

## Article

# Religious Authority, Popular Preaching and the Dialectic of Structure-Agency in an Islamic Revivalist Movement: The Case of Maulana Tariq Jamil and the Tablighi Jama'at

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**Abstract:** This article provides the first academic analysis of the popular Pakistani Islamic scholar and Urdu-speaking preacher Maulana Tariq Jamil. Drawing on years of ethnographic study of the Tablighi Jama'at, the revivalist movement to which Jamil belongs, as well as content analysis of dozens of his recorded lectures, the article presents a detailed biography of the Maulana in five stages. These comprise: (a) his upbringing and early life (1953–1972); (b) his conversion to the Tablighi Jama'at and studies at the Raiwind international headquarters (1972–1980); (c) his meteoric rise to fame and ascendancy up the movement's leadership ranks (1980–1997); (d) his development into a national celebrity (1997–2016); and (e) major causes of controversy and criticism (2014–present). Tracing his narrative register within the historical archetypes of the *quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers) and *wu'āḏ* (popular preachers), the paper identifies core tenets of the Maulana's revivalist discourse, key milestones in his life—such as the high-profile conversion to the Tablighi Jama'at of Pakistani popstar Junaid Jamshed—and subtle changes in his approach over the years. The article deploys the classical sociological framework of structure-agency to explore how Maulana Tariq Jamil's increasing exercise of agency in preaching Islam has unsettled structural expectations within traditionalist 'ulamā' (religious scholar) circles as well as the Tablighi leadership. It situates his emergence within a broader trend of Islamic media-based personalities who embrace contemporary technological tools to reach new audiences and respond to the challenges of postcolonial modernity.

**Keywords:** Maulana Tariq Jamil; Tablighi Jama'at; Raiwind; Deoband; Islam in Pakistan; ulama; religious authority; popular preachers; Islamic televangelists; *da'wa*; digital religion



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## 1. Introduction

In 2020, the Islamic scholar and preacher Maulana Tariq Jamil once again topped YouGov's national poll for Pakistan's most admired man. Beating off competition from Prime Minister Imran Khan, Jamil's popularity percentile was more than triple that of American billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates and more than five times that of Portuguese footballing superstar Cristiano Ronaldo.<sup>1</sup> His two official YouTube channels ('Tariq Jamil' and 'AJ Official') boast a combined 16.6 million subscribers with individual videos having garnered, at the time of writing, a collective total of 1.92 billion views.<sup>2</sup> Such metrics indicate an unprecedented popularity in Pakistani public life which few, if any, other religious figures can hope to match. Through his life-long affiliation with the Tablighi Jama'at, widely regarded as the largest movement of Islamic revival in the world today (Ahmad 1991; Ali 2010; Metcalf 1994), the Maulana has also travelled tirelessly over several decades to countries around the world. Events at which he speaks invariably attract packed audiences from diverse backgrounds including cultural elites, rural magnates, wealthy entrepreneurs, feared gangsters, religious scholars, secular-educated professionals and coarse rustics. Uniquely, Jamil has also been successful in attracting followers of rival sectarian groupings such as the Barelvi and Shia. Beyond his Pakistani homeland, Jamil has also developed huge fanbases across India's 210 million Muslim population and

Bangladesh's 150 million population—both important bulwarks of the Tablighi Jama'at. Additionally, through large-scale audiocassette and CD ministries during the 1990s and, more recently, the broadcast of televised programs on cable and satellite channels, he has become a household name in the global South Asian Muslim diaspora including countries such as Britain, South Africa and Canada. Maulana Tariq Jamil, it may plausibly be argued then, is the most popular Urdu-speaking Islamic scholar in the world today. According to Pakistani anthropologist Zaigham Khan writing in June 2021:

Not many can match his influence and following. The subscribers on his two YouTube channels exceed 13 million. He has his own official apps on the Google Play Store and Apple's App Store. The Maulana's services have also been officially recognised and he received the President's Pride of Performance Award this year. In a way, he has become the Maulana Laureate of Pakistan. (Z. Khan 2021).

This article proposes to do two things. First, to fill a gap in the extant literature on contemporary Islamic religious personalities. While detailed studies of leading global figures such as the Egyptian jurist Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (Graf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009), the Indian polemicist Dr. Zakir Naik (Kuiper 2019) or the American convert Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (Korb 2013) have been published, virtually nothing to date exists on Maulana Tariq Jamil—certainly in Anglophone spheres. This paper ventures a first step in this direction by sketching an in-depth biographical profile of the Maulana, including key influences, milestones and controversies in his life, as well as analyzing core tenets of his revivalist discourse and reasons for his mass appeal. Secondly, the article examines Jamil's increasingly complex relationship with the Tablighi Jama'at through the classical sociological lens of structure and agency. Maulana Tariq Jamil is a direct product of the Tablighi Jama'at movement which facilitated his powerful 'intra-religious conversion' experience in 1972 aged 18 (Timol 2022). His subsequent devotion to the movement coupled with his rhetorical panache and magnetic personality resulted in a meteoric rise to fame and a rapid ascension through the movement's leadership ranks. Yet there is some evidence that his methodological innovations in preaching Islam and more recent venture into market capitalism have led to raised eyebrows among some elders of the Tablighi Jama'at as well as the broader fraternity of Deobandi '*ulamā*' (religious scholars). In unpacking this, the article argues for the need to recognize the internal heterogeneity of mass movements and their leaders as they attempt to assuage the discontents of postcolonial modernity and respond to the challenges of a rapidly shifting digital landscape:

As popular preachers and movements multiply in the Muslim world, there is a need for thoughtful scholarship on such figures and movements—scholarship which views them as movers of historical change, which understand them within the contingencies of their historical contexts, and which takes their theological discourses seriously. (Kuiper 2019, p. 261).

By presenting a fine-grained analysis of a single leader within a single movement, this article sheds light on the operational and evolutionary mechanics of an important strand of Islamic revivalism in the modern world. Conceptually, the article locates Maulana Tariq Jamil at the interface of structure and agency within the Tablighi Jama'at or at the point which sociologist Anthony Giddens (1986) has termed 'structuration'. While proponents of structural functionalism have posited the overwhelming power of social systems in determining human action—as exemplified in Durkheim's ([1897] 1951) paradigmatic study of suicide—phenomenologists emphasize the meaning-making capacities of human beings—as exemplified by Weber's notion of *Verstehen*—to guide individual choices (Morrison 1995). Giddens' attempt to synthesize these contrasting viewpoints suggests that though the hegemony of structure may be reinforced by the compliance of social actors to rule-based behavioral patterns, such actors simultaneously possess the ability to reflexively redefine structural expectations by operating outside of the rules. This article thus teases out the symbiotic relationship between institution and individual; while the Tablighi Jama'at benefits from the widespread popularity of charismatic figures such as Maulana Tariq

Jamil for its ongoing appeal in society, it is simultaneously obliged at times to curtail their autonomy to maintain its own self-identity. The power of individual charisma in challenging institutional norms may thus be viewed as a subversive force which requires careful management so as to prevent the ultimate disintegration of the institution and its values; though equally it possesses an incipient potential to precipitate change in the wider organizational trajectory. The paper therefore contributes to the sociology of religious organizations and the literature on charismatic leadership in Islam.

The article proceeds along the following lines. First, it outlines the historical contours of religious authority in Islam highlighting perennial tensions between classically trained scholars—the ‘*ulamā*’—and popular preachers and storytellers (*wu’āz* and *quṣṣās*) to form an important backdrop to Maulana Tariq Jamil’s own narrative register. Such tensions, I argue, have been exacerbated by the onset of a widespread digital revolution which has significantly altered human modes of living and interaction. A detailed biographical profile of Jamil is then presented in five stages: (a) his comfortable early life as the scion of a wealthy landowner; (b) his conversion to the Tablighi Jama’at and years of grueling study to qualify as an Islamic scholar; (c) his spectacular success as a compelling orator and rapid ascendancy up the Tablighi Jama’at’s leadership ranks; (d) his development into a national celebrity and concomitant subtle shifts in discourse and approach; and (e) his points of departure from classical Tablighi policy and controversies thus provoked. In conclusion, I examine the implications of Maulana Tariq Jamil’s story of personal evolution for the Tablighi Jama’at as a whole and extrapolate the significance of his *da’wa* (revivalist message)—and the media through which it is delivered—for methodologies of Islamic revivalism and social transformation in the modern world.

## 2. The ‘*Ulamā*’, Popular Preachers and Contestations of Religious Authority in a Digital Age

Nearly a thousand years ago, a charismatic preacher named Ardashir bin Mansur al-Abbadi, while returning home from the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, stopped awhile at the great Nizamiyya university in Baghdad and began to preach. His sermons, attended by no less than the famed Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, caused something of a stir eventually attracting crowds of up to thirty thousand people: “... the congregation filled the courtyard, the building’s upper rooms, and its roof ... women apparently were even more strongly drawn to the *shaykh* than were men” (Berkey 2001, p. 53). Al-Abbadi’s dramatic style moved his audience deeply: “... attendees would shout aloud; some abandoned their worldly occupations in order to take up the *shaykh*’s call to piety and pious action. Young men cut their hair and began to spend their days in mosques, or roamed through the city’s streets spilling jugs of wine and smashing musical instruments” (Berkey 2001, p. 53). Clearly this itinerant preacher, traversing dusty paths in a long bygone era, exercised a charismatic power over those who listened to him. Yet how, one wonders, would al-Abbadi fare in today’s globalized, digital world? What sorts of followings would he attract on contemporary social media platforms and what types of reactions would his sermons provoke via online streaming websites such as YouTube?

Figures like al-Abbadi abound in the annals of Islamic history. Part of a distinct register of Islamic public discourse inhabited by those Berkey (2001) terms *wu’āz* (popular preachers) and *quṣṣās* (storytellers), they form a large amorphous cloud around the more rigorous ‘establishment’ scholars—the ‘*ulamā*’—more concerned with maintaining the textual integrity of the Islamic tradition. Passionate homilies delivered by skilled orators could sway the emotions of dense crowds, inspiring repentance among many, grand gestures of largesse from the rich or, if political circumstances so dictated, even riots and armed revolt. Kuiper (2019, p. 65), discerning a basic proselytizing impulse at the core of the faith, suggests that: “... with its urgent eschatology, demand for ethical self-improvement and stock of familiar tales, Islam is a “preachers’ religion” *par excellence*.”

The power of such figures derived from their mass appeal, a charismatic persona combined with an evocative yet accessible idiom and an ability to tap intuitively into

the emotional dynamics of diverse audiences. Yet their popularity did not go unchallenged. Most significantly, the *wu'āz* and *quṣṣās* would frequently provoke the ire of more scripturalist scholars for their less than stringent adherence to the conventions of Islamic scholarship. A genre of disapproving rebuttal literature thus emerged which, while acknowledging the popularity and good work of many preachers, nevertheless lamented their shortcomings. Ibn al-Jawzi's *Kitāb al-quṣṣās wa'l-mudhakkirīn*, al-Suyuti's *Tahdhīr al-khawāṣṣ min akādhīb al-quṣṣās* or Ibn Taymiyyah's *Aḥādīth al-quṣṣās* are all examples of such works (Berkey 2001). This contestation of authenticity and authority in medieval Islam goes to the heart of an intrinsically decentralized and egalitarian religious tradition lacking a stratified hierarchy or formal ecclesiastical structure. Who, in the final analysis, has the most right to speak for Islam and on behalf of Allah? The formally trained '*ulamā*'—preservers of what Graham (1993) has termed the '*isnad* paradigm' and, according to a well-known hadith (prophetic tradition), revered 'inheritors of the prophets'—certainly appear historically to have been the most authoritative representatives of the religion. Yet the persistent mass appeal of figures such as al-Abbadi, many of whom gain affectionate, even hysterical, acceptance among widespread fanbases (to use a modern term), indicates an inherently centrifugal tendency in the historical configuration of religious authority in Islam.

