Non-Electoral Islamic Activism: Dr. Israr Ahmed's Critique Of Political Participation

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ABSTRACT
This paper looks at non-electoral Islamic activism by specifically looking at the Dr. Israr Ahmed critique of politics participation, by putting his ideas in the context of the general pasture of Islamic revivalism in Pakistan. Although much of the current research into political Islam in South Asia has been concerned with electorally active movements, especially Jamaat-e-Islami, this paper prefigures a different paradigm of revivalist that does not accept parliamentary politics based on theological and methodological grounds. Based on the qualitative analysis of the writings of Dr. Israr Ahmed, speeches, and organizational literature, the article claims that his efforts to reject electoral participation did not occur in isolation since they were part of a coherent Qurayan-based vision of Islamic transformation. Dr. Israr has criticized contemporary democracy as based on popular sovereignty, which he perceived to be inconsistent with the Islamic concept of divine sovereignty, and as endorsing moral compromise, dilution of ideologies, and early claim to power. At the heart of his approach was a firm adherence to the Prophetic approach, with its emphasis on sequential phases of daʿwah, tarbiyah, disciplined organization (tanzīm) and moral change before any approach could be made to the politics of authority.

The article also illustrates how such a non-electoral position made Tanzeem-e-Islami stand out among other revivalist streams in Pakistan such as Jamaat-e-Islami constitutional activism, jurisprudential incrementalism of traditional ulama-led movements, and the devotionalism of the Sufi-Barelvi traditions. The study questions state centred, electoral models of political Islam by analyzing Tanzeem-e-Islami as a unique model of bottom-up, non-electoral revivalism. It concludes that the idea of Dr. Israr Ahmed is a theoretically consistent, albeit practically limited, alternative vision of Islamic activism that suggests the necessity to include non-electoral movements in the wider conceptualizations of Islamic revitalization in Pakistan and other countries.

Keywords: Non-electoral Islamic activism, Dr. Israr Ahmed, Political Islam in Pakistan, Tanzeem-e-Islami, Islamic revivalism

Introduction
Islamic revivalist movements sin South Asia have historically differed over the question of political participation within modern nation-states. While some movements have viewed electoral politics and constitutional engagement as legitimate means for achieving Islamic reform, others have regarded such participation as inherently problematic, arguing that it entails moral compromise and ideological dilution. This fundamental divergence reflects deeper disagreements over the nature of Islamic methodology, the proper relationship

between religious movements and state power, and the sequence through which comprehensive Islamic transformation can be achieved in contemporary societies. In Pakistan, this debate has been most clearly reflected in the contrasting approaches of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), which has consistently engaged in electoral politics since the mid-1950s, and revivalist thinkers who rejected parliamentary participation as incompatible with Islamic methodology. Among the latter, Dr. Israr Ahmed (1932–2010) occupies a distinctive and influential position, having articulated a systematic critique of electoral Islamism while simultaneously constructing an alternative paradigm of non-electoral revivalism rooted in Qur'anic pedagogy, moral formation, and disciplined organizational development.

Dr. Israr Ahmed was initially associated with Jamaat-e-Islami and deeply influenced by Syed Abul A'la Maududi's conception of Islam as a comprehensive system governing all aspects of life. During his early association with JI from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s, Dr. Israr participated in the organization's educational and training activities, absorbing Maududi's revolutionary vision of Islam as an ideological alternative to both Western capitalism and Soviet communism. However, he later emerged as one of Jamaat-e-Islami's most systematic internal critics, particularly regarding its participation in elections and its alliances with secular political forces (Metcalf, 1982). His critique was not merely tactical or situational but rested on a fundamental disagreement over methodology a disagreement that would shape the trajectory of Islamic revivalism in Pakistan for decades to come. Dr. Israr argued that Islamic revival could not be achieved through electoral politics, which he viewed as rooted in man-made sovereignty and driven by pragmatic compromise rather than Qur'anic principles (Ahmed, 1992; Ahmed, 1997). He resigned from JI in April 1957, following the organization's 1956 decision to enter electoral processes, describing this shift as a "plunge into the arena of power politics" that led to "degeneration from a pure Islamic revolutionary party to a mere political one" (Nasr, 1994). This resignation marked not an abandonment of Islamic activism but rather the beginning of a decades-long effort to formulate and implement an alternative methodology for Islamic revival.

