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Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband and its Self-Representation on the Media

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At a time when the influence of Deobandi thought on purist Islamic groups and radical militants across a number of countries in Asia and Africa is making sensational news after September 11, 2001 it seems necessary to assess in more factual and realistic terms the forms and objectives and the potential of the Deobandi educational movement. This paper seeks to explore how the Dār al-'Ulūm, the Islamic school of higher learning in Deoband, north India, has fashioned its self-representation on the media, radiating its message across the countries of South Asia and much beyond. The paper also seeks to understand the ingredients of this educational movement, the way it functions across cultural and political boundaries, and the institutions it has spawned. The school's commitment to spread the 'true Islam' of its reading and the message of Islam as such requires that constant attention be paid to using all the rightful means available for propagation and communication. On the basis of this writer's recent field research at the Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband in March 2004, the paper will give an overview of the formal and informal channels of communication from the Deobandi *madrasah* network to derived Deobandi institutions, to the ever-expanding network of Deobandi graduates, to manifestations of their local and translocal influence on other Islamic groups and organisations.

Old Beginnings and New Traditions

The higher Islamic seminary, the Dār al-'Ulūm of Deoband, was founded in 1283/1866 in north India by Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautawī (1248–1297/1832–1879) and Rashīd Aḥmad Gangōhī (1245–1323/1829–1905). It was meant to rectify the perceived lack of religious education among the Muslims of British India as the religious scholars feared a loss or weakening of Islamic identity in the wake of the spread of English language education and western values. After the defeat of the anti-colonial uprising of 1857–58 in which many Muslim

princes and scholars participated, the Islamic institutions of the country faced the British rulers' suspicion of disloyalty and sedition. In this situation the religious scholars decided to concentrate on the reconstruction of religious knowledge and reinforcement of religiosity. They also generally preferred to prove their loyalty to British rule. A more radical section of the seminary's teachers, however, emerged after the turn of the century. The new head teacher of the Dār al-'Ulūm, Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan (1267–1339/1851–1921), and scholars like Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (0296–1377/1879–1957) and 'Ubayd Allāh Sindhī (1289–1363/1872–1944) represented a highly politicised thinking and wanted to challenge the British rule which they saw as a major impediment to the profession of true Islam not only in India but also in the Islamic world at large. They particularly identified themselves with the Ottoman rule and mobilized people for its preservation after its defeat in the First World War. In this effort they allied themselves with M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948) in the broad-based but unsuccessful Khilāfat movement.

At the same time, the school championed religious discourse in the reformist fashion of *iṣlāḥ* through which its founders and the generations of students sought to spread the true Islam as they understood it. Their views were characterized by a marked orthodoxy but also by puritanism and asceticism. Their relations with the other Islamic schools of thought (called *maslak*, pl. *masālik*) were troubled by controversy. They attacked the dissenting views within Islam, particularly those of the Barēlwīs, who represented the culture of the shrine-based Ṣūfī Islam. Yet most Deobandi divines were themselves active Ṣūfī *shaykh*s who followed the path, or *ṭarīqah*, as far as they considered it to be in consonance with the law and word of God, or *sharī'ah*. Although they were staunch followers of the Ḥanafī school (*maḏhab*), they were wrongly labeled as Wahhābīs with whom they shared a certain bent for the radical and puritan interpretation of Islamic tenets. They anxiously marked themselves off from other sects, notably the Shī'ah, and especially the Aḥmadiyyah, whom they considered to be heterodox. Over time the school became the head seminary with an elaborate network of schools and activities inspired by the doctrines of the Deobandi school and its interpretation of Islam. They introduced mass religious education within their own seminary through the innovative approach of hostel-based study and a large number of branches and *madāris* across South Asia and beyond.

Their curriculum usually consists of an eight-year course after which the degree of '*ālim* or scholar of religion and law is conferred on the student, roughly comparable to a graduate degree. It is still based on the Dars-i Niẓāmī, a curriculum compiled and introduced by Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn (d. 1161/1748).

The students following this scheme of studies are required to study the Qur'ān, the Prophetic traditions (*Ḥadīth*), the principles of the Ḥanafī law alongside a large number of often arcane commentaries written mainly by traditionists (*muḥadithūn*). The degree attained by the students consists of teaching licenses (*sanad*s) for major works, not failing to mention the venerable line of succession in which the respective teacher stands. Besides the *manqūlāt*, or transmitted sciences, related to the divine sources, the curriculum also includes the *maʿqūlāt*, or rational sciences, comprising subjects such as philosophy, logic and various branches of mathematics representing some form of worldly knowledge of a rather dated variety, based on the ancient Greeks. Modern subjects such as English, Geography or History have long been conspicuous by their absence.

The Deoband school has exerted its influence throughout India's independent existence as a learned reference institution of normative and orthodox Islam. Recent developments have raised much speculation about the influence of the Deobandi educational movement and its role in the formation of radical and militant Islamic thought. The reference of the Ṭālibān rulers of Afghanistan to their Deobandi theological moorings contributed to this as much as the active role which the Pakistan-based religious parties wedded to the Deobandi school of thought, the two wings of the Jamʿiyyat-i ʿUlamā'-i Islām played in the organisation and support of militant religious opposition groups in Afghanistan, the *mujāhidīn*, and in the militant Islamist struggle in divided Kashmir.

