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GREAT MOVEMENTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

No. 2

JAMA'AT-E-ISLAMI

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The movement of Jama'at-e-Islami ranks among the foremost movements for Islamic revival in the contemporary world.

Formally established on 26 August 1941, its intellectual inspiration came from the thoughts of Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, who, along with Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, set the pace for contemporary Muslim thinking in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. With the establishment of Pakistan on the 14th August, 1947, the Jama'at was also reorganized in the form of two independent organizations – the Jama'at-e-Islami, Pakistan, and the Jama'at-e-Islami, Hind. In the Indian held Kashmir, the Jama'at has an autonomous existence. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the Jama'at is working as an independent organization. After the establishment of Bangladesh, the Jama'at-e-Islami, Bangladesh was also revived as an independent movement. While all the five organizations, under the name of the Jama'at-e-Islami, are working for essentially similar objectives and have a somewhat identical ideological approach, there is no organizational link between them. Each one operates as an independent organization and has developed its programmes and strategies for change and reconstruction, in the light of the politico-ideological situation it faces. The impact of the Jama'at-e-Islami is not confined to the sub-continent. Its ideological message has reached all the four corners of the globe. A number of independent organizations and groups are operating in major countries of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia drawing their inspiration from the message and mission of the Jama'ate-Islami, although they may not have any formal or legal organizational link. All of these organizations are like members of an extended ideological family. Yet each one has its own legal personality and distinct organizational form and strategies program. In this short paper the main focus is on the Jama'at-e-Islami, Pakistan.

Mawlana Mawdudi and His Approach

Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979) was one of the chief architects of contemporary Islamic resurgence of the Ummah and the principal founder of the movement of Jama'at-e-Islami. Born in Aurangabad (Deccan) presently, Andhera Pradesh, India, he started his career as a journalist, writer, and social reformer. In his early youth he moved to Delhi, the intellectual and cultural center of Muslim India. At the young age of twenty-two he became the Editor of the leading Muslim daily of India, *Al-Jamiyat* (1925-1928). His first major work of scholarship, *al-Jihad fi al-Islam* appeared in 1930. In 1932 he moved back to Hyderabad and took up the editorship of the monthly *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, a journal that became the main

vehicle for the dissemination of his ideas. This journal has played a significant role in the revival of Islamic thought in the 20th Century. Mawdudi used this journal for presenting his vision of Islam, causes of Muslim decline and the ways out of their predicament. Other scholars also contributed through this medium. It became a catalyst for the development of revivalist thought in the sub-continent and beyond. Naturally the main focus was on the central message of Islam with reference to our own time, particularly in the context of the intellectual and cultural challenge from the Western civilization. He paid special attention to the questions arising out of the conflict between the Islamic and contemporary Western worldviews. He also attempted to discuss some of the major problems of the modern age and looked upon these problems from an Islamic perspective, elucidating the way in which Islam tries to solve them. He developed a new methodology to study those problems in the context of the experiences of the West and the Muslim world, judging them on the theoretical criterion of their intrinsic soundness, and viability and conformity with the teachings and virtue of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. His writings disclosed erudition and scholarship, a deep perception of the significance of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and a critical awareness of the mainstream of Western thought and history. All this brought a freshness to his approach and lent a wider appeal to his message.

In the mid-thirties, Mawdudi started writing on the major political and cultural issues confronting Muslim India at that time and tried to examine them from the Islamic perspective rather than merely from the viewpoint of short-term political and economic interests. He relentlessly criticized the new fangled ideologies which had begun to cast a spell over the minds and hearts of his brethren-in-faith and exposed the hollowness of those ideologies. In this connection, the idea of territorial nationalism received special attention from Mawdudi when he forcefully explained its dangerous potentialities, as well as its incompatibility with the teachings of Islam. Mawdudi also emphasized that nationalism in the context of India meant the utter destruction of the collective identity of Muslims. In the meantime, an invitation from the philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal persuaded him to leave Hyderabad (1938) and settle down at a place which lay in the eastern part of Punjab, in the district of Pathankot. Mawdudi established what was essentially an academic and research center called *Dar al-Islam*, where, in collaboration with Iqbal, he had planned to train competent scholars in Islamic to produce works of outstanding quality on Islam, and above all, to carry out the reconstruction of Islamic law. Iqbal's death in April 1938 aborted this grand joint venture. Mawdudi, however, continued single-handedly what was planned to be done jointly by the two enumerators of 20th century Islam.

