

Understanding Jihad in Islam with Maulana Wahidudin Khan

- Javid Ahmad Bhat

Abstract

Islam literally means peace. Its fundamental purpose is to create an atmosphere of peace based upon submission and surrender to the Supreme Will of the Creator and the love of His creation. Submission to the Will of Allah gives humans complete peace, inner as well as outer. But Islam appears to have become one of the most misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented religion. A number of books have been written on the supposed link between Islam and violence. Islamic critique aficionados argue that Islam per se is an aggressive religion, encouraging Muslim to have recourse to violence, terrorism and destruction.¹ Muslim civilization has been castigated as being backward, insular, stagnant and unable to deal with demands of the twenty-first century. Islam has been equated with fanaticism, intolerance, violence and wars of aggression; the ideology of jihad is often deployed to cast doubts on the compatibility of Islam with modern norms of international law as enunciated in the United Nations charter. The concept of jihad and the misconceptions surrounding it needs to be removed. Maulana Wahidudin Khan, an influential Indian Muslim personality in modern times, is a staunch advocate of peace and non-violence and he gave his best to clear the misconception against Islam especially one of the glaring aspects of Islam Jihad in the form of Qital. His ideas on Jihad in Islam can be gleaned from his works. The present paper attempts to undertake a study of his views on Jihad in Islam which has become the pressing need of present times owing to the escalation of extremism and terrorism in the world and unfortunately its attribution to Islam.

Keywords: Islam, Jihad, Qital, Mujahid, Terrorism,

Introduction

With the event of 9/11 has emerged a new debate on Islam in general and Muslims in particular. In legal and political environment, Islam appears to have become one of the most misunderstood misinterpreted and misrepresented religions. A number of books have been written on the supposed link between Islam and violence, with a good portion of the output unfortunately consisting of crude Islam phobic tracts, such as best sellers Mark Steyn's America alone: the end of the world as we know it and Robert Spencer's the politically incorrect guide to Islam (and the Crusades). Individuals like David Horowitz and Daniel Pipes have made it a full time crusade to inveigh against Islam, with Horowitz even organising an Islamo-Fascism awareness week on college campuses across the country.²

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¹ Many horrible acts have been, and continue to be carried out in the name of Islam, just as they have been in the name of Christianity. But unlike Islam, Christianity does not justify the use of all forms of violence as Islam does. P Sookhdeo, *A Religion That sanctions violence*, Daily telegraph, 2001, 22. Cf. ShaheenSardar Ali and JavaidRehman, "The Concept of Jihad in Islamic International Law," *Journal of Conflict and security law* 2005, 10, no.

² Amitabh Pal, *Islam Means Peace* (California: Praeger 2011), 1.

Leading evangelists such as Pat Robertson and Franklin Graham have spoken of Islam in the crudest possible terms. Some politicians have pandered subtly and not so subtly to the anti-Islam prejudices of many in their base.³ Hollywood and other media outlets surreptitiously tried to debilitate the image of Islam by showing movies. A good number of people mostly politicians across globe used vituperative remarks against Islam just to gain fame in short span of time.⁴

Islamic critique aficionados argue that Islam per se is an aggressive religion, encouraging Muslim to have recourse to violence, terrorism and destruction.⁵ Muslim civilization has been castigated as being backward, insular, stagnant and unable to deal with demands of the twenty-first century. Islam has been equated with fanaticism, intolerance, violence and wars of aggression; the ideology of *jihad* is often deployed to cast doubts on the compatibility of Islam with modern norms of international law as enunciated in the United Nations charter.⁶ Islam is an old religion that is very misunderstood in the minds of many westerners today; it has moreover been degraded and associated with violence despite being despite being condemned by renowned Muslim scholars across globe. This is a problem on the world stage because of religiously motivated terrorism and the links that have been forged, wrongly so, by terrorist groups.⁷

