

## Muslims preaching movements in British-India: An appraisal of the Tablighi Jamaat and its competitors

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### Abstract:

The article examines emergence of the Tablighi Jamaat (henceforth TJ) in colonial India. It discusses the emergence of Tablighi Jamaat in light of the proselytizing (Tablighi) competition among various Islamic schools that emerged soon after the failure of the 1857 war. This article answers the question of why Maulana Ilyas founded the TJ in undivided India? This study aims to understand the emergence of the TJ in light of the deprivation and Maududian theory of Islamic revivalism. The discussion is based on qualitative analysis of the existing secondary sources in the form of books, research articles, and reports, etc. This study finds that TJ was founded because several Tablighi Jamaats belonged to different Islamic sects during British rule, responded to the challenges of the Muslim community. The Deobandi, Barailvi, Ahl-i-Hadith, and Shi'a Muslims established their proselytizing societies. This study concludes that the Deobandi Tablighi Jamaat emerged not only in response to the anti-Islamic campaigns of Hindus and Christians. The TJ was also founded in response to the preaching struggles of other Islamic schools in the British Raj. It is recommended that the TJ works to implement the Deobandi version of Islam in the world should be further studied.

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## 1. Introduction

The Tablighi Jamaat is an Islamic proselytizing movement established in colonial India. Maulana Mohammad Ilyas was the founding father of this non-violent and “apolitical” movement. The primary objective behind the creation of this movement was to urge ordinary Muslims to organize their lives according to *Shariah* (Islamic law). This movement was launched in the Mewat area near Delhi. According to many sources, the Muslims of Mewat did not know anything about Islam and its fundamentals. They even did not know how to perform *salat* (prayer). The threat of Shuddhi and Sangathan organizations, active in the region in the 1920s, was so dangerous that it alarmed people like Maulana Mohammad Ilyas. In order to save these Muslims from going into the hands of such anti-Muslim organizations, Maulana Ilyas founded the Tablighi Jamaat in the middle of the 1920s (Siddiqi, 2014).

After the end of Mughal rule in India and the failure of the 1857 war, Muslim religious scholars came up with a new response to the already-changed political condition that prevailed in the country (Metcalf, 2003). Indian Muslims did not have a fair share in the new administrative setup. For example, orders were issued that Arabic and Persian languages would not be taught anymore in state-run educational institutions (Cohen, 2004). This particular period created a vacuum in Muslim society. Many Muslim reformers came forward to fill this vacuum and formed various reform movements with clear objectives to get Indian Muslims out of the dire situation (Iram, 2019). On the one hand, religious scholars believed that Muslims should acquire only religious knowledge. On the other hand, the Modernists and progressive class in the Muslim community wanted Indian Muslims to get modern education only.

The failure of the Khilafat movement frustrated all the Islamists in India, including Maulana Ilyas. The end of the Khilafat movement at the hands of the western imperialists further strengthened the notion that the British *Raj* (rule) was the most dangerous threat to Islam (Robinson, 2008). The disintegration of Muslim political power in North Africa, the Middle East, and India to different European nations awakened Muslims *ulama* (Islamic scholars) and other intellectuals to explain the “real” causes of their political crisis. These intellectuals blamed the ruling class and ordinary Muslims for not following the laws of *Sharia* and *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) in their lives. These reformers believed that the earlier Muslims were practical and religious in their public and private lives. They strictly followed Allah’s orders and implemented all His laws in their states (Ali, 2006). In order to make them good Muslims, the TJ was founded in the middle of the 1920s.

## 2. Literature review

The existing literature on Islamic revivalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in British-India view the emergence of the Tablighi Jamaat in light of two important factors. One is the collapse of Muslim political power in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that created a vacuum for the Indian Muslims. Second, the anti-Muslim activities of the Christian and Hindu missionaries aimed to re-convert Indian Muslims into Christianity and Hinduism, respectively. These sources ignore the differences and competition that existed among various schools of thought in Islam. This study explores and analyses all the existing English and Urdu sources that deal with Islamic revivalism. This paper suggests that the emergence of the TJ was not only a response to the Christian and Hindu movements, but it also challenged the preaching efforts of other Islamic sects of the time. The paper contributes to the existing literature of Islamic revivalism in colonial India in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Metcalf (2003) has argued that several Sunni reformist groups originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These Muslim groups aimed to challenge the reconversion policy adopted by the Arya Samaj and Christian missionaries. Ali (2010) has argued that Maulana Ilyas founded the TJ as a direct response to the Arya Samaj in India. The TJ also believed that *ulama* had always remained within the confines of their traditional madrassas. The TJ believed that Indian *ulama* had always focused on building religious knowledge only. Mamun (2019) also views the emergence of Tablighi Jamaat in terms of Hindu militant groups and their anti-Muslim activities in the early 1920s. According to this study, the Arya Samaj threatened the Islamic way of life and its culture. To save Islam and its followers from these Hindu militant societies, Maulana Ilyas formed the Tablighi Jamaat.

