Chapter 3

Dawood Shah and his religious reforms

In the Indian subcontinent, the emergence of national and political consciousness during the colonial period was ‘intertwined with religious revival’ (Anderson, 2012). Religious revival movements played a pivotal role in homogenizing some of the people but at the same time it also highlighted the heterogeneity inherent among the people. Religion attained a new and significant role among all the people. Amidst this renewed interests in reviving and restoring the religious ideology among the people, it must be pointed out that the Dravidian Movement is the only movement that was completely against the idea of religion itself. In this chapter we will look at the religious changes that took place among the Tamil Muslims and how these religious movements and other movements such as the Dravidian Movement affected the Tamil Muslims.

Islamic reform movements during the colonial period were of two types, one that advocated returning to the purest form of Islam by following only the Qur’an and the Hadiths and eliminating all other innovations (bid’ah). The other movement advocated the following of Qur’an and the Hadiths, but doing it in the light of the modern developments and advances in the way of life. Maulana Shah Abdul Wahab (1831 – 1921) who was born in the southern part of India was considered to be the earliest reformer among the Tamil Muslims. He
belonged to the former group of reformists and he started the Madrasa Al-Baqiyat As-Salihat in order to spread his teachings. Next and the most important of the reformists among the Tamil Muslims was Dawood Shah who belonged to the second category. He was a Muslim reformist without any formal Madrasa education, and his modern education might have been one of the reason for his reformist tendency. It cannot be disputed that no other reformer contributed to the development of the Tamil Muslims like Dawood Shah did and therefore this chapter will deal with his work in detail.

Born in the year 1885, at Keezhmattur, Tanjore District, Dawood Shah completed his early education at Natchiar Kovil. At the age of 18 he completed his matriculation and at the same age he lost his father. He was a close friend of C.P. Ramanujam26 during his school days. In the year 1908 he completed his F.A. (First Arts Degree). In the year 1912, he completed his B.A. Degree. In the same year he also wrote the exam conducted by Madurai Tamil Sangam in Tamil and got a gold medal for scoring the highest marks. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan27 and U. Ve. Saminatha Aiyar28 were some of his mentors during his college days. After finishing his education in the year 1912, he joined the Government service as a clerk and rose to the level of Sub magistrate and had a bright chance of becoming the Deputy Collector. But he resigned the government job for the sake of Khilafat Movement. Simultaneously, he was also involved in social activities and started the “Arivananda Sabha”

26 An Indian mathematician known for his works in the field of number theory and algebraic geometry.
27 An Indian philosopher and also the first Vice-President of India.
28 An important Tamil Scholar who was instrumental in printing many Tamil works from palm leaf manuscripts.
in the year 1914 along with Janab Khan and K. Ameeruddin. Soon he rose to be the head of the organization and renamed it as “Muslim Sangam” in the year 1919.

During these early years itself Dawood Shah developed an interest in translating the Qur’an into Tamil. But as he was not a product of the Madrasah, he could not translate the Qur’an directly from Arabic. Therefore he tried to translate the Qur’an from English and he chose the translation done by Muhammad Ali as his source. This choice that he made during his early days had a lasting impact throughout his life. Muhammad Ali, a missionary and a well-known associate of the Ahmadiyya Movement. After coming to know about Muhammad and his translation and other works, Dawood Shah contacted him in an effort to get his support for the translation project that Dawood Shah had begun. As a result Dawood Shah was invited to London to work as a missionary along with Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din and was also made an editor of Muslim Review for some time. But after a year’s time (April, 1922 – May, 1923) in England Dawood Shah realised that he was unable to focus on the translation project that he had set out to accomplish. Therefore, despite the insistence of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din to stay in London, Dawoodh Shah returned to Tamil Nadu. This connection with Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din who in turn was a supporter of the Ahmadiyya Movement made it easier for others to connect Dawood Shah with the Ahmadiyya Movement, though he completely denied the allegations.

