

# AHL-E-HADITH

## in Britain

*History, Establishment,  
Organisation, Activities*

*and*

*Objectives*



**RASHAD AHMAD AZAMI**



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Objectives*

**RASHAD AHMAD AZAMI**

Submission for the Postgraduate degree  
in Islamic Studies at:

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## Preface

The *Ahl-e-Hadith* Movement is little understood by its own followers, and largely misunderstood by others. Sometimes, it is presented as the fifth denomination of Sunnite schools, or as a religious group opposed to the interpretations of the four established schools of jurisprudence. At some stages of history it was known as the group of *Mujahidin* and *Muwahhidin*. In some cases it is seen as a group of literalists who take the text as it is, and are not prepared to take account of the over-all spirit or reason behind a ruling, and ignore the spiritual side of Islam. It has been labelled as a group of fanatics and by some as irreligious and heretical. Sometimes, the purpose of the movement is trivialised and its identity is seen only in the background of some minor jurisprudential differences, e.g. whether *Amin* in prayers should be said aloud or silently, whether *Al-Fatiha* should be recited by people when they are offering their prayers behind an Imam, and whether hands should be raised in prayer on certain occasions.

The cause and purpose of the *Ahl-e-Hadith* Movement are little known or truly represented among Muslims. Its political resistance to British rule in India caused them to be nicknamed 'Wahabis', only to demonise and alienate its followers socially and religiously from the mainstream Muslim community. Their beliefs and political allegiance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular, created antagonism against them from all those sections of the Muslim community who were, for one reason or another, opposed to the religious approach and fundamental reformative and revivalist efforts of the 'Wahabi' *ulama*, with whom Al-Saud made their political and religious alliance. The dwindling efforts of reform by *Ahl-e-Hadith* have seen many ups and downs over the years since it started. However, the present era seems to have badly affected the very spirit of this revivalist and reformist movement. The organisation of *Ahl-e-Hadith* itself, all over the world, did not benefit from this Petro-Dollar generosity in material terms, though it created in many instance an incapable and, in some instances, opportunist leadership who exploited the organisation, as did the so-called leadership of other organisations, for their own ends.

However, when I was given this topic to write about as a part of my post-graduate course in Islamic studies, I was delighted for two reasons:

The first reason is that it has provided me with an opportunity to study and understand the proper history of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, as an organisation and as a movement. The second reason is that it has enabled me to make my best effort to present an introduction about this movement to others, and to contribute comments and criticism wherever needed.

I am glad to have this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me in the completion of this task. I am indebted to my Professor Dr.A.Z. Badawi, the principal of the Muslim College, for granting me this opportunity; he has given me all the help I needed, whether material or academic.

My special thanks also go to Professor Dr. A. A. Hamid, who has helped me all along my academic work and supervised this dissertation.

My thanks also to all those who provided necessary information about the establishment of the *Jamiat* in Britain. In particular, Moulana Fazal Karim Asim, the founder and ex-Amir of the *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* in UK, Moulana Abdul Hadi, the present Amir, and Moulana Sharif Ahmad Hafiz, the ex-Amir.

## Chapter One

### ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN INDIA

Islam was introduced into India in different ways. It was introduced by Arab traders who used to land on the west coast of Malabar and trade in spices, ivory and gems. The history of this contact dates back as far as the end of the seventh century. There was also peaceful missionary work by Muslim scholars and religious men or Sufis, who either came to India of their own accord to propagate Islam, or came for other reasons but made an effort to introduce Islam at the same time.

However, apart from these individual and missionary works and some earlier expeditions like, for instance, that of Mohammad ibn Qasim Al-Thaqafi in 712CE, the political conquerors of India were not the Arabs. Muslim domination of India came through the Turks. The Turks had converted to Islam during the eighth and ninth centuries. Their conversion, however, did not bring a comprehensive and thorough change in their previous customs, cultures and pagan lifestyle, neither did they absorb properly and fully the true spirit of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, political and sometimes denominational and sectarian considerations have always played a vital role in the interpretation of Islam. It is also worth mentioning that some of the preachers, Sufis, and political conquerors, because of their lack of knowledge of proper Islamic teachings and other specific considerations, were often lax in the teaching of Islam, and adopted elements of local 'religious' traditions. This mixture certainly had the effect of reshaping Islam in the local environment.

As it were the Turks who spread Islam politically and militarily across the Indian territories, the spiritual and ethical aspects of the religion naturally acquired many elements of Turkish local customs and polytheistic traditions. Even some Arab Muslims who lived in the Arabian Peninsula found it hard to abandon their pre-Islamic practices. So it is no surprise that those who lived far from the land of Islam, tended through ignorance or choice to mix their Islam with a different tradition.

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<sup>1</sup>Wahabi movement in India 10-11



When this already "tainted Islam" reached Indian soil, it was confronted by a well-established polytheistic civilisation, with a well-developed philosophy of its own. These new Muslim conquerors, on the one hand, influenced the local people with their customs and cultures they brought with them. On the other hand, the mutual process of inter-influencing also affected them. They came under a strong impact of local tradition through social intercourse and marriage with local women.

This doubly tainted Islam was not only further abused by political and military rulers, but the original teachings were also neglected by some so-called Sufis and preachers of loose character or, as they came to be known, *Darbari Ulama*<sup>2</sup>. The corruption and exploitation of religion became widespread. Superficial or nominal Islam became a means of acquiring social status, high positions in the government and armies and feudal status. Deep religious conviction lessened as the lure of material benefits grew stronger. This was the position of Islam and the condition in which it entered India.

The situation must have led concerned *ulama* and scholars to denounce the prevailing customs and ever-increasing abuse of the religion. It is, however, very difficult to detect any such movement or organised efforts in the early centuries of the Muslim political domination of India.

The religious corruption seems to have reached its culmination at the time of the Moghul emperor Akbar, when he proclaimed himself, with the help of some of his close associate scholars, the founder and head of a new religion, which cannot be considered in any way Islamic<sup>3</sup>. Two major factors could have been behind this invention. The first may well have been political: Akbar could have seen that it was in his regime's best interest to bring the different religions and systems of India into one. It could not have been done with one existing religion, because any effort to make Islam an umbrella religion would have been seen as a Muslim ruler's efforts to enforce his own religion under the pretext of creating religious harmony. On the other hand, any effort to bring in any other system would have been fatal and disastrous to his whole empire.

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<sup>2</sup> a term used for a ruler's appointed scholars who may or may not sit in the court, but who usually issue rulings which favour the present regime

<sup>3</sup>Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment. P 167-181



Emperor Akbar was not a religious man or leader. His attitude in his social and religious life was more like that of 'freethinkers' and unrestrained people. Religious instructions and injunctions were irritating obstacles in the way of his material enjoyment and free rule.

The blessing of the Emperor Akbar speeded the whole cycle of corruption and exploitation in social and religious life. Now people found themselves in an atmosphere where religious restrictions and injunctions were no longer enforced in their society. Not only were ordinary people free to do as they pleased with their religious life, but those people with religious authority enjoyed the full advantages of this changing trend, and were free to use religion for financial gain, making a profit out of people's superstitions.

### **THE POLITICAL AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS WHICH CAUSED THE EMERGENCE OF THE MOVEMENT.**

The final years of the 18th century, which preceded the emergence of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, saw a gradual political disintegration of the Moghul empire. Although its final and formal extinction was yet to come, the light which had been burning brightly and steadily for the previous two centuries had started flickering. This process of disintegration gained rapid momentum as the century drew towards its close. The period started to witness various independent or quasi-independent local governments in different regions of India.

At the same time, a very significant political factor was developing, namely the political ambition and strength of the British, who were gaining momentum through their successes in battle with local and provincial Muslim governments. The latter's share of land decreased day by day, and they became the main obstacle to British rule. They were being economically, politically and psychologically ruined in all parts of India.

The social life of this period saw a process of change and transition from a medieval society to a more modern one. Social degeneration was beginning to erode the moral and ethical values of the nation. Larger national interests were being sacrificed for the sake of personal gratification and greed. The future appeared to be dark and foreboding, so everyone was anxious to enjoy the best

of times for as long as they could. Luxuries, wine and dancing parties were the essential ingredients of an average nobleman's life and these were imitated by his lower counterparts on a correspondingly lower scale. The literature of the period also pandered to this prevailing mood of indolence and indulgence<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, the social and cultural impacts of Hindu thought, in the absence of an effective Muslim religious role, was beginning to show its influence in Muslim society. Social contacts through marriages flourished with a consequent deterioration in the role of Islam in social life which could not fail to leave its impact on the following generations. Moreover the caste system of Hindu culture penetrated the Muslim community<sup>5</sup>.

Such was the background of political, social and religious conditions prior to the emergence of *Ahl-e-Hadith*. The prevailing socio-religious degradation and the increasing loss of power to the non-Muslims were two forces behind the rise of the movement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Social Conditions in Eighteenth Century Northern India P158-164

<sup>5</sup>Ibid P 102-123

<sup>6</sup>Wahabi Movement in India Page 15

## **AHL-E-HADITH:**

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO THEIR HISTORY**

The beliefs, teachings and aims which the *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* holds can best be described as reformatory and puritanical in their nature. The movement emerged to reform a society which had stagnated religiously, became corrupted ethically and lost most of its links with authentic Islam.

A thorough study of the emergence of *Ahl-e-Hadith* (often referred to either as a 'group of people' or 'movement') in the Indian subcontinent shows that it is not new either in name or in spirit, nor is it unprecedented in its message or aims<sup>7</sup>. The pages of Islamic history have recorded similar movements over the centuries in different parts of the Muslim world, and under different political, social and religious circumstances. Similar movements have emerged throughout Islamic history, largely with one main purpose: to reform society along original Islamic lines. Nonetheless, these movements have taken different forms according to their own circumstances.

Revival and reform, two essential ingredients of the movement, go hand in hand. Revivalism represents the restoration of earlier Islamic teachings and Prophetic traditions, while reform is the result of this revivalism. However, the subject of the reform is the society and not the principles themselves. Reform also accommodates the ever-changing condition of the society and seeks to implement Islamic teachings and *dawah* accordingly.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* have their clear identity and distinct principles and aims within the Muslim community. They emerged as a movement to bring reform to this community, whose beliefs and practices had been polluted with non-Islamic ideas, political influences and social and religious customs of other cultures and civilisations. The movement's goal was also to bring unity to the Muslim community on the basis of their call to follow only the Qur'an and the Sunnah, using these alone as their source and principles.

There have been extensive discussions as to whether *Ahl-e-Hadith* form a sectarian / denominational group concerned only about the Islamic creed

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<sup>7</sup>Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P 161

Al-Irshad Ila Sabeel Al-Rashad P 373, 388-390



(*Aqai'd*), or a *fiqhi* group based on the system of deducing the religious rulings (*Fiqh*) and following the system blindly<sup>8</sup>. In other words, is their goal confined to any one aspect of Islamic theology or is there a wider purpose for their movement?

