

Politics of religion

The role of religion and the Ulama is significant and rife in Pakistan. It has a history that is older than the birth of this Islamic republic. The present condition of the state of Pakistan is the direct result, at least partly, of this role. Its future in the same way is linked to the vision and actions of the Ulama who are deeply involved in politics. The recently held centenary celebrations in KPK, of JUI (Fazl ur Rahman) on 7-9 April along with the proceedings of the Namus Risalat (honour of the Prophet) conference held on February 1 in Islamabad where Maulana Rahman assumed its leading role provide a clear window of overview of this phenomenon.

JUI is a successor of the Jamiat Ulama Hind (JUH) that came into being in 1919. JUH's members, as also leadership, comprised primarily men of Muslims of Deoband school, originally a reformist group that soon turned to politics. They even issued a *fatwa* that, "It is *Haram* (unlawful as per Sharia) for a Muslim to be a member of the Muslim League." During the Raj, this party reckoned that it was no use rising in armed revolt against the British, so it co-operated with the Congress to attain freedom. By early 1940s, Indian Muslims generally rejected the political leadership of JUH, and supported Muslim League – as a result Pakistan came into being.

In Pakistan, NWFP (now KPK) to be specific, JUI was led by Mufti Mahmud, the father of Maulana Fazl ur Rahman. It wielded political clout in the province and on account of its Deoband appeal, controlled a fair share of mosques and madrassahs in other provinces of Pakistan. With the passage of time, and its emphasis on politics in the society, the JUI's reformist role dwindled, and it represented ultra right-wing Islamist politics in the land. This helped it maintain its political leverage but it played a major role in radicalizing the society. It developed internal feuds, splitting into JUI (F) and JUI (S), the former claiming the lead role. Islamization of the society by General Zia, assisted by Islamist political parties, led to radicalization which in turn ripened into extremism that subsequently bred terrorism. The JUI had to perform a difficult balancing act to synchronize its politics with the rise and subsequent rejection of terrorism by the state and the society. Till recently Maulana Rahman was publicly sympathetic to the cause of the Mujahedeen, then to the Taliban etc on both sides of the Durand Line; however since the attack on APS in Peshawar, terrorism has earned disgrace in society, so the Maulana has artfully changed his rhetoric to suit the times. His actions however betray no change in practice. The two events, the celebrations in April and the 'APC' on February 1 are ample proof of this dichotomy or plain hypocrisy. We elaborate.

The centenary celebrations were designed to show a fair face of the JUI. Even non-Muslim religious leaders were invited to the event. Leaders of PPP and PML-N were asked to address the participants. The Imam Ka'aba and the Saudi minister of religious affairs were invited, as also the Deoband leadership from India. The JUI leadership said the right things to impress all present; for example:

- Muslims, the world over, are wrongly linked to terrorism, violence and intolerance.
- It is a conspiracy to accuse Deoband of militancy and conflict, as this group is committed to democracy, peace and minorities' rights.
- Spiritual progeny of Sheikh ul Hind (Mahmud ul Hasan) follow his philosophy of peace worldwide.
- Local and foreign evil lobbies accuse madrassahs of militancy while these citadels of Islam only protect the Faith.
- Unity and mutual tolerance are a dire need of present times and we must achieve these despite our differences.

- Religion and faith are integral to politics in Pakistan, and liberals and seculars indulge in wishful thinking to break this link.
- All religious political parties should form a joint front. To that end, Siraj-ul-Haq, the JI emir gave a free hand to Maulana Rahman.

Précis from the daily Islam "Aalami Ijtema", April 17, 2017

Whatever the merit or worth of the above proclamations, let's now recollect the statements and actions of the same leading Maulana and his colleagues in the All Parties Namus Risalat Conference held a few weeks earlier on February 1, 2017 in the Dreamland Hotel of Islamabad.

Those who attended this conference included Fazlur Rahman (JUI), Samiul Haq (JUI-S), Siraj ul Haq (JI), Zafarul Haq (PML-N), Fazlur Rehman Khalil (Ansar ul Ummah), Abdul Khair Zubair (JUP), Kafil Bokhari (Ahrar Islam), Tariq Cheema (PML-Q), Ejaz ul Haq (ML-Zia) etc. Only mulla Allah Wasaya, a second line cleric of the KN, was present to represent the sponsors. Apparently the stage was handed over to politico-religious leadership to sell their ware in the name of Honour of the Prophet and the End of Prophethood. The 'church' and the 'state' came out, hand in hand, to exploit each other to the full. The proceedings reported in the press made that very clear.

Maulvi Fazl ur Rahman of JUI-F was given the lead role and he read out 'the Declaration'. In this he started off with telling the authorities not to meddle with the blasphemy law 295-C, but then quickly fired all his broadsides on Ahmadiyya targets. He demanded, *inter alia*:

- Qadiani (TV) channels should be banned for their anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan transmissions.
- The decision to change the name of the QA University's Centre for Physics to Dr Abdul Salam Qadiani should be withdrawn.
- Innocent accused Muslims of Dulmial (riot) should be released and action should be taken against officials who were partial against the wronged (*Mazloom*) Muslims.
- Desist from returning to Qadianis the educational institutions nationalized in the days of Bhutto, etc.

The Conference, having made these demands, conveyed that these were not empty words to be soon forgotten, but would be pursued with further action if they were not implemented within deadline of one month. A 15-member committee was formed to plan and implement future course of action. The committee comprised leaders of the participating parties as members, while Maulana Fazal ur Rahman would head the committee.

Following opinions were aired in the conference and reported in the vernacular press (for instance the dailies Ausaf and Islam of February 2, 2017):

- Trump has come out openly against Muslims. There is need to unite against him.
- The government proceeds to hang Mumtaz Qadri overnight, but fails to implement court's verdict on Aasia Masih.
- Police cases should be registered against bloggers.
- The disbelievers (*Kafirs*) have given the name 'terrorism' to Jihad.
- We may have our differences with Hafiz Saeed but the government's treatment of him is not appropriate. We are all one on religious issues.
- Qadianis have dug in abroad against Pakistan. They have never been deprived of basic rights here.
- An APC should be called on Chakwal (Ahmadiyya mosque) issue to raise voice in support of wronged Muslims.

- Foreign powers attempt to change (school) syllabi; we'll have to play our role.
- 'End of Prophethood' day should be celebrated every year officially.
- Religious and political parties should jointly resist international pressure.
- We respect the PM, but any violation of Sharia restrictions is not licit. If the Ulama head for Islamabad, all (past) sit-ins would be blurred.
- Religious parties should launch the Nizam Mustafa campaign.
- Any effort to change the blasphemy law will result in violent chaos (*fasaad*).
- Qadianis are active against the country.

Comparison of what was said in April with what was undertaken on February 1 is interesting, to say the least. It appears that Maulana Fazl ur Rahman has found it convenient to gloss over the Quranic injunction: **“O ye who believe, why do say what you do not? It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not.”** (61: 2/3-3/4)