Kuiper (2017) has argued that Tablighi Jamaat's formation was due to many reasons. He further said that inter-religious competition between Muslims, Hindus, and Christians in the early twentieth century gave birth to TJ. Noor (2013) has argued that the Tablighi Jamaat literature divides the whole world into two different forces. One is the force of good, and the other is the force of devil or evil. The force of the devil includes not only the Jews, Christians, and Hindus but also those Muslim groups that oppose the TJ. For example, Islamic political parties, the Wahabis, and modern-minded Muslims are considered evil forces in the literature of the TJ.

All the studies mentioned above failed to give a detailed account of the preaching competition among various sects of Islam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Several Muslim reformers responded to the decline of Muslim political power in India. The *ulama* and the progressive-minded Muslims were the two prominent groups within the Muslim community of India that responded to the then challenges faced by their co-religionists. One group struggled for modern education and ideas. In contrast, the second group wanted Indian Muslims to get religious education only. Both had the same objective in their minds. The *ulama* group can further be divided into many sectarian groups that emerged after the 1857 war. What others have ignored is the rise of the sectarian division in Islam after the 1857 war. Every sect tried to establish its own Tablighi Jamaat. Every Tablighi Jamaat wanted to save Islam and its followers from the enemies of Islam and other sects.

This study is based on the deprivation theory of Glock and Stark (Glock & Stark, 1965) and the Maududian theory of Islamic revivalism (Maududi, 1979). These theories are selected because of two reasons. First, the Tablighi Jamaat was founded at a time when the Muslims of India had already lost their political power not only in India but outside Indian as well. Second, at that time, the people of Mewat were facing grave financial crisis and they believed that all these problems arose because they were not good Muslims. The financial crisis of that time increased religiosity in the people.

### **3. Theoretical perspectives**

Several social theories can explain the rise of religious movements in the world. For this study, we used two important theories: the deprivation theory and the Maududian theory of Islamic revivalism. Glock and Stark (1965) have argued that the origin and development of the religious groups and movements are linked to direct deprivation of the people in the society. They suggest that new religious groups and movements are on the rise and it is because of socio-economic issues and challenges in the society. The backward and lower classes of the society take refuge in such religious groups and movements (Glock & Stark, 1965). The deprivation theory suggests that people participate in religious revivalist movements because

of social inequality, poverty, and unfulfilled aspirations. It is a religious activity that can help agents to cope with such unfulfilled aspirations. The religious participants put less emphasis on material objects such as wealth and income (Carvalho, 2009). According to Glock and Stark (1965), there may be different kinds of deprivations. Wimberley (1984) has argued that social and economic deprivation are the most prominent types of deprivations (Wimberley, 1984). Chen (2010) has also argued that poverty and other financial issues in a society increase religiosity. His main work was based on the 1998 Indonesian financial crisis (Chen, 2010). The reason for this is that religious people consider these issues as an act of God or what Bentzen (2013) termed as a “supernatural punishment hypothesis” (Bentzen, 2013, p. 2).

The Maududian theory is Islamic revivalism explains the real causes that, according to Maududi, were responsible for all the challenges of the Muslim community or *ummah*. According to Maududi (1979), the decline of Muslim political power was due to the reason that they had ignored the “right” way of Islam. Islam, according to Maududi, is a complete code for human life and the solution to all the existing issues and challenges lies in the sacred principles of Islam (Maududi, 1979). Maududi (1945) has argued that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) first gave *dawat-i-Islami* to the people of Arabia and then established an Islamic system that replaced the old system of *jahiliya* (ignorance).

The Tablighi Jamaat was established at a time when Muslims had lost their political power not only in India but outside India as well. Thus, we see that not only the Mughal state was collapsed in India, but the Ottoman Empire was also disintegrated soon after the end of the First World War (1914-1918). The early leadership of the TJ believed that Muslims lost their power and glory because they were not “good” Muslims. Robinson (2008) has argued that by 1920 the European imperialist powers had captured most Muslim countries in the world. The socio-economic challenges of the time also support the theories mentioned above.

#### **4. Research methodology**

In order to properly understand the current research topic, the researcher has used the qualitative research methodology. The nature of this research topic is descriptive and exploratory. The researcher has searched for various secondary data for this study and analyzed the question under discussion. The secondary data includes both English and Urdu books, articles, reports, unpublished manuscripts, etc. Several Urdu sources belonging to different Islamic schools have also be studied and analyzed by the researcher. All the available sources, both published and unpublished, were collected and analyzed by the researcher before putting them into the current study. The researcher also visited the websites of different schools of thought for the collection of relevant data. This research article will contribute to the rich academic work on religious revivalism in South Asia in general and Pakistan in particular. However, there are some limitations and restrictions. A very rich data in the form of Urdu books and articles written by religious scholars of different schools are not available online. Such data can be found in madrassas and religious bookshops only.