However, a close study of this movement removes the least suspicion about the formation of "*Ahl-e-Hadith*" on the above lines. Indeed the purpose seems quite the opposite. It is more of an intellectual movement which came to reform a society muddled by superstitions and forms of inauthentic beliefs, and restore it to its original teachings. The movement with this nature in fact includes both the above terms: *Aqai'd* and *Fiqh*. All the evidence strengthens this notion. *Ahl-e-Hadith* started as a movement not only to purify the *Aqidah* (creed) of people, but also to remove the rigidity and irrational approach in their attitudes towards *Fiqh* and *Fuqaha* (those responsible for deducing religious rulings).<sup>9</sup> Also they call their organisation, if it is one, "*Jamiat*" *Ahl-e-Hadith*, a term which very delicately defines itself and distinguishes it from being sectarian.

The movement, as it is known now, traces its origins in India to Syed Ahmad Barelvi [1786-1831] and his disciple Shah Ismail Shahid [?-1831]. Shah Ismail was the nephew of Shah Abdul Aziz and grandchild of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. He was a prolific writer and his treatises and letters contain some of the most lucid and forceful expositions of the aims and objectives of the movement. He was its role model and the one who organised this movement into its present form. There are some other distinct personalities who inspired the movement and led the process of reform and restoration before Shah Ismail and Syed Ahmad Barelvi. For example, Shah Abdul Aziz and the great scholar Shah Waliullah of Delhi.

However, Syed Ahmad Sirhindi, better known as *Mujaddid alf thani* (the Renovator of the Second Millennium) is considered in this respect the first scholar to raise the banner of reformation and revivalism in India at the time of the Moghul emperor Akbar on many fronts. His work for reform was on his own. He wrote many religious treatises and corresponded with many of his eminent contemporaries.

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<sup>8</sup>Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P 50-96 and 136-156

<sup>9</sup>Ibid P 272-273

Though the movement is known as *Ahl-e-Hadith*, there have been several other names and nicknames which they have been called by their opponents. One of these names is *Ghair Muqallid* or non-conformists, as they refuse to bind themselves to following any particular established schools of thought and jurisprudence in daily religious matters. The subject of *Taqlid* or strict conformity with one of the existing schools of thought is the most important subject which occupies their intellectual debate and discussions. As this subject is very sensitive among the followers of the four Sunni established schools of thought, any debate would inevitably only lead to further hatred and emotional arguments. This has always been the most divisive issue to the Muslim Ummah.

This title of *Ghair Muqallid*, though, indicates the exact nature of this movement and the people. This is one of the main reasons why some scholars of this movement feel proud to call their movement "the movement of the freedom of thought" or *Tahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr*<sup>10</sup>. As 'non-conformists' they see themselves as the followers of the original teachings and principles of Islam, and not bound by rulings of scholars in the intervening centuries, which were given and issued with regard to their own social circumstances, and on the basis of knowledge available to them, in particular, in *Hadith* sciences.

Likewise, the movement has also been nicknamed 'Wahhabism' or 'the Wahhabi Movement of India'. It is true that the movement, on the one hand, has many similarities in its beliefs, principles and aims with that which arose in central Arabia. Both are identical in much of their religious approach and thought, and approving of each other.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the term 'Wahhabism' was first used by the British India Authorities, or rather the East India Company, and stood for what we hear every now and then as 'Fundamentalism' or 'Extremism'. It has always been a matter of convenience to demonise a movement by this means and declare it as a pariah in the eyes of the public.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* have no hesitation in identifying with any scholar or movement who have stood to reform Muslim society in the light of the Quran and Sunnah, and restore Islam to its original teachings and fought against any

<sup>10</sup>*Tahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr* P 46-47

<sup>11</sup>*The Religious Quest of India* Pages 187-189



heresy and innovation in Islam. This is the reason why they have named themselves after the *Ahl al-Hadith*, the movement which emerged in the second and third centuries of Islam to revive the Sunnah of the Prophet and to resist what they called the *fitnah* of the Mutazalites and heretics. It claims as its own every scholar who made an effort to reform the beliefs of the Muslims, and to establish the authority of the Sunnah as the second source of Islamic teachings.

The reform of the Muslim society and the restoration of the authority of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and their proper interpretation were at the centre of the movement. Bearing this in mind, it would not be difficult to understand why they, on the one hand, vigorously supported the reformatory movement of Arabia, nicknamed 'Wahhabism', while, on the other hand, being in full sympathy with the reformatory efforts of Shaikh Jamaluddin Afghani, Shaikh Mohammad Abdu and Shaikh Rashid Reda<sup>12</sup>. We also find a considerable number of *Ahl-e-Hadith* scholars who either have an open mind towards the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, or who have been active members of *Jamat-e-Islami* of the Indian Subcontinent. This has also been the reason, in the Indian Subcontinent, that they have adopted three different attitudes with three different schools of thought. The movement of *Nadwat al-Ulama* was wholeheartedly supported<sup>13</sup>, while the Deobandis presented some difficulties, largely because of their attitudes towards *Fiqh* and *Taqlid* and some other religious issues<sup>14</sup>. However, *Ahl-e-Hadith* were diametrically opposed to the ideologies and beliefs of the Barelvis, which they called the first ever organised form of all past and present heresies<sup>15</sup>.

Although the movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith* was started purely to reform socio-religious condition of Muslim societies, it quickly gained a political orientation, and subsequently had to confront the British and Sikhs in north and north western parts of undivided India. The movement was defeated at Balakote in 1831, in a fierce battle with the Sikhs, in which Syed Ahmad and Shah Ismail were killed<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P 371-372

<sup>13</sup>Fitna-e-Qadiyaniat P 47

<sup>14</sup>Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P 375-420

<sup>15</sup>Ibid P 382-383 and 420

<sup>16</sup>Wahabi Movement in India P 24-60 and 324-342



With the defeat of the movement's political and military fronts and the demise of its leaders, the movement seemed to fall into disarray, and its army and preachers, with no apparent objectives in sight, became disorganised and dispersed. Its organisational structure soon began to fall apart, and its reform activities came to be restricted in time to only some particular areas, by some individual *ulama*. By the end of the nineteenth century, some *Ahl-e-Hadith ulama*, who were alarmed by the total demise of the movement and the ever-increasing heretical practices among Muslims, came to the conclusion that the whole reform movement would disappear if it were not soon reorganised.

To this purpose, and after much contemplation, a conference was called in Arah<sup>17</sup>, on 22nd December 1906, and the whole situation was discussed thoroughly. A decision was made to begin the efforts of reform anew. It was decided at the conference to reorganise the whole movement and bring together those who were in agreement with the aims and objectives of the reform. To realise these objectives, the movement was given a form of organisation called the 'All India *Ahl-e-Hadith* Conference', which held its first meeting in 1912 in Delhi. Moulana Thanauallah Amritsari played the most active role in organising this conference, and was elected its first general secretary. Moulana Thanauallah, together with Moulana Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Rahimabadi and Moulana Mohammad Ibrahim Sialkoti toured the whole country. They organised *Ahl-e-Hadith*, established centres, seminaries and mosques, presented their *dawah* and reform objectives to other Muslims and tried to revitalise the movement. They held their conferences frequently at intervals of one or two years. This is how the community of *Ahl-e-Hadith* came into their present organisation<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup>A town in north East India

<sup>18</sup>Fitna-e-Qadiyaniat aur Moulana Thanauallah Amritsari Pages 45-46

## Chapter Two

### IMMIGRATION AND THE AHL-E-HADITH COMMUNITY

It is impossible to pinpoint the exact year when the first Muslims came to the UK. No immigration record documents Muslim immigration sufficiently accurately. Different research works show different dates, even different centuries. Philip Lewis, documenting the presence of Muslims in Britain says: 'A Muslim presence in Britain goes back at least three hundred years to the activities of the East India Company when men from the Indian Subcontinent were first recruited into the Merchant Navy. Known as "lascars" these sailors were present in Britain's ports in sizeable numbers... At the outbreak of the Second World War seamen from South Asia accounted for some 20 percent of the Merchant Navy'<sup>1</sup>.

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the number of recruits into the Merchant Navy increased. A large proportion of them came from Yemen. Lewis says: "A recent study has documented the establishment of Yemeni communities in London Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, Hull and Sheffield in the twentieth century. Cumulatively they number no more than 15,000, but represent probably the oldest permanent Muslim settlements"<sup>2</sup>.

London, Liverpool and Woking were the most prominent centres in the late 19th and early 20th century for organised Islam in Britain, where a transient community of businessmen and students, mainly from India, used to visit and stay. Many distinguished Indian Muslims were coming to study in Britain. In 1880 there were some 100 Indian students, in 1910 more than 700, and in 1931 the number reached 1800. A high proportion, though not all, were Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

London gradually became a centre for Muslims from all over the world. The large numbers necessitated the inception of some cultural and religious activities. Some of the students and political thinkers established the *Anjuman-e-Islam* in 1886, which came to be known as the Bonn Islamic Society in

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<sup>1</sup> Islamic Britain P 11

<sup>2</sup> Ibid P 11

<sup>3</sup> Ibid P 12-13



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1903, and *Al-Jamiat Al-Islamiya* in 1907.<sup>4</sup> A central mosque fund was opened in 1910, and in 1926 a temporary mosque was established in three neighbouring houses in East London. Their efforts came to a climax in 1975, when a beautiful mosque was constructed in Fieldgate Street.<sup>5</sup>

However, the most prestigious mosque came to be established at Regent's Park in London. The land was donated by King George VI in 1944, in return for a site in Cairo intended for a new Anglican Cathedral. This spectacular Islamic cultural centre and mosque was finally opened in 1977.<sup>6</sup>

An English priest, John Paul, has discussed in his book "Studies in Mohammadism" the Muslims of Liverpool, where a Liverpool solicitor, William Henry Quillam, embraced Islam in 1887 after he had visited Morocco. Quillam established the first mosque in the city and claimed 150 adherents to Islam. He was an active writer and essayist, and produced some booklets about Islam, such as "The Faith of Islam" and "The Religion of the Sword". He also produced a weekly magazine "The Crescent", from 1893 to 1908.<sup>7</sup>

However, Woking, situated in Surrey, south-west of London, proved to be the most significant centre for Muslims in Britain. A mosque was built there in 1889, with the generous help of Princess Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal. Shah Jahan Begum was persuaded by Dr. Leitner, a Hungarian orientalist and registrar in the University of the Punjab, to found this mosque, which was intended to be the nucleus of an Islamic University. It is relevant to mention here that the benefactor Shah Jahan Begum was the wife of Nawab Siddique Hasan Khan\*, one of the most eminent and prominent Ahl -e-Hadith scholars in the Indian Subcontinent.

