

MODERN INDO-PAKISTANI ISLAMIC REVIVAL BETWEEN PIETISM AND POLITICS: Al-Mawdūdī and Tablighi Jama'at¹

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to offer the reader a short perspective on the ideology, political and militant forms of Indo-Pakistani Islam, in its classical period, as it is especially represented by al-Mawdūdī and the Tabligh movement. Being under British domination, South Asia experienced, as The Middle East did, an ample process of religious, identity and political resurrection, even since the 19th Century. The Muslim communities, being under the double pressure of Western influence and the overwhelming Hindu culture, seek to retrieve and especially reinterpret their traditional values, either piously, ethically and religiously, or politically and even in a militant fashion. Once with the establishment of the Pakistani state, in 1947, they will exist in a much more structured and institutionalized form, especially within the Islamic parties that will contribute more and more to the Islamization of the political, social, juridical and ethical fields of the new state. More so, the Tablighi Jama'at as well as al-Mawdūdī will largely overpass the Pakistani reference and will exert an influence over the whole Muslim community, until nowadays. Even if Tabligh essentially contributed to the revival of the Muslim identity values in a manner as faithful as possible to the Prophet's initial model, becoming part of the Salafi transnational movements, at the same time, al-Mawdūdī and the Pakistani political Islam will serve as a model for the attempts of installing a Muslim order based on the construction of an Islamic state - it is the direction especially assumed by The Muslim Brotherhood.

Keywords: Islam, Islamism, Pakistan, India, al-Mawdūdī, Tabligh

Islamic Revival in Modern Muslim India

Ever since the classical age, Islam has ceased to be only a geographical and cultural expression of the Middle East: Arab troops reached Chinese border and conquered Turkestan only thirty years after Prophet's death. Since the

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8th century, once the Abbasid dynasty was installed, Persian influences have become significant, such that, after 940, along with caliphate's authority decay, a series of autonomous states appear in the Islamic Orient: they admitted spiritual authority from Baghdad's Caliph, but they were politically independent, representing the rise of both Persian (Samanid, Ghurid and Kwarazmian dynasties) and Turk (Ghaznavids and Seljuk) populations. Starting with Mahmud of Ghazni (beginning of the 10th century), Islam reaches India and Sind province becomes Muslim territory. In the 13th century, Afghan Mamluks advance significantly, founding an own Islamic kingdom, e.g. Delhi Sultanate, but whose ruling dynasty would be eliminated in 1526 by Babur, a Turcoman retreating from Transoxiana determined by Uzbek invasions. The Mughal dynasty he founded would politically rule almost entire India, facilitating an important symbiosis between Islamic (both Arabic and Persian) and Hindu traditions; North-West India would intensely turn to Islam, allowing Pakistan to appear during the 20th century. The last Mughals however, had been forced to accept British domination, in 1856 (Wynbrandt 2009: 41-113).

Similar to other territories that had to face colonialism at the end of the 19th century, Muslim and Hindu India would generate liberation and identity revival movements. Among Muslim population, the first generation of reform theoreticians were tempted to assimilate modernism and European socio-political order, similar to their Arab an-Nahda or al-Islah contemporaries: Sayyed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), founder of the Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh, that became a center of Muslim nationalist thinking in India, or Sayyed Amir Ali (1849-1928), willing to combine Islam's values with Western humanism (Parray 2011).

The most influential figure however was Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938), modern thinker, as first to propose unification of all Muslims from India in a new state that he called Pakistan. Although highly influenced by Western thought, he was willing to provide an alternative to political and cultural decay of the Muslim world. In his best known book, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he pleads for getting over out of date and pietistic conservatism and courageous taking over modern discoveries as only way through which Islam can resist to impact with Western domination, whose materialism and imperialism are criticized: in order to resist, he suggests getting back to moral values that inspired the first Muslim community founded by the Prophet at Medina, as a state model he was willing to adopt. The state should be based obviously on the Revealed Law Shari'a, ruled by principles like equality and fraternity, eminently