Dr. Israr Ahmed's intellectual formation was profoundly shaped by what might be termed the "Farahi-Islahi school" of Quranic exegesis. This approach, pioneered by Maulana Hamiduddin Farahi (1863-1930) and systematized by his student Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi (1904-1997), emphasized the Quran's inherent coherence (nazm), thematic unity, and revolutionary message. Unlike traditional verse-by-verse exegesis (tafsir), the Farahi-Islahi method focused on understanding the Quran holistically, identifying central themes (amud) that unified each surah, and interpreting verses in relation to their thematic context (Islahi, 2004). Dr. Israr studied directly under Maulana Islahi and internalized this methodological approach, which would become the cornerstone of his own interpretive practice and revivalist methodology.

Beyond the Farahi-Islahi school, Dr. Israr's intellectual universe encompassed multiple strands of South Asian Islamic thought. From Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), he absorbed the concept of "khudi" (selfhood) and the imperative for Islamic intellectual rebirth (tajdid) in the modern world. From Sheikh-ul-Hind Maulana Mahmood-ul-Hasan (1851-1920), he drew inspiration for anti-colonial resistance and the vision of restoring Islamic political authority. From Sheikh-ul-Islam Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (1887-1949), he inherited a constitutional understanding of how Islamic principles could be institutionalized in a modern state (Metcalf, 1982). This eclectic intellectual heritage allowed Dr. Israr to synthesize a distinctive approach that combined rigorous Quranic scholarship with a revolutionary political vision.

Central to Dr. Israr Ahmed's methodology was his concept of "Quran-centric revolution" a process of societal transformation that began not with political mobilization but with deep, transformative engagement with the Quran at both individual and collective levels. He argued that previous Islamic movements had failed because they attempted to implement Islamic systems without first creating genuinely Islamic individuals and communities. His approach emphasized a sequential methodology: first, intellectual conviction (yaqeen) through Quranic understanding; second, moral transformation (tazkiyah) of individuals; third, formation of a Quranic community (jamaah); fourth, social reform of the larger society; and finally, the establishment of Islamic political authority (hukumat) (Ahmed, 2000). This bottom-up, gradualist approach represented a fundamental departure from both traditionalist incrementalism and Jamaat-e-Islami's top-down political strategy.

Dr. Israr's break with Jamaat-e-Islami in 1956, after nearly a decade of membership, was precipitated by profound methodological disagreements. He criticized what he saw as JI's "political deviation" its increasing focus on electoral politics, alliance-building with secular parties, and dilution of ideological purity for political gain. In his view, this represented a fundamental betrayal of Maududi's original revolutionary vision. This critique was elaborated in his seminal work "Renaissance of Islam and the Dominance of True Religion," where he argued that true Islamic revival required a return to the Prophet Muhammad's methodology in Mecca a phase of pure invitation (dawah), education (taleem), and organization (tanzim) without political power, which only came after thirteen years of foundational work (Ahmed, 1997).

This article examines Dr. Israr Ahmed's critique of political participation and situates his non-electoral stance within the broader landscape of Islamic revivalist movements in Pakistan. It addresses two research questions: (1) What were the main arguments Dr. Israr Ahmed used to criticize Jamaat-e-Islami's participation in electoral politics and its alliances with secular forces? (2) In what ways did this non-electoral stance distinguish Tanzeem-e-Islami from other revivalist streams, including traditional ulama movements, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Sufi-Barelvi traditions? By addressing these questions through qualitative textual analysis of Dr. Israr's writings, speeches, and organizational literature supplemented by secondary scholarship on Islamic revivalism, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Islamic activism beyond electoral and state-centered frameworks. In doing so, it seeks to recover a significant but understudied dimension of Pakistan's religious landscape and to challenge assumptions that equate Islamic revivalism with electoral participation or that treat non-electoral approaches as merely derivative or marginal. The paper argues that Dr. Israr Ahmed's non-electoral paradigm represents a theoretically consistent, methodologically distinctive, and practically significant alternative vision of Islamic transformation one that illuminates the diversity of revivalist strategies and enriches scholarly understanding of political Islam's multiple trajectories in contemporary South Asia.

