

Part 1. Renaissance in the Near and Middle East

Chapter 72: Renaissance in Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon

[Muhammad Bin Abd Al-Wahhab and His Movement](#)

[A](#)

The continuity of efforts for revival amongst the Muslims is a subject of profound interest. During the very early years of the period of decadence two leaders of thought rose to combat the forces of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*) and tried their best to bring back the Muslims to the fountainhead of Islam. The first of these was Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab of Arabia whose spiritual influence spread far and wide in the Islamic world, particularly in the Arab countries: Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

[B](#)

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born about 1111/1700 in the heart of the Arabian Desert, the region known as Najd. This puritan reformer kindled a fire that soon spread to the remotest corners of the Muslim world, purging it of its sloth and reviving the fervour of the olden days. As a religious reformer, as a standard-bearer of freedom, as an orator, he not only won and retained undisputed eminence but also left in all these fields a deep and lasting imprint of his pioneering individuality.

There was none amongst his con-temporaries in Arabia who could lash and sooth, plead and urge, preach and move from pulpit and platform with the same fire and eloquence as he had perennially at his command.

The Shaikh studied at Madinah, travelled as far as Persia, and ultimately settled in his native place in the Najd. Amongst his teachers Shaikh Abd Allah bin Ibrahim Najdi, Shaikh Muhammad Hayat Sindhi, and Shaikh Muhammad Majmui are well known.

The Shaikh displayed from his childhood a studious and religious bent of mind and thus acquired a reputation for his learning and piety even at the threshold of his life. During his period of study he developed intense love for the Quran and the Sunnah, and decided that he should strain every nerve to bring his people back to the pristine glory of Islam.

For the attainment of this objective he wandered up and down Arabia and raised the slogan “Back to Islam.” His utterances, characterized by directness and candour brought fresh life and courage wherever he went and as such served a much-needed tonic to the people disgusted with sham and cant. He persuaded them to abandon all such practices as were antagonistic to the spirit of Islam.

After some time it dawned upon him that mere persuasion unaided by political power might prove effective in the case of an individual, but it was difficult to bring about any radical change in a people's outlook without the backing of a political force. He, therefore, decided to rally under one banner, the different tribes of Arabia.

For the achievement of this objective he approached, through Uthman bin Hamad bin Mamar, the Amir of Uvainah. The Amir at the very outset responded enthusiastically to the call of the Shaikh, but did not keep his word.¹ The Shaikh left Uvainah and proceeded to Dariyyah where he continued his preaching despite opposition from the ignorant '*ulama*'.

In the long run, he not only succeeded in converting the people to his point of view, but also won the heart of Muhammad, the head of the great clan of Saud and the most powerful chieftain in the whole of the Najd. Thus, the moral prestige and material strength of the Shaikh were considerably enhanced.

“Gradually the desert Arabs were wedded into politico-religious unity like that effected by the Prophet of Islam. Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab was, in truth, a faithful counterpart of the first two Caliphs, abu Bakr and Umar. When he died in 1201/1787, his disciple Saud proved a worthy successor. The new Wahhabi State was a close counterpart of the Meccan Caliphate.”²

A great change was brought about in the political and administrative set-up of the country. “Though possessing great military power, Saud always considered himself responsible to public opinion and never encroached upon the legitimate freedom of his subjects. His government, though stern, was able and just. The Wahhabi judges were competent and honest. Robbery became almost unknown, so well was the public peace maintained.”³

Having consolidated the Najd politically, Saud was ready to undertake the greater task of purifying Islam from all those un-Islamic influences that had been slowly creeping into it for the last few centuries. A campaign was thus set on foot to eradicate from the society all those superstitious practices that had

been eating into the vitals of the faith. An honest attempt was made to return to pure Islam.

All later accretions—monstrous, many-sided edifices of scholastic interpretations of the medieval theologians, and ceremonial or mystical innovations like saint-worship—in short, all those practices which have no sanction from Islam were condemned and the masses were exhorted to abandon them. The austere monotheism of the Prophet was preached in all its uncompromising simplicity and the Quran and the Sunnah were taken to be the sole guide for human action. The doctrinal simplification was accompanied by a most rigid code of morals.

Many critics of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab condemn this movement as retrogressive. But this is an absolutely baseless charge. Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab stood up with determination to bring his people back to true Islam. He, therefore, tried to purge Muslim life of all innovations and declared a “holy war” against them.

The feeling that he voiced was rather one of rationalistic dissatisfaction with the outworn palimpsest of cults than of the destruction of everything that he found before him. He wanted to separate grain from chaff and this work he performed with admirable courage and alertness of mind. He tried to demolish all those things that he found alien to the spirit of Islam and weeded out all those practices from Muslim society that he considered antagonistic to the spirit of the faith.

He rightly believed that a certain amount of change is always essential in a living civilization, but the change should be organic, that is to say, it should come from within that civilization in response to the genuine needs of the society which claims to own it and should not be a mere imitation of another civilization. Imitation of another civilization implies the surrender of all creative powers that are essential for the life of a progressive society. The Shaikh was, therefore, very cautious about his decisions. He persuaded the people to discard only those things that he found un-Islamic, while he readily accepted the ideas and practices that could be fitted into the structure of Islam.

The Wahhabi movement is, therefore, not essentially retrograde and conservative in its nature. It is progressive in the sense that it not only awakened the Arabs to the most urgent need of heart-searching and broke the complacency to which they had been accustomed for years, but also gave the reformers a definite line of action.

It taught them that for the revival of Islam it was necessary to give up reliance on second-hand formulas and sterile conventions, and that it was equally essential to come back to the realities of Islam and build only on the bases of these solid rocks new modes of thought and action. An attempt to slip away from the cultural forms and aims connected with Islam, and to accept aims of non-Islamic (often anti-Islamic) social organizations, would not spell regeneration but degeneration for Islamic culture.

In order to set his movement on the right lines and to perpetuate the influence of his teaching on future generations, the Shaikh made an elaborate programme of fostering education amongst the masses. As a result of his efforts every oasis was given its own *maktab*, and teachers who could both teach and

preach were sent to the Bedouin tribes.

The disciples of the Shaikh pursued learning with great ardour. Ibn Bashr says that so many were the students attracted to his classes that if somebody were to attempt to give their number nobody would believe him. All his sons, Husain, Abd Allah, Ali, and Ibrahim, had their own *maktabs* in their houses where students from distant places came to master Islamic learning. Their expenses were borne by the Bait al-Maal.⁴

Although the Shaikh was a follower of the Hanbalite school of *Fiqh*, yet he did not follow it rigidly. In his book *Hadyat al-Saniyyah*, he makes a frank confession of this. "Imam ibn Qayyim and his illustrious teacher ibn Taimiyyah," observes he, "were both righteous leaders according to the Sunni school of thought and their writings are dear to my heart, but I do not follow them rigidly in all matters."

As a matter of fact, the puritan beginnings of Islamic revival were combined with an elaborate programme of mass education and a reaction against *taqlid* (blind following) broadened along more constructive lines. The teachings of Mutazilism that had long faded away were revived and the liberal-minded reformers were delighted to find such striking confirmation of their ideas, both in the writings of the Mutazilite doctors and in the sacred texts themselves.

The principle that reason and not blind prescription was to be the test of truth opened the door to the possibility of reforms that they had most at heart.⁵ They embarked on a process of introspection and self-examination.

These are the main characteristics of the Islamic revival in Arabia as everywhere in the world.

The leaders of thought began to sift the whole of Islamic literature handed down to them by their ancestors and with admirable skill purified Islam of all those un-Islamic practices which had nothing to do with the teachings of Islam but had unfortunately become parts of Islamic culture. Thus, as a result of the efforts of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab a critical attitude was developed amongst Muslim scholars; they would not accept anything that came down from the past without testing its validity on the basis of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Thus, the first change that was visible in society was an urge for stocktaking of *Fiqh*. It was felt that the pristine simplicity and reasonableness of the *Shariah* had almost been buried in a forest of subjective deductions propounded by scholars several years ago. These deductions, however valuable, could not be held final for all times.

New problems had cropped up with the march of time, and these demanded new solutions in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah. Thus, with the development of the critical attitude, which in itself was the direct result of Islamic revival, the gates of *ijtihad* sealed for six hundred years were opened again. The whole of Muslim society was awakened to the need of a fresh approach towards *Fiqh*.

There was a general feeling of unrest towards everything that did not have the sanction of the Quran and the Sunnah, and the educated people began to feel that no finality and definiteness could be legitimately attributed to any interpretation or conclusion regarding any problem not justified by the *nass* of either of the two sources. In other words, they began to believe that the *ijtihad* of even the greatest Muslim scholar could not be binding on them.

It was the logical consequence of this critical attitude that the commentators of Hadith like Hafiz ibn Hajar, Dar Qutni, Imam Nawawi, Imam Dhahabi, Imam Shaukani became popular with the people. Their writings attracted the attention of scholars and they began to devote themselves to the study of the Quran and the Sunnah. The emphasis was, thus, shifted from *Fiqh* and logic to the study of the two main sources of Islamic teachings.

This change can also be observed in the attitude of Muslim scholars towards social philosophers. Al-Farabi (d. 339/950) who had derived his theory of the State from abstract philosophical speculation was relegated to the background and scholars began to be attracted by the writings of ibn Khaldun who based his theory of State on demonstrable facts and laid the foundations of a scientific theory of history.

It was the study of ibn Khaldun's writings that paved the way for pan-Islamism. He had argued that since the power of the Quraish had gone, there was no other alternative but to accept the most powerful man in the country as Imam. "Thus Ibn Khaldun," observes Iqbal, "realizing that hard logic of the facts, suggests a view which may be regarded as the first dim vision of an international Islam fairly in sight today."⁶

Such is the attitude of the modern Arab inspired as he is by the realities of experience, and not by the scholastic reasoning of jurists who lived and thought under different conditions.

The dazzling achievements of the West in the realm of science and the material benefits which the Western people have derived from them have also moved the people of Arabia freely to participate in them. They are trying to achieve this end by adjusting their own pattern of life to that of the West and adopting some of its outer forms.

But they are also anxiously jealous to guard their cherished customs and values inherent in their own cultural pattern. Although there are visible changes in their political and social structures, yet the speed of change is extremely slow at the present time. The spread of the liberal principles and the Western means of progress go side by side with conservative forces. It can be said that of all the Muslim countries Arabia is the greatest country that is anchored in the traditional pattern of her past.

C

Role of the Arab Academy of Damascus in Syria

In 1336/1918, Muhammad Kurd Ali (1293/1876–1372/1953), a devoted scholar, founded the Arab

Academy in Damascus (*al-Majma al-Ilm al-Arabi*). The Academy was endowed by King Faisal. It assumed charge of al-Zahiriyyah Library with 3,000 works, for the most part manuscripts. The Academy consisted of:

(a) A literary linguistic committee (*lajnah lughawiyah*) in charge of investigating linguistic problems, literature, and the ways and means of improving the Arabic language in order to make it an effective instrument for the expression of modern thought

(b) A scientific committee (*lajnah ilmiyyah fanniyyah*) in charge of enriching the language and broadening its scope for the expression of the various branches of science.⁷

In 1339/1921, the Academy started the publication of the journal *Majallah al-Majma al-Ilm al-Arabi*, which welcomed contributions from Eastern and Western writers. The most important task that the Academy undertook at the outset was to establish a linguistic academy and initiate the compilation of an up-to-date dictionary after the pattern of the La Rousse or the Oxford dictionary.

It continued its work with great vigour and zeal, surmounting various obstacles, and has achieved a good deal of success in the problems of language. The Syrian Government has always relied on the Academy for coining equivalents to foreign technical terms. Agricultural, medical, philosophical, and scientific terms have been coined, and published in the above journal.⁸

American University of Beirut

The nationalist movement of the Arabs received its strongest impulse from the literary revivalism which was itself the result of so many forces. The impact of the French and the Americans enthused the younger generation of the Arab lands to take stock of their literary treasures and enrich them so as to suit modern conditions.

“The Presbyterian College in Beirut (established in 1283/1866) which eventually became the American University was the first modern educational centre in the Near East where young Arabs could gain a scholarly knowledge of their great cultural and national past.⁹

Thus, out of these many and variegated threads: the spread of Western ideas, the rediscovery and publication of the Arab classics by the Orientalists, the introduction of the printing press, and the establishment of newspapers and periodicals, was woven the rainbow-colored web of literary revivalism in Arab lands.

This movement implied a revolution against the artificial poetic diction of the twelfth/eighteenth century. In the literary field, the artist began to strengthen and reassert his individuality. It was thought that there was no artistic tradition to which he was forced to submit except one of his own choosing. All the canons of art, established by the generations of predecessors, existed only to guide him, not to enslave him or impose a check upon his genius. This implied an interest in the artist's own self and in the natural

emotional environment in which he had his being.

At the same time another group, similar to the Beirut group in many ways, was being created in Cairo by means of schools, educational missions, and translations initiated or encouraged by Muhammad Ali and his successors. This group differed from the former in its greater concern with the question of Islam and modern civilization, and its greater caution in accepting ideas and innovations from Europe. These two groups, and similar but less important groups in other towns, laid the foundations of a new Arabic literature. [10](#)

As a result of the efforts of these groups, the scope of Arabic language has been broadened. Western ideas have been popularized through translations and new literary forms; the poetic drama, the novel, the romantic autobiography, have been introduced. At the same time old literature is also being revived. The Arab children are now asked to memorize al-Mutanabbi. The books of ibn Rushd and ibn Sina are again becoming popular in colleges, and ideas put forward by ibn Khaldun and al-Fakhri on the problems of culture and State are being popularized.

The speeches of Tariq ibn Ziyad and other generals of Arabia are repeated on the platform in order to infuse the spirit of nationalism amongst the younger generation. The recent celebrations of the millenaries of the great figures of the past indicate the zeal for revivalism. The glorious past of the Arabs is used as a stimulus for the present revival, and the achievements of the present are utilized to promote future development.

As a consequence there have arisen on the horizon of Arab lands some of the best brains, for example, the religious thinker Muhammad Abduh, the social reformer Qasim Amin, the essayists Muhammad Husain Haikal and al-Manfaluti, the poets Ahmad Shauqi and Hafiz Ibrahim, the playwright and novelist Taufiq al-Hakim, and the scholar Taha Husain.

All these are Egyptian names. But there have also been very important Syrian and Lebanese writers, many of whom worked for most of their life in Egypt, while others remained in their own country. They include the scholars and poets of Bustani and Yaziji families; the religious reformer Rashid Rida, the learned disciple of Muhammad Abduh; the leaders of Arabic journalism, Shidiaq, Nimr, Sarruf, Zaidan, and Taqla; the poet Khalil Matran; the best of women writers in Arabic, May Ziadah; the traveller Amin Raihani; and the mystic Khalil Jibran. [11](#)

Since the rapid progress of the literary movement during the past few years one has been impressed by the practical results of the efforts of Arab writers in adapting the classical Arabic language to the conditions of modern life, creating scientific terminology, and producing scientific works in Arabic, e.g., the various lexica of technical terms published by modern scholars, like Muhammad Sharaf, Ahmad Isa Bey, Maluf Pasha, Mazhar Said, and the scientific works of Yaqub Sarruf, Fuad Sarruf, al-Ghamrawaih, Musharrafah, etc. [12](#)

Role of the Arab League in Unifying the Arab World

The most recent attempt to consolidate the Arab world and give its endeavour concentration and direction was that of the Arab League. It was on March 22, 1945, that seven independent Arab States signed the pact of the Arab League.

“Unity and independence had from the first been the double aim of the Arab national movement. The two are inseparable in the mind of the Arab nationalist. Developments at first took another course when, after World War I, Arabia was split up into a number of States. But the farther the national idea spread among the peoples of these States, the stronger became their effort for unity. Arab nationalism never accepted the fact of partition. It was inevitable that within the independent Arab countries special interests of dynastic, economic, or of some other nature should develop and gain strength—interests with which the public movement for unity has to reckon.”¹³

Regional particularism and dynastic jealousies were indeed there. But despite these, there was a general desire amongst the Arabs to form a union of their countries. It was in response to this general need that Egypt, Libya, the Sudan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the Yemen joined their hands together. The formation of the League was then considered to be a major and positive step towards the fulfilment of Arab hopes and aspirations.¹⁴

In many respects the League was one of the most eloquent expressions of the spirit of pan-Arabism. It was acclaimed a good beginning, even though it was established on shaky foundations, and weakened by the half-hearted attitude and mental reservations of some of its members.

The role of the Arab League was further enhanced by the concerted participation of the Arab States in the United Nations as a “Political Block” and by their express and written pledges to defend Palestine at all cost. Palestine soon proved to be an acid test for the Arab States, the result of which was disheartening to all concerned. The defeat in Palestine not only meant the loss of a good part of Palestine, but was also the greatest blow within living memory to Arab unity, Arab pride, and Arab life.

This created a feeling of general dissatisfaction amongst the Arabs about the leadership of the League. Moreover, with the failure of Arab League on the Palestine question, the particularizing aims and interests of its member States began to counteract its unifying trends and tendencies. Even attempts at co-ordination of their efforts in the economic and cultural spheres, in spite of some slight success, were overpowered by the stronger centrifugal forces of their political aspirations.

The Arab League had united the Arabs in their fight against Western domination; it had been called into play whenever a constellation of power politics threatened some vital interests of all or some of the Arab States. But negative attitudes and impulses proved uncreative, even destructive. Significantly, the Arab League was declared all but dead by the Arabs themselves in March 1956, when its member States again rallied to an Arab cause in the Suez crisis—once more against a threat from without, not for a constructive purpose within.

The recent unification of Egypt and Syria and the federation between Iraq and Jordan in 1377/1958 were also defensive reactions against political pressures. Neither their effect on the movement towards Arab unity, be it favourable or adverse, nor their impact on the development of Islam can as yet be assessed. [15](#)

What does the future hold for the Arab movement? Its future depends on the dissemination on a large scale of some factors of unity. The factors of language, history, geography, similarity of problems, the zeal for the maintenance of independence and sovereignty, quest for a respectable place among the comity of nations, common interests and aspirations are solid bases for Arab co-operation, if not for Arab unity.

There have been many failings on the part of the Arab League. But, in spite of all inadequacies, in spite of all disappointments and frustrated hopes due to indecision and indiscipline, Arab nationalism is entitled to recognition for its stimulation of a general intellectual and political renaissance. Its work is not yet complete; the last word has not been spoken about the new Arab world, because the Arab peoples and States are still in the midst of a transition. [16](#)

D

1. In general all movements mentioned in the preceding sections show a deep influence of Western liberalism, as a result of which there has been a continuous attempt to interpret Islam “freely.”
2. In general, again all these movements share a common feature not purely religious. Because of the dual nature of Islam as a religion and State, and because of the pressure to which Muslim society has been subjected in almost every field, these movements resent and resist Western penetration and influence, with methods almost modern.
3. Impressive strides have been taken throughout the Arab world towards Muslim revival. “The rapid multiplication of newspapers, periodicals, books and pamphlets, the great increase in the number of literary societies and intellectual organizations along modern lines, the exchange of academic visits of professors and students, as well as of scientific research missions, are phenomena that are witnessed today in Arab countries.

The appointment of Egyptian teachers and experts in educational centres of Iraq, Arabia, the Yemen; the exchange of students; the organization of universities and the increase of new colleges; the dissemination of the wireless and its utilization for the propagation of cultural activities; the rising and surging tide of new thought; the flourishing movement of translation of foreign literature, all indicate a noble intellectual awakening.” [17](#)

4. Intellectual renaissance in these countries is going hand in hand with national awakening and interest in language. Thus, for more than fifty years, Arab intellectuals have viewed intellectual revival and national consciousness from the standpoint of language and historical traditions. As a result, there is an

agreement amounting to consensus that Arabic is not only the faithful register of Arab cultural achievements, but the pillar of politico-intellectual revival throughout the length and breadth of the Arab world. This awareness of the importance of language has been practically universal in most Arab countries.

Father Kirmili (d. 1366/1947) of Iraq, who had a passion for Arabic from his early youth, devoted most of his energy to linguistic problems. He, on the strength of very strong arguments, proved that Arabic has a unique gift of adaptability and adjustment to new situations; it has the power to assimilate new words and phrases and coin its own when the need arises. But he at the same time warned the Arabic-speaking world against the danger of the unlimited use of foreign words since this would lead to the abandonment of Arabism and the loss of nationalism.

Salim al-Jundi (1297/1880–1374/1955), while discussing the importance of Arabic language, said, “Language is the model that represents the long-standing nobility of a community. It is the guide that points to the extent of its civilization and progress.”¹⁸

Similarly, Munir al-Ajlani of Iraq in one of his addresses remarks that Arabic is the earth; in it we have eternal poetry, eternal prose, and the Quran. It is like the flag behind which soldiers (the Arabs) march.

To the great majority of Arab writers on nationalism, Arabic is the lifeblood and soul of the community, it is the strongest bond of unity; the mainstay and the strongest pillar of Arab nationalism, the main deterrent against internal and external dividing forces, the instrument of thought and emotions, and a link between the past and the present. It is the faithful guardian of Arab cultural heritage, the register of the Arabs' deeds and accomplishments, and of their triumphs and pitfalls, and is the most important factor in their unity.¹⁹

As a matter of fact, the Arabic language has marvellously developed in the hands of modern Arab writers. It has been proved that this flexible and expressively powerful language is capable of depicting every manifestation of modern life without recourse to loanwords.

5. Industrialization is advancing in these countries at a notable speed and the standard of living of the people is slowly and steadily rising. The old prejudices against technical knowledge and scientific inventions are gradually withering away. The industrialization of the Arab countries has led to the transformation of labour that is being organized along modern lines; this is likely to have its effect in the whole Arab East, and even beyond. In the field of agriculture too “evolution in the Near East is witnessing a new state of affairs, by the gradual transformation from nomadism into sedentarism.”

In this respect, the improvement and multiplication of means of communication in their modern form have made a large contribution. The major and pressing problems of combating illiteracy and infant mortality, improving sanitation and applying the principles of preventive medicine, and educating women are being given serious attention.

6. Another feature of this movement is that the effervescent young men and the enlightened women are playing an important part everywhere. As a consequence of internal evolution in the realm of family life, the Oriental youth has become, within a remarkably short time, the hope of the old generation which has neither the possibilities of organizing a State, nor the scientific and administrative knowledge necessary for the comprehension and conduct of modern political movements.²⁰

7. There is going on everywhere a movement for the reconstruction of Islamic philosophy and theology to satisfy the reflective and inquisitive minds of those trained in the philosophical traditions of Plato and Aristotle. Thus, an Islamic system of thought is being created which can adequately meet the intellectual doubts to which the modern world is prone.

The leaders of Islamic renaissance have fully realized the need of an affirmation of Islam against the onslaught of modern scepticism that has come in the wake of modern science. This is how the door of *ijtihad*, sealed for centuries, has been re-opened. In their efforts to harmonize the scientific and social discoveries of the modern age with the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah, they sometimes make a departure even from the fundamentals of Islam. Such a trend is rightly considered dangerous by the *ulama* and the masses.

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- [15.](#) I. Lichtenstandter, *Islam and the Modern Age*, Vision Press, London, p. 167.
- [16.](#) F. W. Fernau, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
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- [19.](#) See al-Husri, "Wataniyyah," *Wahdat al-Ummah*.
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Chapter 73: Renaissance in North Africa: The Sanusiyyah Movement

A: Rise of the Sanusiyyah Order

The rise of the Sanusiyyah Order is closely bound up with that of other revivalist movements in Islam during the thirteenth/nineteenth century. For this reason it is not possible nor indeed advisable to discuss the rise and impact of this Order without first touching upon the nature of the events preceding and accompanying it; consideration must also be given to the forces which played a considerable role in preparing the way for shaping and directing the trend of thought and action of the Sanusiyyah movement.

The second half of the twelfth/eighteenth century was a period of dormancy in the history of modern Islam, and the beginning of the thirteenth/nineteenth century proved to be a grave time for the Muslim peoples. The Ottoman Empire, once an edifice of glory and achievement, began to weaken both politically and spiritually. The world of Islam, to which the Ottomans had for centuries stood as guardians and to which they had claimed the right of primacy, started to disintegrate.

Soon, therefore, the call for political and spiritual reforms began to be heard; attempts were now being actively made to resuscitate the Empire and to turn it once more into a vigorous and superior institution along the lines of the advancing European nations.

In the spiritual field the need was particularly felt for a rejuvenation of the Islamic faith, the source of inspiration and the very backbone of the Islamo–Arab Empire from the first/seventh to the seventh/thirteenth century. By the beginning of the twelfth/eighteenth century Islam had been practically forgotten, and a great many alien ideas and practices had crept into it. The original purity of the doctrine of Islam was to be found nowhere; abuse of its rites was increasing day by day.

The feeling that reform was necessary was, thus, a natural phenomenon of the time. And when the Ottoman Sultan, who was also the Caliph of Islam and, therefore, the *de facto* ruler of the three holy cities of Islam, could no longer command the confidence and allegiance of the Muslims and demonstrate his willingness and ability to restore to Islam its purity and its vigour, his position as protector and defender of the faith weakened. Opposition to his authority began to rear its head.

Besides this internal strain in the Ottoman Empire itself, there was the external threat, both political and economic. By the turn of the thirteenth/ nineteenth century the leading European powers had started coveting the lucrative territories of the Ottoman Empire both in Asia and in Africa. Accordingly, it was these two motive forces combined; the desire to ameliorate the condition of the Muslims and the determination to resist foreign danger, which led Muslim thinkers and leaders at that time to rise and call for reforms in the Muslim world, and later to make plans for overcoming the obstacles in the way of an Islamic renaissance.

It was against this background that the Sanusiyyah Order was founded and began to grow. Its rise was indeed a reaction to both the spiritual disintegration of and the external political threat to the very existence of Islam. Its aim was three fold: first, to work for the restoration of the original purity of Islam and the advancement of Islamic society; secondly, to bring about the solidarity and unity of the Muslim countries and, thus, revive the “community of Islam”; and, thirdly, to combat the growing encroachments of European imperialism upon the Muslim homeland.

The founder of the Sanusiyyah Order, Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al Sanusi (known as the Grand Sanusi), was born in 1202/1787¹ in the village of al–Wasita, near Mustaghanem, in Algeria. Politically, socially, and economically, this was a time of great instability and discontent in Algeria. The Ottoman governors, the *beys*, as they were called, had misruled the country and inflicted so many hardships on the people that resentment had reached a high degree, and the very authority of the Sultan had become exceedingly unpopular in the country.

By the time Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali reached his twentieth year and was able to think rationally and to analyse the state of affairs into which the Algerians had drifted, he became exceedingly bitter about the disintegration of Algerian society as well as about the oppressive rule of the Ottoman governors.

Indeed, in his earlier years, while still receiving instruction at the hands of Muslim Shaikhs in Algeria, he showed a keen interest in the welfare of the Algerian Muslims as well as enthusiasm for the unity of Muslim territories all over the world. From the trade caravans that used to pass frequently through Algeria, he used to hear about the backwardness of Muslims in other Muslim lands.

Once he told his father, expressing his feelings about the debacle of Muslims at the time, “[the Muslims] are vanquished everywhere; [Muslim] territories and policies are being abandoned by the Muslims constantly and with the speed of lightning, and Islam is, thus, in a state of fearful decline. This is [indeed] what I am thinking of, O father!”²

The Grand Sanusi received his early education from a number of Shaikhs in Algeria, at Mustaghanem and later at Mazun. His instructors included abu Talib al-Mazuni, abu al-Mahl, ibn al-Qanduz al-Mustaghanemi, abu Ras al-Muaskari, ibn Ajibah, and Muhammad bin Abd al-Qadir abu Ruwainah. Under these Shaikhs he studied the Quran, the Hadith, and Muslim jurisprudence in general.

Then he moved to Fez, where for eight years he studied in its grand mosque school, generally known as *Jami al-Qurawiyyin*, to which innumerable students of Muslim theology used to come from all parts of North Africa. There he studied under a number of learned Shaikhs, including Hammud bin al-Hajj, Sidi al-Tayyib al-Kirani, Sidi Muhammad bin Amir al-Miwani, Sidi abu Bakr al-Idrisi, and Sidi al-Arabi bin Abmad al-Dirqawi.³

But he did not seem to have been happy in Fez. This was not only because of the pathetic state of morals and the lack of security and stability in the place, but also on account of the discouraging attitude which seems to have been taken by the authorities towards his teachings.⁴

Accordingly, while still in his early thirties, he left Fez for Egypt. There he studied under Shaikhs al-Mili al-Tunisiyy, Thuailib, al-Sawi, al-Attar, al-Quwaisini, and al-Najjar. From there he went to the Hijaz, where he studied under Shaikhs Sulaiman al-Ajami, abu Hafs bin Abd al-Karim al-Attar, and Imam abu al-Abbas Abmad bin Abd Allah bin Idris.

While studying under all these Shaikhs, Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali seems to have fallen under the influence of their Sufi teachings, particularly those of the Tijaniyyah Order in Morocco. Later, however, he became a member of other Sufi Orders, including the Shadhiliyyah, Nasiriyyah and Qadiriyyah. But he does not seem to have been wholeheartedly in favour of their teachings.⁵

His purpose in joining them appears, as we shall see later, to be to make himself acquainted with their rites and teachings and to choose the best from every order so as to be able later to combine them in a new Order which would, thus, be “the crown of Sufi thought and practice.”⁶

In pursuing his studies in Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, Sayyid Muhammad had ample opportunity to examine the state of affairs into which the Muslims had drifted, particularly the state of decadence prevailing in North Africa at the time. Comparison between the glorious past of the Muslims and their

condition in his time seems to have occupied his mind greatly, and the thought that the Muslims were in a state of material and spiritual degeneracy haunted him constantly.⁷

In trying to discover the cause of this backwardness and find the remedy for it, he came to the conclusion that only by the restoration of the original purity of Islam and the unity of the Muslims the world over, could the future of Islam be made secure. This he now made the mission of his life and the object of all his efforts and preaching.

And, in order to obtain further spiritual strength, he decided to pay a visit to the Hijaz, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the original springboard of the Muslims in the establishment of their empire in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries. The ostensible reason for his journey was to perform the pilgrimage, but his actual motive was much more than that, namely, to invigorate his yearning spirit by the additional spiritual stamina which he wished to obtain during his visit to the holy cities of Islam.

Moreover, there seems to have been a political reason for his departure. While teaching at Fez, he appears to have shown a critical attitude towards the Ottoman authorities there, in a manner now mild and admonitory, now severe and remonstrative; he drew their attention to their maladministration and to the sorry conditions then prevailing in Fez.

As a consequence, his presence in Morocco was considered dangerous; the authorities considered him a threat to their prestige, fearing that his religious teachings would develop into a political challenge and, thus, lead to the end of the Ottoman rule in Morocco. In order, therefore, to avoid further friction with the authorities, Sayyid Muhammad decided to leave for Laghouat, in Algeria. This place lay in a highly strategic situation for the purpose of trade caravans to and from the Sudan in addition to holding a key position in the Atlas Sahara.⁸

One of Sayyid Muhammad's main objectives in his choice of Laghouat was his desire to preach his ideas in that area and to carry on with his preaching for the reform of Islam and the unity of the Muslim world. Soon, however, he realized he could not accomplish this to the full, for he found himself shut away in the Sahara, far from all useful activity.

He, therefore, left for Gabis in Tunisia, and then went on to Tripoli, Misurata and Benghazi in Libya, as well as to Egypt and the Hijaz. It was indeed at this stage of his life that he began to exercise his influence successfully on the people of North Africa, preparing thereby the way for the founding of the Sanusiyyah Order.

He had already succeeded in converting to his viewpoint a considerable number of Algerians and other "Brethren" (*Ikhwan*). These were now his disciples, and a few of them accompanied him on his journey eastward through Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and the Hijaz, and helped him in the dissemination of his teachings.

Sayyid Muhammad's stay in Tunisia and Libya was relatively short, but even during this short period he

remained actively engaged in the preaching of his ideas. Similarly, his stay in Egypt was brief, lasting only for a few weeks. He had originally intended to study at al-Azhar University in Cairo in order to improve his education, but he was soon defeated in his plans.

