

Pakistan, Islam and Modernity

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Abstract

Pakistan has been striving since its inception for an Islamic identity established on modernity, progress and compatibility. Despite the various stages of constitutional development, policy planning, power sharing and law making in its political history the lines between modernity and Islam have not been clearly drawn and protracted battles between traditionalists and modernists continue in Pakistan's political scene. The younger generations are estranged from true Islamic values and culture because of the in clarity of understanding between Modernity and Islam, State or Islamic polity. The need to profess concepts of humanism, justice for all, shunning of absolutism of demi-gods, reinstating of good in place of evils upholding equality and liberty for all, together with faith in Allah and His commands, is what needs to be implemented as objectives of the State.

Key words: Right Focus, Islam and Modernity

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Islam is a complete code of life and its rise is an important event in human history. Its rise resulted in the shattering of great empires, over throwing long established religious, remolding the soul of races and building up a whole new world – the world of Islam. The reason for Islam's amazing success was the nature of the Arab race and more so, the simple and impressive nature of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) who transformed the small town of Medina into an Islamic state.

The word 'Islam' holds varied connotations for different people and it must be understood in entirety to be of value to believers and non-believers alike because it is progressive and directed against human failings like immorality, materialism and political and ecclesiastical tyrannies. Thus the world of Islam is very different to the west in religious and intellectual background of the nature of the Islamic state and why Muslims want an Islamic state, should be addressed and understood by all. The educated younger generation of the Muslims all over the world have been estranged from their own cultural and intellectual traditions under the influence of western education and western political concepts and are now thinking of introducing these concepts in the Muslim world without regard to Muslim traditions. Hence a precise presentation of the case of an Islamic state has increased manifold. Muslim countries in the Arab and African world, Turkey and Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh in Asia and Pakistan being a case of an ideological state are the focus of such attempts. It is therefore necessary that the fundamentals of an Islamic state, as part of traditional thought should be understood and the developments of later centuries of Islamic revivalism in changed circumstances be viewed and a clear objective of the study of Islam and modernity in perspective of its polity and society should be ascertained so that Pakistan can be judged on the basis of ideology in the contemporary perspective.

Life is a unity and cannot be divided in watertight compartments. The function of religion is to direct the affairs of life therefore its domain is life in its entirety and not any specific aspect of it. The mission of the prophets in Islam is not merely to cater to spiritual elevation but to purify the beliefs and ideas of man about Reality, to purge his soul of all impurities, to awaken his moral consciousness and to use this moral force for the reconstruction of the society and the remolding of the flux of history.¹

¹ Mawdudi Abul Àla. The Islamic Law and Constitution- Translated and Edited by Khurshid Ahmed. Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore, 7th ed. p.3

Politics is central to Islam if it is defined in its narrow sense to mean the 'art of government' and also when defined in realist perspective as a 'struggle for power'. Politics resulting from western conceptualization has no relevance to politics as conceptualized in Islam. Quranic exhortations of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, of upholding justice and other divine values and criteria require the participation of all members of the society in the affairs of the government to ends laid down by Allah. To profess faith in Allah and to proclaim Tawhid, to banish Zulm (oppression and injustice), to shatter the absolutism of demi-gods and false deities, to wrest power for the righteous and to reinstate good in place of evil cannot be compromised. One of the major objectives of the hijrah {migration to Medina of the Prophet (SAW)} was to establish political authority in accordance with the Divine Will. Similarly, all other prophets were engaged in conveying the Divine guidance and reminding the faithful to eschew Taghut². Islam is thus actively concerned with power which can transform the world to benefit humanity Jihad fi sabil Allah (utmost exertion in the way of Allah) is a name to establish Divine Order. The importance of securing power for the righteous is so fundamental that the Quran declares Jihad to be a touchstone of belief. Islam puts power in an active moral framework. It is not an end but a means to serve Allah to earn a blissful eternal life and thus a source of mercy and justice to humanity. Thus fusion of religion and politics is the dictate of Islam and cannot be disregarded. The Sharia'h (Islamic law) incorporates the temporal with the spiritual and sets the tone for politics and the rules of political behaviour. Thus the major concerns of politics i.e. striving to control the state structure, to wrest power for the righteous, to root out evil and bring about the good life are all relevant to and encouraged by Islam. Islam accords centrality to these activities with the difference that the political life has to be situated within the larger frame of the religious and spiritual life. Religion and politics as such are not two sides of a single coin in Islam³. The truth as Mohammed Iqbal puts it is that 'Islam is a single, unanalysable reality which is one or the other, as your point of view varies⁴.

The call of the Quran is:

He it is who hath sent His messenger with the
Guidance and religion of truth, that He may make it

² Al Quran, 16:36.

