Wahhaby Threat to Traditional Cultures in the Sunni-Muslim World: A Neglected Theme in Cultural Globalization

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Introduction:

Globalization, a movement currently in crisis, has opened the doors not only for the integration of economies and polities but also for the interaction of ideas and values across cultural communities. The late twentieth century revolution in transport and communication technologies followed by an expanding global consumer market for affordable electronic accoutrements such as mini-computers, mobile phones and laptops, have made the social media a powerful tool in promoting globalization in all its dimensions . However, the same social media operating in the geopolitical environment of integrated economic and financial structures has also empowered Islamist ideologies like Wahhabism with its puritanic and philistine doctrine of lieteralist Islam to overwhelm the cultural landscape of the Muslim world, thereby threatening to eliminate the cosmopolitan cultural diversity, the proud product of Islamic civilization, a theme largely neglected by explorers of cultural globalization. This article deals with some aspects of this neglected theme.

Cultural Globalization

Although globalization as a movement for human interaction and integration is historically a pre-modern phenomenon (Frank, 1998) its current wave as a "transplanetary *process* or set of *processes* involving increasing *liquidity* and the growing multidirectional *flows* of people, objects, places … information" (Ritzer, 2015:2) and ideas is evidently post-modern. Apart from its hyper-capitalistic manifestation evinced by an aggressively integrated economic and financial structure this transplanetary process through its technological and information accoutrement has also triggered, as a defensive reaction, the revival of timeless religious or spiritual values and ideologies that are radically in dissonance with the secular and rational underpinnings of globalization's post-modern avatar (Scholte, 2005:259-61). In its essence cultural globalization, like its predecessor, economic modernization, implies a movement towards reshaping or remodelling diverse national cultures into a monolithic secular Western culture built paradoxically on a Christian edifice. Cultutral globalization is in many ways a movement towards cultural homogenization. The intrusion of this homogenizing trend on the different compartments of traditional cultures such as art and architecture, music, dance and literature, and other constituents of aesthetics - a theme on which a fair number of research has been done (Pieterse 2004; Tomlinson, 1999) - has provoked some ingenious and seductive terminologies and phraseologies like coco-colaization, McDonaldization, Americanization, Hollywoodization, cultural hybridity, cultural imperialism and so on. However, these apellations and

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descriptions also echo at the same time the collective voices of protest and defence from the subaltern against the cultural hegemony of the West. Bassam Tiby, a political scientist cum Islamologist, detects a worldwide trend not towards cultural globalization but towards cultural fragmentation (Tibi, 2009). Yet, within this fragmentation one can also detect a growing contest for supremacy bwetween subcultures. Wahhabism represents one such subculture competing for dominance within the Sunni-Muslim world.

Wahhabism - a sectarian Islamist ideology that originated as a provincial reformist movement in Saudi Arabia before becoming a national ideology through a fortunate political alliance with the Saud family and eventually metamorphosing into a transnational religious mission - with its exclusivist and literalist interpretation of Islam's primary texts namely, the Quran and the Hadith, has utilised the tumultuous environment of post-cold-war geopolitics, the opportunities created by a globalized economic and financial structure and the benefits of a revolutionary communication technology to spread its philistine doctrine and philosophy to the detriment of a cultural diversity that historically enriched Islamic civilization. While the world leaders and opinion makers are too preoccupied with the geopolitical implications of a deepening Shia-Sunni sectarian split in the Muslim world and with the contest for geopolitical supremacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia's ulterior objective is not simply to win this battle but to transform and homogenize the the Muslim world, at least its Sunni sector, with the Wahhabi religio-cultural model.

Although the political and geopolitical dimensions of Wahhabism have been explored fairly exhaustively by several scholars and expertly by Madawi Al-Rasheed (Al-Rasheed, 2008) its aggressive calling to homogenize Muslim culture in the image of Wahhabism demands serious attention.