(1) What were the main arguments Dr. Israr Ahmed used to criticize Jamaat-e-Islami's participation in electoral politics and its alliances with secular forces?

The critiques of Jamaat-e-Islami's involvement in electoral politics and its connections with secular forces presented by Dr. Israr Ahmed were based on a systematic theological and methodological framework rather than ad hoc political differences (Nasr, 1994). He claimed that contemporary parliamentary democracy is fundamentally based on popular sovereignty (hakimiyyat-e-sha'b), which is directly opposed to the Islamic doctrine of divine sovereignty (hakimiyyat-e-Ilahi) (Ahmed, 1997). His view was that taking part in

elections with the aim of Islamizing the state was tantamount to implicit acceptance of man-made law and majority rule, and therefore entailed the nullification of the Qur'anic principle that ultimate legislative authority must be vested in God alone (Ahmed, 1992). Such theological criticism was combined with a methodological critique based on his interpretation of the Prophetic model (Esposito, 1998). Dr. Israr argued that the revival of Islam should be carried out in sequential stages beginning with da'wah (calling), followed by tarbiyah (moral training), and then the formation of a disciplined organization (tanzim) before political power could be legitimately pursued (Ahmed, 2000). Jamaat-e-Islami, in his assessment, had entered electoral politics prematurely, without first attaining the comprehensive moral and intellectual transformation of society that the Prophetic methodology required (Nasr, 1996).

Additionally, Dr. Israr Ahmed argued that electoral politics is by its very nature an arena of pragmatism, compromise, and striving to win numerical majorities, which in his view inevitably corrupts ideological clarity and moral uprightness (Ahmad, 2009). He condemned Jamaat-e-Islami for having adjusted its discourse to accommodate electoral necessities and for having involved itself in political bargaining, which diluted its initial revolutionary spirit (Ḥasanbaygī & Sabūrīfar, 2021). What particularly troubled him were the alliances that the movement forged with secular political forces, which he considered to blur the distinction between Islamic and non-Islamic worldviews and subordinate Islamic principles to short-term strategic calculations (Munir, 1980). According to him, such alliances disoriented the masses regarding the normative vision of Islamic politics and reduced Islam to merely one alternative ideology within a pluralistic political marketplace (Roy, 1994). He maintained that these practices ensured that Jamaat-e-Islami gradually ceased being a principled Islamic revivalist movement and instead became a conventional political party preoccupied with electoral survival rather than comprehensive societal transformation (Ahmed, 1997). It was on this basis that he opposed electoral participation not merely as an ineffectual tactic but as a fundamental abandonment of authentic Islamic methodology, which would later inform the non-electoral, bottom-up revivalist model institutionalized through Tanzeem-e-Islami (Hussain, 2005).

A further dimension of Dr. Israr's critique concerned what he perceived as Jamaat-e-Islami's departure from its original revolutionary character following its decision to enter electoral politics in 1956 (Nasr, 1994). He described this shift as a "plunge into the arena of power politics" that led to "degeneration from a pure Islamic revolutionary party to a mere political one" (Nasr, 1994, p. 112). This degeneration, in his analysis, manifested not only in ideological compromise but also in organizational transformation the party that had been conceived as a vanguard for Islamic revolution gradually adapted itself to the logic of the very system it had originally sought to transcend (Zaman, 2002). Dr. Israr maintained that this transformation was inevitable given the inherent contradictions between Islamic methodology and democratic politics, arguing that once a movement commits to working within a secular constitutional framework, it cannot escape the gravitational pull of that system's underlying assumptions about sovereignty, legitimacy, and political authority (Ahmed, 1992). He contrasted this trajectory unfavorably with what he termed the "revolutionary methodology" that had characterized Jamaat-e-Islami's approach during its formative years before 1947, when it focused on ideological training and cadre development without entanglement in electoral contests (Nasr, 1996; Metcalf, 1982).