The Shaikhs of al-Azhar decided to combat his influence, perhaps out of jealousy of the success of his movement, or perhaps genuinely thinking that his teachings were not in accordance with the prevailing docile attitude taken by them towards the authoritarian rule of Muhammad Ali, then Governor of Egypt. In addition, seeing that the Sayyid and his followers viewed his autocratic rule with more than suspicion, if not actual hostility, Governor Muhammad Ali decided for his part to stifle the rapid advance of the Sanusi teachings.

He is, in fact, said to have suggested to the Shaikhs of al-Azhar to oppose the very presence in Cairo of the Sayyid and his disciples and even encouraged them to do so. This hostile attitude of the Shaikhs of al-Azhar and the authorities in Egypt, coupled with the persistent desire of the Sayyid to perform the pilgrimage, soon made him leave Egypt for the Hijaz.⁹

But his studies in Egypt left a deep impression on his mind. There Muhammad Ali had succeeded in shaking the authority of the Ottoman Sultan and establishing his own rule instead. Accordingly, Egypt, although nominally a vassal State and subject to Turkish suzerainty, had in fact declared its independence of the Turkish Sultan and was beginning to emerge as an autonomous entity among the States of the world.

Already the inability of the Ottoman Empire to repulse the French invasion of his own country, Algeria, had pointed to the weakness of that Empire. To the Sayyid all this provided a concrete example of the growing decadence of the Ottoman Empire and of the actual feasibility of a rising in the face of the Sultan. It was, indeed, an incentive to him to redouble his efforts in order to end the pathetic state of affairs into which the Muslims had drifted.

And yet the Sayyid felt he was hardly ready for such a move. Although he was encouraged by the example of Muhammad Ali, he seems to have felt that the kind of political triumph of the latter over the authority of the Sultan was not the real victory he would wish for himself. He wanted political victory to be coupled with a real movement for reform and advancement.

He, thus, concluded that his aim might be better served by his own superior education, by his striving to combat the influence of sectarianism and authoritarian regimes, and by the dissemination of knowledge that would include the teaching of technical subjects to all classes of Muslims. Moreover, he advocated the popularization of sports, particularly the use of arms and horsemanship, and resolved, above all, to realize these aims without delay.¹⁰

It was with this in mind that the Sayyid set out for the Hijaz. There he stayed for six years, mostly at Makkah, where he resumed his studies and preaching. He developed close relations with many prominent Shaikhs in the Hijaz, but was particularly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad bin Idris al-Fasi, the

fourth head of the Moroccan Order of the Qadiriyyah dervishes and later the founder of the Idrisiyyah or Qadiriyyah–Idrisiyyah Order. [11](#)

In addition, through his contacts with the pilgrims, flocking in thousands to Makkah and al–Madinah every year, he made a deeper study of the condition of Muslims in other Muslim lands.

Having thus fortified his theological and other studies, acquiring in this way a much broader knowledge of the Islamic world, he began to feel he was in a position to start his own Order.

Upon the death of Sayyid Ahmad bin Idris in the Yemen (where he had gone into exile following the hostility of the Maliki Shaikhs at Makkah), Sayyid Muhammad al–Sanusi proceeded in 1253/1837 to establish a new Order, which was actually a sub–Order of the Idrisiyyah, and chose as its seat Mt. Abu Qubais, near Makkah. [12](#)

Here he made great progress, particularly among the Bedouin tribes of the Hijaz, chief among which was the Harb tribe between Makkah and al–Madinah. [13](#) This success among the Hijazi tribes aroused the jealousy of the various authorities in Makkah, and they proceeded to provoke opposition to his movement, as they had previously opposed that of Muhammad bin Abd al–Wahhab.

In this they found great support in the attitude of the *‘ulama’* and the Sharifs of Makkah and the Turkish administration. [14](#) This was apparently because the Order seems to have threatened the prestige and privileges of these authorities. Objection was also made to the manner in which the Order “lowered Sufi standards to accommodate itself to Bedouin laxity in religious matters, and that it verged on heresy.” [15](#)

The Sayyid now decided to leave the Hijaz, in the same way as he had previously been compelled to leave Egypt. But he was faced with the difficult task of choosing a new seat for his movement. First, he knew his movement had very little, if any, chance of success in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in view of the opposition to his movement by the Turkish authorities and the Sharifs and Shaikhs of Makkah. Secondly, he was bound to encounter the same opposition as he had already experienced in Egypt before his departure for the Hijaz.

Thirdly, he could not very well make his own country, Algeria, the centre of his movement, since the French had already occupied it in 1246/1830. Fourthly, such a new place had to be centrally situated in the Islamic world, a seat where the movement could flourish without at the same time attracting the attention of the ruling authorities.

In 1257/1841, he left the Hijaz, accompanied by a large number of his disciples and followers, and headed for Algeria. After a few months’ stay in Cairo, during which the Shaikhs of al–Azhar renewed their hostility to his person and movement, he continued his journey westward through Libya to Tunisia. Here he learnt of the recent French advances in Algeria, and, being fearful of their designs (he was apprehensive lest the French authorities should be planning to arrest him or in any case to crush his movement), he hurried back to Libya, [16](#) now the only place to which he could go and where he could

settle and extend his movement without arousing the jealousy and open hostility of the authorities.

In a way, therefore, his choice of Libya was rather accidental, but in any case that country seemed to meet all the conditions he had conceived of for a new centre for his Order.¹⁷ It was remote from the seat of Government in Istanbul, and was also relatively neglected. The Ottoman officials in it were few in number and were for the most part confined to the coastal towns, while the tribes were left to themselves and rarely disturbed by the authorities so long as they paid the taxes and kept the peace.¹⁸

Even the Turkish troops seldom exceeded a thousand, and the semblance of a police force was not introduced until shortly before the Italian occupation in 1329/1911.¹⁹ Moreover, the Libyan population was on the whole backward and in great need of religious orientation. Libya's human soil was, so to speak, ready for the reception of the Sayyid's teachings, a fact that no doubt made his task all the easier and thus speeded up his progress.

In 1259/1843, with the help of the Awaqir and Barasa tribes, Sayyid Muhammad al-Sanusi founded his first lodge (*zawiyah*) near Sidi Rafi on the central Cyrenaican plateau (*al-Jabal al-A khdar*).²⁰ This first lodge came to be known as the White Lodge (*al-Zawiyah al-Baida*), and it was from here that the Sayyid began to direct his teaching and propagandistic activities for the first few years after the establishment of his new seat.

In 1263/1846, however, he returned to Makkah, where he stayed for seven years, while his disciples carried on his teaching and preaching in his absence. In 1270/1853, he returned to Cyrenaica, and three years later he moved his seat to Jaghbub, about one hundred and fifty kilometres south-east of Sidi Rafi, and made it now the centre of his Order. His purpose in this was to direct his activities southward, particularly in the pagan and semi-pagan countries of the Sahara and Equatorial Africa and beyond.

He was now out of reach of the Turkish, French, and Egyptian Governments, as well as on the main pilgrimage route from North West Africa through Egypt to Makkah; at Jaghbub itself, this route bisected one of the trade routes from the coast to the Sahara and the Sudan. Jaghbub was also centrally located for the purpose of his movement, lying as it was at fairly equal distances from his lodges in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, the Western Desert of Egypt, and the Sudan.²¹

Actually, Sayyid Muhammad al-Sanusi's transfer of the seat of his Order to Jaghbub heralded a new stage in the history of the development of the Order. Whereas previously the Order had confined itself to being mainly an internal movement aiming at the rejuvenation and reform of Islam as a faith, it now began to disseminate Islamic teachings and to extend the influence of Islam.²²

Sayyid Muhammad must have been alarmed by the Christian missionary work in the Sudan, and he seems to have wanted to combat their activities. In this he was encouraged by the success that his movement had already scored in the coastal regions and the successful establishment of so many Sanusi lodges in North Africa.²³

Jaghub soon became not only a centre for the Sanusi movement, but also a seat for an Islamic university which brought under its fold a total of some three hundred learned teachers and students in a community of some one thousand Sanusis and “Brethren”.²⁴ This community included the Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans, Libyans, and others.

As time went on, the University of Jaghub, with its team of scholars, poets, theologians, and others played an important role in the revivalist movement of Islam and its expansion in Africa during the thirteenth/nineteenth century. It was at this university that the future leaders of the Sanusi Order were trained, and it was from here that Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali, his followers, and successors directed their missionary activities in Libya, the Sahara, and the Sudan.²⁵

When the Sayyid died in 1276/1859, he had already founded twenty-one lodges in Cyrenaica alone.²⁶ In addition, his Order had spread so widely in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania—and elsewhere—that the Ottoman Government was compelled to take his influence and prestige seriously into account; it, thus, wanted to win his friendship and support in order to use his prestige for improving the then deteriorating Turco-Arab relations and to quell the risings which were taking place in Tripolitania.

It is even reported that one of the Turkish governors in Tripolitania at the time (*Ashqar Pasha*) became a member of the Sanusi Order.²⁷ In accordance with this courteous attitude of the Ottoman Government towards the Sanusiyah Order, Sultan Abd al Majid I issued in 1273/1856 a *firman* exempting Sanusi properties from taxation and permitting the Order to collect a religious tithe from its followers.²⁸

The Grand Sanusi was succeeded in 1276/1859 by his elder son, Sayyid Muhammad al-Mahdi, as head of the Order,²⁹ following a short period of regency. During Sayyid al-Mahdi's tenure the Order expanded considerably with twenty-two new lodges founded in Cyrenaica, apart from those in Tripolitania and Central Africa: In fact, so influential did the Order become that not only the Turkish Government but also the leading European Powers of the time sought its friendship and support.

Sultan Abd al-Aziz (1278/1861–1293/1876) issued a *firman* confirming the privileges granted by the earlier *firman* of Sultan Abd al-Majid (1273/1856) and further recognized the right of sanctuary within the confines of the Sanusi lodges.³⁰ Yet, in spite of these flattering advances made by the Ottoman Government towards them the Sanusiyah leaders refused to take any part in Turkish political entanglements abroad.

In 1294/1877, thus, they refused to accede to the Sultan's request that they should send troops to fight for him in the Russo-Turkish war. Moreover, in 1301/1883 they denounced the rising of the Mahdi in the Sudan and refused to give him help in his movement against the British. The head of the Sanusi Order seems to have taken this attitude as a matter of principle, particularly in view of what he considered to be the “false pretensions” of the Sudanese Mahdi.³¹

In 1304/1886 the Ottoman Sultan sent General Sadiq Pasha to Jaghub with presents for Sayyid al-Mahdi (al-Sanusi). Ten years later, Rashid Pasha, Governor of Cyrenaica, dressed in civilian clothes

and unarmed, visited the Sayyid and paid him homage.[32](#)

Sanusi relations with the European Powers were on the whole conducted with great caution and circumspection. In 1289/1872, Germany unsuccessfully tried to enlist the support of Sayyid al-Mahdi and to rouse him to rebel against the French in both North Africa and French West Africa. In 1299/1881, the Sanusis remained unresponsive to Italian presents and flattery.

One year later they refused to give support to Arabi Pasha's rising in Egypt, although at the time there were some who thought that Arabi was a mere tool in the hands of the Sanusis and that he had risen in revolt under their influence.[33](#)

In 1313/1895 Sayyid al-Mahdi moved the seat of the Order to Kufra, a hitherto insignificant oasis, about one hundred and fifty kilometres south of Jaghbub. This may have been done to be out of the reach of the Turkish authorities.[34](#) It may also have been instigated a reaction to the attitude of Sultan Abd al-Hamid II who, it is alleged, arranged with the 'ulama' of al-Azhar University in Cairo to issue a *fatwa* discrediting the Order by condemning Sanusi practices which they considered to be innovations in the rules of prayer.[35](#)

Following this transfer of the seat of the Order to Kufra, the affairs of the Order continued to prosper. Economically, the Order profited greatly from customs dues as well as from directly engaging in trade. Kufra now became a relatively important commercial centre through which caravans were constantly passing.[36](#) In the political and religious fields the Order extended its influence to the then independent Sultanates in the Sahara: Kawar, Tibesti, Borku, Ennedi, Darfur, Wadai, Kanem, Chad, the Azgar, the Air, and Baghirmi. It also reached the Sudan.[37](#)

In fact, contact with some of these Sultanates had already been made by the Grand Sanusi shortly after his move to Jaghbub in 1273/1856. But it was not until Sayyid al-Mahdi's tenure that the Order began to infiltrate into the Sahara and the Sudan. This not only brought the various Sultanates in the area under Sanusi influence and led to the foundation of new lodges in their territories, but also swelled the revenues of the Order as a result of improvement in the security of the desert routes and the consequent prosperity of trade activities in the region.[38](#)

This advance of the Sanusiyyah into the Sahara and the Central Sudan brought the Order face to face with the French, and Franco-Sanusi relations henceforward became greatly strained. In 1317/1899, therefore, Sayyid al-Mahdi moved the seat of the Order from Kufra to Qiru, in Kanem, in order to organize resistance to the French, to administer the vast regions recently won by the Order, and to direct the propaganda activities of the Order in a more effective manner in the region.[39](#)

Between 1317/1899 (the date of the Anglo-French Declaration concerning disputed frontiers in the area) and 1320/1902, a number of armed clashes took place between the French garrisons and the Sanusi forces in the area, with results alternating between Sanusi victory and French ascendancy.[40](#)

With the death of Sayyid al-Mahdi at Qiru in the summer of 1320/1902, however, the Order suffered a great blow and its resistance against the French began to crumble. Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, the successor of Sayyid al-Mahdi, apprehensive of French advance and of the designs on Africa harboured by the other leading European Powers, was careful to avoid any friction with any of these powers.⁴¹

Being a well read Shaikh and scholar, he preferred the mosque and religious instruction to the sword and the field. He, thus, moved the seat of the Order back to Kufra. It was in fact because of this that the fortunes of the Order began to suffer. The political, religious, and economic progress achieved by the Order during Sayyid al-Mahdi's tenure began now to diminish. In addition, personal rivalries among members of the Sanusi family, after Sayyid al-Mahdi's death, helped to further weaken the solidarity and strength of the Order and to halt the extension of its influence.⁴² By the time the Italian invasion of Libya began in 1329/1911, the Order was already on the decline.

B: Teachings and Philosophy of the Sanussiyyah Order

It has already been stated that the main objective of the Sanusiyyah movement, when it first began to take shape, was to purify the religion of Islam from the heresies and alien beliefs and practices which had in the course of centuries crept into it. It was, thus, a puritan and reformist movement, the chief purpose of which was to restore the original purity of Islam and to guide the Muslims to a better understanding of their religion.

It continued to be an internal reformist movement until its founder, the Grand Sanusi, moved the seat of the Order in 1273/1856 to Jaghub. It was at this stage of the development of the Order that it embarked on a new course, i.e., that of preaching and extending the teachings and influence of Islam to wider regions. But even in this it did not confine itself to being a religious and missionary movement.

It soon began to be a political movement, concerning itself essentially with political matters. Its development from the purely spiritual level to the political one as well, together with the ground it covered and the problems it encountered in these two fields, must, therefore, be discussed at some length.

In its nature the Sanusiyyah Order was a strictly Sufi Order calling for puritanism and a return to the true tenets and rites of Islam. This it strove to reach through what it considered the achievement of the purity of the soul that would ultimately lead to communion with God.

The process of accomplishing this "salvation" is described by the Grand Sanusi himself in three of his nine books: *al-Salsabil al-Main fi al-Taraiq al-Arbain* (The Sweet Spring of the Forty Orders), wherein he describes seven stages through which the soul has to pass in order to become purified and united with God; *Kitab al-Masail al-Ashr, al-Musamma Bughyat al-Maqasid fi Khulasat al-Marasid* (The Book of the Ten Problems, Called the Purpose of Desires and the Summary of Intentions), in which he discusses ten of the problems which the Muslims encounter in their daily prayers), and *lqad al-Wasnan*

fi al-Amal bi al-Hadith wal-Quran (Awakening the Slumberer through Observance of the Hadith and the Quran), in which, in an effort to extol the virtue of following the Prophet's (S) sayings and practices, he deals with the various ways and means followed by the Muslim 'ulama' for understanding the Hadith.[43](#)

But the Sanusiyyah Order differed in many respects from other Sufi Orders. These other Sufi Orders believed in and encouraged meditation, liturgical recitations, and the practice of the familiar bodily exertions (particularly, the rhythmic movements of the body together with music playing, singing, dancing, drumbeating, and taking out of processions) which were supposed to enable the Sufi to rid himself of his physical self and attain spiritual union with God.

In opposition to this, the Sanusiyyah leaders declared themselves in favour of the rational approach to religion and the reform and guidance of Muslims.[44](#)

This was not only the attitude of the founder of the Sanusiyyah Order and his immediate successors, but is also that of the present leader of the Order (Sayyid Idris) who, shortly after his proclamation as the first king of independent Libya, issued orders to his followers not to resort to what he called antiquated physical practices.[45](#)

A basic feature of Sanusi philosophy is its attempt to combine and reconcile the two methods familiar to Islamic religious thought: that of the 'ulama' who adhere to the Shariah and that of the Sufis. In this he tried to follow the example of al-Ghazali. But the Grand Sannsi, in trying to follow the path of the 'ulama', admired and was greatly influenced by ibn Taimiyyah, though he differed with him in his attitude towards Sufism, for ibn Taimiyyah had evinced open hostility to all Sufi teachings and methods, while the Grand Sanusi (and his successors) showed tolerance towards these Orders.

It has already been stated that the Grand Sanusi carefully studied the teachings of a number of Sufi Orders (all of which were Sunni Orders) before he decided to establish his own, and that he made it a point to choose from each of these Orders those principles which he considered most suited for incorporation into a new Order. His book *al-Salsabil al-Main* contains an account of the chief Orders which he had studied including the Muhammadiyyah; the Siddiqiyyah, the Uwaisiyyah, the Qadiriyyah, the Rifaiyyah, the Suhrawardiyyah, the Ahmadiyyah, and the Shadhiliyyah.[46](#)

But although he studied all these Orders and was influenced by them, his own Order was not, as has been sometimes claimed, a mere conglomeration of them. On the contrary, it was a "consistent and carefully thought out way of life."[47](#) Nor is his Order a mere offshoot of the Shadhiliyyah Order.[48](#) What he in fact seems to have intended was to bring together and unite the various Islamic Orders and so, eventually, to unite all Muslims.[49](#)

In its teachings the Sanusiyyah Order did not make an *intrinsically* new contribution to Islam; it did not introduce any essentially original principles or ideas. It was only a modern revivalist movement derived from the Sunni sect, and is in fact considered to be one of the most orthodox Orders.[50](#)

It followed the Maliki school of Muslim thought which was and still is prevalent in North Africa. The Grand Sanusi placed great emphasis on the Sunnah which, together with the Quran, he regarded as the basic source of Islamic Law. Though he also attached a certain degree of importance to *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijma* (consensus of opinion) as the sources of law in Islam he considered these to be of secondary importance.⁵¹

But the most courageous stand that the Grand Sanusi took in this connection was his recognition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) as a method for understanding and developing Islam. It was in fact this doctrine which evoked the hostility of the '*ulama*' of the time in Egypt and the Hijaz and made him stand at variance with them; for many centuries before, it was considered that the door of *ijtihad* had been closed, and the '*ulama*', therefore, held that the advocacy of this method was likely to lead to innovations in Islam.⁵²

C: Achievements: An Evaluation

The success of the Sanusiyyah Order was spectacular in more ways than one. The rapid progress that it scored among the tribes of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and the Fezzan, together with the extension of its influence to other countries, particularly Tunisia, Egypt, the Hijaz, and Central Africa, has been especially conspicuous in three main fields.

In the religious field, the movement found ready acceptance wherever it went. By 1335/1916, when Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif relinquished the headship of the Order in favour of Sayyid Idris, one hundred and forty-six lodges had been founded in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, the Fezzan, Egypt, Arabia, Central Africa, and the Sudan.⁵³

The success of the movement was, at least partly, due as much to the devotion of its leaders as to the simplicity and originality of its teachings. Its original purpose, as we have noted earlier in this chapter, was to reform Islam by combating alien beliefs and practices that had been creeping into Islam throughout the centuries. This purpose, which is actually the avowed purpose of all modern Islamic revivalist movements, was all the easier to realize since it came at a time when Muslims all over the world began to feel the need for the rejuvenation and reinvigoration of their faith.

What served to help the Order in this respect was the fact that when it emerged the Muslims in the countries to which it addressed its call were in a state of abject poverty and backwardness; they were, indeed, ignorant of their religion and in dire need for some spiritual orientation, particularly when Sanusi teachings took as their basis the true and original tenets and rites of Islam. This, no doubt, made the Sanusiyyah teachings readily acceptable to these people, since it not only gave them the spiritual stamina they had needed, but also *reassurance and confidence in their own values by acknowledging and in fact reinforcing the true principles and rites of their own religion.*

On the other hand, the poverty, backwardness, and ignorance of the Muslim peoples at the time must

not be carried too far as an explanation for the rapid progress that the Sanusiyyah Order achieved. For, then, the success of the Order would (unjustifiably) be attributed rather to the naïveté of these people than to the rational appreciation on their part of the intrinsic values of its teachings.

Nor should the Sanusiyyah Order be misunderstood, as it has been by several writers and thinkers, to be a purely reactionary and fanatical movement, seeking self-gratification through a negative attitude not only towards other religions but also towards life in general. The Sanusiyyah Order is indeed a constructive movement which aims primarily at introducing a positive element into the *Ummat al-Islam* (the Islamic community) which it tried to recreate and transform into a healthy and progressive society.

The methods which it employed to realize this end were peaceful; it did not advocate violence or aggression and would not agree to incite rebellion even in territories falling under colonial regimes, unless provoked to do so by the attitude of these regimes; it professedly and openly declared that its foremost weapons were “guidance and persuasion.”⁵⁴

Considered in this light, the Sanusiyyah Order is far from deserving the accusations of extreme puritanism and fanaticism which H. Duveyrier⁵⁵ levelled against it. He asserted that the Sanusiyyah prohibition of drinking and smoking is a reflection of this fanaticism. He even went to the extreme of saying that assassinations of Europeans in North and Central Africa at that time could have been committed by none other than the Sanusi agents, and even considered that the Sanusiyyah propaganda was in fact at the root of every misfortune which befell the French interests.⁵⁶

Similarly, Professor Arnold J. Toynbee⁵⁷ has accused the Sanusiyyah of “Zealotism,” that is, “archaism evoked by foreign pressure” seeking, in self-defence when encountering Western civilization, to take refuge from the unknown into the familiar. In his opinion when it joins battle with a stranger who practises superior tactics and employs formidable new-fangled weapons, it finds itself getting the worst of the encounter, and, therefore, responds by practising its own traditional art of war with abnormally scrupulous exactitude.

These and many other similar accusations are as unfounded as they are misleading; they lack evidence to substantiate their assertions.

This constructive aspect of the Sanusiyyah Order has been manifested by Sanusi leaders and their teachings in several ways. It will suffice to mention in this connection that the Order showed a most tolerant attitude towards other reformist movements as well as towards the cult of saints which was so common and widespread throughout North Africa.⁵⁸

This tolerance may be attributed to the broadmindedness and complacent disposition of the Sanusi leaders themselves, and the high degree of learning and accomplishment they had attained. It may also be because the Sanusiyyah Order itself partook of and was influenced by many Sufi Orders that had been in existence before it came to flourish.

We have already noted that the founder of the Order himself had deliberately studied the tenets and rites of these various Orders and had chosen the best of each for incorporation into the Order that he was going to establish in his own name. In any case, as the Sanusiyyah Order was, *par excellence*, a movement calling for a return to true Islam and the actual implementation of its principles, it was inevitably natural and logical that it should show tolerance, which is one of the chief characteristics of Islam itself, not only towards other Sufi orders and cults, but also towards other religions and indeed towards humanity as a whole. Admittedly, the Sanusiyyah Order was a conservative movement, but the claim that it was reactionary and fanatical is a completely different thing.

In the political field too the Sanusiyyah Order scored considerable success. Although starting originally as a purely “religious” movement, the Order soon found itself entangled in political matters, both internal and external.

This was inevitable in view of the Grand Sanusi's keen interest in the welfare of the Muslims in general and his early anxiety about the fate of the Ottoman Empire as the protector and defender of the faith. The “political” conditions of the Muslims and their endangered situation, particularly in the face of the growing threat of European imperialism in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco, made a deep impression on the Sanusi leaders, and they, therefore, strove for the political advancement and liberation of Muslim lands.

In addition, Islam being by its very nature both a code of ethics and a way of life, not recognizing any real distinction between what are commonly known as “political” matters and purely “religious” matters, it was inevitable and indeed natural that any approach by the Sanusiyyah Order to the religious affairs of Muslims should have also touched upon their political affairs.

The attitude of the Sanusiyyah Order towards the position of the Ottoman Sultan as the Caliph of all Muslims is of great interest here and should, therefore, be noted. It has already been mentioned that the Grand Sanusi and his successors wanted to maintain cordial relations with the Ottoman Sultan, that the Ottoman Government for its part tried to cultivate friendship with them, and that it was on that basis that the Ottoman Government accorded its recognition to the Sanusiyyah Order.

What actually happened in this respect is that the Sanusi leaders were ever ready to support the Ottoman Sultan as the Caliph of all Muslims, provided that his Government did not in any way encroach upon their much-cherished autonomy. It was in fact on that basis that they also accepted the secular authority of the Sultan as the political head of the Ottoman Empire.

But it is doubtful whether they were profoundly and wholeheartedly in favour of the Turks as such. However, when the Sanusis saw that they, equally with the Turks, were being threatened by common foreign enemies, particularly France and Italy, they hastened to rally around the Sultan. This, as we shall see later in this chapter, became all the more evident when Italy proceeded to occupy Libya, thereby provoking the Sanusi leaders, together with other prominent figures in Libya, to rise on the side of the

Turks and declare a war of jihad against the Italians.

What is of particular interest at this juncture is to note how the Sanusiyyah Order developed from being a purely spiritual movement into one also political.

One important factor which helped the Sanusi leaders to score political influence in Libya was that the Order did not confine itself to purely preaching activities, but soon grew into a coherent movement with a common direction and developed into an organization of its own, identifying itself with the tribal system of the Bedouins of Libya.

The Grand Sanusi and his successors came, thus, to be regarded not only as holy men who had come to preach, in the way it had been done by others before them, but also as national leaders who exercised great political and religious influence and commanded not only the respect and affection of the tribes but also their allegiance.⁵⁹

It was actually in the economic and social fields that the Sanusiyyah Order made its greatest contribution to Libyan life, and it was this role that helped to make its impact on Libyan life durable and more conspicuous. Although the Order rallied around it the tribal people of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and the Fezzan, as well as a limited number of the townsmen of these territories, and although it educated these people in the matter of their religious duties, its effect on their life proved to be much more lasting and conspicuous than any other reformist movement which had influenced the Bedouins of Libya.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the Sanusiyyah Order won much more than a personal and local following among the Libyan populace; its founder and his successors were able to establish themselves as leaders of a national movement which has continued to affect and indeed direct the destinies of the country up to the present day. The secret of this lies, not only in the capable, devoted, and commanding personality of the Sanusi leaders themselves, not only in the social, economic, and political conditions under which the Libyans had been living before the advent of the Sanusiyyah movement and which made the teachings of the movement more readily acceptable, but also in the type of organization which the Sanusi leaders were able to give the country and which aimed at creating people who were “healthy in body and mind.”⁶⁰

It has been already noted that it was the avowed purpose of the Sanusi leaders to associate their movement with the tribes themselves. This is why the vast majority of the Sanusi lodges were founded in tribal centres and not in towns, and the distribution of the lodges also followed tribal divisions.⁶¹

The distribution of the lodges was carefully planned by the Sanusi leaders. They were designed to comprehend the principal tribal groupings, the more important lodges being built at the centres of tribal life, while most of the other lodges were placed on important caravan-routes. Professor E. E. Evans--Pritchard, while commenting on the wisdom of the Sanusi leaders for constructing their lodges on Graeco-Roman foundations in conformity with a “politico-economic plan,” remarks that “where the Greek and Romans and Turks found it convenient or essential to build villages and posts was where the

Sanusiyyah established its lodges.”[62](#)

In fact, it was the tribes themselves that established the lodges which came, thus, to be regarded as tribal institutions. This was usually done following the grant of permission by the head of the Sanusiyyah Order each time a lodge was to be established. The head of the Order would, thus, send the tribe concerned a Shaikh from among his followers at the seat of the Order. This Shaikh was called the *muqaddam* and acted as a custodian of the lodge; he was helped in the performance of his duties by another Shaikh called the *wakil* who was primarily responsible for the financial and economic affairs of the lodge.[63](#)

The lodges were, thus, administered by the principal Shaikhs, each of whom represented the head of the Order in his particular lodge. The functions of each of these Shaikhs covered the settlement of disputes between members of the tribe; leading the tribesmen in *jihad* (the holy war); looking after security matters in the area covered by the lodge; acting as intermediary between the tribe and the Turkish administration; receiving foreigners and offering them hospitality; supervising the collection of tithe; directing the cultivation of grain and care of stock; dispatching surplus revenues to the seat of the Order; acting as Imam on Fridays; and assisting in preaching and teaching.[64](#)

Every lodge, small or large, usually contained a mosque, schoolrooms, guest-rooms, living quarters for teachers and pupils, and houses for the *Ikhwan* (Brethren – those Shaikhs who accompanied the principal Shaikh of the lodge to help him run it), clients and servants and their families. Some of the lodges had small gardens, and the local cemetery was usually close to the lodge.[65](#)

The various tribal sections would donate to the lodge the lands adjoining it. Often other donations were also made, such as wells, springs, date palms, flocks, crops, and camels. The total lands of the Order amounted to 200,000 hectares in Cyrenaica alone, while the endowments of the Order totaled some 50,000 hectares.[66](#) Most of the work needed at the lodge was usually carried out by the lodge community itself, though often the tribesmen helped the Shaikh of the lodge in the cultivation of the lands.

The lands attached to the lodges belonged to the various lodges to which they were given and not to the Shaikhs of the lodges or even to the Sanusi leaders themselves. They were considered *waqf* properties, and the Shaikhs of the lodges were only the legal representatives of the properties of these lodges. In this way, the revenues of one lodge could not be used for the maintenance of another lodge.

Even the head of the Order possessed no authority to interfere directly in the administration of the estates of the lodges. Members of the Sanusi family and the teachers and administrative officials of the Order usually lived at Jaghbub and Kufra, and the lodges used to supply them regularly with gifts of various products, local or imported, such as skin, wool, grain, butter, honey, meat, rice, tea, sugar, and cloth.[67](#)

In fact, the relations between the seat of the Order and the various lodges became very strong and

regular, particularly during the tenure of Sayyid al-Mahdi. For this purpose, a postal system was established, and horses were for the most part used to carry correspondence from the seat of the Order to the various lodges and vice versa. In this way, Jaghbub was closely connected with Egypt, Tripolitania, the Fezzan, Wadai, and the rest of Cyrenaica.[68](#)

Later, however, during the life-time of Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, abuse of the affairs of the lodges became common; it became now the practice to earmark the surplus revenues of particular lodges for particular members of the Sanusi family, and these members came to be regarded as patrons of the lodges which supplied them their needs and were under their supervision.[69](#)

In addition, although, as stated above, the estates of the lodges did not belong to the head of the Order or to the Shaikhs of the lodges, the hereditary system of Shaikhdom soon became an established practice in many of the lodges. In the early days of the Order, it was the practice that once the head of the Order sent a Shaikh to found a new lodge and once that lodge was established, that particular Shaikh was transferred to another lodge.

Later on it became the practice to leave a Shaikh in charge of a lodge till his death and then nominate his successor from among his nearest relatives, with the consent of the tribe and on the advice of the Shaikhs of the neighbouring lodges. In most cases this happened following a request by the members of the tribe concerned for the appointment of the son or brother of the deceased Shaikh as director of their lodge, upon which the head of the Order sanctioned their nomination. In course of time the families of these Shaikhs came to regard themselves as having a hereditary title to their lodges and also a pre-emptive claim to their administration and to the enjoyment of their revenues.[70](#)

The importance of the Sanusi lodges in the history of Libya and, indeed, of every other country to which the Sanusiyyah order extended its influence, does not lie in the religious and missionary field only. It lies also, and in a particularly conspicuous manner, in the economic and social progress attained by the Order in these countries.