To be sure, the boundaries between such Weberian ideal types—the '*ulamā*', the *wu'āz* and the *quṣṣās*—have never been clear-cut. To take an example, ibn al-Jawzi, author of perhaps the best-known critique of popular preachers, was himself an accomplished orator who would routinely pull large crowds (Berkey 2001, p. 27). Yet the onset of modernity and its attendant technological revolutions have only served to exacerbate the fragmentation and diffusion of religious authority in Islam. As Robinson (1993) argues, the printing press, though initially resisted by the '*ulamā*', was eventually deployed by them as a key means of disseminating religious instruction in an increasingly competitive, pluralized religious marketplace. An unintended consequence of this, however, was the undermining of their own authority. Whereas religious tracts had hitherto been copied by hand and meticulously transmitted orally from teacher to student, the impact of print led to both the democratization and vernacularization of knowledge (Kuiper 2019, p. 92). Combined with rising literacy rates and mass education across Muslim societies, increasing numbers of Muslims were now able to access religious texts directly, bypassing the interpretive medium of the '*ulamā*'. To put this differently, every Tom, Dick and Abdullah, potentially, was empowered to speak on behalf of the faith.

For Zaman (2002), the transition of Muslim societies from colonial to postcolonial cemented two further challenges to the authority of the traditionalist '*ulamā*', namely those posed by 'modernists' and 'Islamists'. To crudely distinguish between them, modernists seek to reconfigure key tenets of Islam so as to bring them in line with Western sensibilities while Islamists seek to reconfigure the political apparatus of the state so as to bring it in line with a perceived Islamic blueprint (Zaman 2002, pp. 7–8). Unlike the '*ulamā*', modernist or Islamist reactions to modernity were usually incubated in thoroughly secular institutions of learning; their purveyors were therefore permutations of the 'new religious intellectuals' identified by Eickelman and Piscatori ([1996] 2004, p. 13) in their seminal work *Muslim Politics*. Alongside this, the continual development of new mass media technologies provided preachers, scholars and activists of all stripes with novel ways to complement the impact of print in disseminating their messages to ever-widening circles of influence. To take an influential example, Hirschkind's (2009) detailed analysis of the proliferation of audiocassette sermons across the Middle East in the 1990s demonstrates how the power of such technologies were successfully harnessed into ubiquitous units of acoustic religious consumption which helped shape the ethical and affective sensibilities of countless men and women as part of the broader Islamic revival.

The twenty-first century has witnessed a full-blown digital revolution which has significantly altered human modes of living and interaction in unprecedented ways. The implications for religious authority in Islam have been manifold. Eickelman and Anderson ([1999] 2003) suggest that a confluence of 'new media' (i.e., new methods of producing

and consuming information), ‘new people’ and ‘new thinking’ have, ultimately, led to the emergence of ‘new religious public spheres’ in Islamic societies while Bunt’s several books document the proliferation of ‘Cyber Islamic Environments’ engaging disparate Muslim sensibilities in diverse ways (Bunt 2003, 2018). For the purposes of this article however, I will narrowly focus on the rapid rise of media-based religious personalities in contemporary Islam as a prelude to examining Maulana Tariq Jamil’s emergence in South Asian public spheres.

Following in the footsteps of well-known Christian televangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart or Pat Robertson, the development of satellite broadcast networks catering to Muslim-majority audiences—such as the Saudi-funded Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), the Qatari-owned al-Jazeera or Geo TV, Pakistan’s most popular privately owned channel—launched the careers of numerous ‘Muslim televangelists’. Floden (2016) contests this term, preferring instead the phrase ‘media *du’ā*’, in his study of three particularly popular preachers in the Arab world—Amr Khaled (Egypt), Ahmad al-Shugairi (Saudi Arabia) and Tariq al-Suwaïdan (Kuwait)—to argue that rather than fragmentation, the engagement of such figures with technological modernity has led to both a proliferation and differentiation of Islamic religious authority. Other studies have examined the appeal of celebrity Muslim preachers in Indonesia (Aa Gym), Mali (Cherif Haidara) and, most significantly for our purposes, Pakistan (Watson 2005; Schulz 2006; Ahmad 2010).

Ahmad (2010) examines the impact of four prominent Islamic evangelists in Pakistan’s contested public sphere: the liberalist thinker Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, the female Salafi scholar Farhat Hashmi, the Maududi-inspired Dr. Israr Ahmad, and the Barelvi revivalist Shaykh Tahirul Qadri, founder of the international movement Minhaj-ul-Quran. Like the three famous Arab preachers studied by Floden, these figures—with the sole exception of Qadri—are not classically trained ‘*ulamā*’ lending credence to the thesis that the contemporary efflorescence of digital technologies has empowered nontraditional, often secular-educated, personalities to disseminate religious messages to mass audiences. In fact, part of their appeal stems from their self-conscious positioning as *alternative voices* to the ‘*ulamā*’, more attuned to the needs of youth, women and the intellectual and cultural challenges of pious living felt more keenly by educated middle-classes in postcolonial Muslim societies. Beyond their popularity in Pakistan, Ahmad also documents how these four figures have developed considerable followings among Pakistani diaspora communities through regular cable and satellite transmissions; both Qadri and Hashmi having actually migrated to Canada where they extend their ministries to global audiences via online broadcasts.

Other than a passing nod to his booming audiocassette ministry (Ahmad 2010, p. 25), the subject of this paper, Maulana Tariq Jamil, is conspicuous by his absence in Ahmad’s report probably due to the fact that his own embrace of digital technology has been a relatively recent phenomenon. The metrics cited at the beginning of this paper, however, coupled with recent fieldwork undertaken by the author in Pakistan, indicate that for some time now he has been by far Pakistan’s most popular Islamic personality. Unlike the majority of contemporary Muslim media celebrities however, Maulana Tariq Jamil is firmly a member of the establishment ‘*ulamā*’ having completed a traditional Dars-i-Nizami seminary education at the Dar al-Uloom Madrassah Arabiyyah seminary attached to the international Tablighi Jama’at headquarters in Raiwind, near Lahore. In this respect, his ubiquitousness across various Urdu-Islamic mediascapes today most closely resembles that of the ‘global mufti’ Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s pervasiveness across multiple Arabic-Islamic mediascapes (Graf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009). Further, like al-Qaradawi, Jamil has had to balance the proclivities of his own pursuits with the demands made on him by pre-existing religious structures. As Skovgaard-Petersen (2009) and Tammam (2009) have shown, al-Qaradawi has maintained a respectful deference to the scholarly institution of al-Azhar where he studied and worked during the 1950s—though he has not been averse to voicing criticisms regarding curriculum, pedagogy and a perceived lack of independence from the state—as well as a lifelong association with the Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (Muslim

Brotherhood), while simultaneously establishing his credentials as an independent and formidable Muslim scholar. Maulana Tariq Jamil, similarly, has maintained a respectful deference to the broader Deobandi orientation of Islamic scholarship—though he has not been averse to voicing criticism of its perceived development into a polemical sectarian identity<sup>3</sup>—along with a lifelong service to the Tablighi Jama'at, while establishing his credentials as an independent and formidable Muslim preacher. Unlike al-Qaradawi, however, Jamil's output has been almost entirely oral and, calling to mind the dramatic impact of the erstwhile Mansur al-Abbadi on his Baghdad audiences, based principally on passionate homilies delivered to gargantuan audiences across the length and breadth of Pakistan; his written oeuvre is virtually non-existent. It is perhaps for this reason that he has escaped the attention of scholars such as Zaman (2002) who focused largely on the textual productions of *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*. In what follows, and in much the same vein as the several studies of other prominent contemporary Islamic media personalities cited above, I venture a first step in filling this lacuna by sketching a detailed biographical profile of Maulana Tariq Jamil, identifying key tenets of his revivalist discourse, and attempting to locate him within the broader parameters of Tablighi-Deobandi reform.

### 3. Methods

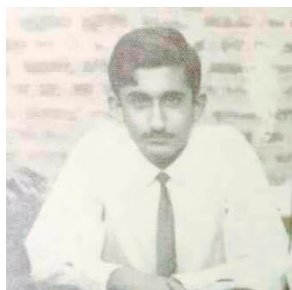
According to Floden (2016, p. 18), academic studies of Muslim televangelists as a group are “remarkably absent” as are the examination of “modern media tools that extend preaching beyond the mosque.” As a consequence, many famous and influential preachers such as Maulana Tariq Jamil “in English language sources . . . remain primarily confined to journalistic pieces and short mentions or asides in scholarly works” (Floden 2016, p. 21). In addressing this gap, this article draws upon sustained academic examination of the Tablighi Jama'at conducted by the author in various international settings over the previous decade. This has involved ethnographic fieldwork in the UK, across Europe and, most recently, a trip to Pakistan over March and April 2022 during which time I stayed at the movement's Raiwind headquarters and visited key cities including Lahore, Gujranwala and Islamabad. Over this period, multiple interviews have been conducted with senior Tablighi leaders, rank-and-file activists and various first-hand observers of Islam in South Asian and diaspora contexts. For the purposes of this article, I have also been able to consult with several personal acquaintances of Maulana Tariq Jamil, including a family member and a student at one of his Dar al-Ulooms (Islamic seminaries), which has assisted greatly in verifying certain biographical details. In a similar vein to scholars such as Kuiper (2019, p. 202) and Floden, I also deploy a “method of using multiple sources—the televangelists' publications, speeches, interviews, and television programs—to capture and analyze their ideology” (Floden 2016, p. 42). Consequently, content analysis of dozens of Jamil's Urdu-language lectures was conducted from which various details, biographical and otherwise, have been extrapolated and organized into a systematic and coherent narrative. As well as several Urdu-language publications about Jamil, such as those by Akhtar (2008) or Abdul Qadir (2018), I have accessed numerous news articles published about him in the Pakistani media, the most detailed of which is an English-language feature piece by Zaigham Khan (2021). In what follows, I directly translate excerpts of speeches and writings from Urdu into English when necessary and meticulously cite online sources. Unless otherwise specified, all URL links referenced throughout this paper were accessed and checked as working on 8 July 2022.

### 4. Maulana Tariq Jamil: A Biographical Sketch

#### 4.1. Upbringing and Early Life (1953–1972)

Maulana Tariq Jamil was born in the small Pakistani town of Tulamba, Punjab in 1953. By all accounts, his upbringing was a privileged one; his father, an aristocratic Rajput landholder (*zamindār*) with acres of orchards and scores of workers, was an intimidating figure who wielded considerable local influence. Like scions of other wealthy families, Jamil was sent for education to Lahore where he attended the Central Model School from

the age of 11. Subsequently, he completed a course in medical science at the British-established Government College, where he enrolled aged 16, before gaining admission into the prestigious King Edward Medical College to train as a doctor (Figure 1). Though complying with his father's wishes, Jamil had no real inclination for medicine and, by his own admission, would spend most of his time merrymaking with friends. In a 2021 speech delivered to a packed audience at his former college in Lahore, he laughingly recounted how he would secretly read film magazines or novels sneaked into class within textbooks and how he fumbled his way through exams by reciting *bismillah* ('in the name of God') the night before, opening his textbooks on random pages and memorizing what appeared before him (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpc6uiYwwak>). He has also described himself as an avid cinemagoer, an amateur singer and a banjo enthusiast, and recalls being punished regularly by teachers for assorted misdemeanors (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGnvInLnIG4>). This period in his life was characterized by a generally lackadaisical attitude towards religion; he was not regular in his daily prayers and shared many of the anticlerical attitudes exhibited by the secular liberal classes in which he was raised.



**Figure 1.** Maulana Tariq Jamil as a college student, prior to his profound conversion experience. Source: <https://dawaeasy.blogspot.com/p/maulana-tariq-jameel.html>.

#### 4.2. Conversion to the Tablighi Jama'at and Studies at Raiwind (1972–1980)

At the age of 18, Maulana Tariq Jamil experienced a profound 'intra-religious conversion' experience facilitated by the Tablighi Jama'at (Blom 2017; Timol 2022). Though initially hostile to approaches by fellow Tablighi students on campus, Jamil was eventually convinced to participate in a three-day *khurūj* (Tablighi outing) which proved life changing. During this weekend trip, he heard, for the first time, a lengthy hadith describing how the Angel of Death extracts the souls of sinners which, quite literally, put the fear of God in him. Impulsively, he extended his weekend trip into a continuous four-month *khurūj* so as to consolidate a nascent sense of religiosity. Yet this was not an easy journey. For thirty days during this trip, Jamil joined a group of simple, impoverished peasants who constantly argued over petty issues, a far cry from the upper-class company he was accustomed to. On several occasions, he contemplated a premature exit:

I did not desire to stay with those people for one single minute. Because I had left college and when I saw them, all illiterate rustics [*anpar dihāti*], I thought to myself what will they teach me? I already know more than them, my mentality was one of learning new information whereas Tabligh cultivates qualities [*ṣifāt*] ... But I stayed with them and I disciplined myself to live against my desires. In my future life, I was destined to face many, many hardships so Allah made this my foundation from my first journey. I was left decimated [*mai pis kar reh gaya*], every day I thought I'll run away. On one occasion, I even wrapped my *bistar* [baggage], tied the knot and bent down to lift it but then I remembered the reality of my state and suddenly an invisible force moved me back ... (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPuDzSiLcWk>).

