

## Issues/Discussion Forum

### **Wahhabi Impact: Influence of Wahhabi Islam on the Indian Muslim Community is Growing**

- Sultan Shahin

I have been talking about the growing impact of Wahhabism in India, including on Sufi institutions, for a long time. Now an important article has appeared in the *Frontline Magazine*, which more or less substantiates the same point, though it does not talk about the Wahhabisation of Sufism in India. Before I offer this article to New Age Islam readers, let me provide some background in which to view the issue of grave concern to Indian Muslims. Unfortunately, few Muslims look at the issue with the gravity and concern that it deserves. Indeed, many simply criticise me for highlighting the issue and indeed accuse me of seeking to divide the community.

Though Wahhabism started making a noticeable impact since 1974 when Saudi Arabian economy started getting a massive injection of Petrodollars. But Wahhabism has been spread aggressively since the 1744 pact between Muhammad bin Saud and Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab which marked the emergence of the first Saudi state. But even before that Mohammad Abdul Wahhab had started implementing his perverted ideas of stoning women accused of adultery to death and destroying Islamic heritage buildings with the help of Uthman ibn Mu‘ammar, the ruler of his native village Uyayna in Najd. He had personally organised the stoning of a woman accused of committing adultery *a la* Taliban and Boko Haram in our times. Even before meeting Ibn-e-Saud he had destroyed the grave of Zayd ibn al-Khattab, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (saw), whose shrine was revered by the local population. After the pact with Ibn-e-Saud, of course, a wave of killings and destruction of Islamic heritage sites started.

Thus, aggressive Wahhabi preaching and practice of forcible conversion to Wahhabism (which was considered synonymous with Islam, as Wahhabis do not consider non-Wahhabis Muslim), killing of those who did not convert, and destruction of Islamic heritage has been going on for almost 300 years. Wahhabis consider themselves non-sectarian, as they believe only their sect has the divine right to survive. Once all Muslims have been forced to convert to Wahhabism or been killed, sectarianism will vanish. Mohammad Ibn-e-Abdul Wahhab’s mentor Ibn-e-Taimiyya was violently opposed to the idea of different people interpreting Quran in their own way. He just wanted his own interpretation to prevail.

However, petrodollar has given the spread of Wahhabism an immense impetus. It has been there for quite some time (discovery of oil in 1938 and large-scale exploitation after World War II), but the volume of petrodollar quadrupled all of a sudden at the end of 1973 following the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973. And since then the crude oil prices have been spiralling much to the detriment of peaceful, inclusive Islam.

One of the mysteries of how Wahhabism spread around the world is the support it got from the West. The West did not object to Saudis massively increasing the volume of money they spent on indoctrination of Muslims around the world into Wahhabi ideology and forcing them to adopt seventh century Arab cultural norms and practices like stoning women to death if they dared to show the slightest amount of independence. All that happens in Saudi Arabia in terms of treatment of women or happened in Afghanistan under Taliban (and probably will happen again elsewhere, most likely in Africa and Middle East) was a manifestation of Wahhabi ideology in action. The West probably did not object because Wahhabism had helped them defeat the last Muslim Khilafat, Turkish Khilafat-e-Osmania, and would (they apparently hope, according to a widespread conspiracy theory among Sufi-Barailwis) help them destroy Islam finally, something crusaders had failed to do in the absence of Wahhabism. The conspiracy theorists ask: have you noticed the reverence with which Wahhabism is treated in the Western media: they call it a puritan sect. This leniency towards Wahhabism continues even after 9/11 in which 16 out of 19 terrorists were Saudi Wahhabis and the rest Egyptians schooled in Wahhabi ideology.

According to this ideology, Muslims should never befriend non-Muslims including those Muslims who are not yet Wahhabi. There is a reason why the West is helping Saudi Wahhabism's latest project: to install Al-Qaeda dictatorship in all erstwhile secular Muslim dictatorships. Have you not noticed the Wahhabi demand in largest-circulated Pakistani newspapers: "Kafirs (Shias) convert to Islam (Wahhabism), or pay *jizya*, or leave the country, or be responsible for being killed, your women being made concubines of your Wahhabi killers, and children being enslaved by them?" This is not just a demand: it is actually being implemented.

