

The Qur'anic Concept of *Wasatiyah* (Moderation): The Role of Ghulam Azam towards Reforming of a Moderate and Balanced Society in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Wasatiyah as a multi-dimensional concept is scholarly attributed as a “justly balanced path or balanced approach” of Islam. In the context of contemporary Islamic thought, *Wasatiyah* is the counterweight of religious extremism and liberalism. Many liberal Muslim intellectuals and non-Muslim scholars tend to link terrorism and extremism to the existing Islamic movements globally. However, leaders of moderate Islamic movement never approve of a global *Jihad* or terrorism. This study aims at investigating the relevance of the concept of *Wasatiyah* in Bangladesh, and the role of Ghulam Azam- a legendary Islamic thinker in South-Asian Muslim communities and *guru* of a contemporary leading Islamic movement in Bangladesh. He is also the most misunderstood Islamic thinker and political leader of 20th century in Bangladesh politics who represents a comprehensive example of a Muslim group in trying to address the prevailing socio-cultural and politico-economic problems which Muslim nations face. Nevertheless, Ghulam Azam’s contribution towards reforming of a moderate and balanced society in Bangladesh has lessened his paramount bequest afterwards his inflammatory role in 1971 liberation war. This research first examines *Wasatiyah* from the divine sources - the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* based on the interpretation of early and contemporary scholars’ views. This paper also deals with the contribution of Ghulam Azam in Islamic *da’wah* and upholding *Wasatiyah* model regardless of his provocative fashion in Bangladesh politics. It then revisits his education, involvement in politics, controversial view in 1971, and scholarly contribution towards reforming of a moderate and balanced society in Bangladesh. This study is a conceptual analysis, which analyzing the data gathered from textual, contextual and comparative review.

I. Introduction

Allah (SWT) has made *Wasatiyah* a hallmark of the Muslim *Ummah* as mentioned in the Qur’anic verse, “Thus We have made of you an Ummah justly balanced, so that you might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger (Muhammad) a witness over you” (al-Baqarah,

2:143). Islam is, in essence, a justly balanced religion and a complete code of life that promotes peace, mercy, justice, and universal brotherhood. Islam categorically rejects extremism or fanaticism in all its forms. It equally rejects ideological liberalism, secularism and atheism.

In the context of the Qur'anic expression "*ummatan wasatan*", the interpretation of the *Mufasssirun* (Qur'anic exegetes) and the views of the early Muslim scholars refer to the term *Wasatiyah* to imply the Islamic community or nation having the attributes of justice, excellence, and balance (Kamal Hassan, 2013). Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111), in his many writings, especially his magnum opus *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* and *Mizan al-'Amal*, offers a detailed understanding of the meaning of *al-wasat*. He opined that in order to achieve success in this world and in the Hereafter, a man and his inner faculties must be in line with *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* (the Righteous Path) (Al-Ghazali, 1995 and Feisal, 2008).

Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b.1926) interprets the phrase *Ummah Wasat* as the Just (*al-'Adl*) and Chosen (*al-Khair*) or best nation (al-Qaradawi, 1991). He highlights *Wasatiyah* approach alongside classical and contemporary scholars and as such articulates, "Islam, therefore, recommends *Wasatiyah* and balance in everything: in belief, *'Ibadah*, conduct, and legislation. This is the straightforward path that Allah (SWT) has prescribed *al-Sirat al-Mustaqim* (straightforward path). Therefore *Wasatiyah*, or the balanced path, is not only a general characteristic of Islam; it is also a fundamental landmark" (al-Qaradawi, 1991). As a contemporary advocate of the "justly balanced" approach or Islamic moderation, al-Qaradawi lists thirty¹ landmarks and milestones of *Wasatiyah*. Out of the thirty "middle path" positions, Muslims have to adopt eight basic religious implications in pursuing the path of *Wasatiyah* (Kamal Hassan, 2011). Furthermore, al-Qaradawi mentions that "the Muslim *Ummah* is a nation of justice and justly balanced; it witnesses every deviation from the 'straightforward path' in this life and in the Hereafter" (al-Qaradawi, 1992). *Wasatiyah* thus implies carrying out to the best of one's ability what Allah (SWT) has prescribed and avoiding what He has forbidden, understanding the wisdom of His laws and moral guidance, and grasping and applying basic Islamic principles to every new situation as it arises (Lemu 1993). According to a number of *Ahadith*, the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) praised those who adopted a balanced approach to worship. The Prophet (s.a.w) said: "Indeed this religion is easy and it will defeat anyone who makes it difficult" (Al-Bukhari, 2006). In another Hadith, the Prophet (s.a.w) reminded his followers: "Convey the good news and do not make them run away, make it easy and do not make it difficult" (Al-Bukhari, 2006).

