

# Islam, State and Modernity : Muslim Political Discourse in Late 19th and Early 20th century India

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**Islam, State and Modernity :  
Muslim Political Discourse in Late 19<sup>th</sup>  
and Early 20<sup>th</sup> century India**

**Iqbal Singh Sevea**

**Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies  
Singapore**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interaction between Muslim intellectuals and ‘Western’ socio-political ideas, particularly the concept of the nation-state, in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India. Debates over the adaptability of Western political ideologies and institutions are located within the wider context of the evolution of Islam/Islams and Islamic political thought. Rejecting assertions of an ‘authentic’ and unchanging Islam, this study highlights the rich and diverse political imagination of Muslim intellectuals in India. This study reflects the diversity of Indian-Muslim political discourse. While some intellectuals argued that Islam was not inimical to the adoption of new Western political ideologies/institutions, others constructed Islam itself into an ideology and polity.

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## **Islam, State and Modernity : Muslim Political Discourse in Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> century India**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, 2005, the *Shura* or central council of the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan passed a resolution appealing to all “democratic, freedom loving and anti-dictatorial political forces” to unite in support of a national system based on the three pillars of “constitution, Quran and *Sunna*”.<sup>1</sup> While this resolution can be firmly located within the context of debates within Pakistan over the Islamic nature of the state and constitution, it is reflective of two wider Islamic debates – must a Muslim majority state be an Islamic state and do the Quran and *Sunna*, the practices of the Prophet, present a fixed set of political ideals. A study of the work and concerns of the Muslim intelligentsia in contemporary South Asia reveals that issues such as the ideal form of political structure,<sup>2</sup> the concomitant debate over ‘substantive’ and ‘ascriptive’ representation,<sup>3</sup> and the role of Islam in the state<sup>4</sup> continue to be discussed and debated, perhaps more so in the wake of ‘Hindu fundamentalism’ in India, the appropriation of Islam by various regimes in Pakistan and the global attention on ‘political Islam’/‘Islamic fundamentalism’.

Such debates are not entirely new. They reflect, draw upon and appropriate debates amongst Muslim intellectuals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aim

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.jamaat.org/news/2005/jan/10jan05\\_identity.html](http://www.jamaat.org/news/2005/jan/10jan05_identity.html).

<sup>2</sup> Professor J. M. Khan of the Jamia Milia Islamia, for instance, has lamented that the juxtaposition of a Western liberal political model upon a society whose social structures and practices were essentially traditional has hindered the development of ‘backward and weaker sections of the community’ such as the Muslims. He does not only call for the need to examine and understand the Indian political system but also for the creation of structures through which Muslims would be able to participate in politics to safeguard true democracy. See J. M. Khan, ‘Indian Muslims : Profile and Challenges’ at [http://www.iosworld.org/Indian\\_muslims.htm](http://www.iosworld.org/Indian_muslims.htm).

<sup>3</sup> In an article published in the *Milli Gazette* of 16-31 August, 2004, Syed Shahabuddin, president of the *Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat*, argued that Muslim economic and educational development in India was contingent on the reservation of seats for the Muslims in the legislature. He further argued that the salience of reservations for Muslims was a recognized fact in Indian politics even though separate electorates were denounced and that the first draft of the Indian constitution had provided for reservations for Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of debates and dissenting voices over the role of Islam in the state of Pakistan see Afzal Iqbal, *Islamization of Pakistan* (Lahore, 1986).

of this paper is to explore the interaction between Muslim intellectuals and ‘Western’ socio-political ideas in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India. It will focus specifically on their interaction with the concept of the nation-state which was promoted as an expression of political modernity. Challenging the characterization of Muslim political discourse as a return to an authentic Islam or as a ‘derivative discourse’<sup>5</sup> derived from the West, this paper seeks to study how Islam itself was reinterpreted in the light of modern material and intellectual developments.

While the Muslims of pre-Partition India constituted the largest body of Muslims in the world, the core-periphery approach prevalent in the study of Islam continues to place South Asia at the periphery of the Muslim world portraying it as a mere recipient of intellectual and religious influences. The political and intellectual influence exerted by South Asian Muslims on the wider Muslim world is often neglected. The Indian Muslims were, for instance, at the forefront of the Caliphate movement. Not only did they mobilize support from both Muslims and Hindus within India in support of the Caliph,<sup>6</sup> they also organized medical missions and deputations to the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> Far from seeing themselves as being on the periphery of the Muslim world, many Muslim intellectuals in India felt that they were uniquely placed to shape an Islamic response to the modern age. The thinkers studied in this paper have made a significant intellectual contribution towards the evolution of Islam/Islams and Islamic political thought. Works by Muhammad Iqbal, Maulana Hussein Ahmad Madani and Abu A’la Maududi have influenced religious and

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<sup>5</sup> The term “derivative discourse” is drawn from Partha Chatterjee’s work on nationalist discourse in India where he has argued that Western theories of nationalism have been imposed upon the east through the impact of Western education leading to the detriment of alternative world-views. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World : A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement : Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Mushirul Hasan’s discussion of M. A. Ansari’s activities in *A Nationalist Conscience : M. A. Ansari the Congress and the Raj* (New Delhi, 1987).

political discourse in large parts of the Muslim world. Maududi's work, which has been fundamental in shaping the views of Sayyid Qutb and later 'Islamist', continues to be widely circulated amongst 'Islamist' groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Iqbal's work has been used to justify a myriad of religious and political demands in South East and Central Asia. Ali Shariati, amongst others, has drawn on Iqbal's ideas on Islam as a complete system in developing his own religio-political thought.<sup>8</sup>

The period studied here witnessed the burgeoning of a public sphere as members of the Muslim elite attempted to use newspapers, journals and tracts as a means to inform public opinion, discuss the contemporary condition of the Muslims and usher in social and religious reforms.<sup>9</sup> The expansion in print media and education led to the rise of a new group of Muslim intellectuals who claimed authority not only to interpret Islam but also to act as spokesmen for the community. This fragmentation of religious authority facilitated the rise of a number of intellectuals who sought to exercise *ijtihad*, independent judgment, in order to provide solutions to contemporary problems.

The Muslim intelligentsia in late 19th and early 20th century India was not only active in acquiring new socio-political ideas from the west, they were also actively reinterpreting their own traditions in the light of these new ideas. Myopic categorizations of intellectuals as 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' only serve to detract from an insightful analysis of the interaction between Muslim intellectuals and

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Ali Shariati's discussion on Islam and Marxism in *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies – An Islamic Critique*, translated by R. Campbell (Berkeley, 1980) pp. 90 and 95. Shariati draws on Iqbal's critique of Marxism and his construction of Islam as the solution to contemporary social, economic and political problems.

<sup>9</sup> Margrit Pernau's work on the *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* traces how the new print media came to provide a link between the traditional local public opinion and the new public, no longer based on direct interaction but on imagined communities. She has also shown that newspapers such as the *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* consciously aimed at forming public opinion and providing a forum for discussion. See Pernau, 'The *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* Between Persian Akhbarat and English Newspapers' in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 18, 2003, pp. 105-131. For an interesting study on the role of the press in the political climate of the period under study refer to Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty – Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London, 2000).

Western thought. Any rejection of Western political thought should not be seen simply as a return to an authentic Islam or recourse to 'Pan-Islamism'. Muslim intellectuals were essentially trying to shape an Islamic response to modernity. While the west was being studied and critiqued, Islam itself, both its theology and institutions, was being reinterpreted.