Finally, Dr. Israr Ahmed's critique extended to the conceptual confusion he believed resulted from Jamaat-e-Islami's attempt to reconcile Islamic governance with democratic procedures through Maududi's formulation of "theo-democracy" (Binder, 1961). While

acknowledging Maududi's seminal contribution in presenting Islam as a comprehensive ideological system, Dr. Israr argued that the synthesis of divine sovereignty and popular sovereignty remained fundamentally incoherent (Ahmed, 1997; Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). He contended that genuine Islamic governance could only emerge from a society thoroughly saturated with Qur'anic consciousness and committed to implementing divine law in its entirety—not from electoral victories achieved through alliances, compromises, and the aggregation of votes from a population lacking deep Islamic conviction (Islahi, 2004; Khan, 2021). This conviction led him to articulate an alternative vision in which the establishment of Islamic order (Iqamat-e-Deen) required first creating a critical mass of sincerely committed individuals through intensive Qur'anic education and moral purification, after which political authority would follow naturally as a consequence of society's transformation rather than as a mechanism for imposing change from above (Ahmed, 2000; Sanyal, 1996; Arien & Zubair, 2019).

(2) In what ways did this non-electoral stance distinguish Tanzeem-e-Islami from other revivalist streams, including traditional ulama movements, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Sufi-Barelvi traditions?

The approach, organizational priorities, and vision of Islamic change made Tanzeem-e-Islami stand out from the rest of the revivalist streams in Pakistan due to its non-electoral position. Compared to Jamaat-e-Islami, which viewed electoral involvement and constitutional politics as a valid way to reform Islam, Tanzeem-e-Islami was categorically opposed to electoral involvement as methodologically premature and theologically questionable. Tanzeem based its arguments on Dr. Israr Ahmed's interpretation of the Prophetic model, where it was necessary to progress through a strict sequence of revival first intensive Quranic education, moral purification (tazkiyah), and disciplined jama'ah formation before one could legitimately pursue political power (Ahmed, 2000). This stance contrasted sharply with Jamaat-e-Islami's approach of seeking influence within the existing political framework and its readiness to forge practical alliances with non-Islamic forces for short-term electoral gains (Nasr, 1994).

Tanzeem-e-Islami was also in stark contrast to the traditional ulama-led movements, which have been primarily concerned with the preservation of religious knowledge, jurisprudential authority, and the regulation of community religious practices rather than with an overarching system-change agenda. Movements associated with Deobandi and Barelvi ulama, such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), pursued incremental strategies focused on safeguarding Islamic law, maintaining madrasah networks, and exerting influence on personal status legislation while operating within the existing constitutional framework (Zaman, 2002). Their methodology centered on fiqh-based guidance and localized religious reform transmitted through traditional madrasah education, with political engagement typically occurring defensively to protect religious institutions or mobilize around specific issues rather than as part of a comprehensive revolutionary program. In contrast, Tanzeem pursued an overtly ideological and movement-oriented agenda of long-term societal restructuring through the systematic formation of a Quranic worldview, aiming not merely to preserve Islamic practices but to transform the fundamental basis of society and state (Ahmad, 2019). Simultaneously, Tanzeem contrasted sharply with the Sufi-Barelvi traditions, which have traditionally focused on devotional practice, veneration of saints (pirs), and the cultivation of popular religious culture centered around shrines and spiritual lineages (Sanyal, 1996). Dr. Israr Ahmed perceived these traditions as inadequate for addressing the challenges of secularism in the modern era, arguing that such approaches had the tendency to depoliticize

Islam and limit it to ritual and spiritual realms without engaging fundamental questions of sovereignty, social order, and collective discipline (Ahmed, 1997).

A further dimension of Tanzeem-e-Islami's distinctiveness lay in its sophisticated organizational structure, which was deliberately designed to implement Dr. Israr's sequential methodology for Islamic revival. Unlike the looser organizational frameworks of traditional ulama movements or the centralized party structure of Jamaat-e-Islami, Tanzeem developed a multi-layered system beginning with shakhsi bai'at (personal allegiance), followed by the formation of munfarid rufaqa (isolated members), and progressing through a nizam-i-usra' (family unit system) to local Tanzim chapters, and ultimately to the nizam-i-halqajat (circle system) at the central level (Ahmad, 2019). This graduated structure was designed to ensure that ideological commitment and moral transformation preceded any expansion of organizational activity, embodying the principle that quality of membership must take precedence over quantitative growth. The organization also developed parallel institutions for specialized functions: Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an focused exclusively on Quranic education and the cultivation of what Dr. Israr termed "Qur'anic consciousness," while Tanzeem-e-Islami proper concentrated on cadre development, training, and the gradual expansion of organizational influence (Ahmad, Shakeel, 2019). This institutional differentiation reflected Dr. Israr's conviction that the foundational work of ideological preparation required dedicated structures separate from the broader organizational framework, ensuring that the movement's educational and transformative functions would not be compromised by premature engagement with political or social activism.

