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Jihad in India: Time to Review, Re interpret and Understand:

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Some news reports in May last from Washington indicated that the terror group ISIS had launched a new propaganda video that showed off the Jihadists allegedly from India fighting against the Syrian forces in the Homs province.

This report has not been challenged and it is presumed that the Jihadi ideology of the terrorist organisation - the ISIS has also inspired a section of Indian Muslim youths to follow the short-cut route for a seat in Paradise.

Violent Jihad does not operate in a vacuum:

Although, the number of such Jihadist Indians may not be much to cause any alarm, it certainly poses a question to the community in India as to how and why some of their youths are motivated for joining the ISIS? This may not have been possible without any direct or indirect support within the community as well as without subtle infrastructure propagating the idea of Jihadi Islamism for restoration of the institution of Caliphate. Since violent ideology does not operate in vacuum and a fire requires oxygen to grow, the Jihadi-ideology too has perhaps a support base within the community. It is therefore the responsibility of the community to identify the source of oxygen so that the Jihadi fire does not swallow the community in the long run.

The Government of India must have certainly taken due cognizance of this propaganda piece of the ISIS, but in view of the increasing Islamic terror violence capturing the world landscape in general and India in particular, the Indian Islamic community needs to do a thorough introspection on this vital issue. There has to be an intellectual exercise which unfortunately is lacking. There is an urgent need for the community to redefine the word Jihad and examine its true meaning in every sense of the word.

Salman Rushdie, a noted Muslim writer had pointed out that "there needs to be a thorough examination by Muslims everywhere, of why it is that the faith they love breeds so many violent mutant strains." (Quote from 'Guardian' dated October 6, 2001 published in Hindustan Times dated October 7).

The Concept of Jihad:

Before discussing about the Indian Jihadists fighting for ISIS we must understand that ever since the advent of Islam in India, common Muslims have understood the concept of Jihad as a "holy war in the way of Allah", which for them is the ideological root of their faith. Jihad was initially, a fight against the idol worshippers in Arabia, but subsequently it was used as a weapon to fulfil the imperialistic desire of the ruthless warlords in the name of spreading Islam in other parts of the world.

Recent terrorist attacks in different parts of the world particularly in Kashmir and its extension in other parts of India have by and large been understood or misunderstood as part of the Jihadi onslaught by Islam and hence there is no scope for spiritual interpretation of the term Jihad. This is not true and there is an urgent and an immediate need for the Indian community at least to look for proper interpretation.

Jihadi history in India:

India has been facing the challenge of the Jihadists ever since the first Islamist invasion in Sind (Now a province in Pakistan) in 712 AD. The successive invasions of the jihadi warlords which were apparently the outcome of their might is right political system rooted in Arab tradition. This was carried forward by the Islamist reformers like Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi (1556-1624), Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703-1762) and other Islamist mystics of Naqshbandi Sufi order as a legacy of Islam from generation to generation whenever they felt any challenge to the glory of Islamic political power.

After the death of Aurangzeb when the glory of Sunni extremism started fading, the Islamist reformers launched the movement for Islamic revivalism for which Jihad became their main ideological weapon to mobilise the Indian Muslims against any non-Islamic political system. Factually the Jihadists' had failed to Islamise India completely despite their rule for about 500 years. They even lost their empire to the British which too lost it to the democratic and secular people of the country.

Jihad Redefined:

It is possible that only a few hold the extremist Jihadist views in India but the time has come now to go into the origins, different interpretations and beliefs of Jihad.

Ibn Rushd, a twelfth century Islamic philosopher had divided the term Jihad into four kinds: "Jihad by heart; Jihad by tongue; Jihad by the hand and Jihad by the sword" (<http://islamicsupremecouncil.org/understanding-islam/legal-rulings/5-jih...> [1]) but for the common people in the community, its meaning is still linked to the historical expansion of Islam by sword in which millions of innocent people lost their lives.

