

# Ahmad Deedat: The Making of a Transnational Religious Figure

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## Abstract

Ahmad Deedat is one of South Africa's well known Muslim missionaries whose contributions towards Christian-Muslim relations have been duly acknowledged by friend and foe alike. Even though Deedat's method was not approved by many Muslims, his labours in doing mission in and outside South Africa cannot be ignored. Deedat might not be regarded as a champion of Christian-Muslim dialogue in South Africa he obliquely pushed Christian and Muslims in that direction.

Though this essay is somewhat of a review of Goolam Vahed's *Ahmad Deedat: The Man and His Mission* (Durban: IPCI, 2013) it employs it as a platform to throw more light on Deedat as a transnational figure. Apart from providing a synoptic overview of the Vahed's text's rich contents and pointing out its merits/demerits, it veers off into looking closely at those events and individuals/organizations that played a part in influencing Deedat; in addition it evaluates the exclusivist approach that he determinedly adopted to counter Christian mission between the 1940s and the 1990s. In the process of doing this the essay attempts to assess Deedat's legacy.

**Keywords:** South Africa, Deedat, Muslim, Christian, mission, transnational

## 0. Introduction

During the 1980s and 1990s whenever South Africa's Muslims travelled abroad for pleasure or pilgrimage, they were usually quizzed by strangers about Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) and Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005). Whilst

the former was known to them via news reports for his courageous political escapades as the ‘scarlet pimpernel’ of the African National Congress against the apartheid regime, the latter was widely known to them via his booklets and video cassettes for his intellectual ‘crusades’ as the zealous Muslim *da’wah* combatant who countered unswerving South African Christian missionaries (referred to as the tent makers). In different parts of the world – particularly those residing in the South (i.e. Africa, Southwest and Southeast Asia) - many admired both men for their sterling contributions in their respective political and religious terrains. Well, since this is not a comparative study of these two individuals as transnational figures (Sadouni 2007; 2013), it is essentially - though not exclusively – an essay that reviews Goolam Vahed’s wonderful text that focus on *Ahmed Deedat: The Man and His Mission* (Durban: IPCI, ISBN 978-0-6205-3897-8). It, however, uses Vahed’s book - that took a while to reach the book shelves as a result of numerous (internal) technical hitches – as a useful platform to further explore Deedat’s escapades as a Muslim missionary.

In Vahed’s concluding chapter titled ‘On God’s Wavelength?’ he clearly stated that ‘...this book does not attempt to engage with Deedat’s personal life. Its focal point is largely on ‘what he achieved in the public sphere’ (p.254) and his introductory chapter titled ‘The Argumentative Muslim’ (pp.1-15) he clarified that ‘(t)his study does not evaluate Deedat’s theological arguments in any depth ... (but) ... seeks to situate Deedat historically and weave the facts of his life and mission into a coherent narrative’ (p.14). After having gone through the twenty five chapters, which include the respective introduction and conclusion, one may confidently argue that Vahed has done South African biographical scholarship a great service with the manner in which he approached the study of Deedat’s life. It is a worthwhile read and let us share our thoughts why this is the case. Vahed, who is a trained UKZN historian and who has co-authored/edited numerous academic works related to religion, ethnicity and sports, has once again not disappointed the reader in the way he skillfully narrated the life of this fascinating transnational figure despite the odds that were stacked against Deedat for much of his life.

## **The Biographical Text’s Sources**

Vahed like all ardent historians and biographers based himself on both

primary and secondary sources to write this informative text about one of South Africa's most well-known Muslim missionaries. The book was thus based upon a variety of materials such as correspondence and interviews, and, of course, Deedat's long list of audio/video cassettes and books/booklets of which the two volumes, namely *The Choice: Islam and Christianity* (Durban & Birmingham: IPCI, 1995 and 1999), stand out as one of his most important publications. He did not include all the Deedat publications that he consulted since they were readily available for scrutinizing and viewing at the Islamic Propagation Centre International's (IPCI) Durban headquarters. And instead of providing in the (End)notes (Vahed 2013: 273-283) copious citations that he extracted from the forty four (personal and e-mail correspondence) interviews that Vahed (2013: 284-285) conducted, he only recorded the names of the individuals as part of his list of sources.

Now since Vahed drew upon different published and unpublished material to construct his narrative about Deedat and his mission, we wonder why he did not fully acknowledge – though listed in his bibliography - the descriptive research of Riaz Cassim Jamal (d.2013) as a pioneering effort in recording Deedat's eventful life. Jamal completed his 1991 MA thesis titled *The Role and Contribution of the Islamic Propagation Centre International in the Field of Da'wah* in the (now defunct) Department of Islamic Studies at the University of Durban-Westville (that has since amalgamated with the University of Natal to form the UKZN). Whilst this slight oversight is acceptable since Vahed was able to reconstruct material that was readily available at IPCI, we are of the view that he should have consulted Samadia Sadouni's series of articles as well as her thesis even though they were mostly written in French.

Sadouni, who was for a while associated with the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa) and now at the University of Lyon (France), completed her 1997 doctorate dissertation titled *Islam <minoritaire>, diaspora et leadership en Afrique du Sud* at the University of Aix en Provence in France. Sadouni subsequently transformed her thesis into a 257 page book; she retitled it as *La controverse islamo-chrétienne en Afrique du Sud: Ahmed Deedat et les nouvelles formes de débat* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence 2011). Sadouni's text incidently received a positive review from Roman Loimeier; a review that appeared in *Journal of Religions in Africa* 43,4: 485-486, 2013.

We would, in fact, preferred to have compared Sadouni's book with Vahed's text in order to have demonstrated where, why and how they differed from each other. Notwithstanding this, before Sadouni had her book published she penned the following three articles – before Vahed's book appeared - that were relevant to this work under review: 'Le minoritaire sud-africain Ahmed Deedat, une figure originale de la *da'wa*' in *Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara* (12 : 149-170, 1999), 'Les territoires d'un prédicateur musulman sud-africain' in *Les dynamiques religieuses en Afrique Australe* (ed. Faure Véronique) (Paris: Karthala, pp.161-173, 2000), and 'Ahmed Deedat et l'islam Indien en Afrique du Sud: Individualisme at transnationalisme Islamique' in *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* (139: 101-118, 2007). Sadouni's article 'Ahmed Deedat, Internationalisation, and Transformations of Islamic Polemic' that appeared in *Journal of Religions in Africa* 43,1: 53-73, 2013 basically restated some of the points that were mentioned in her earlier essays and was not privy to see Vahed's book except his article titled 'Ahmed Deedat and Muslim-Christian Relations at the Cape' that was published in *Journal for Islamic Studies* 29:2-32.

