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David, Deobandis, and Druzes: A Comparative Analysis of Religious and Cultural Figures in Light of Brill Encyclopedia of Quran

ڈیوڈ، دیوبندی اور دروز: برل انسائیکلوپیڈیا آف قرآن کی روشنی میں مذہبی اور ثقافتی شخصیات کا تقابلی تجزیہ

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of three distinct religious and cultural groups: David, Deobandis, and Druzes, examining their respective contributions to religious thought and cultural practices, drawing upon insights from the *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran*. The purpose of this study is to explore the interplay between religious beliefs, cultural identity, and socio-political roles, as these groups have evolved over time. By leveraging the extensive resources provided by the *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran*, this study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the nuanced theological doctrines, historical narratives, and cultural expressions that shape the identities of these groups. The methodology of this study involves a multidisciplinary approach, combining textual analysis of sacred scriptures, religious commentaries, and historical records. Primary sources from the *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran*, supplemented with secondary scholarly literature, provide a foundation for comparative analysis. The study focuses on the theological underpinnings, ritual practices, and the impact of these groups on the wider socio-political landscape. Findings reveal that while David holds a pivotal role in Abrahamic traditions, particularly within Judaism, his figure is also emblematic in both Christian and Islamic contexts. The Deobandis, a prominent Islamic scholarly movement originating in South Asia, emphasize traditionalism and strict adherence to orthodox teachings, offering a counterpoint to more progressive interpretations. The Druzes, with their distinct syncretic beliefs, represent a unique fusion of Islamic, Christian, and other regional religious influences. Despite their differences, all three groups demonstrate the significant impact of religion on cultural identity and political dynamics. This comparative analysis highlights the importance of religious and cultural figures in shaping both religious discourse and societal structures. The study underscores the complexity of these groups' historical legacies and their enduring influence on contemporary global issues.

Keywords: David, Deobandis, Druzes, comparative analysis, *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran*, socio-political impact etc.

INTRODUCTION

Religious and culture identities contribute significantly in defining the theological beliefs, theological practices and the socio-political processes of several people all over the world. Among these various communities, three different religious entities are particularly distinct and notable, including figure of David, the Deobandis and Druzes, due to their massive contribution in the religious thinking, cultural practices and political ideologies. David (Dawoud), the Israelite monarch and prophet, occupies a noble position in the Abrahamic cultures especially in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. David is mentioned 16 times in the Quran where he is not merely a king but a prophet who is connected with the chain of the previous prophets until the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (Quran 4:163; 6:84).

The Quranic story gives David the image of a faithful man and a political ruler, who serves as the interpreter between the two realms of religious piety and spiritual leadership. He is revealed to be the receiver of divine revelations, the most significant of which are the Psalms (Zabur), a fact that indicates his position as a carrier of holy text (Quran 4:163; 17:55). However, his greatness as a ruler and prophet does not make the life of David in the Quran only about his kingship and military achievements, including the battle with Goliath (Jālūt) (Quran 2: 251). His story, on the contrary, is mixed with moral and ethical teachings, his ability to repent, forgive and the divine mercy God bestowed on him after his sins were admitted (Quran 38:24-25).

The figure of David in the Islamic tradition, though similar to the biblical ones, also has some differences in important points. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible where we get the story of how David adulterated with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah; the Quranic version is silent on these incidences. Rather the interest is in the repentance of David and how he serves as an example of piety and justice. The Quran explains how David was a person who was not only wise (hikmah) but also capable of making judgments that were just (Quran 38: 20) and therefore a perfect ruler and guide to his people. His position as Khalifa (deputy of God) on the Earth also raises his significance in Quran as this is the same title of other significant figures like Adam and Muhammad (Quran 38:26).