Islamic ideals: "The Ultimate Reality, according to the Qur'ān, in spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, the material, the secular. All that is secular is, therefore, sacred in the roots of its being. The greatest service that the modern thought has rendered to Islam, and as a matter of fact to all religion, consists in its criticism of what we call material or natural – a criticism which discloses that the merely material has no substance until we discover it rooted in the spiritual. There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit. All is holy ground. As the Prophet so beautifully puts it: 'The whole of this earth is a mosque'. The state, according to Islam, is only an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization. But in this sense all state, not based on mere domination and aiming at the realization of ideal principles, is theocratic" (Mohammad Iqbal 2003: 123). Iqbal's work, by trying to reconcile tradition and modernism, had a massive impact on the entire Asian Muslim space; it ignited new ideas both progressive, allowing modernism to show up, and conservative, reviving an original Islamic spirit and culturally and political regaining an entirely Islamic identity (Raja 2008: 37-49).

Modernism as a current was represented by the Muslim League, founded in 1904 by Muhammad Ali Jinnah: through the 1940 Lahore Resolution, the league demands creating an own state, Pakistan. By grouping a series of modern intellectuals and attracting a part of the ulamas, in order to better legitimate its actions religiously, the League manages in 1947 to impose a separation between Muslim and Hindu territories from India, without including the Kashmir region that remained as Indian territory. The new elites were rather nationalist and secular. Only after the 1956 Constitution, as a result of combined modernist and religious pressures, an Islamic reference becomes public again. Pakistan is at that time proclaimed an "Islamic Republic" and its new Constitution confirms the success of "religious currents that from 1948 launched a campaign meant to transform Pakistan into a state founded on religious <<ideology>>" (Gaborieu 1982: 194).

The traditionalist religious current was represented by Sunni Hanafi theological schools emerged in the late 19th Century: Barelwi and Deobandi. The Barelwi School was founded by Ahmad Ridā Khān (1855-1921) as an institution closer to popular Islam, accepting saints' veneration and Sufi devotion practices, spread throughout all Muslim Asia (Sanyal 2005). Although primarily interested in the mystical side of Islam, in the

late '40s the school generates a more activist movement at Karachi, which is later to become involved in Pakistani political life: Jamiat Ulama-e Pakistan (JUP) - Assembly of Pakistani Clergy. The Deobandi School founded by Muhammad Kāsim Nanotawi (1832-1879) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905) at Deoband, opposes saints' veneration and promotes a very conservative education which recommends, in a manner similar to that of the Wahhabis, a return to the original sources of Islamic doctrine, the Qur'ān and the Sunna. The school's impact in the Indian sub-continent, and then in Afghanistan and in South-East Asia, is largely due to the wide network of madrasas, the religious schools in which students follow a very orthodox Sunni interpretation of Muslim principles and in which the ulemas have a strong authority (Metcalf 1982). In 1945 the movement created a political party in Calcutta, Jamiat Ulama-e Islam (JUI) that will religiously support Jinnah in order to form a state based on confession, separate from Hindus, and which was later to become involved in Pakistani political life.

Both movements will separately present their vision on the state Pakistan was supposed to be (Binder 1963: 155-182). "This project was a modern version of the medieval caliphate. State's ruler, a Muslim by definition, is provided with extended rights. Closely after, comes an Ulama Committee designated to interpret and apply Sharī'a as state's fundamental law; JUI's president grants himself the ostentatious title of shaikh-ul islām (...) political parties became suspect: if Islam had been state's <<ideology>>, there was no place left for organization preaching competitive ideologies" (Gaborieu 1982: 195). Nevertheless, both movements will become political parties after 1956 and together with Jamā'at-e Islami, they will constitute significant pressure group acting in politics: "their tactics resumes to 3 points. Firstly, they systematically formed an opposition. Secondly, the opposition positioned itself to the right, joining parties that disagree with nationalization, agrarian reform and changing existent social structure. Thirdly, they presented own claims from a religious perspective, obliging their adversaries to act similarly" (Gaborieu 1982: 197). The other Islamic tendency was an expression of the most influential Islamic thinker that Indo-Pakistani region has ever seen: al-Mawdūdī.

