

Islamic Revivalist Movements In South Asia With Special Reference To Manipur

Dr. Syed Ahmed

Assistant Professor Department of History D.M. College of Arts, Imphal.

Abstract

An Islamic revival and reform movement led by Md. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab emerged in Saudi Arabia in the 18th century, which came to be known as Wahabbi movement. It was a puritanical movement which advocated the adherents of the faith to strictly follow the Islamic doctrines and teachings enshrined in the Quran, hadith (words or actions of Prophet Muhammad) and the shariat (Islamic law), and purge the un-Islamic beliefs and practices. The movement inspired many religious leaders in various parts of the Muslim world to initiate similar puritanical movements in their own lands. In South Asia too, several revivalist movements emerged. Eastern India, particularly undivided Bengal, became the nerve centre of these movements. From Bengal the movement reached its influence among the Bengali speaking Muslims in Southern parts of Assam, and further to the Muslims in Manipur, a small state in the easternmost part of South Asia. Manipuri Muslims, who were taking refuge in Barak Valley during the Burmese occupation of Manipur from 1819 to 1826, were introduced to Islamic knowledge and learning. After their return to Manipur, a handful of Muslims began to revitalize the faith of the ordinary Muslims through preaching. In the 20th century, the Islamic scholars trained and educated in the madrassas outside Manipur and Tablighi Jamaat carried the revival movement forward. These movements greatly helped in reforming and revitalizing the religious life of the Muslims in Manipur. This research paper is an attempt to trace the growth of the Islamic revival and reform movement in South Asia with special reference to Manipur, taking into account the ideology, nature, course and the outcomes of the movements.

Keywords: Wahabbi, Faraizi, Darul Uloom, Tablighi Jamaat, ulema, marifat, Manipuri Muslim.

Introduction

Islamic revival and reform movement in Saudi Arabia

An Islamic revival and reform movement was initiated in the 18th century in Saudi Arabia under the leadership of an Islamic scholar and reformer, Md. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), which came to be known as Wahabbism or Wahhabi movement. The movement, puritanical in its nature, outlined socio-religious reform within the Muslim society based on the doctrine of tawhid (absolute monotheism) and condemned all acts of polytheism as shirk, such as the practice of seeking intercession and spiritual blessings from Muslim saints, venerating their shrines, etc. as heretic. It also denounced other innovations which were against the injunctions of Quran and sunnah (traditions of the Prophet) as bidat. The movement further stressed the necessity of returning directly to the teachings of the Quran and hadith, rather than relying on medieval interpretations, promoted strict adherence to shariat, opposed taqlid (adherence to tradition), and called for the use of ijtihad (individual inquiry and reasoning). Abd al-Wahhab made an agreement with the tribal leader, Ibn al-Saud, in 1744, according to which al-Saud was to control the military, political, and economic matters, while al-Wahhab was to look into the religious matters. The accord led to the establishment of the Saudi ruling dynasty and state by al-Saud. Wahabbism prospered under the rule of Saud dynasty. Wahhabi movement inspired many conservatives in various parts of the Muslim world to initiate such revival and reform movements in their own lands.

Islamic revival movements in South Asia

In South Asia too, several Islamic revivalist movements surfaced in the 19th century replicating Wahabbism. However, an Islamic scholar, Shah Waliullah (1703-1763) of Delhi also formulated a revivalist ideology, which came to be known as Delhi school of Islamic theology.¹ According to Kenneth Jones, al-Wahhab's doctrines and Waliullah's teachings constituted the fundamental frame of reference for socio-religious movements among Muslims in South Asia.² Some of the prominent revivalist movements and the leaders that emerged in South Asia were Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah, popularly known as Wahhabi movement, led by Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareilly (1786-1831), his follower, Titu Mir (1782-1831), Ahl-i-Hadith of Sayyid Nazir (d. 1902), Faraizi led by Haji Shariatullah (1781-1840), Taiyuni of Maulana Karamat Ali (1800-1873), Deoband Movement started by Md. Kasim Nanautavi (1833-1877) and

Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1829-1905), centred around Darul-Uloom at Deoband in UP, and the Tablighi Jamaat launched by Maulana Md. Ilyas (1885-1944) in 1926, among others. These movements espoused the teachings of al-Wahhab and Waliullah and worked to revive the pure doctrines of Islam laid down in the Quran, hadith and shariat. Unlike others, Deoband movement engaged in producing ulema (Islamic scholars; singular alim) which they believed would lead the umma (community of believers in Islam). Within few decades, the religious ideology of Deobandis became popular far and wide, and numerous madrassas were established across South Asia modelled on Darul Uloom, Deoband.³

In general, the appearance of such religious movements could be seen as an impact of colonialism and imperialism. The emergence of Wahabbism in Saudi Arabia has been observed as an outcome of the Ottoman imperialism, which debased the Islamic traditions in Saudi Arabia. In South Asia, such Islamic movements arose as a reaction to Mughal rule and British imperialism. During the Mughals, the Islamic revivalist scholar, Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi (1564-1624), attempted to challenge the policy of religious tolerance and fostering of syncretic religious traditions by the Mughal rulers. After the Mughals, revivalist movements emerged to counter the repressive policies of the British colonialism. However, 19th century also saw the growth of Muslim modernists in Northern India led by Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) who called for imbibing western scientific knowledge and developing loyalty to the British among the Muslims. He founded Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1877 modelled after Oxford and Cambridge (upgraded into Aligarh Muslim University in 1920). In few decades, the college produced a new class of educated Muslims who began to play significant political role in British India.

Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah of Sayyid Ahmed had its chapters opened in Bengal under the leadership of Titu Mir, Inayat Ali and Karamat Ali. Their main objectives were to bring Islam to its past purity by purging the Muslims of polytheistic beliefs and superstitious practices, which they had imbibed through their intercourse with the Hindus, to cultivate equality among the co-religionist, and to create an Islamic state by overthrowing British India, a darul harb (land of infidels) to darul Islam (land of Islam) through jihad, or religious war. With an aim to establish darul Islam, Sayyid Ahmed fought against the Sikhs and founded his rule in Peshawar, but it was short lived. He died fighting against the Sikh army at the Battle of Balakot in 1831. Since then, the centre of the movement was

shifted to Patna and its leaders, Wilayat Ali and Inayat Ali, started confrontation with the British authorities. They both died fighting the British.

In Bengal, the Tariqah leaders laboured among the Muslim peasants for religious reform and revival. Karamat Ali of Jaunpur moved to Bengal in 1835, where he engaged in propagating a purified Islam till his death in 1874.⁴ His movement was also known as Taiyuni, meaning 'those who appoint,' from their practice of appointing from among them a leader, a qazi, who answers the religious queries. Karamat Ali was responsible for bringing Assam within the ambit of the revivalist movement. He sailed on the rivers of Bengal and Assam for around four decades in a flotilla which was converted into a travelling cum residential institution of Islamic learning.⁵ His son, Hafiz Ahmed carried forward the mission of his father by preaching among the Muslims of North and East Bengal.

The Faraizi movement of Haji Shariatullah emerged in the first half of the 19th century in eastern Bengal. After his early religious education in Calcutta, Shariatullah went to Mecca for higher Islamic studies. He was also introduced to Wahhabism and its traditions there. He even spent two years at the famous al-Azhar University in Cairo. After returning to Bengal as a scholar of Islamic law and philosophy in 1818, Shariatullah started preaching among the ordinary Bengali Muslims, who were ignorant of their faith. He advocated for religious purification, urging the fellow Muslims to shed the local customs which were against Islam, and to return to faraiz (the obligatory duties of Islam).⁶ After his death, the movement was carried forward by his son, Dadu Miyan (1840-1862), who too acquired Islamic education at Mecca. His organising skill led to greater success of the movement. The Faraizis became very influential among the Muslim cultivators, artisans and craftsmen of Dacca, Bakerganj, Faridpur, Naokhali, Pabna and eastern most parts of Bengal.

The Faraizis, besides socio-religious engagements, became a political force which challenged the exploitation of the rural Muslim peasants of Bengal by the Hindu zamindars and indigo planters. The Faraizis called upon the Muslim peasants not to pay revenue to the zamindars, which led to serious confrontations.⁷ Dadu proclaimed that all land belonged to God and that the land tax was both illegal and immoral. The declaration became popular with the Muslim peasants of eastern India resulting in frequent clashes with the landlords and British authorities. After the death of Dadu, his son, Naya Miyan (1852-1884), took over the leadership of the

movement. After Naya Miyan, his brother, Said al-Din (1855-1906), took the movement forward.

The revivalist movements based at Bengal had produced widespread impact on the socio-religious life of the ordinary Muslims of Bengal and even beyond. A literary culture developed among the Muslims. *Nasihah nama* (manuals of religious instruction), a literary tradition in Bengali, was introduced which instructed the ordinary Muslims the basic teachings of Islam. Attempt to translate the Quran into vernacular was made to make the text comprehensible to the lay Muslims. An illustrious Islamic scholar, Maulana Md. Naimuddin (1832-1907), a native of Shuruj in Tangail, Mymensingh District, translated a portion of the Quran into Bengali. The first part of the translation, containing 400 pages, was published in 1891. However, it was Brahma Samaj member, Girish Chandra Sen (1834-1910), who for the first time translated the entire Quran into Bengali in 1886.⁸ In 1892, Naimuddin also published four volumes of the Bengali translation of the *Fatwa-e-Alamgir*, and served as an editor of a Bengali Islamic journal.⁹ The erudite section of the Muslim society read these religious texts in their mother tongue with great enthusiasm. Anjumans or religious organizations were formed, public religious debates, or *bahas*, and discussions on Islam were also popularised from 1860s.

Thus, the revivalist preachers mobilized the Muslims, strengthened their Islamic consciousness and identity and created solidarity among them. Mosques began to proliferate in the Bengal hinterland. It may be mentioned that during the Mughal rule in Bengal, their officials offered tax-free lands for the maintenance of village mosques in parts of Eastern Bengal. The income from the lands were used to pay preachers (*musallian*), pious men and Quran readers, in addition to the deliverers of sermon (*khatib*), the prayer-leaders (*imam*), callers of prayer (*mauzzin*).¹⁰

Observing the Muslim revival and reform activities in Bengal, I.M. Lapidus writes, "In Bengal, the reform movement went back to the pre-mutiny efforts of Titu Mir and the Faraizi. Despite the impact of these earlier reform movements, most Bengali villages maintained an identity based on local dialect and a syncretic form of Muslim Hindu folk culture. They were led by village mullas, prayer leaders, and teachers who had little in common with the nobles. After 1870, however, reformism began to spread in the Bengali countryside. Though there was no focal educational institution like Deoband, public debates and revivalist meetings fostered a heightened Muslim consciousness. Anjumans (religious associations) were formed

to link town and country side, urban and rural 'ulama, and to teach correct Islamic practice most importantly, numerous pamphlets were published to give advice on Muslim rituals, to counsel parents on how to raise children, and to censure gambling, drinking and smoking. The typical pamphlet, called *nasihat nama* (book of advice) try to purge rural Islam of its basis in Bengali folk culture and to bring it into closer into accord with urban high culture Islam..."¹¹

Islamic renewal in Surma and Barak Valley

The religious ideas and teachings of Islamic revivalists in Bengal had its impact in the Bengali dominated Surma-Barak Valley region (Sylhet, Tripura, Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar). Few revivalist preachers reached the region. A Tariqah leader, Zainul Abedin, was commissioned to preach in Dacca and Sylhet. He is said to have converted the peasantry of Sylhet and Tipperah. The religious activities enhanced the religious consciousness of the Muslims in the region. Islamic seminaries were established in the region by Islamic scholars in collaboration with the Muslim elites. Towards the later half of the 19th century, the ideology of Deoband movement also began to influence the Muslims in the region. Consequently, madrassas modelled on Darul Uloom, Deoband, sprang up. A list of prominent madrassas established in the Surma-Barak Valley region during the 19th century is given below:

1. Kanakpur Faiz-e-Aam Alia and Hafizia Madrassa, founded in 1842 by Moulana Md. Alim at Kanakpur village in Karimganj District, which was then a part of Sylhet district.
2. Ashraful Uloom Ratanpur Madrassa, set up in 1856 by Maulana Azraf Ali and Maulana Sadar Ali at Ratanpur in Hailakandi District.
3. Nayagram Ahmadia Madrassa, established in 1870 by a renowned sufi, Maulana Azizur Rahman, at Nayagram in Hailakandi District.
4. Madinatul Uloom Madrassa, founded in 1873 by a distinguished Islamic scholar, Maulana Najib Ali Choudhury, in Baghbari village in Karimganj sub-division. It is said that Choudhury became a disciple of the renowned sufi scholar, Imdadullah Muhajir Makki (1817-1899). He fought alongside Makki against the British in the Battle of Shamli during the Revolt of 1857. After the failure of the revolt, Choudhury accompanied Makki to Mecca. He later came back to establish the madrassa.
5. Purahuria Alia Madrassa, set up in 1877 by Maulana Firoze Ali Choudhury in Kairimganj District.

6. Cheragia Qaumia Alia Madrassa (1882) in Karimganj District.
7. Jamia Islamia Darul-Uloom Darul Hadith (1893) at Kanaighat in Sylhet.
8. Imdadul Uloom Madrassa (1898) at Umarganj in Sylhet.
9. Darul Uloom (1895) at Sahabad in Hailakandi District.
10. Banskandi Islamia Madrassa, later renamed Darul Uloom Banskandi, founded in 1897 by Maulana Ahmed Ali, a Manipuri Muslim, at Banskandi under Silchar sub-division. Ahmed Ali, a resident of Lamba Basti, Banskandi, met Imdadullah Makki in Mecca and became a disciple. Ahmed Ali set up the madrassa under the advice of Makki. He was helped by Nena Miyan, a wealthy Bengali Muslim zamindar, who gifted land for the madrassa. Today, Banskandi Madrassa is the largest Islamic seminary in North-east India.
11. Deorail Alia Madrassa, established in 1898 by Moulana Yaqub Badarpuri at Deorail in Badarpur.

Islamic revival in Manipur

The genesis of Islamic revival movement in Manipur could be traced from the early part of the 19th century. Manipur, then a small independent Meetei/Meitei kingdom, had a sizable Muslim population (locally referred to as Pangal or Meitei Pangal). The history of Muslim settlement is generally traced from the early part of the 17th century. In 1606, a combined force of Cacharis and Muslims invaded Manipur to overthrow king Khagemba (1597-1652), but the attempt failed. The Cacharis managed to flee, while the Muslims, numbering a thousand, were taken as captives and forced to settle in Manipur by offering local women. These Muslims were the natives of Taraf, now a part of Habiganj district in Sylhet division of Bangladesh. The subsequent immigration of Muslims, in small number, from the west further increased the population of the community. In course of time, the Muslims were integrated to the socio-cultural environment of the valley of Manipur. They started to speak the local language and imbibe the socio-cultural customs and traditions of the Meeteis.

Nongsamei Puya, an old local text, mentions of the arrival of three Syeds, namely Syed Ambiya, Syed Abdullah and Syed Kalka Hussain from Taraf in 1608. One of them bought a religious text; believed to be a hand-written Quran. They were men who had proper knowledge of their religion.¹² The puya also records the entry of a group of fakirs (mendicants) from Gujarat in 1709.¹³ They all settled after marrying local women.

These Muslims must have guided the ordinary Muslims, to some extent, in following and practicing their religion. However, the Muslims were, at large, not well conversant with the doctrines of their faith and hence they were lax in adhering to Islamic behaviors and practices. And the contact and communication of the Manipuri Muslims with their co-religionists outside the kingdom was also very limited.

In 1891, Manipur faced a major Burmese aggression and the valley was occupied for seven years from 1819 to 1826, a period known as Seven Years Devastation. To escape the Burmese atrocities, majority of the Meetei and Muslim population of the valley fled to Barak and Surma Valley following their king, while several thousands were taken as captives by the Burmese. Many Manipuris settled permanently in different parts of Barak Valley, Tripura and Sylhet, while a portion of the migrated population returned to Manipur after the Burmese were chased out in 1826. The exodus of the Muslims in Barak and Surma Valley was a momentous phase in the history of the Muslims in Manipur. It, for the first time, brought them, in such a large number, in close contact with their religious brethrens outside Manipur, giving them the opportunity to see, experience and learn their ways of life. All these made them consciousness of their religious identity. During their sojourn, the Muslims might have also witnessed the growing activities of Islamic renewal in and around Bengal. Few of the Muslims received Islamic knowledge and understanding from the religious scholars there. It was this handful of learned Muslims, who felt the need for religious regeneration within the community. They took upon the task of preaching their fellow Muslims the basic teachings and practices of their faith. These learned Muslims were generally referred to as *munshis*.¹⁴ Kazi Ahmed Ali of the Khutheibam clan is said to have gone to Dacca for religious learning. He brought Quran from there. His son, Sariatullah Chowdhury and another Manipuri Muslim, Nawab Usman of Maibam clan, who were well-versed in Islamic knowledge, engaged in preaching the lay Muslims in Manipur by roaming around the Muslim villages.¹⁵ Research scholar, Abdur Rahman writes, "During those days Manipuri Muslims were educationally and economically backward, but they did not forget that they were Muslims. During the Seven Years Devastation, the Muslims fled to Cachar and Sylhet. They interacted with the Muslims of these places and gathered Islamic knowledge. Many Manipuri Muslims settled permanently in Cachar and Sylhet, while other returned after the Burmese were evacuated from the valley. Sariatullah Choudhury of Khutheibam clan and Nawab Usman