³ Jansen G.H. Militant Islam, Pan Books, London, 1979, p.17

⁴ Iqbal Muhammad Sir, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Lahore, Sh. Mohammad Ashraf, 1971, p.154

supreme over all other ways, however much idolaters may be averse⁵ (61:9)

Verily, His is the Creation and His is the law⁶ (7:54)

If any do fail to establish and decide by what God hath revealed, they are the unbelievers ... the unjust ... the evil doers⁷ (5: 44, 45, 47)

This is the approach of Islam and the logical consequence of this approach is that the state must be moulded on Islamic patterns.

The ideal Islamic polity is first and foremost a community of believers which is a lawful society. Rulers and ruled alike are governed by the Shariah as interpreted by the learned scholars of Islam, the Ulama, the legists and the Fuqaha. Ideally, the political leader, the Khalifa or Imam is also the spiritual leaders and his legitmacy is confirmed by the Baya (confirmation oath) of the leading members of the community⁸. Whatever the form of leadership, it is to be guided and limited by the law of God.

Shariah or the Law of God symbolizes the supreme authority of God. Shura (counsel) is the basis of democracy in Islam. Islamic law is derived from the Quran and Sunnah as primary sources and Qiyas (analogy) and Ijma (consensus) as secondary sources.⁹

The failure of war of Independence of 1857 in Indo-Pak sub continent slowly paved the way for the establishment of an Islamic state wherein Islam and modernity, nationhood and ideology could be established. First a desire for Hindu Muslim unity and then an identity on the basis of Islam against the British Rule and a Hindu majority if left in united India, was an unusual Islamic experience. Hence relevant to the creation of Pakistan as a separate homeland to Muslims is the assertion that Islam demands statehood.

⁵ Al Quran, 61:9.

⁶ Al Quran, 7:54.

⁷ Al Quran, 5:44, 45, 47.

⁸ Esposito John L. Ed., Islam and Development, Syracuse University Press, 1980, p.3

⁹ Khan Qamaruddin, Political Concepts in the Quran, Islamic Book Foundation, An Institute of Islamic Research and Publications, 1982, p.55

Originally conservatives like Mawdudi opposed the idea of a separate Islamic state, and this is not surprising since the arguments for Pakistan used by Mohammed Ali Jinnah were largely secular¹⁰.

Mawdudi was undoubtedly right in his analysis of the situation in Pakistan at the time when he said (1) that there was a great confusion in the national movement because of the diversity of groups and view points that had participated in it (2) there was no clear conception of the nature of the new state; (3) that the leadership of the movement rested in the hands of a highly secularized and westernized portion of the population, (4) that popular sentiment was strongly in favour of an Islamic state¹¹.

Although religious ideology and symbols had been utilized to mobilize mass support in the freedom movement there was no clear understanding about the positive content of the ideology and its application in the new state's structure and policies. Put quite simply the ideological questions the new nation faced were. What does it mean to say that Pakistan is a modern Islamic or Muslim state? How is its Islamic character to be reflected in the ideology and institutions of the state?¹² Two major events (drafting the constitution of 1956 and the Anti-Ahmadiya disturbances) during the first decade of Pakistan existence provide an insight into the problems and issues associated with the quest to articulate its Islamic identity.

The process of framing the first constitution lasted for nine years. The constitutional debate provided the area for a protracted battle between conservative traditionalist and modernist factions – the former more inclined to revival of the past, the latter of modernization and reform.¹³

Two general directions before the new state of Pakistan were (1) model of a traditional Islamic state wherein Sovereignty was vested in

¹⁰ Cragg Kenneth, *Counsels in Contemporary Islam*, PP. 21-3, quoted in *Islamic Fundamentalism and modernity* by Watt Montgomery, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, p.93

¹¹ Adams Charles J., 'Maududi and the Islamic State' in 'Voices of the Resurgent Islam' edited by Esposito John L., New York, Oxford University, 1983, p.106

¹² Esposito John L. (ed), *Islam and Development* Syracuse University Press, 1980, p.142

¹³ Binder Leonard, *Religion and Politics in Pakistan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961;) Rosenthal E. J., *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), PP. 181-281, cited in Esposito John L. (ed), *Islam and Development*, Syracuse University Press, 1980, p.142

God Almighty and supremacy of SHARIAH was to be mentioned as a comprehensive law governing all aspects of the individual's life (2) Modern nation state model based on western modes of law. The formidable tasks for the new state was not adoption of either model but an adaptation wherein a blue print of a modern state and society incorporating Islamic ideals and values be created on which the mass support of the freedom movement was based. What complicated matters further was the ill equipped leadership in training and orientation or the mammoth task. The political leadership were western educated and the religious leadership or Ulema were of a traditional orientation and world view. Both had little training for the required standards and while the former had little understanding of basic fundamentals in an Islamic state the latter had little appreciation for the demands of modernity. Hence the constitution of 1956 reflected the long years of debate between traditionalists and modernists. Some of the most intractable problems hindering constitutions making were:

1. The character of the proposed constitution and specially the place which Islam should occupy in it.
2. Geographical division of the country and the question of quantum of representation in federal legislature.
3. Distribution or allocation of powers between the federal government and the provinces.
4. The national language issue.
5. The question of relationship between the executive and the legislature, that is, whether Pakistan should adopt a parliamentary or presidential form of government.
6. Most important, the provincial and parochial power tussles¹⁴.

