

Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization (JITC)

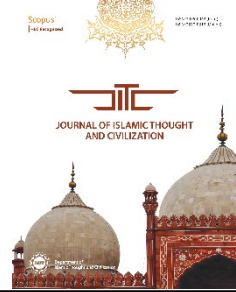
Volume 14 Issue 1, Spring 2024

ISSN(P): 2075-0943 ISSN(E): 2520-0313

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC>



Article QR



- Title:** Muslim Ummah and its Disintegration in the Past: A Critical Analysis of the *Tablighi* Jamaat Perspective
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- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.141.04>
- History:** Received: November 14, 2023, Revised: April 18, 2024, Accepted: April 23, 2024, Published: June 14, 2024
- Citation:** Ali, Kausar, Huang Minxing, and Andrew Smith. "Muslim Ummah and its Disintegration in the Past: A Critical Analysis of the *Tablighi* Jamaat Perspective." *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 1 (2024): 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.141.04>
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- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of

Department of Islamic Thought and Civilization, School of Social Science and Humanities
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Muslim Ummah and its Disintegration in the Past: A Critical Analysis of the *Tablighi* Jamaat Perspective

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Abstract

The Tablighi Jamaat (hereinafter referred to as TJ) is one of the largest Islamic evangelical movements dedicated to advancing the cause of Islam and Muslims on a global scale. The TJ has garnered significant scholarly attention in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Until now, most scholars have primarily examined its origins and rapid dissemination across the globe. This study seeks to explore a crucial question: In the context of TJ what were the various factors that significantly contributed to the historical decline of the Muslim Ummah in the past? To investigate this issue, the researchers thoroughly examined numerous primary and secondary sources to attain a comprehensive understanding of TJ's doctrine regarding the socio-political degradation of Muslim Ummah in the past. The results of the study demonstrate that the Tablighis' views on the historical collapse of the Muslim Ummah are similar to those of other contemporary Islamic movements and groups. For Tablighi activists, neglecting the fundamental duty of *dawat* by later Muslims led to the emergence of various socio-political, economic, and religious challenges. This ultimately resulted in the disintegration of the Muslim Ummah. Moreover, Tablighi activists widely attribute the social, economic, and political backwardness of the Muslim nation to the following factors: the irreligiosity of ordinary Muslims, the historical focus of Muslim scholars on academia, the concentration of the Muslim ruling class on tax collection and revenue from the masses, and the moral decline of common Muslims.

Keywords: Islamic Revivalism; Tabligh; *Dawat*; Muslims Decline; Preaching Islam

Introduction

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Muslim world confronted significant challenges and problems. This era marked the decline of Muslim political authority and the disintegration of Muslim empires worldwide. This process of disintegration and decline enabled several European nations to enter the Muslim world and establish long-lasting colonial and imperialist hegemony. For instance, following the death of Aurangzeb Alamgir in 1707, several provincial governors seized the opportunity to establish their own independent kingdoms across different regions of Mughal India. These developments and conflicts among different societal factions enabled the East India Company to bolster its authority and extend its influence throughout the country.¹ Hence, Bengal became the first Indian province to be governed by the English company.² Apart from India, the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) was yet another

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¹Altaf Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi: His Movement and Legacy from the Pukhtun Perspective* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015), Xiii, Xiv.

²*Ibid.*, 8.

setback for the Muslim community. The Ottoman Empire, which held sway over modern-day Turkey, Egypt, North Africa, Inner Asia, and the Arab world, experienced a sudden decline following the conclusion of the First World War (1914-1918).³ Furthermore, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Muslims also witnessed the disintegration of their established states in other regions of the world. Similar to the fate of the Ottoman Empire, several African Muslim states also came under the control of various European powers. For instance, France seized Algeria in 1830, and Italy conquered Libya in 1911.⁴ Faced with numerous socio-political and religious challenges both within and outside India, Muslims responded by founding religious revivalist organizations. While some nobles and princes waged wars against the adversaries of the Mughal state, some of the Indian Ulama endeavored to reform the lives of the Indian nobility and ordinary Muslims.⁵

The period following the decline of the Islamic world marked the onset of debates among various Islamic groups and revivalist movements, all pondering the same question: What factors and causes contributed to the downfall of their fellow Muslims across the globe? During this sudden socio-political setback to the Muslim Ummah, numerous religious scholars proposed various remedies and answers. Some initiated religious revivalist movements aimed at revitalizing the lives of the Muslim Ummah. The final goal of all these revivalist movements was to rejuvenate the lives of ordinary Muslims in accordance with the teachings of Islam and the holy Quran.⁶

After the failure of the 1857 uprising, Indian Muslims experienced a sense of insecurity in the country. To safeguard Islam and its believers from perceived threats, a group of prominent religious scholars founded the Deoband Madrassa in the 1860s. The purpose of the Deoband seminary was to reform the lives of Indian Muslims and to convert them into ideal followers of Islam. Colonial Ulama widely believed that Indian Muslims were at risk of losing their faith and Islamic identity in the country and they need to be protected in the crisis situation.⁷ This legacy of reformation and purification of Islam started by the Deobandi Ulama later gave birth to the TJ.⁸ Besides facing socio-political challenges, Indian Muslims also encountered the grave issue of reconversion by Christian and Arya Samaj missionaries. During the British Raj, a number of Christian and Hindu missionary movements were established with the aim of converting ordinary Muslims to Christianity and Hinduism. While Christian missionaries sought to convert Hindus and Muslims to Christianity, Hindu missionaries also attempted to convert ordinary Muslims to Hinduism. Hindu revivalists strongly believed that Hinduism was the 'original religion' of Indian Muslims, and thus it became their religious duty to call Muslims back to the religion of their forefathers. One of the factors that led to the foundation of the Tablighi movement in the early decades of the twentieth century was the anti-Muslim activities of Christian and Arya Samaj missionaries. These missionary organizations targeted the Mewati Muslims.⁹

³Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 592-593.

⁴*Ibid.*, 680.

⁵Qadir, *Sayyid Ahmad Barailvi*, Xiii.

⁶Meryem Fatima Zaman, *The Semiotics of Revivalist Islam: Women Space and Stories in Pakistan's Islamic Movements* (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2014), 13.

⁷Arsalan Khan, "Contested Sovereignty: Islamic Piety, Blasphemy Politics, and the Paradox of Islamization of Pakistan," *Asian Affairs* 53, No.2 (2022): 9-10. DOI: 10.1080/03068374.2022.2076485

⁸Yoginder Sikand, "The Origins and Growth of the Tablighi Jamaat in Britain," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9, No.2 (1998): 171-172.

⁹Kausar Ali and Huang Minxing, "Muslims Preaching Movements in British India: An Appraisal of the Tablighi Jamaat," *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Journal LASSIJ* 5:1 (2021): 358.

