

**E-DA'WA: RELIGION IN THE PERIOD OF
INTERNET IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the material in this dissertation entitle “E-Da’wa: Religion in the Period of Internet in Saudi Arabia” submitted by me is original work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.


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TO

MY GRAND FATHER

ACKNOLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia occupies about the four fifths of Arabian Peninsula. About 85 percentage of the population are Sunni Muslims and most of the indigenous inhabitants belong to the strictly orthodox Wahhabi sect. About 15 percentage of the population are Shia Muslims, principally in the east of the country. Islam, being the socio-cultural fabric of the peninsula, has witnessed many political assertions right from the period of Prophet Muhammed. Here my attempt is to analyze the various Da'wa activities in the home land of Islam in the period of internet.

Saudi Arabia has allowed mass media to enter in to the social and cultural terrain. It has been transformed much by the interplay between technology and culture. The subject of concern in many of the literary texts in Saudi Arabia is the encounter between the indigenous culture and the world of technology. Saudi Arabia is a specific case that has at once accepted, resisted and been overwhelmed by the modern technology. Probably because of the inability to continue research in Saudi, scholars had played little attention to explore the specific nature of the interplay.

Media regimes are in a spontaneous process of redefining the public and private sphere. It is an excellent area to analyze the interplay. Saudi Arabia has been a victim and beneficiary of this interplay. The role of internet in the global scene and its impact on Islam in the previous decade has been characterized as the latest episode in the interplay.

From the first quarter of 20th century, drastic changes are visible in Saudi society. Despite the various voices of protest, the press, radio, television and fax have been introduced all over the Kingdom. Then, came internet, a global provider of information. Many scholars use the term 'cyberspace' to address the internet

landscape. It is estimated that there are more than thousand websites designed for Da'wa. Electronic Da'wa (E-Da'wa) means the propagation of Islam through cyberspace.

The Wahhabi movement, dedicated to the reform of Islam, was launched in Najd in 18th century. A call to the early Islam rejecting philosophy scholasticism, arts, Sufistic ideas and scientific innovations was the greatest revival in the peninsula. Muhammed Ibn Saud, Emir of Najd, gave military support to the revivalist call in 1744 AD. The greatest alliance has been working till today. In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism has been giving a religious legitimacy to Saudi regime. Despite the alliance with Western countries and the introduction of technology, Al Sauds have never compromised on the Wahhabi Revival of Islam.

Even after the disintegration of the regime twice, a member of the deposed Saudi family managed to defeat the Rashidi dynasty in 1902. The member was nobody other than Ibn Saud, the founder of modern Saudi Arabia. Having defeated Turkish attempt many times, he consolidated his position in the peninsula. In 1916, Hashemite dynasty proclaimed their sovereignty over Mecca with the British support. Between 1919 and 1925 Ibn Saud successfully campaigned against the rulers of the four Arab states (Hijaz, Asir, Hayil and Jauf).

Ibn Saud, who remained in power until his death in November 1953, had initiated the modernization of Saudi Arabia. Though the king is the supreme religious leader as well as the head of state, he governs by royal decree. Saudi Arabia has historically allied with United States and other Western countries. Debates on the confrontation with Western and Wahhabi values started from 1932, when King Ibn Saud set up his private radio station.

The introduction of modern technology and media had been part of the struggle to centralize its traditional, tribal and decentralized society under its ideological hegemony. Upto King Fahd, the regimes have imposed strict censorship on the role of media in society since the voice of Ulama was not in the favour of the media regimes. However, media created a space both in private and public spheres, where constant counter discourses in Islamic vocabulary have been emerging. The spread of education and the economic crisis in the Kingdom have contributed to the generation of counter discourses. The regime set itself to have full hold on Islamic world and silence the dissidents. When regimes seal on the press, radio and satellite channel have been deliberately increased, internet came as a way out. It is in these contexts that Saudi opposition like CDLR and MIRA initiated web based propagation of Islamic ideas. It became a necessity for the regime to make experiments with the new weapon: internet.

Now the ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wa and Guidance exercises its superiority on Da'wa activities across the Muslim world. Apart from maintaining web pages of its own, it financially supports the countries and organizations which are in favour of Saudi version of Islam.

Having aimed at total Islamization of both public and private spheres, innumerable websites are being operated, some of them based in Saudi Arabia. Diaspora communities are also playing a key role in the electronic propagation of Islam. Numbers of Da'wa sites have their base in USA, UK and other Western countries. But, majority of them keep a connection with the dominant Wahhabi doctrine of the Kingdom.

Another tendency which is to be noted here is that there are individual efforts in propagating Islam throughout the world. They are either extra Ummatic or intra

Ummatic in nature. With the emergence of internet as the principal means for Islamic propagation, the nature of Islam has undergone drastic changes from within.

A significant development in the previous decade was the proliferation of interpretations on Islamic values. It is to make Islam compatible with the socio-political discourses on freedom and rights. Different sites try to represent the correct Islamic beliefs and clarify the Islamic point of view on the different intellectual issues. Diaspora communities take advantages from the web based Islamic propagation. Besides, any believer or non-believer can get access to these websites. Secondly, cyber Islamic environments prioritize the role of women in society. Most of the argumentation on the issue is fore grounded in the Qur'an and the teaching of Prophet Muhammad. Undoubtedly, a new Islamo – liberal front is emerging as a result of the proximity Islam established with western culture.

My work is done in five chapters, including a small introduction and conclusion. In the second chapter, I have traced the history of Saudi Arabia briefly. My emphasis is to bring out the consolidation of the regime and its unquestionable role in propagating Wahhabi doctrines. The introduction of media and interplay between tradition and modernity is also briefly discussed here.

In the third chapter, my attempt is to cover the Saudi based electronic propagation of Islam (E-Da'wa). Different versions of Islamic Da'wa have been discussed. Here, I am trying to focus on Sunni and Shia Websites, Government initiatives for Da'wa activities and the emerging cyber resistance through internet.

The fourth chapter is an attempt to summarize some of the significant socio-political impact of internet and electronic propagation in Saudi society. A small conclusion is given in the end.

CHAPTER-II

A SHORT HISTORY OF ISLAM IN SAUDI ARABIA

A PROLOGUE TO SAUDI ARABIA

Mass media and technology are a little over a century old in the Arab Middle East. Within a generation the first newspapers in Egypt in the 1880s, there had been proliferation of vernacular press from Morocco to Afghanistan. Arab mass media are spread across eighteen Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, The United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, and Sudan. From Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, these countries have a total population of nearly 300million people. Most of them, even though they are living in a environment of rapid economic and political change, share a single culture, language and religion. There is no doubt that mass media and technology enter social life and alter the balance of values and practices. Media regimes constantly redefine the public sphere and problematize the way of understanding.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia comprises about four fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia occupies 2,250,000 sq. km and is bounded on the north by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, on the east by the gulf, Bahrain, Qatar and UAE, on the south by the Sultanate of Oman and Yemen and on the west by the Red sea.

Saudi Arabia owes its origin to the 18th century reform movement, popularly known as the Arabian Revolution. During this time, Arabia was an agglomeration of petty emirates. Ottoman Sultan exercised nominal sovereignty over these principalities. Having lost their contact with the masses, the Ottomans were heading towards the decay and downfall. It was during this period Ibn Abd al-Wahhab of Najd struggled in the face of great opposition for the salvation of people of Arabia from

social backwardness and moral degeneration. His basic aim was to reconstruct the Muslim society on the foundation of the theory of *Al-Tawhid*.

The great alliance between Mohammed ibn-Saud and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in 1744 AD marked the real birth of Arabian reformation. The sole aim of the alliance was to revive the true spirit of Quran, revealed to Prophet Mohammed.

Before the birth of Islam there was no political unity in the Arabian Peninsula. The nomadic tribes of the region subscribed to a primitive religion of naturalism. They worshipped the sun and the moon. It is believed to be the age of ignorance (Asrul Jahiliyya), in which moral rectitude and the spiritual urge had long been forgotten. J.J Saunders comments "The primitive religion of the desert was restricted to worship of trees and streams and stones in which the deity was supposed to reside nomads had naturally no temples or priesthoods, they usually carried their gods with them in a tent or tabernacles, and consulted them by casting lots with arrows, while their *Kahins* (high priests) or soothsayers delivered oracles in short rhymed sentences."¹ The tenets of religious codes and divine revelations, which the Prophets had brought to every nation and tribe, had been replaced by superstitious rites and dogmas. Among the followers of the religion of Abraham, there existed a disharmony between ideals and practices. But, majority of the Arabs were idolaters. They did not however recognise idols as God but only as intermediaries to God

As the trade routes of the Arabian Peninsula grew in importance in the 4th century AD, towns developed especially along the west and the east coast. Mecca was one among the newly emerged townships. It was comprised by a number of tribal groups of which the most important was the Quraysh tribe.

¹ J. J, Saunders., *A History of Medieval Islam*, P. 25.

Muhammad was born in Mecca in the recently impoverished family of the tribe of Quraysh in 1570 AD. It was at a time when the city was establishing itself as a trading centre. For the residents of Mecca, tribal connection was still the most important part of the tribal structure. By the time of Mohammed, Quraysh had become the leading tribe in the city because they have been guardians of the sacred well of the *Zam Zam* in Mecca. They engaged in commerce and established alliances all over the Peninsula as the active traders.

At the age of forty, 610 AD, Mohammed received the call from God, his first revelation. The content of the revelation was the vision of a great, just God, Allah, who would on the Day of Judgment weigh every man's works. The early revelations emphasized Oneness of God and opposed the idol worship. When Islam was now proclaimed to the world, a small group of people accepted it first; among them were Khadeeja, Ali, Abubakar and others.

After three years of the revelation, the Prophet began to preach Islam openly. The Quraysh were increasingly hostile to Prophet and his followers. They had good reason. The idols of Mecca which symbolized ignorance had become the focus of the Prophet's preaching. The revelation was an implicit challenge to all the existing institutions of the society-worship of gods, the economic life attached to their shrines, the values of tribal tradition, the authority of the chiefs and the solidarity of the clans from which Muhammad wished to draw his followers. Religion, moral belief, social structure, and economic life formed a system of ideas and institutions inextricably bound up with one another. To attack them at any major point was to attack the whole society.² So they called him a liar, a soothsayer, a magician or a mad man. Some of the early Muslims were beaten up and tortured.

² Ira, M, Lapidus., *A history of Islamic societies*, P. 25 .

Despite the opposition, Muhammed started His divine mission to rescue people from ignorance and guide them on the path to righteousness. Infact, Muhammad included Christians, Jews and pagans in his mission.

Muhammad survived in Mecca with the protection of his uncle Abu Talib and his clansmen of *Banu Hashim*. With their support, Muhammad could continue his preaching. In 619 AD, Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib and his wife Khadeeja were dead.

However, Muhammad felt obliged to leave Mecca in 622 AD. He secretly left the city and travelled 322 kilometres north to the town of *Yethrib* or Medina. It is called *Hijra* which means 'migration'. Even today the Muslim system of dating years starts with the Prophet's journey. 622 AD is the first years of the Muslim calendar.

The Hijra to Medina was a turning point in the life of Muhammad. In Medina, Prophet was a dominant personality and his companions, who had migrated from Mecca along with him (*Muhajirun*), were a respected community. They worked to create a community based on shared religious belief, ceremonies, ethics and laws. Muslims of Medina (*Ansar*) were part of the new community. Marshall G.S. Hodgson comments "to Muhammad, the move to Medina was not merely an escape from an untenable immediate position in Mecca. It was an opportunity to build a new order of social life, such as the development of his faith had more and more obviously demanded. The cult of Allah as creator demanded, in the first instance, a personal devotion to moral purity, but personal purity implied a just social behaviour: generosity to the weak and curbing the licence of the strong. Moreover, it was fully recognised that a person's moral life is usually less a function of his good resolutions than of the level of actual expectations around him. It must be society and not just individuals that should be reformed. The Qur'an makes it sufficiently clear that the new way is for everyone, not just for moral heroes, by praising almost as much those

who urge others to a virtue as those who practice it themselves. The new life must be lived by a society at large.”³

During the early period in Medina, the Prophet established a brotherhood between the immigrants and the helpers. The community life of Muslims was organized, prayers were instituted and alms tax and fasting were prescribed. Legal punishment was fixed and the lawful and the unlawful were defined.

However, the Quraysh were reluctant to leave Mohammed in *Yathrib*. Small raids, retaliations and fierce wars occurred both at Medina and various places in Hijaz, which ended up in Mohammed conquering Mecca.

The fall of the holy city to the Muslims was the triumph of Islam against the paganism. Apart from propagation against paganism, Prophet ordered the demolition of all idols and his followers obeyed him. He pardoned Quraysh, who had declared war on the messenger and opposed him. When Mecca was occupied, the Arabs knew they could not fight the messenger. Ultimately they all embraced Islam.

Mohammed died on 6 June 632 AD. He is the person who has been remembered all over the world in every time. The entire Arabian Peninsula was united under his religious state with Medina as the capital. The Prophet had no spiritual successors except four Caliphs, who possessed temporal political authority. Caliphs ruled the Islamic world until 1258 AD, when the last Caliphs and all heirs were killed by the Mongols. For the first thirty years, Caliphs managed to spread the influence of Islam from *Yathrib*. Within a short time, the caliphs had built a large empire. With the end of this apostasy wars, the Arab tribes united behind Islam and channelized their energies against the Roman and Persian empires. They entered tentatively in to

³Marshall, G. S, Hodgson., *The Venture Of Islam: Conscience And History In A World Civilization*, Volume: I, *The Classical Age Of Islam*, P. 172.

southern Palestine, a step that quickly led to the fall of Palestine, Syria and Egypt and the eventual conquest of territories from Spain to the borders of China. Most of these great events took place far from the holy cities of Hijaz. However, Mecca obviously remained a sacred place and Medina retained its position as the capital city of the new Islamic state down to the time of the fourth caliph Ali (656-661 AD). Later, the capital city was shifted to Kufa and Muawiya (661-680AD) moved his family seat to Damascus in Syria.

The Umayyads were overthrown in 750 AD by the Abbasids, who ruled from Baghdad. By the later part of the 7th century the political importance of Arabia in the Islamic world had declined. The Muslims under the two dynasties imparted depth and variety to the Arab culture born and bred in the Arabian Peninsula. Gradually darkness, ignorance, dissension and anarchy grew in the peninsula. Although Kufa, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, Qairawan and many other places became the cultural centres and there developed many branches of knowledge like science, literature, speculation and philosophy, language and philosophy etc, the Arabic and Islamic culture began to grow thin and pale in Arabia.