In addition, Vahed's study should also have made reference to the following texts some of which appeared online at <http://cmcoxford.org.uk/resources/starter-bibliographies/>: Josh McDowell and John Gilchrist's *The Islam Debate: Josh McDowell and John Gilchrist vs Ahmed Deedat* (San Bernadino, CA: Here's Life Publishers1983) that contains the JM and AD debate's transcripts; Larry Poston's *Islamic Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activities and the Dynamics of Conversion* (New York: OUP 1992) that devotes a section to Deedat; John Chesworth's 'Fundamentalism and Outreach Strategies in East Africa: Christian Evangelism and Muslim Da'wa' that appeared in Benjamin Soares' *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, (Leiden: EJ. Brill 159-186, 2006) in which he discoursed about Deedat's impact; Mohamed Said's unpublished 'Muslim Bible Scholars in Tanzania: Sheikh Ahmed Deedat's Legacy' AwqafSA 2006 paper; Imran Garda's text 'Sheikh Ahmad Deedat: Demystifying Islam and Debating Christianity' (<http://www.islamonline.net/English/Views/2006/01/article02.SHTML>); Candy Ahmed's 'The Wahubiri wa Kislamu (Preachers of Islam) in East Africa' in *Africa Today* (54,4: 3-18, 2008) that makes reference to Deedat's influence; and John Chesworth's 'Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005)' that was published in Dale C. Allison Jr. et al's *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (Berlin: de Gruyter Vol. 6, 2010). Now regardless of the absence

of these texts in Vahed's list of Sources (pp.285-288), he produced a very readable and informative text that will indeed remain an important text – along with that of Sadouni's French publication - in the years ahead.

## **1. Its Structure and Contents**

Vahed's twenty five chapter text was accompanied in the inside cover by a list of four quotations from prominent personalities such as Shafiq Morton - the award winning South African journalist and Dr. Ahmed Ali - the president of the Jeddah based Islamic Development Bank. The book's Foreword (pp.iv-v) was written by IPCI's current chairperson, Haroon Kalla – a respected Pretoria born businessperson, in which he had a fair amount to say about Deedat and the IPCI but disappointingly nothing to say about Vahed whose labors in writing this book should have been duly acknowledged. We should never forget that a great deal of pains is invested in writing a text such as this; in this instance Vahed took a while to write because he had to do several things; among these he had to: (a) read on the subject, (b) search for primary and secondary sources, and (c) conduct interviews. The purpose is to fundamentally present, as far as possible, a balanced and unbiased publication. Since Vahed managed to do that let us begin by commenting on selected aspects and hastily add that it is not possible to address each and every issue that has been dealt with in the chapters.

### ***1.1 Sources, Notes and Photographs***

But before we dip into the chapters, let us make reference to the 'Sources' that appear at the end of the book (pp.284-288). Like most other publications, Vahed has a useful list of sources that consists of two sub-sections; the first contains forty four items that are 'interviews and e-mail correspondence' and the second lists about one hundred and fifteen 'books, articles and dissertations' that he consulted for this publication. Now each of these bibliographical works has been drawn upon to enrich the text's contents. We, however, observe that Vahed used 'Endnotes' for each chapter and these notes appear before the 'Sources' on pp. 273-283. What we, moreover, do not find is a user-friendly index; this glaring omission is indeed lamentable

because researchers have a habit of scanning the index for relevant information located in the body of the text and in this instance there is unfortunately nothing to assist them. Here, it should be emphasized, we are not finding fault with the author but with IPCI, the publisher; if IPCI had taken its time and invested in an indexer such as the award winning indexer, Abdul Bemath, then it would of course have improved the book's appearance (see Kalley *et al.* 2005).

Furthermore the book has been enhanced by an array of photographs that appear on the first few unnumbered pages of the book. The fifty two photographs that are spread across the pages superbly capture aspects of Deedat's rich social life. These photographs tangibly illustrate that Deedat was a photogenic person and that he chiefly reveled in being photographed alongside individuals from all walks of life. In, at least, two of the colourful photos he chats to two international figures; in photograph no.37 Deedat chats to 'Ali Mazrui (1933-2014), the Kenyan born Professor of African Studies at New York's Binghamton University, and in photograph no.38 he is seen with Minister Louis Farrakhan (b.1933), the USA's Nation of Islam leader. Apart from these, the book also contains numerous other photographs that depict various other scenes from his wonderful social life; these photographs were scattered at appropriate places throughout the book. Each chapter has, as a matter of fact, been appropriately illustrated and this shows that care was taken to insert these in a way that they connect with the chapter's contents. Perhaps IPCI should consider producing a coffee-table text that pictorially captures Deedat's life and that would complement this particular and other publications associated with this unrepressed religious personality. Setting aside these technical aspects, let us turn our focus to the chapters that plainly reveal 'The Man and His Mission'.

## ***1.2 Chapters: A Synopsis***

Earlier it was already mentioned that Vahed divided his text into twenty five chapters; each of which flows seamlessly into the one that follows. Since this is the case, it demonstrates to what extent the author was mindful of the reader when he constructed this book. One of the reasons, it is assumed, for having followed this method was to exemplify that one is able to have a good sense of how Deedat expressed his ideas locally and how these reverberated continentally and globally.

Vahed readily recognized towards the closing of the opening chapter that Deedat was like many other prominent personalities ‘a complex figure’ and for anyone writing a ‘biographical narrative (it) is not an easy genre...’ That being the case, Vahed stated that he attempted at all cost to avoid being either hagiographic or creating a picture of Deedat as – here he quotes Kaneth Malcolm – ‘a character in a bad novel.’ Theoretically, Vahed (2013: 14) reminded us that ‘transformation’ is central to Deedat’s life and that we should keep in mind, among other issues, the connection between ‘culture and power.’ So instead of starting to trace Deedat’s life from birth to death, he steers clear of providing a straight-forward chronological order of Deedat’s biography and for this reason he narrates in the second chapter about Deedat’s stroke during May 1996 and about his death during the first week of August 2005.