This paper seeks to locate the debates over the adaptability of the Western concept of the nation-state within the context of the wider evolution of Islam/Islams and Islamic political thought.<sup>10</sup> The first section of this paper will provide a background to Muslim political discourse and its sources. It will be stressed that a study of the interaction between Muslim intellectuals with sources within and without the fold of Islam, and their interpretation of Islam/Islams will provide an insight into the processes by which some intellectuals constructed a 'Political Islam' while others argued that Islam was not inimical to the adoption of new political ideas and institutions. Rejecting assertions of an 'authentic' unchanging Islam, this paper will then turn to discuss how Islam was reinterpreted in the light of modern developments. The central aim of this section will be to demonstrate how, confronted by Orientalist portrayals of a rigid unchanging Islam, some intellectuals sought to demonstrate that Islam did not stipulate any socio-political ethic, hence, it could adopt modern political ideals and institutions, while others constructed Islam itself into a complete socio-political ethic. The last sections will deal specifically with the acceptance or rejection of the modern nation-state. An examination of Iqbal's and Maududi's views on the state structure, particularly the latter's construction of the 'Islamic State' will also be

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<sup>10</sup> The attempt in many works to locate theological arguments as well as political actions and ideas which are 'Islamic' and to dismiss others as 'un-Islamic' has detracted not only from a proper analysis of the views of Muslim thinkers but also from the evolution of Islam itself. Hamid Enayat, for instance, in his *Modern Islamic Political Thought – The Response of Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century*, states that his concern is not with ideas put forward by Muslim thinkers but with ideas which are Islamic. Such an approach detracts from a study of the debates amongst various Muslim thinkers and the attempts by them to reinterpret and in the process shape Islam.

undertaken. Their views will be contrasted with those of the Deobandi *ulema*.

### **Islamic Political Thought and Sources**

Hamid Enayat has argued that prior to the European encroachment in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Muslims rarely studied politics in isolation from their religion. He suggests that Muslim elites had traditionally dealt with problems such as the nature of the state, the varieties of government and the powers of the ruler within the unassailable walls of the sharia and that it was only under the trauma of European domination that Muslims began to produce works specifically on political topics.<sup>11</sup> Such an essentialist view on Muslim political literature is not entirely accurate for a number of reasons. Firstly, Enayat has neglected medieval *akhlaqi* literature<sup>12</sup> which “represented in fact the best example of the appropriation into the medieval Muslim intellectual world of non-Islamic and in strictly juristic terms even anti-Islamic ideas”.<sup>13</sup> *Akhlaqi* texts, particularly writings which took the work of Nasir al-Din Tusi as a model, provided a philosophical, non-sectarian and humane solution to the emergent problems that Muslim society’s encountered. Furthermore, sharia itself was redefined in these works in part to signify a kind of a protest against an overly legalistic approach.<sup>14</sup> It is, however, important to note that confronted by European political, economic and intellectual domination and spurred by the rise of the printing presses, modern Muslim intellectuals began to write on political developments and issues with a new vigor. Both ‘Western’ and ‘Islamic’ political ideas and institutions

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<sup>11</sup> Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought – The Response of the Shi’i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century*, new edition (London, 2005) p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Classified as ‘mirrors of princes’ literature, *akhlaqi* texts aimed at instructing on the right political conduct in specific political contexts. They were concerned with statecraft, political culture and philosophy. See interesting discussion on *akhlaqi* texts by Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India c. 1200-1800* (Delhi, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>14</sup> See discussion in *Ibid.*

were actively discussed in the public realm as intellectuals grappled with political developments across the world and the condition of their own societies. These intellectuals drew upon a wide range of sources both Western and Islamic. While the works studied in this paper were primarily on political topics, they were not necessarily isolated from religion. New political concepts such as the nation-state and democracy raised questions over the utility and space for older 'Islamic' institutions such as the caliphate and sharia. Moreover, the acceptability of Western institutions hinged upon their compatibility with Islam.

A clearer narrative on Muslim political discourse in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India - one which highlights the diverse and rich political imagination of Muslim intellectuals - requires an exploration of their interpretation of Islam and examination of the sources they drew from, both within and without the fold of Islam as well as their interaction with 'Western' texts, ideologies and political concepts. This will provide a much needed insight, on the one hand, into the processes by which some Muslim intellectuals constructed a 'Political Islam', and into the attempts by others to show that Islam was not inimical to new political ideals and institutions. Instead of approaching the political views of Muslim intellectuals simply as a return to an authentic 'Islam',<sup>15</sup> the approach here is to study their ideas as a hybrid born out of a rejection and acceptance of facets of modernity.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to deny that there is an Islamic corpus on politics or that Muslim history has provided models of political organization or behavior. Muslim

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<sup>15</sup> Islamist rejections of "imported ideologies" such as socialism and liberalism should be seen in the light of a discourse of authenticity, a discourse which they share with their Western counterparts. Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, (Verso,1993).

<sup>16</sup> "Many ideologies to be found in the Third World are based on influences received from Europe in a colonial context. Some anthropologists call this process an exogenously-induced cultural change, or acculturation, and associate distinctly colonial, Eurocentric elements with these concepts. We consider that the acculturation concept can also be applied in critical analyses if it is divested of these elements, especially since it then points to the existence in a non-Western society of aspects of two cultures within a single ideology." Bassam Tibi, 'Islam and Modern European Ideologies' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (February, 1986), p. 26.

intellectuals in India drew upon the political works of jurists, theologians and philosophers such as Ghazali, Farabi and Tusi. Moreover, the early Islamic community under the Prophet and the *Rashidun* Caliphs has also provided a model for socio-political organization to which Muslims have looked back to throughout the ages. Some have also argued that socio-political prescriptions can also be located in the hadith and the Quran. Looking back to the verses and sayings of the Prophet from the Madinian period, Ghulam Ahmed has gone to the extent of arguing that the Quran provides a “constitution” for the organization of the state, a constitution which is elastic enough to suit different places, periods and nations.<sup>17</sup>

Such texts and historical models of political organization provided important sources for Muslim intellectuals in India to draw upon. Islam, however, was to mean different things to different intellectuals, they were to attribute different meanings to it, and were to draw from varying sources within the ‘Islamic’ tradition (as well as without) in developing their socio-political thought. This is reflective of a wider debate over the authenticity of sources such as the *hadith*, a debate which had religious, legal and political implications. While tracts and articles were written by the likes of Muhammad Ali in defense of the veracity of *hadith* as the basis for the organization of the religious, social and political life of Muslims<sup>18</sup> and figures such as Suleiman Nadwi looked to the sayings of the Prophet to find answers to politically relevant questions,<sup>19</sup> sections of the Muslim intelligentsia rejected the *hadith* literature’s de facto legitimations of socio-religious and political practices. Chiragh

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<sup>17</sup> The constitution laid out in the Quran is a federal constitution which ensures the freedom of the individual and various religious communities. He speaks of this political ideology as Quranism. Ghulam Ahmed, *Dastur Istate Madina Quran Izam Hisah Madani*, jald awal (Hyderabad, 1961).

<sup>18</sup> See Muhammad Ali, ‘Collection and Preservation of Hadith’ in P. K. Koya, *Hadith and Sunnah – Ideals and Realities*, second edition (Kuala Lumpur, 2003) pp. 23-57.

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, correspondence between Nadwi and Iqbal in *Iqbal Nama Majmuah Makatib-i-Iqbal*, jald awal, pp. 183-185 and 405.

Ali (1844-1895),<sup>20</sup> for instance, refused to accept the *hadith* as authentic sources of Islam, asserting that all sorts of political systems could and have been defended by an appeal to traditions.<sup>21</sup> The Quran, he argued, was the only authentic source to which Muslims could look back to, hence, any socio-political formulations had to be based solely on a proper interpretation of the Quran.

Others who stressed the contributions of later epochs to the development of Islam and Islamic political theory looked to the contributions of Muslim philosophers and ‘foreign’ influences. Ameer Ali (1849-1928),<sup>22</sup> based his views on the “political spirit of Islam” on the works of Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Rushd and Ali bin Taba Taba.<sup>23</sup> While acknowledging that the Quran and *hadith* provided the foundation for a new type of social order and political organization, Bashiruddin emphasized the fact that in studying “the principles of the political philosophy of Islam, we must examine sources both native and foreign which have molded into a polity the beliefs, practices and institutions of the Arab people”.<sup>24</sup> An appreciation of Islamic political theory, thus, required an understanding of the social structure, political culture and psychology of the early Muslim communities and the foreign influences which interacted with the teachings of the Quran and *hadith* to shape the Islamic polity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> His works include *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire* (Bombay, 1883) and *A critical exposition of the popular "jihád", showing that all the wars of Mohammad were defensive ; and that aggressive war, or compulsory conversion, is not allowed in the Koran : with appendices proving that the word 'jihad' does not exegetically mean 'warfare', and that slavery is not sanctioned by the prophet of Islam* (Calcutta, 1885).

