Peace and Inter-Faith Dialogue:
An Islamic Approach in the Indian Context

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Abstract

India is home to a remarkable variety of religions, and a major challenge that the country faces today is that of conflict between various religious communities. This has taken on menacing forms in recent decades. Incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims, in which often agencies of the state play a central role in directing anti-Muslim violence, have now become endemic in some parts of the country. This form of communal violence, generally instigated by right-wing Hindu forces, is sought to be given religious sanction and is also projected as a crusade to save the Indian "nation", which is described and portrayed in Hindu terms. Communal violence and anti-Muslim pogroms in various parts of the country have resulted in mounting human rights violations, particularly of marginalised communities such as the country's Muslims, who number more than 150 million. To add to this is the pervasive neglect of Muslims by the state. Responding to this context, various Indian Muslim organisations and Islamic movements are today seeking to promote peace and inter-community dialogue and solidarity, particularly between India's Muslims and the dominant Hindu community, arguing that not only is this crucial for safeguarding Muslim lives and protecting and promoting their interests but, more importantly, that this is an Islamic duty and necessary for promoting Islamic missionary work or *tabligh* among India's non-Muslim communities. What, in effect, they are articulating are contextually-grounded Islamic perspectives on peace and inter-faith solidarity.

This paper examines the approach that a major Indian Islamic movement, the Jamaat-i Islami Hind, has adopted in promoting peace and inter-community dialogue in the Indian context. It is based on a content analysis of the movement's literature as well as an overview of some of the movement's practical efforts in this regard.

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Introduction

Founded in 1941 by the journalist and self-taught Islamic scholar Sayyed Abul 'Ala Maududi, the Jama'at-i Islami is today one of the most active and well-organised Islamic movements in South Asia, with independent units in India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.[1] The influence of the Jama'at is not limited to South Asia, however. Through translations of Maududi's writings into various languages and through organisational and other contacts with other Islamic groups and movements, the Jama'at has exercised a powerful impact on Muslim revivalist thinking and efforts in many other parts of the world.[2]

Much has been written about the life and works of Maududi, the genesis and growth of the Jama'at in its South Asian context, and, particularly, its ideology. Briefly put, the Jama'at sees Islam as a complete world-view and way of life, dealing with not just the individual believer's relations with God, but also embracing all collective affairs. God is said to have sent a long chain of prophets to teach the pristine religion of *al-Islam* ('The Surrender'), and His last prophet, Muhammad (s.a.w.), was commissioned with the last revelation, the Qur'an, which, along with the Prophetic example, is believed to henceforth be the sole guide for human beings and the only means through which salvation in this world and in the next may be had. Islam, then, is seen as the only perfect religion. All other religions are believed to be either false human creations or else distortions of the ultimate truths that prophets prior to Muhammad were sent by God to preach.

Given the Jama'at's understanding of Islam as the only completely true religion and as the only means for ultimate salvation, and as all-embracing in its scope, the question of how it sees Muslims relating to people of other faiths and to the system of nation states is particularly crucial. The problem assumes particular salience in a multi-religious context like India's, where Muslims are a relatively small and vulnerable minority. Reconciling a commitment to their missionary calling, which they see as their principal duty, on the one hand, and an acute awareness of the beleaguered minority status of the Indian Muslims, on the other, Islamic groups in India have had to chart a delicate balance between what might seem the conflictual demands as members of the world-wide Muslim *ummah* and as citizens of what, in theory, still remains, a secular,

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1. For a comprehensive study of Maududi's life and thought, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Maududi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

2. For an overview of the Jama'at's influence on Islamist movements outside South Asia, Al-Hamidi, Khalil Ahmad, *Tehrik-i Islami ke 'Alami Asrat* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1994).

non-confessional and democratic state. How citizenship of a non-Islamic state can be comfortably accommodated with a commitment to an Islamist vision of Islam as an all-encompassing ideology and way of life is a crucial issue that many Muslims in India and in other similar minority contexts are faced with.

