Chapter First

Ideological Foundations of Saudi State
The beginning of the 12th century A.H./18th century A.D. witnessed the religious and moral degradation of the Muslims all over the world was at its lowest ebb especially in the province of Najd in central Arabia. More so because over the centuries this province of Arabia had became neglected due to its geographical location. Lying amongst the vast sand dunes of Arabia and also due to the fact that the centre of the Muslim empire had drifted far away from Arabia and the only important province for the rulers was the province of Hejaz which contained the two Holy cities of Mecca and Medina to which flocked the Muslims from all over the world every year and so they realized that the Ottoman Caliphs were the rulers of the Holy cities who bore the title of Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn. They had deviated from the spirit and stipulated standards of Islam to such an extent that even the non-Muslims wondered at the disparity between the Muslims of early times and those of the present era.\(^1\) It may be pointed out that the simple, clear-cut, chaste monotheism of Islam constituting the nucleus of the Islamic religious thought was completely eroded by saint-worship among its followers. The religious practices of the Muslims of this area had become encumbered with all sorts of un-Islamic rites, superstitions and innovations comparable to those of the pre-Islamic Arabs consequently, the ignorant majority of the Muslims, bedecked with amulets, charms and rosaries preferred to go on pilgrimage to the tombs of the fakirs or dervishes.
whom they worshipped as Saints and intercessors with Allah. The mosques in which Almighty Allah used to be worshipped were but naturally rendered deserted and ruinous. In short, the Muslims had become so thoroughly un-Islamic in their religious deeds and practices that, had Prophet Muhammad (SAW) come to earth, he would certainly have declared his followers as apostates and idolaters.² It is a fact of history and a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that Allah will raise at the head of each century such people for this Ummah, who will revive his religion”.³ Whenever the Muslims deviated from the spirit of Islam and became un-Islamic in their religious deeds and practices, a reviveralist was born among them in order to put before them the genuine image of Islam.

It was against this background that Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab appeared on the scene to champion the cause of Islam, and launched a reviveralist movement which brought about one of the most remarkable changes in Arabia since the days of the Prophet (SAW)⁴.

of Riyadh, the present capital of Saudi Arabia. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab belonged to the Masharifa clan of Banu Tamim Tribe which was influential as well as noted for its traditions of knowledge and learning in the whole of Najd. Both his father Abd al-Wahhab and his grandfather Sulayman bin Ali were reputed scholars of Najd. His grandfather Sulayman was the most learned and well-versed in *fiqh* in his native town ‘Uyaynah, and was one of the eminent ‘Ulama’ in Najd. He was an authority on *hadith, tafsir, fiqh* and *usul*.

He was an authority in the Hanbali doctrine and gave legal opinion according to the teachings of Hanbali School, but at the same time he was well-versed in the doctrines of the other schools too. Apart from imparting instruction, giving fatwa, and administering justice he also compiled some books and treatises on *fiqh*. His most important work is entitled ‘*Tufhat al-Nasik fi Ahkam al-Manasik’*. He died in 1668 but his place was filled by his son Abd al-Wahhab who became more distinguished, learned and reputed. Sulayman was the chief *mufti* of Najd and when he died he was *qadi* in ‘Uyaynah. ‘Abd al-Wahhab succeeded him in 1713 but was dismissed by the amir in 1727 whence he moved to Huraymila where he died in 1740.

His pedigree coalesces with that of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the first Century of the Christian era. possessing a healthy and strong physique, he was extra-ordinarily intelligent and alert. He memorized the Quran at the
age of ten. His memory is said to have been so excellent that he could reproduce and write as many as twenty pages from a religious book in one sitting. He was given the best religious education that could be had in those days by his father who himself was a reputed jurist and traditionist as well as Qadi at `Uyaynah. He developed a keen interest in the study of Tafsir, Hadith and Hanbalite Jurisprudence and soon became well grounded in the Islamic religious sciences, as a result of which he was competent enough to lead the prescribed congregational prayers at the mosque at the early age of twelve. Pleased with the achievement of his son, his father got him married the same year.

Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab was a widely travelled man. Soon after his marriage he visited Mecca and Madina, and performed the pilgrimage at an early age. After having stayed in these cities for about two months, he proceeded to Syria and Iraq, and visited a number of towns including Basra. On his return from the pilgrimage to his native town, he devoted himself to further study of the Hanbalite theology and law. He also thoroughly studied the works of ibn Taymiyah and his disciple ibn-al-Qayyim, and soon established his reputation as a scholar, jurist, reformer and an effective speaker.

Having an insatiable thirst for knowledge, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab travelled widely and met a number of scholars at various places, of
whom Shaykh Abdullah b. Ibrahim b. Sayf, the head of the ‘Ulama’ of Medina, was learned and prominent, who had embarked on a similar mission of bringing the believers back to the uncorrupted principles of Islam by purging it of the un-Islamic elements that had crept into it in the course of centuries.

At that time Madina was no exception to the abuses generally prevalent among the Muslims all over. Once, while he was standing before the Prophet’s tomb, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab saw a person at the tomb invoking, supplicating and doing what was contrary to the teaching of the Prophet himself. He could not restrain himself from pointing out to the people his strong disapproval of their practices. The young Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was fortunate enough to get the opportunity to stay with this learned Shaykh, who, on being deeply impressed by his enthusiasm for learning, put his rare collection of books at his disposal by telling him that they were the main weapons stored by him for the redemption of the people of Najd. Muhammad’s stay at Mecca and Madina proved most fruitful for him, for, apart from studying under distinguished ‘Ulama’ there, he got the opportunity of meeting the visitors to those cities coming from all corners of the Muslim world thus acquainting himself with the various innovations and superstitions prevalent in the world of Islam.
After completing his education in Madina, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab returned to Najd, travelled widely, and visited a number of cities. First, he went to Basra which at that time was an active centre of Islamic learning, and he stayed there for a fairly long time. There he studied under many learned scholars the most prominent among them being Shaykh Muhammad al-Majmu’i of the village Majma’a near Basra. Under Shaykh al-Majmu’i he studied philology and Sirah. Moreover, he also learned traditions and grammar. In addition to this he wrote books and treatises condemning all types of innovations in which he had found the people engaged.

These journeys made Shaykh Muhammad fully acquainted with the socio-religious conditions of the followers of Islam. He was deeply perturbed, saddened and infuriated by the un-Islamic practices in which they were involved. Being totally ignorant of the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah, they visited the tombs of the saints including that of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and sought their help and blessings instead of approaching Allah and worshipping him, thereby making a mockery of tawhid, the most fundamental principle of Islam. All that enkindled in the Shaykh a fire to combat all sorts of un-Islamic innovations by bringing them back to the authentic mode of Islam as preached and practised by the Prophet (SAW). With a view to achieving this objective, he launched a
vigorous reform movement which had far-reaching implications in the social, religious and political life of the Muslims of the world in general and of the Arabian Peninsula in particular.

When Muhammad ibn Abd. Al- Wahhab shifted to Huraymala in 1129 A.H./1726 A.D., along with his father, he started his reform movement with added vigour and momentum. He came out openly and established himself 'as an apostle of moral and spiritual regeneration'. It was also here that he composed his most important work entitled *Kitab al-Tawhid* on the doctrine of God's oneness in which he vehemently attacked syntheism and gave a call for a return to the true Islam, very soon he became well known not only in Huraymala but also in the adjoining areas through his disciples who went to these places to spread his word. His preaching’s bore fruits in Huraymala when a number of people became his followers. However, in the beginning he had to face severe opposition from different corners. His own brother Sulayman b. Abd al-Wahhab wrote against him and opposed his mission. Similarly his father too was not well-disposed towards his movement. But he succeeded in convincing both of them and won them over to his cause. In spite of all the opposition which he encountered, he continued to propagate his reformist ideas relentlessly, enthusiastically and courageously. His speeches and sermons proved very effective, following
which the number of his supporters also began to increase slowly but steadily.