Tanzeem-e-Islami's non-electoral stance was accompanied by a distinctive philosophy of revolutionary change that rejected both the "ballot" approach of electoral Islamism and the "bullet" approach of armed confrontation pursued by some militant groups. Dr. Israr articulated a six-phase methodology derived from his study of the Prophetic seerah, comprising: (1) da'wah (calling to the oneness of God), (2) tanzeem (organization), (3) tazkiyah and tarbiyah (purification and training), (4) sabr (passive resistance), (5) iqdam (active resistance), and (6) tasadum (confrontation) (Tanzeem-e-Islami, n.d.). This framework stipulated that the movement must pass through extended periods of ideological preparation, organizational consolidation, and non-violent struggle before reaching the stage where political authority could be legitimately pursued. Crucially, the methodology emphasized that progression through these stages must be cumulative each phase building upon rather than superseding previous work and that premature advancement to later stages would compromise the entire revolutionary project. This approach distinguished Tanzeem not only from electoral Islamist parties like Jamaat-e-Islami but also from revolutionary groups advocating immediate confrontation with the state, as well as from quietist religious traditions that eschewed any systematic program for societal transformation. The organization's emphasis on non-violent mass mobilization, its rejection of both electoral participation and armed insurrection, and its insistence on thorough ideological preparation before any bid for political authority placed it in a unique position within Pakistan's Islamic landscape one characterized by unwavering commitment to eventual Islamic governance combined with rigorous methodological discipline about how that goal could legitimately be achieved (Hussain, 2005; Khan, 2021).

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative textual analysis of Dr. Israr Ahmed's writings, speeches, and organizational literature (including tanzeem.org resources), supplemented by secondary scholarship on Islamic revivalism and political Islam in South Asia. By foregrounding Dr. Israr's critique and comparing it with other revivalist approaches, the article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Islamic activism

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beyond electoral and state-centered frameworks. His approach emphasized a sequential, bottom-up process: intellectual conviction through Qur'anic study, moral transformation (tazkiyah), formation of a committed community (jamaah), social reform, and only then political authority mirroring the Prophetic model in the Meccan phase of dawah, tarbiyah, and tanzim before Madinan governance (Ahmed, 1997; Ahmed, 2000).

The rest of this paper is organized in the following way. The second part, which is immediately followed by this introduction, is a literature review of, the Islamic revivalism and political participation in Pakistan with special reference to the scholarly arguments on Jamaat-e-Islami, electoral Islamism, and state-centred political engagement. In this section, the analysis of the scholarly contributions is done critically and conceptual or empirical gaps in the treatment of non-electoral revivalist movements are identified and the current study is placed within the position in relation to these debates and relative neglect is given to the contributions of thinkers like Dr. Israr Ahmed. The first research question (Section Three) concerns the case of Jamaat-e-Islami engaging in electoral politics and analyzes the objections that the Jamaat made against parliamentary sovereignty, constitutionalism, and practical collaborations with secular political politics. Section Four addresses the second research question putting Tanzeem-e-Islami in the context of the more global picture of Islamic revivalist movements in Pakistan, contrasting its non-electoral approach with Jamaat-e-Islami, older ulama-based movements and Sufi-Barelvi traditions. The final part is a conclusion, which summarizes the findings and comments on the implications of the non-electoral model by Dr. Israr Ahmed to understand the concept of Islamic activism not in terms of electoral and state based approaches. In that regard, the current section engages in an examination of the pertinent literature to put the study into perspective and build the analytical base that will be used to discuss it in the subsequent section.