From the middle of 9th century AD, tribal autonomy rather than national unity was the general practice in desert politics. The tribes were perpetually in feud with each other. Apart from tribal wars, there were frequent wars of succession within the tribes.

Partial decline of the Abbasid caliphate at the end of the 9th century AD changed the political fortune of the whole Arabia in tune with the rise of the empires in Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Persia. In 1174, Emperor Saladin, uniting Egypt and Syria, asserted his authority over Arabia in a vague manner. He brought Hijaz under the control of Cairo. Having subjugated some of the tribes, he re-established Sunnism which opposed the Shia creed. Saladin and his descendants (Ayyubids) ruled till the

middle of 13th century. Since then peninsula witnessed the return of tribal rule. Occasionally, the Sheriffs of Mecca and Hijaz marched to central Arabia, but never succeeded in maintaining their authority over the tribes permanently. Sultan Salim, the Ottoman Emperor, tried to take over Arabia in 1517. But Ottoman control never became effective till his successor Suleiman, who managed it by a mixture of force and diplomacy. The Ottoman Sultans were regarded by the tribes more as the caliphs of Islam than as their rulers. So far as the internal conditions of the deserts were concerned, nothing changed radically. Even though Turkish suzerainty was normally acknowledged, Turkish sovereignty remained in abeyance. The Turks were quite content with the irregular relation they established with the Arabs of inaccessible desert. Not under the reign of Abdhul Hamid II did the Turks attempt to bring the Arab of Hijaz and the Red Sea coast under their administrative system. The Bedouins of the interior remained beyond the reach of Turks.⁴

After one thousand years of political wildness and anarchy Arabia was on the threshold of a revitalising change when Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab appeared on the scene. He was the follower of Ibn-Hanbal, founder of the orthodox school of jurisprudence. *Wahhabism* carried forward the spirit of Ibn-Taymiyya (1263-1328), who defended Islam from the ideas and practices of Sufism.

The call of Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is generally known as Wahhabism and its preachers and adherents as Wahhabis. The names were attributed during the early wars the Wahhabis waged in the 18th century. The people of Najd, who were the proponents of this call, do not call the name Wahhabism. In a speech delivered at the royal palace in Mecca on 11th may 1929, the King Abdul Aziz al-Saud said "They call us 'wahhabis' and they call our creed a 'Wahhabi' one as if it were a special one.....and this is externally erroneous allegation that has arisen from the false propaganda launched by those who had ill feelings as well as ill intentions towards the movement. We are not proclaiming a new creed or a new dogma. Muhammad Ibn Abd

⁴ Nikshoy, C, Chatterji., *Muddle of the Middle East*, Vol:1, P. 45.

al-Wahhab did not come with anything new. Our creed is the creed of those good people who preceded us and which came in the book of God (the Qur'an) as well as that of his messenger (the Prophet Muhammad, prayer and peace be upon him).....this is the creed which Sheikh al-Islam Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is calling for, and it is our creed. It is a creed built on the oneness of the almighty god, totally for his sake, and it is divorced from any ills or false innovation. The Unitarian creed is the creed or dogma which we are calling for, and it is the one which will save us from calamity and catastrophe.”⁵ Wahhabism does not constitute any new school of jurisprudence. It does not forbid its followers from following any established school.

Undoubtedly, the expansion of the Saudi Kingdom was based on the militancy and fundamentalism of Wahhabism. It meant a return to the early Islam, rejecting philosophy, scholasticism and its Sufistic ideas and scientific innovations, which did not exist in early Islam. In every sense, Wahhab's teachings and methods gave strong, purifying and invigorating urge to Islamic society, which had been complicated in its intellectual, psychological, cultural and spiritual content through the ages under various compulsions. Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abdullah Ibn Baz comments on the early conditions.

“The people of Najd had lived in a condition that could not be approved by any believer. Polytheism had appear there and spread widely. People worshipped domes, trees, rocks, caves or any persons who claimed to be Auliya (saints) though they might be insane and idiotic.

There were few to rise up for the sake of Allah and support his religion. Same was the situation in Mecca, and Medina and as well as Yemen where building domes on the graves, invoking the saints for their help and other forms of polytheism were

⁵ Fouad, al-Farsy., *Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi equation*, P. 24.

predominant. But in Najd polytheistic beliefs and practices were all the more intense. In Najd people had worshiped different objects ranging from the graves, caves and trees to the obsessed and mad men who were called Saints.

When Sheikh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab saw that polytheism was dominating the people that no one showed any disapproval of it or no one was ready to call the people back to Allah, he decided to labour single and patiently in the field. He knew that nothing could be achieved without Jihad, patience and suffering.”⁶

The Saudi regimes right to rule rests largely on the alliance with the Al-Wahhab family. This symbiosis dates back to the 1744 AD alliance between Muhammed-Ibn-Abd-al-Wahhab and Muhammad-Ibn-Saud, Emir of Najd. It was a merger of military power and religious legitimacy. The foundation of the great alliance had been laid in Diriyyah.

The Saudi family belongs to the Anaza tribe. The Anaza is one of the biggest Arab tribes with many branches and sub branches, which are spread over Najd, Iraq and Syria. The Saudi dynasty was established by Saud-b-Muhammad-h-Muqrin. He was the first to rule over Diriyyah and oasis around it at the beginning. Muhammad-Ibn-Saud, who succeeded his father Saud, gave protection to Muhammad-Ibn-al-Wahhab. This was an important event in the history of Wahhabism and in the career of Saudi dynasty.

When Ibn Abdul Wahhab began his preaching, Najd had in east the Emirate of Al-Ahsa where the Khalids ruled. Iraq was the province of the Ottoman Empire though the rule had been weak. The Sharif of Mecca under the Ottoman suzerainty was ruling in Hijaz.⁷ Abd al-wahhab sent letters addressed to the men of eminence and

⁶ Abd al-Aziz, ibn, Abdullah, ibn, Baz., *www.sunnah.org* .

⁷.Sheikh, Muhammad, Iqbal., *Emergence of Saudi Arabia*, P. 15.

also to the rulers of various principalities. Since his call was universal in character, the movement could not but cross the barriers of the Emirate of Dirriyyah. The Amir of Uyaynah submitted first to his authority. But the ruler of Dahham resisted the expansionist revival. In 1765, the death of Muhammed ibn Saud gave a sudden full stop to first round of wars.

The long reign of Abd al-Aziz (1765-1803A.D), who succeeded Muhammad ibn Saud, was a decisive period for the renaissance of Islam. During his reign Riyadh, Qaseem, Buraid and Al-Ahsa were conquered. Vehement attacks were made on Hijaz and Iraq. In 1776, good relationship existed between the Sauds and sheriffs. Sharif arranged a conference of Ulama in which the teachings and methods of ibn al - Wahhab was admired. Besides, the Sharif allowed the subjects of Saudi state a special permission to perform the Hajj. But the relationship was broken down during the Sharifate of Surur. He enforced a new law that prevented Saudi subjects from performing the duty of Hajj. The Sharif Ghalib also continued the same attitude towards the reform movement of Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Consequently, Saudi army occupied Mecca in 1803. But the sudden demise of Abd al-Aziz gave him an opportunity to regain his control over Mecca.

Abd al-Aziz was succeeded by his son Saud [1803-1814], who is generally called Saud the great. He was the leader of armed forces during his father's tenure. He had studied under Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Having occupied Medina in 1804 AD, Saud turned to Mecca. Ghalib was forced to accept the cause of Wahhabism and the suzerainty of Sauds. The occupation of the holy cities by the Wahhabis and the razing of tombs provoked the Ottoman Empire.⁸ The Sauds were about to replace the sovereign power in the whole of Hijaz. Consequently, the Sultan asked Muhammad Ali to give a befitting punishment to Wahhabies. Muhammad Ali, who was busy with

⁸ ibid P.15

his work in Europe, directed the Pasha of Egypt to advance towards the Hijaz. It became a matter of prestige for the Ottomans to liberate Hijaz from 'the heretics'.⁹

Ghalib convinced Muhammad Ali that he was ready to throw off the yoke of Wahhabism as soon as Ottoman army landed his terrain. In the first war that followed the silent understanding between Ghalib and Egyptians, the Egyptians suffered a bewildering defeat at the hands of the Saudis. But Pasha was not ready to loose. In the following attempt Pasha managed to take the control of Mecca. The army of Ghalib joined the Egyptians after the fall of Medina. When the combined force got Al-Mudaifi captured, the conquest of Mecca by Egyptians became a reality.

Muhammad Ali's plan was to conquer the rest of the Hijaz. Tousun, son of Muhammad made attempts to invade Najd, the stronghold of Wahhabis. The result was a humiliating defeat and a treaty was concluded at Al-Ras. Soon, another expedition was initiated by Pasha on the grounds that Abdullah Al-Saud was not keenly following the terms concluded at Al- Raz. The leader of the expedition was Ibrahim, his son. This time they captured all the strongholds of northern Najd and forced the Saudis to surrender unconditionally. This was dated in 1818 September.

However, Pasha could not consolidate his rule in Arabia leaving the vast territories to be reunited by the dynasty of Al- Saud. Mushari, the first Saudi prince who fought for hegemony could not be successful as his own people betrayed him. The credit goes to Turki ibn Abdullah, the second son of Abdullah bin Saud [1819-33] for revitalizing the dead corpse of Saudi state. His son, Faisal ibn Turki was a good diplomat and a source of inspiration for the revival. Having created a religious urge, Faisal continued his effort to rejuvenate the foundations of state and *Wahhabism*. He ruled two times [1834-1838, 1843- 1865], with an interval, during which Khalid ibn Saud [1838-1841] and Abdullah ibn Thanyon [1841-1843] ruled.

⁹ ibid P.22

Khalid challenged the supremacy of Faisal in 1836 AD with the support of Egyptians. People were against the military backed regime of Khalid. Abdullah ibn Rasheed of Shammer, who forced Khalid to take refuge in the Hijaz, gave the charges of his territories back to Faisal. Faisal took strong measures against the rebellious chiefs on the eastern coasts. Besides, he asked the rulers of Bahrain to pay the tribute. He could establish relationship with Britain. However, he was proved to be a failure to stop the disputes between his sons, Abdullah and Saud. It was these disputes that ultimately resulted in the disintegration of Saudi Kingdom for the second time.¹⁰

Faisal was succeeded by his son Abdullah. His other son Saud captured Riyadh and ruled it till 1875 AD. After his death, Abdullah could resume another tenure. As a result of Saud-Abdullah conflict, Ottomans occupied the rich province of Ahsa. When Abdullah died in 1889, the capital of Riyadh was left under the control of Abd Al-Rahman, the third son of Faisal. The Rashids in the north (hail) were growing stronger and had the support of the Ottoman. Ibn Rashid extended his rule up to Kharj and urged Abd al-Rahman to accept the suzerainty of Rashids. Having rejected the offer, Abd al-Rahman preferred to go in to exile in Kuwait. Even though Ibn Rasheed established his supremacy in Najd defeating a strong confederacy in the south led by Zamil al-Sulaym, he could not wipe out the last vestiges of the Saudi dynasty.

While in Kuwait, Abd al-Rahman was preparing his ground to regain the sovereignty of his country. During this time Kuwait had a commercial and strategic value to the Europeans. Abd al-Rahman's stay in Kuwait imparted to the young Ibn Saud a tremendous power of understanding the complexity of international diplomacy.

It was with the assistance of Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait Ibn-Saud initiated efforts to build up an empire out of the shattered fragments of his ancestral domains.

¹⁰ M.A. Saleem Khan., *Evolution of Arabia: A socio-political interpretation*, P. 71

At the same time, the revival of true Islam was his true mission. Taking advantages from the civil war in Najd, Ibn-Saud launched a frontal attack on Riyadh. Rashids were forced to surrender in 1902. The factor of religion played a vital role in facilitating his occupation and consolidation in the ancestral town. Realising that his position is still unstable, Ibn-Saud captured Qasim, even though Ottoman employed Sami Pasha of Medina to annex Qasim. After this important success, Ibn-Saud ensured the complete hegemony of the Saudis over central Arabia. Ottoman Empire was in complete trouble whether it was the case of Yemen, Syria or Bahrain.

From 1907 to 1911, Ibn-Saud was heavily engaged in fighting the insurgents throughout the Peninsula. However, the termination of Ottoman rule in Ahsa in 1913 and the emergence of Ibn-Saud as a statesman impressed the minds of insurgent tribes. The conquest of Hijaz with its two holy cities of Mecca and Medina gave Saudi Arabia a prestige unparalleled in the Islamic world.¹¹ The conquest of Hijaz also gave Saudi Arabia an opening in the Red Sea.

Ikhawanism of Ibn-Saud was a religious-cum-economic movement with underlying military, political and material aims. Reviving the reform programme of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Ibn-Saud added a scheme of founding settlements for his nomad population. He wanted a reliable military force, which combined the quality of town dwellers with the mobility of Bedouin. However, the most important reason was to stop raids and prevailing anarchy and to give the tribes discipline and steadfastness. He was expecting a change in the material conditions of the tribal areas where revolts were repeated.

Undoubtedly, the organisation of *Ikhawan* was the first step to modernise Arabia and to found Arabian state on the basic pillars of Islam. No one can underestimate the role of *Ikhawan* in rebuilding the Saudi state and culture. Ibn-Saud

¹¹ Ibid., P.82.

believed that this was the best way of bringing internal harmony and breaking a way from individuality of clans.

At the end of World War I, there were five principal states in Arabia, namely, Hijaz, Najd, Yemen, and Shammar. While Ibn-Saud had already been holding an independent position, the legal and international status of other principal states was upheld by Great Britain through the Treaty of Sevres (August 10, 1920). According to Arnold Toynbee, "one of the effects of war of 1914 -18 was to eliminate the Turks from Arabia and to extend the fear of influence of the British over the whole Peninsula."

