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MAWLANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN'S
CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM

Key words: Politics, Political Islam, Islamism, Totalitarianism, Fascism, Marxism, Secularism, Modernity

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, the world faced two major totalitarian threats: one in the form of fascism, spearheaded by Nazi Germany, and the other in the form of Communism, spearheaded by The Soviet Union. Fascism mostly died after the defeat of Axis forces during World War II, and Communism lost most of its global influence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, this did not mark the end of totalitarianism – a new similar threat emerged. There was one aspect that distinguished this new threat from the preceding two: this one did not claim to be secular in nature, but instead purported to be based on a religious faith. Its adherents chanted religious slogans before they murdered innocent people. Their goal was not to create a perfect race or a classless society, but rather to establish God's kingdom on Earth. This was the threat of Political Islam, also known as Islamism. Ideologically, it was similar to the other two totalitarian ideologies: it was utopian and had an agenda of complete global domination. The only difference was that this one sought its legitimacy on religious grounds. The similarities between the three ideologies have been studied by H. Hansen and P. Kainz. They observed that although the three ideologies differ in their end goals, they still follow a similar structure. All three begin with the assumption that an evil power has brought humanity to the verge of disaster and threatens its existence. In such a situation, it is the job of a particular group which is the personification of good, to rescue the world from this disaster and eradicate the evil force. This group will then realize the utopia of the classless society (Marxism),

the natural race struggle (Nazism), or the purified society of the followers of the true faith (Islamism)[1].

The actions of these militant Islamists have led many people to question the nature of the religion which these extremists claim to follow. Are these people merely putting into action the directives of Islam, or are they a product of a particular interpretation of Islam that has no previous antecedents in Islamic history?

Most sophisticated Western scholars have always agreed that the violence committed by these extremists has little to do with Islam, understood as a religion, but more to do with a particular reading of Islam which presents Islam primarily in socio-political terms[2].

This paper supports this thesis and presents an Islamic criticism of the Political interpretation of Islam put forward by the esteemed Indian scholar, Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan.

Islamism has had many theorists such as Hasan-Al-Banah (founder of Muslim Brotherhood) and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, Mawlana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi (founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in Indian subcontinent) and Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. However, the present paper only deals with the Political exposition of Islam put forward by the Indo-Pak scholar Mawlana Mawdudi. The reason for focusing solely on Mawlana Mawdudi is two-fold. The first reason is that it was Mawdudi who should be regarded as the first systematic thinker of political Islam, as Jan-Peter Hartung points out[3]. In fact, his influence can easily be observed on the other three thinkers. Hasan-Al-Banah was influenced by him, Sayyid Qutb adopted his concept of "Jahilliya", and Ayatollah Khomeini embraced his idea of Islamic revolution (with some alteration) and had his books translated into Persian[4]. The second reason for focusing solely on Mawdudi is that the scholar whose criticism of Islamism I wish to address here, Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan, also dealt mostly with the writings of Mawdudi. This paper does not simply present Khan's criticism of Mawdudi's religio-political ideas, but also studies it in the light of additional scholarship. It is often felt amongst some circles (especially members of Jamaat-e-Islami) that Khan's critique of Mawdudi was fueled by some personal animosity. This paper serves to invalidate that assumption by citing opinions of different scholars who agree with Mawlana Khan's analysis of Islamism.

2. ISLAM VERSUS ISLAMISM

When a Western observer studies Islam, he does so through his own cultural lens which is ultimately shaped by Christianity. This is quite natural, and my intention

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[1] H. Hansen, P. Kainz, *Radical Islamism and totalitarian ideology: A comparison of Sayyid Qutb's Islamism with Marxism and National Socialism*, Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions 2007, 8(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760601121648

[2] O. Roy, *The failure of political Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001, p. VIII.

[3] J. Hartung, *A System of life*, New York: Oxford University Press 2014, 12.

[4] R. Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi and political Islam*, London: Routledge 2011, 2.

here is not to berate the field of Orientalism. I simply wish to point out an obvious so-cial fact that we are all shaped by our cultural assumptions, and try as we might, we cannot totally situate ourselves out of those assumptions while we are exploring cultures different from ours. Thus, we may get a little surprised when we come across a culture that does not share our assumptions and is in fact governed by a slightly different ethos. This naturally applies to the Western study of Islam. Amongst the things that have at times bewildered certain western minds is that Islam, unlike Christianity, does not distinguish between religion and politics. Thus, the French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about Islam in the following words:

> "Mohammed made not only religious doctrines, but also political maxims, civil and criminal laws, and scientific theories descend from heaven and placed them in the Koran. The Gospel, in contrast, speaks only of the general relationships of men with God and with each other. Beyond that, it teaches nothing and requires no belief in anything. That alone, among a thousand other reasons, is enough to show that the first of these two religions cannot long dominate during times of enlightenment and democracy, whereas the second is destined to reign during these centuries as in all others"[5].

