

Book Presentation

MUHAMMAD KHALID MASUD

The Tablighi Jama'at founded by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas (d. 1944) in a rural setting in Mewat, India, in the early 20th century spread over the entire globe in less than a decade. With its centre in Delhi, the Jama'at currently operates in more than 80 countries. Attended by millions, its annual conference has now become the second largest Muslim congregation after the Hajj.

In the absence of official writings and the movement's abstinence from media publicity, academic studies on the Tablighi Jama'at have been completed only by participant observations – a phenomenon confirmed by the many Master's theses and PhD dissertations from universities in the UK, France, South Africa, Malaysia, Germany, Pakistan and the Netherlands during the last two decades.

Travellers in Faith, which stemmed from papers read at a workshop on Tablighi Jama'at, held in London on 7-8 June 1990, offers studies on the Jama'at in India, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Canada, Morocco and South Africa.

Studying the historical and social growth of this movement in India, its transnational transformation and the development of its ideology, particularly on the questions of conversion, gender, religious diversity, organization, communication, adjustment with the local environment and personal transformation, the volume offers fascinating information about contemporary *da'wa* in Islam.

Transnationalism and travel are two distinct characteristics of this movement. It adopted transnational travel and physical movement as a means of *da'wa*. Reports about the gatherings of the Jama'at in the news media carry pictures of the Tablighis walking on the roadside with bedding on their shoulders or riding the trains in spectacularly large numbers. Groups of Tablighis knocking at neighbourhood doors, inviting people to come out to the mosque, is a common sight in South Asia and in many countries of other regions. The

Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal

most important and frequent activity of an adept of the Jama'at is going out for God's sake.

A combination of time and space, 'travel' has a special meaning in the Tablighi discourse. It is a physical movement from one's present space (house, city, and country) to other areas. It is comparable with the concept of Hijra, both in the sense of migration and withdrawal. It is travel within one's self. One temporarily migrates from *dunya* (worldly pursuits) to *din* (religious concerns), a favourite dichotomy among the Tablighis. It is a migration from cor-

ruption to purity, withdrawing from worldly attachments to the Path of God.

Reform of self becomes feasible when one travels out of one's present environment. Staying in one's usual setting hinders the ability to discriminate between what is vital and what is trivial in one's life. This temporal withdrawal enables one to give up the trivial (*tark la ya'ni*), one of the fundamental principle of the Jama'at. While going out, meeting others and speaking to them, one is urged to continually address oneself. Knocking at others' doors, one is expected to arrive at one's own doorsteps.

A Tablighi crosses several types of frontiers in this journey. For example, the boundaries of gender disappear as the Tablighi assumes certain roles and modes of behaviour that, in his original setting, belong to the opposite gender. He also travels across the frontiers of ethnicity by becoming aware that he can transcend national, geographical, and language boundaries. But he also becomes sensitive to the bond that creates an 'imagined' boundary, bringing the global Muslim community closer together. Finally, the transnational linkages reaffirm the Tablighi's conviction of the legitimacy of his *da'wa*. ◀

Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal
Editor: Muhammad Khalid Masud
Leiden: Brill, 2000
ISBN: 90-04-11622-2

Muhammad Khalid Masud is ISIM Academic Director.

Travellers in Faith includes the following chapters:

- *The Growth and Development of the Tablighi Jama'at in India*
Muhammad Khalid Masud
- *Tablighi Jama'at and Women*
Barbara D. Metcalf
- *Construction and Reconstruction of the World in the Tablighi Ideology*
Mohammad Talib
- *Ideology and Legitimacy*
Muhammad Khalid Masud
- *The Transformation of Tablighi Jama'at into a Transnational Movement*
Marc Gaborieau
- *Close Ties and New Boundaries: Tablighi Jama'at in Britain and Germany*
Elke Faust
- *Sequences of a Quest: Tablighi Jama'at in Morocco*
Mohamed Tozy
- *Tablighi Jama'at in Belgium*
Felice Dassetto
- *Foi et Pratique: Tablighi Jama'at in France*
Gilles Kepel
- *Worlds 'Apart': The Tablighi Jama'at in South Africa under Apartheid (1963-1993)*
Ebrahim Moosa
- *A Movement or a Jama'at? Tablighi Jama'at in Canada*
Shaheen H. Azmi

