DA’WAH IDEOLOGY

Haji Sharitullah was basically a preacher (da ‘I) and he spent his entire life in preaching (da,wah) of his ideology. Preaching and da,wah are used here in their in widest possible meaning. His reform activities as well as social and political ideas were simple different facets of da,wah that inspired and motivated him to take up the challenging task of making a Herculean effort to pull out his people from the degrading position in which he found them at that time. This aspect of his mission has not received. It is therefore, necessary to try to understand different aspects and dimension of the preaching of Haji Shariatullah and his immediate successor.

The entire efforts of Haji Shariatullah, Dudu Miyan and their successor were in reality aimed at propagating and preaching the original ideals of Islam. This also included, besides the reformation of religious outlook, reformation of socio-political and cultural aspects of the contemporary Muslim society of Bengal. As such, no aspect of faraizi activity could be Faraizi activity could be possibly excluded from the ambit this movement from close quarters and came to the conclusion that Haji Shariatullah was the first preacher in Eastern Bengal.
For example, wise says that Haji Shariatullah "born of poor Muhammadan weavers amid the swamps of Eastern Bengal, should have been the first preacher to denounce the superstitions and corruption's, which a long contact with Hindu polytheism had developed is sufficiently remarkable".¹ Same opinion has been pronounced by Hunter and others, who had almost copied the words of wise.²

Renowned English Orientalist and an authority on the history of Muslim preaching, T.W. Arnold who has been for his objectivity and lack of bias against Islam and Muslim, has observed:

"In the nineteen century there was a remarkable of the Mohammadan reigion in Bengal and several sects that owe their origin to the influence of the wahhabi reformation have their missionaries through the province out remnants of Hindi

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1. James wis, Eastern Bengal, p.23
   Ravensaw said, "Haji Shariatullah was a noted preacher" see, Trial of Ahmadullah, p.140.
superstitions, awakening religious zeal and spreading the faith among the unbelievers".  

This observation in fact relates to the faraizi Da’wah activities as this was almost the only movement that was engaged in this kind of work around that time.

F. Strong confirmed the same view when he observed: “Of recent years what might be described a Muhammadan revival under the auspicious of itinerant Mullahs has been going on. They traveled about the koran, result was considerable, many Muslim joined what in locally called the community of Naya Muslmans”. This is not to suggest that this great change in the perception and outlook of the people was brought about by the faraizis alone. Muslim karamat Ali, leader of the Tayyuni Movement and his followers as well as the later followers of jihad movement of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid had also made significant contribution at least in the region about which F. strong speaks.

   ; J. Wise, p.32.
The faraizis adopted Quranic teachings and prophetic *da'wah* activities as the main ideology of their movement. According to one faraizi book "in the Quran there are many injunctions and directions. Similarly the *Hadith* literature is replete with the details of the prophetic mission and the problems and hardships that the prophet had to face in this way. After the prophet it has been the bounden duty of the Muslim community to continue this mission".  

According to the Quranic injunction at least one section of the Muslim community should be engaged in the missionary activities. Another verse of the Holy Quran charges the entire Muslim community with this responsibility. It further them responsible to propagate good and resist evil (*amr bil-maruf wa nahy anil munkar*).  

6. Dudu Miyan, *Faraizi Jamater Adarsha*, p.4. The writer quoted one verse of Holy Quran where Allah declared: "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good and enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity," *Al-Quran* : Al-i- *Imran* : 104.  
7. Dudu Miyan, p.5 He quoted here another verse of Holy Quran, it reads: you are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind. Enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah." *Al-i- Imran* : 110.
In this regard the contemporary Muslim society of Bengal was a case in point. The people had fallen far away from the ideals of Islam. They were leading a life that had almost nothing to do with Islam except the name.\(^8\) This could be changed only through dedicated preaching (\textit{da'wah}). Haji Shariatullah and his successors were first of all preachers. They preached original teachings of Islam to the people who had forgotten it. And it was because of their preaching that a revolution of sorts happened in Bengal, a total change in the views and lives of people and almost a complete break from the past.\(^9\) \textit{Da'wah} (\textit{Tabligh} as it is called in faraizi literature)\(^10\) or preaching therefore occupies the central in the faraizi ideology. It is perhaps because of this importance of \textit{da'wah} that the faraizis themselves have written on this subject. But it should also be noted that these writings and explanations belong to a much later period. From the earlier period we do not posses any theoretical exposition of this concept. As also other concepts associated with them. About the early period, their activities are

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{10.} See, Dudu Miyan, \textit{Faraizi Jamater Adersha}.
\end{itemize}
our best guides and their basic principles could be deduced and formulated in its light.