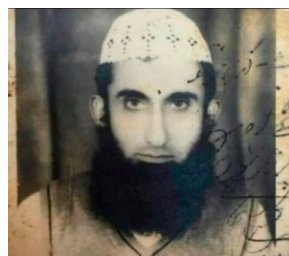
Returning from this journey, Jamil met a young man from Peshawar who convinced him, despite the radical shift in social standing it would entail, to abandon his medical

career and, instead, train to become an *‘ālim* (religious scholar). Displaying his penchant for hyperbole, a hallmark of his rhetorical style, he reflected in a 2019 speech: “A doctor was a person of high stature in those days while a maulvi was *past-tareen gandagi ka keerra* [the lowliest worm of garbage] in society” (Z. Khan 2021; see [https://youtu.be/ZFf\\_6K9qUdw](https://youtu.be/ZFf_6K9qUdw) for the original clip from which this quote is derived). Returning to his hometown in Tulumba to seek parental consent, his new-found ambitions caused a deep rupture with his father and, eventually, he was turned out from his home. Many years later, a sobbing Jamil recounted:

I wanted to learn religion . . . I wasn’t going to become a thief or a bandit! But if your aspirations collide with even your parents, then they [may] disown you. 23 November 1972, 9 a.m. in the morning has forever been etched onto my heart! At the age of 18, if your father evicts you from your home [saying]: “Get out! If you want to become a religious scholar [*maulvi*], then get out of my house!” [then how can one forget?] . . . (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2oWErAFILg>).

Jamil’s mother took pity on him however, providing him with a cash sum and her blessings. He therefore made a beeline for Raiwind and commenced his religious training in the same week.

Jamil’s subsequent years as a student at the Raiwind madrassa were characterized by a single-minded dedication to acquiring deep Islamic knowledge: “For the first three years, I studied like a madman. I had a luxurious life prior to that, but I subject myself to such rigor that in the fourth year I fell ill” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWf1V6xkJDE>). Blessed with a photographic memory and a keen ear for linguistic beauty, he quickly learned Arabic and threw himself into memorizing entire books of hadith and poetry; other than eating, sleeping and prayer, he has stated he would never be found without a book in his hand (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0-P-weAQoY>). It seems his new-found devotion functioned as something of a penance for his previous years of easy living: “. . . in a willing act of renunciation, he would use a brick for a pillow and not change his dress for weeks in the hot month of June” (Z. Khan 2021). Unsurprisingly, and unlike his college days, he excelled as a student and caught the eye of his teachers who recognized his natural talent and gifts of oratory; though, to prevent pride, he would regularly rise at 4 am to prepare food for and serve (*khidma*) the constant stream of poor missionaries who visited the Raiwind headquarters on Tablighi tours (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZe8yR7Hl4U>). After an intense eight-year study regime, Jamil completed the traditional Dars-i-Nizami curriculum in 1980 acquiring *ijāzāt* (authorization) in hadith from numerous teachers and, immediately, embarked upon a year-long tour with the Tablighi Jama’at across Pakistan (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 2.** Maulana Tariq Jamil as a young relatively unknown religious scholar. Source: [https://photos.hamariweb.com/pakistan/oldest-photo-of-maulana-tariq-jameel\\_pid16375](https://photos.hamariweb.com/pakistan/oldest-photo-of-maulana-tariq-jameel_pid16375).

#### 4.3. A Rising Star (1980–1997)

The next stage in Jamil’s life is characterized by utter devotion to the work of the Tablighi Jama’at, both nationally and internationally. Other than brief visits home, most of his time would be spent at the Raiwind Tablighi headquarters or out on various *khurūj* (preaching) trips as he systematically prioritized the movement’s *da’wa* (proselytization/invitation) over everything else in his life:

I had donated [*waqf*] my life to Raiwind . . . Even after two months if I requested some time off, I'd get admonished "You want to leave so soon!" After marriage, when I returned to Raiwind after two weeks, Abdul Wahhab Sahib took me to task [saying] "You spent two weeks, such a long time!"<sup>5</sup>

Embarking on his career as an Islamic preacher, Maulana Tariq Jamil's rhetorical panache and the emotional weight of his talks quickly distinguished him from fellow '*ulamā*' and other Tablighis. As word about his mesmerizing style spread, people began flocking to his speeches in ever greater numbers. Large-scale Tablighi *ijtimās* (mass gatherings) became a favorite venue where he would encourage huge crowds to undertake lengthy *khurūj* outings and adopt the Tablighi Jama'at's method of Islamic revival as a permanent lifestyle. His international travels with the Tablighi Jama'at commenced in March 1982 when he stayed for two months at the global Nizamuddin headquarters in India and, in December that year, he also undertook a *chillah* (40-day outing) to the UK ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyX\\_eOdjdvo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyX_eOdjdvo)). Though not yet meeting Raiwind's requisite criterion for overseas travel, his inclusion within the group of Karachi elders was personally approved by Hajji Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (who would become *amīr* [leader] of Raiwind in 1992). Reminiscing about this latter trip in an informal 2017 gathering with his own students, Jamil recalled:

I was newly graduated, every speech of mine would be different to another . . . I had a passion for knowledge, the temperament [*mizāj*] of *da'wa* had not overwhelmed me, I had a knowledge-seeking temperament. So, I did around 80 speeches [on that trip to the UK] and every one was different to another . . . and I became very well-known there. And from 1982 till now . . . 2017, I have continuously travelled. Allah takes me through His grace and kindness. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0-P-weAQoY>).

Over the coming years, as the demands of *da'wa* progressively consumed him, Jamil established a basic repertoire of themes and topics—or what Kuiper (2019, p. 210), with reference to his analysis of Dr. Zakir Naik's public lectures, terms "a set of discursive motifs or building blocks that can be arranged in different ways according to need"—which characterize his revivalist message. In keeping with the Tablighi Jama'at's emphasis on a relentlessly apolitical bottom-up mass spiritual revival, the Maulana's discursive building blocks across countless lectures may principally be identified as *tawhīd* [monotheism], *risālah* [prophethood] and *ākhirah* [the Afterlife] (refer to Akhtar 2008 for a detailed compendium of transcribed lectures). Drawing both on scriptural sources and scientific descriptions of the natural world, Jamil would expound for hours on the incomparable majesty of Allah as sole sovereign of the universe who alone deserves the worship and allegiance of human beings. The Prophet Muhammad, as the seal of Allah's messengers, represents the quintessence of divine guidance whose personal example and habits must be followed by Muslims to achieve success. And, a favorite of Jamil as with countless other *wu'āz* past and present (Berkey 2001; Hirschkind 2009), were fiery disquisitions on the thanatological and eschatological dimensions of Islam—including the inexorability of death, the transience of worldly life, graphic descriptions of the grave (*barzakh*), the terrors of Judgment, the pleasures of Paradise and pains of Hell, and the urgent need to repent—which would frequently move his audience to tears.

Other key themes which surface are the crucial importance of establishing daily prayer (*ṣalāt*), the emulation of the Prophet's companions (*ṣaḥāba*) as role models, the need to consistently make sacrifice [*qurbāni*] for acquiring religion, and the implacable global responsibility of *da'wa* that the ummah has inherited due to the finality of Muhammad's prophethood (Akhtar 2008). Jamil's photographic memory helped him to fire out Qur'anic verses in rapid succession—interspersed with choice quotations of Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Punjabi poetry—and, over the course of what frequently became three-hour long marathon sermons, he would lead his audience to an emotional crescendo, peaking with a passionate call to embark on lengthy Tablighi *khurūj* outings (*tashkīl*) followed by a long, tearful supplication (*du'ā*) filled with pathos (Figure 3). Such events became spectacles,

high-profile rhetorical feats delivered in mass gatherings which would entertain as well as inspire, and clearly displayed Jamil's penchant for drawing upon the narrative registers of the *wu'āz* and the *quṣṣāṣ* as well as the '*ulamā*'. After listening to one of his speeches, the notable Indian scholar Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, biographer of the Tablighi Jama'at's founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (Nadwi 1983), remarked, "Observing Tariq's memory, eloquence and rhetorical arrangement of words I have been reminded of the personalities of the pious scholars of old" (Akhtar 2008, p. 9), and once reportedly likened his heart-rending style to the great early preacher of Islam Hasan al-Basri.



**Figure 3.** A typical crowd gathered to listen to Maulana Tariq Jamil under makeshift tents. Source: Daily Jang (accessed 8 July 2022).

### Key Influences

This phase in Maulana Tariq Jamil's life may be characterized as one of 'hard' Tabligh and his devotion to the cause saw him swiftly embedded into the upper echelons of the movement's global leadership. Despite his relative youth, he began to accompany the elders of the Pakistani chapter on their annual Hajj pilgrimage where they would meet with Tablighi leaders from around the world and he became intimate with the Kandhalawi family, based at the Nizamuddin Markaz in India, who had originated the movement (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hUztFDCsbA>). Interestingly however, up until 1986 there seems to have been no single charismatic or inspirational figure who decisively influenced Jamil. This contrasts with the trajectories of other prominent contemporary Islamic personalities such as Dr. Zakir Naik, for whom a meeting with the South African Ahmed Deedat was a decisive turning-point in his life (Kuiper 2019, p. 205), or Shaykh Hamza Yusuf whose sojourn in the Saharan desert with the Mauritanian Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj proved transformative (Al-Hajj and Yusuf 2001, pp. 3–5). The trajectory of Jamil's personal formation, rather, seems to reflect the broader ethos of the Tablighi Jama'at in which individual charisma is absorbed within the broader dynamic of the movement: "As Tablighis say, 'The movement is the shaykh, and *tazkiya* (self-rectification) comes from involvement in its programme'" (Birt 2001, p. 376). Certainly, Maulana Tariq Jamil enjoyed close relations with leading Tablighi Jama'at figures, such as the global *amīr* from 1965 to 1995 Hazratji Maulana Inam ul-Hasan Kandhalawi or the head of the Pakistani chapter Hajji Abdul Wahhab, but it was the movement itself that converted and sustained him in his formative years, not any particular person. Ironically, as we shall see, it is Jamil's own charisma and tremendous personal appeal which is today perceived by some as unsettling these historical configurations of religious authority in the Tablighi Jama'at.

Nevertheless, in 1984, Jamil did encounter a saintly personality who would significantly shape his religious outlook:

When I saw Maulana Saeed Ahmad Khan sahib, then I was like [awestruck facial expression]. You know, when someone sees an amazing thing and he's [startled] . . . By Allah! Watching that bondsman [*banda*] I was like, wow [awestruck facial

expression]! What is this? What is this? ... [and after our first interaction] an intense desire arose in my heart, if only I could remain in the company [*ṣuḥba*] of this bondsman [of God]. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCJu9cIp86I>).

Khan was an Indian expatriate who had been resident in the Hijaz for several decades at the time of their meeting. A traditionally trained *‘ālim* (religious scholar), he had become attached to Tablighi Jama’at’s founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi soon after graduating from the distinguished Mazahir-e-Uloom seminary in Saharanpur in 1941. Subsequently, he devoted himself to the Tablighi Jama’at and was *amīr* (leader) of the third delegation to be dispatched to the Hijaz from India in 1947 (Muhammad 2012, p. 307). Building on the work of Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and the alumni of the cosmopolitan Nadwatul Ulama institution in Lucknow, who had initiated the spread of the movement in the Arab world (Gaborieau 2000, pp. 132–33), Khan was subsequently posted to the Hijaz on a permanent basis by Ilyas’ son and successor, Maulana Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalawi, with the express aim of establishing networks of Tablighi activism among the Arabs; soon after he was appointed *amīr* of the movement in Saudi Arabia. In 1986, however, the Saudi government demanded that Khan commit in writing to the immediate cessation of all Tablighi activities which he refused to do. As a result, his citizenship was revoked and, quickly obtaining Pakistani citizenship, he took up residence in Raiwind initially in the same room as Hajji Abdul Wahhab (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCJu9cIp86I>). Though personally pained at being separated from the City of the Prophet (where he eventually died during an *‘umrah* pilgrimage in 1999), his arrival in Pakistan was, for Jamil, a blessing in disguise:

He remained grieved all his life that my Medina has escaped me, but I benefited a great deal ... My understanding is that Allah sent him here only for me. I stayed twelve years with him ... two, three, four months I’d spend with him [each year]. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCJu9cIp86I>).

