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Jamal Malik: Local forms of religious organisation as structural modernisation. Impacts on religious community-building and globalisation
 Traditional Islamic Learning and Reform in Pakistan^x

In the following presentation the competition between the state and the ulama (traditional Islamic scholars) in the development of religious education in Pakistan is addressed. In doing so, reference will be made to globalization processes from within and from without, that is from a traditional, say pre-colonial, Islamic point of view, as manifest in the institutions and organizations of religious learning on the one side, and from a post-colonial stand-point, as can be seen from state-policy, on the other. It will be evident from the data presented, that there are two differing and contesting globalizations,^{xi} connected through complex institution-building processes.

Hence, one may distinguish between two possible understandings of globalization, e.g., the intensification of a universal Islam, such as proclaimed by the policies advocated by the state and a movement towards a more or less uniform, global civilization. At the same time one can discern different positions Muslim communities may have in various types of contemporary globalization processes, namely what may be called positions as (co-) actor, as re-actor, or as victim, such as is the case with Islamic scholars and their places of learning, the madrasa (the Arabic word for school).

Similarly, both the dynamics of globalization and localization and the complicated — but not necessarily problematic — relation of Islam and modernity has to be taken into account. To be sure, these concepts are characterized by a combination of continuity and change, or a combination of transformation and permanence. In dealing with these issues, I will try to relate the data to the context of religious community-building and jihad, the holy struggle.

Introduction

To start with, considerable criticism has been directed towards traditional Islamic educational institutions, the madrasas, as breeding grounds of militant Islam and training camps for global jihad. The powerful perception of the supposedly unilateral inter-relatedness between these religious schools and jihad, between mullah and violence, produced and perpetuated fear in the public mind in the West. As a result, the relationship between state power and civil rights has been subjected to very severe restrictions in countries like Pakistan — and without major reactions from the public. This has enabled governments globally to push through restrictive policies in an unprecedented way.

Efforts in Pakistan and other Muslim countries to streamline madrasas into the national educational systems are not new, but they are now seen as a part of the global war on terrorism. Also in secular India, the approximately 100,000 madrasas have become subject to scrutiny and suspicion. It is evident that the majority of Muslims do not regard the madrasa as a terrorist institution. They believe it fulfils the needs of religious education and, in fact, community-building. It is therefore unsatisfactory and indeed too simplistic to equate madrasas with terrorism, as becomes evident in General Musharraf's historic speech of 12 January 2002 in which he indulges in a rather sweeping 'othering' of the ulama, reminiscent of the 19th-century colonial topos of the chaotic, unorganized, mad mullah. Even if the General appreciates religious schools as excellent welfare and educational organizations, better even than services offered by NGOs, he clearly revealed that he is influenced by the notion that religious scholars are narrow-minded and propagate hatred. The country's future, he postulated, was to be not a theocratic state but an Islamic welfare state, not marginalization but modernization, not traditionalism but reform.

To understand Musharraf's speech and his policy of crack-down, it seems proper to scan the structural, formative and normative developments in the field of Islamic education in the Indian sub-continent that have been regarded as responsible for the latest scenario.

I would like to shed some light on the background of these developments, by showing how state policies have been changing traditional education in content and form during the last decades and how autonomous religious institutions have reacted to these policies. I will also discuss the normative changes in religious education, the social and regional background of religious scholars and the latest trends resulting from state encroachment into these autochthonous institutions. The focus is thus laid on the struggle between a globalizing reform-Islam as perceived by state-authorities and Muslim avantgardists on the one hand, and the targets of change, the Islamic scholars, on the other. A short introductory note on the historical background of reform in the field of Islamic education will provide the basis for the argument of this presentation, namely that state Islam has produced a new – albeit uncontrolled - dynamics among religious scholars and their local forms of religious organization.

Historical background

Recent studies suggest that the 18th century was a century of great cultural achievement with a new approach to life, that culminated among others, in the reform and standardization of education. Emphasis was placed on rational sciences with Islamic law, logic, philosophy, syntax and Arabic language, being important subjects. This syllabus – the dars-e nizami – developed by some scholars in Northern India,^{xiii} went back to the Persian-Shiite tradition of knowledge, a tradition which had gained momentum in other Muslim empires as well, disseminated through a vast network of Islamic scholarship. Some speak of an "intellectual commerce between Turkey and the West, and also ... with Persia, and ... Mughal India". It was a shared knowledge^{xiii} with shared history so to speak, a general education designed for functional elites.

