

THE INFLUENCE OF SUFI-CENTRIC MOVEMENTS ON THE FLOURISHING OF ISLAMIC PLURALITY IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

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DOI:
[https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.
vol26no2.11](https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol26no2.11)

Abstract

This article explores the multi-faceted impact of Sufi ideological groups such as Deobandi, Tablighi Jamaat, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama Nadwi, and Barelvi movements on the dissemination of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. It focuses on the educational contributions of Sufi institutions, particularly *Khanqahs* and *Madrasahs*, which were pivotal in spreading Islamic knowledge, including theology, literature, arts, and sciences. The study provides a historical overview of Sufism's evolution in the region and analyses the distinct methods of Islamic propagation used by these four movements. Methodologically, the research employs historical analysis, primary source examination, and socio-cultural investigation to uncover how Sufi scholars facilitated spiritual enlightenment, fostering acceptance of Islam across diverse communities. Findings reveal that while Deobandi and Nadvi groups propagated Islam through *madrasas*, Tablighi Jamaat utilized mosques and outreach to non-Muslims, and Barelvi groups focused on *Khanqahs*. The study highlights the Sufi movements' role in promoting communal harmony, religious tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. The research offers original insights into the socio-cultural influence of Sufi teachings in shaping Islam's spread and calls for further

Article History:

Acceptance
date: 9 Dec
2024
Available
Online: 30 Dec
2024

Funding: This
research
received no
specific grant
from any
funding agency
in the public,
commercial or
not-for-profit
sectors.

**Competing
interest:** The
author(s) have
declared that
no competing
interest exist.



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investigation into their contemporary impact on interfaith relations in the region. Recommendations include strengthening Sufi educational institutions to foster peace and tolerance.

Keywords: Sufism; Indian Subcontinent; Sufi ideological groups; the spread of Islam; communal harmony.

Khulasah

Makalah ini meneroka impak pelbagai aspek kumpulan Sufi—Deobandi, Tablighi Jamaat, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama Nadwi, dan gerakan Barelvi—terhadap penyebaran Islam di benua kecil India. Ia memberi tumpuan kepada sumbangan pendidikan institusi Sufi, khususnya Khanqah dan Madrasah, yang memainkan peranan penting dalam penyebaran ilmu Islam, termasuk teologi, kesusasteraan, seni, dan sains. Kajian ini menyediakan gambaran sejarah perkembangan Sufisme di rantau ini dan menganalisis kaedah penyebaran Islam yang berbeza yang digunakan oleh keempat-empat gerakan ini. Dari segi metodologi, penyelidikan ini menggunakan analisis sejarah, penelitian sumber primer, dan penyelidikan sosio-budaya untuk memahami bagaimana ulama Sufi membimbing pencerahan rohani, yang mendorong penerimaan Islam dalam kalangan pelbagai komuniti. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa, sementara kumpulan Deobandi dan Nadwi menyebarkan Islam melalui madrasah, Tablighi Jamaat pula menggunakan masjid dan pendekatan kepada bukan Muslim, manakala kumpulan Barelvi memberi tumpuan kepada Khanqah. Kajian ini menekankan peranan gerakan Sufi dalam mempromosikan keharmonian komuniti, toleransi agama, dan kehidupan bersama secara aman. Kajian ini juga menjelaskan pandangan murni mengenai pengaruh sosio-budaya ajaran Sufi dalam membentuk penyebaran Islam dan menyeru penyelidikan lanjut mengenai impak kontemporari gerakan-gerakan ini terhadap hubungan antara agama di rantau ini.

Cadangan kajian adalah supaya memperkukuhkan institusi pendidikan Sufi bagi memupuk keamanan dan toleransi.

Kata kunci: Sufisme; benua kecil India; kumpulan Sufi; penyebaran Islam; keharmonian komuniti.

Introduction

The history of Sufism in the Indian subcontinent spans over a thousand years and has played a crucial role in the spread of Islam across South Asia. Following the arrival of Islam in the region in the early 8th century, Sufism emerged as a fundamental spiritual and cultural force, particularly during the 10th and 11th centuries under the Delhi Sultanate. Subsequently, Sufi traditions flourished significantly. Notably, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti established the Chishti Order, and other Sufi orders gained widespread prominence during this period. Later, during the Mughal Empire, Imam Rabbani Ahmed Sirhindi founded the Naqshbandi Mujaddidi Order, further advancing the spread of Islam. In addition, the Chishti and Qadri orders saw substantial expansion during this time.

During British colonial rule, various Sufi groups contributed significantly to Islam's propagation and played an essential role in resistance against the British Empire. In 1857, Indian Muslims organized the Sepoy Mutiny, a pivotal event in the struggle for independence. Following the defeat in the war and its aftermath, several prominent Sufi scholars, including Muhammad Qasim Nanotvi, Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, and Syed Abid Hussain, established the Darul Uloom Deoband on May 30, 1866, to revive Islamic education and thought.

In 1893, Indian scholars such as Mahmud Hasan, Ashraf Ali Thanvi, Muhammad Ali Mungeri, and Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri established the Nadwatul Ulama in Kanpur, India. Though all the founders of this institution were Sufi scholars, their work focused not on Sufi practices but on reforming the existing educational system and

resolving theological disagreements within the Muslim community.

In 1926, Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi founded a movement in the Meo region of India known as the Deobandi movement to respond to the decline of Islamic morals and values in contemporary society. The movement focused on grassroots efforts to rejuvenate and reconstruct Islam among the masses spiritually.

The renowned Sufi scholar Ahmad Raza Khan (d. 1921) founded the Barelvi Movement in northern India. His followers, known as *Ahl-e-Sunnat wa al-Jamaat* or People of Tradition and Community, considered themselves to be Sunni Sufis and opposed the Deobandi, *Ahl-e-Hadith*, Salafi, and Nadwi movements. They regarded themselves as the sole legitimate expression of Sunni Islam in South Asia, rooted in traditional practices and spiritual guidance.

The Muslim community faced the blow of the political and cultural upheavals as the colonial administration's policies endangered a period of socio-religious flux. In response to the perceived erosion of moral values, the erudite Sufi scholars of the Indian subcontinent embarked upon a journey of intellectual and spiritual revival, giving rise to a series of influential movements that reverberated through the realms of politics, education, culture, and religious philosophy. This academic endeavor delves into the rich tapestry of the Sufi movements and doctrines that emerged in the Indian subcontinent during this transformative period. The discourse is poised to unveil the intricate interplay between historical circumstances, religious fervor, and intellectual ferment that catalyzed these movements' birth.

