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## Da'wat-i Islami: An Aspiring Transnational Movement

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South Asia  
MUJEEB AHMAD

There has been considerable attention for the working and significance of the Tablighi Jama'at, established in 1927, but little has been done to study the origin and rapid expansion of the more recently formed Da'wat-i Islami (Invitation to Islam), whose motto is 'love for the Prophet and Medinah'. The Da'wat-i Islami was launched by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Qadiri in 1981.\* Today, the spate of green turbans, its trademark, can be seen not only in the rural areas of Pakistan, but also in its metropolitan cities.

When the military regime in Pakistan in 1977 banned all political activities and parties, Islamic political parties were shocked for they had launched the mass movement for Islamic Order (*nizami-i Mustafa*) that paved the way for the military take-over. The military legitimized its rule on a religious basis shared by these parties. The three main religio-political parties, the Jama'at Islami, the Jam'iyat Ulama'i Islam and the Jam'iyat Ulama'i Pakistan were hoping that the new regime would allow them a broader role. They had jointly campaigned for the establishment of the Islamic order and now were experiencing a dilemma: should they support the new military regime or not?

The Jam'iyati Ulama'i Islam and the Jam'iyat Ulama'i Pakistan both furthered the implementation of the Hanafi school of law. They, however, differed on certain details. The former was supported by the Deobandis while the latter by the Barelwis, the Ahl al-Sunnat wa'l Jama'at, popularly called Sunnis. The Deoband, a reformist educational institution established in India in 1867 was critical of a number of popular religious practices to which the Barelwis adhered. Contrary to these two parties, Jama'at Islami criticized both groups for their adherence to Sufi orders and law schools; they favoured a puritan interpretation of Islam. The three soon fell apart on the question of supporting the new regime. The Jama'at Islami joined hands with the regime while the Jam'iyati Ulama'i Islam publicly supported it. The Jam'iyat-i Ulama'i Pakistan decided not to cooperate with the Martial Law Regime.

The Jam'iyat-i Ulama-i Pakistan, founded in March 1948, was the leading religio-political party of the Barelwis. This state of isolation and political dormancy was the main cause of frustration among the young Sunni Barelwi intelligentsia. Da'wat-i Islami emerged as a catharsis to this desperate state of affairs. In response to the leadership crisis among Sunni Muslims and the frustration of young and middle class Sunnis, Dr Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadiri (born in February 1951 at Jhang Saddar, Panjab) founded the Idarah-I Minhaj ul-Qur'an (Institution of Qur'anic Path) in October 1980 in Lahore. His intentions were to enter into the political arena under the guise of religion. Later, in May 1989, he formed a political party, Pakistan Awami Tehrik (Pakistan People's Movement). However, because Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri was more respected as a religious and devout scholar and more clearly associated with the Barelwis when compared to Tahir ul-Qadiri, the former managed to obtain a constituency among a large number of Sunnis. Nowadays he is known as the *amir-i ahl-i sunnat* (Leader of the Sunnis) among his followers.

The Da'wat-i Islami, catapulted by the Sunnis, comprising middle and lower-middle strata of the Pakistani society, was founded on the principles of *da'wah* (invitation) to follow the *sunnah*, prophetic way. It aimed to promote and deepen the love for the Prophet and the early community of Muslims in Medinah. The movement stands for the revival and resurgence of Islam through

preaching. Its main characteristic is to preach 'what is righteous and what is forbidden'. The members of the Da'wat-i Islami are so keen on following the *sunnah* that they always wear white clothes, a green turban and a *miswak* (a wooden stick used in place of a toothbrush) in their pockets.

The Da'wat-i Islami advocates the universal brotherhood among the Muslims. The Hanafi school of thought of the Da'wat-i Islami is the official school of the movement, but followers of the other rites count among its members. Since the primary objective is to promote unity among the Muslims, theological and political controversies are discouraged in the Da'wat-i Islami.

