



Review article

Maulana Muhammad Tahir's contribution to Islamic and Quranic Studies

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT



Keywords:

Preacher, Islamic Sciences, Arabic Language, Jamiat e Ulama e Hind, Badarpur, Darul Uloom Deoband

Article History:

Received: 01-02-2026

Revised: 05-06-2026

Accepted: 10-06-2026

Published: 15-06-2026

Maulana Muhammad Tahir alias Md Tahir or Tahir Saheb was an Assam origin Bengali theologian, his birth place is Karimganj (formerly Shylhet of Bangladesh) of Assam state. He migrated to Calcutta (presently known as Kolkata) on 4th April of 1949 when he had joined with Calcutta Alia Madrasa (now Aliah University) by the instruction of his teacher Shaikhul Islam Hussain Ahmad Madani and became indigenous of West Bengal. He was simultaneously a renowned Islamic scholar, preacher, prolific writer, Islamic lawyer and jurist, professor of hadith, social reformer, skilled organizer and leader, champion of religious aspects of Arabic and Urdu language for Bengali speaking Muslims and freedom fighter during the thirties and forties of twentieth-century.

Cite this Article:

Hussain, M. M. Maulana Muhammad Tahir's contribution to Islamic and Quranic Studies. *Sprin Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 4(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjaes.v4i1.76>

Introduction

Birth, Early Age and Education:

Maulana Muhammad Tahir was born on 15th May, 1922 A.D in a famous noble religious family of Karimganj (Formerly part of Shylet of Bangladesh), Assam. His father Maulana Haji Hajim belonged to Shylet's royal family in united India, and was a prominent teacher of Islamic sciences and Arabic language, preacher, pious and generous personality. He had established several *maktabs*, madrasas and *eidgah* (open place for performing salat of Eid). He was much brilliant student since his childhood and was able to attract his teachers' attention to him, as well as being nurtured under his father guidance and discipline became a famous student. He had received his basic Islamic education and traditional learning from his father and local *maktab* of his maternal grandfather's village Singaria in Karimganj district. In his four-year age, was brought to Zerzeri Madrasa of Tripura where his father Maulana Haji Hajim was a reputed teacher and Imam of that village. There Muhammad Tahir received notable knowledge from a famous teacher of that time Maulana Nasim Ali and his father. During 1927-1928 C.E, when the Zerzeri region was affected by infamous epidemic of chicken pox and around seventy thousand people were died, therefore his father had been transferred to Kurti madrasa, which is known Kurti Islamic Madrasa (formerly known Kurti Jabiria Islamia Madrasa), after few months he had to come back with his father to his maternal grandfather's village Singaria in Karimganj district due to take care of his newborn sister. Here in Singaria his father continued his teaching in Singaria Eidgah Madrasa and Muhammad Tahir pursued his learning of the

Holy Quran, Islamic studies, mathematics, Bengali, Urdu, English and other traditional subjects from prominent teachers. He was admitted in 102 no. primary school, Kayastha Gram M.V School and later in Middle school of Singaria, thereafter studied up to certain level in Islahul Uloom Madrasa till 1931 A.D.

Afterwards he left for Badarpur to pursue higher education, so continued the study in Badarpur Maktab Madrasa up to Third Standard and thereafter in Badarpur Junior School (Deorail M.E Madrasa). In 1936 A.D, Muhammad Tahir got admission in Badarpur M.V Madrasa in the class of Fourth Standard, and he ranked first class first in the final board examination of Sixth Standard throughout the state of Assam. Later, in 1939 A.D, his benevolent teachers advised him to pursue higher studies of Islamic sciences in Sylhet Alia Madrasa, when he participated in the intermediate board examination, stood second position in the board, and his class fellow Maulana Imdadur Rahman secured the first position; but when the final examination of board was held Maulana Muhammad Tahir ranked first in the board. Since this time, he came into contact with the freedom fighters of Jamiat e Ulama e Hind, organized revolutionary activities and participated in Quit India Movement. Some of his highly qualified teachers of Sylhet Alia Madrasa are Maulana Abdul Aziz, Maulana Sher Zaman, Maulana Ilyas Ali and others. Noteworthy that Maulana Sher Zaman was son-in-law of the prominent Deobandi freedom fighter, professor of hadith in Darul Uloom Deoband Shaikh al-Hind Mahmud Hassan Deobandi (May Allah's mercy be upon him), who was among the pioneer freedom fighters of India.