<sup>4</sup> The Straight Path, Vol 9, Nov/Dec88 Page 7

<sup>5</sup> Ibid Page 7

<sup>6</sup> Islamic Britain P 13

<sup>7</sup> Ibid P 13, The Straight Path Vol. 9, P 6

\* Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan (1835-1889) occupies a position of outstanding eminence. Born at Qannuj, a city in northern India, he received his early education under the famous Jurist of Delhi, Mufti Sadr al-Din Khan "Azarda". Later he specialised in the study of Tafsir (Quranic exegesis) and specially Hadith. In the latter discipline one of his teachers, Abd al-Haqq Banarsi, was a disciple of the Yemenite scholar al-Shaukani.



The Woking Mosque became a social centre for British Muslims, frequented by visiting Muslim dignitaries. The mosque and the Muslim Literary Society involved many of the Muslim luminaries of South Asia and Britain, including the distinguished Indian Jurist and Islamic scholar, Syed Ameer Ali [d.1928], and the Qur'an translator Marmaduke Pickthall [d.1936]. In 1924 it was reckoned that thirty people regularly attended prayers at the Woking mosque.<sup>8</sup>

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It is even more difficult to establish when a member of *Ahl-e-Hadith* first landed in the U.K. There has never been a system of categorising immigrants on the basis of religious background. Their only motivation was financial gain and benefits, and they belonged to all different Muslim denominations and cultures.

However, one thing was apparent and interesting, and that was the proportion of *Ahl-e-Hadith* among Muslims here, relatively same as to their population back home. There has been no serious effort to count the number of Muslims belonging to the *Ahl-e-Hadith* in general. A limited effort, though, has been made to find their numbers through their membership of the *Jamiat*. It does not necessarily mean, however, that every single *Ahl-e-Hadith* has registered with the *Jamiat*.

However, the number of *Ahl-e-Hadith* who hold membership of *Jamiat* is just around 5000, while in general their actual number is estimated to be around 9000. However, as Moulana Abdul Hadi, the ex-General Secretary (and the

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Siddiq Hasan Khan entered service in the Muslim Princely state of Bhopal, where he rose to the position of Chief Minister. In 1871, he married Shah Jahan Begum, the ruler of the state. In 1886, he was suspected and accused by the British authorities of Wahabi proclivities, and though he disclaimed any political or doctrinal association with the Wahabis, he fell into disgrace and spent the last years of his life in scholarly and pietistic retirement. He is credited with the scholarship of over a hundred works. (Muslim Self-statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968 P 6-7). Also see "An account of my life", by Her Highness Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum, Vol 1, P 166-178 and 203-211.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid P 12

Ibid P 6 Islam and Muslims in Britain by: Suhaib Hasan

present Amir) of *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* U.K. stressed,<sup>9</sup> the above number only belongs to *Ahl-e-Hadith* from the Indian Subcontinent. It does not include other like-minded Muslims and 'Salafis', who come from Muslim countries other than the Indian Subcontinent. There is no doubt that the number of "*Ahl-e-Hadith*" or Salafis would shot up greatly if the numbers from other countries were counted. Usually mosques belonging to each of the above groups are shared by all.

## A COMMUNITY IN THE MAKING

The influx of Muslim immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent started in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Muslims belonging to various strata of society, schools of thought, intellectual and ideological sections of the community sought to migrate to Britain. Most of the immigrants came here as labourers and factory workers into booming British industries, which were suffering from a shortage of workers. The main and primary motive for immigration was, therefore, economic and financial<sup>10</sup>.

The chief characteristic of immigration in the 1950s was that it was confined to male immigrants, as a foreign labour force was being recruited to work in textile mills and other factories. There were not many immigrants who felt either willing or able to bring over their families and children. Naturally, in these circumstances and in the light of their economic situation they did not have much religious urge or see the necessity of establishing places of worship, and had no need of supplementary schools. Those who had a religious inclination tried to perform their religious duties, as convenient, in their homes.

However, from the early 1960s, the immigration situation started to change. Philip Lewis has noted<sup>11</sup> that by the early 60s the amount of immigration had increased and Muslim households and communities had begun to take shape with the arrival of parents, wives and children. The increase of immigrants and the arrival of families created a need for separate social and religious organisations, which on the one hand could satisfy their spiritual needs and

<sup>9</sup> Personal Interview 1995

<sup>10</sup> The Straight Path P 6-7 and Teesside's Muslims P 14

<sup>11</sup> Islamic Britain 17-18



provide a suitable place and atmosphere for the upbringing of their children, and on the other would help them to understand the nature of the country's culture, and how best they could conduct their religious lives in their present situation.

Philip Lewis further noted: "This shift from being sojourners to settlers necessitated the investment in a mosque and an imam to lead prayers and teach children, and both reflected and precipitated community formation."

## A CRISIS OF IDENTITY

Along with this ever-changing process and struggle for religious survival, while other religious groups appeared to be organising themselves, *Ahl-e-Hadith* seemed to be invisible and away from the limelight. Many of them tried to hide their religious identity as they were very much in a minority with regard to other Muslim religious groups. The most prominent *Ahl-e-Hadith* activist at that time, who had the privilege of being the first Amir to this organisation, was Moulana Fazal Karim Asim. In conversation Moulana Asim explained that in those early years, although *Ahl-e-Hadith* immigrants existed in many parts of Britain, they shied away from disclosing their identity to their fellow Muslims.

Moulana Asim further explained this with two examples. In those days, he said, *Ahl-e-Hadith* journals published in India and Pakistan, used to come on subscription to some activists, but many of them did not dare read them or share them publicly. Moreover, many *Ahl-e-Hadith* did not feel comfortable offering their prayers the way they should, and some of them even participated in the 'religious' activities of some other groups whose views they did not share religiously or ideologically. This religious inferiority complex seems at first glance to have been the direct result of being a very tiny minority within the hostile surroundings of other Muslim groups, who were vying with each other to dominate the newly emerging Muslim community. However, the whole situation had more to do with the religious background the immigrants had come from.

When one looks back at the situation in the Subcontinent before the 1960s, one can clearly see why a narrow religious attitude and rigidity in behaviour existed on the part of some Muslim factions, and why *Ahl-e-Hadith* had



developed this sense of religious inferiority. Indeed, before the 1960s and in many instances up to the late 60s, *Ahl-e-Hadith* or, as they were called, 'Wahhabis' were forbidden from entering the mosques of other factions in most part of the Indian Subcontinent. If it happened that a 'Wahhabi' entered the mosque of another group and offered his prayers, the place had to be washed and purified. The misnomer 'Wahhabi' shows the extent of contempt and disregard which an *Ahl-e-Hadith* had to suffer.

Therefore, this attitude among Muslims together with the numerical disadvantage of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, made them even less visible and less active.

## A MAN OF COURAGE

Though *Ahl-e-Hadith* seemed to be absent from the stage and invisible as a religious group, some individuals nevertheless felt the need to reorganise themselves. However, nobody had the time and courage to come forward, except one who from his very arrival has involved himself in the service of the community: Moulana Fazal Karim Asim.

Moulana Asim immigrated to Britain in 1962 as a factory worker. He was educated in religious sciences, a holder of *Fadil* degree from Madrasa Ghaznawiyah in Amritsar, and *Moulvi Fadil*, *Munshi Fadil* and *Adib Fadil* from Punjab University. Before he emigrated to Britain, he had worked for 27 years in the educational administration both for the British and for the Pakistan government.

After his arrival in Birmingham he came across two gentlemen who ran a mosque converted from a small house. They were Moulvi Muhammad Azim and Hafiz Muhammad Ilyas. They ran some small religious activities among immigrant Muslims under the title *Jam'iyat al Muslimin*. These activities were run on a voluntary basis. Though neither belonged to *Ahl-e-Hadith*, Moulana Asim joined them in their religious activities and served also as the *Khateeb* of that mosque.

When in 1963 the UK Islamic Mission was founded in Birmingham, he became a very active member. He worked as *Khateeb* at the Mission's mosque for about one year and taught children as well.

In 1965, he saw the compelling need to establish a proper supplementary school for Muslim children whose parents were just immigrating to Britain and settling here. The main aim was to enable them to learn English so that they could compete in their classes. To this purpose he laid down the foundation of the Muslim Oriental School at Small Heath, Birmingham.

Moulana Asim, though a staunch *Ahl-e-Hadith* and ever keen to promote the cause of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, made great efforts to keep the Muslim community united, and not divided on denominational lines. He worked with every group of the Muslim community regardless of their ideological inclinations and differences. He even harmonised himself to the extent that he avoided offering prayers according to his own personal conviction.

### TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE

Moulana Asim did his best to work in full co-operation with all the groups of the Muslim community until 1974. However, the community appeared to be forming itself along the same ideological and communal lines as 'back home'. *Ahl-e-Hadith* were now being excluded or marginalised in various religious and social activities. Other groups speeded up their activities and started forming their own communities on ideological lines. Factional *Ulama* were being recruited from 'back home' to serve this purpose and run the mosques. Differences started to widen, and disunity instead of unity became an instrument to gain some religious or social leadership.

At this stage, Moulana Asim explained, it became imperative for *Ahl-e-Hadith* to establish their own identity in the jungle of ever-mushrooming organisations. It was vital for them to have their own centre and mosques. It was time to organise the community and start their own activities. He consulted his other colleagues and *Ahl-e-Hadith* friends and with their help he laid down the foundation of *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* U.K. in the beginning of 1975. Soon afterwards he started the task of gathering information about *Ahl-e-Hadith* individuals and families.



## THE DELEGATION FROM MADINAH

It so happened that in August 1975, as the organisation and its activities was getting under way, a delegation from the Islamic University Madinah, Saudi Arabia, arrived in Britain to look into the prospects and need of *dawah* among Muslim immigrants in particular, and non-Muslims in general. The delegation stayed in Birmingham for about one and a half months, and toured the different cities to meet the Muslim communities and their organisations. The delegation was made up of two Sheikhs and three students. The two Sheikhs were Sheikh Abdul Wahhab Al-Banna, who was the inspector of schools in Saudi Arabia, and Sheikh Nasiruddin al-Albani, a prominent scholar in *Hadith* Science at the Islamic University. The three students who came for the purpose of translation, were Shareef Ahmad Hafiz, Mahmood Ahmad Mirpuri, and Major Mohammad Aslam.<sup>11</sup>

The foundation of the *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* came as a happy coincidence for the purpose of the delegation as they found it intellectually and ideologically a like-minded organisation. They visited the centre and met Moulana Asim and other members and together with them organised several public and private meetings.

As the delegation was preparing to return to Madinah, Moulana Asim requested them to help *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* both financially and with able and learned people. As the delegation had observed the situation very closely, and felt a need to speed up the prospect of *dawah*, they promised to bring this to the attention of benevolent people and Islamic organisations. They also requested Moulana Asim to come for the pilgrimage that year, so that they could arrange a meeting for him with Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Abdullah Ibn Baz, the chairman of the presidency of *Dar al-Ifta* in Saudi Arabia.