The syllabus was, however, subject to several reforms well before the advent of nation-states on the sub-continent. Some of these changes go back to the 18th century when some pietists postulated mystical reform and the promotion of traditional, transmitted sciences. This tradition was also part of an inter-regional network, Mecca and Medina being its centres.^{xiv}

But in the 19th century – in the wake of colonial penetration – with the introduction of new systems of education, the madrasa lost its function as a general training institute and turned into an institution exclusively for religious learning. While some groups made use of Islamic symbolism to mobilize against colonial power, others tried to change, reform or conserve it, as a means to counter colonialism. Hence, various Sunnite schools of thought emerged^{xv}, making up for some kind of division of labor: They appealed to specific social groups and were tied to particular regions, and thereby added to the religious and societal complexity of South Asia.^{xvi}

The various reforms, however different they may have been, were thought to be achievable only through 'modernization'. It was in this context, that modernity – as a vehicle of universally accepted ideas - came to be regarded as the opposite of – local - tradition and thus determined the fate of Muslim education. Religious institutions that did not subscribe to this development were marginalized politically and culturally but continued to provide knowledge to the majority of Muslims. This led to a dramatic societal split. It was only the recent wave of Islamization that has given the madrasa new life. While after 1947, in India, these schools were left more or less untouched by the secular state, in Pakistan, as in many other Muslim countries, the situation was quite different: political leaders have always been interested in

bringing the madrasas into the mainstream national system of education in order to try to curb autonomy.

State intervention

State encroachments in Pakistan became prominent fairly early, with Ayyub Khan's nationalization of religious endowments and schools during the 1960s. A first survey of religious schools was undertaken, discussing their histories, affiliations and locations and the numbers of religious students and teachers in what was then West Pakistan. Their institutional affiliation to state machinery was to be paralleled by curricular reforms which, however, aroused opposition among the representatives of religion. They therefore established umbrella organizations for religious schools – just prior to the proclamation of the 'West Pakistan Waqf Property Ordinance 1961', e.g., an ordinance to regulate religious endowments, waqf, which have been major economic sources for the madrasa. The main tasks of these umbrella organizations were to reform and to standardize their educational system, and of course, to counter state power collectively.

During Z.A. Bhutto's time Islamic scholars were able to negotiate some concessions, but it was with the advent of so-called Islamization in the late 1970s – that goes hand in hand with the global “return of religion”, that state activities touching on traditional institutions in general and centres of Islamic learning in particular took increasing effect, although most of them had been pushed to the margins of the political process before the advent of Zia al-Haqq's Islamization policy, when they regained significance partly as an alternative educational system.

The Islamization policy in Pakistan has resulted in a new dimension of curricular reform and has ushered in a new phase of institutionalization. For the first time the degrees of religious schools were put on a par with those of the formal education system and recognized by the centre – the University Grants Commission. This recognition was based on certain conditions: the students were now supposed to be taught a modernized syllabus lasting sixteen years, which meant that the religious scholars would have to follow the suggestions of the National Committee on Religious Schools established in 1979.^{xvii} The report of the Committee suggested making

“concrete and feasible measures for improving and developing Deeni-Madrassahs along sound lines, in terms of physical facilities, curricula and syllabi, staff and equipment...so as to bring education and training at such Madrassahs *in consonance with the requirements of modern age and the basic tenets of Islam*...to expand higher education and employment opportunities for the students of the Madrassahs...integrating them with the overall educational system in the country.” (My emphasis)

The idea of this reformed, centralizing and unifying Islam stood in contrast to the concepts of most of the various ulama, however. These suggestions provoked considerable reaction, but with the insistent pressure of the government and its support – i.a. through zakat money, as we shall see – and with the equating of their degrees with those of national universities in 1981/82, the ulama became more and more convinced of the potentially positive consequences of this policy for them. So they did adapt the curriculum by merely adding subjects from the formal primary education system to their own syllabus, and Arabic instead of English was used on the certificates. Thus, the ulama showed their ability to gain official recognition by effecting minor changes, and they were gradually able to exercise more influence on the government. Theoretically, these degrees, once recognized, were to open up economic mobility and possibilities of promotion for the graduates. However, there was no consideration of how and where the now officially examined armies of mullahs would be integrated into the job market. This short-sighted planning soon resulted in considerable problems.

Stemming the tide

Parallel to these administrative, institutional and curricular reform measures, the economic situation of religious schools was changed and, indeed, improved by means of money disbursed through the central and provincial zakat (alms) funds set up by the government in 1980: ten per cent of the alms collected from current accounts through zakat-deducting agencies – established throughout the country - go to religious education if curricular reform and political loyalty are observed. These additional financial resources enhanced the budgets of religious schools considerably, comprising up to one-third of their annual income, and were exclusively at the disposal of the rectors of the schools, e.g. the ulama. This certainly created new expectations and new patterns of consumption.

