

Muslim Concepts of Local Power and Resistance. Islamic Militants in the Indian Frontier Province between 1900 and Independence

Dietrich Reetz

When talking about Islamic militancy on the north-west frontier,¹ the objective is to understand the conceptual framework by which movements of this description were driven. Muslim militancy on the frontier can provide clues to understanding the mechanism of the fusion of politics and religion within Islam, or, more specifically, within Southasian Islam. It is an attempt to look closer at the pretension of Islamic movements of harbouring a radically and fundamentally different world view, and to see how Islamic ideals fared when confronted with western political concepts and local power considerations. Since the problem is acute even today, it may provide some insight into how Islamic religious injunctions are reconciled to the need for adaptation to western political concepts. The latter prevailed at the time in India through colonial domination and continue to dominate the political discourse in Islamic countries today.

No extensive research on this aspect of Islamic politics has been done so far, *i.e.* on the specific political views and concepts of regional Islamic movements. The north-west frontier region comprised the North-West Frontier Province belonging to British India, carved out of the Punjab in 1900, and the independent tribal territories under the direct rule of the Chief Commissioner of the Frontier Province on behalf of the Government of India. Frontier politics in the north-west have so far mainly been described within the framework of the Pakhtun movement under Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988), the so-called Red Shirt movement which started out as the *Khudai-Khidmatgaran*, or Servants of God, doing social service in the countryside. Other research focused on Frontier politics as part of the Pakistan movement. Thus, frontier politics have mainly been treated from the perspective of the two dominating discourses of (1) the nationalist Congress movement, with which the Red Shirts were aligned², and (2) the Pakistan movement, led by the Muslim League³. Although anthropological and cultural research on local Islamic traditions of the frontier has been carried out, the political implications of local Islam have rarely been discussed. It is assumed here that mainstream politics on the north-west frontier in the 1930's and 1940's, which have been widely covered by researchers,

originated from the kind of local political mobilisation, of which the Islamic discourse was an important element.

Most of the rare case studies conducted provide little more than an assemblage of random facts on the movements covered by this paper. They are often lacking in clarity and concept as far as political consequences or historical meaning are concerned. An ideological approach is also discernible, claiming these movements exclusively either as doctrinal Islamic traditions or as a separate Muslim liberation movement leading to the creation of Pakistan. This is typical of the studies on the *mujahidin* where there is another drawback: with the exception of an article by Lal Baha, the twentieth century is not covered.⁴ In the 1920 *hijrat*, an unpublished dissertation was written at Peshawar University, Pakistan, which, despite a wealth of material from the local archives, treats the subject strictly within the parameters of an Islamic ideological framework.⁵ This disallows for an independent evaluation of other contributing factors going beyond the interpretational boundaries of Islam such as economic calamities, social upheavals etc. The same limitations apply to the usual articles on the *hijrat* that cover only selected aspects of the phenomenon.⁶ A recent monograph by this author limits itself to one British file from the India Office Library, though within a more comprehensive regional framework.⁷ Little is available on the "provisional government" at present. It is usually mentioned in passing only,⁸ no recent independent study of it has come to this author's knowledge. Activities of militant mullahs on the Frontier have not been politically conceptualised so far. They have either been mentioned in reports and writings on tribal uprisings⁹ or in anthropological studies of Muslim customs in the Frontier region.

After a cursory explanation of the conceptual framework on which the understanding of Islamic movements in British India could rest, a sketch of their forays into politics will follow, rounded off by a number of points tracing some structural features of the correlation between Islam and politics. The paper mainly concentrates on the beginning of the 1920's when all four movements mentioned were active in the province almost concurrently and thus a number of cross-connections became evident, pointing to similarities as well as to certain differences.

Root causes of Islamic activism - an overview

Conceptually, the question arises whether Indian Muslims had a political concept of their own, sufficiently different from mainstream nationalism to merit special distinction. It would be illuminating to understand to what extent they produced indigenous concepts of political power, authority and society and how these were linked to classical political concepts of the time. Islamic movements were trying to position themselves within a triangular reference scheme of (1) the Islamic doctrine, (2) the western constitutional reforms project pursued by the colonial British government in India and (3) the nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru from the Indian National Congress, with the latter, through Gandhi, drawing substantially on Hindu ethics and unitarian religious beliefs. The British-sponsored political project aimed at the slow but gradual and steady process of introducing constitutional parliamentary reforms to increase a certain measure of self-rule and popularly elected local government. The reality of the Indian constitutional reforms in terms of limitations and conditions imposed upon India fell considerably short of the radical demands of Indian nationalists who wanted a fully responsible government elected by a parliament based on adult franchise. The acts of 1919 and 1935, reforming the British-Indian constitution, nevertheless broadened and strengthened western political institutions and structures. Indian Muslims constituted the largest religious minority in India, comprising twenty-one percent of the population. Their impact on political life and on society increased further by way of clustered settlement in certain areas where they constituted the majority, i.e. Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, and Bengal in British-India, and among the larger principalities, Kashmir and Haiderabad. However, centres of Islamic learning and culture were located in the United Provinces, the largest and most populous province up to today, where Muslims made up a minority of 15 per cent.¹⁰ Based on the comprehensive interpretation of Islam as *deen*, i.e. way of life, instead of the narrow approach as *mazhab*, or religion, politics were supposed to form part of Islamic doctrine by implication. But it was not formulated as a separate concept, as yet.

This changed with the concept of Muslim nationalism which assumed that all Muslims belonged to one separate nation, *qaum*, similar to the Bengalis or Indians in general. This concept presumed that the Muslim community in India would seek self-determination for very much the same reasons as the all-India nationalist movement fought for independence. The Muslims were seeking constitutional safeguards against alleged domination by a non-Muslim statutory

majority in elected bodies. Otherwise, goals and methods of policy-making were hardly different from secular nationalist movements. To demand a separate territory for this imagined Muslim nation was supposed to be the aim of the Pakistan movement when it demanded a homeland for Indian Muslims. It was led by the Muslim League founded in 1906 which had come to be a synonym for Muslim politics in pre-independence India. The Pakistan movement was no doubt the major political movement of Indian Muslims both in terms of scope and resulting success and it has also been covered extensively by researchers.¹¹ However, from the point of view of Islamic doctrine, the Pakistan movement could only partially and in a very limited way be called an Islamic movement. It was conducted by the Muslim League, a political party which - beyond its Muslim subject members and its Muslim majority area concept - followed rather orthodox bourgeois political ends, that is power and control of legislatures and over the allocation of resources, for which it also employed fairly established political means. The Muslim League was a mainstream party which more or less strictly followed the example of the British parliamentary system, complete with office bearers and conventions, programs and all the trimmings of Westminster-style democracy. In this respect it can hardly be considered representative of a particularly Islamic way of politics. Prior to 1935, in terms of size and influence it also remained a small, so-called leader party, representing a certain elite. It broadened its support only after the rather disastrous outcome of the 1937 provincial elections in which it could not prove its claim to be a major spokesman for Indian Muslims. The Muslim League was not in a position to form a government in any single one of the provinces where Muslims constituted the majority of the population.