2. Review of literature
2.1 Islamic Revivalism and Political Participation in Pakistan

The emergence of Islamic revivalist movements in Pakistan must be understood within the broader post-colonial context marked by ideological uncertainty and debates over the role of Islam in the modern state. While the creation of Pakistan was justified in Islamic terms, the early state inherited colonial administrative structures and largely secular modes of governance, producing what scholars have described as an "ideological vacuum" (Ahmad, 2009; Binder, 1961). This tension between Islamic aspirations and political pragmatism created fertile ground for diverse revivalist responses, intensified by milestones such as the Objectives Resolution (1949), the 1956 Constitution, Ayub Khan's secularizing reforms (e.g., the 1961 Muslim Family Laws Ordinance), the 1971 loss of East Pakistan (interpreted by many as divine punishment for incomplete Islamization), and Bhutto's selective Islamic concessions (Nasr, 1994; Esposito, 1998).

Among these responses, Jamaat-e-Islami emerged as the most systematic advocate of political engagement. Founded by Maududi in 1941, it conceptualized Islam as a complete ideological system and sought to establish an Islamic state through disciplined organization, political mobilization, and constitutional means, including the notion of "theo-democracy" (Nasr, 1996). Traditional ulama movements such as JamiatUlema-e-Islam (JUI) and JamiatUlema-e-Pakistan (JUP) pursued more incremental strategies focused on safeguarding Islamic law, religious education, and moral norms while engaging selectively in politics (Zaman, 2002). In contrast, Sufi and Barelvi movements emphasized spiritual reform and popular religious practices, generally avoiding systematic political programs (Sanyal, 1996). Radical revivalist and jihadi streams gained prominence later,

particularly during the Afghan jihad(Zaman, 2012).

These divergent approaches reflect broader debates within political Islam regarding the legitimacy and efficacy of modern democratic institutions. Scholars such as Roy (1994) have argued that political Islam's engagement with the modern state often leads to ideological compromise, while others highlight its adaptive capacity within constitutional frameworks (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). Dr. Israr Ahmed's thought must be situated within this contested terrain, as his critique directly engaged with these debates while offering an alternative revivalist methodology centered on non-electoral, revolutionary preparation.

2. Dr. Israr Ahmed's Intellectual Foundations

Dr. Israr Ahmed's intellectual formation was shaped by multiple strands of South Asian Islamic thought, most notably the Farahi-Islahi school of Qur'anic exegesis. Under the direct tutelage of Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi, Dr. Israr adopted a Qur'an-centric approach that emphasized thematic coherence (nazm) and the Qur'an's revolutionary message (Islahi, 2004). This methodology differed from traditional verse-by-verse exegesis and informed his broader vision of Islamic revival(Khan, 2021).

While Dr. Israr acknowledged Maududi's contribution in presenting Islam as a comprehensive system, he increasingly criticized what he perceived as Jamaat-e-Islami's deviation from its original revolutionary vision after 1947, particularly its post-1956 embrace of electoral politics (Ahmed, 1992). Central to Dr. Israr's thought was the concept of "Iqamat-e-Deen" (establishment of religion), which he understood not merely as state power but as the comprehensive implementation of Islamic values in individual, social, and political life(Hussain, 2005; Jalal, 1994). He maintained that political authority could only be legitimately established after the formation of a morally transformed and ideologically committed community, following the Prophetic model of gradual transformation, which began in Mecca. This phase focused on dawah, tarbiyah, tanzim, and passive resistance, without seeking power prematurely. As he explained in his lectures and writings, this Meccan methodology involved "Jihad bil-Qur'an" (struggle through the Qur'an), a highly disciplined organization, and endurance of persecution without retaliation until sufficient strength was built (Ahmed, 1997)

3. Dr. Israr Ahmed's Critique of Electoral Politics

Dr. Israr Ahmed's critique of electoral participation rested on several interrelated arguments, directed primarily at Jamaat-e-Islami's political strategy.

3.1 Sovereignty and Democratic Politics

A central element of Dr. Israr's critique concerned the concept of sovereignty. He argued that modern democracy is fundamentally based on popular sovereignty (hakimiyyat-e-sha'b), which conflicts with the Qur'anic principle that sovereignty belongs exclusively to Allah (hakimiyyat-e-Ilahi). While Jamaat-e-Islami attempted to reconcile this through "theo-democracy," Dr. Israr contended that such reconciliation remained conceptually flawed, as electoral systems inevitably prioritize numerical majorities over divine injunctions and amount to shirk in sovereignty. In his words, human-made laws are limited by biases and cannot ensure true justice or morality without divine guidance (Ahmed, 1997).