With this backdrop, Vahed takes us in the third chapter back to the 1930s where he was introduced to ‘Adam’s Mission’; known as Adams College that was established during 1853 in KwaZulu Natal and one that offered a liberal Christian missionary education to African students. Deedat’s interaction with these students caused him to take a serious interest in the Bible and subsequently he by chance came across an invaluable 1867 booklet titled *Izhar ul-Haq* (Revealed Truth); a 1915 English text that was published and circulated by Ghulam Muhammad ibn Haji Hafez Sadik. This text captured the Agra theological debate – to which this essay shall return to later - that took place between Maulana Rahmat Allah Kairanawi (d.1891) - a (Shi’ite) Muslim luminary, and Rev. Carl Gottlieb Pfander (d.1865) - a Protestant Christian missionary and linguist who knew Urdu well; the theological dispute took place in the Indian city of Agra during April 1854 (pp.33-36 and see Bennet 1996: 77; Schirmacher 1997; Avari 2013: 171).

After Deedat read *Izhar ul-Haq* closely, it ignited in him an interest that was to transform the rest of his life; a life that was dedicated to responding to Christian mission that undermined and devalued his religious tradition. So when Pakistan gained independence in 1947 (see Chapter 5), Deedat like many others was under the illusion that this ‘pure (Muslim) state’ was going to assist in reinforcing his Muslim identity and further strengthen his faith in Islam. Deedat was tremendously disheartened at what he encountered in this newly created Muslim state. Here Vahed (2013:56) makes reference to the imprisoned Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s poem ‘Freedom Dawn’ that expressed Deedat’s inner feelings towards Pakistan (see Avari [2013: 251] who refers to

the poet's poem titled 'Speak'). After having stayed there for about three years he opted to return in 1951 to South Africa where Islam's situation was none the better. Upon Deedat's return, he was familiar with the various Muslim associations such as the Young Men Muslims Association, Natal British Moslem League and the Kemal Study Group that were established in the 1930s to pursue specific religio-cultural goals. It was Deedat's association with some of these associations that he gradually familiarized himself with *da'wah*. Since this strategy was seen as pivotal in countering Christian mission, he broached the matter with the Arabic Study Circle (ASC est.1950) leadership to establish a separate organization that would channel its energies into dealing specifically with Muslim approaches towards the growing Christian evangelical activities. Dr. Daoud Mall, the ASC's chairperson, along with Goolam Vanker (d.1987) and others laid the foundations for the Islamic Propagation Centre (IPC see Chapters 6 and 7) in 1957. Vanker, as a matter of interest, was a key executive member who manned the IPC office between 1962 and 1972; he was a person who adopted a softer and a rather diplomatic *da'wah* approach compared to that of Deedat (Vahed 2013:73-80).

Now whilst Vanker staffed the IPC office in the Madressa Arcade that was adjacent to the famous Grey Street Mosque (est.1881) complex, Deedat conducted classes at As-Salam (Chapter 11); a centre that was located outside the Greater Durban area and one that acted as an important incubator for Muslim mission within the broader South African context; it may be argued that much of Deedat's ideas on dealing with and responding to Christian mission were crystalized and concretized at this place. In fact, it was at this centre that offered him the opportunity to prepare and write various texts such as *Is Bible the Word of God?* This text like some of the others was caustically written, according to David Westerlund - the Swedish specialist on Christian theology and Christian-Muslim relations, and one that was interestingly in line with orthodox Christianity's interpretation. This particular publication raised numerous questions as to whether the Bible - that is in circulation during the contemporary period - can really be considered God's literal word; one of Deedat's stock arguments is that it is a text unlike the Qur'an that was tampered and corrupted by human beings over the centuries (Chapter 8). Deedat's steadfast and unwavering approach to *da'wah* was naturally challenged by Christian evangelists/missionaries such as Gerhard Nehls who authored *Christians ask Muslims* (Cape Town: Life Challenge, 1980) and *Christians answer Muslims* (Cape Town: Life



Challenge, 1980) and Muslims such as A.S.K. Joommal who penned *The Riddle of Trinity and the Sonship of Christ* (Johannesburg: LMS, 1966) and *The Bible: Word of God or Word of Man* (Johannesburg: LMS, 1976); for some reason, the views of these Christian and Muslim polemicists have been ignored in this text.

Nonetheless, not all South African Muslims agreed with Deedat's style and methods. Among this faction of individuals were Adam Peerbhai who penned a thin publication titled *Missing Documents from Gospel of Barnabas* (Durban: Islamic Institute, 1967) and Mohammed Makki who produced the *Ramadan Annual* and the monthly *Muslim Digest* (Haron 2006). Whilst both teamed up on occasions to argue against Deedat's methods, it was Deedat's younger brother, namely Abdullah Deedat who also countered him publicly despite the fact that he worked for IPCI for a period (Chapter 9; Jeppie 2007: 95-100). In spite of these Muslim critics, Deedat's popularity soared in 'Cape of Storms' (Chapter 10) where the Cape Muslims constantly faced the regular onslaught of Christian (Anglican and Dutch Reform) missionary activities in the 1950s and 1960s (Haron 1999); at Cape Town's Green Point stadium and the Drill Hall located in the city centre he addressed large crowds who appreciated his missionary zeal and interventions. He, as already mentioned, used As-Salam as a training ground for the young converts and organized Bible classes to teach them about comparative religion. As-Salam (Chapter 11), which acted as a significant Muslim missionary platform, was subsequently taken over by the Muslim Youth Movement (est. 1970) during 1977 after Deedat had spent about 20 years of his life there. The MYM transformed As-Salam into an educational institute where young poverty-stricken children could pursue their school studies and where young emerging Muslim activists such as Farid Esack (b.1959), who adopted a different approach to Muslim-Christian relations, spent some of their early years.

Deedat's dedication to Muslim mission came to the fore when he returned to Durban where he held classes and conducted 'religious' tours to the adjacent Grey Street mosque; the largest at that time in the southern hemisphere. From the late 1970s and into the early 1990s Deedat was 'creating change' (Chapter 12) in the minds of many people in and beyond South Africa. Though these changes involved (minor) 'controversies and diversions' (Chapter 13) about Deedat's run-in with John Gilchrist – the Benoni based lawyer/evangelist, and his uncritical acceptance of Rashad

Khalifa's (1935-1990) prolematic theory of no.19, Vahed could have expanded on the Deedat-Gilchrist (theological) controversy by drawing upon McDowell & Gilchrist (1983) text as well as Gilchrist's publications such as *The Crucifixion of Christ: A Fact, not Fiction* and *Is Muhammad foretold in the Bible*.

