

Waheed-uz-Zaman

## ISLAMISATION IN PAKISTAN: SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS\*

Islamic resurgence is a fact of contemporary international political scene<sup>1</sup>, although its manifestations vary in intensity and assertion from country to country depending upon historical compulsions, geo-political considerations and the pattern of leadership. The region comprising Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan however offers the most striking example of this resurgence.

Apart from some apparent similarities with other Muslim countries Pakistan stands out quite distinctly in the Islamic world. It is the only country which owes its very genesis to what is familiarly termed as the 'Islamic Ideology'. Needless to say that it was not simply 'to add one more country to the conglomeration of countries in the world'<sup>2</sup> that hundreds of thousands of people were killed or wounded and millions were forced to abandon their ancestral homes and hearths.

It was surely the prospects of reliving their Islamic past, with all its political, economic and social implications in their new homeland that prompted them to willingly offer such tremendous sacrifices. This vision of Pakistan is also reflected in the numerous pronouncements of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah made before as well as after the establishment of Pakistan and constitute an overwhelming evidence to rebut the claim of detractors of Pakistan that the participation of different sections of Indian Muslim society such as the landlords, the middle class and the working people in the struggle for a separate Muslim homeland was motivated only by economic and class considerations.<sup>3</sup> It may be recalled here that except for the Islamic sentiment there was hardly any justification for the support extended by the Muslims of the minority provinces to the demand for Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> The Resolution demanding the establishment of a separate independent sovereign state comprising the contiguous Muslim majority areas was moved by the Premier of Bengal, Maulvi A.K. Fazlul Haq and was supported by 13 Muslim leaders drawn from different provinces. As many as eight of them belonged to Muslim minority provinces.<sup>5</sup> This support was willingly lent by the latter despite the realisation that the areas they represented were in no case to be included in the State of Pakistan.

The role of religion is evidenced not only by the successful struggle for independence but also by the crucial part it played in enabling the people to overcome the problems that the country had to face soon after independence. 'Indeed', says Wilfred Cantwell Smith 'without the stamina and morale generated

\* Paper presented at the Conference on 'Contemporary Pakistan: Problems and Prospects', held at Columbia University, New York, from October 25-27, 1984.

by religious fervour the new dominion would hardly have survived the devastations of its first disorders'.<sup>6</sup> This Islamic sentiment also played a vital role in subsequent years, especially during the 1965 war with India, in the anti-Qadiani agitation of 1974 and the PNA movement in 1977<sup>7</sup> and it was the absence of this Islamic sentiment or at least its weakening which finally resulted in the secession of the eastern half of the country which is now known as Bangladesh. This view is upheld by no less a person than Hamoodur Rehman, a former Chief Justice of Pakistan and the man who was commissioned to identify the reasons of Pakistan's disintegration: *'If the principles of justice, equity and brotherhood preached by Islam had been put into practice, the secession of East Pakistan might well have been avoided. This still holds good for what is now left of Pakistan.'*<sup>8</sup>

The relationship of Islam and Pakistan is not only an historical legacy but as far as the unity of the country is concerned, it is a political necessity as well. In the words of Dr. I.H. Qureshi 'When we talk of a common heritage and history, let us not forget that common heritage and history have been given to us by Islam. If we let go the ideology of Islam we cannot hold together as a nation by any other means... If the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, God forbid, give up Islam, the Arabs yet remain Arabs, the Turks remain Turks, the Iranians remain Iranian, but what do we remain if we give up Islam?'<sup>9</sup>

There is of course no doubt that practically all governments in Pakistan have contributed their bit in advancing the process of Islamisation but most of these endeavours were in the nature of providing a justification for the creation of Pakistan as a separate independent state<sup>10</sup> and in some cases these steps were taken as a result of direct or indirect public pressure.<sup>11</sup> The present Government on the other hand, partly because of the fact that it came into power in the wake of a fierce and popularly backed Islamic movement launched by the PNA<sup>12</sup> and partly due to the strong religious outlook and attitude of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, took the task of Islamisation with unprecedented seriousness.<sup>13</sup> General Zia's very first address to the nation after the assumption of power was suggestive of his prescription to solve the country's ailments:

'I must say that the spirit of Islam, demonstrated during the recent movement, was commendable. It proves that Pakistan which was created in the name of Islam, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country.'<sup>14</sup>

