# India's Islamist Groups

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CONTEMPORARY INDIA IS A HINDU-MAJORITY COUNTRY, governed under a secular democratic constitution since 1947, when it achieved independence from British rule. At first glance India's pluralism appears to protect it from falling under the spell of extremist ideologies, including Islamism. Muslim influence—cultural, political, economic, religious and linguistic—has been an integral part of the Indian ethos since the seventh century, and for the most part this influence has been benign. But India has been home to some significant thinkers of political Islam, and militant Islamist groups continue to operate in, and even target, India today.

Islam was first introduced to India's coastal regions by Arab Muslim traders soon after its advent. In 711, a young general commanding an Arab army captured the kingdom of Sindh and established Muslim political power on the Indian subcontinent. Parts of India, now in Pakistan, were ruled by governors or tributaries of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties that ruled from Damascus and Baghdad respectively.

Muslim traders, mystics, preachers and invaders have shaped and influenced India for thirteen centuries. Muslim sultanates ruling from Delhi, beginning in the eleventh century, and the great Mughal Empire (1526-1857) that followed created a substantive Islamic legacy before India fell under British colonial rule. Decolonization resulted in the partition of India along religious lines, but the birth of Pakistan in 1947 did not sever India's linkages with Islam. At least one-third of pre-partition India's Muslims stayed in India. Today almost 12 percent of modern India's population is Muslim, and with an estimated Muslim population of 170 million, India has one of the largest concentrations of Islamic believers.

Islam in India has historically been represented by both its esoteric form of Sufism as well as its various exoteric, traditional forms. Even after ruling large parts of India for eight centuries, Muslims overall remained a minority on the subcontinent. The ruling Muslim minority was generally tolerant

toward the majority. This coexistence resulted in an Indo-Muslim syncretism exemplified in art, architecture, and culture throughout the subcontinent. However, the decline in Muslim political power in India from the late eighteenth century onward changed Muslim attitudes significantly. After the demise of the Mughal Empire, Islamic fundamentalism increased. Muslim elites, seeing a decline in their power, prestige and influence, focused on ways to revive their ascendancy. This generated in India's Muslim elites a preoccupation with the "revival of Islam's lost glory," which has been an important factor in the rise and spread of Islamist ideology the world over.

One of political Islam's most significant thinkers, Syed Abul Ala Maududi, explains the concept of Islamic revivalism in the context of an eternal struggle between "Islam and un-Islam."[1] According to him,

> Islamic Revival is neither striking compromises with un-Islam, nor preparing new blends of Islam and un-Islam, but it is cleansing Islam of all the un-Godly elements and presenting it and making it flourish more or less in its original pure form. Considered from this viewpoint, a *mujaddid* [Islamic revivalist] is a most uncompromising person with regard to un-Islam and one least tolerant as to the presence of even a tinge of un-Islam in the Islamic system.[2]

From the point of view of Islamists, the syncretism emerging under Muslim rule in India amounted to blending Islam with un-Islam. The foremost task for Islamic revival, as they saw it, was to purify Islam by purging it of outside influences. In Maududi's words, any program for Islamic revival must also include a scheme "to wrest authority from the hands of un-Islam and practically reestablish government on the pattern described as 'Caliphate after the pattern of Prophethood' by the Holy Prophet."[3] Furthermore, Muslim revivalists must not "rest content with establishing the Islamic system in one or more countries already inhabited by the Muslims." They must "initiate such a strong universal movement as may spread the reformative and revolutionary message of Islam among mankind at large." The final aim of Islamic revivalism is to "enable Islam to become a predominant cultural force in the world and capture the moral, intellectual and political leadership of mankind."[4]

Most South Asian Muslims recognize Shaykh Ahmad of Sirhind (1563-1624) as the subcontinent's first Islamic revivalist. Shaykh Ahmad questioned the Mughal emperor Akbar's efforts to create a formal Indian religion (*Deen-e-Ilahi*, or "religion of God") and insisted instead on strict adherence to *sharia* (Islamic law). Although Shaykh Ahmad's intellectual efforts did not result in

*sharia*-based government throughout the subcontinent, they did ensure that Islam retained its separate identity. Shaykh Ahmad did not demand an end to Sufi traditions, and he managed only to circumscribe the influence of other faiths over Muslims rather than ending that influence completely. For that reason, the scholarly Shaykh Ahmad does not serve as a model for modern-day Islamist militants. That mantle is conferred on Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1703-1753), who combined religious scholarship with an active role in political matters.