Like most community or the political leaders of that time, Dawood Shah too used the print medium in various forms to further the causes that he believed in. He started his
publishing career in the year 1919 with the circulation of a free notice every month which was collected and published at the end of the year in the name of *Muslim Sanga Mutharkamalam* (The first flower of the Muslim Sangam) followed by the *Muslim Sanga Marukamalam* (The next flower of the Muslim Sangam) in the year 1920. Then he turned the free notice into a regular journal and with just 50 subscribers he started the journal *Tattuva Islam* in the year 1921. Later in the year 1923 he changed the name of the journal into *Darul Islam* with the aim of covering not only the philosophical aspects of Islam but to cover everything that concerns the Muslims and Islam. *Darul Islam* was published continuously till the year 1957 (38 Years) with some interruptions in between. Through this journal Dawood Shah tried to spread his reformist ideas to the Muslims as well as other Tamil people.

The reform activities of Dawood Shah was met with a hostile reaction from the Ulema. He was an educated scholar devoted to the development and revival of Islam, but the fact that he was not a product of any Madrasah made the Ulema to be critical of his views. He propagated many reforms such as presenting the Khutbah (Friday Sermon) in Tamil and as mentioned before, was also one of the pioneers in the translation of the Qur’an into Tamil. As he was not a product of Madrasah, he didn’t have a complete command over Arabic. So he translated the Qur’an into Tamil from English sources. This was the time when the Ulema were completely against any kind of translation of Qur’an. Not only the Qur’an but he also translated some of the Hadiths into Tamil. He also supported education for women, and gave full support when Justice Basheer Ahamed started the first women’s college (Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed College for Women, Teynampet) in Chennai. Because of his
reformist tendencies, he was criticised by many people and he claims that some journals were started just to attack him (journals like *Al Kalam, Thajul Islam and Musalman*). Almost all the issues of *Darul Islam* we can find an article either in defence of his views or against some ‘mullahs’ who follow some un-Islamic practices. Some people called him as ‘Muslim Periyar’ because of the similarities between his activities and the activities of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy. The reasons behind the hostility of the Ulema towards Dawood Shah and *Darul Islam* are discussed in detail in the following pages.

Dawood Shah’s political life was not very significant. But he was a member of some political parties throughout his life. Just like Periyar, Dawood Shah too was a supporter of Congress during his early years. He joined the Congress in the early 20th century. He rose to become the district head while he was in the Congress. But during the 1940s, inspired by Jinnah, he joined the Muslim League. He published many articles in his journal supporting Pakistan and also Dravidasthan. He also supported Periyar in his move to get Dravidasthan. Though he supported Periyar in the beginning, later he grew sceptical of him and in the end he turned completely hostile towards Periyar and his ideas. These changing allegiances, from Congress to Muslim League and his oscillating opinion about Periyar show that Dawood Shah had a world view of his own despite some of the influences of the political parties and other ideologies.
The cover page of *Darul Islam* commemorating the 10th anniversary of its publication.
To reiterate some of the points mentioned earlier, it can be clearly said that Dawood Shah was at the forefront of all the reform activities that took place among the Tamil Muslims. He became active during one of the most important movements that took place among the Muslims of India - the Khilafat Movement, and he continued to be active till the end of his days. His active years coincides with the most active years of the Muslims of India and it is my opinion that while studying about the religious movements of India and particularly Tamil Nadu, it is impossible to do it without taking into consideration the activities of Dawood Shah.

One of the most influential movements that had a lasting impact upon Dawood Shah was the non-Brahmin movement. During the late 19th century, because of many activities of the British such as the establishment of schools and colleges, recruitment of Indians into the lower ranks of the civil services, the establishment of the communication network such as the post, telegraph, railway, etc. and the introduction of printing presses, there was an increasing awareness about the status of the individuals in the society and the relationship between various societies. As this was the case in the whole of India, Eugene F. Irschick in his pioneering book titled *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, points out that in the South Indian context, the awareness of the difference between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins or the Dravidians grew and the non-Brahmins started realising that despite their disproportionate population, the Brahmins occupied most of the position in the government jobs and other major jobs that were available to the Indians during the colonial period (Irschick, 1969). This awareness among the non-Brahmins culminated in the formation of a political organization in order to counter the influence of the Brahmins. In the year 1916,
the Justice Party was formed by some of the prominent non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency in order to safeguard their interests. The most interesting thing is that the term ‘non-Brahmins’ is interpreted as to cover all those who don’t belong to the category of the Brahmins. This included the Muslims of the Madras Presidency too (Irshick, 1969).