This research paper has been divided into six main sections. The first section discusses the historical background of Islamic revivalism in British-India. This part helps us to understand the foundation of the Tablighi Jamaat. The second part deals with the existing literature on Islamic revivalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This part elaborates what others have found while exploring the topic under discussion. The third part deals with the theoretical framework for the study. The fourth section elaborates on the research method adopted in this study. The

final section of this paper is the main body of discussion. This section of the paper answers the research question asked at the very start of this research article. The final section discusses the preaching competition among different Islamic schools that emerged in the post-1857 war in colonial India.

## 5. Discussion and findings

### 5.1 The Making of Madrassa Deoband and its Tablighi Jamaat

The history of religious seminaries in India dates back to the foundation of Muslim political power in India. Patronized by the ruling class, its primary purpose was to train men for the state administration. However, the coming of the imperialist powers in India changed the very purpose of the madrassa. After losing political power and the revolt of 1857, the new madrassa system turned towards ordinary Muslims (*ajlaf* Muslims). The Islamic scholars feared that Muslim's identity was at risk both from Western powers and the so-called liberals of the country (Naghma, 2015). For the religious people of India, one of the main reasons due to which Muslims lost their political power was the influence of the non-Muslims. The purification of Islam from such evil influences had become their fundamental goal (Ali, 1993). Muhammad Qasim Nanaotawi (1832-1880) and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d. 1905) wanted to educate Indian Muslims on religious lines. As a result, a religious seminary was established at a place called Deoband in 1866. The Deoband school became very popular in the country (Mandaville, 2009).

The Deoband madrassa also questioned the faith of those Muslims who did not believe in Deobandism. For example, it challenged the thinking and ideas of the progressive-minded Muslims on one side, and on the other, it questioned the Islam of Ahl-i-Hadith, Barailve, and Shia Muslims. The Ahmadi community was declared to be *kafirs* (non-Muslims). Another important aim of the *Darul-ul-ulom* was to train Islamic activists for preaching and propagating the "right" form of Islam. To do this, Maulana Ilyas, a graduate student from the *Darul-ul-ulom* in 1910, tried to spread the Deobandi form of Islam in northern India (Sikand, 1998). According to Sikand, Maulana Ilyas's letters reveal that he was also very concerned about the then poor condition of the Muslim community. It seems that he had concluded that the deplorable condition of the Indian Muslims was due to the reason that they had adopted the ways and customs of the disbelievers (Sikand, 2008).

It was in 1907 when the Deoband seminary started an organized preaching program. According to Reetz (2007), the Tablighi Jamaat has always used the Deobandi religious seminaries for its preaching activities (Reetz, 2007). The Tablighi Jamaat cannot be separated from the Deoband seminary because its early leadership belonged to Deobandism. Maulana Ilyas had also invited some of the Deobandi scholars to help him in Islamizing the Meos. He had also sent many groups of the Mewatis to the *Darul-ul-ulom* at Deoband because Maulana Ilyas wanted them to learn Islam from the Deoband Islamic school only (Ahmad, 2015). The invitation of only Deobandi scholars to the affected areas and the sending of many groups of Mewatis to the *Darul-ul-ulom* reveals that Maulana Ilyas wanted to spread only the Deoband version of Islam in the Mewat of India. It also makes it clear that Ilyas aimed to save local Muslims not only from Shuddhi and Sangathan, the two anti-Islamic organizations, but he also wanted to keep them safe from other Islamic schools whose Islam and beliefs had already been questioned by the *Darul-ul-ulom*.

Maulana Mohammad Zakariya (1898-1982), in his famous book titled *Fazial-i-Tablighi* (virtues of preaching), has discussed the early phase of the *da'wa* (calling) movement in British-India. At one place, the Maulana was perturbed when he saw that objections against Islam were being raised not only by the non-Muslims but also by the so-called Muslims (Zakariya, n.d). The question is, who were these so-called Muslims? This article suggests that they were the followers of other Islamic schools who were also very active in Mewat. To respond to the anti-Muslim activities of Christian and Shuddhi missionaries, the Barailvi, Ahl-i-Hadith, Ahmadi, and Shi'a had also developed their preaching organizations.

In his article in a monthly magazine issued from Deoband in June 2011, Abul Laith Al-Husni Gaghyarvi has explained that the TJ movement is an offshoot of the Deoband movement. According to him, both movements emerged to achieve one objective. Maulana Ilyas, who had studied in the Deoband madrassa, later founded the TJ to complete the mission of the Deoband seminary (Al-Husni, 2011). However, the TJ has attracted many followers who belonged to other sects or sub-sects. Nevertheless, the TJ had always used the Deobandi mosques for converting ordinary Muslims into good Muslims (Tariq, 2015). The TJ could not be separated from the Deobandi school, and it is because of two reasons. First, the early leadership of the TJ had studied in Deoband madrassa, and they firmly believed in Islam of this school. Second, the TJ aimed to convert ordinary Muslims into "good" Muslims. The followers of Ahl-i-Hadith, Barelvi, Shia, and Ahmadi sects could not be "ideal" and "good" Muslims in the eyes of TJ.

