

# Knowledge Sharing and Transfer through Tableeghi Jamaat among Muslims in India

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## ABSTRACT

Having had a humble beginning with the efforts in a small region known as Mewat in India, Tableeghi Jamaat had now make the presence felt in almost all the continents. In the absence of any publicity material this is indeed a remarkable achievement. The present paper attempts to describe the efforts of Jamaat in the most populous state of India namely Uttar Pradesh. It is unfortunate that not enough material has been produced related to Tableeghi Jamaat. Furthermore, whatever has been written, most of it, is not free from malice and prejudice. As a matter of fact, this kind of study needs participation on the part of any author to present a balance picture. The present author has spent a considerable amount of time to get familiarity with the ideology of Jamaat. Besides outings, the author also participates in the local activities concerning the daily and weekly programmes. The present paper is thus an outcome of this indoor and outdoor participation. It states that how the Jamaat played significant role in the knowledge sharing and transfer and to what extent the Muslim community had been benefitted in India.

**Keywords:** Information, Knowledge, Tableeghi Jamaat, Muslim, UP, India

## I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The present paper is based on an interesting story of Tableeghi Jamaat (TJ) that how it has been instrumental in spreading knowledge amongst Muslim community in the most populous state of India namely Uttar Pradesh (UP). In the beginning, some discussion will be made regarding the founder of Tableeghi Jamaat. Maulana Ilyas who is known as the founder of Tableeghi Jamaat was the son of a great saint Maulana Ismael. The native place of Maulana Ismael has been a small village *Jhinjhana* in district Muzaffar Nagar of *Uttar Pradesh* province of India. Following the death of his first wife, Maulana Ismael has been married in a famous religious family of Kandhla, another village of the same district.

To teach sons of Mirza Ilahi Bakhsh who used to happen close relative of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Maulana Ismael had migrated to Nizamuddin, a vicinity now located in New Delhi, the capital of India, around the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century. This locality was named after famous *saint* of India Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulya. Maulana Ismael used to live in a small mosque known as Bangle Wali Masjid which is now called as Markaz or headquarter of Tableeghi Jamat. Besides teaching Quran to children, Maulana Ismael used to arrange water for the passers-by. These passers-by were mainly from lower stratum of the society including labours from nearby Mewat region.

**A. Association with Mewati Community -** Maulana Ismael was a very pious person who aimed to teach basic principles of Islam to Muslims. He was so devoted to this noble task that he even used to give some money from his own pocket as wages to Muslims coming from Mewat in search of some labour. Maulana bring these Mewatis to Bangle Wali Masjid and used to teach Quran and Namaz. Notably, this was the beginning of Tableeghi activities by Maulana Ismael with 10-12 people from Mewat region. This region was considered one of the most backward regions in India. Also, the Mewati society was plagued with numerous social evils. The noble teachings of Maulana Ismael not only influenced these handful Mewati people but also paved way for the establishment of closer relationship with the whole of Mewat region as whosoever came in contact with Maulana started bringing more and more people from the region for the purpose of learning Quran and Namaz. Maulana, however, died on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1898 but left three sons Maulana Muhammad, Maulana Yahya and Maulana Ilyas. The youngest was Maulana Ilyas and he was known as 'Akhtar Ilyas' during his childhood. Maulana Ilyas spent the early years of his life in Kandhla, the place of his grand maternal uncle. Due to this association, he is also known as Maulana Ilyas Kandhlavi.

**B. Maulana Ilyas and his disinclination toward Mewat-** After the death of Maulana Ismail, the eldest son, Maulana Muhammad started a small Madrasa in Bangle Wali Masjid to teach children from Mewat and Delhi. This teaching was confined to Quran and there was also emphasis to instill spirit of Islam among these children so that they can, later on, serve the entire humankind selflessly. Maulana Muhammad died while performing Namaz *Isha* in sajda (Bowing down the head before Almighty). The second son Maulana Yahya died two years before the death of Maulana Muhammad. Significantly, there was a noticeable change among the Muslims of Mewat and many evils had disappeared due to the efforts of Maulana Ismael and his son Maulana Muhammad. Having feared the stop in progress made in spirituality, some prominent Muslims of Mewat went to Saharanpur to request Maulana Khalil Ahmad *Saharanpuri* who was the spiritual teacher of Maulana Ilyas to send him Nizamuddin for the continuation of their children's teachings. Initially, Maulana Ilyas was not ready to leave the company of Maulana Khalil as he was tremendously attached to him and receiving substantial spiritual benefits. However, Maulana Khalil insisted him to settle in Nizamuddin for the larger benefits of children from Mewat and Delhi. Thus Maulana Ilyas, on the advice of his spiritual teacher had shifted to the Nizamuddin. This locality at that time was situated on the outskirt of main city-Delhi. He started teaching Quran and some other religious books to the children of Mewat and Delhi in a small Madrasa.