While scholars have accredited *Wasatiyah* as a moderate and balanced approach, subsequently, it is important to understand the relevance of *Wasatiyah* discourse in Islamic *Da'wah* and movement, and to examine the rhetorical meaning of the Islamic movement and the practice of its leaders towards people and society. Henceforth, al-Qaradawi stated in his book, *Priorities of the Islamic Movements*, that

¹ Actually prior to this it was 'twenty landmarks' concisely as a methodology of moderation, and distributed these to the General Constituent Assembly of the International Union of the Muslim Scholars, in London in 2004. Afterwards it has become thirty in detailed and well-arranged form until it becomes more perfect as it should be, in terms of the idea, presentation and expression. Thus, it has reached at the thirty landmarks. See more: *Fiqh al-Wasatiyah al-Islamiyah wa al-Tajdid: Maalim wa Manaraat*, and *Islamic Moderation and Renewal: Wasatiyah – Tajdid* (trans.). Hassan Ahmed Ibrahim and et al, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2013).

Islamic movement is an organised and popular collectivism incorporated in the service of Islam and the welfare of people. It is a grassroots movement guided by a structured leadership. It is politically active in recognition that championing the holistic mission of Islam requires political influence. Islam combines faith, worship, *Shari'ah*, creed, propagation, dealings, transactions, governance, and worldly life. In order for all of these to be achieved, Islam has to be related to the system of governance, and the use of political power and public administration (al-Qaradawi, 1992).

The contemporary Islamic movements emerged with the desire to implement social justice within the guidance of Islamic *Shari'ah* in Muslim societies, while seeking to offer better solutions to the political and economic institutions, reform social and cultural values, and remedy the philosophical and intellectual problems faced by the majority of Muslim countries. It endeavours to lead the Muslim *Ummah* to success in both this world and the Hereafter.

Likewise, Bangladesh, one of the most populous Muslim countries, has also been witnessing the proliferation of Islamic movements as both a political and ideological force since its independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Kabir, 2006). The rise of Islamic political forces has brought forth several contenders, one of them being the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (BJI) or the Jamaat, and its elites which serve as a contemporary leading Islamic movement and the pioneer of Islamic political parties in Bangladesh. Moreover, Jamaat-e-Islami is one of the oldest parties in the sub-continent and Ghulam Azam is considered one of the key figures among the first generation of the Jamaat. It was first formed in British India under the leadership of Sayed Abul 'Ala Mawdudi in 1941 and started its work in what is now Bangladesh in the 1950s (Islam, 2011). After Bangladesh gained its independence, the Jamaat began to operate publicly under its own name on May 25-27, 1979, along with other Islam-based political parties.

The Jamaat's organisational achievement under the leadership of Ghulam Azam has made it an expanding force in Bangladeshi politics (Kabir, 2006). It is the pioneer of Islamic movements, as mentioned earlier, in united Pakistan and in the later independent Bangladesh (Ali, 1989). Furthermore, the Jamaat is a moderate Islamic movement and an Islamic political organisation and leaders of the Jamaat believe in democracy, human rights, and are committed to upholding the rule of law. Islam, as a matter of fact, is a deep-rooted social institution in Bangladesh. Social norms and other interactions in the country have largely been originated and guided by Islamic principles and values (Islam, 2016). Even though the Jamaat seeks to establish a just and welfare society through a democratic process, however, the relative indispensability of the concept of *Tayyar al-Wasatiyah al-Islamiyah*, or the trend of a justly balanced approach in Islam cannot be discounted from the socio-political milieu of today, because it is the right attitude that reflects a balanced Islamic method (Islam, 2016 and al-Qaradawi, 1988).

In adopting the methodology of *Wasatiyah* in *Da'wah* (preaching), teaching, *Ifta'* (issuing legal edicts), research, reform, as well as revival, Ghulam Azam, and his party, (the Jamaat), has realised that the propagation of Islam in the context of Muslim-majority Bangladesh where the secular elites and civil society, and some radical Islamic groups are synthesised, is in need of a comprehensive and complete model of a balanced method (*Wasatiyah*). What's more, Ghulam Azam and the current Jamaat rhetoric concerning the place of women in the society shifted from an extreme to a moderate approach. This new position differs significantly from

that held by its founder Abul 'Ala Mawdudi that women's place is at home by virtue of divine ordinance (Ahmad, 2005 and Shehabuddin, 2008).

Furthermore, *Wasatiyah* advocacy of the Jamaat, though it has yet to address certain social and religious issues, has on the other hand increased its popularity in rural areas by its provision of social services and implementation of Islamic integration through its network of school and madrasah, health clinics, hospitals (Iqbal, 2007), charities, Islamic economics and micro-credit projects (Bangladesh Today, 2012).

Alternatively, compared to other Islamic movements and organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Justice and Development Party in Turkey and Morocco, the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islam is considered one of the most flexible of such groups. This is viewed against the backdrop of the Jamaat's willingness to address contemporary issues with a high degree of tolerance and openness (Islam, H. 2016). Issues like democracy in Islam, Islamic economics and finance, the qualities of leadership, state-society relations, the role of civil society, minority rights, and women's rights etc. have all had a place in the new evolving socio-political lexicon of the Jamaat (Islam, 2011 and Kamel, 2009).

