

## **Mediating the External: The Changing World and Religious Renewal in Indian Islam**

Dietrich Reetz

Developments in colonial India, particularly during the active phase of the national and anti-colonial movement in the 1920s to 1940s, are a prime example of rapid political and economic change and the challenge they pose to social and cultural forces. Religious groups were drawn deep into the overall process of polarisation. The role of Islamic movements in a predominantly Hindu country ruled by a Christian colonial power was a particularly precarious one. This is the point of departure for an inquiry into the strategies of two Islamic movements in colonial India to deal with the pressures of modernisation. The two groups were the Deoband movement, named after the religious seminary in the north Indian town of Deoband, and the *Tablīghī Jamā'at*<sup>1</sup>, aimed at renewing Muslim religious beliefs and practices. They are treated here as representing a much broader trend of Islamic mobilisation in colonial India aimed at reviving religiosity and piety in society. Although Islam was a minority religion of roughly 22 per cent of the population<sup>2</sup>, representing a broad medley of social groups, and linguistic and ethnic identities, it drew its significance from the fact that its influence was concentrated in geographical areas where more than half the local population adhered to Islam<sup>3</sup>. It gained additional importance by receiving political representation in legislative bodies. Constituencies in India were traditionally diverse. Legislative representation in India gradually developed from indirect elections where electoral bodies were constituted either territorially by district or local boards or by special interest groups, such as chambers of industry and universities. The constitutional reforms act of 1892 recognised the representation of religious communities in legislative bodies in principle and the Act of 1909 formally introduced separate constituencies for Muslims. These were widely regarded as political manoeuvres to contrast the anti-colonial movement led by Congress with potentially more "loyal" groups.<sup>4</sup>

Islamic mobilisation in colonial India was characterised by a variety of forms. The spectrum ranged from established bourgeois parties appealing to a Muslim constituency,<sup>5</sup> to sectarian and revival movements,<sup>6</sup> and spontaneous and militant forms of mass mobilisation.<sup>7</sup> Within this framework the Deobandis and the Tablighis were "middle of the road". They represented movements which were created with the objective not of fighting for political power, but for religious renewal. And yet, they were drawn into nationwide currents of political and social change, forcing them to take public positions.

It is argued here that the public intervention they sought in the interest of religion led them to reach out from the "sacred" to the "secular" public domain.<sup>8</sup> In order to affect change for a religious renewal they had to engage in social and political transformation. Thus, they acted as "Agents of Change" not only and not so much for religious conduct as for the strata of Muslims they mobilised who looked to their religion as a source of identity and orientation in a fast-changing environment. "Agents of Change" are understood here to be cultural brokers who inhabit the intermediate space between the indigenous cultural norm and western (colonial) influence.<sup>9</sup> The term looks beyond forces spearheading capitalist transformation such as established parties, entrepreneurs, and trade unions, forces which directly adapted western values and institutions but left them basically intact. Although western institutions underwent significant mutation at their hands, these forces and structures were still western. They contributed little in terms of cultural mediation and brokerage. Within the scope of the project, the concept of "Agents of Change" is extended to the more traditional elements not usually associated with change or transformation since they often remain deeply committed to their local culture and mostly conservative tradition. It is still underestimated that cultural and religious forms of public mobilisation in Asia and Africa have been a key element in mediating external transformation processes through their ability to translate new values and institutions into the local idiom. In the process, external influences and their local interpretation often underwent significant alterations. This approach draws on the increasingly active discourse on the intersection of cultural and political landscapes in a globalising world where clear-cut sureties are few and intermediate stages abound. It was inspired by Homi Bhabha and his study of the "interstices" of cultures<sup>10</sup> and continues work on the meaning of networks, cultural brokers and friends.<sup>11</sup> It is meant to contribute to the understanding and emancipation of social and cultural agents who live in more than one world continuously and concurrently, participating in transformation and bringing it about not in a linear fashion but in a roundabout way, being both selfless and selfish in turns.

It is proposed to discuss here what aspects of change affected the Deobandis and the Tablighis, what change did they aim at, and what changes did they undergo themselves. Through this, it is intended to clarify their concept of change and their role in this process. The argument will concentrate on the twentieth century when public and political mobilisation became especially pronounced in British-India in the course of the national movement against colonial rule, marked by the movements for non-cooperation and civil disobedience starting in 1919.

## Islamic mobilization in India

When the Deoband seminary was founded in 1867 it responded to the perceived need of the Muslim community in India to improve the knowledge of Islam among its members. Muslim dynasties had ruled over India for many centuries. But ever since Unitarian tendencies took root under Emperor Akbar (1542-1605), who sought to promote inter-religious dialogue and to placate the Hindu majority, Islamic scholars had demanded a renewal of Islam, allegedly fearing their community would resolve in majority Hinduism which had successfully assimilated many religious movements in its fold before. Particularly the practices of the mystic Muslim orders of Sufism had resonated well beyond the confines of Islam, helped by their emphasis on sensual experiences through music, poetry and dance. Scholars like Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi (1564-1624) sought to redirect Sufism back to its orthodox beginnings and to re-establish the authority of Islamic knowledge based on the Quran and the Sunnah, the revealed book of Islam and the written tradition of the Prophet and his companions. This reform tradition was continued by Shah Waliullah (1703-1962). Without exception, the reformers of Indian Islam understood by reform not modernising Islam in an abstract sense but rectifying and correcting its religious practice, to bring it into closer conformity with the original sources of Islam. The Deobandis were one of several *seminary movements*. Other important seminaries in Indian Islam, with affiliated mosques and seminaries across India, were the Firanghi Mahal, established around 1700, and the Nadwat seminary (1908) in Lucknow, the *Madrassa manzar al-Islām* (1904) of the Barelwi school of thought, in Bareilly, all in the United Provinces (U.P.) of north India.

The Tablighi Jamaat came into existence in 1934 to counter the reconversion efforts of the Hindu reformist movement Arya Samaj.<sup>12</sup> It was one of many *faith and revival movements* in Indian Islam, which were not connected with any particular seat of religious learning. They displayed a great variety of approaches all meant to improve the position of Islam or of Indian Muslims in general. Yet, their outlook was often regional and sectarian. The radical *Ahl-i Ḥ adīth* ("people of the tradition"), starting in the 1880s, rejected conventional orthodoxy as embodied in the four medieval law schools of Islam and pleaded for an exclusive return to the Quran and the Sunnah. The *Aḥrār* movement (of the "noble" - 1930) similarly argued in favour of a purification of Islam. Both of them, sometimes violently, opposed a reformist sect by the name of *Aḥmadīya*<sup>13</sup> which was constituted after its founder had claimed to be the awaited saviour and messiah. Although the latter movement was considered liberal with bourgeois leanings, its attitude was one of deep-felt religiosity. All three vehemently fought against Hindu and Christian conversion efforts. A fourth one, the *Khāksār* (the "humble"), founded in 1930, strove to exercise physical prowess

and militant self-esteem for Muslims in alleged defence against inter-communal violence.

Separating seminary and revival movements is, to a certain extent, artificial, since seminary movements fully shared the goals of revival movements for a renewal and the purification of Islam. The distinction is, therefore, more symbolic in nature, to help understand the different currents of Islamic mobilisation in India. A functional distinction becomes visible in the attachment of the seminary movements to the institutions and structure of a seminary whereas the revival movements were largely leader-centred. The seminary movements, therefore, did not strictly or exclusively focus on the personality of the principal or vice-chairman but were built around a more collective leadership. In contrast, the revival movements critically depended on and were defined by the activity of their founder-leader, as in the case of Allama Inayatullah Khan Mashriqi for the Khaksar, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944) for the Tablighis, Ghulam Mirza Ahmad (1835-1908) for the Ahmadiyya, Sayyid 'Ata'ullah Shah Bukhari (1891-1967) for the Ahrar, and Maulana Nazir Husain for the Ahl-i Hadith. Another consequence of this distinction between institution-building and personal leadership is the degree to which emphasis is put on religious knowledge or spiritual guidance. One could say, particularly looking at the Deobandis and the Tablighis, that the seminary movements by virtue of their vocation stood for increased religious knowledge, whereas the revival movements significantly cherished spiritual guidance provided by a mentor, or *shaikh*, who would initiate adherents into one or several of the Sufi orders. But it is important to note that in the reform movements of Indian Islam both elements were always present in one form or another ever since scholars like Sirhindi and Waliullah attempted to join these two currents of Islam. It is interesting to see how the principles of religious knowledge, of spiritual and moral guidance became structuring elements of the reformist discourse in Indian Islam.

The Deobandis and the Tablighis were exemplarily well-suited to demonstrate this dialectic. Their concept of change was very much related to the comparative importance they attached to religious knowledge, or to spiritual guidance and moral renewal. For them, reform was *Islāh*, correcting a misguided practice. Reform was not meant to make improvements in terms of changes or innovation, which has come to be a contemporary meaning of "reform." It was understood that Islam as a revealed religion was in no need of improvement but was to be practised properly. The correction of the prevalent religious practice mainly meant the purification of Islam from syncretic customs inherited from Hinduism. In their opinion, this required increased religious knowledge, renewed morality and faith. Such changes, it was assumed, would go a long way in solving not only the problems of faith and the hereafter, but

also of this world, and would provide a recipe for the ills of both the sacred and the secular realm.