Moulana Asim left for Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj which was held in December 1975. A meeting was arranged as planned between Moulana Asim and Sheikh ibn Baz. The Sheikh listened to what the Moulana and his

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<sup>11</sup> Moulana Fazal Karim Asim, Personal Interview,  
also see *Sirat-e-Mustaqeem*, vol. 12 P19



delegation had to say, and asked how he could help. Moulana Asim with the help of his delegation put forward two requests. As the *Jamiat* needed to purchase a property where it could base its activities and promote its *dawah* mission, they asked the Sheikh to help them, if possible, financially. Looking at the shortage of learned and expert people in the *dawah* field they also requested him to send graduate students from the Islamic University Madinah to help strengthen the organisation and widen the scope of its mission, suggesting the names of the three students who had earlier come to Britain. The Sheikh initially agreed to both requests. However, it seems that he was never able to send any financial help. Though reminded and requested again, financial constraints may not have allowed him to help in this way, and his promise may have exceeded his organisation's financial ability.

However, Sheikh ibn Baz fulfilled his second promise and sent two of the three students named who graduated in 1976 from the Islamic University: Mahmood Ahmad Mirpuri and Shareef Ahmad Hafiz. They arrived in Britain at the end of 1976. Meanwhile another graduate from the Islamic University, Abdul Kareem Saqib, who had already arrived in Britain on his own, happened to meet Moulana Asim and joined the team. He also became an appointee from Saudi Arabia like the other two students requested by the *Jamiat*.

Moulana Asim served the *Jamiat* in his capacity as Amir from its foundation in 1975 until 1991. Hafiz Muhammad Yaqub was chosen as its first general secretary, though he was forced to resign in 1983 owing to the demands of his Halal meat business.

## AN UNEXPECTED OFFER OF HELP

Moulana Asim did not succeed in securing any financial help from Saudi Arabia. Large premises were needed for the purpose of the *Jamiat's* activities and donations and collections did not raise sufficient amounts.

Meanwhile a huge building which used to be a public library and leisure centre in Small Heath, Birmingham, was put up for sale by the council in early 1976. The building seemed to be potentially suitable for all activities of the *Jamiat*, and was on offer for £24,000. The solicitor advised Moulana Asim to

accept the offer and buy the building. However, the shortage of money was the greatest hurdle.

While efforts were being made to secure the purchase of this building, a Kuwaiti businessman happened to visit Birmingham. His name was Abd al-Aziz Al-Mutawwa'. He came to know of the activities of the *Jamiat* and the financial problems it was facing. Sheikh Al-Mutawwa' donated from his own pocket the huge sum of £20,000. With the help of further local donations the building was purchased and a centre for the *Jamiat* was thus established.

### MOULANA MAHMOOD AHMAD MIRPURI

Without doubt, the credit for establishing the *Jamiat* and initial organisation of *Ahl-e-Hadith* goes to Moulana Fazal Karim Asim, who was its Amir from 1975 till 1991. He made the greatest efforts under the circumstances for the cause and benefit of the "*Jamiat*". Although, from the foundation of the *Jamiat*, he had a good and sincere team of people who gave of their time and worked hard for the *Jamiat*, he nonetheless felt the need for somebody who was not only able and active, but who could be devoted full-time to the cause and mission of the *Jamiat*, understanding the situation and circumstances and working accordingly.

Moulana Asim, in his search for such a person, found his hopes realised when he met the Islamic University delegation. He found all three students very able and apparently dedicated, in particular, Mahmood Ahmad Mirpuri.

Moulana Mirpuri, as he toured the country with the delegation and met people, expressed a desire to come to Britain after the completion of his studies in Madinah and work for the *Jamiat*. A request was therefore put forward to the officials at the Islamic University, and at the end of their term he and Shareef Ahmad Hafiz were sent to work in Britain.

Moulana Mirpuri was born in 1945 in a small village near Mirpur. In his childhood he lost his parents and was brought up as an orphan. He had no brothers or sisters. However, although his family had no educational background, he became a learned and highly educated man.



After his early education, he went to Gujranwala (Punjab, Pakistan), where he completed *Dars-e-Nizami* in a well known religious seminary: Jamia Islamia. Later he moved from Jamia Islamia Gujranwala to Jamia Islamia Bahawalpur, which was raised in 1975 to the level of university under the name of Islamic University Bahawalpur. Here he attained a degree in Islamic studies and moved to Lahore where he enrolled in the department of the Arabic Oriental College, Punjab University Lahore, and received his master's degree in Arabic in 1971.

During his stay in Lahore, he became deeply involved in the activities of the *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* Pakistan, and became a member of the editorial board of the *Jamiat's* organ "*Ahl-e-Hadith*". He resided in Begum Kot, in the suburb of Lahore, where he used to deliver his Friday sermons. Both these activities helped him to gain substantial experience and fame as a journalist and orator.

In 1971, he received a scholarship for higher education in Islamic studies at Islamic University, Madinah. The atmosphere in Madinah helped him develop his abilities and knowledge both of Islamic sciences and the Arabic language. He also took the opportunity to develop a relationship with prominent Saudi scholars.<sup>12</sup>

After being appointed to Britain by the Saudi religious authority, *Dar al-Ifita*, he found a vast and enormous field to exercise his abilities. The *Jamiat* was at that time barely two years old, still in its early process of organisation. The task was challenging and demanding and Moulana Mirpuri seemed happy to take it up, with a full realisation of the responsibilities ahead. He became the mind and soul of the *Jamiat* and the driving force behind all its activities. The *Jamiat* became known among *Ahl-e-Hadith* as well as among other Muslim groups and organisations.

Moulana Mirpuri came from a region which for a long time has been an area of confrontation between India and Pakistan. This background, together with his other communicative abilities, provided him with a chance to speak out on political issues. This developed in him a taste for politics and he soon became known in political circles. People from Mirpur came from both *Ahl-e-Hadith* and non-*Ahl-e-Hadith* backgrounds. To make a good politician he had to

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<sup>12</sup> The Straight Path Vol. 9 P4



establish relationships with both groups, which was also good for his religious mission.

On the one hand, he speeded up the activities of the *Jamiat* and the strengthening of the organisation, while on the other hand, he maintained a very good working relationship with all other religious organisations, and good personal relations with community leaders. The most vivid example of his sincere efforts to bring together the scholars of different schools of thought was the foundation of the Islamic Shariah Council.<sup>13</sup>

When Hafiz Yaqub, due to personal reasons, resigned in about at the end of 1983 as General Secretary of the *Jamiat*, Moulana Mirpuri was elected in his place, and then was re-elected in 1986.

He toured the whole country, searching for *Ahl-e-Hadith* wherever he had any clues, and established branches. He reinvigorated and activated the whole body of the *Jamiat*, not only in Britain but in Pakistan and some other countries.

He proved himself a Muslim leader of International calibre by organising the first European Islamic conference to co-ordinate the activities of European Muslims to preserve their identity and to promote the cause of Islam. The conference was held at Olympia in London and was attended by hundreds of delegates from all over the world.

Moulana Mirpuri had also a great desire to unite *Ahl-e-Hadith* with all its factions and organisations in different countries. To this end, he was planning to set up the movement's international headquarters in Britain, from where it could supervise all the activities run by *Ahl-e-Hadith* all over the world. This would have been his greatest contribution to the movement. However, his brilliant career came to an untimely end on 10th October 1988, on the M6 Motorway in Cheshire. He was travelling from Edinburgh to Birmingham with his wife, mother-in-law and two of his sons when a lorry ploughed into the back of his car. He, his mother-in law and son Faisal (aged 8) died instantly while the other passengers were injured.

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13 Ibid  
P.60

## Chapter Three

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

*Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* started its first activities in Birmingham, and so its first centre and mosque as well as its school came to be established there. The city of Birmingham, in the course of time, has become the centre for all its activities and has gradually acquired the status of *Jamiat's* UK headquarters, from where the central committee functions.

After its establishment the *Jamiat* worked vigorously to organise *Ahl-e-Hadith* living in other cities and to form local units in those cities, so that the members and families of *Ahl-e-Hadith* could be brought together and their religious needs could be met. Up to now 35 local units have been established in cities where *Ahl-e-Hadith* are identified to be living. However, this does not necessarily mean that all of these branches are of equivalent nature and standard. A 'branch' usually means a place of worship or a mosque, whether this mosque is purpose-built or the prayers are only performed in a house. While some of these branches have their own premises for their religious activities, others exist in name only. This is because even if there are only one or two *Ahl-e-Hadith* living in a particular town, they are considered to be a 'branch', even if they do not meet the actual requirements of a branch.<sup>1</sup>

The article 11 section (a) of the *Jamiat's* Constitution<sup>2</sup> says: "The local *Jamiat* will be formed in a town/city in which at least three persons accept the beliefs of *Ahl-e-Hadith* and if they adopt the membership of the *Jamiat*."

Nevertheless, this is part of their process of organising the *Ahl-e-Hadith* community. While 35 branches or units are announced to be working, the struggle is vigorously being made to organise them in other cities and places.

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<sup>1</sup> Moulana Abdul Hadi, Personal Interview 1995

<sup>2</sup> *Jamiat's* Constitution P 7

## STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANISATION

The *Jamiat* as a organisation has the following divisions:

- 1- The Executive Council
- 2- The Advisory Council
- 3- The Trustees

### THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Article 16 of the *Jamiat*'s constitution states:<sup>3</sup> "The Executive Council will be the most powerful organ of the *Jamiat* for the purpose of the organisation and the administration of the *Jamiat*. The Executive Council will manage and accomplish the affairs which include:-

- a-To make proposals for important problems and to find practical ways and means for furthering the ideals and objectives of the *Jamiat*.
- b-To give practical shape to the decisions of the central *Jamiat* Advisory Council.
- c-To form sub-committees to solve important and special problems.
- d-To prepare the annual budget and to sanction expenditure after the approval of the budget.
- e-To sanction expenses in excess of budget in view of the emergency situation.
- f-To appoint, suspend, demote and dismiss as well as fix the duties and the responsibilities and the emoluments of the personnel working under the authority of the *Jamiat*.
- g-To arrange for the annual conference and other missionary activities and the organisational meetings.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid P10



h-To arrange for the election at local *Jamiat* branch level and to prepare the code of rules and regulations for election.

i-To suspend or to take any disciplinary action against an office-bearer who does not follow the beliefs, ideals and objectives of the *Jamiat* or acts as an obstacle in the way of the *Jamiat*.

j-The final decision will be given by the Amir of the *Jamiat* Advisory Council in cases when the Amir takes a decision against a member or an office-bearer.

k-To extend the period of legal authority of the central *Jamiat* Advisory Council.

l-To entrust any duty and authority to any member of the Central Executive Council."

## MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Members who hold office at the Central Executive Council are as follows<sup>4</sup>:-

- 1-Amir
- 2-Deputy Amir (1)
- 3-Deputy Amir (2)
- 4-Secretary General
- 5-Deputy Secretary General
- 6-Secretary to the Treasury
- 7-Secretary for information/publication
- 8-Secretary of Tablighi mission
- 9-Secretary of Education

Since the *Jamiat* has always been dominated by members who belonged to or had their origin in Pakistan, and in particular, in Mirpur, an area in Pakistan-dominated Kashmir, a new office has been opened with the name of "Jihad Section". Its main and primary purpose was to co-ordinate efforts among Kashmiris to collect donations and finance those who are struggling for Kashmir in India, or to look after those families whose members are in one

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<sup>4</sup> The Constitution, Article 17

way or other affected by this struggle. However, the responsibilities of the "Jihad Section" have since been extended and it aims to serve all those places where Muslims are affected by war.

## THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The *Jamiat* holds its election every three years<sup>5</sup>. No election will be considered legal unless the notification has been given at least four weeks in advance to the members of the Advisory Council. Under the electoral system, the meeting, held for the purpose of electing the executive council, elects only three members: the Amir, the Secretary General and the Secretary to the Treasury.<sup>6</sup> The rest of the office-bearers will be nominated by the Amir in consultation with the Secretary General. The above three members are elected not by a general body of the people, but rather by the members of the advisory council.

In the event of resignation or dismissal of an office-bearer, the Amir will have the right to nominate an office-bearer from among the members of the Advisory Council on a temporary basis, who will hold office until the normal meeting of the Central Advisory Council.

## THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The advisory council is basically made of those members who are elected by their *Jamiat*'s local branches for the purpose of representation at central *Jamiat* office. The representation of cities is in accordance with the number of the members in each local *Jamiat* branch.<sup>7</sup>

Its main functions involves<sup>8</sup> :-

- 1- Electing the office bearers in accordance with legal sanctions of the *Jamiat*.

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<sup>5</sup> Article 18, Section B

<sup>6</sup> Ibid A

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 12 Section A-C

<sup>8</sup> Article 13, Section A-E

2- Receiving and storing information about all members of the *Jamiat* all over Britain.

3- Raising funds in order to meet the expenses of the *Jamiat*.

4-Supervising the work in progress of the local *Jamiat* and meeting their lawful demands.

There have to be at least two meetings of the Advisory Council in a year. It is the duty of the Secretary General to call the meeting<sup>9</sup>. The activities of the *Jamiat* are reported and the financial accounts are presented in the last meeting of the year.

The members of the Advisory Council can move a resolution for amendment or incorporation in the constitution. The Advisory Council can endorse or incorporate in the constitution with either unanimous or majority vote. For the move of any amendment two weeks' notice is necessary before the meeting of the Advisory Council<sup>10</sup>.

The Amir has the highest authority in the central Advisory Council of the *Jamiat*. His decision is final in case of differences in explanation or interpretation of any article of the constitution of the *Jamiat*. He will always remain a member of the Central Advisory Council with a right to nominate five members for the Central Advisory Council who will be extra to the elected representatives from the local *Jamiat* membership.

## THE JAMIAT'S LOCAL BRANCHES

Local branches are considered as the backbone of the whole organisation. They provide members as well as donations to run the activities of the *Jamiat*. They are the bearers of its message, and are immensely important to the entire activities which the *Jamiat* organises.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 14, A

<sup>10</sup> Ibid G



The local *Jamiat* branches is "formed in a town or city in which at least three persons accept the beliefs of the *Ahl-e-Hadith*, and adopt the membership of the *Jamiat*"<sup>11</sup>.

The office-bearers of the local *Jamiat* are elected as follows:-

- 1- The Amir
- 2- The Secretary General
- 3- The Treasurer

The office-bearers make up the local administrative panel, and administer on the advice of local *Jamiat* members. Any office-bearer at the local branch has to resign before assuming the office in the central *Jamiat*.<sup>12</sup>

The main duties which the local *Jamiat* has to carry out are :-

1-To maintain a register of all the members who live locally with details pertaining to their names, occupation and numbers of the members of their families with their addresses<sup>13</sup>.

2-To fix a monthly amount of donation and collect it from the local *Jamiat*'s members<sup>14</sup>.

3-To reach the local people and convey the beliefs and message of *Ahl-e-Hadith*. To run the local religious activities for Muslim families, and solve any problems concerning the spiritual and religious aspects of life.

The local *Jamiat* is directly affiliated to the central *Jamiat*. The executive council has the right, if the local situation so demands to dissolve any local *Jamiat* committee and call fresh elections<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid 11 A

<sup>12</sup> Article 11, Section E

<sup>13</sup> Ibid G

<sup>14</sup> Ibid C

<sup>15</sup> Ibid B/F

## THE TRUSTEES

The central *Jamiat* of *Ahl-e-Hadith* and its local branches can have a maximum of seven Trustees. All candidates for the Trusteeship have to be adherents of the *Ahl-e-Hadith* school of thought and support its beliefs and ideas. The selection of the Trustees takes place through a meeting of the Advisory Council. If any conflict arises in selecting a trustee at local level then in that case the Central *Jamiat* has the right to intervene and impose its own authority. It also has the right to nominate trustees if it so wishes<sup>16</sup>. The Advisory Council of the *Jamiat* has the power to relieve a trustee of his trusteeship. The reason to remove a trustee from the Central *Jamiat*, the procedure is as follows. This is also the procedure for the cancellation of membership<sup>17</sup>:

1-Insanity

2-Continuous disregard of the beliefs, the goals, the agreed ways of executing an assigned work, and the decision taken by the *Jamiat*, on the part of the members.

3-Obduracy and persistence on major sinful acts.<sup>18</sup>

In the event of the above-mentioned cases the Amir of the *Jamiat* can cancel the membership or trusteeship of a person for which he has the right to appeal to the Central Advisory Council of the *Jamiat*.<sup>19</sup>

The Trustees hold the property of the *Jamiat* rested in them whether freehold or leasehold. All investments of the *Jamiat* is held by the Trustees upon trust for the *Jamiat*. They are responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of all trust property including insurance and repair.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Article 29 Sections A/B/ C

<sup>17</sup> Article 29 Sections G

<sup>18</sup> Article 8

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 8

<sup>20</sup> Article 29 Section B 1/ 3/4

## Chapter Four

### BELIEFS, IDEALS AND OBJECTIVES

As has been explained earlier, *Ahl-e-Hadith* as a movement and as a group came into existence in the Indian Subcontinent as a reaction to religious corruption and misrepresentation of Islamic teachings by the very people who were at the heart of religious authority. The movement's main aim was to purify the beliefs of Muslims according to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They aim to go back to Islam's first principles and to restore the original simplicity and purity of faith and practice. They lay emphasis, accordingly, on the reassertion of *Tawhid* and the denial of occult powers and knowledge of the unseen to any of Allah's creatures. They reject the miraculous powers of saints and their exaggerated veneration. They claim no new interpretation of Islam, but rather go back to the original.

As a result of the nature and objectives of the movement, *Ahl-e-Hadith* had to emphasise two main objects: The first is strict observation of *Tawhid*, as it was explained by the Qur'an and the Prophet. The subject of *Tawhid* or Monotheism occupies the most eminent place in their beliefs, and stands at the head of their missionary activities<sup>1</sup>. This is seen as the main purpose of the Prophet's mission. *Ahl-e-Hadith* believe that the majority of Muslims have drifted away from the authentic notion of *Tawhid*. They also believe that spiritual eminence and salvation could only be achieved by strict adherence to the teachings and commands of Allah as given in the Qur'an and laid down by the Prophet, and not by developing different notions of theological philosophies alien to the Islamic teachings.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, they follow the teachings and explanation of *Tawhid* put forward by Ibn Taymiyah.

The second emphasis is upon holding fast to the teachings and spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah<sup>3</sup>. As a reformist and puritanical movement they have this as the pivotal point of their mission, and they emphasise that a pure Islam

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<sup>1</sup> The Constitution, Our Mission, Section A P 3

<sup>2</sup> Wahabi movement in India P 17

<sup>3</sup> The Constitution, P 3



could only be followed by adopting the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Both are the primary sources of Islam and the integrity must be maintained. Authorities and scholars, when deciding any religious rulings, must take account of both sources.

This belief has made them the vigorous defenders and champions of *Hadith* which, on the one hand, made them look upon their movement as the inheritors of revivalism and reform by *Ahl al-Hadith* in the first three centuries of Hijra. On the other hand, it produced among them many eminent scholars who have contributed by their research works, treatises and commentaries in the field of *Hadith Science*.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* defend their claim of being the true upholders of the Qur'an and Sunnah by presenting many examples in this respect. For instance, In the subject of *Tawhid*, they say that their position is that which the Qur'an teaches, not one which Sufis have invented, or the one held by Muslim Philosophers. They also derive their beliefs about the Prophet whether in his life or after his death, from the Qur'an, the *Hadith* and the views of the Companions.

There are two other main subjects which distinguish *Ahl-e-Hadith* from other Muslims. They are *Taqlid* and *Ijtihad*.

### **TAQLID\***

*Taqlid* is one of the most distinct dividing lines between *Ahl-e-Hadith* and other Muslim denominations. Piles of treatises and books have been written over the centuries for and against the notion of *Taqlid* by scholars of all sides. It had provoked an extensive ideological and theological discussion among Muslims<sup>4</sup>. The notion of *Taqlid*, which is perceived and practised by majority of the Muslim denominations and religious groups, has existed only since the third century from Hijra. *Ahl-e-Hadith* argue that it would be unwise, in first

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\* *Taqlid* means to act or follow someone blindly in what he is saying without demanding any evidence.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Irshad* P9-42 The entire book is written to refute the notion of *Taqlid* advocated by some eminent Deobandi scholars, for example, Rasheed Ahmad Gangohi, Moulana Mahmood al-Hasan and Moulana Mohammad Yahya Kandhlawi. Also see *Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr* P177-247

place, to bind oneself with rulings and religious edicts issued in some certain social, cultural and political backgrounds of second, third and fourth centuries<sup>5</sup>.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* hold that the *Shariah* is dynamic and the principles of its teachings are complete and comprehensive. They provide full guidance for Muslims in different times, places and circumstances. Muslim scholars are free to deduce any ruling in the guidance of *Shariah's* principles in their own circumstances, and are not bound to follow a ruling given by other scholars according to their own situation and context. *Taqlid*, they believe, makes people stagnate, and works against the whole spirit of Islam.

In the view of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, *Taqlid* was not the way of the *Salaf* (the Companions and *Ulama* of the first and second centuries)<sup>6</sup>. They support this case with evidence from sayings of those Jurists (*Fuqaha*), whose religious opinions and rulings are alleged to be followed, and their insistence that if an authentic *Hadith* was found to contradict an opinion given by them, the *Hadith* had to be followed<sup>7</sup>.

