

CULTURE OF *Da'wa*

ISLAMIC PREACHING IN THE MODERN WORLD

**FREE
QURAN**

مَا نَقَصَ مَالُ عَبْدٍ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ ... وَتَرْتَمَى
Charity does NOT reduce wealth

مَنْ آذَى الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا
فِيصَاعِفَهُ لَهُ وَلَهُ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ
... (سورة البقرة 275)

"Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He will multiply it for him and he will have a noble reward?" (Quran 57:11)

مَا نَقَصَ مَالُ عَبْدٍ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ ... وَتَرْتَمَى
"The wealth of a man will not diminish by Sadaqah (charity)..." (Tirmidi)

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EDITED BY

ITZCHAK WEISMANN & JAMAL MALIK

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CHAPTER 2

Discourse(s) of Da'wa in Postcolonial India

HILAL AHMED

THE DOMINANCE OF the secularism/communalism debate in postcolonial India has resulted in a static and fixed official imagination of Islam as the religion of a constitutionally protected minority. The minoritization of Islam in independent India has not only paved the way for a different kind of legal-constitutional Muslim politics but has also reshaped current Islamic religious discourses. Within this framework, ideas of *da'wa* have been redefined and reconstituted in a variety of ways in order to adjust to the limits set by the evolving discourse of minority rights.

This chapter addresses two related principal questions. First, how is it possible to make sense of an Islamic religiosity that concentrates mainly on the propagation of Islam among Muslims while deliberately dissociating itself from the controversial issue of religious conversion of non-Muslims? Second, how has the normative sphere of Islam been reconceptualized in light of this stated adherence to a restricted form of *da'wa*? To answer these questions, we must consider some broader conceptual and empirical issues. One concerns the possibility of reconstituting Islamic *da'wa* projects in a national society based on the broad principles of mutual coexistence envisioned respectively by M. K. Gandhi and Abul Kalam Azad. Another issue is the relation of such *da'wa* projects to the ideal secular imagination of the political sphere. Finally, we need to examine the view of postcolonial *da'wa* movements and thinkers regarding the question of conversion in the Hindu-majority state.

Rather than discuss the various postcolonial Indian Islamic *da'wa* projects, however, this chapter focuses on the notion of *da'wa* as a

discourse. It examines the ongoing positions of two leading Sunni *da'wa* movements—Tablighi Jama'at and Jama'at-e Islami Hind (JIH), along with the ideas of three prominent Sunni religious figures: Mawlana Wahiduddin Khan (b. 1925), Mawlana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (also known as Ali Mian) (1914–1999) and Zakir Naik (b. 1965). These organizations and religious scholars have had a profound impact on contemporary Indo-Islamic religious traditions, especially among Sunnis.

The widely spread Tablighi Jama'at professes commitment to apolitical *da'wa*, but its presence has always been felt in public life, particularly in relation to communally targeted violence against Muslims.¹ The JIH, which essentially functions as a pressure group, has had a problematic relationship with the Indian state but nonetheless was able to engage successfully in *da'wa*.² Wahiduddin Khan, head of the *al-Risala* (Mission) organization, criticizes the inward-looking attitude of Islamic religious leaders and argues for a humane, peace-oriented, rational approach to propagating Islam. Abu al-Hasan Ali Nadwi, the former rector of the Dar al-Ulum Nadwat al-Ulama and who wrote extensively on Islamic *da'wa* in India, argues for a contextual operation within the realm of the constitutional right to religion. The controversial Zakir Naik promotes a more direct and radical *da'wa* project aimed at religious conversion using various media channels.³

These practitioners seem to follow a common, unspecified impulse with certain ideas, if not an ideology, of *da'wa*. Ali Mian, at one time a member of the Tablighi Jama'at, wrote about its founder, Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (1885–1944). Wahiduddin Khan was a member of JIH at one point and has likewise been sympathetic to the work of Muhammad Ilyas. Even Zakir Naik, who follows the South African writer and public speaker of Indian origin, Ahmed Deedat (1918–2005), shares some of the most fundamental understandings of *da'wa* with other Islamic scholars. Still, there are serious debates and differences of opinion among these scholars concerning the methods of mobilization for *da'wa* work as well as regarding the question of religious conversion.⁴