Expansion of the movement

During its early days, the Da'wat-i Islami held its weekly meeting at the Gulzar-i-Habib Mosque, Soldier Bazar, in Karachi every Thursday after the evening prayer. After recitation from the Qur'an and the salutation of the Prophet, one of its preachers would give a speech on a spiritual and moral topic, followed by a speech of Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri, who explained day to day problems in terms of Islamic law. The following day, after the Friday prayer, a small group of preachers, under the leadership of Mawlana Qadiri, visited other quarters of Karachi. They offered the remaining prayers at the central mosque of the area. In between prayers, Mawlana Qadiri briefed local residents about the basic teachings of Islam. The Da'wat-i Islami expanded rapidly in Karachi; in one year's time these weekly meetings began to be held in some 300 mosques. From Karachi, the movement expanded quietly in the Sindh and then throughout Pakistan. It then became conspicuous and influential, and started to spread over other parts of the world, thus constituting a veritably transnational *tablighi* movement.

There is no secretive nature of the Da'wat-i Islami or any long-term/short-term strategic agenda. However, it struggles for the implementation of the *nizam-i Mustafa* (the system of the Prophet) in Pakistan through peaceful preaching so as to create an Islamic society. In addition to the weekly meetings in the various larger and smaller cities and towns of Pakistan, it holds its annual meeting in different metropolitan areas of Pakistan. Thus far, it has held annual meetings in Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and Multan. The Da'wat-i Islami established secretariats in both Karachi and Lahore, naming them Faidan-i Medinah (Blessing of Medinah).

In nearly every city of Pakistan, the Da'wat-i Islami has established religious schools and libraries. It has its own edifying literature, the most important of which is *Faidan-i Sunnat* (Blessing of the Sunnah), (Karachi: Maktabatul Medinah, N.D.) compiled by Mawlana Qadiri. In this voluminous work, Mawlana Qadiri narrates the *sunnah* of the Prophet regarding affairs of daily life. Besides *Faidan-i Sunnat*, some booklets, lectures and speeches of Mawlana Qadiri recorded on audio cas-

sette are also regarded as sources of inspiration for the members of the Da'wat-i Islami. The Da'wat-i Islami also publishes works by other Barelwi scholars, particularly works of Mawlana Ahmad Rida Khan Qadiri Barelwi (1856-1921).

The Da'wat-i Islami has a considerable hold on its members. From the very beginning, it was a centralized movement, revolving around the personality of Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri. The centre in Karachi, authorized *amir* (chiefs) of provinces, cities and towns to work in accordance with the directions of the centre. Local *amirs* come regularly to the centre for training and guidance. So as to have close contact with the different branches of the Da'wat-i Islami, Mawlana Qadiri regularly travels all over Pakistan. The members must show their commitment to the Islamic way of life as is reflected compendiously in his *Faidan-i Sunnat*. The centre discourages the reading and discussing of anything other than the *Faidan-i Sunnat* in the weekly meetings. In addition to male participants, it has a considerable enrolment of Pakistani women.

Although the Da'wat-i Islami is supported on its aims to build character in its individual members, particularly the young generation, and to establish religious institutions, it nevertheless attracts diverse criticism about some of its practices. Its over-emphasis on wearing the green turban not only irritates common Muslims, but also scholars are reluctant to endorse it. They do not consider

wearing the green turban as compulsory (*sunnat-i mu'akkadah*). In fact, they hold that any type of cape, or white or black coloured turban can be used to cover one's head. Leading Barelwi scholars also object to calling Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri the *amir-i ahl-i sunnat*. Da'wat-i Islami requires each of its members to become a *murid* (pupil) of Mawlana Qadiri. The critics of the movement regard this as a reflection of his desire to maintain control over this entire rapidly expanding, even perhaps transnational movement. ♦

**Note**  
\* Mawlana Qadiri was born in July 1950 in a Karachi-based Memon family. He is a *khalifah* (vicegerent) of Mawlana Muhammad Diya' uddin Ahmad Qadiri Madni (1877-1981), a Sialkot-born religious scholar, who migrated to Medinah in 1910.

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