Around the year 1940, Mawdudi developed ideas regarding the founding of a more comprehensive and ambitious movement and this led him to launch a new organization under the name of Jama'at-e-Islami. It was on 26th August, 1941 that the Jama'at was founded in Lahore with 75 persons as founding members. Mawdudi was elected its chief and remained so until 1972 when he withdrew from that responsibility for reasons of health. He, however, remained active intellectually as well as a source of guidance for the movement.

Since August 1947, when Mawdudi migrated to Pakistan, he concentrated his efforts on establishing a truly Islamic society and state in this country. Consistent with this objective, he wrote profusely to explain the different aspects of the Islamic way of life, especially its socio-political aspects. This concern for the implementation of the Islamic way of life also led Mawdudi to criticize and oppose the policies pursued by the successive governments of Pakistan, and their consequent failure to transform Pakistan into a truly Islamic society and state. The rulers reacted with severely repressive measures. Mawdudi was often arrested and had to serve long spells in prison almost one in five days of his life in Pakistan. During these years of struggle and persecution, Mawdudi impressed all, including his critics and opponents, by his upright character and by the firmness and tenacity of his will, among other outstanding qualities. In 1953, when he was sentenced to death by the martial law authorities on the charge of writing a "seditious" pamphlet on the Qadiyani problem, he resolutely turned down the opportunity to

file a petition for mercy. He cheerfully expressed his preference for death to seeking clemency from those who wanted, altogether unjustly, to hang him. With unshakeable faith that life and death lie solely in the hands of Allah, he told his son as well as his colleagues: "If the time of my death has come, no one can keep me from it; and if it has not come, they cannot send me to the gallows even if they hang themselves upside down in trying to do so". His family also declined to make any appeal for mercy. His firmness astonished the government which was forced, under strong public pressure both from within and without, to commute the death sentence to life imprisonment.

Mawlana Mawdudi died in September, 1979, completing nearly sixty years of public life. During these many years, he had been continually active and vocal. He wrote over one hundred and thirty books and pamphlets and has made over a thousand speeches and press statements of which at least seven hundred are available on record. Several volumes of his letters have also been published over the years. Mawdudi's pen has been at once prolific, forceful and versatile. The range of subjects he has covered is unusually wide. Disciplines such as *tafsir*, *hadith*, law, philosophy, *kalam*, *tazkiyya*, and history, all have received the due share of his attention. He has discussed a wide variety of problems – political, economic, cultural, social, theological and so on – and has attempted to state how the teachings of Islam are related to those problems. He has also dealt profusely with the inner dimensions of faith, worship and life in obedience to Allah. Mawdudi without necessarily going into the technical world of the specialists, has expounded the essentials of the Islamic approach in most of the fields of learning and inquiry, particularly law, ethics, economics, state and politics, war and peace, family and society. His main contribution, however, has been in the fields of the Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), politics, social studies and the problems facing the international movement of Islamic revival. His last work has been the first two volumes on the life of the Prophet (s) covering the Makkan period. Unfortunately, the book remains incomplete. His greatest work however, is his monumental *tafsir* of the Qur'an in Urdu, *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (six volumes) a work he took thirty years to complete. Its chief characteristic lies in presenting the meaning of the message of the Qur'an in a language and style that penetrates the hearts and minds of the men and women of today, and show the relevance of the Qur'an to their everyday problems, both on the individual and social planes. He has translated the Qur'an into direct and forceful modern Urdu idiom. His translation is much more readable and eloquent than ordinary literal translations of the Qur'an. He has presented the Qur'an as a book of guidance for human life and as a guidebook for change, to initiate and guide the movement to implement and enforce divine guidance in human life. He has attempted to explain the verses of the Qur'an in the context of its total message. This *tafsir* has made a far-reaching impact on contemporary Islamic thinking in the sub-continent, and through its translations, even abroad. Translations of his *tafsir* have been offered in Persian, Turkish, Russian, Sindhi, Bengali and a host of local vernacular of the sub-continent. Six volumes conveying almost half of the Urdu *tafsir*, have now appeared in English from the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK. Certain parts of the *tafsir* have also been published in the Arabic language.

Jama'at's Strategy for Islamic Revolution

The Jama'at-e-Islami, the Islamic movement which Mawdudi founded, has grown into a strong and highly organized religio-political organization which has attracted people from all classes, but has an especially strong influence over the intelligentsia and the youth of the sub-continent and the world.