Toynbee puts it "the principal specific effects of the war were to enhance the political power of the rulers, through whose hands the foreign gold and arms were dispensed to the tribesmen; to increase the tribesmen's military experience and efficiency at a low relative cost in devastation and casualties; and to stimulate their minds and implant in them a restless appetite for fresh advantages by bringing them in to sudden contact with the great world which had hitherto lain beyond their horizon."¹²

Great Britain tried her level best to keep her dominance without being part of territorial dispute in the territory. Dispute over Taraba and Khurma was a crucial one. King Hussain unilaterally declared his suzerainty over the tribes of Atayaba and the oases of Khurma and Taraba. The townships of Khurma and Taraba were the centres of commercial exchange between Najd and Hijaz. Ibn-Saud believed that he was entitled to the disputed areas on the grounds of religious ideology and history. The inhabitants of the oases had already accepted the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

Regarding the specificity of the new dispute, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal quotes Philby "Khurma itself was the locality of little importance economically and

¹² Arnold. J Toynbee., *Survey of international affairs*, 1920-38.

politically, though it occupied a strategic position as the backdoor of Najd. Its real significance was a symbol of the struggle for Arabian hegemony.”¹³ Khalid ibn-Luway defeated the Sherifian conspiracy to occupy Khurma by force. Again, at Taraba, Sharifs got a devastating defeat from Khalid. Ibn-Saud assumed the title of Sultan of Najd and its dependencies as per the recommendation of the Ulama and the *Ikhawan* commanders. Thereafter, Ibn-Saud began his operation against Shammar on the grounds that Ibn-Rashid, the ruler of Shammar rejected his proposal for accepting his suzerainty.

The conquest of Shammar was completed by May 1921. Subsequently, Ibn Saud turned to the strategic areas of Wadi Sirhan. Jawf, Khaybar and Tayma became parts of Saudi state. At this stage, the British saw the desirability of calling the conference of Uqayr and Kuwait.

The *Ikhawan* revolt in 1928-30 was very important as far as the new politics of Ibn-Saud was concerned. When Ibn Saud concluded certain pacts with the Great Briton, by which he would no longer attack neighbouring territories, the *Ikhawans* were the most disappointed. They protested against Ibn-Saud’s association with foreigners. They blamed him for his neglect of religious duties. Without the orders of Ibn-Saud, *Ikhawan* began to attack the areas of Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan in the guise of religious propagation. The divide was widening within Ibn-Saud’s policy of modernisation and administrative reforms.

It is generally believed that *Ikhawan* soldiers were at home after the conquest of Hijaz. They could not tolerate the leniency adopted by Saud in Hijaz. Dikson puts it in a different way. He argues that *Ikhawan* opposed Ibn-Saud’s modernity and policies because it would help him establish a strong central authority and thereby destroy the tribal individuality.¹⁴ However, the revolt was quelled by March 30, 1929 at Sibila.

¹³ Shaikh, Muhammad, Iqbal., *Emergence of Saudi Arabia*, P.96.

¹⁴ *ibid* p.97

After signing the alliance of Taifa in 1934, Ibn-Saud had fully concentrated on administrative and material aspects of the state. Adhering to the cautious policy of modernising, he imported the latest scientific technology to adopt judicious and responsible administrative machinery. The discovery of oil in 1938 came to the rescue of Ibn-Saud as it put Saudi Arabia firmly on the road to progress and development.

Ibn-Saud had been successful in settling his differences with King Faizal of Iraq. He tried to be in good terms with the Syria and Lebanon represented by the French government. He reached an understanding with Yemen too. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal quotes George Antonius "But still important from the Arab point of view is the chain of pacts and treaties, which now bind the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to its neighbours in Yemen, Iraq and Egypt. Their conclusions did far more than put an end to contentions and strife. It opened up channels, which had hitherto been blocked for cultural and economic interpenetration and free play of the forces, which were slowly shaping the Arab future."¹⁵

The modernisation of the Saudi state had been given tremendous momentum by the discovery of oil. The history of oil in the Middle East dates back to many centuries. A mission of German experts in 1871 reported that huge deposits of oil reserves were there in Iraq. In 1908, oil was found in enormous quantity in Iran. In 1932, petroleum was discovered in Bahrain.

MODERNIZATION, MEDIA AND ISLAM

In 1923, the King Ibn-Saud gave the first concession to Frank Holmes, a New Zealander to explore oil and other minerals in more than 30000 square miles in the eastern region. As he was facing a substantial fall in revenue, Ibn-Saud invited Charles

¹⁵ ibid 238

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R. Crone to assess water, mineral and oil reserves in 1930.¹⁶ Standard Oil Company of California was increasingly interested in the oil potential of Saudi mainland. In 1944, the company was renamed as Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). In 1973, Saudi took 25% stake in ARAMCO. In 1974, this was increased to 60%. It was amicably agreed in 1980 that ARAMCO should become 100% state owned.¹⁷

The conflict between western values traditional Wahhabi values dominate the scene of modernisation of Saudi Arabia from the very beginning till today. In 1932, when King Ibn-Saud set up his own private Radio network in the Kingdom, Ulama resisted the move. Later, King won the debate on the grounds that anything that transmits the word of Allah could not be against the Islamic faith. Even though he battle was won, the public had no access to the new media since it was largely installed for communication between palaces. It was only in 1949 a public broadcasting system was started. In order to please the Ulama, the regime maintained its strict control over the broadcasting service.

This was followed three years later by a station in the Holy City of Mecca. These two stations broadcast recitation from the Holy Qur'an, the saying of the Prophet, news and cultural programmes and some music. However, broadcasting was restricted to fourteen hours a week. From these relatively modest beginnings, the Saudi Radio Broadcasting service started from Riyadh in 1964. Consequently, the call of Islam station in Mecca too began transmission.

The Kingdom employed radio to strengthen Islam within and outside Saudi Arabia in 1973. The Kingdom began short wave and high frequently broadcasting in Bengali, English, French, Indonesian, Persian, Somali, Turkish, and Urdu.

¹⁶*Saudi Arabia Review*, Issue-1, September 23, 2004

¹⁷ *ibid*



Radio broadcast from the various stations were unified into the General Service. The programming policy governing the General Service is based on the following principles.

- The essential emphasis must be on religious, social and cultural programmes. Particular attention should be given to news and political programmes.
- Outstanding thinkers should be encouraged to give talks on important topics.
- Provision should be made for education programmes for the enlightenment of the listeners.
- There should be special programmes catering for the family, for childcare and the health education.
- Eminent men of letters should be encouraged to write religious, cultural and social dramas for broadcast as serials.¹⁸

Thanks to the influence of voice of Arabs, an Egyptian station with a popular appeal, Saudi regime had to reconsider the restriction on broadcasting. Steps were taken to extend its popularity over the population by the mid- sixties. Apart from relaying regimes on agenda, music and female voice were introduced to retain listeners through out the Kingdom. Twenty hours daily broadcasting was newly scheduled for this.

The same is the case with television also. Television appeared first in the eastern region in 1957. The credit goes to Armco. In early 1960, Saudi regime began to show its interest in the new media. Having found that it would be better weapon to counter the popular appeal of voice of the Arabs in 1964, King Faisal, who succeeded his brother Saud, commissioned the American national broadcasting company to construct a national television network. He tried to convince Ulama that the new

¹⁸ Fouadal-Farsy., *Modernity and tradition: the Saudi Equation*, pp, 23-24.

media will be under complete state control. Above all, Ulama also had to accept a fact that popular appeal the neighbouring states exert on Saudi minds through their media horses is alarming. As a result, the first test television transmission in the Kingdom occurred in 1965, from stations in Riyadh and Jeddah. The first untoward incident reported was the attack on Jeddah transmitter station by a mob led by Prince Khalid Ibn Musaid. The prince was killed in the encounter that followed the resistance in 1965 September.

Taking into account the meaning and nature of opposition, the regime put extremely strict rules on television programmes. The list of unaccepted items to Saudi television ranges from scene in which women appear indecently to scene which praises other countries. A ban on advertising was retained till 1986 on religious grounds. Over all public broadcasting, the broadcasting service department of the ministry clearly exercise a monopoly.

Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was the first private Arab satellite channel. It emerged a pioneer in innovative programming in early nineties. The founders of this London based channel are Sheikh Salih Kamal and Sheikh Walid Ibrahim. In order to give a systematic review of the non-Arab, MBC set up offices in America, Russia and India. It had given a wide coverage to 1992 coup in Algeria. MBC's seven part documentary on 'Desert Storm' in 1997 was not at par with the accepted Arab versions prevalent in the Gulf.

In 1994, ART, another private satellite channel was introduced. Sheikh Salih Kamal of MBC sold his share (37.5%) in MBC and joined hands with Saudi prince Al-Wahid to start this channel. Following MBC, Orbit made several partially successful efforts to become an all- news service. Its joint venture with BBC was the result of the decisive efforts. Later, its deal with BBC collapsed. It had to terminate its contract with the BBC after its Arabic language television service gave airtime to the

Saudi resident Muhammad Al-Massari and also showed a programme critical of Saudi Arabia's human rights report. Orbit had to turn completely to programmes for entertainment. Obviously, members of the Al Saud family are behind Orbit, ART and have links with leading pay-TV channels in the region except Al- Jazera.

Since satellite television is a potential political tool, the movement of Islamic reform (MIRA), an offshoot of CDLR in London, has rented slot on satellite and has begun to transmit propaganda programmes that question the legitimacy of the Saudi regime.

However, the Saudi press seems to be loyal to the regime in power from the very beginning of its introduction. There are some exceptional efforts at times. Between 1905 and 1925, the press in Hijaz was critical and outspoken. At that time Hijaz was the control of the Hashemite government of Hussain. After the capture of Mecca by Ibn Saud, the region became more political than before. The Hijazi newspapers, as a result, became pre-occupied with literary concerns.

Al Bilad and Al Medina flourished in the western region in 1930s. The name of the government's official gazette was Umm al-Qura. As the economy was advancing in 50s and 60s, there was proliferation of daily news papers through out the country. Al- Riyadh and Okays started in 60s are conservative in the sense that they vehemently support the government policies whatever it may be.

Al-Watan, which is relatively a new daily supported by Prince Khalid al-Faisal, has been critical of the government policies than before. Some dailies like Al-Medina retains its pan- Islamic out look even after the relaxation on restrictions. It is interesting to note that among eleven dailies now in Saudi Arabia three are in English. The later 1970s and 1980s witnessed the stifling free debates through out the Arab world. Arab governments sought to maintain media monopolies at home and co-opt

the expatriate press as part of their attempt to retain power. The Saudi Arabia was in no way an exception. It sought to suppress media criticism and concluded agreements with other Middle East governments in order to silence the voice of opposition from any corner.

In march1992, the editor of the Saudi daily Arab News Khalid al-Maina was dismissed for offending Cairo by reprinting an interview with the militant Egyptian Muslim leader Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman. Similarly, in December 1984 Ahmad Mahmud, editor of Al-Medina, was asked to leave because he had printed a Reuters report alleging the death of Syrian president Hafis al-Asad.

Saudi regime openly threatened London for telecasting a controversial film 'death of a princess' in 1980. These all incidents show that the media control is not confined within Saudi borders. Over the last two decades, Riyadh's growing power over media outlets in the Middle East, particularly in the print media and satellite television, has been challenged by dissident groups on the grounds of religion.

Meanwhile, Iranian revolution in 1979 had certain impact on Saudi Arabia. Shia community in the eastern region came out to streets in support of the new government in Iran. Saudi government was seriously thinking of new control on mobility and expression. Another incident that contributed to the rethinking was an attempt to topple the ruling family in 1979. Juhaiman al-Utaibi, who was the grandson of an *Ikhawan* warrior, accused the regime of deviating from the straight path of Islam and forcibly took the control of Mecca. After executing the rebels, it became a necessity for the king Faisal to wrap himself in the mantle of Islam. Heavy censorship on media was introduced since then.

It is believed by many that the influence of Ulama has been declining considerably under the rule of King Faisal, who was the predecessor of King Fahd. He

disregarded the traditional Ulama who thought that science and technology had nothing to teach the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia achieved rapid progress in matters of education and health under Faisal. His view on Islam was that the Sharia system was so comprehensive in its scope that could absorb science and technology as well as social ideas of justice, freedom and human development.

The transformation of Wahhabism into Salafi movement is a specific emergence of this time. Salafi movement is extremely political. It was pointed that the Gulf War of 90-91 and the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia were the foremost reasons for the emergence. The character common to all resistance was the opposition to corruption of Al Saud and the stationing of the American troops in Saudi Arabia.

Another feature of the time is that, as Fantasia and Hirsch pointed out, the mosques increasingly became the centre of opposition and ideological debate. The so-called independent scholars dared to challenge the overwhelming power of state institutions. Secret tapes, pamphlets, and circulations elsewhere in streets, schools and mosques empowered people to understand the alternative historic narratives in Islamic vocabulary and reasoning.¹⁹

The decade was characterised by socio-economic crisis and convergence of dissent for the first time. King Fahd received a mass petition demanding political change. This indicates the growing societal disruption. When the official clergy issued fatwas defending the presence of US troops, the independent scholars reacted with fatwas condemning the presence as unIslamic.

The official clergy believe that the ruler is the shadow of God on earth. He cannot be publicly criticized. But for the emerging independent scholars, the ruler is not God's vice regent. The clergy is bound to take risks against injustices. Salafi

¹⁹ Khalid, bin, Sayed., *Western Dominance and Political Islam*, P.83.

movement effectively capitulated the sentiment of people against malpractices in state institutions. They propagandists argued that official clergy was a failure in arguing for ordinary people. Media has been playing a leading role in giving momentum to this opposition. Middle East mirror reported on June 30, 1999 “so rampant has corruption become that ordinary people are as revolted by it as scholars and the reformed”.²⁰

It is believed by many that the influence of Ulama has been declining considerably under the rule of King Faisal, who was the predecessor of King Fahd. He disregarded the traditional Ulama, who thought that science and technology had nothing to teach the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia achieved rapid progress in matters of education and health under Faisal. His view on Islam was that the Sharia system was so comprehensive in its scope that could absorb science and technology as well as social ideas of justice, freedom and human development.

Conservative Islamic thinkers are of the opinion that Qur’an has dealt with every social and scientific question. Some of them are ready to think that the Qura’nic values are flexible to be applied to problems of modern times. Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, former grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, published an essay in two Saudi dailies taking issue with the rotation of the earth around a fixed son.

“.....Hence I say the Holy Quran, the Prophet’s teaching, the majority of Islamic scientist and the actual fact all prove that sun is running in its orbit, as Almighty ordained, and that the earth is fixed and stable, spread out by God for his mankind and made a bed and a cradle for them, fixed dawn firmly by mountain lest it shake.....”²¹

²⁰ *Middle East Mirror*, June 30 1999.

²¹ Khalid, bin, Sayed., *Op ct*, P. 82.

While struggle for getting hegemony over Islamic values continues in the Kingdom, Prince Bandar bin Sultan concludes the role of the regime. “The Holy Quran is our constitution and the Sharia our main body of law. Thus, His majesty Fahd is concerned with not just development- but development for a higher purpose and with ethical and human meaning.....

Our legitimacy is valid so long as we work within Islamic parameters.....

