

Part 2. Renaissance in South and South-East Asia

Chapter 79: Renaissance in Indo-Pakistan: Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi

[A: Introduction](#)

Of the two leaders of thought who appeared during the early years of decadence, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab of Arabia and Shah Wali Allah of Delhi, the latter occupies a more prominent position. He was a luminary who during the stormy period of Indian history showed the bewildered Muslims the right path, the path of peace and glory. He was possessed of deep insight, profound learning, and heroic nobleness. Not long after his death his thought gave rise to a mighty movement under the leadership of Shah Ismail Shahid and Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi for liberating the Muslims from the clutches of Western imperialism.

[B: Life and Works](#)

Qutb al-Din Ahmad, popularly known as Shah Wali Allah, was born in 1114/1703, four years before the death of Aurangzib. His genealogy can be traced back to the family of Umar Faruq, the great Caliph. It is difficult to ascertain the exact time when his forefathers left Arabia and settled down in India, but the circumstantial evidence indicates that it was about three hundred years after the great Migration (*Hijrah*). The historical records speak eloquently of the prominent position which Shah Wali Allah's grandfather occupied in the Mughul Court. It has been narrated that he played an important role in the struggle for power amongst the sons of Shah Jahan, and that he fought bravely against the Marathas of the

Deccan.¹

Shah Wali Allah's father, Shah Abd al-Rahim, was greatly loved and respected by the people for his great scholarship and piety. He was entrusted by the Emperor Alamgir with the delicate and important task of revising the *Fatawa-i Alamgiri*. He acquitted himself creditably of the duty assigned to him and declined to accept any remuneration for the work.²

In his booklet *al-Juz al-Latif fi Tarjamat al-Abd al-Daif*, Shah Wali Allah gives an account of his brilliant educational career. Even a cursory reading of this booklet shows that Shah Wali Allah was precocious as a child. He soon mastered the different branches of learning, and so great was his command over them that even at the tender age of fifteen he could teach all these with confidence to others.

After the death of his illustrious father, we find him busy teaching *Tafsir*, Hadith, *Fiqh*, and logic, subjects commonly taught in the *madrassahs* of those days. During this period of about twelve years, he penetrated deeply into the teachings of Islam and pondered seriously over the future of Muslims in India.

In the year 1143/1731 he went to the Hijaz on a pilgrimage and stayed there for fourteen months studying Hadith and *Fiqh* under such distinguished scholars as abu Tahir al-Kurdi al-Madani, Wafd Allah al-Makki, and Taj al-Din al-Qali. During this period he came into contact with people from all parts of the Muslim world and, thus, obtained first-hand information about the conditions then prevailing in the various Muslim countries.

He returned to Delhi in 1145/1733, where he spent the rest of his life in producing numerous works till his death in 1176/1763 during the reign of Shah Alam II.³ The most important of Shah Wali Allah's works is his *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah* in which he made an attempt to present the teachings of Islam in a scientific manner. His approach, though radical from beginning to end, is without complete break with the past.

The range of his works is varied and wide covering all aspects of knowledge: economic, political, social, metaphysical, as well as purely theological. Whether one agrees or disagrees either with Shah Wali Allah's theses or his conclusions, one has to admit that the book represents the first brilliant attempt to rethink the entire system of Islam in a spirit of scientific objectivity.

C: Sources of Shah Wali Allah's Thought

The pivotal point on which revolves the philosophical thought of Shah Wali Allah is religion. Since it is religion alone that, according to him, had been the source of strength and power for the Muslims, their decline was the direct result of their apathy towards it. His chief concern, therefore, was to call the Muslims back to the teachings of Islam.

He had a strong faith in the force and strength of Islamic ideology in which, he believed, if accepted fully and applied honestly, lay the hope for peaceful and prosperous development of the human race. Shah Wali Allah consequently bent all his energies towards purifying Islamic ideals of all unhealthy influences

and providing them a fresh intellectual ground to meet the challenge of the time.

Shah Wali Allah was fully aware of the gap between the pattern of life as enunciated in the Quran and the Sunnah and the one which the Muslims had devised for themselves, the gap between the social and political institutions the framework of which had been supplied by Islam and the institutions which the Muslims had developed and set up for themselves in the course of history.

Nevertheless, Shah Wali Allah keenly realized that it was impossible to wheel back the march of history. It was, therefore, unwise to think that the Muslims could afford to live usefully on the pattern of life accepted as valid in the past, under the illusion that it would remain valid for all times to come.

For a proper study of Shah Wali Allah, historical imagination is, thus, the first necessity. Without referring to the intellectual environment from which he derived his inspiration, it is not easy to penetrate below the alluvial deposits of his intellectual and mystical experiences.

Even a cursory glance reveals that the first and the strongest influence that engraved the deepest mark upon his mind was that which came from his own father. From him he learnt the Holy Quran and the Sunnah and had the keen realization of the kind of invaluable guidance these contained for humanity. It can, therefore, be said that the Holy Quran and the Sunnah formed the bedrock on which he raised the superstructure of his thought system.

Shah Wali Allah was also greatly influenced by Imam Ghazali, Khatabi, and Shaikh al-Islam Izz al-Din bin Abd al-Salam. From them he learnt the art of rational interpretation of the different aspects of Islam. In his introduction to *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah* he mentions these names with great respect. He also seems to be interested in abu al-Hasan al-Ashari, abu al-Mansur Maturidi, ibn Taimiyyah, and Imam Fakhr al-Din Razi.

In mysticism he was influenced by both ibn Arabi and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. One may, however, find from the study of his mystical thought that though he received inspiration from both of them, yet his ideas were closer to the views of ibn Arabi than to those of the Mujaddid.

D: Socio-Economic and Political Thought

Shah Wali Allah made quite a serious attempt to find out the relationship between social, ethical, and economic systems. According to him, spirituality has two aspects: first, it is a personal relation of man to God, secondly, it is man's relation to his fellow-beings. No man is fully spiritual who seeks only his own personal salvation in isolation from society. It is only in the social setup that the spirituality of an individual is expressed.

Islam, therefore, seldom deals with the individual as an individual; it always envisages him as a member of a family or a community. Thus, the achievement of social justice is a prerequisite for the development of the individual. How this ideal of social justice can be formulated and realized is a question that Shah

Wali Allah has taken up in great detail in his famous work *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*.

Adalah (justice or balance), according to him, is the essential feature for the harmonious development of the human race. Its manifestations may be numerous, but it is the one golden thread that runs into the web and woof of the variegated patterns of human life. When it expresses itself in dress, manners, and mores, it goes by the name of *adab* (etiquette). In matters relating to income and expenditure, we call it economy, and in the affairs of the State it is named politics.⁴

Under the head *Irtifaqat*,⁵ Shah Wali Allah discusses the problem of human relations. He starts with the fact that man has innumerable wants that urge him to action. The satisfaction of human wants, involving as it does the interdependence of individuals, leads to the origination of a society and its mores. When human beings join hands for collective safety and security, the government is formed, and when they come into contact with one another for the satisfaction of their material needs, the economic system is established.

The basic quality of a sound system, be it social, economic, or political, is the balanced relationship amongst the different members of a social group. This balanced relationship is without doubt a reflection of inward peace and of a sound relationship with the Creator. On the other hand, the social system it evolves is itself conducive to the achievement of such peace and relationship.

Shah Wali Allah then briefly deals with some of the basic aspects of a social system as a dynamic process. He starts with language and points out that it is not only a vehicle of expression, but is also an important factor for the development of culture and civilization.⁶ Then comes agriculture which provides food for the people. In this process man learns the art of irrigation; he also domesticates the animals and is benefited by them in hundred and one ways. Then the houses are built in order to safeguard the human race against the inclemency of weather and seasons.⁷ All further development depends on the establishment of a State. The more uncultured a social group is, the more does it stand in need of a coercive power to exercise a proper check.

State, according to him, should not restrict the sphere of its activities only to the safety and security of the individuals, but should also devise ways and means for the happiness and progress of society as a whole. It is, therefore, within the functions of the State to eradicate all sorts of social evils, e.g., gambling, adultery, usury, bribery, etc.

A careful check should be exercised upon the traders to ensure that they do not indulge in malpractices. The State should also see that the energies of the people are made to flow into profitable channels, by maintaining, for example, the proper distribution of people in different occupations. Shah Wali Allah points out: "When the occupations are not fairly distributed amongst the different sections of a society, its culture receives a set-back; for example, if the majority of the people take to commerce, agriculture would be necessarily neglected and, thus, there will be a marked decline in the agricultural produce. Similarly, the people would suffer great hardships if the bulk of population enlisted themselves in the

army; there would be only a few left to look after agriculture and commerce and the whole social system would be disturbed.”

Shah Wali Allah thinks that after the functions of the army and police, the most important activity within the State is that of agriculture, for it supplies to the people those necessities of life on which their very existence depends.⁸ The State should develop methods of cultivation. Every inch of land should be properly tilled, and there should be a scheme for the rotation of crops.⁹

Besides, the State should adopt ways and means to encourage trade and industry. Thus, according to Shah Wali Allah, the richness of society as a whole depends upon its diversity, a truism that cannot be too often stressed. This diversity should be achieved by fixing people into different professions according to their aptitudes. The unlimited possibilities latent in men can only be unfolded if they are permitted to seek occupations according to their own bents of mind.

Shah Wali Allah believes that a sound economic system based on social justice can contribute to the happiness of society. If and when a State fails to develop or retain such a system, its decline becomes inevitable. He concludes his deliberations on this problem, as it existed in his own times as follows: “After a careful analysis I have come to the conclusion that there are two main factors responsible for the decline of the Muslim culture. First, many people have abandoned their own occupations and have become parasites on the government. They are a great burden on the public exchequer. Some of these are soldiers; some claim themselves to be men of great learning and, thus, deem it their birthright to get regular financial help from the State. There are not a few who get regular donations, gifts, and rewards from the Court as a matter of past custom, such as, for example, poets and clowns. Many of the people belonging to these groups do not contribute anything to the welfare of society, yet they are allowed to suck its blood. The sooner the State gets rid of these parasites, the better.

Secondly, the government has levied an exorbitant rate of tax on the agriculturists, cultivators, and traders. Added to this is the cruel treatment meted out to the taxpayers by government officials at the time of collecting the taxes. The people groan under the heavy weight of taxes while their economic position deteriorates at an alarming speed. This is how the country has come to ruin.”¹⁰

In this connection Shah Wali Allah points out also a great misconception that is common among the Muslims. Most of them believe that poverty is loved by God and hence no good Muslim should make an effort to become rich. Such a view is erroneous. The simple living that comes from selfcontentment is fundamentally different from the abject poverty to which the weaker groups are often subjected by the ruling classes.

This “forced starvation of certain classes,” as Shah Wali Allah calls it, “is highly detrimental to the welfare of society. It is no virtue but a crime. Islam grants no license to any class to compel others to remain as hewers of wood and drawers of water. It aims at the achievement of social justice, which is possible only when society is free from class conflict and everyone is provided with an opportunity to

develop his latent powers and capacities and strengthen his individuality through free and active participation in the benefits of his material and cultural environment.” [11](#)

“Islam,” he continues, “teaches that this strong concentrated individuality, sharpened and steeled through a life of active experience, should not become obsessed with self-aggrandizement; it should rather be devoted to the service of God and through this to the good of mankind. Islam never preaches its followers to submit themselves ungrudgingly to an oppressive social system. It is social justice rather than poverty which is eulogized by the Holy Prophet (S), justice which not only safeguards an individual against an attitude of arrogance and self-conceit, but also develops in him a power to spurn the temptations, bribes, and snares with which an unscrupulous ruling clique tries cynically to corrupt the integrity and character of the subjects.” [12](#)

Shah Wali Allah agrees with Aristotle that a State exists to promote “good life.” By “good life” he means life possessed of goodness as enunciated by Islam. For him the State is a means to an end and not an end-in-itself. Therefore, he holds that the possession of coercive power cannot be defended regardless of the ends to which it is devoted.

If a State wields this power honestly, then the highest duty of an individual is to become a loyal member of that State, but if it is a State only in name and is in reality a blind brute force, then it becomes the bounden duty of its members to overthrow it. Thus, an important duty of an individual is to become a member of the State, but more important than this is his duty to judge the quality of the State of which he is a member.

In his book *Izalat al-Khifa an Khilafat al-Khulafa* Shah Wali Allah lays down in very, clear terms the duty of an Islamic State (*Khilafat*). “Khilafat in general terms is a form of State which is established for the enforcement of the Laws of *Shariah* in accordance with the will of the Holy Prophet (S). The foremost functions of the *Khilafat* are the revival of Islamic teachings and their translation in practical life, preparing the *millah* for endeavour (*jihad*), and carefully suppressing all those evils which arise from the misuse of its functions.” [13](#)

Shah Wali Allah clearly explains the relationship between the individual and the State. According to his theory of State, which he has in fact drawn from the teachings of Islam, an individual is not a mere part of a social whole in the same sense as bees, ants, and termites are. An individual has a real value of his own, for in Islam the beginning and the end of every consideration is the individual. But as every human being lives in a society it is through the social pattern that his spirituality is properly developed. Being the most powerful factor in the social pattern, a Muslim State is primarily responsible for the all-round development of an individual.

E: Philosophy of History

Every theory of social dynamics is ultimately a philosophy of history. Its special urgency arises from the

fact that it gives people, as best as it may, an insight into the experiences of mankind and brings to mind the lessons that accrue from them. History is not a series of mere accidents; there is always a purpose behind them. The essential task of a historian is to study that inner process of thought, that underlying motive of action, which works behind the social change.

Anyone who cares to penetrate through the outer crust of historical events and episodes will find “something” that may be called the metaphysical structure of the historic humanity; something essentially independent of the outward forms social, spiritual, and political, which we see clearly. [14](#)

Shah Wali Allah as a historian tried in his own peculiar way to acquaint us with that “something.” It is noteworthy that he has also offered us an explanation for the differences in the social codes of the various prophets.

Lastly, he has, with remarkable acumen and penetration, winnowed out many mistaken notions about Muslim history commonly found even amongst the Muslim historians themselves. He reviews even that delicate period of Muslim history about which there is much inept sentimentalism amongst the Muslims. More particularly he draws a line of demarcation between Islamic history and history of the Muslim people and courageously points out the follies committed in the past because of overlooking this important distinction.

In his book *Tawil al-Ahadith*, he proves with the help of actual facts of history that man is not “an Ixion bound for ever to his wheel nor a Sisyphus for ever rolling his stone to the summit of the same mountain and helplessly watching it roll down again.” Humanity is ever-growing and, thus, faces new problems at every step.

The invisible hand that works on the loom of time is bringing into existence a tapestry in which one may envisage a developing design and not simply an endless repetition of the same old pattern. Shah Wali Allah, thus, comes to affirm that though there is a complete agreement of prophets with regard to the basic import of the divine revelation, yet they differ with one another in the matter of the special codes which they presented in the forms that suited the needs of their times.

In his book *Fauz al-Kabir*, Shah Wali Allah says: “Every nation is accustomed to a certain mode of worship, and has a political and social pattern of its own. When a prophet (as) is sent to the people by God, he does not replace the old order by an absolutely new one. He, on the other hand, allows those customs to continue which do not contravene the will of God and effects necessary changes in all those patterns where these alterations are essential.” [15](#)

In his book *Tawil al-Ahadith*, Shah Wali Allah traces the development of society right from Adam (as) down to the last of the prophets (S) and discusses in detail the peculiarities of each age. Amongst the Muslim thinkers Shah Wali Allah is the first [16](#) to compile a systematic history of the prophets and to explain that the social codes offered by the prophets can be reasonably interpreted in the light of the needs of their respective times.

Shah Wali Allah believes that in Adam the angelic qualities and the urges of the flesh existed side by side. The former led him to discover the different modes of worship and the latter showed him the way to satisfy his material needs, for example, cultivation of soil, domestication of animals,[17](#) etc.

The Prophet Idris (as) later was possessed of all these qualities which his predecessor, Adam (as), combined in himself, yet he improved upon them by pondering over the creation, acquiring thereby a good deal of knowledge about physics, astronomy, and medicine. Further, as he flourished in an age when the people had learnt handicrafts, he acquired proficiency in these as well.[18](#)

The period between the death of Prophet Idris (as) and the birth of Prophet Noah (as) was marked by an all-round deterioration in the moral standards of the people. Virtues such as piety, truthfulness, and selflessness were hard to be found anywhere; man had become a veritable brute. Noah (as), therefore, made incumbent upon the people the offering of continuous prayers and observing of fasts. This was necessary to exercise a check on the urges of the flesh that had then taken full hold of the mind of the people.[19](#)

The above example should be sufficient to give an idea how Shah Wali Allah explains the differences of the social codes presented by various prophets at various stages of human history.

It is, however, important to point out that the differences of *Shariahs* to which Shah Wali Allah has referred here are differences in external forms only, i.e., in the rituals and routine activities, and not in their essentials. Since all prophets (as) were inspired by God alone, there could not be any difference in their fundamental teachings.

Belief in the unity of God, charity and brotherhood among mankind, subjugation of passions by the desire for higher values of life, accountability of human actions in the life hereafter, etc., formed the bedrock upon which were raised the superstructures of the various *Shariahs*.

In his work *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*, Shah Wali Allah particularly emphasizes the, essential unity of all religions by saying, “Remember, the real faith is one. This alone was preached by all the prophets (as) of God and it is this alone that should be followed by the whole of humanity. Differences, if any, are only in their superstructures and details, rather than in their fundamentals. All prophets (as) have unanimously preached the gospel of divine unity.”[20](#) At another place he reiterates: “Just as articles of faith are the same in all religions, similarly the basic virtues preached by them are necessarily the same.”[21](#)

The unity of faiths and moral values is due to the fact that human nature has essentially remained the same through the march of time. The human race has not altered physically and very little intellectually during the thousands of years of recorded history. The passions, pleasures, heartaches, and the political and domestic problems of the people of bygone ages were, in all likelihood, much the same as ours.

The greed of imperialistic powers was causing men to kill one another as brutally in 1600 B.C. as in the

twelfth/eighteenth century. Though the fields of human activity have widened, the instincts that are the springboards of all action have remained the same. It is this sameness of human nature which led the celebrated philosopher–historian ibn Khaldun remark: “The past resembles the future as water; hence sociology, the study of the present, casts light on history, the study of the past, just as the study of history supplies the material for sociological studies.”²²

Shah Wali Allah completely agrees with ibn Khaldun on this point²³ and considers history “remembrance of the days of God,” to be a key to the study of the Holy Quran.²⁴ It is one of the remarkable doctrines of the Quran that nations are judged collectively and suffer for their misdeeds here and now.

In order to establish this, the Quran constantly cites historical instances and urges upon the reader to reflect on the past and the present experience of mankind: “Of old did We send Moses with Our signs; and said to him: ‘Bring forth thy people from darkness to light, and remind them of the days of God.’ Verily in this are signs for patient and grateful persons”²⁵; “Already, before your time, have precedents been made. Traverse the earth then, and see what hath been the end of those who falsified the signs of God.”²⁶

The latter verse is an instance of a more specific historical generalization, which, in its epigrammatic formulation, suggests not only the possibility of a scientific treatment of the life of human societies, but a warning for the future. To the students of the Holy Quran, Shah Wali Allah gives a very valuable advice in the following words: “While reciting the Holy Quran one should not think that the accounts of the nations of the past are given for the sake of mere narration. No, the stories of the past have been narrated not for an appeal to fancy but for the generalizations that may be drawn from them.”²⁷

It may be noted that Shah Wali Allah attaches great importance to the study of social phenomena as a preparation for the proper understanding of the Quran. These phenomena are sufficiently constant and follow regular and well–defined patterns and sequences. The social changes and complexities of the past have an object lesson for those living in the present, since the people of every age have to encounter the same kind of complexities as were encountered by those who lived before them.

The danger spots in the march of nations are nearly the same. The historical record is, therefore, the lighthouse that informs the new sailors of life about the perilous rocks that may be hidden beneath the surface of the bottomless ocean of human existence. The Quran says: “Have they not travelled on land and seen the end of those who were before them? They were even stronger than these in power, and they dug the earth and built upon it more than these have built.”²⁸

This verse reveals that the past with all its sunshines and sorrows recurs and manifests itself in the garb of the future. The events of life are governed by laws which have not only taken effect in the past, but which are also bound to take effect in every similar situation that may arise in the future. Shah Wali Allah, like all great thinkers, has endeavoured to discover these laws according to which nations rise and fall. His generalizations are based mainly on the Quran and the Sunnah, but the way in which he has

applied them to practical life bears ample testimony to his keen insight both into the Quran and in the problems of human existence.

In his *Izalat al-Khifa*, Shah Wali Allah points out that the love of material wealth leads the nation to moral depravity that brings in its wake its downfall. "Remember," says he with a note of grim warning, "that sensual qualities like selfishness, greed, etc., develop in unbalanced personalities. The abundance of riches brings these brutal qualities into action."²⁹

In support of this view Shah Wali Allah recalls the words in which the Prophet (S) on one occasion addressed the people: "By God, I am not worried about your poverty but I am afraid you might become proud of the worldly riches that might be stretched before you as was done by the people of the past ages and like them these worldly riches might destroy you as they destroyed those who were vainglorious before you."³⁰

Shah Wali Allah is of the opinion, which in fact is based upon the teachings of the Quran, that when the acquisitive instincts take hold of the majority of human beings, the creative genius dies in them and this brings about their ruin. If day in and day out they are busy in accumulating riches, morality, justice, and truthfulness become mere empty words, having no use in practical life.

The love of worldly riches is accompanied by the love of power and distinction. What the aristocracy desires is not only to own riches but also to keep others under the yoke of abject poverty. Society is split up into two distinct classes, haves and have-nots, the one that owns the treasures and along with it controls the affairs of the government, the other which through persistent hard labour ekes out a precarious subsistence.

The rich become callous and watch tyranny and oppression with complete indifference, the religious people retire into seclusion or become otherworldly, and the immoral aristocracy inflicts unchecked wrongs upon the class of have-nots. The result is a frightful moral disorder, born of unspeakable suffering and intolerable oppression. Such conditions strike at the very root of social structure and the outward grandeur and glare of national life cannot make any compensation for its inner wretchedness, and ultimately the whole nation collapses like a house of cards.

Shah Wali Allah substantiates this contention with the rise and fall of the Roman and Persian Empires. He gives a vivid account of all the circumstances that led to the ruin of these two great nations of the past. He writes: "The historical records eloquently speak of the fact that the Romans and the Persians held sceptre and crown for a fairly long time. According to their own cultural requirements, they added a good deal to the luxuries of their age. Their highest aim was to lead a life of pleasure.... The people who could make their lives more luxurious flocked from all the corners of the world in order to achieve this objective.

The aristocracy having thus become immersed in the pursuit of pleasures, there began a race amongst its members to excel one another in this respect, and matters became so bad that a rich man who tied a

belt around his waist costing less than one thousand gold coins was looked down upon by others.

Everyone tried to possess a magnificent palace with a number of orchards attached to it. Their whole life came to be centred upon sumptuous foods, gaudy and attractive dresses, horses of the finest stock, coaches and carriages, and a retinue of servants.... They got used to all forms of luxurious living, and this was in fact the canker eating into the very vitals of their society.

“This meant a heavy drain on the purse of the people, as the kings and rulers were forced to levy an exorbitant rate of taxation upon the artisans and cultivators. The poor had perforce to raise a banner of revolt against the ruling clique. But under the circumstances this was well nigh impossible; therefore, the only course left for the poor was to live as bond slaves and lead their lives like donkeys.... In short, the lower strata of society were so much occupied in the service of the aristocracy that they found no time to pay any heed to the problems of the life hereafter.”[31](#)

Shah Wali Allah then further analyses this process of degeneration. He states that in order to run such a sensate system where all well-to-do persons were absorbed in the pleasures of life, a class of society came into existence, the highest duty of which was to supply the aristocracy the maximum luxuries of life. A useful section of the population was, thus, engaged in idle pursuits with the result that no one was left to think of the nation’s welfare. All this naturally led to their downfall.[32](#)

It is interesting to note that this brilliant analysis of the Roman as of the Persian society given by Shah Wali Allah (1114/1703–1177/1763) is substantially the same as given by Edward Gibbon (1150/1737–1209/1794) about thirty years later. In his monumental work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon writes: “Under the Roman empire, the labour of an industrious and ingenious people was variously, but incessantly employed, in the service of the rich. In their dress, their table, their houses, and their furniture, the favourites of fortune united every refinement of conveniency, of elegance, and of splendour, whatever could soothe their pride or gratify their sensuality. Such refinements, under the odious name of luxury, have been severely arraigned by the moralists of every age; and it might perhaps be more conducive to the virtue, as well as happiness, of mankind, if all possessed the necessities, and none of the superfluities, of life.”[33](#)

It is, however, wrong to conclude from the above discussion that Shah Wali Allah favoured the life of renunciation and considered it as such conducive to the progress of any nation. No, not in the least. He condemns such a view of life[34](#) and calls it un-Islamic. He commends the individual’s active participation in the affairs of the world.

This attitude of his does not interfere with his belief that unless the overwhelming majority of the people retain an inner attitude of detachment and superiority with regard to material possessions, a nation cannot make real progress. Its progress is possible only when the people, instead of becoming slaves to worldly riches, use them for the betterment of mankind. What is referred to here is a kind of intellectual and emotional asceticism rather than a life of renunciation.

F: Metaphysics

Doctrines of Wahdat al-Wujud and Wahdat al-Shuhud

Like all great Muslim thinkers, Shah Wali Allah penetrated deeply into the metaphysical problems raised by the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah. His approach in this as in other matters was to bring about a creative synthesis by reconciling the opposite movements of thought.

He tried, for example, to reconcile the views of ibn Arabi and those of Mujaddid Alf Thani. In order fully to appreciate this effort of Shah Wali Allah, it will be necessary to outline here briefly the views of ibn Arabi and those of the Mujaddid with regard to the problem of Being.

There are two different senses in which the term “Being” may be understood. First, it may be taken epistemologically as the *cognized form* or *idea* of existence and, secondly, it may be taken ontologically to stand for that which exists or subsists and not for the *idea* of it. *Tauhid* or the unity of Being may, therefore, mean either the unity of the mystically *cognized* existence or existence *per se*.

The term “Absolute Being” (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*) or “Universal Being” (*al-wujud al-kulli*) explained by ibn Arabi’s school is Reality as the ultimate ground of all that exists. This expression may be taken in either of the above two senses.³⁵ From the writings of ibn Arabi, which are, however, at places highly subtle and sometimes equally ambiguous, it may be gathered that when he says that all Being is One which is an Absolute Unity, he does not mean that all individual beings, past, present, or future, are essentially One Being, nor does he mean that Being in its abstract and most universal sense comprises all forms of Being in all possible universes of discourse.

When he says that all existence is one, he means that all existence is at source one, that is to say, that God is the one *source* and *cause* of all that has being (existence or subsistence). It is only for the sake of convenience that ibn Arabi compares God’s “Being” to a “universal” (say, colour) and the being of any other existent (or subsistent) to a particular “mode” or manifestation of that “universal” (say, red).³⁶

Were it not for the all-pervasiveness of God, by virtue of His form in all existents, the world would have no existence, just as, were it not for the intelligible universal realities (*al-haqaiq al-maqulat al-kulliyah*), no predications (*ahkam*) of external objects would have been possible.³⁷

To express the whole matter in modern terminology, there is an identity of God and universe on the basis of the identity of His “existence and essence” (*dhat-o sifat*) or substance and attribute, the world being only a *tajalli* or manifestation of His attributes. In other words, the creation of the world is a form of emanation.

