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# Transnational Islam in India: Movements, Networks, and Conflict Dynamics

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the events of 9/11, transnational Islamic forces have consolidated more along religious lines with regional and local Islamic outfits to further the extremist cause worldwide. South Asia has been confronting the challenge of Islamic extremism for many years and in varied forms. Among the South Asian countries worst hit by Islamic extremism, India, with a Muslim minority population numbering over 140 million, has cradled a number of important transnational Islamic movements throughout history. As this paper shows, many of these movements have tremendous influence on present-day Islamic radicalism and grassroots activism all over the world. This paper argues that India's Muslims have largely shunned Islamic violence and radical influences, though perceived marginalization and insecurity among this minority community could prove a potential source for radicalization.

### MAIN FINDINGS

While many Islamic movements arising from India remain local in influence, others have spread across the world, primarily through immigration and the Indian diaspora, missionary activities, and pilgrimages to Mecca. The roots of India's Islamist challenge can be traced to late nineteenth century India where the seeds of dominant reformist and revivalist movements were implanted, namely: the Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat, Ahle Hadith and Jamaat-i-Islami. In due course, these movements have transcended the political boundaries of the subcontinent and manifested in both violent and pietistic forms at home and elsewhere. The key principle which drives India's transnational Islamic movements (with the exception of Sufi mystic movements) is the establishment of the imaginary *Ummah* through either violent or other (e.g., conversion) means. Unlike other parts of the world where the transnational Islamic movements are intense, only a small section of India's Muslims is believed to be endorsing radical Islam, though the numbers are increasing. While India's Muslims have largely shunned Islamic terrorism, there is evidence of Indian Muslims contributing to international terrorism. Increasingly, Indian Muslim youth are talking about the plights of fellow Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, and neighboring Pakistan. Indian blogospheres and social networking websites are full of these instances. India's leading radical Muslim youth movement and increasing source of concern is the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and its off shoot, Indian Mujahedeen.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- In India, the drive to implement *shari'a* has never been as intense as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, a sense of insecurity has long gripped India's Muslims. Future policy should monitor and address this perception of marginalization.
- A small section of India's Muslims—homegrown jihadists—has taken to terrorism and has acquired international links in recent times. Terrorism among Indian Muslims appears to have originated following the Babri mosque demolition in 1992. Since then, the potential for homegrown terrorism has grown extensively throughout the country.
- The changing Islamic political landscape in neighboring Bangladesh and Pakistan, where terrorist outfits have political parties with overt ties to transnational movements and networks, and the resurgent Islamic violence in the region will likely dictate the future trajectories of transnational Islam in India.

Islam in India unfolds a bewildering diversity of Muslim communities and no statistical data can be framed to determine their location and assess the multiple streams of thoughts existing within them.<sup>183</sup>

This paper traces the emergence and growth of major transnational Islamic revivalist and militant movements and networks in India. While outlining their influence and geographical spread, the paper attempts to assess the degree of dialogue, interaction and confrontation occurring within and between these movements which have dominated India's Islamic landscape for over a century. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of their sphere of influence, the paper examines the flow of ideas, resources and, most importantly, future trajectory of these movements and how they are shaped by contemporary circumstances inside India.

In particular, the paper addresses some specific questions about the Islamic movements in India: What role do transnational Islamic movements play in a country where Muslims are a minority? Which movement is playing a dominant role in shaping the Islamic space? To what degree do these movements fuel inter- and intra-religious understandings and conflict in India? To what extent do these movements play a role towards building a unique Islamic identity in the country? How do regional and wider geopolitical events influence the growth or decline of Islamic movements in India? The above set of research questions addresses at least three concerns for policymakers about transnational Islam in its Indian context; the study thus: 1) locates the dominant and emerging Indian Islamic movements with transnational reach and influence; 2) provides a clear understanding of various transnational Islamic movements and networks, which are not always quietist, in the Indian setting; and 3) identifies the ideological and operational convergence of contemporary militant and activist Islam in India.

This paper demonstrates how emphasis on orthodox Islamic practices and intra-religious rivalries between Indian Islamic movements play a significant role in jeopardizing efforts to build a Muslim "community of believers" as originally conceptualized by the Islamic movements and networks. Further, this paper observes that not all movements in India are pietist or quietist, as movements like the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Ahle Hadith are actively involved in subversive and sectarian activities. Additionally, the paper explores the connections among both activist and militant strains of Islam in India, as well as the groups' relations with

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<sup>183</sup> Mushirul Hasan, "Religion, Society and Politics during the Nehruvian Era: Profiling India's Muslim Communities," *Third Frame: Literature, Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (2008): 95.

their foreign counterparts. Finally, the paper notes that these movements are not following a single trajectory at present, but future convergence is possible.

Following this introduction, the paper is divided into six sections. The first section defines and traces the emergence of transnational Islamic revival and reformist movements in India, while briefly assessing the current status of Muslims in the country. The following three sections focus on five major Indian Islamic movements and networks—the pietist Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), and Ahle Hadith (AH); the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and its Indian offshoot, the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind (JIH); and, finally, the militant Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)—paying special attention to their connections with contemporary circumstances. The fifth section discusses the various dimensions of the cooperation and confrontation occurring within and between these and other emerging movements (e.g., the Tablighi Jamaat vs. the Dawat-i-Islami) and shows how these Muslim actors interact and maneuver to dominate India’s Islamic space. The sixth and concluding section highlights common traits shared by these groups, and summarizes the current state of affairs with regard to the Islamic movements and their future direction.

## Transnational Islamic Movements and the Status of Muslims in India

Transnational Islam<sup>184</sup> in India has been the focus of intense intellectual debate since the late twentieth century due to its controversial links to “Islamic” terrorism and violence. The nineteenth century witnessed fundamental changes in Islamic thought worldwide, especially in Cairo, Tehran, Damascus and Istanbul. The shift was reflected in almost all aspects of the Islamic intellectual debate ranging from issues of identity, the state, tradition, jurisprudence, rituals and practices.<sup>185</sup> Precisely during that time, the seeds of many dominant Islamic reformist and revivalist movements were implanted on Indian soil and many of those movements have alleged influence on present-day Islamic militancy and grassroots activism the world over. Most of these Islamic movements have been influenced either by internal reform movements, e.g. anti-Sufi Wahhabi and Salafi movements,<sup>186</sup> or arose in the face of rising neo-Hindu and Bhakti (devotional) movements in India.

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<sup>184</sup> Post-9/11 research has attempted to map the intricate anatomy of Islamic movements, which have largely aimed to spread and strengthen Islam by transcending political boundaries. In the context of Islam as a transnational religious practice, Bowen emphasizes three basic and characteristic phenomena: 1) demographic movement; 2) transnational Islamic institutions; and 3) Islamic reference and discourse crossing political boundaries. See John R. Bowen, “Beyond Migration: Islam as a Transnational Public Space,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004): 879-894. While demographic movements do not necessarily trigger revivalist or reformist movements, the latter two trends seem to have contributed to the transnational communication of ideas and practices which in turn promotes transnational socio-religious movements. Scholars have argued that the process of globalization has been one of the prime motivators and fuelling factors for transnational social and religious movements.

But it is imperative to note that religious ideas and thoughts have transcended geographical and political boundaries since the emergence of religion and are not a new-age phenomenon as they are sometimes thought to be. Broadly, we may term this phenomenon as “transnationalism” which means socio-religious ties and interactions linking people or institutions through the continuous exchange of ideas, people and material, notwithstanding the presence of national borders. These “movements-sans-frontiers” invariably focus on the global interactions that occur during the course of engagement and not necessarily with single power centers, but with multiple hubs favoring local socio-political conditions.

<sup>185</sup> For an excellent overview of these changes, see Basheer M. Nafi, “The Rise of Islamic Reformist Thought and its Challenge to Traditional Islam,” in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Suha Taji Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 28-60.

<sup>186</sup> Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006), 256.

