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Maudūdī's *al-Jihād fī'l-Islām*

A Neglected Document

Abstract

The notions of virtuosity in Islamic civilization are sometimes construed with a metaphorical allusion to the ink of scholars and the blood of martyrs. The two aspects find a common ground in the web of meanings which are associated with the broader term jihad, which leaves the door wide open for different (re)constructions and multiple (mis)perceptions. Thus, this metaphor is rich enough for understanding the symbolism which functions behind the Muslim cultural and religious consciousness. Among other things, it implies that the ink of scholars can reinvigorate the inspirations for potential martyrs in the changing historical contexts.

*Against this background, the present paper introduces and analysis a neglected Urdu work of Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Maudūdī (1903-1979), namely *al-Jihād fī'l-Islām* (the title can be translated as »The Concept of Jihad in Islam«). This was the first book written by Maudūdī (in 1927) in which he conceptualizes jihad in such terms as to become the foundation of the whole religio-political philosophy that unfolds in his later works. In fact, this book can be considered one of the key documents representing the particular strand of revivalist Islamic thought in the twentieth century which interprets Islam largely along political and ideological lines. Another aspect of this book which seems to be much relevant to the theme of the present volume is that it puts jihad in comparative religious context. According to my knowledge, this book has not been translated into any Western language; therefore, apart from the modest analysis, the paper seeks to draw attention of the scholarly community to this important work.*

1. Introduction

A tradition reports Prophet Muhammad having said: »The ink of scholars is holier than the blood of martyrs«.¹ Though the technical experts would dispute the authenticity of this tradition and some of them would rate it as a plain fabrication but it had found ways into popular Muslim literature as well as into some radical circles. For instance Abdullah al-Azzam who has been one of the motors of inspiration behind the international jihad movement against Soviets in Afghanistan during 1980s,

¹ I wish to thank Muhammad Akram, University of Erfurt, for his insightful suggestions.

employed this metaphor and sought an integrative reading of its two clauses. In his conceptualization, the history of Muslim *ummah* is written with the ink of scholars and the blood of martyrs. He believed that the most virtuous person is the one in whose case both the ink and the blood are intermingled. In a way, this rich metaphor opens a window onto the symbolism which functions behind the Muslim cultural and religious consciousness.

In the context of Islamic notions of piety and virtuosity mingling of the ink of scholars and blood of martyrs can be linked to the broader idea of *jihād*. The history of interpretations of the term *jihad* pertains to a wide range of different (re)constructions and multiple (mis)perceptions both in the Muslim and non-Muslim scholarly circles. *Jihad* literally means to strive for something and as a technical term it encompasses every kind of struggle in the cause of Islam provided that it is only for the sake of God's pleasure and not for any personal or material benefit. Outwardly and with reference to the collectivity of Muslim community (*ummah*), it takes different confrontational forms with the perceived foes of Islam. Inwardly, and at the level of individual, it implies a constant struggle within oneself against the base desires. Concerning inner dimension, a Sufi parable goes: when the horizon of a heart becomes reddish with the blood of sacrificed caprices it is an indication that the sun of God's grace is about to dawn onto that heart (source?). This again supports the contention that the two aspects alluded to in the above metaphor find a common ground in the web of meanings which are associated with *jihad*. Among other things, the metaphor implies that the ink of scholars reinvigorates the inspirations for potential martyrs in the changing historical contexts.