The constitution of 1956 was a compromise of many aspects of a secular state while injecting several Islamic provisions. The chief Islamic provisions were: the title of state was the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; she was to be a democratic state based on Islamic principles; the head of the state was to be a Muslim; a research center would assist in the reconstruction of Muslim society on truly Islamic basic wherein no law, contrary to the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet could be enacted. Implementation was to be enhanced by a presidential commission which would recommend how existing law might be brought into conformity with Islam. The constitution of 1956 clearly reflected Pskistani's ideological difficulties for it lacked

¹⁴ Mahmood Safdar, Pakistan – Political Roots and Development 1947-1999, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.36

any systematic statement and implementation of a clear Islamic rationale¹⁵.

In 1958 when Gen. Mohammad Ayub Khan led a military coup d'état, he sought primarily to rebuild a strong centralized national government to foster rapid socio-economic reforms, Islam continued to be a factor in Pakistan's political development and the sharp divisions between the highly westernized few and the remaining disparate population continued. Gen. Ayub Khan was himself a modernist Muslim in understanding and approach and stressed the need to liberate the spirit of religion from the cobwebs of superstition and stagnation which surround it and move forward under the forces of modern science and knowledge. His modernist outlook was reflected quite clearly in the new constitution of 1962, the establishment of the Advisory Council on Islamic Ideology and the Islamic Research Institute as well as the reforms in the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961).

The operational code of Pakistan's Establishment has changed over the years but in the Ayub era they included the following percepts:

- India was the chief threat to Pakistan and armed forces was central to the defense of the state
- Military alliances were necessary
- Kashmir was an important issue
- Moderate Islamic states were Pakistan's natural allies
- Democracy was theoretically desirable and radical or violent Islamic groups were regarded with disdain
- The Establishment made gestures towards Islamic but never took seriously the idea of imposing a standard Islam¹⁶

When the first two decades of Pakistan's existence are viewed considering the quest to give shape to Islamic aspirations it can be concluded that while there was a general agreement for a Muslim homeland, what that meant was far from clear. Profound differences between modernists and traditionalists in education, outlook and approaches presented formidable obstacles. No systematic attempt to define Pakistan's Islamic ideology was made and peace meal approaches were taken to reach an acceptable compromise. The Islamicity of the constitutions of 1956 and 1962 was established by the inclusion of a few Islamic provisions and an Advisory Council

¹⁵ Rahman CF, "Islam and the Constitutional Problems of Pakistan," *Studia Islamica*, 32, 4 (December 1970)

¹⁶ Cohen Stephen P., *The idea of Pakistan*, Vanguard Books, Lahore/Karachi/Islamabad, 2005, pp.70-72

whose independence and effectiveness was hampered by its dependence on the executive.

In 1971 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came to power. Islamic sentiments were viewed as a sensibility to be respected but not considered a major factor in political development. Bhutto was a modern, secular politician with an ideological bent towards socialism. He merged the two ideologies that were anathema to the Establishment, socialism and Islam, proclaiming a vision for Pakistan as an Islamic and socialist state¹⁷. He sought to align Pakistan with her South West Asian neighbours, the Arab oil producing states in particular and emphasized on Islamic ties. He gave speeches on common Islamic brotherhood and held an Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore in 1974 with representatives of all Muslim countries and further underscored Islamic solidarity. Islam became a prominent part of his governments approach to foreign policy. Despite his appeals to Islam religious groups developed into a potent opposition force. His use of Islam was viewed as exploitation of religion by one whom traditional religious leaders judged as singularly unislamic in personal behavior and attitudes. Bhutto made policy choices between socialist and Islamic symbolism. A constitution was made in 1973 declaring Pakistan an Islamic Republic with Islam as religion of the state. It had more Islamic clauses as compared to the previous constitutions. It carried references to the Islamic way of life, compulsory teaching of the Holy Quran, and encouraged learning of Arabic. Despite all these efforts the politico-religious parties gathered under the banner of PNA for Nazim-e-Islam and ouster of the Bhutto government. All Islamic measures taken later by the government were dismissed as insincere stop gap measures. This momentum for an Islamic system was used as a sentiment by Gen Zia ul Haque to justify his coup d'etat on 5th July 1977. Addressing the nation on the eve of the coup he declared "Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of an Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country."¹⁸

Gen Zia quietly established his authority leading the country in a new direction. Islam was at the centre of his vision of a rejuvenated nation. He was the first Pakistan leader to take Islam seriously and believed that Pakistan should be guided by Islamic principles. Preservation of Islamic character of the county was as important as the security of the country's geographical boundaries. A new Islamic order was built and the Advisory Council of Islamic Ideology was revived, Islamic penal reforms were introduced (Shariah Punishments) and further

¹⁷ Ibid p.79

¹⁸ Pakistan Times, July 7, 1977, p.8

steps were taken for Islamization. This Islamic system, in an expanded and revised version, became law in February 1979 when on the occasion of the celebration of the Prophet Muhammed's (SAW) birthday, Zia ul Haque formally promulgated the introduction of Islamic Laws¹⁹.