### The Deoband movement

The Deoband seminary or *dāru'l 'ulum* ("house of religious learning, or knowledge") was founded for the purpose of Islamic and Arabic education. In the first 45 years of its existence it educated 1000 students, providing Arabic and Islamic courses at Secondary and College Level. The circumstances surrounding its establishment have been described in great detail in Barbara Metcalf's classical study of 1982.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted here that its very inception embodied change. By creating separate buildings and departments for various educational activities, with hostels where students could stay during the week, it departed from the tradition where students received instruction from teachers in a more private setting, often in the corner of a mosque or even at home. The set-up at Deoband obviously copied western models such as English colleges. Doctrine-wise, it followed a rather conventional syllabus for Islamic instruction, the famous *dars-i nizāmī*. This collection of Islamic readers was compiled in the eighteenth century at the *Firanghi Mahal* seminary in Lucknow. It was named after its author, Nizamu'd-Din (d. 1748), and based on Arabic grammar, logic, philosophy, mathematics, rhetoric, the study of the Islamic law schools (*fiqh*), and theology.<sup>15</sup>

In the twentieth century, issues agitating the *'ulamā'*<sup>16</sup> of Deoband in their seminary affairs have so far received little attention in academic literature. The centenary history publication of the seminary<sup>17</sup> draws on a mass of data and details and provides a unique insight into the workings of this institution. The conflicts and campaigns of these theologians and their students furnish interesting evidence on the different ways in which currents of change and conservatism swept through the seminary during the heydays of anti-colonial discontent. Broadly speaking, these issues were

- the ascent of materialism and science and the declining interest in spiritual and moral values;
- national education as opposed to western and colonial education and the role of religion therein;
- student politics and agitation within the confines of a religious educational institution such as Deoband;
- participatory principles and majority rule within the body politics of the seminary.

### *Science and religion*

Reflecting the contemporary political and intellectual discourse in the west, which was mirrored in the Indian media, the role of scientific and materialist thinking was an important issue. This discourse was partly fed by a rapid succession of stunning scientific discoveries and their breathless reception. Foremost among them perhaps was the relativity theory of Einstein. Increasingly the question was being asked as to what was left of the dominion of God if supposedly the answer to all cardinal questions of existence was within reach of mankind. Another source of this discourse presumably was the hotly-debated advent of Soviet Russia and its political philosophy of materialist thinking, combined with increasing hostility towards religion and religious institutions under Stalin.

In 1359 AH (1940),<sup>18</sup> the long-time vice-chancellor of the seminary, Qazi Tayyib, delivered a lecture on "Islam & Science" at the Aligarh Muslim University (A.M.U.), the start of a whole series of lectures there to boost the reputation of the scholarship of the *'ulamā* of Deoband. At the largely secular, although Muslim-oriented university, *'ulamā*, as freely admitted by the Deobandis themselves, were held in rather low esteem as far as their academic qualifications were concerned. The official Deoband centenary history volume noted:

"As a result of these lectures, the academic underestimation and mistrust prevailing in the university regarding the *'ulamā* was removed. From that time onwards the relations between the *daru'l 'ulum* and the A.M.U. have been on the increase from day to day and the distance that existed *inter se* these two great academic institutions has now, thank Allah, been much reduced."<sup>19</sup>

In his lecture, based on an "authentic *athar*"<sup>20</sup>, Tayyib, discussed in theological terms the "human energy and capacity and its sway and domination over material powers." "After making it clear that the spring of human powers is the soul," the Deoband history noted, Tayyib "argued in a very subtle manner about spiritualism, theology, the Being of Allah and His Attributes." In asking questions such as "What is the relation between Islam and material wisdom? What are the harms of pure materialism?"<sup>21</sup> he apparently wanted to provide ammunition to counter the numerous arguments about the growing irrelevance of religion in the face of an increasing impact of science on people's lives.

### *Education and identity*

The second issue of national and religious education derived directly from the first one. On several occasions Deoband scholars intervened in the debate on

the character of education required for a liberated India. This was a truly national debate in which Gandhi and many contemporary Indian leaders and educationists of all confessions participated. The origins of the debate went right back to that famous Minute on Education in 1835 by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) in which English-language education was made mandatory in India. English education opened channels for communication and kept India abreast with global trends. But ever since it started, leaders of public opinion in India had believed that it also bestowed India with a sense of servility towards British and English-language culture. A truly free and independent India required a national education policy of its own including the elevation of its native tongues. The search for the meaning and contents of national education united religious leaders, ethno-nationalists and socialists. It was therefore no coincidence that one of the first major campaigns in the anti-colonial struggle from the twenties to forties was the boycott of English education and the creation of national educational institutions.

Rejecting the western legacy of the Aligarh Muslim University which came into being through heavy colonial patronage, all-India Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Ali (1878-1931)<sup>22</sup> initiated the creation of a national university. In the beginning this amounted to makeshift open-air public university classes at Aligarh during the *Khilafat* campaign.<sup>23</sup> It was intended to put pressure on the trustees of Aligarh University to give up the government grant-in-aid as part of the movement of non-cooperation with British colonial institutions. Eventually his initiative laid the foundation for the *Jamia Millia Islamia* in Delhi, an Islamic university which, somewhat contrary to the expectations of its founder, grew into a secular national university for Muslims in independent India.<sup>24</sup> One of the founding fathers was the *Shaikh-al Hind* Mahmud al-Hasan (1851-1920), a spiritual leader of Indian Muslims who was closely associated with the Deoband seminary. He delivered the presidential address at the foundation ceremony for the *Jamia Millia* in 1921. Other occasions on which Deoband divines formulated their position on national education were advisory missions to Afghanistan and the Muslim-Indian principality of Qalat where the rulers asked for their opinion on suitable national education and its compatibility with religious instruction. On all these occasions Deoband *'ulamā* argued in favour of a curriculum in which "the religious sciences would be given due weight along with modern sciences and social necessities". This was thought necessary to remove "that gulf of 'educational dualism'" so that, as the Deoband historian puts it, "by the gathering of both the old and modern educational tendencies at one point of union, an effort be made to create the unity of knowledge and thought in the community"<sup>25</sup>.

In other words, religious instruction was considered a national duty, a prerequisite to achieve national unity. Otherwise, unity would supposedly be threatened by the dominant western education and orientation of an elite which

was increasingly about to turn its back on religion. Interestingly, also from today's perspective of endless infighting, this issue was considered relevant for Afghanistan as well, not only by the Deoband divines, but also by an influential faction of the royal Afghan household.

### *Agitation and democracy vs. paternalism*

The third and fourth issues, those of agitational student politics and of participatory majority rule, threw an illuminating light on the transformation of the seminary itself. Although remaining highly conservative on doctrinal points of social relations (such as the role of women etc.), political intervention by the Deoband seminary, both teaching staff and graduates, has been equally pronounced over the years and based itself on a long tradition. The political activism of Deoband was substantiated with reference to its purist and pan-Islamic antecedents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the highlights of which were the struggle of the so-called *mujāhidīn* or freedom-fighters under Sayyid Ahmad Bareilly (1736-1831) and the uprising of 1857-58 against British colonial rule in which Muslims played a prominent role. This interventionist and purist doctrinal discourse went back to Shah Waliullah. Due to their purist notions this school of thought was called the "Indian Wahhabis" or "Nejdis", with reference to the movement of the Muwahhidun, or "monotheists," commonly referred to as "Wahhabis". Yet doctrinally the Deoband seminary remained within the confines of the Hanafiyya law school, or *fiqh*<sup>26</sup>, which differed notably from the Wahhabis over the relationship to Sufism<sup>27</sup>. The latter was completely rejected by the Wahhabi school but partially accepted by the Waliullahi school in a purified version. The Deoband seminary stood firmly in the Waliullahi tradition. Purism itself is a form of interventionism as it seeks to correct religious practice. This perhaps partly explains why this school of thought also actively engaged with the British colonial power. The Waliullahi tradition opposed the British for undermining the rule of Islamic law by virtue of their legislative and executive actions while ruling over India. It sought to restore the priority of the Quran as a primary source of tradition *vis-à-vis* the British, and even more so for ordinary Muslims who were advised against the creeping dilution of local Islamic customs and rituals by Hindu and Sufi practices. There was a fear that Indian minority Islam would become extinct if it did not guard the purity of its faith. A contributing factor to anti-British feelings on the part of the Waliullahi tradition was the fear that Christian missionary efforts allegedly aimed at eliminating all other religions in India, a fear shared by many religious revival and reform movements in India, also among the Hindus and the Sikhs.