The Jama'at-e-Islami was founded as an ideological movement, distinct from other religious or

political parties. It has been founded and run in accordance with a written constitution. Its objective has been stated to be: "To seek the good pleasure of Allah by striving to establish the Islamic order in its entirety – *iqama al-din*". Its membership is open to all but it makes clear demands on those who commit themselves to its discipline. That is why it has two categories of membership *ruk'n* (pl: *arkan*) and *muttafiq*. While the number of *arkan* is very limited, its *muttafiqeen* in Pakistan alone are over four million. There are over four thousand branches of the movement in Pakistan.

What is the basic strategy that the Jama'at has adopted to bring about an Islamic transformation of the society? This can be summed up in its four point program.

1) The first major element of this programme is intellectual revolution and reconstruction of human thought on Islamic values and principles. A major contribution of the movement lies in a clear exposition of the teachings of Islam in a simple, forthright and clear manner, which is shorn of verbosity and free from all unhealthy accretions clustered around it over the years. This exposition is also geared to showing how the teachings of Islam can be applied in the present day world, and what steps are required to be taken up so as to develop a sound and healthy Islamic personality and a just and balanced society. This naturally necessitates a stock taking both of the Muslim heritage and of modern civilization, followed by a discriminate appropriation of healthy elements from them. That is why the interaction has a critical ring around it and stimulates critical thought and reflection. So far as the teaching of the Qur'an and the Sunnah are concerned, they are eternally binding and should thus be followed by the Muslims in all periods of history. Yet the challenge that confronts the Ummah relates in the application of the eternal and the absolute in the demands of the temporal, the current and the specific. This intellectual movement has produced vast literature dealing with different aspects of Islamic thought and culture. Most of this literature is available in over twenty-five languages of the world. The most distinct feature of this intellectual effort is to present Islam as a complete way of life and as an alternative civilization.

2) The second element of the program is to reach out to all those persons who are disposed to righteousness, and are inclined to work for the establishment and entronement of righteousness in human life. Such persons should be identified and brought together into an organized movement. Not only that, an effort should also be made to help such people develop a clear outlook, to purify their lives, and cultivate the qualities of good moral character. It is only after a group of people, combining true Islamic vision and Islamic character side by side with intellectual competence and with the skills needed to run the affairs of this world, emerges on the stage of human history, pools its strength and resources, and strives in a systematic manner that the way would be paved for an Islamic Order to be established. Hence, the Jama'at tries to emphasize the necessity of maintaining an inner core of highly dedicated and upright men and women as the foundation, the core-group and catalysts of Islamic revival.

3) The third point of the program consists of striving to bring about societal change, to bring about individual and instituted reforms in the light of Islamic teachings. The idea is that the people who are dedicated to the cause of Islam, or at least have an Islamic orientation and a concern for the well-being of human society should take the initiative and expend their time, effort and resources to bring about maximum healthy change and improvement in other human beings and the society in general. This program of societal reform is quite a comprehensive one. It begins with individual reform and purification: the strengthening and deepening of the spiritual foundation of one's personality. It seeks to make the mosque the hub of all Islamic activity. Moreover, there is heavy emphasis on education: the basic teachings of Islam should be communicated to the common people, arrangements should be made for adult education, reading rooms should be opened to create enlightenment and educational institutions should be established at different levels. An essential element of this program is moral uplift of the people and cultivating in them the spirit to defend their rights and extend help to others in protecting

their rights, including resort to public pressure to protect people from being subjected to injustice. At a highly personal level, the social program of the Jama'at aims at inculcating in every human being the basic personal ethics of Islam, starting with creation of sense of personal hygiene and cleanliness and fostering co-operation among people so as to ensure healthy conditions of living; drawing up lists of orphans and widows, of the crippled and the incapacitated people, and of poor students, arranging for their financial assistance and catering for the health requirements of people, especially the poor. Clearly, inspired by Islamic ideals, the objective is to foster the religious, moral, social and material welfare of the people and to move towards creating the social conditions which are conducive to the total transformation of human life.