CONTOURS OF *DA'WA* DISCOURSE IN COLONIAL INDIA

Nineteenth-century debates on the propagation of Islam emerged from the long process of reconstituting Islamic religiosity—codifying Islamic principles on a modern basis and searching for an ideal practice that could

rejuvenate Islam as a way of life. Religious revival was manifested in a variety of ways in response to two crucial questions: (1) how should Islamic supremacy be reestablished as the ultimate religion in a colonial context? And (2) how should Muslims be invited to give up un-Islamic practices and embrace the ideal Islam? In these debates, the fall of Muslim rule in India was conceived as an inevitable consequence of the un-Islamic values and cultural practices adopted among Muslims.

The argument that Muslims have given up the true path of Islam dominated religious discussions of late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India. Although the nature of the true Islamic path and what methods should be used to achieve it have always been highly contested issues, there was a consensus that return to the original, ideal Islam would be the ultimate solution.

Such collective self-evaluations were compatible with the demands imposed by the colonial state, especially in the post-1857 period, after the great rebellion. The pro-empire Muslim elite, led by the modernist Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898), founder of Aligarh Muslim University, evoked the inherent liberal and scientific spirit of original Islamic principles to carve out a political space for Muslims in the colonial institutional framework.⁵ This religious reinterpretation would later legitimize the reform agenda of modern education. On the other hand, the antiempire Muslim elite, especially the ulama associated with the Deoband school network, highlighted the revolutionary potentials of “original” Islam. This radical elucidation of Islam produced a powerful conceptualization of *muttahaqawmiyyat* (unified/composite nationalism)—an assertion that true Islam permits Muslims to make collaborations with other religious groups for the sake of territorial nationalism.⁶ These seemingly different Islamic explanations focused primarily on the reconversion of Muslims—the assertion that in order to establish Islamic supremacy there was a need to make better Muslims.

In the late colonial period, three main theses were advanced with regard to the objective of *da'wa*. The dominant view was that Islam should be presented as capable of answering the challenges posed by modernity. The purpose of *da'wa* according to this thesis was twofold: Muslims should be educated to appreciate the universal spirit of Islam; and non-Muslims should be introduced to Islam to widen the scope for rational intellectual debates. The emphasis on education found a different expression among the ulama. This second influential thesis of *da'wa* relied heavily on ideas and practices related to purity and advocated the spread of religious education through

a network of mosques and traditional schools (*madrāsas*). Institutionalization was seen as a means for *da'wa* among Muslims.⁷ The third thesis, advocated mainly by Muhammad Ilyas, founder of Tablighi Jama'at, suggested a clear separation of religion from overtly political affairs so as to build commitment and resolve among Muslims.⁸

The contours of *da'wa* discourse in colonial India, broadly speaking, revolved around these three contesting positions: the top down approach toward *da'wa* to make Muslims religiously civic and ostensibly modern; institutionalized *da'wa* to make Muslims religiously Islamic; and grass-roots *da'wa* to make committed, exemplary Muslims. Postcolonial *da'wa* discourse inherited these contestations while responding to the challenges posed by the postcolonial legal-constitutional discourse of secularism.

THE LEGAL-CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK: PROPAGATION VERSUS CONVERSION

The Constituent Assembly of India held an extensive discussion on the question of religious conversion. After a fierce debate, the assembly agreed to accept conversion as an important aspect of the freedom of religion. Article 25(1) of the constitution decreed, "Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion." Article 25 is a fundamental right protected by the judiciary, and therefore the commitment expressed in relation to religious freedom in this article (and for that matter, the propagation of religion) constitutes the basic structure of the constitution itself.

