

Darul Ulum Deoband Movement: Anti-imperialist Struggle, Conventional Religious Education and Stance on Nationalism

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Abstract

South Asian Muslims reacted in a variety of ways to the British occupation of India and the resulting socio-cultural and institutional reforms initiated by the government then. The Muslims saw the British attempts to instill modernism in Indian societies as a political and cultural challenge. Unlike Muslim ideologues such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-18), who launched the Aligarh Movement with a progressive and loyalist approach, the exponents of the Deoband Movement demonstrated militant resistance to British imperialism and attempted to reform society along orthodox lines by adhering to their religious dogmas. Nonetheless, they later modernized their educational institutions and appeared to be one of the dominant sets of Islam, making seminary the second leading religious academic institution in the Muslim World. This paper goes into political environment of South Asia which instigated the Muslim theologians launch anti-imperialist struggle against British raj and they formed Deoband Madrasah. It discusses and examines the vision, ideology and philosophy of this school of thought to reform Muslim society facing a severe political decline and economic predicament. It also evaluates the political ideology of Deoband movement as to composite nationalism and its endorsement of the coexistence of various religious communities or that of the Muslim separatism in India. It also sheds light on how it by developing a network and making collaboration with Jamiat Ulama-e Hind and Tablighi Jamaat, appeared to be one of Islam's great strand of Islam. This discourse is constructed using descriptive, analytical, and critical methodologies.

Keywords: British Colonialism, South Asia, Conventional Religious Education, Militancy, Nationalism.

Introduction

The far-reaching political changes occurred in India in the middle of 19th Century CE: the British East India Company crushed the uprising of annoying Indian people in 1857, the subcontinent became a dominion of Great Britain, and the Mughal Empire got vanished in the wake of that violent conflict. The Muslims of South Asia bore the brunt of these upheavals. After taking power, the British began the process of reforming the political, administrative, and educational structures in accordance with modern ideals that had evolved in Europe due to the Renaissance movement which was followed by various socio-political revolutions. The response of India's degenerated Muslim society to British colonization and the introduction of modernity was multifaceted. The Muslim ideologue Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) attempted to reform Muslim society by establishing educational institutions and writing discernable literature advocating liberalism, progressivism, rational thinking and the loyalty towards the British Raj. Contrary to these developments, the some of the ulema associated with Deoband Madrasah showed militant resistance towards British imperialism in India and disliking the modernity remained assertive on departing traditional religious educations to the Muslim masses. Over the course of history, the structure of educational institutions this movement evolved on modern English bureaucratic style and attracted the student from all over South Asia, which helped it prevail as one of the major offshoots of Islam and this seminary has emerged as the second largest institution imparting religious education in the Muslim World, after Al-Azhar University, which was established in 975 CE in Cairo, Egypt, by the fourth Caliph Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (r. 953-975 CE) belonging to the Fatimid dynasty.

The reformist traditions and political philosophy of Deoband movement has attracted the attentions of the scholar, journalists and researchers not only in the Islamic world but outside it as well. Since the Taliban and countless other violent groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan are believed to be the most infamous disciples of this same school of thought, there is a growing desire among academic, religious, and political forums in the modern period to comprehend Deoband and its teachings in the aftermath of 9/11. The current study, on the other hand, aims to analyze the origins of the Darul Ulum Deoband Movement and how it inspired the common Muslim masses of South Asian region during the British Raj. It explains the causes that lead to the Deoband Movement being one of the largest sects in the Islamic/ Muslim world. It investigates and explains the sociopolitical difficulties that prompted the formation of Darul Ulum Deoband. The influence of the movement on the social structure of the Muslim community, its political ideology and actions, its connections and strategy to reach and convince the public, and its interaction with the colonial power, the British Raj, are some of the other subjects addressed by the current research.

