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Beyond textual acts of translation

Kitab At-Tawhid and the politics of Muslim identity in British India

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Analysing the reception of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab's eighteenth-century Arabic text in its Urdu translation, this paper highlights the importance of the cultural context of the original text and the impact of its translation within the discursive framework of Indian Islam. In the process of its production and consumption, this translation took on a mythic value that transformed the text from a monograph to a signifier of a specific Wahabi political subjectivity that has had direct consequences for Indian Islam, both in its colonial and postcolonial phases.

Introduction

In *Islamic Revival in British India*, Barbara Metcalf emphasises an important aspect of Urdu textual production in nineteenth-century India—i.e., the translation of important Muslim texts from Arabic to Urdu:

> The two main documents of the early period of reform, the *Taqwiyatu'l-Iman* and the *Siratu'l-Mustaqim*, both addressed themselves to all Muslims, not only the learned. They sought to disseminate familiarity with the fundamental sources of the faith. To do so, Muhammad Isma'il explained in the introduction to the *Taqwiyat*, the argument of the book was carried by quotations from the Qur'an and *hadis*, "adding their translation and true meaning in simple and easy Urdu so that they would be comprehensible to all who read or heard." (Metcalf 1982: 200)

This brief passage highlights important aspects of the translation of Arabic works into Urdu at that time: the need for a simple language and the 'purity' of the sources of interpretation, especially the reliance on the Qur'an and *hadis* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). The simple, direct and natural style found in such nineteenth-century Urdu translations also represented a shift from the earlier, more

ornate and often convoluted prose of all major languages of the Islamic world (Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Urdu) that Fazlur Rahman calls the "medieval style" (Rahman 1982: 70). This new use of Urdu as the language of translation for Arabic religious texts transformed Urdu into the language of the popular Muslim identity in India. Highlighting the particular impact of the first texts to be translated, Metcalf (1982: 207) suggests that by the late nineteenth century "Urdu had become the language of almost all Muslim religious works" in India.

While the simplicity of language helped the popular reception of religious texts, the reliance on the Qur'an and *hadis* made the interpretation more literalist by foreclosing any references to contemporary contexts. The intent behind the drive to interpret day-to-day religious conduct through direct references to the Qur'an and *hadis* was to fix the interpretation. This fixing of meaning was inextricably linked with the project of eliminating competing sectarian differences and bringing Indian Muslims together under one overarching regime of textual interpretation. In fact, in order to eliminate the sectarian differences caused by the religious commentaries of scholars from various schools of Islamic thought, Abu'l-A'la Mawdūdi, one of the most important twentieth-century Islamic scholars, considered this return to the two basic sources of Islamic interpretation—the Qur'an and *hadis*—as the most important step in defining a more unifying mode of interpretation:

> We should accord the same importance to the Qur'an as it had in the past, and we should respect the *hadis* as they were respected during the times of the prophet. Then we should rely on the works of earlier scholars, collectors of *hadis*, and interpreters of tradition, but never take their interpretations as irrevocable. We should never assume that these interpretations have completely eliminated the use of the Qur'an and *hadis* as our true sources of guidance. (Mawdūdi 1939: 123; my translation)

This return to the Qur'an and *hadis*, though suggested as a mode of bridging the sectarian differences in Indian Islam, eventually becomes an exercise in retrieving a purist Islamic identity, mostly as a response to colonial dominance. While Mawdūdi reasserted the importance of this new mode of interpretation in the early twentieth century, the literalist and purist approach to the Qur'an and *hadis* had already been inaugurated in the late eighteenth century in the Hijaz, the site of Islam's holy places, by Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab. This essay traces the impact of the Urdu translation of Abdul-Wahab's *Kitab At-Tawhid* on the politics of Muslim identity in India and Pakistan and how it eventually privileged a certain view of Islam within the larger reform movements in Indian Islam.

Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab and his times

Kitab At-Tawhid is the magnum opus of the eighteenth-century Arab reformer Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab (1703–1792), who was highly influenced by the works of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), a Muslim philosopher famous for his interpretation of the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God). In the foreword to his *Al-Jawab Al-Sahih* (1317), Ibn Taymiyyah gave the following reasons for his scholarly undertaking:

> Whoever says that God has taken residence in or united with some one of the Companions or relatives [of the Prophet] or one of the shaykhs is in this respect more unbelieving than Christians, who hold for divine union and indwelling in Christ, for Christ is superior to all these others. Whoever holds for universal indwelling and union has fallen into an error more universal than that of the Christians. (Taymiyyah 1317/1984: 140)

Obviously, this work was a challenge to the concept of innovations (*bidda'*) in Islam, a concept whose origins Ibn Taymiyyah traced to Christianity. He was also responding to the major Muslim debate of his time over *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being).[1] Ibn Taymiyyah's major work was a putative philosophical challenge to this idea of unity of being, against which he put forward his own philosophical stance that posited God's separateness from His creation(s). What Taymiyyah emphasised, then, was the idea of a God who cannot absolutely be seen as a part of His own creations, but in doing so Taymiyyah also inaugurated a habit of observing and criticising any Muslim practices that might weaken the idea of God's absolute separation from His creations. It is this philosophical discussion of Taymiyyah that is entered, albeit reductively, in the works of Abdul-Wahab.

Although Abdul-Wahab was influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah, he did not leave us any works of such scholarly sophistication. In fact, his only book—more of a booklet—was *Kitab At-Tawhid*. Abdul-Wahab as a Muslim reformer was fiercely anti-intellectual and inherently rigid in his approach to questions of Islamic interpretation, especially the concept of the unique oneness of God, of which he was a "fanatical and extremist devotee" (Abukhalil 2004: 55). So, by extension, are the Wahabiya or the Wahabis, the followers of his tradition. The ramifications of the translation and introduction of Abdul-Wahab's *Kitab At-Tawhid* within the Indian context are, therefore, enormous, but first let me outline Abdul-Wahab's life and the political influence of his work.

Abdul-Wahab gained political prominence through his alliance with the family of Muhammad Ibn-Saud (d. 1765), who was an ancestor of King Abdul-Aziz

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1.   For a detailed discussion of this concept, see Thomas F. Michel's introduction to his translation of Ibn Taymiyyah's *Al-Jawab Al-Sahih*.

(1880–1953), the founder of the current ruling dynasty of Saudi Arabia. Abukhalil provides the following account of the alliance between Abdul-Wahab and Ibn-Saud:

> ... Prince Muhammad Bin Sa'ud walked to Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul-Wahab and in 1744 struck a firm alliance that remains the core of the Saudi state to this very day: the alliance between the House of Sa'ud and the House of Ash-Shaykh (as the contemporary descendents of 'Abdul-Wahab are known). 'Abdul-Wahab settled and began a campaign of jihad. Jihad means struggle in general, but here it refers to the holy war that the two men led in Arabia. Their war continued into the last century until the Saudi kingdom was founded. (Abukhalil 2004: 57–58)

It was this combined message of politics and religion that transformed Abdul-Wahab's booklet from a religious polemic into a text that emphasised and instigated a peculiar view of Islam that is inextricably linked with the political implementation, often by force, of the booklet's message. The result, then, is a puritanical version of Islam, abstracted from its deeper history and philosophy, presenting itself as a testament to Muslim success in eradicating religious innovations in Arabia.

The privatisation of Islam in *Kitab At-Tawhid*

The text's translations into Urdu carry the burden of the text's attendant history and politics from the Arabian context to the Indian context. Depending on the specific politics of its translators and the institutional sites that adopt it, teach it, and infuse its teachings into real-life politics, the translations take on a life of their own and create a specific politics of Muslim identity. Translation of the text, therefore, is a loaded political act. Here I will focus on the socio-political ramifications of one particular translation and the impact of its political traces upon the colonial and postcolonial politics of Indian Muslims.

The earliest Indian work in Arabic that incorporates Abdul-Wahab's teachings was published by Shah Ismail in the 1830s under the title *Taqwiyat'l-Iman* and translated into Urdu by Shahamat Ali in 1852. The particular Urdu translation of *Kitab At-Tawhid* that is under discussion here, however, was published in 1934 by Muhammad bin Yusuf Surti, a native Indian Muslim from Surat. Comprising 204 pages, the translation contains a 30-page introduction to the original Arabic text and the life of its author, followed by 69 chapters in translation.[2] Each chapter invokes a particular issue closely related to the concept of *tawhid*, oneness of God. The author starts with a citation from the Qur'an and then explains the verse by citing certain *hadis* pertinent to the subject. Each chapter concludes with a

