

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL
STUDIES OF
THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

(S.F.P.S.M.E.A.)

(Founding editor: C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze)

Editor

REINHARD SCHULZE

Advisory Board

Dale Eickelman (Dartmouth College)
Roger Owen (Harvard University)
Judith Tucker (Georgetown University)
Yann Richard (Sorbonne Nouvelle)

VOLUME 69



TRAVELLERS
IN
FAITH

*Studies of the Tablighī Jamā'at as a Transnational Islamic
Movement for Faith Renewal*

EDITED BY

MUHAMMAD KHALID MASUD



BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON · KÖLN
2000

CHAPTER TEN

WORLDS 'APART': TABLĪGHĪ JAMĀ'AT IN SOUTH
AFRICA UNDER APARTHEID, 1963-1993

Ebrahim Moosa

*Introduction*¹

The first effects of the Tabligh movement were felt in South Africa less than three decades after the founder Mawlānā Muḥammad Ilyās (1885-1944) died in India. Today, the Tablighi Jamat [Tablighī Jamā'at] in South Africa is perhaps the strongest and fastest growing Muslim religious movement in southern Africa. The demise of white colonial rule in Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe signaled the dissipation of the European presence in this sub-region. The end of European prestige did not mean the decline of Christianity. It did however, create the social space for Islam to flourish in the form of Tabligh evangelism. In South Africa, apartheid rule tolerated only those forms of cultural and religious activity which did not threaten white political hegemony.

Islam arrived in South Africa from the Malay Archipelago as far back as 1658 with the earliest Dutch colonizers (see Moosa 1993, 27-59 for a detailed background). In 1860, Muslims from the Indian sub-continent arrived as indentured labourers under British rule. Isolated from the rest of Muslim Africa by the high visibility of Christianity, Islam in southern Africa has since the mid-twentieth century experienced a growth in visibility, largely as a result of Tabligh activities. Today Muslims number well over 500,000, with some unofficial estimates suggesting one million followers. Although Muslims of Malay origin did proselytize among indigenous inhabi-

tants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there have been no discernable trends of significant conversion to Islam in the twentieth century.

The first adherents who arrived here three centuries ago hailed from the Indonesian archipelago and the Kurumandel coast of India, and found ethnic integration hard to resist. Conversion of "free black" slaves to Islam promoted ethnic and social assimilation. Thereafter, the conversion to Islam of some Afrikaners (persons of Dutch origin) further extended the scope of integration. The Indic religious consciousness that early immigrant Muslims brought with them from the East in the seventeenth century soon domesticated itself to the African context. It is nevertheless noticeable that the dominant leitmotif of Islam at the Cape remains its underlying Malay-Javanese character. Over a period of three centuries there have also been influences from the Middle East, ranging from the period of the Ottoman Empire to latter-day Egyptian and Saudi influences. The latter are transmitted by means of South African *ulamā* who are trained abroad.

The beginnings of the Tablighī Jamā'at in South Africa were inextricably tied to the fortunes of descendants of so-called "passenger Indians" who arrived in the provinces of Natal and Transvaal toward the close of the nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1870 the effects of British capitalism in the colonies spawned the mass emigration of some two million Indians from the Indian sub-continent. Some of them paid their passage to Africa rather than being indentured, and subsequently became the mercantile class among Indians. Muslims among them hailed from various parts of pre-partition India, but mainly the Surat, Kathiawar and Bharuch districts of the state of Gujarat, and from the Kokan area of Maharashtra State. They served as traders in the rural areas of what is today known as the Kwazulu-Natal region, the three Transvaal regions (northern, eastern and western), and the Pretoria-Witwatersrand and Vereeniging (PWV) region which includes the metropolitan areas of Durban and Johannesburg.

¹ I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of a University of Cape Town Research Grant, which made this contribution possible. I would also like to thank Jane Parry for her assistance, which saved me from several infelicities. The remaining mistakes, needless to say, are mine alone.

History

Early History

While Islam in East and West Africa spread at the hands of Arab traders (Mazrui 1985, 817-818), in South Africa the "conversion" of diaspora Muslims to Tabligh-Islam took place through descendants of Indian traders. They were the first to respond to the call of the Tablighi Jamā'at there. By "conversion" here is meant, not a conversion from one religion to another, but rather a "deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another" (Nock 1933, 6-7). This is precisely what the teaching of the Tablighi Jamā'at inspires, a meticulous commitment to the fundamentals of faith and an unquestioning loyalty to prophetic authority (*Sumna*).

