6 Shared Beliefs of Northwestern Indian Muslims

Understanding shared beliefs of a group is key to determining intuitiveness or counterintuitiveness of an idea and thus any transmission advantages its counterintuitiveness may confer on it. In order to understand how Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s ideas were perceived by his primary target audience consisting of late nineteenth century North Indian Muslim elite, we first need to understand their shared beliefs about themselves, about Christian missionaries, and their expectations about imminent arrival of a saviour. This would be really easy to do if modern opinion polls had been regularly conducted among the nineteenth century North Indian Muslims! Since, they were not, we have to rely on writings of the principal actors that are available to us and conduct a historical analysis. Such a deep dive into history may be difficult to follow for some of the readers but according to the context-based view understanding the nitty gritty details of people’s mental representations is crucial to being able to explain transmission advantages that some ideas enjoy over others. To those cognitive science readers who wish to skip a detailed historical account, I suggest skipping to Page 91 to read Chapter Summary for Chapter 6 and then to Page 119 to see Chapter Summary for Chapter 7.

6.1 Northwestern Indian Muslim Perceptions of Themselves

The Mughal empire that had dominated Northern India for centuries went into a sharp decline following Aurangzeb’s death in 1707 for a variety of reasons not the least of which was infighting among the royal family for succession. With the top layer of this “layered sovereignty” unravelling, various regional leaders, including many Mughal appointed governors, asserted their authority as sovereigns. The most dominant states to emerge from the decline of the Mughal power in North India included the Maratha state and the Sikh state. Marathas, who held a vast territory in Western and Central India, captured Delhi in 1784. Various Sikh principalities to the Northwest of Delhi were consolidated into a state by Raja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839).

In the eighteenth century, Northwestern India contained a significant proportion of Muslims (10-20% of the population by various estimates). This was especially true of the major cities of Lahore and Delhi half of whose population was Muslim. Eighteenth century, Indian Muslims were a very diverse population. Ethnically, they consisted of recent migrants from Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Arabia and local Indian converts hailing from upper and lower castes and of various Indian ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Sindhis, Kashmiris etc. Religiously, they were divided into Shia (Ithna asharis, Ismailis, Dawoodi Bohras), Sunnis (mostly Hanafis), and Sufis (Chishti, Naqshbandi, Qadri, Suharwardi). Socio-culturally, they were divided into upper aristocratic classes who called themselves ashraf (meaning respectable) and labeled others as ajmal (meaning commoners). According to Encyclopedia of Islam,
the term *sharif* (singular of *ashraf*) is an honorific term used throughout the Muslim and Arab world (Campo, 2009). Most of the Indian Muslim ashraf claimed decent from outside India.

1. Sayyids claimed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband (and prophet’s paternal cousin Ali ibn Talib). They use Sayyid, Mir or Shah as a title to indicate their ancestry.

2. Mughals claimed a Turanian (i.e., Persian speaking Turkish central Asian) lineage. They use Mirza or Beg as a title to claim their ancestry.

3. Pashtuns claimed an Afghan ancestry. They use Khan as a title.

4. Sheikhs claimed an Arab decent (though not from prophet Muhammad). They use Sheikh as a title to indicate their lineage.

While many ashraf lived in the ‘royal cities’ of Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow, which had a flourishing ashraf culture, many also lived in small towns (called *qasbahs*) spread all over Northwestern India. The ashraf society was a Persianate society (Hodgson, 1974) because of its use of Farsi as the language of its various cultural expressions. The center of the ashraf culture was the *darbar* (i.e., court) of the King or a lesser noble. The status of ashraf was not a simple matter of blood-lines, it also required a mastery of Persianate culture including the elaborately meticulous *adab* (i.e., etiquettes) system and Farsi and Urdu poetry. The ashraf culture reached its zenith during the reign of Mughal King Shah Jehan (1594-1666) but had a brief resurgence in the early nineteenth century.

The Central Asian Islam, itself an interesting mix of Hanafi Sunnism and Sufism, when brought into the unique multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment of Northern India blossomed into a unique blend of Hanafi Sufism and local Hindu rituals and customs. In this syncretism, a person could achieve a higher spiritual status by devoting oneself fully to seeking perfection in ritualized prayers, fasting, and giving up worldly desires. God was thought to reward those who resist the temptations of the world and spend a lifetime performing pious rituals with various supernatural powers. These included the power of intercession on behalf of others and the power to request miracles to convince the non-believing. A Sufi, or a seeker of knowledge, could progress from Sufi to pir to wali to ghous to qutb to nabi to rasul. According to Metcalf, “the Sufi elder (known as pir, shaykh, or murshid) was an instructor in spiritual disciplines, a guide to the moral way and discipline (tariqa) that led to the inner realization of the Divine, an intercessor for his followers, and a conduit of divine intervention or miracles (karamat) in everyday life” (Metcalf, 2009: 8). Once a student was deemed to have acquired sufficient knowledge by his murshid, he was awarded a sanad (degree) signed by his master.

Various kings, including the Mughals, patronized Sufis as “inheritors of charisma (baraka) derived through “chains of intercession” (silsila) from the Prophet himself” (Metcalf, 2009: 8). Kings were not the only ones who sought intercession from Sufis, ordinary people (Muslims as well as Hindus and Sikhs) also flocked to visit their
lodgings and offer them nazar (i.e., gifts). Sufis did not lose their special powers with their death. In fact, they got reinforced and “in a reinforced form continued to emanate from his tomb, from things belonging to him and even from his name” (Suvorova, 2004: 11). The Sufi tombs called mazars were visited by people seeking intercession with God. Thus a dead Sufi’s belongings and pieces of his tombstone became prized as tawiz (i.e., amulets) and could be sold by his descendants from his former lodgings (Suvorova, 2004: 8). According to Survova (2004), the tawiz eventually transformed into “a piece of paper with a prayer or a verse from the Quran written on it” custom designed by a Sufi to “ward off the effect of evil eye and black magic, some to cure diseases of the body and others would ensure success in life and so on.” By the eighteenth century the mazar “had grown from a modest structure of cubic form with a dome into a prayer and ritual complex (dargah), where side by side with the tomb proper there used to be a small mosque with minaret, living accommodation for the pir (‘old man’), or the ‘successor of a pir’ the sajjadanishin (literally ‘one sitting on his prayer rug’), cells for dervishes (hujra), halls for gatherings (majalis), for hearing music (sama) and for celebration of the saint’s birthday (maulud) and day of demise (urs), a guest house for pilgrims and also a public kitchen, where any visitor or beggar could get food free of charge” (Suvorova, 2004: 17).

The ‘wild growth’ of what Suvorova (2004) calls the ‘cult of sainthood,’ happened despite a perpetual tension between official government appointed Qazis, orthodox ulema, and reformist ‘moderate’ Sufis such as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) and Shah Waliullah (1703-1762). Both Sirhindi and Waliullah had been formally inducted into the Naqshbandi Sufi silsila. While fully understanding the benefits of a Sufi approach to Islam (e.g., in attracting Hindus and Sikhs to Islam), the Sufi reformers were worried about dilution of boundaries separating the Muslim minority from the much larger Hindu majority. Thus they condemned excesses of Sufism while attempting to show that a moderate Sufism is compatible with a Hanafi Islam. Shah Waliullah, because he grew up in a time of declining Mughal power, was even more concerned with unifying various Muslim factions than he was with reforming Sufism. Shah Waliullah argued that Muslim political unity could only be achieved through an ideological reconciliation between various sects and schools of thought. He preached against taqlid i.e., dogmatically adhering to the teachings of any one of the four Sunni traditional Islamic mazhabs or schools of thought, namely, Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali. Even though he claimed to be a Hanafi, he said that he would have no qualms in accepting a ruling by Maliki on divorce from an absentee husband if he felt that it was more congruent to the teachings of Quran and the Prophet Muhammad.

Utilizing the authority of Quran and authentic Hadith–sayings of the Prophet Muhammad–Muslim ulema should use their powers of ijtehad to accept rulings by mufti of any school of thought or create an entirely new ruling if no existing ruling is in accordance with Quran and Hadith. Empowering and freeing Muslims from the yoke of traditional thinking, he thought would not only allow the Muslim ummah (nation) to achieve unity that had eluded them for centuries but also allow them
to purge Hindu influences such as praying on the shrines of dead saints that had crept into Sufi Islam. Little did Shah Waliullah know that just over a century later his anti-taqlid message would allow Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to question the centuries of consensus on Muslim beliefs about Jesus.

A number of scholars (e.g., Robinson, 2000; Sikand, 2005) of South Asian Islam argue that traditionally ulema had considered themselves, the Muslim kings, and the ashraf as guardians of Islamic culture in South Asia. Sikand argues that during the times of Muslim power in India most “Muslim rulers as well as the ashraf ulema associated with the courts had little or no interest in the ‘proper’ Islamization of the ajlaf” (Sikand, 2005: 53). Robinson (2000) argues that equipping all Muslims with proper Islamic knowledge increasingly concerned Muslims leaders who were worried about sustenance of Islam without political power in India. He credits Shah Waliullah for placing “on the individual Muslim conscience the burden of responsibility for creating an Islamic society and give him or her the knowledge to enable them to do so” (Robinson, 2002: 108). Shah Waliullah argued for the revision of madrassa curriculum with more emphasis on Quran and Hadith and less on logic and philosophy so that all Muslims could become defenders of their faith. Shah Waliullah translated the Quran into Persian to allow non-Arabic speakers to understand it.

After Shah Waliullah’s death, his mission was continued by his four sons, Shah Abdul Aziz (1745-1823), Shah Rafiudin (1749-1817), Shah Abdul Qadir (1753-1827), and Shah Abdul Ghani. Raifudin and Qadir translated the Quran into Urdu, which had become the literary language of North India, to allow all literate Muslims to understand their holy book. Shah Waliullah was succeeded as leader of Madrassa Rahimiyya by his eldest son Shah Abdul Aziz who in turn was succeeded by his nephew Shah Ishaq (1782-1846) because Aziz did not have any sons.