It is therefore easy to see why Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) started his massive non-cooperation movement in 1919-20 on a religious Muslim campaign issue, the fate of the Turkish Caliph after the end of World War I. Indian Muslims campaigned for the defence of the Turkish-Ottoman Khalifat when the Ottoman empire was about to disintegrate after its defeat in the war - as was suspected, with a good measure of British support. This was dictated mainly by British-Indian politics. Indian Muslims strove to shore up their position *vis-à-vis* the British and to assert their minority rights strongly, completely disregarding the critique of the institution of the Khalifat by Turkish Muslims who abandoned the Khalifat, and from dependent Ottoman territories striving for independence from Turkey. It was only natural that Deobandi divines were a party to this movement, some of them like Mahmud al-Hasan, its instigator and prime mover.<sup>28</sup>

This in itself could not but politicise and radicalise internal seminary affairs. The issue of priority for political or educational involvement remained topical throughout this period, that is from the twenties through the forties. Adherents of a more conventional academic vocation for Deoband were defeated in the seminary. Even the chancellor of the seminary, Maulana Sabbir Ahmed Usmani, was forced to resign in 1942 on the grounds that he considered political activity for staff and students at Deoband harmful to their educational goals.<sup>29</sup> His resignation was equally a result of the amputation of the powers of the chancellor in favour of the vice-chancellor. The chancellor was made the constitutional authority of the convening body with little or no decision-making power. Interestingly, these decisions were brought about by a majority decision of the Majlis, or decision-making congregation of the seminary. A similar development denoting the advent of majority rule within the seminary was the abolition of the position of patron in 1354 AH (1935).<sup>30</sup> The patron used to be an eminent personality from public and religious life. At the time it was held by Maulana Shah Muhammad Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi (1863-1943), an outstanding Islamic theologian and scholar in the tradition of Deoband who had published extensively on Islamic law and other doctrinal issues. The opposing Majlis faction argued that the patronship was an expression of the "helplessness" of the Majlis and "unneeded". It wanted to make "the majority opinion as the pivot of decision"<sup>31</sup>. A resolution of the Majlis finally accepted Thanawi's resignation and requested him "to cast his shadow always on the Dar al-Ulum with his pious invocations and lofty favours"<sup>32</sup>.

Violent student politics entered Deoband in a big way in 1344 AH (1926). A students' party came into being with the name *Lujnat al-Ittehad* ("Unity Committee") and took exception to certain practices in the kitchen and in the administration of the seminary. During the annual examination, the administrative officer was manhandled, for which five students were rusticated. The students' party was declared illegal, considering it a "source of interference in

the administration"<sup>33</sup>. Unexpectedly, the disturbances not only revived the following year but engulfed the whole faculty, with one of the teachers, Maulana Anwar Shah Kashmiri delivering two speeches at the local mosque in support of the students' demands, joined by a number of other teachers.<sup>34</sup> Strikes and manhandling instances, which would seem to be at variance with the self-proclaimed ethos of the seminary, nevertheless recurred. The response of the administration was twofold. The dissenters among the students and teachers were dealt with firmly through strictures and censures, not dissimilar to colonial government attitudes, easing them out over time. The practical issues were diffused by the new vice-chancellor, Tayyib, when he took office in 1348 AH (1929) and regularised administrative affairs, introducing *en lieu* a meal ticket system.<sup>35</sup>

### *Inspired activism*

A picture of Deobandi thought and action during this century would be incomplete without a brief account of the activist campaigns since 1900 which were inspired by the Deobandi school but took place mainly outside the confines of the seminary. The first Deobandi off-spring came into being in 1911, an organisation of the graduates and alumni of Deoband, the *Jam 'īyat al-Ansār*.<sup>36</sup> It was organised by Mahmud al-Hasan who had been one of the first students at Deoband and served as its principal (*sadr-e-mudarris*) and superintendent (*sarparast*) since 1890 and 1905 resp. Its declared objectives were to arrange for religious instruction and the teaching of Arabic to Muslim students in government schools and colleges; to arrange for the placement of well-trained imams in mosques; and to promote the publication of inexpensive religious books and pamphlets.<sup>37</sup> Hasan involved one of his old students in this project, a former Sikh, Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi (1872-1944), who had an equally activist temperament. In 1913 they both also organised a Quranic school in Delhi, the *Nazārat al-Ma'arif al-Quraniyya*, aimed at English-educated Muslim boys whose religious education was found wanting or nonexistent. Despite the obvious educational thrust of both endeavours, it was felt that the organisers were pursuing other objectives as well. Sindhi stressed the need for reforms within the Deoband seminary, with emphasis on the activist teachings of Walliullah and Shah Ismail Shahid, on public speaking and writing. Sindhi later went on to hold radical social views, merging Islamic millenarianism with socialist ideas which were becoming more popular during World War I, as an outflow of the Russian revolution of 1917. The anxiety of Muslim intellectuals in India was caused by the Tripolitan and Balkan wars of 1911-12 which saw a conflict emerging between the Caliph residing in Turkey and the Christian ruler of India. Islamic solidarity with the Turkish Caliph resulted in opposition to the

British and, by extension, to British rule in India. Hence polarisation and tension deepened between the cautious non-political and pro-British line of the Deoband administration and the activities of the group around Hasan and Sindhi. The latter was expelled from Deoband as an "infidel" and both were engaged in a political intrigue aimed at securing a naive alliance against the British between the Islamic ruler of Afghanistan and Indian Muslims. It was later called the "silk letter conspiracy," after a bunch of letters written on yellow silk was intercepted, leading to the arrest and internment of Hasan in 1916 while Sindhi went underground.

Deobandi divines were joined in these activities mainly by Muhammad 'Abdul Bari (1879-1926) from the Firangi Mahal seminary, who had organised a medical mission to collect money to help Turkish participants and victims of war activities. This was followed by the introduction of an albeit short-lived organisation to mobilise Indian Muslims for the protection of the holy places of Islam during the war activities, the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Ka'aba* ("Society of the Servants of the Ka'aba", the holy shrine of Islam in Mecca) in 1913. Other prominent Indian Muslims who participated in these activities beyond the allegiance to a particular seminary were Dr. Ansari and the brothers Shaukat Ali (1873-1938) and Muhammad Ali.

A more successful endeavour in terms of longevity was the founding of the *Jam'iyat 'al-'Ulamā-e-Hind*, an organisation of Islamic scholars in India, in 1919. It continued to exist after independence and its branches are still active in India and Pakistan. It was meant to formalise arrangements for an increased role of the more radical ulama in religious and political affairs and co-operated closely with Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, particularly during the Khilafat campaign of 1919-24. Gandhi and Indian Muslim theologians called on the Indian public to mobilise against the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after WWI and against the removal of the Caliph. They made it the first stage of the civil disobedience campaign, turning it into a huge mass movement of non-violent resistance against British rule.<sup>38</sup>

The common denominator of these endeavours was the activist view grounded in the tradition of Shah Waliullah and the Indian *mujāhidīn* movement of the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was a concept that sought to establish the true Islam, holding colonial rule by a Christian European power as much responsible for the plight of Islam in India as every single Muslim who failed to live according to the dictates of religion. Gaining control over religious (Islamic), political and social institutions was considered imperative for clearing the way to erect the kingdom of Allah on earth.

## The Tablighis

In contrast, the movement of the Tablighis, also called the Tablighi Jamaat, proposed a different approach in dealing with the challenges of a changing society, concentrating on the individual and his inner perfection. Although Tabligh literally means "mission", it was not exactly a missionary movement since it was not primarily aimed at conversion but at keeping Muslims within the fold of the Islamic faith. Hindu and Muslim élites were particularly shaken by the so-called Moplah riots in 1921-22 in which Muslim peasants on the West Indian Malabar coast rose in revolt against their mainly Hindu landlords and proclaimed a short-lived "Khilafat Republic". Their militants subjected local Hindus to violent attempts at conversion and killed a considerable number of them. In response, radical Hindu and Muslim leaders intensified their efforts to organise co-religionists to resist conversion and practise self-defence on the basis of their religious community. Hindu campaigns of *Shuddhi* ("purification") and *Sangathan* ("Unity") were countered by Muslim campaigns of *Tabligh* and *Tanzim* ("Organisation"). These militant movements were led by former "non-cooperators" who had grudgingly cooperated in that previous anti-colonial campaign. The Shuddhi and the Tabligh campaigns clashed over conversion, notably of the Malkana Rajputs in the districts of Agra and Saharanpur in the western United Provinces. Tabligh efforts were headed by Khwaja Hasan Nizami and Maulana Abdul Bari. The Sangathan and the Tanzim campaigns aimed at strengthening communal religious institutions and their defences. Both were led by prominent Punjabis, Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew (c. 1888-1963).<sup>39</sup> Tension soon rose and the years 1923-24 were marked by a spate of bloody inter-religious riots.

While the Tabligh efforts of the 1920s responded to the intensified Shuddhi campaign, the latter had already started in the 1880s.<sup>40</sup> Beyond the Moplah violence it was a reaction to the perception of a relentless growth in the Christian and Muslim communities at the expense of the number of adherents to Hinduism. This sense of alarm was heightened by the decennial publication of census figures showing much higher population growth rates for Muslims and Christians than for Hindus.<sup>41</sup> Orthodox Hinduism, which accepted membership by birth only, did not know of any ritual for the return of converts who would otherwise remain permanently excommunicated. The Shuddhi campaign provided such a ritual of purification. Although the Arya Samaj pursued a constructive agenda of social reforms not limited to doctrinal issues, critics often accused it of a negative attitude, primarily thriving on controversy between caste Hindus, Christians and Muslims.<sup>42</sup> The Shuddhi campaign concentrated on Punjab and parts of the United Provinces, it peaked around 1900 and at the beginning of the 1920s.

