

Notification no: 578/2025, dated 08/05/2025

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Title of the thesis: Constructing a National Muslim Self and Nadwatul Ulema

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Findings

The thesis titled “Constructing a National Muslim Self and Nadwatul Ulema” presents a comprehensive investigation into the sources of Arabized construction of Muslim self imagined in the late 19th century by the council of North Indian Ulema known as Nadwatul Ulema. The research uses post-colonial theories rooted in post-structuralism, to move beyond the loop of binary opposition, and develop a novel approach of ‘in-betweenness’, variously known as acculturation, ‘Janus faced’, ‘third space’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘liminality’ among others in cultural psychology, linguistic and literature and cultural studies. The application of the approach in-betweenness to study Nadwatul Ulema is novel and original as it challenges those studies which tried to box it in the opposition binary of the Westernized Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College and the traditional Darul Uloom at Deoband, designed to prepare Ulema to Islam against the onslaught of western modernity. It rather poses that Nadwatul Ulema neither rejected modernity nor tradition.

The study also challenges those who locate the origins of reforms in modernity and argues instead that origins of reform is rooted in the revivalist movement of 17th and 18th centuries, spearheaded by those Hadith scholars who frequented to Mecca such Ali Muttaqi, Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dehlavi, Murtadha Zabidi and Shah Waliullah. This trans-regional movement of Hadith scholars was warranted by the emergence of “the first globalization. In India, this first globalization, the migration of Indian Ulama to Hijaz and trans-imperial movement of Hadith literature was facilitated by the Portuguese navigation in Indian Ocean. This made the dormant Arab-Islamic culture in India to flourish. The first chapter of the dissertation argues that the reform of Nadwa was continuation of this intellectual tradition and demonstrates that it constituted the fundamental basis and vertical legacy for the Nadwa reform movement in the late 19th century and continued in the later period.

The second chapter posits that modernity represented the temporal, horizontal legacy of the Nadwa movement, equipping it with interpretive methods and tools to engage with the vertical legacy and foundational texts. The idea of vertical and horizontal legacy being

imperatives for any self construction is a framework articulated by Lebanese-born French writer Amin Maalouf . Maalouf posits that each individual is the bearer of two legacies. The first is a vertical legacy, inherited from our ancestors and rooted in the traditions, customs, and religious communities that have shaped us over generations. The second is a horizontal legacy, influenced by the era in which we live and the contemporaries with whom we share our world. This dual inheritance forms the basis for exploring cultural identity and interaction, and in the context of the Nadwa, these trajectories take on significant meaning. The first two chapters delve deeply into these dual dimensions of cultural legacy—the vertical inheritance of tradition and history, and the horizontal influence of modernity and contemporaneity—tracing how they shape and are reflected within the Nadwa’s cultural fabric.

The third chapter of the dissertation explores how Nadwatul-Ulema engaged with national and Arab’s cultural and political developments during the colonial and post-colonial periods. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the Arab world experienced the Arab Cold War, marked by a clash between the Islamist ideology of Saudi Arabia and the Nasserite socialism of Egypt. Post-1979, the region witnessed a shift to sectarian conflict, primarily between Shia factions led by Iran and Sunni factions led by Saudi Arabia.

The chapter delves into how Nadwatul-Ulema's trans-regional normative identity was constructed by appropriating and reinterpreting the works of Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah. This process not only deepened the tradition of 17th- and 18th-century Arab Islamic culture in India but also integrated elements from the region’s vertical and horizontal cultural legacies. The fourth chapter addresses the external others and the last chapter examines the interactive processes through which internal others were constructed within the Arabized normative Muslim self late 19th and early 20th century, which are believed to be determined to undermine the integrity of the Arabized normative Muslim Self.

This thesis showed that the Nadwa movement’s construction of self was a complex and evolving process, shaped by an on-going interplay of historical legacy, modernist adaptation, internal development, and external interaction. Nadwa’s capacity to synthesize diverse influences while preserving a distinct identity highlights its resilience and adaptability. This study not only enhances our understanding of Nadwa but also provides broader insights into the dynamics of identity formation within transnational religious movements. By examining these processes, the thesis offers a nuanced perspective on Nadwa’s historical and contemporary significance within the Islamic world.