However, this view of *Ahl-e-Hadith* about *Taqlid* does not, in any way, mean their disrespect to those Imams whose rulings are claimed to be followed, and for that matter, to any Muslim scholars<sup>8</sup>. *Ahl-e-Hadith* strongly defend their position and accuse their opponents of violating the objectives of the *Shariah*, and idolising their respective Imams and scholars, instead of understanding the message of their academic and religious work<sup>9</sup>. For *Ahl-e-Hadith*, being more than one school of thought, and having more than one opinion in many cases, are themselves evidence of the flexibility and openness of the *Shariah*. *Taqlid*, for them, leads only to narrow-mindedness, rigidity and stagnation of Muslim thoughts and community. *Taqlid* is an innovation with no root in Islamic principles and teachings.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Al-Irshad P 70-71

<sup>6</sup> Ibid P104 -105

<sup>7</sup> Ibid P115 116 Footnotes, Also Tharik-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P197-244

<sup>8</sup> Al-Irshad P 34

<sup>9</sup> Ibid P 33

<sup>10</sup> Ibid and Tahrik-e-Azadi-e-Fikr Pages: 174 - 247



## IJTIHAD

Although *Taqlid* and *Ijtihad*, are two separate subjects, *Taqlid* began to be practised only when the 'door of *Ijtihad*' was, as it was claimed, closed. They are two separate but related subjects. *Ijtihad* as a technical term means to strive hard to deduce a ruling when there is no obvious answer in the Qur'an, or Prophetic Traditions, i.e. human judgement.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* hold that the 'door' of *Ijtihad* has never been and can never be closed. Nobody is authorised to do it. "Some rigid and narrow minded people claim that the process of *Ijtihad* ended with the four Imams, and that there would be no *Mujtahid* after them. This is utterly wrong and has no evidence or authority"<sup>11</sup>.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* say that a *Mujtahid* today does not face the same difficulties as those who lived in the early centuries of Islam, with regard to the books of exegesis of the Qur'an and *Hadith* and their sciences, *Usul al-Fiqh*, Arabic grammar and the knowledge of other related subjects. The availability of these sciences has made the process of *Ijtihad* easier than ever. They accuse those who claim the door of *Ijtihad* to be closed, of being unrealistic about the whole discussion. *Ahl-e-Hadith* say of their opponents that when they come to discuss the subject of *Ijtihad* and *Taqlid*, they argue that *Ijtihad* is not allowed to us because nobody can reach the intellectual abilities which those Imams reached, so any new understanding of the meaning and context of the Qur'an and *Hadith* is now impossible and heretical. However, *Ahl-e-Hadith* have noted that when it comes to arguing and defending the notion of *Taqlid*, and defending the deductions and understanding of their own Imams, they drain their undiscovered mental and intellectual abilities.<sup>12</sup>

*Ahl-e-Hadith* do not believe in only one *Mujtahid* or four *Mujtahids*. They say that the *Ummah* has produced *Mujtahids* in every age and every part of the Muslim world. This is God-given knowledge and not restricted to any particular scholar and age, as is explained in the Qur'an<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Al-Irshad P 119-122

<sup>12</sup> Ibid P 328-339 & P340-341

<sup>13</sup> Al-Irshad P85-88



*Ahl-e-Hadith* believe that the reapplication of the principle of *Ijtihad* will end the stagnation of thought which has clouded the minds of Muslims over the generations and centuries. This stagnation has completely alienated Muslims from the true mainstream of Islam, and weakened their cause in presenting the authentic, simple and tolerant nature of this religion.<sup>14</sup>

However, hardly any practical steps or rigorous efforts have been made to put this rhetoric into realisation. As it has been made clear earlier, the purpose and aims of the movement is hardly now clear into the minds of its own followers. This is more true when it comes to the religious leadership of the organisation and their co-ordination, even in the implementation of the basic purposes and aims of the movement. It lacks an executive body whose sole function would be the co-ordination and execution of the primary purposes of its foundation and not the running of the organisation only. The body should be fully independent of any organisational or electoral change and personal ideological inclination. The body should be made up of only those scholars who are dedicated to the cause of the movement, and agree with its basic aims in full clarity, who could elaborate, lead and give the direction under all changing circumstances.

Here the question may arise whether *Ahl-e-Hadith* follow the practice of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's school of thought or Ibn Taymiyah? Imam Ahmad, in my opinion, represents the revivalist movement of *Ahl al-Hadith* in the second century, while Ibn Taymiyah embodies both the revivalism as well as the reformist movement of his own time. Thus it may make it easier for us to understand why *Ahl-e-Hadith* pay their respects and regard to both of them as religious leaders and inspirers of their own movement.

## SUFISM

*Ahl-e-Hadith*, as harsh critics of Sufi mythology and innovation, have acquired a bad name among most of the Sufi sections of the Muslim community. The movement's attitudes towards Sufism could be summarised as follows:-

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<sup>14</sup> See Al-Irshad Pages: 119, 136, 327-339, Also Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P44 -50, 372-373

One of the great ironies of the movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith* was that its reform efforts with regard to Sufism were deliberately misrepresented by its opponents. The movement has generally been perceived as hostile to the whole notion of Sufism, and is often branded as literalist. However, a mere cursory study of the movement and its early leaders show this claim to be baseless. The great scholars and *Ulama* whom the movement regards as its inspirers, pioneers and activists were well-known Sufis and spiritual leaders. *Ulama* like Syed Ahmad Sarhindi, and the whole households of the great scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, who inspired the movement intellectually and ideologically, were not in any sense mere literalists<sup>15</sup>.

Likewise, many Arab scholars and *Ulama*, whose teachings and writings are also regarded as the guidance and inspiration of the movement, like Ibn Tamiyah, Ibn Qayyim, and Mohammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, were not against Sufism as such. They only tried to bring reform to some of its alien ideologies which were adopted later and have nothing to do, in their opinion, with the authentic teachings of Islam.

However, the Sufism which they practised and preached was different from that of institutionalised versions in later periods of Islamic history. Later Sufism, in the view of the movement, became the breeding ground for all sorts of corruption and heresy in the socio-religious life of the people. It drifted away from the true spirit and mainstream teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet (SAAS).

For *Ahl-e-Hadith*, 'Sufism' is a term invented later in Islamic theological history representing the trend towards non-involvement in active life at the time of the social degeneration and political suppression. After the expansion of Muslim rule, when Islam came into contact with other similar Greek and Indian philosophies, it became influenced by their passive teachings. *Ahl-e-Hadith* teaches that institutionalised Sufism has nothing to do with the inner purification of man's heart. It is an altogether different ideology in its own right. They say that the Prophet (SAAS)'s mission of *Ta'lim* and *Tazkiyah* was intertwined with the general teachings and guidance of Islam, which was sufficient for the purification of both the inner and outer attitudes of mankind.

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<sup>15</sup> Wahabi Movement in India P 15-16, Also Thahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P373



*Sirat-e-Mustaqim*\* has criticised many Sufi corruptions in beliefs and practices. Criticising some of its contemporary Sufi corruptions it says:

1- "Another innovation of the heretics of the 'Wajudia Order' which is prevalent among the people and which is supposed to be in consonance with the sayings of the great leaders of the Sufi orders, is the heretical talk about '*Tawhid-e-wajudi*' (Pantheistic conception of God). These Sufis imagine themselves to be in union with God and derive sensuous pleasure from this sense of communion. Due to Satanic delusions and perverse self-deception, they imagine themselves to have an insight into the knowledge of Divine Truth. They waste their precious time in obnoxious talk"<sup>16</sup>.

2- "Among the innovations of Sufi polytheists which are in vogue in our time, particularly in India, ... is the excessive and extreme respect shown to the 'Pirs' or spiritual guides, to the extent of regarding them as a deity or a prophet. The spiritual guide is undoubtedly a means to reach the path of God ... and it is hardly possible to find the path without a guide. But he should be one who never acts contrary to the *Shariah*, which means treading the straight path with implicit faith in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*"<sup>17</sup>.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* have some other objections to the beliefs and practices of their fellow Muslims. They largely come under the title of Innovation.

## INNOVATION

The movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith* calls on Muslims to understand Islam in the light of pure Quranic and prophetic teachings. Those teachings, as they say, were free from all heretical rites, customs, non-Islamic ideas and practices, as well as fabricated traditions of the Prophet (SAAS) which have distorted the real teachings of Islam.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid P 51-52

<sup>17</sup> Ibid P 57 Wahabi Movement in India on P 22

\* *Sirat-e-Mustaqim* was a joint compilation by Shah Ismail and Abdul Hai, on the basis of the sayings and observations of Syed Ahmad. This could be regarded as a manifesto of the socio-religious objectives of the movement.



*Barzakh* life. However to them the *Barzakh* life bears no resemblance to earthly life.

The Qur'an is clear as far as the life of martyrs is concerned. It says: "do not call them dead, they are alive, though you perceive it not" (2:154). In another verse it says: "They are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord". (3:169)

In the first verse, the phrase 'but you perceive it not' has clearly removed any doubt about the resemblance of the two kinds of life. In the second verse the phrase 'finding their sustenance' does not imply that they are alive as we are in this world.

However, there is no such Quranic verse about the life of the prophets, neither are there any authentic *Hadiths*. Some non-authentic *Hadiths* suggest that the 'bodies of prophets are not eaten by earth', though this does not imply in any way that they are alive in an earthly sense.<sup>20</sup>

### **MILAD OR MAULAD**

It is common among some groups of Muslims that when the birthday of the Prophet (SAAS) comes, it is celebrated with the full spirit of enjoyment and venerative poems are read which elevate him above his human position.

*Ahl-e-Hadith* oppose this celebration for two reasons. The first is on the basis that it has no root whatsoever in Islamic teachings or Companion Traditions<sup>21</sup>. It is seen rather as an innovation by Muzaffer al-Din, the governor of Arbel, in 604 of Hijra<sup>22</sup>. Secondly, the spirit and atmosphere of the celebration in many instances are quite contrary to the spirit of the teachings of Islam<sup>23</sup>. The excessive veneration, almost deification, of the

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<sup>20</sup> Tahrik-e-Azadi-e-Fikr Page: 385

<sup>21</sup> Eid Milad al-Nabi P 18-22

<sup>22</sup> Ibid P 23-25 Also see al-Insaf fima qila fi al-Maulad by Abu Bakr al-Jaza'ri P50

<sup>23</sup> Al-Insaf P 44-45

position of the Prophet (SAAS) in hymns and speeches is too dangerous a path to follow.

## VISITING TOMBS

*Ahl-e-Hadith* believe it is against the religious teachings to build a tomb on a grave. They reject any practice inside the tomb and around the grave as irreligious and permit the visiting of the grave only if the intention is to make some prayers for the dead, and to be reminded of one's own inevitable fate.<sup>24</sup>

Ibn Taymiyah says: "Tomb visiting is of two kinds: prohibited and permitted. The one which is prohibited by the Prophet (SAAS) is that upon which people have built a mosque, or being used as a place of gathering and celebration, or where people treat them as idols, and go and offer prayers or bow in front of them and ask release from their sufferings"<sup>25</sup>.

