

# Regional Implications of the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Pakistan

Kalim Bahadur

## Abstract

*Muslims comprise the second largest population after Hindus in South Asia. They are, however, not a monolithic community. The rise of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan and the official patronage it has got has an enormous political and security impact on the region. The terrorist campaign, sponsored by Pakistan and waged by Islamic fundamentalist groups in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan, has wide implications and poses a major threat to the region. Setting up an Islamic state and Jihad are the two objectives of all fundamentalist movements. Religious parties had opposed the Pakistan movement before Independence. After Pakistan came into being, the fundamentalist parties gradually raised Islamic issues and the demand for making Pakistan an Islamic state. Though successive governments in Pakistan used Islamic parties for political objectives, it was under General Zia-ul Haq that a campaign was launched from the top to 'islamise' Pakistan. Gen. Zia's policies led to the growth of Islamic and sectarian violence in the country. Pakistan's intervention in Afghanistan and the Islamic policies at home gradually turned the country into the epicentre of global Islamic militancy. The Mullah-Military alliance has been strengthened during the Musharraf regime. The recent growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the South Asian countries, apart from specific historic and social factors in each country, can be greatly attributed to Pakistan's religious parties and its strategic anti-India policies. After Afghanistan, Bangladesh is one of the larger Muslim countries upon which the threat of Islamic militancy looms large. The involvement of Pakistani agencies can also be clearly discerned in the growth of militancy in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka*

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

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military, in some of the countries in the region have used Islam as a means to legitimise their rule. 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. Pakistan's military ruler Gen. Musharraf has only strengthened the Mullah-Military alliance.

These developments in Pakistan were bound to have 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 have 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).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> All the countries in the region that emerged after Independence are hence multi-religious, 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. 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

rule in India, the Muslims of the region did not constitute a single harmonious community.<sup>3</sup> They are divided in different Islamic sects, sub-sects 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

### **Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism**

The origins of Islamic fundamentalism can be traced to the tendency among the Muslims to scrutinise the early origins and scriptures for clues to return to the golden era. The setting up of an Islamic state and jihad are the two objectives of every fundamentalist movement. However, there can be no uniform definition of Islamic fundamentalism since the Quran does not prescribe any particular system of government.<sup>5</sup> The term has hence come to be applied to a wide variety of disparate religious and political movements.<sup>6</sup> It is also called ‘resurgent Islam’, ‘radical Islam’ and ‘political Islam’. Islamic fundamentalism is commonly used synonymously with ‘communalism’ and ‘religious revivalism’. Fundamentalism is only one of a number of strands of politics and thought in Muslim countries.<sup>7</sup> Islamic fundamentalism is also defined as a religio-political movement, which essentially seeks to return to the original sources and roots of Islam. It advocates adherence to the original beliefs of religion in their literal interpretations as a fundamental and basic principle, thus transcending all social, economic, political and cultural transformations that span a period of 14 centuries.<sup>8</sup> The philosophical roots of Islamic fundamentalism are largely the result of a conscious attempt to revive and restate the theoretical relevance of Islam in the modern world.

The earliest fundamentalist movement in the Indian sub-continent can be traced to the collapse of the Mughal Empire in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The anarchy that followed the loss of Muslim power created widespread feeling among the Muslims that they lost power because they were no longer righteous and that Islam had been polluted by accretions from non-Muslims practices. The real danger, according to the purists, was the ignorance of newly-converted Muslims of the requirements of Islam in their daily life and their non-Islamic practices and beliefs. One of the critics of these impure practices was Shah Waliullah (1703-1762). He criticised the practice of popular Islam in India.<sup>9</sup> He was followed by his son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824), and later by his disciple, Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi (1786-1831).<sup>10</sup> The Faraizi movement led by Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840) and Titu Mir (1782-1831) in Bengal was also a reform movement. These reformers wanted to purify Islam of un-Islamic accretions and return to its basic precepts. Sayyid Ahmed Barelvi aimed at setting up an Islamic state in India. He also aimed at reconquering India and proclaimed jihad against the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh. His army was decimated in the battle at Balakot (1831) but the movement survived. His followers were called the Wahabis.<sup>11</sup> Some of his followers later founded the famous Deoband School in 1867. The Jamiat-al Ulema-i-Hind (formed in 1919) and the Jama'at-i-Islami-i-Hind (formed in 1941), apart from some others, though different in religious and political perspectives, were the leading exponents of the fundamentalist movement in pre-partition India in the twentieth century.