Here we see a classical example of what I alluded to above. Tocqueville, being from the West, is deeply saturated by his cultural suppositions and already accepts the Christian distinction between church and state. Thus, when he reads about Islam and finds that Islam does not differentiate between politics and religion , this leads him to view Islam as inferior to Christianity. However, despite his chauvinism, he is not incorrect about Islam's position on the matter. It is quite true that Islam entertains no such distinction, in fact, as T.N Madan argues, this distinction between the sacred and the secular, generally known as secularism, is essentially Christian in origin[6]. In a famous passage in the New Testament, Christ instructed his followers to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21). The exact meaning of this verse has been debated, but it has generally been interpreted as recognizing two distinct institutes in society, one concerned with political or temporal affairs (the secular government), and the other concerned with the matters of religion (The Church). The relation between these two institutes has not always been smooth. There have been instances when the priests have attempted to exercise temporal power or when kings have claimed authority over the church. However, these encroachments have largely been viewed as aberrations from Christian norms, and throughout Christian history there has always been an acknowledgement of two distinct authorities: one representing the imperium (the imperial power), and the other representing the Sacerdotium (the priestly power). However, when we study other religions, in particular Islam and Judaism, we find that nothing analogous to this distinction exists in either faith. This is because both these religions lack any institute which can be considered as synonymous to the

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[5] A. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, English Edition. Vol. 2., Liberty Fund 2012, 747. https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/democracy-in-america-english-edition-vol-2.

[6] T.N. Madan, *Secularism in its place*, The Journal of Asian Studies 1987, 46(4), 747–759. https://doi.org/10.2307/2057100

church[7]. Thus, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out, in Islam, there is no acceptance of a domain outside the realm of religion (or the sacred), and thus no acknowledgment of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane (or the spiritual and the temporal). As a matter of fact, there are no equivalent terms for "secular" and "profane" in the Islamic languages in their classical form[8].

Similarly, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, one of the chief expositors of Islam in the twentieth century, writes:

> "In Islam the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains, and the nature of an act, however secular in its import, is determined by the attitude of mind with which the agent does it.... In Islam it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another". He further adds, „The ultimate Reality, according to the Quran, is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, the material, the secular. All that is secular is therefore sacred in the roots of its being.... There is no such thing as a profane world… All is holy ground"[9].

This should not lead one to assume that Islam amounts to some obscure political ideology whose primary concern is to solve matters pertaining to the temporal world. As is the case with most religions, Islam's fundamental concern is not to offer paradise on earth, but to enable mankind to attain paradise in the world yet to come. Nor does Islam supply any socio-political system. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes in another place, '„the Quran does not provide a particular political structure but only offers certain basic principles for rule … What the Quran and the Hadith emphasize is that the domain of politics cannot be separated from that of religion"[10].

However, in the twentieth century, a new thought emerged in the Islamic world which endeavored to do exactly that, defining Islam primarily as a political system in keeping with the major ideologies of the twentieth century (Communism, Fascism, and Liberalism). Hasan-Al-Banah and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, Mawlana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi in the Indian subcontinent, and Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran were the main expositors of this new ideology. However, out of the four, it was Mawdudi who presented the most complete and coherent picture of political Islam. Mawdudi was arguably the most important Islamic thinker of the 20th century. His political and religious vision of Islam has gained widespread currency across much of the Muslim world, and even beyond that amongst the Muslim diaspora in the West. According to the Pakistani scholar Nadeem Farooq Paracha, Mawdudi is to political Islam what Karl Marx was to Communism[11]. He was a prolific writer whose writings covered an extremely wide spectrum of subjects, ranging from explaining religious injunctions concerning meat to a critique of western political thought. He also wrote a six-volume commentary of the Quran (Tafheem ul Quran), which has often been

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[7] B. Lewis, *Faith and power*, New York: Oxford University Press 2010, 44–46.

[8] S. Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*, HarperOne 2002, 26.

[9] M. Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, Stanford University Press 2013, 122–123.

[10] S. Nasr, *The heart of Islam*, New York, NY: HarperSanfrancisco, a division of HarperCollins 2004, 147.

[11] N. Paracha, (2015). *Abul Ala Maududi: An existentialist history*. Retrieved 22 June 2022, from https://www.dawn.com/news/1154419

described as his magnum opus. However, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith points out, his main contribution lies in being able to derive a systematic political interpretation of Islam[12]. Most of his works have been translated into Arabic, English, and many other languages. Mawdudi was born in the year 1903 in British India to a family which traced its roots back to a famous eleventh century Sufi mystic Mawdood Chisti (after whom Mawdudi was named). Yet, very early, Mawdudi relinquished his family's Sufi affiliations and became interested in exploring the new ideas and movements, imported from Europe, that were slowly engulfing the Indian political and social discourse. What alarmed him the most was the fact that many of the Muslims in India were being influenced by secular ideologies such as Communism. In order to counter this intellectual colonization, he felt necessary to present Islam in a way that it could confront these secular ideas. But for Islam to be able to do that, it had to pose more as an ideology motivating social action, and less as a religion primarily concerned with salvation. It was in this context that Mawdudi formulated his particular interpretation of Islam. His ideas found a warm reception, especially amongst those Muslims who had received modern education and were acutely aware of the western ideas[13]. One such individual who was initially inspired by Mawdudi's movement was Wahiduddin Khan. Born in 1925 in the city of Azamgarh in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P), Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan was a scholar just as versatile as Mawlana Mawdudi. He joined Jamaat-e-Islami in 1948 and served as an administrator of the Jamaat's publishing house. However, as he began to study Mawdudi's and Jaamat's ideology, he started to discern deep political connotations in Mawdudi's exposition of Islam. Khan felt that Mawdudi, owing to his extensive study of the Western political systems, had brought those external influences into his understanding of the religion. What resulted was a series of correspondence between Khan, Mawdudi, and many of the Jamaat's senior leaders in India, but Khan could not get a convincing answer from them. Consequently, he left the Jaamat in 1962[14]. In 1963, he published a book entitled "Ta'bir Ki Ghalati" (The error of Interpretation), where he at length elaborated how the Politic-centric worldview of Mawdudi greatly influenced his interpretation of Islam. This book is of particular significance since it is possibly the first proper intellectual criticism leveled against the political interpretation of Islam. Prior to that, Mawdudi was criticized by other scholars, most notably by Mawlana Husain Ahmad Madani of the Deoband Seminary[15], but none of those criticisms amounted to a complete deconstruction. Khan's book was the first of its kind. What made Khan's criticism even more important is, as the Canadian researcher Asif Iftikhar points out, that it came from within the ranks of Jamaat-e-Islami[16].