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2.   An online English translation of the work contains 64 chapters. For details, see Sameh Strauch.

tabulated list of the possible meaning and interpretations of the Qur'anic verses and the *hadis* cited and their impact on the practice of *tawhid*. Following is one example of this method of exposition:

<div align="center">

Chapter 12: It is *Shirk*[3] to make a Vow[4]
in the Name of Someone Other than Allah

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And Allah Said: They perform their vows, and they fear a Day whose evil is spread far and wide (Qur'an 76: 7).
And Allah Said: And whatever you spend in charity or whatever vow you make, be sure Allah knows it all. But the wrongdoers have no helpers (Qur'an 2: 270).[5]
From Sahi Bukhari: It is authentically reported on the authority of 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet ... said: "Whoever vowed to obey Allah ... he should do so, and whoever vowed to disobey Him, should not do so".[6]
There are three meanings in this:
It is mandatory to fulfill one's vows.
When it is proven that a vow is only for God, then it should not be taken in the name of someone besides God.
It is forbidden to make wrong vows, such as making a vow to sacrifice a goat or give alms in the name of a saint. (Abdul-Wahab 1750/1992: 72–73)

This brief chapter from *Kitab At-Tawhid* is instructive in explaining the structural aspects of the text and its socio-religious ramifications. Structurally, each chapter deals with one aspect of Muslim social practice in order to weigh its religious validity against the concept of *tawhid* or oneness of God. All practices that negate the strictly defined concept of *tawhid* are considered irreligious and are accorded the highest degree of sinfulness—i.e., *shirk*. The discussion starts with a reference from the Qur'an supported by one or two authentic *hadis*. Besides fixing the meaning, this privileges the Qur'an and *hadis* as the only authentic sources of Islamic interpretation. The simple method of explication, followed by simply worded pronouncements about the question of faith, leaves no room for ambiguity or philosophical discussion, and nor does the work provide any historical, contextual

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3.   *Shirk*, deeming someone equal to God, is considered the worst sin in Islam. It is the exact opposite of *tawhid*, the belief in the unique oneness of God.

4.   *Vow* is an imprecise translation of the Arabic and Urdu word *naz'r*, which in its Indian context means the practice of sending an offering—food or money—to a Sufi saint's shrine to hope for the saint's intercession in times of need. In Wahabi doctrine such a practice will clearly be seen as *shirk*.

5.   The translation of both these verses is taken from Strauch's online English translation of *Kitab At-Tawhid*. Unless otherwise stated, all other quotations from the Urdu translation of *Kitab At-Tawhid*, including the introduction and the preface, are in my translation.

6.   The translation of the *hadis* is adapted from Strauch's online translation.

details of the Qur'anic verses or the *hadis*. Being a good Muslim is thus condensed to the question of *tawhid* alone, which transports Muslim subjectivity from the realm of the social to the realm of the internal measuring of one's direct relationship with God.

In contrast to the Wahabi doctrine, Indian Sufi Islam had traditionally always been very inclusive, at least of other Islamic sects. Although most Sufi orders were solely concerned with the idea of divine love and a private relationship with God, their approach to *tawhid* was not as simplistic as that of the Wahabis. According to Annemarie Schimmel (1975: 17), the Sufis emphasised

> a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of *tauh i d*, 'to declare that God is One.' The Sufis always remained inside the fold of Islam, and their mystical attitude was not limited by their adherence to any legal or theological schools. They could reach their goal from any starting point—neither the differences between the legal *madhhabs* nor theological hairsplitting was, basically, of interest to them.

Hence when the Sufis spread their word to their followers, the main message was love. After the death of a saint, in almost all Muslim communities an order of followers was established and people sent alms to their spiritual leader's tomb as a religious practice. Such practices ensured that the spiritual experience was grounded in the world and expressed through good deeds. As explained above, however, the Wahabi doctrine, declares such practices un-Islamic and places them outside the boundaries of *tawhid*.

In terms of socio-political Muslim subjectivity, therefore, the Wahabi doctrine generates a certain narrow and specific approach to the question of Muslim faith. The concern with questions of socio-economic justice, acceptance of differences, and habits of philosophical thought that had previously existed in all major schools of interpretation of Islam is reduced to bare essentials of faith: a belief in the absolute oneness of God, against which all actions must be measured. This privatises the socio-political impulses of Islam and transforms the practice of religion from that of a life in the world to the practice of private faith. Salvation, therefore, is not so much connected to one's actions toward others in the world as dependent upon one's understanding, fear of, and obedience to God as one God. Islam thus becomes strictly interiorised.