The lodges were, of course, places of worship and centres for teaching the principles and rites of Islam. They also served to extend the influence of Islam into hitherto pagan or semi-pagan lands. But the lodges were not convents paying no attention to the course of worldly events and developments, nor were they places for mystical meditation and exercises.

On the contrary, they were (in addition to being centres for religious instruction and missionary propaganda) community centres bustling with great educational, economic, and agricultural activities. The Sanusi lodges provided the countries in which they were founded with a unique educational machinery which served to instruct both tribesmen and townsmen (but more the former) in their language, history, and religion, as well as to teach them purely secular subjects, including mathematics, chemistry, agriculture, and the use of weapons.[71](#)

The Sanusi leaders are, in fact, known for insisting that their followers should work hard and avoid

accustoming themselves to a lazy and leisurely life. Agriculture and commerce, thus, progressed, and Libya in particular experienced a degree of material progress that it had not known for centuries.

Sanusi influence in Libya, as indeed in the other countries to which the Sanusiyyah Order addressed itself, was, thus, two-fold: spiritual which consisted of the religious instruction and the missionary work carried on in the various territories falling within the orbit of the Order's activities; and material consisting of the social and economic progress attained by the Sanusi lodges in these territories.

D: Decline and Recovery

By the turn of the fourteenth/twentieth century the "Sick Man of Europe" had become, as one might say, so sick that there was very little prospect of his recovery or improvement. By this time, too, the importance of the Mediterranean, for a long time the centre of political and economic interests of Europe, had doubly increased, particularly in view of the opening of the Suez Canal.

The Mediterranean now became the scene of conflict and a bone of contention among the leading Powers of Europe. Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy were keenly interested, for various motives, in the welfare of that sea. The race for the acquisition of oversea territories was now in great progress. As it happened, Italy was left more or less free to annex Libya.⁷²

By this time the Sanusis had succeeded in establishing in Libya a position almost independent of the Turkish administration, recognizing only the *de facto* authority of the Turkish Sultan, which in practice amounted to no more than a nominal acknowledgment of his already enfeebled representation in the territory.

At the same time, however, Italy was busy securing the diplomatic support of the leading powers of Europe for the occupation of Libya. Pending the arrival of the right opportunity for her to launch her offensive against Libya, she had proceeded to penetrate that country peacefully, particularly in the economic and commercial fields.

By 1326/1908, when the Young Turks came to power, Turco-Italian relations had reached a critical stage. Italian public opinion was greatly alarmed at the mistrust in Italian projects shown by the Turkish administration in Libya. The mood of the Italian official and semi-official circles was hostile, and it was becoming clearer every day that Italy was busy trying to provoke Turkey into war over the mastery of Libya.⁷³ Eventually, on September 29, 1911, the Italian Government proceeded to declare war on Turkey.

The Italians had estimated that the Arab inhabitants of Libya would take the only course open to them, namely, complete surrender and the acceptance of the Italian rule. However, as events proved, the Italians had miscalculated the feelings of the Arabs about the Italian adventure, for as soon as hostilities began, the Libyans, Cyrenaicans, Tripolitanians, and Fezzanese hastened to join the Turkish force,

rising as one man in an effort to repulse and drive out the invading gentiles.

In Cyrenaica, the resistance movement was led by Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, leader of the Sanusi Order, who was then at Kufra. Immediately on learning of the Italian invasion, Sayyid Ahmad issued a call to *jihad*. A large number of tribal chiefs and tribesmen, roused by the call, hastened to rally around the Sanusi flag. In the Fezzan, the call to jihad sent out by Sayyid Ahmad met a similarly favourable response. And in Tripolitania, steps were taken for the co-ordination of Arab resistance throughout the whole of Libya.

For some time Arab resistance against Italy's invasion continued to be tough. But Turco-Arab forces were soon compelled to retreat to the interior. Eventually, the Turks, harassed by a number of complications at home and abroad and losing hope of any victory over the Italians in Libya, agreed in October 1912 to sign a peace treaty (Treaty of Ouchy) with Italy, by which Italy acquired *de facto* control, though not sovereignty, over Libya, while the Ottoman Sultan reserved for himself a number of rights which he insisted on exercising in Libya. But shortly before signing the Treaty, the Sultan issued a *firman* granting the Libyans self-government, thereby making Libya a semi-independent State.

But the Libyan leaders, including Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi, disclaimed the Treaty of Ouchy and decided to continue the war against Italy.[74](#)

Actually, the Turks wanted to encourage Libyan resistance against the Italians, and they soon nominated Sayyid Ahmad as the leader of the new Libyan State.[75](#)

The designation of Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif as the leader of the future Libyan State meant that the unchallenged Sanusi rule in the country now received final and definite recognition on the part of the Turkish Government.

Turco-Sanusi relations remained cordial all the time. And Libyan resistance continued until 1335/1916, when a serious difference of opinion arose between Sayyid Ahmad and his cousin, Sayyid Idris al-Sanusi, over the alignments of the Sanusiyyah in the War. Sayyid Ahmad wanted to join Turkey and Germany against Italy, while Sayyid Idris, who was known for his affection for the British and who seems to have been impressed by the understanding reached at the time between the Arabs and the British Government,[76](#) preferred to join Britain against Turkey and, thus, reach an understanding with the Italians.[77](#)

By March 1916 the Turks and Libyans were in retreat. By this time, too, the differences of opinion between Sayyid Ahmad and Sayyid Idris had become too great to be in any way bridged.[78](#) This was all the more evident since these differences were of a basic nature and reflected the difference in outlook and in the basic philosophy with which each of the two Sayyids looked upon the task of continuing the war against Turkey.

In view of the openly professed colonial and religious considerations underlying and motivating Italy's

invasion of Libya, Sayyid Ahmad considered the continuation of Libyan resistance to be both a religious duty and a matter of necessity. On the other hand, Sayyid Idris seems to have looked upon the Italian occupation of Libya as an inevitable evil, and thought it was no use continuing the struggle against such a formidable enemy.

It was, thus, natural that some decisive measure should have been taken to call a halt to the duel that was going on between the two Sanusi Sayyids. In this it was Sayyid Idris who took the initiative. He now wanted to take over the leadership of the Sanusi Order himself. He considered that leadership of the Order had devolved upon Sayyid Ahmad following the death of Sayyid al-Mahdi (1320/1902) only because he, Sayyid Idris, as the elder son of Sayyid al-Mahdi, was then too young to succeed his father.

Now, however, he argued, matters had changed, and he had become old enough (twenty seven) to take over the command. Eventually, Sayyid Ahmad, looking with grief at this attitude of his cousin and in view of the failure of his own plans to continue the resistance movement against Italy, decided to hand over political and military authority to Sayyid Idris. According to this arrangement, a number of leading Sanusis were to share with the new head the management of Sanusi affairs in Cyrenaica and the Fezzan. At the same time, Sayyid Ahmad was to remain the religious head of the Sanusi Order, while Sayyid Idris himself agreed to designate Sayyid al-Arabi (Sayyid Ahmad's eldest son) as his successor as the head of that Order.⁷⁹

Following this, Sayyid Ahmad retired to Jaghbub, but was soon forced to leave it under British threat to destroy that place and demolish the tomb of Grand Sanusi. From there he went to the Oases of Aujla and Marada and then to Jufra, with the intention of proceeding from there to the Fezzan and, if need be, to the Sudan.

Upon the insistence of Nuri Bey, however, he had to go to Aqaila, some 250 kilometres southwest of Benghazi, in order to continue the struggle against Italy. There he remained until August 1918, when he left for Istanbul at the invitation of the Turkish Government. He was received as a great hero and came to be treated with the utmost courtesy. In 1337/1918, when Wahid al-Din came to the throne of the Ottoman Empire, the ceremony of "coronation," which had hitherto been performed by the head of the Maulawi Dervishes, was carried out by Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif. "It was," remarks Sir Harry Luke, "probably in order to stimulate sympathy for the Sultan in Islamic circles that [Sayyid Ahmad] was invited to officiate."⁸⁰

In April 1921, the Turkish Parliament nominated him as King of Iraq. He proved to be a staunch supporter of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and later tried to work for the restoration of the *Khilafat* to Istanbul. He went afterwards to Damascus in order to bring about a reconciliation between Syria and Turkey, but was forced by the French authorities to leave Syria in 1343/1924. From there he went to the Hijaz, where he was well received by King ibn Saud, and remained there until his death at Madinah in 1352/1933.⁸¹

Sayyid Idris took over control of Sanusi affairs at a very critical time. The Sanusis under the leadership of his predecessor had suffered a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the British forces in Egypt. Moreover, a devastating drought had overcome the country in 1333/1915. It was followed the next year by large swarms of locusts, and the year after by a general famine and epidemic throughout the country.

Sayyid Idris, therefore, decided (with the approval of Sayyid Ahmad who was still in Cyrenaica) to enter into negotiations with the British and Italian authorities with a view to reaching a *modus vivendi* with the latter. This was indeed Sayyid Idris's long-awaited opportunity for establishing himself not only as the political leader of the Sanusi movement, but also as its spiritual head.

However, although an agreement (Akrama Agreement of April 1917) was reached between Sayyid Idris and the Italians (with the help of the British) whereby a truce was established, the Italians soon violated the agreement by insisting on the acquisition of sovereign rights over Libya, a course to which Sayyid Idris could not agree without meeting the opposition of the Sanusi leaders.⁸²

Eventually, in 1339/1920, another agreement (Agreement of al-Rajma) was concluded between Sayyid Idris and the Italians. According to the terms of this agreement, the Italian Government agreed to grant the Sanusi Order a limited degree of self-government within specified areas. Sayyid Idris was designated as the hereditary chief of this "Sanusi Government" with the title of Amir. The Sanusi lodges were exempt from taxation, and a parliament was to be set up on the basis of proportional representation from the oases under the Amir's jurisdiction.

The Italian Government, moreover, promised to respect Arab lands and properties including those of the Sanusi lodges. Among other things, the Amir promised to put an end, within eight months of the signing of the agreement, to all the Sanusi military camps and other military formations within his area.⁸³

In the meantime, the Tripolitanian leaders who had been anxious from the start of the resistance to coordinate their policies with those of the Sanusi leaders in Cyrenaica and the Fezzan, eventually met at Gharyan in Tripolitania, proclaimed a "Tripolitanian Republic" in 1340/1921, and decided to invite Sayyid Idris to be its head.⁸⁴

Following this, in 1341/1922, a Tripolitanian delegation left for Ajadabiyah, seat of the Sanusiyyah Government since 1339/1920, in order to lay before and explain to the members of that Government the resolutions adopted at the Congress of Gharyan. On November 22, 1922, Amir Idris formally accepted the Tripolitanian offer.

The Tripolitanian *baiah* to Amir Idris stands as a landmark in the history of Libya for being particularly one of the most important formal bases on which Libyan unity has come to be erected in recent times. It is all the more remarkable since, in spite of the differences which had earlier existed between the Sanusi leaders and the Tripolitanians, it made it possible for the latter to accept Sanusi hegemony.

This *baiah*, in fact, proved to be a deadly blow to Italy's prestige and chances in Libya. It was now

obvious that Italy's position in Tripolitania had become greatly jeopardized.⁸⁵ Even Amir Idris, under pressure from the Cyrenaican tribes, could not suppress the military camps and other formations within eight months in accordance with the Agreement of al-Rajma.

This in fact proved to be of great annoyance and displeasure to the Italian authorities who were ever-apprehensive of the establishment of a unified and strong Libya. They always felt that they had come to terms with the Libyans as a result of the pressure of their own political and military circumstances.

With the rise of the Fascists and their assumption of power in Italy in October 1922 matters came to a head. Determined to uphold Italy's name and prestige in Libya and to reassert the acquisition of Italian sovereignty over that country, the Fascist regime proceeded to launch a new offensive on Libya.

On April 21, 1923, the Italian forces occupied Ajadabiyah, the seat of the Sanusi Government, and three days later the Italian Governor declared the unilateral abrogation of all the agreements concluded between the Sanusiyyah Order and the Italian Government.⁸⁶

Libyan resistance was once again weakening. By the end of 1342/1923 resistance in Tripolitania had collapsed, and the Italians had established themselves firmly in that territory. In December 1922, Amir Idris fled secretly to Egypt. Before leaving the country, however, he appointed his younger brother, Sayyid al-Rida, as spiritual head of the Sanusiyyah Order in Cyrenaica and Umar al-Mukhtar as political and military leader of the territory.

Cyrenaican resistance continued until the end of 1350/1931, when Umar al-Mukhtar, at the time eighty years of age, was caught and executed by the Italians. With this the resistance movement in Cyrenaica completely collapsed. A new phase in Italy's occupation of the country thus started. It now became possible for the Italians to carry out their plans for the colonization of the country and the settlement therein of Italian farmers and other colonists.

Italy's occupation of Libya lasted until 1362/1943 and formally ended with the conclusion of the Italian peace treaty in February 1947. During the thirty years of Italian rule in Libya, Sanusi fortunes suffered terribly; almost all the Sanusi leaders were forced to leave the country and live in the neighbouring Arab lands, particularly in Egypt.

On December 22, 1930, a Royal Decree was issued, whereby the various pacts between the Italians and the Sanusis were formally revoked and the lodges were closed. The sequestration of the estates and goods of these lodges was ordered. By this Decree all movable and immovable property of the lodges was confiscated and transferred to the patrimony of the "Colony" (i.e., Libya). The Decree even expressly forbade any recourse to the courts against seizures thus made by the Italian administration.

The Sanusiyyah Order itself was considered by the Italians to be an illegal association.⁸⁷ By the outbreak of the Second World War the Order had been finally crippled both as a spiritual and as a political force. It was not until August 1939 that the Sanusi leaders again began to recover their lost

position as liberators and leaders of Libya. And it was not until December 1951, following many internal and external developments, that Libya emerged as an independent and sovereign State under the political and, to a much lesser extent, spiritual leadership of the Sanusiyyah Order.

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- [13.](#) Bayyu, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- [14.](#) *Ibid.*
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Chapter 74: Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani

A: Introduction

While Europe was disengaging herself from the spiritual hold of Rome and embarking upon the hazardous yet challenging road of freedom, the Arab world was being isolated from and insulated against almost all outside influences and changes. This process of isolation and insulation continued unabated till it came to an abrupt end at the time of the Napoleonic expedition against Egypt in 1213/1798.

This was indeed the first serious external stimulus that the Arab and the Muslim world had received since the Ottoman conquest in 922/1516. The episode of French occupation of Egypt was quite significant as it ushered a new era for the Muslim world, an era in which the Western nations began to penetrate into the lands of the Muslims at a breakneck speed.

The story of this penetration is very painful to narrate but it proved to be a blessing in disguise since it awakened the Muslims from their slumber. The Muslim society, which was a medieval and ossified society, when it faced a relentless and superior power that subjected its people and exploited its wealth, fully realized the enormity of the danger.

The method by which the policy of the Western imperialists was executed and the resistance crushed, and the way in which the culture of the conquerors was imposed, did not foster either understanding or friendship, but rather created doubts and promoted fears with regard to the intentions of the rulers. The Muslims were alarmed at the situation that not only their political freedom was in peril, but their institutions, culture, and even their faith, the bedrock of their life, were also being threatened.

The advent of the modern Christian missionary movement at about the same time confirmed this belief. Islam as a result became a rallying call for existence and an instrument of protest against foreigners. The foreigners in turn arrived at the conclusion that unless this potent instrument was dubbed, their position in Muslim lands would not become stable. They, therefore, besides tightening their political control, tried to change the outlook of the younger generations of the Muslims by encouraging Christian missionary activity and foreign educational efforts.

“Throughout the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular this relentless political penetration galvanized Muslims into a reaction consonant with Islam's politico-religious structure. This structure being both a religion and a State at the same time, weakness in one was deemed by the Muslims weakness in the other and *vice versa*” (Nabih Amin Faris).

This feeling culminated in a form of movement that aroused the Muslims on the one hand to defend their lands against the inroads of Western imperialism and on the other to save their faith against the

aggression of the Christian missionary. That is how the Muslims came to realize that they could not, even if they wanted to continue to live as they had hitherto lived, be complacently secure in the illusion that the pattern of life accepted as valid in the past must for ever remain valid, for that complacency, that security of convictions and illusions, was shattered to pieces by what had happened to them in the last few decades.

It was the realization of this time-lag between the demands of a new situation and their traditional ways of thinking and living which inspired them with a strong desire to cast off their fatal inertia. The Muslims were, thus, awakened to the need of taking stock of their cultural holdings. They observed that only paying lip-service to their ideology could not help them to solve the problems which had cropped up as a result of the penetration of Western Powers in their respective lands.

If they really wanted to defend their freedom without obliterating Islam as a basis of their civilization, they must make a fresh start in terms of Islamic programme and thus resurrect their society from the old ashes of convention and decay. In case they did not realize the gravity of the situation and simply clung to old notions and conventions in their entirety, they would be playing the game of the proverbial ostrich that buries its head in the sand in order to escape the necessity of making a decision.

If Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab of Arabia (Chap. 72) and Shah Wali Allah of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent (Chap. 79) be considered to be precursors of the modern awakening in Islam and their movements the signs of the coming dawn, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1254/1838–1314/1897) must be taken to be the foremost leader of this awakening and his movement the first glow of the dawn.

He was the greatest Oriental thinker of the thirteenth/nineteenth century. It has rightly been said that the message of al-Afghani burst through the reigning obscurantism as a splendid lightning. He was a thinker and at the same time a man of action, endowed with a penetrating intelligence and a great heart. His rare intellectual gifts and his high moral qualities gave to his personality the magnetism peculiar to all great leaders and drew to him many followers.

Al-Afghani was for the Muslim world a comprehensive personality, being at the same time a great thinker, a religious reformer, and a political leader. Among his contemporaries he was regarded as a remarkable writer, a charming and eloquent speaker, and a dialectician endowed with great powers of persuasion. According to Muhammad Abduh, he was also a man of heart and strong will, ever ready to undertake actions requiring the greatest courage and generosity, and devoted to the things of the spirit.

This “wild man of genius,” as Blunt called him, always refused to consider money or honours, and preferred, without doubt, to preserve his liberty of action in order to serve better the ideal to which he devoted his whole life, namely, the rebirth of the Muslim world.

During his stay in Paris in 1301/1883, al-Afghani met Ernest Renan on whom he made such an impression that the illustrious French writer could not but express his enthusiasm in these terms: “The freedom of his thought, his noble and loyal character made me believe during our conversation that I had

before me, brought to life again, one of my old acquaintances, Avicenna, Averroes, or another of those great infidels who represented during five centuries the tradition of the human spirit.”

B: Life

Problems touching the origin of Jamal al-Din are far from having been solved. The biographers of diverse Islamic lands—Turks, Persians, Indians, and Afghans, still claim the honour of being his compatriots. In reality, although he was named al-Afghani, i.e., coming from Afghanistan, his activities and influence were widespread; every Islamic land was home to him; and, besides, he was no stranger to the capitals of Europe. He made the acquaintance of scholars, theologians, and politicians both from the East and the West.

His early studies were pursued in Persia and Afghanistan where, by the age of eighteen, he had acquired an exceptionally thorough mastery of Islamic studies, philosophy, and science. The next year and a half, spent in India, introduced him to European teachings. He then made a pilgrimage to Mecca.

On his return to Afghanistan, there followed for him a decade of political career, interrupted by the vicissitudes of civil war. His liberal ideas and his popularity with the people led to the covert hostility of the English who were supporting Amir Shir Ali. On this Amir's accession in 1286/1869, Jamal al-Din left the country.

For a short period, he visited India again. The Indian Government honoured him, but also imposed restrictions on his activities. So he proceeded to Constantinople by way of Egypt where he made his mark at al-Azhar. In Constantinople he was well received but eventually his advanced views brought him the disfavour of the Shaikh al-Islam, and the resulting controversy was so heated that he was asked to leave the country in 1288/1871.

This was the prelude to an important period of his life, his stay in Egypt, where the warm reception given him by intellectual circles induced him to prolong his visit. There he spread his new ideas—notably influencing the future reformer Muhammad Abduh, and did much to awaken the young Egyptians to the dangers of foreign domination. Finally, however, his advanced religious views offended the conservative theologians and his political opponents, the British, and he was expelled from Egypt in 1297/1879.

Returning to India, he wrote “The Refutation of the Materialists,” a defence of Islam against modern attacks. While he was in India, the Arabi Rebellion broke out in Egypt, whereupon the British detained him until the defeat of Arabi.

Then followed a period of three years in Paris, fruitful for the publication of his ideas. In 1301/1883, he carried on a controversy with Ernest Renan on “Islam and Science,” and in 1302/1884, published with his disciple Muhammad Abduh, exiled from Egypt for his complicity in the Arabi uprising, an Arabic weekly *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* (The Indissoluble Link) aiming at arousing the Muslims against Western

exploitation. The British soon banned the paper in Egypt and India; nevertheless, in its short life it did exercise some influence in these countries.

From Paris, al-Afghani went to London to discuss the Mahdi uprising in the Sudan but was unable to obtain an agreement with the British. Thence, interrupted by a four years' stay in Russia, followed a period of service under the Shah of Persia, ending in his expulsion in 1308/1890 or 1309/1891 when his reforming zeal antagonized the Shah.

Then followed another brief visit to England where Jamal al-Din started his campaign against the Shah and published his "Splendour of the Two Hemispheres" (*Dia al-Khafiqain*) ending in his ill-fated acceptance of the Sultan of Turkey's invitation to be his guest at Constantinople for there he had to remain in "gilded captivity" till his death in 1315/1897.

C: Philosophy

The life of al-Afghani corresponded exactly with his thought; in him theory and practice were closely linked. In this respect one might compare his mission in the modern Muslim world with that of Socrates in Hellenic antiquity. His life and thought were both marked by three characteristic traits: a subtle spirituality, a profound religious sense, and a high moral sense that influenced very strongly all his actions.

1. *Spirituality*: This trait manifested itself clearly in his detachment from physical pleasures, in his pursuit of spiritual things, and in his devotion to the ideals to which he had dedicated himself.

As Abbas al-Aqqad has said, Jamal al-Din was opposed to the propaganda made among the Muslims in favour of materialism; with his natural perspicacity he exposed the characteristic traits of materialism. He published a book entitled "The Refutation of the Materialists" (*al-Raddala al-Dahriyyin*). "Sometimes the materialists," says al-Afghani, "proclaim their concern to purify our minds from superstition and to illuminate our intelligence with true knowledge; sometimes they present themselves to us as friends of the poor, protectors of the weak, and defenders of the oppressed.... Whatever the group to which they belong, their action constitutes a formidable shock which will not fail to shake the very foundations of society and destroy the fruits of its labour.... Their words would suppress the noble motives of our hearts; their ideas would poison our souls; and their tentacles would be a continual source of disturbance for the established order." Jamal al-Din had denounced the sophism and practices of the partisans of the materialistic interpretation of history before it became well known in Europe.

2. *Religious Sense*: This trait found its expression in almost all of al-Afghani's writings and is notably manifest in his views about the function of religion in society. "Religion," he wrote, "is the very substance of nations and the real source of the happiness of man."

Moreover, true civilization, he held, is that which is based on learning, morality, and religion, and not on

material progress such as the building of great cities, the accumulation of great riches, or the perfection of the engines of murder and destruction.

3. *Moral Sense*: His acute moral sense subjected him to the famous accusation that he addressed himself against the imperialistic colonial policy of the Western powers, a policy based upon their intention to exploit the weak. He was of the view that what the Occidentals designate as “colonization” is in reality no other than what is its opposite in meaning, “decolonization,” “depopulation,” and “destruction.”

It was this view that made al-Afghani make a distinction between “the Holy Wars” of Islam, which aimed at the propagation of faith, and the economic wars of Europe, which always ended in the subjugation and enslavement of the vanquished peoples.

He clearly distinguished between “Muslim socialism,” which, according to him, is based on love, reason, and freedom, and material communism,” which is erected on hatred, selfishness, and tyranny.

Al-Afghani was a true Muslim and a rationalist. He appealed to the Muslims of all sects to make use of the principle of rationalism that is a special privilege of Islam. “Of all religions,” he says, “Islam is almost the only one that blames those who believe without having proofs, and rebukes those who follow opinions without having any certainty.... In whatever Islam teaches, it appeals to reason ... and the holy texts proclaim that happiness consists in the right use of reason.”

In the same spirit, al-Afghani advocated the Mutazilite doctrine of free will against fatalism; this latter is an attitude commonly but wrongly attributed to the Muslims by the Western people. According to Jamal al-Din, there is a great difference between the Muslim belief in *al-qada wal-qadar* (predestination) and that in *al-jabr* (fatalism).

Al-qada wal-qadar is a belief that strengthens the faculty of resolution in man, builds up his moral stamina, and inculcates in him courage and endurance. *Al-jabr*, on the other hand, is nothing but an evil innovation (*bidah*) that was introduced maliciously into the Muslim world for political purposes.

D: Political Thought

Al-Afghani made himself the champion of what Western writers call political “Pan-Islamism,” preaching the union of all Islamic peoples under the same Caliphate for the purpose of emancipating themselves from foreign domination. He used to say that “the European States justify the attacks and humiliations inflicted by them upon the countries of the East on the pretext of the latter’s backwardness.

Nevertheless, the same States try to prevent by all means in their power, even by war, all attempts at reform or renaissance of the Islamic peoples. From all this arises the necessity for the Muslim world to unite in a great defensive alliance, in order to preserve itself against annihilation; to achieve this it must acquire the technique of Western progress and learn the secrets of European power.”

He propounded these ideas in *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*, under the title "Islamic Unity." He maintained that Muslims were once united under one glorious empire, and that their achievements in learning and philosophy and all the sciences are still the boast of all Muslims. It is a duty incumbent upon all Muslims to aid in maintaining the authority of Islam and Islamic rule over all Muslim lands, and they are not permitted under any circumstances to make peace with and be conciliatory towards anyone who contends their mastery over their lands, until they obtain complete authority without sharing it with anyone else.

The bonds holding the Muslims together, al-Afghani maintained, began to fall apart when the Abbasid Caliphs became contented with their titular powers ceased to encourage scholars and those trained in religious matters, and stopped the exercise of *ijtihad* (free thinking). He said, "Today we see Muslim rulers giving a free hand too foreigners in managing the affairs of their States and even of their own houses and fastening the yoke of foreign rule upon their own necks. Europeans, greedy for Muslim lands, seek to destroy their religious unity and, thus, take advantage of the inner discords of Muslim countries."

However, as it has been rightly pointed out, al-Afghani did not intend to substitute religious zeal for national patriotism; he wished the efforts of the Muslim countries to converge independently of one another towards a common goal—political liberation. And it was in order to regenerate Turkey, Persia, India, and Egypt that he worked for the resuscitation of Islam, a religion that exercises such profound influence on the political and social life of those who profess it.

In advocating the defence of one's own country, Jamal al-Din wrote in the *Urwat al-Wuthqa*: "To defend one's homeland is a law of nature and a precept of life bound up with the demands made by nature through the instinctive urges for food and drink." About traitors he says: "By the term 'traitor' we do not refer to the individual who sells his country for money and gives her over to an enemy for a price, whether it be great or small, no price for which one's country is sold can ever be great; the real traitor is one who is responsible for the enemy's taking one step on his land and who allows the enemy to plant his foot on his country's soil, while he is able to shake it loose. He indeed is the real traitor in whatever guise he may appear. Anyone who is capable of counteracting the enemy in thought or action, and then acquits himself poorly in this, is a traitor."

He goes on to say: "There is no shame attached to any small and weak nation, if she is vanquished by the armed might of a nation larger and stronger than she. But the disgrace which the passage of time will not erase, is that the nation, or one of her individuals or a group, should run to put their necks under the enemy's yoke, whether through carelessness in the management of their affairs or out of desire for some temporary benefit, for they become thus the agents of their own destruction."

The Occidentals, according to al-Afghani, adopt in the East strange methods for suppressing the patriotic spirit, stifling national education, and destroying Oriental culture. Thus, they incite the Orientals to deny every virtue and every value in vogue in their respective countries. They persuade them that

there is not, in the Arabic, Persian, or Indian languages, any literature worth mentioning, and that in their history there is not a single glory to report.

They make them to believe that all merit for an Oriental consists in turning away from the understanding of his own language and in feeling proud of the fact that he cannot express himself well in his own language, and in maintaining that all he can attain in human culture resides in the jargon of some Occidental language.

The Orientals, exhorted Jamal al-Din, must understand that there cannot be a sense of being one community in a people who do not have their own language; that there cannot be a language for a people who have no literature of their own; that there can be no glory for a people who have no history of their own; that there cannot be history for a people who have no attachment to the heritage of their country or recognition of the great achievements of their men.

E: Conclusion

Al Afghani died in exile in Istanbul on the 9th of March 1897. His short life had been full of persecutions and vexations which were the natural result either of despotism or of ignorance, but it was a life of heroism, full of noble thoughts and lofty notions, a life which exercised on the succeeding generations of the Muslims a lasting influence which has not been surpassed.

In fact, the secret of his personality and of all his activities was his love of freedom and independence and his antagonism to any oppression whether internal or external.

Self-dignity was the ideal of his life. The Muslims have to set up as a maxim, as they did in the past, the fine principle so well expressed in the verse: "Live in dignity and die in dignity; among the blows of swords and the waving of flags."

But, unfortunately, the Muslims have for long disregarded this principle. Having accepted a life of submission and servitude, they have fallen so low that others who have adopted their maxim as an ideal of life have been able to attain higher degrees of perfection and glory.

It is now necessary to proceed without delay on a new enterprise aiming to inspire the Muslims with a new spirit and to create a new generation. It is necessary, finally, to form associations of "salvation," led by men of faith and sincerity who would swear never to seek favour from the holders of power, never to be deceived by promises, never to flinch before threats, and ever to continue their efforts till they obtain the removal, from positions of authority in their country, of all the timorous hypocrites and charlatans.

More than sixty years have elapsed since the death of al-Afghani, but his illustrious name will rest engraved in all memories and his attractive personality will remain dear to all Muslim hearts. As was pointed out by Mustafa Abd al-Raziq, al-Afghani was in the history of modern Orient the first defender of freedom as he was also its first martyr. Indeed, he is the father of modern renaissance in Islam.

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Chapter 75: Renaissance in Egypt: Muhammad Abduh and His School

A: Life

Nobody has contributed to the renaissance of Muslim thought in modern Egypt more than Muhammad Abduh. He was a great Egyptian philosopher, sociologist, and reformer, and is ranked as one of the most remarkable figures in the modern Muslim world. On his death in 1323/1905 he left numerous disciples and many works of real interest and inestimable value. He was, and still is, commonly given the superb title "al-Ustadh al-Imam" (The Master and Guide); this title alone shows the influence that he had upon his contemporaries.

A young Egyptian writer, Kamil al-Shinnawi, recently described Abduh's life as a "combination of the life of a prophet and that of a hero." However, he remained little known: on the one hand, the passion for factions and schools of thought had for over half a century distorted his true personality; on the other hand, a superficial knowledge of his teachings had given rise to erroneous interpretations which everything in the Master's writings combined to contradict, as everything in his life tended to refute.

We know the essential facts of Muhammad Abduh's life, thanks to a source which is excellent because authentic. It is a form of autobiography that the Egyptian philosopher himself composed towards the end of his life, by way of replies to questions put to him by his disciple, Rashid Rida. We also possess, written by the hand of the Master, a number of very interesting documents about his family and his early education.

Muhammad Abduh was the son of an Egyptian farmer. He was born in 1266/1849 at Mahallat Nasr, a little village of Beheira Province, where his father enjoyed a high reputation as a man of integrity whose growing prosperity did not mar his altruism and willingness to make sacrifices for the cause of justice; Abduh's mother was a gentle soul, respected for her piety and charity.

He studied first at Tanta, at the Mosque of al-Ahmadi, where he became so discouraged by the teaching method of his time, with its suppression of intelligent inquiry, that he would undoubtedly have turned away from his schooling altogether had it not been for the beneficial influence of his uncle, Shaikh Darwish, who was able to awaken in his nephew the feeling and taste for study and meditation.

"I had no one to guide me," wrote Abduh later, "but Shaikh Darwish, who first liberated me from the prison of ignorance in opening to me the doors of knowledge. He broke for me the chains which had bound us when we repeated blindly all that we were told, and brought me back to true religion." Shaikh Darwish remained for Abduh, for the rest of his life, a spiritual guide and the director of his conscience.