While all modern south Asian Islamic movements revere Shah Waliullah and his sons, his legacy splintered into two groups that mainly differed on whether North India had become a Darul-Harab (land of war) or remained a Darul-Islam (land of peace) despite the dominance of non-Muslims powers. Waliullah’s grandson (and Ghani’s son) Shah Ismail (1779-1831) joined Syed Ahmed Barelvi (1786-1831) who declared India to be a Darul-Harab and urged Indian Muslims to undertake hijra (migration) to Muslims lands and launch a Jihad against their non-Muslim rulers. Ismail and Barelvi migrated to the Northwestern frontier of India and took up arms against the Sikhs in Punjab. Barelvi labeled his movement Tariqa-e-Muhammadi while others labeled them as Wahabis because of the similarity of their worldview to that of Abdul Wahab of Arabia. The Wahabis were considered extremists by the British government and they came to be persecuted both in Arabia and India. The second faction was led by two former Madrassa Rahimiyya students, Syed Nazir Hussain (1805-1902) and Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-1890). They argued that India was a still a land of peace because the British had permitted Muslims to freely practice their faith. They called themselves variously as Muwahideen (i.e., unitarians- the term preferred by Khan) and Ahl-e-Hadith (i.e., the followers of Prophet’s Words- the term preferred by
Hussain). The Ahl-e-Hadith took Shah Waliullah's anti-taqlid approach further and argued that Muslims were not obliged to follow traditional rulings of any of the four traditional schools of thought and that they should only use Quran and Hadith as their guidance to make independent judgements of ijtihad. While Khan married the queen of Bhopal and moved there, Hussain stayed in Delhi and became the foremost reformist Muslim leader in Delhi. He attracted hundreds of students from all over India and the larger Islamic world. Hussain was considered to be a Muhaddis by his followers who called him Shaikh-ul-kul i.e., the master of everything knowable. One of his prominent students, Muhammad Hussain Batalavi (1840-1920), was so worried about being lumped with Syed Ahmad Barelvi’s Wahabis that he lobbied the British officials to stop referring to Ahl-e-Hadith as Wahabis. In 1876, Batalavi started an Urdu magazine called Ishat-us-Sunnah as a mouthpiece of the Ahl-e-Hadith movement.

The non-denominational Ahl-e-Hadith view was very influential among Muslim reformers in the nineteenth century including Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898)-son of a Delhi ashraf family who became one of the most prominent Muslim reform leaders of the nineteenth century. Khan received a traditional training in Quran and hadith in Delhi (some under Shah Abdul Aziz). Khan claimed that Ahl-e-hadith had been the original faith of Muslims from the very early days that had become corrupted in the medieval times.

Mahomedanism was at first for many long years a pure and simple Theism; but in the second century of the Higra, when the ideas of the learned men as to its principle were reduced to writing, it was divided into four churches-Hanafi, Shafai, Malik, and Humbali. For some time it remained optional for Mahomedans to choose and follow any doctrine of any of these four Churches. When, however, Bani Umaiya and Bani Abbas became kings as edict was issued directing all Mahomedans to embrace the whole doctrine of any one church of the above four. Those who disobeyed were punished... There were still, however, many who clung the true faith in its primitive simplicity, but who dared not breathe their opinion except to a trusted few. Their name was then Ahal-i-Hadis i.e., believers in the sayings of the Prophet, who were not bound down by the doctrines of the four churches... In India, during the Mahomedan rule, the Turk and Pathan kings who were of the Hanafi sect were strictly averse to religious toleration, and the same state of affairs prevailed during the sovereignty of the Mogul Emperors... On the establishment of the British rule, however, owing to the English principle of strict religious toleration, the followers of Ahal-i-Hadis again came to the front and preached openly and fearlessly. (Khan, 1872: 11-12)

In a letter Khan claimed that he had been a practicing Ahl-e-Hadith long before his friend Nazir Hussain.

I am the one who turned Syed Nazir Hussain into a puritan Wahabi. He didn't use to perform rafa-yadain [Ahl-e-Hadith practice of repeatedly lifting and dropping of hands] during namaz [ritual Islamic prayer] even though he considered it to be the practice of those who were rightly guided. I said, it is sad that you do not practice what you consider to be a virtuous deed because of what others will think of it. He got up to offer the asar (afternoon) prayer and started practicing rafa-yadain. (Ikram, 2003: 69-70)
Khan was a prolific writer. His early writings mostly expressed traditional Islamic views. For instance, in his book “Qaul-e-Matin dar ibtal-e-harkat-e-zamin” (firm assertion about the false assertion of the earth’s motion), he defended the traditional Ptolemaic view universally accepted by early nineteenth century Indian Muslims (Powell, 1993: 209). He changed his views, however, as he learned more about the scientific basis for modern Western views through his interactions with British officers, his study of the Western literature, and a 1 ½ year-long visit to England in 1869-70. He became a forceful advocate of integration of Western scientific knowledge with Islamic worldview. Politically, he argued that Muslims and British were natural allies in India. Robinson (1988) argues that Khan used the techniques invented by his friends Syed Nazir Hussain and Sidiq Hasan Khan to reconcile Muslims to British rule and western civilisation.

Like the Ahl-i Hadith he circumvented the medieval law schools and went straight to the Quran and Hadith as guidance for Muslims. The basis of his exegetical principles was that the laws of Creation were the Work of God and the Quran was the Word of God and they just could not be contradictory - and if they seemed to be so it was because man failed to understand them correctly. So, for instance, he explained apparently miraculous events in the Quran, as Christian apologists might have done similar events in the Bible, as metaphors. (Robinson, 1988: 10)

In 1880, Khan published first volume of *tafsir* (i.e., exegesis) of Quran. In it, he argued that Jesus’ ascension to heaven violated God’s law of creation. He wrote:

> The Quran makes mention of Jesus’ death in four places... Firstly in *Sura Aal Imran*, secondly in *Sura Ma'ida*, ... thirdly in *Sura Maryam*... fourthly in *Sura Nisa*. Jesus was not killed by the Jews, either by stoning or by crucifixion, but he died his natural death, and God raised him in rank and status... From the first three verses it is clear that Jesus died a natural death.” (Khan, 1880: 48)

Khan raised funds to open schools and colleges for Muslims throughout India where they would be taught traditional Islamic subjects as well as Western philosophy and science translated into Urdu by his Scientific Society. Khan opened the Mohamadan Anglo-Indian College in Aligarh in 1870 and dreamt of making it the Oxford University of India. Overtime, Khan’s Aligarh movement came to be seen as distinct from Ahl-e-Hadith. Traditional Sunni Muslims thought that Sir Syed and his followers were blind followers of the Western thinking and they mocked them as *naturies*. While Khan built on the political ideas of Ahl-e-Hadith (i.e., loyalty for the British government), another group that came out of Ahl-e-Hadith built on the distinct identity pioneered by Ahl-e-Hadith (e.g., through *rafa-yadain*). The *Ahl-e-Quran* argued that since the Quran was the most authentic of all revelations of God, it alone should form the basis of Islamic ideals.

As is not unusual with such intense ideological sects, the Ahl-i Hadith split. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a group emerged under Maulana Abdullah Chakralavi in Lahore which accused them of placing excessive reliance on Hadith, indeed, turning them into a second form
of revelation Chakralavi asserted that only the Quran could be used as compulsory guidance, the Hadith referring merely to the human condition of the Prophet. The group, of course, came to be called the Ahl-i Quran. They were even more exclusive than the Ahl-i Hadith, not bothering to raise the question of whether they could pray with others, but establishing their own prayer ritual with a series of distinctive practices including kneeling only on one knee. They prayed only in their own mosques, eliminated funeral and id prayers, and prayers and alms offered for the sake of the dead. Their dispute with the Ahl-i Hadith was so bitter that eventually the government had to intervene to protect Chakralavi’s life. Up to the middle of this century the Ahl-i Quran were found mainly in the Punjab. (Robinson, 1988: 7-8)

Two other scholars who studied under Madrassa Rahimiyya ulema, left Delhi in 1866 to found a new madrassa in the qasbah of Deoband. Darul-uloom Deoband established by Muhammad Qasim Nanatawi (1833-1880) and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905) became very influential in institutionalizing Waliullah’s non-denominational views into the mainstream Hanafi Sunni thought. Robinson argues that part of Deoband’s success was because of its missionary inspired model of raising funds from public and refusing any form of governmental assistance.

The organisation, moreover, unlike earlier Muslim organisations which tended to live little longer than their founders, was bureaucratic; many lessons were learned from the example of mission schools and pre-Mutiny Delhi College. Much effort was devoted to proselytisation; debating was part of the Deobandi training while large numbers of books in Arabic and Persian were translated into the vernacular and spread wide by means of the printing press. A typical Deobandi book is Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi’s still popular Bihishti Zevar, first published in the 1890s, which offers complete guidance to a woman on how to behave as a Muslim. While should anyone be in doubt on a point of Islamic law they had only to write to the Dar ul-Ifta (office of Legal Judges) at Deoband to receive guidance. (Robinson, 1988: 5)

While both Deobandis and Ahl-e-Hadith claimed to be Shah Waliullah’s intellectual descendants, the Ahl-e-Hadith were seen as more ‘puritanical’, ‘sectarian’ (Robinson, 1988: 7) and ‘embattled’ (Metcalfe, 1982) by most Indian Muslims.