The Chamber's Dictionary of world history on the other hand is more specific to explain the term Jihad: "According to Quran, Muslims have a duty to oppose those who reject Islam, by armed struggle if necessary, and Jihad has been invoked to justify both the expansion and defence of Islam". Even Islamic history suggests that the Muslims fought marauding wars against the non-Muslim countries only for fulfilment of their imperialistic desire in the name of Islam.

According to a well known Muslim writer Anwar Shaikh, those who believe in Allah and his Prophet have the most sacred duty to eliminate and subdue the non-believers..... Islam calls it 'Jihad', which guarantees the Mujahid (holy warrior) salvation i.e. seat in Paradise". ('Islam and Human Rights' published by A.Ghosh, Houston, USA, page 37).

"Many interpreters of Jihad in the Muslim world, and an equal number in the west, have explained Jihad with double meaning. It stands for Jihad bi al saif (holy war by means of sword) and for Jihad al nafs (literally, struggle for one's soul against one's own base instinct). Both interpretations are true, but Islamic militants have rejected the spiritual explanation as dangerous heresy..." (Walter Laquer, an American expert on terrorism -Pioneer dated October 2001).

Indian Jihadi support for the Ottoman Caliphate:

In fact, it is not the first time that some Indian Muslim youths have become Jihadis. Sultan Shahin, chief editor of the website NewageIslam has mentioned that as far back as in early 1920s, 18000 Indian Muslims went to Turkey to wage Jihad in defence of the Ottoman Caliphate. Similarly, according to Pakistani Urdu daily Roznama Express of 20 July, 2016, a Pakistani writer Abdul Qader wrote that Muslim women in India sent jewellery for the Turkish men to wage Jihad.

This information was disclosed by Tufail Ahmad, a British journalist and political commentator of Indian origin during his lecture in Hyderabad on August 13, 2016 at a launch for his book – Jihadist Threat to India The Case for Islamic Reformation by an Indian Muslim.(<http://www.firstpost.com/india/the-tufail-ahmad-lecture-how-serious-is-t...> [2]). He said categorically that “the IS and Al-Qaeda succeed in attracting and recruiting Muslims from India because there already exists in India an infrastructure of jihad-sympathetic ideas propagated by Islamic clerics, preachers like Zakir Naik and Brother Imran as well as hidden Islamists working as journalists of Urdu-Muslim newspapers and magazines” (Ibid.).

The Quranic Concept of War, a book written by Brigadier Malik of Pakistan justified the vision of Zia-ul Haq about Pakistan as a Jihadi state. The clue to the terror doctrine according to Brigadier Malik lies in Quran. He said, "The Quranic military strategy thus enjoins us to prepare ourselves for war to the utmost in order to strike terror in the heart of the enemy, known or hidden". He observed, " Terror is not a means of imposing decision upon the enemy, it is a decision to impose upon him." The key word here is “TERROR”. Compare it with what General Musharraf of Pakistan had said. He defined Jihad as a "humane" concept and its execution in Jammu and Kashmir as "freedom struggle".

Is the majority ignorant about the true meaning of Jihad?

Surprisingly, over ninety percent of Indian Muslims who are the descendants of the converted natives during the Jihad waged by Persio-Arabian and Turkish warlords since the beginning of early eighth century are found to maintain a studied silence more perhaps due to ignorance than anything else.

A natural question arises –Will they ever come out in the streets to challenge the jihadis effectively? Doubtful. Will they ever come forward and isolate the small numbers within them ideologically and politically? Again - Doubtful!

Prevailing ignorance about Islam among the common people has become the strength of the vested interests in the community. In the absence of any spiritual knowledge of Islamic scriptures they are in a stage of perpetual confusion about Jihad. On the other hand, the responsibility of the interpretation of Islamic scriptures continues to be in the hands of Islamist scholars, who never allow any intellectual interpretation of Jihad differently. Far away from modern and scientific education, most of them continue to depend upon the madrassa education, which does not allow them to develop any scientific approach towards the society in which they live.