In the South Asian Muslim history, the *jihad* movement launched by Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd in the 19th century can be considered as an example in which the ideals of scholarship and martyrdom converged. The Movement was crushed when its eminent leaders including Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd and Shah Ismā'il Shahīd were »martyred« along with hundreds of their followers in the battle of Balakot in 1831 against the Sikhs. Nevertheless, this incident left deep impressions in the popular Muslim consciousness setting new ideals to be qualified for the title of a Godly-scholar (*'ālim-e-rabbānī*) or a true scholar (s. *'ālim-e-haqq*, pl. *'ulamā'-e-haqq*). Moving to the 20th century, in the person of Sayyid Abu'l-A'lā Maudūdī (1903-1979) we come across someone who narrowly escaped a similar fate. Maudūdī is rightly considered the doyen of political Islam and his ideological contributions count for one of the major factors behind the global Islamic reawakening since the last decades of the 20th century.² Because of his peculiar religio-political ideology and the challenges that it posed to the political system, he was sentenced to death by a military court of Pakistan in 1953. He refused to appeal for mercy which could have lead him to the gallows but his death penalty was eventually cancelled on the public pressure. However, what interests us here more is not his averted »martyrdom« but rather one of the works of his pen and ink.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce and analyze a neglected work of Sayyid Abu'l-A'lā Maudūdī (1903-1984), namely *al-Jihād fī'l-Islām*. The book was

2 Anis Ahmad, *Syed Abul Ala Maududi, Young Muslims Canada*, <http://www.youngmuslims.ca/biographies/display.asp?ID=5>.

written in Urdu language and its title can be translated as »The Concept of Jihad in Islam«. ³ This was the first book written by Maudūdī in which he conceptualizes jihad in such terms as to become the foundation of the whole religio-political philosophy that unfolds in his later works. In fact, this book can be considered one of the key documents representing the particular strand of revivalist Islamic thought in the twentieth century which interprets Islam largely along political and ideological lines. Another aspect of this book which seems to be much relevant to the theme of the present volume is that it puts jihad in comparative religious context.

Initially, Maudūdī conceived the substance of this book as a short essay and started publishing it serially in *al-Jamī'ah* newspaper. After 24 issues he realized that the subject has expanded beyond the scope of a newspaper column and stopped publishing it in the newspaper. Eventually, the complete book saw the light of day in 1927. It was first published by Dār al-Musannifin, Azam Garh (India). Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), poet and philosopher, and so-called spiritual father of Pakistan, is said to have commended the book as the best explication of the concept of jihad in any language. The very next year it was translated into Arabic and published from Beirut. Since then, at least 19 editions of the book have been printed in Urdu which indicates the extent of its influence. However strangely enough, unlike most of Maudūdī's other works, which have been translated into Arabic, Persian, Turkish, English, French and German etc., *al-Jihād fī'l-Islām* has not been translated into any Western language. A clarification may be made here that in 1939, he gave a speech on jihad which was published in the form of a booklet of about 25 pages entitled *Jihād fī Sabīl Allāh* (Jihad in the Way of Allah). This booklet has been translated into English by Professor Khurshid Ahmad and should not be mixed with the book *al-Jihād fī'l-Islām* which comprises about 600 pages. Apart from the modest analysis; the paper seeks to draw attention of the scholarly community to this seminal work which is vital for understanding the Islamic ideological thought in the modern world.

2. The Motive and Method of Maudūdī

Haydar Fārūq Maudūdī, the son of Abu'l-A'la Maudūdī, writes in the »Publisher's Note« that in 1926 after the alleged assassination of Hindu activist Swami Sharnandan by a Muslim, the concept of jihad came under attack from every side. On this Muhammad Ali Jauhar (d.1931), a famous journalist and Muslim leader stressed the need of a comprehensive book on jihad to refute the doubts and allegations against this notion and clarify its true meanings to the world. The author took the lead and completed the task in three years. ⁴

3 See however J. Slomp, »The »political equation« of Al-jihād fī al-Islām of Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979)«, in: D. Thomas (ed.), *A Faithful Presence – essays for Kenneth Cragg*, London 2003, 237-255; and C. Adams, »Abu'l-A'la Maududi«, in: G. von Grunebaum; Aziz Ahmad (eds.), *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968*, Wiesbaden 1970, 156 f.

4 Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Maudūdī, *Al-Jihād Fī'l-Islām*, Lahore ¹⁹2006, 14.