Ibn Arabi believes that the act of creation by the word “Be” (*kun*) is nothing but the descent of the Creator into the being of things. There are, however, five stages of this descent or determination. “The first two are *ilmi* or cognitive and the last three are *khariji* or existential.

In the first descent, Unity becomes conscious of itself as pure Being, and the consciousness of attributes is only implicit and general (*sifat-i ijmalī*). In the second descent, it becomes conscious of itself as presenting the attributes explicitly and in detail (*sifat-i tafsilī*). These two descents seem to be conceived by ibn Arabi as *conceptual* rather than actual; they are supra temporal, and the distinction between existence and essence in their case is only logical.

The *real* distinctions begin with the third descent, which consists in the determination of spirits (*taayyun-i ruhi*) when Unity breaks itself into so many spirits, e.g., angels. The fourth descent is ideal determination (*taayyun-i mithali*), whereby the world of ideas comes into being. And the fifth descent is physical determination (*taayyun-i jasadi*): it yields the phenomenal or physical beings.”[38](#)

This shows that for ibn Arabi “Being” (*dhat*) of God is identical with His attributes (*sifat*), and these attributes express themselves in manifestations (*tajalliyat*) as modes that are objects and events of this world. It is, thus, clear that, according to ibn Arabi, ontologically there is only one reality. It has two aspects: (1) a reality transcending the phenomenal world and (2) a multiplicity of subjectivities that find their ultimate ground and explanation in the essential unity of the Real.[39](#)

Thus, the world as it looks and the multiplicity that we find in it is nothing but the multiplicity of the modes of the Unity; it has no existence of its own. Ibn Arabi proclaims that “existent things have not the slightest touch of reality about them.”[40](#) He explains this statement through the metaphor of the “mirror” and the “image.”[41](#) The phenomenal world is the mirror image, i.e., the shadow of the real object beyond. The whole world is like a shadow play.

At another place ibn Arabi uses the metaphors of permeation and “spiritual food.” The many permeate the One in the sense in which qualities (say, colours) permeate substance. The One, on the other hand, permeates the many as the nutriment permeates the body; God is our sustaining spiritual “food,” because He is our essence. He is also the spiritual food of the phenomenal world and it is thus that God is endowed with attributes.[42](#)

We can, thus, sum up ibn Arabi’s whole philosophical thought in the two propositions: (1) in God existence and essence or being and attributes are identical; (2) the world is nothing but a pale reflection or emanation, or mode of His attributes only.

Mujaddid Alf Thani, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, vehemently criticizes the philosophy of ibn Arabi. He says that it is wrong to believe that the attributes are identical with Being. The Quran says: “Verily God is wholly sufficient unto Himself – He needs none of the world.” According to him, this verse is clearly indicative of the fact that God is not dependent upon the world for His unfoldment. The attributes by which He turns to the world and creates it are other than His Self.

The Mujaddid also finds no valid basis for the theory of ibn Arabi that the world is the emanation (*tajalli*) of the attributes of God. For, if the world is merely the emanation of God’s attributes, it would have been identical with them, but the attributes of God are perfect, while the world is full of imperfections,[43](#) for

example, human knowledge has no resemblance to God's knowledge, so the former cannot be called to be the *tajalli* of the latter.⁴⁴

Just as we cannot call the shadow of man his being on the existence of which his very existence depends, similarly it is wrong to conclude that God depends upon the creation for His own unfoldment. There is no reciprocity between the One and the many as understood by ibn Arabi. God is an objective Reality, independent of the existence of created worlds.

Thus, there is no likeness whatsoever between the divine and the human attributes. The verse "Thy Lord is nobler than the qualities which they ascribe to Him"⁴⁵ clearly points to this.

So, while ibn Arabi bases his theory of *wahdat al-wujud* on the identity of *asl* and *zill*, i.e., the thing and its adumbration, the Mujaddid insists that the *zill* of a thing can never be identical with its *asl* or being.⁴⁶ Thus, according to him, there is absolutely no identity between the unique Creator and the world created by Him.

He also believes that mystic experience, however valuable and perfect it might be, has no objective validity with regard to Being and attributes. It is through prophetic revelation alone that we can understand Reality. Moreover, the finite beings cannot apprehend the Infinite through mystical experiences. Consequently, the faith in the unseen is unavoidable. Such faith alone is valid in the case of God, because it is in keeping with our limitations and His inaccessibility or beyondness.

Shaikh Ahmad also bitterly criticizes the doctrine of determinism that is a natural corollary of the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. He believes that man has been afforded opportunity by God to exercise his freedom in a sphere of life where he may accept or reject a certain line of action according to his own choice. Should he be a mere puppet, as he is according to the inherent logic of ibn Arabi's pantheism, he cannot be justifiably rewarded or punished for his good and evil deeds. The idea of reward and punishment presupposes a world of free and responsible moral agents who can adopt or reject a certain course of action.

These are, in short, some basic differences between the metaphysical thought of ibn Arabi and that of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. The Mujaddid's criticism of the philosophy of *wahdat al-wujud* was very severe, and few had the courage to oppose him. It was Shah Wali Allah who for the first time tried to bridge the gulf that yawned between the views of these two great thinkers of Islam. Shah Wali Allah professed that God had granted him the special gift of creative synthesis or reconciliation.⁴⁷

According to Shah Wali Allah, there is no substantial difference between the philosophy of *wahdat al-wujud* and that of *wahdat al-shuhud* and the difference if any is nothing but an illusion. The world is not an attribute or emanation of attributes but consists of non-emanative modes of attributes in the mirror of non-existence. These modes look real, but in truth their reality lies only in Being.

He resolves this difference with the help of an example. He says, "Let us make a horse, a donkey, and a

man out of wax. This wax is common to all of them although their forms differ from one another. We call these forms, moulded out of wax, a horse, a donkey, and a man. If we reflect deeply we find that these forms are only modes of their being and their being is nothing but the wax.”[48](#)

Shah Wali Allah contends, however, that if we leave simile and metaphor aside, there is no essential difference between the doctrines of ibn Arabi and those of the Mujaddid. To say that the essence of the contingent beings are the names and attributes of the necessary being differentiated in the conceptual, as ibn Arabi holds, or to say that the contingent beings are the *asma-o sifat* of the Necessary Being reflected in their *adam al-mutaqabilah* or non-being as the Mujaddid maintains, is practically the same.[49](#)

If there is any difference between the two positions, it is quite insignificant. The Mujaddid and ibn Arabi relate the same fact in two different languages but the shortsighted critics look upon these as matters of vital difference.[50](#)

The Spiritual World and the Material World

Shah Wali Allah believes that in between the material world and its Creator, there is a spiritual world in which the planning will of God is first reflected and then materialized into different forms. Thus, there is a close relationship between the two. All beings and happenings of this world are first reflected in the spiritual world or, as Shah Wali Allah names it, the *alam al-mithal*, then these are transmuted into material forms.

He elucidates this point by the example of a clairvoyant dream. The coming events are first visualized in the forms of shadows which have no material existence but which later may actualize into tangible existents. A true dream is, thus, an instance of the *alam al-mithal*. The things found in the spiritual world appear to a layman to be immaterial, but to the prophets (as) they are tangible and concrete.

For example, the Prophet (S) once after having offered his prayer said to his Companions, “I saw heaven and hell before me.” Once in the midst of his prayer, he is reported to have heaved a deep sigh as if he were actually feeling the heat of hell. Shah Wali Allah, quoting numerous examples in support of his contention, concludes, “It is an established fact that the prophets (as) could not see all these phenomena with their physical eyes. Heaven and hell are too large to be comprehended physically. Had these been matters of common sight they would have been visible to the Companions also who were by his side at such occasions.”[51](#)

Thus, over and above the material world, there is another world that transcends its spatio-temporal limitations and receives the impressions of the planning will of God before these are manifested as concrete configurations in space and time.

Space and Time

Shah Wali Allah in his book *al-Khair al-Kathir* deals with the nature of space and time. He affirms that space is inconceivable without time, and vice versa. These are not two separate categories, but a single category of space–time continuum in which time and space have their being. He further holds that space and time are indivisible and adds that but for this indivisibility there would have been complete chaos and disorder in the world so much so that the creation could not stand even for a single second.⁵²

He also maintains that space and time like all created things are not eternal, but were created by the will of God and would cease to be with the end of creation.⁵³

As regards matter, Shah Wali Allah argues that, matter can be conceived only in terms of space and time. It is only the external form of space and time, for it can be apprehended only through the agency of these.⁵⁴

Freedom and Fatalism

Shah Wali Allah's attempt to solve the problems of freedom and fatalism is also of the nature of a reconciliation. He looks upon fate as a fundamental article of faith and declares that anyone who disbelieves it is not entitled to be called a Muslim.⁵⁵

The Quran explicitly states that all beings and happenings in this world are due to a conscious creative power or divine will.⁵⁶ The omnipotent will of God has such a full grasp of the whole universe that no one can budge even an inch from His decree. In fact, our belief in God is closely related to our belief in the divine ordinances. They are as much laws, in the strictest sense of the term, as laws that regulate the movements of celestial bodies, and, thus, belief in them forms the cornerstone of Islam.⁵⁷

The above view of Shah Wali Allah, however, should not be construed in terms of *wahdat al-wujud*, which, through its intrinsic logic, leads to a form of determinism such as leaves no scope for the free activity of man. According to him, if men were mere puppets made to move by a kind of push from behind, they could not be held responsible for their actions, and the distinction between good and evil too would become meaningless; all this is repugnant to the teachings of Islam.

Islam holds man accountable for his deeds to God; His justice demands that man should be given freedom to avoid the path of vice and follow the path of virtue and piety. Every human being has two inclinations, one angelic, prompting and impelling him to good, and the other beastly, prompting and impelling him to evil. It is up to man himself to adopt the one and abandon the other.

“Everyone is divinely furthered in accordance with his character. Say not that man is compelled, for that means attributing tyranny to God, nor say that man has absolute discretion. We are rather furthered by His help and grace in our endeavours to act righteously, and we transgress because of our neglect of His commands.”⁵⁸

G: Jurisprudence

Shah Wali Allah attempts reconciliation between the different schools of Muslim jurisprudence. He delineates the broad outlines of Islamic Law, consisting of mandatory and unalterable edicts and fundamental principles that have always been accepted unanimously by all the Muslim schools of thought.

More important, however, for our purpose here are his views with regard to the problems about which differences do exist and which are the outcome of interpretations and *ijtihad*, all, of course, within the limits prescribed by Islam.

He advocates the policy of confining oneself within the framework of the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence, viz., Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki, and Hanbali.

There is a consensus of opinion amongst the majority of '*ulama*' that *taqlid* is essential. He agrees with them, but moderates the traditional view of *taqlid* by saying: "No one can have any objection to the concept of *taqlid*; but I neither look upon any Imam as infallible, nor do I believe that his judgments were revealed to him by God Himself and so are obligatory for us.

When we follow a certain Imam we do so on the explicit understanding that he was possessed of a deep insight into the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah and his findings were drawn from the Quran and the Sunnah.... Had it not been so, we would not have attached any importance to them. It would be the height of misfortune to give priority to the reasoning of man over the command of the *nass*. This alone is the type of *taqlid* which appears to me quite justifiable."⁵⁹

Similarly, Shah Wali Allah offers a workable solution of the differences of pure traditionists (*Muhaddithin*) and the followers of the four Imams. "The general practice," he says, "with regard to the framing of *Fiqhi* Law is that either the deductions are directly based upon the Hadith or they are drawn in the light of the principles enunciated by the jurists.

The scholars of every age have been following these two courses, some stressing the former, others stressing the latter.... It is unfair to tilt the balance to one side only and neglect the other altogether.... The right procedure is to harmonize them. Both these methods should be employed for raising the superstructure of Islamic jurisprudence. The edifice of the *Shariah* so erected would be sound and well consolidated.

The Muhaddithin should judge their deductions on the principles enunciated by the great jurists. On the other hand, those who follow the practice of deducing laws on the basis of the procedure adopted by great jurists should never give preference to their own principles over those of the *nass*, and see that their conclusions do not in anyway contravene the injunctions of the Hadith. In the same way it is not proper for any Muhaddith to lay unnecessary stress on the principles laid down by the old compilers of

the Hadith. They were after all human beings and their principles could not, therefore, be claimed to be final and free from all errors.”[60](#)

Shah Wali Allah fully recognizes the importance of individual judgment (*ijtihad*), but at the same time believes that as this important task entails great responsibilities, it cannot be entrusted to everyone. He recounts three main qualifications of a mujtahid: (1) He should be able to frame the principles according to which the individual judgment is to be exercised; (2) he should be fully conversant with the Quran and the Sunnah and should know the ahadith which form the basis of Fiqh; (3) he must be capable of exercising his judgment to draw injunctions from the Quran and the Sunnah in order to meet the new requirements of his times.[61](#)

Shah Wali Allah not only emphasizes the catholicity of Islamic Law and explains its assimilative spirit, but also stresses the need of reasoning in matters relating to the *Shariah*. He believes that the *ijtihad* of the old jurists, however high and exalted their status, is open to correction in the light of the Quran and the Sunnah. He, thus, opens the gate of *ijtihad* that had been sealed long ago.

No wonder that, like his illustrious predecessors, ibn Taimiyyah and ibn Qayyim, he was also accused of heretical innovations; yet he was one of the few intellectuals of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent whose influence was deeply felt even beyond the borders of that country. His works, especially *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*, *Budur al-Bazighah* and *Fauz al-Kabir*, are read with admiration throughout the Muslim world.

His popularity outside the sub-continent of Indo-Pakistan may be partly attributed to the fact that he had a perfect command over the Arabic and Persian languages. His mastery over the Arabic language was especially remarkable; he was one of the very few writers of the Indo-Pak sub-continent who could write Arabic prose with the same ease and confidence with which he could write his own mother tongue.

This might have been one of the factors of his popularity abroad. But a close analysis of the writings of the Muslim scholars of other countries clearly reveals that he was respected more for the depth of his thought and his keen insight in the matters of *Shariah* than for the lucidity of his style. This is substantiated by the fact that his reputation as a scholar and as a leader of thought has considerably increased during the last few decades when there has been a visible stir amongst the Muslims to reconstruct their thought on Islamic foundations without losing sight of the benefits which can be derived from the study of modern sciences.

There is hardly any modern scholar of repute in the Muslim world who has worked on *Fiqh* and Hadith and has not quoted Shah Wali Allah in support of his contentions. Abu Zuhra of Egypt, who is an authority on Muslim law, seems to be deeply influenced by him and has profusely quoted him in his scholarly discussions on Imam abu Hanifah's juridical views.

Jamal al-Din Qasimi, an eminent scholar of Hadith in Damascus, has time and again referred to Shah Wali Allah's valuable thought in his famous book *Qawaid al-Tahdith*, which is considered to be a basic work on the principles of Hadith. Abu Zahau in his scholarly treatise, *al-Hadith wal-Muhaddithun*, in

which he traces the history of the revival of Hadith in different lands, pays glowing tributes to Shah Wali Allah for the enviable contributions that he made in connection with the popularization of the study of Hadith in India. In fact, he places him at the top of the list in this respect.

The famous Shaikh al-Islam of Turkey, Shaikh Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari, devotes a whole chapter to Shah Wali Allah in his compilation *Maqalat al-Kauthari* published in Damascus. Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, a leader of the liberation movement of Egypt and for several years editor of *al-Fath*, speaks of Shah Wali Allah in several of his articles with great respect.

Abd al-Munim al-Namar, another leading scholar of Egypt and a member of the Board of 'Ulama' of Azhar, in his book *Tarikh al-Islam fi al-Hind*, speaks of him as an authority on Hadith and *Tafsir*. He states that Shah Wali Allah shattered the bonds of *taqlid* and prepared the Muslim scholars for research. Al-Mukhtar, a compilation by abu al-Hasan Nadawi, which has been prescribed as a textbook for the secondary school stage in Damascus, includes a selection from *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*.

Shah Wali Allah's most valuable book, *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah*, has been published in Egypt in various editions and is widely read in the Arab lands. *Musawwa*, another important work of Shah Wali Allah, has also been translated into Arabic. A French translation of *Hujjat Allah al-Balighah* has recently been published in Paris.

H: Conclusion

Shah Wali Allah's influence was quite widespread and penetrating. He revolutionized the philosophical, political, social, and economic ideas within the framework of Islam. Like an experienced surgeon he analysed and examined the various components of Islamic mysticism and *Fiqh* and rearranged them in an order that made them highly beneficial to the Muslim society. According to Iqbal, he was the first Muslim to feel the urge for rethinking the whole system of Islam without in any way breaking away from its past.

Shah Wali Allah aimed at presenting Islamic thought in as coherent and logical form as any theologico-philosophical system could be. His style has all the philosophical subtlety and penetration about it and his doctrines have a logical cogency and consistency surpassing those of many Muslim theologians.

His philosophical endeavour consisted in explaining and resolving satisfactorily the apparent contradictions and dichotomies between the eternal values and the changing conditions, the unity of God and the multiplicity within the universe, etc. In this he was the precursor of Iqbal; anyone delving deep into Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* will find the spirit of Shah Wali Allah pervading this work from beginning to end.

In Islamic mysticism Shah Wali Allah tried to comb out all unhealthy foreign influences, such as a morbid kind of neo-Platonism and Vedantism. He stressed that genuine mysticism, as distinguished from

pseudo-mysticism, encourages an active way of life that assures progress and prosperity in this world and salvation in the hereafter.

Commenting on Shah Wali Allah's role as a Sufi, Professor Gibb writes: "During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a succession of remarkable scholars strove to restate the bases of Islamic theology in a manner which broke away from the formalism of the orthodox manuals and laid new stress upon the psychological and ethical elements in religion. Among the more outstanding figures in this movement, which has not yet received the attention it deserves, were the Syrian Abd al-Ghani of Nablus (1641-1731) and the Indians Ahmad Sarhindi (1563-1624) and Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1702-1762)."⁶²

Shah Wali Allah translated the Holy Qur'an into Persian despite opposition and, thus, brought the Word of Allah within the reach of the common man. His illustrious son, Shah Rafi al-Din, following his example, translated the Quran in Urdu and, thus, dispelled the prejudice against translations of the Holy Book.

In *Hadith* he revived interest in the study of Imam Malik's *Muwatta*, which became elevated in the eyes of scholars only through his efforts.

In *Fiqh*, Shah Wali Allah attacked the conventional notions prevailing during his time. His main endeavour consisted in freeing the concept of the divine Law from the subjective elements that had intruded into it, thus restoring to it the purity and compactness that it had at the time of the Companions.

He also tried to bridge the gulfs that yawned amongst the different schools of *Fiqh*. According to him, all the prevalent systems of *Fiqh* drew their inspiration from one single source so that there could be no fundamental differences in them; differences there had been and there would be, but these were differences in interpretation only, not in principles. The significance of Shah Wali Allah's standpoint in *Fiqh* from the point of view of welding the Muslim community into one *ummah* cannot be over-emphasized.

Shah Wali Allah, like Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, made it amply clear that Islam is not a religion in the usual sense of the term but a complete code of life which aims not only at individual righteousness but provides a framework for all individual and social activities.

It was the effect of the radical change brought about by Shah Wali Allah in the outlook of the Muslim community in the various walks of life that a mighty movement under the leadership of Shah Ismail Shahid and Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi was set afoot. This made the Muslim community realize the condition in which they had been left through a neglect of their faith, or through an incorrect approach to it.

There sprang up an ardent desire in the minds of the Muslims to retrieve their position, not merely to claim the heritage of their past culture but also to revive the vitality inherent in it. Although the movement suffered defeat at the hands of the imperialistic powers, yet it could not be curbed permanently. The time that elapsed between the martyrdom of Shah Ismail and late forties of the present century, is very

important for it was the time during which the plant nourished by the lifeblood of Shah Wali Allah continued growing till it flowered into the birth of Pakistan.

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2. Ibid., pp. 113, 170.
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37. Ibid., p. 178.

- [38.](#) Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi quoted by Burhan Ahmad Faruqi in his Mujaddid's Conception of Tawhid, pp. 88–89.
- [39.](#) A. E. Affifi, op. cit., p. 11.
- [40.](#) Fusus al-Hikam, Cairo, p. 63.
- [41.](#) Ibid., p. 120.
- [42.](#) A. E. Affifi, op. cit., p. 16.
- [43.](#) Maktubat Imam Rabbani, Urdu translation by Qadi Alam al-Din, Lahore, Vol. 3, pp. 113–14.
- [44.](#) Ibid., p. 100.
- [45.](#) Quran (37: 180).
- [46.](#) Maktubat Imam Rabbani, Vol. 2, Epistle 7.
- [47.](#) Shah Wali Allah, Faisalat al-Wahdat al-Wujud wa Wahdat at-Shuhud (Arabic), p. 6.
- [48.](#) Ibid., pp. 6–7.
- [49.](#) Ibid., p. 7.
- [50.](#) Ibid.
- [51.](#) Hujjat Allah al-Balighah, Vol. 1, pp. 13–14.
- [52.](#) Shah Wali Allah, al-Khair al-Kathir, ed. Bashir Ahmad, Dairat al-Hilal, Benares, pp. 29–30.
- [53.](#) Ibid.
- [54.](#) Ibid.
- [55.](#) Hujjat Allah al-Balighah, Vol. 1, pp. 65–66.
- [56.](#) Cf. Quran (15:21); (16:79); (48:21).
- [57.](#) For a detailed study of this aspect, see Hujjat Allah al-Balighah, Vol. 1, pp. 55–67.
- [58.](#) Ibid., pp. 27–28.
- [59.](#) Shah Wali Allah, al-insaf fi Bayan-i Sabab al-Ikhtilaf, Urdu translation by Sadr al-Din Islahi, Lahore, n.d., pp. 29–80.
- [60.](#) Ibid., pp. 82–83.
- [61.](#) Ibid., p. 123.
- [62.](#) H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism, The New American Library, New York, 1955, p. 125.

Chapter 80: Renaissance in Indo-Pakistan (Continued): Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a Politician, Historian, and Reformist

[A: Introductory](#)

Born of a distinguished family of Delhi in 1232/1817, Sayyid Ahmad was brought up under the care of his mother and went through the customary schooling. He started his literary career in 1273/1856 when he began to write for his brother's journal, *Sayyid al-Akhar*. After the fashion of the time he took to composing poetry but the hobby did not hold his interest for long.

The death of his father in 1254/1838 sent him out into the world in quest of a living. His first occupation

was a petty job in a civil court under the East India Company at Delhi. He earned promotions by sheer merit and served first at Agra and then at Fatehpur Sikri. In 1263/1846, he was sent back to Delhi at his own request. Before coming to this place he had compiled a few tracts on such diverse subjects as history, science, theology, and civil law, dealing with them each in a distinctly medieval spirit.

In addition to his official duties at Delhi, he re-read intensively a number of medieval Muslim classics, sat in the company of prominent poets and men of letters, practised medicine for some time, and busied himself with the first round of his researches in history which culminated in the *Athar al-Sanadid*, a work which would do credit to any professional historian.

After seven years' stay at Delhi his employers transferred him to Bijnaur as a civil judge. The rising known as the Mutiny of 1273-74/1857 broke out while he was stationed there. The rulers foisted the responsibility for this on the Muslims and singled them out for a fierce vendetta. The Muslim losses by way of seizures, confiscations, and malicious persecutions were colossal.

In Sayyid Ahmad's own words: "Scores of illustrious families were laid low. Theirs is a harrowing tale. I was heedless of my personal sufferings, grievous though they were. I was shocked at the afflictions of my people.... I was seized with despair. I lost all hope of Muslims' ever rising again and recovering their departed grandeur. I stood aghast at the tragedy. I could not stand Muslim tribulations. The gnawing agony aged me prematurely. I wanted to say good-bye to the country of my birth and settle down in a foreign land. However.... I realized that I should not desert my post, but stand by my people in their ordeal and sink or swim with them...."¹

Sayyid Ahmad viewed the Mutiny as an outcome of racial misunderstanding and administrative blunders. After the outbreak had been quelled, he threw himself heart and soul into the task of bringing about a better understanding between the British and the Indians, and between the British and the Muslims. His thought-provoking book on the causes of the revolt and his commentary on the Bible belong to this period.

He anticipated his educational work by setting up two schools in the cities of Muradabad and Ghazipur. In 1281/1864, he founded the Scientific Society, almost the first learned body in Northern India. The periodical of this association, *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, was noted for its sober tone, objective reporting, and scrupulous avoidance of cheap journalistic tricks, qualities rare in early Indian journalism.

Three years later, Sayyid Ahmad found himself involved in an unedifying wrangle with the protagonists of Hindi who were determined to do away with Urdu as the language of the law-courts in Upper India. This together with his visit to England in 1286-87/1869-70 gave a fresh orientation to his ideas and a new direction to his efforts and he dedicated himself to the social and intellectual regeneration of the Indian Muslims.

On his return to India Sayyid Ahmad brought out his magazine, the *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, with the sub-title *Mohammedan Social Reformer*. This bright periodical had a chequered career and ultimately its

publication ceased in 1311/1893. Sayyid Ahmad himself was its principal contributor. The essays that he wrote for it are universally acknowledged among the classics of Urdu literature. They examined the foundations of Muslim society and subjected Muslim institutions to a powerful searchlight.

Whereas Bentham inquired into the utilitarian bases of institutions, Sayyid Ahmad applied to them the test of reason and religious sanction. The *Tahdhib* gathered round itself a select and highly discriminating readership that shared Sayyid Ahmad's zeal for reform. It countered on the one hand the forces of scepticism and irreligion unleashed by Western influences, and on the other beat down the firmly entrenched opposition to Western education.

Towards the end, Sayyid Ahmad devoted himself more and more to the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which was, an imaginative educational experiment intended to develop into a character-building residential institution. The College produced a unique community of alumni and in due season Aligarh became the political and educational capital of Muslim India.

The cognate organization, the All-India Mohammadan Educational Conference, founded by Sayyid Ahmad in 1304/1886, became a lively forum for the discussion of social and educational questions and proved to be an important factor in promoting Muslim solidarity in the sub-continent.

Sayyid Ahmad resolutely declined to be drawn into politics. "Educate, educate, educate..." was his watchword. His decision to hold aloof from the political movement has been often maligned and caricatured as a counsel of political reactionism. The misunderstanding arises primarily from an attempt at studying his ideas out of context and disregarding the circumstances of the times.

A more realistic appraisal of his political creed in the context of contemporary events is urgently called for. Be that as it may, Sayyid Ahmad's political testament prevented the absorption of the Muslim community into Hindu nationalism and finally resulted in the partition of the Indian sub-continent into its Hindu and Muslim zones. He was knighted in 1305/1888, and after a long intellectual and political career passed away at Aligarh in 1315/1898 at the ripe age of eighty-one.

B: The Sayyid as a Historian

Sayyid Ahmad had the intellectual make-up of a true historian and his entire thinking was coloured with a deep sense of obligation to the past. But he was seldom obsessed with it, and did not become, like Burke, one of its unreasoning worshippers. Indeed, he could distinguish between its healthy and injurious legacies. He viewed political and social problems in the light of history and his ideas bore a close resemblance to the findings of the historical school in political science.

As a historian he was concrete and objective. His monograph on the history of the Mutiny in the district of Bijnaur, entitled *Tarikh-i Sarkashi-i Bijnaur*, opens with the following observations about the responsibility of a historian:

“The contents of this book mostly deal with what I saw with my own eyes and did with my own hands. I have taken great pains to ascertain the truth of events and incidents beyond my own experience. Tampering with historical truth is a fraudulent enterprise. (It damages the truth and) its evil influence works forever. Thus, the sinful irresponsibility of the historian becomes everlasting.”