Against colonial oppression, the intellectual luminaries of these Sufi movements tried to craft comprehensive responses encompassing education, culture, and socio-political engagement. Through establishing educational institutions like Darul Uloom Deoband and

Nadwatul Ulama, these scholars pioneered a reformist spirit to impart Islamic knowledge and values to future generations.

Concurrently, the movements sought to foster cultural resilience by intertwining Sufi principles of love, compassion, and tolerance with the diverse cultural background of the subcontinent. The Sufi movements also manifested in the political realm, aligning with the broader anti-colonial sentiment. The Deoband movement's participation in the Sepoy Revolution of 1857 and the ideological endeavors of Ahmad Reza Khan Bareilvi's movement illustrate Sufi scholars' dynamic role in the struggle for freedom and autonomy.

Sufi scholars embarked upon safeguarding, preserving, and propagating Islam's moral essence within a rapidly changing socio-political scenario. By analyzing how Sufi discourses enriched the cultural quality of the Indian Subcontinent, the research highlights the creation of an all-encompassing atmosphere that nurtured mutual comprehension among various religious and ethnic groups. Sufism's emphasis on direct experiential connection with the Divine and its universalist ethos transcended religious boundaries and resonated with people from varied backgrounds. The legacy of Sufi music, literature, and cultural practices attests to the enduring influence of these movements on the region's collective psyche. This article thus provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the long-lasting impact of Sufi scholars and their movements on the propagation of Islam, the advancement of education, and the cultivation of a pluralistic and culturally rich society within the Indian Subcontinent.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine the influence of Sufi-centric organizations in disseminating Islam throughout the diverse Indian Subcontinent. By

utilizing a technique that incorporates historical analysis, examination of secondary sources, and intellectual engagement, this investigation was able to facilitate a full grasp of the intricate connection between Sufism and the propagation of Islam within this geographical area.

This research used primary and secondary sources to examine scholarly papers, monographs, and books. These materials contribute to a more comprehensive contextualisation of the Sufi movement by providing a variety of perspectives and interpretations from the academic community. Engaging with the insights of contemporary scholars and experts in the field enables a multi-faceted understanding of the dynamic interactions between Sufism and the diffusion of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent.

By employing this multi-dimensional methodology, this study seeks to unravel the intricate tapestry of Sufi-centric movements and their profound influence on the diffusion of Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. The synergistic combination of historical analysis and primary and secondary source examination enriches our comprehension of the multi-faceted dynamics that underpin the symbiotic relationship between Sufism and the spread of Islam within this captivating region.

Literature Review

This study explores the Sufi-inspired movements in the Indian subcontinent, focusing on the Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat, Barelvi, and Nadwi movements, all of which have been central to the spread of Islam in the region. The existing literature offers a wealth of insights, though gaps remain in understanding the spiritual foundations of these movements and their connections with Sufism.

The Deoband movement, initially founded in 1866, has been extensively studied, with critical works such as Barbara Daly Metcalf's *Islamic Revival in British India* (1982) and Abul Fatah Muhammad Yahya's *Deoband*

Movement: Contribution to Historical Tradition (1998), shedding light on its historical and political context.¹ However, these studies often overlook the influence of Sufism despite the movement's roots in spiritual discipline.² Brannon D. Ingram's *Revival from Below* (2018) addresses this gap, exploring the relationship between Deobandism and Sufi principles, highlighting the tension between its reformist agenda and its spiritual underpinnings.³

The Tablighi Jamaat, founded by Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi in 1926, has also been a subject of extensive scholarship. Ziaul Islam's *Inside the Tablighi Jamaat* (2020) examines the movement's grassroots approach to Islamic revivalism but does not sufficiently address its Sufi-centric ethos.⁴ The Tablighi Jamaat's foundational principles align closely with Sufi practices, suggesting a need for deeper exploration of its spiritual roots.

The Barelvi movement, established by Ahmad Raza Khan, is characterized by its syncretic blend of conservative and Sufi spirituality. Anil Maheshwari and Richa Singh's *Syncretic Islam: Life and Times of Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi* (2021) provides a comprehensive biography of Khan but falls short in analyzing the full extent of his relationship with Sufism. The Barelvi movement's emphasis on devotion to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and veneration of saints reflects

¹ Barbara Daly Metcalf, *In Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860- 1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

² Abul Fatah Muhammad Yahya, *Deoband Movement: Contribution to Historical Tradition* (Dhaka: Maqtabatul Fatah, 1998), 157.

³ Brannon D. Ingram, *In Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2018), 16-33.

⁴ Ziya Us Salam, *Inside the Tablighi Jamaat* (New York: Harper Collins, 2020), 46.

significant Sufi influence, an area that warrants further investigation.⁵

The Nadwi movement, associated with Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, has been less studied concerning its Sufi foundations. Syed Muhammad Rabey Hasani Nadwi's biography (2014) offers important insights into Nadwi's reformist ideology, but more work is needed to understand how Sufi traditions influenced his scholarly and reformist endeavors.⁶

Across the literature reviewed, a common theme emerges: the movements under discussion, Tablighi Jamaat, Barelvi, and Nadwi—are deeply influenced by Sufi traditions, though this relationship is often downplayed or underexplored. While usually positioned as a response to Sufi excesses, the Deoband movement shares many commonalities with Sufism, mainly focusing on personal piety and spiritual discipline. Similarly, the Tablighi Jamaat's grassroots approach to Islamic revivalism is closely aligned with Sufi practices, even if these influences are not always explicitly acknowledged. The Barelvi movement's syncretic blend of actual Islam and Sufi spirituality highlights Sufism's central role in shaping religious practice and thought in South Asia. Finally, the Nadwi movement, though not exclusively Sufi, was heavily influenced by Sufi ideas, particularly in its focus on moral reform and spiritual rejuvenation.

This literature review underscores the need for further scholarly inquiry into these movements' spiritual and ideological underpinnings, particularly their relationship with Sufism. By synthesizing the existing literature and identifying critical gaps, this study seeks to contribute to a

⁵ Anil Maheshwari & Richa Singh, *Syncretic Islam: Life and Times of Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi* (UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

⁶ Syed Muhammad Rabey Hasani Nadwi, *Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi: An Eminent Scholar, Thinker, and Reformer* (New Delhi: D. K. Print World Ltd, 2014).

deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the Islamic religious landscape of the Indian subcontinent.

Results and Discussion

The spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent was an elaborate process driven by numerous factors. Among the major ones, the role played by Sufi-centric movements is significant. Sufis were Muslim mystics who stressed the common elements of love, compassion, and tolerance. These features made Islam more acceptable to the local population, which helped it spread successfully.⁷ The Sufi tradition has significantly influenced Indian culture, which is evident in the region's arts, literature, and music.