The political and socio-religious setting of the nineteenth century forced Indian Muslims to shift their attention towards the Prophet Mohammed again, and away from the medieval Sufi<sup>187</sup> saints, shrines and Islamic clerics. To name some of the important Indian Islamic movements and networks, among others which will be studied below, there are the Deoband movement, Tablighi Jamaat, Ahle Hadith, and the Jamaat-i-Islami which, in due course, transcended the political boundaries of the subcontinent and manifested in both violent and pietistic forms at home and elsewhere. While many Islamic movements that arose from India remained local in influence, others have spread across the globe primarily through immigration, diaspora contacts, missionary activities and pilgrimage.

The key principle which drives many of these Islamic movements, except Sufi/shrine-centric mystic movements like the Suhrawardiya and Chistiyya, is supposedly the establishment of the imaginary *ummah* (community of believers) through either violent or other (e.g. conversion, proselytization) means. Many commonalities can be seen among these various movements in varying degrees on questions related to Muslim personal law, language (Urdu in South Asia), and sectarian and communal violence targeting Muslims.

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Unlike other parts of the world where Islamic activism is intense, this activism is relatively moderate in India. Demographically a minority, the Muslim population in India feels rather safe and secure under India's constitution and largely supports the secular concept of the Indian state and India's composite culture. The overt drive to implement *shari'a* (Islamic law) has never been as intense in India as in neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh. Since independence, the Indian government has allowed its minority Muslim citizenry to follow *shari'a* in civil life and does not promote the majority Hindu religion and practices. However, despite this, the sense of minority insecurity<sup>188</sup> has gripped the Muslim community since the vivisection of the subcontinent after the departure of British and, perhaps, much before that.

Islamic revivalism appeared in the Indian subcontinent when Muslim power waned at the hands of the British colonial powers. Soon after, the ideas of Shah Waliyu'llah<sup>189</sup> and Shah Abdul Aziz gained ground and their ideas of an Islamic state galvanized Muslims into movements like

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<sup>187</sup> At least 14 Sufi orders operated in India during the time of Mughal Emperor Akbar (d. 1605), but only four of them have survived into the 20th century: Firdawsiya, Suhrawardiya, Chistiyya and Zaydiya. The Sufi decline came when the Sufis came under severe attacks from orthodox Muslims and Islamic clerics in the absence of monarchical patronage to mystic or popular pietistic Islam. See Gopal Krishna, "Piety and Politics in Indian Islam," in *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power*, ed. T.N. Madan (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 331-364.

<sup>188</sup> Even though Muslims feel secure in India, their confidence has been largely shaken by the rise of right-wing Hindus and militant groups who have challenged Indian Muslims' "loyalty" to the land, questioning their true allegiance, and increasing communal violence targeting the Indian Muslim community.

<sup>189</sup> G.N. Jalbani, *Teachings of Shah Waliyullah of Delhi* (Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1967). Also see M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967).

the Tehrik-i-Mujahidin.<sup>190</sup> Waliyu'llah believed in the innate perfection of the *shari'a* and was much more inclined to advocate the total enforcement of the *shari'a* and large-scale Islamization of the Indian population. In the political domain, his primary concern was to restore Muslim dominance in the governance of India. To that effect, Waliyu'llah outlined a three-point program: 1) Muslims must rely on military force to overcome their political adversaries; 2) Muslim society in India must be restructured in accordance with the early Islamic ideals; and 3) the Muslims of the subcontinent must explore the possibility of inviting Muslim intervention from outside to achieve the first two objectives.

Arguably, Waliyu'llah's idea set in motion a new trend in Indian Islam and inspired the cult of militant and reformist Islam in the country while paving the way for numerous local and transnational Islamic movements.<sup>191</sup> The most prominent Waliyu'llah-inspired movements in India are discussed below under three broad categories: 1) Pietist movements (e.g., Deoband school, Tablighi Jamaat, and Ahle Hadith); 2) Islamist ideology based (Jamaat-i-Islami-Hind); and militant networks (e.g., the Students Islamic Movement of India).

## Indian Pietist<sup>192</sup> Movements: Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat, and Ahle Hadith

### *The Deoband Movement in India*

Nearly after a decade of events following 1857, and coinciding with the downfall of the Mughal Empire and the advent of British colonial rule in India, the followers of Waliyu'llah and Sayyid Ahmad resurfaced in an organized way, with the foundation of the Darul Uloom (abode of learning) madrassa in Deoband, north India, in 1866. The perceived large-scale moral and spiritual degeneration among Muslims paved the way for the establishment of this institution. The Darul Uloom was established by two Islamic teachers—Muhammad Qasim Nanaotawi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi—primarily to rectify the perceived lack of religious education among the Muslims of British India.

While the Aligarh school led by Syed Ahmed Khan<sup>193</sup> rejected the Islamic state concept and accepted the community status for the Muslims in India, the Deoband school (the direct and legitimate offshoot of the Waliyu'llah school) comprised its nation-state theme with that of the community, by observing the example of the Caliphate in Turkey as its political guide. The Waliyu'llah tradition has been carried forward by the Deoband and other groups which were

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<sup>190</sup> During the Tehrik period, Muslims under Sayyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly, declared armed struggle (jihad or holy war) against the Sikh community with the hope to regain power and the indirect objective of throwing the British out of the subcontinent in order to establish an Islamic nation-state. However, the zeal died down for two reasons: difference of opinion among clerics with regards to the Waliyu'llahi concept of the nation-state and the defeat of the mujahidin at Balakot (now in Pakistan) in 1831. For further details, see Anwar Moazzam, "The Indian Muslim: A Dilemma of Dual Personality," in *India and Contemporary Islam: Proceedings of a Seminar*, ed. S.T. Lokhandwalla (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1971).

<sup>191</sup> M.S. Agwani, *Islamic Fundamentalism in India* (Chandigarh: Twenty First Century Indian Society, 1986), 10-11.

<sup>192</sup> The term "pietist," as used in this paper derives from the piety that forms part of the basic essentials of Islam, calling for the strict observance of the divine commandments. This piety also calls Muslims to shun all forbidden, evil and reprehensible things. Largely, Muslim religiosity has been derived from the Quranic text and the life of the Prophet, who has been the role model of piety for all Muslims. This piety has manifested in two broad forms: orthodox and mystical. While mystical piety emphasizes love for God and spiritual Islam, orthodox piety stresses the strict observance of Islamic religious duties and traditional practices inherited from the past. The Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat and Ahle Hadith movements fall under this broad category.

<sup>193</sup> Sir Syed Ahmed Khan founded the Anglo-Muhammadian College in Aligarh, whose curriculum sought to give Indian Muslims both Western scientific and Islamic learning, unlike Deoband.

espousing both religious reform and Islamic militancy at that time. However, many liberal Islamic scholars rejected and vehemently resisted the Deoband's tendencies to look towards other Muslim nations for guidance and questioned the right of Turkish sultans to claim religious authority over the Muslims of the world.

Originally intended to be a reformist movement, Darul Uloom Deoband became the most vital institution for Islamic learning in India and largely emphasized individual spiritual discipline, but opposed any veneration of saints, even though the movement was rooted in the tradition of some Sufi orders. The Deoband's influence spread far and wide in due course and became more pervasive than any other contemporary Islamic movement. The first hundred years of Darul Uloom witnessed large numbers of Islamic graduates coming to India from places like Myanmar, Afghanistan, Central Asia, China and Malaysia.<sup>194</sup> The *dawat o tabligh* (preaching and propagation) wing of Darul Uloom Deoband, which has been most active in post-independence India, was initiated against the rise of the Hindu *Shuddhi* movement which was aimed at the conversion of Indian Muslims to Hinduism.<sup>195</sup>

Arguably, the Deoband's influence spread due to two of its inspired offshoots, Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), though an independent movement, it has motives similar to the Deoband's *dawat o tabligh* wing) and the Jamiatul Ulema-i Hind (JUIH, Association of Indian Ulema).<sup>196</sup> The Deoband movement was not overtly apolitical even though it strictly adhered to the principle of keeping politics at bay. It had supported the Khilafat (Caliphate) Movement<sup>197</sup> during World War I and the freedom movement in India (prior to 1947). The Deoband's activist stance was evident from its goal for freedom from foreign rule and preservation of the Muslim faith and its historical institution.<sup>198</sup> Retaining its semi-apolitical character in post-independence India, the Deoband school has largely refrained from active political participation while working for Muslim identity and interests in the country.