### **Pakistan and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism**

It is necessary to underline here that the idea of Pakistan emerged not from the desire of the Indian Muslims for an Islamic state but was rooted in socio-economic factors. One important factor was the emergence of educated Muslims in provinces where Muslims were in a minority and faced competition from the well-entrenched non-Muslims. Another reason was that the abolition of the use of Persian as the official language had adversely affected the job prospects of educated Muslims. Religion, much less fundamentalist Islamic ideology, played no role in the politics of the Muslim League, founded in 1906, and the Pakistan movement till the second half of the 1940s. Two major fundamentalist parties of India, the Jamiat-al Ulema-i-Hind, along with the Ulema of the Deoband and the Jama'at-i-Islami actively opposed the demand for Pakistan. Maulana Husain Ahmed Madani, head of the Deoband, had stated that nations are made by homelands.<sup>12</sup> The then head of the Jama'at-i-Islami, Maulana Maududi,

had declared that he was opposed to Pakistan because the system of the government would not be based on the sovereignty of God but on the sovereignty of the people.<sup>13</sup> The crux of the opposition of the Ulema lay in their traditional conception of Islam, and also because the leadership of the Pakistan movement was in the hands of the Western educated elite.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the movement for Pakistan was led by political activists rather than by the Ulema.<sup>15</sup> Many Ulema parties, which, in fact, opposed Pakistan, ironically later claimed that it was Islamic ideology that created Pakistan and they, therefore, had the right to decide its future.<sup>16</sup>

The Muslim League leadership in its early years in power in Pakistan faced the gigantic problem of economic reconstruction in the wake of the migration of non-Muslim businessmen and industrialists to India and influx of Muslim refugees from India. Most Muslim League leaders were migrants from India and had no political base in the new country. They were dogged by the problem of legitimacy and failing political fortunes, and it was in this context that the Muslim League leaders began to raise Islamic issues.<sup>17</sup> On taking over power, the Muslim League found that they had done no homework for building the political system of the new country. While the Muslim League leadership had talked of Islam – in very general and vague terms – as being the guiding light for Pakistan, party workers used slogans of Islam and Islamic state to mobilise Muslims for the movement. The Muslim League used the Ulema and an assortment of clerics during the election to the Constituent Assembly in 1946.<sup>18</sup> After independence, the new country had nothing but Islam as the common factor to unite and mobilise the people for carrying out the essential task of nation building. In such a situation, the politicians in Pakistan increasingly used Islam for achieving their political ends. The Ulema parties, which had opposed Pakistan before independence, too were looking for some platform or cause to get back into favour with the common people.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah did not live long after independence to work out any definite outline of the political system for the country. His speech at the inaugural session of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947 clearly spelt out the vision of a secular and democratic system for the country. Addressing the people of Pakistan, he had said: “You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in the state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state...”<sup>19</sup>

His speech shocked the Ulema. After Jinnah died, the political elite of the country was divided and there was no consensus on the political system. References in Jinnah's speech to religion having no role in the business of the state were deleted from its later versions.<sup>20</sup> The Ulema wanted to give an Islamic colour to the new Constitution, which was in the making and they succeeded in getting an objective resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly, which could be interpreted as a resolution for Pakistan to be an Islamic state.<sup>21</sup>