The frequent Western view that material development is dissolving long accumulated, deeper identities is shallow and self-deceiving.”²²

²² Prince Bandar bin Sultan ‘*Saudi Arabia and the Middle East*’, address to the Carter Centre for Emory University, 1983.

CHAPTER-III

ELECTRONIC DA'WA IN SAUDI ARABIA

EXPLAINING DA'WA:

The word Da'wa appears in the Quran, its commentaries, classical Muslim texts and contemporary theological or ideological texts. It simply denotes the various religious activities targeted at both Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims and non-Muslims acknowledge Islam as a missionary religion. Right from the period of Prophet Muhammad, Muslims employed Da'wa as much towards fellow Muslims as to non-Muslims.

The Islamic Da'wa was first practiced as a way of inviting non-Muslims to Islam. It was a non-Jihadic practice in 9th and 10th centuries. But, later, sectarian and violent meaning began to enter in to the terrain of Islamic propagation. The term encompasses more than proselytizing activities. Based on this hypothesis, scholars have made a distinction between extra-Ummatic Da'wa and intra- Ummatic Da'wa.²³ The extra-Ummatic Da'wa addresses non-Muslims while intra-Ummatic Da'wa addresses Muslims only. The second half of the twentieth century was marked by tremendous shift in Muslim missionary activities.

In the last decade, the internet has changed the dimension and scope of the Da'wa activities all over the world. The number of Da'wa sites on the internet is more than one thousand. For non-Muslims, these Da'wa sites provide more information regarding Islam and for fellow Muslims they give advice and proper guidance.

²³ Michael, Cook., *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, P. 515.

Most of the Da'wa sites are being operated from USA, UK and Saudi Arabia. Majority of them use English as medium. Some of them are using French, German, Malay, Indonesian, Arabic, Urdu and other languages. The ultimate aim of these Da'wa sites is to bring about total Islamization of public and private spheres.

Apart from purely religious activities, many Da'wa organizations and individual sites are politically angled. It is a fact that the inseparability between religious sphere and political sphere characterise Islam on Internet, especially in its home land- Saudi Arabia. On the governmental level, a sort of Da'wa is being implemented in various socio-cultural and political projects. The process is known as 'cultural Islamization', which has been pursued by many Muslim states since 1970.

Da'wa as actively addressed towards non-Muslims is the primary Da'wa envisioned by the Qur'an and Sunna. At the same time, the Da'wa towards the fellow Muslim is a post-Qura'nic development. The Da'wa sites operating from Great Britain or America have its roots in Saudi Arabia. They are either extra-Ummatic or intra-Ummatic in nature. It is difficult to distinguish these sites since in almost all sites of Saudi opposition political content dominates religious content.

Exclusivism has been favoured by Da'wa sites though inclusivism is also reversed. The extra-Ummatic Da'wa sites are based on the serious exclusive stand that only Islam offers the correct way of life. Aslan argues that "the reason why a Muslim believes in Islamic exclusivism is that Islam makes such absolute through claims and convinces its adherents to believe that is so."²⁴ In the case of intra-Ummatic Da'wa, this exclusivism continues as a particular Muslim exclusivism set against the exclusivism of other Muslims. Mutually exclusive Muslim exclusivism characterize

²⁴ Adnan, Aslan., *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, p.103.

most of the Saudi based Da'wa sites whether it is run by the government, Saudi opposition abroad, Sunni or Shia Muslims.

Though Da'wa and Jihad are not directly related to each other, they assume a common aim: spread Islam. In the juridico-religious sense, the term Jihad has two broad meanings. The greater Jihad is to overcome one weakness and to become a God fearing Muslim. The lesser Jihad is an external struggle against enemies who stand against Islamic God. There are still debates not only between Muslims and non-Muslims but also among Muslims themselves on the specific nature of Jihad. Islam in the period of internet encompasses still ongoing polemic since it becomes virtually impossible to give a comprehensible definition of Jihad.

Poston advances the idea that Jihad was meant to set the ground for successful Da'wa. "The political conquest was designed to create a milieu, an environment in which the Muslim faith could be planted, tended and harvested."²⁵ Poston's reasoning has been refuted vehemently by the Islamic sites of extremist nature. Mutahhari has made his stand very clear on the issue. "If a barrier hinders the call, such as some power having arisen as an obstacle, denying permission.... then it is permissible to fight against it until it falls and the barrier against the call crumbles."²⁶ This stand is highly political. Jihadi websites appropriate this kind of a political reasoning.

Many Saudi women, who have access to internet, often see Jihad as a part of Da'wa, if it is greater Jihad for further perfection of Islamicity. Recently, a group of Saudi woman protested the launch of a new internet magazine that target woman for Jihad. Hala al-Sasser, a Saudi female journalist said that the internet magazine was giving a twist to the concept of Jihad: "to me Jihad means constant struggle and perseverance with oneself for the cause of peace...."²⁷ The late Saudi grand mufti Ibn

²⁵ Larry, Poston., *Islamic Da'wa in the West*, P.147.

²⁶ Ayatullah, Murtada, Mutahhari., *Jihad in the Qur'an*, P. 111.

²⁷ <http://www.gulfnews.com>.

Baz puts the relation between Da'wa and Jihad in the following words "there are different kinds of Jihad... with oneself, wealth, supplication, teaching, giving guidance or helping others in good in any form. The highest form of Jihad, however, is with ones life; then comes Jihad with ones wealth and Jihad with teaching and guidance, and in this way Da'wa is a form of Jihad, but Jihad with one's life is the highest form."²⁸

Radical Islamic thinker Sayyed Qutb views Jihad as the means of establishing Islamic principles on the earth. Yvonne Haddad comments on Qutb's position. "It is the duty of the Muslims to protect the believers that they do not stray from the religion, permitting the use of force to repel force. 2) Islam must be guaranteed freedom of propagation; otherwise it becomes incumbent on Muslims to eradicate any oppressive powers on the earth, which impede the Da'wa of Islam. 3) Muslims must be able to affirm god's sovereignty on earth and remove those who usurp this sovereignty by legislating laws."²⁹

Similarly, another controversy regarding the Da'wa sites is the eligibility of the individual of group behind them. Muhammad Salih Al- Uthaimin has stated "it is not a condition upon *Daa'ee* (caller) to attain great amount of knowledge of what one is calling to." Ibn Baz also states in his fatwa "it is not a condition that *Daa'ee* has reached a great level of knowledge, but he must be knowledgeable about what he is calling to."³⁰

Ibn Baz favours the dissemination of Islamic principles by means of mass communication "if media such as radio, news papers and television are used for giving Da'wa and for guiding people to Allah and what the Prophet Muhammad has brought, then this is a great thing which can benefit the umma wherever they are, by the

²⁸ <http://www.alharamain.org/English/newsletter/issue4/fatwas4.html> (Fatawa Islamiya, 2002,8:24)

²⁹ Yvonne, Y. Haddad and Sayyid, Qutb.,: *Ideologue of Islamic revival*, P.84.

³⁰ <http://www.alharamain.org/English/newsletter/issue4/fatwas4.htm> (Fatawa Islamiya, 2002, 8:32)

permission of Allah. This can also benefit the non- Muslims in helping them to understand Islam and comprehend it, learn about its merits and know that it is the path of success in this world and in the hereafter.”³¹

ELECRONIC DA’WA IN SAUDI ARABIA.

Information revolution is sweeping a complex global landscape that encompasses a range of technological, economic, social and cultural practices. Information Technology is highly instrumental to transmit trans-national movements in to national context. The new turn is made possible by the conceit of a discrete and uniform digital age.

Saudi Arabia is struggling with the implications of globalization’s main vehicle, the internet. The internet is a global provider of information of varying degrees of quality and utility. Many Islam related sites on the internet represents and influences Muslim and non-Muslim perspective on Islam and Islamic issues. The internet landscape is popularly known as cyberspace. Generally cyberspace cannot be regulated by regimes. Many use the internet to convey their own interpretation of Islam and Da’wa related issues.

Gary R. Bunt, while referring to the new changes in Islamic environment, uses the term computer mediated communication (CMC) and cyber Islamic environments.³² He draws inspiration from media theorist MacLuhan. Many media theorists regard cyber Islamic environments as an important field for future academic research.

³¹ <http://www.islaam.com/Article.asp?id=287>

³² Gary, R. Burmt, *Virtually Islamic*, P. 1.

Traditional structure of authority and power can be reconceptualized within the cyber Islamic environments. New forces of the authority are emerging. Electronic Da'wa represents the rapid shifts and changes in cyber Islamic environments.

Since its founding in 1902, the modern Saudi state has struggled to centralize traditional, tribal and decentralized society under its ideological hegemony. Radical Islamic trends have been challenging the state's monopoly on religion over the years. Modernity in the form of technology added momentum to these challenges. Al-Sauds have been largely successful in their centralizing policies without alienating Ulama. But internet is a new challenge that annihilates space and time while allowing the free flow of information across borders.

SAUDI OPPOSITION ON INTERNET

In 1994, the committee for the defence of legitimate rights (CDLR) started a sophisticated website-www.cdlnet.net. Following a split in the organization in 1996, the movement for Islamic reform in Arabia was founded (MIRA). It inaugurated a new website, (www.miraserve.com, www.islah.org). The basic aim of these websites was to challenge the Saudi regime.

THE COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENCE OF LEGITIMATE RIGHTS (CDLR)

Sa'd al-Faqih, one of the founding members of CDLR says about its objective: "Everything appeared to be in place: charismatic preachers, thousands of enthusiastic followers, and a religious public. What was missing was an effective organization to channelise this energy and pose a serious challenge to the regime." Mohsen al-Awaji, Khalid al-Hmeidh, Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim, Abd al-Wahab al-Tairi, and Sa'd al-Faqih were the first five scholars who formed the basic committee and met in Riyadh to devise a plan to use these forces. In May 1991, after 30 meetings, the group drafted a letter of demands to be sent to the King in the name of the Islamic leaders. The letter was signed by many Saudi Islamists and intellectuals. Prior to it, the liberal forces had submitted a letter to the King demanding codification of the laws. Keeping a

separate identity from the liberal forces, the letter demands tried to seek solution for various issues ranging from corruption in the bureaucracy to the codification of laws to human rights.³³ In September 1992, the group published a 45-page pamphlet known as the Memorandum of Advice. It was deliberately addressed to the Ulama and the King.³⁴ The group used Copying machines and faxes to propagate its ideas all over the Kingdom.

The activities of the Islamists provoked both the regime and the liberals. The government response to the Islamists was harsher. Government forces not only arrested activists as they distributed the letter, the Memorandum, and the cassette tapes, but also raided shops selling tapes. However, the Saudi public's response to the letter and the Memorandum encouraged the group to formally launch the organization known as the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR) on May 3, 1993.

The group knew very well the importance of alternative media such as cassettes, faxes, and later the internet while encountering a powerful regime and attracting more followers to the movement. The first issue of their newsletter, *Huquq* (Rights) clearly emphasizes this awareness.

“Honest and responsible media are a very important alternative to the distorted view given to our people by the official media. This alternative media will be received by a nation thirsty for sincere words and real news. Although we do not have the money that the government media has, our followers will do their best to distribute our message and this message will reach the hearts and minds of millions.”³⁵

³³ Hriar, Dekmejian., “The Rise of Political Islam in Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Journal*, 48:8 (Autumn 1994), 630-1.

³⁴ Ibid, 633-5.

³⁵CDLR's Newsletter *Al-Huquq*, no. 1, P. 1.

As a first response, Saudi government arrested Muhammad al-Mas'ari, the main spokesman of CDLR. Later Al-Mas'ari and other leaders of the movement moved to London. There they could establish new headquarters for the movement. From London, the leaders of CDLR have sent a steady stream of information critical of the Riyadh government. "Every week, via CompuServe, the CDLR faxes its newsletter to 600 distribution points in Saudi Arabia."³⁶ They also transmit the same information through e-mail and their World Wide Web homepage. The group uses similar means to gather news about the Kingdom. Their informants include disaffected Saudi businessmen, clerics, military officers, and intelligence officials.

CDLR's homepage targets policy makers, journalists, scholars, and Saudi students studying in the West. The students, when they return to Saudi Arabia, become ardent supporters of CDLR agenda. The homepage is published both in English and Arabic. It consists of four parts: the *Monitor*, a weekly publication also available in print; *ash-Shar'iyah*, a monthly magazine, also available in print; communiqués, which respond to specific events and essentially act as press releases. It publishes some country reports and yearbooks at times.

These publications differ in tone and discourse depending on the language used. For example, references to human rights in the English edition become references to *Sharia* rights in Arabic. English discourses are designed to win the support of Western audiences. The general discourses in Arabic addresses a large audience in Saudi Arabia. That is why CDLR leader Muhammad al-Mas'ari seems to condemn the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as anti-Islamic since it calls for absolute equality between men and women.

The structure of the CDLR *Monitor* resembles that of a newspaper. The CDLR *Monitor* report seems to respond to articles in the Saudi and Arab media. The *Monitor*

³⁶ Louise, Lief., "Waging War by Fax Machine," *U.S. News & World Report*, November 27, 1995

also documents human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia. It publishes the names of those detained by the Saudi authorities. One component of the newsletter is designed to counter rumors about the CDLR. Apart from these components, the last section of the newsletter is usually devoted to an opinion article. *Monitor* tends to exaggerate basic facts about the Kingdom. They send everywhere the image that the Kingdom is on the verge of a collapse. Despite the credibility gaps, the *Monitor* is an important data source for those interested in studying the Islam in the digital age.

Most publications of CDLR include a detailed description of how to contact the group and receive their publications. *Ash-Shar'iyah* is the name of the group's monthly Arabic publication. The contents of the first issue, published in June 1995, reflect the organization's agenda and the kind of news it attempts to provide or analyze. Dr. Sa'd al-Faqih, was the chief editor of the magazine. He quit following a split in CDLR. In spite of al-Faqih's departure, the magazine continued to publish in the same format.

Although it exploits almost all available means of communication, CDLR is limited by the existing communication structure. For instance, most of CDLR's information is distributed either through the United States or Britain. This is because the internet facilities in the Gulf area are still very limited. The only existing nodes in the Gulf area are Gulfnet and Emirates Net. Although these nets are government controlled, universities in the Gulf in general have email so that one person with access to the internet can relay information to other e-mail users.

THE MOVEMENT FOR ISLAMIC REFORM (MIRA)

The Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia emerged in March 1996 as the result of a split in CDLR. MIRA's director, Dr. Sa'd al-Faqih, sees the split as inevitable because of differences over policy and methodology. Al-Faqih wanted CDLR to focus on Saudi Arabia only. But, Al-Mas'ari, with whom Al-Faqih had differences, wanted to make alliances with other Islamic movements in the region.

