

## 7 Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

In 1530, the last year of the Emperor Babar's reign, Hadi Baig, a Mughal of Samarkand, emigrated to the Punjab and settled in the Gurdaspur district. He was a man of some learning and was appointed Qazi or Magistrate over 70 villages in the neighbourhood of Qadian, which town he is said to have founded, naming it Islampur Qazi, from which Qadian has by a natural change arisen. For several generations the family held offices of respectability under the Imperial Government, and it was only when the Sikhs became powerful that it fell into poverty. Gul Muhammad and his son, Ata Muhammad, were engaged in perpetual quarrels with Ramgarhia and Kanahaya Misals, who held the country in the neighbourhood of Qadian; and at last, having lost all his estates, Ata Muhammad retired to Begowal, where, under the protection of Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluvalia (ancestor of the present ruling chief of the Kapurthala State) he lived quietly for twelve years. On his death Ranjit Singh, who had taken possession of all the lands of the Ramgarhia Misal, invited Ghulam Murtaza to return to Qadian and restored to him a large portion of his ancestral estate. He then, with his brothers, entered the army of the Maharaja, and performed efficient service on the Kashmir frontier and at other places.

During the time of Nao Nahal Singh and the Darbar, Ghulam Murtaza was continually employed on active service. In 1841 he was sent with General Ventura to Mandi and Kalu, and in 1843 to Peshawar in command of an infantry regiment. He distinguished himself in Hazara at the time of the insurrection there; and when the rebellion broke out, he remained faithful to his Government and fought on its side. His brother Ghulam Mohaiudin also did good service at this time. (Griffin & Massy, 1890: 35)

Dard (1948) goes into more detail about the tragic events that befell the Mirza family of Qadian around 1802 when they were forced to leave Qadian and seek shelter in Begowal.

...the Sikhs of Ramgarh, Jassa Singh or his followers, found their way into Qadian through treachery, and the members of the family were all made prisoners. Everything was looted. Mosques and buildings were pulled down, and one of the mosques was turned into a Gurdawara, i.e., a Sikh temple, which can be seen to this day. The whole of the library containing a large number of valuable books was burnt to ashes. A number of people were killed, but the members of the family were spared and on a cold wintry night they were all expelled from Qadian. They had to leave the town by night, shivering with cold and overcome with grief. They repaired, shuddering and exhausted, to a village called Begowal, where... Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluvalia, an ancestor of the Maharaja of Kapurthala, treated them with kindness, and extended to them a practical sympathy... In consideration of their sad plight he granted them an allowance... The family remained there for about 16 years... Ata Muhammad was poisoned in 1814 by his enemies. His son Mirza Ghulam Murtaza was quite young at that time, but he brought his father's body to Qadian, so that he might be buried in the family cemetery and thus the ancestral connection with Qadian and the claim over the estate might remain intact. The Sikhs opposed this; but the local population, consisting of humble people, were very much excited and the Sikhs, fearing open rebellion, had to give in. (Dard, 1948: 12-13)

Mirza Ghulam Murtaza was finally able to bring his family back to Qadian after the defeat of Ramgarh Sikhs at the hands of Ranjit Singh. In the late 1830s, Ranjit Singh

restored Murtaza's sovereignty over five villages around Qadian. Despite this gesture, the enmity between the Sikhs and Mirzas was far from over as, according to Dard, "the Sikhs made, in their last days, an abortive effort to kill Mirza Ghulam Murtaza and his brother, Mirza Ghulam Muhyuddin, who were confined by them in Basrawan, near Qadian; but they were soon rescued by their younger brother, Mirza Ghulam Haidar" (Dard, 1948: 15).

In the late 1830s, just as the Sikh rule was finally being brought to an end by the British, Mirza Ghulam Murtaza and his wife Charagh Bibi had their second son<sup>27</sup>. They named him Ghulam Ahmad (i.e., the slave of Ahmad—Ahmad being another name for prophet Muhammad). Even though Mirza Ghulam Murtaza had served in Ranjit Singh's army, he supported the British in their fight against Ranjit Singh's descendants. The British reciprocated by granting Murtaza a pension of Rs. 700. When the British needed help to put down the 1857 mutiny, Murtaza raised a small army of 50 soldiers including his elder son, Mirza Ghulam Qadir, to support the British. They served as part of General Nicholson's militia and helped the British retake Delhi from the mutineers.

As were other noble men of his time, Murtaza was not just a military leader but also a *hakim* (i.e., a doctor of traditional medicine) and a poet. He also had some interest in religion as he spent considerable resources to purchase land and construct a large mosque in Qadian. Since none of Murtaza's writings have survived, we know little about his precise religious views. We can, however, attempt to infer his thoughts by analyzing his actions that have been narrated by Ahmad and by Ahmad's biographers. For instance, his selection of teachers to homeschool young Ahmad is a case in point. Murtaza hired three teachers including a Hanafi Sunni named Fazal Ilahi, an Ahl-e-Hadith alim named Fazal Ahmad of Sialkot, and a Shia alim named Gul Ali Shah of Batala. These would hardly have been the choices of a traditional Hanafi Sunni who believed in strict adherence (*taqlid*) to a particular mazhab. Instead, they suggest a non-denominational approach such as that advocated by Ahl-e-Hadith leaders of nearby Delhi. Here's how Ahmad describes his early education.

When I was six or seven a Persian-speaking was pressed into my service as a teacher. He taught me Holy Quran and a few Persian books. This respectable man's name was Fazl Ilahi. And when my age was about ten-years then an Arabic speaking Moulavi Sahib, whose name was Fazl Ahmad, was appointed for my instructions... The praiseworthy Moulavi Sahib was a religious and respectable man. He taught me with much attention and hard work. And I studied some books of *sarf* and *nahv* from him. And when I was seventeen or eighteen, I happened to have the chance to study under another Moulavi Sahib for a few years. His name was Gul Ali Shah. He was also pressed into service by my father to teach me in Qadian. From the latter Moulavi Sahib, I acquired as much knowledge of *nahv*, logic, and traditional medicine etc. as Allah had intended. And I read some books of traditional medicine from my father who was a great physician. (Ahmad, 1898: 149-150)

There is also no mention by Ahmad or any of his biographers of any visits by his family to any Sufis or their *mazars* (shrines) despite the fact that this was a common practice among traditional Hanafi Sunnis in rural Punjab. Nor is any affiliation with a traditional Sufi order ever mentioned. There were several tariqa Sufis in towns all around Qadian and for an ashraf family with attachment to a Sufi tariqa, it would have been customary to send their son to be trained by a Sufi and be initiated into the order.

All of Ahmad's Ahmadi biographers agree that Ahmad moved to the family's second home in Batala to continue his study (probably around 1857). Shahid says, "even though Moulavi Fazal Ilahi and Moulavi Fazal Ahmad lived in Qadian till the end of their employment, but Moulavi Gul Ali Shah moved to Batala after a short stay in Qadian" (Shahid, 1958: 55). Thus Ahmad had to move to the nearby town of Batala to continue his studies. During this time, he became friends with a fellow ashraf disciple of Gul Ali Shah named Muhammad Hussain Batalavi. This was before Batalavi moved to Delhi to study under the famous Ahl-e-Hadith alim Syed Nazir Hussain. Ahmad and Batalavi's friendship was both social and intellectual and lasted for more than three decades. Years later, Batalavi publicly wrote about this friendship in his magazine *Ishat-us-Sunnah*:

Few of my contemporaries know the author of *Brahin-e-Ahmadiyya* as well as I do. Not only are we from the same part of the country but in our young age (when we studied *Qutbi* and *Sharh Mulla*) we were also class mates. Since then he and I have continuously written to each other. Therefore, to say that I am very familiar with his circumstances and thoughts won't be a lie. (Batalavi, 1884: 176)

Ahmad also valued Batalavi's friendship just as much. In an 8 September 1887 letter to Batalavi, he wrote:

I know for sure that you have had true fondness (for me) and my heart attests that you are engaged in supporting my activities with your pen and tongue only due to the enthusiasm of true endearment. (Ahmad, 2008: 305)

Then again in a 5 October 1887 letter, Ahmad wrote:

I believe that compared to most ulema of the day, and if you don't mind, in some divine endeavors even in comparison with Moulavi Nazir Hussain, you are better... I am fond of you because of your inner piety. (Ahmad, 2008: 312)

The relationship between Ahmad and Batalavi also extended to their families. Batalavi's father was a *mukhtar* (legal assistant) and Ahmad's father seemed to be in constant need of legal help on account of his large estate. There was always a serf who refused to submit the due share of the crop or a neighbouring farmer who encroached on Murtaza's water or land rights. Some of the legal proceedings took place at the Batala Magistrate Court and hence Ahmad's family needed to acquire a second home

in Batala. Ahmad's letters make clear that Ahmad not only knew Batalavi's father but had also interceded on Batalavi's behalf to prevent Batalavi's father from taking adverse actions against his son presumably due to a shortcoming on Batalavi's part. Ahmad's letters also make reference to multiple meetings between their fathers.

As was the family tradition, Ahmad was married at a young age (in 1854 when he was probably 15) to the daughter of his maternal uncle, Mirza Jamiat Beg. He had two boys, named Mirza Sultan Ahmad and Mirza Fazal Ahmad, with his first wife. There is little mention by Ahmad or by any of his biographers of Ahmad's first wife or their first two sons. What was the state of their relationship? What was his wife's name? Did she and her sons move with him to Batala? What religious beliefs did she and her sons hold? Sir Griffin and Col. Massy in their 1890 description of the Chiefs of Punjab mention Mirza Sultan Ahmad as having been adopted by Ahmad's childless older brother Mirza Ghulam Qadir. None of his biographers (or Ahmad himself) describe how Ahmad felt about having to give his son up for adoption. We know that Ahmad's first family did not join Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at during Ahmad's lifetime and seemed to have remained non-denominational reformed Sunni Muslims similar to their grandfather and uncle.

Ahmad grew up as the youngest child of the family (other children were born after him but they died young). His brother Ghulam Qadir may have been as much as a decade older. As they grew up, Qadir shared their father's interests and inclinations more closely than Ahmad did. This is what may have led Ahmad's father to prefer Qadir over Ahmad. He is reported to have described Qadir as a 'capable' helper and Ahmad pejoratively as a 'disabled' individual "who has given up all relations" and as someone who is "dead in this life" (Ahmad, 1939: 27-28). Murtaza was deeply disappointed in his younger son because he seemed to have withdrawn from the world and closeted himself in the family mosque. Ahmad talks about often being the "aim of my father's anger" (Ahmad, 1898: 156). Ahmad was much closer to his mother. While Qadir accompanied his father in various military missions in various parts of North India, Ahmad stayed home with his mother.

Ghulam Kadar was serving in the force of General Nicholson when that officer destroyed the mutineers of the 46th Native Infantry, who had fled from Sialkot, at Trimughat. General Nicholson gave Ghulam Kadar a certificate, stating that in 1857 the Qadian family showed greater loyalty than any other in the district... Ghulam Kadar was always active in assisting the local authorities, and held many satisfactory certificates from officers connected with the administration. He enjoyed a reduced pension of Rs. 180 per annum. (Griffin & Massy, 1890: 50)

General Nicholson himself acknowledged Ghulam Qadir's assistance in a letter to him in August 1857.

You have... helped the Government at your own expense with 50 sowars and horses, therefore, in recognition of your loyalty and bravery this parwana is addressed to you, which please keep with yourself. The Government and its officials will always have due regard for your services

and rights, and for the devotion you have shown to the Government. After the suppression of the insurgents I will look to the welfare of your family. I have also written to Mr. Nisbet, Deputy Commissioner, Gurdaspur, drawing his attention to your services.' (Ahmad, 1898: 6)

Thus it was Qadir, not Ahmad, who came to inherit his father's mantle as the Chief of Qadian. Griffin and Massy describe Mirza Sultan Ahmad as the successor to Qadir bypassing Ghulam Ahmad. It may have been in response to Gen Nicholson's recommendation that Qadir was hired as a police sub-inspector by Mr. Nisbet. Ahmad's father also asked his contacts in the government for a job for Ahmad. But unlike his older brother who was offered an officer's position to serve in the close by city of Gurdaspur, Ahmad was only offered the lowly position of a court clerk in the relatively far away city of Sialkot. Similarly, while no expense had been spared for Qadir's lavish wedding ceremony, Ahmad's wedding was kept a low-key low-budget affair.