Raison d'être of the Foundation and Underlying Organization of Darul Ulum Deoband Movement and Madrasah

In precolonial India, the educational institutions were designated as maktab or madrasah were supported by both the courts and the class of aristocrats. Theologians, leading Sufis, and qazi (Islamic jurists) were mostly rewarded with jagirs (land grants) or other types of gifts in exchange for the services they delivered by the Sultans of Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Emperors, rulers of the princely states and aristocrats.¹ In his book *Faithful Education: Madrasahs in South Asia* (2008), Ali Riaz says about the growth of madrasahs during the Mughal era that there were two major reasons which led to foundation and organization of educational institutions given patronage by the Mughal Emperors, particularly in the sixteenth century CE. First, it was the relatively increased political stability stemming out of the absorption of authority at a single point which resulted in a centralized administration and bureaucratic structure. Secondly, the mounting influence of the ulema as the leading religious authorities in comparison to the Sufis.² The madrasahs, however, were patronized and respected by both the emperors and the common people.

Under both the Sultans of Delhi Sultanate as well as Mughal Emperors, the education spread among the people through those institutions was in the manner introduced by comparable institutes in the rest of the Muslim World, namely the Middle East and Central Asia. There were no western-style courses, but pupils were required to take an oath of fealty to the teacher. There were no formal classrooms, syllabus, or system of evaluating students' progress at those institution. Until the recent times, several religious academic institutions in South Asia followed this style, the celebrated Firangi Mahal at Lucknow is one of its glaring example.

The British after attaining crushing the rebellion in 1857 reacted harshly towards mutineers.³ The British Raj's fury was especially felt by Muslims; hundreds of Muslim mutineers were put to death, and numerous masques and madrasahs were harshly punished or burnt. The Mughal Empire had officially crumbled, and the Madrasahs and education of Muslim students in Delhi had suffered greatly as well. Because of such perilous trends, the funding and growth of Madrasahs has suffered greatly. Under such circumstances, the Chhatta Mosque of Deoband commenced courses in 1866 with just one teacher, Mullah Mahmud (d. 1886), and one student, Mahmud Hasan Deobandi (1851-1920), who later on commanded this Madrasah and acquired fame as Shaykh al-Hind for his religious services for the Indian Muslims.⁴ The prominent individuals who are acknowledged and revered as the founders of madrasah-e Deoband include inter alia: Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1826-1905), Muhammad Yaqub Nanautawi (1833-84), Shah Rafi al-Din (1836-90), Sayyid Muhammad Abid (1834-1912), Zulfiqar Ali (1819-1904),⁵ Fadhl al-Rahman Usmani (1831-1907)⁶ and Muhammad Qasim Nanautwi (1832-80). Shedding the light on the mission and objectives of the Darul Ulum Deoband, Muhammad Moj, in his

enterprise Deoband Marassah Movement: Structural Trends and Tendencies (2017), puts it that since the founders of the madrasah had perceived modernism a menace to Muslim culture and thus intended to preserve it. This task could not be accomplished through establishing merely one madrasah. Therefore, numerous new madaris were established, at first, in the region of Upper Doab, in northern part of India. It was by 1880 that Deoband ulema had established as a minimum fifteen new madaris that had been following model devised by the mother institution at Deoband. They, by the end of the nineteenth century, succeeded in establishing more than fifty madaris in distinct parts of India.⁷

Despite the fact that this Madrasah deviated from traditional religious instruction, it is evident that the madrasah's organization was both visionary and contemporary in various ways. In her study "Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," Barbara Metcalf says that it was a departure from the previous Indian educational system and was strongly organized in the English bureaucratic paradigm. Its instructors were all highly trained experts. The Deoband Madrasah established separate classroom buildings, libraries, reading-rooms and hostels as early as the administration found it possible. It was the first time that a course curriculum and schedule were proposed. The yearly performance evaluation was one such milestone in the history of South Asian Muslim religious educational institutions.⁸

Strategy of Fund Raising and its Implication for the Credibility and Reputation

It was unprecedented in the history of education of South Asian Muslims that practically any academic institution had been founded by common people. Before that, madaris had been relying on merely royal endowments from the monarchs, aristocrats and landowners. An effective implementation of this principle of soliciting funding from the general public appears to have had a considerable impact not just on religious education, but also on various other institutions associated with modern western education such as Aligarh school founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Some veterans of Deoband school of thought such as Maulana Ahmad Ali Saharanpuri (1852-1927), Mualana Mazhar Ali Nanautawi (1823-85), and Maulana Sa'adat Ali Faqih built another Madarsa Mazahir ul Ulum at Saharanpur in 1866, which too followed the same ideological and academic lines. Another notable example of a public donation-based educational institution is Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which was founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khans in 1875 and eventually raised to Aligarh Muslim University in 1920.