Islam's diversity

Islam, both as a faith and as a cultural system is a mosaic and not a monolith (Gregorian, 2004). As Edward Said's pioneering study of *Orientalism* testifies, it was the Orientalists during the colonial era, who in the wake of the growing power relationship between Western colonizers and the Muslim colonized, condensed the theological, juridical, philosophical and cultural plurality of the Muslim world into an artificial single moniker called Islam and dismissed its historical diversity so that Islam's civilizational cosmopolitanism, historical experiences and its contribution to human civilization could be obfuscated and denigrated in order to elevate in comparison the so called superiority of a

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Christo-Western civilization (Said, 1991). In contrast to this manufactured singularity, Islam, throughout its long historical experience, has demonstrated a heterogeneity that was if not unique at least not uncommon in almost all established religions. This heterogeneity has even provoked some scholars like Al-Azmeh (Al-Azmeh, 1993) to employ the plural form Islams to capture the diversity in textual discursiveness and lived experiences of world Muslim communities. This diversity with its embedded conflicts and contradictions has made the conceptualization of Islam a problematic task (Ahmed, 2016). (Incidentally, the names Muslim and Islam appear to have entered English vocabulary in 1615 and 1625 respectively, and interestingly the first Muslim to enter England was a Tartar girl named Aura Sultana who was bought in Astrakhan, a Turkic Muslim Khanate, by the English trader Anthony Jenkinson in 1558 and who later presented her as a gift to Queen Elizabeth I (Brotton, 2016: pp. 9 & 51-52).

As Islam spread from the land of its birth to new territorial, demographic and cultural environs as in Persia, North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, Asia and parts of Europe it had to encounter relentless pressures for accommodation and tolerance from a variety of linguistic, ethnic, cultural and historical communities whose artistic and aesthetic traditions and legacies added immensely to the intellectual and cultural effervescence of Muslim civilization. Frederick Starr's extensive study of *Lost Enlightenment* in Central Asia before and after the Arab conquest in the late seventh century clearly substantiates this conclusion (Starr, 2015).

While religiously the five pillars or the core elements of the Islamic faith namely, the *shahada* or confession, five daily prayers, fasting, *zakat* or obligatory charity and *hajj* or the pilgrimage to Mecca, and in addition, the unaltered text of the Quran, unified the Muslim *umma*, that *umma* in turn reflected a kaleidoscopic cultural diversity which even diluted in many regions the ritualistic dimension of the Islamic faith through a process of "creative assimilation". As far as the glory of Muslim civilization is concerned this diversity and assimilation proved to be a blessing and it is this process that is now under threat from the puritan ideology of Wahhabism.

Rise of Wahhabism and its Tenets

Within the sectarian binary Sunni and Shia, born out of the political controversy over the issue of succession to the Prophet as community leader but snowballed and eventually became rigidified as two major religious divisions in Islam (Hazelton, 2010), the eponymous Wahhabism falls within the

Sunni sect. Within this sect are four major schools namely the Shafi, Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali, all of which like Wahhabism are also eponymous but unlike Wahhabism, which was an eighteenth century product of the rural environment of Najd in Saudi Arabia, originated in the eighth and ninth centuries and thrived in the urban milieu of Mecca, Medina, Iraq, Egypt, India and Central Asia. If one were to arrange these schools in an ascending order of liberality one may start with the most illiberal Hanbali and end up with the most liberal Hanafi leaving Shafi and Maliki to take second and third places respectively.

Wahhabism, named after its founder Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1702/3 – 1791/2) is not a separate school of jurisprudence in Islam nor even a sect but an ideology that has its roots in the "literalist monotheism" associated with (a) Kharijism, "the stem of Islamic fundamentalisms", as described by David Lewis (Lewis D. L, 2008: 189), (b) the rigidly orthodox Hanbali school of jurisprudence, and (c) the teachings of the thrirteenth century obstreperous Damscene scholar and intellectual Ibn Taimiyya (El-Fadl,2007: 59-60; AbuKhalil, 2004: 50-66; Allawi, 2009: 37-39; Meddeb, 2003). Even though DeLong-Bas, the American Professor and a Wahhabi apologist has tried to dissociate al-Wahhab from the Kharijis, Wahhabism, with "probably the most impoverished interpretation known in the theological and doctrinal history of Islam" (Meddeb, 2013: 40) arose as an uncompromising and militant religious response to the destabilizing effects of modernity experienced by many parts of the Muslim world including the then declining Ottoman Empire that fell increrasingly under the influence of European powers in the 18th and 19th cdnturies (El Fadl, 2007: 46). Wahhabism is, as Lewis describes, "Puritanical in precept and militant in practice" (Lewis, B: 1995: 310). Over the last few decades its ideology has become the surrogate mother of several Islamist movements including the Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Boko Horam, Jabhat an-Nusra, Jama'a Islamiyya, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and so on.