The first opportunity for the Ulema to flex their muscles came in 1951. Punjab Chief Minister Mian Mumtaz Daultana, who belonged to the Muslim League, fomented an anti-Ahmadi<sup>22</sup> agitation mainly for factional reasons. His aim was to bring down the federal government. Widespread violence against the Ahmadi community broke out, which also led to the breakdown of law and order in Punjab. A virulent campaign spearheaded by the various fundamentalist parties was launched, demanding that the Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims and be removed from important positions in the government, including the then Foreign Minister of the country, Zafarullah Khan. The Ulema thus had a cause that could help them seize the ideological initiative, though the Ahmadis were far too few to pose any danger to mainstream Islam.<sup>23</sup> The Punjab government appointed a commission, headed by Justice Munir and Justice Kayani, to inquire into the disturbances. The Munir Commission came to the conclusion after questioning the Ulema of the different schools of Islam that, "Pakistan is being taken by the common man, though it is not, as an Islamic State. This belief has been encouraged by the ceaseless clamour for Islam and Islamic state that is being heard from all quarters since the establishment of Pakistan."<sup>24</sup> The fundamentalist parties did not succeed in getting the Ahmadis declared as non-Muslims but the entire agitation put the Ulema in the centre-stage. For them, the huge problems facing the new state – the rehabilitation of the refugees from India, unemployment and mass poverty were marginal. They carried on a ceaseless campaign for an Islamic state.

The Ulema had a confrontation in the early 1960s with the military ruler General Ayub Khan, who was a liberal and wanted to modernise the country. The first clash took place over the Constitution, which Ayub Khan had introduced and which declared Pakistan a republic and not an Islamic republic. Secondly, the new Constitution stipulated that the laws in Pakistan

would be in accordance with Islam and not in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah. The Ulema threatened agitation and Ayub buckled down. The Constitution was amended within a few weeks of its enforcement. The Ulema had tasted victory but their happiness was short-lived. In 1961 Ayub faced another challenge from the Ulema, when he introduced a progressive Muslim marriage law. The military ruler reacted strongly by having the Ulema leaders arrested, banning the Jama'at-i-Islami and freezing their funds. Ayub realised that much of the increasing militancy of the mullahs had to do with the madrassas. This was the first time the government sensed the danger posed by the madrassas in promoting militancy.<sup>25</sup>

The trend towards Islamisation picked up once Gen. Ayub was forced to give up power. General Yahya Khan, who took over the reins in 1969, focused on the military's role as the guardian of the 'ideological frontiers' of Pakistan. The election he conducted in 1970 also promoted Islamic elements. The Legal Framework Order, under which the elections were held, prescribed a fundamental role to Islamic ideology. The military went out of its way to provide material and financial help not only to the Muslim League during the election but also to the Islamic parties. The military agencies were actively campaigning to sabotage the secular and liberal parties. The government agencies created the spectre of a threat to Islam and Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> The Jama'at-i-Islami organised the infamous terrorist groups, Al Badr and Al Shams, to kill Bengali nationalists during the liberation movement in East Pakistan. The Jama'at had declared that Bengali Muslims were not good Muslims and the Bengali nationalist movement was sponsored by Hindus, communists and atheists, all of whom were acting as agents of India, Western imperialists and Jews that wanted to eliminate the Muslims.<sup>27</sup> It was during the East Pakistan crisis that a nexus between the Pakistan Army and the fundamentalists was created and this has continued ever since. Later, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto gave a major boost to the fundamentalist forces by passing in 1974 a legislation declaring the Ahmadi community as a non-Muslim minority. It is ironical that a very religious Khwaja Nazimuddin in 1952 had refused to surrender before the religious fundamentalist forces while Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, not known for his religiosity, conceded their demand for declaring the community out of the pale of Islam. It was also extraordinary that a National Assembly elected on a secular mandate chose to sit in judgement on a question that was purely religious.