During his time in Sialkot, Ahmad seemed to have made a concerted effort to change his circumstances and to acquire the skills needed to succeed in worldly affairs. He convinced one of his fellow clerks to teach him English and he studied for months to write the *mukhtar* (legal assistant) exam. He failed in both of his efforts. His admirers argue that Ahmad failed in his worldly education because he was too busy studying Quran instead of studying his textbooks (Ahmad, 1939: 44), while his critics argue that he lacked the required intellect (Amritsari, 2002).

During the time he spent away from his family in Sialkot, Ahmad also felt free to pursue his own interests in religion. He met with Sufis, Christian missionaries, in addition to Muslim reformers. Ahmad may also have been able to reconnect with his Ahl-e-Hadith teacher Fazal Ahmad and his son Mubarak Ali who was the Imam of the Jamia Masjid (i.e., central mosque) of Sialkot. Ahmad also frequented the esteemed Naqshbandi Sufi Pir Shaikh Mahbub Alam to learn about Sufism. While it is not clear whether or not Ahmad ever took a formal *bayat* (oath of allegiance) at the hands of Alam, scholar of religion Adil Khan argues that "Alam may still have served as a spiritual guide for Ghulam Ahmad all the same, irrespective of whether Ghulam Ahmad was initiated into the Naqshbandi order" (Khan, 2015: 29). Because of their keenness to emphasize divine origin for Ahmad's ideas, Ahmad's Ahmadi biographers are loath to admit to any training he may have received from the ulema. Khan argues that "Ahmad's biographers appear to have consistently concealed the names and religious affiliations of Muslims capable of influencing his mission in any way" (Khan, 2015: 30). Ahmad's close ideological affinity with Ahl-e-Hadith ulema is seen particularly troublesome by Ahmadis because of the opposition that Ahmad subsequently faced from his former Ahl-e-Hadith friends. Thus, Ahmad's three-decade-long friendly relations with Muhammad Hussain Batalavi are glossed over while enmity during the last fourteen years of Ahmad's life are dwelled upon at length. Batalavi is often described by Ahmadis as Ahmad's nemesis and Ahmad's *Abu-Jahl* (a reference to the 8<sup>th</sup> century Meccan opponent of the prophet Muhammad).

Perhaps, because of the reputation that Syed Mir Hasan came to enjoy because of having been a teacher to Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Ahmadis discuss at length the intellectual friendship between Hasan and Ahmad during Ahmad's stay in Sialkot. Hasan was well-known for his reformist ideas and his support of Sir Syed's Aligarh movement. Hasan describes that other Muslims who had an influence on Ahmad during his Sialkot days were also reformers.

Since Mirza Sahib liked to debate Christian clerics, Murad Beg who used the *nom de guerre* of Mirza Shikasta (and later on Muwahid) and was a resident of Jalandhar, told him, "Syed Ahmad Khan has written an exegesis of Torah and Injil. If you write to him it may be helpful." Thus Mirza Sahib wrote a letter to Sir Syed in Arabic. (Shahid, 1958: 97)

Discussions with these reformers and the relative isolation from his father's influence may have allowed Ahmad to develop his own independent belief system.

Ahmad only stayed in Sialkot for four years and hastily left the city with his father's messenger who came to inform him about his mother's illness in 1868. When Ahmad reached Qadian, he found out that his mother had already passed away. So worried had been Ahmad's father about Ahmad's reaction that he had instructed the messenger not to tell Ahmad about her death. Ahmad was so stricken with grief that his father didn't have the heart to send him back to Sialkot. Ahmad wrote a letter to his father describing his thoughts at this time.

My revered father—May you live long and in peace. I wish to say that all around me I see, in towns and country, an epidemic that appears to separate friends from friends, and relations from relations. Not a year passes but that a calamity inflicts suffering on the world. In view of this, my heart has grown cold towards all around me, and I have turned pale out of fear. I often read the following verse of Shaikh Muslih-ud-Din Sa'di Shirazi, and shed tears of regret and grief:

مکن تکیہ بر عمر ناپایدار

مباش ایمن از بازی روزگار

Also the following verse from the work of Farrukh Qadiani<sup>28</sup> saddens my heart:

بدنیائے دون دل میند اے جوان

کہ وقت اجل میر سد نا گہاں

Hence I wish I could spend the rest of my days in some solitary corner, drawing myself away from the company of men and busying myself with the remembrance of God. Perchance I may succeed in making up for lost time, and may be able to make amends for all my past:

عمر بگذشت و نمااند است جز از گامے چند

بہ کہ در یاد کسی صبح کنم شامے چندا

There is no stability in this world. All life is transient.

On his return from Sialkot, Ahmad describes the circumstances in which he came to reconnect with his friend Muhammad Hussain Batalavi who was now a full-fledged sanad-holding Ahl-e-Hadith alim.

In 1868 or 1869, when Moulavi Abu Saeed Muhammad Hussain Batalavi, who at one time was also my classmate, came back to Batala after having become a moulavi. The people of Batala were bothered by his ideas. A person pressured this humble servant into having a debate on some controversial issue with the praiseworthy Moulavi Sahib. Therefore, on his insistence, this humble servant accompanied that person that evening to the praiseworthy Moulavi Sahib's house. We found him along with his father in a mosque. In summary, this humble servant after hearing Moulavi Sahib's learned that there was no objectionable excess in Moulavi Sahib's speech. Therefore, I gave up the debate for God's sake. (Ahmad, 1884: 520:521)

That chance meeting between Batalavi and a twenty-something year old Ahmad turned out to be momentous occasion in Ahmad's life. It was on that fateful day that Ahmad received some of the most awesome revelations that he ever received.

That night the powerful God through his revelation pointed to the same abandonment of debate and said that, "your Lord is pleased with this action of yours and he will award you many blessings. So much so that kings will seek blessings from your clothes." Then I was shown those kings who were riding horses. Since I had adopted humility and abasement purely for God and His prophet, therefore, that Absolute Benevolent did not want to leave it unrewarded. Thus think and reflect.

Then He said that the benefit of God's blessings is that they can be used to cure people's afflictions. Those who are pure of the heart will be rightly guided through your sayings... After these revelations, some Farsi, Urdu, and an English revelation happened... "The days (sic) shall come when God shall help you glory be to this Lord God of earth and heaven." (Ahmad, 1884: 521)

The ideological compatibility between Ahmad and Batalavi suggests that despite the fact that Ahmad never received a sanad from an Ahl-e-Hadith alim, the knowledge that he had acquired, since the days of their co-discipleship of Gul Ali Shah, had led him to ideas not very dis-similar from those being advocated by the Ahl-e-Hadith ulema. The divine sanction of Ahmad's agreement with Batalavi's Ahl-e-Hadith doctrine brought Ahmad and Batalavi even closer together. Batalavi went on to have a major influence on Ahmad's life for the next couple of decades.

Having had to sell their own Batala house to pay their legal fees, Ahmad took to staying at Batalavi's house whenever he visited Batala (Ahmad, 1939: 27-28). Batalavi may also have introduced Ahmad to a fellow student of Syed Nazir Hussain, named Moulavi Abdullah Ghaznavi. Ghaznavi had been expelled from his native Afghanistan because of his Ahl-e-Hadith views and he had had to move to Punjab to save his and his family's life. He settled in the village of Khayrdi near Amritsar. Ahmad and Ghaznavi seemed to have hit it off from their first meeting. Ahmad frequently visited Khayrdi to meet Ghaznavi and the two became very close. Khan argues that Ahmad may have learned a lot more from Ghaznavi than Ahl-e-Hadith doctrine.

On a visit to Ghaznavi's village of Khjayrdi, near Amritsar, Ghulam Ahmad requested the maulana for special prayers concerning an undisclosed matter. Upon receiving this request, Maulana Ghaznavi immediately went home and began to pray for Ghulam Ahmad. In the coming days after returning home to Qadian, Ghulam Ahmad received a letter from Ghaznavi relating a slight variation of the following Qur'anic verse as a revelation which he had seen in a dream: "you are our Protector, so help us against the disbelievers (anta mawlana fa'nurna 'ala 'l-qawm al-kafirin)" Maulana Ghaznavi interpreted the revelation to mean that Allah would help Ghulam Ahmad with his predicament, similar to the way in which Allah helped his companions of the Prophet Muhammad through various tribulations. The revelation, however, was almost identical to the last verse of Sura al-Baqara (2:286). An overwhelming number of Ghulam Ahmad's revelations have repeated Qur'anic verses, similar to this revelation of Abdullah Ghaznavi. In this light, it would be interesting to see how frequently other recipients of divine revelation have repeated portions of the Quran and claimed it as their own. If this format is unique, then perhaps it was first observed by Ghulam Ahmad in the revelations of Abdullah Ghaznavi.

On a separate occasion, Ghaznavi saw a vision in which he described a light (nur) descending upon Qadian, but his children were being deprived of it. (Khan, 2015: 32)

The religious belief system that Ahmad was developing through independent readings and discussions with Ahl-e-hadith ulema, seemed indistinguishable from mainstream Ahl-e-Hadith doctrine. Like Ahl-e-Hadith, Ahmad believed that Quran and authentic Ahadith were the only authoritative sources of Islamic doctrine and that issues unaddressed by them should be resolved through ijtehad rather than blind taqlid of traditional jurists. Ahmad was also vehemently opposed to taqlidi cult of saints and mazars. Like mainstream Ahl-e-Hadith, he also rejected the "excessive rationalization" of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Having become convinced of the rightness of the Ahl-e-Hadith doctrine, Ahmad started preaching his ideas to those around him including his father.

To read Ahmad describe his father, it seems as if the old man had two completely different personalities. On the one hand, we see a wildly successful man of the world: in this version, Mirza Ghulam Murtaza is a brave military leader who has nothing but success on the battlefield, he is a successful hakim who can cure kings and ordinary men alike with serious illnesses that don't seem to have a cure, and he is a feudal lord who successfully earns hundreds of rupees from his landholdings and holds court with other feudal lords and British officers. On the other hand, Ahmad talks about Mirza Ghulam Murtaza as a sad poet and a wannabe Sufi who regretted having spent all his life in futile attempts to restore family's lost estates:

My father was often sad and lost because of his failures. He had spent some seventy thousand rupees in legal expenses but their result was failure. Because our ancestor's villages had long passed out of our possession so their return was wishful thinking. Because of this failure, my father led a life of pain and was deeply buried under a torrent of sadness and restlessness. Watching these circumstances gave me a chance to make a virtuous change. Because my father's bitter life gave me lessons of a generous life that is free of worldly immorality... He often said that if he had exerted as much effort for religion as he had exerted for this foul world, he would have been a Qutb or Ghous of his time... Once my father described this dream that he saw the Holy



Prophet<sup>sa</sup> coming in state to his house. He ran to receive the Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> and thought of offering *Nazar*. When, however, he put his hand into his pocket, he found that he had only one rupee and that it was a counterfeit coin. This brought tears to his eyes. At this point he awoke. This he interpreted to mean that the love of God and His Prophet<sup>sa</sup>, mixed with the love of this world, is nothing better than a false coin. He used to say that similar to me, the last part of my father's life was also spent wallowing in sadness, pain and bitterness. Everything he touched turned into failure. He used to quote this verse of his father i.e., my grandfather...

Whenever I make a plan, fate laughs at me. This sadness and pain had much increased in his old age. Because of this thought, my respected father built a mosque in the center of this town and willed that he be buried in a corner of the mosque so that his ears could hear the name of God and who knows that may save me on the day of judgement. (Ahmad, 1898: 156-159)

Here we get another clue to the religious belief system of Ahmad's father. It seems that his father not only believed in the hierarchy of Sufi offices but also believed that one could attain progressively higher statuses through spiritual exercises. Ahmad rejected the worldly part of his father's legacy that was embodied by his older brother, while claiming to fulfil his father's unmet spiritual aspirations of wanting to become a "Qutb or Ghous of his time." Ahmad claimed that spiritual achievements were an essential part of his family's long legacy.

