal, monarchical, democratic, etc.) recommended in the Quran or the Hadeeth literature, and that Islam is a religion and leaves it to humans to decide their political institutions.

Choosing of a caliph from outside the Quraysh bloodline is another controversial issue among Muslim scholars. All the four Rashidun Caliphs, followed by the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphs, hailed from the Quraysh clan of Mecca, to which the Prophet belonged. Although the Khariji and Mutazilate sects of Islam did not accept that only a Quraysh was qualified to be a caliph, the more orthodox view put the condition that only a male from the Quraysh tribe could hold the high office. For his part, celebrated Muslim philosopher and scholar Ibn Khaldun (1334–1406 CE) believed that at the beginning of Islam, caliphs were chosen from the bloodline of Quraysh as they were reputed to provide justice

for all citizens in the Islamic state. Then it became a kingdom, where obeying a caliph was accepted as just one of the pillars of Islamic creed. For this reason, the ISIS goes to great lengths to claim that its caliph belongs to the Quraysh tribe, just as it did in the case of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

The *Saqifah* and Dispute of Succession

As the Prophet's burial ceremony was underway, a gathering of Ansar was convened in the Saqifah (courtyard) of the Banu Saida clan. This meeting was reportedly held to decide the new Muslim leader from among Medina's leaders, excluding *muhajirun* (the Muslim Meccan emigrants) who were not invited. However, this intent on the part of the Ansar is now being contested by some scholars.⁸

Upon learning of the meeting, Abu Bakr and Umar (both companions of the Prophet and *muhajirun*) took another of their companions, Abu Ubaidah, and hastened to attend the meeting, and forced their way into the *Saqifah*.⁹ On arrival, Abu Bakr tried to impress upon the Ansar that most Arab tribes will not recognise a Medinan caliph or the rule of anyone other than the elite Meccan tribe of Quraysh (to which the Prophet and the *muhajirun* belonged). In *Sahih Bukhari*, Umar is said to have quoted Abu Bakr's speech thus:

"O company of *Ansaar!* You are surely the recipient of the attributes which you have described and you have achieved them. But, Caliphate and government is only the right of the Quraysh because they are renowned for their nobility and lineage, manners and conduct throughout the Arabian Peninsula and enjoy an undisputed position. It is only for your betterment that I do this...."¹⁰

He then took Umar and Abu Ubaidah by the hand and offered them to the Ansar as potential candidates. In response, an Ansar veteran of the Battle of Badr, Habab ibn Mundhir, suggested to the meeting that the Quraysh and the Ansar could choose separate rulers from among themselves. This counter proposal led to a heated exchange, and the stalemate reportedly continued through the night and into the next day. Thereafter, eloquent speeches gave way to a shouting match until Umar raised Abu Bakr's hand and swore his allegiance to him. His gesture had such an effect that even the Ansar followed suit, that is, they agreed with Abu Bakr's suitability for the high office. The lead among the Ansar is said to have been taken by Usaid ibn Hudair (a major figure of the Aws tribe) and Bashir bin Saad, from the Khazraj tribe.¹¹

However, Shia scholars insist that many Ansar refused to pay allegiance to

Abu Bakr at the Saqifah and said: “We will not pay allegiance to anybody except Ali.” They point out that the Ansar would have likely supported Ali because of their family ties with him, and the claims made by Abu Bakr on the superiority of the Quraysh over the Ansar (kinship, service to Islam, etc.) were more applicable to Ali than Abu Bakr.

In any case, in the absence of Abu Bakr, Umar and other companions of the Prophet who were busy settling political matters at the *Saqifah*, Ali ibn Talib conducted the funeral and burial ceremony of the beloved Prophet. When the news of the appointment of Abu Bakr as *khalifah* came to those muhajirun who had not attended the *Saqifah*, some of them refused to acknowledge his authority.

Those who did not swear immediate allegiance to Abu Bakr included some big names, such as Al-Abbas bin Abd Al-Muttalib (the uncle of the Prophet), Al-Zubayr ibn Al-Awwam, Ammar ibn Yasir, Abu Zar Ghaffari, Salman the Persian, Miqdad ibn Amr Al-Bahrani, Khalid bin Saïd, Al-Bara’a, Ubayy bin Ka’b and most importantly, Ali ibn Talib (along with his wife, Fatima). However, about six months after the Prophet’s death, Fatima passed away. It was only after her death that her husband, Ali, openly accepted the caliphate of Abu Bakr for the stated aim of preserving the unity of Islam.

Thus, the appointment of the first caliph was marred by controversy and was the outcome of political exigency and not part of any religiously sanctified or politically institutionalised process. Even Umar, who supported the appointment of Abu Bakr as caliph, considered the *Saqifah* process to have been a hasty decision or *falta*.

It is believed that the Ansar allegiance at the *Saqifah* could only be secured after Umar had deployed the dreaded Aslam and Aws tribesmen on the streets of Medina. Thus, the event of the Saqifah exposes the paucity of any religious or legal framework employed for appointing the first caliph.

Abu Bakr: Consolidating the Confederacy

It is noteworthy that as soon as the Prophet passed away, the majority of the Arab tribes started seceding from the new-found state. Even the Prophet’s early supporters in Medina (*Ansar*) did not wait for his burial to take place and decided to elect own leader, keeping out the *muhajirun* from the process.

The great challenge for the Prophet’s companions at this time was retaining and consolidating the Islamic confederacy built by the Holy Prophet and preventing its relapse into the diffused pagan tribalism of the past. In this respect,

the Muslim community found a dedicated, capable and firm leader in Abu Bakr, who viewed the office of the *khalifah* or caliph not as much as a theological leader, but more as a religious head of state taking political and military actions in defence of religion.

Some Islamic scholars, particularly those belonging to the Shia sect, question the legitimacy of Abu Bakr's appointment as the first caliph (both in terms of his credentials and the means employed to gain the high office). They even question the theological validity of some of his political decisions directed to quell internal revolts and dissensions against the fledgling state. However, few can question the effectiveness of Abu Bakr in settling the internal confusion and turmoil that followed the death of the Prophet, and in successfully achieving his aim of politically establishing Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond in the two years of his reign as the caliph.

Ridda Wars and the Defeat of Musaylimah, the "False Prophet"

As mentioned earlier, the Prophet's death in about 632 CE was seen as an opportunity by many Arabian tribes, who had earlier accepted the religion and political suzerainty of the newly formed Muslim state, to revert to their pre-Islamic lifestyle. In contrast, others sought similar fame by declaring themselves as prophets. These tribes had never been under a centralised rule in their history and did not wish to be part of a nation where they thought they had little at stake.

They believed that with the Prophet's death, their pact with Medina ended; and they no longer had to pay *zakat* (alms payable by all Muslims with certain financial standing) to Medina as a form of tribute. In the words of Philip Hitti, all of Arabia, barring the region of Hejaz (western region of modern Saudi Arabia that includes cities of Mecca, Medina, Jeddah and Taif), broke off from the state founded by the Prophet.

Here, there is a need to differentiate the three groups of tribes that seceded from the Prophet's umma after his death:

- (a) Tribal leaders who had gone so far as to claim prophethood for themselves.
- (b) Tribes that reverted to their old pagan practices after the death of the Prophet and reneged on their Islamic faith.
- (c) Tribes who remained Muslim but refused to pay *zakat* to Abu Bakr, the Caliph of the Prophet.

Abu Bakr declared the secession of these tribes as an act of *Ridda* (apostasy) and divided his armies into eleven corps, each meant for the subjugation of a

particular region. One after the other, rebellious tribes were won over, either by the use of arms or through diplomacy, within a year. On the battlefield, the biggest threat was posed by the forces of Musaylimah and his wife, Sajah (both claimed to be prophets), but they were eventually defeated and killed in the Battle of Yamamah (in the Nejd region), later in 632 CE, by the great Muslim general, Khalid bin Walid. The last rebels at Hadhramaut (Southern Arabia) were also subjugated by March 633 CE.

A more problematic theological controversy ensued when Abu Bakr included the self-proclaimed Muslim tribes who refused to pay him tribute in the list of enemies in the Ridda Wars. These Muslim tribes felt that only the Prophet was fit to take the tribute money and not his successor (Abu Bakr). They even quoted the Quranic verse in their defence: “Take yourself, [O, Muhammad], from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase, and invoke [Allah’s blessings] upon them. Indeed, your invocations are reassurance for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing” (Quran: Surah 9, Verse 13).¹²

Many companions of Abu Bakr, such as Umar, advised him against launching military campaigns against the Muslim tribes who had stopped paying tribute to Medina after the death of the Prophet and to not club them with the other renegades. However, Abu Bakr replied:

I will fight whoever separates *Salah* (prayers) and *Zakah*, for *Zakah* is the compulsory right to be taken from wealth. By Allah, if they withhold from me a young goat that they used to give to the Messenger of Allah [SAW], I will fight them for withholding it.¹³

An even more considerable theological fallout occurred when a respected companion of the Prophet, Malik bin Nuwayra (who was the Prophet’s representative to collect alms from his tribe), refused to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr. In response, Abu Bakr’s general, Khalid bin Walid, went to Nuwayra’s tribe and beheaded him, even though Nuwayra did not show the will to fight. Khalid bin Walid is then said to have enslaved Nuwayra’s wife. People, such as Abu Qutada Al-Ansari and Umar, condemned this act of Khalid, but Abu Bakr did not punish him. He, however, admitted that Khalid had committed a mistake; and Abu Bakr paid the blood money (monetary compensation) for Malik’s death from the *bayt al-mal* (public treasury).

Most Sunni scholars, like Al-Tabari and Ibn Athir, do not consider Malik to be an apostate as Caliph Abu Bakr paid the blood money for his death. In contrast, some Sunni scholars, like Abdul Wahhab, deem Malik to be a renegade as he

refused to pay any *zakat* to Caliph Abu Bakr. The events of the Saqifah and the Ridda Wars expose the extreme differences among the Prophet's companions and even question the general Sunni proclivity of deeming Prophet's closest companions nearly infallible. The judgement and actions of Caliph Abu Bakr, Khalid bin Walid and Malik Nuwayra have been a subject of controversy among Muslim theologians across the sectarian divide and, to some extent, even among Sunni religious scholars.

Abu Bakr's Nomination of Umar as Caliph

The *Saqifah* event set a precedent for appointing a caliph by arriving at some form of an agreement within the community, even if it was not unanimous. However, Umar was not appointed as caliph through any attempt at consensus building. Instead, Abu Bakr simply nominated Umar as his successor on deathbed. Thus, a new method was adopted for the appointment of the second caliph. Shia scholars question why Umar did not allow the Prophet to nominate his successor on his deathbed, in the controversial pen and paper Hadeeth, as recorded in *Sahih Bukhari*, while Caliph Abu Bakr was allowed to do so. This inconsistency in appointing a caliph led to many unfortunate political controversies in the history of the Muslim world.

The incidents during the reign of Abu Bakr show that although highly successful in consolidating the fledgling Islamic confederacy in the Arabian Peninsula, he could not always settle internal differences or resolve theological controversies that eventually led to sectarian divisions in the community. The religion of Islam had nothing to do with these issues, as the controversies stemmed from the political actions of caliphs who, although pious and religious, were not regarded infallible in their judgement. Therefore, over-glorification and idealisation of even the Rashidun Caliphate can be religiously misleading.

However, the great standards in moral uprightness and political and military leadership achieved by Caliph Abu Bakr cannot be overstated. Leading a religiously abstemious life, Abu Bakr subjugated the widespread rebellion following the Prophet's death by launching simultaneous counteroffensives and recapturing, and even expanding, the territory of the Muslims. Over the centuries, Shia and even some Sunni theologians have often questioned the ethical and religious interpretations provided by the caliph for his actions. However, when it comes to personal probity and integrity of character, the religiously observant and abstemious lifestyle and the indefatigable commitment to the cause of politically consolidating the faith, Abu Bakr stars as literally the first among all caliphs.

In his book ‘The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire’, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794 CE) writes about the ideals of probity of character observed by Caliph Abu Bakr:

He (Abu Bakr) thought himself entitled to a stipend of three pieces of gold, with the sufficient maintenance of a single camel and a black slave; but on Friday of each week, he distributed the residue of his own and the public money, first to the most worthy, and then to the most indigent of the Muslims. The remains of his wealth, a coarse garment, and five pieces of gold, were delivered to his successor, who lamented with a modest sigh his own inability to equal such an admirable model.¹⁴

NOTES

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4

Caliph Umar Ibn Khattab: Blueprint for Islamic Administration

“I cannot present before you the examples of Sri Ram Chandra and Sri Krishna as they are not personalities recognized by modern historians. I cannot help but present to you names of Abu Bakar and Umar. They were leaders of a vast empire, yet they lived a life of austerity”, Gandhi wrote.

—Mahatma Gandhi¹

The *Saqifah* event tried to reach a consensus within the community, although the agreement forged in favour of Abu Bakr becoming the first caliph did not include all the *muhajirun*. Umar’s appointment, as the second caliph, broke the precedent set by the *Saqifah* event. He was not elected through consultation but nominated by the first caliph.

In 634 CE, Caliph Abu Bakr nominated Umar as his successor on his deathbed, though Umar was not a popular figure among the notables of Medina, nor among the members of *majlis al-shura* (consultative committee), due to his somewhat strict and domineering disposition. Abu Bakr explained his nomination of Umar to the consultative committee as follows:

His (Umar’s) strictness was there because of my softness when the weight of Caliphate will be over his shoulders he will remain no longer strict. If I will be asked by God to whom I have appointed my successor, I will tell him that I have appointed the best man among your men.²

Thus, the precedent of reaching a partial consensus, through consultation, among religious elites ceased in the case of Umar's appointment. These inconsistencies in appointing a caliph caused a great deal of confusion on the issue of succession and transfer of power in Muslim polity for all times to come. As the Islamic scriptures are silent on this matter and other political issues, the Islamist claim that religion provides a complete political theory and system appears baseless. Even the Rashidun Caliphs, venerated as honest companions of the Prophet, could not develop any sanctified method for transfer of power in their times for such a significant institution as the Caliphate. So, the Islamist claim that the Rashidun Caliphate provides a sanctified religious model for Islamic governance appears unsupported.

The New Caliphal Title: 'Ameerul Mumineen'

Caliph Umar had reservations about calling himself khalifah. Even some of the sahaba asked the question as to whose khalifah or successor Umar was. Many of Umar's companions pointed out that he was not the khalifah of the Prophet because that was Abu Bakr. Thus, Umar is said to have first assumed the title, *Khalifat Abi Bakr* ("successor to Abû Bakr"), because the title, *Khalifat Khalifat Rasul Allah* ("the successor to the successor of the messenger of God"), seemed long, confusing and cumbersome. Caliph Umar then designated himself *Ameer Al-Mumineen* or "commander of the faithful", which became an additional customary title for succeeding caliphs and later, for independent Muslim rulers.

However, the argument that Umar was a successor or representative of Abu Bakr and not the Prophet does not seem plausible, as any leader of the Muslim nation should forever be a representative of the Prophet and not of the leader immediately preceding him. It has been narrated that Umar wanted a different title from that of "Khalifah" and asked people around him to ponder over the matter and come up with a different and better title. The very idea of the title of caliph being questioned by, arguably, the most effective and successful of the Rashiun Caliphs—Umar ibn Khattab—hollows the Islamist claim for reinstating that very institution. There is a compelling narration on how a new title, "Ameer-ul Mumineen", replaced the title of Khalifah.

One day Labid bin Rabia and Adi bin Hatim came to Madina from Kufa. They alighted at the Prophet's mosque and there coming across Amr b. Al-As asked him to announce their arrival to the Ameer-ul-Mumineen. Amr b. Al-As was struck by the novelty of the term "Amir-ul-Muminin". He asked Labid and Adi as to how they referred to Umar

as “Amir-ul-Muminin”. They said, “We all Muslims are Momins and Umar is our Commander. He is thus Amir-ul-Muminin”.

Amr b. Al-As said, “Wonderful You have hit upon a beautiful term. God bless You”. Amr b. Al-As hastened to Umar’s end there said “Amir-ul-Muminin, two persons have come from Kufa, and they seek permission to see you”. Umar became curious at being addressed “Amirul-Muminin”. He asked Amr b. al-As as to how he had coined the term “Amir-ul-Muminin”. Amr b. al-As said that the visitors from Kufa had used that term, and as he was attracted by the term he had used it. Umar said, “We were in search of some suitable term to signify the office I hold, and here is a term which is attractive”. He asked Amr b. al-As as to what he thought of the title. Amr b. al-As said, “I am attracted by the term. It is God-sent. We all are Muslims and you are our Amir. The term is very attractive and significant.”

After Umar had seen the visitors from Kufa, he convened a meeting of his consultative assembly, and there, the question was discussed whether he should adopt the title of “Amir-ul-Muminin” for the office that he held. The Assembly approved the title. Henceforward Umar came to be addressed in his official capacity as Amir-ul-Muminin.³

The rationale for devising the new title of “Ameer-ul Mumineen” appears to be an attempt by the new caliph to move out of the shadow of the Prophet’s precedent and the pressure that related expectations would be weighing on the new head of the state.

As an alternate title, “Ameer-ul Mumineen” appeared less inhibiting and more empowering, providing greater freedom for the new leader to take more independent decisions in the interest of the community, without being unnecessarily weighed down by people’s conceptions of the Prophet’s precedent that his representative or successor (bearing the title ‘*khalifah*’) ought to follow.

Indeed, Umar was able to take many significant administrative measures and make changes in the established norms in the wake of new challenges faced by an expanding Muslim empire, for which the title of “*Ameer-ul Mumineen*” worked much better than the more constricting one, “khalifah of the Prophet or Abu Bakr”. Therefore, the glorification of the institution of caliphate by modern-day Islamists as a religiously incumbent political institution seems far-fetched.

Conquests of Persia, the Levant and Jerusalem

It is essentially the remarkable administration of Umar, along with his military

successes and the general period of peace and stability under his 10-year-long reign (634–44 CE), that became the basic framework of administration of the so-called caliphate, which most Islamists either implicitly or openly refer to while extolling the period of the Rashidun Caliphate.

One of the many reasons for the great acclaim for Umar's term as caliph is that, under his reign, the Islamic state transformed "from an Arabian principality to a world power"⁴. Under his leadership, the Byzantines lost more than three-fourths of their territory, while the Sassanid Empire in Persia ceased to exist. In this respect, the Battle of Al-Qadisiyyah, fought in 636 CE, proved to be a decisive battle between the Arab Muslim army of Caliph Umar and the army of the Sassanian Empire of Persia.

By appointing brilliant generals and field commanders, Umar was able to incorporate into the caliphate regions of present-day Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, as well as parts of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and southwestern Pakistan.

Among the most illustrious victories of Caliph Umar was the capture of Jerusalem. When the Muslim forces were at the doors of the holy city, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (c. 560–638 CE), found no Byzantine force coming for relief. Consequently, he offered to surrender peacefully but only if Caliph Umar came in person. On receiving the Christian leader's plea, Caliph Umar left for Jerusalem without any entourage, and thus went to the city in a completely unceremonious manner.

In Jerusalem, the caliph was given a guided tour of the city by Patriarch Sophronius and was asked to offer prayers at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. However, Umar, wanting to preserve the holy place of Christian worship, refused to pray there. He also asked Jews (whom Christians had forbidden from entering Jerusalem for 500-odd years) to return to the city, as they held the city holy as well.

Umar offered lenient terms to the newly conquered people, including religious freedom, although they were to pay a tax called *jizya*, which made them protected citizens and exempted them from military service. In addition, the caliph forbade the purchase of land in newly acquired territories. The troops too were housed separately from local populations in garrison cities.⁵ His purpose was to keep the troops and settled people apart to discipline the troops, and to check their desire to acquire lands and booty.

Administrative Framework and Accountability

The military successes of Umar's reign are often the focus of most histories written about him, but his administrative reforms and measures outdo the magnificent achievements on the battlefield.

As an administrator, Umar was a hard taskmaster:

For centuries, nomads and foreign armies had overrun the settled parts of the Middle East, only to fall under the influence of their own captives. Umar did not want his Muslims to become corrupted in this way. It was no mere quirk of character that made him stride through the bazaars and streets of Medina, whip in hand, ready to scourge any Muslim who missed the prayers or violated the Ramadan fast.⁶

Among Umar's fundamental achievements was the establishment of *diwan* (a record of soldiers' pensions that later turned into a powerful governmental body). Besides, he invented the Islamic Hijri calendar, which is based on the ancient Arabian lunar calendar and holds the year of Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE (the time from which Muslim fortune's improved) as year zero, that is, 0 AH. Caliph Umar also founded the garrison cities of Fustat in Egypt and Basra and Kufa in Iraq.⁷

As caliph, Umar formally instituted a *majlis al-shura* (consultative assembly), consisting of prominent companions of the Prophet. In addition, he constituted a large body called *majlis-e-aam* (general assembly), consisting of 'muhajirun', Ansar and representatives of various tribes.

In the words of Moin Qazi, "He (Caliph Umar) divided the far-flung empire into the provinces of Makkah, Madinah, Syria, Jazira (the fertile region between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates in Iraq), Basra, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, Persia and Egypt."⁸

The provinces were governed by provincial governors, who were selected carefully by Umar himself. In fact, he was reputed for following a strict standard for the appointment of governors and took particular care to appoint men of known integrity to high offices under the state. The governor was not just an administrative head of a province but also its religious head.⁹

Before assuming responsibility, a governor was required to declare his assets, and a complete inventory of his possessions was prepared and kept in record. If an unusual increase of wealth was ever reported in the assets of a governor, he was held accountable. Furthermore, the unlawful property was confiscated by the state. At the time of appointment, a governor was required to make the following

pledges: (i) he would not ride a Turkish horse; (ii) he would not wear fine clothes; (iii) he would not eat sifted flour; (iv) he would not keep a porter at his door; and (v) he would always keep his door open to the public.¹⁰

These provinces were further divided into approximately 100 districts. Each district or main city was under the charge of a junior governor or 'Ameer', usually appointed by Umar himself, but occasionally also appointed by the provincial governor.¹¹

Umar's administrative framework had different departments, including: the military department; the police department; the financial department (bayt al-mal); the tax department; and the education department.

Some of his noteworthy administrative measures were:

- *Office of investigation/accountability against top officials and governors:* The puritanical caliph established a unique office for investigating complaints against top officials and governors. The department was under Muhammad bin Maslamah Ansari, a man of undisputed integrity.¹² In crucial cases, Muhammad bin Maslamah was deputed by the caliph to proceed to the site of the case, investigate the charge and take action. Sometimes, an inquiry commission was constituted to investigate the charges. On occasions, the officers against whom complaints were received were summoned to Medina and had to give an explanation to the caliph himself.¹³
- *Instituting judicial system separate from executive:* Umar was known to be a champion of justice. For his sound discrimination and perfect sense of justice, he was called 'Al-Farooq'. He established a judicial system separate from the executive. Qazis or judges were appointed in large numbers at all administrative levels for the administration of justice. They were chosen for their learning in Islamic law and probity of character.¹⁴

In his ordinances issued to judicial officers, Caliph Umar laid down several principles for maintaining the impartiality and high standards by the judiciary.¹⁵

In a celebrated injunction, Caliph Umar notably stated:

Verily justice is an important obligation to God and man. You have been charged with this responsibility. Discharge the responsibility so that you may win the approbation of God and the goodwill of the people. Treat the people equally in your presence, in your company, and in your decisions, so that the weak despair not of justice and the high-placed have no hope of your favour....¹⁶

The World's First "Welfare State"?

Caliph Umar's state is considered by some Islamists as one of the world's first welfare state.¹⁷ His innovative welfare reforms encompassed the introduction of social security. He was known for upholding justice for non-Muslim citizens as well. He espoused the principle that there was no coercion in religion. In his bequest to his successor, he called for equal rights and fair justice for all of them:

My bequest to my successor is that covenants with *ahl-ud-dhimma* (i.e., non-Muslim citizens) should be observed faithfully. They should be defended against all invasions. No injustice should be done to them. They should be treated as full-fledged citizens and should enjoy equality before law. Their taxes should be fair, and no burden should be imposed on them which they cannot bear.¹⁸

Similarly, Caliph Umar initiated reforms wherein any disabled citizen, or one who had lost ability to work was provided minimum basic means of sustenance by the state. Even the unemployed/indigents received stipends from the public treasury. He also instituted pension scheme for the soldiers and their families post retirement. In the words of the feted orientalist Laura Veccia Valegeri, "Another merit of Umar, was that he realized the need of a stable fiscal system, which could meet the present and future requirements of the state. To satisfy the soldiers and keep their morale high, he thought of the expedient of reserving to the state the duty of compensating them, and founding a 'diwan', i.e. a register of pensioners."¹⁹ Among the pensioners, were also other civilian elderly people.

Caliph Umar also introduced the concept of public trusteeship and public ownership by implementing the charitable 'waqf' system, which exists in many Muslim countries to this day. This entailed the transfer of "wealth from the individual or the few to a social collective ownership", to provide "services to the community at large". For example, Caliph Umar got land from the Banu Harithah and converted it into a charitable trust, wherein the "profit and produce from the land went towards benefiting the poor, slaves, and travelers".²⁰

During the great famine during his term as Caliph (638 CE), Umar introduced food rationing using coupons for the needy, who could exchange coupons for wheat and flour. Another innovative concept was the introduction of a poverty threshold, with efforts made to ensure a minimum standard of living, so that no citizen across the empire would suffer from hunger.

The state also dug up several canals to bolster agriculture, particularly in the more fertile lands conquered, such as in the Levant and Egypt. A number of

canals were constructed in Khuzistan and Ahwaz during this period. A major canal known as Nahr-Ul-Amirul Momineen, which connected the Nile with the Red Sea, was constructed for quick transport of grain from Egypt to the Arabian Peninsula.²¹

Systemisation of the Public Treasury: Fixed Salaries of Officials

Umar is known to have established and systematised the central treasury or *bayt al-mal*.²² Following major conquests, revenues of the state increased, along with the expenditures. After consulting the companions, Caliph Umar instituted the central treasury at Medina. Abdullah bin Arqam was appointed as the treasury officer. He was assisted by Abdul Rahman ibn Awf and Muiqib. A separate accounts department was also set up, which was required to maintain a record of all expenses. Later, provincial treasuries were set up in the provinces. After meeting the local expenditure, the provincial treasuries were required to remit the surplus amount to the central treasury at Medina. The salaries and stipends charged to the central treasury amounted to over 30 million dirhams.

A separate building was constructed for the royal treasury which, in large cities, was guarded by as many as 400 guards. When Persia was conquered, three types of coins were current in the conquered territories.²³

Among other notable measures of Caliph Umar was the establishment of military offices (with regular salaries and pensions for soldiers), police forces and prisons. Before Umar's leadership, civil servants did not receive specified and regular salaries. However, with the expansion of the state, he determined the number of civil servants and their salaries, as per their rank.²⁴

He started record-keeping of the population and, according to some scholars, he even started census. He is also said to have created a land revenue department, and was the first ruler under whom survey and assessment of cultivated land were undertaken. The government-built housing for thousands of people, along with rest houses, and provided aid for the poor, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Image of Efficient and Hard Taskmaster

Caliph Umar's personality has been a subject of controversy among Muslims. While the mainstream Sunnis view him as a man of uncompromising standards of morality and justice, the Shia community regards him as a bigoted and cruel person. Moreover, Sunnis see Umar's claim as caliph as legitimate, but the vast majority of the Shias consider him a usurper (alongside Abu Bakr and Uthman).

They dismiss many of the Sunni Hadeeth literature that extol his religious status, such as: “were a prophet to come after me, it would be Umar”;²⁵ and “Messenger of Allah said: ‘*Indeed Allah has put the truth upon the tongue and in the heart of Umar.*’”²⁶

Notwithstanding his propensity to be harsh and unflinching in his judgement and decisions at the time, there can be little doubt that both as a military leader and as the architect of administration based on Shariah, Caliph Umar stands tall among Muslim leaders.

It is his great achievements as a highly disciplined ascetic and competent leader on which much of the nostalgia of the Pious Caliphate resonates in the minds and hearts of Muslims. Sunni Islamists try to present him as if he is second to the Holy Prophet in his inspired leadership, evident from the above-mentioned Hadeeth literature.

However, in its strictest interpretation, Sunni theology does not deem the rule of Rashidun Caliphs (including Umar’s rule) as the exact exemplar of Shariah rule in its entirety, as these leaders were humans and not divinely inspired, nor infallible, in their actions.

Caliph Umar was attacked by a Persian slave of Mughira, named Fairus (Abu Lu’Lu’) while leading a public prayer at Masjid Un Nabawi. The attacker had personal grudge against the Khalifa. Umar succumbed to the wounds and breathed his last in the year 644 C.E.

Umar’s caliphate is seen as the embodiment of the perfect ideals of the institutions by Sunni Muslim scholars because of its application of Quranic principle of ‘shura’ (consultation) through the formation of consultative assembly and for making religious merit as the basis for leadership in the community. Modern Islamists seen in Umar’s caliphate a democratic spirit of accountability and consultation and a true model for an Islamic form of government.²⁷

In his book “History of the Arabs” Professor Philip K. Hitti sums up the high stature and status Caliph Umar enjoys in the minds of Sunni religious scholarship to this day.

Umar, whose name according to Muslim tradition is the greatest in early Islam after that of Mohammad, has been idolized by Muslim writers for his piety, justice and patriarchal simplicity and treated as the personification of all the virtues a Caliph ought to possess. His irreproachable character became an exemplar for all conscientious successors to follow. He owned, we are told, one shirt and one mantle

only, both conspicuous for their patchwork, slept on a bed of palm leaves, and had no concern other than the maintenance of the purity of the faith, the upholding of justice and the ascendancy and security of Islam and the Arabians. Arabic literature is replete with anecdotes extolling Umar's stern character. He is said to have scourged his own son to death for drunkenness.²⁸

NOTES

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5

Uthman ibn Affan: The Assassination of a Caliph

By God, if you kill me you will never again have love for one another, nor will you ever pray together again, nor will you be ever united in fighting an enemy.

—Caliph Uthman warning his assassins as they were about to strike¹

These were the prescient words of Uthman ibn Affan (reigned from 6 November 644 to 17 June 656 CE), chronologically the third of the Rashidun Caliphs, whose assassination set in motion a series of unfortunate events leading to several internecine wars as well as major sectarian divisions in the Muslim community, whose effects continue to unfold to the present day.

Born into the prominent Meccan clan of Banu Umayya, whose members fought significant battles against the Prophet, Uthman (name also pronounced as Usman or Osman in the Indian subcontinent) faced hostility from his clan on account of his conversion to Islam at a young age. Still, he became one of the richest men among the Quraysh as his father left him a good inheritance and a he proved to be a prosperous cloth merchant.

Uthman was married to the Prophet's daughter, Ruqayya; and upon her death, married to her sister, Umm Kulthum, which earned him the honorific title, *Dhû al-Nurayn* ("The Possessor of Two Lights"). Benefiting from his business contacts

in Abyssinia (roughly corresponding to present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea), Uthman was able to migrate to the African kingdom with his then wife, Ruqayya, and other Meccan Muslims to evade persecution in Mecca. After a six to seven year sojourn in Abyssinia, he migrated to Medina in 622 CE, when the Prophet had established his state. When Caliph Umar died in office aged 59/60 years, Uthman (then aged 64/65 years) succeeded him as the third Rashidun Caliph.

Uthman was celebrated for his charitable acts and for having ordered the compilation of the standard version of the Quran as caliph. His assassination, however, marks the beginning of open political conflicts within the Muslim community, which later led to the emergence of various theological sects, such as the Sunni, the Shia and the Khariji.²

Controversial Election

In November 644 CE, Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab was stabbed by a Persian craftsman, Abu Lulua Firuz, with a double-bladed dagger while he prayed in the Medina mosque. It is said that the slave committed the deed after the caliph had turned down Lulua's request for lifting a tax imposed on him by his Arab master, Al-Mughira ibn Shuba. On his deathbed, Umar tasked a committee (shura) of six with choosing the next caliph among themselves.³ Having built various administrative institutions, it appeared Umar wanted to systematise the process of caliph's nomination by constituting a committee.

On the face of it, Ali seemed the clear favourite because the "famed philosopher-warrior" was then in his mid-forties,⁴ while Uthman, Ali's closest contender for the post, was nearing the age of 70 and had never fought a battle or displayed any qualities of public leadership.⁵

However, according to Shia Muslims, the election should not have happened, and Caliph Umar should not have appointed the consultative committee because the Prophet had clearly instructed that Ali should succeed him and thus, every successive choice of a different caliph was in defiance of the Prophet's wishes.

The six men of the committee—all from the Quraysh tribe of Mecca and early companions of the Prophet—were: Ali ibn Talib; Abd Al-Rahman ibn Awf; Saad ibn Abi Waqaas; Uthman ibn Affan; Zubayr ibn Al-Awwam; and Talha bin Ubaydullah. Caliph Umar stipulated several rules for the committee, which was to meet in a closed caucus. According to these rules, the new caliph must be one of the committee, elected by the majority of its members.⁶ Abd Al-Rahman was to elect the next caliph in case of a tie. However, he took himself out of the competition in return for being recognised as the arbitrator.⁷

As it turned out, only Uthman and Ali were willing to accept the responsibility of being a caliph. They also said that they would swear allegiance to the other if not chosen by the committee. It was thus left to the three remaining members to make a choice. Whereas Talha and Zubayr supported Uthman, Saad was initially supportive of Ali. Abd Al-Rahman was left with having the deciding vote. He announced his selection in a public gathering at the Medina mosque, where he gave his allegiance (*bayah*) to Uthman. Ali had to accept the outcome and immediately gave his allegiance.⁸

Thus, the appointment of the first three Rashidun Caliphs happened in three distinct ways: one by partial consensus; the other by the nomination of the previous caliph; and the third through the setting up of a shura, whose decision by several accounts surprised the larger community, to say the least.

Standardisation of the Quran

Perhaps, the most incredible legacy of the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, is how the Quran is being read today. According to certain traditions, the process of collecting the *surahs* (chapters) of the Quran had started under Caliph Umar. There is another version that states that a manuscript (*mushaf*) existed during Abu Bakr's caliphate and that the Prophet himself had determined the order of all the surahs (collecting verses into specific chapters).⁹

However, Caliph Uthman began noticing minor differences in pronunciation of the holy book as Islam started spreading beyond the Arabian Peninsula into the Levant, modern-day Iran and North Africa. He realised that the use of different dialects of Arabic across various parts of the Muslim world might lead to misinterpretation of the Quranic text.

Therefore, he ordered the text to be standardised. The task was assigned to Zayd ibn Thabit, one of Prophet's scribes and the man chosen by Abu Bakr for his aforementioned first volume. On completing the standardised volume, all other unauthorised copies were destroyed. Some of his enemies put the charge of blasphemy against him for destroying the additional copies, but he mainly was absolved of these charges after his death.

Under Umar, the military commanders had acted strictly as per the instructions of the caliph. However, Uthman allowed them to operate independently, and they began to expand the empire on their own. Benefiting from native Syrians, the Muslim generals started developing naval warfare, and the Byzantine Empire was beaten in Alexandria and Cyprus fell in 649 CE. However, these military feats started draining the state exchequer.

Return of Umayyad and Charge of Nepotism

It is noteworthy that neither Prophet Muhammad (who came from the clan of Banu Hashim of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca) nor the two early caliphs—namely, Abu Bakr (who came from Mecca's Banu Taym tribe) and Umar (who came from Banu Adi tribe)—appointed high officials from their families. However, Uthman sought to establish a cohesive central authority over an expanding empire to replace the loose tribal alliance that his predecessors had sought.¹⁰

He introduced a system of landed fiefs and assigned some of the provincial governorships to his family members. In this new system, much of the treasure received by the central government went to Uthman's family and other provincial governors rather than to the army. Unlike Umar, who had been decisive in imposing his authority on top officials and governors, irrespective of their tribal or family affiliations, Uthman relaxed the rules and allowed himself and his governors to accept gifts. Although he did not draw money from the state treasury, he and the Quraysh of Mecca ended up owning massive estates in conquered lands. This became a cause for discontentment among the natives of newly conquered territories and the people of Medina (Ansar).

Uthman, though an early convert to Islam, came from the family of Umayyad of the Quraysh tribe, whose members dominated the affairs of Mecca at the time of the Prophet's early preaching. Indeed, the clan had been bitter enemy of Islam until the Prophet's conquest of Mecca. Through the rise of Uthman to the seat of caliphate, it was alleged that the Umayyad clan had seized the opportunity to recapture their pre-Islamic pre-eminence in political affairs. As a result, the resentment among non-Umayyad Meccans, the people of Medina and the subjects of newly conquered lands was growing. Most of the criticism was directed against four Umayyad officials, namely, Waleed bin Uqaba (the Governor of Kufa), Abdullah bin Saad bin Sarh (Governor of Egypt), Marwan bin Hakam (State Secretary) and Ameer Muawiya (Governor of Syria).

Rebellion and Assassination

As general discontent against Uthman's policies began to rise, some noted companions of the Prophet, like Talha Al-Taymi and Zubayr Al-Awwam, openly called upon Uthman to step down from his position. There was also outrage over his ill-treatment of other companions of the Prophet, such as Abu Dharr Ak-Ghifari, Abd Allah ibn Masud and Ammar ibn Yasir.

By 650 CE, rebellions broke out in Egypt, Kufa and Basra. In 655 CE, a

group of Egyptian malcontents marched to Medina, which was then the seat of the caliphal authority. However, Caliph Uthman took a conciliatory approach and managed to send the rebels back to Egypt. Shortly after that, another group of rebels besieged Uthman at his home and, after several days of wrangling, he was killed in 656 CE. His wife, with some of Uthman's friends, buried him in the night without the ritual of bathing the body, while listening to the abuses of the people, some of whom pelted stones at them. He was buried in a Jewish cemetery, as the Muslim graveyard was barred for him.

Although Shia regard Uthman as an unworthy caliph to say the least, even some Sunni scholars concede that the caliph's leniency and ineptitude were responsible for his downfall and the degradation it brought to the institution of the caliphate. Indeed, the inordinate glorification of the Rashidun Caliphate completely glosses over this major political debacle and its consequences that paved the way for more political uncertainties in Muslim history.

Unlike the theology of Islam, which is quite meticulous in its conceptions and forms of worship, the new political empire that came in the wake of a united Arabia under the banner of Islam, found the erstwhile tribal egalitarian order quite incapable of providing the institutional strength or legal framework for resolving new political challenges and disputes. In the absence of any divinely ordained law or written constitution, a new political system detailing the structures and functions of governance, methods of appointment or removal of a caliph or means for resolving internal disputes and schisms in a rapidly expanding Islamdom led to growing instances of rebellion against leadership and civil discord. Thus, Caliph Uthman ibn Affan faced the first open rebellion that unleashed an unfortunate chain of events that led to deep-seated schisms, first, in a fledgling Muslim polity and ultimately, in Islamic theology that split into Sunni and Shia sects.

Egyptian historian, Dr. Taha Husayn admirably sums up the issue in his book, *al-Fitna-tul-Kubra* (The Great Tribulation): "One thing about which there can be no doubt is that Muslims were divided in the matter of Uthman, and their divisions ended in his death, and they have never been reunited since."¹¹

NOTES

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6

Caliph Ali ibn Talib and the First Fitna (Tribulation)

He whose Mawla (Lord) I am, Ali is his Mawla

—Prophet Muhammad¹

Ali ibn Talib, the first cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, was chronologically the fourth and last of the Rashidun Caliphs; and the first of the imams, according to Shia Muslims, to be appointed by divine mandate. Shia itself is derived from the term “*shiat* Ali”, which means “partisans of Ali”.² Sunni Muslims also hold him in special reverence and after the Prophet, there is nobody in Islamic history about whom as much has been written in the Muslim world as Ali ibn Talib.

The Shia believe Ali to be the sole rightful heir of the Prophet, whose right to succeed was usurped by Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. Thus, the question of Ali’s right to the caliphate caused the primary split in the Muslim community, and later in Islamic theology, into the Sunni and the Shia branches. In his lifetime, Ali was given various titles: *Asad Allah* (“Lion of God”); *Ṣaydar* (“Lion”); *Murtada* (“One Who is Chosen and Contented”); and *Mawlay-i-Muttaqiyān* (“Master of the God-Fearing”).³

Ali was an outstanding soldier, who is said to have fought brilliantly in the Battles of Badr, Uhud (defending the Prophet when others were fleeing) and Khandaq (by taking down the dreaded giant Abd Wud); at Khaybar (by lifting

the gates of the fort and turning it into a bridge on the moat to allow Muslim forces in); and at Hunain (by bravely taking out enemy snipers at hilltops). As a scholar, Ali was known for his scholarship in various disciplines, including theology, philosophy, mysticism, warfare, grammar, rhetoric and calligraphy.

Ghadir Khumm Controversy: Was Ali Prophet's Chosen Successor?

While returning to Medina from his last Haj pilgrimage in Mecca in 632 CE, the Prophet made certain statements about Ali at Ghadir Khumm that have since been interpreted differently by Sunni and Shia adherents. According to both traditions, the Prophet said that Ali was his inheritor and brother, and that whoever accepted the Prophet as his *mawla* (“master” or “lord” but also, contradictorily, “client” or “protégé”) also should accept Ali as his *mawla*. The Shia regard these statements as indicating the Prophet's naming of Ali as the first “imam” (leader of Muslims after him).⁴

In contrast, the Sunnis take the declaration only as an expression of the Prophet's closeness to Ali and his wish that his cousin and son-in-law inherit his family responsibilities upon his death. Many of the later Islamic Sufis and esotericists have also interpreted the episode as the transfer of the Prophet's spiritual power and authority to Ali (‘*mawla*’ is related to *wilayah* or *walayah*, meaning “rule”, “initiation”, “spiritual authority” or “power”), whom they regard as *wali* (literally “friend”, usually translated as “saint”) par excellence.⁵

Ali under Preceding Caliphs

It is well known that neither Ali nor his wife (and daughter of the Prophet), Fatima, initially accepted the investiture of Abu Bakr as the successor to the Prophet. After Ali performed the funeral rites of the Prophet, he was told that the absentees from the ceremony—notably Abu Bakr and Umar—had taken part in deliberations of a few leaders in the *Saqifat bani Saidah* (“the room with the thatched roof of the tribe of Bani Saidah”), where Abu Bakr was finally named *khalifah*, the ruler of the Islamic community.

Despite his wife's instructions, Ali eventually accepted Abu Bakr as the caliph and later, even accepted Umar and Uthman who succeeded Abu Bakr as caliphs. Ali retired from public life during this time and dedicated himself to studying and teaching the Quran. However, all the three caliphs preceding him used to consult him, acknowledging his wisdom in matters of state.

Tumultuous Reign as Caliph

Ali ibn Talib was always well qualified for the position of caliph. He was the son of the Prophet's uncle and protector (Abu Talib). He was born in the Kaaba and was the first male convert to Islam (when he was 10 years old). Later, he married Fatima (daughter of the Prophet) and was the father of the Prophet's only grandsons (Hasan and Husayn). He was very learned, pious, humble and known for his bravery and chivalry in battle.

However, his brief reign as caliph (656–61 CE) was the most tumultuous period in his life. It was marked by the beginning of the First Fitna, the first large-scale civil war in Muslim history that covered Battle of the Camel, Battle of Siffin and Battle of Nahrawan, which led to the rise of three sects in the religion, namely, the Sunni, the Shia and the Khariji.

Battle of the Camel

Following the assassination of Caliph Uthman, many Muslims—including the rebels—urged Ali to take up the mantle of leadership. After a few days of hesitation, Ali became caliph in order to ensure peace and security in the land. Upon assuming office, he dismissed several governors who had been appointed by Uthman but were viewed by many as corrupt. This upset a number of beneficiaries of the Uthman administration, mostly members of the Umayya clan—led by Governor of Syria, Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan—who expressed their resentment over Ali's reluctance to deliver exemplary punishment against the killers of Uthman. The bloodstained shirt of Uthman and the severed finger of his wife (who had attempted to save him) were publicly displayed in a Damascus mosque to gain public support for the fallen leader.

Meanwhile, Ali left Medina and shifted the capital of the caliphate to Kufa, a garrison city more centrally located in an expanded empire. During the move, when Ali reached Basra, he was confronted by the Prophet's companions, Talha ibn Ubaydullah and Zubayr, both whom he had not made governors of Kufa and Basra respectively. Some historians attribute this snub as the reason Talha and Zubayr turned hostile towards Ali, even after having initially accepted him as caliph. The two had also garnered the support of the Prophet's wife, Ayesha, in their campaign against Ali.

In the ensuing affray, called the Battle of the Camel (for it was fought around Ayesha's protected camel), Ali's forces prevailed. The caliph managed to explain to Ayesha his version of the events and she was escorted back to Medina. However,

the battle that reportedly killed thousands on both sides, also claimed the lives of Talha and Zubayr.⁶

Battle of Siffin

A more dangerous challenge confronted Ali just after the Battle of the Camel. Muawiya, Uthman's cousin and Governor of Syria whom Ali had tried to dismiss, challenged the caliph in a series of skirmishes at Siffin in 657 CE in northern Syria. When Ali's forces appeared to be winning, a wily general of Muawiya, Amr ibn Al-Aas, asked the soldiers to stick pages of the Quran on the tip of their spears, calling for peaceful arbitration. Ali was suspicious of Muawiya's intentions, but many of his soldiers were wary of fighting their Muslim brethren, so he accepted the call for arbitration.

However, a small fact of Ali's army, later known as the Khariji ("seceders"), turned renegade and mutinied against Ali over his decision to accept arbitration. Ali dealt a pulverising defeat upon the Khariji in the Battle of Nahrawan (658 CE). Taking advantage of the situation, Al-Aas convinced Ali's representative in the arbitration to accept his stepping down from the position of caliph. Although Ali did not accept the embarrassing outcome of the arbitration, his followers started deserting him, and some of the provinces too began shifting to Muawiya's side. Finally, in January 661 CE, when Ali was praying at the mosque in Kufa, he was killed by a poisoned sword by a Khariji, Abd Al-Rahman ibn Muljam.

Ali's Campaign for Social Justice

Reversing Uthman's policies, Ali reasserted central control over the provinces and sought equitable distribution of state revenue among people. His stance against corruption angered the power elite, which had entrenched itself during the 12 years reign of Uthman, and Ali had to contend with powerful internal enemies. Nevertheless, the reign of Ali is remembered as a model for socio-political and religious righteousness that defied worldly corruption and social injustice.⁷

Ali's Assassination by the Khariji

As mentioned earlier, Caliph Ali was assassinated by a leader of the Khariji community, Abd Al-Rahman ibn Muljam. The Khariji, who appeared during the First Fitna, was the first sect in Islam that came into existence, much before the Sunni-Shia divide became a full-fledged theological schism.

The early members of the Khariji were soldiers of Caliph Ali's army, who

mutinied after Ali agreed to hold arbitration with his adversary, Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan, to decide the question of succession to the caliphate following the Battle of Siffin (July 657 CE). The Khariji felt that according to the Quran, Caliph Ali should have fought with the rebels under Muawiya's leadership and overcome them, but by accepting arbitration, he had proven himself to be an unfit caliph and had violated the holy book. Even after much persuasion, Ali could not convince the seceders, who turned belligerent against Ali's forces.

In response, Caliph Ali crushed the Khariji revolt in the Battle of Nahrawan in July 658 CE. However, he was killed in the Kufa mosque in 661 CE, when Ibn Muljam hit him on the head with a poison-coated sword.

The Khariji were excommunicated by the Sunni and the Shia sects of Islam. They did not accept the ruling of most Muslim jurists that the caliph should come from the Quraysh, but believed that even an enslaved person with moral and religious piety and the right capabilities could be elected caliph. Similarly, they believed that a caliph could be deposed on the commission of even the most minor sin.

The Kharijis were highly egalitarian and disliked kingship. They were also highly fanatical and puritanical. Any Muslim who committed a major sin was considered an apostate, as the evidence of faith in the religion was supposed to reflect in deeds and not verbal affirmations. Luxury, music, games and lascivious lifestyle were spurned and a literal interpretation of the Quran was insisted upon.⁸

Some Khariji, like Azariqa (an extremist branch of the sect), believed that jihad was the sixth pillar of Islam and that indiscriminate killing (*istirad*) was allowed. Therefore, the slaughter of kafirs (non-believers) was valid, and even Muslims who did not practice Islam in the proper manner fell in the category of non-believing apostates. It was forbidden to allow such Muslims to mend their ways, and it was permitted to kill even their women and children.⁹

In modern times, many Islamist and jihadist groups, like the Al-Qaeda, the ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood and even the Tahreek-i-Taliban (Pakistan), have been vilified by Sunni scholars as being closet Khariji. The parallel of modern Muslim terrorist groups with Khariji is drawn because of their constant state of war against existing Muslim governments, which does not originate from any personal enmity or lust for power but is a practical exercise of their religious belief. However, the modern Khariji sub-sect of the Ibadi school (found mainly in Oman) protests as being wrongly accused of belonging to the Khariji sect and follows a remarkably much tolerant version of Islam.

Ali's death ended the period of the Rashidun Caliphs. All four of these companions of the Prophet were related to the Prophet through matrimonial ties. Though known for their piety, the Rashidun could not remain immune from internal political feuds and power struggles. Some radical Muslims have tended to glorify this period as a golden age and filled it with a sense of utopian nostalgia, sometimes overlooking the fact that their rule was riddled with internecine feuds, with three of the four being assassinated. In the words of Arthur Goldschmidt Jr and Lawrence Davidson:

Indeed, most of the Rashidun caliphs were admirable and all four were interesting, but their era was marked by frequent strife, many crises of adjustment to changing conditions, and much improvisation. Even the caliphate itself had begun as a stopgap measure, shaped by Umar into a lasting institution. It became the linchpin for a state that was doubling and redoubling in area, population, and wealth. Now, upon Ali's death, it seemed to be in peril.¹⁰

NOTES

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*UMAYYAD EMPIRE AND ORIGIN OF
SECTARIANISM*

7

Battle of Karbala and Umayyad Dynastic Caliphate

Husayn gave his person and his possessions as an offering to God to “revive the religion of his grandfather Muhammad”, “to redeem it”, and “save it from the destruction into which it had been thrown by the behaviour of Yazid”; furthermore, he wished to show that the conduct of the hypocrites was shameful and to teach the peoples the necessity of revolt against unjust and impious governments (fasiks), in short he offered himself as an example (uswa) to the Muslim community.

—Veccia Vegliari¹

Notwithstanding the personal piety and austere lifestyle of Rashidun Caliphs, their period of governance was not as idyllic as portrayed by most Islamist ideologues. These extraordinary religious personalities valiantly confronted the conflicting demands of religious idealism and political realism of an ever-expanding caliphate that conquered territories of crumbling empires and embraced an eclectic mix of nationalities and cultures in ever-increasing numbers.

Initially, the austere leadership of Abu Bakr and Umar was able to manage the unprecedented speed of success and the resulting challenges faced by a largely inexperienced Arab military and political dispensation. However, the overbearing control that Abu Bakr and Umar exercised proved a tough act to follow for succeeding caliphs, who found it difficult to control the ambitions of far-flung governors and generals and the aspirations of newly converted populations.

With the outbreak of the First Fitna—the first among several succeeding periods of civil wars and internecine feuds—the issues of succession, misgovernance, favouritism and nepotism continued to afflict the nascent polity. Ironically, these political differences caused theological schisms; and highly conflicting and contentious sects, such as Sunni, Shia and Khariji, came into existence. At this time, one of the most controversial companions of the Prophet and challenger to the caliphate, Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, seized political control and sought to stabilise the political order more through principles of realpolitik rather than religious idealism that the Rashidun Caliphs espoused.

Indeed, Shias largely despise Muawiya for waging the Battle of Siffin against Caliph Ali and for allegedly poisoning Hasan (Ali's eldest son), the rightful claimant for the post of caliph after Ali. Most Sunnis too remember Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan (reigned from 660 CE to 681 CE) as an 'Ameer' (ruler) and not a caliph because he did not qualify as a religious leader of the community to have succeeded the first four Rashidun Caliphs.

Many Sunni Muslims, however, credit Muawiya for restoring unity to the Muslim Empire, and also consider him the founder of the great Umayyad dynasty. To them, dynastic form of succession albeit not ideal brought more political stability than the uncertainty that followed the death of a caliph, as no method for succession was firmly established. In contrast, Islamist ideologues like Maulana Maududi denigrate Muawiya for bringing to an end the Rashidun Caliphate (which based its polity on Islamic values) and for introducing the authoritarian despotism of pre-Islamic Byzantine and Sassanid empires. The other reason for Muawiya's disrepute among Islamist and Shia detractors is that he is seen as the son of Abu Sufyan, the greatest foe of Islam and the Prophet before the conquest of Mecca, who instigated all three major battles at Badr, Uhud and Khandaq (also known as the Battle of Ahzab). Belonging to the Umayyad tribe, Muawiya is also seen as one of the beneficiaries of favouritism and nepotism practised by Caliph Uthman towards his Umayyad clansmen during his reign.

Muawiya's Pragmatism in War and Politics

During his twenty years of governorship of Syria, Muawiya is said to have raised a large Arab tribal army that was more loyal to him than the caliph of the time. It is also alleged that he bought a truce with Byzantine rulers to free his army for the fight against Ali to become the caliph. Further, he took advantage of Caliph Ali's difficulties in Iraq by sending a force to seize control of Egypt, away from its appointed Muslim governor.

Thus, when Ali was assassinated in 661 CE, Muawiya was in control of both Syria and Egypt and, as commander of the largest force in the Muslim Empire, had the strongest claim to the caliphate. Hasan, the eldest son of Ali, stood no chance and was persuaded to remove himself from public life in exchange for a subsidy. Also, under his rule, the capital of the caliphate shifted from Kufa to Damascus. It is because of these Machiavellian moves that Muawiya is not celebrated as much in Muslim religious history.

To be fair to Muawiya, he had witnessed the dangers of exposing the caliph to attacks by dissenting masses in the name of greater accountability. He also understood that the problem of recurrent disputes over succession to the high office was quite destabilising for the caliphate as no religious or political norms or conventions had been established by his predecessors. As the territories under the caliphate expanded and included entire regions held by former empires, particularly the Persian Sassanid and much of Byzantine territories, the importance of indisputable political authority and sovereignty of the ruler, even above the principles of religion, was evident to the new leader, who was himself fairly ambitious and less of a religious idealist than his predecessors.

Under Muawiya and his successors, who established a patrimonial dynastic order under the Umayyad Caliphate, the ideals of theocratic, egalitarian and accountable governance of the Rashidun Caliphs were seen more as a liability for running an overstretched empire and a highly diverse and restive population. In fact, the ideals of absolute monarchy and the values of Oriental despotism, as established by the Persian Achaemenid and Sassanid empires, were found to be more suitable for governing agrarian-based economies of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran.

Introduction of *Malookiyat* (Monarchy) and Patrimonial Succession

After the assassination of Ali, Muawiya led his forces from his capital, Damascus, to Kufa, where Hasan (the eldest son of Ali) had been nominated for the position of caliph. Muawiya was able to bribe the commander of Hasan's vanguard forces to give up resistance, and he then sent emissaries to Hasan for negotiations. As a result, the two sides agreed to some terms, collectively known as the Hasan–Muawiya Pact (661 CE).² The main points were: Hasan would abdicate the position of caliph in favour of Muawiya in return for a pension; and upon the death of Muawiya (who was 20 years older than the then 38-year-old Hasan), his successor would be elected by a council (shura).³

However, Hasan's death (in 670 CE) preceded the death of Muawiya, which some Muslim historians claim was caused by poisoning by Hasan's wife, Jada bint Al-Ashath, at the instance of Muawiya. After the death of Hasan, Muawiya considered the pact null and void, and just before his death in 680 CE, managed to gain broader political acceptance to make his son, Yazid I, his successor. Arab historian Firas Al-Khateeb tries to justify Muawiya's decision to name his son his successor and for starting patrimonial caliphate after him:

Muslim historians throughout the ages have speculated as to his reasoning for doing so, especially considering the subsequent opposition that arose to Yazid. However, keeping in mind the historical context of Mu'awiya's time makes it easier to understand why the switch to a hereditary system made sense. Mu'awiya's time as Caliph showed the emphasis he placed on political unity and harmony. After the political upheaval of Ali's Caliphate, Mu'awiya's main challenge was keeping the Muslim world united under one command.⁴

However, Muawiya's decision to name his son his successor earned him the condemnation of Muslim scholars and historians, because from that time until the caliphate was abolished in 1924, the highest political office in Islam was hereditary. The accusation has been that he broke the relationship of Islamic brotherhood that the Holy Prophet had established in Islamic society, in which religious piety and not heredity was the theoretical basis for attaining political office.

Most Shia scholars and even Sunni Islamists of today, including Maududi who condemns the Umayyad's introduction of *malookiyat* (monarchy),⁵ deplore the degeneration of the Rashidun Caliphate into the patrimonial dynasty under the Umayyads and the succeeding caliphates.

A more significant political change was Muawiya's adoption of Uthman's title *khalifat Allah* ('deputy of God'), instead of Abu Bakr's *khalifat Rasul Allah* ('deputy of the messenger of God').⁶ The 9th century Muslim historian al-Baladhuri reports that Muawiya claimed "The earth belongs to God and I am the deputy of God".⁷ This change had significant political implications. As deputy of the Prophet, the status of the khalifa could never grow above the law and could not free him from public scrutiny and accountability. However, the title *Khalifat Allah* ('deputy of God') accorded a status to the Muslim head of state an almost divine right to rule with impunity. From now on, the Khalifa was no longer an egalitarian leader, like the Rashidun caliphs, but a hereditary king, who enjoyed a pre-eminent

political and social status superior to that of his subjects. This allowed the gradual introduction of pre-Islamic neo-Platonic cosmogony and Sassanid regal myths into Muslim political theory, which further elevated the political status and powers of the Khalifa.

Battle of Karbala and the Martyrdom of Husayn

When Muawiya—once called the “Caesar of Arabs” by Caliph Umar himself—died in 680 CE, his son, Yazid ibn Muawiya, tried to assert his position as the new caliph. A large majority of Muslim historians paint a very negative picture of Yazid, presenting him as a weak, lecherous and cruel person, unfit to rule and given to “enjoyment of singing girls and playing with a pet monkey”⁸. Being unpopular in his own times, Yazid faced opposition when he assumed the position of Khalifa from prominent companions of the Prophet — mainly Husayn, the younger of the two grandsons of the Prophet and son of Caliph Ali, and Abdullah bin Zubayr, son of Zubayr ibn Al-Awwam.

In fact, Husayn refrained from giving allegiance to Yazid as caliph. When the latter demanded allegiance from Husayn and sent an emissary to Medina for this purpose, the Prophet’s grandson evaded the emissary by travelling to Mecca. Over a period of time, Husayn started receiving letters of support from members of the Kufan population, who proposed that he should overthrow Yazid. On the assurance of support from these “Alids” (supporters of Caliph Ali, who also called themselves Shia-i-Ali and later simply Shia), Husayn set out with a small band of around 72 male followers (with their wives and children) to Kufa on 9 September 680 CE. By the time he reached Karbala, the desert plain on the outskirts of Kufa, he came to know that the people of Kufa who supported Ali had been silenced by Yazid’s forces under the command of Ubaidullah ibn Al-Ziyad (Yazid’s cousin).

At Karbala, Husayn found himself and his warriors surrounded by a strong Umayyad army. When negotiations failed and the Kufan governor, Ubaidullah ibn Al-Ziyad, refused Husayn safe passage out of Karbala without submitting to his authority, a condition rejected by Husayn, the famous battle of Karbala ensued on 10 October 680 CE.

Husayn and his small force fought valiantly. Legend has it that Husayn was heavily wounded as he took a volley of arrows to his face and a blow to his head. However, he kept fighting until all his fellow warriors were killed. Eventually, he was beheaded by a soldier and his body was trampled by horses, as previously instructed by Ibn Ziyad. The severed head was then taken to Yazid in Damascus,

where the victorious potentate is said to have poked at it with a stick. Among the captive women and children of Husayn's household taken to Yazid's court was his sister, Zaynab bint Ali, who, despite being in chains, is said to have shamed Yazid publicly for his evil deed. The women of Yazid's household joined Zaynab and the other captive women in their lamentation for the dead, prompting the sovereign to release the captives.

The Second Fitna: Yazid's Attack on Mecca and Medina

After his death, Husayn is said to have become a more powerful opponent of Yazid than when he was alive. Although the Battle of Karbala initially appeared insignificant, it swelled public resentment and opposition to great heights, leading the Umayyad Empire to be confined to the walls of Damascus following Yazid's death and the outbreak of the Second Fitna from 680 CE to 692 CE.

The other prominent Muslim figure to have opposed the rule of Yazid was Abdullah bin Zubayr. Following Husayn's martyrdom, Abdullah bin Zubayr gave a call for reconvening a *shura* (consultative council initiated under Umar's caliphate) and the removal of Yazid from the position of caliph. His call from Mecca received a sympathetic ear in Medina, which was disillusioned by irrigation projects started under Muawiya's rule that had caused large-scale confiscation of people's lands. Under Abdallah ibn Hanzala, the leaders of Medina renounced allegiance to Yazid and expelled the Umayyad governor from the city. After several failed persuasions and negotiations, Yazid's forces defeated the Madina forces at the Battle of Harrah (683 CE) and Umayyad troops plundered the holy city for three days. From there, Yazid's forces attacked Mecca to subdue the rebellion of Zubayr's forces. Legend has it, that just as the cloth cover of the Kaaba caught fire, news of the sudden death of Yazid arrived and ended the siege of Mecca. Yazid's teenage son, Muawiya II (reigned 683–84 CE), succeeded, but he too died a few months later.⁹

Meanwhile, Abdullah bin Zubayr proclaimed himself the caliph (683–92 CE) from Mecca and extended control over Hejaz, Iraq, Egypt and even parts of Syria close to Damascus. In Kufa, an Alid rebel named Mukhtar Al-Thaqafi rose up against the Umayyads and killed the notorious governor, Ubaidullah ibn Ziyad, in 686 CE to avenge his killing of Husayn ibn Ali.

However, differences between Zubayr and Al-Thaqafi led to the latter's defeat and death in the Battle of Harura in 687 CE. The successor of Muawiya II, Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan, who became the Umayyad caliph in 685 CE, killed

Abdullah bin Zubayr in 692 CE and brought all of the Muslim world under the control of the Umayyad dynasty, thus ending the 'Second Fitna'.

Significance of the Battle of Karbala

The polity of the Islamic world completely changed after the Battle of Karbala and the Second Fitna. The Islamic government, as it was known under the Prophet's rule and the Rashidun Caliphs, was no longer the egalitarian theocracy or tribal democracy but had come firmly in the grip of a single mercantile clan, with the capital not in Medina or Kufa, but the historic Syrian city of Damascus.

Today's Islamists complain about the Umayyad rule, which crushed all forms of dissent with an iron fist and instituted dynastic monarchy (*Malookiyat*) that continues in the Muslim world to this day. From that time, the kings were not bound by the Shariah but were considered above the law, and their legitimacy was not derived through general consent or bayah but through military power that became the basis for assuming political power.

The death of the Prophet's grandson became central to the belief of Shiism. Although all "Muslims lament this tragic death of the Prophet's grandson, but Husain's fate focused the attention of those who regarded themselves as the Shiah-i-Ali even more intensely on the Prophet's descendants," observes Karen Armstrong.¹⁰

Prior to the Battle of Karbala, the Muslim community was said to have been divided into two political factions.¹¹ A distinct religious sect with specific theology and rituals had not evolved until then.¹² In the words of Heinz Halm: "There was no religious aspect to Shi'ism prior to 680. The death of the third imam and his followers marked the 'big bang' that created the rapidly expanding cosmos of Shi'ism and brought it into motion."¹³

The 10th day of Muharram of the Hijri calendar is commemorated as Husayn's death anniversary in the annual Ashura festival by the Shia community. Again, after the end of the Second Fitna in 692 CE, the Umayyads managed to preserve their sovereignty for little less than six decades. One of the biggest reasons why the Abbasid Revolution was successful was because they effectively harvested the negative emotions of the empire's Shia population.¹⁴

The story of Karbala and the martyrdom of Husayn has inspired legions of Muslim revolutionary thinkers, as reflected in this Urdu couplet of Mohammad Ali Jauhar, a leading figure of India's Khilafat Movement in the 1920s:

*Qatl-e-Husein asal mein marge-Yazid hai
Islam zinda hota hai har karbala ke baad*

(The killing of Hussein is in reality Yazid's death,
Islam comes to life after every Karabala)^{15,16}

NOTES

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8

Political and Religious Ferment in Umayyad Rule

Once, while Muhammad sat in the company of Gabriel, a second angel descended to pay him a visit and posed him a question, “Shall your Lord make you a prophet king or a messenger servant (a-fa- malikan nabiyyan yaj ‘aluka aw ‘abdan rasulan)?” The humble Muhammad chose to be a messenger servant.

—Ibn Hanbal¹

The title “*malik*” for a king and the word “*mulk*” for the kingdom was widely used in pre-Islamic Arabia.² The epigraphic record of the Arabian Peninsula, stretching back a millennium before the coming of Islam, testifies to this fact. However, the Prophet and the Rashidun Caliphs did not accept the title “*malik*” and preferred to use “*abd Allah*” (slave of Allah) as a suffix to their names. In addition, all the caliphs from Umar onwards also used the title “*ameer ul mumineen*”. Thus, as Sean Anthony writes:

The rulers of the early Islamic polity rejected the imperial titulature of the Byzantines and Sasanians in their inscriptions, monuments, and coinage. The rulers did not claim to be “*shahanshah*”, (the king of kings), on the Sasanian model, and they avoided the title of “king” in official proclamations just after the Byzantine emperor Heraclius had adopted the Greek title *basileus*, or “king”, as an official title, thus codifying a

long-standing vernacular precedent of referring to Roman emperors a [*sic*] “kings”.³

After the reign of the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthamn and Ali, known as the *Khulaf-i-Rashidun*), when Muawiya became the political ruler of the Muslim community, he established a dynastic kingdom named after the Umayyad clan of Mecca. Whereas, the earlier Islamic rulers liked to be called *Khalifa* (or caliph) and “*ameer ul mumineen*”, Umayyad rulers re-introduced the title “malik” which meant a ruler or king. This change in the nature and status of the ruler’s powers was opposed by many religious figures, most prominent being the household of the Prophet himself. Much of modern-day Islamist/jihadist opposition to kingship and despotism derives its arguments from the same anti-monarchical literature in Islamic history. Thus, Nadia Maria El-Cheikh writes:

In the early Islamic centuries ‘mulk’ was used as a term of condemnation to distinguish between the man-made; impious and arbitrary rule of worldly sovereigns and the just and divine rule of caliphs. So while the era of the Orthodox Caliphs (Rashidun caliphs) was referred to as “khilafa”, symbolizing justice and piety, the reign of the Umayyads was dismissed as “mulk”, a term carrying connotations of usurpations and oppression.⁴

Despite being vilified by the puritans, such as the Prophet’s grandsons, Umayyad rulers gave justification for behaving as kings and for introducing *mulukiyat* (kingship) and even dynastic despotism. Muawiya presented the example of Prophet David, described in the Quran as a righteous Israelite king, and his son Solomon, who succeeded to the throne after David. Thus, the system of Patrimonial Succession was justified by giving a scriptural reference. Muawiya is also known to have declared, “I am the first king and the last caliph (*ana awwalu malikin wa-akhiru khalifa*)”.⁵

As the Umayyad rulers lost much territory to rebellions following the Battle of Karbala, a period known as the Second Fitna, it deepened their resolve to further strengthen the foundations of despotism. The early Umayyads, who belonged the family line of Abu Sufyan (the father of Muawiyah) saw an end to their rule after the young ruler Muawiya II, the son of Yazid I, was removed in 684 CE. They were replaced by a second line coming from Marwan I, who also belonged to the Umayyad clan of Mecca. With the exception of Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz (reigned 717–20 CE), who lived an ascetic life like the Rashidun Caliphs, other Umayyad caliphs (ruled till 750 CE) indulged in luxury due to increased

wealth and a super-abundance of slaves was rife. Indulgence in luxury due to increased wealth and a superabundance of slaves was rife. The eunuch system, which made the harem institution possible, developed under the Umayyads.⁶

The Umayyad rulers justified absolute monarchical rule by claiming it was the only means for avoiding violent anarchy, civil war and misrule, which prevailed during the first and second fitnas. However, the Umayyads faced consistent revolts and religious opposition from the Khawarij, the Qadarites, the Mutazila, and the school of religious jurists (*faqih*) who were instituting different schools of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) at that time and were mostly opposed to the absolutism of the Umayyad caliphs.

“Divine Right of Caliphs”: From Deputy of Prophet to Deputy of God

Under Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan and later Hisham I, the Umayyad rulers crushed internal revolts and growing internal dissent with a heavy hand. Like Muawiyah and Yazid I before them, these Umayyad caliphs used the title to *Khalifat Allah*. It has been discussed in the earlier chapter on how the title *Khalifat Rasul Allah* (successor of the Prophet) implies that the “caliph is a steward of the Prophet’s legacy, a trustee of the Prophetic state”.⁷ By contrast, *Khalifat Allah* (deputy of God) implies that the caliph is divinely appointed leader of the Muslims and a ruler invested with divine authority.⁸ With this slight change in the nomenclature, dissenters were not to be viewed as merely political rebels but as religious rebels who opposed the order established by God.

Although the idea of absolute monarchy was abhorrent to the revolutionaries who eventually overturned the Umayyad dynastic rule and replaced it with the Abbasid Caliphate, the idea of dynastic despotism could not be removed. Even the Abbasid rulers over a period of time became unabashedly despotic. Under the fifth Abbasid Caliph Harun Al-Rashid (786–809 CE), the Abbasid caliphate had fully adopted the ways of the old-fashioned Umayyad monarchs. According to the Sunnah, the Prophet had forbidden the people to rise from their seats to honour him upon his arrival, but under the Abbasids the courtiers were instructed to kiss the ground at the time of presenting themselves before their caliph.

The Marwanite Umayyads

Among the later Umayyad Marwanite rulers, Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan and Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz hold sway in the public imagination of the Muslim world.

Ibn Marwan's reign saw the culmination of the Umayyad Empire's glory, epitomised in the construction of golden Dome of the Rock, which was built in Jerusalem in 691 CE and ushered in the Islamic style of architecture. The other notable feature of Marwan's reign was his general, Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, who was infamous for his brutality.

Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan and the Dome of the Rock

Abd Al-Malik ibn Marwan belonged to the first generation of born Muslims. He held administrative and military positions under the Umayyad ruler Muawiya I, and later under his own father, Caliph Marwan I (684–85 CE). By the time of his accession, Umayyad authority had collapsed because of a rebellion by Abdullah bin Zubayr.