According to the State Department of USA, Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim country in its nature. To measure the extent of *Wasatiyah* and the Islamic movement in Bangladesh, and to examine Jamaat's support of democracy, modern-education, Islamic micro-finance and banking, women's empowerment, and the ways in which it has adapted sort of Western institution like good governance is clearly show an integrated and balanced manner (Iqbal, 2007). Above and beyond, Muslim nations have long suffered from military, autocratic, and suppressive regime in the one hand, religious chauvinism, militancy, political violence and corruption on the other, all have led to the increasingly intense call for Islamic political and social reforms. Remarkably, the Muslims in Bangladesh oppose terrorism and extremism within their own ranks that often arise from a perceived threat of ultra-secularism and liberalism (Islam, 2016)

Above and beyond, the legacy of Ghulam Azam for the service of Islam and struggle for *iqamat-e-din* through reforming a moderate society undoubtedly documented in the contemporary history of Bangladesh. As being a long-time Ameer of the Jamaat, his charismatic leadership has transformed the Jamaat into a prestigious and more visible position in Bangladesh politics. Moreover, the study of the Jamaat and the role of Ghulam Azam are very much inter-related in both political and religious aspects.

Ghulam Azam

Ghulam Azam- his popular name is "Professor Ghulam Azam"- a legendary Islamic thinker in South-Asian Muslim communities as well as the most misunderstood Islamic thinker and political leader of 20th century in Bangladesh politics. Unlike Nik Abdul Aziz, a great spiritual *guru* and scholar in Southeast Asian and very precisely in the Malay world's Islamic *Da'wah* and politics, Ghulam Azam was neglected by his nation for the reason that of inflammatory role in 1971 liberation war. He is not widely read and accepted by the modern and secular nationalists and as well as by some segments of religious *Ulama* of *Tabligh* Jamaat, Sufi and Deobandi tradition. It is arguably said, less than 25% religious *Ulama* have read him well and comfortable with his legacy towards Islamizing the contemporary Muslim society in Bangladesh and more than 40% people believe that he is the one of the civilian mastermind of genocide and violence, along with Pakistani Army, against Bengali in 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh (Azadi, 2017). However, he was a spiritual guide and *pundit* to his followers for his balanced and moderate approach characterized "*Wasatiyah* model" in Islamic *da'wah* and

politics regardless of his provocative fashion in Bangladesh politics. He was born on 7 November 1922 in Dhaka in the then Bengal province of British India, the eldest son of Mawlana Ghulam Kabir and Sayeda Ashrafunnisa. He died on 23 October 2014 at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Medical University (BSMMU) at the age of 91 (Azami, 2013).

II. Education and Involvement in Islamic *Da'wah* and Politics

In his educational expedition, Ghulam Azam initiated his primary study in Birgaon primary school and passed class eight from a religious school. Later, he completed matriculation and higher secondary exam from the then Islamic Intermediate College (now Kobi Nazrul College). Then he obtained BA and MA degree in political science from University of Dhaka in 1949. He was a popular student leader and became an Assistant Secretary of East Pakistan Cultural Union for the term 1945-1946. He was also elected General Secretary (GS) of Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) for 1947-48 and 1948-49 terms. Later he began his teaching career at Rangpur Carmichael College in 1951 (Azam, 2002).

What is more, he was one of the famous disciples of Sayed Abul 'Ala Mawdudi, founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, arguably considered a modern architect of Islamic movement of 20th century in South and Southeast Asia. In addition to that, Ghulam Azam acted one of the key players of historic events of the nation including the 'Language Movement' and the movement for democracy in the 1960s and 1980s. As a political leader he presented the 'Caretaker Government' formula which became a Milestone in restoration of Bangladesh's democracy in 1990s and 2000s (Jamaat-e-Islami). As an activist in the language movement, he was arrested twice, in 1952 and in 1955. He also lost his job as an Assistant Professor at Rangpur Carmichael College for his role in the language movement. Although his job was reinstated after a strong student protest, but he did not re-join rather he had decided to dedicate his life in the cause of Islam and to struggle for establishing a welfare and Islamic state in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh. Fascinatingly, it turns into his mission of life to flourishing the attributes of "*Khaira Ummah*" (best nation). The attributes of "*Khaira Ummah*" stated in the Qur'an², for instance, "enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and believe in Allah" which distinguish Muslim Ummah from the 'Book of People' and other nations.

Ghulam Azam was brought up as a practicing Muslim. In his early career, came in touch with a broader socio-political understanding of Islam through a cultural organization called *Tamaddun Majlis* – an organization that also played a key role in the language movement. While a teacher of Political Science in Rangpur Carmichael College, he founded a branch of *Tamaddun Majlis* in Rangpur in 1952. His quest for leading the life of a complete Muslim further took him to *Tabligh* Jamaat. He was the Ameer of *Tabligh* Jamaat of Rangpur for the period of 1951-1954. His integrated knowledge with '*Tamaddun Majlish*' and '*Tabligh* Jamaat' caused him to seek an organisation or movement that covers both the spiritual and sociopolitical aspects of Islam. As a result, he decided to join Jamaat-e-Islami and in a short time became the Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami of East Pakistan in 1957. He was again thrown into jail in 1964 by the military ruler Ayub Khan for his Jamaat activities and his party Jamaat-e-Islami was also declared banned (Azami, 2013)

As a leader of Islamic movement, Ghulam Azam played a key role in the formation of Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDM) in 1967 of which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first

² "You are the best 'Ummah ever raised for mankind. You bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair, and you believe in Allah." (Al-Imran, 3:110).

