CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The history of modern trends in Islam in Saudi Arabia in real terms is a history of the origin and development of Wahhabism in all its aspects. The movement started by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the second quarter of the eighteenth century was in essence a revival of the purity of early Islam. It was a reform movement which in the twentieth century would oppose the presence of non-Muslim powers and corrupt Muslim governments within the Peninsula or outside it. Whatever little has been said about the Wahhabis has generally been limited to a list of such acts as destruction of tombs and minarets, intolerance of smoking and wearing of fine adornments, and merciless slaughter of enemies. However, most of the reports have been so much exaggerated as to obscure any real understanding of their beliefs and practices.

Looking minutely at the Wahhabi precepts it will be found that they were in conformity with the Hanbali madhab to which they fully adhered. The Hanbali school of law emanated in the ninth century from the writings of Ahmad ibn Hanbal of Baghdad. But his teachings could not be codified till the next century and was able to gain some
popularity only for a short while. They could regain their popularity and new vigour finally in the modern times through the Wahhabi movement. Although the Wahhabis based their precepts on the teachings of Imam Ibn Taymiyya, who was a staunch Hanbali jurist, but their origins cannot be separated from the radical tradition of Hanbalism. The Hanbalis denounced kalam (scholastic theology), qiyyas (analogical reasoning), ijm/ (consensus), aql (reasoning) and other such methods which could give way to the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna or which could affect the original purity of Islam because the Hanbalis held the view that the teachings of Islam were derived exclusively from the Qur'an and the Sunna and all else was bida' (innovation). According to the Hanbalis it was the duty of the `ulama' to interpret the Qur'an and of the people to only adhere to the precepts of Islam. They did not oppose the Abbasid caliph but believed that the `ulama', independent of the caliph or his political interests, would preserve Islam better. But at the same time the Hanbalis held the view that to be patient with a tyrant ruler was better than to create disturbance unless he transgressed God's law in which case the person can refuse to obey as was the case with Imam Ibn Hanbal with the minha of al-Mamun. 

In the fourteenth century we find two renowned Hanbalites Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn Qayyim

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1. See p. 5 above.
whose influence on the Wahhabi thought was more than that of any of the earlier Hanbalites. Ibn Taymiyya rejected Ijtihad and taqlid and looked forward to a re-interpretation of Islamic law. His teachings proved more in accordance to the will of the Wahhabis. Ibn Taymiyya believed that the 'ulama' were responsible for the preservation of the divine law and so no one should follow the authority of any single individual even the Caliph but if he followed the shari‘a. Ibn Taymiyya wanted to re-discover pure Islam unadulterated by the later developments. Any change after the period of the salaf was bida‘, the same was adopted by the Wahhabis later. By this view Ibn Taymiyya was emphasizing on tawhid and the Wahhabis followed this too. It is worth to note that Ibn Taymiyya did not oppose qiyas or even falsafa if they were based on the Qur‘an and Sunna. Another important thought of Ibn Taymiyya which influenced the Wahhabi movement more, was his strong rejection of saint worship and of shrine and grave-cults. This was also a reassertion of tawhid as these practices amounted to shir‘a.

It will be observed that in the eighteenth century revivalism was on the march such as the Sanusiyya and Wahhabiyya condemning the moral laxity and corruption of original Islam.

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Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab sought to eliminate all paganistic rituals and to do away with all forms of popular religion among the believers. His call was a reassertion of the Prophet’s call ‘There is no God but Allah’. The Shaykh gave precedence to the membership of the umma over all other social bonds, thus, all men within the umma were equal. In the twentieth century ‘Abd al-‘Aziz did just this when he freed the inferior tribal groups, abolished customary law and the inter-tribal system of loyalties and supported a policy of settling the nomadics under his authority.

It was just a pure coincidence that the Shaykh met the Al Saud. The two were united in their resolve to purify the community of all the later accretions. The respect given to the Shaykh’s family is because they never held temporal authority. When the shaykh died he was bankrupt whereas the wealth of the Saudis was tied to the public treasury till 1933. The Shaykh’s family members have always been advisers to the Saudis and religious leaders, whereas the Saudis were in between the temporal and religious authority. The Saudis belong to both the families - descending on the mothers side from the Al-Wahhab and thus got all the prestige, and from the fathers side they descended from politicians and warriors. The Saudis gave
importance to the right of the Imam to choose his heir. They realised fully well that their claims to political authority were associated with the success of the Wahhabi call and its support of their hereditary claims.

Apart from how the Wahhabi movement changed the fate of the inhabitants of the peninsula, it had far-reaching effects outside too. Therefore one must also trace its effects on the later reform movements. In India the movement of the Nhahidin was started by Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareilly (b. 1786). It is often said that he was influenced by the Wahhabis when he visited Mecca and then started his movement in India in 1824. This movement continued in India till it was crushed by the British in 1847.

The Sanusi movement of Cyrenaica was also a reform movement and like the Wahhabis it also created a state in Libya. Significant comparison between the two might be made by tracing their developments from religious into political movements. Both started as revivalist movements among backward peoples, chiefly Bedouin, the Wahhabi movement in the Najd in the eighteenth century and the Sanusi movement first in the Hijaz and then in Cyrenaica in the middle of the nineteenth century; the Ihwans organisations of the two movements have much in common; and

both ended in the form of Amirates, or small Islamic states.

To the inspiration of the Wahhabis we can also trace the Faraidi and the Ahl-i-Hadith movements in India, and the Mirghanism and Mandism of the Sudan who have a definite affinity with the Wahhabis. Also under this influence were definitely the Pan-Islamists and salafis of Egypt and the Muhammadiyya in Indonesia.