The inter-religious competition among Muslims, Christians, and Hindus intensified at the dawn of the twentieth century, with each group striving to increase the number of co-religionists in the country. Thus, in order to protect Indian Muslims from falling into the hands of Christian and Hindu missionaries and to convert them into what Tablighis call ideal or pious Muslims, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), a graduate student from the Deoband Madrassa, founded the Tablighi movement in the Mewat region of colonial India in 1926.¹⁰ In the 1930s and 1940s, the TJ spread to many parts of the British India. In the post-independence period, Muslim immigrants played a key role in the spread of Tablighi ideology in many countries of Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the United States of America, and Africa. Today, the TJ has headquarters (they call them *Markaz*) in Nizam Uddin in India, Tongi in Bangladesh, and Raiwind in Pakistan. Tablighi missions are being dispatched to various locations from these centers to awaken their Muslim brothers and to put them back on the right track of Islam.¹¹ According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, the TJ is a worldwide Islamic missionary movement currently operating in more than 150 countries. According to the survey, the TJ has 12 to 80 million followers around the world.¹²

This paper aims to unfold an important aspect of the TJ that has not been fully elaborated by scholars until this day. The TJ has developed its own ideological structure when it comes to the decline and disintegration of the Muslim community in the world. Very few studies have explained TJ's ideology on this particular issue. For instance, Jan Ali and Faroque Amin (2020) argue that contemporary Muslim scholars strongly believe that Muslim rulers who ruled different states in the past did not implement Islam in its real sense. Islamic revivalists also believe that the ruling class and their close associates were not interested in implementing the socio-political system of Islam as incorporated in the religious texts (Quran and Hadith).¹³ Bulbul Siddique (2014) elaborated on the Islamization of TJ in the UK and Bangladesh. For Siddique, Tablighi's soft image, their apolitical approach in the UK and Bangladesh, among other reasons, was one of the main factors that earned a good name for the Islamic movement.¹⁴ The main argument of Pieri (2012) revolves around how Tablighis have embraced certain fundamental changes in their Islamization process within the British context. According to Pieri, the elders and administrators of TJ reject the notion that their Islamic organization is involved in the radicalization of society in the country.¹⁵

Abubaker Bagedar (1994) argued that Muslims living during the colonial period encountered multi-dimensional challenges, which significantly influenced various aspects of their life at that time. Confronted by these socio-political and religious challenges during the colonial period, the Muslim community began to ponder fundamental questions regarding the reasons of their socio-political downfall. They started asking questions about the causes that contributed to the decline and

¹⁰Sukron Mamun, "Tablighi Jamaat: An Islamic Revivalist Movement and Radicalism Issues," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 5, No. 2 (2019): 145-159.

¹¹Barbara Metcalf, "Travelers' Tales in the Tablighi Jamaat," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, No. 1 (2003): 137.

¹² "Tablighi Jamaat," Pew Research Center, September 15, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/09/15/muslim-networks-and-movements-in-western-europe-tablighi-jamaat/>

¹³Jan and Amin, "Jamaat-e-Islami and Tabligh Jamaat: A Comparative Study of Islamic Revivalist Movements," *Islam and Civilizational Renewal* 11, no. 1 (2020): 75-94.

¹⁴For detailed study on this, see Mohammad Bulbul Ashraf Siddiqi *The Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh and the UK: An Ethnographic Study of an Islamic Reform Movement* (PhD diss., Cardiff University, 2014).

¹⁵For further study on this see Zacharias Pieri, "The Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement: The Transformation of the Tablighi Jamaat in London," (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012).

disintegration of their political power.¹⁶ In addition, Farish A. Noor (2012) has primarily focused on the origin and development of TJ in the Southeast Asia region. The author endeavors to elucidate how the dawat of TJ has evolved and Islamized the lives of its adherents over the years.¹⁷ Arsalan Khan (2016) has also argued that TJ aims to create an Islamic society by encouraging individuals to participate in their missionary activities. For Tablighis, Muslim civilization is in a state of degeneration, primarily because ordinary Muslims have adopted the lifestyle of ‘others’.¹⁸ Jan Ali (2006) has elucidated how the Tablighi movement came to Australia and played a pivotal role in transforming the lives of many Australian Muslims.¹⁹

While the above scholars have discussed various aspects of TJ, none of them have critically focused on its ideological concept regarding the decline of Muslim socio-political power in the past. This article aims to fill this gap in the existing knowledge. The article seeks to comprehend TJ’s concept of Muslim disintegration by investigating its various texts as well as literature produced by its ideological supporters over the years. Based on various primary sources and fieldwork with the TJ, this research study suggests that as an Islamic revivalist movement, TJ firmly believes that Muslim rulers who governed different states in the past were not interested in fulfilling the duty of dawah. Tablighi activists also attribute blame to past religious scholars who, according to Tablighis, confined themselves to their religious seminaries and ignored ordinary Muslims. Tablighi Islamists argue that it was due to their ‘irreligiosity’, sinful behavior, and negligence of the duty of dawat that deprived the Muslim community of their well-established states around the world.

Tablighi Islamists do not acknowledge certain other factors that also played a significant role in the civilizational decline of the Muslim community. The perpetuation of traditional socio-political systems, widespread corruption among Muslim elites, and the absence of socio-political reformation in the Muslim world are not deemed significant in their assessment of the dissolution of the Muslim Ummah. Tablighi activists firmly believe that both ordinary and elite Muslims ignored their Islamic duties and did not organize their lives in accordance with sharia laws. Tablighis also argue that due to their involvement in irreligious activities and the absence of a grassroots Islamic revivalist movement, God punished them by enabling the *Kafirs* (non-Muslims) to colonize the Muslim world in many parts of the world. What Tablighis argue is that the main fault lies in abandoning the fundamental duty of inviting others towards Islam and nothing else. Instead of asking for money or building new religious institutions, Tablighis widely believe that sending small missionary groups to various distant locations is the only rightful and God-approved method that will reunite the Muslim community once again and enable them to lead the world as the early generations of Muslims once did.

2. Methodology

In order to find an answer to the above question, the researchers deployed various research methods. Firstly, they extensively reviewed the existing literature produced by Islamic scholars who played significant roles in the foundation of TJ in colonial India. Additionally, numerous Urdu books primarily authored by its ideological supporters were collected and analyzed. Furthermore, research

¹⁶ Abubaker Bagader, Contemporary Islamic Movements in the Arab World, in *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, ed. A. Ahmed and H. Donnan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1994), 114-116.

¹⁷For further study on this see Farish Noor, *Islam on the Move: the Tablighi Jamaat in Southeast Asia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012),

¹⁸For further study on this see Arsalan Khan, “Islam, Ritual and Ethical Life: Dawat in the Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan,” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2014).

¹⁹For further study on this see Jan Ali, *Islamic Revivalism: A Study of the Tablighi Jamaat in Sydney* (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2006).

articles published in prominent international journals were examined to understand TJ's ideology on the question of Muslims' political downfall. In addition, the researchers also employed the participant observation method, as it is considered to be the most suitable research method for investigating the TJ and its ideology. The data collected from the above-mentioned sources has been analyzed through content analysis, which is one of the main data analysis techniques in social sciences and humanities.