4) The fourth point of the program envisages change of leadership in the broader sense of the term. It includes intellectual leadership, social, economic and cultural leadership, and ultimately also political leadership. The last mentioned marks the culmination of the process. The state is conceived as an indispensable means for establishing the order envisaged by Islam. Along with the civil society, state and its organs should also be harnessed in the service of the values and ideals of Islam. The leadership in its walks of life should be imbued with this idealism. It is only through change of leadership that a truly participatory society can run on the principles of *shura*, and freedom and justice can be established. A truly Islamic society and state is considered inconceivable unless its affairs are directed by people of clear Islamic vision and commitment, and upright character and competence.

How can this change of leadership be brought about? As far as non-political leadership is concerned, perhaps a great deal can be done by developing leadership qualities in people who are possessed of the right orientation. The Jama'at has always kept this as one of its aims. As for the change of political leadership in a democratic order this can possibly be brought about through general elections. The Jama'at has been hopeful that if the Islamic movement keeps on striving patiently, it will ultimately succeed in bringing righteous men in power. It also thinks that the democratic order can provide the framework in which an Islamic movement may flourish, gather strength and bring about the total transformation that it aims at. The Jama'at is committed to peaceful and democratic means for change and its constitution forbids resort to any means that may cause mischief, oppression and violence in the world (*fasad fil-ard*). For all these reasons, the Jama'at favours the establishment and maintenance of a truly democratic order in Pakistan, in keeping with the principles and values of Islam. The establishment of a just, democratic welfare state is the ultimate objective.

Distinctive Contributions of the Jama'at

Finally, let us briefly sum up the distinctive contributions of the Jama'at and also sum up the problems it faces:

1) The Jama'at has emerged as a powerful ideological movement and not merely as a religious or political party. It has tried to influence almost all dimensions of Muslim life; intellectual, cultural, moral, educational, literary, economic and political. It stands, not for partial reform, but for total change. Yet it is opposed to totalitarianism or oppressive approaches. Its uniqueness comes from its comprehensiveness without being totalitarian: this constitutes its distinctive merit and perhaps which is also responsible for some of the difficulties and complexities it has to face. Every vested group of the society has somehow been affected by its work. Its followers have come from all walks of life but its challenge has also been felt in all corners.

2) Secondly, Saiyyid Mawdudi and the Jama'at stand out as unique influences in bringing about

a world wide awakening that Islam is not a religion in the limited sense of the word; it is a *din*, a complete way of life. The demands of faith are not fulfilled merely by offering *ibadat*; *ibadat* are an objective as well as a means to a life that links every aspect of human life and activity to obedience to Allah and fulfils *Haququllah* (Rights of God) and *Haququl'ibad* (Rights of People). If *munkar* and *fawahish* are not eradicated with the offering of *salah*, our prayers are not fulfilling their role in society. The sovereignty of Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* must be established in all fields of human existence. Mosque and Parliament, *taqwa* and *adl*, *dikr* and *shariah*, prayer and progress are inalienable dimensions of the same reality. Islamic fulfilment is possible only through complete submission and total transformation of individual and collective behaviour in harmony with Divine Will and tenets of equity and justice. The establishment of the Islamic society and state is as much a part of the prophetic model as individual godliness, social ethics and sexual morality. This may have been a meek voice in the 1920's and 30's but al-hamdullillah today this is acknowledged as the language of Islamic resurgence and a formidable influence in shaping the future of the Muslim world, by the human civilization in the next century.

3) The Jama'at, drawing its inspiration from the prophetic models of Makkah and Madinah and the Islamic tradition of *tajdid wa ihya* (revival and renewal) has challenged the Western approach to social change, which consists primarily in social and structural reform. Islamic strategy for change gives equal importance to change within man (Iman, *taqwa* and character building) and change from without, i.e. society, law and state and its institutions. That is why the Jama'at has emphasized that while the revival of Iman and the moral transformation of the individual are the key to healthy social change, society and its institutions have to be changed and a new leadership evolved to see that the socio-economic and political order also reflect the same values on which personal piety is based. Personal morality and social ethics must conform and strengthen each other. This being the basic approach, revival of Islamic thought and morality become the central passion of the Jama'at. This makes it a movement for education and re-education. Moral training and character building assume a critical position in its vision for change. Hence, the emphasis on personal discipline and two-tier membership. Sometimes emphasis on societal change is misconstrued as neglect of the personal and spiritual dimensions. Nothing is further from the truth. The unique contribution of the Jama'at lies in restoring the link between the personal, spiritual, social and historical.