The word "propagation" has itself been a highly contested issue in the postcolonial legal-constitutional discourse. A variety of laws have been legislated to deal with what is often referred to as "forced conversion." In fact, "public order, morality and health" are often given precedence over the "right to profess and propagate religion" in various anticonversion laws and the court rulings upholding them. Some states even have separate anticonversion laws. These laws empower the state to control the activities of those organized religions that employ different means (including force) to convert people, especially those sections of society perceived as weaker, such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women.

This conversion-versus-propagation binary has produced a special typology of religions. Those faiths born in India are classified as

intrinsically Indian; those originating outside are described as foreign.⁹ In this sense, the territorial boundaries of the postcolonial Indian republic are recognized as the ultimate marker for determining the Indian-ness of a particular religion.¹⁰ In fact, the nineteenth-century discovery of the Hindu religion as the most authentic and fundamental religious tradition of India is taken up conceptually to evaluate the notion of religious propagation.

The judiciary has employed the “Indian origin of religion” as an explanatory template on many occasions. In *Rev. Stanislaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977), the Supreme Court had to consider two questions: (1) what is the meaning and scope of the word propagation? And, (2) since freedom of religion is a fundamental right, can a state legislature (assembly) enact a law that might aim at governing religious issues?

Citing the Oxford English Dictionary, the court made a distinction between freedom of conscience and the right to propagate religion. It argued,

Art 25(1) guarantees “freedom of conscience” to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion, and that, in turn, postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one’s own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the “freedom of conscience” guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike.¹¹

The judgment’s second finding was more problematic. It upheld the authority of state legislatures to enact such anticonversion laws with the justification that forced conversions might affect public order, partly because it would affect the sentiments of the majority community (read: those belonging to religions of Indian origin) and partly because the weaker sections of society would become more vulnerable given their lack of independent judgment.¹²

The preoccupation of various judicial explanations with the conversion of weaker sections of society is inextricably linked to the modern history of Indian religions, which found a very different political manifestation after partition.¹³ The weaker sections—tribal communities, as well as communities considered to be lower in the caste hierarchy—were defined essentially as Hindus. In fact, a political consensus emerged

in the 1950s that through legal intervention the state should play an active role in dealing with social problems such as untouchability and Hindu caste-based discrimination. The social stratification in non-Hindu religions, especially among Muslims and Christians, was completely ignored in these discussions. As a result, citing “backwardness” (being part of a socially disadvantaged group) for providing “reservation” (preferential treatment in selection for jobs and educational institutions as well as seats in parliament and state assemblies) actually emerged as one of the most crucial components of the state’s Hindu social reform agenda.

To elaborate this point, Presidential Order 1950, which has already been amended twice, is a relevant example. The order argues that “the castes, races or tribes or parts of, or groups within, castes or tribes . . . shall, in relation to the States to which those Parts respectively related, be deemed to be Scheduled Castes.” The next paragraph of the order notes, “No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu, the Sikh or the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.”¹⁴ This clearly implies that, in order to avail the benefit of reservation, members of the identified Scheduled Castes would have to stay within the Hindu fold.¹⁵ Further, socially disadvantaged Muslims and Christians are not entitled to reservation as part of a Scheduled Caste.¹⁶

Conversion among the weaker sections to Christianity and Islam is thus interpreted as a serious challenge to the very nature of affirmative action policies, at least in a legal-constitutional sense.¹⁷ The Dissent Note of the Member Secretary, Misra Commission 2007, is a case in point. Describing the objective of affirmative action as a way of addressing Hindu social problems, this note evokes the Indian origin of religions theory. It argues, “Both Islam and Christianity are religions, which originated outside India and came from foreign lands . . . along with traders, invaders and preachers.” Since these foreign religions do not recognize caste, the argument goes, it is very difficult to determine the exact numbers of “the progeny of such traders/invaders/preachers/settlers from foreign lands and Scheduled Castes who converted in the present population of Muslims/Christians in India.”¹⁸

This observation clearly establishes that those communities that had left their original Hindu religion in the past are not entitled to positive discrimination for two reasons: (1) embracing Islam or Christianity means accepting a faith that is intrinsically alien to caste-based Indian social order; and (2) leaving Hinduism means the end of exploitation based on untouchability. In this sense, freedom of religion, both in terms of

the “propagation of religion” as well as conversion to another religion, is understood with reference to an unstated order of religion. Thus, the religions of Indian origin—Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism—constitute the core of Indian religiosity, while Islam and Christianity are seen as floating external ideas.¹⁹ Islamic *da'wa* movements operate within a legal-constitutional framework in which the freedom to propagate Islamic ideas is *not to be aimed* at converting people of other religions.