At Saharanpur, Khan had been a student of Tablighi Jama’at founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas’ nephew, the renowned hadith teacher and Sufi master Shaykh-ul Hadith Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi, who conferred the Sufi mantle of *khilāfa* (spiritual successorship) upon him. Consequently, Jamil’s time with Khan was spiritually transformative:

When I came into the *ṣuḥba* [companionship] of Maulana Saeed Ahmed Khan sahib, then I saw that this person was a walking, talking *dhikr* [remembrance of God], at every opportunity he performed litanies ... then, after that ... through the grace of Allah ... I began giving more importance [to my own *dhikr*], it was only after seeing him I [gained this] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPuDzSiLcWk>) ... The gentleness Allah has created in my temperament, the forgiveness, love, abhorrence of backbiting, whatever Allah has given me ... though what have I to boast about, it’s all from observing that bondsman. These things cannot be acquired through study. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCJu9cIp86I>).

Khan’s sagacity had earned him the title of the “Ghazali of Tabligh” among his peers, and his lengthy sojourn in the Hijaz and extensive interaction with Arabs helped nurture a universalist outlook in the much younger Jamil. Further, Jamil’s own mastery of Arabic allowed him to directly address indigenous audiences in Gulf, Middle Eastern and various African countries during his frequent international tours and he also became the translator of choice for the sizeable flow of Arab Tablighi Jama’at delegations visiting Raiwind. His language of choice, however, remained Urdu and, now augmented by Khan’s mentorship, he continued his tireless schedule of constant travel, delivering speeches in every major town and city in Pakistan as well as addressing South Asian diaspora communities across Europe, the Americas, and countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Fiji Islands. His talks were phenomenally popular and effective, and he may be credited during this period with expanding and strengthening the Tablighi Jama’at’s national

infrastructure across Pakistan, raising the profile of the movement overseas, and touching many thousands of individual lives in the process. Recognizing the marketability of his speeches, media-savvy entrepreneurs started to sell recordings which resulted in a booming audiocassette ministry from the late 1980s. In a country characterized by a cacophony of Islamic sounds continually impinging on public spaces (N. Khan 2011), Maulana Tariq Jamil's voice could henceforth be heard blaring out of cassette players at various Islamic storefronts from Lahore to Karachi—and indeed further afield from Dhaka to Delhi. This, as Ahmad (2010, p. 25) points out, had real-world commercial impact; a speech delivered by Jamil in a packed *ijtimā'* (mass Tablighi gathering) could line the pockets of cassette manufacturers and shopkeepers for weeks to come. Though there is no indication that Jamil himself, or the Tablighi Jama'at in general, profited from such cassette sales, this interplay of religion, technology and market forces clearly highlights the incipient potential of a lucrative 'MTJ brand' which, as we shall see, the Maulana would actualize in future years.

By the end of this period, Maulana Tariq Jamil had become the most popular and sought-after speaker in subcontinental Tablighi circles and was firmly ensconced in the highest levels of the movement's leadership (Figure 4). In a brief message of condolence delivered upon the death of Maulana Zubair ul-Hasan Kandhalawi (son of the third global *amīr* Hazratji Maulana Inam ul-Hasan) in 2014, Jamil reminisced:

When he [Maulana Zubair ul-Hasan] would come to Pakistan, there would be great expressions of love. He would specially call me, and his children had great love for me too . . . In the Hajj of 1997 we were together and he called me over saying, "Brother, all the ladies of our household listen only to your speeches so do this, go . . . to their tent in Arafat and deliver a lecture." So I went there and delivered a lecture. And just now, when he attended the [annual Raiwind] *ijtimā'* his eldest son said, "My young son would like to talk to you" and he talked to me over the phone . . . a five-year-old child . . . saying, "Please pray that I too become someone who delivers speeches like you." I said, "Son, may Allah make you like your grandfather" . . . Allah has taken such work from this family as rarely occurs in centuries. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2hUztFDCsbA>).



**Figure 4.** Maulana Tariq Jamil with Hafiz Muhammad Patel, the late *amīr* of the Tablighi Jama'at in Europe and the Americas, at the movement's European headquarters in Dewsbury, England. Source: respondent's photo.

#### 4.4. Development into a National Celebrity (1997–2016)

I have selected 1997 as the beginning of the next phase of Jamil's life as that is when he first met the famous Pakistani singer and cultural icon Junaid Jamshed. Jamshed was the lead vocalist of the enormously popular band Vital Signs, best known for their 1987 song *Dil Dil Pakistan* which became the country's unofficial national anthem. The story of Jamshed's conversion to the Tablighi Jama'at is lengthy but what concerns us here is the crucial role played by Maulana Tariq Jamil. Up until this point, Jamil was something of a

sensation in Tablighi-Deobandi circles only; my argument is that his successful recruitment of numerous high-profile celebrities to the Tablighi cause from 1997 onwards—of whom Jamshed is just one—was a key catalyst for his own journey to national stardom.

According to cultural critic Nadeem Paracha (2009), the 1990s were a time of ferment in the Pakistani middle classes. The impact of General Zia ul-Haq's Islamization policies of the 1980s, endemic subsequent political instability, a gradual drifting from their mainly Barelvi ancestry due to urbanization and increased social mobility, the rousing of pan-Islamic sentiments in the wake of the anti-Soviet Afghan-jihad, and the proliferation of Islamic revivalist messages through various audio and videocassette ministries all combined to predispose the Pakistani bourgeoisie to a "non-militant version of modern conservative Islam being peddled by the neo-Islamic-evangelists"—that is, the Tablighi Jama'at. According to Paracha (2009), "... members of the petty-bourgeois trader classes ... were the first major urbanites to join the Tableeghi Jamaat [sic] in large numbers soon followed by experimental middle-class folks who'd been dangling uneasily between Salafiyya militancy and Muslim secularism in the 1980s." This trend gained momentum in the early 2000s through the high-profile conversion to the Tablighi Jama'at of several celebrities, including numerous members of the Pakistani national cricket team, which can be directly traced to Maulana Tariq Jamil's influence (A. Khan 2021). It was through their very public 'intra-religious conversion' experiences (Timol 2022), I argue, that Jamil first came to the attention of the Pakistani mainstream (see also Z. Khan 2021).

It was the turn to the Tablighi Jama'at of Saeed Ahmed, a retired cricketer infamous for his nightclub antics in the 1970s, which paved the way for the subsequent large-scale conversion of the national team (Jawalekar 2017; Paracha 2019). Ahmed began visiting the team's dressing room around 2000 and, having formed friendships with several players, supplied them with audiocassettes of Jamil's lectures which they listened to avidly on car stereos (Paracha 2009; A. Khan 2021, p. 1407). As Hirschkind's (2009) capturing of late twentieth-century Egyptian religiosity shows, such cassette sermons comprised a key component in the technological scaffolding of a broader Islamic revival sweeping across multiple Muslim-majority settings during this period. Chastened by the public embarrassment of recent match-fixing scandals, a reconfigured national team searching for redemption and new sources of identity found itself, according to several analysts, receptive to the Tablighi Jama'at's message of reform (Samiuddin 2006; A. Khan 2021). Saeed Anwar, Pakistan's renowned opening batsman, was the first to convert after undertaking a three-day *khurūj* (Tablighi outing) following the sudden death of his young daughter in 2001 which Jamil was quick to capitalize on through several in-person meetings (A. Khan 2021, p. 1408). Others followed in quick succession—including Shahid Afridi, Mushtaq Ahmed, Saqlain Mushtaq and Inzimam ul-Haq—but it was the conversion to Islam of the team's only Christian player Yousuf Youhana (henceforth known as Mohammad Yousuf), who had been discreetly accompanying Anwar to Jamil's lectures, which caused the most stir (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqB5LeGFPeI>). Under the captainship of Inzimam ul-Haq, the spectacle of public prayer, flowing beards, and constant references to Allah in post-match interviews henceforth punctuated Pakistan's national sport provoking ridicule and admiration in equal measure from different segments of Pakistani society (Paracha 2019).

Though they met for the first time at a Karachi *ijtimā'* (mass Tablighi gathering) in 1997, it took several years of sustained interaction with Maulana Tariq Jamil for Junaid Jamshed to convert definitively to the Tablighi Jama'at (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0pmWuHDWv4>). Following a four-month *khurūj* outing in 2002, he suffered considerable privation and thus succumbed to the pressure of a lucrative concert tour offer in the Gulf region—despite his stated intention to retire from music and its associated hedonistic lifestyle. Jamil immediately intervened and successfully convinced Jamshed to attend Raiwind instead; soon after, Jamshed launched an international clothing franchise (J.—see <https://www.junaidjamshed.com>) in partnership with a fellow Tablighi and turned his musical talents to the production of numerous Islamic *nasheeds* (pious songs) which became hugely popular in religious circles. The two became bosom friends; Jamil chose

titles for all Jamshed's *nasheed* albums (even contributing vocals on occasion) and when Jamshed launched an upmarket Hajj tour group in 2007, Maulana Tariq Jamil became the scholar-in-residence who would accompany pilgrims to the Hijaz (Siddiq 2020; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHruFj1TFHw>; Figure 5). Jamshed was also very open about Jamil's role in his conversion, referencing him in numerous television interviews, speeches and talk-show programs (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0pmWuHDWv4>). His own celebrity status opened doors, such as live performances at the annual Reviving Islamic Spirit conference in Canada (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjVozIK75DM>), which in due course Jamil himself would walk through (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bzH0j4OGdU>; Figure 6).



**Figure 5.** Junaid Jamshed tweets a picture of himself and Maulana Tariq Jamil in pilgrim garbs en route to Arafat as part of the 2014 Hajj pilgrimage. Source: <https://twitter.com/junaidjamshedpk/status/517903518191980544?lang=en-GB>.



**Figure 6.** A Facebook poster advertising Maulana Tariq Jamil co-delivering the Friday prayer with American scholar Imam Zaid Shakir as part of the 2017 Reviving Islamic Spirit conference in Canada. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/events/312249172595859/permalink/314846235669486/>.

This period also witnessed the public Tablighi activism of other well-known figures in Pakistan including actor Naeem Butt, politician Mian Abbas Sharif (younger brother of former and current Prime Ministers Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif) and military leader Lieutenant-General Javed Nasir. From the 1990s, Jamil also began to call upon successive serving Prime Ministers inviting them to the annual Tablighi *ijtimā'* (mass gathering) in Raiwind ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB\\_x4fEM-kA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB_x4fEM-kA)) and, as documented by Shah (1999), he had begun addressing Cabinet Ministers and senior bureaucrats in special meetings organized at the behest of the Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif as early as 1999. Moving in such elite circles, including forging close links with leading army personnel and business moguls, helped Jamil develop “intricate personal power networks” which, according to critics such as Siddiqua (2020), represent the dangerous potential of exploitation for personal gain. The net social impact of this approach, however, was to legitimize the Tablighi Jama'at as a credible framework of religious practice for many among the professional middle classes, and concomitantly to bring Jamil into the public limelight. As a visible member of the traditionally trained religious establishment, Maulana Tariq Jamil's impact also lay in rehabilitating the reputation of the '*ulamā*' among the secularized upper classes, many of whom foster the deeply entrenched anticlerical attitudes once espoused by his own family:

Observers of contemporary Islam have often viewed the ulama as mired in an unchanging tradition that precludes any serious or sophisticated understanding of the modern world on their part, and prevents them from playing any significant role in their societies other than striving fruitlessly to mitigate their increasing marginalisation. (Zaman 2009, pp. 214–15).