Darul Ulum Deoband's public endowment enabled the general people to associate with it more than the organizations previously founded by royal support. People from many walks of life, no matter how large or little, contributed to it. This nonetheless developed a sense of ownership that they had their own institution. Furthermore, this was the reason that ensured that no privileged, affluent, or important individual or

class may meddle in its academic and administrative problems just because of their exceptional social standing. Consequently, only ulema were permitted to administer and govern the madrasah's academic and administrative activities.

Strategies to Make the Religious Education Popular among South Asian Muslims

There is all evident that vernaculars and nomenclature play an important role in deliverance of knowledge, and it is sometimes closely linked to identity development and social position.⁹ This might be the first time that Urdu was used as a lingual medium of imparting education rather than Arabic or Farsi (i.e. Persian), the latter being primarily represented by religious elites and judicial bureaucracy.¹⁰ Using Urdu as a medium of teaching by madrasah administrators was primarily a plan to make theological education understandable and accessible to the general population, since Persian and Arabic had been assumed as the languages of the religious elites and were beyond the intelligibility of the common people who were well-versed in Urdu, a language evolved and developed in South Asia.¹¹

The works written by a renowned Deoband scholars like Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863-1943), are widely regarded as the first theological talks written for the general public, and he used Urdu as his medium of communication when writing them.¹² He published several books including the commentary on the Holy Quran titled Bayan-ul Quran, and Bhahishti Zewer which is a book on everyday routine affairs and mannerism. His works have until now been significant and are considered as guiding-books to be consulted by a vast range of Urdu speaking Muslims living in South Asia as they were unable to grasp 'Arabic texts in the original.' Thus, his works played a huge role in introducing Islamic education to the common Muslim masses of South Asia. Furthermore, Deoband ulema's approach of using Urdu as a means of communication helped extend the language outside of the areas where it originated, such as Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, and Banaras. Considering the educational standards it provides to its pupils, the Muslim community from all over the subcontinent come to learn and continues to show great interest in being a graduate of Darul Uloom, which appropriately emphasizes Urdu as a mode of teaching after Arabic.¹³ This is the very reason that Darul Uloom Deoband's contribution to popularizing Urdu has been significantly far more than that of Aligarh Muslim University.

The Muslim elite allegedly intended to maintain their supremacy by publishing literature and providing instruction solely in Arabic and Persian. Nonetheless, it was the adoption of Urdu as the language of education that allowed the common people of the South Asian Muslim community to be in the limelight and contribute to the promotion of Islamic education; otherwise, the dominance of Arabic language for religious educations gave elitist status to Syeds, Shaikhs, and ulema educated in Middle Eastern and Central religious educational institutions. Adoption of Urdu

language became thus a madrasah tactic to organize backward elements of the Muslim population in South Asia, both politically and educationally. Darul Ulum succeeded in spreading its reformist brand of Islam around the world by creating many madrasahs with similar administrative and pedagogical patterns and vision throughout South Asia and accepting international students.

Theologians of Darul Ulum Deoband and their Confrontation with Imperialist British Raj in India

Since last two decades, the scholars' greatest intriguing concerns regarding Deoband Darul Ulum movement is how politically engaged it was engaged with the British Raj and what type of philosophy it advocated at that time. The Deoband Movement was staunchly opposed to the economic and political hegemony of East India Company and then the British imperialistic oppression in India. Its anti-imperialist political activism can be divided into three stages: 1) its militant activism in the Indian Uprising of 1857; 2) Reshmi Rimal Tehrik [the Silk Letter Movement] to overthrow the British Government from India; and 3) Its entrance into the nationalist politics through the formation of the political party namely Jamiat Ulama-e Hind and by coming into a collaboration with the Indian National Congress.