A key reaction to the socio-political transformations that took place during the British colonial rule is the Deobandis, a powerful Islamic intellectual movement that began its existence in South Asia at the end of the 19 th century. The movement was started in 1867 in a town named Deoband in India to maintain the traditional Islamic teachings in a period of political instability and colonial rule. To oppose western influence and missionary work, Deobandi school especially the Darul Uloom Deoband was founded to give religious education which conformed to strict interpretation of Islamic law (Shari'ah). The Deobandis interest in the study of traditional Islamic sciences, such as the Quran (Tafsir), Hadith, and Fiqh (jurisprudence) was a change in the sciences that were more rationalist, towards the classical religious sciences, which focused on faith-based education and scriptural obedience. Key to their theology is the interpretation of the Quran as a divine revelation that has not been altered and they emphasize the need to be orthodox in faith and practice.

The interpretation of the Islamic doctrine by Deobandi scholars such as Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanawi is considered to have been influential to the movement, as they emphasized upon personal piety and purification of the soul by devotion towards God and following the Islamic law strictly. The Deobandis are not a very political organization, but their impact on the larger Muslim world, especially in South Asia, has been immense. Tablighi Jamat This is a grassroots organization of Deobandi scholars established in the 1920s to do missionary work by encouraging Muslims to live in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith and by fostering a more personal, spiritual dedication to Islam. The Deobandi teaching has overgone limits of South Asia to impact Muslims in Europe, Africa and the Middle East through the Tablighi movement. This political apathy has

not gone without criticism as the Deobandi school has been criticized as being apolitical by some scholars as more and more Muslim communities become politically active.

Druze as a distinctive branch of the Ismaili Shia Islam developed in the 11 th century in the Fatawimid Caliphate of Egypt, when Imam-Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996-1021) was in power. The Druze people are of the Ismaili Shiite movement but coined their own religious and philosophical doctrines that have borrowed the concepts of several religions, such as Gnosticism, Christianity, Judaism, and Neoplatonism. The concept of unitarianism (tawhid) is core to Druze doctrine; that is, the oneness of God, and that anthropomorphism should be abandoned since the divine cannot be understood by humanity. Their religious texts are mostly centered on the mystical and esoteric reading of the Quran and the Druze Canon of 111 Epistles of Wisdom (rasa il-hikma) is the central part of their religious literature. In contrast to the mainstream Islamic organizations, Druzes do not believe in exoteric or external religious views, but in inner and spiritual worshiping God.

The religion is not to be enjoyed by all, but rather a few chosen members, the ruqqal, are privy to the inner, esoteric interpretation of the scriptures. Such knowledge does not extend to the juhhal, or general masses, which underlines the snobbish character of the Druze religion. The Druzes have long been overlooked and discriminated against by both the Sunni and the Shia Muslims because of their unique beliefs. Nevertheless, they have remained with a strong sense of identity, with its main possession being in Lebanon, Syria and Israel/Palestine. They have been characterized by the need to be autonomous and highly communal by their participation in the political and social life of these countries especially in Lebanon. Druze religion has also contributed significantly to the inter faith dialogue given that it has similarities with Christianity as well as Islam although it has retained its own religious identity.

This study is intended to give a subtle comparative analysis of David, the Deobandis, and the Druzes, and the theological doctrines, historical account, and the culture of these groups. This comparison was help us in better comprehending how these camps are involved in religious discourse, cultural identities formation and shaping the current socio-political forces.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of the given comparative analysis is based on the comparative religious studies, dwelling upon the interaction of theology and cultural identity with socio-political functions. The intention is to know the ways of how religious characters and movements of religion such as David, the Deobandis and the Druzes are shaped and conditioned by religious, historical and cultural context within which they operate. This methodology elucidates the role of these personalities in the greater religious discourse, social organization, and political processes in their own traditions. Theological comparison is at the center of such framework, as it enables one to appreciate religious personalities and their doctrines in various religious traditions at a fine level.

David is a prophet and a king who is discussed in the context of prophetic leadership and divine justice because his image on the Quran corresponds or does not correspond to the one presented in the Jewish and Christian writings. The framework is especially informed by the Islamic theology, in particular, the prophetic infallibility that, according to the Islam theology, prophets are free of moral errors, and they are spiritually led (Asad, 2010). The concept influences the manner in which the narrative of David in the Quran is viewed concentrating on his moral uprightness and repentance than the more politically divisive elements of his biblical story.