## Pakistan's Islamisation under General Zia-ul Haq

General Zia-ul Haq toppled the elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on July 5, 1977. He had no legitimacy whatsoever and from the first day announced his intention to promote an Islamic agenda. Gen. Zia is also seen responsible for making Pakistan the global centre of political Islam. He assiduously worked to turn the country into an Islamic state, which inspired the ideology of jihad and which threatened to destabilise most of the region and the Muslim world.<sup>28</sup> Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, chief of the Jama'at-i-Islami, had welcomed the Islamisation programme of General Zia-ul Haq soon after the military takeover. The Jama'at leaders were happy that for the first time in the history of Pakistan, a ruler was carrying out a programme close to their heart. However, they were also apprehensive, as the experience of the Jama'at with the earlier military ruler Gen. Ayub Khan had not been pleasant, since he had banned the party and jailed its leaders. In fact, it was Gen. Zia who needed the help of the Jama'at, since it had a well-organised cadre that would have countered any political opposition. Thus, while other political parties were banned and not allowed to function, the Jama'at was allowed to function unhindered. Gen. Zia also mobilised the Ulema, mullahs and *pirs* of various Islamic sects. The Army's role was redefined as the 'defenders of Pakistan's ideological frontiers.'<sup>29</sup> Within a few days of taking over power, General Zia-ul Haq had issued Martial Law Order No. 5, which introduced for the first time the Islamic punishment of amputation of the right hand from the wrist for theft, robbery and dacoity.

The politics of Islamisation in the region has often focused on the regulative, punitive and extractive aspects. Islamisation in Pakistan under Gen. Zia was not only the means to acquire legitimacy but it was held to be the *raison d'être* of martial law.<sup>30</sup> Gen. Zia reconstituted the Council for Islamic Ideology to give representation to the conservative and orthodox Ulema. The Constitution was amended to set up Shariat benches for the four High Courts and the Supreme Court. Four laws were issued for Islamic punishments, which are collectively called the Hudood Laws. Interest-free banking was introduced. A compulsory Zakat law was also introduced. Several other measures like compulsory break during work for prayers and restrictions on music, television and cultural activities were imposed.<sup>31</sup> Highly discriminatory laws and rules were imposed against women. Several restrictions were placed on their movement and travel, and a dress code was prescribed. The *Diyat* ordinance was issued, which set the blood money

compensation for a female victim at half of that for the male. A Presidential order laid down that the testimony of two women would be equal to that of a man.<sup>32</sup> Gen. Zia's Islamisation was just the precursor to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

There was another dimension to Gen. Zia's Islamisation of Pakistan. He encouraged various sectarian groups, particularly the Deobandi School, and promoted the setting up of madrassas by religious parties and such groups.<sup>33</sup> Many of them were meant for refugees from Afghanistan. This was done in order to create a group of religion-oriented students, who would assist the Afghan Mujahideen to drive out the Soviet Army from Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> These madrassas ultimately became factories for producing jihadis to fight in Afghanistan, Jammu & Kashmir and Muslims of other sects in Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> Most heads of the madrassas deny that they had anything to do with jihad, though there is enough evidence to show that during the war against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, training camps were set up in the Pakistani areas bordering Afghanistan. In these camps, apart from training in guerrilla warfare, handling of arms and making bombs, the trainees were given a smattering of religious education mainly to indoctrinate them with the spirit of jihad and to fill them with religious fervour. These madrassas were funded by the CIA and some Muslim countries.<sup>36</sup> It is often suggested that there were only few madrassas imparting extremist training. There is the contrary view that most of the madrassas, which were controlled by the religious political parties, provided the foot soldiers for the extremist groups, which subscribed to the belief that jihad against non-Muslims is mandatory.<sup>37</sup> A Pakistan scholar, Tariq Rahman, on the basis of a survey of different educational institutions in Pakistan, found that 59.86 per cent of the students of the madrassas supported open war for taking Kashmir away from India. The teachers were even more militant than their students. His survey showed that 70.37 per cent of the teachers of madrassas favoured open war for taking away Kashmir from India. According to the author of a book on Osama bin Laden cited by Rahman, "nowhere is bin Laden more popular than in Pakistan's madrassas, religious schools from which Taliban draws many of its recruits." Madrassas, according to Rahman, may be the potential centres of Islamic militancy.<sup>38</sup>

There are different versions of the birth of the Taliban in Afghanistan. They came from the madrassas, which had been set up by the Jamiat-ul Ulema-i-Islam, the Jama'at-i-Islami and other Deobandi groups in Pakistan.