Regarding the participant observation method, Denzin (1989) describes it as "a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection".²⁰ Based on this definition, one of the researchers actively participated in numerous Tablighi activities from July to August 2023. This method played a crucial role in comprehending TJ's operational methods and its ideology related to the research question. Additionally, the researcher visited the Tablighi Markaz (center) situated in the Mardan city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). For this purpose, the researcher selected only those dedicated Tablighi activists who have long been associated with the Islamization of TJ in Pakistan. My interviewees were aged between 25 and 55 years and hailed from various cities and villages of the province. The identities of our interviewees have been kept confidential for various reasons. One major limitation of this research study is that the researcher was unable to participate in the gatherings of female Tablighis. In the TJ, it is strictly prohibited for an outsider to interview or observe female Tablighis and their religious activities. Only women are allowed to interact with the female Tablighi activists.

3. The Decay of the Muslim World: Explaining the *Tablighi* Jamat's (TJ's) Perspective

This section of the article aims to elucidate all the significant factors that, according to TJ, contributed to the decline of Muslim socio-political dominance in history. The concluding portion of this article endeavors to critically analyze these factors and elucidate why and how Tablighi activists tend to overlook other factors that also played a significant role when it comes to the socio-political disintegration of the Muslim Ummah in the past.

3.1. Neglecting the Duty of *Dawat-i-Tabligh*

The duty of *amr bi'l mar'uf wa nahi ani'l munkar* (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong) has always been a key ideological concept of the TJ since its inception in colonial India. Members of the TJ strongly believe that inviting fellow Muslims to the path of Islam and dissuading them from engaging in wrongful deeds has consistently been one of the primary responsibilities of all those people who have recited the holy *kalima*. To prove that *dawat-i-Tabligh* is the primary duty of the Muslim community, they (Tablighis) quote several verses from the holy Quran. For instance, according to *Surah al-Imran*, "You are the best community raised for the well-being and benefits of humanity. You encourage good deeds and forbid evils and you also believe in Allah."²¹ Regarding the responsibility of Muslims as preachers, Tablighis also cite another verse of the same *Surah*. According to the verse, "And there must be a group of people among you who calls other people towards good deeds and forbid them from committing evils, and they (preachers) are the successful people."²²

Members of TJ also cite several *hadith* (sayings) of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to explain that preaching Islam to others has several advantages both in this world and in the Hereafter. Additionally, they caution ordinary Muslims about the grave consequences of neglecting the noble work of *dawat-i-Tabligh*. For instance, a well-known *hadith* often cited by Tablighis in their religious

²⁰ N. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (Englewood Cliffs Prentice-Hall, 1989), 158.

²¹ Al-i-Imran 3:110.

²² Ibid., 3:104.

discourse is narrated by a known companion of the holy prophet. According to Hazrat Jarir, once the Messenger of Allah explained to the *Sahaba* that if a person commits a sin and others fail to deter him, then Allah Almighty will punish that community (Qom), subjecting them to numerous problems and difficulties in this worldly life.²³ Ayesha, one of the beloved wives of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), reported that once she noticed a particular expression on the face of the messenger of Allah. The messenger of Allah did not talk to anyone and went to the mosque after making ablution (*wazu*). In order to hear his words clearly, she stood very close to the wall of the mosque. According to Ayesha, the messenger of Allah told his companions that it was the order of Allah to preach good and forbid people from bad deeds. Failing to do so would result in Allah not accepting their prayers and withholding His assistance when Muslims needed it in times of crisis.²⁴

After citing various verses from the Quran and hadith, Tablighi activists firmly assert that one of the fundamental factors contributing to the decline and disintegration of the global Muslim community was their failure to fulfill the duty of preaching Islam among their fellow Muslims. Tablighi Islamists also believe that this duty was assigned to the followers of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) by Allah. Maulana Ihtisham-ul-Hasan, one of the co-founders of TJ, emphasized that inviting fellow Muslims to the right path of Islam has always been an integral part of the faith.²⁵ When elucidating the reasons behind the decline of the early Muslim ruling dynasties, activists of the Tablighi movement assert that ceasing the efforts of dawat was the sole factor responsible for the demise of the political dominance of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties in the past.²⁶ Maulana Ahmad Laa (2008) elucidated that medical science has demonstrated how infection in human blood can lead to various physical and mental ailments. Drawing a parallel, the Maulana argued that neglecting the duty of dawat-i-Tabligh can similarly engender numerous social, cultural, religious, and political challenges within a society.²⁷ Tablighi Islamists widely believe that abandoning the work of dawat paved the way for other socio-religious and political challenges that ultimately played a key role in the destruction and disintegration of the Muslim community. Maulana Ijaz²⁸ is a senior Tablighi activist who said that:

The Tablighi work is not a new movement aiming to propagate a different form of Islam, nor does it contravene the fundamental tenets of Islam, as claimed by some people. The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his highly respected companions were engaged in this noble work of dawat. It was due to their dawat that resulted in the establishment of a formidable state whose influence extended in all directions. Regrettably, later Muslims neglected this incredible duty of dawat-i-Tabligh. After abandoning the work of dawat-i-Tabligh, Muslims faced severe consequences that came in the form of different challenges. Muslims lost their state and status.

Like many other Islamists, Tablighi activists also consider the Muslim community as a unified group of people who firmly believe in Allah Almighty and His last Prophet. This unified belief system, according to Tablighis, distinguishes Muslims from other nations of the world. As a cohesive group, it has always been one of the core responsibilities of the Muslim community to first understand Islam and then propagate its peaceful message worldwide. Tablighis argue that Muslim kings and

²³Jarir was a famous companion of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him.

²⁴Ibid., 8-9.

²⁵Ibid., 9.

²⁶Maulana Nadwi, *Hazrat Maulana Ilyas aor unki Dini Dawat* (Maulana Ilyas and His Preaching Movement) (New Delhi: Idara Ishaat Diniyat, 2005), 303-304.

²⁷Maulana Hafiz Rahman, *Khutbat-i-Dawat of Maulana Ahmad Laa Sahib* (Preaching of Maulana Ahmad Laa) (Jamegha Darul-Uloom Bayawar, 2008), 160.

