

IBN KHALDUN'S CONCEPT OF ASABIYAH AND ITS CURRENT MANIFESTATION

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Abstract

The nature and dimension of ideological conflicts in the world has dramatically changed with the inception of the 21st century. In Pakistan, the war on terror against Al-Qaida and Taliban in Afghanistan has fueled the existing theological differences among the various religious groups and paved the way for intra sectarian violence and militancy in Pakistan. To counter violence and militant attitudes, the state at first patronized the mystical version of Islam for social cohesion. Secondly the state used force against the united militant front in the shape of Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to maintain political order. As a result, a series of attacks on shrines started across Pakistan. This research tries to find out that on what basis the militant outfits across Pakistan managed to transform themselves into a single organization that is Tehreek Taliban Pakistan and what are the political motivations and religious zealotry which provoked them to attack and destroy the important shrines in Pakistan? In answering the critical question, the present study uses the key concept of Ibn Khaldun that is asabiyah, as expressed in his book *Muqaddimah* and links the concept of asabiyah with intra sectarian conflict in the shape of attacks on shrines in Pakistan. The absence of conceptual historical framework left a wide gap to analyze and theorize not only the past trends but also the emerging trends of present ideological collisions within Islam. These trends have drastic implications on politics as well as social fabrics of the country. Therefore, the present study evaluates and examines the problem on the basis of Ibn Khaldun's concept of asabiyah and its relation with political power.

Keywords: *Asabiyah, War on Terror, Shrines, Lal Masjid, TTP, Al-Qaida*

1. Introduction: Conceptual Overview

Ibn Khaldun's model of a political organization significantly revolves around the notion of *asabiyah*. In Ibn Khaldun's assessment,

asabiyah remained the single dominant factor in shaping and reshaping of human societies. In fact, asabiyah is a key concept in Ibn Khaldun's philosophy in describing the cyclical patterns of history related to the rise and fall of human societies whether dynasties or civilizations. On the basis of this concept, Ibn Khaldun made an effort to correlate asabiyah and political control. In *Muqaddimah*, he stated that in the absence of asabiyah, religious propaganda could not be materialized because every political task required asabiyah¹. Convincingly, religion reinforces asabiyah which is essential to sustain political authority therefore asabiyah is a driving force behind a strong political order.

As stronger asabiyah on the basis of religion encourages mutual co-operation, the state flourishes and expands leading to strong political organization because there is a greater sense of common cause and people would eagerly die for that cause². On the other hand, Ibn Khaldun also elaborates that the religious community within a society often tries to revolt against the state or ruler against evil practices in a hope to get reward from God. In doing so it often lacks or has weak group feelings as compared to the foundations of a state which is strongly entrenched and ingrained³. Indeed, the state or the ruler requires a strong group feeling or asabiyah for a solid base to propagate the religious ideologies for the sake of a strong political order and social control.

Ibn Khaldun uses the term asabiyah to explain the political transformation of a society and its institutions. In fact, asabiyah is a diverse and comprehensive term to understand the political phenomenon in a civilization or a society. The interdependence of religion and asabiyah is meant to be the politicization of religion in Ibn Khaldun's philosophy. According to Ibn Khaldun: religious propaganda adds further power besides asabiyah for political stability. Convincingly, asabiyah is indispensable for the creation of a strong political group and religious propagation is necessary for social and political control.

A society with differences in ideologies, desires and conflicting opinions increase the chances of revolt against the established political rule even in the presence of asabiyah. According to Ibn Khaldun, it is difficult for the state to establish itself firmly in a proper manner because each group thinks of a stronger asabiyah for itself⁴. Ibn Khaldun further argues that it is the demand of rational politics to crush such rebellions by using force which is a common practice in every ruler whether he is a Muslim or non-Muslim⁵. In this way, a stronger

asabiyah would overcome weaker asabiyah which leads towards a stable political leadership for a social organization. This concept, was applied by Ibn Khaldun, to study his contemporary dynasties. The relevance and applicability of asabiyah is also as important to study the dynamics of recent times. Indeed, the concept of asabiyah is dynamic, dialectic, broad and comprehensive. This concept is helpful in understanding the different changes at different levels in different political structures and Pakistan is no exception.

