

Growth of islamic fundamentalism in south asia history essay



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Islamic fundamentalism is not a new phenomenon. In recent times, it has acquired a militant and jihadi form. It has grown because of the failure of the ruling elite in South Asian countries in nation building and in constructing democratic polities. Successive regimes, both civilian and military, in some of the countries in the region have used Islam as a means to legitimise their rule.

As seen in previous chapter that the Islamic fundamentalism has been well entrenched in Pakistan's power structure for the last two decades or so, ever since the military rule of General Zia-ul Haq. Pakistan military's alliance with the Mullahs was formed during this period. The conglomerate of six fundamentalist parties, the Muttahida Majlise Amal (MMA), controls the provincial government in the strategic NWFP, where it has already enforced a kind of Taliban rule. The MMA is also part of the government in Baluchistan. Subsequently Gen. Musharraf strengthened the Mullah-Military alliance. In the subsequent paragraphs we will study the Islamic fundamentalism in various other asian countries and pak role in spreading this fundamenatalism.

PART I: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan and the Rise of Taliban

Demography. Afghanistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and China. Its population approximately stand somewhere between 15 and 20 million people. The overwhelming majority of its population is Muslims, although a significant minority -between 10 and 20 per cent – adheres to heterodox Sunni

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confession. The population is also diverse in both ethnic and linguistic terms. While two Indo- Iranian languages – Persian and Pustho- are the ones most widely heard in the country, one also encounters speakers of Turk, Dravidian, Nuristani, and other languages. Afghanistan besides ethnicaly and linguistically, is also divided economically and spatially.

Shaping of Fundamentalism

Power Struggle the Root Cause. The Afghanistan is in turmoil since 1973. In 1973 Mohammed Daoud khan staged a coup, deposing his cousin king Zahir Shah and appointing himself as president. Daoud captured power with the help of Soviet- trained military officers, who were members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). On 27 Apr 1978, the leftist military officers overthrew Mohammed Daoud Khan in a surprise coup and Noor Mohammed Taraki came to power. Due to internal disputes within the Taraki Camp there was widespread killing of tribal leaders to extend control over them. Thus Amin overthrew and killed Taraki and made overtures to the USA.

Russian Intervention. The Russian Intervention in Afghanistan played a crucial role for its subsequent control and a state of anarchy in the region. The reason for russian intervention in Afghanistan were as under:-

Iranian Connection. During Oct 1974 The Shah of Iran offered aid worth \$ 2 billion to Kabul and also give secure access to Iranian port of Bandar Abbas to the sea via Iran, there by reducing the Soviet leverage as the only alternative route for Afghan overland trade. The increased overtures of iran towards Afghanistan increased Soviet apprehensions.

Inclination to USA. The Amin after assuming the power from Taraki made overtures towards USA. This caused Moscow panic and at this stage the Soviets decided to intervene militarily to stabilize the situation, instead the soviets got sucked into the war.

Situation after Soviet Withdrawal. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. The number of Mujahideen faction who fought their Jihad against Soviet forces and communist regime of Kabul tried to capture the power in Kabul. The Afghan society was highly divided on tribal and ethnolinguistically lines at that time. The mujahideen warlords were also fragmented along these lines. As their communities' interests were involved hence a consensus government could not be formed and neither a power sharing agreement could reach between them. The end result was anarchy in Afghanistan. Pakistan, which was a front line state for Americans and western nation for arms supplies to mujahideen during Soviet occupation of Afghanistan had now its own interest in keeping the Afghan disintegrated as it wanted it establish its own puppet government there, so it backed number of mujahideen groups but when they failed to capture the power in Kabul, it started the Taliban movement with Saudi money and US planning and Pakistan's manpower.

Pakistan's Objectives. Pakistan objectives in Afghanistan are two fold. The first was to secure a receptive leader ship in Kabul which would ensure the transformation of Afghanistan into a Pakistan dominated, Pushtun ruled enclave and assist Pakistan's goal of wider regional influence, and broader regional political, economic and strategic gains. The other was to enable

Pakistan to enmesh the identity of Pakistan's and Afghanistan Pushtun into <https://assignbuster.com/growth-of-islamic-fundamentalism-in-south-asia-history-essay/>

one and settle once and for all the longstanding Afghanistan -Pakistan border dispute in line with Pakistan's interests. These considerations assumed greater urgency after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which not only signalled the imminent end of communist rule in Kabul, but also opened up the potentially resource rich Central Asian Republic(CAR).