²⁸This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Majid-i-Bilal of Bazargy district Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 22nd July 2023.

nobles strived to seize and expand the boundaries of their kingdoms. They primarily focused on collecting taxes and generating revenue from the common people. As a result, the entire Muslim community lost its true direction.²⁹

Maulana Sabir asserts that the *Sahaba*, *Tabi'een*, and *Taba Tabi'een* effectively fulfilled the duty of dawat. However, their successors neglected dawat-i-Tabligh, also known as *Fareza-i-Nabowwat* (Duty of the Messengers).³⁰ Tablighi activists believe that after the *Taba Tabi'een*, there was no specific group of righteous Muslims who could invite others to the Islamic ways of life and protect them from engaging in un-Islamic activities.³¹ Maulana Habib (2000) argued that neglecting the duty of inviting others to Islam was one of the fundamental causes that led to the socio-political downfall of the entire Muslim community in the past.³² Maulana Sabir Mahmood (2012) explains that Muslims ruled over India for many centuries, but the majority of them neglected the duty of dawat-i-Tabligh. According to Maulana Sabir, this negligence ultimately led to the downfall of their established state in the sub-continent.³³

In other words, neglecting dawat-i-Tabligh weakened the Muslim community and made them incapable to give response to various social, religious and political challenges confronted by their society in the past. The socio-political decline of the Muslim Ummah is believed to be primarily based on the work of dawat-i-Tabligh and nothing else. In short, Tablighi activists strongly assert that the work of dawat-i-Tabligh holds a central position in the socio-religious life of the Muslim community. Neglecting it can result in social, political, economic, and religious problems.

3.2. From Good Deeds to Bad Religious Activism

Similar to many other Islamic movements, activists of TJ also contend that the pre-Islamic period was characterized by chaos, political instability, social injustices, religious oppression, and economic disparities. It was the Messenger of Allah and his devoted *Sahaba* who established a new socio-political system based on Islamic principles of justice and security. The Messenger of Allah and his companions not only dismantled the existing socio-political and religious systems in the Arabian Peninsula, but also disseminated what Tablighis refer to as '*Noor*' (light) to every corner of the world. Tablighi activists attribute the establishment of such a generous socio-economic and political system to the good and pious deeds of the early generations of Muslims.³⁴

Maulana Ihtisham-ul-Hassan explained that there was a period when Muslims were the rulers of the world. They conquered many parts of the globe and established an exemplary socio-political system that lasted for many centuries. The earlier generations of Muslims enjoyed peace, stability, power, and respect among other nations of the world. However, contemporary Muslims are no longer the rulers of the world, nor do they possess sufficient power, respect, brotherhood, and wealth. The Maulana further argued that *Ahlaq* (character) and *Amm'al* (deeds) of the contemporary Muslim community cannot enable them to regain their lost socio-political power and position.³⁵ In other words, it was the outcome of their wrongdoings that angered God, ultimately leading to their subjugation by non-Muslims.

²⁹Manzoor Numani, *Words and Reflections of Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Ilyas* (No other details are available, 2001), 215-216.

³⁰Mahmood Sabir, *Tablighi Jamaat* (Karachi: Idara Rasheed, 2012), 9-10.

³¹Numani, *Words and Reflections of Maulana Ilyas*, 217.

³²Maulana Habib, *Dawat-e-Deen, (Preaching of Religion)* (Islamabad: Dawat Academy, 2000), 12.

³³Sabir, *Tablighi Jamaat*, 28.

³⁴Sabir, *Tablighi Jamaat*, 28.

³⁵Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 3.

Like the duty of dawat-i-Tabligh, Tablighis also believe that the worldly progress and prosperity of the Muslim community are deeply related to their good deeds and sacrifices (*qurbani*) for the cause of Islam. Maulana Zakriya argued that the *Sahaba* of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) rendered great sacrifices for the cause of Islam, and it was their loyalty to Islamic teachings that enabled them to make worldly progress in the past.³⁶ Tablighi activists believe that contemporary Muslims should strictly adhere to the lifestyle of the early generation of Muslims because they were ideal Muslims. Regarding the connection between Muslims' political power and their virtuous deeds, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas remarked:

When we do not fulfil the commandments of Allah and refrain from various forbidden things in our personal lives over which we have full control and there is no obstacle or compulsion, then how is it possible that we be entrusted with the governing of this world? It is only through the decision of Allah that the believers may be granted government on the earth so that they may seek His pleasure and establish His laws in this world.³⁷

This statement suggests that for Tablighis state authority and power are intricately linked to the religious observances and righteousness of the Muslim community. Tablighis believe that the decline of the Muslim community began when its members became involved in immoral religious practices. When did Muslims begin engaging in such misconduct? Farish A. Noor (2012) argued that Tablighi Islamists take the view that the disintegration of Islam and Muslims began with the demise of the Prophet of Islam.³⁸ But upon investigating various Tablighi texts, it becomes clear that Muslims' irreligiosity did not start soon after the demise of the holy prophet of Islam. Tablighi Islamists argue that there has consistently been a purified group of Muslims who rigorously adhered to the traditions established by the early generations of Muslims. The messenger of Allah trained a specific group of righteous Muslims who were tasked with educating ordinary Muslims about their religious responsibilities. According to Tablighi texts, every Prophet of Allah used to educate and train a particular group of people who not only fulfilled their religious duties but also guided other Muslims in performing their religious obligations. However, there came a time when people started ignoring their basic Islamic duties and this led to the emergence of what Tablighis call *Sharr wu Pasad* (the days of ignorance and disorder).³⁹ Said Ullah Khan⁴⁰, a Tablighi activist said:

In the past, it was the divine decree that whenever a *Qom* (the followers of a particular prophet) violated the fundamentals of Islam and engaged in various bad deeds, Allah would punish them by sending different calamities (Aafat). The story of Bani Israel is in front of us. Similar consequences befell the Muslim community. When they adhered to righteousness, Allah granted them worldly power and position. However, upon indulging in severe sins and other immoral activities, they incurred the wrath of Allah, who punished them as He had punished previous nations. Unfortunately, the majority of them failed to abstain from wrongdoings and other sins. This rebellion against Allah Almighty and His beloved prophet led to their decline and decay in worldly affairs. Lessons should be learned from such stories.

Maulana Ihtisham-ul-Hassan and numerous other Tablighi activists assert that bad deeds were among the primary causes that precipitated their downfall. He described it as *Zillat* (dishonor),

³⁶ Maulana Zakriya, *Fazail-i-Ammal* (Merits of the Good Deeds) (Lahore: Maktaba-i-Hashmiyya), 25.

³⁷Manzoor, *Discourses of Maulana Ilyas*, 15-16.

³⁸Noor, *Islam on the Move*, 67.

³⁹Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 10.

⁴⁰This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Masjid Al-Farooq Tablighi Markaz Mardan on 2nd August, 2023.

Khwari (dissolution), and *Tanazzuli* (disintegration). Maulana Ahmad Laat, a prominent Tablighi activist, argued that good deeds foster favorable conditions, whereas bad deeds pave the way for various socio-economic and other societal problems.⁴¹ During its formation in the Mewat region of colonial India, the TJ propagated the concept that the socio-economic problems of Mewati Muslims were a result of their bad deeds. Colonial Tablighis firmly argued that Mewati Muslims were living in a state of ignorance (*Jahiliyyat*), similar to the Arabs before the dawn of Islam.⁴²

Regarding contemporary Muslims, Majid Ali⁴³, who has dedicated many years to the dawat of TJ, asserts that the majority of contemporary Muslims are not exemplary in their practice of Islam. Ali further opines that their deeds and actions are not in line with the teachings of Islam and the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Ghulam Nabi⁴⁴, another Tablighi activist, argued that Allah only helps those Muslims who strictly adhere to religious principles in their daily lives. When asked whether bad deeds played a role in the political downfall of Muslims in the past, Nabi concurred, stating that if Muslim rulers and ordinary Muslims had been ideal Muslims like the companions of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), it would have been difficult for their enemies to overcome them and colonize their established states around the world. According to Nabi, their bad deeds invited the wrath of God, thus He empowered non-Muslims to strip Muslims of their well-established socio-political positions in the world.