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[12] W. Cantwell Smith, *Islam in modern history*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1977, 234–235.

[13] J. Esposito, E. Shahin, *Key Islamic political thinkers*, Oxford University Press Inc. 2018, 44–46.

[14] I. Raazia, H. Shah, *Mawlana Mawdudi's Concept of Political Islam. Al-Irfan*, Journal of Arabic Literature And Islamic Studies 2021, 4(2), 140–141. doi: 10.36835/alirfan.v4i2.4982

[15] B. Metcalf, *Husain Ahmad Madani*, Oxford: Oneworld 2009, 196–200.

[16] A. Iftikhar, *Jihad and the Establishment of Islamic Global Order: A Comparative Study of the Worldviews and Interpretative Approaches of Abü al-A'la Mawdüdi and Javed Almad Ghamidi*, McGill University 2004, 29.

3. WAHIDUDDIN KHAN'S CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

What Wahiduddin Khan found problematic in Mawdudi's interpretation of Islam was not that it stressed upon the political aspects of Islam. As mentioned earlier, all Islamic schools of law and theology affirm the inseparability of religion and politics. Khan himself writes: "I do not object to his including politics in the deen. […] Politics, too, is part of religion"[17]. Rather, what he found objectionable was that Mawdudi so greatly exaggerated the political aspects of Islam that he managed to evolve a whole new interpretation of the religion. According to Khan, this politicized reading of Islam promoted a distinct mentality, one which perceives all the aspects of Islam through a political prism[18]. Khan considers this political exposition of Islam as entirely unprecedented in Islamic history. He mentions that, while different scholars over the centuries have emphasized the political dimensions of religion, especially when they felt that the political injunctions were being sidelined, this did not lead them to view politics as the underlying essence of Islam. He gives the example of Muslims scholars in India who, after the fall of the Mughal Empire, attempted to revive the Muslim rule and thus gave particular importance to politics. Yet even so, they still did not project the attainment of political power as the fundamental objective of Islam. However, in Mawdudi's interpretation, politics acquired such a central role that the whole of Islam, even the non-political aspects, came to be understood in a political manner. Politics, therefore, became the basis around which the totality of Islam was explained[19]. According to Vali Nasr, "Mawdudi accepted only politics as a legitimate vehicle for the manifestation of the Islamic revelation and as the sole means for the expression of Islamic spirituality, a position that correlated piety with political activity, the cleansing of the soul with political liberation, and salvation with Utopia"[20].

According to Khan, the natural corollary of this political exposition of Islam was that "…the goal towards which a believer had to strive came to be understood in essentially political terms. In this understanding of the goal of a believer, acquiring political power became of fundamental importance"[21]. He cites a passage from one of Mawdudi's books where he states:

> "Establishing and maintaining a pious leadership and the Divine System is the real aim of the deen"[22].

Khan cities several instances where Mawdudi departed from the established understanding of Islam. For instance, in his book "Tajdeed-o-Ihya-e Deen" ("A Short History of Revivalist Movement in Islam"), Mawdudi presents the purpose of prophethood in a peculiarly political way. He writes:

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[17] W. Khan, *The political interpretation of Islam*, Goodword Books 2016, 23.

[18] Ibid, 24.

[19] Ibid, 25.

[20] S. Nasr, *Mawdudi and the making of Islamic revivalism*, New York: Oxford University Press 1996, 59.

[21] W. Khan, 2016, 30.

[22] S. Mawdudi, *Tahreek E Islami Ki Ikhlaqi Bunyaden*, 1945, 7–8.

"The ultimate aim of all the Prophets' missions in the world has been to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth and to enforce the system of life received from Him. The Prophets, one and all, could very well concede the polytheists' demand of sticking to their old beliefs and practices, in so far as their activities and influence were restricted to their own communal sphere, but they could never agree, and rightly so, to their remaining in authority and yielding power for their own ends. With this object before them all the Prophets did endeavour to bring about political revolutions in their respective ages. Some of them were only able to prepare ground, as Prophet Abraham; others succeeded in practically starting the revolutionary movement, but their mission was terminated before they could establish the rule of God, as Prophet Jesus. But there were others who led their movement to its natural goal, culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. In this latter category are included Prophet Joseph, Prophet Moses and our Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them all)"[23].