of Maibam clan were also among those who returned. The stories of how the two went to the Muslim inhabited areas and preached the basic knowledge of Islam are still not forgotten. Even though Muslims did not study Islam through books, they study with their mouth. As a result, the Pangals lived as Muslims and died as Muslims.”¹⁶ Rahman also recalls that Dewan Amuba of Maibam clan, Tolen Kazi of Ipham clan, Bindawan Mufti of Thoubalmayum clan and Ahmed Ali of Khutheibam clan were some of the prominent Muslims who worked to re-establish the Muslim community in conformity with the laws of the shariat after the great devastation.¹⁷ Manipuri Muslim munshis from Cachar also started visiting Manipur regularly and preached the Muslims on their faith. Many of them even served as imam (one who leads prayers in a mosque) in the mosques.

Gradually, the ordinary Muslims got more acquainted with the belief and practices of Islam. B.C. Allen had observed in his Gazette, published in 1904, that the Muslims in Manipur were fairly acquainted with the doctrines of their religion, and had mosques where they performed their congregational prayers, and send their children to Cachar for religious education.¹⁸ It is worth noticing the changes in the religious life of the Muslims in Manipur. Three decades earlier, Political Agent in Manipur, R. Brown had noted in his account (1874) that the Muslims had no mosque and they were ignorant of their religion, while their women live in non-seclusion conforming to the customs of the land.¹⁹

Interestingly, the statement of Brown is strongly contended by several local scholars. Maulana Mubarak Ali argues, “Mister R. Brown in his book, Statistical Account of Native State of Manipur and Hill Territory under its Rule (1873), published in 1874 writes about the Muslims and mentions that there were no masjids in Manipur. This statement is wrong, because we got information that masjids have been in existence in Manipur since the beginning of the settlement of Muslims. Before the Seven Years Devastation (1819-26) there were masjids in 13 Muslim villages and panjgana in around 11 villages. However, these masjids were not constructed with Islamic architectural designs, which led Mister Brown to state that there were no masjids in Manipur.”²⁰ Abdur Rahman, based on oral traditions, writes, “The first prominent masjid was constructed at Moirangkhom in Imphal by a Muslim artisan, named Sheikh Jali of the Khutheibam clan. The masjid survived till the period of Seven Years Devastation. The descendants of Sheikh Jali again constructed a masjid at Langthabal, which was made the

capital by King Gambhir Singh (1825-1834) after the period of devastation. The descendants of the same clan also built a masjid at Yairipok when their population moved there. During the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti (1834-1844), the clan migrated to Keikhu Muslim village in Imphal. There also the members of the clan constructed a masjid, which is still today known as Khutheibam Masjid.”²¹

Muslims must have constructed mosques for congregational prayers from the early times, however these prayer houses were probably similar to the ordinary residential huts, which were small and humble structures with mud-plastered walls and thatched with grass unlike those brick structures built with Islamic architectural designs and motifs found in Bengal then. As a result, these modest constructions were not recognized by Brown as mosques.

After the great devastation, Muslims started performing hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) by taking the arduous journey up to Saudi Arabia. Amuraba Haji of Sangomsumphum clan performed hajj after the Seven Years Devastation. After him, Baraktullah Haji of Pukhrimayum clan from Keirao went to perform hajj during the reign of Chandrakirti. It is said that the journey took three years.²²

Acquiring religious education

As the religious consciousness increased, few Muslim families in Manipur started sending their children outside the state for acquiring Islamic education in the madrassas towards the end of the 19th century. The early batch of students went to the madrassas of Assam, East Bengal, particularly in Sylhet, United Province, Delhi and even Lahore for formal Islamic education. The names of some of the early batch of ulema (madrassa graduates) are – Maulana Ebadullah from Irong Chesaba, Maulana Md. Abdul Jalil from Thoubal Moijing, Maulana Kiramat Ali from Yairipok Ningthounei, Maulana Md. Osman Gani from Keikhu, Maulana Md. Umed Ali from Lilong, Maulana Md. Hafiz Ali and Maulana Moinuddin from Thoubal Moijing, Maulana Sarafuddin Ahmed Khan and Maulana Rahimuddin Khan from Lilong, Maulana Abdul Halim from Mayang Imphal, Maulana Obedullah from Heibong Makhong, among others.

Maulana Ebadullah, born in 1844 at Irong Chesaba Mayai Leikai, in Kakching District, is the first alim of Manipur. He left Manipur in 1859 for religious education to East Bengal. He completed his alim course in 1871. He is said to have studied at Madrassa Phulbara in Sylhet for 5 years, and completed his course in a madrassa in Dacca.

Few other Muslims followed his foot-steps and went outside Manipur for religious education. During their stay, they witnessed the activities of the revivalist reformers and were strongly influenced by their ideology, teachings and traditions.

Role of ulema in Islamic revival

After returning to Manipur on the completion of their courses, the ulema took upon the task of guiding and reforming the life of Muslims based on the Quran, hadith and shariat. They taught the ordinary Muslims on the Islamic faith, beliefs and practices. They informed about the significance of the cardinal pillars of Islam and the articles of faith,²³ insisted the Muslims to pray five times a day, fast during the month of Ramadan, give alms to the poor, learn and read Quran regularly, teach the children the fundamentals of the faith, observe the rites-de-passage (rituals of birth, marriage and death) in correct Islamic manner, adopt Islamic names, dress code, particularly purdah (veil) by the womenfolk, etiquettes and behaviours, etc. Ordinary Muslims were also urged to disown customs and traditions of local origin which were un-Islamic in nature, such as engaging in singing and dancing during wedding ceremonies, free mixing of opposite sexes, belief in astrology, supernatural (bhut-pret) and other superstitious practices, participating in the festivals of other communities, etc. These practices are condemned as shirk and bidat. Such sermons are still today delivered by imams and maulanas, particularly prior to the juma prayers (on Fridays) at noon.