With the help of his notorious general, Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, Ibn Marwan began a seven-year campaign to defeat all rebellions and in 692 CE, he defeated and killed Abdullah bin Zubayr. He resumed the conquest of North Africa, winning the Berbers to his side and captured Carthage (in 697 CE) from the Byzantine Empire. He made Arabic the national language across the empire, struck Islamic gold coins for the first time and built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf was a trusted governor of Ibn Marwan and the head of the caliph's dreaded *shurta* (security forces). Well known for his brutality, Hajjaj bombarded the Kaaba and shed blood within the holy precincts to bring the rebellion of Abdullah bin Zubayr to an end. Later, he put Zubayr's dead body in an inverted gibbet. He also crushed the resilient Khariji uprising in Arabia and finally entered Kufa, the centre of the rebellion. Entering the city wearing a disguise, he entered the main mosque and mounted the pulpit to address the Kufans with one of his memorable speeches: "I see heads ripe for the cutting. People of Iraq, I will not myself be crushed like a soft fig.... By God, I will strip you as men strip the bark from trees.... I will beat you as stray camels are beaten."⁹

Legend has it that the Kufans were so intimidated by the speech that they gave no more trouble in terms of rebellion against the Umayyads. Under the instructions of this brutal general, Muhammad bin Qasim captured Sindh and Multan (711–14 CE).

Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz: "The Fifth Rashidun Caliph"

In sharp contrast to the absolutist policies of Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marwan and the brutal repression of Hajjaj was the rule of Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz (reigned 717–

20 CE), also known as Umar II and affectionately referred to as the fifth and last caliph of Islam in some circles.¹⁰ Respected as a pious and righteous caliph who emphasised reverting to the original principles of Islam, Umar II, among all the Umayyads, was also held in high esteem by the later Abbasid dynasty and was highly regarded even among the Shia community.

He associated himself with great Islamic scholars and is credited with having ordered the first official collection of Hadeeth (documented sayings and actions of the Prophet), as he feared that they might be forgotten from collective memory. On his behest, notable compilers, namely, Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Hazm and Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, recorded Hadeeth narrations in the written form.

He was reportedly more tolerant towards non-Muslim citizens of his state and worked towards developing equality between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims (called '*Mawaliis*'), giving them equal salaries and incentives as state employees. He abolished many taxes levied on the people, such as home tax, marriage tax and stamp tax. In addition, he abolished jizya tax that was earlier levied even on the '*mawaliis*'. When officials complained about the scrapping of the jizya tax, he famously said: "Muhammad (peace be upon him) was sent as a prophet and not as a tax collector."¹¹

He is also credited with stopping the cursing of Caliph Ali in Friday sermons, which was in vogue under the earlier Umayyad rulers. This won him praise from the Shia community. As a ruler, he is deemed a pacifist, as he remained focused on home affairs and made no major military conquests. He is said to have quelled a Khariji revolt mainly through diplomacy and is said to have lifted his predecessor's disastrous siege of Christian Constantinople soon after his accession. When he died at the age of 38 in a rented house in Homs in Syria, it is reported that even the Roman emperor praised him for his simple living and virtuous policies.

The rule of Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz underscores the continuing confusion within Muslim polity, as this caliph tried to revive the pietism of the Rashidun Caliphs (due to which he is often affectionately regarded as the fifth Rashidun Caliph). However, the succeeding rulers—Yazid II, Hisham I, Walid II and Yazid III—could not stem the rot in the declining Umayyad Caliphate, until the Abbasids conquered Kufa and overthrew the Umayyads in 750 CE.

New Arab: From Racial to Linguistic Identity

Under the Umayyad rulers, mainly from the time of Ibn Marwan's reign, the segregation between the ruling class from the Arabian Peninsula and the subjects

from disparate cultures started to diffuse: “Non-Muslims began to settle in garrison towns, peasants got work in Muslim areas and learned to speak Arabic. Merchants began to trade with the Muslims and, even though conversion was still not encouraged, some imperial officials did embrace Islam.”¹²

As Arabic slowly became the lingua franca, any follower of Muhammad now passed for an Arab. In the words of Philip Hitti: “An Arab henceforth became one who professed Islam, and spoke and wrote the Arabic tongue, regardless of his racial affiliation. This is one of the most significant facts of the Islamic civilization.”¹³

However, Umayyad officials have also been criticised for establishing discriminatory policy regarding new converts from races and ethnicities other than those from the Arabian Peninsula. Non-Arab Muslims were called *mawalis*, which was similar to the status of manumitted slaves in pre-Islamic society. This created a new social hierarchy wherein the convert remained at a socially and economically lower position. These converts also kept paying the *jizya*, a practice Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz briefly discontinued, which is said to have depleted the state exchequer.

Three Theological Approaches: Ahl Al-Kalaam, Ahl Al-Rai and Ahl Al-Hadeeth

As the capital of the caliphate shifted from Medina to Damascus under the Umayyad rule and a tribal, egalitarian order gave way to dynastic despotism, links with the seats of Islamic culture in both space and time grew wider. With new cultural influences entering the Islamic fold, the original Arab Islamic traditions got diluted and the pristine theology itself faced new challenges in maintaining its spiritual and intellectual coherence in an ever-expanding Islamic space–time.

As the distance from the early generations of Islam increased, the need to document the Prophet’s traditions (*Sunnah*) in the form of Hadeeth literature was strongly felt, and so was the urgency for formally codifying Islamic legal system based on the Quran and Prophetic methodology (*manhaj*) in a legalistic framework. By the turn of Islam’s second century, oral Hadeeth traditions were being collected in large volumes, with noted scholars compiling and grading them as per acceptable standards to measure authenticity. The Quran and the Hadeeth were religious texts and not written as legal documents. There was, therefore, a need to systematise Islamic jurisprudence in a legal framework to administer justice

for a dynamically evolving socio-political order, now challenged by a surfeit of foreign influences throwing up new cases and issues without precedent. This gave birth to several juristic and theological approaches for interpreting the Quran and the Hadeeth to meet the changing social, economic and political realities.

It is in this context that the historian Daniel Brown has described the rise of three distinct theological approaches in Islamic history, which have had far-reaching political implications. According to him, groups following these three approaches are: *Ahl Al-Kalaam* (speculative theologians); *Ahl Al-Rai* (liberal theologians); and *Ahl Al-Hadeeth* (the partisans of Hadeeth who eventually prevailed).¹⁴ There might be some debate in the way the scholar has characterised these groups, but the categorisation remains helpful in studying the theological trends that later had significant political implications in the course of Muslim history.

Ahl Al-Kalaam: Philosophical Interpreters of Islamic Theology

The commingling of cultures and the resultant friction, along with the tension between the pietist stance of the Rashidun Caliphs that was still idealised by the common laity versus the regal authority of the Umayyads, caused political and religious debates and gave rise to new theological, philosophical and mystical movements at the time.

In this regard, the discipline of *ilm al-kalaam* (literally the ‘science of discourse’) related to the philosophical study of Islamic doctrine (*aqaid*) came up.¹⁵ According to Majid Fakhry, this theological movement arose in an “attempt to grapple” with several “complex problems” early in the history of Islam, particularly to rebut arguments “leveled at Islam by pagans, Christians and Jews”,¹⁶ as well as to deal with theological issues of predestination of sinners in Islamic scripture, etc. However, it soon got largely associated with the Mutazilas, who used Greek philosophical rationality to explain Islamic beliefs.

Alongside the Mutazila, their antithetical Aharite and Maturidi schools are also included among the Ahl Al-Kalaam (people of philosophical and speculative theology), as are Shia sub-sects (Twelver, Ismailis) and Ibadis. However, the commencement of the philosophical discourse on Islamic doctrines can be found to have its origins in Hasan Al-Basri’s *qadariya* (free will) argument.

Hasan Al-Basri’s Qadariya (Free Will) against Jabariya (Determinism)

A notable example of this new spiritual and intellectual churning was the theology of qadariya propounded by an ascetic scholar Hasan Al-Basri (642–728 CE).

Belonging to the second generation of Muslims (generally called *tabiun*), Hasan was a revered preacher in Basra, who called for a frugal life and “renunciation” (*zuhd*) of worldliness and materialism. He excelled in the exegesis (*tafseer*) of the Quran and his name is frequently mentioned in classical and medieval literature on the scripture.¹⁷ Basri’s name is a forerunner “in many mystical *silsilas* (chains of teachers and their disciples) going back to Muhammad” in the writings of Sunni mystics from the ninth century onwards. His book *Kūt al-ḳulūb* is regarded as the seminal work of Sunni mysticism.¹⁸

In opposition to the prevalent Jabariya school (followers of theologian Jahm ibn Safwan) that extolled predestination, Hasan Al-Basri is credited with producing the earliest text for the Qadariya school of philosophy, which asserted the doctrine of free will. This concept later promoted the Greek philosophy-inspired Mutazila movement, which was instrumental in the removal of Umayyad caliphs from power.

Hasan Al-Basri contended that humans had free will, making them responsible for their actions. This flew in the face of the Jabariya philosophy that people were predestined to behave in a certain manner, which meant that there was divine will in allowing the Umayyad caliphs to maintain their oppressive policies. In the words of Karen Armstrong:

When Caliph Abd Al-Malik heard that Hasan had been spreading this potentially rebellious doctrine, he summoned him to court, but Hasan was so popular that the Caliph dared not punish him. Hasan had begun the strong Muslim tradition of combining a disciplined interior life with political opposition to the government.¹⁹

Ahl Al-Rai and the Hanafi School: Liberal, Non-Judgemental Murjia Thought

The philosophy of the Murjia school of Sunni Muslims is mainly antithetical to the views of the Kharijis, detailed earlier in the chapter on Caliph Ali. Unlike the Khariji who believed in the philosophy of *takfeer* (denouncing “sinning” Muslims as non-believers and therefore fit for slaughter), the Murjias held that God alone could judge the professed faith of people and one should defer (*irja*) these matters to God and His Day of Judgment (*yawm al-qiyamah*).

They not only believed that it was wrong to take sides in the controversial conduct of Rashidun Caliphs and the Umayyad caliphs but also rejected the Khariji idea that the faith of a believer strengthens or weakens on account of the

person's good or bad deeds. These theologians believed that good deeds or omission of them did not affect a person's faith, which remains constant irrespective of his or her moral uprightness or frailty.

Thus, the Murjia could castigate an irreligious ruler but could not declare the sovereign illegitimate, even if they might appear to contravene the standards of the scripture. The Murjia philosophy was welcomed by the Umayyad rulers and is said to have influenced the Mutazila, Ashari and Maturidi schools of Islam later.

One of the most famous adherents of this school was Abu Hanifa (699–766 CE), the pioneer of the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), whose Hanafi school of Sunni Islam is widely practised by Muslims of the Indian subcontinent (particularly in northern and central India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan), along with Central Asia, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Balkans, Russia, Chechnya and some parts of the Arab world (such as Egypt).

Ahl Al-Hadeeth: Proto-Salafi Opposition to Ahl Al-Kalaam and Ahl Al-Rai

In opposition to the conceited speculations of Al-Kalaam theorists on matters of Islamic doctrines, based largely on pagan philosophies of ancient Greece, as well as the alleged indulgence of Ahl Al-Rai jurists, like Abu Hanifa, on analogous reasoning (*qiyas*) in matters of jurisprudence, the Ahl Al-Hadeeth movement of the Hadeeth scholars insisted on strict literalist adherence to the Quran and the Prophetic tradition, above the intellectual derivations made by Ahl Al-Rai and Kalaam scholars.

Constituting the most authoritative and dominant bloc of Sunni orthodoxy prior to the emergence of *madhabs* (legal schools) by the fourth Islamic century, Ahl Al-Hadeeth scholars, like modern-day Salafi-Wahhabis,²⁰ rejected rationalist approaches and espoused a strictly literalist (*zahiri*) interpretation of the Quran and Hadeeth literature.²¹ However, Oliver Leaman cautions against misinterpreting the terms “traditionalists” for Ahl Al-Hadeeth and “rationalists” for Mutazila as implying that the former favoured irrationality, while the latter did not use Hadeeth.²²

Emerging towards the end of the eighth century, the Ahl Al-Hadeeth were also known as Atharis, who later even opposed the use of metaphorical interpretation of Quranic verses, particularly on matters of anthropomorphic descriptions and attributes of God and believed that the realities of godhead should

be left to Allah alone (*tafweed*). They famously asserted that the literal meaning of the Quran and the Hadeeth should be accepted by Muslims, without asking *bila kayfa* (how). The most prominent leader of Ahl Al-Hadeeth movement was Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855 CE),²³ who spearheaded the opposition to the Mutazila argument of “Quran as a creation” that was orchestrated by the Abbasid rulers of his time.

The doctrine of Ahl Al-Hadeeth calls for strict compliance to: the sources of Islamic law, that is, the Quran and the Hadeeth; *ijma* (scholarly consensus), that is, deference of complex religious issues to qualified scholars of the Hadeeth who are capable of deriving rulings from Hadeeth literature; and vehement hostility towards various forms of *bidah* (religious innovations). Unlike the followers of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence (described later), Ahl Al-Hadeeth adherents reject *taqlid* (the practice of blindly following jurists and their opinions [*rai*] without scriptural evidence). They accept the use of reason to back religious argument, but are against making it the sole basis for accepting divine revelation or religious truth. They also believe that the Quran is uncreated and eternal and still not part of godhead, an argument deemed untenable by the Mutazila philosophers. They believe that Kalaam philosophising in religious matters is a blameworthy innovation (*bidah*) and hold that faith of a Muslim increases and decreases in correlation with the performance of prescribed rituals and duties—a claim contested by Ashari and Maturidi scholars.

According to Ahl Al-Hadeeth, there are three incumbents in accepting tauheed: (i) that a Muslim believes in the oneness of God, the creator and sustainer of creation (*tauheed ar-rububiyah*); (ii) that a Muslim not only believes but also worships only that one God who is Allah (*tauheed al-uluhiyyah*); and (iii) that a Muslim asserts that God has a set of attributes which do not contradict each other (*tauheed al-asma wa-l-sifat*).

By the ninth and tenth centuries, the Hanafi and Maliki jurists gradually came to accept the primacy of the Quran and the Hadeeth advocated by the Atharis and curtailed their *Ahl Al-Rai* analogous “excesses”. This “traditionalising” of legal reasoning is evident in the Shafii legal school. For their part, *Ahl Al-Hadeeth* scholars, particularly the Hanbalis, gradually accepted analogous reasoning (*qiyas*), albeit strictly founded on scriptural sources. Thus, the independent thinking of Kalaam philosophers and the legal analogy of the relatively liberal *Ahl Al-Rai* suffered a major decline and the process led to the closing of the “doors of *ijtihad*”, although the *Ahl Al-Hadeeth* technically remain proponents of *ijtihad*.

During the fourteenth century, the *Ahl Al-Hadeeth* school underwent a religious renewal under the controversial scholarship of Ahmad Ibn Taimiyah and in the eighteenth century, under Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab.²⁴

Formation of Jurisprudential Schools (pl. Madhahib)

The authoritarian practices of the Umayyad Caliphate, as opposed to the relatively more egalitarian rule of the Rashidun Caliphs, became a significant subject of discussion among the religious and philosophical personages of the time. A major discussion was on how to run contemporary politics and society based on Islamic principles. At that time, the Quran was the principal source of guidance, but it mostly spoke of metaphysical aspects and was quite succinct in its directions when it came to complex legal issues and everyday codes of conduct.

The Prophet had not encouraged his disciples to write down his sayings and acts as he wished there should be no confusion between the revelations of the Quran, which he believed he received from God, and his explanations and teachings. However, the oral tradition had kept alive his sayings and acts for over a century in the collective memory of his devout followers. In order to better understand the context of the Quranic verses, it was felt, in the eighth century, that it was important to write books on the life of the Prophet (*Seerat-un-Nabi*) and collect his “sayings” (known as *Hadeeth*) of his *Sunnah* (Prophet’s sayings and practices that are both undocumented sources such as in oral tradition and those in *Hadeeth* texts) in writing by various scholars.

These written records of the Hadeeth and the *Seerah* (short for ‘*Seeratul Nabi*’, which refers to the Prophet’s biography) were to be used to complement the instructions from the Quran, in order to build a fully codified and detailed way of life and system of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in order to establish the Shariah (the social, ethical, legal and even political code of Islam). The development of *fiqh* became so popular under the Umayyads that virtually every town in the empire had its own “*fiqh*”.²⁵ It was only in the Abbasid period that jurists started to evolve a more unified system of Islamic law.²⁶

In contemporary times, the Amman Message (a statement issued for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world by King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein of Jordan), issued in 2004, recognised eight legitimate schools of Islamic law and prohibited declarations of apostasy against them. As a result, the message received wide acceptability in the Muslim world.²⁷ These eight schools of Islamic law—which include four Sunni, two Shia and two other Muslim schools of jurisprudence—

are *Hanafi* (Sunni), *Maliki* (Sunni), *Shafii* (Sunni), *Hanbali* (Sunni), *Jafari* (Shia), *Zaydi* (Shia), *Ibadi* (moderate Khariji), *Zahiri* (Ahl Al-Hadeeth). Discussed next are a few prominent schools and their geopolitical spread across the map of the Islamic world.

Hanafi Fiqh of Sunni Islam: Room for Interpretation (Rai)

As stated earlier, Abu Hanifa is the founder of the most largely followed Sunni school of Islamic jurisprudence. Abu Hanifa is known to have favoured reason in his legal rulings (*faqih du ray*). His theological school is claimed to have later developed into the Maturidi school of Islamic theology.²⁸

In its interpretation of divine law (Shariah) as enshrined in the Quran and Hadeeth literature, Hanafi methodology (*usul*) makes use of four sources: (i) ijma or concensus; (ii) qiyas or legal analogy; (iii) *istihsan* (juristic discretion); and (iv) *urf* (normative customs). The Hanafi school may not endorse ijtehad (independent reasoning), but it favours *istihsan*, which literally means “to consider something good”, particularly preferring one juristic analogy over the other because of it being more beneficial. Abu Hanifa is known for having his personal opinion (*rai*) on issues and free use of *istihsan*, which makes him a controversial jurist in the eyes of certain other Sunni schools, such as the Shafii and Hanbali. However, in his time, this juristic flexibility of *istihsan*, through the application of *rai*, in formulating legal stances made Hanafi school more popular among converts from other non-Arab cultures.²⁹

Although Abu Hanifa wrote little himself, his students (like Abu Yusuf and Muhammad Al-Shaybani) preserved his views in their writings for posterity.³⁰ It is interesting to note that Abu Hanifa was a silk merchant and his grandfather, Zuta, was brought as a slave from Kabul (Afghanistan) to Kufa. No wonder his eclectic upbringing and school of jurisprudence appealed to the converts from Persia, Central Asia and India!

Maliki Fiqh: Importance of Customs in Law (Medina Practice)

Departing from Abu Hanifa’s stress on *istihsan*, Malik ibn Anas (711–95 CE) stressed on the customary law and religious practices of Medina, the city nurtured by Prophetic practices. According to Imam Malik ibn Anas, the city preserved the Prophet’s community in the original Sunnah (Prophetic practices). To this end, he wrote a compendium called *Mutawattab* (The Beaten Path) on the customs of Medina, as a repository of the Prophet’s law and way of life. The Maliki school

also included the rulings of the Rashidun Caliphs, particularly Caliph Umar, in its school of jurisprudence.³¹

Thus, in its sources of law, Maliki school covered the Quran, the Hadeeth, the '*Amal*' (traditions of the city of Medina), the practices and legal rulings of '*sahaba*' (companions of the Prophet such as Caliph Umar), along with *qiyas*, *istislah* (judgments in Islamic law given in public interest in the absence of clear scriptural reference) and *urf* (societal norms as opposed to religious law). The Maliki school became prevalent in Medina, Egypt and North Africa.

Some prominent Islamic scholars and personalities of this school were Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Battuta (the great Moroccan explorer), Ibn Khaldun (the great philosopher and sociologist), among many others.

Shafii Fiqh: Importance to Documented Records

Muhammad Idris ibn Al-Shafii (767–820 CE) was not convinced that contemporary Medina city was a reliable guide to Islamic way of life under the Prophet. Born in Gaza, Imam Shafii had studied under Imam Malik in Medina but, unlike his teacher's views, preferred documented and verified sayings of the Prophet (Ahadeeth, which is plural for Hadeeth) over the customs of the city of Medina. He also wanted every Hadeeth of the Prophet to be reliably supported by a chain (*isnad*) of devout Muslims leading directly to the Prophet.

Imam Shafii took a middle position between personal opinion (*rai*) and *istihsan* (juristic discretion) and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) preferred by the Hanafi school over the more conformist and literal interpretations of the Ahl Al-Hadeeth scholars. He stressed four roots of Islamic law (*usul al-fiqh*), namely, the Quran, the Sunnah and the Hadeeth, *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijma* (the consensus of the community). Not averse to *ijtihad*, Al-Shafii believed it should be confined to strict analogy (*qiyas*). Today, the Shafii school dominates in the regions of Southern Arabia, East Africa, Upper Egypt, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Hanbali Fiqh: Rejection of Bidah (Non-Islamic Innovations)

The Hanbali fiqh belongs to the Ahl Al-Hadeeth group (explained earlier) and is opposed to both Ahl Al-Kalaam and Ahl Al-Rai school of Abu Hanifa and Malik. Highly critical of foreign influences and innovations in religious belief (*bidah*), the school rejects taqleed (blind following of religious scholars). Of all the above-mentioned three jurisprudential schools, the Hanbali fiqh is the smallest, now found primarily in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and

Jordan's Bedouins.³² The UAE emirates of Sharjah, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah and Ajman are predominantly Hanbali.

The sources it uses to derive its codification of Shariah are the Quran, the Hadeeth and the views of sahaba. It is, however, very sceptical of using *urf* (customs of a community), or *istihsan* (juristic discretion) or *ijtihad* (independent reasoning).

As discussed earlier, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal did not alter his religious beliefs despite the torture of Caliph Mamun to accept that the Quran is a time and space-bound creation. The literalist outlook of the Hanbali school and its rejection of *bidah* is closest in framing the religious doctrines of thirteenth-century philosopher Ibn Taimiyyah, eighteenth-century theologian Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and many of today's Salafi-jihadist groups.

Jafari Fiqh: Shia Law School Relying on Reason (Ijtihad)

Named after the sixth imam of Shia Islam, Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq (702–65 CE), the Jafari school of Shia jurisprudence relies on *ijtihad* and differs from the above-mentioned Sunni madhabs on matters of inheritance, religious taxes and commercial matters; also, it allows temporary marriage (or *mutah*).³³ The renowned Sunni Al-Azhar University of Egypt has accorded the status of fifth school to Jafari jurisprudence, along with the aforementioned Sunni schools.³⁴

Known as *Al-Fiqh Al-Jafari*, the jurisprudence of Imam Jafar is collected in 400 *usuls* (foundations), which are written by his students, and cover the Hadeeth, Islamic philosophy, theology, commentary of the Quran, literature and ethics. The Jafari school is itself divided into two branches, the Usuli and the Akhbari. The Usuli school is open to *ijtihad* under a *mujtahid* (scholar of immense religious knowledge and wisdom, capable of independent reasoning) based on contemporary reality, while the Akhbaris are somewhat restrictive in this approach.³⁵

Ibadi Fiqh: Moderate Remnant of Khariji Sect

Ibadism is the only surviving sect of Kharijis, and thus represents the third main branch of Islam after Sunni and Shia Islam. In fact, Kharijis emerged as the first sect in Islam, before Sunni and Shia, during the First Fitna (656–61 CE).³⁶

Having faced persecution by both Sunnis and Shias for several centuries over their allegedly uncompromising and extremist beliefs, the sect split into several sub-sects during the Second Fitna (680–92 CE), which involved the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and Abdullah bin Zubayr. A surviving sub-sect of Khariji sect, Ibadism is currently the largest Muslim denomination in Oman, but its followers are also found in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

The Ibadis have many things in common with not only Salafi but also Shia doctrines. Like Salafis, they oppose taqleed (blind adherence to any Imam or scholar), but stress the importance of ijtihad. Unlike Sunnis and Shias, they believe that in the absence of any real imam in contemporary times, *hudud* punishments (such as flogging and stoning) against some sexual sins remain suspended. Friday prayers are also not held in Ibadi fiqh. Unlike Salafis, Ibadis interpret anthropomorphic references to God in the Quran symbolically rather than literally, and unlike most Sunnis, they believe Quran is created. They practise Shia *taqiyya* (allowance to lie) to avoid persecution, even though some of their scholars do not consider Uthman and Ali as legitimate caliphs.³⁷

Collection of Hadeeth Literature

Remarkably, the collection of the Prophet's sayings in written volumes started notably after the formation of Islamic schools of jurisprudence, particularly after Imam Shafii laid down the rules for their possible compilation and classification.

Without going deep into how the sayings of the Prophet were culled out of the oral history and collective memory of the masses and then verified for their authenticity by the compilers in their written volumes (which would be a more suitable subject for a book on Islamic theology), it is essential to note that among the majority Sunni school of Islam, which constitutes over 80 per cent of the Muslim population, the canonical Hadeeth collections are the six books (*Sahih Sitta*), named after its six compilers.

Of these, *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (compiled in 846 CE) and *Shahih Muslim* (875 CE) were compiled almost 200 years after the birth of the Prophet. The other books of Hadeeth are *Sunan Abu Dawood*, *Jami Al-Tirmidhi*, *Al-Sunan Al-Sughra* (also known as *Sunan Al-Nisai*) and *Sunan ibn Majah*. However, the Malikis reject *Sunan ibn Majah* and assert the canonical status of *Muwatta Imam Malik*.³⁸

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*ABBASID GOLDEN AGE AND THE
NEW COSMOPOLITY*

9

Abbasid Revolution and the Pivot to Persia

“While Rome was falling, Islam was rising, so you had a caliphate doing well while Rome was doing terribly. And that ended up being a source of preservation of knowledge and many scientific advancements.”

—Elon Musk¹

The Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE) came to power after a revolt against corrupt Umayyad rulers, following the Third Fitna (744–50 CE). Building on the wave of rebellions in Khorasan (eastern Iran) as well as the Shia Zaidi revolt south of Caspian and in Lebanon, the Abbasids defeated the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, at the Battle of Great Zab River in Mesopotamia (750 CE) and proclaimed Abu Al-Abbas Al-Saffah as their first caliph.

The Abbasids were descendants of Al-Abbas (who died in 653 CE), the famous uncle of the Prophet. They belonged to his Hashemite clan of Quraysh tribe in Mecca, unlike their rival Umayyad clan who had been adversaries of the Prophet until the conquest of Mecca. However, the Umayyad rivalry with the household of the Prophet (*Ahl Al Bayt*), Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan against Ali ibn Talib in the Battle of Siffin, Yazid ibn Muawiyah against Husayn ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala. The history of Umayyads against the Prophet’s descendants in addition to their unpopular oppressive policies helped Abbasids to whip up support among the masses, through propaganda, they won the support of Shia Arabs and Persians in the Khorasan region.

The Abbasids has started off as righteous revolutionaries. But they soon turned out to be ruthless dictators, who abandoned their initial sympathies towards the minority groups, like the Shias, and adopted the heavy-handed measures that were characteristic of the Umayyads. For instance, their first caliph, Abu Al-Abbas Al-Saffah, in an apparent gesture of reconciliation, invited eighty of the surviving members of the Umayyad clan to a banquet at Jaffa on 22 June 750 CE. The Umayyads who attended this infamous “Banquet of Blood” were massacred, while the remaining male members were hunted down.²

The only prominent member of the Umayyad clan to survive was Abd Al-Rahman. He fled west and established an independent polity in Spain, the Umayyad Emirate (and later caliphate) of Cordoba. Al-Saffah’s successor, Abu Jafar Al-Mansur (754–75 CE), was also known for his brutality. He killed a number of Shia leaders, many of whom had helped Abbasids come to power.

The Baghdad Cosmopolity

The Umayyads, with their capital in Damascus, had focused their expansion to the west—North Africa, the Mediterranean and Southeast Europe. In contrast, the Abbasid caliphs focused their attention eastwards and they shifted the capital from Damascus to Kufa, and from there built their new capital city of Baghdad (in 762 CE), which was close to the Sassanid city of Ctesiphon and on the banks of the river Tigris (“Dajla” in Arabic).

The Abbasids promised that non-Arab Muslim converts (known as ‘*mawalis*’) and their provinces would be given equal treatment under their rule, and Arab provinces would not be accorded a higher status, as was the norm under the Umayyads. The shifting of the capital to Baghdad brought the Abbasids closer to their support base of Persian *mawalis*. From this vantage point, events in Persia and Transoxiana were easy to monitor.

For the first time in Muslim history, Islamic rule extended beyond its so-called caliphate. In Egypt, North Africa and Spain, local dynasties claimed independent status. An international community of religious brotherhood extended beyond the bounds of Arab nationality.

It was under the Abbasids that the term ‘*Dawla*’ was first used. In the words of Antony Black: “In his inaugural speech, Abu Al-Abbas referred to *dawla*. *Dawla* was to become the standard term for dynasty, regime and the state. It meant a turn of fortune (and of the stars in their spheres) and thus the era in which a particular dynasty held sway rather than the governmental institutions”.³

Mutazila Neo-Platonists and the Hanbali–Athari Pushback

As noted in the previous chapter, the Jabriyya philosophical school that grew popular under Umayyad rulers upheld the belief that human actions are predetermined by God and so there is no real choice or freewill accorded to humans in shaping their destinies. In fact, this fatalistic philosophy was used by Umayyad rulers to justify their heavy-handed oppression, and they claimed that as their rule was pre-determined by God under *Khilafat al Allah* (under a Caliph of God), there was no room for the exercise of any freewill by the subjects (in other words any rebellion) against the political status quo.

In opposition of this line of reasoning, a new school of rationality inspired by Greek philosophy, re-interpreted Islam and advocated that Islam supports freewill and not determinism, as God would judge humans based on the choices they make out of their free will on Judgment Day. By using the scientific theory of causality, they asserted that as religiously codified ethical actions have favourable outcomes and sins lead to harmful consequences, Islam and Greek scientific thought had great similarity.

Wasil ibn Ata (700–48 CE), who was one of the students of aforementioned Hasan Al-Basri, became the founder of the Mutazila school of *kalaam* (religious philosophising), which soon gained in popularity and ultimately became the political antithesis against the ruling dispensation, which was exploited by Abbasid revolutionaries to topple the Umayyad caliphate.

The Mutazila school of thought promoted a rationalism that upheld Islamic principles of *tauheed* (oneness of God), *adl* (justice) and made controversial interpretations that favoured human freewill (as opposed to determinism) and made the claim that the Quran is a creation and is therefore uncreated, which made it time-bound and not eternal. This implied that the rules of religion were not meant to be applicable for all times. The emphasis on Greek rationality opened avenues for free scientific thought and unsurprisingly, the Abbasid Caliphate that replaced erstwhile Jabariyya beliefs with Mutazila Kalaam theology led to a boost in science and mathematics as well as in wider cultural affluence.

As these religious philosophers were inspired by Greek rationalism, they did not take sides on sectarian issues, such as the Ali–Muawiya rivalry. Their tendency to withdraw (*itazahu*) from making a judgement from such debates gave them the name “*Mutazila*” (“those who stand out” or are non-partisan). By the tenth century, the Mutazilas flourished as a school of speculative theology in Basra and Baghdad.

The later *Mutazilas* dealt with three fundamental philosophical ideas: (i) the oneness and justice of God (contending that God does not do evil and that evil is the result of human misdeeds or error); (ii) human freedom of action (God does not predetermine human destiny and therefore will hold humans responsible for their decisions on the Last Day); and (iii) the Quran is a creation as God would have logically preceded his speech (thereby rejecting the doctrine that Quran is co-eternal with God and for all times).⁴

By declaring the Quran a creation, the Abbasid rulers who rode to power on popular Mutazila revolt against the Umayyads used the *Mutazila* argument of a created Quran to annul its applicability to their times. The *Mutazila* “taught that the content of the Quran was contingent to the time and place of its revelation, thus allowing for adaptation to changes in the future.”⁵ By limiting its creation to the time and space continuum of the Prophet’s Arabia, they sought to absolve themselves from conforming to its injunctions to pursue *Mutazila* rationalism as a means for expedient policymaking.

Thus, the philosophical movement that initially opposed Umayyad despotism became a handmaiden of the new Abbasid rulers, who wanted to operate above the limitations set by even religious laws. In 833 CE, Caliph Al-Mamun sought to exploit *Mutazila* philosophy for political ends and initiated a draconian phase of repression known as the *Mihna* (or “ordeal”). Lasting 18 years, it was a phase in which Islamic scholars (both Sunni and Shia) were imprisoned, tortured and even killed, unless they conformed to the Mutazila doctrine of Quran’s “createdness”.

Among the Islamic scholars persecuted was the proponent of a Sunni school of jurisprudence, Imam Ibn Hanbal. Abbasid Caliph Al-Mamun repeatedly flogged the highly venerated figure, a practice which continued after his death in the reign of his brother, Al-Mutassim. It was not until their half-brother, Al-Mutawakkil, took power in AD 847 that the persecution stopped.

To a great extent, the unfortunate “ordeal” disenchanting Muslim acceptance of Greek rationality and the rational *Mutazilas*. The persecution of Ibn Hanbal made his school of jurisprudence reactionary and more averse to rationality than the earlier schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), giving way to Athari theology which reads the Quran in a literal and non-contextual manner and in being opposed to inductive and abductive reasoning for its understanding. Adherents of Athari theology only accept the *zahiri* (literal) meaning of the Quran and the Hadeeth for framing their beliefs (*aqeeda*) and legal interpretation of Shariah (*fiqh*).

Belonging to the Hanbali school (at times Shafii) of Sunni jurisprudence, they oppose rational determination or Sufi metaphorical interpretation in trying to comprehend the scriptural texts (Quran and Hadeeth). Instead, they advocate the famous Arabic dictum, *bila kayfa*, which implies accepting occurrences as ways of God, without asking “how” or “what”.⁶

Although the Salafi-Wahhabi movement does not officially conform to the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam, many of its jurisprudential positions are similar to Hanbali *fiqh* (followed mainly in the Arabian Peninsula to date), for example, it is opposed to any hermeneutic and philosophical reinterpretation of the Quran and Hadeeth texts.

Most contemporary Islamists view the once-feted Mutazila school as a near-heretic movement based on “irreligious rational philosophising” (*kalaam*). Despised by both the Sufi and the Salafi schools, the *Mutazila* precedent lies at the root of theological scepticism towards Western philosophy and sciences. To many conservative Islamic scholars of the day, the call for Islamic jurisprudential reform in keeping with twenty-first-century realities is just an echo of Caliph Mamun’s deception.

The Golden Age and the House of Wisdom (*Bayt Al-Hikma*)

However, Abbasid Caliphate also gained by implementing the rationalist Mutazila approach and is credited with ushering in the Islamic Golden Age, a period of immense socio-cultural, economic and scientific flourishing. The phase is understood to have begun during the rule of Caliph Harun Al-Rashid (786–809 CE) with the inauguration of the House of Wisdom (*Bayt Al-Hikma*) in Baghdad, which became the world’s largest city of its time.

The age of rationality and enlightenment was further facilitated by the introduction of paper in the tenth century, which enabled Islamic scholars to write several manuscripts. Classical works of antiquity and scientific knowledge from the ancient Greek, Roman, Persian, Chinese, Indian, Egyptian and Phoenician civilisations were saved and translated into Arabic. As a result, scientific advancements in the fields of algebra, calculus, geometry, chemistry, biology, medicine and astronomy were achieved.

This Golden Age of economic, cultural and scientific progress produced notable pioneers in the field of knowledge, like Al-Khwarizmi (father of algebra and founder of algorithm); Ibn Sina or Avicenna (medicine or clinical pharmacology); Alhazen (father of modern optics); Al-Biruni (father of Indology

and regarded as the first anthropologist); Ibn Rushd or Averroes (the philosopher whose commentaries reintroduced Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle to Europe); Al-Jazari (forerunner of automaton); Ibn Khaldun (father of sociology); and many more. According to Neil deGrasse Tyson, a famous US astrophysicist, two-thirds of all named stars in the night sky have Arabic names till date.⁷ These were mainly discovered and named by Abbasid era astrologers. Literary works, such as *The Arabian Nights* (which includes world-renowned stories, like “Alibaba and the Forty Thieves”) and *The Seven Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor*, were also the marvels of this age.

Scholars attribute political stability, government sponsorship of educational institutions and scholarly endeavours, widespread education and invention of new technology (particularly in writing with the invention of paper), and the contribution of non-Arab Muslims, particularly Persians, as reasons for the flowering of the Abbasid Golden Age. In the words of Bernard Lewis:

Culturally, politically, and most remarkable of all even religiously, the Persian contribution to this new Islamic civilization is of immense importance. The work of Iranians can be seen in every field of cultural endeavor, including Arabic poetry, to which poets of Iranian origin composing their poems in Arabic made a very significant contribution.⁸

Growing Influence of Non-Islamic Political Thought

Islamic political thought had veered between Arab neo-tribalism, with its characteristically pietist, egalitarian ideal, and patrimonial bureaucracy even during the Umayyad period. This confusion was largely settled with the coming of the Abbasid period, when “an articulate tradition of centralised monarchy was transmitted from Iran by Ibn Muqaffa (written 754–6)”, which gained the upper hand over an Islamic tradition that “was still not fully formed, and its political drift not yet clear”.⁹

Although the Abbasids had started off as idealistic revolutionaries, they adopted the ways of their autocratic predecessors (the Umayyad caliphs) and once in power, reverted to Umayyad absolutism. In order to gain popular legitimacy and strengthen their rule, they eliminated many of the religious leaders (both Shias who had supported their revolution and Sunni jurists like Imam Ibn Hanbal).

For this purpose, they used Sassanid political literature that literally elevated kingship to cosmic proportions. Abbasid regal propaganda borrowed profusely from Perso-Sassanian concepts with Quranic undertones. A common catchphrase

of the time was that “[t]he light of prophecy” shines from the prince’s forehead, “the government (al-saltana) is God’s shadow on earth, and all those troubled find refuge in it”.¹⁰

The Sassanian view of monarchy was transmitted in *The Testament of Ardashir*, translated for the Abbasid rulers by Ibn Muqaffa. The treatise contained a statement made popular by Abbasid rulers: “Kingship and religion are twins...religion is the foundation of kingship and kingship the protector of religion.”¹¹

Ibn Muqaffa: The First Arab Political Scientist

A pioneer of classical Arabic prose literature, Abdallah Ibn Muqaffa (720–57 CE) translated several Indo-Persian texts into Arabic, and also wrote extensively for the development of Abbasid political philosophy.

Among his many achievements is the epic translation of the 3 century BC Sanskrit allegorical fables *Panchatantra* (written by Vishnu Sharma), which are replete with ancient Indian wisdom on political issues. Ibn Muqaffa translated them from Farsi into Arabic under the title, *Kalilah wa-Dimnah*, which became one of the first masterpieces of Arabic literary prose. He also wrote a manual for secretaries, *Kitab Adab Al-Kabir* (“The Major Work on Secretarial Etiquette”), which had an important first section, “Mirror for Princes”, that advised the caliph’s young son on the rules of conduct (*adaab*). It encouraged the future leader to listen to advice from qualified counsellors, even when it was unpalatable.

However, it is Ibn Muqaffa’s “*Risalah fil-Sahabah*” (“Messages in Friendship”) that has drawn much interest of political theorists. Written in 754–56 CE, the short and prescriptive text was a direct message to Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur, whom the writer hoped would be open to receiving ideas for improving government, unlike some of his predecessors. Considered an attempt at devising a political philosophy for the Abbasid Caliphate, the text counselled on leadership, military, ministries, advisors, legislation, economics, interest groups, as well as how to manage one’s subjects.

In the text, Ibn Muqaffa tried to resolve the confusion between obedience to God and obedience to the ruler, which often causes cognitive dissonance in minds of Muslims to this day. Remarkably, Ibn Muqaffa believed that religious jurisprudence that prescribed similar duties for both rulers and subjects would lead to greater stability than power based on subordination or arbitrary force. However, the leader’s command should gain precedence and his orders obeyed on matters related to the declaration and execution of war, the appointment of officials,

generation and distribution of public revenue from taxes, war booty and other sources.

Ibn Muqaffa said that the ruler should not only administer legal penalties (as was generally accepted) but also clarify and systematise the framework of religious law by propounding his authoritative codification. He proposed that the law for the Muslim subjects should be taken out of the hands of contending religious scholars (*ulema*) and be entrusted to the *Ameerul Mumineen* (which is the caliph).

Islamic religious scholarship might not have contended such a line of thought had the caliph stuck to a way of life in line with the Rashidun Caliphs. However, at that time, the arbitrary practices of the head of state had diminished the legitimacy of the titular caliph to interfere in matters of religious affair. Ibn Muqaffa's views may, arguably, have had an impact on Caliph Al-Mamun and his infamous policy of forcing the *ulema* to accept his theological position on the "createdness" of the Quran, which had dire consequences for the Abbasid Caliphate and the future of Muslim civilisation.

Still, Ibn Muqaffa's "*Risalah fil-Sahabah*" was a seminal political treatise, which helped in the development of early Muslim political thought. Anthony Black writes: "The *Risala* had a clear programme: the application of the principles of patrimonial government developed in ancient Iran to the Caliphate. It was one of the most systematic and least rhetorical or reverential of early Islamic political writings. The narrative Report-culture (Hadeeth collection) was already established, but the Religious Jurists had not yet formulated a theory of government. There was, therefore, something of a gap in political theory and culture that Ibn Muqaffa presumably thought he could fill."¹²

Al-Jahiz: Rationalist Advocate of the State

Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr Al-Jahiz (776–868/869 CE) was another philosopher litterateur who supported the primacy of the caliph or leader of the state (*dawla*) over the *ulema*. Possibly of Abyssinian origin, he supported the cosmopolitan policies of the Abbasids and, as a true Mutazila philosopher, held the intellect (*aql*) as "a pilot and companion in good fortune and ill".¹³

Al-Jahiz was an elitist and spoke contemptuously about the ordinary people and his polemic is replete with the binary between the elite and the masses (*al-khassa wa'l-amma*).¹⁴ Opposed to popular participation in politics at any level, he emphasised: "it is, therefore, our duty to establish a single Leader... This is a fact confirmed by general observation and...experience... God so designed the world and its inhabitants... that they are better off with a single Leader."¹⁵

He stressed the need for political authority and monarchical race to discipline human nature to make it work hard for its own good. Thus, he stated:

It is only by rigorous training, severe rebukes in this world, and the threat of terrible punishment in the next, that men are able to resist their own worst natures...It is in men's nature...to evade the enforcement of deserved penalties whenever they can. This is what causes general disorder and the non-enforcement of laws.¹⁶

Al-Jahiz staunchly rejected the egalitarian view prevalent in some circles that "it is more profitable for men to be left in liberty without a guardian". A true statist, he believed that the institution of state was also important for those humans who sought to lead a spiritual and religious life. Thus, he wrote that people could attend to spiritual needs only if they had satisfied their material needs. In this respect, Al-Jahiz was more of a materialist than a typical religious idealist of his time.

Al-Farabi: Religion as a Branch of Political Science

A Shia musician of Turkish descent, Abu Nasr Al-Farabi (872–950 CE) placed rationalist philosophy close to revealed religion. He believed that Shia Islam, with its belief in an abstract God and its cult of Imam, was the perfect religion to build a rational society, something that Plato and Aristotle could only dream of a polity ruled by a philosopher King. Al Farabi said that even Plato argued that a well-ordered society was based on useful doctrines that the masses might conceive of as divinely inspired.

According to Al-Farabi, Islam fulfilled the Platonic ideal as he believed it was more reasonable than its predecessors and had no illogical doctrines, such as the Trinity. He argued that Islam could both persuade the enlightened and compell the ignorant for building a good society with its emphasis on law. To Al-Farabi, "Religion was a branch of political science, and should be studied and observed by a good 'faylasuf' (philosopher)."¹⁷

Expounding the traits of the ideal ruler, Al-Farabi wrote in "The Governance of the Ideal City/State" (*Al-Siyasa Al-Madaniyya*):

The best ruler without qualification is he who does not need anyone to rule him in anything whatever, but has actually acquired the sciences and every kind of knowledge...The men who are governed by the rule of this ruler are the virtuous, good and happy men. If they form a nation then that is the virtuous nation.¹⁸

The primary purpose of the political order, stated Al-Farabi (in his relatively early work, “Attainment of Happiness”; in Arabic, *Tahsil Al-Sada*), was the dissemination of knowledge and virtue. These were to be instilled in peoples (*al-umam*) and states (*al-mudan*) by “instruction and the formation of character”.¹⁹ In his description of the “virtuous city” (chapters 15–19) and “governance of the state”, “Al-Farabi presented the most systematic theory of the state that the Muslim world had so far produced.”²⁰

Known in the Islamic world as the “Second Teacher” after Aristotle, Al-Farabi provided a theory of the state that compared political society with the human body, both of which contain different organic “parts” and a ruler. The state’s parts (five categories based on the division of labour) arise out of nature via the division of labour. To this, he added:

People’s dispositions and habits by which they perform their actions in the city are not natural but voluntary... They are not parts of the city by their inborn nature alone but rather by the voluntary habits which they acquire such as the arts and their likes.²¹

Apart from the “virtuous city”, Al-Farabi delineated the numerous imperfections of various other city-state categories: ignorant, wicked and errant cities. Thus, he classified various good and deviant states, much like Weberian ideal types.

Emergence of Shia Islam as a Separate Sect: The Core Tenets

In strictly political terms, the history of the Shia sect can be studied in at least three distinct stages. The first part is the emergence of the Shias just after the Prophet’s death in 632 CE and until the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE. This period coincides with Ali’s ‘Imamah’ (political and spiritual leadership), followed by that of Hasan and then of Husayn. At this time, there is no formal differentiation or separation between the Shia and Sunni sects.

The second stage is when the differentiation between the two sects of Shia and Sunni Islam is clear and distinct, with the Sunni caliphs frequently opposing the Shia rise as a separate sect within the Muslim community. This stage begins after the Battle of Karbala until 10 century CE. In this stage, the Shia sect is further divided into several other sub-sects, like the Twelvers (*Ithna Ashariyya*), the *Zaidis* and the *Ismailis*. The third stage begins around the tenth century with the formation of Shia states around the Muslim world, from Egypt, Levant, the Maghreb, Persia to Yemen, among others.

As mentioned earlier, when the Prophet died, he had not named an heir for his newly founded Arabian state and Muslim community; therefore, there were disagreements over who should succeed him. The group that affirmed its devotion to the Prophet's Sunnah (the Prophet's traditions) became known as Ahl Al-Sunnah or Sunni. It was the view of Sunnis that the close companions of the Prophet, who belonged to the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, should become his successors. In fact, the first four successors of the Prophet—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali—were Quraysh Meccans and were regarded as legitimate successors by the Sunnis, who are estimated to constitute more than 85 per cent of the Muslim community.

Meanwhile, the Shia community claimed that only members of the Prophet's own household (*Ahl Al-Bayt*), beginning with the Prophet's cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima, Ali ibn Talib (the fourth caliph), were the legitimate leaders (*imam*) of the Muslim community. Thus, they rejected the first three caliphs in Islamic history, with almost all Shia sub-sects (barring Zaidi Shia) considering them as usurpers and holding them responsible for not allowing Islam to reach its ultimate glory. Although none of the Shia imams ever cursed any companion of the Prophet, Sunni scholars often alleged that the Shia doctrine of *tabarri* (obligation of dissociation) was often applied to sahaba, like Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Muawaiya, and among women, to Ayesha, Hafsa, Hind and Ummul Hakam (a daughter of Hind), along with all their associates and followers.

The Shias believed that the Prophet had, in his last days (in mid-March of 632 CE), conferred the title of "*Maula*" to Ali at Ghadeer Khumm,²² which made him the heir apparent. In contrast, Sunnis argued that conferring the title of Maula (which may connote "friend of God", for it is derived from the word "wali") did not necessarily connote successor or heir. According to Islamic scholar Lesley Hazleton, the Prophet's statement at Ghadeer Khumm, "O God, befriend the friend of Ali and be the enemy of his enemy", was the standard formula for pledging allegiance in the Middle East at that time.²³ Both Ali and his son, Hasan, demanded a similar pledge from their supporters during their caliphates.²⁴

So, the dispute that simmered from the very moment of the Prophet's death eventually led to the Battle of the Camel (656 CE; fought between forces of the Prophet's wife, Ayesha, and Ali that ended in reconciliation), and then the Battle of Siffin (657 CE; fought between the *Shiatul Ali*, "the Partisans of Ali", and *Shiatul Muawiyah*, "the Partisans of Muawiyah"). In fact, it was from the Battle of Siffin that the two aforementioned groups splintered out of the hitherto unified

body of Muslims. While the Shiatul Muawiya dwindled over a period of time and adopted the neutral position of mainstream Sunnis that regarded both Ali and Muawiya as respectable companions of the Prophet, the Shiatul Ali continued under the shortened title Shia madhab or as Ahl-e-Tashiyyu.

The theological argument of the Shias assigns a logical framework to their whole system of faith. In fact, the Shia reading of the Quran is radically different from that of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (pl. *madhabib*). The last Quranic verse that was recited by the Prophet in his last Haj sermon — “This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as the religion (Surah Maidah 5:3)”²⁵—is explained by Sunni scholars as the finality of the divine message in the extant Quran. However, the Shias read the verse as the initiation of the institution of Imamah (as opposed to the Sunni caliphate), which they claim was announced by the Prophet through the proclamation of Ali as his successor.

Thus, the Shias derive their faith from the Quran itself, which they complement with their separate version of Hadeeth literature. For instance, Twelver Shia (generally known as Ithna Ashariya or Imami Shia) derive their Hadeeth literature not just from the Prophet’s sayings and deeds but also from the Twelve Imams. Their Hadeeth books include *Nahj Al-Balagha* by Ash-Sharif Ar-Radhi, *Kitab Al-Kafi* by Muhammad ibn Yaqub Al-Kulayni and *Wasail Al-Shiah* by Al-Hurr Al-Amili.²⁶

Among most sub-sects of Shia Islam, imams (spiritual leaders) of the community are descendants of the Prophet and are considered sinless and infallible (*masoom*), with some having greater spiritual stature than certain prophets preceding Prophet Muhammad. They are divinely ordained by a previous imam (*nass*) and receive divine guidance and assistance, even foreknowledge of future events. Thus, the imams are endowed with divine esoteric and hidden knowledge (*batini ilm*). Sunni theology, in contrast, disapproves the infallibility of humans other than the prophets and does not regard any human to be superior to the prophets. However, Shiism and Sufism (Sunni mysticism) are said to share a number of similarities, such as their belief in an inner meaning to the Quran, esoteric knowledge of certain Muslim figures (saints for Sufi, imams for Shias), as well as veneration of Ali and the Prophet’s family (*Ahl Al-Bayt*).

The Imami (Twelver) Shia follow the 12 infallible imams: Ali bin Talib, Hasan, Husayn, Ali Zainul Abideen, Muhammad Al-Baqir, Jafar Al-Sadiq, Musa Al-Kazim, Ali Al-Raza, Muhammad Al-Taqi, Ali Al-Naqi, Hasan Al-Askari and

Muhammad Al-Mahdi (who is hidden and whose return is awaited before the end of time).²⁷

The first succession crisis for Shia imams arose (on the fifth link in the chain) when Zaid ibn Ali was upheld as the rightful imam by his supporters (Zaidis), whilst the rest of the Shia community upheld Muhammad Al-Baqir as the imam. For their part, the deeply esoteric Ismaili Shia (Sevensers) get the name from their acceptance of Imam Ismail ibn Jafar, as appointed by Jafar Al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam, and differ from the Twelver Shia, who uphold Musa Al-Kazim, the younger brother of Ismail, as the rightful imam.

The five basic tenets of Shia Islam (covering most of its sub-sects) include: (i) *tawheed* (belief in the One God, Allah); (ii) *adl* (belief in divine justice); (iii) *nubuwaah* (belief in divinely appointed prophethood as described in Quran); (iv) *imamate* (belief in the institutional leadership of divinely appointed imams after the Prophet); and (v) *miad* (belief in resurrection and Day of Judgement by Allah). There are ten *furud al-din* (ancillaries of faith): *salat* (five daily prayers); *sawm* (fasting in month of Ramadan); *zakat* (alms-giving to the Muslim needy); *khums* (20 per cent of annual unused savings given to the Imams); the *Haj* (pilgrimage to the Kaaba once in life if means permit); *jihad* (struggle against evil); enjoining good; forbidding wrong; *tawalla* (expressing love for good); and *tabarra* (dissociating from evil).

The Shias allow *taqiyya*, that is, to be able to deny faith when under grave danger. Some Shia sects also allow temporary marriage (*mutah*), although it is performed rarely. For the Twelver Shia, belief in the twelfth imam as the “*Mahdi*”, who would come of occultation during the end times, is a principle of faith. He is not only still alive but also exercises power and exerts influence in the world in places of his own choosing. Sunnis generally believe in the coming of a Mahdi and Jesus, albeit belief in the personage of the Mahdi differs from that of the Imami Shia version, and they do not hold the belief that *Mahdi* is already alive and in occultation, nor is belief in him an article of Sunni faith.

The Shias hold various festivals, like *Eid Al-Fitr*, *Eid Al-Adha*, *Eid Al-Ghadeer*, the Mourning of Muharram, *Arbaeen* (commemoration of the suffering of women and children in Imam Husayn’s household), *Mawlid* (Prophet’s birthday) and the Prophet’s daughter Fatima’s birthday, among other religious holidays. Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Najaf (sanctuary of Imam Ali), Karbala (place of Imam Husayn’s martyrdom), Mashhad and Qom are their revered cities.

Zaid's Martyrdom and the Zaidi Shia

After the Battle of Karbala, the Shia emerged as a distinct sect in Islam, and its believers used the martyrdom of Husayn as a rallying cry for opposition against the Umayyad rulers. The most notable among the early Shia revolts against the Umayyads was that of Zaid ibn Ali, the learned grandson of Husayn ibn Ali. The revolt ended unsuccessfully and led to the martyrdom of Zaid in 740 CE, which then gave rise to the Zaidi sect of Shia Islam.

Zaid had also received Sunni support, with the renowned Sunni jurist Abu Hanifa issuing a fatwa in support of his uprising against the Umayyad rule. Today, Zaid is considered a martyr by almost all Islamic sects. There was also another Shia revolt against the Umayyads under Abdallah ibn Muawiya, who even managed to establish temporary rule over Persia, but not for long.

After that, a more significant proto-Shia rebellion was led by Al-Mukhtar from Kufa (Ali's former power base) in the name of Muhammad ibn Al-Hanafiyya, another of Ali's sons. Al-Hanafiyya was Ali's son with one of his concubines, a woman from the Banu Hanifa tribe. However, the Umayyads were able to crush this revolt too.

Later, the son of Al-Hanafiyya, by the name of Abu Hashim, started a movement against the Umayyads and built for himself secret bases in Khorasan. After Abu Hashim died in 718 CE, members of the Abbasid family (descendants of the Prophet's uncle, Al-Abbas) took over that movement. In their revolt against the Umayyads, they used the propaganda that the "preferred one from the house of Muhammad" is coming. Considering the Abbasids as the successors of Abu Hisham, various Shia groups supported the Sunni Abbasids, who were not from the progeny of the Prophet but were his uncle's descendants.

Quietist Shia Majority of Ithna Ashariyya (Twelvers)

Once in power, the Abbasid policies towards the Shia sympathisers changed. Many of their prominent Shia supporters, such as their favourite propagandist Abu Muslim, were murdered. In such perilous times, Jafar Al-Sadiq (sixth imam of the Shia) told his disciples to practice taqiyya (dissimulation) for their safety.

During the ninth century, as the pre-eminence of the Abbasid Caliphate in the Islamic world started to decline, relations between the caliph and the Shia leaders worsened. Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847–61 CE) summoned the tenth Shia imam, Ali Al-Hadi, from Medina to Samarra and placed him under house arrest. He apparently did not want a repeat of the Husayn–Yazid confrontation; and

since then, the imams were inaccessible to the Shia masses and could only communicate through their agents.

When the eleventh imam, Hasan Al-Askari, died in 874 CE, it was said that he had left behind a precocious son who assumed imamate at the age of 4 years, but had gone into hiding to remain safe from threats to his life. In 934 CE, when the “Hidden Imam” would have neared the final stages of earthly life, the agent brought the message that the imam had gone into occultation and would emerge out of it before the coming of Jesus, as the “Promised Mahdi”. The Twelver Shias have since largely followed a pacifist line and abjured politics (barring followers of Khomeini’s Iranian Revolution), as they patiently await the coming of the Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan Al-Mahdi, their twelfth imam.

Ismaili Shia: The Allure of the Esoteric (“Batini”)

Another Shia sub-sect, the Ismailis did not accept the Twelver quietism. The two Shia groups differed over matters of succession, wherein the Twelver contended that the imamat passed from the sixth imam, Jafar, to his younger son, Musa, and the Ismailis argued that his eldest son, Ismail, was the designated successor.

The Ismailis were far more esoteric (*batini*) than the Twelvers at the spiritual level. They sought to understand the Quran beyond its literal meaning in order to understand its inherent signs and symbols. They believed that true knowledge could never be fully expressed in rational and logical discourse. They also believed that the full significance and meaning of the revelation that came to the Prophet through the Quran would become clear only when the Mahdi arrives. The Ismaili insistence on deeper, esoteric meanings was not acceptable to the literalist Sunni religious scholars, who were wary that the newer interpretations could entirely change the character of the religion and cause more significant discord (*fitna*).

Unlike the Twelver Shia, the Ismailis were more politically active. Their missionary leaders travelled from India to East Africa, establishing clandestine groups of Ismaili loyalists under a well-organised central leadership.²⁸

Working underground for many years, the Ismailis established their first caliphate in Egypt in 909 CE, which extended from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Founded by Abdullah bin Mahdi Billah, its rulers called themselves Fatimids, reflecting their claim of descent from the daughter of the Prophet, Fatima. Over time, the empire grew into one of the greatest in Muslim history, covering at its height North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, Syria and much of Central Arabia, including Mecca and Medina. The Al-Azhar University, today called the Vatican

of Sunni Islam, was founded by this Shia Ismaili Empire in 970 CE. The Fatimids ruled from Egypt for two centuries until Saladin Ayyubi, the celebrated Muslim commander of the Crusades, formally abolished the dynasty in 1171 CE.

Another branch of Ismailis called Qarmitas established states in southern Syria and in Al-Hassa (eastern region of the Arabian Peninsula) in the tenth century. In 930 CE, their notorious leader, Abu Tahir Al-Jannabi, is known to have briefly stolen the Black Stone of the Kaaba and to have desecrated the Zamzam well with corpses.

Formulation of Sunni Political Theology

The emergence of rationalist religious philosophers (Kalaam theology), such as the Mutazilas, absolute patrimonial dynasts and Ismaili and Zaidi Shia political actors undermined orthodox non-philosophical Sunni jurists' sway in the Abbasid age.

The new political movements raised several questions on matters of political authority and governance, even as rationalists fed on concepts from Greek philosophy started questioning the ways of God, as explained in traditional Sunni theology. Under these circumstances, there was a spurt in Sunni theological discourse aimed at responding to the new intellectual and sectarian questions raised against its teachings.

Asharism: Occasionalist Counter to the Causative Mutazila

The masses could never wholly grasp the philosophical abstruseness of the Mutazila, nor the occultism of the Shia esoteric (batini) sects. In addition, the Hanbali precept of *bila kayfa*, of not enquiring the causes and practical validity of the religious precepts, was also felt wanting by the intellectually inclined. It was then that the school of Asharite theology, named after Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ashari (873–936 CE), arose to give a reasoned argument against the philosophical queries raised by the Mutazila philosophers and Shia heretics against mainstream Sunni propositions. In the words of Daniel Brown, “it was by fully embracing this method of *kalaam*, the dialectical approach to theology, that al-Ashari came to represent a symbolic turning point in the development of Islamic theology.”²⁹

While Al-Ashari opposed the views of the rival Mutazila school, he was also opposed to the view which rejected debate that was held by conservative Sunni schools. Thus, according to Asharites, although reason has its limitations and cannot answer all the mysteries of life and creation, Islam recognises it as a God-

given faculty that must be employed for gaining knowledge. The Quran and the Prophet decree intellectual reasoning, therefore the exegeses of the Quran and the Hadeeth should be kept up without dispensing with older interpretations.³⁰

On the Mutazila argument that God is never unjust, Ashari posits that God is all-powerful; hence, good is what God commands and evil is what God forbids.³¹ Therefore, God is not subject to human understanding of good and evil. On the Mutazila argument that the Quran cannot be eternal and uncreated, as nothing can be co-eternal with God, Ashari reasons that the Quran is the uncreated word of God in essence, although it is “created” when it takes on a form in letters or sound.

On the Mutazila question of free will (or, more accurately, freedom of intention), the Ashari argument is that human beings have no power to create anything. Instead, they simply decide between God’s given possibilities. This doctrine is now known in Western philosophy as occasionalism.

The Al-Azhar University of Egypt and the Indian Sunni Hanafi schools of Bareilvi and Deobandi Islam largely follow the Maturidi and Ashari schools of theology, which have differences on only minor matters of theology.

Al-Mawardi’s Textbook on Sunni Rule (Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah)

The son of a rose water merchant, Abu Al-Hasan Al-Mawardi (972–1058 CE) was a tenth-century chief judge of Nishapur, Iran. Known as Alboacen in Latin, he also served as a diplomat for Abbasid caliphs, Al-Qaim and Al-Qadir, during their negotiations with Buyid ameer. Best known for his treatise, *Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah* (“The Ordinances of Government”), Al-Mawardi provided a detailed definition of the functions of caliphate government. Written in 1045–58 CE, this is the most-cited textbook in Islamic political studies and is held as the framework for the ideal Islamic state by radical groups like HuT.

The broad framework for governance that *Al-Ahkam As-Sultaniyyah* details is the hierarchical structure with the caliph at the apex. The caliph exercises political authority (*sultan*) in the Islamic state, but sovereignty lies solely with the Shariah (scriptural law). Below the caliph sit the governors (*wazirs*), executive and non-executive assistants (*muawin*), judges (*qudaa*), head of the military (*ameer*), judicial redress, *niqabaj* tribunal and administrators, who are accountable to the caliph.

However, the book is remarkable because it uses Sunni Hadeeth literature to clear several controversies and issues related to the institution of caliphate from the time of its establishment.

From the Hadeeth cited in the book, the Prophet appears to have clarified many of the questions raised by the Shia and Khawarij sects against the Rashidun Caliphs and the institution of caliphate and seems to uphold the Murjia position of passive acceptance of the ruler's will.

Thus, the book cites the Prophet's pronouncement: "He who obeys me, obeys God; He who disobeys me disobeys God." Then, the book cites Prophet's Hadeeth wherein he states: "You will hear and obey the prince, even if he beats your back and steals your property. Hear and obey";³² and "They (the rulers) will be judged for what they do, and you will be judged for what you do." The author chose another Hadeeth reference against the Khariji sect, which had secluded itself from the broader Muslim community, by indirectly charging them with apostasy. The cited Hadeeth reads: "Whoever abandons the ruling power and separates from the general body of believers, then dies, dies a pagan."³³

On the question of succession after the Prophet, the book cites another Sunni tradition in which Ali ibn Talib clarified his position on the matter. Thus, when one of his sons asks him, "Which is the best Muslim after the Prophet?", Ali replied, "Abu Bakr". To the next question, "then who?", Ali said "Umar". Fearing the next similar question would receive the reply in favour of Uthman, the son suggested, "Then yourself?" Still, Ali replies, "No, I am just another ordinary Muslim."³⁴

These Hadeeth are cited to refute Shia and Khariji claims regarding the institution of the caliphate. The book also takes up the controversial issue about the mode of appointment of a caliph, which was always different among various Rashidun Caliphs. Thus, Al-Mawardi accepts all the methods employed in the appointment of the Rashidun Caliphs, such as the limited number of people who elected Abu Bakr at the Saqifah in the absence of Ali, the nomination of Umar by Abu Bakr (which did not involve any election) and the appointment by a committee in case of Uthman's controversial election.

Curiously, the injunction to obey the imam or caliph in the book flies in the face of the opposition and hostility employed by radical Islamist groups like HuT against their governments, even as they use Al-Mawardi's book as a model for appointing the caliph and ministers of an Islamic state. By Al-Mawardi's standards, the Islamist parties that rebel against their regimes must be considered renegades, who sequester themselves from the majority of Muslim masses and thereby invoke divine punishment.

The problem with Al-Mawardi's book for the modern-day Islamists is that it

ostensibly champions the Rashidun Caliphs, but is authored to implicitly defend the excesses of the despotic Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs, whom these Islamists detest.

NOTES

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10

Disintegration of the Caliphate: Rise of Sufi and Shia Power

Sedentary culture is the goal of civilization. It also means the end of its lifespan and brings about its corruption.

—Ibn Khaldun¹

By the end of the tenth century, Islamdom could not sustain its unity under the Abbasid rule, and growing corruption made it challenging to overcome fissiparous forces. Nevertheless, as the caliphate broke up into several kingdoms, the Abbasid caliphs ruled in and around Baghdad as nominal heads, retaining mainly a symbolic aura.

Then, in 1055 CE, the leader of a Sunni Turkish nomadic clan by the name of Toghril Beg marched into Baghdad, released the caliph from the control of Shia Buyid family that had controlled the high office for about a century and declared his clan members as the protector of the caliphate and the saviour of Sunni Islam. Over the next century, Toghril's clan members—known as Seljuk Turks—ruled a large expanse under the caliph's name.

However, Islamdom could never be put under one political umbrella ever again. It had already divided between Shia dynasties—the Fatimids (in Egypt), the Buyids (western Iraq and Iran), Hamanids (Syria, Cappadocia) and Qaramitas (Northeast Arabian Peninsula)—and the Sunni dynasties, namely, Seljuks (Iraq and Persia), Samanids (eastern Iran), Ghaznavids (Afghanistan, northwestern

India), Qarakhanids (or Ilkhanids, Central Asia) and Umayyad descendants (Al-Andalus).

The decline of the caliphate by the tenth century ironically opened the floodgates to a new cultural efflorescence in humanism and philosophy. Despite political turmoil, spiritual, intellectual and artistic works increased, and Islam spread and found more capitals to disseminate its influence in the absence of caliphal control. The city of Cairo (*Qahira* in Arabic that means “the conqueror”), which was developed in 969 CE under the Fatimids, was named after planet Mars (*Al-Najm Al-Qahir*) that was on the ascendant at the time of its establishment. It became the centre of art and learning; and it was in the tenth century itself that the college of Al-Azhar was founded in the city (still extant as the world-famous Al-Azhar University).

Meanwhile, Samarqand (an existing city in southeastern Uzbekistan) saw a renaissance in Persian literature and the city gained popularity thanks to its great luminaries, like the great physician and philosopher Ibn Sina (known as Avicenna in Europe). The city of Cordova (in southern Spain) became famous for its poetry and philosophy under Ibn Hazem and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Famous historian Muhammad Jarir Al-Tabari (from Tabaristan, Iran), who died in 932 CE, wrote a chronicle, *Tarikh Al-Rusul wa Al-Muluk* (“History of the Prophets and Kings”), often referred to as *Tarikh Al-Tabari*. Having established the Jariri school of jurisprudence (known for its remarkable fluidity, it went extinct two centuries after his death), he was also a poet, lexicographer, grammarian, mathematician and had expertise in medicine.

Thus, Islam spread across various kingdoms which were released from the oppressive control of the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphs. In the words of Karen Armstrong:

The new polities that were emerging in the Islamic world by a process of trial and error were closer to the Islamic vision. Not all the new rulers were pious Muslims—far from it—but the system of independent courts and rulers, all on a par with one another but contained within a loose notional unity, approximated more truly the egalitarian spirit of the Quran.²

From One Caliphate Rule to Sunni and Shia Kingdoms (Sultanate)

As the Abbasid Empire disintegrated from the tenth century onwards, it gave rise to independent states. However, the caliph, at best, remained the nominal head of the so-called Muslim umma, as the different regions of Islamdom were governed

by their separate kingdoms independently. Sometimes, these kingdoms did not even recognise any allegiance to the caliph and their own “ruler” took up the title of “caliph”.

Thus, the idea of a caliph as the shepherd of the entire Muslim community declined after the fall of the Abbasids as many empires and states gave their ruling dynasties the grandiose title of caliphates, even though neither their political nor spiritual writ could run across Islamdom. Hence, we find the Ayyubid Caliphate during the reign of Salahuddin Ayyubi (1174–93); the independent Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba in Iberia (929–1031); the Berber Almohad Caliphate in Morocco (1121–1269); the Fula Sokoto Caliphate in a region of present-day northern Nigeria (1804–1903); and the infamous proto-state of ISIS in the 2010s.

Surprisingly, even the Shia Ismaili Fatimid Caliphate in Northern Africa (909–1171) used the title of caliphate, even though Shia Islam believes in imamate as, according to them, a caliph should be an “imam” chosen from the household of the Prophet (*Ahl Al-Bayt*).

The decline of the unified caliphate caused a new set of issues for the Muslim polity. The rule of the Umayyads and the Abbasids may not have won the approval of Islamic jurists or the members of the Prophet’s family (the Alids), but at least they were descendants from the Quraysh tribe of Mecca. The Khariji opposition to the Sunni precondition that a caliph should be from the Quraysh tribe was not acceptable to mainstream Muslims for as long as the caliphate was conterminous with Islamdom. It was also not acceptable to the Shia as their leader (or imam) had to be from the Ahl Al-Bayt, from Banu Hashim, not just a Quraysh.

However, with the dismemberment of the Abbasid Caliphate, new Muslim rulers (or sultans) of independent states (or dawlas) faced the problem of deriving religious and moral legitimacy for their rule. The sultan (which in the Quran means moral or spiritual authority) and the dawla (which the Abbasid rulers used to refer to as their “period of rule”, and later got the connotation of regime and even state) struggled with issue of succession as the Shariah did not clearly endorse patrimonial succession and even gave equal property to all male children. This led to military and political contests and so, the kings started resorting to innovative ways for gaining legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects.

The sultans—be they Sunni, Ismaili and Imami (Twelver) Shias—commonly sought legitimacy through Islamic and even non-Islamic pedigree and royal Iranian descent. Anthony Black notes: “A Sunni ruler, rather than claiming to be religious leader, in his own right, would seek endorsement from the Abbasid Deputy

(Caliph).”³ Sometimes, they were merely with the title “ameer”, a modest derivative from the caliphal title “*Ameer-Al Muslimeen*” used by the Samanids. Mahmud of Ghazni (971–1030) too sought to trace his descent from the Sassanid Iranians and commissioned the great Ferdowsi to write *Shahnameh* (written between 977–1010), which traces the mythical and historical origins of the Persian Empire from the time of creation to the coming of Islam. The epic glorified Mahmud of Ghazni by comparing him to the great non-Muslim Sassanid king, Ardashir, whom Ferdowsi called the epitome of an ideal king.