Understanding the Meaning of Jihad

Another important aspect of Islam which has been manipulated is the concept of *jihad* and the misconceptions surrounding it needs to be removed. This term has become popular amongst the Muslims and non-Muslims alike but unfortunately it is confronted with misunderstanding on both sides. The word *jihad* is mistranslated in the west as “holy war”. The word *jihad* is an Arabic word; its root word is *jhd* which means to struggle.⁸ Some of its derivatives are: *Jahada*, *JahadusJuhd*, *ijtihad*.⁹ All these contain the meanings of striving, struggling or making efforts to advance the divine causes or purposes.¹⁰ *Jihad* refers ‘to struggle, to strive, to exert oneself to the utmost to achieve one’s goal.’¹¹ Therefore *jihad* does not denote killing or warfare. It is a struggle for a greater good, for the betterment of

³ President Obama supposedly being Muslim is political liability he constantly has had to battle during his presidential campaign and his presidency.

⁴ Pal, *op.cit.*, 2.

⁵ Many horrible acts have been, and continued to be carried out in the name of Islam, just as they have been in the name of Christianity. But unlike Islam, Christianity does not justify the use of all forms of violence. Islam does. P Sookhdeo, *A Religion That sanctions violence*, Daily telegraph, 2001, 22. Cf. ShaheenSardar Ali and JavaidRehman, “The Concept of Jihad in Islamic International Law,” *Journal of Conflict and security law* 2005, 10, no.

⁶ J L Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or reality* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1992), 5.

⁷ Joshua Gillum, “Is Islam Peaceful or violent: Comparing Islam and Christianity to Reveal the Propaganda of Terrorism,” Paper presented at *MidwestPolitical Science Association Annual conference* (April 2010).

⁸ Wahid al-ZamanKiranwi, *Al-Qamus al-Jadid* (UP: MaktabahMuhammadiyah, 1992), 141. IbnManzur, *lisan al- ‘Arab*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Jil. 1997), vol. 3, 143.

⁹ Al-Qamus, *Ibid*, 141.

¹⁰ Brigadier S.K. Malik, *TheQur’anic concept of War* (Delhi: Adam Publishers and distributors, nd.), 2.

¹¹ Majid Khaduri, *War and Peace in Islam in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1955), 55.

mankind; it is a tool of eliminating oppression and terror; it is a means to an end, not an end within itself. The ultimate end of *jihad* is the establishment of peace at all levels.¹²

In Islamic teachings the struggle against the self is means of disciplining one's ego from evil propensities, such as sexual desires, material greeds, lust for power and all other impure wishes. Islam does not aim to eliminate these completely but through self-discipline it aims to bring them under control; this process of disciplining ones soul is known as *tazkiyya*.¹³ Which according to the teachings of Prophet is a greater *jihad* (*Jihad i Akbar*) as after returning from a battle with his companions the Prophet Muhammad stated:

“You have returned from a lesser *jihad* (*al-jihad al-Asghar*) to a supreme *jihad* (*al-jihad al-Akbar*).¹⁴

The above saying of Prophet Muhammad is clear that to participate in a battle against enemies is a lesser *jihad* and to purify your *nafs* is a greater *jihad*. Shaikh ul Islam IbnTaimiyah, is also of the opinion that the *jihad* is a continuous process and fighting with one's enemy is something that might happen by chance and only occasionally as he says, “Battle with enemy forces takes place occasionally but the faithful spends his entire life engaged in *Jihad*”. From this it may be implied that *jihad* is a struggle, a constant struggle to eliminate discrepancies between deficiencies and perfection. It is an immense search for accomplishment, an immense attack on deformities. Again *Jihad* for him, a just and defensive war launched and waged by Muslims whenever their security was threatened by the infidels or heretics. Lawful warfare is the essence of *jihad*, the aim of which is to secure peace, justice and equity.¹⁵

Mawlana Mawdudi says that: “*Jihad* denotes doing one's utmost to achieve something. It is not equivalent to war, for which the Arabic word is *qital*, *jihad* has a wider connotation and embrace every kind of striving in God's cause. A Scholar's devotion towards his cause propagates it by word of mouth and by the pen, uses his physical energy in striving to serve it spends all resources at his disposal to promote it, all this is *jihad*.”¹⁶

“*Strive against unbelievers with the utmost strenuousness, with the (Qur'an)*.”¹⁷

Abdullah Yusuf Ali wrote a commentary on this verse as he says: “The distribution of Allah's signs being universal, the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) pays no heed to carping critics who reject faith. He waged the biggest *jihad* of all, with the weapon of Allah's Revelation.”¹⁸

¹² Qadri, *op.cit.*, 65.