The great event of the youth of Muhammad Abduh was his entry, in 1283/1866, into the University of al-Azhar, the traditional centre of Islamic studies. However, the young Abduh spent two years there without deriving much profit from the courses that he attended, which circumstance was surely due to the altogether antiquated and stale methods of instruction then employed.

In his book, *The Egyptian Empire under Ismail*, Dr. Muhammad Sabri observed: "They overloaded the memories of the pupils with a welter of grammatical knowledge and theological subtleties designed to narrow the mind and prevent its development." While at al-Azhar, Abduh went through an inner crisis; he was then to be seen indulging in ascetic exercises and even trying to isolate himself and shun the world. But again the wise counsel of Shaikh Darwish aided him to emerge from this mystical crisis.

Yet another great personality was to exercise on Abduh a profound influence, and to show him the road that he had to follow. This was Jamal al-Din al-Aghfani, already famous as the courageous champion of religious and political freedom for Oriental peoples. Jamal al-Din, on arriving in Egypt, drew many disciples around himself, notably Muhammad Abduh. It was the spiritual direction of Jamal al-Din that

made decisive Abduh's turning away from ascetic practices in favour of an active life.

Abduh gradually broke away from religious traditionalism and studied philosophy, mathematics, morals, and politics, all outside the al-Azhar curriculum. To Jamal al-Din he owed a new vision in the comprehension of classical Arabic works, and equally a taste for Western works translated into Arabic, but above all he owed to Jamal al-Din the awakening of national feeling, the love of liberty, and the idea of a constitutional regime.

Abduh showed his enthusiasm for Jamal al-Din in his first work, *Risalat al-Waridat* (1291/1874). At the same time, Abduh actively interested himself in the political relations between the East and the West, and he admitted the necessity for a complete modification of the political and social life of the East. In 1293/1876 he began writing for journals articles on various subjects of general culture, but he still seemed to have difficulty in breaking loose from the technique and spirit then prevalent in the Azharite circles.

In 1294/1877 Abduh obtained the *al-Alimiyyah* diploma which conferred upon him the title of *Alim* (learned man in the theological sense) and the right to teach in the various branches of Islamic science. He first earned his living by giving private lessons, and then by giving discourses at al-Azhar on theology, logic, and morals. These courses were distinguished by a new method that attracted a great number of students to him.

Having become a teacher, this man of inquisitive mind did not cease to study and to instruct himself. He applied himself to the general sciences called "modern" because they did not figure in the programme of instruction at the Islamic University. In 1296/1879 he was nominated Professor of History at the college of *Dar al-Ulum* and Professor of Literature at the School of Languages; he fulfilled his new functions still continuing his courses at al-Azhar.

At the same time Abduh devoted himself to the journalistic activity which Jamal al-Din had already recommended. Since its origin, the Arabic Press has been mainly centred in Egypt. At the beginning of the reign of the Khedive Tewfik, Abduh was made an editor of "The Official Journal." He soon became its chief editor, and, by the impetus given by him, this publication acquired a new significance. It was in this journal that there appeared the orientation and effort towards religious and moral reform that characterized the work of Muhammad Abduh.

Then occurred the *coup d'état* of 1296/1879, which precipitated the fall of the cabinet of Nubar Pasha, and some European ministers, the first consequence of the nationalist movement that was beginning to develop. Another, more serious, consequence was the revolt of the Egyptian army under Urabi against the Turko-Circassian officers; it developed into a revolution that resulted in the occupation of Egypt by the British troops in 1300/1882.

After Urabi's failure, Muhammad Abduh, accused of conspiring with the revolutionaries, was condemned to three years' exile. For, although he had not at first been a partisan of Urabi whom he considered to be

the mouthpiece of purely military ideas, Abduh with the further development of events, came wholeheartedly to support his cause and became one of the chief voices of the revolutionist government, fighting energetically for the liberty and independence of the Egyptian people.

As an exile he first settled in Syria, but not for long; his spiritual guide, al-Afghani, having returned from India, invited him to join him in Paris. Abduh accordingly joined Afghani in Paris the following year; there they founded a society and started *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* (The Indissoluble Link), a political weekly given to the cause of Pan-Islamism and the defence of the Orientals against foreign domination and internal despotism, and notably against the occupation of Egypt by the British.

Al-Urwah was the first Arabic journal to appear in Europe which was conscious of such a mission and which defended it energetically and with eloquence. At the beginning of the summer of 1302/1884, Muhammad Abduh left for England as a representative of his Review. His friend Wilfried Blunt gave him his valuable assistance in winning over public opinion through the English Press and making it interested in the Egyptian cause. He introduced Abduh to a large number of English politicians; among others to Randolph Churchill, the father of Winston Churchill.

Muhammad Abduh next returned to Paris to resume his work. But the banning of his Review in Islamic countries, as a result of English machinations, made his field of activity restricted, and the Review ceased to appear. In its short life this Review had a decisive influence on the development of nationalism and Pan-Islamism, but, in fact, it little suited the spirit of the Egyptian Shaikh, which leaned more towards education and gradual reform.

In 1303/1885, Muhammad Abduh returned to Beirut. There he was appointed teacher in the Sultaniyyah School, and gave his famous course of lectures on theology which served as a basis for his future treatise on Monotheism (*Risalat al-Tauhid*). His activity as a professor was particularly fruitful, but he did not occupy himself with instruction alone; he founded, with the aid of some others, an association which had one of its aims the bringing together of the three great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But it seems that his activity in this connection having been interpreted in Turkey in a political sense unfavourable to the interests of the Ottoman Caliphate, Sultan Abd al-Hamid moved against it and took steps to persuade the British Government to ask the Egyptian Shaikh to leave Syria as soon as possible.

It is thus that Muhammad Abduh returned to Egypt in 1306/1888. He was appointed, a Judge in the Native Tribunal and then a Counsellor at the Court of Appeal. As a magistrate he was well known for his sense of equity and independence of his spirit that were never encumbered with the forms of judicial procedure. He now concentrated his efforts on the awakening of Egypt by the spreading of knowledge, by moral education, and by the adaptation of the traditional social institutions to the demands of contemporary life.

Nominated as a member of the Administrative Council of al-Azhar University, Muhammad Abduh threw himself into an indefatigable activity in order to renew and raise the material, cultural, and moral

standards of this old Islamic University. The influence of the liberal doctrines he professed was readily felt. He instituted courses in the secular sciences such as history, geography, natural history, mathematics, and philosophy, sciences that had not previously appeared in the curricula of this University.

Nominated in 1307/1899 as Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muhammad Abduh gave this religious post a hitherto unknown prestige. It was in this capacity that his modernizing influence had its far-reaching effects. He himself gave a course of lectures consisting of commentary on the Quran, a course animated from beginning to end by a new spirit.

As Grand Mufti, Muhammad Abduh took three religious decisions (*fatawa*) that clearly showed his tolerance towards other religions. The first of these authorized the Muslims to receive interest and dividends; the second authorized them, while living in non-Muslim countries, to eat the meat of animals slaughtered by non-Muslims; and the third permitted them, if the occasion arose, to wear clothes other than their traditional costume.

It is not difficult to imagine why these decisions aroused so many controversies and even let loose the old Muslim faction and brought down on the Grand Mufti no small number of calumnies of which the motives were not purely religious. During the same years, he was made a member of the Legislative Council.

Muhammad Abduh was one of the founders of the "Islamic Benevolent Society" which aimed at spreading education among and giving moral and material aid to the poorer classes. He also founded a "Society for the Renaissance of Arabic Books," i.e., for the publication of the masterpieces of classical authors.

In another sphere, he worked for the reform of the religious courts (*mahakim Shariah*); his report on this became well known, and remained a basis for the reform of the judicial procedure in the personal statute tribunals. The principal idea developed by Muhammad Abduh in the report had, as its point of departure, the elementary realization of the importance to the State of raising the intellectual and moral standard of future judges by improving their material conditions, and reorganizing their recruitment on a better basis. The idea of creating a School for Religious Judges (*al-Qada al-Shari*) was also initiated by him.

In 1320/1902, Muhammad Abduh was engaged in a controversy with Gabriel Hanotaux, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, following the publication by the latter of an article entitled "Confronting the Muslim Question." The Grand Mufti pointed out to the French historian how false was the idea held in France of Islam.

In another polemic on the philosophy of ibn Rushd, Muhammad Abduh defended a thesis dear to him, that the fatalism with which Islam is reproached is only a distortion of the Muslim religion, a distortion due to the misunderstanding of the very fundamentals of the faith. On another occasion, an article on ibn Rushd published by the Christian editor of the review *al-Jamiah* drew a reply from Muhammad Abduh

which, published at first in a series of articles in the *Manar*, then collected in one volume, *al-Islam wal-Nasraniyyah* (Islam and Christianity), constitutes a piece of the modern Muslim apologetics of great value.

The Grand Mufti was a man of frank and keen intelligence, holding precise ideas on men's conduct and their ability to evaluate events. He was conversant with the principal works of European thinkers, and enriched his wide scholarship with many journeys through Africa and Europe. He often said that he needed these journeys "to renew himself." He had numerous Occidental and Oriental friends, and entered into correspondence with European thinkers, among whom were W. S. Blunt, Gustave le Bon, Herbert Spencer, and Tolstoy.

It must be remembered that Muhammad Abduh played an important part in the creation of the Egyptian University, a part too often forgotten in Egypt.

Loyalty, courage, generosity, love of good, and patriotism were the principal traits of his character. In the prison to which he was condemned for his liberal ideas and enlightened support during the Urabist revolution, Abduh wrote a letter which, in spite of the defection of certain of his friends who, under threats, had come to denounce him before the English and, thus, to betray his confidence, shows him a magnanimous and loyal associate. He was courageous in opposing the Khedive on an occasion when the favouritism of the latter proposed the awarding of an Azharite distinction to a special Imam unworthy of it.

His gentle quality of kindness found expression in more ways than mere words after the fire of Mit-Ghamr, when he applied himself to the task, a thankless one in Egypt, of exhorting the rich to make donations to the victims of the disaster. After a tour of Egyptian towns and villages, sparing neither time nor effort, Muhammad Abduh succeeded in obtaining the sum of twelve thousand pounds. It is also known that the Mufti distributed his own *waqf* salary among the needy families.

Abduh possessed in his character and conduct many of the mystical traits that he had acquired in the early stages of his education. But it was due to the influence of Jamal al-Din that he developed within him that happy balance between an altogether inner mysticism and an overwhelming need for action.

Muhammad Abduh died on 11th July 1905, in the midst of his work, without having had yet accomplished all his projects of reform. The Egyptian people and Government took the funeral of the Grand Mufti as an occasion of public mourning. He was buried in the cemetery of al-Afifi at Cairo and on his tomb was engraved the famous verse of an Arab poet:

For greatness we have made a resting-place
And we have interred together religion and the world.

B: His Philosophy

In his philosophy, Muhammad Abduh soon emerged from the Azharite scholastic position and developed pragmatic and humanistic views that made his influence felt and pointed the way to reforms. He was well aware that philosophical reflection cannot always remain speculative or contemplative. To endow our existence with complete consciousness and full experience, it must engage us in the activities of the world, command us to take all our responsibilities, and urge us not to seek a form of refuge in solitary meditation.

Abduh's views even on the science of logic seem to characterize his whole belief in the dynamic relation between true thinking and good action. In his view, logic and the general scientific temper of thought must assume a highly moral character and role. In the beginning of the year 1283/1866, when the young Abduh entered the old theological University of al-Azhar, Islamic philosophy was in so backward a state that it was almost a negation of philosophy.

The only manuals of logic and Muslim rationalistic theology (*Kalam*), which were tolerated at the University, were those that had been composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of the Christian era. It was al-Afghani who, the first in the whole Islamic Orient, drew the attention of the young people around him to the necessity of studying classics and, in a general way, promoted the renaissance of Muslim philosophy, encouraging the direct study of original works rather than the customary study of the rather sterile commentaries and super-commentaries.

Al-Afghani himself turned to the study of ibn Sina, the ever-fresh source of inspiration unspoilt by centuries of neglect. According to Muhammad Abduh, this standpoint of al-Afghani was received by the orthodox and by the Azharites as a heresy of an unprecedented audacity. From 1292/1875 on, the young Abduh applied himself to the study of treatises on classical logic, of which many were then only in manuscript form.

Two years later, while still a student at al-Azhar, he wrote an article in which he resolutely defended logic and *Kalam* in view of certain prejudices and certain popular and even Azharite suspicions about them. He pointed out that faith could be strengthened, not weakened, by rational proofs, and that a sound appreciation of logic, the art and science of thinking, was essential to Muslim theology.

During his exile in Beirut, Abduh discovered al-Sawi's treatise on logic, *al-Basair al-Nasiriyyah*, which he later edited with scholarly annotations and enlightening clarifications. His course of lectures on logic at al-Azhar was marked by the same thoroughness and erudition. Muhammad Abduh's own system of logic showed the influences of Aristotle, ibn Rushd, ibn Sina, and, to a lesser degree, of certain Western, particularly French, authors.

He regarded logic not as an academic exercise, but as a positive instrument for true and constructive thinking that led to action. This view rendered the pursuit of logic obligatory for one's moral life. Shaikh

Abduh, however, repeatedly expressed the opinion that, to liberate oneself from vulgar prejudices and idols, to be in a position to cultivate a science, in brief to be able usefully to seek the true and the good, force of the intellect in itself is insufficient. Necessary also, and above all, are moral qualities, principally courage, the will for action, integrity, and the love of truth.

Hence Muhammad Abduh constantly upheld the principle of *ijtihad*, that is, the right of unfettered personal inquiry, of thought free from all fetters, and did not cease to fight against *taqlid*, that is, the passive acceptance of dogmas from religious authorities without asking for proof, and without thinking of the rights of free examination and personal initiative.

In fact, he stigmatized the imitator (*muqallid*) to the point of likening him at times to an infidel. The gates of *ijtihad*, said Abduh, far from being closed once for all, as some wrongly pretend, are wide open to meet all the questions raised by the new conditions of life; the last word must no longer belong to the old works or to the authorities long dead, but must be the result of the modernist spirit and the due consideration of the common good. He argued that Islam is essentially a rationalistic religion. "Islam," he said, "has liberated man from the authority of the clergy; it has brought him face to face with God and has taught him not to rely on any intercession."

His philosophy of the history of religion envisages this rationalism in Islam as a final stage in religious evolution. His view shows the progressive stages by which humanity has arrived at last at the perfect religion, which is Islam. The earlier religions imposed stringent and rigorous rules and, appealing to the senses, pointed to the impressive miracles wrought by the prophets.

When human society had passed this primitive stage, there came the religion which appealed to the heart and spoke the language of sentiments and inner mysteries; but though it preached to its followers rigorous asceticism and contempt for this world, the people did not take long to corrupt its teaching to accommodate it to human needs and interests.

Finally, appealing to the intellectually mature, came the religion of Islam. Addressing itself to reason that it associated with feeling and sense, Islam reconciled reason with nature, and, recognizing neither master nor mysteries, freed minds from the tutelage of authority and brought man through his highest faculties closer to God.

The Egyptian philosopher approaches the problem of free will in a clearly pragmatic way. He is opposed to abstract speculation no less than William James or F. C. S. Schiller. He considers that the theory of predestination "results in negation pure and simple of the divine Law, in the suppression of all responsibility, and in the rejection of the evidence of reason which is the basis of faith."

Abduh, in the second phase of his intellectual activity, preoccupied more with ethics than with pure metaphysics, rapidly passes over a thousand and one controversies raised by the question of free-will which, in Islam, has set the partisans of free-will (the Qadarites) and the partisans of predestination (the Jabrites) one against the other.

The system of the Asharites (the dogmatic theologians of Islam) was based on the idea of necessity. Following their metaphysics, if one should admit this necessity, then no morality would be possible. As Kant has said, there is no morality without freedom. Faced with this contradiction between ethics and ontology, Abduh, as a pragmatist, opts for the former.

Concerning divine prescience, Muhammad Abduh says: "The omniscience of God embraces that which man will accomplish by his own will; it embraces the fact that at such a moment a man will do such an action which will be good and for which he will be rewarded, or such another which will be bad and for which he will be punished." According to Abduh, this prescience does not prevent man from being free to a certain extent: "Nothing in the omniscience of God prevents man from choosing, and acting according to his choice."

From the point of view of reason, the foreknowledge of what will happen can be regarded neither a curb nor an impulsion for action. To establish and define the freedom of man, Muhammad Abduh, like Descartes, almost always appeals to the testimony of conscience. Again, he points to the testimony of common sense that in everyday life attributes to each person the actions he performs.

Further, the divine commandments would have no meaning without free will. "All the commandments in religious Law are based on the principle that man is responsible for what he does. If man's actions were not his own, the notion of responsibility would be annihilated and it would then be unreasonable to demand of the individual what exceeds his power or to hold him responsible for what is not the effect of his will."

But there is no question of inferring complete freedom from this: freedom is absolute for God, but limited for men. "Appeal to your experience," says Muhammad Abduh. "It is a well known experience to 'will' to accomplish something and yet not to be able to do it, or even to realize the existence of a greater power which directs the world." The Islamic term *qada*, taken by the Jabrites to mean predestination, is interpreted by Abduh as the principle of causation in nature, which makes ample allowance for freedom of will.

In other words, "necessity" applies to the natural and even to the social sciences, but leaves a wide range within which the human will, guided by reason, may act. According to his interpretation, Islam is not, as has often been supposed, a religion of "fatalism." On the contrary, "Islam," says Abduh, "is the negation of fatalism. In forty-six verses of the Quran free will is maintained explicitly and unequivocally. If there are other verses liable to suggest the idea of constraint, these are only to establish the general divine laws of the universe."

He points out that the Prophet and his Companions were men of action whose lives expressed an unshakable faith in the freedom of the human will. In fact, "fatalism" associated with Islam was a later distortion which well served those rulers whose interest lay in exploiting the Muslim peoples. The evil effects of that enervating doctrine were only too visible in Abduh's own time, and supplied a living

argument in favour of his pragmatic appeal to return to the vitality and freedom of the original faith.

Consistent with his attitude to free will is Muhammad Abduh's theory of good and evil. In his *Risalat al-Tauhid* he devotes several pages to this problem and its relation to dogma and reason. First, he tries to establish a sort of parallelism between the moral and aesthetic points of view, a parallelism which seems to be imposed by the Arabic language in which the term *husn* denotes both "beauty" and "good," and *qubh*, both "ugliness" and "evil." He deals with beauty, first in the sensible realm, and then in that of the intelligible, and in this latter respect compares beauty as conceived in the different domains of art, science, and morals.

This parallelism of values is established by Abduh, as by the Muslim rationalists (the Mutazilah), in a way which is now familiar to us, thanks to the teaching of Andre Lalande and to the writings of F. C. S. Schiller and also of so many other contemporary philosophers. "It is our conscience," says Abduh, "which provides us with the principle by which we distinguish between beautiful and ugly things." Individual tastes differ, but humanity nevertheless has a sort of general criterion, an innate sense of beauty and harmony.

Muhammad Abduh established a third parallelism between beings (*al-akwan*) and human actions (*al-afal*): "The impression made on our soul by these actions is analogous to that made on it by objects and beings." Then Abduh seems to use the term *husn* (good) in the three fundamental senses of the Muslim theologians (*Mutakallimin*), giving, in addition, a finer and more psychological analysis.

First, good is *perfection*, evil imperfection, whether it is found in the moral or in the intellectual order; secondly, good equally designates a relationship of *fitness* (*mulaamah*), in which two subdivisions must be made: of fitness to our nature, meaning the *agreeable*, a distinction hardly differing from that made by the superior animals, and of fitness for the ends which reason pursues, meaning the *useful* in a wide sense, which prevails over the agreeable as one rises in the hierarchy of beings, and is directed by utility, whether for oneself or for society, taking precedence over agreeableness even if it involves temporary revulsion or pain; thirdly, the good comprises the *praiseworthy*, the evil the *blameworthy*.

The Asharites and the Mutazilites recognized that the good in the first two senses is perceived by reason, but it is with regard to the third sense that disagreement between the two groups of the Mutakallimin arises. According to the Asharite theologians, *husn* and *qubh*, neither by their essence nor by the qualities inherent in the things, are such as should make them appear good or evil, beautiful or ugly.

Quite on the contrary, it is the religious Law, the divine decree, which confers on actions their character of being good or evil which we recognize in them. A reversal of values thus remains conceivable, if the will of the divine legislator (*al-Shari*) is pleased to reverse the order and criterion of his judgments and to arrange that good shall become evil and vice versa, as it happens, for example, in the abrogation (*naskh*) of a prohibition (*hurmah*) to make it an obligation (*wujub*).

And so, in the Asharite doctrine, the divine decree, envisaged in its absolute character, appears to conscience something so arbitrary that it could easily be confused with implacable fate. We consequently understand why the moralist that Muhammad Abduh was could not subscribe to a thesis of which the consequences seemed to him to be irremediably compromising the freedom that he had so strongly defended.

It is, thus, deliberately but without ever departing from his customary good sense that Muhammad Abduh ranges himself, on this point, on the side of the Mutazilah, of al-Farabi, and of ibn Rushd, who were certainly aware of a similar difficulty. All of them perceived that the distinction between good and evil was natural and that it was perceived by our common sense. Abduh adds that man finds this distinction by conscience itself.

The sense and natural reason of man are capable of making this distinction in every instance without awaiting the decision of an authority or guidance of revelation. This can be realized from observation of the way in which very young children grasp the meaning of the religious Law, or from the evidence of the history of primitive societies.

The distinction between good and evil is thus, according to Abduh, made by reason without the aid of dogma. Once the principle has been stated, Abduh is not afraid to draw conclusions from it. If, therefore, he says, a person arrives, solely by reasoning, at the affirmation of the existence of God and His attributes, if he deduces from this rationally acquired knowledge the idea of the immortality of the soul and the joys or torments it may have in the other life, briefly, if a thinker, basing his arguments solely on reason, arrives at the discovery or construction of a completely natural morality, nothing can prevent him from putting forward rules which would be as valid as the rules imposed by dogma.

And Abduh manifestly considers that reason can take him a long way on this path. "Natural morality," he says, "is not only possible in theory, but it has been applied by certain individuals of the *elite*." Unfortunately, not all humanity is constituted of sages. Man is not a simple creature, and his needs are not as limited as those of animals. Moreover, humanity does not always allow itself to be guided by reason alone; there are other faculties, other factors which exert an influence no less great on the conduct and judgments of men; from them comes the possibility of error and evil; and, besides, reason alone, with rare exceptions, is not sufficient to lead to happiness.

To attain this happiness, most men need a surer guide, a prophet. On the great mass of humanity is, thus, imposed religious morality of which the need is demonstrated by the history of human society. It is thus that revelation has been introduced into morality. Religious morality, abstracting from it the certitude with which it is presented because of its having a divine source, does not fundamentally constitute a teaching entirely different from that of natural morality.

"The sacred Law," writes Muhammad Abduh in his *Risalat al-Tauhid*, "came simply to show us what existed in reality; it was not this Law which created either the good or the evil.... At the same time as the

sacred Law imposes certain beliefs on us, it makes their beauty accessible to reason.”

The question which has raised many controversies among Muslim philosophers, that of the *elite* (*al-khassah*) and the common man (*al-kaffah*), seems to be settled by Muhammad Abduh in the same manner as was done by Ibn Rushd by differentiating between two kinds of knowledge, one that of the philosopher and the other that of the common believer.

“Prophecy,” says Abduh, “indicates to the elite how they may rise above the common level, but it makes obligatory only that which is accessible to all.” Nevertheless, the Egyptian philosopher is convinced that no man, whoever he may be, can do without the natural gift, the instinctive feeling, we have for good and evil. There are certain principles of good on which all human beings are agreed, but this does not mean that a thing is good because God has commanded it; on the contrary, God has commanded it because it is good. To use the Kantian terminology, in the judgment of good and evil it is reason which gives us the categorical imperative.

If, in this theory of good, Abduh speaks so insistently of the essential role of reason, it is because in his eyes such an attitude entails important practical consequences in the moral and social orders. By this decision in favour of the renaissance of Mutazilite rationalism, the Egyptian reformer undoubtedly hoped to contribute to the restoration in the Muslim world of the principle of *ijtihad* and of the freedom of research on every subject.

It is thus, he thought, that the *fuqaha* (the Muslim jurists), for example, would come to treat the religious Law with greater independence and personal initiative, so that when they come to determine the licit and the illicit, to put forward prescriptions and prohibitions, they would be able to judge the spirit of the Law according to reason and not stop as they did in the past at the letter; and rather than restrict themselves to the usage of the single principle of arguing by analogy (*qiyas*), they would be able to examine new facts liberally and to apply to them solutions which would be more suited to the spirit and exigencies of the modern age.

In brief, by this rationalism, Abduh hoped to realize the ideal of emancipating minds from routine, imitation, and intellectual stagnation that had marked the past few centuries of Islam.

As good and evil have a social significance, Muhammad Abduh was drawn at an early stage towards the study of human society. Muhammad Sabri, one of the historians of modern Egypt, speaks of Muhammad Abduh as “the greatest Egyptian reformer and sociologist” who “possessed to the highest point the sense of evolution.”

In 1295/1878, Abduh gave at the college of *Dar al-Ulum*, a course of lectures on the “Prolegomena” of Ibn Khaldun, which was as remarkable for its method and novelty as for the wealth of its ideas. These lectures probably served as the basis of a work that Muhammad Abduh, according to Rashid Rida, wrote in the same year, namely, “The Philosophy of Society and History.”

“As the manuscript of this last of Abduh’s work was unfortunately lost during the events of 1296/1879, we are obliged, in order to learn about the sociological theory of Muhammad Abduh, to have recourse to the more or less detailed accounts contained in his various writings. He appears to share the ideas of ibn Khaldun, the great Muslim sociologist and the precursor of Auguste Comte.

Like ibn Khaldun, Abduh conceives history as a veritable science, and it is for him a discipline indispensable to philosophical studies. His evolutionary approach is evident in his *Risalat al-Tauhid* and his commentary on the Quranic verse: “Men form a single nation.”

According to his conception of history, humanity is led by God progressively to realize a certain world-view. Abduh perhaps also belongs to that class of thinkers who see in history a sort of morality in action that must be studied by statesmen and venerated by the people. He is strongly aware of man’s natural and necessary orientation towards social integration, a physical, intellectual, and moral need which makes it difficult for men to live in this world without feeling reciprocal sympathies and without giving one another mutual aid.

Conscious of this need for solidarity, Abduh, in his commentary on the Quran, condemns the indifferent state of mind of certain members of the social group towards others, an attitude which, in his opinion, must lead to the dissolution of social ties. But social solidarity for Muhammad Abduh is not something purely speculative.

The Egyptian sociologist worked all his life for the common good and always set an example of active co-operation, as a result of which he realized numerous social ends. In societies like ours, this sentiment of solidarity is not perfect. Abduh hopes that it is possible to lead minds to union and agreement by resorting to a new moral education, more effective than the laws imposed by the State.

“Union,” he says in an introductory article, “is the fruit of the tree of virtue.” No morality is possible without union and without love. The new education must, therefore, be essentially altruistic. But this education must begin with the family. “We hope,” he says, “to give our daughters an education worthy of those who will be called on to take responsibilities equal to those of men.” And again, “It is an unpardonable crime to leave women in a state of ignorance and mediocrity.”

Besides, thanks to his experience as a judge, Muhammad Abduh ascertains that seventy-five per cent of lawsuits are those between relatives. Their causes generally are feelings of hatred and antipathy existing between members of the same family, feelings that, according to him, must be attributed to the lack of social instruction and education in social matters. The same remarks can be extended to a wider society. God, in His mercy, has sent men messengers (*rusul*), who are to the human race what intelligence is to the individual.

To Abduh, the evolution of human society has known three stages. The first stage is the age of the senses, when preoccupations of men scarcely rise above physical cares and their beliefs are animistic. The second stage is the age of prophecy, in which men have already been prepared by the experience

of the preceding age to gain some understanding of the laws of nature and of the constitution of society. Corresponding to these stages, the first step in the education of society is the experience that it progressively acquires, and the second is the teaching of the prophets who serve as guides to society and adapt their missions to its conditions.

Christ, for example, could accomplish his mission only in the epoch in which he lived, an epoch in which victims of violence and cruelty cried out for mercy and love. Muhammad (S) brought a vital and unifying message to revive men in an epoch of lethargy and of evasion of real spiritual issues in futile quibbling. The third stage, which is still with us, brings the era of error.

As we become distant from the prophets, hearts become hardened and passions predominate; society moves away from sound reasoning and moral principles; theologians falsify the divine teaching and use sacred texts in such a way that religion loses all influence on the souls of men; politics becomes mingled with religion; and discord and misunderstanding reign supreme resulting in error and war.

Muhammad Abduh does not, however, stop at this pessimistic note. He thinks the solution to lie in the awakening of a sort of universal conscience and thereby in the discovery of the right path that society must follow. Reason and morality are essential to this end.

Muhammad Abduh bases this optimism on a general view of humanity, very close to that of Socrates and the Stoics of antiquity, and to that of Rousseau in modern times. He believes that man is not intentionally wicked, and that he has a nature inclined towards good and love for peace. How can it be otherwise, he says, when God has given him a nature superior to that of the animals and “has endowed him with reason by which he has made himself master of the terrestrial world and has been able to have glimpses of the secret of the celestial world?”

Then God has not made the evil more congenial to our souls than the good. The good is so innate in the nature of man that we need only a simple piece of advice or a reminder to realize this good in action. It is thus that “the light which God sends to men through the mediacy of the prophets demands no effort to fix it in their souls and hearts, but it is a reminder to those who are not conscious of what God has already put in their nature.”

To affirm this instinct for good in man, Muhammad Abduh goes so far as to profess the human universalism of the Stoics, a universalism which tends to establish a community between men, in spite of the diversity of countries, religions, languages, and races; for, he says, they are all equal by their reason and their origin. This explains why men tend to associate with one another and to unite and live in harmony. If we regard men thus, we shall see that all humanity is like a single family living on the surface of the same earth and linked by the same morals, relationships, and habits.

“This state of affairs has so influenced the majority of reasonable men that they have tended to serve humanity without attaching themselves fanatically to one race, or one religion, or one doctrine.” If humanity conducted itself by following its nature, and in recalling the good that is innate in it, it would

possess the social virtues such as strengthen in people's minds the consciousness of their original identity, which consciousness would inculcate in them the spirit of concord, sympathy, and peace. Muhammad Abduh even declared in *al-Urwah* in 1302/1884 that virtues in the human race are common; they preserve human society and protect it from dissolution.

Nearly all the biographers of Muhammad Abduh have pointed out that the principal task of his life was the religious reform of Islamic society. This opinion is right to a certain extent. But if we study the activities of Muhammad Abduh carefully and if we consider the import of his teaching, we shall perceive that there are, above all, reasons of ethical order, which explain the basic attitudes of the Egyptian reformer.

More than one theological or philosophical problem is, for him, dominated by moral considerations, and his every effort tends to moral action. If he fights against certain manners and customs and certain popular religious beliefs, if he denounces injustice and social and political abuses, if he strives to modify the teaching methods of al-Azhar, it is always in order to bring about a moral reform in Muslim society.

We can safely say that the movement of religious reform with which Abduh's name is associated in the Muslim world was only, in the mind of the reformer, a means for the realization of an end, which was moral reform. The Grand Mufti said it expressly: "The aim of religious reform is to direct the belief of the Muslims in such a way as to make them better morally and also to improve their social condition. To set religious beliefs right, to put an end to errors, consequent upon misunderstanding religious texts, so well that, once the beliefs are fortified, actions will be more in conformity with morality; such is the task of the Muslim reformer."

Religion is thus, for Abduh, the most effective means of realizing this moral reform. Minds not being mature enough to replace precise dogmas by abstract principles, it is the religious conceptions that we must begin to reform. "If the reformer," he says, "appeals directly to a morality or to a wisdom deprived of all religious character, he will have to build a new edifice for which there is neither material nor labour. But if religion is able to raise the level of morality, give actions a solid foundation, and urge people to seek happiness by the most appropriate means, if the adepts in religion are much attached to it, and if finally one has less difficulty in bringing people back to religion than in creating something new which they cannot clearly understand, then why not have recourse to religion and why seek other less effective means?"