Maulana Muhammad Ilyas introduced the Tabligh movement out of concern for the Meo hill tribes in the Mewat region near Delhi, who adhered to syncretic practices with strong Hindu influence.<sup>43</sup> Strengthening their faith in Islam meant providing them with religious schools, instructing them in the five pillars of Islam, teaching them the Islamic way of conducting prayers etc. This task was compounded by the low level of development and education among them. Ilyas started his movement by sending out groups of Mewati students for *da'wat*<sup>44</sup> as travelling preachers. He sent them to the centers of Muslim learning in western U.P., notably to Kandhela, from where Ilyas hailed.<sup>45</sup> These were areas inhabited by people known for their experience in Islamic doctrine and rites. At the 1941 convention of the movement as many as 20,000-25,000 people assembled at Nuh in the Gurgaon district of Assam.<sup>46</sup> While the orthodox *'ulamā* had been cautious at this outburst of public piety, the growing mass appeal of the movement forced them to adopt a clear position. From 1940, students and staff of the Nadwat seminary in Lucknow participated openly, and in 1944 principals of a number of Islamic seminaries and academies from Deoband, Delhi, Saharanpur and Lucknow convened to debate what part their academies could play in Ilyas' movement.<sup>47</sup> This close relationship between the Tablighi Jamaat and some reformist Islamic seminaries was embodied by Sayyid Abul-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi (b. 1913) and Muhammad Manzur Numani from the Nadwat Seminary in Lucknow. Both wrote a number of devotional tracts on the life and ideas of Muhammad Ilyas and the concept of his movement.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond this immediate objective Ilyas' movement aimed at strengthening existent faith wherever it became weak for whatever reason. Its main aim was spiritual revival. This made it akin to similar religious movements of the quietist, pietist or puritan variety known from European and Christian history. Renewal was to be achieved through increased observance of the Islamic ritual, obeying the commandments of God mainly by conforming to the requirement for prayer five times daily. In Islam Tabligh activities refer to the traditional Quranic institution of *da'wah* (arab.). Its root meaning is "invitation," assuming an invitation is extended to non-believers to embrace Islam and to believers to join in prayer.

The institution of *da'wah* in particular relates to the Quranic verse "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way"<sup>49</sup>. It closely interconnects with the institution of *jihād*, variously translated as "holy war" or "exertion in the way of God". Non-believers are to be called upon to clarify their position towards Islam, either to embrace it or to submit to its rule (and to accept the tax on non-believers). *Da'wah* as such is an opportunity to be offered to them before they are conquered in the name of Allah. That *da'wah* can be directed at non-Muslims and Muslims alike has been the subject of a long and contentious debate both in and outside of Islam.<sup>50</sup>

Some historical instances of *da'wah* movements had strong political implications. They usually denoted a propaganda or mobilisation campaign for allegiance to a particular *imām*. The *da'wah* served the "Abbasid dynasty when it came to power and the Isma'ilis in their Quarmatians movement which challenged the 'Abbasids in Syria, Iraq and Bahrain in the ninth century. For political purposes any sympathiser could execute this propaganda, but in doctrinal matters it was carried out by the *dā'īs* or preachers.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the *da'wah's* ability was noted as communicating rapidly over a large area, relying on its travelling operatives as well as on a network of local cells. This particular feature of its communication technique also proved to be instrumental in the modern activities of Ilyas' Tabligh movement. Although it is not clear that he was influenced by historical precedent, he insisted that his Tabligh efforts were moulded on the Quran and the companions of Muhammad.<sup>52</sup>

The main source of information on the activities of this movement in the 1930s and 1940s is its devotional literature written mainly by Abul-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi, Manzur Numani and Shaikh al-Hadīth Muhammad Zakariyya (b. 1898). It contains accounts of the life of Muhammad Ilyas, his letters, his so-called sayings or pronouncements and treatises on the principles of *Da'wah* and Tabligh.<sup>53</sup> The collection of religious texts compiled by Zakariyya, the son-in-law of Ilyas, under the title of *Tablighī Nisāb* is the only authoritative foundation for the philosophy of the movements, with all other tracts not officially owned by the Tablighis. And since the former contained well-known orthodox Islamic texts, Tablighi leaders maintain that there is nothing new in their movement, that the mode for Tabligh and *Da'wah* was set by the companions of the Prophet themselves, devising ways and means of extending the influence of Islam and propagating it through preaching.<sup>54</sup> From the beginning, the Tablighi Jamaat maintained its character as a grassroots movement of laymen with minimal administration.

From the literary sources a concept of reform emerges directed at religious practice, and the personal and social behaviour of Indian Muslims which partly resulted from the pressures of the time and partly from long-term objectives. Here one can broadly distinguish between

- religious reform,
- moral and personal perfection,
- social concerns and
- political consequences.

### *The meaning of religious reform*

Ilyas himself preferred his movement to be called a faith movement seeking religious renewal.<sup>55</sup> This was more in consonance with his striving for an all-

encompassing approach to the reactivation of Muslims and implied an activist approach to his co-religionists. He wanted to change their way of life bringing it into conformity with the basic commandments of Islam. But his activist approach differed from that pursued by the Deoband seminary, although he maintained close links with that institution ever since he was a student there. While students and faculty members from Deoband supported active intervention in anti-colonial politics, Ilyas' emphasis was on the hereafter and a withdrawal from this-worldly concerns.

Religious reform was at the heart of his approach. As far as his understanding of Islamic doctrine was concerned, he mainly followed the Deoband and Wahhabi tradition, calling for the correction of a misguided practice. Where Deoband emphasised knowledge and purity of doctrine, the religious knowledge recommended by the Tablighis primarily concerned the ritualistic aspects of Islam. Where Ilyas demanded a purification of Islamic practices, he targeted not only Hindu "corruptions" in Islam, but also European and Christian influences. Ilyas though did not distance himself aggressively from Hindus or Islamic sects outside the Indian Sunnite mainstream such as Shias and Ahmadiyya in particular, as other Islamic reformers had done.<sup>56</sup> His emphasis on the *practical* knowledge of Islam brought him closer to the Sufi tradition of focusing on the proper ritual for a union with God.

On one hand, his intent was to turn the gaze of Muslims to the world hereafter, while on the other hand, he demanded that Muslims should turn inwards to seek the path of self-perfection.<sup>57</sup> His practical bent became obvious when he pointed to the devil and demanded the propagation of the advantages of paradise "so that the followers can imagine the merits and rewards of joining the Tablighi movement and may forget the worldly loss caused by their engagement"<sup>58</sup>. The way to self-perfection was to be closely modelled on the life of the Prophet. His advice was

- to seek comfort in simple life like Muhammad<sup>59</sup>,
- to be ready to make sacrifices for religious purposes<sup>60</sup>,
- to be always hospitable to fellow Muslims<sup>61</sup>,
- to make obedience to God the primary occupation in life, all other activity such as bread-earning being secondary<sup>62</sup>.

A key strategy for him to reach these goals of faith, devotion and self-perfection was the acquisition or strengthening of religious knowledge (*ilm-e-dīn*). This in turn should lead to an intensified religious practice, particularly keeping the regular daily five prayers, and *remembering God* through repeated recitation of his name and of key verses of the Quran (*zikr*) a practice perfected mainly by the various Sufi orders in combination with techniques of breathing and trance.<sup>63</sup> However, Ilyas preferred the so-called quiet *zikr* where His name is

not invoked loudly, where the emphasis is not on outward features but on internal devotion.

It is not surprising that this agenda, aimed at restoring the "Golden" era of the Prophet, religious sincerity and the customs and practices of the Prophet's community, also served the intent of *uniting* the various factions of Islam in a common recourse to faith and to the original sources and practices of Islam, or what they were understood to be. In verse 102 he emphasised that the Tablighi movement's foremost aim should be to try to become the source of reconciliation between different Islamic groups which should drop their doctrinal differences.<sup>64</sup> In verse 164 he talked about the "main aim of the Tabligh to bring all Muslims around one nucleus that is the spirit of the religion"<sup>65</sup>.

### Model conduct and preaching technique

The idea of improving the conduct of the members of the Tablighi Jamaat extends beyond the religious aspect to civil affairs and, in particular, to personal character-building. The concept of being a good Muslim has to be internalised as well as practically lived.