According to Eugene F. Irshick, the Brahmins occupied a disproportionate position in power which provoked the non-Brahmins to show their power as a population which was comparatively larger than that of the Brahmins. The sole purpose of the non-Brahmins was to overthrow the hold of the Brahmins in every domain possible. This awareness of the disproportionate power that was being held by the Brahmins and the meagre opportunities that were available to the non-Brahmins were an outcome of the modern education facilitated by the British. The entire discourse of the social consciousness in the Tamil context is situated in the dichotomy between the concepts of Brahmin versus non-Brahmins/Dravidians (Irshick, 1969).

Not only the Brahmins occupied a prominent position in government jobs and other political positions but they also occupied a prominent position in the social and religious spheres. They exercised their power in the form of religious rituals that used to be performed only in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit language was the stronghold of the Brahmins and only the Brahmins were allowed to perform the rituals using Sanskrit either in temples or in any other places. The non-Brahmin movement that emerged during the early twentieth century tried to overcome the dominance of the Brahmins in all the fields. In order to secure government
jobs, English education was necessary and the non-Brahmins started acquiring that and for that purpose they also started many schools and colleges. To overcome the dominance of the Brahmins in the political field, ‘The Madras Non-Brahmin Association’ was formed in the year 1912, which was later developed into the Justice Party (1916). Through these political organizations the non-Brahmins put forth the idea of communal representation and reservation in order to give the non-Brahmins and the other minorities a better chance of development. The non-Brahmins had an unlikely ally in the British for the reason that till that period the Brahmins were the power group who sought to overthrow the power of the British. In order to counter the activities of the Brahmins and the Congress which was the political organization initiated by the Brahmins, the British supported the non-Brahmin movement and their agenda (Irschick, 1969). The non-Brahmins saw the Brahmins as their first enemy and they utilised the opportunities provided by the British in order to achieve their aim.

Dawood Shah became active in this context when the debate between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins was gathering momentum. Though Dawood Shah doesn’t directly acknowledge the influence of the non-Brahmin movement upon him, the manifesto that he sets out for himself clearly alludes to this influence. In the year 1920, he published the ‘Muslim Sangha Marukamalam’ in which he wrote an article titled ‘Emathu Kolgai (Our Policy)’ in which he points out some of the goals that he was planning to achieve. He begins the essay by pointing out how rational the Islamic religion is and the necessity to do research in the Qur’an and the Hadiths in order to incorporate the Islamic religion with the modern sensibility. In order to do research, every Muslim should be able to read and understand the
meaning of the Qur’an and therefore Dawood Shah highlights the importance of translating the Qur’an into the regional languages. Here he highlights the point that because of the narrow mindedness of the Ulema (he uses the term *Purohits* or *Brokers*) the real philosophy of the Islamic religion is hidden in the Arabic language. He also adds that because of the misleading teachings of the Ulema, the Muslims saw the English language as the language of the *Nasranis* (the Arabic word for Christians) and therefore they should not learn the language. In short he blamed the Ulema or the *brokers* for the backwardness of the Muslim community. The term ‘purohits’ is commonly used by both Dawood Shah and Periyar to denote the ‘brokers’ who try to mediate between the people and their gods. Both Periyar and Dawood Shah attacked such ‘brokers’ for all the negative things that prevails in their religion. Apart from this, among Dawood Shah’s mottos, the last one is to save the Muslims from the Brahmanic forces at all level. All these points clearly shows that Dawood Shah was influenced by Periyar and his non-Brahmin movement.

Dawood Shah who was a product of the modern education was not only influenced by the non-Brahmin movement, but also by the pan-Islamic developments that were happening all over the world. His trip to England (1922) and his stint as an editor of the *Islamic Review* during his stay in Woking gave him the kind of exposure that helped him to have a broad understanding of Islam. With this understanding, he returned to Tamil Nadu in the year 1923 in order to work for the Tamil Muslim society.
Because of a lack of clear understanding of the Qur’an and the Hadiths the Tamil Muslims were influenced by other religions and many un-Islamic practices crept into Islam. The reform movements focussed on eliminating some of the un-Islamic practices like tomb worshipping (dargah worship), muharram celebrations, and other practices inspired by Hinduism such as tying thali (Karumani [black beaded ornament] as known among the Tamil Muslims) during the marriage ceremony, revering Alims as the ultimate authority on Islamic matters, etc. Dawood Shah played a very important role in trying to eliminate these practices from the lives of the Tamil Muslims. His activities began with the inauguration of the Natchiar Koil Muslim Sangam (Association) in the second decade of the 20th century. His publication activity began in the year 1919.

