11. Social ministers of care (*khādims*): Islamic higher education in Britain

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INTRODUCTION

In a world where education is often aimed at gaining individual financial prosperity, what does it mean to be educated to serve humanity? Islam, as submission to God in this world, is tied to a civilisational imagination of the commonweal (Yusuf 2022). Drawing from the Prophetic blueprint, Muslims are to be educated to live faithfully to God and to honour the dignity and humanity of others. The Qur'ān reminds readers to believe *and* perform righteous actions. To nurture an ethical way of living, educational institutions – formal and informal – emerged throughout Islamic history (Nakosteen 1965). Education was to be embodied with seekers of knowledge (*ṭalabā*) being in the companionship (*suḥba*) of pious living exemplars: knowledge was inseparable from the bodies that inhabit it. As a result, a graduate is nurtured with a deep sense of selfless service (*khidma*) to others. In a theocentric society, God, the individual, and society are in a symbiotic relationship. One such curriculum that sought this vision was the *Dars-i Niẓāmī* which, though conceived of in 17th-century Hindustan,[1] found its way to the British Isles. In this chapter, I explore its practical application through the case study of an Islamic seminary

[1] I have chosen Hindustan over India because the latter is a colonial category: "The interest in locating the Muslim-or-Hindu-ness in the deep past is a contest about the future of the subcontinent in material ways. The majoritarian politics that has come to the fore in the last decade is predicated on finding historical roots for imagined trauma" (Asif 2020, 61). I prefer to follow Manan Ahmed Asif in his monograph, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (2020), where he argues convincingly that nation states like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Republic of India shared a common political ancestry in that they were part of a region whose people understood themselves as Hindustani.

(*dār al-ʿulūm;* literally translated to "house of sciences")[2] in modern Britain. We see how religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) function to serve as social ministers of care (*khādims*) to wider society.[3] A recent report on faith engagement in Britain found that religion acts as a social glue that brings people from different backgrounds together and creates strong bonds (Bloom 2023). In this sense, *dār al-ʿulūms* and their graduates provide an important (public) value to both Muslims and the larger communities they are part of.

EARLY BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: A SCHOLASTIC TRADITION

The *dār al-ʿulūm* is a curious combination of a tradition of learning and a modern institution. To unpack this requires a brief journey back in time. Islam and the learning that came with it were brought to Hindustan by Arab and Persian traders, Sufīs, and scholars during the 7th century (Jafri 2021, 129–130; Schimmel 1980). It also arrived via the Indian Ocean in places like Sindh as early as the mid-8th century. The formalisation of education occurred under Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn (d. 1748).[4] He would be famed as the "Ustāḍ al-Hind" (the teacher of Hindustan), who developed, it is claimed, the *Dars-i Niẓāmī* (a particular curriculum and accompanying pedagogy), which at that time inherited

[2] In this chapter, I will use *madrasas* and *dār al-ʿulūm* interchangeably, though I am referring to higher forms of Islamic education. Some words have been retained and not translated. This is because translating them would not capture their "wider meaning that is informed by Muslim normativity" (Rehman 2022, 132). One such word is *ṭālib* (plural: *ṭalabā* or *ṭullāb*; Persian *ṭalibān*). Translating this simply as "student" does not capture what it means, so readers will appreciate its broader meaning, which is a form of active truth-seeking.

[3] Two things to note here. First, I have argued in a forthcoming book chapter that those who graduate from *dār al-ʿūlūms* should be called religious functionaries, and those who continue to pursue further studies should be regarded as the religious elite (*ʿulamāʾ*). As it stands, in practice, a graduate from a *dār al-ʿulūm* is called an *ʿālim* (the singular of *ʿulamāʾ*), so I will retain the wording. Second, I have described the graduates as *khādims* to emphasise how they see themselves. The translation I have used is "social ministers of care" and the verb "minister" here is taken from the Oxford English Dictionary as someone who "attend[s] to the needs of (someone)".

