

ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE PARTY (IRP) AN INTRODUCTION

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Central Asia, which can historically be called the 'second cradle' of Islam, has become a station of conspiracies of world powers after the disintegration of previous Soviet Union. To compete with these world powers, there are three such movements in Central Asia. Among which Islamic Renaissance Party stands first. Islamic Renaissance Party came into being in early 1990s. This Islamic movement was acclaimed a lot by the Muslims of the area due to its moderate ideology, ideological maturity and political consciousness. According to Alexei V. Malashenko, 'besides being moderate, IRP is modern political formation, supporting the idea of equality for all religious beliefs and concentrating its attention on culture; on preserving the Islamic heritage and on family relations' (1). This movement is actively working in all areas of Muslim states of Russia, whether they belong to five independent states of Central Asia or the areas of Northern Caucasus like the Tatar areas of Russian Federation and Daghestan or Moscow city.

As this Islamic movement emerged in Soviet Union in early 1990s, therefore, many religious scholars belonging to various regional countries of this area besides Tajikistan were permanent members of this movement. These members were also related to the Islamic movements of their respective areas. Atif Abdul Hamid says that the most important point is that Muslims of that area worked for Islamic revival in Central Asia leaving behind the secretarian affairs. Sufis, Qadimists and other Muslims with various ideologies were also the part of this movement. They proved their open heartedness to such an extent that they also included those Muslims of the area who were ideologically related to nationalist movement (2). This was the strategy that ideologically and politically provided a combined platform to the Muslims living in the territories of the Soviet Union to establish a new government. Islamic Renaissance Party kept on struggling to develop a combined platform for the revival of an Islamic system with the Russian Muslims of Central Asia at territorial level just before the dismemberment of Soviet Union. In 1990, it became so successful for the achievement of its goals that its branches spread to Daghestan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan. Its centre was established at Astrakhan near the eastern border of Caucasus in Southern Russia.(3)

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According to M. Iqbal Khan, Islamic Renaissance Party is the largest force in the country and has the support of more than eighty percent of the Tajik population. Party follows the ideology of Syed Abul A'la Maududi, Hasan al-Banna' and Syed Qutub Shaheed. (4)

Although Islamic Renaissance Party's fame had increased in the first half of early 1990s but still it attached itself at party level and ideological level to the "learned Sheikh Muhammad Rustamov Hindustani" of early 1970s.

Ahmad Rashid writes about Hindustani, "The most influential underground spiritual leader in the Soviet era was Mullah Muhammad Rustamov Hindustani, who had studied at the madrassa in Deoband, India, before returning home to open a clandestine madrassah in Dushanbe in the 1970s". (5)

As he returned from Pakistan and India after strengthening himself ideologically and religiously, he started producing a spirit of liberty of thought in young Muslims even in the time of Soviet Union. Young Muslims called themselves as Almallali al-Shabban in that age. From that time a period of novelty of thought at ideological level started among the youngsters. Due to which traditional Ullema appointed at government posts showed a difference of opinion. In spite of the difference of opinion the people of Renaissance ideology won appreciation and fame in mosques and various religious centers. This also created quarrelsome situations at some places between the youngsters of al-Mallali al-Shabban and various traditional Muslims.

KGB, the secret agency of Soviet Union regarded the activities of Sheikh Rustamov as alarming in the local cell and presented a report in Kremlin that Communism would fall in Moscow if such movements for the revival of Islam would be allowed to strengthen themselves. That is why KGB arrested Sheikh Rustamov Hindustani and sent him to the jail of Siberia where he died. (6). Sheikh Muhammad Rustamov had a student Abdullah Sayedov who later on became famous with the name of Syed Abdullah Nuri.

According to Olivier Roy, "He was described as a Wahhabi by the Communist Press. But Nuri's profile is typical of the development of a modern Islamist militant, born in 1947 and educated within the Government's system of secular education. He also came from a traditional family, and had followed a parallel religious education in an environment that was deeply impregnated with Sufism. (7). By 1974, as Rashid states in his book 'Nuri had helped form an illegal Islamic educational organization, Nahzer-i-Islami (Islamic knowledge), whilst training to become a surveying engineer'. Later in 1987, Nuri headed a demonstration in support of the Afghan Mujahideen. He was then arrested with

forty others on charges of organizing a protest against Russian occupation of Afghanistan and circulating Islamic literature. Nuri was released after a year but he didn't stop his struggle and political activities and finally he became the leader of Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP).(8)

Sheikh Muhammad Rustamov had another student with the name of Muhammad Sharif Himmatzada like Nuri who decided to promote the teachings of Sheikh Muhammad Rustamov and the movement. Muhammad Sharif Himmatzada spent fifteen years in secret activities. Some people also called him Gulbadeen Hikmat Yar of Central Asia. He told in an interview, "For seventy five years the Communist tried to wipe out the memory of Allah, but every Tajik today still remembers Allah and prays for the success of the party of Allah". (9)

THOUGHTS:

The Thoughts of Islamic Renaissance Party were initially the notion to be closer to the ideas of Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, an Islamic organization of Arab world, while experts of Russian intelligence perceived it as a Qadimist Movement. As leaders of Caucasus, linked to this Islamic movement, consider themselves as honest Qadimists with pure and non-innovative ideas of Islam. Resolution and the Program of the Party

According to Olivier Roy,
'It presented itself explicitly as a 'sociopolitical organization'. Its program denounced ethnic and national conflicts. It was firm in the view that it respected the constitution and rejected terrorism. This claim is clear from the party program'.(10)

Bess Brown reports, 'The Islamic Renaissance Party does profess a desire for all Muslims to live in accordance with the Quran, they also state the desire to achieve such a goal through constitutional means'. (11)

M.E. Ahrari and James Beal discussed the Party's desire for Islamic orders in their book, 'The New Great Game in Muslim Central Asia' as 'Party has continued to express its desire to achieve an Islamic order slowly through legitimate, peaceful means'. (12)

Haghayghi gives a review of the party's initial platform which was made public on December 16, 1990, clearly demonstrates its comprehensively religious orientation.

1. To explain to the people the real meanings of Holy Quran and Hadith and to call the people to live and act according to the Quran and Hadith.
2. To call to Islam by all means of mass media.
3. To fight national and radical discrimination, impudence, crime, alcoholism and all other things that are forbidden by Sharia through understanding and appeal.
4. To educate young people on the principles of Islam and for this purpose, to create instruction and training centers and madrassahs.
5. To ensure that the rights of all Muslims are exercised according to the Quran.
6. To strengthen Islamic brotherhood, to develop religious relations with the Muslim world and to seek for a relationship of equal rights with representative of other religions.
7. To co-operate with other democratic parties and state organizations in all fields.
8. To create philanthropic funds that will support anyone in need of help.
9. To strengthen the family according to the principles of Islam and to ensure the rights of women and children.
10. To ensure the principles of an Islamic economy and regaining ecological purity.
11. To ensure the distribution of food according to the Sharia.
12. To solve the problems of people according to the Holy Quran and Hadith. (13)

Economically Islamic Renaissance Movement wants to make Tajikistan as a manufacturing country instead of exporter of raw oil in a short span of time whose manufacturing goods could be sold in international markets. Keeping in view, laws of Sharia, this party also condemns monopoly and controlled profits. It also feels the dire need for reforms in economy so that progress could be done towards gradual free economy. The Party also particularly stresses upon the fact that the management of the training of local experts should be done within the country. The basic job of the party is to create awareness among public so that they could have a view of the world themselves and mutually compete different governments, and they could reach up to the conclusion that Islamic economic system is the best.

In its foreign policies, Islamic Renaissance Party wants to have relationships with all countries particularly with Muslim countries. The leaders of Renaissance Party want to see the states of Central Asia free. They want eastern democracy that should be established according to Islamic laws. The solution of regionalism to them is to consult Islam. No government other than

Islamic government can join variety of nations. Religiously all Muslims are brothers so there is no questions of regional differences. The Party believes that their forefathers lived in peace and mutual harmony for hundreds of years but Communist government gave air to Tatar, Uzbek and Tajik nationalism and separated them. They just need to go back to the teachings of Quran and Islam. (14)

In an interview published in April 1992, the first deputy of the party, Abdullah Yousaf, explained the party's vision of an Islamic democracy:

"With our people, the notion democracy means no restrictions...it would not be a one party state; the franchise would be universal; the rise of the ethnic and religious minorities would be protected; and private property would be honoured". (15)

According to Olivier Roy,

"this party published journals in various languages of the USSR, including 'Hedayat' in Persian and 'al-Wahdat' in Russian". (16)

SIGNIFICANT SERVICES OF THE PARTY:

Islamic Renaissance Party worked at social level in Tajikistan. In Tajik society the burden of marital customs was so hard that it was extremely difficult for a person with an ordinary salary to perform this duty. Islamic Renaissance Party worked in a religiously organized manner to end this curse in Tajik society. They also convinced the people of this society on the basis of religious education that there was no such concept of customs in Islam, rather a common man is unable to perform this duty and for this sin authorities would be liable. Besides, Renaissance Party also started a successful venture against musical programs in marriages but common and traditional Ullema propagated this struggle as prejudiced and violent.

Moreover, the Renaissance Party also refused to be the part of any such movement that may have agenda of separation. According to a Russian expert, 'Malishenko', this Islamic movement refrained from confronting the official administration. Rather they preferred the discourse in cultural and educational centers and in various educational fields whose brighter aspect started coming up very soon. They also made the Muslims there realized after seventy years long Jewish Communism, that Islam and Politics cannot be separated. (17)

Part leaders also started a newspaper to propagate Islamic resolutions of the movement so that struggle could be done for the economic and political

freedom of Tajikistan. Along with this Himmatzada also reminded Tajik people from the platform of the movement that legal and political freedom of the country is more important; implementation of Islamic code of life can only be made practical after this. The demand became stronger all over the country for this purpose that pig meat and alcohol be banned. Moreover, the names of the roads should be changed from Russian to local names. Atif Abdul Hamid writes that in June 1990 when this organization was established, it was announced that under this party Russian Muslims will be united and name of the organization will be 'United party'. (18) But Soviet Union rejected its establishment considering its existence extremely dangerous for her. Reaction was definite to it. Under this sense of deprivation, people related to this Islamic Movement started struggling for the establishment of an Islamic state under Islamic Sharia in Soviet Union. Getting above the concept of nationalism, the people of this movement started struggling on Islamic foundations. They were not concerned with the fact that which Muslim nation had the leadership of that movement. Whether they are Tatar or Tajik or Uzbek, this organization was maintained purely on the foundations of Islamic nationalism. Each Soviet Muslim was thought to be the member of this movement. Soon imperial powers started putting up hurdles for this movement.