Immediately thereafter Vahed narrates Deedat's unstinting support for Palestine (Chapter 14) and how Deedat, who relentlessly powered on, in the long run turned his focus from the local Muslim scene to 'going global' (Chapter 15). In the end Deedat's debates caught the eye of the committee of the prestigious King Faisal Foundation that did not hesitate to confer on him 'The King Faisal International Prize' (Chapter 16) on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1986; this he, at that time, shared with Dr. Roger Garaudy (d.2012) who was the author of *The Founding Myths of Modern Israel*. Later that year (i.e. 1986) Vahed describes 'The Swagger of Deedat' (Chapter 17) when Deedat entered into a debate with the USA Christian evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart; they essentially responded to the question: 'Is the Bible God's Word?' (see Father Zakaria Boutros' *The Challenges of Sheikh Deedat and their answers* online: [www.fatherzakaria.com](http://www.fatherzakaria.com))

Vahed accurately states that 'the decade from 1985 was arguably Deedat's 'finest hour' as he undertook numerous lectures and debate tours all over the world and in the process enhanced his standing in the global Muslim world' (p.186). Indeed from that period onwards this 'Faisal Laureate' (Chapter 18) did not look back but far beyond the South African borders where he was openly welcomed by Muslim communities in other parts of Africa and Asia. But even though he was permitted to enter many countries to engage in debates with the local missionaries or address the crowds on comparative religion, he was not allowed to do so in countries such as Malaysia because the authorities argued that his approach was going to inflame the debates that may lead to negative inter-religious relations. An issue that insensed and inflamed the Muslims in many parts of the world during that time was Salman Rushdi's *The Satanic Verses*. The 'Rush-die' (Chapter 19) affair was a matter that caught Deedat's attention and that he could not afford to avoid; the Rushdi publication, in fact, was even raised with the apartheid Censor Board that banned its circulation in the South African book market.

By the end of the 1980s Deedat's IPC of the 1960s had transformed itself into an empire with funding flowing in from various Arab Muslim

philanthropists. Deedat and the team that staffed the IPCI unfortunately did not realize the need to observe ‘elementary corporate governance practices’ when the organization changed into a mighty Muslim missionary outfit (Vahed 2013: 218); if IPCI had put in place financial structures at an early stage, then IPCI would not have encountered some of the headaches when Deedat became a global iconic figure. So as consequence of IPCI’s rapid growth and transformation of IPC into an international organization with branches in the UK and elsewhere, Deedat could not effortlessly side-step the question as to whether he had entered this missionary market ‘For the Prophet or Profit?’ (Chapter 20). Deedat’s detractors would like to have showed that it was for the latter and not for the former since they have been closely and somewhat enviously monitoring him and the IPCI as an organization.

Vahed, at this point, shifts his attention to commenting on ‘The (IPCI’s) Best of Times, The Worst of Times: The 1980s and 1990s’ (Chapter 21) and instantaneously thereafter looks at ‘Islam and Hinduism: Sowing the seeds of division’ (Chapter 22). As a follow up to this concern, Vahed discusses the use of ‘The Combat Kit’ that was labelled the *Combat Kit: against Bible Thumpers*; the text, which was described as an acerbic 1992 IPCI publication by Larkin (2008), was challenged by Gilchrist’s *A Response to Deedat’s COMBAT KIT*. This specific apolitical text was constructed to train individuals how to appropriate the biblical text as a ‘patriot missile’ against groups such as the Jehovah Witness and other missionaries. Vahed quotes Deedat who had metaphorically stated that this kit was a ‘manual to convert the Christian Scud [Bible] into a Patriotic Missile’ (p.237).

Besides discussing this contentious text, Vahed also brings into view other issues that had a harmful impact on IPCI’s image and its activities; one of the issues that cropped up was the apparent ‘mismanagement’ of its public funds. Notwithstanding these matters, in Vahed’s penultimate chapter he records how two individuals, namely Yakub Cunningham (d.2008) and David Ngwane (d.2009), from ‘Other Persuasions’ entered into Islam as result of Deedat’s theological ‘interactions’ with them. And in Vahed’s ‘On God’s Wavelength’ chapter he – here we wish to repeat his quote - underlines the point that this publication’s focus ‘is largely on what he achieved in the public sphere’ (p.254). After having gone through the text, it may be stated the Vahed did vividly and concretely demonstrate to what extent Deedat achieved personal and organizational goals from the time IPC was set up in 1957 until the time Deedat was forced into ‘retirement’ as a result of his

unexpected 1996 stroke; an illness that caused him to be bedridden until his eventual death on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2005.

## **2. The Influences upon Deedat**

Vahed notes in his final chapter that when evaluating Deedat's legacy, it is no easy task because of the different positions that were articulated by his defenders and detractors (pp.267-268). Deedat's fervent critics, Vahed states, argued that he – as an unapologetic polemicist - was not a builder of inter-faith dialogue but a destroyer whilst Deedat's ardent followers expressed the view that he rescued and protected the Muslims from aggressive and chauvinistic Christian evangelists. Now before this essay briefly assesses Deedat's legacy in the light of Vahed's text, it first turns its focus to those issues/events/texts that influenced him.

During Deedat's formative years Vahed records that he had a tough upbringing and throughout this period was not well-informed about his religious tradition; an issue that Deedat was quite straightforward about when he was interviewed regarding his interaction with Adams College students who ridiculed him about his beliefs and practices. This negative experience was suddenly turned into a positive one because he like many curious individuals was interested to know more about his religion so that he may be in a strong position to counter and disarm the criticisms vented against Islam by the Christian evangelists who persistently adopted aggressive tactics to lure Muslims away from Islam; a religious tradition that Christians considered to be false. So having been taken off guard by these Christian missionaries, Deedat decided to read texts about his religion that were written in Gujarati, Urdu and English; the languages that he was familiar with and that assisted him in responding comfortably to the Christian mission. Interestingly one of the most important and lasting influences upon Deedat was the Pfander-Kairanawi theological debate that had taken place in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is to this debate that this essay turns to in order to argue that if it was not for the 'accidental' Kairanawi text then we would not have witnessed the emergence of Deedat as a transnational religious figure but one who would have remained an unknown local salesperson.