At the same time, Mahmud of Ghazni also secured the title of *Yamin ud-Dawala* (right hand of the state) from the Abbasid Caliph to gain greater legitimacy in the Muslim masses across Islamdom by reporting of his Holy War against the “idol-worshipping” kings of India. In the words of Anthony Black: “He (Mahmud Ghazni) was the secular arm of Sunnism in the east, long admired as a model Muslim ruler.”⁴

New Persian Genre of *Nasihatul Muluk* (Advice to Kings)

The disintegration of the Arab Abbasid Caliphate and the establishment of several states helped the many local belief systems, religions, philosophies and social ethos to percolate into the general social and political regimes spread across intercontinental Islamdom.

During the period c. 1100–1220, between the rise of the Seljuk dynasty and the Mongol invasions, a “new Sunni internationalism”⁵ was at its peak. In this phase, political thought developed in the genre of books called *nasihatul muluk* or “advice to kings”. The marrying of Persian political concepts with Islamic ideals is the hallmark of these treatises, a few of which are discussed next.

Ibn Qutaiba and Kitab Al-Taj: Exploring Wisdom outside Islam

As illustrated in the case of Ferdowsi’s *Shahnama*, gaining legitimacy for the king even from non-Islamic sources was no longer considered invalid. Accordingly, *Uyun Al-Akhhbar* (“Choice Narratives”) by Ibn Qutaiba—a vast collection of Islamic and pre-Islamic Persian sayings, deemed a “synthesis between Islamic and courtly culture”⁶—claimed to provide moral culture outside the fold of Islam. The book stated:

There is not just one road to God, nor is all [that is] good...confined to nightly prayer...[Rather], the roads that lead to Him are legion, and the gates leading to the good are open wide. This book, although it

does not treat of the Quran or [Tradition]...yet shows the way to matters of high importance, gives guidance to noble virtues, restrains from moral (turpitude) and proscribes evil.⁷

Thus, Ibn Qutaiba introduced the Iranian concept, which made its first appearance in Islamic literature: for instance, he extolled the concept of private property to promote cultivation in an agrarian economy, which reminds one of the Persian ideal of “circle of power”. “There can be no government without an army: No army without money: No money without prosperity: And no prosperity without justice and good administration.”⁸

Ibn Qutaiba blended Islamic ethics with pre-Islamic Persian wisdom. He reminded the kings of Islamic ethics through the Hadeeth on the necessity of gaining the trust of the subjects with a Persian saying: “Use kindness rather than force; with force you can rule their bodies, but you can only enter their hearts; through kindness.” His book also referred to old Persian gems: “Manage the best of the people by love, the common people by a mixture of love and fear, the low people only by fear.”⁹

Another essential book of unknown authorship of the period and the genre of advice to kings was *Kitab Al-Taj* (“Book of the Crown”). The book highlighted the importance of dividing society between the elite and the masses, implying that the elite were superior people. It highlighted the argument that even classical Islam does not espouse pure egalitarianism. Louise Marlow describes the views thus: “Early Islam had an egalitarian potential”, insofar as “inequalities have no bearing on an individual’s moral worth and ultimate fate in the next world”.¹⁰ However, the Quran does acknowledge that God has raised some above the others in terms of rank, so that some may take others in servitude.¹¹

Thus, *Kitab Al-Taj* made a few modifications to the Indo-Persian four social categories: “(1) the high nobility and princes; (2) theologians and priests of the fire temple; (3) medics, secretaries and astrologers; and (4) farmers and manual workers.”¹²

Even Ibn Qutaiba underlined the Indo-Persian idea of a society based on four social groups, which he believed were necessary for maintaining any state’s social, political and economic security. He stratified society into four divisions: “(1) the learned who are the bearers of religion, (2) the horsemen who are the guards of the seat of power, (3) the writers who are the ornament of the kingdom, (4) the agriculturalists who make the lands prosperous.”¹³ Ibn Qutaiba was rather sympathetic towards the last rung of his society, the farmers: “act kindly towards the farmers, you will remain fat as long as they are fat”.¹⁴

“The Sea of Precious Virtues” (Bahr Al-Favaid)

Another popular political treatise, written in Persian language by an anonymous Sunni scholar of the Shafai school, was *Bahr Al-Favaid* (“The Sea of Precious Virtues”; 1159–62 CE). Religious in orientation, it firmly placed the Shariah above the king’s powers and told all government officials to beware about acting on the principle of “rule as you please”.

It stipulated that the sultan should honour the *ulema* and consult with them regularly, as even “the kings of Rum (Rome) and the Franks ‘do whatever the monks command’”.¹⁵ Curiously, the author even approved rebellion against a king who imposes innovation (*bidah*) or what is contrary to the Shariah—a provision that runs contrary to Al-Mawardi’s Sunni treatise that calls on the subjects to comply with the rulers fully and disapproves of revolt.

The *Bahr Al-Favaid* showed early traces of extremist ideas associated with modern times, telling rulers not to appoint Jews and Christians to public office.

Nizam Al-Mulk’s Siyasatnama and Founding of Islamic Madrasas

Also known as *Siyar Al-Muluk* (“Rules for Kings”), *Siyasatnama* (“Book of Politics or Government”) was supposedly written by Abu Ali Hasan ibn Ali Tusi (popularly known as Nizam Al-Mulk), the famous Sunni wazir of Seljuk rulers. In this Persian treatise, Nizam Al-Mulk (the de facto ruler of the Seljuk dynasty from 1063 to 1092) justified the rule of the benevolent despot. The treatise provided examples of justice and effective governance in Islamic society using historical examples.

The book, reading as an elaboration of Khusrau I or Anushirwan’s “circle of justice” ideals, stated: “The monarchy depends on the army; the army on the money; money comes from land tax; the land tax comes from agriculture; agriculture depends on justice; justice on the integrity of officials; and on the integrity of the ever-watchfulness of the king.”¹⁶ Nizam Al-Mulk mostly cited examples of Persian kings rather than Islamic rulers, emphasising the importance of justice in his book. Still, he called on the king to establish religious beliefs and warned him against the dangers of religious heresy, which he believed becomes a source of political disorder.

In practice, Nizam Al-Mulk established the first madrass (colleges for studying Islamic disciplines). These seminaries made Islamic teaching more systematic and enhanced the status of the *ulema*. In addition to religious education, young Islamic scholars were taught subjects to provide them government jobs. In Baghdad, he founded the prestigious Nizamiyya madrasa in 1067 CE.¹⁷ The madrasas gave the *ulema* a power base and even monopoly on law through their Shariah courts.

Influence of Greek Humanism and Philosophy

Earlier, it has been discussed how the Mutazila religious movement sought to understand Islamic thought through the prism of Greek rationality and Aristotelian logic and was instrumental in shaping the political views of some Abbasid rulers, particularly Al-Mamun. This efflorescence of Greek philosophy in the Muslim world, even as Europe had turned a blind eye to it in the medieval “Dark Ages”, was primarily the result of the establishment of the House of Wisdom (Bayt Al-Hikma)—under the patronage of Abbasid kings, namely, Harun Al-Rashid, Al-Mamun and Al-Mansur—which translated manuscripts of texts from Greek, Persian and Indian sources into Arabic.

In this respect, Abu Yusuf Yaqub ibn Ishaq Al-Kindi (d. 873) was the first significant Arabian philosopher to utilise and develop the philosophical conceptions of Greek thought. It is said that his work significantly affected the intellectual development of Western Europe in the thirteenth century. The influence of Greek political philosophy in the writings of Al-Farabi was also outlined earlier. Another Greek philosopher, albeit mainly a physician, was Ibn Sina (or Avicenna), who shared with Al-Farabi the Durkheimian theory of religion’s social and political function.

Kitab Al-Siyasa by Ibn Sina or Avicenna: State for Social Justice

Born near Bukhara in 980 CE, Ibn Sina is considered one of the most outstanding physicians and polymaths in Muslim history, whose influence on philosophy and medicine lasted until the seventeenth century in Europe, while his contribution to philosophy has its impact in Iran to this day.

Among his famous works is *Kitab Al-Shifa* (“The Book of Healing”), a philosophical and scientific encyclopedia. At the same time, his political philosophy is known from his work, *Kitab Al-Siyasa* (“Book of Governance”), which deals with issues of state policy for political and economic governance.

According to Avicenna, people will only obey laws if the agency making them was made to appear exceptional; therefore, the Prophet was a kind of philosopher as well as ruler, combining “theoretical wisdom”, justice and prophecy. This made him “the world’s earthly king and God’s Deputy in it”.¹⁸

Like Al-Farabi and later Suhrawardi, Avicenna believed in a divine power that influences the human mind, conditioning its imaginative and intellectual faculties to receive or understand a revelation of the law. Therefore, he was one of the “Ishraqi” philosophers, an Islamic illuminationist.

Ibn Sina said that human beings complemented each other to make humanity self-sufficient. His social and political outlook was shaped by the idea of division of labour, where “one man (for instance) would provide another with vegetables, while the other would bake for him; one man would sew for another, while the other would provide him with needles”.¹⁹ This greater interconnectedness led to the formation of cities, societies and states.

There has been some speculation whether Ibn Sina, who served under Sunni Samanid, was a Shia or Sunni Muslim. At least in matters of succession of the Muslim ruler, Ibn Sina upheld Sunni views and did not accept the Shia view of the right of the Prophet’s household. Thus, for him, succession could be through testamentary designation by the previous ruler, as was usually the practice of the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphs, or by “consensus of the elders”.

Unusual for his times, Ibn Sina accepted the right of rebellion if a person usurped the high office of caliph through unrighteous means. According to him, if a “seceder” claims to be the caliph “by virtue of power or wealth”, “then it becomes the duty of every citizen to fight and kill him...Next to belief in the prophet, nothing brings one closer to God than the killing of such a usurper.” In order to determine the righteousness of the cause, Ibn Sina emphasised “practical judgement and excellence in political management”—which is more of a Sunni than Shia view of the qualifications for leadership.²⁰

Ibn Sina believed that the role of the state could be divided into three functions: (i) the legislation and implementation of law; (ii) the availability of economic opportunity; and (iii) the provision of social security. According to the philosopher, the state was responsible for stabilising the economy. For this, the government was required to formulate economic policies and make laws. Economic ills gave rise to many problems in society, such as exploitation, double-dealing, persecution, oppression and corruption.²¹

Intellectuals from Northern Africa also enriched Muslim political philosophy. Here, it is relevant to mention the contribution of Ibn Hezam, who developed his theory of authoritarianism in response to the fall of the Spanish Caliphate. Other socio-political philosophers from Andalusia who were greatly influenced by Aristotle were Ibn Bajja (Avempace) and the polymath Ibn Tufayl.

Ibn Rushd (Averroes): Advocate of Rationalism, Women’s Political Role

Perhaps few Muslim philosophers have won the attention or acclaim of European thinkers as “The Commentator” Ibn Rushd (or Averroes as he is more popularly known in the West).

In Raphael's 1501 fresco, "The School of Athens", at the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, Ibn Rushd (1126–98 CE) is depicted in a green robe and turban, trying to read a book from behind Pythagoras. In the "Prologue" of *The Canterbury Tales* (1387) by the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, Averroes is also mentioned as an authority in medicine known across Europe. He is said to have inspired Latin Averroist philosophers: Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun (fourteenth century); Gaetano da Thiene and Pietro Pomponazzi (fifteenth century); and Agostino Nifo (sixteenth century).²² Though critiqued by Thomas Aquinas in his 1229 book, *On the Unity of the Intellect*, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun were hailed by French President Emmanuel Macron in his speech against radical Islam in 2020.²³

Author of over hundred books and treatises,²⁴ Ibn Rushd was a devout Aristotlean and affirmed the importance of conceptual analysis and syllogistic demonstration, without any of the mystical ambivalence of neo-Platonic ideas. For this reason, he is often called the "father of rationalism".²⁵ According to Ibn Rushd, Aristotle could cover every aspect of what could be known. He also sought to update the Aristotlean oeuvre by including knowledge gained in his times. He started off by writing "Short Synopses" on Aristotle's work (c. 1160–70), followed by "Intermediate Commentaries" (c. 1168–77 CE), in which he introduced some of his own opinions, and then came his "Great Commentaries" (1180–90 CE), which earned him the European title of "The Commentator".

Ibn Rushd dealt with government and politics in his "Intermediate" commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1177 CE) and Plato's *On Republic*.²⁶ Considered a greater advocate of empiricism than Aristotle himself, the philosopher advocated using both rationality and empirical evidence in the development and execution of state legislation. For this reason, he supported that public administration should be the domain of experienced people. He stated: "Hence it is said that the governance of cities is appropriate for the old, in whom knowledge of the theoretical sciences is combined with long experience."²⁷

The state, according to Ibn Rushd, was essential for the development of human virtue: "To acquire his virtue, a man has need of other people. Hence, he (man) is political by nature."²⁸ Thus, the formation of the state was driven by both philosophy and scientific technology. All human perfections was realised in "perfect association" or virtuous state.

On the issue of women's role in society, Ibn Rushd was rather advanced for his times. He was against the subordination of women in society, which he believed

was morally wrong and contributed to economic backwardness: “Women in these cities are not groomed with respect to any of the human virtues... Their being a burden upon the men in these cities is one of the causes of the poverty of these cities.” Thus, he stated: “Women may, therefore, practise crafts—they are ‘weaker’ at some, ‘more diligent’ at others. They may be warriors. They may be philosopher-rulers.”²⁹ Although a Maliki judge himself, Ibn Rushd did not mind being ruled a woman philosopher-ruler.

The Andalusian scholar was a harsh critic of the Asharite philosophy of occasionalism and defended philosophy (*falsafa*) from Ghazali’s charge of it being highly incoherent. He repudiated the Asharite concept of *bila kayfa* and said that discovering causes was an intrinsic part of knowledge, and that causal explanation was Islamically valid. He advocated that logical reasoning and religion were not opposites but complementary, and that intuition, mysticism and dogma alone could not ensure religious and spiritual good.

Sufism and its Mystical Orders

As noted earlier, the institution of madrasas (started by Nizam Al-Mulk) started spreading all over the scattered Islamdom. With the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate, the *ulema* were left free and unchecked by any central authority, as were Muslim mystics called Sufis, who started travelling to various regions. They served as a non-political glue to hold the religious community, divided among various states, around the Muslim world.

The clerics opposed the philosophers and blamed them for using reason as a supreme virtue and an absolute value for judging and understanding even the Quran. The mystics (Sufis), however, were less critical of philosophy as the Sufi “gnosis” also had a Platonic genealogy and as neo-Platonism was close to the human spirit’s exploration of both the self and God.³⁰

The term Sufi first appeared in the Arabic literature in the middle of the ninth century and applied to a certain class of ascetics who reacted against the intellectualism of the Muslim philosophers and the dogmatism of the religious clerics (*ulema*). These ascetics wore clothes made of coarse wool (*suff*), from which they got their name “Sufi”. However, others find their origins from the pre-Islamic gnostics, who worshipped Greek Goddess “Sophia” (personifying wisdom), courted both by intellectuals of philosophy (which means “in love with Sophia”) and mystics (as is evident in the lady whom Ibn Arabi symbolically meets on his way to Mecca and other pilgrimages).

Although Sufi mysticism drew a lot from the Prophet's life, which was replete with solitary meditation and prolonged nightly vigils, Sufis also borrowed mystical ideas from neo-Platonism and Gnosticism, Christian monasticism and even Buddhism.

Eschewing the lures of outward (*zahiri*) sensory experiences, the Sufis concentrate in grasping the inner (*batini*) spiritual and intuitive truths of the Quran. They believe that the goal of Islam is the spiritual development for perfecting the self (*nafs*), from a lower state of base impulses and desires (*nafs-e-ammara*), through an intermediate level of self-awareness and self-criticism (*nafs-e-lawwama*) to attain the ultimate state of self-control and spiritual bliss (*nafs-e-mutmainna*). This requires continuous effort and rigorous training under the supervision of a spiritual teacher (*murshid*). The purpose is to cultivate positive moral and spiritual values such as love, compassion, and humility. Thus, the concept of controlling the *nafs* is the central tenet of Sufi thought, and the Sufi tariqa (methodology) has developed varied frameworks for understanding the nature of the self and its relationship with God.³¹

By the thirteenth century, they developed the Sufi fraternity (*tariqa* or the right method), with its "master" (shaykh/shaikh) and novice (*murid*). However, there was no monasticism (or *rabbaniya*) in Islam because of Quranic prohibition.

The first fraternity (*tariqa*) established on such a principle was the Qadariya, named after the revered Abd Al-Qadir Al-Jalani (1077–1166), whom even the Sufi critic Ibn Taimiyyah used to respect, mainly because of his conformist religious views. Based in Baghdad, his order remains one of the most tolerant and charitable, with followers spread worldwide, including in the Indian subcontinent, Java, Guinea and Algeria.

The second fraternity in order of antiquity was the Rifaite, founded by another Iraqi, Ahmad Al-Rifai (1183 CE), whose members could perform dangerous feats, such as swallowing burning coal, serpents and glass, as well as walking on embers.

Finally, the Malawi order of the whirling dervishes was founded by the Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi in 1273. He was the Sufi saint who permitted music and dancing as a means to commune with the divine. In Africa, the strong mystic brotherhood of Shadhilis, founded by Ali Al Shadhila (c. 1258) developed in Morocco and Tunisia and spread from there. It soon developed other Sufi subjects and branches.³²

With their practices of *dhikr* (recitation of God's names and hymns), Sufis won many converts to Islam, including, more importantly, the invincible Mongol

warriors who themselves followed mystical beliefs of Shamanism. Jabir ibn Hayyan (c. 776 CE) was one of the prominent early occultist Sufis in Islam. Later, Bayazid Al-Bistami (c. 875), a Persian, introduced the concept of *fana* (self-annihilation) in Sufi thought.

Another Persian, Mansur Al-Hallaj (the carder), was flogged and decapitated, then burned in an Abbasid inquisition in 922 CE, for having declared, *an al-haq* (“I am the Truth”).

His execution made him a great Sufi martyr, and his tomb in west Baghdad stands to date. Among great mystical poets was the Egyptian Ibn Al-Farid (1181–1235), while Persian poets of international acclaim, such as Sadi, Hafiz and Rumi, were accomplished mystics in their own right.

Ibn Arabi and Suhrawardi: All-inclusive Illuminist Philosophers

Still, the Sufi mystics and thinkers considered philosophy inferior to the pursuit of spiritual knowledge. For them, “Whatever (the Philosopher) knows rationally, the Sufis perceive intuitively.”³³

The illuminationist philosopher, Yahya Suhrawardi (c. 1155–91 CE) was a neo-Platonic mystic who introduced “unitive insights that mystical experience made possible”.³⁴ His philosophy, called “illumination” (*Hikmat Al-Ishraq*), showed creation as a successive outflow from the original Supreme Light of Lights (*Nur Al-Anwar*). All levels of existence after that were but varying degrees of light and darkness.³⁵

As suggested by unverified historical records, Suhrawardi was executed at the age of 36 on the order of Al-Malik Al-Zahir, son of Saladin Ayyubi, for his occult practices.³⁶ He is known by honorific titles, *Shaikh Al-Ishraq* (“Master of Illumination”) and *Shaikh Al-Maqtul* (“The Murdered Master”).

However, the Grand Master (*Al Shaykh Al-Akbar*) of both unorthodox and orthodox Sufism was the Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi (full name, Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Arabi), the greatest mystic and speculative philosopher in Islamic history. Born on 28 July 1165, in Murcia in Valencia, Ibn Arabi was spiritually close to the Isharqi school of Suhrawardi; but unlike the latter, he had a longer life and died on 16 November 1240, in Damascus, at the age of 75. Known for his abstruse mystical gems, *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah* (“The Meccan Revelations”) and *Fusus Al-Hikam* (“The Bezels of Wisdom”; 1229), Ibn Arabi is said to have met the great philosopher Ibn Rushd at the age of 9 years, when the latter was in his mid-forties. Despite his young age, Ibn Arabi is said to have left Ibn Rushd flabbergasted with his responses to the great “Commentator”.

Ibn Rushd asked the precocious boy if philosophical speculation (*nazar*) could arrive at the same conclusions as a divine unveiling (*kashf*). Ibn Arabi replied, “yes and no”, and then explained, “Between the yes and the no, spirits fly from their matter and heads from their bodies”.³⁷ In the view of Henry Corbin, Ibn Arabi and subsequent Muslim philosophers preserved the creative tension between the “yes”, or the affirmation of the legitimacy of rational thought, and the “no”, or the declaration of its inadequacy, in the face of pure knowledge.³⁸

Mystical intuition was now seen as a higher and more advanced level of the human intellect. In jurisprudence, Ibn Arabi was nominally aligned to the conformist “*zabiri*” (empiricists and literalist) school of his contemporary Ibn Hazm, but in matters of belief, he was quite the opposite of “*zabiri*”, in that he was a “*batini*” (which means “hidden” or esoteric).

His doctrine has remained central to most Sufis to this day, called *wahdatul wujud* (the unity of existence), which posits, like the Advaita concept, that all existence is one. At a lower level:

all things pre-exist as ideas (*ayn thabitah*) in the knowledge of God, from where they emanate and to which they return. There is no creation *ex nihilo*; the world is merely the outer aspect of God, who is its inner aspect. Between the essence and the attributes, i.e. God and the universe, there is no real difference.³⁹

Muslim mysticism here comes quite close to pantheism in Ibn Arabi. The divine manifests himself in the human, which Ibn Arabi says is Muhammad (the perfect man—*insan-i-kamil*). The Prophet is also the *kalimah* (expression), Ibn Arabi puts it, similar to Jesus, who was called the “logos”.

Al-Ghazali: Ruler should have Spiritual Knowledge (Marifa)

One of the greatest theologians and mystics of Islam, and in the words of Philip Hitti, “one of its noblest and most original thinkers”,⁴⁰ is Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE). Known as Algazelus or Algazel in Latin, he was born in the city of Tus in Iran (as a Sunni Seljuk subject) and is often seen as the final authority in Sunni orthodox thought. Building on Al-Ashari’s theology, many Sunnis know Al-Ghazali by his honorific title, *Hujjat Al-Islam* (“Proof of Islam”). He is also called *mujaddid* (reviver) of his age.

His scholarship is said to have had a profound influence on Jewish and Christian scholasticism, with Thomas Aquinas, and later Pascal, being influenced by his philosophical and religious views. In the words of Hitti, “The scholastic shell constructed by Al-Ashari and Al-Ghazali has held Islam to the present day.”⁴¹

Initially a student of Shafii jurisprudence, Ghazali was made teacher at Nizamiyya madrasa by Nizam Al-Mulk himself because of his exceptional mental abilities. One of his first works was a defence of Abbasid against Fatimid claims, which was written in 1094–95. However, in 1095, Al-Ghazali suffered an intellectual and physical breakdown, which was associated with a crisis in his spiritual life, and a “phase of scepticism” seized him, forcing him to resign from his teaching job and disappear into the Syrian desert in search of truth.

In a way, Ghazali’s confusion was a reflection of the broader spiritual and intellectual confusion of Muslim thought at that time, which had sought answers in theology and schools of jurisprudence but could not find solace in its dour casuistry. It had sought refuge in Mutazila rationalism and Greek philosophy that was only useful in answering mathematical and scientific questions, but was found to be purely speculative and inconclusive in addressing spiritual, ethical and metaphysical problems. Shiism, particularly Ismaili Shiism, was also found wanting by Ghazali because of its over-insistence in following an “imam”. Ghazali questioned: how are we going to recognise an ideal “imam” or teacher when the Shia faith was itself riddled with divergent claims in this regard?

In the end, Al-Ghazali brought all these divergent strands together in his synthesis of upholding the ascetic insight. He felt that in order to gain proper knowledge, one needed to go deeper than the theological, the empirical and even the rational. Thus, Ghazali believed that true knowledge was gained when the thinking soul received the “intelligible forms” directly from the “universal soul”, a silent and intuitive gift called *marifa*—a state in which even the mind does not always know what it knows.

According to Ghazali, knowledge was acquired through spiritual experience and could not be communicated in words. Hence, we know right and wrong only through this intuitive, almost divine revelation, and also things are right and wrong because God had willed it so.⁴² Ghazali endorsed the integration of knowing and doing (orthopraxis, along with orthodoxy) and attacked the *ulema* who preached but did not practice, and so he turned against mere bookish knowledge and academic life.

By adopting “*Marifa*” as the basis for knowledge, which is harnessed through religious worship and deeds, Ghazali gave pure intuitive revelations of Sufism, and also gave religious fundamentalism a kind of philosophical authority. Further, for Ghazali, political power pivoted between the temporal and the religious aspects. According to him, the sultan or caliph should be blessed with the gift of *Marifa*,

of being able to probe deep into the inner reality without the outward appearance to know the truth: “Be assured of this, O Sultan, that justice springs from perfection of the intellect and that perfection of the intellect means that you see things as they [really] are and perceive the facts of their inner reality without being deceived by their outward appearance.”⁴³

Ghazali was also remarkable in his emphasis on physical reality as much as spiritual truth. According to him, Islam upheld a middle way between materialism and asceticism: the school did not teach the complete abandonment of “this world”, nor the eradication of physical appetites. He believed that for religion to flourish, this world must be organised appropriately by political power to maximise the “opportunities for paradise”. Hence, a good ruler “is necessary for the good ordering of this world, and the good ordering of this world is necessary for the good ordering of religion, and the good ordering of religion is necessary for the acquisition of happiness in the hereafter.”⁴⁴ This political philosophy of Ghazali has been called his “Middle Way” (between asceticism and materialism), the philosophy of maintaining balance as was later espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood.

In modern times, Ghazali has come in for much criticism about his stance against philosophy, mathematics and science. While Ibn Rushd himself wrote a scathing critique (“Incoherence of the Incoherent”) against Ghazali’s diatribe against philosophy titled, “The Incoherence of the Philosophers” (in which he justified Ashari occasionalism), American astrophysicist Niel deGrasse Tyson⁴⁵ accuses him of having stifled scientific enquiry in the Muslim world (which Tyson said, in the Abbasid Golden Age, had charted the heavens, with two-thirds of the stars still bearing their Arabic names). To be fair to Ghazali, it can be said that he merely used philosophical argument to show the limitations of reason. Indeed, just as Kant’s famous *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the Persian mystic and philosopher never opposed science and mathematics but, as Joseph Lumbard (a scholar on Ghazali) points out, merely opposed the abuse of science and maths for purposes of harm and mischief.⁴⁶

To hold Ghazali responsible for the decline of rationality and science in the Muslim world is too far-fetched an accusation. In fact, Ghazali can be viewed as a post-Mutazila Ashari scholar who made an immense impact on the political thought of even medieval Indian political thinkers and rulers.

Shia Polity: Leadership through Divine Designation

Many of the theological doctrines of Shia Islam, particularly the majority Twelver

(Ithna Ashariyya) or Imami Shiism, fully developed in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Over time, the Sunni and the Shia views on political theory started to diverge. Although different schools of Shia Islam have held different opinions on who should be the leader and how he should be chosen, they all believe in the concept of imamate that is central to their religious belief and conduct. The doctrine of imamate asserts that leaders and guides (called *imam*) of the Muslim community should come solely from the progeny of the Prophet, as they possess divine knowledge and authority (*ismah*), which is exclusive to the *Ahl Al-Bayt* (that is, the Prophet's household).

For the Zaidis, the true imam should lead an armed insurrection against oppressive rulers, as Imam Zaid did against the Umayyad potentates. Political power can only be gained through this means. In contrast, the early Twelvers or Imami Shia rejected armed struggle and taught instead that they should wait for the installation of the true imam through divine intervention. Thus, the sixth imam, Jafar Al-Sadiq, urged patience, non-resistance and withdrawal from mainstream politics. However, when Imam Jafar passed away, supporters of his eldest son, Ismail (who had died before Imam Jafar), claimed that Ismail's son, Muhammad ibn Ismael, should be the rightful imam. However, the Twelver Shia school simply selected the younger brother of Ismail, Musa Al-Kazim as their imam. Since then, Ismailis have believed that Muhammad ibn Ismail would return as Mahdi before the end of days to redress injustice in the world.⁴⁷

A concise theory on the imamate (Shia political theory) first appears to have been started by the Zaidi Shia Al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim (785–860). He was opposed to elections, either by the elite or ordinary people, as he believed it led to a civil dispute. According to him:

Any election would have to be carried out by a shura (council), and its members must come from different and distant places, their aims will be different...since every group of the council will claim the Leadership. Their controversy will bring about war, and war will lead to perdition.⁴⁸

Later, Twelver (or Imami) Shia theologians—namely, Al-Mufid (d. 1022); his pupil, Al-Murtada (d. 1044); and his pupil, Abu Jafar Al-Tusi (d. 1067)—extolled the importance of the Shia Hidden Imam thus:

Man is by nature fallible and is therefore forever in need of guidance, which can only be provided by an Imam who is “ma'sum” (immune from error and sin). As the ruling Sunni caliphs are sinful and act tyrannically, there is always a Hidden Imam because of whom God has not forsaken mankind.⁴⁹

The Twelver Shias grew in number in Iraq and Iran under the Seljuk rulers of the tenth century. During the “Great Absence” (period of occultation of the twelfth imam since around 934 CE), guidance for the Twelver Shias came through the jurists (*fuqaha*), who were the spiritual guides of the community. This concept is essential to understand the concept of *Vilayat-e-Faqih* (guardianship of the jurist), which was also the political doctrine under the Shia Safavid Empire and the Iranian Revolution under Imam Khomeini in the twentieth century.

The Shia *ulema* and *fuqaha* were legal–moral experts and became representatives of the Hidden Imam. In the words of Abu Jafar Al-Tusi: “The true (Imam) has cast (the mantle of) judgement on the (Expert Jurists) of the Shia during such time as he himself is not in a position to exercise it in person.”⁵⁰ The Shia clerics (*ulema* and *fuqaha*), thus, started exercising significantly greater authority in their community than their counterparts did in the Sunni sect.

As explained earlier, the Shia were to endure the oppression of existing rulers until the Hidden Imam finally appeared. However, if one’s life, family or property were in danger, the follower was permitted to conceal one’s beliefs (*taqiyya*; precautionary dissimulation). Therefore, non-resistance and conformism needed to be practised to protect the Shia community from danger in adverse times. Meanwhile, a good Sunni ruler and Shia rulers who acknowledged the true imams could be regarded by the Shias as acting at the behest of the imam and in compliance with God.

Under the Fatimids, the Ismaili Shia rulers of Egypt (909–1171CE), the ruler imam was no longer hidden but in the open. His status was loftier than any Sunni caliph as he was seen as the earthly form of the intellect emanating from God. He was both the religious and political authority, to whom every subject owed complete obedience (*taslim*). Under the Fatimid rulers, the injunctions of *jihad* (in its connotation of Holy War), *iman* (faith) and *wilaya* (allegiance) were added to the five pillars of Islam, namely, *shahada*, *salat*, *sawm*, *zakat* and the Haj. However, most Ismailis in Iraq and Arabia refused to recognise the Fatimid Ismaili rulers and so was the case with the Qarmati of Eastern Arabia (Bahrain), who were ruled by a council of elders.

The “Assassins”: Legend of the Narco-terrorist

When the Fatimid Empire was on the decline in the eleventh century, one of its missionary leaders, Hasan-i-Sabah, launched an insurrection from the remote hilly fortress of Alamut (south of the Caspian Sea) in 1090 CE against the Sunni Seljuk rulers of Persia.

In 1094, Fatimid Imam Al-Mustanasir died, so Hasan-i-Sabah supported the designated successor of Al-Mustanasir by the name of Nizar. However, the Fatimid general killed Nizar and appointed Nizar's younger brother, Al-Mustali, to the throne in Cairo. This led to the schism in the Ismaili sect, between the Nizari Ismailis (later known as Agha Khanis) and the Mustali line (which further split into Taiyyabi and Hafizi, with Taiyyibi Ismailism found in Bohra communities in India).

On the assassination of his imam, Al-Sabah proclaimed himself to be the *hujja* (lieutenant) of Nizar until the imam decided to reappear in person. Some sources even suggest Nizar's son had migrated to Alamut and was under the protection of Hasan-i-Sabah. To revive the Ismaili Empire, Al-Sabah started a secretive military campaign against the Sunni Seljuks and assassinated the wazir, Nizam Al-Mulk, in 1092.

From his hilly fortress of Alamut, Hasan-i-Sabah became the terror of the Mediterranean. His rebels (whom he called *fidayeen*) were better known by his enemies as *hashashin* (which gives us the word "assassin" in English) because they were said to be drugged with hashish to give them the courage to carry out political assassinations. The legend of narco-terrorism goes back to almost a millennium in Muslim history. However, the historical portrayal of the so-called hashashin in a distinctively negative light is derived from their adverse portrayal by Seljuk chroniclers.

In addition to Nizam Al-Mulk, the hashashin were successful in killing the ruler of the Syrian city of Homs (1103), Seljuk governor of Mosul (1113), the Wazir of Aleppo (1177) and the Crusader king of Jerusalem (1192). Fictional tales about the hashashin or assassins became popular in Europe, and the "Old Man of the Mountain" became the subject of European legend. The small Ismaili state around Alamut lasted for about 150 years, until the Mongol raiders destroyed the fortress.

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*THE MONGOLS AND THE
RESURGENT WEST*

11

Mongol Attacks, the Crusades and the Gunpowder Empires

In one week, libraries and their treasures that had been accumulated over hundreds of years were burned or otherwise destroyed. So many books were thrown into the Tigris River, according to one writer, that they formed a bridge that would support a man on horseback.

—An account on the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258 CE¹

With the weakening of a unified caliphate from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, the Muslim world soon became vulnerable to threats from two emerging powers. One was Christian Europe, which was witnessing a population bulge and economic revival in these centuries. In addition, the Gregorian Reform movement had made the papacy stronger and Italian shipping was beginning to challenge Muslim domination of the Mediterranean.

The second external threat came with the rise of the Mongol Empire under its founder and first universal Mongol emperor, Genghis Khan, who eventually established the largest contiguous empire in the history of humankind. He conquered most of Eurasia, reached as far west as Poland and south as Egypt and by the end of his reign, had a substantial part of Central Asia and China under his control. For the first time, the Muslim world faced major reversals from external threats on the world stage.²

The remnants of Abbasid glory ended with the sacking of Baghdad by Genghis Khan's pantheist grandson, Hulagu Khan, in 1258 CE, even though the monolithic political unit of caliphate had started disintegrating much earlier, since the tenth century itself.

The Mongol military interventions into the Muslim world had begun almost four decades earlier. In 1218 CE, the governor of Khwarezm (a Muslim state centred in present-day Uzbekistan) rounded up 450 Muslim merchants who had come from the Mongol territory and had them killed on the suspicion that they were Mongol spies. On hearing this, Genghis Khan sent three envoys to demand reparation. The insolent governor had one of the envoys killed and shaved off the beards of the other two and sent them back to the emperor, a pointed insult.³

The Mongol reprisal came in 1219 CE—swift, brutal and massive. It is said that a crimson stream marked the trail of the Mongol horde: “Out of a population of 100,000, Harat (Herat) was left with 40,000. The mosques of Bukhara, famed for piety and learning, served as stables for Mongolian hordes. Many of Samarqand and Balkh inhabitants were either butchered or carried into captivity. Khwarizm was utterly devastated.”⁴ While recounting the sordid tales of the time, Ibn Al-Athir shuddered at his narration and wished that his mother had not borne him. When Ibn Battuta visited the cities of Bukhara, Samarqand, Balkh and others a century later, he still found them in ruins.

Mongol Invasions: From Genghis Khan to Hulagu

According to Joseph Fletcher, the Mongol Empire grew from a militaristic, super-tribal confederation that came into existence for the sole purpose of preying on the rich settled lands.⁵ Once Genghis Khan consolidated the confederation in 1206, a continued pattern of invasion and conquest was followed to justify the empire's existence. Thus, the empire was utterly dependent on the army, and even the confederate army could not be held together without an ever-expanding empire. Once the Mongol Army had started, it was difficult to stop.

After Genghis Khan's death in 1227 CE, his empire was divided into four parts and the attacks on the Muslim world subsided. Genghis Khan was succeeded by Great Khan Ogedei, whose death was followed by a period of uncertainty until Mongke Khan became the emperor. Great Khan Mongke sent his brother Hulagu on a campaign to the Middle East. According to David Morgan, Hulagu had three reasons for conducting this second campaign in the region. First, his immediate aim was to eliminate Nizari Imaili assassins, who were rumoured to be

planning the assassination of the Great Khan. The second goal was to subdue or destroy the caliph of Baghdad; and the third was to establish a kingdom of his own.⁶

The first aim was achieved easily when, in 1256 CE, the last Nizari assassin surrendered, and the hashashin of Persia were completely eliminated. Then, in 1258 CE, Hulagu moved to Iraq. He issued summons to the Abbasid caliph and when this was refused, Baghdad was sacked. The caliph was wrapped in a carpet and kicked to death. Later in a letter to the king of France, Hulagu reported that 200,000 people were killed in Baghdad. Muslim historians linked Hulagu's savagery to Crusading Christians, as they claim Hulagu's mother Sorghaghtani was a Nestorian Christian, as was his wife Doquz Khatun and his close friend general Kitbuqa Noyan. Finally, in 1260 CE, Hulagu took the Ayyubid kingdoms of Aleppo and Damascus.

The Mongol juggernaut came to a sudden halt when they were dealt an unexpected defeat at the hands of the Egyptian Mamluks. The Mamluk victory in the Battle of Ayn Jalut (Spring of Goliath) marked the end of the Mongol expansion. There were two reasons for this Mongol defeat. One was that Hulagu had left the campaign midway to his general on news of Mongke's death; and second, the Mongols did not find territories in the Near East attractive pasturelands. However, the fact is that Mamluks started seizing territory even from the Mongols, and their general, Baybar, took Syria and became the real founder of Mamluk power. However, Persia and Iraq continued under Hulagu and his successors as the empire of Ilkhans, who ruled over Iranzamin (land of Iran). In 1295 CE, the Ilkhan rulers converted to Islam, beginning with Ghazan Khan.

Following Hulagu's death, the Mongols created four large states. The descendants of Hulagu established the dynasty of Ilkhans (who established their kingdom in the Tigris–Euphrates valley and the mountainous regions of Iran). The Chaghtay Mongols carved their state in the Syr–Oxus region, while the Golden Horde was established in the Volga River basin and the White Horde in the Irtysh region. Having beliefs closer to Buddhism, the Mongol law code (the *Yasa*) was mainly a military system that Genghis Khan himself supposedly drew. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, all four of the Mongol states had converted to Islam, mainly because of Sufi mysticism that resonated with the shamanic occultism of the Mongols.

The Crusades: Saladin Ayyubi and the Millennial Wars

By the turn of the first millennium, European Christians believed that the end of the world was imminent; and their priests had raised apocalyptic expectations that around the years 1000 CE and 1033 CE, a Christian king would lead the faithful to Jerusalem to await the Second Coming of Christ.

The reality was quite different, though. By the eleventh century, about two-thirds of the ancient Christian world had been conquered by Muslims, which included the Christian holy lands of Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Anatolia. The rise of Seljuks to power and their encroachment into Byzantine territory so alarmed Emperor Alexios I that he urged the Roman pope, with whom the Greek Orthodox Church had broken 40 years earlier, to save his realm from the Muslim threat. For his part, Pope Urban II responded to the call for help and made a speech in 1095 CE, inviting Christians to join a war to regain Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre from the "wicked race".⁷ This call led to the first in a series of Christian–Muslim wars, known in history as the Crusades.

The Crusades refer to eight major official military campaigns (and many more unofficial ones) between 1095 CE and 1270 CE, launched by Catholic popes and Christian Western powers to wrest the Holy Land of Jerusalem from Muslim control. Although there were many crusades, the most successful for the Christian forces was the first. Still, by 1291 CE, the newly created Christian states by Crusading armies in West Asia—namely, the Kingdom of Jerusalem, County of Edessa, County of Tripoli and Principality of Antioch—were defeated and subsumed by the Muslim Mamluk Sultanate.

Thousands of Christian volunteers had responded to Pope Urban's speech and led by able European generals of the day, the Crusaders joined the Byzantine Army and took Antioch in 1097 CE, after a nine-month-long siege. In 1099 CE, the army reached the walls of Jerusalem, even as only 1,000 Fatimid forces guarded the fort. The 15,000 Crusaders soon managed to breach the wall and this was followed by a bloodbath, in which thousands of non-combatant Jews, Muslims and native Christians were killed. It is said that human blood flowed knee-deep in the streets of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock was stripped of silver and gold candelabra and turned into a church. The Holy Sepulcher was back in the control of the Christians. Armenian Christians, who had fled from conquering Seljuks, were given a mini-state along with the new Crusader states and proved one of the Crusaders' staunchest allies.

The Muslim front against the Crusaders in the First Crusade was weak because

at that time, the Abbasid Empire had grown very weak and the Fatimid caliphs did not want to antagonise the Christians too much as they had strong business ties with them, with trade between Alexandria and Italian ports of Venice and Genoa.

The turning point came in 1144 CE, when Zengi, Mosul's governor during the collapsing Seljuk rule, captured Edessa from the Crusaders. He was succeeded by his worthy son, Nur Al-Din. With his Kurdish general, Shirkuh, and his brilliant nephew, Saladin Ayyubi, Nur Al-Din's forces fended a Christian invasion of Egypt. Saladin proclaimed himself the Sultan of Egypt (although still a lieutenant of Nur Al-Din) as soon as the Fatimid caliph died in 1171 CE, and he seized power in Syria after Nur Al-Din died three years later. Then, he managed to take Jerusalem and most of Palestine from the Crusaders between 1187 CE and 1192 CE. Saladin Ayyubi, thus, founded the Ayyubid dynasty by the Third Crusade.

Mamluks: “Slave Rulers” Who Defeated the Crusaders and the Mongols

Saladin Ayyubi had given greater impetus to an old Abbasid practice of importing Turkish boys (*mamluks* or “owned men”) from Central Asia and training them as adept soldiers. Under his reign, the Mamluks started to dominate the Ayyubi Army.

Slavery in Islam was not as evil a practice as in other parts of the medieval world. In fact, slavery enabled young and gifted men through the army or the bureaucracy. Many families (even non-Muslims) in remote parts of Central Asia and Turkey were willing to sell their sons to slave traders to serve the Muslim rulers. A boy generally became a “mamluk” or enslaved person when he was about 10–12 years old and was sold to either the reigning sultan or one of the ameurs (ministers) and put into a dormitory with other Mamluks. The younglings were instructed in Islam and Arabic, as well as trained in riding horses, archery and fighting with swords and lances. This rigorous education lasted for 10 years, during which the youth were kept in strict discipline. Upon completing the military training, each Mamluk received his manumission paper of being a free man, a horse and fighting gear. Although freed, these Mamluks remained loyal to the sultan or ameer and generally joined the army with their fellow batchmates.

In the Seventh Crusade, which was led by France's King Louis IX (later St Louis), the Crusaders occupied the Egyptian coast city of Damietta in 1249 CE and were about to take Mansura when the Mamluk forces intercepted them. In

the ensuing battle, the Mamluks defeated the Crusaders and captured Louis IX and his army.

Around that time in Cairo, the last Ayyubi king died. His widow, Shajar Al-Durr, kept his death secret for six months and ruled in his name. When her son and heir-apparent, who was living away from Cairo, finally arrived in the capital, the Mamluks came to know about the king's death and killed the prince before he could ascend to the throne. The murderers made Shajar Al-Durr the sultan until the Mamluk commander married her a few months later and became the ruler.

The Mamluks had a strange history of succession. Although a son would often succeed his father, he had a brief reign as various Mamluk factions used to fight to seize the sultanate. Nevertheless, this system of "survival of the fittest" strangely produced good rulers and the Mamluks thrived for nearly 250 years. One of the best examples of the system was the Mamluk general, Baybar, who defeated Hulagu's forces in Ayn Jalut. However, Baybar soon killed his master and became the new sultan (reigned 1260–77).

Timur ('Tamerlane'): The "Scourge of God"

Despite Hulagu's successors (Ilkhan rulers) converting to Islam, the legacy of Mongolian savagery was revived by the rise of Timur (known as Tamerlane in European texts), who hoped to build a universal empire like that of Genghis Khan. An undefeated commander and one of the greatest military leaders and tacticians in history, Timur was born in the house of a shoemaker in Transoxiana in 1336. Initially, he lived by brigandage and got the epithet "*lang*" (lame) after his leg was injured while stealing sheep.⁸

In 1380, Timur headed his Tartar hordes in campaigns that won him Afghanistan, Persia, Faris and Kurdistan. A nominal Muslim, he captured Baghdad and in Tikrit in 1393, the birthplace of Saladin the Magnificent and raised a pyramid of skulls of his Muslim victims. He then invaded Moscow in 1395 and occupied it for a year. In 1398, he ravaged northern India, and also massacred 80,000 inhabitants of Delhi. From here, he turned towards Syria, and in 1400, plundered Aleppo for three days. About 20,000 of Aleppo's inhabitants were decapitated, and their heads built into mounds 10 cubits high by 20 cubits in circumference. Soon, he captured Damascus in February 1401.⁹

In the next two years, Timur invaded Asia Minor, crushed the Ottoman Army at Ankara (1402) and took Sultan Bayazid I prisoner: "The distinguished captive was kept in chains during the night and made to travel in a litter surrounded

by a grille (qafas) carried on two horses.”¹⁰ Timur’s personality cult centred on the idea that he was the “Scourge of Allah”, sent to Earth to uphold the true religion. While not a practising Muslim, Timur invoked God often to justify his military campaigns. On February 1405, the 70 year old set out with an army of 200,000 men from his capital, Samarqand, to parley with the Chinese Empire, 3,000 miles away. It was a cold winter and the army halted at Otrar in Kazakhstan. The old conqueror had contracted a cold and had high fever. Understanding he was about to die, Timur, in an almost inaudible voice, made an eloquent speech, telling the women of his family and commanders not to weep madly on his death but to pray to God to have mercy on him. One of the most infamous butchers of humankind, Timur is said to have died silently in the evening of 18 February 1405 CE.

Unlike his father, Timur’s son, Shahrukh (who ruled from 1405 to 1447), was a great patron of the arts and sciences and made Samarqand a beautiful capital. He even maintained good political and economic relations with neighbouring kingdoms. In the view of Thomas Lentz and Glenn Lowry:

unlike his father, Shahrukh ruled the Timurid empire, not as a Turco-Mongol warlord-conqueror, but as an Islamic sultan. In dynastic chronicles, he is exalted as a man of great piety, diplomacy, and modesty—a model Islamic ruler who repaired much of the physical and psychological damage caused by his father.¹¹

Impact of Invasions: Closing of the Doors of Ijtihad (Independent Thought)

The Mongol invasion of Baghdad wiped out the caliphate and it is believed that, in the aftermath, the Islamic world even lost its intellectual vitality. The destruction caused by the invasions led to an intensification of conservatism, as only those concepts were promoted that were conformist and would unite the Muslim ranks. The tolerance for heterodox ideas that might cause confusion and dissension in an already weakened umma was disapproved. The existing schools of Islamic jurisprudence were to be blindly followed from now on, and the idea of taqleed (strict adherence) was followed. “The gates of ijtihad” for independent reasoning and enquiry were closed and have remained primarily so to this day.

Reversals compounded the setbacks brought by the Crusades and Mongol attacks on the western front of Islamdom. Christians in Spain conducted a successful “Reconquista” of Muslim territory, taking Cordova in 1236, Seville in

1248 and later, the city-state of Granada in 1492. The Black Death plague swept Europe and then entered Muslim North Africa, causing a massive decline in Berber society in the fourteenth century.

Gunpowder Empires: Ottomans and Safavids

In the tenth century, the Mongol invasions exposed the Muslim world and Christian Europe to Chinese use of gunpowder for fireworks. By 1330, both Muslim and Christian forces in Spain loaded gunpowder into canons to fire massive projectiles into enemy battlements. The ameer of Granada had them in 1330, and the Mamluks (although they used it only occasionally) had canons by 1365. However, the most significant Muslim gunpowder state was the Ottoman Empire.¹²

Ottoman Empire (1299–1922): The Sword against Christian Europe

The Ottoman Empire was founded at the end of the thirteenth century in northwestern Anatolia, in the town of Sogut, by the Turkoman tribal leader Osman I. It is believed that the ruling family came from the Turkic Kayi tribe, whose members had fled westwards from their ancestral land in Khorasan to escape from thirteenth-century Mongol invaders. According to legend, a scion of the Kayi tribe by the name Ertugrul, and his followers, entered the service of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum. His offer of 444 horse soldiers had turned the tide in favour of the Seljuk Sultanate in its campaign against the Byzantine Empire. In appreciation, the Seljuks rewarded Ertugrul with an *iqta* (land grant) at Sogut.

Upon Ertugrul's death, the leadership passed on to Osman I,¹³ who was girded with a special sword by a Sufi priest and commanded to wage war against his Christian neighbour, the Byzantines. As a result, he took the title of “*ghazi*” (leading warrior of Islam to be granted paradise). From that time on till the empire's end in 1922, Osman's descendants—known as the Ottomans—would be girded with that sword and commanded to fight for Islam against Christian Europe at the time of their accession. In fact, the sword is still among the many treasures of the Ottoman Empire at the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul.¹⁴

From 1354 onwards, the Ottomans started winning European territory and, with the conquest of the Balkan kingdoms, their tiny principality was transformed into a transcontinental empire. Nevertheless, the pinnacle of their conquests against Christian Europe was achieved when they conquered Constantinople (which was renamed “Islambol”, which later got corrupted to Istanbul) in 1453, in the reign of Ottoman Sultan Mehmed, the Conqueror.¹⁵

Mehmed's strength was built around the Balkan nobility, many of whom were converting to Islam. In addition, there was the infantry—the *yeni cheri* or janissaries—which had become more important since the introduction of gunpowder. Besides, there were the landless converted slaves, called the “Janissaries” (special forces), who were dedicated to giving their lives to the Sultan.¹⁶

Under the rule of Suleiman, the Magnificent (reigned from 1520 to 1566), the Ottoman Empire marked the peak of its power and prosperity, making significant progress in administrative, social and economic systems. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the empire ruled over 32 provinces (administered by *pashas* or governors) and numerous vassal states. Some of these were absorbed into the empire, while others were granted varying degrees of autonomy. To the west, the Ottoman armies continued their conquests and reached even the gates of Vienna in the 1530s. Thus, the empire controlled much of Southeastern Europe, West Asia and North Africa between the fourteenth and early twentieth centuries. The empire had a mix of different groups—Turks, Arabs, Christians, Jews, *ulema*, Sufi tariqas, trade guilds, etc.

In the words of Karen Armstrong:

Under Suleiman, the Shariah received a more exalted status than in any previous Muslim state. It became the official law of the land for all Muslims, and the Ottomans were the first to give standard form to Shariah courts. Legal experts—with qadis, who dispensed justice in the courts, their consultants (muftis), who interpreted the law, and the teachers in the madrasahs—became an official government corps, creating a moral and religious link between the sultan and his subjects.¹⁷

The Safavid Empire (1501–1736): Iran Converts from Sunni to Shia Islam

Following the Mongol invasions, there was also a revival of Imami (Twelver) Shias: “The Mongols were in some way their liberators and gave Shias prominent positions. Imamis were especially numerous in Iraq, north-western Iran and south of the Caspian; they had their madrassas, and leaders and they were represented in the Mongol court with a chief spokesman.”¹⁸

Another major success for the Imami Shias came from an unlikely source. A Sunni Sufi sect from modern-day Azerbaijan, the Safaviyyeh, got converted to Twelver Shia Islam, and then its forces took control of Iran, making it the only Shia state in the world to this day. The Safavids were descendants of Safi Al-Din (1253–1334) of Ardabil, who was the head of the Sufi order of Safaviyyeh and

followed the Sunni Shafii school of jurisprudence. In their opposition to the excesses committed by the ameer of Mesopotamia, the Safavids are said to have later embraced Twelver Shia Islam. Soon, they started converting large number of Turks in Azerbaijan and Anatolia to Shiism. These Shia Turks were called *Qizilbash* (red heads) because of their distinctive headgears.

In 1500 CE, 16-year-old Ismail became the *pir* (spiritual leader) of his Sufi order and decided to avenge the killing of his father, who had died at the hands of the Mesopotamian “ameers”. In 1501, Ismail conquered Tabriz and, over the next decade, conquered the rest of Iran. He then declared that Twelver Shiism was the religion of Iran.

For centuries, Twelver Shiism had remained a pacifist, mystical sect, which had withdrawn from politics and wars as it did not believe in any government during the “Long Absence” of the Hidden Imam. However, the recently converted Shah Ismail did not quite understand this reasoning. In the words of Karen Armstrong: “He probably knew very little about Twelver orthodoxy, since he subscribed to the folk extremist *ghuluww* Shiism of the new tariqas, which believed the messianic utopia was at hand.”¹⁹

Ismail called himself the “Shah” and, like the pre-Islamic Sassanid and then Abbasid monarchs, also called himself ‘the shadow of God on earth’. He waged many wars with the Sunni world. In 1510, he ousted the Sunni Uzbeks from Khorasan and pushed them north of Oxus. He also attacked the Ottomans, but was defeated by Sultan Selim I at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. Nevertheless, Ismail’s campaign within Iran was so successful that by the end of the seventeenth century, this predominantly Sunni country was staunchly converted to the Twelver Shia faith, and has remained so till this day.

It was under Shah Abbas I (1587–1629) that the Safavid rule reached its zenith. Tabriz, Qazvin and Isfahan became the dazzling capitals of their empire. The bazaars, palaces, mosques and madrasas of Isfahan dazzle even today. Under the Safavids, Isfahan became the centre of cultural renaissance, with great painters, such as Bihzad (d. 1535) and Riza-i Abbari (d. 1635), producing breathtaking miniatures. The Persians started saying, “Isfahan *nisf-i-jahan*” or “Isfahan is half of the world”.

Under Shah Abbas I, the aristocracy of the Qizilbash was put in check by raising a trained force of enslaved people or *ghulams*. The king also courted many European countries because of their typical rivalry with the Ottomans. Spain, Portugal, France, England and the Netherlands sent their representatives to the

court of Shah Abbas, and even India's Mughal ruler, Humayun, came to the court of Safavi Shah Tahmasp, where he got Persian help for reconquering Delhi.

However, Shah Abbas's reign also sowed the seeds of the Safavid Empire's decline. He curtailed the influence of the Sufis and people's representatives and enhanced the status of the religious jurists (*fuqaha*). Even among the *fuqaha*, the conformists of the Quranic and Hadeeth texts gave way to the more enterprising *mujtahids* (independent interpreters), who brought about political interpretations in matters of religion; and they remained influential up until the time of the 1979 revolution.²⁰ Replacing the old Sufi devotion of *dhikr* (recitation of God's names), the *ulema*, like Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1700), started the elaborate passion play processions—the miniature mausoleums (*taziye*) taken out in the streets during the 10th day of Muharram ceremonies—to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn with ritual mourning and chest-beating, as well as to direct hatred towards Sunnis, presented as people in sympathy with the killers of the Prophet's grandson.

Late in life, Shah Abbas grew increasingly suspicious of his courtiers to the extent that he even blinded and killed some of his worthy sons out of fear of them staging a coup. These actions left the Safavids with weak successors after the death of Shah Abbas.

The Decline in Intellectual Efflorescence?

The Mongol invasions are said to have drawn Islam into conservatism. However, scholars like Daniel Brown contest the view by citing that the times witnessed the rise of brilliant Sufi scholars, like Ibn Arabi; poets like Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–73); the great Egyptian polymath and historian Jalaluddin Suyuti (1445–1505); along with the historian Al-Maqrizi (d. 1442). Born in Herat (today's Afghanistan) a little earlier than these luminaries, Fakhr Al-Din Razi (1150–1209) was a polymath and Islamic scholar of renown.²¹ Belonging to the Ashari school of thought, he is often cited by the great philosophers who came after him—particularly Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Taimiyyah—and contributed to medicine, chemistry, physics, astronomy, cosmology, philosophy, theology and jurisprudence. Al-Razi was critical of the Aristotelian and Avicennian notions of a single universe revolving around a single world. Like any theorist of twentieth-century quantum physics, he contended that there exists an infinite number of parallel universes.²²

However, three of the most brilliant minds of the Muslim world who shaped the times to come were: Nasir Al-Din Tusi (1201–74), the Azerbaijani Shia

polymath, father of trigonometry and astrophysicist, who shaped medieval Indian political thought; Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), renowned philosopher and among the early founders of historiography, sociology, economics and demography; and the great philosopher and one of the most controversial theologians, Ibn Taimiyyah (1263–1328).

However, it should be noted that barring these luminaries, who were primarily born around the time of the invasions, fewer intellectual luminaries were produced by the Muslim world in the middle and latter half of the second millennium than during the Umayyad and the Abbasid times.

Nasir Al-Din Tusi: The Polymath Wazir of Hulagu

Born in Tus (northeastern Iran), Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi—popularly known as Nasir Al-Din Tusi—was a genius who wrote on subjects of mathematics, engineering, mysticism as well as political ethics. He made very accurate tables of planetary motion and is considered to be the founder of trigonometry as a mathematical discipline in its own right. His *Treatise on the Quadrilateral* gave an extensive exposition of spherical trigonometry, distinct from astronomy. Indeed, Ibn Khaldun considered Al-Tusi to be the greatest of the later Persian scholars.

According to Michael Nosonovsky and several recent physicists, his theories influenced Copernicus' heliocentrism,²³ while Robert Morrison considers him “a scholarly intermediary between the Ottoman Empire and Renaissance Europe”.²⁴ Some scientists find a remarkable similarity in the Tusi couple and the Copernican heliocentric model in that their methods match geometrically. More importantly, they both use the same exact lettering system for each vertex.²⁵ His most famous work, however, is *Akhlāq-i Nasiri* (*Nasirean Ethics* in English), which profoundly influenced social and political thought in Persia and India in medieval times.

As the armies of Genghis Khan raided his hometown, Nasir Al-Din Tusi was employed by the Nizari Ismaili state as a scientist and engineer. He was later sent to the major castles of Alamut and Maymun-Diz of the hashashin leaders. However, he became a prisoner of the Mongols who invaded Alamut and destroyed it in 1255–56. Thereafter, Al-Tusi became an astrologer and adviser to the Mongol leader Hulagu. Being a closet Twelver Shia, it has been alleged that Al-Tusi encouraged Hulagu in his expedition against Baghdad, which caused the extinction of the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate.

As a reward, Al-Tusi was made wazir and supervisor of religious foundations

by Hulagu and his successor. Hulagu even had an observatory built for Al-Tusi, which enabled him to calculate new planetary tables. In addition, Tusi wrote prolifically and composed “The Rules and Customs of Ancient Kings” (probably for a Mongol prince), which contained advice on finances.²⁶ Al-Tusi is credited with having written about 150 works, of which 25 are in Persian and the remaining are in Arabic.²⁷ The impact of his work on the political theory of Muslim rulers in medieval India will be discussed at length later in the book.

Ibn Khaldun’s “Asabiyya” and the Cyclical Theory of Empires

Abu Zayd Abd ar-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun was an Arab precursive founder of the proto-disciplines that would become historiography, sociology, economics and demography.²⁸ Niccolo Machiavelli and Friedrich Hegel, along with several nineteenth-century Western philosophers, considered him among the greatest philosophers of the Middle Ages.²⁹

Of Yemeni descent from the tribe of Hadramaut, with a family ancestry going back to Wal ibn Hujr (a companion of the Prophet), Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis in 1332. His best-known work, *Muqaddimah* (“Introduction”), was considered an authority on the works of Plato, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, through whom he got acquainted with Aristotle. He was also well aware of Nasir Al-Din Tusi and Fakhr Al-Din Razi. His philosophical work concentrated on conquest theory of state formation, cyclical theory of empires, economic growth theory, political midlife crisis and supply and demand theory, which anticipates Adam Smith’s “invisible hand theory” and is said to have influenced his work.

Whereas Aristotle had studied the *polis* (city-state), the subject of Ibn Khaldun’s study was human association (*al-ijtima al-insani*) or civilisation (*umran*).³⁰ Aristotle applied his scientific method to the study of the polis. Ibn Khaldun, however, developed the Aristotelian method by incorporating his specific historical methodology and incorporating the sociological dimension that he said causes the rise and fall of civilisations.

Further, Ibn Khaldun applied the principles of philosophical rationalism to the domain of history. He believed that universal laws lay behind the determination of historical events. It is from here that he derives his most famous theory of *asabiyya* (sense of community, of group feeling). According to him, the two driving forces in human history in every civilisation are *asabiyya* and *mulk* (state power). *Asabiyya* is “the affection a man feels for a brother or a neighbour when one of them is treated unjustly or killed”.³¹ As per Ibn Khaldun, it is this sense of affiliation

that determines the military strength of a group or society: “Group Feeling produces the ability to defend oneself...and to press one’s claims. Whoever loses it is too weak to do any of these things.”³² According to the philosopher, *asabiyya* is the natural force that gives rise to the communities of clan and lineage. It is this sense that helps a particular community to survive and even to subjugate others.

The conquest of this dominant group, clan or community manages to absorb the resources of the subject people and develop a culture and complex urban life. However, sedentary and comfortable living, the very goal of an aspiring civilisation, leads to corruption and exhaustion in the ruling class and a dissipation in the sense of *asabiyya*, leading to the decline of a particular civilisation over some time.

Ibn Khaldun has cited examples of both the Arab world and the Mongol states to confirm his theory. Their original *asabiyya* had peaked, complacency and infighting had set in, and now the stage was set for other groups seeking domination to seize control. However, Ibn Khaldun does not undermine the importance of state power or *mulk*, ‘a systemising and constraining force to manage humanity, which is absolutely necessary (*daruri*) to humankind’.³³

British historian Arnold Toynbee has called Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddimah*, “the greatest work of its kind”.³⁴ Ernest Geller, professor of philosophy at the London School of Economics, has found Ibn Khaldun’s definition of government as “...an institution which prevents injustice other than such as it commits itself,” the best in the history of political theory.³⁵ Arthur Laffer, after whom the Laffer Curve is named, has acknowledged that he did not invent the curve and then acknowledged his indebtedness to Ibn Khaldun for discovering it.³⁶ It has even been suggested that Ibn Khaldun not only first developed the neo-liberal economic model in his *Muqaddimah* published in 1372, but even highlighted its shortcomings. He also explains some of the significant shortcomings of this model.³⁷ Even noted economist Paul Krugman has described Ibn Khaldun as “a 14th-century Islamic philosopher who invented what we would now call the social sciences”.³⁸

Ibn Taimiyyah: The Maverick Fundamentalist

One of the most controversial and intellectually complex theologians—whose study has been popularised in modern times by mostly radical ideologues, like Sayyid Qutb and Mohammad Al-Farag—Taqi Al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taimiyyah was a thirteenth to fourteenth century Sunni Islamic scholar of the conservative Hanbali school. He is considered as the ideological source of Wahhabiyyah (Salafi-

Wahhabism in English), which arose in the Arabian Peninsula in the mid-eighteenth century.

Born in Harran in modern Turkey and having lived in the troubled times of Mongol invasions, he considered Mongol converts to Islam, like the Ilkhan ruler Ghazan Khan in his times, to be non-Muslims as they did not practise Islamic rituals and stuck to their Mongol Yasa code. Ibn Taimiyyah also blamed the neophyte Mongol rulers for continuing their rapacious attacks against Muslim kingdoms, even after their avowed conversion to Islam. He declared them “apostates” and encouraged war against them, thus justifying ‘takfeer’ (declaring a Muslim to be a non-believer, which makes it legitimate to kill that person)—a practice later adopted by twentieth-century terrorist groups, like the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS.

Ibn Taimiyyah was also critical of Islamic philosophers who were inspired by Greek philosophy. Thus, he accused Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi of being unbelievers for teaching that the world is eternal, which he said would mean that God is redundant. In addition, he was highly critical of Sufi and Shia Muslims for venerating the graves of their dead imams and sheikhs, which he believed was an egregious act that was tantamount to idol worship (the gravest sin in Islam). He was also highly intolerant of Christians for having turned the Islamic Prophet and Messiah Jesus into the son of God.

In spite of his strident positions that were considered radical in his times, Ibn Taimiyyah is far too complex to place into any conventional category. He was a champion of women’s rights and was opposed to the juristic acceptance of easy divorce by men to women; in fact, he was imprisoned for such views.³⁹ Ibn Taimiyyah found no evidence in the Quran for the so-called ‘triple talaq’ (divorce) to a woman in one sitting and was also in favour of religiously pious and learned women leading prayers in mosques.⁴⁰ Again, he rejected the necessity of having a single caliphate, which many modern extremist groups, like the HuT and the ISIS, advocate.⁴¹ At the epistemological level, Ibn Taimiyyah considered the Salaf (the first three generations of Muslims) to be better than any other later generations, which even excludes the subsequent founders of the juristic schools, in understanding the conformity of reason with revelation. He even upheld the right of non-Arabic-speaking Muslims to perform *dua* (supplication) in their native languages.

Ibn Taimiyyah, thus, turns out to be a more nuanced scholar than the fanatical and extreme image his radical supporters try to project. His famous fatwa of

Mardin is often claimed by modern militants as a text that authorises Muslims to declare war on infidels and so-called Muslim “apostates”. However, a careful reading of the fatwa presents a different picture. According to Indonesian scholars Alfina Hidayah and Hamdan Maghribi, the fatwa, “rejects the understanding of the Jihadists who make this fatwa the basis for fighting fellow Muslims who are legitimate rulers and even infidels who live in peace with Muslims.”⁴² These scholars point to the findings of an international conference titled “Mardin Dar al-Salam (Mardin the city of peace)” which was held on 27-8 March 2010 which specifically discussed Mardin’s fatwa in the very city in Syria, where the fatwa was issued centuries ago. The conference revealed that so-called modern Salafi jihadists have changed the wording from the original manuscript of Ibn Taimiyyah’s Mardin fatwa in their writings.⁴³

Whereas the original sentence reads: “... Muslims who live there (in Mardin) must be treated (yu’amal) according to their rights (as Muslims), while (non-Muslims who live in Mardin) and who are outside the jurisdiction of Islamic law must be treated (yu’amal) according to their rights.” However, modern Salafi-jihadist ideologues have mischievously changed the wording to “... Muslims living there should be treated (yu’amal) according to their rights (as Muslims), whereas (non-Muslims living there) and outside the rule of Islamic law should be *fought* (*yuqatal*) for their rights.”⁴⁴ Thus, towards the end of the line the Arabic word ‘yu’amal’ (which implies ‘treated’) is misquoted to ‘yuqatal’ (which means to fight or kill).

When Ibn Taimiyyah had called for an armed insurrection against the Mongols in his fatwa, he clearly instructed:

the lives and property of the people of Mardin are inviolable. Therefore, their living under the subjugation of the Mongols does not compromise any of their rights, nor can they be maligned verbally or accused of hypocrisy. As long as the inhabitants of Mardin can practice their religion, they are not obliged to emigrate. The territory is neither wholly a part of the Muslim world, since it is under the domination of the Mongols, nor is it part of the non-Muslim world since its populace is Muslim. It is in fact, a composite of the two. The Muslims living therein should be treated according to their rights as Muslims, while the non-Muslims living there outside of the authority of Islamic Law should be treated according to their rights.⁴⁵

It is noteworthy that, unlike the ISIS, Ibn Taimiyyah did not ask Muslims in

Mardin to emigrate to Islamic territory. Moreover, he did not categorise Mardin as *dar al-Islam* (territory of Islam) or *dar al-kufr* (territory of infidels), but said it was a composite of the two, and therefore both Muslims and non-Muslims there should enjoy their rights equally. Ibn Taimiyyah created a new “composite” category, known as *dar al-ahd* (territory of conciliation/treaty).⁴⁶ So, he included the multi-religious state within the formal strictures of Islamic jurisprudence, although the Prophet in Medina already established it. It can be seen here that even Ibn Taimiyyah’s oft-cited jihad fatwa does not seem as violently extreme and may even teach a few lessons to jihadists on communal amity. Islamic scholar Yahya Michot has worked over the years in debunking jihadist narratives that cite Ibn Taimiyyah for validation and has explained how the medieval Islamic theologian’s writings could be used as a counter-narrative against so-called modern jihadism.⁴⁷

Ibn Taimiyyah was a highly controversial theologian and was imprisoned by Mamluk rulers on charges of anthropomorphism and other strident polemical views many times in his life. An author of over 35 volumes, Ibn Taimiyyah died in a Damascus prison (in 1328) because of his supposed depression over being denied writing material. His funeral was attended by over 200,000 of his admirers, including 15,000–16,000 women. It is noteworthy that he was buried in a Sufi cemetery in Damascus.⁴⁸

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12

Saudi Wahhabism, Pan-Islamist Salafism and Decline of Safavid Empire

Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab is not a prophet, he is not an angel. He was just a scholar like many other scholars, who lived during the first Saudi state, among many political leaders and military leaders.

—Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman¹

Like Siamese twins, Wahhabism and the Saudi state have been together for nearly three centuries. Their combined strength and shared destiny have given them longevity and resilience. However, this seamless compatibility hides an inner restiveness, with the two often looking the other away, even dragging the other into different directions without prior consent. This inherent tension between Wahhabi dogmatism and Saudi state pragmatism bedevils the relationship to this day.

Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and the Pact with the Ruler of First Saudi State (1744)

It cannot be denied that much of the political vitality of the Saudi state has historically come from its adherence to Wahhabi beliefs, from the great pact of 1744 when the first ruler of the hamlet of Diriyah, Muhammad ibn Saud, and Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab decided to join forces.

Al-Wahhab was a conservative religious preacher and activist, who opposed the so-called non-Islamic practices prevalent at the time in Central Arabia in the name of Sufism. Belonging to Ahl Al-Hadeeth school of thought, the religious scholar detested the veneration of graves and the blind adherence (taqleed) of the Sunni populace to their madhahib (schools of Islamic jurisprudence), without ever reading the Quran and the Hadeeth to find the authenticity of their beliefs.

In the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire held great sway over western regions of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Hejaz, which hosts the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. However, it had no formal presence or influence over Najd (which covers the north-central area of present-day Saudi Arabia).² Moreover, as Najd did not produce enough agricultural surplus or livestock, it was not an attractive proposition for the Ottomans, the Hejazi sharifs or the Banu Khalid rulers of Hasa to extend control over the region.

Eventually, it was from Najd that a new theological movement and a political power in the form of Wahhabism and the state of Saudi Arabia, respectively, emerged that stirred Islamic history from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Born into a family of famous theologians, Al-Wahhab came from the Banu Tamim tribe. After receiving religious education from education institutions in Medina,³ Basra and Hasa, he returned to Najd and his native village of Uyayna.