Interestingly, the first South African contact with the Tabligh movement was not with its headquarters in India, but with Saudi Arabia. The reason for this detour was that soon after the coming to power of the National Party² and the advent of apartheid in 1948, Indian immigration to South Africa was halted. The white minority government was reluctant even to give visas to Indian visitors. Furthermore, contact between South Africa and the Indian sub-continent was severely restricted after India and Pakistan took a strong adversarial stance towards Pretoria's racist domestic policies and enforced a cultural boycott against the country.

By the 1960s, the Tabligh movement, under the leadership of Mawlānā Muhammad Yūsuf (d. 1965), the son of Mawlānā Ilyās, saw the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca as an ideal opportunity to promote his missionary work (see also Gaboricau, this volume). Given the large number of pilgrims at the holy cities, Tabligh activists worked hard to gain new recruits among them in order that they might spread the simple content of this fledgling movement in their respective countries.

Local Founders

One of the earliest participants in South African Tabligh work recalls that his first exposure to the activities of the Tablighi Jamā'at occurred

² This party was ousted from power in the historic April 1994 elections and was succeeded by the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela.

in the 1950s. An Indian, remembered only as Hafez Soojie (Ḥāfiẓ Sūjī), was on a visit to his Gujarātī-speaking relatives in South Africa. Feeling compelled to share his understanding of Tablighī Islam he initiated the first *gashī* by taking a group of people to a mosque in the Johannesburg suburb of Rodepoort.³ Although there was no continued activity after the departure of Hafez Soojie, the first seeds of the movement had been sown.

In 1962, a businessman from Umzinto in the Natal province, Ghulam Mohamed Padia, a Muslim of Indian descent, was exposed to the activities of the Tablighī Jamā'at during a pilgrimage in Mecca (Cilliers 1983). Before returning home to South Africa he spent four months (three *chillas*) abroad, visiting the movement's headquarters in Delhi where he learned the methods of Tabligh instruction. Thereafter, Hadji-Bhai Padia, as he is better known, became the movement's most influential pioneer in South Africa. At first there was opposition to his activities. The local Umzinto community felt that religious instruction and propagation were best left to qualified *ṣulama*. However, the sympathetic attitude of the *ṣulama* of the Deoband school soon legitimated the activities of the Tablighī Jamā'at.

The main participants in the initial Tabligh activities were businessmen of Indian descent whose ancestors had come from the Surat area of modern India. Gradually, the movement was successfully attracting individuals from other subethnicities which make up the range of Muslims of Indian descent in South Africa, such as the Urdu-speaking community from Hyderabad, Daccan, Memon speakers from north Gujarat, and later, Kokani speakers from Maharashtra. By the 1970s the Tabligh movement had also made inroads into the Western Cape area, where it gained adherents among Muslims from the historical Malay and "coloured" (mixed race) communities. Among Muslims of African and European descent, the Tabligh movement had little appeal.

Growth

In 1966, three years after Tablighī Jamā'at's inception in South Africa, the first nationwide gathering (*ḡimnā'*), attended by some 300 persons, was held at Ladysmith, in what is today known as the Kwazulu-Natal region. Thereafter, the size of the annual gatherings

³ Interview with Mr. Rashid Patel, 29 December 1993.

became an index of the movement's strength. In the mid-1970s annual Tabligh gatherings became an important fixture in the country's religious calendar, and Muslim activities in particular. These gatherings attracted thousands of people and necessitated elaborate and detailed organization. The numbers at the Tablighī Jamā'at's *ijmā'at* eclipsed those at the annual convention of the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), an event which was subsequently abandoned due to declining support (Tayob 1992, 101–124).

A range of factors account for the large-scale gravitation of Muslims towards the Tabligh movement. Firstly, the Tablighī Jamā'at represents a type of Islam with a Sūfī orientation, which has an attraction for Muslims of Indian ancestry. The common group identity and ethnicity which a section of the converts to Tabligh share with the geographical roots of the movement, namely India, provide a natural religious "home" in a "symbolic" diaspora.⁴ In an alienating environment such as South Africa, the natural gravitation of diaspora communities towards ethnocentrism is hardly surprising. Nevertheless, it would be reductionist to suggest that ethnocentrism is the only factor contributing to the appeal of Tabligh-Islam.