**C. Travel of Mewat-** Some of the Mewati people made a request to Maulana Ilyas to visit Mewat so that he can be introduced in larger part of the region. He got ready with a condition that they should start sending children to learn Quranic teachings in Madrasa. Maulana Ilyas visited Mewat along with few companions and one of them had settled down for the purpose of starting Madrasa to impart knowledge and Quranic teaching to the children of Mewat. Maulan, around the last quarter of the Nineteenth Century, Ilyas, significantly, toured extensively in Mewat during 1935 to 1940 and opened 260 Madrasa in the region. However, he ultimately got disappointed with the prevailing system of teaching when one person who became Hafiz of Quran (Memorizer of Quran) did not grow beard which, indeed, is one of the important traditions

of the prophet Muhammad. Having seen this awkward situation, Maulana had abandoned his efforts which were focused towards opening of Madrasas. He had soon realized that these children after receiving Quranic education goes back to their home and found the atmosphere diametrically opposite to Madrasas. Since the atmosphere of their homes is unislamic, hence they could not remain steadfast on the basic teachings of Islam.

**D. Travel to Arab-** Maulana Ilyas was terribly upset seeing the conditions of Muslims in India as the high majority of the community had drifted from the basic tenets of Islam. Subsequently, he made up his mind to migrate from India and settle down in the holy city of Medina. There in Medina, he was instructed by Prophet Muhammad in the dream to go back to India. This dream came when he was in seclusion (Eitekaf) in Masjid-e-Nabvi (the mosque of the Prophet).

**E. Return to India-** Subsequently, Maulana Ilyas came back to India and went to the same Bangle Wali Masjid in Nizamuddin. He once again had seen in a dream that he had gone in a village alongwith few companions and made request to the villagers to spend some time in the path of Allah. While he awakens, he at once went to the main city of Delhi situated around seven kilo meters from the locality of Nizamuddin. Maulana persuaded people and fortunately they got ready to spend three days with him. After then he came back to Nizamuddin and took four people from his Madrasa. This was the first Jamaat of eight people who went in the company of Maulana Ilyas to Mewat. (Abdul Mateen, 1989).

## II. METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic method had been used in this research so that an in-depth understanding of the Tableeghi Jamaat and its role in spreading knowledge can be understood. Participant observation, which is the main tool of the ethnographic approach, has provided a deep insight into the movement. The present study is based on multi-sited ethnographies method to explore the movement of Jamaat (Marcus, 1995).

It is worthy to point out here that it is not possible to get exact understanding of the Tableeghi movement without going in Jamaat.

Therefore, the author had spent many days in Jamaat at frequent intervals in different cities of Uttar Pradesh. These cities are Aligarh, Bareilly, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Hathras, Agra, Bulandshahar, Etah, Lucknow, Sitapur, Barabanki, Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Deoria, Ballia, Ghaziabad etc. The total length of the fieldwork runs in many months but with an interval. Besides this I also participated in day-to-day activities of TJ such as *Mashwara* (consultation), *Gasht* (Meeting with local community members in order to get familiarity with the purpose of the movement). Apart from these activities, this author has also visited many times the headquarter of Tableeghi Jamaat, famous as *Markaz* located in Nizamuddin, New Delhi. It is interesting to note here that majority of the people call it *Markaz* while actually it is the same mosque known as Bangle Wali Masjid from where Tableeghi activities had started. Significantly, in *Markaz*, I got an opportunity to see many people who had joined Tableeghi Jamaat during the life of Maulana Ilyas who passed away in 1944. Prominent among these are Maulana Inamul Hasan, Maulana Ubaidullah, Maulana Saeed Ahmad Khan, Miyanji Mehrab Mewati, Qari Badruddin Mewati, Qari Zaheer, Munshi Basheer etc. Furthermore, I have also attended many big *Ijtemas* held in various cities of UP. Besides these, I have also interviewed people those who had come to Aligarh from various parts of India as well as from other countries in Jamaat. In this way, I have gathered very useful first information about Tableeghi Jamaat.

