

“GOD’S KINGDOM ON EARTH” –

THE CONTESTATION OF THE PUBLIC
SPHERE BY ISLAMIC GROUPS IN COLONIAL
INDIA (1900-1947)

von

Dr. phil. Dietrich Reetz, Berlin

Freie Universität Berlin
Fachbereich Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften
Otto-Suhr-Institut für Politikwissenschaft
zur Erlangung der *Venia legendi*

vorgelegte Habilitationsschrift

Berlin, im November 2001

Abstract

This study explores the contestation of the public sphere by ten Islamic groups and traditions in colonial India (1900-47). For this purpose the concept of the public sphere as developed by Jürgen Habermas is being discussed and reviewed. In particular, the concerns of Asian and African countries and the discourse of Islam are taken into consideration. It is felt that the concept can provide a useful tool to measure the impact of non-formal public actors on politics. The public sphere is understood here both as a normative concept and a research tool. While the former emphasises its critical potential and autonomy, the latter points to the interplay of discourse, institution-building and activism creating public space for the formation, contestation and implementation of desired values. Recent developments have highlighted the emancipatory potential of the public sphere. It is related to the terms and extent of participation in it. 'Insurgent publics' strive to get their share in public discourse, decision-making, institution-building and activism. Islamic groups in general and in colonial India in particular can be seen to represent such 'insurgent publics.' This also extends to independent India and Pakistan.

The groups studied here represent reformist and revivalist traditions with a significant degree of heterogeneity. Broadly they comprise seminary movements grouping around a particular lead *madrassa* or school (*Dēobandīs*, *Barēlwīs*, *Nadwa*, *Firangī Mahall*, ^ʿ*Alīgarh*) and revival movements attempting to increase religious awareness in ritual observance, in public life and in politics (*Ahl-i Ḥadīth*, *Tablīghī Jamāʿat*, *Aḥmadīya*, *Khaksār*, *Aḥrār*). The study looks at their intervention in religious affairs, public life, politics and social issues.

Their discourses and lines of activity reveal a marked ambiguity. Their activity is characterised by huge diversity often creating tension and mutual hostility. However, a common concern for an Islamic project is also discernible in outline. Groups which regarded each other as doctrinal enemies reacted in similar ways to the major challenges they faced: the perceived threat of materialism and atheism; the influence of Christianity; and western political domination through British rule over India. Muslim minority status in India (22 %) and difficult relations with the Hindu majority was a major topic for all of them. These issues became entangled with the political awakening in India brought about by the nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress.

These challenges caused Islamic groups to formulate their own project for society and an Islamic polity in India. Their Islamic project evolved over time from scholarly debates to political action and social concepts. They took up political issues related to the status of Islam in India, the Islamic world and *vis-à-vis* British colonial rule. The thrust of these issues was often at variance with political reality, as in the *Khilāfat* movement in defence of the Ottoman Caliph against the young Turkish republic. But the undeclared objectives of their campaigns were often effective and successful: training a modern Islamic leadership, conducting mass campaigns for religious education and political awareness. In this they were similar to other religious and ethnic groups. Their establishment of Islamic discourse in the public life and politics of India has made Islamic politics an independent and highly influential factor in today's South Asia. Discourses, institutions and campaigns of the period under study continue to play a role in the South Asian public sphere. They form a robust and rapidly expanding Islamic sector.

Islamic discourse also played itself out in the radicalisation of Sunni Islam. Most Islamic groups came to share doctrinal and political assumptions about enmity with dissenters, focusing on the Shīʿa, the *Aḥmadīya*, Hindu reformists and Christian missionaries. This hardened doctrinal discourse and increased the militancy of a number of public Islamic campaigns.

At the same time, the functioning of the public sphere forced Islamic groups to open up, to interact with the public and with each other. In their discourse, institutions and campaigns most groups accepted the rule of law and the principles of publicness. They imbibed modern influences as much as they themselves used modern techniques and adopted modern features of public life.