Al-Wahhab held purist views about Islam, which were different from the Sufi practices of his fellow villagers. He started preaching against the prevalent customs and rites performed by the villagers, some allegedly verging on sorcery, superstition, solarism and idol worship. Due to his opposition to the religious practices of his fellow villagers, he and his followers became unpopular in Uyayna. Al-Wahhab and his followers were charged with levelling the grave of Zayd ibn Al-Khattab (a companion of Prophet Muhammad),⁴ which was venerated by the people. They were also accused of cutting down trees that were held sacred by locals and stoning an insane woman to death for the crime of adultery.

The actions of Al-Wahhab and his group infuriated the people of Uyayna, and its chief banished the scholar and his followers from the village. Wandering from place to place, he finally found refuge in the hamlet of Diriyah, ruled by Muhammad ibn Saud. Soon, the scholar's ideas influenced the chief to the extent that the two entered into a pact in 1744, which made Al-Wahhab's religious mission the impulse for militaristic campaign for Diriyah. The two decided to wage jihad against tribes who resisted their reformist ideals. A historian has described how the 1744 pact was consecrated:

Muhammad ibn Saud greeted Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab and said, “This is your oasis, do not fear your enemies. By the name of God, if all Najd was summoned to throw you out, we will never agree to expel you.” Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab replied, “You are the settlement’s chief and wise man. I want you to grant me an oath that you will perform jihad against the unbelievers. In return, you will be imam, leader of the Muslim community, and I will be leader in religious matters.”⁵

In Defence of Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab

Although the ruler of Diriyah was asked to wage jihad for promoting the Wahhabi version of Islam against the so-called “unbelievers” of Arabia, some historians claim that Al-Wahhab has been mischaracterised as being a religious bigot supporting violence. For instance, Natana DeLong-Bas maintains that Al-Wahhab waged jihad only in defence against aggressive opponents.⁶ His main objective was the reform of Muslim religious beliefs and practices through a gradual educational process and dialogue. Indeed, his approach was to send invitations for religious discussions and debates, rather than a “convert or die” approach. It is also averred that the military campaigns of Ibn Saud did not always get the approval from Al-Wahhab.

Historians like Natana DeLong-Bas highlight the fact that the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the Najd region that was left neglected and unconquered even by the Ottomans, suffered from social and political disarray, with problems of poverty and lack of education. The rise of the first Saudi state brought some degree of political security and mass awareness among the people of Central Arabia, and also forced Ottoman caliphs in Turkey to tend to the affairs of this region.

It is said that Al-Wahhab was just a scholar belonging to the Ahl Al-Hadeeth movement in Sunni Islam. He never claimed to have launched a movement after his name, and even his followers never called themselves Wahhabis. Historically, they preferred to identify themselves as “Ahl Al-Tawheed” or “Al-Muwahiddun” and in modern times, as “Salafis”.⁷

Salafi-Wahhabi Beliefs: Revival of Ahl Al-Hadeeth Literalism

Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab’s religious orientation focused mainly on the core belief of Islamic creed or aqeeda, which is tawheed (the oneness of God), and emphasised the eschewing of shirk (the worship or adoration of anything other than the one God, that is, Allah) as well as the rejection of bidah (innovation in religious matters).

Al-Wahhab adopted a highly antithetical approach to Sufism and Shia beliefs and practices. He was strongly averse to celebrating or venerating any saint or holy person. His doctrine was based on rejection of *tawassul* (intercession of saints to pray to God on behalf of a person), even more so of *istighatha* (beseeching a dead prophet or saint to pray to God on behalf of a person).

Further, he opposed the doctrine of *wahdatul wujud* (the Sufi doctrine of the essential oneness of creator and creation). Wahhabism also adopted controversial approaches on matters of jihad by taking an extremist position on *takfeer* (declaring a person or community infidel in order to legitimise killing [*qital*] them) and *tajseem* (rejection of Sufi belief that God is formless, is immanent and without body).

Ibn Taimiyyah deeply influenced Al-Wahhab's theological outlook. In his book, *Kitab Al-Tauheed*,⁸ Al-Wahhab deemed the Shia arch-enemies of Islam and the Jews and Christians (who have been accorded the status of "Ahl Al-Kitab" -i.e. 'People of the Book' - by classical Islamic scholarship) as infidels and devil worshippers.⁹ He vehemently argued that the Shia belief in the "infallibility of the imams" constituted *shirk* (blasphemy).

He also believed that *tawassul* was, in reality, praying to the person invoked and not God and was, therefore, *shirk* (making somebody part of Godhead), which becomes the biggest and most inexcusable of all sins in Islam. Thus, visiting graves and praying to dead saints in the grave, who cannot hear or move, was considered blasphemous and tantamount to idol worship by Al-Wahhab.

As mentioned earlier, Wahhabism opposed *bidah* in religion and blamed Sufis for introducing and inculcating various new forms of worship and meditation into Islam. Being highly literal in its reading of Islamic scriptures, it opposed the mystical and figurative interpretation of verses by Sufi scholars and considered such interpretations invalid concoctions. Thus, Wahhabism—coming from the Ahl Al-Hadeeth—emphasised the *zahiri* (apparent or the literal) meaning of the Islamic texts, instead of their spiritually or intellectually derived interpretation. It even objected to the Asharite and Maturidi interpretations on theological matters.

Believing that these deviations in religion were introduced by wayward theologians and mystics three generations after the death of the Prophet, Al-Wahhab called for reverting to the purist monotheistical practices of the *salaf* (the first three generations of faithful followers of Islam). He rejected the doctrine of *taqleed* in Sunni jurisprudence, which means strict compliance with any of the four juristic schools of Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki and Hanbali), because

compliance should be with the Quran and not with the error of interpretation by human jurists. Indeed, according to Wahhabism, the inordinate reverence of even Prophet Muhammad violated the teachings of Islam, and the belief in miracles (*karamaat*) of saints, other superstition, etc., was patently wrong.

Non-Wahhabi Islamic scholars have often criticised the Wahhabi style and manner of jihad for violating the principles of Islamic warfare, conducted by them as a typically savage and tribal raid for gaining territory and lucre than for religious cause.¹⁰ Some adverse scholars find parallels in the violence perpetrated by early Wahhabi adherents and twenty-first-century Salafi-jihadist groups, like the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS. Thus, Cole Bunzel observes:

Over the past few decades, the jihadi-Salafi movement has increasingly billed itself as the rightful heir to the Wahhabi tradition and has appropriated its textual resources. The Islamic State in some sense represents the culmination of this effort—a Wahhabi state as radical and sectarian as the original Saudi-Wahhabi state, though departing from it in certain ways.¹¹

On the other hand, many Muslims across various sects have increasingly accepted Wahhabi puritanical ideals and doctrines in modern times, principally in their strict adherence to tawheed.

The First and Second Saudi-Wahhabi State (1765–1803)

While Wahhabism thrived under the political protection of Saudi rulers, its emphasis on jihad provided the ideological impetus for the state of Diriyah to expand its boundaries and launch the conquest of Arabia.¹² The jihadi raids based on the doctrine of takfeer (wherein they pronounced all non-Wahhabi Muslims as infidels) were more successful under the reign of Muhammad ibn Saud's son, Abdul Aziz (1765–1803). By taking advantage of the militant zealotry of Wahhabi neophytes, the Saudi leadership was able to subjugate most of the chieftains in Najd. After that, the Saudi forces moved eastwards into Hasa and terminated the rule of Banu Khalid. The capture of Qatif in 1780 opened the road to the coast of the Persian Gulf and Oman. Qatar accepted the suzerainty of the Saudi king in 1797, and Bahrain followed suit.

Under Saud ibn Abdul Aziz (reigned 1803–14), the Saudi forces raided the western regions and took control of Taif in 1802, Mecca in 1803 and Medina in 1804. The raid on Taif was particularly violent, where the Saudi forces massacred the male population and enslaved the women and children.¹³ The Wahhabi

religious leaders also ordered the destruction of the domed tombs of the Prophet and his companions, in accordance with their doctrinal opposition to the building of monuments on graves.¹⁴ Further, the Saudis marched into Asir, where local leaders embraced Wahhabism. However, the most brutal of their attacks was on the Shia holy city of Karbala in 1802. There, according to the Wahhabi chronicler Uthman bin Abdallah bin Bishr, the marauding forces:

”...scaled the walls, entered the city, and killed the majority of its people in the markets and in their homes. They destroyed the dome placed over the grave of Imam Hussein (the revered grandson of the Prophet), they stole whatever they found inside the dome and its surroundings...including emeralds, rubies, and other jewels...different types of property, weapons, clothing, carpets, gold, silver, precious copies of the Quran.”¹⁵

The sacking and plundering of Karbala resulted in the revenge killing of Saudi ruler Abdul Aziz in 1803 by a Shia in a mosque in Diriyah.¹⁶ Eventually, the Ottoman Empire responded to the growing Saudi-Wahhabi threat and despatched forces under the Egyptian ruler, Muhammad Ali, into the Arabian Peninsula in 1811, which led many tribal confederations that had accepted the Saudi yoke to switch sides in favour of Muhammad Ali's troops. After freeing the region of Hejaz, the son of Muhammad Ali (Ibrahim Pasha) invaded Najd and ravaged the capital city of Diriyah and massacred several Wahhabi religious scholars. The Saudis surrendered on 11 September 1818. The Saudi ruler, Abdullah, was held prisoner, taken to Istanbul and beheaded. Thus ended the first Saudi-Wahhabi state of Diriyah.¹⁷

Following the obliteration of the first Saudi-Wahhabi state, a second and much smaller “Emirate of Najd” gradually emerged out of the ruins. As it limited itself to the area of Najd, it did not draw the wrath of the Ottoman caliph or the Egyptian forces. It was protected by the region's remoteness, paucity of natural resources and poor communication and transportation. However, in 1891, the Rashidis of Jabal Shammar successfully ended the second Saudi state in the Battle of Mulayda and forced the House of Saud, led by Abd Al-Rahman bin Faisal, to flee to Kuwait.

Ibn Saud and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (1902–32)

The son of Abd Al-Rahman bin Faisal was Abdulaziz, popularly known in the Western world as Ibn Saud. One night in January 1902, he scaled the walls of Al-

Rashidi city of Riyadh with a contingent of 40 men and took control of the city after killing its governor, Ajlan, in front of his fortress.¹⁸ This audacious and successful raid made the charismatic Ibn Saud famous overnight, with many of the former supporters of the House of Saud rallying to his call to arms.

For several years after that, Ibn Saud and his forces fought and captured a large portion of Najd from the Rashidi rulers. Then, around 1912, Wahhabi scholars associated with Ibn Saud religiously radicalised young nomad raiders into soldiers for the fledgling Saudi state. This new religious militia became known as “Ikhwan” (not to be confused with Egypt’s Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen, translated as Muslim Brotherhood).

In December 1915, the British entered into a treaty with Ibn Saud (The Treaty of Darin). The treaty made the latter’s territories a British protectorate and attempted to define its boundaries.¹⁹ For his part, Ibn Saud vowed to wage war against Ibn Rashid, an ally of the Ottomans. In 1921, the Battle of Hail sounded the death knell of the Rashidi rulers and the Jabal Shammar fell into the hands of the Saudi juggernaut.²⁰ This conquest was followed by a protracted conflict known as the Second Najd–Hejaz War (1924–25), which ended successfully for Ibn Saud in December 1925 with the fall of Jeddah. In 1926, the entire territory of Najd and Hejaz was brought under the Saudi rule.

However, an even more significant challenge for the Saudi ruler emerged from within his forces. A large section of Ikhwan militants, raised by the Saudi clergy, sought to fulfil their ideal of purifying and unifying the world of Islam. This ideal eventually clashed with the political pragmatism displayed by Ibn Saud once he had unified Najd and Hejaz into his kingdom and forged an alliance with the British.

Soon after the Battle of Hail, the Ikhwan independently raided Transjordan between 1922 and 1924. Under pressure from the British, who had treaties with territories in Transjordan, Ibn Saud forbade Ikhwan from conducting raids against non-Wahhabi Muslims. He also wanted to reassure the Muslim world that his state was not opposed to other Muslim sects and that the “new Wahhabi regime would not disrupt the (Haj) pilgrimage”.²¹

In 1926, Ikhwan leaders met at Al-Artawiya and accused Ibn Saud of not siding with religion. In 1927, the Ikhwan began raiding neighbouring Iraq and Kuwait despite Ibn Saud’s orders against it.²² The final decisive battle between the Ikhwan and the Saudi forces broke out in March 1929, called the Battle of Sabilla. The Ikhwan, who fought with traditional swords and spears, could not

withstand machine-gun fire and modern weaponry provided by the British to Ibn Saud's forces.²³ The rebellion was crushed entirely in 1930 when several Ikhwan rebel leaders surrendered to the British.

In the long and tortuous history of the Saudi–Wahhabi relationship, the Ikhwan Revolt is the first episode where Wahhabi idealism directly clashed with the political pragmatism of the Saudi state. It is essential to note that it was a descendant of the Ikhwan survivors, Juhayman Al-Otaybi, who later led the infamous Grand Mosque seizure of 1979 against the Saudi government. In both instances, the will of the Saudi state prevailed over the Wahhabi uprising. Eventually, on 23 September 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formally proclaimed.²⁴

Iran: Causes for the Decline of Safavid Empire

Meanwhile, radical religious revivalism was not limited to the Arabian Peninsula, but was also spreading in the Safavid empire by the 17th and 18th centuries under the Shia kings of the Safavid Empire. Under their rule, Iran (known then as Persia to the outside world) witnessed state-backed conversion of its Sunni population on a large scale.

From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the predominantly Sunni Iran converted into the Ithna Ashariyya (Twelver) sub-sect of Shia Islam, which in turn made the Sunni Ottoman Empire and other Sunni neighbours hostile towards Iran. The coming of the Safavid rulers (1501) had helped reunify Iran as an independent state, but with them came a Persianised Shia ethos that gradually developed and disseminated across the country. However, the increased proselytisation raised the political clout of the clergy in Iran.

In order to spread Shia Islam in Iran, the Safavids brought foreign Shia scholars into the country, and the religious clerics became an elite group close to the kings. A *sadr* (coordinating chief) was appointed to manage this elite clerical class. Although Shia Islam had been close to many Sufi groups, Safavid Iran forbade many mystical Sufi groups. Instead, the Safavids preferred to develop Shia law and turned to the mujtahids—jurists capable of independent reasoning on religious matters—to develop these laws.

Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Karaki: Early Proponent of Vilayat-e-Faqih

The preference of mujtahids above Sufis suited the state's aim of giving Iran cohesion, rules and a strong state. In this respect, the germ of Shia theocratic

elitism, and even Vilayat-e-Faqih, was laid by Al-Muhaqqiq Al-Karaki (1456–1544), who was invited by Shah Ismail I, the first Safavid ruler, to spread Shia beliefs across Iran.

Indeed, Al-Karaki is viewed as being a major transformer of orthodox Imami Shias (Twelvers), from being committed to quietism, caution and dissimulation (*taqiyya*) to openly performing congregation prayers behind a qualified mujtahid, allowing a Shia sultan to impose land tax (*kharaj*) and for the Shia *ulema* to accept it as a source of remuneration. In the words of Antony Black, “he (Al-Karaki) made it possible for the Shite ulama to become state employees.”²⁵

However, Al-Karaki went a step further. In making such radical changes to quietist beliefs, Al-Karaki claimed to be speaking on behalf of the Hidden Mahdi (the Twelfth Imam) himself. Thus, he assumed the highest possible authority in Shia Islam and surprisingly, the Safavid king at that time, Shah Tahmasp, supported his claim.

Enunciating the principles of Vilayat-e-Faqih, Al-Karaki said that the belief is that the qualified faqih must rise and undertake the leadership of the Islamic society authoritatively and firmly. He shall introduce Islam as an important political and social thought and as a perfect system to govern humankind.²⁶

Muhammad Baqir Majlisi: Conversion of Sunni Iran to the Shia Faith

Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (1616–98), often considered the most effective Shia cleric, devoted himself to eradicating Sunnism from Iran. According to Colin Turner: “it was under Majlisi that Twelver Shi’ite externalism became truly orthodox, while all other views were rejected and often forcibly repressed.”²⁷

Over time, private landowners secured their lands by donating them to the clergy as so-called waqf to protect ownership of their lands from being confiscated by royals, governors or senior officials. A fixed percentage of the revenue from the land used to go to the *ulema* and the organisation of dervishes (*futuwwa*). However, the waqf properties soon made a new class of clerics. The mujtahids grew rich and became landowners in their own right. Soon, the proponents of folk Sufism became more popular with the common masses than the rich and state-backed mujtahids, commonly known as mullahs.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the Safavid Empire witnessed religious unrest and religion-based rebellions. The rampant corruption and wars with the Ottomans and the Russians set the pace of Safavid’s decline. Although the Safavids were able to gradually convert mainland Iran to the Shia faith, their efforts to

convert Sunni Afghanistan proved costly. When Sultan Husayn tried to convert his Sunni Afghan subjects to Shia Islam forcibly, a revolt broke out, leading to the independence of Kandahar from the empire in 1709. Indeed, after the conquest of Herat, the Ghilzai Afghans invaded Iran itself. Subsequent to the sack of Shamakhi (1721), in which thousands of the city's Shia inhabitants were killed, and the Battle of Gulnabad (1722), which led to the besieging and capture of the beautiful capital city of Isfahan, the Safavid dynasty abruptly ended.

Taking advantage of the chaos, the Ottomans and the Russians seized more territory of Iran for themselves as Peter the Great launched the Russo-Persian War (1722–23). For over a decade, Iran remained a victim of external aggressions and in a state of civil war until Nadir Shah established the Afsharid dynasty in 1736. Brought up as a Shia, Nadir Shah reverted to Sunni Islam, and on gaining power, told the Shia clergy to refrain from cursing Caliphs Umar and Uthman and avoid beating themselves to draw blood during the Ashura (10th day of Muharram) festival. He wanted to create an Iranian polity acceptable to Shia and Sunni Islam.

Nevertheless, Nadir Shah was a brutal king. He invaded Mughal India, killed hundreds of thousands and looted the country's wealth to fund his campaign against the Ottomans. At its peak, Nadir Shah's empire controlled parts of Anatolia and Mesopotamia, the Caucasus and even Bahrain. However, his defeat in Dagestan and his fear of treachery by his sons (which led him to blind them) marked his decline until he was assassinated in 1747. After his death, Iran again faced a period of intense civil war, barring Karim Khan's Zand dynasty with its capital in Shiraz, "an island of relative calm and peace in an otherwise bloody and destructive period".²⁸

Following a protracted period of political instability, the Qajar dynasty (coming from a Turkic tribe) established its reign for over a century (1789–1925). However, the weak kingdom lost many of Iran's integral territories to Russia, namely, Georgia, Dagestan, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Jamal Al-Din Afghani: Exponent of Pan-Islamism

Jamal Al-Din Afghani (1839–97) was the founder of modern Salafi movement which, in the second half of the twentieth century, got subsumed into Saudi Wahhabism. In his own right, Afghani cannot be associated with the hard-line ideology of contemporary Salafism and is known as both the founder of Islamic modernism and pan-Islamic unity. Curiously, he was also an ardent supporter of Hindu–Muslim unity in India against the British rule.

According to noted historian N.R. Keddie, Afghani visited India at the time of the 1857 Revolt and “it seems likely that the strong anti-British sentiments voiced by Afghani throughout his career have their origin in his Indian experience”. Al-Afghani published six articles in the Persian journal, *Muallam-e-Shafiq*, coming out from the Indian city of Hyderabad in 1880–81. He attacked Sir Syed Ahmad Khan for becoming a tool of the British, while also criticising conservative Muslims who opposed Sir Syed for opposing Western education. More importantly, he stressed on the unity of Indian Hindus and Muslims in the fight against British imperialism and said that linguistic ties are stronger than religious ones. However, he made the exact opposite point a few years later in West Asia. Professor Keddie says in his defence: “In India, he felt the best anti-imperialist policy was Hindu–Muslim unity, while in Europe he felt it was pan-Islam.”²⁹

In any case, Al-Afghani remains a controversial, even mysterious historical figure. The Islamic ideologist and political activist claimed to have been born in Asadabad, near Kabul, thereby holding the *nisba* “Al-Afghani”. However, based on certain facts, many modern historians claim that Al-Afghani wanted to hide being an Iranian and a Shia from the mainstream Sunni world and was not of Afghan origin but from Asadabad in Hamadan in Iran.³⁰

Afghani was alarmed by the failure of India’s 1857 Revolt. He feared that, having conquered India, Western imperialism would next conquer the Middle East. However, he believed that only by adopting modern knowledge and technology like the West could Asia fight back against Western imperialism and that Islam, despite its traditionalism, remained a strong creed for mobilising the masses against European imperialism.³¹

Al-Afghani travelled to several countries throughout his life. After leaving India in 1859, he was noticed taking part in Afghani tribal resistance to the British (1866–68).³² He appeared in Cairo in 1871 to become a maverick teacher (1871–79), returned to India (1879–82), and then left for London and Paris (1883) where he met Europeans interested in Islam, and also engaged the Ernest Renan in discussion on religion and society.

Al-Afghani tried to advice several Muslim rulers on how to defeat Western imperialism, but was expelled by them from their countries. In Afghanistan, he was seen as a stranger who spoke the Persian language and followed a European lifestyle. In 1868, he was banished from Afghanistan by its ruler, Sher Ali Khan. Passing through India, he reached Constantinople, where he spoke at the opening of the Istanbul University, exhorting academics to embrace modernism:

Are we not going to take an example from the civilized nations? Let us cast a glance at the achievement of others. By effort they have achieved the final degree of knowledge and the peak of elevation. For us too all the means are ready, and there remains no obstacle to our progress. Only laziness, stupidity, and ignorance are obstacles to [our] advance.³³

However, the university closed under pressure of religious conservatives in 1871, and Al-Afghani was expelled from there. Thereafter, he went to Egypt, where he got involved in actions to remove the Khedive Ismail regime. For this purpose, he even joined Freemasonry, but then left it for what he alleged was “cowardice, selfishness and egoism within the fraternity”;³⁴ however, his association with Madam Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society continued for much longer.³⁵ After being expelled from Egypt for his activities against the regime in 1879, Al-Afghani revisited Hyderabad and Calcutta in India, and then left for London, Paris, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Munich.

When in Paris, Al-Afghani and his devoted friends, Muhammad Abduh and Yaqub Sanu (or James Sanua; an Egyptian Jewish journalist), published a newspaper called, *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa* (“The Firmest Bond”). “By spreading the newspaper throughout the Islamic world, they called for Islamic unity against British imperialism.”³⁶

In 1881, he published a collection of polemics titled, *Al-Radd ‘ala al-Dabriyyi* (“Refutation of the Materialists”). Jamal Al-Din Afghani died in Istanbul in 1897. To Al-Afghani, science was part of Islam, and even the latest European developments in philosophy and politics (such as the ideals of liberalism) pointed to the return of true Islamic principles. Nevertheless, in his writings, he never seemed to have endorsed parliamentary democracy and mainly spoke about overthrowing corrupt and careless Muslim rulers or those subservient to foreigners. In this respect, his views were similar to many pan-jihadist Islamic extremists of the twenty-first century.

Muhammad Abduh: Neo-Mutazila Leader of Modern Arabia

A devout student of Jamal Al-Din Afghani was the Islamic scholar, jurist and liberal reformer Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), who rose to the position of Grand Mufti of Egypt later in life. Deemed a founding figure of Islamic modernism, Muhammad Abduh is often called a “neo-Mutazalite” in that he revived the spirit of Western rationalism in Islamic thought.³⁷

Disillusioned with traditional Islamic teachings in his early life, Abduh was

drawn to the Sufi teachings of his uncle, Shaikh Darwish Al-Khadir, a member of the Madaniyya tariqa that shunned taqleed (strict adherence to Sunni schools of jurisprudence), while remaining true to foundational teachings of the religion. Upon getting enrolled in the famed Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the Egyptian prodigy met Al-Afghani and found in him his destined mentor (*murshid*), who shaped his spiritual, philosophical and rationalist interpretations of Islam.

Abduh was exiled from his country for many years in the wake of his role in the Urabi Pasha rebellion against Ottoman control in 1882, which was followed by the occupation of Egypt by the British military. In 1888, he was allowed to return to his country, where he was appointed a judge at the Court of First Instance. With the support of the British, he gradually rose through the ranks and eventually became the Grand Mufti in 1899. In that position, he carried out several liberal reforms, such as permission to eat meat slaughtered by Christian and Jewish butchers and acceptance of interest paid on loans.

During his extensive travels, Abduh met European scholars in Oxford and Cambridge. His visits led him to believe that Muslims were ignorant of their religious values, while the Western world had fully embraced and adopted them.³⁸

Although a supporter of the Sufi philosophical ideal of *wahdatul wujud* (which conflates the existence of creation and the creator as one), Abduh was opposed to some Sufi practices, such as visiting graves of saints for acceptance of prayers. He deemed such practices as *bidah* that were not followed by the *salaf* (the first three generations of Muslims).

Abduh strived for better relations between Sunni and Shia sects, as well as improved Muslim relations with Christians, who constituted the second-largest religious community in Egypt. Like Al-Afghani, Abduh was also closely associated with preachers of the Bahai faith, particularly with Abdul Baha (the son of the founder of the faith, Bahaullah).

Rasheed Rida: First Proponent of Islamic State, Admirer of Gandhi and Darwin

Along with Jamal Al-Din Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, the triumvirate of pan-Islamist reformists included Rasheed Rida (1865–1935), who blended many modernist views of his peers and yet remained opposed to Western liberalism and secular values, and was perhaps the first Salafi exponent of a modern Islamic state. Opposed to blind adherence (*taqleed*) to any of the four Sunni canonical schools and heavily influenced by the works of Ibn Taimiyyah and Abd Al-Wahhab,

Syria-born Rasheed Rida lived and based his socio-political activism in Egypt. He also objected to many Sufi beliefs and practices, yet he was not opposed to Sufism entirely.

Rida advocated that both laymen and scholars should interpret the primary sources of Islam themselves and not solely depend on the teachings of Islamic jurists of the orthodox schools. By applying this principle, Rida was himself able to tackle several subjects in a modern way and held many unorthodox and controversial views. Thus, like Afghani and Abduh, Rida supported Darwin's Theory of Evolution, and together with Abduh, he wrote a commentary on the Quran from the standpoint of Darwin's Theory of Evolution.³⁹

Following the line of Islamic scholar Ibn Al-Qayyim, Rida believed that certain types of interest (*riba al-fadl*) might be permitted in certain cases (that is, in cases of extreme poverty or larger public interest). In this respect also, he was in line with his mentor, Muhammad Abduh. It must be mentioned here that contemporary Islamists consider any form of *riba* (usury) a major sin.⁴⁰ Like Abduh, Rida closely associated with Freemasonry but, unlike his teacher, he was highly critical of the Bahai faith.

An eminent religious scholar who called for the revival of Hadeeth sciences, Rida was a proponent of the Islamic state in modern times, that is, a state which strictly abides by the rulings of the Shariah. Although he did not call for the revolutionary establishment of such a state, he is considered a forerunner of Islamist scholars like Maududi and Sayyid Qutb. His writings, particularly in his magazine, *Al-Manar*, influenced many individuals in the Muslim world, particularly the noted Salafi scholar Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani. Rida was also one of the earliest and harsh critics of Zionism and wrote an article against the movement in 1898.

Surprisingly, Mahatma Gandhi deeply influenced Rida, who even translated his book, *Guide to Health*, into *Kitab Al-Sihah* in Arabic, published in 1921.⁴¹ He added his commentary in the book, where he praised the Mahatma by saying:

The chief merits and praiseworthy traits of Gandhi that adequately reflect the greatness of this man are that he trod the straight path of his religion and followed the lofty ideals with all sincerity and that he never practised politics in isolation from religion and ethics at a time when our cultured intellectuals are feeling shy of being associated with their religion, not to speak of following its injunctions with sincerity, as they consider it as antagonistic to enlightened and progressive thought.⁴²

When some Muslims criticised Rasheed Rida for eulogising Gandhi, he silenced them by telling them that he likened Gandhi's thoughts and actions to those of Muslim Sufi saints of yore.⁴³ In a letter written to the Indian journalist Akbar Malihabadi in 1926, Rasheed Rida further highlighted the piety of Gandhiji.⁴⁴ He exhorted Arab leaders to follow Gandhiji as an ideal leader in politics. However, Rida had some reservations about Gandhiji's pristine views on Brahmanism and did not support the great leader's conservative stance against vaccinations.

Rida visited India in 1912 at the invitation of Shibli Nomani and delivered lectures at Nadwatul Ulama in Lucknow, and also in Darul Uloom in Deoband, and left highly impressed by the religious scholarship of Indian Muslims.⁴⁵ In his later years, he again visited India and held meetings with Gandhiji and other Indian political leaders. However, he opposed the views of the two Ali brothers, Muhammad Ali Jawhar and Shaukat Ali, who disapproved of Gandhian model of non-violent protests. On his return to Egypt, Rida wrote several articles in *Al-Manar*, in which he supported Gandhiji's Satyagraha and opposed the views of Muhammad Ali Jawhar.⁴⁶

Rasheed Rida grew religiously conservative in his later years. Today, he is seen more as an early proponent of Islamism than the modernism championed by Muhammad Abduh and his other disciples, like Ali Abd Al-Raziq (whose views will be discussed later in the book).

His growing association with Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi scholars in his later years turned the Salafi movement. The movement, which had started as more receptive to Western enlightenment and scientific ideas, came to be associated with the Wahhabi school of Saudi Arabia so much so that the Wahhabis started calling themselves Salafis by the 1970s onwards.

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*TURKISH, ARAB, IRANIAN
NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS*

13

Turkish Tanzimat Reforms and Dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate

I went to the West and saw Islam, but no Muslims; I got back to the East and saw Muslims, but not Islam.

—Muhammad Abduh¹

The three major Muslim empires of the later medieval times—Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal—started showing visible decline by the beginning of the eighteenth century. The same weakness was visible among the Central Asian Uzbeks and Sharifian rulers of Morocco. The wide territorial expanse under the Ottoman sultans, which covered much of Southeastern Europe, West Asia (barring Persia) and Northern Africa, became increasingly restive and unmanageable for the overstretched military riddled with frequent Janissary revolts and a leadership beset with constant court intrigues.

In 1683, the Ottomans failed to take Vienna, the capital of the Hapsburg Empire. They also suffered a massive blow to their imperial pride in 1696 when they ceded the province of Hungary to the Hapsburgs and the Aegean coast to the Venetians by signing a treaty at Karlowitz. In 1718, they had to part with more of their territories and lost Crimea to Russia in 1774.

However, the major challenge for the Ottomans came from Egypt, which had been under their sway since 1517. Istanbul had left the control of the country

to Mamluks (their vassals), an aristocracy of ex-slaves who had governed Egypt since 1250. By the eighteenth century, the Mamluks had become corrupt and imposed heavy taxes on the peasantry. The status of the old Al-Azhar University had also fallen because of the general decline in the level of education. At this time, two great foreigners introduced modernity to Egypt, which then challenged the “old regime” of the Ottoman Empire. These two extraordinary Europeans were: Napoleon Bonaparte; and the Albanian reformist governor Muhammad Ali.

Napoleon Invades Egypt and Syria to Reach India (1798)

To defend French maritime trading interests and recover Indian colonies lost to the British East India Company in 1763, the French revolutionary government came up with a fantastic plan in 1798, to send a young military prodigy, Napoleon Bonaparte, to invade Egypt and Syria. The plan was that once Egypt was secured, Napoleon would dispatch 15,000 French soldiers from the port of Suez (though the Suez Canal was not made then, the Suez Port was considered suitable for the journey to India) to win back erstwhile French colonies in India from the British. Thus, the celebrated French diplomat Talleyrand stated: “Having occupied and fortified Egypt, we shall send a force of 15,000 men from Suez to India to join the forces of Tipu-Sahib (Ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore) and drive away the English.”² Another set of historians, however, believes that Napoleon wanted to emulate Alexander the Great and lead his army via the Fertile Crescent to Persia, Afghanistan and India.

Napoleon was able to defeat the Mamluk rulers in Egypt easily, and quickly took Alexandria and Cairo in 1798. In order to assuage the Egyptians, who were furious over the conquest of European Christian forces, Napoleon went so far as to declare that he and the French were also “faithful Muslims”. One of Napoleon’s manifestos posted on Egyptian walls said:

Peoples of Egypt, you will be told that I have come to destroy your religion. This is an obvious lie; do not believe it! Tell the slanderers that I have come to you to restore your rights from the hands of the oppressors and that I, more than Mamluks serve God and revere His Prophet Muhammad and the glorious Quran.³

The Sunni clerics of Al-Azhar reacted incredulously. Some even expressed outrage at Napoleon’s declaration of faith in Islam.⁴ Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti, a well-known Islamic scholar, rejected Napoleon’s claim that the French were

Muslims and thought it was a ruse.⁵ In the end, the French forces were not welcomed in Egypt, and their ignorance of local customs and religious values shocked the society and contributed to their unpopularity. The joint landing of British and Ottoman forces in Alexandria finally paved way for France's exit from Egypt by 1801. Napoleon eventually failed in Egypt, losing his Siege of Acre in 1799 and the Battle of Abukir in 1801.

Although Napoleon's expedition was a failure, one of its benefits was the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, which led to the deciphering of the hieroglyphics in subsequent decades. In addition, Napoleon introduced printing press to Egypt, which he had brought along with him. These presses could print in Arabic, French and Greek scripts.

Napoleon's invasion also opened Egyptian eyes to the growing might of European powers. On the one hand, with literature published in the printing presses, they got introduced to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the age of exploration and discovery, the expansion of trade, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, the Napoleonic invasion led to the dominance of patronising Orientalist narratives of the Muslim world in the West: "The Napoleonic expedition, with its great collective monument of erudition, the *Description de l'Égypte*, provided a scene or setting for Orientalism.... Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and his foray into Syria have had by far the greater consequence for the modern history of Orientalism."⁶

Muhammad Ali Pasha: Father of Modern Egypt, True Machiavellian "Prince"

"I was born in the same year as Napoleon in the land of Alexander," said the wily Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769–1849), also known as "father of modern Egypt".⁷ Modelling himself after the above-mentioned conquerors, Muhammad Ali was not Egyptian by origin. He was born to an Albanian family in Kavala, Macedonia, in the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, he rose to the rank of second-in-command of an Albanian volunteer force, which became part of a much larger Ottoman Army that unsuccessfully tried to defeat the French occupiers of Egypt in 1799.

After Napoleon's forces exited Egypt in 1801, Muhammad Ali started increasing his political influence and secured recognition from a group of high-level *ulema* from Al-Azhar University and other political elite. In 1805, he became the chief instigator of a revolt against the Egyptian governor. Through deft political manoeuvring, he was able to convince the Ottoman sultan to make him the governor of Egypt as he had the support of the masses.

Muhammad Ali directed his energies towards freeing Egypt from the Ottoman yoke so that he and his progeny could rule over the country. He summed up his vision for Egypt as follows: “I am well aware that the (Ottoman) Empire is heading by the day toward destruction...On its ruins, I will build a vast kingdom...up to the Euphrates and the Tigris.”⁸

To achieve this end, he felt he had to reorganise the Egyptian society, streamline the administration, improve the economy and modernise the military. However, the biggest stumbling block in his way was the Mamluk military elite. Though their power had declined following Napoleon’s invasion, their 600 year rule was still entrenched in the south, along the Nile River up to north Egypt.

Taking a leaf out of the Abbasid “Banquet of Blood”, Muhammad Ali invited top Mamluk leaders to the Cairo Citadel to celebrate his son Tusun Pasha’s upcoming military expedition against the first Saudi state (Emirate of Diriyah). When the Mamluks gathered at the Citadel on 1 March 1811, they were surrounded and killed by Muhammad Ali’s forces. After the massacre, Muhammad Ali dispatched his army across Egypt to eliminate Mamluk remnants.

Muhammad Ali believed in industrialisation of the economy and modernisation of the military, for which he resorted to brutal and dictatorial ways. To begin with, he took control of waqf lands in possession of *ulema* by often exploiting their internecine rivalries, and also put most of the privately owned lands under state control, which wiped out the rural aristocracy. The marginalisation of the *ulema*, who experienced modernity as a shocking assault, made them even more insular and hostile towards scientific advancement and modernism.

With the state becoming the principal owner of agricultural land, it started deciding the crops to be grown by the peasants and directly supplied seeds, tools and fertilisers to them, and then purchased the crops and made a profit from them. For the transfer of crops and goods, Muhammad Ali drafted farmers to build roads and dig canals. With new irrigation, they raised three crops a year and moved on from subsistence farming to cash crop farming. Industrialisation was carried out in the field of defence for building munition plants, dockyards and textiles for making uniforms and tents. However, as mentioned, these modernising reforms were carried out very harshly and at breakneck speed, which took a toll on most farmers, who were not trained for such different forms of manual labour.

Muhammad Ali was also the first ruler since the Ptolemies to conscript Egyptian farmers as soldiers, many of whom hated military service. In the words of Karen Armstrong:

twenty-three thousand peasants are said to have died in the conscripted labour bands that improved Egypt's irrigation and water communications, other peasants so feared conscription into Muhammad Ali's modernised army that they frequently resorted to self-mutilation, cutting off their fingers and even blinding themselves.⁹

Eventually, Muhammad Ali turned against the Ottoman Sultan, and his forces marched into Palestine and Syria. By the end of 1832, he ruled most of the Fertile Crescent and Hejaz (the western part of the Arabian Desert having the two holy cities, Mecca and Medina). By 1839, he and his son Ibrahim were on the verge of entering Anatolia. It was only due to the intervention of the Great Powers (mainly Britain) that Muhammad Ali was forced to withdraw from Syria and accept autonomy in Egypt. With his plans for expansion failing, Muhammad Ali—much like his heroes Alexander and Napoleon—died a dejected man in 1849.

Rifa At-Tahtawi: Importance of Technological Progress in Muslim Societies

In 1826, in the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Asharite scholar by the name of Rifa At-Tahtawi from Al-Azhar University was sent as a chaplain of students by the Egyptian government to France. In Paris, Tahtawi studied the Enlightenment treatises on ethics, social and political philosophy, mathematics and geometry. There, he read works by Rousseau, Voltaire, Condillac, Montesquieu and Bezout, among others. On return to Egypt in 1831, he became part of the state's efforts to modernise Egypt. Tahtawi's work is viewed as the first endeavour towards an Egyptian renaissance (*nahda*) that flourished from 1860 to 1940.¹⁰

Tahtawi's books (which include several translations of French political treatises into Arabic as well as the author's philosophy) underscored the importance of technological advancement in the Islamic state of the modern age. He emphasised that material progress should be achieved as part of a coherently functioning government and society using Western technology. Indeed, his work influenced many future Arab modernists, like Muhammad Abduh.¹¹

Founder of Turkish Modernism: Selim III's "Nizam-i-Jedid" (New Order)

The invasion of Napoleon in Egypt, the rise of Hapsburgs in Austria, the growing threat from czarist Russia and the incursion from its Egyptian governor Muhammad Ali, all pushed the Ottomans to initiate modern administrative reforms.

Fearing a European threat to the empire, Ottoman Caliph Selim III (1761–1808) planned full-scale social, economic and administrative reforms that he called “Nizam-i-Jedid” (New Order). He also initiated secret military reforms by giving modern training to recruits, often taken from street gangs, without taking the entrenched Janissary forces into confidence. Nevertheless, the Janissaries came to know about this change. They feared that an effective fighting force trained by European instructors and equipped with modern weapons would soon expose the incompetence of outdated Janissaries.¹²

The Janissaries killed off the new troops, imprisoned Selim and unleashed a civil war. They got the support of the *ulema*, who were opposed to Westernised reforms being introduced in Turkey. A cousin of Selim III, Mustafa IV, eventually got the sultan killed and usurped the throne. With it ended the Nizam-i-Jedid reforms.

Ahmed Reshmi Efendi’s Call for Peace

Selim III’s peaceful overtures towards the West had the support of the strategic thinker and diplomat Ahmed Reshmi Efendi (1700–83), who called on the Ottomans to pursue the policy of negotiation and peace in place of jihad.

He argued that Ottoman sultans should understand that war was not always the best thing, and that prosperity and power depend upon peace and reconciliation with the enemy. He even cited “Surah Al-Araf” of the Quran to argue that dividing the earth into separate peoples with natural boundaries hints at God’s will.¹³

Mahmud II: “Peter the Great of Turkey”

After ascending the throne, Mustafa IV could not control the rampaging Janissaries. They started killing anybody favouring Selim III’s reformist ideas and stirred up trade guilds and madrasa students to stand up for their rights. Soon, they killed Mustafa IV and put Mahmud II (1808–39), his cousin, on the throne.

Initially, Mahmud II kept a low profile, and then he gradually raised a well-trained force of palace guards to match the might of the Janissaries. He also stealthily weaned the *ulema*, students and traders away from the Janissaries.

After silently ruling for almost 18 years, Mahmud struck against the Janissaries and in one fell swoop, killed all the top Janissaries and their Bektashi Sufi supporters. The whole elite force of the Janissaries was then disbanded. The reinstatement of the sultan’s authority by releasing it from the Janissary stranglehold was celebrated as the “Auspicious Event”, which cleared the way for large-scale

modernising reforms initiated by Mahmud II and his sons, known as the Tanzimat era.¹⁴

Modern Reorganisation: The Ottoman's Tanzimat Era (1839–76)

The Tanzimat is the name given to a series of modern reforms promulgated by Ottoman sultans in the reign of Mahmud II's sons, Abdulmecid I (1839–61) and Abdulaziz (1861–76). The best known of those reform measures are said to be the "Hatt-i-Serif Gulhane" ("Noble Decree of the Rose Chamber"; 3 November 1839) and the "Hatt-i-Humayun" ("Imperial Edict"; 18 February 1856). The importance of Tanzimat reforms lies in the fact that it was for the first time that an official edict was issued by the head of an Islamic state that "adopted the language of European political thought".¹⁵ Mustafa Reshid Pasha, a brilliant Turkish statesman and diplomat, was the leading architect behind the Tanzimat reforms.

The Tanzimat (reform, reorganisation, regulation) edict of 1839 was announced in the name of the new sultan, Abdulmecid I, and was simultaneously published in Turkish and French. Demonstrating the liberalising intentions of the Ottoman government, especially towards its Christian subjects, the reforms covered: introduction of a new secular school system; establishment of provincial representative assemblies; reorganisation of the army based on the Prussian conscript system; and introduction of new codes of commercial and criminal law, primarily derived from those enforced in France.

Thus, the Tanzimat edict of 1839 stated that there must be "guarantees insuring to our subjects perfect security for life, honour, and fortune".¹⁶ In his 1846 decree, Abdulmecid declared: "The differences of religion and sect among the subjects is something concerning only their persons and not affecting their rights of citizenship. As we are living all in the same country under the same government, it is wrong to make discriminations among us."¹⁷ His edict of 1856 was even more strident:

Every distinction or designation tending to make any class whatsoever of the subjects of my Empire inferior to another because of their religion, language or race, shall be forever effaced from the laws...of the empire...As all forms of religion are and shall be freely professed in my dominions, no subject of the empire shall be in any way annoyed on this account and no-one shall be forced to change his religion.¹⁸

The period saw the abolition of slavery and slave trade across the empire. It

also witnessed the establishment of secular Nizamiye courts. Ottoman sultans established these courts to apply new secular laws. In addition, there were attempts to codify the Shariah, which resulted in the “Mejelle”, a newly codified law based on the Hanafi fiqh.¹⁹ However, the Mejelle focused only on a part of the Shariah law—contracts, obligations, hiring and trust—which pertained to economic and procedural matters. The family law and criminal law were already codified, as stated earlier, on a European-inspired basis.²⁰

Many Western critics dismiss the Tanzimat reforms as window-dressing by Ottoman rulers to win European diplomatic support at critical moments. Indeed, the reforms did not modernise Turkish society and polity in its entirety, nor did they aim to do so. However, they did help the Ottoman Empire to introduce changes in a traditional Islamic polity and showed that the caliphate was not wholly impervious to adopting modern, secular laws of nineteenth-century Europe.

The reforms were given religious sanction as secular modernism was justified by the juristic doctrine that “necessity permits what is prohibited”, especially when it enables the ruler to protect the Islamic territory.²¹ Ahmed Cevdet Pasha even put Turkish nationhood and the idea of the nation state ahead of the Islamic caliphate as a basis for the reforms and reorganisation. Thus, he said: “In reality, it is a Turkish state... The real strength of the Sublime State lies with the Turks. It is an obligation of their national character and religion to sacrifice their lives for the House of Osman.”²²

To their credit, these latter-day Ottomans did institute “Meclis-i Maarif”, a committee of education that reduced the *ulema* stranglehold on education, thereby essentially creating a secular system of learning. Drastic educational reforms, covering primary (made free and compulsory in 1869) and secondary education leading to the university level, were introduced in 1846. By 1914, it is estimated that over 36,000 Ottoman schools imparted systematic, secular education programmes, which ran parallel to the traditional madrasa education system in the empire. These changes paved way for the subsequent secular order initiated by Ataturk in Turkey following the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

“Young Ottomans”: Democratic Freedoms Conform with Islam

In the second half of the nineteenth century, some Turkish intellectuals and diplomats felt that the Ottoman sultans did not want full-scale political reforms in the empire and were, in fact, opposed to concepts of freedom and individual rights, democracy and the nation state. The “Young Ottomans”, as they came to

be known, wanted the Tanzimat reforms to incorporate political ideals, as were summed up by their activist Namik Kemal (1840–88), to include: “the sovereignty of the nation, the separation of powers, the responsibility of officials, personal freedom, equality, freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom of association, enjoyment of property, sanctity of the home.”²³

These intellectuals, like Ibrahim Sinasi (1826–71) and Namik Kemal, started popular newspapers and journals, such as *Tasvir-i-Afkar* (“Illustration of Opinion”) and *Hurriyet* (“Freedom”), and equated political terms in Islam with modern liberalism and democracy. As Niyazi Berkes puts it: “For them *ümmet* (*ummah* in Arabic) meant nation, *icma* (*ijma*) social contract, *bîat* (*bayat*) the delegation of sovereignty to the ruler by the people, *içtihad* (*ijtihad*) meant parliamentary legislation, *mesveret* (*mushwarah*) democracy.”²⁴

They also interpreted passages from scriptural texts in support of parliamentary democracy, such as the Quranic verse (3:153), “So pardon [your brothers]...and take counsel with them in the affair” and the Hadeeth, “difference of opinion within my community is an act of divine mercy”.²⁵ For these thinkers, European ideals of parliamentary liberalism were not only superior to the Turkish political ideology but were also in accordance with Islam’s egalitarian spirit and essential tenets. In the words of Antony Black: “For the first time in Islamic political thought (referring to Young Ottomans), popular sovereignty was based upon the liberty of the individual, and indeed upon human nature.”²⁶

The high point of the Tanzimat reforms in the Ottoman Empire was the 1876 Constitution, which stated:

all subjects of the Empire are, without distinction, called Ottomans whatever religion they profess...All Ottomans enjoy individual liberty on condition that they do not interfere with the liberty of others...All Ottomans are equal in the eyes of the law. They have the same rights and duties towards the country without prejudice regarding religion.²⁷

Khayr Al-Din Al-Tunis: Western Science Linked to Political Progress

Khayr Al-Din Al-Tunis (1822–90) was a political theorist who studied European philosophy and modern state institutions, as well as analysed them based on Ibn Khaldun’s methodology. He was not a Turk or Egyptian but a Circassian slave-soldier, who eventually wrote the Constitution of Tunisia of 1861.

In his book, *Aqwam Al-Masalik fi Ma’rifat Ahwal al-Mamalik* (“The Surest Path to Knowledge Concerning the Condition of Countries”), Khayr Al-Din

analysed the causes of the progress and backwardness of nations and used empirical evidence from 21 European states and compared it with that of the Islamic world.²⁸ He emphasised that the Shariah included “the protection of the rights of mankind whether Muslim or not”. He even underscored that “one may legitimately borrow from non-Muslims anything that will promote the prosperity and well-being (maslaha: public interest) of the Islamic Community, and that is not explicitly contrary to the Shariah.”²⁹

Khayr Al-Din said that the prevailing political weakness of the Muslim world was economic backwardness, compounded by the superiority of Western scientific technology. Western technology, in turn, was the product of the European “constitution (*tanzimat*: political organisation)”, which he said was based on justice and liberty. He further averred that liberty and “*tanzimat*”, which were the very bases of Islamic law, produced prosperity. He repeatedly emphasised that Islam had long recognised the principle that justice and good administration were the causes of an increase in wealth and prosperity. In contrast, oppression led to the ruin of civilisation.

He attributed European progress in science, agriculture and commerce to personal liberty, which he said entailed “the individual’s complete freedom of action over himself and his property, and the protection of his person, his honour and his wealth”, so that he could not “be prosecuted for anything not provided for in the laws of the land duly determined before the courts”. This gave people “complete control over the conduct of commerce”.³⁰

However, Khayr Al-Din remained sceptical of democracy in an empire with many religious and ethnic differences. Eventually, he showed streaks of Islamic exceptionalism when he concluded, “Muslim masses are superior in intelligence to the masses in other nations” and the “freedom and human resolution which others have achieved only through political reform are inculcated into Muslims by their education and the Sharia”.³¹

Abdulhamid II: Subversion of Tanzimat

The Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman Empire reached a high point when Abdulhamid II ascended the throne (1876–1909) and, along with Young Ottoman intellectuals, promulgated the empire’s first constitution, *Kanun-i Esasi*, which declared all of its subjects as Ottomans without distinction of religion.³²

However, Abdulhamid II could not adhere to his promises of liberalism for more than a couple of years and citing differences with the Parliament, he

suspended it and the Constitution in 1878. Shunning the line of liberalism, he now took a pan-Islamist stance. The modernisation of infrastructure and education continued, but without corresponding advancement in liberal political thought and institutions. Thus, progress was made in extending the Rumelia Railway and the Anatolia Railway. Also, the construction of the Baghdad Railway (Berlin to Baghdad, completed in 1940) and Hejaz Railway (from Damascus to Medina, completed in 1908) was launched in his reign.

Abdulhamid pursued centralisation of the empire at the expense of liberalisation policies that had earlier been included in the Tanzimat reforms. He initiated military reforms, formed gendarmerie, spread the transportation and communication networks (such as the telegraph system) and strengthened the spy system. His brutal repression of the Armenians and the Assyrians in 1894–96 gave him the dubious title of the “Red Sultan”.³³ The Istanbul University was opened and then closed in 1881, only to reopen in 1890, and several secondary, primary and military schools were established. Professional schools in law, arts, trades, civil engineering, veterinary medicine, customs, farming and linguistics were also opened.

However, Abdulhamid is often criticised for his pan-Islamist ambitions that extended beyond the Ottoman Empire. Of all the Ottoman sultans, he is said to have used the title of caliph the most. He made strengthening relations with the rest of the Muslim world his fundamental policy and sent preachers of Sunni Hanafi Islam as far as South Africa and Japan to spread the word of Islam.

Indeed, Anthony Black finds Abdulhamid II a forerunner of modern Islamism or Political Islam, as he:

...sought to base his own authority on his role as Sultan–Caliph of Sunni Muslims. He asserted his position as Caliph of Muslims living outside the Ottoman empire, for example, by claiming the right to appoint religious judges in Egypt and the independent Balkans. At the outbreak of the First World War (following his precedent), the Ottoman Caliph issued “a universal proclamation to all the people of Islam”, which called upon Muslims everywhere to “rise up as the rising of one man, in one hand the sword in the other the gun, and in his pockets balls of fire and annihilating missiles, and in his heart the light of faith” against “the English, the Russians and the French” as oppressors of Islam: “India for the Muslim Indians...Algeria for the Algerians...Caucasus for the Caucasians” This, if anything, was political Islam.³⁴

Young Turks Revolt (1908): Constitutionalism versus Caliphate Rule

Abdulhamid II's suspension of the Constitution and the Parliament in 1878 caused massive disappointment among the Young Ottoman enthusiasts desiring liberal political reforms. In 1889, a group of students from the movement, studying at the Imperial Medical in Istanbul, hatched a plot to depose Abdulhamid. The conspiracy soon involved students of other colleges in the city. However, the plot was foiled by the regime, and many of the conspirators fled to Paris, led by Ahmed Riza. He became a key spokesman for the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which called for a more reform-oriented regime in Istanbul. Another group, the League of Private Initiative and Decentralisation, which openly spoke of decentralisation and European assistance for initiating reforms in the empire, was led by Prince Sabaheddin.

However, these foreign-based movements proved less effective than groups within the empire, particularly the malcontents under Major Ahmed Niyazi of the 3rd Army Corps in Macedonia, who spread rebellion across the empire, which forced Abdulhamid II to re-establish the 1876 Constitution and the Parliament.

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908, regarded by some historians as having little popular support, was more of "a coup d'état by a small group of military officers and civilian activists in the Balkans".³⁵ However, with this revolution, many underground organisations of different political persuasions established political parties in Turkey. Simultaneously, Bulgaria declared its independence and Austria-Hungary declared official annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Abdulhamid II agreed to the demands of the Young Turks to reinstate the 1876 Constitution, but he managed to stir populist Islamist sentiments throughout the empire. He staged a counter-revolt on 31 March 1909, promising his supporters restoration of the caliphate and a Shariah-based legal system. However, the Action Army of Mehmed Shevkat Pasha crushed the uprising and restored parliamentary rule on 24 April 1909. As a result, Abdulhamid II was finally deposed and Mehmed V became the titular caliph in his stead.

After a period of internal squabbling, the Young Turk government settled for the triumvirate leadership of Talat Pasha, Cemal Pasha and Enver Pasha as arbiters of Ottoman politics by 1913, initiating secularisation reforms and major industrialisation initiatives. However, their government sided with Central Powers in World War I and in 1915, decided on the deportation and execution of millions of Armenians, now known as the Armenian genocide.

At the end of the war, the CUP cabinet resigned in October 1918, less than a month before the humiliating acceptance of the Armistice of Mudros.

Ziya Gokalp's Turkmen Nationalism

A moderniser of religious thought, Turkish socialist Mehmed Ziya Gokalp (1876–1924) was part of the Young Turk movement and became its most articulate political ideologue. Using the pen name Gokalp (sky-hero), the political philosopher dealt with three directions for the future course of the Ottoman Empire of his times: imperialism of the Ottoman Empire; political unification of all Muslim territories under the rule of the Shariah; or national unification of Turks (regardless of the religious orientation of its citizens). On the basis of his intellectual reasoning, Gokalp rejected Islamism, pan-Islamism and Ottoman imperialism and opted for the nationalistic option of Turkification.

To Gokalp, “civilisation” and “culture” appeared interrelated, but were two distinct concepts. Civilisation included technological advancement, religious and ideological beliefs and different forms of knowledge that could be acquired from foreign influences, whereas nationalism came from culture which had deeply intrinsic ethnic and linguistic roots. Influenced by Emile Durkheim, Gokalp criticised Western individualism and averred that a nation must have a “shared consciousness” to thrive and that “the individual becomes a genuine personality only as he becomes a representative of his culture”.³⁶ To this end, he argued for the separation of religion from the state and insisted that “patriotism should be the most important area of morality for the Turks”.³⁷

Not a complete secularist, Gokalp believed that religion plays a part in strengthening patriotism. Still, he held the view of many modernist Muslims that while “the divine part” of the Shariah does not need to be changed, social rules can and should evolve along with society. Over some time, Gokalp evolved as a proponent of pan-Turkism and Turanism, and his ideology is described as “a cult of nationalism and modernization”.³⁸

Kemalist Secularism: End of the Ottoman Caliphate

The Ottoman Empire, which had for about six centuries grown into a multi-ethnic, multi-religious political power with boundaries extending from Vienna to Yemen, came to an end after World War I, which it had joined with the hope of reconquering some of its territories. Following the Armistice of Mudros, most of its territories were taken by Britain, France, Greece and Russia.

With the infamous Treaty of Sevres of 1920, the empire was left with less than a fifth of the current size of modern Turkey. However, under the military leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), a War of Liberation (1919–22) was successfully waged, mainly against the invading Greek Army, which made him a national hero and president. On becoming president, Mustafa Kemal abolished the Ottoman Empire and proclaimed the establishment of the Turkish republic on 29 October 1923. He then abolished the world’s last widely recognised caliphate on 3 March 1924. A couple of days before its abolition, Mustafa Kemal said: “The religion of Islam will be elevated if it will cease to be a political instrument, as had been the case in the past.”³⁹

Despite Kemal’s ideological divergences with the conservative interpretations of Islam, he was right in anticipating the end of the Ottoman Caliphate bringing in newer Islamic approaches to develop in international relations. It opened ways for major revisions on how Islam should be interpreted politically and the political role Muslims should play in the new international order that was then coming into existence.

In 1934, the Turkish Parliament conferred on Mustafa Kemal the title “Atatürk”, which means “father of Turks”. Although Mustafa Kemal introduced a single-party regime dominated by his People’s Republican Party (CHP), he initiated large-scale progressive reforms to modernise Turkey into a secular, industrialising nation.⁴⁰ Atatürk’s political ideology, known as “Kemalism” (also known as the Six Arrows), rested on the two pillars of Turkish nationalism and secularism. Nationalism was meant for a nation state belonging to Turkish citizens, in contrast to the multi-ethnic subjects of the Ottoman Empire. By secularism, Kemalism referred to keeping Islam out of the modern, Western-oriented republic.

Under Atatürk’s reforms, Turkish women received equal civil and political rights, including the right to vote in local elections. Then, in 1934, the Turkish women won full universal suffrage. Atatürk also disbanded the Ottoman “Ministry of Shariah” and Sufi orders and traditional madrasas were abolished, while mosques were put under government control. The European-style brimmed hat was imposed by law for government officials, while the Ottoman fez was banned, and so was women’s veil and covering of the head. In addition, the Gregorian calendar replaced the Islamic lunar calendar and Turkish language written in Arabic alphabet was replaced by the Latin script. All of these changes were made to uphold the secular principle of *laiklik* (adopted from the French *laïcité*, which means complete removal of religious values from the public sphere) that became an essential constituent of the Constitution of the Turkish republic.⁴¹

However, Kemalist secularism was never fully embraced by the Turkish masses. The large rural and newly urbanised voters consistently favoured centre-right parties ever since free and fair elections began in the 1950s. Be it the Democrat Party in the 1950s, the Justice Party in the 1960s and 1970s and the Homeland Party in the 1980s and 1990s, the electorate generally favoured a religion-friendly secularism.

In recent decades, Turkey's so-called authoritarian secularism has been challenged by two key pro-Islamic forces: the ruling Justice and Democratic Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdogan; and its once ally, but now arch-enemy, the Gulen movement. Critics allege that the current AKP government under Erdogan is fast turning Turkey into an Islamist polity. It has also been charged that although Turkey constitutionally remains a secular state, "hundreds of secularist officers and their civilian allies" have been jailed since 2007; and by 2012, the "old secularist guard" had been removed from positions of authority and replaced by AKP supporters.⁴²

It is reported that the former speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Ismail Kahraman, told a group of Islamic scholars in April 2016 that "secularism would not have a place in a new constitution" as Turkey is "a Muslim country and so we should have a religious constitution".⁴³ A century after the Kemalist revolution, Turkey seems to be heading towards an intended neo-Ottoman political orientation.

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14

Arab and Iranian Nationalism against European Colonialism

A ruler who needs religion to help him rule is a weakling. No weakling should rule.

—Kemal Atatürk¹

Arab Nationalism: Reaction to Pan-Turkism

Following the European Enlightenment, Ottoman Turks and Arabs felt the importance of a nation state that celebrated a common ethnic and cultural identity, which the commonality of religion could not compensate. The distinctive cultures and civilisation of ancient Indians, Egyptians, Chinese and Greeks were revived by the conceptualisation of nationalism during *Aufklärung* or the Enlightenment era in Europe, which, like the Turks, the Arab world also instinctually gravitated towards.

The Arab world, long subjugated by the Turkish Caliphate, was exposed to the concepts of nation state, social contract, democracy, civil liberties and secularism in the wake of the Tanzimat reforms that the Ottomans themselves initiated. Rifa At-Tahtawi was one of the pioneers in developing the concept of *watanniyah* (nationality) in the Arab world after his exposure to the Western world in the mid-nineteenth century. He further argued that the concept of *wataniyyah* was applicable to Egypt as the country had had a different system and

structure since the era of Pharaohs and because of a sense of national identity among the Egyptians.²

The Egyptian governor, Muhammad Ali, also sought to develop the concept of nationalism in which he unsuccessfully envisioned building an Arabic empire that could compete with the Ottomans. The Urabi Revolt, from 1879 to 1882, was a nationalist uprising of Egyptians to depose Khedive Tewfiq Pasha and end the British and French influence over the country. Led by Colonel Ahmed Urabi, the revolt comprised Egyptians who resented Western European interference in the country and the stranglehold of Turks, Circassians and Albanian on the country's important positions in the military and the government.³ Although the Urabi Revolt was a failure as it was followed by direct British control of Egypt in 1882, which lasted until the Suez crisis of 1954, it sparked a great sense of Arab nationalism in the consciousness of people from West Asia.⁴

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many Christian Arab scholars started promoting the idea of secularisation of the Arab nation and for accepting every Arab person who speaks Arabic to be regarded as equal. One of the leading Christian exponents of Arab nationalism was Boutros Al-Bustani, a Lebanese Maronite who played a significant role in establishing "Al-Madrasah Al-Watanniyah". Nurturing the values of secularism among Arabs, Al-Bustani distanced himself from following a Western way of life and emphasised the practice of Arabic cultural and societal values in the education system developed in Madrasah Al-Watanniyah.⁵

The rise of the Young Turk movement in Anatolia also had a corresponding impact, with the rise of Arab nationalism at the expense of the Islamic political construct under an Ottoman Caliphate, which was now fraying fast.

Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi: Mecca not Istanbul Seat of Caliphate

An early Syrian intellectual who called for pan-Arabism against Ottoman imperialism, Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi (1849–1902) was an author, mostly known for his two influential books, *Tabai al-Istibdad wa-Masari al-Isti'bad* ("The Nature of Despotism") and *Umm al-Qura* ("Mother of All Villages).⁶ He was also the editor of the famous journal, *Al-Manar*, which Rasheed Rida launched.

Imprisoned several times and later exiled for stating that the Ottomans had corrupted Islamic identity, Al-Kawakibi urged the Arabs to overthrow the Turks and seize control of the caliphate. He believed Mecca should be the centre of Islamic power, not Istanbul.⁷ He also emphasised that Arabs were of all nations the most suitable to be an authority in religion and an example to the Muslims.⁸

His death in 1902, under “mysterious” circumstances, was attributed by his family to poisoning by Turkish agents.

Sati Al-Husri: Arab Identity Predates Islam

Perhaps the best philosophical proponent of Arab nationalism was Sati Al-Husri (1880–1968), a Syrian educationist in the Ottoman Empire. Al-Husri was fluent in Arabic and Turkish and was influenced by German romantic nationalists, such as Herder and Fichte.⁹

Al-Husri regarded the nation as a living entity with long historical roots that affect its people, even if they may not acknowledge it. He rejected that state action, religion or economic factors can affect the spirit of nationhood. Echoing Gokalp, whom he detested for his Turkism, Al-Husri “established a barrier between civilisation on the one hand, and culture on the other hand, taking the view that the first, which comprises the sciences, technology, and modes of production, is intrinsically ‘universal’, while the latter, which comprises customs and language, is ‘national’.”¹⁰

Al-Husri tried to distance Islam from Arabs and the Arabic language, arguing that both existed before the coming of Islam and there is more to Arab identity and culture than Islam. He argued that even if Islamic unity were to be achieved, it would have to begin by forging Arab unity first.¹¹

Arab Revolt and the Sykes–Picot “Betrayal”

The Arab population started becoming restive against the declining Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat era for a variety of reasons. The series of defeats of the Ottomans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the rise of Europe showed the Arabs that the Turks were no longer the power they once were. When the Ottoman Empire started reforming its administration and society based on Western values, Arabs saw it as a departure from Islamic values and the Shariah, the basis on which they had accepted the Turkish Ottoman Empire as a caliphate.¹² The Arabs were also upset by the paucity of Arab representation in the higher echelons of Ottoman administration (particularly legislative bodies) and over some of the oppressive practices of the Ottomans that were blatantly discriminatory and unjust against them.¹³

The high point of Arab nationalism came with the Arab Revolt (*Al-Thawra Al-Arabiya*), when Arab forces, led by Sharif Hussein bin Ali (1854–1931) of Mecca, launched a military uprising against the Ottoman Empire on 10 June

1916. Backed by the British Egyptian Expeditionary Force and the advice of T.E. Lawrence (popularly known later as Lawrence of Arabia), the Sharifian Army, led by the Hashemites, expelled the Ottoman presence from Hejaz and Transjordan. After that, an Arab rebellion took control of Damascus, and the Arab kingdom of Syria was briefly led by Feisal, one of Hussein's sons.

The Arab Revolt was launched based on the so-called "McMahon–Hussein Correspondence". The British purportedly assured Sharif Hussein bin Ali of Britain's recognition of an independent Arab state from Aleppo to Aden if the revolt was successful. However, differences arose over the distribution of territories in the supposedly 10 letters exchanged between Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, and Lieutenant Colonel Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner to Egypt. Therefore, it was decided that the matter would be discussed later.

The British interest in forging a deal with Hussein bin Ali was twofold: first, as the Sharif of Mecca, he had a great deal of influence over 70 million Muslims in India, which would prevent them from turning against the British Raj; and second, to blunt the Ottoman call for jihad around the world.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the misgovernance during a famine and the summary execution of innocent peasants and scholars in 1916 by Djemal Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Syria, became a trigger for Feisal, the son of Hussein bin Ali, to start the Arab Revolt. When the insurrection successfully threw out Ottoman forces from Iraq and Syria, the Arab revolutionaries were jubilant as they expected that their promised independence was close at hand.

However, little did they know that the British government had promised to hand over Ottoman-ruled Arab lands to other foreign countries. For example, Britain and France had promised Russia, through a secret treaty in 1915, the control of the Turkish straits. Italy and Greece were also told they could claim portions of Anatolia, while France laid claim to all of Syria, including Lebanon and Palestine.

The three Allied Powers—Britain, France and Russia—also signed a secret pact in May 1916, known as the Sykes–Picot Agreement, which allocated to Britain the control of present-day Jordan, southern Iraq, southern Israel and Palestine, along with the ports of Haifa and Acre for strategic access to the Mediterranean. France got areas of southeastern Turkey, the region of Kurdistan, Syria and Lebanon. An enclave around Jaffa and Jerusalem was put under international rule, for Russia was interested in ruling over Christian holy places.

The secret Sykes–Picot Agreement, which was made public by the Bolsheviks

when they came to power in Russia in 1917, was viewed as a betrayal by Arabs as it negated Britain's promises to them. This agreement's legacy has led to much resentment in the Arab world. Even terrorist groups like the ISIS exploit near a century later the Arab resentment against the carving up of West Asia into British and French mandates that later further gave way to the still-fledgling and mostly unstable Arab nation states.

Birth of Israel and *Al-Nakba* (Catastrophe)

The secretive Sykes–Picot Agreement was not the only shock that struck the Arab and Muslim psyche during World War I. The 1917 Balfour Declaration by the British government that promised the international Zionist movement its support in re-creating the Jewish homeland in Palestine was a *Nakba* (catastrophe in Arabic) from which the Arab and Muslim world has still not recovered.

Under the British Mandate for Palestine, from 1917 to 1948, the framework for a future Jewish state was being laid by, mainly, European Jewish migrants pouring into the Promised Land in hundreds of thousands, which led to the destruction of the Palestinian society and homeland in 1948, and the permanent displacement of a majority of the Palestinian Arabs.

On 14 May 1948, when the British Mandate for Palestine ended, the Zionist leadership was ready to declare the establishment of the state of Israel. The subsequent Arab–Israeli War of 1948 led to the victory of the newly founded state against the combined armies of Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The Arab world mostly suffered humiliation in subsequent wars with Israel, including the 1967 Six-Day War, 1967–70 War of Attrition, 1973 Yom Kippur War, 1982 Lebanon War and several lesser conflicts of lower intensity. The war expelled 800,000 Palestinians from their homeland after the 1948 war, and they became refugees in neighbouring countries. and another 280,000 to 350,000 people became refugees of the 1967 war.

As the colonial mandates of European powers gradually came to an end after World War II, the US became the primary security provider for many newly founded independent nation states of West Asia. With the revival of pan-Arabist movements, many radical anti-Western regimes liberated their respective states—Egypt (1954), Syria (1963), Iraq (1968) and Libya (1969).

Gemal Abdel Nasser: Personification of Pan-Arab *Zeitgeist*

The successful anti-Western pan-Arabist regimes revived hopes of eventual Arab

unity. The heydays of this pan-Arabism were experienced under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70).

One of the most revered and charismatic Arab leaders of the twentieth century, Nasser played a central role in driving the British out of Egypt after their 72 year rule by proxy. On 23 July 1952, Nasser and 89 officers of his secret Free Officers group (which included his friend and future president, Anwar Sadat) staged an almost bloodless coup against the British-backed King Farouk I.

For over a year, Major General Muhammad Naguib remained the puppet head of state. However, in 1954, Nasser put Naguib under house arrest and became the prime minister. That same year, an assassin from the Muslim Brotherhood tried to assassinate Nasser but was caught. Nasser, then, clamped down heavily against the Islamist organisation.

A committed socialist, Nasser confiscated the land of mega-rich Egyptian landowners, who had prospered under King Farouk, and distributed it amongst the Egyptian masses. Unlike Ataturk, Nasser did not approve of atheism and made Islam the state religion. His popularity soared in the Arab world when he won the Second Arab–Israeli War of 1956 against Britain, France and Israel over the Suez Canal and nationalised the strategic waterway.¹⁵

After that, Nasser did something that left the Arab world in “stunned amazement, which quickly turned into uncontrolled euphoria”.¹⁶ On 1 February 1958, Syria and Egypt formed the United Arab Republic (UAR), with Nasser as president, who hoped the merger would one day spread to cover the entire Arab world. It was during the three years (1958–61) of the Egypt–Syria political union that pan-Arab nationalism peaked.

