ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN THE INDO-PAKISTAN SUBCONTINENT AND THE MIDDLE EAST[1]

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THE relationship of Indian Islam to that of the Islamic heartlands can be studied historically in terms of the actual impacts from the Middle East and vice versa. So far as Islamic thought in the subcontinent is concerned, its major source up to the seventeenth century lay in the north—Iran and Central Asia.[2] The main religious disciplines cultivated in this period are law and mysticism. Beginning with the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this picture becomes modified. With the opening of the direct sea route to Arabia, certain Indian scholars began visiting the Ḥijāz for the purpose of study. As a result of this orientation, the characteristic orthodox Arabo-Islamic science of Ḥadith was introduced and propagated in India, its monumental champion in the seventeenth century being Shaikh ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq of Delhi, called *Muḥaddith*, or traditionist *par excellence*.

This development coincides with a vigorous reassertion of Islamic orthodoxy and a bid for the recovery of a purist Islam from the compromises to which Islam had been subjected in India through the growth of certain popular forms of Sufism as mass religion. In the present paper, we shall not be concerned too much with the external historical relationship of Indian Islam with the Arab Middle East, but with the efforts of the Indian Muslims, in the realm of thought, to respond to the challenges and tensions created by the existence of Islam in a Hindu majority India. Hence, in the process we are dealing with, Islamization and orthodoxification become identical. As will become apparent presently, the terms of the resolution of this challenge are set within India and the emergent product is an Indian Islam, but with a definite reference to and with a source of inspiration from the outside at two levels: the ethos of Islam as it was shaped by the Prophet and the Qurʾān and the theologians of the early centuries, and the consciousness that Muslims in India are a part of the World Muslim Community with the Middle East as its natural center, as it were.

The leadership of the Muslim Community in India was first shocked into an acute awareness of the precarious situation of Islam in India by the religious attitude and policies of Akbar. The Bhakti Movement,[3] which was essentially a massive mechanism to revivify Hinduism against the threat of Islam by minimizing the rigors of the caste system, and of the purely ritual aspects of the Brahmanic religion, and heavily stressing

[1] This brief paper was given at the plenary session of the Middle East Studies Association held in Denver in November 1971, the theme of the session being the relationship of Islam in the outlying regions of the Muslim World to the heartlands of Islam.

[2] Principal works in English on the religio-cultural development of Islam in the subcontinent are: I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1962); S. M. Ikram, *Muslim Civilization in India* (New York, 1964); Azīz Aḥmad, *Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (London, 1964); Murray Titus, *Islam in India and Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960); Muḥammad Mujeeb, *Indian Muslims* (London, 1967). There is no work so far, however, dealing with the history of Islamic institutions in that part of the Muslim world.

[3] This has been ably stated by Tārā Chand in his *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad, 1963).

the emotional elements in worship, had closely approached Islamic Sufism which was operating at the mass level. But now, all of a sudden, heresy of immense dimensions had assailed the political citadel of Islam. This is not the place to go into the details of Akbar's religion. It is obvious enough that it was heretical: no apologist for Akbar can defend his cult of the sun and the fire.[4] Yet, it is also a fact that Akbar never renounced Islam and there is a good deal of evidence to show that he genuinely regarded his religion as "true" Islam. On the other hand, it is quite possible that he might have renounced Islam if he had not found a generous quantum of rationalized flexibility at the hands of his religious advisors, the two brothers Abū ʾl-Faḍl and Faiḍī, the orthodox sentence upon whom might, from this point of view, be somewhat mitigated.

The reformist reaction that set in against this phenomenon has a very definite character. It is relentlessly orthodox in its intent and goals but in its instrument and method it is Sufic and theosophical. In the Middle East, Ibn Taimīya had reacted with acuteness and vigor in the fourteenth century against Ibn ʿArabī who is regarded by him as the epitome of all that is anti-Islam. In doing so, Ibn Taimīya seeks to go back to the Qurʾān and the Sunna and the freshness of his spirit is equaled only by the harshness of his tone. With this new inspiration from the original sources of Islam, he not only attacks Ibn ʿArabī but also demolishes some of the central theses of the orthodox Ashʿarite Kalām on the questions of human free will and the rationality and purposiveness of the Sharīʿa-commands. But Ibn Taimīya's instrument of theological reform is Kalām, nonetheless. He restates Kalām theses and elaborates them, but from the beginning to the end his argument is Kalāmistic. Indeed, despite the spread of Sufism in the Middle East, the continuous cultivation of unadulterated formal Kalām as the unique instrument of orthodoxy is a remarkable phenomenon.