Founding Father of Deoband Madrasah as the Veterans in First War of Independence 1857

Historians debate the militant engagement of two founding fathers of Darul Ulum Deoband, Qasim Nanautwi (1832-80) and R.A. Gangohi (1826-1905) in the War of Independence in 1857. In his undertaking Tarikh-e Darul Ulum Deoband [History of Darul Ulum Deoband], Maulana Muhammad Tayyab venerates the jihadist service of these notable founders of Darul Ulum Deoband.¹⁴ They fought a battle against British East India Company under the command of their instructor, Imdadullah Muhajir Makki (1817-99). British troops were defeated by these insurgents in the town of Shamli in Muzaffarnagar. Nonetheless, following the defeat of the insurrection, all of them were captured, tried, and imprisoned. This shows that the proponents of Deoband madrasah were not stoic in the face of subcontinental politics, but rather maintained an anticolonial stance from the start. According to Muhammad Tariq Moj, the Deoband Movement is a continuation of the Shah Wali Allah movement, which sought to create an Islamic state in India.¹⁵

On the other hand, some scholars and researchers, however, argue that Qasim Nanautwi and Rashid Gangohi did not join in violent battle against the British. In his essay "The Proof of Islam: Shaykh Qasim al-Nanotwi," published online on the website of Darul Ulum Deoband, Mawolana 'Abd al-Hayy al-Hasani expresses that Qasim Nanautwi's rebellion against the British was only an allegation. He therefore expresses that when India's a great civil war broke in 1273 H, the British put an accusation on Shaykh Qasim Nanutawi of insurrection against the English authority. As a result, he went into hiding for a while. "Then he appeared, and Allah (Glorified

be He) protected him and established his innocence to them.”¹⁶ Similarly, vindicating Rashid Ahmad Gangohi from the accusation of his participation in the war, he in a biographic note titled “The Epitome of Shari’ah and Tariqah: Shaykh Rashid Ahmad al-Gangohi” wrote that:

“He [Rashid Ahmad] then took up teaching in Gangoh and was accused of participating in the rebellion against the English in the year 1276 AH. So, the authorities arrested him and imprisoned him for six-months in the town of Muzaffarnagar. When his innocence became clear, they released him from captivity. He then, for a short time, occupied himself with teaching and imparting knowledge.”¹⁷ Being critical of such details provided by the historians disputing involvement of the legends in the Great Rebellion of 1857, Maulana Muhammad Tayyab remarks that those who tried to conceal their political and jihadist activities did so either out of ignorance or for some other foresighted reason. Their insight, however, is unreasonable, and their ignorance is ludicrous.¹⁸

Following the formation of Darul Ulum, its major exponents and ideologues stayed out of active politics in order to avoid British assault. This was due to a new recognition that the Muslim community needed to be developed first, and then they needed to strive to gain political power from the British colonial domination.

Reshmi Rumal Tehrik [Silk Letter Movement 1913-1923]

Shaykh al-Hind Mahmud Hasan tried to convert the Deoband movement into a militancy by using World War I as an opportunity. On October 9, 1915, he landed in Makkah and met Ghalib Pasha, one of the Ottoman Empire's most powerful governors. The Governor asked him to provide his support to the British Empire. To proclaim his support among Indian Muslims, he composed a lengthy letter instigating the ordinary masses to continue fighting against British imperialism and pledging that they will reclaim power from the oppressors. The Freedom fighters saw the conflict as a free opportunity to attack the basis of British interests. Militant insurgencies against British forces were predicted. Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi as a delegate of Shaykh al-Hind Maulana Mahmud Hasan moved on to Kabul, whereas he himself relocated to Arabia.¹⁹

Maulana Sindhi penned a letter to Mahmud Hasan, who was residing in Arabia, informing him about his action-plan and revolutionary activities in Kabul, as well as the working of the exiled revolutionaries for liberation of India. He also wrote him the names of persons directing the campaign against the British from India.²⁰ It was predicted that an extraordinary armed insurgence, coupled with popular mobilization and agitation, would be launched from all corners of the country. Because the message was written on a piece of silk cloth, the English dubbed the movement the Silk Letter Conspiracy.