Growth of Taliban

Birth of Taliban. It is generally accepted by Afghanistan watchers that the Taliban had its birth in the rugged mountains of the Pak-Afghan border, inside Pakistan territory some time in Aug 1994. By early 1994 it became obvious to the ISI that the Burhanuddin Rabbani regime, not very friendly to Islamabad, was slowly consolidating itself in Kabul. While they were looking for alternative s, Maj Gen (Retd) Naseerullah Babar, the Interior Minister in the second Benazir Bhutto government floated the idea of creating a students militia along with some veterans from the Afghan mujahideen who had fought the Red Army and who had taken shelter in Pakistan. Gen Babar started his search for suitable leaders from around April-May 1994. In the process, he came across a certain Mohammad Umar Mujahid. Later widely known as Mullah Umar. By the end of May 1994 the basic infrastructure for launching the Taliban was in place. Around this time, the meeting with the Jamait Ulema Islam headed by Maulana Fazlur Rahman started bearing fruit in terms of deputing its students for the proposed outfit, which it proposed to call ' Taliban'.

Most of the Taliban are the children of the Jihad against Soviet Union. Many were born in Pakistani refugee camps, educated in Pakistani madrassas and learnt their fighting skill from Afghan Mujahideen parties based in Pakistan.

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Their families continued to live in Pakistan as refugees even after the fall of Kabul to the Mujahideen in 1992. The Taliban – the Army of Islamic students -was raised from the madrassas on the Afghan – Pakistan border.

Sociologically, Pakistan had based this new revolution upon the segment of the fanatical and illiterate village mullahs- the land less and weakest section of Afghan society. They are generally orphans who prefer to live in madrassas for three square meals a day.

Pakistani Connection. Many Taliban carry Pakistani identity cards, as they spent years in refuge camps in Pakistan, and thousand voted in the 1997 elections Baluchistan for their favourite Pakistani party- the Jamiat -e Ulema-I Islam. Moreover the Taliban recruited hundreds of Pakistani Islamic fundamentalist students to fight for their causes and were closely linked to Pakistan's fundamentalist Islamic parties such as the Jamait -e Uleama Islam led by Maulana Fazular Rahman. Their social history also allowed them to be extremely well connected to many Pakistani state institution, political parties and business groups in what was already an extremely fragmented Pakistani power structure. Thus the Taliban were never beholden to one exclusive Pakistani lobby.

ISI Support to Taliban. It is believed that the Taliban Shura and Umer are only a front and the actual thinking and strategy is provide by the former and serving members of the Inter Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) of Pakistan. It wold be difficult to explain otherwise how the students of madrassas, dedicated to religious learning as a way to life almost overnight became warriors. The improvised madrassas in the NWFP and Baluchistan would hardly be in a position to impart any military training, unless they

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have sound and organized financial and military backing. In any event, over the last two years Lt Gen (Retd.) Hameed Gul, former Chief of the ISI, has emerged as an important spokesperson of the Taliban movement. Large number of former Pakistani military personnel have been spotted in Taliban camps actively engaged in Taliban activities.

PART II: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN BANGLADESH

Brief History

Formation of Bangladesh. Bangladesh emerged as a new state in 1971 after a protracted struggle for autonomy, which evolved into a freedom movement against the Punjabi-dominated military bureaucratic establishment of Pakistan.

Religion and Constitution. Though the initial Constitution of Bangladesh unambiguously enshrined secularism, which was to be realised by eliminating communalism in all its forms, and the establishment of multi-party democracy as fundamental political values. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had spelt out the meaning of secularism in the context of the Muslim society. He had explained that secularism does not mean absence of religion. The people of Bangladesh would have the right to religion but nobody would be allowed to use religion as a political weapon. Islam in Bangladesh has been based on three types of religious beliefs: modern, orthodox and popular. A majority of the Muslims of Bangladesh practice 'popular' religion that includes faith in pirs, sacred places, Hindu gods and local deities and spirits. The Jama'at-i- Islami had no appeal in the political environment in East

Pakistan since 1947. In, the Jama'at-i-Islami had only one member in that part of Pakistan.