Deobandis are examined through the prism of Islamic orthodoxy and scripturalism. The Deobandi movement has its basis on the idea that Quran and Hadith are the ultimate authority on how individuals and communities should live. The historical and theological

implications of the movement are explained by its focus on keeping the traditional religious practice in the colonial context of resisting and preserving the cultural traditions (Hashmi, 2013). The Deobandi theology is contrasted to other Islamic reformist movements in order to comprehend how it influenced the Islamic jurisprudence and schooling practices especially in South Asia.

Druzes are discussed in the perspective of esoteric interpretation and religious syncretism. Having its origins in the Ismaili Shia Islam, the Druze religion is a mixture of different religious traditions, which is why it is a unique case study in the intersection of mysticism and philosophy (Bierman, 2017). Druze Canon is examined in order to learn about the way it preconditions their idea of divine unity (tawhid) and strategy towards Quranic revelation. The framework may be used to analyze how Druze rebuffed exoteric ritualism and focused on interior devotion and intellectual inquiry, which makes their practice unlike other Islamic sects.

The framework is comparative in nature, which means that a multi-dimensional analysis is possible, which involves not only exploring the differences and similarities between the theologies but also examining the cultural and political consequences of these religious traditions. The study aids in the better understanding of how the Deobandis, the Druzes, and David indulge themselves in the foundational religious texts and practices, which can help one understand their role in the religious discourse and societal norms better.

METHODOLOGY

The research approach in this study was a combination of textual analysis and comparative religious studies that focuses on the theological, historical and socio-political aspects of David, the Deobandis and the Druzes. The *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran* (McAuliffe, 2006) can be considered as the main resource of all the comparisons as the entries about these figures and groups are made in detail and the study was have a reliable basis to rely on. The study is qualitative research on the Quranic texts, commentaries and exegeses of David in the Islamic faith, the Deobandi school of thought of Islamic scholarship and the esoteric teachings of the Druze religion.

The research is critical because it uses the *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran* to review important texts that provide the contributions of each group in theology as well as their cultural practices. It is accompanied by the secondary sources, i.e. scholarly articles and books, which offer more extensive historic and sociological background. The comparative analysis is aimed at establishing the theological foundations, rituals as well as the socio-political positions of each religion with an emphasis on how their religious books and teachings have contributed to shaping the religious discourse besides other cultural and political processes and structures. The methodology assures that the analysis is based on primary source material of authoritative scholarly works in the field especially the *Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran* which is the key of the analysis of the religious texts and historical progressions.

ANALYSIS

The comparative study on David, the Deobandis and the Druzes provides a complex study of the religious traditions, theological beliefs and socio-political roles of three different religious and cultural groups. Although the three—David in the Abrahamic traditions, the Deobandis in South Asian Islam and the Druzes in the Levant have their roots in different historical contexts and in different geographical regions, they all indicate the multifaceted nature of religion, culture, and political identity. This study explores the theological foundations, historical accounts, and ritual activities of these individuals and movements and finds that numerous themes and considerable differences are intertwined. This comparative analysis was enabling a deep insight into the manner in which these groups have influenced

religious discourse and social formation by referencing to religious texts and commentaries, most notably what the Brill Encyclopedie of the Quran has to say (McAuliffe, 2006).

David:

The Israelite king and prophet David (Dawud) is central to the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Quran tells us that David was a larger figure in the hierarchy of prophets who linked previous religious lessons with a new prophet Muhammad (Quran 4: 163; 6:84). Though David is not counted as among the Ul ul-Atiq (the five great law-givers), his significance is also quite significant because of his kingship, his wisdom, and because he was given a divine revelation (the Psalms or Zabur). The Quran talks of David as an example of justice and remorse whereby he was both a ruler and a prophet who was sent by God (Quran 38:26). The kingship and prophetic is inseparable in the Islamic thinking and his judgment usually focuses on fairness and divine wisdom and is a guide to morality and spirituality. The Islamic teachings, however, are different to the biblical and Christian traditions in that the story of David has a lot of moral failings in it like his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, and murder of her husband, Uriah (2 Samuel 11).