Ilyas' movement is marked by a system of the minutest instructions on how to behave as a Tablighi.<sup>66</sup> This is a multi-layered formula including a complete canon of preaching technique, ethical and civilised behaviour in a group environment while on a preaching tour and a moral code of conduct in everyday life. At times it borders on group therapy and attempts to mould or model its members in detail. The obsession with detailed instruction partly stems from the belief that to restore the conditions and terms of the life of the Prophet and his companions is a major step towards becoming a good Muslim. The need for these instructions lies partly in the nature of the movement. Since it is by and large a movement of laymen, new members or adherents are schooled in the ways of the Tabligh by other lay members. Large numbers of rural and lower middle-class men are drawn into the movement and introduced to an urban etiquette of behaviour. Conduct is also central to the success of the movement since by definition it wishes to convert or mobilise by example and not by pressure. In reality this is often undermined by considerable organised moral pressure. The rounds (*gāshṭ*) in market places and neighbourhood areas are obviously meant to intimidate "anti-social" elements, corrupt, immoral and un-Islamic practices as they understand them. It has an air of religious policing, as practised by the latter-day Taliban in Afghanistan and in Iran after Khomeini's revolution. Such an approach cannot be considered Islam-specific, as neighbourhood watch has become an effective tool of crime prevention in the United States and Britain, and is also occasionally fed by religious motives. In character formation special emphasis is put on self-denial and a self-effacing attitude, but also on self-control. This is expressed in advice such as



- to refrain from showing off while doing good<sup>67</sup>,
- that one should exercise self-assessment and not hurry to pass judgement on others<sup>68</sup>,
- or, to spend money in the right way, balanced, within the limitations set by God and without being stingy<sup>69</sup>.

The technique of self-denial has proven to be a very effective strategy to deal with ideological/religious adversaries. It leaves the onus of being wrong on the other and claims high moral ground for whatever one demands. Its practical importance becomes visible in the instructions for preaching. There Ilyas demanded

- to show patience and yet passion, to be humble,
- to interact with the local pious and intellectual people,
- to accept hardship on the road of preaching,
- not to get disheartened by a negative response, or by not getting the right attention even from the pious and learned.<sup>70</sup>

He advised them to impart simple and basic knowledge about the Islamic ritual so as to give people the feeling that they now know how to observe the five pillars of Islam correctly, to which prayer and *Zikr* as a means of seeking union with God are clearly central. This included knowledge

- on how to do a correct recitation of the names of God and of certain Quraanic verses<sup>71</sup>, how much *Zikr* and why<sup>72</sup>,
- on what to focus on in preaching, for which he suggests three points: to submit to the will of God, to believe in the day of judgement, and to highlight the principle of requital that every act will be rewarded or punished on the day of judgement<sup>73</sup>.

The fundamentals of the Tablighi work were summarised in the so-called *sath batein*, seven matters or sayings, sometimes also reduced to six. They show interesting parallels with the preaching instructions of the Arya Samaj. (Table 1) From this comparison it can clearly be seen that such instructions for preaching are not Islam-specific either. It is a technique equally cherished by missionaries of other religions, notably the evangelical churches of America. It similarly shows to what extent the concerns of the Tablighis were influenced and shaped by their potential adversaries, that is the Arya Samaj which they and their colleagues at Deoband studied in great detail. Yet the approach of the Tablighis also aimed at wider goals of moral improvement. In their technique of self-reflection and moral improvement, of pressure by exemplary conduct, the Tablighis shared the cultural legacy of South Asia's many religions. Around the same time as the movement came in to existence, M. K. Gandhi, leader of the anti-colonial movement in India, had exemplarily shown by his *satyagraha* technique how effective non-violent pressure can be.

**Table**

<b>Tablighi Jamaat</b>	<b>Arya Samaj</b>
<p><b>1. Kalima</b> Profession of faith in Allah as the only God, and in Muhammad as his Prophet, in Allah as the sole guardian and helper in distress who is present everywhere and sees and hears everything (<i>hazir-o-nazir</i>), as expressed in the <i>Kalima</i> verse of the Quran.</p>	<p>1. God is the primary source of all true knowledge, and of all that is known by its means.</p>
<p><b>2. Namaz</b> Regular prayers, five times a day, every part of the worshipper's body is engaged in an exercise of obedience to His commands.</p>	<p>2. God is All-truth, All-knowledge, All-Beatitude, Incorporeal, Almighty, Just, Merciful, Unbegotten, Infinite, Changeless, Without a beginning, Incomparable, the Support and Lord of all, All-pervading, Omniscient, Imperishable, Immortal, Exempt from fear, Eternal, Holy and the Maker of the universe. To Him alone is worship due.</p>
<p><b>3. Ilm and Zikr</b> Acquire religious knowledge to know and observe Allah's commands. Continuous remembrance of Allah and his Prophet so as to intensify one's devotion to Him, with special Quranic verses for various details of life, like falling asleep, waking up, meeting people, having the meals, setting out for a journey and returning etc.</p>	<p>3. The Vedas are the books of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all Aryas to read them and to instruct others in them, to hear them read, and to recite them to others.</p>
<p><b>4. Ikram-i Musilmeen</b> Respect every Muslim. Every Muslim must be considered as one's real brother and must always be given affection, sympathy and sincere attention at all times, particularly when in need. No controversial matters or points of secondary importance are to be discussed at any time.</p>	<p>4. All persons should remain ever ready to accept the Truth and to renounce untruth.</p>
<p><b>5. Ikhlaas</b> Pure intentions, sincerity, self-appraisal.</p>	<p>All actions ought to be performed in conformity to virtue, <i>i.e.</i> after due consideration of right and wrong.</p>

<p><b>6. Tafrigh-i waqt</b></p> <p>Spare time as much as possible for inviting others, and by implication oneself, to the commands of Allah and the ways of the Prophet. This may involve leaving home and family for a specified duration, in the way of the Prophet and his companions, who ate leaves or a single date and walked barefoot long distances. It does not mean giving up everything else in one's profession and employment.</p> <p>Minimum schedule:</p> <p>once a week a <i>gasht</i> (walk, talking rounds) in the locality, around the mosque;</p> <p>once a month a tour of full three days to a locality, town or village other than one's own;</p> <p>once a year a tour of forty days (<i>chilla</i>) in a distant area;</p> <p>once a life a tour of four months in a given place or area.</p>	<p>6. The primary aim of the Arya Samaj is to do good to mankind, i.e. to ameliorate the physical, spiritual and social condition of all men.</p>
<p><b>7. Tark-i layani</b></p> <p>Abdicating the pointless, which is telling lies, backbiting, picking quarrels, any thought or deed which takes the believer away from the commands of Allah.</p>	<p>7. All ought to be treated with love, justice, and due regard to their merits.</p>
	<p>8. Ignorance ought to be dispelled and knowledge diffused.</p>
	<p>9. No one ought to remain satisfied with his own welfare. The welfare of the individual should be regarded as included in the welfare of all.</p>
	<p>10. In matters which affect the well-being of all, the individual should subordinate his personal liking; in matters that affect him alone, he is to enjoy freedom of action.</p>

*Source:* Mohammad Talib, *The Tablighis in the Making of Muslim Identity*. In: Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, Delhi 1998; Kenneth Jones/Arya Dharm, *Hindu Consciousness in the 19th Century Punjab*, Delhi 1989, p. 321.

## Social change

Within the parameters of this concept, social and political concerns were understood to derive from religious reform, character formation and preaching. Yet concentrating on the world hereafter, he could not dissociate himself and his movement from social reality in British India. His main advice to a member of the Tablighi Jamaat was to do his work in society as a good Muslim, help other Muslims, and particularly help poor Muslims. Although he did not take an explicit position on secular matters, some of his sayings suggest what attitude he had towards issues such as education, women and poverty.

## Education

In keeping with views shared by the Deobandis Ilyas argued that education should be mainly religious. True education (in religious terms) for Tablighis should conform with the time of the Prophet, modern education was seen as a deviation.<sup>74</sup> Only religious education was seen to restore a sense of identity other than western. Again, this combined with the sense of a civilising mission. He supported efforts and concepts directed at providing the masses with basic education as propagated by Zakir Hussain (1897-1967) through the Jamia Millia, a public educational institution for Muslims.<sup>75</sup>

## Role of Women

Women were expected to stay at home and look after the children, to create a model household. The most influential publication in Indian reformist Islam on this subject was *Perfecting women* (Urdu: *bihishti zewar*) by the Deobandi theologian Thanawi, which for generations was - and is - a bedside table book for most Muslim wives in India.<sup>76</sup> Although this was a conventional and conservative approach, within the Tabligh movement it included emancipatory elements as well. Women could run their own study circles, and occasionally, they would go on tour, although this was generally discouraged. Looking at the role of women in recent forms of Islamic mobilisation in Iran and also in Turkey, it becomes clear that women do not contend themselves for long with a subordinate role and use Islam also as a means of emancipation within religion to go on to emancipation in society.<sup>77</sup>

## Wealth and Poverty

The relation to rich people was ambiguous. While the Tablighis needed their support they definitely wanted to reform them in the spirit of Islam. Therefore, Ilyas stipulated that the Tablighis should not ignore wealthy people because they need guidance in religious matters.<sup>78</sup>