The emergence of the Taliban shows the role played by the madrassas in the NWFP and Baluchistan. Most of these schools were being used as hideouts for terrorists attached to foreign agencies, which were funding the institutions.<sup>39</sup> The Taliban was the product of the war against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan and the intense bloodletting by the various Mujahideen factions after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from that country.<sup>40</sup>

The rise of sectarian conflicts within Pakistan was the direct result of the growth of the jihadi madrassas and sectarian armed groups. Religious terrorism is the principal source of terrorism in Pakistan.<sup>41</sup> Sectarian confrontation between the Sunni and Shia communities has also grown in the country since the Zia regime. Sipaha Sahaba,<sup>42</sup> an extremist Deobandi organisation and its military wing, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, have been carrying on their murderous campaign against the Shias. The religious parties were helped by government agencies in setting up militant groups for fighting in Jammu & Kashmir. Pakistan-sponsored terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Hizb-ul Mujahideen and others, owing their allegiance to the Jamiat-ul Ulema-i-Islam, Jama'at-i-Islami, Ahle Hadith, etc., are even now active in Kashmir. It was Pakistan's fundamentalist parties that exported Deobandi Wahabi ideology to Kashmir and Afghanistan, both of which were earlier largely free from such ideological currents. Successive Pakistani governments from 1994 onwards, when the Taliban almost controlled 90 per cent of Afghanistan, supported the Taliban regime. The world community later boycotted the Taliban regime for its violation of human rights, treatment of women, persecution of minorities like Shias, public executions as Islamic punishments, and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. Once in power, the Taliban also began to re-export its brand of Islam to the troubled northern and western frontier areas of Pakistan.

### **General Musharraf and the MMA**

General Pervez Musharraf, who toppled the elected government of Mian Nawaz Sharif in October 1999, has broadly followed in the footsteps of his military predecessors. For some time, he gave the impression that he would follow a rather liberal policy so far as religious issues were concerned. He gave several indications in his speeches during the first few months after his takeover that he would act decisively against militants and sectarian groups. However, he found that this was easier said than

done. The militants and the religious groups were inseparably connected with Pakistan's Afghanistan and Kashmir policies. Soon after he took over power, Musharraf had promised to amend the anti-minority Blasphemy Law and the anti-women Hudood Ordinance. Expectedly, the religious groups raised uproar, and Musharraf backed down within weeks.<sup>43</sup> Later, he banned some sectarian groups and terrorist organisations but they re-emerged soon thereafter under different names without much interference from the government. He had promised in his speech in January 2002 that he would not allow terrorists to use Pakistani territory for attacks on neighbouring countries. However, there are credible reports that the terrorist infrastructure is intact and training camps continue to function unhindered even four years after his speech.

The Musharraf regime has been persecuting the mainstream political parties of Pakistan and has forced into exile popular leaders of two major parties, i.e., Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party and Mian Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League. The military also manipulated the 2002 elections to ensure that the group of religious parties under the umbrella of the Muttahida Majlise Amal (MMA), which was the mentor of the Taliban and also sponsored the militant groups fighting in Jammu & Kashmir, secured a crucial position in Pakistan's political structure.<sup>44</sup> The MMA was able to form the government in the strategic North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and was a partner in the provincial government in Baluchistan. The MMA supported General Musharraf on the passage of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, which allowed the military ruler to simultaneously retain two offices – that of the President and the Army chief. In return, the military allowed the MMA chief, Maulana Fazalur Rahman to become the leader of the opposition against all rules of parliamentary democracy, as the MMA was not the second largest party in the National Assembly.<sup>45</sup>

The nexus between the mullahs and the military that had taken shape during Zia ul Haq's regime has been carried forward and strengthened during the Musharraf regime. Over the past few decades, Islam has been nationalised in Pakistan. The Pakistani state has been completely identified with religion as interpreted by one particular school of Islam. The Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs and the state-sponsored Council of Islamic Ideology propagate, administer, guide, coordinate and finance all religious activities, including public morals and mores.<sup>46</sup> Their worldview can be judged by the fact that the Ministry of Religious Affairs

justified the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban, saying that there was nothing wrong in destroying them.<sup>47</sup> These institutions are dominated by the Ulema of one particular school and offer patronage to its followers.