In December 2016, Junaid Jamshed tragically died in a plane crash while returning from a Tablighi *khurūj* trip undertaken with cricketer Saeed Anwar in Chitral. Seemingly inspired by his legacy, several *nasheed* artists—such as Anas Yunus (*Jazba-e-Dawat*), Sohail Moten and Shaz Khan (*Chal Deen Ki Tabligh Main*), the latter of whom underwent his own singer-to-preacher conversion experience—soon released popular singles extolling the virtues of the Tablighi Jama'at (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZGsS0ZIMKo>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgDLubq1aTs>). Their professional production and popularity on YouTube (2.8 million and 7.7 million views respectively) signal a step change in bourgeoisie perceptions and engagements with the movement and, in the technical terminology of the sociology of religion, this may be characterized as a shift from 'sect' to 'denomination' in Pakistani society for which Maulana Tariq Jamil, personally, must largely be credited:

The TJ [Tablighi Jama'at] has, undoubtedly, penetrated deep into the Pakistani society and counts among its activists members of the civil and military bureaucracy, businessmen, university lecturers, celebrities from the entertainment industry and . . . sportsmen.” (A. Khan 2021, p. 1407).

Such a social constituency represents considerable evolution from the group of “illiterate rustics” Jamil had patiently endured during his formative four-month *khurūj* as a teenager in 1972 and, cementing his own emergence as a leading Islamic figure on the national stage, Jamil passionately addressed the vast crowds assembled for Jamshed's funeral, and led them in prayer, as part of a multi-channel live television broadcast watched by millions on what effectively became a national day of mourning (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gYBO18qpLk> for the speech and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8varNHZpVbA> for the funeral prayer).

It would be unfair however, as some have suggested (Siddiqua 2020; refer also to Jamil's interlocutor during a BBC News Urdu interview [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB\\_x4fEM-kA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB_x4fEM-kA)), to restrict the Maulana's influence to the upper strata of Pakistani society. At the same time as targeting high-profile celebrities, there is ample evidence of his dedicated work among some of the most disenfranchised and marginalized people in South Asian cultural milieus. These include sexually ambiguous cross-dressers or hermaphrodites (known collo-

quially as *hijra* or *khawaja sira*), usually disowned by their families and condemned to a life of social exclusion (Rao 2017; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TyUJGdvN2M>; <https://tinyurl.com/5k6ujs75>), those with long-term disabilities (including the deaf, blind, crippled, mute and lepers) and prostitutes (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8mPMzX9cRI>). As a direct result of his efforts, sign language was incorporated into the plethora of translations offered for daily speeches at the Raiwind Markaz, madrassas for transgender adults were set up in Islamabad and Lahore (Mehmood 2022; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mrPQjgYhyg>), and hundreds of prostitutes, especially in Lahore's notorious 'Heera Mandi' quarter and the 'Bazar-e-Husn' red light district of his hometown Tulumba, repented from their lifestyles with the aid of monthly stipends, personally provided by Jamil, which helped them to marry and settle into a new life of Islamic piety (Arqam 2015; Abdul Qadir 2018; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ttr52MKFJjg>). In 1998, Maulana Tariq Jamil also established Jamia al-Hasanain in Faisalabad, a Dar al-Uloom institution teaching the traditional Dars-i-Nizami syllabus, but with a much greater emphasis on *sīra* (prophetic biography), Islamic history and, under the tutelage of his close friend the Tunisian émigré to Pakistan Shaykh Ramzi al-Habib, the Arabic language (Figures 7 and 8). Over the years, this has developed into an international franchise with ten branches, eight catering for male students and two for female, including one in Indiana, North America, and another in his hometown of Tulumba; to date they have collectively produced around a thousand '*ulamā*' (see <https://alhasanainofficial.com>).



**Figure 7.** Maulana Tariq Jamil's primary Dar al-Uloom institution, the Jamia al-Hasanain established in Faisalabad in 1998. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialMTJ/videos/601310440352560/>.



**Figure 8.** Students listening attentively to Maulana Tariq Jamil at the annual graduation ceremony of Jamia al-Hasanain in June 2022. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FL1HGAY20Rs&t=962s>.

### A Shift from ‘Hard’ to ‘Soft’ Tabligh

This period also witnessed subtle changes in Maulana Tariq Jamil’s public discourse which may be characterized as a shift in approach from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ Tabligh. Probably cognizant of the broader social audiences his speeches were now attracting, Jamil’s tone gradually mellowed from that of fiery preacher to wise counsellor, and he more directly began to address social ills perceived around him including bribery, exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, filial impiety, endemic malfeasance, or the common practice of depriving women of inheritance. In fact, his message was remarkably empowering for young women straddling the expectations of modernity amidst the entrenched conventions of a patriarchal society by insisting, for example, that women are not juristically obligated to serve their husbands’ families and should be given considerable latitude in selecting their own marriage partners (Siddiq 2020; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5SRjfy3JE>). Moving away from mosques, Jamil’s speeches would more frequently be delivered at neutral public venues—such as universities, army barracks, finance centers or simply large, open grounds capable of accommodating the huge crowds that would inevitably attend—and emphasize the overwhelming mercy of God. Humor began to permeate his talks with ever-more frequency and, rather than fervent calls to embark immediately upon lengthy Tablighi *khurūj* outings, the Maulana would now ask his audiences to publicly repent of their sins and commit to a new life of piety and virtuous character (*akhlāq*) facilitated by a framework of monthly weekend *khurūj* outings. During this period, Jamil also introduced a new element into his public performances in which he traced the Prophet Muhammad’s lineage back to the Prophet Adam through an unbroken chain of 80 generations (Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abdul Mutallib bin Hashim bin Abd Munaf bin Qusai bin Kilab . . . etc.) in a feat of rhetorical grandiosity which showcased his remarkable memory and never failed to draw exclamations of wonder from the assembled crowds (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLwqtdxJeY8> for an example). The ‘discursive building blocks’ of his talks remained implacably centered around *tawhid*, *risālah* and *ākhirah* (monotheism, prophethood and the Hereafter) however, and he continued to evince a relentless commitment to the “bottom-up *da’wa* modernity” (Kuiper 2019, p.173) of the Tablighi Jama’at:

It is not [due to] anybody’s conspiracy! [People say: “Our downfall is due to] an American conspiracy, a British conspiracy, a French conspiracy. Ah! These are the habits of defeated nations who project their faults onto others. They ascribe their weaknesses to others. If they get a stomach ache, then even that’s blamed on an American conspiracy! Find faults within yourself. Seek out your own shortcomings. [Quoting Allamah Iqbal, *apne man mein dūb kar pā ja surāgh-e-zindagi*]: “Delve into yourself and discover life’s secret traces” . . . A nation’s ship only sinks when its crew drill holes into it with their own hands. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnNevzucIKs>.

Most significantly, there was a discernible shift towards a powerful ecumenical discourse which has today become a defining hallmark of Jamil’s preaching (Z. Khan 2021). The immediate driver of this seems to have been the internecine sectarian bloodshed which has blighted Pakistani religious life for decades, both between various Sunni groups and the Sunni and Shia (Zaman 2002, pp. 111–43). In this context, Maulana Tariq Jamil began making impassioned pleas for Muslims of all backgrounds to tolerate each other and relegate sectarian affiliations to the private sphere, thus advocating for a type of civic pluralism:

Show me, what are you doing with my Prophet? [weeping] Did he leave you bound in sects or did he make you into an ummah? Why do you squander your lives in these foolish games [*nāḍān khel*]? . . . Difference of opinion has existed since the inception of this ummah and will always remain, but don’t go to the extent of issuing decrees of disbelief [*kufr*] against one another [weeping]. Who will go to Paradise? [If] Sunnis say that Wahhabis are *kāfir* [disbelievers], Wahhabis say that Sunnis are *kāfir*, Barelvis say that Deobandis are *kāfir*, Deobandis say

that Barelvīs are *kāfir*, Shias say that Sunnis are *kāfir*, Sunnis say that Shias are *kāfir* [then] who will go to Paradise? . . . [weeping] You don't go to one another's mosques, you don't pray behind one another, [but have instead] made yourselves into wardens over Paradise! . . . Show me, where have you got this religion from in which you've divided into sects and spread fires of hostility? . . . I beseech you in the name of Allah and His Prophet [to] live as an ummah. Live [simply] as Muslims. Remain firm on your own creeds [*aqīdah*] but be lenient towards others. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKB2SDYTodI>).

Taking this further, the Maulana also started meeting with leading scholars of different Islamic denominations (Figure 9) and, during a period of heightened tensions in 2013, delivered a lecture at the Central Shia Mosque in Gilgit where a local curfew had been imposed to stem rampant Sunni-Shia violence which had claimed 70 lives over the past year. In a historic gesture, Shia clerics reciprocated by accepting Jamil's invitation to attend the local Tablighi *ijtimā'* and his intervention was widely perceived to have reduced tensions in the area by 'dousing the flames of sectarianism' (Mir 2013; <https://tinyurl.com/kyhjfkf>). In an ostensible move to further build bridges with Shia audiences, Jamil began a tradition of tearful annual lectures delivered on 10th Muharram (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9BBFgpzfKY> for an example) in which he would mournfully lament the massacre of the Prophet's family at Karbala—the ultimate event of Islamic theodicy—which, for some, went dangerously close to undermining the parameters of Sunni orthodoxy (Rangooni 2019). Similarly, in the month of Rabi ul-Awwal, Jamil would extol the life and virtues of the Prophet Muhammad in a seeming attempt to appeal to Barelvi sensibilities. In reaching out to ever wider audiences through an expanding array of techniques and technologies however, Maulana Tariq Jamil has, as we shall see, faced the challenge of maintaining credibility and support within his own foundational constituencies.



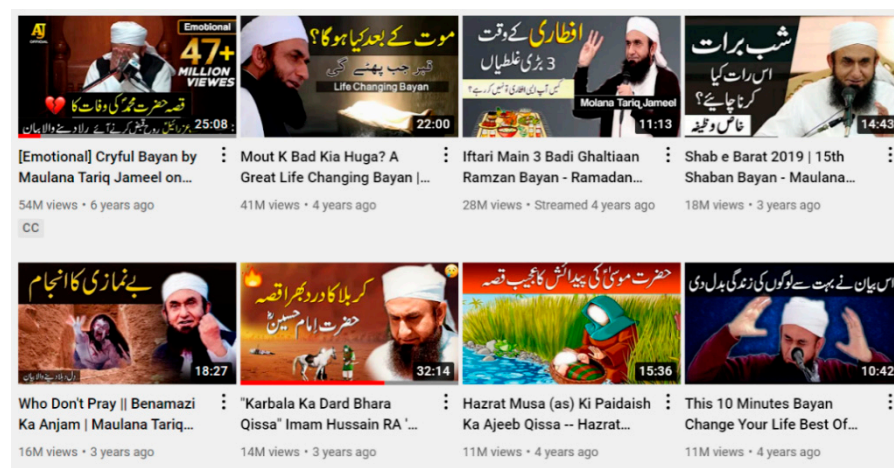
**Figure 9.** Maulana Tariq Jamil building bridges with the Shia. Source: <https://www.parhlo.com/life-of-molana-tariq-jameel/>.

#### 4.5. Forging His Own Way: Controversy and Criticism (2014–Present)

It was around 2014 that Maulana Tariq Jamil's embrace of digital media gained momentum. Third parties had begun uploading his lectures onto YouTube and, probably recognizing their popularity and the changing nature of religious consumption in a digital age, he started recording messages directly for virtual audiences and allowing his own live lectures to be videorecorded for dissemination via social media platforms or channels such as Message TV. Around the same time, he began accepting invitations to be interviewed on mainstream television programs—initially over the telephone but before long via live video transmission too—and would offer comments on newsworthy incidents.<sup>6</sup> Both moves signaled a departure from classical Tablighi Jama'at policy which insists on the primacy of face-to-face *da'wa* and which has long-maintained a stoic public silence in the face of topical crisis events, for which it has frequently been subject to criticism from rival Muslim groups (Ahmad 1991). Further, his rapid transition into a major media-based Islamic personality challenged the traditional Tablighi position of adopting the most cautious opinion on any contentious juristic (*fiqh*) issues which divide people; South Asian Tablighis had

therefore generally accepted the basic prohibition of *taswīr* (photographic/digital imagery) propounded by the majority of Deobandi ‘*ulamā*’.