Secondly, the theological commonality between the Tablighī Jamā'at and the school of Deoband is critically important. The theological seminary of Deoband (see Introduction) has significant credibility among a section of the South African Muslim community, namely the descendants of Indian immigrants. At least three *ulamā* associations, the Jam'iyyat al-'Ulamā of both Transvaal and Natal, and Majlis al-'Ulamā of South Africa, are pro-Deoband, and thus provide legitimacy to the discourse of the Tabligh movement. Even though not all *ulamā* are Tabligh adherents, it would be rare to find pro-Deoband *ulamā* who actively oppose the Tabligh movement. The hegemony and authority which the Deobandī *ulamā* exercise in at least five regions—the PWV region, the three Transvaal regions and the Kwa-zulu-Natal region—contributes significantly to the growth of the Tablighī Jamā'at there.

⁴ I am not asserting that South African Muslims of Indian ancestry consider India to be their home. Many of them belong to families that have been here for more than four generations. The younger generation in particular has little in common with Indian and eastern culture. The same applies to Muslims of Malay-Javanese descent. Yet, that there is a symbolic connection with India, Malaysia and Indonesia cannot be denied. For this reason, I chose to call it a symbolic diaspora, not intending thereby the Jewish connotation of diaspora.

Another factor that boosted the fortunes of the Tabligh movement was the participation of graduates from the two pro-Deoband seminaries in Newcastle, in the Kwa-zulu-Natal region, and Azaadville, in the PWV region. Both of these seminaries actively encourage their students to participate in the Tabligh movement. Once they qualify as *ulamā*, most of them vigorously further the goals of the movement from the mosques and pulpits which they occupy. A sizeable number of these graduates are from the Cape and they have made a noticeable impact on the Cape landscape by extending the influence of the Deoband School.

Opposition to the Tabligh movement comes mainly from two segments of the Muslim community. The first is those who are committed to what can be called "folk Islam." Among the two main strains of folk Islam in South Africa, the Brēlwi school of thought (see Introduction, Metcalf 1982 and Sanyal 1990) has a sizeable support-base in the regions of Kwa-zulu-Natal, the PWV and the Cape. The other strain is the vintage Islam of the Cape, which carries elements of Southeast Asian Sufism. The second segment to voice its opposition is comprised of the youth, student and politicized sectors of the Muslim community, and the neoconservative *ulamā* of the Cape who align themselves to religious trends in the Middle East. Examples are those associated with Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and with pro-Wahhābī Saudi Arabian institutions such as the Islamic University of Medina and Ummul Qurā in Mecca.

Those who do not readily associate with the Tablighī Jamā'at are the neoconservative *ulamā* of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), who constitute the leading *ulamā* council in the Cape region, and members of the youth and student associations and politically activist groupings, like the Call of Islam and the Qjibla Mass Movement (Le Roux and Jhazhbay 1992, 85–100).

These latter groups do not, however, overtly criticize the Tablighī Jamā'at. Thus it would seem that the Tablighī Jamā'at has managed to neutralize opposition in some instances where it has failed to gain allies. However, the opposition towards the Tablighī Jamā'at evident in the second group is mild compared to the hostility of the Brēlwi group (Jamālī 1987).⁵

⁵ A full-length tract by Hadrat 'Allāma Arshadul Qādirī of Calcutta, translated by Professor Na'im Jamālī (Jamālī 1987), is evidence of the vituperative debate between the Brēlwi movement and the Tablighī Jamā'at.

In 1987 this hostility was exacerbated by an incident which had tragic consequences. A group of Brēlwi supporters decided to hold a *me'lad* (*mīlād* or *ma'elid al-Nabi*: birthday of the Prophet celebration) in one of the halls of Azadville, home of the Madrasa 'Arabiyya Islamiyya seminary. Some prominent teachers at the seminary were also highly placed within the ranks of the Tablighī Jamā'at. After failing to obstruct the Brēlwi group's plans, the Tablighī followers, spearheaded by the seminary leadership, decided to express their outrage at what they considered to be the *bid'a* (heretical) practice of the Brēlwis. They decreed their own activity to be a religious cause demanding of belligerence—*jihad* against its opponents. Scuffles and pandemonium broke out as the two groups clashed, and one person was killed.