4) The Jama'at has tried to steer clear of the sectarian issues and biases and traditional religious controversies. It has emphasized that the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (s) are the corner stones of Islamic faith and culture. Fiqh is important; perhaps the greatest contribution of the Muslims in history. But narrow and unthinking adherence to a particular school or set of customs and intolerance towards other schools can deprive the Ummah of the flexibility and dynamism that has been its hallmark in history. There must not be a break with our history and tradition, but we must differentiate between what is fundamental and what is peripheral, between the ideals, values and principles and the details and the minutia spelled out in different periods of our history. Authentic dissent and genuine difference of opinion and plurality of interpretations should be respected and looked upon as the area of flexibility within the Islamic framework. Instead of fighting each other for our differences, we should learn to live with our differences and to work for building upon the vast and inexhaustible area of our agreement.

5) The Jama'at has emerged as a third force, a movement of the middle, bridging the gap between the so-called modernists who almost uncritically adopted the modernization model of the West and the so-called conservatives who refused to accept any modification or departure from the Muslim *status quo*. The Jama'at stands for change and reform, not in imitation of the West, but taking full cognizance of the fact that the world has changed materially under the influence of the Western civilization whose fundamental values are at variance with the ideals and values of Islam. But everything that has been developed in the West is not necessarily abhorrent to Islam. There can be vast areas of agreement and commonality of concerns. Muslims

must learn from the experience of mankind without compromising on our principles and values. Direct inspiration from the Qur'an and Sunnah and an openness to benefit from all schools of Islamic thought wherever necessary ensure greater flexibility and adaptability in the Jama'at approach to face the challenge of so-called modernity and civilized models developed in the West. It was a result of this approach that the Jama'at has been able to build its cadre by drawing upon both the modern educated classes as well as the *ulama* and traditional groups. It provides a meeting point between the two.

6) The Jama'at has influenced people in all walks of life but its greatest contribution lies in saving millions of Muslim youth from the agonies of scepticism, unbelief and moral decadence. It has offered before them Islam as an alternative to the contemporary ideologies of secularism, liberalism, nationalism, capitalism, socialism and the like. It has given them a new confidence in Islam and a new pride in working for the supremacy of Islam. This in part, has been the impact of the new literature produced by the movement and its intellectuals. Several hundred original works have been produced during the last five decades and several dozen institutions are engaged, in the sub-continent alone, in producing new literature on Islam showing its relevance to the problems of today and tomorrow.

Now a word about some of the problems that confront the Jama'at and are yet to be properly and fully resolved. It has already been mentioned that the comprehensive nature of the Jama'at's work has created many problems, both of size and quality, with which the movement has been grappling. The opposition from certain elements from within the Muslim society as well as frontal attacks from the protagonists of the Western secularization and from agents of western powers and agencies is not an insignificant phenomenon. Clash and confrontation have not been an unmixed evil but were responsible for a heavy toll. The movement has significantly influenced the educated classes but its influence on the common mass of people deserves to be extended vastly. The movement began in urban areas and its early converts belonged to the educated elite. Dawah amongst the masses has only gradually increased. It has developed a new language of Islamic politics but it has not yet been successful in overcoming the traditional sources of power in the society, with the result that its moral and ideological weight is not being fully and properly translated into political might. It has been more effective as an ideological force, or even as a pressure group with immense street power, but not yet so effective as an electoral force. Of late, emphasis on mass contact and mobilization has increased. With street power it has played an important role in dislodging many dictators and usurpers of power. It is yet to establish its credentials as an alternative government. Its representation in the Parliament and the provincial assemblies has been limited, although the performance of its MP's has been acknowledged as superb and above all clean and free from any taint of corruption. As such, it would not be fair to say that it has inaugurated a new, even illustrious process, but the process is yet to attain maturity and fulfilment. Al-hamdulillah, there is new light – an expanding silver lining on the horizon, but the blanket of darkness is yet to be fully dispelled. The struggle is entering new phases and peoples' participation along with the Jama'at is increasing. It is being increasingly realized at all levels that Pakistan's problems, or for that matter of any Muslim society, can not be solved by the leadership that has failed to deliver over the last fifty years. More of the same is not the answer. It is only the Islamic alternative that can bring about real change in society and history. While struggle in the right direction is its own, there is a clear indication that the socio-cultural landscape of the Muslim world is also destined to change. It is the Islamic movement that can bring about this change. Let us hope and pray and strive to rebuild a new world and see that darkness disappears and the entire horizon is illumined.

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