Abd al-Wahhab identified the causes of Muslim decline in the corrupt teachings and practices, as he viewed, that had crept into Islam from other schools of thought like rationalism and mysticism on the one hand and from the liberal interpretations of Islam's holy texts on the other. In contrast, Wahhabism, as the liberal reformist scholar Khalid El-Fadl points out, "exhibits an extreme form of distrust of all forms of social theory, and considers intellectualism a form of devilish sophistry." (El Fadl, 2001: 7). "Its language was that of purging, purifying, obliterating, and eradicating difference, especially that emanating from faith, tribalism, regionalism, and cultural

practices" (Al-Rasheed, 2013:70). Accordingly, Al-Wahhab's remedy to the malaise of Muslims was to "return to a presumed pristine, simple, and straightforward Islam, which was believed to be entirely reclaimable by a literal implementation of the commands and precedents of the Prophet, and by a strict adherence to correct ritual practice" (El-Fadl, 2003: 50). Although the primary mission of Wahhabism is to universalize the creed and practice of a "specific religious tradition anchored in a narrow and isolated niche in central Arabia" (Al-Rasheed, *ibid*) its history is marked by violent suppression of "alternative and competing religiosity and folk sacred spaces and religious figures" (Al-Rasheed, *ibid*). As far as the Quran is concerned, as Meddeb argues, the Wahhhabis and all its Islamist offshoots "represent the zealot of the text reduced to its signified, cancelling the aesthetics and metaphysics that sustain it, and restricting religious experience to the ostentatious practice of worship, which results in social censure and kind of ideological indoctrination" (Meddeb, 2013: 8).

When translated into the context of culture this nihilistic philosophy implied a wholesale repudiation and condemnation of centuries of Muslim cultural achievements in the fields of art, music, painting, poetry and sculptor. An inherent fear grounded on a literalist comprehension of Islam's holy scripture and an indiscriminate acceptance of all recorded practices and sayings of the Prophet and those of his immediate disciples drove the Wahhabis to conclude that spiritual purity on the one hand and worldly aesthetic beauty on the other, are essentially incongruent and that all manifestations of that beauty, if left unchecked would lead the *umma* to idolatry, immorality and lasciviousness. Hence, Wahhabism and its present day successors showed no sympathy to the rich and colourful cultural heritage of the many dynasties that ruled the Muslim world since the murder of Ali, the fourth Caliph, in 661.

Wahhabism and Traditional Cultures

Art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance are among the most popular expressions of fine arts in any civilized culture. Over the centuries Muslim communities in different parts of the world have made their own distinct contributions in all these fields. The Abbasids in Baghdad (Kennedy, 2005: 112-129; Clot, 2005) the Umayyads in Spain (Menocal, 2003: 125-129) the Ottomans in Istanbul (Clot, 2012: 269-295) and the Mughals in Delhi (Eraly, 2007: 355-364) were among the proud sponsors of aesthetic beauty, and Islam during their reign witnessed an unprecedented cultural efflorescence. All this in the eyes of the Wahhabis were evidence of corruption and cultural decay that had damaged the pristine purity of the religion. Even in Saudi Arabia there

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was tension between the urban Hijazi love for music and *maulud* (a cultural festival in many parts of the world until the advent of Wahhabism, in which Muslims sing panegyrics to celebrate the birth of Prophet Muhammad) and rural Najdi hatred of all forms of entertainment including public religious ceremonies (Sardar, 2014: 319). Even listening to the songs of the late Egyptian maestro Umm Kalthoum was deemed un-Islamic by the Wahhabis (El-Fadl, 2001: 9).

There appears to be a deliberate and systematic program to carry out "a form of cultural and historical cleansing" (MacEoin, 2015) by the so called purists and their fanatics. To enumerate and list the countless destructions and damage caused to historical monuments and traditional cultural artefacts will be a lengthy exercise. However, the more glaring ones lost by humanity so far deserve highlighting. Ziauddin Sardar (2014: 346) has already cited with lament the Saudi government's demolition of the tombs of Fatima and Khadijah, the Prophet's daughter and wife respectively, which happened early in the 19th century. In the same period when the Saudis under Abdul Aziz bin Saud captured the Shia holy cities of Karbala and Najaf in Iraq they destroyed the tomb of Hussain bin Ali, the grandson of the Prophet. In fact, the Saudis levelled completely the cemetery of Jannat al-Baqi adjacent to the Prophet's mosque (Masjid al-Nabawi) which housed the remains of many of the members of the Prophet's family, his close companions and central figures of early Islam (Wikipedia, 6/07/2016)). In the name of preventing idolatry the Saudis were actually engaging in a monumental destruction of historical monuments and cultural treasures.