Some of the reform activities that Dawood Shah advocated and will be analysed in the present research are:

1. Undermining the absolute authority of the Ulema (Purohits is the term used by Dawood Shah).
2. Translating Islamic works into Tamil.
3. ‘Kutba’ - (Friday Sermon) to be presented in Tamil.
4. Educating Muslims including women in Tamil and English.
5. Equality of Muslim Men and Women.
6. In national issues, preventing the Muslims from joining the Brahmanic forces.

(Ayoob, 2007)
From the above list we can identify the basic interests that drove Dawood Shah. He points out that his inspirations were Khwaja Kamaluddin’s *Islamic Review* (1916) and Muhammad Ali’s English translation of Qur’an. While his Islamic ideas were shaped by Khwaja Kamaluddin and Muhammad Ali, his opinions on social issues such as dethroning the authority of Ulema, performing religious activities in Tamil, education and equality of men and women and overthrowing the power of the Brahmins, might have been influenced by the non-Brahmin Movement and the ideas of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy because they too had similar goals (Hardgrave, 1965). The Dravidian Movement was also identified as the Non-Brahmin movement. The towering figure of the Dravidian Movement, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy was completely against Brahminism. He propagated that because the Brahmins are at the top of the caste hierarchy, their dominant ideology is the root-cause of all inequalities in the society. Therefore it is necessary to overthrow the hegemony of the Brahmins in every field in order for the society to achieve real freedom and equality.

The reform activities of Dawood Shah listed above can be further divided into two sub categories:

1. **Religious reforms**

   These include reform activities involving the Tamil Muslim community alone. We can call them internal reform. Some of the reform activities that can be listed here are:

   a. Undermining the absolute authority of the Ulema.

   b. Educating women.

   c. Achieving equality of Muslim men and women.
d. Cleansing Islam of all the un-Islamic practices.

2. Cultural and Social reforms

Some of the reform activities that focused not only on the Tamil Muslims but also involves their relationship with other communities can be included here. For example, their relationship with the larger Tamil community and the Muslim communities in the remaining part of India and the world. Some of the reform activities that can be listed here are:

1) Translating Islamic works (Qur’an, Hadiths, Khutbah sermons, etc)
2) Issues concerning Language and Script
3) The relationship between the Muslims and other communities.

The present chapter will analyze the cultural and religious reform or the internal reforms that were initiated by Dawood Shah. The next chapter will deal with the cultural and social reforms that took place among the Tamil Muslims through Dawood Shah’s efforts.

Let us begin with Dawood Shah’s understanding of Islam and the situation of the Muslims all over the world during his time. He points out that ‘Falah’ – To bring out the inner greatness of men – is the main aim of Islam. Dawood Shah highlights that though this was easier for the Muslims during the period of the prophet and the caliphs, in recent times they are finding it difficult to achieve this goal. He attributes it to the influence of the West.

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29 ‘Melnaattinar’ is the term used by Dawood Shah. He refers to Europe, America and Russia when he uses the term West.
When the western civilization started spreading all over the world, the Islamic civilization started declining (Shah, 1924). The degrading situation of the Muslims was recognized as early as the 18th century by a scholar and preacher named Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. His activities were identified as Wahhabism or Wahhabi mission. Dawood Shah highlights that during this time, there were two groups of reformists:

1. A group that advocated incorporating the Western influence and developing along with them.
2. A second group that wanted to completely do away with the Western influence and bring back the pristine Islam that was there during the Prophet’s and Khalifas’ period.