DA'WA IN THE (RE)PUBLIC: PURPOSES, MODES, AND IMAGINATIONS OF POSTCOLONIAL ISLAM(S)

In a programmatic speech delivered on 26 April 1947—a few months before the partition of South Asia—Jama'at-e Islami leader Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi (1903–1979) explored the possibilities of *da'wa* in the future Republic of India and offered a blueprint for what he considered a peaceful Islamic revolution. He made four proposals. The first two dealt with the creation of a conducive environment for *da'wa*—a trust-building endeavor so as to carve out a space for spreading the message of Islam in India. The other two proposals concerned the practicalities of *da'wa*: preparing Islamic intellectuals and translating Islamic literature into Indian languages. Mawdudi advised, “Our workers . . . should learn . . . Indian languages. . . . If Muslims restrict themselves only to Urdu due to their religious prejudice, they will become strangers to the general population of the nation.”²⁰

This blueprint involved three central aspects of *da'wa* discourse that would prevail in postcolonial India: its meaning and purpose, the constituency for religious mobilization, and the putative methods by which the message of Islam could be effectively disseminated. Islamic scholars, religious movements, and Muslim political elites have offered a variety of different (and usually conflicting) responses to these fundamental issues. Nor are these responses fixed: arguments change, positions are modified, and sometimes completely new resolutions are proposed. To map out this varied and flexible discourse, I concentrate on context-specific contestations and issue-based consensus. In the following discussion, I identify five different responses and read them in relation to the freedom of religion, especially the propagation versus conversion debate, explored in the previous section.

DA'WA FOR THE SAKE OF DA'WA

For Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalawi (d. 1965), Muhammad Ilyas's successor as second amir of Tablighi Jama'at, *da'wa* is an end in itself.²¹ In his definition, "The manner in which the Prophet Muhammad lived his life and worked for the *din* of Allah is *tabligh*."²² Taking the cue from God's messenger he reasons,

The Roman and Persian empires were like spider webs at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet worked on building the commitment of Muslims and preparing pure believers. Because of the sheer presence of these pure believers, Allah cleaned out the webs of Rome and Persia with his *azab* [punishment]. This will eventually happen with the superpowers of our time: Russia and the USA.²³

Din (religion) in this framework of *da'wa* is juxtaposed with *dunya* (world). It is an expression of faith and commitment to Allah, which can only be completed by absorbing the message of the Prophet. Muslims need to consolidate *din* if they want to be successful in this life and in the hereafter.²⁴ Therefore, Muslims should not endeavor to establish Islamic dominance (in direct political terms) in this world; they should act to consolidate *din* through *da'wa*. In Kandhalawi's words, "The purpose of *tabligh* is not to disseminate any particular form of knowledge; instead, the aim is to breathe life into the very idea of *din* that the Prophet introduced and made possible for the prosperity of Muslims. If this very idea were to triumph as part and parcel of everyday life, the Almighty would shower his kindness on us."²⁵

To understand the nature of this "*da'wa for din*," one must keep in mind the six principles of the Tablighi Jama'at: *kalima* (profession of faith), *salat* (or *namaz*, the five obligatory prayers), *ilm o dhikr* (knowledge and remembrance of God), *ikram-e Muslim* (respect for all Muslims), *ikhlas-e niyyat* (sincerity of intention), and *tafrigh-e waqt* (sparing time).²⁶ The first three principles focus on the universally accepted norms of Islamic religiosity. One must profess his faith, pray five times a day, and recite the Quran (and for that matter any other religious text). The other three principles are more innovative. They call upon Muslims—particularly those involved in the Jama'at's *da'wa* work—to show respect toward all forms of Islamic religious practice and to avoid argument

and confrontation. Respecting all Muslims is necessary if one intends to participate in the activities of the Jama'at. Sparing time is an extension of the purity of intention and tells us how to put words and intentions into action.