## ***2.1 The 1854 Pfander-Kairanawi Debate in Agra, India***

During the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the East India Company (EIC) was still in control commercially and politically of the sub-continent, the Christian missionaries were actively spreading the Gospel among the Indians whose religious traditions and cultures they generally denigrated. Although Bennet and others argued that the EIC ‘claimed religious neutrality’, some of its officials such as Sir William Muir (d.1905) who was the government secretary of the North West Provinces were sympathetic towards and supportive of the increasing missionary activities. The rise of these missions obviously forced the Hindus and Muslims to react by developing combating strategies and one of these was to challenge these self-assured and over-confident missionaries to publicly debate the Christian theological positions towards Hinduism and Islam. During this period Christian-Muslim relations were far from healthy because the Christian missionaries firmly believed that Islam was a ‘false’ religion which was founded by an ‘unstable’ ‘epileptic’ prophet. These insensitive comments forced Muslim leaders/intellectuals to consider methods of countering these tactless stereotypical opinions and one of these was to engage the Christians in a *munazarat* (i.e. a public debate).

The Muslim intellectual to rise to the occasion three years before the 1857 Indian mutiny in which the Muslims were accused of having been the central instigators was Maulana Rahmat Allah ibn Khalil al-Uthmani Kairanawi (d.1891). He was not only well schooled in the Quranic sciences but also well versed with European theological approaches to biblical criticism; approaches that illustrated the Bible’s unreliability. Bennet (1996: 77) stated that Kairanawi’s ideas on European theology was probably gained from his Bengali aide, namely Muhammad Wazir Khan who was a trained medical doctor that had read most of the relevant works on the topic when he was still studying for his medical degree in England (Schirrmacher 1997). On the 10 and 11 April 1854 Kairanawi, who subsequently wrote *Izhar ul-Haqq* (The Revealed Truth) that was republished in 1989 in English by the London based Taha Publishers, openly challenged the doyen of Christian missionaries, namely Karl Gottlieb Pfander; a German speaking missionary who was trained at the Swiss based Basel Evangelical Institute (Powell 1976; Sadouni 2007; Vahed 2013: 30-36).

From 1841 onwards Pfander devoutly served the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in India where he was regarded as ‘the Christian

champion for Christ' since he held and publicly state that 'Islam was the religion of the sword, and Christianity the religion of peace' (Bennet 1996: 77). Having been intimately familiar with Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu, Pfander effortlessly drew from the Muslim primary sources for the texts that he penned; one of the most significant texts that remain relevant for the missionaries to this day is his *Mizan ul-Haqq* (The Balance of Truth). According to Bennet (1996: 78) the two day event, which was witnessed by Christians and Muslims, planned to dwell on four issues: (a) Christian Scripture: the question of abrogation and corruption, (b) the Doctrine of Trinity, (c) Prophet Muhammad's claims regarding his prophethood, and (d) the inspiration of the Qur'an (Vahed 2013: 34).

Schirmmacher (1997) traced the historiographical impact that both *Mizan ul-Haqq* and *Izhar ul-Haqq* have had on later generations. She pointed to the fact that both were edited and translated into a variety of languages and that are still in circulation in English and Arabic as well as other languages. Whilst Christian missionaries (e.g. John Gilchrist who authored *Facing the Muslim Challenge* [Cape Town: Life Challenge, 1999/2002]) who operate in predominantly Muslim lands and non-Muslim countries such as South Africa continued to use Pfander's work, Arab Muslim scholars such as Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (d.1905), Rashid Rida (d.1935) and Muhammad Abu Zahra (d.1974) also made ample use of *Izhar ul-Haqq* when they addressed the nature of Christian mission during their respective periods. Now Ahmad Deedat came onto the scene during Abu Zahra's era and, according to Vahed, accidentally stumbled across the Kairanawi text. Even though Deedat might not have been intimately familiar with the debate as outlined and explained by Bennet (1996) and Schirmmacher (1997), he was totally bowled over and convinced by Kairanawi's logically set-out arguments. Deedat thus adopted and adapted the Kairanawi methods to assist him in the years that followed and to publicly tackle the strategies employed by the Christian missionaries in and beyond South Africa.

## **2.2 Khwaja Kamal ud-Din (the Ahmadi), Joseph Perdue (the Bahai) and Others**

The above re-narration of the famous Agra debate as captured by the Kairanawi text confirmed that it historically filtered down over the decades

and permanently influenced Muslim apologetics – to use Schirrmacher’s term – who continued to bump into Christian mission in Muslim majority and minority communities. And since Deedat was an inadvertent beneficiary of a debate that was indirectly affected by European Christian theological approaches to textual criticism, it - through Deedat’s unique style and hard labours - indelibly transformed Muslim mission in and outside South Africa. Schirrmacher (1997) hypothesized that these approaches probably influenced the Ahmadiyya movement that emerged at the end of the 1880s; a religious movement that came to play a pivotal role to counter Christian missionary activities in India and elsewhere.

Years before this movement was jurisprudentially and theologically ‘outlawed’ by the traditional Muslim theologians as non-Muslims, its ideologues (e.g. Khwaja Kamal ud-Din [d. 1932] and Maulana Muhammad ‘Ali [d.1951]) had made a deep impression on the thinking of Muslims in places such as South Africa where Deedat grew up under the care of his father. It is therefore more than likely that Deedat like many other young Muslims had read their books/articles and was faintly influenced by their ideas when he was a member of the Kemal Study Group (circa 1930s-1950s); an organization that was apparently established as a result of the Khwaja Kamal ud-Din and Lord Headley (d.1935) visit to Durban during 1926 (Germain 2007; and see Germain 2009). Khwaja Kamal ud-Din was the founder the Woking mosque in England and the editor of the widely circulated magazine, the *Islamic Review* (circa 1913-1970) that challenged the ‘campaign against Islam’ led by Samuel Zwemer (Aziz 2013: 5; Vahed 2013: 58).

Even though the study group ended its organizational life by the 1950s, the Ahmadiyya movement set up formal structures in South Africa by the end of the 1950s at the Cape. The Suleiman Ebrahim family was one of the few committed families that chose to create a base for movement in the Athlone area, a few kilometres from the city centre. Up until the late 1950s the South African Muslim community was generally ill-informed about its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d.1908), and it was oblivious of the movement’s theological position with regards to, among others, Jesus. Organizations such as ASC considered the ideas of the movement relevant to their circumstances and encouraged individuals such as Deedat to read, inter alia, Muhammad Ali’s *The Religion of Islam*, Ghulam Parwez’s *Islam: A Challenge to Religion* and Yusuf ‘Ali’s English commentary of the Quran so that they may be informed about various aspects of Islam.