After the death of his father in 1153 A.H./1740 A.D. the Shaykh and the handful of his followers devoted themselves exclusively to the popularization of their movement. The Shaykh soon became the household name in Arabia. And people, attracted by his magnetism and religious fervour, began to swell the ranks of his followers drawn from different strata of society.

The popularity of the Shaykh invited the wrath of the rulers of Huraymala, and those of the neighboring territories. It is worthy of mention in this context that the whole of Najd at that time was split up into tiny emirates, while the people were mostly nomadic and lived a tribal life.

In the absence of an organized central form of government. The entire area was plunged in a state of anarchy. An idea of the state of anarchy which prevailed in central Arabia at that time may be derived from the fact that there were two rival tribes in Huraymala itself, each of which claimed supremacy for itself. One of them had the support of a large number of slaves called Humayan. Constituting a sort of irregular army, they oppressed the people with no fear of reprisal from any government worth the name. It was under these circumstances that Muhammad ibn Abd al- Wahhab thought that mere persuasion unaided by political power might prove
effective in the case of an individual, but it was difficult to bring about any radical change in a people's outlook without the backing of a political force.\textsuperscript{18} After that the Shaykh decided to move to Uyaynah and entered into correspondence with the then Amir of Uyaynah Uthman b. Mu'ammar to that effect. When the Amir assured him not only to give him his full support but also to accept his faith, he proceeded to Uyaynah, and reached there about the year 1744 A.D. where he was warmly welcomed by the Amir.

Under the Amir's protection, Shaykh ibn Abd al-Wahhab carried out a series of operations in order to reform the people of Uyaynah. First, he cut down all the 'believed to be pious trees'. Next, the Shaykh advised the Amir to be regular in offering prayers in congregation, as well as suggested punishment for those who did not perform prayers. He also abolished the numerous kinds of taxes that were imposed on the public. Now they had to pay only the \textit{Zakat} and the \textit{Khums} in accordance with the Islamic law.\textsuperscript{19} All these activities made the Shaykh popular far and wide.

The growing popularity of the Shaykh aroused the suspicion and anger of Sulayman b. Muhammad, chief of the Banu Khalid tribe and ruler of al-Hasa, who apprehended that Shaykh might usurp his throne and expropriate the taxes that maintain him and his court. It is because of this, that Sulayman b. Muhammad wrote to Uthman either to kill or banish the Shaykh. He also threatened him with serious consequences in case he failed
to comply with his orders. The Shaykh was compelled to seek asylum in Dir`iyya.

Dir`iyya, which is situated between `Uyaynah and Riyadh, was at that time a village consisting of about seventy houses. It was ruled by Muhammad ibn Sau`d, who, even before the arrival of the Shaykh, and already established a reputation for courtesy and honourable dealings with all men. The Shaykh’s arrival was not made known to the amir of Dir`iyya because his host ibn Suwaylim feared that the amir might not be courteous to the Shaykh and turn him out of his dominion as had happened at `Uyaynah. Meanwhile, the Shaykh was busy in his preaching’s and the number of people who visited him secretly began to grow day by day. It was also feared that Sulayman b. Muhammad or `Uthman b. Mu`ammar might send a messenger to the amir informing him of the Shaykh’s presence in Dir`iyya.