This ambivalence between narrowing down choices and opening up to public scrutiny and influence continues to mark the functioning of the Islamic sector in Pakistan and India. The Islamic project they pursue has the potential to conceptualise large areas of public and social activity and generate action for its implementation. Yet most of this potential is lost in cleavages over differing doctrinal perspectives and conflicting interests.

The debate over the role of Islamic groups in the public sphere and the formation of an Islamic sector within it can serve as a catalyst for better understanding of diverse trends and modes of their interaction. The perspective of the public sphere can reveal the constructive potential of public engagement by Islamic groups. It can also help to pinpoint destructive trends. The concept of the public sphere has not lost its utility for a differentiated analysis of public actors. However, the focus of the concept must be redirected to take full cognisance of diversity in culture, religion, ethnic loyalties and social status.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS	I
CHARTS.....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
ABBREVIATIONS.....	VI
GLOSSARY	VII
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. <i>Subject of research</i>	2
1.2. <i>Sources</i>	6
1.3. <i>Research literature</i>	8
1.4. <i>Antecedents of the project</i>	16
1.5. <i>Technical remarks</i>	17
2. CONCEPT AND EVOLUTION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE	20
2.1. THE MODERNIST DISCOURSE ON THE PUBLIC SPHERE.....	20
2.1.1. Jürgen Habermas on the public sphere	20
2.1.2. Associated concepts of ‘civil society,’ ‘political culture’ and ‘counterculture’	28
2.1.3. The meaning of the public sphere in relation to Asia and Africa.....	34
2.2. THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND ISLAM	39
2.2.1. Islam and politics – Dīn and Dawla.....	39
2.2.2. Distinction Between Private and Public in Islam	41
2.2.3. Evolution of an Islamic public sphere	45
2.2.4. Classification of Muslim political traditions in India.....	53
2.3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN COLONIAL INDIA	60
2.3.1. The gradual introduction of public representation in colonial India	60
2.3.2. The contestation of the public sphere by religious groups and reform movements.....	66
2.3.3. The evolution of communal representation and of a Muslim public in India	68
2.3.4. Role of printing and print media.....	73
3. THE ISLAMIC ACTIVISTS AND THEIR MOVEMENTS IN INDIA	82
3.1. THE SEMINARY MOVEMENTS	85
3.1.1. Dēoband.....	86
3.1.2. Barēlwī.....	87
3.1.3. Nadwa.....	89
3.1.4. Firangī Maḥall	90
3.1.5. ‘Alīgarh.....	92
3.2. FAITH AND REVIVAL MOVEMENT	95
3.2.1. Ahl-i Ḥadīth.....	97
3.2.2. Tablīghī Jamā‘at	98
3.2.3. Aḥmadiya.....	99
3.2.4. Aḥrār	100