They [Ahl-e-Hadith] quite clearly set themselves apart from other Muslims, sporting their own cut of beard and insisting on their own form of prayer. This latter practice sharply divided them from Hanafis. It was, in communal prayer, a highly visible and extremely annoying distinction: they said ‘amen’ aloud, lifted their hands at the time of bowing, folded their hands above the navel and repeated the fatihah (the opening chapter of the Quran which Muslims use as Christians might use the Lord’s prayer) aloud along with the Imam. The presence of Ahl-i Hadith often caused disturbances in late nineteenth century India and Hanafis resorted to banning them from their mosques. This led to a series of judicial disputes in which, eventually, the Privy Council ruled that mosques should be open to Ahli-i Hadith as well as Hanafis. (Robinson, 1988: 7)

Partly because of the tireless efforts of the Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandis, and Aligarh movement and partly because of the changed environment in North India the efforts to reform Islam resonated much more widely among Indian Muslims than they ever had in the past. The spread of lithographic press throughout Northern India allowed
the nineteenth century reformers to reach Muslims in ways that were unthinkable in the eighteenth century and earlier. Suvorova argues that the British official and missionary attitudes may also have played a role.

Of course, a certain role in the hardening of the Indian reformers’ attitude towards the cult of saints was played even by the position of the Englishmen, who saw in the veneration of pirs and their tombs one of the manifestations of native ‘barbarity’. If the Englishmen displayed a certain respect, even if merely formal, for the institutions of normative Islam, popular religion evoked staunch hostility on their part. The Sufi shaikhs and pirs were associated by them with Roman Catholic monasticism – to be frank an incorrect analogy – and that is why in the heat of puritan indignation they stigmatized them as ‘parasites’ and ‘deceivers of the people.’ (Suvorova, 2004: 27)

This is not to say that the reformist movement did not face any opposition. The opposition was led by Ahmad Riza Khan (Metcalf, 1982) who “used his Hanafi legal scholarship to justify Islam as it had been handed down - a custom-laden Islam which was closely tied to the Sufi world of the shrines where believers sought the help of saints to intercede from them with God” (Robinson, 1988: 7). The faction led by Khan called themselves muqalideen (i.e., followers of tradition) and they lumped Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandis, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s Aligarh Movement into ghair-muqalideen (i.e., non-followers of tradition) camp. Others called Ahmad Riza Khan and his followers Barelvis. The Barelvis accused their ghair-muqalideen opponents in general, and Ahl-e-Hadith in particular, of being conceited individuals who put their own judgement above that of Imam Abu Hanifa—the eighth century founder of the Hanafi mazhab. In a counterattack they redirected the label of bidah (i.e., innovative deviations from pristine Islam) that Waliullah had employed in his polemics against excessive Sufi practices, against the Ahl-e-Hadith to argue that various changes (e.g., rafa-yadain) introduced by them were the real bidah. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s Aligarh movement came in for the harshest criticism because they were seen as denying supernatural powers to the Holy Prophet and to God in addition to the disregard for the traditional mazhabs they shared with Ahl-e-Hadith. According to the Barelvis, the Aligarh movement represented the worst excesses of the ghair-muqalideen.

As has been noted by most historians (Metcalf, 1982; Robinson, 2000), the atmosphere in nineteenth century India allowed for a variety of Muslim responses to thrive ranging from Jihad of Syed Ahmed Barelvi to modernization approach of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. As we will see in the next chapter, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, found some room even in this crowded space for yet one more variety. Next, I review the shared beliefs of North Indian ashraf about Jesus, the Mahdi, the British rule, and tactics of Christian missionaries in Northwest India because they provide the critical context for understanding why Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s claims were accepted by some North Indian Muslims.
6.2 Beliefs about Jesus

In Richard Burton’s account of his covert pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, he describes visiting the devotional area outside the chamber (hujra, by tradition the room of Muhammad’s beloved wife Ā‘isha) of the Prophet’s mosque. The chamber itself, Burton discovered, was kept out of view by an ornate curtain. Still he reports that on the other side of the curtain were arranged the tombs of Muhammad, Abū Bakr, and ‘Umar. Moreover, Burton adds with amazement, next to these tombs was a “spare place for only a single grave, reserved for Isa bin Maryam after his second coming”. If Burton (whose travelogues tend towards the incredible) can be trusted, the Prophet’s mosque itself was arranged in keeping with the prevalent Islamic teaching that Jesus escaped death on the cross, that instead God raised him body and soul to heaven, and that God will send him back to earth in the end times. (Reynolds, 2000: 237)

Western Christians are often surprised to find out that Islam has a well-articulated persona for Jesus albeit markedly different from a Christian one. Even though Jesus is one of God’s one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets that were sent to all tribes and nations, he is a special prophet in Islam. He is so special that by most counts he is mentioned 25 times, 5 times more than Muhammad himself. Quran confirms Jesus’s virgin birth and calls him a “word from Allah” (3:45) who was “aided by the holy spirit” (5:110). He is mentioned along with Moses as a major law-bearing prophet who was given a book containing God’s message (similar to the Quran). Quran also confirms Jesus’s miracles and his ability to speak in his cradle. Muslims are told that the divine message being revealed to Muhammad is a continuation and completion of the message relayed to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (33:7). This message needed to be repeated because Jesus’s true message had become distorted over time and a humble man had been turned into the son of God.

And behold! Allah will say: “O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?” He will say: “Glory to Thee! never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, Thou I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden.

Never said I to them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, to wit, ‘worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord’; and I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a witness to all things. (Quran 5:116-117)

The Quran also defends Jesus against the purported Jewish boasting that they had killed Jesus.

That they said (in boast), “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”: but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not.

Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (Quran 4:157-158)
Lawson and Reynolds carry out two excellent surveys of the medieval Muslim position on Jesus’ death (or lack thereof). Reynolds quotes Abu Jafar al-Tabari, the father of Quranic exegetists as saying that:

the mufassirūn are in agreement that Jesus did not die, that instead he ascended to heaven body and soul while someone else died in his place. Their principal disagreement is only whether God cast the image of Jesus on a number of people, from whom the Jews chose one to crucify, or whether God cast the image of Jesus only on one specific person. (Reynolds, 2009: 41)

So while there was some disagreement among classical Muslim exegetes over events leading to Jesus’s crucifixion, it was not about whether Jesus escaped crucifixion on not (they were unanimous that he escaped crucifixion), but rather who was crucified in his place. Judas Iscariot was considered by many exegetists to be the one who was hanged. Since, Quran refers to Jesus’s death using the word tawaffa (meaning we caused him to die) in verses besides 4:157-158 (I just quoted above), classical exegetes had to interpret them in a way that made sense given their interpretation of 4:157-158. Reynolds explains various strategies used by them:

Tafsīr Muqātil accepts that tawaffā refers to God causing a human to die, but he insists that the Quran uses it for Jesus only in reference to his death in the end times, after his return to earth... Some interpreters, Tabarī notes, are of the opinion that when the Quran applies tawaffā to Jesus it refers not to death but to sleep... According to a second opinion, however, tawaffά – when it applies to Jesus – is synonymous instead with qabada, “to seize”; that is, with this term the Quran is not referring to Jesus falling asleep before God took him into heaven, but rather to the act of God taking Jesus into heaven, or to the moment when God took hold of Jesus before raising him to heaven. These two views of tawaffά, of course, redound to precisely the same doctrine about Jesus. In both cases the interpreters are eager to prove that the presence of the verb tawaffα can be reconciled with the doctrine that Jesus did not die, that he was taken body and soul into heaven, whence he will return... Still Tabarī also cites a third view, that tawaffά – even in the case of Jesus – can only mean “to make die”. Most traditions that reflect this view reconcile it, as Tafsīr Muqātil does, with the doctrine of Jesus’ eschatological return. If in sūrat āl ʿImrān (3) 55 tawaffά appears before Jesus’ ascension, then this verse must be read with hysteron proteron or taqdīm al-mu’akhkhar. Yet Tabarī also notes that some scholars concede Jesus did indeed die. One tradition to this effect insists that he was dead for three hours (another version has seven hours). In the end, however, Tabarī declares his support for the second view, that tawaffά refers in the Quran to God taking hold of Jesus. He justifies this position by referring to the preponderance of hadith in support of it, but there are other factors at play here. First, for Tabarī the doctrine of Jesus’ eschatological return is beyond any doubt. This leads him to reason, in light of quranic passages which imply that a person can only die once (cf. Q 6.60; 19.33), that Jesus must have been preserved from death. In other words, if Jesus is to return in the eschaton to finish his life and die, then the view that Jesus has already died must perforce be rejected. (Reynolds 2009:247-248)

After reviewing positions of the very first Muslim exegetists (such as Abdullah Ibn Abbas who died in 687 AD), Lawson (2009) concludes that, “even at this early date the Muslim community was in agreement on the event of the crucifixion, but not on
Beliefs about the Mahdi

who was crucified, except that it was not Jesus” (Lawson, 2009: 47). Reynolds (2009) concludes his survey of traditional Islamic views on Jesus’ death by saying that classical interpreters of Quran (and by extension ordinary Muslims) believed that God had avoided Jesus’ ignoble death on the cross by raising him to the heavens where he awaits his return at the end of times to lead Islam to victory over Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslims. This is the view that Christian missionaries encountered when they followed colonial militaries around the greater Middle East. The sharp decline in Muslim power around the world convinced many Muslims that time for Jesus’ return was imminent. The streak of millennialism running through various Christian missionary movements may have only encouraged this belief among Muslims. Powell (1993) describes the 1833 missionary visit to India by Rev. Joseph Wolff of the Society for Promoting Christianity.

The aspect of his preaching which distinguished him from other missionaries of his day was his conviction that the second coming of Christ was ordained for the year 1847. His own calculations were based on various Old Testament prophecies, principally in the Book of Daniel, but his millenarianism had also been nurtured by contact with the “Irvingites” in England, including Edward Irving, the founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church, Henry Drummond MP, and Hames Heatley Frer. When Wolff reached Lucknow in 1833 after more than a decade of missionary travels, the imminence of the apocalypse was the main theme of his message. (Powell, 1993: 119-120)

Powell (1993) argues that nineteenth century Indian Muslims ulema were so interested in hearing more about Wolff’s prophecies about Jesus’ return that they overcame their customary reluctance to engage missionaries in a debate (Powell, 1993: 123).