This fact must also be noted that whereas the reform movements in other parts were under the influence of the West too and therefore they were either subdued and cooled down after some time or they changed their course. Arabia was never occupied by the West and therefore there was no impact of the West on its population and hence we do not find traces of any impact of modernism. To an unbiased observer, without doubt Wahhabism was a genuine movement generated from within, with no foreign influence, not even of the Turks who had only nominal control over it and were in no position to influence its society. It can be said without any hesitation that of all the Muslim countries Arabia is the only important country which is still anchored in the traditional pattern of her past.

During his exile in Kuwait, when 'Abd al-'Aziz (r. 1902-53) was still dreaming of conquering Riyadh,

4. Ibid., p. 9.
he was fond of saying that his realm should encompass 'the lands of our forefathers'. But finally, he was able to achieve what he may not even have dreamt of. He was the king of Saudi Arabia and he reigned over ninety percent of the total area of the Peninsula. Although the political boundaries of the modern kingdom exceed the greatest extent of the previous two Saudi states of 1744-1818 and 1824-1891, but in spirit Saudi Arabia of the twentieth century is not in the least different from its ancestral states. The driving force at the back still being Wahhabism -- the pure faith of the salaf as propagated by Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

The incident of the birth and development of Saudi Arabia has no parallel in modern history. King 'Abd al-'Aziz joined together four separate provinces of the peninsula, each consisting of many independent tribes, into one great kingdom. This, no doubt, is a miraculous achievement accomplished by means of religious zeal. The homogeneity of Arabian society was not perfect, tribal and factional differences existed. In Arabia, from the earliest times, a distinction between the nomads and the settled folk has always been made, with hostility characterizing their

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relations. Tribalism was strongest in the desert, though it penetrated the oases as well. Islam had sought to substitute the higher loyalty of brotherhood in the faith for tribal ties. Later, in the eighteenth century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the House of Saud undertook to make Islam function in the society as it was supposed to, harnessing tribal energies to build a true Islamic state. ’Abd al-’Aziz acquired the reputation of being the greatest figure in Arabia in the modern times largely through his genius in managing the tribes, relying on them as long as they served his purposes and breaking their power when they challenged his authority. Keeping pace with the traditions of the Saudis since the eighteenth century he was bound by the sense of social equality as put forward by Islam and was never far from his people. ‘Islam and Arabian democracy, writes George Rentz,’ have moulded the character of the monarchy in Saudi Arabia. The rule of the House of Saud from its beginning have been guided by the principles of Islam and by old customs of rulers in Arabia of keeping in close touch with their people and of being constantly solicitous of their needs. The monarchy that has thus emerged in the peninsula differs radically from the Western conceptions of the institution: no Sun king, no pomp elevating the monarch far above the common breed, not even a
The conquest of much of Arabian peninsula by ‘Abd al-‘Aziz during the quarter of a century of struggle is an epic story, but his greatest feat was to forge a unified, secure state under his rule which ensured modern development under stable conditions. Islam plays an important part in shaping and motivating the state and society.

*Shari‘a* is the only legally accepted code since, it is declared that the country’s constitution is the Book of Allah (Qur’an) and the Traditions of the Prophet. In fact it was in 1926 that the fundamental Instructions of the Kingdom of the Hijaz -- generally called the Hijaz Constitution -- had made the king’s status as a constitutional monarch. The Islamic laws occupy the primary place in Saudi Arabia and Islam dictates the political, social, legal and cultural systems. Besides regulating


7. At that time Hijaz was administered separately from the rest of the kingdom. This document provided that "His Majesty is bound by the laws of the noble *Shari‘a* ... The laws of the Kingdom of Hijaz must always conform to the Book of God and the practices of His Prophet and of the Prophet’s Companions and the first generation of the pious." Cf. R. Leblicher and others, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
religious questions, they provide a system of private law, civil and penal codes, laws of war, and part of the system regulating relations with non-Muslims. It is the duty of the King to see to it that the specific Islamic laws are enforced and obeyed. It is the responsibility of the 'ulama to interpret these laws. In spheres where the divine law does not have direct application the will of the King comes first. The regulation comes into effect when it is embodied in a Royal decree. This form of government, therefore, cannot be called an absolute monarchy. The King's deference to a higher law precludes that term. His freedom of action, too, is limited by religious laws and customs.

Saudi Arabia as a historical legacy and cultural heritage is closely identified with Islamic civilization. The presence of Mecca and Madina, the two Holy cities of Islam, within the Kingdom's border, are also responsible for this religious awareness. Saudi Arabia is expected to uphold the practices and defend the principles of Islam. The highest principle guiding the governments development policy is the preservation of the religious and moral values of the Saudi Arabian people. King 'Abd al-'Aziz believed that it was possible to maintain the traditional Islamic values while at the same time creating a modern industrial society.
Thus, more than any other Arab or Muslim country, Islam pervades all aspects of private and public life in Saudi Arabia. It is the religion of the state, the source of political legitimacy and the educational and judicial systems, and it is the moral code of the society. The observance of the traditional forms of Islam, as defined by the Wahhabis in the eighteenth century remain an integral part of every day life in the country. Because of its fundamentalist ideology, based upon Hanbalite thoughts, and the fact that during the Haj season Muslims from all over the world assemble annually at Mecca and Medina, therefore Saudi Arabia is viewed as the ‘Kingdom of Islam’.

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