Looking for an Islamic state: the political program of al-Mawdūdī
Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī (1903-1979) started his career as journalist at different Islamic publications across India, such that, in 1927, he published his first book called Jihād in Islam, a quick success. Contemporary with first ideas of Hasan al-Banna in Egypt, his writing criticizes nationalism

and the “Muslim state” idea issued by Islamic nationalists willing to create a modern state, with institutions inspired by the British model. He pleads for an Islamic state that should incorporate entire India, surpassing Banna's ideas that nationalism should be rejected, as a symbol of unfaithfulness (kufr) coming from the European space (Nasr 1996: 80-106). The fundamental attribute of an Islamic state does not derive from affiliation to a nation but to Islam only: “in his eyes, Islam is a total and comprising system: as a complete spiritual, ethical, political and moral set, it is in all aspects superior to Western civilization from which Muslims cannot await anything positive” (Lamchichi 2001: 56). Islamization should follow a top-bottom approach: state is the power that supervises implementing Shari’a, as politics is an “intangible and inseparable component of Islamic faith and the Islamic state is a result of Muslims' political action and the answer to all their problems” (Kepel 2000: 32). The mentioned Islamic state with all its laws “is entirely guided by Shari’a. He does not mention the institution in charge for controlling the process: instead of Ulamas, he considered state's president together with an elected presidium or high court; by leaving the issue open, he consolidated his tactical position, mediating debates” (Gaborieu 1982: 195).

Besides his theory on the Islamic state, al-Mawdūdi is well known for his theoretical extensions brought to the Jihād concept. The five fundamental obligations, Islam's “pillars”, as described in his *Fundamentals of Islam*, are only a preliminary form, a spiritual basis for the supreme duty, the Jihād, as an effort of each Muslim for propagating Islam throughout the world. It overcomes the traditional concepts dated back in the classical period, when jurists justified the holy war only as defensive, in order to surpass threats to a community – that is why it was not designated as a “pillar” (Maududi 1980: 243). Al-Mawdūdi advances even more with the synthesis Jihad in Islam, stating that “the objective of the Islamic ‘Jihād’ is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead an Islamic system of state rule. Islam does not intend to confine this revolution to a single state or a few countries; the aim of Islam is to bring about a universal revolution. Although in the initial stages it is incumbent upon members of the party of Islam to carry out a revolution in the State system of the countries to which they belong, but their ultimate objective is no other than to effect a world revolution. No revolutionary ideology which champions the principles of the welfare of humanity as a whole instead of upholding national interests can restrict its aims and objectives to the limits of a country or a nation. The goal of such an all-embracing doctrine is naturally bound to be world revolution. Truth cannot be confined within geographical borders. Truth

demands that whatever is right on this side of the river or the mountain is also right on the other side of the river or mountain; no portion of mankind should be deprived of the Truth; wherever mankind is being subjected to repression, discrimination and exploitation, it is the duty of the righteous to go to their succour" (Maududi 1980: 22).

In 1937, al-Mawdūdī is required by Iqbal in Punjab, where he is granted the leading position of Dār al-Islām Research Institute, concerned with Islamic studies. From now on, he involves gradually in politics, insisting on an Islamic state as the solution for solving Indian Muslims' problems. In order to better organize his mobilizing call for Jihād, he established the "Islamic Revolution's Vanguard" as a party in 1941, also called Jamā'at-e Islami (Islamic Party), which "in certain aspects is similar to the Leninist model" (Kepel 2000: 33). The party was meant to represent a prototype of Muslim authentic attitude that should be followed by each contemporary Muslim: raise a frontier against unfaithful cultures, as the Prophet Muhammad did when leaving from pagan Mecca to Medina for creating the true Islamic State. A new "emigration" (hegira) is therefore required in order to rebuild an authentic Muslim society and state, while simultaneously braking relations with norms other than Islam, which distanced Muslim community from the truth and weakened it, subjecting it to spiritual and political attacks initiated by non-believers (Adams 1983). The "breaking" theme will be later situated at the center of Sayyid Qutb's thinking model: while Qutb stands for a violent power overtake from a supposed lawless authority, al-Mawdūdī supports an official procedure: Jihād meant to build an Islamic state, is defined for him as participation in a Pakistani political system (Asyraf and Nooraihan 2012: 232-236).