These references have created some confusion in the public mind as to the character of the Deobandi educational movement. Although Deoband's ideological thrust is marked by strong anti-western radicalism and theological puritanism, it cannot be simply equated with militant Islam. This paper seeks to give an overview of the different institutions and instruments by which the Deobandi theological interpretation is promoted within the head seminary at Deoband and beyond, concentrating on its role in India.

The Message of God and its Propagation

Any proselytising religion basing itself on God's message and seeking to spread it across the world is bound to have has media representation at the heart of its activities. A reformist religious school seeking to teach and propagate the 'right Islam' is even more dependent on efficient communication with the outside world, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Its mission in the field of media derives from the missionary activity itself. The

Qur'ān enjoins upon Muslims to fulfill the task of spreading Islam, to act as its missionaries and propagators the world over. In so doing the Muslims would be following in the footsteps of the Prophet and pursuing the ultimate objective of Islam to convert the whole world to its beliefs.

In the history of Islam, organized and targeted *da'wah* activities seem often to have been used by dissenting interpretations and sects, such as the Ismā'īlīs or the Aḥmadiyyah, as a means to ensure the allegiance of their followers. But specialised movements or departments of *da'wah* as the concern of the mainstream Muslim community appear to be a rather late development and belong perhaps to the early twentieth century. The religious scholars, or '*ulamā'*, have played a key role in this process. According to a Prophetic tradition they believe that they are the heirs of the Prophet. Their teaching of Islam is a missionary activity proper.

The concept of message is central to all revealed religions and to Islam in particular. It is God's word, the Qur'ān, the literal message, but also the complete codex of beliefs and practices, which needs to be communicated so that Islam might achieve its objective. Reformist traditions and schools such as Deoband have an 'additional' message to communicate — their interpretation of what the 'correct Islam' is. In Deoband's case it consists both of its general reformist contentions and the views of its revered founder-leaders, Qāsim Nānautawī and Gangōhī.

The Diversification of Self-representation

As the Deoband school carefully negotiated the boundaries of tradition and modernity it adopted various methods of propagating its message, both traditional (in the sense of inherited, long-tried) and innovative. (See Table 1). If the present-day media self-representation concerns the dissemination of knowledge and information, the early Islamic media were rooted in oral and personal communication. With the advent of printing and its adoption in South Asia by the Muslim religious institutions in the course of the nineteenth century, the dissemination of religious knowledge was put on a mass footing. It became possible to standardise interpretation, thereby promoting greater cohesion among the followers. But printing also promoted divisiveness as groups multiplied and fostered their own understanding of Islam, propagating their own message among their adherents and in the emerging public sphere in which they were greatly helped by mass publications.

Table 1

Channels of Communicating the Deoband school's message before Independence (1947)	Since
School (Dār al-ʿUlūm), its students (*ṭalabāʾ*) and graduates (*fuḍalāʾ*)	1866
Legal Department and its legal decisions – *Dār al-Iftāʾ*	1892
Department of Preaching (*Shuʿbah-ʾi Tablīgh*) and its preachers (*muballighīn*)	1934
Politico-religious organisations under its influence – Association of Religious Scholars of India (Jamʿiyyat-i ʿUlamāʾ-i Hind – JUH) and the Central Khilāfat Organisation (Jamʿiyyat-i Khilāfat, Hind – JKH)	1919
Periodical publications of the school and under its influence – *al-Qāsim* (1913); *al-Rashīd* (1914), named after the founders of the seminary, Qāsim Nānautawī and Rashīd Gangōhī; *al-Jamʿiyyat* (1925); *Khilāfat* (1920–35)	1913–1925
Educational and Students' Organizations — Thamarāt al-Tarbiyyat (Benefactors' Association of Former Graduates, 1878); Anjuman-i Muʿīn al-Islām (Helpers of Islam Association, 1886); Jamʿiyyat al-Anṣār (Graduates' Association, 1909); Naẓārat al-Maʿārif al-Qurʾāniyyah (Qurʾānic school for English-educated Muslim Boys, Delhi, 1913); Lajnat al-Ittihād ([Opposition] Students' Union, 1926); Jamʿiyyat al-Ṭalabāʾ ([Loyalist] Students' Union, 1926); Jāmiʿah Milliyyah Islāmiyyah (National University, Aligarh/Delhi, 1920).	1878-1926

Based on Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900–1947* (Oxford University Press) (forthcoming).