President of independent Bangladesh from 1972-1975, was also a member. It was an all-party democratic resistance movement against the military regime of Ayub Khan. He was the Secretary General of the Executive Committee of East Pakistan Wing of PDM. Meanwhile, he was also the Ameer of East Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami in 1969 and two decades later he was again elected as the “Ameer of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami in 1991. He set a unique example of leaving the post for the maiden time in the political history of Bangladesh. He steps down from the post of Ameer of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami after placing an appeal of self-resignation to the party’s working committee in 2000 (Jamaat-e-Islami).

Ghulam Azam, although, politically oppose the creation of Bangladesh but he worked very hard for the continuation of peace and democracy in independent Bangladesh. To save the country from political turmoil and naked division, he outlined the “caretaker government” formula in 1980s in a bid to hold a free, fair and credible election. The political parties of Bangladesh agreed with his concept in 1990s and then Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government led by Begum Khaleda Zia legitimated the formula in the parliament in 1996, and sanctioned an article in the constitution. It is worthy mentioned, Ghulam Azam, at the end of his long-run political career, was one of the originators of “four-party alliance” in the beginning of 000s millennium which won the landslide victory in 2001 general election. The four-party alliance later formed an “coalition government” called ‘BNP-Jamaat alliance’ where two senior leaders, Mawlana Matiur Rahman Nizami, then Ameer of the Jamaat and the Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid serve the nation as a member of the Cabinet in 2001-2006 (Jamaat-e-Islami).

III. Controversial Views of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1971 Independence

A) Critical Decision of the Jamaat on Independence of Bangladesh

Bangladesh and Pakistan together emerged as a new country by the name Pakistan in 1947 when the British colonial ruler left the Indian subcontinent. The then Pakistan continued to function as a single country until 1971—a year which was marked by a tragic war between Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) and Pakistan (the then West Pakistan). Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamic political party in the undivided Pakistan, had to make a critical decision as to support the continuity of the undivided and united Pakistan or opt for the division of it, allowing the then East Pakistan to emerge as a new independent country on the world map. This section examines the critical decision of the Jamaat taken in a special historical-political context and tries to see how certain principles or landmarks of *Wasatiyah* (Islamic moderation) were reflected in the decision.

Two big issues have shaped post-colonial and post-independent Bangladesh. One was the natural demand for ‘*Bengali*’ as a national language. This resulted from the attitude of the West Pakistani leadership to dominate politically, economically, militarily and culturally the erstwhile East Pakistan separated by 1000 miles belonging to Indian Territory. The issue of language, better known in the history as “Ekushe February” (21st February, 1952), got its root from the incautious statement made by the Pakistani freedom fighter-cum-father of the nation - Qaaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah. To materialize the goal of national integration, Jinnah, while visiting the erstwhile East Pakistan in March, 1948 declared that “Urdu and Urdu shall be the only state language of Pakistan”(Pramanik, 2007). Apart from this step-motherly treatment perpetrated by the West Pakistani leadership, the determination of Indian freedom fighter-cum-father of the nation - Jawherlal Nehru to prove ‘Two Nation Theory’ wrong manifested through the direct support for the freedom fighter during 25 March 1971 till Dec 16, 1971 culminated into the birth of a new nation called ‘Bangladesh’ (Pramanik, 1982).

B) Resistance of the Jamaat to Independent Bangladesh

In the late 1960s, the secessionist movement took the form of a Bengali ethnic-and language-based struggle against economic, cultural and political exploitation by the (Punjabi) military-bureaucratic leadership in West Pakistan. Ironically, this struggle downplayed the Muslim identity of about 90 per cent of the country's population (Hossain, 2012). With the exception, the major reason among others for discontent in East Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s was the exploitation of its resources by the West Pakistani military-bureaucratic-industrial establishment. While East Pakistan's agriculture remained stagnant, its jute export earnings were expropriated for industrial development in West Pakistan (Khan, 1972). Second, the Islamabad-centred government distributed foreign aid and other development funds inequitably between West and East Pakistan (Hossain, 2009). Third, West Pakistani politicians were not willing to share power with their counterparts in East Pakistan. Discontent came to a climax in 1971 when the Pakistani military rulers failed to transfer power to the Awami League after it won the parliamentary elections held in December 1970 on a platform that demanded regional autonomy. The military crackdown on 25 March 1971 was the final nail in the coffin of Pakistani rule over East Bengal (Islam, 2016).