2. State and Religion in Pakistan

After the creation of state, Pakistan faced multiple challenges especially in defining the state's religious ideology and to create a strong social organization. Different experiments were carried out to meet the desires and demands of religious groups but due to certain political interests, the state had failed to reach a consensus on single ideology. In fact, various sectarian groups became active and the politics of agitation since 1947 pressurized the political leadership to bow before the demands of these groups. The inclusion of Islamic clauses in Pakistan's three constitutions were the direct result of relentless pressures from the religious leadership. Notwithstanding, the initial years of Pakistan, it had been the failure of the state to reach out to a single agenda regarding the official religion of modern Islamic state⁶. The cosmetic measures in the name of Islamization, the slogans of Islamic constitution and Islamic country were used as potential weapons to exploit the masses emotionally and religiously and, intensified the sectarian rifts among different religious groups.

It was General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime and military establishment that vigorously chanted the slogan of Islam to gain support from the religious groups and the masses to legitimize the authority of the military rule because Zia came into power due to the agitational politics of these religious groups⁷. Therefore, the military regime needed religion for legitimacy and the religious leadership needed state patronage. Indeed, it was the beginning of an unshakable alliance between the military regime and the religious groups which remained intact afterwards. Further, Zia regime was inclined towards a specific Deobandi ideology and appointed persons of that ideology to his consultative assembly and promulgated his agenda of Islamization in the shape of Islamic penal and procedural laws, formation of zakat committees which were entitled to collect funds through village imams and khatibs⁸. The international scenario and domestic political situation paved the way for the state to get support from the masses by exploiting

their religious sentiments through a planned propaganda for a strong political order and effective social control. This support also came from an extensive network of Madrasah.

3. Madrasah Network in Pakistan

The Jihad culture or Jihadi ideology in Pakistan was fostered by madrasah network which were affiliated with Deobandi school of thought. The state and international donor agencies in United States and Saudi Arabia poured heaps of funds to such madrasahs to encourage Jihad culture in Pakistan and Afghanistan⁹. It is a matter of fact that through this madrasah network the Pakistani state remained successful in formulating a specific state ideology and in preparing a specific creed which could implement the future agenda of state. It is worth mentioning here that the establishment of Lal Masjid and the madrasah complex in Islamabad was a part of larger efforts of the state to propagate Deobandi ideology¹⁰. Although this madrasah network not only executed the agenda of political establishment in Pakistan but also safeguarded the vested interests of foreign donors. In addition to this, these madrasahs remained instrumental and back bone in the recruitment of Jihadi volunteers and preparing them for the cause of Afghan Jihad¹¹. Pakistan, thus, entered into the twenty 21st century with a baggage of a large network of madrasahs.

4. Al-Qaida and Rise of Militancy in 21st Century

The advent of 21st century witnessed revolutionary changes not only in ideological terms but also in the political transformation of state. The military regime led by Pervez Musharraf, the 9/11 incident and the US invasion of Afghanistan at once altered the religious and political landscape of the country. The Jihad ideology and the creation of Jihadi groups which were fostered and nurtured by the state now turned against the state. As a result, the state banned different religious groups and such groups looked for another master for the nourishment and propagation of their ideology. In the meantime, such groups aligned themselves with Al-Qaida and its ideology¹². Most of them belonged to Deobandi school of thought. These were either involved in sectarian activities or in propagation of Jihad ideology and they fully endorsed the ideology of Al-Qaida¹³. On the same time, Al-Qaida welcomed every group that was willing to accept its militancy. It is a fact that after the US invasion in Afghanistan, Al-Qaida had to search for its allies in tribal areas of Pakistan for its reorganization in the region.

The Jihadi groups operating in Pakistan were without any central command. After their alliance with Al-Qaida, they carried out their militant operation under the umbrella of Al-Qaida. In fact, these groups operated as different subsidiaries of Al-Qaida in Pakistan. This was a worrying situation for the state because anyone who opposed the ideology of militants, whether the state or any other competitive religious sect, either Shia or Barelvi; it would be attacked by the militants. The situation was getting worse and worse day by day. For instance, a militant group attacked a procession of celebrations of Prophet (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Descendants and Companions be Peace¹⁴. In fact, the mystic and Barelvi Islam, as compared to Deobandi and Jihadi groups, lacked coherence and organization within their ranks¹⁵. So, it was easy for the militants to attack such soft targets.