### **Afghanistan and the Rise of the Taliban**

Afghanistan was the greatest victim of the rise and growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan originated in the late 1950s. Cross-currents in Islam in India have influenced Afghan Muslim society, along with their tribal traditions. The Deoband School rejected innovation in Islam and maintained strict orthodoxy but accepted Sufism, which became the hallmark of the Ulema of India as well of Afghanistan, as distinct from the Saudi brand of Wahabism.<sup>48</sup>

The Islamic fundamentalist movement in Afghanistan is of recent origin and owed much more to Ikhwanul Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt rather than the Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan.<sup>49</sup> There were surprising similarities between Maulana Abul Ala Maududi's writings and the ideology of the Ikhwan.<sup>50</sup> Maulana Maududi had contributed to the strengthening of relations with Afghan Islamists during the 1970s. The current head of the Jama'at, Qazi Husain Ahmed, who is a Pushtun, was a frequent visitor to Afghanistan. In fact, since the early 1970s, most of the Saudi aid to Afghan refugees and terrorists in Afghanistan has been channelled through the Jama'at-i-Islami and the Muslim World League.<sup>51</sup> Pakistan's Afghan policy after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Afghanistan was to unite the various Mujahideen groups and to enable them to form a united government. This did not succeed because tribal, ethnic, religious and personality conflicts prevented the Mujahideen from uniting. The Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan was deeply involved in running Pakistan's Afghanistan policy till the emergence of the Taliban. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the Hizb-e-Islami, was the favourite of the Jama'at and also of the ISI. The Taliban did not represent any specific Islamic group or ideology. Their interpretation of Islam, jihad, and social transformation did not tally with any other Islamic trend that had emerged during the anti-Soviet war.<sup>52</sup> The Darul Uloom Haqqania in Akora Khatak, led by Maulana Samiul Haq, has claimed that thousands of students of their institution joined the Taliban. The Taliban was recruited from Afghan refugee camps, indoctrinated in Pakistani madrassas, and learnt its fighting skills from

Mujahideen groups based in Pakistan. The families of the Taliban men carried Pakistani identity cards.<sup>53</sup>

The Taliban revived the concept of jihad in the later half of the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Its ideology, like that of all fundamentalist movements, revolved around a central key personality, a leader or a cult figure, the *Ameer al Momeneen*, Mullah Omar. The political system constructed by the Taliban could be called totalitarian, as under it, pluralism did not have a place. It was backed by the creation of the religious police, a Taliban innovation in the modern period. The Taliban issued decrees on women's conduct and cultural issues. These decrees imposed stiff restrictions on the movements of women, their visits to hospitals, total ban on music, kite flying and on men shaving their beard. They also abolished all pictures and portraits.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the essence of Taliban ideology was against democracy, secularism and pluralism, and was anti-women. They represented the worst picture of the ideal Islamic life.

In October 2002, the six-party fundamentalist alliance, the MMA, took office at the provincial government in NWFP. It soon thereafter ordered compulsory prayers for the population and created a Taliban-style religious police called the Department of Vice and Virtue. It also introduced a Hisba law, which was, however, declared void by the country's Supreme Court. Pakistani mullahs have been allies of the Army and see the opportunity to turn Pakistan into a theocratic state.<sup>56</sup> The situation in the NWFP and several districts of Punjab indicates that the Taliban have come back to haunt Pakistan.

