

Proliferation of Islamic Monotheism through Religious Tourism: An Overview on Tabligh Jamat in Bangladesh

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Abstract Tourism is not only one of the pragmatic sectors of exploring new sights and unknown pleasures rather it plays ample roles in socio-cultural and economic developments too. Religious tourism is hence involved in exploring sights and spreading religious phenomenon along with religious journey, pilgrimage and other purposive perspectives. Islam is the largest monotheistic religion of the world. People specially the Muslims are involved in diverse religious tourism. Tabligh Jamat is one of the devoted religious tourist groups who pay their visits mosque to mosque from central to spatal areas both in home and abroad. The study endeavored to narrate the nexus between the religious tourism of Tabligh Jamat and their core objectives of proliferating the monotheistic spirit among the Muslims. To meet the research gap the study basically followed focused group discussions and content analysis to fulfill the empirical methods of the research. After participation and observation of the activities of Tabligh Jamat, the findings of the research finally proceeded towards a dispassionate discussion to analyze the monotheistic spirits of Tabligh Jamat through religious tourism. However, there are also some limitations and scopes for further academic undertaking.

Keywords Religious Tourism, Islamic Monotheism, Tabligh Jamat

1. Introduction

Islam is the most wide-spread monotheistic religions of the world that believes in invitation to people to accept the dispatch of Islamic monotheism. Tabligh Jamat popularly engaged in touring from place to places to invite Muslims towards the mainstream of Islam. In order to understand the structural dimensions and activities of the problems concerning in proliferation of Islamic Monotheism through religious tourism, this article seeks to explicate whether or not the functions of Tabligh Jamat in Bangladesh is deeply concentrated in Islamic Monotheism and the way how they are inviting Muslims is religious tourism. The research endeavors to compare the concept of religious tourism with the movements of Tabligh Jamat and also to investigate the nature and practice of the Jamat. It seeks to understand the empirical evidence on their monotheistic belief. The central question of the research, proliferation of Islamic Monotheism through religious tourism is significant in order to understand the objectives and activities of Tabligh Jamat and the nature of their tourism. Based on the existing literature and the definitions, the articles firstly endeavors to determine whether or not the way how Tabligh Jamat is

touring is categorized as religious tourism. Further it overviewed the activities of the Tabligh Jamat in Bangladesh whether is focused on the proliferation of Islamic Monotheism. To meet the central question, the discussion of this article begins through conceptualizing religious tourism and Islamic Monotheism then it proceeded towards evaluation of the activities and main objectives of Tabligh Jamat to draw a nexus between the conception and actual happenings inside the Jamat. For a better investigation of the problem, the research basically followed the qualitative approach based on secondary data from electronic and printed resources. However, beside literature review the researcher physically participated to the activities of the Jamat according to their principles and met the practitioners in closed discussions to follow their speech and activities and to understand the spirits of their central focus. By analyzing the content of their speech and opinions and comparing the existing literature, finally through a dispassionate writing the research drew the conclusion that the central focus of Tabligh Jamat is in proliferation of Islamic Monotheism through religious tourism.

2. Islam and Monotheism

Theism is an origin of religion and human belief in God and Goddess. Monotheism has been defined as the doctrine or belief that there is only one God. According to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, "belief in one personal

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and transcendent God", is monotheism¹. Based on number of practitioners, Islam is the second largest religion in the world which is considered as the largest monotheistic religion. (Esposito, J. Ed.1999, The Oxford history of Islam, New York: Oxford University Press)

Islamic Monotheism more specifically used as 'At-Tawhid' is to consider and believe in one God, unification of Allah is to believe in His Oneness of Lordship and His Holy Names and Qualities, and to believe that He is the Owing Lord Who only deserves to be worshipped. Therefore, Islamic Monotheism is to perform Monotheism of Allah in all what is specified for Him among all said and done adoration, and it is the basis of Islam, from which its ordinances, regulations, orders and prohibitions originated². Islamic Monotheism of Allah's Lordship is a belief that Allah has created mankind and bestowed upon them their means of living, and can give life to them and can take it from. It is the Monotheism of Allah in His deeds, like the belief that he is the Creator and the Provider. (source: islamweb.net/en/ebooks/?&startno=50)

3. Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is an oldest idea like the religion itself. It is practiced from the ancient period. The person who visits any holy place is called pilgrim. People from different religions pilgrim different holy places for religious obligation are the part of religious tourism (Deanna Hyland, 2009). According to Wright (2008b), (Chen, 2004) and Roy & Roy (2015), religious tourism is a form of tourism whereby people of faith travel individually or in groups for pilgrimage, missionary, leisure or fellowship purposes.

