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ORIENTALIST REMARKS ON SOUTH ASIAN *DHIMMIS*

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The partition of the Indian empire along ostensibly religious lines exposed the inadequate fit between Islamic nationalism and territorial statehood soon after the creation of Pakistan but far acutely in its subsequent dismemberment. The consequent formation of Bangladesh did not vitiate this anomaly where as in Pakistan—and apart from Iran—one can still find significant and several non-Muslim communities (or *dhimmis*) of the Islamic oecumene, namely, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Jews, Buddhists, Bahais, Ahmadis, and animists. My overview of the socio-political status and condition of religious minorities in these two successor states of British India is predicated on the confessional constant because it is unfeasible to review here other manifestations of minorityism, a politically loaded variable with multiple attributes, especially in a heterogeneous region of fluid, diverse, and nuanced identities and relations.

Paradoxically, the Muslim populations of both states is almost demographically equivalent to those in a secular albeit compositionally and culturally Hindu India. That the subjective attitudes of a Muslim majority towards its minorities are influenced by the alienation and predicament of their spiritual brethren in India and elsewhere, after the Ayodhya mosque incident and during the ensuing war on terror, cannot be gainsaid. But routine and random petty discrimination was a staple of mediaeval and modern Islamic history. The professional disdain of social scientists in examining 'essentialist' features of non-western peoples—in no small measure due to the trend for theorizing in lieu of acquiring competence in empirical controls such as language, religion, in a word, culture—as irrelevant is grimly conspicuous in the systemic expulsions and massacres whether of

Ottoman Armenians (1915-16), Arab Jewry before and after the making of Israel (1940-60) and East Pakistani Hindus (1971).

The exclusionary nationalism of Pakistan and Bangladesh and their officially ambivalent tolerance towards religious minorities has been odious but endurable. It is, as in other Muslim countries, a moot point in the civil society debate among Islamists on equality, social justice, non-discrimination, and adult franchise. Fratricide and factionalism in recent years, however, has impaired political development to the advantage of religious bigots who have exacerbated social relations through the poisonous politics of difference which, admittedly, does not distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim victims. Its ramifications, nevertheless, for non-Muslims whose second class status is scripturally sanctioned and upheld makes their present and future precarious given the absence of redress through socio-cultural rethinking, civil rights, genuinely representative participation or legislative reform.



MILITARY, DEMOCRACY AND ISLAMIZATION IN PAKISTAN

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In Pakistan, two phenomena solicit rigorous academic scrutiny for its potential to have far-reaching implications not only for Pakistan, but for the entire Southern Asia region as well. First, military's growing hold on the political power through might and machinations, and second, Islamization of Pakistan. The interesting aspect in it is the strong nexus between the two and it has thrived for decades until recently when some cracks have begun to emerge in the relations. A lot has been written on the military-mullah relationship in Pakistan but with so many developments unfolding everyday in Pakistan, there is always something new to look into and analyse. For instance, the *Hisba* Bill passed by the NWFP Assembly and overturned by the Supreme Court; and the unexpected setback for the MMA (Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal) in the 2005 local elections, particularly in their bastion in NWFP are some developments which suggest a new trajectory in fortunes of Military-Mullah hobnobbing.

In the wake of the reversals in the local elections, serious doubts are now being cast over the future of the six party religious conglomeration. Already plagued by internal turmoil, can the MMA afford to lose the support of the establishment? Has the establishment begun to consider MMA more as a hindrance in its policies due to the latter's Islamization drive, and hint at

some kind of a tilt towards the mainstream parties? As the Nazims (district council head) play a key role in the general elections, would the local elections results go against the political fortunes of the MMA in 2007 elections? Would the military marginalize the MMA like it marginalized the PPPP and the PML (N) in 2002 elections? Or would the military still prefer the MMA eventually over the PPPP and the PML (N) and continue ignoring the Islamization drive at the cost of democracy and 'enlightened moderation'? How deep is the influence of the fundamentalist parties and elements in the Pakistani establishment, especially in the military and the ISI? Can Musharraf's efforts at containing the tide of Islamization be taken as genuine or as mere eyewash? What message can be derived from the attacks on General Musharraf, former Corps Commander Karachi Ahsan Saleh Hyat and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz? Has the tiger begun to show its teeth to its mentor and thereby heralding a new era in the mullah-military relationship?