### III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Not much literature particularly in English language is available on Tableeghi Jamaat. Even Urdu writers have written less about Tableeghi Jamaat. In fact, this topic needs actual participation to present a balanced view about Tableeghi Jamaat. Notably, this author had gone through some articles written by western authors who unfortunately failed to present true information about Tableeghi Jamaat before the audience. In an article by (Alexiev, 2005) apart from many criticisms, it was also alleged that large-scale Saudi financing of Tableeghi Jamaat is done. Unfortunately, this study does not throw light the fact that there is a complete ban of Tableeghi Jamaat in Saudi Arabia. Neither anyone from Saudi Arabia nor from any other part of the world is allowed to participate in any

Tableeghi activity in Saudi Arabia. Notably, criticism to Jamaat is not only from the author who are outside the domain of Islam but also from many muslim authors. (Qaderi, 1987) too have criticized heavily in his work simply due to the fact that Tableeghi Jamaat opposes those practices which came into being after the lives of the Prophet and his companions. One of these practices like *Mehfile-Milad* (Gatherings particularly female to praise the prophet loudly in a particular rhythm) which did find favour with Tableeghi Jamaat simply due to the reason that these kinds of *Mahfil* (gathering) have never been organized and arranged during the time of companions of the Prophet and therefore, hence, no companion of Prophet had been involved in this kind of *Bidat*. Bulbul (2010) has been a successful to a large extent in presenting a true picture of Tableeghi Jamaat and this was possible as he has personally spent many months alongwith Jamaat. In fact, writing this kind of paper needs participation without which it is impossible to examine any movement. This author, however, has tried to present the information with maximum amount of objectivity.

### IV. OBJECTIVES OF TABLEEGHI JAMAAT

The movement never had any objective of capturing political power by any mean. Nor it is intended to convert any person from another religion such as Hindu etc into folds of Islam. As a matter of fact, if any person come to the headquarter of Tableeghi Jamaat with the intention of embracing Islam, he is politely informed that he may either go to the Jama Masjid, Delhi or any other place for this purpose. This is strictly prohibited to convert any person from different religion. In the history of more than eighty years, not even a single conversion has been made in any markaz of Tableeghi Jamaat. Apart from that, politics is just like a forbidden tree of the heaven and is so much untouchable that no one is allowed to read any news paper while moving in Jamaat. Again, it is treated as a grave violation of basic principles if someone speaks any sentence with respect to contemporary events or any issue of politics. This saved it attracting any wrath from the government even during turbulent times such as Emergency period (1975-1977) in India. The main objective of Tableeghi Jamaat is to prepare Muslim *ummah* for the judgment day. If a person is entered into Jannat (paradise), he is

true successful but this is possible only when Muslim adopt Islamic lifestyle i.e. obeying the commandments of Almighty Allah and following the manners of Prophet Muhammad.

## **V. MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT JAMAAT**

Surprisingly, a substantial population among the muslim community is still in the dark as they treat the members of Jamaat untouchable. In the following paragraphs, description will be made about harsh critics of Tableeghi Jamaat.

**(a) View of Westerners-** it is worthy to point out here that many renowned personalities have minutely observed the Jamaat activities and finally presented their opinion free from any prejudice. Graham fuller, a former CIA official and expert on Islam, for example, characterized Tableeghi Jamaat as a “peaceful and apolitical preaching-to-the-people movement (fuller, 2002)”. A university of California Scholar of South Asian Islam called Tableeghi Jamaat, “an apolitical, quietest movement of internal grassroots missionary renewal” and compares its activities to the efforts to reshape individual lives by Alcoholics Anonymous (Metcalf, 2004). Olivier Ray, a prominent authority on Islam at Paris’s prestigious centre *de la Recherche Scientifique*, described Tableeghi Jamaat as “completely apolitical and law abiding” (Ray, 2002).

**(b) Basic principles of Tableeghi Jamaat-** Maulana Ilyas stated the work of *Dawat* on the pattern of Prophet and his companions. He believed that Muslim can achieve success only when they become Muslim. And this is possible only when they spend two most loving things i.e. time and money in the path of Allah. Without sacrificing time and money, it is not possible for them to attain the reality of *Kalma*. Prophet’s companions have reached to the top most run of the *Imaani* ladder by way of sacrificing their most beloved things. Sequel to this, Tableeghi Jamaat did not seek donations from any quarter and every one who goes in the path of Allah bears his own expenses. Though every Muslim is encouraged to leave home for the purpose of his purifications, however, illiterate Muslims coming from the downtrodden Muslim society go more in comparison to the well-off part of the community. It is important to note here that literacy rate among Muslims in

India is low in comparison to other communities like Hindus, Jains, Sikhs etc.