A *resume* of Sayyid Ahmad’s historical writings must naturally begin with the *Athar al-Sanadid* that deals with the ancient buildings and historical monuments of Delhi and its suburbs. The city of Delhi is one of the oldest capitals and can boast of a hoary antiquity. It is the graveyard of dynasties and empires. Time has hallowed almost every bit of its territory.

When Sayyid Ahmad entered the field of historical research he was fascinated by the wealth of its unexplored archaeological remains. He personally surveyed some one hundred and thirty sites, measured their dimensions, transcribed their inscriptions, and reconstructed their original plans. He experienced considerable hardship in getting at the inscriptions located in different parts of the column of Qutb Minor.

The researcher in him was undeterred by hindrances. He tried heroically and managed to reach its height by the use of an ingenious but dangerous device. He also made a careful study of the mass of related historical materials in print as well as in manuscript and spun the data thus collected into a lively narrative of an almost encyclopedic range. While the account of the relics constitute the central theme of the book, some of its sections deal with the Fort, the aristocratic quarters, shopping centres, natural springs and the climate of Delhi, and the origin and evolution of the Urdu language.

The first edition of the *Athar* included the life-sketches of the celebrities of Delhi, both dead and living, each as the heads of religious orders, poets, calligraphists, painters, and musicians. This part was omitted from later editions. The book was translated by a French Orientalist. The translation introduced Sayyid Ahmad to the scholars of Oriental history in Europe.

It is interesting to note that this clear narrative was poorly paragraphed, contained practically no punctuation marks from beginning to end, and was characterized by a certain lack of restraint in presentation. The book went through a second edition in 1270/1853, when its grosser flaws were eliminated. Its language was simplified and new material introduced. Probably the only extant copy of this edition is to be found in the Panjab University Library, Lahore.

Sayyid Ahmad next turned his attention to the *Ain-i Akbari*, the principal source book for the colourful reign of Akbar who presided over an administration remarkable for its efficiency as well as its complexity. (The land-revenue system built up under the British was faithfully raised upon the foundations laid in the reign of this renowned monarch.) But the available copies of this classic were full of errors and were positively unserviceable for an understanding of an important epoch.

Sayyid Ahmad sought to establish the text of the great work. The job was undertaken at the request of a merchant prince of Delhi. He collected all the manuscripts within his reach and prepared his own

version. To this he added a glossary of difficult phrases, unfamiliar names, and obsolete terms. Legends of the coins of different denominations were reproduced together with detailed particulars about the utensils, implements, arms, and jewellery current in Akbar's time. He also corrected, wherever he could, the inaccuracies of the author himself. All this represented an immense improvement upon the utility of the original work. But unluckily a good part of the manuscript together with its printed portions was destroyed during the Mutiny.

The reign of Firuz Shah Tughlaq is another brilliant interlude in the annals of Medieval India. Firuz Shah was the creator of what may be described as a welfare State, and his fame justly rests on a mild and humane administration. The record of Firuz Shah's life and achievements was preserved by a contemporary named Dia al-Din Barni.

Sayyid Ahmad prepared a collated manuscript of Barni's work after consulting the four available manuscripts, one of which belonged to the private library of the Mughul royalty and was highly prized for its authenticity. In the preface of the printed book Sayyid Ahmad gave an extensive bibliography of the historical literature of the period and set down all that he had been able to gather about the life of Barni himself. The monograph, published by the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1279/1862, was encumbered with numerous printing errors for which, a high authority informs us, the responsibility must be fixed on the press and not on the editor.

Two other pamphlets reminiscent of Sayyid Ahmad's family affiliations with the Court of Delhi deserve a passing mention. The first one, entitled *Jam-i Jam*, was a brief tabulated account of the kings of the House of Timur, beginning from the founder and ending with Bahadur Shah II. The reign of each king was described under seventeen columns. It also carried a bibliography and was noticed in Elliot and Dawson's *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*. The second brochure catalogued the kings of Delhi from 1400 B.C. listing Queen Victoria as the 202nd sovereign in the chronological order.

A few years before the Mutiny Sayyid Ahmad offered to compile a history of the district of Bijnaur, an offer heartily accepted by his official superiors. The self-imposed obligation led him, after a diligent search for materials, to the original records on the subject dating from the times of Akbar and Jahangir. This was an achievement by itself. The work was duly completed but was lost in the rising of 1273-74/1857, like some of his other works.

Jala al-Qulub bi Dhikr al-Mahbub was a biographical account of the Prophet (S), old fashioned but based on authentic sources, written to repair the deficiency of suitable reading texts at the annual birthday celebrations of the Prophet (S).

Tarikh-i Sarkashi-i Bijnaur is a history of the Mutiny in a particular sector. This is, in fact, an uninterrupted day-to-day diary maintained by Sayyid Ahmad that goes into great detail about the military and related events that took place in the district of Bijnaur between May 1857 and April 1858. He recorded all that he witnessed and preserved all that he wrote amidst the death-dealing conflagration.

The fact that he had numerous enemies about him and lived in hourly peril of his life and yet kept calm enough to make regular entries in his journal is significant. One has to be a historian to the marrow of one's bone to enter into the stream of history with a stoic indifference to one's personal circumstances.

Risalah Asbab-i Baghawat-i Hind is an outstanding contribution to contemporary history. It has been written with a sense of perspective, which almost invariably eludes those who chronicle the happenings they have lived through. The pamphlet represents an important landmark in the evolution of Sayyid Ahmad's mind. His former concern with history was in the nature of a disinterested intellectual and cultural pursuit. But the horrifying and humiliating consequences of the Mutiny taught him, consciously or unconsciously, to resort to history for more practical ends. One of these new motivations was to promote accord between the rulers and the ruled.

The British rule in India has a credit as well as a debit side. However admirable the qualities of the British mind, it has been too sensitive about its own prerogatives and too much off the balance to make a fair estimate of the intensity of Indian feeling and sentiment. No alien rule can be popular, and even when the British acted with the best of motives they earned little or no gratitude from the subject populace.

Like all foreign masters they were prone to dwell glibly on the benefits and blessings of their own domination, but their claims were summarily dismissed by the Indians as mere hypocrisy. Some members of the ruling class who thought over the matter felt exasperated at the want of "appreciation"; others never bothered about questions of human psychology and declared bluntly, like Sir Micheal O'Dwyer half a century later, that the dominion in India had been carved by the sword and that it could not be retained by the faint-hearted.

Sayyid Ahmad knew the British well enough and when he sat down to record his own views about the causes of the Mutiny, the psychological factor was uppermost in his mind. But this was not all. In order to provide his readers with a panoramic view of the catastrophe he gave due weight to the sociological, economic, and historical factors in formulating his view. The product exhibits a robust sense of proportion and the skill of a craftsman in making use of the raw materials of history. The book would show that Sayyid Ahmad had almost an intuitive grasp of the techniques of scientific history writing that were being developed in Europe about this time.

In *Risalah Asbab-i Baghawat-i Hind*, Sayyid Ahmad spotlighted the errors of the administration of the East India Company and brought home the manifold Indian grievances against foreign rule. He called attention to the utter futility of a system of law-making which operated, so to speak, in a vacuum, unconcerned with the state of society; the unrestrained and irritating proselytizing zeal of the Christian missionaries who followed in the wake of the conquest; the well-founded popular suspicion about the Government's planning a wholesale conversion of the Indians to Christianity; the mistaken zeal of the Company's functionaries in helping missionary propaganda; and the mortal injury that all this inflicted on the pride of a people deeply attached to their religious creeds.

In the economic sphere the Company rule had created financial and fiscal monopolies. The local industries had been crushed out of existence to create a market for British imports. A high-handed revenue settlement in Upper India and the escheat of freeholds had caused widespread misery.

The disbandment of princely Courts and armies had restricted the scope for Indian talent. The officials of the East India Company showed little sympathy for the people over whom they ruled. They loved to assert their authority and savagely suppressed all manifestations of discontent. Sayyid Ahmad explained all this without mincing words and attributed the outbreak to the ferocity of the British rule. Viewed differently, it was a powerful plea for humanizing the administration and making it responsive to the urges of the people.

Vast tracts of the country were subjected to declared or undeclared martial law in the months following the suppression of the Mutiny. Ruthlessness of the rulers was proverbial. Freedom of expression and opinion was unthinkable. It was an act of cold courage to have drawn up this indictment. Any Englishman who read it was likely to brand it treasonous and inflict the direct chastisement upon its author.

Sayyid Ahmad had the pamphlet printed in a limited number and was on the point of sending it to the Viceroy and members of the British Parliament when some of his friends dissuaded him from the course. But Sayyid Ahmad disregarded the friendly pressure though he experienced some difficulty afterwards in clearing himself of the charges of disloyalty brought against him by his British critics.

Dr. Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans*, published in 1857/1871, was avowedly intended to pave the way to a better understanding of a "persistently belligerent" class of Asiatic subjects (i.e., the Indian Muslims), to bridge "the gap between the rulers and the ruled" and, thus, to safeguard the British power in India against the "chronic peril" facing it. Basing his assertions on the evidence adduced at successive State trials, he concluded that there was a close causal connection between the Wahabi activities and the perennially disturbed state of the North-Western Frontier.

The underground movement, he went on to say, was skillfully organized, and its leaders arrogated to themselves all functions of sovereignty over their constituents. The ties that bound the members of the secret order were of extraordinary toughness and endurance. The central office, located at Patna and controlling the permanent machinery throughout the rural areas for spreading disaffection, sent out a multitude of lonely, melancholy, and wandering zealots carefully indoctrinated with treason and equipped with extensive literature on the duty of waging war against the British. An uninterrupted stream of money and ardent recruits sworn to extirpate the infidel flowed towards the frontier.

This vivid portrayal of Wahabi transgressions against law evoked a sharp protest from Sayyid Ahmad, who characterized the book as mischievous and unhistorical. In a lengthy review of *The Indian Musalmans*, he pointed out several inaccuracies in Hunter's statement of Wahabi tenets, and critically surveyed the history of the movement from 1239/1823 up to the publication of this book.

The relentless trans-border hostility to British rule, Sayyid Ahmad declared, could not be ascribed to

Wahabi fomentations. It was largely prompted by the continued presence on the Frontier of a large, disloyal, and terror stricken population (both Hindu and Muslim), who had fled from the British territory after the Mutiny to escape the wrath of the conqueror, sought asylum with the tribes and started life afresh amidst unfamiliar surroundings. There was nothing unusual in these migrants' receiving visitors and gifts of money from their relations in India.

Finally, the tribal enmity against the constituted authority in the country to the east of the river Indus became a recurring phenomenon of Indian history. The expeditions sent in the past by the Emperors Akbar, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzib (all Muslims) had failed to subdue the over-refractory highlanders. Studying *The Indian Musalmans* and its review by Sayyid Ahmad together, it would appear that he had the better of the argument and many fair minded Englishmen were convinced of the invalidity of Dr. Hunter's deductions.

It has been sometimes suggested that Sayyid Ahmad disengaged himself from historical studies after the Mutiny and that he was engrossed more and more in the advancement of social reform and the preaching of political "quietism." But that is wide of the mark. It is true that the results of his later interest in history did not issue in big volumes. But numerous later articles from his pen deal with historical subjects, and a subtle sense of history pervades the rest of his writings.

In one of his letters he spoke of the unsavoury fruit of history. The phrase was interpreted to mean that an excessive contemplation of the past was likely to act as a dope and lead the people away from the task of reform and reconstruction. A careful study of the context, however, makes it clear that this was far from his mind. He only called for a rational approach to history and a proper evaluation of its bequests.

It would be more appropriate to say that Sayyid Ahmad discovered new uses of history. He informed one of his friends from abroad that the vilification of Islam and distortion of its history in the West were directly responsible for the political adversities of the Indian Muslims. A more objective approach to the past, he felt, would go a long way in conquering the deep rooted aversion of the West for Islam and its followers.

While the nostrum was sorely needed for the West, it was about as necessary for the Muslims themselves. As a people they had to rediscover their own identity and their own ideals. What can be done depends much upon what has been. History, thus, became an instrument of Muslim renaissance in Sayyid Ahmad's hands. History, he was careful to emphasize, was not to be treated as a jumble of useless information crammed in dusty volumes but as a continuous and meaningful record of man, living in association with his kind and toiling for the satisfaction of his material needs.

This could best be brought about by integrating history with sociology. Therefore, history had to be reapproached, refathomed, and rechronicled. Sayyid Ahmad was probably the first man of letters in the Indian sub-continent to make out a case for the reformulation of historical values. The task has been

going on steadily. Still a lot remains to be accomplished. The same cry is heard from different platforms and institutions even today.

Sayyid Ahmad had his ideas not only on the content of history but also about its form. He made a sharp distinction between history and fiction: the two belonged to different departments of literature, each with a method of its own. Historical romance was fatal to history and fiction alike. The mere stylist must never be entrusted with the job of putting history into shape. He may be tempted to sacrifice accuracy for the sake of a few smart phrases.

Sayyid Ahmad did not have a high opinion about Macaulay's talent as a historian because he (i.e., Sayyid) did not look upon history as an affair of chiselled idiom. The historiographer, according to him, must cultivate the art of expressing himself in inornate and exact prose.

Sayyid Ahmad's own contribution to history was not inconsiderable. But the inspiration which two prolific yet conscientious historians received from him is equally important. The first among them was Shibli Numani, Professor of Oriental Languages at the M.A.O. College, who came into contact with Sayyid Ahmad while he was yet deeply imbued with the orthodox tradition. But he gradually outgrew his narrowness of vision under the liberalizing influence of the Master.

In addition to a comprehensive biography of the Prophet (S), he wrote a series of works on some of the leading personalities of Muslim history such as the Caliph Umar, al-Mamun, Rumi, al-Ghazali, and the like, and set their achievements in a clear light. He had to undertake an expensive journey to Turkey and other Muslim countries in search of material for his volumes.

Written in accordance with the principles of historiography laid down by Sayyid Ahmad, Shibli's works had a great vogue and constituted an important force behind the Muslim renaissance in India initiated by the Aligarh Movement.

The other scholar to imbibe Sayyid Ahmad's methodology was Professor Zaka Allah of the Central Muir College, Allahabad, whose greatest achievement was a voluminous history of India. The preface of this work reaffirms the validity of Sayyid Ahmad's thinking and the author hastens to impress upon his readers that a fruitful study of history should enable discerning minds to discover the laws of human development. Maulawi Mehdi Ali, better known as Muhsin al-Mulk, reviewed Ibn Khaldun's "Prolegomena" in the *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* and introduced Urdu readers to the theories of the medieval savant. This served to induce realism about the past among later Indian Muslim writers.

C: The Sayyid as a Reformer

The revolutionary changes, social and political, which came over the subcontinent in the thirteenth/nineteenth century disorganized the spiritual no less than the mundane life of the Indian Muslims. The central Muslim problem was one of adjustments to an adamant political dispensation. The

process entailed a fight against the persistent antagonism between the Christian rulers and their Muslim subjects.

The political rivalry between Islam and Christendom was a legacy of the past and began as far back as the second/eighth century when Muslim conquests in Europe and Africa brought the followers of the two faiths in close geographical proximity. The Crusades deepened the fissure. The European Powers felt the Turkish conquest of Constantinople as a thorn in their side.

No wonder that the majority of European scholars looked at Islam through coloured glasses; they were loth to make a dispassionate study of its tenets and institutions and were content to repeat popular distortions about it. Such crudities which represented Muhammad (S) as an idol in the temple of Mecca and Muslims as bloodthirsty destroyers of the peace of the world and the cultures of its peoples gained wide credence.

With such prepossessions, the rulers of the country were suspicious of Muslim loyalty towards the new order. There was much in Muslim thinking and conduct to confirm their misgivings. Consequently, the British would not feel secure unless they liquidated the Muslim menace. The Hindus who had lived under Muslim rule for many centuries and nursed real or fancied grievances against their former rulers were attracted by the opportunities for advancement provided by the change of masters.

The leaders of thought among them discarded their ancient caste scruples and went forward to meet the British conquerors more than half way. The alliance was advantageous to both. The Muslims were slowly crushed between the two pincers. The British ignored the very existence of Muslims and felt no qualm in sacrificing Muslim rights to advance Hindu interests. As Hindu subjects drew closer and closer to the British rulers, the Muslims drifted apart. In course of time the estrangement was complete and the two found themselves separated by an unbridgeable gulf.

Sayyid Ahmad was a realist. He had been through the Mutiny and watched at close quarters the outcome of the conqueror's unappeasable wrath against the Muslims. He had witnessed vast sections of Muslim aristocracy being either obliterated or utterly impoverished. He was convinced that the British had come to stay in India and that their supremacy, along with that of the Western way of thinking, could not be challenged in any foreseeable future.

The Muslims must, therefore, refashion their lives as Muslims. If they did not, they would go deeper down into the morass of degradation. In his opinion the Christian-Muslim rancour was based merely upon mutual ignorance and prejudice. His effort to mediate between the two religions took the form of an unfinished commentary on the Bible, which, among other things, sought to establish that both Islam and Christianity were fed from the same spiritual spring.

The identity of their history and family resemblance between their doctrines could be readily understood by anyone who studied and compared their contents. Sayyid Ahmad also allowed, against the accepted Muslim belief, some sort of integrity to the existing Biblical text and showed that Christianity was a

humanitarian religion that forbade all kinds of cruelty and all forms of wanton bloodshed. It would be interesting to note that this was the first commentary on the Bible in any Asian language. For obvious reasons the exposition found no favour either with Christians or with Muslims.

The Muslim society in India tabooed social intercourse with Christians under a mistaken interpretation of religion. In order to remove this social barrier, Sayyid Ahmad wrote a pamphlet, entitled *Ahkam-i-Taam-i Ahl-i Kitab*, to explain that Muslim Law does not prevent Muslims from dining with Jews or Christians provided prohibited foods or drinks are not served.

Periods of transition are inevitably attended by confusion and perplexities. New education was a powerful ally of all *isms* opposed to religion and ethics. As Dr. Hunter had put it: "No young man ... passes through our schools without learning to disbelieve the faith of his forefathers. The luxuriant religions of Asia shrivel into dry sticks when brought into contact with the icy realities of Western science."

There is nothing unusual in a conservative community rejecting all new ideas that threaten its homogeneity. The older generation among Muslims had no sense of direction. It scouted all current scientific ideas as incompatible with religion. While the Hindus took to the new education avidly, it stuck in Muslim throats. The Muslim child who went to a West-oriented school was deemed to have crossed the limits of the Holy Law and placed himself outside the pale of Islam.

This was the way to extinction. With his usual foresight Sayyid Ahmad grasped the nature of the issue and devised a solution. In the first place, he attempted a new synthesis of religious thought in Islam the central doctrine of which was that Islam was not opposed to the study of science and had nothing to fear from its impact; secondly, he conceived of a new system of education in which the responsibility for educating the coming generations would be thrown on the community itself and in which the scholars would receive instruction in Islam along with a grounding in Western sciences.

This was the basic principle of Aligarh education that brought influential elements in the Indian Muslim society into the current of modernism. If Aligarh did not develop on the lines envisaged by Sayyid Ahmad, the failure cannot be ascribed to him. Though he said many hard things about the system of Muslim education received from the Middle Ages, it is unfair to suggest that he had set his heart on a total breach with the past.

He advocated, for instance, the retention of self-perpetuating and inexpensive arrangements for elementary education. In respect of female education his ideas were not much in advance of his times. He would first have the men educated and leave the problem of women's education to solve itself.

The proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries were giving an acute cause of anxiety to the Muslim society. The missionaries who had been allowed to settle down and pursue their vocation in the territorial possessions of the East India Company by the Charter Act of 1813 enjoyed Government patronage and used a variety of methods to secure conversions.

The missionary ingress virtually became an invasion. They spread a network of schools where the Bible was placed in the hands of young pupils and its study encouraged by pecuniary rewards. Their hospitals gave free medicines to visiting patients along with doses of Christian teaching. The field behaviour of missionaries was arrogant, offensive, and aggressive. In the course of their preaching they freely entered into religious and theological disputations and indulged in intemperate language about founders of other religions and their teachings.

Islam was an unfailing target of their platform invective. It was also vilified in leaflets and pamphlets. The Muslim youth was confronted with a mutilated presentation of Muslim history and doctrines to shatter his faith and breed a sense of inferiority in him. The core of missionary preaching was that Islam had outlived its day, that it could not stand scientific and intellectual scrutiny, that its appeal lay to the grosser impulses of human nature, and that it had kept the Muslim communities all over the world in a state of chronic backwardness.

The Life of Mohammed (S) written by Sir William Muir, at the instance of a veteran missionary, amplified this thesis. The book based its argument on the information collected from a close study of some Muslim sources and was acclaimed as a great help to the missionary in his spiritual onslaught on Islam. Sir William had pointed to the institutions of divorce, polygamy, and slavery with the finger of scorn, though towards the end he was constrained to admit that Islam had “banished for ever many of the darker elements of superstition.... Idolatry vanished before the battle cry of Islam; the doctrine of the Unity and infinite perfections of God ... became a living principle in the hearts and lives of the followers of Mohammed (S).... Brotherly love is inculcated ... within the circle of the faith ... orphans to be protected, and slaves treated with consideration; intoxicating drinks prohibited, so that Mohammadanism may boast of a degree of temperance unknown to any other creed.”²

Sayyid Ahmad wrote a refutation of this book under the title *Essays on the Life of Mohammed (S) and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto*. This was a scientific historical study characterized by rigorous reasoning and can be rightly regarded as a specimen of the author's ripe scholarship. The materials needed for the work could not be found in India. Sayyid Ahmad undertook a voyage to Britain where he studied in the British Museum and the India Office Library, sent for rare works from Turkish and Egyptian libraries and had numerous passages from the works of European scholars translated into English for his own use. The work proved costly. He had to sell his household effects and borrow heavily to meet the expenses of the publication.

Sayyid Ahmad dug deep into the canonical literature of Islam. But he was no mere respecter of authority. He freely questioned the credentials of reputed commentators. In his way of thinking Hadith did not furnish an adequate basis for the understanding of Islam. He held that the brilliant allegorical method of the Quran made it plain that every age had to understand the Book in the light of its own requirements.

Religion, Sayyid Ahmad opined, had gathered a good deal of mass in its sojourn through time. It had

been inextricably mixed up with the judgments of its exponents. It needed to be combed of all exotic ideas and placed in its proper perspective. In questioning sanctified opinions Sayyid Ahmad emancipated the Muslim thought in India from the bondage of prescription and in this lies his monumental achievement.

Sayyid Ahmad can justly be regarded as a maker of Urdu prose and the first real prose-writer in this language. Born out of the confluence of Persian and local Indian dialects, Urdu is a cultural heritage of Muslim rule in India. But it was as yet in a state of comparative infancy. Its thought had been enriched and mode of expression refined by a long line of illustrious poets. Its prose, however, was underdeveloped.

Its intellectual content was small and its vocabulary could grapple only with a narrow range of subjects, like religion, history, and mysticism. Written in rhymed prose, the early Urdu books abounded in similes and metaphors and represented an unscientific and lifeless assemblage of facts with a strong didactic and otherworldly flavour. Most of the writers were old-fashioned Arabic scholars whose ponderous Urdu was beyond the comprehension of those unacquainted with that language. Their phraseology leaves the modern reader cold and sneering.

Sayyid Ahmad worked a veritable revolution in literature. Primarily a reformer who wanted to raise his community to the intellectual level of the more advanced Western peoples, he sought to propagate his ideas through workmanlike, unvarnished Urdu prose. This purpose could be served only if the language was stripped of its medieval trappings and invested with a sufficiently sensitive and expressive vocabulary to absorb and expound all shades of meaning on different subjects connected with contemporary life.

He made his first effort in this sphere by founding the Scientific Society at Muradabad in 1281/1864. The Society was later headquartered at Aligarh, where it published very readable translations of standard English works on history, political economy, agriculture, mathematics, and other useful subjects. The Society also ran a weekly journal, the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, in which appeared articles of popular interest on social, educational, and scientific subjects. The translations issued by the Scientific Society are far more serviceable than the unreadable laborious work done later under princely auspices and at fabulous cost.

As a writer Sayyid Ahmad dealt with momentous issues of the day. He often wrote on controversial and debatable subjects and began them with a provocative statement. Master of a smooth and matter-of-fact style he never burdened his writings with unfamiliar terminology. His romanticism was very much subdued and was under the control of a conscious classicism. He seldom played with the feelings of his readers. He could enliven almost any subject that he chose for discussion and had all the qualities of penmanship that distinguish the true artist from a mere scribe.

As he wrote he appeared to be engaged in an intimate conversation. By inimitable inductive methods he

built up his arguments bit by bit with the help of shared experience leading the reader to his own conclusions and communicating to him his personal enthusiasm for social improvement. The galaxy of talent that surrounded Sayyid Ahmad included renowned intellectuals who made valuable contributions to the Urdu language in history, criticism, mathematics, and even science.

Sayyid Ahmad made no direct contribution to poetry. With him, and after him, prose became a vehicle of awakening and instruction.

To sum up, before Sayyid Ahmad's day Urdu was not much above the status of a dialect. It was he who transformed it into a language pulsating with life and capable of meeting the demands of a complex modern society.

An idea of Sayyid Ahmad's notions about the mental and moral equipment of a social reformer and his duties and obligations can be gained from the following extracts taken from one of his best known essays:

“Most people believe that they can rid themselves of social evils by common action.... I do not subscribe to this view. The way to reform lies through discord and not through unity. Reformist ideals call for courage and perseverance of a high order. It is for the reformer boldly to violate the customs of his group.... In this he will incur a lot of odium and popular disapprobation. But ultimately he will succeed and win converts. Though he provokes opposition in the beginning he is acknowledged a benefactor in the end.”³

“I wish to point out to my countrymen the futility of condemning and cursing our social heritage in the privacy of our conclaves. It is vain to look for friends and supporters in the task of regeneration. One who wishes well of his people should come out in the open, break his own chains, and put heart into others to do the same.”⁴

Sayyid Ahmad himself lived up to these professions. He was fully imbued with the impatience of a zealot and the fervour of an iconoclast. At times he was forthright to the point of wounding others' feelings. In his reformist programme he included freedom of opinion, a critical approach to religion, the discarding of social evils imbibed from Hindu contacts, the elimination of the less desirable traits of human character such as flattery, insincerity and selfish individualism, proper observance of the cleanliness of person and environment, reforms of dress and manners of eating, the recognition of women's rights and the simplification of current forms of address in correspondence.

D: The Sayyid as a Politician

Sayyid Ahmad never presented himself as a politician. At the conscious level his life work was primarily educational and reformative. It is usual to study his political views within a narrow sector and speak of them in colourful and hostile adjectives. It is, therefore, necessary to review his political doctrines in the

context of problems facing him. This alone can make his thought intelligible.

For one thing, Sayyid Ahmad was often reticent on politics. But whenever he spoke he was far from polemical. His opinions were characterized by the same candour and empirical quality that permeated his discussion on social and religious questions. A recent Indian publication has pointedly stated that each one of Sayyid Ahmad's major projects (i.e., the Scientific Society, the M.A.O. College, the commentary on the Bible, the plea for social reform, the commentary on the Quran) was inspired by political considerations and was, directly or indirectly, designed to lead to the political rehabilitation of the Indian Muslims.

This view is correct if the term "politics" is meant to include all that it conveyed to the ancient Greeks. But if we choose the narrower meaning, the view, though arguable, is directly disputed by his friend and biographer, Altaf Husain Hali, who has explained at some length that Sayyid Ahmad's love of religion alone supplied the dynamic for all his activities.