6.3 Beliefs about the Mahdi

The Arabic word Mahdi means guide. Although the word is never used in the Quran, several ahadith (sayings of the prophet Muhammad recorded over a hundred years after his death) mention it along with the sign of the end times. Of the six ahadith books considered authentic by Sunni Muslims, only three (ibn Majah, Abu Dawud, and Al-Tirmazi) chose to include Muhammad’s sayings about Mahdi. The two authoritative of the six authentic books (namely, Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim) do not include any ahadith about Mahdi. According to the ahadith included by ibn Majah, Abu Dawud, and Tirmazi, Mahdi and his father will have the same name as the prophet Muhammad and his father. Mahdi’s arrival will be accompanied by the return of Jesus. Jesus will assist the Mahdi in killing Masih ad-Dajjal (the false messiah). The Mahdi will usher peace and justice on earth and establish a moral system. Upon Mahdi and Jesus’ natural deaths, the angel Israfeel will blow his trumpet to indicate the end of the world. This will be followed by resurrection of all humanity and Judgement Day.

Shia tradition differs somewhat from its Sunni counterpart. According to Shia beliefs Mahdi is already born but is currently hidden and will reappear at the end of
times. According the Encyclopedia of Islam, this tradition started with the death of Ali’s third son Muhammad ibn Al-Hanafiyya as:

...his followers began insisting that their leader was not dead but rather hiding in a transcendent realm from which he would one day return to fill the world with Justice, they initiated a doctrine that eventually became one of the central tenets of Shiism: The occultation (ghayba) and return (raja) of the Mahdi.

The doctrine of occultation and return was developed even further after the sudden death of Ismail ibn Jaafar (d. 762) who had originally been designated the seventh Imam. When Ismail was replaced by his younger brother, Musa a-Kazim, a small group of Shiis calling themselves the Ismailis refused to accept the new Imam and instead claimed that Ismail was alive and in occultation as the Hidden Imam, another term for the Mahdi. For the majority of Shiis, however, the line of Imams continued through Musa until the 12th Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (also known as Muhammad al-Mahdi), who himself went into final occultation in 941 CE as the Mahdi. (Campo, 2009: 447)

According to ibn-Khaldun, the fourteenth century Muslim historiographer, the concept of Mahdi seeped into Sunni thought from Shias (Khaldun, 1967). The popularity of the concept in Sunni thought seems to have waxed and waned throughout history. The concept was more popular during times of socio-political turmoil when Muslims felt so frustrated with their current leadership that they longed for a saviour messiah to save them. Throughout Islamic history numerous people claimed to have been Mahdis. “From India to Tunisia, every few generations an individual lifts a banner and claims that he is the Mahdi” concludes historian Michal Rubin Furnish (2005). He further argues that despite the “stereotype that Mahdism is chiefly a Shi’i phenomenon”, “most Mahdist movements have sprung from the brows of charismatic Sunni holy men” (Furnish, 2005: 5). These movements aimed to restore Islam to its pristine form as was expected of a reformer Mahdi.

The Sunni Mahdi, more than anything, “was believed to be a divinely guided and appointed agent for renewal (mujaddid), in contrast with the more illuminationist and incarnationist Shi’a ideas.” The Sunni Mahdi does not question the validity of the shari’a in its current form, only the adherence to it during periods of perceived moral laxity. His function is to “support and restore the Sunna of the community, not to transcend or destroy it.” This forms the crux of the Mahdi’s ideology. In theory, the Sunni Mahdi would agree with the ‘ulama’s authority, but not with their permissive and lenient interpretation of Islamic tradition. The Mahdi acts as the renewer of Islam, leading to a restoration of Islam to its previous austerity. (McLellan, 2012: 80)

McLellan argues that the Sunnis do not expect the Mahdi to be “an initiator of a new religious dispensation” or to significantly reinterpret traditional Sunni doctrine (McLellan, 2012: 80-81). They only expect the Mahdi to purge Islam of local cultural influences and other “innovations” to restore it to the way it was in the time of the prophet Muhammad. This argues McLellan is why Sunni Mahdis seem to appear more often than not in “the borderlands of Islam” (McLellan, 2012: 81).
Even though Arab Muslims conquered Sind within eight decades of the prophet Muhammad’s death, they did not expand their southern kingdoms north or eastwards towards the rest of India. That had to wait for another three hundred years until the crowning of Mahmud Ghaznavi in Afghanistan. He led a wave of raids on temples throughout Northern India but failed to establish a permanent presence. The Delhi sultanate founded by Qutubudin Aibak in 1192 started Afghan/Turkmen Muslim rule over Northern India which lasted until the Marathas gained power over Delhi to be followed by the British in 1803. The declining power of Muslims empires (Mughals in India, Ottomans in Middle East, North Africa and Europe) and the rising power of Christian Europe was deeply worrying for many Indian Muslims especially the ashraf. Many thought that this would be an appropriate time for the arrival of the Mahdi to reinvigorate Islam. As Indian Historian Charles Allen recounts:

...there was talk of prophecies being fulfilled and of the approach of the end of the days... both Sunnis and Shias shared the belief that at the end of the days a messiah-figure known as the Mahdi, or the ‘expected one’, would come to the rescue of Islam. He would return to Mecca at the head of all the forces of righteousness to take on the forces of evil in one final apocalyptic battle, after which he and the lesser prophet Jesus would proceed to Jerusalem to kill the devil... in January 1810, when a Muslim named Abdul Rahman proclaimed himself the Imam-Mahdi, collected a band of followers of the Bohra sect of Sunnis and seized the fort of Mandvi in Eastern Surat. The insurgents had then marched on the nearest town, calling on all Hindus to embrace Islam or be killed. The British agent at Surat had been sent a demand to convert, and he had responded by summoning troops from Bombay. Four companies of infantry and two troops of cavalry were landed on 19 January and a one-sided encounter followed in which the aspiring Imam-Mahdi and some two hindered insurgents were killed, after which the uprising fizzled out.” (Allen, 2006: 74)

Allen (2006) devotes most of his book to the more successful Mahdiship of Syed Ahmed of Bareli. Syed Ahmed Barelvi not only managed to collect a much larger group of followers including Shah Waliullah’s grandson Shah Ismail but also succeeded in establishing a Mahdi-kingdom in the mountainous northwestern frontier of India. He appointed himself as the Amir-ul-Mumineen (leader of the faithful) of his Kingdom and ruled a large area which at one point included the city of Peshawar. Allen argues that the reason for Barelvi’s success had been the “well established predisposition among all sections of the Muslim community in India to respond to the call of the true Imam-Mahdi in a time of religious crisis, and this now became an established part of Barelvi’s Wahabi platform in India: the belief that the end of the days was drawing nigh and with it the imminent return of the Hidden Imam-Mahdi.” Canadian Anglican missionary Revd. Worthington Jukes adds:

Much about this time there was much talk among Muhammadans about the “Imam Mahdy”, I wrote a paper on the subject, entitled “Imam Mahdy, and Dajjal, the Muhammadan Antichrist”, who was expected to bring the world to a close at the end of the 13th Cent. of the Muhammadan era, and that it was to be synchronous with the return of Jesus Christ, which the Muhammadans
professed to look forward to. It was published in the October number of the Church Missionary Intelligencer 1883. (Jukes, 1925: 112)

Barelvi and hundreds of his followers died in an 1831 battle with Sikhs who ruled Punjab at the time but it failed to extinguish the Mahdi movement from India. A mere fifty eight years after Barelvi’s death, Indian Muslims witnessed the most successful Mahdi movement to originate from British India: The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at. Claiming to be heirs to Barelvi’s message, followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad would claim that Barelvi had been to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad what John the Baptist had been to Jesus. But before we can turn to their story, we need to better understand the fiercely competitive religious milieu that prevailed in nineteenth century in India in which Christian missionaries were seen to be supported by their compatriot British government workers in their attempts to convert Indian Muslims to Christianity.

6.4 Perception of the British Rule

As discussed earlier, waning Mughal power following Mughal emperor Aurangzeb’s death created a vacuum which encouraged various ambitious regional leaders to fight with each other to occupy the Mughal territory. The Indian Muslim ashraf, who were most closely tied to the Mughals in a patronage network suffered greatly from the perpetual fighting that lasted a greater part of the eighteenth century. Delhi, the capital city of Mughals, suffered particularly from the fighting. According to Naim (2001):

…the human tragedy of Delhi in the second half of the eighteenth century was indeed immense. The wars between the Turani and Irani factions, the cataclysmic invasion by Nadir Shah, the repeated scourges of the Afghans, the Marathas, the Ruhilas and the Jats—they all took heavy tolls in human lives and also forced much emigration from Delhi and its environs. Then there was the great famine of 1782 in which, according to some estimates, nearly one-third of the rural population of the territory around Delhi starved to death... when the British took Delhi they found that “it had been divided into spheres of control by neighbouring Gujar tribes for purposes of plunder.” (Naim, 2001: 8)

