

REVIVALIST MOVEMENTS AND MUSLIM COMMUNALISM IN SOUTH-EAST PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Several Muslims revivalist movements were started among the Muslims in this region. These movements attacked Hindu-Muslim composite culture and created religious identity. Although, differences between Hindus and Muslims at religious and cultural levels existed in the pre-British period but a kind of community consciousness, which created both Hindu and Muslim religious revivalist movements, did not prevail. So it is a recent phenomena which was started in modern times. A number of religious revivalist movement arose among the Muslim community in the early twentieth century.

Keywords: Composite Culture, Tabligh Movement, Pre-British Period, Muslim Community.

Introduction

Tabligh movement was started by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas in 1923 among the Meo of Gurgaon districtⁱ and later it spread to other parts of the region. The movement's fundamental goal had been specially conveying Shariat based guidance.ⁱⁱ It had consistently used vernacular works based on translation of the Quran and devoted religious practices among Muslims. For the mobilization of the Muslims particularly, Meos of Gurgaon district, the preaching parties visited from village to village teaching Muslims to offer prayers, to observe Roza, to give up extravagance on marriage occasion and other ceremonies, to observe Muslim dress and to emphasize to give up those immemorial ways of life which appeared as wasteful and irrational and which were considered as a part of the Hindu way of life.ⁱⁱⁱ Ilyas had managed to establish a firm base in the area around Nuh, he formed a 'Jama'at' composed six Meos- Hafiz Muhammad Ishaq and Numberdar Mehrab Khan of Ferozepur –Nanak, Chaudhri Namaj Khan of Raisina and three children. The first Jama'at tour lasted three weeks. They visited several villages, performing the Friday prayer on the way at Sohna, Taoro and Nagina, all in the Gurgaon district. Ilyas, along with some other 'Ulema' attended the congregational prayers, giving the missionaries advice and encouragement; and helping to strengthen their zeal for what they believed was a great divine mission.^{iv}

Sixteen Tabligh parties meeting was held at Faridabad by Maulana which came to Jama Masjid and after meeting they proceeded to Panipat, Sonipat etc. On the 28th to 30th Nov.1941, a significant conference was held at Nooh, in Gurgaon district and about 25,000 people attended the meeting. Such a huge gathering had never been seen in Mewat.^v Many students of Madrassas visited, Sonipat, Panipat, Karnal and Rohtak and Tabligh Jammait, were formed at these places.^{vi} Arabic Madrassas and Maktabas were established and thousands of mosques were built in the region where no one was to be seen for miles.^{vii} Religious education began to be imparted. English education began to be condemned. Brayne Meo high school, founded in 1923^{viii} by the Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon F.L. Brayne in Nuh tehsil of Gurgaon district came under attack. Fanatic Mullas who often visited Ferozepur Nanak and Nuh warned the Meos against the evil influence of English education and told them that the Meo School at Nuh was a Satanic institution.^{ix}

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In order to strengthen the movement a panchayat meeting was held at Nuh on Aug. 2, 1934. It was presided by Ilyas and about 107 persons attended the meeting. They were all choudharies, ziledars, nambardars, subedars, munsis, all leaders and responsible persons from Mewat.^x On this occasion Ilyas told about the importance of Islam and appealed to them to carry on the work of religious renewal. The following were particularly emphasized; 1) Article of faith, 2) prayer or Namaz, 3) religious knowledge, 4) Adoption of Islamic appearance and dresses, Islamic ceremonies and rejection of non-Islamic customs, 5) seclusion of women, 6) performance of nikah or marriage ceremony in the Islamic manner, 7) adherence to Muslim dress in regard to women, 8) non-deviation from Islamic beliefs and non acceptance of any other religion, 9) protection and preservation of mutual rights, 10) participation of responsible persons in every meetings and conventions, 11) not to impart secular instruction to children before they had religious learning, 12) to strive and endeavor for the preaching of religion of Islam, 13) observances of cleanliness, 14) adoption of Islamic beliefs, 15) to protect the dignity and respect of one another.^{xi} The Nuh meeting gave major boost to Ilyas movement in the Mewat. Large numbers of Ulema and Deoband as well as scholars from other similar Islamic centres of northern India now began, at Ilyas invitation, touring Mewat, addressing Meo gatherings and spreading the message of Islam.^{xii}

Ilyas also emphasized at the panchayat that preaching of Islam was not only the work of Ulama alone but the duty of every Muslim. All these matters were written and an agreement was signed by all those who were present there.^{xiii} Ilyas increased his preaching activity among the Muslims. He undertook several tours and meetings. He emphasized that every Muslim should preach in his own locality about the basic principles of Islam. He also told the people to visit learning centres to study about Islamic religion.

