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ISLAMIZATION OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY: STUDY OF BANGLADESH JAMA'AT-E-ISLAMI (BJI)

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ABSTRACT

From its establishment in 1941 in the Indian Subcontinent, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), a contemporary leading Islamic movement in Bangladesh, represents a comprehensive example of a Muslim group in trying to address the prevailing socio-cultural and politico-economic problems which Muslim nations face. The purpose of this study to examine Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) and its policy, ideology, social activities and most importantly intellectual activities and involvements in the policies of Islamization of family and society. In this regard, Jamaat's constitution, literatures and various lectures of the top leaders available were critically analyzed. This study found that the concept of "Islamization of family and society" is used as an important means for an Islamist movement to revert the ultra-secular polity as well as liberal and extreme views not in favor of Islam. This study concludes that based on the true Islamic teachings, the BJI has the potential in promoting a project of Islamization Movement in order to develop and institutionalize a value-oriented family and society based on the worldview of Islam.

Keywords: Islamization, Family, Society, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh, one of the most populous Muslim countries, has also been witnessing the proliferation of Islamic movements as both a political, social and ideological force since its independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Kabir, 2006). The rise of Islamic Da'wah and political forces have brought forth several contenders, one of them being Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami (BJI), which serves as a contemporary leading Islamic movement and the pioneer of Islamic parties in Bangladesh. Moreover, Jama'at-e-Islami is one of the oldest parties in the sub-continent. It was first formed in British India under the leadership of Sayed Abul 'Ala Mawdudi in 1941. The Jama'at started its work in what is now Bangladesh in the 1950s (Islam, 2011). After Bangladesh gained its independence, the Jama'at began to operate publicly under its own name in May 1979, along with other

Islam-based political parties. Worth to mention, The mainstream Islamic movements and Islamic political parties in Bangladesh are Bangladesh Jamaa-e- Islami (BJI, or Jama'at) and Islamic Oikko Jote (JOJ), Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Andolon, and Islami Shashontontro Andolon (ISA). Apart from that, there are other Islamic groups, namely, Hizbut Tahrer (HT), Harkatul Jihad al-Islami (HUJI) and Jama'atul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) which are domestically and internationally labeled as Radical or Militant group and banned by the Government of Bangladesh (Kabir, 2006).

The Jama'at's organisational achievement has made it an expanding force in Bangladeshi politics. It is the pioneer of Islamic movements in united Pakistan and in the later independent Bangladesh (Ali, 1989). Furthermore, the Jama'at is a moderate Islamic movement and an Islamic political organisation that believes in democracy, human rights, and is committed to upholding the rule of law. Islam in Bangladesh is a deep-rooted social institution. Social norms and other interactions in the country have largely been originated and are guided by Islamic principles. The Jama'at seeks to establish a just society only through democratic principles and a democratic process (Islam, 2011).

In adopting the methodology of *al-Wasatiyah* in *Da'wah* (preaching), teaching, *Ifta'* (issuing legal edicts), research, reform, as well as revival, the Jama'at has realised that the propagation of Islam in the context of Muslim-majority Bangladesh where the secular civil society and some radical Islamic groups are synthesised, is in need of a comprehensive and complete model of the balanced method (Shehabuddin, 2008).

THE CONCEPT OF ISLAMIZATION OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY

"Islamization of Family and Society" is a process of actualising the Divine imperatives of human development based on the Islamic worldview and its philosophy of knowledge and *tarbiyah*. In fact, it is the soul of the Jamaat's mission and vision. Essentially, Islamization of Family and Society entails a continuous process of development and strengthening of *Ilm* (knowledge, *Iman* (faith), *Yaqeen* (beneficence and moral excellence and *Husn al-Khuluq* (good character) in the personality and life of a *Mu'min* (belover) through the process of *Jihad al-Nafs* (striving against the influence of base desires, passion and moral vices as well as temptations of worldly pleasures. Moreover, the Islamization of Family and Society necessitates *Tazkiyat al-Nafs* that forward to the

process of spiritual purification of the heart and soul from a variety of spiritual and moral diseases.