¹³ Qadri, *op.cit.*, 66.

¹⁴ Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 13, 523; cf, Qadiri, *Op.cit.*, 65.

¹⁵ Richard Bonney, *Jihad From Qur'an to Bin Laden* (New York: Pal Grave Macmillan, 2004), 121; cf. Aaisha, *Op.cit.*, 72.

¹⁶ S. A. A. Maududi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an* trans. Zafar Ishaque Ansari, Vol. 1 (New Delhi: MMI Publications, 2004), 169.

¹⁷ *Al-Qur'an*, 25:52.

¹⁸ Abdullah Yousuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an English Translation and The Meanings and Commentary*, revised and edited by The Presidency of Islamic Researches (IFTA, Call and Guidance), 1047.

According to Mawlana Wahidudin Khan: “Undertaking the great *jihad* by means of the Qur’an means a peaceful struggle to spread the word of Allah. That is to say, peaceful struggle is the real *jihad*—nay the greatest *jihad*. Even if opponents try to divert the attention of the believers from the realm of peaceful efforts, it should then be the endeavour of the believers to concentrate upon the field of preaching based on the teachings of the Qur’an.”¹⁹

Mawlana Maududi is of the view: “That the mighty striving means, to fight the enemy on all fronts in order to raise the banner of truth regardless of whether that involves fighting with the pen or the tongue, fighting with one’s wealth or life.”²⁰

Therefore, from the above discussion it is clear that the Qur’an is not a bomb or any sword through which Muslims can fight non-believers, but Qur’an is an ideology through which Allah orders his Prophet to fight these non-believers. Therefore it is clear that to fight with Qur’an means a peaceful *dawah* activity or inviting others to accept the faith through the Qur’an.

In fact a *mujahid* cannot go for fighting the external enemies of truth unless he had purified his heart from selfish desires and freed himself from the clutches of devil. That is why Prophet Muhammad said:

“You have returned from a lesser *jihad* (*al-jihad al-Asgar*) to a supreme *jihad* (*al-jihad al-Akbar*) i.e., to struggle with the temptation of one’s *nafs*.”²¹

This is more clearly explained by Prophet Muhammad when he was asked by Abu Dhar as to which category of *jihad* is the greatest. Prophet Muhammad replied: “The greatest *jihad* is the struggle of man against his selfishness and lust.”²²

Therefore, the best *jihad* in status is *jihad bin nafs*, to struggle against one’s ego. The best *mujahid* is one who strives against his own self as in the tradition, a conversation of Hazrat Aishah with the Prophet of Islam, makes the *jihad* clearer:

“O Messenger of Allah, is *jihad* obligatory for women? Prophet Muhammad said: yes, up to them is *jihad* in which there is no fighting, that is al-Hajj and al-‘Umrah.”²³

This tradition shows that *jihad* refers to a peaceful struggle, not armed warfare.

Therefore *jihad* is a misnomer that has come into common usage. Literally *jihad* refers to a peaceful struggle, not an armed struggle as explained by Asghar Ali Engineer in on developing theology of peace in Islam: “... As far as the Qur’an is concerned, the concept of

¹⁹ Wahidudin Khan, *The Qur’an English translation, Commentary and parallel Arabic Text* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2016), 1111.

²⁰ Maududi, *op.cit.*, Vol. vii, 32.

²¹ Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, vol. 13, 523; cf. Qadiri, *op.cit.*, 65.

²² KanzulUmmal, vol 4, 616; Cf, Zargar, *Op.cit.*, 228.