Shah Waliullah's birth coincided with the slow decline of Mughal influence and the corresponding rise of Hindu political power under the Marathas, a fighting force from India's southwestern Maharashtra region. Shah Waliullah wrote to the Afghan chieftain Ahmed Shah Abdali (1722-1772) asking him to attack the Maratha chieftains and save the Mughal empire from losing territory. In his writings Shah Waliullah emphasized the importance of Muslim political power and ascribed Muslim decline to the rise of secular monarchy at the expense of the religiously guided caliphate. Shah Waliullah's critique of Muslim history and his linking political decline with spiritual decline have significantly influenced subsequent Islamist movements throughout the subcontinent.

## Muslims Under British Colonial Rule

Shah Waliullah's efforts had a profound impact on India's Muslims, but were in themselves not sufficient to revitalize the declining Mughal Empire. The Mughals, as well as other autonomous indigenous rulers that emerged during the period of Mughal decline, gradually lost power, and by 1857 all of South Asia—including contemporary India, Pakistan and Bangladesh—had fallen under British colonial rule. The British brought new ideas and technology, as well as other far-reaching changes, into the lives of South Asia's peoples.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries in India witnessed, on the one hand, the rise of the Indian national movement and, on the other, the growth of religious revivalist organizations among both Hindus and Muslims. In 1875 the Arya Samaj (Aryan Society) was established to promote Hindu reformation and to reconvert Hindus who had been "lost" to Islam. Calls for *shuddhi* (purification) and *sangathan* (organization) among the Hindus prompted Muslim organizations to call for *tanzim* (organization) and *tabligh* (evangelism). Muslims were also influenced by the Mujahidin Movement initiated by Sayyid Ahmed Bareili in northwest India (discussed in "The Ideologies of South Asian Jihadi Groups," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Volume 1) and the Faraizi Movement in Bengal.

The Mujahidin Movement's founder Sayyid Ahmed Bareili had been influenced by the teachings of Shaykh Muhammad bin Abdel Wahhab during a pilgrimage to Mecca and had returned to India with the belief that there was a need to purify Islam as it was practiced in India and to reestablish Muslim power. Sayyid Ahmed Bareili designated regions of India under British or Sikh (i.e., non-Muslim) rule as a Land of War (*Dar al-Harb*) and declared that it was the duty of every Muslim to leave these regions and migrate to the Land of Islam, or *Dar al-Islam*. He described the northwestern region of India, along the Afghan border, as *Dar al-Islam* because Muslim Afghan tribes held sway there. Sayyid Ahmed set up cells throughout India that supplied men and money to his base in the northwestern region and continued his jihad until his death in 1831.

Around the same period Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840) initiated a movement to bring the Muslims of Bengal back to the true path of Islam. Like Sayyid Ahmed he, too, had been influenced by Wahhabi teachings during his pilgrimage to Mecca. Shariatullah emphasized a return to the five pillars of Islam and called any deviation from them a *bida* (sinful innovation). As such, his followers were called the "Faraizis" which derives from the word *farz,* meaning obligation.

The influence of the Mujahidin and Faraizi movements receded as the British gradually dispersed the fruits of modernity and introduced representative institutions among Indians, while simultaneously repressing their militant opponents. The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the flowering of Indian nationalism, however. When Muslim leaders Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Shaukat Ali launched the Committee for the Defense of the Caliphate to show support for the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the Indian nationalist leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) joined hands with them in an effort to undermine British authority in India. Hindu-Muslim cooperation against the British kept radical Islam at bay for some time and also contained the influence of Hindu religious extremism. But individuals and groups espousing the view that Hindus and Muslims could not be part of one nation persisted, challenging the supporters of secular Indian nationalism.