Travelling with the intention of visiting the tombs of the prophets and virtuous men is not allowed. Once Imam Malik was asked about a man who made a vow to visit the tomb of the Prophet (SAAS). He answered: "If he has made the vow to visit the mosque, he could come and offer his prayers there. But if he intended to visit the tomb itself, then he must not do it, [quoting the famous *Hadith*]: 'Travel (i.e. pilgrimage) must not be made but towards the three mosques.'"<sup>26</sup>

*Ahl-e-Hadith* also do not allow the building of a mosque on graves, and if a mosque is built on a grave, no prayer is allowed in that mosque, except the mosque of the Prophet (SAAS), in which the reward of the prayers is a thousand fold for every prayer<sup>27</sup>.

There are many *Hadiths* in this respect, of which only two are quoted here. A *Hadith* in the Book of Muslim says that the Prophet (SAAS), before he died,

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<sup>24</sup> Ziyarat Al-Quboor P15-17

<sup>25</sup> Al-Jawab Al-Bahir P 54

<sup>26</sup> Al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Salat and Muslim. Also Al-Jawab Al-Bahir P17-22  
For more details refer to Kitab al-Rad Ala AlIkhnai P18-19

<sup>27</sup> Al-Bukhari and Muslim

explained five things. One of them was "those people who were before you, would make graves into mosques (or places of worship). You must not make graves mosques. I forbid you from this".

In other *Hadiths*, reported by 'A'isha, it says that Umm Habibah and Umm Salamah mentioned a church which they had seen in Abyssinia, and which was decorated by images. The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Indeed, they are those people among whom if there was a virtuous man and he died, they built on his grave a place of worship and decorated it with those pictures. They are the worst people on the day of Judgement"<sup>28</sup>.

Likewise, as no celebration is permitted to be held on or around a grave, *Ahl-e-Hadith* consider it also as offensive to the notion of *Tawhid* to light candles or decorate the graves with flowers. Because these acts, as they argue, lead only, in many instances, to excessive veneration if the dead person was of eminent personality or position. The candles do not light the graves, neither do the flowers spread fragrance inside. The only thing which could benefit them is the good deeds they did in their lives.<sup>29</sup>

The only visit which is allowed is the one which is for the purpose of making prayers for the dead, or being reminded of the ultimate abode and one's own fate. A *Hadith*, reported by Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, says that the Prophet (SAAS) said: "I had forbidden you from visiting graves, now you can visit them, because they decrease your interest in this world and remind you of the Last Day".<sup>30</sup>

## TAWASSUL

*Tawassul* is defined as acquiring means which bring one nearer to Allah.<sup>31</sup> However, Muslims are split with regards to what these 'means' are. Largely, there are two main schools of thought. *Ahl-e-Hadith* and other like-minded

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<sup>28</sup> Al-Bukhari and Muslim Kitab al-Masajid

<sup>29</sup> Tahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P 467-469

<sup>30</sup> Muslim, Abu Da'ud and Ibn Majah, For more details see Tahreek-e-Azadi-e-Fikr P 450-477

<sup>31</sup> Al-Tawassul P 11



schools and scholars say that these means are confined to three categories, according to the teachings of the Qur'an and *Hadith*, and they are:

1-The beautiful names of Allah or His exalted attributes. As Allah says: "To Allah belong the most beautiful names, so call on Him by them". (7:180) This means that you make your invocation to Allah through the means of His Beautiful Names.

As far His Attributes are concerned, there are many examples in *Hadith*. One such example is this: "O the Living and Self-Subsisting, I seek your help through Your Mercy."<sup>32</sup>

2-The virtuous acts of a person himself. For example, a person who has done some good deeds with the sole intention and sincerity to Allah, with no intention of showing off or hypocrisy. These acts could be made by the person as an intermediary in his invocation to Allah.

The Qur'an and *Hadith* are full of examples for this type. It is difficult to quote them all, or in detail. However, here are two examples, one from the Qur'an and another from the *Hadith*:

The Qur'an says quoting the invocation of pious people: "Those who say: Our Lord! we have indeed believed, so forgive us our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire." (Al-Imran 16)

In this verse 'the act of believing in Allah' which was a virtuous act, is made as an intermediary, and clarifies the fact that it could be acquired as means of *Tawassul*.

The examples from *Hadith* are numerous. However, the story of 'the three people of the cave' is best known among Muslims. In this *Hadith* three people used their past good deeds as means or *Tawassul* to ask Allah to remove the sufferings they were facing.<sup>33</sup>

3-The prayers and supplications of a virtuous man. For example, a man might get into trouble and know that he has no good deeds in the past to use as an

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<sup>32</sup> Al-Tirmizi and Hakim

<sup>33</sup> Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Al-Nasai, see *al-Tawassul* P 31-36

intermediary in his supplication. However, if he knows a man who is renowned for his virtuous acts, piety and sincerity, and who acts in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah, he may ask this man to make prayers for him to be released from his present sufferings. This then is an act approved by the Qur'an and Sunnah.

This kind of *Tawassul* has also many examples in *Hadith* and in the acts of the Companions, for example, the *Hadith* which explains how a Bedouin came on Friday in the Prophet (SAAS)'s mosque while he was delivering his sermon and requested his prayers for rain,<sup>34</sup> or the *Hadith* in which the Companions asked the Prophet (SAAS)'s uncle Abbas to make supplication to remove the state of drought.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from these three means of *Tawassul*, *Ahl-e-Hadith* reject all other means which some other Muslim groups practise, and term them as superstitious acts leading to polytheism. They say that no *Tawassul* is allowed to be sought from dead people whether they are prophets or virtuous people,<sup>36</sup> neither is it allowed to make a virtuous man himself a means of *Tawassul* except through his supplications.<sup>37</sup>

Palmistry, astrology and fortune telling are also banned. It is also considered against the teaching of Islam to specify some days or months, or a particular time of a day or night to be bad luck or good luck.<sup>38</sup>

These are the most prominent aspects of the movement and beliefs of *Ahl-e-Hadith*. That is what they stood for in the Indian Subcontinent, and they are the main aims of their establishment in Britain. These aims and objectives require them to be involved more closely and deeply with all sections and denominations of Muslim communities. This has also provided them with the opportunity to present Islam to non-Muslims away from any cultural or regional impact, with purity, originality and simplicity.

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<sup>34</sup> Al-Bukhari from Anas ibn Malik

<sup>35</sup> Al-Bukhari 2/398, 7/62, also see *Al-Tawassul* 36-40

<sup>36</sup> *Ziyarat la-Quboor* P24-25

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* P37-40

<sup>38</sup> *Al-Tawassul* P24, 133, 135

Working in an environment full of challenges and problems like Britain, the *Jamiat* has developed some other objectives, resulting from the community's needs.

The clash of two different civilisations has had its impact upon Muslims in general, and upon the new generation in particular. Being neither fully assimilated into Western culture, nor familiar with their own identity, they have succumbed to some sort of psychological bewilderment. The *Jamiat* feels that it is its responsibility to create an atmosphere where they can feel closer to their own identities.

The *Jamiat* also aims to provide training in different religious matters to its young people in particular, so that they can carry the message to their friends and different sections of society. Moreover, they may be able to solve some of their religious problems which arise from their own circumstances, and help others to solve theirs.

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## Chapter Five

### EDUCATION, MISSIONARY WORK AND PUBLICATIONS

Religious institutions, in common with all ideological organisations based on particular beliefs and philosophies, have different means to propagate their faiths and ideologies, and *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* is no exception. Many ambitious plans have been devised to provide full religious guidance and educational and training programmes to the community. However, some of these have remained on paper, due to the shortage of resources in finance and trained manpower, while those in progress need more attention and care to reach the required standard.

#### EDUCATION

The *Jamiat* has long taken a keen interest in education. Members of the *Ahl-e-Hadith* community, long before the foundation of the *Jamiat* in Britain, did their utmost to contribute on an individual basis. Many of those members who were religiously educated and trained have always offered their co-operation, in their spare time, to teach the children of their community and others. They have helped run evening schools, in particular at weekends.

One of those earlier efforts was the foundation of the Muslim Oriental School in Birmingham by Moulana Fazal Karim Asim as mentioned previously. The school started on a very small basis due to a shortage of funds, and functioned as an evening school. It gradually acquired popularity among Muslims, and at one time, as Moulana Asim put it, the number of those attending it exceeded one hundred.<sup>1</sup> This number certainly confirmed its growing popularity, bearing in mind the number of Muslim families at that time.

In 1974, before the foundation of the *Jamiat*, the Muslim Oriental School was renamed *Madrasah Salafia*<sup>2</sup>. This showed the growing sense of need among *Ahl-e-Hadith* to establish their own organisations and identity. Several branches were subsequently established in places where a sufficient number of *Ahl-e-Hadith* families lived. They usually held evening classes where the

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<sup>1</sup> Fazal Karim Asim, Personal Interview 1995

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

children learnt the basics of their religion and mother tongues. The syllabus and style of these classes are generally parallel to that taught and used in religious seminaries in the Indian Subcontinent.

Classes are run for both boys and girls of school age. Education is limited to the basic knowledge of Islam, and recitation of the Qur'an. Once a child has learnt and completed the latter, his or her education comes to an end. This is a system which prevailed in all *Madrasas* of the different denominations of Muslims in UK. The activities of *Madrasa Salafia*, and as is the case with all religious schools, are generally held in the mosques themselves. In rare cases they have separate premises for this purpose. Classes are not in a very organised form, and are run usually by the Imams of the mosques, where they occupy different corners of the building.

Study circles are also organised for those mature girls who are interested in further study of their religion. They are normally held for the purpose of serious studies of Islam and to answer any questions or address any doubts which they face or which arise in their minds.

The *Jamiat* had a very ambitious plan to start an institution called *Ma'had al-Dirasat al-Islamiyyah* or Institution for Islamic Studies, where Muslim children after GCSE and A level could continue their Islamic Studies. Though efforts were made to open the institution some years ago, because of the shortage of funds and lack of organisation and commitment on the part of the management, the institution had to be closed after just a short time. Students from far and wide showed interest, but no proper arrangements were made for them, neither were any proper teaching staff available.

However, the *Jamiat* is planing to reopen this institution in the near future. It will be modelled on the traditional religious schools, sometimes known as *Dar al-Ulum*. The medium of instruction will be English and Arabic. It will aim to equip the students with knowledge and abilities to function in their challenging and rapidly changing environments. The teaching staff will be recruited from Britain as well as from foreign countries.



## MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

The *Jamiat* believes that Islam is a divine religion given to foster justice and equality between human beings and different sections of society. It believes firmly that the message of *Tawhid* or monotheism, must reach every human being, and that polytheism and greed must be removed from people's lives, so that a just society can be established.

However, at present the entire *Jamiat's* missionary activity, if there is any, is only within its *Ahl-e-Hadith* community, in the form of teaching children the Qur'an and basics of Islam. There has been no apparent and sincere effort either to further the cause and purpose of the movement and its reform objectives, or more importantly to preach the simple and authentic teachings of Islam in an environment deeply biased against it. The organisational structure seems to have been developed on pure traditional lines, to work only in a traditional community, rather than to confront the challenges and demands of the time and place. This increasing gap of culture and thought is the biggest hurdle in achieving any positive results.