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But his never ended thirst for knowledge compelled him to travel Deoband on 24th April of 1944 A.D, a famous Islamic knowledge city in the west of Uttar Pradesh state, to take preparations for the entrance examination of Darul Uloom Deoband.

Maulana Muhammad Tahir and his classmate Imdadur Rahman at first arrived at Rampur, and took preparations under the guidance of Maulana Abdud Daaim in Rampur Oriental College, after six months of preparation camp they began journey towards Deoband and cleared the entrance examination on 12th August, 1944 A.D, there he received profound knowledge of Islamic sciences like hadith, tafseer, fiqh etc. from the prominent teachers of that time, among them Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani, Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, Qari Tayib, Maulana I'jaz Ali are notable.

Quest of knowledge could not bind him within a boundary of region; therefore, during the vacation of Ramadan he set up a journey to Lahore with his aforesaid class fellow Imdadur Rahman to learn *qirat* and *tafseer* from Maulana Ahmad Ali Lahori, after completing the course, in 1945 A.D turned back to Deoband to pursue the remaining curriculum of hadith. But being victim of severe diseases he had to return home in 1946 leaving his study incomplete, during that time after getting little well, he was appointed as a teacher in the Urdu College of Shylhet, and would visit Shaikul Islam Hussain Ahmad Madani when he used to perform *I'tikaf* in Naya Sarak Mosque in Sylhet during Ramadan, however his father did not allow him teaching there without completing his formal education,¹ so he again moved towards Deoband and finished the remaining study of hadith and received *ijazah* (permission of citation of hadith from the source of his teacher) as well as *tafseer*, and came back to his homeland in 1948 A.D as an expert Islamic scholar.²

Maulana Tahir as a Teacher:

As earlier mentioned that Maulana Tahir had started his teaching in 1946 A.D in the Urdu College of Shylhet although he could not complete that time his formal study in Deoband, but his father compelled him to leave for Deoband and complete study.³ So he had come back from there being graduated from Darul Uloom Deoband in 1948, and began another journey of life as a teacher. So, at first, he was appointed to teach holy hadith in Badarpur Alia Madrasa in the last part of 1948 A.D with remuneration of 30 rupees, but he had to leave Badarpur Alia Madrasa on 4th April of 1949 A.D to join Calcutta Alia Madrasa (nowadays known as Alia University) as a teacher of hadith on the request of Shaikul Islam Hussain Ahmad Madani. Afterwards he shifted to Bankra, a village located in the west side of Gate no. 8 of Kolkata Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport, and established there a prominent Islamic madrasa named *Jamia Islamia Madania* on 25th February of 1977 A.D, the foundation stone of this Islamic seminary was laid by Maulana Asad Madani, son of Shaikhul Islam Hussain

Ahmad Madani.⁴ This madrasa was his last workplace and place of rest forever. Here at Bankra, his successors like middle son Maulana Muhammad, 3rd son -who is closest to youngest son- Maulana Masud Nasir, third daughter Razia Chowdhury spouse of West Bengal's cabinet minister and president of West Bengal Jamiat e Ulama e Hind Maulana Siddiqullah Chowdhury are still living. Noteworthy that there is a Maulana Muhammad Tahir Library named after him and was inaugurated in 2021 A.D, on the second floor of Jamiat Ulama Bhawan, Bankra, Kolkata-51, which foundation stone was laid on 25th January, 2018 A.D in the presence of Mufti Abul Qasim Numani, Mohtamim (vice chancellor) of Darul Uloom Deoband, Qari Muhammad Usman, the All-India President of Jamiat e Ulama e Hind, Maulana Muhammad Tahir's son-in-law Maulana Siddiqullah Chowdhury, and other prominent Ulema. After a short period of six months, on 25th July, 2018, this historical building of Jamiat Ulama Bhawan was inaugurated officially in the presence of Maulana Mahmud Madani, the All-India General Secretary of Jamiat e Ulama e Hind, Maulana Shaukat Bastavi, a teacher of Darul Uloom Deoband and All India General Secretary of Rabeta e Madrasas e Arabia, Maulana Siddiqullah Chowdhury and other Ulema, at the occasion of 20th annual conference of West Bengal Rabeta e Madrasas e Arabia. Noteworthy that, this historical Jamiat Ulama Bhawan along with the Maulana Muhammad Tahir Library were built by cordial efforts of his son-in-law Maulana Siddiqullah Chowdhury.⁵