The best theoretical statement on Sayyid Ahmad's politics is contained in a communication that he addressed to one of his English friends. He says, "I am a Musalman domiciled in India. Racially I am a Semite: the Arab blood still courses in my veins. The religion of Islam in which I have full and abiding faith preaches radical principles. Thus, both by blood and faith I am a true radical.... Islam is opposed to all forms of monarchy, whether hereditary or limited. It approves of the rule of a popularly elected president; it denounces the concentration of capital and insists upon the division of properties and possessions among legal heirs on the demise of their owners.

(In this way) even a mine of wealth would suffer countless subdivisions in the course of two generations. But the religion that teaches me these principles also inculcates certain other principles. First, if God wills our subjection to another race, which grants us religious freedom, governs us justly, preserves peace, protects our life and belongings, as the British do in India, we should wish it well and owe it allegiance...."⁵

The latter part of this declaration has invited strongly worded and undeserved criticism. Some have spoken of it as a new version of the divine right of rulers. But it should be clear, as we proceed, that the loyalty of which Sayyid Ahmad spoke was the loyalty of free men and not of helots. Sayyid Ahmad throughout prided himself on his radicalism. But, generally speaking, the content of radicalism is relative to time and place. A radical of yesterday may be the conservative of today. But Sayyid Ahmad's liberalism has an objective stamp that will be recognized by anyone who follows his opinions carefully.

In post-Mutiny India the ruling race, with rare exceptions, displayed abnormal racial arrogance. In part this could be attributed to the Mutiny that furnished a grim background to the era that it opened. Old memories rankled on both sides. The Indians soon reconciled themselves to British rule as to a decree of fate. But the British, drunk with the pride of conquest, were always squaring the past accounts with the subjugated populace.

They treated their Indian subjects as half-savages and were quick and demonstrative in heaping indignities on their heads. All Britons deemed it a national duty to exact all external courtesies from the Indians they were forced to meet in the ordinary business of life. There were few points of social contact between the two. The ruling race lived a life of its own and behaved like an army of occupation.

“Apartheid” was practised by rulers in India in an obnoxious form before it made its appearance elsewhere. Whatever his rank or birth, no Indian was allowed to enter restaurants, public parks, or railway compartments frequented by Englishmen. If he did so even unwittingly, he found himself rudely thrown out. The passage of time did nothing to soften the haughtiness of the ruling class.

Sayyid Ahmad reminded them of this weakness of theirs in 1294/1877 in these words: “For a whole century and more, you, gentlemen, have lived in the same country; you have breathed the same air; you have drunk the same water; you have lived on the same crops that have given nourishment to the millions of your fellow Indian subjects, yet the absence of social intercourse, which is implied by the word friendship between the English and the people of this country has been most deplorable.”⁶

The controversy which centred round the Ilbert Bill (a legislative measure which sought to extend the jurisdiction of Indian magistrates and judges of a certain standing by investing them with the power of trying European criminals) called forth an aggressive and noisy agitation from the British community resident in India, who thought that the world would end if a white man was made to stand in the dock before a magistrate with a tanned complexion.

Sayyid Ahmad committed an irredeemable sin in their eyes by recording his vote in favour of the Bill. In the course of his speech before the Legislature, on the occasion, he made out a weighty case for equality before law and observed, “I am convinced that laws based on racial discrimination will prevent the growth of friendship and amity between our two peoples. Pleasant social life and political equality are born out of subjection to a uniform system of law. It is time that all subjects of the Crown, Hindus, Muslims, Europeans, Eurasians, should enjoy the same political and constitutional rights, and be subject to the same disabilities.”⁷

Towards the end of his life, Sayyid Ahmad grew pessimistic about the likelihood of Englishmen learning to conduct themselves differently. He gave expression to his despondency in an article, a part of which runs as follows:

“In my opinion the time has not yet come, and perhaps will never come, when our European friends, conquerors of this country... will condescend to sit on the same bench with a conquered and naturally hated Indian.... If the Indian wants to keep up his self-respect... his life becomes unbearable.... If an Indian desires to obey the dictates of his conscience... he cannot perform his duties.... It is no secret that the treatment which English people accord to their own countrymen and that which they accord to Indians are as different from one another as black is from white.”⁸

Sayyid Ahmad’s dealings with the British fail to corroborate the legend of “servility” assiduously

circulated by an extremely vocal coterie of propagandists in the following generation. His opposition to certain policies of the Government was constant, consistent, and unsparing. He never hesitated to cross swords with insolent and ill-mannered bureaucrats and was impatient with the widespread habit of suffering official high-handedness meekly.

He advised his countrymen not to put up with injustice and indignity even if it came straight from Caesar. Said he, "They (the Indians) have at present little or no voice in the management of the affairs of this country; and should any measure of the Government prove obnoxious to them, they brood over it, appearing outwardly satisfied and happy, whilst discontent is rankling in their hearts. You are in the habit of inveighing against various acts of Government in your homes, and amongst your friends, (but) in the course of your visits to (officials), you represent yourselves as quite satisfied with the justice and wisdom of the same acts."⁹ Sayyid Ahmad did not consider such a temper dignified or helpful.

The part played by the Urdu-Hindi controversy in shaping Hindu-Muslim relations on the political plane has often been overlooked. Sayyid Ahmad was the first Muslim to sense the political implications of the linguistic wrangle. The dispute, the ashes of which have not yet been buried, forced itself on public attention in 1284/1867.

The Hindus were determined to undo Urdu and have it replaced by Hindi as the language of the law-courts. They opened the front at Benares. Gradually, their demand gathered strength and momentum. The methods by which the friends of Hindi pursued their ends ripped open the wounds of the past and portended the inevitable conflict.

Sayyid Ahmad abandoned all hope of co-operation between Hindus and Muslims and read with uncanny sureness the writing on the wall. His oft-quoted letter, written from London in 1286/1869 in which he talked of Hindus and Muslims parting company for good, can be read as a veritable political prophecy about the 1366/1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent.

In 1295/1878 Sayyid Ahmad was nominated as a member of the Indian Legislature and sat in this body for a little over four years. As a legislator he took his duties seriously and spoke practically on every bill that came up for discussion. He was the first Indian to introduce a private bill into the Legislature that eventually found place on the statute book. His speeches displayed a firm understanding of social questions underlying legal issues. He also interested himself in the waning fortunes of the once prosperous Muslim families and sought to arrest by legislation their increasing impoverishment. But his draft bill was not taken up on technical grounds.

The earliest political movements in India were local in character. But they soon coalesced under the auspices of the Indian National Congress. This body was actually founded by an Englishman, A.O. Hume, a retired member of the Bengal Civil Service, with the active encouragement of the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin. It was almost a Government sponsored body and its relations with Authority were cordial in the earlier phase of its stormy career.

The Congress met once a year and its annual festival of speech making lasted for three days. Year after year, it passed resolutions demanding the introduction of Western electoral and representative institutions in India. As time went by, the influential reform movements in Hindu society were integrated with the political creed of the Indian National Congress that became the marketplace of Hindu ideologies and the forum of Hindu aspirations.

Sayyid Ahmad counselled Muslims to keep away from the Congress for several cogent reasons. In education and enlightenment they were sadly behind the times and were not experienced enough for the game of politics. They had large gaps to fill and big deficiencies to make up; politics, at this stage, would prove a distracting pursuit and upset plans of educational reform and social uplift.

There was nothing baneful in asking an educationally backward and economically poor people to attend to first things first. He further argued that no political movement in India could be depended upon to produce worthwhile results in the face of growing estrangement between Hindus and Muslims. Fruitful politics could only be raised upon consensus of opinion.

The conclusion is as valid in the fourteenth/twentieth century as it was in the thirteenth/nineteenth. Experience has taught the Muslims, if they are at all prepared to heed its warning, that consensus alone can give substance and reality to democratic forms and not a mechanical manipulation of the will of those in majority.

Finally, India's size and racial and cultural diversities will always militate against the success of Western democratic institutions. He expressed this line of thought in one of his articles thus: "I seriously pondered over the suitability (or otherwise) of the representative system of government in India long before the Congress took up the matter. Having carefully gone through the (clearly expressed) opinions of John Stuart Mill, I am convinced that where majority vote is a decisive factor in a political system, it is essential for the electors to be united by ties of race, religion, manners, customs, culture, and historical traditions. In the presence of these conditions, representative government is practicable and useful. In their absence it would only injure the well-being and tranquillity of the land."¹⁰

The Muslim community could not agree to sacrifice its historic identity on the altar of a nationalism with which it had no affinities. That the Muslims formed a nation by themselves by virtue of their common adherence to the Muslim faith, is the most recurring refrain of Sayyid Ahmad's speeches and writings. A typical extract culled at random from an address to Muslim students at Lahore is as follows:

"I use the word community to include all Musalmans. Faith in God and His Prophet (S) and proper observance of the precepts of the faith are the only bonds that hold us together. You are irrevocably lost to us if you turn your back on religion. We have no part or lot with transgressors and derelicts even if they shine like the stars of the firmament. I want you to dive deep into European literature and sciences but at the same time I expect you to be true to your faith."¹¹

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Chapter 81: Renaissance in Indo-Pakistan (Continued): Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan as a Religio-Philosophical Thinker

It was the experience of the Indian Revolt that made Sayyid Ahmad Khan what he is for us today. He realized the dangers that were inherent in the situation for the future welfare of the Muslim community in India, and decided to take the challenge boldly. He wrote *The Causes of Indian Revolt (1276–77/1859)* and *The Loyal Mohammedans of India* to counteract the growing anti-Muslim attitude of the British rulers and hostile propaganda of the Hindus.

On the positive side he tried to acquaint the Muslims with the wealth and richness of the new learning of the West. He set up his Scientific Society in 1281/1864 first at Ghazipur and then at Aligarh with the purpose of translating English books into Urdu so that the common people might become aware of the advance in knowledge reached by the West. In 1283/1866 he started a bi-weekly, *The Aligarh Institute Gazette*, to enlighten the public on the aims of the Scientific Society.

His visit to England in 1286/1869 proved very helpful in convincing him that the only way to rehabilitate the Muslims was to provide them with the weapons of Western learning through modern education. But this very introduction of Western learning brought with it the intellectual ferment which compelled Sayyid Ahmad Khan to address himself to the reinterpretation of the whole cultural and religious heritage of the Muslims.

For this purpose he started the famous periodical *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*, in the first issue of which he set forth in detail its aims and objects. "The aim of this periodical is that the Muslims of India should be persuaded to adopt the best kind of civilization so that the contempt with which the civilized people look upon the Muslims should be removed;... it is true that religion plays a great part in making a people civilized. There are, no doubt, some religions that stand in the way of progress. It is our aim to judge where Islam stands in this regard."¹

The spread of Western education among Muslims and the general enlightenment that the introduction of modern science brought about in the public was the greatest challenge. In one of his lectures he refers to the spread of doubt and misgivings in the hearts of the people about Islam.² Discussing the spread of belief in naturalism, he said, "Today we are in need of a modern *Ilm al-Kalam* by which we should refute the doctrines of modern science and undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with the articles of Islamic faith. While I am endeavouring to introduce these sciences among the Muslims, it is my duty to defend the religion of Islam and to reveal its original bright face."

But the important question was how to prove the validity of a particular religion in the face of so many claimants. He came to the conclusion that "the only touchstone of a true religion can be this: if it is in conformity with human nature or with nature in general, then it is true. This would be a clear proof that the religion in question has come from God, the Author of nature both in man and outside.

I am fully confident that the guidance that He has given us is absolutely in conformity with our constitution and our nature and this is the only touchstone of its truth. It would be clearly absurd to assert that God's action is different from His Word. All creation including man is the work of God and religion is His Word, so there cannot be any contradiction between the two."³

What is nature? Sayyid Ahmad Khan interprets it in the sense in which the thirteenth/nineteenth century scientists interpreted it as a closed system of the universe which obeys certain laws of mechanics and physics and which is characterized by a uniformity of behaviour to which there cannot be any exception. All inorganic, organic, and human behaviour is subject to these mechanical laws.

In one of his articles, he says, "In the beginning this knowledge of nature was limited. But with the increase in knowledge, the sphere of nature has correspondingly increased and, thus, seems to have become co-extensive with what we find in the universe, what we see or feel, so much so that the actions and thoughts of man and even his beliefs are all different chains in the inexorable laws of nature."⁴

But this mechanical conception of nature, as James Ward put it, is totally antagonistic to the spiritual

interpretation of life, and, therefore, cannot be upheld by a person who is advocating the truth of any theistic religion. In the writings of Sayyid Ahmad Khan we meet with both types of naturalism, mechanistic and antitheistic on the one hand and teleological and theistic on the other, and he often passes from the former to the latter without any thought to consistency or logic.

In the same article he says that “just as among us some people are religious and others irreligious, so among the naturalists there are several people who begin to think that when we find the laws of nature permeating every sphere of the universe, then there is nothing but nature, and so come to deny God. Perhaps such were the people whom our ancient Muslim thinkers called naturalists (*dahriyyun*).

But there are some people among the modern scientists who in their intensive researches in the laws of nature came to the conclusion, on the basis of nature’s magnificent display of design, that there must be some designer, the Cause of causes, whom we usually call God. These scientists traversed the same path as the youth of Chaldea, well known as Abraham, had followed.”

Thus it is clear that Sayyid Ahmad starts with a mechanical and quantitative conception of nature and passes on to a teleological interpretation of it without realizing the inconsistency involved. He interprets the experiences of Moses (as) and Abraham (as) in the same spirit. “None of the prophets,” he says, “came to realize God except through this process. Moses (as) expressed his wish to see God; he got the reply: ‘By no means canst thou see Me but look upon the mount’ (7:143).

What was on the mountain? It was nature, a manifestation of the law of nature. God could not manifest Himself direct; the way He pointed out was the way of nature.... When asked, ‘What art Thou?’ He invariably refers to the laws of nature and implies that it is He who changes night into day and day into night and gives life to the dead and death to the living.”

Secondly, he refers to the spiritual experience of Abraham (as) as recorded in the Quran (3:75–79). “From nature he went to God, from the uniformity of the laws of the physical universe, he was able to transcend to the spiritual reality behind. He saw the stars, the moon, the sun, that appear and disappear, rise and set according to fixed immutable laws, and was able to penetrate behind the veil of these laws of nature to their Author. He declared, ‘I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him who created the heavens and the earth.’”⁵

This identification of Islam with nature implied that true religion consists in the belief in one God only and that all those people who accept this doctrine of the unity of God are Muslims, however different they may be in the rituals and other religious observances. In an article “Islam is Nature and Nature is Islam,” he says, “Islam is such a simple and useful religion that even irreligiousness is included in it... What minimum beliefs an irreligious person may hold must be the basic creed of Islam.

Every religion has certain special rituals and creeds on account of which it is differentiated from others, and anyone who does not believe in and follow these rituals is called irreligious, though we have no right to call him so, for religion pure and simple is above all these rituals and formalities with which it comes

unfortunately to be bound up. He who does not believe in any prophet, avatar, revealed Scripture, or the ritualistic formalities but believes only in one God is a Muslim in the true sense of the word.”⁶

By reason Sayyid Ahmad Khan means the empirical reason, to which the Quran appeals. He calls it human reason or *aql-i kulli*. “It is that inherent capacity in man by which he draws conclusions on the basis of the observation of objective phenomena or mental thinking processes, and which proceeds from particulars to generalizations and *vice versa*.... It is this capacity of man which has enabled him to invent new things and led him on to understand and control the forces of nature; it is by this that man is able to know things which are a source of his happiness and then tries to get as much profit out of, them as possible; it is this which makes a man ask the whys and the wherefores of different events around him.”⁷

In a very illuminating article, “Thoughts of Man,” Sayyid Ahmad Khan discusses the problem of reason in detail. After defining reason as above, he says that man is distinguished from animals on account of rationality, which imposes on him duties and responsibilities far in excess of those on animals. The main function of reason, according to him, is to acquire knowledge about the nature and reality of things. But this knowledge is intimately related with certitude (*yaqin*).

“I fully realized,” he says, “that without certitude knowledge is possible neither in the sphere of the world nor in that of religion. But what kind of certitude do we need? I know, for instance, that ten is more than three. If someone states to the contrary and in proof of his statement changes a stick into a snake, I would, no doubt, be utterly surprised at his strange feat but it would never shake me out of my belief that ten is more than three. Without a certitude of this kind it is not possible to proceed further.”

But the important question is how and where to get this kind of certitude. He examines the beliefs of different people. A Christian, for instance, believes in the doctrine of the Trinity, because it is claimed to have been taught by Jesus (as) and Jesus (as) is credited to have wrought many wonderful miracles. But such beliefs, based as they are on the authority of a particular individual and supported by the miraculous performances, cannot stand on any sure ground.

In order to be acceptable they must have the sanction of reason and common sense. He concludes, “I come to the conclusion that reason alone is the instrument which can decide the matter, and bring about the necessary conviction. But is not reason fallible? Yes, it is, and we cannot help it. As reason is used almost universally, so the reason of one man can be corrected by that of another and the reason of one age by that of another age. Without it nothing can be achieved.”⁸

In the history of Muslim thought and especially among the mystics, however, reason has often been placed subordinate to intuition or mystic disclosure (*kashf*). Ghazali, for instance, whose line of argument (as developed by him in the *Munqidh*), is adopted by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, holds that there is a higher stage beyond reason where reason appears as fallible and defective as sense perception is at the bar of reason.

But Sayyid Ahmad is not willing to accept this argument. He says that supposing such a state exists,

how can we judge the validity or otherwise of the knowledge yielded by it? The contradictions in the reports of mystic experience are proverbial. What criterion is there by which we can determine which of them are true and which false? Naturally, we have nothing else but reason to decide the matter.⁹

There is, however, no qualitative difference, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, between reason and revelation. He does not admit the usually accepted distinction of natural and revealed religions, for it would mean that revealed religion is something different or in certain respects even antagonistic to the natural and rational demands of man. He looks at the problem of their relationship biologically and makes inspiration a natural development of man's instinctive and rational capacities.

All insects and animals possess instinctive power that the Quran calls *wahi*, revelation (16:68), and thus makes instinct, reason, and revelation belong to the same category, though with a difference of degree at each grade of being. It is as a result of man's natural aptitude that he calls *wahi* that people in different ages and regions have been able to evolve an almost universal standard of moral values.

Those who are endowed with reason to the highest degree are the guides and leaders of people whom Shah Wali Allah calls the *mufhimun*. According to Sayyid Ahmad, these guides and leaders appear in all spheres of human life, secular as well as religious, and they all, without any distinction, receive divine illumination or *wahi*.

An inventor of a new mechanical device, a discoverer of hitherto unknown and unexplored regions of the universe, a composer of beautiful symphony, are all recipients of spiritual revelation in their different spheres. The difference between the prophets and other geniuses, according to him, is due to the difference of the spheres in which they work. The prophets are spiritual healers and their primary and sole function is to reorientate the spiritual and moral life of the people.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan totally rejects the view of the theologians according to whom a person attains prophethood merely because God, in the arbitrary exercise of His power, confers this rank on him. According to them, there is no difference between the prophets and other mortals except that the former occupy a particular rank conferred on them by the favour of God. The relationship between the prophet and his followers is envisaged as that between a king and his subjects, a difference depending in most cases merely on the accident of birth.

But, according to Sayyid Ahmad, this relationship can be better understood in terms of the relation that holds between a shepherd and his sheep. "Though the prophet and his followers both belong to the category of humanity, as the shepherd and the sheep belong to that of animality, yet the possession of prophetic faculty marks off the prophet from the rest of humanity just as the possession of rationality marks off the shepherd from the sheep."¹⁰

Thus, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, prophethood is a special natural faculty like other human faculties and capacities which blossoms forth at the opportune time as flowers and fruit ripen on a tree at a particular time. There is nothing strange about it. Sometimes a particular individual comes to possess

a certain faculty in such a perfect form that the people recognize him to be a genius in that particular branch of art or craft.

A poet, a physician, or a blacksmith can become the master of his art and craft. One who possesses extraordinary natural powers of healing spiritual maladies and is thereby able to bring about moral regeneration of mankind is called a prophet. When these natural aptitudes ripen and mature at the proper time, he feels called upon to declare to the people his new mission of moral and spiritual regeneration.

The Sayyid rejects the mechanical interpretation of the way revelation came to the prophets; it was the logical consequence of his view of prophethood. According to him, there is no intermediary between God and the prophet. He receives all revelation direct from God. Gabriel is in reality a symbolical representation of the prophetic faculty.

“His heart is the mirror which reflects the divine illuminations. It is his heart that carries the message to God and then returns with the divine message. He is the being from whom the words of God’s speech emanate, he is the ear which hears the wordless and noiseless speech of God. From his heart gushes forth, like a fountain, the revelation and then it descends on him. His spiritual experiences are all the result of human nature. He hears his spiritual message (*kalam-i nafsī*) by his physical ears as if somebody else is saying something to him; he sees himself with his physical eyes as if another person is standing before him.”¹¹

Thus, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, revelation is not something which comes from outside. It is the divine mind working through human consciousness. The intensity of the feeling which moves and vibrates the deepest chords of human personality makes the recipient feel as if he is receiving something from outside; in fact, revelation is the projection of his inner consciousness when it is in deep contact with the spiritual reality in which he lives, moves, and has his being.

The Sayyid derives support for his theory from the fact that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet (S) not as a whole but piecemeal as and when occasion demanded. All human faculties come into operation only in reference to certain situations and practical needs. The human mind is a storehouse of several ideas, memorized verses and remembered events, but they all lie dormant in it. When the occasion demands, say, the recall of a verse, it comes into consciousness and we quote it. The same is the position of the prophetic faculty. When circumstances demand, the prophetic consciousness comes into operation and gives expression to what is needed at the moment by direct revelation from God.¹²

Sayyid Ahmad Khan believes that the prophetic faculty is present in all men without distinction, though there may be differences of degree. The revelations of God are open to all men. The deeper recesses of the human heart are always susceptible to the spiritual call; it is due to this that man is able to penetrate through the world of nature to God. What has come to an end is, according to him, the role of prophethood.¹³

There was a time when people were not mature rationally and they needed the guidance of prophets, but with the passage of time and development of human reason, this guidance was discontinued and, as the last favour of God, the moral and spiritual values enunciated by Islam were fully disseminated.

“Therefore, he [Muhammad (S)] is the last of the distributors of these divine gifts, not only because he came in the last period, not only because there would come none after him for the distribution of divine gifts, and both of these meanings form the very connotation of finality, but also because with him these divine gifts were fully distributed and there was left nothing to be distributed.

As Islam is the most valuable gift of all, its distributor must be looked upon as the highest of all; and because divine gifts were distributed in stages and the Prophet Muhammad (S) came to distribute them the last of all, his prophethood is also the last. So it was declared in the Quran (5:5): ‘Today I complete for you your religion and complete My favour to you and have chosen for you your religion, Islam.’” [14](#)

According to Sayyid Ahmad, this finality of prophethood lay in clarifying the conception of *tauhid* on which alone depends the ultimate salvation of man. [15](#)

But if religion is so natural and simple as Sayyid Ahmad holds, the question naturally arises: what is the necessity of prophetic guidance? It is true, he admits, that a man can attain moral truth by a reflective study of the laws of nature. But this possibility is realizable only after men have explored these laws of nature in their totality and unravelled their mystery and secrets.

In spite of spectacular advances in the different fields of science and technology, modern man still feels that he has not been able to reach the core of the mystery. It is due to this difficulty in attaining moral and spiritual truth through a purely scientific understanding of nature that, according to Sayyid Ahmad Khan, mankind needs the divine guidance of prophets who, due to their natural aptitude and spiritual vision, are able to arrive at moral truths which are universally valid. Like geniuses in other branches, prophets are geniuses in the spiritual field and mankind has been able to make progress both in the material and in the spiritual world through the appearance and work of these geniuses.

In conformity with his view of religion as an aspect of nature, Sayyid Ahmad Khan looked upon God as the Author of nature and as the First Cause. The relation of God to the universe is analogous to the relation of the watchmaker to the watch. As the craftsman is responsible for the peculiar make-up of the machine, the correlation of its parts, and its overall function, so is God the Creator of the universe. It is He who gave it the laws according to which it continues to work.

As God is unchangeable, so are the laws that operate in the universe. As the Quran (48:23) asserts, “No change shall you find in the habit of God.” Just as the material world works and operates in accordance with immutable laws, so there is in the moral sphere an absolute law of right and wrong that knows no exception whatsoever. Pains and pleasures follow logically the kind of acts performed by men and there is need for divine interference neither in the physical nor in the moral sphere.

It was as a result of this deistic view of God's nature and His relation to the universe that Sayyid Ahmad Khan denied the possibility of miracles and efficacy of prayer. He could not accept miracles as violations of the laws of nature for "the law of nature," according to him, "is a practical promise of God that something will happen so, and if we say it can happen otherwise we are accusing Him of going against His promise and this is inconceivable."¹⁶

He continues, "I do not deny the possibility of miracles because they are against reason, but because the Quran does not support the happenings of events or occurrences that are against the laws of nature or those that violate the usual course of things."¹⁷

In a way, Sayyid Ahmad was correct, for the Quran emphatically and repeatedly refuses people their request to Muhammad (S) to show miracles in proof of his veracity. To all such demands the Quran replies, "Say: Glory to my Lord! Am I aught but a man, an apostle?" (17:90-93). But he was wrong in a way, for the Quran is full of the accounts of miracles of earlier prophets. In order to substantiate his stand, he made an attempt to explain these miracles by reference to natural laws, an attempt that was perhaps the only cause why his *Tafsir* did not gain among the Muslims the popularity it deserved.

By the same line of argument, Sayyid Ahmad Khan denied the efficacy of prayers (*dua*) as it is usually understood. The laws of nature are inviolable and nothing can change them; even God cannot go against them. The utility of prayer should be measured, according to him, not by its acceptance or non-acceptance by God, for that acceptance is out of question, but by the psychological effect it has on the individual in relieving him of the pains and anxieties attendant upon certain unfortunate events in his life.

But Sayyid Mahdi Ali made a very penetrating criticism of his views on God and His relation to nature. He rightly said that if God is the mere Cause of causes and cannot rise above the laws of nature and the absolute law of right and wrong, then he is God only in name, a being devoid of personality and all feelings of love and affection towards human beings.

"God is really dethroned and all religious life becomes extinct. Prayer would become a cold attribute of perfunctory worship of a being whose arm is never stretched out in answer to prayers, whose ear is never open to the supplications of the penitent." If such is the case, then man has no need to look to God in time of suffering; he has only to get as much detailed knowledge of the laws of nature as possible and then adapt his life mechanically to the requirements of the external world and, thus, attain success in life in proportion to his efforts.

This philosophy of life leads not to the broadening of human outlook but to the spirit of self-sufficiency and self-centredness, which is the enemy of spiritual life. Sayyid Mahdi refers to verses 25-35 of the twentieth Surah of the Quran where Moses (as) is said to have prayed to God for granting some specific requests, and the reply was "Granted is your prayer, O Moses." In view of this episode Sayyid Mahdi Ali rightly infers that Sayyid Ahmad Khan's conception of God and the function of prayer (*dua*) does not accord with religious consciousness at all. He points out that if we accept this position, it will mean that

man has no significant part to play in the world and everything is tied to the inexorable necessity of mechanical laws. [18](#)

Sayyid Ahmad Khan tried to explain the emergence of man on this earth as a specific event in the long and laborious process of evolution, though, he adds, the process was originally started by God Himself when He uttered the creative word “Be.” Man is the result of the chemical processes that went on in the universe, and at a particular moment he appeared as a form of animal life.

In order to explain the complex nature of man as he is at present, he gives his own interpretation of the legend of Adam’s (as) Fall as related in the Quran. He thinks that its presentation in a dramatic form is only a literary way of placing before us certain basic truths about man. It is wrong, he thinks, to take it as a literal account of a dialogue between angels and Satan on the one hand and God on the other.