Various Sikh principalities to the Northwest of Delhi were consolidated into a state by Raja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839). Ranjit Singh made the old Mughal city of Lahore his capital in 1799. Ranjit Singh considered the territory under his rule to be a holy Sikh state, calling it Khalsa, using the name given by Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) to the order of initiated Sikhs. According to historian Nadhra Naeem, “Ranjit Singh struck all coins in the name of the Khalsa... He used to call his court the Khalsa darbar, his army the Khalsa and himself a humble servant of the Gurū” (Naeem, 2010: 296). Ranjit Singh patronized both Sikh and Hindu temples by donating to them generously (G. Singh, 1952).
The Punjab Akhbar reported on June 13, 1839 that on Sankrant Day, when the Maharaja was gravely ill, he gave away eleven cows with their horns covered with gold, two horses, an elephant, two diamond rings, ten golden and silver images, five golden deer and as many of silver, eleven coral things and two thousand rupees to the Brahmins (Ganda Singh, 1952: 45). Misr Ram Kishan reported on June 24, that he had prepared a golden chair, a bedstead, plates and many other items amounting to twenty one lakhs of rupees to be given as alms (Ibid, 59). A day before his death, the Maharaja also tried to give away the famous Koh-i-noor diamond to the Jagannath Temple in South India dedicated to the worship of Vishnu and Krishna, but Misr Beli Ram declined the Maharaja’s orders stating that all assets now belonged to Kharak Singh. As compensation for Koh-i-noor, two armlets with diamonds, worth two lakh rupees, several other jewelry pieces, eight Persian-style top-hats, two elephants with gold howdahs and five lakh rupees in cash were given away in sankalāp (charity). (Naeem, 2010: 298)

Ranjit Singh’s support of Hindus extended beyond temples and Brahmins. Following the Hindu tradition, he forbade the slaughter of cows by meat-eating Muslims. It appears that at times, Ranjit Singh also forbade the Muslim call to prayer, the azan and “viewed the Muslim clergy with suspicion... as they would promote extremism and rebellion” (Masson, 1842). He also confiscated parts of the jagirs from some of the Muslim ashraf that had been awarded to them by the Mughals. The celebrated Sikh historian Khushwant Singh notes the confiscation of the estates of many Punjabi nawabs by Ranjit Singh’s Khalsa darbar.

The Nawab of Jhang, who had been in arrears for three years... his estate yielding four lacs of rupees a year, was attached to the Durbar. The district of Ucch was likewise taken over. At the same time, on the death of Ramgarhia misaldar, the estates of the misl, which were worth four lacs of rupees a year and included important towns like Qadian and Gobindpur and many powerful fortresses, were attached... (Singh, 1963: 249)

As discussed earlier some of the followers of Shah Waliullah, including his grandson Shah Ismail and Syed Ahmed Barelvi decided to wage a military Jihad against the Sikhs. Others looked to the regional powers to rid them of the repressive rule by the Sikhs and Marathas. For instance, the Muslim nawabs of the state of Malerkotla “accepted British protection in 1809, thereby preserving their territorial integrity and some degree of autonomy” (Bigelow, 2005: 65). These Muslims welcomed the East India Company’s intervention in Punjab and supported it in its wars against the Sikh army. They celebrated the defeat of the Sikh army in 1849 and the freedoms of being able to say azan and slaughter cows that came with it.

Contrary to the traditional anti-colonial and anti-orientoists narratives (Said, 1978), recent scholarship (Nizami, 1983; Powell, 1993) has found that the North Indian Muslim ashraf culture (especially around the Mughal darbar in Delhi) went through a revival immediately following the takeover by the East India Company in 1803. After militarily defeating the Marathas, the British allowed the Mughal King, Bahadur Shah Zafar to live in his Red Fort and “maintain a façade of Mughal sovereignty” (Spear, 1969: 88) with the company only acting as his vassal. The “illusions of” Mughal court’s “former grandeur were to some extent still fostered by the outlook of the first generation of
British officials in Delhi, most of whom belonged to the school of thought... which held Indian culture and traditions in some respect” (Powell, 1993: 43-44). The company took over the “upkeep of the royal court, the core of the city around the Red Fort palace enclave... to allow the restoration of the royal darbar with considerable pretensions to its former grandeur” (Powell, 1993: 48). According to Naim:

The Emperor’s elephants paraded through the city in festive processions, and ceremonial durbars were regularly held in the Red Fort. It is also true that the people of the pre-Revolt Delhi did not imitate the British in dress, food, and social behavior, and no doubt the etiquette of the royal court was emulated in all élite assemblies in the city, as it was in many similar gatherings all over India... the Emperor regularly took part in the two annual Eid gatherings in the Jama Masjid, and his name was mentioned in the Friday khutbas in Delhi as well as elsewhere. His symbolic position as the champion of the Sunni faith also remained important. (Naim, 2001: 12)

The company officers not only took over patronage of Muslim ashraf but to some extent assimilated themselves into the Muslim ashraf culture. Powell discusses how some British officers not only learned Farsi but also acquired court etiquettes (adab), attended poetry gatherings called mushairas, and some even wrote Farsi poetry (Powell, 1993: 50-52). As Powell notes:

... in Delhi (1806-27), British officials seemed to combine Company service with considerable relish for a ‘nawabi’ style of comfort and culture. Many of them, including the Residents, Sir David Ochterlony and Sir Charles Metcalfe, had well-born Indian wives or mistresses, and built for their families grandiose town and country mansions in a combination of Mughal and European architectural styles. In this setting they played out roles not unlike those of umara in the great days of [Mughal] empire. (Powell, 1993: 51)

Powell describes in detail the case of the company Agent William Fraser who confided in a friend that:

... he had never found a ‘companion to his taste’ among his British colleagues, but companions he certainly had among the ashraf of Delhi. Like Ocherlon, and others who had discovered India before the turn of the [nineteenth] century, Fraser had an Indian wife and several children, whose portraits he commissioned from local artists. His habit of ‘consorting with the grey-beards of Delhi’ which marked him off from his British colleagues, reflects a number of close friendships with scholarly Muslims... Notables were Shah Abdul Aziz, of the Madrassa-I Rahimiyya, with whom Fraser read Persian, and the poets, Asad Allah Khan Ghalib who, it is said, was ‘genuinely attached’ to Fraser, and Mufti Sadr al-Din Azurda, who apart from his patronage of literary gatherings, was a key figure in judicial and educational spheres. (Powell, 1993: 52)

The company officers had become so well established as patrons of the ashraf culture that, Ghalib, arguably the father of Modern Urdu poetry, did not find it odd to persistently request the British for a pension for his participation in the darbar activities (Naim, 2001).
The East India company also, at least prior to 1813, “forbade the initiation of any new missionary ventures within its territories in India” (Powell, 1993: 78). Powell says that some of the company directors and officers were ‘hostile’ to Christian evangelicals because of their reputation as overly enthusiastic unsophisticated simpletons who lacked ‘theological complexity’ (Powell, 1993: 77-78). Carson points out that the old established ‘high church’ in Europe looked down at the evangelists as ‘fanatical and subversive of the established order’ Some company officials wanted to “keep out ‘undesirable’ Europeans who might disturb the status quo” and “lower Europeans in the eyes of the people” (Carson, 1988: 36). Perhaps not keen to show their newly cultured Muslim ashraf friends, their closeted unsophisticated zealot compatriots, or because of the ‘fears of alienating’ the natives ‘in a land where they were vastly outnumbered’ (Carson, 1988: 23-24), the company officers made “strenuous efforts to prevent settlements of any missionaries” in the early part of their rule (Powell, 1993: 79). This policy appeared to have support from Lord Cornwallis, the Commander in Chief of British India and Governor of Bengal Presidency, who is considered to have laid the ‘foundation for British rule throughout India’ (Dupont, 2001: 483). Rejecting a scheme by Charles Grant to set up company sponsored missions in India, he said that, “he had ‘no faith in such schemes’, thinking they ‘must prove ineffectual’” (Carson, 1993: 45).

After years of Evangelical lobbying in the UK (Carson, 1988), the company decided in 1813 to allow “British missionaries, and from 1833 all Protestant missionaries, to work in India” (Jeyaraj, 2008: 32). Powell (1993) notes two significant changes in the attitude of the British officials in India that happened in the middle of nineteenth century as the British hold on India became more firmly established. Unlike the first generation of East India company officials, the later company British officials were less respectful of Indian traditions and more supportive of a civilizational and Christianisation project for India. These changes argues Powell, “would create a situation in which intrusion into Muslim circles became for the first time a noticeable phenomenon” (Powell, 1993: 79). The great mutiny by some of the company’s native soldiers against their British superiors broke out in 1857. This is what Lord Cornwallis had wanted to prevent through his policy of non-interference into religious sensibilities of Indians. According to Carson, he had argued that British officers should pay “a minute attention to the customs and religious prejudices of the sepoys” because “you need not be told how dangerous disaffection in our native troops would be to our existence in this country.” (Carson, 1988: 36).

During the mutiny, the Ahl-e-Hadith leaders such as Syed Nazir Hussain and Nawab Sidiq Hasan Khan refused to join other Muslim leaders in issuing fatwas against the British rule. They argued that a religious Jihad could not be waged against the British because they had allowed Muslims to follow all aspects their religion. Instead, both Syed Nazir Hussain and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan actively worked to save the lives of British officials and their families. Syed Nazir Hussain gave refuge to a British woman and hid her in his house till the rebellion was over. Once the mutiny
had been crushed, Queen Victoria assumed direct control of the colony and promised to restrain missionary activity and non-interference in religious and cultural customs of Indians. The Queen’s declaration of 1 November 1858 was widely circulated in India (Smith, 1923: 728-729).

It will be our royal will and pleasure that none will be in (anyway) favoured, none molested or disquieted, by the reason of their religious faith of observances, but that all alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure. (East-India-Proclamations, 1908)

This statement was greeted with hope and some skepticism by Muslim ashraf who expected a much worse fate following the uprising of 1857. The missionaries themselves, argues Powell became more cautious in their evangelical activities because they were aware of the “charge that missionary provocation was the primary cause of the uprisings” (Powell, 1993: 283). The British officials, who had started to openly associate with Christian missionaries, became more cautious and adopted a neutral approach in religious disputes.