This procedure is a reversal of al-Ghazālī's who, three centuries earlier, had given up Kalām as a genuine method of religious reform and relied on Sufism and particularly Sufi ethics. Perhaps this diffierence is to be explained, besides the temperaments of these two men, by their relative situations. Al-Ghazālī's activity originated when the atmosphere was saturated with Kalām, which seemed to him to have become pedantic and lifeless, whereas Sufism was still struggling for recognition by the orthodoxy. By the time of Ibn Taimīya, the tide of Sufism was running high; indeed, the deluge of Ibn ʿArabī's pantheistic theosophy had all but submerged the orthodox aspects of Islam. It was time to apply, not the supple and somewhat greasy—albeit more appealing —methods of Sufism, but the sharp and cutting edge of Kalām. Ibn Taimīya, however, did not repudiate Sufism altogether. For him, the *Ijtihād* of the ʿUlamā and the *Kashf* of the Sufis are initially on a par and both must struggle for Sharīʿa-validation.[5]

Among the medieval Muslim theoreticians of India, Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1625),[6] the spearhead of the orthodox ideological movement against Akbar and heretical

[4] It should be remembered, however, that a cult of the sun had been advocated by the twelfth century Muslim mystic-philosopher al-Suhrawardī, called "the Philosopher of Illumination," executed at Aleppo by Saladin's order in A.D. 1191. Sun veneration was given prominence by later Persian Muslim philosophers and it may well be—although no detailed study has been made on the point—that this influence was felt in Akbar's court.

[5] See my *Islam* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 134.

[6] In view of Sirhindī's role in the orthodoxification of Indian Islam, modern scholars are sharply divided on the evaluation of his work—there is a pro-Sirhindī "Pakistāni" point of view projected, e.g., by I. H. Qureshi in his work mentioned in n. 2 above, while there is a sharply opposed "Indian" point of view canvassed, e.g., by Muḥammad Mujeeb in his above-mentioned work. This undoubtedly partisan attitude has unfortunately affected the only study of Sirhindī made so far in the West, by Y. Friedmann, *Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī* (Montreal: McGill University Press,

forms of Sufism, is the closest in spirit and intent to Ibn Taimīya, although it is not possible to say whether he had studied Ibn Taimīya or not. His scholarly makeup appears to be very different from that of his Middle Eastern predecessor. Whereas the former was a great *Muḥaddith*, an eminent jurist and an accomplished Mutakallim—indeed, a paradigm of traditional learning—Sirhindī was not. He was steeped in Sufi thought. His brand of Sufism, however, was Naqshbandī, and his extraordinary creative and restless spirit was fired by Khwāja Bāqī Bi'llāh, a Naqshbandī shaikh who had come from Central Asia and settled in Delhi. But like Ibn Taimīya, his spirit was rebellious and crusading. Like Ibn Taimīya, he was accused of heresy and jailed. Although Ibn Taimīya was a Ḥanbalī and Sirhindī a Ḥanafī, both attacked Ash'arism on the ground of its denial of real power and efficacy to the human will. But most important of all, like Ibn Taimīya, Sirhindī attempted to restore to the Sharī'a its supreme position in religious thought and action and to resurrect the unique position of the Prophet from the Sufi mesh of controversy as to whether the prophet was superior to the saint, or the saint to the prophet. In doing so, like Ibn Taimīya, the primary target of Sirhindī's criticism is Ibn 'Arabī, although in their religious judgment on Ibn 'Arabī, the two men differ: whereas for Ibn Taimīya, he represents a paragon of un-Islamic forces in Muslim thought, Sirhindī envisages him as a saint in cardinal error, a judgment that was possible only for a Sufi, not for a Mutakallim or a Muḥaddith. Finally, both men were activists and played an historical role for the political victory of Islam against non-Muslims.

The central point of Sirhindī's thought[7] is the introduction of a principle of moral dualism in the monistic system of Ibn 'Arabī. According to Ibn 'Arabī, God, in His absolute unity, transcends all categories of thought and being. This absolute, however, undergoes certain stages of descent (*tanazzulāt*). At the first stage, the Absolute develops consciousness whose contents become diversified at the second stage of descent. These contents of the Divine Consciousness are at once the attributes of God and the "essences" of contingent existents. These essences, at the next stage of the Absolute's self-diremption, cast their reflections in the mirror of external existence—which is nothing but God's existence—and the World comes to be constituted. Ibn 'Arabī, therefore, states that if you like, you can describe the World as God or creature or creature-God. In this monistic system, there is no room for real moral distinctions and, indeed, Ibn 'Arabī welcomes Satan in so far as he is Satan and performing his functions truly and faithfully.

