Chapter 2

Preparing for Europe

Whereas in the previous chapter, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s vision was placed in a global context, in this chapter and the next I shall retrace the beginnings of the Ahmadiyya mission in interwar Europe. Viewing their endeavour as part of the quest for modernity, and describing the entanglement between India and Europe that they soon set in motion, we follow the missionaries on their track towards Europe. In London, they addressed the empire as British citizens with a message from the colonial periphery, while as foreigners in Berlin they established a node in the web of Muslim émigrés, appealing to a section of the German population that included bourgeois families and lower nobility. Once established in Berlin, they also formed a network among the indigenous Muslim communities in Central and Southeast Europe that were equally searching for modern answers. In Berlin especially, the missionaries tried to make sense of the European approach to modernity, which, in view of evolving German politics, was soon to take a dangerous turn. Caught in the struggle between liberals and nationalists, left- and right-wing sympathizers, Jews and Nazis, the missionaries nonetheless continued to invite a broad segment of German society to voice their very different visions of the future, including the future of religious progress. Invitation and discussion were the Ahmadiyya ‘weapons’ simultaneously to win over Europeans and to modernize Islam.

To clarify the nature of their engagement, the two chapters ahead address the approach with which the mission in Lahore and the mission in Qadian set out to convince Europeans of Islam. Chapter 2 recounts the arrival of their missionaries in the British capital, whereas Chapter 3 reconstructs their attempts to settle in Berlin. As success and failure line their paths in different proportions, the account will lay bare the different stages of preparation through which Lahore and Qadian progressed. The reconstruction of the mission organizations will offer some impression of the directions in which missionaries searched to communicate with European audiences. Recounting how this aim was achieved, the chapter illuminates on a micro level the interaction between Ahmadiyya religious reform and European realities.

In the contest between the two branches of the Ahmadiyya mission, the Lahore movement was the first to make an appearance in the British capital and conquer the most promising market of continental Europe. Consequently, missionaries from Lahore dominated the interwar period in Europe. By way of preparing for the next stage of this book, their biographies will be summarized.
at the end of the chapter. What did these men perceive when they said ‘Europe’? What did they mean by religious progress? What signals did they send to which segment of society?

2.1 Mission Approaches

As an outcome of the conflict that gripped the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad on the eve of the Great War, two different mission organizations emerged. That of Lahore voiced the aim of ameliorating the image of Islam through intellectual encounter and of formulating a common quest for religious renewal. That of Qadian offered itself as a real alternative to the perceived backwardness in the Muslim world. Where the former toned down the doctrinal differences to fit in with the Islamic mainstream, the latter stressed those differences to the point of excommunicating all other Muslims. When the missionaries started on their mission, it was along these tracks that they moved.

Lahore: Establishing an Interface

In 1912, Kamal-ud-Din, secretary of the Sadr Anjuman, a distinguished figure with a distinguished ancestry and doubtlessly long habituated to his Lahore surroundings, decided to travel to England to ‘plead the cause of Islam’ and launch ‘jihad by persuasion.’\(^1\) This was a one-man action that initially landed him at Hyde Park Speakers’ Corner.\(^2\) One year later, we find him established at 158 Fleet Street, where he launched the Islamic Review and Muslim India, the monthly paper in which, in the years ahead, the British prejudice against Islam would be analysed and counteracted.\(^3\) At the same time, he took over the Woking mosque. Eventually this would become ‘the leading symbol of the British worldwide Muslim community,’\(^4\) visited and supported by Muslim leaders from across the world, and a centre for interfaith meetings in Britain.

Looking back in 1949, his friend Arslan Bohdanowicz, himself a Muslim

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2 Ansari, ‘Kamal-ud-Din.’

3 Ahmad, *Eid Sermons*, xiv.

4 Ansari, ‘Kamal-ud-Din.’