<sup>21</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Other Muhammadan States* (Bombay, 1883) p. xix.

<sup>22</sup> Ameer Ali established the London branch of the Muslim League in 1908. For a number of years it was the London branch which guided the policy of the All-India Muslim League. He also wrote a number of books including *The Spirit of Islam – A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam with a Life of the Prophet* (Delhi, 2002) and *Muhammedan Law* (1929).

<sup>23</sup> Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, see especially pp. 288-289.

<sup>24</sup> Bashiruddin, ‘The Political Theory of Islam’ in *Islamic Culture* vol. 8, (October, 1934) p. 587.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 597.

Their reactions to political realities, namely the acceptance or rejection of ‘Western’ socio-political institutions and concepts, often hinged upon or reflected their interpretation of Islam. It would not be accurate to describe the relationship between their thought and Western ideas merely as ‘borrowing’ nor should their socio-political discourse be seen merely in terms of a rejection of or compromise and accommodation to modern socio-political ideas. In many cases aspects of the basic Islamic symbol system were developed in certain ways in response to the Western challenge.<sup>26</sup> As they worked within the context of their cultural heritages to respond to the challenges of modernity<sup>27</sup> there is a need to reflect on the dialectical relationship involved in their response to modernity and their interpretation of Islam.

This does not imply that their reconstruction of Islam was in any way ‘false’ or less ‘authentic’.<sup>28</sup> Individuals such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Chiragh Ali and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938)<sup>29</sup> were intrinsically attached to Islam, they looked to Muslim history, theology, sources and its repertoire of symbols to help them face the challenges of modernity. They did, however, attribute varying meanings to Islam,

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<sup>26</sup> I draw here from William E. Shepard’s analysis of “radical Islamism” in ‘Islam and Ideology’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (August, 1987) pp. 314-317.

<sup>27</sup> John Esposito and John Voll have argued that while the actions and influence of Muslim intellectuals in the modern era have been similar to the experiences of intellectuals throughout the world, Muslim intellectuals represent a distinctive example of how intellectuals work within the context of their broader cultural symbols to respond to the challenges of the modern world experience. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll ‘Muslim Intellectuals and Their Place in History’ in Esposito and Voll (eds.) *Makers of Contemporary Islam* (New York, 2001). While drawing from the point made by Esposito and Voll that Muslim intellectuals responded to the modern period within the context of their cultural heritages, I do not agree with their argument for the uniqueness of the experience of Muslim intellectuals.

<sup>28</sup> I differ substantially from Elie Kedourie’s approach in his study of Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in which he argued that it would be better to approach their views on religion in the light of the fact that they were men involved in complicated and obscure transactions and that what is said in public by them was substantially different from what was believed by them in private. Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and ‘Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London, 1966).

<sup>29</sup> Celebrated as one of the greatest Urdu poets, Muhammad Iqbal remains one of the most controversial figures in modern South Asian history. He is on the one hand heralded, and decried, as the founding father of Pakistan, while being proclaimed as an undying Indian patriot on the other. These controversies stem in no small measure from the attempts to appropriate the legacy of Iqbal in support of various religious and political views. Iqbal published a number of collections of poetry in Urdu and Persian. He also wrote a number of tracts, articles and books dealing with the contemporary issues confronting Muslims, Islam, India and the people of the East in general.

each believing that their interpretation was a return to the true authentic Islam. There is therefore a need to go beyond merely structural explanations of social and cultural analysis and to take ideas, cultural imagination and discourse seriously.<sup>30</sup>

### **Interacting with Western political thought/Interpreting Islam**

Faced with new political concepts and institutions, there was a tendency amongst sections of the intelligentsia to attempt to link aspects of the *turath*, heritage, with ‘Western’ institutions and concepts in order to show the compatibility of these ‘Western’ ideas and practices with Islam. Traditional institutions such as the *Shura*<sup>31</sup> and *bai’ah* were linked with democracy,<sup>32</sup> resulting in the assertion that the nascent Muslim community provided the earliest and truest example of a democratic socio-political system. Some Muslim thinkers have emphasized the flexibility of Islam in the public sphere and used this flexibility to interpret Islam in terms congruent with, or at least in very positive dialogue with one or more Western ideologies.<sup>33</sup>

Such efforts were also no doubt spurred in part by accusations that Islam was theocratic, undemocratic and antithetical to modern liberal socio-political ideals. Chiragh Ali recorded that his key work, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in The Ottoman Empire and Other Mohammadan States*, was written in response to Malcolm MacColl’s assertion that Islam was a rigid system which

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<sup>30</sup> I draw here from Ali Mirsepassi’s critique of ‘modernization’ theory and Marxism, which dismiss ‘native’ cultures as false/illusionary consciousness functioning to impede successful development, and as masks which prevent class awareness respectively. Mirsepassi calls for cultural imagination and discourse to be taken seriously. Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernisation – Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> The Shura was essentially an advisory board to the Caliph.

<sup>32</sup> *Bayaat* refers to the traditional public acknowledgement of a caliph or ruler. Bassam Tibi has argued that attempts by contemporary Muslim scholars and statesmen to link the two terms stems not from any shared meaning between the terms but from the desire to make democracy compatible with the *turath*. Tibi, ‘Islam and Modern European Ideologies’, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> William E. Shepard, ‘Islam and Ideology : Towards a Typology’ in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Aug., 1987) pp. 311-313.

promoted theocratic and illiberal states.<sup>34</sup> In their attempts to dispel the images of a theocratic and illiberal ‘Islamic polity’, scholars such as Ameer Ali indulged in apologetics which sought to locate democratic and liberal practices and concepts in Muslim history. The case for a ‘liberal’ Islam was made through the equation of terms such as *hurriyat* with the principle of liberty<sup>35</sup> and through the assertion that Islam itself was founded upon liberal principles.<sup>36</sup> At times such efforts translated into attempts to show that new ‘Western’ political concepts and practices, such as democracy, were originally derived from Islam itself. A. Y. Ali, for instance, argued that democracy in principle “flows directly from the fundamental views of Islam” and that Muslim philosophers such as Mawardi had stipulated safeguards against certain failures of democracy such as “popular gusts of passion” and the risk of certain groups getting a greater voice while others were excluded from the representative institutions.<sup>37</sup>

In his *The Spirit of Islam*, a work written primarily for a Western readership, Ameer Ali speaks of a “political spirit” of Islam which is akin to modern political structures and ideals. Dismissing charges leveled against Islam, he asserts that Muhammad had ushered in a democratic system which wrestled control away from any particular group or tribe,<sup>38</sup> displacing the feudal structure of society. It is important to note that Islam is heralded for freeing the people, from feudalism, not only in the Arab lands but also in Spain, and for enfranchising them.<sup>39</sup> The political structure under the Rashidun Caliphs is portrayed as being based on the suffrage of

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<sup>34</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Other Mohammadan States* (Bombay, 1883) p. i.

<sup>35</sup> A. Y. Ali stated that the “principle of Liberty, *Hurriyat*, is insisted upon with great force by Mawardi ... The liberty consists in the liberty of person and in the free use of all things lawful. Private property is lawful and encroachments on it are encroachments on liberty.” ‘The Religious Polity of Islam’ in *Islamic Culture*, vol. 7 (January, 1933) p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Khuda Bukhsh, *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilisation* (Calcutta, 1929-1930), pp. 69-70.