[4] Nūr al-Ḥasan Rāshid Kāndhlavī has raised doubts about the attribution to solely Mullā Niẓām al-Dīn and the title of *Dars-i Niẓāmī.* He refers to it as the curriculum of the Farangī Mahallī *ʿulamā*. See Nūr al-Ḥasan Rāshid Kāndhlavī, *Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband aur Maẓāhir-i ʿUlūm Sahāranpūr kā sab say pehlā niṣāb-i taʿlīm: Is kī maʿnawiyyat wa jāmiʿiyyat aur dūr ras natā'ij wa samarāt*, Aḥwāl o Āsār (Muḥarram, Ṣafar, Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1429 AH, 93).

a large composition of both the rational and revealed sciences (Mahali 1973, 46; Robinson 2001). In turn, the *Dars-i Niẓāmī* actually inclined towards the rational sciences to include reasoned ethical practice (*fiqh*) and dialectical or rational theology (*kalām*).[5]

Over time, the *Dars-i Niẓāmī*, with its emphasis on the rational sciences, gained wide traction, allowing *ṭalabā* to become highly skilled scholars, bureaucrats, and intellectuals.[6] The texts, though chosen carefully, were secondary to the primary aim of gradually developing the student's intellectual ability to become independent scholars upon graduation (Robinson 2001, 46). The *method* mattered. The texts, with a handful from each discipline, some dating back as far as the 9th century, were often archaic and terse, yet their mastery by unlocking linguistic puzzles prepared the *ṭalabā* for life as a scholar. The *ṭalabā*, it was expected, would have enough knowledge of the essentials of those disciplines, such as philosophy, logic, and speculative theology, by the time she or he graduates, to specialise.

Advanced teaching was split over several years. At the completion of their studies, scholars were categorised according to their area of study. A *fāḍil* was someone who specialised in the rationalist sciences, an *ʿālim* was someone who specialised in theological studies, and a *qābil* was someone who specialised in literature and grammar (Nadwi 1936, 109; Munāẓir 1944, 137–144; Maimoona 2002, 101–102). The syllabus was highly academic in nature and attracted some of the greatest minds of the time. However, this was to undergo a transformation vis-à-vis colonialism.

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[5] To see the original *Dars-i Niẓāmī*, see Bashir (2022, 364–365). I have not translated *fiqh* to "law" because there is a substantive difference. *Fiqh* is the training in a form of legal reasoning by a close reading of Ḥanafī precedent. The subject of this training can explain this precedent and reason with it, considering the sacred sources, and, importantly, generate law based on the first two. Law is the output of this training. The precedent itself emerged in response to its time and place yet was "timeless" in maintaining the underlying logic ensconced in the precedent. The precedent is not the law but an ideal guide to the law (see Wheeler 1996, 228; Hanif 2017, 9).

[6] Others have argued against its "integrational potential" and that it was indeed intended to remain a faith-based curriculum and was highly confessional. See Hartung (2014) where the so-called division between religious and rational sciences, and the focus on the latter by the Farangi Mahall *'ulamā'*, is challenged. For books that made up the syllabus, see Mujeeb (1967, 406–408) and Robinson (2001, 48–50). For a detailed list of assigned works in the Deoband syllabus, which was taught over eight years, see Sufi (1941, 127–134).

A MODERN INSTITUTION

Orthodox Muslim theologians in colonial India coped with changing socio-political realities by inhabiting alternative ways of being, knowing, and doing. These alternative ways enabled them to reformulate, and to some extent manufacture, religious concepts and practices that were at once reflective of their nascent marginalised status in British India and assertive of their past imperial and sovereign political aspirations.

The disintegration of the Mughal empire signalled the demise and fragmentation of *dār al-Islām*, the abode of Islam.[7] As British rule expanded, the *ʿulamāʾ* were increasingly marginalised, and the madrasas, long endowed by Muslim elites, collapsed. With the division between what the British viewed as "useless" and "useful" knowledge, a synthetic and narrowly defined opposition began to take hold as *ʿulamāʾ* were increasingly identified as "religious" professionals, along with the madrasa being seen as a purely "religious" institute (Ingram 2018, 48–52). The *madrasa* and its curriculum, however, was becoming distinct from its pre-colonial tradition.[8] A modern *madrasa* emerged.