The word “angel”, according to him, stands for the limitless power of God and potentialities of things. The solidity of mountains, the fluidity of water, the power of growth in vegetation, the power of attraction and repulsion in electricity, in short, all powers that we see manifested in different things of the universe, are signified by the word “angel”. [19](#)

Similarly, Satan, according to him, is not a being who exists outside us; it stands for evil forces in the universe. Man is angel and Satan combined. God’s command to the angels to bow down before Adam (as) signifies that the angelic or good forces of the universe will be obedient to man and ever willing to help him.

The same divine order to Satan means that man has the power to control the evil forces in him but the refusal of Satan in obeying the order of God signifies that the baser passions of man are not easily susceptible to control, and, therefore, man has to exert the full force of his personality to keep them in check.

There are two other things in the legend that need explanation. One is the reference to the forbidden tree. According to Sayyid Ahmad, this signifies reason and self-consciousness, which enable man to distinguish between good and evil. God’s order and man’s disobedience mean that man is able to make full use of his powers independently of what anybody may order him to do, even though he may be led astray thereby.

The other thing referred to in the same context is Satan’s stripping Adam (as) and Eve “of their raiment and exposing the shameful parts of their bodies” (7:27). The word “raiment,” according to him, means virtue and the “shameful parts” stand for evil, thus implying that man’s virtuous acts can cover up the nakedness of man’s evil deeds. [20](#)

With regard to the problem of freedom of will, Sayyid Ahmad’s position is based on his naturalistic study of man. He thinks that man is determined in his actions partly by external causes such as society, environment, and training and partly by internal causes such as the peculiar physiological and

psychological structure that he possesses. But, in spite of this, he holds, man does possess a faculty by which he can discriminate between good and evil. He calls it “fight of the heart” or “light of nature” which enables a man to rise above the prejudices of his age.

This intellectual power of breaking with the past and introducing new value-judgments is present, according to him, potentially in all men though it matures and comes into play in the case only of a few gifted persons who unfold before the people new dimensions of life. It was this faculty of discriminating between right and wrong which helped Abraham (as), the youth of Chaldea, as Sayyid Ahmad puts it, to experience and declare: “I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I ascribe partners to Him” (6:89).[21](#)

Everybody possesses the capacity to follow the good as well as to do evil; well-being results when the tendency towards good outweighs the tendency towards evil. It is possible that in a certain person inclination towards evil may predominate, yet he need not be condemned, for if he brings into play the little tendency towards good that he possesses to counteract the effect of evil deeds, he is sure of salvation.

Salvation does not depend on the amount of virtuous deeds a person is able to perform; it rather depends, according to Sayyid Ahmad, on the honest efforts that he makes to put to full use all the powers that he is endowed with. What is demanded by God from all of us is the sincere effort directed towards the realization of well-being and good in preference to doing evil.

If we continue using this “light of the heart” and look upon evil deeds as evil and feel repentant of them, then surely a day will come when our lower impulses will weaken and the tendency towards good will predominate. There is no sin for man in that over which he has no power; sin follows only when man does not put the tendency towards good to full use.[22](#)

Man’s freedom follows, as a matter of course, from his very nature, which, in the words of the Quran, is patterned after the nature of God Himself. This capacity of man for free spontaneous action does not set any limitation to the omnipotence of God, for God gave this freedom to man of His own accord and not under any compulsion.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan also takes up the problem of the reconciliation of man’s freedom with God’s prescience. Like many thinkers of the past and of the present, he does not deny the omniscience of God in order to safeguard the freedom of man. To him there is no incompatibility between the two.

He gives the example of an astrologer who predicts that a certain man will die by drowning, and this comes out to be true. Can we say, asks Sayyid Ahmad Khan, that the astrologer has been the cause of this man’s death? What is in God’s knowledge, which he called fate (*taqdir*), is inevitable, and yet it does not involve or impose any restriction on the freedom of man. Whatever necessity there is it is in the knowledge of God, in *taqdir*, not in man. In spite of this knowledge, man still retains his freedom of actions.[23](#)

Sayyid Ahmad believes in the existence of the soul, for, according to him, on no other premise can we explain the existence of reason and will in men and animals. He does not go into any details about the nature of the soul, for, according to him, it is not possible for man to unravel the secret of this mysterious entity. He believes that it is a self-existing substance of a subtler matter and not a mere attribute. Qualitatively, the souls of animals and men are alike; differences arise from the peculiar structure of the bodies that are the instruments of their souls.

The soul is definitely immortal and does not die with the death of the body. Sayyid Ahmad Khan derives support for this position from the scientific doctrine that nothing perishes in the world, the quantity of matter remains unchanged, and only its form is changed. As to the Resurrection he refers to many theories but accepts the one according to which both body and soul will emerge.

The soul at the time of death acquires a certain physical medium distinct from the present body and so at the Resurrection there will be no new life but a continuation of the old. He argues that wherever the Quran refers to the reality of the Resurrection, its real purpose is to refute the belief of those who deny the existence of the soul and identify life with life on this earth only. The various analogies employed by the Quran refer to the fact of the Resurrection; they are not intended to describe and reveal its nature and character.[24](#)

He holds that paradise and hell described in sensuous terms in the Quran are mere symbolical representations of the psychological states of individuals in the life after death. The Quran says, "No soul knoweth what joy of the eyes is reserved for the good, in recompense of their work" (32:17). It is impossible to express the reality of super-sensuous things in words, even though those be the words of God.[25](#)

The impact of the new learning and the spread of scientific knowledge created many problems for religious thought not only in Europe but also in India. The Christian missionaries who had already met the onslaughts of the challenge of modern science in the West began to approach and study the religious thought of Muslims in this new context.

The tradition-ridden '*ulama*' who were unfortunately completely unaware of the new currents of thought released by science and also of the new moral outlook on life proved incapable of meeting this challenge. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was, thus, forced to take up this challenge. He had to rethink the whole cultural heritage of Islam and reinterpret it in the light of modern developments.

The first main hurdle in his way was the general belief among the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent that the door of *ijtihad* had been closed forever. No religion, if it is to be progressive and dynamic, can ignore the importance of change and development in human thought and knowledge, and so it is necessary that people in every age should give all basic moral and spiritual values a new interpretation.

During the creative period Muslim thinkers continued to think and expound the problems of their religious

thought in consonance with the spirit of the changing times, but after the fall of Baghdad, when political and social life was disrupted, the doctrine of *taqlid* was put forth with the intention of arresting any further deterioration and disintegration. Even Iqbal accepted this plea and in *Rumuz-i Bekhudi* advocated *taqlid*, blind allegiance to authority, during a period of decline. Later on, however, he repudiated this stand.

A blind reverence for the past cannot help people overcome their shortcomings. The only thing that can counteract the forces of reactionism is the freedom of expression enjoyed by creative individuals. It was this truth that Sayyid Ahmad Khan realized, and he strove hard to convince others of it. He advocated that the door of *ijtihad* should be thrown open and every person who is qualified for it should be prepared to rethink and reinterpret the problems of life and religion in accordance with the circumstances of his age.

In every religion there are certain truths that form the very basis of spiritual life. Such principles are eternal verities that cannot change with the change of time and place. Thus the Quran (30:30) says, "Set your face towards the right religion which is based on the nature of God on which is patterned the nature of man. There is no change in the creation of God: this is the right religion." This verse refers to that aspect of religious faith that is above spatial and temporal vicissitudes.

For Sayyid Ahmad Khan the basic aspects of a religion such as Islam are belief in the unity of God (*tauhid*) and moral behaviour which springs forth from the depth of one's heart and the light of which radiates in all directions. But religion, as usually understood, is much more than this; it includes also what is usually called *Shariah*.

Shah Wali Allah was the first thinker in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent who realized the necessity of clarifying this important issue. Discussing the role and function of a prophet, he pointed out that reforms and social and moral reorientation carried out by a prophet should always be considered in the context of the type of social atmosphere in which he is born, and the cultural and intellectual stage of the people among whom he appears. It is not his aim, nor is it possible for him, to bring about a total change in the social and legal practices of his people. His main object is to build a society on moral and spiritual principles and for this purpose he keeps intact almost all that he finds in his environment except what is inconsistent with his ideology. He scrupulously tries to maintain whatever is compatible with moral principles and modifies the rest as little as possible; so as to avoid introducing unnecessary changes such as his contemporary society cannot easily assimilate.²⁶

Accepting this explanation of the role of a prophet, Sayyid Ahmad made a distinction between *Din*, *Shariah*, and worldly affairs. In the first category he includes belief in God and in His attributes, as well as acts of worship. In the second category he includes those matters that deal with moral and spiritual purification of mankind. He denies that a prophet is concerned at all with matters relating to our daily life.

Din is not subject to change, but our needs and the way we satisfy them depend on differences of time and place. If we include these things within the sphere of prophetic function, then with the change of

time we shall need another prophet, which is contrary to the spirit of the finality of prophethood.

What is claimed to have been perfected and finalized by Islam is *Din* and not the *Shariah*. If the *Shariah* is not final, it logically follows that it is the duty of Muslims in every age and every country to deal with their problems in the light of their needs in accordance with the basic moral and spiritual tenets of Islam. For this purpose he took the step that Ibn Taimiyyah had taken in the seventh/thirteenth century. Like him he revolted against the dogma of the finality of the four schools of jurisprudence and went back to the very source in order to make a fresh start.

With regard to Tradition, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's attitude was unequivocal. When the collections of Hadith were compiled in the second/eighth century, political and social conditions of the time helped in the fabrication of innumerable traditions ascribing them to the Holy Prophet (S). He was, therefore, not willing to accept Tradition as a valid source of religious knowledge.

Our traditionists gave all their attention to developing the science of *rijal* that deals with the biographies of all the various transmitters of traditions. But the most important work to be done was a critical appraisal of Traditions with regard to their content, a task that was unfortunately not undertaken as diligently as it should have been.

According to Sayyid Ahmad, it is the duty of Muslims now to take up this important work. As the situation stands, he would accept only those traditions that are compatible with the letter and spirit of the Quran. He approvingly quotes the statement of Ibn Taimiyyah that "the truly traditional is truly rational." There is no other way out of this situation. In case by a critical analysis a tradition is proved to be true, Sayyid Ahmad would be willing to accept it as a valid basis for religion. Still he makes a distinction between traditions that deal with purely religious matters and those that deal with non-religious matters. The latter, he thinks, we are not bound to follow at all.²⁷

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was not satisfied with the numerous available commentaries of the Quran. According to him, they contained nothing but fabricated stories and accounts of alleged miracles. Moreover, in the interpretation of the Quranic verses, they invariably referred to particular historical events in the context of which alone, it was claimed, their real meanings could be grasped. The result was that the universal and eternal significance of the Quranic verses was sacrificed at the altar of historical erudition.

To him the interpretation of the Quran by a standard (of traditions) which was itself doubtful could not be the best way of approaching the study of the Holy Book. He says, "When I am not willing to accept abrogation (or modification) of one verse of the Quran by another for the reason of its being against the wisdom or omniscience of God, how can I accept the abrogation or modification of the Quranic verses by any tradition, howsoever trustworthy it may be claimed to be by any standard? I am not willing to accord to the tradition any right of abrogation even in the secondary sense, of progressive revelation, which I have accepted with regard to the verses of the Quran. If there is any such contradiction, I would reject

the tradition outright as untrue.”[28](#)

Sayyid Ahmad Khan critically reviews the work done by the ancient jurists. In the *Khutubat* his attitude towards their achievements is appreciative. He explains in details how they derived rules and laws from the Quran and the Sunnah for the regulation of social, political, and religious life of the people. In view of the spread, of Islam, it was necessary that the political and social life of the Muslim community should have been built up in accordance with the spirit of the Quran and the example set by the Holy Prophet (S).

This magnificent work was successfully undertaken by our early jurists. But at present we must distinguish between what the Quran says and the rules and regulations which the jurists have formulated through inference. Sayyid Ahmad is of the opinion that howsoever praiseworthy and commendable the efforts of the jurists may be, we are not bound to accept their conclusions, for after all these are no more than man-made regulations which can and must be altered with the change of circumstances.

In one of his articles, “Uncivilized Countries,” Sayyid Ahmad Khan rebukes Turkey for her negligence in the matter of legal reform. He holds that backwardness and weakness of Turkey in his time were due solely to the obsolete legal code that was prevalent there. According to him, it is one of the causes of the decline of the Muslims that they are still following legal codes that were formulated to satisfy the demands of a bygone age.

Every age presents new problems; and even though some old problems recur, yet their form is quite different and, therefore, the solutions they demand must be totally new. Nothing old can fill the place of the new without adaptation and proper amendment. The present age demands a totally new legal system pertaining to social, political, and administrative affairs.

Unfortunately, the political decline of the Muslims, instead of giving rise to a spirit of critical appraisal of the situation and a demand for a dynamic adaptation to the new environment, has produced an attitude of passive obedience to a static ideal of *taqlid*, i.e., blind allegiance to an authority which is no longer valid and useful in the new circumstances. Thus, according to Sayyid Ahmad, the spirit of *taqlid* in the sphere of jurisprudence produced the following evil consequences:

(1) People wrongly came to believe that all worldly matters were covered by religion and, therefore, nothing could be done without first obtaining sanction from the ‘*ulama*’.

(2) The decisions of the jurists gradually came to be identified with Islam itself. As a matter of fact, they were the expressions of opinion by different individuals within the context of their own time and place and were not meant to be applicable to all times. The result of this was that any attempt to modify them or replace them with better decisions was looked upon as a revolt against Islam itself.

Sayyid Ahmad thinks that it is the duty of the Muslims to rethink the whole legal system, civil and criminal, and rewrite their trade and revenue codes in the light of modern knowledge.[29](#)

Like ibn Taimiyyah, Sayyid Ahmad refuses to accept *ijma* as the source of Islamic Law. According to the former, it was the cause of all superstition and un-Islamic practices. Sayyid Ahmad's passion for *ijtihad* could not brook any limitations imposed by the so-called unanimity of jurists on certain matters. This unanimity may be the result of certain peculiar circumstances of a particular period.

With the change of time and circumstances, the validity of such decisions loses its force. Even the *ijma* of the Companions of the Prophet (S) does not possess any overriding importance for Sayyid Ahmad. We can certainly make full use of the decisions of these and other scholars in the reformulation and reinterpretation of the Islamic legal code in the modern age, but none of these, according to him, can impose any limit on the judgments of modern jurists who can arrive at decisions which they consider to be compatible with the demands of the time and in consonance with the spirit of Islam and the Quran.[30](#)

For this purpose Sayyid Ahmad decided to go back to the Quran as the only valid and sure ground of all our attempts at modern interpretation of Islam. In *Khutabat-i Ahmadiyyah*, he developed this view and supported it by the famous saying of the Caliph Umar that "God's Book is sufficient for us."

He boldly claimed to ignore all the mythical stories that had become current among the Muslims due to their having been incorporated in the vast store of commentaries on the Quran and, thus, taken for the scriptural text, i.e., the very Word of God. It did not mean that he was breaking with the past, for in his own *Tafsir* he discussed the views and opinions of almost all-important commentators and accepted and followed those that he thought were true.

What he wished to emphasize was that the altered conditions of modern life, the advance in and development of human knowledge, and the peculiar position in which the Muslims were placed, all demanded an effort on their part to solve their problems in the light of their own experiences unhampered by what the ancient doctors and thinkers had said. In several matters he refused to accept the views commonly held as true among Muslims because, in his view, they were neither supported by the Quran nor were practicable in the context of the changed circumstances.

For instance, he held that *rajm* (stoning to death), the accepted punishment for fornication, could not be accepted because, first, the Quran did not mention it, and, secondly, the traditions, on the basis of which the ancient jurists accepted it, seem to uphold the custom prevalent among the Arabs of those days in imitation of the Jews.

Again, there was a custom among Arabs to pay ransom money (*dit*) to the relatives of the deceased in case of murder. This custom is referred to in the traditions. But Sayyid Ahmad could not accept this as legally practicable and, therefore, tried to prove that the Quran did not sanction it.

It is commonly held on the basis of traditions that a will executed in favour of legal heirs is null and void. But Sayyid Ahmad followed the Quran in this respect. He strongly advocated that dividing of property by will is as valid according to the Quran as its distribution by the law of inheritance.

In one respect Sayyid Ahmad's work certainly proved epoch-making. Before him it had been generally held on the basis of the Quran (2: 106; 12:39; 16:101) as well as traditions that some of the Quranic verses stood abrogated. The number of such verses came to hundreds, though Shah Wali Allah held that they were only five.

Sayyid Ahmad gave a serious thought to this problem and came to the conclusion that the Quran being the eternal Word of God could not be looked upon as the notebook of a whimsical poet. He held that the Quran as actually recited by the Muslims was exactly as it was revealed to the Holy Prophet (S); not a word or jot of it was omitted and no verse of it stood abrogated.

For Sayyid Ahmad the abrogation to which the verses of the Quran refer relate to the laws of the previous prophets like Moses (as) and Jesus (as). A certain law is said to be abrogated only when, in spite of the continuity of the circumstances in which it was first promulgated, it is withdrawn, waived, and replaced by another law.

To Sayyid Ahmad such abrogation was totally foreign to the spirit of the Quran. The possibility of abrogation would be against the omniscience and wisdom of God. But if the conditions and circumstances themselves changed, then the promulgation of a new law instead of an old one would not be abrogation of the latter at all; it would rather be the sign of God's wisdom which expresses itself in progressive revelation.

According to Sayyid Ahmad, what have been abrogated are the laws of previous prophets and those laws of Islam itself that ceased to be operative on account of change in circumstances and conditions, so that if these conditions recur, the previous order would automatically become operative.

The attitude of Sayyid Ahmad was not merely theoretical; he was principally a man of action and by circumstances he was forced to put his ideas into practice. Just as he did not rest till he had set up the college at Aligarh for the education of Muslims, so in religious matters his purpose could not be fulfilled unless he could give satisfactory answers to some of the concrete problems of the Muslims in those days.

The Christian polemic had questioned the utility and moral value of such institutions as polygamy, divorce, and slavery. He tackled each problem in a scientific way, studied its pros and cons and gave a most judicious solution. It is important to note that in our own times many follow the course set up by him in this field. Similarly, with regard to the problem of inheritance, will, *riba*, and certain penal injunctions, his solutions are being accepted and advocated by all the progressive and liberal schools of thought in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

There is no gainsaying the fact that by his scientific and critical thinking he became the first great thinker whose patterns of thought proved very fruitful. He was the first Muslim in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent who was able to see the potentialities of the contact of Western culture with Islamic way of life and suggested the ways and means to meet the challenge of modern ideas for the future development

of Muslim thought.

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- [3.](#) Ibid., pp. 276–98.
- [4.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 1, p. 336.
- [5.](#) Ibid., pp. 340–41.
- [6.](#) Ibid., pp. 41–42.
- [7.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 3, pp. 11–12.
- [8.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, pp. 18–22.
- [9.](#) Ibid.
- [10.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 1, pp. 34–35.
- [11.](#) Ibid., p. 32.
- [12.](#) Ibid., pp. 29–35; Vol. 3, pp. 49–57.
- [13.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, p. 125.
- [14.](#) Ibid., p. 290.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 126.
- [16.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 3, p. 28.
- [17.](#) Ibid., p. 33.
- [18.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 1, pp. 387, 396, 397, 407, 426, 428, 429; Tafsir al Quran, Vol. 1, pp. 12–13.
- [19.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 1, p. 56; see also Vol. 3, pp. 37–38.
- [20.](#) Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 52–77; Vol. 3, pp. 75–78; Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, pp. 183–200.
- [21.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 1, pp. 19–25.
- [22.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, pp. 220–21.
- [23.](#) Tafsir at-Quran, Vol. 6, pp. 140–45; Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, p. 219.
- [24.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 3, pp. 84–119.
- [25.](#) Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 39–47.
- [26.](#) Hujjat Allah al-Balighah (Urdu translation, Lahore, 1953), Vol. 1, pp. 521–23.
- [27.](#) Khutabat, pp. 203–04, 215, 225–26; Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, pp. 164–69.
- [28.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 1, pp. 162–69.
- [29.](#) Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, pp. 141–42.
- [30.](#) Tafsir al-Quran, Vol. 1, pp. 217–18; Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, Vol. 2, p. 487.

Chapter 82: Renaissance in Indo-Pakistan

(Continued): Iqbal

Muhammad Iqbal was born, in 1289/1873, at Sialkot. His ancestors were Kashmiri Brahmans of the Sapru caste. His great-grandfather migrated to the Punjab sometime in early thirteenth/nineteenth century and settled down in Sialkot, a historical town that has produced many great scholars. His father Nur Muhammad was a saintly man for whom religion was a matter of living experience.

As related by Iqbal himself, he had distinct tendency towards mysticism. Heredity and parental influence made Iqbal inherit and imbibe this tendency that continued to mature throughout his intellectual and spiritual development. The father used to earn his modest living by the labour and skill of his own hands and originally had the intention of giving the son some instruction in the mosque and then making him a helper in his own craft.

It has been reliably stated by many contemporaries of his father that it was Maulawi Mir Hasan who seeing great promise in this intelligent child persuaded his father to let him enter an ordinary public school which followed methods of teaching and curricula introduced by the British Indian system of education.

A ceremonious initiation into needlework proposed by the father was not approved by the learned Mir Hasan and the father accepted his advice. The boy started wielding the pen instead of the needle, a pen destined to exercise a marvellous creative influence.

Like many a person of sensitive mind and spiritual leanings, the father had faith in prophetic dreams. He related a dream that he had shortly before the birth of Iqbal.¹ He saw that there was a bird of exquisite plumage flying low in the air and hovering over the heads of a crowd of people who were jumping up and stretching their arms to catch it. While he stood looking and admiring the beauty of the bird, it dropped into his lap of its own accord.

When the genius in Iqbal began to sprout forth and receive early admiration from great scholars and poets, the father was convinced that it was the spirit of Iqbal that had been symbolized in his dream as a beautiful bird. We find the same symbolism in the New Testament where it is related that the Holy Ghost descended in the shape of a dove.

The school that Iqbal attended still exists almost unchanged even after the lapse of three quarters of a century. Its curriculum consisted mostly of reading, writing, and arithmetic with an uninspiring emphasis on cramming, meant for passing examinations and moving from grade to grade. Shabby surroundings and poorly paid, under-educated teachers could have only cramping effects on the mental and moral growth of young pupils.

But Iqbal was rare type, which goes its own way and carves its own destiny under all systems, good, bad, or indifferent. Mir Hasan, a scholar of distinction and a man of sterling qualities of personality, was deeply impressed by the liberal cultural movement of the celebrated Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He was not a teacher in the school where Iqbal completed his secondary education, but it appears that Iqbal's spirit began to be nourished by him very early and his influence had a long, lasting effect on him.

When the British Crown proposed to confer Knighthood on Iqbal, he suggested that Mir Hasan, to whose scholarly influence he owed so much, had a better right to recognition by a title. For his graduate studies Iqbal came over to Lahore, which was then developing as a centre of higher learning. He chose philosophy as his major subject for which he had a particular bent of mind. He was fortunate in studying philosophy under Thomas Arnold who was no ordinary teacher. An intimate teacher-pupil relationship soon developed between the two to which Iqbal's poem on Arnold, included in the collection of *Bang-i Dara*, bears evidence.

Iqbal's grateful recognition of what he received from Arnold is also expressed by him in his dedication to him of his book, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. It runs as follows: "This little book is the first-fruit of that literary and philosophical training which I have been receiving from you for the last ten years, and as an expression of gratitude I beg to dedicate it to your name. You have always judged me liberally; I hope you will judge these pages in the same spirit."

Arnold before coming to Lahore had been a Professor at Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, where he had written his famous book, *The Preaching of Islam*. It was Sayyid Ahmad Khan to whom he owed his keen interest in Islamic studies. On his return to England he achieved distinction as a great scholar and was knighted.

When Iqbal went to England for higher studies in Western philosophy, he re-established his contact with him. Iqbal enriched his knowledge of Western philosophy under McTaggart who was his guide for his research thesis in philosophy.

Having saturated himself with whatever Western philosophy, past and present, had to offer, Iqbal went to Germany for a doctorate because the British universities at that time had nothing higher than Master's degree in philosophy. Having received the philosophical lore of the West, Iqbal decided to repay the debt by acquainting the West with some currents of philosophical thought in pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Persia.

Even while Iqbal was completing his formal academic education his genius had already developed, a creative synthesis of the East and the West. Before Iqbal went to Europe for higher philosophical studies he had already become famous as a poet. The literary critics of his nation had acknowledged him as a new star on the firmament of Urdu poetry.

His poetry from the very beginning was rich in thought. In this respect among the Urdu poets only Ghalib could be considered to be his forerunner, but in the choice of themes his predecessors were also Azad

and Hali who had revolted against the degenerate traditional trends and had introduced into Urdu poetry new forms as well as new content under the impact of English literature.

Azad had predicted in his book *Nairang-i Khayal* that the future development of Urdu literature would be brought about by those who would have in their hands keys of the East as well as of the West. Hali was also of the same opinion and in his *Muqaddimah*, a critique of poetry; he freely borrowed the tenets of literary criticism directly or indirectly from Western writers, although he took his illustrations also from Arabic, Persian, and Urdu literature.

The ideal thinker and literary genius that Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Azad, and Hali had visualized was embodied in Iqbal. The, Sayyid was a liberal rationalist, influenced by the Western naturalism that held its sway in the later half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century due to the rise and achievement of physical sciences. Convinced of the truth of Islam in embodying eternal verities, he felt no opposition between reason and revelation or science and religion and he aimed at a synthesis of them both.

Iqbal was a great admirer of this all-round reformer and in a poem, which belongs to a very early period of his poetic production, while paying a heartfelt tribute to him, he makes the spirit of the departed leader advise the young poet to inspire his nation with broad, liberal, and rejuvenating ideals, a task which Iqbal adopted as his divinely ordained mission and fulfilled in a manner that placed him in the galaxy of the great literary geniuses of all times.

Iqbal was an heir to a very rich literary and philosophical scholarship. He imbibed and assimilated all that was best in the Islamic and Oriental thought to which he added his extensive knowledge of Western literature, philosophy, and culture both of the past and the present. His range of interests covered religion, philosophy, art, politics, economics, nationalism, the revival of Muslim life, and the universal brotherhood of man.

He was capable of writing powerful prose not only in his own national language but also in English, which he could wield with a masterly pen; the language of his two books in English is that of a skilled English writer. But he continued to use poetry as his medium of expression because he was a born poet and everything that he thought or felt almost involuntarily shaped itself into verse.

Many poems flowed from his pen, which a protagonist of "art for art's sake" could relish and admire, but he himself was a strong opponent of those who thought that art could or should be divorced from the stern realities of life. He traversed the whole gamut of the problems of human life, and a comprehensive survey of his thoughts, ideals, and sentiments could fill several volumes.

Books on exposition of his ideas have appeared during the last two decades and numerous articles in journals have assessed his contributions. The stream of appreciation and criticism is still flowing unabated and thesis after thesis is being offered in the universities as a dissertation for a doctorate degree.

The inspiring message of his poetry, responsible for his extensive and intensive influence, cannot be translated into a cold prosaic survey. His poetry throbs with soul stirring life and a prosaic paraphrase has the same poor relation to this pulsating life as postmortem has to a living organism. Goethe said that the tree of life is green but the theory about it is grey like autumn leaves.

A great Urdu poet, a friend of Iqbal and his co-eval, said that if the Quran had been revealed in the Urdu language, it would have been poured in the mould of Iqbal's poetry. And about the Quran the great Western scholar of Arabic and Islamic studies, Sir Hamilton Gibb, observes that translating it into any other language is turning gold into mud.