In 1961, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser and President Tito of Yugoslavia founded the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). However, Syria withdrew from the UAR in 1961, which Nasser blamed on Syrian Baathists, calling them fascists.¹⁷ In September 1962, Egypt entered the Yemeni civil war. The involvement in the long-drawn-out Yemen civil war was, in the words of Nasser himself, “a miscalculation”.¹⁸

However, for Nasser, a more significant miscalculation was Egypt’s humiliating defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel, which it fought alongside Syria, Jordan and Iraq. On 5 June, Israel staged a sudden pre-emptive airstrike that destroyed over 90 per cent of Egypt’s aircraft standing on the tarmac. A similar aerial assault wiped out the Syrian Air Force. The entire war ended within a week. Israel’s decisive victory led to the capture of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan

Heights and the Old City of Jerusalem, with the status of these territories remaining a major point of contention in the Arab–Israeli conflict.

In the wake of this defeat, Nasser resigned from office, but public demonstrations forced him to return. After the three-year-long War of Attrition to recover Israel-held Sinai Peninsula ended in an inconclusive ceasefire, Nasser died of heart attack in September 1970.

Nasserism and Baathism: Anti-Atheistic, Anti-Islamist Socialism

Nasser's political ideology, also known as Nasserism, can be described as pan-Arabist socialism. It is ideologically opposed to Western capitalism, but equally hostile to the spread of communism in the Arab world. It is well known that, mindful of the spiritual heritage of the Arab world, Nasser made Islam the state religion of Egypt, but he was strongly opposed to fundamentalist groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood, and extremist ideologues, like Sayyid Qutb, who was executed by hanging in 1966 for plotting to kill Nasser.¹⁹

Although in favour of modernisation, Nasserists are staunchly opposed to Western interference in Arab affairs and seek progress and cooperation among developing countries.²⁰ They do not believe that Jews have a claim over their ancestral “holy land”, but conform to the commonly held Arab view that Zionism is an extension of European colonialism on Arab soil. Not a supporter of democracy but of a one-party state, Nasser is also associated with building grand infrastructure projects, like the Aswan Dam and Helwan City.

Despite Nasser disapproving the actions of Baathists, the ideology of the latter is not vastly different from his own. Baathism, an Arab nationalist ideology, is based on the concepts propounded by certain twentieth-century Syrian intellectuals, namely, Michel Aflaq (1910–89), Zaki Arsuzi (1899–68) and Salah Al-Din Al-Bitar (1912–80).²¹ It is mainly a secular political ideology based on the principles of Arab nationalism, which, though socialistic in orientation, opposes Marxian confiscation of private property or state socialism.²²

With a strong current of modernisation, it believes that socialism is the sole means for the progress of developing nations. Baathism does not fully adhere to Islamic principles and is strictly opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. However, it regards Islam as historical proof of “Arab genius” and a testament to Arab culture, values and thought.²³

Michel Aflaq, an Arab Christian, has praised Islam for its revolutionary quality and believes that the Prophet had given socialism an Arab expression. Thus, in

the words of Aflaq, the chief Baathist philosopher: “Europe is as fearful of Islam today as she has been in the past. She now knows that the strength of Islam (which in the past expressed that of the Arabs) has been reborn and has appeared in a new form: Arab nationalism.”²⁴

Modern Arab nationalism has always had three main streams of thought within it: socialism, liberalism and Islamism. Although the liberals and socialists vehemently despise the Islamist elements, they still feel proud of the historical achievements of Islam because of its Arab origins.²⁵

Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905–11): Islam for Democracy

Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century, Western liberalism and democracy had started inspiring young Iranian intellectuals and diplomats. Mirza Yousuf Khan of the Qajar dynasty was among the first to claim that Western and Islamic political principles were not contradictory but in agreement. According to him:

If you study the contents of the codes of France and other civilised states, you will see how the evolution of the ideas of nations and the experiences of the peoples of the world confirm the Sharia of Islam...Whatever good laws there are in Europe...your Prophet set down and established for the people of Islam 1,280 years ago.²⁶

Another disseminator of liberal ideas in the latter years of the Qajar dynasty was Mirza Malkham Khan (1831–1908). Educated in Paris, where he was fascinated by humanism and the philosopher of positivism Auguste Comte, Malkham Khan came under the influence of Jamal Al-Din Afghani through his newspaper, *Qanun* (law). Malkham advocated parliamentary democracy in Iran and called for the establishment of a bicameral assembly on British lines with the assembly of representatives elected by the people themselves, while the upper chamber consisting of unelected ‘notables’, including the mujtahids.²⁷

These revolutionary ideas practically manifested in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–06. Opposed to Russian interference in the country’s affairs, the revolution was engineered by the *ulema*, merchants and secular intellectuals, as part of the Tobacco Protests, which forced the Qajar king to order the framing of a constitution (making his power dependent on the will of the people) and convene a national assembly in 1906.

The Constitution was inspired by the Belgian model but was ratified by a committee of mujtahids. Thus, it stated: “Government according to the law of Islam, justice, and equality, or according to science and civilisation...are one and

the same... the Europeans have taken their laws and constitutions from the Quran and the words of the Imams.”²⁸

However, the Constitution was abolished in 1908 by the new Qajar king, with the support of Britain and Russia, and then re-established in 1909. It is indeed surprising that most of the quietist Shia mujtahids of Najaf in Iraq supported the constitutional movement. Shaikh Hussain Ahmad Naini expressed such views cogently in his book, *Admonition of the Nation* (1909).²⁹ The Shia *marja* (source of emulation) said: “that freedom of the pen and speech both are God-given freedoms, necessary for liberation from despotism (taghut).”³⁰ However, political instability continued until the Pahlavi dynasty under Reza Shah was established in 1925, which lasted till the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Palestinian Struggle: Violent Non-State Actors after 1967 War

It is customary to attribute “Palestinian resistance” to the activities of violent non-state actors since the 1960s. Some scholars, however, argue that it started with the onset of Jewish settlements in the beginning of the twentieth century. The concept of military resistance was central to the ideology of Palestinian resistance groups, such as Fatah (formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement), which was established in 1959 by Yasser Arafat, who was then head of the General Union of Palestinian Students at the Cairo University.

The common objectives of Palestinian resistance groups are “liberation of Palestine” and recognition of a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. More limited goals include: the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israel; and achieving the Palestinian right to return (referring to the millions of Palestinian refugees displaced by the Israel–Palestinian conflict) to their homeland.

Establishment of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964

Encouraged by President Gemal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, the Arab League began the process of establishing the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) at its first summit meeting in Cairo in 1964. The role of the PLO was to serve as an umbrella organisation for all organisations serving the Palestinian cause. The core ideology of the PLO stated that the Zionists had expelled Palestinians from their country and established a state for Jews. Opposed to the “false ideology” of Zionism, the PLO objected to the colonialist debasing of the Jewish faith and called for unity among Muslim, Christian and even Jewish Palestinians, who earlier constituted the Palestinian people. Israeli settlers were likened to White

settlers of South Africa, and Israel's policies were akin to apartheid, while the PLO saw itself akin to organisations like the Algerian National Liberation Front. The face of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, was fond of extolling an independent Palestine that would be a democratic and secular state, with Jews, Christians and Muslims living together in peace.³¹

Besides Fatah and the PLO, the Palestinian movement soon developed several other resistance organisations, like the Marxist–Leninist group formed by George Habash called the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; another Marxist–Leninist group was the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine; the now-defunct Abu Nidal Organisation; the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command that had the famous Jihad Jibril Brigades; and the Islamist groups, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

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THE AGE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

15

Islamism, Jihadism and Modern Reformers (1900–2020)

It is the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its laws on all nations and to extend its power to the entire planet.

—Hassan Al-Banna¹

Of the many scholarly definitions of Islamism, few come close to encapsulating the meaning, scope and danger posed by this globalised religious–political phenomenon to the modern society’s largely liberal and multi-cultural ethos than the aforesaid statement made by the founder of Muslim Brotherhood.

The seamlessness with which Hassan Al-Banna conflates the religion of Islam with Muslim political power is shocking. Moreover, the use of the word “dominate” in the global context points to the alarming implications such a line of thinking poses for world peace and, more directly, to the strength and stability of Muslim polities, cultures and societies.²

Rise of Islamism as a Religious Revivalist Movement

Islamism has been described as a Muslim fundamentalist pushback against modernism.³ In the words of William E. Shephard, Francois Burgat, James Piscatori and Armando Salvatore, the term “Islamism/Islamist” has come into increasing use in recent years to denote the views of those Muslims who claim that Islam, or

more specifically, the Islamic sharîḥah, provides guidance for all areas of human life.”⁴

Although opposed to monarchical rule, Islamism is critical of modern and liberal political thought than it is towards medieval Muslim history, which since Umayyad times followed dynastic despotism as its political model and whose rulers sparingly adhered to Shariah rulings.

In simple terms, Islamism or Political Islam refers to an ideology that believes that Islam is a revolutionary political movement and will attain the fulfilment of its objectives only with the creation of an Islamic state or caliphate (like that of the Rashidun caliphs) through political enforcement of the Shariah, although there is debate over which school of jurisprudence – Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, Hanbali, Jafari or Ibadi version of Shariah — will this dispensation follow. It believes in reconstituting modern states and the international order in constitutional, economic and judicial terms, in accordance with a conceived return to the earliest Islamic practices.

However, many Muslim intellectuals and reformers – including Kalaam rationalists and Sufi spiritualists – have from the eleventh century on, objected to a “mechanistic”, literal approach to Islam and have argued that the schools of law instituted several generations after the Prophet’s death are too rigid in defining Sharia. Many modern reformers are similarly critical of Islamism for viewing the religion through a legalistic prism, for it being heavily political, communal and collectivist in its approach⁵. They point out that Islamism’s reductionist interpretation of the faith robs it of its inner spiritual, ethical and intellectual strengths, which in its holistic form engenders and nourishes moral vitality of human society and civilisation. Thus, Islamism has been blamed for seeking to revive Muslim societies either through political force⁶ or by launching aggressive and hate-filled social activism. As for jihadism, it has become another distorted derivative of Islamism, in that it finds indiscriminate violence as the only means for achieving Islamist goals and sometimes waging violence in the name of jihad as a goal in and of itself, which provides an easy passage to everlasting bliss. Thus, modern jihadism has developed many features to death cults and apocalyptic/doomsday cults.

The emphasis on a formulaic adherence to religious dogma and rituals, outright rejection of every foreign influence and non-Muslim communities, intolerance towards any rational argument for the common good, refusal to develop scientific temper and insistence on drastic, uncompromising and extreme responses

to complex social or political phenomena are issues that have been attributed to Islamism, which is a derivative of and yet separate from the religion of Islam itself. According to Robin Wright, Islamist movements have “arguably altered the Middle East more than any trend since the modern states gained independence”.⁷

Islamism also appears post-modernist in its aversion to both modern rationality as well as traditional religious spiritualism. As a post-modernist movement, its proponents like Maududi call for instituting “theo-democratic” states, blending the modern with the medieval. Thus, when Noah Feldman states, “[m]ainstream Islamism has in principle accepted the compatibility of the sharia and democracy”,⁸ and yet there is little room for accepting the liberal embrace of divergent viewpoints of other secular or religious communities.

Although, Islamists may allow the institution of shura (consultative bodies) in their polity their approach is totalitarian and against democracy, in that they seek the religious and the political powers to rest within a single religious-political leader, a caliph or an ameer, of utmost moral, spiritual, political and intellectual brilliance. Olivier Roy rightly observes, “the more radical the party, the more central is the figure of the ‘amir’. Such a person would be a religious as well as a political leader.”⁹ However, they propose little in terms of institutional mechanisms for holding the person holding the high office accountable for administrative shortcomings, policy failures or misdemeanours and high crimes, and remain silent on the method of succession, which proved to be the source of great ‘fitna’ even for the Rashidun caliphs.

In the words of Antony Black, “one-man rule, whether in the form of hereditary monarchy or rule by one individual in the name of a principle, party or common interest (‘dictatorship’), remained remarkably common throughout the twentieth century, especially in the Arab world.”¹⁰ However, there is no denying that despite their hostility to modern Western socio-political values, Islamists take a distinctly modern materialist approach to both religion and polity.

Hassan Al-Banna’s Muslim Brotherhood: “Islam is the Solution”

A young social and religious activist, who was a habitué of the Salafiyya book store in Cairo and often attended the lectures of Rasheed Rida there, was Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic: Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen). Al-Banna joined the Society of Moral Behaviour at the age of 12 years and showed great interest in religious affairs and ways to the uplift of the poor.

In 1927, he was appointed a teacher of Arabic language at a primary school in Ismailia, near the Suez Canal. When Al-Banna saw the luxurious lifestyle of the British living in the area and compared it to the miserable living conditions of Egyptian workers, he was profoundly disturbed. So, in March 1928, with six workers from a British labour force camp, Al-Banna founded the Society of the Muslim Brothers to rejuvenate the Muslim community.¹¹

This organisation founded by Al-Banna reached every section of the society. Thus, in the words of Karen Armstrong:

Besides training the Brothers and Sisters in the rituals of prayer and Quranic living, al-Banna built schools, founded a modern scout movement, ran night schools for workers, and tutorial colleges to prepare for the civil services examinations. The Brothers founded clinics and hospitals in the rural areas, built factories where Muslims got better pay, health insurance, and holidays than in the state sector, and taught Muslims modern labour laws so that they could defend their rights.¹²

The Muslim Brotherhood soon emerged as a grassroots movement across many countries of West Asia that aimed at mass mobilisation.

However, like Maududi's *Jamaat-i-Islami*, the Muslim Brotherhood developed the political ideology of establishing a Shariah-based Islamic state. One of its famous slogans worldwide became, "Islam is the Solution".¹³ In the 1930s and 1940s, the plight of the Palestinians transformed and radicalised its youth cadres. With the onset of World War II, the Muslim Brotherhood started providing both humanitarian and military aid to the Palestinian groups. The Nakba of 1948 further radicalised the ranks of Muslim Brotherhood. The group's international outreach made it an increasingly pan-Islamic movement, unrestricted by the interests of the Egyptian nation state.

Al-Banna believed that Muslim liberals and Sufis had emasculated the idea of jihad, and he wanted militant jihad to be fought against the British in Palestine. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood, therefore, took the pledge that they would "be soldiers in the call to Islam, and in that is the life for the country and the honour for the Umma... We are brothers in the service of Islam... Hence we are the 'Muslim Brothers'." ¹⁴

Like Maududi, Al-Banna believed that Islam was not just a spiritual means for attaining salvation but a comprehensive religious and socio-political system that could solve the challenges of modernity; hence, he called upon Muslims to reject Western values.¹⁵ He also said:

If the French Revolution decreed the rights of man and declared for freedom, equality, and brotherhood, and if the Russian revolution brought closer the classes and social justice for the people, the great Islamic Revolution [had] decreed all that 1300 years before. It did not confine itself to philosophical theories but rather spread these principles through daily life, and added to them [the notions of] divinity of mankind, and the perfectibility of his virtues and [the fulfilment of] his spiritual tendencies.¹⁶

The growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood threatened to rival the writ of the Egyptian government, and the increasingly radical and revolutionary statements made by Hassan Al-Banna only made matters worse. In 1948, the organisation was banned, its members arrested and assets impounded. Against this action of the Egyptian government, a student member of the Muslim Brotherhood killed Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Al-Nuqrashi in December 1948. Al-Banna criticised the killing, but he was assassinated, allegedly by the Egyptian secret police, in 1949.¹⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood had a tortuous journey after the death of its founder. The movement went underground in Egypt and was considered a significant threat by Gamal Abdul Nasser when one of its members tried to assassinate him in October 1954. After that, six of its leaders were tried and executed for treason, while many more were imprisoned, including the maverick ideologue Sayyid Qutb. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood was said to be involved in the 1982 Hama uprising in Syria, which the Hafez Al-Assad regime brutally crushed by killing 1,000 people,¹⁸ according to Western government sources. However, journalist Robert Fisk put the number at 20,000.¹⁹

From the 1980s to 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood either participated, was intermittently banned or sometimes itself boycotted elections in Egypt and Jordan. After the failed Arab Spring and the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Morsi government in 2013 by the Egyptian Armed Forces, led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, the Muslim Brotherhood remains banned in Egypt, with Amnesty International decrying several hundred members of Muslim Brotherhood being given death sentences in that country.²⁰ Several other Arab states (particularly Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE) have also banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Taqi Al-Din Nabhani's Hizb-ut-Tahreer (HuT): "Bloodless Coup for Caliphate"

Born in Jerusalem, Taqi Al-Din Nabhani was a religious scholar who founded the pan-Islamist radical yet avowedly non-violent party, the HuT. With both parents being Islamic scholars, Al-Nabhani studied at the Al-Azhar University in Egypt and the Dar Al-Uloom College of Cairo. After graduating in 1931, he returned to Palestine.²¹

For Al-Nabhani, the depressing situation faced by the Muslim community in the twentieth century was the result of the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. Although many other Islamic scholars, like Rasheed Rida, had spoken of reinstating the institution of the caliphate in the Arab world, no other contemporary made it the mission of his life through his party. Distraught by the establishment of the state of Israel and the Arab defeat in the 1948 war with Israel, Al-Nabhani founded the HuT party in 1953. However, Transjordan, which controlled Jerusalem at that time, banned the party as soon as it was founded. Therefore, Al-Nabhan moved to Beirut, where he died in 1977.²²

Since his death, the HuT has grown into a major international Islamist movement. The party has spelled out a detailed programme and even drafted the constitution for its Islamist state. It calls for the creation of a unitary and not federal caliphate. It states that the state should be run by a caliph elected (not chosen by bloodline) by Muslims. It also calls for military conscription of every able-bodied male Muslim over 15 years of age and makes Arabic the sole language of this state. As opposed to paper or electronic currency, it wants to make only gold and silver the state currency. Membership of the state in secular international institutions (which might include the UN and other global organisations) is strictly forbidden by the constitution.²³

Although the organisation claims to adopt a non-violent ideology, its methods of gaining political power are considered dubious. Their first step is to "convert new members, Second, they establish a network of secret cells, and finally, they try to infiltrate the government to work to legalize their party and its aims."²⁴ Thus, the organisation seeks to stage a "bloodless coup" (or what it calls in Arabic, *nussrah*).²⁵

Since the 1950s, the party has spread to over 50 countries and is estimated to have members in excess of "tens of thousands",²⁶ if not "about a million".²⁷ The group is active in the Arab world, the United Kingdom (UK), Central Asia and particularly South Asia (mainly Bangladesh, Pakistan and even Afghanistan). The

so-called party or “Hizb” has been banned in China, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia and almost all Arab states, barring Lebanon, Yemen and the UAE.²⁸ A 2004 Nixon Centre report alleges that the HuT has been involved in coup attempts in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Iraq.²⁹

Pahlavi Dynasty: The West’s Betrayal of Iranian Modernisation

As mentioned earlier, after the decline of the Qajar Empire, the Pahlavi dynasty was established in Iran in 1925. Like Ataturk in Turkey, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Shah (1878–1944), carried out sweeping social, political and economic reforms. Many of the modernising projects related to building economic infrastructure were successful. On 21 March 1935, the country’s name was also changed from Persia to Iran (“land of the Aryans”), which highlighted an ethno-nationalist identity.

In his bid to modernise the Iranian society, Reza Shah banned the wearing of traditional Islamic clothing and instituted a law in which every Iranian was supposed to wear Western clothes. He also forbade the Islamic separation of the sexes and the veiling of women. In addition, he required mosques to have chairs and stopped people from sitting on the mosque floors. Such measures caused disaffection among the Shia clergy. In 1935, a rebellion broke out at the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad. The people chanted, “The Shah is the new Yazid (the Umayyad King who killed Imam Hussein).”³⁰

During the reign of Reza Shah, Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi founded the Qom Seminary in 1922. At the seminary, Yazdi had a student, Ayatollah Khomeini, who became the nemesis of the dynasty decades later. Reza Shah was neutral during World War II, but his neutrality was viewed as opposition by British and Russian troops. As a result, the Allied Powers launched a land, air and sea assault on Iran in August 1941. The Iranian military collapsed under the barrage of British aerial bombing and there was chaos across the country. However, it was the Soviet forces who entered Tehran in 1941, and Reza Shah abdicated. The British chose to make Reza Shah’s son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran’s new shah.

From 1909, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (an antecedent of present-day British Petroleum Company) was formed when oil was discovered in Iran. Soon, it became the most profitable British business globally.⁷ However, the Iranians lived in abject poverty, even as Iranian oil played a critical role in making Britain a predominant power in the world. In 1951, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and became a national

hero. In January 1953, the British and American intelligence, under Operation Ajax, orchestrated the overthrow of the first democratically elected government of Mosaddegh and strengthened the monarchical rule of the shah. To pre-empt the Soviet influence, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi restarted economic reform programmes and social projects, like women's emancipation, under the so-called White Revolution of 1963. However, the development projects were mired in corruption. The wealth gap between the rich and the poor increased dramatically as the "trickle-down" policy did not work and the oil wealth remained in the hands of the elite and not the masses. In this backdrop, the Islamic Revolution of Iran came about in 1979 and ended the 2,500 years of monarchical rule in Persia.

Ali Shariati: Revolutionary "Red Shiism" as Source for Social Justice

One of the most influential Iranian intellectuals of the twentieth century, Ali Shariati (1933–77) was a Western-educated non-clerical Islamist with strong socialist leanings.³¹ Having completed his graduation from the University of Mashhad in 1955, he left for Paris to earn his PhD from the Sorbonne. He was deeply influenced by Frantz Fanon, a political philosopher, and sociologist Georges Gurvitch, and also came to know of the great French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.³²

On his return to Iran in 1964, Shariati became politically active and highly critical of Iran's Pahlavi monarchy and Western colonialism. He started teaching at the University of Mashhad until his lectures and speeches became too critical of the government, the clergy and even the Marxists.³³

Shariati was a champion of revolutionary Shiism, which had started becoming popular in the 1960s and was inspired by the global anti-colonial movements. However, the young revolutionary thinker was frustrated with the pacifism of what he called "Black Shiism", a term he used to describe orthodox Shia clergy that, he claimed, tacitly supported the "oppression of the Shah" to "preserve its own class interests".³⁴ By putting up a veneer of spiritualism and individual piety, Shariati claimed that "Black Shiism" overlooked social justice against oppression—which he considered was the true essence of Shiism. In its stead, he advocated revolutionary "Red Shiism", as practised by Imam Ali ibn Talib and Imam Husayn ibn Ali, who he said stood up for the oppressed classes and did not indulge in any theological disputes or dabbling into mysticism prevalent among the "Black Shia".

Shariati spoke of Islam as a political movement for a classless utopia and

redefined Islamic terms, such as *tawheed* (monotheism) and jihad, as concepts promoting social solidarity and liberation struggle. He criticised Western ideological schools of liberalism and capitalism as they upheld the values of private ownership,³⁵ as opposed to the collective ownership of egalitarian societies that existed in pre-capitalist and pre-feudal times. He was even critical of Marxism, which he said placed the economy as the foundation of society. In contrast, it is the human being and not the economy which lies at the foundation of society.³⁶

Ali Shariati also criticised Western democracy because of what he found was its allowance for demagogy. He charged that voting in these democracies was strongly influenced by advertising techniques, which distract attention from real issues and direct them to surface-level arguments. He maintained that Western democracy was based on gold, cruelty and tricking, and was an anti-revolutionary system different from rightful religious leadership's guidance. Shariati championed Islamic values and was highly critical of Muslims who adopted a Western outlook. Thus, he said: "They need to replace their hollowness of soul...their collapse of originality, their self-alienation, their other-worshipping...with the spirit of faith."³⁷

However, Shariati did not envision a primeval vision of Islam, as lived by the first three generations after the Prophet, as a model for an ideal society. Instead, in this regard, he took the philosophical approach of the modernists using critical theory. In particular, Shariati wanted to radically update the social and political programme of Islam, as the modernists had, with respect to women's rights.³⁸ Further, he said:

Islam pays attention to bread, its eschatology is based on active life in the world, its God respects human dignity, and its messenger is armed...The Prophet of Islam was the only one who simultaneously carried the sword of Caesar in his hand and the heart of Jesus in his chest...[This is] the religion whose founder is an "armed messenger" and whose follower is Ali; the religion whose history began amidst politics and struggle (jihad); the religion whose taxation is on a par with praying; the religion which...has built societies, political and economic systems.³⁹

It is important to note that Shariati said he was primarily interested in the historical and social concept of *tawheed*, not in the truth of the Quran or of Muhammad or Ali. In this way, he approached Islam as a system of governance and studied it as a sociologist and not as a theologian.

From 1972 to 1977, Shariati was jailed and then put under house arrest by the shah's government because of his statements against the regime. He flew to

London on his release but died there from a heart attack. Some of his supporters blamed the shah's secret service for his early demise. According to Hamid Elgar, Shariati was the number one ideologue of the Islamic Revolution in Iran that occurred two years after his death.⁴⁰ Although known as the 'Teacher of the Revolution', his ideology did not form the basis of the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁴¹

Iranian Revolution of 1979: Islamism Attains Political Power

A far more charismatic leader than Shariati and politically the most successful Islamist revolutionary of modern times was the Islamic "marja" in Imami (Twelver) Shia Islam, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89). He surprised the world when he masterminded the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran while still in exile (since 1964), to depose Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. In the words of Armstrong:

The Iranian Revolution was the only revolution inspired by a 20th-century ideology (the Russian and Chinese revolutions both owed their inspiration to the nineteenth-century vision of Karl Marx). Khomeini had evolved a radically new interpretation of Shiism: in the absence of a hidden Imam, only the mystically inspired jurist, who knew the sacred law, could validly govern the nation.⁴²

***Hokumat-e Islami: Velayat-e faqih* ("Islamic Government: Rule of the Jurist")**

Karen Armstrong refers to the expansion in meaning that Khomeini gave to the post-occultation theory of Vilayat-e-Faqih in Imami or Ithna Ashariyya (Twelver) Shia Islam, which states that Islam gives a *faqih* (Islamic jurist) custodianship over its people. It is based on this interpretation of the theory of Vilayat-e-Faqih that Ayatollah Khomeini made the following proclamation: "...This government is no ordinary one; it is a canonical government. Opposition to this government is opposition to the canon laws and is tantamount to rebellion against religion."⁴³

Khomeini used the theory of Vilayat-e-Faqih as the cornerstone for political legitimacy of his theocratic state. Traditionally, the theory was used by Shia religious scholars in a restricted, largely apolitical sense, wherein *vilayah* (guardianship) was bestowed upon a *faqih al-adil* (just Islamic jurist) in non-litigious affairs (*al-omoor al-hisbiya*) of the Muslims.⁴⁴ The non-litigious affairs pertained to: establishing the Friday and congregational prayers; implementing penal provisions; supervising endowments; discretionary mandate over children, orphans and people of unsound mind; and collecting religious taxes.

According to this theory of limited guardianship of the Islamic jurist, the divine authority to rule an Islamic state was “exclusively” vested with the infallible imams of the Ahl Al-Bayt (that is, Twelve Imams from the family of the Prophet). Based on this interpretation, the tradition *fuqaha* in the Twelver Shia sect left secular power to Shia kings called “sultans” and, as religious leaders, did not meddle in political matters.

Contrary to this understanding, Khomeini enforced *Vilayat-e-Faqih*, an Islamic doctrine by which a *faqih* is considered the guardian of all affairs of Muslims and is religiously authorised to establish and administer a political system on behalf of the Hidden Twelfth Imam. This understanding of the concept of *Vilayat-e-Faqih* is regarded as that of absolute guardianship (*al-vilaya al-mutlaqa*) of the Islamic jurist.⁴⁵

Ayatollah Khomeini further expanded on the jurisdiction of the *faqih* in his book, *Hokumat-e Islami: Velayat-e-Faqih* (“Islamic Government: Rule of the Jurist”).⁴⁶ He proposed a new doctrine that the mandate could be attributed to an individual: “if a worthy individual possessing [the qualities of legal expertise and justice] arises and establishes a government, he will possess the same authority as [the Prophet himself] in the administration of society, and it will be the duty of all peoples to obey him.”⁴⁷ However, he qualified this statement by adding that such powers would be confined to “rational and extrinsic” matters of government, and the mandate of the individual jurist would not apply to religious affairs.

In its political sense, the concept of *Vilayat-e-Faqih* was first mentioned by the early Shia mujtahids, like Al-Shaikh Al-Mufid (948–1022), and even briefly by Muhaqqiq Karaki during the reign of Safavid ruler, Shah Tahmasp (1524–76).⁴⁸ However, according to John Esposito, the first Islamic scholar to advance the theory of *Vilayat-e-Faqih* was Morteza Ansari (1781–1864).

Only Ayatollah Khomeini became the biggest proponent of the concept, even enlarging the interpretation of the concept in the political sense and employing it at the theoretical and practical levels. He advanced his theory in a series of lectures in 1970, which was smuggled into Iran when he was in exile and distributed to his supporters; and now forms the basis of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁴⁹ In other words, he not only transformed *Vilayat-e-Faqih* into a full-fledged political ideology but also implemented it in a modern nation state.⁵⁰

Khomeini’s Islamic Constitution: Qualified Democracy

Apart from the provision of *Vilayat-e-Faqih*, the Constitutional Law of the Islamic

Republic of Iran (*qanun-i-asasi-yi Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran*), which was ratified by a referendum in December 1979, had certain other interesting features.

There was an attempt to synthesise the Vilayat-e-Faqih doctrine with democracy. The just jurist (*faqih al-adil*), in addition to having splendid spiritual, moral, intellectual and religious education, must be “recognised and accepted as Leader by the majority of the people”. However, the supreme leader, or leadership council, was to be chosen by “experts elected by the people” (Articles 5 and 107). In the words of Black:

A National Consultative Assembly (majlis), and also provincial and other local councils, are to be elected, following the practice of shura (articles 6 and 7). Legislation by the majlis is subject to scrutiny by the Guardian Council, which consists of six Religious Jurists, selected by the Leader or Leadership Council, and six other jurists elected “from among the Muslim jurists nominated by the Supreme Judicial Council” (articles 91, 94, 96 and 98).⁵¹

Therefore, Iran conducts elections for the position of the president, its majlis (or parliament), its assembly of experts (which elects the supreme leader) and local councils. According to the Constitution, all candidates running for these positions must be vetted by the Guardian Council before being elected. So, Iran Constitution adopted modern republican elements in its Islamist polity.

Khomeini believed in Muslim unity and worked hard on exporting his revolution throughout the world. He believed that Shia and Sunni Muslims should be “united and stand firmly against Western and arrogant powers”, particularly the US, whom he repeatedly called “Iblees” (leader of the devils in Islam) and the Great Satan in his speeches.⁵² Shortly after assuming power, Khomeini called on Muslims of the world to wage Islamic revolutions worldwide. The pronouncement caused consternation in many neighbouring Sunni countries, ruled by monarchs. No wonder they supported Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, when he launched a war against Iran that lasted eight years (1980–88) and killed over half a million people.

Under Khomeini’s rule, a strict Islamic dress code was rigorously enforced. The women were required to cover their hair and men were forbidden to wear shorts. Alcoholic drinks, most Western movies and the practice of men and women swimming or sunbathing together were banned. The broadcasting of any music other than martial or religious on Iranian radio and television was also banned by Khomeini in July 1979. In addition, he imposed capital punishment on

homosexuals. According to Janet Afari, “the newly established regime of Ayatollah Khomeini moved quickly to repress feminists, ethnic and religious minorities, liberals, and leftists—all in the name of Islam.”⁵³

Saudi Arabia: Wahhabi Dissidence and the Siege of Mecca (1979)

Established in 1932 by King Abdulaziz (also known as Ibn Saud), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia united the four regions of the Arabian Peninsula: Hejaz (western region having the holy cities of Mecca and Medina); Najd (Central Arabia, which was the seat of the Emirate of Diriyah, the first Saudi state, in 1727); parts of Eastern Arabia (which included the governorate of Qatif that had major oilfields and large Shia population); and Southern Arabia (Asir and Najran provinces, with the latter having a large Ismaili Shia population).⁵⁴

Abdulaziz built the kingdom through a series of conquests, starting with the capture of Riyadh in 1902 (then called the third Saudi state). Then, with the aid of Ikhwan (a radicalised Wahhabi militia made up of newly Islamicised Bedouins) and the British, he took control of the four above-mentioned regions and declared himself King of Hejaz in 1926.⁵⁵ However, the zealotry of Ikhwan was difficult to contain even for Abdulaziz and the militia started raiding the British protectorates of Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait. Under British pressure, Abdulaziz turned against the Ikhwan and after a two year struggle, massacred its leadership in the decisive Battle of Sabilla (1929).⁵⁶ From that time onwards, the more extreme elements of Wahhabism became enemies of the Wahhabi state, and their threat resurfaced and haunted the kingdom often.⁵⁷

For instance, in 1979, Juhayman Al-Otaibi’s group captured the Kaaba compound (called Masjid Al-Haram) to herald the year 1400 Hijri in the Islamic calendar (with some Hadeeth tradition suggesting that the fourteenth century ushers in the apocalypse). This group called itself the Ikhwan (the name of the first group of dissidents Abdulaziz had defeated in 1929) and came from Al-Jamaa Al-Salafiyya Al-Muhtasiba (a Salafi group formed by the disciples of radical Wahhabi thinker Muhammad Nasiruddin Albani and supported by Abd Al-Aziz ibn Abdullah ibn Baz, who later in life became the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia).⁵⁸

Incensed by the ruler’s introduction of modernism into the kingdom’s highly conservative society with the advent of television, radio, cars, etc., Al-Otaibi took control of the holiest mosque in Islam by championing his associate and brother-in-law, Mohammed Abdullah Al-Qahtani, to be the Mahdi, the promised saviour of Muslims near the end times, who had come to remove the king and begin a

new messianic age.⁵⁹ Al-Qahtani was killed in the recapture of the mosque, while Al-Otaibi and 67 of his fellow fighters who survived the fighting were beheaded. However, the threat of ultra-Wahhabi elements taking over the Saudi state started to haunt the rulers.

This Grand Mosque seizure incident put a stop to the tepid social modernisation of the Saudi kingdom after 1979, which also faced a threat from the Iranian Revolution that broke out the same year and had started provoking the Shia in the Qatif province against the Saudi state. Following the attack, the Saudi rulers implemented stricter enforcement of Shariah and gave the *ulema* (some co-opted from the ranks of the extremists themselves) more power in the coming decades. They also exported radicalised youth, who could endanger internal security, to foreign lands like Afghanistan to fight jihad, spread Wahhabism and counter the threat from Khomeini's revolution.

Status of Religion in Saudi Government

The Sunni Islam of the Salafi school (which non-Saudi detractors of Salafism dub as Wahhabism) is not just a religion but a complete way of life in the kingdom. Despite recent attempts at moderation by Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, Salafi Islam is still strictly observed by the majority of the population and is all-pervasive. According to Article 1 of the 1992 Basic Law of Governance: "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book, The Holy Quran, and the Sunna (Traditions) of the Prophet (PBUH). Arabic is the language of the Kingdom."⁶⁰

Like Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia gives its *ulema* a direct role in the government. However, Robert Baer states that since the time of its establishment, the influence of the *ulema* has been only in specific sectors of governance. According to an arrangement with the Saudi royal family, the *ulema* or religious establishment has "control of the mosques, culture, and education", but it "would never go near core political issues, such as royal succession, foreign policy, and the armed forces".⁶¹

The *ulema* has historically been led by the Al Ash-Sheikh family, the descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, second in prestige only to the Al-Saud (the royal family). This is thanks to the still extant pact made in 1744 between Sheikh Muhammad ibn Saud and the theologian Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. In addition, a Council of Senior Scholars advises the king on religious matters.

The so-called religious police, called *haia* or *mutaween*, patrols the streets,

enforcing Islamic dress codes, separation of men and women in public places, attendance at prayer in mosques five times each day, the ban on alcohol, etc. However, their intrusive actions have been put under check following the reforms undertaken by the present Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. The mutaween are now banned from pursuing, questioning, asking for identification, arresting and detaining anyone suspected of a crime. The punishment of flogging and the death penalty for minors has also been disallowed now. In addition, the ban on women driving motor vehicles has been lifted.⁶²

However, Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood version has become a major security hazard for most Gulf Cooperation Council countries, including Saudi Arabia. In recent years, the political activities of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Sahwa movement, led by Safar Al-Hawali, Salman Al-Awda and Awad bin Mohammad Al-Qarni, have been curtailed in the country. The UAE has also cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Islamist group Al-Islah.⁶³

The Concept of Jihad in Islam

In mainstream media, jihad is often understood as a monovalent concept related to “militant violence”, “terrorism” and “armed combat”. However, the word jihad in Islam refers to “struggle” and “striving” for a righteous cause. *Ibn Rushd (Averroes) has divided jihad into four categories:*⁶⁴ (i) jihad of the heart or struggle against the self (Arabic transliteration: *jihad bil qalb/nafs*—deemed *jihad al-akbar* or the “greater” jihad);⁶⁵ (ii) jihad of the tongue/pen or striving with education, the pursuit of knowledge and counsel (*jihad bil lisan/qalam*); (iii) jihad of the hand or development of civil society and material progress (*jihad bil yad*); and (iv) jihad of the sword or combative war (*jihâdun bissayf*, the combative war, also sometimes called *qital fi sabilillah*—armed combat for the sake of God only in exceptional circumstances).⁶⁶

It is thus evident that even when jihad is used in the context of armed combat, it does not purport indiscriminate violence. In fact, it comes with a strict code of conduct and inviolable rules of military engagement. In her brilliant treatise, *Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought and History*,⁶⁷ Asma Afsaruddin writes that the earliest Islamic scholars were very clear about the Quranic injunction that forbade initiating aggression by stating, “God does not love aggressors” (Quran 2:190).⁶⁸ This is a clear and general prohibition against initiating hostilities under any circumstances. In its normative usage, jihad refers to the struggle against evil within the mind and soul of an individual and at the collective level — be it for

gaining knowledge, charity, development or related to warfare when it is unavoidable.

Afsaruddin cites early Islamic scholar Mujahid b. Jabr (d. AD 722), who preached that Muslims should not fight until the other side commences fighting.^{69,70} Other Quranic exegetes, like Muqatil bin Sulayman, Abi Rabah, Ibn Abbas and Al-Qummi, stated that Islam provided immunity to non-combatants and were also insistent about waging defensive jihad. Muqatil b. Sulayman (d. 150/767), in fact, said that an enemy should be engaged in fighting upon the contingent the enemy initiates hostilities.⁷¹ Clearly, only defensive jihad is advocated in schools of Islamic law.

Imam Abu Sufyan Al-Thawri states that “fighting idol-worshippers is not an obligation unless the initiation comes from them.”⁷² He then cites the Quranic verse (60:8) to support his claim: “Allah forbids you not those who warred not against you on account of your religion and drove you not out from your homes, that you should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah loveth the just dealers.”⁷³

However, later scholars working for Umayyad and Abbasid rulers, mainly around the tenth century, found such peaceful verses that put humanitarian restrictions even during times of war inconvenient for achieving aggressive imperialist objectives. Theologians, like Al-Tabari, Said Al-Tanukhi, Abu Bakr Al-Sarukhshi and Ibn Qudama, during the Abbasid era, developed the view that jihad primarily meant Islamic warfare and was aggressive rather than defensive in nature.⁷⁴ Still, their views continued to be contested by several of their contemporary and later scholars and jurists, like Fakhr Al-Din Razi and Abu Abdullah Al-Qurtubi, who stuck to the position of the early Quran exegetes.

A central and recurring theme in Islamic jurisprudence is that war is only to be waged according to religious principle—*bellum pium* (pious war) and *bellumustum* (just war).⁷⁵ The classic volume in this regard is *The Book of the Law of Nations*, compiled by Muhammad bin Al-Hasan Al-Shaybani.

Indeed, it was during the time of the Umayyads and the Abbasids that Muslim theologians divided the world between “*dar al-Islam*” (land of Islam) and “*dar al-kufi*” (land of non-believers), sometimes even to settle issues related to territorial jurisprudence and not based on hostility.⁷⁶ Later, the coinages “*murakkabah*” (land with mixed population of Muslims and non-Muslims) as well as “*dar al-ahd*” (land of peace where both Muslims and non-Muslims could coexist) was

supposedly introduced by the radical thinker Ibn Taimiyyah in his fatwa of Mardin.⁷⁷

Rise of Salafi-Jihadism: An Ideological Offshoot of Islamism

Many radical ideologues of the twentieth century, who were not as keen on developing an Islamist counter to the secular, liberal or socialist political systems of the modern age, resorted to distorting the militant version of jihad by turning it into indiscriminate form of unending violence. This version of Jihad became an ideology in its own right, which was ostensibly meant to achieve questionable Islamist polity but a cult of unceasing violence, which sought to justify itself through dubious eschatological interpretations in Hadeeth literature related to formation of an end time global caliphate.

Hence, though jihadism grew out of Islamism as a militant path to achieve an Islamic caliphate, it has become a war-like cult or somewhat of an apocalyptic cult different from Islamism itself. The evolution of this ideology, which took over a century, has unfortunately been associated with the Salafi school of Sunni Islam and is known as Salafi-jihadism or “Jihadi-Salafism”, as the French political scientist Giles Keppel first called it in 2002.⁷⁸ Salafi-jihadism has come up with concepts and methodologies that are quite different from the terms used by Islamists. It has made militant jihad an essential Islamic incumbent (*fard al-ain*), and has also introduced distorted connotations of *tawheed*, *takfeer* (declaring person or community *kafir* to allow slaughter), *al-wala-al bara* (loyalty and disavowal), *hakamiyya* (sovereignty), *nikaya* (war of attrition), *tamkeen* (political and military consolidation), *hijra* (migration), *khilafah* (Caliphate), etc.^{79,80}

Sayyid Qutb: Jihad against “Jahiliyya” (Modern Pagan Socio-political System)

It has been said that Sayyid Qutb (1900–66) is the “philosopher of Islamic terror and godfather ideologue of Al-Qaeda”.⁸¹ A secular man of letters until the 1930s, Qutb’s outlook on modernity changed during his stay in the US from 1948 to 1950, and he became a harsh critic of Western materialistic culture and liberal capitalism.

On his return from America, Qutb began championing an Islamic way of life above all religions and socio-political systems. He mocked the Islamic canonical injunction on defensive jihad and called for an active, offensive jihad against all secular governments of the West and the Muslim world, including the rule of Gemal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, his home country.

He compared the twentieth-century political systems to the pagan (*Jabiliyya*) system of pre-Islamic Arabia and called for its replacement with Shariah-based true and just Islamic society. Arrested and jailed for nearly a decade for plotting the assassination of President Nasser, Qutb was executed in 1966. However, he was viewed by radical ideologues as a martyr, and even Khomeini, on coming to power, issued an Iranian postage stamp in Qutb's honour showing him behind bars.

Qutb acknowledged his intellectual indebtedness to Maududi and echoed him by claiming that sovereignty belonged to God alone, but it had been violated by Western humanists who place man above God in their secular worldview.⁸² In his famous work, *Ma'lim fi Al-Tariq* ("Milestones Along the Way"), Qutb wrote: "Any system in which the final decisions are referred to human beings...deifies human beings by designating others than God as lords over men."⁸³

In the words of noted counter-terrorism expert A.E. Stahl:

The true meaning of Jihad has very little to do with Qutb's radical distortion of the term. Yet, due to misunderstandings in, inter alia, the mass media, the true meaning of the word became wrongly associated with Qutb's offensive jihad and wrongly associated with Islam itself.⁸⁴

Thus, Qutb ultimately "broke with mainstream Islam" with his adaptation of jihad.⁸⁵

Mohammad Farag: Jihad as "Essential Incumbent" (Fard Al-Ain)

Mohammad Abd Al-Salam Farag (1954–82) was a young radical jihadist who led the Cairo branch of the terrorist group Al-Jihad. He was executed in 1982 for his role in coordinating the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

An admirer of Sayyid Qutb, Al-Farag propagated his message in a radical pamphlet, *Al-Farida Al-Ghaiba* ("The Neglected Obligation"),⁸⁶ wherein he argued that violent jihad was an essential duty in Islam that stood alongside the five fundamental pillars of worship in Islam, namely, shahada, salat (known as 'namaz' in subcontinent), sawm (or 'roza' - fasting during month of Ramadan), *zakat* and the Hajj.

He dismissed Islamic scholars who emphasised that inner spiritual cleansing was the "greater jihad" and claimed that the cited Hadeeth in this regard was a fabricated tradition. He further asserted that jihad was *fard al-ain* (incumbent on every Muslim for perpetuity) and not the normative *fard al-kifayah* (to be conducted in the time of an existential threat and issued by the ruler). He also

believed that the immediate targets for violent jihad should be Muslim regimes because they had failed to enforce the Shariah rule. In fact, Farag is held responsible for coining the term “near enemy” to describe modern Muslim states, which gain priority as targets for jihadists over “far enemies”, such as the US or Israel.

Abdullah Azzam: Non-Negotiable, Perpetual, Transnational Jihad

The mentor of Bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam is known for introducing non-state militant cadres and transnational jihad and discounting any talks or negotiations. Most Salafi-jihadists have followed his famous slogan, “Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, and no dialogues”.

Although the Prophet had himself signed peace treaties with polytheists of Mecca, Azzam made jihad perpetual, non-negotiable and transnational with his contention that “such defense was a personal obligation”.⁸⁷ Moreover, although Hadeeth literature prohibits it, Azzam allowed children to participate in militant jihad without the permission of parent, and women to join in the fight without the permission of their husbands.⁸⁸ Thus, he said: “Many Muslims know about the hadeeth in which the Prophet ordered his companions not to kill any women or children, etc., but very few know that there are exceptions to this case.”⁸⁹

Bin Laden: Terrorism as Legitimate Form of Jihad

On 24 April 2002, Osama bin Laden released an extended statement which outlined Al-Qaeda’s religious justification for killing civilians in a total war against the US, titled, “A Statement from Qaidat Al-Jihad Regarding the Mandates of the Heroes and the Legality of the Operations in New York and Washington”.⁹⁰ He listed several conditions to invalidate Islam’s prohibition against the killing of civilians and against terrorism as a ploy to defeat the enemy. His conditions included:

- The norm of reciprocity, that is, when an aggressor, like the US, conducts a military operation in which a large number of civilians are killed.
- The inability to distinguish civilians from combatants in the theatre of war is not restricted to traditional battlefields.
- The role of civilians in aiding the enemy and their responsibility in electing democratic representatives that launch wars against Muslim states.
- The transformation of enemy “strongholds” that are no longer just military targets but economic centres, like the World Trade Center, which financially support the military.

- The use of modern weaponry which invariably entails collateral damage.
- The acceptability of killing women and children if the enemy uses them as human shields (called *turs*).
- The enemy's violation of agreements or treaties (like the Sykes–Picot Agreement's betrayal) that puts the lives of Muslim populations in danger.⁹¹

Al-Suri, Abu Bakr Naji and Al-Muhajir: Licence to Indiscriminate Violence

An Al-Qaeda ideologue until the 2001 US War on Afghanistan, Abu Musab Al-Suri eventually became critical of Bin Laden's leadership and devised his theory of “*nizam, la tanzim*” (system, without organisation) for jihadism. He sought to give religious sanction to “disaffiliated jihad”, by which he meant licence to wanton acts of terrorism through lone-wolf operators. His online book, *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, became a big draw. Al-Suri's sanction of lone-wolf operators was criticised by many Islamic scholars, including the Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh Abd Al-Aziz Al-Shaikh, and Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi.⁹²

In the book, *Idarat Al-Tawabbush* (“Management of Savagery”), published online in 2004, Abu Bakr Naji called on jihadists to carry out merciless acts of savagery in order to psychologically weaken and terrorise the overwhelmingly strong adversary. The book stated:

The increase in savagery is not the worst thing that can happen now or (as it has already happened) in the previous decade or those before it. Rather, the most abominable of the levels of savagery is less (abominable) than stability under the order of unbelief.⁹³

Terrence McCoy of *The Washington Post*⁹⁴ and former MI-6 agent Alastair Croke⁹⁵ confirm that Naji's book served as a guide for warfare for the ISIS in its military strategy and operations.

Another treatise written by Abu Abdullah Al-Muhajir is *Fiqh Al-Dima* (or the Jurisprudence of the Blood). This 569-page text sanctions the ISIS mutilation of corpses, trade in human organs, killing of children and other ghastly war crimes.⁹⁶

The ISIS: Caliphate of the “End Times”

Although Al-Qaeda was waging a political war against the West, the ISIS introduced the apocalyptic narrative into the jihadist discourse. By calling its proto-state a seed caliphate, it envisioned itself as the group destined to unleash

the prophesised *Al Malahamal Kubra* (an end time war mentioned in the Hadeeth literature), which would usher in the rule of the promised Mahdi and the prophesised Messiah.⁹⁷

The ISIS named its online magazines based on two cities with apocalyptic significance in Islamic eschatology, *Dabiq* and *Rumaiyyah*. According to Islamic religious teachings, it is wrong to speculate about the future. Even the Hadeeth literature speaking about future occurrences has mystical overtones and cannot be taken at face value.

The perversity of the ISIS' thinking makes it more of a doomsday cult than a movement championing the cause of Islam. It is clearly far removed from the teachings of the religion it professes to espouse.

Modern Islamic Scholarship against Islamism

Many Islamic scholars have opposed the movement of Islamism or Political Islam in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and regard Islam primarily as a religion rather than as a political system. Those who have opposed the politicisation of Islam include conservative *ulema*, academicians, thinkers as well as Muslim liberals and socialists.

Ali Abd Al-Raziq: Islam is Apolitical, Caliphate not a Divine Institution

As early as 1925, some Muslim scholars started warning about the rise of Political Islam or Islamism as a new threat (just before the birth of the Muslim Brotherhood) that would cause immense harm to both the Muslim world and international peace and security. It was in the same year that Ali Abd Al-Raziq (1888–1966), a disciple of Muhammad Abduh and a critic of his colleague Rasheed Rida, wrote the book, *Islam and the Principles of Governance*.

Abd Al-Raziq was an Oxford scholar who became a senior member of Egypt's Al-Azhar University and echoed Chiragh Ali's views on the place of politics in Islam. As an Islamic scholar (*alim*), Al-Raziq proclaimed that the Prophet did not set out to establish a state and Islam did not lay down any particular political system. Here, "we meet for the first time a consistent, unequivocal theoretical assertion of the purely and exclusively religious character of Islam".⁹⁸ Instead, Al-Raziq asserted the rules which the Prophet laid down related to spiritual matters, such as prayer and fasting, and "all of those apparently political actions, even warfare, are means for the Prophet to establish the religion and promulgate his religious call."⁹⁹

Thus, Al-Raziq claimed that the social norms of the Shariah could be changed as they were developed out of specific historical circumstances. He stressed that as the caliphate was itself a product of history and was not instituted by the Prophet, it had no divine origin. Emphasising that the caliphate was a purely political office with no religious significance or role, he stated:

All political functions are left to us, our reason, its judgements and political principles. Religion...neither commands nor forbids [such things], it simply leaves them to us so that in respect of them we have recourse to the laws of reason, the experience of nations and the rules of politics.¹⁰⁰

Muhammad Said Al-Ashmawi: The Damage Caused by Political Islam

Muhammad Said Al-Ashmawi (1932–2013), the acclaimed judge of the Egyptian Supreme Court, was a prominent Islamic scholar who analysed the dangers of Political Islam for the Muslim society. According to him, the politicisation of Islam had produced dangerous consequences for the Muslim world in recent decades. The existence of political groups that used Islam as an ideology had weakened the spiritual and moral compass of Islam. Even in historical times, the linking of political power to heaven projected many Muslim leaders and caliphs as being infallible agents of God, which led to tyranny and corruption in government, as well as hindered development of rational thought. Al-Ashmawi felt that it was now time to differentiate the spiritual and intellectual fundamentals of Islam from the distortions of radical and political fundamentalism.¹⁰¹

According to him, many ethnic and nationalist issues—which are purely political in nature—were given a religious twist over the centuries, which, in turn, caused sectarian splits within the religion and introduced harshness and hatred in the ecclesiastical discourse. Political Islam had also hindered the Muslim world from learning humanitarian principles and in developing scientific temper of the West. He said that instead of associating Sharia with legal rules, the term is used in the Quran as the “path of Islam”, which covers three constituents: worship, ethical code and social interaction.¹⁰²

He further argued that several factions of Political Islam called on Muslims to give up loyalty towards their countries, claiming that loyalty is a kind of ignorance and that proper loyalty should be extended towards the larger Muslim community of the world. Such dubious messaging gave birth to a kind of anarchism, destroying the loyalty of the population towards their respective

countries, and made them a threat to the law and order in their own countries and across the globe. This led to people revolting against their governments without any legitimate demands, ignoring the law, avoiding payment of taxes, and becoming averse to participating in the country's political life, joining the military or even being part of the mainstream society.

In fact, according to Al-Ashmawi, the idea of the larger “Muslim community” was very vague and could not be clearly drawn the way nationalism could be visualised. Therefore, the call for loyalty towards such a vague and scattered entity created political and social unrest.

Mohammed Arkoun: Jurists Decontextualised Quran

One of the most influential secular scholars in Islamic studies who contributed immensely to Islamic reform was the great Algerian philosopher of Islam, Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010). Educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, Arkoun advocated Islamic modernism, secularism and humanism.

By employing a conceptual and historical approach, Arkoun convincingly demonstrated the way Islamic schools of jurisprudence invented legal techniques to “de-historicize and decontextualize” Islam's holy book, the Quran. By fabricating social and historical narratives as the only acceptable interpretation of the scripture, Arkoun showed that the narratives served to promote the power struggles and conflict of interests in early Islamic history after the life of the Prophet. In Arkoun's view, consensus and obsolete jurisprudential augmentation models displayed a lack of historical legitimacy and methodological soundness, serving more to protect the interests of certain social classes (such as the jurists) than to pursue a correct understanding of Islam.¹⁰³

By critiquing Islamic jurisprudential reasoning, Arkoun sought to clear the minds of modern Muslims from dogmatic ideas and religious authorities whose views are not sacrosanct. Being a votary of freedom, he promoted critical thinking to enable Muslims to contribute to the progress of human civilisation and engage in a meaningful exchange of knowledge with others.¹⁰⁴

Several other Arab Muslim scholars studied in France, just like Arkoun. They approached the Quran from a rational and philosophical rather than conventional theological perspective to reform Islam in accordance with the needs of modern society. Prominent among these are Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Hasan Hanif and even the noted Iranian scholar Abdolkarim Soroush.

Fazlur Rahman Malik: "Apostate" Pakistani Scholar Exiled to the US

An Islamic modernist, who was declared an "apostate" by conservative clerics in Pakistan and exiled to the US, where he taught at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Chicago, Fazlur Rahman Malik called for the revival of independent reasoning (ijtihad) for much-needed reforms.

He criticised Islamists or so-called Islamic revivalists who believed the main challenge facing the Muslim world was the process of secularisation, which they claimed to be the "removal of religious value from all aspects of society except that defined as specifically religious".¹⁰⁵ Thus, according to Rahman, the main goal of the Islamic revivalists was to arrest the process of secularisation and the so-called "de-Islamisation" in Muslim societies. The underlying assumption of the revivalists was that the same "Islam" which existed in the early Islamic community was also capable of empowering modern Islamic societies. Therefore, the very same Islamic institutions, legal codes and social mores of earlier times were suitable for present Islamic societies, with only minor variations needed.

Rahman vehemently opposed these simplistic assumptions. To him, the revival of modern Islamic societies required much more than following the trite and hackneyed Islamic institutions and behaviours, and he was opposed to abandoning Western institutions and behaviours. He criticised the position of the revivalists: "To insist on a literal implementation of the rules of the Quran, shutting one's eyes to the social change that has occurred and that is palpably occurring before our eyes, is tantamount to deliberately defeating its moral-social purposes and objectives."¹⁰⁶

Rahman insisted that the illness afflicting modern Muslim societies was rooted in a faulty Islamic methodology, not in the process of secularisation. He contended that the decline of Muslim power did not occur because of Western invasions and influences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but because of the intellectual ossification that had set in after the collapse of the Abbasids in the thirteenth century. Like Malek Bennabi, Rahman insisted that Muslims became colonised because they had become "colonizable".¹⁰⁷

Rahman proposed a new methodology that strived to draw a clear distinction between "historical Islam and normative Islam".¹⁰⁸ He stated that if one reads the Quran carefully, repeated exhortations for taking care of the poor, the widows, the orphans and the destitute can be found. Similarly, the Quran warns that the rich hoard wealth, do not encourage the feeding of the poor, usurp the rights of the orphan and are malevolent towards the widows. However, these social

responsibilities were not mentioned enough by scholars and exegetes. Similarly, Fazlur Rahman pointed out that the Quran opposed exorbitant usury on the poor, as was practised in the Prophet's time in the Arab world. However, he did not place modern interest taken by banks to promote trade and business in that category.

Many Muslim feminists, such as Amina Wadud and Sadiya Shaikh, regard Fazlur Rahman as a feminist, although he never categorised himself as such. He, however, believed that though the Quran insists that a man should only engage in polygamy if he can do justice towards all his wives, it later claims that a man is incapable of doing justice to more than one wife. Therefore, he said that the Quran recommends monogamy. He also cited the examples of the Prophets' wives (Khadija and Ayesha) being businesswomen, which traditional *ulema* would not allow modern Muslim women to be.¹⁰⁹ In addition, in political matters, Fazlur Rahman called on Muslim scholars to champion social justice in their polities and extend the concept of shura to include inclusive democratic values.¹¹⁰

After Rahman, many other Islamic scholars who condemn terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and the ISIS and even the hudud laws (Islamic penal laws), as enforced in Pakistan, have had to live outside the country. Out of these, Tahir-ul Qadri and Javed Ghamdi are two prominent names. Whereas Tahir-ul Qadri is known for his 600-page *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombing* (among several similar works), Javed Ghamdi has published deeply researched and insightful Islamic counter-narratives against extremist and terrorist propaganda.

Abdullahi An-Naim: Secular State Vital for Practising Islam

Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, a Sudanese religious thinker, and his admirer, Abdullahi An-Naim, introduced brilliant and compelling ideas about the dynamic nature of Islamic thought, long ossified under juristic stagnation.

Taha (1909–85) stated that the verses of the Quran revealed in the Medinan phase (when the Prophet also became a political figurehead) were appropriate in their time as the basis of Islamic law. Nevertheless, the verses revealed in Mecca (often considered abrogated by jurists) genuinely represented that the ideal and universal religion would be revived when humanity had reached a stage of development capable of accepting them. Thus, Taha interpreted the distinction between these two phases in the Prophet's career differently than Islamists, who focus mainly on the Medinan phase.

One of Taha's more eloquent disciples, Abdullah An-Naim (b. 1946),

summarises Taha's views as follows:

Islam...was offered first in tolerant and egalitarian terms in Mecca, where the Prophet preached equality and individual responsibility between all men and women without distinction on grounds of race, sex or social origin. As that message was rejected in practice...some aspects of the message changed in response to the socio-economic and political realities of the time.¹¹¹

In his own right, An-Naim is no less an original Islamic thinker. He urges Muslims to exercise *ijtihad*, which he equates with "civic reason". Just as Muhammad Said Al-Ashmawi, he emphasises on the ethical aspects of the Shariah rather than its legal prescriptions.

Further, like Maulana Madani of India, An-Naim argues in his book, *Islam and the Secular State*, the case for a secular state on religious grounds. According to him, only if the state is devoid of religious bias will Muslims be able to practise their faith entirely voluntarily, which is the only way any religion is meant to be practised.¹¹²

Many scholars consider Sudan's former Foreign Minister Hasan Al-Turabi (1932–2016) and Doha-based Egyptian scholar Yusuf Qaradawi (b. 1926) as moderate Islamists. Although Al-Turabi is known for championing monogamy and women's right to divorce, his links to terrorist organisations and his role as the "true architect" in bringing the brutal Al-Bashir regime in Sudan to power make him a highly controversial figure. Similarly, Qaradawi's anti-Semitic remarks, condoning Palestinian suicide bombers, and Saudi Arabia's allegations that he has links with terror groups have soiled his reputation.

In comparison, Rached Ghannouchi (b. 1941) of Tunisia is still highly regarded, even in the West, as a "democratic Islamist". He has been named one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World in 2012 and Foreign Policy's Top 100 Global Thinkers. In addition, he has been awarded Chatham House Prize in 2012 and the Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 2016 for "promoting Gandhian values outside India".

Though Ghannouchi champions multi-party democracy, claiming that it is acceptable in Islam, he endeared himself to his opponents when he applauded the courage of the leftists who came out on the streets of Tunisia during the Arab Spring. Like a typical Islamist, he opposes homosexuality and gay marriage, but disapproves of it being criminalised.

In present times, a religious scholar of great eminence who opposes extremist

Islamist ideology is Abdallah bin Mahfudh ibn Bayyah (b. 1935). He has also been quoted by President Barack Obama during his speech before the UN Security Council in 2014. An Islamic scholar and professor of Islamic Studies at the King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, he has founded the UAE-based Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies. He is ably supported by his follower, Hamza Yusuf (b. 1958), a distinguished Islamic scholar in his own right.¹¹³

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PART III
HISTORY OF MUSLIM POLITICAL
THOUGHT IN SOUTH ASIA

*POLITICAL EXCLUSIVISM VERSUS
SYNCRETISM IN SOUTH ASIA*

16

Ingress of Islamic Political Rule and Thought into India (712–1526 CE)

*Delhi, the centre of religion and justice
Is the garden of Eden, and so populous.
If the splendor of this garden falls upon the ear
Mecca itself might go round it in reverence.*

—Amir Khusrau in *Qiranus Sadain*¹

In India, Muslim political rule was firmly established only around the thirteenth century when Islamdom had outgrown the monolithic Arab caliphal control and had started adopting values and customs of non-Arab cultures and, occasionally, even non-Islamic practices.

Although the Arabs had invaded Sindh in the eighth century, they failed to make inroads into the Indian heartland. Muslim invasions into the Gangetic plains only started in the eleventh and twelfth centuries under non-Arab Persianate and Turkic Ghaznavid and Ghurid rulers, who had newly converted to Sunni Islam from Buddhism. Along with Turkic traditions and Mongol influences, Persianate culture profoundly influenced the orientation of the neophyte rulers. So, the ingress of Islam as a political power in north India in the twelfth century already bore several eclectic influences as compared to the Arab caliphal rule which the countries of West Asia had to contend with since the seventh century.

India was, thus, introduced not just to Islam but also to what the Chicago historian Marshall Hodgson termed as an “Islamicate”,² which makes the distinction between religion on the one hand, and “the overall society and culture associated historically with the religion” on the other.³ Through the term Islamicate, Hodgson referred to characteristics of regions in which Muslims were culturally dominant, but were not, properly speaking, religious.

Early Arab Muslim Encounters with India

In the early eighth century, Arab Islamic polity under the Umayyad caliphs was struggling with its expansion, and the consequent exposure to foreign cultures, when it first encountered, what it claims, threats emanating towards it from Sindh. Contemporary Arab chroniclers, like Baladhuri, speak of “piracy” emanating from the Sindh region of western India as a threat to Arab sea trade since the time of the Rashidun Caliphs themselves.⁴ Although the second caliph, Umar, had disapproved of sea battles, his maritime forces did conduct a few raids through the Makran (Balochistan) region of the Indian subcontinent. After that, Caliph Uthman and the governor of Bahrain are said to have launched a failed expedition to Thana, near Mumbai, in 636 CE.⁵

According to Derryl Maclean, in the year 649 CE, a companion of the Prophet, Hakim ibn Jabalah Al-Abdi, travelled to Sindh and then to Makran, and presented a report on the area to Caliph Uthman.⁶ Later, he supported Caliph Ali and died in the Battle of the Camel alongside Sindhi Jats (called Az-Zutt in Arabic), who had become Muslims and had come to Arabia to support Ali.⁷ Subsequently, in the reign of Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan (661–680 CE), the region of Makran was subdued and a garrison was stationed there.

Spread of Islam in Kerala from Seventh Century

Islam came to Kerala in the seventh century, earlier than its advent in the north of the country from the eighth century onwards. It came to Kerala through Muslim traders (mainly spice and silk traders) in the ports of Malabar.⁸ Muslim tombstones with medieval dates, short inscriptions in old mosques and rare Arab coin collections testify to the presence of Muslims on the Malabar Coast in the seventh century.

Legend has it that a Hindu king, Cheraman Perumal Tajuddin, left for Arabia to meet Prophet Muhammad and converted to Islam.⁹ Muslims in Kerala also believe that the Cheraman Juma Mosque in Kodungallur in Thrissur district was

built in 629 CE (that is, during the lifetime of the Prophet). However, historians generally doubt this date and believe Islam may have come to Kerala only in the early ninth century.

Nonetheless, Kerala has remained more closely influenced by developments in the Arab world than north India, with the latter being more exposed to the Turkic–Persian Islamic orientation. In the words of Ronald Miller: “The Arab affinity has affected and continues to affect the language, religion, and culture of the ‘Mappilas’ (predominant community among Kerala Muslims coming from north of the state) more profoundly than those of any other Indian Muslim.”¹⁰

Arab Conquest of Sindh

The first significant military campaign by Arabs in the Indian subcontinent took place in 712 CE.¹¹ The immediate cause of this invasion was the supposed plundering of eight Arab ships that were taking gifts from the king of Ceylon to Caliph Abd Al-Malik and his dreaded Umayyad commander, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, at the port of Debal (near today’s Karachi). Some historical accounts state that the looted ships also carried beautiful women and valuable articles for the caliph.

Hajjaj demanded compensation from King Dahir of Sindh for the looted ships. However, Dahir rejected the demand saying that he had no control over the pirates. This angered Hajjaj, who took permission from the caliph to launch the invasion of Sindh. After two of Hajjaj’s commanders failed to punish Dahir, the dreaded commander sent his 15–17-year-old nephew and son-in-law, Muhammad bin Qasim, to lead a major expedition. *Chach Nama* (a purported historical text on the life of Muhammad bin Qasim) states that Qasim marched at the head of a strong army through Shiraz (in Iran) and Makran and carried *ballistae* (large wooden catapults to throw stones at forts and distant targets) with him towards Debal.

It is said that each of the ballistae used by Qasim required 500 trained men to operate. These giant catapults were sent by sea to join the main army at Debal. Dahir’s garrison inside the stone fortification at Debal offered strict resistance, but the bombardment of rocks by the ballistae forced them to capitulate. After several similar battles in Nirun, south of modern Hyderabad, Sehwan (a commercial centre) and lower Sindh, Muhammad bin Qasim fought and killed Dahir in Brahmanabad in June 712 CE and married his widow, Rani Ladi. In a few months, he even captured the capital, Aror, held by the raja’s son. After capturing both lower and upper Sindh, Qasim proceeded towards Multan, which also surrendered after some resistance.¹²

Muhammad bin Qasim sent a fifth of the war booty (*ghanima*) to the caliph's treasury and distributed the rest among the army. The non-Muslim civilians were then divided into three categories for the imposition of *jizya* (the poll tax), with people in the highest income bracket paying as much as 48 dirhams of silver; the middle-income groups, 24 dirhams; and the lowest class, 12 dirhams. The number of common people was counted to be about 10,000. After that, a ruling was received from Hajjaj that since the people of Sindh had accepted the status of being "dhimmis" (protected minorities), they would be permitted to pray in their temples and even build new temples.¹³

There are two conflicting accounts of Qasim's death on 18 July 715 CE in Mosul, Iraq. According to the Arab historian Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Jabir Al-Baladhuri, he was killed due to a family feud with the governor of Iraq.¹⁴ However, the more popular albeit less reliable account, according to historians, is given in the *Chach Nama*, which claims to be a Persian translation by a certain Ali Kufi (in the thirteenth century) of an undated, original Arabic text. The text concludes with the death of Muhammad bin Qasim which was supposedly caused by the false charge made to the caliph by the daughters of Dahir, who had been taken captive and allegedly forced into slavery after the campaign. The account relates that they tricked the caliph into believing that Qasim had already violated their chastity before sending them on. As a result of this deception, Qasim was wrapped and stitched in oxen hides and sent to Baghdad, which resulted in his death en route from suffocation.¹⁵

However, many modern historians doubt the *Chach Nama* account because the capital of the caliphate under the Umayyads was Damascus and not Baghdad, and because of other anachronisms and errors in the historical details given in it. There are conflicting views about Muhammad bin Qasim among historians.¹⁶ Some historians like H.M. Elliot, Cousens, Majumdar and Vaidya, suggest that he carried out coercive conversions, as much as his limited military forces could force the local population.¹⁷ Others, like noted Israeli historian Yohanan Friedmann along with India's Prof. D. N. Jha praise Muhammad bin Qasim for his conciliation of Brahmins to consolidate his power and his relative level of tolerance towards his non-Muslim subjects (Hindus and Buddhists) in Sindh.¹⁸

Some historians have gone to the extent of claiming that Muhammad bin Qasim equated Hindus with Jews and Christians (deemed as "People of the Book" in Islam) and not as infidels. Thus, Prof. Jha cites medieval historian Baladhuri reporting Muhammad bin Qasim's purported statement: "the idol temple is similar

to the churches of the Christians, (to the synagogues) of the Jews and the fire temples of the Zoroastrians (Arabic transliteration ‘*mâ al-budd illâ ka-kanâ^{3/4}is al-nacârâ wa ’l-yahûd wa-buyût nîrân al-madjûs’*),¹⁹. Perhaps, Friedmann’s assessment appears more plausible here that *Muhammad bin Qasim’s* policy towards non-Muslims varied from place to place.²⁰

In contrast, Pakistani historians have turned Muhammad bin Qasim into the “First Pakistani” in their nationalist historical discourse dating back to the early 1950s, in a bid to bring some historical legitimacy to their state. In fact, the Bagh ibn Qasim (the biggest park in Karachi) is named in honour of Muhammad bin Qasim by Pakistani state.

After Muhammad bin Qasim’s death, Arab governors continued to occupy Sindh well into the eighth and ninth centuries, until the Abbasid Caliphate started to decline. Then, Sindh became independent under the Habbari dynasty which ruled it for two centuries. After that, Sindh, Makran, Turan and Multan broke up under different dynasties; and each was an independent kingdom in the early eleventh century when the Ghaznavids invaded India. Largely, the Arabs were unsuccessful in penetrating India and remained confined to Sindh. According to Stanley Lane-Poole: “The Arabs had conquered Sindh but the conquest was only an episode in the history of India and of Islam, a triumph without results.”²¹

Indian Cultural Influence on Medieval Arab Society

From ancient times, the people of India and the Arabian Peninsula were well-acquainted with each other and had good relations in trade and business, leading to transmission of socio-cultural values. However, it was during the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad that cultural cooperation between India and the Arabs reached its acme, when several books on astronomy, mathematics, medicine and even political science were translated from Sanskrit into Arabic.