After a failed war of independence by Muslims and Hindus in 1857, many *ʿulamāʾ* sought to revive Islam by educating lay Muslims.[9] The founding of the *Madrasa Islamiyya* in the city of Deoband happened in North India in 1866.[10] While some have argued that the primary objective of the Deoband seminary has been the conservation of classical Islamic texts and sciences, the reality is many texts underwent change and adaptation (Bashir 2022, 122–133). Breaking from traditional modes of finance, Deoband reduced its reliance on

[7] Another son of Sḥāh Walī Allāh, Shāh ʿAbdul Azīz (d. 1822), issued a *fatwā* declaring India to be *dạr al-ḥarb*, an abode of war (see Sikand 2005, 56). For more, see my paper: "Competing Spaces of Religious Belonging: Deobandi Debates on Interest/Usury as a Case Study", accessed 19 January 2025 at https://johas.org/competing-spaces-of-religious-belonging/

[8] This is not to suggest that there did not exist any attempt to bring both streams together. The establishment of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental High School in Aligarh, which was later upgraded to a college by Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, is an example. Khān studied under Mamlūk ʿAli, who was a teacher of the founders of Deoband. Dār al-Nadwā in Lucknow is another example of seeking rapprochement (Sikand 2005, 77–83).

[9] Historians have used different terms to describe the events of 1857. Fuerst refers to it as the Rebellion because of the "purposeful resistance to imperial might" (Fuerst 2017, 9–10; see also Pernau 2013, 207–237; Anderson 2007).

[10] See Ingram (2018, 35–38) and footnote 33 in his book, which summarises some discrepancies over the actual founding year. See also Khan (2001). In 1879 the name was changed to Dār al-ʿUlūm Deoband (Rizvi 1977, 187–188).

endowments (*waqf*) and patronage (related to kinship ties) with funds coming instead from public donations.[11] During this period, it became a public institution in the true sense of the word. The founding fathers' experiences at Delhi College no doubt played a role. For example, with the enunciation of eight principles articulated by Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānotwī (d. 1880),[12] they emulated the bureaucratic style of the British. It was a distinct institution that was not attached to the mosque; it had a formal structure, examinations, yearly reports, an extra-local character, was formed of professional staff, and had a defined curriculum (Metcalf 1982, 94–116).

The medieval *madrasa*, on the other hand, did not have exams, and mastery of texts was certified by the granting of the licence to teach (*ijāza*) that carried with it the burden of scholarship. It was largely flexible, and teaching was informal. It is claimed that the modern madrasa "jettisoned" this medieval tradition (Berkey 2007, 49). The *ijāza* was now granted by an institution commonly referred to as the *shahādat al-ʿālimiyya*. The question was less "who is your teacher?" but "where did you study?" In many ways, while scholarly prestige remained, the attraction for *ṭalabā* was the institution of Deoband and less so the scholar. Far from being viewed as a reified object, there can be no doubt that Deoband has been shaped by and developed within modernity (Ingram 2018, 33–34).

Deoband became replicable, with Mazāhir al-ʿUlūm in nearby Saharanpur being established within six months (Kandhlavi 1972; Metcalf 1982, 128). Within 30 years of its founding, Deobandī graduates had established some 40 branch schools, making Deoband a distinct style, or *maslak*, of Indian Islam. Standardisation and mobility allowed rapid replicability, and what was once an elite enterprise now became a mass franchise. With a synthesis of various disciplines and personalities, Deoband and its founders embodied an intellectual outlook interwoven with mysticism and devotional piety that sought social reform.

[11] As Kozlowski notes, "The endowments clearly focused on the community of faith formed by the neighbourhood or town in which the founders lived" (Kozlowski 1985, 61). See Metcalf (1982, 94–100) and Kozlowski (1985, 60–80).

[12] See as follows, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://darululoom-deoband.com/en/constitution-of-darul-uloom/. For more on Nānotwī and his colleagues' exposure to the British educational system and their appropriation of this system for Islamic mass education, see Munāẓir (1944, *Sawaniḥ-i-Qāsmī*, 2:233–235). See also Reetz (2008, 74).