5. Conflicting Ideologies and State Response

After the start of ‘war on terror’, the Musharraf regime tried to introduce certain reforms in the madrasah network in Pakistan. Importantly the European states and the United States for their vested interests persuaded the political establishment in Pakistan to reform the curriculum of the Jihadi madrasah to lessen the influence of Jihadi literature¹⁶. Conceivably, it was also favourable for the political establishment in Pakistan to eradicate the Jihad oriented militants. Despite the fact that the government anxiously tried to implement its madrasah reform agenda, there was diverse reaction from the madrasah administration: some madrasahs welcomed the decision of government by showing eagerness while majority of Deobandi oriented madrasah rejected the reform agenda of government by calling it a conspiracy and western agenda¹⁷.

6. Role of Lal Masjid in Propagation of Jihad Ideology

As mentioned earlier, Lal Masjid played an important role in propagating Jihad and mobilizing the Jihadis during the Afghan Jihad in Zia regime and in subsequent years Lal Masjid remained the hub of Jihad literature and produced many Jihadi minds. In other words, Lal Masjid acted as a nursery for Jihadi groups and was engaged in maintaining a balance between the state and Jihadi groups. According to the report of *Al-Jazeera*: “As of April 2007, there were known to be approximately 7,000 pupils studying at both these madrasahs, belonging mainly to the North West Frontier Province (now KPK) and the Afghan-bordering tribal areas”¹⁸ and the official statistics claimed

that “two third of the enrolled students of madrasah were from KPK and tribal areas”¹⁹. From the above-mentioned figures, it is clear that all the banned and militant groups were operating in the tribal areas and majority of the students in Lal masjid belonged to that region.

Besides this, the political administration and government officials were fully aware of the alleged links and ties of Lal Masjid with the Jihadi organizations in alliance with the Al-Qaida. As it was quoted officially:

We have confirmed information that there are a number of wanted men inside the precincts of Lal masjid and associated madrassa of Jamia Hafsa and whatever Abdul Aziz is doing he is taking advice from these people who are wanted in a number of terrorism related activities in the country ²⁰.

On the other hand, the ‘war on terror’ and anti-Jihad policies of Musharraf government provided a space to the administration of Lal Masjid to criticize the government policies. In fact, during the ‘war on terror’, Lal Masjid played an active role in the agitations against the Musharraf regime and its alliance with the West and chanted slogans in favour of militants²¹.

Moreover, Lal Masjid remained in the highlights due to controversial statements against the state and in favour of militants. Indeed, the overwhelming association of Lal masjid with militant groups and their armed resistance against the state that provoked the administration of masjid to issue a fatwa duly stamped by the clerics of Lal Masjid in which they were ‘calling the Muslim community to deny the Muslim ritual of burial to the Pakistani soldiers as they considered them infidel because they have committed the sin of killing innocent people’²². Further, the Lal Masjid reaffirmed its links and support for the cause of militants in these words:

“We consider suicide attacks are right in Pakistan under a few circumstances while we consider them as absolutely justified in the context of Afghanistan and Iraq. We favoured the Taliban not only in the past, we favour them even today”²³.

7. Lal Masjid Operation and Formation of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The support of Lal Masjid to the militant groups was endorsed by the militants operating in the tribal region because it was a blessing for these groups as the propagation of their ideology in capital gave them needed strength. Therefore, they showed and assured their support by threatening the political administration in these words: “if the government tried to attack Lal Masjid, they would take revenge”²⁴. The nexus between Lal Masjid and militant groups shared a strong group feeling on the basis of single religious ideology. At last, the state and political administration took a bold step to attack the Lal Masjid in 2007 and it was a turning point in the shift of the state policy towards religious matters and policy. Though the state took a deceive step in curbing the militant attitudes and Jihadi groups but the backlash from the militants was eminent. A call was intercepted in which a militant leader endorsed the services of cleric, Abdul Rashid, of Lal Masjid who was killed in operation in these words “if he is killed, his blood will not be wasted”²⁵.

After the Lal Masjid operation, the banned Jihadi militant organizations started to reorganize themselves in the wake of state operation under the banner of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The suicide bombing which was unknown in this region especially in Pakistan was started after the Lal Masjid operation²⁶. Besides the militant activities of TTP, the Lal Masjid cleric, Abdul Aziz, incited the firebrand agenda of Jihad and legalized the acts of violence in the realm of Shariah. Evidently, the Lal Masjid cleric legitimized the need of Jihad against the Pakistani military as well as Pakistani state and stated in these words “those who were killed were dear to Allah that’s why, they have embraced martyrdom which has boosted our morale and every mosque in the country is Lal Masjid”²⁷. Hence, the old alliance between the Jihadi organizations and state came to an end with the formation of TTP.