The six principles offer a conceptual outline for the purpose of *da'wa*, that is, the endeavor to (re)create an environment of *din*. Its focus is on actions (*'amal*). The Jama'at makes a persuasive argument for abandoning the given understanding of Islam as an individual-centric spiritual experience, offering instead a systematic plan of action for collective involvement in worldly affairs in order to prepare Muslims for the hereafter. This unequivocal appeal for religious transformation is an appropriate example of the "propagation of religion" in the legal-constitutional sense discussed in the previous section. In fact, this form of *da'wa* moves away from social and/or political intervention and seeks to protect the faith of those who have already recognized themselves as Muslims.²⁷

DA'WA AS AN ASSERTION OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY

Jama'at-e Islami Hind's conception of *da'wa* is more overtly political. Departing from Mawdudi's original formulations, JIH presents *da'wa* as a way of intervening in the postcolonial public sphere.²⁸ In a speech delivered as early as 1952 at Hyderabad, Abul Lais Islahi Nadwi (1913–90), its then amir, outlined the key features of their *da'wa* project. He argued,

JIH is not a religious organization in the restricted sense of the term; nor is it a political group in the way politics is popularly understood. . . . We invite people to worship the Almighty. We have not only given *da'wa* to Muslims but have made a serious endeavor to introduce it [Islamic teachings] to each and every community of India. For this purpose we have started producing literature in languages other than Urdu. . . . We do not desire a large congregation—or crowd—in our meetings; our aim is to achieve a wider acceptability—conformity of those ideas and values that we cherish. When they [people] recognize the truthfulness of our message, they would redesign their lives accordingly.²⁹

JIH recognizes the centrality of *da'wa* as an important aspect of Islamic religiosity. Yet, in contrast to Tablighi Jama'at, it shows an active

interest in the ongoing political debates and issues that concern Muslims. In fact, it identified the dissemination of Islam as a means for direct engagement in political discussions. To work out a practical design for this seemingly difficult project of *da'wa*, especially in the postpartition, anti-Muslim environment of the 1950s–1970s, JIH took the language question very seriously. Mawdudi's foreword for the 1970 Hindi translation of the Quran states, "It had been felt for a long time that there was a need for translating the Quran and other Islamic literature into Hindi, which is the national language of India . . . so that the vast majority of [Indians,] the Hindi speaking population, can become acquainted with the fundamental essence of Islam."³⁰

To better realize the value of Mawdudi's argument, one must consider the manner in which the question of language and translation is debated in postcolonial Islamic *da'wa* discourse. The Calcutta Quran case of 1985 is an example. A writ petition was filed in the Calcutta High Court demanding that "the publication of the Koran in the original Arabic as well as in its translations in various languages . . . amounts to commission of offences . . . and accordingly each copy of the book must be declared as forfeited."³¹ The petition, as expected, was dismissed by the court on the grounds that the Quran is the basic text of Islam. Hindu fundamentalist groups, however, continued to use this politically grounded reading of the Quran to aid in their mobilization efforts.

The Hindi translation of the Quran, published by the Jam'iyat-e Ulama-ye Hind, a religiopolitical body established by Deobandi ulama in 1919, responded to this debate directly. In the preface, the translators argue that their purpose is primarily to expose the anti-Muslim propaganda of Hindu fundamentalists and that "the essentialist and anti-Muslim conclusions are quite possibly due only to substandard Hindi translations of the Quran."³² In order to maintain the purity of Hindi, this translation was sent to several Hindi experts, who happened to be non-Muslims, for their approval.