On the instructions of Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur, the great Indian mathematical treatise, *Brahma Siddhanta*, was translated into Arabic. It served as the foundation text for Arab astrologers of that time to compute the motion of the planets. Ibrahim Al-Fazari and Yaqub ibn Tariq translated the book, with the cooperation of Hindu pandits, in 750 CE and the Arabic translation was called, *Az-Zij alâ Sinî al-Arab* or *Sindhant Al-Kabir*.²² In fact, historians believe that the *Siddhanta* translation became the vehicle for the transmission of Indian numerals from India to Baghdad. Further, with the help of Hindu pundits, Al-Fazari also translated Brahmagupta’s book, *Khandakhadyaka*, and gave it the Arabic name of *Arkand*.²³

Both above-mentioned works were extensively used and exercised significant influence in the development of astronomy in the Muslim world. Thus, what the Western world today calls Arabic numerals were Indian numbers. The Arabic word for numbers is *Hindsab*, which means “from India”. Arab scientists in Iraq, especially Muhammad ibn Musa Al-Khwarizmi (9th century CE), used the new numbers, including the Indian invention of zero, to further develop algebra. In addition, some mathematical and astronomical terms were borrowed from Sanskrit.

In 750 CE, Ibn Muqaffa translated into Arabic the *Panchatantra* by the name *Kalila-wa-Dimna*, which inspired the political self-help books for leadership.²⁴ He also refers to *Chanakya Niti* as *Kitab Shanaq fil Tadbir*, which is a collection of political aphorisms in Sanskrit, not to be confused with Chanakya or Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*. The ethical advice of Chanakya (Shanaq) and works on logic and magic were translated, as catalogued by Ibn Nadim in his tenth-century *Kitab Al-Fihrist*. Similarly, the Spaniard Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Walid Al-Tartushi (1059–c. 1127) wrote the *Muntakhabul Jawahir* (Selected Gems), which included the precepts of Chanakya, as a guide for kings. The fascinating story of Sindbad was also partly of Indian origin. Even parts of Mahabharata were rendered into Arabic by Ali Jabali in 1026 CE.

Invasions of Mahmud Ghazni

Apart from sending the Umayyad forces to capture Sindh, Hajjaj launched more successful campaigns into Transoxiana. One of his generals, Qutayba bin Muslim, reached Shash (modern Tashkent); and in the east, the forces penetrated as deep as Kashgar (a city in today’s Xinjiang province of China). As a result, proselytisation in Transoxiana was more successful than in Sindh, and soon the entire region of Khorasan became the seat of the Samanid dynasty that ruled from 819 CE to 1005 CE.

In the tenth century, a newly converted rebellious Muslim commander of the Samanids, Alptigin, withdrew to the Balkh region and then conquered the city of Ghazni (in today’s southeastern Afghanistan) from Anuk, brother-in-law of Hindu Shahi ruler of the region, Kabul Shah.²⁵ After an extended period of infighting following Alptigin’s death in 963 CE, his bondservant and son-in-law, Subuktigin, seized power and became the ruler of Ghazni in 977 CE. In 986–87 CE, Hindu Shahi ruler Jayapala marched towards Ghazni, but his forces were defeated. Despite promising to not attack again, Jayapala decided on a second invasion after receiving support from other Hindu kings. However, he was once again defeated by Subuktigin. This enmity between Subuktigin and Jayapala made a deep impression

on the former's son, Mahmud, who ascended the throne after Subuktigin's death in 997 CE.

Initially, Mahmud focused his attention on the Samanids, who were a major threat to both his kingdom and the Abbasid Caliphate (then under Caliph Al-Qadir, 991–1031 CE). By 999 CE, Mahmud had crushed the Samanids and seized control of much of the Khorasan region. For this remarkable achievement, the grateful caliph bestowed upon Mahmud the title of *Yamin ud-Dawala* (right hand of the state) and *Amin-ul-Mulk* (trustee of the nation), though Mahmud only gave nominal allegiance to the weakened caliph. After conquering the Samanid vassal states of Khwarazm and Sistan, Mahmud turned his attention to his father's arch-foe, Jayapala, the Hindu Shahi ruler who reigned over a vast territory, from Lamghan to the river Chenab and from the hills of southern Chenab to Multan.

Lured by accounts of India's immense wealth and enmity with Jayapala, Mahmud is said to have vowed to invade India every year, which eventually led to the launch of 17 expeditions. By 1016 CE, Mahmud had defeated and killed Jayapala; his successor, Anandpala; and Jaypala's grandson, Sukhpala. He also eliminated the Ismaili Shia ruler of Multan, Abul Fath bin Daud, because of his alliance with Anandpala. Being a Sunni himself, Mahmud took great pride in wiping out the Ismailis in Multan and desecrating their mosques, along with Hindu temples. By 1018 CE, through repeated invasions, Mahmud had not only decimated many kingdoms in Punjab but also the Rajput resistance in Rajasthan. In September 1018 CE, Mahmud invaded east of Delhi and conquered Baran (Bulandshahar). The beautiful city of Mahaban (Mathura) surrendered, yet Mahmud destroyed many of its temples and collected vast amounts of booty.

Mahmud is most infamous for his expedition against the Somnath temple on the coast of Kathiawar. In October 1025 CE, he set out at the head of 30,000 regular cavalries and a vast army of volunteers for the grand temple through the inhospitable desert of Jaisalmer and Anhilwara. The Chalukyan king of Anhilwara, Bhudeva, offered resistance with his army of 20,000, but was soon routed. Then, early in January 1026 CE, the sultan was ready for the assault on the Somnath fortress by the seashore.

Although a later tradition stated that "50,000 devotees lost their lives in trying to stop Mahmud" during his sack of Somnath temple,²⁶ it is doubtful whether so many devotees were killed by Mahmud's smaller force. In fact, according to Romila Thapar, this was a boastful claim, "constantly reiterated" in Muslim texts to highlight "Mahmud's legitimacy in the eyes of established Islam".²⁷ In the raid,

the temple was desecrated, the *jyotirlinga* broken and a wealth of 20 million dinars was plundered. In April 1026 CE, Mahmud returned to Ghazni. In the same year, the last of the Hindu Shahi rulers, Bhimpala, breathed his last, ending the dynasty.²⁸

Mahmud took pride in calling himself *but-shikan* (idol-breaker). Still, he had Hindu fighters in his multi-racial army, who served under their own commander, *Salar-i-Hinduyan*. Indeed, the anonymous historian of *Tarikh-i-Sistan* has complained of ruthless massacres of Muslims and Christians by the pagan Indian troops of Mahmud.²⁹ In Sistan in 1003, they sacked a mosque and a church.³⁰

Mahmud's barbaric destruction of the Somnath temple embittered Hindu-Muslim relations for centuries, particularly in north India. While medieval Persian literature and modern Pakistani history books glorify the tragedy as a "historic jihad against non-Muslims", the rebuilding of the Somnath temple in the 1950s, says Donald Smith, became a moment of Hindu repudiation of "almost a thousand years of Muslim domination, and reassertion of Hindu supremacy" in post-Partition India.³¹

Al-Biruni (who worked in the Ghaznavi court and went with the sultan's troops in some of the raids into India), in *Kitab al-Biruni fi Tahqiq ma li-al-Hind*, the famous book that made him the founder of Indology, criticised Mahmud's invasion for "ruining the prosperity" of India.³² Moreover, according to him, it caused antagonism among the Hindus for "all foreigners" and triggered an exodus of scholars of Hindu sciences from the newly conquered Ghaznavid territory.³³

Ghurid Dynasty and the Delhi Sultanate

A Persianate dynasty of Tajik origin, the Ghurids (from the mountainous region of Ghur in Afghanistan) were initially vassals of the Ghaznavids, who had converted to Sunni Islam from Buddhism after Mahmud's invasion of Ghur in 1011 CE. However, they soon became independent and, in 1150 CE, captured and plundered the city of Ghazni, driving the Ghaznavids into Punjab. In 1186 CE, Sultan Muhammad of Ghur conquered the principality of Lahore, thereby overthrowing the Ghaznavid Empire altogether.

The Ghurids then confronted the Chauhan dynasty. They were initially defeated in the First Battle of Tarain in 1191 CE. However, Muhammad Ghuri vanquished King Prithviraj Chauhan in the Second Battle of Tarain in 1192 CE. Finally, in 1193 CE, Qutbuddin Aibaq of the Ghurid dynasty seized control of Delhi. After the death of Sultan Muhammad Ghuri in 1206 CE, Qutbuddin

Aibaq started the Mamluk dynasty in Delhi, marking the beginning of the Delhi Sultanate, which stretched over large parts of the Indian subcontinent for 320 years (1206–1526 CE).³⁴ The five dynasties that constituted the Delhi Sultanate in chronological order were: the Mamluk dynasty (1206–90 CE); the Khilji dynasty (1290–1320 CE); the Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1414 CE); the Sayyid dynasty (1414–51 CE); and the Lodi dynasty (1451–1526 CE).

In India's public imagination today, Delhi Sultanate is given little attention compared to the succeeding Mughal dynasty. Yet, at its peak, it controlled all of north India, Afghanistan and Bengal. Alauddin Khilji's general, Malik Kafur, even invaded the Pandya kingdom, with its capital in Madurai (today's Tamil Nadu), in 1310–11 CE. The Delhi Sultanate was also one of the few world empires that was able to repel attacks by the Mongols (from the Chagatai Khanate) and even enthroned a woman, Razia Sultan, who reigned from 1236 CE to 1240 CE—a rarity not just in the Muslim world but across the globe at that time.

India in the Sphere of Persianate *Ajam*

As mentioned earlier, Mahmud Ghazni paid informal obeisance to the Abbasid caliph of his time and destroyed Indian temples to burnish his Islamic credentials. However, ironically, it was his rule that marked the geographical and cultural ascendance of non-Arab Muslims in the Islamic world, marking a shift from the more sacred Arabic language to the relatively “secular” Persian. The gradual inclusion of India in the growing region of *Ajam* (non-Arabic-speaking Muslim world), from the eleventh to the nineteenth century, marked the political and cultural assertion of non-Arab Muslims against the hegemony of Arab rulers over the Muslim world.

Thus, the famous Persian poet Firdausi composed his great epic, *Shahnameh*, at Mahmud Ghazni's court, extolling the glorious feats of pre-Islamic Sassanid kings up until the Arab conquest of Persia. Later Muslim rulers of India may not have glorified India's pre-Islamic past because of their Persian and Turkic origins, but they patronised Persian language and literature in a growing rivalry of the sphere of *Ajam* against the Arab in the Islamic world. In the words of Muzaffar Alam, “North Indian Muslim rulers remained under the hegemony of the resurrected *Ajam*. The courts of Delhi sultans imitated the ancient Sassanid culture wholesale, and rulers looked upon Iranian heroes as their models.”³⁵

During the Mongol invasions of Iran and Central Asia, there was continued migration of Persian and Turkic princes, noblemen and scholars into India, which

enhanced the Persianate culture of the Indian ruling elite, but developed a kind of inferiority complex among non-immigrant Indians close to the courts. The exact process was accentuated under the Mughals when India became a haven for Persian émigrés and Persian language and culture. “The ideal within the high culture of north Indians,” Alam stated, “in this sense remained Perso-Turkic.”³⁶ Thus, the Ajami culture, unfortunately, remained confined to Perso-Turkic tradition, although some Sufi poets like Amir Khusrau disapproved of the “Khorasani” idiom and used Indian languages in their poetry.

Expediency of the Secular in Sacred Political Theory

With the rise of Persianised *Ajam* regions and culture in Arab-dominated Islamic areas, the influence of non-Arab and secular ideas in Muslim religious and political thought gradually increased. Many of the Shariah jurists came from non-Arab regions and managed to cleverly integrate the demands of the Shariah with pre-Islamic Persian, Turkic or North African heritage and traditions. As discussed earlier, the *Siyasatnama* of Nizam Al-Mulk cited Persian precedents to justify concepts of Shariah, thus using Sassanid examples to justify the nomination of Umar as caliph by Abu Bakr.

On his part, Al-Ghazali employed both mystical and philosophical sensibilities to justify and uphold the Shariah, but at times he argued the primacy of secular decision making by the king on the grounds of political expediency. According to Ghazali, “necessity makes lawful, what is prohibited”.³⁷ Thus, the Turkic sultans of Central Asia, including the Seljuks, codified administrative legislation as *Jahandari* (worldly administration) measures to ostensibly support the Shariah laws to make their political control more effective.

The attempt was to resolve the tension between pragmatic measures and inviolable sacred laws in the matter of political governance, which increased after Muslim rule was established in India under the Delhi Sultanate.

In *Adab Al-Muluk*, *Adab Al-Harb* and *Fakhr-i-Mudabbir*, the treatises dedicated to Delhi’s Mamluk Sultan Shams Al-Din Iltutmish (1211–36 CE), the emphasis was on the uncompromising finality of the Shariah which left little room for secular and practical concerns related to administering a largely non-Muslim population.

Barani’s Theory on the Shariah and the Zawabit (State Laws)

In this respect, Ziauddin Barani (1285–1358 CE) ushered in a relatively pragmatic

political approach, which was more in the tradition of Ghazali and Nizam Al-Mulk, in that he ostensibly remained unflinching in commitment to Shariah's injunctions but managed to build a political theory in the prevailing environment. He thus became the first "theoretician to justify secular laws among the Mussalmans".³⁸ His famous work, *Fatwa-i-Jahandari*, was written as advice (*nasihat*) for Muslim kings and has been compared to other historical works on statecraft, such as Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Barani has been called a Muslim fundamentalist and a bigot because of his emphasis on implementing the Shariah (Advice II) and his views regarding the Hindus on matters of *jizya* and *jihad*. However, in his own time, Barani was criticised by the mullahs for having diluted the importance of the Shariah and for proclaiming himself as an Indian rather than a Turk. Indeed, after considering the totality of circumstances in which he grew, many scholars believe that the political thinker emphasised the Shariah chiefly to strengthen the legitimacy of the rulers as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Thus, according to him, though it was desirable for the kings and nobility to follow the Shariah, it was also important to formulate "*zawabit*" (state laws) in the political domain for practical purposes. Further, he stated that these laws need not be formulated in consultation with religious scholars (*ulema*). He also said that the "*zawabit*" should not violate the Shariah in letter and spirit in normal circumstances, but it could go beyond the writ of the Shariah given the vicious nature of the people, even though "*zawabit*" may never be considered as right in principle. Philosophically, the monarchy itself was against the Shariah, yet Barani accepted it on the grounds of political realities.

He said that spiritual life could only be attained through humility, poverty and self-abnegation, yet pride and self-glorification were essential for a king. He added that a king could not survive without showing divinity (*rububiyyah*) and so, kingship was the vice-regency (*khilafat*) of God. Therefore, in the interest of defending Islam and annihilating the enemies of the faith, Muslim kings had to adopt the ways of Persian emperors. He compared the situation with the eating of carrion, which is prohibited in Islam except in extreme situations.³⁹

In another famous work, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, Barani discussed the dialogue between Alauddin Khilji and Qazi Mughiz of Bayana over the importance of the Shariah and the "*zawabit*". Barani ends the discussion with Khilji's purported statement that he was not concerned with the agreement of his laws with the Shariah, nor with his fate on Judgement Day, as his main concern was the state's interest.⁴⁰

Inroads of Islam into Kashmir

Although the Arab governors of Sindh, including Muhammad bin Qasim, made several expeditions to conquer Kashmir, they failed miserably. In the reign of Abbasid Caliph Hisham, the governor of Sindh, Junaid, marched towards Kashmir but was defeated by the raja of Kashmir, Lalitaditya Muktapida (724–60 CE). Lalitaditya also stopped later invasions by succeeding Arab governors. In the eleventh century, Mahmud Ghazni launched two campaigns against Kashmir (1014 CE and 1021 CE), but was compelled to retreat because of heavy snowfall and bad weather conditions on both occasions.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Muslim missionaries started to settle in Kashmir. The earliest copy of the Quran in Kashmir, dated 1237 CE, was calligraphed by Fateh Ullah Kashmiri.⁴¹ One of the newly arrived Muslim settlers was Shah Mir, who, some historians say, was a descendant of the rulers of Swat and came to Kashmir with his family in 1313 CE. A few years later, in 1320 CE, the Mongols ravaged Kashmir and shook the foundations of its Hindu dynasty. Taking advantage of the ensuing chaos, Rinchana, the Buddhist commander-in-chief of King Suhadeva, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir, seized the throne. When Rinchana did not get the cooperation of Hindu noblemen, it is believed that, on the advice of Shah Mir, he decided to convert to Islam and took the name Sadruddin. Some historians suggest that Rinchana decided to woo the invading Mongols, who were then becoming Muslims in large numbers. After he died in 1323 CE, Hindu rule was re-established but remained embroiled in internal political feuds.⁴²

The situation changed when Shah Mir got public recognition for warding off a second Mongol attack, which he capitalised by becoming the ruler of Kashmir in 1339 CE, under the title Shamsuddin. He changed the Hindu feudal system by introducing the grant of Turkic ‘iqta’, which won him loyal support amongst Hindu and Muslim noblemen. Thus, he founded the Shah Mir dynasty that ruled Kashmir for over 200 years (1342–1561 CE).

Under the rule of Shah Mir’s great-grandson, Sultan Sikander (1389–1413 CE), a large number of Kashmiri Hindus converted to Islam, and the Persianisation of the Kashmiri administration took place. In the words of Andre Wink, “To variable degrees, the greater part of the population of Kashmir valley converted in the reign of Sikander Butshikan.”⁴³ The process is said to have already started during the reign of his father, Sultan Qutbuddin (1373–89 CE), with the arrival of Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani. However, the Islamisation of Kashmir is said to have

intensified under Suha Bhatt, prime minister of Sikander, who had recently converted to the religion. Along with forced conversions, Kashmiri Brahmans were dismissed from top positions, jizya was imposed and the famous sun temple of Martanda was demolished. It is reported that towards the end of his life, Sikander had scrapped the jizya.

Sikander's policy was entirely reversed by his successor, Sultan Zaynul Abidin (1420–70 CE), as he rebuilt temples and urged Kashmiri Brahmans to return to Kashmir. Cremation tax was abolished, cow slaughter prohibited and even sati was allowed (Sikander had prohibited it). The sultan also got the Mahabharata and *Rajatarangini* translated into Persian. The Kashmiris gave Zaynul Abidin the title of *Badshah* (The Great King), an honorific by which he is still remembered.

Hamdani's *Zakhiratul Muluk* (Hindu–Muslim Segregation)

Sayyid Ali Hamdani played a significant role in spreading Islam in Kashmir and brought several crafts and industries from Iran to the region. A Persian Sufi saint of the Kubrawiya order, he authored many books and treatises, with his Persian work, *Zakhiratul Muluk*, being a significant contribution in understanding political ethics and rules of good government in his times.

The revered saint believed that a ruler who did not have a benign attitude towards his people and who crossed the limits of the Shariah was the enemy of God and the Prophet. According to Hamdani, the primary purpose of the state was to enforce the Shariah to provide justice to Muslims. He divided the subjects (*raiyat*) into Muslims and kafirs (disbelievers) and said that the ruler should protect the lives and property of kafir citizens in a Muslim country. However, in addition to paying the jizya, the non-Muslims were also supposed to follow a somewhat elaborate set of conditions that were laid down in an agreement (*ahad nama*) by Caliph Umar with the People of the Book and Zoroastrians. The conditions for living in a Muslim state for non-believers, even as dhimmis (called zimmi in South Asia), were detailed thus:

- 1) They should not build places of worship, 2) nor should they rebuild or renew old and desolate ones 3) Muslim travellers should be allowed to enter and stay in their religious buildings, and if 4) any Muslim wants, he can stay as a guest for three or four days in their houses. 5) The zimmi should not act as spies. 6) If a relative of theirs is inclined to accept Islam, the person should not be discouraged or dissuaded from doing so. 7) They should give due respect to Muslims, and 8) if a Muslim happens to visit a place where a non-Muslim occupies a seat,

the latter must vacate it for the Muslim. 9) They should not dress like Muslims. 10) They should not use Muslim names. 11) They should ride horses without reins and saddles. 12) They should not carry weapons. 13) They should not use rings with engraved stones. 14) They should not sell wine, nor should they drink in public. 15) To look different from Muslims, they should wear clothes in their style. 16) There should be no public demonstration of their rituals and customs before the Muslims. 17) They should not live in the neighbourhood of Muslims. 18) They should not carry their dead bodies through Muslim graveyards. 19) They should not mourn their dead in public, and 20) they cannot buy bondservants.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding the so-called Shariah-oriented Indo-Muslim political theorists, like Fakhr-i-Mudabbir, Hamadani and even Barani, most rulers of Delhi Sultanate or even Kashmir found such political concepts too extreme and impractical to be given a serious thought. Shams Al-Din Iltutmish, for instance, is said to have told the firebrand theologians of his court that in terms of strength, Muslims in the country were like salt in a dish and could not force the overwhelming majority of non-Muslim subjects to embrace Islam. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban (1266–87 CE), despite his fanaticism, considered rabid political thinkers championing religious causes as seekers of narrow worldly gain (*ulama-i-duniya*) and did not take their advice seriously. Firuz Tughlaq (1351–88 CE), in spite of his orthodox views, took an interest in Hindu traditions and monuments, whereas Sikander Lodi (1489–1517 CE), whom many consider a bigot, encouraged Hindus to learn Persian and participate in state management.

Sufi “Sabk-i-Hindi”: Allegorical Synthesis of Hindu–Muslim Ethos

Unlike many Arab theologians in West Asia, orthodox Islamic clergy distanced itself from the masses and, just like the ruling elite, persevered in maintaining its foreign roots and Persianate heritage. However, the Sufi movement entered India in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and became a votary of democratic and egalitarian principles of Islam. The Sufis believed that the elitist *ulema* had forgotten these principles and had become the supporters of the state to gain worldly comforts.

The universalist Sufi concept of “*wahdatul wujud*”, emphasising that “God is one, and all is in God”, found resonance among the Hindus because of its closeness to the ideals of Advaita spirituality in Vedanta literature. Thus, the attempts by the *ulema* and political theorists of separating the masses of the sultanate into

camps of Muslims and non-Muslims was repudiated by most Sufis. In the sixteenth century, Abul Fazl mentioned the presence of 14 major Sufi orders (silsilas) in India, with Chishtiya, Suhrawardi, Qadariya, Naqshbandiya and Kubrawiya (in Kashmir) being the most notable.

A remarkable development in Indian Sufi tradition was the evolution of Hindu themes in the poetry of Sufis using “Hindavi” (similar to the Hindi language). Thus, Shaikh Hamid Al-Din Nagauri (d. 1274 CE) and Baba Farid (d. 1265 CE) are known for their *dohas* to this day. Among the celebrated Hindavi *masnavis* is Mulla Daud’s *Chandayan*, an anthology compiled in 1379 CE, “which had the distinction of being recited from the mosque pulpit of Delhi”.⁴⁵

Shaikh Abdul Quddus (1456–1537 CE) wrote the Hindavi treatise *Rushd Nama* or *Alakh Bani*, which identified Sufi beliefs with the philosophy of Shaivite Gorakhnath. Some of his verses are said to find variant versions in the poetry of Kabir and even Nath poetry.⁴⁶ Similarly, Abdul Wahid Bilgrami (1510–1608 CE) wrote *Haqiq-i-Hind*, which sought to reconcile Vaishnava symbols, including the idioms of Hindu devotional lyrics, with orthodox Muslim beliefs.⁴⁷

Among the most notable works in the pre-Akbar Hindavi tradition is Malik Muhammad Jayasi’s *Padmavat* (1540–41 CE).⁴⁸ The poem, originally written in Awadhi but in Persian Nastaliq script, is the spiritually allegorical story of Sultan Alauddin Khilji’s desire for Padmavati, the Queen of Chittor. Another celebrated Sufi poet of the pre-Mughal age is Amir Khusrau, also known as the “Parrot of India” (*Tuti-e-Hind*) and the father of *qawwali*. He is credited with writing in many verse forms, including masnavi, ghazal (which he introduced in India), *rubai*, *qata*, *do-baiti* and *tarkib-band*.

More importantly, Khusrau is known to literary critics today as one of the inventors of “Sabk-i-Hindi”, an Indo-Persian diction that mixed the ethos of the two cultures in its artistic compositions. In the words of Alam:

This process which began with Mas‘ud Sa‘d Salman and Amir Khusrau and showed signs of stability first in fifteenth-century Timurid Herat, combined in its idiom what may be termed as the best of the culture of “Ajam”—that is to say the non-Arab world of eastern Islam. Sometimes, this style is mentioned in our sources sometimes as *tarz-i-Hindustaniyana*, matured and scaled to new heights in the late sixteenth and seventeenth-century movement of *taza-gui* (fresh diction) among Mughal poets.⁴⁹

A remarkable aspect of this poetic diction was its use of the literary device

known as *ibam*, used as deliberate ambivalence, that employed a word with different meanings: one direct and immediate (*qarib*); and the other remote and strange (*gharib*). Amir Khusrau used this poetic technique so that a word or a combination of words could be used in as many senses as the poet intends and that all these could be simultaneously intended (*zul wujuh*).

It can be said that, linguistically, Amir Khusrau was one of India's first nationalist poets, with traces of Sindhi, Lahauri, Kashmiri, Kubri, Dhur-Samandri, Tilangi (Telugu), Gujar (Gujarati), Gauri (North Bengal), Bengali, Awad and Delhi vernaculars and dialects found in his works.⁵⁰ Khusrau profusely celebrated the polyglot intellect of the Indian mind when he stated:

*The people of Khita, Mongol, Turks, and Arabs
In speaking Indian dialects, get sewn lips
But we can speak any language of the world
As expertly as a shepherd tends his sheep.*⁵¹

While Barani and Minhajus Siraj were highly critical of the presence of Hindus, particularly Brahmans of India, Amir Khusrau waxed eloquently in their praise: "Brahman in their knowledge and intellect are far superior to the knowledge of all the books of Aristotle... Whatever the Greek revealed in philosophical thought to the world, the Brahmans have a greater wealth."⁵² It was, however, in India's praise that Amir Khusrau was the most eloquent. Thus, in *Nuh Sipihri*, he wrote: "Hind was a paradise for the unbelievers since the advent of Adam till the coming of Islam. Even in recent times, these infidels have had every pleasure of heaven like wine and honey."⁵³

While the Delhi sultans lived in their palaces and stuck to their Perso-Turkic ways of life, it was the Muslim Sufi saints who embraced the Indian subcontinent and its people. In the process, they helped build a new syncretic ethos, which later helped the Mughal ruler Akbar in blending the polity of Muslim invaders with the cultural flavour and colours of India.

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17

Akbar's Eclecticism and the Puritanical Backlash (1526–1707 CE)

*'Adl-o-insaaf daan na kufr-o-na-deen
Aanchi dar hijz-i mulk darkaar ast
'Adl-i bi-din nizam-e aalam ra
Bihtar az zulm-i shaahi dindaar ast*

*(Know that it is Justice; not Infidelity or Religion
That ensures the safety of the Country;
For the World is better served by Justice without Religion,
Than by the tyranny of a Religious King)*

—Akhlaq-i-Jahangiri¹

The sixteenth century ushered in a new phase of political stability in the Muslim world, which was unprecedented in its scope and duration. The agrarian-based Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires were all structurally similar and ruled from the Balkans to Bengal for over 200 years.

By this time, the Mongol threat to the Muslim world had abated. Nevertheless, there was a fundamentalist backlash to the rule of newly converted Mongols in the Arab world, as evidenced in the rise of religious and political views of Ibn Taimiyyah and his disciple Ibn Qayyim in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, the assimilation of the Turkic Mongol races in the Perso-Islamic world,

of which the Delhi Sultanate and the succeeding Mughal Empire in India were vital constituents, did not find any resonance in India until the emergence of Wahhabism in India in the early eighteenth century.

Another eclectic constituent in the Perso-Islamic world of the *Ajam* was the introduction of Shia Islam in India since the time of Caliph Ali's reign itself. It is reported that some converted Sindhi Jats participated on the side of Caliph Ali in the Battle of the Camel in 656 CE.² Over the coming centuries, the Shia community started to grow and began gaining political power in many regions of India by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For example, in 1505 CE, King Fateh Shah of the Shah Mir dynasty in Kashmir converted to Shia Islam.³

Again, in the sixteenth century, people of Gilgit are said to have converted from Buddhism to Shia Islam following the invasion of Shia leader Shamsheer of Skardu. However, it was in the Deccan that the first noteworthy Shia power in the name of Bahmani Kingdom (1347–1526 CE; with its capital in Gulbarga and then Bidar) ruled. It then split into five smaller kingdoms, with three of them having Shia rulers—Adil Shahi, Qutb Shahi and Nizam Shahi dynasties.

Tura-i-Changizi, Not Shariah, as the Mughal Norm

Despite being Hanafi Sunnis, the early Mughal rulers followed the “Tura-i-Changizi” (Law of Genghis Khan) as punctiliously as they claimed to follow the Shariah. They also had close relations with the Shia Safavid Empire of Persia in the formative years of political struggle.

Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530 CE), known as the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, succeeded his father, Umar Shaikh Mirza II, to the throne of Ferghana (in modern Uzbekistan) in 1494 CE. In a couple of years, he conquered the coveted city of Samarqand, but by 1497 CE, he lost both the city and his kingdom of Ferghana to Shaybani Khan, the Uzbek leader. In the following years, though Babur tried to win back the lost territories, he was not successful. Then, Shah Ismail I, the founder of the Safavid Empire, helped him briefly reconquer Samarqand. Thus, in October 1511 CE, Babur seized Samarqand but only as a vassal of Shah Ismail I and had to fulfil the Persian emperor's demand of issuing coins in his name and adopting a Shia lifestyle. However, Babur became unpopular in the predominantly orthodox Sunni country due to these measures, and Shaybani's nephew, Ubaydullah Khan, threw him out of Samarqand. From then on, Babur started planning to invade India from Kabul.⁴

Later on, when Babur's son, Humayun, lost his kingdom in Delhi to Sher

Shah Suri, he also sought help from the Safavid Empire, which was extended to him by Shah Tamasp on the condition that he converted to the Shia faith, which Humayun ostensibly accepted. When Humayun died a few months after winning back Delhi, his 13-year-old son, Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1542–1605 CE), was coronated by Humayun's trusted Shia commander Bairam Khan, who was then accorded the titles *ataliq* (guardian)⁵ and *khan-e-khana* (chief of chiefs). Akbar's mother, Hamida Banu Begum, was the daughter of the famous Shia preceptor, Shaikh Ali Akbar Jami. Therefore, Akbar was raised in an eclectic Muslim household that shaped his intellect into becoming a king with a heterodox outlook on Islam.⁶

Before the coming of Mughals, most rulers of the Delhi Sultanate sought to gain the approval of the Sunni *ulema* to legitimise their rule. Independent-minded rulers, like Iltutmish or Alauddin Khilji, also tried to justify their inability to meet the desired standards of Shariah; and even Barani was apologetic over the *zawabit* (secular) practices of the state and called for keeping them under check.

However, with the coming of the Mughals, the primacy of the Shariah—particularly of the Sunni Hanafi fiqh—did not feature as a fundamental precondition for governance. The one glaring exception to the rule was the 49-year-long puritanical reign of Aurangzeb Alamgir (1618–1707 CE). Thus, the political treatise of Nasir Al-Din Tusi (a Twelver Shia with Ismaili occultists leanings) named *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri*, the influence of “*Tura-i-Changizi*” (Law of Genghis Khan; from whom the Mughal's traced their lineage), as well as Timurid traditions of Central Asia played a more influential role in formulating Mughal political thought and culture than the didactic texts (*adaab* literature) of the Shariah scholars.⁷

Here, it is important to note that Babur considered the “*Tura-i-Changizi*” as an important albeit extra-religious convention and a part of his heritage:

My forefathers had always sacredly observed the rules of Changez (Genghis Khan). In their parties, their courts, their festivals, and their entertainments, in their sitting down and in their rising up, they never acted contrary to the “*Tura-i-Changizi*”. The “*Tura-i-Changizi*” certainly did not possess any divine authority, so that anyone should be obliged to conform to them; every man who has a good rule of conduct ought to observe it. If the father has done what is wrong, the son is ought to change it for what is right.⁸

Notably, contemporaries of the empire founded by Babur characterised it as

the Timurid Empire, while the Mughal rulers preferred to call themselves Chaghtayids, originating from Changez's second son, Chaghtay, who ruled Transoxiana.

Tusi's Akhlaq-i-Nasiri: Akbar's Political Guide Places Love Above Justice

In addition to the "Tura-i-Changizi", it is said that Babur inherited political wisdom from the great Shia astronomer, mathematician (pioneer of mathematical trigonometry) and philosopher Nasir Al-Din Tusi. In 1235 CE, Al-Tusi wrote *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (*Nasirean Ethics*), which contained his political philosophy that, in the words of Antony Black, was "a synthesis of Aristotelian and Iranian ideas",⁹ and served as the basis for the political orientation of most Mughal rulers. In the words of Muzaffar Alam:

Tusi's book was not simply among the five most important books that Abu al-Fazl wanted to be read before Emperor Akbar regularly: it was among the most favourite readings of the Mughal political elites. So the emperor issued an instruction to his officials to read Tusi and Rumi in particular.¹⁰

According to Tusi, practical wisdom (*bikmat-i-amali*) was very important along with ethical revelations of the Shariah. The individual who attains perfection through equanimity and equipoise (*itidal*) was the Nasirean ideal king, which closely resembled the Platonic concept of the philosopher-king. The ultimate aim of the king, in Tusi's view, was to help his subjects reach "potential wisdom by virtue of their mental powers". In his conception of the ideal city or state (*al madinat-al fazila*), people could be composed of different religions and social backgrounds.¹¹ All these principles appealed to the Mughal rulers governing a diverse country like India.

Although an *Ithna Ashraiyya* (Twelver) Shia, Tusi incorporated some Ismaili Shia thoughts developed under the Nizari Ismaili rule, and gave more credit to the views of Plato and Aristotle on justice and political organisation than any Sunni writer. He felt that human wisdom in earlier phases of historical evolution (before the revelation of the Quran) may also offer beneficial wisdom. Thus, Tusi was more open to a liberal interpretation of religious laws and injunctions.

Tusi's political thoughts were based on his philosophy that humanity was in between higher intellectual and spiritual planes and lower physical and ephemeral ones in its present state of development: "Man's perfection and the enabling of his virtue were entrusted to his reflection, reason, intelligence, and will; and the key of felicity and affliction... was given into the hand of his own competence."¹²

In addition, according to Tusi, human cooperation and social organisation were provided by the organisation of techniques (*tadbir-i sinai*) such as sowing, harvesting, cleaning, pounding, kneading and cooking. For this reason, “divine wisdom has required that there should be a disparity of aspirations and opinions, so that each desires a different occupation, some noble and others base, in the practice of which they are cheerful and contented”.¹³ Thus, political wisdom (*hikmat-e-madani*) was essential for upholding social order. Tusi stated:

The ordering of cities depends on kingship (*mulk*) and the ordering of kingship on statecraft (*siyasa*) and that of statecraft on wisdom. When wisdom prevails and the true law (*namus-e haqq*) is followed, order (*nizam*) is obtained, as is the attention to the perfection of beings. However, if wisdom departs, *namus* (law) is impaired, and when *namus* is impaired the adornment of kingship disappears, and disorder (*fitna*) makes its appearance.¹⁴

It is remarkable that Tusi spoke of mutual love (*muhabbat*) as a much higher and nobler ideal for achieving social and state organisation than justice (*adl*) itself, in that love enhanced cooperation across all sections of society and religious/ethnic denominations. In fact, for Tusi, justice (*adl*) occupied the second position when it came to the philosopher-king's order of preference, as justice was somewhat artificial, always enforced through regal exercise of power and through coercive government machinery. However, love (*muhabbat*) inspired involuntary participation from subjects belonging to all communities. Thus, Al-Tusi stated:

Justice leads to artificial union (of the state), whereas love generates natural unity, and the artificial in relation to the natural is compulsive, like an imposition. The artificial comes after the natural, and thus it is obvious that the need for justice, which is the most accomplished human virtue, is because of the absence of love.¹⁵

***Akhlaq* Genre of Mughal India: Justice above Religion**

Historians like Jean Calmard believe that the Mughal rulers derived *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* traditions from Babur, who in turn inherited it from the last great Timurid leader of Herat, Sultan Husain Bayqara (1470–1506 CE). Although the sultan was a Sunni, he did not want to run his kingdom on strictly Sunni rules of jurisprudence and had Shia leanings.¹⁶

The book inspired other political treatises in the “*akhlaq*” (ethics) genre, attempting to simplify Tusi's philosophical text itself. One of them was a small

book on ethics and politics, *Akhlaq-i-Humayuni*, initially titled *Dastur Al-Wizarat*, by Qazi Ikhtiyar Al-Din Hasan Al-Husaini.¹⁷ In this book, the author stated that he had encapsulated and tabulated some of the subtle and convoluted discourses of Ibn Miskawayh (tenth-century philosopher of ethics and human evolution said to be holding views similar to Darwin's) and Nasir Al-Din Tusi on human nature, the family, household and government. The book's aim, according to the author, was to provide the state officials with a manual for everyday activities for enhancing the stability of the state. The author hoped the book would prove helpful for Babur and his progeny in their running of government.

Another work on political ethics was *Akhlaq-i-Muhsini* by Husain Waiz Kashifi. According to this treatise, justice played a vital part in the stability of the country: "If his (the king's) intention is justice, the result will be blessing, and the country will become prosperous and well managed, but in the absence of justice, blessings will depart, revenues will decline, and people will be in turmoil."¹⁸ Thus, a just king was the shadow of God, the source for all that was good in society. The emphasis in the book was on the maintenance of balance in society than on eradication of infidelity and idolatry, where the subjects should be treated as "sons and friends" of the king.

Another notable work in the genre was Nurul Din Qazi Al-Khaqani's *Akhlaq-i-Jahangiri*, in which the ruler was advised to discipline his own self in order to acquire moral authority to discipline and control others. According to Qazi, justice and not religion should occupy a principal place in matters of governance, and a just non-Muslim ruler served society better than an unjust Muslim one.¹⁹

In *Tuhfa-i-Qutb Shahi Akhlaq-i-Badshahi* by Ali ibn Taifur Al-Bistami, a treatise in the akhlaq tradition, a passage citing the Hadeeth reads:

Even though Anushirwan is outside the circle of Islam, his justice was of such a high order that the Prophet (boastfully) said: "I was born in the age of Nushirwan, the just"!...Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (the Umayyad governor of Iraq) was a born Muslim, companion of the companions of the Prophet. Still, people mention his name spitefully because of his cruelties, while Anushirwan, a fire-worshipper infidel, is always remembered with adulation.²⁰

The genre of akhlaq literature, which prospered under the Mughal patronage, has a consistent theme of judging the ruler based on reason (aql) and not any religious legal code. Justice, in these treatises, has an independent existence, which is aimed at serving genuine public interest, be it for Muslim or non-Muslims.

Abul Fazl and the Concept of Sulh-i-Kul (Universal Peace)

Abul Fazl ibn Mubarak, the grand wazir of Akbar from 1579 CE to 1602 CE, was the author of the *Akbarnama* (“Book of Akbar”), a three-part official history of Akbar’s reign (with the third volume known as the *Ain-i-Akbari* or the “Constitution of Akbar”). He also translated the Bible into Persian and along with his elder brother, poet laureate Faizi, was among the “Nine Jewels” (*Navaratna*) of Akbar’s court.

Abul Fazl was educated by his father, Shaikh Mubarak, who was a follower of the mystical Mahdavi movement that was much reviled by the Muslim orthodoxy. From his father, Abul Fazl wrote, he “acquired many of the secrets of the Illuminationists, the mysteries of the Sufis, and the marvellous observations of the Peripatetics”.²¹

In the *Akbarnama*, Abul Fazl described the main qualities of Fatehpur Sikri, built in 1571 CE by Akbar near Agra, which match the main qualities of a virtuous city as outlined in Tusi’s akhlaq text. He believed that rather than the individual who held the office, it was the institution of kingship that was endowed with *farr-i-izadi* (a concept first developed by the illuminationist Sufi Shihabuddin Suhrawardi), that is, a divine light transmitted to the king, which made him the source of spiritual guidance.

Thus, for Abul Fazl, the institution of the king (*padshah*) veered close to that of prophethood. According to him, *padshahat* meant “an established owner”, where “pad” stood for stability and “shah” stood for the owner. Therefore, padshah was an established owner whom no one could remove. Further, as per Abul Fazl, padshah was an agent of God, who worked for the welfare of his subjects and maintained peace in his empire.

Abul Fazl promulgated the values of “Sulh-i-kul” (universal peace), which he described were the cornerstone of Akbar’s rule of enlightenment. According to this concept, all religions and schools of thought had freedom of expression but on the condition that they do not undermine the authority of the state or fight among themselves. People of all religious denominations, ethnicities and races—be they Iranis, Turanis, Afghans, Rajputs, Deccanis and others—composed the state’s nobility that executed state policies. In the spirit of Sulh-i-kul, Akbar abolished the pilgrimage tax in 1563 CE and the *jizya* in 1564 CE. Even succeeding Mughal emperors gave grants for building and maintaining places of worship.

Emperor Jahangir, Akbar’s son and successor, who was accused of assassinating Abul Fazl, described Sulh-i-kul in the following words:

As in the wide expanse of the divine compassion there is room for all classes and the followers of all creeds, so...in his Imperial dominions, which on all sides were limited only by the sea, there was room for the professors of opposite religions, and for beliefs, good and bad, and the road to intolerance was closed. Sunnis and Shias met in one mosque and Christians and Jews in one church to pray. He consistently followed the principle of “universal peace”.²²

Akbar's Ibadat Khana and New Religion, Din-i-Ilahi

In 1575 CE, Akbar built a “House of Worship” called “Ibadat Khana” in his capital Fatehpur Sikri. The hall was constructed around the cell of Shaikh Abdullah Niyazi, who had left for Gujarat. The place was more of a debating hall, which the emperor visited on each Thursday night, although the discussions continued until Friday.

Initially, only Sunni religious scholars and sheikhs participated in the discussions. However, over a period of time, many prominent *ulema* at the court grew increasingly unruly and unpopular in these discussions and became the target of ridicule by Abul Fazl and other intellectuals. These *ulema* included prominent personalities, like Haji Ibrahim Sirhindi, Makhdumul Mulk and Shaikh Abdun Nabi. After a few years, the doors of the Ibadat Khana were opened to non-Muslim religious clerics and scholars, including Hindus, Roman Catholics, Jesuits, Zoroastrians, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, and even atheists.²³

Akbar got frustrated with the protracted and fractious debates held at the Ibadat Khana by various religious scholars and concluded that no single religion could claim the monopoly of truth. This realisation is said to have inspired Akbar to propound his religion, *Din-i-Ilahi*, in 1582 CE. The new faith of Akbar had elements of Sufi philosophy (the doctrines of Ibn Arabi's wahdatul wujud); devotionism of Bhakti saints; some elements of Christianity, like crosses, and Zoroastrianism (fire ceremonies); non-violence of Jainism that included vegetarianism; and the universalism preached by Vedanta scholars who visited the Ibadat Khana.

The central practices and beliefs of *Din-i-Ilahi* comprised a spiritual system than a full-fledged religion. The principal beliefs of the faith were monotheism, vegetarianism, non-violence, praise of God by pronouncing “*Allah-u-Akbar*” or “*Jalla Jalalahu*” (meaning “may His brilliance be glorified”) and an anniversary party of the faith to be attended by every member.²⁴ *Din-i-Ilahi* is said to have

survived the death of Akbar, but it never had a membership of more than 18 individuals, who were mainly from the Mughal nobility.

Various conservative Muslims were outraged about Akbar allegedly propounding a new religion, and the qazi of Bengal province and Ahmad Shah Sirhindi declared the new faith as blasphemy against Islam. Even Father Jerome Xavier of the third mission to Akbar's court in 1594 CE believed that Akbar was not a Muslim but a superstitious pagan, who "aims at making a new religion, of which he is himself to be the head: and it is said he already had numerous followers; but that these are for the most part flatterers or people who have been bribed by money."²⁵

The Fundamentalist Backlash

The non-conformist and eclectic conventions promoted by Akbar and his successors outraged many *ulema* and conservative scholars of the age, and their simmering discontent found political manifestation in the rise of Aurangzeb, the bigoted ruler who ushered in the decline of the Mughal Empire.

As opposed to the Tusi school of political thought, the Ghazalian theory of kingship was expounded in the *Nasihatul Muluk* and was the favourite among both the *ulema* and the conservative Sufi scholars. In the book, Al-Ghazali had bestowed upon the king the responsibility for defending the religion, following the decline of the high office of the caliph.

To the translator, historian and the first Grand Mufti of India, Abdul Qadir Badauni (1540–1615 CE),²⁶ Akbar had violated not only his duty of defending the faith but had also committed the sacrilegious act of starting a new religion under the name of Din-i-Ilahi.

Badauni's Muntakhab Al-Tawarikh: A Critique of Akbar's "Irreligiosity"

In his famous work, *Muntakhab Al-Tawarikh* ("Selection from History"), Badauni provided biographical accounts of Muslim religious figures, physicians, poets and scholars. However, the book is famous for provoking debate because of its hostile remarks about Akbar and his religious practices that were apparently suppressed until the rule of Jahangir.

In the book, Badauni lamented that Hindu ascetics and Brahmans managed to get "frequent private interviews with his Majesty" and:

There grew the conviction in his (Akbar's) heart (as gradually as the outline on a stone) that there were sensible men in all religions and

abstemious thinkers and men endowed with miraculous powers among all nations. If some true knowledge was thus to be found everywhere, why should truth be confined to one religion or to a creed like Islam, which was comparatively new and scarcely a thousand years old.²⁷

Critical of Akbar, Badauni further complained:

The teachings of Islam, on the contrary, were esteemed follies, innovations, and inventions of indigent beggars, rebels and highway robbers; and those who professed that religion was set down as contemptible idiots. These sentiments had long been growing up in his Majesty's mind and gradually ripened into a firm conviction of their truth.²⁸

The historian was abusive towards the Shia in his book and disapproved of Akbar for entertaining the Sufi ideal of *wahdatul wujud* (the oneness of existence)—a belief he claimed puts the Almighty on par with His creation. His disapproval of Mughal rule extended to the kingdom in general, and Badauni often wallowed in unvarnished cynicism: “Hindustan is a wide place, where there is an open field for all manner of licentiousness; and no one interferes in another's business, so that everyone can do just as he pleases.”²⁹

A notable contemporary and ideological ally of Badauni and Ahmad Sirhindi was Shaikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dehlawi (1551–1642 CE). A critic of Akbar's latitudinarianism, Shaikh Abdul Haqq was a Qadariya Sufi who strove to reconcile the Shariah with the mystic path. Much like Ghazali, he believed in the judicious mix of scholarship, mystical ecstasy, adherence to Islamic laws and *marifa* (gnosis) as the hallmark of a Sufi. A great defender of kingship, he wrote in his book, *Nuriya-i-Sultania*: “no rank is higher than that of a king, and all words of conventional praise are insufficient to return thanks to him.”³⁰

Contrary to Akbar's policies, however, Shaikh Abdul Haqq thought that the kafir could never be just and urged Akbar and Jahangir to impose the Shariah law. He even criticised Ibn Arabi's concept of *wahdatul wujud* and said they were his subjective observations. He said people who believed in this monistic concept cried “*Huma Us!*” (All is He) when their souls were foul and vicious.

Ahmad Sirhindi and the Naqshbandi Imprint on Aurangzeb

However, the most radical opposition to Akbar's latitudinarianism—whose virulent ideological strains against the Shia, Hindu and Sikh communities led to the rise of fanatic Islam in the Indian subcontinent—ironically came from Naqshbandi

Sufi Shaikh Ahmad Al-Faruqi Al-Sirhindi (1564–1624 CE). It is believed that his highly conservative ideas were passed on to Aurangzeb by his scions, which had a profound impact on the course of Indian political thought and ethos for centuries.

Noted for his contribution to Sufi epistemology and practices by scholars like Friedmann, Haar and Buehler,³¹ Ahmad Shah Sirhindi was accorded the title *Mujaddid Alf-i-Thani* (“Reviver of the Second Millennium”) by his followers. An indefatigable preacher against the alleged pantheism and Shia inclinations of Akbar and Jahangir, Sirhindi was irate over the Mughal rule that allowed Hindus to build their temples and even at times demolish Muslim mosques, which can be gleaned from his famous letters (“*Muktubat*”) to his friends. Thus, he wrote:

The infidels of India fearlessly destroy mosques and build their own places of worship in their stead. In Thanesar in the Krukhet (Kurukshetra) there was a mosque and a shrine of a saint. Both have been pulled down by the infidels and in their place now, they have built a big temple. Agin, the infidels, freely observed the rituals of infidelity, while Muslims are unable to execute most Islamic ordinances. For example, on the day of “Ekadashi” when Hindus abstain from eating and drinking, they see to it that no Muslim bakes or sells bread or any other food in the bazaar. On the contrary, in the blessed month of Ramazan, they cook and sell food openly. Due to the weakness of Islam, nobody can stop them from doing this. Alas, a thousand times, alas!³²

Sirhindi also refuted the basic monistic philosophy of Sufism, that is, the concept of *wahdatul wujud*, as to him it smacked of pantheism, whereby God and creation, angel and the devil, good and evil, were in unity. In its stead, he said that any experience of unity between God and the world that a mystic has is a purely subjective experience and occurs only in the mind of the Sufi and has no objective counterpart in the real world. Therefore, mystical experience cannot supplant the Shariah injunction that God is transcendent and not part of creation. Thus, the Sufi saint advanced the idea of *Wahdat Al Shuhud* (the concept of the unity of vision) instead of *wahdatul wujud*. Although Sirhindi’s concept of “*Wahdat Al-Shuhud*” was further elucidated later by Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, it could never replace the ideal of “*wahdatul wujud*” from the *khanqah* of various Sufi orders.

The spiritual and philosophical affinity between Advaita philosophy of Vedanta and *wahdatul wujud* was highlighted by Shah Jahan’s eldest son, Dara Shikoh, in his book, *Majma ul-Bahrain* (“The Confluence of the Seas”). However, according to historian Ghulam Husain Salim, the Mughal prince’s book was

declared blasphemous by the royal *ulema*, who ordered his execution. Aurangzeb, the youngest of the three brothers of Dara Shikoh, gladly carried out the command in the bitter war of succession.³³

Certain Naqshbandi sources claim that the spiritual successor of Ahmad Sirhindi, Khwaja Muhammad Masoom Sirhindi, had five sons. The fifth son, Shaikh Saifuddin, had the most widespread following and established a *silsila*. Believed to be the spiritual guide to the Mughal emperor, Shaikh Saifuddin trained Aurangzeb in the Naqshbandi tariqah.³⁴ It is also claimed that out of 18 letters that were sent to Aurangzeb by Shaikh Saifuddin, one of them urged him to implement the Shariah rule in India.³⁵

The bigoted policies of Aurangzeb against the Hindus, Sikhs, Shias and advocates of moderate Islam for almost half a century were sufficient to damage the foundations of the Mughal Empire, which started crumbling in his lifetime, and more swiftly after his death in 1707 CE. He often used the pretext of crushing political opposition as a means to carry out religious persecution—a policy that led to a host of protests from Sikhs, Marathas, Jats and even Pashtuns.

His harsh imposition of the *jizya* tax on non-Muslims, in addition to pilgrim's tax and doubling of custom duties on Hindus, destruction of temples (the rebuilt Somnath and Gyanvapi being among the many) and the execution of his brothers and all opposition figures make him one of the most infamous and tyrannical figures in Indian history.

With the decline of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, radical movements and revivalist personalities started emerging in the Indian subcontinent as the Muslim community struggled to retrieve its pristine glory in a rapidly modernising world.

NOTES

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*MODERN MUSLIM RADICALISM IN
SOUTH ASIA*

18

Muslim Fundamentalism in India under British Colonialism (1707–1857 CE)

*Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hatred, and hatred leads to violence.
This is the equation.*

—Ibn Rushd (attributed)¹

After Aurangzeb died in 1707 CE, the Mughal Empire began to decline steadily. A host of weak successors, namely, Bahadur Shah (1707–12 CE), Jahandar Shah (1712–13 CE), Farrukh Siyar (1713–19 CE), Muhammad Shah (1719–48 CE), could not rid their governments from continual courtly intrigues, corruption of the nobility and internecine wars of succession.

The abject surrender of Muhammad Shah to Nadir Shah (founder of the Afsharid dynasty of Iran) and the subsequent massacre in Delhi of about 30,000 people in a single day (23 March 1739) severely tarnished Mughal prestige from which it could never redeem itself. Nadir Shah plundered India's immense wealth in this assault, stealing the famous *Takht-e-Taus* (Peacock Throne) that was built by Shah Jahan and is said to have cost the treasury twice as much as the Taj Mahal,^{2,3} in addition to the famed *Koh-i-Noor* ("Light of the Mountains") and *Darya-i-Noor* ("Light of the River") diamonds, which are now part of the British and Iranian crowns respectively.

As Nadir Shah's invasion exposed the weakness of the Mughal Empire, prominent regional governors started to rule independent of Delhi's control, like

Murshid Quli Khan of Bengal, Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah of Hyderabad and Saadat Khan of Awadh. Rajput rulers also started governing quite independently of Mughal control in their territories, while rebellious states under the Marathas, the Sikhs and the Jats started threatening the integrity of the empire.

Rise of European Colonial Powers

The nemesis of the great Mughal Empire, however, came from a most unlikely source. It was the European maritime trading companies that had started their commercial activities in the coastal regions from the fifteenth century onwards, even before Babur could first set foot in Hindustan, that proved to be the nemesis for later Mughals and their many independently run provincial governorates.

In 1492 CE, Christopher Columbus unintentionally discovered the Americas for the Europeans, even though he was trying to find a nautical route to India. Six years later, Vasco da Gama succeeded where Columbus had failed, by becoming the first European seafarer to establish direct trade links with India when he circumnavigated Africa and through the Cape of Good Hope arrived in Kozhikode (Calicut in English). By the seventeenth century, the Dutch, English, French and Denmark–Norway sailors had set up trading posts in India. However, over the next 100 years, the contest for maritime trading dominance in the subcontinent was mainly limited to Britain and France, who fought each other through their proxy Indian rulers and direct military intervention.

The rise in European ships plying India's western shorelines threatened the predominantly Middle Eastern traders and Indian Muslim communities that ruled the Arabian Sea. In fact, fourteenth-century Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta speaks of the considerable presence of Muslim seafarers and traders in Kerala, the Maldives and surrounding coastal regions before the coming of the Europeans. He writes that critical administrative positions in the kingdom of Kozhikode, such as that of the "Shah Bandar" (port commissioner), were held mainly by Muslims. He also mentions many Muslim ship-owning merchant magnates, known as *nakhudas*, who had spread their shipping businesses across the Indian Ocean.⁴

***Tuhfatul Mujahideen*: Kerala's Kunjali Marakkar versus the Portugese**

Following the successful expedition of Vasco da Gama to Kozhikode, the Portuguese rapidly expanded their territories in the Indian Ocean region. They ruled the seas between Ormus (the Portuguese word for the island of Hormuz in

the Persian Gulf) and the Malabar Coast and south Ceylon.⁵ It was only natural that the Arab sea traders and the Mappila community (the mixed West Asian–Indian Muslims of Kerala and the Lakshadweep), who had complete domination of these seas, entered into open confrontations with the Portuguese naval forces. Thus, by the 1520s, there were many clashes between the Portuguese and the Mappilas in various places, from Ramanathapuram and Thoothukudi to northern Kerala and western Sri Lanka.⁶

Four admirals (known by the title Kunjali Marakkar) of the fleet of the Samoothiri (Zamorin in Portuguese), the ruler of Kozhikode, resisted the Portuguese invasion of their kingdom from the seas from 1520 CE to 1600 CE—the first naval defence of the Indian coast against European colonisers. However, it is said that the wily Portuguese eventually convinced the Zamorin, in 1598 CE, that Marakkar IV (the fourth admiral) intended to take over the kingdom. The Kozhikode king joined hands with the Portuguese to defeat Marakkar IV, ending in his defeat and death in 1600 CE.⁷

A Keralite Muslim, Zainuddin Makhdoom II (born around 1532 CE), wrote a book in Arabic, *Tuhfatul Mujahideen* (“Gift for Islamic Fighters”), giving details of the Muslim admiral Kunjali Marakkar of Kozhikode giving a tough fight to the Portuguese from 1498 CE to 1583 CE. This book has lived in the collective memory of the Mappilas, inspiring them to do jihad (in terms of militant violence) against oppression, and even has a copy preserved in Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

Most Mappilas were low-caste Hindus of Malabar who had converted to Islam because of discrimination by high-caste Hindu landlords. They had grown rich by becoming maritime traders and coming close to, and even inter-marrying with, the Arab traders before the arrival of European seafarers. However, with the Portuguese and other European maritime powers obliterating their erstwhile domination of sea trade, the Mappila again fell on hard times.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Mysore Kingdom, ruled by Haider Ali, occupied northern Kerala. Haider Ali dealt harshly with the high-caste Nair community, executing many rebellious leaders and forcibly relocating them to Mysorean highlands. This caused much resentment in the society, and the British exploited this when the East India Company allied with the high-caste Hindus to fight the kingdom of Mysore. When Haider Ali’s son, Tipu Sultan (pioneer of rocket artillery and the leader who commissioned Zainul Abedin Shustari to write the military manual, *Fathul Mujahideen*⁸), lost the decisive Anglo-Mysore War in May 1799 CE, Malabar was captured by the British and organised as a district under the Madras Presidency.

Under a discriminatory land tenure system, the Mappilas (along with other low-caste Hindus) were again denied landownership, reinstating the norm of pre-modern Kerala. From 1836 to 1921, the Mappilas launched a series of revolts against the oppression of Hindu landlords and the British rule, which snowballed by becoming part of the Khilafat movement, leading to an explosion of violence in 1921–22, known as the Malabar Uprising. Initially supported by Mahatma Gandhi, the movement was brutally crushed by invoking martial law in the region, followed by the trial and execution of many Mappila rebels. An infamous incident, called “Wagon Tragedy”, remains part of the collective memory of Kerala Muslims against the Western rule, when a total of 67 Mappila prisoners were killed due to suffocation as they were being transported in a closed freight wagon from Tirur to the Central Prison in Podanur on 10 November 1921.⁹

These events are important to note while understanding Muslim anger against Western powers in Kerala and their relatively larger exodus to the ISIS-held territories in Afghanistan and Syria in recent years. The bitter memories of the Portuguese and British rule still resound in the collective Muslim psyche in Kerala, while the call to fight Western “crusaders” by jihadist groups, like the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS, finds resonance among fanatical elements in the community.

***Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*: Muslim Legal Text under Aurangzeb and the British**

Islam had never established itself as the state religion of India under the Mughal rule. This was a cause of great frustration among most *ulema* and even Sufi scholars, like Ahmad Shah Sirhindi, which gave rise to a firebrand political movement culminating in the ascendance of Aurangzeb to the throne.

During the Delhi Sultanate era, the judiciary and state law enforcement institutions, such as the *hisbah* (an institution for “promoting religious virtue and preventing vice”), used to provide enough incentives for the *ulema* to keep them in good humour.¹⁰ However, such state support was not extended to the *ulema* by Akbar, particularly in the later years of his reign. This galvanised the clerics in their support of Aurangzeb’s Islamisation agenda against the religious latitudinarianism of his predecessors.

According to Princeton scholar Muhammad Qasim Zaman, in the two centuries following the reign of Aurangzeb, the *ulema* overemphasised the study of original Islamic sources and downplayed the importance of rational sciences and free enquiry.¹¹ Further, the *ulema* of this period claimed that “Muslim political

decay in India was a function of religious decline, the result of the contamination of thought and practice with local polytheism and alien philosophies.”¹²

However, the *ulema* were also faced with a dual problem: how would they determine the constitutional basis and legal code for an Islamic state; and which Islamic school of jurisprudence should be chosen out of the four equally respected madhahib (Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki and Hanbali) in Sunni Islam in India?

Although the Hanafi madhab, being followed by most Sunnis in India, was believed to be the official school during the Muslim rule in India, Mahmud of Ghazni had himself turned away from Hanafi Sunni school to the Shafii madhab, according to scholars like Imam Al-Haramayn and Taj Al-Din Al-Subki.¹³ It is claimed that Mahmud wanted to please Abbasid Caliph Al-Qadir, who had transferred the *qada* (judgeship) from the Hanafis to the Shafiis, as enunciated in his statement of creed, known as *Risala Qadiriyya* (1031 CE), that supported the Shafii school of law and the Ashari theology. Thereafter, the Hanafi madhab was never given a formal sanction of being the official madhab by either the Ghurids, the Delhi Sultanate or the Mughals (barring Aurangzeb). Furthermore, the Hanafi doctrines were never transformed into a coherent and “unequivocal body” of authoritative rulings that the judges were obliged to abide by as a body of rulings, before the last of the great Mughals. In fact, Akbar had reduced the power of Hanafi madhab in the Mughal polity: “With an official document, known as *Mahdar*, he attempted to assume final authority in case of conflicting doctrines of *madhabib*.”¹⁴

The challenge for the *ulema* under Aurangzeb was how to convert India into “dar al-Islam” (dominion of Islam) when the doctrines of the Hanafi madhab had got mixed up with several divergent views and weak opinions (fatwas) of the school. Again, these legal doctrines were scattered in several books, most of which were not available in India.¹⁵ To overcome these problems, Aurangzeb himself chose to emphasise his adherence to the Hanafi madhab in order to “gain the support of the Sunni ulama and the Turani umara (lords) against the Rajput and Irani umara (lords), who had sympathies for his rivals.” To this end, Aurangzeb “put all his efforts in the direction that all the Muslims should adhere to the unanimous views of the Hanafi jurists”,¹⁶ and therefore patronised the compilation of the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* or *Fatawa-i-Hindiyya* (a comprehensive Hanafi legal text).¹⁷

This Shariah-based (Hanafi school-oriented) compilation was completed in 1672 CE. Its original 30 volumes (printed now in six volumes) covered issues of

statecraft, general ethics, personal laws, inter-religious matters, property and inheritance laws, military strategy, economic policy, transaction and taxation, justice and punishment. *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri* served as the law and was prepared to be the main regulating body of the Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb.¹⁸

Vaunted as “the greatest digest of Muslim law made in Mughal India”,¹⁹ the legal compendium comprised verses from the Quran and Hadeeth narrations taken from *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Al-Muslim*, *Sunan Abu Dawood* and *Jami Al-Tirmidhi*. It is believed that prominent Hanafi scholars from different parts of the world were gathered by Aurangzeb—300 from the subcontinent, 100 from Iraq and 100 from Hejaz (the western region of the Arabian Peninsula, where the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located)—for the compilation of *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri*. The project was led by Shiekh Nizam Burhanpuri and drew on the scholarship of another Naqshbandi scholar, Shah Abdur Rahim (father of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi).²⁰ To Aurangzeb, the treatise was his puritanical and abstract magnum opus, to rival earlier Mughal corporeal marvels of Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri over time.

Although earlier versions of Hanafi legal treatises were written in India to assist muftis and qazis and also harmonise their juristic differences, such as the *Fatawa Ghiyathiyah* (written in 1287 CE and attributed to Balban) and the *Tatar Khaniya* (completed in 1388 CE and attributed to Muhammad Tughlaq), no work before the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* was officially patronised by the emperor himself. It is believed that the Islamic jurists (*fuqaha*) themselves wanted to keep the rulers away from interfering in matters of the Shariah.²¹

However, medieval historian Richard Eaton states that the *Fatawa* did not necessarily bind Aurangzeb from acting independently: “The Emperor also used the finished text to guide the *farmans*, or Imperial decrees, although this did not prevent him from tailoring his interpretations of the text to fit particular circumstances.”²² According to Alan Guenther, the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* was a means of the emperor to wrest control of the *ulema* away from the Shariah and bring it into the domain of the state. Thus, Guenther believes that the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* resulted from a tension between Aurangzeb and the jurists and that the compendium was mainly a legal Hanafi text and never a piece of legislation.²³

More than Al-Marghilani’s famous Hanafi legal text, *Al-Hidaya*, the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* became the reference text for the British Raj to control their Muslim subjects better. The British rigidly impose Hanafi ulema’s version of Islamic law on a broad cross-section of Indian population from eighteenth century onwards.²⁴

Charles Hamilton, William Jones and Neill Baillie translated parts of the document and other Hanafi texts that shaped Islamic law and jurisprudence for India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the twentieth century.²⁵ Consequently, the Hanafi madhab no longer remained a legal doctrine but was the definitive image of Islam in the eyes of non-Muslims. The British colonialist could not differentiate the Hanafi code as merely a school of jurisprudence and equated it with religion, stripped of its spiritual and cultural vitality and ossified in legal casuistry.

Shah Waliullah Dehlawi: Meeting with Abd Al-Wahhab in Medina

One of the leading scholars in developing the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* was Shah Abdur Rahim, who also built Madrasah-i Rahimiyah. After his death in 1718 CE, Abdur Rahim's son, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703–62 CE)—the eminent Sufi mystic, religious scholar and reformist—started teaching at the madrasa. In fact, the madrasa became a leading institute of Islamic learning and Muslim resistance against British occupation under Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's sons, namely, Shah Abdul Aziz, Shah Rafi and Shah Abdul Qader, who taught there. Following the death of Abdul Aziz, the leadership of the madrasa was passed on to his son, Shah Muhammad Ishaq.

After the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 CE, several regional governors and rebellious rulers started to challenge the Mughal sway over the country. Prominent among the threats faced by Muslim rulers of the subcontinent was that from the Maratha Empire, whose boundaries, by 1757 CE, extended from the Indus in the north to northern Kerala in the south. In 1758 CE, the Maratha Empire nominally occupied Delhi, then conquered Lahore by driving out Timur Shah Durrani, the son and viceroy of the Afghan ruler, Ahmad Shah Abdali.²⁶

Fearing that the Marathas would wipe out the Mughal rule altogether, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, with several other Muslim clergy members, invited Ahmad Shah Abdali to defeat the Hindu Maratha power.²⁷ Already upset by the defeat of his son Timur Shah, Abdali decided to invade India and fight the growing Maratha challenge. On 14 January 1761, he dealt a decisive blow to the Maratha Army in the Third Battle of Panipat.²⁸

Shah Waliullah is often credited with successfully persuading Abadali to rescue Mughal rule in India from decimation by the Maratha Empire, but the impact of this Naqshbandi scholar and political activist on the course of Indian history does not end here.²⁹ His ideas spurred violent jihadist actions among many of his followers in subsequent years, be it against the British East India Company or

non-Muslim rulers of the country. In Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, many Muslims of the subcontinent found a “mujaddid” (reviver of faith who, according to the Prophet, comes in every century), who reconciled many of the internal disputes within Sunni Islam in order to prepare his community to take on the Shia as well as all non-Muslim adversaries.

Thus, Shah Waliullah made it his mission to bring synthesis or reconciliation (*tatbeeq*) among diverse views of the Sunni community. He made compelling arguments to reconcile the injunctions of the Quran and the Hadeeth (*manqulaat*) with the rational sciences (*maqulaat*). He believed that the differences among the Sunni schools of jurisprudence (fiqh)—the Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki and Hanbali—could be eliminated with the use of “demonstrated proof” (*burhan*), “intuition” (*wijdan*) and “demonstrated knowledge” (*manqool*). He also praised Sirhindi for his attempts at *tatbeeq* between Sufi mysticism and the Shariah.³⁰

As mentioned earlier, the great Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi expounded, among the major theological tensions between Sufism and the Shariah, the monistic concept of *wahdatul wujud*. According to hard-line *ulema* with a strict interpretation of *tawheed* (oneness of God), the Sufi concept of *wahdatul wujud* posits that the entire creation is part of godhead, which violates the monotheistic Islamic argument that God is transcendent and separate from creation. Therefore, no created thing bears any similitude nor has a share in God’s power. In fact, to make creation a part of the creator is tantamount to committing the biggest and most unpardonable sin of “shirk” (associating or including anything with godhead, *in this case all of creation*) in Islam.

However, purist Sufis regard the Islamic term *tauheed* (which comes from the word *waahid* or “one”) as being monistic, underscoring the impossibility of any real existence occurring outside of God. To resolve this philosophical conundrum, Ahmad Shah Sirhindi used the term “*Wahdat Al-Shuhud*” (oneness of witness) instead of “*Wahdatul Wujud*”. That is, the mystic in a state of trance perceives no difference between God and his creation, but this is only the delirious and subjective experience of a mystical mind that “witnesses oneness”, even though the creator and creation are separate from each other.

Despite Sirhindi’s arguments, many reputed Sufis continued to abide by Ibn Arabi’s original concept of ‘*wahdatul wujud*’. Among the Sufis who did not embrace Sirhindi’s monotheistic ideal of ‘*wahdatul shuhud*’ were Shah Waliullah’s father and eminent Sufi scholar Shah Abdur Rahim (d. 1718 CE), the noted Persian poet Mirza Abd Al-Qadir Bedil (d. 1720 CE) and the noted Persian poet

and intellectual Mir Ali Muttaqi (d. 1810 CE).³¹ In an attempt to resolve this contentious issue, Shah Waliullah wrote a mind-bending argument, *Faisla-i-Wahdatal-Wujud Wa 'al Shubhood*, to rationally prove the difference between the two concepts mentioned in the title of his work was merely semantic.³²

Shah Waliullah also provided his understanding of the theory of the caliphate, again intending to reconcile both the Sufi mystics and the hard-line *ulema* following a minimalist interpretation of the Shariah. He distinguished between the inner or spiritual (*batini*) caliphate that promotes the highest values of spirituality and ethics, instead of the political (*zahiri*) caliphate that is only expected to uphold Islamic forms of worship and rituals in society. He observed that the first four caliphs were both the “*batini*” (spiritually enlightened) and “*zahiri*” (temporal and practically astute) leaders of the community. After them, Muslim caliphates mainly comprised *zahiri* caliphs, such as the Abbasids. Therefore, the community should not fret too much about caliphs who may not seem to measure up to the highest levels of spiritual and ethical conduct.

There has been much speculation on whether Shah Waliullah ever actually met Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, founder of the so-called Wahhabi movement in the Arabian Peninsula, as both of them were contemporaries. In fact, Shah Waliullah had travelled to Hejaz (the region of Mecca and Medina) as a young man to perform the Haj around 1730 CE. According to Charles Allen, Shah Waliullah and Al-Wahhab were both contemporaries and were taught by an immigrant Naqshbandi Sufi teacher, Muhammad Hayat from Sindh, who was from the line of Ahmad Shah Sirhindi himself.

At Medina, Al Wahhab studied initially under a fellow Nejdī, Abd Allah ibn Ibrahim ibn Sayf, a known admirer of the theology of Ibn Taymiyyah, who then introduced him to an Indian immigrant named MUHAMMAD HAYAT of Sindh, a prominent teacher of Hadith. Although a follower of Shafii school of jurisprudence and not a Hanbali, Muhammad Hayat was a Naqshbandi Sufi of the line of 16th-century hardline revivalist Sheikh Ahmad Shah Sirhindi—and he too was an admirer of the heretical Sheikh Ibn Taymiyya. Muhammad Hayat and his father are known to have taught a great many students in Medina. Besides Al Wahhab from Nejd, these Talibs included a young man from Delhi: Shah Waliullah.