During the early age of the Sikhs, my great grandfather Mirza Gul Muhammad was a famous and well-known Lord who had eighty five villages... He was so big hearted and generous that even in this difficult time, he awarded many villages to various displaced Muslim lords... about a hundred ulema, sulaha, and Hafiz of Quran inhabited his court and were awarded scholarships. God and his prophet's name was frequently mentioned in his court. None of his servants and relations ever missed prayers. Even the women who ground flour also performed the five ritual prayers as well as the optional predawn tahajjud prayer... the Afghans surrounding Qadian used to call it Mecca because during that tumultuous period, this was a blessed refuge for every Muslim. And whereas infidelity, anarchy, and cruelty could be seen everywhere else, the fragrance of Islam, virtue, and justice came from Qadian. The late Mirza Gul Muhammad was one of the respected shaikhs of his time, and capable of performing *karamah* (i.e., miracles) and *kha-wariq* (i.e., apparitions). Many men of God, reformers, and distinguished persons had gathered in Qadian. And even more strange is that many of his *karamah* (miracles) are so well-known that a large group of Islam's opponents have also attested to them... thus I've heard from my father that a Mughal minister came to visit him and said... had I known... I'd have made an effort to put you on the royal seat in Delhi... During the high time of his sickness, the doctors agreed that if you use alcohol for this disease, it'd help but they lacked the courage to suggest it. Eventually, some of them meekly suggested it. He [Mirza Gul Muhamad] responded by saying that if God wanted to cure me, he would have produced many other medicines, I don't want to use this polluted thing. I have accepted God's decision. A few days later, he died from this illness. Death was his destiny but his virtuous path became memorable for the fact that he preferred death over alcohol. (Ahmad, 1898: 137-142)

When his father died in 1876, Ahmad considered his older brother to be his caretaker. Because Qadir lived in Gurdaspur, he was not always able to take care of Ahmad as their father had done. However, similar to their father, Qadir was also unhappy with

Ahmad for his refusal to help out in the family business. Once, when Ahmad asked him for money to buy some newspapers, Qadir wrote back, “this is wasteful. You don’t do any work and just read books and newspapers” (Ahmad, 1939: 66).

The books that Ahmad spent all his time reading included exegesis of Quran, Hadith and works by Sufis such as Ibn-e-Arabi and Abdul Qadir Jilani as well as books by reformist Muslims such as Sirhindi and Waliullah who condemned various Sufi excesses. The periodicals he avidly read included Urdu newspapers such as *Safir-e-Hind* of Amritsar, and *Akhbar-e-Aam* of Lahore, the Ahl-e-Hadith magazines such as *Manshoor-e-Muhammadi* and *Ishat-us-Sunnah* edited by Batalavi, and Christian mouthpieces such as *Nur Afshan* of Ludhiana (Shahid, 1958: 119). These were communal newspapers that historians believed played a critical role in raising communal awareness and tensions in the nineteenth century India.

While Ahmad may have met Christian missionaries before his move to Sialkot neither he nor any of Ahmad’s biographers mention it. This may have been because the Christian missionary activity hadn’t ramped up in Batala/Qadian area before the 1860s. There was no established mission in Batala until CMS established one there in 1866. The Church of Scotland established a mission in Sialkot a decade earlier in 1856 (Melton & Baumann, 2010: 696). During Ahmad’s stay in Sialkot from 1864 to 1868, his biographers mention several meetings and debates that Ahmad had with Christian missionaries based there.

At Sialkot Ahmad came in touch with Christian missionaries. He held several debates with them. Elisha (Swift?), a native Christian missionary, who lived to the south of Hajipura, once had a discussion with Ahmad... The Rev. Butler, M. A. was a very learned Christian missionary and he had arguments with Ahmad on several occasions. (Dard, 1948: 48-49)

Ahmad was given a copy of the Urdu translation of the Bible during his stay in Sialkot. He read it carefully highlighting various lines and writing footnotes. He wrote another letter to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who had announced that he was writing an exegesis of the Bible from a Muslim perspective (a project that he never completed). According to Dard, his friends in Sialkot included Nasrullah, a Christian convert who taught at the Scotch Mission School (Dard, 1948: 50). One of Ahmad’s Muslim friends, Murad Beg, who later called himself ‘muwahid’ (perhaps a clue to his Ahl-e-Hadith faith who were known as Muwahideen) and was “fond of debating missionaries. He would frequently visit Mirza Sahib to seek answers to various questions” (B. A. Ahmad, 1939: 97). One of Ahmad’s future followers, an Ahle-e-Hadith named Basharat Ahmad, recalling the tactics used by Christian missionaries in Sialkot in the late nineteenth century, wrote:

Those days, I used to live in Sadr Bazar Sialkot. Since I studied at the Scotch Mission High School in Sialkot City and was sick of the daily objections by missionaries. I used to be embarrassed by the missionaries’ translation of the Quranic verse *يعيسى انى متوفيك ورافعك الى* as [Jesus’s] having been physically fully lifted to the heavens. I used to say, “why didn’t Allah lift our Holy Prophet

peace be upon him to the heavens?” He embarrassed us in front of the missionaries by lifting Jesus alive to the heavens. (Ahmad, 1939: 331)

Thus it may have been in Sialkot that Ahmad first came to hear of the Christian missionary’s new non-controversialist approach of using traditional Islamic sources to ease new recruits towards basic tenets of Christianity. Khan also emphasizes the importance of Ahmad’s interactions with Sialkot Christians in developing Ahmad’s worldview.

The Christian missionaries of Sialkot provided new prospects for religious dialogue with which Ghulam Ahmad was unfamiliar in Qadian. This exposure opened up new modes of thought for Ghulam Ahmad in his youth and enabled him to debate eschatology and salvation in an endeavor to prove the superiority of Islam as a religion. The exchanges also provided Ghulam Ahmad an opportunity to improve his communication skills by articulating his views, finessing his arguments, and formally expressing his beliefs—both verbally and in writing—for the first time. These discussions were beneficial in many ways, especially since Ghulam Ahmad was still an amateur theologian, whereas his opponents were more experienced and better educated missionaries. His encounters with Christian missionaries facilitated a second period of spiritual growth, which enabled his thought to mature... (Khan, 2015: 28)

By the time, Ahmad moved back to Qadian, the CMS mission in nearby Batala had been well established and missionaries from there and Amritsar (e.g., Rev. Rowland Bateman) were visiting Qadian to proselytize (Ahmad, 1939: 76). On 6 March 1873, the American Mission in Ludhiana launched a weekly newspaper in Urdu to, “discuss all matters in an unprejudiced and unbiased manner.” Nur Afshan was offered for the low price of 1 Ana per month (“lowest priced newspaper in the country” claimed the third issue) so that “poor people who are fond of reading papers but unable to do so because of the high cost of newspapers” can get the latest news (Nur Afshan, 1873). The newspaper made it possible for Urdu speakers such as Ahmad who could not read or write English to not only learn about latest advances in European science and technology (the 1894 issue reports the invention of “self-driving vehicles”) but also directly hear the Christian message from the missionaries.

Nur Afshan epitomized the new non-controversial approach to Islam increasingly being adopted by Christian missionaries in Punjab in the late nineteenth century. Indeed the first eighteen issues of Nur Afshan did not contain a single article with a traditional pro-Christian or anti-Muslims message. Instead the magazine criticized moral evils of lying, prostitution, “using false weights,” “lack of education,” and “multiple marriages” from a common sense perspective. But in a sign of the hyper-partisan times, one of Ahmad’s friends from Sialkot days, the above mentioned Mirza Muwahad perceived the attack on “multiple marriages” as an implicit criticism of Islam and responded with an article in *Manshoor-e-Muhammadi*. The 10 July 1873 issue of Nur Afshan responded to Muwahad as follows.

Mirza Muwahad has written an article in issue number 10 of Manshoor-e-Muhammadi dated 8 Rabiul Awal. In the above mentioned article, Mirza Sahib has used pejorative words about the paper and comic words about Christian clerics. Well, this is not so shocking because when one is overtaken by anger one's wisdom leaves him. (Nur Afshan, 1873: 74)

Perhaps assuming that if an article that does not even mention Islam or Christianity is going to be perceived as an attack on Islam then one may just as well write articles explicitly comparing the two religions, the 10 July 1873 issue also featured an article titled "on the topic of intercession (*shifaat kay bayan mein*)." This was the first Nur Afshan issue to do so.

How should one relate to God? This is a serious question that demands attention. Quran has one answer to this question. See Surah Baqra Rukoo 1-2, *ahsinu innallah yuhibul muhsineen* meaning do deeds because Allah befriends the virtuous. Next, Surah Maida Rukoo 10 presents some conditions for salvation. It says man amana billahil yomil akhir wa amila salihan fala khauffun alaihim meaning he who believes in Allah and performs good deeds therefore will not have any fear... Muslims consider Muhammad to be an intercessor and Christians also believe in the need for intercession and so do Hindus. The question is what are the characteristics of an intercessor?... My friends, I have not heard of anyone else besides our Lord Maseeh who has sacrificed for ever deliverance... This claim also does not fit Muhammad Sahib who only came to guide people. But our Lord Maseeh made this clear claim that I have come to save sinners. Therefore, how should we relate to God? The answer is through the intercession of Maseeh Issa because he has paid our debt. And on this basis, he has the capability to intercede on our behalf. Because he is our friend, our bailor, and our intercessor. And Allah ta-Allah will never refuse His intercession of humanity. (Nur Afshan, 1875: 178)

After publishing eighteen issues without any mention of Christian-Islamic debates, Nur Afshan began to regularly feature articles such as the one quoted above. These articles were filled with quotations from Quran and Hadith. Nur Afshan used the traditional Islamic sources of authority to support its argument that Quran did not nullify the older holy books of Torah and Injil. Instead, they argued that Muhammad was a holy man whose mission was to convey Gospel's message to the Arabs. Through Quran, God (using the Islamic term "Allah" to refer to God) they said, has emphasized a high status for Jesus (using the traditional Islamic term "Hazrat Issa" to refer to Jesus) as a miracle-worker born of a virgin who was lifted to the heaven alive and sits on Allah's right hand waiting his return at the end of times. By extensively quoting ahadith, they argued that Muhammad (referring to him in respectable terms "Muhammad Sahib") had only claimed the status of a humble man for himself. They pointed out that Muhammad had refused to show miracles when demanded by his opponents and he died a natural death like all other men.

The ramped-up Christian activity in Punjab was starting to bear fruit. Reports of conversions to Christianity became a regular feature of Nur Afshan. For instance, 3 June 1875 issue contained this report titled "Growth of Christian Religion (*taraqqi-e-Din-e-Issavi*)":

Because of God's blessings, the true religion is growing daily. The preachers of the true religion are enlightening inhabitants of Islands of the north and south. Good news for Christianity comes frequently. For instance, we find out from *Kokab-e-Issavi* of Lucknow that in the south of India, Church Missionary Society has been working for a long time. Thousands of people have entered the church from those areas... The total number of people in that mission is forty six thousand six hundred and twenty. In addition, another thirteen thousand people are seeking to join. (Nur Afshan, 1875: 178)

In a complete reversal of the situation a half century earlier when Muslims, believing that they had an upper hand, had avoided Christian missionaries, were now seeking debate with them. Ahmad's biographers say that missionaries made an effort to avoid Ahmad, who was eager to try his newly-rehearsed arguments during their Qadian visits. Ahmad also shared the lessons that he was learning through his interactions with Christians with his fellow Muslim debaters. His Ahmadi biographer, B. A. Ahmad mentions one such debater, named Mian Nabi Baksh who would visit him in Qadian to tell him about the latest Christian objections against Islam. "Hazrat Sahib would write down all the objections of non-Muslim critics... he had collected three thousand objections" (Ahmad, 1939: 75-76). After listening to the objections gathered by visiting Muslim debaters, Ahmad would offer various responses and ask the Muslim debaters to rehearse their arguments over and over again, "so that you don't run into any difficulties" at the time of the actual debate with missionaries (Ahmad, 1939: 75). Ahmad would play the role of an aggressive missionary to see whether a debater had fully grasped the fullness of his argument. Once Baksh brought him the bad news of an alim's conversion to Christianity. Hearing about Moulavi Qudrat Ullah's conversion seemed to have hurt Ahmad deeply. He asked Baksh to go back immediately and beg the moulavi to reconsider.