The first alim of Manipur, Maulana Ebadullah, is said to have gathered Muslim children and imparted them free Islamic education at his residence. Some of his students then went to the madrassas outside Manipur for further Islamic studies. One of his students, Maulana Abdul Halim went for higher studies to United Province. He completed his studies from Alia Sarkari Madrassa in Rampur. After returning, he also engaged in teaching Muslim children from the surrounding villages.

The first madrassa, Mazharul Uloom, was founded at Mayang Imphal in 1940 with Maulana Qayamuddin as the Mohtamim (administrator). It was established by a body of ulema and prominent Muslims. Some of the early batch of ulema taught at the madrassa. It was maintained and managed by public subscription. The seminary is still in existence. The second seminary, Alia Madrassa, was established in 1942 by Maulana Rahimuddin at Khongnangkhong, Lilong. In 1944, the madrassa was shifted near Lilong Bazar, the present location, after Noor Ali and Md. Ali donated land. Maulana Md. Obedullah established a third one, Madrassa Imdadul Islam, at

Khelakhong in 1965. Obedullah completed his madrassa education from Madrassa Islamia Arabia in Meerut in 1922. Today, Darul Uloom (Markaz) at Lilong Haoreibi is the largest Islamic seminary in Manipur. The foundation stone of the madrassa was laid in 1980 by the renowned Islamic scholar of Hadith, Shaikh-ul-Hadis, Ahmed Ali, and Tayeb Ali of Darul Uloom Banskandi, Cachar. Darul Uloom (Markaz) is modelled on Darul Uloom, Deoband.²⁴ It has Dar-ul-Ifta, a department which issues fatwas (a decision according to Islamic law). The madrassa also runs a Darul Yatima (orphanage).

Ulema also started maktabas, which are informal religious primary schools attached to mosques. In these maktabas, imams of the mosques and ulema of the localities (mohalla) taught the reading of the Quran, prayers, supplications, obligatory Islamic etiquettes and behaviours, etc. to the children. At present, more than 70 madrassas and 300 maktabas are registered to the State Wakf Board.

Islamic scholars also employed waz-nasihah (lectures and advices) to inform the general Muslim public on the fundamentals of Islam, the stories and legends of the prophets and walis (holy men), obligatory duties and Islamic way of life. They went to the Muslim village to deliver sermons.

Maulana Md. Abdul Jalil (popular as Tonjao Maulvi) is remembered for advocating the Muslim women in and around Thoubal Moijing to observe purdah and restrict their movement. Jalil was a Manipuri Muslim from Cachar, who came to Manipur in 1876 after completing his Islamic education from a madrassa in Sylhet. He insisted the Muslim parents to give Islamic education to their children. He himself taught children at his residence in Thoubal. Maulana Md. Hafiz Ali, also from Thoubal Moijing, urged Muslim menfolk to wear lungi instead of pheirom and khudei as these costumes exposed the thighs and knees. Maulana Moinuddin, also from the same area, preached Muslim women to observe purdah, and particularly exhorted the Muslim women to give up the practice of taking bath in rivers.

In and around Mayang Imphal, Maulana Abdul Halim advocated the Muslims to pray five times a day, keep fast, give religious education to children and observe purdah by women. He introduced wearing burkha, or a long kurta (furit achonbi), instead of blouse, for married women. He also insisted Muslim men to wear kurta-pyjama and lungi, the dress worn by Muslim men in mainland India. He condemned the participation of Muslims in the local festivals, such as Thabal Chongba, Cheiraoba, Lai Haraoba, etc.

In 1961, a body of the ulema called Jamiat Ulema, Manipur was formed, which started to work as a state unit of All India Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, the oldest and largest socio-religious body of the Indian Muslims founded in 1919. Jamiat Ulema, Manipur's main objectives include propagation of Islam and its values, securing and safeguarding the religious, educational, cultural and civil rights of the Muslims, reviving Islamic and Arabic studies, bringing educational and socio-religious reform of the Muslims, promoting communal harmony in the state, etc. The Jamiat became an effective institution for regulating the socio-religious life of the Muslims.

Islamic literature in vernacular

Besides these efforts, the Islamic scholars started to adopt print culture to disseminate the Islamic knowledge to the ordinary believers of the faith. Islamic literary works written in vernacular were produced for the lay Muslims who could not read and understand the Islamic texts in Arabic and Urdu. The literature deals with the fundamental teachings of Islam, such as the importance of the five pillars of Islam, instructions on prayers, dua (supplication) and hajj, virtues of reading the Quran, on haram and halal acts, etc.

The first Islamic literature to publish in vernacular was Punsiratki Pambei. It is a Manipuri translation of a part of an Urdu text, Deeniyat, published in 1938, by an Islamic body, Anjuman Himayat Islam, based in Lahore. The book was brought by Dr. Maulana Md. Hussain Ali (1907-1974). Interestingly, Hussain Ali was the first Muslim from Manipur who acquired Islamic as well as general education. He cleared Matriculation exam in 1928, and completed alim course in 1930-31 from a madrassa in Lahore. He also studied Homeopathy at Calcutta. The Institute of Homeopathy and Biochemistry awarded him Doctor of Homeopathy and Biochemical Medicine in 1933. He taught Hindi and Urdu at Churachand High School at Imphal; practised Homeopathy and Unani by opening a clinic cum pharmacy at Imphal. He formed Muslim Anjuman as a branch of Anjuman Himayat Islam in 1940-41 to teach the correct Islamic belief and practices to the Muslims.²⁵ He also extended assistance in setting up madrassas in the state.