3.3. Shah Wali Ullah and the Decline of Moral Values Among the Muslims

TJ's teachings and Islamization have been significantly shaped by the scholarly contributions and Islamic services of Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), an 18th-century Islamic scholar. Waliullah lived during a period when Muslim political power faced challenges from various anti-Muslim forces. Regarding the crumbling of Muslims political power, Waliullah firmly believed that Muslims had deviated from the original teachings of Islam and that their negligence of Islam and Islamic teachings made them incapable of defending their political suzerainty. In other words, he believed that Muslims' moral decay was the primary factor that shattered their political authority and power.⁴⁵ This ideological concept was later embraced by the Deobandi Ulama, who sought to shield Indian Muslims from the influence of Hindus and the British colonial rulers. Deobandis began dressing themselves according to the attire of prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions, believing that adhering to the Prophet's way of life would preserve their unique Islamic identity intact.⁴⁶

Following the principles formulated by Shah Wali Ullah and the Deoband Madrassa, Tablighis also started believing that the immorality of the Muslim community was one of the main causes of its worldly worries and challenges. The founding fathers of the Tablighi movement in colonial India were affiliated with the Deobandi school of thought. Tablighis argue extensively that, in addition to other qualities possessed by the companions of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him), their ideal and pious character enabled them to rule the world in the past. Sadiq Ahmad⁴⁷ explained that the majority of the Muslims who followed the early generation did not remain ideal and pious enough to sustain

⁴¹Hafiz, *Khutbat-i-Dawat*, 73.

⁴²Pieri, *the Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement*, 105.

⁴³This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Masjid Al-Farooq Tablighi Markaz Mardan on 27th July, 2023.

⁴⁴ Pieri, *the Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement*, 105.

⁴⁵Pieri, *Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement*, 104-105.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁴⁷This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Masjid Al-Farooq Tablighi Markaz Mardan on 18th August, 2023.

their rule in the world. Their lives were governed by established customs and norms rather than by Islamic principles.

Maulana Ilyas believed that the Mewati Muslims had reached the peak of their moral degeneration. He saw this as one of the fundamental causes of their socio-political and religious challenges in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁸ Maulana Nadwi (1978) argued that one of the primary factors contributing to the suffering of Mewati Muslims in the early decades of the twentieth century was their severely degraded morality. He observed that their lifestyle bore a striking resemblance to that of the Arabs who lived before the advent of Islam in the seventh century. Maulana Nadwi further explained that Mewati Muslims kept Hindu deities in their homes, and celebrated Hindu festivals and customs such as *Dussehra* and *Diwali*. According to Nadwi, only a small number of Muslims were familiar with the holy *kalimah* and regularly performed their prayers, while the majority were ignorant of the *kalimah*, prayers, and other Islamic duties incumbent upon them as the followers of Islam. Additionally, they adopted Hindu dress and gave their children names such as Ram and Singh. In summary, due to their irreligious lifestyle and adoption of Hindu customs in the region, local Muslims were referred to as ‘half-Hindus.’⁴⁹

Like the Mewati Muslims living during the British Raj, Tablighi activists still contend that contemporary Muslims are once again facing challenges due to the prevailing immorality in societies across the globe. Tablighi Islamists assert that there are Muslims who are unaware of their Islamic duties such as *Namaz* (prayers), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), *Roza* (fasting), and other religious obligations. Ihtisham argued that Muslims who once taught civilization to other nations are now themselves considered ‘uncivilized’. According to Ihtisham, their habits and morality are not in line with the teachings and Sunnah of the holy prophet (peace be upon him).⁵⁰ Similarly, Maulana Ahmad Laat (2008) argued that it was due to the prevailing moral evils in the Muslim world that led to their socio-political disintegration.⁵¹ When asked about the immorality of modern-day Muslims, Muhammad Ibrahim elaborated that it is their desires, rather than Islamic injunctions, that govern the lives of contemporary Muslims. He says:

We can find Muslims who are ignorant of their basic Islamic duties such as Salah, Hajj, and Sawm. They give false testimony in law courts, deceive their own brothers and other relatives for worldly gains. Even some are even involved in the killing of their relatives and friends to get some *dunyaye maqasid* (worldly objectives). Parents have failed to educate the younger generation about their Islamic duties, and the younger generation does not respect their elders. Such moral evils have surfaced because Muslims have failed to fulfill the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Their selfishness and greed have corrupted the societal system. It is the need of time to follow the moral values of the Sahaba because they serve as the guiding light for present-day Muslims. The purpose of sending these Tablighi Jamaats is to teach Muslims Islamic morality.⁵²

This statement underscores the significance of Islamic morality in shaping the prosperity or adversity of a society. Tablighis attribute the golden age of Muslims (700-1250) to the moral virtues and piety prevalent during that era. However, over time, the moral standards established by the early generation of Muslims were neglected by succeeding generations. Consequently, this departure from moral values among later Muslims contributed to their societal and socio-political disintegration.

⁴⁸Pieri, *Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement*, 52-53.

⁴⁹Abdul Hassan, *Life and Mission of Maulana Ilyas* (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1978), 24-28.

⁵⁰Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 3.

⁵¹Hafiz, *Khutbat-i-Dawat*, 225.

⁵²Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 3.

Yasir Ahmad,⁵³ another Tablighi activist, contended that whenever nations disregarded their moral values, it was one of the principles of God to send His messengers to remind them and guide them back to the right path. Ahmad further elaborated that elders of TJ also recognized the necessity of initiating a religious movement aimed at fostering good manners, compassion, and re-establishing a profound connection between Muslims and God. Maulana Sarfaraz Ahmad (2013) argued that it was due to their moral decay that deprived contemporary Muslims of their past glory and respect.⁵⁴

Similar to other Islamic revivalist movements working in different parts of the globe, Tablighi activists staunchly uphold the belief that moral disorder and various societal maladies have once again proliferated within contemporary Muslim societies. Tablighis firmly believe that this has posed a grave threat to their unique Islamic identity and way of life. To rectify morality and cultivate elevated moral standards, members of TJ can be observed traversing from one location to another, striving to impart high moral values and put ordinary Muslims back on the righteous path of Islam.