²³ Imam Muhammad Bin Yazeed Ibn Majah al-Qazwini, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, reviewed by Abu Khaliyl (Riyadh: Darus Salam, 2007), the Chapters on Hajj rituals, Chapter, Hajj is the jihad of women, vol. 4, 126.

jihad has nothing to do with violence. The Qur'an does not use this word in any sense of war at all."²⁴

While *jihad* has nothing to do with fighting or armed struggle; *jihad* is an important principle in Islam as seen from the following Qur'anic verse:

“...strive for the cause of Allah as you ought to strive...”²⁵

In this verse ‘strive for the cause of Allah’ means ‘striving’ or “exerting one’s utmost” to achieve salvation in the next eternal world of paradise.²⁶ The term *jihad fi-sabilillah* meaning ‘for the cause of Allah’ is often used in conjunction with the *jihad* to depict that *jihad* is solely for the sake (and pleasure) of Allah’s cause. As such *jihad* in the cause of Allah (in the peaceful sense) is the direct way to paradise.²⁷

Mujahid is one who strives or engage in *jihad*, Musand Ahmad (Hadith compilation by Ahmad bin Hanbal), as quoted from Wahidudin Khan give three roles of *Mujahid* as, first, one who struggles with himself for the sake of Allah. Second, one who exerts himself for the cause of Allah and the third, one who struggles with his self for the sake of obedience to Allah.²⁸ Prophet Muhammad distinguished different ways in which a believer may fulfil his *jihad* obligation as, by the heart; his tongue, his hands.²⁹ And the best *jihad* is word of truth to a tyrant ruler, as Prophetic tradition goes like this:

“Someone asked Prophet Muhammad, which *jihad* is the best? Prophet Muhammad replied: to say a word of truth to a tyrant ruler.”³⁰

Therefore, *jihad* with the tongue or exhortation for the sake of Allah can take two forms: first, forbidding evil and patiently exhorting (people in general) to do good; and second, peaceful exhortation to a tyrant ruler. So the *mujahid* is one who will control his *nafs* from all evil doings and will struggle to live his life according to the rule of Allah, and who will fulfill his duty of *dawah* (spreading the message of Allah) to common people as well as to the rulers. The best *mujahideen* are the Prophets of Allah, who have fulfilled His mission by calling people towards the right and forbid them from doing any evil.

Summarising *jihad* and *mujahid* we can say that *jihad* is a peaceful struggle to attain nearness to Allah by subduing one’s passion, spreading message of Islam peacefully, also termed as *dawah*; and spending one’s wealth for the service of humanity, to help the poor and destitute. All these are eternal processes of *jihad* termed as ‘everyday *jihad*.’ (This type of *jihad* is fard

²⁴ Asghar Ali engineer, *On Developing Theology of Peace in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers pvt. Ltd., 2003), 33.

²⁵ *Al-Qur'an*, 22:78.

²⁶ Fayruzabadi, *Qamus al-Muhit*(Arabic), Vol. 1 (Digital: Shamela Digital Library), 286.

²⁷ Majid Khaduri, *op.cit.*, 55.

²⁸ Musanad Ahmad; cf. Khan, *Islam and World Peace, op.cit.*, 25.

²⁹ Muslim, *Op.cit.*, Book of Faith, Clearing that forbidding evil is part of faith, faith increases and decreases, enjoying what is good and forbidding what is evil are obligatory.

³⁰ Imam Hafiz Abu Abdur Rahman Ahmad bin Shu'aib bin 'Ali An-Nasa'i, Sunan An-Nasa'i, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, final Reviewed by Abu Khaliyl (Riyadh: Darus Salam, 2007), The Book of Al-Bay'ah (Oath of Allegiance), Chapter, the virtue of the one who speaks truth before an unjust ruler.