A PIVOT TO SERVICE: *KHIDMA* AS A PATH TO GOD

> This is why with the knowledge of the book, it has been made a condition to seek and accompany [both] the teacher of the book and a nurturer of the self (*murabbī nafs*) so that an ethical self who understands the correct meaning [of words] and is [then] able to form others, emerges. (Qārī 1988, 47)

A *ṭālib* that inhabits the Deobandī universe operates within a *maslak*.[13] Linguistically, *maslak* refers to a Sufī path that an aspirant is expected to travel as they make their way to God. Muḥammad Yūsuf Banūri (d. 1977), a prominent 20th-century scholar (Uthmānī 2007, 85–110), captures the *maslak*:

> By combining the following of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah [in *fiqh*] with Prophetic ḥadīths and knowledge of the Sufīs, a beautiful, affective and heart moving *maslak* emerged. This name is the *maslak* of the School of Thought of Deoband. (Qārī 1977, 6)

In this passage, moderation emerges through three interrelated modes of knowing: *fiqh*, *kalām*, and Sufīsm.[14] Deobandīs claim to follow the early adherents

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[13] Fuad Naeem translates *maslak* as scholarly orientation (Naeem 2015, 41). My understanding of the *maslak* is partly framed by a reading (among others) of two of Qārī Muḥammad Tayyib's books (d. 1983), in Urdu, titled, *The Ethical* (*Nomothetic*) *Temperament of the Ulama of Deoband (Maslak-i ʿulamāʾ-i Deoband*) and *The Religious Orientation and Ethical* (*Nomothetic*) *Temperament of the Ulama of Deoband (ʿUlamāʾ-i Deoband kā Dīnī Rukh aur Maslakī Mizāj*). He is important for a number of reasons; he is the grandson of one of the founders of Deoband Mawlānā Muḥammad Qāsim Nānotwī (d. 1880). In addition, Tayyib is a spiritual representative of polymath and highly influential scholar of Deoband, Mawlānā Ashraf Thānvī (d. 1943) (Mian 2015). Tayyib remained the longest-serving Principal of the Deobandī madrasa for five decades. He was the grandson of Nānotwī and was referred to as the "savant of Islam" (*Ḥakīm al-Islām*). The translation of the first title has been taken from Ebrahim Moosa. He defines the *maslak* as "an ideological formation that claims to be normatively coherent" (Moosa 2009, 428). The former was written during his lifetime while the second was published posthumously. A text that further explains the Deoband movement is Khalīl Aḥmad Saharānpurī's *Al-Muhannad 'alā al-Mufannad*. Though he does not use the word *maslak*, it is more of a theological clarification written in response to queries from Arab *'ulamā'* after the founder of the rival Barelvī movement had declared them disbelievers. See below for more. For more on Tayyib, see Ghulām Nabī Qāsmī, *Ḥayāt-i Tayyib* (Deoband: Dār al-'Ulūm Waqf, 2014); Muḥammad Taqī 'Uthmānī, *Nuqūsh-i Raftagān* (Karachi: Maktabah Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān Karachi, 2007, 189–194). Brannon Ingram (2018, 141–145) discusses *maslak* too.

[14] As Ebrahim Moosa puts it in "History and Normativity in Traditional Indian Muslim Thought: Reading Sharia in the Hermeneutics of Qari Muhammad

of Islam in privileging the apprenticeship (*suḥba*) of pious individuals as a prerequisite for teaching and learning.[15] Books are inseparable from the bodies that inhabit them. Texts form the intellectual capability of the *ṭalabāʾ*, while apprenticeships with masters who embody that learning through an unbroken chain (*sanad*) back to the Prophet ﷺ form the moral character of the *ṭālib*.[16] Mohammad Fadel notes that, as opposed to "Republican Islam" which does not see tradition as a critical ingredient in the modern world, for traditionalist Islam, "mastery of religious values emerges through a process of acculturation (*tarbiya*) that enables novices to embody those values. This process of acculturation is distinct from, and transcends intellectual cognition of, religious truth".[17] For the Deobandīs, *adab*, a way of being that places acts in their proper place and focuses on producing a virtuous self and purging oneself of blameworthy character traits, is the essence of Sufīsm.[18]

The *ṭalabā* are taught with the goal of leading an ethical life, with eternal salvation as its promise. This was and is the teleology of Muslims. *Adab*, as a way of propriety in this world, converts cerebral knowledge into practical behaviour. This can be traced back to the various sciences taught in the *madrasa*. Faith, usually taught in lessons on *kalām*, is not mere belief (and knowledge of what it is) but extends to acting according to its demands, that is,

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Tayyab": "In South Asian Hanafi intellectual circles, legal discourse effortlessly communes with a heady mix of metaphysics, dialectical theology (*kalam*), and mysticism (*tasawwuf*)" (Moosa 2010, 286). Suheil Laher states that Traditionalism by the 14th century was composed of a "three-fold knot": adherence to a juridical school, theology, and Sufism (Laher 2018, 202).