Historically speaking, Deobandi thought has been spreading through the informal networks of graduates and like-minded institutions created by them. The personal networks comprised Deoband's teachers, its current students, and its graduates, but also those who didn't complete their studies and studied only for a short term. They spread throughout India, in fact throughout South Asia, and even all across the world, concentrating in areas where the Indian Muslim migrants settled, but also producing groups of indigenous Deobandi graduates from countries such as Malaysia, Afghanistan and China (Xinjiang province). Today the Dār al-ʿUlūm is one of the largest religious schools in Asia with 3,504 students enrolled in 2002–03 and 774 graduates for the same year. According to Deoband's own data, until 2004 the school had produced 32,806 graduates during its period of existence out of which about 6 percent were from countries other than India.[1] In addition, a very large number of

[1] Based on the journal *Dār al-ʿUlūm*, November 1994: 43 (Deoband graduates 1283–1414 AH); *Dār al-ʿUlūm,* 2001: 55 (Deoband graduates 1400–1421 AH). Figures provides by the Department of Education (*Daftar-i Taʿlīmāt*) (Graduates 1422–24 AH).

students benefited from the school outside the classical *'ālim* course; these are the so-called *mustafidīn* (See Table 2). They also include those who broke off studies or studied for a short term for courses such as *ḥifẓ*, *tajwīd* and *qirā'at.* They are twice the number of the regular graduates. Today the religious schools following the Deobandi interpretation are among the most numerous in India and Pakistan, being next to those of the Barēlwī *maslak*. The larger Deobandi schools are estimated to number more than 2,000 in each of India and Pakistan.

Table 2

	Number of Students (enrolled)	Number of Graduates
1400 AH (1979–80)	1822	406
1424 AH (2003–04)	3504	774
1283–1414 AH (1866–1993)	Graduates from outside the country	5,078
	Graduates from inside the country	20,379
	Total Graduates	25,457
	Number of *mustafidīn* (those who benefited)	51,925
	Total number	77,382

Based on data provided by the Department of Education (*Daftar-i Ta'līmāt*), Dār al-'Ulūm, Deoband during the field research of the author in February and March, 2004. See also n. 1 above.

Deoband's classical forms of media propagation also included its legal decisions, the *fatāwā*, which provided interpretation of Islamic law (*sharī'ah*). They were disseminated by the school's legal department (*Dār al-Iftā'*). The *fatāwā* sought to answer questions on whether or not any act or view was in consonance with Islamic law, and whether it was acceptable, permissible, or legal from the perspective of the Ḥanafī school of law (*fiqh*) to which most South Asian Muslims generally belong, and whether it conformed with the Deobandi doctrine (*maslak*). It is largely through these that the school's normative influence has spread far and wide. In time *fatwā*-writing assumed enormous proportions. Between 1911 and 1976 (1329–1396 AH) Deoband issued 439,336 *fatāwā* serving as a guideline for correct religious practice not only for the adherents of the Deoband tradition, but also for orthodox and conservative Muslims following other interpretations of Islam.[2] These legal decisions were brought together in collected volumes and reprinted for easy

[2] Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-UlumDeoband*, tr. Murtaz Husain F. Qureshi 2 vols. (Deoband: Idarah-'e Ihtemam, 1980), 2: 242.

reference. The *Fatāwā-'i Rashīdiyyah* written by Gangōhī and published in 1906 are a prominent case in point. They serve as a legal standard of the Deobandi movement and are regularly quoted in various publications such as *al-Maḥmūd*[3] and *al-Jamʿiyyat*[4] (May 1998) of the Jamʿiyyat al-ʿUlamā' South Africa. Nowadays many Islamic schools that maintain a legal department, also offer legal advice on the internet. A major Deobandi school active in this field is the Jāmiʿah Binūriyyah in Karachi founded in 1978.[5]

Preachers and preaching movements in Islam have constituted another historical form of the propagation of Islamic norms. The religious and the political sphere in the late colonial India was severely contested between various revivalist movements, but also between supporters and opponents of British rule. Hindu revivalist and reclamation efforts triggered a mass outpouring of preaching activities from various Islamic institutions seeking to prevent the so-called 'Neo Muslims,' that is, Muslim converts, to revert to Hinduism. The Deoband school joined other Islamic groups at the time to oppose the reclamation efforts of the Hindu reformist sect, Āryā Samāj.[6] It established its own preaching department in 1353/1934. Today there are three full-time employees working in the department. They visit different parts of India, largely on the invitation to address public religious meetings of local Muslims and explain the fundamentals of the Deobandi school of thought.[7] The preaching that is disseminating the Deobandi interpretation of Islam is, however, considered a basic task of all graduates. It has been infused with new life by more recent additions to the list of the departments at the school.

The upsurge in preaching activity also contributed to the formation of a separate movement for this purpose, the Tablīghī Jamāʿat, in 1344/1926. Its founder, Muḥammad Ilyās (1302-1363/1885–1944) had once studied at Deoband where he had become a follower of one of the school's founders, Gangōhī. The Deobandi scholar Maulānā Ashraf ʿAlī Thānawī (1280-1362/1863–1943) exerted strong influence on the formative phase of this group through his writings and through his own *tablīgh* activities. Ilyās fused Ṣūfī and reformist concepts of Islam. But over time the Tablīghī Jamāʿat has come to be seen as an emissary of Deobandi thought. While the movement has a strong presence in the town of Deoband today and also in its environs, it is somewhat less visible on the Deoband campus.

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[3] See, for example *Maḥmūd*, no. 2 (December 1999) and no. 8 (March 2000).

[4] See *al-Jamʿiyyat* (May 1998) available on their websites <http://www.jamiat.org.za> and <http://www.msapubli.com>.

[5] <http://www.binoria.org/fatwaonline.asp>.