In more recent times, in 2001, the world watched with horror what the Taliban slaughterers who were schooled in Wahhabi ideology did to the 1,700 year old Buddhas in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. They dynamited and destroyed the golden heritage that belonged not simply to Afghanistan alone but to humanity as a whole. Kite flying, an innocuous past time in the Afghani culture, also was banned by the Taliban. In 2013, the Jabhat ul Nusra jihadists in Syria, another product of Wahhabism, beheaded the statue of the 10th century Muslim poet Abul Ala al-Maari, the author of *Risalat al-Ghufran*, considered by many as the forerunner to Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Syria 02/14/2013). It is ironic that already in his work al-Maari wrote with great perspicacity the following lines:

> "*There are two types of people on earth:*
> *Those who have reason without religion,*
> *And those who have religion but lack reason.*"

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In the same year in Timbuktu in Mali Al-Qaeda Jihadists burnt to ashes a total of 4,202 texts on chemistry, physics and mathematics that were written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries "in an act of nihilistic vindictiveness" (Hammer, 2016: 245). Finally, the destruction of ancient monuments and the pillaging of the museum in the city of Palmyra in Syria by the ISIS/ISIL butchers, the proud children of Wahhabism; and very lately, the blow up of the 16th century mosque in Yemen by the Sunni Islamist radicals (*Ceylon Daily* News, 2 Aug. 2016). All this unambiguously illustrate the impending threat posed by this purist ideology to the cultural heritage and historical monuments of humanity.

Globalization and Borderless Wahhabism

An important question that has to be addressed is how and why a philistine ideology that remained provincial and confined to the borders of Saudi Arabia until the 1970s became borderless thereafter and a threat to traditional cultures in other parts of the world. The answer to this question should be sought in Saudi Arabia's fortunate placement in post-cold war geopolitics and economics of globalization.

By the time the Cold War ended in the 1980s the U.S. and its Western allies had already lost the support of one pro-Western Muslim regional power in the Middle East, Iran. After the Iranian revolution Ayatollah Khomeini's theocratic Shia regime was threatening to export its revolution to the Sunni parts of the Muslim world. The siege of the holy mosque in Mecca by a group of Wahhabi schooled religious fanatics led by Juhaiman al-Uteybi, a Bedouin preacher in 1979 (Trofimov, 2008) was indeed a direct outcome of this propulsion which, sent shock waves to the Saudi regime. The U.S. and its allies were determined to stop the spread of Khomeinism in the Muslim world partly by direct sanctions against Iran and partly by strengthening Saudi Arabia which had been a special ally of the U.S. since the time of President Roosevelt. Even in the 1950s when the charismatic Egyptian President Nasser was winning the hearts and minds of Muslims with his socialist policies and anti-Israel foreign policy stand the United States countered that wave by promoting Saudi Arabia "as the Islamic pole of attraction" (Kumar, 2012: 63). Saudi brand of Islamic orthodoxy was promoted as a bulwark against the spread of Socialism. Similarly, in the context of the strained relationship between Khomeini's Iran and the U.S. the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88 provided an opportunity to the super power weaken Iran and to halt Khomeinism becoming a threat to the Westphalia-manufactured World Order. As a counter measure Saudi Arabia was now given the licence to export its version of Islamic orthodoxy.

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The petroleum boom that ushered in on the eve of globalization in the 1980s allowed OAPEC (Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations freedom to move their surplus capital in search of more attractive financial returns and towards promoting Arab sectarian and national interests. In the case of the latter option financial and material rewards were promised to those who promoted those interests. Many poorer Muslim nations and Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries availed themselves to this opportunity. Like the cross that followed trade in the colonial era it is Wahhabism that is accompanying Saudi aid to the Muslim umma in the modern era. Saudi funded mosques and Quranic schools, Saudi sponsored Muslim organizations and Saudi authored religious textbooks and journals became the chief conduit that carried Wahhabi messages and preaching. Ahmed Rashid's penetrating journalism clearly illustrates the role of the Deobandi-Wahhabi religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan in promoting Taliban jihadism (Rashid, 2001). Regular financial payments, scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia and invitation to Saudi funded conferences attracted many imams to the Wahhabifold.   The World Muslim League (Rabita al-Alam al-Islam) is a Saudi establishment that funds many of these initiatives.