Islam in the Western Cape region,⁶ where it has a longer history than in the rest of South Africa, is of a more diverse character. Muslims in this region are mainly of Indonesian, Malay and, to a lesser extent, Indian ancestry. Given the diversity and indigenous acculturation of Islam here, it is not surprising that the Tablighī Jamā'at has been relatively less successful. Furthermore, among a large section of the Kokani speaking Indian community in the Western Cape, Brēlwi influence is significant and there is resistance to Tablighī encroachment. However, for many working class Malay and "coloured" Muslims, the Indianisation of their Islam is also an index of socially upward mobility. The demonstration effect of Tablighī Islam, consisting of a dress code, beard and other ritualistic tenets, as well as the *charismata* that the Tablighī movement offers to individuals, makes it an attractive prospect. A survey of Tablighī activists indicates that the movement holds greater attraction for middle-aged persons, many of whom have for most of their lives not been devout in terms of observing daily rituals. They experience a new kind of religiosity in Tablighī work. Elements of atonement and compensation for their lack of prior piety, plus the espousal of a new identity, make Tablighī-Islam particularly attractive. The profile of Tablighī adherents ranges from students, to blue-collar workers, to businessmen to profession-

⁶ The previous four provinces have been redivided into nine regions under the new dispensation in South Africa, effective since April 1994. The Transvaal has been divided into the Pretoria-Witwatersrand and Vereeniging (PWV) region, Northern, Eastern and Western Transvaal. The Cape into Northern, Eastern and Western Cape, etc.

als the latter mainly in the medical profession). At the same time, the turn-over of Tablighī activists is high. Although a core group remains dedicated to Tablighī work throughout their lives, the average individual is a fervent activist for only some five to ten years. Thereafter, the person may become an active sympathizer, or, most often, a passive sympathizer.

Among women, the Tablighī Jamā'at has cultivated an extensive constituency in South Africa (see also Metcalf, and Faust, this volume). Female family members or other women are often converted to the movement, but the majority of female converts are the spouses of male activists. Women have their own circles and operate from homes. Their activities are similar to those of men, with an emphasis on regular weekly *tafīm* (teaching circles) where they are exposed to literature that promotes zeal for virtue as defined by the instructional manual approved by the movement. This remains the *Tablighī Nisāb*, literally translated as Evangelical Curriculum, (now re-titled as *Faḍā'il-i-A'mal*; see chapter four, this volume) but better known as the *Teachings of Islam*.

Activities

Tablighī activists travel frequently within cities and over the length and breadth of South Africa. Operating on austere budgets, they sleep in mosques and share food communally. Meager resources are stretched to optimum levels to allow activists to reach as many people as possible during evangelical travels. The movement's major strength is its access to grassroot communities and the recruitment of neophytes takes place particularly at the level of evangelical visits (*gashd*) to fellow Muslims on an individual basis.

There is a remarkable global uniformity in the format of Tablighī *modus operandi*. Functions are divided into national, regional and local levels. In every locality and region one mosque is identified as the headquarters (*markaz*) of Tablighī activity. On weekends, from Friday evening until Sunday, localities send groups of men to the regional headquarters, from where they are redeployed to spend time in targeted areas. *Dā'wa* work entails doing evangelical work on a voluntary basis and traveling at personal expense within a country as an itinerant lay preacher. Some Tablighī activists also go abroad.

In this way, lay persons are trained to articulate the ideas and message of Tabligh, and specifically to meditate on their own experiences of faith (*Imān*). The entire programme is designed to make the individual an active participant in the dissemination and teaching of religion, a task that was previously assumed by the *ʿulamā*. Missionary zeal, combined with individual empowerment, bolsters the confidence and religious identity of persons who would otherwise consume religion passively. The religious experience gained through the intense exercise of prayer, a commitment to mission and the sanctified living environment of mosques, results in the Tabligh activist discovering a new self-identity.

Ideology and Discourse

Tabligh discourse projects the movement as Noah's ark, with its simplistic but attractive inference: whoever boards the Jamā'at is saved, and those who fail to do so are doomed. Observation of Tabligh workers has shown that they display all the characteristics of "conversion" (Snow and Machalek 1984, 167-190; Staples 1987, 133-147). The rhetorical indicators of Tabligh "conversion" are that the adherents adopt a new discourse steeped in Islamic metaphor; they espouse an ideal and purist universe with its attendant discourse and paraphernalia. All events and happenings are causally attributed to God alone. The convert adopts a master attribution scheme which states that success can only be achieved if there is an unflinching commitment to the commands of Allah, meaning ritual piety and imitating the prophetic lifestyle. These range from the personal and customary habits of the Arabian Prophet to his religious practices. In emphasizing the claim that "success" is only attainable by imitating the lifestyle of the Prophet of Islam, the Tabligh movement closely resembles a "prosperity cult."