[6] Sayyid Mahboob Rizvī, *History of the Dar al-UlumDeoband,* 2: 243.

[7] My interviews during field research 2004 – DR.

While to many observers the Deoband school today appears to be a traditional and orthodox institution, one should remember that it had always been in the forefront of institutional innovation and change. The historical forms of self-representation, scholar and student networks, *fatwā*-writing and preaching were given new shape keeping in view the requirements of the changing times. Deoband introduced hostel-based education at the Dār al-'Ulūm and institutionalised *fatwā*-writing, and started the departmental coordination of preaching which were radical innovations in their time, placing the seminary on the edge of modernity in respect of religious instruction and indoctrination.

In competition with secular organisations the school also conquered political and social space. It heavily influenced the establishment of two major politico-religious bodies of Indian Muslims since 1919: the Association of Religious Scholars of India (Jam'iyyat-i 'Ulamā'-i Hind) and the Central Khilāfat Conference (see Table 1 above). The school as well as the associations started their own print media. The school published two religious journals (*al-Qāsim* and *al-Rashīd*). The associations published a number of periodicals, some with national and many with local editions.[8]

Festivities and Calamities

Although the mode of operation of the school still remains very much distinct from the secular and westernised educational institutions, the pace of change significantly accelerated after the school celebrated its centenary with much pomp and fanfare on 21–23 March, 1980. Commemorative sessions were held and were attended by politicians and religious leaders from all over India — among them Prime Minister Indira Gandhi — and from other South Asian nations and also from several other parts of the world. All in all 8,000 delegates were said to have participated.[9] The occasion was used to reunite a large number of graduates of Deoband from all over the world in a traditional turban-binding ceremony (*dastārbandī*).

The commemorative session adopted several resolutions. They proposed to significantly expand the institutional infrastructure of the school, suggesting new departments of preaching, centres for training and preaching across the country, research facilities, and associations for the graduates and for the

[8] Muḥammad Miyāṇ, *Jam'iyyat al-'Ulamā'-i Hind Kiyā Hay,* 2 vols. (Lahore: Jam'iyyat-i 'Ulamā'-i Islam Pakistan, 2001); M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[9] *Mukhtṣar Rūdād Ijlās-i Ṣadsālah Dār al-'Ulūm Deoband* (Deoband: Deoband Century Celebrations Committee, 1980), 17.

religious schools. Many of these proposals were taken up, although not on the same grand scale as envisioned. The participants also passed resolutions on Palestine and Afghanistan.[10]

The celebrations visibly raised the public profile of the school. This may have heightened the competition over its control by rival factions as the public attention stressed the school's importance. Tensions came to a head in 1402/1982 when the school split. As a result of family feuds over the nomination of its new principal, a new institution was created — the Dār al-ʿUlūm Waqf. It represented the outcome of a power struggle between the so-called Madanī faction, led by Maulānā Asad Madanī, the son of Ḥusayn Aḥmad Madanī (d. 1377/1957) and the Qāsimī faction, headed by the former Rector Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib Qāsimī (1314–1403/1897–1983), the grandson of the founder Nānautawī. The latter faction was defeated in this power struggle and moved out of the historic premises to set up a new institution on *waqf* land, that is, endowed land. While it presents itself to the outside world and to intending students as the legitimate heir to the historical Deobandi institution it did not succeed in effectively challenging the leadership role of the old school.

Whereas the old school is still seen as the genuine reference institution for normative and orthodox Islam in modern India (and Pakistan), the new school is regarded as a legitimate means to acquire recognised religious education of the same standard as that of the old school. Within the South Asian system of *ʿālim* education a few select *madāris* enjoy the status of recognised reference schools where students from smaller or less important schools in the provinces are sent for their final year (*daurah-ʾi ḥadīth*) to complete graduation. The new school is already considered among these few. Some argue that its theological academic standard may even be higher than that of the old school. The more learned and academically inclined teachers joined the new school when the split occurred, although the old school has now compensated for the loss. In contrast with the old school, the new school demonstrably desists from political pronouncements. Interviews with its representatives revealed that it grants *de facto* recognition to the old school as its *mādar-i ʿilmī*[11] and that their differences are not theological but personal. The new school is already important in numerical terms. During the short time of its existence it has been able to attract about 1,500 students, half the number of the old school. Thus their mutual competition relates more to the rapidly expanding private educational market in South Asia where the *madāris* position themselves as the private schools of the mainly rural Muslim underclass and the urban lower

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[10] Ibid., 49–46.

[11] *Alma mater*, also: 'mother of schools,' head school.

middle class. But also for the old school the crisis proved to be a catharsis from which it emerged stronger, bigger and more dynamic than before.

New Forms of Intervention and Self-representation

Since the centenary celebrations and the reorganisation after the split of 1402/1982 several new departments have come into existence which have enhanced coordination among the schools following the Deobandi persuasion and strengthened the coherence and thrust of its thought. In this the school responded not only to the crisis situation within the institution symbolised by the split but also to pressures from outside reflected in the competition of private secular educational institutions for the minds of India's Muslims, and even more important, in the militant campaign of Hindu nationalists against the legitimacy of *madrasah*-based religious education.

