

Islamist Organisations in Pakistan & Egypt: Differences and Ideological Interactions

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاؤنٹر ٹیرورزم

It certainly is a compelling task that which seeks to understand the development of two of the most powerful and influencing Islamist organization of the 20th century, namely, the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (hereafter Ikhwan) in Egypt and the *Jama'at-i-Islami* (hereafter Jama'at) in Pakistan. In fact, vis-à-vis the literature produced on the subject, it appears that a similar task must, if it is to be of any accuracy, firstly ask questions concerning such concepts as nationalism, the *Qur'an*, and the *Shari'ah*. Eventually, then, it must go further, and seek to explain how the interactions between these concepts happen, insofar as it subsequently helps to understand the ways in which the resulting ideologies are shaped. Hence, this essay will attempt to carry out a similar task, and ultimately give as precise an account as possible of how the two aforementioned Islamist religio-political organisations developed, with reference to their regional and historic contingencies, in addition to grasping both the similarities and the differences between the two at the level of their ideological nuances and organisational character traits.

In terms of the particular choices this paper will make, with regards to the methodology it wishes to adhere to and follow throughout its analysis, it must be premised that there will be a strong emphasis on the founding thinkers of the two Islamist organisations, respectively Hasan al-Banna for the Ikhwan and Sayyid Abu'l- A'la Mawdudi for the Jama'at. Hence, through the figures of the first *Murshid-i Aam* and the first *Amir* this essay will attempt to explain, at the same time, the ideologies they put forward and the development of their movements, while still accounting for the socio-political differences amongst the two. Furthermore, I wish to make the case that, on the level of ideas, “there is no clear evidence to support the argument that these two movements are utterly different from one another” (1).

In fact, as I will proceed to show, the Ikhwan and the Jama'at overlap in terms of their understanding and of their advocacy of a version of Islam which is “pristine” and comprehensive as a way of life. *De facto*, I believe that their differences are to be found in the socio-political conditions of the two countries which therein saw them become leading and fundamental actors. Finally, certainly not wanting to be reductionist in its approach and analysis, this paper will also address the pivotal aspect of the interpretation given of the *Shari'ah*, this time maintaining a focus on the figure of Sayyid Qutb, as well as on that of Mawdudi. This decision stems from the understanding that the *Shari'ah* seems to be a recurring thematic in the ideologies of these two Islamist organizations, that present it as an organic and all-encompassing moral code, capable of providing ready-made answers to issues that may arise in the behavioural conduct of the archetypical Muslim believer.

To start my analysis, then, I first wish to address the concept of nationalism, as understood interlinked with the flourishing of the many Islamist organisations that developed across the Middle East and South Asia. With regards to this, in fact, it must be noted that “one of the paradoxes of recent Muslim history is that the emergence of nationalism in the Muslim world is connected to the rise of modern Islamic reform movements” (2). Moreover, the contradictory essence in the relationship between Islam and nationalism becomes self-evident when one is to consider how the efforts of the Prophet himself had always been directed towards freeing his contemporary Arabian society from tribalism. Furthermore, nationalism as an ideology is explicitly refuted by the Islamic framework, antithetical to it due to its inherent universal view of the world and to its creed, which does not seem to recognise geographical boundaries of any type.

However, neither the Ikhwan nor the Jama'at, through the words respectively of al-Banna and Mawdudi, clearly ever implemented this nationalistic feature as part of their *manifestos*. On the contrary, both these Islamic thinkers seemed to divert quite radically from it. Hence, one need only think back to the speech given by Mawdudi before the Aligarh Muslim University, which saw him in stark opposition of the Muslim League, to see that “there is no room for nationalism in [his] concept of an Islamic State” (3). With regards to the founding thinker of the Ikhwan, conversely, one need not forget that one of al-Banna’s main objectives was “the liberation of the whole Muslim world from every foreign domination” (4).