The central pillar of economics of globalization is the neo-liberal economic model. Under this model unimpeded capital mobility for direct investment was deemed to be the panacea for developing countries which suffer from a type of economic AIDS (acute insufficnecy of domestic savings). With this freedom Arab capital enjoyed unprecedented opportunity not only to invest in real assets abroad but also to channel funds to Islamic projects. The call for Islamization of finance and economy and the growth of Islamic banks coincided with the rise of the neo-liberal model, and "the Islamic financial system laid the economic basis for the growth of Islamism" (Kumar, 2012: 68-69).   In this growth the influence of Wahhabi ideology became prominent. As a passing reference it should be noted that Wahhabism is totally in bed with the economic tenets of neo-liberalism and as El-Fadl (2001: 6) says, "In many ways Wahhabism is the ultimate form of religiously sanctioned consumerism."

There was, in addition, another valuable source through which Wahhabism was able to penetrate non-Arab Muslim societies. Hundreds of thousands of foreign workers flocked to Saudi Arabia to work in Saudi infrastructure projects. According to Azim Thassim, the Sri Lankan Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, nearly one-third of the 1.5 million Sri Lankans working abroad are in Saudi Arabia (Mohamed Rasooldeen, *arab news,* 8 Feb. 2016). During their stay these workers learn the values of Wahhabism and when returning to their own

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countries many of them become the foot soldiers of an ideological battle to universalise the Wahhabi tenets.

The new communication technology which aided the process of globalization and in turn benefited from it became handy in the hands of warring ideologues to accelerate their global ideological aggression. Manuel Castells' *Network Society* (Castells, 1998) equipped with a plethora of advanced computers, laptops, i-pads, i-phones, mobile phones, and other such electronic paraphernalia created a world of emails and the internet, and the social media thus produced became a powerful weapon which enabled confronting idiologies to attain global reach. Wahhabism stood to benefit from the social media network. Saudi backed preachers and pedagogues through audio and video channels are able to influence the hearts and minds of millions of Muslim men and women.

Thus, in the geopolitical aftermath of the Cold War and in the wake of neo-liberal economic globalization combined with the revolution in communication technology, Wahhabism, with its provocative puritan world view, sprang out of the Saudi Arabian confines and is contesting for religious and cultural hegemony at least in the Sunni sector of the Muslim world. The political consequences of this contest, as witnessed in the recent experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and in several other parts of the Muslim world continue to be bloody and chaotic. A political analysis of the Wahhabi brand of Islamism is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the Wahhabi threat to national cultures cannot be underrated.

A Micro Scene

To illustrate what has been discussed so far with a case study, this paper focuses on a small Muslim town, Kattankudy, in Sri Lanka, where the Wahhabi influence has become particularly noticeable in recent times. To start with, the vast majority of Sri Lankan Muslims belong to the conservative Shafi School of Islam. Although the doctrinal teachings and practices of this school were originally introduced from the Middle East a greater indoctrination of the practical details of Shafiite Islam was injected from South India where Hinduism and Islam had already influenced each other and diluted parts of their respective religious and cultural practices. Philosophically and in practice there is an overlapping consensus between the Hindu Bakti movement and Islamic mysticism. There is ample evidence for this Hindu-Islam mystic confluence in the literary output of Hindu and Muslim Tamil poets (Shulman, 1984). Likewise a similar consensus can be discerned between elements of

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Buddhist philosophy and practices on the one hand and Muslim mysticism and Sufi practices on the other (Elverskog, 2010). This Indianised Islam came to Sri Lanka more freely after the 16th century when the Portuguese took control of the Indian Ocean and blocked the arrival of Arabs. Centuries of living ubiquitously in a predominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka has obviously added more to this cultural dilution. Perhaps it was this adaptability and elasticity of Islamic culture and beliefs besides the economic and commercial reasons that must have persuaded the Buddhist monarchs of medieval Sri Lanka to be readily accommodative and respectfully hospitable towards the early Muslim imigrants to the island. This extremely harmonious relationship between the Sri Lankan Muslim minority and the Buddhist majority in the medieval era was a unique development in the annals of Asian history. I have expanded this theme in one of my earlier publications (Ali, 2014).