While its offshoot, TJ, is an apolitical group reaching almost every corner of the globe (discussed below), JUIH actively participated in Indian politics following the Khilafat episode of the 1920s. Jamiatul Ulema-i Hind has entered into *mu'ahadah* (or mutual contract) with non-Muslims to establish and support a secular political and social environment in India.<sup>199</sup> The JUIH has been part of the Indian political landscape since 1920s. As a religious organization, it was closely associated with the Muslim League with the demand for partition and then with the Congress Party and some contemporary regional political groupings. With its nationwide network, besides reaching the Indian parliament, the JUIH has been involved in charity, minority educational reforms, and continues to fight for the rights of Indian Muslims.

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<sup>194</sup> For a number of graduates between 1866 and 1962, see Syed Mehabub Rizvi, *Tarikh-i Deoband* (Deoband: Ilmi-Marqaz, 1972), 370-71.

<sup>195</sup> In the early 1920s, the *ulema* of Deoband had diverted attention to the *Shuddhi* movement of the Arya Samaj through which about 18,000 Malkana Muslim Rajputs had been reconverted to Hinduism. Later different methods, including coercion, were used to reconvert them into the Islamic fold, mainly through Islamic preachers or Tablighs, thus starting *tabligh* (proselytization) and *tanzeem* movements. Both Hindu and Muslim organizations were criticized for their involvement in active proselytization, which very often led to violence, and for their lack of focus on the ongoing freedom struggle.

<sup>196</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf classified these movements as "Deoband movements" and discussed at length how they were different from other Islamic movements in the contemporary Muslim world. See Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>197</sup> The Khilafat (Caliphate) Movement was launched by Muslims in the subcontinent in the aftermath of World War I to influence the colonial British regime and aimed at protecting the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>198</sup> M. Azam Qasmi, "Sufism and the Founders of Deoband," in *The Islamic Path: Sufism, Society and Politics in India*, ed. Saiyid Zaheer Hussain Jafri and Helmut Reifeld (New Delhi: Rainbow Publishers, 2006), 354-356.

<sup>199</sup> The *mu'ahada* concept has its origin in the early years of Islamic history when the Prophet Muhammed devised a civic contract between Muslim groups and the large Jewish community in the city of Medina. Noted in Ziya-ul Hasan Faruqi, "Indian Muslims and the Ideology of the Secular State," in *South Asian Politics and Religion*, ed. Donald Eugene Smith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 140.

The Deoband's tryst with modernity is reflected in its adoption of print and information technology to reach out to a global audience and readership. The *ulema* of the Deoband use the print media to impart Islamic knowledge to a wider readership beyond the seminary. The advent of information technology and the spread of the Internet provided the Deoband a platform to publicize its activities in at least four languages (English, Urdu, Hindi and Arabic), and even issue *fatwas* (Islamic legal opinions) online in two languages (Urdu and English). The Deoband also publishes a monthly Arabic magazine, *Al-Da'ie*, which is available online for audiences outside South Asia, particularly targeting the Arab world. Even though it adopted information technology to propagate Islam, in 2004 Darul Uloom issued a *fatwa* against watching television, including Islamic channels, perhaps perceiving itself as threatened by individual Islamic (lay) preachers who used the television as a conduit to reach out to the masses.

The Deoband school openly criticizes all forms of violence including terrorism, but ambiguously supports the "freedom struggles" of Muslims worldwide. In early 2008, the Darul Uloom, along with the Jamiat and other Islamic institutions, issued a *fatwa* denouncing all forms of terrorism in the country. By adhering to this principle, the Deoband also criticizes the United States, Israel, Russia, China and other countries where Muslims are subjected to perceived injustices.

### *The Tablighi Jamaat in India*

With the demise of the Khilafat Movement, there arose another transnational Islamic revivalist movement, known as Tablighi Jamaat (also known as Jamaat Tablighi which literally means Preaching Society). Tablighi Jamaat grew from a movement to purify the Meo tribes of Mewat during the communal competition in early twentieth century India to become the most widely followed movement in the Muslim world. Basically a missionary, activist oriented informal grouping, TJ aims to teach Muslims "how to become true Muslims" (*Oh Musalman, Musalman Bano!*). Tablighi Jamaat was started by Deoband alumnus Maulana Muhammed Ilyas. Ilyas was influenced both by his Deobandi training, and Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareilly's concept of jihad<sup>200</sup> which had been directed against the Sikh community in then Punjab.<sup>201</sup>

Practically, TJ shares the same ideology as the Deoband and the former has been instrumental in the spread of Deobandism by hiding its true orientations and evading sectarian controversies. For TJ and also for other Islamic revivalist movements, the modern world is in a state of ignorance and the movement tries to bring about a change by infusing its followers with Islamic values and practices. The TJ movement is essentially conservative in outlook and orientation, with a strong aversion to rational sciences.

According to Jorgen Nielsen, TJ acts as the "active pietism of the Deoband movement"<sup>202</sup> with TJ providing the foot soldiers (e.g., missionaries) and the Deoband providing the mosques. However, "TJ is fundamentalist with a difference," as one author described the movement, especially due to Ilyas's gradual divergence from the jihadist path and aloofness from politics<sup>203</sup> during the initial

<sup>200</sup> Sayyid Ahmed waged jihad against "infidels" or "non-believers" (e.g. Sikhs and the British). For a detailed account, see Freeland Abbott, "The Jihad of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid," *The Muslim World* 52, no. 3 (1962): 216-222.

<sup>201</sup> Maulana Muhammed Ilyas's preaching campaign was described as *tehrlik* (movement), *tanzeem* (organization) and, more commonly, *jamaat* (party). Ilyas himself called it a *tehrlik-i-iman* (faith movement). See M. Anwarul Haq, *The Faith Movement of Mawlana Muhammed Ilyas* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972).

<sup>202</sup> Jorgen S. Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 132-33.

<sup>203</sup> The widely accepted view on the apolitical nature of TJ has been challenged by many scholars. For example, Marc Gaborieau points out that, both in Pakistan and Bangladesh, TJ has an interface with the political establishment. He further argues that TJ first builds individuals and institutions, which over time may exert a more lasting political influence." Marc Gaborieau, "Transnational Islamic Movements: Tablighi Jama'at in Politics?" *ISIM Newsletter* 3 (1999). Also see, Yoginder Sikand, "The Tablighi Jama'at and Politics," *ISIM Newsletter* 13 (2003).

years of the movement's formation.<sup>204</sup> In his work, Yoginder Sikand points out that TJ was not just about improving the Islamic consciousness of common Muslims but grew into a project of the construction of a pan-Indian Muslim community identity.

Tablighi Jamaat, since its emergence perhaps, has never been involved in or promoted violence in any form. Instead, the prime concern of TJ has been the moral reform of individual Muslims and sometimes non-Muslims. With its headquarters in New Delhi, TJ has managed to influence Indian Muslims irrespective of geographical locations and, often, it has had to compete with other Islamic movements and ideologies. Tablighi Jamaat faces criticism from within the movement as well for not conforming completely to the Quran or Hadith and for empowering youths without any substantive knowledge of Islam to preach.

However, the success of TJ as a broad-based grassroots movement can be gauged from the fact that it conducts a very systematic method for *da'wa* (literally, inviting) activities in India as elsewhere. Every day at least one hundred preaching parties—comprising 10 to 12 members each—travel to different parts of the country. These parties also travel overseas every week.<sup>205</sup> The usual duration of a Jamaat tour varies from three to 40 days. During tours, Tablighis (members of the Tablighi Jamaat) stay overnight in mosques and go door-to-door urging people to come for prayers and listen to *bayan* (sermons). It is perhaps TJ's openness to embrace all Muslims irrespective of their social status that makes it the most followed movement in contemporary India.