Meanwhile, two brothers of Muhammad ibn Sa`ud, Mishari and Thunayan, who had heard of the Shaykh’s knowledge and reputation and were interested in his teachings, went to meet him personally at ibn Suwaylim’s house. They were greatly influenced by what he taught and later on they became his greatest supporters. They desired that their brother Muhammad should also visit the Shaykh and adhere to his teachings. When Muhammad was told about the Shaykh’s presence in Dir`iyya and the
mission which he had undertaken, he agreed on summoning the Shaykh to his place and felt reluctant to visit him personally. Muhammad’s wife Mawdha bint Abi Wahtan of the Al-Kathir was a wise and discerning woman and had a reputation among her people for charity to students and learned men. When she came to know about the Shaykh she persuaded her husband to visit him personally instead of summoning him to his own place. Thus, the amir proceeded on foot to ibn Suwaylim’s house to meet the Shaykh in person. When he met the Shaykh he was fascinated. The Shaykh explained to him the meaning of Tawhid (Unitarianism), which was the mission of all the Prophets, the ills of Shirk (associating with God) and also at the same time explained to him the religious degeneration in which the people of Najd were engulfed. He further encouraged the amir to help and support him by emphasizing that if he would help him in these reforms then he hoped that one day they would together be able to bring all the Muslims under one banner and he (the amir) would win dominion over lands and men. This proposal of the Shaykh so moved the amir that he immediately agreed to be on his side to assist him in his mission and to fight his enemies side by side. But at the same time the amir put two conditions before the Shaykh. First, the amir said, that if he (the amir) helped him and fought in the path of Allah and if Allah give them victory over lands then he feared that he (the Shaykh) would desert him and go over to other people.
Secondly, the amir said that in Dir`iyya he taxed the people during the fruits season and he feared that the Shaykh would tell him to take nothing from it. On hearing the two conditions the Shaykh replied that as far as the first condition is concerned, extend your hand to me, we are one in affluence and distress—blood for blood, destruction for destruction, and for the second condition may God bestow upon you conquests and spoils so much that it would suffice you for the taxes that you levy. Thus the two entered into a compact sealed by the same oath the Prophet and the men of Madina had sworn to cement their alliance.

The understanding between the Shaykh and the amir took place in 1744 or 1745. The amir then took an oath of allegiance to him and became his disciple and pledged to enforce “al-amr bi`l-ma`ruf wa`l-nahy `an al-munkar” (ordering good and forbidding evil). He requested the Shaykh to accompany him and rose up along with him. From then on the Shaykh became the guest of the amir of Dir`iyya. It is stated by some Scholars that the Shaykh married his daughter to Muhammad ibn Saud and in this way the reigning king of Saudi Arabia is a descendent on the male side of Muhammad ibn Saud and on the distaff side of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.
With the conversion and backing of the amir, the movement of the Shaykh gained momentum. People who had secretly became his followers, came out in the open. His disciples and acquaintances from all the surrounding areas of Dir‘iyya came freely to meet him. The news of the success of the Shaykh’s mission also reached ‘Uttman ibn Mu‘ammar in ‘Uyaynah. He along with a number of notables of ‘Uyaynah reached Dir‘iyya to meet the Shaykh. He pledged obedience to him repented upon his act and vowed to stand by his side to support and propagate his doctrine. Uthman also requested the Shaykh to return to ‘Uyaynah but The Shaykh directed him to take up the matter with Muhammad ibn Saud. Muhammad did not allow the Shaykh to leave Dir‘iyya and so ‘Uthman had to return to ‘Uyaynah unsuccessful.  

Once the Shaykh established himself peacefully at Dir‘iyya, he started to work on the same lines as the Prophet had done after the conquest of Mecca, i.e., he sent letters to rulers, nobles, and religious Scholars in other towns to win them to his views. In these letters he made known to them the facts regarding his mission and emphasised upon them to give up Shirk and bid‘a. Some of these people were moved by the Shaykh’s mission and were converted to his cause but at the same time there was a majority of them who made fun of the Shaykh’s proposal and even attacked him in insulting terms. This, however, did not deter the Shaykh from keeping on
with his preaching’s and he, meanwhile, also wrote books and treatises in support of his doctrines and in condemnation of bid’a. On the other hand his antagonists were actively engaged in their sinister designs, that of dissuading the people from submitting to the Shaykh’s views and at the same time doing whatever they could do oppress the converts. Among the bitterest of opponents of the Shaykh’s movement and call were Dahham b. Dawwab, the Amir of Riyadh, Sulayman ibn Muhammad al-Hamiri, the amir of Hasa, and the chief of the Banu Khalid tribe, ibn Maftaq of Qatif and ibn Thuwayni, the Amir of Basra.37