A historical analysis shows that some Sufi-based movements have played a significant role in the spread of Islam in the rural areas of the Indian subcontinent. Collectively, movements like Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama, Barelvi, and Tablighi Jamaat transcend distinct domains of knowledge and culture, creating a resonant symphony that reverberates across the arenas of politics, economics, social change, and thought leadership. In the wake of these movements, a significant change has given Islamic teachings both relevance and resonance in the complex situation of modernity.

As the Muslim ummah of the subcontinent faces new challenges and opportunities today, the pillars of strength formed by these movements provide guidance and inspiration in all walks of life. Often, the local population in these areas resisted the new religion brought by the outsiders. However, the Sufis could capture the hearts and minds of the masses by catering to their spiritual needs. Additionally, they caused the cultural gap between

⁷ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury & Vahit Gökteş, "A Critical Analysis of Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi's Doctrines on Sufism", *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 11(1) (2021), 93-121.

Muslims and Hindus to narrow down and thus made it easier for people to embrace Islam.

The Impact of Sufi-Based Movements on the Indian Subcontinent's Culture and Society

The Indian subcontinent has a long and rich history of Sufism, dating back to the 12th century. Sufis, or Islamic mystics, emphasized the importance of personal experience and direct contact with God, which appealed to many people dissatisfied with the formalistic practices of mainstream Hinduism and Buddhism. Sufis were also known for their emphasis on love, compassion, and tolerance, which made their message more accessible to the general population.⁸

Over time, Sufi movements developed in the Indian subcontinent, each with its unique focus and approach. Some Sufi movements, such as the Deobandi movement, focused on education and reform. Others, such as the Bareilvi movement, emphasized popular Sufism and the need for social justice. Still others, such as the Tablighi Jamaat movement, focused on spiritual renewal and the propagation of Islam. Despite their differences, all these Sufi movements have significantly impacted the Indian subcontinent. They have helped spread Islam's message, promote education and reform, and foster tolerance and understanding among religious communities. Some of the most essential Sufi-based movements and groups in the Indian sub-continent are as follows:

1. The Deobandi Movement: Sufi Influences and Ideological Impact

The Deobandi movement, which took shape in 1866 from the Darul Uloom Deoband, is one of South Asia's most influential Islamic reformist movements. The movement

⁸ Saezd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, *Bangladeş'te İslâm ve Tasavvuf (Islam and Sufism in Bangladesh)* (Ankara: Ankara Kalem Neşriyat, 2023), 13-17.

was born in colonial British India to preserve traditional Islamic teaching and practice amidst the dual challenges of colonial influence and Western modernization.⁹ Although the Deoband movement is often thought to be synonymous with an implacable adherence to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence or commitment to a reformist vision of Islam, its relations with Sufism are genuinely complex and multi-dimensional.¹⁰ This essay aims to assess and analyze the Deobandi movement in terms of Sufism, how it has interacted with Sufi traditions, and how these have shaped its intellectual and spiritual outlook.

a. The Historical and Intellectual Context of the Deobandi Movement

The Deobandi movement's roots are deeply embedded in the intellectual legacy of Shah Waliullah of Delhi (d. 1762), a key figure who sought to reconcile Islamic teachings with the socio-political realities of South Asia during the Mughal decline. Shah Waliullah is often regarded as the intellectual forebear of Deobandism due to his emphasis on purifying Islamic practices and advocating for a return to authentic Islamic sources, particularly the Qur'an and Hadith, in the face of growing heterodox practices, including Sufi rituals.¹¹

While Shah Waliullah's thoughts were foundational to the Deobandi movement, it is essential to note that Sufism heavily influenced his spiritual practices. Shah Waliullah's teachings on the importance of inner purification, the pursuit of spiritual knowledge, and integrating Sufi

⁹ Yahya, *Deoband Movement*, 157.

¹⁰ Ethem Cebecioglu, "Güney Asya'da İslam'ın Yayılmasında Süfilerin Rolü (The Role of Sufis in the Spread of Islam in South Asia)", *Journal of the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University* 33(1) (1994), 158-178.

¹¹ Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, Harun Alkan & Murat İsmailoğlu, "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent," *Sufiyye* 15 (2023), 23-62.

practices into everyday life served as a bridge between traditional Islamic conservative and the Sufi mysticism prevalent in the subcontinent. Despite his intellectual contribution to Deobandism, the movement adopted a more critical stance toward Sufism, particularly its popular expressions.¹²

b. The Deobandi School and Sufi Teachings

At its inception, the Deobandi movement was primarily focused on religious reform, advocating for a return to the fundamental sources of Islam and a rejection of innovation (*bid'ah*) in spiritual practices. While the movement sought to uphold the importance of the Qur'an, Hadith, and the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, it also maintained a degree of openness to Sufi thought, albeit in a limited and often cautious manner.¹³

A central tenet of the Deobandi approach to Sufism is its adherence to the Maturidi creed, which emphasizes rationalism and the importance of following the traditional principles of Islam.¹⁴ In this regard, the Deobandis were critical of certain Sufi practices that they viewed as excessive or superstitious, particularly those associated with saint veneration, pilgrimage to tombs, and certain forms of mysticism that contradicted the strict monotheism of Islam.¹⁵

However, despite this theological conservatism, the Deobandi movement did not wholly reject Sufism. On the

¹² Saeed Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi and the Conclusive Argument from God," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 4(3) (2024), 267-270.

¹³ Mushtaq Ahmad, *Tahrike Deoband* (Dhaka: Shantidhara Publications, 1998), 31-46.

¹⁴ Martin van Bruinessen & Stefano Allievi, *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 100.