The translation of Deeniyat into Manipuri was done by Munshi Haji Ahmed Amanullah (1885-1964), a teacher of Khergao Madrassa School. He had translated the three parts of the book. However, due to financial difficulties only the first part was published. The book was published by Hussain Ali's father, Md. Yusuf Ali Munshi. It was printed in Jorhat, Assam.

The book gives the fundamental knowledge of Islam, such as the Islamic creed, instructions on azan (call for prayer), ablution, prayers, supplication, ramadan and sermons on ibadat (worship, devotion), kufr (disbelief), shirk, bidat, faraz (obligatory duties), gunah (sins), etc. The book was widely read by Muslims. It was recommended as a course book for the Muslim students studying in the Government madrassa schools. It is said that even parents presented copies of the book to daughters at the time of their marriage.

Few decades later, a monthly journal, entitled Thoudang, was published in Nov. 1957. Sihabuddin Kureisi and Md. Hamiduddin Yahya were editors of the journal. It was published with the purpose of disseminating the basic Islamic knowledge to the Muslims. However, it failed to continue due to financial difficulties.

In 1959, Maulana Muhaijuddin and Maulana Barkatullah Haji published Janatki Sojei (The Key to Heaven), which informs the Muslims on the different aspects of Islamic rituals and practices. In 1960, a tri-monthly journal, Paygamme Islam (Message of Islam), was published by Maulana Hussain Ali. This journal could not continue for long. He also published booklets, entitled Darul Isat, Tabligh, and Ramjan. Interestingly, the booklet Tabligh informed the Muslims on the objectives and activities of Tablighi Jamaat.

In the 1970s, there was proliferation in the publication of Islamic literature. The decade saw the publication of Md. Maneruddin's Janatki Leiteng (1973), Maulana Ashraf Ali's Wareng Taruk (1975), Maulana Helaluddin's Punshigi Pambei (1976), Kazi Mujibur Rahman's Hingnabagi Mangal (1978), Maulana Hatim Ali's Hazrat Muhammadki Punshi Wari (1980), Alhaj Maneruddin Ahmed's Qurangi Wari (1982), among others. Kazi Mujibur Rahman also published a booklet, Fundamentals of Islam (1979), written in English.

A body, Islamic Cultural and Research Association (ICRA), Manipur, formed in 1988 also started publishing several books on Islam and its culture with an aim to inform the ordinary believers. Some of the books published by ICRA include Md. Abdur Rahman's Muharram amasung Karbalagi Lan (1992), Islam (1997), Duniya Akiratki Lourokphamni (1999), Lankon (2003); M.M. Ahmed's Qurangi Quiz (2014), Hajrat Muhammad (2014); Maulvi Mubarak Ali's Ashabe Kahf (1999); Md. Salim's Hazrat Isa (2006), etc. A publishing body, Kutub Khana Imdadia, Darul-Uloom (Markaz), Lilong has also been publishing numerous books on different topics of Islam over the years. Its most popular publications include the two volumes of Fazail-e-Amaal, published in 1996 and 2005

respectively. Jamiatul Ulema, Manipur has also been publishing a bi-monthly Islamic journal in Manipuri, entitled Noor, for several years. The journal, edited by Mufti Siraj Ahmed Kashmiri, carries articles on different topics of Islam written by prominent Islamic scholars. Over the years, even the Quran has been translated and explained into Manipuri. Some of the translations and explanations are Sheikh Barkatullah's Tafseer Barkatul Quran (2014), Md. Habibullah and Md. Hussain's Al-Quran (2018), Abdullah's Quran Majid, Tazkirul Quran (2017), and Asker Khan and Md. Ali Haider's Al-Quran (2021).

An interesting aspect of the Islamic revival movement in Manipur is the use of songs to spread the message of Islam. These rhythmic compositions in Manipuri based on the simple teachings of Islam, life of Prophet Muhammad, story of the sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim, anecdotes from the lives of prophets, etc., popularly known as marifat, were introduced and popularized by few Manipuri Muslims from Cachar in the 1960s. It is said that Maulana Tamijur, a Manipuri Muslim from Dolugao, Cachar, introduced marifat in Manipur for the first time. He came and settled at Kwakta, a Muslim village in Bishenpur district of Manipur. He was later joined by two of his relatives, Maulana Jamal and Md. Kamal, from Sirgang village, Cachar. The trio toured the Muslim villages in Manipur and popularized marifat and jang-nama. Marifat programmes were arranged in social gatherings. However, in Islamic tradition, marifat literally means gnosis or special Islamic mystical knowledge. Jang-nama, or war-ballads, is another category of compositions based on the heart-rending narration of the sufferings of Imam Husain (grandson of Prophet Muhammad and son of the fourth caliph, Hazrat Ali) and his small force at the Battle of Karbala (now in Iraq) in 680 CE. Husain and his army were defeated and massacred by an army sent by Ummayyad Caliph, Yazid I (680-683 CE). These rhythmic compositions use local language, metaphors and expressions, and set to the rhymes and tunes of ghazals, qasidas, and even modern songs, which make it popular among the ordinary unlettered Muslims even today. Musical instruments are not used in singing these songs as Islam prohibits using musical instruments. Urdu naat, another type of compositions, which glorifies Prophet Muhammad, became popular. It was introduced from North India. Naat competitions are often organized for madrassa students.