The aim of Abduh's reform is, thus, certainly not, as has been wrongly believed, the realization of the political unity of the Muslim countries, and still less the "Holy War" against the non-Muslims. He expressly refrained from holding pan-Islamic ideas, which he considered to be chimerical and existing merely in the imagination of certain dreamers, Europeans and others.

Hence his concentration on moral and educational reform after the disappearance of *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*. For him, theory and practice were always intimately related, and it was only arbitrarily that one

could separate one's ideas from one's actions. Abduh was, in fact, a born moralist, and he wished to act directly on people's conscience rather than to isolate himself to construct a more or less coherent theological system.

Like Plato, Abduh, it seems, considered that only direct contact could light the flame in others. Abduh was above all a creative force; his teachings and his actions had a profound moral influence. More than one theological or philosophical problem was for him dominated by moral conditions, for example, the problems of the attributes of God, prophecy, and free-will.

He applied himself early to the work of reform in education, a condition indispensable in his eyes to the recovery of Islamic morality. He felt the results obtained by this means to be deeper and surer, even if slower than those obtained by a revolution, considering that "only progressive and methodical reforms are able to give the required results." The educative and moral aspects of Muhammad Abduh's reform explain in fact the profound and lasting influence he has had, particularly in Egypt and in the entire Muslim world in general.

This predominance of morality appears particularly in his commentary (*tafsir*) on the Quran. This commentary aims at explaining the Quran as a scripture containing moral guidance (*al-hidayah*) on which rests human happiness in this life and the next. The understanding of the Quran is a duty incumbent on all Muslims without distinction of race or culture.

As the only question for Muhammad Abduh is to explain the spirit and general sense of the Quranic verses without keeping too closely to the letter, he is careful, from the beginning, to discard as unwelcome the purely philological and grammatical considerations with which a great number of Quranic commentators have been conversant.

Abduh, moreover, criticizes the attitude of the Arabic authors who, due to an exaggerated admiration for ancient Arabic poetry, make it the basis of grammar and then find numerous grammatical difficulties in the text of the Quran. For Abduh, it is necessary, on the contrary, to make the Quran the criterion for the rules of grammar.

Equally unwelcome to him is the method of pure erudition dear to certain commentators, which consists in amassing, without any discrimination, all that may have been said by others about such and such a chapter, or such and such a verse, or such and such a word. "God," said Abduh, "will not ask us, on the Day of Judgment, what people may have said or understood, but He will ask us if we ourselves have understood His Book and if we have followed its direction."

For him, then, an exegesis drawn from all sources would very likely mislead the believers and make them stray away from the true aim of the Quran that is, above all, the guidance of conduct. The understanding urged by Abduh is thus that which rises in the depths of a sensitive and circumspect conscience, and is the fruit of meditation on the Book itself. The effort of Muhammad Abduh tends to eliminate from his *tafsir* all the questions giving rise to differences between the commentators.

And he insisted upon taking the Quran as a whole and not interpreting it in fragments; only thus may we rediscover under the apparent diversity the unity of the original inspiration. Abduh sometimes seems to apply to the Book the Cartesian rule of evidence. He often advises us to give credit only to what is related in a clear and explicit manner and never to abandon a categorical report in favour of a mere hypothetical one, that is, to rely only on traditions the transmission of which appears to be free of disagreement or collusion to fabricate.

Abduh is always opposed to the interpretation of the Zahiriyah and the anthropomorphists, who explain the religious texts literally and without recourse to reason. For example, in explaining the *Surah al-Kauthar*, certain commentators pretended that the Kauthar was the name of a river in paradise that God had given to the Prophet. According to Abduh, there is no such thing; the Kauthar here simply means the great gift that God has conferred on humanity in the sending of prophets.

The condition for the veracity of a religious assertion, he says, is the fact of including nothing in it that can offend *tanzih*, i.e., the transcendence of God over creatures. If we come across a text of which the apparent meaning would imply a certain anthropomorphism, it is necessary for us to interpret it so as to reject the apparent meaning.

Rationalism, combined with marked pragmatic tendencies, seems to render the *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh a justification of the principle according to which “a religion full of legends and stupid superstitions cannot live in the same mind with an enlightened reason.” It is, thus, impossible that things of the former kind may really be found in the Quran.

Islam is in harmony with enlightened reason; one must, therefore, make a sound and right interpretation that takes account only of categorical proof, or of sure tradition, and not of personal opinions and subjective impressions. Abduh rejects many of the long stories and anecdotes that a good number of commentators have been pleased to invent.

And, contrary to the practice of commentators, who sought to specify precisely the nature of certain places or persons mentioned in the Quranic text but left rather vague, Abduh observes that his method is to abstain from going in the details beyond the positive content of the sacred text, particularly because such efforts of the commentators have not brought any light to bear on the understanding of the text.

For example, in commenting on verse 58 of Sarah 2, which begins “Enter this village...,” Abduh does not wish to specify precisely to which village it refers, but prefers to stress the fact that the children of Israel received the order to enter various countries with the sentiment of humility and obedience to the divine order.

It is the same with the verse which follows immediately: “To the unjust We have brought down torment from heaven,” where Abduh, in accordance with his method, abstains from determining the nature of the torment; that, he would have said, has no practical importance. The *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh shows a constant concern for affirming the universal message of the Quran, while always fitting this belief into an

evolutionistic and progressive conception.

The old commentators often had a tendency to interpret certain Quranic verses by giving them a particular meaning, or relating them to local events which occurred at the time of the Prophet or before him. It is thus that some of them pretended that Sarah 102, for example, alluded to two tribes of the Ansars of Medina who boasted of the large number of their members, to the extent that one of them, feeling itself inferior to its rival in the number of those alive, went to visit the tombs of those who were dead.

For Abduh the verses of this Sarah, like those of so many others, must not be interpreted in so particularized and narrow a manner; the Quran is not addressed to an individual or to a group of individuals. On the contrary, it is to mankind that it is addressed, and it aims at what is most permanent in the beliefs, customs, and practices of peoples. The school of Muhammad Abduh starts with the principle that Islam is a universal religion, suited to all people, to all times, and to all states of culture.

Thus, one of the important traits of his work on exegesis is its spiritualism modified by a kind of pragmatism. The *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh has largely contributed to the purification of religious belief, as much among the mass of Muslims as among the '*ulama*' and theologians, by freeing the minds of the believers from certain legends and ideas that are too materialistic and anthropomorphic. His *tafsir*, as Rashid Rida has put it, tends to offer an interpretation of the Quran in a spiritual sense conforming to reason.

In religious and social life, Muhammad Abduh takes the position of a critic and puts on trial the ideas, morals, and customs that he condemns, whether they are current among the masses or among the educated men of his time. He reproaches the Muslims for having falsified the teachings of their religion.

The '*ulama*' and the representatives of Islam in general, he reproaches either for a rigorous formalism and unhealthy anxiety to observe in the minutest detail such practical rituals as ablution and fasting, or for the use of religious knowledge for lucrative ends. Religion, thus, furnishes them only with some sort of profession.

As for the popular conceptions, they contain, in his eyes, nothing religious except the name; they are all for the most part survivals of fatalistic beliefs. Abduh made the liveliest criticism of the *bidah*, that is, the false innovations introduced into the religious practices of the Muslims in later times. The '*ulama*' in particular, he said, were completely indifferent to the superior interests of their country. Except the commentaries and super commentaries on old texts, which they understood badly and explained even more badly, they occupied themselves with nothing.

Ignorant of the needs and aspirations of their time, they lived almost on the fringe of society. Hence he urged his countrymen to realize their social responsibility towards their country, instead of waiting till reform came to them; he further urged them to build up their culture progressively upon their own institutions rather than blindly imitate Western ideas and customs in a superficial manner. He wanted a

real reform from within, rather than the outward show thereof.

C: The School of Muhammad Abduh in Egypt

In July 1935, on the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Muhammad Abduh, "The Society of Muslim Youth" of Cairo held a public meeting to honour the memory of him who had justly been called *al-Ustadh al-Imam* (The Master and Guide). Testimony of Muhammad Abduh's former colleagues, and of his old students, who have now in their turn become masters, demonstrated the extent of the influence exercised by his thought.

In the beginning of the present century, Muhammad Abduh promoted, in Egypt, the cause of science, religion, and patriotism. All the noble and generous sentiments of the Egyptian elite found their source of inspiration in him. When, in 1318/1900, the younger generation sought a guide to lead them out of their confusion, they addressed themselves to him.

One of the characteristic traits of Muhammad Abduh was the profound influence that he exerted upon the people. The words of M. Bougle about the philosopher Frederic Hauh (*Les Maitres de la Philosophie Universitaire en France*, 1938) might equally well have been applied to Muhammad Abduh: "A fisher of souls..., converter, the least dogmatic of all, but the most pressing, the most able to change men, the most capable of preparing and firing young people with the personal effort of inner renewal." In his courses of lectures, virtually prolonged conversations, he seemed to apply himself to an examination of conscience, revealing a restless soul indignant at hypocrisy, bigotry, and indolence.

While having thrown himself into teaching and work of reform, Abduh was yet able to leave for us books which show the development of his thought and which have perpetuated his name. But in fact the reading of his works is not in itself sufficient to give one an idea of the profound influence that he had upon his contemporaries.

There were, in Egypt, many disciples of Muhammad Abduh other than those in the Azharite circles. It is noteworthy that it is among laymen, and particularly among those who had received European education, that the true disciples of Muhammad Abduh are to be found. First, the personality and the writings of Muhammad Abduh lent valuable support to social, religious, and philosophical reformers, represented by Qasim Amin, Rashid Rida, and Mustafa Abd al-Raziq.

Thanks to the authority of the Master's name, wrote Husain Haikal Pasha, his disciples were able to make the people accept principles that they had never before recognized. Then Abduh tried to reconcile the traditional Islamic method of teaching with the new methods borrowed from the West.

Between these two opposite schools, the modernist and the traditionalist, there was formed a third school mainly recruited from the most important writers of our time, all of whom, in different ways, were disciples of Muhammad Abduh. Egyptian thinkers before Abduh's time were in fact not inspired by any

well-defined ideal. And there is good reason to say that Muhammad Abduh gave unity and precision to Egyptian thought.

Henri Bergson wrote: "One measures the significance of a philosophical doctrine by the variety of ideas into which it flowers and the simplicity of the principle into which it is gathered." This is true of the doctrine of Muhammad Abduh which, in spite of the simplicity of its principle, has led to reform, at least in Egypt, in three different ways: social, religious, and philosophical.

1. *The Social School: Qasim Amin* – One of the ideas dear to Muhammad Abduh was that of the instruction and education of Muslim women, with all that this implies concerning social reform of the conditions and customs affecting their lives in the Muslim world. True Islam, affirmed the Grand Mufti, gives woman perfect equality of rights with man. It is only because the original intention of the Law has been ignored that all kinds of abuses have crept in to harm the moral and social position of women in the Muslim world.

Polygamy, for example, although allowed by the Quran, is basically no more than a concession to certain historical necessities which no longer exist. In any case this concession, properly understood, is equivalent to a refusal and a negation, given the practical difficulty in which one finds oneself the moment one wishes exactly to fulfill the conditions laid down by the religious Law concerning polygamy.

This shows to those who take the trouble of thinking and of penetrating into the deeper meaning of the Law that the intention of Islam remains in favour of the principle of monogamy, and that it justly considers it to be the most perfect ideal of marriage. The law of inheritance also testifies to this spirit. It is, thus, important that the social condition of the woman should be raised without delay and, if necessary, by appropriate modifications in the actual canonical Law of Islam and by all possible means providing women with better opportunities of education and instruction. It is, he considered, an unpardonable crime to leave Muslim women in ignorance and mediocrity, since they are to carry the heaviest responsibility in national life: the bringing up of children.

If Abduh was not able to see the realization of the social reforms that he ardently wished, it was left for one of his colleagues and friends, Qasim Amin, to distinguish himself by tireless activity in the domain of the defence of feminism in Egypt.

Like Muhammad Abduh, Qasim Amin was above all opposed to the great mass of the conservatives to whom every innovator appeared as a heretic. He showed that Islam, far from degrading woman, as was commonly believed, does, on the contrary, favour her, and that the responsibility for placing her at a disadvantage lay, not with Islam, but with the Muslims of later epochs.

Meditating upon the evils from which Egyptian society suffered, he perceived that half the nation was gripped by a general paralysis of social life, a paralysis the cause of which was the ignorance and mediocrity in which women were kept in the country.

The reform that Qasim Amin wished to introduce in the problems of the Muslim woman can be summarized under two heads. The first concerns the manner of treating woman and her education; the second is an appeal to the Muslim theologians and jurists to become aware of the needs and exigencies of the modern age and, therefore, cease to cling in the application of the laws to the advice of one religious authority more than to that of another; the only valid advice indeed is that which, while arising from the spirit and essential principles of the Islamic law, is in conformity with the interests of the nation and with the new conditions of its evolution.

However, the voice of Qasim Amin, which, during his life, was not well heard, began after his death to be singularly amplified. It was not long before women in Egypt took up journalism. Men appeared who took the reform of women's position as the basis of every true renaissance. Some of them produced a journal named *al-Sufur* (The Unveiled), which had as its aims the preaching of feminism, and insistence on the necessity of the education and liberation of women, as well as on their equality with men.

Thus we see, in 1337/1918, the Egyptian women, in some of the demonstrations, marching before men to vindicate the rights of the nation. Safiya Zaghlul, the wife of the national leader, was venerated by all the people, and was called "The Mother of the Egyptians."

2. The Religious School: Rashid Rida – Rashid Rida is considered to be the interpreter of the religious school of Muhammad Abduh. Of all the disciples of Muhammad Abduh he exerted himself most to keep the master's memory alive by recording his thoughts and the history of his life.

He was born in the village of Qalamoun in Syria. On completing his Islamic studies according to the method of instruction followed in the schools of his country, he turned towards religious and literary studies. He devoted himself, at first, to mysticism, but the review *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* of al-Afghani and Abduh exercised great influence on him and urged him to follow a new path.

In 1315/1897, he migrated to Egypt, moved by the conviction that there he would be able to serve his religion and his people, an end which conditions in Syria prevented him from accomplishing. "I decided," he said, "to join Jamal al-Din in order that I might perfect myself, through philosophy and personal effort, to serve the faith.

On the death of al-Afghani, when it became well known that it was the politics of Abd al-Hamid that ruined him, I felt myself suffocated in the Ottoman Empire and decided to leave for Egypt because of the liberty of thought which existed there; what I most hoped to acquire in Egypt was to profit from the wisdom, the experience, and the spirit of reform which Muhammad Abduh represented in that country." Thus wrote Rashid Rida in his *Tarikh*.

Rashid Rida contacted Muhammad Abduh as soon as he arrived in Cairo. He followed the Master, he said, like his shadow. In March 1898, he founded the review *al-Manar* that aimed at arousing the desire for education and at reforming textbooks and teaching methods, besides denouncing the innovations that had been introduced in religious beliefs and criticizing customs and practices foreign to the spirit of

Islam.

Following the Master, Rashid Rida did not cease to declare that one could work for effective reform only through the direction of the Book and the Sunnah which are in harmony with human interests in every country and at all times. From the moment of the foundation of *al-Manar* he indefatigably put forth the idea that neither in the dogmas nor in the rites of Islam is it held that the Muslim should imitate any particular Imam.

In following the path traced by Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida was simply continuing the liberal modernism of his Egyptian Master. Nevertheless, because of a reaction against the growing European influence, Rashid Rida, according to Laoust, “became more and more conservative.”

There are other things in which the disciple departs from the Master’s path. Muhammad Abduh was always, to quote Lord Cromer (Egypt, 1906), “a genuine Egyptian patriot.” That is to say, the Master played a role in the awakening of the Egyptian national spirit, which fact is far from being contested. Rashid Rida for himself was an anti-nationalist, an ardent defender of pan-Islamism, and he well nigh regarded nationalism as a principle strange to Islam.

In opposing the development of secular tendencies in Egyptian literature, in denouncing the heterodoxy of the thesis of Ali Abd al-Raziq on the Caliphate and that of Taha Husain’s on pre-Islamic literature, Rashid Rida, without being fully aware of it, departs from the line of thought of the Master. In any case, the conservative modernism of Rashid Rida has, at the present time, been superseded by a secular modernism of Western inspiration conforming to the ideas of Muhammad Abduh.

3. *The Philosophical School: Mustafa Abd al-Raziq* – Having graduated from al-Azhar in 1326/1908 at the age of twenty-three, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq continued his studies in France. He studied first at the Sorbonne, where, among other courses, he followed that of Emile Drukheim on sociology; he completed his education at Lyons, at the same time lecturing on Islamic Law and on Arabic literature at that University.

On his return to Egypt he became Secretary General of al-Azhar University, and took active part in its evolution along the lines inspired by Muhammad Abduh. While nominated as inspector of the religious tribunals he also worked, with the collaboration of Egyptians and foreigners, for the realization of a popular university and arranged during the First World War a series of remarkable lectures on cultural subjects. Shaikh Abd al-Raziq himself gave a valuable course of lectures on Muhammad Abduh.

When the Egyptian University was officially founded in 1344/1925, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq was called upon to teach there. He became the first Professor of Islamic Philosophy in that University. In his lectures at the Faculty of Arts, later published under the modest title of “Prolegomena to the Study of Islamic Philosophy,” he traced the main trends of Muslim philosophy; while throwing light on the various aspects of the principal problems, he met, with calm and serenity, the attacks of certain Orientalists who had denied the originality of Muslim thought.

He perceived that while the Muslims had admitted into their conception of the world elements borrowed from Greek thought, they had their own method and their own culture. And the real Islamic thought is to be found not so much in the philosophy of al-Farabi and ibn Sina as in the theological speculations of *Kalam* and the principles of Muslim jurisprudence.

Besides his functions in the Universities of al-Azhar and Cairo, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq was a member of the Egyptian Institute and a member of the Egyptian Academy for the Arabic Language. He was many times Minister of Trusts (*Auqaf*), and in the Chamber of Deputies he was President of the Commission of *Auqaf* and Religious Institutes.

In 1365/1945, he was elected Honorary President of the Egyptian Philosophical Society. The crowning point of his career was his nomination, in succession to Shaikh al-Maraghi, as Rector of the University of al-Azhar. In this exceptional position of Shaikh al-Islam he showed initiative and breadth of vision: he introduced the study of foreign languages at al-Azhar, encouraged educational missions abroad, sent Azharite scholars to France and England to prepare themselves for the teaching of languages at the University, sent Muslim missionaries to Uganda, and, lastly, sent a group of research scholars to the Hijaz to study the faith at the sacred places of Islam.

Shaikh Abd al-Raziq was the author of a number of works on Muslim philosophy. His own philosophy was essentially moral and altruistic, filled with generosity, tolerance, and love of his fellow men. He often said that a great philosophy has existed since the dawn of human thought and has survived the vicissitudes of history: it is the heroic philosophy, the philosophy of those who live for others and not only for themselves, of those who are in unison with the fundamental note of the universe, which, to him, was a note of generosity and love.

Originally practised by the Oriental prophets, this philosophy, he said, was then spread by the great thinkers who, from Socrates to Plato and Aristotle, from Aristotle to the Stoics and Plotinus, from Plotinus to al-Farabi and Descartes, from Descartes to Kant and Gandhi, fall in a single great line. Many by glimpsing the essence of religion, some by deepening it through their meditations, arrive at a philosophy which they practise and live, the philosophy of generosity, which sees love to be a virtue which consists in always giving and giving without calculation.

Mustafa Abd al-Raziq believed, further, that this love is fundamental to each of us, that it is natural, that we have not to create it, that it will blossom on its own when we remove the obstacle which our egoism and our passions place in its way. With all the great philosophers he said that we are part of a whole, that the duty of the part is to act for the sake of the whole, and that the whole of which we are the part is humanity.

He wished our education to be oriented to an awareness of these potentialities – an education truly liberal that would make us conscious of our belonging to the same great family. Likewise, he saw the remedy for our social evils to lie in a moral reform that would extend our powers of sympathy with our

fellow men. In that direction lie social harmony and solidarity.

This philosophy, so much of the heart, demanded the self-mastery of the sage. Mustafa Abd al-Raziq practised what he preached, recognizing wisdom in the constancy of conduct which guards against the instability of emotions. Muhammad Abduh glimpsed these qualities in the young Abd al-Raziq, whose faithfulness to his Master was to survive him. Abd al-Raziq aroused in his pupils at the University the desire to learn more of the doctrine of Muhammad Abduh, besides writing upon him and translating into French his *Risalat al-Tauhid*. Thus he sought to keep alive the spiritual flame kindled by the reformer, Abduh.

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Chapter 76: Renaissance in Turkey: Zia Gokalp and His School

In this chapter we shall discuss the role of philosophy in the rebirth of Turkey. It would be useful to clarify first the sense in which the term “philosophy” has been used here as a yardstick for identifying movements of thought. “Philosophy” denotes the intellectual efforts to understand and explain, in terms of rational and secular thinking, the problems relating to man, society, and the universe that have been presented to people when they felt unsatisfied by the interpretations given by religions or by the sciences.

The foremost prerequisite for the rise of philosophical thinking is the liberation of the mind from traditional modes of thinking. Secondly, it rests on a certain level of scientific advancement and begins when ultimate questions relating to man, society, and universe compel men to go beyond the realm of science. Philosophy arises when the traditional mode of thinking based on fixed values breaks down and when scientific knowledge opens new horizons, both of which compel men to rational speculation. The establishment of a tradition of philosophical thinking is the third important factor in the history of philosophy in a country.

When we survey the development and present-day status of philosophy in Turkey, we find the first prerequisite amply whereas the other two exist only partially and imperfectly. During the last two centuries, modern Turkey has been in a process of gradual (at times violent) cultural transformation.

This transformation had two features that were decisive in determining the rise of philosophy and the direction it took. One was its secularizing feature and the other was its westernizing direction. With the breakdown of the traditional Islamic thinking, there appeared attempts to interpret phenomena in a very different way from that indicated by tradition. In these, however, Western European thinking served as a model.

As this transformation is still going on and the two features mentioned above have not yet obtained an all-encompassing hold over the society and the individual, the state and the tradition of philosophical thinking in Turkey cannot be expected to be comparable to what they are in the West. Nonetheless, as several other Muslim nations are facing or are going to face the same conditions that gave rise to modern philosophical thinking in Turkey, it can be instructive to study that thinking.

The beginnings of the intellectual transformation in Turkey go so far back as the early part of the twelfth/eighteenth century. Philosophy had ceased to be taught in the *madrasahs* that were the highest schools of learning in Turkey even in the eleventh/seventeenth century. Hajji Khalifah (known in Turkish as Katib Chelebi), the unique liberal mind of that century, describes the deplorable condition of the philosophical and scientific teaching in the *madrasahs*. There was not only neglect of the sciences, but even hostility towards them for their being conducive to philosophizing.

Thus, the three bases of philosophy, the spirit of free inquiry, scientific investigation, and philosophical tradition, were destroyed by a growing religious traditionalism. This is an excellent example of the disappearance of philosophy whenever the value of free inquiry is denied and the progress of science halted.

From the early part of the twelfth/eighteenth century on, intellectual awakening in Turkey showed its first stirrings. The printing press was introduced, a new interest in modern sciences arose, and the minds began to think about some political and social questions in a new way. Except for the emergence of some rudimentary philosophical inquiry, a century and a half had to pass before the Turkish thinkers could become acquainted with the European thought.

It is true that intellectual contacts with the modern European sciences had begun earlier than that. These contacts were especially in the fields of mathematics, physical sciences, and medicine. But the level reached by them was not yet conducive to philosophy. The intellectuals were still in the stage of acquiring the fundamentals of these sciences, and interest in them was purely a practical one and had not yet reached a theoretical level.

As a result of an intense desire to acquire European science and technology there arose a firm belief that reason and its product, science, were the prime factors of progress and therefore, capable of performing wonders in the progress of humanity. This belief contained in itself three germinal ideas (the power of science, progress, and the evolution of humanity) that were bound to lead to philosophical thinking sooner or later.

In fact, we find the first manifestations of an interest in philosophical thinking in literary publications in the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century. These were occasioned by the acquaintance of the Turkish intellectuals with the European philosophy of Enlightenment. Thinkers like Fenelon, Bayle, Newton, d'Alembert, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Volney became known, and full or partial translations of their works began to be made.

The philosophical manifestation of the new mode of thinking and contacts with the European philosophy were seen in the rise of interest in two philosophical tendencies. One was scientism and materialism, the other the philosophy of natural rights and social contract. We find the first expressed by a former member of the '*ulama*' corps, Tahsin Hoca, and the second by Namik Kemal, one of the leaders of the constitutional movement in Turkey.

Neither, however, can be called genuine philosophy. The first was a kind of creed, an expression of revolt against old ideas. Its exponents, far from being the founders of a philosophical tradition, were viewed as eccentrics or atheists. The second served as an ideological instrument in proving the necessity of a constitutional government in Islam. However, even that meant great progress and an unmistakable sign of the liberation of mind from tradition.

A severe reaction against both came with the establishment of what was known as Abd al-Hamid's regime. Both materialism and the theory of natural rights and social contract were declared incompatible with Islam and dangerous to morality, and were severely suppressed. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's *Refutation of the Materialists* did a great service in the suppression of these ideas under the Hamidian regime.

Presented personally by the author to Abd al-Hamid, this work served as a model for several books written to refute the naturalists, materialists, constitutionalists – in short, all the manifestations of philosophical revolt against traditional obscurantism. Neither Afghani nor his Turkish imitators, however, left any philosophical tradition of their own to take the place of those rejected.

Furthermore, the suppression of Western materialism failed to stop the infiltration of European philosophical thinking, this time in a subversive manner. Not only did the range of the then known and read European philosophers widen to include such thinkers as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Spencer, but materialistic philosophy with its Buchners and Haeckels also pressed harder across the border.

The naturalism of Zola and others became known through literature. The best exponent of naturalism was Besir Fuad, a gifted young man who found himself compelled to commit suicide that he did in a manner conducive to scientific knowledge. Although his writings were few, they exerted a great influence upon the younger generations, upon those who were going to emerge into full light with the fall of the Hamidian regime.

When the Constitutional Revolution of 1326/1908 came, the Turkish intellectuals appeared with a vision of European philosophy incomparably keener and broader than that of the pre-Hamidian Turkish intellectuals. From the philosophies they discussed and also from the movements with which they began to align themselves we can guess what they had been reading and learning under Abd al-Hamid's very nose.

An intense interest in philosophy appeared with the coming of the Constitutional era. This time, those who were engaged in philosophical thinking were not looked upon as eccentrics or *dahriyyun*. The first philosophical review, *Yeni Felsefe Mecmuasi*, began to appear at this time.

This review is itself the best example of the craving, now established, for a new philosophical orientation. Its pages were not reserved for the exposition of any particular philosophy. It was an excursion into all the various European philosophical ventures in search of ideas that might satisfy the needs of the Turkish thinkers. This review discussed and gave a panorama of the philosophies represented by Kant, Hegel, Comte, Spencer, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Mill, Marx, and a number of other Western thinkers.

This philosophical review died without establishing its own philosophical tradition. Its death, however, was not caused by any dearth of interest in philosophy as such. On the contrary, it was caused by its too much ramification. The review disappeared by giving rise to a number of different schools of philosophy. The subsequent years constituted a very active period for philosophy; but, if one considers the very calamitous political events, economic distress, and social upheaval through which Turkey had to pass during these years, one can understand why this active and variegated philosophical period did not flower into valuable and lasting works.

The principal field of interest was social and political philosophy. We find the emergence and differentiation of positivism, Spencerian evolutionism, materialism, and idealism. All except the last appealed greatly to individual intellectuals; still they remained matters of intellectual embellishment and snobbery, in spite of the popularity of their exponents such as Rıza Tevfik who became known even among the common people as the "Philosopher."

Only idealism took root and played an important role in the intellectual life of Turkey through the hands of its exponent Ziya Gökalp. This thinker, who cannot be called a philosopher in the narrow and technical sense of the term, can be called the real founder of a tradition of philosophical thinking in Turkey.

Gökalp's idealism was a reaction against Spencerianism and utilitarianism as well as against materialism. It was not, however, the product of a theory of knowledge investigating the basis and nature of mind before it does so with regard to the nature of physical reality. It was rather an ideological premise to work out a moral philosophy upon which Turkish nationalism could be built.

Hence, Gökalp gave to his philosophy the appellation of "social idealism." It was a spiritualistic as contrasted with the materialistic interpretation of history. It reduced reality, the physical as well as the social, to ideas; it rejected the individualistic philosophies of society and placed society, as a primordial and transcendental whole, above the individual. It suffered, however, from an internal strain due to its emphasis on the positivistic view of causation and the role of science in human conduct.

In spite of its serious defects as a system of philosophy, Gökalp's idealism exercised tremendous influence over Turkish thinking. Part of this influence has been to the advantage of philosophy itself because Gökalp for the first time gave the courage as well as the taste for philosophical thinking independent of tradition and Western philosophies.

His was a daring experiment, to work out a philosophical view, not by the mere repetition of the Muslim or Western philosophies or by a juxtaposition of both in a syncretistic manner, but by blending them together through a creative synthesis. In spite of the fact that his philosophy aimed at teaching certain definite beliefs and value judgments derived from his own philosophical speculation, it did great service to philosophical thinking by stimulating the rise of rival philosophies.

Gökalp's intellectual integrity and personality played a decisive role in his contribution to thought. His great respect for philosophy, his emphasis on independent thinking, and his freedom from philosophical

fanaticism prevented the utilization of his philosophy as an instrument for the suppression and persecution of the rival philosophies. In reality, all the subsequent philosophical trends took their initial clues from Gokalp's thinking or were direct continuations of some aspects of his analysis. Another contribution of Gokalp's personality to the Turkish mind was the road he prepared for closer contacts with Western philosophy.

As Zia Gokalp has done more to promote philosophy than expound his own philosophical views, it will be of interest to those concerned with the growth of philosophical thinking in the contemporary Muslim countries to dwell a little more on this aspect of his influence.

Prior to Gokalp's time, philosophy was not taught in its modern form in the institutions of learning. Philosophy was only a private pursuit, an amateurish preoccupation. Its importance in the cultural formation of a nation as well as in the intellectual growth of the enlightened minds was not recognized.

On the contrary, philosophy was looked upon either with suspicion or with derision. Neither the conservatives who abhorred intellectual deviation from established dogmas nor the progressives who believed in the utility of action had a favourable view of philosophy. It was either a heresy or an idle phantasy.

Zia Gokalp has been the chief instrument in discrediting both of these views about philosophy and in giving it an academic and educational prestige. Through his influence, courses of lectures on philosophy, logic, ethics, psychology, and sociology were introduced in the syllabi for undergraduates.

While teachers for these courses were sent to study in European universities, a department of philosophy was opened with an entirely modern programme in the University of Istanbul. This programme was based primarily upon the tradition for teaching philosophy of the French universities.

A course on the history of philosophy from the early Greek period down to the contemporary Western philosophy was introduced in this department for the first time. A separate course was introduced on the history of philosophy in Muslim countries with a view to teaching the subject with a scientific approach. The latter course was introduced also in the Faculty of Theology. In addition to specialized courses dealing with Greek, medieval, Islamic, and modern Western philosophies, courses were given in systematic philosophy, metaphysics, logic, ethics, and aesthetics as branches of philosophical inquiry.

Gokalp himself taught none of these, he was a Professor of Sociology, but he was the patron behind all, even though the men who taught these were his philosophical adversaries. A further step was taken in the modernization of philosophical teaching during World War I with the appointment of German professors. Although these German professors of philosophy contributed nothing to the content of philosophical thinking in Turkey, they were useful in introducing the scientific treatment of the history of philosophy for which the Germans are reputed.

Gokalp's social idealism was a synthesis of Islamic and Western philosophical traditions with the aim of

deriving a theoretical basis for Turkish nationalism. For him, therefore, teaching Muslim or Western philosophies was not enough. His greatest contribution, perhaps, lay in his emphasis on bringing home knowledge of these philosophies so as to make them the data by which Turkish thinking would free itself from the bondage of the old and of the foreign.