Needless to say, this interpretation—termed the *Taqleedi* (Following) method—has been challenged by various Muslim scholars who belong to the *Tajdeedi* (reformative) interpretive tradition. In the Indian subcontinent Allama Muhammad Iqbal was one such scholar who emphasised the need to reread the Muslim sacred texts in the light of modernity. In his book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam*, Iqbal asserted the importance of *tajdeed* (reform) as follows:

> I know the Ulema of Islam claim finality for the popular schools of Mohammedan law,[7] though they never found it possible to deny the theoretical possibility of a complete *Ijtihad*.[8] .... But since things have changed and the world of Islam is confronted and affected today by new forces set free by the extraordinary development of human thought in all its directions, I see no reason why this attitude should be maintained any longer. Did the founders of our schools ever claim finality for their reasonings and interpretations? Never. (Iqbal 1930: 147)

Hence in Iqbal's view juridical interpretation in Islam cannot rely solely on the past; it must also take into account the current state of human knowledge. This opens a space in Islamic thought for staying in tune with the changing times, instead of becoming totally ossified.

Another modern Muslim scholar, Fazlur Rahman, in his book *Islam and Modernity*, outlines a very sophisticated method of Islamic interpretation:

> In building any genuine and viable Islamic set of laws and institutions, there has to be a twofold movement: First one must move from the concrete case treatments of the Qur'an—taking the necessary and relevant social conditions of that time into account—to the general principles upon which the entire teaching converges. Second, from this general level there must be a movement back to specific legislation, taking into account the necessary and relevant social conditions now obtaining. (Rahman 1982: 20)

Unlike the entrenched views of the Taqleedi scholars, this assertion is based on a belief that Islamic interpretation must be grounded in the present as well as the past, since Islam, besides being an individual faith, is inherently also a message for socio-economic justice (Rahman 1982: 5). A true understanding of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (a collection of the Prophet Muhammad's recorded words and actions) is two-pronged: individual and collective. Abdul-Wahab's method of explication in *Kitab At-Tawhid* thus fails on two accounts: it explains Qur'anic verses only in relation to *tawhid*, and it does so only on an individual scale. As a result, Muslim subjectivity is completely divested of its socio-economic context and placed in a normative domain constantly designed and controlled by an unchanging past. There is no effort in *Kitab At-Tawhid* to trace the historical context of the cited verses or to

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7.   The four major schools of Sunni Islam are based on the teachings and juridical opinions of four Imams: Abu Hanifa, Ibn Sha'fi, Ibn Ma'lik, and Ibn Hanbal. The Wahabis belong to the Hanbali school of interpretation. In the India of Iqbal's time, Sunni Muslims were divided by their following of a particular school, and almost all the groups believed that the door to *Ijtihad* (see note below) had been closed after the early juridical work of the four Imams. The Shia follow the teachings of Imam Ja'far Sadiq.

8.   *Ijtihad* is the technical Arabic term for questions of interpretation in Islam. Iqbal is suggesting that scholars should reinterpret certain aspects of Muslim faith in the light of new developments. This opens up interpretative possibilities from a *Tajdeedi* (reformative) point of view.

reinterpret them in the light of changing times. The Muslim subject is constantly placed in the realm of the private and completely outside the march of history.

Creation and articulation of the object in *Kitab At-Tawhid*

To understand the impact of *Kitab At-Tawhid* in India, we must first look at the discursive framework within which the book was translated into Urdu and in which it is consumed in India. Its translation into Urdu presupposed and normalised a specific understanding of the Muslim faith—especially the concept of *tawhid* or oneness of God—and popularised this understanding as the most credible interpretation of this core Muslim concept. The act of translation automatically links the translated work to the politics and metaphysics of Abdul-Wahab in his Arabian context and then posits the translation as a normative text within the sectarian context of Indian Islam.