As a result of these changes, a new dimension of mobility of these scholars and their centres of learning can be discerned. One is tempted to speak of an expanding indigenous infrastructure which in the early 1990s already had far-reaching consequences: firstly, the prospect of zakat grants resulted in a mushrooming of madrasas, mostly in rural areas. In response, the government has introduced various measures to try to stem the tide, but this has only resulted in new problems. Secondly, the number of the graduates of higher religious schools – not to speak of students in religious schools in general – is constantly on the rise, as these institutions now also offer formal primary education with officially recognized degrees. Thirdly, the Islamization policy brought in a new phase of institutionalization among umbrella organizations, so that the number of affiliated schools has increased tremendously. Fourthly, the data available on religious schools also shed light on their spatial distribution and the social and regional background of their students:^{xviii} It turns out, that each school of thought has its own reserved area, be it tribal, rural, urban, trade oriented or even strategic.

In the wake of the formalization and reform of religious schools, an increasing trans-provincial north-south migration from rural to urban areas can be observed, a sign of the degree of spatial mobility of the young religious scholars. Students from specific regions then look for schools and teachers who comply with their cultural perceptions and ethnic affiliations and the search for corresponding institutions that create identity-giving sub-structures in an urban environment which may otherwise be perceived as alien and even hostile. The migrant scholars-to-be gather in the metropolis and potentially contribute to conflicts that are often religiously and ethnically motivated. The fact that the number of religious schools and their students has grown spectacularly in urban, and even more in rural areas also suggests that not only cities have become locations of increasing conflict: the hinterland has also been increasingly drawn into the sphere of religiously legitimized battles. Thus, the Islamization policy has promoted the institutionalization of different groups, but has fostered their politicization and even radicalization. And since contemporary regimes are not able or willing to integrate ulama in a productive way, their increasing marginalization is the result.

The increasing number of young theologians, with degrees equivalent to an M.A. in Arabic/Islam Studies, are faced with government reform measures that lack plans for dealing with the labour market. The promised Islamization and improved literacy of the country has not been translated into jobs for the ulama; on the contrary, the lack of proper measures comprises a potential source of conflict. The American advisor on religious education made the following criticism:

'Reservations were voiced by various officials of the provincial Departments of Education about recruiting "Maulanas" for the schools on the suspicion that they would divide the students on the basis of their own preferences for a particular "Maktab-i-Fikr" (school of thought; J.M.).' He hastened to add that 'these suspicions, however, were proved in the field to be ill-founded. Such suspicions should never be allowed to affect the making of educational policy at any level.'^{xix}

It is only as teachers of Arabic, having been promoted since 1979, that some young scholars have found jobs. These courses, however, targeted Pakistanis going to work in the Middle East, and so were motivated primarily by pragmatic financial considerations. On a different front, the military, against the background of the cold war, has been encouraging the recruitment of religious scholars since 1983 – with foreign aid. In the medium term, this has led to new values and structures in the army, especially at junior levels of command.

Danger of expectations

With the official support of religious scholars in the 1980s and even in the 1990s, the political strength of representatives of this section of Islamic traditionalism has increased unmistakably. Thus, the Islamization policy – or better the politics of de-traditionalization – has ultimately forced the politically dominant sector to rethink its own position. The centre may be pushed onto the political defensive, a position from which it could extricate itself only by violence, and with increasing alienation from the rest of the society. This danger exists especially when indigenous social and educational structures, such as endowments, alms and religious schools, still existent and mostly functioning, cannot be adequately replaced and thousands of unemployed mullahs who have access to the masses are not successfully integrated.

The raised expectations have pushed many graduates of religious schools into the hands of different players: their role in the cold war in Afghanistan, when they were exploited by certain groups and governments; their role in post cold-war Afghanistan, when once again, they were caught up in power politics supported by different secret services; and now in the post-Taliban era, when some of them have taken sides with terrorist groups.

In these circumstances, the rhetoric of Islamic symbolism and jihad has shown that it can be effectively used as a means of self-defence against foreign encroachments, and there has been constantly increasing pressure on the state by religious elements. The Council of Islamic Ideology set up in the 1960s, and the Pakistani Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, should not therefore be blamed for issuing outrageous Islamic proposals. Similarly, the failure to reform either the Blasphemy Law in 1994 and 2001, or the madrasas in 1995 is simply a reflection of the aggressive mood of the clergy and Islamists, based on what has been called 'paranoid Islam'. In May 2000, Islamic political parties, who recruit their members from religious schools, were powerful enough to demand several Islamic provisions, some of them met instantly by the government. But in order to increase control over the clergy, the current regime came up with yet another madrasa reform proposal in August 2001.