[15] Tayyib states "that in order to complete ethical embodiment and purification of the self … pledging allegiance (*bayʿah*) and companionship of scholars of the [spiritual] path is required from experience (*tajruba*)" (see Qārī 1977, 36 and Metcalf 1982, 161).

[16] As Ingram puts it: "It was the centripetal, anthropocentric force that counterbalanced the centrifugal force of an increasingly bibliocentric economy of knowledge. For the Deobandīs, the self is best cultivated by way of other selves" (Ingram 2018, 116).

[17] Fadel (2016, 474–475). "Their goal, as expounded by Mawlānā Ashraf ʿAIi Thnawi, was not *ilm*, the imparting of knowledge, but *tarbiyat*, the tutelage that transforms character" (Metcalf 1982, 172).

[18] Mawlānā Rashid Aḥmad Gangohī (1905), a formative figure in Deoband and very close to Nānotwī, is said to have described the ideal Sufī thus: "They were to be humble, warm, and forbearing toward others, and completely free of anger, sympathetic and self-abnegating, generous, forgiving, open, happy, informal; trusting in God, satisfied with very little, abstemious, free of anger or envy, unconcerned with status, devoted to keeping their word, farsighted, full of love for their fellows, and generous to Muslims" (Metcalf 1982, 167).

carrying out good deeds. The Sharʿīa is expressive of a socially based moral system of values. Even the so-called "ritualistic" parts of faith were deeply imbued with a synthesis of "morality, law, theology, mysticism, and philosophy but also an 'anthropological' foray into Muslim subjectivity", all of which engendered a paradigm that was "intellectual, social-communal, and psychological" (Hallaq 2012, 117, 137).

While philosophy placed reason at its helm, Sufism tempered it by focusing on the love of God. In sum, each science cumulatively formed an ethical subject and must be what Aristotle called "practices of virtue". This virtuous embodied self extends to service, or *khidma*, to society, "since a virtue-based society will be led and populated by those who have also perfected their own characters" (Zargar 2018, 9). With Deoband, such *khādims* (active participle of *khidma*) ought to be the *ʿulamāʾ*. Academic pursuit shifted to actual service. This outlook migrated to modern Britain.

The first two *Dār al-ʿUlūms* in Britain were established by two Gujarati-born Sufī Shaykhs.[19] The first was established by Mawlānā Yusuf Motala (d. 2019) who established what is known as *Dar al-Uloom Al-Arabiya Al-Islamiyya* in Bury, near Manchester in 1999 (Reetz 2007, 156; Gilliat-Ray 2006, 58).[20] The aim was simple: to "train a generation of Muslim scholars that would educate and guide the growing Muslim community" (Mangera, n.d.). To date, alongside the sister *dār al-ʿulūm* established in Bradford by Yusuf Motala for the training of girls, affectionately named after his own Shaykh, Jamiatul Imam

[19] Lewis (2004) and Mahmood (2012) have noted the impact the Gujarati community has had in institution building in Britain. Reetz (2007) has observed that coming from trading groups has given them in both South Africa and Britain "a certain middle-class flavour mostly absent from the South Asian subcontinent's madrassas" (156). For a detailed study of Gujarati migrants to London and New York see Poros (2011). Poros focuses on network ties and goods that are produced and exchanged seamlessly across geography, and the stratification of Indians more along working- and middle-class lines. It seems like trade; religion flows with it. Even though Deoband emerged in Northern India in the Uttar Pradesh province, in Britain, Deobandi *Dār al-ʿUlūms* have been funded and run by Gujaratis who come from West India. This region has historically remained significant in foreign trade, and it is argued that their success in Britain partly lies in being already adapted to living as a minority in non-Muslim societies.

[20] The name has been taken from the Ofsted website, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/27/105372. The *Dār al-ʿUlūm* is often just referred to as "Bury Dār al-ʿUlūm". I spent one year there rehearsing the Qurʾān that I had memorised.