What is the discursive milieu in which *Kitab At-Tawhid* is placed as an authoritative text? Obviously, here I am drawing on Michel Foucault's specific theorisation of discourse. In *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault suggests the following about the construction of objects of a discourse:

> When one describes the formation of the objects of a discourse, one tries to locate the relations that characterize a discursive practice, one determines neither a lexical organization, nor the scansions of a lexical field. ... I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. (Foucault 1972: 48–49)

Thus *Kitab At-Tawhid* deals with the creation and articulation of its object—a true Muslim—and within its discursive framework it privileges a certain discourse of Muslimhood, while also enunciating the specific attributes that the objects of this particular discourse of Muslimhood must possess in order to be its true objects. The text, then, is firmly placed within the internal structures of power of the discourse itself that accords certain authorities and certain sites the power to pronounce a certain kind of Muslimhood as normative. The speaking subject of such a discourse is also created within the discourse. Foucault describes this as follows:

> First question: who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language (*langage*)? Who is qualified to do so? .... What is the status of the individuals who—alone—have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? (Foucault 1972: 50)

Foucault is obviously suggesting that within a discursive field certain individuals exercise—through knowledge and institutional prestige—the power to declare others as the objects of a particular discourse.

This is the function that translations of Abdul-Wahab's text have served within the discursive framework of Indian Muslimhood since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such a discourse, I suggest, fixes the idea of Muslimhood and creates it as an object of its own power and then also creates its absolute other. Hence the authority of Wahabi discourse introduces an element of absolute otherness within the larger discursive field of Islam. In such a discourse, those who are found deviant need spiritual instruction. If they fail to respond, they become a threat to the corporate Muslim body and deserve forced elimination.

This text, then, constitutes a simple and easy-to-read book that instructs its readers, at all times, about their state of Muslimness only in relation to their actions as juxtaposed with the idea of the absolute oneness of God. Such a framework excludes those who might not have the same view of Muslimhood, and it also absolves the individual of any collective responsibility toward social change or social good. What is also instructive about the nature of the object that this creates—i.e., the good Muslim—is that the objects themselves eventually become the speaking subjects: a simple way of defining good Muslimhood also equips those so designated with the knowledge and power to pronounce other Muslims as deviant. Hence the first impact of Abdul-Wahab's teaching is to cause an interiorisation of Islam, which is followed by the imposition of this particular interiority onto the bodies of other Muslims who might not fit such a literalist and purist interpretation of Muslimhood.

The translation and its historical baggage

The Urdu translation of *Kitab At-Tawhid* carries the historical value attached to the original in its Arabian context. Nineteenth-century Indian Islam had already been heavily influenced by the main currents of Islam from Hijaz. Hijaz also exercises both a material and symbolic influence—i.e., as the place of two of the holiest Muslim sites, the Kaba and the Prophet's mosque, and as the temporal marker of early Islam. Its symbolic power is further accentuated by the political influence of Wahabi Islam. According to Abukhalil (2004: 64–65), the Wahab–Ibn Saud alliance was so bent on eliminating what were perceived as deviant practices that

during their campaign in Medina they destroyed the "gravestones and tombs of close companions and wives of the prophet", and in Karbala in 1801 they ransacked the tomb of Imam Hussain, the Prophet's grandson. These acts were underwritten by a strict interpretation of the concept of *tawhid*, according to which any deference paid to those other than God is considered a sacrilege. Yet such a focus on *tawhid* robs Islam of its complexity, for Islam also forbids the desecration of graves and places of worship. The Wahabis were able to rationalise their actions because of their atomistic approach to the Qur'an, reading and applying verses abstracted from their larger context. In Rahman's view, due to this atomistic approach "laws were often derived from verses that were not at all legal in intent" (Rahman 1982: 3).

The Urdu translation, then, conveys not just the militancy of Wahabi Islam but also this atomistic view of the Qur'an and its selective application. For example, chapter thirty-eight of the Urdu translation explains the proscription against desiring wordly goods or riches. The chapter starts with a citation from the Qur'an that translates as follows: "And Allah says whosoever seeks only the worldly life, we give them the world, but these are the people for whom there will be nothing but fire on the day of judgement" (Abdul-Wahab 1750/1992: 146). Certainly, there is room in Islam to seek the world and God at the same time. In fact, the Qur'an highly valorises the acts of giving and charity, so anyone who does possess worldly riches can still gain God's favour through charitable works. Like the Arab followers of the original text, however, the Indian adherents of the translated work use the teachings to deal with the multiplicity of Islamic sects, and their approach to the questions of faith leaves no room for any broad interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, instead labelling all acts of "seeking the world' as reprehensible.