According to Sirhindī, who accepts the framework of this theory of "descent," when the Absolute becomes self-conscious and the contents of divine consciousness become multiple, a very basic development takes place. Parallel and in opposition to these contents—the attributes of God—non-beings arise. The attributes represent pure being and goodness; these non-beings represent pure negation of being and negation of goodness. When the attributes of God cast their reflections or, rather, their shadows (*ẓilāl*), they cast them not on the being of God but on these non-beings (*a'dām*). This constitutes

1971). Not only does Dr. Friedmann not tackle Sirhindī's thought at its central point of relevance to Islamic religious thought anywhere in the book but, in an obvious effort to debunk Sirhindī, has published, at the end of his work, some *Fatwās* by certain "Ulamā" who declared Sirhindī a "kāfir." He forgets that "kāfir-calling" has been a common game in Islam; if such *Fatwās* are collected about Ibn Taimīya or even al-Ghazālī, the number would easily run into hundreds and perhaps thousands.

[7] For this account, see the introduction and chapters 1 and 2 in my *Selected Letters of Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī* (Karachi, 1968).

the generation of the world. Also, parallel to the undifferentiated consciousness of God arises the undifferentiated non-being (*ʿadam maḥḍ*) or evil (*sharr*), and parallel to the differentiated or particular attributes arise particular evils and non-beings. The attributes of God are not, therefore, the "essences of contingents (*māhīyat-i-mumkināt*)," as Ibn ʿArabī believes; these latter are rather the non-beings on which the attributes of God cast their shadows.

The world is, therefore, originally rooted in non-being. But the reflections or shadows of God that have been cast on it create a struggle between good and evil. This casting of shadows is a serious business and not a vain "sport" as some Hindu philosophers assert who think in terms of the "enchained" Brahman in this world, whence it must be freed; or a tragedy as Zoroastrians imagine, according to whom Light becomes incarcerated in Darkness, whence it must struggle to escape. The struggle that ensues after the world is constituted (created) has a positive orientation, to transform non-being into being and evil into good. This is what distinguishes the prophet from the Sufi, for whereas a Sufi "goes to God" and forsakes this world, the prophet brings God to this world and seeks to transform this world into something nobler.

The mystics are beguiled by appearances. When they see evil in the world, they think the world is evil. They therefore give up the "earth" and seemingly take flight to the spiritual realm. The movement of God is, however, exactly opposite to theirs, for He, far from remaining content with the spiritual realm, has cast His own shadow on this earthly realm. His purpose is obviously to redeem and transform it. In the realm of the spirit, there is perfect repose; there is no rebellion and warfare there. It is down here that there is tumult and sweat and struggle. The reason is that it is this "earth" which has the potentiality of transformation, and, when it is transformed, it far outstrips the realm of the spirit. Many Sufīs claim that a saint is superior to a prophet because a saint is "with God" whereas a prophet is "with people" or "with the World." This claim is belied by the very nature of spiritual experience. In fact, a saint, if he is not "with the World," cannot be and cannot have been with God. Every genuine spiritual experient comes "down" to the world after having "gone up." This dialectical nature of spiritual experience shows that the greater the "rise," the greater proportionally will be the "fall" or "return" to the world. The prophet "returns" to the world *because* his spiritual "rise" has been the highest and that is precisely why his reentry into history and his legacy to the world are most creative and meaningful (*nuzūl ba-andāzah-i-ṣuʿūd ast*).

By this argument, which, according to Sirhindī, is not a mere thought construction but is based on actual mystical experience of his own, he brings out the uniqueness of the prophetic experience (which, he insists, is qualitatively different from the mystic experience) and the centrality of the Sharīʿa-values. Since the truth of the Prophetic Revelation is absolute, it cannot even be approached by mystic experience, and Sirhindī declares unequivocally that on all points where the ʿUlamā differ from the Sufīs, the truth lies with the ʿUlamā and the Sufīs are in error. This conclusion, reached not through orthodox methods of Kalām but through Sufism itself, is apparently more radical than that of Ibn Taimīya who, as we have seen, gives initially equal place to Sufi intuition and the ʿUlamā's *ijtihād*.