Nevertheless, the Jamaat-e-Islami (of Bangladesh) like other Islamic forces including Nezam-e-Islami and Muslim League, took stance and felt that the independence of Bangladesh on the basis of 'Bengali and Secular' identity will not be the true independence of Muslims majority people in Bangladesh. For Muslims, being in majority, independence would only mean a change in masters. Pakistani hegemony (Muslim dominance) will be replaced by Indian hegemony (Hindu dominance), and that would be no independence for Muslim Bangladesh. Islamic forces' feelings were that they were a Muslim majority nation and Muslim brotherhood could not be disintegrated with the West Pakistani Muslim although there was a struggle against economic, cultural and political exploitation by the (Punjabi) military-bureaucratic leadership. To many pro-Islamic parties and personalities, Pakistanis and Bengalis were 'Muslim Brothers', no matter, what colour they are and what language they speak (Jaffry, 2009).

The Qur'anic concept of 'Muslim Brotherhood' has obviously been reflected in the attitude of Islamic forces who struggled for integrated Pakistan. Allah (SWT) said:

If two groups of the believers fight each other, seek reconciliation between them. And if one of them commits aggression against the other, fight the one that commits aggression until it comes back to Allah's command. So if it comes back, seek reconciliation between them with fairness, and maintain justice. Surely Allah loves those who maintain justice. All believers are but brothers, therefore seek reconciliation between your two brothers, and fear Allah, so that you may be blessed with mercy (Qur'an, 49: 9 -10).

It is true that there was a struggle of all political parties in East Pakistan including Islam-loving people against economic, cultural and political exploitation by West Pakistani military-bureaucratic leadership. The struggle of Islamic parties and personalities against exploitation for the reason of integrated Pakistan is another reflection of the Prophetic tradition:

Jabir b. Abdullah reported that two young men, one from the *Muhajirin* (emigrants) and the other one from the *Ansar* (helpers) fell into dispute and the *Muhajir* called his fellow *Muhajirin*, and the *Ansari* (the helper) called the *Ansar* (for help). In the meanwhile, Allah's Messenger (s.a.w) came there and said: What is this, the proclamation of the days of *Jahiliyah* (ignorance)? They said: O Messenger of Allah! there is nothing

serious. The two young men fell into dispute and the one struck at the back of the other. Thereupon he (the Prophet) said: Well, a person should help his brother whether he is an oppressor or an oppressed. If he is the oppressor he should prevent him from doing it, for that is his help; and if he is the oppressed he should be helped (against oppression) (Muslim).

The above mentioned Qur'anic and Prophetic principle was understood by Islam-loving people. Unfortunately, it was not realised by the Federal Governments of Pakistan. Not only that, even they [Pakistani regime] denied power transfer to the AL, the single largest party in the Parliament, coupled with brutal military action in East Pakistan in 1971. All these injustices caused Bengalis to revolt which gave India a "Chance of the Century"³ to cut Pakistan into two, so she declared war against Pakistan, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh and surrender of over 90 thousand Pakistani troops to Indian Army in Dhaka on 16 December, 1971 (Jamaat-e-Islami).

In the case of Ghulam Azam, the ideologue of the Jamaat in Bangladesh had to face brickbats in his life from his political opponents for the stance he as well as his party (the Jamaat) has taken against the independent Bangladesh. But he neither denied nor regretted his stance. In the run-up to the interviews and lectures, he justified it ever more courageously. He stated in a long interview, conducted in UK, in 2003: "People can say whatever they like regarding me and the party's stance in 1971. I don't bother it. I still believe that my duty is to please Allah and to convince Muslims that their aim is to establish the *Deen* of Allah [*Iqaamat-e-Deen*] on His earth."

In the fateful and calamitous situation of 1971, the Jamaat all across the country faced tremendous challenges and allegations. Regarding 1971 issue and war crimes, Ghulam Azam and other Jamaat senior leaders have delivered speeches in several places, including at the parliament⁴ and tribunal of war crimes and they explained why they said 'NO' to liberation war. In 1971's political crisis and turmoil, the Jamaat suggested ways to solve the problems politically and constitutionally. The Jamaat pointed out to the fact that the movement emerged in East Pakistan on the basis of Bengali nationalism (hence East Pakistan was created based on Muslim nationalism or two nation theory in 1947). Bengali nationalism was standing on two legs. One leg was on the struggle against the West Pakistani hegemony over the Bengalis in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) while the other one was set on the antagonism against the Islamic identity and struggle for secularism by the support of India. With the independence [disbanding united Pakistan as a Muslim country] one leg would be cut off, as the freedom against the Pakistani would by then have been accomplished. So, Bengali nationalism would have only the leg of hatred to Islamic identity to stand on by the support of Indian hegemony for secularism (Kabeer, 2014).

What is more, the Independence War began unexpectedly following the military crackdown on 25 March 1971. Ordinary people fought against the Pakistani military for survival, not necessarily to establish a secular socialist state. Moreover, the 1970 parliamentary elections had been held under a 'Legal Framework Order' that upheld Islamic principles (Abdullah,

³ The term 'Chance of the Century' often used by two Bangladeshi nationalist columnists; Minar Rashid and Mahmudur Rahman.

⁴ For instance, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, senior deputy Ameer of the Jam'at, has challenged the allegation in the Parliament in 1996 while AL was in power but nobody show the courage to take his challenge.