Much of Abdul-Wahab's purist and literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah was directed against socio-cultural practices that had converted Arabian Islam into a practice centred around the cultish following of Sufi saints and their tombs and shrines. This is precisely the state of cultural Islam that Abdul-Wahab and his followers challenged on the plane of *tawhid*, the absolute oneness of God. And it is the cleansing and purist drive of this message that the translation brought to its Indian context. Indian Islam has historically been quite peculiar: various strands of Islam had co-existed in peace in India until the introduction of the Wahabi doctrine. The nineteenth-century reform movements altered that peaceful mode and pitted various schools of interpretation against each other. The impulse to reform can be traced to one major event: the rebellion of 1857. According to Schimmel (2003: 189), "The abortive military rebellion of 1857 was the turning point in the history of the Indian Muslims. …. The problems of how to react to this shock, and that meant, more generally, to the British supremacy, evoked various answers among Muslims". A return to Islamic teachings was one such thrust on the

part of the reform movements. In the case of Wahabis, this return involved a two-layered practice that invoked a specific temporality and spatiality. The movement placed its emphasis on replicating, as far as humanly possible, the Islam of the Prophet's time, and spatially this time was inextricably linked with the symbolic significance of the Hijaz, the place where the first Muslim city-state was created during the Prophet's life.

In this process of cultural signification the Urdu translation of *Kitab At-Tawhid* took on a mythic value. It has a literal message, but that literal message also becomes a myth in itself for a certain absolutist and literalist view of what constitutes the state of being a Muslim. Here it will be apt to draw on Roland Barthes' discussion of myth and the process of signification. Barthes suggests that "everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse" (Barthes 1972: 109). In defining "mythical speech" (Barthes 1972: 115), he emphasises the following point:

> [M]yth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is *a second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. (Barthes 1972: 114)

Within the discursive framework of the Islamic revival in India after the 1857 rebellion, the translation of *Kitab At-Tawhid* becomes mythic, because the mere invocation of the translated text signifies not just the literal explanation of the concept of *tawhid*, but also how this particular interpretation impacts the practices of other Muslims. In turn, this mythic role of the source text makes the translation something more than a mere booklet: it turns it into a manifesto for a particular Islamic method of defining and imposing one's idea of Muslimhood on other Muslims. Just as the writer of the original text was instrumental in 'cleansing' Hijaz of deviant and innovative practices, the followers of the translated text must pursue the same path in India. Through its mythic value, therefore, the translation ceases to be just a text and becomes yet another prop in the process of articulating a particular—Wahabi—view of Islamic faith in India.

In postcolonial Islam, Wahabi philosophy—if it can be called a philosophy—has become the most potent ideology of Islamic radicalism. There are quite a few reasons for the ascendancy of this particular interpretation of Islam, not the least of which is the simplicity of its core text, the *Kitab At-Tawhid*. With its literalist and simplistic approach to the question of faith, the book eliminates complexity and provides an easily comprehensible path to salvation. Another important reason for the popularity of this doctrine is its inextricable connection to the myths of Muslim anti-colonial struggles. Most Muslim heroes—especially in the Indian context—come from this particular group, and therefore, in the Muslim postcolonial imaginary, which is always in search of events and instances of anti-colonial

resistance, Wahabi resistance fighters become icons of the Muslim struggle for freedom. Within postcolonial Islam the most important reason for the success of the Wahabi doctrine is the material and symbolic influence of Saudi Arabia. As one of the richest Muslim countries and one that is deeply steeped in the Wahabi system, Saudi Arabia—seen as a sacred land by the majority of Muslims—also becomes the place to emulate in terms of creating an Islamic system. This situation is further reinforced by the material assistance provided by the Saudis to Wahabi movements all over the Muslim world, of which the Afghan Taliban movement is a prime example. This symbolic and material display of one particular system of Islamic interpretation keeps on replicating itself for the Muslims of the world.

The Urdu translation of *Kitab-At-Tawhid*, then, did not occur in a vacuum, and nor did it stay confined to the actual text. Rather, it has obtained a mythic value of its own and become a powerful tool of political transformation within the discursive framework in which it has been produced and consumed in India.

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