In the absence of ulema, these illiterate people need some basic guiding principles to be followed in Jamaat so that they should work in the stipulated frame work. Primarily, due to this reason, the six basic principles have been articulated in the light of *Quran* and *Hadees*.

As a matter of fact, these six principles are actually six qualities found in the lives of companions of the holy prophet and which everyone in Jamaat is supposed to adopt in his lives. These six principles are, *Imaan*, *Namaaz*, *Ilm* and *Zikr*, *Ikraam-e-Muslim*, *Ikhlas-e-Niyat*, *Dawat*.

### **V1. Impart of Knowledge through TJ**

Discussion will now be made in the following pages, how; Tableeghi Jamaat has been successful in imparting knowledge among the Muslims of UP (India).

**A.Uttar Pradesh-** Uttar Pradesh (UP) is the most populated state in India. During British rule, it was known as the United Province. The state has seventy five districts with 200 million people. Muslim constitutes 18% of the population UP. The overall literacy rate in the state is 69.72%. However, the literacy rate among the Muslim as per available census data is 47.79%.

**B.Importance of Knowledge-** Importance of knowledge in Islam can be assessed from the fact that the *creator of the whole universe has* in very first verse of Quranic revelation says:

*Read with the name of your Lord who created (every thing) (Surah Al-Alaq: 96:1).*

Apart from this verse, the word *Ilm* (knowledge) has appeared in Quran thirty eight times. Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad in many of his *duas* (prayers) used to say “asks *Ilm* from the Almighty”. One of his usual dua after drinking Zamzam has a component related to knowledge as; ‘I ask Allah to grant me knowledge that prove beneficial for me’, (Zamzam is considered the most pious water coming from the Zamzam Well inside the Haram Mosque in Makka).

In the cities such as Aligarh, Bareilly, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Hathras, Agra, Bulandshahar, Etah, Lucknow, Sitapur, Barabanki, Etah, Etawah, Hardoi, Kanpur, Ghaziabad, Deoria, Gorakhpur, Ballia etc ; it

was estimated that on a daily basis around fifty people got benefited from the teachings of Tableeghi Jamaat. In a chilla (fourty days) of Jamaat, thus, two thousand people started learning the basic principles of Islam in a city. But the wonderful finding of the study suggests that elders started sending their children to schools to receive modern education. This landmark step has been possible after having known the importance of knowledge in Islam. Many drop-outs among the youth have also decided to continue their studies besides embracing the Islamic values. Not only this, these people started reading *Fazail-e-Amal* in their houses where womenfolk' along with the children listen the virtues of deeds such as Namaz, Zikr, Dawah etc. for the purpose of adopting the Islamic principle in their lives. It is worthy to point out here that *Fazail-e-Amal* is not a book; rather, it has taken the shape of a book. Maulana Zakariya, who was nephew of Maulana Ilyas, has written several lengthy articles on the different topics such as the life stories of the Prophets's companions, the virtues of Namaaz (prayer), the virtues of Dawat work, the virtues of Zikr (Remembrance of Allah), the virtues of Quran etc. at different intervals. These articles were later on, merged together and given a title *Tableeghi Nisab* which was, later on, modified as *Fazail-e-Amal*. Notably, in collective teaching, only *Fazail-e-Amal* is read in Tableeghi Jamaat that highlights the Quranic teachings and Prophets's sayings in a simple language so that even an illiterate person is able to comprehend the basic principles and teachings of Islam. It is worthy to mention that this book was written in Urdu language but now has been translated in almost all major regional languages of India like Bangla, Malyalam, Telgu, Tamil, and Oriya etc. Moreover, *Fazail-e-Amal* is also available in several international languages besides English.

## VII. FINDING OF THE STUDY

During the stay, in these cities, the substantial number of people revealed to this author that the inspiration from Jamaat for seeking knowledge has benefited them in the following

- They have been able to learnt basic tenets of Islam as well as many verses of Quran
- Women, in their houses, start the learning many useful things along with the importance of knowledge
- Surprisingly, children and adolescents have been the greatest beneficiary from the

collective teachings that started in homes. On the one hand, they have enlightened with the teachings of Islam while on the other, they also became serious in their studies and careers.