Table 3

New Deoband school departments and institutions started after 1982	Date
Department of English language and literature[12]	7 February 2002
Computer Department	30 August 1996
Rābiṭah Madāris-i ʻArabiyyah (RMA)	25–26 October 1994
Tanẓīm-i Abnā'-i Qadīm	1991
Taḥaffuẓ-i Khatm-i Nubuwwat	31 October 1986
Shaykh al-Hind Academy[13]	1403 (1982/83)

The Shaykh al-Hind Academy and the Department to safeguard the Finality of the Prophethood of Muḥammad (Taḥaffuẓ-i Khatm-i Nubuwwat), established in 1402/1982 and 1406/1986 respectively reflect the trend of the eighties for a pronounced assertion and ideological interpretation of the puritan Sunnī Islam. In this case the school responded as much to global developments, such as the Islamic revolution in neighbouring Shīʻite Iran, as to local trends. Defending the ideological boundaries of the true Sunnī Islam was a claim advanced by the *mujāhidīn* fighting in Afghanistan and by the radical Sunnī groups in Pakistan. Muslims felt under attack in India and the religious leaders saw a distinct need for the reassertion of their beliefs.

Both the institutions are considered part of the post-graduate specialisation programme for *ʻulamā'* called *takhaṣṣuṣ*. The Academy was meant to support in-depth academic studies that would produce more

[12] *Administrative Report* for the Shūrā Session held on 30th April-2nd May 2003 (Urdu – computer printout), p. 31.

[13] See <http://darululoom-deoband.com/urdu/departments/show.php?dept=academy.gif>.

sophisticated arguments for the dissemination and defence of the beliefs of the school founders, Nānautawī and Gangōhī. Staff members are also charged with writing religious and political speeches for the rector, other luminaries and teachers of the school, and addressing public meetings. Within post-graduate specialisation the Academy offers selected graduate students a practice in Islam-related journalism and research. While I was in Deoband, one case attracted public attention where a student[14] was rusticated from the Academy for publishing an article in the local press which he had signed under his official affiliation. In the article he had recognised the need to include mundane subjects in the curriculum of the school. This indicated that such debate had penetrated the very heart of the school's ideological institutions and that it seemed only a matter of time before that debate would become more pronounced. Through the Academy the school actively promoted the appropriation of new media for Islamic propaganda. It started training students specifically in religious journalism. Thus it sought to enhance the professionalism of its media activities and to raise its intervention in public debates.

The Finality of Prophethood Department *de facto* heads a separate organisation with branches all over India, South Asia, and also in the west. The organisation's name represents a sectarian perspective on Islam battling with perceived enemies that supposedly question the Finality of the Prophethood of Muḥammad, a charge, first of all, levelled against the Aḥmadiyyah for the claims of their founder and subsequent leaders to some degree of prophethood. The movement has also engendered a world body of noted radicalism.[15] Its local chapters, particularly in Pakistan, occasionally make news by their persecution of Aḥmadīs. The Pakistan chapter is notorious for its links with other sectarian organizations such as Sipāh-i Ṣaḥābah and other groups engaged in or concerned with *jihād.* The Deoband office focuses on production of pamphlets against the above-mentioned groups. Local chapters enjoy a wide degree of autonomy. But the existence of a global network and their mutual support cannot be denied. The coordinating function of the Indian organisation seems to extend also to Nepal. The body held camps to train scholars for the refutation of Aḥmadī doctrines across India.[16] As the prevalence of the Aḥmadiyyah in India is

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[14] Arshad Fayzee – my interviews in Deoband, March 2004.

[15] 'Ālamī Majlis Taḥaffuẓ-i Khatm-e Nabuwwat, 35 Stockwell Green, London, SW9. <http://www.islamicfinder.org/getitWorld.php?id=26201&lang>; see their website at: <http://www.khatmenubuwwat.org/>; also see the website of the US branch of the *Irshād-o-Daʿwat*, a pro-Ahl-i Ḥadīth organisation, co-sponsoring its international activities: <http://www.irshad.org/finality/significance.php>.

[16] Such camps were held once every year in 1988, 1990–95, 1997–98. See *Dār al-ʿUlūm*, 1982: 25.

miniscule, the camps are used to streamline the scholars ideologically. The pamphlets produced by this department repudiating the rival interpretations of Islam are another form of application of the writing skills acquired in the Academy. They are directed against the Aḥmadīs, the Shīʻah, the Ahl-i Ḥadīth, Mawdūdī, the Barēlwīs, Christians, and Hindus.[17] They are used in what is sometimes called a 'pamphlet war' against the perceived enemies who usually retort in kind.

The Computer and English departments were established after much debate, which in the case of English lasted for more than a century. They are also a part of the post-graduate specialisation course offer — *takhaṣṣuṣ*. While the number of students benefiting from these services is comparatively small, it is expected that soon their number will increase. The two year courses may still contribute to change the profile and outlook of several hundreds of graduates within a 4–5 year period. Their reach extends beyond the confines of the seminary as they are connected with new projects aiming at modern post-graduate education for *ʻulamā'* graduates that have been started recently thanks to donations and private sponsorships. The two departments at Deoband have come into existence largely owing to the intervention and financial assistance of Badr al-Dīn Ajmal, a wealthy perfume merchant from Assam, a Dār al-ʻUlūm graduate and a member of its *Shūrā*. He also supports other such projects in Assam, Bombay and Hyderabad.