2006). According to AKM Wahiduzzaman (2013), Ghulam Azam and his party the Jamaat, being a witness to genocide of 25 March 1971, had strategically made a mistake in support of Pakistani forces for undivided Pakistan. The strategy was Islamic identity [Muslim nationalism] which was the foundation of Pakistan movement in the one hand, and the Indian hegemony on the other.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami has repeated the same history as its founder and ideologue Mawdudi did by opposing the nationalism movement in early 1940s. The Jamaat was a passionate critic of the Bangladesh Liberation Movement and opposed the creation of Bangladesh as it ascribed to a 'Bengali and Secular' identity. Surprisingly, after independence, however, it moved to accept Bangladesh as an Independent and sovereign state and started articulating the "vision" for Bangladesh, to establish an Islamic State that encompassed an Islamic constitution and law. Moreover, the Jamaat stood for Bangladesh and worked as a law abiding constitutional party. No propaganda could deny and change this fact which testifies to the realism and balanced attitude of the leaders of Jamaat (Abdullah, 2006 and Azami, 2013).

According to Mahmudur Rahman (Manju, 2017), in the religious morality and political debate, the Jamaat has been discredited in the Partition of 1947 and the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. In political issues, decision was not made in considering the political demand, but it was made on the basis of religious consideration. In 1947, 'the Two-Nation Theory' was a politically expected and popular issue but the religious *Ulama* and *guru* of Islamic movements have found it inappropriate in the light of Islamic principles and opposed the partition of Pakistan and India. The same stem has happened in 1971. The *Ulama* and leaders of Islamic Parties were in favor of integrated Pakistan, and the reason was same-the religious mind-setup and consideration. But the peoples' popular support was in favor of independent Bangladesh. If they could prefer political thought they would have been in the favor of Bangladesh's independence. Since the issue was considered on the basis of Islamic principle (reconciliation), so the stance was not to break the Pakistan.

To conclude the above historical and critical discussion, the independence of Bangladesh, in other words, separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan has so many hidden interpretations that had never been justly and neutrally unfolded to the people of Bangladesh until now. For the period of the liberation war in 1971, the Jamaat-e-Islami of Bangladesh was a minor political party. Unlike Awami League (AL) a leading political party, the Jamaat as an insignificant party in that time, took a major decision not to support the separation of united Pakistan although there was a 'struggle'⁵ against economic, cultural and political exploitation by the (Punjabi) military-bureaucratic leadership in West Pakistan. In the views of the Jamaat, the separation may cause the intervention of Indian hegemony into 'new born Bangladesh' and disbanding of two Muslim brotherhood states could be a great loss for Islam and Muslim. Hence, the intention of the Jamaat did serve the landmark of *Wasatiyah* in Muslim unity and brotherhood but it did not serve the interest of the majority of people in Bangladesh. The support of Jamaat for undivided Pakistan was ideological and political. Consequently, the Pakistani military and their auxiliary forces committed brutality and mass killing over East Pakistani Bengalis may consider as an unintended support of the Jamaat, which did not reflect the principle of justice.

⁵ The prophetic teaching has also been reflected in this regard.

IV. Scholarly Contribution

Alongside political activities, Ghulam Azam also appeared as an outstanding thinker and notable scholar and writer. He discharged the duty of the editorial body of Daily Ittehad in 1958. He wrote many columns and editorials in several dailies and journals. He wrote almost 107 titles on different topics including *Tafsir* books, life of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), Islam, Islamic *da'wah*, movement and organisations. Several books [of his] have been translated into English, Urdu, Tamil and Persian. His autobiographical book '*Jibone Ja Dekhlam*' [My Journey Through Life] is a masterpiece which also upholds the segments and facts of the history. He is the first Bengali to write down the *tafsir* of the holy *Qur'ān* in a very simple and plain language. His small books are also being included in the syllabus of *Islami Chhatra Shibir* (Student Wing of the Jamaat) and Jamaat-e-Islami, which really help the Islamic activists to mould their life style (Azam, 2002). More significantly, his enlightening literature and well constructive lecture in various occasions have influenced hundreds of thousands youth and middle ages of people especially those who are the associates of leading Islamic Student Wing called *Islami Chhatra Shibir*, the largest student organisation of the country with hundreds of thousands student activists (*Shibir*). Members of *Chhatra Shibir*, who are committed to serve the nation with strong Islamic orientation and professionalism, might be the future leader of the country if the political avenue comes in their favour. Further, legacy and struggle of Ghulam Azam for the process of Islamization of family and reforming of a moderate society could be demonstrated in the following lines.

i. Islamization of Family and Society

One of the highest agenda of Ghulam Azam and his party the Jamaat is to deal with the broad and basic principles and teachings of Islam; spiritual, moral, social, political and economic. The ideal Islamic society, suggested by Mawdudi, consists of people who, through putting their faith in Islam, have liberated themselves from all allegiances except to Allah; such a society would be free and "Theo-democratic" and its citizens would be as equal as the teeth of a comb (Moten, 2002).