Fears of being swamped by the Hindu majority in an independent India and the inability of the Indian National Congress led by Gandhi to reassure the Muslim elite about its future gave impetus to the demand for a separate Muslim homeland as a precondition of independence. Indian scholars have also cited the long-term impact of Britain's "divide-and-rule" policy as a key factor leading to the partition of the subcontinent and the birth of Pakistan

in 1947. Although Pakistan itself was later divided by the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, the partition of 1947 was final in terms of taking two-thirds of British India's Muslims out of postcolonial independent India.

## Indian Secularism and Radical Islam

Modern India's twin founders, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) espoused a secular ideology that called on the state not to favor any religion, to extend equal rights to all religious communities, and to grant minorities special protections and privileges. Serving as India's prime minister from independence in 1947 until his death in 1964, Nehru attempted to translate these secular ideals into the state's political philosophy. But Indian secularism was frowned upon by both radical Muslims and Hindu nationalists. For radical Muslims, the ideal remained an Islamic state and universal Islamic revolution. Hindu nationalists, on the other hand, embraced the ideology of Hindutva, which insists that India's identity be defined in terms of its Hindu origins and that religions of foreign origin, such as Islam and Christianity, be reduced to a subordinate position in India's national life.

The preamble to the Indian Constitution declares India to be a secular state and guarantees religious freedom to all minorities, which includes the right to set up and manage cultural and educational institutions. India's Muslims have lived in a functioning democracy for almost sixty years while Muslim-majority states have been mostly governed by authoritarian regimes. Three of India's eleven presidents, including its current president, have been Muslim, and Muslims have regularly enjoyed representation in parliament and ministerial cabinets. The inclusion of Muslims within the democratic process has, by and large, kept radicalism among Muslims in check. But communal riots, involving Hindus and Muslims, have erupted on several occasions sparked by issues such as the slaughter of cows near a Hindu temple or the playing of music in front of mosques.

The post-partition era has also seen the steady presence of Hindu fundamentalist groups in India's polity, highlighted since the 1990s by the rise of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or Indian People's Party). The BJP was formed in 1980 but traces its origins to the Hindu Maha Sabha (Hindu Grand Assembly), which was founded in 1915 to defend Hindus against Muslim influence. The BJP rose to prominence in the early 1990s when it started a campaign to rebuild Hindu temples on sites where India's Muslim rulers had allegedly constructed mosques after demolishing temples. This campaign provoked a violent dispute at Ayodhya in northern India on December 6, 1992, when thousands of Hindutva volunteers tore down

the sixteenth-century Babri Masjid (Babar's mosque, named after the first Mughal emperor).

Militant Islamist groups gained some ground as Muslims rioted across India to protest the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The riots were followed by bomb blasts in the Bombay Stock Exchange, an attack Indian officials attributed to collusion among organized crime groups that involved Muslims and Islamist organizations. Ten years later in 2002, large-scale communal riots in the western state of Gujarat also resulted in the death of thousands of Muslims and Hindus.

Contemporary India's encounter with radical Islam has been complicated by India's relationship with its predominantly Muslim neighbor, Pakistan. The two countries have fought three wars since partition, and their dispute over the Himalayan territories of Jammu and Kashmir has been particularly bitter. Since 1989, Islamist groups supported by Pakistan have fought Indian control over Kashmir with a guerilla insurgency and terrorism. Most of the militant Islamist groups currently believed to be operating in India are linked to the conflict in Kashmir. But radical ideological groups beholden to the global Islamist agenda also exist.

Each of India's radical Islamist groups, whether in Kashmir or elsewhere, traces its ideological origins to one or more of three principal sources. The first source is the Darul Uloom Deoband, a conservative madrassa established in 1867 to train Muslim reformers and to combat Western influences. The second is the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Society), which was founded by Abul Ala Maulana in 1941 to serve as the vanguard of global Islamic revolution. And the third is the Wahhabi movement originating in Saudi Arabia.