Bangladesh's Drift Towards Extremism. However, after the military coup d'état of 1975, secularism was replaced by the words "Faith in Almighty Allah" in the revised constitution. A new era of the relationship with Middle Eastern Muslim countries, brought Wahhabi ideology back home from Arabia and created a social ground and support base for future fundamentalists in the country. In 1988, another military dictator declared Islam the state religion of Bangladesh by amending the Constitution. To create an aura of political legitimacy as well as to win support from the oil-rich Middle Eastern Muslim countries, military regimes rehabilitated and eventually collaborated with Islamic political organizations, some of which were radical and fundamentalist in nature. 43 Both military regimes tried to overcome their legitimacy crises by manipulating the political issue of Islamic identity. In this way, the military regimes not only created the opportunity for the Islamists to be a part of mainstream politics in Bangladesh, but they also made Islamization an agenda of the state and Islam the de facto state ideology. 44 Subsequent democratic governments could not overcome the religious ideology created by the military regimes. During the anti-military period of the 1980s, the two major political parties, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), continued to maintain tactical relationships with fundamentalist political organizations. The party that won the general elections in 1991 and 2001 formed a coalition with fundamentalist political organizations. The two of the militant fundamentalist organizations of this period that shocked the country the most were the

HUJIB and the JMB. The mother organization of the HUJIB was located in Pakistan.

Fundamentalist Acts in Bangladesh. Between March 6, 1999 and January 27, 2005, militant Islamists killed at least 156 people in Bangladesh. Bombs were thrown mostly at secular cultural gatherings, courthouses, and Sufi shrines. Worst among them were the bomb attacks at Udichi programs (a secularist cultural organization) programs, the Ahmadiyya mosque (a minority Islamic religious sect), Bengali new year celebrations, churches, movie theatres, the Bangladeshi born British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, and at the rally of the party of opposition. The bomb attack that shocked the country most was the blast of August 17, 2005, where 459 bombs were exploded in 63 of the 64 districts in the country between 11: 00 and 11: 30 am. There were also several attacks on secularist NGO (Non-Government Organization) activists and newspapers. Two militant religious fundamentalist organizations, Harkatul Jihad al-Islam Bangladesh (HUJIB), and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), carried out these attacks. These two groups alone exploded hundreds of bombs throughout the country during this period in order to establish an Islamic regime in the country. In addition to these two groups, other militant Islamist organizations, active in this period that were also involved in similar violent and terrorist activities included, Shahadat al-Hikma, Hizbut Tawhid, Bangladesh Islamic Manch, and Hifajate Khatme Nabuwat Andolon.

Pakistan Link. The two of the major and active militant fundamentalist organizations of Bangladesh are HUJIB (Harkatul Jihad al-Islam of

Bangladesh) and the JMB (Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh). The mother <https://assignbuster.com/growth-of-islamic-fundamentalism-in-south-asia-history-essay/>

organization of the HUJIB was located in Pakistan. The Pakistani HUJI had first appeared in the early 1980s as a group of supporters of the Afghan resistance against Soviet aggression, known as Jama'atul Ansar (Group of the Helpers). With the support of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI), the group renamed itself as Harkatul Jihad al-Islam (The Movement for the Islamic Jihad) in 1988. 53 In the 1990s it expanded its operations beyond Afghanistan, especially in support of the struggle of Muslims in non-Muslim countries. Shafiqur Rahman, an Afghan war veteran, founded the Harkatul Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh in 1992. The organization officially declared its existence at a press conference at the National Press Club in Dhaka on April 30, 1992. Presently there are approx 27 militant outfits in India's Northeast that have ties with Bangladesh and its various religio-political groups. The ISI and Bangladesh's DGFI coordinate with ULFA. The influx of migrants from Bangladesh across the border into north-east India and West Bengal certainly poses a threat of Islamic militancy spreading in these regions of India as well. During the rule of the BNP-led four-party alliance between 2001 and 2006, militant Islamic groups such as the HUJIB and JMB received significant material and moral support from Islamists within the alliance.

PART III: THE DANGER IN NEPAL

Gen. Nepal is a Hindu kingdom but not a Hindu state and religious minorities have lived in the Kingdom without any discrimination. Over the last several years, the Kingdom, however, has been in turmoil. It has been plagued by Maoist insurgency and the struggle for end of monarchy and establishment of Democracy in the Kingdom. Both these major struggle were over by 2006.

However the country had to think and work out the settlement before the maoist can be adopted and the new constitution can be enacted for the country. Though the country is pro India and anti – Islamic Fundamentalism, but a disturbed situation has been exploited by the anti India countries over the years. The use of Nepal soil by the Islamists for causing disturbance in India have been established time again. The presence of militant Islamists on the India-Nepal border has been causing concern in the contiguous Indian areas.