Jamil, however, found justification for his differing stance in the more lenient juristic opinion of the influential Mufti Taqi Usmani ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Gsm\\_9ZPEyM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Gsm_9ZPEyM)) and, as he warmed to a digital audience, two YouTube channels emerged as official carriers of his content. ‘AJ Official’, launched in December 2014, is today Pakistan’s largest Islamic YouTube channel with a 9.71 million subscriber-base while ‘Tariq Jamil’, launched in March 2017, today has 6.84 million subscribers. Many other unofficial channels carry stylized excerpts from his lectures which, between them, have attracted hundreds of millions of views (and associated advertising revenues). The gradual supplanting of traditional television broadcasts by online video streaming platforms accessible largely via handheld devices marks a shift in global patterns of digital consumption; Jamil’s responsiveness to such media thus marks him out as a contemporary ‘intervangelist’, to use a neologism coined by Bekkering (2011), rather than a conventional ‘televangelist’ (Figures 10 and 11). That said, the Maulana’s lectures have also been broadcast regularly on satellite channels since 2014 when a Ramadan special series, *Roshni Ka Safar* (Journey of Light), premiering on the state-run network Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV), attracted more viewers “than most dramas aired on prime time with a star cast ... [and] mustered millions in advertisement revenue” (Arqam 2015).



**Figure 10.** Maulana Tariq Jamil has a YouTube following which few other religious scholars can hope to match. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/c/AJOfficialPK/videos?view=0&sort=p&flow=grid>.



**Figure 11.** Passengers on a Faisal Movers coach from Islamabad to Lahore watching speeches by Maulana Tariq Jamil via on-board entertainment consoles in April 2022. Source: author’s photograph.

By the time of Hajji Abdul Wahhab’s death in November 2018, the revered *amīr* of the international Tablighi headquarters in Raiwind, Maulana Tariq Jamil had become a

household name across Pakistan and synonymous with the Tablighi Jama'at in the mind of many Pakistanis. By this stage he had, somewhat ironically, morphed into the de facto role of 'media spokesperson' for a movement always known for shying away from publicity—as evidenced by the way in which media anchors flocked to him to learn more about the eminent yet somewhat reclusive religious personality who had just passed away (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgWRDBIoyIk>). Yet, the fact that he was simultaneously selected to address the vast crowds who assembled for Abdul Wahhab's funeral in Raiwind, and lead them in prayer, indicates his continued role at the very top of the Tablighi Jama'at's leadership hierarchy. Balancing such roles has not always been straightforward though and has gone hand in hand with the challenge of maintaining cordial links with Pakistan's rival political parties.

In this regard, Jamil's close personal relationship with the chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and former Prime Minister Imran Khan has been seen to compromise the strict political neutrality of the Tablighi Jama'at—often identified as a key reason for the movement's ability to flourish in multiple international settings (Ahmad 1991; Ali 2010). As early as 2014, at Jamil's behest, Khan renamed his landmark three-day protest against alleged election-rigging in opposition Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif's government from the 'Tsunami March' to the 'Azadi [Freedom] March' (see <https://www.prideofpakistan.com/who-is-who-detail/Maulana-Tariq-Jameel/655>). After his accession to power in 2018, Khan regularly called upon Jamil (Figure 12) who, in turn, publicly praised and supported him: "We have been blessed with a very good ruler. All of you should pray for him" (Z. Khan 2021; see also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25KfcvwdNu0>). Such an endorsement of a member of the secular-educated elite, however, was perceived by many '*ulamā*' as a betrayal of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, a Deobandi political group led by the traditionally trained '*ālim* Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, thus causing some antagonism towards him in religious circles (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6e2rI-Qkcc>). Jamil was simultaneously obliged during this period to navigate the tightrope of maintaining cordial relations with the Sharif family associated with the rival political group Pakistan Muslim League. In 2018, he led the funeral prayers of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's wife, Begum Kulsoom Nawaz (<https://tinyurl.com/yc23wy3h>), and upon the death of his and current Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's mother in London in 2020, visited their family home in Lahore to offer condolences (<https://tinyurl.com/3bmzxhcm>). As anthropologist Zaigham Khan pertinently observes:

Tariq Jamil's success in reaching out to the powerful elite was seen as an asset. And his huge popularity is clearly seen as an asset by state officials as well. His close association with them can be seen as a mutually beneficial relationship. Maulana's endorsement, even a picture with him, extends an aura of religiosity to members of Pakistan's political elite, who have always used religion as a major source of their legitimacy. They also find him valuable in extending the state's messages to the religiously inclined masses. It is hard to guess who benefits more from the relationship—members of the political elite or the Tableeghi Jamaat [sic] and its mission. (Z. Khan 2021).



**Figure 12.** Maulana Tariq Jamil and Imran Khan, during the time of his premiership. Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1630280>.

As part of his drive to recruit high-profile public figures to the Tablighi cause, Maulana Tariq Jamil has not shied away from meeting female showbiz celebrities including actresses, singers, and talk-show hosts. This signals another departure from classical Tablighi policy which advocates strict gender-segregation when engaging in *da'wa*. In 2014 however, Jamil visited the provocative Pakistani actress Veena Malik at her Dubai residence who, soon after in a televised interview, caused a media storm by attributing her new-found religiosity to Jamil and referring to him as her “spiritual father” (<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1a244h>). The Maulana has also interacted with other well-known figures including popular Punjabi stage dancer Nargis, who accompanied him on a Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, supermodel Ayyan Ali, and the celebrated actress Reema Khan, in meetings which swiftly attract headlines and which in no small measure enhance Jamil’s own reputation as a religious preacher with uncommon appeal (Arqam 2015). Further, in an apparent move to indulge his considerable female fanbase, Jamil premiered Shaista Lodhi’s new program *Gupshup with Shaista* in a candid 2019 interview focusing on his personal life which rapidly attracted millions of YouTube views (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkIg1mVISPY>). Most recently, Indian model and Bollywood actress Sana Khan caused widespread astonishment in 2020 when—inspired by Junaid Jamshed—she suddenly quit the entertainment industry and married a wealthy Tablighi scholar, Mufti Anas Sayed, after a sustained period of listening to Jamil’s lectures online and eventually meeting with him in Dubai (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErLH029przM>). Such public interaction with women, allied with a growing tendency to attend and address mixed-gender gatherings (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujhUXJbKa8c>), has caused consternation among the more conservative sections of Pakistani society and marks a shift in the conventional role of ‘*ulamā*’ in Pakistani public life (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIBMazouuoo>).

As Maulana Tariq Jamil settled into the role of full-blown national celebrity, criticism of him mounted from several fronts. Most significantly, fellow ‘*ulamā*’ began to express reservations about the content of some of his talks and cast doubt upon his scholarly credentials (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvin9WFnDv0>). As with the *quṣṣāṣ* and *wu‘āz* of old, Jamil’s tendency to relate fanciful tales and ‘weak’ (*da‘if*) traditions, particularly those drawn from the corpus of *Isrā‘īliyyāt* narrations,<sup>7</sup> provoked the ire of stricter scholars who insisted on a more stringent scriptural engagement. His trademark recital of the Prophet’s lineage back to Adam, for example, appears to ignore a traditional body of scholarship which cautions that, beyond the patrilineal Ishmaelite ancestor Adnan, a definitive genealogy cannot be traced. For such issues as this, several Pakistani ‘*ulamā*’—most prominently Mufti Zar Wali Khan and Maulana Manzoor Mengal—have publicly criticized him sometimes leading to muted spats and some back and forth over social media (see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww9ycdWT9\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww9ycdWT9_k); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q34wOITpQXo>; <https://youtu.be/8wm9ZeUUukM>; [https://youtu.be/J4\\$\\times\\$70qqLpCA](https://youtu.be/J4$\\times$70qqLpCA)).

It is the Maulana’s unrelenting discourse of intra-Muslim ecumenicalism however—laden with overtures to the Shia and sporadic praise of rival Muslim leaders such as Maulana Ahmed Raza Khan or Syed Abul A’la Maududi—which has attracted the most criticism from Deobandi ‘*ulamā*’, who see it as potentially imperiling the boundaries of a received orthodoxy. Consequently, he has on occasion found himself summoned to different Pakistani Dar al-Uloms to account for or publicly retract statements made in his speeches which, initially, he acquiesced to but more recently has tended to demur (Vawda 2018). In recent years, several full-length books have been published cataloguing his mistakes in forensic detail carrying titles such as *Fundamental Errors found in the Speeches of the Famous, Independent Preacher Maulana Tariq Jamil Sahib which are Contrary to Orthodox Beliefs and Viewpoints* [*Ahl-e Sunnat wal Jamā‘at Aq‘āid wa Nazariyāt ke Khilāf Ma‘ruf Āzād Muballigh Maulana Tariq Jamil Sahib ke Bayānāt mai Pāyī Jane Wālī Bunyādī Galtīyā*] (Eesa Khan 2010; Rangooni 2019). In line with the disapproving genre of medieval refutational literature identified by Berkey (2001), such texts evince the perennial concern of the ‘*ulamā*’ to police orthodoxy and safeguard the simple faith of the masses by warning against

the excesses of popular preachers who, despite their unmatched appeal, fall short of the exacting standards demanded of public callers to Allah. Ironically, they are likely to appeal to a limited readership base however and almost entirely bypass millions of ordinary fans of the Maulana whose consumption of religious material revolves far more around bitesize social media clips than the perusal of weighty technical tomes. While personally upset at some of the allegations made against him (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDs1awivPns>), Jamil's response has generally been to disengage and, avoiding any form of direct confrontation, press on tenaciously with his own revivalist vocation.

In April 2021, Maulana Tariq Jamil launched a commercial Islamic clothing franchise—the 'MTJ brand' (<https://mtjonline.com>; Figure 13)—at a lavish, star-studded ceremony in Karachi (Haq 2021; see <https://youtu.be/fDTu3O4xsTg> for the launch ceremony). Among others, the event included a video endorsement from Mufti Taqi Usmani—a strategic move which not only provided juristic validation of the venture but also a public show of unity between the country's most prominent Deobandi and Tablighi scholars<sup>8</sup>—performances by spoken word artists and a speech by a representative of Imran Khan's government (Figure 14). Jamil's stated rationale for the enterprise was to generate a source of lasting income for the multiple Dar al-Ulooms he administers, thus freeing them from dependency on the largesse of individual donors, and the immediate driver was the COVID-19 pandemic which made it untenable for him to rely on conventional funding sources (<https://images.dawn.com/news/1186601>). For critics, however, the move was indicative of a hypocritical or egotistical desire to commodify his religious reputation along the lines of a Western consumerist model, adding to the considerable advertising revenues already generated via YouTube (Javed 2021). Shortly after, Jamil launched a charitable organization, the 'Molana Tariq Jamil Foundation' (<https://www.mtjfoundation.org>), aimed at formally institutionalizing and expanding philanthropic work he had long been attending to privately (<https://youtu.be/0LC7Jlxko78>). Both moves are rather unusual for a traditional elder of the Tablighi Jama'at—which, as a movement, has maintained a fundamental separation between its own spiritual revivalist activities and humanitarian aid—and the overt use of his own name, in particular, has been found distasteful by some.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, they cement Jamil's reputation as a charismatic public figure able to pursue personal ventures independently of groupthink but reveal a tension in balancing his autonomy with the weight of corporate responsibility that attends his leadership position in the Tablighi Jama'at. More broadly, such ventures—and the medium through which they are promoted—contribute to the redefinition of Islam in the Pakistani public sphere:

The transposition of religious (and political) issues to new media also changes the associative ecology of Islamic discourse, juxtaposing religious issues in innovative ways with commerce, entertainment, and the professions, and contributing to the greater pervasiveness of religious themes in an increasingly redefined public life. (Eickelman and Anderson [1999] 2003, p. 14).



**Figure 13.** A MTJ store in Lahore's prestigious Emporium Mall. Source: author's photo.



**Figure 14.** A representative of Imran Khan’s government speaking at the MTJ brand’s launch event in Karachi. Source: <https://youtu.be/fDTu3O4xsTg>.

### 5. The Dialectic of Structure-Agency in a Global Revivalist Movement

The preceding biographical outline has captured the story of one of Pakistan’s most influential public figures, and one of the most popular and prominent Islamic preachers in the world today. In doing so, it has highlighted the extent to which Maulana Tariq Jamil’s own journey has been intertwined with that of the Tablighi Jama’at; individual and institution have largely been inseparable over the past 50 years. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that, in the most recent past especially, Jamil has developed into an independent global preacher who commands a following among a wide cross-section of the Muslim (and indeed Urdu-speaking non-Muslim) community. Cognizant of this wide social appeal, his revivalist discourse and methods of delivery have witnessed considerable evolution over the years transcending both the Tablighi Jama’at as a movement and the conventional praxes of the Deobandi ‘*ulamā*’.<sup>10</sup> His autonomy as an individual thus appears to chafe against the institutional expectations of the broader revivalist impulse which nurtured him and the resulting tension sheds important light on how movements and individuals, in responding to the exigencies of particular social and cultural moments, evolve in history.