on every Muslim.) A *mujahid* is one who struggles with himself for the sake of Allah; who exerts himself for the cause of Allah; and who struggles with his self in submission to the will of Allah. Hence, when a person seeks the truth, he is immersed in an intellectual *jihad*. When he realised the truth continues throughout his life, taking an added dimensions. He must now engage in *jihad* or struggle to the utmost against his own self, satanic desires and against the difficulties and challenges of his surroundings. In this way he strengthens and deepens his faith and trust in Allah is a real *mujahid*.³¹ *Jihad* is an entirely peaceful action. At the individual level, to engage in *jihad* is to refuse to deviate from Allah's path in the face of the desires and inclinations of one's carnal desire and baneful influence of environment. It is to face the difficulties and challenges that stand in one's path and remain steadfast on the path of truth. At the collective level *jihad* may be defined as a peaceful struggle.³² *Jihad* is linked to intellectual awakening. It entails enkindling among people a healthy spirit, exhorting them to positive action and seeking to refine their character. *Jihad* inspires people to seek to become beneficial to others and to be concerned about their welfare. The weapon used in *jihad* is love, not hatred or violence.³³ Thus, whatever we do or intended to do is known as *Jihad*.

Wahidudin Khan on Jihad in Islam

Maulana Wahidudin Khan is an Islamic spiritual scholar who has adopted peace as a mission of his life. Known for his Gandhian views, he considered non-violence as the only method to achieve success. Internationally recognised for his contribution to world peace, he has received, among others, the Demiurgus Peace International Award, the Padma Bhushan, the Rajiv Gandhi National Sadbhavna Award and the National Citizen's Award. A recent book, 500 most Influential Muslims of 2009 by Georgetown University, Washington, has named him "Islam's spiritual ambassador to the world." He was born in 1925 AD and he was educated in a traditional seminary. From his early years, he showed a voracious appetite for modern knowledge, spending entire days in the library. As a result, he became well versed in both classical Islamic teachings and modern disciplines. His extensive research led him to conclude that the need of the hour was to present Islamic teachings in the style and language of the post-scientific era.

Maulana was a staunch advocate of peace and non-violence so much so that he can be rightly regarded as '*pacifist par excellence*'. He has written extensively on these issues. Khan advocates reconciliation that is integral to peace. Drawing on the Qur'anic statements that reconciliation is best, he regards it as the key to success and achievement that would be simply impossible by having recourse to violence.³⁴

Khan vehemently rejects terrorism arguing that Islam does not allow for terrorism under any circumstances. Claiming that Islam is altogether a peaceful message, he argues the term Islamic terrorism as a misnomer. He, very disdainfully, equates the term with pacifist

³¹ Khan, *Islam and world Peace*, op.cit., 6.

³² *Ibid*, 5.

³³ *Ibid*, 5,6.

³⁴ Wahidudin Khan, *Islam and World Peace* (New Delhi: Good Word Books, 2015), 8.

terrorism. He argues that the wars permitted in the Qur'an and waged by the Prophet were meant to end the religious persecution. In modern times, he regards war solely as the prerogative of a duly established government, if necessary by the circumstances.³⁵

Khan's approach to jihad is different from other Islamist scholars. He argues that Jihad is regularly misinterpreted as war with all its connotations of violence and bloodshed. According to Khan, jihad literary means any sort of struggle-doing one's utmost to further a worthy cause.³⁶ Khan asserts that there are two types of Jihad in Islam one is with the self (Jihad bin Nafs) that is utilizing the maximum effort to keep control over negative feelings in one's self like arrogance, jealousy, greed and anger.³⁷ Qur'an also sanctioned such sort of Jihad, "*So do not yield to those who deny the truth, but strives with the utmost strenuousness by means of this Qur'an.*"³⁸

Jihad through the Qur'an means to explain the teachings of the Qur'an to people. That is presenting the concept of one God instead of many gods: emphasized God-oriented life instead of world-oriented life; and principal oriented life instead of interest-Oriented life. Therefore, Jihad is peaceful struggle for God's message carried out through peaceful methods. So the violence and compulsion have no place in while waging Jihad.³⁹

The other type of Jihad is called Qital (armed struggle) that is, engaging in a war at God's behest at the time of aggression on the part of enemies. The Jihad is purely in self-defence in order to counter aggression. It is also a sort of struggle against evil that is why it is called Jihad in Islam.⁴⁰