The only TJ training manual is the *Tablighi Nisab*, later known as *Fazail-e-Amal* (or “the virtues of actions and worship”). Another major TJ publication is *Hayat as Sahabha* written in Arabic by Muhaamed Yousuf.

Tablighi Jamaat in India (as elsewhere) never publicizes its agenda of conclaves in the media, nor does it make public any details of conclave participants. Tablighi Jamaat primarily relies on oral communication in spreading its messages. This secretive organizational approach and lack of control on the movement's followers<sup>206</sup> draws widespread criticism from the Muslim community and government agencies.

At regular intervals, TJ organizes regional, national and international conclaves or congregations (*ijtemas*)<sup>207</sup> in different parts of India, mostly in rural or small townships. In 2006, a two-day regional meeting was held at Warangode in Kerala where hundreds of followers gathered. Again that year in November, a three-day long international congregation was held on the outskirts of Bhopal in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. It was reported that “Jamaats” from 58 countries participated in the Bhopal assembly.<sup>208</sup> Late last year (2007), a similar TJ conclave was held at Sarai Meer, Uttar Pradesh, that witnessed tens of thousands of Muslims from across the world gathered in this small town.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> M. S. Agwani, *Islamic Fundamentalism in India*, 49-50.

<sup>205</sup> “Tabligh, or the enigma of revival,” *Times of India*, July 22, 2007.

<sup>206</sup> Tablighi Jamaat has recently initiated background and identity check procedures for any prospective new member in India. The author's interaction with some Tablighis in Delhi reveals that the organization does not bother to dictate to their followers what to do for a living. Tablighi Jamaat embraces people from all walks of life.

<sup>207</sup> International Tabligh *ijtemas*, considered to be the second largest congregation of Muslims after the Mecca (Haji) congregation, are now a symbol of the unity of all Muslims, an opportunity to demonstrate their mutual solidarity, love and respect and to reiterate their commitment to the Islamic values of discipline, brotherhood and magnanimity. *Ijtema* is the largest congregation of Muslims next to the Haji.

<sup>208</sup> E.g., Iran, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Africa, Canada, US, UK, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, etc. “Global ‘Tablighi Ijtema’ concludes in Bhopal seeking blessings for world peace,” *The Indian Muslims*, November 26, 2006.

<sup>209</sup> Sarai Meer's opulence mostly comes from Gulf remittance (mostly from Saudi Arabia and UAE); the township is home to increasing Islamic activism and has been in the news for all the wrong reasons recently. Author's interactions with local Muslims in Sarai Meer (Azamgarh, UP) in September, 2008. Sarai Meer was dubbed “little Dubai,” and is also called the “terror city” of India.

In the global arena, TJ has consolidated its foothold since 1947. Muhammad Yusuf, Ilyas's son and successor, had been credited with the transnationalisation of TJ. Yusuf consolidated the movement in South Asia following the vivisection of the subcontinent, ignoring the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh borders. Then TJ was introduced in the Arab countries after 1948; in Western countries after 1950; in the Afro-Asian countries after 1956; and, recently, in China and Central Asia.<sup>210</sup> Tablighi Jamaat began a worldwide program starting from the 1960s, with the spread of immigrant populations to America and Europe<sup>211</sup> and Southeast Asia.<sup>212</sup> Both American and UK based TJ wings have maintained close working relations with the movement's Indian headquarters.

The presence of a large South Asian Muslim population in the US and the establishment of the Al Falah Mosque at Corona, TJ headquarters with branches in Los Angeles and San Diego, facilitated the group's cause to a larger extent in the West.<sup>213</sup> Earlier, TJ operated out of a Bangladeshi mosque located in Manhattan. Like elsewhere, Tablighs in the US are committed to active *da'wa* among Muslims and non-Muslims. At Corona, the sermon is usually in English and in Arabic and sometimes in Urdu to cater to South Asian Tablighis. The board of management is largely dominated by Indians, especially Muslims from Gujarat, Pakistanis and a few of Bangladeshi origin. The Gujarati Muslims too are dominating the TJ scene in Dewsbury, UK.

However, as a result of the total isolationism of TJ followers (who are sometimes accused of being obscurantists)<sup>214</sup> and their staunch practices within the host societies, TJ has made little impact in the US in comparison to Canada and the UK, especially among the immigrants and lower social classes.

### *The Tablighi Jamaat's Alleged Links to Terrorism*

Like the Deoband's influence over the Taliban militia in Afghanistan, allegations about TJ's ties to terrorism surfaced when many Guantanamo Bay detainees were found to have association with the TJ movement. Closer to home, the Islamic militants outfits Harkat ul Jihad Islami (HuJI) and Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) are believed to have TJ influence. The criticism and suspicion TJ has raised in the last couple of decades cannot be totally ignored. The US intelligence agencies probing terrorist incidents (such as those of shoe-bomber Richard Reid, Jose Padilla and John Lindh) and networks noted that TJ has become radicalized and perhaps used for a safe cover for individual terrorists or groups including members of al Qaeda.<sup>215</sup>

There are a couple of similar cases that have emerged in India recently, though not proven conclusively. Immediately after the July 2006 Mumbai commuter train blasts, counter-terrorism

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<sup>210</sup> Shail Mayaram, "Hindu and Islamic Transnational Religious Movements," *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 3, 2004, 82.

<sup>211</sup> Tablighi Jamaat activities expanded rapidly under Maulana Yusuf both in the subcontinent and abroad. The acceptance could be gauged by the attendance of followers in TJ's annual congregations held in Raiwind (Pakistan), Tungi (Bangladesh), or in Bhopal (India). See Barbara D. Metcalf, "Travelers' Tales in the Tablighi Jama'at," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, no. 1 (2003): 136-148.

<sup>212</sup> See Alexander Horstmann, "The Tablighi Jama'at, Transnational Islam, and the Transformation of the Self between Southern Thailand and South Asia," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 26-40.

<sup>213</sup> Tablighi Jamaat is known in the US and Canada for organizing large gatherings. In 1988 TJ's Chicago convention drew more than 6,000 people and, in Toronto, it drew not less than 4,000 people in 1997. See Amina Mohammad-Arif, *Salam America: South Asian Muslims in New York* (London: Anthem Press, 2002).

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-184.

<sup>215</sup> For TJ's alleged ties with jihad and terrorism, see, for example, Alex Alexiev, "Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad's Stealthy Legions," *Middle East Quarterly* XII, no. 1 (Winter 2005). Also see Daniel Friedman, "Tablighi Jamaat Dossier," *Center for Policing Terrorism* (May 12, 2005). The author cautioned in the dossier that TJ is "neither harmless nor malign."

investigators tracked a group of TJ activists in the northeastern state of Tripura<sup>216</sup> and interrogated them for any clues or ties with Islamic militants across the border, in Bangladesh. The Tablighis were originally from Maharashtra in western India. The security agencies tried to find out why they had been staying in the village close to the international border and coming from such a far flung state. In the aftermath, security forces deployed in the northeastern part of the country confirmed that many Islamic militants and criminals are active in that part of the country. These militants operate in the guise of TJ activists and travel frequently across the border to Nepal and Bangladesh, as it is always easy to get travel permits when in a preaching group. However, the question remains unanswered if those detained were real Tablighis or undercover militants, and also if TJ has ever facilitated these “terror travels” or missions across the border. With its stature as a “movement-sans-frontiers,” there is every chance that, unknowingly, TJ might have helped to procure travel documents for real militant elements.