¹⁵ Saeed Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Preserving Inner Peace in Islam in the Context of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent" (Ph.D diss., Ankara University, Ankara, 2019), 168.

contrary, it incorporated critical elements of Sufi thought, particularly its emphasis on spiritual purification (*tasfiyah*) and self-discipline (*tazkiyah*). Prominent Deobandi scholars, such as Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, Imdadullah Muhajir Makki, and Ashraf Ali Thanwi, were themselves influenced by Sufi traditions of Naqshbandi Mujaddidi, Chishti, Qadiriyya and their works reflect an engagement with Sufi ideas of personal piety, humility, and the cultivation of inner virtues.¹⁶

Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, for example, is often regarded as one of the key figures in bridging the gap between Deobandi conservative and Sufi practices.¹⁷ His teachings emphasised the importance of sincerity in worship and spiritual discipline, which resonated with the core values of Sufism.¹⁸ Similarly, Imdadullah Muhajir Makki, a prominent Sufi scholar, was deeply involved in the Deobandi movement, and his influence can be seen in the movement's emphasis on the inner dimensions of Islamic practice, including the purification of the soul and the cultivation of a direct relationship with Allah.¹⁹

c. The Relationship Between Deobandism and Sufism

The Deobandi movement's relationship with Sufism can be understood as continuity and tension. On one hand, the Deobandis inherited a legacy of spiritual refinement and ethical conduct from Sufism. The movement's emphasis on spiritual purification, asceticism, and the rejection of worldly distractions aligns closely with Sufi teachings. The

¹⁶ Vahit Goktaa & Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "An Evaluation of Mu'in al-Din Chishti's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent: The Case of Chishti Tariqa", *Sirnak Universitesi Ilahiyat Fakultesi Dergisi* 31 (2023), 47-76.

¹⁷ Ziya-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 151-159.

¹⁸ Metcalf, *In Islamic Revival in British India*, 141.

¹⁹ Yahya, *Deoband Movement*, 27-46.

Deobandis also continued the Sufi tradition of seeking spiritual guidance from learned scholars (*pir*) and pursuing personal ethical development, albeit more restrained and controlled.²⁰

On the other hand, the Deobandi movement distanced itself from certain Sufi practices that it perceived as innovations (*bid'ah*) or deviations from Islam. For instance, Deobandi scholars did not fully embrace certain practices linked to Sufism, including the veneration of saints, reverence for tombs, and spiritual rituals like *dhikr*. The Deobandis were particularly critical of the Barelvi movement, which was more open to syncretic Sufi practices, and they regarded such practices as harmful to the purity of Islamic monotheism (*Tawhid*).²¹

Despite these differences, the Deobandi movement's engagement with Sufism was not entirely antagonistic. Several leading Deobandi scholars, including Maulana Qasim Nanotvi, recognized the importance of Sufi ethics and spirituality in the broader framework of Islamic revivalism. While rejecting the more ritualistic and popular elements of Sufism, the Deobandis maintained respect for the spiritual discipline that Sufism promoted.²²

This tension between adherence to traditional Islamic principles and the influence of Sufi thought is evident in the works of crucial Deobandi figures. For example, Ashraf Ali Thanwi's *Bahar-e-Shari'at* emphasizes the importance of inner purification, which is central to both Sufism and Deobandi thought.²³ Thanwi's works advocate for a balanced approach to Islamic spirituality, incorporating the

²⁰ Aaron Spevack, *The Archetypal Aliye Scholar: Law, Theology, and Mysticism in the Synthesis of al-Bajuri* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2014), 49.

²¹ Chowdury, *Banglades'te Islam ve Tasavvuf*, 13-17.

²² Metcalf, *In Islamic Revival in British India*, 141.

²³ Ahmad, *Tahrike Deoband*, 49.

formal aspects of Islamic law and the Sufi-inspired focus on the heart (*qalb*) and personal holiness.²⁴

d. The Global Spread and Sufi Influence

The Deobandi movement's global spread, particularly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the United Kingdom, has also seen the continued intersection of Deobandi teachings with Sufi practices. Deobandi *madrasas* have become centers for religious education and spiritual guidance in many regions.²⁵ While the strict adherence to Deobandi conservative often leads to a more formal and structured approach to Islamic practice, there are also many examples of Deobandi scholars incorporating Sufi ideas into their teachings.²⁶

For instance, in Bangladesh, *madrasas* affiliated with the Deobandi tradition continue to emphasize the importance of spiritual discipline and the cultivation of ethical values, which are central tenets of Sufism.²⁷ Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Deobandi institutions such as Darul Uloom London and Jamiatul Ilm Wal Huda have become focal points for Islamic education and spiritual guidance, incorporating aspects of Sufi thought, especially in their focus on the cultivation of personal character and the purification of the soul.

2. Tablighi Jamaat: A Sufi Influence on Practices and Ideology

Tablighi Jamaat, founded by Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi in the early 20th century, has emerged as one of the most significant Islamic movements, spreading across the globe with millions of followers. The movement, emphasizing spiritual revival, prayer, and community involvement, has

²⁴ Ingram, *In Revival from Below*, 27.

²⁵ Ingram, *In Revival from Below*, 33.

²⁶ Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan*, 148.

²⁷ "Bangladesh Qaumi Madrasa Education Board," BEFAC, 2017, accessed October 5, 2024, <https://bmeb.gov.bd/>.

distinct connections to the Sufi tradition.²⁸ However, it maintains a particular emphasis on reforming the practices of Muslims rather than engaging deeply in esoteric or mystical dimensions. The following evaluation will analyze Tablighi Jamaat through the lens of Sufism, addressing its philosophical and practical alignment with Sufi ideals, principles, and teachings.

a. Sufi Foundations of Tablighi Jamaat

Tablighi Jamaat has its roots in the Sufism tradition, not only through its founder's individual spiritual history but also in the primary operational modes of the group. The spiritual base from which Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi got his bearings was well-saturated with Sufism. He was particularly in close contact with renowned Sufi scholars like Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Khalil Ahmad Saharanpuri. This became a mold in which all the basic tenets, such as inner purification and spiritual discipline, were impressed upon the structural core of the Tablighi Jamaat.²⁹

The primary purpose of Tablighi Jamaat - to purify the heart, revive the basic features of Islam, and preach Islamic virtues - is in close harmony with the principles of Sufi thought.³⁰ Sufism stresses the need for the purification of the soul, intimate love with Allah, and the discarding of worldly attachments. In this respect, the Tablighi Jamaat's focus on purifying one's faith through practices such as regular prayer (*salah*), the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*), and the development of sincerity (*ikhlas*) is similar to Sufi ideals for personal improvement and spiritual purification.

²⁸ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad, "The History of Jama'ah Tabligh in Southeast Asia: The Role of Islamic Sufism in Islamic revival," *al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 46(2) (2008), 353-400.

²⁹ Mawlana Manzur Numani, *Teblig-i Cema'at, Cema'at-i Islami and Bareilvi Hazret* (Leknev: n.pb., 1989), 20-37.