To study specific Islamic responses, one may therefore have to look for other parties and movements. The grouping of these parties brings up the question as to what could be called a specific Islamic response to western political categories. For the purposes of this study, a movement or party will be considered to be Islamic if it was not primarily founded to participate in a parliamentary system, but whose aims were directly related to Islamic doctrine or the furtherance of Islamic belief.

Colonial India sported a great variety of Islamic parties and movements. With regard to political identity, one can broadly distinguish four major groups: (i) *Islamic mass activism* where a large number of Muslims showed more or less spontaneous responses to political challenges, such as demonstrations, unrest, and riots, and where these responses were legitimised with reference to a threat to Islam. If organisation preceded these outbreaks it played the role of a trigger

and was usually eclipsed by the magnitude of the spontaneous mass response which often moved away from the original intention of the organisers. This category could perhaps include movements like the Indian Wahhabis or *mujahidin*, the *moplah* rebellion of Muslim peasants on the West Indian Malabar coast in 1921, the *khilafat* movement in the 1920s in support of the continued authority of the Turkish *khilafah*, despite Turkey's defeat on the German side by Britain in WW I, and the Frontier *hijrat*, which was an exodus of Muslim peasants from the North-West Frontier in 1920. Presumably, communal riots would also qualify for inclusion in this category.

(ii) *Institutional Islamic activism* centred around Islamic institutions of learning such as the Dar-ul-Uloom, the religious seminars, in Deoband, of the Bareilly and of the Nadwa in Lucknow. They represented different doctrinal approaches when responding to political issues with reference to Islam. Their political influence, and also their interest in politics, was often substantial. Building up a large cross-regional following, they wielded significant social and cultural influence with political implications. The Muslim University in Aligarh would qualify for inclusion in this category insofar as it also represented a distinct school of doctrinal thought which stood for a reconciliation of Islam with modern western influences. Though being a university and not a seminar, teaching Islamic subjects was an important part of Aligarh's brief. Aligarh created a group of followers on this count, not less numerous and influential than those from the Islamic seminars.

(iii) *Islamic sectarian and revival movements* usually wanted to restore some of the original meaning of the Qur'an and the Hadith within Islamic practice. In a way, they were reform movements representing a form of purification drives inspired by Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) and emphasised by the Deobandi school. Their political impact was mainly felt by implication, usually emphasising one element or another of the Islamic discourse which was then seized upon by more established political forces. For the purpose of self-definition and self-projection, they gave prominence to certain Islamic injunctions or institutions and their re-interpretation. These movements included the Ahl-e-Hadith, the Ahrar, the Ahmadiyya, the Khaksar, and also the Tabligh and the Tanzim movements.

(iv) *Established Muslim political parties and mainstream movements* would then form a separate group characterised by their intention to participate in the elective institutions and processes for which they were often - but not always - founded. They mainly operated within the parameters of Muslim nationalism and its regional variations. These parties comprised the Muslim League, the

Unionist Party in Punjab, the Red Shirts from the Frontier province, the Bengal Peasants Party, Krishak Praja, and the Jammu & Kashmir Muslim Conference under Sheikh Abdullah.

The definition of an authentic Islamic response to political challenges set out above would imply that it was groups (i) to (iii) from which such a response could be expected. While Muslim nationalists wanted to participate in the game but to change the rules in their favour, the first three groups were not constituted for this purpose. Yet, although they had not intended to play by the rules of the British game, they were forced to respond because the gradual introduction of popularly elected representation created a set of pressures which threatened to undermine the position of the Islamic as well as all traditional, non-political religious and cultural elites in society. Although their control over society had long since been eroded, elected representation was to put the seal on their demise. In order to retain their mostly local position of influence and importance they had to adapt to the new system. The purpose of the larger project is to show how they adapted to these circumstances and what responses they developed.

Islamic militant movements on the north-west Frontier

The movements which will briefly be discussed here in relation to the North-West Frontier Province belong to the first group, Islamic mass activism. The period which is covered is the 1920's when these movements were at the height of their activities, leaving aside earlier peaks in the nineteenth century.

The mujahidin as "Soldiers of the Faith"

The twentieth century *mujahidin* in the Frontier area had taken their name, meaning holy warriors, from the Qur'an. They had survived from a nineteenth century movement which contemporaries called the *Indian Wahhabis*. Yet, their link with Arabian Wahhabism was very remote. The eighteenth century Islamic scholar Shah Waliullah had been inspired by Wahhabi ideas to cleanse Islam and to free it from later accretions, to restore the central position of the Qur'an and the Hadith in the teachings and practice of Islam. However, Indian Sunni Muslims and their reformers mostly continued to follow the *Hannafi fiqh* and not the Wahhabi rite. In this sense, the term Indian Wahhabis was a