According to the faraizis, Da’wah is an obligatory duty of every Muslim and a means of securing the pleasure of Allah. Every Muslim should engage himself in Da’wah. The field of Da’wah is not confined to personal life, rather its activities should be extended to all spheres of life and efforts should be made to take message of Islam to everybody.\(^{11}\)

According to one Faraizi book, following prophet’s example, Haji Shariatullah began his mission with a call to those who were nearest to him. He first called upon his relatives and neighbors to join his movement, and take the baiat of Taubah, to order their lives according to the Quran, the sunnah and Hanafi jurisprudence.\(^{12}\)

But it was not a smooth sail for him. He met with stiff opposition from various corners. Besides the zamindars and indigoplanter, who opposed him because they perceived his

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   ; Dudu Miyan, Faraizi Jamater Adarsha, p.13.
   ; M.A. Latif, Amar Jivani, p.50.

12. M.A. Latif, Amar Jivani, p.34.
mission as a threat to their vested interests, ever the traditional Muslim also bitterly opposed his efforts directed at reforming the Muslim society of Bengal. Those Muslim who joined his hands were pressurized and ex-communicated from the society so much so that some of them came to return their Taubah. Then the Haji reconciled them. They were made to understand that Taubah was something that could not be returned. This however, explains the kinds of difficulties that he had to face in this way.\(^\text{13}\)

Afterwards, he went to Arabia for further studies. During this second visit he was instructed by the prophet in dream three times to propagate Islam in Bengal. In consequence of this, he seems to have intensified his efforts after his return.\(^\text{14}\)

As a result, he traveled to many places with a view to disseminate the fundamental teachings of Islam. These places which he visited included districts of Faridpur of Barisal, Khulna and pabna. This attracted many people to his mission, who because his ardent followers.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^\text{13}\) M.A. Latif, *Amar Jivani*, p. 35.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid, pp.43-44.
\(^\text{15}\) Ibid, pp.46-47.

; See, *Trial of Dudu Miyan*, pp.30-35.
Emulating the example of the prophet, he preached in market places, public gatherings mosques, fairs, peasants' fields, business centers and weavers' houses. This untiring effort while established his reputation as a great preaches and his following increased, it also aroused the animosity of many people who misbehaved with him and called him names.

The strategy that he adopted and the way he won the people on his side is best explained by an incident, which occurred while he was coming back from Arabia. While travelling through Bihar, he fell into the hands of robbers who robbed him of all his possessions including his books and the relics he was bringing from Arabia. With a view to reforming these people, he joined their gang. These hardened criminals were deeply impressed by his character and piety and not only renounced their wicked ways, but they because his zealous supporters.

16. Ibid.
   ; Ency, of Islam, (1927), vol. 11, p.57.
   ; JASB, p.48,
   ; O’Malley, BDG, Faridpur, 1925, p.38.
But this strategy did not always work. There were occasions when he had no other alternative but to withdraw. His experience in Nayabari in Modern Munshigonj district is a case in point. He was virtually driven out of that place. Afterwards he decided to settle down in his birth place and carry on his mission from there. There he had already some following to whom he could look for help and support. The results of this decision were momentous and in the words of James Wise "in short time he enlisted the vast majority of the uneducated and most excitable classes of the Mohammadan population. His influence has become unbounded and no one hesitated to carry out his orders".

According to one Faraizi puthi, "As a pious guide he taught every one lessons in kalima, fasting prayer, hajj, zakat and the other fundamental teachings of Islam according to Hanafi School of law. He did not teach them only shariat, but also Tariqat, Haqiqat and Ma'rifat". By his preaching many people came to believe in his philosophy and Islam flourished.

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
Most of the time the mode of his journeys, which he undertook for the purpose of preaching, was boat. It is perhaps due to this fact that the river ports and those places easily accessible by rivers came under his greater influence than other places. In one such journey he started “from Bahadurpur and undertook religious journey by boat to the river ports of Faridpur, Barisal, Dhaka, Narayanganj, Chandpur, Comilla (Tipperah) and Noakhali. His frequent visits to those places attracted the ordinary Muslims to his way of thinking and ideals and imbued them with a desire to lead their lives according to these ideals”.  