According to Khan, this is a grotesque misrepresentation of the mission of the prophets of God for it implies that when the prophets acquired power, they allowed the people to continue in their wrong ways. As per Khan, the messengers of God were sent not to establish a political system but to convey the truth of religion in its final form to the people to whom they were assigned[24].

Mawdudi also defined the term "deen" in a different way. According to him "deen" is synonymous to "state" or "government". He writes:

"Acknowledging that someone is your ruler to whom you must submit means that you have accepted his Deen. He now becomes your sovereign and you become his subjects … Deen, therefore, actually means the same thing as state and government"[25].

This led him to understand the following Quranic verse as calling for the establishment of an Islamic state:

"He [Allah] has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], and what We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus – to establish the religion and not be divided therein. Difficult for those who associate others with Allah is that to which you invite them. Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself whoever turns back [to Him]" (42:13).

Mawdudi interpreted the injunction "establish the religion" ("iqamat-e-deen") as calling for the enforcement of the laws of Islam (Shariah) in their entirety. Since this can only be materialized through a state, this means that Muslims must strive to establish a 'Divine Government', or what Mawdudi described as "Hukumat-e Ilahiya".

However, Khan points out that none of the previous commentators of the Quran ever understood this verse as calling for the establishment of an Islamic government. He mentions several medieval Quranic exegetes (Imam Fakhruddin Razi, al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir etc.) as well as modern ones such as the noted Indian scholar Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, all of whom interpret "iqamat-e-din" as referring to the establishing of the basic teachings of the deen and not the whole sharia system. Khan believes that the reason behind this is that if this verse is understood in its entire context, it will become clear that it is commanding the establishment of the same deen which was revealed

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[23] S. Mawdudi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers 1963, 29–30.

[24] W. Khan, *Ta'bir ki Ghalati*, New Delhi: Al-Risala Books 1987, 209–256.

[25] S. Mawdudi, *Process of Islamic Revolution* 1979, 25–26.

to all the prophets. "Now, as far as the beliefs and fundamental principles taught by the different prophets are concerned, their deen was identical, but there were considerable differences in terms of the details of the laws (shariah) and practical commandments that they taught. This is why this Quranic verse can only indicate that portion of the deen that was common to the teachings of all the prophets"[26].

According to Khan, deen in its essence does not equate to a „system" of life in the political-legal sense as defined by Mawdudi, rather it is the manifestation of man's spiritual relationship with God. He does not deny that deen also provides a system of sorts but deems it as one of the manifestations of deen, and not its essence in any way. Thus, he concludes, that the effort to establish an Islamic state cannot be seen as a primary religious obligation of a Muslim[27].

Khan was not the only one who castigated Mawdudi for tampering with the meaning of "iqamat-e-din". Two other distinguished scholars joined the fray. According to the famous Indian scholar Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, in Mawdudi's interpretation of Islam, theocracy supersedes spirituality as the objective of Quranic revelation and the Quran assumes the form of a book which is concerned primarily with solving man's worldly plights[28]. Similarly, the Deobandi scholar Mawlana Manzoor Muhammad Nomani argued that Mawdudi misconstrued the real aim of the Islamic revelation which „is not an establishment of a government, but the promotion of faith and piety... [and the] gaining of God's favor"[29]. He, in fact, believed that Mawdudi's concept of "divine government" was neo-Khariji in outlook. It essentially reduced Islam into a drive for political power, thus converting it into an „-ism" which appeared less as a faith and more as a political ideology[30].

Another aspect which signified Mawdudi's departure from the traditional understanding of Islam was his re-definition of the four Quranic terms "Ilah", "Rab", "Ibadat", and "Deen" in his book "Quran ki Char Bunyadi Istilahen"("Four Basic Quranic Terms"). He states that these four terms are basic to the whole teaching of Islam, and the Quran would lose its whole meaning for anyone who does not know what is meant by ilah or rabb, what constitutes ibadah, and what the Quran means when it uses the word deen[31].

However, he asserts that these four terms in the books of linguistics and Quranic commentary written in the later period of Muslim history had acquired simply spiritual or religious meanings, and their real civilizational and political significance had gotten obscured. Thus, he writes:

> "The word ilah, as used in respect of others than God, came to be synonymous with idols or gods; The word rabb came to mean only someone who brings up or rears or feeds another or provides for his worldly needs; 'Ibadah began to be understood as the performance of a set of rituals of „worship"; Deen began to mean a religion, or belief in some precepts"[32].

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[26] W. Khan, 2016, 44–50.

[27] A. Iftikhar, 2004, 29.

[28] S. Nasr, 1996, 62.

[29] Ibid, 59.

[30] Ibid, 114.

[31] S. Mawdudi, *Four basic Qur'anic terms*, Islamic Publications 1989, 3.

[32] Ibid, 7.