misnomer. But their idea of the purification of Islam proved a powerful influence, also with Sayyid Ahmad Shahid of Rai Bareilly (1786-1831) who founded the *mujahidin* movement. Their *jihad* activities began in 1826. Being also called the *tariqa mohammadiyya*, they wanted to follow the way of life of Mohammad the Prophet. They engaged, first with the Sikhs and later with the British, in military encounters, their form of *jihad*, by which they hoped to liberate their homeland from alien forces although their strongholds were limited to a relatively small area in Punjab, on the north-western Frontier, and in Bengal. They were militarily defeated and many of their members were tried in a series of so-called Wahhabi trials in the 1870's. Groups of activists withdrew into the Black Mountains in Mansehra subdivision, where they founded colonies in Smasta and later near Chamarkand in Bajaur. From 1915 they were ruled by Amir Nimatullah of Smasta. In 1915 and 1916 they participated in local attacks on British positions. By the end of 1916 the Government of India decided to get tough with the *mujahidin*, keeping in mind the ongoing war with Germany and Turkey both of which exploited the special relationship they supposedly had with Indian Muslims. The Government instituted a blockade of *mujahidin* settlements, intercepted messengers and money. The Amir then began secret negotiations with the Government, claiming his *mujahidin* were sandwiched between the fighting Mohmands and the British troops. In opposition to the governor on the Frontier who felt that the defeat of the *mujahidin* was close at hand, the British-Indian administration decided to clinch a deal with the Amir which was signed in December 1917 in exchange for a grant of some land to the Amir. The deal was to remain secret for most of the time but during the 1920's the significance of the *mujahidin* steadily declined.¹² Eight people were tried in the *mujahidin* and conspiracy case in 1921-22. The colonies of the *Hindustani Fanatics* were declared unlawful associations in 1923 and thus prohibited though they lingered on for some time.¹³ The Chamarkand colony acted more independently after 1923. They provided shelter to various political activists and participated in tribal risings of the Mohmands in 1933 and 1935.¹⁴

The British called the *mujahidin* also *Hindustani Fanatics* under which name they gained prominence in the intelligence reports from the Frontier province.¹⁵ The latter showed how their movements had been followed in detail and their activities in terms of contacts and travels covered a large area of the Province as well as of the so-called independent territories. Political responses were visible in two ways. One was the emphasis on a code of conduct or guidelines for their camps at Charmakand and Smasta which were supposed to make life conform to Islamic tenets.¹⁶ This implied contrast and critique of the

social and political ills of life which had come to dominate the Frontier areas, loosely called the commercialisation of society and the oppressive rule of the British. Another political response was their thorough opposition to British rule over the Frontier province. They would seek to support tribal forces who rose against the British. This often took the form of local encounters or skirmishes for which the *mujahidin* provided weapons, collecting money, sometimes calling the tribes into action when a local dispute arose, and sometimes participating themselves. Their political response was mostly violent and unrelenting, and could hardly be called withdrawal protest. Yet, they withdrew into mountainous areas which were difficult to access in order to protect themselves from the British. At the same time, their solitary settlements also revealed elements of cultural isolation. Their violent protest culture could only function through withdrawal into seclusion. Another prominent feature of their protest is the linkage they provided between different strands of anti-British activities. Acting in a strategically important region, they had links with Afghanistan, the Russian Bolsheviks, Turkey, Germany, and the Indian nationalists. At one time or another, they played host to activists with these affiliations.

The muhajirin as "Refugees of the Faith"

The Hijrat movement¹⁷ was a mass movement of excited Muslims from the Frontier province and the Punjab, mainly peasants or landless agricultural workers from rural areas who wanted to leave India in 1920 in the wake of calls and rumours that Islam was in danger. India was considered to be no longer *darul islam*, but became *darul harb*, which meant there were major obstacles to practicing Islam. It was partly inspired by the *Pakhtun* movement. Since Britain was a party to the peace negotiations with Turkey in 1919-20 which resulted in the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the reduction of Turkish sovereignty to its Anatolian heartland, Britain was accused of wilfully undermining the authority of the Turkish *khalifah*, the spiritual head of all Muslims. The *Pakhtun* cause was made popular in India by radical Muslim nationalists like Mohammad Ali who agreed with Gandhi that strong emotional impulses were required to start a nation-wide protest campaign against British rule in India. They calculated that India's Muslim minority should be made a prime target for mobilisation as it had been sitting on the sidelines so far. They considered, not without reason as was established later, that the success of the Indian nationalist movement without Muslim participation would be difficult

but not impossible whereas Muslim participation would make the nationalist movement almost irresistible.

The logic of the argument of Muslim activists was that when Britain became an enemy of Islam through its deeds against the *khalifah*, Muslims were obliged by their religious duty to leave the country, that is to migrate, possibly to Afghanistan where the young Amir was striking a strong Islamic posture for his own purposes. What was thought of as a publicity stunt, designed merely to increase pressure on the British, turned into grim reality. The call for migration or *hijrat* was taken up in 1920 by local politicians and by the Islamic clergy on the Frontier and met with an overwhelming response. At the height of the campaign in August 1920, almost 40,000 people had migrated to Afghanistan. They had done so under most difficult personal conditions, selling all their belongings, going practically bankrupt, banking on the good promises of the Afghan Amir, who had pledged support to the *muhajirin* to grind his own mill with the British. The Afghans, however, were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the response and feared a catastrophic drain on their own meagre resources. When the migration was halted by the Afghans in August 1920, the *muhajirin* party which was stopped at the frontier could not believe it. However, having been turned back they were saved the fate of their fellow pilgrims who had made it to the other side but were often plundered by marauding tribes. Several hundred *muhajirin* died on the road to and from Afghanistan.

Comparable to the *mujahidin*, the *muhajirin's* political response was likewise directed against British rule, particularly against the un-Islamic character of British rule and its consequences for the practice of Islam. The dogmatic debate about the inception of the 1920 *hijrat* was derived from the question whether or not India under the British, and particularly owing to the war with Ottoman Turkey, was inimical to Islam, that is *dar-ul harb*.

There was no unanimity on this issue among the *ulama*. The influential but pragmatic Abdul Bari from *Firangi Mahal* in Lucknow wanted to keep his options open. He refused to outrightly declare India *dar-ul harb*, probably because he feared the repercussions of a mass exodus of Indian Muslims which would have been its logical consequence. Bari carefully argued:

"In my opinion migration is neither obligatory nor is it meant for one's own advantage or good. It is only to attain the object of protecting Islam and hence no one has a right to stop those who want to migrate and in the same way no one has a right to compel those who do not want to go."¹⁸

By contrast, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his *fatwa* was satisfied "that from the view-point of the Shari'a, the Muslims of India have no choice but to migrate from India... Migration from India before World War I was desirable, now it is mandatory in order to restore the Caliphate"¹⁹.