Maudūdī himself gives some details about his motive and objective in the preface to the 1st edition of the book. The gist of his statement is that modern times have witnessed a renewed campaign of demonizing Islam presenting it as a religion of violence. Maudūdī laments that this was being done by Europeans in a time when their own sword was soaked in the innocent blood in every corner of the world. (Obviously his hint was the First World War and the colonial wars) He also complains that Muslims were apologetic about jihad. Then he raises the question: How come the invaders and the oppressors blame the oppressed for violence? While trying to answer this question, he employs a modified form of the metaphor of ink and blood and substitutes it with that of the pen and sword. Then he virtually hints at what Michael Foucault would explicate later, the role of power in knowledge. To quote Maudūdī:

*»It is the natural weakness of human beings that when they are defeated in the battlefield they automatically become subjugated in the academy. Man cannot withstand the pen of one whose sword can defeat him. In every age, those ideas and thoughts prevail that emanate from the pens of sword-wielded hands«.*⁵

However, discovery of this rule does not daunt Maudūdī from defying the »pens of sword-wielded hands« and he takes on the challenge to defend the doctrine of jihad.

He also discusses what is known in the contemporary discourses as the problem of stereotypical images. Referring to the assassination of Swami Shirdanand, he writes that God knows the truth but what has been reported in the media is that a Muslim killed him in hope to be rewarded with paradise for this act. The Muslim religious and political leadership condemned this act. But in spite of that the anti-Islamic lobbies grabbed on this opportunity and took the matter beyond its natural limits blaming the whole Muslim community or the teachings of Islam for the wrong doing of a single individual. We may note here the strikingly resemblance of the background of the book with the post 9/11 scenario.

He notes that scholars have written a lot about the concept of jihad from time to time and it has become a beaten topic. Apparently there seems nothing to add but the problem with most of the literature on jihad is that the Muslims unnecessarily become defensive as if they are standing in a court pleading innocent. To support their case, some of them even distort the teachings and principles of Islam and try to get rid of those elements which they consider difficult to defend. But this approach leads to inconsistencies. The need of the hour is according to Maudūdī that the true teachings of Islam on jihad should be presented as they are found in Qur'an, the authentic traditions of the Holy Prophet, and the rulings of the Muslim jurists. Further clarifying his approach Maudūdī says:

»As a matter of principle, I disagree with the inclination to adjust our beliefs keeping in view the perceptions of others. World agrees on no principle and every group finds a particular way best fitting. Howsoever we try to

5 Ibid., 15 f.

make our faith appealing for the others, groups of diverging tendencies will not agree on our artificially readjusted positions either. So the best way is to present our views honestly and clearly along with the arguments that we have, and leave the matter for the reason of human beings to decide. If they accept, well and good; and if they don't, we damn care.»⁶

The quotation is also telling about the first person narrative of the book. Though not explicitly polemical the book is written from the standpoint of a believer without any pretension of a detached study.

3. An Overview of the Contents

The book consists of seven chapters. For analytical purpose, these chapters can be divided into two clusters. The first four chapters interpret the doctrine of jihad in a particular ideological way. The chapters five through seven put this notion in a comparative perspective vis-à-vis the concepts of war, peace, and international law in different secular and religious worldviews from the pre-Islamic Arabia, Ancient Persian and Roman Empires, the major religions of the world, to the contemporary international law.