Citrinot (2007) has categorized religious tourism into three mainstreams:

- Visits to a temple or place for the purpose of praying or paying homage or performing religious rites when staying nearby. The motivation is purely religious. (He referred to this as Spontaneous Religious Tourism).
- Visits of religious monuments and object as part of a sight-seeing tour. Heritage, architecture, history and art are the main motivations.
- Visits to religious sites involving religious activities such as spiritual retreat, festivals or religious teachings.

Tourism, from prehistoric time is closely linked to religion which has acted as a powerful motive for traveling. Religious buildings, rituals, festivals and religious events are important tourist attractions for those who are the followers of the particular systems of belief represented (Henderson, 2003).

Vorzsak and Gut (2009) and Wright (2008), add that religious tourism comprises not only visiting sites, shrines, and structures with religious significance but also attending religious conferences, different culturally religious events, exhibitions of cultic objects, and concerts of sacred music. Religious tourism is motivated by religious values, faith, belief and the religion itself. Spiritual tourism is a journey to

a sacred place or shrine on the basis of a person's beliefs or faith.

Spiritual Tourism is another form of religious tourism which is established through religious and socio-cultural values derived from religion. Religious tourism is a tradition, culture or local ceremonies practiced from generation to generation. These cultural aspects are presented as a form of tourism, including activities related to tradition, beliefs, and local ceremonies (Vidic, 2007). Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys provides a comprehensive assessment of the primary issues and concepts related to the intersection of tourism and religion. (Daniel H. Olsen and Dallen J. Timothy 2006).

4. Tabligh Jamat

Tabligh Jamaat is a religious movement based on the principle of the "Work of the Prophets" inviting to Allah in the manner of Muhammed (S.M) primarily aims spiritual reformation by working at the grass roots level, reaching out to Muslims across all social and economic spectra to bring them closer to Islam . It gradually expanded from local to national to an international movement and now has over 10 Million followers in more than 200 countries.

The Jamaat as a missionary organization is popular in South Asia and has many adherents internationally. The main headquarters for Tabligh Jamaat (known as a Markaz) is in Nizamud-deen, India. The Tablighi Jamaat movement in Bangladesh is mostly based in Kakrail Mosque, Dhaka, the main markaz of Bangladesh. The group has also given lectures in the majority of mosques in the world. (Muhammad Arslan Ilyas, 2014)

5. Basic Structure of Tabligh Jamat

After visiting the Kakrail Mosque (Romna, Dhaka) and Madani Mosque (Love Lane, Chittagong) it is observed that, Tablighi Jamaat goes door to door to invite people towards mosques for preaching the message of Islam and also assemble in Ijtema, a religious conference in different places. They comprise small group of eight to fifteen members who depend on their own finance. It does not require any formal bureaucracy rather follow the instruction given from their markazs. Participants are ideally organized in four ways; one day a week, one three-day period a month, one forty-day period a year, and one four-month tour at least once in a lifetime (Interview with Capt. Erwin Ruliansyah, an Indonesian participant of the Tablighi Jamaat and former Jet Airways senior commander pilot, now living in Hongkong; retrieved from (<https://zulkhanip.wordpress.com/2012/01/22/tablighi-jamaat-movement-ideology-and-organization/>)).

They follow the *intrinsic motivational theory* and the *organizational commitment theory* where according to the first theory the member acts for the love of the activities and believes the rewards coming from his intrinsic belief. This

theory enables the movement to grow continuously (Dana George 2010). On the other hand, the second theory focuses on movement strategies for gaining member motivation to provide necessary resources and the consequences on building loyalty to the movement, thus assuring its validity and growth. This theory helps an individual to tend to adhere to the norms and conform to the values and expectations of those to whom he is committed (J. H. Amernic 1998).