The split did not bring a crack in the movement inside the Kingdom. However, there is a visible shift in the nature of discourses. Al-Faqih seems to be committed to the vision of the group that started with the Letter of Demands and the Memorandum of Advice. As one of the five founding members of the domestic Islamist movement, Al-Faqih intensified the religious and political struggle. For him, MIRA is the media arm of the (Sunni) reform movement inside the country. The contents of MIRA's homepage are very sophisticated. Aside from the basic introduction about who they are and the aims of the organization, the homepage provides analytical articles on relevant subjects such as royal succession, the economic crisis in the Kingdom,

The Arabic version of MIRA's weekly newsletter, *al-Islah*, provides news from the Kingdom, foreign media reports about Saudi Arabia, and an analytical article about the current situation. *Al-Islah* is designed to address a large local audience. It keeps Islamic colour in a moderate tone. Discourses of MIRA seem to be more moderate than that of CDLR.

One gets access to MIRA both by e-mail and by telephone. The homepage also provides downloadable information. The country report in MIRA web page is quite similar to downloadable information from CDLR web page. However, MIRA provides its own information. One can also get the MIRA newsletter by dialing a telephone number in the United States. When one dials this number, one gets step-by-step instructions in Arabic concerning how to get the newsletter automatically. When asked about how MIRA gets its information, al-Faqih stated that e-mail, faxes and telephone calls from individuals were his main source. MIRA also advises its members in the Kingdom on how to use the internet. In its May 20, 1996 issue, MIRA instructed its supporters on how to get on-line through universities and research institutions or through commercial servers like CompuServe.

The subscriber is safe if he subscribes to a server in a neighboring country like Kuwait or Emirates. Saudi intelligence can not detect this. Those who use the internet can also talk to each other free of charge as long as computer has a microphone and the special software needed for this activity.

Saudis can get access to MIRA through its toll-free numbers when they are in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and Egypt. MIRA is also entertaining the possibility of providing a broadcast version of their electronic resistance via one of the satellite channels that send beam radio broadcasts directly to Saudi Arabia.

SAUDI GOVERNMENT AND DA'WA ACTIVITIES

The government too joined the domain of the battle over representing the Haramayn, by establishing an internet presence of its own. It set up Al-Qimam (www.alqimam.com) in 1997. Publishing government announcements and interviews with officials were the initial strategies to get control over the new media. One of the important sites in Muslim Saudi Arabia is **www.islam.org.sa**. Ministry of Islamic affairs maintain this site. When Sheikh Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abdullah Bin Baz died in 1997, the government opened a website

www.binbaz.org.sa.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs has developed a website –the Islam.com- for Da'wa and guidance. There was a compelling need for starting universal Islamic website that can give guidance to all other Islamic websites. As a result of permission from various scholars in Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs too created Da'was sites and financially supported organizations, media which are in their favour. These official Da'wa sites compete with independent individual's and movement's sites that pursue their own version of Da'wa. As Teitelbaum has observed, "to a great extent, its confrontation with opposition preachers has been over who determines what the correct form of Islam is, and who has right to speech Islam in the country. At a 9, June 1999 seminar on Da'wa in the reign of the founder of the Kingdom, Abd al-Aziz al-Saud, the interior minister prince Naif bin Abd al-Aziz addressed the preachers gathered. He stressed the importance of a unified message coming from preachers, and reminded them that "this is a state for Da'wa and not a state that has been established merely for earthly matter."³⁷ Ministry of Islamic Affairs, endowments, Da'wa and guidance has arrogated to itself the most important domain name in Muslim Saudi Arabia: **islam.org.sa**. Among the many items to be found at the site was "a work plan for Qualifying Islamic Propagators" presented to the 6th conference of ministers of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, held in Jakarta in November 1997. The Islamic

³⁷ Joshua, Teitelbaum., 2002, *Dueling for Da'wa: State vs. Society on the Saudi Internet*. *Middle East Journal* P.225.

studies and research centre of the ministry, which could be accessed from the site, proclaimed its mission as “manifesting and defending the correct Islamic beliefs, and clarifying the Islamic point of view on the different contemporary intellectual issues.” It further set for itself the soul of “keeping a vigil watch on whatever is established-regarding Islam and Muslims.” The ministry also operates the websites of the cooperative office of call and guidance with offices in Jeddah. Its declared aim is to missionize in the name of Islam. The obvious purpose of such websites is to present the Saudi version of Islam to the world.³⁸

The Saudi government in particular envisions the reislamization as a universal project: first to Islamize the whole Muslim Umma and then to embark upon the Islamization of the non-Muslim world. On his speech at OIC summit in Tehran in December, 1996 Crown Prince Abdullah said. “If we manage to run our affairs properly, and if we hold fast to our glorious Sharia and its spirit of tolerance, we would be able, by the help of Allah to put our nation along the part of new revival that will spread all over the vast Muslim world. An objective look at our nation’s present reality, enveloped as it is by circumstances and rocked by events, will reveal to us the extent and the depth of Islamic awakening which is being echoed wherever the name of Allah is mentioned. This is the awakening of religious faith aimed at revival of the values of Islam and solid principles derived from the teaching of the Holy Qur’an and the guidance of the purified Prophet’s Sunna.”³⁹

Those Muslim countries that support the project of Saudi Arabia are favoured by Saudi Arabia and other GCC States with low interest loans, humanitarian, military, technological and other assistance. On the international level, Muslim countries

³⁸ Ibid, PP. 228-229.

³⁹ *Rearrange the Islamic House from the Inside*. The Internet version of the speech delivered at OIC Summit in Tehran, December 9, at: <http://netral.arab.net/arabview/articles/abdullah1.html>

receive economic support from the Gulf on the condition that it should promote the Saudi version of re-islamization.⁴⁰

The web site represents efforts being exerted to maintain position of one of the key Islamic faith and call scholars in the 20th century. It also aims at disseminating Ibn Baz's message, approach and efforts in supporting religious programmes.

The site is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- a) Revival of school of thought of Sheikh ibn Baz as well as his outstanding Islamic faith propagation approach based on moderation.
- b) Documentation of his rich life, books, lectures which cover diverse topics such as worship, transactions, Hadith (Prophet's deeds and sayings) and current issues.
- c) Presentation of his Islamic opinions (fatwa) on permanent basis to cope with events and issues related to the interests of Muslims in the Islamic world and elsewhere.
- d) Spreading of his knowledge in an attractive way to help knowledge seekers assimilate and get benefits of that knowledge.
- e) Keeping in touch with Muslims and non-Muslims through Sheikh ibn Baz's approach in all parts of the World, and to demonstrate the humanitarian aspect of the Islamic faith and its address to all mankind. That will only be possible by the reinforcement of the approach of tolerance and moderation called for by Sheikh ibn Baz during his life or via his books and lectures after his death.

Attempts were made to control major sources of pornography and information on the political opposition. Eventually, the regime realises that it cannot block everything. Ajeeb.com⁴¹ estimates that internet usage in the Kingdom has increased

⁴⁰Reinhard, Schulze., *A Modern History of the Islamic World*. PP.170-72.

⁴¹<http://www.ajeeb.com>.

much. Its 2001 March survey points out that there are more than 57,000 users in the Kingdom. Use by women seems to be a growing phenomenon.

It is very clear that Saudi government seeks to use the internet for the modernisation and business uses, but to prevent globalisation from attending the traditional more of the Kingdom. But the implication of internet is sweeping the traditional structure of Islamic society and religion than anything before. Peter Mandeville has explored the aspects of the Islam and cyber space from the angle of globalisation.⁴² He has of the view that technology allows greater number of people to take Islam into their hands, opening new spaces for debate and critical dialogue. In his view, technology furnishes Islam with a mirror to hold up itself an opportunity to gaze upon its many diverse faces.

SUNNI WEB PAGES

There is no single archive of the Islam and the internet in Saudi Arabia. There is substantial growth in the number of Muslim religious authorities that make internet a primary channel for the pronouncement of their edicts and opinion. After 9/11 attacks, it is significant contemporary phenomenon foregrounded in Islamic diversity and representation.

Marshal McLuhan argues that the changes in the means of communication have an impact on the trajectory of social evolution and social change. Muslim and Islamic developments in cyber space should be seen as part of an evolutionary process. However, Qur'an is the central focus of computer mediated interpretation aimed at social transformation. The Qur'an in cyber space represents a continuity of the obligation of the Da'wa – Da'wa can be seen as a part of interaction where individuals and organization seek to propagate Islam with a particular mode of

⁴²Peter, Mandeville., *Re imagining the Ummah? Information Technology and the Changing Boundaries of Political Islam, In Islam encountering Globalization*, Ali, Muhammedi, (Ed) P.88.

interpretation. Islam is focussed on the power of the word and Muhammad is perceived as the medium for the revelation rather than its author. Historical, cultural and philosophical factors contributed to the diverse understanding of Islam despite the fact that consistent factors and features are common to them. Cyber Islamic environments, as data from Saudi Arabia indicates, reflect the silent aspects of diversity and unity in Da'wa activities.

The broadcasting of Qur'an on television was strongly resisted by some quarters Saudi Arabia in 1960s. Now it is available on websites. Besides, reform-centred Qura'nic translations by Muhammad Taqi-ud-din al Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan of the Islamic University, Al-Medina al-Munawwara, Saudi Arabia is available on the UK website about Islam and Muslims.⁴³ Radio Al-Islam⁴⁴ provided the entire Quran on internet in audio format for the first time in 1997. It is directly linked with Islamicity website.⁴⁵

Ibn Abdul Wahhab influenced by the Hanbali School that strictly focuses upon the Quran and Sunnah. Ibn Taimiyya was influenced by the Hanbali Madhhab. He was the legal scholar, who asserted that independent judgement could be applied when interpreting Islamic primary sources. According to him, interpretations can be specific for particular historical or cultural contexts. These lines of reasoning haunt many Islamic websites in Saudi Arabia, while defining reform and modernity in the era.

Initially, Islamic sites produced inside Saudi were very limited. Aspects of Sunni authority are represented on wide range of sites outside Saudi Arabia. Belfast Islamic centre is one of the earliest examples of a dedicated cyber Islamic environment operating from the UK. The aim behind the move was "to set up the first site hosting

⁴³ <http://www.unn.ac.uk/societies/islamic>.

⁴⁴ www.islamicity.com

⁴⁵ Ibid

the first mosque in the online world.....”⁴⁶ “We do not see ourselves as storing a monotonous view of Islam but instead, we are working towards sharing the many different views and cultures that give Islam its essence and character that we see contemporarily as important, its traditional setting as well.”⁴⁷

The muslimonline is another important early website in Sunni parameters. The sites own vision statements indicate the increasing awareness of the role of internet in global context. Muslimonline is an effort to promoting the use of the internet within the Muslim community. With the explosive growth of internet being a fairly recent phenomenon, we feel it is imperative for Muslims to generate and produce their own content on the World Wide Web.⁴⁸

Ideological differences and fight between various sects dominate the cyber Islamic environment in and out side Saudi Arabia. Gary R Bunt, in his book, *digital Islam* has gone through the nature of these differences. Each of the sites claims authority and authenticity regarding Islam. As the IG mission statement puts it “the main aim of IG is to create an open independent, non-partisan, non profit public access media service with the right-of-reply for all Muslims and Islamic organizations”.⁴⁹ But the principles of proclaiming a belief in One God whose final Prophet was Muhammad (*Shahada*); prayer (*Salat*); fasting in Ramadan (*Sawm*); alms taxation (*Zakat*); and pilgrimage (*hajj*) are conceptually similar in all electronic propagations.

Islam Q&A: Islam Q&A site was designed by Sheikh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid in Saudi Arabia in 1997. It is one of the long standing fatwa/questions in a web format. The objective of the site is to respond to user’s question and inquiries to the best of the resources and capabilities, assist in solving the social and personal

⁴⁶ M. Afiti al –Akiti, *Belfast Islamic Centre*, 5 June 1998.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ <http://www.muslimonline.com>.

⁴⁹ <http://www.ummah.net/aboutig.html>

problems of the Muslims in an Islamic context and above all teach Muslims on various aspects of their religion.⁵⁰

Fatwa-online: It is also Sunni-oriented internet platform like Islam Q&A. Its pages contain and appropriate scholarly sources right from Ibn Taymiyya to the fatwas of Sheikh Ibn Baz. The pages have strong views on a number of subjects, including relations with non-Muslims.

Fatwas issued by prominent twentieth century religious authority sheikh Muhammad Ibn Saalih Ibn Uthaymeen are available on the site. Sufism is highly targeted in the website. A fatwa produced by the permanent committee for Islamic Research and fatwa condemn the Barelvi, a Sufi oriented group.⁵¹ “Whoever has these characteristics and attributes then it is not permissible to offer your *Salaah* behind them, and whoever knows of their conditions, and then their *Salaah* is not correct. This is because most of their characteristics and attributes are of *Kufr* and *Bid'ah* which negate the *Tawheed* with which Allah had sent his messenger and revealed in his Book, and that which conflicts with the Quran such as His saying.⁵²

Islam Online: Islam online is a substantial Fatwa resource. The scholar behind this site is Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Even though the site is based in Qatar, it has significant influence in Saudi Arabia too. This site offers live fatwa dialogue between scholars and site visitors. Apart from this, cyber counselling facility is ensured in this site. There is a cross-referencing between the counselling and fatwa zones of the Islam. The online Islamic counselling model incorporates anonymity and confidentiality.

⁵⁰ www.islam-qa.com

⁵¹ www.fatwa-online.com/fatawa/creed/deviants/00105175.html

⁵² Ibid.

Gary R. Bunt lists some of the issues appeared repeatedly in the Ask the scholar section during July 2002.

- Has the Bible been tampered with?
- A husband refusing intimacy with his wife.
- Immunization: Does it contravene belief in the Ghayb?
- Islamic workable measures to overcome AIDS
- Is body piercing permissible in Islam?
- Is liposuction permission in Islam?
- Islamic remedy for procrastination and laziness.
- How Islam views cremation?
- Hymen repair surgery.
- Placing American flags on Islamic centres in the states.
- Arab centric religion makes me upset, I want to stop feeling like a fraud.⁵³

Islam online also contain several fatwas associated with internet behaviour. Internet chatting invoke cultural and religious concerns. It often seems to contradict religiously sanctioned relationships. Islam online takes the stand that internet chat is *halal* so long as the words are decent, but it will become *haram* if words contradict the rules of Islam....⁵⁴

Yusuf al-Qardawee is regarded by many as the enemy of Sunni faith. Al-Manhaj, a Salafi society has posted articles of vehement criticism on Yusuf al-Qardawee by Sheik Muqbil "...therefore I do not advise that his tapes be listened to or that his lecture be attended or that his books be read, because he is foolish. He has a

⁵³ Gary, R. Burnt., *Islam in the Digital Age*, P.154.