Poverty alleviation should be organised mainly through *zakat*. For true and wealthy Muslims he considered the customary amount of *zakat* insufficient, sympathisers can give their dues, advanced followers should renounce their

worldly possessions in favour of the movement.<sup>79</sup> Renouncing one's possessions is played down nowadays as it occasionally creates considerable difficulties when men desert their families and force the dissolution of the household on them in order to go on unlimited preaching travel. Wives are known to have strongly protested to leaders of the movement that this should not be condoned. A preferred interpretation today is, therefore, that nobody should escape his duties in the place in society where God has put him. Businessmen should demonstrate the Islamic way of life to the business community, teachers to the educational community etc.<sup>80</sup>

Ilyas wanted to encourage the interaction of people belonging to different sections and classes of society, e.g. religious scholars, people with English/western education, traders, and the poor since this would have "a good impact on the Tabligh movement". It was hoped this would contribute to enhancing the understanding of the Tablighis' approach and would in turn help the 'ulamā deal with the social diversity of the movement, a tacit acknowledgement of the mental isolation in which the 'ulamā sometimes live. Such social intercourse would lay the foundation for the co-operation of all classes as desired.<sup>81</sup>

While being in favour of reforming the moneyed and landed classes, the Tablighis did not advocate plain egalitarianism. All members of a Jamaat, a group of travelling lay preachers, should relate to each other morally and ethically on an equal footing. Yet, social harmony was not to be confused with equality. Hierarchical structures were important in the conduct of the Tablighi tours where Tablighis were advised to obey the elders<sup>82</sup> who play a central role in the conduct of the affairs of the Tablighi organisation.

The existing social order is treated as God-given and should not be altered by man, yet beyond social status, religious knowledge is the main criterion for belonging to a social group. Ilyas distinguished three classes of Muslims who should play their role in the Tabligh movement in the place Allah has put them.

"There are three classes of Muslims: (1) the backward (*pasmandah*), (2) the reputable/dignified people (*ahl-e-waqār*), and (3) the scholars of religion (*'ulamā-e-dīn*). Those groups should play their role (in the spreading of Islam) according to their place/ right (*haqq*), the ordinary people marked by mercy and service, the dignitaries marked by veneration/honour, the religious scholars, by respect. Accordingly, religious work (*da'wat*) should be directed at them."<sup>83</sup>

### *His political views*

Ilyas expressly stated that the Tablighi Jamaat does not involve itself in politics. Here again he markedly differed with the activist stance of the Deoband seminary. Yet, looking close at his positions it becomes clear that he shared many of the basic assumptions of the Deobandis about politics and Islam, notably in relation to colonialism and the west, to the "adversaries" of Islam in general. As in other matters, Ilyas' position was derived from his focus on the other-worldly aspect of Islam. In answer to the question of why Muslims in British India have difficulty getting positions of power and authority in government, he referred to the need to focus on God's kingdom which is the world hereafter.

"How can the administration of this world be entrusted to you if you did not mould your personality and your life with regard to the defence of the commandments and deeds of Allah (to the extent where you are capable of it and do not face any disability). When trusting the believers with the governance of this world Allah's will is that his intentions and commandments reign supreme in this world. If you could not achieve this within the limits of your own capabilities what hope is there from you for tomorrow if the world is entrusted to you?"<sup>84</sup>

His underlying sympathy with the anti-colonial movement became clear when he touted the loyalists and influence-seekers for the sake of opportunistic gains who should be influenced to turn back to the path of faith and religion.<sup>85</sup> He was critical of the system of examination in Government-sponsored educational institutions since through its secular emphasis it exerted "a negative impact on religious knowledge"<sup>86</sup>.

Ilyas' emphasis was on withdrawal from politics and strengthening the faith in its many facets. His movement was non-political in the sense of being apolitical to the point of almost having an aversion to politics or political actions. Yet its political impact cannot be truly measured by its intentions and declarations. Its impressive gain in influence among Indian Muslims in the late thirties and forties, and even more so today, raises questions of vast political implications. The way in which this movement was and is tied in with social and political change was accentuated by its desire to ameliorate and alleviate the spiritual and moral privation of the rapidly "urbanizing" middle and lower middle classes. Social and cultural dislocation of these strata was the background against which they acted and from which they obtained their sense of direction. Their major field of activity were the district towns and the townships of the big cities. The response of the local people was known to be ambivalent. While some were ardently enthusiastic about them, many reacted with indifference and mild ridicule. With many they had the reputation of simpletons, often including half- or uneducated youths with burning religious fervour.

The seemingly passive political position of the Tablighis proved to be potentially explosive at times and its consequences were fraught with ambiguities. Before independence, the movement was criticised for leading part of the Muslim community away from active involvement in the anti-colonial movement, and more specifically from the movement for the creation of the separate Islamic state of Pakistan. More recently the political nihilism of the Tablighis was strongly denounced by the politicised Islamic groups, notably the *Jamā'at-i Islāmī* (Islamic Party), founded by Maulana Syed Abul Ala Maudoodi (1903-1979) in 1941. The latter strongly believed in the creation of an Islamic polity. The Tablighis were attacked for their stand on Afghanistan where they refused to support the involvement of militant Islamic groups from Pakistan. Given the fact that this position was maintained despite considerable pressure it is difficult to call the Tablighis non-political. As such the Tablighis perhaps exerted a certain moderating effect on political radicalism among Indian and Pakistani Muslims.

At the same time, their attempts at recharging the religious faith of people at large strengthened the environment for Islam-based politics since it raised the self-awareness of Muslims and increased their religious focus. Dual and multiple membership in movements was and is typical of South Asia. While banning politics from its own ranks, the Tablighis never refused to allow any Muslim to go on tour with them and would never question his antecedents whether he belonged to the *Jamaat-i Islami*, or to more radical and militant groups like the infamous *Harkat-ul Ansār* in Pakistan<sup>87</sup>, a militant Islamist outfit which is accused of being at the back of part of the Afghan militancy as well as of that in Indian Kashmir. They took spiritual refuge in the Tablighi preaching tours to rekindle their faith just as others go to prayer. In fact it strengthened a sort of "catholic" attitude where you remain unburdened by a sin as long as you repent.

The Tablighis remain a product as well as an element of change. Although they claim otherwise, the change they desired was not towards restoring tradition as it was known. They constructed a new religiosity of the industrial age for which its counterparts in the western world were well known, including groups such as the Salvation Army, Jehova's Witnesses, or the New Age religious cults.

## Summary

The Deobandis and the Tablighis demonstrated that reformist Islam in South Asia was indeed interventionist. It aimed at change both of society and of the

individual. It needed to do so by nature of its reformism which is never content with what it finds, reaching out from the "sacred" into the "secular". It was intervention not explicitly intended to help modernisation to bear fruit but rather to counter its effect on Muslim India. Yet to do so it had to engage with modernisation and society so deeply, had to "pollute" itself by the mundane to such an extent that it could not achieve its desired sacral "purity" without adapting itself to the world around.

The Deobandis and the Tablighis acted as "Agents of Change" to the extent that

- they were themselves affected by changes, facing consequences of social transformation and acknowledging their impact;
- they followed their own agenda of change, partly as a response to the social and political transformation and partly on their own initiative;
- they underwent changes themselves, went through a process of adaptation, relocation and redefinition.

From the perusal of their major concerns and activities during the period under study it appears that the Deobandis and the Tablighis were mainly affected by

- social transformation and the attending circumstances of a market-oriented bourgeois way of life such as the rise of materialism and non-religious ideologies, "spiritual deprivation", the marginalisation of religious institutions and professional religious functionaries;
- competitive and participatory public institutions and political mobilisation, partly replacing hierarchichal and hereditary decision-making by egalitarian approaches and merit-based selection for participation in the public arena;
- cultural alienation resulting from structural hegemony of western and colonial concepts and policies leading to an intense quest for a true national identity of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious society in India encompassing all social and political forces in colonial India.

These changes in Indian society obviously had a secularizing effect, or so it was feared, increasing laxity in religious matters. This would undermine the cohesion of religious communities and also community-based decision-making. The *'ulamā* who constituted the core of the activists of both movements explicitly acknowledged the increasing competition in the public arena from other religious communities. They had to accommodate the restructuring of the political system as pursued by the constitutional reforms projects of the British who introduced more elements of representative participation through the gradual extension of elective principles. And they had to come to terms with the aspirations of the nationalist forces regarding the envisioned polity of an independent India for which schemes and concepts were advanced and in which the



'*ulamā* definitely wanted a secure place and perhaps increased influence in decision-making compared to the colonial period.

From these pressures a separate agenda of change arose, pushed by the '*ulamā* and aimed at

- a revival of a spiritual perspective and practice in the daily life of Indian Muslims, strengthening religious knowledge, faith and conduct, constituting the "internal", pietist thrust of Islamic mobilisation;
- a renewal of religious institutions, demarcating the Muslim community more distinctly from other communities, defending Muslims and Islam against secular and competing religious commitments to the point of claiming a privileged position for minority Muslims as the best possible defence, constituting the "external" dimension of their agenda.