During its early years, the TJ was severely criticized by most of the Deobandi *ulama*. However, this non-cooperative response did not discourage Maulana Ilyas, and he continued his work with more zeal and enthusiasm (Robinson, 1988). It is a fact that T.J was rejected and criticized by some of the Deobandi *ulama* in its early stage. However, this was not on the ground of its ideology. Instead, it was because of TJ's turn towards the *ajlaf* Muslims. Once a Tablighi Jamaat visited the neighbouring areas of Thana Bhawan and made contacts with the local people for preaching. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, a known Deobandi scholar, was not happy because they (the preachers) had not studied in any established religious seminary. The Maulana feared that these illiterate preachers could not guide local Muslims (Al-Nadwi, 1979). He believed that only learned *ulama* could preach the true religion (Naeem, 2009). During the long course of Muslim rule over India, Islamic learning had always been considered the monopoly of a particular class of the Muslim society. It was TJ that challenged this monopoly.

This study suggests that TJ did not have any ideological differences with the Deoband seminary. Some scholars from Deoband objected but this objection was not based on any ideological issue. The preaching of ordinary Muslims was the only possible factor due to which some of the Deoband scholars raised objections. One should also keep in mind that the Ahl-i-Hadith, the Barailvis, and the Ahmadi Muslims had also responded to the conversion campaign of the non-Muslims. They also wanted to save Muslims from them. For Deobandi scholars, the Ahl-i-Hadith and Barelvis were *Bi'dati* Muslims, and the Ahmadi community was out of the fold of Islam. The preaching activities of these *Bi'dati* Muslims would have alarmed Deobandi *ulama*. The next part of the study put light on the preaching activities of the other Islamic sects.

## 5.2 The Barelvi School of Thought and its Preaching Efforts in Colonial India

Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan (d. 1921) founded the famous Barelvi school of thought. It is very interesting to note that this school was also founded to counter the anti-Islamic activities of the Christian missionaries and Hindu Arya Samaj, established in 1875 (Mujeeb, 2020). The

Barelvis believed that Muhammad (PBUH) had his natural light, which they called *Nur-i-Muhammad*. The Barelvis also believed that Muhammad (PBUH) is always *hazer-o-nazir* (witness to everything), and he had unknown knowledge (*Ilm-i-ghaib*). Such beliefs were not acceptable to the Deobandi school of thought. Those who believed in this school were considered *Bi'dati* (innovator) by the Deobandi *ulama*. For Barelvis, the Deobandis were blasphemous people who did not respect the Holy Prophet (PBUH) by not accepting his supernatural personality (Gugler, 2011).

The Deoband-Barelvi differences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave birth to the culture of *fatwa* (religious verdict). In a famous verdict of Ahmad Raza Khan, which he wrote in 1902, he called all those scholars who did not believe in his ideas as devils and heretics. According to this verdict, the Deoband *ulama* did not recognize the finality of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Deobandi scholars came up with the same response. They used the word *Bidati* for the Barelvi Muslims (Jackson, 2013).

In 1901, a Pir (a religious leader) named Sayyed Jamaat Ali Shah Puri (1841-1951) established an organization called *Anjuman-i-Khuddamul Sofia-i-Hind* (Organization of the Indian Sufi Scholars). It aimed to counter anti-Islamic forces and also to fight all those who opposed the Barelvi school. In July 1923, another organization called *Jamiyyat Markaziyyah Tabligh-ul-Islam* (society for the preaching of Islam) was established by Maulana Sayyed Ghulam Bhik Nairang Ambalvi (1876-1952). In 1925, another society named *Al-Jamiyyat al-Aliyyat al-Islamiyah al-Markaziyyah* (All-India Sunni Conference) was founded by some influential Barelvis of India. This body aimed to protect Islam and its followers (Jackson, 2013).

Maulana Shah Muhammad Hamid Raza Khan Barelvi (1875-1943), the president of the reception committee of AISC, put forward his programme which included four essential things. His programme included preaching the “correct” form of Islam, religious education, the security of Muslims and social reforms. He also forwarded the idea of a centralized Tablighi activity. He named it *Madrassa-i-Tabligh* (the school for preaching). He believed that this proposed Tablighi Markaz (centre) would monitor the whole preaching work in the Shuddhi affected areas (Mujeeb, 2020).

This study finds that the Barelvi school of thought had also initiated its preaching campaign for two purposes. First, they wanted to protect ordinary Muslims from the activities of the Christian and Shuddhi missionaries. Second, this Islamic sect, which had severe ideological differences with the Deoband seminary and whose leaders and students had already been considered as heretics and devils, started its Tablighi movement to keep Muslims “safe” from those heretics and devils who, according to Barelvi scholars, did not believe in the finality of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) at all.