<sup>37</sup> A. Y. Ali, ‘The Religious Polity of Islam’ in *Islamic Culture* vol. 7, (January, 1933) p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 282.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

the people, providing for a constitution and as being “Republican”.<sup>40</sup> The term “Republic” was often used by the Muslim intelligentsia to describe the early political community established by Muhammad and expanded by the *Rashidun* Caliphs.<sup>41</sup> Ameer Ali’s views on the modernizing and liberalizing potential of Muslim political theory is echoed by Bashiruddin when he stated that the arrival of Islam in India led to the first attempt “to transcend the narrow conception of a communal polity and build up, on a wider synthesis of cultures and peoples, a theory of citizenship based upon the recognition of the common, secular loyalties of different races and civilizations, as a sufficient bond of political union”.<sup>42</sup>

Abul A’la Maududi (1903-1979)<sup>43</sup> was highly critical of attempts by the ‘modernists’ to equate Islam with new ‘Western’ political ideas and practices. He lamented that,

With certain people it has become a sort of fashion to somehow identify Islam with one or the other system of life in vogue at the time. So at this time also there are people who say that Islam is a democracy, and by this they mean to imply that there is no difference between Islam and the democracy in vogue in the West. Some others suggest that Communism is but the latest and revised version of Islam and it is in the fitness of things that Muslims imitate the Communist experiment of Soviet Russia. Still some others whisper that Islam has elements of dictatorship in it and we should revive the cult of “obedience

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 277, 278, 283.

<sup>41</sup> Bashiruddin, for instance, speaks of the ‘Republican period’ in Islamic history, beginning with the establishment of the Republic by the Prophet’s enunciation of the basic principles of the social, legal and political structure of the system and the maintenance of the “democratic nature of the State as a trust to be administered in the public interests, as a national institution which fitted every man into a proper place within the framework of the political order. See ‘The Political Theory of Islam’ in *Islamic Culture* vol. 8, (October, 1934) pp. 585-599.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 594-595.

<sup>43</sup> Maududi is the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islamia Pakistan. After the establishment of Pakistan, he launched a movement calling for Pakistan to have an ‘Islamic constitution’. A prolific writer, Maududi has authored a number of works including *al-Jihad fi-al-Islam*, the *Tahfim al-Quran* and the monthly journal *Tarjuman al-Quran*.

to the Amir”. All these people, in their misinformed and misguided zeal to serve what they hold to be the cause of Islam, are always at great pains to prove that Islam contains within itself the elements of all types of contemporary social and political thought and action. Most of the people who indulge in this prattle have no clear idea of the Islamic way of life. They have never made nor try to make a systematic study of the Islamic political order—the place and nature of democracy, social justice and equality in it. Instead they behave like the proverbial blind men who gave altogether contradictory descriptions of an elephant because one had been able to touch only its tail. The other its legs, the third its belly and the fourth its ears. Or perhaps they look upon Islam as an orphan whose sole hope for survival lies in winning the patronage and the sheltering care of some dominant creed. That is why some people have begun to present apologies on Islam’s behalf.<sup>44</sup>

Maududi felt that the writing of apologetic pieces and the equation of new ‘Western’ concepts and institutions with aspects of the Muslim heritage was the result of a defensive stance on the part of Muslim scholars,<sup>45</sup> it failed to sufficiently explain the socio-political ideas presented by Islam. Essentially, Maududi’s attack reflects a key difference in the political discourse of Muslim intellectuals in India, one which stemmed from diverging interpretations of Islam itself, centering around whether Islam presented a social and political ethic.

Partly in response to assertions by Orientalists of the rigid, inflexible and unchangeable nature of Islam, in part due to the need to shape an Islam which could adapt to new sciences and technology, a section of the Muslim intelligentsia argued

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<sup>44</sup> Abul A’La Maududi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, fourth edition (Lahore, 1969) p. 119.

<sup>45</sup> Maududi, *al-Jihad fi al-Islam* (Lahore, 1948) p. ii.

that Islam did not present a social-political structure, thus, it “could adapt itself to the social and political revolutions going on around it”.<sup>46</sup> Khuda Bukhsh (1877-1931)<sup>47</sup> asserted that Islam had repeatedly yielded to the pressure of progressive ideas and altered like other great religions. He argued that the sanctioning of *bid’ah* (innovation) and the principle of *maslaha*, defined as the recognition of the common interests of the community,<sup>48</sup> had provided channels through which new socio-political ideas could override even long established practices.<sup>49</sup> In his historical survey of Muslim political history, Ameer Ali argued that the case of Arab rule in Spain furnishes one of the most instructive examples of the adaptability of the political character of Islam to all forms and conditions of society.<sup>50</sup> It has already been noted that sections of the Muslim intelligentsia conceived of Islamic political theory as a structure which had evolved with the expansion of the Arab empire and the incorporation of foreign ideas on politics and social organization. Furthermore, some claimed that the new ‘Western’ ideas and practices represented the best way to carry out the traditional injunctions of Islam under modern conditions.<sup>51</sup>

Dismissing claims that Islam presented its followers with a binding political and social structure revealed in the Quran and the *sunna*, Chiragh Ali set about to prove, firstly, that the *sunna* was not a reliable source on which to base an interpretation of Islam<sup>52</sup> and that it has been used to support widely differing political

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<sup>46</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. ii.

<sup>47</sup> Salahuddin Khuda Bukhsh translated Arabic, Persian and German texts into English and wrote widely on Islam and Muslims in India. Many of his essays have been compiled in the *Studies : Indian and Islamic* (London, 1927) and *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilisation* (Calcutta, 1929-1930). His English translations include D. S. Margoliouth’s *Die Renaissance Des Islam* and Alfred Freiherr von Kremer’s *Staatsidee des Islams*.

<sup>48</sup> The principle of *maslaha* has had significant political implications perhaps most so in the Islamic Republic of Iran where Khomeini decreed that *maslaha* could override even religious stipulations.

<sup>49</sup> Khuda Bukhsh, *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilisation*, pp. 72-76.

<sup>50</sup> Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>51</sup> This observation has been made by Shepard in his study on Muslim politics in the Middle East. See Shepard, ‘Islam and Ideology’, p.313.

<sup>52</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, pp. xviii-xxi.

structures.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, he asserted that the Quran, accepted as the sole reliable source for an analysis of Islam,<sup>54</sup> stipulates no socio-political structure. All the political, social and legal reforms recommended by him in his *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Other Mohammadan States* are based on the authority and justification of the Quran.<sup>55</sup> Having challenged the views of those who sought to argue for an Islamic socio-political and legal structure on the basis of the *Sunna*, Chiragh Ali proceeds to argue that Muslims who state that the Quran reveals the basis of such a structure are guilty of an erroneous interpretation of the Quran. He argued that the “more important civil and political institutions of the Mohammadan Common Law based on the Koran are bare inferences and deductions from a single word or an isolated sentence”, inferences and deductions which have not taken the least notice of the spirit of the Quran.<sup>56</sup>

Chiragh Ali’s work reveals a number of themes significant for this study. Firstly, it demonstrates that the changing political scenario in India, coupled with the ascendancy of new ‘Western’ political concepts, led Muslim intellectuals to grapple with the issue of whether these new concepts and institutions were compatible with Islam. This ultimately led to an analysis of the structure of Islam, focusing on whether Islam provided a socio-political and legal structure. Furthermore, it reveals that in their interpretation of Islam, Muslim intellectuals during this period accepted different Islamic sources, this was to culminate in varying interpretations of Islam particularly over the issue of Muslim law and its significance for the development of Muslims.

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<sup>53</sup> He writes that “every religious, social and political system was defended, when necessary, to please a Khalif or an Ameer to serve his purpose, by an appeal to some oral traditions.” *Ibid.*, p. xix.

<sup>54</sup> In his introduction to *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms in the Ottoman Empire and Other Mohammadan States* Chiragh Ali analyses the foundations of Islam, arguing that *Sunna*, *ijma* (consensus of learned Muslims) and *qias* (analogical reasoning) are not foundations of Islam, the Quran was the sole source for the study of Islam. See pp. iv-xxxvi.

