TRENDS IN ISLAM IN SAUDI ARABIA

(ABSTRACT)

The thesis 'Trends in Islam in Saudi Arabia' comprises of seven chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the ideological roots of the Wahhabiyya. The Wahhabi movement is the driving force behind the religious trends in Saudi Arabia. Therefore in order to study the current topic it becomes necessary to know the ideological bases of the Wahhabi movement. Wahhabism was influenced in the main by the thoughts of the ninth century Muslim jurist Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855). The thoughts of Ibn Hanbal were interpreted, in the fourteenth century by Ahmad ibn Taymiyya, (d. 1328) and his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), which were largely adopted by Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792), the founder of the Wahhabi movement during the eighteenth century.

To the Hanbali school can be traced back the Sunni origins of Islamic fundamentalism. Therefore, in order to understand the pre-modern and modern revivalist movements in Sunni Islam it becomes necessary to know the ideas of Ibn Hanbal. He was well educated in hadith and figh in addition to other Muslim sciences. He became one of the greatest teachers of hadith and figh and a champion of
orthodoxy and was strict in his ritual observances. He was the one person who resisted the *minha* of caliph al-Mamun on the issue of the *ihāq al-Qurān*. He was also imprisoned for about two years.

The thoughts of Ibn Hanbal are reflected through his different works. His most important work was the *Musnad* which was a collection of about 30,000 to 40,000 traditions. Since the school of Ibn Hanbal was much more orthodox therefore his school could not remain popular for long. The advent of the Turfs, who were Hanafis, dealt a severe blow to Hanbalism.

The Hanbali school regained some ground during the fourteenth century when Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and his disciple Ibn Dayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) propagated its thoughts. Both these thinkers influenced the Wahhabi thought more than any earlier Hanbalite thinker. Ibn Taymiyya was a prolific writer and left behind many important works. He was very critical of the *fālasāfa* and condemned Saint worship, Sufi practices and theology. He believed in the impossibility of attaining knowledge of God by rational methods, whether those of philosophy or of philosophical theology, and also to the impossibility of the mystical aim of union with God. He was a great champion of *Ijtihād* and
considered himself a mujtahid at such a time when other 'ulama' held that the gates of ijtihad are closed. He was against the taqlid of an individual and said that the sayings of every individual can be set aside except the Prophet. He was emphatically severe of the practice of saint and tomb worship. He laid great stress on authority and regarded it as a part of the Shari'a. He wrote an important work on the methodology of the administration of the state entitled al-Siyasa al-Shari'yya.

Ibn Taymiyya was followed closely in his beliefs by his disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya who propagated and popularised Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts after him. Ibn Qayyim was also a great writer and well versed in all branches of knowledge. He followed the Hanbali view rigidly in masail, usul and aqaid and was against the philosophers. He disliked innovations and wanted to rid Islam of its later accretions and wanted to guide the Muslims back to the simplicity of the early Islam of the salaf. His works were also highly regarded by Shaykh Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab and even in this period the sa'udi 'ulama' attach immense importance to them.

The second chapter of the thesis gives a background knowledge towards understanding the social,
religious and political conditions of Arabia at the start of
the eighteenth century. The chapter starts with a physical
description of Arabia and especially the environs of Najd,
the province from where the Wahhabi movement originated. In
that period the whole of central Arabia was in a political
turmoil. There were numerous small states ruled by
princelings belonging to different tribes. The most
powerful state at that time was Hasa' where Shulayman was
the ruler who belonged to the powerful Banu i-Halid tribe.
Then there was 'Uthman b. Mu'ammar in 'Uyayna. He was
probably a governor of Sulayman or under his protection.
Riyadh was ruled by the powerful Dahham b. Dawwas, and in a
small amirate in Dar‘iyya near Riyadh the family of the
Sa‘uds was ruling. Muhammad ibn Sa‘ud had become the amir
of Dar‘iyya in or around 1720.

The state of the society and religion in
Central Arabia was worst. There was moral laxity everywhere
and religion was corrupted in every possible way. Numerous
un-Islamic customs and traditions had taken root. People
visited many supposed to be holy places whereas the mosques
remained unfrequented. There were sacred trees, stones,
caves etc. where the people thronged and involved in immoral
practices. The cult of the saints had reaffirmed itself.
It was in this background that Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-
Wahhab was born.
The third and fourth chapters deal with the life and works of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his reforms respectively. Chapter three starts with the early life of the Shaykh. There is a description of his early education and his travels in quest of knowledge to various centres of learning at that time e.g. Mecca, Madina, Tufa and Basra etc. followed by a description of his early attempts at starting his reform movement in the city of his birth ‘Uyayna. At ‘Uyayna he took certain extreme decisions like destroying the so called tomb of Zayd b. Thattab and cutting down the supposed to be sacred trees and implementing hadd punishment on a women who had committed adultery. All this accounted for his expulsion from ‘Uyayna from where he went to Darʿiya. In Darʿiya he was welcomed by the amir Muhammad ibn Saʿud who converted to his mission and pledged to support him. Thus the two came to an agreement to propagate and establish the true faith of Islam in its unadulterated form.