Maulana Tahir as a Polemicist:

Because of his profound knowledge in Islamic theology and chairing the historic organization Jamiat e Ulama e Hind, he would be invited by the people and other regional Muslim scholars as a mediator to solve the many religious and social disputes in Muslim dominated villages and cities; so, he prevented the people from severe conflicts between the Muslim communities of different sects. That's why, he sometimes played a role of debater and polemicist against several scholars of different school of thoughts, and presented solutions to the people as per the Islamic law and jurisprudence.

A notable mediating role of his life is "Chaita Debate", which was held on 17th April, 1979 at Chaita village, located in Basirhat subdivision under Haroa Police station of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Where he prevented two fanatic groups of Muslim villagers from an unavoidable conflict by his mediation and wisely explanation of Islamic law in the presence of prominent scholars, local administrative officials and thousands of people.⁶

¹ Chowdhury, Siddiqullah. *Savhyatar Nirmane Muslim Manishi*, West Bengal State Jamiat Ulama Bhaban, Bankra, Kolkata, 2019, p.15

² Hoque, Monjurul. *Maulana Md. Tahir: Life and Works*, Department of Arabic, Assam University, Silchar, 2013, pp. 05-20

³ Chowdhury, Siddiqullah. *Savyatar Nirmane Muslim Manishi*, West Bengal State Jamiat Ulama Bhaban, Bankra, Kolkata, 2019, p.15,

⁴ Hoque, Monjurul. *Maulana Md. Tahir: Life and Works*, Department of Arabic, Assam University, Silchar, 2013, p.54

⁵ The author of this research article was a student of Jamia Islamia Madania for 12 years up to Mishkat, and now eldest grandson-in-law of Razia Chowdhury and Siddiqullah Chowdhury. I, myself was present at the abovementioned programs related to Jamit Ulama Bhawan and Maulana Muhammad Tahir Library. Follow also Sabar Insaaf Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/sabar.insaaf>

⁶ Gobindopuri, Muhammad Ainuddin, *Chaita Bahath-er-Bibaron* (Report of Chaita Debate), Gobindapur, North 24 Parganas, pp. 6-15

Maulana Muhammad Tahir's Islamic Literary Contributions:

Maulana Muhammad Tahir was a prolific Islamic writer in West Bengal, he was considered by many scholars as the pioneer of Islamic theology, Islamic social sciences, Islamic feminism, Islamic criticism and Arabic- Bengali translation of Islamic theology in Bengali language, as well as an extender of Arabic language among the Bengali speaking Muslims and into the Bengali language itself.⁷ He penned about 37 books,⁸ among them several books are in untouched disciplines of Bengali language of his time, for instance he authored *Ramaneer Man* in the subject of Islamic feminism, and compared there in that book the rights of women provided by Islam and other non-Islamic religions and governments, *Sadhona o Sangbidhan* was produced by him to introduce Islamic Social life through the social norms and Islamic values in social life, therefore the way of Islamic greetings, polite conversations, doing *khidmat* for parents, humanity and guests etc. are described in this book. On the topic of Islamic criticism, he wrote *Natun Dharma and Maududi Fitna* to criticize the misinterpretation of Islam and evil efforts made by Maududi to present his own ideas. Besides to make the Bengali Muslims aware of newly formed religion Qadianism and rebutted the false claim of prophet hood by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani and his refusal other stable and fixed creeds regarding I'ssa (peace be upon him) he wrote *Qadiyani Jaliat*. On Islamic politics and political science, he penned a notable book named *Rashtra Biggan O Islam*. Along with these untouched or little touched disciplines in Bengali language he compiled and authored many other books, among them notable books are *Al-Quran Tarjama O Tafseer* a Bengali translation and brief explanation of the Holy Quran in five volumes, *Al-manar*, a book of selected hadith for Bengali speaking Muslims, *Premar Pancho Audhayi* (The five Chapters of Love), *Inqilab*, is a revolutionary literature, was written to create the passion of freedom and patriotism in the heart of Bengali Muslims, *Maroner Pore* (The life after death), it was written aftermath of his father during Haj pilgrimage in Mecca, *Pother Shandhane* (In the search for straight path) was produced to explain the eternity, veracity and truth of Islam among other religions, *Taleemul Islam* (Teaching of Islam), a great elementary book translated from Urdu in four volumes for the primary students of *maktabs*, *Tasbeeh* (Glorification of Allah) a collection of his religious poems, and many other books. It is noteworthy that a notable amount of Maulana Muhammad Tahir's poetry is yet unpublished and a diary of his poetry is still preserved by his grand-daughter *Sadia Liaquat* spouse of *Mufti Liaquat Ali*, belongs to *Kazipara, Barasat, North 24 Parganas* of West Bengal.⁹