Islam and the Missionary Imperative

Islam, rooted in its insistence as being the only perfect religion meant for all humankind, is a missionary faith, and the JIH regards its missionary responsibility as its major task. Further, given India's overwhelming Hindu majority, its agenda, the JIH recognises, of establishing the 'rule of Allah' in the country, as epitomised in an Islamic state and social order, cannot be fulfilled unless large numbers of Hindus accept Islam. Hence, the added importance, a top JIH functionary writes, of Islamic missionary work or *da'wah* ('invitation') among non-Muslims.[3] How this responsibility should be undertaken in a country like India, where inter-communal antagonisms are sometimes extreme, and where Muslim missionary efforts are regarded with considerable suspicion, is a particularly complex issue. Mindful of accusations that have been levelled against it from militant Hindu and other quarters, the JIH is careful to insist that in its missionary work it adopts only 'ethical, constructive, peaceful, democratic and constitutional means', while refraining from 'all such activities as are opposed to truth and honesty or are likely to provoke communal hatred, class conflict or social disorder'.[4] This does not, however, mean that the JIH would renege on its commitment to propagating Islam and countering other religions that it sees as false. The Islamic missionary imperative is still its utmost priority, it insists, but this is to be done only through peaceful persuasion, not through force or conflict. Thus, the JIH declares that it would work among the non-Muslims of the country so that:

> [T]he truth shall dawn upon them that Islam is the only just and humane order, and that success in this world and salvation in the hereafter consist in the sincere submission to their Creator, Master and Sustainer. At the same time, it would endeavour to acquaint them with the irrationality and harmful effects of polytheism, atheism and other false ideologies and systems of life.[5]

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3. Fazlur Rahman, Faridi, *Iqamat-i Din Ka Safar Hindustani Tanazur Mai* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1997), 44.

4. *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Policy and Programme* (April 1999-March 2003) [henceforth *Policy and Programme*]. Also*, The Constitution of the Jama'at-i Islami Hind.* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1995) .7

5. *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Policy and Programme* (April 1999-March 2003), 4-5.

Classical Sunni Islamic law developed in a context of Muslim political authority. Hence, the classical jurists devoted little attention to the status of Muslim minorities, and none at all to what was then only a hypothetical situation, where, as is the case in contemporary India, in theory at least, Muslims are neither rulers nor the ruled, but, theoretically, equal citizens along with people of other faiths. Fazlur Rahman Faridi, a member of the central committee of the JIH, and editor of its English weekly, *Radiance*, notes that, 'The classical jurists had little experience of living in a multi-religious society', and so suggests that the Indian Muslims must 'critically examine the contemporary conditions and seek guidance from the Qur'an and the Sunnah' in order to learn how they must live in a context that the classical jurists could hardly have envisaged.[6] This entails a departure from the formulations of classical *fiqh* and suggests the need for Muslims to engage in a process of *ijtihad* to discover how Muslims in contemporary India should relate to people of other faiths in the light of the primary sources of Islam. Faridi insists that in today's context Muslims must relate to non-Muslims as missionaries of the one true faith, and faithfully abide by the Qur'anic commandment of 'countering evil with good', relating to them in a spirit of love. This, he says, is 'the most effective means to win over their foes' and to remove their misunderstandings about Islam.[7] All human beings, irrespective of religion, are, another leading figure of the JIH, Sadruddin Islahi, writes, creatures of God and children of Adam and Eve, and this relation of 'brotherhood' calls for Muslims to 'show love and concern for their welfare'. The best way in which this concern can be expressed is to 'guide them to the path of Allah' by preaching Islam to them. This should be done through "wisdom, the best possible guidance and argument in a proper manner".[8] *Hikmat* (wisdom) and *nasihat* (guidance) should be the two pillars of the Islamic missionary approach, emulating the style adopted by the Prophet. This demands that one should always keep in mind 'the welfare of those who are being addressed'. The Muslim missionary must present himself to others with love. While he should hate the evil deeds of others, he must not hate their selves (*zat*), for "a doctor does not fight with his patient but with the patient's disease".[9] Besides this, Muslims must also seek to help non-Muslims in distress, providing them physical as well as

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6. Fazlur Rahman Faridi, *Tahaffuz-i Shari'at Aur Millat-i Islamiya-i Hind* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1996), 18.

7. Faridi, *Tahaffuz-i Shari'at*, 14.

8. Sadruddin Islahi, *Tehrik-i Islami-i Hind* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami 1994), 51-54.

9. Islahi, *Tehrik-i Islami-i Hind*, 51-54.

financial assistance, as well as their loving concern. By doing so, their 'enemies will turn into friends', the 'hardest heart will change into molten wax', and they would be convinced that 'there is no one more concerned about their well-being than us'. The Prophet Muhammad is taken as a model in this regard. The Prophet is said to have taken pity on the pre-Islamic Arabs as people who had 'strayed from the true path'. He is said to have spared no opportunity to serve them, helping the poor, the elderly and the orphaned, while also crusading against social evils such as robbery, drinking and adultery. As a result of his 'pious actions, morals, service and love', the enemies of the faith "turned into Islam's most trusted soldiers".[10]