*Ahmad Deedat: The Making of a Transnational Religious Figure*

From the early 1960s, Cape Muslim organizations led by the conservatively oriented Muslim Judicial Council (MJC est. 1945) began to speak out against the silent threat of Ahmadiasm, Qadianism and Bahaism. The *Muslim News* regularly reported on the theological issues pertaining to these groups that settled in the Cape. By the 1970s and early 1980s the conflict between the Muslims represented by the MJC came to a head and this culminated in a major court case. When the Ahmadi issue appeared before the High Court in Cape Town during the mid 1980s – the time when Deedat became the Faisal Laureate and when he shifted his focus to the international scene where his skills were sought after against international evangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart, Deedat did not utter publicly his thoughts on the Ahmadi case. Deedat wisely left it to the MJC, which was supported by the Pakistan experts on Ahmadiasm, to fight the case. Unluckily for the MJC and its supporters, they lost the case and they were obliged to financially pay out large sums to the ‘demonized’ Ahmadis (see Aziz 1987).

Whilst the Ahmadis were considered one controversial theological group between the 1950s and 1980s, another appeared at the same. This was the Bahai Faith that gradually expanded into Southern Africa; it is a faith that originated in Iran and that has its headquarters in Haifa (Israel). During the 1950s when not much was known about the Bahai faith, its representative surreptitiously settled at the Cape and they invited speakers to come and publicize their ideas on public platforms. In Durban where the ASC was active and influential, it met up with Joseph Perdue, who had claimed to be a Muslim but was in fact a practicing Bahai and whose ‘religious’ services it secured for a short period (Jeppie 2007: 85-95; Jeppie 2007a). All oral reports state that Perdue’s knowledge of Islam was deep and this is precisely how he succeeded to lure and attract ASC members towards him. However, when Perdue’s true identity was ultimately revealed he disappeared in 1959 from Durban and nothing was heard of him since then. The important aspect about Perdue’s notorious appointment in 1954 by the ASC was that he injected a spirit into the local Muslim community that was not witnessed before and his method of argumentation was striking. According to an *Indian Views* (6 November 1975) report that Vahed (2013: 62) draws upon, Deedat was unapologetic and candid when he publicized that he ‘learnt more from Mr. Joseph Perdue than I had learnt in my previous thirty-eight years of my life.’

Critics such as Mohamed Makki (d.2009) argued that Deedat and others were not grounded in Islamic theology and were exceptionally gullible



(Vahed 2013: 94); instead of seriously and critically reflecting about Perdue and other guests' background and from whence they derived their ideas, they were easily influenced by their thinking. Apart from having been criticized by Makki and company for uncritically accepting the ideas from questionable individuals such as Perdue, Deedat was again severely reprimanded by them for openly supporting Rashad Khalifa's debatable thesis - as stated in his *Qur'an: the Final Scripture* - that an arithmetical pattern (i.e. the number 19) underlines the whole of this divine text. Between 1978 and 1988, Deedat remained convinced about this theory and it was only in 1988 that Deedat distanced himself from this false claim (Vahed 2013: 146-147).

Sometime prior to this period Muhammad Asad came on a 1976 tour to promote his well written *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Darul Andalus, 1980) commentary. Asad was unfortunately lambasted in a special 1978 *Muslim Digest* issue by the triumvirate, namely M. Makki, A. Peerbhai and I. Bawa, for some of his theological ideas; they basically accused him of leaning towards Ahmadi/Qadiani thought that are subtly contained in his comments on Jesus' crucifixion and other related Qur'anic verses. Now since Asad was the official guest of Professor Salman Nadvi, who was the Head of the Department of Islamic Studies at the then University of Durban-Westville, they - along with the ASC that was chaired by Mall and the IPC that was led by Deedat - were heavily condemned by Makki and others for advertising and promoting Asad's translation and commentary. Even though Asad was rather restricted by these Makki manipulated outbursts and unfounded accusations, the commentary was widely welcomed and circulated (Haron 2006: 42-43; Jeppie 2007: 95). Fortunately, Deedat did not respond or enter into a debate on the Qur'an translation, and he prudently steered clear of giving his detractors added ammunition against his missionary methods.

Deedat remained on course with his mission against Christian evangelists and continued to make his mark though he was occasionally distracted locally by some of the mentioned critics who had hoped that Deedat's credibility would take a knock and put him out of the Muslim mission business; alas this was not to be. Nonetheless, the basic point that was being made in the afore-mentioned paragraphs was that whilst Deedat did not advocate Ahmadi/Qadiyani thoughts or associated himself with the Bahai faith or for that matter with any other group that reflected deviant behaviour theologically, he like many other Muslims marvelled at how some of these groups/individuals stage-managed and processed the information

they possessed about Islam, the rational manner in which they presented their arguments, and the confidence that they displayed when they shared their ideas in public. These were and are character traits that Deedat admired and ones that he readily employed in all of his presentations and writings.

### **3. Deedat's Approach and Legacy**

When Deedat started out in the 1930s, he was unique on the South African Muslim missionary circuit and he remained so until he was forced to quit the public platform by May 1996. Though Deedat was very much a lone-ranger, who gradually became acquainted with Christian missionary activities after reading the Kairanawi text that provided him with some of the essential theological ammunition against the arguments presented by Adams College students and Christian evangelists, he was given the support for a while by individuals such as Goolam Vanker and Mohamed Laher; the latter was a leading member of the Johannesburg based Islamic Missionary Society that published, among others, Joommal's previously recorded publications (Haron 2006). But in spite of the assistance that Deedat received from his co-religionists, Deedat took a slightly different course and pursued an approach that was appropriate and suitable for his time and circumstances.

#### ***3.1 The Deedatian Method***

Since Deedat's goal was to always emerge victorious when debating and disputing with Christian missionaries, he saw to it that he familiarized himself with their texts and arguments; for example, when Deedat took up the invitation to debate with Swaggart, he made sure that he collected all the relevant information (i.e. books, articles, and audio/video cassettes) about Swaggart in order that he is fully informed about this missionary's style of presentation and arguments (Vahed 2013: 179). Accordingly over the years, Deedat's knowledge about the Bible increased to such a degree that he could comfortably quote from any part of the text and he thus conducted special Bible classes to educate the students how to read and understand the Bible through the eyes of a devoted Christian. Deedat's self-confidence in his abilities to out-strip his Christian opponents grew and it is this that helped him to stand on his own. Although Deedat did not theologially agree with the Ahmadis or

Bahais, he was inspired by the way they presented their ideas in the public arena and these he adapted for his audiences whenever the need arose.