³⁰ Ziya Us Salam, *Inside the Tablighi Jamaat*, 34-47.

b. The Six Principles of Tablighi Jamaat and Their Sufi Roots

The six foundational principles of Tablighi Jamaat—faith (*kalimah*), prayer (*salah*), knowledge and remembrance of Allah (*'ilm* and *dhikr*), respecting Muslims (*ikram al-Muslimin*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and *da'wah* (propagating Islam)—have clear parallels with core Sufi teachings:

- i. Faith (*kalimah*): The first principle, the declaration of faith in Allah's oneness and Muhammad's (PBUH) prophethood, aligns with Sufi teachings on *Tawhid*. Sufism emphasizes the experiential knowledge of Allah's unity, leading to an intimate connection with the Divine. Affirming this belief through verbal and spiritual affirmation mirrors the Sufi emphasis on the *dhikr*.³¹
- ii. Prayer (*salah*): The Sufi tradition considers prayer central to spiritual elevation. Like the Tablighi Jamaat, Sufism views prayer as an essential means of communication with Allah, a pathway to spiritual purification. The practice of *salah*, emphasizing humility, sincerity, and focus, is a form of worship deeply rooted in both Sufi and Tablighi traditions.
- iii. Knowledge and remembrance of Allah (*'ilm* and *dhikr*): Knowledge and remembrance are central tenets in both movements. Sufism stresses the importance of knowledge as a scholarly pursuit and a means of deepening one's spiritual understanding. *Dhikr* is an essential practice in Sufism, helping practitioners transcend the ego and attain closeness to Allah. The Tablighi Jamaat's

³¹ Abdulhalik Birzadeh, *al-Shaykh Muhammad Ilyas al-Dihlawi* (Cairo: n.p., 1990).

- emphasis on the remembrance of Allah and seeking knowledge directly reflects Sufi principles.³²
- iv. Respecting Muslims (*ikram al-Muslimin*): Sufism teaches the importance of treating fellow Muslims with compassion, humility, and respect. The concept of *ikhlas* in Sufi thought involves cultivating the correct intention and offering genuine care to others, which is reflected in Tablighi Jamaat's principle of helping and respecting fellow Muslims.
 - v. Sincerity (*ikhlas*): Sufism is deeply concerned with purifying intentions. A central idea in Sufism is the *ikhlas*-purity of purpose in all actions. Tablighi Jamaat's insistence on sincerity in religious duties and social actions mirrors this Sufi notion of achieving spiritual purity.
 - vi. *Da'wah* (inviting to Islam): The Sufi tradition often emphasizes the spread of Islam through personal example and spiritual wisdom. Tablighi Jamaat's emphasis on *da'wah* mirrors this aspect of Sufi philosophy, encouraging its followers to spread the message of Islam through exemplary character, spirituality, and active engagement in community life.³³

c. Tablighi Jamaat's Non-Political Stance and Sufi Philosophy

One of the distinctive features of Tablighi Jamaat is its deliberate avoidance of political involvement. This

³² Vahit Goktaş, Mohammad Mahmudul Hasan, Saeed Rashed Hasan Chowdhury & Murat Ismailoglu, "Spirituality in the Context of Tablighi Cemaat and its Implication on Muslim Society: The Sufi Perspective," *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 9(1) (2022), 49-66.

³³ Dietrich Reetz, "Sufi Spirituality Fires Reformist Zeal: The Tablighi Jama'at in Today's India and Pakistan," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 135(3) (2006), 33-51.

approach aligns with the Sufi tradition, which often promotes retreats from worldly affairs and emphasizes inner spiritual development over pursuing political power or material wealth. The Sufi approach generally discourages involvement in political disputes, regarding such involvement as a detour on the path to spiritual enlightenment.³⁴

In Sufi thought, political authority is temporary, while the quest for spiritual purity and closeness to Allah is an eternal goal. Therefore, Tablighi Jamaat's apolitical stance agrees with such a perspective, where its followers can focus on self-reformation, morality, and personal servitude to Allah, unencumbered by disputes or conflicts within the political realm.³⁵

d. Sufi Influence on the Global Reach of Tablighi Jamaat

One of the most important reasons for the broad appeal of Tablighi Jamaat across different cultural and geographical settings is its Sufi origins. Sufism has been marked by inherent inclusiveness and adaptability, drawing on such universal principles as love, compassion, and humility. These have made Sufism and, by extension, Tablighi Jamaat very effective in appealing to Muslim communities worldwide.³⁶

This movement can transcend cultural and sectarian divisions because of its flexible stance, emphasizing fundamental religious observances rather than complex theological discussions. The accommodating character of Sufism was evidenced by the ability of Tablighi Jamaat to

³⁴ Jan Ali, "Islamic Revivalism: The Case of the Tablighi Jamaat," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23(1) (2003), 173-181.

³⁵ Bulbul Siddiqi, *Becoming 'Good Muslim' The Tablighi Jamaat in the UK and Bangladesh* (Singapore: Springer, 2018): 61-76.

³⁶ Sukron Mamun, "Tablighi Jamaat: An Islamic Revivalist Movement and Radicalism Issues," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 5(2) (2019), 145-159.

appeal to Muslims of all ethnicities and cultural heritages, fostering a sense of cohesion and spiritual linkedness.³⁷

3. The Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama (Nadwi) Movement: A Study of Sufi Practices and Scholarly Contributions

The Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama (Nadwi) movement, established in 1893, is one of the most influential Islamic educational and reformist organizations in the Indian subcontinent. Its foundational principles are grounded in the desire for Islamic revitalization, addressing intellectual and religious challenges, and fostering unity among Muslims in India. The movement's strong relationship with Sufism significantly shapes its approach to Islamic education, spirituality, and social engagement.³⁸ A deeper examination of this relationship reveals how Sufi philosophy and practices have enriched the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama and its associated movement, offering a distinct model of reform based on spiritual and intellectual development.

a. Historical Background and Sufi Influence

The Nadwi movement was primarily led by a group of eminent Islamic scholars, notably Muhammad Ali Mungeri, whose aim was to revive Islamic scholarship and education by founding Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama. However, deep inroads into Sufism distinguish the Nadwi movement from almost all Islamic educational endeavors. The dynamics of this relationship are most prominently illustrated in the institution's leadership, which has been molded by some leading Sufi scholars, including Abul

³⁷ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "The History of Jama'ah Tabligh in Southeast Asia: The Role of Islamic Sufism in Islamic Revival," *al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 46(2) (2008): 353-400.

³⁸ Nizamuddin Asir Adravi, *Tazkirah Maṣāḥir Hind: Karwane Rafta (Urdu)* (Deoband: Darul Muallifeen, 2016), 235.