Yet, the local mullahs and the organisers of the *hijrat* campaign in the Frontier and the Punjab remained somewhat aloof from this theological dispute. In order to compel people to join the movement they made strong references to the spiritual advantages of going on *hijrat*. From their arguments as well as from activities related to the establishment and regulation of the *muhajirin* colonies in Afghanistan, it transpires that the whole affair had infused its followers with strong millenarian hopes of deliverance from earthly dilemmas. They sought to establish a counter-model of an Islamic society of brotherhood and common good. This was evident from the spirit of some of their caravan journeys, their *qafilas*, by which they travelled to Afghanistan, which were conducted in an exulted and celebratory, almost festive mood.²⁰ Also the way they intended to manage the affairs of the settlers' colonies in Afghanistan through committees with common guidelines, strangely reminiscent of the communist collective communes, pointed to the ideal of an Islamic community.²¹ However, in contrast with the *mujahidin*, the *hijrat* was not primarily thought of as an offensive measure against the British. If force or pressure were applied in the course of the *hijrat*, it was indirectly and by implication. Pressure was mounted on the British through resignations by government, police and army officers in the course of the concurrent civil disobedience movement. These officers resigned in order to go on *hijrat* which made the *hijrat* also appear to be part of the non-cooperation campaign. Pressure was also exerted on the Muslim masses in the Frontier region by the local mullah who threatened the unwilling in case of failure to join the *hijrat* with dire consequences such as foregoing their marital rights in the case of "un-Islamic" behaviour. The convergence of the *hijrat* and the civil disobedience movement, that Gandhi had launched at the time along with the Pakhtun movement, was significant. The withdrawal of the intending *muhajirin* from public life in India, and from India as such, was in a way civil disobedience carried to the extreme where cooperation with the colonial power is abandoned and its territorial domain deserted. This form of response is sometimes called "avoidance protest" and as a form of archaic social protest it is found in other cultures and countries as well.²²

"Muslim Internationalists" from the Provisional Government

Another form of local unrest proceeded in the name of the Provisional Government of India. It had been set up by Mahendra Pratap (b. 1886), a taluqdar or landowner from the Province of Oudh, in 1915. As he remembered in his autobiography, it was 1st December, his birthday, when a few friends came together to start this undertaking. He had graduated from the Anglo-Mohammadan College in Aligarh, the first and only one of its kind, later the first Muslim University of India. Under the strong influence of Islamic values and Persian education imbibed in Aligarh, yet setting his eyes on a rather romantic militant nationalism, he travelled from Afghanistan around the world to make friends with other governments and courts, with whomever was willing to assist militant Indian nationalists like himself against the British. This desire made strange bedfellows, first with the German and Turkish courts, and later with the Bolsheviks and the Third International. Strangely enough, their small group of activists always contained overtones of pan-Islamism which was regarded at the time by a certain faction of Islamic activists as somewhat akin to communism in its desire to have a world and a society of the equal. Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944) and Maulvi Barkatullah (1870-1928) were the most well-known Islamic activists. Sindhi functioned as the "Administrative and Foreign Minister" of the Provisional government. Ahmad Aziz described his views as a form of "Pseudo-Waliullahi communism"²³. Barkatullah was the "Prime Minister". In March 1919, he went to Soviet Russia as the Afghan representative to negotiate the establishment of diplomatic relations. When Pratap came to Moscow in May 1919, he joined his party and participated in an interview with Lenin. He stayed on in Soviet Russia for several months, closely involved in Pratap's activities to popularise Marxism and Socialism among Muslims in Central Asia. For this purpose he had written a number of articles and pamphlets, the best known among which was on "*Bolshevism and Islam*" explaining Marxist Socialism as a return to the concept of the *bait al-mal*, the common treasury for the community. From a pan-Islamic perspective, he shared with the Bolsheviks the abolition of private property which he believed to be the "cause of all evil on earth"²⁴, and the rejection of Western parliamentary democracy which he called "a children's toy made to dupe the people"²⁵.

As in the two preceding cases, the support base was located in the North-West Frontier province from where the "Provisional Government" helped train militants and sent out propaganda literature, weapons and explosives. Through Sindhi and Barkatullah the "Provisional Government" remained in close contact

with the Pakhtun tribal areas and the Frontier Province of British India, particularly with the bases of the *mujahidin* in the Black Mountains. Local skirmishes occurred in Mansehra subdivision of the Frontier province in 1920 when the British raided the positions of their supporters. Maulvi Muhammad Ishak and Maulvi Muhammad Irfan had been successful in organising a series of mass meetings in Hazara district in 1920, coinciding with the *hijrat* movement and culminating in the declaration of a "provisional government" or "self-rule" in some localities. About 30 thousand people participated in their meeting at Khaki village on 22 August, 1920. After their arrest, this movement petered out.²⁶ On this occasion, the British-Indian government noted with imperial arrogance and ferocity that

"The efforts of fanatical agitators in the Mansehra Sub-division resulted in the working up of wild excitement which culminated in the repudiation of the British administration and the erection in many places of a "Provisional Government. This movement collapsed with the arrest of the ringleaders; but the neighbouring Black Mountain tribes, having been persuaded that they were invulnerable to rifle fire, burnt and sacked some of our posts until they were brought to their senses by a severe repulse followed by aerial operations."²⁷

Prior to these events, the activists of the "Provisional Government" gained a certain prominence in the "Silk letter conspiracy" in 1916 when a messenger was caught carrying a letter written on yellow silk, addressed by Sindhi to his teacher, the *Sheikh al Hindh*, Mahmud al-Hasan of Deoband, where he gave detailed instructions how Indian Muslims should be mobilised against the British. However, none of the major activists was caught at the time, except that Mahmud al-Hasan was exiled to Malta.²⁸

Politically, the Provisional Government sought to end British rule over India. Coming from a radical nationalist background, their primary concern was not the un-Islamic character of British rule but the political oppression and alien rule it stood for. Yet, through the participation of Muslim leaders in their activities, their nationalist goals became fused with Islamic injunctions on the basis of the liberative potential of Islam and its potential inspiration for a quasi-communist utopian society. Initially, Pratap himself believed in the potential of true religion for the liberation of India. Lenin, when confronted with Pratap's book *Religion of Love*, called his views "Tolstoyan" which supposedly had already failed in Russia.²⁹ Although their group did support acts of violence against British rule in India, this was rather sporadic. They did not form the closed community that the *mujahidin* did. They represented rather a

network of radical and militant activists, moving as individuals and linking up with local activities.