There is no doubt that Islamic militants do participate in the Tabligh’s activities, perhaps for learning or imbibing Islamic ethos and practices. However, examples of leaflets circulated by the terrorist group Al-Salafiyah al-Jihadiyah, Morocco, would be best suited here to substantiate the doubt. Moroccan authorities have said on record that al-Jihadiyah urged their members to join Islamic organizations such TJ, in order “to hide their identity.”<sup>217</sup> Counter-terror investigations in India and Pakistan show in the recent past the militants’ proximity to the movement. Following the arrest of Indian-born terror suspects Kafeel and Sabeel Ahmed<sup>218</sup> in the failed terror plots in the United Kingdom in July 2007, Syed Anzar Shah Qasmy, a senior member of TJ and a priest at the Masjid-e-Noorani, Bangalore, carefully admitted to their alleged TJ linkage and influence. According to Qasmy, since TJ followers are asked to give up material things and serve Allah, they can be attracted to (militant) ideologies peddled in the name of Allah. He further added that, “Youngsters following the Tablighi Jamaat are vulnerable to any outside influence spread in the name of Allah, may it be terrorism or anything else.”<sup>219</sup>

### *The Ahle Hadith in India*

Similar to the Tablighi Jamaat, the Ahle Hadith (AH, also Ahle Hadees) has been influential in the subcontinent with active ties with Saudi Wahhabis and strong diaspora links. Literally meaning the “People of the Tradition of the Prophet,” AH is called *ghair muqallid* (non-conformist) by rival Islamic movements, mostly due to the movement’s non-conformism to any of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali) or the commentaries and legal opinions based on them.

Ahle Hadith, which challenged the customary Indian Islamic ethos and associated practices, was founded by Sayyid Nazir, who belonged to a family of judges who practiced at the Mughal court.

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<sup>216</sup> “Islamic preachers in India’s northeast questioned over role in train bombings,” *Khaleej Times*, July 18, 2006, [www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/subcontinent/2006/July/subcontinent\\_July639.xml&section=subcontinent&col](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/subcontinent/2006/July/subcontinent_July639.xml&section=subcontinent&col).

<sup>217</sup> Alexiev, “Tablighi Jamaat.”

<sup>218</sup> “Glasgow terror plot: Sabeel, Kafeel members of fundamentalist sect,” *Indo Asian News Service*, July 6, 2007.

<sup>219</sup> “Why Tabligh men answer terror call,” *Daily News and Analysis*, July 10, 2007. Of late, TJ has come under scathing attacks from Hindu hardliners in India for their alleged links with terrorism in the country which has forced the movement as a whole to introduce some organizational reforms, e.g., background checks of new activists. This is coupled with media highlights of TJ’s influence over Muslim youths in the Western world and the movement’s suspected links with terror masterminds in India. Following the Godhra train burning in 2002, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, along with other right-wing organizations, called for public discussion on Islamic *madrassas*, and TJ’s and Darul Uloom Deoband’s activities. They also demanded the proscription of five Muslim organizations including the Students Islamic Movement of India, Jamaat-i-Islami Hind and the TJ for their suspected involvement in anti-India activities. However, these claims have been refuted by Muslim bodies and TJ followers.

Most of AH's followers came from the higher strata of society in the initial years of its formation.<sup>220</sup> Although not as widespread in India as TJ, this revivalist group grew as a major Islamic movement in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Middle Eastern countries over the years. Ahle Hadith had its origins in early nineteenth century north India. The movement has inspired personalities like Sayyid Ahmed, the pioneer of the Barelvi movement. The founders of AH insisted that Muslims must go back to the original sources of their faith, the Quran and the Hadith. Largely, members of AH launched the movement for reviving Islam on the basis of its fundamental principles.<sup>221</sup>

The Jamiat Ahle Hadith Hind, though founded in 1906, regained stature as a major Islamic movement in the 1950s under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Ahab Arvin. The Jamiat was founded with a view to propagate the Islamic message and to motivate Muslims to adhere to the "pristine" monotheism (*tawhid*).<sup>222</sup> Presently, it has branches in almost 20 states in India with its headquarters in the walled city of Delhi.<sup>223</sup>

Ahle Hadith propagates openly the doctrine of jihad in India, however, under special circumstances. According to AH, jihad can be invoked when and where the Islamic community is facing hardships and tyranny.

In southern India, AH inspired among others, the Mujahid Students Movement (MSM) in the state of Kerala in the early 1970s which emerged as a student wing of the Kerala Nadvathul Mujahedeen (KNM), the Salafi group active in Kerala with Gulf ties. Initially a part of the Ittihad Subbanul Mujahedeen (ISM), the youth wing of KNM, MSM engages in Islamic *da'wa* and propagates Islamic ideals and principles among the student community in Kerala and facilitates deliberations on Islam.<sup>224</sup> It also has branches in Gulf countries along with Indian *Islahi* centers in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait. Recently, Indian *Islahi* centers have been established in other large cities in India.

This movement is presently active and widespread in Pakistan through nearly 17 affiliated organizations, including the Markazi Jami'at Ahle Hadith (est. 1948). The Markazi even has a center in Small Heath, Birmingham (UK) with mass followings and a branch in India. Ahle Hadith is not apolitical and many of the followers of this movement have actively participated in politics and aim to restore the Caliphate. With a massive presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, many AH groups are involved in the Kashmir armed struggle and are affiliated with Kashmir-centric militant outfits such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Harkat-ul Mujahedeen.

The Indian Ahle Hadith has been under the influence of the Saudi Salafi movement and petrodollars have evidently played a significant role in changing the followers so much that many of them prefer to call themselves Salafis, rather than Ahle Hadith in order to stress their closeness with the Saudis. The early AH was evidently a progressive movement in many ways. But presently, partly due to the Saudi connection, sections of the movement are growing increasingly reactionary, raising minor issues of differences with other Muslim sects (e.g., TJ and Barelvis) in order to condemn them.

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<sup>220</sup> See, Peter B. Clarke, *New Religions in Global Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006), 259.

<sup>221</sup> Yoginder Sikand, "Stoking the Flames: Intra-Muslim Rivalries in India and the Saudi Connection," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 95-108.

<sup>222</sup> Tawhid acknowledges the unity of God. It is all-inclusive, implying that nothing exists outside of God. This term originated from the word *wahhada*, meaning to make, declare or acknowledge oneness.

<sup>223</sup> Author's interaction with AH scholars in Delhi and Kolkata in July 2008. For more information on its activities, visit the official website of Markazi Jamiat Ahle Hadith Hind, [www.ahlehadees.org](http://www.ahlehadees.org).

<sup>224</sup> Mammoth Mujahid conference in Kerala, *The Milli Gazette*, January 16-31, 2004. For details of this AH inspired movement and Gulf-wide network, see the official website of the Mujahid Students Movement, [www.msmkerala.org](http://www.msmkerala.org).

Ahle Hadith has been blamed for the growing intra-Muslim sectarian strife in India in recent years.<sup>225</sup> It is observed that AH has been instrumental in fuelling intra-Muslim rivalries and reinforcing negative stereotypes about non-Muslims. Ahle Hadith even issues directives to its followers to stop visiting Sufi shrines, not to use amulets and even not to listen to Sufi music. Ahle Hadith has been producing literature targeting other Muslim sects too. The funds for these activities are evidently coming from their Saudi patrons. As a result of the increasing divides within AH and for its sectarian tendencies, the real problems of the community—education, communalism, poverty and so on—are being sidelined as they fight over petty issues of ritual or doctrinal differences.<sup>226</sup>

The AH seat of power, Ahle Hadis Jami'a Salafia of Benares, has been under intelligence monitoring for receiving funds from Saudi charities (e.g. Al Rashid Trust) which has also been generous to the Markaz-ul Dawa al-Irshad, Lashkar-e-Toiba's parent body in Pakistan. Investigations into the recent terror attacks in Gujarat and Rajasthan revealed that religious groups like AH and TJ have virtually filled the cramped *bastis* (ghettos) providing basic amenities to woo Muslims to their religious discourses regularly. One estimate shows that about 200 *madrassas* have cropped up in the Shah-e-Alam area of Ahmadabad alone since 2002.<sup>227</sup> And many AH and TJ followers have turned to the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI, discussed below) and are suspected to be involved in the newly emerged Indian Mujahedeen outfit with the sole aim of "Indianizing" the Islamic militancy in the country.