The missionary enterprise that the JIH envisages is one in which all Muslims, men as well as women, no matter what their station in life, have a crucial role to play. All Muslims must be conscious of being members of 'the best of the nations', charged with the responsibility of spreading God's Word and seeking to enforce His laws throughout the world. The Islamic mission is not to be restricted to mere preaching. Rather, it must express itself in active social intervention, working to transform society and usher in a new social order based on Islamic values. Thus, besides seeking to communicate Islam to people of other faiths in a spirit of love and concern, Muslims must also strive to promote 'social, political and economic justice for all'. This is seen not simply as a missionary ploy but as a religious duty binding on all Muslims. In a document detailing its aims and objectives, the JIH declares that Muslims must work for "safeguarding human rights, promoting democratic values and containing the upsurge of fascism in the country."[11] As members of the 'best of the nations' Muslims, the JIH insists, must seek to 'promote fellow feelings among people and seek the ascendance of moral values', issues of concern for people of all communities. 'To enjoin the good and forbid the evil', a phrase that appears repeatedly in the Qur'an, is said to be the responsibility that God has entrusted the Muslim community with, this being 'the reason for its creation', its 'defining symbol', and Muslims must abide by this divine responsibility.[12] Alongside this, the JIH calls for joining hands through 'mutual co-operation' with non-Muslims in 'promoting the good, eradicating evil, solving social and economic problems and undertaking social service activities'. This includes working with others for establishing social equality

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10. Matin Tariq Baghpati, *Da'wat-i Haq Aur Ghayr Muslim* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1994), 10.

11. *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Policy and Programme* (April 1999-March 2003), 4.

12. Abdul Moghni, *Hindustan Ke Liye Mustaqbil Ka Naqsha-i 'Amal* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1994), 20.

and opposing discrimination based on the caste system and the practice of untouchability.[13] This struggle, given its nature and the magnitude, must necessarily be one in which Muslims work along with people of goodwill from other communities, for Muslims cannot hope to tackle these issues by themselves.[14] The fight against poverty is also seen as an integral part of the Islamic mission, for according to the Prophet Muhammad, poverty often inclines people to apostasy.[15] Service of others (*khidmat-i khalq*), writes Abdul Moghni, a senior JIH leader, is a 'form of worship', a means to attain God's favour and 'a *jihad* in God's path'. To fight against oppression, he says, is in fact the highest form of *jihad*. Without fulfilling the 'rights of others' (*huquq ul-'ibad*), one's own duties to God (*huquq ullah*) cannot be fully observed. Striving against evils and crusading against injustice, irrespective of the religion of the victim, is the 'highest form of faith', and for this Muslims must work along with people from other communities, as well as with secular and democratic political parties.[16]

The struggle for democracy is also part of the JIH's mission, as it sees it. Although the JIH is opposed to the concept of democracy as such, wherein it is the people, not God, who frame the law, it adopts a pragmatic approach to the issue, maintaining that 'under the present circumstances it considers democracy as the best form of politics for the country'. The alternative to democracy in India, it recognises, is Hindu fascism, and hence the JIH sees itself as charged with responsibility of seeking to build bridges with democratic forces among the non-Muslims of the country who, too, are opposed to a Hindu fascist take-over.[17] Further, the JIH seeks to "direct its criticism against oppression, exploitation and the lifestyle based on violence and militancy at every level."[18] Muslims, 'Abul Lais Islahi Nadwi[19], the former *amir* of the JIH says, must not enter into communal conflicts with people of other faiths or resort to actions that might 'cause grave damage' to

13. *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Policy and Programme* (April 1999-March 2003), 7-8.
14. Abul Lais Islahi Nadwi, *Mulk-o-Millat Ke Masa'il Aur Unka Hal* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1995), 27.
15. Nadwi, *Mulk-o-Millat,* 11.
16. Moghni, *Hindustan Ke Liye Mustaqbil*, 27-51.
17. Sayyed Jalaluddin Umri, *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Pas-i Manzar, Khidmat, Tariqa-i Kar* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1994), 55.
18. *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Policy and Programme* (April 1999-March 2003), 6.
19. Nadwi served as the *amir* of the JIH from 1948 to 1972 and then again from 1982 to 1992. For biographical details, Abul Lais Islahi Nadwi, *Jama'at-i Islami: Haqa'iq Aur Ilzamat*, Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1996.

the community. Rather, they must strive for promoting peace inter-communal harmony and unity.[20] Through joint efforts with democratic elements among non-Muslims, the JIH sees Muslims as playing a central role in the building of a new society based on values that Islam upholds and that are equally dear to others. Given the JIH's vision of Islam as not simply a spiritual relation between the individual believer and God, but, more than that, also a complete code of conduct for one's personal and collective life, this insistence on active social intervention is seen as an integral part of the expression of a believer's commitment to Islam and as an essential aspect of the Islamic mission.