3.2.5.	Khaksār	101
4.	RELIGIOUS INTERVENTION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE	105
4.1.	THE TRUTH: CONTESTED REFORMIST CATEGORIES	108
4.1.1.	Islam in danger	109
4.1.2.	Walīullāh and Wahnāb	111
4.1.3.	Constructing a reformist lineage.....	113
4.1.4.	The problem to define iṣlāḥ: scripturalism, traditionalism or fundamentalism	115
4.1.5.	Divergent meanings of iṣlāḥ	118
4.1.6.	Independent reasoning (ijtihād).....	130
4.1.7.	The principle of monism (tauḥīd).....	136
4.1.8.	The central role of the ‘ulamā’	138
4.1.9.	Consequences – summarising the discourses	145
4.2.	THE AGENDA: LINES OF INTERVENTION	146
4.2.1.	Focus on Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (ḥadīth/Sunna).....	151
4.2.2.	Veneration of the Prophet and the legacy of popular Islam	157
4.2.3.	Fighting atheism and materialism – dahriyat and mādiyat.....	165
4.2.4.	Fighting the Schism – fitnā.....	170
4.3.	THE LEADER – MESSIAH AND RENEWER OF THE FAITH.....	173
4.4.	TABLIGH - SPIRITUALITY OR MATERIALISM	181
4.4.1.	General task of tablīgh and da‘wa.....	182
4.4.2.	The role of the Āryā Samāj and the Hindū Mahāsabhā (Savarkār).....	184
4.4.3.	Various organised forms of Tablīgh coming up in the twenties.....	186
4.4.4.	The concept of the Tablighi Jamaat.....	197
5.	PUBLIC ACTION AND POLITICAL MEANING	209
5.1.	PARTICIPATION OR PATRIMONY.....	210
5.1.1.	Participation in leadership - inside the Islamic movements	211
5.1.2.	Participation outside – the public life of associations, representation, elections	223
5.1.3.	Proposals for an Islamic Polity	236
5.2.	ASSERTION OR SUBMISSION – ON DEFENCE AND SELF-DEFENCE	244
5.2.1.	Defence of Muslim causes – Islamic solidarity abroad and in India.....	245
5.2.2.	Defence of Muslims against conversions and communal riots	249
5.2.3.	Self-defence of Muslims.....	255
5.3.	ACTIVISM OR CONTEMPLATION – FROM ENGAGEMENT TO JIHAD	262
5.3.1.	Piety vs. Political Engagement	263
5.3.2.	Pan-Turkism and the Khilafat movement.....	265
5.3.3.	Two-Nation Theory or composite nationalism.....	274
5.3.4.	Engaging in jihād.....	276
5.3.5.	Pan-Islamism and the war effort.....	281
5.4.	RADICALISATION OF SUNNI ISLAM	284
6.	SOCIAL COMMITMENT AND A NEW SOCIETY	295
6.1.	A MODEL COMMUNITY OF ISLAM	296
6.2.	RELIGIOUS OR NATIONAL EDUCATION	303
6.2.1.	Reform of curriculum	304
6.2.2.	True national education.	309
6.2.3.	Mass education	311
6.2.4.	Development, eradication of poverty	313
6.3.	ISLAMIC OR SECULAR LAW.....	315

6.4. ISLAMIC SOCIAL RELIEF OR WELFARE SOCIETY	321
7. CONCLUSIONS.....	325
7.1. ISLAMIC PROJECT	325
7.2. ISLAMIC SPHERE	333
APPENDIX I	341
The ‘tack’ of the Dēoband school.....	341
Articles of Faith of the <i>Barēlwī</i> group.....	342
Objectives of the <i>Nadwa</i> council and seminary.	344
<i>Firangī Maḥall</i> activist and scholar ‘Abdul Bārī (1878-1926)	344
Articles of Faith of the <i>Ahl-i Ḥadīth</i>	346
The six essentials of the <i>Tablīghī Jamā‘at</i>	348
Articles of Faith of the <i>Aḥmadiya</i>	350
Objectives of the Majlis-e <i>Aḥrār-e Islām</i>	351
Creed of the <i>Khaksār</i> movement of ‘Ināyatullāh Mashriqī.....	353
APPENDIX II	355
Chart 8 Religious debates and public campaigns by Islamic groups in colonial India (schematic, selected).....	355
APPENDIX III.....	365
Programme/Statutes of the <i>Jam‘īyat-e ‘Ulamā’-ye Hind (JUH)</i>	365
APPENDIX IV	367
Duties and Powers of the Amīr al-Hind	367
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	369

CHARTS

Caption	Page
Chart 1 Forms of Islamic mobilisation in colonial India, 1900-1947	p. 3
Chart 2 Stages of the evolution of the Islamic public sphere in a transnational perspective (selective, schematic)	p. 53
Chart 3 Intertwining of sectors in the public sphere in colonial India (schematic)	p. 80
Chart 4 Forms of public life of Islamic seminary movements (selected)	p. 94
Chart 5 Forms of public life of Islamic faith and revival movements (selected)	p. 103
Chart 6 Contestation of the public sphere	p. 103
Chart 7 Doctrinaire preferences in the public discourse of the Islamic groups in colonial India (schematic, selected)	p. 203
Chart 8 Religious debates and public campaigns by Islamic groups in colonial India (schematic, selected)	p. 355