It was a very strenuous life. Preaching and reforming a society with deep rooted traditions and well-entrenched practices was not an easy job. But with single-minded commitment to his mission, sincerity of purpose and a remarkable tenacity, he ultimately succeeded in convincing the people about the genuineness of his mission. The change that followed in the thinking and lives of the people so was deep and significant that games wise was obliged to remark (in 1883 and in 1894) that “the apathetic and careless Bengali peasants

should have been roused into enthusiasm is still more extraordinary. To effect this required a sincere and sympathetic preacher and on one ever appealed more strongly to the sympathies of a people than Shariatullah. People admired him as a blameless and exemplary life ... they venerated him as a father, able to advise them in seasons of adversity and give consolation in times of affliction”.  

Dudu Miyan who succeeded. Haji Shariatullah, was a dynamic leader and a persuasive preacher. Through his constant journeys and vigorous preaching, he was able to attract a large number of people to the fold of Faraizi movement. His success in the field of preaching the Faraizi teaching could be assessed from the fact that his name almost because a household name in many areas of Bengal. It was because of his exertions that the movement spread not only throughout Bengal but parts of Assam also came under its influence.

   : ______ JASB, 1894, P.49.
25. J. wise *Eastern Bengal*, p.24
   : ______ JASB, P.50.
The strategy that he adopted for disseminating the teachings of the movement consisted of personal visits to the regions concerned. Wherever it was not possible, he sent his emissaries for the purpose. As they used to travel by boats, the regions lying on the banks of Ganges and Meghna were their favorite resorts. As a result, over the period of the time this region particularly became a stronghold of the Faraizis. Some school have pointedly referred to this fact. For example, James wise says “The churs or alluvial islands among the Ganges and Meghna are the favorite retreats of the Farazi royts”. A modern scholar R.L. Roy also reported that “the movement spread along the banks of the delta down which the Muslim missionaries floated by boats in order to preach the cult of Muslim peasants”.

According to a Faraizi *puthi* (B.S 1335/1928) Dudu Miyan also succeeded in converting many non-Muslims to Islam.

27. Shorter Ency. of Islam, 1974, p.100.
   ; J. Wise, Eastern Bengal, p.37.
   ; J.E. Gastrell, Geography and Statistical Report of the Districts Jessore, Fareedpur and Backergunge, Calcutta, 1866, p.36.
29. Ratna Lekha Roy, Change in Bengal, Monohar, Delhi, 1979, p.244.
   ; Mohibuddin Ahmad, Pir Dudu Miyan, Shariatia Library and Prokashani, Dhaka, 1992, p.15.
through his preaching. But this is not supported by other contemporary or near contemporary sources. It is possible that some people might have converted but their number would not have been large enough to attract the attention of others. For example, we know it for certain that second wife of Dudu Miyan was a converted Brahmin lady.  

The tradition was carried by the successors of Dudu Miyan who continued to treat this aspect of the movement as very important segment of their activities. Besides direct preaching and inviting people to accept their ideology, they resorted to establishing madrases, hifz-khanas, orphanage, rendering social-political organisations, sending their leaders to the provincial and National Assemblies, summoning justice through their panchayats (village courts), driving out all anti-Islamic activities from the society, and endeavoring for establishing Islam ideology at state level.  

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32. Tradition current in the Family of Haji Shariatulla. There are many organisations established by the Farazis. Some of these are “The Faraizi Jamat”, The Faraizi *Ulma Jamat*, “The Faraizi Youth Jamat”, etc. For sending their leader to the Assemblies, see, Proceedings of Pakistan National Assembly, 1965
Through education and social services they sought to disseminate their ideas and reach out to the people. There could be no doubt that it was a very effective method. It would seem that they had taken a leaf out of the Christian missionaries.

Moreover, the tradition of extensive tours by the Faraizi leader, for the propose of propagation of their ideology was carried by the successive leaders. During these tours they had waz-Mahfil Tafsir Mahfil, religious conference etc. To bring home to the people their basic message.

In recent time they have even established institutions with the express purpose of training and preparing preachers (Muballighs). Da’wah was the basis of Faraizi movement and in spite of many ups and downs, they had by and large stuck to it and it continues to be guiding principle of their activities. Percival Spears has rightly observes that the Faraizi leaders “were actively propagandists and did much to purify and strengthen East Indian Islam”.  

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33. See, Dudu Miyan, *Faraizi Jamater Adarsha*, p.44.