There has been considerable attention to the working for and significance of the Tablighi Jama’at, established in 1927, but little has been done to study the origin and rapid expansion of the more recently formed Da’wat-i Islami (Invitation to Islam), whose motto is ‘love for the Prophet and Medina’. The Da’wat-i Islami was launched by Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Qadiri in 1981. Today, the spate of green turbans, its trade-mark, can be seen not only in the rural areas of Pakistan, but also in its metropolitan cities.

When the military regime in Pakistan in 1977 banned all political activities and parties, Islamic political parties were shocked for they had launched the mass movement for Islamic Order (nimzmi Mustalah) that paved the way for the military junta to take over the military regime or not.

The Jam’iyyat Ulama’i Islam and the Jam’iyyat Ulama’i Pakistan both furthered the implementation of the Hanafi school of law. They, however, differed on certain details. The former was supported by the Deobandis while the latter by the Barahees, the Ahl al-Sunnat Ul Jama’at, popularly called Sunnis. The Deoband, a reformist educational institution established in India in 1867 was critical of the Barahees for their adherence to Sufi orders and law schools, they favoured a puritan interpretation of the Islam. The three soon fell apart on the question of supporting the new government of Jam’iyyat Islam which decided not to cooperate with the Martial Law Regime.

The Jam’iyyat-ul-Ulama Pakistan, founded in March 1948, was the leading religious and political party of the Barelwis. This state of isolation from the political arena under the guise of religion. Later, in 1952, a central movement, revolving around the personality of Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri. The movement stands for the revival and renaissance of Islam through preaching. Its main characteristic is to preach what is righteous and what is forbidden. Its members of the Da’wat-i Islami are so keen on following the sunnah that they always wear white clothes, a green turban and a miswak (a wooden stick used in place of a toothbrush) in their pockets.

The Da’wat-i Islami advocates the universal brotherhood among the Muslims. They have a plan of battle of the Da’wat-Islami is the official school of the movement, but followers of the other rites count among its members. Since the primary objective is to promote unity among the Muslims, theological and political controversies are discouraged in the Da’wat-i Islami.

Expansion of the movement

During its early days, the Da’wat-i Islami held its weekly meeting at the Gazt-i-Habib Mosque, Soldier Bazar, in Karachi every Thursday after the evening prayer. After recitation from the Qur’an and the salutation of the Prophet, one of its preachers would give a speech on a spiritual and moral topic, followed by a speech of Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri, which explained day to day problems in terms of Islamic law. The following day, after the Friday prayer, a small group of preachers, under the leadership of Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Qadiri, visited other quarters of Karachi. They offered the remaining prayers at the central mosque of the area. In between prayers, Mawlana Qadiri briefed local residents about the basic teachings of Islam. The Da’wat-i Islami expanded rapidly in Karachi, in a single year these weekly meetings began to be held in some 300 mosques. From Karachi, the movement expanded quietly in the Sind and then throughout Pakistan. It then became conspicuous and influential, and started to spread over other parts of the world, thus constituting a veritable transnational tablighi movement.

There is no secretive nature of the Da’wat-i Islami or any long-term short-term strategical agenda. However, it struggles for the implementation of the nizmi Mustalah (the system of the Prophet) in Pakistan through peaceful preaching as well as printed literature. In addition to the weekly meetings in the various larger and smaller cities and towns of Pakistan, it holds its its regional meetings in different metropolitan areas of Pakistan. Thus far, it has held annual meetings in Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and Multan. The Da’wat-i Islami established secretaries in both Karachi and Lahore, naming them Faidani and Miswak. In nearly every city of Pakistan, the Da’wat-i Islami has established religious schools and libraries. It has its own edifying literature, the most important of which is Faidan-i Sunnat (Invitation to Medina) and Faidan-i Mustalah (system of the Prophet), a new movement and field of work.

The Jam’iyyat-ul-Islami is a movement that is most widely regarded as sources of inspiration for the members of the Da’wat-i Islami. The Da’wat-i Islami also publishes works by other Barelwi scholars, particularly works of Mawlana Ahmad Rida Khan Qadiri. Qadiri, established in India in 1867 was criticized by the Jam’iyyat-ul-Islami.

The Da’wat-i Islami has a considerable hold on its members. From the very beginning, it was a serious political movement, revolving around the personality of Mawlana Qadiri. The centre in Karachi, authorized amir (chief) of provinces, cities and towns to work in according to the dictates of the centre. A local amir comes regularly to the centre for training and guidance. So as to have close contact with the other branches of the Da’wat-i Islam, Mawlana Qadiri regularly travels all over Pakistan. The members must show their commitment to the Islamic way of life as it is reflected in his Faidan-i Sunnat. The centre discourages the reading and discussing of anything other than the Faidan-i Sunnat in the weekly meetings. In addition to male participants, it has a considerable enrolment of Pakistani women.

Although the Da’wat-i Islami is supported on its aims to build character in its individuals, the Da’wat-i Islami is involved in political controversies and to establish religious institutions, and it never attracts diverse criticism about some of its practices. Its over-emphasis on wearing the green turban not only irritates common Muslims, but also scholars are reluctant to endorse it. They do not consider wearing the green turban as compulsory (sunnah-o-mu’akkadah). In fact, they hold that any type of cap, or white or black coloured turban can be used to cover one’s head. Leading Barelwi scholars also object to calling Mawlana Ilyas Qadiri the amir i-c-Ilahi (leader of the Sunnis) among his followers.

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Note

Mawlana Qadiri was born July 1910 in a Karachi-based Memon family. He is a Khalilb (exponent) of Mawlana Muhammad Qadiri (1877-1981), a Sufi-bred religious scholar, who migrated to Medina in 1910.

Miswak is a toothbrush (a wooden stick used in place of a toothbrush). In fact, they hold that there is no secretive nature of the Da’wat-i Islami or any long-term short-term strategical agenda. However, it struggles for the implementation of the nizmi Mustalah (the system of the Prophet) in Pakistan through peaceful preaching as well as printed literature. In addition to the weekly meetings in the various larger and smaller cities and towns of Pakistan, it holds its its regional meetings in different metropolitan areas of Pakistan. Thus far, it has held annual meetings in Karachi, Hyderabad, Lahore and Multan. The Da’wat-i Islami established secretaries in both Karachi and Lahore, naming them Faidani and Miswak. In nearly every city of Pakistan, the Da’wat-i Islami has established religious schools and libraries. It has its own edifying literature, the most important of which is Faidan-i Sunnat (Invitation to Medina) and Faidan-i Mustalah (system of the Prophet), a new movement and field of work.

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