The faithful Mullah as "Militant Preacher"

A fourth kind of Islamist political activity highly typical of the Frontier region was the militant mullah, or preacher. This was local Islamic mass activism inasmuch as the mullahs aroused one or the other tribe into action against the British on various occasions. Mostly these were tribal insurrections.³⁰ The mullahs were sometimes people of spell-binding influence. During the 1920's and 1930's the Haji of Turangzai³¹, the Babra Mullah³², the Fakir of Alingar³³, and the Mullah of Chaknawar³⁴ retained a high profile. At one stage or other all were involved in the Mohmand disturbances of 1915-17, 1927 and 1937-38. What the Haji of Turangzai was for the Mohmands, Haji Abdul Razzaq was for the Wazirs. In a duly signed and sealed letter to the British Agent in 1920 he claimed that he had set up an independent government for the political agency of Waziristan. He believed that he had the support of a Bolshevik minister, that Afghanistan was "compelled" to assist him, and that Indians "approved" of his actions.³⁵ The Sandaki Baba was active in Upper Swat in the Malakand Agency in the 1920's.³⁶ Certain notoriety was achieved by the so-called Shami Pir in 1938. Of Syrian origin, as the honorary appellation "Shami" indicates, his name was Sayyid Muhammed Sadi, nephew of Soraya, the former queen of Afghanistan and wife of the deposed Afghan King Amanullah. He belonged to the Qadiriyya order for which he allegedly came to collect tribute among certain tribes on the Frontier. But his intention proved to be the disposal of the Afghan king Zahir Shah in order to avenge the downfall of Amanullah. The Shami Pir succeeded in mobilising a subsection of the Waziris who were stopped, however, by the British. The usual pattern of action was that a *lashkar* or group of volunteer fighters was raised from among the tribals. The latter were either lured by the promise of loot or particularly attracted by certain oratory qualities of the mullahs. The mullahs were not averse to using crafty imagery to impress the tribals. The Shami Pir was believed to be capable of rendering the weapons of the adversary ineffective. For a lump sum of 25,000 Pounds Sterling the Shami Pir was finally bought off from his endeavour by the British and exiled from South Waziristan in the same year.³⁷

The mullahs largely shared the political response to British rule with the first two groups discussed here. They were enraged by the un-Islamic character of British rule, but their political activities were also very much concerned with securing a permanent position for themselves in the local power equation which was disturbed by British rule in general and, more specifically, through the impending introduction of elected institutions. Generally they were associated with one or sometimes two particular tribes or sub-tribes for some time. Beyond recruiting followers from these tribes for certain campaigns, they did not head any particular party or movement.

Islam and politics in British India - the "Weapon of Faith"

These four groups were remarkably similar in many ways despite the very pronounced differences in terms of their inception, activity and response. Their political responses suggest a number of common compulsions underlying their reactions. By way of conclusion and of a tentative agenda for further research into the nexus of Islam and politics during this period and in this region, the following eight points are suggested for deliberation:

One, there was close interaction between local, national, *i.e.* Indian, and international factors.

In the 1920's Muslim unrest on the Frontier and elsewhere in India took its root from a number of earlier political campaigns in which Muslim political opinion was polarised. One such root cause were the wars lead by Turkey or affecting it, such as the Turko-Italian war and the Balkan wars, and more significantly, the beginning of World War I in 1914. Attacks on Turkey were taken very much to heart by Indian Muslims. Solidarity movements were started by those who later played a prominent role in other forms of protest like Muhammad and Shaukat Ali.³⁸ Germany raised its hopes of becoming a potential ally in defeating British rule in India. Another root cause inspiring Muslim political mobilisation was, no doubt, the strengthening of the Indian nationalist movement which concluded a strategic, albeit short-lived, pact between Hindu and Muslim forces at a conference in Lucknow in 1916.

Afghanistan played a central role in these affairs. Its struggle for greater independence from the British became another Muslim cause on the Frontier, all the more since Afghanistan supported close relations with many Pakhtun tribes on the Indian side by paying regular allowances to some of their chiefs.

The fundamental changes in Bolshevik Russia also captured the imagination of Islamic activists, particularly between 1917 and 1923, when pan-Islamic schemes banked for a while on support from Russia against the British, and even more after the Bolshevik success against the allied armies in the civil war, in which Britain also played a certain role. It was typical that Maulana Muhammad Irfan declared at a meeting for the *muhajirin* in Abbottabad,

"A strong flood would shortly set in from Baku which would sweep away everything from its path. He praised the Amir of Afghanistan who had drawn the sword in defence of Islam and would not sheathe it until he had accomplished something. The non-existence of the Pakhtun was the death-blow of Islam."³⁹

Pan-Islamic causes like support for the Ottoman Empire or for Afghanistan were a strong motivating force, but they almost always underwent significant mutations when enacted in India to the extent where they became unrecognisable or inconsistent with the original source of inspiration. The compulsion for Indians to defend the Pakhtun was entirely internal and difficult to stomach for Islamic militants from Arabia who wanted to break free from the Ottoman Empire. Likewise, the classical *hijrat*, undertaken by Muhammad the Prophet was generally a topic of consent in the *Ummah*, the Muslim world community. When this pan-Islamic issue of undertaking *hijrat* was appropriated by Indian Frontier Muslims who went to Afghanistan, their motives became somewhat divorced from the *hijrat* of the Prophet, as they were driven by dissatisfaction with the Indian political situation, pursuing the campaign to an extent which took Afghanistan by surprise. The Pakhtun and the *hijrat* campaigns showed that Indian Muslim leaders, both local and national, selected pan-Islamic courses more or less at random to illustrate or support their political intentions.

Two, all four forms of local political mobilisation were closely interrelated. Activists frequently passed from one stream of action on to another. The *mujahidin* colonies played host to almost all of them at one time or another. In the localities, there were a number of people who would be known to be active and interested in politics, they would take up one or the other course as it came along. Organising committees for the *Pakhtun* movement and the *hijrat* campaign used to be identical or overlapping in many cases. The mullahs would wait for a new tribal conflict and use it to consolidate their influence to embarrass the authorities. In a way, local activists would create an informal Islamic network which could be called into action whenever the need or desire arose.

Three, these were emotional and spontaneous responses on the mass level, invoking strong images of Islam in danger - except in the case of the "Provi-

sional Government", where Islam was held high as a romantic promise. At the same time, at least on the part of some of the organisers of these campaigns, these were intentional responses which were used to demonstrate to the British how easy it was with little means to mobilise a large following for "the right cause." They knew very well that the British were extremely uneasy about religious fervour which was irrational to them and difficult to deal with. Causes could rarely be explained to the superiors in a manner that they could be removed or dealt with administratively, forecasts about the duration and outcome of such action were difficult to make. It was very clearly a potential for blackmailing the British administration into caution and compromise. This, for instance, is supported by the decisions of the British to deal leniently by their own standards with the *hijrat* agitation where extensive rehabilitation measures were taken after the return of numerous *muhajirin*, as well as in the case of the Shami Pir who was bought off rather than arrested. The official files show that fear of the outcome of such religious campaigns prompted compromise rather than confrontation.