In other words, he wanted to promote it as an intellectual guide for an understanding of the world confronting the Turkish mind. It was, thus, above all a cultural matter rather than a matter of mere speculative curiosity or a continuation of scientific inquiry. In spite of the fact that this understanding of the role of philosophy is not in accordance with that dominant in the West and that it may tend to obscure the universal humanistic character of philosophy, it has left a tradition in Turkey that is worthy of attention.

Philosophy is conceived in Turkey to be very closely related to culture and society. The teaching of philosophy is believed to be of supreme cultural and pedagogical importance, particularly in a nation that is undergoing a total cultural transformation.

This understanding was inevitable in a country like Turkey where the other two prerequisites for philosophy, advanced science and a tradition of philosophy, did not exist. Both of these were necessary parts of Turkey's civilizational transformation for which philosophy was viewed as a guide. Gokalp's emphasis on social philosophy as against the theory of knowledge and scientific philosophy and his obsession for regarding philosophy as a preoccupation with eminently cultural function had at least the virtue of giving a philosophical tinge to all the educational, political, economic, religious, and moral aspects of Turkey's supreme problems.

This view of philosophical occupation showed itself in two other respects that, in our view, are extremely important for nations in a position similar to that of Turkey with regard to philosophy. Both were of vital importance in establishing a congenial milieu as well as a vehicle of communication in the realization of a philosophical tradition.

The first was the translation of the great philosophical works, Eastern and Western, into the Turkish language. The other was the stabilization and enrichment of a uniform terminology for expressing philosophical concepts.

The first was not merely a matter of practical facility for those who did not know Greek, Arabic, or modern European languages. A serious student of philosophy is supposed to be acquainted with at least some of these languages and, in fact, these are taught today to students of philosophy.

The problem was to use translations for developing the Turkish language to the degree of becoming capable of expressing philosophical thought. A nation that does not have a language to express abstract ideas is bound to remain foreign to philosophy or fail to understand philosophy when expressed in a foreign language.

As Latin in the West, so Arabic in all Muslim countries was the universal medium in the past for expressing philosophical thought. Significantly, the rise of modern European philosophies, several times richer than those in Latin, coincided with the flourishing of modern national languages.

When Turkish came into contact with modern philosophical thinking, it was utterly incapable of expressing philosophical thought without the aid of Arabic or of some foreign language (French). Arabic had ceased to be a medium of philosophical thought that had been killed in the hands of those who used that language. It was, therefore, necessary to improve Turkish as a vehicle of expression for the cultural experiences of a modern nation.

This task had already been faced in the natural sciences and in literature just before the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century. A new vocabulary had developed in mathematics, the physical sciences, and medicine on the basis of Arabic. In the field of philosophical sciences, however, the situation was highly inadequate, confused, and unstable until Gokalp's time. It was impossible to understand a philosophical text without constantly using French terms and expressions.

Gokalp's contribution in improving this situation was great. He attached so much importance to the question of uniformity in scientific and philosophical terminology that he suggested the holding of an international conference among the Muslim nations to develop modern concepts derived from Arabic. As this never became possible, he worked for the development of a philosophical language in Turkish. He not only standardized the use of the already existing Arabic terms but also coined new terms by derivations from Arabic roots; some of these survive even today.

The establishment of a modernized teaching of philosophy, the translations and adaptations from the world philosophical classics, and the impetus given to the development of Turkish as a means of communicating philosophical thought contributed towards the establishment of a philosophical tradition in Turkey.

Gokalp's idealism and collectivism gave rise to a variety of reactions. On the whole, however, we may identify two major lines of thought, each being a reaction to one of the two aspects of his philosophy. One was individualism, and the other materialism.

The first reaction was inspired by the study of psychology, especially the Freudian psychology. It was best represented by Mustafa Sekip Tunc, a professor of psychology but an artist at heart. His greatest merit was, perhaps, his contribution to the development of a superior literary style of philosophical writing; he showed skill both in translation and in original composition. In this he was perhaps influenced by his major inspirer, Henri Bergson.

Tunc's scope of philosophical interest was much wider than that of Gokalp. He avoided the conceptual and doctrinal rigidity of Gokalp. He was influential as a teacher, as an inspirer, and as a man of intuitive thinking, rather than as a systematizer. His individualistic approach to philosophy was not the one in vogue in the thirteenth/nineteenth century.

It was rather a revolt against rationalism and intellectualism; it emphasized the non-rational aspects of the human mind. Useful though it was in giving philosophical thinking greater depth and subtlety, its cultural implications remained complex and elusive. It varied from providing inspiration to liberal progressive leanings to supporting fascist anti-intellectualism. The saddest manifestation of this was Tunc's preoccupation with spiritism, psychic phenomena, and occult sciences at the end of his life. His was a restless soul and, despite his great efforts to the contrary, his thinking amounted to nothing but a kind of mysticism.

Another successor of Gokalp in cultivating philosophy was Mehmed Izzet. If Tunc's was an anti-intellectualistic reaction to Gokalp, Izzet's was a sceptic's reaction. Much better organized, subtler, and far more systematically versed in both Eastern and Western philosophies, Izzet was a careful thinker and an excellent teacher. He was in search of a moral philosophy, basically idealistic, oriented to a humanistic view of freedom. With his untimely death in 1349/1930 however, terminated conscientious, thoughtful work.

Both Tunc and Izzet were expressions of an attempt to break with Gokalp's nationalism in order to widen the horizons of philosophical thinking. Another reaction in this direction came with the rebirth of materialism, this time in the form of historical materialism. It is hardly possible to speak of this as a philosophical movement. It had neither a philosophical exponent of even mediocre stature nor any following in the academic circles. Its importance lay in its diffusedness and in its infiltration in bits, not as a system, into the intellectual make-up of the generations that sought liberation from Gokalp's idealism.

The same may be said of another philosophy of action: pragmatism. Although pragmatism never had a systematic presentation in the hands of a thinker comparable to Gokalp, it penetrated into the several facets of the Turkish mind and provided another diffused form of escape from Gokalp's influence.

All of these were expressions of a challenge to philosophy by the radical reforms carried out under Kemal Ataturk. All these were mere experiments in discovering new values compatible with those that were supposed to reign in modern civilization. Remembering the philosophical chaos reigning in the Western mind, one may excuse the Turkish thinkers for failing in their philosophical ventures.

Once plunged into the dazzling stage of the contemporary Western philosophy, the attempts of a number of Turkish thinkers, whose names would be too numerous to mention, became once again restless, searching for an orientation. None of these had the chance or capacity to select, digest, and systematize something that would take root as a philosophical movement.

The instability just illustrated was an inevitable consequence of the Turkish thinkers' plunge into the world of Western philosophy supported by a long tradition as well as by a constantly changing cultural and scientific background. It has shown that Turkey has not yet reached the stage of having genuine philosophical schools and representatives and that there is still a long road to travel.

Quite naturally, one reaction to this philosophical flux has been a growing distrust of philosophizing. A

group of German scientists and philosophers, who, expelled from Germany, taught in the Turkish universities, have contributed to this trend. Not by any coincidence, most of them were internationally known representatives of logical positivism. Hardly a trace of their philosophy has remained behind them in Turkey, but they left a deep impression by making the Turkish students of philosophy see what great and difficult tasks they have before them.

Discouraging though it may seem, philosophy at present is only a matter of disciplined academic teaching. The emphasis is upon the history of philosophy. The University of Istanbul, in particular, can boast of having a presentable staff of professors of philosophy. The history of Islamic philosophy is gaining special interest. More value is being given to research, especially historical, than to attempts at original thinking. This, perhaps, is the right path.

After about one century of crawling, flying, and falling, a tradition is growing. The Turkish language has a rich literature in the world's philosophy available to Turkish students. A stage of careful learning and research has come. The longer this stage lasts, the more likely will it be possible one day to speak of the existence of a genuine philosophical tradition in Turkey.

Bibliographical Note

The following is not an exhaustive bibliography of the publications of philosophical nature. It does not include publications of the following categories: (a) philosophical works translated from European languages; (b) philosophical classics translated from non-Turkish languages; (c) works of Muslim philosophers of the past; (d) philosophical dictionaries; and (e) text-books on philosophical disciplines. The great majority of the philosophical publications in modern Turkey fall under the above categories.

The following contains writings concerning the philosophical trends and problems relating to the role of philosophy in the social and cultural transformation of modern Turkey.

1. *Pre-Nineteenth Century* – Some of the *madrasahs* of the capital of the Ottoman Empire were institutions of higher learning. In the early stage of the history of this Empire teaching in them was more legal and scientific than philosophical in tenor. In course of time, these institutions lost their interest in science and confined themselves to the study of law, with the so-called “religious sciences” as subsidiary disciplines. What we might call “philosophy” was connected with *tasawwuf* that was cultivated outside the *madrasahs*. Ibn al-Arabi and Rumi were the thinkers having the greatest influence on the educated classes. See Katib Chelebi (Hajji Khalifah), *Mizan al-Haqq fi Ikhtiyar al-Ahaqq*, translated by G. L. Lewis as *The Balance of Truth*, London, 1957; A. Adnan Adivar, *Osmanli Turklerinde Ilim*, Istanbul, 1943, particularly pp. 105–06. There arose during the eleventh/seventeenth century a strong fundamentalist opposition to philosophy and mysticism both of which were branded as *ilhad*. This was followed in the twelfth/eighteenth century by the trends of scepticism, deism, and even atheism, perhaps as a reaction. No study of these is available.

2. *The Earliest Phase of the Modern Era* – The earliest manifestations of a modern philosophical tendency arose in the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century and were a reflection of the European Enlightenment. Some acquaintance with the modern European thinking, notably with Voltaire, goes back to the late twelfth/eighteenth century in which the introduction of the European natural sciences and medicine played an important role. See Cevdet Pasha, *Tarih*, Vol. VIII, Istanbul, 1303 A. H., pp. 212–14, and Vol. XII, Istanbul, 1301 A. H., p. 212. The first translation from European philosophy appeared in 1276/1859 in a collection of selections entitled *Muhaverat-ı Hikemiye* (Philosophical Dialogues) by Tahir Munif (later Pasha). This contained selections from the writings of Voltaire, Fenelon, and Fontenelle. During the Tanzimat period (1838–1916), the Turkish thinkers were interested mostly in the ideas of John Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Diderot, d’Holbach, Helvetius, and Cabanis. The influence of materialism, especially that of Ludwig Buchner, was represented by Tahsin who was the first director of the *Dar al-Funun* and a friend of Jamal al-Din Afghani. The philosophy of natural rights and social contract was reflected in the writings of Namik Kemal. See Serif Hulusi, “Namik Kemal ‘in Eserleri,” in *Namik Kemal Hakkında*, Istanbul, 1942, pp. 395–401; M. Kaplan, *Namik Kemal*, Istanbul, 1948, p.31; C. O. Tutengil, *Montesquieu ‘nun Siyasi ve İktisadi Fikirleri*, Istanbul, 1956, Chap. IV, pp. 53–73; Kamiran Birand, “18 inci Asir Fransiz Tefekkuru ve Namik Kemal,” in *Felsefe Arkivi*, Istanbul, 1945, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 90–140; and *Aydinlanma Devri Devlet Felsefesinin Tanzimata Tesirleri*, Ankara, 1955.

3. *Period of Reaction (1295/1878–1326/1908)* – No progress in the development of philosophical thinking was recorded during this period. The period was dominated by writings inspired by Afghani and Ahmed Midhat, the famous publicists of the period, dedicated to the refutation of materialistic systems. Despite this, naturalistic trends of the European thought continued their penetration and were, furthermore, strengthened by the coming of the ideas of evolution. Towards the end of the period, the writers became more acquainted with Western philosophers, particularly with the ideas of Darwin, Haeckel, Spencer, and Auguste Comte, but these remained implicit and were never expressed in writings until the coming of the *Mesrutiyet* (Constitutional) period. No monographic study is available about this period. In general, see H. Z. Ulken, “Tanzimattan Sonra Fikir Hareketleri,” in *Tanzimat*, Istanbul, 1940, pp. 757–75.

4. *The Constitutional Period* – After 1908, various philosophical tendencies came to light. Two philosophico–sociological reviews were published: *Yeni Felsefe Mecmuasi*, Salonika, and *Ulum–u İctimaiye ve İktisadiye Mecmuasi*, Istanbul. The major trends were (a) evolutionism, (b) positivism, and (c) idealism. There was also a weak and vague interest in socialism. See H. Z. Ulken, “Bizde Fikir Cereyanlari,” in *Felsefe ve İctimaiyat Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 1927, Vol. I, No. 4, pp. 311–14; “Turkiyede Positivism Temayulu,” in *Insan*, Istanbul, 1939, No. 11, pp. 849–53; “Turkiyede Idealism Temayulu,” *ibid.*, Istanbul, 1939, No. 12, pp. 929–38; C. O. Tutengil, *Prens Sabahaddin*, Istanbul, 1954. The works produced by writers and translators such as Baha Tevfik, Ahmed Nebil, Haydar Rifat, Subhi Edhem, Mustafa Subhi, Edhem Necdet, and others were not original but transmitted mostly Western philosophical ideas. The idealistic trend was ushered in by Zia Gokalp; see his *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, translated and edited by N. Berkes, London and New York, 1959, pp. 46ff.

5. *The Republican Period* – The study of philosophy in the form of teaching, writing, or translation began in this period in the real sense. Translations from Western philosophers such as Bergson, James, and Dewey, and, later, Russell and the logical positivists, phenomenologists, and, finally, the existentialists became more extensive. This is the period of a definitive turn to Western philosophy. During the 1930's the translation of philosophical classics, ranging from Plato to Russell, began. Scores of major philosophical works were published under the Ministry of Education. The translation work is still in progress. The philosophical reviews of the period were *Felsefe ve İctimaiyat Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 1927–1930, edited by Mehmed Servet; *Felsefe Yillig*, Istanbul, 1931–1932, edited by H. Z. Ulken; *Is*, Istanbul, 1934, edited by F. Findikoglu; *Edebiyat Fakultesi Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 1916–1917 and 1922–1938; *Felsefe Arkivi*, Istanbul, 1948. A Philosophical Society was founded in Istanbul in 1928. About the problems of philosophy and the major trends of thought in general, see the following: Mustafa Sekip, Tunc, “Turk Inkilabinin Felsefeye Tesiri,” in *Hayat*, Ankara, 1927, No. 9, pp. 164–65; *Memleketimizde Felsefenin Inkisafi İcin Lazim Gelen Sartlar*, Ankara, 1938; Mehmed İzzet, “Dar-ul-Funununda Felsefe Dersleri,” in *Edebiyat Fakultesi Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 1925, Vol. IV, No. 2, pp. 121–32; Mehmed Servet, “Fikir Hayatimizda Bir Muhasebe,” in *Hayat*, Ankara, 1929, Vol. V, Nos. 116–31–this is the best survey of the trends before 1929; H. Z. Ulken, “Turk Felsefe Dilinin Gelismesi,” in *Felsefe Tercumerleri Dergisi*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Istanbul, 1947, pp. 135–43. The following may be listed among the works containing some contribution to original thinking and also as a sample of the range of the philosophical interest during the last three decades: Mehmed İzzet, *Milliyet Nazariyeleri ve Milli Hayat*, Istanbul, 1925; “Buyuk İnsanlar ve Musir Hayat,” in *Edebiyat Fakultesi Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 1923, Vol. III, No. 1, pp. 51–61, Nos. 2–3, pp. 91–102; Mustafa Sekip (Tunc), *Terakki Fikrinin Mense ve Tekamulu*, Istanbul, 1928; *Bir Din Felsefesine Dogru*, Istanbul, 1959; Hilmi Ziya Ulken, *Ask Ahlaki*, Istanbul, 1931 (the latter has been the most prolific author of the period; he has written practically on every branch of philosophy, but the above seems to be his most original work); A. Adnan–Adivar, *Tarih Boyunca İlim ve Din*, 2 Vols., Istanbul, 1944; Macit Gokberk, *Kant ile Herder'in Tarih Anlyislari*, Istanbul, 1948; Kamiran Birand, *Dilthey ve Rickert'te Manevi İlimlerin Temellendi-rilmesi*, Ankara, 1954; Nermi Uygur, *Edmund Husserl'de Baskasinin Ben'i Problemi*, Istanbul, 1958.

Chapter 77: Renaissance in Iran: General

In early thirteenth/nineteenth century, Iran presented a gloomy picture of political and social decline. After the collapse of the Safawid power (907/1501–1135/1722) it was never able to regain its old glory. The military achievements and political consolidation under Nadir Shah (1149/1736–1160/1747) were short-lived, and the admirable efforts of Karim Khan Zand (1164/1750–1193/1779), to restore the country's old prestige did not produce lasting results.

A new dynasty was founded in 1211/1796 by Aqa Muhammad Qajar, a great despot and a sadist of the

worst type. It was under this new dynasty that Iran was reduced to a mere shadow of its past. The disaster came through internal disorder and foreign interference. During this period the Anglo–French rivalry in Europe and Napoleon’s grandiose plans to conquer India in early thirteenth/nineteenth century dragged Iran into the orbit of international diplomacy. Again, the new Western influences awakened the people to their miserable plight and led them to the assertion of their basic rights.

An offensive and defensive alliance was concluded between Iran and France in 1222/1807, mainly by the efforts of General Gardanne, which put Great Britain on the alert. By this time her stakes in the Indo–Pakistan subcontinent had become so vital that any threat to her interests there was bound to have repercussions in Europe. Consequently, Iran was wooed with equal vigour by both France and England and was, thus, dragged into international politics in sinister circumstances.

The story of Iran had touched the history of Europe at many points right from Darius and Xerxes in the sixth century B. C. to brisk diplomatic contacts between European Powers and the Safawids in the tenth/sixteenth century, but never before had Iran played the minor role. In the new set–up it had primarily to play the part of a victim. A political era was now initiated in which Iran had much to suffer and learn.

After the downfall of Napoleon, the Anglo–French rivalry in Iran was substituted by the expansionist policy of the Czarist Russia. This led to disastrous and prolonged military campaigns that ended in the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmanchay in 1228/1813 and 1244/1828 respectively. These compelled Iran to part with some of the richest territories in the north. Then started the sordid story of the Anglo–Russian intrigues and encroachments and a race by these powers for extorting economic and political concessions that at times deprived the country of nearly all its resources.¹

The tale of internal administration is no less sombre. The Shah of Iran was absolute and his decisions were unquestionable. “The taxes were collected, concessions were granted, and presents were offered, all for the benefit of the Shah and his courtiers, whose extravagance kept Persia poor.”²

Power was abused in strange ways as Court decisions were sold and robbers were licensed.³ Public offices were monopolized by a host of princes – Fateh Ali Shah (1212/1797–1250/1834) alone had one hundred and fifty–nine children⁴, who in the absence of a strong and efficient central government plundered the helpless peasants with impunity.

Out of the ashes of an almost ruined society, however, emerged a national movement the goal of which was to resurrect a new and independent Iran.

The Russian campaigns had proved the vulnerability of the Iranian army to the new scientific methods of warfare and awakened the Iranians to their woeful backwardness and to the compelling need of Western education. Amongst the outstanding patriots who quickly grasped the implications of the new situation were Prince Abbas Mirza, the eldest son of Fateh Ali Shah, and Mirza Taqi Khan Amir–i Kabir or Amir–i Nizam, the Prime Minister of Nadir al–Din Shah (1265/1848–1314/1896).

Prince Abbas Mirza, whom Watson describes as “the noblest of the Qajar race,”⁵ not only played the chief role in the organization of the Iranian army on Western lines, but was also amongst the first to realize the need for sending Iranian students to European countries for higher education. He sent many students to England to study science at his own expense.

He was the first to introduce typography in Iran, which was a forerunner of the printing press. Again, it was at his instance that a number of Russian and French books on military science were translated into Persian. Mirza Taqi Khan Amir-i Kabir was an extraordinary statesman produced by Iran in the thirteenth/nineteenth century. During the short period of three years that he was the Prime Minister, he set himself to put his country on the road to progress and stability and arrest the political and social decline by the introduction of administrative, legal, and educational reforms of far-reaching importance.

He also tried to retrieve the honour of his country in the comity of nations by a vigorous foreign policy. His brilliant career, however, was cut short by Court intrigues. His exit from Iranian politics was a calamity of great magnitude.⁶ Perhaps his greatest reform was the foundation of the *Dar al-Funun* in 1268/1851, which became the centre of the growing educational and cultural activities in Iran.

This college, started on modern lines, had, besides Iranians, several Austrian professors on its staff. The presence of foreigners facilitated the introduction of new teaching methods. The college looked after the education of the boys of upper classes and provided the Government with diplomats, administrators, and military officers.

To begin with, it had one hundred students on its rolls and its curriculum included courses on infantry, cavalry, and artillery tactics, medicine, geometry, engineering, chemistry, pharmacy, geology, French, English, and Russian. Music and painting were added later. The year 1272/1855 witnessed the formation of the Ministry of Education. Forty-two students were sent to Europe in 1275/1858 in spite of the opposition of the Shah, who had once remarked that an ideal Persian was one who did not know whether Brussels was a city or a cabbage.⁷

In 1289/1872, a school of languages known as *Maktab-i Mashiriyeh* was opened under the supervision of Muhammad Hasan Khan Itimad al-Sultaneh. In addition to languages, it provided facilities for the teaching of different subjects in arts and sciences. A college was inaugurated in Tabriz in 1293/1876 with both Iranian and European teachers on its staff.

This was followed by military colleges in Teheran and Isfahan in 1301/1883 and 1304/1886 respectively. The first school for girls was opened in Chaltas near Kirman in 1315/1897. The next year a society was founded for the express purpose of coordinating the working of various schools as well as for the unification of educational standards. A school of political science was founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1317/1899. This was followed by a school of agriculture in 1318/1900. That is how Iran was slowly struggling ahead in the field of education.

Along with the educational efforts of the State the Western Christian missions too had been active in

opening schools in Iran. The French Lazarite mission was the first to start a school at Tabriz in 1256/1840. In co-operation with les Filles de la Charite, the Lazarites established, during the next three quarters of a century, a chain of seventy-six schools for boys and girls in various towns. These schools played a substantial part in making the Government decide in 1319/1901 to recognize schools in the country run after the French model.

The American Presbyterian Mission also established in Teheran two schools, one in 1289/1872 for boys, and another in 1314/1896 for girls. The British Church Missionary Society founded the Steward Memorial College at Isfahan in 1322/1904. Amongst the non-missionary foreign schools may be included those founded by the Alliance Francaise and the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Germans established a technical college in Teheran, and the Russians opened a commercial school in 1330/1911. This was followed by more Russian schools at Tabriz and other towns in northern Iran.

Amongst the educative influences the role of the Press cannot be overestimated. It admirably discharged the vital function of formulating public opinion in the country and finally bringing about a revolutionary change in people's attitude towards national problems. It accentuated and revitalized the patriotic feeling which had never died down in the country, thanks to the immense influence and unique popularity of the national epic, namely, Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, as well as the lively sense of nearness which the nation has always had with its mighty past.

The first ever newspaper was published in Teheran in 1253/1837 by Mirza Saleh Shirazi⁸ who was, incidentally, a member of the first batch of students sent to England in 1225/1810. The next newspaper *Ruznameh-i Waqayii Ittifaqiyah* appeared in 1267/1850. The second half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century witnessed remarkable activity in the field of journalism.

The newspapers gradually became more outspoken in their comments. The despotic and corrupt government in the country could hardly tolerate independent criticism of its shortsighted policies, with the result that some patriots started independent Persian newspapers outside the country. Important amongst those which helped bring about a new political and social consciousness in Iran were the *Akhtar*, published in Istanbul in 1292/1875, the *Qanun*, founded in London in 1307/1889,⁹ the *Hikmat*, printed in Cairo in 1310/1892, and the *Habl al-Matin*, started in Calcutta in 1311/1893.

Their entry into Iran was prohibited from time to time and yet they were smuggled into the country enclosed in envelopes or books¹⁰ and commanded an ardent readership. By the turn of the century the tone of the Iranian newspapers had grown bitterer, even fiercer. Some of these were suppressed.

One of the editors of the *Sur-i Israfil*, Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi, was put to death. The Press played a vital role in conducting the campaign for constitutional government. So much so that the jelly-graph publications known as *Shab Nameh* used to circulate from hand to hand in those days of official terrorism. Undoubtedly, the Iranian Press brought the dream of renaissance nearer realization.

Amongst the modernizing influences in Iran one cannot ignore the part played by the telegraph line. The

Iranian Government, conscious of the role of telegraph in modern communications, built the first line in 1275/1858 between Teheran and Sultaniyeh. This was later extended to Tabriz and Julfa. The British Government was interested in the extension of telegraph lines in Iran because it lay on the direct route between Europe and India and formed a vital link in the new international telegraphic network.

Three conventions were, therefore, signed between Iran and Great Britain between 1280/1863 and 1290/1873 for the extension and improvement of telegraph lines between Europe and India. According to one of these signed, in 1287/1870, the Indo–European Telegraph Company completed a line between Teheran and London via Tabriz, Tiflis, Warsaw, and Berlin. By the end of the last century Iran had built up a system of telegraphic communications that connected most of her important towns. [11](#)

In the later half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, Nasir al–Din Shah thrice voyaged extravagantly to Europe. When his reckless handling of the exchequer precipitated a financial crisis, he launched upon a policy of granting concessions to foreign countries as a convenient source of revenue. In return the European imperialist Powers began to involve Iran in huge financial commitments that had far–reaching political and economic consequences.

In the words of William Hass, “Teheran became a meeting place for concession hunters of European nations. Many were adventurers and crooks....” [12](#) This created a sense of frustration not only in the people but also in the Shah himself who is said to have remarked once: “I wish that no European had ever set his foot on my country’s soil, for then we would have been spared all these tribulations. But since the foreigners have unfortunately penetrated into our country, we shall, at least, make the best possible use of them.”

Unfortunately, he did not. While concessions were being abused, public opinion began to ferment. In 1289/1872 he had to withdraw the concessions granted to Baron Julius de Reuter. But in 1308/1890 he granted a concession to one Major Talbot bargaining away the tobacco industry for fifty years throughout the country. This caused violent riots and countrywide agitation and led to a national movement against the despotic regime. The political unrest increased till it culminated in a revolution in 1324/1906.

Amongst those who now stepped in with a determination to fight against foreign influences was Sayyid Jamal al–Din, popularly known as Afghani. [13](#) A born revolutionary, he flashed about the Muslim world exhorting its people to rise against the despotic rule of their kings, and put their house in order against the inroads of Western imperialism.

He had a dynamic personality. A peerless orator, he swept the masses off their feet with his impassioned speech. He cut across the frontiers of nations, and revolutions followed in his footsteps. Iran, Egypt, and Turkey felt the full impact of his personality. The Young Turk Movement of 1326/1908 owed most of its dynamism to the overwhelming influence of his teachings during his stay at Istanbul.

The Egyptian national movement and to no less a degree the intellectual awakening represented by Shaikh Muhammad Abduh were the direct outcomes of his creative genius. Most of the future leaders of

the Iranian revolution in its early phase were inspired by him. Sayyid Jamal al-Din's eloquent sermons created amongst the Iranians a devotional attachment to him. He awakened them to a sense of dignity and freedom and to the dangers of internal despotism and foreign exploitation.

Even when he was treacherously expelled from the country, people still continued to receive guidance from him from London where he had started a newspaper called *Dia al-Khafiqain* with the help of Mirza Malkom Khan. In his newspaper Sayyid Jamal al-Din wrote his historic letter to the Iranian '*ulama*'. In this letter he appealed to the divines to rise to a man to save the independence of their country. The effect was miraculous. The famous tobacco riots followed and shook royal absolutism. The real success of this revolutionary figure lay in winning over the '*ulama*' who wielded immense influence on the masses. The seeds of revolution were thus sown. The political discontent which found its first open expression in the tobacco riots of 1309/1891 culminated in the revolution of 1324/1906.

Nasir al-Din Shah was assassinated in 1313/1896 by Mirza Reza Kirmani and was succeeded by Muzaffar al-Din Shah (1313/1896-1324/1906). At this time Iran presented a sordid picture of heartless exploitation by Western nations. The new Shah had a paradoxical character. He was sympathetic to the peoples' political aspirations but he was weak and fickle-minded and played in the hands of corrupt and ambitious ministers who dissipated revenues and mortgaged national resources for foreign loans.

The Russian influence had now reached its peak. Russia advanced loans to Iran, established a bank in Teheran as a rival institution to the British Imperial Bank, while marked increase was registered in Russian trade with the country. By 1324/1906 Iran owed seven and a half million pounds sterling to Russia, mainly spent on the Shah's travels to Europe and on his corrupt ministers.

In return for the Russian and British-Indian loans almost the entire customs revenues of the country had been mortgaged to the two powers. The financial chaos had been accompanied by administrative crisis that drove people to organize an anti-government movement in the country. A secret society was formed by the name of *Islah Talaban*¹⁴ or "the reformists" under the leadership of Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, which rendered considerable service to the cause of freedom. Along with Tabatabai the other most prominent religious leader was Sayyid Abd Allah Bahbahani.¹⁵

The orators like Malik al-Mutakallimin and Sayyid Jamal al-Din Waiz Isfahani tried to awaken people by fiery speeches.¹⁶ At this time an originally minor incident took place that was to touch off a big national movement aiming at the constitutional government.

Encouraged by the policy of the Prime Minister Ain al-Daulah to terrorize the divines and merchants who were in the vanguard of the movement, the Governor of Teheran found a pretext to bastinado a well-known merchant. This provided the people with an excuse to intensify the political movement. The market was closed down and a stormy meeting was held in the Masjid-i Shah. The same night the '*ulama*' decided to lodge the customary form of protest, that is, to take "*bast*" in the sanctuary of Shah Abd al-Azim in the outskirts of Teheran. The scheme to launch a revolutionary movement was almost

complete. This incident hastened its implementation by three months. It was Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai who had prevailed upon the '*ulama*' to start immediately the movement that, according to an earlier decision, was to be launched three months hence. [17](#)

About two thousand persons now took refuge in the above-mentioned sanctuary to condemn the high-handedness of the Governor. This move had the desired effect. The shah agreed to dismiss the Governor of Teheran as well as the Belgian head of the Customs [18](#) Department and to institute the Adalat Khaneh aimed at restricting the powers of the government officials and the nobility.

The promise was not kept and the purposes were not fulfilled and as a consequence the agitation gained momentum. Meanwhile, reports had been pouring into Teheran about the repressive measures adopted by the Governors of Fars and Khurasan and the consequent riot at Meshed and the closing down of the bazaar at Shiraz for one full month.

One can have an idea of the financial crisis in the country and of the blatant disregard of human rights by the government officials from an incident revealed by Aqa Tabatabai in one of his public speeches. When, due to abject poverty, the people of a certain locality failed to pay wheat-tax the local officer forcibly rounded up three hundred girls and sold them off to Turkomans for thirty-six kilograms of wheat per head. [19](#)

Such inhuman conditions drove the people to desperation. It was the arrest of one of the divines, viz., Shaikh Muhammad Waiz, and the consequent mass agitation and shooting by the army which led some '*ulama*' and merchants to take refuge in the Jami Masjid and to demand the dismissal of the Governor of Teheran. Not content with this form of protest, the '*ulama*' led a mass migration movement known as *hijrat-i kubra* to the holy city of Qum, about a hundred miles south of the capital.

This further gave rise to a movement amongst the divines, merchants, and representatives of other classes in the town to seek refuge in the British embassy, a move helped by the political tussle between England and Russia. The Russian influence had become paramount through the granting of the loans, the foundation of a Russian bank, and the winning over of the Prime Minister.

It suited the British Government to help patriots in dislodging the Premier and fighting the Russian influence. Hence the British embassy offered all facilities to the political refugees whose number had swelled to nearly fourteen thousand. They refused to leave until the constitution was granted. Their original stand for the dismissal of the local Governor now culminated in the demand for a constitutional government and the dismissal of the Prime Minister.

The Shah had to concede to the irresistible popular demand. The Governor had to go. The '*ulama*' made a triumphant return from Qum and on Jamadi al-Thani 14, 1324/August 5, 1906, the Shah issued orders for the establishment of the National Parliament. The nation succeeded in attaining its goal after a relatively short struggle. Elections were soon held and the Shah inaugurated the *Majlis* (Parliament) in Shaban/October of the same year. It did not take long to draw up and ratify the constitution. Thus, the

Iranians won the unique distinction of becoming the first nation in the East to attain the parliamentary form of government.[20](#)

A nation that had been devoted for about two thousand and five hundred years to the theory of the divine right of kings, under the impact of the new democratic urge, threw away the yoke of monarchic absolutism. The process, however, was not so smooth as it promised to be at first. Muzaffar al-Din Shah died within five months of the granting of the constitution and his successor Muhammad Ali Shah, himself an ambitious despot, was persuaded by the Russians to overthrow the constitution.