⁷ Hoque, Monjurul. *Maulana Md. Tahir: Life and Works*, Department of Arabic, Assam University, Silchar, 2013, pp. 02-03, 60

⁸ Ibid, p.122

⁹ *Sadia Liaquat* is daughter of Maulana Siddiqullah Chowdhury and granddaughter of Maulana Muhammad Tahir, this information collected by personal visit and interview. See also Hoque, Monjurul. *Maulana Md. Tahir: Life and Works*, Department of Arabic, Assam University, Silchar, 2013, pp. 50-74

Death:

He enjoyed an ideal life filled with freedom struggles, social and educational reforms; blessed with prayers of communal victims, devoted to the nation and people of his own country. He made himself an example of piety and taqwa, and like a crown of contemporary Ulema and scholars. This life of a great theologian, reformist, educationalist, pioneer of theological translation of Arabic-Bengali and vice-versa, a teacher of Hadith, fiqh, and Arabic language and literature, as well as a personality of endless unforgettable services for the Indian Muslims and entire nation had left its last breath on 21 Jumada Al- Saniah, 1415 A.H, corresponding to 26th November, 1994 A.D. Noteworthy that the aforesaid date of birth as well as death is engraved on the marble slab of headstone put at his grave with the brief details of his life along with date of birth and death, but a researcher of Assam University mentioned his date of demise is 11th December, 1998, it seems to be wrong.

A memorable poem in Bengali language is carved on his gravestone, which still bears the witness and represents his poesy nature and fear of Allah with the following verses.¹⁰

হে বন্ধু আমার!
ক্ষণিক দাড়ায়ে মোর কবরের পাশে,
খোদারে বলিয়া যাও "ক্ষমা কর দাসে"
দু-চারটি আয়াত পড়ে দিয়ো উপহার,
তোমার চরণে এই মিনতি আমার;

---মুহাম্মদ তাহির

The aforementioned prayer poem of Maulana Tahir is translated into English by the author of this article in following.

O my friends!
Standing a while beside my grave,
Pray to Allah that 'forgive the slave'
Please give me a gift of a few ayats of The Holy Quran
On your foot, this is my sincere application.

- Muhammad Tahir

Conclusion:

Maulana Muhammad Tahir was a theologian, Islamic scholar, freedom fighter, writer and poet. He is considered as the pioneer of Islamic literature and religious writings in Bengali language among the scholars of Deobandi school of thought. His many books discuss about several important and vital issues which were ignored by the contemporary Islamic writers and poets. He played a historical role in social reforms in the Muslim community of that time through his speeches, books, teaching, establishing madrasas, Islamic seminaries, preaching activities and social services under the patronship of *Jamiat-e Ulama-e-Hind*. A notable number of his books are still unpublished and the manuscripts are kept with his younger son *Mufti Masud Nasir* at his home. The scholars and researchers of Arabic and Islamic studies have a chance to unearth his valuable unpublished manuscripts or rarely available printed books to propagate his Islamic literary heritage.

¹⁰ I visited his grave several times.

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Ibid, pp. 02-03, 60

Ibid, p.122

Interview of Sadia Liaquat: who is daughter of Maulana Siddiqullah Chowdhury and granddaughter of Maulana Muhammad Tahir, this information collected by personal visit and interview.

Gobindopuri, Muhammad Ainuddin, *Chaita Bahath-er-Bibaroon* (Report of Chaita Debate), Gobindapur, North 24 Parganas, pp. 6-15

Author's self-observation, visiting and interview.