Four, morality was made an important element of the campaigns to make the Muslims seem superior to their British detractors. People were offered a utopian vision of a different life which would not be as competitive, and cheap and materialistic as under the British. The *mujahidin* tried to establish model communities in Smasta and Chamarkand with a clear code of conduct. The "Provisional Government" offered a utopian vision of a better life on communist lines, merged with Islamic ideals. The *muhajirin* colonies in Afghanistan in 1920 were also to follow strong moral and religious guidelines. The mullahs invoked moral injunctions branding the infidels and the irreligious ways of the British, where state schools and a state administration supposedly undermined the traditional religiosity of the people. The topic of moral improvement was later picked up by other Muslim movements like the Red Shirt movement. But it was equally shared by non-Muslim movements like those of the Sikhs and Tamils in the 1920's and 1930's.⁴⁰ Gandhi had appropriated the subject for the Congress all along.

Five, the movements seemed surprisingly oblivious to traditional measures of political success or failure. These spontaneous movements were often blessed with little success, measured by western political standards. Those described ended rather in disaster. This did not in any conceivable measure detract their followers, or reduce the stature of the organisers or of Islam as a motivating force. Although there was sometimes a short-lived rage against the Mad Mullah who had misled them, people rather quickly settled in fairly quickly to their

daily routine. The long-term effect was surprisingly positive. Political awareness and the readiness to engage themselves in protest against British rule or in defence of Islam increased. These campaigns also served as training grounds for a new generation of politicians who later entered mainstream local or national politics like Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the so-called Frontier Gandhi. In 1914-15 he considered himself a disciple of the Haji of Turangzai, particularly in the latter's educational enterprises. He had started a chain of Islamic schools which were meant to serve as an alternative to the state schools and were also used to increase public awareness about resistance against Britain. Ghaffar Khan later founded the Red Shirt movement which after the introduction of elected provincial representation under the Government of India Act of 1935 came to form the Government of the Frontier Province.

Six, seen against the background of developments in India proper, these movements sought to anticipate, forestall or rival the imminent introduction of elective representation. Although representative and elective provincial autonomy had been partly introduced in India by the 1919 Constitutional Reforms act, it was only introduced in the Frontier Province in 1932. But the mullahs and tribal elders could clearly see the importance of the principle of public representation. Traditional political authority which was mostly inherited - the position of the mullah was practically very often hereditary as well - would then be challenged by people who were voted into office. This is borne out by evidence to various inquiry commissions by the British Government in preparation for the constitutional and administrative reforms such as the Public Service Commission in 1913⁴¹ and by the 1922 North-West Frontier Enquiry Committee led by the Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, Sir Dennis Bray. This committee set out to collect evidence on whether or not the Frontier Province, created in 1900, should be re-amalgamated with the Punjab province. The issue was raised by Hindu politicians from the Frontier and at the centre, ostensibly to extend the 1919 reforms which were enjoyed by Punjab, to the Frontier districts. Witnesses like the Pakhtun members of the Civil Service, Abdul Qaiyum Khan and Khan Bahadur Khan, repeatedly demanded limitations on the elective principle, reservation for special interests and classes like the Khans.⁴²

Seven, at the time of nationalist mobilisation the campaigns contributed to establishing the Islamic discourse on the political scene. The Islamic campaigns during the First World War and immediately afterwards both on the Frontier and in the rest of India contributed - for better or worse - to linking politics with Islam and Islam with politics. Islamic activists succeeded in preserving and

adapting their traditional system of influence to the new era of elective representation and future independence. During the anti-colonial movement this was helped by the general trend in the Indian body politics not to separate politics and religion but to join them to reinforce their impact on British rule. Events in India and Pakistan since independence have shown that the religious institutions - not only those of the Islamic denominations - have survived independence and elective democracy remarkably well. Politics in India and Pakistan are still largely, though not exclusively, governed by similar assumptions on a close and inherent nexus of religion and politics as in the 1920's and 1930's. To say that this has only been to the detriment of politics, would fall short of the complexity of the issues involved. The example of the Islamic militant campaigns on the frontier in the 1920's shows that it may instead be necessary to understand the rationale of these movements better and evaluate the motives and perspectives of participants within the framework of these movements. Only then will a clearer picture of their place in national politics emerge. The militant Islamic discourse, much as any other religious discourse, should be seen as a means of negotiating a position in society for the local cultural norm, and for the local political and religious establishment.

Eight, the tendency to separate people on the basis of religion should be contrasted with continued syncretism of religious movements and practices throughout South Asia. Islamic militant movements have taken their cue from other religious revival movements, like the Hindus and the Sikhs and have in turn been copied by them. Time and again, religiosity *per se* and the wider issues of morality and spirituality have helped to foster a certain degree of understanding between adherents of different religions. In addition, the peculiar meaning which the concept of secularism has acquired in South Asia continuously contributed religious traditions and institutions to politics. In Europe the term "secularism" and "secularised society" has rather come to mean a society which moves or has moved away from religion, where people have stopped following religious practises, whereas in South Asia it amounts to the accepted and tolerated coexistence of different religions where religion is protected from the state and one faith from the other. This means that religiosity and religious institutions have continued to remain highly visible and influential under Indian secularism.

Tentatively it could therefore be argued that concepts of Islamic militancy in South Asia owe their specifics as much to Islam as to local traditions and cultures and to South Asian religiosity in general. They are less rooted in the abstract categories of Islam than in the need and motivations of local leaders

and their followers to survive and to assert a position of their own in the existing structures of power, influence and society.