It is observed that Ahle Hadith has been instrumental in fuelling intra-Muslim rivalries and reinforcing negative stereotypes about non-Muslims.

## Islamist Ideology: The Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamaat-i-Islami Hind

In contrast to TJ and other pietistic movements, the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), originally based on a political Islamist ideology, emerged in the last decade of British rule in India. In contrast to all previous Islamic movements in India, JI was the first organized political Islamic reformist movement, and came into existence in August 1941 in Lahore under the leadership of Syed Abul Ala Maududi.<sup>228</sup> Maududi formed JI as an alternative to both the leading political parties of that time, the Congress Party and the Muslim League, envisioning the supreme purpose of Islam to establish the sovereignty of God on earth or an Islamic state. He argued that the principles and modalities for setting up God's government on earth were spelt out in the Quran and the Hadith.

<sup>225</sup> Yoginder Sikand, *Muslims in India: Contemporary Social and Political Discourses* (New Delhi: Hope India, 2006), 142-143.

<sup>226</sup> See Arshad Amanullah, "Madrasa Reforms in India," *The South Asian*, January 06, 2005, [www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2005/madrassa\\_reforms\\_in\\_india.html](http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2005/madrassa_reforms_in_india.html). Amanullah is an alumnus of the Jami'a Salafia, Benares, Uttar Pradesh, the apex madrasa of the Ahle Hadith in India.

<sup>227</sup> "Radicals woo Ahmadabad's invisible people," *Daily News and Analysis*, September 10, 2008.

<sup>228</sup> Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, "Mawdudi and Jama'at-i-Islami: The Origins, Theory and Practice of Islamic Revivalism," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed Books, 1994), 98-122.

In contrast to TJ's apolitical character, JI propounded Islamic theocracy and gradually became influential in many Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, in West Asia and also in many Southeast Asian countries. One leading scholar has categorized JI with other contemporary Islamic movements (e.g., Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, or the Muslim Brotherhood, in Egypt; the Fazeelat Party in Turkey; and the Masyumi Party in Indonesia) as integrationist,<sup>229</sup> in other words, as seeking to establish an Islamic state through participation in the constitutional political processes.

After the vivisection of the subcontinent, JI responded to the new realities by splitting into two independent organizations. In April 1948, at a meeting in Allahabad, the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind (JIH) was formed with Maulana Abullais Nadwi as its *ameer* (president). The workers of the Jamaat-i-Islami in Jammu & Kashmir chose to remain as an independent organization called Jammu & Kashmir Jamaat-i-Islami.<sup>230</sup> The Indian branch developed its own philosophy in light of the minority status of the Muslim population in a secular socio-political condition. The JIH projects Islam as a practical doctrine and program above all religious practices. Initially JIH focused on the rights of the Muslim community in the country. In due course it encouraged social, spiritual reform and charity among Muslims and abandoned the goal of forming an Islamic state. The Jamaat's original objective to establish "Allah's government" (*hukumat-e-ilahiya*) was replaced with the concept of the establishment of society in conformity with the *shari'a* (*iqamat-e-deen*), although scholars believe that the replacement was more terminological than substantive-ideological.<sup>231</sup>

However, JIH spearheaded the fight for Muslim identity in India whereas its sister organizations in Pakistan and Bangladesh retained their political ambition and continued to work on that path until recently. While JIH supports secularism, its Pakistani counterpart labels secularism as an "unmitigated evil" and as the worst enemy of Islam. In sharp contrast, the J&K Jamaat's stand is quite on the line of the Pakistani Jamaat's agenda as it goes on denouncing Indian authority over the state and is presently part of the separatist Huriyat Conference and quite subdued as an independent movement. The J&K wing had tried its hand in politics, forming an alliance with the Muslim United Front to achieve poll success. Failure in that effort gave birth to the most lethal and highly organized militant outfit in Kashmir, Hizbul Mujahideen. The J&K wing of the Jamaat largely believes in Islam-inspired political mobilization and advocates the establishment of Nizam-e-Mustafa in accordance with Maududi's idea.<sup>232</sup>

The impact of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was quite visible on both JIH and J&K Jamaats when their respective student wings (SIMI and Jamaat-i-Tulaba of Kashmir) called for an Iranian type Islamic revolution in India. However, their efforts were thwarted by the swift government action.<sup>233</sup> Overwhelmed by the success of the Iranian revolution, the Indian Jamaat supported another Islamic icon in neighboring Pakistan. Jamaat-i-Islami Hind was supportive of Zia ul-Haq's agenda of establishing God's rule in Pakistan and overtly critical of pro-democratic forces

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<sup>229</sup> Kamran Asghar Bokhari, "Jihad & Jihadism: A Rendition of Transnational Militant Non-State Actors" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 04, 2004).

<sup>230</sup> Until 1952, the J & K Jamaat was under the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind. But, due to the disputed status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, JIH decided to separate the Kashmir wing as an independent body. For further details, see Yoginder Sikand, "The Emergence and Development of the Jama'at-i-Islami of Jammu and Kashmir (1940s-1990)," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2002): 723.

<sup>231</sup> Noted in Irfan Ahmad, "Between moderation and radicalization: transnational interactions of Jamaat-e-Islami of India," *Global Networks* 5, no. 3 (2005): 284.

<sup>232</sup> Jagmohan Malhotra, *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2006), 177.

<sup>233</sup> The Indian government reportedly sent back foreign delegates including dignitaries immediately after they landed at the airport. The government also deployed the army during the Jamaat's 1982 popular movements in J&K.

including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's family members in that country. As per JIH, Zia was working not only for Pakistan's stability, but for the unity of the Muslim world.<sup>234</sup>

Gradually, JIH structured itself like the Hindu right-wing organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and refrained from direct political participation, but continued to work closely with secular and other regional Islamic political parties like the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen. It became the key interventionist force in India to fight for Muslim identity. More or less, it followed a relatively flexible Maududi model to suit Indian conditions. At present, JIH has become the main platform for Indian Muslims to air grievances. The Indian *Mujahedeen* email manifestos shed some light on its objectives: to spread Islam in India, to wage jihad against the "infidels" and to establish "God's government" according to Quranic tenets.<sup>235</sup>

Jamaat-i-Islami Hind now has countrywide units with over 6,000 members undertaking a two-pronged program: 1) dispelling the doubts and misgivings about Islam that exist in the minds of non-Muslims, and 2) refining the Muslims as a community. Jamaat-i-Islami Hind has active women and girls units and a student organization, the Students Islamic Organization (SIO). Students Islamic Organization members have participated in conventions organized by the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and the student body has a well established network operating in the global sphere. Evidently, JIH's influence has reached Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia, in due course of time.

In the 1970s, JIH had reportedly developed close links with the Gulf countries when thousands of Indian Muslims migrated to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries for livelihood, mostly in the field of construction. The contribution of Mohammad Yusuf, the *ameer* of JIH in the 1970s, to build strong ties with Saudi Arabia is well documented. Jamaat-i-Islami Hind's transnational reach and influence came to light during the movement's Hyderabad convention in 1981 where Islamic activists from Saudi Arabia,<sup>236</sup> Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates attended the convention.

Beyond the Gulf countries, JI successfully influenced immigrant Muslims in the US to establish the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) in the 1960s. The main objective behind the formation of ICNA was to teach and guide Muslims to live according to Islam. Even today South Asians (including Indian Muslims) are still a majority in ICNA with Urdu as the main language for debate and communication.<sup>237</sup> It is well established now that JIH and other regional Jamaats (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal) get financial support from ICNA, Muslim Aid and the Islamic Foundation (UK) to carry out their activities in their respective countries. The symbiotic relationship among the various Jamaats in South Asia can be ascertained from the Pakistani Jamaat's clearly laid out facts about its ties with other regional Jamaats including JIH extending full moral and material support for their cause.

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<sup>234</sup> Noted in M.S. Agwani, *Islamic Fundamentalism in India*, 96-97.