Islam was to be made the major, and for some the sole determinant for the national and cultural identity of Indian Muslims. Islamic mobilisation was to secure a strong and lasting position of influence for the '*ulamā*, "relaunching" themselves after the turn of the century as a major activist force in the public arena of Muslim India. This goal was not identical with the campaign of the Muslim League or the Pakistan movement. Although objectives regarding the role of Islam in politics were close or overlapping, the role of the '*ulamā* in the League's activities remained limited, and differences over the direction of political and social change after independence continue to this day, particularly in Pakistan. They found their most prominent expression in the so-called Objectives Resolution initiated by the '*ulamā* and moved by Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan in March 1949, reposing final sovereignty over Pakistan in God where the authority delegated by Him to the state of Pakistan was a "sacred trust" to be exercised through the people "within the limit prescribed by Him"<sup>88</sup>. It was meant to offset the more liberal and almost secular directions given by the leader of the Muslim League and the founder-father of Pakistan, M. A. Jinnah (1876-1948), in his late speeches in 1947-48 before his untimely death, expressing strong faith in the institutions of elective democracy.<sup>89</sup>

Yet engaging with change, the '*ulamā* could not help changing themselves. They became more conscious of nationalist politics, more populist, less divorced from social and political reality, acknowledging and accepting some of the basic elements of the western system, such as elections and participatory democracy, although often they would interpret them according to their needs.

The mode of response to change by both of them was disparate, one was active, the other passive. Whereas many of the Deobandis (though by no means all of them) considered it imperative to challenge the external political and social institutions, the Tablighis concentrated on the individual and its reformation as the securest way of achieving final deliverance.<sup>90</sup> In terms of western-inspired modernisation, the Deobandis could partly be considered as an "agent"

since they paved the way for Muslim orthodoxy, for orthodox Muslims into the modern nationalist polity of independent India/Pakistan. The Tablighis represented the "antidote" to modernisation, responding to the consequences of change which is equally indispensable in any process of transformation.

In terms of results of change their impact is difficult to quantify. They shared with other Islamic movements in South Asia a certain mismatch between some extraordinary claims, a distinct short-term failure or inability to accomplish practical goals and a medium- to long-term success in moulding and forming the political ethos of a Muslim élite. Activists coming from movements with a highly local, doctrinal or particularist agenda went on to play a role in mainstream politics.<sup>91</sup> Muslim politicians such as Maulana Maududi, Zakir Husain, who later became President of India, and Maulana Azad acknowledged having been influenced by the reformist tradition of Deoband or by the sincerity and fervour of the Tablighis.

In spite of these peculiarities and their often marginal position it would be wrong to treat these Islamic groups outside the general discourse on change and transformation. Their contribution to change or response to it was as legitimate as that of forces from the political mainstream like parties, trade unions etc., whether one agrees with their recipes and attitudes or not.<sup>92</sup> It is neither possible nor useful to determine unequivocally whether they were dangerous or helpful for the process of transformation. Their sustained capacity to unleash significant social and political forces was proven during the pre-independence period of anti-colonial resistance. And if anything, it is undiminished today. They have been part and parcel of the dialogue between indigenous culture and global influences. This makes it all the more important not to castigate or label them in any way but to involve them increasingly in a dialogue on common concerns.

The intention was not to prove that they were "Agents of Change" because in one way or the other, depending on how broadly one defines change, every socio-religious movement is an "agent of change". The intention was rather to do away with stereotypes in relation to historical change and progress, to show in what way religious groups such as these were involved in change, what kind of agents they were and what kind of change they were after. Their mode of operation in localizing global influences, adapting or responding to western concepts will be difficult to understand without their historical background, notably in pre-independence days when cultural modes of operation in the global political field were established with lasting effect.

The two movements demonstrated that irrespective of how "obscure" and strange these groups may look to the discerning public gaze in the west, their political, social and cultural functions are not dissimilar to phenomena in the history of the west. In many parts of the western world religious mobilisation has been mediating change for a long time and is still being called upon as a

major source of legitimacy for power and morality. To understand the effects of global processes on Asia and Africa it remains pertinent to take a close look at their interaction with the more well-known processes of social and political polarisation and change. Both groups are hugely relevant today, the Deobandis in Pakistan and Afghanistan through the Taliban, the Tablighis in the whole of South Asia. Understanding their current incarnations as part of this global interaction seems impossible without looking at their historical inception. Cultural and religious aspects of the current globalisation can only be meaningfully studied when their historical roots are taken into consideration.

### Notes:

1. Urdu: missionary society, henceforth used in anglicized transliteration: Tabligh, Tablighi Jamaat etc.
2. According to the 1921 census, the share of Muslims in the population of India, including provinces, states and agencies was 21.74 per cent. Government of India, Census of India 1921. India - Report. Vol. 1, Part I, Calcutta, p. 123.
3. Of 15 Indian provinces listed in 1921, the Muslim population exceeded 50 per cent in the North-West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P. - 91.62 per cent), in Baluchistan (87.31 per cent), Punjab (55.33 per cent), and Bengal (53.99 per cent). Amongst the 18 listed states and agencies, the same is true for the Kashmir State (76.75 per cent) and the adjoining confederations of states or agencies in the N.W.F.P., Baluchistan, and Punjab. Beyond their nominal share of between 10 and 20 per cent, Muslims played an important role in the political and cultural life of the United Provinces (U.P.), Bombay, Madras and the Hyderabad State. Ibid.
4. On the evolution of political representation for Muslims and other communities, see Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*, Cambridge 1989, chapter 2 (Participation or representation?) and 3 (Muslim attitudes to representation), pp. 49-118.
5. For the Muslim League and Muslim parties in the provinces of today's Pakistan, cf. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge 1994; Ian Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement*, Karachi 1990; Tazeen Murshid, *The sacred and the secular. Bengal Muslim discourses 1871-1977*, Delhi 1995.
6. For a classical overview, see W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India: a social analysis*. Delhi 1985 (reprint).
7. On radical and mass mobilisation, see Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: religious symbolism and political mobilization in India*, New York 1982; Conrad Wood, *The Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis*, Delhi 1987; D. Reetz, *Hijrat- The Flight of the Faithful: A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920*, Berlin 1995; idem, *On the Nature of Muslim Political Responses: Islamic Militancy in the North-West Frontier Province*. In: Mushirul Hasan (ed.),

- Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond, Delhi 1998, pp. 179-200.
8. On the issue of Islamic intervention in the public domain in connection with inter-religious violence, see Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: public arenas and the emergence of communalism in north India*, Berkeley 1989.
  9. On the concept of "Agents of Change" as pursued by the research group from which this manuscript emerged, see Dietrich Reetz, *Akteure des Wandels und die Globalisierung - zur Einführung*. In: Dietrich Reetz/Heike Liebau (eds.), *Globale Prozesse und "Akteure des Wandels"*. Quellen und Methoden ihrer Untersuchung - ein Werkstattgespräch, Berlin 1997, pp. 5-17.
  10. Homi, Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, London 1994.
  11. Jeremy Fergus Boissevain, *Friends of friends: networks, manipulators and coalitions*, Oxford 1974.
  12. *Āriā Samāj* (Sanskrit): "Society of Nobles". Founded 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883).
  13. Named after its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (c. 1839-1908).
  14. Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India, 1860-1900*. Princeton 1982.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
  16. *ʿulamā* (Arab./Urdu): religious scholar, divine, one possessing religious knowledge, part. about Islamic law and its various schools, derived from *ilm*: knowledge, science.
  17. Sayyid Mahbub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Daru'l-ʿulum*, Diyoband (Deoband). Translated into English by Murtaz Husain F. Quraishi. 2 vols. Deoband 1980-81.
  18. *Anno Hijri*: Year of the Islamic Calendar, starting with the exodus of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca to Meddina in 622 AD.
  19. Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Daru'l-ʿulum*, Diyoband, op. cit., vol. I, p. 235.
  20. *Athar* (Arab./Urdu): Islamic tradition as source of religious knowledge, usually that of the prophet's companions or successors, whereas one emanating from words or deeds of the prophet himself is called *Hadīth*.
  21. Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Daru'l-ʿulum*, Diyoband, op. cit., vol. I, p. 234, note 1.
  22. Muhammad Ali wanted to combine "the separate elements of the common Indian nationality and Islamic *millat* and brotherhood." However, this meant there was no place for Hindu and Muslim students to live and study together: "Only those people can do so for whom religion does not have any value, who consider religion to be a useless thing." Mohammad Sarwar, *Mazamin-e Muhammad Ali*. Part I, Delhi, n.d., p. 254. Quoted in: Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, Delhi 1985 (2nd rev. ed.), p. 97.
  23. Khilafat movement - Indian religio-political movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi and Indian Muslim leaders in 1919 in defence of the Turkish Sultan and the Islamic institution of the Caliph, i.e. the head of the world Muslim community, after the Allied Powers including Britain threatened to punish Turkey in post-World War I peace negotiations for its participation in the war on the side of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires.
  24. Muhammad Ali, for instance, revived Shibli's discourses on the Quran in the first days of the Jamia and ensured that "our day began with a full hour devoted to the rapid exegesis of the Koran". Quoted from: Mushirul Hasan, *My Life: A Fragment: Mohamed Ali's Quest for Identity in Colonial India*. In: *Idem* (ed.), *Islam*,