Having said that, let us return briefly to General Musharraf's speech, in which he called for a peaceful 'Sunnatization' of life-worlds, referring to Islamic mysticism and prohibiting madrasa students from going for divine force. The re-construction of tradition ought to serve to raise the madrasa and bring it to a level with the mainstream. The major task was to open up the job market for the graduates. Similarly, mosques should be reformed in order to guarantee a secular and modernized society, otherwise Pakistan will be marginalized – and radicalized. This policy clearly aims at controlling some 20,000 madrasas with approximately 3 million students, and more than 50,000 mosques – a solid power-structure, indeed.

The control of the clergy seems to be even more important since there has traditionally been a movement across the borders of Pakistan with Afghanistan, India and Kashmir. This is especially true of ethnic groups such as Pashtuns in Pakistan, who outnumber their fellow Pashtuns in Afghanistan, and are linked by family networks, commercial connections, and religio-political solidarity. Hence, despite the Pakistan government's recent strict policy against foreign students, Afghan students of religious schools have vowed to continue their Islamic education in Pakistan.

Effects of the reforms

The reforms envisaged by the state have produced an imbalance that has resulted in a variety of problems, some of which were temporarily alleviated through jihad in Afghanistan. In the wake of these developments, several different branches of Islamic learning and madrasas have emerged. We need to distinguish: firstly, students of religious schools in general; secondly, mujahidin or freedom fighters; thirdly, Taliban; and fourthly, *jihadi* groups.

As far as the first category is concerned, they have been subjected to several reforms from within and from without, but have played a quietist role. Because of traditional ties with Afghanistan and other neighbouring countries and as a result of the use of jihad rhetoric, some of them were used as foot-soldiers in the cold war. This is the second group – the mujahidin. In order to keep this group under control and to maintain a grip on the region for economic and political purposes, another version was established by interested parties: these were the Taliban. Both the mujahidin and the Taliban are known for their forced recruitment of young children in madrasas and refugee camps. As for the fourth category, the *jihadis*, some of them can be traced back to groups returning to Pakistan from other battlefields such as Kashmir and Afghanistan, their leaders being middle-class and secular educated men, rather than madrasa students, though madrasa students also joined the militant and radical groups. There is little doubt that some of these organizations run private armies, collect compulsory donations, and indulge in militant and terrorist activities. Some of them have made a regional conflict, the Kashmir cause, their *raison d'être*. But what is the reason behind their radicalization? Mere hatred, violence and the obsession for jihad?

It is true that the struggle for victory over a super-power and their alleged connections to some international network enhances their feeling of Islamicity, no matter how blurred and intangible that may be. But it is the objective material conditions plus the symbolic power of regional conflicts, such as Palestine and Kashmir, that make up for the explosive mixture because these conflicts represent the suppression of whole nations. However international and globalized these organizations may be, they have arisen primarily as a result of an internal, local problem caused by political mismanagement, and they have subsequently been exploited by external powers. And the state itself has been constructing and perpetuating a martial climate all over the country. The dramatic flaunting and celebration of military power on national occasions such as Pakistan Day and the propagation of jihad in textbooks even in formal schools^{xx} and daily on television for the cause of Kashmir are cases in point.

This state-promoted violence and hatred from childhood onwards might be part of the painful nation-building process and search for ideology, but it certainly fails to instil tolerance and acceptance of plurality in the students. The alarming increase in kidnapping for ransom in the cities as well as in rural areas, the killing of whole families by senior family members because of lack of material resources are causes of major concern.

Concluding remarks

In this scenario religious schools provide at least space for some kind of education and survival, and what is more important, they use the variety of religious repertoires to make sense of the predicaments people are facing in a highly fragmented society. The growing presence and visibility of religious power in the public sphere shows this struggle between the centre, e.g., the neo-colonial élites – mostly the military and bureaucracy that has been ruling in Muslim countries – and the periphery, e.g., local forms of religious organization and their agents that have been exploited in different quarters but have constantly been denied their share, very dramatically. In the face of these developments the making of an epitomizing prophet is easy: the 'ladinist' saviour, who would lead the campaign against suppression. It should be noted that the basis of this Islamically tuned radicalism still has a very secular basis: social conflict, poverty, suppression. The basis is not the Qur'an, but social reality, which is put into a global Islamic symbolism. Formerly, violence and terror were legitimized

nationally; today use is made of the Islamic repertory, not because this violence is or has become Islamic or religious, but because the political discourse has shifted.