Towards the end of 1991, this movement objected on parliament because it had elected Rehman Nabiyov as the president. A sequence of political pressures started all over the country. In reaction to that, a great number of Muslims of Tajikistan started associating themselves with this Islamic movement. (19)

FAME OF IRP

Ahmed Rashid says that in late 1991, Hard line Communist in Tajik parliament eventually forced through the election of 62 years old Rehman Nabiyov as president in September. Mass protest at his election broke out in Dushanbe, as tens of thousands of people camped out in Lenin Square-renamed as Azadi Square in the centre of the city. Rashid saw people, their enthusiasm, and their 'willingness to sit in the square day after day, hungry and thirsty'. No other party, according to him, had a chance of mass contact. When the IRP was registered as a political party by Tajik authorities in December, just a few days after the collapse of Soviet Union, it already claimed twenty thousand members. (20)

Elections were repeated on the demand of the people of Tajikistan with the result that opposition leader got the government. Soon this government started following the pattern of previous administration with regard to policies. In

whose reaction Renaissance Party launched the movement of protest in March 1992 in collaboration with liberal and other parties. Then government started mass killing all over the country. Government agencies started filing activities of murder and kidnapping. Law of jungle was prevailing in the capital Dushanbe and official army murdered thousands of Muslims. Then Renaissance movement also attacked on Communist administration by giving them a military reply. Both sides suffered heavy loss of lives. In that age of anarchy, Imam Ali Rehmanov took the government. That civil war continued for six months in which approximately forty thousand people were killed.

In these circumstances, many members of Renaissance Party fled to Russia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. With the permission of Ahmed Shah Masood and the then Afghan president Burhan-ud-Din Rabbani, they set up their centers in Northern Qandoos and Taliqan in Afghanistan. During the civil war of Tajikistan, Renaissance Party also maintained its relationships with other Tajik parties. With the coming of Taliban government in Afghanistan, situation changed a bit because Tajik people were expelled from Kabul in that period. Considering Taliban dangerous for Tajikistan, Renaissance party started relationship with the government so that civil war could be stopped in Tajikistan.

Hence situation started towards normality in Tajikistan. Many people of Renaissance Party joined Tajik army. Again in 1999, conflict between the government and Renaissance Party strengthened and the activities of kidnapping and murder surfaced. In a general election February 2000, renaissance Party got 7.5 % seats. Its major reason was that some members of the party had separated due to internal conflicts while many members were had joined Islamic Movement of Uzbeki and many had fled to Afghanistan. Renaissance party also removed its ex-leader Justics Torghan from the movement who thought to be a major reason of success in the previous election for the party. Tajik president Rehmanov, thought these conflicts better for his political interests.

Taking advantage of this situation, president Rehmanov reminded people that he was working more for the Islamic teaching than Renaissance Party and the party had proven to be unsuccessful in this regard. (21)

Cases were filed against the leaders of Renaissance Party after that. A leader of the party, Shams-ud-Din Shamsudinov, was sentenced to sixteen years imprisonment. In 2005, a series of bomb explosion happened at large scale in the country and IRP was put to blame by the government. It has another charge

of having ties with Usama bin Laden, leader of al-Qaida. The rulers take Islamic Renaissance Party as 'fundamentalist', 'extremist' who want to create a new Iran on Tajik soil as quoted by Critchlow. (22)

Here the question arises whether this party can succeed in its goals. Answer is not so simple. There are many a slip between cup and the lip. The factors that are countering its efforts are as follows:

1. The rulers of Central Asia are secular and there is no freedom of political exercise. Though in the beginning, these rulers presented them as true representatives of people but when they got ground, they started applying restriction over Islamic movements and their members.
2. The refusal of implementation of a democratic system on the part of secular rulers creating a war like situation within the state.
3. The breakup of Soviet Union is wrongly perceived as the only cause of their economical, political and intellectual hardships.
4. The prevalence of old system and old constitution is the actual reason of all the problems.
5. A continuous denial to accept the legal position of political movements.
6. To avoid a dialogue over basic areas of problem that discourages the parties to an extent that they are forced towards armed struggle.
7. No provision of basic Islamic rights.
8. American armed interference in the name of war against terrorism.
9. Weak roots of Islamic school of thought.

However, in spite of charges against IRP, this Islamic organization is struggling purely on political grounds. Even now it has representation in the parliament of Tajikistan which shows that people support the program devised by IRP.

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