After Indian territory was split in 1947 and Pakistan was proclaimed, al-Mawdūdī's actions and writings stand for a pronounced Islamization of the new society. As nationalist and secular, the new ruling elites were annoyed by Mawdūdī's persistence regarding the role of Islam in politics, and entered a conflict against Jama'at-e Islami. The master is arrested and imprisoned several times, but he continues to preach on party's legality and its right to participate in political life. The party is not declared as clandestine, as other radical movements were when confronting authorities.

Although Jama'at-e Islami had a relatively low impact on masses, the re-Islamization process al-Mawdūdī proposed was well received by the entire Muslim space; his opera, written in Urdu language, were to be translated

and presented in all Muslim countries, decisively influencing new ideologists like Sayyid Qutb. Both of them were considered among the most important thinkers that influenced the Islamic Revival, both Sunni and Shi'a, starting the '70s (Mumtaz 1994: 457-530).

Al-Mawdūdī and his followers comprising Jama'at-e Islami were advising general Zia ul-Haq, which in July 1977 mastered a coup against socialist government led by Ali Bhutto. The split between Bangladesh and Pakistan in 1970 and the defeat of Pakistani troops by Indian army led to a crisis that determined the fall of nationalist government ruling after 1947 and the rise of socialism represented by Pakistani People's Party. In 1970, Ali Bhutto takes over as prime-minister and inaugurates a series of agrarian reforms and national take-overs without positive impact, encouraging the Pakistani National Alliance led by Jama'at-e Islami to fiercely oppose. The attempts to subject the country to Islamization are late, as Bhutto was removed from the government in July 1977 by his chief of armed forces Zia ul-Haq. Advised by al-Mawdūdī, the general immediately installs Sharī'a as state's law, enlarging its action with supplementary measures enforced starting 1979. A military dictatorship is actually installed and religiously legitimized for the population. Unlike Iran, which in the very same year was becoming Islamic through a revolution, Zia's Pakistan rather "evolves" towards the condition of an Islamic state. During these years, Jama'at-e Islami's influence is increasing as the war in Afghanistan evolves, where it involved in organizing resistance and indoctrinating jihadi fighters arrived from the entire Muslim world. The party, led by Qadi Hussein Ahmad after 1984, infiltrates in schools, universities, army, and comprises more than 10.000 militants, with more than one million supporters. It forms branches in Afghanistan, India, and Bangladesh as well as in Great Britain, United States and Canada (Nasr 1994).

Transnational networks of Tablighi jama'at: towards a globalized Islam

These political expressions of Islamic Renaissance are not the only ones to indicate a re-Islamization process in Indo-Pakistani region. Ever since 1927, prior to apparition of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or al-Mawdūdī's writings, tablighi jama'at would have been founded in India as "the society for propagating faith", shortly tabligh. The Society became, at the end of the 20th century, the most important re-Islamization movement on global scale.

Founded by Muhammad Ilyas, which studied at the school from Deoband (similar to al-Mawdūdī), the movement aims primarily to find a solution