<sup>235</sup> For a detail analysis on IM as homegrown Jihadi outfit, See, Animesh Roul, "India's Home-Grown Jihadi Threat: A Profile of the Indian Mujahedeen," *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 4 (March 3, 2009).

<sup>236</sup> For a detailed account on the JIH operation in Saudi Arabia, how its circle of members in the Gulf countries functioned directly under the supervision of the JIH headquarters in New Delhi, and how they secretly congregate and disperse during special dinners, see, Irfan Ahmed, "Between moderation and radicalization," 279-299.

<sup>237</sup> Amina Mohammad-Arif, *Salam America*, 170-172.

## Militant Islamic Networks in India: The Case of the Students Islamic Movement of India

Islamic principles are always important for militant Islamists who believe that these should be followed as a guide for all walks of life. The militants used to call for an Islamic state with the strict applications of *shari'a* and sometimes follow the path of violence to safeguard their utopian space. In India, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), the JIH's erstwhile student wing, can be identified as a militant Islamic movement with transregional reach and influence.

Students Islamic Movement of India was founded in 1977 at the University of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, as a radical student outfit. The interlinked triad of the *ummah*, caliphate and jihad determined SIMI's postures and activities in the country thereafter—the group's logo includes a Quran, an AK-47 assault rifle and a globe. Students Islamic Movement of India started as a united platform for Muslim students and youth in the country,<sup>238</sup> with the objective to restore the Caliphate for the unity of the *ummah* by rejecting the concept of nationalism, secularism and

Islam, SIMI believes, has laid down a complete code of conduct for Muslims to follow, with detailed rules regulating such private matters as dress and food habits as well as collective affairs such as politics, economics and international relations.

democracy. The group's aim was to establish Dar-ul-Islam (land of Islam) by using violence, if necessary, to convert non-Muslims.

The group's ideological inspirations were derived from Muslim thinkers who had launched Islamic movements in the subcontinent in the past, e.g. Shah Waliyu'llah, Sayyid Ahmad and Haji Shariat Allah and Maududi. Students Islamic Movement of India was deeply inspired by Maududi's goal to make Islam the supreme organizing principle for the social and political life of the Muslim community as a whole through the concepts of *iqamat-i-deen* and *hukumat-i-ilahiya*. In its annual report, SIMI reiterated these tenets urging Muslim youths to struggle for

the revival of Islam in the light of the Quran and Sunna.<sup>239</sup>

The first decade of SIMI's existence was dominated by JIH's leadership. However, owing to internal differences, and increasing radicalism within the cadres of SIMI, JIH had disassociated itself from the group by establishing another parallel student Islamic body, the SIO. Nevertheless, the success of the Islamic Revolution had impacted SIMI's optimism for an Islamic state to a larger extent.

As an Islamic movement, SIMI undertakes missionary activities especially among non-Muslims, trying to impress them with its own version of Islam. It operates essentially through

<sup>238</sup> Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 208.

<sup>239</sup> Students Islamic Movement of India's publication, "The Saga of Struggle," has been quoted in R. Upadhyay, "Students Islamic Movement of India," Paper no. 825, *South Asia Analysis Group*, October 30, 2003, [www.southasiaanalysis.org](http://www.southasiaanalysis.org).

personal networks, meetings, and conferences as well as the numerous magazines that it publishes in English as well as several Indian languages. Similar to TJ, SIMI too sees Islam as a complete worldview and ideology, governing every aspect of a Muslim's personal as well as collective life. Islam, SIMI believes, has laid down a complete code of conduct for Muslims to follow, with detailed rules regulating such private matters as dress and food habits as well as collective affairs such as politics, economics and international relations.<sup>240</sup>

According to SIMI, a true Muslim cannot lead his life in accordance with Islam in a pluralist, secular society which is un-Islamic. Thus, an organized struggle to establish the Islamic state is largely imperative and is a duty for each Muslim.<sup>241</sup> Students Islamic Movement of India also believes in jihad and is ready to wage jihad against nonbelievers and whoever puts hurdles in the path of the struggle for establishing the Caliphate. Gradually, SIMI's adoption of the Quran, jihad and *shahadat* (martyrdom) as its constitution, path and desire respectively branded it as a radical and violent outfit.

In the early 1990s, SIMI activists were indoctrinated by Pakistan's ISI and travelled far and wide to garner support. The outfit convened an *Ikhwanul* (Muslim Brotherhood) conference in Kanpur city in October 1999 which was attended by around 20,000 people including Sheikh Yaseen (Hamas), Qazi Hussain Ahmed (JI, Pakistan) and the imam of the al Aqsa mosque. In 2001, SIMI again convened a mass conclave in Mumbai, especially for Muslim youths. It was here that SIMI urged fellow Indian Muslims to launch an armed jihad in India with the establishment of an Islamic caliphate as the goal. The SIMI network is actively involved in conversion in the southwestern states of India.

Students Islamic Movement of India has operational ties with many militant student bodies including the Saudi Arabian Jamayyatul Ansar (JA) and Bangladesh's Islamic Chhatra Shibir, Jamiat-e-Talaba of Pakistan, and Ittehad al-Tallab al-Muslimeen of Myanmar. The Saudi Arabia-based JA is mostly comprised of SIMI activists, primarily expatriate Indian Muslims. The ideological affinity with Hamas was revealed by SIMI's financial secretary Salim Sajid following his arrest in June 2002.<sup>242</sup> According to Sajid, Hamas's former spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yasin had endorsed the "freedom struggle" in India's Jammu and Kashmir state and the reconstruction of the demolished Babri Masjid in Uttar Pradesh.

Besides ideological support, financial aid too comes from these sources. In addition, SIMI has always kept ties floating with the Jamaats in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Among other sources of funding, the role of WAMY in Riyadh and the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations based in Kuwait are well established. Even the US-based Consultative Committee of Indian Muslims supported SIMI in its transnational Islamic activities.<sup>243</sup> Additionally, Kashmir-

In the early 1990s, SIMI activists were indoctrinated by Pakistan's ISI and travelled far and wide to garner support.

<sup>240</sup> Yoginder Sikand, "Countering Fundamentalism: Beyond the Ban on SIMI," *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 6, 2001, 3803.

<sup>241</sup> Yoginder Sikand, "The Perils of Islamist Radicalism: The Students Islamic Movement of India," *Qalandar: Islam and Interfaith Relations in South Asia* (February 2005).

<sup>242</sup> Animesh Roul, "Students Islamic Movement of India: A Profile," *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 7 (April 6, 2006).

<sup>243</sup> "SIMI has extensive pan-Islamic links," *The Hindu*, September 28, 2001.

centric Pakistani terrorist outfits like Hizbul Mujahedeen, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad have had strong logistical and operational ties with SIMI. In late 2002, Maharashtra police seized as many as 30 compact discs containing speeches of Maulana Masood Azhar, chief of Jaish-e-Muhammad, along with clippings of communal riots in Gujarat from SIMI offices in Aurangabad.