### **Regional Fallout**

Bangladesh has been a fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalism for a long time, particularly since the assassination of the founder of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in August 1975. This was followed by the return of pro-Pakistani elements and politicians. The ISI tightened its hold on Bangladesh using its past connections with Islamic fundamentalists, certain sections of the military and the political establishment. The Jama'at-i-Islami was legalised and its leader, Golam Azam's citizenship restored. He was let off by the BNP Government on the serious charge of being a war criminal despite popular demand for his trial.<sup>57</sup> The ideology of the Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan of setting up an Islamic State in Bangladesh is being disseminated through various militant groups and the madrassas. There

was a flurry of building of mosques and madrassas with the generous help of Saudi charities, like Al Haramain Islamic Foundation, and funds from Pakistan's ISI, leading to recruitment of youth for jihad. The Pakistani agency had undertaken the training of anti-India militants in Bangladesh. The head of India's Border Security Force had reported that the terrorist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir were also being trained in Bangladesh. He went on to claim that the ISI is now fully concentrating on Bangladesh.<sup>58</sup> Pakistan's major terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e Muhammad coordinate their activities with Bangladesh's militant groups. The 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines' plane on a flight from Kathmandu to New Delhi indicated that the ISI had set up facilities in Nepal taking advantage of the porous India-Nepal border. Militant groups from Kashmir have also been active in the area. The small Muslim community in Sri Lanka has become an unwitting victim of the ethnic conflict in the country. The Lashkar-e-Toiba has been showing keen interest in taking jihad to the Eastern province of Sri Lanka. Of late, there have been attempts by Pakistani terrorist groups to extend their activities in India, and some recent incidents show they have begun to succeed.

### **Bangladesh's Drift into Extremism**

Bangladesh is another country in the region after Afghanistan over which the threat of Islamic militancy looms large. 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. 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> The disenchantment with Pakistan among the Bengalis began with the imposition of Urdu soon after independence. Bengalis in Pakistan began to suffer from a sense of frustration and

deprivation because of the domination by the Punjabis. The language movement in defence of the Bengali language gave rise to the autonomy movement. The Jama'at-i-Islami had no appeal in the political environment in East Pakistan. In 1947, the Jama'at-i-Islami had only one member in that part of Pakistan. The party was aware of the growth of discontent and alienation among the people of East Pakistan. It also accepted that the imposition of Urdu was resented by the people. The Jama'at leader Maududi in 1956, nonetheless, asserted that Hindus, communists and political adventurers were taking advantage of the problems in the province. What Maududi was saying in other words was that anyone who championed the cause of Bengali nationalism was a communist, a Hindu or a political adventurer.<sup>62</sup> The Jama'at increasingly found itself on the wrong side of history. During the liberation struggle, the Jama'at appealed to the Bengalis to support the Pakistan Army.<sup>63</sup>

The reason for the dilution of secularism after 1975 was not the resurgence of Islam in Bangladesh. As in Pakistan, the military rulers, Gen. Zia-ur Rahman and General H M Ershad, used Islam to strengthen their hold on power as they lacked legitimacy. Bangladesh officially became an Islamic state in 1988 and in the course of time, Islamic extremism became well entrenched.<sup>64</sup> The Jama'at-i-Islami, which had been banned because of its opposition to the liberation movement and support to the Pakistan Army, was legalised and its leader, Prof. Golam Azam, who had been forced into exile and whose citizenship had been cancelled, was given back his rights and political role.<sup>65</sup> The Jama'at won 18 seats in the National Assembly in 1990 and it helped Khaleda Zia to form the government. The Jama'at suffered a setback in the next election in 1996 and could secure only three seats. In the 2001 election, religious rhetoric was a prominent feature. The Jama'at won 18 seats in the National Assembly in alliance with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). During this period, new militant Islamic groups emerged in Bangladesh. The fact that the Jama'at-i-Islami and another group, the Islami Oikya Jot, are part of the Khaleda Zia government complicates the situation and is a major reason for the growth of Islamic militancy. A new outfit, the Jama'at-ul Mujahideen, has come into prominence since 2002. Some of the leaders of the militant groups had their training in Pakistan and one of them called 'Bangla Bhai' had participated in the Mujahideen war in Afghanistan. There are reports that Saudi and Kuwaiti funds are coming to these militant groups.<sup>66</sup> Bangladesh today has become a centre for Islamic militants. The emergence of the