It is notable that the argument in favour of English and Computer Studies was won against the resistance by the 'old guard' of *ʻulamā'* only because of the assurance that these new media are required as a means of propagation of Islam among the secularized and non-orthodox Muslims, but also among those who do not speak Urdu and live in South India or in the diaspora where they might have little access to reliable and 'true' information on Islam.[18]

The Rābiṭah-'i Madāris-i ʻArabiyyah (RMA), or Organisation of Arabic Schools, represents another significant institutional innovation of the Dār al-ʻUlūm. Created in 1994 it came into being in response to the increasing pressure on the religious schools. Functioning as a department of the school, its head office processes applications by Deobandi *madāris* for registration. After investigating their teaching practices and rules, their certificate (*sanad*) will be endorsed. The RMA regularly convenes meetings of rectors and head teachers to discuss new challenges and problems of the curriculum. This started with conferences in 1994. Further, all-India meetings of Islamic-Arabic

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[17] For a list of these pamphlets see the price list of Deoband's bookshop at: <*http://darululoomdeoband.com/urdu/index.htm*>.

[18] My interviews during field research in March 2004 – DR.

schools were held on 12 November 1998 and on 30 April 2002.[19] By and large, it serves as a forum to close the ranks and to resist demands for more far-reaching changes. At the same time, changes in several matters are being entertained and quietly endorsed, mainly concerning computerization and the use of English. This also serves as a means to prevent sub-standard religious teaching in the burgeoning market of religious education being offered in the name of the prestigious Deobandi school of thought. In a way, this is a branding of their product and protection of its promotional rights in a lucrative and expanding market. The rival *waqf* school belonging to the Qāsimī faction remains excluded from the RMA. Its leader, Anẓar Kashmīrī, stressed in an interview that they are not seeking affiliation as they regard themselves an embodiment of the same *alma mater*. But he pointedly added that they would not object if invited, meaning thereby that they tacitly accepted the lead role of the old school and, in ideological terms, apparently regarded the rift as a painful anomaly.

The RMA represents the most formal effort yet in the history of the Deoband seminary and Deobandi school of thought to give the networking of the school a distinct organisational shape. This change was rather forced on the Deoband school by circumstances and represents a clear break with the earlier tradition where the networking was based more on intermittent interaction between graduates and their newly-founded religious institutions.

Student Propagandists of Islam: Training in Religious Media

Not less important for the efficiency of the Deoband educational movement is the level of preparedness of its students. Regular student unions had been in existence at the Deoband school in the late colonial period and also in the early years of independence. Their activities were regularly disrupted by prolonged periods of proscription and suppression, particularly in response to student strikes. The change of administration in 1402/1982 was used as a pretext for a clampdown on the student union and it has not been allowed to function since. The *ʿulamāʾ* linked with the school defended this measure by referring to the same state of affairs in state universities such as the Jāmiʿah Milliyyah of Delhi where student unions were also prohibited around the same time and had not been allowed since. As student unions would come and go, this had nothing to do with the character of the Deoband school, but with the disruptive nature of student politics, they argued.

[19] *Khutbah-i Ṣadārat - Kul Hind Ijtimāʿ-i Madāris-i Islāmiyyah ʿArabiyyah 21 Rajab 1419* AH/12 *November 1998* (Deoband: Markazī Daftar-i Madāris-i ʿArabiyyah, n.d.); also *Khutbah-i Ṣadārat Kul Hind Ijlās-i Majlis ʿUmūmī-i Rābiṭah Madāris-i Islāmiyyah ʿArabiyyah 16 Ṣafar 1423 AH/30 April 2002.*

Currently, the student clubs (*ṭalabā' kī anjumanēṇ*) play a major role in Deoband student life. There are more than 100 in operation at the school. They are meant to facilitate learning and study. Their structure replicates the geographical areas of origin. Other clubs reflect interest in promoting the study of Arabic language and literature (*al-nādī al-adabī*). Office bearers are elected. Students prepare wallpapers (*dīwārī parchē*) which adorn the walls and trees of the inner courtyards where students learn the basics of religious and — one might say — ideological journalism. One of the monthly wallpapers for March 2004 included articles sporting headlines such as "You also stand for elections," arguing that the *'ulamā'* should not leave the field of politics to secularised Muslims; "From the Karbalā' of Ḥusayn to today's Karbalā'" attacking US policy on Iraq; and "The Islamic World in the Grip of Judaism," directed against Israel (see Picture 1). The wallpapers are written in the vernacular, some in the regional languages of the areas of origin such as Bengali, Tamil, Nepali, as well as Arabic. One of them keeps track of school events communicating announcements and news such as the arrival of guests, etc.

Picture 1: *Māh Nāmah al-Ḍīyā'*, Muḥarram 1425 AH, pp. 2, 3, 6, 7.

The student clubs have their own libraries and hold regular meetings, mostly on Thursdays, where they function as debating societies. While it is free speech which is practiced here to fulfil the duties of a prayer leader addressing a congregation, the subjects are not free to choose but reflect strict

doctrinal and ideological concerns. In practice they seem to serve as an effective means to retain control of the brains of the students and sharpen the doctrinal profile of the school.