Successful missionary work among non-Muslims, it is stressed, requires that Muslims revise their own understandings of Islam and their relations with people of other faiths. Thus, Sayyed Jalaluddin 'Umri, presently *amir* of the JIH, claims that the JIH, with its fierce opposition to all forms of communalism, including even the Muslim nationalism of the Muslim League which led the movement for the creation of Pakistan as a separate state for the Muslims of India[21], can play a major role in promoting inter-communal harmony by presenting a vision of Islam as a religion not meant for Muslims alone, as many Muslims see it, but, indeed, as meant for the welfare of all humankind. Communalism of any variety, including Muslim nationalism, is seen as leading to hatred and ultimately to fascism, and hence is to be condemned. Because, he says, Muslims have traditionally, though erroneously, seen themselves as a community (*qaum*) instead of as an ideological group (*millat*), and the Hindus, in turn, view them as such, fierce inter-communal antagonisms have resulted as various communities have fought for worldly ends.[22] Consequently, Hindus tend to see Islam as the religion of their 'enemies' who had ruled over them for centuries. The Muslims, for their part, have regarded Islam merely as the religion of their own community, not as a system meant for the welfare and salvation of the whole of humankind. They must now realise that they are not like any other community, concerned solely with their own worldly interests. Rather, they are the 'heralds of the truth', charged with the responsibility of upholding God's religion, establishing divine justice and crusading against all social evils. If Muslims are not a community in the conventional sense of the term, they must not be concerned

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20. Nadwi, *Mulk-o-Millat*, 23.

21. Interestingly, the Jama'at in Pakistan claims to have played a major role in the Partition of the country and the creation of a separate state for Muslims.

22. Umri, *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, 13.

solely about their own worldly gains. Rather, being an 'ideological community', based not on descent or race but on common belief and faith, they must model their lives solely on the Qur'anic commandment of 'enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil', even if this might seem, at times, to go against the community's worldly interests.

A complete transformation of perspective is called for on the part of the Muslims, and the JIH sees itself as taking the lead in presenting Islam as a religion meant for all, and as the only solution to the manifold problems of worldly existence as well as the only means to 'success' in the life after death. It is necessary, 'Umri writes, for Muslims to actively combat prejudices and misunderstandings and exercise a generous tolerance, so that others 'can listen to the Truth and understand it'. For this purpose, it is claimed, the JIH has sought to establish close links with people of other faiths, inviting them to its meetings to speak about their own religions and to 'learn the truth' about Islam, involving them in its relief and social welfare programmes working among people of all faiths, and reaching out to non-Muslims through literature in various local languages as well as enrolling them as its 'helpers' (*ma'avin*).[23] In this way, "Umri says, the JIH uses 'constructive and peaceful means' in order to 'prepare people's minds and public opinion for a healthy revolution (*saleh inqilab*) in the country's collective life."[24]

Inter-Communal Riots and Anti-Muslim Violence: Their Causes and The Remedy

Post-1947 India has witnessed a series of acute communal conflicts and pogroms, in which, inevitably, the Muslims have been the major victims. Recent decades have witnessed a growing involvement of agencies of the state in anti-Muslim attacks, in which several thousand Muslims have lost their lives. The issue of anti-Muslim violence is at the heart of the Hindu-Muslim question, and the JIH has sought to actively intervene to reduce conflict and improve Hindu-Muslim relations. It sees anti-Muslim violence as a problem not restricted in its impact to the Muslims alone, but as having serious consequences for India as a whole, proving to be a major hurdle in the country's overall progress.[25]

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23. Sayyed Jalaluddin Umri, *Jama'at-i Islami Hind: Pas-i Manzar, Khidmat, Tariqa-i Kar* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1994), 29-35. As of mid-1992, the JIH claimed to have some 5000 non-Muslim *ma'avin* all over India.