Despite their efforts, the influence of the West was inevitable and eventually both the groups felt the need to deal with it. Through their colonization, the west tried to dominate the ‘rest of the world’. The colonization was not welcomed in the ‘rest of world’ because of their ill-treatment of the local people. Dawood Shah points out that the West used the technique of ‘divide and rule’ in order to achieve their goal. For these reasons, people from the rest of the world wanted to get rid of the colonizers from their countries, but they were doubtful as to whether it is possible to defeat the West. But Dawood Shah points to the Russo-Japanese war (1904 – 1905), which the Japanese won, as the turning point when the

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30 Keezhnaadu - is the term used by Dawood Shah in order to refer to the countries that were colonised by the West. Shah also includes Japan in this category and therefore it is not possible to use the term colonized countries as Japan was never formally colonized, instead it was a colonizer itself. Therefore the term ‘rest of the world’ is used in order to capture Dawood Shah’s concept. The distinction used by Shah also refers to West and East, thus not only colonizer and colonized but Western powers (which includes Russia) and Eastern countries (including Japan). Dawood Shah used these two distinctions (west-east and colonizer and colonized) interchangeably.

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‘rest of the world’ realised that even the West can be defeated. The Muslims from the ‘rest of the world’ were also inspired by this event.

Amidst these developments in the ‘rest of the world’ the reform activities among the Muslims started gaining momentum. Among these reform activities Dawood Shah quotes two which can be considered to have had a vast influence upon him, they are the Senussi Movement (1837 to the present day) and the movement led by Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1839 – 1897). The Senussi movement was initiated by Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ali as-Senussi (1787 – 1859). Afghani was from Afghanistan as the name suggests and Senussi was from Africa. Both Senussi and Afghani were reformers who supported a liberal Islam without adhering to any Imam or any of the four schools of Islamic law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi‘i, Hanbali). They advocated ‘Ijtihad’ – independent reasoning. Muslims should be self-reliant and they should be able to read and understand the Qur’an themselves. And to achieve such a self-reliance, the Muslims should be educated, not only in the Islamic knowledge but they should acquire the Western knowledge too. They should acquire only the necessary things from the Western knowledge and leave out the unnecessary things. Only this way they can achieve the independent reasoning capability. Because of their insistence on not relying on any mediators in order to understand Allah, they were disliked by the Ulema community and they issued fatwas against them. Dawood Shah also urged the Tamil Muslims to use their self-reasoning capability and not rely on any mediators to reach Allah. And for this he was attacked by the Ulema.
Among the reforms that Dawood Shah undertook, undermining the authority of the Ulema tops the list. He equates the Ulema with the Brahmin priests of Hinduism whom the Dravidian Movement attacked vehemently. The Brahmin priests identify themselves as the absolute authority in the matters of religion and they never allow anybody to interrogate anything related to religion. They maintained this position with the help of Sanskrit in which all the religious texts of Hinduism have been written. Nobody other than the Brahmins were allowed to learn Sanskrit and read the texts for themselves. Similarly though the Tamil Muslims were taught to read Arabic, it was rarely that they understood what they read. This is because of the tradition before the print culture where only the Ulema had access to the religious manuscript and the common people believed whatever the Ulema said. Though they might have been truthful to the manuscripts in the beginning, the Islamic reformers accused that, later they started deviating from the actual message. (Haj, 2008).

Therefore, for the common people whatever the Alim said became the authentic word. Despite such restrictions, if some Muslim comes up with a new understanding of the Qur’an or the Hadiths which is not in sync with the Ulema’s understanding, then it will be confronted by a fatwa (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) and he will be branded as a Kafir (one who doesn’t believe in the principles of Islam) or calling his ideas as bid’at (unacceptable innovation). This is what happened with Dawood shah too when he tried to reform the Tamil Muslim society based on the modern sensibility. The Ulema branded him as a Kafir and advised the other Muslims not to listen to his words. Dawood Shah countered this by Quoting Prophet Mohammed who mentioned that no one except Allah has the power to judge anybody (Samy, 2007: 135). In this way, Dawood Shah
disapproved of the activities of the Ulema and also questioned the authority of the Ulema. He attributed the degraded position of Islam and the Muslims during the colonial period to the ignorance and greed of the Ulema. Thus, in order to enlighten the common people he advocated translating the Qur’an into Tamil and also advocated that all the religious proceedings must be conducted in Tamil.