⁵⁴ Ibid, P. 156.

book in which he makes it permissible to have numerous groups (*Jamaa 'aat*), even though the Prophet said *the hand of Allah is with the Jama 'aah* (group) and he did not say *with the Jamaa 'aat* (groups)...

Troid.org: It is another website representing a Salafi perspective emerging from a minority context as Gary R. Burnt characterizes it "...it shares the pronouncement of fatwa online and its ideology. TROID (the reign of Islamic Da'wa) is operating from Toronto. The site propagates the opinions of Ibn Baz and the fatwa committee in Saudi Arabia on diverse issues such as the Islamic ruling regarding standing for the national anthem, the splitting of Umma and fatwa of Sheik Ibn Baz on peace treaty with the Jews."⁵⁵

Islam today: The website, Islam Today (www.islamtoday.net) interprets Islam according to the Prophetic methodology. Even though the website accepts high quality contributions from many fields, its character is mainly propagation. Salman b. Fahd is the man behind the website. He received his master degree in the Sunna and sciences from the academic institute of Buraybh, where he studied for six years. A discussion with Sheikh Muhammad al-Gazali, who has the right to engage in independent juristic reasoning and Guidelines for studying Islamic law are all available on the Arabic pages of the website. It may be the first website in the Kingdom offering high diversity in its subject matter. Apart from giving lessons after the sunset prayer on Qur'anic commentary, ethic, education and personal reform, Salman bin Fahd is answering the questions that Muslims send to him through his e-mail address salman@islamtoday.net

The website Islam Today is a comprehensive Islamic website. It is a cooperative effort of many writers, intellectuals, and people who engage in inviting others to Islam. The website accepts all high quality contributions in many fields from those who wish to help in serving Islam and the Muslims. Contributions, which may

⁵⁵ www.al-manhaj.com/page/.cfm?Article ID=138.

be academic, propagational, educational, intellectual, cultural, or literary, can find their place on World Wide Web.

The website struggles to present Islam according to the Prophetic methodology and stay free from all forms of innovation and corruption. It is a forum to call people to Allah with insight and understanding. It is a podium for disseminating knowledge in an objective manner. It does not seek to benefit the vested interests of any individual, government, or group. Instead, it seeks to bring about reform by cultivating the capabilities of the Muslim people, developing their knowledge. Having recognized the need for variety and presenting things in a new way, the site attracts people across the globe. In brief, the website welcomes participation of all kinds, including questions, opinions, and comments. It will publish everything that is beneficial. And Allah is the provider of success and the one who guides to the correct path. ⁵⁶

Wefound.org: The Wisdom enrichment foundation is a non-profile Islamic organisation. Their mission is to present the authentic teaching of Islam to mankind for the pleasure of Allah the Almighty. The global Da'wa by email is now being continued through wisdomglobal@wefound.org. Wefound is distributing articles/lessons on Islam and Da'wa based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

In addition, wefound has also supported the international council for Islamic information (ICII). Da'wa workshop in South East Asia was held in the University of Philippines. Representative of Da'wa organisations from Singapore, Malaysia, Srilanka, Thailand, Korea and the Philippines attended this event. During this workshop, the existing Da'wa situation of the participating counties was analysed.

⁵⁶ www.wefound.org

We found, through internet, educate Muslims who lack knowledge of Islam based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah and eradicate the misconceptions of non-Muslims about Islam. The initiative is known as Wisdom⁵⁷- World Islamic service for developing outstanding Muslims. They adopt the following curriculum.⁵⁸

Level: 1

Course No.	Course Description
ISPD Module 1	Introduction to Islam
ISPD Module 2	Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism or Oneness of God)
ISPD Module 3	Arkanul Islam and Eeman (Pillars of Islam and Faith)

Level: 2

ISPD Module 4	Islamic Knowledge and Education
ISPD Module 5	Aqeedah and Eeman (Belief & faith)
ISPD Module 6	The Qur'an: Qualities and Sciences

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

Level: 3

ISPD Module 7	The Sunnah and the Science of Hadith
ISPD Module 8	Search (Life Story) of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s)
ISPD Module 9	Right Manners and Characteristics of ideal Muslims

Level: 4

ISDP Module 10	Introduction to Shari'ah and Usul al-Fiqh (Islamic Law and Fundamentals of Jurisprudence)
ISDP Module 11	Life in this World, Death and the Life Hereafter
ISDP Module 12	Hadith, Dhikr and Du'a

Level 5

ISDP Module 13	Da'wah According to the Qur'an and Sunnah
ISDP Module 14	Roadblocks to success (covers: Nullifiers of Islam, Bid'ah, Minor and Minor Sins, Halal and Haram in Islam)
ISDP Module 15	Ways of Strengthening Faith and Righteousness

Given below are the goals of their Da'wa activities as given in the web page.

1. Educate members and other Muslims about the greatness of Qur'an and the Sunnah.

2. Cultivate mutual respect, understanding, trust, harmony, love, sympathy, mercy, co-operation, and unity among the members and the Muslims who adhere to the Qur'an and Sunnah for the sole pleasure of Allah.

3. Build the best image of Muslims as the best among mankind and Islam as the true and perfect religion and the best way of life for the whole mankind. It is to serve Allah by directing others to the path of Qur'an and Sunnah.

4. Train potential Muslims: how to do Da'wah based on the Qur'an and Sunnah by presenting truth about Islam.

5. To plan, work and strive for the development and success of Muslims both materially and spiritually so that they will enjoy a well-balanced life both in this world and in the life hereafter.

6. To educate and develop Muslims (most especially women and children) with the ideals of Islam based on the Qur'an and Sunnah and encourage them to build ideal Muslim families and societies.

7. To impart knowledge and skills (e.g., leadership, personality, development, effective writing and communication, public speaking and management skills) to Muslims for total personal development.

8. To link other Muslim individuals, groups or institutions concerned with the development and success of Muslim individuals and organizations world wide.

SHIA WEB PAGES

Saudi Arabia has a significant presence of Shia Muslims. They propagate a belief based upon the sayings and actions of Ali and his descendents. They attribute an infallible status to Ali and his descents contrary to Sunni beliefs, whose focus was only Muhammad. Numerous aspects of Shiaism are wired into the net.

To the majority of Sunni Muslim, Ali is a companion of Muhammad. According to Shias, he is not only a companion but also the chosen successor to

Muhammad. Military defeats and administrative problems during the expansion of Islam, after the Prophet's death, made many detractors think that the Caliphs did not deserve their status. In 656 AD, Ali became the fourth caliph in Kufa.

Sunni backed websites present a Sunni interpretation of Ali. For instance, world Association of Muslim youth gives an ordinary status to Ali, contrary to Shia beliefs.⁵⁹ One of the relevant sites defending Shia perspective is Al-Islam.⁶⁰ It keeps a specific archive highlighting the salient feature of Shia Islam distinguishing it from Sunni beliefs.

Thanks to the effort of the Ahl al-Bayth Digital Islamic Library Project, a lot of primary source material related to Shi'ism is available on the internet. Ahl al-Bayth's homepage, at <http://www.al-islam.org/organizations/dilp> contains links to reputable translations of many full-length classic texts such as *Nahjul Balagha*, a collection of over two hundred sermons of Ali. It also contains letters and saying by Ali ibn-Abu-Talib and *Shifa al-Kamila*, a collection of supplications by Ali ibn Husayn. 'Shifa al-Kamila' is considered to be one of the oldest Islamic prayer manuals

In addition to classical material, the Ahl al-Bayth site includes links to full text translations of more contemporary materials. It ranges from *Peshawar Nights* to legal rulings by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. A page on Islamic laws according to the fatwa of ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (<http://www.al-islam.org/laws/index.html>) contains an interesting discussion of issues such as purity and the concept of filth in Shi'ite law. This well organized and comprehensive site also contains information about pilgrimage, with maps, information and pictures of Shi'a shrines and graves in a number of Middle Eastern countries. Much of this material, including the translated texts, can also be accessed through the Shi'a homepage, at [http://www. Shia.org/](http://www.Shia.org/).

⁵⁹ <http://www.wamy.org>

⁶⁰ <http://www.al-islam.org/gallery/sound3.htm#Allah>

A related site, at <http://www.al-islam.org/>, includes links to some of the same translations, as well as additional works. There are a number of useful links here, including translations of *Nahjul Balagha*, *al-Sahifa al-Kamila*, *Du`a Kumayl* and Imam Husayn's Sermon of Mina. The Biography section includes links to lists of the Imams, biographies of the Imams, information about the graves and shrines of the Imams. It provides a genealogy of the Quraysh and the Imams. A section titled as 'Sayings' contains selections of Hadith from various Imams, such as selections from *Usul al-Kafi*. The *Shiite Encyclopedia*, which is available at the site, <http://www.al-islam.org/encyclopedia>, includes a lot of legal information such as a long discussion about the institution of *mut`a*, or temporary marriage and comparisons of laws about prayer, modesty, fasting, etc. in the five different law schools.

The developments in Iran often affect the Shia community in Saudi Arabia. Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia enter number of sites that provide information on Ayathullah Ruhullah Khumayni (1902-1989), the spiritual leader whose revolution paved the way for a theocratic governmental system in Iran in 1978. In 1998, the Iranian government launched the sun's house, a website based at the Imam Khomeini Cultural Institute's International Affairs Division. The extensive multimedia facets of the sun's house explore the Da'wa potential of technology. It propagates Khomeini's perspectives on Shia Islam all over the world. It has far reaching impact on Saudi Arabia, especially in Eastern region.

By appropriating the contemporary situation, the Shia opposition took pains to strike out at Saudi hegemony over the Haramayn. The website started by them is www.alharmain.org. Haramayn is Arabic for Islam's two holiest shrines Mecca and Medina.

CHAPTER-IV

E-DA'WA AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPACTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

SHRINKING ROLE OF ULAMA

Saudi Arabia is the most theocratic state in the Sunni Muslim world today. It emerged out of a puritanical religious renaissance movement, Wahhabism, aimed at restoring the ancestral Islam. Wahhabism urged to apply the Shariah uncompromisingly in all spheres of life. Saudi Arabia is the third incarnation of Wahhabi state. It re-established itself in the early twentieth century after having lost its sovereignty twice.

The Saudi Arabian Ulama occupy a prominent position in the state's political elite, although their hold is gradually weakening. Right from the establishment of the first Wahhabi state to the present day, the one fifth of the Ulama originates from tribes in the peninsula. Some of them were appointed to serve as qa'dis among the Ikhwan by Abdul Aziz. The principle occupation of the Ulama is connected with the legal system. Rendering of legal opinions (fatwas) is their prestigious religious function. The office of mufti became completely institutionalized after the establishment of the Dar al-Ifta (institute for the issue of religio-legal opinions.) and the Majlis Hay'at Kibar al-Ulama (Council of the Grand Ulama in 1971).⁶¹

Members of Ulama set up institutions and academics for religious and legal studies in Riyadh, Mecca and other cities. They serve as principals and teachers. Some

⁶¹ Larbi, Sadiki., Saudi Arabia: *Re-reading Politics and Religion in the wake of September 11*, in Islam and Political Legitimacy, edited by Shabron Akbarzadeh, Abdullah Saed, P. 30.

Ulama make a living in agriculture. In their spare time, they teach seekers for knowledge who come to them. In return, Ulama receive assistance from the Kings and local governors.

Shariya courts enjoy the status of general judicial authorities. Until the mid 1970s, an expeditious court, a greater Shariya court and the commission on judicial supervision are three grades of judicial system. The system was reorganized in 1974 with three grades of courts following the western pattern: summer courts, general courts and courts of causation. Hanbali Ulama continued to control the judicial system. In 1927, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud, inspired by Ibn Taymiyya, was for a court of Islamic law based not only on the Hanbali doctrine but also on any other doctrine based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Later, he had to abort the plan since the Hanbali Ulama stood against him.⁶²

Rulers of Saudi Arabia always look to the Ulama for a religious sanction of his decree and innovations. With this purpose, the institute for the issue of religio-legal opinions and the supervision of the religious affairs was set up in 1953. The Council of Grand Ulama was established by Faisal in 1971. It consisted of seven members headed by sheikh Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd Allah Ibn Baz. Between 1965 and 1974, six hundred and seventy five fatwas were issued by this institute. These fatwas were mainly concerned with ritual duties, theological questions and the position of women.⁶³ However, in the period of internet, the fatwas issued were mainly political.

The public morality committees have been influencing Saudi society until recently. More than anything else, the Ulama exercise their monopoly on social morals through the Council for exhortation to good and interdiction of evil. These councils are the modern versions of the hisha. It still restricts any kind of radical changes on the

⁶² Aharon, Layish., *Ulama and Politics in Saudi Arabia, in Islam and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, edited by Metin, Heper and Raphael Israeli, P. 33.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, P. 35.

eve of globalization. King Faisal in 1962 had introduced some reforms to restrict the power of these committees. Now they have to cooperate with the civil police for punishing the offenders.

Even though conservative Ulama has been supervising all levels of education, following the modernization of the system and rapid socio-political changes implied in it, the proportion of religious studies in the curricula is constantly decreasing. Schooling for girls was introduced in the early 1960s. Secular subjects began to be taught in universities run by Ulama. Modern universities, specializing in humanities and the social and natural sciences, have been started in several cities outside the control of Ulama.⁶⁴ Mass media and particularly internet provide information regarding higher education abroad. Thousands of Saudi student study in institutions of higher education overseas. United States alone accommodates more than 30,000 students. They came back to their land with a radical, political and religious outlook. This is one of the main reasons for rapid socio-political changes in the Kingdom. Recent reports from Saudi Arabia show very clearly that the influence of Ulama is diminishing in this sphere of education and that is an indicator of shrinking role of Ulama.

Earlier, Ulama controlled the Hajj and the waqf. As the regime is constantly restructuring its machinery and policies to ensure a smooth control over all religious matters, it weakened the link between Ulama and endowed property that are made by pilgrims from all over the world. The government had increased its involvement in waqf than before.

The Ulama have played a major role in disseminating Islamic law and culture throughout the Muslim Asia and Africa, as well as in the non-Muslim countries of the West. Wahhabi Ulama sent many delegations to debate matters of religion with the

⁶⁴ Ibid., P. 37.