for Indian Muslims' situation, facing the danger of losing religious identity when confronted with Hindu and European, e.g. English, cultures. Islam's rediscovery is based on practices that meticulously imitate all Prophet's acts ("the effort to imitate ways described by the Prophet" - al-Minhajj al-Nabi), as described in Hadīth. The idea is not new for the Islamic world, as Sunni traditions consider Muhammad's words and fact a second inspiration source following the Qur'an; the mimetic effort proclaimed by Ilyas does nothing else but sending back to Islam's beginning, as the Brotherhood does, but anyhow in a more pronounced manner. It is in fact a literary application of Shari'a: general conduct is respected and regards behavior, cloths, spiritual attitude, exactly as the Prophet described them (Ali 2010). All together will manage to impose a conscience of affiliation to 'Umma for Indian Muslims, and then, as the practice spreads around the world will impact Muslim minorities, subjected to secularization process in the Western world, or simple Muslims seeking own cultural identity. The social impact expected on global scale shall be determined by the activism its members exhibit during their preaching expeditions, somehow similar to Protestants that will allow them to form and maintain efficient inter-personal relations geographically uninterrupted. They reconsider an old Islamic tradition which defines the entire history of classic Islam as the one of missionaries, philosophers, mystics that traveled around the entire Muslim space, spreading out teachings, founding schools and brotherhoods led afterward by followers and diffusing ideas, as the one of complex fidelity networks, equalizing Islamic conscience across territories with different cultures and populations. Tabligh looks like old Sufi brotherhoods, with branches across the entire Muslim space, comprising social, education and informative infrastructure, mediating between population and authorities. Nevertheless, the association is opposed to Sufi mysticism and brotherhoods strongly anchored in India and Central Asia; it directly expresses affiliation to Hanbali School's rigidity, close to Wahhābism and Muslim Brotherhood. Most of Muslim reform in traditional way currents, along with Christian neo-Protestantism exhibit a common feature: they are all aim for reviving primary spirit of religion along with a social and proselyte activism.

In the sixth decade of 20th Century, the society moved its headquarters from India to Pakistan in the Raiwind city close to Lahore; it is the period when its influence goes global, succeeding through its relation and contact network around the world to become a "mobile school, itinerant monastery, a truth lighthouse and good example at the same time" (Muhammad Ilyas). In spite of this immense re-Islamization program at

mass level and its real success in implementing an “authentic” life-style in all Islamic countries, Tabligh is not well known in the West, where media's interest as well as politics has been captivated by Muslim radical movements. Although discrete, the society is “the most successful transnational movement with fluid and informal character, representing the most extended network starting the ‘60s” (Kepel 2000: 43).

Missionaries of Tabligh have made a decisive contribution to reinforcing Muslim patterns of behaviour in the Western world even if they are much simplified (in an attempt to maintain an orthopraxis strictly limited to the acts of the Prophet), and much impoverished in their intellectual content (Diop 1994). Tabligh is opposed on principle to any political involvement, which on the one hand has allowed its faster penetration into Europe (since it was regarded as presenting no danger to public security) but on the other hand has generated rejection from the Islamist movements with a political agenda. In Europe, the movement's strongest influence was manifested in the '70s and '80s, especially in France, where it was represented by the associations *Foi et Pratique* and *Tabligh wa Da'ouat Allah*, both led mostly by leaders of Tunisian origin (Kepel 1991: 177-209). At the time, Tabligh exerted a considerable influence on the first generation of Muslim immigrants settled in the developed West and generally coming from a social milieu with no higher education, few economic prospects and little integration in the culture of the Western world. These young people responded to a system that preached a highly schematized and simplified existential and religious model, which transcended national identities and the various Sunni rites (Khedimellah 2001). However, once the first generation of Europe-born immigrants reached maturity, a generation which had already assimilated the general framework of Western culture and civilization without truly appropriating it, the lack of intellectual scope and excessive simplification of Tabligh practices made the new movement become less and less relevant for the sophisticated expectations of the youth. Therefore, since the 1990s Tabligh has started losing its appeal and encountered ever-stronger competition from new organizations which hope to secure the loyalty of European Muslims: the Salafi movements and numerous Muslim associations, many of which follow the tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter benefited from the financial support provided by the Gulf states in order to promote various charity and propaganda actions.

Tabligh however, differentiates from its contemporary re-Islamization movements through its opposition to Islam's politicization; it's not the state

that has to apply Islam in a society but every Muslim's duty: he has to complete himself first and then convert others to the authentic practice of Islam. However, a part of its networks and adherents are used by Islamic political movements, without altering their main function, e.g. introducing Sharī'a in Muslims' lives and practice the da'wa for the entire humanity to Islam. Following its model, other social-cultural associations will rise, contributing to mass re-Islamization and mediating between people and authorities.

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