The Government of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq consequently announced various Islamic measures from time to time which include the establishment of Federal Shariah Court, promulgation of the Hudood (Islamic penal code), introduction of Zakat and Ushr, profit and loss sharing bank accounts, the passage of the law of evidence and the various steps taken in order to finalise the Qisas (blood money) and Diyyat (compensation) laws, the establishment of an Islamic University and finally the announcement for the setting up of the

machinery for persuading the people to offer congregational prayers in local mosques. The most important single achievement which has directly affected large number of people, however, is the introduction of a system of collection of Zakat and Ushr under which about 2750 million rupees have been distributed to more than eight million people. The recipients of this amount include 700,000 widows, 600,000 physically handicapped and 300,000 orphans. In addition to this some 70,000 students from religious seminaries were financially assisted and more than 100,000 physically handicapped persons were helped to become self-supporting.<sup>15</sup>

Side by side with the endeavours to transform the society and bring about an Islamic order the Government has over the years initiated certain measures to minimise the problems of the common man. The appointment of a former Chief Justice of a Provincial High Court as the Federal *Mohtasib* (Ombudsman) is one of these steps. The extent to which the Mohtasib's office has been able to get the common man's grievances redressed is borne out by the fact that in the first year of its establishment his office has dealt with 32455 cases.<sup>16</sup>

The much awaited and widely speculated political programme of the Government was however announced on August 12, 1983.<sup>17</sup> This was in fulfilment of the President's promise made on the independence day a year earlier and was based on the proposals submitted by the Islamic Ideology Council, a Sub-Committee of the Federal Cabinet, a Special Committee of the Majlis-e-Shoora and a Commission headed by Maulana Zafar Ahmad Ansari. This announcement has since been followed by two more major policy statements.<sup>18</sup> These statements taken together give an outline of the distinctive features of the new polity, President Zia's government plans to introduce in the country.

The proposed system will be based on the tenets of the Quran and Sunnah. There will be a special stress on the principle that sovereignty belongs to Allah and the person in power would hold authority as a trust of God. The state will look after the needs of the poor and needy; judiciary will be independent; all citizens irrespective of their caste, creed, sex, rank and status will be equal before law; measures will be taken to ensure that the reins of Government are always held by just, upright and God-fearing people, and all representatives of the people and government functionaries are persons of strong moral character and of unimpeachable integrity. To achieve this objective first of all the electoral college will be cleansed by disenfranchising all criminals and the elements known for their anti-Islamic activities. The society would be rid of all professional politicians and monopolists. The spirit of political adventurism will be eliminated. Only staunch believers in Islam and upholders of the ideology of Pakistan will be allowed to participate in the election; but they will be prohibited from self-canvassing.

The minorities will have separate electorates and their rights will be duly protected. Similarly, in order to give adequate representation to various classes and interests the principle of functional representation would be introduced

which would enable the ulama, educationists, scientists, technical experts, farmers and labourers to send their representatives to various legislatures.

A measure of balance will be brought about in the powers, enshrined in the 1973 constitution, of the President and the Prime Minister and the purview of Islam will no longer be confined to the preamble of the said document. In the new setup its role will be comprehensive and all-embracing.

The form of government will be democratic but it would not be the Western kind of democracy. It would instead be called Shooracracy because 'that is what Islam stands for'.<sup>19</sup> Under this system the ruled would enjoy the same freedom of expression as they enjoyed in the early days of Islam and the rulers would be as much accountable to the public as they were under the Rightly Guided Caliphs.

The process of Islamisation, as briefly outlined above, has been supported by large segments of the Pakistani society. There is nevertheless no dearth of critics and sceptics belonging both to the left and the right with of course, various shades of opinion within each category.