### **5.3. The preaching of the Ahl-i-Hadith school**

Another reformist school that emerged in India was the Ahl-i-Hadith movement, which means people of the *hadith* (sayings) of the messenger of Allah. The Ahl-i-Hadith school believed that only the Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) were the only legal and reliable sources of Islam. Thus, they rejected any other source or sources that were introduced in Islam after the earliest times. Their rivals gave it the name of *ghair muqallid* (people who do not follow any *imam*) (Mandaville, 2009). Islamic scholars of the *Darul-ulom* at Deoband considered the Ahl-i-Hadith sect as the agents of the colonial rulers (Qasmi, 2016). Both the

schools did not tolerate each other owing to ideological differences. The Ahl-i-Hadith Muslims were not allowed to offer prayers in the mosques of the Deobandi school because of their *amin-bil-Jahar* (loudly amin in prayer). The Ahl-i-Hadith Muslims were even declared non-Muslims by the Deobandi *ulama* (Khan, 2000). The Deobandi *ulama* issued a fatwa named *Jamegha-al-Shawahid fi ahra'jul wahabeen min'al Masajid*. In this *fatwa*, they declared that people who accept the Islam of Ahl-i-Hadith school are heretics and thus should be killed. Maulana Muhammad Husain, who belonged to the Ahl-i-Hadith school, also responded to such allegations by writing several articles against the Deobandi *ulama* (Abduh, 1991).

The Ahl-i-Hadith school also started establishing its own system of madrassa in the country. For example, a religious seminary called *Dar-ul-Hadith Rahmaniyya* was founded in 1921 in Delhi. This madrassa was followed by another school called *Al-Jami'at-ul-Salafiyya*, founded by Shaikhul Quran Maulana Sanaullah Amritsari in the Mewat region of India. Its purpose was to produce Islamic scholars and preachers (*moballigheen*) who would work for the propagation and protection of Islam in Mewat (Naghma, 2015). This reveals that the Ahl-i-Hadith Muslims were also very active in “saving” Islam and its followers from the “enemies” of Islam in Mewat.

In order to respond to the anti-Muslim work of the Shuddhi movement, the All-India Ahl-i-Hadith conference under the leadership of Maulana Sana Ullah established several Tablighi camps in Mewat. It was claimed that the Ahl-i-Hadith Tablighi camp saved many ordinary Muslims from the reconversion efforts of the enemies of Islam. It was not an easy task because they (Ahl-i-Hadith) had to save Muslims from several enemies of Islam. These enemies included Arya Samaj, Christians, the Qadiani sect and also the *bi'dati* Muslims (Aslam, 1996). It is very important to know that the word *bi'dati* was used for all those Muslims who did not believe in the Islam of Ahl-i-Hadith school.

The coming of several Tablighi Jamaats in the region opened a new chapter of competition among these Tablighi Jamaats. All Tablighi Jamaats wanted to save real Islam and to convert people into good Muslims. The Ahl-i-Hadith, Deobandi, Bareilvi, and Ahmadi Tablighi Jamaats were founded to save the Muslims of Mewat (Shahid, 2007). Once Maulana Ilyas was stopped from delivering a speech in a mosque located in the Mewat region of India. It was Friday and people forcefully stopped him from leading the Friday prayer (Azma, 2003).

This article suggests that the foundation of Ahl-i-Hadith seminaries in Delhi and Mewat aimed to respond not only to the anti-Islamic forces such as the Christian missionaries and Arya Samaj but also targeted all those Muslims, who according to the school, had owned heretical and superstitious thoughts and thus must be corrected. It seems there was a tough competition among several sects of Islam in Mewat. People who forcefully stopped Maulana Ilyas were neither Hindus nor Christians. Perhaps they were supporters of other schools in Mewat.

#### **5.4 The Shi'a-Sunni factor**

Shi'as and Sunnis are the two well-known sects of Islam having a long history of ideological differences over beliefs and practices (Rezavi, 2017). The majority of the Mughal rulers of India had tolerated people who were followers of different religions and sects. They followed the policy of *Sulh-i-Kul* (peace with all). However, this environment of peaceful co-existence changed after the end of the Mughal rule.

The Islamic reformation period that started after the 1857 war also affected relations between

Shi'a and Sunni sects. The Deoband *ulama* published several books and issued many religious verdicts against the Shi'a sect. Thus, the Sunni community was kept at a distance from the Shi'as of India (Mohammad, n.d.). The period of the nineteenth century witnessed the formation of several religious seminaries in India. The Shi'a reformation in India also started during this period. From 1889 onwards, the Shi'a community, like other schools, also established religious madrasas to reform Shi'a Islamic society (Jones, 2007).

The Indian Sunnis had always participated in the Muharram procession, but the problem started when *Anjuman-i-Sadr-ul-Sadoor* introduced new reforms for the Muharram procession. For example, it was decided that only bear-footed and bear-headed men would enter the Karbala ground in the future. The Shi'as also started praising Feroz, a man who had murdered the second Islamic ruler, Hazrat Umar Farooq (R.A). Seeing this, the Sunni Muslims made their burial ground for *Taziya* at a place called Poolkatora. The Sunni Muslims started praising the first four caliphs of Islam. The Shi'as reacted by cursing the first three caliphs (Fuchs, 2015).