This trend towards a peaceful cultural dilution and religious coexistence began experiencing spasms of discomfort since the end of the 1970s with the re-birth of a free market economy in Sri Lanka and the onset of globalization. It was a fortunate coincidence that these two events coincided with a boom in the forunes of the hydrocarbon industry. Awash with a sudden and unmanageable influx of financial wealth the labour-scarce and underdeveloped Arab kingdoms, Emirates and Sultanates embarked on a rapid program of economic modernization and infrastructure building, which naturally increased the demand for cheap but skilled and unskilled labour from other developing countries. Muslim men and women flocked to the Gulf kingdoms and especially to Saudi Arabia in search of higher income. In Sri Lanka even college teachers retired prematurely from their employment and flew to the Middle East. At the same time, the capital starved open economy of Sri Lanka removed all impediments on the inflow of foreign capital investment.

While Muslim cheap labour from Sri Lanka entered the Wahhabi kingdom in large numbers Wahhabi public and private capital in turn entered Sri Lanka not entirely in search of economic returns but also to win adherents to the Wahhabi ideology. The so called Islamization of values and lifestyle as dictated by Wahhabism demonstrated its affectation in the local Muslim community through changes in Muslim attire, inflexion in spoken language with the addition of more and more Arabic words and phrases, changes in the architecture of religious buildings and in the changes in religious observation. Kattankudy is a mulla-merchant urban complex (Ali, 2009) with a 99 per cent Muslim population totaling over 40,000 in the 2012 census and living within a land area of around 6 km^2. (This population figure is obviously an

underestimation because a significant number of males from this town are engaged in trading activities and work mostly outside Kattankudy). By the end of the 1970s this urban settlement had a total of less than twenty mosques but today that number has almost quadrupled to around eighty. Although Kattankudy has always been a conservative Muslim town the number of religious teachers and preachers in that place and in consequence their grip on the spiritual and social set up has increased tremendously over the past 20 years. Sectarian tension is one of the consequences of this development.

In 2006, under the aegis of the Wahhabi preachers of Tawhid Jamaat, an organization whose name is truncated from the infamous Jama'at al-Tawhid wal- Jihad founded in 1999 by the Jordanian national Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a mob of youngsters went on rampaging the town targeting the followers of two other religious leaders whose teachings were alleged to have promoted Sufi mysticism (Ali, 2009; Schwartz and Al-Alawi, 2013) which, according to the Wahhabis, is heresy. The orthodox *ulema* of Kattankudy also banned *maulud* celebrations owing to pressures from the Wahhabis. Recently, when a museum was opened in the town the *ulema* protested against displaying any exhibits of human remains or pictures, which are unavoidable elements in any museum collection. At the moment there is neither a professional music group nor a photo studio in this town because they are all actively discouraged by religious orthodoxy.

About three decades ago during the days of the end of Ramadhan Eid festival the main street of Kattankudy was populated with gaming stalls and other harmless entertainment venues. All this have disappeared now and so were the disappearance of several cultural events such as *kalikkampattam*[*] and *oonchalattam*[**]. In short and in an aesthetic sense, Wahhabism has turned this place into a joyless cultural desert.

Kattankudy is only a microcosm of the larger picture of Wahhabization of the Islamic religion and culture. In Sri Lanka itself the Tawhid Jamaat had been responsible for the destruction of a 150 year old shrine in Ukuwela in the hill country in 2009 and for violence in the same year against the Qadiri Sufi order in the town of Beruwela in the southwest (Schwartz and Al-Alawi, *op.cit.*). At a macro level, while the world powers are too preoccupied, although with justification, with the security threat engendered by Wahhabi inspired terror groups and while the debate on the impact of globalization on national cultures concentrates more on coca-colaization, Macdonladization and Americanization, within the Muslim micro level the dangers posed by

Wahhabism to national cultures largely goes unnoticed. Even the Western powers must realise that in addition to the so called War on Terrorism which has so far only increased the menace rather than decreasing it there is a desperate need for a war on ideology. Phillistinic Wahhabism is the most pernicious religious ideology that if left uhnchecked would lead to cultural cleansing. The sooner the world realises this danger and resolves to take counter measures better will be the prospects for peace, freedom and cultural pluralism.

- *Kalikkampattam* is mostly a male dominated entertainment performed to the beating sounds of batons of wood, *kalikkampu*, and directed by a celebrated vocalist called *annavi*. The performance is staged on specially erected public platforms of sand and in front of a gender-mixed audience.

** *Oonchalattam* simply means movement of the swing. On festive days large swings would be erected in public compounds (with separate swings for women erected in secluded compounds) in which a maximum of seven men will swing as a group while singing traditional melodies.

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