This made the situation even worse for the Shaykh’s movement and it compelled him to realise that in order to strengthen his movement, other weapons must also be used.38 Therefore, he prepared for a Jihad (religious war) against his opponents. His campaign against syntheism opened a new front for his opponents and Dir’iyya came into conflict with a number of towns in central Najd. His first military campaign, it is said, began with only seven riders on camels then followed a number of conflicts and battles against many neighbouring states and especially Riyadh which was finally annexed by ’Abd al-Aziz, the son of Muhammad ibn Saud, in 1795. When Muhammad ibn Saud died in 1765, he was master of all the provinces between the Hijaz and the Persian Gulf, with the exception of Qatif.40 But his death did not affect the position of the Shaykh in Dir’iyya, as, his son
and successor, 'Abd al-Aziz, like his father, showed much reverence to the Shaykh.

In this manner the Shaykh was able to give a practical form to the ideological system which he dreamt of while still young and lived enough to see it bearing fruits. His call had been successful in building a Muslim society on the basis of Islamic principles; he carved out a virtuous and a human society wherein all the members belonged to one and the same family. It was due to his labours that the Arabs had renounced their nomadic way of life and adopted themselves to a better urban one. During the last few years of his life the Shaykh dedicated himself towards disseminating his message but at the same time he did not dissociate himself from participating in the government and the conduct of affairs in the new state. He was able to create a generation of new adherents, messengers and preachers to instruct thousands of enthusiastic followers in religious matters and bring them up in the true Islamic spirit. Thus the Shaykh was able to guide them on to 'the straight path' that of the Salaf al-Salih (the pious ancestors). On the political front a vast empire was being formed by 'Abd al-Aziz by forcing into submission all those who opposed the teachings of the Shaykh.

The Shaykh died but his teachings survived strongly because he left behind those who would carry the banner of the call, strive hard for it and
protect and disseminate it. The Shaykh was reputed for his strict adherence to the precepts of Islam. He also clung to the teachings of the righteous old doctors of true theology following their way, manner, and deeds. He was a true follower of Sunnah and eliminator of innovations. His knowledge was extensive and was the master of all the sciences of the day. To teach the people he held congregations several times a day and lectured on different subjects like *Tawhid, Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh* and all the auxiliary sciences of Arabic language. He had a deep insight into the *Tafsir* and *Hadith*, and possessed thorough knowledge of *ilal* (points) of weakness in *Hadith* and the *rijal* (narrators of Hadith).  

The Shaykh was self-composed patient, wise and tolerant. Seldom was he excited to rage except when religion or its rituals were dishonoured. On such occasions he lashed out equally with word and sword. He always praised the *Ulama* and talked highly of their virtues, he practised *al-amr bi ’l-ma’ruf wa ’l-nahy ’an al-munkar*. He could not tolerate any innovation; he would, at first politely remonstrate with those who practised innovations then would go on admonishing with harsh words, and lastly with anger and severity accordingly as the circumstances demanded.  

As a matter of fact the teachings of the Shaykh were not those of a new religion nor did they differ from those of the *Salaf al-Salih* and above all he did not at all desire a
special status for himself. Philby is faultless when about the Shaykh, he aptly observes.\textsuperscript{44}

"... The creed he taught never professed to be a new revelation or even a new interpretation of Islam; and the teacher never claimed a prophetic status. Yet Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was in reality something more than a doctor of divinity... viewed from the standpoint of history alone, the Wahhabi movement in Arabia has all the characteristics of a prophetic dispensation. It is to its author's credit, and proof sufficient of his disinterestedness and political sagacity, that he was never tempted to assume the guise of the promised Messiah... he seems never to have had any ambition for temporal power, nor even to have coveted any kind of titular spiritual status...".