I'm ready to go there if needed... His name has the word moulavi attached to it. This makes a bad impression on the public... Apostasy from Islam is a big deal. It should not be considered a minor issue. We should bring other people into the fold of Islam. If someone apostates because of our oversight then we are all answerable to God for it... Meet with him alone. Do not meet him in front of others and do not get into a debate because people get defensive. (Ahmad, 1939: 76).

Ahmad argued that Christian missionaries were using every means available to them to convert North Indian Muslims to Christianity and that Muslims response to date had been severely lacking.

Now O Mussalmans, hear, and hear attentively that this campaign against Islam and Islam's holy influence cannot be defeated by ordinary methods and means. The campaign is backed by the most complex fabrications and the most carefully planned devices that Christians can design. It is pursued mercilessly, with no thought of the expenditure involved. It does not exclude some most shameful devices which decency forbids us to detail. It is a campaign let loose on a large scale and pushed by the worst possible wizardry by Christian peoples, followers of Trinity. Such a campaign cannot be countered by ordinary methods. It cannot be beaten unless its magic and wizardry are confronted by the miraculous power of the Hand of God. Only miraculous power

can and will smash this campaign and without it we cannot save our simple souls from this vicious Western magic. (Ahmad, 1891b: 5-6)

The ultimate Christian missionary objective, he argues, is the complete destruction of Islam.

Christians are out to destroy Islam and ready to use lies and fabrications in ways most subtle, and on all occasions and with the help of ever new techniques - all directed to beguile and lead people astray. Christians are defaming and lampooning the Holy Prophet, the perfect man who proved himself the pride of holy men of all times and chief among the saints and apostles of the world. They hesitate not to caricature him in theatrical shows. They try and project a most hateful image they can invent of him. The worst that vicious and unchaste minds can think of is leveled against Islam and the Holy Prophet of Islam to lower them in the eyes of the world. (Ahmad, 1891b: 4-5)

Christian missionary efforts seem to have concerned Ahmad perhaps equally – if not far more than – as the vigorous Hindu Arya efforts that were also aimed at converting Muslims. Basharat Ahmad says that “Ahmad’s pen was especially sharp against Christianity” (Ahmad, 1939: 76). In the Muslim attitude towards Hindus one sees hints of Christian missionary’s perceptions of Hindus as primitive heathens who would be easy prey for far more sophisticated Christianity. Another reason for the difference could be the relative status of the two religions in traditional Islamic view. Traditionally, most Muslims regarded Christianity as a religion of divine origin that was founded by one of Allah’s major prophets, Hazrat Isa (alt. Maseeh) (Jesus), may peace be on him, who was given the holy book of *Injil*. Hinduism, perceived as idol worship, was considered akin to the polytheistic Quraish of pre-Islamic Arabia. Respect for all of Allah’s prophets including Jesus (as indicated by compulsory postfix *allaih-salam* (عليه السلام), meaning ‘may peace be on him’, following his name) is one of the basic five tenets (pillars) of Islam. This meant that while responding to Arya Hindus a Muslim debater had a freer hand in ridiculing his opponent’s arguments and their sources, they would not have been able to do so when responding to a Christian attack. Thus while a Hindu opponent who impugned prophet Muhammad’s character could be reminded of Krishna’s character flaws, a Christian pursuing the same argument could not be told about any flaws in Jesus’ character. Ahmad described the dilemma faced by Muslim debaters in his book *Kitab-ul-Baria*.

What Christian missionaries want is to be able to disrespect, curse, and blame our prophet peace be upon him as much as they want and hurt us through every humiliation possible but want us to keep our mouth shut and not respond to their attack at all...

Since we accept Hazrat Isa (peace be upon him) to be God’s true, pious, and forthright prophet, how can we say any stern words against him but since Christian missionaries do not believe in our prophet, peace be upon him, therefore, they say whatever they want...

There are many missionaries in British India whose job it is to curse our Holy Prophet and lord and master Muhammad peace be upon him, day and night. The worst among them is Rev. Imad-ud-Din Amritsari. In his various books, *Tahqiq-ul-Iman* etc, he openly lobs obscenities at Muhammad, peace be upon him. He declares him (Muhammad) to be a fraud, usurper of other's women and uses stern and offensive words against him. So does Rev. Thakur Das. In *Seerat-ul-Masih* and *Review Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya*, he declares our prophet peace be upon him to be a licentious, a womanizer, a cheat, a thief, a trickster, an ignorant person, and a fraud. In the magazine *Dafi-al Buhtan*, Rev. Roncallian has used the following words about our prophet: he was licentious, Muhammad's disciples were rapists, swindlers, and thieves. Rev. Rogers writes in his *Tafteesh-ul-Islam* that Muhammad was licentious, under the thumb of his evil desires, a lecher, a swindler, bloodthirsty, and a liar. In the magazine *Nabi Masoon* published by American Tract Society, it is written that Muhammad is a sinner, who was guilty of forbidden love meaning rape, and was a swindler and a charlatan. In the magazine *Masih-ud-Dajjal*, Master Ram Chandar says about our prophet: he was head of dacoits and a thief and a swindler, a womanizer, a liar, licentious, bloodthirsty, and a rapist. In the book "Sawanih Umari Muhammad Sahib," the author, Washington Irwing Sahib writes that Muhammad's disciples were all bandits and swindlers and he himself was self-worshipper, a liar, and a fraudster. In *Androona Bible* by author Athim Isai, it is written that Muhamad was an anti-Christ and a fraud. Then he says that end for Muhammadans is tragic meaning they will soon disappear. In an issue of *Noor Afshan Ludhiana*, it is written that Muhammad received Satanic revelations, engaged in improper activities, and was a selfish man, a lost man, a cheater, a fraud, a rapist, a thief, bloodthirsty, a swindler, a dacoit, a helper of Satan, and lustful for his daughter Fatima.

Now it is worth thinking that what can be the consequences of such words against our Holy Prophet peace be upon him. Can a Mussalman ever utter such words against Hazrat Isa allaih-salam?...

These are the stern, liable and denigrating words that missionaries and Arya people have used against our Lord and Master, the Head of prophets, and the Seal of Apostles, peace be upon him. Many of these books have been printed many times in Punjab and Hindustan. They are always assigned to the mission school students to study. They are read in the streets and bazars. Christian women who are assigned to preach take them into Muslim homes. I cannot describe the pain and hurt and disgust with which my trembling body has copied the above words...

What aggressiveness can we show against the missionaries? Because similar to them it is also our duty to accept the dignity and status of Hazrat Isa allaih-salam. Other than the status of God, we consider Isa allaih-salam to be truthful, forthright and deserving of all respect due to a true prophet. But missionaries do not have such good impression of our prophet. (Ahmad, 1898: 93-125)

Ahmad believed that Christians were converting 'thousands upon thousands' of Punjabi Muslims through their clever tactics and needed to be stopped before they succeed in eliminating Islam from the soil of Punjab (M. G. Ahmad, 1891c: 32). Obsessed with the urgent need to find an appropriate response to the Christian onslaught, Ahmad seems to have spent much time praying, fasting, and reading alone in the mosque owned by his family. He also continued to meet like-minded friends to discuss how to respond to Christian missionaries. He seems to have convinced himself that Islamic reforms being advocated by Ahl-e-Hadith, while absolutely necessary, were

not enough on their own to defeat Christians. It took him years of prayer, reading, and reflection but by the early 1880s, Ahmad seemed to have discovered a brilliant strategy to free the hands of Muslim debaters. Let's hear Ahmad describe this strategy in his own words.

I want to express to the readers that my belief in Hazrat Maseeh allaih-salam is a virtuous belief. I believe from the bottom of my heart that he was Allah's true and beloved prophet... Therefore, I grant him all sorts of respect due to his status. But the Yesu that Christians have presented who claimed to be God and considered everyone except himself, all his predecessors to be cursed. That is he considered them to be guilty of such moral deficiencies that deserve to be punished by damnation. I consider such a person to be undeserving of divine blessings. Quran has not informed us of this disrespectful and foul-mouthed Yesu. We are astounded at the manners of this person who permits God to die and claims to be God. And curses such pure souls who were thousands of times better than him. Therefore, in my discussions everywhere, I have referred to this fictional Yesu of Christians. God's humble man Isa bin Mariam (Jesus son of Mary) is absolutely not the target of my crude words. I have had to adopt this strategy after listening to invectives of Christian missionaries for forty years... I have a stack of books by missionaries who have filled their text with hundreds of invectives... It is Christians who are attacking their own Yesu. They just will not stop their cursing and damnation. I am just tired of hearing it. (Ahmad, 2008: 179-180)

Similar to the research efforts undertaken by Dr. Wazir Khan and Moulana Kairanawi in preparation for their famous debate against Pfander, Ahmad then scoured the Christian literature as well as secular-Western critics of Christianity to find evidence that showed Jesus in poor light especially when compared to Prophet Muhammad. He used the evidence he collected in his debates with missionaries that were carried on orally as well as in back-and-forth letters. In a letter to Rev. Soft, he wrote:

I am surprised that despite all the wretchedness that is found in your beliefs, you people claim that your beliefs are in accordance with reason. I am surprised that people who believe that God gave up his ancient and unchanging majesty to enter into a woman and was birthed through an impure path. Then he bore pain and suffering and died by hanging. (Ahmad, 2008: 103)

In a letter to Rev. Fatah Masih, he wrote:

The respect that Jesus had among kings of his time is not hidden from you. Those pages are probably still in the Bible where it is written that Herod charged Hazrat Maseeh like criminals towards Pilate. His Godliness did not amount to anything... Was this Godliness?... If you have any honour or shame so then for Maseeh's sake, present this level of respect from kings of the time and get a thousand rupees cash from me... What was Maseeh's mannerism? A glutton and a drunkard, neither pious nor a worshipper, never loved the truth, arrogant, navel-gazer, claimant of God... Disciples ate stolen food in front of your Maseeh. That is breaking chaff from a stranger's fields. Was it the right thing to do?... Maseeh called Peter a Satan. Then why did he forget it and accept Satan into his disciples?... It is a major objection that because Hazrat Maseeh Alaaiah-salam was not lucky enough to be endowed with the highest of male virtues and was therefore not able to show a model of true and full domestic behavior with wives. This is why European women have taken advantage of shameful freedom and crossed the limits of moderation and the situation has



reached such chaos and wretchedness that it cannot be talked about... Maseeh, because of his faulty teachings, left this shortcoming in his sayings and deeds. But because it was a natural urge therefore Europe and Christianity invented rules for it. Now you can see with justice that filthy, dark, morally deficient behavior, and turning of the whole country into a whore-house, the lying on each other of thousands upon thousands like dogs and bitches in Hyde Park during the broad day light... What is the cause of this? This is the result of definitely deficient, unworthy book, anti-nature Paulian Gospel, and half-baked education... I am sending you this letter as a notice that if you keep using such impure words about the Holy Prophet peace be upon him and libel him then I will also take to task your fictional and fake God such that all his Godliness will fall in the pit of humiliation... Surely, whatever you say about the Holy Prophet will also be said of your fictional Maseeh. But we know and believe that true sacred Messiah to be honourable and pure who neither claimed to be a God nor son of God and prophesized the coming of Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. (Ahmad, 2008: 187-194)

In a follow up letter to Rev. Masih, he wrote:

Your fifth objection is that once Muhammad (peace be upon him) happened to look at some woman. When he came home, he had sex with his wife Sauda... You will remember that your God couldn't even restrain himself from the pain of a little hunger and ran towards a fig tree. So can you prove that the tree belonged to his father? Thus the person who couldn't even control himself on seeing someone else's tree and ran to fill his stomach is not only not God but is not even a complete person according to you... Your God didn't get the ability to distinguish but to satisfy the lust of his belly, he ran to a fig tree and didn't even think who it belongs to.