In Darʿiya the Shaykh got the political support which he needed in order to push his movement forward. This alliance between the Shaykh and Muhammad ibn Saʿud took place in 1744. In Darʿiya the Shaykh successfully propagated his faith and had won the confidence
of all the inhabitants of the city within a year. But all the same there was danger from without and the Shaykh had realised that in order to strengthen his movement other weapons must also be used. Muhammad ibn Sa‘ud and his son ‘Abd a--Aziz assisted the Shaykh politically and the Saudi-Wahhabi state slowly began to grow. There took place a number of battles and Riyadh was captured by ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. When Muhammad ibn Sa‘ud died in 1765 he was the master of all the provinces between the Hijaz and the Persian Gulf with the exception of Qatif.

In order to understand the Sa‘udi society it is necessary to understand the teachings of the Shaykh. The main emphasis of the Wahhabi teachings was on ‘tawhid’ (unity) of God in all its forms, that is why this movement has been called by its followers as the call towards unity (Din al-Tawhid). His followers called themselves ‘Muwahhidun’ (unitarians). The term ‘Wahhabi’ which was originally coined by his opponents has come to stick with them so much so that in the modern period many Wahhabi writers have come to use the term frequently for the movement.

The Shaykh’s teachings are all preserved in his writings. He wrote on a variety of subjects such as
theology, exegesis, jurisprudence and the life of the Prophet. The main points of emphasis in his teachings are, tawhid, tawassul (intercession), Ziyarat al-Dubur (visitation of tombs and erection of buildings over them), bid'a (innovation), and Ijtihad and taqlid. Tawhid is the central theme of the Wahhabi call. There are three aspects of tawhid: tawhid al-ruhubiyya — assertion of the unity of God in His action; tawhid al-asma’ wa-l-sifat — unity of God’s characteristics and attributes; and tawhid al-ilahiyya — worship of God should be to God alone. The Shaykh maintained that Muslims should distinguish between God, the Lord and Creator, and the Prophet, the servant and created being, however, the Prophet occupies an exceptional position among all human beings. Tawassul was considered by the Shaykh as a major polytheistic practice. The intercession commonly sought from dead saints is prohibited. The Shaykh maintained that tawassul cannot be granted without God’s permission. The Shaykh was against showing excessive devotion to saints and against the use of their graves as places of worship. As he rejected intercession he also expressed serious reservation about the cult of graves. For him, a visit to the graves, if performed in the true spirit of Islam, is a pious and praise worthy act. He distinguished between recommended and objectionable visits. A recommended visit is one that is in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet, and, a visit made with the intent
to worship the dead is objectionable and amounted to *shirk*. Thus, to avoid *shirk*, he felt it his duty to destroy all the existing sepulchral monuments. The Shaykh also pointed out that affiliation with Islam cannot suffice to prevent anyone from becoming a polytheist. Of innovation the Shaykh said that it is any doctrine or action not based on the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. Among the *bid'ah* he rejected all actions such as celebrating the Prophet's birth, seeking intercession from saints etc. He believed on the complete adherence only to the Qur'an and the Tradition, the two essential sources of the *Shari'a*. It also means a rejection of following the interpretation of any specific school of thought (*madhab*), including his own Hanbali school, if it is not in accordance with the two prime sources. After the above two sources he depended upon the consensus of the 'pious ancestors' and particularly the 'Companions and their Successors' and the *ijma* of the scholars. The *ijma* he restricted to those who follow the Qur'an and the *Sunna*. He rejected the idea that the doors of *ijtihad* have been finally closed. Though he followed the Hanbali school but not blindly.

All these beliefs of the Shaykh are recorded in his works which number to about twenty-five or more. Most of his works are extant. Some of his main works are:
Kitab al-Tawhid, al-Masa'il al-Jahiliyya, Mukhtasar al-Sirah, etc. (A complete list of the works is included in the thesis). All his works have been recently published by the Saudi Arabian government.

Chapter five is a brief political history of the Saudi rulers starting from 1744 when the Shaykh reached Dar'iyya. The first Saudi-Wahhabi state was founded in 1744 and continued till 1818. Muhammad ibn Saud was the first ruler and his rule ended with his death in 1765. He was succeeded by his son 'Abd al-'Aziz who reigned till 1803 when he was assassinated. During the period of these two rulers the boundaries of the state increased to a large extent and included the whole of Najd and some parts of Hijaz. The Wahhabis had conquered Riyadh and Hasa' and had also attacked Karbala in Iraq. They raided Karbala in 1801 and destroyed the domes over the shrine of Imam Husayn and looted the monument. There also followed a massacre of the inhabitants. This raid was carried out by the Wahhabis because they considered the place as a centre of bid'a and an abode of polytheists. But the greatest achievement of the Wahhabis was attained when they annexed Mecca in 1803 and Madina in 1804, the two Holy places of the Muslims. The Wahhabi ruler at that time was Sa'ud, the son of 'Abd al-
'Aziz, who had succeeded his father in 1803. But by now the Wahhabis were considered a threat by the Ottomans who were the nominal suzerains of the two Holy cities. The Ottoman Sultan then appointed Muhammad Ali as the governor of Egypt, mainly in order to check the growing Wahhabi threat in Arabia. By that time the Wahhabis had annexed the whole of Hijaz.