He bombed the Parliament building in 1326/1908 and set upon a policy of repression. But the nationalists rose in revolt in Adharbaijan and Isfahan, and ultimately the Bakhtiyari tribes from Isfahan marched in Teheran under the leadership of Sardar-i Asad. This victory in Jamadi al-Thani 1327/July 1909 sealed the fate of Muhammad Ali Shah who had to abdicate in favour of his twelve-year old son Abroad Shah, destined to be the last of the Qajars, while he himself took refuge at Odessa in Russia. He struggled to stage a comeback in 1329/1911, but failed.

Muhammad Ali Shah's abdication brought an end to what is known as *Istibdad-i Saghir* or the smaller tyranny in Iranian history. But Iran was not destined to reap the benefits of constitutional freedom for many years. As early as 1325/1907 it had been divided into spheres of influence by the Russian and British Governments under an agreement which was the direct result of the Triple Entente concluded in Europe on the one hand and of the growing confidence of Iranians in an independent, democratic form of government on the other.

The Parliament could not work with freedom, as was amply proved by the resignation in 1329/1911 of Morgan Shuster, the American financial adviser, who had been engaged by the Iranian Government to reorganize the finances of the country. The riots which followed and the demonstration of three hundred women in front of the Parliament building in which they brandished revolvers out of their veils and threatened to kill their husbands and sons if they yielded to pressure and compromised with the national honour,[21](#) showed that Iran was now pulsating with a new spirit and a new urge for freedom.

The First World War which came soon after, however, stifled the new aspirations. Iran was overwhelmed by the sweep of international events. It was occupied by the Russians in the north and the British in the south. Adharbaijan had to suffer the havoc of war on a large scale.[22](#)

After the October Revolution of 1917/1336, however, the Russian policy completely changed. The Russian forces withdrew from Iran and the new government gave up all territorial claims and all economic concessions except fishery rights in the Caspian Sea. The vacuum created by the departure of the Russian troops was immediately filled up by the British army.

In 1338/1919 the British concluded an agreement with the Iranian Government headed by Wuthuq al-Dauleh, which virtually meant the complete political and economic domination of Iran by Great Britain. The Parliament, however, refused to ratify the agreement and be a party to surrendering the sovereign

rights of the nation. This shows that the national will for survival had triumphed even in the worst hour of political crisis.

The proposed agreement aroused strong feeling in foreign countries and even amongst the British people, especially in view of the scandalous circumstances in which it had been negotiated.²³ The world opinion stirred up against the British deal, the withdrawal of the Russian forces, the offer to Iran of a pact of friendship by the Soviet Government, and the lack of enthusiasm amongst the war-weary British people to undertake new imperialistic ventures—all contributed to the cause of Iranian freedom.

The most determining factor in the situation was the people themselves who jealously safeguarded the spirit of freedom even in their darkest hour of trial, another evidence of the historical truth that Iran has always survived the greatest political crises, owing to the virile national spirit of the people which never completely died down and which had by now found a symbol, however weak, in the resistance put up by the Iranian Parliament.

It was at this stage that Reza Khan, a colonel in the Cossak Brigade,²⁴ appeared on the scene. In collaboration with Sayyid Dia al-Din Tabatabai, editor of the Teheran newspaper *Rad*, Reza Khan, staged a *coup d'état* on April 21, 1921. He arrested members of the Cabinet and formed a new Government of which Sayyid Dia al-Din was selected the Prime Minister.

Reza Khan himself took over as the Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the army. Five days later, the Parliament rejected the Anglo-Persian Agreement that it had so long resisted. To provide an element of dramatic surprise the new Iranian Government signed on the same day a pact of friendship with Soviet Russia, by which the Soviet Government revoked all the concessions that had been granted earlier to the Czarist Government.

“All debts were cancelled and the Russian bank, railways, roads, and posts were handed back to Iran; Russian rights under the capitulations were also abolished.”²⁵ After this pact with the Russians the Iranian Government became bold. Now that it had rejected the agreement it ordered the British officers and advisers out of the country.

In the new set-up the British troops that had occupied parts of the country so long had to withdraw. This withdrawal was effected in stages so that the last outpost in the south-eastern desert was evacuated in 1343/1924. Soon after, the last of the Soviet troops, still stationed in Gilan, also left the country. For the first time in about twenty years the Iranian soil was now free from the presence of foreign troops.

A new wave of national resurgence now swept the whole country, which, although still licking the wounds of the many inglorious years of misery and humiliation, yet aspired to conquer hunger, disease, governmental inefficiency, and the large-scale devastation wrought by World War I. It must be repeated that even in their darkest hour of frustration the people of Iran never abandoned the democratic ideals of the revolution of 1324/1906, and even in the face of the heaviest odds, and perhaps because of these, the national spirit continued to gather force and momentum.

Reza Khan was the first Asian dictator of the post-war world. As the Commander-in-Chief of the army and the Minister of War, he became the virtual ruler of the country. He was born in 1296/1878 at Alasht in Sawad Kuh in the Caspian province of Mazandaran. He inherited the military profession from his father, Major Abbas Ali Khan, and joined in 1318/1900 the Cossak Brigade in which he served with distinction and attracted the attention of some of the British officers who had replaced the Russians after the October Revolution.

To be able to exercise greater independence in his new position, he got certain sources of revenue transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of War. Sayyid Dia al-Din, who was a known Anglophile, soon came to realize who the real power in the Cabinet was and had to go within a hundred days of his installation as the first Prime Minister after the coup. He was followed by a number of premiers, all overshadowed by the dominant and fierce personality of Reza Khan, who eventually stepped into the office of the Prime Minister in 1342/1923. Shortly afterwards Ahmad Shah, who was destined to be the last Qajar ruler, left for France never to come back to his country.

Immediately after the coup, Reza Khan set out to re-establish law and order with an iron hand and to unify the country under a strong central government. He first proceeded against Mirza Kuchik Khan, who had established an independent republic in Gilan, and defeated him in 1340/1921.

In 1342/1923 he liquidated the power of the Kurd leader Ismail Aqa Simitqo, who was planning to establish himself in Adharbajjan and had become dangerously strong for the central government. Next, he turned his attention to Shaikh Khazal of Mohammereh, who posed the greatest threat in the oil-rich region of the southwest. Very soon he was able to bring the Shaikh into complete submission. Different turbulent tribes including the Bakhtiyaris and the Lurs were also pacified by 1344/1925.

These successful military campaigns and the consequent establishment of law and order in the strife-torn country won the Sardar-i Sipah, as Reza Khan was known in those days, immense popularity, which was further enhanced by the ability he showed in unifying and reorganizing the army. He absorbed the South Persia Rifles, a force raised by the British during World War I, and the *gendarmerie* created by Morgan Shuster into the Cossak Brigade and formed a compact national army. Adequate resources were diverted to re-equip and modernize it.

Reza Khan, the dictator, was now faced with the question of the future constitution. In spite of 2,500 years of its monarchic traditions, the Iranian nation, or at least a section of it, was now seriously advocating the establishment of a republic. After World War I the ideas of political democracy swept the whole world and the Iranians who had won constitutional government much earlier were now thrilled at the prospect of a republican form of government.

Ahmad Shah had made an exit. The example of Turkey, where the Caliphate had been abolished in 1343/1924, gave great impetus to this idea. But at this moment opposition came from the most unexpected quarters. The Iranian divines who had played a highly important role in the constitutional

struggle were alarmed at the extinction of the religious authority of the '*ulama*' in Turkey.

The apprehension that in a republic they would fare no better led them to oppose the new demand. In April 1924, Reza Khan forbade any discussion on the republican form of government.²⁶ In February 1925, he was officially given dictatorial powers; on October 31, Ahmad Shah was deposed and on December 12 Reza Shah was chosen the Shah of Iran by a majority vote in the Parliament. On April 25, 1926, the coronation of the new Shah took place amidst scenes of pomp and festivity. He now became the founder of the new royal dynasty of the Pahlawis.

The word "Pahlawi" has great historical associations. It is not only the name of the language which was spoken in western Iran during the Sassanian period, as has been pointed out by so many writers, but it is also the name of the brave tribe known as the Parthians,²⁷ long misunderstood by the Iranians as a foreign element but actually being of the purest Iranian stock.

The Parthians had driven out Greeks from Iran in 250 B.C. and during their long rule of nearly five hundred years (250 B.C. – 227 A.D.) they had vanquished many a foe on the field of battle. The word "Pahlawi" was, thus, bound to conjure up in Reza Shah's mind the visions of a glorious past from which he could derive boundless inspiration like his countrymen.

The past became a symbol of power and glory that stirred up the national spirit, as it had never done before. This spirit now touched new heights. Indeed, the national spirit was exhibited in many countries after World War I with exaggerated enthusiasm. Iran was no exception. A process of revivalism was set in motion that enveloped the entire national life.

Love of the old found expression in the minute study of ancient Iranian languages and literature in a desperate and even futile attempt to purify the Persian language of foreign influences and in an effort to harmonize in the stately buildings in Teheran the old Achaemenian architectural designs found in the buildings of Persepolis and Susa with the latest motifs in German architecture.

The Government took keen interest in archaeological excavations and built a huge museum in the capital to project the glory that was Iran. Even the word "Persia" long in vogue in the whole world was officially changed for "Iran", the old name of the country. This exuberant love of the past was also exhibited in the commemoration of anniversaries of great literary figures and thinkers. Thus the thousandth anniversary of Firdausi's birth was celebrated officially on a lavish scale in 1353/1934 to which Orientalists were invited from all over the world. This tradition has been carried into the regime of the present Shah and the memory of the philosophers ibn Sina and Nasir al-Din Tusi and the poet Rudaki has been similarly honoured in recent years.

A society known as the "Anjuman-i Athar-i Milli"²⁸ was formed in 1345/1926 to look after the mausoleums of eminent writers, poets, and philosophers. It has so far repaired or reconstructed the mausoleums of Firdausi, ibn Sina, Khayyam, and a few others. A tribute has also been paid to poets and scholars by associating the broad modern avenues of Teheran with some of the immortal names in

Persian literature. Thus, we come across Hafiz Avenue, Sadi Avenue, Firdausi Avenue, etc., which happen to be amongst the finest in the city.

While the anxiety of the new regime to attain material progress was reflected in the improvement of communications by building a network of roads to link all important towns with Teheran and by constructing a spectacular railway line which connected the Caspian Sea with the Persian Gulf in 1356/1937 at a cost of £30,000,000, and while it implemented many industrial and financial projects, it was never forgetful of the all-important question of education.

Extensive reforms were carried out in this field. The number of elementary and secondary schools was still very limited. After the revolution in 1324/1906, an effort was made to reorganize the educational system of the country. For the first time interest was taken by the Government in women's education. To foster an independent national outlook in children, the employment of foreign teachers was forbidden in elementary schools.

The progress, however, was still very slow. It was left to Reza Shah's Government to make a fundamental departure from the old system both in its organization and scope. In 1340/1921 there were only two colleges in Teheran, both run by foreign missions. Reza Shah set out to make amends for the deficiencies of the past, first by unifying the sporadic activities into a national system of education and then by gradually expanding its scope.

Modern educational methods were adopted. Elementary education was made free and compulsory. Separate secondary schools for boys and girls were established. The buildings of these schools in Teheran are very impressive and symbolic of the new spirit of progress and development. Rightly enough, some of these schools have been named after great Persian poets.

Secondary education is not compulsory in the country but tuition fees are low. The secondary school certificate is treated as equal to matriculation by the German, French, and some British and American universities.²⁹ These schools generally branch off into liberal arts and sciences after three years. There are a number of technical, vocational, industrial, agricultural, medical, and other schools that prepare students for higher university education as well as for specific occupations.

To give an idea of progress in the spread of education it would suffice to say that the number of elementary and secondary schools, which at the end of World War I was nearly three hundred, was raised to five thousand in the next decade and a half. Ever since it has made rapid strides forward. In 1376/1957, there were 7,301 elementary and 842 secondary schools in the country with 910,000 and 163,000 students respectively.³⁰ The stress now is on village schools and on manual and technical training.³¹

A special Act was passed by the Parliament in 1347/1928 according to which one hundred students were sent to Europe annually for higher studies by the Ministry of Education at State expense. This was particularly welcome as no university existed in the country. Besides, the Ministries of War, Posts and

Telegraphs, and the Departments of Agriculture, Justice, Finance, and Industries also sent abroad a number of students to ensure the supply of trained personnel. To have an idea of expansion in higher education, it may be noted that the number of students studying abroad in 1376/1957 was about four thousand.³²

During the new regime education was practically brought under State control. After 1351/1932 no foreign school was permitted to admit students of Iranian nationality. In 1360/1941 the Government took over all foreign schools.

The Teheran University Act was passed on May 3, 1934. The foundation stone of the University campus was laid by the Shah on February 5, 1935. Soon elegant and spacious buildings began to rise with Mount Alburz in the background. The University had five faculties to begin with, namely, Arts, Science, Law, Medicine, and Engineering. The faculties of Fine Arts and Divinity were added afterwards. The campus of Teheran University enjoys a site of great natural beauty.

Although new universities have been founded at Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Meshed during recent years, they are as yet in their infancy. Teheran University has come to enjoy a unique position in the intellectual life of the country. It can now accommodate hundreds of students who would otherwise go to Western universities for higher studies. It runs post-graduate classes in Persian literature and affords facilities for the doctor's degree.

The names of most of the eminent Iranian scholars are associated with the University academic staff. The literary output of the academic staff is by no means inconsiderable. Persian being the medium of instruction, the task of rendering important works of arts and sciences from Western languages into Persian engaged immediate attention. Several hundred books have been translated or originally written by the University professors. In order to popularize the Persian language and literature and to familiarize the foreign students of Persian with the latest trends in the language, the University runs a special class for scholars from foreign countries.

Technical education comes within the purview of the Ministry of Industries, which maintains a college for mining, metallurgy, chemistry, etc. Besides, there is a chain of art and craft schools where pure and utilitarian arts are taught including those traditionally associated with Iran like miniature painting, book illumination, enamel-work, and carpet making. Above these there is the Teheran College of Arts.

Other Ministries also run their own colleges. The Ministry of Agriculture has an agricultural college at Karaj and a college of animal husbandry in Teheran; the Ministry of Education administers the Academy of Music. Some other Ministries like those of Posts and Telegraphs, Transport, and the Interior also have colleges to meet their own requirements. Scientific education is encouraged. Library facilities have been extended throughout the country. The Parliament Library and the National Library enjoy a pride of place in this rather elaborate network.

There is co-education in elementary schools and at the university stage. The doors of all the colleges

have been flung open to girl students and today there are a large number of girls studying in various colleges, especially in the departments of Medicine and Fine Arts.

As the curricula of educational institutions would suggest, the main object of Iranian education is to produce good citizens imbued with a profound sense of patriotism. All possible means are explored to strengthen the national spirit and the national outlook.

Adult education is not ignored. In a country where the overwhelming majority of people are illiterate, the importance of adult education cannot be over-emphasized. In 1355/1936, steps were taken to establish adult education centres in the country. The response was so spontaneous that within two months seven hundred and fifty centres were opened with more than fifty-six thousand adults on rolls.³³ The demand increased so rapidly that the Ministry of Education had to allocate increasingly large sums for adult education every year.

With all the admirable progress made in the field of education one would say that in view of the population and vast area of the country much work still remains to be done to justify the possibility of a scientific and technical revolution that is the dream of every educated citizen.

In the thirteenth/nineteenth century few facilities existed for the maintenance and improvement of public health. The British General Mission Board and the American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, were running hospitals in a few cities by the middle of the century. The earliest to be built by the Iranian Government, however, dates back to 1294/1877.

Conscious of the deplorable lack of medical facilities in the country, the new regime devoted full attention to this vital problem so that now every big town has a well equipped hospital. There are several large hospitals each with the capacity of five hundred beds. In addition to this, there are a large number of dispensaries throughout the country.

Apart from the spacious and magnificent medical college in Teheran there is a number of medical institutions in the country. There is no prejudice against nursing, and various colleges exist in Teheran for the training of nurses. Teheran has all kinds of medical specialists, while there are numerous clinics run by Iranian doctors who have qualified from abroad or from the University of Teheran.

One of the fundamental changes in the Iranian society in recent history has been the emancipation of women, who had for long been deprived of their legitimate legal and social rights accorded to them by Islam. The late Shah, inspired by the example set by Mustafa Kemal, whom he looked upon as his model and whom he visited in 1353/1934, introduced far-reaching social changes.

The Shah had been gradually encouraging the fair sex to come out and discard the veil. By 1354/1935 a favourable atmosphere had been created for a big change. On January 8, 1936, the Shah provided a dramatic touch to his policy of emancipating women when, accompanied by the Queen and his two grown-up daughters, all the three unveiled, he appeared in the Teachers' Training School in Teheran to

present diplomas for the year. This was a signal for the abolition of the veil.

In his speech the Shah advised the women of Iran to serve their country with talent and ability. He could not imagine, he said, that one-half of the country's working power should be idle. From this day women assumed a new role in society. Legislation had already come to their help. Although *mutah* (temporary marriage) and polygamy were still in vogue, woman was given the right to sue for divorce if the husband married without her consent, or if he had concealed the fact of an earlier marriage.

Women now came out to work as typists, clerks, and secretaries in banks and commercial firms and, with the further progress in education, also as doctors, artists, lawyers, and even pilots. After the abdication of Reza Shah in 1360/1941 the force of law behind the abolition of veil was gone, with the result that the majority of women who had not yet got accustomed to the new change went back to *chadur* (veil).³⁴

Iranian women still lack some other fundamental rights like those of suffrage and appointments to high offices, yet the movement to win the rights enjoyed by their sisters in some other Islamic countries, say Pakistan, exists in the country and is gradually gaining force.

The impact of the West and the far-reaching changes in the political and social life of the country were bound to reflect themselves in modern Persian literature. Till the middle of the thirteenth/nineteenth century poets and writers pursued old themes without showing any awareness of the new change. The later half of the century was marked by great social and political upheavals.

The Press created a new political and social consciousness amongst the people. By the end of the century, the Persian poets and writers had become increasingly conscious of their role in society. They gave expression to these new feelings in their works. Some poets, Kamali being foremost amongst them, advocated the cause of pan-Islamism. The chief interest of the poets, however, lay in the future of their own country and in its suffering masses, and its despotic masters.

They put new vigour into the constitutional movement. We find a rare phenomenon of patriotic poetry in the early fourteenth/twentieth century. It reflected the common urge of the people and was imbued with an unparalleled emotional sincerity.

The changing fortunes of Iran's political history continued to find an echo in the contemporary literature, and the poets violently reacted to the inroads of Western imperialism during World War I and the immediate post-war years. It was, however, after long years of suffering that stability and freedom of the country were restored under Reza Shah.

The literature of this period has a tinge of roseate optimism and the poet and the writer seem to have regained the lost self-confidence. With interest in the reconstruction of the new society, they responded to the new social urges. They advocated the cause of education, women's rights, political stability, reassertion of the national spirit, and revival of the ancient glory of the country.

There was a passionate desire to purify the Iranian society of its weaknesses and vices and to usher in an era of social justice and economic prosperity. Literature that till then was looked upon as a privilege of the few became a vehicle for the dissemination of social and moral values amongst the people at large. It showed a marked trend towards simplicity of style and expression to attain the widest appeal. The writers conveyed new aims and ideals through fiction and drama, and though Persian literature had no traditions in novel and short story in the modern sense, yet the writers made great efforts to catch up with Western literature.

The new Iranian writers and scholars have made rapid progress in the production of original literary works. Yet the output of translations far exceeds creative writing. As the Iranians, like many other peoples in the East, made a late start after a long time of intellectual sloth and social degeneration, it was but natural for them to learn through translations the phenomenal advances which the West had made both in the field of arts and humanities and in natural sciences and technology.

In order to understand Western thought the knowledge of one of the European languages was considered to be indispensable. Hence the Iranian schools made it compulsory for students to learn English, French, or German. Since the medium of instruction in Iranian schools and universities is Persian, it is imperative to write in and translate monumental works of arts and sciences into Persian. That is why translation of books has achieved singular importance in Iran.

The work of translation started in the later half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century, and it had proceeded apace till it gained further impetus after 1340/1921. To begin with, this venture started in a rather haphazard manner and translations were rendered indiscriminately. Now, the University of Teheran is mainly responsible for the translation of works of classical importance.

On the individual level, however, this work continues to be purely a matter of personal taste. Fiction and books of popular interest command the first position. Another organization called the Institute for Translation and Publication established under the Crown patronage in 1375/1955³⁵ has been accelerating the process of translation with special attention to the quality and importance of the books to be translated. The Institute specializes in the translation of Western classics.

As a result of these attempts hundreds of European books have been rendered into Persian. These books have been translated mainly from French that was, till the end of the last war, the second language of the country. This deep interest in the work of translation is a sign of sincere efforts to render into Persian what is regarded as valuable and fascinating in Western thought.

There is a genuine desire to learn and derive benefit, and a stage is bound to come when creative approach to problems will take the place of translation. Besides those who are deeply interested in Western learning, some scholars have been trying to recapture the philosophical thought of their forefathers. The most important name in this second category is that of Mulla Hadi Sabziwari an account of whose philosophy is given in the next chapter.

During the last half century serious attention has been paid to problems of research in the literary field. The Iranians, till recently, were dependent on research carried out in the West to understand the currents and crosscurrents of their own literary history. That stage of dependence is happily over. Numerous scholars have made distinct contributions in the field of research.

Unpublished classical works have been and are being edited and published at a very fast rate. If for nothing else, the modern Iranian scholarship should command respect for the interest it has evinced in the republication of numerous unpublished works of literature, some of them after minute research.

New trends in literature have synchronized with a new approach in other Fine Arts like painting and architecture. In the latter, as mentioned earlier, the modern architectural trends have been harmonized with the ancient designs found in the ruins of palaces at Persepolis and Susa. The classical traditions of miniature painting have been renewed with skill and imagination, while there is a visible attempt to understand or assimilate new movements in painting the world over.

There are three museums in Teheran that reflect the cavalcade of Iranian history and culture. These include the archaeological and ethnographical museums and the Gulistan Palace Museum. The last contains a treasure of crown jewels and rare specimens of art.

Various arts and crafts like miniature painting, enamel and inlay work, carpet-weaving and designing, tile-work, mosaic, and pottery are not only taught in the College of Arts, and industrial and arts schools but have also become widely popular in the country.

The new movement has not yet spent itself. There is much to be planned and done. The progress in modern Iranian society still lacks harmony and proportion. Modernization in the early twenties came abruptly and violently, and behind it was the force of dictatorship. The country was not fully prepared for the desired change. The edifice of the traditional Iranian society crumbled as a new way of life was grafted on it. Consequently, the progress made was rather uneven and lopsided.

The policy of modernization maintained itself after World War II, but since the reform movement had come like a storm and tried to destroy all that was old without creating a harmony and balance between the traditional and the modern, it could not achieve its objective fully and set a chain of reactions instead. In fact, creative activity alone can generate and sustain an original cultural movement.

The people of Iran have given repeated proofs of the remarkable assimilation of new and alien movements and of the institution of new sciences and philosophy. The present conflict between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, is bound to solve itself as the people of Iran recover from the first great impact of Western civilization. They have learnt through trial and error, and the time is not far when they will have resolved all their present conflicts, assimilated the best of Western thought, and upheld their own cultural and national individuality as a people of great gifts.

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[1.](#) L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran*, p. 60.

[2.](#) P. Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. 2, p. 382.

[3.](#) V. Sheean, *The New Persia*, p. 10.

[4.](#) R. G. Watson, *A History of Persia*, p. 269.

[5.](#) Ibid.

[6.](#) Some authors have paid great tributes to him: see E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 4, p. 152; Robert Curzon, *Armenia*, p. 55; R. G. Watson, op. cit., p. 264; Bahar, *Sabk Shinasi*, Vol. 3, p. 401.

[7.](#) V. Sheean, op. cit., p. 10.

[8.](#) Bahar, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 344.

[9.](#) This paper was started by Mirza Malkom Khan who had been dismissed from the office of the Iranian Ambassador in London on account of his pronouncedly patriotic stand on the issue of tobacco concessions. His newspaper turned out to be the best contemporary Persian journal for its splendid expression. See E. G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 19.

- [10.](#) E. G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 17.
- [11.](#) According to G. N. Curzon, the influence of the telegraph on Iran has been enormous. "I am disposed to attribute to it," he says, "more than to any other cause or agency, the change that has passed over Persia during the last thirty years ..." It is an exaggerated statement, yet it cannot be gainsaid that the telegraph played a substantial part in indirectly enlightening the Iranian mind.
- [12.](#) W. S. Haas, *Iran*, p. 35.
- [13.](#) The Iranian writers like Mirza Lutf Allah, the author of *Sharh-i Hal-o Athar-i Sayyid Jamal al-Din*, and Mirza Sifat Allah, the editor of *Maqalat-i Jamaliyyah*, claim Sayyid Jamal al-Din, who was born at Asadabad in 1254/1838, to be of Iranian origin. Mirza Lutf Allah describes himself as the son of the Sayyid's sister.
- [14.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *Tarikh-i Mufasssal-i Iran*, p. 532.
- [15.](#) Habib Allah Mukhtari, *Tarikh-i Bidari-i Iran*, pp. 39-40.
- [16.](#) Both of them lost their lives after the bombardment of the Parliament in 1326/1908; see Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 521.
- [17.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 509.
- [18.](#) During the thirteenth/nineteenth century, when the capitalist financial ideas of the British and Russian imperialists dominated the history of Iran, certain small European nations also came forward to share the grab-scramble, so that Belgium succeeded in taking over the management of the Customs in 1316/1898.
- [19.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 512.
- [20.](#) E. Groseclose, *Introduction to Iran*, p. 61.
- [21.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 532.
- [22.](#) "The sovereignty of Iran was violated with less compunction than that of Belgium, and with probably greater loss of life and property and greater disorganization of society" (E. Groseclose, *op. cit.*, p. 72).
- [23.](#) "To bring the agreement to a conclusion the British had to resort to bribery on a large scale. Three cabinet members, one of them the Prime Minister, were paid handsomely" (W. S. Haas, *op. cit.*, p. 140). "The British negotiators (Sir Percy Cox and Lord Curzon, presumably) ... paid 750,000 tomans to the three Persian statesmen" (V. Sheean, *op. cit.*, p. 23).
- [24.](#) "It had been created in 1290/1878 as a brigade. Russian officers traditionally held key positions in this unit, and during the period of Russian political ascendancy the brigade served as an additional safeguard to Russian interests in Iran" (George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, p. 157).
- [25.](#) *Modern Iran*, p. 69.
- [26.](#) E. Groseclose, *op. cit.*, p. 124. In the words of William S. Haas, "It is at least doubtful whether Reza Khan was ever attracted to republicanism, despite the example of Mustafa Kemal. Reza's ambition and idea of power fitted better with a monarchy" (*Iran*, p. 142).
- [27.](#) It derives its root from the word "Parthawa" which evolved itself into various forms, to wit, Parhawa, Palhawa, Palhaw and Pahlaw. Apart from Pahlawi, the word Pahlawan is also derived from Pahlaw and means brave and heroic like the members of the Pahlaw (Parthian) tribe.
- [28.](#) *Rahnuma-i Iran*, pp. 85-87.
- [29.](#) *Modern Iran*, p. 136.
- [30.](#) D. N. Wilber, *Iran, Past and Present*, p. 204.
- [31.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- [32.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- [33.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 365.
- [34.](#) A veil or mantle used by Iranian women to cover their body.
- [35.](#) Naficy, *A General Survey of the Existing Situation in Persian Literature*, p. 2.

Chapter 78: Renasissance in Iran: Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari

A: Life and Works

After the death of Mulla Sadra, the school established by him found its most famous interpreter and expositor in Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari who was the greatest of the Hakims of the Qajar period in Persia. After a period of turmoil caused by the Afghan invasion, in which the spiritual as well as the political life of Persia was temporarily disturbed, traditional learning became once again established under the Qajars, and in the hands of Haji Mulla Hadi and his students the wisdom of Mulla Sadra began once again to flourish through the Shiah world. This sage from Sabziwar gained so much fame that soon he became endowed with the simple title of Haji by which he is still known in the traditional *madrasahs*,¹ and his *Sharh-i Manzumah* became the most widely used book on *Hikmat* in Persia and has remained so until today.

Haji Mulla Hadi was born in 1212/1797–98 at Sabziwar in Khurasan, a city well known for its Sufis and also for Shiah tendencies even before the Safawid period, where he completed his early education in Arabic grammar and language.² At the age of ten he went to Meshed where he continued his studies in jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), logic, mathematics, and *Hikmat* for another ten years.

By now, his love for the intellectual sciences had become so great that the Haji left Meshed as well and journeyed to Ispahan, as Mulla Sadra had done two hundred and fifty years before him, to meet the greatest authorities of the day in *Hikmat*. Ispahan in that period was still the major centre of learning, especially in *Hikmat*. Haji spent eight years in this city studying under Mulla Ismail Ispahani and Mulla Ali Nuri both of whom were the leading authorities in the school of Akhund.

Haji Mulla Hadi, having completed his formal education, left Ispahan once again for Khurasan from where after five years of teaching he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Upon returning to Persia after three years of absence, he spent a year in Kirman where he married and then settled down in Sabziwar where he established a school of his own. His fame had by then become so great that disciples from all over Persia as well as from India and the Arab countries came to the small city of Sabziwar to benefit from his personal contact and to attend his classes.

Nasir al-Din Shah in his visit to Meshed in 1274/1857–58 came especially to the city of Haji in order to meet him in person. In Sabziwar, away from the turmoil of the capital, Haji spent forty years in teaching, writing, and training disciples, of whom over a thousand completed the course on *Hikmat* under his direction.

Haji's life was extremely simple and his spirituality resembled more that of a Sufi master than just of a learned Hakim. It is said that along with regular students whom he instructed in the *madrasah* he had also special disciples whom he taught the mysteries of Sufism and initiated into the Path.³

He was not only called the "Plato of his time" and the "seal of the Hukama'" (*khatam al-Hukama*), but was also considered by his contemporaries to possess the power of performing miracles of which many have been attributed to him in the various traditional sources. By the time he passed away in 1289/1878, Haji had become the most famous and exalted spiritual and intellectual figure in Persia and has ever since been considered one of the dominant figures in the intellectual life of the Shiah world.

Unlike Mulla Sadra all of whose writings with one exception were in Arabic, Haji wrote in Persian as well as in Arabic. Moreover, he composed a great deal of poetry collected in his *Diwan*, which consists of poems in Persian of gnostic inspiration and poems in Arabic on *Hikmat* and logic.

The writings of Haji, of which a complete list is available, are as follows: *Al-Laali*, Arabic poem on logic; *Ghurur al-Faraid* or the *Sharh-i Manzumah*, Arabic poem with commentary on *Hikmat*; *Diwan* in Persian written under the pen name Asrar; commentary upon the prayer *Dua-i Kabir*;⁴ commentary upon the prayer *Dua-i Sabah*; *Asrar al-Hikam*, written at the request of Nasir al-Din Shah, on *Hikmat*; commentaries upon the *Asfar*, the *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, *al-Mabda wal-Maad*, and *al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah* of Mulla Sadra; glosses upon the commentary of Suyuti upon the *Alfiyyah* of ibn Malik, on grammar; commentary upon the *Mathnawi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi; commentary upon the *Nibras*, on the mysteries of worship; commentary upon the divine names; glosses upon the *Sharh-i Tajrid* of Lahiji; *Rah Qarah* and *Rahiq* in rhetoric; *Hidayat al-Talibin*, as yet an unpublished treatise in Persian on prophethood and the imamate; questions and answers regarding gnosis; and a treatise on the debate between Mulla Muhsin Faid and Shaikh Ahmad Ahsai.⁵

Of these writings the most famous is the *Sharh-i Manzumah*, which, along with the *Asfar* of Mulla Sadra, the *Shifa* of ibn Sina, and the *Sharh al-Isharat* of Nasir al-Din Tusi, is the basic text on *Hikmat*. This work consists of a series of poems on the essential questions of *Hikmat* composed in 1239/1823 on which Haji himself wrote a commentary along with glosses in 1260/1844. The book contains a complete summary of *Hikmat* in precise and orderly form.