## Darul Uloom Deoband and Its Offshoots

Founded in 1867 by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi, the Darul Uloom (Center of Learning) at Deoband spearheaded a traditionalist reform movement among South Asia's Muslims. The Deobandis, as the seminary's graduates and followers of the movement it inspired are known, attribute the decline of Islamic societies in all spheres of endeavor to Muslims being seduced by an amoral and materialist Western culture, and from assorted Hindu practices believed to have crept into and corrupted the Islamic religion. The basic goal of the Deoband School is purifying Islam of such un-Islamic beliefs and practices. In the training of *ulama*, or religious scholars, the Deobandis emphasize the teachings of the Quran and the practices of Prophet Muhammad as reported in the Hadith. Within a couple of years of its establishment, the Darul Uloom spawned several branches in different parts

of India, the most prominent of which was a sister school called Mazahirul Uloom at Saharanpur. After modernist Muslims set up Aligarh University in 1875 to pursue Western learning, the madrassa at Deoband and its offshoots were increasingly defined as traditionalist centers of learning to rival Western education.

To occupy some of the ground between these antagonists, the Nadwatul Ulama (Congress of Ulama) was set up in 1893 at Kanpur. This institution, which moved to Lucknow in 1898 and still exists today, sought to create a corps of *ulama* who would be conversant with conditions and events occurring around the world. It offered both a challenge to the Aligarh movement and an updated version of Deoband. The curriculum at Nadwatul Ulama was an amalgamation of traditional Islamic curricula, as taught at Deoband, along with modern sciences, vocational training and some paramilitary training.

Deobandi religious scholars have historically been opposed to the West, and this tradition endures today. A statement titled "What Is Terrorism?" on the website of Darul Uloom Deoband argues that the label of "terrorist" has been unfairly applied to Islam and Muslims because the latter are weak and the Zionists and the West are strong:

> The powerful commits the destruction and brutal massacre of innocent persons, yet claims to be a defender of freedom, mankind and torchbearer of justice and civilization. The struggle or resistance of the weak for securing their legitimate rights against suppression or aggression is branded as terrorism. The barbarous bombing of several countries by USA, Israeli aggression against Palestinians, Russian atrocities in Chechnya and Chinese brutalities against Muslims in Sinkiang (Xinjiang) are glaring examples of double standards being applied for defining terrorism. According to the definition of terrorism by intellectuals, and thinkers of the West, the conduct of the governments of USA, Israel, Russia, the Philippines and Burma may be regarded as brazen acts of state terrorism. Unfortunately, the organs of (the) United Nations and the media have been utterly unsuccessful in restraining the tyrants and aggressors… The struggle waged by Muslims of Palestine, Chechnya and Sinkiang cannot be called 'terrorism'. That is a legitimate resistance against aggressors and oppressors for securing their just rights.[5]

In an interview in May 2003, the deputy rector of the Deoband seminary, Maulana Abdul Khaliq Madrasi, blamed Zionist and Christian forces for waging a "crusade to realize their dream of greater Israel." He quoted extensively from the speeches and writings of organizations like the Southern Baptist

Convention, the Touch Ministries and Franklin Graham to state that the war in Iraq is a war "between forces that believe in one God and forces upholding Trinity." In what can be seen as a definitive enunciation of the Deobandi worldview, Madrasi explained:

> It is the sacred duty of every Muslim to defend the territory for the defence of the Faith. They must continue their efforts till all threats to Islam are dismissed. In view of the presence of the forces of US and allies in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq, it is obligatory for the Islamic World and every Muslim, individually and collectively, to ensure that the resistance against the enemy is continued till each and every member of anti-Islam Christian forces is expelled from Muslim countries….There are various verses at several places in the Holy Quran which state that if a Muslim country is attacked, or if Muslims are subjected to atrocities, if they are deprived of their rights, or if their religious beliefs are attacked or if Muslims are deprived of their power and suppressed; in every case it is obligatory for Muslims to fight the enemy. All that is being done by US forces in Iraq; for that reason it is mandatory for Muslims of the world, particularly of Muslims of adjoining countries that they should rise in an organized manner against the USA for defense of the nation and the country….[The] Islamic world should form a united defense instead of taking recourse to verbal rhetoric. They should mobilize all their material and martial resources with unflinching faith to defeat Zionist forces. If that is done, the time is not far off when Muslims will emerge from the life of humiliation and degradation to lead life of success and dignity.[6]

The rhetoric of jihad notwithstanding, the Darul Uloom has not been charged so far with direct involvement in violence or militant training. The only significant Deobandi groups known to be involved in acts of terrorism have operated primarily in Kashmir. These Kashmiri groups—including Harakatul Mujahidin (Movement of Holy Warriors), Harakatul Ansar (Movement of Enablers) and Harakatul Jihad al-Islami (Movement for Islamic Holy War)—are the main Deobandi militant groups. They emerged during the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad and turned their attention to Kashmir after 1989 under the influence of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