The Quran, in its turn, highlights the theme of David repenting after he is tested by God (Quran 38:24), which is one of the themes of Islamic doctrines about divine mercy. In his scholarly work, Al-Azmeh (1993) claims that this disparity in the story of David between the Quran and the Bible highlights the emphasis of the Islamic religion on moral righteousness and the goodness of the prophets by their nature. The Islamic philosophy of the character of David specifically in tafsir (Quranic commentary) depicts him as an upright ruler who tries to maintain righteousness (Quran 38:20) and who is forgiven by God because of his perceived mistakes. This emphasis on repentance and God-given forgiveness underscores an even larger theological theme of human incompleteness and with divine mercy of limitless generosity.

According to McAuliffe (2006), in Islamic exegesis, David is traditionally linked to the mythological and the homiletic traditions of the Jewish Midrash and the Christian teachings. By using the sources found in the Jewry and Christian, Early Quran scholars like Wahb ibn Munabbih gave interpretations of the ambiguities in the Quran account of David, showing a more idealized picture of the prophet. His divinely inspired ruler and role model of piety is reinforced by the verses in the Quran relating to his ability to communicate with the birds (Quran 27:15) and his mastery of nature, in which the birds and the mountain are supposed to glorify God with David (Quran 21:79; 34:10). This is also backed up by the fact of David being a Khalili of God where he is associated with other important personalities such as Adam and Muhammad (Quran 38:26). The title of Khalifa does not only take the status of David in the Islamic thought but also plays the role of a model of spiritual leadership that goes beyond political power.

Deobandi:

The Deobandi movement is one of the most important religious and intellectual reactions to the colonialism, modernity, and destruction of the traditional Islamic values which was initiated in 1867 in Deoband, India. The Deobandis also had their foundations on the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence and were keen to uphold the orthodox practices and teachings of Islam at a time when the British colonialism was gradually exposing the Muslims to western ideas and reform. The center of the Deobandi movement is the Darul Uloom Deoband which emerged to be a foremost institution of Islamic education in South Asia. Metcalf (2002) and Hashmi (2013) have observed, the Deobandis aspired to stick to the conventional Islamic doctrine, but they also had to touch the reality of colonialism. They emphasized on Quranic study, Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence as the foundation of their religious philosophy in that they gave the emphasis of a backtrack of the basics of Islam as enshrined in the holy texts. This orthodoxy and scripturalism of the Deobandi movement,

which stressed Quranic and Hadith interpretation of the Islamic law, distinguished it among more reformist and rationalist forms of thought.

The Deobandi movement denounced the effects of western rationalism as well as, modernity on the practices of Islam and instead promoted conservative approach to religion. This emphasis on saving the traditional Islamic sciences was also aimed to overcome the colonial systems of education which were regarded as a danger to Islamic cultural and religious identity. According to Metcalf (2002), the adherence of the Deobandis to the classical Islamic curriculum and their campaign to produce a new generation of scholars came into play in ensuring continuity of religion and culture in the rapidly changing political and social environment. Although the Deobandi movement was originally based on the non-political approach, the emergence of Islamic political movements throughout the 20th century makes some researchers reconsider the political aspects of the Deobandi teachings.

A new movement known as the Tablighi Jamaat in the 1920s lead by the Mawlana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalwii marked the beginning of a grassroots type of Islamic activism. Despite the Tablighi Jamaat keeping an apolitical orientation, its focus on spiritual regeneration and Islamic piety has contributed to a broad spectrum of Islamic movements around the world and is a testimony to the fact that Deobandi ideals have remained relevant to Islamic thinking in the present age. Jaffrelot (2009) also asserts that the apolitical position of the Deobandi movement as one of the characteristics of its early growth has also led indirectly to the political mobilization of Muslims in South Asia and other parts of the world.