This work has been so popular that during the hundred years that have passed since its composition many commentaries have been written upon it including those of Muhammad Hidaji and the late Mirza Mehdi Ashtiyani as well as that of Muhammad Taqi Amuli whose commentary called the *Durar al-Fawaid* is perhaps the most comprehensive of all. The other writings of Haji, especially the *Asrar al-Hikam* which is of special interest because, as Haji himself writes in the introduction, it is a book concerned with the *Hikmat* derived from the Islamic revelation (*hikmat-i imani*) and not just with Greek philosophy (*hikmat-i yunani*), and the commentary upon the *Mathnawi* are also of much importance, but the fame of Haji is due primarily to his *Sharh-i Manzumah*.

B: Sources of Haji's Doctrines and the Characteristics of His

Approach

Haji cannot be considered to be the founder of a new school; rather, he expanded and clarified the teachings of Mulla Sadra without departing from the basic features of Akhund's doctrines. The sources of Haji's writings are, therefore, the same as those enumerated in our study of Mulla Sadra, viz., gnostic doctrines drawn mostly from the teachings of Ibn Arabi, the teachings of the Shiah Imams, *ishraqi* theosophy, and Peripatetic philosophy.

In his writings the sage from Sabziwar drew mostly on the *Asfar* of Mulla Sadra, the *Qabasat* of Mir Damad, the commentary upon the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* of Suhrawardi by Qutb al-Din Shirazi, the *Sharh al-Isharat* of Nasir al-Din Tusi, and the *Shawariq* of Lahiji.

In general, Haji did not rely so much upon reading various texts as he did upon meditating and contemplating on the essential aspects of metaphysics. The major source of his knowledge, as with Mulla Sadra, was his inner imam or the guardian angel through whom he was illuminated with the knowledge of the intelligible world. As to the formal sources of his doctrines, one must first of all mention Akhund and, secondly, Akhund's teachers and students some of whom have already been mentioned.⁶

Haji, following the path trod by Mulla Sadra, sought to combine gnosis, philosophy, and formal revelation; throughout his writings these three are present in a harmonious blend. He differed from Akhund in that he was able to expound the gnostic elements of his doctrines much more explicitly than Akhund and that he was not as much molested by the critics as the latter was.

It was due to this fact that he was highly respected by the Qajars and the '*ulama*'; the Qajars were indeed not so opposed to Sufism and *Hikmat* as the Safawids were. Possessed with the gift for poetry and eloquence and great intellectual intuition which sometimes even in the middle of a treatise on logic would draw him towards metaphysical expositions, Haji wrote openly on Sufism and appears more as a Sufi well versed in philosophy and theosophy than a Hakim interested in gnostic doctrines. He was, like Mulla Sadra, among the few sages who were masters of both esoteric and exoteric doctrines, and of philosophy and gnosis.⁷

C: Teachings

As already mentioned, Haji's doctrines are in reality those of Mulla Sadra's condensed and systematized into a more orderly form. Haji follows his master in all the essential elements of his teaching such as the unity and gradation of Being, substantial motion, the union of the knower and the known.

There are only two points on which Haji criticizes his master: first, on the nature of knowledge which in some of his writings Akhund considers a quality of the human soul while Haji considers it to belong to its

essence, like Being itself, above all the Aristotelian categories such as quality, quantity, etc.; and secondly, on Mulla Sadra's doctrine of the union of the intellect and the intelligible which Haji accepts, criticizing, however, his method of demonstrating its validity. Otherwise, the principles of the teachings of Haji in *Hikmat* are already to be found in the writings of Akhund.

It must not be thought, however, that Haji Mulla Hadi simply repeated the teachings of his predecessor verbatim. It is enough to glance at the voluminous writings of Mulla Sadra, in which one would surely be lost without a capable guide, and compare them with the precise form of *Sharh-i Manzumah* to see what service Haji rendered to *Hikmat* in general and to Mulla Sadra's school in particular. Haji prepared the way for the study of Mulla Sadra, and his writings may be considered to be an excellent introduction to the doctrines of his master.

The *Sharh-i Manzumah* depicts a complete cycle of *Hikmat*, containing in summary form all the basic elements of Mulla Sadra's teachings on the subject. In discussing its contents, therefore, one becomes better acquainted with Mulla Sadra as well as with Haji himself, and one gains a glimpse of traditional philosophy as it is taught in the Shiah *madrasahs* today.

The *Sharh-i Manzumah*, excluding the part on logic, is divided into seven books each of which is divided into several chapters, and each chapter in turn into several sections. The seven books deal with Being and Non-Being, substance and accidents, theodicy, natural philosophy, prophecy and dreams, eschatology, and ethics respectively.

The first book that is in a sense the basis of the whole work and is on general principles (*al-umur al-ammah*) treats of the various aspects of Being, its positive and negative qualities, its unity and gradation, necessity and possibility, time and eternity, actuality and potentiality, quiddities, unity and multiplicity, and causality.

The second book treats of the definition of substance and accidents, and the third, which is called *al-ilahiyat bi al-maani al-akhass*, of the divine essence, the divine qualities and attributes, and the divine acts. The fourth book contains a summary discussion of natural philosophy (*tabiiyat*), including the meaning of body (*jism*), motion, time and space-astronomy, physics (in the Aristotelian sense), psychology, and the science of heavenly souls.

The fifth book treats of the cause of the truth and falsehood of dreams, the principles of miracles, the cause for strange happenings, and prophecy; and the sixth book of the resurrection of the soul and the body and questions pertaining to the Last Day. Finally, the last book treats of faith and infidelity and the various spiritual virtues such as repentance, truthfulness, surrender to the divine will, etc., which are usually discussed in the books on Sufi ethics such as the *Kitab al-Luma* of abu Nasr al-Sarraj.

Haji divides reality into three categories: the divine essence which is at once above all determinations including Being and is also the principle of all manifestations of Being Itself; extended being (*wujud al-munbasat*) which is the first act or word or determination of the divine essence and is identified with light;

and particular beings which are the degrees and grades of extended being and from which the quiddities are abstracted.⁸ All these stages of reality are unified so that one can say that reality is an absolute unity with gradations, of which the most intelligible symbol is light.

The first feature of Being which Haji discusses is that it is self-evident and indefinable. There is no concept more evident than Being, because all things, by virtue of their existence, are drowned in the ocean of Being.⁹ Moreover, the definition of a species in logic involves its genus and specific difference, but there is no genus of which Being is the species. Therefore, from a logical point of view there is no definition of Being; Being is the most universal concept since the divine ipseity of which It is the first determination is, strictly speaking, above all conception.

Though the concept of Being is the most obvious of all concepts, yet the knowledge of the root or truth of Being, i.e., as It is in Itself and not in Its manifestation, is the most difficult to attain. Existence, which is the extension or manifestation of Being, is principal with respect to the quiddities. This view, which we have already mentioned in previous chapters, is one of the major points of contention among Muslim Hakims.

The Peripatetics gave priority to existence or Being over the quiddities, considering each being to be in essence different and distinct from other beings. Although Suhrawardi Maqtul never speaks of the principality of the quiddities as understood by the later Hakims, he can be interpreted to consider existence to have no reality independent of the quiddities.

It was Mir Damad who re-examined this whole question and reached the conclusion that either the quiddities or existence would have to be principal, and divided the philosophers before him into the followers either of the principality of existence or Being (*isalat-i wujud*), or of the principality of the quiddities (*isalat-i mahiyah*) while he himself sided with the latter group.¹⁰

Mulla Sadra in turn accepted his teacher's classification but sided with the followers of the principality of existence. Haji, likewise, follows Akhund in accepting the principality of Being which he considers to be the source of all effects partaking of gradations.

Another question that arises concerning the concept of Being is whether It is just a verbal expression shared by particular beings or a reality that particular beings have in common. It is known that the Asharites considered the term "being" to be merely a verbal expression used for both the Creator and the creatures; otherwise, according to them, there would be an aspect common to both which is opposed to the idea of divine transcendence.

Haji, like the other Hakims, rejects this reasoning and argues that in the statement "God is," by "is" we mean either non-being in which case we have denied God or something other than what we mean in the statement "man is" in which case we have denied our intelligence the ability to attain a knowledge of God. Since both of these conclusions are untenable, "is" in the case of God must share a meaning in common with "is" in the case of this or that creature.¹¹ The truth is that Being is one reality with degrees

of intensity and not many realities from which the mind abstracts the concept of Being. [12](#)

Another point on which Haji criticizes the Asharites is that of the existence of the images of things in the mind that is one of the important aspects of his doctrines. The Asharites believe that in the mind the quiddity and existence of an object are one and the same; when we think of man, the quiddity of the conception of man in our mind is the same as its existence in our mind.

Haji opposes this view and distinguishes between quiddity and existence even in the mind. The world of the mind is the same as the external world with the same quiddity in each case. The difference between the two comes in their existence; each has an existence proper to itself. If external existence becomes mental existence, then the object as it exists externally becomes the image of that object in the mind.

For example, when we think of fire, the concept of fire exists in our mind. It is the same quiddity as the objective fire that burns but its mode of existence differs. It has a mental existence that, although deprived of the power that makes fire burn and give off heat, is nevertheless a being. [13](#)

Reality, then, is a unity comprising stages or grades of intensity [14](#) the source of which is the divine essence that we may consider to be Pure Being without quiddity if by quiddity we mean the answer to the question *quid est* – “what is it?” or identical with its quiddity if by quiddity we understand that by which a thing is what it is.

Being has certain negative and positive qualities, the first such as the qualities of being neither substance nor accident, having no opposite, having no like, not being a compound and having no genus, species, and specific difference, etc.; and the second, the attributes of power, will, knowledge, and the like.

The quiddities, which accompany all stages of universal existence below Pure Being Itself, are abstracted by the mind from particular beings and are in fact the limitations of Being in each state of manifestation in all the vertical (*tuli*) and horizontal (*ardi*) stages in which Being manifests Itself. It is, therefore, by the quiddities that we can distinguish between various beings and different levels of existence.

Haji divides the quiddities according to their association with matter or potentiality. Quiddities are either free from matter in which case they are called the world of the spirits, or combined with matter and are then called the world of bodies. In the world of spirits, if the quiddities are by essence and in actuality free from all matter, they are the intelligences (*uqul*), and if they are free but have need of matter to become actualized, they are the souls (*nufus*).

And in the world of bodies, if the quiddities possess a subtle form of matter, they belong to the world of inverted forms (*alam al-mithal*), which is the same as that of cosmic imagination, and if they possess a gross form of matter, they belong to the world of nature. All of these worlds are distinguished in this manner by their quiddities, but all of them are in reality stages of the same Being which manifests Itself

in different manners according to the conditions at each stage of manifestation.

After a discussion of the various aspects of Being and the quiddities, Haji turns to a study of substance and accidents. [15](#) There are three substances, the intelligences, souls, and bodies, and the nine categories of accidents as outlined by Aristotle and Porphyry. Of special interest in this discussion is the category of quality (*kaiif*) that is closely connected with that of knowledge.

Dawwani, the ninth/fifteenth century philosopher and jurist, had considered knowledge (*ilm*) to be in essence of the category of the known (*malum*) and in accident of the category of the quality of the soul. Mulla Sadra, on the contrary, believed that knowledge belongs in essence to the category of quality and in accident to that of the known. Haji adds and modifies these views, considering knowledge to be an accident of the category of the known as well as that of quality but in essence beyond all categories like Being Itself. [16](#)

The third chapter of the *Sharh-i Manzumah* concerns theodicy, i.e., what pertains to the Divine Being, His names, attributes, and acts. [17](#) Haji, after emphasizing the transcendence, unity, and simplicity of the divine essence, begins his discussion about the divine qualities and attributes, which are mentioned in the Quran, and interprets each following the tradition of the Hakims and Sufis before him.

Of special interest is his account of the epithet “Knower” (*al-Alim*) in which Haji discusses divine knowledge mentioning that knowledge is in the essence of God and God is in essence the Knower of all things. He knows all things by knowing His own essence. [18](#)

The knowledge of God consists of knowledge of beings at several stages which Haji enumerates as follows: [19](#) *ilm-i anani*, the heavenly science, which is the knowledge of God that creatures have no being of their own; *ilm-i qalami*, the science of the Pen, the knowledge that God has of all beings in the world of multiplicity before their manifestation; [20](#) *ilm-i lauhi*, the science of the Tablet, which consists of the knowledge of the universals as they are issued forth from the first intellect or the Pen; *ilm-i qadai*, the science of predestination, which is the knowledge of the archetypes or masters of species of the realities of this world; and, finally, *ilm-i qadari*, the science of fate which consists of the knowledge of particulars whether they be of the world of cosmic imagination or the psyche or of the world of the elements which is the physical world. God, therefore, has knowledge of all things, and all degrees of existence are included in His knowledge.

Following the study of God’s essence and His attributes, Haji turns to His acts [21](#) which in reality mean the stages of Being in which God’s signs are made manifest. God’s acts are of many kinds and from them the hierarchy of creatures comes into being. This hierarchy consists of seven stages: the longitudinal intelligences, horizontal intelligences which are the same as the celestial archetypes, [22](#) the universal soul and the soul of the heavenly spheres, the inverted forms of the world of imagination, nature, form, and matter.

These stages, although distinct from one another, do not destroy the unity of God’s acts. God’s essence,

attributes, and acts all possess unity, each in its own degree. The lowest stage of unity is the unity of the acts and the highest that of the essence, the realization of which comes at the end of the spiritual journey.

In the chapter on natural philosophy, Haji briefly outlines the physics of the Muslim Peripatetics as contained in detail in the *Shifa* of ibn Sina and other similar texts, and the Ptolemaic astronomy of epicycles as perfected by Muslim astronomers with the modifications made in it by Mulla Sadra and the other later Hakims.

The most important of these modifications is the introduction of the idea of substantial motion according to which the whole of the cosmic substance is in a state of becoming and the quantity of change is comprised in the measure of time. Haji also displays the tendency to interpret various aspects of the natural and mathematical sciences symbolically; for instance, the water of Thales which he, like Mulla Sadra, identifies with the breath of the Compassionate (*nafas al-Rahman*) or the *tetractys* of Pythagoras which he regards as the symbol for the four principal stages of Being, intellect, soul, and nature.

After the discussion of natural philosophy, Haji turns to the soul and its faculties and stages of development. There are three types of souls: vegetative, animal, and rational, the last of which comprises the human soul as well as the soul of the heavenly spheres. The vegetative soul has the three faculties of feeding, growth, and reproduction; and the animal soul, the five external senses, the five internal senses, and the power of motion.[23](#)

In man all of these faculties are developed to their fullness, but they are no more than the tools and instruments of the human soul that Haji calls the *ispahbad* light[24](#) and which is of the family of the lights of heaven.

The perfection of the soul is attained by treading the stages of the intellect and finally unifying itself with God. The soul is given essentially two powers, theoretical and practical, for each of which there are four degrees of perfection. The theoretical intellect is comprised of the potential intellect that has the capacity merely of receiving knowledge, the habitual intellect by which acquaintance is made with simple truth, the active intellect by which knowledge is gained without the aid of the senses, and finally the acquired intellect by which the spiritual essences can be contemplated directly.[25](#)

As for the practical intellect, it too consists of four stages: *tajliyyah*, which consists in following the divine Laws revealed through the prophets; *takhliyyah*, purifying the soul of evil traits; *tahliyyah*, embellishing the soul with spiritual virtues, and, finally, *fana* or annihilation, which has the three degrees: annihilation in the divine acts, in the divine attributes, and finally in the divine essence.[26](#)

In the chapter on prophecy[27](#) Haji discusses the qualifications and characteristics that distinguish a prophet from ordinary men. The prophet is the intermediary between this world and the next, between the world of the senses and the spiritual essences, so that his being is necessary to maintain the hierarchy of Being. The prophet is distinguished by the fact that he has knowledge of all things which he

has acquired by the grace of God and not through human instruction, by his power of action which is such that the matter of this world obeys him as if it were his body, and by his senses which are such that he sees and hears through them what is hidden to others. He is also marked by his immunity from sin and error (*ismah*) in all his acts and deeds.

Sainthood (*wilayah*) is in one aspect similar to prophecy in that the saint, like the prophet, has knowledge of the spiritual world. Yet every prophet is a saint while every saint is not a prophet. The prophet, in addition to his aspect of sainthood, has the duty of establishing laws in society and guiding the social, moral, and religious life of the people to whom he is sent.

Among the prophets themselves, a distinction is to be made between the *nabi* and the *rasul*, the latter being distinguished by the fact that he possesses a divine Book in addition to his prophetic mission. Among those who are called *rasul* there is a further distinction to be made between the *ulu al-azm*, i.e., those who's *Shariah* abrogates the *Shariah* before theirs, and those with whom this is not the case.²⁸ Finally, there is the Seal of the Prophets (*khatam al-anbiya*) the Prophet who envelops all these stages within himself.²⁹

The mission of the Prophet Muhammad (S), upon whom be peace—by virtue of his being the Seal of Prophets is the summation of all previous prophetic missions; his spirit is the universal intellect which is the first theophany of the divine essence and which made the body of the Prophet (S) so subtle that he was able to make the Nocturnal Ascent (*miraj*) to the highest heaven. That is why his light filled all directions and also that to whatever direction he turned he had no shadow.

The direction of prayer (*qiblah*) of Moses (as) was in the west or in the world of multiplicity and that of Jesus (as) in the east or the world of unity. The *qiblah* of the Prophet Muhammad (s), on the other hand, is neither in the east nor in the west,³⁰ but between them because, being the centre as well as the totality of existence, he brought a prophetic message based upon unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity.³¹

As a Shiah, Haji was greatly concerned with the question of the Imamate in addition to that of prophecy and, therefore, discusses the political and religious differences which distinguish the Shiah conception of the Imamate from that of the Sunnis'. For the Shiahs, as Haji writes, the spirit of Ali (as) is in essence one with that of the Prophet (S). It is the universal soul as the spirit of the Prophet is the universal intellect. Moreover, the light of Ali (as) is passed on to his descendants until the last and twelfth Imam (as) who is the invisible guardian and protector of the world and without whom all religion and social as well as cosmic order will be disturbed.

Just as there are twelve signs of the Zodiac, so are there twelve Imams of whom the last is like *Pisces* for all the stars of the Imamate and sainthood.³² The Last Day which means the end of the longitudinal hierarchy of existence is also the day of the manifestation of the twelfth Imam (as) who is himself the last stage of the hierarchy which extends upwards to the divine essence or Light of lights (*nur al-anwar*).

On the question of eschatology,³³ Haji follows closely the teachings of Mulla Sadra in considering the soul to have come into being with the body but to have a life independent of the body after death. He also rejects the argument of earlier philosophers against bodily resurrection and defends the idea of the resurrection of the soul and the body together on the Last Day.

There are two resurrections, the first at death, which is the minor, and the other on the Last Day, which is the major resurrection. In the first case all the faculties of the soul are absorbed in the *ispahbad* light and in the second all the lights of the universe are absorbed in the divine source of all being or the Light of all lights.

Haji discusses also the traditional belief about the events which are to take place at the time of resurrection and discusses the symbolic as well as the literal meaning of the Scale (*mizan*), the Bridge (*sirat*), and the Account-taking (*hisab*) of good and evil. The physical *sirat* is that which, as the Quran mentions, covers the chasm over the inferno, but the spiritual *sirat* is the path which the universal man treads towards the Truth (*Haqq*) and which connects him with the Truth.

In the final chapter on ethics Haji outlines the degrees of faith (*iman*) from simple acceptance to demonstration and from that to spiritual vision. This last degree can be reached only through the purification of the soul and the acquisition of spiritual virtues such as purity, truthfulness, reliance upon God, surrender to the divine will, etc. When man acquires all of these virtues his soul becomes simple and pure; he then becomes the receptor of the divine theophanies that illuminate his being and finally unify him with the centre, which is at once his own source of being and the origin of cosmic existence.

D: Post-Sabziwarian Hikmat

The doctrines of Haji that we have outlined and his influence are still very much alive in Persia. The school of those whose teachers learnt the mysteries of *Hikmat* from Haji Sabziwari himself and narrated stories about his life to them has been able to preserve itself in Persia, despite the anticontemplative attitude encouraged by the spirit of excessive modernism, chiefly because of the life which Haji and to a certain extent some of the other Qajar Hakims infused into it.³⁴

Of the famous masters of *Hikmat* in Persia during the last century, we may name abu al-Hasan Jilwah, Muhammad Rida Qumshii, Jahangir Khan Qashqai, Mulla Ali Zunuzi, the author of *Badayi al-Hikam*, and Mirza Tahir Tunikabuni, all of whom were contemporaries of Haji, and those of a later date like the late Mirza Mehdi Ashtiyani, the author of *Asas al-Tauhid*, who passed away only recently.

Of the masters living today there are several who are worthy of special attention like Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Assar,³⁵ Hajj Muhammad Husain Tabatabai, the most prolific writer among the present Hakims of Persia,³⁶ and Sayyid abu al-Hasan Rafii Qazwini, a man who is a true master of all the traditional sciences and perhaps the greatest living authority on *Hikmat* and who lives in Qazwin in meditation and training of a few disciples away from the turmoils of modern life.

One should also mention Muhyi al-Din Qumshii, the author of *Hikmat-i Ilahi* and a large *Diwan* of Sufi poetry and the holder of the chair of Mulla Sadra in the Theological Faculty of Teheran University; Mirza Rahim Arbab who lives in Ispahan, the old centre of *Hikmat* in Persia; Hairi Mazandarani, now residing in Simnan, the author of *Hikmat-i bu Ali* and one of the most erudite of the living Hakims; Jawad Muslih, the author of a commentary upon the *Asfar* and its translator into Persian; Murtida Mutahhari, Muhammad Ali Hakim, Husain Ali Rashid, and Mahmud Shibahi, all with the exception of Mirza Rahim Arbab and Hairi Mazandarani being Professors at the Theological Faculty of Teheran University; Ahmad Ashtiyani, the author of several works on *Hikmat* and gnosis; Fadil-i Tuni, the commentator of the *Fusus al-Hikam* of ibn Arabi and many other treatises and a Professor at the Faculty of Letters of Teheran University; and Muhammad Taqi Amuli, the author of the commentary *Durar al-Fawaid* upon the *Sharh-i Manzumah*.

One cannot discuss the intellectual history of Islam justly without taking into account this long tradition the roots of which go back to the early civilizations of the Middle East and which has been preserved in Persia and in the bosom of Shiism to this day.³⁷ The outstanding figure of Haji Mulla Hadi was able to revive and strengthen this tradition in the Qajar period as Mulla Sadra had done two centuries before him, and to make this wisdom to continue as a living spiritual and intellectual tradition till today.

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¹ Only the most eminent figures in the intellectual life of Islam have come to receive such simple designations. In Persia one can name only a few such luminaries, ibn Sina being called Shaikh; Nasir al-Din Tusi, Khwajah; Jalal al-Din Rumi, Mulla; ibn Arabi, Shaikh al-Akbar; and Mulla Sadra, Akhund. In view of these designations it is easy to see what an exalted position has been accorded to Haji in Persia.

² There is an account of the life of Haji by himself on which we have drawn much for our information. See M. Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *Tarikh-i Falasifih-i Islam*, Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1336-37 Solar, Vol. 2, pp. 131ff.; and also by the same author *Life and Philosophy of Haji Mulla Hddi Sabziwari*, Tahuri Bookshop, Teheran, 1955. The story of the life of Haji as related by his son as well as a summary of some of Haji's doctrines not all of which, however, can be considered to be authentic is given by E. G. Browne, in his *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1950, pp. 143-58. Accounts of his life are also found in the usual sources like the *Qisas al-Ulama*, *Matla al-Shams*, and *Riyad al-Arifin*. When

Gobineau visited Persia, Haji was alive and at the height of his fame; he is mentioned with great respect in Gobineau's writings; see Comte de Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, G. Gres et Cie, Paris, 1923, pp. 113–16. There are also references to Haji in A. M. A. Shushtery, *Outlines of Islamic Culture*, Bangalore, 1938, Vol. 2, pp. 452–54; and in M. Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Luzac & Co., London, 1908, pp. 175ff.

3. Among his special disciples one may name Sultan Ali Shah Gunabadi who later became the founder of the Gunabadi brotherhood of Sufis that is one of the most widely expanded brotherhoods in Persia today. For the stages through which Haji's students had to pass before being able to participate in his courses on Hikmat, see E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–48.

4. There are many prayers composed by the various Shiah Imams, especially the fourth Imam Zain al-Abidin (as), like the *Dua-i Kubra*, *Misbah*, and the *Sahifah-i Sajjadiyyah* (Sajjad being the title of the fourth Imam) which are read and chanted throughout the year, especially during Ramadan, as devotional prayers. Many of them, however, are not simply prayers of devotion but are replete with gnostic and metaphysical doctrines of highest inspiration and have been, therefore, commented upon by many of the Hukama and gnostics, who, like Haji, have drawn out their inner meaning by the light of their own inspiration.

5. See M. Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *op. cit.*, pp. 63ff.

6. It is difficult to understand Iqbal's statement made in his *Development of Metaphysics in Persia* that with Sabziwari Persian thought went back to pure Platonism and abandoned the Neo-Platonic theory of emanation. Actually, Haji, like other Muslim Hakims before him, accepts the multiple states of Being each of which has issued forth from the state above through effusion or theophany. It is true that Plato was a definite source of Haji's doctrines as he himself was for nearly all the later Persian Hakims after Suhrawardi, but this is not to deny Haji's affinity to the doctrines of Plotinus and his commentators, especially concerning the hierarchy of the intelligences.

7. See the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

8. The relation of particular beings to extended being is like that of knots to the chord in which they are tied. See *Sharh-i Manzumah*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1298/1880, section on *Ilahiyat*, pp. 1ff.; and M. R. Salihi Kirmani, *Wujud az Nazar-i Falasifah-i Islam*, Piruz Press, Qum, 1336/1917, pp. 55ff.

9. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Polarisation of Being," *Pakistan Philosophical Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Oct. 1959, pp. 8–13.

10. We can, therefore, justly say that this issue as understood by the later Hakims is one of the distinguishing features of Hikmat in the Safawid period and that the earlier schools, the Peripatetics as well as the Illuminationists, did not interpret this question in the same manner as the later Hakims.

11. The whole discussion concerning Being occupies the first section of the *Ilahiyat* of *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 1–131.

12. The theologians (*Mutikallimun*) believed that each creature in the objective world is a quiddity including the divine essence that is an unknowable quiddity. Although this view is diametrically opposed to the view of the Hakims, in certain passages Haji interprets the view of the theologians symbolically to mean the same as the view of the Illuminationists and, therefore, defends them even though attacking them for their literalism.

13. For this view Haji is indebted partly to Mulla Sadra and partly to Jalal al-Din Dawwani.

14. In his commentary upon the *Mathnawi*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1285/1868, p. 8, Haji names these stages as the divine essence or ipseity; its first determination; the archetypes (*al-ayan al-thabitah*); the world of the spirits (*arwah*); the world of inverted forms or similitudes (*amthal*); the world of bodies (*ajsam*); and, finally, the stage which is the summation of all those before it, i.e., the stage of the perfect man (*al-insan al-kamil*). In other places Haji considers the seven stages of universal existence to be the divine essence that is the Principle, the world of divinity, of the intelligences, of the angels, of the archetypes, of forms, and of matter. This descending hierarchy is also mentioned in E. G. Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 150; A. M. A. Shushtery, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

15. *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 131–40.

16. Mulla Ali Zunuzi, a contemporary of the sage of Sabziwar, in his *Badayi al-Hikam* criticizes Haji's view and defends Mulla Sadra against his criticism. The view of Mulla Sadra as mentioned above appears in some of his works, while in others he also considers knowledge to be, like Being, above the categories.

17. *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 140–51.

- [18.](#) Ibid., p. 157. M. T. Amuli, *Durar al-Fawaid*, Mustafawi Press, Teheran, Vol. 1, pp. 480ff. It is in this discussion that Haji criticizes Mulla Sadra for having proved the identity of the knower and the known in the Mashair through the argument of relation (*tadayuf*) that Haji considers to be insufficient.
- [19.](#) *Asrar al-Hikam*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1286/1869, pp. 83ff.
- [20.](#) This knowledge, Haji compares to the point of the Pen before writing which contains all the letters of the alphabet before they become distinct on paper. The Pen is the same as the reality of Muhammad (*al-haqiqat al-Muhammadiyah*) and the first victorial light (*nur al-qahir*) of the Illuminationists.
- [21.](#) *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 183–84.
- [22.](#) Refer to the chapter on *Suhrawardi Maqtul*. This seven-fold hierarchy is essentially the same as mentioned above with only a change in terminology that occurs often among the Hakims.
- [23.](#) *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 284ff.; *Asrar al-Hikam*, pp. 152ff. These faculties are also outlined in *Iqbal*, op. cit., and *Browne*, op. cit., p. 157.
- [24.](#) For the meaning of this expression that is taken from the terminology of the Illuminationists, see the chapter on *Suhrawardi Maqtul*.
- [25.](#) See *Iqbal*, op. cit., pp. 185–86.
- [26.](#) These stages have already been discussed in the chapter on Mulla Sadra whose terminology Haji has adopted directly. See also A. M. A., *Shushtary*, op. cit., p. 454.
- [27.](#) *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 318–29; also *Asrar al-Hikam*, pp. 307ff.
- [28.](#) Regarding the question of the relation of Islam to previous religions and abrogation of older religions, see F. Schuon, *Transcendent Unity of Religions*, Pantheon Co., New York, 1953, Chaps. 5 to 7.
- [29.](#) Haji considers the greatest miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (S), who is the Seal of Prophecy, to be the Quran, which in the beauty of language has no match in Arabic literature. He adds that in each period God gives those miracles to His prophets that conform to the mentality of the people of that age. That is why the miracle of the Quran lies in its language as the Arabs considered eloquence to be of such great importance; likewise, in the case of Moses (as) his miracle was in magic which was at his time one of the basic arts, and in the case of Christ (as) raising the dead to life because medicine occupied at that time an exalted position among the sciences.
- [30.](#) This is with reference to the verse of Light in the Quran (24:35), in which the olive tree, from the oil of which the divine light emanates, is said to be neither of the east nor of the west.
- [31.](#) By this symbolism Haji implies that the message of Moses (as) was essentially the exoteric aspect of the Abrahamic tradition, and the message of Jesus (as) its esoteric aspect, while Islam, being a totality, is the summation of the two, at once esoteric and exoteric. See also F. Schuon, op. cit., Chap. 6.
- [32.](#) *Asrar al-Hikam*, p. 369.
- [33.](#) *Sharh-i Manzumah*, pp. 329ff.; *Asrar al-Hikam*, pp. 261ff.
- [34.](#) A list of some of these Hakims is given by *Gobineau*, op. cit., pp. 116–20. See also *Itimad al-Saltanih Muhammad Husain Khan*, *Kitab al-Maathir wal-Athar*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1306/1888, pp. 131–226.
- [35.](#) This great authority on Hikmat and gnosis has trained a generation of students in Teheran University and the *Sepahsalar* madrasah but has not written extensively on these subjects.
- [36.](#) This sage whom we mentioned in the chapter on Mulla Sadra is the author of many important works in Arabic and Persian including the commentary *al-Mizan*, *Usul-i Falsafih wa Rawish-i Realism* with commentary by Murtida Mutahhari, a book on the principles of Shiism which came as answers to a set of questions posed by Henri Corbin and published as the *Salanih-i Maktab-i Tashayyu*, No. 2; commentary upon the *Asfar*, etc. *Tabatabai* has revived the study of Hikmat in Qum, which is the most important centre of Shiah studies today and has produced many scholars who have themselves become authorities on the intellectual sciences.
- [37.](#) It is for this reason that with great obstinacy and despite some awkwardness we have refused to translate Hikmat and Hakim simply as philosophy and philosopher even if in Persia too Hikmat is often called *falsafah*. Philosophy in Western languages is almost synonymous with one form or another of rationalism, and recently irrationalism has been divorced from *sapientia* which Hikmat and even *falsafah* imply in Arabic and Persian.

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