Another fascinating aspect of the revival movement is that the Muslim preachers, through their lectures, conversations and writings, gradually introduced Arabic,

Persian (Farsi) and Urdu words, besides Islamic salutations, greetings and expressions. The ordinary Muslims use these words frequently in their daily conversations. Some of commonly used Arabic, Persian and Urdu words: *din* (religion), *khuda* (God), *rasul* (messenger of God), *paigambar/nabi* (prophet), *niyat* (intension), *ilm* (knowledge), *talim* (education), *dini talim* (religious education), *talba/taalib* (student), *ustad* (teacher), *amal* (action, deed), *alam* (universe), *adab* (etiquette), *haram* (prohibited), *halal* (permitted), *makruh* (detestable), *jais* (permitted by religion), *iman* (faith/belief), *tauba* (to seek forgiveness), *rizq* (sustenance), *sabr* (patience, endurance), *duniya* (world), *ameen* (declaration of affirmation), *dunya* (life of this world; temporal world), *akhirat* (life hereafter), *qayamat/hashr* (day of judgement), *barkat* (blessings), *dua* (supplication to God), *mashwara* (consultation), *khidmat* (service), *neki* (virtue), *bayan* (lecture), *nasiha* (advice, counsel), *marhoom* (deceased), *qurbani* (sacrifice), *jaahil* (ignorant), *sawab* (reward), *yatim* (orphan), *dawah* (invitation, the act of inviting people to Islam), *ummah* (Muslim community), *quam* (nation, community), *mumin* (believer), *shahid* (a martyr to the Islamic faith), *inteqal* (death), *nikah* (marriage), *walima* (feast), *shaitan* (evil spirit), *farista* (angel), *zikr* (remembrance, devotion), *sadaqa* (charity), etc. Islamic salutations, greetings and expressions are also commonly used, such as *as-salamu alaikum* (peace be upon you), *wa-aleikum salam* (and peace be on you too), *khuda hafiz* (God be with you), *inshallah* (if Allah wills it), *mashallah* (as Allah willed), *alhamdulillah* (praise to Allah), *allahu akbar* (Allah is great), *subanallah* (glory to Allah), *ashtaghfirullah* (I seek forgiveness from Allah), *bismillah* (in the name of Allah), *bismillah hir rahman nir rahim* (in the name of Allah, the most gracious and the most merciful), *subanallah* (Allah be praised), *la illaha illallah* (there is no one worthy of worship except Allah), *la hawla wala quwwatta illa billah* (there is no power and no strength except with Allah), *inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi rajiun* (to Allah we belong and to Him we shall return; recite when someone dies), etc. became popularly used.

Tablighi Jamaat in Manipur

Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic missionary movement, took its root in Manipur in 1972. Madrasa Alia became the markaz (centre/headquarter) and Maulana Abdul Aziz of Lilong Atoukhong became the amir (head) of the movement.

It may be mentioned that the movement was started by Maulana Md. Ilyas in 1926 at Mewat, Haryana, among the

Meo Muslims, who were ignorant of their faith. It emerged as one of the important Islamic revival movements in South Asia in the 19th century. It's a Deobandi-inspired movement, which is apolitical and peaceful. The movement is based on six basic principles: 1) Kalima (declaration of faith), 2) Salat (prayers), 3) Ilm and zikr (knowledge and remembrance of God), 4) Ikram-i-Muslim (respect for Muslims), 5) Ikhlas-e-niyyat (sincerity of intension), and 6) Dawat and tabligh (inviting and propagating, which means to spare time from one's daily cores to undertake journey far and wide in order to acquire knowledge and also spread the message of Allah). Over the decades, it has become the largest and most popular global Islamic movement. As per the Pew Research Centre's estimate, the adherents of the movement range from 12 to 80 million, and spread across more than 150 countries. Its membership in Europe has been estimated at about 150,000 or more.

The itinerant tablighis advocate the Muslims to imbibe the Islamic way of life by strictly following the religious duties, behaviours and etiquettes, get rid of the un-Islamic customs and ceremonies, and to develop missionary spirit by joining Tablighi Jamaat. The tablighis, which consist of ulema as well as ordinary Muslims, go to Muslim inhabited areas, in India and even across the globe, to preach the fellow Muslims. The journey could be for three days (teen deen), forty days (chilla) or for four months (teen chilla). During these journeys, they stay at mosques and madrassas. Darul Uloom Madrassa at Lilong is the markaz of Tablighi Jamaat in Manipur since 1980, while Nizamuddin Markaz at Nizamuddin, New Delhi, is the international headquarter of the movement. Ijtema, three-day congregation of Tablighi Jamaat, is organised in the state every year. Several thousands of Muslim males attend the congregation. Prominent and senior tablighis from various parts of India come to deliver sermons on the importance of the movement and on various religious topics.

As a part of the tablighi movement, some of the important Islamic texts have been translated into Manipuri. The most significant translation is the *Fazail-e-Amaal*, the celebrated work of the renowned Islamic scholar, Md. Zakariya Kandhlawi (1898-1982) on the fundamental teachings of Islam, virtues of Quran, salat, zikr, tabligh (preaching), ramadan, hajj and sadaqa, stories of the companions of the Prophet (sahabahs), explanation of the six primary principles of Tabligh, etc. It is a popular text used by the tablighis for preaching purposes. It is translated from Urdu to Manipuri in two volumes by a jamaat (body) of Islamic scholars from Manipur.

Over the last few decades, Anjumans of ulema have been formed in the Muslim inhabited areas. These bodies are actively engaged in curbing various illegal and un-Islamic activities within the Muslim society, particularly the menace of drug addiction and trafficking. Anjumans even set up rehabilitation centres for drug addicts.