- Youth are yet another category receiving great benefits from the Jamaat. On the one hand, gradually, they discarded useless activities which hitherto, have been exploiting their careers. To name few, they have been able to control long hours of chatting and gossiping through mobile and computer. Also, they have been able to restrain watching those TV programme that were detrimental, and spoiling their careers. Preaching of Tableeghi Jamaat realized this youth community the importance of time.
- Significantly, it was also revealed by hundreds of citizens in the almost all the cities that crime rate among the Muslim community have been reduced substantially wherever Jamaat stayed. Indeed, one of the main tasks of the Jamaat is to make *Tashkeel* (motivate) local members to go in the path of Allah for minimum three days and also for fourty days that is known as *Chilla*. Those who go in chilla regularly in a year, they are also motivated to go for four months in the path of Allah. Notably, a remarkable improvement has been witnessed in the lives of these person after spending four months, at one go, in Jamaat.
- Muslim families started leading austere lives thus making themselves away from show-off tendencies.
- It is also worth pointing out that quarrels in the families have been reduce substantially as members of both the sexes started following noble teachings of Islam
- Less number of Ulemas (person with religious backgroungd) have come forward to make themselves go in Jamaat while more and more Ulema are required for this important task that involve religious teachings.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

One of the interesting and wonderful findings of the study is that Tableeghi Jamaat has contributed substantially in acquiring knowledge among the Muslim community. Great motivation among the adolescents, youth, and middle aged person in the community has been achieved with the help of Jamaat. The downtrodden Muslim community has been

immensely enriched in various aspects by the efforts of the Jamaat. Because of its peaceful approach, the activities of Jamaat have never been banned from the Indian Government even during turbulent time the country had ever witnessed. Nor these have ever been opposed from the overwhelming Hindu Majority. Indeed, this substantially, owe to apolitical nature of Jamaat. Surprisingly, the opposition came from the within Muslims particularly from *Bareilvi* sect and of late from Salfis. These two sect have, again interestingly, form diametrically opposite views about Jamaat. The former mainly criticize Jamaat members that they do not pay due respect to the *Saints* as they do not pay visit to the graves of these famous *Saints*. This show the reflection of Wahhabi temperament (discussed elsewhere in paper), on contrary, Salafis oppose Jamaat on the pretext that they have no respect for Wahabbism. Perhaps, neither group has been able to form the right opinion about Jamaat. Serious efforts are indeed needed to be done on the part of senior members of Jammat to remove these wrong notions. There are other Islamist movements such as *Jamat-e-Islami* which believe that the acquisition of political power is the absolute requirement for the establishment of a pristine Islamic society. Notably, this view has been out rightly rejected by the Tableeghi Jamaat. Yet another interesting part of the findings is that the Shia sect has never opposed the ideology of Jamaat. Apart from these findings, it was also revealed by a large number of people that wherever the efforts of Jamaat have been welcomed, it has a profound effect on the overall improvement in the information literacy rate. In a number of cities, it was also seen, an enthusiasm is apparent to receive Islamic knowledge as well as the knowledge required to manage the worldly affairs. A significant number of these members are being seen in the Public libraries. The same people who were, hitherto, involved in the useless activities have now started behaving as responsible citizens. Hundreds of children in these densely populated cities started going schools. Besides, a number of college drop out also have become serious in pursuing their careers, once they realized the importance of acquiring knowledge in Islam. As mentioned above, this trend was observed in almost all the cities. Nevertheless, in comparison to overall population, the ratio is still insignificant. But; again it is worthy to mention that in the next couple of years there

will be substantial population who is going to be benefited provided the present trend continue.

Not only in India, has the activities of Tableeghi Jamaat also been witnessed in over one hundred countries of the World. In the absence of any literature or publicity material, this has been possible, due to its apolitical and law-abiding nature of the movement. The call of its founder, Maulana Ilyas, 'Oh muslim, be muslim has deeply touched the community as the principles of Jamaat are based on the life of the Prophet and his companions. One of the landmark achievements of Tableeghi Jamaat has been witnessed in the field of knowledge. As thousands of Muslims who before the association with Jamaat have no interest in knowledge, started receiving it with all seriousness. Thus this movement may be considered as a vehicle to promote knowledge and education among the community.

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## Notes

1. *Halat Mashaikhe Kandhla* by Ehtashamul Hasan Kandhlawi is also considered an important and authentic source regarding the life-sketch of Maulana Ilyas and his other relatives.
2. Data related to UP has appeared in the Hindustan Times, November 17, 2011, see also [Wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar Pradesh](http://Wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar Pradesh)
3. Abul Hasan Nadvi who is popularly known as 'Ali Miyan' has compiled the sayings of Maulana Ilyas. This is one of the most authentic source available in Urdu language to get familiarity with the ideology of Tableeghi Jamaat.