The evolution of Hindi as a possible language of Islam in postcolonial *da'wa* discourse is apparent in the wider Hindi/Urdu politics of the 1970s.³³ The protection of Urdu, which eventually emerged as a "minority issue," is creatively reconceptualized by *da'wa* movements, especially by JIH. While determination to protect Urdu was profoundly expressed in this case, the other Indian languages, especially Hindi, were seen as tools for spreading the message of Islam. This reordering of languages helped JIH communicate with various actors—the state, non-Muslims,

and non-Urdu-speaking Muslim communities within the framework of the constitutionally granted freedom of religion.

DA'WA AS AN EVOCATION OF RATIONALITY

Wahiduddin Khan describes *da'wa* as the natural expression of faith (*iman*) and offers a nuanced perspective on conversion. Adopting a historical viewpoint, he emphasizes the outcome of the “sacred performance” that has brought large numbers of non-Muslims to Islam. In Khan’s opinion,

conversion in Islamic thought is not synonymous with proselytism in the formal sense. It is an event, which takes place in a person’s life as a result of intellectual revolution or spiritual transformation. It is not simply leaving one religious tradition for another. The Islamic ideal of conversion is for the individual to discover the truth after an exhaustive search for it and then by his own choice, abandon one religion for another.³⁴

But what are the possibilities for this kind of intellectual change of hearts today? Khan argues that modern rationality has become a way of life in the contemporary world. He recognizes a number of rational truth seekers, individuals who are exploring all sorts of possibilities in their search for solutions to the challenges of modern life. In his view, the intellectual revolution of our times has favored Islam because “all other religions have been subjected to human interpolation and have been rendered historically unauthentic. . . . Islam enjoys the exceptional position of having the authentic version of the revealed religion.”³⁵ Therefore, there is a need to convert this rational search for truth into consciousness, as “all the people of the present day have potentially become Muslims” and thus, “the need of the hour is to do *da'wa* work . . . so that this potential may be turned into a reality.”³⁶

The conducive environment mentioned by Mawdudi in his 1947 speech is interpreted differently by Wahiduddin Khan. He envisages an environment of rationality and identifies “potential Muslims” in this rational world. Khan seems to suggest that conversion in the given and formal sense of the term disrupts the argument for the propagation of Islam as *da'wa*—primarily because conversion is not an event or rupture but a

continuing quest for rationality. In this constellation, Muslims function as *du'a* (who have been given the responsibility to invite others to Allah and the truth), while non-Muslims are *mad'u* (who are called by Muslims). Khan argues that in their role as *du'a*, Muslims must tolerate the oppression and injustice of other nations, since without such forbearance, "That atmosphere cannot be produced which is required for the effective performance of *da'wa*."³⁷ This appeal to the rational spirit in people of all faiths represents a clear adherence to the constitutional expression of the freedom of religion, in which conversion is always understood as a rational choice.

DA'WA AS AN EQUILIBRIUM BETWEEN FAITH AND RIGHTS

A different version of rational *da'wa* is offered by Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, who argues that the methods of *da'wa* are contingent upon the sociocultural formation of society. He thus emphasizes that there are no "fixed rules and regulations" for *da'wa* work.³⁸ This context-sensitive mode of *da'wa* is supplemented by two other required components: linguistic clarity and purity of intention. Nadwi writes, "Linguistic competence is of the utmost importance for the purpose of *da'wah*. . . . And the most important ingredient is sincerity and an earnest urge to persuade others."³⁹ Confident of the inner strength of *da'wa*, he declares, "The powerful nations like USA or Soviet Russia will never be able to win the hearts of the people as Islam has won them. The call of true Islamic faith which draws hearts of Muslims unfailingly is like a magnet that pulls iron chips toward it. Nothing in the World but faith (*iman*) has such a power."⁴⁰ Still, in view of the present situation in India, Nadwi prefers not to elaborate on the crucial relationship between the propagation of Islamic ideas and the conversion of non-Muslims.