Muhammad Zakariyya, they have produced over 2,000 male and female graduates, all of whom are British born.[21]

Reflecting their ethos of providing education to both genders, the ratio between them is roughly equal. Encouraged by Yusuf Motala, graduates have gone on to work in a host of roles beyond being imams and teachers.[22] Yunus Dudhwala, a graduate of Bury, was the first-ever appointed "faith manager" of the NHS trust in 2003 and was the head chaplain at one of the makeshift Nightingale Hospitals set up in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. Another graduate of the Bury *Dār al-ʿUlūm* and a PhD holder, Dr Mufti Abdur-Rahman Mangera, summarises the trajectories of graduates:

> As a result, many *ʿālimiyya* graduates of his institutes are trained in law, mainstream medicine, natural medicine and homeopathy, mental health, child protection, finance, IT, education, chaplaincy, psychology, philosophy, pharmacy, physics, journalism, engineering, architecture, calligraphy, typography, graphic design, optometry, social services, public health, even British Sign Language. His students also include several who have completed PhDs and lecture at universities. His vision was to train British-born (or other) Muslim scholars who would be well versed in contemporary thought and discipline along with their advanced Islamic learning, equipping them to better contribute to society. (Mangera, n.d.)[23]

The second *dār al-ʿulūm* to be established was in the town of Dewsbury, in West Yorkshire, in 1982.[24] It is part of a larger Mosque complex and has been referred to by various names such as the *Jāmiʾat Taʾlīm al-Islām* or just as Dewsbury *dār al-ʿulūm*. At the time of writing, it had closed. Other graduates have set up "sister" *dār al-ʿulūms* across Britain and Europe, such as *Jamiatul Ilm Wal Huda* in Blackburn, Islamic Dawah Academy in Leicester, *Jamiah al-Kawthar* in Lancaster, and *Darul Uloom Palmela* in Portugal.[25] While

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[21] Ibid. There are other *Dār al-ʿUlūms* which he helped establish including: Madinatul Ulum Al Islamia, Kidderminster; Markazul Ulum, Blackburn; Madrasatul Imam Muhammad Zakariya, Bolton; Madrasatul Imam Muhammad Zakariya, Preston. See Mukadam et al. (2010, 40).

[22] It is interesting that Lewis (2004) uses the analogy of "transplanting" *Dār al-ʿUlūms* in Britain. Plants are often planted in this way so that the young ones are protected from disease and pests. Once they are established, they are ready to flourish and bear fruit.

[23] For the biography of Dr Mangera, see as follows, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://www.zamzamacademy.com/about-us/teachers/dr-mufti-abdur-rahman-ibn-yusuf-mangera/

[24] Bowen (2016, 36) has the year as 1989. For an insightful MA thesis looking at this *Dār al-ʿUlūm* see Mahmood (2012).

[25] Ibid. For a list of notable students and *Dār al-ʿUlūms* established by students, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://islamicportal.co.uk/obituary-shaykh

boundaries are becoming more porous intra-denominationally, it is important not to homogenise what is in fact a diverse movement both globally and within Britain.[26] Their ambivalent relationship with Deobandī Dār al-ʿUlūms in South Asia has made them "an independent self-propelled mode of operation and growth" (Reetz 2007, 158) and their relationship with the *maslak* appears to be evolving. In fact, organic adaptation is taking place – albeit slowly – in a way that is true to both Islamic and British society.[27]

RECENTRING *KHIDMA*

> O Allah, I seek refuge with You from knowledge that is of no benefit, from a supplication that is not heard from a heart that does not fear (you) and from a soul that is not satisfied.[28]

Khādim is an Arabic active participle that describes someone in service of others. In Urdu, it carries a similar meaning. The Prophet ﷺ had a companion, Anas ibn Mālik, who served him for ten years, earning the title of servant of the Prophet (*Khādim al-Rasūl*).[29] The Prophet ﷺ himself embodied a life of service, resulting in him being referred to as a Slave Prophet as opposed to a King Prophet.

Many *ṭalabā*, as heirs to the Prophetic legacy, and despite their various career trajectories, embody an ethos of *khidma*. In particular, they combine their learning to provide the *khidma* of the transmission of knowledge to the next generation of Muslims. One *ṭālib* had this to say:

> *Maktab* (evening supplementary school) is so important because most young Muslims attend them. Not many will go to *dār al-ʿulūm*. But we can make a difference to their lives. It's not about money because the pay is not that good [at the *maktab*]. It's about *khidma*, about serving the *umma* and saving the *īman* (faith) of our children. Therefore, *dār al-ʿulūms* are important (fieldnotes, 9 October 2017).