It is strange that an alcoholic, glutton, and drunkard can't be called lascivious but that pure soul whose every action was for God, is allowed to be called licentious by profane people of this world... What can we say and write about your Yesu and how long are we to cry about his behavior? Was it appropriate for him to provide the opportunity for a whore to sit with him at the height of her youth and beauty and with her head bare? And rub her hair on his feet in a flirty and coquettish manner. And massage her perfume of depravity on his head. If Yesu's heart had been free of filthy thoughts, he would have forbidden her from coming near him. But those people who derive pleasure from being touched by depraved women do not listen to any advisor amidst such selfish moments. Listen, an honorable dignified man tried to stop Yesu by advising that such actions are not appropriate but Yesu, having understood from his harsh tone that this man is revolted by my deeds, spurned his objection and claimed that this prostitute is very sincere and even you don't have her sincerity. Praise be to Allah. What a fine answer this is! Yesu is praising a harlot that she is very virtuous. Claims of being a God and actions like this! How can we expect piety and virtue from a person who is always inebriated with alcohol and has relations with prostitutes and eats so much that he's known as a glutton? Look at the piety of our lord and master Muhammad, head of all the prophets, may God have peace on him, that he would not even shake hands with women who were pious and virtuous and came to pledge their allegiance to him. Instead he would sit them at a distance and orally teach them to seek forgiveness. But what intelligent and pious person would consider such a person, who doesn't avoid touching young women, as pure of heart? A prostitute is sitting so close as if to be in his arms. Sometimes she stretches her hand to massage his hair and at other times she rubs his feet. Sometime she puts her alluring black hair on his feet. She's doing this show in his lap and Yesu is sitting in a trance. And when someone objects, he scolds them. And situation is this that he is a young alcoholic man who is a bachelor and a pretty young woman is lying in front of him, rubbing her body to his. Is this what gentlemen do? And how can you prove that Yesu's lust did not get stoked

by her touching? Alas, Yesu did not even have the opportunity to seek company of his wife after looking at this harlot? Who knows what bodily emotions would have been stoked by the touching of that whore and her flirting and coquetting. Lust must have been fully aroused. That is why Yesu couldn't even utter, "O depraved woman, stay away from me." And Injil proves it that that woman was a prostitute and was famous in the whole city for her whoring...

The seventh objection is *muta* (i.e., temporary marriage) being allowed and then disallowed... It is strange as to why Christians mention temporary marriage which is marriage for a fixed time. Why don't they look at their Yesu's behavior? He looks at those young women who he should not have looked at? Was it acceptable for him to sit together with a woman? Only if he had been restricted to *muta*, he could have been saved from such deeds. Did Yesu's old paternal and maternal grandmothers perform *muta* or did they engage in clear prostitution? (Ahmad, 2008: 223-228)

In a letter to a Barelvi Muslims, he wrote:

These people [Christians] do not look at their own scriptures and see how open Gospels are to objections. Listen, how great of an objection is this that Mary was given over to Jerusalem Temple to serve there her entire life and never get a husband. But when her pregnancy became visible after six or seven months, then within the condition of pregnancy, she was married of to a carpenter named Joseph. One or two months after her moving to his house, a son was born to Mary who was named Isa or Yesu. Now the objection is that if the pregnancy was indeed miraculous then why didn't they wait till its completion? The second objection is that the covenant was that Mary would serve at the temple for a long time then why was the covenant broken and she made the wife of Joseph the carpenter? The third objection is that since it was proscribed by Torah to marry a pregnant woman, why was Mary married to Joseph in contravention of the orders of Torah? Even though Joseph had a previous wife and he was angered by this marriage. It seems that those who deny multiple marriages have not been informed about this marriage. Thus a detractor would be justified to assume that the reason for this marriage was that elders of the nation had suspected her of having an inappropriate pregnancy. Even though we believe according to the Holy Quran that the pregnancy was entirely through God's power so that it is a sign for the Jews till the end of times. And the same way that thousands of bugs are born by themselves during the rainy season, Hazrat Adam was also born without a father or a mother. So then a fatherless birth for Hazrat Isa does not prove a high status. Actually, being born without a father indicates a lack of certain qualities. In summary, Hazrat Mary's betrothal only happened because of a suspicion, otherwise a why would a woman who had been anointed to serve the Jerusalem Temple need a marriage? (Ahmad, 2008: 288-289)

There was little mention of Ahmad's new strategy of distinguishing the Christian Jesus from Muslim Jesus in Ahmad's first book titled *Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya* that was completed in 1879 but took another five years to publish because of lack of funds (Dard, 1948: 90). This could also be because *Braheen* was primarily directed at proving that Islam was superior to Hinduism to respond to Arya Samaj's missionary activities. In *Braheen*, Ahmad displayed the same fierceness in attacking Hinduism as he was to go on to display in attacking Christianity. Publication of *Braheen* also occurred at a time when Muslims were still fearful of appearing too aggressive lest they be labeled as *Wahabi* extremists by the British government. In fact, Muhammad

Hussain Batalavi actively lobbied the British officials throughout the 1880s requesting that reformist Muslims from Shah-Waliullah's tradition be relabeled an Ahl-e-Hadith rather than as Wahabis.

Ahmad shared drafts of Braheen with Batalavi to seek his comments. Batalavi published advertisements in *Ishat-us-Sunnah* promoting Braheen years before its publications. Finally, when the book was published, Batalavi and most in the Ahl-e-Hadith community (especially those in Delhi and Punjab) hailed it enthusiastically. Batalavi wrote a glowing review in *Ishat-us-Sunnah*.

In our opinion, it is in this time and in the present circumstances, a book the like of which has not been written up to this time in Islam, and nothing can be said about the future; Allah may bring about another affair after this. Its author, too, has proved himself firm in helping the cause of Islam, with his property, his person, his pen, his tongue and his personal religious experience, to such an extent that it is rarely seen among Muslims who have gone before. If someone thinks that my words are Asian exaggeration then show me at least one such book that confronts opponents of Islam especially the Arya Samaj with such gusto and enthusiasm. And point out such supporters of Islam who have taken upon themselves to help the cause of Islam with their property, their person, their treasure, their pen, and their tongue. And who has successfully challenged, with all his manly courage, opponents of Islam and deniers of revelation that if they doubt divine revelation to visit him and experience, observe and taste it. (Batalavi, 1884: 169-170)

The reaction to Braheen was not uniform even among the Ahl-e-Hadith. Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan, for instance, angrily returned copies of Ahmad's books sent to him with a note saying that he was afraid that such controversial works will draw the anger of the British authorities. Responding to Khan in an *ishtihar* (i.e., poster), Ahmad exhibited a much more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the relationship between the British government and Christian missionaries in India than was common among Muslim leaders of the time. He wrote:

Criticism of the government in such matters is wrong. It is not the British government's policy to prevent a nation from proving the truth of its religion or prevent people from supporting religious books. Yes, if there is something that obstructs peace or is against administration of the state then the government will interfere in it. Otherwise, everyone has the permission to use resources for the progress of their religion... This is the reason that about a month ago Lieutenant Government of our country of Punjab, Sir Charles Aitchison Sahib Bahadur, came to the district of Gurdaspur. While laying down the foundations of a church, with remarkable plainness and without a hint of pretense, he said that, "I hope that within a few days this country will progress in religiosity and forthrightness"... One should understand the freedom of the British government from this remark. Because when the Lieutenant Governor Bahadur himself not only wants to spread his good faith in India but also urges others whenever he finds an occasion then why would he be angry when others express their affinity for their religion? (Ahmad, 1891c: 53)

Even among the pro-British Ahl-e-Hadith, Ahmad's unreserved support for all British government actions stood out and marked him along with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan as one of the most pro-government Muslim leaders of his time.

While Nawab Sidiq Khan had criticized Braheen because of its anti-Christian views, a number of other Muslim leaders saw in it claims that ran counter to their understanding of Islamic doctrine. These included Amritsar and Ludhiana's Muslim leaders who issued a fatwa of kufr against Ahmad and went around India to collect signatures from other Muslims to the same effect (Batalavi, 1884: 170). Ahmad's friend, Muhammad Hussain Batalavi, took upon himself to reply to this criticism through his *Ishat-us-Sunnah* magazine. He devoted a whopping one hundred and fifty three pages of Issue Nine and Ten to respond to each of these criticisms with well researched arguments. The amount of time, effort, money, and his personal capital, Batalavi spent on defending Ahmad reveals the extent of their ideological and social connections. The review also reveals Batalavi's perceptions of Ahmad. Batalavi clearly identifies with Ahmad as a fellow Punjabi Ahl-e-Hadith who is willing to spend considerable resources to defend Islam. He also sees Ahmad as more rural, less educated, less sophisticated, and less successful than himself. He sees Ahmad as "a Punjabi who has never had the opportunity" to live in the cosmopolitan cultural centers of Hindustan, "who hasn't had the occasion to read Urdu literature" and therefore is not able to write "refined Urdu vernacular" (Batalavi, 1884: 346). There are also hints of a noble savage in Batalavi's perceptions of Ahmad as he sees Ahmad as someone who is so overcome with religious fervor and zeal that "he's unable to hold back" from including his unrelated revelations in the Braheen (thereby lengthening it and "increasing publication costs"), and someone who doesn't understand that the "current civilization" demands refraining from crudely attacking one's enemies (Batalavi, 1884: 346).

Batalavi touts his personal knowledge of Ahmad's beliefs beyond the words written in Braheen to defend Ahmad. Answering the accusation that some of Ahmad's English revelations are grammatically incorrect, Batalavi says, "When I met the author who visited the city of Batala, where I am now, I asked him, 'when you receive revelations in English, are you shown English alphabets or Persian alphabets?' He responded that he is shown English sentences written in Farsi script. That's when I became sure of my suggestion that the mistake lies in the author's perception... and not the divine revelation" (Batalavi, 1884: 291). Ahmad's ignorance of English and his miracle of English revelations will attract English speaking Christians and Hindus to Islam argues Batalavi. It's clear that Batalavi sees the younger Ahmad as his junior, albeit more zealous, friend in need of assistance. Batalavi sees himself as heroically defending Ahmad with his superior knowledge of Quran, Hadith, and Islamic traditions. Since Batalavi does not see Ahmad as his competitor, he holds nothing back in defending him.

Perhaps some of our critics will place me in the same category as the author of Braheen-e-Ah-madiyya and slap the fatwa of kufr on me as well. They may say that I have raised the author of Braheen to the level of prophet Muhammad and I have declared his revelations to be innocent similar to the revelations of the Prophet but I am not afraid of their fatwa of kufr... (Batalavi, 1884: 284)

Over and over again, Batalavi insists throughout his review that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had not made any prophetic claims (pages 175; 191; 260; 268; 269; 273; 275; 278; 279). Muslim leaders who insist that he has, are mistaken argues Batalavi. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a Muslim and not a *kafir*, argues Batalavi. In one paragraph where Batalavi not only foresees the group-name of *Ahmadi* that Ahmad was to assign to his movement seventeen years later but also the pejorative group name of *Mirzai* that their opponents were to call them by, Batalavi writes:

What does he [Mirza Ghulam Ahmad] conclude from his revelations and miracles? Does he use them to prove his prophethood or the prophethood of Muhammad? What religion does he invite people (including many top padres, pundits, Brahmo Arya rajas, and sardars of other religions) with such bravery and boldness? Is it the Islamic religion or Ahmadi religion or Mirzai religion?

Unless you are a person whose heart has been darkened with prejudice, these arguments and reasoning would have convinced you that **he absolutely makes no claim whatsoever to his own prophethood** [emphasis in the original]. The true purpose of all of each and every one of his claims is the proof of prophethood of Muhammad. (Batalavi, 1884: 278-279)

Thanks to the tireless promotion of reformist Muslims leaders such as Batalavi, Ahmad started to become known all across North India as a fierce advocate of the Islamic causes. While Ahmad was having some success in his professional life, his personal life was going through some turmoil. His elder brother, who had been his caretaker since his father's death, also died in 1883. Ahmad's grown up sons had their own lives (the older son, Sultan Ahmad, had moved away from Qadian to work as a civil servant). Ahmad's relations with his first wife were 'practically severed' perhaps because of her insistence to cling to her traditional orthodox Hanafi beliefs and because of Ahmad now openly associating himself with his unorthodox Ahl-e-Hadith friends such as Batalavi. Ahmad felt the need for companionship and decided that the time was right to get married again but this time to an Ahl-e-Hadith girl who shared his reformist views. According to the account, written by Ahmad's son, he contacted his friend Muhammad Hussain Batalavi requesting him to look for a suitable match for him.