BACKGROUND OF ISLAMIC DA'WAH MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH

Broadly, Islamic Da'wah movements can be categorised into two. The first is of an initial and essential religious orientation, whilst the second has important socio-political considerations. The Salafiyyah movement type and the Tablighi movement exemplify the first group whilst the Islamic revolution in Iran and Jama'at-e-Islami movement exemplify the second. Both groups call upon Muslim to a return to pristine Islam. They view Islam as code of life offering solutions to the many problems faced by man and a means to establish justice in all areas. Moreover, they are of the belief that the Islamic way of life is universal and applicable to all. They regard it as the lifestyle par excellence and the simple yet eternally relevant ideal that best guarantees human happiness (Shehabuddin, 2008).

Apart from the movements mentioned above, there is another trend of Islamic group well-known as Sufis exists in Bangladesh. The Sufism is a different carrier and disseminator of Islamic culture in the Indian subcontinent, specifically in the region that is now Bangladesh. It is important to note that Islam was introduced to Bengal, now Bangladesh, in the 13th century and later become main religion coming from mainly by the arrivals of Arab and Persian missionaries and merchants (Karim, 2012). The religion of Islam entered the region in many different ways, the Muslim traders, the Turkish conquest and, the missionary activities of the Muslim Sufis (Ali, 1992).

Sufism in Bangladesh shares affinities and connections with the Indic culture of the region. Among Muslim and non-Muslim historians, it is widely accepted that Sufism was instrumental in converting the indigenous people to Islam following the Turkish Muslim invasion of India in the eleventh century (Alam, 2004).

It is noteworthy that between the 8th century and 12th century, the Buddhist dynasty known as the Pala Empire ruled Bengal. During that time, the majority of the population in Bengal were thought to be Buddhists. After the decline of the Pala dynasties, the Sena dynasty came to power. The large scale conversion to Islam began in the 13th century and

continued for hundreds of years. Conversion was generally collective rather than individual. Islam attracted numerous Buddhists and Hindus. Sufis were responsible for most conversions (Ali, 1992).

Focusing the varieties Islamic movements and trends in Bangladesh it is remarkable that the Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami (BJI) is one of the prominent Islamic Da'wah movements in Bangladesh: a point often overlooked by those studying such matters. The Jama'at in Bangladesh and in each neighbouring country like India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are independent of each other and do not indulge in acts of violence and terrorism. Perhaps, Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami is a large and influential organisation to develop a society with Islamic values in Bangladesh.

THE PROJECT OF ISLAMIZATION OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY

The Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami focused on safeguarding and promoting an Islamic lifestyle (Ali, 1992). The Jama'at focuses its efforts on nurturing responsible Islamic minded citizens through family institution. The bigger success would be when the society loves Islam and respect its values. Islamic activists must prepare themselves with the correct knowledge and relevant skill so that they will be able to apply wisdom in carrying out effective and efficient Da'wah activities (Halim, 2001). In addition, the Malaysian Islamic Party leader Abdul-Hadi Awang rightly pointed out, "Politics of Islam is the politics of *Da'wah*, of winning hearts and minds of the people more than getting votes. It is based on fundamental truths, not short-lived interests. That's how Islam has been winning people all through history" (Halim, 2001).

The existing leadership of Jama'at is deliberately moderate and flexible rather than its founding leadership. Besides that, both generations of leadership view revolution as a long-term process, which involves, among other things, providing social services to build mass support; educating and indoctrinating young people through institutions.

The BJI makes efforts to find out and organize Islam-loving conscious and honest people and those intending to be honest, to train them up through practical activities suitable. This is with the aim to develop them as true servants of Allah and efficient activists for the

cause of Islam and humanity and to build up a group of activists for providing the society with honest leadership at all levels (<https://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/en/>).

One of the highest agenda of the Jamaat is to deal with the broad and basic principles and teachings of Islam; spiritual, moral, social, political and economic. The ideal Islamic society, suggested by Mawdudi, consists of people who, through putting their faith in Islam, have liberated themselves from all allegiances except to Allah; such a society would be free and its citizens would be as equal as the teeth of a comb.