Hasan Ali Nadwi, who was the head of the movement for several decades.³⁹

The influence of Sufism on the Nadwi movement can be attributed to the presence of influential personalities and spiritual exercises within the Darul Uloom. Being essentially an Islamic mysticism, Sufism emphasizes personal spiritual development, purification of one's inner self, righteousness for God, and practical application of Islamic ethos in everyday life. Notably, the intellectuals from the Nadwi movement were highly influenced by Sufi principles, which is evident from their education and community-building initiatives and their being strictly bound by the Islamic way of life.

b. Sufism's Role in Nadwi's Educational Vision

One of the salient features of the Nadwi movement has been its holistic educational setup in religious knowledge and spiritual growth. While the traditional Islamic learning institutions leaned only toward intellectual training, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama tried to combine the study of religious texts with a strong emphasis on spirituality, moral values, and personality building. This methodology aligns with the Sufi tradition that views knowledge as a means to purify the soul and cultivate virtues such as humility, sincerity, and affection for others.

Sufism teaches that pursuing knowledge should bring forth everyone's inner character and instill qualities like compassion, tolerance, patience, and self-discipline. Many Nadwi scholars, whose intellectual thought had been most closely influenced by Sufism, tried to infuse that value system into their new teaching framework. To them, seeking knowledge was an act of continuous spiritual growth and could not be reduced to intellectual development alone. This is especially evident in their

³⁹ Ghazanfar Ali Khan, *Nadwat al-Ulama: A Centre of Islamic Learning* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 2001).

commitment to teaching the outward expressions of Islamic practice and the inner, spiritual dimensions of faith.

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi had a vision for Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama, unique in the history of Sufi-inspired education. During his tenure, the institution focused on developing the students' intellectual and spiritual dimensions. The curriculum included all traditional Islamic sciences, such as Qur'anic studies, Hadith, jurisprudence, and philosophy, emphasizing ethics, spiritual purification, and Islamic mysticism. This reflects the broader Sufi belief that knowledge is only achieved when the heart is purified, and one's actions follow divine will.

c. Sufi Spirituality in the Nadwi Movement's Social and Humanitarian Work

The influence of Sufism within the Nadwi movement extends beyond education to its social and humanitarian efforts. Sufism has historically been a powerful force for social cohesion, emphasizing unity, peace, and tolerance. These values are evident in how the Nadwi movement has engaged with the Muslim community in India and beyond.

Sufism's emphasis on serving others and cultivating compassion is reflected in the social work undertaken by the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama. The institution and its affiliated organizations have actively promoted social justice, charitable activities, and interfaith dialogue. Through its various publications and outreach programs, the Nadwi movement has worked to address issues such as poverty, illiteracy, and social inequality, reflecting the Sufi ideals of service to humanity and the importance of community welfare.

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi emphasized the need for Muslims to engage with the broader society and to contribute positively to social harmony. This is consistent with the Sufi concept of *Insan Kamil* (the perfect human being), who is spiritually accomplished and uplifting others. The Nadwi movement's emphasis on social

engagement and humanitarian work reflects the Sufi understanding that spiritual enlightenment should manifest in tangible acts of kindness and service.⁴⁰

d. Sufi Ethics and the Nadwi Movement's Intellectual Contributions

The Nadwi movement's intellectual contribution toward Islamic reform and revival came from its founder and prominent figures like Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi. Whereas most other reformist movements in the Islamic world had emphasized Islam's political or legal dimensions, the Nadwi movement's approach was more spiritual and stressed the purification of the soul and the need for individual transformation.

As modulated by Sufi teachings, this focus on spiritual development is a counterpoint to the more secular or politically oriented movements. In many of his writings, Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi raises questions about the interior purity of one's self, the onus placed on the individual in maintaining Islamic mores, and the necessity for Muslims to embrace the spiritual dimensions of their religion. His works are a confluence of traditional Islamic scholarship and Sufi spirituality, summoning a renaissance of the very spirit of Islam at the core, emphasizing this transformative power inherent in spiritual practice.

The intellectual output of the Nadwi movement, in particular through its journals and publications like *Al-Baas Al-Islami* and *Tameer e Hayat*, has contributed significantly to Islamic thought by adding a unique confluence of religious scholarship with spiritual insight.⁴¹ These publications are platforms for disseminating this Sufi-influenced vision of Islam, underlining the importance of intellectual engagement and spiritual cultivation.

⁴⁰ Nadwi, *Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi*, 27.

⁴¹ Khan, *Nadvat al-Ulama: A Centre of Islamic Learning*, 34.

4. Sufi Perspectives on the Barelvi Movement: An Analytical Study

The Barelvi movement, founded by the renowned scholar Sufi Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi (1856-1921), is one of South Asia's most influential and enduring Islamic movements. It emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to the religious, social, and political challenges faced by Muslims in British India, particularly the rise of reformist movements such as the Deobandi and Wahhabi movements, which sought to challenge the influence of Sufism.⁴² From the perspective of Sufism, the Barelvi movement can be understood as a profoundly spiritual response aimed at preserving and revitalizing the Sufi traditions of Islam while countering the perceived doctrinal and theological threats posed by other reformist factions.

a. Sufi Foundations of the Barelvi Movement

The Barelvi movement is inherently grounded in the rich spiritual traditions of Sufism, which emphasizes the inner, mystical dimensions of Islam, focusing on the cultivation of a personal relationship with God, devotion to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the cultivation of moral and spiritual virtues. The movement adheres to the Maturidi theological school and the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, both compatible with Sufi practices. Still, the spiritual practices and ethos of Sufism truly define the character of the Barelvi tradition.

At the core of the Barelvi movement is its unwavering support for the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), a central tenet of Sufi practice. Ahmad Raza Khan and his followers have consistently emphasized respecting the Prophet's spiritual status, calling for love and devotion

⁴² "Barelvi", *Oxford Reference*,
<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095446664>, accessed October 7, 2024.

to him as an essential element of the Muslim faith. This is in stark contrast to the anti-Sufi stance adopted by some reformist groups, such as the Wahhabis, who sought to minimize or even eliminate practices like the veneration of the Prophet and Sufi saints.⁴³

The Barelvi movement also emphasizes the importance of the Sufi orders, particularly the Qadiriyya, Chishtiyya, and Suhrawardiyya orders, which were central to the spiritual and intellectual life of the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁴ These Sufi orders stress the significance of a spiritual master (*murshid*) and the cultivation of spiritual practices (such as *dhikr* and *muraqabah*) as pathways to spiritual enlightenment and closeness to God. Ahmad Raza Khan's writings and teachings reflect this deep engagement with Sufi thought, as he not only defended the practices of Sufism but also sought to integrate them into the broader religious and social framework of Islam in British India.⁴⁵

b. Sufism's Role in the Barelvi Movement

Sufism's role in the Barelvi movement can be understood through several vital lenses:

- i. **Spiritual Renewal and Social Reform:** Ahmad Raza Khan served mainly as a spiritual reformer of the Barelvi movement. He wished to address what he perceived as the moral and religious decline among Muslims in the British Indian

⁴³ Usha Sanyal, "Generational Changes in the Leadership of the Ahl-e Sunnat Movement in North India during the Twentieth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 32(3) (1998), 635–656.