Since the time he reached Dir'iyya in 1744 the Shaykh lived there continuously for nearly fifty years and thus he stuck to his word and fulfilled the 'agreement' that he had with Muhammad ibn Saud about not leaving the city.\textsuperscript{45} During the course of his stay there the city of Dir'iyya developed so swiftly that it had very soon transformed itself to become the biggest city in Najd, perhaps in all Arabia. And Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was its central figure, its leading light the luminary which sent its
rays and its flames in every direction.⁴⁶ In all the sincere efforts of his he was very ably assisted by his aide Muhammad ibn Saud (d. 1765), and after him his son Abd al-Aziz, so much so that together they practically remodelled for the better, the outlook of their society. `Abd al-Aziz, who is credited with the extension of the boundaries of the new state more than his father, is often characterised even by the orientlists as the `Umar of the new movement.⁴⁷ Sometimes a parallel is drawn between the political and religious restoration of the Shaykh and the establishment of the Islamic state under the Prophet and the orthodox Caliphs.
REFERENCES:

5. Musil stresses that 'ibn Abd al-Wahhab' was the name of Muhammad's family and Abd al-Wahhab was not his father as stated by other's and his father's name was Sulayman. A Musil, _Northern Najd_, (New York, 1928), p. 258.
8. H.St. J.B. Philby, _Arabia_, p.8; Margoliouth says that 'he was a Banu Sinan, a branch of Tamim; *Cf.* D.S. Margoliouth, “Wahabiya.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 


17. This raises a question in the minds, that whether his father had converted to his views or not. Some are of opinion that with the death of his father there remained no further hindrance for him, M. Ahmad *op. cit.,* p. 23; M. A. Nadwi states that his father did not like his activities but he had paid full reverence to his father and teacher. But on the other hand, H. Laoust, “Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam.* (New Ed.) vol. 111, p. 678, is of the opinion that “these accounts should not be accepted without some reservation, particularly since there exists a dissertation, by his father against the cult of saints. The last one seems to be true.


27. As A. Rihani puts it, Thou most pledge thyself to remain here in Dir‘iyya to make it thy city and the pole of our religion; and thou must pledge thyself, whatsoever may chance, to make no alliance with any other Ameer in the land of Arabs. *Cf. Ibn Saud of Arabia*, p. 242.


30. G. Rentz, ‘*Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia*’, p. 56. D.S. Margoliouth has definitely misinterpreted this pact. According to him ‘the two came to an agreement whereby, should they succeed in enforcing their system on their neighbors, the sovereignty should rest with ibn Saud, whereas the religious headship should belong to Muhammad ibn ’Abd al-Wahhab’. *Cf. ‘Wahabiya*, p. 618.
31. Margoliouth asserts that he was the first disciple of the Shaykh in Dir’iyya. Cf. ‘Wahhabis’, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. x11, p. 661.


33. G. Rentz, op. cit., p. 56.

34. Ahmad b. Hujr, op. cit. p.25.


37. A. Rihani, Ta’rikh Najd, p. 32.

38. G. Rentz, op. cit. p.57; probably D. S. Margoliouth does not take into consideration the malefic and menacing attitudes of the Shaykh’s opponents towards his followers while commenting “. . . . The two made their resolve to restore Islam to its original purity a ground for attacking their neighbors . . . ,” Cf. ‘Wahhabis’, p.661.

39. Ibn Bishr, op. cit., p. 18; D. S. Margoliouth, op. cit., p. 661

40. D. S. Margoliouth, op. cit.

41. Attar, op. cit., p. 83.

42. Ahmad b. Hujr, op. cit. p. 28.


44. Cf. op. cit., pp. 54-5.
45. See above, pp. 116-7.

46. A. Rihani, *op. cit*, p. 245.

47. S. M. Zwemer, Arabia; *The cradle of Islam*, p. 194.