General Musharraf continues to display a firm posture against the *jihadis* in Pakistan but with limited success. His policies confront a fundamental dilemma as far as the madrassa reforms are concerned. Madrassas play a key role in the society by providing education to the poorer sections of Pakistan. Plus, in times of crisis they also provide the military with a supplementary fighting force and on a sustained basis also keep supplying 'lashkars' for jihad in Jammu and Kashmir. Musharraf's tactics of 'catching release' towards the leaders of the proscribed groups have repeatedly drawn flak from the international quarters. Then what are the options before him and how much domestic space does he have to manoeuvre his policies? Would it be rather prudent for him to try changing the military's thinking towards democracy and democratic parties or should he continue to align with the ulema for mutual gains as before and keep the military's interests supreme? What are the gains for General Musharraf in institutionalizing himself with the help of the PPPP and PML (N) in 2007 elections? Or is the military genetically more inclined towards the ulema than the democratic forces or is it only a tactical relationship and therefore prone to occasional changes?

To envision the political setup after the 2007 elections is a very complicated task, as in politics unforeseen events can overnight change the entire scenario. Apart from the domestic situation, the state of affairs in Afghanistan would also have a significant bearing on the elections in Pakistan. If Afghanistan stabilizes politically and the US forces bail out of the country, then there are strong reasons to believe that the US may pressurize General Musharraf to hold free and fair polls which may then change the political equation significantly.

Nevertheless there is a strong possibility to see the continuation of the current political set up with the establishment applying all resources and tricks to ensure a majority for the PML-Q with little pluses and minuses in the overall tally. This is certainty that General Musharraf would hold the elections as

General President notwithstanding the Commonwealth reminder. If he chooses to stick to 'one man two posts' principle than more than any other institution he may be antagonizing his own colleagues who are eager to step into his shoes. Post-elections, once he sheds his uniform, he would seek to get himself elected as a civilian president with the PML-Q's, allies' and military's support. He would hand pick the prime minister by all means in Shaukat Aziz and ensure that his party gets as many provinces under its wing with the support of its allies as possible. In this the nazims whom he has placed recently in districts play an important role. The mainstream parties would fair their chances provided they jump in the fray united. The MMA may witnesses a reversal in its fortune but still would maintain a sizable clout to dominate the political scene.

Once General Musharraf wears civilian clothes then it will be interesting to watch the posture of the new army chief who like his predecessors would be as powerful and ambitious. End result-- a government with Pervez Musharraf as the President, Shaukat Aziz as the prime minister heading a regime supported by the military under a new COAS. Still, there is a likelihood of the new army chief staging a coup at the slightest given pretext and Musharraf would have no moral face to condemn it. Such a scenario very much hinges on the needs and priorities of the US in the region at that point in time. Also, since General Musharraf has earned the ire of the jihadis in certain quarters for his crackdowns, as a civilian president he would be having a relatively slack security cover and thus prone to any eventuality. If at all any attempt on his life succeeds then it would provoke yet another swift coup from the new COAS on the pretext of national security. In sum, how would the new COAS act and interpret the unfolding events in the new political setup hold the key to Pakistan's democratic and Islamic destiny in the following years.



**THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION:
REVOLUTIONARY IDEALS AND POLITICAL PRACTICE IN
BANGLADESH**

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This paper starts from the postulate that until now, the problem in Bangladesh is that the different governments as well as analysts have desperately tried to protect the image of this country as a "moderate Muslim democracy". In their approaches of Islamism, Bangladeshi historians and political scientists have indirectly contributed to consolidate this idea, by emphasising 4 arguments, of which I draw a synthesis:

1) The main responsibility in the development of Islamic political parties in Bangladesh lies in the military, which has been using Islam as a political tool to legitimize its rule. I will show that this view is wrong, in the sense that the type of Islam used by military rulers, whether Zia or Ershad, was a popular one, i.e. the charismatic power of the Sufi saints or their descents. The revolutionary Islamist parties like Jamaat-e Islami have in fact developed by struggling against the military rule (adopting here a very different stance than their counterparts in Pakistan under Zia-ul Haque's regime), and all the military rulers' efforts have in fact been directed to weaken or divide those Islamist parties. I will show that the real period of ascendancy of the Islamist parties corresponds to the process of democratisation started in the 1990s and it is in fact thanks to "democracy", as it has been implemented and experienced in Bangladesh, that the Islamist parties have flourished.

2) The different Islamic movements in the country have usually been considered to belong to the same mould, whether it is termed "communal" or "fundamentalist" or "extremist". This one-size view has in fact prevented the public and the foreign governments from clearly identifying the different forms of Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh and their specific characteristics. An inventory of these different movements has still to be made.

3) Radical Islam has always been used to fuel the blame game between the two major political parties, Awami League and BNP. Both of them have been accusing each other to support or manipulate radical Islamic movements in order to destabilise the party in power. While doing it, they have been unable to really consider radical Islam as a potential "third actor" in the political arena of Bangladesh until now.