The Muslims, according to Mawdudi, belong to the *Ummah Wasat* (Just and balanced community), and "*Shuhada' 'ala al-nas*" (witnesses over mankind), as such, are duty bound to enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil (Mawdudi, 1976). Furthermore, Mawdudi insists that a good society needs honesty and justice to uphold a healthy and prosperous family and the social order. To maintain the standard of the family and the social order, it would come only from the sincere members of the society who have patience and appreciate others (Mawdudi, 1995).

The Qur'an introduces the concept of *Khaira Ummah*, which is to develop a good community for the benefit of mankind, enjoining *al-Ma'ruf* (what is right, good and fair) and forbidding *al-Munkar* (what is wrong, bad and unfair, e.g., polytheism, disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden), and you believing in Allah. The Qur'ān (3:110) says:

You are the Best Ummah ever raised for mankind. You command that which is good and forbid that which is Evil, and you believe in Allah. If the people of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them, there are believers, while most of them are sinners.

When the Muslim community ignores enjoining good (*ma'ruf*) and prohibition of evil (*munkar*), then society at large faces serious corruption (*fasad*) beginning from the individual and then family to the whole community. In this regard, the Muslim community has to be united to overcome the challenges and difficulties, and there should be a group of people

dedicated the quest and tranquillity. Obviously this needs commitment from the individual and the community, as stated in the Qur'an, 3:110 (Islam, 2016).

Islamic organisations and groups actively work to fulfil this purpose and show their sincere guidance for the happy, Islamic and prosperous life so that society could have the best of this world and the Hereafter. Unfortunately, the religious organisations in Bangladesh are generally divided into two groups. In brief, the first of them is forward-thinking and somewhat balanced in faith and practice, and represents the leading position in Islamic *Da'wah* and politics. The second group is unconventional and unconscious about worldly life. The Jamaat and Islamic political parties belong to the former and the *Tabligh* Jamaat and Sufi-oriented tradition belong to the latter. An indication of the first group is they do not limit Islam to worship and the Hereafter. Beyond the scope of the Hereafter, this group also believes that Islam, constituting an ideology, social order, and rules of law, is concerned with every aspect of human life and how to deal and lead the worldly life for success in the Hereafter. Islam is thus very much concerned with human salvation in the Hereafter, as well as the significance of people's worldly lives (Samad, 2015).

Accordingly, one the Jamaat's permanent agendas is '*Islahi Mu'ashara*' or social reform. In this regard, Ghulam Azam and his party [the Jamaat] have initiated social-based projects to overcome prejudice and ignorance and unconsciousness of religiosity in the society. They also established mass education centres, Masjid-based activities, Islamic cultural centres, celebrating the Islamic calendar and scholarship-based institutions for the needy and poor family (Hassan, 1993).

In this regard, al-Qaradawi advised:

Take care of the family which is the foundation for community, and the primary pillar to build up a good society. "Taking care of the rights of each spouse on his/her partner, and not to resort to divorce except if harmony would become impossible and legalizing the polygamy subject to the respective conditions and restrictions, with neither expansion nor prohibition, and expanding the scope of the family to include agnates and relatives on the maternal side (al-Qaradawi, 2010).

ii. Islamization of Economics and Finance

Socio-economic justice is one of the most significant goals of Islamic social, political, economic and cultural reform. The goals of socio-economic justice and equitable distribution of income and wealth are integral parts of the moral philosophy of Islam. One of the socio-economic reforms made by Islam was the prohibition of interest through the establishment of interest-free Islamic finance (Zahid, 2015).

In accordance to the fact, since the party's relaunch, Ghulam Azam and think-tank of the Jamaat have made considerable inroads in several non-state sectors as well. The Islamic Economics Research Bureau (IERB) and Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd (IBBL), whose management is mostly affiliated with the Jamaat-oriented people, were the first organization that took active initiative in this regard. Islami Bank has become the third largest bank in the country and the first largest bank in the private banking sector. In addition to that, Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL) is a Joint Venture Public Limited Company engaged in commercial banking business based on Islamic Shari'ah with 63.09% foreign shareholding having largest branch network (total 310 Branches) among the private sector Banks in Bangladesh. It was established on the 13th March 1983 as the first Islamic Bank in the South East Asia in which 19 Bangladeshi national, 4 Bangladeshi institutions and 11 banks, financial institutions and

government bodies of the Middle East and Europe including IDB and two eminent personalities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Fuad Abdullah Al-Khatib and Yousif Abdullah Al-Rajhi, joined hands to make the dream a reality. It is interesting to note that Fuad Al Khatib was an intimate friend of Ghulam Azam and later he was an Ambassador of KSA to Bangladesh in early 1980s (Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited). Basically, the Islamic Bank was founded in 1983 at the initiative of Fuad Al Khatib, then the Saudi ambassador to Bangladesh. His personal initiative and support encouraged Jamaat oriented people and some other Islam like-minded intellectuals to initiate the long journey of Islamization of economics and finance based on Islamic *Shari'ah* principles (IBBL). Mir Quasem Ali, one of the senior leaders of the Jamaat, was the director of both the IBBL and the NGO *Rabita al-Alam al-Islami*. According to Jawad Sayed (2016), the Jamaat like-minded people also control few more Islamic banks, of which the IBBL is one of the third largest banks in South Asia. Further he added that the Jamaati people have also recently moved into the Islamic insurance sector as well, entering into a collaboration agreement with the Far Easter Insurance Corporation (2016). Critics of the Jamaat finger out to IBBL as a property of the Jamaat what is coined out a robust channel to Islamize the country's economic sector and to demolish the monopoly of secularized economics.