My mother told me that, "before my marriage, Hazrat Sahib [i.e., Ahmad] found out that his second marriage would be in Delhi. Therefore, he mentioned it to Moulavi Muhammad Hussain Batalavi. Because at that time he [i.e., Batalavi] had a list of all Ahl-e-Hadith girls and Mir Sahib [i.e., her father and Ahmad's future father in law] was also an Ahl-e-Hadith who had a great relationship with him. Therefore, he mentioned Hazrat Sahib's name to Mir Sahib. He also wrote to Mir Sahib. In the beginning, Mir Sahib did not like this match because of the differences in our ages but eventually he relented. Then Hazrat Sahib came to Delhi to marry me. He was accompanied by Shaikh Hamid Ali and Lala Malawa Mal. The marriage was performed by Moulana Nazir Hussain. This happened on Monday, 27 Muharram 1302, when I was eighteen years old. Hazrat Sahib gave Moulavi Nazir Hussain five rupees and a prayer rug as a nazar. (Ahmad, 1935: 57-58)

Offering *nazar* to the founder of the Ahl-e-Hadith movement in India is a rare occasion where Ahmad's Ahmadi biographers allow him to engage in a traditional Sufi practice. It is noteworthy that this exception was made for an Ahl-e-Hadith alim and not for a traditional Sufi. It appears that Nazir Hussain shared the affection that Ahmad had for him. According to Ahmad's disciple and biographer Pir Siraj-ul-Haq Numani, Nazir Hussain called Ahmad a 'holy man' while Ahmad called Nazir a '*waliullah*'.

One day I asked Hazrat Aqdas<sup>as</sup> [i.e., Mirza Ghulam Ahmad] "Hazoor, what do you say about the *wahabi ghair-muqalads*? Are they an impure sect? (I used to be a strongly prejudiced Hanafi back then)."

On listening to this, he smiled but stayed silent and didn't say a word.

Next day, when I asked him again he said, "that sect is also from God and is not bad. When people stressed taqlid and Hanafism so much that they turned the four saints into prophets then God created this sect with his wisdom so that muqallids return to the right path and become balanced. The only thing bad about them is that each of them has become a mujtahid and an imam and started calling the four imams bad."

I asked, "what do you think about the founder and the leader of this sect, Moulavi Nazir Hussain?"

He said, "I have good impression of Moulavi Nazir Hussain and he is also a *waliullah*."

I said that "Huzoor, I should ask for forgiveness for many bad things that I have uttered about Nazir Hussain"...

I traveled to Qadian, I said I am coming from Qadian. He asked, "did you also meet Mirza Ghulam Ahmad? " I said, "Yes I just came from his place." He said, "It's good that you went there and met him. He is a holy person similar to the holy people of the past" ... He said, "if you go to Qadian, then convey my salam greetings in accordance with the Sunnah of the holy prophet." (Numani, 1915: 214-215)

Waliullah literally means friend of Allah and is considered to be an extremely high rank on the ladder of piousness. Ahmad's use of the title to refer to Syed Nazeer Hussain show his reverence for the Ahl-e-Hadith leader.

While Ahmad's innovative strategy of aggressively attacking Christians by distinguishing the Christian Jesus from Muslims' Issa won him accolades from fellow Muslims, it failed to stem the tide of Muslim conversions to Christianity. After about a decade (from about 1880 to about 1890) of exclusively relying on this strategy, Ahmad came to the conclusion that the strategy was not enough on its own. As the number of Christian missions, schools, and hospitals in Punjab multiplied, the number of Muslims converting to Christianity also continued to increase. In fact, some of Ahmad's followers and relatives also converted to Christianity (Ahmad, 1898: 143). Ahmad searched for an additional weapon to counter the attack of Christian missionaries against Islam. This is when he discovered what he regarded as his greatest weapon.

Ahmad came to call it the key to “breaking the cross” i.e., debunking Christianity and banishing it from earth forever.

At long last, the time for the breaking of the cross came: the time when the error of the creed of the cross was to be exposed with such clarity as the splitting a piece of wood into two. Heaven has thrown open the door to the breaking of the cross, so that whoever seeks the truth may seek and learn. (Ahmad, 1908: 72)

In 1891, Ahmad published three books titled “Fath-e-Islam,” “Tauziyay Maram,” and “Azala-Auoham” to outline his new strategy. He claimed that God had told him that (a) Jesus had not been lifted to heaven by God prior to his crucifixion, (b) it had been Jesus who had suffered the indignity of having been hanged on a cross but God has miraculously saved him from immediate death, and (c) Jesus had died a natural death after having lived his full natural life.

In order to sell this change in belief to Muslims, Ahmad adopted an arcing narrative that appealed to social identity beliefs of his fellow Muslims (Upal, 2015c). He argued that Muslims during their glory days (i.e., during the life of the prophet and his first four ‘rightly guided’ Caliphs) did not believe in Jesus’ physical ascension to heaven. Such beliefs he argued were corruptions that had slowly crept into Islam over the preceding centuries. Note that this is the same process through which Muslims believe that the divine message to Christians and Jews was corrupted over time. Ahmad merely extended the same process to the Islamic beliefs regarding Jesus. He argued that a correction in Islamic beliefs was the only way for Muslims to fight a well-organized and well-funded Christian missionary effort. If Muslims adopt these changes, Ahmad argued that they will be able to turn the world back to the glory days when Islam dominated Christianity and this would result in the long-promised final victory of Islam. In order to appeal to Muslim social identity beliefs, he argued that a natural death for Jesus would show that Jesus was not better than Muhammad. Thus, those who oppose this change are not true friends of Islam.

To believe that Jesus is alive, is highly insulting and derogatory to the Holy Prophet. I cannot stand this sacrilege even for a moment. Everyone knows that the Holy Prophet passed away at the age of sixty-three and lies buried in his tomb at Medina, which millions of pilgrims visit every year. If it is disrespectful to believe in the death of Jesus or even to think of it, then I ask how can you permit this insolence and disrespect with regard to the Holy Prophet?... how can one claim to love and be a follower of the Holy Prophet if he accepts a superior status for Jesus by pronouncing him alive and the Holy Prophet dead?

Believe me, had the Holy Prophet continued to live, not a single person would have remained an unbeliever. On the other hand, what is the use of Jesus supposedly being alive except for the four hundred million Christians? Just pause and ponder! Haven’t you tested the belief in Jesus being alive? Hasn’t the outcome been grave? Name any Muslim community of which no member has been converted to Christianity. For my part, I can say with certainty that Muslims belonging to all classes have converted to Christianity and the number of such converts may be more than one hundred thousand. The lone weapon with which Christians convert Muslims to Christianity

is none other than the belief that Jesus is still alive. "Show us such an exclusive quality in anyone else other than Jesus," they say. "If Jesus is not God, why was he singled out for this distinction?" To them, he is Ever-Living, and Self-Existing—God forbid. This concept of a living Jesus has emboldened them to mount attack on Muslims, the effect of which I have already pointed out. Imagine the dismay of the priests if, on the contrary, you were to establish the death of Jesus! I have confronted many an eminent Christian priest with this and they have invariably replied: "If it is proved that Jesus is dead, our faith cannot live."

Here is another point to ponder: You have seen for yourselves the consequences of the belief in a living Jesus. Now try to visualize the after-effect of his demise and the damage it does to the Christian creed. This can be illustrated from the fact that whenever any of my followers wants to enter into discussion with the Christians on this point, they instantly refuse, for they know it would sound their death knell. With Jesus dead, they can prove neither redemption, nor Jesus' divinity, nor, for that matter, his being the son of God. So try this formula for a few days and the reality will speak for itself...this too is an undeniable fact that Islam lives if Jesus dies. If you reflect on this, you will realize that this is the issue which is destined to seal the fate of Christianity. It is the mainstay of the edifice of the Christian faith, so let it collapse. (Ahmad, 1908: 72)

While Ahmad had hoped to eventually turn the focus of his missionary efforts towards the enemy camp and convert Christians to Islam, the primary target audience of his early messages consisted of his fellow Ahl-e-Hadith including Muhammad Hussain Batalavi, Syed Nazir Hussain, and sons of late Moulavi Abdullah Ghaznavi. In his 1891 books, in a traditional Ahl-e-Hadith style, he bypassed the medieval Islamic sources of authority such as the four Imams and focused directly on evidence from Quran and Hadith to convince his audience of the merits of his ijtehad.

To really blunt the arguments by Christian Evangelists, who pointed to Muhammad's tomb as a proof of his lower status, Ahmad wanted a physical symbol of Jesus' death, preferably a tomb. Ahmad's search for Jesus' tomb seemed to have started in the holy land where Christian sources have traditionally placed Jesus' tomb. In 1891, he wrote that, "Of course it is true that Jesus died in Galilee but it is not true that his body was resurrected" (Ahmad, 1891a: 473). In 1894, he wrote to a Syrian acquaintance inquiring about the exact co-ordinates of the tomb. When told that it was nearby, he assumed that it was in Syria. He wrote,

...the funny thing is that there is a tomb of Jesus in the country of Syria. For further clarity regarding this matter I quote the witness of brother Syed Muhammad Al-saeedi Tarablassi who lives in Tarablas, Syria. . . If you were to argue that the tomb is fake then you would have to prove your argument. You would also have to show when the fakery were invented? If Jesus' tomb is proved fake we would also become suspicious about the tombs of other prophets and lose our belief in their authenticity. We would have to admit that perhaps those tombs are also fake. (Ahmad, 1894: 18-19)

The milieu in which Ahmad made his claims served as fodder for his creative process both by providing him with social problems to think about and by limiting the creative space he had to explore to find solutions. The period in which Ahmad lived was unique in a number of ways: opening of reliable contacts with India and Americas unleashed



an exciting period of discovery for Europeans, contacts with India allowed them to explore the common origins of the European and Indian languages (Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit), and European and Indian religions (Christianity and Buddhism). Some were reminded of the holy land as described in the Bible when they visited India. Some saw the lighter skinned Afghans and Kashmiris as being similar to European Aryans while others saw them as being similar to Jews in appearance as well as customs. The presumed similarities between Buddhism and Christianity also led scholars to a number of controversial hypotheses. Perhaps, none was as controversial as the hypothesis put forward by Russian journalist Nicolas Notovitch, who speculated that Jesus had come to India during his “missing years” (i.e., between the ages of 12 and 30). He claimed to have personally seen the evidence in a Buddhist book shown to him by monks when he visited Tibet (Notovitch, 1990/1887).

It was in this milieu that Ahmad first articulated his claim that Jesus had come to India after having miraculously survived the cross to save the lost tribes that lives in Afghanistan and Kashmir. After preaching to all twelve Israeli tribes, Jesus had died a natural death at the ripe old age of 120 and was buried in Srinagar, Kashmir where one of Ahmad’s followers had located the tomb of an unknown Christian. Given the time period during which it was proposed, nothing about Ahmad’s theory sounds remarkable (for example, when compared with Notovitch’s theory) other than the fact that after narrating all the scholarly arguments in favour of his claim, Ahmad concluded that it was God who had revealed the truth to him.