The Shia Tabligh was started by Haji Maqbool, an active Shia activist during the British Raj. Then the idea of Shi'a Tabligh became very popular among different Shi'a anjumans. For example, *Madrassa Waizeen* (a seminary of preachers) was founded in Lucknow in 1919. Its very aim was to train preachers for spreading Islam in the country. This Tablighi madrasa also started publishing Shi'a Tablighi literature such as *Al-Wa'iez* (preachers) and an English-language magazine called the Muslim review (Jones, 2007).

It is said that trained preachers who belonged to *madrassa Waizeen* were sent towards different areas and cities of colonial India. For example, Shi'a preachers were sent to Punjab, Peshawar, Bihar, Bengal, and Gujrat for the only purpose of protecting the local Shi'a people (Jones, 2007). The idea of Shi'a Tabligh became very popular in the 1930s. A famous Shia mujtahid Syed Ali Naqi (1905-1988) founded a Shia missionary organization called the *Imamiya* Mission in the 1930s. Its very purpose was to preach Shiaism in the country. This society of the Shia community became one of the most influential Shia societies in the 1930s and 1940s (Jones, 2014). The activities of Shi'a preachers in different cities of British-India would have alarmed religious scholars who belonged to the Deobandi school because Deoband had already issued verdicts against the Shia of India and declared them as non-Muslims. Maulana Zakariya in *Fazail-e-Amm'al* writes:

Do contemporary Muslims face difficulties in conveying (Tabligh) Islam? So did the Prophet and Companions. Do they face religious competitors? So did the Prophet and Companions. Do internal schisms test them? So were the Prophet and Companions. Do they wonder how to live as devoted Muslims? (Kuijper, 2017, p. 166).

This statement clearly shows several things. First, by giving the example of the messenger of Allah and his companions, it is suggested that the Tablighi Jamaat believed that it was calling people to the only "right path" of Islam. It also means that other organizations were misguiding people. Second, they had to face opposition from the followers of other religions, such as Hindus and Christian missionaries. The text also put light on the internal schism of the Indian Muslims. It means other sects of Islam such as the Bareilvis, Ahl-i-Hadith, Shias, and Ahmadi community were also very active in preaching Islam in the country. The Deobandi scholars could not tolerate the preaching efforts of a sect whose leaders did not recognize the first three caliphs who ruled the Islamic state established by the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

### 5.5. The Tabligh of the Ahmadi community

Like other Muslims, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, founder of the Ahmadi community, also wanted the reformation of Indian Muslims. It was in 1889 when according to his supporters, he was “selected” by God to reform the Muslim community in the “right direction.” It is also said that he established his school under a “divine” command (Ahmad, 2016). One should keep in mind that the Ahmadiyya movement also emerged to respond to the preaching campaigns of Christian missionaries and the anti-Muslim activities of *Arya Samaj* (Balci, 2015). In the words of Cantwell Smith, “It arose as a protest against Christianity and the success of Christian proselytization; a protest also against Sir Sayyid’s rationalism and Westernization, and at the same time as a protest against the decadence of the prevailing Islam” (Smith, 1943, p. 324). The followers of Ghulam Ahmad believed in a peaceful *Jihad* and not in a violent struggle. He believed in *Jihad bil Qalam* (a holy war with the pen) and not in *Jihad bil saif* (holy war with sword). According to Moten (2018), the founder of the Ahmadi school firmly believed that there should be no force in converting people to Islam.

Since its inception in British-India, the Ahmadi community was involved in converting Muslims to the *Jamaat* of Ahmadiyya. This conversion campaign of the Ahmadi community had to face severe opposition from the orthodox *ulama*. The *ulama* rejected Ahmadiyyat as a corrupted form of Islam. That is why three Ahmadi preachers were stoned to death in Afghanistan in 1903. It was firmly believed that they were preachers (*Tablighis*) of Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani (Jones, 1986). In August 1924 an Ahmadi, named Nematullah Khan was stoned to death, followed by another incident in Kabul city in February 1925 (Kamran, 2015). The killing of Ahmadi preachers in a foreign country reveals that its early leaders were very interested in spreading the Ahmadiyya sect not only in India but also in neighbouring countries.

In the year 1914, the Ahmadiyya School founded an organization by the name of *Anjuman-i-Taraqq-i-Islam* (organization for the spread of Islam). The primary purpose of this organization was to spread Ahmadiyya Islam in India. The Ahmadi caliph believed that Muslims are the favorite nation of Allah, and they have been given the responsibility of preaching Islam (Shahid, 2007). It was in the year 1920 when the Ahmadi Jamaat started its overseas Tablighi work. An Ahmadi named Mufti Mohammad Sadiq was sent to North America for propagating Ahmadi Islam, and it is said that he established a small Ahmadi community in New York. Another Ahmadi Tablighi Jamaat was sent to West Africa for the same purpose (Moten, 2018). The Ahmadi community also sent several preachers into Southeast Asia (Noor, 2013).