3.2 Moral Compromise and Political Alliances

Dr. Israr further criticized Jamaat-e-Islami for entering alliances with secular and nationalist political parties, particularly during periods of electoral competition (e.g.,

implications during the Bhutto era)(Ḥasanbaygī&Sabūrīfar, 2021). He viewed such alliances as symptomatic of electoral politics, which compel Islamic movements to compromise on principles to gain votes and political influence(Munir, 1980). In his assessment, these compromises diluted the ideological purity of Islamic movements, eroded their moral credibility, and turned them into "victims of power politics" where principles are sacrificed for electoral gains (Ahmed, 2000).

2.3 Deviation from the Prophetic Methodology
Perhaps the most significant dimension of Dr. Israr's critique was methodological. Drawing on the Prophetic model, he argued that Islamic movements must prioritize dawah, tarbiyah, organizational discipline, and passive resistance before seeking political power. Electoral participation represented a premature attempt to capture state authority without first establishing a Qur'anically grounded community. This approach reversed the natural sequence of the Islamic revolution,starting with the Meccan phase of ideological training, community building, and endurance of hardship,and was therefore destined to fail. As Dr. Israr emphasized, the Prophet (PBUH) spent 13 years in Mecca building faith, character, and organization without political involvement, only establishing authority in Madina after this foundation (Ahmed, 1992).

2.4 Additional Dimensions
Ineffectiveness and Degeneration Dr. Israr emphasized that elections legitimize un-Islamic systems rather than transform them, leading to ideological degeneration. He saw JI's shift as turning a revolutionary movement into a conventional political party focused on short-term gains rather than long-term supremacy of Deen(Ahmed, 1997).

4. Differentiation from Other Revivalist Streams
Dr. Israr Ahmed's non-electoral stance clearly distinguished Tanzeem-e-Islami from other revivalist streams in Pakistan.In contrast to Jamaat-e-Islami, Tanzeem-e-Islami explicitly rejected electoral politics and parliamentary engagement, viewing them as incompatible with its revivalist methodology. While JI emphasized constitutional reform, political participation, and alliances to achieve power, Tanzeem focused on long-term ideological training, Qur'anic education (via AnjumanKhuddam-ul-Qur'an), and disciplined organization for societal transformation without seeking votes or offices. Dr. Israr noted that both shared a revolutionary foundation, but JI pursued power through elections, while Tanzeem emphasized sacrifice and struggle following the Prophetic revolutionary path (Nasr, 1994).

Compared with traditional ulama movements (e.g., JUI, JUP), Tanzeem-e-Islami differed in both orientation and method. Whereas ulama-led groups emphasized jurisprudence (fiqh), madrasas, preservation of personal law, and incremental legislative influence within the existing system, Dr. Israr's movement prioritized direct Qur'anic engagement, thematic exegesis, and systematic organizational discipline aimed at revolutionary change(Zaman, 2002).Similarly, Tanzeem-e-Islami diverged from Sufi and Barelvi movements, which largely focused on spiritual renewal, devotion to saints (pirs), and preservation of popular religious practices without articulating a comprehensive program for societal or political transformation. Dr. Israr regarded such approaches as insufficient for addressing structural injustices and the need for Iqamat-e-Deen in the modern age (Sanyal, 1996).

Tanzeem's dual institutional strategy, comprising Anjuman for Qur'anic dissemination and education, and Tanzeem for activist organization and tarbiyah, embodied his

sequential, non-electoral methodology, setting it apart as a Quran-centered, revolutionary yet non-violent alternative (Weber, 1968).

Through the analysis of the views and discussions provided by other researchers about Islamic revivalism and party politics in Pakistan, the following analytical evaluation is provided by this research upon the evidence reviewed.