24. Umri, *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, 55.

25. Muhammad Yusuf Islahi, *Izzat Ki Zindagi Aur Muslamanan-i Hind* (Dehli: Maktaba-i Zikra, 1999), 11-12.

Inter-communal conflict, as the JIH sees it, stems, at root, from a lack of proper faith in God, a sharp decline in moral standards and an instrumental use of religion for pursuing this-worldly interests. Sayyed Hamid 'Ali, a top JIH ideologue, writes that if Muslims were to recognise themselves as being not just another community, defined on the basis of birth, but as an 'ideological group' commissioned to establish love, justice and good relations with all others, helping the oppressed of all communities in their struggles for justice, the communal problem would go a long way towards being solved.[26] They must, therefore, rise above temptations and revive true Islamic morality in their personal lives, thereby earning the goodwill of others. Likewise, according to Sayyed Ahmad 'Uruj Qadri, a JIH spokesman, if Muslims were truly to follow the teachings of Islam, through their 'good deeds' and 'high moral standards' they would ensure that 'their enemies of today would tomorrow become their friends and helpers'. Qadri calls for Muslims to shed their 'communal' attitude, and to be guided in their dealings with others only by Islamic commandments, not by what they see to be Muslim 'community interests', for this is a manifestation of *jahiliya*, the pre-Islamic age of 'ignorance'. Thus, they must not hesitate from sternly condemning the 'excesses' (*zyadati*) committed by fellow Muslims against others, while, at the same time, they should also learn to exercise restraint in the face of attacks by others. In addition, they must actively seek to establish bonds of goodwill with people of other faiths, helping them in their troubles, so as to convince them that Islam is "the best guarantor of their success in this world and the next."[27]

Muhammad Yusuf Islahi, another writer associated with the JIH, argues that the Muslims must 'desist from all such thoughts and actions that might cause the majority [Hindus] to seek revenge or which would create distance and hatred or lead to separatism', seeing this as their 'moral and religious duty'. India, he says, can only progress and prosper in a climate of 'love and good relations between different communities, and hence the Muslims must behave in such a manner that their existence 'is seen as a blessing for this country and as a fundamental necessity'. By manifesting their faith in this way, the Muslims would be able to convince others that they have a "reliable and successful ideology and system of life that is the best means for the construction, progress and welfare of the country."[28] Muslims must strive to

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26. Sayyed Hamid Ali, *Hindustan Mai Firqavarana Fasadat Ka Masla* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1992), 29.

27. Sayyed Ahmad Uruj Qadri, *Fasdat Ka Ilaj* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1989), 12-16.

28. Islahi, *Izzat Ki Zindagi Aur,* 13.

counter all forms of communal conflict and work for inter-communal harmony to create an environment in which all communities might prosper. In particular, Muslims must steer clear from rioting and uncalled-for violence, because this would provide a convenient pretext for anti-Muslim forces to attack them. However, in the face of continued anti-Muslim attacks, Muslims can take to self-defence, a right granted to them by the Indian Constitution and a divine duty, but this should be conducted within the bounds of Islamic morality, which limits violence to be directed only towards the guilty.[29]

Communalism, Naim Siddiqui, another JIH leader, writes, is based on 'worship of the community' (*qaum parasti*), which is a negation of the fundamental Islamic principle of *tawhid*, the Unity of God, which demands that God alone be the object of worship. It is rooted in materialism and in such factors as racial, linguistic, caste and communal prejudice, and hence is bereft of any moral principles that can unite people across confessional boundaries. The principle of 'My community, right or wrong', he argues, is a complete violation of Islamic ethics as well as of all standards of universal morality. Communalism is free from all moral restraints and the fear of God or punishment after death in its blind pursuit of worldly interests, and does not balk at harming others in its uncontrolled quest for serving its own purposes. It thrives on hatred for others and thus leads to endless conflict.[30] The solution, then, is a revival of morality and fear of God's wrath, for one will be accountable to Him for all of one's actions. Firm faith in God and divine retribution restrains people from infringing on the rights of others and indulging in evil deeds. True faith would inspire people to fight against all forms of oppression, including communal strife and the violation of the rights of others, to appreciate the good qualities in people of other communities in addition to one's own, and to be ready to speak out against all oppressors, even if they be from among one's own community.[31] For this purpose, Siddiqui calls for the launching of a 'living movement' (*zinda tehrik*) of people of goodwill from all communities to struggle against communalism and other forms of oppression. Despite their differing religious beliefs, they would be united in a common commitment to 'God-worship', truth, morality and service of the oppressed. They would create a 'strong army' of workers whose only weapon would be 'high morals', and they would be ready to sacrifice their all in the

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29. Islahi, *Izzat Ki Zindagi Aur,* 46-48.

30. Naim Siddiqui, *Hindustan Main Fasadat Aur Unka 'Ilaj* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1989), 5-15.