The Ahmadi community, like other schools, also responded to the anti-Islamic activities of the Shuddhi and Sangathan. Mirza Bashir, the Khalifa of the Ahmadi community, sent an Ahmadi named Sufi Abdul Qadir Niazi to the areas where the Shuddhi activists were very active. It was in February 1923 when Sufi Abdul Qadir Niazi presented a detailed report. It was decided to send some Ahmadi Tablighis to the targeted areas of Shuddhi. As a result, several Tablighi Jamaats of the Ahmadi community were sent to save Muslims from the Shuddhi movement. It is said that several thousand Muslims were saved from the Shuddhi anti-Islamic programme. An Ahmadi preacher expressed his feelings in a poem:

Kia dra thy ho hama'ny keh mar daingay jan say.  
Kia dra kartay hain wo jo ab'd hai Rehman k.  
Ham to mar is din gaye thy jab hi gar say chal phary.  
Ay safiha, kia hai to waqif Ahmadi ima'n say (Shahid, 2007, p. 330-31).

English translation of Urdu poem means that do not threaten us by death. Do not threaten the servants of God. We had been dead while leaving home. O cruel! are not you know the believer of God? The number of Ahmadiyya sect in India was increasing at the start of the twentieth century. In 1921 the total number of this community was 28,816, and according to Tahir Kamran, “by 1931, it had almost doubled to 55,908.” The Ahmadi Jamaat emphasized Tabligh and gave it the name of *Jihadi-Akbar* (Kamran, 2015,p 4). The number of Ahmadi followers increased very rapidly, and it was probably because of its preaching activities across India.

The followers of Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani had been very active in preaching the ideology of Ahmadi Jamaat since its very inception in the nineteenth century. In the 1920s, the preachers of this school were busy calling people to the “right” path of Islam not only in British-India but also in foreign countries. It responded to the anti-Islamic activities of the Arya Samaj and Christian missionaries. This paper suggests that Ahmadi Tablighi's work in India would have created panic among other Islamic schools because they (Ahmadis) had already been declared non-Muslims by the mainstream Islamic schools of thought in colonial India. For Deobandi, Barelvi, and Ahl-i-Hadith schools, the Ahmadi community was big *fitna* of the enemies of Islam. For the mainstream schools of Islam, there was no difference between Ahmadis, Hindus, and Christians. Even Ahmadi people were considered more dangerous than Hindus and Christians. Thus, the present study suggests that the *Tablighi Jamaat* of Deoband emerged not as a response only to the Shuddhi and Sangathan but also as a reaction to the anti-Islamic activities of the Ahmadi Tablighis in the early years of the twentieth century.

#### **5.6. The struggle between Islamists and modernists in British-India**

According to Ali (2006), Islamic revivalism emerged in India as a response to modernism. The revivalist movement challenged the idea of modernization. They thought that modernity was a revolt of humanity against God. To them, society was in a state of *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance). The revivalists questioned the idea of modern education. For Lapidus (1997), the wave of Islamic revivalism was a direct response to the modernization of the society. The creation of new states, scientific and social changes gave birth to Islamic revivalism in the world.

The early leadership of the Tablighi Jamaat considered western culture as a big threat to the Islamic way of life in India. According to Pieri, “The perception here is that minority Muslims would lose their religious identities in the wave of Western education and cultural dominance that would follow. In the view of TJ, many Muslims in the West have deviated from the straight path of Islam, being Muslim in name but secular in custom” (Pieri, 2019, p. 367). Maulana Ilyas feared that Muslims would lose their religious identity if they accepted the western educational system and its un-Islamic culture. According to Maulana Zakariya, the solution to these problems and challenges in the current situation was not the one suggested by the enlightened people of the country. The Maulana said that people who believe that only modern education would resolve all such challenges are wrong (Zakariya, n.d).

After the failure of the 1857 war, a new group of the Muslim community emerged who wanted that Indian Muslims should acquire modern education only. They firmly believed that their progressive ideas would solve all the problems faced by their co-religionists. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) wanted Indian Muslims to accept Western ideas and their education system. The orthodox section attacked Sir Syed's ideas. The Indian *ulama* believed that modern education would corrupt their faith (Khan, 2005). This was the beginning of the differences between the modernists and Islamists in India.

Indian Muslims who believed in modern education and politics formed a separate political party by the name of the All-India Muslim League in 1906. This political party aimed to engage Indian Muslims in politics, while the TJ aimed to inform ordinary Muslims about the basic tenets of Islam. The TJ also aimed to keep ordinary Muslims away from the public arena of politics in the British Raj (Tariq, 2015). The two organizations differed on this point.

After the First World War (1914-1918), supported by Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Muslims launched the Khilafat movement. The Indian Muslims launched this movement to protect the centuries-old caliphate system. However, Mr. Jinnah (d.1948) was opposed to Gandhi's non-cooperation. As a result, he resigned from Congress in 1920. According to Paracha (2016), "In a letter to INC's revered figurehead, Mahatma Gandhi, Jinnah wrote that the movement was bound to stir up untapped religious passions of the masses and would be a disaster to the fate of the Hindus and Muslims of India." There was a section within the Muslim League, which supported the Khilafat movement. Dr. Ansari led this section. However, Jinnah's section within the same party stood aloof from the Khilafat movement. The failure of the Khilafat movement and the establishment of a modern Turkey by a modern secular man, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (d. 1938), frustrated all Islamic scholars, including Maulana Ilyas (Paracha, 2016).