-yusuf-motala/

[26] This is the cautionary conclusion Reetz makes: "the bewildering variety of international Deobandi activities makes it difficult to ascribe to this network a singular homogeneous quality" (Reetz 2007, 159).

[27] The adaptation of Islamic institutions in the fields of education, law, and Muslim representation has been made by Jones (2020). My paper "Between Tradition and Transition: An Islamic Seminary, or Dar al-Uloom in Modern Britain" charts this shift for a *Dār al-ʿUlūm* (Sidat 2018).

[28] M. Amin. Prophetic supplication shared during fieldwork, open discussion, 2017.

[29] Mentioned in the ḥadīth collection of Muslim.

Here the *dār al-ʿulūm* produces *khādims* who serve society in an educative role. The potential contributions that graduates can make to the lives of everyday Muslims outweigh financial considerations. Furthermore, though a minority of Muslims study at *dār al-ʿulūms*, the impact they have on Muslim society is significant. Graduates go on to teach and nurture everyday Muslims in their social lives, which in turn means that Islam plays an important role in society. One teacher explained the process from entering *dār al-ʿulūm* to graduation this way:

> Having come to *dār al-ʿulūm* as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, or as a raw nugget, they are now filled or formed with knowledge to be able to fill and shine light on others. (interview extract, Mawlānā Adam, 3 September 2017)

Khidma here is broadened to serving society. Many *ṭalabā* expressed a desire to engage in social work while acknowledging they will need to complete further studies. A *ṭālib* approaching the end of his time at the *dār al-ʿulūm* mentioned the following:

> My future is to work as a social worker. To help foster kids and orphans, and children who are put into homes that are at risk of losing their *īman*. However, I will need to go to university to get my qualifications first. (interview extract, final year student, 6 October 2017)

Another *khādim* talks about how he is engaged in *khidma*. He is an English teacher at a secondary school:

> I teach English at a leading school for boys, and I am also the head of the department. I try to bring what I have learnt at the *dār al-ʿulūm* to the classroom. I try to inspire the students. That's my *khidma*. But I also teach at the *dār al-ʿulūm* here in evening class, so I can do *khidma* that way. (interview extract, "Mawlānā Zubair", 3 September 2017).

A few *ṭalabā* talked of becoming imams. This was because a position had either become vacant, their community had an absence of religious leadership (or they wanted an English-speaking imam), their parents were closely affiliated with the mosque leadership, or the *ṭālib* had found an imam position through their teachers, parents, or the principal. Our four-year research project, *Understanding British Imams*, has found that imams play an important role in both Muslim and wider British society.[30] One *ṭālib* explained how he branched out to do *khidma* in a place that needed religious and spiritual leadership:

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[30] See as follows, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/understanding-british-imams. At the time of

> One of our graduates moved to Liverpool. In *dār al-ʿulūm*, he was an average student, but he had the ability to get things done. But everyone has a skill. He had moved to an area where the community was diverse and needed an *ʿālim*. He was able to take the existing mosque, expand it, and even set up a *maktab*. (interview, extract, the principal, 20 September 2017)

Notice how an "average" student becomes an exceptional graduate not because of his learning per se, but by his practical ability to get tasks completed. No doubt, his training and education would have formed his ethical and moral outlook and thus invigorated in him the need to make his religion practical. The self-perception of graduates as *khādims* is an important corrective to the notion that graduates are all expected to become engaged in academic pursuits. The reality is given where the Muslim community is now; *khādims are* what is most needed. Zaman (2012, 175), however, argues that it is this very environment that may be "fertile ground for new ways of thinking about Islam, education, and politics in their interrelationship".

This view fits in with the literature that has provided a more nuanced picture of adaptation in Shī'ā and Azhari colleges (Gilliat-Ray 2006), of increasing use of English through British-born teachers (Sidat 2018), adaptation of modern pedagogical methods (Geaves 2013), and a more promising shift taking place in some *dār al-ʿulūms* towards more outward-facing forms of engagement (Gilliat-Ray 2018). Scott-Baumann and Cheruvallil-Contractor (2015) note encouraging aspiration levels with students combining their studies and the national curriculum to produce the "best of both worlds" graduates entering academia (Sidat 2023). Gilliat-Ray in her study with British Muslim chaplains, many of whom were *dār al-ʿulūm* graduates, found that there was a variety of worldviews and behaviour even among graduates from the same seminary. She concludes that:

> This is a powerful counterargument to the homogenising, generalising and dehumanising portrayals of Deobandi ulama in Britain today, and the assumptions that are often made about their alleged extremism and conservatism in media and think-tank reports. (Gilliat-Ray 2018, 428)

Unlike Christian theological seminaries, the syllabus has not been accredited by mainstream higher education, and though there have been recent attempts

writing, the project findings are undergoing preparation for publication. For an up-to-date research bulletin, see as follows, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://www.britsoc.co.uk/groups/study-groups/sociology-of-religion-study-group/socrel-news/ (Issue 17).

to bridge the gap (Sidat 2023), universities appear to be reluctant (Shah 2019).[31] Due to the central role graduates and imams play in the lives of Muslims, a report by Citizens UK ("Commission on Islam, Participation, and Public Life" 2017) entitled *The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All* recommended that universities consider pairing with seminaries so that educational schemes for imams become accredited, allowing imams to receive both an educational qualification along with a religious qualification. Crucially, such provision and training seeks to prepare students to become better people and British citizens (Scott-Baumann and Cheruvallil-Contractor 2015, 38) and focus on a *tarbiyyatic* (character building and refining) pedagogy (Sidat 2018). While not all the *khādims* are leaders in the conventional sense, they are, in their own ways, seen as leaders. One graduate, who now manages a petrol station that employs significant numbers of Muslim staff, explains how he is seen as more than just a store manager:

> All the workers here expect me to be an exemplar of Islam, so I must make sure I behave well. I always wear my *topī* (head cap) though sometimes I might not wear the *thawb* (ankle-length robe). If I take my *topī* off it's not good. Also, they expect me to organise and lead prayers, and oftentimes, the workers bring their questions and concerns to me. This is the only job I have. But to these guys, I am their local imam. (interview extract, "Muftī Safwan", 11 August 2017)

Many graduates thus embody unofficial leadership roles after graduation. The principal of another *dār al-ʿulūm* had this to say:

> I often say to people who are about to graduate that even if you are in business with something completely disconnected to what you have trained for here, your role as a faith leader is guaranteed. Because regardless of what you do; because you've studied in an institution that is known as a seminary, the expectation will exist upon you even though it won't be the same as somebody who's dedicated themselves as an imam. There will still be the expectation that you can lead on matters of faith, you'll be pushed forward […] and people will come to you for advice. (interview extract, "Mawlānā Suleiman", 7 July 2017)

[31] See as follows, accessed 19 January 2025 at https://www.soas.ac.uk/about/news/new-report-universities-and-muslim-seminaries-project-maps-darul-uloom-education. A project titled "The Universities and Muslim Seminaries Project (UMSEP)" emerged in response to the British government's 2018 Integrated Communities and Strategies Green Paper. The project seeks to provide a model through which seminaries, in a five-year project, will lead to a template and model through which the UK's traditional Muslim seminaries can work towards accreditation of their courses alongside developing relationships with universities (Scott-Baumann et al. 2019).

This ethnographic research confirmed that some *khādims* were indeed furthering their education. Many of the courses *ṭalabā* are looking to apply for – medicine, optometry, accountancy for example – raise some interesting questions about the relationship between the *dār al-ʿulūm* curriculum and graduates' future educational aspirations. Many stated that there is no link and that their motivation was simply to improve their financial circumstances. This confirms that the institutional aim of *dār al-ʿulūm* is not only to provide ritualistic proficiency with the Islamic tradition but, as stated by the graduates here, to shape individuals actively concerned with and delivering public value to their communities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has charted the evolution of a *dār al-ʿulūm* education from one of scholasticism to one that focuses primarily on societal change. This shift has occurred largely in response to the needs of the community in Britain, who require graduates that act as pastoral theologians and religious functionaries. Some may focus on scholarship and become *ʿulamāʾ* in the real sense of the word. More broadly however, through the virtuous companionship of pious teachers and a Deobandi *maslak* that seeks to produce graduates in the service of society, graduates that emerge are steeped in a learning tradition that emphasises *khidma*. This *khidma* is universal in the sense that graduates enter diverse fields beyond the purely religious, and as such, the *dār al-ʿulūms* all around Britain and their graduates provide an important value to both Muslims and mainstream society.

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