The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was comprised of thirteen militant groups including the sectarian outfits like SSP and LEJ, united under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud to form TTP in December 2007 and the objectives behind the establishment of TTP were to resist the actions of state, to enforce the shari‘ah and to wage war to counter the infidels²⁸. The TTP started its operation in the shape of suicide attacks by attacking on the training camp in Malakand in late 2006 but the formation of TTP was officially announced in 2007 after the Lal masjid operation²⁹. After this, TTP in an organized manner

attacked different targets which they considered a threat for them. Firstly, TTP attacked the military forces which they considered their foremost enemy. Secondly, they targeted each and everything which government launched as a tool to counter their influence. Thirdly, TTP launched a fear campaign among the masses by attacking the public places such as they targeted the shrines where large numbers of people gather to pay homage to the Sufi saints.

8. Al-Qaida and Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan

After the Lal Masjid operation, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, the leaders of Al Qaida severely criticized the military operation on Lal Masjid and aired various statements in condemnation of government action and urged the people to rebel against the state³⁰. In the meantime, the Al-Qaida operatives in Pakistan who fled from Afghanistan after the US invasion played a vital role in providing the technical support to newly established organization TTP³¹. TTP adhered to the religious ideology and political agenda of Al-Qaida and it remained, more or less, a franchise of Al-Qaida in this region. Besides TTP, Al-Qaida launched a violent and deadly campaign against the Pakistani state and its army as, according to Ayman al-Zawahiri “the parliament and the constitution of Pakistan are un-Islamic and negated the foundation of Pakistan as an Islamic state” and this argument of Al-Qaida leadership is widely and wholeheartedly accepted by the TTP and other anti-Pakistan militant groups and organizations³².

In fact, this proximity of Al-Qaida has strengthened the abilities of TTP and has multiplied its force and power to the maximum level. Further, Al-Qaida expands the capability of TTP not only by plugging them into the global Jihadist network, logistical expertise and propaganda tools but also acted as an advisor and negotiator among different groups within TTP³³. In this way, Al-Qaida has remained efficacious in spreading its ideology through their role of negotiator and successfully separated the major groups and merged them into the TTP³⁴. Strikingly, the ideology of TTP compelled the subsidiary militant groups to wage war against fellow Muslims who did not believe in their ideology and help their enemies either they were the Pakistani state or the US which has the overwhelming influence over the policies regarding the war in Afghanistan. Thus, under the proper guidance of Al-Qaida leadership, TTP is able to think globally and further adopt the global agenda of Jihad.

9. Propagation and Patronage of Mystical Version of Islam

To counter the growing insurgency and violence by the militant groups and, to re-enforce the political authority, the state propagated mystical version of religion as it did it in Zia regime by propagating the Jihad and Deobandi ideology. Previously Jihad remained a tool in the hands of state for the social control and political order but now it has been continuously weakening the social organization, political order and social control. Resultantly, an effective counter insurgency measure and policy by the state has to choose a more tolerant ideology to confront the endemic influence of militants and their ideology in the society³⁵ and to present a lenient and flexible version of Islam in front of already radicalized society.

Further, the glorification of Sufi ideals abroad and its propagation as replacement and alternative of the radical ideology gave an easy way to the Pakistani authorities to take it on the serious notes³⁶. Moreover, the state tried to propagate the Sufi teachings by mobilization and strengthening these teachings through political means. But the ill-equipped Sufi institutions neither have the ability to counter the deep-rooted orthodox ideology of their counter parts nor do they have the modern propaganda tools for the communication and propagation of their teachings which are successfully utilized by their opponents.

As the government of Pakistan People Party (PPP) started to patronize the Sufi version, it threatened the hegemonic political positions of Deobandis. In fact, the Musharraf government established a Sufi council to spread the mystical trends against the growing radical and extremist element. The creation of the council was praised and recognized internationally but, at the same time, it had to face severe criticism from the Deobandi groups in Pakistan³⁷. In addition, the PPP government tried to undermine and to neutralize the influence of militancy by condemning the terrorism and suicide attacks through the official *fatwas* by their counterparts. As a reprisal, Sufi oriented Baralvi leaders were killed. Mufti Sarfaraz Naeemi, for instance, was attacked and murdered in 2009 and it was officially owned by TTP leadership³⁸.