He therefore adopted a logical and rational approach when he disputed with Christian evangelists about whether the Bible is the word of God. And since some of his Christian contestants adopted an egotistical exclusivist approach towards Islam and other religious traditions, Deedat was among a few Muslim missionaries who expressed the view that in such instances one has to adopt a forceful (polemicist) approach instead of a weak one (see McDowel & Gilchrist 1983; Zebri 1997: 33-34; Raciuz 2004: 135; Haron 2006: 14-16; Marshall 2006: 93-94; Estes 2015). Related to this point we wish to briefly relate Zakir Naik's (b.1965) interaction with Deedat. Naik, who is the founder of the Indian based Islamic Research Foundation and the 2015 King Faisal Laureate, was still practicing medicine when he attended one of Deedat's lectures; at the end of it he ventured to ask Deedat the reason for adopting an over-confident and arrogant approach on the public stage towards his opponents. Deedat paternalistically and instinctively responded to Naik saying: 'My son, there are two ways of fighting the battle, either with holy water or with fire and I have chosen to fight with fire. If you can fight with holy water you are most welcome, but I have chosen with fire' (Vahed 2013: 194).

When pondering over this reply as Naik obviously did, one should take into account that Deedat lived and worked within a predominantly western oriented Christian society; a South African society that struggled to balance between their Christian beliefs/outlook and their secular western lifestyle. In general the South African society, which was largely represented by a white racist mentality that allied itself with European theological thought, looked askance at African cultures and suspiciously at Eastern traditions; hence the negative notions towards African Religious Tradition, Hinduism and Islam. Throughout the apartheid era and even before South Africa's white racist government steadfastly held the defective opinion that Islam was 'a false religion'; it was a view that was publicly articulated during 1986 by the leadership of the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK); a Church that fully supported the apartheid regime's inhumane policies. The Muslims, as expected, did not quietly sit back to allow the issue to pass by; when they fervently – and rightly so - responded to this accusation, they were extraordinarily given support by outspoken anti-apartheid Christian clerics such as Dr. Rev Allan Boesak (b.1945) (Haron 2006: 74-78).

Now since Islam was under attack theologically (and politically), Muslims such as Deedat felt that they, were justified – to employ his metaphor - to counter the aggressive missionary activities with ‘fire’ and not enter the battle by using ‘holy water’; the argument is based on the fact that when one pours ‘holy water’ over the dispute, it will not automatically die down but it will rekindle the conceited spirit of the Christian missionaries and thus restart at another point/time. For Deedat, fighting with fire implied that one will not only neutralize one’s opponent but ultimately extinguish their fighting spirit and power (i.e. their ideas). When looking back at Deedat’s missionary work, we note that despite his hardnosed and assertive approach the passionate Christian missionaries – except for a few - did not stop in their tracks to implement a softer diplomatic cum religious pluralist approach; many dedicated Christian evangelicals continue to argue in favour of converting Muslims and those who are adherents of other religious traditions. In the light of Deedat’s marginal/significant – depending from which side one views it - success in undertaking *da’wah*, it is perhaps opportune to conclude by commenting upon his legacy.

### ***3.2 The Deedatian Legacy***

In evaluating Deedat’s legacy, we cannot completely ignore the fact that he lived in a period when the South African society was under the hegemony of a white racist minority government; a government that harboured negative thoughts and feelings towards the oppressed communities of which the Muslims were an integral part and in which they were a religious minority (Sadouni 1999). And since Islam was considered by the apartheid government a potential threat throughout this period, NGK and Anglican missionaries were granted the license to freely spread the Gospel among Muslims and others (Haron 1999). So when Deedat encountered their exclusivist theological approach south of Durban where he worked for a while in a shop near Adams College, he was of the view that the only alternative and reaction to this method that he experienced was to implement a similar one; from then on Deedat resolved to enter the battle by fighting the Christian missionaries with ‘fire’ instead of using the ‘holy water’ approach.

Some, however, argued that Deedat’s method cannot be strictly considered in line with the prophetic model; one that ‘teaches principles of

compassionate dialogue and mutual respect that should govern Muslim thinking and praxis regarding *da'wah* and, more broadly, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims' (Safi 2011: 11). Deedat, moreover, saw it differently; it was a method of coming to the aide of defenseless and vulnerable Muslims. So from Deedat's perspective his approach was in sync with the prophetic method. As far as Deedat was concerned he made the pursuance of *da'wah* his undying vocation and this meant following the footsteps of the prophet as closely as he possibly can within the circumstances he finds himself in (Safi 2011: 12). On this note, David Foster, a Christian evangelist who visited and prayed for Deedat whilst being bedridden, asked: 'whether he (i.e. Deedat) was now prepared to admit having done wrong. Deedat spelt out an emphatic reply, one letter at a time, 'I have no guilt on my head'' (Vahed 2013: 25). To the very end Deedat was certain that he followed the correct path and pursued the proper *da'wah* method for much of his life and that he had no qualms with the approach he adopted and implemented throughout this period.

Setting aside the disagreements regarding this concept, it may be argued that Deedat entered a phase (i.e. the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) when *da'wah*, according to Esack (2006: 26) was in the process of being reconstructed because of the new modern socio-political developments that everyone encountered; it was part of a post-colonial period during which Muslim territories were being contested and during which various Muslim movements emerged to respond to the socio-political changes. During this early phase *da'wah* movements came into existence to counter the Christian missionaries in and beyond the Muslim heartlands. According to Raciuc (2004: 137-138), organized Muslim *da'wah* (or mission) was spurred on and influenced by Christian mission and this was indeed the case when Deedat came onto the scene and he went on to set up with others the IPC at the end of the 1950s. The methods that were on the whole approved were not dissimilar to those of the Christian missionaries. Since the latter assumed an exclusivist approach in their mission towards Muslims and other non-Christians, it was more than likely that these religious communities (e.g. Muslims) would assume the same approach with minor modifications. When we assess Deedat's activities and his projects, we notice that the techniques and methods were slightly altered but that they were almost the same. In fact, when Deedat studied the operations of the Jehovah Witness, he was amazed at the amount of funds that they spend to advertise their religious activities

and Deedat dreamed of doing the same if and when he was able to bring in the necessary monies (Larkin 2008: 115). By the time Deedat's activities and exclusivist approach were globally acknowledged and recognized by Muslim states such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the petro-dollars began to flow into the IPC coffers (Racius 2004: 135) and this, according to Esack (2006: 28), meant that *da'wah* was driven by Arab monies. So from that moment onwards IPC did not only undergo a minor name change; it underwent a significant name change (from IPC to IPCI). Alongside this Deedat's image automatically transformed from a national *da'wah* worker into an international religious superstar (Sadouni 2007: 107-108) or what we would like to call: a transnational religious figure.