How did this serious misapprehension occur? He writes:

"When the Qur'an was first presented to the Arabs, they all knew what was meant by ilah or rabb as both the words were already current in their language. They were not new terms, nor were any new meanings put upon them. They knew fully well what the connotations were and so, when it was said that Allah alone is the IIah, and the Rabb and that no-one has the least share in the qualities and attributes which the words denote, they at once comprehended the full import, understood completely without any doubt or uncertainty as to what specifically was being declared to Pertain to Allah exclusively and what was being hence denied to others. Those who opposed the precept were. very clear in their minds as to the implications of denying others than Allah to be ilahs or rabbs, in any sense, while those who accepted it knew equally well what they would have to give up by their acceptance and what they would forgo.

Similarly, the words 'ibadah and deen were in common use, and the people knew what was meant by 'abd, what state was implied by 'uboodiyyah (the state of being an 'abd) what kind of conduct was referred to when the word 'ibadah was used, and what was the sense of the term deen. So, when they were told to give up the 'ibadah of all others and reserve it exclusively for Allah, and give up all other deens and enter into the Deen of Allah only, they felt no difficulty in concluding what the Quranic dawah (message) implied and the drastic revolution in their way of life it sought to bring about. But as centuries passed, the real meanings of these terms gradually underwent subtle changes so that, in course of time, instead of the full connotations, they came to stand for only very limited meanings or restricted and rather vague concepts. One reason was the gradual decline of interest in the Arabic language and the other that the words ceased to have the same meanings for the later generations of Muslims that they had for the original Arabs to whom the Quran had been revealed"[33].

According to khan, this interpretation perverts the whole nature of Islamic history. "Muslims believe that throughout Islamic history there has been an ideological continuity or continuity of religious ideas. But if the Mawlana is to be believed, this belief is erroneous. Going by his understanding, Islamic history, during its long existence, was marked by an enormous vacuum which no one was able to address before the advent of the Mawlana himself"[34].

Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi also criticized Mawdudi's understanding of Islamic history. In his book "Asr-e-Hazir-Mein-Deen-Ki-Tafheem-o-Tashreeh" ("Appreciation and interpretation of religion in the modern age"), Nadwi states:

"The type of research conducted and the style of description adopted by Mawlana Mawdudi would lead one to conclude that the Ummah went through a long period of ignorance of the true import of the basic terms and their connotations and a mystery on which depended the soundness of their thinking and action. That would be tantamount to clear ignorance and negligence and even to perdition"[35].

Mawdudi was also criticized by Hasan al-Hudaybi, the second guide of the Muslim brotherhood who succeeded the founder Hasan-al-Banah. In his book "Du'at la-qudat" ("Preachers, Not Judges"), Hudaiybi writes:

"The assertion of the author (Mawdudi) that in Muslim society the terms 'Ilah', 'Rabb' 'Deen' and 'Ibadat' were not understood as they were understood in pre-Islamic days at the time of descent of the Quran, is an unwarranted and untrue assertion and a baseless and fatuous accusation"[36].

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[33] Ibid, 5–6.

[34] W. Khan, 2016, 59.

[35] S. Nadwi, *Appreciation and interpretation of religion in the modern age*, Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications 1982, 38.

[36] H. al-Hudaybi, (Du'at.la-qudat), Cairo 1977, 19–25.

According to Vali Nasr, "From the earliest days, traditional Islam has accepted the unfolding of history as the will of God, arguing that mankind had no authority to question what lay in the realm of divine wisdom. Although traditional divines idealized the early history of Islam, they did not view what followed that era to be 'un-Islamic'… Like other contemporary Islamic revivalists, Mawdudi did not view Islamic history as the history of Islam but as the history of un-Islam or jahiliyah. Islamic history, as the product of human choice, was corruptible and corrupted. For him, Islamic history held no value and manifested no religious truths, except during its early phase … The revival of Islam, it followed, must entail the total rejection of what came after the rightly guided caliphs and would be realized by reconstructing that period. The Islamic state therefore had to stand outside the cumulative tradition of history of Muslim societies"[37].

All this discussion demonstrates that, although Wahiduddin Khan was the first to offer a complete critique of Mawdudi's political exposition of Islam, he is definitely not the only scholar who finds his interpretation of Islam as erroneous and problematic.

4. POLITICAL ISLAM AND MODERNITY

In his book "Straw Dogs, Thoughts On Humans And Other Animals", the British philosopher John Gray states that the three great Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) introduced a new concept of history into human imagination. The ancient Greeks, like Hindus and Buddhists, saw human life and human history as cyclical. We live, they believed, in alternating stages of hope and despair, of growth and decay. Thus, for them, history was merely a series of cycles with no overall meaning. But according to the Abrahamic faiths, since history is the expression of God's purpose for humanity (providence), it cannot be meaningless. It begins with the fall and works its way towards the salvation of the human race. In this vision, history is always directed towards some final end or goal. According to Gray, this gave birth to the idea so characteristic of the modern times, the idea that history entails a meaningful progressive evolution. He calls this concept as the idea of progress[38]. The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner writes that the idea of progress entails the belief that the whole of humanity is involved in a continuous process of progress and amelioration, from primitive beginnings as an animal, to the loftiest peaks of true spiritual humanity. In this vision of history, everything is moving towards a better or more perfect end. Thus, when people say that certain things are unacceptable today, or conversely, that certain things should now be accepted since we are living in the twenty-first century, they are appealing to this progressive understanding of history. However, Brunner points out that while this idea is possible only within the Biblical understanding of history, it is not a direct product of it. This is because in Abrahamic

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[37] S. Nasr, 1996, 59–60.