3.4. Criticizing the Established Madrassa Structure

To justify their emergence and Islamization process, new religious movements often highlight shortcomings in the established socio-religious structure of society. The Tablighi movement also follows this pattern. While TJ is not explicitly opposed to Madrassas, its founding fathers did critique certain aspects of established Madrassa education in India. For Tablighi activists, the old Madrassa structure was also partly accountable when it came to the decline of Muslim's socio-political and religious status and authority. For Tablighi activists, the traditional Madrassa structure also shares partial responsibility for the decline of Muslim socio-political and religious status and authority. Maulana Ihtisham, for instance, argued that the establishment of religious seminaries, the publication of religious books, speeches delivered by the Ulama, and the existence of *khanqa*⁵⁵ were not enough forces to halt the process of Ummah's downfall.⁵⁶ Maulana Ihtisham also acknowledged that these institutions were engaged in the noble work of dawat. However, he believed that such institutions were not sufficiently equipped to guide ordinary Muslims in colonial India.

In the views of the founding fathers of TJ, one of the factors that led to the downfall of Muslims socio-political authority around the world was that Madrassa education had become a trend without seriousness or fervor in the hearts of its students. Maulana Ilyas realized that theological sciences could not yield the desired outcomes due to the increasing worldly interests of those involved in Madrassa education. According to Maulana Ilyas, the original purpose behind establishing religious seminaries in the past was to prepare individuals for the propagation of Islam on a global scale. He believed that there came a time when the enthusiasm for spreading Islam faded from people's hearts.⁵⁷ Maulana Manzoor Numani argued that Maulana Ilyas once expressed concern that after their graduation, Madrassa students either pursued careers in medicine or became teachers in state-run educational institutions established by the British Raj.⁵⁸ Instead of spreading Islam to others which was widely considered to be the primary duty of Madrassa graduates, they ended up helping the 'enemies' of Islam and Muslims.

Tablighi Islamists also blame sectarian division within the Muslim Ummah as a reason that further weakened the community and paved the way for other hostile forces of Islam. On the issue of

⁵³This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Bilal Masjid located in Bazargy, district Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 11th August, 2023.

⁵⁴Sarfaraz Ahmad, *Tablighi Islam* (Gujranwala: Maktaba-i-Safdariyya, 2013), 10.

⁵⁵Khanqah was a spiritual place owned by Sufi scholars for religious and spiritual purposes in colonial India.

⁵⁶Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 16-17.

⁵⁷Nadwi, *Life and Mission of Maulana Ilyas*, 133-134.

⁵⁸Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 16-17.

the traditional Ulama and their contribution to the emergence of various socio-political and religious challenges confronted by the Muslim community in the past, Maulana Asim Umar (2013) argued that traditional religious scholars often promoted the idea that their particular school of thought was the only true interpretation of Islam, labeling all others as deviant. These sectarian feuds and mindsets led to further division within the Muslim community. Tablighis widely believe that adversaries of Islam exploited the already deplorable situation and established their own colonial structure in the country.⁵⁹

In addition, Tablighi activists also argue that one of the fundamental causes that led to the decline of Muslims political authority in the past was the emergence of a gap between external and internal aspects of religious knowledge. Tablighi activists argue that various challenges arose when Muslims prioritized surface-level religious knowledge over spiritual training. Tablighis argue that the old Madrassa structure produced only scholars whose interests were limited to what Tablighis call 'worldly concerns'.⁶⁰ Acquiring religious knowledge was considered insufficient to address the prevailing deplorable conditions within and outside colonial India. Even today, Tablighis maintain that their Tablighi activism holds greater importance than acquiring knowledge in a religious seminary. Once Maulana Ilyas argued that if Tablighi activism was taken seriously, then every Muslim would become a Madrassa and *khanqah* in themselves. He said that, If this work is seriously undertaken, a thousand more Madrassas and Sufi lodges will be established automatically.⁶¹

The findings of this study suggest that Muslims could not have lost their established political authority if there had been a grassroots Islamic movement in the past. The reason, it is suggested, is that such a grassroots Islamic movement would have transformed ordinary Muslims into ideal and pious individuals, enabling them to respond effectively to various challenges and issues. Additionally, it is believed in Tablighi circles that Allah Almighty only helps pious and ideal Muslims when they encounter crisis and challenges. Tablighi Islamists firmly believe that the absence of such an Islamic revivalist movement, coupled with the increasing worldly concerns within the established Madrassa structure, contributed to the disintegration of Muslim socio-political authority in the past.

3.5. Blaming the Western World

Islamic revivalists, including members of Tablighi movement, have raised serious concerns about the Westernization and Europeanization of the Muslim world. They believe that this socio-political system is anti-Islamic and has failed to address societal issues effectively. Additionally, they blame the political elite class for failing to halt the decline and stagnation faced by the Muslim world. Hunter (1988) argued that Islamic revivalists lament that their political leadership has been indoctrinated with European values and lifestyles.⁶² This is a well-known concept popular among Islam-based political revivalists in the Muslim world. However, what do spiritual revivalists like the Tablighis think about this particular issue?

Tablighi activists assert that Muslims under colonial rule gradually adopted European lifestyles, which further contributed to their societal disintegration. Highlighting the historical prosperity of Muslims, Maulana Sarfaraz, a dedicated Tablighi activist, expounded that contemporary Muslims have become 'mental slaves' to Western nations. He argued that Muslims have lost their respect and political authority due to many factors. However, among these factors, following the Western lifestyle and adopting their worldly ideas were significant contributors to their disintegration and

⁵⁹Asim Umar, *Adyan ki Jang: Din-i-Islam Ya Din-i-Jamhoriyyat* (Competition among the Religions: Islam or the Religion of Democracy). (2013), 4-5.

⁶⁰Manzoor, *Discourses of Maulana Ilyas*, 14.

⁶¹Ibid., 140.

⁶²Nadwi, *Life and Mission of Maulana Ilyas*, 221.

decay.⁶³ Maulana Zakriya also criticized those Indian Muslims who aspired to adopt Western ways of life and their social and cultural structures. According to him, Indian Muslims desired progress and prosperity, but how could they achieve it while embracing the luxurious lifestyle of the *Kafirs* (non-believers)?⁶⁴ Akbar Ali⁶⁵ who have participated in a number of Tablighi tours, explained that Muslims should abstain from adopting the values and lifestyles of those who deprived them of their well-established states in the past.

Here arises a question: why are Islamic revivalist movements opposed to the Western world? Two important reasons elucidate this perplexion. First, it was the Western nations that colonized the Muslim world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of colonial rule and the dissolution of Muslim political authority in countries like India produced socio-economic and political conditions that spawned several Islamic resurgent movements across the country.⁶⁶ Islamic revivalists witnessed the dissolution of their long-lasting political sovereignty in many parts of the world, all at the hands of various European nations. Opposition to their political authority and way of life can be termed as a natural outcome. Secondly, the U.S. and its Western allies have led numerous campaigns and toppled many governments in the Muslim world such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. This Western policy has further strengthened the ideology of Islamic resurgent movements that portray the West as anti-Islamic. Jan and Amin (2020) have argued that the U.S.-led 'War on Terror,' has further escalated the already devastated situation in the Muslim world.⁶⁷ In the eyes of all revivalist thinkers, the Muslim community is confronting a very serious situation where their distinct socio-religious identity is at risk. Tablighi Islamists believe that Muslims need to protect themselves from the irreligious environment that surrounds them.