Mahmud Hasan and his associates planned to topple British control from India with the help of Turkey, Germany, Afghanistan, and Indian princely kingdoms. The

British, on the other side, discovered the scheme, and Turkey and Germany were defeated in World War I. Mahmud Hasan and another Darul Ulum Deoband adherent, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, were captured and imprisoned in Malta.²¹

Shedding off Militant Struggle and Entering into Mainstream Politics

Following the revelation of the Silk Letters Conspiracy and the collapse of Turkey at the end of World War II, the ulema of Darul Ulum Deoband actively participated in the Khilafat Movement and backed Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement, which he started in September 1920.²² This was the third phase of the Darul Ulum Deoband Movement's politics, when it worked closely with the Indian National Congress, recognizing, approving, and implementing the British Raj's democratic process. Furthermore, during this time, a group of ulema affiliated with Darul Ulum, including Husain Ahmad Madani (1879-1957), Kifayatullah Dihlawi (1875-1952), Maulana Ahmed Ali Lahori (1887-1962), Anwar Shah Kashmiri (1875-1933), Abdul Haq Akorwi (1912-1988), Abdul Halim Siddiqui, and Abdul Bari Firangi Mahali (1878-1926), formally formed a political party namely Jamiat Ulama-e Hind in , which pursued the political motives as a part of mainstream politics in colonial period. The premise that it declared self-independence as a goal in 1917, much before the Indian National Congress, reveals the character of its political purpose and action. Jamiat Ulama-e Hind supported the Indian National Congress' nationalist philosophy and opposed the Two Nations Theory and the concept of India's division. As a result, it pushed Indian Muslims to vote for the Indian National Congress against the partition of India.

Endorsement for Composite Nationalism

Jamiat Ulama-e Hind is no longer a significant political force, but it continues to use its political clout to serve Muslims. Darul Ulum has always seen Muslims as a community that has to be strengthened, but it does not support the notion of an Islamic State, which was promoted by the All India Muslim League during the 1940s. Darul Ulum has clearly been open to non-Muslim students since its inception, and its policy is to accommodate both Hindu and Muslim students. Darul Ulum now does not condemn the English language or contemporary education for Muslims. It advocates for a secular political state that allows all religious communities the freedom to practice their religious doctrine.

Facilitating the Coreligionists in Ordering their Social and Religious Matters

One of the significant contributions that Darul Ulum Deoband has made is simplifying South Asian Muslims' socio-cultural order. It established a system of individual Fatwa for this purpose. Because the rulers did not want the people to have direct direction during the Mughal era, the Mufti gave fatwas to the Qazi or Judges as a guide. The much contested issue of individual fatwa in its current form is also a gift

of the Deoband movement, which is now being adopted by other ulema and religious organizations. Fatwas have had a huge impact on the general public and have occasionally inspired individuals to organize economically and socially.

Emerging as One of the Major Strained of Islam

It becomes evident that Darul Ulum Deoband Movement, which began in the little town of Deoband in North India, has grown to become one of Islam's main sects. It accomplished this by expanding its network of connected institutions not just in India but also throughout the world. Its missionary, non-political sub-organization with a reformist goal is the Tablighi Jamat. There have been strong arguments in the past over its links and networking with the Taliban and other extremist organizations. Scholars typically correlate these changes with previous Darul Ulum exponents' jihadist activity and thought, which has evolved from that violent rhetoric. During the current spate of terrorism, it released a Fatwa condemning all forms of unjust violence and disruption of peace.²³ Darul Ulum Deoband currently attempts at announcing its disavowal of militant insurgencies, unjust violent acts, and the parties doing them, as well as promoting peace and harmony in society.

Conclusion

To summarize, this can safely be said that the Darul Ulum Deoband Movement was emulated by Muslim religious experts in response to British imperialism in India and its modernization. Its goal was to preserve South Asian Muslims' culture and religious traditions while breaking from traditional religious education. Though its early proponents opposed British modernism and imperialism and were actively engaged in militant insurgency during the Great Revolt of 1857 and against the British Raj during World War I, they later entered mainstream politics by coordinating with the Indian National Congress and adhering to the concept of composite nationalism, i.e. coexistence with other religious communities of South Asia. It updated its educational apparatus, creating a number of madrasahs along the lines of the mother institution and extending network by founding Jamiat Ulama-e Hind and Tablighi Jamat, and seemed to be one of the major sects of Islam in the Muslim world.



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- ⁶ Fadhl al-Rahman Usmani was the father of Aziz-ul-Rehman Usmani, the first Grand Mufti of Darul Ulum Deoband.
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