Belief in Allah as the only God and Muhammad as his messenger has always been considered by most Muslims to be the primary condition of being a Muslim. Jesus’ being alive or dead had never been the primary determinant of Muslims identity. Since Jesus is not central to the Islamic narrative, it is not surprising if an average Muslim does not have a strong position on the issue of Jesus’ life and death. The only reason the issue aroused emotions among nineteenth century North Indian Muslims was that the Christian missionaries had been introducing it to open discussions with Muslims. Thus, had it not been for the Christian missionaries bringing Jesus to the fore of the consciousness of North Indian Muslims, it is doubtful that anyone would have paid attention to Ahmad’s message of Jesus’ survival of his crucifixion and his later death. Similarly, it is hard to imagine Ahmad’s claims gaining much traction in a pre-reform traditional Hanafi/Sufi environment of North Indian Islam. This is because in such an environment, doing taqlid (i.e., the following of more-than-a millennia of tradition) is what makes one a better Muslim and not engaging in ijtehad (i.e., using one’s deep knowledge of Quran & Hadith to address current problems). One can also imagine how difficult Ahmad’s task would have been if in addition to reinterpreting Quran and Hadith to suggest that Jesus had died, Ahmad also had to reinterpret sayings of hundreds of Hanafi scholars on the issue. However, because similar to his Ahl-e-Hadith friends, he insisted that Quran and authentic Hadith were the only sources of authority, this was not an issue in his mind or his closest associates. While there is no evidence to indicate that Ahmad ever formally offered bayat to an Ahl-e-Hadith

alim (such as Syed Nazir Hussain), he regarded them highly in the early part of his life and many of his associates openly identified themselves as Ahl-e-Hadith prior to becoming Ahmadis. Ahmad also called himself a *ghair-muqallid* and acknowledged that that is how others saw him. In a letter written to Moulavi Nur-ud-Din, he wrote:

This humble man had sent out many letter for your second marriage. One place that has responded seems in accordance with our desires. By this I refer to Mir Abbas Ali Shah Sahib's letter that I am sending for your perusal. This letter has a strange condition that [groom] be Hanafi, not be a *ghair-muqalad*. Since Mir Sahib is Hanafi and my sincere friend Munshi Ahmad Jan Sahib (May God shower him with blessings), with whose blessed daughter this proposal is in front of us, was also a staunch Hanafi. That's why they have put the condition of Hanafi. Even though all Muslims are part of Hanafi religion of Abraham but still there has to be an appropriate answer. Munshi Ahmad Jan... was not prejudiced. He knew about me that that I am not a believer in Hanafi taqlid and nor did he like it but even then this thought did not prevent him from love and sincerity. (Ahmad, 2008: 56)

## 7.1 How Ahmad's Friends & Family Helped Him Realize His Role in Life

One of the people who read Braheen was an Ahl-e-Hadith *alim* by the name of Hakeem Nur-ud-Din. As an Ahl-e-Hadith Muslim ashraf who worked as a chief physician for the Maharaja of Kashmir, Nur-ud-Din was exactly the kind of person Ahmad had hoped his books would appeal to. Nur-ud-Din was a sanad-holding alim who had travelled all over India and Arabia to study Islam under the most well-known ulema of the time. Nur-ud-Din was so impressed with Braheen that he decided to pay a visit to Qadian to meet with its author. They seem to have hit it off from their first meeting in 1885:

As soon as I saw his face I was overjoyed, and felt happy and grateful to have found the *perfect man* that I was seeking all my life... (Nur-ud-Din, 1908)

Nur-ud-Din said that in that moment he felt such an instantaneous connection with Ahmad that he knew that "I could lay down my life for him."

At the end of the first meeting, I offered my hand for Bay'ah. Hazrat Mirza Sahib [i.e., Mirza Ghulam Ahmad] said, he was not yet divinely commissioned to accept bay'ah; then I made Mirza Sahib promise me that I would be the person whose bay'ah would be accepted first.

You may be sure.

Is there any special effort that I should put forth to win the love of God?

Write a book on refutation of Christian criticism of Islam. (Nur-ud-Din, 1908)

Nur-ud-Din devoted the next few months to write the book he was asked to write. Over the next few years, Nur-ud-Din was to completely devote everything he had (his time, money, and expertise) to Ahmad and the two would have such an influence on each other that it is hard to imagine what course Ahmad's life would have taken had he not met Nur-ud-Din. They wrote to each other frequently. Nur-ud-Din visited Qadian as frequently as he could. When Nur-ud-Din got sick, Ahmad visited him in Jammu. Nur-ud-Din kept urging Ahmad to accept a leadership role and to accept his oath of allegiance (bay'ah) but Ahmad was reluctant to do so.

It is hard to know what was going through Ahmad's mind as he repeatedly declined invitations from devotees such as Nur-ud-Din to publicly proclaim divine authority and to accept their formal oaths of allegiance. Ahmad's Muslim opponents often attacked him for lacking the authority of a formal sanad from any well-known *alim*. They argued that this was a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for engaging in *ijtehad*. Only a much higher ranked *mujaddid* could advocate the kind of changes Ahmad was advocating. Islamic tradition describes a hierarchy of divine authorities ranging from 'Christian saint-like' figures called a *mujaddid* (literally a renewer) to prophets called a *nabi* or a *rasul*. A *mujaddid* introduces reforms in religious doctrines but failure to recognize them and give them one's allegiance (or *bayah*) does not make a Muslim an infidel. Prophets on the other hand, bring new laws and scriptures from God and have to be obeyed to achieve salvation. Claimants to the offices of *mujaddid* and *nabi/rasul* have been treated very differently in the history of Islam. Most claimants to the office of *mujaddid* (e.g., Shah Waliullah of Delhi) were tolerated by most Muslims and even revered by some. All of those who claimed to be prophets, however, were vehemently opposed and attempts on their life were religiously sanctioned by a vast majority of Muslims. These include a series of tribal chiefs who declared themselves to be prophets following the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. They were militarily attacked, defeated and killed under the commands of the first successor (or Caliph) to the Prophet Muhammad.

In 1882, Ahmad claimed that God had appointed him a *mujaddid* of the 14<sup>th</sup> Islamic century. As he was to explain to Nur-ud-Din years later, as a *mujaddid*, he was not authorized to accept people's formal allegiance or to start a formal community. Nur-ud-Din's insistence that he accept his *bayah* may have indicated to Ahmad that Nur-ud-Din thought that Ahmad deserved a higher rank. After desertions of some prominent followers following Ahmad's son Bashir's death, who he had thought was the target of his prophecy of a wildly successful successor, died in infancy, Ahmad decided to formalize his relationship with his followers in 1889. Nur-ud-Din became the first of the approximately 40 people to offer their oath to Ahmad. In 1891, Ahmad formally announced the formation of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at as a chosen community of true Muslims who would win the final global victory of Islam by converting people around the globe to 'true Islam.' He also claimed that God had told him that the Mahdi and the Messiah were supposed to be the same person and that God had appointed him to both offices. He said that Allah had told him "the Messiah, son of Mary, prophet of

Allah, had died and in his attribute thou hast come in accordance with the promise.” (Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s 1890 revelation as quoted by Alladin, 2015).

Since the original Jesus was a prophet, Ahmad seemed to suggest in some of his writings that he was also raised to that status so that the Islamic Messiah was seen by people as inferior to the Christian Messiah. He argued that a rise in his personal status was also needed to show that Muhammad was superior to Jesus.

It pains me to hear the ignorant people say that Jesus is alive in heaven, whereas it is in the Holy Prophet that I see the signs of life. People ask me how could I have claimed to be the Promised Messiah. Let me tell them that, through complete obedience to the Holy Prophet, one can attain a status even higher than that of Jesus... (Ahmad, 2007: 26)

When some Muslims objected that the Quran declares Muhammad as his final prophet (e.g., 33:40 “Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of God and the last of the prophets”), he argued that they had misunderstood the true meaning of the verse. He said that the Arabic word “khatim” is not used in the sense of its common meaning of “last” but in the less used meaning of a “seal.”

the verse means that, though the Holy Prophet did not have any male offspring, he will have countless spiritual progeny, and that he is ‘the Seal of Prophets’, which means that no one can attain the excellence of prophethood unless he possesses the certificate of obedience to him. This is the true connotation of this verse, but these people have completely reversed its meaning and have rejected the bounty of prophethood in the future, even though this implies a criticism of the Holy Prophet himself. The perfection of a Prophet lies in his ability to impart to his followers the excellence of prophethood... Remember O Muslims! It is the height of ignorance and stupidity to harbour this belief. If Islam is indeed such a ‘dead’ religion, then whom will you invite to embrace it? Will you take its corpse to Japan or will you offer it to Europe?... The fact, O naive and blind people, is that our Holy Prophet, and our lord and master, (countless blessings be upon him), surpassed all Prophets in his spiritual influence. The influence of all prophets came to an end at a certain point and their people and their religions have no trace of life left in them, but the spiritual influence of the Holy Prophet will endure to the last day. For this reason, this umma does not require that a Messiah should come into it from outside, for under the Holy Prophet’s influence, even an ordinary man can become a Messiah, just as God has done in my case. (Ahmad, 1906: 74-75)

By following Muhammad, Ahmad said that he had become not only similar to Jesus but also similar to numerous other prophets who had all become prophets because of Muhammad the *khatim* i.e., prophet-maker in Ahmad’s new interpretation. This led him to famously declare that, “I am Adam, I am Noah, I am Issac, I am Jacob, I am Ismail, I am Moses, I am Abraham, I am Jesus, and I am Muhammad” (M. G. Ahmad, 1907: 84).

Ahmad also announced that God had told him that traditional Muslim beliefs about Jihad also needed to be reformed. The abrogation of Jihad as “war against infidels” was also required to ensure the domination of Islam over Christianity, argued Ahmad.

Here's how one of Ahmad's early followers, Moulana Muhammad Ali interpreted Ahmad's claims regarding Jihad:

What Ahmad rejected was not the doctrine of jihad but the orthodox interpretation of it, which had given rise in the West to grave misconceptions regarding the doctrine of jihad, so that even unprejudiced Western writers thought the word jihad to be synonymous with war undertaken for forcing the religion of Islam upon non-Muslims. Thus, in the Encyclopedia of Islam, the article on Jihad opens with the following words: 'The spread of Islam by arms is a religious duty upon Muslims in general'. Klein, in his Religion of Islam, makes an even more sweeping statement: 'Jihad ... The fighting against unbelievers with the object of either winning them over to Islam, or subduing and exterminating them in case they refuse to become Muslims.'

In the Muslim popular mind there was an even-greater misconception, that the killing of an unbeliever was jihad and that such an act entitled the perpetrator to be called a ghazi.

This conception, coupled with the prevailing belief in the advent of a Mahdi who would put all non-Muslims to the sword if they refused to accept Islam, opposed as it was to the plain teachings of the Holy Quran, was doing immense harm to the cause of the spread of Islam among non-Muslims. (Ali, 1937: 75)

While Ahmad's message quickly attracted dozens of sympathetic souls from among the Ahl-e-Hadith who already believed that Jihad against the British was forbidden, he also attracted plenty of opposition, not only from Christians and Hindus but also fellow Muslims, perhaps most shocking even from fellow Ahl-e-Hadith, i.e. Muhammad Hussain Batalavi, who in a complete role reversal now vowed to bring Ahmad down. Batalavi lobbied his teacher Syed Nazir Hussain to also publicly condemn Ahmad as *kafir*. According to Ahmadi sources, the old and frail Hussain only begrudgingly agreed to Batalavi's repeated requests. Abdullah Ghaznavi's sons (who succeeded him in Khjayrdi) who had never liked their father's close relationship with Ahmad, also joined in condemning him as a *kafir*. Ahmad described some of the fatwas issued against him by his former Ahl-e-Hadith supporters.

#### **Mian Nazeer Hussain Dehlavi known as Shaikh-ul-kul**

He is the writer and originator of the fatwa that was published against me in *Ishat-us-Sunnah* Volume 5 Issue 13. The writer of the fatwa i.e., Mian Sahib has used these words about me in his fatwa:

Expelled from Ahl-e-Sunnat. His actual practice is that of inner atheists etc. who have become lost. He can be called one of the thirty dajjals (anti-Christ) that have been foretold in the Hadith because of his false claims and publication and non-believing ways...

#### **Shaikh Muhammad Hussain Batalavi, Editor of *Ishat-us-Sunnah*...**

A hidden enemy of Islam, the second Musailima, dajjal of the age, fortune-teller, astrologer...

**Ghaznavi Group**

Moulavi Abdul Jabbar Sahib while signing the above mentioned fatwa on page 200 wrote the following words: "The one who makes such claims is against the Prophet of God... One of those people about whom Allah's prophet has said that at the end of times lying dajjals will be born... Save yourself from them lest they misguide you and talk you into it. His (Qadiani's) little chicks (followers) are eunuchs of Christianity and Hinduism."...