4) Finally, I will show that to protect the image of Bangladesh as a "moderate Muslim country", radical Islam has always been represented as an "imported product". In the conspiracy theory of BNP or Jamaat, militant Islam was a phenomenon guided by a "foreign hand", whether the "hand" belongs to India or even to the United States. According to the AL and its allies' views, the same phenomenon was labelled as "Taleban". While attempting to protect the international image of Bangladesh vis-à-vis its Western allies, the successive governments have failed to identify what, in this phenomenon, was specifically national, and how militant Islamist movements could manage to mobilise recruits within this so-called "moderate majority".

In order to clarify the present situation, I will proceed in 2 parts. First, I shall make an inventory of the different forms of the Islamic resurgence which are considered as legal and act as constitutional actors in the present political arena. I have defined three distinct trends: the Jamaat-e Islami, which has specific ideology, organisation and strategy; the orthodox Ulemas mainly driven by the Deobandi school of thought; and the different Sufi

organisations. I shall demonstrate here that the realignments of those different trends in the recent years have actually lead to a bipolarisation between “shariatic” and “traditional” Islam, which now corresponds with the usual bipolarisation of the political system between BNP and the AL. While entering the political game as such, they have only contributed to reinforce the two main contenders to power and in fact none of them has been clearly able to define itself as an alternative.

This process has left the space of protest opened for other Islamic movements, which are not part of the usual game of power politics and represent today the phenomenon of religious revivalism in Bangladesh. As such, they oppose the democratic system and its institutions as a whole and present Islam as an ideological alternative. I will divide this second part into three subtitles. First, by showing that militant Islam is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, that it has already developed in the 1990s through the movement of fatwas for instance, and that in fact militant Islam, as represented for example, by Jamaatul Mujahideen, comes from the convergence between the Salafi movement, backed by the Ahl-e-Hadith network of madrasas on the one hand, and the Jihadist groups which have come in touch with the armed struggle in the name of Islam through their experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s. Secondly, I will specifically look into the organisation, ideology and strategies of this Salafi-Jihadist trend while studying the two cases of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh. Finally, I will consider the responsibility of the different governments in the development of radical Islam, the reaction of the present government to face this phenomenon and its flaws, and eventually the possibility of links between the Salafi-Jihadist groups and the legal political parties.

To conclude, while considering this emergence of a strong militant Islam, I shall try to identify the different issues that will arise now that Bangladesh is entering the electoral year.

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WHO ASKS THE ‘WOMAN QUESTION’? WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT IN PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH

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The political process in South Asia has been influenced by movements and parties of the religious right for centuries. However it is in the aftermath of

September 11 and the worldwide war against terrorism that such movements, and especially Islamic fundamentalist movements, have become a much greater political threat and cultural mystery than ever before. The discussion about the confrontation between traditional norms and values and modernity focuses on religious, ethnic, political, social and economic factors and analyses the situation from all possible angles. There is especially serious concern over the lack of social and political freedoms available to women living under conditions of fundamentalisms and about the implications of this not just for women, but for the capacity of the religion Islam to respond to changing realities. Feminist research has tried to find an answer to this “woman question” by analysing the impact of fundamentalisms on women in general, as well as on women’s resistance and oppositional movements to fundamentalist activities¹. It is however surprising that so far relatively little is known about women’s involvement in the politics of fundamentalist right wing parties.

This paper attempts to show that because of their potential ability to appropriate gender rhetoric as well as the role of women within their political agenda, such parties of the religious right in South Asia pose a big challenge for feminist theorising and practise. Perceiving women’s empowerment as independence from patriarchal structures, feminism indeed has difficulties to find effective ways of appealing to women in a culturally acceptable way.

After outlining a framework for Islamic fundamentalist revivalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the author describes the role of women in the Jamaat-i-Islami, a movement-cum-party of the religious right active in both countries. The paper illustrates how the movement is packaging Islamic values in such a way as to attract women supporters. Through its tactics it is claiming to appropriate “feminist” spaces within the political arena of both countries²: it is fronting women candidates for election, building up female membership and mobilising women for political participation. A closer analysis, however, shows that although taking considerable efforts *to bring women in*, women’s political engagement is mainly used as a bargaining chip for the opportunistic and political self-interests of the movement. Women’s interests are promoted according to the way the Jamaat-i-Islami defines them. The author concludes by analysing why, despite the fact that there is little that is ‘feminist’ about this process, women in Pakistan and Bangladesh do support the Jamaat-i-Islami and why despite of this, such kind of political engagement claims to promote women’s interests.



¹ Especially broad research can be found analysing the pre- and post revolution context in Iran and on fundamentalist politics and women in Egypt.

² The Jamaat-i-Islami itself, however, never claims to be ‘feminist’.

UNDERSTANDING MADRASSAHS

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<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060101facomment85102/alexander-evans/understanding-madrasahs.html>.