## Jamaat-e-Islami and Its Jihadi Offshoots

The Jamaat-e-Islami, founded in 1941 by Abu Ala Maududi, divided itself into three distinct organizations after partition, one each for India, Pakistan and Kashmir. Maududi moved to Pakistan in 1947, leaving Jamaat-e-

Islami India in the hands of his followers. Like the Arab Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hasan al-Banna, which originated in Egypt but spread to other Arab countries, the Jamaat-e-Islami considered itself the "vanguard of the Islamic Revolution" in South Asia. While the organization in Pakistan, and subsequently Bangladesh, embraced electoral politics in addition to organization and training of cadres, the Jamaat-e-Islami in India stayed away from the electoral fray. Rather, the Indian Jamaat emulated more closely the Eyptian Muslim Brotherhood in seeking to expand its influence through social and charitable work.

Maududi can be described as the first complete theoretician of the modern Islamic state. He argued that Western civilization was leading the world to doom and only Islam could rescue humanity. For him Islam was not just a religion but an ideology, a way of life. He put forth the concept of "theo-democracy," which meant a theologically circumscribed democracy or, as Frederic Grare puts it, "limited people's sovereignty under the suzerainty of God."[7]

Maududi's main ideas focused on the notion of a single law (i.e., *sharia*), divine sovereignty and the belief that the struggle between Islam and un-Islam would lead to an Islamic revolution that would bring about the creation of an Islamic state. But Maududi realized that the Islamic state he envisaged would not be able to uphold the rigid demands of Islamic law in democratic conditions unless the population willingly abided by such demands. For that reason, he insisted, it was necessary to Islamize society before creating the Islamic state.

Although the Jamaat-e-Islami agreed to reorder its priorities in Pakistan by demanding an Islamic state before society had been Islamized, no similar revision occurred in India. Pakistan had an overwhelming Muslim majority, and the Pakistani establishment embraced Islam as a national ideology; this encouraged Maududi to believe that he and the Jamaat-e-Islami could secure political power and carry forward the task of the Islamization of society in stages. In India, however, where Muslims remained a minority, the situation was quite different, and the Indian wing of the movement continued to adhere to a purer version of its original ideological agenda.

The Jamaat-e-Islami of India, named "Jamaat-e-Islami Hind," was organized in 1948, soon after partition, at Allahabad with Abul Lais Nadvi as its head. In 1960 its headquarters were moved to Delhi. The Indian organization's literature and constitution assert that Jamaat-e-Islami in India has been involved in promoting communal harmony, and emphasizes *dawa* (call to faith) and social work among Muslims. But the Indian section of the movement continues to espouse Maududi's fundamental worldview. Jamaat-e-

Islami still expects to show Muslims where they went wrong and to make them good Muslims, as well as to convert non-Muslims whenever possible. While the movement does not eschew politics, it is waiting for "the basic tenets of the Jamaat's ideology that the Divine Guidance should form the basis of our entire activity, expressed in political language as the Sovereignty of God, the Viceregency of Man and the Supremacy of His Law" to be appreciated by the majority of Indians.[8] Jamaat-e-Islami Hind does not, in other words, consider the conditions in India to be ripe for it to assume an overt political role.

A radical offshoot of this movement is the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), which was banned by the Indian government in 2001 for having links with terrorism.[9] Founded at Aligarh in 1977 by students tied to Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, SIMI is a radical Islamist organization dedicated to converting India to an Islamic land. Indian officials believe that the rationale for setting up SIMI as a separate militant organization was to insulate Jamaat-e-Islami Hind from a direct political role and to avoid a confrontation between the parent organization and India's secular state. But SIMI's open admiration of jihadi and radical views has led—at least on the surface—to serious differences with Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, which has now established a separate student front called the Student's Islamic Organisation (SIO). Before 1987 all of SIMI's presidents were senior members of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, but the organization publicly disowned SIMI in 1986 after it called for the "liberation" of India through Islam. This slogan greatly embarrassed the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind leadership, which had consistently tried not to do or say anything openly that would cause the Indian government to brand Jamaat a terrorist or jihadi organization. Covert links between SIMI and Jamaat are alleged to have continued, however, even after their public discord.