To describe the Tabligh movement as "cult" or "sect," however, risks distorting the sociological analysis. The Tablighī Jamā'at does have an unconscious sense of community (Wilson 1982, 103), but adherents also see themselves and their religious experiences as unique and incomparable to those of people outside the group (on this point see also Tozy, this volume). Their belief that their experiences are unique results in Tabligh activists suspending analogical reasoning. This means that they are unable to compare their own experiences with similar, if not identical, Buddhist or Christian encounters. How-

ever, they can easily identify with an Islamic past dating back centuries. The most persistent analogical metaphor in Tabligh discourse is identification with the Companions of the Prophet (Ṣaḥāba). It is therefore not surprising that *Teachings of Islam* contains hagiographic accounts of the Companions and well-known religious personalities, especially Ṣūfīs. Committed Tabligh activists embrace the mission of the movement in an uncompromising manner. After conversion, many activists adopt an attitude that all their social interactions should lead to recruitment and the furtherance of the aims of the movement.

It is perhaps the accessibility and simplicity of the Tabligh teachings that give the movement its greatest appeal. Every activist aspires to reach and share the prophetic *charismata* which is believed to be transmitted by means of strict emulation (*iṭihād*) of the Prophet, a notion which lies at the core of Tabligh teachings. Its famous programme involves a commitment to the Six Points (see chapter one, this volume).

The International Connection

The affluence of the most visible ethnic group in the Tablighī Jamā'at, namely Muslims of Indian descent, allows the South African chapter to engage in extensive international work. South African groups regularly visit all neighbouring states and have been instrumental in the success of the movement in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mauritius and Mozambique. Prior to 1990, easy access to countries north of Zambia was restricted because of South Africa's pariah political status in the international community. With the country's readmission into the international fold, the Tabligh movement there is expected to increase its activities in sub-Saharan Africa at large. In the past, the South African chapter concentrated its efforts in South American countries such as Brazil and Argentina, as well as parts of North America and Britain.

Tabligh Ethos

The bulk of Tabligh participants on their first international outings visit India and Pakistan, especially the main centres in Nizāmuddīn in New Delhi and Raiwind in Pakistan. For it is on the Indian subcontinent that Tabligh initiates are subjected to the proverbial baptism

by fire. The unique living conditions of the sub-continent test the individual's ability to make *mujāhada*—a voluntary mental and physical ability to endure. *Mujāhada* is not an entirely novel concept to Tabligh since it is more fully developed in Sūfī literature.

Many aspects of the Tabligh movement are an attempt to bring about a synthesis between esoteric tendencies of the orthodox Sūfī orders (Tarīqa) and exoteric juridical practices (*sharīʿa*). Although this synthesis is characteristic of the school of Deoband, it also reflects the close association of the founder, Mawlānā Ilyās, with the more prominent figures of the Deoband school such as Rashīd Ahmad Gangōhī and Khalīl Ahmad Sahārapurī, both of whom were Sūfī mentors (*shaykh*) as well as religious scholars. Many seasoned South African Tabligh activists take *bayʿa* (oaths of spiritual initiation) with the prominent mentors of Tasawwuf associated with the movement. The late Mawlānā Inʿāmūl Hasan (1918–1995) was a *shaykh* of the Naqshbandī order (Tarīqa), and had several South African disciples. Mawlānā Muhammad Zakariyyā (1898–1982), the author of the *Teachings of Islam [Fada'il A'māl]*, also generated a substantial following among Tabligh workers in South Africa. The ordinary Tabligh routine introduces the lay person to a moderate discipline of daily oral remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Divine, a feature enthusiastically embraced by new activists. In short, the goal is to create missionaries who are inspired by a sober Sufism that will not clash with the demands of the law (*sharīʿa*). In summary, it would be fair to say that the Tabligh Jamāʿat adheres to mainstream Sunnī practices and symbols of a moderately puritan kind which are conducive to pan-Islamic and transnational ideals.