The Muslims, according to Mawdudi, belong to the *Ummah Wasat* (Just and balanced community), and “*Shuhada’ ‘ala al-nas*” (witnesses over mankind), as such, are duty bound to enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil. Furthermore, Mawdudi insists that a good society needs honesty and justice to uphold a healthy and prosperous family and the social order. To maintain the standard of the family and the social order, it would come only from the sincere members of the society who have patience and appreciate others. The Qur’an introduces the concept of *Khaira Ummah*, which is to develop a good community for the benefit of mankind, enjoining *al-Ma’ruf* (what is right, good and fair) and forbidding *al-Munkar* (what is wrong, bad and unfair, e.g., polytheism, disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden), and you believing in Allah. The Qur’ān (3:110) says:

You are the Best *Ummah* ever raised for mankind. You command that which is good and forbid that which is Evil, and you believe in Allah. If the people of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them, there are believers, while most of them are sinners.

When the Muslim community ignores enjoining good (*ma’ruf*) and prohibition of evil (*munkar*), then society at large faces serious corruption (*fasad*) beginning from the individual and then family to the whole community. In this regard, the Muslim community has to be united to overcome the challenges and difficulties, and there should be a group of people dedicated the quest and tranquillity. Obviously this needs commitment from the individual and the community, as stated in the Qur’an, 3:110. Islamic organisations and groups actively work to fulfil this purpose and show their sincere guidance for the happy,

Islamic and prosperous life so that society could have the best of this world and the Hereafter.

Accordingly, one the Jamaat's permanent agendas is '*Islahi Mu'ashara*' or social reform. In this regard, the former Ameer Ghulam Azam and his party [the Jamaat] have initiated social-based projects to overcome prejudice and ignorance and unconsciousness of religiosity in the society. They also established mass education centres, Masjid-based activities, Islamic cultural centres, celebrating the Islamic calendar and scholarship-based institutions for the needy and poor family.

DA'WAH & TARBIYAH: CHALLENGES & PROSPECTS

The religious organisations in Bangladesh are generally divided into two groups. In brief, the first of them is forward-thinking and somewhat balanced in faith and practice, and represents the leading position in Islamic *Da'wah* and politics. The second group is unconventional and unconscious about worldly life. The Jama'at and Islamic political parties belong to the former and the *Tabligh* Jama'at and Sufi-oriented tradition belong to the latter. An indication of the first group is they do not limit Islam to worship and the Hereafter. Beyond the scope of the Hereafter, this group also believes that Islam, constituting an ideology, social order, and rules of law, is concerned with every aspect of human life and how to deal and lead the worldly life for success in the Hereafter. Islam is thus very much concerned with human salvation in the Hereafter, as well as the significance of people's worldly lives.

Since *Da'wah* And *Tarbiyah* (Islamic Moral-Spiritual Training and Education) is one of the main agendas of the Jama'at, hence "Enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong" is an essential duty of the Muslim *Ummah*. It is one of the main purposes for which it has been raised (Ali, 1994). This noble duty has promoted the Muslim *Ummah* toward becoming *Khaira Ummah* or *Ummah Wasat*. The code of life in Islam requires the attitude of complete submission to Allah, the Creator of man and the universe. However, human beings continued to drift away from the right path. Either they lost the original teachings through negligence or they deliberately adulterated and distorted them. They associated Allah (S.W.T.) with innumerable human beings, material objects and imaginary gods. *Shirk* (polytheism) became widespread. They mixed the teachings of Allah (S.W.T.) with myths

and strange philosophies and thus produced a jumble of religions and cults; and they discarded the Allah-given principles of personal and social morality, the *Shari'ah* (Mawdudi, 1976).