In the aftermath of the risings most of the evangelical government servants followed Sir William Muir in avoiding any direct association with controversial missionary publications or with public debates. The Punjab was particularly noted for the evangelical sympathies of its leading officers in this era, but it is significant that two of its Chief Commissioners, John Lawrence and Donald McLeod, in spite of wanting to do ‘Christian things in a Christian way’, took a firm stand on the principle of ‘neutrality’. Herbert Edwardes, a Punjab officer who was censured from Calcutta in 1858 for advocating a display of ‘open Christianity’ by, among other means, the introduction of the Bible into government schools, was regarded as unwise by most of the evangelical officers in the north-west, who remaining, for the most part, just as committed to missionary objectives as they had been before the risings, were more cautious in their expression of that commitment. It is unlikely, however, that any of these internal changes of emphasis would have been evident to those who were the objects of missionary proselytism. From their perspective of the alim and the pandit the Christian missionary activity in their midst seemed to continue just as intrusively as before the uprisings. (Powell, 1993: 284)

This meant that while the image of British officials as patrons of Muslim ashraf culture continued to suffer, it did not get to the point where most North Indian Muslims perceived them as outright enemies of Islam and in cahoots with the missionaries. Instead, the British officials came to be seen as distinct actors primarily interested in maintaining law and order so that trade could be ‘carried on as smoothly as possible’ (Carson, 1993: 23). The North Indian Muslims understood that while some of the British officials were personally sympathetic to the cause of Christianisation of India but, wanting to be seen as fair and impartial, were unwilling to openly support the missionaries.
6.5 Perceptions of Christian Missionaries

Although it’s easy to see Christianity and Islam as vast and static forces, they are perpetually in flux. Over time each religion has shaped the other. Religion is dynamic and fluid. The most often overlooked fact of religious revivals... is that they give rise to divisions within the religions themselves. They are about a struggle over who speaks for God—a confrontation that takes place not simply between rival religions, but inside them. (Griswold, 2010: 12)

Eighteenth century witnessed one of the greatest religious revivals in history. The evangelical movement began in Britain and New England in the 1730s. Evangelicals focused on the role of individual laity in consciously accepting God’s gift of salvation as laid out in the Bible without requiring an interpretation by the clergy or the church. Only by deciding to dedicate one’s life to Christ—thereby being “reborn”—could one be saved. Great emphasis was also placed on the need to convey this message to those who had not been reborn yet. “Many saw it as their duty to reach new believers, a project known as the Great Commission and rooted in Jesus’ parting command to his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)” (Griswold, 2010: 28). Bebbington (1989) argued that “there are four qualities that have been the special mark of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; Biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on sacrifice of Christ on the cross” (Bebbington, 1989: 3).

Perhaps, no other Christian movement besides the Crusades has had as much of an impact on Islam as did the Evangelical movement. This is, in part, due to the character of the movement but also due to the time at which it happened. The eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries marked the heyday of Western colonialism with most of the world having been carved up by European colonial powers. The same European advancements in transportation and communication technologies that made colonialism possible, also allowed British and American evangelicals to reach people around the world. As Griswold convincingly argues, colonial evangelical preachers found Islam as standing in the way of bringing the whole world into the Christian fold:

“evangelize the world in this generation.” These were the words of the Reverend Arthur T. Pierson, a now largely forgotten Yankee evangelical who inspired a worldwide movement. As Pierson put it, “[A]ll should go and go to all.” With his urging, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), founded in London in 1844 launched the Student Volunteer Movement. Thousands of young men and women mobilized as missionaries to reach what they believed were the last blank spaces of the map with Gospel... This worldview, with its emphasis on the language of light and darkness, good and evil, flourished in opposition to an enemy. Islam, many evangelicals believed was their most formidable foe. (Griswold, 2010: 29)
India, because of the size of its non-Christian population, was considered a prime target for the evangelization effort. Evangelicals, as early as 1694, had started developing detailed plans for setting up a “government-supported missionary activity” (Carson, 1988: 19). Humphrey Prideaux argued that “English East India Company was declining while the Dutch Company was thriving and attributed this to God’s curse on Britain for neglecting the progress of Christianity” (Carson, 1988: 19).

The first missionary societies, namely, the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), were formed at the turn of the century. Both societies were interested in sending missionaries to company territories in India but they faced a number of obstacles. The biggest problem was finding volunteers willing to risk their lives to live in a far off hostile territory where people did not understand any European language (Carson, 1988). Lack of money to fund travel and salaries was another hurdle. Given the reports from Dutch and Portuguese missions in Goa, Ceylon and Southern India, it was clear that locals were hostile to foreign missionaries. The societies appealed to the company officials in UK for protection and support. The company responded that they welcomed chaplains to minister to the needs of the Europeans in India who were of “tempers and qualifications fit for the undertaking” (Carson, 1988: 28).

The insistence on a proper temperament was meant to exclude the ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘democratic’ challengers of the establishment church. Carson quotes Sidney Smith as calling such people ‘dangerous’ and ‘maniacs.’

... even for missionary purposes... the utmost discretion is necessary; and if we wish to teach the natives a better religion, we must take care to do it in a manner which will not inspire them with a passion for political change or we shall inevitably lose our disciples altogether... (Carson, 1988: 63).

He argued that Evangelicals were “disgusting and dangerous enough at home” and asked “why are we sending out little detachments of maniacs to spread over the fine regions of the world the most unjust and contemptible opinion of the gospel?” (Carson, 1988: 63). Carson says that the Bishop of Worcester, Samuel Butler, also warned the government that “unless [it] act cautiously, these methodistical proselytizers, by their absurd enthusiasm, will bring about the loss of India.” (Carson, 1988: 63). To the extent that prejudices of the high church were shared by decision makers in the British government, such as Lord Cornwallis, their lowly image was a problem for Evangelicals. Evangelicals engaged in an effort to rebrand themselves as respectable subjects of the crown. Carson argues that “a feature of evangelical writings and speeches during the 1790s and 1800s therefore was a concern to emphasize the role of Christianity as a stabilizing force and the best way of maintaining order in society” not just in Britain but also in India (Carson, 1988: 69). Charles Grant argued that “the establishment of Christianity in a country does not necessarily bring it a free political constitution” (Grant, 1813: 96).
Part of this rebranding effort, argues Carson was the formation of new missionary societies, such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), founded in 1799, and the British and Foreign Bible Society, formed in 1804. These organizations were “deliberately aimed at attracting the aristocracy and episcopacy” to their cause (Carson, 1988: 267). An organized campaign was launched to pressure British Parliament into forcing the East India Company to support missionary work in India. The basic message of the campaign was that (1) Providence has given India to Britain for a higher purpose, (2) that purpose is to bring about spiritual salvation and material improvement in the lives of all Indians, and (3) the only way to help Indians is to convert them to Christianity (Carson, 1988: 256). William Wilberforce of the British and Foreign Bible Society emphasized:

> the importance of obtaining as many as possible of the friends of humanity who may not agree with us in religious sentiments. All surely will join who do not wish to see such as vast body of our fellow subjects... sunk in the greatest moral and social and domestic barbarism without an effort to raise them on the scale of beings” (Carson, 1988: 288).

A key to selling this message was building an image of poor Indians as being held back by wretched Hindu, Muslim and Sikh ideologies and desperately in need of help. This involved painting ‘images of degraded Hindu, and the horrifying practices of sati, hook-swinging and infanticide’ (Carson, 1988: 262). Coming on the heels of the anti-slavery campaign, they framed their campaigns as ‘moral crusades to ameliorate the plight of Britain’s heathen subjects’ (Carson, 1988: 271). The evangelicals spread their message through tactics such as, “lobbying key ministers, involving the Established Church, adopting a high moral and religious tone, establishing a nationwide network” (Carson, 1988: 271).

Evangelicals used various world events and a growing religious awareness in Europe to their advantage. They argued that events such as “the Wilkes agitation, the Gordon riots, the loss of the American colonies and, most dramatic of all, the French Revolution and its aftermath” were “signs of God’s displeasure” (Carson, 1988: 255). These events were signs of the end of the world. Carson notes:

> Millenarianism had a close connection with the idea of missionary activity because of the belief that men must labour for souls in preparation for Christ’s second Advent: ‘And the God of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall the end come’ [Matt 24.14] (Carson, 1988: 255).

The campaign was so successful that “between April and June 1813 nearly 900 petitions signed by half a million people were presented in the House of Commons in support of the principle that Britain had a duty to propagate Christianity in the areas under her control” (Carson, 1988: 282). On 20 July 1813, the British Parliament voted to include the “pious clause” in the renewed charter of East India Company. It added to the company’s mission the objective to:
promote the interests and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dominions in India, and such measures ought to be adopted as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement, and in furtherance of the above objects, sufficient facilities ought to be afforded by law to persons desirous of going to and remaining in India. (Carson 1988: 411)

The passage of the clause had an immediate effect on East India Company’s policy of awarding licenses to missionaries in India. The first CMS missionaries were given licenses to proceed to India at the end of 1813 (Carson 1988: 311). Most of the early missionaries focused their efforts on Hindus living in the Southern and Eastern parts of the country and had made “very little contact with the Muslims of the [Northwestern Indian] region until as late as 1830s” (Powell, 1993: 81). Powell argues that this had to do with perceptions of Muslims as unreasonable barbarians with whom a theological “impasse had long been reached” (Powell, 1993: 81) and also because of the desire to focus on the ‘more primitive’ majority Hindus who would be easier to convince of the obvious errors of their ways. This early optimism faded, however, as there were few Hindus willing to convert to Christianity and face social ostracism from their communities. The few missionaries who did make attempts to engage Muslim ulama and ashraf found that Muslims were convinced that they already knew everything they needed to know about Christianity. Early missionaries such as Henry Martyn and Joseph Wolff had trouble getting into the darbars of various Indian Muslim kings or getting Muslim scholars to engage in a munazara—a public religious debate—with them. The missionaries labeled this attitude ‘hauteur’ and ‘arrogant’ (Powell, 1993: 74). The CMS missionary Rev. T. P. Hughes argued that such an attitude was inherent in Islam:

The special difficulties in the way of conversion of Mohammadans appear to arise from that self-conscious superiority and arrogance which is inherent power in Islam. Mohammadanism was never intended to be the religion of the conquered, and hence it is that the pious Moslems regards all other religionists, whether Jews, Christians, or fire-worshippers, as real objects of pity. The inspirations of the Koran and the divine mission of Mohammed are always taken for granted... the mind of the Moslem is so saturated with dogma that it instinctively repels any suggestions of inquiry, and consequently, in the majority of cases where an honest mind in Islam begins to inquire, he soon finds himself landed in the regions of practical atheism. (Hughes, 1879: 329)

The only way to break through the Muslim haughtiness would be to be provocative. Powell argues that this was the strategy adopted by Rev. Carl Gottlieb Pfander—the CMS missionary to Agra from 1841 to 1855. Pfander published three anti-Islam polemical works in Persian including “Mizan al-Haqq”, “which remains until now the single most provocative Christian contribution to the Christian-Muslim polemical interchange” (Powell, 1993: 138). Pfander labeled hadis (traditions of prophet Muhammad) as ‘gross fiction,’ Islam as a ‘system of falsehood,’ Islamic theology a ‘mire of error and superstition’ and the prophet Muhammad as ‘deluded’ and ‘false prophet’ (Powell, 1993: 145-151). Immediately upon getting to Agra, Pfander sent Urdu translations of his
books to Muslim ashraf and ulama of the city. Powell notes that “instead of ignoring them as before” the ulama responded to Pfander. This Powell argues showed that “some of the ulama were undergoing a change of opinion about the missionaries... and they were beginning to view their activities, and British rule generally as a growing danger to Islam” (Powell, 1993: 170). Powell argues that “the catalysis in this transformation from passive observance to active remonstrance, was the campaign launched by Carl Pfander in 1841, to engage ashraf Muslims in religious interchange” (Powell, 1993: 264). Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a pro-British Muslim Indian civil servant, also blamed aggressive missionary preaching for the change in Muslim perceptions of missionaries. In his book, “On Causes of Rebellion of India,” he wrote:

The missionaries, moreover, introduced a new system of preaching. They took to printing and circulating controversial tracts, in the shape of questions and answers. Men of a different faith were spoken of in those tracts in a most offensive and irritating way. In Hindustan these things have always been managed very differently. Every man in this country preaches and explains his views in his own mosque or his own house. If any one wishes to listen to him, he can go to the mosque or house and hear what he has to say. But the missionaries’ plan was exactly the opposite. They used to attend places of public resort—markets, for instance, and fairs, where men of different creeds were collected together—and used to begin preaching there. It was only from fear of the authorities that no one bade them be off about their business. In some districts the missionaries were actually attended by policemen from the station. And then the missionaries did not confine themselves to explaining the doctrines of their own books. In violent and unmeasured language they attacked the followers and the holy places of other creeds, annoying and insulting beyond expression the feelings of those who listened to them. (Khan, 1885: 42)

Maulana Rahmatullah Kairanawi—a Sunni alim and principal of a madrassa at Kairana, accepted Pfander’s challenge of a munazara debate. At the munazara, held 11-12 April 1854 at Agra’s Church Missionary Society School, Kairanawi was assisted by English speaking surgeon of Lucknow Dr. Wazir Khan while Pfander was assisted by his fellow CMS missionary Rev. Thomas Valpy French. After going through the traditional Islamic objections against Trinity, the discussion moved to Muslim allegations of tahrif (corruption) in the Bible. Like other evangelicals of the time, Pfander denied “any alterations in any manuscript or printed editions of any part of the Bible, apart that is from, any insignificant ‘copyist’ errors in any editions” (Powell, 1993: 243). Surprisingly, for the missionaries, the Muslim debaters cited “evidence” against the missionary claims from biblical commentaries, recent works of Biblical criticism, ecclesiastical and secular histories, and from a miscellaneous assortment of European reference works” (Powell, 1993:230-231). This seems to have forced, at least Rev. French and the presiding judge Mosley Smith, to admit to ‘various readings’ of the Bible. The debate ended in bitterness with both sides claiming victory and refusing to “sign the written accounts of the debate drawn up by the opponent, and both made allegations of deliberate falsification of the record” (Powell, 1993:255). Muslims perceived that they had ‘taken fortress of Christianity’ and utilized, “every available vehicle of effective communication from fatwa to newspaper report... to
broadcast the Muslim ‘victory’ over the missionaries” (Powell, 1993:264). Even though both Kairanwi and Khan were charged by the British authorities for their role in the 1857 mutiny, they both managed to escape to Mecca. Moulana Kairanawi was hailed as a modern day Saladin and invited by Ottoman Sultan to Istanbul to write a rebuttal to Christian missionaries. His two volume Arabic book “Izhar ul Haq” was published in 1864-65 and translated into Turkish, English, and French (Powell, 1993:295).

As discussed earlier, the missionaries became more cautious in their activities following the 1857 mutiny because of the perception by some British officials that fears of Christianization had caused some of the native soldiers to turn on their British masters. This does not mean, however, that there was any decrease in the number of missionaries. On the contrary, the number of missionaries continued to steadily increase throughout Northwestern India. According to Cox (2002), in the second half of nineteenth century, numerous Christian societies were active in Punjab (see Table 6).

In the nineteenth century, Punjab encompassed much of what is now Pakistan and northwest India (Including Delhi). Although subject to Christian influences at various times, including well-documented Jesuit attempts to influence the Mughal court, this part of the world contained as a practical matter no Christians at all at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the Punjab and its Himalayan hinterlands had been the scene of major efforts by missionary societies representing the principal Protestant denominations of both Great Britain and the United States: evangelical and high church Anglicans; the established church of Scotland; two competing groups of American Presbyterians; American Methodists; British Baptists; and the Salvation Army as well as Roman Catholics (mostly Flemish speaking). Smaller missions followed in their train, and in the early twentieth century (the heyday of foreign mission work in India) more than thirty societies were at work alongside innumerable private individuals and small groups of locally based philanthropists and missionaries. (Cox, 2002: 2)

**Table 6:** A list of missionary societies that were active in Northwestern India in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries compiled by (Cox, 2002: 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presbyterian Church in the USA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Reformed Presbyterian Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>British and Foreign Bible Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baptist Missionary Society</td>
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<td>Baptist Zanana Missionary Society</td>
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<td>Central Asian Mission</td>
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<td>Church of England in Canada Missionary Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of England in Zanana Missionary Society</td>
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<td>Cambridge Mission to Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian Missions in Many Lands (“Open Brethren”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chuch Missionary Society (Anglican)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danish Pathan Mission</td>
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In the wake of the 1857 mutiny and the debacle of Pfander-Kairanawi debate, the Christian missionaries paused to take stock of the situation and to chart a new course more suited to the new environment in Northwestern India. The Punjab Missionary Conference was held in Lahore, at the end of 1862 and the start of 1863, to compare notes on the effectiveness of various strategies for preaching to Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. The first speaker in the opening session of the conference, Rev. John Newton of the American Presbyterian Mission in Lahore admitted that current missionary strategies may not have been effective:

The preaching of Gospel in the Punjab, however, and indeed in most parts of India, in respect to its primary object, has hitherto met with very small success: for, though a wide impression may have been made, and doubtless has been made in favour of Christianity, few souls have actually been converted to Christ. What reasons can be assigned for this? And how can preaching to the heathen, in these parts, be rendered more efficacious? (Compilation-Committee, 1863: 4)

Answering his own question, he argued that the most important element of successful preaching involves, “giving no unnecessary offense to their prejudices; but seeking a conciliatory mode of address” (Compilation-Committee, 1863: 4). The use of ‘controversy’ in preaching was a major topic of discussion at the meeting.
Summarizing the discussion, Guenther notes that, “a number of missionary writers actually shared Ahmad Khan’s criticism of bazaar preachers” (Guenther, 1998: 10). Rev. Newton continued to argue that Jesus’s status should be the central point of preaching:

Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, endowed with all the attributes of a mighty Saviour, cannot be held too much to the view of the heathen...Let it be seen that he was indeed spotless, and benevolent, and self-denying, as well; as mighty, beyond comparison... The resurrection, too of Jesus should occupy a prominent place, as the crowning miracle of his incarnate state, as the great attesting seal of all his claims... (Compilation-Committee, 1863: 6)

Rev. J. H. Orbison, who followed Rev. Newton, agreed with him that the use of controversy “has been shown to be injurious in most cases” and should be banished “from Mission policy and practices” (Compilation-Committee, 1863: 26). He argued that a conciliatory start can be had by learning about the religious beliefs of the natives and by emphasizing the common ground between Christianity and native religions.

1. Every Missionary ought to be thoroughly acquainted with the languages and notions of the people. He ought to have a good knowledge of the books, and religious maxims, and prejudices, of the Hindoos and Mahomedans. For want of this, much time and breath are often spent in vain, by encouraging and prolonging disputation which might have been prevented, or at least finished, with a few words. Answers to many objections can be drawn from their own books and opinions.

2. The plan of dwelling on the subjects of agreement and points of contact, instead of those of repulsion and disagreement, would doubtless facilitate the good work, and tend to conciliate and win over hearers. (Compilation-Committee, 1863: 27)

Rev. Thomas Patrick, a CMS missionary to Peshawar from 1864 to 1884, admitted that the Muslim charge of corruption in the Bible – the central point of the Pfander-Kairanawi debate – is “the most plausible of modern objections” (Hughes, 1875: 22). Instead of focusing their energies on such controversial issues, he advised missionaries to focus on traditional Islamic beliefs about Jesus which he argued not only form a common ground between Muslims and Christians but can be exploited by missionaries prove the truth of Christianity.