Method of Work: Differences and Changes

At its very inception in South Africa, the leadership structure of Tablighī Jamāʿat consisted of a national leader (*amīr*), with provincial *amīrs* in the previous provinces of Transvaal, Natal and the Cape. The Cape is the oldest seat of Islam in southern Africa, where the largest concentration of Muslims is to be found. But it is there that the Tabligh movement is weakest. Despite nearly three decades of continuous work in this province, the Jamāʿat has failed to capture the imagination of Cape Muslims as it has elsewhere in the coun-

try. However, the Tablighī Jamāʿat does command more support than other Muslim organizations in the Cape. A complex set of reasons, including the diversity of Islamic trends, ethnicities and class differences, account for the Jamāʿat's lack of success in the Cape. Islam there is a confluence of heterogeneous influences and no hegemonic force can claim to command the loyalty of all its Muslims. The majority of Cape Muslims have a mixed ethnic ancestry.

In the Cape, the Tablighī Jamāʿat abandoned the practice of a single regional *amīr* after a leadership crisis in the 1980s. In an unusual precedent, the leadership issue became a matter of serious acrimony and politicking within Tabligh circles. This contradicted the Jamāʿat's claim that it is free from the flaws and bureaucratic strictures found within other Muslim organizations which follow Western management styles. In the other regions, the Jamāʿat has a more coherent leadership, given the close affinity between the ideology of the Jamāʿat and the socio-cultural proclivities of its target audiences.

Impact on Society

One of the most visible aspects of the Tabligh movement is its ability to promote a routinized Islam in a conservative guise. By "routinization" I mean the regulated discipline of especially religious rituals, which become the main preoccupation of a group. In the case of the Tabligh it is more than just being ritualistic—for them rituals are the very fulfillment of Islam. By "conservative" I mean that preservation of tradition rather than innovation is the major thrust of the social expression of the religion. Every act, practice or idea is referred to an *ur-text*, the prophetic model, as visualized within the very specific confines of Tablighī-Islam.

One of the direct results of the Tabligh movement has been the introduction of rigid segregation between the sexes in those social spheres and institutions where the influence of Tablighī Islam is dominant. A completely veiled (*pardah*) female is the definition of an ideal woman in the Tabligh ethos. However, there is also a tolerance for women wearing *hijāb*, where the entire body except the face is covered. In order to cater to the increased demand for sexual segregation of Muslim women, several single-sex Muslim private schools

have mushroomed in the last decade. Since there are no sexually segregated facilities at the level of tertiary education, many young Muslim women are forced to pursue post-secondary education by means of distance learning at the world's largest correspondence university—the University of South Africa.

The legitimization of the Tablighī Jamā'at by the pro-Deoband *'ulamā* in South Africa in the 1960s, which led to the public acceptance of their role in religious life, has paid handsome dividends to the *'ulamā*. Today the Tablighī Jamā'at is the most zealous purveyor of the Deoband school in theology; law and other aspects of ideology. The influence of the Deoband now extends beyond its original settings in the Northern, Western and Eastern Transvaal, PWV and Kwazulu-Natal regions.

Political Quietism

Tabligh conservatism is not restricted to religious and gender matters, but extends to politics as well. Although Tabligh spokespersons constantly emphasize that their mission is not to dislocate people from society and their professions, a commitment to the Tablighī Jamā'at inevitably has the effect of detachment from mainstream society, and of political isolation. Given their focus on eschatological matters and concern for personal salvation, the social and political ethos of Islam is not just neglected but ignored. In the South African context, except for self-confessed right-wing religious groups, virtually all significant religious denominations and movements except for the Tablighī Jamā'at demonstrated their abhorrence for the political system of apartheid.

Religious determinism is a noticeable feature of Tabligh ideology. In fact, Tabligh discourse explains the plight of millions of black people under the yoke of apartheid in the very deterministic language of Islamic theology. It comes perilously close to saying that apartheid was a divine visitation upon the people of this land due to their sin and disobedience to God. The belief is that when all Muslims follow the ritual obligations of Islam with sincerity and obedience then God will change the material conditions of people. During the dark years of racial discrimination, Tabligh ideology found it prudent not to question the morality of the apartheid state and its attendant practices of racial discrimination.