Periyar in one of his article titled “Danger to Mullahs” (Kudiarasu, October 27, 1929) talks about the influence of the Mullahs among the Muslims and the efforts made by some of the Muslims to eradicate their influence. He says:

Now an association has emerged that has been started in order to reform the Mullahs. In the manifesto of this association, it has claimed that as the Mullahs are filled with irrational practices, irrational beliefs, religious fanaticism and stubbornness, the association was started to reform them. Like the Mullahs, the Mawlawis, Piras, and Fakirs, are all religious fanatics who are leading Islam into the wrong direction and this association will try to put an end to these un-Islamic practices. This association doesn’t attack all the Mullahs and Mawlawis as a whole, rather they attack only those who are backward and try to resist the reform activities. This act of reforming the Mullahs and making them better missionaries of the association is admirable. But eradicating the whole concept of Mullahs will be the ideal reform. Because, Mohammed the prophet didn’t approve of the
Mullahs\textsuperscript{31}. Still, the activities of this association are a good effort. (Kudiarasu, October 27, 1929)

While eradicating the whole institution of Mullahs is the ideal reform according to Periyar, he still appreciates the effort of this association. Though it is unclear which association he was referring to in this article, based on the historical background of this period it can be said that Periyar was pointing to the Natchiar Koil Muslim Sangam initiated by Dawood Shah.

Because of Dawood Shah’s antagonism towards the Ulema, he had to face many hardships in his life and endeavors. When he attacked any practice of the Ulema which was un-Islamic in nature, there was always a counter attack and just to counter his attacks many journals were started (Ayoob, 2007). But most of his attacks against the Ulema were genuine, such as going to Dargahs, celebrating Prophet’s birthday (Meelad-un-nabi), conducting Kanthuri\textsuperscript{32} festivals and reading Mawlid\textsuperscript{33}, etc. against which the Ulema had no defense, because all of them were un-Islamic practices. So the Ulema were searching for a reason to criticize Dawood Shah and his connection with the Qadiani movement provided that.

\textsuperscript{31} It is not clear as to how Periyar got this idea that Prophet Mohammed was completely against the idea of Mullahs or the Ulema. From this it can be argued that Periyar had a superficial understanding of Islam. He saw the principle of equality prevalent among the Muslims and saw an opportunity for the untouchables to escape the caste hierarchy. Apart from this principle, there were many irrational practices among the Muslims and Periyar accused the Ulema for allowing such practices to spread among the Muslims. This is the reason he equates the Ulema with the Purohits of Hinduism.

\textsuperscript{32} It is a celebration conducted in the name of Saint Quadirwali whose shrine is situated in Nagore, Tamil Nadu. This festival is conducted usually between the month of July and August.

\textsuperscript{33} Though it refers to the observance of the birthday of the Prophet, among the Tamil Muslims ‘Mawlid’ refers to reading a book that contains the life history and venerations of the Prophet.
Earlier we noted that Dawood Shah was inspired by Khwaja Kamaluddin and Muhammad Ali, both of whom were connected with the Ahmadiyya Movement or Qadiani Movement as it is known in Tamil Nadu. This movement was initiated by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908) and he claimed that he was the ‘promised messiah’ announced in the Qur’an and that he received revelations in his dreams. Because of this outrageous claim he was criticized by most of the Muslim groups. Dawood Shah in his initial days worked with Khwaja Kamaluddin in his Islamic Review, and he translated Muhammad Ali’s English translation of the Qur’an into Tamil. Though later he distanced himself from the Qadiani Movement, the Ulema never stopped connecting him and his works with the Qadiani Movement.

Because of his connection with the Qadiani Movement, reading or even possessing the works of Dawood Shah was prohibited by the Ulema. Most of the readers of Darul Islam interviewed by Ayoob, admitted that they read the journals secretly and as soon as they finished reading them they would destroy them. Though Dawood Shah never propagated the ideas of the Qadiani Movement, it was a taboo for the Tamil Muslims to read his writings. Because of this reason the popularity of Dawood Shah and his views were curtailed and it is very difficult to find his writings today.