Druzes:

Druze religion, the appearance of which took place in the Fātty Caliphate in the 11th century, is a syncretic religious tradition that combines Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Neoplatonism. The Druzes have their origins in the Ismaili Shia group of Islam and especially in the reign of Imam-Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (r. 996-1021). The religion was influenced by a complex of esoteric doctrines called the Epistles of Wisdom (rasa il-Hikma), which is the center of Druze theology. These epistles underline the fact of the unity of God (tawhid) and the belief that God is not understandable in his being. According to Swayd (2012), the Druze mystical definition on God denies anthropomorphic explanation of God. In contrast to other Islamic sects, the Druzes attach much importance to esoteric knowledge and spiritual cleansing of the soul. This emphasis on mysticism and speculative thinking distinguishes the Druze religion against more ritualistic Islamic religious forms.

Al-Tamiami (2000) points to the way in which the Druze religion does not believe it necessary to have ritual duties (taklīf) as in mainstream Islam and instead urges an inner worship of God that does not require the involvement of religious practices. This perspective also concurs with Druze perception about the esoteric meaning of the Quran in which the verses in the Quran are not taken at face value, but are understood symbolically with the aim of discovering the deeper spiritual meaning. The syncretism of the Druze that has entailed blending of teachings of Islam, Christianity and Judaism has in most cases made them an outsider in the overall religious arena of the Middle East.

According to Bierman (2017), the Druzes have been persecuted by the Sunni and Shia Muslims because of their orthodox beliefs and practices. They have nevertheless preserved a high ethno religious identity especially in such nations as Lebanon, Syria, and Israel/ Palestine. Their distinct religious culture has enabled them to retain their feeling of independence in the area, regardless of political and sectarian compulsions. Krayem (2010) discusses the political aspect of the Druzes in Lebanon, which during the Lebanese sectarian politics have been very influential in balancing its religious identity with the socio-political participation.

Comparative Analysis:

The figure of David in the Islamic faith is similar to the orthodoxy of the Deobandis where the two of them focus on the virtuousness of religious leaders and the prominence of divine law. Although the Deobandis are concerned with maintaining the Islamic traditions by following the scripture, the role of David in the Quran as an individual who is given divine revelation and guidance is similar to the Deobandi attachment towards scripture. The esoteric reading of scripture, especially the mystical interpretation of the Quran in the Druzes, is a dramatic contrast to the more literalist and legalistic interpretation of scripture by the Deobandis and the Quranic version of David. The cultural aspect of the three groups which include David, the Deobandis and the Druzes prove the significance of religious leaders in making people identify themselves as a group.

In the case of Abrahamic religions, David is associated with the universal religious ancestry. It is the contribution of the Deobandis, in terms of their educational system and study of religion, which has helped to determine the religious identity of millions of Muslims in South Asia and elsewhere. In the meantime, the Druzes have been able to preserve their own identity despite decades of marginalization, and this is where religious syncretism comes in, creating an ethno-religious unity. David depicts himself as a politically fair ruler with a divine right and politically, it appeals to the Deobandi concept of rulership where a ruler is a person whose leadership is founded on spiritualism rather than political activism. Nonetheless, the Druzes unlike both David and the Deobandis have been engrossed in the political life especially in the Middle East where they reconcile their religious values with their political power.

DISCUSSIONS

David, just as the Deobandis, is depicted as right and ethical character who was selected by God to judge and guide the people with wisdom (Quran 38:20). They both focus on divine guidance in leadership and how religious leaders maintain justice, follow the scripture, and act as illustrations of morality within their communities. Nevertheless, whereas the story of David in the Quran is based more on his wisdom, his repentance and his divine forgiveness, the Deobandi movement is more concerned with retention of Islamic orthodoxy by following the traditional scriptures like the Quran and the Hadith, this is more structured and legalistic in its approach to living a religious life. The Druzes, on the other hand, are a very different people, with an esoteric theology of syncretism and combination of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and other philosophical schools.