Iqbal himself says in one of his verses that truth without feeling and pathos becomes philosophy but when it stirs the heart it becomes poetry; in this respect he compares a typical representative of the intellect, ibn Sina (Avicenna), with a typical mystical poet, Rumi, both pursuing a camel carrying a veiled beauty (the hidden truth); the former is enveloped and lost in the cloud of sand raised by the speeding camel but the latter leaps forward with uncalculating courage and unveils the veiled beauty.

Iqbal has persistently advocated his conviction that intuition is more basic than intellect, and that the intuitions about life if at all could be expressed better through arts than through other media. Among the arts Rumi considered music to be a more adequate medium to touch the essence of reality, and Schopenhauer is of the same view even though their conceptions of reality are diametrically opposed.

Iqbal might have endorsed this view of Rumi about music but human souls require communication not only with the Ultimate Reality but also between themselves; for this purpose there is no better medium than language, and language reaches its perfection in poetry which is thought tinged with emotion.

We have already said that nothing human was foreign to Iqbal; there is hardly any problem of human life that he did not grapple with to find a satisfactory solution. Let us pick up a few basic problems of life and note some of Iqbal's ruling ideas.

In the early period of his poetic production we find him in general a free-lance poet, expressing in verse whatever impressed him; he poured out the stirrings of his heart freely, without concentrating on any particular mission or message as he did in the later decades of his life. We find in this early phase stirring poems on territorial nationalism, and a burning desire for political freedom from the yoke of British imperialism that was at its height during this period.

He believed at that time that multi-communal and multi-credal conglomeration of the teeming masses of the Indian sub-continent, although riddled with caste and religious cleavages, could be welded into a nation of the Western type; the people could not be freed unless they felt a psychological unity based on a common love for the motherland.

He exhorted the polytheistic idolatrous Hindu masses to discard their old gods and worship the motherland instead, raising new temples wherein all the worshippers, irrespective of their creeds and

castes, could join in a common worship. This phase of Iqbal ended when he went to Europe for the study of Western philosophy and culture.

Many a student during this period returned from Europe either completely denationalized, becoming by blind imitation a travesty of a Westerner, or fired with the idea of territorial nationalism. They came back Westernized in their whole mode of living. Overwhelmed by the achievements of the West in science and technology they belittled even the good aspects of their own cultural heritage. They desired their society to become dynamic and progressive, and the only way that they considered to be effective was to adopt Western attitudes uncritically.

Iqbal was one of those few observers of Western civilization who saw also the seamy side of it. It was a ruthlessly competitive society split up into antagonistic nations bent upon exploiting not only their own working classes, but also making all unorganized, technically backward people of Asia and Africa victims of economic imperialism.

Iqbal was convinced that Europe was heading towards a catastrophe, because of its purely materialistic outlook divorced from ethical and spiritual values. Jingoistic territorial nationalism had for long been hypocritically masquerading as patriotism. National lust for power had replaced the ethics of Jesus with the machinations of Machiavelli.

The worship of the State to which Hegel had given a philosophical grounding was producing thinkers like Nietzsche and Trotsky for whom the power of the superman or super-nation had become the ultimate goal of individuals as well as of nations. Iqbal was disillusioned by a closer study of the West and some of the poems that he wrote in Europe expressed dark prophecies about the fate of this hectic civilization.

He said that Western nations were building their nests on very slender and weak branches and were heading towards mass suicide. Carlyle had seen it much earlier than Iqbal when he prophesied about half a century before the First World War that if Britain persisted to move on the path that she had chosen for herself she was bound to plunge into hell within fifty years.

The period of Iqbal's stay in Europe almost coincided with the time when Spengler, an obscure school-teacher, was quietly engaged in a monumental historical survey of the rise and fall of cultures through the millennia of civilized life to establish his thesis of the *Decline of the West* which was published shortly after the termination of the First World War.

Iqbal returned to his country in 1327/1908 with a new outlook that was neither Eastern nor Western. He came to the conclusion that as the lopsided material progress of the West was unethical and unspiritual so the religiosity of the East was a hollow and life-thwarting force. The realm of the spirit had to be rediscovered by the East as well as by the West.

A good deal of science and technology of the West was valuable and the East was to learn it and adopt it to eliminate poverty, squalor, and disease, but the East must not repeat the mistake of worshipping

material power as an end-in-itself. Physical sciences and the tremendous forces that they have unleashed must be harnessed to ethical and spiritual aims.

A religious outlook alone can save humanity but this outlook itself requires re-examination and reconstruction. Iqbal not only gave up writing inspiring songs about nationalism and patriotism but began to denounce these narrow urges of collective egoism that are idealized by patriotic songs.

He now decided to devote his philosophy and his art primarily to rejuvenating the dormant Muslim community. Territorial or racial nationalism is foreign to the spirit of Islam; it originated in the West. He was convinced now that it would be a tragically retrograde step if the Muslim world began to try to remedy its frustrations by replacing the global Islamic sentiment by aggressive nationalism of the Western type.

He conceived of Islam as a universal religion that envisaged all humanity as a unity. But the Islam of his time had become narrow, rigid and static. He conceived of life as evolutionary and dynamic. He came to the conclusion that a fossilized religious dogmatism could not generate an outlook that would lead to the self-realization of individuals and communities.

But it was not only the narrowness of religious dogmatism but also a mechanistic materialism that was responsible for a false view of reality. Iqbal became an iconoclast, bent upon demolishing all orthodoxies and idolatries. Religious dogmatism had debased religion, territorial or racial nationalism had split up humanity into hostile aggressive groups, and materialistic philosophy had made the spirit an epiphenomenal and evanescent manifestation of matter.

He continued developing an ideology the basic concepts and corollaries of which would purify and advance human life in every direction. It would be difficult to sum up his ideology in any one *ism*.

You could call him a spiritualist because he held the spirit to be the basic reality or you could call him an idealist. With greater definiteness one could hold him to be a creative evolutionist. As a staunch believer in a personal God, he was also a theist. Believing that all existence is constituted of egos or selves one could class him along with Rumi and Bergson as a monadologist.

A question is often raised about Iqbal's originality. Was he merely an eclectic bringing together various trends of thought without any successful attempt at harmonizing them into an intellectually consistent organic system or did he succeed in removing the fragmentariness of different systems of thought and belief, dissolving half-truths into the unity of one great truth?

Here we have a thinker who, though a theist, could heartily appreciate a good deal even in the keen though incoherent utterances of an atheistic thinker like Nietzsche, about whom he said that he had the heart of a believer but the head of an infidel. He believes with Nietzsche that present day humanity must be transcended in a further evolutionary leap; but Nietzsche's superman appeared to him to be only a super beast because Nietzsche had drawn his speculative conclusions from Darwinian biology.

The concept of the superman had been developed by Muslim mystical metaphysicians like ibn Arabi, Rumi, and Jili but from quite different starting points and on quite different lines. In the development of his ideology we can see that he is indebted to many a great thinker of the past and the present but never does he submit wholeheartedly to any one of them. He goes a part of the way with one or the other but then suddenly stops and parts company with him.

For instance, he would feel exhilarated by Nietzsche's notion of power as an intrinsic value and end-in-itself but he would soon say that Nietzsche had a poor conception of the infinite potentialities of the human self, which, having originated in the Cosmic Self, progressively assimilates divine attributes.

Nor could he agree with Nietzsche in his view of existence as eternal recurrence. If life were eternally creative, it would never repeat itself. Nietzsche's superman is ruthless and loveless, riding roughshod over all tender emotions in his advance towards greater biological fitness.

Among his contemporary thinkers Iqbal felt a much keener kinship with Bergson who successfully demolished mechanistic materialism and Darwinian biological philosophy along with intellectualism that attempted to subject creative life to rigid moulds of syllogistic logic. Bergson had repudiated not only mechanism but also teleology.

According to Bergson, life does not create according to any eternally preconceived plan existing in the Cosmic Mind. Iqbal supports Bergson in this view and thus runs counter to the orthodox Muslim conception of *taqdir* or destiny, which envisages an eternal pre-ordination of all happenings in the universe, even to the minutest details.²

According to the orthodox conception, serial time only unfolds what was eternally present in the mind of God. But after complete agreement with many parts of Bergsonian philosophy he parts company with him. Bergson conceived of reality as creative duration. For him, at the centre of existence there is nothing that he could call a self.

For Iqbal, life, though not teleological in the sense of being implemented according to a preconceived plan, is purposive activity. The concept of self too implies purposiveness. In his lecture on "The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience," he criticizes Bergson as follows: "Purposes colour not only our present states of consciousness, but also reveal its future direction. In fact, they constitute the forward push of our life, and thus in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be.

To be determined by an end is to be determined by what ought to be. Thus past and future both operate in the present state of consciousness and the future is not wholly undetermined as Bergson's analysis of our conscious experience shows. A state of attentive consciousness involves both memory and imagination as operating factors. On the analogy of our conscious experience, therefore, Reality is not a blind vital impulse wholly unilluminated by idea. Its nature is through and through teleological."³

Iqbal summarizes his criticism of Bergson's non-purposive *clan vital* in a few lines: "In Bergson's view the forward rush of the vital impulse in its creative freedom is unilluminated by the light of an immediate or remote purpose. It is not aiming at a result; it is wholly arbitrary, undirected, chaotic, and unforeseeable in its behaviour.

It is mainly here that Bergson's analysis of our conscious experience reveals its inadequacy. He regards conscious experience as the past moving along with and operating in the present. He ignores that the unity of consciousness has a forward aspect also. Life is only a series of acts of attention and an act of attention is inexplicable without reference to a purpose, conscious or unconscious.

Even our acts of perception are determined by our immediate interests and purposes. The Persian poet Urfi has given a beautiful expression to this aspect of human perception (by pointing out that): 'if your heart is not deceived by the mirage, be not proud of the sharpness of your understanding; for your freedom from this optical illusion is due to your imperfect thirst.'⁴

Iqbal conceived of God or the Cosmic Self primarily as Creator and of the egos or the selves that He has created or that have emerged out of His eternally creative activity as potentially creative at various levels of consciousness. Even the poorest potter or craftsman is a creator but if he is shaping his material only according to a set plan or pattern his creativeness is of the lowest order.

The best example of a creative genius is the musical composer or the poet. When a Beethoven or a Mozart composes a symphony he has no chart before him; the creative urge or emotion creates its own body as it proceeds and the musical genius views his own creation objectively after it has assumed a visible or audible shape.

Others who play that symphony try to create that emotion by reproduction; they are not creating but re-creating. Iqbal was an extremely gifted poetic genius; he knew not how and from which source a great poem emerged. The poet cannot himself know in advance the words that his inspiration brings forth. He often wonders at the unforeseen beauty of his own creation.

In the book of *Genesis* in the Bible it is said that God after having created saw and appreciated His own creation. Iqbal could not attribute to the Cosmic Creative Genius anything less than what he had experienced in the process of his own poetic creation. The embodiment of a genuine creative urge or inspiration must be unpredictable.

There are no eternal patterns or archetypal ideas such as we find in Plato's metaphysics. Plato's creator god, the Demiurge, is not a real creator; he materializes only the forms or ideas that were never created and were meant only to be imitated or partially assimilated. Iqbal could have considered Bergsonian ontology and epistemology a great and revolutionary advance on Plato's conception of a static Ultimate Reality.

Plato relegated all movement and change to the unholy alliance of Being with Non-Being. According to

him, the Real does not move or create; movement results only from the effort of Non-Being at imperfect participation in the reality of eternally static archetypes.

Aristotle too likens God to a beautiful statue to which the appreciating people are drawn; there is no movement or volition in the statue itself. The first great revolt in Western philosophy against this classical and Greek conception of Ultimate Reality was Hegel's dialectic wherein nothing remains itself and every thing or process is moved by implicit and internal contradiction into its opposite to achieve a synthesis with it, which synthesis also cannot rest in itself but becomes in its turn a thesis which begins to develop an antithesis already inherent in it.

But Hegel's Absolute too is eternally what it is and is not a free creator in the sense in which theism conceives a Creator God. Hegel's Absolute is not a creative, purposive self, engaged in actualizing its infinite potentialities. Hegel's dynamic dialectic also follows an eternal pattern that is being unfolded in time.

This conception of God and the universe does not appeal to Iqbal. He does not follow either Plato or Hegel or Bergson. As William James, another great philosopher of creative life, said, the universe in which we live is not a block universe; reality is itself in the making and the truth about reality too must constantly conform to new manifestations of the reality that follows no logic.

Iqbal believed that the Quran supported him in this dynamic view of reality "To my mind," said he, "nothing is more alien to the Quranic outlook than the idea that the universe is the temporal working out of a pre-conceived plan.... The universe, according to the Quran, is liable to increase. It is a growing universe and not an already completed product which left the hand of its maker ages ago, and is now lying stretched in space as a dead mass of matter to which time does nothing, and consequently is nothing."⁵

If Iqbal had produced only philosophical poetry, it would have been a very difficult task to collect his scattered thoughts and weave them into a self-consistent philosophy. Fortunately, he undertook to perform that task himself in his lectures on the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. In these lectures he has done intensely concentrated thinking. These lectures are themselves a summary, and the attempt to summarize them further would leave out much that is essential for an intelligible exposition. But, however inadequately, the attempt has to be made.

His first lecture deals with knowledge and religious experience. Iqbal is a poet as well as a philosopher, but temperamentally he is a religious man for whom religion is a vital experience as well as an intellectually establishable reality.

He holds that in human life religion is more central and vital than philosophy because, in the words of a great modern philosopher, Whitehead, whom Iqbal has quoted more than once in his support, religion is a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended.

But man being a rational creature cannot be satisfied with faith unless he finds reason also to be in agreement with it. In view of its function religion is in greater need of a rational foundation than even the dogmas of science. Reconciliation of the oppositions of experience is an inescapable necessity for a man who is religious as well as rational.

Thought and intuition (or faith) need each other for mutual rejuvenation. Bergson, a great protagonist of intuition as more basic than intellect, has, nevertheless, expressed the view that intuition also is a higher kind of intellect.

The Greeks deified the logical intellect, despising the study of reason in nature. On the other hand, religions before Islam rooted themselves in faith not demanding its conformity with the logical intellect or reason in nature. Islam preached the basic conformity of reason and revelation.

Reason as informing the phenomena of physical nature as well as the mind of man has been presented by the Quran to be in complete agreement with faith in God. The Quran uses the same word for revelation granted to saints and prophets and the instincts of animals whose unconscious rationality appears to be miraculous; it sees in the humble bee a recipient of divine revelation and constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of the winds, the alternation of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens, and the planets swimming through infinite space.

Why should the intuitions of a prophet and a saint be less related to reality than the instincts of lower animals? Iqbal sees no unbridgeable gulf between intellectual knowledge and religious experience. Plato had despised sense–experience as a source of knowledge; the modern irrationalist has looked down upon the intellect as an instrument for the knowledge of reality.

Iqbal's view is integrative, considering sense perception, intellect, and intuition to be different modes of apprehension of the same reality. His outlook is unmistakably Quranic, not only appealing to reason in support of revelation and faith but also regarding hearing and sight as the most valuable divine gifts and declaring them to be accountable to God.

Iqbal accuses the early Muslim scholastics of having missed the spirit of the Quran under the spell of Greek speculation. Ghazali revolted against Greek intellectualism and moved to mystic experience as the sole avenue for the knowledge of Ultimate Reality. In spite of his deep appreciation of Ghazali, Iqbal disagrees with him about the relation of thought and intuition and says that Ghazali “failed to see that thought and intuition are organically related and that thought must necessarily simulate finitude and inconclusiveness because of its alliance with serial time.”⁶

Kant, who did splendid work in analysing the logical and scientific intellect establishing its limitations, could not rest in its inadequacies and was compelled to postulate reason as standing above the categories of understanding, pointing towards ultra logical realities like God and free will.

Long before Kant, Rumi had reached a similar conclusion in repudiating the claims of the logical intellect

and spatio-temporal categories to be the sole determinants of reality. What Kant termed the intellect, Rumi called “particular reason” which he contrasted with universal reason, which latter is one with the intuition of total reality.

Iqbal’s view coincides entirely with Rumi’s. He recognizes the inadequacy of the logical understanding; it finds a multiplicity of mutually exclusive particulars with no prospect of their ultimate reduction to a unity and this makes him sceptical about the conclusiveness of thought. He is fully aware of the fact that the logical understanding is incapable of seeing this multiplicity as a coherent universe.

The generalizations of inductive logic are fictitious unities that do not affect the reality of concrete things. But human reason is not confined merely to discursive thinking and is not wholly exhausted by its processes of induction and deduction. “In its deeper movement thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are only moments.”

Thought is potentially infinite and contains infinitude as the seed carries within itself the organic unity of the tree as a present fact. Thinking would not point towards its own limitations and inadequacies if it were not haunted by infinity, with which it implicitly compares every finite percept and concept. “It is the presence of the total infinite in the movement of knowledge that makes finite thinking possible.”

Iqbal says that “both Kant and Ghazali failed to see that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude.”⁷ Many creeds and philosophies created a cleavage between the ideal and the real and could not see the bridge that unites the two. The ideal and the real are as much interpenetrating as the finite and the infinite.

“It is the mysterious touch of the ideal that animates and sustains the real.... The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with the real, which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life in painful oppositions, but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and to illuminate its whole being.”⁸

Iqbal has an organic view of life and existence in which heaven embraces earth, intuition and faith are reconciled with universal reason, science ceases to be antagonistic to religion, and infinity informs and animates finitude. His view of existence is based on a conception of the unity and continuity of all aspects of Being with no breaks, gulfs, or gaps.

He tries to point to the organic unity of all aspects of Being which creeds, philosophies, and sciences have sundered by analytic thinking. One can sum up his whole philosophy as a philosophy of universal integration. The Ultimate Reality reveals its symbols both within and without. The empirical, no less than the rational attitude, is an indispensable stage in the spiritual life of humanity.

Iqbal gets solid support from the Quranic verses for his philosophy of integration wherein senses, reasons, and intuition springing from what the Quran calls *fuad* or the heart, all offer valid and legitimate approaches to the Ultimate Reality which, being a self-consistent unity underlying all diversity, relates

organically the findings of all the three sources of knowledge.

“God hath made everything which He hath created most good; and began the creation of man with clay; then ordained his progeny from germs of life, from sorry water; then shaped him (in due proportion), and breathed of His spirit unto him, gave you hearing and seeing and *heart*: what little thanks do ye return?’ (32:6–8).”⁹

Quoting Rumi, Iqbal says the “heart” is a kind of intuition or insight that feeds on the rays of a super-sensuous sun, and brings us into contact with aspects of reality other than those open to sense-perception or ratiocination. Primitive gropings of religious consciousness are as little indicative of the unreality of religions consciousness in its higher and purer forms as primitive views about the phenomena of physical nature are in proving the invalidity of all scientific thought.

Iqbal’s conception of God is a corollary of his view of the nature of the Ultimate Reality because he identifies God with the Ultimate Reality. But he is a theist and not a monist of any of the different types or a pantheist. It is not only God who is real but the egos created by God are also real and they share both the essence and the creative urge of the Cosmic Creator.

God is the Perfect Ego, the Perfect Self, or the Perfect Individual; for all created egos, individuality is an aim to be progressively realized. He agrees with Bergson that individuality is a matter of degrees and is not fully realized even in the case of an apparently closed-off unity as that of the human self.

The tendency to individuate is present everywhere in the organized world but it is always opposed by the tendency towards reproduction by which detached parts of the organism begin to live separately and independently. Says Bergson, “In this way individuality harbours its own enemy at home.”

Iqbal derives his conception of God from the Quran wherein God is immanent as well as transcendent, personal as well as impersonal. There are verses in the Quran which apparently lend support to a pantheistic view of reality; pantheistic Sufism has raised a magnificent superstructure on these foundations. For instance, it is said, “He is the beginning and He is the end, He is without and He is within.”¹⁰

In the famous *Sarah al-Nur* it is said that “God is the light of the heavens and the earth.”¹¹ This simile is developed further and it is said that this light emanates from a lamp in a niche and the lamp is encased in a glass as if it were a star that is selfluminous. The lamp is fed from the oil of a tree that is neither in the East nor in the West.

Iqbal says that the Quranic simile is meant to convey the idea that God is a spiritual reality which is not spatial and yet it is not a vague, undetermined infinite suffused in all existence as a selfless impersonal entity. The enclosed lamp in a niche is meant to point to God as an individual self.

God, the Ultimate Ego, is infinite but His infinitude is not temporal or spatial but consists in the infinite

inner possibilities of His creative activity, of which the universe, as known to us, is only a partial expression. God's infinity is intensive and not extensive; it involves an infinite series but is not that series.

Iqbal does not conceive of the world to have been created at a point of time, lying in infinite space outside the being of God as a manufactured article. It is in the nature of God to be eternally creative; the universe does not confront God as His "other". Space, time, and matter are interpretations which thought puts on the free creative activity of God.

The relation of God to His creation, if conceived under these categories, would lead to antinomies compelling the mind to accept both affirmations and denials, and be content with contradictions in the matter of faith about God and His relation to the creation, as was forcibly pointed out by Kant. If Iqbal refuses to accept the naive orthodox theistic view of creation in time, he, at the same time, cannot accept that the world of matter is co-eternal with God, operated upon by Him, as it were, from a distance.

With respect to God's knowledge, Iqbal says that human thought is discursive but knowledge in the sense of discursive knowledge, however infinite, cannot be predicated of God because His knowledge is also creative of the objects that He knows. Iqbal does not conceive of God's knowledge as omniscience in the sense of an immediate awareness of the entire sweep of history, past, present and future, regarded as an order of specific events in an eternal ever-present "now".

It was thus that Jalal al-Din Dawwani, Iraqi, and Josiah Royce conceived God's knowledge. Iqbal does not agree with them in this view. To him it appears that it suggests a closed universe, a fixed futurity, a predetermined, unalterable order of specific events, which, like a superior fate, has once and for all determined the direction of God's creative activity. Iqbal is not a believer in the correspondence theory of knowledge for which truth is nothing but an exact mirroring of reality.

A thinker for whom the Ultimate Reality, which is phenomenal as well as noumenal, is a Creative Self, perpetually creating and objectifying ever-new possibilities, could not conceive of God, the Perfect Ego, as omniscient, as one that knows in details not only the past and the present but also the not-yet-happened future events. Such a static view of reality would nullify God's creative activity that would no longer be conceived of as free but as eternally determined.

God's knowledge is not a sort of mirror passively reflecting the details of an already finished structure of things that the finite consciousness reflects in fragments only. God's foreknowledge as conceived in orthodox theology could be conceded only by sacrificing His freedom.

We may repeat here that Iqbal, in thinking of God as an ego or self, has conceived of Him on the analogy of a creative human self, creative either in the realm of intellect or in that of aesthetics. He says that a fruitful idea pregnant with great wealth of its possible applications emerges in consciousness all at once but the intellectual working out of its numerous bearings is a process in time.

Sometimes it takes many generations before the possibilities that were inherent in it from the very beginning actualize themselves completely. The same is the case with poetry or musical composition; the pattern of verses or tones implicit in the creative genius becomes explicit by unfolding itself. For Iqbal God is an infinitely creative genius creating novelties at every moment.

The problem of free will in man offers no great difficulties to Iqbal. The difficulties are created by mathematically determined, mechanistic determinism that Iqbal repudiates, seeking support from the view of matter and material causation presented by philosophers of science like Einstein and Eddington.

Determinism has been advocated not only by mechanistic materialists but also by the theistic theologians. Further, the modern age has produced theories of physiological and psychological determinism. Theistic theology has not been able to reconcile God's infinite freedom and foreknowledge with human freedom. Iqbal solves the problem by denying foreknowledge to God and by making God grant freedom to human egos who are to share His creative activity.

He admits that the emergence of egos endowed with the power of spontaneous and hence unforeseeable action is in a sense a limitation of the freedom of the all-inclusive Ego, but this limitation is not externally imposed. It is born of God's own creative freedom whereby He has chosen finite egos to be participators in His life, power, and freedom.

Iqbal considers the prevalent idea of God's absolute omnipotence to be a misconception. According to him, all activity, creational or otherwise, is a kind of limitation without which it is impossible to conceive of God as a concrete operative Ego. Omnipotence, abstractly conceived, is a blind capricious power without limits. Omnipotence so conceived would make it impossible to think of God as possessing the attributes of reason, love, or justice.

As a theist, Iqbal has also to deal with the problem of evil. He realizes that if the rationally directed divine will is good, a serious problem arises, unless we close our eyes to the presence of physical and moral evil. We have before our eyes the tragic spectacle of universal suffering and wrongdoing. Pain is an inevitable concomitant not only of wrong actions but even of attempts to do what is right.

The course of evolution has involved endless ruthlessness. Iqbal is not an optimist of the type that says "whatever is, is right" and that from a cosmic viewpoint all is well with the world. Nor is he a pessimist of the Schopenhaurian type who, like many Indian philosophers, views life to be essentially an evil that must be ended because it cannot be mended.

God does not create evil; in the words of the Quran, "He holds all goodness in His hand." Existence or life could not be possible if it did not meet resistance, but the goodness of God lies in the fact that existence contains forces that can overcome evil. No evil is absolute; the alchemy of life is capable of converting evil into good. If the character of the ego can develop only by struggle against thwarting forces, the presence of resistance to the realization of goodness cannot be deplored.

Iqbal agrees with Fichte that life creates resistances in the interest of its own development. Whoever asks why there is evil in life wrongly imagines that there could have been life without pain and evil, resistance and frustration. If moral and spiritual development is good, how could anyone achieve it if there were no internal or external opposition to its realization?

Those who want life without its hurdles are, according to a simile used by Kant, like birds that would resent the resistance of the air as if they could fly in a vacuum. Flight is the result of the effort of the wings to overcome the resistance of the air. Iqbal is neither an optimist nor a pessimist of any extreme type; he is a meliorist.

It may be asked if Iqbal believes in an eventual victory of good over evil at any point of time in the future course of evolution. Consistent with his view of life as a perpetually creative activity his vision of life after death, even for the blessed, is not a paradise where all unfulfilled desires are eternally fulfilled.

For him the reward of goodness is not an epicurean paradise where all motivation for further development ceases in a bliss of eternal satisfaction. The reward of life is a higher life with higher actualities and deeper potentialities, and yet, according to his conception of life, the ego must meet resistance at every level and, therefore, pain must remain an eternal element of life.

Iqbal has produced very intriguing and exhilarating poems in praise of Satan, the personification of evil and resistance. In a dialogue between Satan and the archangel Gabriel, he seems to be the advocate of the former. In a verse he exhorts lovers of life not to aspire for life on any plane of existence where Satan, the principle of resistance, does not exist.

Life cannot rest in any of its achievements; every goal is the starting point of a new venture. He would have greatly appreciated the sentiment of Lessing which the latter expressed by saying that if God offered him truth in one hand, and search for truth in the other, he would accept the eternal search, saying, "O Lord, keep the truth for Thyself because only Thou canst have the truth and live; as for myself, only seeking can keep me alive."

Iqbal's paradise is neither the one from which Adam and Eve were driven out for an act of disobedience nor the vision of unfulfilled earthly desires. He gives his own interpretation of the legend of the Fall of Man that he believes to be the true meaning of the Quranic version of this legend. He says, "The Quranic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience.

The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being."¹² There was a paradise that humanity left behind on its course of evolution and there is a paradise that awaits it which will unfold further possibilities in other dimensions of being, but at every stage it will be aspiration more than fulfilment; life is a perpetual revelation of the infinite

possibilities of existence. Iqbal has no desire to come to a state of rest by merging the self in a static Absolute, because for him the static Absolute does not exist.