SIMI's expressed goal is to convert India into *Dar al-Islam* by converting everyone there to Islam, and the group has declared jihad against the secular Indian state. SIMI seeks inspiration from the views of Maududi and Jamaat-e-Islami: According to SIMI, Islam is not just a religion but an ideology, the Quran is the only basis for governing human life, and it is the duty of every Muslim to propagate Islam and wage jihad to establish an Islamic state. SIMI is against not only the Western culture and modernization that Maududi critiqued at length, but also the prevalent Hindu Brahmanical culture and idol worship. In other words, the mere existence of other faiths and beliefs is unacceptable, and religious tolerance amounts to diluting Islam's purity. Jihad, the Umma, and the caliphate are core concepts in the ideology of SIMI, which stridently asserts pan-Islamic ideals.

According to Safdar Nagori, a prominent SIMI leader, Osama bin Laden is "not a terrorist" but rather, an "outstanding example of a true Mujahid" who has undertaken jihad on behalf of the entire community of believers, the Umma. For Nagori other inspiring personalities include Shaykh Ahmed Yassin of Hamas and Masood Azhar of Jaish-e-Muhammad, the hardline Pakistani jihadi group most known for beheading the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl. SIMI held a conference in 1999 under the slogan "Allah's Party Shall Indeed Prevail" (*Allah Ki Jamaat He Ghalib Rahne Wali Hai*). The conference logo depicted the Quran with the superimposed image of a hand holding a gun against a globe. The conference heard an address in Arabic by Shaykh Yasin, which was primarily an exhortation to jihad. Conference participants were issued certificates declaring the "Quran is our constitution; Jihad is our path; and Martyrdom is our desire."[10]

SIMI targets Muslim youth between the ages of fifteen and thirty for membership, and demands that members retire after the age of thirty. Several former members of SIMI have moved to different parts of India and set up such local radical Islamist groups as the National Democratic Front and the Islamic Youth Center (IYC), based in the southern state of Kerala; Darsgah Jihad-o-Shahadat (School for Jihad and Martyrdom), based in Andhra Pradesh; and the Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (Muslim National Movement—TMMK) in Tamil Nadu. SIMI and its associated groups publish several magazines in various Indian languages, including *Vivekam* in Malayalam, *Sedhi Madal* in Tamil, *Rupantar* in Bengali, *Iqraa* in Gujarati, *Tahreek* in Hindi, *Al Harkah* in Urdu and the *Shaheen Times* in English and Urdu. In its 2000 annual report, the year before it was banned, SIMI explained its ideological agenda:

> It is the responsibility of this (Muslim) 'last community', the 'best community', the 'middle community', to rise up and face the challenges that surround it, to revive *Deen*, to lead and guide not only the Islamic world, but all of humanity along the 'Straight Path' and rescue it from the clutches of Satanic power. It is the demand of the time that Muslim youth should struggle for the superiority and establishment of *Deen* and revival of Islam in the light of Holy Quraan [sic] and Sunnah…The end of the *Khilafah* (Caliphate) led to our (Muslim) disintegration into different countries on the basis of nationalism, language and other sectarian prejudices. Naturally therefore, our main responsibility is to strive in those areas, which are directly related to the reinstating of Khilafah…It is essential to emphasize that no political party or organization can bring about a solid and constructive change through secularism in the light of their erratic ideologies. The only way to bring about real change [is] through …establishing an Islamic system of life."[11]

## The Wahhabi Movement and Its Indian Offshoots

Although the nineteenth-century Bareili and Faraizi movements, originally inspired by the Wahhabis of the Arabian peninsula, fizzled out against the might of the British Empire, some Indian Muslims adopted their puritanical doctrine. The Wahhabis of India describe themselves as "Ahle Hadith" or "Followers of Hadith." Their numbers have generally remained small, however, due to their limited cultural appeal.