Although much of the extant literature has been justified in focusing on the organizational scope and political influence of Jamaat-e-Islami, it has also been disposed to equate the activism of Islamism with electoral and state-focused activities. The reason why such an assumption can be methodologically restrictive is the case of Tanzeem-e-Islami influenced by the consideration of the thought of Dr. Israr Ahmed. Dr. The criticism of electoral politics by Israr was not so much an oppositional one, but a systematic vision of the revival of Islam based on Quranic pedagogy, moral reform, and disciplined group organization. This shows that rather than being political withdrawal, non-electoral Islamism is a different theory of social change.

Critically, this study holds that the non-electoral position of Dr. Israr Ahmed reveals a tensed issue in the contemporary Islamic revivalism between the normative coherence and political effectiveness. On the one hand, his demand of ideological purity and the sequencing of methodologies is a very strong commentary on the trade-offs in the world of electoral politics and the danger of making Islam a bargaining tool. Conversely, the lack of a conceived move out of long-term moral reform to definite political frameworks poses questions on the viability of a permanently non-electoral movement in a competitive nation-state system. In contrast to Jamaat-e-Islami which has evolved the ways to adapt to the politics and survive in the form of an institution, Tanzeem-e-Islami has been organizationally constrained, implying that moral rigor cannot automatically become a source of wider social impact.

This paper will further argue that there is a gap in the current literature to tap into the intellectual substance of the works of Dr. Israr Ahmed, as they tend to classify him as a preacher as opposed to a systematic thinker of revivalists. Through a close examination of his arguments on methodology and a comparison to other revivalist streams-ulama based, Jamaat-e-Islami, Sufi-Barelvi based traditions, this study has shown that Tanzeem-e-Islami is another revivalist paradigm that does not either degenerate into quietism or fall into electoral Islamism. Their focus on Quranic worldview formation, disciplined community-building and subsequent political lateness makes it a theoretically consistent, though practically limited, framework of Islamic activism.

Finally, this study proposes that the concept of including non-electoral movements like Tanzeem-e-Islami into the process of understanding the concept of political Islam means we should have a broader concept of Islam revival in Pakistan. Instead of considering the political participation as the only or unavoidable horizon of Islamic activism, the project of Dr. Israr Ahmed encourages the scholarly community to rethink revivalism as a multi-level process where politics depends on a previous moral and intellectual reformation.

5. Discussion

Dr. Israr Ahmed's non-electoral model represents a principled but demanding approach to Islamic revival. Its emphasis on ideological purity, moral transformation, and methodological rigor (following the Prophetic Meccan phase) offers a critique of both political pragmatism and superficial religiosity. At the same time, the movement's marginal political influence highlights the practical limitations of non-electoral activism in highly politicized societies. His use of media (TV lectures, digital platforms) amplified this model globally, sustaining influence beyond electoral constraints.

In the context of broader debates on the crisis of political Islam, Dr. Israr's thought provides an alternative framework that challenges assumptions about the inevitability of electoral participation(Arien & Zubair, 2019). His critique remains relevant amid repeated failures and compromises by Islamist parties (Roy, 1994b).

6. Conclusion

This article has examined Dr. Israr Ahmed's critique of electoral participation—rooted in concerns over sovereignty (hakimiyyat-e-Ilahi vs. popular rule), moral compromise through alliances, methodological deviation from the Prophetic Meccan phase (dawah, tarbiyah, tanzim, and passive resistance before power), and resulting degeneration and analyzed how his non-electoral stance distinguished Tanzeem-e-Islami from other Islamic revivalist movements in Pakistan. His approach represents a distinctive strand of Islamic activism that prioritizes long-term ideological and moral transformation over immediate political engagement, as detailed in his writings and lectures.

By situating Dr. Israr Ahmed within the broader landscape of Islamic revivalism, the study highlights the diversity of strategies through which Islamic movements seek social and political change. This aligns closely with the thesis chapter's emphasis on Dr. Israr's Quran-centered vision, sequential bottom-up process (individual conviction to moral tazkiyah tojamaah formation to societal reform to political authority), and institutional embodiment through the complementary roles of Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an (educational foundation) and Tanzeem-e-Islami (activist organization). It also highlights the scholarly gap in analyzing non-electoral models, their continuity under new leadership after 2010, and their adaptations via digital platforms, offering a more comprehensive view of revivalism beyond state-centered electoral frameworks.

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