Notes

- 1 An earlier version of the paper was contributed to the 14th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies at Copenhagen on 21- 24 August, 1996. It is part of a larger comparative project discussing the political identity of Islam in pre-independence India: "Allah's kingdom on earth. The political project of Islamic movements in colonial India" at the Centre of Modern Oriental Studies, Berlin, 1996-97. The project is still at an early stage and, therefore, conclusions drawn here are of a preliminary nature.
- 2 Stephen Rittenberg, *Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Pakhtuns: the independence movement in India's North-West Frontier Province*, Durham, N. C., 1988; E. Jansson, *India, Pakistan or Pakhtunistan? The Nationalist Movements in the North-West Frontier Province, 1937-47*, Uppsala 1981.
- 3 Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, Karachi 1990.
- 4 On the mujahidin movement, see Qeyamuddin Ahmad, *The Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta 1966; Lal Baha, *The Activities of the Mujahideen 1900-1936*. In: *Islamic Studies*, 18 (1979), pp. 97-168; Maulana Ghulam Rasul Mehr, *Jama'at-i-mujahidin*, Lahore 1955; N. D. Ahmad, *Mujahidin - triumph of the British diplomacy*. In: *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 12 iii (1975), pp. 33-45.
- 5 Noshad Khan, *The Khilafatists' Hijrat to Afghanistan* (Diss.), Peshawar 1995 (unpublished).
- 6 F. S. Briggs, *The Indian Hijrat of 1920*. In: *Moslem World*, Princeton, NJ, (1930) 20, pp. 164-168; Lal Baha, *The Hijrat movement and the North-West Frontier Province*. In: *Islamic Studies*, Islamabad (1979) 18, pp. 231-242; M. Naeem Qureshi, *The ulema of British India and the hijrat of 1920*. In: *Modern Asian Studies*, Cambridge (1979) (13), pp. 41-59.
- 7 Dietrich Reetz, *Hijrat - The Flight of the Faithful: A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920*, Berlin 1995, pp 140. It is being revised and extended for re-edition at present.
- 8 See the official Government of India note by the Criminal Investigation Department, later published in book form by the author of the note: P. C. Bamford, *Histories of the Non-cooperation and Khilafat Movements*. Delhi: Government of India Press, 1925. Cf. also Sir Cecil Kaye, *Communism in India*; with unpublished documents from National Archives of India (1919-1924), compiled and edited by Sobodh Roy, Calcutta 1971, although this note discusses M. N. Roy mainly as founder of the Communist Party of India. Recent historical studies add more details: from a leftist, Marxist perspective: Ashok Kumar Patnaik, *The Soviets and the Indian Revolutionary Movement, 1917-1929*, Delhi 1992, part. pp. 56-68, and Shashi Bairathi, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, Delhi 1987. The latter, again, does not expressly focus on the "Provisional Government".

- 9 A typical example is by Akbar S. Ahmed, *Religion and politics in Muslim society*, Cambridge 1983, on the controversial Mullah in Wana, Waziristan, which mentions historical antecedents only briefly and concentrates on the post-independence history of the area. For Ahmad, history and conflict of this kind in the tribal belt, in keeping with his anthropological training, mainly is agnatic rivalry which has to be sorted out in order to be solved. See also his 1978 dissertation: *Pakhtun economy and society: Traditional structure and economic development in a tribal society*, London 1980.
- 10 For an overview of the Muslim community in colonial India, see Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge 1972; W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India: a social analysis*, Delhi 1985 [repr.]; Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, Leiden-Köln 1980.
- 11 Cf. Hafeez Malik, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan*, New York 1980; Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge 1984.
- 12 Files from the India Office Library give many more details about the *mujahidin*, for example British Library India Office Collection (BL IOC) File No 4261/16: *Hindustani fanatics*; NW Frontier: relations of the Soviet Legation in Kabul with the Chamarkand colony; GoI recommended no action. 29-7-12 - 18-6-26. See also, Lal Baha, *The Activities of the Mujahideen 1900-1936*, op. cit.
- 13 The Peshawar Frontier Archives keep multi-volume files on the *mujahidin* as files nos. 9/12/7-Vols I-VI and 9/12/9-Vols I-VII, with single items also included in other files.
- 14 Lal Baha, *The Activities of the Mujahideen 1900-1936*, op. cit., pp. 113-114.
- 15 BL IOC File No. 1229/19, *Provincial and Intelligence Bureau Diaries 9-7-21*.
- 16 Cf. Lal Baha, *The activities of the mujahidin*, op. cit., passim; Ghulam Muhammad Jaffar, *Agreement between the British Government of India and the Amir of Mujahidin, Mawlawi Ni'mat Allah*. In: *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, Islamabad 41 (1993), pp. 53-62.
- 17 For a more detailed exposition of the Hijrat movement, see Dietrich Reetz, *Hijrat - The Flight of the Faithful*, op. cit.
- 18 Letter from Maulana Abdul Bari, Al Bureed (Cawnpore) of the 4 June, 1920.
- 19 Quoted after Hafeez Malik, *Moslem Nationalism in India and Pakistan*, Washington 1962, Appendix B.
- 20 F. S. Briggs, a contemporary, thus described the arrival of one of the *qafilas* at the Indian-Afghan border in an article "The Indian Hijrat of 1920". In: *Moslem World*, Princeton 20 (1930), p. 166.
- 21 For various copies and versions of the rules, regulating the settlement of the *muhajirin* in Afghanistan, see the India Office dossier on the movement, BL IOC L/P&J/6/1701, file No 5703/1920, *Hijrat in N. W. F. Province* etc, file pages 26-27; and Confidential Political Diaries and Special Branch Record, B. No 30, F. No 475, which also includes a version of the Nizam Nama-e-Muahjirin in Dari, quoted in: Noshad Khan, *The Khilafatists's Hijrat*, op. cit., pp. 96-98, 197-211.
- 22 Michael Addas, *From Footdragging to Flight: The Evasive History of Peasant Avoidance Protest in South and South-East Asia*. In: *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 13 (1986) 2, pp. 64-86.
- 23 Moin Shakir, *Khilafat to Partition 1919-1947*, Delhi 1983 (2nd ed.), pp. 41-46.
- 24 Quoted in Patnaik, *The Soviets and the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, op. cit., p. 62.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 26 BL IOC File No P/CONF/59, protocol no 306, Nov 1920.