In Bangladesh, Islam is a deep-rooted religious, social and cultural institution. Social norms and other interactions in the country have largely originated and are guided by Islamic principles. Therefore, abrupt replacement of Islam from the social fabric and political arena will potentially disrupt social cohesion to and generate massive opposition from the masses. To avert this imminent disruption and opposition, the secular forces and regimes have adopted approaches that are both paradoxical and diametrically opposed to one another. Thus, it is a major challenge for the Islamic forces in Bangladesh to propagate Islamic *Da'wah* and *Tarbiyah* since the society and political arena is dominant by the secular, and leftist socialist- elites (Islam, 2011).

Bangladesh Jama'at-e-Islami believing that it is not a conventional religious, political, social or cultural party, the emphasizing on moral and spiritual life is very important in an Islamic organization. The Jama'at concentrates on social service and social reform as strong emphasis has been given on social service and social reform in Islam. In this sense, the Jama'at is an Islamic movement, to propagate Islam and to call the people to the way of Allah (S.W.T.). It aims at reconstructing the thoughts of the people on the basis of the Qur'an and Sunnah, in conformity with the Islamic worldview in all sections of the people and to make them feel the necessity to follow Islamic teachings in every sphere of life (<https://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/en/>).

It is part of the program of the Jama'at to awaken the slumbering people and to make them an organized force through training and *Tarbiyah*. This is so in order to popularize and expose people to Islamic thought in the society and thus enabling the Muslims equip themselves with Islamic characteristics of a practicing Muslim and with the help of masses to challenge the secular attitude generally in all spheres of life. By so doing, it would be possible to remove those who disobey Allah (S.W.T.) from the helm of affairs, in particular, and instead to enthrone those who are obedient to Allah (S.W.T.).

The contribution of immense importance is that Jama'at Islami gave a strategy for ideological enculturation at all levels and layers of society, including education, social work, economic, medical and religious aspects. As a result, Islamic thought has entered at all levels and classes in the society (<https://www.jamaat-e-islami.org/en/>).

Through the process and application of modern knowledge as developed in the West, the Muslim society suffers contradictions and chaos. The modern knowledge is based on secular views of reality and is mainly related to only worldly views of the socio-cultural settings of the West. The movement of Islamization of human knowledge, initiated by contemporary Muslim and social scientists, is seen by Islamic intellectuals as the response to the secular and modern knowledge. Its primary goal is re-Islamizing the socio-cultural setting of the Islamic worldview through educational institution (Kamal Hassan, 2014).

Hence, Islamic *Da'wah* and *Tarbiyah* is a distinctive point of view and method of Islamic movement to Islamize human mind and society based on Islamic worldview and Islamic epistemology. Islam has always been a visible and dynamic force in Muslim life and society. In recent decades, Islam has emerged as a major religious, political, and social force in public as well as personal life in response to the multiple experiences of Muslims. Islamization has had an impact on states, society and communities – on politics, economics, laws, education, women and minorities (Esposito, 2003).

CONCLUSION

As discussed earlier, one of the highest agenda of the Jama'at is to deal with the broad and basic principles and teachings of Islam; spiritual, moral, social, political and economic. The ideal Islamic society, suggested by Mawdudi, consists of people who, through putting their faith in Islam, have liberated themselves from all allegiances except to Allah; such a society would be free and its citizens would be as equal as the teeth of a comb (Moten, 2002).

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According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali, commentator of the Qur'an, the word *Muflih, aflaha, falah*: the root idea is attainment of desires; happiness, in this world and next; success; productivity; freedom from anxiety, care, or a disturbed state of mind;-the opposite of *'adhab* in the next verse, which includes: failure; misery; punishment or penalty; agony and anguish. As has been delineated, the ideal Muslim community is supposed to be happy, untroubled by conflicts or doubts, sure of itself, strong, united, and prosperous: because it invites to all that is good; enjoins the right; and forbids the wrong, -a master-stroke of description in three clauses (Ali,1994). Islamic organisations and groups actively work to fulfil this purpose and show their sincere guidance for the happy, Islamic and prosperous life so that society could have the best of this world and the Hereafter (Samad, 2015). In this regard, al-Qaradawi advised: Take care of the family which is the foundation for community, and the primary pillar to build up a good society (Al-Qaradawi, 2010).

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