For Zaman (2002, p. 7), “No rupture is greater in the history of Islam than that brought about by the impact of Western modernity.” The scriptural-spiritual theological enterprise formalized at Deoband in 1867, as wonderfully illustrated by Barbara Metcalf (1982), was one distinct response to this challenge. Developed in the new conditions of British colonial rule, the Deobandi *maslak* (theological orientation) privileged a privatized, interiorized religious life able to sustain itself independently of state patronage and which disseminated mass religious instruction through the continuous production of ‘*ulamā*’, facilitated by the technologies of rail and print. Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi, founder of the Tablighi Jama’at, was a scion of this movement but innovated several lasting changes which reconfigured the contours of its reformist ambit. As Maulana Saeed Ahmad Khan, Jamil’s mentor and Ilyas’ companion during the final years of his life, observed:

When Hadhrat Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Saheb Rahmatullahi alayhi [God have mercy upon him] commenced his mission of propagation, even the Ulama were at variance with him and even the most eminent scholars tended to be critical towards him, but placing his confidence in Allah, he nonetheless planted the roots of this mission and went ahead. He showed no outward sign of being awe-struck by their criticism and condemnation. (Kadwa 2003, p. 5).

Most significantly, Ilyas was successful in adding the dimension of *tabligh* (proselytization) to the well-established traditions of *ta’līm* (scriptural pedagogy) and *tazkiya* (reformist Sufism) in the Deobandi cosmology. His development of the Tablighi mechanism of *chillah* for example—the standard 40-day *khurūj* outing which has become a hallmark of

the movement globally—drew upon a long-standing Sufi tradition in which the spiritual novitiate, under the supervision of a master, would undertake a 40-day retreat aimed at self-improvement (see [Özelsel \(2002\)](#) for a riveting account of such a retreat in contemporary Istanbul). Consequently, Ilyas' exercise of agency in pursuing his own revivalist vocation ended up reflexively altering the structures of Deobandi reform he had inherited.<sup>11</sup> Henceforth, the institution of the Markaz (Tablighi headquarters) was added to the existing institutions of the Dar al-Uloom (theological seminary) and the Khanqah (Sufi hospice); and—accentuating the democratization and vernacularization of Islam noted earlier—his greatest achievement perhaps lay in reconfiguring the conceptual landscape of twentieth-century Islamic activism by wresting the responsibility of *da'wa* away from the '*ulamā*' and Sufis instead placing it squarely on the shoulders of the ordinary Muslim. As such, his efforts gave birth to a movement of lay preaching *par excellence* (and many of the reservations expressed by historical '*ulamā*' with respect to individual *wu'āz* and *quṣṣāṣ* have certainly been echoed in response to the collective lapses of ordinary Tablighis—see [Azmi \(2010\)](#), for example, or [Rahman's \(2020\)](#) compilation of *Fifty Unsubstantiated Narrations* popularly repeated by Tablighis). For sociologist Anthony Giddens, this capacity of subordinate agency to modify superordinate structure is essential to the ongoing sustainability of social systems in history:

Power within social systems which enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities in contexts of social interaction. But all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This is what I call the *dialectic of control* in social systems. ([Giddens 1986](#), p. 16, italics original).

Over the course of its century-long history, the Tablighi Jama'at has developed into an independent global revivalist movement which, in many regional settings such as Africa or the Middle East, retains little to no links with its Deobandi progenitor. Though in South Asian social contexts, the Tablighi Jama'at continues to enjoy cordial relations with the majority of Deobandi '*ulamā*', who provide an important source of legitimacy for the movement, it is not directly managed by them (and has, indeed, on occasion antagonized them ([Azmi 2010](#))) functioning rather as an autonomous entity with its own hierarchy and bureaucratic structures ([Reetz 2008](#); [Timol 2019](#)). The Deobandi '*ulamā*'—while acknowledging the significant impact of the Tablighi Jama'at in reviving a grassroots religious consciousness among the Muslim laity, and in no small measure remaining dependent on that for the ongoing vitality of their institutions—have also faced the challenge of exerting some form of control, somewhat in the capacity of theological or juridical chaperones, over the movement's trajectory. This situation, I argue, mirrors in several important ways the subsidiary relationship of Maulana Tariq Jamil with the Tablighi Jama'at today.

As we have seen, Jamil is a direct product of the Tablighi movement and trained as an '*ālim*' (religious scholar) under its auspices at the Raiwind headquarters during the 1970s. Over the course of the past four decades, he has exhibited a tireless dedication to the movement's revivalist mission single-handedly attracting millions of new recruits from across the social spectrum. Yet over recent years, his increasing exercise of personal agency in preaching Islam has seen him depart from the conventional trajectory expected of a typical Tablighi elder. This article has identified five specific areas in which his personal choices diverge from classical Tablighi policy, namely: his embrace of digital media vis-à-vis the movement's insistence on face-to-face *da'wa*; his frequent engagement with the news media to address topical events; his public support of former Prime Minister Imran Khan widely perceived as compromising the Tablighi Jama'at's stance of political neutrality; his blurring of the Tablighi Jama'at's strict gender segregation norms; and his recent launching of an eponymous clothing brand and philanthropic organization. Further, his style of oratory—closely resembling the archetypes of the *quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers) and the *wu'āz* (popular preachers)—as well as his unwavering message of intra-Muslim unity have provoked the ire of more scripturally oriented scholars, including those from within

his own Deobandi fraternity. Consequently, senior Tablighi elders and ‘*ulamā*’ have for some time faced the implicit dilemma of managing his high-profile revivalist activities, particularly given the precedent they may set for rank-and-file Tablighis:

... the most fundamental issue surrounding preachers and storytellers was one of control: who was to control their activities, their words, and their messages, and how was such control to be exercised? (Berkey 2001, p. 55).

There has been a tendency in the academic literature to characterize the Tablighi Jama’at as a Goffmanian ‘total institution’ (Dassetto 2000; Gaborieau 2006; Pieri 2021)—that is, an organization which requires the almost complete relinquishment of autonomy on the part of the individual as Goffman’s prototypical cases of incarceration or hospitalization entail (Goffman 1961). The biodata presented in this article, however, supports Rauf et al.’s (2018) more nuanced argument that the Tablighi Jama’at operates as a ‘soft’ total institution in which individual agency *does* enjoy room for maneuver, especially away from the closed setting of the *khurūj* outing (the temporal context which most closely resembles the conditions of a ‘total institution’). To take this a step further—and evoking Giddens’ ‘dialectic of control’ cited above with reference to Maulana Muhammad Ilyas’ eventual modification of the Deobandi reformist paradigm—it may be asserted that the exercise of agency outside of conventional parameters possesses the incipient potential, should the power dynamic so permit, to modify or even transform structural organizational norms given that those norms, though they wield considerable authority in governing the activities of group members, are nevertheless dependent upon social agents for their ongoing legitimization and actualization in society (Giddens 1986). Charismatic leadership thus constitutes for Weber one of the principal forces of change in human history which, though it exists in a complex relationship with ‘traditional’ and ‘legal-rational’ forms of authority, may be posited as an important evolutionary mechanism through which change is instigated within established traditions (Weber [1920]1978; Robbins 1998).

Viewed through the conceptual lens of the sociology of religious organizations, there is some analytical purchase in comparing Maulana Tariq Jamil’s role in the Tablighi Jama’at today with that of Malcolm X in the historic development of the Nation of Islam (Haley [1965] 2001). In each case, the life-story of the individual has been intimately tied to that of the organization and through the sheer power of their words and force of their convictions, both figures successfully expanded networks of activism across their respective national spheres. The Tablighi Jama’at—while acknowledging the immense role played by Jamil in raising the movement’s profile over recent decades, and while remaining somewhat dependent on his personal reputation for its ongoing credibility among the more secularized classes in South Asian public spheres—has nevertheless been sometimes constrained to ‘clip the wings of the eagle’. Consequently, I was reliably informed by several respondents<sup>12</sup> that Maulana Tariq Jamil has sporadically been banned from giving speeches at the Raiwind headquarters and at traditional Tablighi *ijtimās* in a move somewhat reminiscent of Elijah Muhammad’s 1963 suspension of Malcolm X from speaking on behalf of the Nation of Islam. The rationale for this, I was informed, has been to placate those ‘*ulamā*’ who remain vocal in their criticism of him by taking away his formal Tablighi platform as well as to inhibit the discernible ‘cult of personality’ developing around him which—having spawned even an eerie copycat<sup>13</sup>—threatens to undermine the collectivist dynamics of the movement (Figure 15). Managing the impact of such high-profile individuals within existing organizational structures thus becomes a delicate balancing act revolving around the ‘bureaucratization of charisma’—though not in a classical Weberian sense (Morrison 1995). Rather, it is about the subtle and diplomatic management of charisma within existing structures of authority, and the ultimate privileging of the institution over the individual while minimizing rupture. Whether Maulana Tariq Jamil’s tremendous personal appeal is seen as a threat to the ordinary functioning of the Tablighi Jama’at—as it was with Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam—or whether his revivalist vocation catalyzes new directions in the movement’s broader trajectory—just as Maulana Muhammad Ilyas’ revivalist vocation

institutionalized new trends in the broader Deobandi movement—remains to be seen. As Giddens puts this:

Action depends on the capability of the individual to ‘make a difference’ to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to ‘make a difference’, that is, to exercise some sort of power . . . Expressing these observations in another way, we can say that action logically involves power in the sense of transformative capacity. (Giddens 1986, pp. 14–15).



**Figure 15.** Maulana Tariq Jamil greeted by hordes of adoring students during a visit to the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad in November 2021. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir5-o6cl72k>.

Finally, it may be argued that the story of Maulana Tariq Jamil’s biographical trajectory casts light on a tension at the heart of the contemporary Tablighi Jama’at: namely, the conflicting tendencies of adhering rigidly to long-established conventions vis-à-vis a pragmatic responsiveness to new conditions and changing circumstances. While many of the ‘old guard’ in the movement espouse the former attitude, Jamil is clearly pioneering the latter with great aplomb. While visiting Raiwind during March and April 2022, I was struck at how, to this day, daily prayers are offered without the aid of a microphone to amplify the imam’s voice; consequently, an elaborate system of human amplifiers (*mukabbirs*) are strategically placed across the huge congregation to call out changing postures (though the audible recitation of the Qur’an during the *Fajr* (dawn prayer), *Maghrib* (dusk prayer) and *Isha* (night) prayers can only be heard by a tiny handful of people within physical earshot of the imam). Upon querying this, I was informed that it stems from the Tablighi Jama’at’s tendency to adopt the most cautious position when it comes to divisive issues of *fiqh* (see Mian (2017) for an excellent analysis of the debates regarding the permissibility of loudspeaker usage during ritual prayer in early twentieth-century South Asia) as well as a desire to replicate the practice of the Prophet’s Mosque as closely as possible.<sup>14</sup> Juxtaposing this anachronism with Maulana Tariq Jamil’s embrace of digital media reveals two starkly contrasting faces of the movement today: “Even as spokespersons for some groups assert that they seek a return to past values . . . they do so in a distinctively modern way, oriented to the future and assimilating new technologies and communicative forms” (Eickelman and Anderson [1999] 2003, p. 6). For Masud (2000), antecedents of such contrasting tendencies can be traced back to the movement’s genesis when leading Tablighi Jama’at scholars espoused subtly different approaches to Islamic revival thus indicating an internal heterogeneity which has long resided—in theory if not always in practice—at the heart of the movement.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

Maulana Tariq Jamil's rise to prominence—and the concomitant conversion to the Tablighi Jama'at of numerous high-profile celebrities—should be placed against the wider canvas of the Islamization of public life in Pakistan since General Zia ul-Haq's state-sponsored policies of the 1980s in a way which defies the expectations of early secularization theorists (Casanova 1994; Berger 1999). Unlike other popular religious figures in Pakistan such as Javed Ghamidi, Farhat Hashmi or Dr. Israr Ahmad, who have often highlighted “their modern educational credentials” to self-consciously position themselves as alternative voices to the ‘*ulamā*’ (Ahmad 2010, p. 22), Jamil has successfully catapulted himself to national stardom as a bona fide representative of the religious establishment. That a traditionally trained Islamic scholar—and a member of the conservative Tablighi Jama'at to boot—should consistently top annual survey results purporting to list the most admired figures in the world's second most populous Muslim country signifies not only the ongoing influence of the ‘*ulamā*’ in shaping mass religious sensibilities but also the enduring popularity of bottom-up reformist paradigms which focus on the reinvigoration of grassroots piety and ritual practice over Islamist or modernist goals (Zaman 2002; Kuiper 2019).