Few historians seem to have realised that Shah Waliullah of Delhi, born in 1703, and Al-Wahhab of Nejd were not only contemporaries but studied in Medina over the same period and had at least one teacher in

common... Thus, the intriguing possibility presents itself that these two young revolutionaries to be may have sat in the same class and even exchanged ideas.³³

Other historians have also confirmed the above-mentioned claims of Charles Allen about the teacher of Al-Wahhab being a Naqshbandi Sufi scholar, greatly influenced by the religious teachings of Ahmad Shah Sirhindi.³⁴

Again, some of the Bareilvi Sufi critics of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi disregard his Sufi writings and consider him a complete Wahhabi. His position against “*istighatha*” (seeking help from prophets and Muslim saints) and equating it with shirk has been cited as evidence of his non-Sufi and Wahhabi ideals. However, even more than Shah Waliullah, who has made profound observations on Sufi thought, it is in his son, Shah Abdul Aziz, that one finds clear strains of Wahhabi ideology.

Thus, to overcome the decline of Muslim power in the country, Shah Waliullah sought to unite Sunni Muslims, bury doctrinal disputes within their sect and present a united front against their adversaries. Although a Sufi of the Naqshbandi order, he called for adopting the Shariah to overcome contemporary socio-political problems, and also worked towards resolving the confusion between Sufi beliefs and Islamic teachings. Further, alarmed by the growing influence of Hindu religion and culture on Indian Muslims, he urged Muslim nobles to raise a purely Sunni army to overpower the rising Sikh, Jat and Maratha power in the country. Shah Waliullah was also against the Persian and allegedly Shia influence on Mughal India, which he believed diluted the purity of Islam. Although a Sufi himself, he was opposed to certain monistic beliefs and so-called Hindu practices of Indian Sufis, which he considered *bidah* (religious innovation).

This line of thinking greatly influenced many influential Indian Muslim scholars and activists after him and formed the basis for what came to be known as the Deobandi school of thought. In the words of Tariq Hasan:

It is his (Shah Waliullah's) school of thought that is often referred to as the Waliullah Movement, which is regarded as the seminal 18th-century movement for reforms amongst Indian Muslims.

It is the seed from which germinated all schools of reform including the Mohammedia Movement in the 19th century in North India, the Faraizi movement for agrarian and socio-religious reforms in Bengal, the Saiyad Ahmad Bareilvi movement for Jihad (not to be confused with the later-day Bareilvi movement of Sunni Muslims) and finally the Deoband Movement in the mid-19th century.³⁵

Shah Abdul Aziz and the “Wahhabi” Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya Movement

The spiritual successor of Shah Waliullah was his son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746–1824 CE), who, as shown by his writings, was even more extreme in his views towards the Shia (whom he considered a Shia) than his father. He also translated the Quran into Urdu, as the nascent Indian language had gradually started to replace Persian.

Unlike his father’s time when Hindu Maratha power seemed to be threatening Muslim rule in India, Shah Abdul Aziz was witness to the rise of the British East India Company, which was steadily increasing its political sway over India after defeating the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, in the Battle of Plassey (1757 CE). They, then, vanquished the combined armies of Mir Qasim of Bengal, Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh and Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II in the Battle of Buxar (1764 CE). Eventually, the British East India Company invaded Maratha territory by the end of the three Anglo-Maratha wars (1775–1819 CE).

In these adverse circumstances, Shah Abdul Aziz issued a fatwa that declared territories under British rule “*dar al-harb*”, but kept territories under Hindu rulers outside of this categorisation.³⁶ Although the fatwa did not provoke an immediate violent reaction or any Muslim campaign against territories under British control, it did become the basis for Muslim uprising against the British East India Company in the Revolt of 1857.

Shah Abdul Aziz is also considered the founder of the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya movement, which many of his detractors considered to be nothing else but radical Wahhabism under a different name.

Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi: India’s First Jihadist based in Balakot

Perhaps the most famous disciple of Shah Abdul Aziz was Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (1786–1831 CE), from Raebareli city in today’s Uttar Pradesh. Labelled by his detractors as a Wahhabi, even though he did not consider himself as such. Edward Mortimer says Sayyid Ahmad is fore-runner of modern Islamists in the way they wage jihad and he attempted to form an Islamic state with strict enforcement of the Shariah.³⁷ Olivier Roy also finds in him the first modern Islamic leader who led a “religious, military and political” campaign; and for this cause, he did not just address the rulers but also rallied the common people for jihad.³⁸

In matters of theology, he followed a puritanical interpretation of tawheed (Islamic monotheism), which smacked of a *muwahhidun* (Wahhabi) interpretation

in that it was devoid of the traces of monistic interpretations—wahdatul wujud. Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi was staunchly opposed to the veneration of saints or visit to the graves of holy men, which the common Sufi followers practised and considered to be bidah. His teachings were compiled by an acolyte, Shah Ismail Dehlavi, in the form of two treatises, *Sirat'ul Mustaqim* (“The Straight Path”) and *Taqwiyatul-Iman* (“Strengthening of the Faith”).³⁹

Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi was disturbed by the conquest of Muslim-ruled territories in India by the British East India Company. In particular, he was concerned about the growing activities of Christian missionaries and what he considered was their systematic movement for religious conversions. The issue triggered a strong desire in him to wage war against the British East India Company across the country.

Sayyid Ahmad was, thus, the first radical Islamist theologian of the subcontinent who worked towards stirring a scholarly, military and political movement to combat the British threat. He directly addressed Muslim masses and not just prominent rulers in his call for jihad against the British rule. For this purpose, he sought help from Pindari nawab of the state of Tonk in today's province of Rajasthan. His plea for support was not limited to Muslim rulers only, but extended to the Hindu king of Gwalior and Maratha nobleman Raja Hindu Rao as well, to whom he wrote:

It is apparent to you that unfriendly foreigners of a distant land have become masters of the country, that traders have assumed the dignity of “Sultanat” and destroyed the reign of great rulers...by depriving them from respect and honour...The purport of this affectionate letter will truly be explained to you in details by Haji Bahadur Shah who is an old associate of mine.⁴⁰

He first participated in a war against the British by joining the forces of Ameer Khan, the ruler of Tonk, in 1810 CE. However, Sayyid Ahmad left the service of Ameer Khan when he became an ally of the East India Company, in 1817 CE, after the Third Anglo-Maratha War. Between 1818–21 CE, he visited numerous towns in northern India, preaching against many Sufi and Shia beliefs and practices, which he considered were polytheistic.⁴¹ Once, he told his disciples who had sworn allegiance (bayah) to him:

Brethren! the purpose of performing the “bayah” is that you should give up everything you do which is of the nature of polytheism or heresy, your making of tazyiah (Shia passion play tableaux), setting up of banners,

worshipping the tombs of saints and martyrs, making offerings to them and taking vows in their names. All this you should give up, and do not believe that your good and ill come from anyone except God; do not recognize anyone but Him as having the power to grant the fulfilment of your wishes. If you continue [in this way of polytheism and heresy], merely offering “bayah” will bring no benefit.⁴²

After returning from the Haj in 1823 CE, Sayyid Ahmad decided to fight the Sikh Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which he feared was expanding too deep into Afghanistan, a Muslim region. To check Ranjit Singh’s advance and establish a base for launching a future invasion of India, Sayyid Ahmad sought to establish a Shariah-based Islamic state in the North-West Frontier in the Peshawar Valley. In late 1826 CE, funded by nawabs like Ameer Khan, Sayyid Ahmad arrived in Peshawar with 8,000 mujahideen fighters and set up bases in the towns of Hund and Zaida in the Swabi district.⁴³ His fighters were educated in both theological doctrines and warfare training. In December 1826 CE, Sayyid Ahmad and his fighters clashed with Sikh troops at Akora with some success. After a month, he was declared “khalifah” and was also given the title of “imam”.

After becoming the khalifah, Sayyid Ahmad imposed his own strict version of the Shariah and increased the land revenue to the religious tithe (*ushr*) of 10 per cent of crop yields. In addition, he prohibited some evil social practices, polygamy of having more than four wives, denial of inheritance to women and clan wars. These measures eventually drew fierce backlash from Afghan patriarchal tribal leaders, who did not accept his reformist fundamentalism. By 1830 CE, many of Sayyid Ahmad’s mujahideen were killed, and the movement was forced to retreat to the hills. Then, in 1831 CE, Sayyid Ahmad was decapitated by the Sikh Army in Balakot, while his disciple, Shah Ismail Dehlavi, was shot dead.

Shah Ismail Dehlavi’s Treatises on ‘*Tariqa-i-Muhammadiyah*’

It is important to note that Shah Ismail Dehlavi (1771–1831 CE) was the grandson of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. Impressed by the cause of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi, he joined his movement along with Maulvi Abdul Hai (d. 1828 CE). The agenda of their new movement, known as “*Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah*”, was to fight British colonisers and their allies, as well as to purify the tenets of Islam from Hindu customs, traditions and cultural practices. To this effect, Shah Ismail wrote two treatises: *Sira’ul Mustaqim* and *Taqwiyatul-Iman*. In the words of the famous historian Barbara Metcalf:

Sayyid Ahmad's reformist teachings were set down in two works that, when printed on the new lithographic press of the day, soon achieved wide circulation. *The Sirat'ul Mustaqim* (the Straight Path) was compiled by Muhammad Ismail in 1819. Written initially in Persian, it was translated into Urdu to reach a wider audience. The second work, *Taqwiyatul-Iman* or the strengthening of the Faith, was written directly in Urdu. The two works stressed above all the centrality of tawhid, the transcendent unity of God, and denounced all those practices and beliefs that were held in any way to compromise that most fundamental of Islamic tenets. God alone was held to be omniscient and omnipotent. He alone, entitled to worship and homage. There were, the followers of Sayyid Ahmad argued, three sources of threat to this belief: false Sufism, Shia doctrines and practices, and popular custom.⁴⁴

The *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* movement has been called the Indian version of Wahhabism, starting from Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi. However, the movement appears to have more in common with the Naqshbandi silsila of Sirhindi's Sufism, which, as mentioned earlier, was one of the major influences for the rise of Wahhabism in Central Arabia.

After his death, Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi was turned into an imam by the *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya*, more in the fashion of a Sufi or Shia religious leader, the precursor of the Ahl-i-Hadeeth movement in the subcontinent.⁴⁵

Spread of *Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya* in Bengal

The manner of Islam's advent in Bengal has remained a contentious issue. According to historical sources, Muslim traders first visited the province during the early years of Islam's spread and traversed the maritime route to reach China. Coins of the Abbasid age have been excavated in Bengal, matching the Buddhist rule of the Pala Empire in the region. One of the first Sufi mystics to reach the region was Shah Sultan Rumi in the eleventh century.⁴⁶

In 1203 CE, a Turko-Afghan general of the Ghurid Empire, Bakhtiyar Khalji, defeated King Lakshman Sena of the Sena Empire of Bengal. His conquests of Bengal and Bihar led to the establishment of the Khalji dynasty of Bengal from 1203 CE to 1227 CE. His reign is said to have been responsible for the displacement of Buddhists from the region and the desecration of their religious sites and academic institutions, including the famed Nalanda University. The fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the rise of the Bengal Sultanate, the dominant power of the Ganges–Brahmaputra Delta. Its five dynastic periods

reached their peak under Hussain Shahi dynasty. Its vast expanse, along with its vassal states, covered Odisha (modern Orissa) in the southwest, Arakan (region of Rohingya population) in the southeast and Tripura in the east.

The Bengali, Assamese and Arakanese Muslim communities (of largely Hanafi Sunnis) trace their histories to the Bengal Sultanate—a dynasty of Perso-Turkic, Arab, Pashtun and Bengali elites.⁴⁷ The establishment of a single united Bengal Sultanate in 1352 CE, by Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, eventually developed a “Bengali” socio-linguistic identity. European traders identified the Bengal Sultanate as “the richest country to trade with”.⁴⁸ However, with the rise of the Suri Empire and then the expansion of Mughals, the Bengal Sultanate disintegrated, and the region turned into the Bengal *subah* (province) under the Mughal Empire.

With the decline of the Mughal Empire and the capture of India’s eastern provinces by the British after winning the Battle of Plassey in 1757 CE, Muslims of the former Bengali subah felt politically weakened and fell for the militant message of Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi. Thus, the former Bengal Sultanate region soon became a hotbed of Shah Abdul Aziz’s *Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya* movement. Most of these socio-political and militant activists belonged to the ideology of Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi or Wahhabism that they learnt in Mecca while travelling for the Haj.

Titu Mir: Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi’s Ardent Disciple

A clear example is that of Syed Mir Nisar Ali, better known as Titu Mir (1782–1831 CE), an Islamic scholar and *hafiz* (memoriser) of the Quran, who became a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi in Mecca when both of them were performing the Haj pilgrimage. Titu Mir was impressed by Sayyid Ahmad’s puritanical teachings and his advocacy of jihad for purging non-Islamic practices from society.⁴⁹

Upon his return from Mecca, he mobilised the Muslim peasantry that felt exploited by Hindu zamindars (landlords) and the British East India Company, which forced them to cultivate indigo. Titu Mir asked the peasants to be more spiritually disciplined, observe the Shariah’s injunctions punctiliously and stop praying at the graves of saints. Gaining huge support from the Muslim and even Hindu peasantry, Titu Mir proclaimed himself the “badshah” of a large area around Narkelberia and built a bamboo fort (“Bansher Kella”) there. On 18 November 1831, after receiving instructions from Lord William Bentick, the Governor-General of India, the British forces bombarded Titu Mir’s bamboo fort, which

took a long time to breach. Titu Mir was bayoneted to death, while 800 of his fighters were arrested, with many being tried and hanged to death.⁵⁰

Shariatullah and the Faraizi Movement

Another prominent Bengali leader and a more accomplished Islamic scholar than Titu Mir was Haji Shariatullah, who founded the Faraizi movement in Bengal in 1818 CE. Having lived in Arabia for 19 years (1799–1818 CE), Shariatullah was deeply influenced by Wahhabi principles prevalent in the region at that time. On returning to India, he was well received for his scholarship in Arabic literature and fiqh (jurisprudence).

When Shariatullah witnessed the social ills and religious practices of fellow Bengali Muslims, he started preaching for strict compliance of obligatory religious duties or *faraiz*, from which his movement derived its name. He believed that by shunning non-Islamic Sufi practices of visiting graves, etc., and adherence to tawheed (belief in the oneness of God) and *taubah* (sincere repentance), even the poorest of peasants would receive divine guidance and help to overcome their problems.

The movement became very popular and spread to Dhaka, Faridpur, Barisal and Comilla, and even caused a riot in the Nayabari district of Dhaka. The Hindu and Muslim landlords and European indigo planters were afraid that Shariatullah's teachings would stir up a peasant revolt against oppressive taxation and enforced cultivation of indigo. For his part, Shariatullah urged the peasants to stop paying heavy taxes to the landlords and opposed the ban on slaughter of cattle during Eid festival. For such activities, he was put in prison several times.⁵¹

Dadu Miyan: Rage of the Indigo Cultivators

Haji Shariatullah died in 1840 CE and his movement was then led by his only son, Muhsinuddin Ahmad alias Dadu Miyan (also spelt as Dudu Miyan).⁵² Though not as great a scholar as his illustrious father, he gave the Faraizi movement a better organisational structure. To him, the land belonged to those who worked it, not the landlords or British rulers. He established a khalifah in every village and set up an independent administrative structure.⁵³ Like his father, Dadu Miyan was arrested many times at the behest of the landlords for asking peasants not to pay taxes. During the 1857 revolt, the British government kept him in Alipore prison as a precaution. He was released in 1860, but two years later, he died of natural causes at the age of 43.⁵⁴

After its initiation in the northwestern regions of the country by Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi and his loyal comrade-in-arms Shah Ismail Dehlavi, the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya movement spread to the eastern states of India. Despite its stridently radical Islamist message, it reached out to the concerns of the common people and, in the east, took up the cause of the lowly peasants. Although its religious extremism stopped it from becoming hugely popular, it impacted the outbreak of the 1857 revolt and the Partition of Bengal, both in 1905 and in 1947. With a mix of Wahhabi and Naqshbandiya strains, it also became the precursor to the emergence of the Ahl-i-Hadeeth community in India.

However, the historical importance of this movement has increased in recent decades because the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya has striking similarities with the non-state jihadi groups operating in South Asia in the twenty-first century, with their Wahhabi and Deobandi ideologies and methodologies being first introduced to the subcontinent by this movement.

Wilayat Ali and Inayat Ali: Barelvi's Warriors till 1857 CE

The period between Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi's death in 1831 CE and the famed 1857 revolt is, to a great extent, the history of the activities of Wilayat Ali (1790–1852 CE) and Inayat Ali (1794–1858 CE) of the Sadiqpur family of Patna (then called Azeemabad). Dubbed by the British historian William Hunter as Indian Wahhabis, these two brothers were described thus:

Indefatigable as missionaries, careless of themselves, blameless in their lives, supremely devoted to the overthrow of their English infidels, admirably skilful in organising a permanent system for supplying money and recruits, the Patna caliphs stand forth as the types and exemplars of the sect. Much of their teaching was faultless, and it was given to them to stir up thousands of their countrymen to the truer life and purer conception of the Almighty.⁵⁵

The two brothers had sworn allegiance to Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi himself and had served him in the North-Western Frontier Province, fighting the Sikh forces for years. In 1829–30 CE, Sayyid Ahmad sent Wilayat Ali and Saiyyad Mohammad Ali Rampuri to Hyderabad (Deccan) to propagate his teaching. After Sayyid Ahmad died in Balakot in 1831 CE, Wilayat Ali became the leader of the militant movement. His group propagated that Sayyid Ahmad did not die in the battle but had gone into hiding. The two brothers propagated myths about Sayyid Ahmad's spiritual powers and kept sending recruits to their base in Sittana town in the Frontier region.

In 1847 CE, the British defeated the forces of Wilayat Ali in Dub. Wilayat Ali and his soldiers were arrested and sent back to Patna following the defeat. However, by 1851 CE, he returned to the Frontier region and fomented revolt within the 4th Native Infantry stationed at Rawalpindi. The movement suffered an irreparable loss when Maulana Wilayat Ali suddenly passed away in October 1852.

Inayat Ali succeeded his elder brother and took on the British forces in 1853 CE, in which many of his mujahideen soldiers died and he narrowly escaped. In October 1857, Inayat Ali made a successful night attack on the British assistant commissioner at Sheikhjana. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the 1857 rebellion cut off his supplies from Patna, forcing him to suspend his operations. Inayat Ali died in Swat in 1858 CE.⁵⁶

NOTES

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19

Indian Muslims: From Rulers to Subjects of British Raj (1857–1920)

The Musalmans of India are, and have been for many years, a source of chronic danger to British power in India.

—W.W. Hunter¹

Rebellion of 1857: The Glory of Hindu–Muslim Unity

The rebellion of 1857 against the rule of the British East India Company, which broke out in May 1857 and lasted up to June 1858, has been variously described in an eloquent manner as India's First War of Independence by most historians from the subcontinent and as Sepoy² Mutiny by British colonial historians. The aim of the insurgents, both Muslims and Hindus, was to restore the pre-British political order in India. Muslim rebels, in particular, wanted to restore their past imperial glory. Although political and economic causes were potent enough to bring about the countrywide upheaval, ultimately it was socio-religious causes that proved to be the trigger for the revolt.

The rapid annexation of Indian territories by the British East India Company through dubious policies, like Governor-General Wellesley's subsidiary alliances and Governor-General Dalhousie's "Doctrine of Lapse", and the 1856 Enlistment Act caused a seething resentment among the Indian rulers (rajās and nawabs) and even Indian sepoys working for the British East India Company. However, as observed by famed historian Surendra Nath Sen: "Religion is the most potent

force in the absence of territorial patriotism, and in 1857 men from all walks of life joined hands with the sepoy in the defence of religion.”³ The mutiny was “the last attempt made by the *Brahmanas* and the *maulvis*, who had the support of the masses, to put up a last-ditch fight to save India from the clutches of the foreigners.”⁴

Although Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs came together for reasons that had more to do with protecting their respective religions from British imperialism and the spread of Christianity, their unity under an aged Mughal ruler developed a rare semblance of Indian nationalism. Thus, despite the eventual failure of the revolt, the movement did give birth to a sense of national unity and identity.

In 2007, that is, 150 years after the rebellion, former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, addressing a packed house of the Indian Parliament, stated:

What is significant is that despite rallying under the flag of “deen” and “dharma”, the rebellion was united. There was no division between Hindus and Muslims in their resistance to alien domination... In every “ishtahar” (advertisement) that the rebel leadership issued, Hindus and Muslims were called upon to rise together to fight against British rule and to remove it.⁵

However, for many British strategists at that time, the rebellion was mainly the result of a Muslim conspiracy. According to Colonel George Malleon, a prominent historian of the 1857 revolt: “The war was the result of a premeditated conspiracy which had its ramifications all over India and which had among its prime movers the Maulavis [Indian *ulema*].”⁶

The trigger for the nationwide rebellion came on 10 May 1857 in Meerut, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Hindu and Muslim sepoy (especially from the 11th Bengal Native Infantry), joined by civilians, marched to Delhi and reached the Red Fort in the early hours on 11 May. Here, they proclaimed octogenarian Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal ruler, as the emperor of India.

The representation of Muslims in the march to Delhi was equal to that of Hindus. Muslim sources name Sheikh Peer Ali, Ameer Qudrat Ali, Sheikh Hasan ud-Deen and Sheikh Noor Muhammad as prominent Muslims who took part in the march to Delhi.⁷ In fact, many of the leaders had already prepared the Muslim masses for years before the outbreak of the revolt against the British. Among these were Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah of Faizabad, Imdadullah Muhajir Makki of Muzaffarnagar, Fazl-e-Haq of Khairabad and Azimullah Khan, an associate of Nana Sahib.⁸

In the British sources, certain groups of Muslim revolutionaries were termed *ghazis* or *jhadis* and mujahideen: “When the Mutiny was at its height, hundreds of thousands of *ghazis* (Muslim fighters) converged at the hotspots of revolt that included Delhi, Lucknow, Bareilly, Agra, and Thana Bhawan, besides Kanpur and Shahjahanpur, and fought till the end.”⁹ Irfan Habib describes these *ghazis* as a mixed bag of Wahhabi clerics and Naqshbandis, but mostly composed of skilled wage-earning classes.¹⁰ The description of these so-called *ghazis* was precise: “gray-bearded men of the Rohilla race, clad in green, with green turbans and kummerbunds, round shields on the left arm, and curved talwars that would split a hair”.¹¹

It was not just the *ulema* or *ghazis* but even the Muslim nawabs and landlords who fought valiantly and made numerous sacrifices in this campaign. For instance, Nawab Tafazzul Husain Khan of Farrukhabad supported the mutineers, and so he was exiled by the British to Hejaz, where he is said to have died in poverty. The British executed Nawab of Jhajjar, Abdul Rehman Khan, for participating in the uprising. He was hanged at the Delhi Kotwali on 23 December 1857. Other prominent leaders, namely, the Nawab of Ambapani, Fazil Mohammad Khan and the Nawab of Farrukhnagar, Ahmed Ali Khan, were also hanged in 1857 for their participation in the campaign against the East India Company.

On 19 May 1857, many Muslim leaders raised the cry of jihad from Delhi’s Jama Masjid. However, Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar did not approve of calling of the struggle against the English in the name of religion. “To him, the struggle was not religious. He apprehended that such slogans were bound to exasperate the Hindus.”¹² He, thus, declined to call the fight against the English a jihad because it would give a wrong signal to the sepoys, the majority of whom were Hindus.

Just like Bahadur Shah Zafar, Birjis Qadar (who was Nawab of Awadh at that time) issued a pronouncement on 17 August 1857 that highlighted the following points: “(a) cruelty and misbehaviour of English (b) united defence of the religions of the Hindus and Muslims. (c) Extirpation of English rule from India by all means.”¹³ The martyred Mughal prince, Feroz Shah, also issued a similar proclamation on 25 August 1857, emphasising Hindu–Muslim unity. In almost all the proclamations, the rebel leaders laid emphasis on unity for the protection of *deen* (Islamic faith) and *dharam* (Hindu religion), which they claimed was in danger under the English rule.¹⁴ These apprehensions about the danger to the religion of Hindus and Muslims were not without foundation.

In order to buttress Hindu–Muslim unity, Bahadur Shah Zafar issued an order to his general, Bakht Khan, that the sepoys and the army officers should shun cow slaughter on Eid Al-Adha festival. A stern warning was given to the Muslims that violation of the order could lead to death. Further, the order stated that if anyone encouraged cow slaughter, he could be given the death penalty. Bakht Khan enforced this order, despite some Muslim leaders, like Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, expressing their unhappiness over it.¹⁵

Although freedom-loving Hindu rulers (like Nana Sahib and Rani of Jhansi) fought together with Muslims in the revolt, the British regarded Muslims as the main forerunners and prospective beneficiaries of the uprising. In the words of Belkacem Belmekki:

The British had always regarded the Muslims as their arch-enemy in India due to the fact that they (the British) had unseated them from power, and the fact that the insurgents endeavoured to restore Bahadur Shah II to power convinced the British enough to assume that the Muslim leaders were behind the planning and leading of the uprising.¹⁶

Commenting on this, Thomas Metcalf wrote: “As the former rulers of Hindustan, the Muslims had, in British eyes, necessarily to place themselves at the head of a movement for the overthrow of the British Government.”¹⁷

The 1857 revolt ended as a major humanitarian disaster for the Muslims. It is believed that the *ulema* and Sufi fighters were slaughtered in thousands across the country, the Mughal capital of Delhi was emptied of its Hindu and Muslim people and they were not allowed to return to reclaim their homes and businesses. In the words of S.R. Wasti: “Mass massacres, indiscriminate hangings, inhumane tortures and large-scale confiscation of properties were some of the means adopted by the British.”¹⁸

The great Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib was one of the few people allowed to remain in Delhi (mainly because of his neutrality during the conflict) following the British re-conquest of the capital. However, Ghalib was deeply disturbed by the violence and desolation of the city, as expressed in the following verse:

Shehr-e Dehli ka zarra zarra-e khaak
Tishna khoon hai har Musalman ka

The city of Delhi is thirsty for Muslim blood
And every grain of dust must drink its fill.¹⁹

Paradigmatic Shift to Education Centres, Religious Reforms

The Revolt of 1857 came to a symbolic end with the British exiling the last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah Zafar, to Rangoon (in Myanmar), following his capture at Humayun's Tomb on 20 September 1857. Concurrently, his sons, Mirza Mughal and Mirza Khizr Sultan, as well as his grandson, Mirza Abu Bakht, were shot dead by Major William Hodson.²⁰

It would be incorrect to claim that the Muslim community wholly favoured a militant response to British colonialism. There were many conflicting views of Muslim religious scholars and imams of the time, who questioned whether the declaration of British-ruled Indian territories as “dar al-harb” validated carrying out militant jihad or whether jihad itself always meant carrying out armed combat.²¹ There were also profound differences among Muslim clerics whether 1857 offered the right circumstances for conducting and winning the war against the British.²²

For instance, the position of Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah (who was representative of Peshwa Nana Sahib in London) in favour of militant jihad was not accepted by the *ulema* in Delhi, and he was soon captured and imprisoned in the capital. It is another matter that this great freedom fighter, lauded by Thomas Seaton as a “man of great abilities, of undaunted courage, of stern determination, and by far the best soldier among the rebels. ... The Moulvi was a remarkable person. His name was Ahmad-Ullah and his native place was Faizabad in Oudh. In-person, he was tall, lean and muscular, with large deep eyes, beetle brows, a high aquiline nose, and lantern jaws”,²³ was released from Faizabad prison by mutineers. He then became an adviser to Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh during the mutiny led by her.

Thus, the fact remains that many Muslim clerics and intellectuals did not follow Bahadur Shah Zafar or Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah and were sceptical about resorting to warfare against the British. Both Mirza Ghalib and historian Maulvi Zakauallah were not harassed by the British during the mutiny as they called for reconciliation with the British. The great Muslim reformist Sir Syed Ahmad Khan publicly denounced the call for jihad against the British in Bijnor in 1857. Several *ulema* also issued a fatwa during the revolt against Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and praised the British for permitting Muslims to continue practising their religion freely.²⁴

It is also said that Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, who later founded the Darul Uloom Deoband, were

initially opposed to the revolt, but once the stories of British brutality and repression were reported, they joined the rebellion. However, there remain conflicting views on the extent of the involvement of Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi in the 1857 uprising, particularly in the disturbances that took place in Thana Bhawan and then, in Shamli. In the words of Barabara Metcalf:

Deobandis caught up in the nationalist movement after World War I, came to believe that the founders of their school, particularly Muhammad Qasim, Rashid Ahmad, and Imadullah, had joined the rebels, organising a counter-government and engaging in a military revolt during September of 1857 in the *qasbah* of Thana Bhawan and Shamli. This account has been invariably accepted, yet this view of events at Thana Bhawan, identifying each member's posts, and the course of the uprising, appear only in secondary sources, written after about 1920. Earlier biographies argue that the accusations of involvement were those of enemies and that the ultimate release from the jail of Rashid Ahmad, who spent six months confined, and the fact that Muhammad Qasim was never arrested, testify to the loyalty (to the British) of both men.²⁵

The disturbance in Thana Bhawan is said to have arisen out of a dispute between a Hindu trader and a youth by the name of Hafiz Mohammad Zamin (who belonged to a rich Muslim family of clerics), when the former sold an elephant to the latter. On the suspicion that the Muslim youth was a supporter of the 1857 rebellion, the British district collector investigating the transaction issued the order that he should be executed. However, the hanging of Zamin, without any legal process, triggered off a mass protest, which involved both Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, along with Haji Imdadullah Makki.²⁶

In the wake of this incident, the *ulema* in the nearby town of Shamli issued a decree sanctioning jihad against British rule, which led to a spurt of violence and a heavy British clamp down, with many Muslim fighters being given the death sentence and others being exiled to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (referred to as "Kala Pani") for life. Haji Imdadullah, considered to be the instigator of this uprising, escaped arrest and fled to Punjab. From there, he went to the holy city of Mecca, where he earned much respect and was known as "Muhajir Makki" (refugee of Mecca), and eventually died in the city.

The failure of the Shamli uprising is said to have deeply disturbed both Nanautawi and Gangohi and they accepted that it was futile to try to defeat the British militarily. Instead, they decided to start the "jihad of the pen" by concentrating on preserving Islamic education to safeguard their religion and

culture from what they conceived was the onslaught of British educational system. According to Ziaul Hasan Farouqi: “Shamli and Deoband are, as a matter of fact, the two sides of one and the same picture. The difference lies only in weapons. Now the sword and the spear were replaced by the pen and the tongue.”²⁷

Establishment of Darul Uloom Deoband

The district of Saharanpur, in the extreme west of the present state of Uttar Pradesh, is famous for the Islamic seminary of Darul Uloom (House of Knowledge) in Deoband, a small town about 20 kilometres from the district headquarters.²⁸ Established on 13 May 1866 by Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, Sayyid Muhammad Abid, Fazlur Rahman Usmani, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, among others, this educational institution followed the Hanafi–Maturidi school of Sunni theology.²⁹ In the words of Metcalf:

The madrasa at Deoband began modestly in 1867 (a decade after the Great Rebellion) in an old mosque, the Chatta Masjid, under a spreading pomegranate tree which still stands. The first teacher and the first pupil, in a coincidence deemed auspicious, were both named Mahmud: Mulla Mahmud, the teacher, and Mahmud Hasan, the pupil, who was later to become the school’s most famous teacher.³⁰

Surprisingly, this new Islamic seminary followed British educational institutions in that it had classrooms and a central library. In addition, the school was not an adjunct to a mosque or a home and was run by a professional staff, had a fixed course of study and an examination system, after which prizes were awarded at an annual public convocation. This was, in fact, unlike the other conventional schools at that time that followed the informal familial pattern. For example, in the famous Firangi Mahal in Lucknow, family members taught students in some part of a household compound and they only read a particular book with a teacher who, at the end of the session, issued a certificate (*sanad*) validating the student’s accomplishment, thereby allowing him to seek another teacher for a new course.

The new seminary was also different in terms of its funding, as it was wholly dependent on public contributions and not on waqf holdings (an Islamic endowment of property to be held in trust and used for a charitable or religious purpose) or contributions by wealthy pirs. Whereas the students of earlier seminaries were trained to become government servants under Muslim rulers, the Deobandi *ulema* sought to create a body of religious leaders able to serve their

fellow Muslims' daily legal and spiritual needs apart from government ties. This form of education departed from the Sufi style of close “*pir*” and “*murid*” style of education.³¹

Students were expected to study a fixed and comprehensive course of studies, originally scheduled for 10 years but later reduced to six. These studies covered the “*manqulaat*” (education in Quran and Hadeeth as well as associated literature) and the “*maqulaat*” that pertained to the analytical studies of fiqh or law,³² logic and philosophy as taught in the cities of Lucknow and Khairabad. Thus, the curriculum of *Dars-i-Nizami*³³—a system developed by the great scholar Nizamuddin Sihalivi (born on 27 March 1677 in Barabanki district, Uttar Pradesh) for Firangi Mahal in Lucknow in 1748—was adopted by the seminary. The syllabus broadly covered hafiz (Quranic memorisation), *sarf* and *nawh* (Arabic syntax and grammar), tafseer (exegesis of Quran), *tarikh* (Islamic history), the Shariah and fiqh (Islamic law and jurisprudence) and knowledge of Persian and Urdu.

Deobandi School of Sunni Islam: Sufi–Wahhabi Syncretism

The Darul Uloom Deoband drew its ideological inspiration from Shah Waliullah Dehlawi and Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, who tried to reconcile the Hanafi, Asharite, Maturidi and Sufi traditions with the ascendant Wahhabi/Salafi thought.³⁴

As the Deobandi movement began in opposition to British colonialism and to counter the increasing influence of Christian and Western education in the country, the seminary excluded all forms of learning from its curriculum that it did not deem to be of religious significance. Even secular sciences and philosophical schools in Islamic history were not taught out of fear that with the decline of Muslim political power, the community might become susceptible not only to Hindu and Christian religious and cultural influences but also to the more secular orientations of Mughal kings like Akbar, and eclectic poets and philosophers. Over a period of time, it has got associated with its own version of a more conservative form of Sufi Islam, which seeks to stick punctilious closer to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence than to the more eclectic Sufi practices. In fact, the Deobandi school has come to signify a combination of Sufi and Salafi beliefs, a syncretic amalgam of the two Sunni orientations. Here are some of the principles, which are often attributed to the Deobandi school of Sunni Islam, even though not all Deobandi scholars may not fully subscribe to them.

Adherence to Taqleed (Strict Conformity to Hanafi School)

‘Taqleed’ refers to a theological concept wherein a religious devout unquestioningly accepts all rulings and decisions of religious jurist without even knowing the basis of those decisions and just believing that the scholar has made the right interpretation of the Shariah (as enshrined in the Quran and Hadeeth).³⁵ To avoid the great fitna in Islamic history over theological issues, which the community had suffered for many centuries, tendency to accept religious rulings without asking how (*bila kaifa*) gained acceptance. As differences among religious jurists increased and confusion even on exact rituals and modes of worship grew among various schools of *fiqh* (religious jurisprudence) in Sunni Islam, followers of various juristic schools decided to adhere to the rulings of their own preferred juristic schools without entering into contentious theological debates causing internal discors.

For instance, both Deobandi and Bareilvi schools of Sunni Islam in India accept the legal decisions of Abu Hanifa (i.e. Hanafi school) and the spiritual and philosophical theological approaches of the Ashari-Maturidi Kalaam schools.³⁶ However, the punctilious adherence to taqleed has itself subjected various Muslim schools, like the Deobandi *ulema* to much criticism from liberal Muslims and non-Muslims for being too rigid, conservative and irrational, in a highly progressive modern world. By categorising any kind of change as unwarranted innovation (*bidaa*) in religion, taqleed has been seen as a major stumbling block to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in matters of religious jurisprudence.

Even the hyper-conservative Salafi-Wahhabi detractors, often find fault with Deobandi taqleed by claiming the latter follow Abu Hanifa’s school of jurisprudence to the extreme, for instance in their continuing adherence to ‘instant triple talaq’.³⁷ To the Deobandis, taqleed is not a hindrance but a blessing for true religious followers. They claim it has helped Indian Muslims stick to their pre-modern religious moorings, even in times when modern relativism has changed the character of various religious communities beyond recognition.

Both Deobandis and Bareilvis follow not only the Hanafi school of jurisprudence but also the Asharite and Maturidi theological traditions that differ from the school of the Ahl-i-Hadeeth (belief system similar to ‘Ahl-Al Hadeeth’ in West Asia) on a wide variety of theological issues related to Allah’s attributes, the role of philosophy in religion, etc., the Salafi schools have remained highly critical of both Deobandi and Bareilvi theologies. The deep-seated Deobandi and Bareilvi differences are discussed later.

Unique Position on Tawassul and Istighatha

The Deobandis are also often caught between the dialectical extremes of the Bareilvi Sufis and the Salafi-Wahhabis. While the Salafis, particularly the supporters of Muhammad Wahhab, criticise Deobandis for not discrediting Sufism altogether and for showing philosophical ambivalence over Ibn Arabi's monistic concept of 'wahdatul wujud' (oneness of existence), some of the Sufi schools and Bareilvis denigrate Deobandis for their opposition to holding festivities on the grave of the prophets and the companions or Sufi saints. Often accused of being "crypto-Salafis" by both Sunni Sufis and the Shia communities, the Deobandi avoidance of *tawassul* (intercession by naming saints in prayers to God) and *istighatha* (visiting graves and invoking the dead for acceptance of prayers)³⁸ appears more in line with the Salafi and Ahl-i-Hadeeth positions than those of conventional Sufis. However, Deobandis desist from decrying mainstream Sufi beliefs as un-Islamic in entirety, like many mainstream Salafis of our times do.

In addition to Salafis, Deobandi scholars are also severely criticized by the Sufi-oriented Bareilvi sub-sect for their ambivalent position and at times outright opposition to extolling the high status of the Prophet as the first emanation of the divine light (*noor*) as per Sufi beliefs. Moreover, Deobandi scholars are often accused of opposing Sufi celebration of Prophet's birthday (*Mawlid*), even though Darul Uloom Deoband states it opposes the unethical and irreligious manner in which such festivities are conducted,³⁹ and for their view that the Prophet did not have knowledge of the unseen (*ilm-e-ghaib*), a position also upheld by the Salafi school. Thus Deobandis are blamed by the Sufi-oriented Bareilvis of being crypto-Salafi Wahhabis.

As for the Deobandis themselves, their position is often to find a middle ground between Salafi and Sufi positions. They frequently underscore Salafi-Sufi convergences, highlighting Salafi scholars extolling some Sufi mystics in history and vice versa. Thus, Deobandi scholar Mawlana Abd al-Hafiz al-Makki states that contemporary hardline Salafi opposition to Sufism in its entirety is baseless. Infact:

The truth, in reality, is different. According to the *imams* and revered personalities of the Salafi movement itself, the Sufis are an Islamic group like other Islamic groups, such as the hadith experts (*muhaddiths*), jurists (*faqihis*), theologians (*mutakallims*), historians and *mujahids* etc. Among them are the correct and incorrect, the pious and impious, and authentic and false.⁴⁰

Both Deobandi and Bareilvi schools follow the Hanafi fiqh and have the largest number of Sunni followers in south Asia. It is noteworthy that, Hanafi school of jurisprudence has been the subject of Salafi criticism for centuries.⁴¹ Abu Hanifah is often charged by his Salafi detractors for having depended excessively on ‘qiyas’ (rational analogy) and ‘ijitihad’ (independent reasoning) in his codification of Islamic fiqh (jurisprudence), while interpreting Quran and Hadeeth scriptural references.⁴² In fact, Abu Hanifa is said to belong to the early Islamic movement of *ahl al-ra’y* (scholars using rational derivations) as opposed to the more conformist *ahl al hadeeth* (scholars of traditional literalism or conformism).⁴³

Abu Hanifa is also clubbed among Murjia scholars, those who deferred or suspended judgment while adjudicating on the faith of any person (particularly a self-declared Muslim) by claiming that God alone has the right to judge about the faith of a person, whether the person is a believer or not. In addition, Ashari school avers that faith in God is of a static nature and is never affected by a person’s deeds and one cannot be adjudged a non-believer just on the basis of one’s apparent non-compliance of Shariah laws.

This pacifist stance itself has made Abu Hanifa and Ashari Kalaam school the subject of criticism among mainstream Salafi scholars. According to theologian Allama Shahrastani “Abu Hanifa and his companions were branded ‘*Murjatus Sunnah*’, or ‘*Murjia*’ (deferrers)”.⁴⁴ Even today, ISIS uses the term Murjia to vilify pacifist Muslims (mostly Hanafi adherents of Sunni Islam) for being morally weak in making religious judgments.

The reluctance of Murjia scholars to make conclusive pronouncements against the faith of people (with whom Abu Hanifa came to be associated) made them popular among Sufi mystics who had a more universalist understanding of Islamic values. When the militant and rationalist theological schools of ‘jabariyya’ (under the Umayyads) and the Mutazila under Abbasid empire fell by the 10th to 12 centuries, it was the Ashari-Maturidi mystical theologians, who peacefully won over Mongol forces and much of their central Asian regions embraced the Hanafi version of Sufi-Ashari Sunni faith. Thus, Hanafi school of jurisprudence grew popular in Central Asia and India, where it continues to be the dominant version of Islam to this day.

It should be noted here that many of the above-mentioned positions generally associated with so-called “Deobandi theology” (which has both hardline and moderate strains) may not be found among all of its scholars and adherents, who

may individually show remarkable flexibility of views on Sufi and Salafi theological positions

Despite its many detractors, the Deobandi movement has been successful in its mission of keeping the Muslims of the subcontinent close to their pre-modern Islamic moorings. Also, over the decades, it has produced highly acclaimed Islamic scholars, like Mahmud Deobandi, Mahmud Hasan Deobandi (also known as Shaykh Al-Hind), Ashraf Ali Thanvi (jurist, Chishti Sufi scholar and author of great treatises, like the popular handbook, *Bahishti Zewar*), Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Hussain Ahmad Madani, Muhammad Ilyas Al-Kandhawi (founder of Tablighi Jamaat) and many more.

The political organisations associated with Deobandi school include: Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH, in India) and Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam (JUI, the breakaway faction of JUH in Pakistan); the pre-independence party, Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam; and the world's most prominent religious organisation, Tablighi Jamaat.⁴⁵ The role of Deoband in the Indian freedom struggle, as well as militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan associated with this school of Hanafi theology, will be discussed later.

Indian Modern Reformists: Votaries of Western Rationalism

While the *ulema* of Deoband and other seminaries were preoccupied with preserving Islamic religious and cultural traditions in the aftermath of the failed Revolt of 1857 and the direct rule of the British queen over India, many Indian Muslim thinkers started to educate themselves in Western rational sciences, along with a re-examination of the sources of Islamic jurisprudence. Often known as Muslim modernists—starting in Bengal with Sayyid Karamat Ali (1796–1876) and his disciple, Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928); and then in northern India with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98) and his colleague, Chiragh Ali (1844–95), as well as Allama Shibli Nomani (1857–1914)—these intellectuals called for reformative thinking in Islam, in step with modern rationalistic thought and values.

Chiragh Ali: Advocate of Modern Reconstruction of Islamic Law

Maulvi Chiragh Ali, a Muslim scholar, was born in Meerut, although his family was originally from Kashmir. A polyglot who knew Persian, Arabic, English, French, Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin and Greek,⁴⁶ Chiragh Ali worked in the government of the nizam of Hyderabad, where he rose to the position of finance secretary.⁴⁷

His main argument was against Western Orientalist criticism of Islam. Primarily, he contended that the Islamic legal system and schools were human institutions that merely interpreted the meaning of the Quran in their place and time and were capable of amendment:

The ideas that Islam is essentially rigid and inaccessible to change, that its laws, religious, political and social, are based on a set of specific precepts which can neither be added to, nor taken from, nor modified to suit to altered circumstances; that its political system is theocratic, and that in short, the Islamic code of law is unalterable and unchangeable, have taken a firm hold of the European mind, which is never at any trouble to be enlightened on the subject.⁴⁸

Chiragh Ali emphasised that the Quran taught religious doctrine and ethical rules, but did not offer a detailed code of unchangeable civil laws or formulate a particular political system:⁴⁹

The fact that Muhammad did not compile a law, civil or canonical, for the conduct of the believers, nor did he enjoin them to do so, shows that he left to the believers in general to frame any code, civil or canon law, and to found systems which would harmonize with the times, and suit the political and social changes going on around them.⁵⁰

Further, he believed that there was no place for taqleed (strict adherence) in Islamic law, even though many ulemas insisted on it. Thus, he argued:

[i]n the first place the founders of the four schools of jurisprudence (in Sunni jurisprudence) never claimed any authority for their system or legal decisions, as being final... They were very far from imposing their analogical deductions or private judgments on their contemporaries, much less of making their system binding on the future generation of the wide-spreading Moslem Empire.⁵¹

Thus, Chiragh Ali, who was close colleague of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, contended that every school of Sunni fiqh was changeable and could bring about improvements: "Consequently, the legislation of the 'Mohammadan Common Law', i.e., the Shari'a, was changeable and progressive."⁵²

Chiragh Ali also devoted special attention to jihad in his book, *A Critical Exposition of the Popular "Jihad": Showing that All the Wars of Mohammad Were Defensive and that Aggressive War or Compulsory Conversion is Not Allowed in the Koran*. In it, he emphasised that the Prophet's wars were defensive and that the Quran did not allow aggressive warfare or forced conversion. He even stressed

that Islam was republican in outlook, as evident from the election and high level of accountability and scrutiny faced by the first four Rashidun Caliphs, and that the spirit of consultation and consensus building even in the rule of the Prophet (who had access to divine revelation) was in keeping with the democratic ideal.⁵³

Further, Chiragh Ali was of the view that “church and state” in Islam were not conjoined, as illustrated in an incident from the Prophet’s life, where he claimed that in matters of religion, he should be obeyed, but on other matters (which included him being a head of state), he was just human.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: Ideological Protégé of Ghalib

One of Chiragh Ali’s close friends was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the celebrated Indian Muslim reformer and educationist who founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MAO) College in 1875, which later became Aligarh Muslim University. In 1858, he wrote a daring critique of British policies that he felt led to the Revolt of 1857 in an Urdu booklet, *Asaab-e-Baghaawat-e-Hind* (later translated into English as *The Causes of Indian Revolt*). However, he believed that only by giving up the rigidity of their religious outlook and by embracing Western rationality and scientific outlook can the Muslim community recover from its rapid decline.

Syed Ahmad’s early career gave a few hints of his future modernist outlook. Born in a family of Mughal noblemen, his early writings were in the tradition of conservative Sufi *mujadidi* thought of Sirhindi and Waliullah Dehlawi, albeit veering towards *ghair muqallid* (Ahl-Al-Hadeeth) thought in its aversion towards blind adherence to the Hanafi school.⁵⁴

One of the essential formative influences that helped Syed Ahmad develop a modernist outlook was the celebrated Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib. In 1855, Syed Ahmad approached the great literary genius to write a *taqriz* (a laudatory foreword) for his scholarly work on Abul Fazl’s *Ain-i-Akbari*. Ghalib was himself an admirer of Syed Ahmad’s literary gifts, but on reading the book, he wondered why should the bright youth focus on the past and celebrate Akbar’s rule and constitution when the British were making great strides in the study of science, humanities and political science. Ghalib wrote the foreword, but he also produced a poem for Syed Ahmad in which he urged the youth to stop wasting his talents on the study of the past and look at the modern glories that the British mind was unravelling. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi has rendered an English translation of this Persian poem by Ghalib, a section of which reads:⁵⁵

Go to London, for in that shining garden

*The city is bright in the night, without candles,²⁶
Look at the businesses of the knowledgeable ones:
In every discipline, a hundred innovators!²⁷
Before the Laws and Rules that the times now have
All others have become things of yesteryears,²⁸
Wise and sensitive and prudent one,
Does your book have such good and elegant Laws?²⁹
When one sees such a treasure house of gems
Why should one glean corn from that other harvest?³⁰*

It must be noted that Syed Ahmad Khan was loyal to the British during the 1857 revolt, in which he saved many English lives.⁵⁶ By 1867, he rose to the position of judge at a Small Causes Court and retired from service in 1876. Highly critical of the Indian National Congress (INC), Syed Ahmad called upon the Muslims to shed their animosity towards the British and loyally serve the Raj. For this reason, he was disliked by large sections of the conservative *ulema* and freedom fighters. Moreover, many Islamic scholars objected to his rationalist justifications of the purely spiritual and metaphysical claims of their religion.⁵⁷

Syed Ahmad argued that the Quran should be studied in the context of its time and place, and over-reliance on medieval scholars for its correct understanding should be avoided. He believed that the Hadeeth literature did not always furnish an adequate basis for Islamic law and therefore, it was essential to take all the “exotic” ideas and study them from their correct, rational perspectives. In his treatise, *Abkam-i Ta’am-i Ahl-i Kitab*, he emphasised that Islam, Christianity and Judaism had a common origin, and that in Islam, there was nothing that opposed the study of science and there was no fear in pursuing it.

However, Aligarh Muslim University could hardly initiate the religious reforms that Syed Ahmad envisioned. In the words of Daniel Brown, “Sayyid Ahmad was forced by donors to remove himself from any involvement in the religious curriculum, and the traditional ulama were brought in to do the job.”⁵⁸

It has often been claimed that Syed Ahmad Khan was the founder of the so-called “two-nation theory”. However, it is difficult to argue either in favour or against such a claim conclusively. At times, Syed Ahmad considered Hindus and Muslims of India to be one *qaum* (nation)—arguing that “qaum” should be used to describe the inhabitants of India, even if they have individual characteristics.⁵⁹ He further explained: “By the word ‘*qaum*’ I mean both Hindus and Muslims. That is the way in which I define nation. In my opinion it matters not whatever

be their religious belief because we cannot see anything of it. But what we see is that all of us, whether Hindus or Muslims, live on one soil, are governed by one and the same ruler, have the same sources of benefits and equally share the hardships of famine”⁶⁰ In another instance, the great Indian Muslim modernist stated: “India is like a bride which has got two beautiful and lustrous eyes—Hindus and Mussalmans. If they quarrel against each other, she will lose one eye.”⁶¹

Syed Ahmad Khan was also associated with prominent Hindu luminaries of his time, like Swami Vivekananda and Debendranath Tagore. He held a session in Benares for Swami Dayananda Saraswati to expound his vision for the Arya Samaj. He even forbade the slaughter of cows on the campus of his college. In the words of Prof. Rahat Abrar, “In the 19th century, he opposed cow slaughter. When AMU was established, he banned it on campus. Once during Eid ul-Zuha, an employee had with him a cow for *qurbaani* (*sacrifice*), and he rushed there rightaway to stop it. He asked all Muslims to stop.”⁶²

However, in the wake of a bitter feud on whether Hindi or Urdu should receive official status for use in government departments, courts and educational institutions, Sir Syed ardently supported the case for Urdu language. As the political discussion on this matter became heated, his views on united Hindu–Muslim nationhood started changing. In a speech to Shakespeare, the governor of Benares, he said: “I am convinced now that Hindus and Muslims could never become one nation as their religion and way of life was quite distinct from each other.”⁶³

Later, in a speech delivered at Meerut in March 1888, he opined:

Suppose that the English community and the army were to leave India, taking with them all their cannons and splendid weapons and all else, who then would be the rulers of India? Is it possible that under these circumstances, two nations—the Mohammedans and the Hindus—would sit on the same thrones and remain equal in power? Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other. To hope that both could remain equal is to desire the impossible and the inconceivable. But until one nation has conquered the other and made it obedient, peace cannot reign in the land.⁶⁴

In addition, he was sceptical about the implementation of parliamentary democracy in India where, he said, communal divisions were rampant and elections would present inequitable outcomes. In his 1883 speech at Patna, Syed Ahmad Khan praised democracy and said that “representation by election... (was) no doubt the best system that can be adopted... where the population is composed of one

race and creed.” However, in societies of mixed faith, he feared the representative government would mean the representation of the views and interests of the majority of the population, so that “the larger community would totally override the interests of the smaller, (which) might make the differences of race and creed more violent than ever”. Thus, he preferred British imperial rule because, “in India peace cannot be maintained if either Hindus or Muslims rule the country. It is therefore inevitable that another nation should rule over us.”⁶⁵

Incidentally, this line of thinking anticipated the views of the exponents of the two-nation theory, such as Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, which led to the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

Aligarh Movement and the Flowering of Urdu Literature

Syed Ahmad Khan was not just a non-conformist thinker; he was also a social activist and founder of social and educational institutions. He established schools at Muradabad (1858) and Ghazipur (1863). His more ambitious undertaking was the establishment of the Scientific Society in 1864, which published Urdu translations of many English scientific and academic books. In 1869, he went to England with his sons and was awarded the Order of the Star of India by the British government. After visiting the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, he returned to India and started building a college for Indians based on their model.⁶⁶

In 1875, he founded “Madrasatul Uloom Musalmanan-e-Hind” which, after two years, was named MAO College.⁶⁷ The main objective behind establishing the MAO College in Aligarh—which, as mentioned earlier, eventually developed into Aligarh Muslim University in 1920—was to make it the cradle of new leadership for Indian Muslims, in step with current conditions in the world and based on new kinds of knowledge, as well as to protect Islam and the Muslim identity in the face of rapid societal transformation.⁶⁸

The impact of the Aligarh movement was felt in almost all regions of the Indian subcontinent during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The movement’s annual educational conferences were held in several regions across India to promote modern education among Muslims, leading to the growth of similar institutes, such as Osmania University (established in Hyderabad in 1918), Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama (a seminary with modern education that was established in Kanpur in 1893 and shifted to Lucknow in 1898), Dacca University (established in July 1921), Jamia Millia Islamia (1920) and many more. Moreover, at the onset of the twentieth century, Aligarh movement was the progenitor of

several socio-religious movements, like the Khilafat movement and the Pakistan movement.

Among the prominent members of the Aligarh movement, in addition to Syed Ahmad Khan, were Maulvi Samiullah Khan, Raja Jai Kishan Das (editor of *Aligarh Institute Gazette*), George Farquhar Irving Graham (member of the Scientific Society), Zakaullah Dehlavi, Nazeer Ahmad Dehlavi, Ross Masud, Henry Sidon (the first principal of MAO College) and Mahendra Singh of Patiala (donor of MAO College). This was also the time when many Urdu thinkers and literary luminaries produced important works, with Muhammed Hussain Azad writing an acclaimed treatise on Urdu poetry, *Aab-e-Hayat* (1880); Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali's epic Urdu poem, *Madd-o-Jazr-e-Islam* ("The Ebb and Flow of Islam"), popularly known as *Musaddas-e-Hali* (1879); Shibli Nomani's tour de force, *Seerat-un-Nabi* ("Life of the Prophet"), and *Al-Farooq* (biography of Caliph Umar); and the brilliant Urdu novelist and reformist Nazeer Ahmad's prolific work.

Syed Ameer Ali: Islam is Anti-Feudal and Democratic

Among the modernists, Justice Syed Ameer Ali from Calcutta (1849–1928) was known for his contribution to the law of India, particularly the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act (dealing with marriage, succession, inheritance and charities among Muslims), which was eventually passed in 1937. Ameer Ali believed in progressive social laws and held that Islam was highly adaptive in this respect. He wrote: "Each age has its own standard. What is suited for one time is not suited for the other."⁶⁹

Tracing his ancestry to Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima, Ameer Ali studied at the Bar of the Inner Temple in England in 1873. He was the first Indian to be appointed to the judicial committee of the Privy Council in 1909 and helped establish the first mosque in London. He also played a key role in the formation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906 (established its London office) and helped secure the first separate electorate for Muslims in Bengal in 1909. However, he quit the Muslim League in 1913 and drifted away from the British government, following its policies against the Turkish sultan. He was also one of the key figures for starting the British Red Crescent Society for helping people in need.

Of his several notable books, *The Spirit of Islam* (1891) remains a classic, in praise of which David Margoliouth wrote: "The charming and eloquent treatise of Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, is probably the best achievement in the

way of an apology for Mohammed that is ever likely to be composed in a European language.”⁷⁰

Although a Shia, Ameer Ali considered it possible for the Shia apostolical imamate and the pontifical Sunni caliphate, such as that of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, to coexist, as proven by Ali being an adviser to both Umar and Uthman. He, thus, rejected the mainstream Shia view that considered the caliphate of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman as illegitimate.⁷¹ For him, these caliphs were appointed through unanimous suffrage of Muslims and it was for protecting the unity of Muslims that Ali pledged his allegiance to Abu Bakr.

Ameer Ali was deeply influenced by Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Rushd and Ali bin Taba Taba.⁷² He advocated that Islam itself was founded upon liberal principles and certain terms, such as hurriyet (liberty), were identical to modern Western values. He further asserted that the Prophet had ushered in a democratic system, which took control away from dominant tribes and was opposed to the feudal structure of society.⁷³ He strongly affirmed that the political spirit of Islam was similar to modern political ideals, one which espouses suffrage of the people and provides for a written constitution (such as the Prophet’s *Mithaq Al-Madina*) and leads to the establishment of a “Republic”.

Ahl-i-Hadeeth: Quietist Descendants of Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya

Following the failure of the Revolt of 1857, the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya movement became the prime target of continued British repression. In this period, many leaders of the movement started abandoning their militant outlook and sought pragmatic accommodation with the British.

One of the early quietists was Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (1800–73), who established Madarsa-i-Hasafia in Jaunpur. Although he had no differences with the religious doctrines of Haji Shariatullah and Dadu Miyan, Karamat Ali did not accept their verdict that India under British rule was “*dar al-harb*”, because he believed that the British did not interfere in the religious affairs of the Muslims. He also opposed the suspension of congregation prayers on Fridays and Eid festivals by the Faraizi movement leaders on the pretext of the “*dar al-harb*” argument.

The movement started by Karamat Ali was called the Taiyuni movement, derived from the Arabic word “Taiyun”, meaning “to identify”. Karamat Ali spread his message to Noakhali, Chittagong, Assam, Rangpur and many other interior areas in eastern India. He wrote several books, among which *Miftah ul-Jannah* still remains highly popular.⁷⁴

Karamat Ali worked hard to revive original Islamic teachings in eastern India at a time when Muslim populations there were giving up on *salat* (Muslim prayer) and *sawm* (fasting particularly during month of Ramadan). The mosques too had stopped calling out *azan* (call to prayer) and had adopted Sufi rituals solely to please their local saints. He also taught against blind adherence (*taqleed*) of any of the four classical Sunni jurists and to follow the ways of the early adherents of the Prophet (*salaf*).

Similar doctrinal principles—which are, in essence, closer to Hanbali school prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula and an ideological outlook reminiscent of the Zahiri school of thought (that gives precedence to the outward, obvious or manifest meaning of scriptural text)—were propagated in central India by Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan of Bhopal (1832–90) and Syed Nazeer Husain of Delhi, whose movement is today better known in the Indian subcontinent as the Ahl-i-Hadeeth (followers of tradition) movement.

Tracing its ideological heritage from Ibn Taimiyyah, Abd Al-Wahhab, Yemeni theologian Muhammad Al-Shawkani to his disciple, the “Najdi Sheikh” Abd Al-Haq Benarsi, among Indian Muslims, the Ahl-i-Hadeeth movement’s leading Urdu treatise in India is Shah Ismail Dehlavi’s book, *Taqwiyatul-Iman* (“Strengthening of the Faith”), which is considered as its manifesto.⁷⁵

This new non-militant religious movement, in the post-1857 era, was critical of Sufi rituals that drifted towards idolatry (the inexcusable sin of *shirk*) and the blind adherence (*taqleed*) of Deobandis to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. The leaders of the movement eventually renounced violent rebellion against the British rule and one of the leading Ahl-i-Hadeeth scholars from Punjab, Muhammad Hussain Batalvi (1840–1920), wrote a petition to the British Indian administration, following which the British government stopped calling them “Wahhabi” in official correspondence and conceded to refer to them as Ahl-i-Hadeeth. The movement started spreading to various corners of India and in 1920, it opened a centre in Srinagar.

Barelvi Movement: Sufi Pushback to Ahl-i-Hadeeth and Deobandi Movements

While the Deobandi movement was critical of certain Sufi practices, like overzealous veneration of saints, which it deemed often verged towards idolatry, the Ahl-i-Hadeeth considered the Sufi philosophy of *wahdatul wujud* itself to be

anti-Islamic because of its association of the existence of creation with the existence of the creator or God Almighty.

As the influence of these two movements spread in the subcontinent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a virulent ideological opposition, even from the peaceable Sunni Sufis, against Deobandi and Ahl-i-Hadeeth movements, in the form of so-called Barelvi movement began under the leadership of Imam Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi (1856–1921).

Curiously, the Barelvi movement formally called itself Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jamaat, which is the full name of the Sunni sect itself. By claiming the full name of the Sunni sect of Islam for its own movement, the Barelvi school sought to underscore that its theology alone followed the pristine and legitimate form of Sunni Islam. In addition, it considered the beliefs of the Ahl-i-Hadeeth movement and its affiliates (in which it also included Deobandis) as deviant from the mainstream Sunni fold. Let us take a look at some of the key doctrines of this movement.

Belief in Noor-i-Muhammadiya (Light that Predates Creation)

Barelvis are Sunni Muslims who, in South Asia, follow the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, the Maturidi school of theology and the Qadiri or Chishti Sufi orders. The Barelvis accord a very high station to the Prophet and believe that before his birth as a human, he existed as a light predating creation.

They, thus, believe that the mention of the word “noor” (light) in the Quran (in Surah 5, verse 15) refers to the Prophet. This belief of the Barelvis is common among all Sufis and stands in stark contrast to that of the Salafis, who only accord the status of a human to the Prophet (albeit the last and greatest) and that of being the first light created by God.⁷⁶

Prophet Still Views and Witnesses All Actions (Hazir-o-Nazir)

Like most Sufis, Barelvis believe that Prophet Muhammad views and witnesses the actions of all people. Therefore, they believe that the Prophet is both *hazir* (present) and *nazir* (witness) at all times.⁷⁷

In fact, the Prophet does not just observe everybody but even knows their good and bad deeds, as well as the strength of their faith, along with what a person has done to hinder one’s spiritual progress. This is among the central tenets of the faith, which is not accepted by the Deobandi and Ahl-i-Hadeeth/Salafi-Wahhabi movements.

Intercession (Tawassul) of the Prophet (Both during and after Lifetime)

Although there is unanimous consensus that the Prophet often prayed to God for people as an intermediary several times in his life, the Barelvis believe that there is clear jurisprudential evidence to prove that the Prophet prays for the devout even at present, and that his intercession increases the chances of the acceptance of the prayer.⁷⁸

They believe that the Prophet has the title of *Shaafi*, one who performs intercession. Like most Sufis, Barelvis also believe that not just the Prophet but other pious souls, angels, martyrs, saints and Quran memorisers, both living or dead, can intercede. Further, they point out that the intercession by Prophets Jacob and Jesus is mentioned in the Quran.

The position of Sufis and Barelvis that even dead people (if they may be prophets or saints) can intercede is rejected by Ahl-i-Hadeeth and Salafi movements, which consider visiting graves of the deceased as forbidden. For their part, the Deobandis do not forbid visiting of the graves of saints, but enjoin their followers to pray to God alone and ask Him to shed his blessings and forgiveness on the departed soul and if he or she be a pious one, to accept the plaintiff's prayers on behalf of the pious departed. The Deobandis do not accept direct invocation to the person in the grave.⁷⁹

Prophet's Knowledge of the Unseen (Ilm-i-Ghaib)

Another key belief of the Barelvis is that Prophet Muhammad has knowledge of the unseen. They believe that God Almighty had bestowed on the Prophet special knowledge and had kept him *ummi* (unlettered and untaught by humans as he could not read or write) because the Almighty wanted to grant him innate knowledge of the unseen realms.

This belief is also not acceptable to the Ahl-i-Hadeeth as they contend that the Quran and Hadeeth literature do not specify this Sufi or Barelvi claim.

Celebrations and Singing of Hymns

The Barelvis believe in celebrating Milad-un-Nabi (birthday of the Prophet). They venerate the saintly Sufis who are chronologically linked in a chain leading to the Prophet. They do group dhikr (chanting), which the Ahl-i-Hadeeth see as supererogatory, and use musical instruments while singing devotional compositions (like *hamd* and *naat*), mostly in the form of qawwalis. While Deobandis give

qualified acceptance to some of these practices, the Ahl-i-Hadeeth oppose them, calling them *bidah* (innovation) in religion.

Ahmad Raza Khan's Fatwa Declaring Deobandis and Wahhabis Kafir

It is curious to note that the Bareilvi movement draws inspiration from the Sunni Sufi doctrines of Shah Abdur Rahim (1644–1719), who was the father of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, whom both Deobandis and Ahl-i-Hadeeth consider the founding father of their missions in India. The other inspirational leader for the movement was Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi (1797–1861), a religious scholar and literary figure who wrote extensively against Wahhabism as well as issued fatwa against Ismail Dehlavi. He also met Bahadur Shah Zafar during the Revolt of 1857 and issued fatwa of jihad to fight against the colonial government. For this action, the British later arrested him and sent him into exile in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Kala Pani).⁸⁰

However, the real founder of the movement was Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilvi. Francis Robinson, a leading scholar of Islam in the subcontinent, considered him to be a polymath as he was a jurist, theologian, poet and mystic.⁸¹ He wrote several hundred books in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, including the 30-volume fatwa compilation, *Fatawa Razaviyya*, and *Kanzul Iman* (translation and explanation of the Quran).⁸²

In his famous fatwa, “Hussam Al-Haramain” (Swords of the Two Holy Mosques of Islam), issued in 1906, he declared Deobandis to be “Wahhabis” and branded both of them as apostate (*kafir*). The Bareilvi community still considers the fatwa valid. He even called Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani (1835–1908), founder of the Ahmadiya movement, an anti-Christ for his alleged claims of being the Messiah (or Christ) in his Second Coming, and a later purported claim of being a prophet himself. The Bareilvi animosity towards the Taliban, the Al-Qaeda, the ISIS and even the Ahmadiyas can be understood on the basis of Ahmad Raza Khan's fatwa.⁸³

Leading his religious movement since the 1880s, Raza Khan established Islamic schools in 1904, with the prominent among them being Manzar-e-Islam in Bareilly and other madrasas in Pilibhit and Lahore. Surprisingly, he generally avoided making political statements or giving calls for political action. Until his death in 1921, he maintained that India under the British rule remained “dar al-Islam” as there was freedom for Muslims to offer their prayers (*namaz*) and follow their customs and traditions.

Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement and the Muslim League (1905–06)

As discussed earlier, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the influence of the Tariqa-i-Muhammadiya militant movement (or the so-called Wahhabi militancy) against the British rule was quite strong under radical leaders from Bengal and Bihar, such as Titu Mir, Dadu Miyan and members of the Faraizi movement, just as it was under Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi, Shah Ismail Dehlavi and others fighting in the northwestern regions of the country.

Even today, Assam's Muslims constitute a third of the population, which makes it the Indian state with the largest Muslim population in the country, as Jammu and Kashmir (with a larger Muslim population) has now become a union territory.⁸⁴ The presence of such a huge Muslim population in itself became a cause for communal disharmony in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the British government decided to partition the state of Bengal in 1905, leading to the outbreak of the Swadeshi movement.

With a population of 78.50 million, the Bengal Presidency was British India's largest province in 1905, encompassing Bengal, Bihar, parts of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Assam. In an ostensible plan to divide this large and unwieldy province, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, decided to reorganise it on communal lines by separating the mainly Muslim eastern areas from predominantly Hindu western areas. With this announcement on 19 July 1905, Curzon split Bihar and Orissa and joined 15 eastern districts of Bengal with Assam.⁸⁵

The Partition of Bengal was seen by members of the INC as an attempt by the British to undermine the mainly Hindu-led national agitation by separating them from Muslims in the politically active eastern regions of the Bengal Presidency. Muslims now enjoyed a majority in the new and separate eastern province, who had even earlier not been highly active in the national movement, but now might come even closer to the British government after getting a majority province for themselves.

This move, announced by Lord Curzon, sparked massive protests not only in the Bengal Presidency but also across India, with Bombay, Poona and Punjab witnessing mass demonstrations against the British attempt to "divide and rule". Initially, the Muslim leaders did not support the British decision to divide the province⁸⁶ and many of them, like Liakat Hussain, Abdul Hakim Ghaznavi, Abdul Rasul, Maniruzzaman, Ismail Hussain Siraji, Abul Husain and Din Mahommed, took a prominent role in the agitations.

However, the strident Hindu revivalist tone during the Swadeshi movement not only alienated Muslims but also caused a division between the “moderate” and “extremist” elements in the Congress Party. Exhortations for the reinstatement of Hindu *rashtra*, constant references to the Gita, vow of self-sacrifice before Goddess Kali and observance of “Birashtami” rituals (to commemorate Hindu heroes against medieval Muslims) drew the Muslims away from the Swadeshi movement. Statements by movement leaders, like Bipinchandra Pal, “to separate national life from religion would mean the abandonment of religious and moral values in personal life also”, did not enthuse Muslim support.⁸⁷

As a result, several prominent Muslim leaders, such as the Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka, turned in favour of the Partition of Bengal as they felt that the move would empower the Muslim community. The polarisation of society on communal lines grew to the extent that communal riots broke out in the eastern part of Bengal: first, in Ishwargunj in Mymensingh district in May 1906, which then triggered riots in Comilla, Jamalpur, Dewangunge and Bakshigunj in March 1907.⁸⁸

The uproar over the Partition of Bengal and the emergence of Hindu nationalist factions in the Congress during the Swadeshi movement triggered the need for separatist politics among the Muslims in India. In 1909, the British exploited the tension between the two communities and separate electorates were established for Hindus and Muslims. In fact, the demand for separate Muslim states grew from this point onwards.

It is in this polarised atmosphere that Nawab Salimullah founded the All-India Muslim League on 30 December 1906 in Dhaka. The first honorary president of the Muslim League was Sultan Muhammad Shah (Agha Khan III). The party’s constitution was framed in 1907, as the *Green Book*, written by Maulana Muhammad Ali (a leading scholar of the Lahore Ahmadiya movement).