The clubs seem to be important for the current and future networking of Deobandi students and graduates. In some cases there exist equivalents in the districts where the students hail from. They run local voluntary organizations, arranging religious and cultural programmes in the locality.

Expanding the Universe: Peripheral Institutions and Media

A significant development was the formation of an Old Boys Association, the Tanẓīm-i Abnā-'i Qadīm in 1411/1991.[20] Its central office is located in Delhi. It has established two postgraduate training institutes, one for spoken Arabic and another for English. It successfully publishes a regular monthly, the *Tarjumān-i Dār al-ʿUlūm*, started in 1413/1993 with a worldwide readership of graduates. The journal features debates carefully but decidedly exploring and sometimes crossing the limits of the school's thinking with regard to the history of the school, the need to review the religious curriculum, the inclusion of worldly subjects, or establishing relations with the west. It is particularly noteworthy that the Association maintains contacts with both the old and the new school in the name of strengthening the Deobandi tradition. This Association no doubt contributes to the reconstruction and updating of Deobandi thinking in the modern era, especially as it is run by a new generation of graduates who feel the need to adapt to the changing circumstances.

Table 4

Peripheral institutions facilitating networking of Deobandi graduates (selected)	
All India Taʿlīmī wa Millī Foundation	2000
Dār al-Qāẓī	1994
Markazī JUH	1992
All India Millī Council (AIMC)	1992
Tanẓīm-i Abnā-'i Qadīm	1991
Islamic Fiqh Academy	1989
Institute of Objective Studies	1986
Markaz al-Maʿārif	1982
Jamʿīyyat-i ʿUlamā'-i Hind (JUH)	1919

[20] Earlier attempts to create such an organisation by ʿUbayd Allāh Sindhī in 1327/1909 did not last long.

Coming to the institutions outside the confines of the seminary connected to the Deobandi universe one should first mention the Associations of Religious Scholars, the Jam'iyyat-i 'Ulamā'-i Hind (JUH). Created as a joint effort of different interpretations of Islam, it veered over time to a close and almost inseparable connection with the Deoband school. It started as a part of the overall anti-colonial mobilisation in 1337/1919 and turned into a political party by the time of the partition. Under the name of Jam'iyyat-i 'Ulamā'-i Islām (JUI) it continues its political activity in Pakistan today. Its Indian counterpart is still known by the old name JUH concentrating on religious, educational and cultural activities. After the split of the Deoband school, symbolizing the ascendance of the Madanī faction, the two institutions have moved still closer. Asad Madanī is the veteran President of the JUH and the most influential member of the advisory board (*shūrā*) of the Deoband school. Asad's son, Maḥmūd Madanī, serves as the General Secretary of the JUH. Critics allege that the elder Madanī who was a long-time member of the Rajya Sabha, India's Upper House of Parliament, exploited his connections with the Congress Party in the seventies to neutralise resistance to his manipulation of the split. Maḥmūd Madanī is presumably preparing himself for the successorship in his father's positions. He briefly joined the Samajwadi Party. He then contested elections unsuccessfully for the Rashtriya Lok Dal in 2004. The JUH strives to regain influence in the debate over the political and religious representation of the Muslim community in India. Today the JUH runs its own educational, training and relief projects. A dissident faction broke away from the JUH creating the Central Association of Religious Scholars, or Markazī JUH, in 1412/1992. It reacted to the alleged inactivity of the JUH in defence of the religious rights and interests of India's Muslims. The JUH and its factions are public bodies constantly looking for ways to raise their media profile through public functions, publishing activities, press releases and contributions to local media.

Responding to the acutely felt need for better coordination among Muslims as a minority perceived to be under siege, the "Ittiḥād-i Millat," that is, National Unity Conference convened in 1412/1992 resulted in the creation of the All India Millī (National) Council (AIMC). It already has branches in many Indian states. It also attempted to cut across sectarian lines trying to unite various Sunnī factions. Deobandi scholars play an active, if not the most active part in it, with Maulānā Qāḍī Mujāhid al-Islām Qāsmī (1355–1423/1936–2002) being its Secretary General and Maulana Muḥammad Asrār al-Ḥaqq Qāsmī its Assistant Secretary General. It runs educational and social relief projects. Closely connected with it is the Islamic Fiqh Academy which came into existence in 1409/1989, as it was founded by the same Maulānā Qāḍī

Mujāhid al-Islām Qāsmī. The most recent addition to this group is the All-India Taʿlīmī wa Millī Foundation, primarily an educational trust promoting religious, general, and technical education with special emphasis on girls' education. It is run by the above-mentioned Deobandi *ʿālim* Asrār al-Ḥaqq. The Institute of Objective Studies (IOS)[21] which was founded in 1404/1986 aspires to play a coordinating role. Founded and run with the active involvement of Jamāʿat-i Islāmī India, it is the most modern of these institutions. Deobandī *ʿulamāʾ* also participate in it. The above-mentioned Mujāhid al-Islām has been a member of the Governing Council of the Institute.[22] He and Dr Manẓūr ʿĀlam, Chairman of the IOS, have also been actively involved in the Millī Council. Thus we have a group of projects where leadership positions overlap and a tight network is woven in which reformist scholars play a large role and where representatives of other interpretations of Islam are also getting increasingly involved. This group of organisations, too, is very much preoccupied with its public representation. Its member organisations have compiled institutional profiles as well as prospectus files for potential donors and for parents who would consider sending their children to their educational facilities. Some of these organizations publish periodicals (see Table 5 below). The IOS regularly holds public functions and publishes email newsletters.