Nadwi emerged as a key figure in the debates on Muslim Personal Law in the 1970s and in the Babri Masjid-Ram Temple dispute of the 1980s.⁴¹ His take on overtly political issues helped him develop a clear perspective on the expected role of the state with regard to religious and cultural minorities. He asserted, "If minorities exist in the country, then safeguarding and keeping secure their religions, their places of worship, their Personal Laws and . . . language . . . is necessary. . . . This is the primary duty of every government and no government . . . deserves to be called a government . . . if it cannot provide this."⁴²

Nadwi's understanding of Islamic *da'wa* in the secular-constitutional context of India was rooted in his historical view and political activism. He maintained that Islam had not come to India to destroy Hinduism and that Muslim Indians recognized India as their motherland. They established great empires, which played a pivotal role in the cultural advancement of Indian civilization, rediscovered the ancient sciences and philosophy of India, and introduced them to the wider world. Still, today they suffer discrimination. Nadwi describes the unjust and partial Indian system of education, the decline of Urdu, and other socioeconomic disadvantages borne by Indian Muslims, thereby questioning the policies of the state. This is despite the fact that "Muslims are not only citizens of an equal status with anybody in India; they are among its chief builders and architects, and hold a position second to none among the people of the world for selfless service to the motherland."⁴³

This historically imbedded argument underlies Nadwi's conception of *da'wa*, which he sees as not only the propagation of Islam to non-Muslims but also as a self-awareness of the constitutionally granted rights of Muslims. He traces the compatibility of Islamic principles with democratic norms to conceptualize the Muslims of India as an identifiable minority community with distinct culture and religion. Here, the purpose of *da'wa* is to spread the message of this distinctiveness to Muslims, non-Muslims, and above all to the state.⁴⁴

DA'WA BEYOND ISLAMIC REFORM

Zakir Naik's *da'wa* began in the 1990s, making him one of today's most visible Muslim religious faces in India—online and off-line. Unlike other postcolonial Sunni *da'wa* practitioners, Naik makes a direct appeal to using the Quran and hadith to invite primarily non-Muslims to Islam. For him, "*da'wah* means a 'call' or 'invitation' . . . to invite non-Muslims to Islam as well as the Muslims to the true understanding and practice of Islam."⁴⁵ His *da'wa* project is therefore critical of inner reformist projects such as that of the Tablighi Jama'at. He explains, "Many Muslims . . . doing *Islaah* [reform] . . . have completely ignored *Da'wah*. . . . Therefore, it is . . . our responsibility to concentrate on *Da'wah* in order to fill this vacuum."⁴⁶ In this sense, Naik is more concerned with the modes by which his interpretation of Islam can be adequately propagated and disseminated—for reforming Muslims as well as converting non-Muslims.

Naik's direct form of *da'wa* openly rejects other religious traditions. Replying to a question regarding the use of the term *kafir* (infidel) for non-Muslims, Naik explains, "*Kafir* is derived from the word *kufr*, which means one who conceals . . . the truth of Islam . . . if any non-Muslim considers the word *kafir* as an abuse, he may choose to . . . accept Islam and then we will stop referring to him as a *kafir*." Similarly, when asked about freedom of religion in Islamic regimes, he retorted that since Islam is the only true religion and Muslims believe in it, the propagation of other religions is not permissible in an Islamic country. By the same logic, Naik supports prohibiting non-Muslims from entering Mecca and Medina since "the primary condition required for any human being to enter Makkah or Medina is to say . . . there is no God but Allah and Muhammad (PBUH) is his messenger."⁴⁷

Concomitantly, Naik asserts that the most appropriate method for comprehending Islam is to "understand the authentic sources of Islam—the Quran and the authentic hadith." His strict textuality helps him draw legitimacy for his explanations. Naik rejects the claim that the Hindu gods Rama and Krishna might be recognized as Allah's prophets, as there is no direct reference to these names in the Quran. In addition to disapproving of music, he opposes customary practices such as the wearing of a *mangalsutra* (a black thread worn by married Hindu women) by Muslim women because he finds it offensive to the Islamic dress code.