Up until decades before Deedat's religious celebrity status the definition of *da'wah* as a critical concept in traditional Muslim literature, as Esack (2006: 26) fittingly highlighted, was understood in a restricted and limited sense. In other words, it was not understood or comprehended in a broad sense discussed by Racius (2004) and Safi (2011). Deedat's interpretation was indeed a narrow one because it mainly suited his objective; from his standpoint *da'wah* (i.e. mission to others or the propagation of faith) meant going out and challenging the Christian missionaries on their own terms and their own turf. So whenever Deedat accepted an invite or extended one to someone in order to debate Christian-Muslim or any other religious doctrines, he confidently went out to a neutral territory where he could psychologically engage with his challenger the theological issues at hand (Larkin 2008: 115). Since Deedat seldom rejected a challenge, he demonstrated a courageous trait that was admired by friend and foe alike. Though Deedat was unyielding in his approach, he showed continuous respect for his adversary; a quality that Vahed (2013: 181) describes when he discusses the famous Deedat-Swaggart debate. Upon reflection Vahed (2013: 182-185) insists that it was this debate and not the King Faisal International Award that acted as a key turning point in Deedat's status as a significant Muslim personality; the debate, he avers, catapulted him onto the international scene because he took on one of the Christian West's foremost missionaries and at the end of this momentous theological event Deedat came out victorious. Deedat's triumph on this important religious circuit caused him to be viewed as a transnational religious figure; and through this public act that literally inspired thousands of young Muslims across the globe. It is indeed an act that forms part of his rich legacy that will be remembered in the years ahead.

Before these developments unfolded Deedat remained a local iconic religious figure and his organization was not only financially strapped but it was too confined in its missionary activities. Consequently, Deedat and IPC were guilty of not satisfactorily engaging in any form of serious inter-religious cooperation and dialogue; an activity that was sorely needed because the socio-political and religious landscape compared to the earlier decades had readily changed. In the light of these changes, the question that arises at this juncture is: should *da'wah* be treated as a form of 'dialogue' or regarded merely as a 'mission'? Deedat chose the latter rather than the former because Christian missionaries during his period were not there to initiate or engage in dialogue but to proselytise; they were there on a mission to save souls for Christ and thus intent on converting the 'lost' Muslim soul to become a Christian. For Deedat, this was the perpetual challenge that needed to be dealt with in a firm and uncompromising manner. Since Deedat remained stubbornly devoted to the exclusivist approach, it was unlikely that he would ever have rendered his support for inter-religious dialogue even though the 1980s was vastly different from the 1950s when he began his vocation as a Muslim missionary. In this regard when anti-apartheid religious groups such as the Kairos document signatories and the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (est.1970) (that formed part of the South African Chapter of the World Council of Religion for Peace [WCRP]) aligned themselves with the liberation movements and promoted inter-religious cooperation against the apartheid state Deedat's name did not feature among list of members in the late 1980s. The WCRP's religious pluralist approach was something 'foreign' to Deedat who was understandably still obsessed with his exclusivist approach in spite of having encountered a socially politically and religiously transformed terrain.

Now that we have pointed to some of the salient aspects that form an integral part of his legacy, we wish to close this section by listing a few more points that underscore what had been discussed in this essay: firstly, Deedat embarked on a course at a time when Muslims did not possess much material and financial resources; secondly, he pursued a vocation that no other Muslim individual was prepared to enter; thirdly, he adopted an exclusivist approach because the circumstances in which he operated demanded that he assume this position vis-à-vis the Christian missionaries (Sadouni 2007; 2013); fourthly, he demonstrated that even though he was not able to pursue his studies at Sastri College as a result of the absence of financial support that

nothing should act as an impediment when seeking knowledge; fifthly, he confirmed that reading on and beyond the topic was a critical part of his learning process and it is this that assisted him to become acquainted with various aspects of human life; sixthly, the Christian missionaries ironically encouraged him to become familiar with the Bible and the Qur'an and he, in turn, inspired an array of Muslim Bible scholars (Said 2006); seventhly, he demonstrated through his knowledge of these two sacred texts how powerful one can be in the public arena; eighthly, he displayed confidence when engaging in public disputes; ninthly, he illustrated that through these theological debates that one is able to have a form of Christian-Muslim dialogue that was at variance with what is understood within religious pluralist circles (Haron 2006); and finally, he proved that he was able to move far beyond his existential situation where he constantly faced problems with his co-religionists and that he was greatly appreciated by an international Muslim audience that encountered similar experiences on a global scale with the hordes of (Pentecostal) Christian missionaries (Larkin 2008).

In the afore-mentioned lines it was highlighted that whilst one may not necessarily agree with the methods, techniques and approaches that Deedat accepted and applied over the years that he acted as a Muslim missionary, one may posit the view that he developed his debating skills during trying times and that he laid a firm foundation from which others such as Zakir Naik - including those who vehemently disagreed with his methods of debating - benefitted and learnt. Deedat's approach might have been loathed by some but one cannot deny that he proved that he could counter his Christian challengers with their own tools and by their own rules; an act that has so far not been emulated within the South African Muslim circles.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Though part of this essay's objective was to review the book that was written by Goolam Vahed, we found it difficult to restrict ourselves to simply comment on the text's merits and demerits. As a result of Vahed stimulating and very readable text – one that should be read by not only by those interested in Missiology or Christian-Muslim relations but in the humanities and social sciences in general, it caused us to look at Deedat beyond the text



and within a broader context rather than a confined South African one because Deedat has since become, despite his personal shortcomings, a highly respected theologically influential transnational religious figure. It may be argued that for some scholars he remains a fascinating subject and his works will be kept alive through scholarly studies; one recent one that comes to mind is Gabriel Reynolds' unpublished International Quranic Studies Association conference paper titled *Readings of the Bible with Ahmad Deedat* (2013).

The essay, which was thus divided into two major sections, first described and discussed the contents and in the second veered off by (a) assessing those events and personalities that deeply impacted upon Deedat's life and ideas; and (b) evaluating, on the one hand, Deedat's approach towards Christian mission and, on the other, Deedat's legacy as a Muslim *da'wah* worker. The idea for inserting and elaborating upon the second section was to show to what extent he stood apart from others who performed similar work in (and beyond) the South African Muslim community.

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