It is thus clear that both these religio-political groups did not initially see themselves as territorially circumscribed but spoke in terms on an all-encompassing Muslim world-view. In other words, then, they spoke in favour of the promotion of what may be referred to as trans-national pan-Islamism. Finally, I liken the Ikhwan and the Jama'at, since they fundamentally fit the same causal narrative. The instances that made possible both the aforementioned movements mainly arose due to the fact that “in those cases where ethnicity and Islam coincide to a substantial extent, [...] the latter can be used as a marker to define ethnic identity in opposition to the ethno-religious identity of the dominating or occupying non-Muslim ethnic groups” (5).

The paradoxical aspect of the two movement’s ideologies lays the groundwork for the considerations that are to follow throughout this paper. In fact, the initial antinationalistic stand taken by both the Ikhwan and the Jama'at subsequently began to disappear, lost in what later became a mixture of the idea of Islam and that of the state. This results in the somewhat unconscious association that is often made between these two movements and their countries of origin, namely, Egypt and, in a second moment, Pakistan. It follows that if we are to look for differences in nuance, which I have previously asserted can hardly be traced back to the level of ideologies, we must consider the socio-political and regional contingencies out of which the Ikhwan and the Jama'at emerged. It will prove useful to maintain a constant parallelism between the two, as much as also outlining the similarities in their developmental process, so as to better exemplify the differences that account for the historical inheritance of both the movements.

Both colonial products in their own right, they nonetheless maintained quite stark differences in terms of their coming-into-being. Indeed, the first aspect that one must keep in mind is that there already seems to be a crucial difference between the Ikhwan and the Jama'at in terms of the fact that while Egypt was fundamentally an organic societal reality, Pakistan was contrarily an artificial construct. Furthermore, we are to find the ultimate overlap of the two concepts of Islam and state I had previously mentioned in the latter, since “the whole *raison d'être* of the Pakistan movement was to have a separate homeland for Muslims where their identity and religion could be protected” (6). The reason for this radical difference is to be situated in the societal realities of Egypt and pre-partition India. In fact, while the Ikhwan was born out of a “reaction to both European colonialism and traditional Islam, which was seen as backward and obscurantist” (7), the Jama'at was born out of Mawdudi’s criticisms of both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Specifically, then, I will firstly analyse al-Banna’s societal reality, in terms of the understanding it might give us on the causes that shaped the latter’s ideology.

The beginning of the Ikhwan can be traced back, and not coincidentally, to Isma'ilyya. The city epitomized the signs of Western civilisation as much as those of its rule and oppression. The importance of this city is thus fundamental to the development of the movement, and "Banna himself recognized the importance of Isma'ilyya to his organization, because the Suez Canal Zone and the extensive British facilities and influence there had created a sense of alienation in the Egyptian in his own country" (8). Furthermore, a failure of the liberal institutions, that had sprung out of the Egyptian constitution of 1923, in their effort of freeing the country from the dominance of the British became *per se* a triggering force for the coming-into-being of al-Banna's movement. On the other hand, the socio-political situation in India, the conceptual birthplace of the Jama'at, showcased different dynamics to the previous one, but it resulted in the same oppressive and annihilating effects and on the Indian Muslims that we have seen for the Egyptians. In particular, two were the objections raised by Mawdudi; the one against the Indian National Congress and the one levelled to the Muslim League.

In relation to the ongoing discourse on nationalism, the former finds its articulation through the fear that "should the Muslims accept this type of nationalism by joining the Congress they would be annihilated and assimilated into the Hindu majority" (9). With regards to the Muslim League, on the other hand, Mawdudi's concerns may be synthesized in the belief that "the thoroughly westernized leadership of the Muslim League seemed to him uniquely ill-suited for the establishment of the Islamic state" (10). Thus, this led him to the conviction of the need of a new purely Islamic party, which he himself founded in 1941 with the name of *Jama'at-i-Islami*. Finally, compared to the initial premise, that through which this paper was to identify the similarities and differences in the developmental process of the two religio-political movements, there also seems to be the necessity of stressing that military coups have certainly been a clear feature of the history of the Ikhwan and the Jama'at alike, and analogously of that of Egypt and Pakistan. Furthermore, I believe it is possible to assert that there is a clear interplay between the recurrent *coups d'état* in both countries and the degree of legitimacy of the movements led by al-Banna and Mawdudi.