Summing Up

There is no doubt that Iqbal is the most versatile genius that the modern Muslim world has produced. He is a well-cut diamond whose many facets reflect rays of truth from all directions. It will be difficult to find many who are his equals as poets in any language of the East or the West. He did not build any great system of philosophy like Kant or Hegel but his philosophic thinking was extensive as well as intensive.

He felt his kinship with some great geniuses of the past and the present. In one of his poems he compared himself with Goethe and deplored that he himself was sprung from an almost defunct culture, a solitary plant growing, as it were, by fluke from a dead earth, while Goethe was born in a nation pulsating with the throbs of a new life.

As his inner life was enriched by increasing knowledge and deepening intuition he began to feel, with ample justification, his kinship with Rumi, the creative evolutionist mystic poet of the seventh/thirteenth century. As Rumi's religious consciousness was paralleled with intellectual consciousness so was the case with Iqbal; both preached the gospel of a rich integrated life embracing matter, life, mind, and spirit, a life in which not only the individual and social selves are harmonized but in which the developing ego also makes an attempt to attune its finitude with the Cosmic Infinite Spirit.

For both of them the *elan vital* is essentially the urge of love that spreads in concentric circles to that Ultimate Reality which is the centre as well as the circumference of all existence. Rumi took up the Hellenistic instruments of intellectualism and wielded them to support an outlook that transcended all Hellenism.

Iqbal did the same with the rich heritage of ancient and modern philosophy. Many modern thinkers have been moving in the same direction, so we often find him in company with Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, William James, Whitehead, and Eddington; but these tributary streams seem to have converged in his genius in a deep and broad river.

Malak al-Shuara Bahar, the great poet-laureate of modern Iran, said of Iqbal's poetry that it was the fruit of eight centuries of the development of Persian poetry and cultural heritage. During the last decade of his life Iqbal refused to be classed among the poets. He felt that he was using poetry only as a medium and a vehicle for a message.

He had become a teacher, a preacher, a critic of life, and a reformer with a vision of a new renaissance. This message was addressed directly to the Muslim nation, but what he conveyed was a matter of universal import. The broad universal religious outlook that he presented in his poetry as well as philosophical writing was meant for the whole of humanity. He made an attempt to revive the entire

Muslim world by a liberal and dynamic view of Islam.

He deplored the geographical and racial divisions of humanity and attacked bitterly the jingoistic nationalism that had resulted in the suicide of a whole civilization. He was an enemy of Western economic and political imperialism and colonialism and a bitter critic of Western materialism and naturalism, which, overwhelmed by the achievement of physical science, has lost faith in the reality of the spirit.

He was equally critical of the religiosity of the East which has become rigid and empty and is worshipping the dead past. He wanted to give an ethical and spiritual basis to politics and economics that, left to themselves, become destructive forces. He preached the gospel of self-realization, but his concept of the self was no mystically transcendent concept.

His ideal man was a man of intuition as well as of intellect, wedding reason to revelation. If he had written philosophy like a professional philosopher only, as he was impelled to do in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he could not have stirred the souls of his readers to the extent that he has done by using poetry as his medium.

His critics are still disputing whether he was primarily a poet or a philosopher, a mystic, a preacher, or a reformer. But the fact is that he was an uncommon synthesis of all these. He was no mere eclectic. All the various trends were organically related in his rich personality; they did not lie in his mind unrelated in unharmonized juxtaposition. He sang of cosmic creative love that transcends and resolves the contradictions of natural and personal life. He was a genius of life and love and recognized no boundaries and considered no oppositions to be final. His message was a rich integrated life constantly actualizing its immense potentialities.

Most of Iqbal's thoughts and sentiments are expressed within the framework of Islam, and a substantial portion of his message is directly addressed to the Muslims, to whose regeneration and awakening he had dedicated his life. But there is nothing sectarian or parochial in his broad and liberal ideology. As Plato and Socrates, though dealing primarily with the intellectual, moral, and social problems of Athenian and Greek life, spread messages of universal import, so does Iqbal.

His *Javid Nameh*, in which in the realm beyond he meets the glorious and the inglorious souls of the departed who had influenced humanity for good or for evil, is certainly richer than Dante's *Divine Comedy* which reflects only medieval thoughts, beliefs, and prejudices. His criterion of judgment and criticism remains constant whether he is discussing metaphysics or religion, science or art, economics or politics.

He stands for the dignity of life and its perpetual creativeness and richness. Whatever strengthens and advances life in its various aspects is appreciated and whatever impoverishes or negates it is to be rejected. Throughout his thought and poetry there runs a mystic strain, but his mysticism is not quietistic and otherworldly.

Like the ethical monism of Fichte, his mysticism is dynamic. Long before Bergson came to this conclusion Iqbal had identified the creative urge of life with love, which is a matter of intuition and ruling passion with saints and prophets. He was a great artist, yet he did not believe in art for art's sake, nor did he believe in knowledge for the sake of knowledge like the great Greek philosophers for whom the contemplation of eternally static ideas was the acme of wellbeing, making God Himself a Self-thinking Thought.

His basic conception is life, not thought; thought is only one of the many useful instruments of life, and as such must never be segregated from the life it is meant to serve and advance. There is more healthy dynamism in his thought and poetry than could be found in any poet of the past or the present. Whenever he talks of self-abnegation it is always in the interest of a richer self-realization. His deepest thoughts and intuitions are of immortal significance; he belongs to all times and to the entire humanity, because he imbibed the best that humanity could offer and pointed to goals towards which all creation moves.

Below is given a free rendering in English of some of the poems of Iqbal.

Reason and Heart: A Dialogue

“Once Reason made this claim before the Heart: ‘I am a guide for those who have lost their way. Though working on this lowly earth, all heavens do I survey. Look, how far-reaching is my vision. Guidance is my mission like that of *Khidr* (the Prophet Elias), the immortal sage. I write a commentary on the Book of Life, and the glory of Love do I manifest. Thou art only a drop of blood, but priceless diamonds envy my effulgence.’

“The Heart replied, ‘Thy claim I don’t contest but look more closely into my nature too. Thou probest by thought the mystery of existence, but I *see* directly what thou only *knowest*; is not seeing more revealing than mere knowing? In the realm of appearances dost thou roam, but I contact the reality behind. Thou art only a seeker of God, but I reveal Him. Mine is knowledge *of* reality, thine is only knowledge *about* it. Thy knowledge ends only in restlessness; for this malaise I am the sovereign cure. If thou lightest the hall of truth, I am the illumination of Eternal Beauty. Thou beatest thy wings like a captive bird against the cage of space and time, but my flight in eternity is free and unrestrained. I am the Exalted Throne of the Glorious Lord, placed above all creation.’”¹³

The Odyssey of Man

“Forgetting my eternal covenant with my Lord I wandered away from Him. The heady wine of consciousness made me restless even in the Garden of Eden and drove me away from that abode of bliss. Heaven-surveying thought urged me to pry into the secret of existence. My lore of change afforded me no rest in any state. I filled the temples with idols of gods of my own creation, but then in disgust ousted them from the Kabah, the place of worship of the Only God.

Desirous of conversing with Him, face to face, I ascended Mount Sinai; and the hand illumined with light divine I hid in my sleeve. My fellow beings nailed me on the cross; so leaving the ungrateful world I went to heaven again. Coming down I hid myself for years in the cave of Hira till I was commissioned to deliver a final message to mankind. Sometimes a song celestial did I chant in the land of Hind and I also resorted to wisdom-loving Greece. When Hind paid no heed to my message I was welcomed in China and Japan.

Contrary to the spirit of all true religions, I also ventured to construct a universe with mindless atoms. I take the blame of starting a ruthless strife between reason and faith reddening the earth with the blood of humanity. I spent many sleepless nights as a stargazer to wrest from the shining orbs the secret of existence.

The sword of the Church militant could not make one desist from teaching that the earth moves round the sun. My telescopic reason discerned the Law of Universal Gravitation. I captured rays of light and waves of magnetism making impetuous lightning an obedient slave; I converted the earth into a paradise by controlling the powers of nature. But alas! Though I had subdued the world of nature, nothing could reveal the meaning of existence to me.

“Finally returning into myself and turning my eyes inward I found Him there in the sanctuary of my own heart, Him who is the Source and Meaning of all that exists.”[14](#)

The Nature of Life

“The motionless bank of the river said, ‘In my long existence I have contemplated much to know what I am, but the meaning of my existence has not been revealed to me.’ Hearing this the fast-moving and tumbling wave replied, ‘The secret of life and the essence of it is movement; I exist so long as I move; when I cease to move I shall cease to be.’”[15](#)

“The love that paints with charming colours the leaves of the tulip creates a painful turmoil in my heart; even in the veins of this pale earth, the red life-blood of love doth flow.”[16](#)

“Man is an instrument for the melodies of love; God created the world and man improves on it. Is not man, then, a partner in creation?”[17](#)

“If the heart too had been only clever like reason, no spark would have been kindled in our clay; and in the tavern of life deadly silence would have reigned if love had not been there with its turmoil.”[18](#)

“It is the fire of pathos that lights my heart; the tears of blood in the eyes make their sight keen to survey existence; he who calls Love madness, remains estranged from the secret of life.”[19](#)

“In the garden, breezes in spring are the gifts of love; and in the fields, love brings up buds like stars. The rays of love’s light penetrate the deep sea and make the fish see their way in the dark.”[20](#)

The Birth of Man

“Love exclaimed, ‘Lo! The lover is there who will welcome my painful shafts,’ and a tremor passed through Beauty that a great appreciator is born. In the closed sanctuary of the mysteries of being, the warning went round that eternal secrets are going to be unveiled. Nature got perturbed that the dust of an unfree world has brought forth a being who shall freely make and break himself, a self-knowing and self-determining being. The unconscious urge that slept in the lap of life has opened its eyes thereby heading to a new vista of existence. Life said, ‘Long was I immured in a closed dome of clay, restless to venture out; but now I see the door that offers a chance to escape.’”²¹

“Our body is an old vessel of clay but is brimful of the wine of life; life pulsates secretly even in what seems to be death. When, in autumn, leaves from the branches fall, it is like the dropping of toys from the grip of infant hands loosened by sweet and restful sleep.”²²

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- [1.](#) Khalifah Abdul Hakim states that Iqbal's father personally related this dream to him.
- [2.](#) The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1958, p. 49.
- [3.](#) Ibid., p. 53.
- [4.](#) Ibid., pp. 52–53.
- [5.](#) Ibid., p. 55.
- [6.](#) Ibid., pp. 5–6.
- [7.](#) Ibid., pp. 6–7.
- [8.](#) Ibid., p. 9.
- [9.](#) Ibid., p. 15.
- [10.](#) Quran (57:3).
- [11.](#) Ibid., (24:35).
- [12.](#) Iqbal, op. cit., p. 35.
- [13.](#) Bang-i Dara, Lahore, 1949, p. 28.
- [14.](#) Ibid., p. 80.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 150.
- [16.](#) Ibid., p. 13.
- [17.](#) Ibid., p. 16.
- [18.](#) Ibid., p. 20.
- [19.](#) Ibid., p. 12.
- [20.](#) Ibid.
- [21.](#) Ibid., p. 97.
- [22.](#) Ibid., p. 165.

Chapter 83: Renaissance in Indonesia

A: Introductory

The three centuries during which it was ruled by the Portuguese, the Spaniards, and the Dutch form the dark age of Indonesia's history. All the energies of the Indonesian leaders were concentrated during these years on the problems of political emancipation on one side and social and religious reform on the other. This account of the modern renaissance in Indonesia is, therefore, an account of the political renaissance of that country and of the modernist movements, which indirectly influenced the course of that long drawn and bitter struggle.

The memories of that conflict and the experience gained during this period influenced the present generation in its religious and cultural outlook and its approach to social and economic problems. As religion played an important part in the movement for political emancipation, reference will also be made here and there to religious reforms.

At present ninety per cent of the population of Indonesia professes the religion of Islam but it took several centuries for Islam to become the main religion in that country. As it has been shown in an earlier chapter, the credit for the spread and popularization of Islam in Indonesia goes to the Sufis of various orders.¹

The Sufi interpretation of Islam very well suited the cultural background of the Indonesians in whose life and thought the deep influences of Hinduism and Buddhism, which had at one time been the principal spiritual forces in Indonesian society, were deeply embedded.

The commercial intercourse between Indonesia and other Islamic countries, particularly India, Arabia, and Egypt, led to a closer cultural collaboration with the Muslims in other parts of the world. Many Indonesians went to holy places for the annual pilgrimage and some of them stayed there to complete their studies or to settle down there permanently.

It was these Indonesians who imbibed deeply the tenets of Islamic religion and later on tried to combat the un-Islamic practices that had crept into Islam in their home country. This led to a purist movement in the country insisting on a closer conformity with Islam. "Mecca," says Snouck Hurgronje, "has been well said to have more influence on the religious life of these islands than on Turkey, India, or Bukhara."²

How deeply attached to their old customs and traditions even the modern educated Indonesians are is well illustrated by the statement of a prominent Indonesian lady who, while addressing the members of the British Women Association, remarked "that the Indonesians were indeed proud of their old customs and traditions and wished to preserve them in spite of their Islamic religion adopted about seven centuries ago."³

The Indonesian national movement is of recent origin. Before the beginning of the fourteenth/twentieth century, there had been isolated and sporadic outbursts of armed resistance to the rapacious exploitation of the Indonesians by the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British, such as those of Dipa Nagara, in the province of Djocjkarta,⁴ Tenku Umar,⁵ Imam Bondjol,⁶ etc.

The first organized political movement started in the first decade of this century. There were many factors responsible for the development of Indonesian nationalism and political consciousness which materially affected the course of the Indonesians' struggle as also the political structure of Indonesia after it had been won.

Of the modern Islamic reform movements in other countries that of Muhammad Abduh in Egypt had a very deep influence on Indonesian thought and way of life. The Dutch tried to prevent the inflow of books and newspapers published in Egypt and other Arab countries, as they were afraid of the "dangerous pan-Islamic ideas" which these writings contained.

In spite of their vigilance the Egyptian periodicals *al-Manar*, *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*, *al-Muyyad*, *al-Siyasah*, *al-Liwa*, and *al-Adl* were smuggled into Indonesia and were widely read. Scholars like Imam

Bondjol, H. Jalal al-Din Tayyib, Mukhtar Lutfi, H. H. Amarullah brought back with them modern Islamic ideas current in Islamic lands and particularly those introduced by Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din Afghani in Cairo. Indian modernist writings were equally welcome and widely read.⁷

The main aim of the Indonesian Muslims who were caught up in the current of modern reformist movements in Islamic countries was to purify Indonesian Muslim society from the indigenous unorthodox practices. They had to combat at the same time the Dutch educated intelligentsia who were gradually becoming indifferent towards religion, and regarded Islam “as a religious and cultural anachronism and an obstacle to progress.”

The Christian missionary activities and the large number of missionary schools subsidized by the Dutch posed another difficult problem for the Indonesian religious and educational reformers. “Every new period in the history of civilization obliges a religious community to undertake a general revision of the contents of its treasury,” remarks Snouck Hurgronje, “and the situation in Indonesia called for the establishment of religious, social, and political organizations to rehabilitate Islam and combat the contaminating influences of Western impact.”

The “*pesantren*” or *madrasah* which followed the traditional Muslim pattern of education played a very important role in building up the Islamic character of the Indonesian Muslims, while the Western system of education which touched only the upper stratum of Indonesian society did much to broaden their outlook, rationalize their thought, and prepare them morally and intellectually to fight for the liberation of their country from centuries of colonial exploitation.

One of the most active and popular organizations for socio-religious reform was Muhammadiyah founded by Kiaja Haji Ahmad Dachlan in November 1912 at Jogjakarta, which met with a relatively wide response. It rapidly grew in popularity as is shown by the large number of its branches in various parts of the country.

The objectives of the organization were similar to those of the Salafiyyah in Egypt – the purification of Islam as practised in Indonesia of the customs, rituals, and beliefs which were derived from the Hindu and Buddhist religions and also from the debased Sufi doctrines; a rationalized interpretation of orthodox Islamic doctrines; the reformation of Muslim educational system; and the defence of Islam against external attacks.

This movement aiming at a rationalist interpretation of orthodox Islamic doctrine built up a network of schools. The organization later included a wide range of social services; free clinics, relief for the poor, orphanages, and publication of the Quran. The organization, as a matter of policy, did not take active part in the political problems with which the Indonesians were faced.

In practice, however, “the progressive Muslim social concepts which it sought to advance could not be divested of the political consciousness of its members and of the pupils taught in its many schools. It was a still, but deep, tributary of the stream of political nationalism and quietly but substantially

nourished and strengthened that stream.”⁸

B: National Movement in Indonesia

The degree of religious homogeneity in Indonesia that Islam had brought about was an important factor in the growth of national movement. Islam served both as a symbol of social unity and as an ingroup solidarity against imperialistic foreign aggressors in a country where, in spite of diversity of race, language, and religion, the national feeling was strong.

While the Dutch Government and the Christian organizations in Holland gave moral and material assistance to the Christian missions established in Indonesia, the Government did not allow the purely Muslim societies or organizations to propagate freely the principles of Islam. Besides the Muslims, there are in Indonesia about two million Chinese Buddhists, two million Christians, one million Hindus especially in the Island of Bali, and a large number of animists.

According to Wertheim, “it was possible to sustain the paradox that the extension of Islam in Indonesian Archipelago was due to the Westerners. The arrival of Portuguese power in the area made the princes embrace Islamic faith as a political move to counter Christian penetration.”⁹

Islamic modernist movements, especially in Cairo, as already mentioned, found ready response in Indonesia. In 1329/1911 the Indonesians studying in the international Islamic *milieu* of Mecca and Cairo came back saturated with pan-Islamic ideas that made them ill-disposed towards the European administrative system and the European way of life.

The Dutch Government, too late in the day, decided to give the Indonesians the benefit of Western education and greater association with the government of the country in the hope of neutralizing the influence of Islamic revivalist movements. By giving the Indonesian population, at least its elite, a Western education, it was hoped, the new generation would turn away from Islam towards cultural association with the Dutch. It was hoped that “the pan-Islamic idea which has not yet taken a great hold on the native aristocracy of Java and the other islands will lose all the chance of existence within this *milieu* when those who compose it have become the free associates of our civilization.”¹⁰

The struggle of the Philipinos, the success of Kemal Ataturk in Turkey against Western military powers, the activity of the Congress party in India, the rising tide of anti-Western Chinese nationalism represented by Dr. Sun Yet Sen, the industrialization of Japan and that country’s victory over Russia in 1323/1905, all combined to quicken the rising tide of national movement in Indonesia.

Indonesian students studying in the Netherlands in particular and in Europe in general were strongly impressed by Dutch political ideas of civil liberties and the democratic flavour of the government there. The writings of Bukharin, Karl Marx, Hegel, and Stalin influenced the handful of Indonesian students studying in continental Europe. The American Revolution of 1192/1778, the French Revolution of

1204/1789, and the Russian Revolution of 1336/1917 had a profound effect on the Indonesian people and shook them out of their apathy and complacency.

C: Effect of the First World War on Indonesia

The First World War considerably strengthened national consciousness in Indonesia. Numerous national organizations and parties throughout the country took a leading part in giving shape to their latent aspirations and canalizing the pent-up discontent in a nation-wide struggle for freedom.

The organizations included the Budi Utomo (1326/1908), Minahasa Association (1330/1912), Nena Muria Organization (1331/1913), Muhammadiyah Movement (1337/1918), National Indies Party (1338/1919), Indonesian Social Democratic Association or N.I.V.B. (1335/1916), Sumatra Association (1337/1918), Society of Students (1338/1919), the Christian Ethical Party of Miai (1341/1922), and the Nationalist Party of Indonesia (1346/1927).

The Jambi revolution of 1345/1926, the Padang Congress of 1341/1922, the Pan-Islamic Congress of 1344/1925 at Bandung, the Budi Utomo Congress of 30th July 1924, and the Indonesian Students' Association in the Netherlands, all struggled for national emancipation. Freedom from economic stranglehold of the colonial government was the common objective of most of these organizations.

The war led to the loosening of the ties that had formerly bound Indonesia to Europe and consequently Indonesia formed mercantile connections with other countries round the Pacific Ocean.

Even before and during the war, demand for political freedom of Indonesia was openly voiced by the Indonesian leader, Tjokroaminoto, at the first National Congress of 1335/1916. The war compelled the Dutch Government to change its policy towards Indonesia. In 1335/1916, the Netherlands Parliament passed a bill for the institution of the Volksraad at Jakarta.

In May 1918, van L. Stirum remarked, "...the road has been taken, never to be abandoned, toward the goal of responsible government in Indonesia itself which, in concert with the Volksraad, shall have the right to take final decisions in all matters which are not of general imperial (State) concern. In proper time and degree, so far as is compatible with due appreciation of the consequences of each new step, we must proceed directly toward this end."

The National Indonesian Party and the Budi Utomo demanded the convocation of a provisional parliament to frame a new democratic constitution. For this purpose, the Revision Commission was appointed by the Government on 17th December 1918. In June 1920, the Commission submitted its report to the Government and the following main proposals were made to be included in the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands:

(1) Recognition of Indonesia as an independent part of the kingdom, the centre of gravity of the government being shifted to Indonesia itself.

(2) Elevation of the Volksraad to the status of a general co-legislative representative body to be constituted by election.

In the military field, the World War had increased the importance of the defence problem in Indonesia. Compulsory military service was introduced in Indonesia in 1339/1920, but, by the regulations of 1341-42/1922-23, it was imposed only upon Europeans and not upon natives or foreign Orientals. As a result of the war, an energetic propaganda for an Indonesian army was carried on by an Indonesian Committee of Defence.

Economically, the war had far-reaching consequences in the economic life of the country. In Indonesia the price of foodstuffs rose and this made the Government intervene to prevent the rising spiral of prices.

D: Factors Promoting National Sentiments

The adoption of Malay as the national language was another important factor in the development of national movement. The extensive use of the Indonesian language as the medium of expression throughout Indonesia was made progressively. Kia Hadjar Dewantoro, the founder of Taman Siswa, introduced it first in his school curriculum.

In 1347/1928, the Indonesian youth at their Congress swore to have one country, Indonesia; one nation, the Indonesian; and one national language, the Indonesian language. In 1344/1925, the Indonesian members of the Volksraad demanded the recognition of Indonesian as the official language of the country. In October 1942, an Indonesian Language Commission headed by Dr. Muhammad Hatta, was founded by the Japanese. In August 1945, the Indonesian language was formally declared the State language.¹¹ The national Red and White flag of Indonesia became the symbol of the patriotic liberation movement.¹² The Indonesian Raya (Indonesian National Anthem) acted as an inspiring and unifying factor.

The proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia in 1364/1945 was made an official national movement and its visible symbols, the national flag and the national anthem, helped to join the Archipelago's many local patriotisms together into an all-embracing patriotism.

The discriminatory policy employed by the Dutch in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields and the consequent resentment against colonialism fanned the flames of discontent.¹³ Discrimination in the economic sphere was even more galling and filtered down to the masses. The economic exploitation of the national wealth of the country by the Dutch capitalists and the increased poverty of the vast population living on rich soil provided another source of discontent.

In education, the Indonesians were provided with far fewer facilities than European children, for in the quick growth of Western education amongst the masses the Dutch saw a potential danger to the continuance of their dominant position.

The nationalistic educational institution, commonly known as Taman Siswa (Children's Garden School) established by Kia Hadjar Dewantara on 3rd July 1922, served as the training ground for the ideological preparation for the popularization of the Indonesian national movement. Kia Hadjar Dewantara maintained that the culture of a nation could be bent but could never be broken.

Wisdom, beauty, art, and science from abroad were welcome. Everybody, he said, who learns a foreign language gains access to a new world, but foreign elements should be absorbed into native life, enriching the already existing treasures of national civilization. He built up at least 250 schools all over Indonesia without any government or foreign help.

Muhammadiyah institutions developed the political consciousness of its members and its pupils. The Muhammadiyah movement, founded by H. Ahmad Dahlan on 18th November 1912, had established 29 branches with 4,000 members and built about 55 schools in 1925; 150 branches with 10,320 members in 1928; 209 with 17,550 members in 1929; 267 with 24,383 members in 1931; and 750 (316 in Java, 326 in Sumatra, 79 in Celebes and 29 in Borneo) with 43,000 members in 1935.

It had set up 126 schools and as many clinics in Java which treated 81,000 patients in 1929. In 1930, there were considerable Muhammadiyah schools and colleges in Sumatra. The Dutch colonial government tried to hamper the development of national educational institutions by issuing an Ordinance in 1342/1923 under which the Government assumed control of all privately owned schools, numbering about 2,000 – 2,500 in 1357/1938 with 100,000 to 500,000 pupils.

The Dutch administration had deliberately starved the educational system. "This tended," says John Gunther, "to keep the people in subjection, and to prevent the normal growth of political aspirations. Dutch policy, it has been said, was 'to keep the bellies of the people full, their minds empty.' Indeed, the record of the Dutch in education was indifferent, and illiteracy reached ninety-five per cent."¹⁴

The growth of the national press and radio was the chief means for the propagation of the ideals of nationalistic struggle for freedom and emancipation of the fatherland.

The appearance of the newspaper *Madan Pnyayi* (Civil Servants' Paper) at Bandung was indicative of the desire of the Indonesians to have their own periodicals and dailies as vehicles of expression of their desire for independence.

In 1340/1921, when the National Movement made itself felt in Sumatra (west coast), appeared the newspapers *Banuh Merdeka* (The Seed of Freedom) at Medan, and *Sinar Merdeka* (The Ray of Freedom) at Padang Sidenpau. The *Apirakjat* (The Fire of the People), *Sinar Hindia* (The Ray of Indonesia), the *Api* (Fire), the *Njala* (Flame), and several other newspapers made their appearance. The very names of these papers were symbolic of the passionate and all-absorbing desire for freedom.

The Indonesian journalists like R. M. Titoadisuyo, right down to young journalists like Hatta, Subardjo, Nazir Pamontjak, Mustafa, were pioneers in the fight for national emancipation and independence.

Articles on the Indonesian struggle for independence were published by them in European newspapers and magazines, while the Indonesians abroad served as foreign correspondents of Indonesian newspapers.

During the Japanese occupation (1361/1942 – 1364/1945) the national press was involved in the Japanese propaganda machine. It played an important role during the national revolution against Dutch imperialism and inspired the masses with the spirit of self determination and national self respect.

The development of transport, communication, and the increased geographical mobility of the people as well as ideas of modern economic organization in Indonesia were equally helpful in the spreading of the national movement. Frequent contacts with the nationalist leaders of different countries in international conferences and the League of Nations had stimulating effects in promoting discontent among Indonesian intelligentsia and patriots. In 1341/1922, the Sarekat Islam (S.I.) led by Abd al-Muiz and H. Salim established close relations with the Indian National Congress and adopted the policy of non-cooperation. The S.I. also sent delegations to the World Islamic Conference at Mecca in 1343/1924 and at Cairo in 1345/1926. [15](#)

E: The Role of National Parties (1345/1926 – 1361/1942)

Nationalist Party of Indonesia

The Persatuan National Indonesia (P.N.I.) was founded in July 1927 by Dr. Soekarno at Bandung. This party was essentially nationalistic, with a definite aim, *Indonesia Merdeka*, that is, the liberation of Indonesia from the colonial yoke through a popular movement deriving its strength from indigenous force and ability.

The moving spirits behind the P.N.I. were the repatriated members of the Perhimpunan Indonesia (Indonesian Union) [16](#) in Holland and other members of General Study Club at Bandung. Soekarno was the leader of the propaganda activities of the party and he soon made his mark not only as a great orator but also as the natural leader of the masses.