Indian Pan-Islamism: Silk Letter Conspiracy and the Khilafat Movement

As World War I was about to commence, a few Deobandi leaders, with some links with Indian freedom fighters of the Ghadar movement, hatched a conspiracy against the British rulers by forging an alliance with their adversaries, namely, the Ottoman Empire, the Emirate of Afghanistan and the German Empire.⁸⁹

The conspiracy, known as the Silk Letter movement (“*Tehreek-e-Reshmi Rumal*” in Urdu), used letters written in silk cloth for spreading its secret information and

lasted between 1913–20. With the Sikh convert to Islam, Ubaidullah Sindhi, Mahmud Hasan (principal of Deoband school) and Hussain Ahmad Mehmood leading the conspiracy, the movement was quite secular in that Maharaja Mahendra Pratap was associated with the revolutionaries and coordinated their activities with leaders of the Ghadar movement, led by mainly US-based expatriate Indians. Maharaja Mahendra Pratap was also made President of India's first provisional government-in-exile, established in Kabul in 1915 by the Deobandi revolutionaries.

However, the plot was exposed and top Deobandi leaders were arrested. Mahmud Hasan and Hussain Ahmad Madani were apprehended by the British in Mecca on their way to Turkey. Fearing protests in India if these leaders were brought back home, they were exiled to Malta and released after a few years.⁹⁰

Although the Indian Muslims hardly ever paid any political or spiritual obeisance to a foreign caliph, they empathised with the cause of the Ottoman monarch (who was also the titular caliph of the world's Sunni Muslims) when his rule was threatened by the same colonial power (the British) which had enslaved India. The upholder of the Hanafi, Maturidi schools of Sunni Islam to which most Indians also belonged, Indian Muslims had more empathy towards Hanafi Ottomans than towards Arab rebels who in partnership with British imperial forces were struggling to throw off the Turkish yoke at that time.

To show solidarity with the vanquished Ottoman caliph, the Khilafat movement (1919–24) was launched, led by Oxford-educated journalist Maulana Muhammad Ali Jawhar and his brother, Maulana Shaukat Ali, along with several prominent Muslim leaders, including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Hakim Ajmal Khan. In 1920, the movement aligned itself with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement and the joint call for "Khilafat" and "Swaraj" revived the memories of 1857 Hindu-Muslim unity against the British rule.⁹¹

For its founders and followers, Khilafat was not a religious movement but was just a show of solidarity with their fellow Muslims in Turkey, and was aimed at the British government to allow the continuance of the caliph's reign. However, the peaceful nationwide demonstrations took a vicious turn in Kerala, when the depressed Mappila peasants engaged in violent attacks against the British and the Nair landlords. Gandhiji had to finally call off the civil disobedience movement following the Chauri Chaura incident, in which 22 policemen and three civilians were killed on 22 February 1922. By that time, Muslim enthusiasm had also died out with the separation of the caliphate from the sultanate in 1922 and the abolition of the caliphate in 1924.⁹²

The support of the Congress Party for a pan-Islamist movement came in for some criticism. A new crop of Muslim leaders came to the forefront, with Ali brothers joining the Pakistan movement and Maulana Azad and Hakim Ajmal Khan joining the INC and being celebrated in India as freedom fighters.⁹³

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20

Two-Nation Theory and the Rise of Radical Islam in India (1920–2022)

I am a part of this indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to the noble edifice, and without me, this splendid structure of India is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim.

—Maulana Azad, INC Presidential Address, 1940¹

It is curious to note that many Indian Muslim leaders who embraced Western education (mainly those belonging to the Aligarh school) became advocates of the divisive two-nation theory. At the same time, a majority of *ulema* stuck close to the moderate elements of the INC and were advocates of a secular India. This chapter will study the philosophy and actions of the ideologues of the two-nation theory that led to the unfortunate partition of the country, which then exacerbated the scourge of radical Islamism in the subcontinent, with particular emphasis on its growth in four Muslim-dominated states: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and the Maldives.

Western-educated Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah believed that the socio-religious differences between Hindus and Muslims were wholly incompatible and irreconcilable, and therefore they favoured separate nations for the two communities. At the same time, many prominent Islamic scholars, like Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, fought for

India's freedom against the British rule and became advocates of a secular India. As mentioned earlier, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was not enthused with the INC's idea of composite nationalism and he is often viewed as the person who propounded the two-nation theory. His line of thought resonated with several other Muslim leaders of his time and those who came after him.

The rise of assertive Hindu nationalist leadership under the Lal-Bal-Pal triumvirate (short version of three names of assertive nationalist leaders in British India—Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in , and Bipin Chandra Pal) in the INC, particularly during the Swadeshi movement, also made many Muslim leaders uncertain about the fate of their community in a Hindu-majority India. Thus, considering that political power had slipped away from the Muslims of India, the community faced a deep fear of the future—an apprehension about prolonged alienation, decline and decadence in their own country. This grim and sombre mood was reflected in much of the literary works of Muslim Urdu poets from the eighteenth century onwards. A lament for the decline of Mughal fortunes after the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah became a genre of classical Urdu poetry, known as *shahr ashob* (“the city's misfortune”), whose best exponents were Mirza Rafi Suda (1713–81) and perhaps the greatest Urdu poet, Mir Taqi Mir (1724–1810).

Muhammad Iqbal: Poetic Re-imagination of a Future Muslim State

In 1935, Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) captured the continuing sense of Muslim angst in his poem, “Bal-e-Jibril” (“Gabriel's Wing”):

Ragon Mein Woh Lahoo Baqi Nahin Hai
Woh Dil, Woh Arzoo Baaqi Nahin Hai
Namaz-o-Roza-o-Qurbani-o-Hajj
Ye Sub Baqi Hai, Tu Baqi Nahin Hai

That blood of pristine vigour is no more;
 That yearning heart's power is no more;
 Prayer, fasting, Haj, sacrifice survive,
 But in thee nature's old dower is no more.²

According to renowned journalist Khushwant Singh, Muhammad Iqbal was born in Sialkot in 1877. He was the grandson of a Kashmiri Brahman, Kanhaya Lal Sapru, of Saprain village. Iqbal's father, Rattan Lal, had converted to Islam and was given the name Nur Muhammad.³ Iqbal did graduation from Cambridge and completed PhD from Munich University, by submitting his thesis,

“Development of Metaphysics in Persia”, in 1908. An authority on Islamic philosophy and mysticism, he studied German and was also influenced by the works of Fichte, Nietzsche, Bergson and Goethe.

In the words of Phillips Talbot, Iqbal, like John the Baptist, dedicated his life to rousing Muslim intellectuals out of their sense of despondency and devised ways for the spiritual and political revival of the community.⁴ In order to bring Muslims of the subcontinent out of the morass of self-absorption and defeatism, Iqbal insisted that they should not self-sabotage their sense of “self”, as conventional Sufi saints used to insist while training their initiates. He was also a great advocate of *khudi*—a term he associated with the Quranic word *rooh* (an intrinsic divine spark)—and insisted that it should be nurtured and not be confused with ego.

For Iqbal, “khudi” was related to the continuous struggle in life for a higher purpose; and certain qualities were essential for the growth and consolidation of khudi, like *ishq* (love), *faqr* (indifference to material possessions), courage and creativity. He also listed factors that weakened khudi, like fear, beggary and slavery. According to him, *Khudi* was:

The light of the self, and the fire of the self/Constitute the very essence of Islam, the fire of the Self nourishes life with enlightenment and consciousness/This is the nature of every object, and this is the cause of growth; however, the Nature has concealed its essence.⁵

Iqbal waxed eloquently in his glory of the khudi:

Khudi ki jalwaton mein Mustafai
Khudi ki Khalwaton mein Kibriyai
Zameenon Aasmano Arsh-o-Kursi
Khudi ki zad mein hai saari khudai.

Selfhood in the world of men is prophethood;
Selfhood in solitude is godliness;
The earth, the heavens, the great empyrean,
Are all within the range of Selfhood’s power.⁶

In *Rumuz-i-Khudi*, he urged that a person must nurture the inner self (khudi), but once this has been accomplished, the person should dedicate this self to the nation’s needs, as man cannot realise the “self” outside of society.⁷

Iqbal’s political thought went through several phases of evolution. In his early years (up to 1905), he was not so much of an Islamist and believed in Indian nationalism; indeed, his interests in these years pertained less to politics.⁸ He

wrote the patriotic “Tarana-e-Hindi”, which is sung even today: “*Sare Jahan se Achcha Hindostan Hamara*” (Better than the whole world is India of ours), which was published in the weekly journal *Ittehad* on 16 August 1904 and was later published in 1924 in Iqbal’s Urdu anthology *Bang-e-Dara*.⁹ According to Riffat Hassan: “Two things which stand foremost in Iqbal’s pre-1905 political poetry is: his desire to see a self-governing and united India free of both alien domination and inner dissension.”¹⁰ It is ironic that this poet wrote “Tarana-e-Milli” (Anthem of the Muslim Community) in 1910, which had a global Islamist theme and overlooked his earlier assertions of Indianness. The poem begins as:

*Cheen-o-Arab humara, Hindostan hamara
Muslim hain hum vatan hai saara jahan hamara.*¹¹

China and Arab are ours, India is ours
As Muslims, our nation is the whole world.¹²

From 1905 to 1908, during the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement, Iqbal’s political philosophy underwent a major change. This was a period of transition when his political philosophy started veering towards pan-Islamism and Political Islam. It was also in 1905 that Iqbal visited Europe to pursue higher education and stayed there for three years. Thus, it was in Europe that he became unsure of pan-Indian nationalism and became a supporter of pan-Islamism. He opposed race and nationality and called for unity among Muslims worldwide. He wrote: “Break, break the idols of colour and race/In the Millat (community) yourself you must efface/Call not yourself of Turkish nationality, or an Irani, or an Afghani.”¹³

From 1926 onwards, Iqbal believed in Islamic universalism and considered that the state’s boundaries were for administrative convenience only and the affinity of Muslims was spiritual. He also started opposing Western separation of religion from politics. He said: “politics has its roots in the spiritual life of man...[and] religion is a force of great importance in the life of individual as well as nations.”¹⁴ Iqbal believed that Islam was a religion not limited by time and space and therefore, Muslim nationality had no geographical basis.

It seems to me that God is slowly bringing home to us the truth that Islam is neither nationalism nor imperialism but a League of Nations which recognises artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members.¹⁵

He was not against the idea of democracy but was critical of some aspects of

Western democracy. Iqbal considered the Western democratic system to be same as old European Caesarism or imperialism, which only protected the interest of capitalists. He was against the philosophy of one man, one vote. Further, Iqbal believed that majority of the common people could not be equal to a wise man and therefore, he was in favour of a wise man's decision. For him, democratic institutions, such as election, membership, council and presidentship, were rotten eggs of the new civilisation.¹⁶

Iqbal believed that an Islamic state based on democratic values could provide a better political system, but Western materialism, bereft of religious values, could only lead to a recurrence of wars, which he had witnessed at the outbreak of World War I. The key features of Iqbal's ideal Islamic state were: it would represent tawheed (unity of godhead) as its central principle; and it would be free of any discrimination based on Islamic sects, colour, geography and language.

Thus, tawheed would be the binding force among the state's Muslim subjects. The citizens would have the prerogative to elect their representatives, but both (electors and elected) should work within the boundaries of Allah's law. An Islamic consultative assembly would be put in place to monitor the laws and policies following Islamic law. Parliamentarians (not *ulema*) would be responsible for observing divine law and considering the option of *ijtihad* (innovation) for accommodating change following the modern age.

Iqbal believed that the whole Muslim world must implement spiritual democracy to attain peace and prosperity. He discouraged the concentration of wealth in a few hands and emphasised the need for an Islamic economic system to ensure equal distribution of resources and economic upliftment. He also rejected the rule of kingship and feudalism.¹⁷ However, although Iqbal rejected secularism and nationalism, he did not specify whether his ideal Islamic state was a theocracy. In addition, he criticised the religious scholars (*ulema*) for having "reduced the Law of Islam practically to the state of immobility".¹⁸

This ideological vision of an Islamic state to revive Islam formed the basis for Iqbal's support for the two-nation theory and the creation of Pakistan. In his presidential address at the 21st Annual Session of the All-India Muslim League in 1930, Iqbal spoke of his vision of an independent state for Muslim-majority provinces in northwestern India, where he called for "the amalgamation of North-West Muslim-majority Indian states" consisting of Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan.¹⁹ He stated that for the Muslims of India, there could be no prospect of peace unless they were recognised as a nation in which

the Muslim-majority units were given the same privileges as the Hindu-majority units. Iqbal said:

To Islam, matter is spirit realising itself in space and time...Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.²⁰

Exasperated by the infighting within the Muslim League, between its factional leaders like Sir Mian Muhammad Shafi and Fazlur Rahman, Iqbal considered only Jinnah to have the leadership abilities to draw the support of the Muslim masses for the party and to ensure inter-party harmony. Thus, Iqbal persuaded Jinnah to leave his practice as a lawyer in London and resume his political career by becoming the leader of the Muslim League on 21 June 1937: "I know you are a busy man, but I do hope you won't mind my writing to you often, as you are the only Muslim in India today to whom the community has the right to look up for safe guidance...."²¹ In fact, some historians believe that Iqbal's close correspondence with Jinnah proved critical in the latter's acceptance of the idea of the two-nation theory and the creation of Pakistan.

Ironically, Iqbal was critical of Deobandi scholars for their support to the INC and their advocacy of a secular and democratic India. In the 1930s, he became actively involved in raising funds for the Muslim League and is generally considered to be the formal founder of the two-nation theory.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Partition of India

The 1936–37 provincial elections held in 11 provinces of British India clearly showed that the Muslims did not vote en masse either for the Muslim League or the Congress Party. In the elections, the Muslim League only managed to capture 25 per cent of the seats reserved for Muslims. It was the Unionist Party in Punjab and the United Party in Sindh, mainly representing the interests of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh landed gentry, that won the elections in the two provinces most critical for the Muslim League.

By the time of Iqbal's death in 1938, the Muslim League decided that the time had come to whip up communal sentiments in the Muslim masses and rake up fear in the name of their under-representation in politics by the British and the INC. By 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah had become the chief flagbearer of the two-nation theory of Syed Ahmad Khan and Iqbal, when he enunciated it in stark and blatant terms:

It is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality...Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literary traditions. They neither intermarry nor eat together, and indeed they belong to two different civilisations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions.²²

Ironically, Jinnah, who claimed to represent the Muslim community and its religious and social customs, was known as an Anglophile who enjoyed drinking liquor and eating bacon and egg sandwiches. He was born in a family of the Khoja caste in Gujarat, a household that had converted from Hinduism to the Ismaili Shia Nizari sect of the Agha Khan. In the words of Vali Nasr: "Jinnah was an Ismaili by birth and a Twelver Shia by confession, though not a religiously observant man."²³

A barrister by profession, Jinnah joined the INC in 1906 and was called, by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, "an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity".²⁴ He joined the Muslim League in 1913, but still played an essential role in bringing together the Congress Party and the Muslim League in the Lucknow Pact of 1916. However, he became highly critical of Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience movements and considered them to be fomenting anarchy.

In the 1920s, Jinnah also warned Mahatma Gandhi about his use of religious idioms to mobilise people against the British rule, which he alleged would widen the wedge between Hindus and Muslims and jeopardise the unity of India. He was opposed to the usage of some terms, like "Ram Rajya" and "Khilafat", by Mahatma Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation movement. He even refused to call Muhammad Ali, the leader of the Khilafat movement, "Maulana" at the Nagpur session of the Congress Party in 1920, because of which he was hooted at and had to leave the session in disgust. This incident became the immediate reason for his resignation from the Congress Party.²⁵

Later, in response to the Nehru Report of 15 August 1928, which called for the dominion status of India and reserved seats for minorities, Jinnah put forward his famous 14 points, which envisaged a federal government with equal autonomy to all provinces, with Muslim representation being a third in central and provincial legislatures and cabinets. However, Jinnah's points were not acceptable to the Congress Party because of the weak and impractical federal structure and over-emphasis on minority reservations. Feeling slighted, Jinnah declared that the Congress' rejection of his 14 points marked the "parting of ways" and that he

would not have anything to do with the INC in the future. However, factions in the Muslim League were also critical of his leadership and opposition from the Punjab Muslim League forced Jinnah to withdraw from politics. He then left for England and from 1930 to 1935, he practised before the Privy Council.

At the instance of Iqbal and other Muslim League members, Jinnah returned to politics. Following the setback in the 1937 elections for the Muslim League, he decided to embrace Iqbal's two-nation theory wholeheartedly and launched a campaign among Muslims of the subcontinent in favour of a homeland to secure their interests. On 22–23 March 1940, in Lahore, Jinnah led the Muslim League into adopting a resolution to form a separate Muslim state, Pakistan.

It was Jinnah's divisive communal politics which finally bore fruit for the Muslim League. In the Constituent Assembly elections in December 1945, the Muslim League won every seat reserved for Muslims. After the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan in 1946, Jinnah declared 16 August as "Direct Action Day". This call for "direct action" unleashed nationwide communal riots; in Calcutta alone, allegedly over 4,000 people were killed and 100,000 people rendered homeless. There were also widespread religious riots in the United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar, North-West Frontier Province and other provinces.²⁶ In the wake of such developments, the British government decided to give freedom to India and partitioned the country into two separate states. India and Pakistan thus emerged as independent states in mid-August 1947.

The partition of the country led to the displacement of about 20 million people along religious lines, and estimates of the death toll vary from several hundreds of thousands to 2 million people.²⁷ Jinnah became the first Governor-General of Pakistan and was revered by Pakistanis as their "Quaid-i-Azam" (Founding Leader). He died of tuberculosis on 11 September 1948.

The fact remains that more Muslims stayed on in India as compared to those who left for Pakistan. The two-nation theory suffered another blow when Pakistan split into two states in 1971 and Bangladesh was born. Historian and author Ayesha Jalal asks the ironical question "If the Muslims are supposed to be one nation—then how come they are living in three different states?"²⁸

Abul Kalam Azad: Hindus, Muslims Share Common Destiny

In stark contrast to Jinnah, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) was not an Anglophile but a fierce independence activist and Islamic theologian, who was committed to many Gandhian ideals. Sent to jail many times during the freedom

struggle, he worked for Hindu–Muslim unity through his *Al-Hilal* newspaper. He was the president of the INC from 1940 to 1945 and became the first education minister of independent India. He was conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1992.

Home schooled and self-taught master of several languages, like Bengali, Persian, Urdu, and English, he was a theologian who had studied all the four Sunni madhahib, that is, Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki and Hanbali.²⁹ He was also a scholar of world history and philosophy, and an avid student of modern science. In 1899, when only 11 years old, Azad published a poetical journal, *Nairang-e-Aalam*, at Calcutta. In 1900, he also became the editor of a weekly, *Al-Misbah*.³⁰

In 1903, he brought out a monthly journal, *Lissan-us-Sidq*, and in 1905, he was editing the theological journal, *Al-Nadwa* (of Nadwatul Ulama seminary in Lucknow), at the invitation of the great Islamic scholar Shibli Nomani.³¹ In 1912, Maulana Azad started his daring Urdu weekly, *Al-Hilal*, which openly attacked British policies and spoke of the challenges facing common people. Although a pan-Islamist and close to the idea of Khilafat in his early years, his philosophy changed after joining Gandhi in the Non-Cooperation movement, and he became a staunch Indian nationalist. His later publications, namely, *Al-Balagh* (1916), a nationalist journal, and the weekly *Paigham* (1921), were banned by the British government because of their anti-colonial and nationalist content.³²

Azad, a vociferous supporter of Hindu–Muslim unity, was a staunch critic of the two-nation theory. In his presidential address at the Ramgarh session of the INC in 1940, Azad stated that Hindus and Muslims had developed a composite culture and shared a common destiny:

Our (Hindu–Muslim) language, our poetry, literature, society, our tastes, our dresses, our traditions and the innumerable realities of our daily life bear the zeal of a common life and a unified society...our social intercourse for over 1,000 years has blended into a united nationalism.³

This statement by Azad stands in stark contrast to Jinnah's assertion:

The Muslim nation is a nation of one hundred million and, more importantly, a nation with its own culture and civilisation, language and literature, art and architecture, names and place-names, values and laws and moral norms, as well as customs, calendar, history, traditions, affinities, and ambitions, in a word, a nation with its own, special view of life.³⁴

Towards the end of his life, Azad frequently spoke about the idea of world citizenship. For instance, in his speech at the Second Session of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), he said:

We must have new maps for children in the elementary stages in which the world will be painted in one colour; we must teach the child that he is a citizen of the world first and foremost, and then go on to tell him that just as a town is divided into different wards for purposes of convenience...so the world is divided into segments...but such divisions do not disrupt the unity of the world.³⁵

Azad was dissatisfied with the traditional interpretations of the Quran and was critical of most authors of earlier commentaries (tafseer), who, he believed, “did not aim at representing what the Koran actually states”.³⁶ Instead, according to Azad, many commentators had their own personal view to advance and used the sacred text to lend support to that view.³⁷

Azad, however, was not a modernist like Iqbal when it came to *ijtihad* (independent reasoning and innovation) or the need for changing Islamic injunctions in accordance with the times. He did not believe in modernising Islamic dogma but in reviving the original Islamic teachings, many of which he believed later Muslim theologians had tempered with. Thus, he wrote in 1913 that Muslims need not lay down a new foundation for religion, instead they should revive and reconfirm what the Quran itself instructs.³⁸

Today, India hosts the third-largest Muslim population in the world, mainly because of the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and other freedom fighters, who laid the foundation of a secular Indian union.

Hussain Ahmad Madani: Islam Recognises Nationality by Land, Not Faith

Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957), leading Islamic theologian, mystic and freedom fighter of the Silk Letter conspiracy, became the head of Deobandi Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind (JUH; Council of Indian Muslim Theologians) in 1940, and was the rector of the Deoband madrasa.

When the Muslim League under Jinnah was glorifying its two-nation theory, Madani insisted that all the inhabitants of India were members of a “united nationality” (*Muttahida Qaumiyat*) despite differences in religion. As a Deobandi

religious scholar, he argued that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and other Indians must join hands to work for an independent, united country, where all communities enjoy equal rights and freedoms.

In 1947, Madani elaborated on his theory of united nationalism in the book, *Muttahida Qaumiyat aur Islam* (“United Nationalism and Islam”), which was a rebuttal of Iqbal’s idea of a Muslim state and was translated into English only in 2005. In this book, Madani’s core argument was that Islam does not oppose nationhood based on a common motherland (*watan*), language (*zubaan*), ethnicity (*nasl*) or colour (*rang*), and that both Muslims and non-Muslims can share this common nationhood.³⁹

Reportedly, Madani had a rather fierce debate with Muhammad Iqbal on whether the identity of a nation depends on its religion or territory. In December 1937, Madani said at a political meeting that people living abroad did not distinguish Indians as “Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Parsi”, but viewed all as “Hindustani” (Indian). He even said that “watan” (nation) was based on territory, while *millat* was a term linked to religious community. Iqbal made fun of this statement by Madani and penned a poem, “Hussain Ahmad”, in *Armaghan-e-Hijaz*, his book of verses in Persian:

*Hanooz Nadand Rumooz-E-Deen,
Warnaza Deoband Husain Ahmad!
Aen Che Bu-ul-Ajabi As Saroad
Bar Sar-E-Minbar Ke Millat
Az Watan Ast Che Bekhabar
Za-Maqam-E-Muhammad Arabi Ast*

(Rough Translation: The Ajamites (non-Arabs) do not yet know the fine points of our faith; Otherwise, Husain Ahmad of Deoband! What is this foolhardiness? A sermon song from the pulpit that a nation by a homeland be! From the real position of the Arabian Prophet, how sadly unaware is he!)⁴⁰

Madani responded to Iqbal by claiming that Prophet Muhammad’s Charter of Medina (*Mithaq Al-Madina*) considered all residents of the city-state of Medina, whether Muslim and non-Muslims, as belonging to one community (*qawm*). It is reported that Iqbal, finally, had to accept that a *qawm* includes both Muslims and non-Muslims.⁴¹

Further, Madani argued that the word ‘*qawm*’, which appears about 200 times

in the Quran, is often used while describing the community of Noah, Abraham or other prophets. At times, some people of the prophets' qaum rejected the divine message, but they remained legitimate members of the qaum. This fact, combined with the people of Madina who were regarded as part of the Prophet's Charter of Medina (even though many of them were non-Muslims), substantiated the claim that, according to Islam, Muslims and non-Muslims could be part of the same qaum (community or nationhood) if they shared a common ethnicity, language or motherland. Thus, Madani contended that the two-nation theory (*do qawmi nazariya*) that Jinnah and Iqbal spoke of had no basis in the Quran.

Another devout Muslim who opposed the idea of the two-nation theory was the Pashtun freedom fighter Abdul Ghaffar Khan (or Badshah Khan; nicknamed "*Sarhadi* Gandhi"—Gandhi of the Frontier), who shared the ideology of non-violence with Mahatma Gandhi. In 1929, Ghaffar Khan founded "Khudai Khidmatgar", an anti-colonial non-violent resistance movement, that suffered some of the worst kinds of repression from British forces during the Indian freedom struggle.⁴² He was deeply disappointed when the Congress accepted the Muslim League's demand for India's partition and complained to its leadership, "you have thrown us to the wolves".⁴³

Maududi's "Theo-Democratic Model"

One of the most popular, controversial and influential Islamic political philosophers of modern times, Maulana Abu Ala Al-Maududi (1903–79; born in Aurangabad, in present-day Maharashtra) has been called the "Karl Marx of Political Islam or Islamism", and also been described as "the most systematic thinker of modern Islam".⁴⁴ The ideology of Maududi covers "Quranic exegesis, hadith, law, philosophy, and history".⁴⁵

A polyglot known for his command over Arabic, Persian and Urdu, Maududi was also fluent in English and German and had assiduously studied many Enlightenment philosophers, like Fichte, Mill, Hegel, Adam Smith, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Darwin, Goethe and Herder. Comparing the contribution of Muslim political philosophers to Western Enlightenment luminaries, Maududi admitted that Muslim political philosophers did not reach even 1 per cent of the latter's contribution.⁴⁶

However, to his detractors, including traditionalist *ulema* and leftist and liberal thinkers, Maududi was a fundamentalist scholar whose ideology and organisation (Jamaat-i-Islami) promoted Islamic fundamentalist movements—some of which became jihadist groups around the world. In the words of Nadeem Paracha:

To the left and liberal segments, he (Maududi) is remembered as the man who let the US use JI [Jamaat-i-Islami] (during the Cold War) to undermine leftist and progressive politics in Pakistan, whereas many Islamic parties opposed to the JI once went on to declare him to be a religious innovator who attempted to create a whole new sect (*Maududiyat*).⁴⁷

Like most fundamentalists, Maududi was against both modernism and religious traditionalism. He employed a systematic structure of justification for his politico-religious ideology and tended to understate the spiritual and ritualistic aspects to present an alternate socio-political order in the name of Islam. According to him, the Quran did not merely provide rules of morality and ethics but also had guidance for the political, social and economic fields.

For Maududi, Islam was not just a religion but “a revolutionary ideology and a revolutionary practice that aims to destroy the world’s social order totally and rebuild it from scratch”.⁴⁸ He believed that the Shariah was a complete “code” in Islam’s “total scheme of life”.⁴⁹ However, Maududi was a gradualist and was opposed to sudden or violent change. Thus, he emphasised a patient and step-by-step approach, for, according to him, “the more sudden a change, the more short-lived it is”.⁵⁰ Among his many works, mostly written in Urdu, the important ones focused on politics and include *Al-Khilafah Al-Mulk*, *Al-Dawlah Al-Islamiyyah*, *Al-Jihad fil Islam* and *Al-Hukumah Al-Islamiyyah*.

The establishment of an Islamic state, according to Maududi, was essential for realising the objectives set by Islam, which was a comprehensive reform programme that sought to propagate virtue and obliterate vice, as defined by the Shariah.⁵¹ In addition, the Islamic state was to be based upon four principles: (i) recognition of the sovereignty of God and His laws above people’s laws; (ii) authority of the Prophet and his instructions/example; (iii) the state was the vicegerent of God; and (iv) the state had to conduct its affairs by mutual consultation (*shura*) among all the Muslims.⁵²

Further, the head of the Islamic state would be an imam, caliph, ameer, khalifah or representative of God/Prophet on earth, and function as the representative of Muslims. The ruler could not impose his whims on how people should educate their children, or what script they were supposed to use, and had to impose the divine law. Thus, the ruler in an Islamic state was to run the state by “popular viceregency” than by “popular sovereignty”.

Unlike some classical jurists, Maududi’s imam, caliph or ameer did not come

from the Quraysh or any high family or tribe of special status, but was a devout, responsible and trustworthy leader, in excellent health, that helped him take up the burdens of governance. As detailed by Maududi, the Islamic state had no room for political parties nor a political opposition; its policies were calibrated to meet the needs of the population and keep it satisfied. There was, thus, no reason for regular elections or frequent changes of administration. The government would be run through consultation (or *shura*) and the ruler, like the Pious Caliphs, could be selected, appointed or elected (all three words are used) through a consultative process.

To ensure that the high office of the ruler had the full confidence of the nation, Maududi highlighted three principles: (*i*) the choice of the head of state should depend on the general will (close to Rousseau's concept), with nobody allowed to impose himself by force as ruler; (*ii*) no clan or class should be allowed monopoly of rulership; and (*iii*) the selection of the ruler should be made without coercion.⁵³

According to Maududi, the most qualified for the highest political position in the Islamic state should not just be most knowledgeable and capable in running the affairs of the government, but also be a person of great piety and most upright character. In addition, the legal requirements for any candidate holding public office were that the person should: (*i*) be a Muslim; (*ii*) be male; (*iii*) be of adult age and sane; and (*iv*) be a citizen of the Islamic state.

When it came to the legislative council (*majlis al-shura*), Maududi said that all council members should be of impeccable character, have full faith in the Shariah and have sound knowledge of Arabic as well as the Quran and the Sunna. Members of the council should also be acquainted with the views of the earlier mujtahids (experts who, in the light of religion, could use reason to interpret law). Members of the *majlis al-shura* should not be handpicked by the ruler but should be luminaries, enjoying the people's trust. In addition, the legislative work should conform to the Shariah and perform the following four functions: (*i*) interpretation; (*ii*) instances where the Shariah had not laid down specific injunctions but had made provisions for analogous situations (i.e. employed *qiyas*); (*iii*) inference from general principles to derive guidance for situations where the Shariah had provided nothing specific; and (*iv*) "province of independent legislation", where the Shariah was silent and the matter is left to the discretion and judgement of men. Even with such curtailed scope for functioning, the legislative remained a consultative body whose views and judgements would not be binding on the ruler.

Still, Maududi insisted that his model of an Islamic state was not theocratic but what he called “theo-democracy”. Thus, he stated:

The theocracy built up by Islam is not ruled by any particular religious class but by [the] whole community of Muslims including the rank and file. The entire Muslim population runs the state in accordance with the Book of God and the practice of His Prophet. Therefore, if I were permitted to coin a new term, I would describe this system of government as a theo-democracy, that is to say, a divine democratic government because under it, the Muslims have been given limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty of God.⁵⁴

Although Maududi’s model of an Islamic state did not openly state that residents living within its territories subscribe to its ideology, he insisted that non-Muslim minorities rights in the Islamic state would be those specified in the Shariah teachings on the dhimmis (where they are protected subjects but not equal citizens) and alluded to the Ottoman millet system, wherein independent courts of law pertaining to “personal law” of each religious community was allowed to rule itself under its laws.

However, Maududi’s views on women’s rights were the rather regressive. He supported the complete veiling and segregation of women; the greatest threat to “morality”, for him, was “women’s visibility” in the public space.⁵⁵ Indeed, to him, “Art, literature, music, film, dance, use of makeup by women: all were shrieking signs of immorality.”⁵⁶ Thus, his views were highly conservative when it came to women’s rights:

To the woman, it assigns the duty of managing the household, training and bringing up children in the best possible way, and providing her husband and children with the greatest possible comfort and contentment. The duty of the children is to respect and obey their parents, and, when they are grown up, to serve them and provide for their needs.⁵⁷

The Founding of Jamaat-i-Islami

Despite his knowledge of European philosophers of the Enlightenment era, Maududi’s Islamic vision did not seek modern solutions for contemporary Muslim issues. He was criticised for his fundamentalism by liberal scholars, while religious scholars blamed him for interpreting Islam as a political theory. The German materialist philosophers he read made his interpretation of Islam devoid of its

essentially spiritual moorings. Still, Maududi left a tremendous intellectual influence on the Muslim world, inspiring Islamist figures, like Sayyid Qutb, General Zia-ul-Haq and Ayatollah Khomeini, and motivating his own organisation, Jamaat-e-Islami, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the 1980s regimes in Sudan with his ideas.

In August 1941, Maududi formed his religious–political movement named Jamaat-i-Islami. This organisation actively opposed the partitioning of India, with Maududi arguing that the concept violated the ideal of the umma.⁵⁸ He even opposed Pakistan’s clandestine sponsorship of the Jammu and Kashmir insurgency while professing to observe a ceasefire with India. However, after the formation of Pakistan, Maududi and his followers moved to Pakistan and by 1949 they shifted their focus to practically turning Pakistan into an Islamic state. While Maududi personally led the Jamaat-i-Islami (Pakistan) wing, the organisation also opened Jamaat-i-Islami Hind and Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh branches.

The Jamaat-i-Islami played a significant role in bringing down the liberal administration of Ayub Khan in 1969, as also overthrowing Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977.⁵⁹ The organisation was particularly influential in the early years of Islamisation campaign launched by General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan.

Excommunication of the Ahmadiya Movement

The Ahmadiya community was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), who was born in Qadian town of Punjab. On 23 March 1889, he formally established the Ahmadiya community by accepting ceremonial allegiance from his followers.

With 10 million adherents in about 200 countries worldwide, the Ahmadiya community or Ahmadis have been led by a succession of caliphs since the death of its founder.⁶⁰ The Ahmadiya community believes its founder to have been divinely appointed as both the prophesised end-time Muslim leader, that is, the Promised Mahdi (Guided One), as well as the Christian Messiah (the Muslim version of Christ) who would usher in the final triumph of Islam through peaceful means.⁶¹

The Ahmadis believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s reforms have led to Islam’s propagation, revival and renaissance.⁶² The term “Qadiyani” is often used pejoratively against the Ahmadiyas by their other Muslim detractors. A faction (known as Lahore Ahmadiyas) does not believe Ghulam Ahmad to be the Prophet, but just Mahdi and Christ.⁶³

When Pakistan was founded, to spread its influence in the country, Jamaat-i-Islami launched a nationwide campaign against the relatively recently established Ahmadiya sect. In 1953, Maududi-led Jamaat-i-Islami led a major public campaign against the Ahmadiya community in Pakistan, declaring that it should be declared un-Islamic as it did not believe in Prophet Muhammad as the last messenger of God, which, according to Jamaat-i-Islami, was an essential article of the Islamic faith. Along with many prominent *ulema*, Maududi wanted the Pakistani government to designate the Ahmadiya community as non-Muslim, and even wanted Ahmadis, like Pakistan's first Foreign Minister Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, to be sacked from their posts.⁶⁴

The public campaign led to riots in Lahore that caused the death of at least 200 Ahmadis and left many of them displaced.⁶⁵ Maududi was arrested and sentenced to death for his part in the agitation. However, the government faced intense public pressure to revoke his death verdict and after two years of imprisonment, Maududi was released. Pakistan, then, adopted the 1956 Constitution, which incorporated the Jamaat-i-Islami demands. The National Assembly of Pakistan declared Ahmadis as a non-Muslim minority, and after another government ordinance in 1984, the caliph of Ahmadiyas decided to leave Pakistan and shift his seat to Fazl Mosque in London.⁶⁶

Tablighi Jamaat: Apolitical Antithesis to Jamaat-i-Islami

In stark contrast to Maududi's Jamaat-i-Islami, which sought to bring about an Islamic political and socio-economic revolution to remove the contemporary liberal, democratic and capitalist order of the world, the Tablighi Jamaat (translated as "propagation party") came up as "an apolitical, quietist movement of internal grassroots missionary renewal".⁶⁷

Founded by Deobandi scholar Muhammad Ilyas Al-Kandhlawi in Mewat in 1926, Tablighi Jamaat was not an intellectual movement and was averse to any political or even theological debates on matters of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). With its headquarters in Nizamuddin Markaz Mosque in south Delhi, its travelling preachers taught the basics of Islam to the masses and enjoined the discipline of worship and abstinence from sin.

Focusing on the poor and lower segments of society, the movement had assembled up to 80 million followers by 2010;⁶⁸ and its quietist aversion to contentious issues extended its influence to over 150 countries across the globe.⁶⁹ In *The World Almanac of Islamism*, the American Foreign Policy Council affirmed

that the Tablighi Jamaat taught jihad “primarily as personal purification rather than as holy warfare”.⁷⁰ Although apolitical and against violence, Stratfor Global Intelligence found some of its members connected with terrorism, namely, Zacarias Moussaoui (charged in the 9/11 attacks), Herve Jamal Loiseau and Syed Rizwan Farook.⁷¹

The teachings of Tablighi Jamaat are said to cover six principles: *kalimah* (profession of faith); *salat* (Islamic prayer); *ilm-o-zikr* (knowledge and recitation); *ikraam-e-Muslim* (respect for Muslims); *ikhlas-e-niyat* (sincerity of intention); and *dawat-o-tabligh* (invitation to faith and propagation).⁷²

Split within the Deobandi Movement: Madani’s JUH versus Usmani’s JUI

Unlike the apolitical Tablighi Jamaat, the JUH is a political Deobandi organisation, which had close ties with the INC during the freedom struggle against British colonial rule in India.⁷³

In 1928, as massive nationwide protests for India’s independence ensued under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, in which JUH members also participated, the British asked Indian leaders to hammer out a constitutional framework of their own. In response, the INC prepared the Nehru Report. However, one faction of the Deobandi movement found that the report fell short regarding the JUH demand for a political system to protect Muslim social and religious life from interference by the central government. This divergence within the JUH over the provisions of the Nehru Report led a section of the Deobandi community to support the Muslim League’s separatist call.

An eminent Deobandi scholar, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, and his student, Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, led this dissent within the Deobandi movement. Ultimately, it was Usmani who spearheaded the reshaping of the Deobandi religious sect and played a critical role in charting the geopolitical divide that still defines South Asia today. By 1939, the rift widened to the extent that Maulana Thanvi issued a fatwa calling on Muslims to support the Muslim League. After that, he resigned from Darul Uloom Deoband and spent the last years of his life supporting the formation of Pakistan.

Most Deobandis remained loyal to Hussain Ahmad Madani’s inclusive message and viewed his support for a secular India in keeping with Prophet Muhammad’s ideal of *Mithaq Al-Medina*, which gave equal rights to people of various religious persuasion. However, Shabbir Usmani caused a splinter within Deobandis by

founding JUI in 1945, as a rival to Madani's JUH, as he was deeply sceptical of Hindu–Muslim unity in a future secular Indian state.

After the Partition in 1947, the spiritual home of the Deobandi movement remained in India, but Pakistan became the country of choice for the breakaway JUI. In Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly, the JUI spearheaded the push for an "Islamic political system". Shabbir Usmani played a central role in drafting the Objectives Resolution that placed Islam at the centre of the constitutional process. The resolution stated that "sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone and the authority which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan." It further added, "the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice" must be followed "as enunciated by Islam". Adopted in 1949, the Objectives Resolution was viewed as a massive victory for the JUI and other Islamists, who were sceptical of the more liberal elements in Pakistan's top leadership.⁷⁴

Since independence, Darul Uloom Deoband and its affiliated organisations, like the JUH and Tabligh Jamaat, have adopted a pacifist approach towards the India. However, for the Afghanistan–Pakistan-based Deobandi groups, like the Taliban and Jaish-e-Mohammed, India is dar al-harb (dominion of war). Therefore, one needs to differentiate between Deoband and India's JUH and Pakistan-based JUI.

Islamisation of Pakistan and the Legacy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

Pakistan was founded more in the name of protecting Muslims from the likely prospect of becoming a vulnerable minority community in a post-colonial India, rather than on the promise of establishing an Islamic state based on the lines of the Shariah, as Muslims of India had not lived under such a dispensation in their history, barring a few exceptions.

For this reason, most *ulema*, including Maududi, had initially opposed Pakistan's creation because Jinnah and the Muslim League did not conceive of the new state as a "theocracy". Jinnah vowed to separate politics from religion and ensure equal citizenship rights to people of all religious communities in Pakistan. In his inaugural address to the Constituent Assembly, he asserted: "...in the course of time, Hindus will cease to be Hindus, and Muslims will cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of the individual, but in the political sense as citizens of one nation."⁷⁵

Even the political elite of Pakistan, comprising feudal lords and bureaucratic

communities, wanted the role of Islam to be restricted to that of cultural identity. This was because:

the system of education under which they were educated made them familiar with only the Western type of democracy based on the principle of separation of religion from politics...Their position was subsequently strengthened by Pakistan's alignment and dependence on the West in economic and defence matters.⁷⁶

Another impediment in making Pakistan an Islamic state was expressed by the Enquiry Commission looking into the anti-Ahmadiya riots of 1953, which admitted the divergences within the religious sects and sub-sects on Islamic beliefs and ideology. The Commission recommended, "Nothing but a bold reorientation of Islam to separate the vital from the lifeless can preserve it as a world idea and convert the Mussalman into a citizen of the present and future world from the archaic incongruity that he is today."⁷⁷ The problem of a lack of proper definition of Islam was even noted by Chief Justice Mohammad Munir's report which stated:

...keeping in view the several definitions given by the *ulema*, need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam.⁷⁸

However, the views of the *ulema* were accommodated in the 1956 Constitution to some extent, in which Pakistan was declared as an Islamic Republic. The JUI chief, Shabbir Usmani, and the Jamaat-i-Islami played a significant role in giving an Islamic orientation through the Objectives Resolution. Nevertheless, in the 1962 Constitution, the Ayub government removed the title of Islamic Republic by positing that Pakistan cannot be theocratic because there is no priesthood in Islam and, as such, it is "theocratic only to the extent that real sovereignty belongs to God".⁷⁹

Meanwhile, Jamaat-i-Islami and other religious groups started whipping up Islamist rhetoric and demanded *Nizam-i-Mustafa* (political system of the Prophet) from the politicians. Even socialist leaders, like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who once said that the question of Islam in the political context of Pakistan is irrelevant because both the exploiters and the exploited are Muslims, started introducing Islamic phraseology in their political messages and called for "Islamic socialism". Bhutto invited Afghan mujahideen, like Hekmatyar and Rabbani, to Pakistan and lent them support during his rule. He also succumbed to pressure from

religious groups, like the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam, as well as Saudi Arabia and criminalised the religious practices of Ahmadis and prevented them from claiming they were Muslims or from “behaving” as Muslims. Further, the Ahmadis were barred from going to Saudi Arabia to perform the Haj.⁸⁰

After staging a coup and executing Bhutto, General Zia-ul-Haq justified his military takeover in the name of Islam. In his speeches, press conferences and deliberations, he blamed previous Pakistani leaders, particularly Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, for not promulgating Islami laws in Pakistan and for prevaricating on the imposition of Islamic Shariah rule and the establishment of Nizam-i-Mustafa.

General Zia’s Islamisation: Implementing Maududi’s Model

After taking office as the President of Pakistan on 16 September 1978, General Zia-ul-Haq brought about structural changes to Pakistan’s polity by introducing many features from what appears to be Maududi’s model of Islamic governance. On assuming power, Zia “accorded Maududi the status of a senior statesman, sought his advice, and allowed his words to adorn the front pages of the newspapers. Maududi proved receptive to Zia’s overtures and supported his decision to execute Bhutto.”⁸¹ Although Maududi wanted the Shariah to be introduced gradually and by education to make it lasting, rather than by state fiat, he still supported Zia and his programme of Islamisation or “Sharisation”.

Like Maududi, Zia was opposed to the notion of multiparty “parliamentary democracy”; and the Council of Islamic Ideology, which Zia instituted, announced that elections based on political parties were un-Islamic and unlawful. Instead, Zia preferred the presidential form of government that accorded powers to the president similar to that of an ameer or caliph, as conceived in Maududi’s model of Islamic governance.

Taking another leaf from Maududi’s tomes, Zia replaced the Parliament (National Assembly) with the new institution of “*Majlis-e-Shura*” (a consultative council of unelected technocrats). On 1 December 1984, Zia announced that elections were to be held on a non-party basis. This allowed ethnic and sectarian mobilisation to fill the void left by the banning of political parties, to the detriment of national integration, which, in the 1990s, became a primary concern for Pakistan’s internal security.

In another controversial move, Zia replaced parts of the Pakistan Penal Code with the 1979 Hudud Ordinance, which included punishments of whipping, amputation and stoning to death for theft, adultery and fornication. Zia’s military

government also punished violators of existing blasphemy laws more severely by adding new clauses to target Ahmadi beliefs and those of non-Muslims. A new Section 295-C, prescribing death penalty for blasphemy against the Prophet, was added.⁸² The introduction of hudud and blasphemy laws based on Hanafi fiqh of Sunni Islam, in particular, made the Shias uneasy as they now saw Pakistan turning into a fiercely Sunni state.

Furthermore, the order for women to cover their heads in public was enforced in educational institutions and on state television. Women's participation in sports was severely restricted. Also, their legal rights were curtailed and their testimony was given half the weight of a man's testimony.⁸³ Economic Islamisation came through the establishment of *zakat* (tax) collection committees and a 2.5 per cent annual deduction from personal bank accounts on the first day of Ramadan, which was to be used for poverty relief. There was also the abolition of *riba* (interest), with the subsequent adoption of interest-free banking based on the Saudi Arabia model. In addition, madrasa education was promoted and, for the first time, received state sponsorship.

In this period, many new sectarian groups came up. In 1979, the *Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria* was born to protect the Shia rights, while the radical Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba of the Deobandi school rose as a significant threat against the Shia sect. The Jamaat-e-ulema-Pakistan, representing the Bareilvi school, also came up under Zia's rule to ward off the growing Deobandi threat.⁸⁴ The Islamisation of Pakistan could not be reversed following the death of Zia-ul-Haq in a plane crash in August 1988, but it opened the floodgates to the rise of more violently extreme religious organisation and movements, which have destabilised both Pakistan and the adjoining region in its wake.

Rise of Terrorist Groups in Pakistan

The departure of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1988, followed by the death of Zia-ul-Haq, left tens of thousands of Afghan refugee children in Pakistan to be educated in extremist madrasas that had become training grounds for ideologically radicalised militants. An extremist version of Deobandism, with teachings close to the Wahhabi "*Tariqa-i-Muhammadiyah*", had infused the young minds, who were trained not to become religious scholars but to fight jihad.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, thousands of Afghan Arabs left Afghanistan and became insurgents or terrorists in other countries, such as Egypt, Bosnia, Algeria and Chechnya.

The withdrawal of the Soviet troops was followed by an intra-Islamist war in

Afghanistan, which the Pakistani intelligence agencies deftly exploited to prop up the Taliban regime in the country in 1996. Using its now unemployed, radicalised madrasa cadres, Pakistan's intelligence agencies also galvanised a Muslim separatist uprising that had already been fomented in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989. Apart from the Ahl-i-Hadeeth/Salafi Lashkar-e-Taiba (founded by Hafiz Saeed, Abdullah Azzam and Osama bin Laden in 1986) and the Jamaat-i-Islamia-backed Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Deobandi militant groups conducting their jihadist operations in Kashmir included Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Harakat-ul-Ansar and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Within Pakistan, the Deobandi Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi groups targeted the Shia community, while the Tehreek-i-Taliban fought the Pakistani state to impose its version of fundamentalist Islam on the country. Some groups within the Sufi Barelvis (who are Hanafi Sunnis like Deobandis) in Pakistan also indulged in acts of violent extremism over the years, even though they did not develop terrorist groups like some Deobandi organisations. If violation of the idea of "tawheed" (commission of shirk—equating somebody or anything to God) became the reason for Salafi jihadists to declare people apostates and worthy of slaughter (under the concept of takfeer), for Sufi Barelvis, any insult to Prophet Muhammad, or even other prophets, was considered blasphemous and could justify punishment by death. The "Rangila Rasool" agitation in the 1920s was the first angry protest led mainly by Barelvi Muslims against insult of the Prophet. On 6 April 1929, a young carpenter, Ilm-ud-din (a devout Barelvi protestor), killed a publisher named Rajpal for publishing the book, *Rangila Rasool*, which focused on the marriages of the Prophet.⁸⁶

In 1950, Barelvi scholars initiated a movement, "*Majlis-e-Tahaffuz-e-Khatme Nabuwwat*" (Assembly to Protect the End of Prophethood), aiming to protect the belief in the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad against the claim of the Ahmadiya founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, that he was a prophet of Islam. As the determination of Muhammad as the last Prophet made the Quran and Hadeeth literature the source of divine guidance for Muslims, Ghulam Ahmad's claim of prophethood in the nineteenth century, even if theoretically accepted as Islamic, made them redundant in the face of the new prophet's latest revelations. These concerns led Barelvi scholars, like Shah Ahmad Noorani Siddiqui, to start protests against the Ahmadis, which coincided with protests led by Maududi's Jamaat-i-Islami.

In the face of Deobandi and Ahl-i-Hadeeth's persecution of Barelvis—that

is, their killing by Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, Sipah-e-Shaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, as well the occupation of Barelvi mosques by Deobandi organisations—Muhammad Saleem Qadri, a Barelvi leader, founded a violent group, Sunni Tehreek, in the 1990s. Barelvis also rallied against the death sentence of Mumtaz Qadri, a security guard who killed Punjab Governor Salman Taseer for his defence of a Christian lady (Asia Bibi) who was given capital punishment by a court on the charge of blasphemy.⁸⁷ When Asia Bibi was eventually acquitted and Qadri hanged to death, radical Barelvi party, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), held huge protests across Pakistan in 2018. The controversy over French cartoons also stirred huge protests across Pakistan in 2021, when the TLP demanded that the government deport the French ambassador. The TLP was then banned for many months and the protests ebbed, with the party ban being lifted only towards the end of the year.

Afghanistan: Epicentre of the “Great Game” and Global Jihad

As mentioned earlier, Ahmad Shah Abdali established the Durrani Empire in Afghanistan in the late eighteenth century, which, at its peak, spanned from eastern Iran to northern India. Following the dismemberment of the Durrani Empire, British forces and Maharaja Ranjit Singh forged a tripartite alliance to enthrone Shah Shuja in Afghanistan. However, they faced humiliating defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan War that ended in 1842. After that, Dost Muhammad was able to recapture Afghan territory and ruled it until his death in 1863, with his empire becoming a buffer state between the British Empire and the Tzarist empire of Russia as part of what Rudyard Kipling called the “Great Game” between the two powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸⁸

After the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, Afghanistan became free of foreign dominance and emerged as the independent Kingdom of Afghanistan in June 1926 under Amanullah Khan. The monarchy continued for nearly half a century until Zahir Shah was overthrown in 1973. By 1978, the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized power, but faced stiff resistance from the US and Pakistan military-backed guerrilla mujahideen forces. Then, in December 1979, the Soviet Army invaded the country.

Following the Soviet invasion, the US, the UK, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt viewed the conflict in Afghanistan as part of the Cold War struggle and assisted anti-Soviet forces, with the US Central Intelligence Agency aiding Pakistani intelligence agencies in a programme called Operation Cyclone. The North-West

Frontier Province of Pakistan became the base for Afghan resistance fighters, with Madrasa Haqqaniya (of the now-infamous Haqqani household) becoming the organisational and networking base for anti-Soviet Afghan fighters in the mid-1980s.⁸⁹ Oil-rich Muslim countries provided not only funds but also thousands of volunteer fighters known as “Afghan Arabs”, later known as Salafi jihadists, including latter-day terrorists, like Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri (both founders of Al-Qaeda) and Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi (ideological forerunner of the ISIS).⁹⁰

The Taliban: Throwback to Pre-Modern, Regressive Society

The political ideology of the Taliban has been described as a highly regressive form of Islamic polity, even by the standards of the most fundamentalist and militant groups in Islam, in which Deobandi Hanafi Maturidi orientation combines with Pashtun social and cultural norms called “Pashtunwali”.⁹¹

Emerging in 1994 as one of the prominent factions in the civil war, the movement primarily consisted of students (*talib*) from the Pashtun areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan. The story goes that in 1992, Mullah Omar (founder of the Taliban) had been studying in the Sang-i-Hisar Madrasa in Maiwand (northern Kandahar province). Unhappy over intra-Islamist infighting and the fact that Islamic law had not been installed in Afghanistan after the ousting of communist rule, he managed to band together 50 fellow students to found a group called the Taliban (or students) in September 1994.⁹² In contrast, some experts believe that Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence was heavily involved in “creating” the Taliban, with the main supporters in Pakistan allegedly being General Naseerullah Babur and Maulana Fazlur Rahman of Jamiat Ulama-i-Islam (F).⁹³

During its first regime from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban’s religious and political philosophy was said to be heavily based on the works of Grand Mufti Rashid Ahmad Ludhianvi.⁹⁴ Unlike many Islamist groups, the Taliban was opposed to all forms of modernity and forbade the consumption of pork and alcohol, along with music, radio, television, photography, filming and the Internet; even sporting events, including football, chess and kite flying, were banned.⁹⁵

There were also a lot of inconsistencies in the Taliban’s political structure and system. For example, in Kandahar, the tribal system was based on consultation with a council (*jirga*) that could be equated with the Islamic *shura*. However, the Taliban leader of the first regime, Mullah Omar, eventually made decisions independent of the *jirga*. The Taliban spokesman, Mullah Wakil, explained: “They

(decisions) are based on the advice of the *Amir-ul Momineen*. For us, consultation is not necessary. We believe that this is in line with the *Sharia*. We abide by the Amir's view even if he alone takes this view."⁹⁶ Curiously, the Taliban opposed debating Islamic doctrinal matters with other Muslims: "The Taliban did not allow even Muslim reporters to question [their] edicts or to discuss interpretations of the Quran."⁹⁷

One of the worst aspects of Taliban rule was the banning of women from education and work, the strict observance of purdah (physical separation of the sexes), avoiding their movement outside their homes and the imposition of burqa (strict concealment of their body with clothing from head to toe, with only a small slit for eyes to see). In the words of Physicians for Human Rights: "No other regime in the world has methodically and violently forced half of its population into virtual house arrest, prohibiting them on pain of physical punishment."⁹⁸ In addition, the Taliban was a highly repressive regime and persecuted the minorities, such as Shia Hazaras, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs, under their rule. Men were forced to grow beards and wear turbans outside their homes; and responding to the prayer call and offering congregational prayers was made compulsory for Muslim men.

Although Mullah Umar officially banned opium cultivation in 2001,⁹⁹ the drug trade allegedly continued to fill the the measly Taliban treasury coffers. Also, intemperance matched with inconsistency in Mullah Umar's decision-making. In 1999, he issued a decree calling for the protection of two lofty sixth-century Buddha statues in Bamyān, in the Hazarajat region of central Afghanistan. However, in March 2001, he issued the decree that "all the statues around Afghanistan must be destroyed", after which the Taliban blew up the Bamyān statues.¹⁰⁰ The US invaded Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, after the Taliban regime refused to hand over the Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. By early December that year, the Taliban regime collapsed, while its resistance against the US occupation continued for nearly two decades.

The Taliban recaptured Kabul on 15 August 2021, with the US forces withdrawing from Afghanistan before the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The new Taliban leaders have talked of a "softer" enforcement of their shariah interpretation and have urged the US and other countries to recognise their regime. Thus far, the regime has not gained recognition from any country in the world, as every nation is waiting for the fulfilment of its commitment against terrorism and for restoring human rights (particularly women's rights and rights of minorities) in the country.

Rise of Political Islam in Bangladesh and the Maldives

The birth of Bangladesh was a natural repudiation of the two-nation theory. The Bangla identity proved so strong that the province of East Pakistan declared its independence from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and became the sovereign state of Bangladesh on 26 March 1971.

The new republic, under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was believed to be free from communal politics once and for all. The 1972 Constitution declared secularism as one of the fundamental principles of state policy and prescribed measures for its implementation. Religion-based communal organisations with a political purpose were banned, be it pro-Pakistan parties, like the Jamaat-i-Islami or the Muslim League, or Islamist militant groups, like the Razakars, the Al-Badr and the Al-Shams, involved in genocidal killings alongside Pakistani forces during Bangladesh's independence struggle.¹⁰¹ However, with a Muslim population of 87 per cent at that time, the idea of secularism was viewed by a large section of the Muslim community as an anti-Islamic philosophy rather than a religion-neutral political principle.

In January 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman introduced one-party socialist rule and increased the president's constitutional powers. With his assassination in 1975, political instability ensued, which ended with Ziaur Rahman becoming the army chief in 1977. During his reign, the Quranic verse, "Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Raheem" (Beginning with the name of Allah, Most Merciful and Most Beneficent'), was added to the Preamble of the Constitution and provisions for the implementation of secularism were watered down. There was compulsory broadcast of azan on the radio and television five times a day, and a new Division of Religious Affairs under a full minister was introduced.¹⁰²

Under the reign of Ziaur Rahman's successor, General Ershad (from 1982 to 1990), Islamisation picked up further pace. His establishment of *zakat* fund, frequent visits to the shrines and mosques and liberal grants to Islamic institutions caused a sense of unease among the minorities over the undermining of secularism in the country. Eventually, on 7 June 1988 (Eighth Amendment to the Constitution), Ershad declared Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh. This caused a natural reaction among the religious minorities and led to the formation of Hindu-Buddha-Christian Okiya Parishad (United Council) to protect their rights and interests.

The end of Ershad's military regime ushered in the rule of democratic parties in Bangladesh in the 1990s. During the first presidential term of Khaleda Zia,

madrassa education was expanded and received state support, while new Islamic organisations, like Ahl-i-Hadeeth, raised campaigns against the country's Ahmadi population. Campaigns were also launched for the arrest of secular writers, like Tasleema Nasreen, on charges of heresy. The coming to power of Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League (1996–2001) revived the philosophy of separation of state and religion, yet the period witnessed a rise in incidents of violent extremism taking place around the country. The re-election of Khaleda Zia as premier in 2001, at the head of a combine that included Jamaat-i-Islami, unleashed a phase of violence against the Hindu community, with the rise of terror groups, like Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami. In 2007–08, most of the top leaders of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh were executed following a court verdict.

Between 2013 to 2016, there were several attacks on secular and atheist writers, foreigners, homosexuals and religious minorities. By 2 July 2016, a total of 48 people had been killed in such attacks.¹⁰³ A belated but heavy government crackdown in 2016 led to the arrests of tens of thousands of people, putting an end to the spate of attacks.¹⁰⁴ The government also sought to restore the secular provisions of the Constitution, watered down after the initial years of independence, even though Islam remains the state religion of Bangladesh.

The Maldives is among the four countries of the subcontinent with a sizeable Muslim population. With a 100 per cent Sunni population, at least 170 Maldivian youth (as per official figures) have left for Syria to join the ISIS and Jabhat Al-Nusra since 2014.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the Maldives has itself witnessed several terror-related attacks in recent years. This high level of religious radicalisation in the small country of half a million people is often attributed to Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who was the country's president from 1978 to 2008.¹⁰⁶ Having received education in Egypt's famed Al-Azhar University and other Islamic centres of East Africa, Gayoom restricted Maldivian citizenship to Muslims and even introduced the death penalty for apostasy.¹⁰⁷

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PART IV
EPILOGUE

21

Parallel and Distinctive Political Currents in West Asia and South Asia

West Asia may be the birthplace of Islam, but it is South Asia which has the world's largest Muslim population of about 600 million.¹ In fact, four of the eight countries of South Asia—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan—have Islam as their state religion, with majority Muslim population. Further, although Muslims constitute only a third of the total population of South Asia, one in three Muslims in the world today are of South Asian origin. Indonesia, in Southeast Asia, has the world's largest Muslim population, that is, it is home to 12.7 per cent of the world's Muslims.² However, the next three countries in terms of largest Muslim population in the world come from South Asia, with Pakistan having 11.10 per cent, India having 10.90 per cent and Bangladesh having 9.20 per cent of the world's Muslims.³

India has been witness to the rise of Islam since the early stages of the religion's emergence in West Asia. It was during the lifetime of the Prophet himself that the last the ruler (the Cheraman Perumal) of Chera dynasty is said to have converted to Islam and the first Indian mosque—the Cheraman Juma Mosque—was built in 624 CE at Kodangallur, Thrissur. Tamil Muslims also claim that mosques belonging to early seventh century (such as Palaiya Jumma Palli, built in Kilakarai in 630 CE) on the eastern coast suggest that Islam came to the province during the Prophet's lifetime. The Barwada Mosque in Ghogha, Gujarat, is also said to have been built before 623 CE.⁴

Perhaps, the message of Islam spread in a peaceful manner in some coastal areas of India during the lifetime of the Prophet. It is even said that many Hindu Jats of Sindh had converted to Islam and joined the side of Caliph Ali ibn Talib in the Battle of the Camel (656 CE) and died fighting. This early exposure to Islam happened much before the imperialist Umayyad Empire (beneficiaries of the first and second fitnas) sent its forces to Sindh on the instructions of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf, under Muhammad bin Qasim, in the early eight century.

Muslim Oriental Despotism in India

Islam formally entered mainland India as a political and military force only in the eleventh century, from Turkic Central Asia, and brought in its wake elements of Turkic-Persian political and cultural influences. As this review of Islamic political evolution shows, the pristine egalitarian polity of the Prophet and the Rashidun Caliphs had been long abandoned by the Umayyad Caliphate and then, the Abbasid Caliphate. Later, mainland India faced the invasions of the Turkic Ghaznavids and Ghurids in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the unitary caliphate governing all Muslims under the Abbasids was already disintegrating and ambitious new sultans, paying partial obeisance to the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, were ruling their kingdoms almost independently.

By this time, the Islamic checks and balances on the office of the caliph (as practised by the Rashidun Caliphs) had been long forgotten, and the immunity from prosecution that was extended to the caliphs under the Umayyads and the Abbasids had now passed on to the independent kings (or sultans). Thus, Antony Black found in *Nasihatul Mulk* (ascribed to Ghazali) the following words:

God has singled out two groups of men and given them preference over others: one prophets, and the other kings. Prophets He sent to His servants to lead them to Him, and kings to restrain them from [aggression against] each other; and in His wisdom he [delegated to kings] the well-being of the lives of His servants, and He gave [kings] a high status.⁵

This incipient strain of the almost divine status of kings was further enhanced in India during the Delhi Sultanate, starting from Ghiyasuddin Balban (reigned 1265–87), who officially adopted the “Tura-i-Changizi” (Law of Changizi) as the norm for governance, alongside Islamic law. Later, Akbar, adopting the title of “Zill-e-Ilahi” (the shadow of God on earth) and the manners of the Persian court (following non-Islamic Sassanian norms), introduced the practices of *zaminbos* (prostrating and kissing the ground in front of the king) and *paibos* (kissing the king’s feet on the throne).

India: A Refuge for Islamdom during Mongol Invasions

Islamic polity in India grew from the eleventh to twelfth century onwards, virtually independent of any Arab sovereign—caliph or sultan—and was relatively less troubled from Mongol invaders (both non-Muslim and Muslims) than their West Asian counterparts, following the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While the sultans of Delhi were consolidating their political footings in India, the Mongols under Genghis Khan and his successors were devastating much of Central Asia, China, Persia, Iraq, much of Asia Minor and large parts of southern Russia.

The killing of the last Abbasid caliph, with the sack of Baghdad in 1258 CE, forced many Arab, Persian and Turkic scholars, savants, bureaucrats, artists and nobleman to flee these Islamic lands and seek the protection of the Delhi sultans. Under Balban, over 15 *muhallaas* (neighbourhoods) were established in Delhi to house immigrants from Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East, giving the capital city a cosmopolitan character.⁶

The chronicler Minhajus Siraj, who visited Delhi in 1237 CE, was moved to observe:

the capital city of Dehli,...is the seat of government of Hindustan, and the center of the circle of Islam...the retreat and resting place for the learned, the virtuous, and the excellent of the various parts of the world; and those who, by the mercy of God...escaped from the toils of the calamities sustained by the provinces and cities of *Ajam* (non-Arab Muslim world), and the misfortune caused by the (rise of) infidel Mongols, made the capital—the asylum of the universe...⁷

Thus, even before the Mughal Empire, the Delhi Sultanate rivalled, if not surpassed, many of West Asian centres of political, economic and cultural grandeur, as was acknowledged by the great Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta, who came to stay in Delhi from 1334 CE to 1342 CE, found it “a vast and magnificent city, uniting beauty with strength. It is surrounded by a wall that has no equal in the world, and is the largest city in the entire Muslim Orient”.⁸

Muslim Rule in South Asia: The Ashraf, Ajlaf, Arzal Caste System

Islam entered India not as a religion with its pristine egalitarian message, wherein the Prophet disapproved of his followers to stand up on his arrival, but as an imperialist power out to conquer a non-Muslim civilisation.

There was mostly a clear divide between the ruling foreign elite and the non-Muslim Indian masses for centuries, and it was only over a period of time that the foreign invaders began to accept and embrace the place and the people they had started to rule. At least in the early centuries of Islam, its *faqih* and *ulema* stood for egalitarian principles and championed the cause of the masses (such as Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Hanbal and the Shia imams) against the oppressive excesses of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs (who had robbed the title of caliph of its spiritual and religious import). However, the *ulema* who came to India with the Turkic-cum-Persianate rulers remained members of the state elite, and failed to engage with the ordinary Indians or present their foreign culture and religion in a humane light.

This task was, to a great extent, taken up by the Sufi mystics, like Muinuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Auliya, who developed ties with the Indian laity, as well as with the great Hindu scholars, *advaitins* and Jain sages and worked towards developing a syncretic Indian cultural ethos.

Far from promoting an egalitarian order, Muslim conquerors of Central Asia applied a system of religious stratification and ethnic segregation of their own, even among members of the Muslim community in the country. These caste divisions between the Ashraf (the foreign ruling elite, also known as “*tabqa-i ashrafiyya*”)⁹ and *Ajlaf* (Indian converts) were far more stark and discriminatory than those found in West Asia in medieval times; and this Muslim caste system continues in South Asia to this day.¹⁰ The untouchable Hindu converts to Islam are categorized as the lowest in this social structure and are known as *Arzal* (‘degraded’). Both *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* categories are known as ‘Pasmanda’ (literally, the left behind’). In 1957, Louis Dumont noted that Muslim conquerors purposely adopted the Hindu caste system “as a compromise which degraded’). h they had to make in a predominantly Hindu environment”.¹¹

In fact, Muslim rulers found the Hindu caste system convenient to keep the vast native Indian population divided and repressed, and they introduced the Muslim caste system to encourage this socially and politically convenient system for the ruling elite. Many of the low-caste *Ajlaf* included Indian artisans and workers, like *julaha* (weaver), *darzi* (tailor), *rangrez* (dyer), *qasai* (butcher) and *barhai* (carpenter).

Impact of Indian Radical Movements on West Asia

The inability to convert the whole of India to Islam, as also the frustration of

witnessing some Indian Muslim rulers like Akbar adopting non-Islamic beliefs and practices, caused much resentment and fear among the traditional *ulema*, nobility and even some Indian Sufi scholars over the future of Islam in the subcontinent. Thus, we have read how Naqshbandi Sufi scholars, like Ahmad Shah Sirhindi, devised the concept of “*Wahdat Al-Shubud*” as a theological counter to “*Wahdatul Wujud*” in order to counter Vedic monism with orthodox Islamic monotheism, as the former inclusive belief system had started undermining Islamic philosophical, and thereby political, ascendance in India.

It was Sirhindi’s line of thinking, which objected to Akbar’s inclusive “*Din-i-Ilahi*” brand of a syncretic religion, which ultimately manifested in Aurangzeb’s fundamentalist and puritanical overthrow of Mughal eclecticism, leading to the decline of the empire in the eighteenth century. It was also this radical, hard-line thought that is said to have influenced Al-Wahhab, who was taught by Naqshbandi scholars of Sirhindi’s school in early eighteenth century, that led to the rise of Wahhabism, as discussed earlier in the book.

Later, Wahhabi radicalism spread to both India and Central Arabia and played a major role in the spread of Islamic militancy in the Arabian Peninsula and the northwestern region of India, of which we are painfully aware. Similarly, it was Maulana Maududi’s ideology of Political Islam that became popular in India and then Pakistan, which made him the Karl Marx of global Islamism, with its hard-line Arab exponents, namely, Sayyid Qutb, Khomeini and Bin Laden, acknowledging Maududi’s contribution in their ideological make-up.

Having said that, the contribution of Indian Islamic scholars, like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani and Abul Hasan Nadwi, influenced many Muslim scholars around the world. Indian theological schools of Deoband and Bareilvi Islam also made deep contribution to Muslim thought around the world, with peaceful and apolitical Tablighi Jamaat becoming one of the largest religious organisations in the world.

If West Asia experimented with Political Islam, presenting Twelver Shia and Sunni Wahhabi models of Islamic government in Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively, the South Asian subcontinent too produced its own versions of Islamist states in Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Taliban. It has also provided an Indian Muslim ideology that accepts values of secularism and democracy in the ideology of Ahmad Madani and Maulana Azad.

Muslims contributed to the Indian freedom struggle right from the First War of Independence in 1857. This is testified by the many slogans and paeans of the

freedom struggle penned by Muslim freedom fighters, be it “Jai Hind” (“Hail India”, a slogan given by Abid Hassan Safrani);¹² “Inquilab Zindabad” (“Long Live the Revolution” by Hasrat Mohani);¹³ “Angrezon Bharat Chhoro” and “Quit India” (slogans coined by Yusuf Meherally),¹⁴ or Surayya Tyabji who designed India’s tricolour.¹⁵

The following untranslatable lines written by Bismil Azimabadi were immortalised by the martyrdom of its great populariser, Ram Prasad Bismil (hanged to death by the British along with Ashfaquallah and Roshan Singh):

*Hai liye hathyaar duhsman taak mein baitha udhar
Aur hum tayyar hain seena liye apna idhar,
Khooon se khelenge holi gar watan mushkil mein hai
Safaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hai.*

There the enemy lies in wait bearing a weapon
And here we are ready with our open chests
We shall celebrate Holi in blood if the nation is in peril
As the will to sacrifice heads now swells in our hearts.¹⁶

It has often been said that Islam needs to reform itself. However, as Islam is not a monolith, every reform movement eventually becomes a sect, sub-sect, school or socio-political movement, among many others, within Islam. This process has been taking place for the last several centuries as it was never possible to truly close the so-called “gates of ijtihad”. The orthodox schools continue to stick to their belief systems in the modern age, just like their counterparts in other religions. New and politically radical versions often end up being violently extreme and gain a cult status, while many groups and organisations—moderate and extreme—continue to be either ignored, used, abused, exploited or manipulated by various political forces and states of the Muslim world, and even indirectly by big non-Muslim powers. This politicisation and militarisation of religion is not typical only to Islam, but it certainly mixes the sacred and the profane.

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