suicide bomber in December 2005 and the bomb blasts that took place in several cities in November 2005 point to the seriousness of the situation.<sup>67</sup> They indicate the growth of a wide network of Islamic militants and their capacity to strike. It is no secret that the Islamic forces are opposed to democratic values. There has been a proliferation of madrassas in the country. The Jama'at-ul Mujahideen of Bangladesh has declared that it is time to implement Islamic laws in the country. According to it, there is no future for man-made laws.<sup>68</sup> The Tableeghi Jama'at, which in a way is the mother organisation of most militant groups, now has a strong following in the country. Its annual sessions in Tongi near Dhaka are attended by huge crowds.<sup>69</sup> There are 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.

### **The Danger in Nepal**

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. The situation was compounded by the massacre of the royal family in 2000. King Birendra was succeeded by King Gyanendra. The democratic government was dismissed last year and now the King rules the country as an absolute monarch. The political parties, which opposed the anti-democratic stance of the King, have launched a movement for the restoration of democracy. The presence of militant Islamists on the India-Nepal border has been causing concern in the contiguous Indian areas. 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. 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.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Sri Lankan Crisis**

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.<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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. 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. The ISI is keenly interested to collect intelligence about developments in Indian nuclear establishments, many

of which are located in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. There has been an increase in the activities of Lashkar-e-Toiba in the Eastern province.<sup>75</sup>

### **Indian Secularism and Islamic Fundamentalism**

The origin of Islamic fundamentalism in the Indian subcontinent has been discussed in the earlier part of this study. There were two main fundamentalist parties in the country, apart from some minor outfits when India became independent. They were 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 active politics after the achievement of freedom and the framing of the Indian Constitution, which provided a secular and democratic political system with equal rights to all religious communities. 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. Maududi had declared after the partition plan had been announced that he would try to build Pakistan as an Islamic state. He believed that India would be a secular state, which he equated with an atheistic or anti-religious state.

After independence, the members of the Jama'at, who were left in India, formed a separate Jama'at in April 1948. The leaders of the Indian Jama'at declared secularism as abhorrent since it was no longer a theory or a principle confined to a few aspects of life, but had become an operative principle in all walks of life.<sup>76</sup> They decided that since the secular system was against Islam, they would not participate in elections, in short they decided to opt out of the Indian political system. The Jama'at's opposition to secularism and election did not endure for long. In the 1960s, the Jama'at accepted secularism and the Indian democratic system though with some reservations. The Jama'at's political position promoted Indian Muslim's alienation by detracting from their stake in secularism, democracy and pluralism. The Jama'at members from Jammu & Kashmir have not been part of the Indian Jama'at and formed a separate party in the state. This was done mainly to avoid the legal consequences of its refusal to accept the state of Jammu & Kashmir as a part of India. The Jama'at-i-Islami and its philosophy, however, could never get the acceptance of most Indian Muslims. That is why the efforts of Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad during the last many years to recruit terrorists in India have mostly not succeeded. However, the December 2005 terrorist attacks in Bangalore prove that radical Islam's presence is no longer located in any

particular country. The Indian security establishment has recently accused Pakistan of breeding a new form of jihadi terror aimed at fanning communal tension in India as indicated by the recent bomb attacks in Varanasi. There is a possibility that some Indians are becoming part of the jihadi movement.<sup>77</sup> The Lashkar and other groups are a part of a global web. India clearly has become a target of jihad in the age of globalisation.<sup>78</sup> 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.

### **Conclusion**

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan is not only responsible for the present situation in Afghanistan and Islamic militancy, terrorism and the shaping of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, 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.<sup>79</sup> 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'.<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup>

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Kalim Bahadur retired as Professor of South Asian studies from the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.