**Abdul haq Ghaznavi...**

Dajjal, atheist, liar, black-hearted, evil-doer, Satan, cursed, faithless, dishonored... (Ahmad, 1898: 118-121)

Given the fierce opposition from his fellow Ahl-e-hadith, Ahmad seemed to have backed off a little from his original prophetic claims. In a pamphlet Ahmad published on October 2, 1891, he wrote:

I have heard that some leading ulema of this city of Delhi give publicity to this charge against me that I lay claim to prophethood... Therefore, to make manifest the truth I declare before the learned and the laymen that this charge is a fabrication, pure and simple. Neither, do I lay claim to prophethood, nor am I a denier of miracles and angels... After our leader and master Muhammad, peace be upon him, the last of the messengers, I consider anyone who claims prophethood and messengership to be a liar and kafir. (Ahmad, 1891c: 230)

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1892, he wrote:

Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa, peace and the blessings of God be upon him, is the last of the Prophets. I, therefore, wish to make it clear to all my Muslims brothers that if these words vex or wound their feelings in any ways, they may look upon them as having been struck off and replaced by the word Muhaddath everywhere... it has never been my intention to take the word 'Nabi' to suggest Real Prophethood. The word, to put in a plain language, means a Muhaddath which the Holy Prophet has interpreted to denote 'one spoken by God.' (Ali, 1917: 3-4)

In 1897, he wrote:

Can a wretched imposter who claims messengership and prophethood for himself have any belief in the Holy Quran? And can a man who believes in the Holy Quran, and believes the verse *'He is the Messenger of Allah and the Khatam an-nabiyyin'* to be the word of God, say that he is a messenger and prophet after the Holy Prophet Muhammad?

Anyone who is fair-minded should remember that I have never, at any time, made a claim of nubuwat or risalat [prophethood or messengership] in the real sense. To use a word in a non-real sense, and to employ it in speech according to its broad, root meaning, does not imply infidelity (kufr). However, I do not like even this much, for there is the possibility that ordinary Muslims may misunderstand it. (Ahmad, 1897: 27 Footnote)

In order to change beliefs sanctioned by generations of Muslims for hundreds of years including some of the most revered Islamic figures, Ahmad knew that he still needed the divine authority superseding all Muslims since the Prophet Muhammad's time, but since the Muslim aversion to the word prophet seemed to distract attention from the merits of the reformations he was advocating, he decided to invent a new religious authority. He called it, "zilli nabi" or "shadowy prophethood". He claimed that since Imam Mahdi and Promised Messiah was to be a zill (i.e., shadow) of two prophets (namely Muhammad and Jesus), he could also be called a zilli prophet i.e., his prophethood was not an independent prophethood but only a reflection of the prophethood of Jesus and Muhammad. While this new invention may have allowed him some breathing room, it would also, in time, split his community into two with some Ahmadis arguing that he was a full prophet while others denying it - but let's not get ahead of ourselves. After securing his rear flank, Ahmad focused his attention back onto Christians and Hindus.

Ahmad held a number of public debates with leaders of major religious factions including Dr. Henry Martyn Clark of the CMS. At the end of the debate that lasted fifteen days, Ahmad announced that God had revealed to him that within fifteen months God would show a sign in support of Islam. According to Rev. Robert Clark, this was interpreted by most as indicating that he was to die within fifteen months.

There is great excitement about the Mullah's prophecy about the death of Athim and of Henry in fifteen months after the great controversy in which they took part. The Easterns we shall never understand. (Clark, 1907)

This was not the first time Ahmad had been understood to have prophesized the death of an opponent. In 1893, God had revealed to him that the Arya Samaj leader Pandit Lekh Ram, "shall be cut into pieces" like a calf. On March 6, 1897, Lekh Ram was stabbed to death by an assailant who fled the scene. Police searched Ahmad's property but found no incriminating evidence. This prompted a worried Dr. Henry Martyn Clark of CMS to have Ahmad charged with planning his own murder. It was alleged that Ahmad had deputized one of his disciples, Abdul Hameed, to murder Dr. Clark. Despite the intense sectarian atmosphere of Punjab, the case against Ahmad produced an unprecedented occasion of inter-religious harmony with orthodox Muslims, represented by Muhammad Husain Batalavi, and the Hindu Arya Samajis, represented by Chaudhary Ram Bhaj Dutt, the President of the Arya Samaj, joining hands with Dr. Clark to enter pleas to support Dr. Clark. Ram Bhaj Dutt, a lawyer, even offered his considerable legal expertise free of charge. Unfortunately for the multifaith coalition, and fortunately for Ahmad, the scrupulous District Magistrate, Capt. M.W. Douglas, found that the chief witness in the case had been schooled in his evidence by Christian missionaries who worked with Dr. Clark, and he acquitted Ahmad. Ahmad died of natural causes on 26 May 1908, leaving behind a community of thousands who believed him to be a divinely inspired reformer. Today, millions of Ahmadis present on every continent of the globe continue to believe him to be so<sup>29</sup>.

## 7.2 The Social Identity Change Entrepreneurship (SIE) Model and Ahmad's Religious Innovations

Around the time Ahmad grew up, many thinking Muslims viewed the Islamic community to be under threat from Christian missionaries who were “insinuating themselves into every nook and corner of the Muslim world, and with heaps of abusive literature distributed freely among the Muslims, Christianity was challenging the very existence of Islam” (Ali, 1937: 16). Similar to almost all other North Indian Muslim boys growing in similar environment, he came to internalize this view of the world. With his elder brother having already taken up the role of the good landlord, Ahmad decided to adopt the role of a spiritual healer open to the scion of a feudal family. When one reads Ahmad's books and numerous volumes of his oral sayings recorded by his followers, one is overwhelmed with the strength of his identity as a Muslim to the exclusion of all other identities. While the words Muslims, Mussalmans, Islam, ummah, and believers are frequently repeated on every page, one is struck by the complete absence of terms such as Indians, Punjabis, Northwest Indians, or any other regional or ethnic identity terms in reference to himself. Clearly, Ahmad strongly identified as a Muslim above and beyond any other identity.

As an ardent Muslim, Ahmad was extremely motivated to resolve the social problems facing the Muslim community. Being a son of a feudal family with ethnic connections with the Mughal dynasty, formal religious training, and accolades for his early articles championing the defense of Islam, he certainly had the credibility needed to withstand the blow back that comes as a result of leading social change that he was convinced was needed in order to fix the broken superiority myths of Muslims. There is little doubt that Ahmad's followers respected him for his creative genius in resolving problems of interest to the Muslim community in a way that would enhance the status of Muslims, especially in comparison to the out-group, namely, Christians. Here's how Ahmad's follower Muhammad Ali summarizes Ahmad's major contributions:

Deep religious mysteries which had baffled human minds for centuries had been unraveled. The second advent of Christ, the tribulation of the Anti-Christ, the prevalence of Gog and Magog, the coming of the Mahdi and similar other topics were mysteries which affected the two great religions of the world, Christianity and Islam, both contending for the mastery of the world, and an inspired man was indeed needed to lift the veil from the face of these mysteries. Such a man was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He was gifted not only with inspiration to elucidate the deepest mysteries, but also with the faith and energy which enabled him to give a new direction to the dissemination of Islam, which had hitherto found the West deaf to its message. Christianity was out to conquer the Muslim world; in temporal matters it had ousted Islam, but in the spiritual domain Mirza Ghulam Ahmad made a bold start and gave a challenge to Christianity in its very home. (Ali, 1937: 65)

How Ahmad came to believe that God had told him of Jesus' death and burial in Kashmir illustrates the process through which many religious social identity entrepreneurs



come to believe that their their social identity change ideas are divinely inspired. Ahmad's early articles and books show that Ahmad held traditional Ahl-e-Hadith beliefs regarding Jesus' ascension to the heavens. In fact, he defended those beliefs against the rationalist Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who had argued in his commentary on the Quran that Jesus escaped death on the cross and died of natural causes later (Khan, 1880). However, some time during the early 1880s, Ahmad came to believe that traditional Muslims beliefs were indefensible in arguments with Christians. For years, he thought about possible solutions to this conundrum all the while praying to God to provide him with guidance.

Ahmad describes the intense joy that he received when he finally understood “the true meaning” of the Quranic verses and Ahadith concerning Jesus. He talks about that joy as, “more delicious than a king gets from his throne.” . Why didn't Ahmad believe that it was he himself who had discovered these ideas? After all atheists also have fresh thoughts. Ahmad's answer would probably be that being the source of all knowledge it is indeed God who gives the knowledge to the atheists as well. It's just that an atheist is too ungrateful to acknowledge God as the source of his insight whereas a true believer is too humble to claim that he has discovered something on his own. He for, instance, that when a doctor thinks up a way of healing that is beneficial to us the doctor's search for an answer is akin to an answered prayer that had asked the Higher power for His blessing. “Even the people who have no connection to Allah or a belief in his existence also seek the unknown... but they do not know the source of their knowledge”.

Ahmad had reasons to believe that God was talking to him, as he so desperately wanted God to talk to him, to help him save Punjabi Muslims from conversion at the hands of Christian missionaries. He preferred to live in a world in which he believed that God talked to him rather than living in a world in which he did not believe that God talked to him. Ahmad frequently asks such rhetorical question as “why was I chosen by Allah to have these unique insights? Why has he continued to shower his blessings on me if I am a liar?” The only answer to these questions according to Ahmad was that it was indeed God who had chosen him and given him such brilliant insights.

### 7.3 Summary

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, was born in the Punjabi village of Qadian about 1839. He grew up as the youngest son of a family whose fortunes had waned along with those of the Mughal empire centered in Delhi. While his father and older brother busied themselves with managing their family's feudal lands, Ahmad developed his identity as an inheritor of the family's spiritual traditions of piety and healing. He became increasingly concerned with existential threats of conversion of Punjabi Muslims by both Hindu revivalist movements and

Christian missionaries. Of all the Muslim reform movements attempting to respond to these threats, his was most closely associated with the Ahl-e-Hadith movement that distinguished itself by (a) its vehement opposition to all sources of Islamic tradition except Quran and Hadith, and (b) its revival of the ijtehad doctrine which decreed that knowledgeable individual Muslims could themselves figure out solution to issues not directly addressed in Quran or Hadith rather than blindly following traditions. This freedom not only allowed Ahmad to develop his innovative solution to various problems facing Indian Muslims but also allowed his fellow Ahl-e-Hadith to make sense of his claims that contradicted more than a thousand years of Islamic consensus. Ahmad argued that the only way to blunt Christian missionary arguments about the superiority of Jesus over Muhammad would be to change the traditional Islamic beliefs in physical resurrection of Jesus into a belief in a spiritual resurrection that occurred following his natural death. Appealing to Muslim hierarchy-enhancing myths, he argued that Muhammad was not only superior to Jesus but was a prophet-making super-prophet. Thus, Ahmad said that, unlike other people of the Book (e.g., Jews and Christians who also followed divinely-inspired prophets), Muslims could achieve all spiritual ranks open to man (including that of a prophet) if they followed Muhammad's path (i.e., Sunnah) - presenting himself as an example. He claimed that because of his close pursuit of Sunnah, God had made him a prophet who could show miracles to prove Islam's superiority over other religions. Since, Jesus had died and therefore could not have descended from heaven, prophecies of his second coming were to be fulfilled metaphorically through a Muslim who would be raised to the rank of a prophet. This Muslim was to be no other than the Mahdi. Ahmad claimed that God had told him that he was that promised Mahdi and Messiah.

Since to most non-Ahl-e-Hadith Sunni Muslims (as well as Shia Muslims and non-Muslims), Ahmad's claims appeared maximally socially counterintuitive, they immediately rejected him as a heretic and a false prophet. This is because they revered traditional authorities (including the four traditional Imams) and since Ahmad's claims clearly contradicted the tradition and were thus unacceptable to them. To some among the Ahl-e-Hadith, however, Ahmad's claims were minimally counterintuitive. This is because the Ahl-e-Hadith did not believe in the authority of the traditional imams, and they believed that Islamic scholars should be able to create new solutions to new problems. There is little doubt that many prominent Ahl-e-Hadith leaders (such as the founder of the Ahl-e-Hadith, Syed Nazir Hussain and his prominent student Muhammad Hussain Batalavi who coined the name of the movement) and their followers considered Ahmad to be an eminent scholar of Islam and they enthusiastically supported him – at least initially. Thus most of his early followers came from the Ahl-e-Hadith. The Ahl-e-Hadith leaders were, however, perturbed by Ahmad's stubborn refusal to tone down his claims to prophethood despite their repeated requests. They finally came around to denouncing him as a heretic decades after he made his initial claims, by which time Ahmad counted thousands of Ahl-e-Hadith lay people as his followers.