Geographical Realities. It may be noted that India has an open, porous border with Nepal, which is 1, 859 km-long. There are almost 20 Indian districts that share the border with 27 Nepalese districts. The open border provides a free field to all kinds of criminal activities, like drug trafficking, smuggling, intelligence activities, fake currency, fugitives, etc.

Matter of Concern. What has caused concern is the emergence of numerous madrassas and mosques on both sides of the border. The number of mosques is certainly not justified by the number of Muslims in the area. The madrassas are largely funded from West Asia. These developments too have serious implications for India. The 1999 hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane on a flight from Kathmandu to New Delhi, which ultimately ended with the release of three top Pakistani terrorist leaders, showed that the ISI had set up an active base in Nepal. Some Kashmiri groups belonging to Hizb-ul Mujahideen have been caught in Nepal trying to send money to Islamic separatists in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistani presence in Nepal is reflected in the growth of madrassas, increase in Muslim population, floating of fake

Indian currency and is helped by an open border and lack of monitoring system.

PART IV: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN SRI LANKAN

Origin and Growth of Islamic Fundamentalism. Muslims in Sri Lanka are the descendants of the Arabs, who came about a thousand years ago. The origins of Islamic fundamentalism in the country, however, are recent and can be traced to 1990 when the Sri Lankan ethnic Tamils drove away Muslims from the Eastern region under their control. This forced migration increased Muslim population in the districts to which they had migrated. No effort was made by the government to rehabilitate these uprooted Muslim refugees, who had to live in poverty and misery. Over time, madrassas came up, funded by munificent Arabs. Frequent Sinhala-Muslim communal clashes began to take place. Shariat courts were set up and strict rules imposed on Muslim women in the Eastern areas. The situation in the Muslim areas deteriorated and Muslim- Buddhist clashes became a regular feature. Militant camps were set up in the Eastern areas where volunteers were given arms and weapons training in the jungles and they called themselves jihadis fighting a holy war for protecting themselves. Ironically, the government itself had provided arms to the Muslims in the early 1980s to protect themselves against the LTTE. Also, attempts were made on part of the government to use Islamic militancy as a buffer against the LTTE. The country has been facing the threat of Tamil Eelam. The situation in the Eastern province is a potential bloody cauldron. There have been reports of two Islamic militant bases in Valaichchenai. The formation of an Osama

Squad in Batticaloa has also come to notice. All this indicates growth of extremist elements in the community.

Pak Involvement. The ISI is keenly interested to collect intelligence about developments in Indian nuclear establishments, many of which are located in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In this background, the appointment by Pakistan two years ago of a former director of the Intelligence Bureau as its High Commissioner in Colombo was not without significance. There has been an increase in the activities of Lashkar-e-Toiba in the Eastern province.

PART V: ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND INDIA

Fundamentalist Parties Post Independence. After independence apart from some minor outfits, there were two main fundamentalist parties in the country, the Jamiat-al Ulema-i-Hind and the Jama'at-t-Islami. The Jamiat-al Ulema, which had opposed the creation of Pakistan till the end, withdrew from Indian politics after the freedom and the framing of the Indian Constitution. While the Jama'at-i-Islami was divided after the emergence of Pakistan in 1947 and some members of the Jama'at, including its founder, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, migrated to Pakistan, with an aim of creating an Islamic country. While the, members of the Jama'at, who stayed back in India, formed a separate Jama'at in April 1948. The leaders of the Indian Jama'at opposed secularism in all walks of life and decided not to participate in elections, and decided to opt out of the Indian political system. However Jama'at accepted the secularism in 1960s, though with some reservations. The Jama'at members from Jammu & Kashmir have not been part of the Indian Jama'at and formed a separate party in the state.

Growth of Islamic Fundamentalism in India. India is marred with a plethora of terrorist/ insurgency related problems, terrorism in Punjab, insurgency in its NE, Maoist insurgency in its Central Part, Islamic Fundamentalism in J & K and till late LTTE influence in its southern part. However among all these the threat from Islamic fundamentalism by large, poses the most complex and significant threat to India. India comprises of largest Muslim population after Indonesia in south Asia. Islamic fundamentalism in the form of terrorism in India was initially limited to the region of J & K, but today it has spread its tentacles to other parts of India too. The series of bombing episodes in Mumabai, Banglore, Hyderabad, Varanasi, the hijacking of Indian airlines, attack on parliament, mumbai 26/11, etc are testimony to the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalism in India. India clearly has become a target of jihad in the age of globalisation. Islamic fundamentalism is against democracy and equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of caste, creed, or gender. Its further growth will disrupt peace and stability in the country and in the entire region.