- 27 L.F. Rushbrook Williams (ed.), *India in 1920*, Delhi 1985 (repr.), p. 13.
- 28 For further details on the "Silk letter conspiracy" and Obaidullah Sindhi, see BL IOC File No 4260/16, *Afghanistan: the Silk letter case. 1916-1918*. For books, partly based on these files, see Maulana Muhammad Mian, *Tehrik-e-reshmi rumal*, 1971; Muhammad Hajjan Shaikh, *Maulana Ubaid Allah Sindh: A Revolutionary Scholar*, Islamabad 1986.
- 29 Ashok Kumar Patnaik, *The Soviets and the Indian Revolutionary Movement*, op. cit., p. 39.
- 30 For accounts of the role of religious figures in the tribal wars on the North-West Frontier, see Sir William Barton, *India's North-West Frontier*, London 1939; Arthur Swinson, *North-West Frontier*, New York 1967; Akbar S. Ahmed, *Millennium and Charisma among Pathans*, London 1976; Frederick Barth, *Political Leadership Among Swat Pathans*, London 1958; Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, London 1964.
- 31 His real name was Fazal-i-Wahid (1885-1937). He was named after a place where he was given some land: in the Maira near Turangzai, not far from Charsadda, in Peshawar district, which he used to build a large mosque and a hostel for his Sheikhs and disciples. He was mostly active among the Mohmands of Peshawar district, especially since 1914 and during the Third British-Afghan War of 1919-20. In 1915 he fled to the tribal belt of the independent territories which were loosely controlled by the British through a political agent but where tribal law reigned supreme. He played a significant role in the Mohmand uprisings of 1915 and 1927 and acted as an intermediary in the relations of the Afghans with the Mohmands. Two of his sons also achieved prominence:
Fazl-i-Akbar, known as Badshah Gul I., was the eldest son and succeeded his father in his spiritual duties and political callings. However, while his father was regarded as a *faqir* or saint, he was not. Collected tribute from the Safis whose *de facto* ruler he was. Lived in Lakarai, in Safi country. He was the leader of the Mohmands in the operations of 1933 and 1935. Was assisted by his two brothers Badshah Gul II. and III (Fazl-i-Ma'bud and Fazl Shah).
See Government of India. Who's who in the Peshawar District. Corrected up to 1 January 1931, Peshawar 1931, pp 33. Confidential. BL IOC L/P&S/20B.296/10.
- 32 He was one of the leaders of the Mohmand tribal uprisings in 1915 and 1927. See BL IOC L/PS/12/3125 Coll 23/4, *North-West Frontier. Tribal disturbances 1930-31. Peshawar and District Situation*. 7-5-30 - 14-12-32.
- 33 Active during the 1927 Mohmand uprising and more influential than the Haji of Turangzai at the time. See also BL IOC L/PS/12/3125 Coll 23/4.
- 34 See BL IOC L/PS/12/3125 Coll 23/4. Led a force of Afghans into Mohmand territory in the 1915 trouble.
- 35 Para 398 of the Frontier Intelligence Diary (FID) No 15, 8 April 1920, in BL IOC L/P&S/10/813, *Provincial and Intelligence Bureau Diaries 1919-20*.
- 36 FID No. 8, 21 February, 1920, in L/P&S/10/813, op. cit.
- 37 BL IOC L/P&S/12/3255-59, Shami Pir: adherents, movement, identity, arrest.
- 38 Cf. their efforts for medical relief to Turkey through a Red Crescent missions during the Turko-Italian and the Balkan wars, and more prominently the foundation of the Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Ka'aba in 1913, the "Servants of Ka'aba Society", where they were joint by Mulana Abdul Bari (1879-1926) from the Nadwa seminary in Lucknow who later played a key role during the *Pakhtun* and the *hijrat* campaigns. Afzal Iqbal, *The Life and Times of Mohamed Ali: An Analysis of the Hopes, Fears and Aspirations of Muslim India from 1778 to 1931*, Lahore 1974.

- 39 BL IOC P/CONF/59, op. cit., p. 22.
- 40 Cf. D. Reetz, Religion and group-identity: Comparing three regional movements in Colonial India. In: Annemarie Hafner (ed.), *Essays on South Asian Society, Culture and Politics*, Berlin 1995, pp. 73-89.
- 41 United Kingdom, Parliamentary Papers, Royal Commission on the Public Services in India: Appendix Vol X, Minutes of evidence relating to the Indian and Provincial Civil Services taken at Lahore from the 9th to the 15th April 1913, with appendices. London 1914, Cd. 7582, passim. The fear of the impending changes was for instance reflected in the evidence by Khan Bahadur Khan Abdul Ghafur Khan, Khan of Zaida, who demanded special consideration for the traditional tribal chiefs and Khans, as the aristocracy is "a very large and important class, and their history, traditions and ideals are based on loyalty to the Crown and support of the British rule" (p. 301). He saw no further need to broaden recruitment.
- 42 Government of India, North-West Frontier Enquiry (Bray) Committee 1922. *Proceedings Vols. I-III: Evidence and Appendices*. BL IOC V/26/247/2-4., Vol. I: 4, p. 190.

The Indian Village as Perceived by Peasant Leaders in Late Colonial India

Petra Heidrich

One of the panels of the 14th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies held in Copenhagen in August 1996 invited contributions to the theme "The Construct of the South Asian Village: History, Reality and Relevance". The participants' understanding of the topic proved to be as diverse as the composition of the panellists - they included anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and historians. From my point of view attention has been focused on the issue whether the images of the South Asian village established in the past and in the present provide us with an adequate picture of reality. The ongoing debate on orientalism and postorientalism highlights the role of conscious interests and unconscious motives of the investigating subjects as well as of the objects of their research in distorting the investigated reality, in creating a "construct". The issue, however, is by no means a new one. It has been focused upon in connection with enquiries made into the conditionality of academic studies and their correlation with the cultural and political trends of the respective period of time. Edward Said posed the question anew in a very passionate and provocative manner.

In the early sixties the thesis of the "end of ideology"¹ came up in connection with the debate on modernisation. The Indian agrarian sociologist P.C. Joshi took a very categorical stand: "There is no greater falsehood than the view that the 'end of ideology' constitutes the starting point of social science."² In his essay on the history of agrarian studies authored by Indian as well as foreign scholars he pointed out convincingly how economic and political interests have always affected research. They influenced the evolution and direction of research, the choice of the subject as well as the attitude of the researcher. But, P.C. Joshi also demonstrated, that studies which approached a particular subject from different points of view were, nevertheless, capable of revealing facets of social reality, of uncovering different or even new aspects. In my opinion, this continues to be relevant today too.

I have referred to P.C. Joshi because his essay touches upon an aspect which is of significance to my topic. Under colonial conditions investigations into the rural conditions of India were conducted before agrarian economics and agrarian sociology did emerge as academic disciplines. The colonial administration