31. Siddiqui, *Hindustan Main,* 24.

fight against injustice and communal strife. Every Hindu and Muslim of 'good character' should join this team, which should set up 'peace committees' in various localities.[32]

Sayyed Jalaluddin 'Umri, the present JIH *amir*, sees inter-communal conflict as stemming, at root, from a sinister manipulation of religion for political ends, this being a betrayal of the actual message and import of religion itself. He writes that the present-day religious leadership of all communities is in the hands of irreligious, corrupt and power-hungry people, who, although they do not follow religion in their own private lives, use it to justify violence against people of other faiths. A new religious leadership is called for in all communities, one that abides truly by the teachings of their respective religions. Most people, 'Umri writes, do not have a deep or proper understanding of their own religion. Hence, they get easily swayed by emotional appeals in the name of religion, and are used by their leaders to indulge in violence against others. In this context, 'Umri sees an important role for all religious people to work together to 'prevent the name of religion from being sullied' in this manner, struggling against the political misuse of religion and the spreading of communal hatred and violence.[33]

It is not religion *per se* that is the cause of inter-communal strife, as some insist, writes 'Abdul Haq Ansari, former JIH *amir*. Rather, it is 'irreligiousness' and 'enmity towards true religion' that lead to the misuse of religion for achieving worldly ends, employing violence to pursue worldly interests. Ansari suggests that hatred spread in the name of religion, and the belief that the glory of one's religion lies in the denigration of other religions and their followers, far from helping the cause of religion, actually 'give it a bad name'. In the Indian context, he says, the insistence by some Hindus that only Hindus can be considered as 'true Indians' and that if others wish to be so considered they would have to renounce their faith and adopt Hinduism is a major cause for inter-community strife and conflict. Ansari appeals for a generous tolerance, insisting that even if one believes that one's religion is the only true one, one has no right to denigrate other faiths. 'Instead of forcing one's religion and customs upon others', he says, 'one should respect the religious places, elders, books, customs, festivals and ways of life of others', without this necessarily leading to doubts about one's own faith or to believing that all religions are the

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32. Siddiqui, *Hindustan Main,* 26-28.
33. Umri, *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, 2.

same. According to Islam, 'All religions are worthy of respect', he says. To attack and revile other religions, their leaders, books and customs is 'a grave sin' in Islam, for the Qur'an lays down that there is to be 'no compulsion in religion'. In one's dealing with others, he writes, one should constantly be mindful of the fact that 'general human morals' and 'service and love' for all people are the 'foundation' of all religions. To serve people, irrespective of religion, and to deal with them kindly, is considered in Islam to be 'superior to much worship' (*bahut si 'ibadaten*) and is a 'sure means' to 'acquire God's love and closeness'. On the other hand, to wrongly oppress others and trample upon their rights is not the way to serve one's community or religion.[34]

In order to bring people of various faiths together to work for common social goals, the JIH has sponsored several initiatives, such as relief works in the wake of natural calamities and communal riots.[35] In the face of a growing challenge from Hindu chauvinist forces, culminating in the destruction of the Babri Mosque in December 1992[36] that caused large scale anti-Muslim violence across India in which thousands of Muslims lost their lives, the JIH began to take a more actively involved stance in this regard. Shortly after the destruction of the mosque, in February 1993 the then editor of the Jama'at's English weekly, *Radiance*, Intizar Na'im, appealed for immediate steps to be taken by people of all faiths who were concerned with the growing spectre of communal strife in the country to join hands, 'rising above personal, sectarian, community or party interests'. In July that year, the JIH held a convention in New Delhi, to discuss the alarming situation in the country, to which Muslims as well as non-Muslim social activists were invited. In his inaugural address, the JIH *amir*, Muhammad Shafi Moonis, called for a united struggle against fascism and all forms of discrimination. The participants at the convention decided to set up the 'Forum for Democracy and Communal Amity' (FDCA), which, *Radiance* hoped, would 'help reconstruct a plural Indian society where every flower is allowed to blossom and every culture allowed to flourish, thus providing the finest example of unity in diversity'. Moonis was appointed joint convenor of the Forum, Justice (retired) V.M. Tarkunde, a Maharashtrian Brahmin actively involved in the radical humanist movement, chairman, and leading Muslim (mostly JIH members) and Hindu and Sikh activists and

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34. Abdul Haq Ansari, *Qaumi Yekjuhati Aur Islam* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1996), 4-22.
35. Abul Lais Islahi Nadwi, *Halat-i Hazira Aur Hamari Zimmedariyan* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1997), 10.
36. From the late 1980s onwards, militantly anti-Muslim Hindu groups began a mass campaign to destroy a mosque, the Babri Masjid, at the town of Ayodhya in northern India, which they claimed, had been built on the ruins of a Hindu temple.

intellectuals known for their espousal of communal harmony were selected as members.[37] The FDCA sees itself as a broad-based, inter-faith group working as 'a democratic, humanitarian front […] against communal and fascist forces', based on a commitment to 'religious amity and a broad humanity beyond considerations of caste and religion', and 'mutual love and brotherhood'. It has chapters in several states, with its headquarters in Delhi.[38] This JIH-sponsored body has organised several conferences and meetings across the country, appealing for communal harmony and speaking out against religious intolerance, although its actual impact does not appear to have been particularly noteworthy.