Sirhindī's influence spread widely in India, Central Asia and Turkey and thence to Eastern Europe and, to some extent, in the Arab world. In India, however, it had to

contend against other strong currents of philosophical and theosophical thought, arising partly out of Upanishadic Hinduism—as in the case of Dārā Shikūh, the eldest son and the heir apparent of Shāh Jahān, and his circle—and partly coming from Persia. This conjunction of philosophy and theosophy, with a powerful monistic orientation, could not simply be negated or overcome by the Islamic isolationism of Sirhindī's solution, however subtle, bold, and original it was. Orthodox Islam gained the upper hand in the work of the last great Mughal ruler, Aurangzeb, whose policies may be regarded in a definite sense as the fruition of the trend of thought advocated and represented by Sirhindī. With the disintegration of the Muslim empire, however, a totally new situation was created for Islam in India. The great reformist-thinker who appeared at this juncture was Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, known as Shāh Walīy Allāh of Delhi (1705–67). It may be said that from now on, Muslim religious leadership in the subcontinent is more conscious of the Middle East, with which it cultivates a more deliberate relationship, and many intellectuals in its ranks visit Mecca. Shāh Walīy Allāh himself studied at Mecca after finishing his studies at home, and it has even been suggested that at Mecca he was a fellow student of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb.

Although it would be rash to say exactly how much of his inspiration came from his study in Arabia, it can be said safely that much of the orthodox side of his thought is the result of this study. His tremendous emphasis on Ḥadīth and the Arabic language, the high value he set on the work of the second century traditionist-jurist, Mālik ibn Anas, vis-à-vis later authoritative works of Sunni tradition, his translation of the Qurʾān into Persian, his awareness of the Arab element in Islam, and his acute consciousness of the universal and particular in Islam undoubtedly owe much to his stay in Mecca. Although the notion, popularized by the twentieth century activist reformer, ʿUbaid Allāh Sindhī (d. 1944), that Shāh Walīy Allāh had deliberately set out to produce an Indian version of Islam, may well be exaggerated,[8] it is patently true that he consciously attempted an integration of diverse elements in the Islamic tradition, most importantly the orthodoxy of the Ahl al-Ḥadith with Sufi theosophy.

Shāh Walīy Allāh replaces the crusading philosophy of Sirhindī with a complex system of reconciliation and synthesis (*taṭbīq*) which he claims to be his special mission. He restates Ibn ʿArabī's monism but at the level of multiplicity rejects simple determinism. Even in the realm of purely physical nature, there is no single track and unique cause-effect series, but there is a complex of endless series which are liable to interfere with each other and, although at each given moment the state of affairs of the Universe may be said, in a good sense, to be determined with a view to the past, the very next moment in the future it may be different. This is particularly true at the human level of existence because human actions are capable of infinite variation. The nature of man is such that he is eminently capable of subjecting *khalq*, i.e., the natural properties of things to *tadbīr*, i.e., deliberate manipulation. This sets human actions quite apart from the acts not only of natural bodies but, indeed, from those of other animals whose volition is still semimechanical. Human actions leave their effects not only on the outside world but equally on the human soul itself.

From this arises the phenomenon of moral obligation (*taklīf*) for man. Since the effects of human thoughts and actions never die, they become morally cumulative and histori-

[8] In his Urdu works: *Shāh Walīy Allāh aur Unka Falsafa* (Lahore, 1949), and *Shāh Walīy Allāh aur Unkī Siyasī Taḥrīk* (Lahore, 1952).

cally evolutionary. It is not indifferent to the world now that centuries ago there lived a Jesus or a Muḥammad, or that in further antiquity there lived men, unidentified by history, whose activity has contributed creatively to the destiny of mankind, and who have acquired a permanent place in the spiritual constitution of the Universe (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*). Because of this essentially transitive nature of human actions, organization of human societies is inevitable. The evolution of the social organization of man is divided by Walīy Allāh into four stages called *irtifāq*, beginning with local entities and culminating, through a regional or national state, in an international state or Universal Caliphate.

Walīy Allāh's views on Islam as Universal religion and law are interesting. When God wanted to raise the final Prophet, the central region of the earth was occupied by the two tottering and morally spent empires of Byzantium and Persia. The destruction of these two empires was the necessary and logical end and fulfillment of Muḥammad's mission since it restored this central region to a state of moral regeneration. Now, since it is not possible for a Universal prophet to go and teach every nation, it is inevitable that he first address his own people and train them and then, through their instrumentality, reach the rest of the world. It was, therefore, natural that Islam should have a certain amount of "Arabian colouring" which, however, in no way contradicts its universal character. The message of the Qurʾānic Revelation is universal, and the law of Islam is adaptable through a continuous *ijtihād*, but in order to appreciate fully the spirit of the Qurʾān it is essential to study Arabic, particularly pre-Islamic Arabic literature, for the language and style of the Qurʾān is the same.