Making ample use of the new media, Naik was able to extend his appeal to migrant Muslim communities living in the West, the Middle East, and throughout Asia. These communities are experiencing different trajectories of modern life but together become inseparable components of what might be called an online *umma*. This is constituted when Naik delivers speeches before large congregations but even more so when the images of such gatherings are disseminated through the internet and mobile apps. Naik, in this sense, addresses a community that follows his image—an image of an English-educated, well-dressed (he typically wears Western-style business suits), skull-capped Muslim doctor, who relies primarily on his exceptional memory and scientific knowledge.

Naik's *da'wa* is highly provocative and often described as "tempered jihad" because of its seemingly sympathetic attitude toward Islamic "fundamentalism." Naik does not find this allegation problematic, maintaining, "A fundamentalist is a person who follows and adheres to the doctrine or theory he is following."⁴⁸ In this sense, he and all practicing Muslims are fundamentalists. The same logic is used to justify terrorism. Naik argues,

“A true Muslim should be a terrorist to selective people, i.e., antisocial elements, and not to the common innocent people.”⁴⁹ These refined, commonsensical explanations contribute to his image as a prominent Muslim figure and place him in the top ranks of various lists of “influential Muslims.”

Naik's *da'wa* departs from the dominant religious discourse in postcolonial India, as his project does not entirely respond to the minority rights-centric framework of the law. He disregards the thin line between propagation and conversion, offering instead polemical, straight, and ready-to-use Islamic responses. Yet this straightforward approach has not worked in Naik's favor when in recent years his NGO and TV channel were closed by the Indian government, and access to his website was restricted. His effort to take advantage of the legal-constitutional discourse should be seen in the context of these restrictions. As he now explains,

The system and agencies have been used to suit a premeditated result set by the government of India, a government that took an oath to uphold the Indian Constitution, the same Constitution that allows me the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate my religion. Let us not be gullible to think this was just an attack on me. It is an attack on whom I represent, the Indian Muslims. It is an attack on peace, democracy, and justice. . . . India is my home, my roots, and I will fight this ban come what may.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I suggest that the secular legal-constitutional framework in postcolonial India determines representations of Islam as a religion. The Indian Muslim scholars discussed here have been preoccupied with the cardinal questions of how to reinterpret the secular law without compromising their belief in Islamic supremacy and how to reconfigure *da'wa* without crossing the line between propagating the religion and converting non-Muslims. In this endeavor, they celebrate the discourse of minority rights but also actively engage it, interpret it, and offer new and creative articulations of *da'wa*.

Our discussion has shown that Tablighi Jama'at's expressed commitment to apolitical *da'wa* functions within this framework. The agenda of preparing Muslims for *din* never poses any challenge to secular law,

allowing the Jama'at to operate in a closed sphere of religion. Jama'at-e Islami Hind, by contrast, seems to use the "propagation versus conversion" debate as a vantage point to reinterpret the project of *da'wa* and disseminate an activist version of Islam. Wahiduddin represents *da'wa* as a rational interpretation of Islam, which he finds compatible with Indian secularism. For Nadwi, law and secularism have been deeply ingrained in the social values of Muslims. He argues that reasserting Islamic sovereignty as a form of *da'wa* in the postcolonial period is a legitimate constitutional right. Zakir Naik is the only figure in our discussion to frequently cross the propagation-versus-conversion line. His image-centric identity allows him to speak of the conversion of non-Muslims more directly on TV shows. However, his attitude changed radically as soon as he was interrogated by Indian authorities. Like other postcolonial Indian Islamic scholars, Naik now evokes the discourse of minority rights and asserts his Indian identity to justify his Islamic adherence.

This brings us to the main argument of this chapter: postcolonial Islamic *da'wa* discourse in India is highly multilayered. Functioning like a pendulum, the ideal-textual interpretations of Islam and the concept of Islamic supremacy are at one end of the pendulum's swing, while the legal-constitutional considerations and assertion of minority rights are at the other.