<sup>55</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. xxxii.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Chiragh Ali's dismissal of the *Sunna* and *hadith* as authentic sources of Islam implied that there was no basis for "Muslim Common Law". The true development of Muslim societies, he argued, lay in the development of a 'secular' state legal system through the incorporation of elements of foreign law,<sup>57</sup> and not in the maintenance of a spurious corpus of legal edicts. A resonance of this call for the adoption of new 'secular' state centric legal codes can be found in the works of figures such as Fyzee,<sup>58</sup> Wahed Hussain<sup>59</sup> and A. Y. Ali. A. Y. Ali argued that while the Prophet did enunciate specific ceremonial and private laws for Muslims, all public laws formulated during his lifetime stemmed from eternal principles of justice and righteousness common to mankind,<sup>60</sup> hence, "a Muslim community may decide, as it has actually decided in some instances, to adopt the "Swiss Code" or the "Code of Napoleon", as a matter of convenience.<sup>61</sup> They essentially argued that the identification of Islam with any particular set of concrete institutions was to narrow the bounds of Islam.<sup>62</sup> Such views were seriously contested by others such as Iqbal and the *ulema* of the Jamiyyat-Ulema-i-Hind<sup>63</sup> who felt that the development of the Muslim community lay not in the development of a uniform state legal structure but in the provision of a separate Muslim legal code.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the growth amongst some intellectuals of an approach towards understanding Islam as an object, which might be analyzed,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. xxxvii-xxviii.

<sup>58</sup> See arguments in Fyzee, *Modern Approach to Islam* (London, 1963).

<sup>59</sup> Wahed Hussain argued that "in the primitive state of society law, religion and politics were regarded as the same, and therefore inseparable. But with the progress of human thought, they have been separated and each of them is considered as a distinct branch of science, though inter-related." *Administration of Justice During the Muslim Rule in India* (1934 (?)), p.16.

<sup>60</sup> A. Y. Ali, 'Religious Polity of Islam', p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> The Jamiyyat Ulema-i-Hind was founded in 1919. Its founding members included leading alims such as Mahmood Hasan, Qazi Hussain Ahmad and Abdul Bari, the last of which was to be the first president. The Jamiyyat was politically active, expressing open support for the Congress and opposing the Muslim League's political demands and claims to represent the Muslims. It was to split in 1937 with a faction which was more akin to the views of the Muslim League, led by Shabir Ahmad Usmani, moving on to form the Jamiyyat Ulema-i-Islam.

conceptualized and presented as a system.<sup>64</sup> Such a construction of Islam was itself an example of *ijtihad*. An implication of this was that Islam came to describe not just a relationship with God, but also to be conceptualized as a system which was comprehensive and complete, covering all aspects of human life.<sup>65</sup> I propose that Islam, as reconstructed by intellectuals such as Iqbal and Maududi, who spoke of Islam as a political ethic and ideology, be seen in the light of their attempts to establish an ‘Islamic’ vision of life set against the west and its ideological and political domination. Confronted by colonialism and the disempowerment of both the Muslims and the east in general, Muslim intellectuals looked to Islam to provide a solution to contemporary problems. Instead of approaching such views as assertions of a normative ‘Political Islam’, it is important to understand that such a construction itself emerged out of the interaction with colonialism and Western ideologies. The interpretation of Islam as a complete system and an ideology contended, on the one hand, Universalist ideologies such as Marxism and, on other hand, what was perceived as the other worldly and ascetic tendencies of religions such as Christianity and Buddhism. Iqbal, for instance, argued that the chief difference between Islam and other religious systems was that Islam provided not only a basis for socio-political organization but also a message of re-empowerment.<sup>66</sup> While Christianity had originated as a monastic order and gradually developed into a vast church structure, Islam was a polity in itself.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See F. Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi, 2001) pp. 91-93 and W. C. Smith, ‘The Historical Development in Islam of the Concept of Islam as an Historical Development’, in B. Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds.) *Historians of the Middle East* (London, 1962), pp. 484-502.

<sup>65</sup> Such a view was challenged by figures such as Fyzee who felt that religion in the modern period was defined solely as the personal relation of the individual to the divine being as the individual was no longer seen as a part of a larger whole.

<sup>66</sup> Iqbal, *Islam as an Moral and Political Ideal, issued as a pamphlet with remarks by Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar* (Lahore, 1910) pp. 56-65.

<sup>67</sup> Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, edited by S. A. Vahid (Lahore, 1964) pp. 162-163.

## **Islam, the Nation-State and Modernity**

Political institutions and practices which had evolved in the west were touted by Western intellectuals and statesmen as the sole models of political modernity, models which had to be adopted by the rest of the world. No political salvation was achievable outside of these Western models. Particularly important was the model of the modern nation-state. The state as a form of political organization swept the world, it is argued that its victory over rival forms of political organization is reflected in the fact that the state has conquered our imagination, making it difficult to think of alternatives.<sup>68</sup> In his analysis of Islam, Weber wrote that the patrimonial nature of Muslim political institutions hindered the development of capitalism, rational law and facets of modernity which had developed in western states. It is often argued that the lack of an autonomous ‘political space’ in Muslim societies proved to be a major obstacle to political modernity, thus, leading to the failure of the modern state in the Islamic world.<sup>69</sup> Muslim intellectuals who were keen to demonstrate that Islam was not a barrier to the advance of modernity, met such accusations by either asserting that the distinction between the ‘political’ and the ‘religious’ realms was inherent in the political practice of the Prophet and the *Rashidun* Caliphs, or by arguing that just as such a division could develop in the ‘west’ it could develop in Islam. In other words, Islam was not any more inimical to the development of the modern state than Christianity.

Chiragh Ali dismissed claims “that a religious revolution is required before the work of political reform can begin in a Mohammadan state”.<sup>70</sup> The Quran and the teachings of Muhammad did not present obstacles to innovation in any sphere of life,

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<sup>68</sup> Christopher W. Morris, *An Essay on the Modern State* (Cambridge, 1998) p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> Bertrand Badie quoted in Oliver Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass. 1994) p. 205.

<sup>70</sup> Major R. D. Osborn had made this claim in his work, *Islam under the Arabs* (London, 1876). Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. xxxi.

whether political, social, intellectual or moral.<sup>71</sup> Division between state and religion did not present a challenge which had to be met by a radical change to Islam. In an apparent reference to the tendency amongst Orientalists to quote traditions and Arabic proverbs which asserted the patrimonial nature of the 'Islamic polity', Chiragh Ali argued that proverbs such as "*Al Mulko vad Dino-tawaman*" were mere sayings and not Muslim religious maxims.<sup>72</sup>

By asserting that Prophet Muhammad had not interfered with the civil and political institutions current in the Arab lands,<sup>73</sup> Chiragh Ali hoped to dispel the idea that the political structures in place in Muslim states were in any way derived from an 'Islamic' normative political tradition, thus, such structures were in no way immutable. Secondly, he sought to show that neither Muhammad, nor the *Rashidun* Caliphs, had laid the foundations of a polity which wed the state with religion. Others were to argue that the link between the state and religion was first introduced by the Persians,<sup>74</sup> hence, it was not a part of the early Muslim community established by the Prophet and the *Sahaba*. Modernity demanded the separation between theology and politics. Such a division, it was argued, had been effected in Europe only in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the "enlightened Mohammadans of Turkey and India are in this nineteenth century striving to do the same, and this will, in no way, affect their religion".<sup>75</sup>

Scholars have argued that the history of nationalism is essentially constituted by two different histories, the history of the "spiritual domain" and the "domain of the outside" or the "material domain". While the colonized were able to imagine their

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. xxxv.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. xxxvi.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>74</sup> This is one of the issues highlighted in Khuda Bukhsh's translation and commentary on C. H. Becker's *The Origin and Character of Islamic Civilisation* in Khuda Bukhsh, *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilisation*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>75</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, pp. xvii-xviii.

own communities in the “spiritual domain”, in the “domain of the outside” they had no choice but to choose its forms from the gallery of ‘models’ presented by the experience of modern and primarily Western nation-states.<sup>76</sup> This study argues that Iqbal and Maududi after him, did not only attack the project of political modernity, but also constructed an Islamic polity which opposed the primary foundation of the modern liberal state by extending Islamic tradition beyond the specified religious domain into the ‘political’. Such a construction can be understood in the light of the power and intrusive scope of the modern state itself. The rise of the modern state necessarily involved the expansion of state power and concern over vast domains of social life previously outside of its purview – including that of religion. A consequence of this was that modern politics and the forms of power it deploys have become a condition for the practice of many personal activities. To the extent that the institutions enabling the cultivation of religious virtue become subsumed within legal and administrative structures linked to the state, the project of preserving these virtues will necessarily be ‘political’.<sup>77</sup>