10. Shrines Renovations and International Funding

During a visit to Washington the Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, who was also custodian of a Sufi shrine in Multan, admired the struggle and endeavor of the US authorities for the financial support in the propagation of mystical version of Islam in

Pakistan³⁹. After Pakistan's dive into the 'War on Terror' and the momentous increase of terrorist and suicide attacks by militant organizations, the interest of the state to reinvigorate the Sufi shrine and shrine culture, was a clear sign of revival of the popular version of Islam. The Musharraf and Gilani Governments invested heavily in the renovation of shrines in an effort to upgrade the diminishing cultural symbols. As the political forces in Pakistan vigorously opposed TTP and its ideology, the shrine culture had experienced the mutation of its pluralistic and traditional environment in Pakistan. The most active part played in this regard was the provincial government of Sindh, whose initiative of renovation of Abdullah Shah Ghazi shrine was first step in this regard and the announcement of International Sufi University in Bhit Shah was also a bold step of government in this regard⁴⁰.

As Yousaf Raza Gilani sought help from the international community especially from the US, the US administration fully endorsed the plea of Pakistani government to release funds for the renovation of Sufi shrines. The US government through US Ambassador Fund released millions of dollars to restore the cultural heritage in Pakistan⁴¹. At that time, *Sufism became Washington's agenda because they thought that Sufism would take people away from violent struggles, that it would liberalize them and modernize them*⁴². Moreover, the U.S. embassy and consulates participated in several interfaith events that were reported widely in the media, including visits to numerous shrines and participation in interfaith conferences hosted by the government⁴³. Resultantly, the Sufi shrines have become the targets of militant organizations and the Sufi shrines became soft and easy targets for the militants to pressurize the government as well as to create fear and terror among the masses.

11. The Politics behind the Attacks on Shrines

The propagation of mystic version from the state against the growing extremism and terrorism in the country is vulnerable and susceptible for the radical sections either they are political figures or war lords. As the hardliner sections enjoyed overwhelming powers among the masses and gained enormous official favours in the last two decades of twentieth century, the mystic insertion in political arena is unbearable for them. Many official meetings were held between the Sufi leadership and government officials to encourage their followers to lead the movement against the radical groups so that the panic in the society lessened⁴⁴. Thus, the mass mobilization against the TTP is a clear message to the radical sections that the state is trying to mobilize

the more tolerant and peaceful version of Islam. As a result, they targeted the Sufi shrines to create hype among masses and sabotage the coherence among groups.

12. Conclusion: Relevance of Ibn Khaldun's Theory to the Politics of Shrine Attacks

The theoretical and conceptual framework of Ibn Khaldun is quite relevant in connection with the above-mentioned description and theme. The description in this research clearly indicates the exploitation and politicization of religion for the purpose of cohesion and for social control. The political leadership in Pakistan was incapable in formulating any single religious ideology and there was no serious attempt in this aspect regardless of the Islamic provisions in the constitutions. From time to time, the state propagated Jihadi ideology and incited the religious sentiments. The Islamist and Jihadi groups remained the tool of the state. They served the agenda of state that is to social control and political order. In this way group feelings or *asabiyah* was created among the Jihadi groups through madrasah network and state patronage.

The advent of 21st century has witnessed some dramatic and revolutionary changes internationally which had drastically affected the political landscape and tarnished the social structure of the state. The biggest and troubling task to regain the lessening of social control because the militants and Jihadi groups started armed resistance against the state and they had a group feeling on the basis of religion and more interestingly they thought that they are strong enough to defeat the state. Lastly, state's operation on Lal Masjid was considered as a threat to their solidarity. As a result, an open resistance was started against the state.

At this juncture, the state required another ideology to counter the Jihad ideology. For the stability of political order and to create social cohesion in the society-state relationship, state once again propagated religion to overcome this challenge. This time it was the mystic version of religion which was considered to be flexible and liberal as compared to the militant version. The state sponsored the activities and mobilized this school of thought. It is a matter of the fact that the state tried to empower this group to that extent which would be beneficial for the state and the society. The militants perceived this policy as a threat to their power and influence. So, they attacked the shrines to create fears among the masses on the one hand and to give a

message to the state that the policy would be disastrous for the state and its people on the other.

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