In dealing with Muhammadans the Christian missionary must not treat their system as though the views of Islam were precisely those of modern Socinians. Islam admits the miraculous conception of Christ, and that he is the “Word” which “God conveyed into Mary”; and whilst the other five great prophets are but “the chosen,” “the preacher,” “the friend,” “the converser with,” and “the messenger” of God, Jesus is admitted to be the “Spirit of God.” He is the greatest miracle worker of all the prophets, and whilst Muhammad is dead and buried, and saw corruption, all Muslim divines admit that Jesus “saw no corruption,” and still lives with a human body in Paradise. (Hugh, 1875: 265)
The new ‘non-controversialist’ missionary strategy that became dominant in the second half of nineteenth century in Punjab involved engaging Muslims in a friendly discussion by starting with the commonalities between Islam and Christianity and then proceeding to argue that Islamic sources themselves admit to Jesus’ higher status and Muhammad’s lower status. The genius of the idea was to convert the Muslim knowledge of Christianity from being a source of Muslim strength into a source of weakness that could be exploited by missionaries. They hoped that this new approach would finally allow them to break through the ‘hardness’ and ‘bigotry’ of the Muslim heart. Rev. T.J. Mayer of the CMS had a chance to witness the effectiveness of this strategy firsthand during a preaching session in Bannu in 1875.

Gul Khan, the blind Hafiz is to be baptized, please God, on Sunday, i.e., if they do not murder him or poison him beforehand... I was sitting, on April 24th, in the verandah, after my English class, when Synd Hakim Shah, a member of the municipal committee here, came in to beg me not to teach his son the Gospel... I had got some way in my discourse, when in came the blind man; I referred the Synd to him for an answer as to what he had seen of the beauty and purity of the Gospels. Then followed a long and most interesting discussion. G.K. [i.e., Gul Khan] quoted passage after passage in Arabic from the Koran showing the authority of the book of Moses, the Psalms, and Gospel; the account of Christ in the Koran owning Himself as the Son of God, etc. The Synd sat astonished, and although he made several answers, it was evident his faith had gotten a shock from which it will not readily recover. G. K. then burst out into a splendid peroration on...the humanity only of Mohammed, and the humanity and divinity of Christ. It was a very pleasant time... They went away, and one of our Christians then told me that he wanted to be baptized. (Mayer, 1876: 284)

The new ‘non-controversialist’ approach to preaching appeared to have been more effective than the older ‘controversialist’ approach. In 1893, Rev. Dr. Imad-ud-din claimed that “there was a time when the conversion of a Mohammedan to Christianity was looked on as a wonder. Now they have come and are coming in their thousands” (Imad-ud-din, 1893a: 582). Robert Clark, head of CMS in Punjab, boasted that while there were virtually no Christians in Punjab prior to the establishment of the CMS mission in 1852, they numbered around thirty thousand by 1894.

So impressed was he by quick growth of vegetation in Punjab’s fertile lands that he found allusions to it as the best way of illustrating the rapid expansion of the church in the late nineteenth century. The way, “a little twig soon grows into a great tree, if it receives water and care” he said the Christianity in Punjab has also grown quickly. “A little vine was then planted, which has taken root, and it is gradually spreading itself over the land” (R. Clark, 1883:4).26

Two mission house were built in 1852... Our City School house was built in 1853... The Jandiala Mission was commenced, and a small house built in 1854... Two orphanage houses were built in 1855... The Lady Henry Lawrence Schools were established in 1856-58... The Native Church in Amritsar was built there in 1866... The City Mission House (where His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales received the Native Christians of the Punjab in 1876), the Native Pastor’s House, the Christian Serai, and the Mission Room, Called Shamoun’s Jhanda (the flag for Christ) were built...
in 1866 and 1867... The Batala Mission was established in 1866. The Native Church was twice enlarged in 1866 and 1875... and is being again enlarged in 1883... (Clark, 1883: 32).

He continued:

The little sapling planted in 1852 has already become a great tree; and has thrown out many branches on every side. And the branches are growing, and are throwing out other twigs and shoots, which will themselves soon become branches; and their leaves are furnishing medicine and shade to many people; and their fruits are feeding many from the Tree of Life. (Clark, 1883: 46)

Rev. Clark emphasized that the establishment of missions in Punjab was not the result of a human plan but because of ‘providence of God’ who recognized the central importance of Punjab to spreading Christianity among to the entire Muslims world:

If we accept the position in which God’s providences have placed us, and try to realize the vast opportunities which He has given us, we have to consider what kind of agencies we require to fulfil these great responsibilities... with very few exceptions, there are absolutely no Christian Missions beyond us. We may travel eastward, northward, and westward, to the confines of China, to almost the Arctic regions, or to Palestine and Constantinople, without meeting (with the exception of the Moravian Missions in Lahoul, and a few scattered missionaries in Persia and Armenia), as far as we know, with any living Christianity at all. It is from out Punjab Frontier line, and with it as our basis of operations, that Christianity must advance onwards to the countries where it is yet unknown. (Clark, 1883: 26)

As Porter (2000) argues, Evangelicals saw Christian Europe’s military success against Christianity’s old nemesis Islam as a sign of the end times. They believed that fading of Muslims power in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia would allow them to finally put the Islamic heresy to an end and usher in the second coming of Jesus. Rev. French thus argued that “everywhere we find Mohammedanism... hotly and sorely pressed in a life and death struggle” (as quoted by Porter 2000: 116). At Church Missionary Society meeting in the 1880s, the vicar of Fareham opined: “The fifth horn in the vision of the ram and the he goat in the eighth chapter of Daniel is a symbol of the Mohammedan power, and that its time for practicing and prospering against the Prince of princes is now coming to an end... Certainly it is a sign of times that the crescent is waning before the cross.” “Islam sees all her frontiers falling in” wrote William Arthur. Maj Gen Haig noted that, “days for Mohemmeden Antichrist are numbered. The disintegration of the Turkish Empire proceeds apace.” In combination with the obvious decline in Muslim fortunes throughout the world and the rise of Christian Europe, they were convinced that Indian Muslims as well as Muslims around the world, would soon be converted to Christianity. Mass conversion of Indian Muslims, believed missionaries, would open the door to the conversion of Muslims throughout the Middle East (Porter, 2000). Rev. Imad-ud-din argued:
There was a time of their ascendency when Mohammedans conquered many lands. That speedily went by. Since then nothing is to be seen in Islam, all the Mohammedan world over, but decay on decay... The reason of the backwardness of Mohammedans and their low estate in things religious, as well as things worldly, is the same—it is simply and solely teachings of Mohammed, and the foolish things that obtain among them. These render all progress hopeless... Mohammedans and others are now so utterly crushed and annihilated that they will not recover themselves until the day of judgment. (Imad-ud-din, 1893b: 583-584)

The Punjabi Muslim ashraf who in their earlier haughtiness had believed that since Islam was so superior to Christianity, no Muslims could ever abandon Islam, were now shocked by the rising wave of apostasy. As Rev. Siraj-ud-din pointed out, “the largest number of Christian converts from Islam in India are from the Panjab” ” (Siraj-ud-din, 1913: 96). Far from seeing the 'non-controversial' missionary approach as less threatening than the previous missionary approaches, Muslims saw the dramatic expansion in missionary activity as part of a grand plan to convert Muslims around the world to Christianity. The use of militaristic and triumphant terminology by the missionaries also heightened the sense of danger. As high-identifiers, they genuinely feared an annihilation of their group unless something was done to confront the adversary. The missionary notions of the end of the world served to reinforce their own eschatological expectations about the imminent arrival of a savior who would defeat Islam's opponents, such as Christian missionaries. Savior of Islam was exactly what Mirza Ghulam Ahmad claimed to be. In the next chapter, we will learn more about Ahmad’s family and the environment he grew up in and how that environment shaped his beliefs.

6.6 Chapter Summary

After the fall of the Mughal empire, Indian Muslims families with claims to ancestry from Islamic lands of Central Asia and Arabiaincreasingly thought of themselves as vanguards of Islam in the land of heathen Hindus. The initial loss of Muslim political and military power in the eighteenth century was seen by them as a temporary setback similar to many that had happened in the –a-millennia long history of Muslim power in India. However, as hopes of a quick recovery faded and a large number of Christian missionaries descended upon India (because of socio-cultural and political developments in Britain), Muslims increasingly took refuge in their eschatological beliefs about national saviors who were to appear at their greatest hour of need to save Islam from extinction and to restore the lost Muslim glory. Expectations of an imminent arrival of two end-of-the world figures were particularly rife among nineteenth century Indian Muslims. The first savior was to be Jesus, whom Muslims believe to have been a righteous prophet of God whose divine message had become corrupted into Christianity. Muslims believe that God raised Jesus to heaven alive to save him from the indignity of crucifixion. According to the shared Sunni Indian
Muslims believe, Jesus sits on the right hand of God awaiting his return before the end of time. The returned Jesus would work as a second-in-command to a Muslim reformer titled Mahdi (i.e., the guide). The two men would lead an army of Muslims to defeat all infidels and make the entire world Muslim. Christian missionary activity also played a role in making beliefs about Jesus prominent in the minds of Indian Muslims. Missionaries found that perceptions about Jesus provided them an opening to engage Indian Muslims who were seen to be the most resistant of all Indians to the Christian missionary efforts. Frustrated with the failure of their earlier proselyting efforts, missionaries had taken to telling Muslims that their own teachings showed that Jesus was superior to Muhammad. Thus, while Muhammad lay buried six feet deep in the ground, having died long ago, Jesus was still alive and sat on the right hand of God. This strategy resulted in thousands of Punjabi Muslim converting to Christianity raising fears of the extinction of Islam in the minds of Northwestern Indian Muslims. This common social threat was discussed with an increasing sense of alarm in elite North Indian Muslim literary circles.