It was noted earlier that the period under study witnessed the growth of an approach towards understanding and conceptualizing Islam as a complete system, an ideology. Islam, thus, could not simply adapt modern political ideals and institutions. The adoption of modern ideals such as the nation-state and liberalism would lead to a radical transformation of the structure of Islam itself. Such an interpretation of Islam stood Iqbal apart not only from ‘modernist’ but also from Deoband inspired movements. As highlighted above, the “modernist” postulated that the Quran did not provide a social or political structure, attempting to demonstrate historically that Islam

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<sup>76</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (New Jersey, 1993) pp. 6-11.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Hirschkind, ‘What is Political Islam?’ in *Middle East Report, number 205, Middle East Studies Networks : The Politics of a Field* (Oct-Dec, 1997) p. 13.

had adapted to various forms of governance and political structures.<sup>78</sup> It is, however, worth noting that while they denied that Islam should be approached as a polity, they took pains in their works to argue that the essential “spirit of Islam” was not dissimilar to modern social-political ideals. They spoke of the “spirit of Islam” as being “republican” and “democratic”, stressing that the system of government under the Rashidun Caliphate was based on “the principles of democracy”.<sup>79</sup> Ameer Ali in his *The Spirit of Islam*, speaks of a “political spirit of Islam” which is akin to modern political structures and ideals, one which is based on suffrage of the people, provides for a constitution and leads to the establishment of a “Republic”.<sup>80</sup>

A striking feature of many *Deoband* inspired movements is the extent to which politics is an empty ‘box’ to be expediently and pragmatically filled depending on what seems to work best in a given situation.<sup>81</sup> On the permissibility of the interaction between Islam and other systems, referring specifically to the question of whether Islam could correlate with the modern political ideology of nationalism, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957)<sup>82</sup> wrote that the

assumption that Islam and its adherents cannot confederate and interact with any other system is unacceptable. Although Islamic jurisprudence and sharia contains written views on several matters, there remain uncountable things

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<sup>78</sup> C. Ali has stated that Islamic history demonstrates that the traditions of the Prophet have been used to defend and legitimize different religious, social and political structures. *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. xix.

<sup>79</sup> Denying assertions that Muslim states were theocratic in their system of governance, Chiragh Ali argued that Muslim law was based on the principles of democracy and that the “first four or five Khalifates were purely republican in all their features”. *The Proposed Political, Legal and Social Reforms*, p. iii.

<sup>80</sup> A. Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, pp. 268-290.

<sup>81</sup> B. Metcalf, *‘Traditionalist’ Islamic Activism : Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs* (Leiden, 2002).

<sup>82</sup> Hussain Ahmad Madani was the head of the Dar ul-Ulum Deoband. Actively involved in the struggle for independence, he was one of the chief protagonists in the Jamiyyat Ulema-i-Hind. He opposed the Muslim League’s demand for the creation of a separate nation-state for the Muslims of India. Amongst his many works and tracts is the *Muttahida Qawmiyyat*. For his leadership of the Dar ul-Ulum and his role as a spokesman for the Muslim community in India he was nominated for the Padma Vibhushan award. He, however, declined the award stating that the acceptance of such a state award would compromise his position as a critic and guide to the national government.

that are allowed, and in which each person is free to act upon as per his *expediency*. Among these are kingdoms, their ordinances and organizations, etc., that are used as ways and means of expediency. If certain resolutions are mooted by an agricultural or a commercial or an industrial establishment and practical action is taken to implement them, being Islamic, our participation would not be illegal from any point of view. There are many collective ordinances in the sharia that are based on Islamic rule. These do not address the individual, but Caliphs and Sultans. When there is no Islamic government, it is *neither obligatory nor permissible* that an individual or a unit of Muslims act upon it.<sup>83</sup> (emphasis added)

Modern political institutions such as the nation-state could, therefore, be adopted by the Muslims<sup>84</sup> with the proviso that allowance was made for certain ‘Islamic’ institutions and practices within the state.

In his Presidential address to the All-India Muslim Conference in 1932, Iqbal stated that “the present movement in India is called a rebellion against the west. But in my opinion it is not a revolt against the west because it is the Western institutions that the Indians demand for their own country”.<sup>85</sup> Iqbal was apprehensive over what he perceived to be the mere imitation of ‘Western’/modern institutions and ideas in Asia. Iqbal’s ‘revolt against the west’ or his refusal to accept the mere transplantation of Western institutions and political theories was manifest primarily in his critique of the

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<sup>83</sup> Madani, *Composite Nationalism and Islam* (New Delhi, 2005) pp. 133-134.

<sup>84</sup> After the rise of the Taliban, the Deobandi’s have been portrayed as subscribing to a specific fixed set of Islamic political ideals and institutions which entail the rejection of the nationalism and democracy.

<sup>85</sup> Iqbal. ‘Presidential Address Delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Lahore on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1932’ in *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, compiled by Shamloo, (Lahore, 1957(?)) pp. 52-53.

political ideology of nationalism and its constituent concept of the mono-cultural and territorially defined nation-state.

Iqbal declared that nationalism was the greatest enemy of Islam. In one of his private letters, Iqbal recorded that the export of the ideology of nationalism to the east had spurred him to study the ‘true’ nature of Islam.<sup>86</sup> Nationalism was not only incompatible with Islam, it was a threat to the principles of “true Islam” itself. Iqbal speaks of Islam as a “social nizam” and a solution to the contemporary problems posed by nationalism.<sup>87</sup> The adoption of nationalism by Muslims was seen as a “disastrous innovation” as it displaced the central tenets of the Islamic polity by seeking to provide a basis for social and political organization along territorial and ‘secular’ lines, and by introducing the Manichean division between the public and the private.<sup>88</sup> Since “true Islam” did not only stress the organic unity of the church and the state, but was itself a system of polity, the adoption of the nation-state ideal would require a radical transformation in the structure of Islam itself. It was not possible to retain Islam as an ethical ideal and reject it as a polity.<sup>89</sup>

Iqbal traced the development of the idea of territorial nationality in Europe to the shattering of religious unity and the subsequent search for an alternative secular basis for national life.<sup>90</sup> Luther’s ‘revolt’ against the church had led to the complete displacement of the universal ethics of Christ and the growth of national and narrower

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<sup>86</sup> Iqbal, *Kulliyat Makatib Iqbal*, vol. 2, p. 271.

<sup>87</sup> Iqbal, *Kulliyat Makatib Iqbal*, vol. 2, pp. 494-495.

<sup>88</sup> Distressed by nationalist calls for the assimilation of the religious groups in India on a ‘secular’ basis, Iqbal recorded in a letter to Edward Thompson that his foray into the realm of politics had been dictated by his interest in Islam as a moral polity and the fear that nationalism would lead to atheism. M. Iqbal, *Iqbal-His Political Ideas at Crossroads: A Commentary on Unpublished Letters to Professor Thompson*, edited by S. H. Ahmad (Aligarh, 1979) p. 72. it was endemic in the nation-state system, he argued, that religion be relegated to the private realm, thus, the only thing uniting the people of the nation-state would be ‘irreligiousness’. Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, p. 234.