The movement concentrated on the Meos of Mewat. They were asked to spread Muslim teachings in their own villages, town and neighbouring areas. They were asked to become aware of that they were Muslims.^{xiv} The ultimate goal was to make every Muslim to serve as an effective transmitter to Islam through learning, teaching and practices. The Muslim did not take to English education^{xv} and they were largely dependent on the Madrassa based localized religious education.^{xvi} Soon, the movement had established itself so firmly among the Meos that at a very special meeting organised by Ilyas at the Madrasa Mo-in-ul Islam, Nuh, in Nov. 1941, nearly 25,000 Meos, apart from many leading Ulema took part.^{xvii}

Although, Tabligh and Tanzeem movements were started among the Muslims to counter Shuddhi and Sangthan, but these movements created a sense of Islamic identity among the Muslims of this region. The Tabligh movement began to blow a wind of change in uniquely synthetic culture of Hindu Muslim. The movement not only effected their lives in religious aspects but also in their social, cultural, economic and political aspects.^{xviii} The Tabligh movement promoted Islamic knowledge and familiarization with the rules and principals of Shariat. The Maulana emphasized the following points, "there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his messenger; a Muslim is His slave and His servant. It is the duty of every true Muslim to offer prayer at the appointed hours of day and night".^{xix} The basic idea was to bring back the various factors and different classes in the Muslim society to the fold of the real Islamic brotherhood. Many Ulema also launched a frontal attack on certain widely prevalent un-Islamic practices among the Muslims of this region. In many ways there was a marked turning towards Islamic practices and they became more dedicated to Islam which had never been seen before.^{xx}

The Tabligh Conference was held at Delhi on Dec. 19, 1926 and Mohammad Amin Vias asked the gathering "to buy all their requirements of life from Muslims only and to take a vow to convert non Muslims. The audience which consisted over one thousands persons, in a chorus responded with shouts of Amin. The speaker urged that their aim should be to increase their numerical strength to 15 crores, and eventually convert all Hindus to their faith. Even when their numerical strength reached at 15 crores, he had no doubt that swaraj given to Indians, the Muslims would be the virtual rulers. Donation was collected."^{xxi}

It was a revival movement which had made Muslims aware of true Islam.^{xxii} There were many others organisations such as Central Jamaiyat-ul-Tabligh-ul-Islam (society for propagation of Islam), Anjuman-i-Islamiyah (Islamic Association) Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam (Association for the defence of Islam) Ishat-i-Qurrana and Tabligh-ul-Islam etc.,^{xxiii} who were working among the Muslim in this region. These organisations established many Muslim orphans', schools, Madrassas with a view to improve their economic condition, inspire them with missionary zeal, and to propagate Islam. They had started their Islamic identity and the process of Islamization helped them to consolidate their position as a minority community.^{xxiv}

In July 1923, a Central Jamiat-i-Tabligh-ul-Islam was formed with headquarters at Ambala.^{xxv} Syed Ghulam Bhik Nairang, a leading vakil of Ambala, was appointed organising secretary and Kunwer Abdul Wahab Khan and Haji sir Rehim Bux of Karnal took a leading part in its organisation. In Sep. 1923, a general meeting of this Jamiat was held at Ambala to which preachers were invited from all parts of India. The movement had already spread to certain parts of the Punjab. The movement brought Hindu-Muslim relations under stress not only in the Punjab province but throughout India, resulting in riots at several places such as Lahore, Ajmer, Panipat, Delhi, Meerut, Nagpur and Hyderabad etc. Undoubtedly, the Tabligh and Shuddhi movements were the most important contributory factors leading to the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations.

When there was a powerful Shuddhi movement for the conversion of Malkhana Muslim Rajputs to Hinduism, the main centre of its activities was in the areas in U.P. populated by Malkhana Rajputs. But later its main centre became south-east Punjab and U.P. According to a study of its activities published in 1940, it had been responsible for conversion of 15,000 non-Muslims and reconversion to Islam of 10,000 apostates.^{xxvi} The Jamiat cooperated in its work with other organisations, and had been rendering financial and moral assistance to Anjuman Munatul-Islam of Purnia.^{xxvii}

Sardar Muhammad of Gurgaon and Sapat Khan of Bharatpur were two important leaders of Meos. They joined the Muslim League and favoured the formation of Pakistan. They openly agitated for the inclusion of Mewat in Pakistan.^{xxviii} Such was the result of community consciousness created by Muslim religious revivalist organisations and Muslim League in this region. The Meo elite mobilized the people on religious basis and used religious and cultural symbols for political mobilization. They succeeded in getting elected to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1946 as Muslim candidates.

The Tanzeem movement was started in 1923 by S.D. Kitchlew.^{xxix} It was an attempt to draw the attention of communal political organisations on important religious institutions. He also emphasized that a 'new and more dynamic programme' embracing the whole phase of the life of the community would be considered jointly by the Jamiat-ul-ulema and the central Khilafat Committee so as to enable the community to take its proper places in the affairs of the country and in the struggle of Swaraj. He wished to organise not only Muslim Jathas, but also their primary schools in mosques, prepare text-books, issue Khutbas which were read in mosques, enforce punctuality in prayers, to found technical and commercial colleges; supervise Wakfs and collection of Zakat; to arrange for relief of widows and orphans and to start Muslim co-operative societies and banks.^{xxx}

Dr. Kitchlew urged the Muslim students of Calcutta to form their own organisation with a view to uplifting their own community. He regretted that such a big centre of learning as Calcutta in Bengal had no association of their own, where they could understand the spirit of their religion, philosophy and culture.^{xxxi} Although the Tanzeem movement was quite different from Tabligh which was a purely militant proselyting effort on the part of Muhammadans to counteract the Shuddhi movements started by the Arya Samaj in Punjab and certain other parts of India, it contributed to promote Muslim identity. The movement in a way was directed against both the Government as well as the Hindus.^{xxxii} In their work and agitation they were making frantic efforts to exhort their co-religionists against the Hindus.^{xxxiii} It is significant that the movement played a vital role in formation of communal identity among the Muslims and created a gulf between Hindu and Muslim. For this reason C.R.Das, Moti Lal Nehru and Malviya appealed Kitchlew to stop the movement.^{xxxiv}

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