- Communities and the Nation, loc. cit., p. 77.
25. Rizvi, Tarikh-i Daru'l-'ulum, Diyoband, loc. cit., vol. I, p. 233.
  26. Hanafiyya: one of the four mainstream legal traditions in Sunni Islam, developed from the teachings of the theologian Imam Abu Hanifah (c. 700-767).
  27. Islamic mysticism taking recourse to varied rituals intended to bring about a direct union with God which include certain prayer techniques, devotional poetry, music and dance as well as the worship of Saints.
  28. Cf. Gail Minault, The Khilafat Movement, New York 1982, pp. 103-104 and *passim*.
  29. Rizvi, Tarikh-i Daru'l-'ulum, Diyoband, vol. I, loc. cit., p. 240.
  30. Ibid., p. 222.
  31. Ibid.
  32. Rudad-e Majlis-e Shura (Proceedings of the Advisory Council), 30th Rajab, 1354 AH, quoted in: *ibid*.
  33. Rizvi, Tarikh-i Daru'l-'ulum, Diyoband, vol. I, op. cit., p. 210.
  34. Ibid., p. 211.
  35. Ibid., p. 220.
  36. Old Boys' Association, lit. "group of friends/helpers"; *ansār* - companions of the Prophet from Medina.
  37. Minault, The Khilafat Movement, loc. cit., p. 28.
  38. For a more detailed account of this Islamic activism, see Minault, The Khilafat Movement, loc. cit., chapters 1, 2.
  39. Minault, The Khilafat Movement, loc. cit., pp. 192-197.
  40. Cf. R. K. Ghai, Shuddhi Movement in India, Delhi 1990; K. C. Yadav/K. S. Arya, Arya Samaj and the Freedom Movement 1875-1947. 2 vols, Delhi 1988; G. S. Saxena, Arya Samaj Movement in India, 1875-1947, Delhi 1990.
  41. Proportional share of the religious communities in 1921 and its change over 1881 (in per cent):
 

Hindus	Buddhists	Jains	Sikhs	Muslims	Christians	Tribal	Others
63.41	3.56	0.37	1.03	21.74	1.5	3.09	0.2
- 15	- 19	- 25	+ 41	+ 9	+ 105	+ 19	- 10

 Computed on the basis of: Census of India 1921 - Report, Vol. 1., loc. cit., pp. 122-23.
  42. Cf. J. E. Llewellyn, The Arya Samaj as a Fundamentalist Movement. A Study in Comparative Fundamentalism, Delhi 1993, pp. 103-108.
  43. Cf. I. S. Marwa, Tabligh Movement Among the Meos of Mewat. In: M.S.A. Rao, Social Movements in India, Delhi 1979, pp. 79-98; Abdul Shakur, Tarikh-i Mewat, Delhi 1919.
  44. Urdu: invitation, mission, propagation of Islam.
  45. M. Anwarul Haq, The Faith Movement of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas, London 1972, p. 111.
  46. Mumtaz Ahmad, Tablighi Jamaat of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent: An interpretation. In: Rashid Ahmad/Muhammad Afzal Qarshi (eds.), Islam in South Asia, Lahore Institute of Islamic Culture, 1995, p. 65.
  47. M.A. Haq, The Faith Movement, loc. cit., p. 95.
  48. Cf. Sayyid Abul-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi, Life and Mission of Maulana Mohammad Ilyas, Lucknow 1983 [2nd ed.], pp. 169; Muhammad Manzur Numani, Malfuzāt Hazrat Maulānā Muhammad Ilyās, Lahore, n.d., pp. 152ff.

49. Sura XVI: Verse 125. Quranic translation quoted here after: The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ān, by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Hyderabad-Deccan 1938.
50. Poston, Islamic *da'wah* in the West, loc. cit., pp. 11ff.
51. Cf. B. Lewis *et al.*, The Encyclopedia of Islam. New Edition. Vol 2, Leiden 1991, pp. 168-170. For a historical profile of *da'wah* activities see Larry Poston, Islamic *da'wah* in the West: Muslim missionary activity and the dynamics of conversion to Islam, New York 1992, pp. 3-26.
52. Numani, Malfuzāt (M.), loc. cit., nos. 1, 2, 4, 21 [Sayings quoted according to their numbered listing].
53. Cf. Sayyid Abul-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi, Makātīb, Hazrat Maulana Shah Muhammad Ilyās, Karachi 1982 (1st ed. 1952); Muhammad Ilyās, Irshādāt-o Maktubāt. Compiled by Iftekhar Faridi, Delhi 1980; Manzur Numani, Da'wat-e-Tablīgh', Lahore, n.d.; Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya, Tablīghī Nisāb, Delhi 1975 (various editions); see also note no. 45.
54. Interview with Prof Masood, activist of the Tablighi movement, at its Delhi headquarters in Nizamuddin on 26 October 1998.
55. Manzur Numani, Introduction. In: Nadwi, Muhammad Ilyās aur unkī dīnī da'wat, loc. cit., pp. 30-31.
56. Cf. Numani, Malfuzat, loc. cit., no. 3. Ilyas shared the concern to remove innovations (*bid'at*) from Islam which were introduced under European/Christian and Hindu influences. He particularly denounced imitation (*taqlīd*) of the manners and customs of European Christians [M. 124]. He condemned saint worship (pir parasti) typical of Sufism and the Bareilwi tradition [M. 25].
57. Ibid., M. 73, 18.
58. Ibid., M. 67.
59. Ibid., M. 12.
60. Ibid., M. 15.
61. Ibid., M. 14.
62. Ibid., M. 22.
63. Ibid., M. 35.
64. Ibid., M. 102.
65. Ibid., M. 164.
66. For an account of the routine of Tablighi work which has changed little over time, cf. S. Ziauddin, Tablighi Movement in India: Organisation and Functioning Style. In: Islam and the Modern Age, Delhi, Jamia Millia, November 1996, pp. 264-283.
67. Numani, Malfuzat, loc. cit., no. 6.
68. Ibid., M. 9.
69. Ibid., M. 13.
70. Ibid., M. 25-30.
71. Ibid., M. 49.
72. Ibid., M. 68, 69.
73. Ibid., M. 56.
74. Ibid., M. 84.
75. On the interest taken by Zakir Hussain in the work of the Tablighi Jamaat and his personal relationship with Muhammad Ilyas, cf. Sayyid Abul-Hasan 'Ali Nadwi, Purāne Charāgh. Vol. 2, Lucknow 1980, pp. 62-84, here p. 69.
76. Barbara Daly Metcalf, Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar. A Partial Translation with Commentary, Berkeley 1990.

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77. Cf. Maulana Majaz Azami, *Guidance for a Muslim Wife*, Delhi 1993.
78. Numani, *Malfuzat*, loc. cit., no. 5.
79. *Ibid.*, M. 51, 62, 64.
80. Interview with Prof Masood, a Tablighi activist, on 26 October 26, at the *Tablighi Centre*, Delhi, Nizamuddin West - D.R.
81. Numani, *Malfuzat*, loc. cit., no. 104.
82. The elders are called in Urdu the *Buzurg*, by a Persianised expression, in Pakistan, and *Bare*, in plain Hindustani Urdu, in India.
83. Numani, *Malfuzat*, loc. cit., no. 135.
84. *Ibid.*, M. 10.
85. *Ibid.*, M. 11.
86. *Ibid.*, M. 8.
87. *The News*. 9 October 1997, Islamabad edition reports about double membership in the *Harkat* and the *Tablīghī Jamā'at*.
88. Cf. M. Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan 1947-58*, Islamabad 1976., p. 134.
89. Cf. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, *Speeches: Indian Legislative Assembly 1935-47*, Karachi 1991.
90. In a way, both represent the external and internal variant of missiology as discussed by Poston, in particular in chapter 3, *External-Institutional Versus Internal-Personal: Fundamental Strategies of Religious Proselytization*. In: Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, loc. cit. pp. 49-63.
91. Cf. my monograph, *Hijrat: The Flight of the Faithful*, loc. cit., pp. 76-85, where I make a similar argument for the activists of the regional Hijrat movement in 1920 when peasants and local activists left for Afghanistan in hope for a better future and in protest against colonial rule of the "infidels". Minault shares this argument, as far as the agitation for a Muslim University is concerned which resulted in the 1920 Muslim University Bill. The latter fell much short of the declared objectives of the movement although "it nevertheless had served as an important vehicle for Muslim political mobilization". Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, loc. cit., p. 54.
92. There is a strong opinion, particularly in Indian historiography, that religious movements in Islam, but also in Hinduism, mainly furthered 'communalism,' *i.e.* religious antagonism, and hindered transformation. The argument appears to be justified where it questions the claim of religious organisations to speak for all Indian Muslims or Hindus and deplors militancy and violence. But it is difficult to sustain where it ignores or minimizes the role and potential of religious organisations in political and social transformation. Cf. Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, London 1997; Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, Delhi 1986; Sumit Sarkar, *Writing social history*, Delhi 1997.