The latest crack-down policy of Parvez Musharraf can hardly diminish the significance and power of these groups and organizations, because they reflect systemic problems. Unless these problems (e.g. material conditions of the common people and regional conflicts) are tackled, these groups will start operating under different names, change their modus operandi or move their operations elsewhere, making use of trans-Islamic networks.^{xxi}

To conclude, the interaction between Islamic religious scholars and the State in the development of contemporary Pakistani education refers to the growth of state intervention in education. On the one hand, this process seems to be part of a uniformizing, indeed globalizing trend found almost anywhere on the globe nowadays, both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. In other words, it is part of a movement towards a more or less uniform, global civilization. On the other hand, however, this process is part of a tendency towards a more universal type of Islam. As a matter of fact state authorities, Muslim avant-gardists and Islamists aspire at a type of universalizing, and globalizing Islam that contrasts with the Islam the traditional, nevertheless globalizing, institutions of religious scholars stand for. They seem to have learnt how to make use of the state-sponsored Islamization process to their own profit. As a consequence, the religious specialists and their institutions might well play a crucial role in the adaptation of globalizing and modernizing developments to specific local needs and situations. But if they are not properly integrated and given their due share, they go for a radicalization, as is the case in most of the Muslim states.

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^x Much of the article is based on my *Colonialization of Islam: Dissolution of Traditional Institutions in Pakistan*, New Delhi: Manohar Publications (1998 (2)) (reprint).

^{xi} Basically, globalization may be defined as the process towards an increasingly strong interdependence among increasingly large parts of the world. Through this interdependence events and developments in one region influence most other regions. Certainly, processes that to a certain extent were similar, have existed before, but the unprecedented speed of relations — in transportation, information and communication — is often quoted as the quality that makes contemporary globalization the special phenomenon many hold it to be. See Johan Meuleman (ed.): *Islam in the Era of Globalization*, London: RoutledgeCurzon 2002.

^{xii} For that tradition see Francis Robinson: *The `Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia*, New Delhi: permanent black 2001; Jamal Malik: *Islamische Gelehrtenkultur in Nordindien. Entwicklungsgeschichte und Tendenzen am Beispiel von Lucknow*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1997, pp. 105 ff.

^{xiii} P. Jackson/L. Lockhart (eds.): *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 6, Cambridge 1986, p. 590. See also F. Robinson: "Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems", F. Robinson: *The `Ulama of Farangi Mahall*.

^{xiv} See John O. Voll: "Scholarly interrelations between South Asia and the Middle East in the 18th Century", Peter Gaeffke / D.A. Utz: (eds.): *The Countries of South Asia: Boundaries, Extensions and Interrelations*, Philadelphia 1988, pp. 49-59; the same: *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, Boulder 1982.

^{xv} Such as the Deobandis, the Barelwis, and the Ahl-e Hadith. For these movements and groups see Barbara D. Metcalf: *Islamic Revival in British India. Deoband 1860-1900*, Princeton 1982.

^{xvi} Yet another movement, the modernist Aligarh school, tried to Anglicize the Muslim educational system, but this was contested by the Council of Religious Scholars (Nadwat al-Ulama), which aimed at an integration of religious and secular education.

^{xvii} See Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Riport qaumi kamiti bara-ye dini madaris Pakistan* (Islamabad, 1979).

^{xviii} Deobandis in the North Western Frontier Province and Baluchistan, where tribal society prevails, as well as parts of Punjab and Sindh; Barelwis in rural areas of Sindh and Punjab, where the cult of holy men is most popular; Shi`ites in Northern Areas and in some districts of the Punjab dominated by folk religion; Ahl-e Hadith in commercial centres and important internal markets; and Jama`at-e Islami primarily in urban and politically sensitive areas that seemed to have attracted a number of radical groups from various regions outside Pakistan.

^{xix} Yusuf Talal Ali, draft chapter on 'Islamic Education for Inclusion in the Report of the President's Task Force on Education' (Islamabad, 1982, mimeo), 6.

^{xx} 'Textbooks and the Jihadi Mindset', *DAWN*, 12 February 2002

^{xxi} As a popular diviner has opined, a reaction was brewing: 'This government is paving the way for Islamic revolution by creating hurdles for the Islamic parties.' He hastened to add that '[t]here may not be instant reaction but they will respond once the dust is settled.... We are just watching the situation but the silence will not last for long.... The timing of this announcement by the president [e.g. crack-down, J.M.] has raised suspicion in the minds of religious people. It is being done under U.S. pressure.' And he asked: 'If they were terrorist groups, then why were they allowed to operate for such a long time?' *The News*, 15 January 2002, 11.