South Asian Islam has been very different from the Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia's Nejd desert. Sufi influence has been widespread in India, affecting not only Muslims but also the lives of Hindus and Sikhs, who often participate in Sufi rituals and visit Sufi shrines. Wahhabism's strong dislike of local practices and condemnation of Sufism has prevented its influence in India from being very strong. For years Indian Muslims used "Wahhabi" as a term of denigration for someone who does not respect saints and traditions. It is for this reason that the Deobandis and members of the Jamaat-e-Islami have always avoided the appellation of Wahhabi even when their political cause has been inspired by such ideas.

The global spread of Wahhabi Islam, backed by modern Saudi Arabia's petro-dollars, has not spared India, however. India's small Ahle Hadith and Wahhabi communities have expanded with the construction of new madrasas and mosques funded by Gulf Arab governments and individuals. The Afghan jihad of the 1980s and the Kashmir jihad of the 1990s served as opportunities for militant training for radical Muslims, and India's Wahhabis have won converts from existing Muslim sects, as well as among non-Muslims.

The most prominent Ahle Hadith or Wahhabi-jihadi group operating in India is the Lashkar-e–Taiba ("Army of the Pure.") It is the armed wing of the Pakistan-based religious organization Markaz Dawa-wal-Irshad (Center for the Call to Righteousness,) which was set up in 1989 by Hafiz Muhammad Sayeed (and subsequently renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa (Party for the Call to Righteousness.) The group has been illegal in India and Indian-controlled parts of Kashmir since its inception, and was renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa in Pakistan to circumvent a U.S.-inspired ban on the group as a terrorist organization. Lashkar-e-Taiba is closely linked to the Saudi religious establishment, as well as to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, and its ambitions lie beyond Kashmir (discussed in "The Ideologies of South Asian Jihadi Groups," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Volume 1).

A smaller and not yet well-known organization with Wahhabi roots is the Lashkar-e-Jabbar (LJ—Army of the Compelling God). LJ activists reportedly threw acid on two women in Srinagar on August 7, 2000, on the grounds that

their dress did not conform to the Islamic code. Furthermore, several other jihadi organizations with obscure ideological orientations have surfaced in other parts of India. The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) was reportedly founded in 1996 and, along with the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), is part of the All Muslim United Liberation Forum of Assam (AMULFA). These groups have engaged in random acts of violence in the northeast region of India, claiming that their ultimate aim is to set up a "greater independent Islamistan" for the Muslims of Assam.

## Conclusions

India's secular democratic constitution empowers the country's Muslims more than their co-religionists in Muslim majority states. Indian Muslims are able to elect and replace their rulers, in addition to influencing public policy. As a minority, however, Indian Muslims cannot benefit from democracy without coalition building. This need to establish broad-based democratic coalitions has acted as a check on radical and extremist ideologies, and as such, most orthodox and conservative Muslim groups use their political power to operate within the democratic context.

But has democratic India "solved" the problem of radical Islam? Despite India's clear successes in this regard, Islamist radicals continue to organize and operate outside the political mainstream. While an overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims have stayed away from radical Islamist groups, extremist Islamists remain a threat to India's stability much in the same way that they threaten democratic societies in the West.

## Notes

1. S. Abul Ala Maududi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam* (translated from Urdu), (Lahore: Islamic Publications Limited, 1963), p. 5.

2. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

3. Ibid., p. 39.

4. Ibid.

5. Maulana Abdul Khaliq Madrasi, "Unity of Islamic World indispensable to defeat anti-Islam Conspiracy," Interview with the deputy rector Darul Uloom Deoband, available at http://darululoom-deoband.com/english/index.htm.

6. Ibid.

7. Frederic Grare, *Political Islam in the Indian Subcontinent: The Jamaat-e-Islami* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), p. 21.

8. About Jamaat-e-Islami Hind at http://www.jamaateislamihind.org/about.html.

9. Indian Ministry of Home Affairs Press Release, "Arrests Made After SIMI declared Unlawful Association," September 28, 2001, at http://mha.nic.in/pr092001.htm.

10. Home Ministry of India, "Report on SIMI Activities" (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs), at http://www.hvk.org/articles/0901/180.html.

11. Students Islamic Movement of India, *Saga of Struggle: Annual Report 1998-2000*, ( New Delhi: SIMI, 2000) pp. 3, 8, 34.