The roots of Islamic Reformism

The roots of Islamic reformism in the subcontinent can be traced to the eighteenth century and the decline of the Mughal empire and to the advent of British colonialism. Central to these is the idea of Shah Wali Allah (1703-63) and his son Shah Abdur Aziz (1746-1824). Their influence permeates through a variety of movements ranging from the Tanjir-i-Muhammadiyya of Syed Abul A'la Maududi to the ulama who founded the great seminary of Daru-‘ul-Harbat in Deoband. Foremost among his followers was Maulana Mehmood-ud-Hassan (1852-1921). The main thrust of his movement was the declaration that India was dar-ul-harb, territory of war requiring a jihad. He was among the founders of the Jamiat-ul-ulama-e-Hind (Organization of the Ulamas of India), which participated shoddily in the movement for partition of Pakistan. The remnant united as a federation of communities, remained aligned with the Congress in the ensuing decades and opposed the formation of Pakistan for Pakistan as an idea put forward by westernized Muslims and many were not unaware that any scheme of partition would lead to an erosion of Muslims in India. However, some Deobandis who founded the Jamiat-ul-ulama-e-Hind (JUUI) at a meeting in Calcutta in 1945, supported the formation of Pakistan. The idea of Pakistan was not acceptable either to Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, who in 1941, founded the Jamiat-ul-ulama which saw it as a solution rather than an ideology. In all, in fairness, that is exactly how the Quid-e-Azam, Mohammed Ali Jinnah envisioned Pakistan. Maududi advocated the idea of the Nizam-e-Mustafa as a system, as he perceived it, to be ruled in the time of Prophet Mohammad.

After Partition

With Partition, many organizations split. The entire JUUI went over to Pakistan while the Jamiat-ul-ulama-e-Hind, remained headquartered in India. The Jamiat-ul-ulama split and the Indian section of the nationalist Deobandis and accepted and even lauded the secular ideal as a means of preserving minority culture and focused on education and the welfare of the community. Jamiat-ul-ulama Kashmir had an ambivalent attitude towards politics. It participated in several state assembly elections, the last one being in 1987. The Pakistani branch headed by Maududi, on the other hand, became active in what can be called ‘Islamic’ politics, beginning in the 1950s with the instigation of riots against the Ahmadiyya community. In the past three decades, the organization has become the core of radicalism and fundamentalism in Pakistan. It played an important role in the campaign against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and then supported his Pakistani counterparts, primarily poverty and stress causing the city in March 1993, arguably the worst act of urban terrorism in recent history. Pan-Islamist groups see all this as an opportu- nity. Both the Maudlak dawat-ul-Ilahad and Harkat-ul-Ansar (it has reverted to Harkat-ul-Mujahidin after the American proscription in 1997), make it clear that Kashmir is merely a gateway for a larger jihad in India. To this they have expanded their network across the coun- try, to the eastern and northern parts of the country. Islamic fundamentalism and militancy are now a fact of life in South Asia. Whether or not forces of modernization will moderate their impact in India remains to be seen. The steady decline in the State’s ability to influence the everyday life of the citizens of the region is playing an impor- tant role in this. The ideology of radical Islamic political parties, especially in Pakistan, take quick recourse to hooliganism in an attempt to control the countryside. To compound things, there is a new factor that must now be taken into account – the success of the Taliban in establishing control over Afghanistan. Munoj Joshi is a senior editor for ISIM Today. Islamic Reformism and Militancy in India

The worst occurrences were in Mumbai following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, followed by another round in January in 1993. In retaliation, as it was, elements of the Mumbaïi Muslim ummah, with the help of these groups and, across India, Deobandi madrasas are a target of subversion and a source of recruitment. Information on this in a large number of cases. A very significant pointer is the bombing of the American embassy in Saudi Arabia in 1996. The bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 was carried out by the organization of these militants. The OIC has called for a “Day of Reflection” on the issue of Islamic extremism. Political parties, especially in Pakistan, take quick recourse to hooliganism in an attempt to control the countryside. To compound things, there is a new factor that must now be taken into account – the success of the Taliban in establishing control over Afghanistan.