Students Islamic Movement of India's pro-Taliban stance in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the group's anti-U.S. demonstrations in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, and SIMI's glorification of Osama bin Laden as the "ultimate jihadi" prompted the Indian government to impose a ban on the group in 2001. After the government proscription, SIMI operated closely with the Hyderabad-based Tehreek Tahaffuz-e-Shair-e-Islam and the radical Islamic vigilante outfit, the Darsqah Jihad-o-Shahadat ("Institute for Holy War and Martyrdom") which has countrywide centers teaching self-defense training to Muslim youths and aims to make the Quran the constitution of India. Students Islamic Movement of India also operated through the Islamic Youth Front in Kerala and the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam. Intelligence agencies have established SIMI's involvement in major terrorist strikes in India and believe that the outfit has created the country's first homegrown terror network called the Indian *Mujahedeen* (IM). The Indian Mujahedeen email manifestos shed some light on its objectives: to spread Islam to India, to wage jihad against the "infidels" and to establish "God's government" according to Quranic tenets.<sup>244</sup>

Students Islamic Movement of India attempts to indoctrinate youths by convincing them to fight for Islam. To accomplish this goal, SIMI uses provocative audio/video clippings which selectively depict the atrocities committed against Muslims from Gujarat to Kashmir and from Bosnia to Afghanistan. What was started as a student movement, SIMI has become a major radical Islamist movement in due course with a strong presence in most of the northern and southern states of India. Students Islamic Movement of India, along with other militant outfits, has jointly carried out many terrorist acts including the September 13, 2008 serial blasts in Delhi and multiple explosions in Ahmedabad and Jaipur as well as blasts in Uttar Pradesh courts in the recent past.<sup>245</sup>

## Contestations among Indian Islamic Movements

Contrary to popular perceptions, most Islamic movements do not strive for the greater unity of Muslims (the so called Ummatic notion of Islam), even if they find consensus at times, especially when Islam is perceived to be under attack. In India at least, there is no unanimity among Muslims about various facets of Islam. Indian Muslims are as divided as followers of other religious groups and most of the Islamic movements thrive within India's polarized political environment. There is ample degree of animosity and competition among various groups to dominate each other. The sectarian rift is visible as Deobandis are in conflict with Sunni-Sufi centric movements, such as the Barelvis, when it comes to Islamic practice and observances. However, unlike in Pakistan, in India these two movements have never confronted one another with violence or killings.

Similarly, the ties between TJ and Ahle Sunnat, affiliated to the Barelvi tradition, are not cordial and followers of these movements often clash with each other. A significant development took place in Gujarat in early 2002 when TJ became embroiled in a confrontation with the dominant Ahl-e-Sunnat wal'Jamaat leadership over mosque holdings. The Ahl-e-Sunnat wal'Jamaat is

<sup>244</sup> For a detailed analysis on IM as a homegrown Jihadi outfit, see Animesh Roul, "India's Home-Grown Jihadi Threat: A Profile of the Indian Mujahedeen," *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 4 (March 3, 2009).

<sup>245</sup> "SC extends ban on SIMI for alleged terrorist activities," *IBN Live*, October 13, 2008.

a Barelvi organization, and is opposed to Islamic groups affiliated to the Deoband and Salafi traditions, including TJ. Gradually, with an increasing support base, TJ started dominating the Islamic landscape in Gujarat by establishing new mosques, *maktabs* and *madrassas*, carrying out regular travel and preaching activities. One estimate shows that in Gujarat alone, TJ has taken over 80 percent of the mosques previously run by the Ahl-e-Sunnat wal’Jamaat. These are not isolated events but systematic execution of plans for TJ’s expansion. To outpace the Ahl-e-Sunnat wal’Jamaat and other Sunni-Sufi sects who have been influential in rural pockets, TJ/Deoband has been evidently trying to broaden their support structure in rural and semi-urban areas and TJ is overtly instrumental in doing so.

However, to counter the spread and power of TJ, another Barelvi Islamic movement, Dawat-e-Islami (DeI), took root in the India in the early 1980s and consolidated its position rather strongly to restrict TJ’s influence in the region with a wide network of *madrassas* in Pakistan. The Indian branch reshaped its activities after splitting with the DeI’s parent body based in Karachi in 1992, following the first annual DeI congregation. With the same objective of countering TJ in India, the Sunni Dawat-e-Islami (SDI) came into being as an independent, apolitical and purely religious movement with headquarters in Mumbai and Preston, UK.<sup>246</sup> Sunni Dawat-e-Islami largely follows TJ with regular weekly and annual congregations, unified dress code and regular *dawra* (educational visits), and also through establishing SDI *madrassas* around the country. These *madrassas* are established with funds from the Ibad-ur-Rahman Trust, Manchester, and the World Memon Organization (WMO).<sup>247</sup>

### *Confrontation with the Ahle Hadith*

There is an inherent tendency of sectarianism within AH as it rejects many common Islamic practices such as postures in congregational prayers. Also, AH rejects Sufism.<sup>248</sup> While the Deobandi school and Barelvis confront each other on issues such as religious space and rituals, both these movements have been critical about AH’s worldview. Due to AH’s rigid nonconformist ideology and practice, its adherents are subjected to social boycott in some places in India and the *ulema* of the Deoband and Barelvi groups never hesitate to issue *fatwas* against AH, terming AH followers as “allies of the devil.” Evidently, the ultra-conservative Gorba faction of AH is considered to be the ideological inspiration behind the militant form of Islam in India. In 1985, this Gorba faction called for an organized Muslim armed resistance in the country to counter all communal violence, questioning the legitimacy of the Indian state. Both the Deoband school and TJ had kept distance from this reactionary position that time.

## Conclusion

The above discussion of Indian Islamic movements and networks points to one common factor—all these movements are centered around the religious aspects of Islam, with varied

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<sup>246</sup> The SDI movement led by Moulana Mohammed Shakir Noori has been spreading to various parts of the world, under the guidance of the scholars of the Ahl-e-Sunnat wal’Jamaat. Besides India and the UK, it is emerging as a major challenge to TJ in the US, Canada, Africa, Portugal and Saudi Arabia. For SDI’s activities, see the movement’s official website, [www.sunnidawateislami.net](http://www.sunnidawateislami.net). About the SDI’s confrontation with TJ and Deobandi *ulema*, see, for example, Thomas K. Gugler, “Public Religiosity and the Symbols of the Super Muslim: Sunnah and Sunnaization in Muslim Faith Movements from South Asia,” *Third Frame: Literature, Culture and Society* 1, no. 3, (July-September, 2008): 43-60.

<sup>247</sup> The Memon diaspora connection is helpful to SDI as a counterweight to the TJ’s Gujarati trader networks. See, Gugler, “Public Religiosity and the Symbols of the Super Muslim,” 55.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. Also see M. Azam Qasmi, “Sufism and the Founders of Deoband,” 357.

degrees of socio-political orientations. At the socio-political level, Deobandis and JIH have been playing a leading role in fighting for the rights of Muslims in India, whereas TJ and AH have been spearheading religious fervor among the Indian Muslims. In contrast, SIMI has been taking a different path altogether with the strong but quiet support of most of these Islamic institutions. Another commonality that surfaced is these movements' search for a unique Muslim identity in India. The rise of Hindu fervor and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 put an already vulnerable and impoverished Indian Muslim community on the defensive, causing many Indian Muslims to draw increasingly closer towards their religion in search for relief. Through strict observance of the fundamental rituals of Islam, the Tablighs and AH attempt to create a gulf between Muslims and people of other religions in India, especially Hindus.

One important aspect that one can easily be witnessed is that most of the activist oriented

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Islamic movements, be they the Tablighis or AH, have gained considerable success not only in India but in other countries as well with substantial patronage in terms of funding and other support from their Arab and Pakistani counterparts and from the ever expanding Muslim diaspora. Of course, there are triggering factors that encouraged the movements in India, e.g., the Islamic Revolution or the existing rift between Hindu and Muslims. However, the existing ideological differences among these Islamic movements and the inherent

squabbling have resulted in diluting the Islamic power structure in India.

The conflicts that surround different Islamic movements have neither helped Muslims to reach consensus as to what should be the ideals of the religion or how improvements can be brought out to strengthen the community in the Indian setting. Due to this reason, perhaps, there is not a single and strong Muslim political or religious grouping in India. The newly founded Sunni Dawat-e-Islam has challenged TJ's growth and has substantially curtailed the TJ's influence on Indian Muslims.

These inherent differences have jeopardized two things which would retard the future growth of Islam in India and beyond: the larger Islamic goal of building a community of believers in the immediate future and the institutionalization of Islam in various facets of public life, especially in a minority political setting. However, the changing Islamic political landscape in neighboring Bangladesh and Pakistan, where terrorist outfits have political parties with overt ties to transnational movements and networks (e.g., Jamaat-i-Islami and Harkat-ul Jihadi Islami), and the resurgent Islamic violence in the region will likely dictate the future trajectories of transnational Islam in India.