<sup>89</sup> He argued that the final faith of the national idea in the world of Islam would be dependent on whether Islam would be able to transform and assimilate the national idea or allow a radical transformation of its own structure by the force of this idea. Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

systems of ethics. Iqbal stated that although Luther was perfectly justified in his revolt against the church structure, he had not realized that in the peculiar conditions which obtained in Europe, his revolt would eventually lead to the growth of nation-states.<sup>91</sup> The attack of the Enlightenment philosophers against Christian dogma further spurred the break-up of the “one” into the “ill-adjusted many” which were based upon the notion of the country and found expression through varying systems of polity evolved along the lines of territory as the basis of political solidarity.<sup>92</sup>

The displacement of a universal ethic by national systems was possible in Europe primarily because Christianity was a purely monastic order which had gradually developed into a “vast church-organization”. Unlike Islam it was not a polity.<sup>93</sup> Luther’s ‘revolt’ was directed against this “church-organization” and not against any system of socio-political structure. A Luther in the world of Islam, however, was an impossible phenomenon, firstly, because Islam did not have a “church-organization” similar to that of Christianity and secondly, because Islam was a polity.<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to the views expressed by individuals such as Chiragh Ali, Iqbal perceived the relegation of religion to the private realm in Europe and the calls for such a move in the east as a disastrous innovation. The uncritical adoption of the Manichean duality of spirit and matter in Europe had led to the separation of the spiritual and the temporal resulting in the total exclusion of Christianity from the life of European states.<sup>95</sup> There was no utility in aping this aspect of ‘political modernity’,

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<sup>91</sup> Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>92</sup> Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Iqbal, *Thoughts and Reflections*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>94</sup> Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, p. 6. Also see his *Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal*.

<sup>95</sup> It is interesting that he states that the best thinkers of Europe are realizing this mistake, but her statesmen are indirectly forcing the world to accept it as an unquestionable dogma. Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, pp. 5-6.

Iqbal argued that even the best thinkers of Europe have realized the falsity of such a divide.<sup>96</sup>

Muhammad Iqbal contrasted the displacement of universal ethics and the growth of a plurality of national systems of ethics which accompanied the establishment of nation-states with the humanistic and unifying socio-political ethic presented by Islam.<sup>97</sup> In his poem *Mekka aur Geneva* he writes

*is daur mein aqaum ki sohbat bi hoyi am  
poshidah nigahoon se rahi wahadat-e adam  
tafreetq melal hukumat-e afrang ka maqsud  
islam ka maqsud faqat millat-e adam  
mekka ne diya khak-e geneva ko yeh paigham  
jamiyyat aqawm ke jamiyyat adam*<sup>98</sup>

For Iqbal, the Islamic principle of *tauhid*, traditionally signifying the unity of God, also provided a basis for the development of man and society. Islam as a polity, he argued, was only a practical means of making the principle of *tauhid* a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind.<sup>99</sup> Iqbal believed that the aim of developing a truly human consciousness and a truly international ideal was unique to Islam setting it apart from other religious and social systems.

The history of religions conclusively shows that in ancient times religion was national as in the case of Egyptians, Greeks and Iranians. Later on, it became

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<sup>96</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 5-6.

<sup>98</sup> In the present age in which the company of nations is common  
hidden from sight is the unity of Adam  
differentiation is the aim of Western governance  
the purpose of Islam is only the community of Adam  
Mekka has sent this message to the men of Geneva  
the association of nations or the association of Adam

Translated by myself. M. Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal* (Lahore, 2002), pp. 57-58.

<sup>99</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, 1968) p. 147.

racial as that of the Jews. Christianity taught that religion is an individual and private affair. Religion having become synonymous with private beliefs, Europe began to think that the State alone was responsible for the social life of man. It was Islam and Islam alone which, for the first time, gave the message to mankind that religion was neither national and racial, nor individual and private, but purely human and that its purpose was to unite and organize mankind despite all its natural distinctions.<sup>100</sup>

Muhammad Iqbal argued that it was imperative for Muslims to consider if ideologies such as nationalism and socialism were compatible with the socio-political ideals of Islam. Such concerns reveal the key to understanding Iqbal's political philosophy and the fundamental point of difference between him and the 'modernist'. The latter argued that Islam did not possess a social or political structure, thus, it "could adapt itself to the social and political revolutions going on around it".<sup>101</sup> Although Iqbal shared their concerns and stressed the need for Islamic law to be reinterpreted in line with the conditions and according to the needs of the time, and although he too championed *ijthihad* as a cardinal principle of Islam, he conceived of Islam as a social and political structure.

Iqbal's critique of nationalism sparked an interesting debate between himself and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani. Madani was a leading member of the Jamiyyat Ulema-e-Hind<sup>102</sup> and one of the chief protagonists of the concept of *mutahidda qawmiyyat* (composite nationalism). The ulema of the Jamiyyat formulated the doctrine of *mutahidda qawmiyyat* which stipulated that the people of India were one

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<sup>100</sup> Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>101</sup> Chiragh Ali, *The Proposed Political*, p. ii.

<sup>102</sup> The Jamiyyat Ulema-e-Hind was the first formal organization of ulema for political purposes. It aligned itself with the All India Congress Party and called for cooperation between Muslims and Hindus.

nation despite their religious differences. According to this theory, a nation could be created on the basis of race, religion, homeland, profession, language or any other material or spiritual quality.<sup>103</sup> Championing homeland as the most important factor in the creation of nations in modern times, the ulema argued that the Muslims of any state belonged to the same nation as the other communities.<sup>104</sup> Nationalism posed no threat to Islam and the fear that nationalism would lead Muslims astray from Islam was unfounded.<sup>105</sup>

Both Iqbal and the *ulema* anchored their views on the teachings of the Quran and the practices of the Prophet. Madani claimed that numerous passages in the Quran indicated that the Muslims could accept the nation-state.<sup>106</sup> The ulema also found justification for their view in the Covenant of Medina signed by the Prophet to regulate relations between the different groups in Medina (including non-Muslims). This, argued the ulema, established the precedent of Muslims and non-Muslims being part of the same territorially defined political community.<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, Madani rejected Iqbal's view that Islam had provided a basis for socio-political organization along the lines of human brotherhood.<sup>108</sup> He argued that there was not a single verse or hadith which could substantiate such a view.

### **State Structure : Three 'Islamist' Views**

The aim here is to briefly explore three 'Islamist' critiques of the modern liberal state. It will be demonstrated that there is no one Islamic or 'Islamist' view on

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<sup>103</sup> See discussion on nationhood and *qawmiyyat*, equated by the ulema with the modern concept of the territorial nation, in Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Composite Nationalism and Islam* (New Delhi, 2005) pp. 55-100.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>106</sup> Madani argues that there are numerous Quranic verses in which non-Muslims and the Prophet have been addressed as one *qawm*, translated by him as nation. Ibid., pp. 70-79.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-115.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-94.

the state. While many Muslim intellectuals, including ‘Islamist’ groups, have accepted the state structure,<sup>109</sup> others such as Iqbal and Maududi rejected the modern liberal state structure, attempting instead to fashion alternatives to it. Space constraints do not allow for a detailed discussion on the scope for legislation within the state, therefore, this section will focus primarily on the acceptance, reworking or rejection of the modern state by the *Deobandis*, Maududi and Iqbal. Both Iqbal and Maududi felt that the modern state structure presented a challenge to the socio-political ideals of Islam. Iqbal rejected the state structure, Maududi, on the other hand, sought to ‘Islamize’ it. These critiques extended the realm of ‘religion’ into the domain of the ‘political’.

Iqbal refused to accept the state structure as an essential factor in national life.<sup>110</sup> The division of mankind into territorial judicial units was seen as purely a temporary phase in the development of humanity. He argued that it was a grave mistake to suppose that the concept of the state was more dominant than the other ideas embodied in the system of Islam.<sup>111</sup> The true development of humanity was determined not by the state, but by the development of the religious community, the nation or the *millat*. As such, Iqbal sought to carve out a separate space for the ‘nation’, raising it beyond the limitations imposed upon it by the boundaries of the territorially defined state. In a sense, Iqbal looked back to the *millat* system of the Ottoman empire whereby the central administration of the empire perceived religious communities in local contexts as parts of religious communities that had an empire-wide dimension under their respective ecclesiastical leaderships. Consequently, his

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<sup>109</sup> James P. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge, 1986)

<sup>110</sup> Commenting on the work of the Nationalist Part in Turkey, Iqbal argued that they were wrong in viewing the state as the institution that determines the character and function of all forces. Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, p. 153.