[38] J. Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2007.

religions, it is God and not man who controls the goal and process of history, whereas the idea of progress is based on man's own self-confidence to guide the goal of history. He points out that this idea started to emerge in Europe from the fourteenth century onwards. He mentions that beginning with the Renaissance, man started to become more confident in his own powers to shape the course of history. This self-confidence reached its pinnacle during the Enlightenment- the intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries[39]. The secularism that began with the Enlightenment discarded certain religious concepts such as sin or human corruptibility but retained the biblical understanding of history. Since it also did not view evil as a permanent feature of the material world, it taught that through rational manipulation man can create a perfect world- a world free of evil[40]. It was only now that the idea of progress was properly conceived. According to Karl Löwith, this idea is a distinctly modern creed. He writes, "neither antiquity nor Christianity ever indulged in this modern illusion that history can be conceived as a progressive evolution that solves the problem of evil by way of elimination"[41].

As per the German philosopher Karl Jaspers, the French Revolution, inspired by the enlightenment ideals, was the first revolution whose motive force was a determination to reconstruct life upon rational principles. In this sense, it was truly unprecedented in human history. No prior revolution, he points out, ever attempted to deliberately transform human society. However, he adds, "The surprising result of the French Revolution was that it underwent a transformation into its opposite. The resolve to set men free developed into the Terror which destroyed liberty. The reaction gathered strength; and hostility to the revolution, a fixed intention to prevent its recurrence, became the leading principle of all the States of Europe"[42].

Yet ever since the French Revolution there has prevailed this desire to create a perfect world. As the American theologian David Bentley Hart points out, Nazism and Communism, two of the most dangerous ideas of the twentieth century, shared this optimism with regards to creating a perfect world and were willing to dispose of millions of people in order to achieve their utopian society[43].

Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan shares a similar observation. In his book ''Ta'bir Ki Ghalati'' (''The Error of Interpretation''), Khan mentions that since the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the sort of movements that have gained the most acceptance have been the ones that have sought to improve our material existence, usually by means of political revolutions. In fact, today, only those movements which are pursuing this goal are considered to be truly genuine ones. He adds that this trend has become so prominent that it has even penetrated into certain religious schools of thought. Instead of being dedicated to perfecting a person's afterlife, certain religious schools have assumed the task of perfecting the temporal world. According

[39] H. Brunner, *Eternal hope*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press 1954, 8–10.
[40] C. Hedges, *When atheism becomes religion*, New York: Free Press 2009, 42.
[41] K. Löwith, *Meaning in history*, Chicago: University Press 1950, 3–4.
[42] K. Jaspers, *Man in the modern age*, New York: AMS Press 1978, 6–8.
[43] D. Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, Yale University Press 2010, 227–228.

to him, the political interpretation of Islam is a product of this very same mentality[44]. There are others who have expressed similar opinions. William E. Shepard observes that like the secular ideologies emanating from Europe, Islamism too accepts the idea of progress. He cites a statement from Khomeini where he describes Islam as "progressive" and of Mawdudi where he says that " we can accelerate the onward march to progress only on strength and moral values enunciated by Islam". According to Shepard, this acceptance of the idea of progress shows how modern political Islam is since it clearly deviates from the traditionalist view that historical decline is more or less inevitable and that the ideal of the golden age of the Prophet cannot be realized in later times[45].

According to the French political scientist Olivier Roy, some people often perceive political Islam as a return to the Middle Ages or to a more traditional form of Islam, but this view is mistaken. According to Roy, "The cadres of the Islamist parties are young intellectuals, educated in government schools following a Westernized curriculum and in many cases from recently urbanized families … Thus the advent of contemporary political Islam is in no way the return of a medieval, obscurantist clergy crusading against modernity … It is a group that is sociologically modern, issued from the modernist sectors of the society. Rather than a reaction against the modernization of Muslim societies, Islamism is a product of it"[46].

John Gray notes that since its inception in the mid-twentieth century, militant political Islam has depicted itself – and has been by perceived by others – as a deeply anti-Western movement. But, in fact, it has borrowed many of its themes from radical Western thought. "The idea that the world can be regenerated by spectacular acts of violence echoes the orthodoxy of French Jacobinism, nineteenth century European and Russian anarchism, and Lenin's Bolshevism"[47]. He adds that movements such as Nazism and militant political Islam do not offer an alternative to the modern faith in progress but simply a different flavor of what progress ought to entail. Similarly, Roy states, "It is curious that almost all Western reflection on Islamic terrorism traces it back to the Ismaili 'Assassins' (hashashin) of the twelfth century, without seeing its continuity with the Western terrorist tradition, which dates back to the Carbonari, the anarchists, and the Russian populists"[48].

The influence of radical Western thought on Mawdudi can be easily discerned in the following passage:

> "Islam is a revolutionary ideology (Fikrah inqilabiyyah) and a revolutionary practice, which aims at destroying the social order of the world totally and rebuilding it from scratch … and Jihad denotes the revolutionary struggle"[49].

[44] W. Khan, 1987, 209.

[45] W.E. Shepard, *Islam and ideology: Towards a typology*, International Journal of Middle East Studies 1987, 19(3), 307–336. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743800056750

[46] O. Roy, 2001, 49–50.