Pakistan Involvement. It was well realised by various pakistani rulers and dictators that subdueing India with military might is near to impossible and a proxy war in the form of Jihad would accrue disproportionate result. Keeping this aspect in mind Gen Jia-ul-Haque implemented this plan during his tenure. This plan of destabilising India, was implemented through the ISI, an intelligence agency whose officer cadre is drawn from Pakistan Army which is considered to be the state Instrument of this policy, Pakistan involvement in creating and fostering religious extremist groups and terror organisations in Kashmir and elsewhere in India is well documented.

PART VI: PAK INVOLVEMENT IN GROWTH OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

Through our previous study it has been amply established that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan is not only responsible for the present situation in Afghanistan and in Jammu and Kashmir, but it also has far reaching consequences for all countries of the South Asian region. All South Asian countries are pluralistic and face at different levels, internal tensions and conflicts based on caste, religion, ethnicity, language and community, and these distort their national integrity and unity. Religious nationalism has made a great headway not only in Pakistan but also in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It has made Pakistan a haven for Islamic terrorists, including Al Qaida, and it inspires terrorist activity in Kashmir. Some of the features of Islamic extremism in South Asia are: religiously defined national identity, undermining of democracy by promoting majoritarian theory and practice of non-liberal democracy and accentuation of international conflicts on ethno-religious lines, for example, between 'Hindu India' and 'Muslim Pakistan' and 'Hindu India' and 'Muslim Bangladesh'. The fundamentalists aim to turn the Muslim majority states of the region into Islamic states and start jihad in those countries where Muslims are in a minority. There is no accurate information about the exact number of madrassas in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India. Many of these madrassas disseminate the militant ideology of Islamic fundamentalism and turn out militants. These contribute to the ongoing destabilisation not only in Pakistan but also in other countries of the region. The potential radicalisation of Indian Muslims is also a cause of concern.

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The Pakistan had the repercussions in other countries of the region. The major Islamic party, the Jama'at-i- Islami of Pakistan, and the Tablighi Jama'at and their militant offshoots has a strong presence in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. There is a wide network of Deobandi and Wahabi madrassas in almost each South Asian country and many of them are being funded by Saudi and Pakistani sources. Pakistan has been sponsoring a militant terrorist campaign in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir for the last two decades. Pakistan's official agencies have been active in promoting militant groups in all countries of the region. In India, there has also been a visible increase in the activities of Pakistani-sponsored militant groups, like Lashkar-e Toiba and Jaish-e Muhammad. South Asia is the most complex region of the world in terms of religion, and is inhabited by the followers of all major religions. Islam, after Hinduism, is one of the major religions of South Asia. It has the second largest following (29 per cent) after Hinduism (64 per cent). Almost four out of every 10 South Asians are Muslims, and they form the single largest Muslim population in the world. Islam in the region has had to co-exist, ever since its arrival in the Indian subcontinent in the first century of the Islamic calendar, with a bewildering variety of religions and cults. All the countries in the region that emerged after Independence are hence multireligious, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic. India is larger, both in size and population, than all the other countries of the region combined. It has also the largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia.

Conclusion

Muslims constitute the majority of the population in three of the seven countries in South Asia, i. e., Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives, and they are also a significant minority in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. But Muslims of South Asia are not a monolithic community. Even at the height of the Mughal Regional Implications of the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan rule in India, the Muslims of the region did not constitute a single harmonious community. They are divided in different Islamic sects, subsects and schools of thought. Though a majority of them belong to the Sunni sect, each South Asian country has a substantial number of Shias and other minority sects and schools. Almost every country in the region also faces unresolved ethnic, communal and linguistic tensions that at times lead to major conflicts. The terrorist campaign in Jammu & Kashmir- waged mainly by militant Islamic groups sponsored and trained by Pakistan's agencies – and the disruptive activities of the Islamic fundamentalist parties within Pakistan, therefore have wider implications and pose a major threat to the region. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan has had serious implications for social and political stability in the region and a highly volatile impact on relations among communities adhering to different faiths.

References/End Notes