The first of those consists of avowedly leftist elements who, though publicly reticent, firmly believe that religion is a medieval conception and is therefore irrelevant to the needs of modern progressive society. They argue that it has all along been used as a convenient tool for exploiting the masses and keeping them poor and ignorant in order to maintain the *status quo*. The process of Islamisation in their view is retrogressive and would hinder the solution of socio-economic problems presently confronting the third world countries and which deserve the highest priority. They brush aside all the official attempts at the Islamisation of society as a natural corollary of the synchronisation of interests of the imperialist powers, especially the United States, with those of the Pakistani reactionaries.<sup>20</sup>

'Whilst struggling to extend capitalism to all social and economic spheres', believes this microscopic leftist minority, 'they [the ruling elite] employ an ideology which is feudalistic in origins and reactionary and unscientific in its methodology, and in no way accords with socio-economic relations which have been built on an industrial base. The bourgeois elements have ended feudal dominance in industrialized centres but feudal lords still rule in the vast hinterlands. Where there is any threat to their common rule and hegemony from the popular forces they combine and defend themselves with the shield of a spurious Islamic ideology'.<sup>21</sup> The typical terminology used by the proponents of this view clearly indicates the sources of their inspiration.

The second category consists of those who, though not against the religion as such, hold that Pakistan was neither demanded in the name of Islam nor was it intended to be an Islamic state, at least not in the sense in which it is being projected by the present regime. It was, they argue, meant to be a secular state in which Muslims, hard hit by the lack of equal opportunities in various fields, were to be enabled to flourish free of Hindu domination. Religion, they insist, is

a personal matter between man and God and therefore should have nothing to do with affairs of state. People should be left free to practice or not to practice religion. The Government should instead concentrate on the amelioration of the living conditions of the populace by initiating progressive reforms in areas such as health, education and economy.

The third category comprises centrist politicians many of whom are not averse to the idea of institutionalising Islam in the country. Some of them, in fact, believe it to be a worthy objective and a laudable exercise. They however, strongly feel that unless supported by a popular mandate and initiated by a representative government all measures to Islamise the society would be counter-productive.

The extreme rightist politicians, have reservations of their own about the entire process of Islamisation. While they fully endorse the idea of Islam's efficacy to solve all the problems of the Pakistani society, they are far from satisfied with the quantum, the content and the speed of its enforcement. They go to the extent of saying that nothing worth the name has been done in the field of Islamisation and it is futile to expect anything worthwhile from the present regime. Maulana Shah Ahmad Noorani, the President of the Jamiatul Ulama-i-Pakistan, typically represented this view when he said that 'Zia has made no real progress with Islamisation in seven years, so why should we trust what he says he will do now'.<sup>22</sup> The comment of an influential Jamaat-i-Islami leader, Professor Ghafoor Ahmad, was no less strong. He appeared to believe that the entire process of Islamisation currently going on in the country was nothing more than a strategy for the survival of the military regime. 'The name of Islam', he said, 'is being exploited by the present regime to extend martial law'.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the denunciation of the regime in such strong terms, the rightist elements have generally refrained from extending their support to any active anti-government campaign. The *Arabia* of London very succinctly summed up the latter's predicament when it observed that 'In general the pro-Islamic forces in Pakistan are confronted with an awkward choice: anti-government activity could strengthen the hands of allies of the Soviet Union'.<sup>24</sup>

The fact of the matter is that General Zia despite himself being the architect of the Islamic thrust that Pakistan has witnessed during the last seven years, has not concealed his dissatisfaction with whatever has been achieved so far. 'I am not oblivious' he observed on August 14, 1983, in the course of his Independence Day Address to the Nation 'to what is happening around me. I am aware of the poverty that we have in the country, of the rampant bribery and the high cost of living ... people seldom get justice from the concerned quarters and even if they do, it is at an enormous cost and after much delay, so that the people are compelled to offer bribes and take recourse to other underhand methods'.<sup>25</sup>

A prestigious Indian daily editorially observed recently that apart from developments in various fields to his credit, 'Zia commands considerable respect personally and is perhaps more popular than any individual opposition

politician'.<sup>26</sup> If this analysis is correct it will have to be conceded that Zia derives much of his personal popularity from his emphasis on Islam. A sizeable section of the Pakistani intelligentsia seems to have shed its age old bias against religion as an obstacle in the way of progress. Their outlook towards Islamic way of life and its attendant values has undergone a phenomenal change. How penetrating and lasting this change will prove to be in the long run, remains to be seen. It is, however, obvious that no social change of any consequence can be effected overnight and it would be too naive to expect a cataclysmic transformation in a short span of time.