Re-Examining Hinduism

Positive interaction between people of different faiths is stressed in JIH writings as essential for not only its missionary work but also in order to build bridges with people of other faiths to remove mutual understandings and to combat communal conflict.[39] Although the JIH insists that Islam alone possess the Truth in its entirety, and that, therefore, Muslims do not need to modify their own religious views, it sees inter-religious dialogue as important in order to clear mutual misunderstandings and prejudices and to build better relations between people of different faiths. While firmly committed to its own faith in the superiority of Islam, it is willing to concede that other religions might also contain elements of truth, although not the whole truth. Thus, all religions, even relatively unorganised traditions like Hinduism, are said to have a common faith in 'worship of God, accountability for one's actions and prophethood', although these might have been 'distorted' beyond recognition over time. 'It is ingrained in human nature', writes a senior JIH scholar, to believe, in some form or the other, no matter how distorted, in the three basic principles of Islam—unity of God, prophethood and the hereafter.[40] Hence, theological parallels can be drawn between Islam and Hinduism, which can help bring Muslims closer to others.[41] Based on these common foundational beliefs, Hindus and

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37. "The Menace of Communalism and Fascism", *Radiance* 31 (July, 1993): 10-12.

38. V.K. Hamzah, "FDCA Convention at Kochi", *Radiance* 26 (January, 1994): 7.

39. Islahi, *Izzat Ki Zindagi Aur,* 26.

40. Abul Lais Islahi Nadwi, *Jama'at-i Islami: Haqa'iq Aur Ilzamat* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1996), 6.

41. Nadwi remarks that if the non-Muslims of the country are not willing to accept Islam, they should at least seek to mould their personal and collective lives on the basis of the fundamental principles of their own religions, seeing this is a far better alternative than a system based on 'community-worship (*qaum parasti*), nation-worship (*watan parasti*),and irreligiousness (*la diniyat*)'.

Muslims can work together for a better society.[42] Another JIH activist sees the possibility of Muslims working with Hindus to establish a just and peaceful social order on the basis of certain ethical values that are said to common to Islam and Hinduism, such as regard for the leading figures of other faiths, brotherhood, respect for other's life and property, helping the poor and so on.[43]

Inter-religious dialogue demands that people must seek to learn about other faiths. For the JIH this is seen as important, not only to clear misunderstandings that Muslims might have about other religions, but also to equip them with skills and the necessary knowledge that they need in their missionary work among others. Consequently, JIH writers have been commissioned to pen tracts on Hinduism, and several of these have come out in recent years. Some of these seek to compare Islam with Hinduism, in order to show Islam as a superior faith, while others simply explain the basic tenets of the Brahminical scriptures, which are presented as the defining texts of normative Hinduism[44] The missionary agenda behind this concern to learn about other faiths is clearly spelled out. Thus, while suggesting that Muslims must 'study and understand the thoughts, religious beliefs and customs' of the Hindus, Baghpati, a JIH scholar who has written extensively on the subject, writes that this is indispensable if Muslims are to 'come closer to them and communicate to them the invitation to Islam'. Particular care must be made, he says, to uncover 'those large portions of scriptures such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Buddhist texts that, despite having undergone distortions, are still worth acting upon'—presumably those portions of these scriptures that are in harmony with Islamic teachings. Muslims are advised to 'remind their Hindu brethren' about these 'many reformist aspects' (*islahi pahlu*) of their holy books, and to exhort them to act in accordance with them.[45] He argues that Muslims should also be willing to listen to others 'in a spirit of empathy' and learn about their religions. They would then discover that therein there is much 'that appears as a form, albeit distorted, of Islam's own teachings'. Muslims should then build on these commonalties, presenting the Islamic teachings as their 'perfect form' and inviting non-Muslims to co-operate with them on the

42. Abdul Haq Ansari, *Qaumi Yekjuhati Aur Islam* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1996), 5-15.

43. Nadwi, *Jama'at-i Islami*, 27. See also Umri, *Jama'at-i Islami Hind*, 4.

44. For instance, Muhammad Faruq Khan, *Islam Ki Ahmiyat Hindu Dharam Ke Pas-i Manzar Mai*, Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, Delhi, n.d. After a detailed discussion of what he sees as the serious limitations and distortions of Hinduism, Khan writes that 'When we study Islam in the context of Hinduism, our awareness of its greatness and importance increases by leaps and bounds'.