Tablighi activists argue that contemporary challenges have emerged because the Muslim community has not remained as united as it was in the early days of Islam. They firmly believe that the holy prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions worked tirelessly to unite people of different languages and ethnicities. This unity not only enabled them to overcome challenges posed by Christians and Jews but also facilitated the conquest of their territories. Modern-day Tablighi activists believe that the aforementioned multifaceted problems have weakened the fabric of the Muslim Ummah which resulted in their civilizational decline.

4. A Critical Scrutiny of the Ideology

After discussing the various reasons that contributed to the downfall and disintegration of the Islamic civilization in the past, it is important to critically investigate and analyze these causes. While exploring the factors behind the downfall of Muslims socio-economic and political structures, Tablighi Islamists have either intentionally or unintentionally refrained from criticizing the established socio-political systems that were created and maintained by various Muslim elite classes in the past. As an Islamic revivalist movement, TJ defines every aspect of society within the context of dawat, believing that commitment to religious dogmas enables people to achieve worldly development. Maulana Abdullah Sihar (2017) argued that the early generation of Muslims expanded the boundaries of their state because of their dedication to dawat. The Maulana further explained that

⁶³Sarfaraz, *Tablighi Islam*, 7-9.

⁶⁴Zakriya, *Fazail-i-Ammal*, 25.

⁶⁵This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Masjid-Al-Farooq Mardan Tablighi Markaz on 6th August, 2023.

⁶⁶Imran Ahmed, "The Politics of Congregational Prayer: Trust, Public Health and Religious Authority in Pakistan," *Journal of Law, Religion and State* (2020): 260.

⁶⁷Jan and Amin, *Jamaat-i-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat*, 76.

it was the tools of proselytization (*Dawat kay Hatyar*) that led to their decisive victories over the Iranians and Christians in the past.⁶⁸

History demonstrates that numerous Muslim dynasties have ruled various regions worldwide. These dynasties often justified their rule by asserting sovereignty as their inherent entitlement. For example, the Ottoman dynasty, which governed present-day Turkey and much of the Middle East for many centuries, regarded sovereign authority as its fundamental prerogative. Similar sentiments prevailed among other Muslim dynasties such as the Khalji dynasty (1204-1231), the Balban dynasty (1287-1324), and the Mughals (1526-1857), among others. Ahmad Fanani (2011) argued that after reaching its glory and golden age in the sixteenth century under Suleiman (1494-1566), the Ottoman Empire began to collapse due to several factors.⁶⁹ Fanani attributed the collapse of the state to its outdated political, administrative, and societal systems. The state and its administrators neglected to adapt to the evolving international landscape. The monarch and his nobility neglected to implement modern reforms that could have averted the process of disintegration.⁷⁰ The same pattern was observed with the ruling Mughals who governed India for many centuries.⁷¹

Tablighi Islamists assert that mere political, economic, and administrative reforms were insufficient to arrest the process of societal disintegration. As previously noted, dawat-i-Tabligh occupies a central role in the Islamic reformation mechanism of the Tablighi movement globally. Consequently, Tablighis firmly advocate that their dawat supersedes and holds greater importance than endeavors for other societal reforms. They attribute the demise of the Islamic civilization in the past to the absence of the system of *amr bi'l mar'uf wa nahi ani'l munkar*. Maulana Ihtisham-ul-Hassan argued that neglecting the duty of dawat-i-Tabligh was the main cause of God's wrath which finally led to their socio-political collapse.⁷² On the question of the socio-economic and political crisis confronted by Indian Muslims in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Maulana Sabir argued that only dawat-i-Tabligh could halt the process of their downfall in the subcontinent. It clearly illustrates that Tablighi activists firmly believe that neglecting the duty of dawat-i-Tabligh was the primary factor in the civilizational downfall of the Muslim Ummah in the past.⁷³

While elucidating the crisis of the Muslim Ummah, Tablighi activists refrain from criticizing feudalism, which was integral to the Muslim elites in the past. For example, during the Mughal rule in India, the feudal system became entrenched in the Indian social structure. The king, his relatives, and individuals from the upper class possessed vast properties and businesses, while the majority of common people led simple and severely impoverished lives.⁷⁴ Mubarak Ali (2014) argued that the king used to grant properties, royal titles, and administrative posts exclusively to people deemed loyal to the king and his throne. The nobility enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle due to their access to unlimited sources of income. For instance, Amir Khan, a renowned noble during the reign of Shah Jahan (1592-1666), possessed 500 horses, 50 elephants, 500 servants, and 400 slaves.⁷⁵ In the Ottoman Empire, sultans bestowed high posts and positions upon their loyal friends without considering their ability,

⁶⁸Abdullah Sihar, *Dawat Ka Inqilab*, (Revolutionary Preaching) (Lahore: Maktaba Al-Hassan, 2017): 254.

⁶⁹Ahmad Fanani, "The Ottoman Empire: Its Rise, Decline and Collapse," *Journal Salam*14 (1), (2011): 100. <https://edwardwimberley.com/courses/10580/ottoman.pdf>

⁷⁰Ibid., 101.

⁷¹Ahmad Fanani, "The Ottoman Empire: Its Rise, Decline and Collapse," *Journal Salam*14 (1), (2011): 100.

⁷²Kandhalvi, *Musalmano ki Mojoda Pasti*, 9.

⁷³Mubarak Ali, *Ahiri Ihd-e-Mughliya ka Hindustan*, (The Last Period of the Mughal Rule in India) (Lahore: Fiction House, 1994), 6-10.

⁷⁴Mubarak Ali, *The Court of the Great Mughals* (Lahore: Tarikh Publications, 2014), 193-198.

⁷⁵Ibid., 200.

experience, or skills. Consequently, corruption, nepotism, and exploitation of the lower classes reached their peak.⁷⁶ This was the prevailing state of affairs in the Muslim world. It is evident that these socio-political and economic loopholes in their systems contributed to their downfall. However, these factors may seem insignificant when one reads various Tablighi texts discussing the disintegration of the Muslim Ummah.

On one hand, the Muslim ruling class discouraged socio-political and economic reforms, while on the other hand, the European Industrial Revolution, which originated in the United Kingdom, reshaped the fundamental structure of society and its socio-political dynamics. Feudalism relinquished its prominence and was supplanted by a burgeoning trading class, which in turn generated additional opportunities for the common people of Europe.⁷⁷ Robinson and Daron (2012) argued that the Glorious and Industrial Revolutions brought significant socio-political and economic changes in the whole Europe. The traditional power structures including the church and landlords underwent a decline in influence, fostering the emergence of a reformed society. This societal evolution empowered and modernized both the society and the state. The resulting reformation and modernization of European societies facilitated their expansion and colonization efforts in various parts of the world.⁷⁸ The breakdown of the old traditional socio-political and economic institutions paved the way for the progress and prosperity of many European nations.

