

ISLAMIC IDEOLOGIES

Of all existing major religions, Islam is widely known to provide one of the most comprehensive blueprints for how life ought to be lived. It has scriptural prescriptions for all domains of life, be they social, cultural, legal, political, or economic. Known as *din wa dawla*, or religion and state, Islam as a religion and Islam as politics are not separate spheres; they are fundamentally the same.

While pre-modern Islamic movements were responding to internal challenges, their modern counterparts were contending with that *and* the exigencies of the modern world which were seen as threats to the Islamic way of life. State corruption, large scale unemployment, rapid urbanisation, sense of domination, fraudulent democracies, and secular beliefs were all marked for their ability to disorder Islamic values. Observers note that while dutifully religious in nature, the prescriptions offered by Islamists to these threats bear a resemblance to other Third World radicalisms as they propound remedies on themes such as oppression and freedom, the corrupt elites, and the authentic masses.

Revolutionary Islamism

Scholars such as Qutb and Maududi were key progenitors of the concepts that enabled Islam to develop an Islamist ideology. Qutb contrasts the two concepts, *hakimiyya* or the sovereignty of God to *jahiliyya* or the ignorance before God's revelation to the Prophet Muhammed. *Jahiliyya* is theorised as a state that can exist in any moment in which humans have diverged from God's message and will and Qutb identified the modern age as such a time of unenlightenment, confusion, and lack of God. He exhorted Muslims to move away from *jahili* society, to create an authentically Islamic social order and destroy the ignorance of the current one. As per this prescription, Islam squares off with secularism, individualism, and the rampant moral despoilation of modernity. Qutb, who had been radicalised after a study visit to the US, saw the West as being in a state of *jahiliyya*, with unbridled consumerism and materialism, rabid competition between individuals, and widespread exploitation. The remedy was the *hakimiyya* of God: a completely Islamic way of life. Much like the Prophet Muhammed who rode into Mecca to conquer the city and rid it of corruption, the vanguards of the *hakimiyya* movement undertake *jihad* against the might of *jahiliyya*. *Jihad*, in Qutub's view, is an expression of humans' desire to be liberated from the subjugation of others. Maududi saw Islam as a revolutionary ethic the purpose of which is to upend the social order as it is and reconstruct it in the image and message of Islam. He called for an International Revolutionary Party that would wage *jihad* against corrupt regimes. Both Maududi's and Qutb's calls for *jihad* are an expression of political struggle for the express purpose of getting political power before anything else, in order to found an Islamic state.

Sunni Islamism

Sunni Islamism is based on Salafi and Wahhabi interpretations of Islam. Wahhabism seeks to restore the Islam of the first generation of adherents while taking a stand against all that has come since. While Wahhabism has continued a staunch conservatism, Salafism morphed into a revolutionary and activist ethic that erupted in *jihadi* movements seen as a global anti-Western struggle.

Sunni Islamists have aimed at secular Arab states, and not merely the West. Although customary Sunni views maintain that Muslims are to acquiesce to any political power as long as it does not contravene Islam, Qutb suggested that Muslims are allowed to take over the state from secular governments. The Egyptian Nasser regime, for instance, came to be seen as illegitimate as Qutb saw it as a state of *jahiliyya* though led by a purported Muslim in Nasser. It must be noted that Qutb did not prescribe violence liberally as a means to overpower barriers to human liberation and achieve *hakimiyya*; he saw it as a rare necessity.

Shia Islamism

In contrast to Sunni Islam, which sees the arc of Islamic history as a move away from the ideal form since the time of the Prophet, Shias understand that history is a move towards the ideal form, achievable through the arrival of the Mahdi, the redeemer of Islam. This messianic tendency of Shia Islam has not endeared it to the Sunnis. Activist and quietist strains of the faith had simultaneously existed, but the former did not seek the overthrow of errant regimes, and the latter was associated with a withdrawal of legitimacy for certain regimes. Shia Islamism as an ideology took root in the Islamic Revolution in Iran that led to the overthrow of the Shah and established an Islamic Republic. The movement led by Ruholla Khomeini, coupled with the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran were momentous for the Muslim world. They were proof of the Islamist conviction that by mobilising without fear in the name of God, Muslims could achieve great victory against the infidels. Khomeini popularised the notion of the Muslim as “the downtrodden of the earth” by “the arrogant” and set up an Islamist anti-imperial discourse against Europe, the US and Israel. His thoughts and actions, and the Islamic Revolution overall would go on to impact Islamism around the world, inspiring many radicals who could now envision the Islamic state as a reality.

Moderate Islam

Moderate Islamism attempts to syncretise political Islam with democracy and pluralism. However, the key rub with regard to democracy has been that it places the will of the majority over the will of God. Some saw no conflict between democracy and Islam as *shura* or consultation is a concept therein. The *wasatiyya* or the moderates see that a constitution that inheres within Islamic law to which all are subject in which governing happens via *shura* can be democratic in nature. As long as democracy is on an Islamic basis and not a secular one,

democracy is reconcilable to Islam. Al-Qaradawi believed that this could be achieved by adding a “repugnancy clause” to the constitution whereby any legislation that is repugnant to Islam and contravenes it is declared null and void.

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