The Muslim intellectuals may have a valid reason to disassociate Islam from Jihadi terrorism, but their muted view on the issue has left the common Muslims with no option but to accept the voices of the Mullahs and the clerics.

Outrageous statements by SIMI leaders:

For example, the Statements made by some SIMI leaders against Indian constitution were never challenged by the intellectuals of the community.

"The Quran is our constitution. If the Indian constitution clashes with the Quran, we are not bound by the constitution" (Reyaazul Mushahil, SIMI's Bihar Zone Secretary). "Whenever we come to power, we will destroy the temple, even if it is of gold and build a masjid there"(Sajid Mansuri, SIMI's Ahmedabad Zonal Secretary). (Times of India, September 30, 2001)

No Muslim leader ever dared to challenge this anti-national stand of SIMI ideologically. In fact, despite the menace of Islamist terrorism since early nineties of the last century, Deobandi Ulema held anti-terrorism conference only in 2008 and criticised it. But they never took an ideological stand to counter the theological principles which are used by the Jihadists in the name of Islam.

What is needed is an ideological challenge to medieval interpretation of Jihad:

The rigid stand of the Islamist clerics against any reform in the medieval interpretation of Jihadi ideology or Shariat (Islamic laws) looks like an attempt to keep the spirit of Jihad alive among the followers of Islam. Since there is no effective ideological challenge against the prevailing interpretation of the word Jihad from within the community, the masses in India are left with no option but to accept the jihadi view of Islam of medieval India as explained to them by the self-appointed custodians of the faith.

There may be many reasons behind the Indian youths turning into Jihadists but failure of the Muslim leadership to counter the Islamist clerics, the Urdu Press and the vote baiting by the so called secularists who are responsible for the growing radicalisation of the community youths is the most important of them.

There are a number of Muslim writers whose books and papers are against Islamist conservatism but as they are mostly in English, the common Muslims hardly read them. Apart from it, Muslim intellectuals are by and large found scared of expressing independent views on the possibility of any reform in Islam with the changing times. They are not ready to confront the challenge of Jihadi radicals and the common man in the community therefore is bound to follow the dictates of the self-serving Muslim leaders, who are found expressing the move of anti-terrorism camp as a challenge to Islam.

The Jihadist history in medieval India has had its ups and downs, but those who have not lost their historical memory, may be aware that radical followers of Islam have kept the spirit of this 'holy war' alive even today as this word is still viewed as a part of the holy duty of every Muslim for the establishment of Darul Islam in non-Islamic countries even with a violent struggle.

Re examine, Redefine and Reinterpret the true meaning of Jihad:

With the changing times Indian Muslims may like to raise the issue of re-defining Jihad and re-examine it through a wide debate in the community by the Ulema and Muslim intellectuals who are committed to their faith as a religion of peace to keep Islam away from the shadow of terror ideology as propagated by Pakistan and its agents and ensure that they forget the violent spirit of of this medieval menace by accepting in principle that nation is always guided by self-interest and not by medievalism.

They will have to launch an aggressive ideological movement to prove that the term Jihad is a spiritual term which means “striving with one’s self and money in the cause of God” which could negate the prevailing scenario that justifies violence in the name of Islam. Since the origin of Jihad in modern India is rooted to radicalisation of Indian Muslims by direct or indirect support of the Islamist clerics as well as Urdu media, it is the duty of the state to identify these sources and adopt a national policy to take strong legal action against them and counter the challenge of Jihad without considering its political impact beneficial or otherwise.

The International Community should also help

The International community could also build some pressure on Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and others for sending powerful message to their co-religionists around the world so that the “violent” interpretation of Jihad is totally rejected.

“There is increasing recognition from politicians and policy makers, including by both President Barack Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, that the ideology of jihadi movements must be countered to undermine the threat. Its combination of theology and political objectives needs to be uprooted through rigorous scrutiny, and sustained intellectual confrontation”.

(<http://tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/religion-geopolitics/reports-analysis...> [3]
-mind?gclid=CPWH0tK42c4CFcO4GwodDowBgA#)

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