Compared to the Deobandis and David as shown in the Quran, who uphold the emphasis of the outer religious activity, the Druzes value the inner spiritual knowledge and mysticism. This difference shows that the Druze did not believe in keeping any rituals and instead focused on intellectual and spiritual purity and not exactly outward obedience to the religious laws (Swayd, 2012). All the three groups, culturally, employ their own characters- David of the Abrahamic religions, the Deobandis of South Asia and the Druzes of the Levant, to create and maintain a strong communal identity. The divine kingship and justice that David embodies is cross-culturally relevant and has created a similar narrative that exists between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The Deobandis have defined a unique Islamic identity in South Asia especially their religious schools and observance to classical Islamic scholarship (Metcalf, 2002). Closely related to this is the fact that the Druzes have preserved an ethno-religious identity that is somewhat Islamic esotericism intertwined with local customs despite being persecuted and marginalized (Bierman, 2017). Politically, although David was made the king in the Quran directly backed by God, and the Deobandi movement lays emphasis on spiritual direction and not on political intervention, the Druzes have been greatly engaged in the political life particularly in Lebanon, Syria and Israel/Palestine. The participation of the Druze people in

the political relations indicates their search of independence and their possibilities to form the impact on the further sociopolitical system of the Middle East (Krayem, 2010).

The prophetic David has been analyzed by scholars like Al-Azmeh (1993) who have observed that his image in the Quran is idealized and concentrates on the issues of moral uprightness and repentance and not the biblical weaknesses that he has been credited with. This discussion is in line with the current study where the Quranic image of David as a pattern of righteousness and penance is highlighted. In the same way, Asad (2010) writes about the infallibility of prophets in Islamic theology and makes the arguments in favor of the purported moral uprightness of David as an essential idea of Islam. In the case of the Deobandi movement, the earlier works by Metcalf (2002) and Hashmi (2013) have pointed at the response of the Deobandi movement to British colonialism and its adherence to the Islamic orthodoxy. This is in line with the research of this study, which highlights the role of the Deobandis in upholding the traditional Islamic teachings at the time of colonial struggle.

The fact that the Tablighi Jamaat and its impact on international Islamic movements was discussed in the study echoes the fact that Jaffrelot (2009) discussed the political aspects of the Deobandi movement in the 20th century. Although the Deobandis kept their approach apolitical, their educational and religious lessons had more far reaching social political impacts on the Islamic activism in the world. Regarding the Druzes, previous researchers like Swayd (2012) and Bierman (2017) have highlighted their syncretic and esoteric tendencies of the Druze faith, and their marginalization by both Sunni and Shia Muslims. The current research study adds to this body of literature by examining the Druze rejection of ritualism and the fact that they place more emphasis on spiritual knowledge as compared to external religious practice.

This is a peculiar view that also makes the Druzes a unique religious group, an amalgamation of Islamic mysticism with the philosophical investigation and interreligious dialogue. Although all these figures and groups have been discussed in the previous research, this one provides the comparative framework on which their similar and dissimilar roles in the religious discourse can be understood better. On the one hand, the analysis of these figures in terms of a comparative approach allows the study to give new meanings to how religion is instrumental in shaping cultural identity and political formations across different historical and geographical settings.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study of David, the Deobandis, and the Druzes has given some understanding of the complicated forms of intersections between religion, culture and politics. Although these three figures and movements were different, they have had great influence on the discourse of religion and the socio-political framework. The place of David in the Abrahamic religions is that of prophet leadership and godly justice whereas the Deobandis have helped in maintenance of Islamic orthodoxy in South Asia which has placed more emphasis on scriptural obedience and intellectual analysis. Druzes with their syncretic and esoteric attitudes is a unique combination of religious traditions with the accentuated role of spiritual knowledge and inner devotion over the rite practices. The comparative analysis shows the long-term role of these people and organizations in the construction of religious identities and political movements. David, the Deobandis, and the Druzes all show the might of religious doctrine in shaping cultural practices, communal identities, and social-political realities, and in general make them crucial to the explanation of the larger processes of religion in the modern world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study opens numerous prospects of conducting a further study, especially the analysis of the topicality of these religious figures and movements in the context of inter-faith relations and a global political process. The future research directions may be the effects of

Deobandi doctrine on Islamic fundamentalism and political Islam or how the Druze religion contributed to interreligious dialogue within the Middle East region. More specifically, further analysis of the role of the Druze in the Lebanese political system would provide information about the role of religion and politics in the region.

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