The Sharīʿa rules are of two kinds. Basically, the Sharīʿa is concerned with the achievement of certain moral objectives in terms of the spiritual and material well-being of man. Indeed, since religion arises out of a demand of human nature (the *ṣūra nawʿīya*, "specific nature" of man), all religions have basically the same character. But the institutional forms of religions differ. These institutional set-ups, which may be called the "quantified expression (*al-maqādīr*)" of religion, attempt at "catching" religious truth and, therefore, constitute "symbols (*maẓānn, ashbāḥ*)" of the basic religious reality. Many rationalists have tried to dispense with the importance of institutions or "quantified" expressions and have claimed to go behind them to pure religious truth.

This tempting procedure, however, does not work. For a social organization, "custom" is as central as the heart is for a human organism. To destroy the institutions of a society is to destroy that society. Institutions can, of course, be distorted or misused, or some of them can be simply bad—as, for example, infanticide or usury were among pre-Islamic Arabs. The task of a reformer is to reform them or replace them but not to dispense with them altogether. Indeed, the "quantified expression" of a religion, when it is an adequate and effective index of reality, develops a metaphysical status of its own and is sanctified by the spiritual constitution of the universe we mentioned earlier. Over-institutionalization is, of course, harmful, for it threatens to stifle the living reality of religion and condemns religion to parochialism.

Islam is essentially what the people of the central region of the earth (i.e., people who are physically and mentally healthy and balanced) regard as "natural world-view (*al-madhhab al-ṭabīʿī*)." The Arabian content that it inevitably has from its place of birth, far from militating against its naturalism, may even strengthen it. Following Ibn Khaldūn, Walīy Allāh emphasizes the suitability of Arabia for the rise of Islam,

for the Arabs, unsophisticated and uncorrupted, were best attuned to the acceptance of a genuine summons of truth. It is, therefore, fraught with meaning when the Qurʾān describes itself as "Arab Qurʾān."[9]

After 1857, when the Indian Muslims' bid at recapturing political power from the British failed, the Middle East began to loom much larger in their political thinking, and their search for identity and security produced the *Khilāfat* movement in the 1920s which sought restoration of the Caliphate in Turkey after its abolition by Ataturk. Much more significant, however, was the thinking of Muḥammad Iqbāl whose message, delivered in moving poetry, summoned the Muslims to rise and shape their own destiny. Iqbāl sought inspiration from his image of the pristine Islam of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qurʾān—a spiritually creative and dynamic Islam which he saw buried under negative, non-Arab forms of medieval Sufism and dead formulas of the Kalām on the one hand and, on the other, beguiled by the superficial creativity of the West, which had lost the purpose of life amid its tumultuous and riotous technology, and threatened to numb the moral faculties of man.

Iqbāl had, in a concrete sense, inherited the legacy of Sirhindī and Walīy Allāh, his basic thought being but a restatement of Sirhindī's philosophy in twentieth century terms. And his own thought, in the same concrete sense, begot Pakistan. The thrust that had started with Sirhindī reached its final goal in altering the world map in August 1947. But perhaps we do not stop there. For even more basic than the economic problem in the present East-West Pakistan crisis seems to be the cultural problem affecting, in the final analysis, ideological orientation.[10]

[9] This analysis is based on his principal work *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*, vol. 1, book 1, division 1 (Delhi, 1373/1954), chapters 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 (a discussion of the nature of human actions and their effects); Discussion 3 (on the socio-economic basis of political organization), chapters 1–11; Discussion 6 (on the nature and origin of religions), chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 17, and 21; Discussion 7 (on the origin and formative period of Islam and crystallization of the content of the Sharīʿa), chapter 2. The first volume of this work amply deserves an English translation.

[10] East Pakistan has since become the sovereign state of Bangladesh, thanks to the Indian military intervention in December 1971. It will be highly interesting to watch the development of Islam there. A large section of the Muslim population of Bangladesh is very orthodox, like the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and other cognate forces, but, in the interior, the masses are under heavy Hindu influences. The prediction is probably safe that Islam will resurge there as a conscious and cultivated reaction away from Hinduism in view of the otherwise heavy dependence of Bangladesh on India in politico-economic terms, provided that Marxism does not overtake it (along with Indian Bengal) which, at all events, seems to be a distinct possibility for the future.