6. How Tabligh Invites Muslim

The system of inviting the transients in Tablighi Jamat is very conventional. They largely avoid electronic media and emphasize on a personal communication. They organize units (called jamaats, meaning Assembly) and send them to various areas. This jamaat would visit a particular site instructed by the marquaz, invite the local Muslims only to gather in the mosque and present their message in the form of Six Principles of the Jamat. These six principles were derived from the lives of the companions (Sahabah) of Muhammad (SM).

Since they encourage other Muslims to join in their spiritual journeys, any Muslim can easily join. There are no strict membership rules to be part of Tablighi Jamaat. In fact there is no ‘membership’ at all and there is no background check for newcomers. Almost any Muslim can join the group in a mosque (retrieved from <http://dawatobleegh.blogspot.nl/2012/03/constitution-activities-and-social.html>).

It is expected that when a “Tablighi” returns from his journey, he would try to implement what he has learnt into his life. He should also invite others towards it so they can also spiritually benefit from it. Daily Taalim (which means teaching and learning) is recommended to be done at home so that the women folk and children can also benefit from what the men have learnt. Apart from preaching, followers are also encouraged to spend 2.5 hours every day serving others. Typically this involves encouraging other Muslims to join the effort. In the local mosque, there is a daily ‘Taalim’ (which means teaching or learning) and one person reads from a book. ‘Taalim’ is also done in homes with wife and children. This teaching is generally done with a few books, but is not limited to (Fadail-e-Ammal or virtues of deeds by Maulana Zakaria and Riyadhus-Saleheen) and also the book of selected Ahadith called “Muntakhaba Ahadees” and it covers the basic tenets of Islam. Then there is a ‘Mashwara’ where planning for the effort is done. They also do a weekly program called “Joula” where they go door to door meeting people and inviting them to mosque for prayer etc.

Tablighi Jamaat assembled in Ijtema at least once a year. In Bangladesh the Ijtema is held every year a few days before Ramadan in the Tongi district just outside Dhaka, on the bank of the river Turag, known as Kahar Daria. The annual

Ijtema is said to be the largest congregation of Muslims after *Hajj* in Mecca. The estimated numbers of devotees participating in the Ijtema varies, according to the sources from 1.7 to 4 million. (Sikand 1999: 121; Ahmad 2008: 62; Bdnews 24.com, 29.1.2006).

Due to overcrowding, the Ijtema was divided into two segments and later into four segments. The Ijtema rejects politics and focuses on reviving the tenets of Islam and promoting peace and harmony. The devotees discuss the Qur’an, pray and listen to bayans (sermons) by Islamic scholars from around the world on fundamental issues of tabligh (Internet Herald Tribune 3.2.2007).

The lectures and sermons held by various Islamic scholars are being simultaneously translated into several different Languages. Biswa Ijtema works very much as the core of the Tablighi missionary work. Devotees come here to strengthen their faith, and when they leave, go out to spread the message.

7. Daily Activities of the Members inside the Tour

While staying inside the Jamat for three days the researcher followed that the typical daily routine at the Masjid begins with Fajr prayers at dawn followed by a talk that gets over at 8:00am. At this talk the listeners are told of the necessity of purifying their own following of Islam from all non-Islamic practices, and also of the necessity of visiting Muslim communities in order to spread true Islam among them through an example that emulates the way of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. From 8.00 to 11.00am the visitors are slowly divided into groups of roughly ten people each, and asked to choose a leader from among themselves, preferably an elderly person. Then they are given a destination; the distance depending on how much money the individual members of the group have been able to bring along for this purpose. At 11.00am there is another talk lasting until Zuhr (after noon) prayers that tells them what propagation work they should focus on when they reach their determined destinations. After Zuhr prayers there is lunch and the groups leave. Between 3.00 to 5.00pm (punctuated by Asr prayers) there is a talk on certain aspects of Islam for newcomers, those who started arriving after 10:00am. After the Maghrib prayers there is some recitation from the Qur’an, and from the life of the Prophet and his companions with explanations and exhortations. After supper and Isha prayers there are meetings in language based groups, where individuals recall the events of the day, their attitudes at those times, and subject themselves to correction. About an hour after Isha prayers everyone goes to sleep. The elders of this movement have recommended that every Muslim should give time for this work.