In fact, while the Ikhwan was a quasi-clandestine group, looked upon with suspicion by the various strong-man figures that have subsequently led Egypt, the Jama'at was an officially recognized political party and a legitimate movement, rendered possible through the emphasis of it being a strictly constitutional party, albeit still being treated suspiciously by the Government. Furthermore, both movements, through their writings, managed to reach several military officers. In fact, "General Muhammad Zia al-Haq, who came to power through a military coup in 1977 and governed Pakistan for the next eleven years, was among those influenced by Mawdudi's writings" (11). Similarly, the Ikhwan maintained close ties with various subversive groups, all of which shared the ultimate goal of achieving change in Egypt. Particularly, then, "one of these was the Free Officers group, with whom ties were maintained through an unknown junior officer by the name of Anwar al-Sadat" (12).

Form the analysis of the socio-political contingencies of the two Muslim thinkers, which I have decided to focus on throughout this paper, I wish to move onto the considerations regarding the ideological aspect of the two movements. At the level of ideas, in fact, there seems to be a richness of particularity on behalf of al-Banna and Mawdudi alike. However, I also wish to make the claim that the figure of Sayyid Qutb, insofar as we are to understand his discourse of *Hakimiyya* and *Jahiliyya* relevant to our analysis, represents a noteworthy case-study to this paper.

Generally, however, it may be asserted that the fundamental conviction of both the Muslim thinkers is that “Muslim nations have gone stray from God's true path (Sirat-1 Mustakim). The only cure for this epidemic is to turn to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet” (13). Furthermore, both Mawdudi and al-Banna believed that the realisation of an Islamic state, that would rest upon the *Shari'ah*, was the only possible outcome of their battles against this perdition of the *ummah*. As initially mentioned, I believe there to be quite a stark similarity between the ideologies of the Ikhwan and the Jama'at, since both seem to be operating some sort of dichotomic approach to the issues aforementioned. With regards to Mawdudi, “his vision was chiliastic and dialectic in that it saw the battle between Islam and Kufr (un-Islam)- the West as well as the traditional Muslim culture of India- as the central force in the historical progression of Muslim societies” (14).

It hence seems possible to operate a parallelism with the dialectic procedural thought and understanding that especially Qutb had, as expressed through the idea of the necessity to leave the state of *Jahiliyya* in order to obtain what he deemed to be the best possible idea of state-of-being, that of *Hakimiyya*. Therefore, the common tension of both the ideologies seems to find its articulation through the necessity of fighting an irreligious, un-Godly regime, in order to allow for the re-establishment of the correct divine sovereignty. Accordingly, both the Ikhwan and the Jama'at promoted and implemented the political aspect of Islam in their discourses. Once again, both ideologies brought forward this conceptualization through quite similar narratives.

Al-Banna's understanding of the role that both Islam and the one of the Muslim reformers were very clear. He asserted that “governing, in other words, is in the very nature of Islam. [Furthermore], the role of the Muslim reformer is to act as legislator, educator, judge, and executive: he cannot be only a missionary, but must seek power and authority in order to apply the tenets and laws of Islam” (15). Mawdudi's position appears to be conceptually the same. In fact, he advances the same hierarchical understanding of the figure of the Islamic reformer, who had to lead the community of the true Islamic state. Furthermore, “Mawdudi's conception of the Islamic state rests on the conviction that affirming the oneness of God - tawhid, a cardinal Islamic belief - is not merely a theological tenet but also an eminently political imperative” (16).

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