[47] J. Gray, *An illusion with a future*, Daedalus 2004, 133(3), 16. doi: 10.1162/0011526041504542

[48] O. Roy, 2001, 60.

[49] E. Lerman, *Mawdudi's concept of Islam*, Middle Eastern Studies 1981, 17(4), 500. doi: 10.1080/00263208108700487

As John Gray points out, this belief that the progress of human societies requires the destruction of existing institutions animated a long line of twentieth-century revolutionaries that includes Lenin, Trotsky and Mao. Its origins lie in the Jacobin faith in violence as a means of regenerating society[50]. He further adds, "The use of terror by radical Islamist groups has very little to do with traditional Islam and far more with the techniques of asymmetric warfare used by modern revolutionary movements. There is nothing peculiarly Islamic in suicide bombing. Until the Iraq war it was the Tamil Tigers, a Marxist–Leninist group that recruits mainly in Hindu communities"[51].

According to Khan, political Islam is similar to Marxism in the sense that it interprets the totality of Islam through politics, akin to Marxism's interpretation of entire history in light of economics. He states "Marxism is referred to as an economic interpretation of History. This is because in Karl Marx's understanding of life, the economic factor dominates everything else. In the same way, Mawlana Mawdudi projected Islam in such a way that every aspect of it seemed to acquire a political hue"[52].

The similarity between political Islam and Marxism has also been observed by others. According to Eran Lerman, Mawdudi's act of asserting Islam as a total ideology was inspired by Marxism. He further adds that although Mawdudi rejected most Marxist tenets, he readily embraced one of them: that it is the purpose of revolution to establish social happiness and moral perfection. "Mawdudi's answer to the question of 'What is Islam?' is that Islam is a total, universal ideology that can shape a perfect society; and that the purpose of Islam as a revolutionary movement is to govern the world"[53].

Similarly, Vali Nasr observes that Mawdudi based his understanding of religion and society on a dialectic view of history, "in which the struggle between Islam and disbelief (Kufr) ultimately culminates in a revolutionary struggle. The Jamaat was to be the vanguard of that struggle, which would produce an Islamic utopia". He further adds that Mawdudi founded his organization Jamaat-e-Islami on the European models on display in the 1930's, particularly those of the fascist and communist organizations[54].

Irfan Ahmad writes that far from being antithetical to Modernity, Mawdudi's ideology bears the indelible mark of Modernity[55]. He adds that although Mawdudi criticized Nehru and the Muslim League for being secular and Westernized, his own ideas were inspired by the traditions of Western philosophy, in particular, German idealism and Marxism[56].

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[50] J. Gray, *Al Qaeda And What It Means To Be Modern*, The New Press 2005, 7–8.

[51] J. Gray, 2005, 10–11.

[52] W. Khan, 2016, 10.

[53] E. Lerman, 1981, 504–507.

[54] S. Nasr, *The vanguard of Islamic revolution: The jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan*, University of California Press 1994, 8–13.

[55] I. Ahmad, *Islamism and democracy in India: The transformation of jamaat-e-islami*, Princeton University Press 2009, 50.

[56] Ibid, 63.

Some Islamists have openly admitted that their project is a modern one. Consider the following statement from Maryam Jameelah, one of the disciples of Mawlana Mawdudi:

> "In launching his [Mawdudi's] Islamic movement in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent, his aim was not a mere patch-work of reforms, much less did he intend to attempt any restoration of traditional Islamic civilization as it had existed in the pre-colonial days. His goal was a total revolutionary break, with the medieval past and its so called Muslim society. ... He strived to build a better universal order"[57].

According to Khan, there is another reason for the emergence of the political interpretation of Islam, which is to resist western imperialism. He writes "Islam was the leading civilization of the world in the period between the decline of ancient civilizations and the ascent of modern European ones. But ultimately, Western colonial powers established their dominance over the Muslim world; it was in reaction to this domination that political movements began to be launched in the name of Islam"[58]. Thus, he regards the political interpretation of Islam as primarily a reactionary theory to Western imperialism. According to the American scholar Daniel Pipes, the decline of the Muslim world vis-à-vis the rise of the Christian Europe generated three political responses in the Muslim world- Secularism, Reformism, and Islamism[59].

As for the future of political interpretation of Islam, Khan believes that it is bound to meet the same fate as Marxism. He opines that Mawlana Mawdudi's literature would continue to be read and cherished amongst the Jamaat-e-Islami circles, however, it will no longer have any intellectual potency or practical relevance to people's lives, similar to Karl Marx's writings which are still read by the communists but have little practical relevance today.

"An unrealistic and unnatural interpretation of any truth always passes through a historical process. It temporarily attracts and influences a particular generation of people, and then it begins to weaken. Finally, it comes to be locked up in a cupboard in a museum"[60].

According to Olivier Roy, political Islam has reached a dead end. "For the Islamists, Islamic society exists only through politics, but the political institutions function only as a result of the virtue of those who run them, a virtue that can become widespread only if the society is Islamic beforehand. It is a vicious circle"[61]. This shows that the traditional Islamic perspective which prioritizes individual piety over social or political action (a methodology preferred by the Tablighi Jamaat in the Indian subcontinent) is a much more reasonable approach than the one which believes that religious piety can only be properly materialized through political or social action.