However, I would like to clarify, that not all those who consider themselves Wahhabi are exclusivist or takfiris, i.e. those who consider all other Muslims Kafir. Even those whose ancestors turned to Wahhabism a hundred years ago, may still be inclusivist, peaceful people, not aware of the details of Wahhabi ideology. They are merely opposed to *qabr parasti* (grave worship) and *fateha khwani* (offering sweets or food to the dead ancestors amidst recitals of Quran's verses) and practised rituals like saying *aaameen* loudly at the end of *Surah Fateha* in *nimaz*, as against non-Wahhabis who say the same *Aameen* softly. By and large, that is as far as their Wahhabism went. It's only in the last decades that some Wahhabis' mind-set has gradually changed towards exclusivism, xenophobia, intolerance and radicalism.

The 1.6 billion Muslims in the world would not abide by the tenets of Islam if they considered it a religion of violence and intolerance. Most Muslims live peacefully everywhere in the world. Yes, with the onslaught of Wahhabism and the massive propaganda unleashed by the US-protected Saudi regime, the situation is changing, has already changed quite a bit. Many people who still consider themselves Sufi/Bareilwi have also turned intolerant and are accepting force and coercion and violence as an ideology. Their madrasas have stopped teaching many Sufi books. They are becoming Wahhabi in their mind-set, though many are not even aware of it.

America is the biggest protector of Wahhabi Islam even after 9/11 in which all the terrorists involved were Wahhabi, 16 out of 19 Saudi and three Egyptians. It has not stopped Saudi

Arabia from spending tens of billions of petrodollars exporting Wahhabi Islam. Scores of chartered planes fly from Jeddah practically every day carrying Tablighis to all corners of the world, seeking to impose Seventh-century Arab cultural norms on Muslims.

Indian Muslims are inheritors of a 5,000-year-old civilisation. Our civilisation was the best in the world in every possible way. But we are being told we must now supplant our culture with the desert Bedouin culture of 7th century Arabia. We should all become illiterate 7th century *baddus*, if we want to remain Muslim, so we are told. We should start raiding rival sect's colonies, kill the men, possess their women as concubines, and enslave their children, as is already happening in Pakistan.

Read history. Wahhabi Islam would not have been able to install itself in what was then Hejaz (now the only country in the world to be named after a king and called Saudi Arabia) and destroy over 300 Islamic monuments from the earliest period of Islam without British help. It would not be able to destroy the remaining Islamic sites today without American help. There perhaps is a reason why all forces opposed to Islam call Wahhabi Islam as true Islam, never question their ideology, do everything possible to propagate Wahhabism as true Islam.

Opposing *qabr parasti* (grave-worship) doesn't make one a Wahhabi. It's simple common sense. A manifestation of our belief in *tauheed*. However, destroying Sufi shrines, raising to the ground all historical monuments associated with the earliest period of Islam, killing people who visit Sufi shrines, including some *jahil qabr parasts* (ignorant grave-worshippers), does make one a follower of the Wahhabi ideology as propagated by Syed Qutub and Maulana Maudoodi in the last century, Ibn-e-Taimiya in the 13th-14th century and Mohammad ibn-e-Abdul Wahhab in the 18th century. Even maintaining silence over the spiralling violence does make one a Wahhabi or at least a tacit supporter of Wahhabi violence.

[Incidentally most people who visit Sufi shrines are not *qabr parasts* (grave-worshippers). They go there to show their reverence to Sufis, and learn about people who spent a lifetime in the worship of God, lived a pious life, preached love of God and humanity, and who introduced our ancestors to Islam and were and are loved by all communities, thus making the occasion a multicultural event promoting integration.]

This inclusivist religious culture associated with Sufi shrines in the Indian sub-continent is now under threat. As a matter of fact, Wahhabi militants are not only threatening but actually going into Sufi mosques and shrines and blowing themselves up, having been convinced by their ideologues that by doing so they will go to Heaven. Easiest route to Heaven is push the button on your suicide belt in a mosque or a Sufi shrine or destroy a Muslim girls' school. The militant Wahhabi ideologues know that they will not be able to justify indiscriminate killing of innocents of any community, much less Muslims of any sect, on the basis of Quran. That would be well-nigh impossible. Quran very clearly stands for peace and compassion for all. So, instead of debate, terrorism is being encouraged. The earlier Muslims in India too realise the dangers of growing Wahhabi impact on their community the better. I hope readers would benefit from the following article, considering it an objective voice of reason.

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