The political quietism of the Tablighī Jamā'at, especially in conflict

situations, can perhaps be traced to a specific type of Sūfī ethos that it embraces. In this Sūfī tendency the emphasis is on a Ghazālīan type of personal salvation. This is evident in the movement's six-point programme, which has negligible social content. Unlike expressions of militant Sufism, such as that practiced in the Sokoto Caliphate of 'Usmān dan Fodio (1754–1817), in the Mahdiyyah of Muhammad Ahmad (1845–1885) in the Sudan, or by Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd (1786–1831) in India, who all attempted to establish a socio-political order based on Islam, the Tabligh focus is on the individual. In the Tabligh movement the ideal of a socio-political Islam is not advocated. There are obvious advantages to this strategy. An emphasis on the individual makes Tabligh-Islam amenable to the concept and status of religion in secularized societies, where religion is relegated to the personal or private sphere. Certain strains of political Islam which espouse socio-political ambitions among Muslim communities in the West, and the Middle East for that matter, are under regular surveillance by nervous governments, with occasional subtle restrictions on their activities. To date, Tabligh activity has not been subject to such scrutiny and has had relatively free movement in the West and no significant opposition from Muslim governments.

The phenomenon of a personalized religion may explain why Tabligh activity was acceptable in some Eastern bloc countries such as Hungary and Yugoslavia during the closing years of communism. A private and individualistic Islam is less of a threat to an autocratic state, which must devise strategies of appeasement of its more religious citizenry. Similarly, under successive apartheid regimes, evangelical groups, including the Tablighī Jamā'at, had no restrictions imposed on their activities. On the contrary, the apartheid state readily offered assistance to conservative evangelical groups as part of its counter-revolutionary strategy. By contrast, liberation theologians of all persuasions and their allies abroad were closely monitored—some of them had to suffer imprisonment and torture for their convictions. Tabligh activists are either hostile or indifferent to political Islam. The Tablighī Jamā'at engages in sustained propaganda to discredit the ideologies of the Pakistan-based Jamā'at Islāmī, the Egyptian-based Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian revolution. They hope to curb their influence on local youth and student organizations. Since the Tabligh movement sees itself as the genuine torchbearer of Sunnī Islam, opposition to these politically motivated Muslim groups has a theological basis. In the case of the Jamā'at Islāmī, the

doctrinal *bona fides* of its chief ideologue, Abul A'īā Mawdūdī, are deemed suspect and hence undesirable for Muslims in South Africa. The Tablighī Jamā'at dismisses the Brotherhood for its lack of religious propriety. Most Brotherhood proponents adopt European attire and fashionable beards as opposed to the statutory dress and untrimmied beards demanded by Tabligh standards. The revolution in Iran is clearly an anathema because it is believed to be Shī'a-inspired.

Conclusion

In South Africa the Tablighī Jamā'at has proven to be a very successful religious movement in terms of its own objectives, and it has made an impact on local Islam. Depending on the vantage point of the observer, it is viewed as the very fulfillment of the ideals of Islam in the form of personal piety and the search for salvation, or as a movement which reduces Islam to mere rituals and adds to the intellectual stupor and social decline in Muslim social life. Some opponents go further and charge the Tablighī Jamā'at with conspiring against Islam.

The mileage that the school of Deoband has gained out of its links with the Tablighī Jamā'at in the South African context, in terms of its own spread and authority, is unmistakable. The fortunes of the Deoband School in this region will to a large extent follow that of the Tablighī Jamā'at.

It has been observed that "conversion"⁷ to the Tabligh ideology paves the way to a personalized religion. In seeking to satisfy an inner spiritual need, converts may not always value the role of community in which government and socio-political organizations play a vital role. In South Africa, Tabligh activists displayed an apolitical attitude during the apartheid era. Some critics of the Tablighī Jamā'at argue that this apolitical stand was itself a political posture of defending the status quo. However, as South Africa enters into an era of full secular democracy with a strong market economy, in

which the state will not be hostile to religion but treat it as a private concern, there remains a strong possibility that personalized religion will fit for "mesh" comfortably with the new political order. It may just be that personalized religion *a la* Tablighī Jamā'at is Islam's answer to the rapid, market-orientated liberal democracies of the twenty-first century.

⁷ Richard Bulliet (1979, 128-129) writing in the context of conversion to Islam in medieval times, made two pertinent observations that may be relevant to the notion of "conversion" as used in this essay. Firstly, that conversion almost inevitably leads to the weakening of, or dissolution of centralized government; and, secondly, the conversion process in and of itself gives rise to a clash of interests between elements of the population that convert at different times.