Next in his agenda was the education of Muslims including women. Starting from early in his career, Dawood Shah was concerned about the education of the Muslims. He
strongly believed that the reason for the backwardness of the Muslims is the lack of proper education (Samy, 2007). Particularly in the Tamil context, in places like Perambur and Vellore there were Madrasas that were fairly well known among the Tamil Muslims. But according to Dawood Shah, the kind of education that was provided in these Madrasas was not suitable to make the Muslims learned men. The syllabus that was being followed in these Madrasas was very old and the students were taught completely in Arabic and sometimes in Urdu. They were not taught anything in Tamil as it is considered to be the language of the Kafirs by the Ulema in the Madrasas (Samy, 2007). Neither the Qur’an, nor the Hadiths will be taught in their mother tongue Tamil. Similarly, English as well as the science education were completely neglected. The Madrasas considered them irrelevant for their religious studies and moreover they even feared that it might even make them non-believers or Kafirs.

Moreover, these madrasas did not have a proper mechanism to test the capability of the Alim who came out of them. Dawood Shah’s accusation is that anybody who enters the madrasa and stays there for three to five years automatically become an Alim. Like in modern education, there was no examination system to assess the qualification of these Alims and everybody who entered a madrasa came out as an authority over religious matters. After lamenting over the pathetic condition of the Madrasas, Dawood shah tries to give a solution for this crisis. He says:

For the development of Islamic religion and the Muslims, the teaching methods of the Madrasas should be changed according to the modern developments such as those that are being followed in the English schools. There should be various subjects and government exams should be conducted
for each subject. Whoever clears the final exam they only should be considered as Maulavis. Moreover, everyone should learn the national language of English34 and their mother tongue Tamil. And, the Qur’an and Hadiths should be translated into Tamil so that any individual can read them. Unless reforms like these happen, it is certain that Islam in this southern country will continue to decline. (Muslim Sangha Marukamalam, 1920)

While talking about the importance of science education, Shah points out that learning science is necessary to understand the natural secrets of this world. This will help us to understand the powers of Allah more clearly. Therefore, it is necessary for every Muslim to learn science in order to become a complete Muslim. Shah kept insisting that Education is necessary for one and all irrespective of their gender. Both men and women should equally be entitled to proper education. This was a very radical thought among the Muslims of those period and many people opposed such an idea.

Dawood Shah’s analysis was that there are three reasons why the Muslim woman is not provided proper education. One is the fear that if she goes to school she will have to interact with other men which is considered to be against Islamic principles. The second reason is that most of the schools and colleges during that time (the early 20th century) were run by Christians and their ideology was included as part of the curriculum and the third

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34 Under the colonial rule, English was the official language of British India. All office matters of the government took place in the English language.
reason is the practice of child marriage prevalent among the Muslims (*Darul Islam*, Vol. 7, No. 10). Dawood Shah suggested that all these problems can be overcome by opening more and more schools by Muslims themselves and opening separate schools especially for girls. As mentioned earlier, in order to provide education for the Muslim women, Justice Basheer Ahamed initiated the process to build a college separately for women and there was not much support from the people. But Dawood Shah supported it wholeheartedly and did everything that he could for the establishment of the college, and the portrait of Dawood Shah occupies a pride of place in the college premises even today. Sitti Junaida Begum, the first woman Tamil Muslim writer published her first short story in Dawood Shah’s journal *Darul Islam* in the year 1929 (Ayoob, 2007). Apart from that, Dawood Shah was completely against child marriage. It was a common practice among the Muslims of that time to marry girls as soon as they attained the age of 8. But Dawood Shah condemned this practice and advised the Muslims to educate their girl child at least till 5th standard or till the age of 12 (*Darul Islam*, Vol. 7, No. 11).

One more practice that was prevalent among the Muslims was the practice of marrying more than one woman. It is strongly believed by some Muslims that it is acceptable in Islam to marry up to four women at the same time. The evidence that they quote from the Qur’an is from the surah An-Nisaa, verse 335. But they conveniently ignore the next verse which sets strict conditions to be followed if they were to marry more than one woman which

35 “If you fear that you shall not be able to treat the orphans with fairness, then you should not marry the women with orphan children; marry other women of your choice: two, three or four.” *Surah 4. An-Nisaa, Ayah 3.*
would be impossible for most men³⁶. Therefore, it is appropriate for Muslims to marry just one woman and be rightful to them. Dawood Shah published many articles in *Darul Islam* condemning such practice (Vol. 7, No. 12, Vol. 9, No. 3).