45. Baghpati, *Da'wat-i Haq Aur Ghayr Muslim*, 12.

basis of these common beliefs. This is said to be in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an, which instructs the Muslims to come to an agreement with the People of the Book on the basis of what they share in common— service to and worship of the one God and an aversion to polytheism.[46]

On the other hand, Muhammad Faruq Khan, the JIH's leading expert on Hinduism and author of numerous texts on the subject, takes a far less sympathetic view of the Hindu religion. He writes that a study of the Hindu scriptures, full of distortions, superstitions and immoral teachings that he sees them as containing, should convince anyone that 'Hindu society has absolutely no knowledge of the true characteristics of religion'. The Hindus, he says, are not even aware of the 'degeneration' of their religion and scriptures and of many of their beliefs being false. In this context, Khan says, a Muslim who studies Hinduism 'can instil in his non-Muslim brother a consciousness of the fact that the thing whose support he is taking is not a firm pillar to lean on'. This done, Khan argues, "it will be easy to convince him of the value of Islam".[47]

Conclusion

The JIH, with its vision of Islam as a complete way of life, covering all aspects of personal as well as collective existence, has had to operate in an environment where the odds weigh heavily against it. Muslims are a relatively small, poor and vulnerable minority in India, victims of prejudice and periodic attacks and pogroms, and India has had a long legacy of inter-communal strife between Hindus and Muslims. Given this, the JIH has been forced to adopt pragmatic means to pursue its missionary goals. A comparison between the Jama'at in India and Pakistan is instructive in this regard.[48] Operating in an overwhelmingly Muslim environment, the Jama'at in Pakistan has not had to seriously engage with issues of inter-communal relations and religious pluralism, questions that are of such great concern to its Indian counterpart. While the Jama'at in Pakistan has all along been in the forefront of the movement for the establishment of an Islamic state in the country, the JIH has been forced to accommodate itself within the framework of a theoretically secular and democratic state in India, going so far as to modify its own constitution to replace its demand for an Islamic state (*hukumat-i ilahiya* or the

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46. Baghpati, *Da'wat-i Haq Aur Ghayr Muslim*, 42.

47. Muhammad Faruq Khan, *Hindu Dharm: Ek Muta'ala* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i Islami, 1992), 56.

48. For the Jama'at in Pakistan, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 1994). Also, Kalim Bahadur, *The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan: Political Thought and Political Action* (New Delhi: Chetana Publications, 1997).

'rule of God') as an immediate goal with the more pragmatic and less well-defined aim of 'the establishment of religion' (*iqamat-i din*).[49] Although Maududi is known to have fiercely condemned democracy, as the rule of the people instead of that of God, and secularism, as 'irreligiousness' (*la diniyat*), the JIH has, as we have seen, been particularly concerned about the protection and promotion of democracy and secularism in India, which are today increasingly threatened by the rise of the fiercely anti-Muslim Hindu Right. The JIH has, on numerous occasions, asserted that although, in its view, democracy and secularism may not be fully compatible with its understanding of Islam, it would struggle for the protection of the present democratic and secular order, for the only alternative to it is Hindu fascism.

Operating, as it does, in a context of considerable religious pluralism, the JIH has adopted a pragmatic approach in its missionary work, which it sees as its principal duty. Thus, it has called for inter-religious dialogue initiatives between Muslims and people of other faiths. Joint efforts at social reform are suggested, as well as struggles against social ills and common problems. Dialogue and mission are, however, not to be seen as opposed to each other, Although in the process of dialogue it is realised that Muslims would learn about other faiths and discover values and beliefs that all religions hold in common, the inter-religious dialogue project is seen, above all, as a means to create an environment in which others might be more receptive to the Islamic message. In contrast to the radical rhetoric of certain fringe Islamist groups, the JIH has counselled restraint and has appealed for tolerance and inter-communal harmony. In this way, it has sought to bring about what, for many Muslims, might seem a difficult balance to maintain—between the demands of Islamic commitment, on the one hand, and their responsibilities as members of an ethnically plural, multi-religious society and citizens of what, at least in principle if not in actual practice, is a secular, non-confessional state, on the other.

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49. The two are, however, generally thought to be roughly synonymous in the long run.

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