We would have to confine ourselves to quite a brief look into the main positions developed in these two parts of the book. To begin within the first cluster, the chapter one explains what jihad is and why it is made lawful in Islam. The description begins with a premise that no civilization is conceivable without respecting the dignity of human life. Islam categorically sanctions the sanctity of human life. However, instead of presenting the shallow ideals in such absolute terms which no civilization can ever hold out practically, Islam differentiates between the unlawful bloodshed and the lawful and unavoidable killing of the one who deserves such punishment. Maudūdī contends that practically followers of every civilization and every religion accept this differentiation. Therefore instead of making false pretensions of absolute sanctity of human life and leaving this sensitive issues on the human prejudices and caprices, Islam regulates the use of force and relates it to the ethical principles. Thus the Islamic teachings assert the sanctity of human life on the one hand and nurture the moral courage to withstand the evil forces or the other. The chapter concludes with the following statement:

»For establishment and endurance of virtue a willingness to sacrifice is the most important thing. When a nation becomes devoid of this spirit very soon it is overpowered by the wickedness and perishes.»⁷

6 Ibid., 16 f.

7 Ibid., 50.

The chapters two and three are organized with reference to two modes of jihad. Chapter number two deals with the defensive jihad and chapter three with the pre-emptive or curative jihad. The very schema of these chapters makes abundantly clear that Maudūdī does not agree with those Muslim apologetics who interpret jihad solely as a matter of self-defense. It appears that for Maudūdī the purpose of jihad has to do more with defense of the »system« than that of the self.⁸ In his words:

»The Glorious Qur'an ordains restrain and tolerance in every matter save an attack meant to wipe out the religion of Islam or any attempt to impose on Muslims a system other than Islam.«⁹

In the latter case, Islam not only allows its followers to use force but positively invokes them to repel any such attack with full force. Unislamic governments influencing human morality and civilization are the case in point:

»[...] in order to eradicate evil and to prevent wrong, Islam has prescribed that by systematic endeavour (jihad) – and, if the necessity should befall, by war and bloodshed – all such governments should be wiped out.«¹⁰

Therefore

»[...] the most necessary and effective measure for the destruction of fitna and fasād and the purification of human life from evil is the obliteration of all corrupt governments and their replacement by a government which in principle and in fact is based on righteousness.«¹¹

After maintaining in the chapter two that Islam wants its followers to defend their freedom, he begins the third chapter with a question, but what should the Muslims protect their freedom for and why should they consolidate their might? Is it an end in itself or simply a mean which serves some other purpose? Maudūdī's answer to this loaded question is that the real purpose of the Muslim *ummah*

»[...] is to strive for salvation of the entire humanity removing every obstacle which lies in the way of moral, material or spiritual development of human beings and continue to fight the cruelty, extravagance, vice, mischief, and anarchy as long the evil forces exist in the world.«¹²

Thus for Maudūdī jihad is a tool not only to protect the Islamic system but also to establish it universally in the first place.

8 Here already we can detect his notion of *nizām* = Islam, collectivity vis-a-vis individual, and which he later elaborates at length.

9 Maudūdī, *Al-Jihād*..., 55 [emphasis added].

10 A. A. Maudūdī, *Al-Jihād fī al-Islām*, quoted after C. Adams, »Abu'l-A'la Maududi...«, 156 f.

11 Ibid., 157.

12 Maudūdī, *Al-Jihād*..., 88 f.

Chapter four clarifies that the purpose of curative or pre-emptive jihad is not to coerce people to embrace Islam but rather to eradicate the false ideological systems which impose a coercive atmosphere restricting the freedom of people to choose and practice the religion of their choice. Maudūdī asserts that the blame of imposition of Islam with sword is a baseless allegation. It is neither the conviction of Muslims nor the history supports it. However, it is true that the sword of Islam subjugated the empires which were the backbone of the falsehood. He candidly admits that as it is wrong to say that Islam makes people Muslims with the force of sword, it is equally wrong to say that sword has nothing to do with the spread of Islam. Like every other civilization, Islam needed power to establish itself which consequently made acceptance of the truth of Islam easy for the people.¹³

With the chapter number five titled: »the Islamic injunctions concerning peace and war« begins the second part of the book which puts jihad in a comparative perspective. The chapter begins with elaboration of a general criterion of good and bad acts. An excerpt pertaining to this criterion translates as follows:

»The goodness or badness of every act can be determined on the bases of two things: firstly their purpose and secondly the types of means used to achieve that purpose. If the purpose of an act is vicious it will remain so even if done through fair means. And if the purpose is noble and superior but the means employed to achieve it are barbaric they will stain the moral value of the purpose itself.«¹⁴

Applying this criterion to wars, Maudūdī argues that in pre-Islamic Arab world, and in the age of empires in general, hardly any superior moral objectives are traceable behind most of the wars. People used to impose war on others either for expansion of empires and material benefits or simply because the others were different from them in terms of race, ethnicity or religion. Secondly, there existed no law or moral code which could limit the miseries of war once it started. Killings of non-combatants, abuse of women, destruction of natural resources, burning down the cities to ashes, maltreatment of the dead bodies, and other cruelties are not difficult to trace in the history of those times. Islam in turn rectified the situation firstly identifying the purposes that can justify a war and secondly it put into force detailed injunctions which effectively restrict the miseries of war to the combatants. Even the rights of the combatants were elaborated like prohibiting the burning of somebody alive or killing somebody after tying him up, respect of the dead bodies, generous treatment of the prisoners and so on.

The chapter six discusses teachings of other religions about war and at the end compares them with those of Islam. The study includes the four major religions of the world other than Islam namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. These religions are grouped into those which allow war and those which absolutely forbid it. In the first group come Hinduism and Judaism. The chapter then details the teachings of these religions on war extensively quoting from their

13 See *ibid.*, 174 f.

14 *Ibid.*, 179.

respective scriptures. Maudūdī concludes that in the sacred scriptures of these two religions we are unable to find any elaboration on the higher moral objectives for which a disastrous thing like war can be justified.

The discussion on Buddhism and Christianity takes another turn. He stresses that these religions deny the necessity of use of force only because they do not address the social and political problems of the world. Buddhism pertains to a pessimistic view of life and world and is little concerned with regulating social life. Rather its objective is to get rid of the cycle of existence. Similarly, Christianity does not present a complete code of conduct or legal system for different aspects of the collective life. Little does it tell about mans responsibilities towards his person, family, nation, and human beings at large. The crux of Maudūdī's argument is that in principle Buddhism and Christianity does not address the social, economic and political aspects of the human life, which practically means that they leave the political sphere out of the scope of their guidance. In contrast with these religions, Islam presents a code of conduct which covers every sphere of life. Therefore it regulates the sensitive issue of war bringing it into a moral and legal framework.

The seventh and the last chapter is entitled: »The war in modern civilization«. Here Maudūdī again employs his twofold criterion to evaluate the moral standards of the modern day wars as well as the international law. His conclusion is that the Islamic notion of jihad is morally superior both in terms of the objectives of war as well the code of conduct when a war erupts.

4. Concluding Remarks

Maudūdī's *al-Jihād fi'l-Islām* is a seminal document which can help understand the developments around the end of the 20th ranging from the resurgence of Islam in general to the rise of what is called the political Islam. Since Maudūdī's intellectual career began with this book, the important question is, if it was a particular construction of the doctrine of jihad as a defense of the Islamic system which led Maudūdī to interpret Islam in his later works mainly as an ideological system? An affirmative answer to this question will place this book at the centre of the contemporary Islamic ideological thought.

Al-Jihād fi'l-Islām also counts for one of the main sources of inspiration behind the Afghan jihad movement during 1980s and jihad movement in Kashmir since early 1990s. Both of these movements have been in ideological affinity with the Islamist party Jamā'at-e-Islamī established by Maudūdī.¹⁵ This in turn demonstrates how the constructions of religious leaders and the ideals of martyrs, metaphorically referred to with the ink of scholars and blood of martyrs in the beginning of this article, relate to each other. Since Maudūdī's intellectual career began with this book, the important question is, if it was a particular construction of the

¹⁵ On the party and Maudūdī see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of Islamic Revolution. The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan*, London 1994, and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, New York 1996.

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