Gen Zia's personal piety and cordial relations with the religious leaders and parties and their appointment at cabinet level posts reinforced the expectation that Pakistan would become a more demonstrable example of an Islamic order – politically, economically and legally. But the general criticism on his government has been that he had used Islam to legitimize his coup and introduced a 'negative Islam', restrictive and manipulative.

Civilian government returned in Pakistan after Zia's death in an unexplained plane crash in what is known as the 'decade of democracy' under the two most important civilian politicians – Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. They neither challenged the consensus that had grown up around the idea of Pakistan as an Islamic state and neither made this the core of their policies.

General Pervez Musharraf's October 1999 coup d'état did not bring many changes in the state's posture on Kashmir, an important issue between traditionalists and modernists. Although he spoke of ending religious extremism in Pakistan from the day he took over power it soon became obvious that he made a distinction between Kashmiri freedom fighters and domestic Islamists. The September 11 terrorist attack on United States in 2001 changed Pakistan's position and its relationship with the US. Pakistan's position on Kashmir was not immediately altered and Gen. Musharraf continued to link the end of the militancy to resolution of the Kashmir question. Through his theme of 'enlightened moderation' has won him the support of the US and he is described by President Bush as 'a courageous leader who has risked his life to crackdown on the Al Qaeda terrorist network'²⁰ the whispers of more should be done are still heard.

Gen Musharraf has reversed Zia ul Haque's course of Islamization but only marginally. Controversial Islamic laws such as relating to blasphemy and hudood (Islamic limits) are still generating heated debates. His opinion that Pakistan is safer in the hands of the military

¹⁹ 'Introduction of Islamic Laws' address to the nation by President General Zia ul Haq (Islamabad Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, February 1979)

²⁰ Efron Sonni, 'Bush Lauds the efforts of Pakistani ally', Los Angeles Times, December 5, 2004

than with a civilian democratic government speaks of duality in his approach. Supporting enlightened moderation and justifying military rule to face Islamist opposition has again brought Islam as the central issue in Pakistan's politics because of a conscious and consistent state policy.

The question arises what now? Pakistan is an Islamic state but in which perspective can the interpretation of Islamic ideals be translated into reality to have far reaching changes in the collective life of the people of Pakistan. The change must come gradually. The more sudden the change is the more short-lived it would turn out to be. If we need to promulgate Islamic Law, it would mean a thorough reorientation of our educational system because it has lost contact with practical problems of life and is unable to produce a better lot for a progressive modern state. The Islamic law has not been in force for the last one century or so. Consequently our legal code has become stagnant and lags behind the time while our urgent need is to bring it in level with the latest developments of the modern age²¹. Some of the Ulema are beginning to show liberal tendencies and a liberal opinion in Islam can be sought.

While most Pakistani Muslims are devout, they are not radical and for much of its history Pakistan's politics has been dominated by ethnic, linguistic and economic issues, not religious ones. The dominant Islam is strongly influenced by Sufism and has yet not been amenable to radicalism. There are competing visions of an Islamic state and the issue is how the Pakistani state should implement its Islamic identity. Since Pakistan's Islamist groups have benefited from events across Pakistan's western border, every increase in religious extremism deters many from actively participating in politics so much so that they could become Pakistan's second most important political force. Such religio-political groups are not a new phenomenon. They have been playing a role in social and political life since 1947. What is new is their political activism. Pakistan's difficulties in establishing a national identity have remained the same, while since the 1970's the country has experienced a shift from official Islam to Islamism²².

The solution lies in addressing the core problem – bringing about a social change to determine the extent of Islam's role in politics on issues like national identity, the state and the economy based on Islamic principles of a fair judicial system, equality and rule of law.

²¹ Maududi Abul Ala', *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, Islamic Publication Ltd., Lahore, 1980, p.98

²² Jaffrelot Christophe (ed), *Pakistan; Nation, Nationalism and the State*, Vanguard Publications, Lahore, 2005, p.13

The political leadership must possess administrative skills and an appreciation of the country's Islamic heritage. A well-educated class of religious leaders, trained both in traditional religions and modern discipline, can bridge the gap between tradition and modernity.