8. Preaching Monotheism through 6 Number

The participation of the researcher to the activities of the Jamat has seen that, their program and speech is based on the following six points:

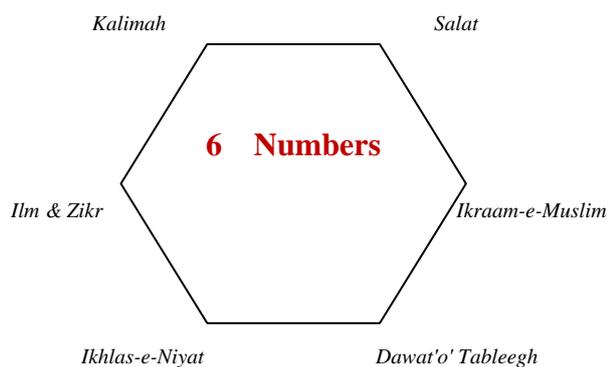


Figure A 1

The research meet that, Tablig Jamat interprets these six points in the following ways: (Howenstein, Nicholas 2007).

8.1. Kalimah

"An article of faith in which the tabligh accepts that there is no god but Allah and the Prophet Muhammad is His Last messenger".

8.2. Salat

"Five daily prayers that are essential to spiritual elevation, piety, and a life free from the ills of the material world".

8.3. Ilm & Zikr

"The knowledge and remembrance of Allah conducted in sessions in which the congregation listens to preaching by the emir, performs prayers, recites the Quran and reads *Hadith*. The congregation will also use these sessions to eat meals together, thus fostering a sense of community and identity".

8.4. Ikraam-e-Muslim

"The treatment of fellow Muslims with honor and deference".

8.5. Ikhlas-e-Niyat

"Reforming one's life in supplication to Allah by performing every human action for the sake of Allah and toward the goal of self-transformation".

8.6. Dawat'o' Tableegh

"The sparing of time to live a life based on faith and learning its virtues, following in the footsteps of the Prophet, and taking His message door-to-door for the sake of faith".

9. Conclusions

Islam is a religion that invites others to accept Islam. But Tabligh Jamat basically doesn't invite non-Muslims rather the Muslims are their target invitees. They invite muslims in a view to returning them towards the mainstream of Islam. Their focus of belief is that the uniqueness of Allah is to be believed among the Muslims by all means. Establishment of monotheism is hence the only doctrine of their entire activities, methodology and practices. Again to achieve more success in their principal objectives, they have selected the religious tourism so that they can make door to door effort of their activities.

Through literature review, content analysis and focused group discussion, the research observed that, though it's a movement, but it doesn't uphold any political ideology or goals rather the Jamat intends to see that all Muslims are to be the best believer of Allah's Monotheism and they want to reflect their whole activities through the uniqueness of Allah and they are devotionally involved in spreading the monotheism of Islam through religious tourism. Talking to different practitioners of Tabligh Jamat the research has found that, the members and the followers of this belief devotionally believe that reaching the monotheism of Islam and tawhid of Allah was the prime objective of Prophet Mohammed (Sm) and as he is the last Prophet and there would not any prophet be sent after him so to spread the monotheism and the principles of Islam is the sole duty of the Muslim. The practitioners also believe that, through their practice and invitation, Islam would be rescued from polytheism and the code of Islam would remain absolute. Most of them are very optimistic rigid in maintaining the norms and principles of the movement. Again the participation Muslims from all levels made it a unique platform. Though people in general have different perceptions and regarding the stubborn activities of the Jamat, they are seen to stress less in political or economic ambitions. Yet many Muslims have a strong complain against their approach of religious tourism from mosque to mosque as the mosque is considered as the home of Almighty and frequent movement inside the Mosque. In reply to that complain, the believers of the movement address some references of religious doctrines. However, the research has found that despite all sort of opinions in favor and against the movement inside Islam, the way how they preach their objectives are found relevant to the definition of religious tourism and the objectives of their tourism is to spread the monotheism of Islam.

It is further to be added here that, the research undergone through a lot of limitations. Firstly, the participants are very introvert in nature who prefers to keep themselves away to media and avoid any detail publications regarding their activities and membership. They rather believe in action and practices for changing minds effectively. So collection of applied data and information was one of the core challenges

of the research. Secondly, in order to avoid any disputes and controversial issues they stay out of public opinion. Most of them were very reluctant to meet in focused group discussions. Despite these sort of constraints the research suggests that, there are ample scope of undertaking further research.

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