It is difficult to find any Tablighi literature that questions the old socio-economic and political systems owned by Muslim elite classes in the past. According to Tablighis, wealth, poverty, happiness, and social classes are all creations of God. Maulana Jamsheed, a prominent Tablighi activist, once asserted that neither the state nor its institutions possess the capability to instigate positive societal changes. He further contended that prayers stand as the sole remedy capable of addressing the contemporary challenges faced by the global Muslim community.⁷⁹ Tablighi activists believe that Muslim rulers, nobles, scholars, and ordinary individuals strayed from the true path of Islam and this paved the way for their civilizational downfall. Muhammad Hanif (2016) argued that Allah withheld assistance from the Muslim Ummah because they deliberately neglected the duty of dawat.⁸⁰

To stop the process of decline, Maulana Ahmad Laa't believes that Muslims should repent before Allah and follow the lifestyle of the holy prophet (peace be upon him) and his *Sahaba*.⁸¹ After elaborating upon the current deplorable condition of the Muslim community, Maulana Ihtisham Kandahlawi also suggested that dawat-i-Tabligh is the only way capable of solving all the existing challenges confronted by the Muslim Ummah.⁸² To sum up, TJ and its preachers have faith in the self-reformation initiative and see it as the most suitable platform for transforming ordinary and

⁷⁶ "Decline in the Muslim World," <https://www.al-islam.org/history-muslim-philosophy-volume-2-book-7/chapter-70-decline-muslim-world>. Retrieved June 12, 2023.

⁷⁷Mubarak Ali, *Europe ka Urooj* (The Rise of Europe) (Lahore: Fiction House, n.d), 150-151.

⁷⁸D. Acemoglu, and J. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: the Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (New York: Crown Business, 2012), 195-200.

⁷⁹Mubarak Ali, *Europe ka Urooj* (The Rise of Europe) (Lahore: Fiction House, n.d), 150-151.

⁸⁰D. Acemoglu and J. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: the Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (New York: Crown Business, 2012), 195-200.

⁸¹Rehman, *Khutbat-i-Dawat*, 225.

⁸²Abdul Hanif Majid, *Dawat Wu Tablighi Kay Fazail (Prospects of the Religious Preaching)* (Karachi: Baitul Ilm, 2016), 315.

lapsed Muslims into good and pious Muslims. For Tablighis, their method of self-purification is grounded in the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).⁸³

Through their *Islah* (correction), *Tajdid* (renewal), and *Ihya* (revival) efforts, Tablighi Islamists aim to eliminate what they perceive as innovations and fabrications that have infiltrated the Muslim Ummah over time. These innovations and fabrications are viewed as significant barriers to the progress and prosperity of Muslims around the world. Tablighis believe that their missionary activism not only enhances religious awareness among contemporary Muslims but also enables them to reclaim their lost political power and authority. Similar to other Islamic revivalist movements, the ultimate goal of TJ is also the establishment of an Islamic political system. Arif Ali⁸⁴ stated that TJ is re-establishing the relationship between Allah and His creatures. Once this pious relationship is established, then Allah Almighty would grant them political authority as He once gave to the early generation of Muslims. This study suggests that it is Tablighis' self-reformation process, known as *Tariqa-i-Tabligh* (the preaching method), and not their ultimate goal, that distinguishes them from other Islam-based political parties and movements around the world.

5. Conclusion

Islamic renewal or revivalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a response to both internal and external factors. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslims witnessed the expansion of Western nations and the decline of their established states in regions such as India, Central Asia, and the Middle East. This Western penetration into the Islamic world and their growing superiority in politics, economy, cultural dominance, and education dealt a severe blow to both the ruling Muslim elite and the clergy. In response to these internal and external threats, the Ulama class began founding revivalist movements with the sole purpose of equipping their fellow Muslims to live according to Islamic principles. The Tablighi movement of Maulana Ilyas can also be situated within this colonial context.

As a non-violent and non-political Islamic movement, the Tablighi Jamaat aims to encourage ordinary Muslims to adhere to the teachings of Islam and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Like other Islamic movements, Tablighis regard the early period of Islam as a golden age for Muslims globally. Participants in Tablighi activities perceive the early era of Islam as providing the true path to addressing the socio-political, religious, and other challenges faced by contemporary Muslims. Tablighi elders and ideological supporters contend that Muslims in the modern era are experiencing a period akin to the pre-Islamic era known as the period of Jahiliyyat. However, unlike other Islamic movements, members of the Tablighi Jamaat firmly believe that their method of self-purification, known as *dawat-i-Tabligh*, is the most effective approach capable of not only combating prevailing ignorance but also laying the groundwork for the establishment of an Islamic system of governance.

As far as the disintegration of Muslims around the world is concerned, Tablighis argue that problems started when Muslims began to ignore the duty of *amr bi'l mar'uf wa nahi ani'l munkar*. What Tablighi Islamists strongly believe is that inviting fellow Muslims to the orthodox ways of Islam had been the primary duty of all Muslims, but unfortunately, this Islamic duty was ignored by those who followed the earlier generation of Muslims. TJ has also taken the view that true worship was replaced by the established rituals and customs of the time. Tablighi activists criticized the earlier Ulama and other religious figures as they focused solely on attaining exoteric religious knowledge. Their moral corruption and other social ills also contributed to the process of their societal downfall.

⁸³Al-Turkistany, "A Critical Hadith Study of the Tablighi Nisab and its Intellectual Implication on the Jamaat-al Tabligh," (PhD diss., The University of Birmingham, 2011), 183.

⁸⁴This is a fictitious name. Interviewed by the researcher at the Masjid-Al-Farooq Mardan Tablighi Markaz on 16th August, 2023.

The publication of Islamic books and articles, obtaining religious education within the confines of religious seminaries, and political participation in the modern world are all considered insufficient to defeat the forces of Jahiliyyah.

Tablighis have confidence in their missionary activities, believing they are capable of enabling ordinary Muslims to not only distance themselves from various un-Islamic forces but also empowering them to live a purified Islamic way of life in the modern world. Small groups of men and women are formed and dispatched to distant regions to awaken the Muslim Ummah. There are different types of Tablighi missions, ranging from three days to one year. Additionally, various gatherings called Ijtimas are held at the Raiwind Tablighi Markaz every year which attracts a large number of devotees from different parts of the country. Tablighi activists from other countries also come to the Raiwind Tablighi Markaz to participate in the three-day Ijtimas. As mentioned above, Tablighi's spiritual revivalism is an attempt to halt the contemporary deteriorating condition of the Muslim Ummah and transform them into ideal Muslims. Tablighis also believe that the Islamic revolution cannot be achieved without converting nominal Muslims into pious Muslims.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

This research did not receive grant from any funding source or agency.

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