Conclusion

Inspired by Wahabbism and the teachings of Shah Waliullah, several Islamic revival and reform movements appeared in South Asia in the 19th century, which sought to regenerate Islam by instilling the believers of the faith the true Islamic beliefs, values and practices enshrined in the Quran, hadith and shariat, and purge the polytheistic and other innovative practices which were not in accord with Islam. Bengal became the nerve centre of these movements. The revivalist preachers, particularly of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah and Faraizis, helped in regenerating the religious life of the Muslims in Bengal and Southern parts of Assam. Further, Islamic revival movement reached Manipur towards the second half of the 19th century. The movement was initiated by few Muslims, who gained some knowledge and understanding of Islam during their sojourn in Barak and Surma Valley from 1819 to 1826. By the turn of the 20th century, the religious renewal movement was carried forward by religious scholars who obtained formal Islamic education from the madrassas outside Manipur. They began to revive and reform the socio-religious life of the ordinary believers through lectures and conversations, publication of didactic Islamic literature in vernacular, besides setting up makhtabs and madrassas for imparting religious education to Muslim children. Further, Tablighi Jamaat, a movement for renewal of faith, took its root in Manipur in the early part of 1970s. The tablighis preach Muslims to be more religiously observant by following Islamic way of life, and to shed beliefs and practices not sanctioned by Islam. Over the decades, all the efforts and activities of religious revival have greatly succeeded in transforming the life of the Muslims in Manipur. There has been a major resurgence of religiosity among the Muslims. Their knowledge and understanding of Islam have increased. They gradually purged un-Islamic age-old customs and practices of local origin. The Islamic renewal movements have also steadily helped the Muslims in shaping their Islamic outlook and identity, as well as in bringing cohesion and solidarity with their co-religionists outside Manipur.

Endnotes

- ¹ Shah Waliullah explained the decline of Muslim power and morality to ignorance that led to an inability to understand the true nature of Islam. He advocated an education focused on the Quran and hadith that would enable Muslims to regain their past glory, to bring an end to the struggles between differing Muslim groups, and purge their faith of non-Muslim customs. He translated the Quran into Persian, while his son, Shah Abdul Qadir, rendered Quran into Urdu.
- ² Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 19
- ³ The Deobandis deplored a range of customary celebrations and practices, which include venerating saints' tombs, prohibition of widow remarriage, extravagant ceremonies and festivals imitating the Hindus, and practices attributed to the influence of Shias.
- ⁴ Karamat Ali strongly denounced the Hindu practices common among the Muslims, particularly the offerings of sirnis or cakes to the spirits of ancestors, playing music, and preparation of tazias, or replica of the mausoleum of Imam Husain, during Muharram.
- ⁵ Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 23
- ⁶ Shariatullah exhorted the Muslims to give up non-Islamic rites and ceremonies, such as the worship of pirs (saints) and holding their urs (death anniversary), rituals connected with the birth of a child or with circumcision, celebration of Muharram, preparation of tazias, practices of caste system, etc. and prescribed payjama and lungi for the Muslim menfolk instead of dhoti.
- ⁷ Dadu Miyan stood against the levy of the illegal cesses by landlords, particularly the collection of money for Hindu religious ceremonies such as Durga Puja.
- ⁸ Girish Sen studied Arabic and Islamic literature at Lucknow in 1876. He also wrote many biographies of great Muslim personalities, including the Prophet Muhammad, his grandsons, Imam Hasan and Imam Husain, the four Khalifas, etc. in *Mahapurushcharita* (1882-87). He also translated several Persian works into Bengali, including Rammohan Roy's book, *Tuhfatul-Muahiddin* (1878).
- ⁹ Naimuddin published several other Islamic works in Bengali. He was the editor of *Akhbar-e-Islamia*, a monthly Bengali Islamic journal, launched in 1884. The magazine mainly dealt with topics relating to the shariat, Islamic theology and culture and contemporary social and religious issues. The Panni zamindar family of Karatia was his patron. He was a

teacher by profession and also worked as qazi (marriage registrar) in Pabna. He also served as Secretary of a religious body called Anjuman-e-Mainul Islam.

¹⁰ Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, pp. 246-247

¹¹ I.M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, p. 703

¹² For details, see O. Bhogeswar Singh & M.A. Janab Khan, eds., *Nongsamei Puya*, pp. 75-77

¹³ For details, see *Ibid.*, pp. 127-129

¹⁴ In general, munshi means an instructor or teacher in the past. In Manipur, the title munshi was given to those Muslims who had considerable knowledge of Islam and its principles and practices. However, they were not ulema educated in madrassas. When the number of ulema was very meagre, Muslims took the guidance of the munshis.

¹⁵ *Mingsel*, Jan.-Apr., 1988, p. 46

¹⁶ Md. Abdur Rahman, *Khangbada Kannaba*, pp. 39-40

¹⁷ Md. Abdur Rahman, 'Asuppa mityengda Manipuri Muslim,' in *Ningsing Chephong*, p. 8

¹⁸ B.C. Allen, *Gazetteer of Manipur and Naga Hills*, p. 65

¹⁹ R. Brown, *Statistical Account of the Native State of Manipur*, p. 11

²⁰ *Pambei*, Oct. 2003, p. 30

²¹ *Mingsel*, Jan.-Apr., 1988, p. 45

²² Md. Abdur Rahman, 'Asuppa mityengda Manipuri Muslim,' p. 8

²³ The five cardinal pillars of Islam are shahadah (profession of faith), salat (daily prayers), sawm (fasting during the month of Ramadan), zakat (giving alms to poor) and hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah), while the six articles of faith (iman) include believe in the oneness of God, His angels, books, prophets, days of judgement and the divine decree.

²⁴ These madrassas followed the Dars-i-Nizami, a syllabus popularised by Darul Uloom and prescribed in majority of the madrassas in India. The syllabus included the study of the Quran and hadith, besides fiqh (jurisprudence), tafsir (exegesis), mantiq (logic), Islamic history, Arabic and Urdu.

²⁵ Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam was founded in 1884 by Qazi Hamiduddin in Lahore with the aim to open institutions for Islamic and modern education for Muslim boys and girls, to propagate and defend Islam against Christian missionaries and Hindu revivalists, and to counter their propaganda against Islam through speeches and publications. Abdul Qadir was its first President. Several Muslim intellectuals and politicians, interested in reforming Muslim society, were

associated with the society, including Md. Iqbal. The society set up a chain of public schools for boys and girls, besides orphanages and widows' homes. It also opened press and published numerous standard books on religious and general themes.

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