The opposition of Jinnah's section in the days of the Khilafat movement and the abolition of the caliphate system by a secular and progressive politician in Turkey caused much frustration and unrest among the orthodox sections of the country, including Maulana Ilyas. All such developments in and outside India had confirmed the threat that the idea of modernism and secularism was a big *fitna*. The words *Roshan hyali* (enlightenment), *naye tahzeeb k log* (the followers of new civilization) have been used many times in the work of Maulana Ehtisham Ul Hasan (Ehtisham, n.d). It means that Maulana used these words for those Muslims who preached the idea of modern and progressive education.

However, the Deobandi Tablighi Jamaat seems to be different from other preaching groups of the time. First, the TJ had adopted an "apolitical" stance (Tariq, 2015). It did not consider it important to take part in the politics of the country. This study suggests that other groups of Muslims were very active in preaching and in the politics of the country. The All-India Muslim League was supported by many sects, including the Shia and Ahmadi communities. Second, the TJ did not claim to represent any school of thought in India, while other groups represented a particular school. However, this claim of the TJ has been questioned by many researchers, including the current study. According to Tariq (2015), "However, the TJ continued to get support from Deoband mosques in the sub-continent where *Tablighi* missions stayed during their proselytizing tours. In this regard, TJ could be considered a pro-Deobandi organization" (Tariq, 2015, p. 110).

This study suggests that the downfall of the Mughal state in India, followed by social, political, and economic changes introduced by the new colonial rulers, gave birth to the idea of religious revivalism in the country. On the one hand, the threat of the Shuddhi and the Christian missionaries and the challenge posed by the opponent sects of Islam was considered a big challenge by the Deobandi *ulama*. The start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also a period of more challenges for the Indian *ulama*. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the great war and the failure of the Khilafat movement further frustrated Indian Islamic scholars. This socio-political deprivation increased religiosity and ultimately gave birth to the Tablighi Jamaat. The socio-economic crisis in the Mewat of India provided a solid ground on which Maulana Ilyas later founded and developed the Tablighi Jamaat in the 1920s. The prevailing conditions in

colonial India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries support the deprivation and Maududian theory of Islamic revivalism.

Nevertheless, Tablighi Jamaat was not the only Jamaat that responded to these challenges. This paper has argued that almost every sect of Islam responded to such issues faced by the Muslim society. The Ahl-i-Hadith, the Barelvis, the Shia, and the Ahmadi community had developed their own Tablighi Jamaats. All these Jamaats aimed to save “true” Islam and its followers from the “enemies” of Islam. The Tablighi Jamaat aimed to protect ordinary Muslims not only from Hindu and Christian missionaries but also from those sects whose Islam had already been questioned by the *Darul-ul-Uloom* Deoband. Moreover, the idea of modernity was also considered anti-religion.

## 6. Conclusion

The decline of Muslim political power in India gave rise to Islamic reformation in colonial India. The death of Syed Ahmad Baraile in 1831 and then the failure in the war of 1857 changed the strategy of the Islamic reformers completely. The idea of self-reformation replaced the militant struggle. The Islamic reformers in the post-war period aimed at protecting Islam and its followers from the enemies of Islam. The establishment of several religious seminaries during this period focused on ordinary Muslims. During this period, a sectarian divide occurred between different schools of Islam. At this time, every sect considered itself on the right path and called its opponents as *fitna*. Preaching (Tabligh) was an essential strategy for all these schools. Each group wanted to save ordinary Muslims from the infidels and spread their sectarian ideology. The emergence of Tablighi Jamaat in the mid-1920s needs to be examined in light of religious and political developments in colonial India.

This study suggests that various Islamic schools in British-India responded to the Hindu revivalist activities. Each sect had its own preaching Jamaat which aimed at protecting ordinary Muslims from the infidels. Thus, we see the emergence of not only the Deobandi Tablighis but other schools such as Barelvi, Ahle-Hadith, Shia, and Ahmadi Tablighi preachers as well. All these preaching groups focused on saving Muslims from going into the hands of the enemies of Islam. Nevertheless, in the process, they also aimed to increase number of their followers.

Formation of TJ also aimed at protecting the Muslims not only from non-Muslims but also from all those sects whose followers were considered as *bi'dathi* Muslims by the Deobandi school of thought. It was because of the sectarian division within Islam and the preaching competition between various schools of thought that gave birth to the foundation of the TJ. Keeping in view the ideological differences between different Islamic schools, it is suggested that the TJ should be understood in this regard. The Tablighi Jamaat has become one of the most popular Islamist movements in Pakistan. It has influenced almost every section of the Pakistani society and needs to be properly investigated by social scientists.

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