Apart from that, Jamaat-supported hospitals, clinics, temporary health centres and coaching centres provide affordable health care and education to urban, working and the lower middle classes. It is well propagated in media that the party has particularly strong financial ties with countries in the Gulf, which had extended their help for these enterprises. Funding and ideological support also comes from the moderate Islamic discourse among the diaspora Bangladeshi community in the UK and North America (Rehman 2013).

iii. Views of Secular Elites towards Ghulam Azam

Beginning in the early 1990s pro-Awami League activists and left-block secularists campaigned energetically to try suspected war criminals. However, these activists sought retribution rather than truth and ending impunity. The goal of healing wounds never stood a chance. The both secular elites and media, mostly controlled by the leftists, impatiently criticised and condemned Ghulam Azam for his inflammatory role in 1971 liberation war. However, few secular elites also articulate his role and personality in other way. Ibn Golam Samad and Muhammad Toha, arguably *guru* of leftists and contemporary of Ghulam Azam, may perhaps be bracketed in the following lines.

According to Samad (2014), Ghulam Azam and his party [the Jamaat] could be regarded in two different instances. One, on the one hand, has been verily transmitted in the contemporary literature and highlighted in the media that he [Ghulam Azam] is the civilian mastermind and *Ghatok* (killer) of genocide in 1971. He, on the other, has also been recognized in the street after his death while hundreds of thousands people marched to attend his funeral in 2014. In addition, he also remains as a *guru* and spiritual guide to many non-partial Islam like-minded people and his followers in Bangladesh and abroad. Further, Samad articulated,

Ghulam Azam is one of the most recognized and admired name in the politics of Bangladesh. He is the man who had witnessed three historical periods such as the British colonial rule (1922-1947), the Pakistani regime (1948-1971) and the independent Bangladesh (1972-2014). In the Political career, Ghulam Azam

starts through the movement of state language called “Language Movement (*Bhahasa Andolon*)”. He was elected GS (General Secretary) of Dhaka University Central Student Union (DUCSU) and he could be remembered forever for his outstanding contribution in the historic language movement of the country. He also bravely read out the memorandum demanding Bengali as the state language of Pakistan along with Urdu in front of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan and secured unique position in the history.

It is a matter of fact, Ghulam Azam, one of the main architects of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami from the perspective of psychology, is not a radical or extremist personality. Rather it is to say, he is a moderate and tender attitude personality. He and his party did not want to grab power by force but he wanted to move in a systematic way. The Jamaat wants to go to power through democratic process and it never desire to grab power by bombing or exercising extremism or radicalism (Samad, 2015). Mohammad Toha, a famous communist leader, in an interview in 2006, accredited the charismatic personality of Ghulam Azam and opined he [Ghulam Azam] was GS (General Secretary) of Dhaka University Central Students Union. He was a brilliant student and naturally was an accommodating and polite personality. Students were very much attracted by his noble personality. We have, like other, worked together in the language movement and many of us associated the circle and were involved in the language movement.”

V. Conclusion

Wasatiyah reinforcement of the Jamaat, though it has yet to address many social and religious issues, has on the other hand increased its popularity throughout the country by its provision of social services and implementation of Islamic integration. Through establishing schools and *madrasah*, hospitals, charitable NGO’s, Islamic economics and micro-credit projects have contributed to develop a prosper society and sustainable economy. Likewise, dedication and sacrifice of Ghulam Azam in the cause of Islam and struggle for a welfare and Islamic state in Pakistan and then in Bangladesh fascinatingly turn into his mission to flourishing the attributes of “*Khaira Ummah*” (best nation) as stated in the Qur’an. Ghulam Azam, although, politically oppose the creation of Bangladesh but he worked very hard for the continuation of peace and democracy in independent Bangladesh. To save the country from political turmoil he outlined the “caretaker government” formula in 1980s and four-party alliance in early 2000s. More significantly, his enlightening and scholarly Islamic literature and well constructive lecture in various occasions have inspired hundreds of thousands youth. Ghulam Azam and his party [the Jamaat] could be regarded in two opposite sides. One, on the one hand, has been verily transmitted in the contemporary literature and highlighted in the media as a *Ghatok* (killer) of genocide in 1971 liberation war. He, on the other, has also been renowned in the street as a national hero after his death while hundreds of thousands people marched to the capital city of Dhaka in attending his last funeral in 2014. In addition, he also remains as a *guru* and spiritual guide to many non-partial and Islam like-minded people and his followers in Bangladesh and abroad.

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