Another attempt by Dawood Shah to spread the true message of Islam was in the form of Friday sermons. It is a general practice among the Muslims to deliver the Friday sermon in Arabic. Though the Arabic name ‘Khutbah’ means a speech, it generally refers to the Friday sermon. As it was their mother tongue, Prophet Mohamed and his followers naturally delivered the Friday sermon in Arabic. But Dawood Shah questioned the practice of delivering the Khutbah in Arabic in those regions where the mother tongue was different and people didn’t know Arabic. So, he published a book containing 54 speeches for every Friday in a year in the Tamil language. Even this attempt by him was condemned by the Ulema, saying that no other language can have the sacredness of Arabic.

In an article published in *Darul Islam* journal titled “Give the Devil its Due” (October, 1947), a person named Gulam claims that “Dawood Shah’s contribution towards the Tamil Muslims and Islam is matched by no other leader or Ulema”. Gulam points out that he came to this conclusion after doing a lot of research and asking many questions regarding the criticisms raised against Dawood Shah. This is the kind of influence that was enjoyed by Dawood Shah among the Tamil Muslims. He became very active during the period of Independence and Partition and his journals carry a number of articles discussing

³⁶ “But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain justice between your wives, then marry only one or any slave girl you may own. That will be more suitable, so that you may not deviate from the Right Way.” *Surah 4. An-Nisaa, Ayah 3.*
issues relating to these developments. Therefore, to emphasize again, it is necessary to analyse his own views and the views that he supported, in order to provide a complete understanding of Tamil Muslim consciousness. The present study has tried to provide a comprehensive view of the influence of Dawood Shah among the Tamil Muslims at various crucial stages in their social and political evolution during the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the crucial stages that will be analysed in the present study are the Khilafat Movement, the interaction with the Dravidian Movement, the pre- and post-partition scenario among others. As mentioned before, many scholars who have written about Tamil Muslims have neglected the contributions of Dawood Shah. J.B.P. More is the only author who mentioned in passing about Dawood Shah and his journal. Other scholars like M.A.K Fakhri and Kenneth McPherson have never mentioned about him at all.

Dawood Shah was not only an influential journalist but was also considered a great writer. Apart from the journal articles that he wrote, it is estimated that he authored around a hundred books. They include religious works, short stories, full-length novels, health related works, etc. Because Dawood Shah was concerned more with the betterment of Islam and the Muslims, most of his works dealt with Islamic themes. Some of those works are: *Islam, Iman, Islam Eppadi Cirandhadhu* (How Islam is Superior), *Prophet Mohammad* (2 parts), *Abu Bakkar Siddique* (2 parts), *Naayaka Vaakkiyam* (Prophet’s Sayings), *Naayaka Maanmiyam* (The greatness of the Prophet), *Nabigal Nayagamum Naangu Thozhargalum* (The Prophet and his four companions), *Nayagathin Nargunangal* (The good characteristics of the Prophet), *Jiyarathul Kufr, Islamiya Njanabotham* (The Wisdom of Islam), *Muslimgalin Munnetram* (The Progress of Muslims), *Sunnat Jamat, Kutba Pirasangam*
(Friday sermons), etc. These were some of the purely Islamic works written by Dawood Shah which contains most of his reformist ideas.

This chapter tried to trace the internal reform activities of Dawood Shah in relation to the spiritual development of the Tamil Muslims and the ways in which he contributed to it. Though he was a social activist who was concerned about the local issues, he was well aware of the developments at the national as well as the global level and this can be clearly seen from the writings he published in Darul Islam as well as many other books. Dawood Shah who started his career as a public servant, soon turned his focus towards social reform of the Tamil Muslim society and made it the only aim throughout his life. Though in the beginning he was more concerned about matters related to Islam and Islamic reforms, Samy points out that during the 1940s, he turned his focus towards the political and social issues that were affecting each and every individual throughout the country (Samy, 2007). Being active in public life from 1919 till his death in the year 1969 (around 50 years), Dawood Shah can be considered the only scholar who dedicated his whole life for the welfare of the Tamil Muslim society. Despite his contribution towards the reform of the Tamil Muslim society, he hasn’t received the recognition and the acceptance that he deserves. Some of the reasons for this neglect have been discussed in this chapter. Some more will be discussed in the next chapter.