Building on the critical role placed on ‘print-capitalism’ by Benedict Anderson (1983) in the early modern construction of a nation as an imagined community, Ahmad (2010, p. 25) suggests the salience of ‘media-capitalism’ in creating new religious public spheres, real or imagined, in contemporary societies. This article thus captures the story of a contemporary Muslim ‘intervangelist’s’ responsiveness to ‘media-capitalism’ and his gradual assimilation of new communicative forms and technologies to influence public discourse (Bekkering 2011). Though there is a precedence of traditionally trained scholars using modern media tools to propagate Islamic messages—the respected Mufti Shafi Usmani, for example, first released his popular Qur'an commentary *Ma'ariful Qur'an* as a decade-long series of radio broadcasts between 1954 and 1964—it has tended to be Eickelman and Piscatori's ([1996] 2004, p. 13) ‘new religious intellectuals’, such as the immensely popular Egyptian Amr Khaled or the Indonesian Aa Gym, who have capitalized on the potential of digital technologies to present forms of Islamic discourse more amenable to secular-liberal sensibilities. With official accounts on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, Maulana Tariq Jamil's full-blown embrace of digital media platforms therefore represents a step change in *da'wa* methodologies for a prominent leader of the Tablighi Jama'at for whom simplicity, humility and a general eschewing of the public limelight have always been cardinal virtues. His development into a national voice of moderate Islam in Pakistan further reveals an instrumental awareness of the forces of supply and demand in the marketplace of Islamic discourse which, coupled with the successful commercialization of his own popularity into a retail brand, marks him out as an astute ‘faith entrepreneur.’<sup>16</sup> Arguably, it has been his method as much as his message which has helped to make Islamic practice more amenable to middle-class bourgeoisie lifestyles through a seeming policy of ‘influencing the influencers’;<sup>17</sup> though there remains an undeniable tension with the basic behavioral psychology of the Tablighi Jama'at which seeks to effect inner transformation not through words or snazzy online content, but by the repetition of ritualized action in the physical context of arduous *khurūj* excursions (Metcalf 1994; Ali 2010).<sup>18</sup>

The implications of Maulana Tariq Jamil's innovations in *da'wa* are manifold. While the legacy of traditional scholars has tended to live on in books pored over by subsequent generations of Muslims, Jamil—who as a popular preacher *par excellence* has produced virtually no literary oeuvre—is likely to live on in a digital cybersphere attracting hundreds of millions of views posthumously. Further, his personal example as a respected leader of the world's most powerful grassroots Islamic revivalist movement has set a precedent which is impacting contemporary Muslim mediascapes. Directly inspired by Jamil for example (and frequently defending him against critics), the Karachi-based Deobandi scholar Mufti Tariq Masood has developed a considerable online following regularly addressed from his digital pulpit (see <https://www.muftitariqmasood.com>). Similarly, the aforementioned former Bollywood actress Sana Khan, drawing on her existing fame, has embarked upon

a career as an Islamic social media influencer regularly publishing pious content via popular Hinglish vlog posts (see <https://www.instagram.com/sanakhaan21/?hl=en>). Such initiatives represent the ‘avant-garde’ impulses of a long-established Islamic revivalist movement with roots in colonial India and speak to a debate centered around the most effective and authentic ways of calling people to Allah under conditions of technological modernity (Kuiper 2021). Rather than typecasting them as static monoliths then, this article argues for the need to recognize the internal heterogeneity of mass Islamic movements as they evolve through space and time under the influence of multiple leaders—some more and others less responsive to the exigencies of changing circumstances—to play out a story of both continuity and change.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2020/09/22/worlds-most-admired-2020> (Pakistan must be selected from the dropdown list of 42 countries). Jamil’s ‘admiration score’ was 17.5%, Imran Khan 16.38%, Bill Gates 5.16% and Cristiano Ronaldo 3.42%. Jamil also topped the poll in 2018 with a 17.6% admiration score (the second highest being army general Raheel Sharif with 13.7%—see <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2018/04/11/worlds-most-admired-2018>), though in 2019 he was narrowly pipped to the top spot by Imran Khan (19.37% and 20.95% admiration scores respectively), the next closest ranking being Bill Gates with 6.74% (see <https://today.yougov.com/topics/international/articles-reports/2019/07/18/2019-worlds-most-admired>). Country-specific ratings seem not to be available on the YouGov website for 2021 or prior to 2018. Unless otherwise specified, all URL links referenced throughout this paper were accessed on 8 July 2022.
- <sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/c/tariqjamilofficial/about> and <https://www.youtube.com/c/AJOfficialPK/about> (accessed on 13 December 2022). These figures do not include the many unofficial channels that feature his talks which have collectively attracted hundreds of millions of additional views.
- <sup>3</sup> To cite a single excerpt from many possible examples: “For the sake of Allah, my children, if you are my students then this Deobandi-Barlevi [conflict], you must get rid of these quarrels! Consider yourself [only] Muslims . . . I want to see you as Muslims. I want to take you out of Deobandiyat [Deobandism], just be Muslims . . . We follow the decrees of Imam Abu Hanifa [and] consider the interpretation of his edicts by the scholars of Deoband to be more correct. [But] we respect everybody else and honour them. Our hearts are open to everybody. [To claim that] we’re exclusively on the truth and we’re exclusively going to Paradise, I want to take this ‘*ujb* [vanity] out of you. He [God] is a generous King who forgives whomsoever He pleases. Are we sentinels [over Paradise]? Be a Muslim, be a *mu’min* [believer], be an *ummatī* [member of the global Muslim community] . . . Love everybody. Clean your hearts [from animosity] towards anybody.” See <https://youtu.be/306c7ZKsrS4> (accessed on 8 July 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> Maulana Tariq Jamil, in particular, was influenced by four teachers two of whom he describes as ‘*jalālī*’ (majestic, stern) and two as ‘*jamālī*’ (beautiful, gentle): (1) Maulana Jamshed, erstwhile imam of Raiwind and *khalīfah* (spiritual successor) of Maulana Masiullah Khan (himself a *khalīfah* of the renowned Deobandi figurehead Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi); (2) the ethereal Maulana Nazar-ur-Rahman, current *amīr* [leader] of Raiwind following the death of Hajji Abdul Wahhab in 2018, and an accomplished scholar of hadith and Sufi master; (3) Maulana Ehsan ul-Haq, son of Raiwind’s second *amīr* Hajji Babu Bashir Ahmad and *khalīfah* (spiritual successor) of Tablighi Jama’at founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi’s nephew Shaykh-ul Hadith Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi; (4) Maulana Abdur Rahman, a pious elder of the Tablighi Jama’at known for his rigorous asceticism (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWf1V6xkJDE>). In addition, he was a personal attendant to Mufti Zainul Abideen, a respected scholar who had been a companion of Tablighi Jama’at founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas during his final illness (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZe8yR7HI4U>).
- <sup>5</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttJKc0yJ5CK>. Hajji Muhammad Abdul Wahhab, one of the most important global leaders of the Tablighi Jama’at, was head of the Pakistani chapter from 1992 until his death in 2018. Maulana Tariq Jamil married around 1983 and has five children, three sons and two daughters.

- <sup>6</sup> To take a recent example, in December 2021 he visited the Sri Lankan embassy to express grief and condemnation at the mob killing of Sri Lankan national Priyantha Kumar in Sialkot for alleged blasphemy; see <https://www.dawn.com/news/1665216> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnZd9rj8nWE>.
- <sup>7</sup> The *Isrā'īliyyāt* refer to a corpus of extra-Quran'ic exegetical material derived mainly from Christian and Jewish sources which has formed "a nebulous and undisciplined stratum of popular culture" (Berkey 2001, p. 41) in Islamic societies.
- <sup>8</sup> In his speech, Mufti Taqi stated: "It is my heartfelt prayer that Allah blesses this work you are commencing today, makes it successful and also grants you divine aid (*taufiq*) to bring it to fruition with sincerity (*ikhlas*) . . . [so you may] achieve the virtuous objectives before you with special divine grace. Hadhrat Maulana Tariq Jamil Sahib, may his blessings abide (*dāmat barakātuhu*), is an asset for our nation and community. In this regard, after conveying my greetings of peace to him, I congratulate him that his personal name is being utilised in this venture. I pray that this becomes a means of virtuous reputation (*naik nāmi*) and a means of serving (*khidma*) Allah's religion and that it results in external and internal benefits, and that Allah confers upon him increases in external and internal [blessings]" (see <https://youtu.be/fDTu3O4xsTg>).
- <sup>9</sup> Conversations with senior Tablighis in Gujranwala and Raiwind (3 and 7 April 2022).
- <sup>10</sup> The foreword to a lengthy Urdu critique of Jamil published in the UK observes: "The respected personality of Sir Maulana Tariq Jamil Sahib is not in need of any introduction. He is famous in the capacity of a global preacher and in this capacity attends diverse religious assemblies across the world addressing Muslims; the Muslim masses thus benefit from him. From the beginning, he has been attached to the Tablighi Jama'at discharging the responsibilities of *da'wa* and *tabligh* in conformance with the principles stipulated by the elders of Tabligh for scholars and masses involved in the Jama'at. However, for some years now Maulana appears to have freed himself from these principles and now he travels the world delivering lectures in the capacity of an independent preacher" (Muhammad Thaqalain Jawed Haidari in Rangooni 2019, p.4).
- <sup>11</sup> There are further examples of evolution in the history of the *maslak*. As Metcalf (2008) also illustrates, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani successfully added an activist political wing to what had hitherto largely been an 'ulamā'-centric educational reformist movement.
- <sup>12</sup> Conversations with senior Tablighis in Pakistan and the UK (April and May 2022).
- <sup>13</sup> A certain Azad Khan—under the misleading title of Maulana Azad Jameel—gained some fame as an Islamic preacher in Pakistan by imitating to a remarkable degree Maulana Tariq Jamil's intonations of voice, idiomatic expressions, and general rhetorical style leading to a widespread misconception that he was the Maulana's son. This caused some chagrin to Jamil's family who were eventually obliged to formally distance themselves from him. For more, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ROT4v3HRF0>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toDJ4cAQIwk>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-hfi0HFdKI>; <https://thenamal.com/latest/fact-check-azad-jameel-is-not-maulana-tariq-jameels-son/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIX5gTM3bFQ> (accessed on 9 September 2022).
- <sup>14</sup> Conversations with senior Tablighis and 'ulamā' in Raiwind and Islamabad (April 2022).
- <sup>15</sup> Specifically, Masud (2000) contrasts Maulana Ihtisham ul-Hasan Kandhalawi's (a close relative and early associate of Tablighi Jama'at founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas) and Shaykh Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's intellectual engagements with modernity, rooted in a rationalizing discourse, with Shaykh-ul Hadith Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalawi's more interiorized Sufi-inflected ethos rooted in strong theological foundations. I am grateful to Professor Muhammad Khalid Masud for bringing this to my attention (personal conversation, Islamabad, 14 April 2022).
- <sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Dietrich Reetz for suggesting this phrase to me (personal communication, 19 August 2022).
- <sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Muhammad Khalid Masud for suggesting this phrase to me (personal communication, 3 September 2022).
- <sup>18</sup> Tablighi Jama'at's second global *amīr* Maulana Yusuf Kandhalawi, son of the founder, unequivocally stated: "It is necessary to avoid usual [*riwāji*] channels like newspapers, advertisement and the press for the publicity of this work, since the customary words cannot properly describe this significant work. This is an extraordinary work. The media, as an ordinary means, tends to reinforce the current ordinary customs in the society. It cannot explain this extraordinary work. The true forms of publicity are *gasht*, *ta'lim* and *tashkil*" (Masud 2000, p. 80).

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