There is nonetheless little doubt that definite beginning has been made in the right direction and to all appearances the change is so irreversible that according to an observer 'no future ruler of Pakistan can ever again be a secular civilian politician like Liaquat Ali Khan or a secular soldier like Iskander Mirza, nor even a semi-secular soldier like Ayub Khan and least of all a civilian politician of the Bhutto stripe, cleverly but obviously using Islam for his own political ends'.<sup>27</sup>

### NOTES

1. For an illuminating survey of Islam and the contemporary Muslim World see a series of five articles by David K. Willis in *Christian Science Monitor*, Boston, July 23-27, 1984.
2. Liaquat Ali Khan in a public meeting in 1951, quoted in Mohammad Ahsen Chaudhri 'Foundations of Pakistan's Foreign Policy' in *Foreign Policy of Pakistan*, Karachi, 1964, p. 20.
3. Marietta Stepaniants, 'Development of the Concept of Nationalism - The Case of the Muslims in the Indian Subcontinent' in *The Muslim World*, LXIX, No. 1, January 1979, p. 36.
4. Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, Lahore, 1973, p. 41.
5. Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *The Foundations of Pakistan*, Karachi, 1970, Vol. II, pp. 342-47.
6. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, New York, 1957, p. 214.
7. The Pakistan National Alliance included the following nine Political Parties: (i) All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference (ii) Pakistan Democratic Party (iii) Pakistan Muslim League (iv) Tehrik-i-Istiqlal (v) Jamaat-i-Islami (vi) Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam (vii) Jamiatul Ulama-i-Pakistan (viii) Pakistan Khaksar Party (ix) National Democratic Party.
8. Hamoodur Rehman, *Reflections on Islam*, Lahore, 1983, p. 120. (Italics in original).
9. Dr. Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, 'Ideology of Pakistan' in *Ideology of Pakistan* (A Radio Pakistan publication), Karachi, 1971, p. 5.
10. Mohammad Ayoob, 'Two Faces of Political Islam: Iran and Pakistan Compared,' in *Asian Survey*, June 1979, Vol. XIX, Number 6, 1979, p. 536.
11. The Basic Principles Committee Report was made public on September 7, 1950. In the context of Islamic provisions it had hardly provided anything more than the compulsory study of Quran for all Muslims. It was severely criticised by such prominent Ulama as Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani, Maulana Aihitsham ul-Haq Thanvi, Maulana Muhammad Ismail and Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi. In view of strong public reaction the Report was withdrawn by the Government. Some two years and three and a half months later the Government issued a fresh report on

- December 22, 1952, which was by and large approved by the Ulama and the public reaction too was favourable. *Fikr-o-Nazar*, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, March-April 1983, pp. 214-215.
12. *Manshoor* (Urdu) [Manifesto of the Pakistan National Alliance], Lahore, n.d., pp. 3-22.
  13. William L. Richter, 'The Political Dynamics of Islamic Resurgence in Pakistan' in *Asian Survey*, June 1979, Vol. XIX, Number 6, p. 555.
  14. *Pakistan Times*, Rawalpindi, July 6, 1977.
  15. President General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's address to the 10th session of the Majlis-e-Shoora on July 10, 1984, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Islamabad, 1984, p. 41.
  16. *The Muslim*, Islamabad, August 8, 1984.
  17. President General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's address to the seventh session of the Majlis-e-Shoora on August 12, 1983, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Islamabad, 1983, pp. 4-57.
  18. Nine-Point Manifesto for an Islamic System of Government, President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's announcement in a public meeting at Peshawar on March 12, 1984, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, pp. 5-19, and President General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's address to the 10th session of the Majlis-e-Shoora on July 10, 1984. For full text see pp. 3-55.
  19. Address to the 10th session of the Majlis-e-Shoora on July 10, 1984.
  20. Hassan Gardezi, 'The Resurgence of Islam, Islamic Ideology and Encounters with Imperialism' in Hassan Gardezi and Jamal Rashid (ed.), *Pakistan: The Unstable State*, Lahore, 1983, pp. 308-311.
  21. Ziaul Haq, 'Pakistan and Islamic Ideology' in *ibid.*, pp. 327-328.
  22. Cited in *Financial Times*, London, May 2, 1984.
  23. *Ibid.*
  24. *Arabia* (London), April 1983, p. 21.
  25. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's address on August 14, 1983, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Islamabad, 1983, pp. 6-7.
  26. *Times of India*, New Delhi, July 7, 1984.
  27. G.H. Jansen, *Militant Islam*, London, 1979.