<sup>111</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 153-162.

political visions were concerned not with the creation of nation-states,<sup>112</sup> but rather with the formulation of schemes which would facilitate the autonomous development of the religious community within a territorial state. In his view, nations did not have to aspire to become states in order to secure their development.<sup>113</sup> Iqbal was, thus, opposed to the Pak Plan formulated by Chaudhari Rahmat Ali. Arguing that all nations had to strive to form their own territorial states in order to facilitate their development, Chaudhari Rahmat Ali called for the creation of a separate Muslim nation-state, Pakistan.<sup>114</sup>

Conventional historiography has failed to note that Iqbal's calls for the political reorganization of India did not translate into a demand for the creation of a separate nation-state for the Muslims of India.<sup>115</sup> Instead, Iqbal called for the establishment of institutions and for the passing of policies that would ensure the development of the *millat* along its own religio-cultural lines. He envisioned the creation of a political framework which would provide the various nations in India opportunities to develop in accordance to their own 'national character'. One such provision was sharia. To ensure the development of the Muslims according to the principles of Islamic law, Iqbal called for the establishment of an assembly of ulema to practice *ijtihad* so as to ensure the protection, expansion and reinterpretation of

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<sup>112</sup> A failure to appreciate his critique of the nation-state coupled with the desire to appropriate the figure of Iqbal as the chief protagonist for the creation of the state of Pakistan has led to the assertion that Muhammad Iqbal voiced the demand for the creation of an independent nation-state for the Muslims of India.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Taylor has, amongst others, has argued that nations only secure themselves by forming states. See 'Why do Nations Have to be States' in Charles Taylor (ed.) *Reconciling the Two Solitudes : Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (USA, 1993).

<sup>114</sup> See, for instance, C. R. Ali, *The Millat and the Mission* (Cambridge, 1944) and *The Continent of Dinia or the Country of Doom* (Cambridge, 1946).

<sup>115</sup> Most works on Iqbal's political thought and activities continue to centre around the need to demonstrate his support for separate statehood for the Muslims of India. See, for instance, M. A. Chaudhari, *The Muslim Ummah and Iqbal* (Islamabad, 1994) and Hafeez Malik, 'The Man of Thought and the Man of Action' in H. Malik and L. P. Malik (ed.) *Iqbal the Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York, 1971). Opposed to these are works which seek to demonstrate that Iqbal remained an ardent patriot of India throughout his life. Particularly interesting is S. M. H. Burney's assertion in *Iqbal and National Integration* (Chandigarh, undated). See also M. A. Jawed, *The Unknown Iqbal* (New Delhi, 1996).

Islamic law in the light of modern conditions.<sup>116</sup> It was to ensure such provisions that he called for the redistribution of India into provinces with effective majorities of one community or another.

It is interesting in this regard to compare his views with those of many *Deoband* inspired movements which were primarily concerned with the provision of institutions for the implementation of sharia and the development of Muslims according to Islamic principles without being overly concerned with the form or political structure of the state. The demands made on their behalf concerned not the creation of states, but the assurance that Muslims would be able to develop according to their own religious-legal system.<sup>117</sup> It was in the light of this that Madani argued that the provisions provided for the Muslims in ‘secular’ India would be more conducive to the development of Muslims and Islam than the political framework propounded by those who called for the creation of the Muslim state of Pakistan.<sup>118</sup>

Contesting such views, Maududi stressed that the state was central to Islam and that the implementation of the political principles laid down in the Quran required a state structure.<sup>119</sup> The centrality of the state in his political visions culminated in what is arguably the first modern discourse on the ‘Islamic State’. Rejecting any division between the private and the public realm,<sup>120</sup> Maududi essentially argued that the modern state had a key role in preserving and promoting Islamic virtues. As highlighted above, such views should be understood in light of the powerful and

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<sup>116</sup> Iqbal, *Speeches and Statements*, p. 54.

<sup>117</sup> See discussion of contemporary political situation by and details on the negotiations with the All-India National Congress Party in various letters personal and official letters written by Madani in Hussain Ahmad Madani, *Maktubat-i-Shiekh-ul-Islam*, vol. 2 (1954(?)). See especially pp. 116-128 where a constitutional framework for independent India is proposed.

<sup>118</sup> For Madani’s views on how the Congress plan for a single union would serve Muslim interests better than the Muslim League’s demand for the creation of Pakistan, see *Maktubat-i-Shiekh-ul-Islam* pp. 120-128, 130-139, 150-160. See also pp. 271-273 for his assessment of the impact of the creation of Pakistan on the Muslims of South Asia.

<sup>119</sup> Maududi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, p. 158.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

intrusive role of the modern state itself. The modern state's administrative and legal structures had subsumed domains such as religion and virtue which had previously been outside of the state's purview. Maududi did not only attack the liberal division of the private and the public, he extended the realm of 'religion' into the 'political'. The state was to play the central role in the preservation and development of virtue and justice.

To ensure virtue and justice, a Muslim majority state had to be an 'Islamic state'. The state had to be based on Islamic principles and implement Islamic socio-economic programs. The enforcement of sharia and the collection of *zakat*, both of which led to the development of a more just and equitable society, were the central functions of the state.<sup>121</sup> To ensure the Islamic and just nature of the state, Maududi argued that the constitution of the 'Islamic State' was to be based on what he believed were the four authentic sources for the socio-political organization of society – the Quran, Sunna, covenants of the Rashidun caliphs and the rulings of the great jurist.<sup>122</sup> Maududi's opposition to the demand for Pakistan has been highlighted by many of his critics within Pakistan as a sign of his duplicity. Such criticisms ignore the fact that his opposition to the Muslim League's demand stemmed from the fact that it called for the creation of a Muslim state, in other words a Muslim majority state, and not an 'Islamic state'. Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami has been at the forefront of demands for the Islamization of the constitution and the state of Pakistan.

Maududi developed an interesting discourse on the state in which he rejected 'Western' liberal concepts of state sovereignty, propounding instead the ideal of the state as a vice-regent of God accepting his *de jure* sovereignty.<sup>123</sup> Describing the

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<sup>121</sup> Maududi, *Fundamentals of Islam*, 21<sup>st</sup> edition (Lahore, 2002) pp. 194-195.

<sup>122</sup> Maududi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-319.

“Islamic State” as a “theo-democracy”,<sup>124</sup> Maududi sought to differentiate it both from Western conceptions of democracy and theocracy. From the perspective of political philosophy, he argued that Islam was the “very anti-thesis of secular Western democracy” as the “philosophical foundation of Western democracy is the sovereignty of the people”.<sup>125</sup> According to his interpretation of Islam, sovereignty rested solely with God.

It is interesting to note, however, that while ultimate sovereignty rested solely with God, the *khilafat* or leadership was vested not in any one individual but in the entire community.<sup>126</sup> The leader of the state was merely a representative to whom the rest of the ‘*kaliphs*’ had delegated their authority.<sup>127</sup> While the legislative roles of the state and civil society were circumscribed, the state’s executive was to be chosen by the general will of the people. He defined the system of government labeled as “theo-democratic” as a “divine democratic government, because under it the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the sovereignty of God”.<sup>128</sup> It is often neglected by scholars that Maududi called for the state executive to be democratically elected,<sup>129</sup> arguing that Islam was only opposed to ‘Western’ democracy because it vested sovereignty in the people and that Islamic polity was democratic in its organizational structure.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to explore the interaction between Muslim

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>129</sup> See Maududi’s discussion on the first principles of the Islamic state. *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, pp. 226-233. There were, however, a number of conditions listed which rulers had to satisfy. These included being Muslim and being male.

<sup>130</sup> See discussion in *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, pp. 142-145.

intellectuals in modern India and Western socio-political ideas, particularly the concept of the nation-state. Rejecting notions of a fixed normative political tradition in Islam this study has emphasized the role of interpretation and the diversity in Muslim political discourse. The work of Indian Muslim intellectuals is situated within the context of the evolution of Islam/Islams and Islamic political thought. As Muslim intellectuals attempted to shape an Islamic response to the modern age, they either sought to demonstrate that Islam was not inimical to the adoption of new political ideologies and institutions or they constructed Islam itself into an ideology and a polity. Through the study of some of the archetypes of 'Islamic fundamentalism' – *Deobandi's*, Iqbal and Maududi – this paper hopes to contribute towards the study of Islam and politics by asserting that their political thought was grounded in a re-interpretation of Islam rather than a return to a normative 'Political Islam'.

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