Ulama of the other sects. From the 18th century onwards, the dissemination of the Wahhabi doctrine in the Arabian Peninsula has been done through the devoted work of Ulama.

Ulama used to hold congresses on the objectives of Da'wa. The Ulama uses the state communication media for the dissemination of Da'wa. Da'wa drives are conducted among pilgrims during the Hajj season. Despite the use of electronic propagation (electronic Da'wa), Ulama still believe that mosque is the most essential instrument for bringing message close to the policies of the government and for controlling the social order.

The Saudi opposition through internet often challenges the authority of Ulama on religious questions. But the Ulama owe its authority to the family of the founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. It holds a prominent position within the Ulama. It is because of its numerical strength and representation in the ranks of religious functionaries. Its members make up about one quarter of the Ulama. They monopolize the propagation of Wahhabi doctrine in the remote districts of the state and outside its territory. They head the institutes and academies for the study of religious law and justice.

Since there is no legislative authority in Saudi Arabia, the main function of the Ulama is to give religious sanction for the acts of the regime. The fatwa permitting king Khalid to overcome the rebels at the Ka'ba mosque in 1979 bears the signatures of about thirty Ulama headed by Sheikhs Abd al-Ali Ibn Humayud, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Rashid.⁶⁵ Now, conflicting fatwas dominate the scene, one contradicts the other. The role of Ulama has been questioned vehemently through the WebPages.

⁶⁵ Ibid., P. 42.

Above all, the bureaucratization and modernization of government activities in the executive, legislative and judicial spheres have eclipsed the power of the Ulama. The spread of education and secular culture outside the control of Ulama have further reduced their power. The ongoing westernization of the Saudi society and the media revolution has added fuel to the fire. Internet and electronic propagation (E-Da'wa) reflects new dynamics in the Saudi society.

ISLAMO-LIBERAL FRONT IN SAUDI ARABIA

Since the end of the 1990s, the Saudi intellectual field has been subjected to significant intellectual developments. As a result, Sunni Islamist component has been divided into three main orientations. The first group confines their activity to the religious field. The government has co-opted them as a substitute for the Council of Senior Ulama, whose legitimacy has been questioned. The second group engages in global Salafi-Jihadi politics. The third group follows a middle path.

The third group intensified its strength after the tragic event of September 11, 2001. Before that, they were expressing their views informally in internet forums and articles in the press. Their web pages reformulate their call for political reform in an Islamo-Liberal fashion. Mainly Liberals and Shi'ites associate with the new emerging intelligentsia. A study on the electronic propagation of Islam shows light on the endogenous dimension of the Saudi reform process and on the new Islamo-liberal trend.

PIONEERS OF THE ISLAMO-LIBERAL FRONT

Shykh Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim:

Al Qasim was part of the nascent religio-political phenomenon right from the 1990s. He joined the 52 Saudi religious scholars who presented the letter of demands to the king Fahad in 1991. When committee for the defense of legitimate rights was formed in 1993 Shykh Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim vehemently strived to strengthen the

opposition. The focus of his thought is Islamo-Liberal in trend. He upholds the role of democracy as the best possible option to ensure justice. His notion of democratization never implies Westernization or secularization. He is for an Islamic democracy that ensures justice and equality among people.⁶⁶ Even though he advocates a dialogue between tradition and Modernity, he is reluctant to extend his liberal attitude to social issues. His controversial stands on women's rights to drive and mixing genders in working place clearly show the slow pace of transformations. He has warned against dangers of mixing genders in working places, since it can give a man the opportunity to be alone with a woman, which is prohibited in Islam.

Abdullah al-Hamid; Al Hamid calls for the revival of real Salafism. By real Salfism, he meant the one which is innovative. He accuses that Saudi religious establishment is conservative. There are many converging points between Al-Qasim and Al-Hamid. But, Al-Hamid uses the term 'shura' instead of democracy as he thinks that the latter is an imported concept.⁶⁷ He argues that in the Islam of the pious ancestors, politics can not be distinguished from religion. Human rights, civil society of 'Shura' are established values. What is the need of the time is a return to these values.

While arguing for substantial changes, Al-Hamid follows the logic of the medieval jurist Ibn Hanbal. He puts it "the Islamic thoughts we know dates back to the Abbasid period. Today, however, we tend to think that this is Islam, which is wrong. If we take a close look at it, we will discover that it contains many secondary things that are solutions to problems that arose at that time, because the jurists and thinkers were influenced by their government"

Hasan al-Maliki; Hasan al-Maliki's writings shake the essential pillars of Wahhabi tradition in Saudi Arabia. His main targets are the school curricula and

⁶⁶ Dialogue between Abd al-Aziz al-Qasim., and TWA, www.tuwaa.com March, 12, 2003

⁶⁷ Stephen, Lacroix., *Interview with Abdullah Al Hamid, Riyadh, June, 2003.*

Wahhabi historiography. He believes that an unbiased rewriting of history can only ensure a true reformation in Saudi Arabia. In his book “The Curricula: A Critical Reading of the Perceptions of Tawhid for the Classes of General Education”, Al-Maliki unleashes his criticism against the pillars of Wahhabi learning. In his polemical work, he demonstrates that the school books are replete with attacks on non-Wahhabi Muslim and non-Muslims.⁶⁸

In order to criticize the Wahhabi dogma, Al-Maliki targets works of its primary sources of inspiration, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. His apprehension is that like any other Mujtahid who have exercised their right to Ijtihad, they had mistakes.⁶⁹ His controversial work “The Imperfections of Elucidation of Doubts” explores the extreme doctrinal rigidity of Abd al-Wahhab’s core books, the “Elucidation of Doubts”. Like Al-Hamid, he calls for a conscious and innovative Salafism capable of giving rights to civil society and of permitting the establishment of ‘shura’. With his iconoclastic views, Al-Maliki invited the wrath of Salafi-Jihadi Shaykhs. For them, Al-Maliki is a defender of the grave worshipers, the Muriji’a and the Shi’ites.

Mansur al-Nuqaydan; Repudiating Wahhabism as well as any other form of Salafism, Al-Nuqaydan insists on a revival of Irja. It is an early school of Islamic thought that was characterized by its insistence on keeping an apolitical attitude and its refusal to judge the faith of others.⁷⁰

He is suspicious of the term ‘Salafis’. It, for him, contains by nature an inclination to exclusivism. He disagrees with Al-Hamid and Al-Qasim in this regard. “I feel intellectually close to such thinkers as Al-Hamid and Al-Qasim. But the great difference between us is that they call themselves Salafis and continue to believe in

⁶⁸ Dialogue between Hasan Al Malik and Tuwa, www.tuwaa.com, June 26, 2003

⁶⁹ Ali, Al, Khudayr., *Statement on Hasan Al Malik*, www.alkhoder.com August, 14, 2001.

⁷⁰ The Accusation of Irja has been the Centre of the Debates within the Saudi Religious Circle, between the Islamists and the Wahhabi Ulama.

the golden age of the first hejirian centuries.⁷¹ As he drew a clear link between Wahhabism with its inclination to Takfir and the terrorist violence, he has incurred the wrath of Shayks, who accused him of his apostasy.

Muhammad Sa'id Tayyib; Sa'id Tayyib's word "I am entirely convinced that mere exist between us and them common principles and denominators, on which we all agree and that we want with seriousness and loyalty to develop and to promote particularly in those difficult and crucial times"⁷² sum up his Islamo-liberal vision. Religion, for him, is a red line that he does not want to cross. Over the last few years, he has been calling for decisive changes without alienating from the central concept of Islam.

Muhammad Mahfuz, Ja'far al-Shayid and Shaykh Zaki al-Milad: They are Shi'ite reformers from Qatif in the Eastern province. The rise of Saudi Islamo-Liberal reformist constituency from 1998s onwards gave Shi'ite intellectuals an opportunity to reinvigorate their position. Their efforts can be located in the emerging Islamo-Liberal vision. They ardently believe that Saudi Arabia can not progress at every level unless it follows the teachings of Islam. The only way to progress and to evolve is to combine Islam and democracy.⁷³

All of the Shi'ite leaders champion Saudi nationalism. As Shaykh Zaki al-Milad puts it "we no longer want to be assimilated to the rest of the Shi'ites, who live in the Gulf and to be suspected of being a fifth column of the neighboring states. We want to be a fully recognized constituent of the Saudi nation....."⁷⁴ The Islamo-Liberal issue seems to have become a bone of contention among the ruling elite.

⁷¹ Stephen, Lacroix., *Interview with Manur Al Nuqaydan, Riyadh, June, 2003.*

⁷² Muhammad, Said, Tayyib., "*Kalimat Akhira Ila Ussrat Al Ghaliyya*" (last words to the beloved family of Tuwa) www.tuwa.com June 22, 2003

⁷³ Muhammad, Mahfuz., *Islam and the Challenges of Democracy*, PP. 204-05.

⁷⁴ Stephen, Ladoix., *Interview with Shaykh Zaki Al Milad, Qatif, June, 2003.*

DIASPORA ISLAM AND SAUDI ARABIA

Diaspora connections are becoming increasingly significant in the light of what is viewed as the diminishing importance of national borders. Diasporic communities do appear to be significant aspects of globalization. Electronic media, especially internet, increasingly links producers and audiences across national borders.

The identities of individuals and groups within the Diasporas are defined by complex historical, social and cultural dynamics within the group and its relationship with other groups. Retention of ancestral customs, language, religion, marriage patterns and particularly the ease of communication between various parts characteristically define Diaspora Islam. Millions of Muslims live in non-Muslim societies, especially in Europe and America. They lack proper knowledge of Islamic faith and culture. These communities are in need of an Islamic channel to protect their identity and link them with their roots. Islamic websites provide them a cultural milieu to strengthen their spiritual and intellectual input. Above all, Saudi regime has taken initiative to enrich Diaspora Islam and retain its ideological roots.

Professor Claus Leggwie, Dr. Angela Joost and Stephen Reen have written a book 'The Way to the Mosque – A Practical Guide'. They point out the fact that millions of Muslims live in Europe. Over four millions in France, more than three millions in Germany and more than a million in UK. The religious community that is expanding most rapidly worldwide is expanding quickly in Europe as well. Majority of Muslims live peacefully along with their indigenous neighbours. They respect the rule of law and have not any aggressive intention towards non-Muslims. Muslims are free to perform Friday prayer. They can celebrate their religious festivals without interference from state.

The US constitution, France's laicist constitution and Germany's Basic Law permit more intra-Islamic pluralism than any regime in the Muslim countries of origin.⁷⁵

Initially, releases of Saudi government in Arabic continued a reluctance to accept the goals of democracy. Moreover, there had been an inclination, from some quarters, to assert that it is a religious obligation for Muslims to retain prejudice on Christians and Jews. Robert Spencer had studied nature of Arabic publishing in Europe and in America. Some web pages condemn democracy as un-Islamic. It is un-Islamic to imitate the Infidel. But, various Islamic scholars across the world, through different websites, have given a big blow to such propagandas. This is reflected significantly in the new releases of Saudi government, which is targeted on Muslims in other continents.⁷⁶

Kasani, a legal expert of Islam, categorically asserts, "Any place where a Muslim is not denied legal certainty cannot be an area of infidels...". Whatever may be the case, the Islamic scholars, at least some of them, underestimate the guarantees of freedom conferred by the secular constitutional states. The post 9/11 scenario has turned the situation worse.

Some Muslim preachers in Europe teach the opposite, it is not right to condemn Jews and Christians as Infidels. Some Saudi clerics responded emotionally to the position "He who castes doubts about their infidelity leaves no doubt about his." Certain edicts published by the Saudi government's ministry of Islamic Affairs about a Muslim who fails to uphold the Wahhabi moral values in his land, seems to be

⁷⁵ Roselyn, Cesari., "The Re-Islamization Of Muslim Immigrants In Europe" in Gema Martin Munoz (Ed) *Islam, Modernism and the west: Cultural and political relations at the end of Millenium*, P. 211.

⁷⁶ <http://www.worldnetdaily.com>

controversial. The edict says, "It would be lawful for Muslims to spill his blood and take his money."⁷⁷

It is a fact that Diasporic Muslims express their concern over identity crisis. The preservation of the Islamic identity has become a challenge rather than something we can take for granted. On the other hand, the grounding argument of scholars like Tariq Ramadan is that Muslims should develop a positive attitude towards European cultural milieu. He argues that the old opposition of Dar-al-Islam and Dar al-Harb has become obsolete.⁷⁸

Non-state dissidents focus internationalization attempt at Diaspora populations. Within the context of Middle East, this audience may be particularly germane to the influence of expatriate Middle Easterners. Gaining access to the population allows non-state dissidents to tap in to the financial resources of the Diaspora community.

SAUDI WOMAN AND INTERNET

For Saudi woman, the internet is fast becoming a way to overcome the traditional structures that deny them their basic rights and freedom. Recent survey reveals that two thirds of internet users in Saudi are woman. Earlier, gulf news online has estimated in 2001 that 45000 woman are using internet in Saudi Arabia accounting for 45% of the total one million web users in the Kingdom. Female subscribers spend an average of thirty hours a month browsing through the net work. Most of them are aged between thirteen and thirty.⁷⁹

The historical, political and socio economic conditions of Saudi Arabia should be the essential parameters of understanding woman's position in the society. The persistence of woman's exclusiveness from public life in contemporary Saudi Arabia

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Tariq, Ramadan., *To be a European Muslim*, P. 127.

⁷⁹ <http://www.gulfnews.com>

is one of the most heated debates. The warhorses of media, especially internet, challenge the deeply embedded and complex nature of gender disparity. Majority of middle class Saudi woman get access to internet. It creates a new consciousness over the reasons for their own miserable conditions. New interpretation and struggles emerge within the horizon of Islam.

Before the advent of internet, schooling initiated the process of woman's empowerment. The history of woman's struggle to achieve higher education goes back to early 1940s, when the ministry of higher education began sending a few bright Saudi men to abroad. A young woman, Fatima Amin Shakir, appealed to King Faizal to get a grant to study abroad. She became the very first Saudi woman to hold a PhD.