⁴⁴ Saezd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Prof. Dr. Hasan Kâmil Yılmaz. An Outline of Sufism and Sufi Orders (Ana Hatlarıyla Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar). Istanbul: Ensar Publication, 2019. 367 p. ISBN: 978-975-6794-30-2," *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 11(2) (2024), 1–10.

⁴⁵ Vahit Göktaş & Saezd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, "Districts of Bangladesh Named After Sufis Manifesting the Great Impact of Sufism on Bengal Civilization: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13(1) (2023), 320-327.

subcontinent, and he believed the restoration of Sufi doctrines was central to this effort. The Barelvi movement has, therefore, sought to revitalize the spiritual life of the Muslim community through an emphasis on spiritual cleansing, devotion to the Prophet, and commitment to Sufi moral precepts. This revitalization was not an individualistic religious devotion. Still, it was linked with broader social reform by advocating values such as integrity, modesty, and compassion—all fundamental tenets of Sufi philosophy.⁴⁶

- ii. Defending Sufi Practices against Reformist Movements: One of the main objectives behind the Barelvi movement was to defend Sufi traditions and doctrines in reaction to the appearance of movements such as the Deobandi and Wahhabi schools, which were out to reject or modify many aspects of Sufism. It is based on this solid disapproval of the Wahhabi movement by Ahmad Raza Khan that emerged as a reaction against the Sufi practices of the veneration of saints, visitation to shrines, and the celebration of the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad, known as *Mawlid*. In the mind of Ahmad Raza Khan, all these *fara'id* were firmly integrated into the spiritual life of Muslims and firmly based upon the teachings of the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the heritage of Sufism.⁴⁷ Through his voluminous literary contributions encompassing fatwas, treatises, and

⁴⁶ Ali Riaz, *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 75.

⁴⁷ Shah Ahmed Rida Khan, "The 'Neglected Genius of the East' by Professor Muhammad Mas'ud Ahmad," *The Muslim Digest* (1985), 223–230.

commentaries, Ahmad Raza Khan formulated a theological structure that justified and defended these practices. His criticisms directed towards the Wahhabis and Deobandis were frequently articulated as a means to safeguard the authenticity of Islamic tradition as interpreted through the perspective of Sufism, which he regarded as the authentic manifestation of Islamic spirituality.

- iii. Syncretism and Social Harmony: Indeed, the syncretic orientation of the Barelvi movement toward Islam is one primary dimension that bonds it to Sufi thought. Sufism, emphasizing universal love, tolerance, and unity of creation, has played a historically conspicuous role in fostering social amity and interfaith ecumenism within South Asia. The messages of Ahmad Raza Khan routinely reflect this broader Sufi vision when he puts forth a moderate and encompassing view of Islam—one that urges Muslims to maintain peace and good neighborly relations with non-Muslims.⁴⁸ The syncretic features of the Barelvi movement are indeed reflected in its adoption of local cultural practices and traditions, often in tandem with Islamic principles. One example is that the Barelvi movement has accommodated established practices such as celebrating religious festivals and reading poetry in honor of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which is common among Sufi circles. These practices, therefore, were seen as ways to connect with the divine and show love for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the saints; hence, they were not considered in conflict with the Islamic creed.

⁴⁸ Maheshwari & Richa Singh, *Syncretic Islam*, 45.

- iv. The Role of Sufi Shrines and Pilgrimages: The Barelvi movement is deeply connected to *dergahs*, the places of spiritual healing, prayer, and intercession. Ahmad Raza Khan greatly supported the veneration of Sufi saints, declaring that these saints play a vital role in the spiritual lives of Muslims. Among the most essential practices of the Barelvi school are visiting shrines and seeking blessings from the saints. This relationship with Sufi shrines makes the Barelvi movement distinct from Puritan movements that reject this sort of practice.
- v. Theological and Social Contributions: Ahmad Raza Khan's contribution to the Barelvi movement was a voluminous and influential theology firmly based on Sufi philosophy. His numerous works on Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and mysticism have emphasized the role of Sufism in Islamic practice. He compiled voluminous works on subjects such as God's nature, the Prophet Muhammad's attributes, the role of saints, and the interpretation of Islamic law (*fiqh*). His theological paradigm combined deep respect for traditional Islamic learning with a powerful commitment to Islam's spiritual and mystical dimensions as expressed through Sufism.⁴⁹

Moreover, the Barelvi movement made a tremendous cultural and social impact on South Asia. In preserving and promoting Sufi practices, the movement helped maintain spiritual and cultural continuity between the Islamic community and its deeply embedded mystical traditions.

⁴⁹ Martin W. Lewis, "Deobandi Islam vs. Barelvi Islam in South Asia," *Osmanisnin*, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://osmanisnin.wordpress.com/2021/09/27/deobandi-islam-vs-barelvi-islam-in-south-asia/>

The Barelvi movement developed a spiritually and socially engaged Muslim community by strongly emphasizing education, charity, and social justice.

Analysis of Findings

By examining the contributions of Sufi ideological groups in dissemination of Islam through establishing *madrastas* and *dargahs* such as Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama, the Barelvi movement, and the Tablighi Jamaat organization, these findings illuminate the nuanced efforts of Sufi scholars to safeguard the moral compass of the Muslim community and rejuvenate Islamic values in response to British colonial pressures in the Indian subcontinent.

The Deobandi movement, focusing on traditional Islamic scholarship and its commitment to reforming Islamic practices in the modern world, offers a unique perspective on the intersection of conservative and Sufism. While the movement's founders sought to purify Islam from what they perceived as innovations, they also recognized the importance of Sufi-inspired spirituality in cultivating a pious and ethical Muslim life. Thus, continuity and tension mark the Deobandi movement's relationship with Sufism, as it has sought to balance the demands of religious conservatives with the spiritual insights of Sufism.

Tablighi Jamaat's Sufi foundations are evident in its focus on personal spiritual reform, the purification of the heart, and the cultivation of good character. The movement's commitment to the basic tenets of Islam - prayer, sincerity, and remembrance of Allah - aligns deeply with Sufi principles. The rejection of political engagement and the emphasis on community service and *da'wah* reflect a deeply Sufi ethos of detachment from worldly affairs and a focus on inward spiritual growth.