The first Egyptian expedition against the Wahhabis was carried out under Muhammad Ali’s son Tusun Bey and the second by Ibrahim Pasha. Muhammad Ali was able to defeat the Wahhabis and annex the two Holy cities by 1813. In 1814 Sa‘ud died and was succeeded by his son ‘Abd Allah. It was in 1818 that Muhammad Ali himself came down on the Wahhabis and completely defeated them. The Wahhabi ruler ‘Abd Allah was imprisoned and sent to Constantinople where he was executed. This put an end to the first Saudi realm in Arabia.

The second Saudi realm was started in 1824 by Turki who, after defeating the Egyptians, conquered Riyadh and made it his capital. He was succeeded by his son Faisal in 1834. Faisal was perhaps the best Saudi ruler in the second Saudi realm. But in 1838 the Egyptians again invaded Arabia and Faisal was imprisoned and carried off to Egypt.
In his place the Egyptians put Khalid as their nominee but Khalid was soon displaced by Thunayyan in 1841 who was again displaced by Faisal in 1842, who had been able to escape from Egypt. Faisal's second rule lasted up to 1865 when he succumbed to illness. By that time Faisal had annexed to the Wahhabi state a good portion of the territories which were ruled by the first Wahhabi rulers. Faisal's death again brought about the downfall of the second Saudi realm as he was succeeded by his son Sa'ud who was vied for the throne by his brothers 'Abd 'Allah and Muhammad. A fourth son of Faisal was 'Abd al-Rahman. The internal fighting of the Saudis continued to weaken the Saudi rule. One after the other the brothers captured the throne and ruled. By that time the House of Rashid had established itself at Ha'il with its capital Ha'il. After the death of Sa'ud his sons fought their uncles for power till ultimately Riyadh was captured by the Rashidis who appointed 'Abd al-Rahman as their governor in Riyadh. But 'Abd al-Rahman suspecting foul play left Riyadh in 1891 and went to live in exile in Kuwait with his family.

The sixth chapter describes the events that took place in the start of the twentieth century. In 1902 in a great exploit 'Abd al-Rahman's son 'Abd al-'Aziz was able to capture Riyadh and laid the foundations of the third Saudi realm which was destined to became the Saudi Arabia of
the modern times. After establishing himself at Riyadh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, popularly known as Ibn Sa’ud, began to consolidate his rule by extending it over Hofuf which was manned by a Turkish garrison. The Turks were dismissed from Arabia. There followed many conflicts with the Rashidis of Ha’il and the Sharif Husayn of Hijaz. In 1912 Ibn Sa’ud established a colony of Ikhwan at Artawiyya. This was followed by more colonies all over the extent of his rule in Najd. The hijar of the Ikhwan helped in maintaining the stability of the Saudi rule. They served the dual purpose of religious revival as well as military cantonments because the Ikhwan in their hijar were taught the religious teachings of the Wahhabis as well as they were called upon to defend the limits of the Saudi rule. With the help of the Ikhwan Ibn Saud was able to defeat the Rashidis in 1819 and capture the whole of Hasa’. Later on in 1924 the Ikhwan played a significant role in the capture of Hijaz. Sharif of Mecca, Ali b. Husayn, was ousted from power. But the Ikhwan very soon became a threat to Ibn Sa’ud and in a way they planned to overthrow him till finally they were defeated by Ibn Sa’ud himself in the battle of Sibila. The real cause of the revolt of the Ikhwan, may be, was that they were originally bedouin tribals made to settle in the hijras and here they were given the training in religion. Anything new was considered by them as bida’ and they defied it. They opposed Ibn Sa’ud if he wished to use the modern inventions
e.g. telegraph, cars, etc. They also opposed his meeting with the British and the rulers of Kuwait or Iraq as they were not Muslims. According to them by suppressing the power of the Ikhwan Ibn Sa'ud removed the greatest threat to his rule and was able to declare the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

The seventh chapter constitutes the conclusions. The basic principle guiding the dynamics of power in traditional Saudi Arabia is that obedience to the rulers is obligatory even in case of oppression.

The views of the Shaykh about the role of the 'ulama' in the Islamic state are based on Ibn Taymiyya's definition of the ideal Islamic polity centered in the authority of the 'ulama'. Political activity in modern Saudi Arabia is conditioned by traditional institutions and patterns of behaviour that are being altered by the demands of the 20th. century. Firstly, the fundamental assumption of the modern polity of Saudi Arabia is that the Qur'an if correctly implemented is more suitable for the country than any secular constitution. The country also knows no political parties or elections. Leading ulama have direct access to both the king and the public at large. In a tradition established by King Ibn Sa'ud the 'Ulama' are
received every Thursday in royal audience where they express their opinions about the state of the nation and advise the King on matters of policy. The administration of the Judicial system of Saudi Arabia is another illustration of the importance of Islam in the country.