The number of woman's institutions was 15 in 1960s. It has grown up to 155 by the end of 70s. In 1986, the statistics show that the number of girls in elementary schools was 246,559. As per the report of UNESCO (1989), the number became 649,509. 185,902 girls graduated in 1982. In the year of 1986, the number had gone up to 255,766. The first girl's college was established in 1970 in Riyadh. The first university with a woman's campus was Riyadh's King Saud University (1979). It has branch campuses in Medina with men and women's campuses offering mathematics, biology, medicine, computer science and humanities.⁸⁰

Education has enabled Saudi woman to have access to internet. Saudi women know other women not only in western countries but also in neighboring Arab countries through the web mechanism. They became increasingly aware of the impact of biased law on their own lives. It is in that way internet is disrupting long established traditions in a country, where Islam act as a primary force in determining social norms. In the traditional society, woman are restricted to their own company and asked to stay at home. When woman went online and interacted with men, they got more

⁸⁰ Amani, Hamdan., *Woman and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Prospectus*, P. 115.

opportunities to understand the wider perspectives of an emerging world order, where woman is no longer in shackles of tradition.

A study conducted by the electronic journal on information systems in developing countries, particularly among online participants, concludes that online participation makes females less naïve and more bold. It avoids unnecessary obsession and inhibition between both the sexes.⁸¹ Even though crown prince Abdullah has stated “Saudi woman is a first class citizen...has rights duties and responsibility ...when we talk about the comprehensive development which our country is experiencing in all aspects, we cannot ignore the role of Saudi woman and her participation in the responsibility of this development,”⁸² the government officers did not invest concrete commitment to end specific aspects of discrimination. The Fatwa issued by the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baz on women driving illustrates the attitude of Ulama and society on the issue of more freedom to Saudi woman. “There is no doubt that such driving is not allowed. Woman driving leads to many evils and negative consequences. Included among these is her mixing with men without her being on her guard. It also leads to the evil sins due to which such an action is forbidden. The pure law forbids those acts that lead to forbidden action and consider those means to be forbidden also. Allah has ordered the wives of the Prophet and the woman of the believers to remain in their home, to wear Hijab and not to display their adornments to non-mahram males as that lead to promiscuity that overruns a society.”⁸³

On 14 June 2005, Prince Naif criticizes the calls to lift a decade old ban on women driving saying that it was not a matter of first priority. Referring to the council member who brought the issue up, the Prince said “does he understand what the priorities are? We consider this issue to be a secondary issue, not a priority. These

⁸¹ <http://www.ejsdc.org>

⁸² Al-Jazeera, 6 december, 1999, *web.amnesty.org*. Saudi Arabia: gross human right violation against woman.

⁸³ *Islamic fatwa regarding women, compiled by Muhammed bin Abdul Aziz al- Musnad.*

matters are decided by taking in to consideration the public interest and what is decided by a woman's honour.”

Despite the gender-based laws in the Kingdom, women are secretly working in the mixed offices. Frank Gardner writes that woman in Saudi are making a growing impact on the economy. Women own approximately 16,390 businesses

in the Kingdom. They own 40% of nation's private wealth. About 10% of private businesses are in the hands of women.⁸⁴

Saudi women show high reluctance to respond to Jihadi calls by various sites maintained by extremists. A number of women in Saudi Arabia have recently signed a request calling for radical reforms in order to tackle the menace of growing extremist influence on Islam. The document signed by more than 300 people, including 57 women, was handed over to crown prince Abdullah.⁸⁵

Similarly, a cross section of Saudi woman has come out strongly against the launch of a new internet magazine targeting Saudi and other Arab women for Jihad. They criticized that these groups deviated from the path of Islam, which stands for mercy, compassion, tolerance and justice. Hala al-Nasser, a Saudi female journalist said that the objective of the internet magazine was defended by twisting the concept of Jihad. She responded in this way: “to me, Jihad means constant struggle and perseverance with oneself for the cause of peace...”⁸⁶

The internet magazine, which is named after Al-Khansaa, a companion of the Prophet, who sent her four son for Jihad, reiterates her stand in the editorial of the first edition “we will stand up, valid and abaya, arm in hand, our children on our laps and

⁸⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1128951.stm

⁸⁵ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3152380.stm

⁸⁶ <http://www.gulfnews.com/articles/news.asp/articleID=3447>

the book of Allah and the Sunna of Prophet as our guide. The blood of our husbands and the bodies of our children are an offering to god.”⁸⁷

INTERNET CENSORSHIP IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia has maintained one of the world’s biggest internet filtering system. The authorities have claimed that they block access to nearly 400,000 WebPages with the aim of protecting the principles of Islam and the social norms. The internet blacklist in Saudi Arabia covers very broad field, including the websites of political and Islamist opposition and any publications directly or indirectly connected with sexuality. Saudi women, who represent nearly two thirds of the country’s internet users, can only access online content that has been expunged of any reference to their rights. Saudi Arabia has no specific law to deal with internet. But, it comes under the purview of the press law.

The internet service unit (ISU) is in charge of maintaining Saudi internet censorship system. It controls the gateway used by all the local internet service providers (ISPs). It is supposed to monitor all online data exchanges taking place in Saudi Arabia. The ISU gives an online form and e-mail address (**abuse@isu.net.sa**) for internet users who want to block certain sites. Official reports say that they are receiving hundreds of requests every day. It seems that filters installed by ISU with the help of US companies are easy to get around.

The sites blocked by Saudi Arabia are mainly those of sexual, political and religious nature. Authorities try their level best to block WebPages on women’s rights and homosexuality. Music sites such as www.rollingstone.com, humour sites such as www.poopreport.com, online translational sites such as www.systransutt.com and

⁸⁷ Ibid

best-known anonymous sites such as www.anonymizer.com and www.megaproxy.com are also on ISU black list.⁸⁸

The Saudi government blocked the sites of Jordan based Arab regional resource center on violence against women (www.amanjordan.org) on 5 August 2003. This centre has posted articles on the violence on women in Saudi society in March 2003. Saudi government blocked the website www.gaymiddleeast.com. It is an information website targeted at the middle-eastern gay communities. It carries gay-oriented information in fifteen countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE and Yemen). The website focuses on the persecutions gays had to undergo in the region. A US site www.365gay.com to which www.gaymiddleeast.com is affiliated was also blocked by the Saudi regime.⁸⁹

Created in 1996 by Sa'ad Al Faqih, MIRA is a London based movement, which has been extremely critical of Saudi regime. Its website www.miraserve.com is on the list of sites that have been censored by the government. However, the movement found new ways of getting around the censorship. To access www.miraserve.com, despite the filter, Saudis just have to send an email message to certain address in order to receive an automatic response identifying an URL that is not blocked.

Even though Saudi Arabia has aggressively sought to limit the effectiveness of the political opposition, the dissidents had both technologically and organizationally to overcome the constraints. A brief analysis on the oppressions of the movement of Islamic reform in Arabia will enable us to understand the web oriented opposition in the Kingdom.

⁸⁸ <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?idarticle=10766>

⁸⁹ Ibid

POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND INTERNET

Sa'ad Al Faqih founded the movement for Islamic reform in Saudi Arabia in 1996. He started his career of dissidence in 1991. Al Faqih and further Saudi scholars drafted a letter of demands that emphasizes a re-examination of economic, military, domestic and foreign policies, in line with the tenets of Islam. The letter opened a debate regarding the equal distribution of public wealth. Al-Faqih and his companions established an official political organization, the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR).

We have discussed the response of Saudi regime to Islamist opposition in the previous chapter. In 1993, Al Faqih and CDLR supporters were exiled to United Kingdom, where CDLR established new headquarters. They vowed to continue their political activism. At first, they relied much on fax machines. Over six hundred locations in Saudi Arabia received anti-Saudi faxes from CDLR headquarters in London.⁹⁰

In 1996, Al Faqih broke away from CDLR as he became disillusioned with the group's decision to pursue radical Islamic goals. He founded a movement to re-focus on Saudi Arabia alone. In the short run, MIRA has focused its attention on achieving limited goals such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and the abolition of secret police within Saudi Arabia. For MIRA, internet based technologies have been a critical component of its political agenda. Operating from London, MIRA employs an impressive array of internet technologies within and outside Saudi Arabia.

MIRA's website, <http://www.miraserve.com> was activated in 1996 after the split in CDLR. The most important content of the site is newsletter in Arabic (the monitor). Current political issues in Saudi Arabia are discussed in detail. It presents

⁹⁰ www.miraserve.com

an Islamic solution to the problems. The articles from foreign media sources are also included here to defend their position. The second component of MIRA's dynamic content is "Arabia in the news."

MIRA presents articles from Saudi Arabian newspapers such as "Al-Riyadh", "Al-Watan", "Al-Sharq-al Awsat" and "Al-Quds al-Arabi."⁹¹ Al-Quds al-Arabi is a London based independent daily. MIRA typically posts articles on the domestic, economic and foreign policies of Saudi Arabia. MIRA provides English translations of articles from Arabic newspapers, articles from New York Times and London Times. Moreover, Russian and Chinese newspapers are being presented in this site.

Above all, MIRA provides an online version of the 1991 letter of demands in Arabic and English. The Arabic programme is Islamist in tone. It frequently uses Qura'nic quoting and references to *Sharia* to justify its political approach. The English content keeps Islamic references, but it focuses on concepts such as legitimacy and human rights. MIRA's web pages provide many links to Amnesty International and to Freedom House that criticize the Saudi regimes human rights record.⁹² In addition to this website content, MIRA makes extensive use of emails. It uses an email list of supporters to send out updates and reports. MIRA's monitor publication is emailed out weekly to those on the list.

MIRA appears to direct its mobilization efforts towards a group of people. Al-Faqih makes it clear in an interview "...change doesn't require that the whole people rise up... it only requires that a group of people who are ready for sacrifice and who are flexible to lead the nation and take the initiative for change...."⁹³ MIRA's efforts to use the internet for mobilizing domestic support derive from the technologies' reduction of transaction cost.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

MIRA's internet does seek to gain international support even though it is not a priority. It is very clear that the movement is directing some of its message towards the international community, since the tone of English differs from the Arabic content. According to Al-Faqih, this English content is specifically designed for western audiences. The static nature of this English content indicates that this goal of internationalization is secondary.

In every sense, MIRA's Islamist program is a political threat to the Saudi regime. Contrary to the views of MIRA and other dissidents, the House of Saud identifies itself as a truly Islamic regime. The regime has constantly thought to co-opt religious elite in a strategic step to legitimate their rule. Along with this elite cooperation, the Saudi regime has maintained strict control over all forms of political expression within the Kingdom, though it adapts gradually.

CONCLUSION

Saudi Monarchy has been initiated massive importation of technology as a means to integrate the Kingdom, strengthen and extend state power, and raise the prestige and influence of the country internationally. Since Saudi Arabia was not culturally prepared to withstand the massive importation, the traditional Saudi culture whose fabric was nothing but Islam, has been subjected to much transformation

Debate over the question of freedom shakes both the state and religion. For King Fahd, there is nothing in freedom of expression beyond the ability to contact an official. The freedom of the individual in this country is secured by the Islamic faith in practice. Expression, rights and duties are permitted as long as it is not harming others. State sponsored Da'wa activities uphold Saudi version of political and religious freedom.

Despite the gradual increase in violent incidents on the part of the Saudi Islamist opposition, terrorism did not develop in to an organized form of activities in Saudi Arabia. Their tendency to fight the government by religious discourse on the level of moral and religious principles has enhanced Da'wa activities unprecedentedly.

Although the opposition movements did not produce an alternative socio-political order, they create an atmosphere which facilitates diverse understanding of Islam. The government's attempts to de-legitimize the opposition as far as possible resulted in government's own initiative in Da'wa activities. Electronic propagation initiated by Saudi government's websites aim at representing the true Islam and at the same time naming the legacy of Al-Saud.

The question of authority matters here. Late Grand Mufti Ibn Baz had issued fatwas banning the lectures and meeting done by dissident groups, it could not find its

way. Educated Saudis and scholars argue for a change in regime. They wanted to redefine Islam in terms of political freedom. The problems of the economic recession are also contributing to the opposition. However, the significance of all these developments is in its occurrence with in the frame of Islam.

As a result, all of the dissident voices have to be echoed in religious discourses. Apart from this, the role of Ulama is shrinking in the Kingdom. It witnesses the emergence an Islamo liberal front. Shi'ites and liberals have come up to strengthen the emerging intelligencia. Their Web Pages attracts a large number of visitors as they call for political reform in an Islamo-liberal fashion. Websites pose a challenge to the dominant views on Islamic values and freedom.

Traditionalists still stress on the larger message of Islam. The confrontation between traditionalists and radicals dominate the controversial argumentation on Jihad. Young radicals reject Sufism and inter faith dialogue. Arberry comments on this "The wheel now appears to have turned full circle. Sufism has run its course; and in the progress of human thoughts it is illusionary to imagine that there can ever be a return to the point of departure. A new journey lies ahead for humanity to travel."⁹⁴

Even though the call for extremist activities proliferate the scene of Islamic propagation, the counter discourses have a popular appeal in the Muslim world especially in Saudi Arabia. Many scholars, right from Sufi philosopher Abu Hameed Muhammed Al-Gazzali to Ibn Baz have emphasized the role of greater Jihad, the inner struggle.

Even though the socio- political impact of media and especially internet is deep in Saudi Arabia, it is clear that people keep reservation on many aspects of contemporary western culture. The reservation includes mainly family and some

⁹⁴ Arthur, J, Arberry., *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, P. 134.

social norms. In Islam, family is a key social unit. They share the fear that the achievement of western civilization and its irresistible cultural advance on the world stage may affect norms and values which have been cherished for centuries. Prominent sites of Islamic propagation try to address the problems through counseling and religious conscientization. Both the radicals and traditional clergy have been struggling to resist the elevation of sex in to the single most important human activity.⁹⁵

This is a brief analysis of dimensions and scope of Da'wa through internet. Aiming at total Islamization of both public and private sphere internet has brought a paradigmatic shift in missionary activities all over the world. 'Cultural Islamization' is only one aspects of the paradigmatic shift in Muslim world. In addition to Saudi Arabia, many Muslim countries have been pursuing the 'cultural Islamization' projects.

Undoubtedly, the impact of internet on Saudi society is profound. Internet has brought Saudi closer to the rest of the world. The global order and its evolutionary paradigms are not strange to Saudi society. School and college curriculum, the traditional nature of Ulema, the role of women in public spheres, the nature of political opposition and diverse aspects of religious propagation in the Kingdom have been redefined by the fast growing interactions with the new world order. Internet is the main vehicle of social change across borders and nations. I do think that the area needs further research in order to get a clear picture of the change both in microscopic and macroscopic level. Now, Saudi government and other groups project themselves to the rest of the world through internet. These projects and propagations entail both adaptation and resistance. Researchers can further look in to the specific nature of adaptation and resistances emerging in Saudi.

⁹⁵ Akbar, S, Ahmed., *Post Modernism and Islam*, P. 246.

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