Despite its strong Sufi underpinnings, some scholars argue that Tablighi Jamaat's focus on ritualistic practices and outward observances might overshadow Islam's more

esoteric and mystical aspects in Sufism. Critics contend that the movement's emphasis on outwardly visible practices might limit the deeper spiritual exploration central to Sufism. Additionally, while Tablighi Jamaat promotes sincerity (*ikhlas*) and purity, some critics question whether the movement's avoidance of complex theological discussions and political engagement limits its ability to address contemporary issues facing Muslim communities, such as the challenges of modernity, social justice, and political oppression.

The Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama and Nadwi movement uniquely synthesize Islamic scholarship and Sufi spirituality. The movement's emphasis on intellectual rigor and spiritual formation aligns with the broader Sufi ideal that actual knowledge is a means of achieving spiritual enlightenment and moral excellence. By integrating Sufi teachings into its educational and social reform efforts, the Nadwi movement has created an intellectual framework that addresses the Muslim community's religious needs and emphasizes the importance of personal transformation and service to humanity.

Further exploration of the Sufi influence on the Nadwi movement could shed light on how these principles have shaped its broader impact on Islamic reform and social change. By focusing on the ethical, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of Islam, the Nadwi movement offers a model of reform that seeks to balance the demands of religious tradition with the evolving needs of modern society. In this sense, the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama is not just an educational institution but a spiritual center dedicated to the holistic development of its students and the broader Muslim community.

With its strong Sufi foundations, the Barelvi movement combines actual Islam and mystical spirituality. Ahmad Raza Khan's leadership and theological

contributions helped to secure Sufism's place within the broader landscape of South Asian Islam, providing a counterpoint to the reformist movements that sought to marginalize Sufi practices. The movement's focus on the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the promotion of Sufi ethics, and its commitment to social harmony and tolerance have made it a key force in shaping Muslims' religious and cultural identity in South Asia. From the perspective of Sufism, the Barelvi movement is not just a theological response but a comprehensive spiritual and social project aimed at preserving and advancing the Sufi legacy in the modern world. Its emphasis on spiritual devotion, social reform, and the veneration of saints reflects the enduring relevance of Sufi principles in contemporary Islamic thought and practice.

The Barelvi and Deobandi groups often intensely criticized each other over theological differences. The Barelvi group claimed to be the sole proponents of true devotion to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and were highly active in opposing Deobandi scholars. While the Deobandi scholars in the Indian subcontinent were actively fighting against the Sikhs and the British on the battlefield, the Barelvi group turned their efforts against them. Under British encouragement, the Barelvi group labeled the Deobandi scholars as Wahhabis in their propaganda. Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi even issued a fatwa declaring British-ruled India as *Darul Islam* (Abode of Islam).⁵⁰

On the other hand, some Deobandi scholars alleged that Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi acted as a British agent during his lifetime. The British had a policy of utilizing confident local leaders and elites within the Barelvi movement to advance their colonial interests in the Indian subcontinent, and some individuals likely collaborated with the British in exchange for benefits or privileges.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Yahya, *Deoband Movement*, 152.

⁵¹ Yahya, *Deoband Movement*, 161.

As we conclude this exploration of the profound awakening ignited by Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama, Barelvi, and Tablighi Jamaat, we are reminded that their impact is not confined to any singular dimension. Instead, they have emerged as transformative forces, shaping the essence of Islamic education, culture, politics, and holistic well-being in the tapestry of the Indian subcontinent. Their influence stands as an embodiment of the enduring potential of faith to illuminate, elevate, and unify – a testament to the limitless possibilities that arise when hearts and minds converge under the banner of shared values and aspirations.

Concluding Remarks

In the intricate tapestry of the Indian Subcontinent's history, Sufi-centric movements emerge as luminous threads that intricately woven the fabric of Islam's spread across diverse landscapes and communities. This comprehensive analysis has illuminated the profound and multi-faceted influence of Sufism on disseminating Islamic ideals, unearthing a wealth of insights that reshape our understanding of the region's religious, cultural, and social dynamics. The remarkable odyssey of Sufism's influence in the spread of Islam across the Indian Subcontinent invites us to a profound contemplation of unity amidst diversity, spiritual harmony amidst cultural heterogeneity, and enduring transformation amidst the passage of time. As we reflect on this comprehensive analysis, may we embrace the timeless lessons of Sufism, nurturing a deeper appreciation for the connective threads that bind us all in the shared tapestry of human experience.

In the unfolding chapters of the Indian subcontinent's history, the emergence and steadfast growth of Islamic movements based on Sufism, such as Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama, Barelvi, and Tablighi Jamaat, have scripted an inspiring narrative of renewal, transformation, and empowerment. Once established with

the pursuit of educational excellence and spiritual revival, these movements have gracefully transcended their initial contours to weave a rich tapestry of awakening across Islamic education, culture, politics, and the essence of the Muslim ummah's existence. The venerable institutions of Darul Uloom Deoband and Nadwatul Ulama, like torchbearers of knowledge, have kindled the flames of enlightened learning. Their commitment to fostering a robust understanding of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and spirituality has nurtured generations of scholars and ignited a luminous path toward intellectual engagement. As these institutions expanded their scope to encompass cultural and societal domains, their teachings resonated with a broader audience, fostering a renewed sense of identity, pride, and unity among the faithful.

With its devotion to the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life and nurturing a vibrant spiritual connection, the Barelvi movement has effused a vibrant tapestry of faith and devotion. It has enriched the cultural mosaic of the subcontinent, fostering an atmosphere of reverence, love, and religious tolerance. In celebrating the Prophet's legacy, Barelvi adherents have not only deepened their faith but have also contributed to the profound interfaith harmony that characterizes the subcontinent's social fabric. The Tablighi Jamaat's outreach, echoing across continents and cultures, has breathed life into the essence of Islamic propagation. Through its focus on personal piety and community service, this movement has reinvigorated the hearts of millions and sown seeds of compassion, humility, and moral integrity. The ripple effect of these efforts has engendered positive change in social, economic, and political spheres, as individuals guided by Tabligh's principles engage earnestly in shaping their communities for the better.

In conclusion, while existing literature provides valuable historical and political insights into these

movements, a comprehensive understanding of their relationship with Sufism remains underexplored. Future research should bridge this gap by examining the spiritual dimensions of these movements and their ongoing impact on Islamic thought and practice in the Indian subcontinent.

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