Another group of Deobandi-related projects points to a more recent trend of modernisation. As mentioned above, some graduates and scholars started training institutes where the graduates of traditional *madāris* are given computer-training, lessons in English and modern Arabic. Foremost among them is the Markaz al-Maʿārif (Centre of Knowledge).[23] Started in 1402/1982, it gained much momentum in the nineties when it also started English-medium secondary schools including instruction of Islamic education. It is run by the earlier-mentioned Badr al-Dīn Ajmal. Maulānā Asad Madanī started an English-medium secondary school with religious education on offer in Deoband town. Maulānā Anẓar Shāh Kashmīrī from the rival Dār al-ʿUlūm Waqf is running a post-graduate training institute for *ʿulamāʾ* called Maʿhad al-Anwar (Institute of Enlightenment). Similar projects exist in Hyderabad, Bangalore and Bombay. To attract potential customers and to market themselves they have printed prospectuses detailing study conditions, course offers and donation procedures.[24]

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[21] See <www.iosworld.org>.

[22] See <http://ifa-india.org/qazibio1.htm>.

[23] It runs its own website: <www.markazulmaarif.org>.

[24] Foregoing references are based on my interviews in February-March 2004 – DR.

Table 5

Journals under reformist/Deobandi influence (selected)			
Kirdār-i Jam'iyyat	Markazī JUH	Monthly	1994
Millī Ittiḥād	All India Millī Council	Fortnightly	1993
Tarjumān-i Dāru'l-'Ulūm	Tanẓīm-i Abnā-'i Qadīm	Monthly	1991
Ā'īnah-'i Maẓāhir al-'Ulūm	Maẓāhir al-'Ulūm (Waqf)	Monthly	1991
Journal of Objective Studies	Institute of Objective Studies	Quarterly	1989
Dār al-'Ulūm	Deoband Seminary	Monthly	1941
Al-Jam'iyyat	*JUH*	Weekly	1925

A large contribution to the continued consistency of the Deobandi educational movement is made by journals which have revived debate on doctrinal and practical issues. Here one has to mention the journals published by the Deoband school, Dār al-'Ulūm, and the Old Boys Association, *Tarjumān-i Dār al-'Ulūm*. Many of the major seminaries affiliated with Deoband, such as the two wings of the famous Maẓāhir al-'Ulūm in Saharanpur, which also suffered a split because of family feuds, have followed suit. The All-India Millī Council started its own fortnightly *Millī Ittiḥād*. The Markazī JUH has been publishing the monthly *Kirdār-i Jam'iyyat* since 1994. These files of journals are usually not maintained in the libraries. Even the Deoband school collection of its own journal shows gaps. This is a field where some innovative research on discourses and institutions of reformist Islam in South Asia can still be made.

Delivering the Message: Preliminary Conclusions

From this brief review we become acquainted with the various ways of media self-representation of the emerging Deobandi universe. Over time the seminary has spawned a large number of institutions by means of which it ensures that its thought continues to radiate and its doctrinal coherence is maintained. It is noteworthy that this networking has assumed new forms and directions since around 1400/1980. Interaction with others has become more intense. The school feels motivated to strengthen the defence of its way of teaching and its worldview. The growing number of graduates is looking for new forms of employment in the Islamic sector. While the initiatives of the eighties were marked more by strong ideological issues, the emphasis has shifted to development concerns and a review of the *madrasah* teaching system. Although religious scholars are resisting more radical change inside the seminaries, they appear to be ready to accommodate and address burning concerns outside the *madāris* where they seem inclined to promote private secular education when it is imparted in a religious atmosphere and is

combined with religious instruction. Post-graduate training for the graduates of the religious schools is another interesting and promising avenue of reform as it opens access to other sectors of the society for employment of the religious elite that is no longer confined to the Islamic sector. At the same time, religious scholars seem to strengthen the ideological hold of the reformist Islamic thought in the Deobandi tradition on the vast and interpenetrating network of religious institutions, organisations and projects in India and beyond.

Media representation has remained at the heart of the school's affairs. Deoband has renewed its historical forms of communicating its message, such as the personal networks, the dissemination of its *fatāwā* and the preaching. It has also gradually adopted new means of communication including computer technology, the internet and the English language. The driving force behind these changes seems to be the desire to remain relevant to the Muslim community. The school adopts new forms of communication to continue to disseminate its message, to spread the Islam of its own interpretation more effectively, to regain the ground lost to the secularizing and modernising influences. In this process it has to strike a compromise with the growing educational needs of the masses who are demanding not only religious but also worldly knowledge. Whether the school can remain consistent with its message and yet integrate more closely with wider society, only the future will tell.

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