The *Jamiat* has also failed to establish its own section of missionary activities which could co-ordinate its preaching network. In the past, some of the *Ahl-e-Hadith* leadership either established their own, or co-operated with other missionary or religious organisations, which worked outside the *Jamiat*, to the neglect of their own organisation's activities. This is not only an act of negligence, but insincerity towards the cause and purpose of the movement. If the *Jamiat* were to establish its own network of missionary activities, then any co-operation between it and other organisations would be more than appreciated, but it must not be at the cost of neglecting its own activities.

In this respect, it would be immensely useful for people if the *Jamiat* were to publish in English a brief history of the movement, its beliefs and objectives, in order to convince non-Muslims that Islam is superior and all-embracing. No attention has been paid towards this by the *Jamiat*.

It is also worth emphasising that the *Jamiat's* leadership has to do its utmost to train its own preachers here in Britain, so that they are able to work in both traditional as well as this new challenging environment. This is the only way forward to create a sincere and original leadership of a reform movement.



## MAJLIS-E-QADHA-E-ISLAMI OR ISLAMIC JUDICIARY BOARD

The *Jamiat* has never had its own body of scholars who could provide counsel as well as religious rulings and practical guidance to its own people, in particular, and to the Muslims at large. Some sorts of *Ifta'* activities have run from the *Jamiat's* premises, like the Islamic Shariah Council, which apparently did not belong to the *Jamiat*. The act of negligence was greater in this area. When an organisation like the *Jamiat* proclaims condemnation of *Taqlid* and enthusiastically supports the notion of *Ijtihad*, it is expected to have established from the very outset such a body of scholars. This body would have been a great help to further the cause and purpose of the movement, and might have played a vital role in establishing its identity more distinctly.

However, a new body was announced a few years ago whose purpose is to provide religious guidance and rulings to the Muslims, as well as to consider some long-standing challenging problems which have arisen in the Western environment. This body will also have contact with eminent Muslim religious institutions and scholars throughout the Muslim world. It is named *Majlis-e-Qadha-e-Islami* or Islamic Judiciary Board. It meets monthly and provides its services free of charge to all sections of the Muslim community.

## INTER-COMMUNAL RELATIONS

The nature of the movement obliges it to work with and among all sections of the Muslim community, no matter what their beliefs and ideologies are. However, its working relationship with other groups differs whenever the personalities and places change. In Britain, the *Jamiat* has always believed in good and constructive relationships with others to create and maintain harmony in the community for the common good. To serve this purpose, they created a sub-organisation entitled, *Majlis-e-Amal-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat*, so that away from the shadow of their own movement, they could attract others and co-operate with them in religious activities. Recently this title has been changed to *Majlis-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat* only, to exclude those with whom they have irreconcilable differences in matters of creed (*Aqa'id*).

The members of the *Jamiat*, in their individual capacities, do not feel prevented from affiliating with other organisations, if they are in agreement

with their basic purposes, whether partially or completely. However, this phenomena of co-operation and relationship has mainly been at the expense of their own *Jamiat's* activities, and has greatly damaged the growth and work of their own movement. The co-operation of members of the committee with other organisations, and the limitation of their work with them, desperately and urgently need re-definition.

## TRAINING SESSIONS

The *Jamiat*, as part of its mission, holds public one or two day training sessions at its different branches all over the country once a month. The purpose of these meetings is generally to explain the beliefs and teachings of Islam to the public and answer any questions concerning the religious life of the people. This sort of training session has proved very popular among Muslims.

The *Jamiat* also provides its training services to Muslim prisoners in jail. This service includes the observance of weekly Friday prayers, distribution of religious books and from time to time provision of study circles.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

To further and strengthen the cause of *Ahl-e-Hadith* and maintain relations with the public more actively, the *Jamiat* has held occasional public meetings on a range of topics. It also holds its annual conferences to which it invites renowned Muslim scholars from all over the world, in particular from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. These conferences are held on a large scale, and are usually attended by people from all over Britain.

The annual conference usually has two sessions, one in Urdu and the other in English. For the Urdu session scholars belonging to *Ahl-e-Hadith* are generally invited from Pakistan. This session is attended in particular by those people who still appreciate and prefer the content and style of oration delivered by the *Ulama* 'back home'.

The English session is dedicated to a new generation for which scholars are invited from Britain. Moulana Suhaib Hasan, the ex-Amir of the *Jamiat*, who



enjoys a good command of English and Arabic, is fully able to convene both sessions.

The invitation of *Ulama* is generally restricted to those who hold the beliefs of *Ahl-e-Hadith*. Nonetheless, as the *Jamiat's* introductory pamphlet explains, they avoid entering into any negative sectarian arguments, and every effort is made to focus upon the purpose and mission of the movement and positive activities.

## PUBLICATIONS AND JOURNALISM

Organisations based on ideological and missionary vision need extensive communication. They need to reach people by every possible means. The *Jamiat* has recognised this fact from its very foundation and had its own organs to carry its messages and beliefs to the people.

With the foundation of the *Jamiat* in Birmingham, a magazine called *Sirat-e-Mustaqeem* appeared. The magazine was started long before the foundation of the *Jamiat* by Moulana Abdul Karim Saqib in Leicester, and when he joined Moulana Asim in his efforts to establish the *Jamiat*, he gave the magazine to the *Jamiat*. He was given the responsibility of editing and managing it. To start publishing any magazine and building up a wide readership is always hard work. Moulana A.K. Saqib with all his abilities and skills started this. He faced difficulties with finance and a shortage of good contributions and writers. Nevertheless, he managed to build its circulation.

However, when Moulana Mirpuri came to work at the *Jamiat*, the publication of *Sirat-e-Mustaqeem* entered a new phase of development. Moulana Mirpuri with all his past experience in journalism, was appointed editor-in-chief and mobilised all his journalistic skills to raise it to the highest possible standard. Its editorial and opinions became highly respected, and he started a Questions and Answers column on religious matters which acquired popularity among the Muslims.

The need was seen by the *Jamiat* to publish an English edition. A couple of years after its first publication the first quarterly English edition appeared. Under the pressure of demand, the *Jamiat* soon had to make it monthly. The English issue was entitled "The Straight Path".



Both magazines are usually sent free to Muslim organisations, centres and mosques. The policy of both magazines is not to pursue a confrontational style of religious argument or to raise insignificant but contentious issues, but rather to focus on matters of common concern. Both magazines have suffered financial problems from time to time. Sometimes they have been forced to revert to quarterly publication for a short time.

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## Conclusion

The movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, by the very nature of its aims and purposes, combines two major elements which need to be delicately balanced and properly maintained.

The first of these two elements is reform, the second presentation. Reform in this context does not apply to the principles and guidelines of the religion. The object of reform is society. People deviate and violate the ethical standards and values which rule their society. Any reformist movement, in this sense, is bound to call on its people to abide by the original beliefs and teachings. In other words, a reformist movement would want to call them back to the first principles.

However, the danger which may arise here is that any reform of this kind, no matter how reasoned and balanced, may create under some circumstances in some people literalism, i.e. inflexible adherence to the letter of the law. This literalism may be unavoidable in the process of reform. All in all, it could very easily turn into, or cause the formation of more liberally minded splinter groups. Islamic history bears many examples of each of the two reactions, and the present era is no exception. There would be some people or fringe groups who inevitably, without understanding the reasons and spirit behind some principles, merely become literalists. This could only lead them to the condemnation of the practices of other groups, without making any real effort of reform or to explain the right from wrong, because they themselves are literalist and have lost the urge to reform, not having any real aspiration and impetus for any purposeful reform.

The responsibility of the leadership of any reformist movement, such as *Ahl-e-Hadith*, is therefore far greater than if they were only an organisation, fulfilling some clerical and priestly work or duties. Leadership of a movement like *Ahl-e-Hadith* requires more than that, and unfortunately, at present, the necessary qualities seem to exist nowhere in the *Ahl-e-Hadith* organisations anywhere in the world.

The second element is that the whole body of the organisation, leadership and its prominent people must present themselves in a way which not only distinguishes them from other Muslim groups, but shows them to be the closest people to the teachings and aims of the *Shariah*. This is the only way

forward if the member is to convey its message successfully. Any misrepresentation would only be misleading and harmful to the cause of the movement. *Ahl-e-Hadith* and similar movements in Islamic history have only been successful in their mission as long as the originators of these movements and their immediate successors have maintained the true spirit of reform, and the closest links, in full sincerity, with the cause and purpose of the *Shariah*.

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The leadership of *Ahl-e-Hadith* has, however, long moved from the position of a leadership of a movement of reform to merely administering an organisation and an established religious group in the conventional sense. Any *Ahl-e-Hadith* leadership requires a balanced combination of two things: a pious and sincere personality who embodies in himself the whole teachings, purpose and spirit of the *Shariah* and is able to attract people, and a skilled and dynamic personality who has the ability to run, lead and organise the whole movement with immense skill.

The *Jamiat* needs, in particular in Britain, a leadership which is visionary, active, dynamic, spiritually effective and able to give clear direction. The movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith* can only exist in its original spirit. It will prove ineffective if it is run merely as an organisation. It needs more spiritually guided personalities, imbued with the true teachings and authentic 'Sufism' of Islam, coupled with a sincere dedication to Allah and His cause, and a clear purpose, vision and understanding of their circumstances and mission.

Any effective leadership in its modern term, no doubt, will benefit the *Jamiat* in its organisational structure, although the *Jamiat* is not all about its outward shape. It has long lost its spiritual leadership which, although existing for a very short time, proved most effective in achieving its purpose and aims, and which has created the vast number of *Ahl-e-Hadith*.

The *Jamiat* has seen no tangible and concrete progress since its foundation. Its previous leaderships have shown ineffectiveness and lack of commitment towards the attainment of the *Jamiat's* objectives and mission. Some of its past leadership have given more time to their own established organisations or political and economic interests than to the aims and development of the *Jamiat*.

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The movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith*, being revivalist and reformist in its nature, should avoid becoming embroiled in minor jurisprudential controversies. It should rather focus its intellectual and missionary activities positively on a much wider area of reform and revivalism to serve the Muslim community at large. At the moment, the *Jamiat* is hardly beneficial religiously to other sections of the community, and its message is rarely getting across out of its own circle. The fact of the matter is that its missionary activities, which seem to be the only activity at the moment, are confined to its own people in the limited area of educating the children and offering religious services.

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The other major weakness of the movement appears to lie with its involvement in active regional politics or semi-political organisations which have their own dictates and agendas. The harm and damage which the movement has suffered from its error of involvement in activities which are far from its aims and purposes of reform, have achieved nothing but a negative image, religious or financial dependency, and insincere leadership.

The movement of *Ahl-e-Hadith* was not about regional politics, factional play, political alliance, material gains and deliberate religious corruption. It is a noble cause and a prophetic mission for which only sincere, devoted and highly spiritual personalities are suitable.

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