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[57] S. Nasr, 1996, 111.

[58] W. Khan, *The prophet of peace*, New Delhi: Penguin Books India 2009, 37–42.

[59] D. Pipes, *Islam and Islamism: Faith and Ideology*, The National Interest 2000, 59, 87–93. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42897264

[60] W. Khan, 2016, 68.

[61] O. Roy, 2001, 60.

5. CONCLUSION

The political interpretation of Islam, particularly its militant manifestations, have been the source of much strife and conflict across the world. This has led many to view the religion of Islam in a negative way. This paper has addressed the critique of political Islam put forward by the Indian Scholar, Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan. According to Khan, the political Islam deviates to a great degree from the traditional understanding of Islam. He regards this interpretation of Islam as a relatively recent phenomenon which is more socio-political in origin than religious. I have examined his criticism in light of the views of many other scholars. As shown, there is a large agreement on the nature of political interpretation of Islam. Khan's critique counts as one of the earliest and the most serious intellectual opposition to this interpretation of Islam.

The difference between Mawdudi's and Khan's understanding of Islam can be summed up in the following way: for Mawdudi, Islam is primarily a socio-political system, and even Islamic piety can only be properly materialized through an Islamic political order; whereas for Khan, although Islam contains politics, its primary concern is spirituality and not political power.

Although known for some of his unorthodox positions on certain religious matters, Khan's critique of political Islam is simply an affirmation of the classical Islamic position on the relation between politics and religion. This is evident by the fact that other traditionalist scholars, whose opinions I have shown in the paper, agree with Khan's analysis.

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Summary

The article presents a critique of the political interpretation of Islam, proposed by the Indian thinker Malwana Wahiduddin Khan. The question of the place of politics in Islam has become enormous especially in the face of the extremist actions of militant Islamists: do such actions fit into a particular reading of Islam that springs from a certain understanding of religion, or do they pursue the main purpose of the religion? Is the establishment of an Islamic political order the primary task of every Muslim?

This kind of question comes naturally to anyone concerned about the terrorist activities of militant Islamists. Since they are trying to justify their actions with a particular interpretation of Islam, it is necessary to present a narrative in opposition to theirs interpretation, and to show that such persons, who are far from a sincere adherence to Islam, are guilty of a serious misinterpretation of it. The article serves this purpose by presenting Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan's critique of political Islam. By the term „political Islam" is meant a particular interpretation of the religion of Islam that sees the faith mainly in socio-political terms.

Khan's criticism is one of the earliest intellectual objections to this understanding of Islam. Although many thinkers have contributed to the theory of political Islam, the article focuses only on the writings of the Indo-Pakistani scholar Mawlana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi and their critical assessment by Wahiduddin Khan. Since the polemic between two thinkers can often be dismissed as inspired by personal conflict or pretension, the article is not limited to Kahn's criticism of Mawudidi, but also assesses it in the light of later scholars.

KRYTYKA POLITYCZNEJ INTERPRETACJI ISLAMU
MAWLANY WAHIDUDDINA KHANA

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia krytykę politycznej interpretacji islamu, zaproponowaną przez indyjskiego myśliciela Malwanę Wahiduddina Khana. Pytanie o miejsce polityki w islamie nabrało olbrzymiego znaczenia, zwłaszcza wobec ekstremistycznych działań wojujących islamistów: czy tego rodzaju działania wpisują się w szczególne odczytanie islamu, które wypływa z pewnego rozumienia religii, czy też zmierzają do wypełnienia głównego celu religii? Czy ustanowienie islamskiego porządku politycznego jest podstawowym zadaniem każdego muzułmanina?

Tego rodzaju pytania pojawiają się w sposób naturalny w każdym człowieku zaniepokojonym terrorystycznymi działaniami wojujących islamistów. Ponieważ próbują oni usprawiedliwić swoje działanie szczególną interpretacją islamu, konieczne jest przedstawienie narracji stojącej w opozycji do ich interpretacji, a także wykazanie, że tego rodzaju osoby będące daleko od szczerego wyznawania islamu ponoszą winę za poważny błąd w jego interpretacji. Artykuł służy temu celowi przez przedstawienie krytyki politycznego islamu, dokonanej przez Mawlanę Wahiduddina Khana. Przez określenie „polityczny Islam" rozumie się szczególny wykład religii islamu, który postrzega wiarę głównie w kategoriach społeczno-politycznych.

Krytyka dokonana przez Khana jest jednym z najwcześniejszych intelektualnych sprzeciwów wobec takiego rozumienia islamu. Mimo że wielu myślicieli wniosło wkład w teorię politycznego Islamu, artykuł koncentruje się jedynie na pismach indopakistańskiego badacza Mawlany Sayyida Abul Ala Mawdudiego i ich krytycznej ocenie dokonanej przez Wahiduddina Khana. Ponieważ polemika pomiędzy dwoma myślicielami może często być lekceważona jako inspirowana osobistym konfliktem lub pretensjami, artykuł nie ogranicza się do krytyki Mawududiego przez Kahna, ale również ocenia ją w świetle późniejszych badaczy.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka, islam polityczny, islamizm, totalitaryzm, faszyzm, marksizm, sekularyzm, nowoczesność

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