According to Khan Jihad means any sort of struggle and the Qur'an mentioned the term Jihad for religious struggle as well as for daw'ah struggle while as the term used for war in Islam is Qital not Jihad.⁴¹ Khan says that Jihad and Qital are two different terms. Qur'an permits Jihad in terms of Qital at two situations only: first is to eliminate fitnah and second is to defend the state. Fitnah, he doesn't mean corruption here but it means religious persecution. In the classical age, the religious persecution was present in Arabia as well as in other parts of the world. Allah commands the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and his companions to strive against it in order to end the persecution for all times. In modern times such religious persecution does not prevail in practice; hence there is no need to wage such kind of Qital anymore. While as Jihad for defence is still relevant and will be prevailed till the day of judgement, but it should be undertaken under some necessary conditions.⁴² War with an aggression takes place in a chance occurs as acceptable by particular situation, while jihad is

³⁵*Ibid.*, 323.

³⁶Wahidudin Khan, *Principles of Islam* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2010), 53.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Al-Qur'an, *Op.Cit.*, 25:52.

³⁹Wahidudin Khan, *Principles of Islam, Op.Cit.*, 55,56.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 67

⁴¹Wahidudin Khan, *Fikr-I Islam: Afkar-I Islam kiTashairihwaTawzi* (New Delhi: Good word Publisher, 2014), 106.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 88.

continuous action of believers everyday life.⁴³ According to Khan Qur'an conveys the command to wage battle but the special circumstance should justify it. When aggression had already been committed by opponents, believers are obliged to defend themselves, initiating hostilities and insurgencies is not permitted in Islam. Even defence war can not be declared by any group or any movement but by the state.⁴⁴ In case of offensive war being declared by an opposite group, the believers are not permitted or supposed to retaliate immediately against them rather in the beginning all efforts are not to be made to avert war by means of reconciliation or treaty.⁴⁵

He further says that there are several groups and movements in the contemporary Muslim world who strives rather wadges war for the restoration of *Khilafah* Islamic political order. As the politics is related with the conditions and secondary aspect of Muslim life. So to undertake the violent step or wadge Qital for it is not allowed in Islam. If it is done there will be coincidence with the existing system, who in turn can undertake measures to curb such revolts and resistances. Hence the lesser evil will automatically be transformed into great evil. More over the possible opportunities for da'awah work will also be vanished. Such steps may have the resemblance of *fasad fil arad* (corruption in the land) which is a crime and not an Islamic action.⁴⁶ Therefore, Khan has taken a peaceful stand on Jihad (Qital) unlike different Islamic movements of the Muslim World.

Conclusion

Therefore, Khan is of the view that *jihad* in Islam is a continuous and comprehensive process. *Jihad* is an exalted process in Islam, which should Carrey on continuously, every day and at every moment in our lives, and this form of *jihad* is Fard-i 'Aan. *Jihad* is also used for war, but in Arabic the actual word for war is *Qital* or *Harb*. Khan says that Jihad and Qital are two different terms. Qur'an permits Jihad in terms of Qital at two situations only: first is to eliminate fitnah and second is to defend the state. He is critical of the contemporary armed struggles in the name of Jihad. He maintains that no movement can turn into a Jihad simply because its flag-bearers give it that label. An action can be considered as Islamic Jihad only if and when it is fully in accordance with the conditions that Islam has laid down in this regard.⁴⁷

⁴³Wahidudin Khan, *The True Jihad: The Concept Of Peace, Tolerance and Non- Violence In Islam* (New Delhi: Good word Publishers, 2018), 13,14.

⁴⁴Wahidudin Khan, *The Qur'an Translation and Commentary*, *Op.Cit.*, 76

⁴⁵Wahidudin Khan, *The True Jihad*, *Op.Cit.*, 62.

⁴⁶Wahidudin Khan, *Fikri Islam* (New Delhi: Good word Publishers, 2008), 142.

⁴⁷Wahidudin Khan, *Islam and World Peace*, *op.Cit.*, 31.