In 1347/1928, the propaganda activities of the P.N.I. were extended to cover small towns and villages, and leaders were sent out to remote places to meet and talk with the masses at their native haunts. For this purpose, the P.N.I. set up a sort of People's University, in which members were given courses in propaganda work. Within one year the party had as many as 600 members.

The P.N.I. leaders now stressed the idea of Indonesian unity in their speeches, using the Indonesian language and adopted for their party the white and red flag with the symbol of a bull's head on it.

The P.N.I. endeavoured to form a national front. For this purpose, they took the initiative in the organization of a federation of nationalist societies, composed of political parties, in December 1927, in order to unify and coordinate the activities of the member societies. The Indonesian Association in

Holland was meanwhile appointed as their advance post for foreign propaganda.

In May 1928, in his speech before the Volksraad, the Governor-General alluded to the propaganda carried on by the P.N.I., calling it “a revolutionary nationalistic propaganda,” and hinting that its revolutionary nature would hurt its own cause. In December 1929, the Government searched the houses and offices of the P.N.I. leaders. Eight persons were arrested, four of whom including Soekarno were later prosecuted.

The members of the P.N.I. split up into two groups after the official dissolution of the party. Those rallying around Sartono organized a new party called the Partai Indonesia (Partindo) at the end of April 1931. The Partindo had the same aim as the dissolved P.N.I., that is, to strive for a free Indonesia.

Other members formed the Indonesian National Education Party (New P.N.I.) in November 1931, under the leadership of Muhammad Hatta. Soetan Sjahrir joined the party in 1351/1932. Early in 1357/1938, Soekarno was rearrested and interned, and this was followed by the arrest of both Hatta and Sjahrir.

Communist Party of Indonesia (P.K.I.)

After the failure of the Sarekat Islam (S.I.) to accept the extreme proposals of Semaun's faction, he and other leaders of the Social Democratic Association converted their organization into the Communist Party of Indonesia in May 1920.

The P.K.I. developed a close relationship with the Comintern that it joined at the end of 1339/1920. In August 1923, Semaun was arrested and forced to leave the country or face exile to Timor. By the end of the year all Dutch leaders of the party had also been forced to leave. According to Semaun, the departure of the Dutch leaders from the party raised the prestige of the party in the eyes of the masses, because of the popular prejudice against the Dutch, whatever their attitude towards colonialism.

Due to his failure to wrest control of the organization from the S.I., Semaun was successful in setting up a rival association of the trade unions, the Revolutionary Trade Union Central, in June 1921. Within four years the communists could control most of the local branches of the S.I., but most of their large peasant membership melted away. This was due to two reasons: (i) the Government's effective barring of contact between the leaders and peasantry and (ii) the communists' alienating of the peasant members by violating their religious sensitivities.

During 1344/1925, the extreme elements within the Indonesian Communist Party came under the control of Dahalan Sukara. The leaders of this party refused to take orders from the regular party leadership and continually agitated for revolution. They resorted to terroristic methods in order to dominate the party.

The failure of the communist revolutionary effort was due mostly to the great schism in the ranks of the Indonesians. Tan Malaka, a prominent member of the party, founded a new organization, Partai Indonesia. The Republic Party (Indonesian Republic Party) was established by him and his two

lieutenants, Tamin and Subakat, in Bangkok in 1346/1927. Partai's immediate objective was the training of Indonesian underground workers in Bangkok, who were to return to Indonesia and there train more members and build up underground cadres.

The Communist Party was forced by the vigilance of the Government to operate more and more underground, while it was deprived of its ablest leaders.

During the first ten months of 1345/1926, more and more of the communist leaders were arrested. Intra-organizational contact was progressively disrupted, as was attested by uncoordinated sporadic outbreaks of violence at widely isolated places throughout Java.

With the failure of the revolutions of 1345–46/1926–27 the communist organization was crushed, as a large number of communist, nationalist, and religious leaders were arrested and deported to a concentration camp in New Guinea. After their arrest the power of the communists was broken for the remainder of the period of Dutch rule.

Partai Indonesia Raja (P.I.R.) (The People's Party of Indonesia)

The Indonesian Study Club, formed by Dr. Sutomo in October 1930 at Surabaya, was changed to the Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia or P.B.I. (Indonesia Association) in January 1931. At its congress of April 18–21, 1935, at Surabaya, the P.B.I. decided to form the Budi Utomo. As a result of the Solo Conference, Partai Indonesia Raja or P.I.R. (Greater Indonesia Party) came into being on December 26, 1935, at Surabaya, under the presidency of Sutomo. The P.R.I. was founded by Tabrani in September 1930 at Jakarta, aiming to achieve the independence of Indonesia through a parliamentary system and dominion status for her.

Sarekat Islam

The name of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce (S.D.I.), founded in 1329/1911 by H. Samanhudi, was changed into the Sarekat Islam in 1330/1912 under the leadership of H. Umar Said Tjokroaminoto. In the years 1331/1913 and 1332/1914, the people joined *en masse* this party based purely on Islamic principles.

By 1333/1915 it had established fifty branches and later, by June 1916, it claimed eighty branches with 360,000 members. In 1334/1916, it became a fully-fledged political party struggling for free Indonesia (dominion status) and adopted a policy of co-operation with the colonial government.

In order to achieve Muslim unity, a pan-Islamic movement, al-Islam, was organized by H. A. Salim. The second congress which al-Islam held from May 19 to 21, 1924, at Carut, was attended by most of the Muslim leaders of Islamic organizations, except the Nahdat al-'Ulama'.

The S.I. formed a Majlis 'Ulama'-i Indonesia in January 1928 which in 1929 was changed into Partai

Sarekat Islam Indonesia or P.S.I.I. (Indonesian Islamic Party).

On account of disagreement with Dr. Sukinan's group at the Jakarta Congress, Partai Islam Indonesia (P.I.I.) was founded in December 1928 at Solo under the presidency of K. M. Misono.

The Muslim Union of Indonesia (Parmi) was founded in 1349/1930 in central Sumatra on the initiative of Mukhtar Lutfi Jalal al-Din Tayyib; it was based on Islam and nationalism with the ultimate object of achieving independence for Indonesia.

The Nahdat al-'Ulama'

The Nahdat al-'Ulama' (Islamic Conservative Party) was formed in January 1926 at Surabaya. It organized its first Congress in October 1928 at Surabaya and was opposed to the modernist movement. The Congress of 1359/1940 set up a Women Organization (Nahdat al-'Ulama'-i Muslimat or N.U.M.) and a Youth Movement (Ansar) in 1354/1935, under the leadership of Tohir Bokri. Among the most outstanding leaders of the N.U. were Hasjim Asjari, Abd al-Wahhab, Mahfuz Siddiq, and Wahid Hasjim.

Budi Utomo (High Endeavour)

The Budi Utomo formed in 1326/1908 had established forty branches with 10,000 members by 1332/1914 and held a congress in August 1915.

Indonesian Youth Movement

The formation of the Student Association in 1330/1912 was followed by Tri Koro Darmo (Student Movement) in March 1915 based on "strength, character, and service." In 1337/1918, its name was changed to the "Young Java" under the presidency of R. Satiman Wiryosojoyo. Its objective was to promote solidarity among the students.

The third Indonesian Youth Congress of December 1939 decided to pursue a literacy campaign with a view to helping the farmers, fighting youth unemployment, and promoting rural uplift and reconstruction.

Indonesian Women Movement

The first women's organization was started by R. A. Kartini in 1319/1901. The first school for women was founded in 1319-20/1901-02 and another in 1321/1903. R. A. Kartini became the pioneer of female education, and though she died young her influence has lived after her. This school was followed by Puteri Merdeke (1330/1912) and Keutamaan Isteri Minagkabau (1330/1912).

A Women's Congress, the first of its kind, was held from December 22 to 25, 1928, at Jakarta. The Congress was attended by thirty Indonesian women's organizations. The main aim of the Congress was to coordinate the working of several Indonesian women's associations and promote the interests of the Indonesian women.

Cooperation and Non-Cooperation Movements

The year 1349/1930 marks the lowest ebb of national movement in Indonesia, as expressed in a general mood of depression both in economic and in social life. The communist revolution of 1345–46/1926–27, made the Government adopt repressive measures that forced the Indonesian political movements to go underground; prominent leaders were either imprisoned, interned, or exiled.

The demand for responsible government and for parliamentary self-government for Indonesia had been the main demand of the political leaders. On 15th July 1936, Mr. Sutardjo along with many other representatives of the Volksraad asked for an Imperial Conference to discuss the best method by which self-government for Indonesia within the limit of Article I of the Netherlands Constitution of 1341/1922 could be realized and to fix a time limit within which this self government could become effective.

When the Nazi armies invaded the Netherlands on 10th May 1940, the Dutch Government fled to England and the States General ceased to function. The exiled Government continued to direct the international relations of Indonesia from London. All power in Indonesia was vested in the hands of a Governor General, who carried on the government in a despotic fashion.

During this international crisis, the Dutch Government promised to consider constitutional changes in Indonesia at the end of the war on the ground that the situation in the world was undergoing a change and the shape democracy would take after the war was not known. Further, there had to be introduced changes in the law of the Netherlands in order to alter the constitution in Indonesia.

F: The Japanese Occupation

The Second World War marks a turning point in the history of Indonesia. As in other belligerent countries it brought great misery and suffering to the people but at the same time it loosened the colonial grip and ushered in a new era of revolutionary struggle for freedom.

Soon after the capitulation of the Dutch in March 1942, the Japanese military authority was established in Indonesia. The Japanese were anxious to completely eradicate the Dutch influence in Indonesia and to win over public opinion in Indonesia in order to utilize its manpower for forced labour as well as for food supplies for their armies.

Political concessions to the nationalists were, therefore, regarded by the Japanese as the means to achieve the main economic goal and to enlist popular support for total economic mobilization. The principal leaders who were either in exile or had been interned were given considerable freedom of movement, but all political parties and political meetings and propaganda were banned by the Japanese authority.

The Japanese realized, however, that an outlet must be created for absorbing the political tensions and passions. Within two months after all political activity had been prohibited, a Peoples Movement was

initiated on 29th April 1942. This was intended to unite all political forces into one powerful movement, directed towards the elimination of the pernicious Western influences which had corrupted the Eastern soul and also towards the indoctrination of the entire population of the Archipelago with the slogans: “Asia for the Asiatics” and “Japan as the mother of Asia.” They, however, proceeded cautiously and avoided giving rise to any premature independence movement. They wanted to Japanize Indonesia under the slogan: “Japan the leader of Asia, Japan the protector of Asia, Japan the light for Asia, and Asia for the Asiatics.”

In order to influence the Indonesian people, the Japanese made a friendly approach to the “four-leaved clover” of the Indonesian leaders: Soekarno, Hatta, Dewantara, and Mansur. These four men accepted the new role, as, in the words of Sjahrir, “it gives the nationalist struggle a broader legal scope and presses the Japanese for political concessions.”¹⁷

The Pusat Tenaga Rakjat or Putera was organized by the Japanese in March 1943. Dr. Soekarno was made president of the new organization (Central People’s Power). The Japanese policy, thus, indirectly encouraged contact between nationalist leaders and the masses, which the repressive government of the Dutch regime had so severely limited.

In September 1943, a volunteer army of “Defenders of the Fatherland,” a Japanese trained but Indonesian officered military organization, was created to help the Japanese defend Indonesia against the Allied invasion. By the middle of 1364/1945, it numbered about 120,000–armed men. This was the “Peta” which was to become the backbone of the Indonesian Republic’s army. By 1363/1944, the average “Peta” member was consciously a strong nationalist, anti–Japanese, and anti–Dutch, but for the most part favourably disposed towards the other allies, particularly the United States.

The Japanese also established several youth organizations. They were given political indoctrination and some military training. The first of them, the “Seinendan,” was established at the end of 1361/1942, as a mass youth organization based particularly on the village.

The Japanese military command dissolved the “Putera” and replaced it with a new organization called Djawa Hokakai (People’s Loyalty Organization) on 1st March 1944. To help neutralize and limit the force of the nationalists the Japanese insisted that it should represent the Chinese, Arab, and Eurasian community as well as the Indonesians, and forced it to submit to a much closer supervision and control than had been the case with the “Putera.”

The Japanese attempted simultaneously to win the support of Indonesian Islamic leaders. They established towards the end of 1362/1943 a large Islamic organization subsuming all the existing ones of a non–political nature, including Muhammadiyah, Nahdat al–‘Ulam’ and M.I.A.I. (Council of Indonesian Muslim Association). Thus, they welded the Indonesian Muslims into a greater unity, bringing the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdat al–‘Ulama’ into a single Muslim mass organization, Masjumi.

At the same time they sharpened the long–standing divisions between the active Muslim community and

the less positively Muslim social groups who found political leadership in aristocratic and secular nationalist elements. But soon the 'Ulama' refused to lend themselves as instruments of Japanese aims, frightened as they were by the clumsy handling of religion by the Japanese. The Japanese order to the Indonesians to bow towards Tokyo rather than Mecca and to exalt the Emperor to a religious plane were particularly odious to them.

In June 1943, Tojo, the Japanese Premier, in a speech to the Diet, promised to allow the people greater participation in their government. The first concrete steps to carry out this promise were announced in Java on 5th September 1943. An advisory system was introduced whereby Indonesians were appointed as advisers to the various departments of the Government, advisory councils were established and Vice-Governors appointed in eight of the provinces.

Under increasing pressure both from the Indonesian nationalists and deteriorating military situation in the Pacific, the Japanese made the first formal promise of independence to the Indonesians in September 1944.

In March 1945, the Japanese, realizing the urgency of a compromise with the leading national organizations in order to stabilize their rule in Indonesia and mobilize the rich resources of the country for their war effort against the Allies, appointed a committee representing various political and ethnic groups for political and economic organization of an independent Indonesia.

Soekarno was the leading exponent of the hopes and aspirations of his countrymen. By careful enunciation of his own "ideological synthesis" he succeeded in bringing about a measure of agreement amongst the various groups, particularly the leaders of the doctrinaire Islamic group. His principles of Pantjasila were accepted as the official Indonesian national philosophy. The five principles were, "Nationalism, internationalism (or humanitarianism), representative government, social justice, and belief in God in the context of religious freedom."

On 7th July 1945, the Japanese military administration announced the decision of the Supreme War Council to the effect that the Indonesians should be given their independence as soon as possible. Soekarno, Hatta, and Wediodiningrat were flown to Tarauchi headquarters to receive the Imperial decree directly.

On 7th August 1945, the Japanese appointed an All-Indonesia Independence Preparatory Committee with Soekarno as Chairman and Muhammad Hatta as Vice-Chairman to make preparations for the transfer of government authority to the Indonesians. When the Japanese finally decided to surrender, Soekarno and Hatta proclaimed Indonesia's independence on 17th August 1945. The Indonesians proudly and justly claimed that the Republic was neither a gift from Japan nor from any other foreign country. "It is the reward," it was claimed, "of the great sacrifices in blood and material suffered by the Indonesians before and during the Second World War." [18](#)

Effects of the Japanese Occupation

The Japanese interlude ended as abruptly as it had begun. The harsh and arbitrary rule of the Japanese and their crude attempts at conciliation affected almost the entire population. It aroused a consciousness of common suffering and humiliation and a common resentment against the Japanese. Further, it enormously strengthened the already existing national consciousness of the Indonesians.

As Soetan Sjahriar observed: “During the three and a half years of Japanese occupation, the foundation of rural society was shaken and undermined by forced regulations, kidnapping from homes for conscription as labourers abroad or as soldiers, compulsory surrender of harvest crops, compulsory planting of designed crops, all imposed with limited arbitrariness.”

As a reaction of and in order to resist the heavy demands of the Japanese, the peasantry became much more politically conscious than it had ever previously been.

The Indonesians gained experience in administration during the occupation. Dr. Hatta correctly pointed out that “while under the Japanese, we laid plans for achieving our independence and when, on 17th August, the last Japanese surrendered and were unable to act effectively, we declared our independence.”

The Japanese established special schools for the training of political leaders from among whom were to be recruited native officials for political affairs. A training institute was set up at Jakarta to give three week courses to the “Kias” and the ‘Ulama’ in order to enable the Japanese to choose those who were willing to cooperate with them and were also promising propagandists.

In 1363/1944, shock brigades, the Hizb Allah, numbering 50,000 were organized from amongst the Muslim youth (ranging between 17 and 25 years in age). The purpose of the Hizb Allah was two fold. “It was a military organization, training reserves for the home defence army and it was also a religious vanguard to propagate Muhammadan doctrine.”

The policy of Japan in Indonesia affected the educated youth. The introduction of the Japanese language coupled with their harsh and autocratic administration of the schools antagonized the students. Takdir Alishahban observed: “Because the Japanese were determined to enlist the energies of the entire Indonesian population in the war efforts, they (the students) penetrated into the villages in the remotest backwater of the islands, using the Indonesian language as they went.

Thus the language flourished and imbued the people with a feeling new to most of them. As more and more of them learnt to speak it freely, they became aware of a communal unity in opposition to the effort of the Japanese ultimately to implant their own language and culture. By the time, therefore, of the Japanese surrender, the position of the Indonesian language had improved enormously, both in strength and in prestige, over not only Dutch but also over the various regional languages of the Archipelago which had no opportunity to develop during the occupation.” [19](#)

The increased use of mass communication media by the Japanese contributed to the progress and development of Indonesian language. The disappearance of the Dutch Press led to a sharp rise in the circulation of the Indonesian newspapers.[20](#)

The Japanese developed a policy of decentralized administration based on the so-called historical and cultural differences of the Indonesian society. They did away with the provincial isolation and traditional ways of life of the Indonesian people. The severance of economic relations between the islands and outside brought suffering to all sections of communities and hence led to the breakdown of provincialism and sectarianism.

The effect of the army as a unifying agent by providing a common experience to different social groups was described as follows by a Japanese training officer assigned to it: "Since the army is made up of volunteers from all walks of life, it had resulted in the unification of the Indonesian social strata towards the realization of its ideals.

In fact, the Indonesian race had never seen such a huge comprehensive system to promote its own racial well-being." He added that the promise of independence had inspired the members of a fully-fledged modern, independent Indonesian army.

The Japanese had intended to make a nationwide purge of the Indonesian political, social, and religious leaders in order to make Indonesia a second Korea. They prepared a plan, known as "black fan" and "black list, in which were written the names of all the Indonesian leaders who were to be massacred immediately.

Van Mook, the former Dutch Governor General in Indonesia, summarized the effects of the Japanese occupation in the following words: "The official and civil servants mostly swallowed their discontent. They were more and more impoverished by inflation; they were pushed back to lower posts by an increasing number of Japanese officials. Many of them were genuinely concerned about the slow ruination of their once excellent services; others gave up and retired till better days. Quite a number of incompetent upstarts filled their places."

Sultan Shahriar, in his political Manifesto issued in 1364/1945, observed as follows: "When the Netherlands Indies Government surrendered to the Japanese in Bandung in March 1942, our unarmed population fell prey to the harshness and cruelty of Japanese militarism. For three years and a half our people were bent under a cruelty that they had never before experienced throughout the last several decades of Netherlands colonial rule.

Our people were treated as worthless material to be wasted in the process of war. From the lowly stations of those who were forced to accept compulsory labour and slavery and whose crops were stolen, to the intellectuals who were forced to prepare lies, the grip of Japanese militarism was universally felt.

For this Dutch imperialism is responsible in that it left our 70,000,000 people to the mercies of Japanese militarism without any means of protecting themselves since they had never been entrusted with firearms, or with the education necessary to use them.”

“A new realization was born in our people, a national feeling that was sharper than ever before. This feeling was also sharpened by the Japanese propaganda for pan-Asianism. Later attempts by the Japanese to supersede the nationalist movement were of no avail.”

The Netherlands Government in exile in London directed Indonesian international relations and planned the political future of Indonesia. The plan provided for the formation of a Netherlands Commonwealth, consisting of the kingdom of the Netherlands and Indonesia as well as the Dutch West Indies, based on absolute equality, fraternity, mutual co-operation, and mutual understanding and goodwill.

As soon as the southern part of the Netherlands was liberated in September-October 1944, a call was issued for volunteers to serve in the armed forces. In order to restore Dutch imperialism and colonialism in Indonesia, on 24th August 1945, the British and the United States Governments concluded the Civil Affairs Agreement with the Dutch Government.

The Nazi aggression in Europe and the Japanese fascist invasion of China found an immediate reaction in Indonesia. The whole Indonesian national movement became anti-fascist. The leftists especially were clear in their political attitude. The anti-Japanese attitude of the Surabaya section of the Gerindo, formed in 1936/1937 in Jakarta under the leadership of Amir Sjarifoeddin, former Prime Minister of Indonesia, and Dr. A. K. Gani, attracted much attention.

Dr. Soekarno along with other colleagues and leaders chose to cooperate with the Japanese only to turn the battle against them because he very well knew that the Japanese imperialism was no better than that of the Dutch.

The Dutch colonial power accused Soekarno of being an unprincipled pro-Japanese collaborator.²¹ Regarding Soekarno, van Mook stated in 1967/1948, from documents later discovered, “it is very clear that in all his objectionable activities he (Soekarno) was always governed by the objective of an independent Indonesia.”

Shahriar, who was anti-Japanese, regarded the Japanese as pure fascists and felt that the Indonesians must use the most subtle counter methods to get round them. Both Soekarno and Hatta, he continued, agreed to do everything legally possible to give the nationalist struggle a broader legal scope and at the same time secretly support the revolutionary resistance.

Through two exceptionally skillful underground workers at first Djohan Sjaruzah and later Abd al-Halim, Hatta was able, throughout the Japanese occupation, to keep in contact with principal Indonesian underground organizations.²²

Most of the underground leaders agreed with Shahriar that Indonesia's bargaining position with the Allies for her independence would be strengthened if there were a powerful Indonesian uprising against the Japanese coincident with the Allies' landings.

G: The Revolutionary Struggle (1364/1945 – 1368/1949)

Just after the capitulation of the Japanese to Allied forces in 1364/1945, the independence of Indonesia was proclaimed, as already observed, by Soekarno–Hatta on 17th August 1945. The proclamation was supported by all youth organizations, underground movements, former civil servants, police, army (except the Royal Amboynese), and the vast mass of the population.

The Japanese ordered the disbandment of the Peta, and all other armed Indonesian organizations. The Peta units in Java resisted the Japanese orders to disarm, kept their arms, clashed with the Japanese, made them surrender their arms, and proceeded to control government buildings, post and telegraph offices, airfields, and harbours. The Indonesian flag was flown from all public buildings. The cry *merdeka* (freedom), the words *bung* and *saudara* (brother) were heard as symbols of national revolution and fraternal love all over the country.

In Borneo, Celebes, and the lesser Sundas, where the Peta had not been properly organized, the Allies reinstated Dutch civil administration without much difficulty. The British in Java and Sumatra were faced with a difficult situation. Without heavy reinforcements in men and material, for which the Home authorities were not prepared, the British troops could not reinstate the Dutch in authority.

They proceeded to deal with the Republic of Indonesia as a *de facto* government and insisted on the Dutch doing the same. The latter under pressure of events entered into an agreement, the Lingadjati Agreement, with the Indonesian Republic. The ultimate object of the Dutch imperial policy was not the grant of complete independence to Indonesia but to work for a Netherlands–Indonesian Union.

The agreement was only a makeshift arrangement to form an interim working plan with the Indonesian Republic and to utilize the time to crush the national movement by a policy of divide and rule, as military victory was beyond their means. The Indonesians offered to give complete cooperation to the Allied forces provided they were prepared to leave Indonesia when their work was done. Soekarno advised his exuberant compatriots through his radio broadcasts not to shoot now and not to waste their bullets on the British.

The Dutch broke the agreement and overran the richest districts in Java and Sumatra. The intervention of U.N. resulted in stopping hostilities, and a new agreement, the Renville Agreement, was signed in January 1947. The Dutch violated this agreement also, and the failure of the United States and the European democracies to force the Dutch to carry out the terms of the agreement considerably strengthened certain elements in Indonesia and made them break into open rebellion against the Republic.

The Dutch, taking advantage of the difficult and explosive domestic situation, launched an all-out military campaign against the Republic. The Indonesians resisted with stubbornness, and backed as they were by world opinion in favour of their righteous cause and the pressure exerted by the U.S.A. they forced the Dutch to accept the realities of the situation.

At the Round Table Conference, held at the Hague in 1368/1949, the Dutch accepted Indonesia's claim to independence. "In essence the Dutch exchanged their claim to sovereignty all over Indonesia except Western New Guinea... for the preservation of their economic stakes in Indonesia."²³

Out of the four years' revolutionary struggle against the Dutch, the Indonesians emerged victorious. The struggle, long and bitter, demonstrated the necessity of a close unity of interests and concerted action amongst various political parties and ethnic groups, and inculcated the habit of making sacrifices for the national cause.

The struggle materially effected the development of political institutions and political integration. The fact that they had won their freedom without the assistance of any foreign power strengthened the Indonesians' confidence in their own ability to manage their house and also their determination to follow an international policy without aligning themselves with any power group.

The Independence Preparatory Committee at its first meeting on 18th August 1945 elected Soekarno and Hatta as President and Vice President respectively and appointed a Commission of Seven to make a final draft of the national Constitution. The new Constitution was promulgated within a week and, though considered provisional, was not replaced till the end of 1949.

According to the new Constitution, the power in the State was vested in the President, the Consultative Assembly, and the Chamber of Representatives. As the last two bodies were not elected, all power was concentrated in the hands of the President. On 29th August, Soekarno replaced the Independence Preparatory Committee by the Central Indonesian National Committee (K.N.I.P.).

As a result of the growing resentment against the concentration of power in the hands of the President, the retention of the officers appointed by the Japanese in key posts in the Government, and the pressure of the armed youth organization and the K.N.I.P., the President was compelled to agree to sharing his legislative power with the K.N.I.P. which body delegated its power to the newly constituted Working Committee with Sjahrir and Sjarifoeddin as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively.

A further loss of authority by the President came as the result of an insistent demand by the party of Sjahrir who, dissatisfied with the "fascist and opportunistic mentality of many members of the Government," demanded the introduction of the principle of Cabinet responsibility to Parliament.

The President accepted the demand and established on 14th November 1945 a new Cabinet headed by Sjahrir responsible to the representative body of the Government. The new Cabinet proceeded to encourage the creation of political parties representing diverse groups "to obviate the possible growth of

a totalitarian political order” and the rise of a “monolithic” political organization, for it was felt that “if democratic principles are to be observed it is not permissible that only one party should be allowed to function.”

In spite of the restrictions gradually placed on the independent exercise of authority by the President, violent conflicts either with the Working Committee or with the K.N.I.P. were avoided by the tactful handling of difficult problems by Soekarno and the good sense of the members of the above body.

President Soekarno explained his position to Kahin thus: “Theoretically I can veto any law of the Parliament. However, I have never done so, because my system was to keep in very close contact with Assaat (chairman of both the Working Committee and the K.N.I.P.) and to influence the Working Committee. Agreements were worked out ahead of time, and thus collisions between the Presidency and the Working Committee were avoided.”²⁴

The efficiency and comparative stability of the Indonesian Government during the difficult revolutionary years was mainly the result of the habit and practice that had developed because of close collaboration between different groups and the feeling of solidarity and community of interests it had developed; the Working Committee, a small compact body consisting of some of the ablest and most trusted men together with the attitude of the President and the Vice President, afforded a quick agency for taking decisions and assuring the smooth working of the political machine.

These conditions were not to be found during the post-revolutionary period (1368/1949). The growing sense of national solidarity and national identity and the universally felt hatred of colonial rule were the factors assuring the success of the Revolutionary Government.

The memories of the Japanese occupation and the revolutionary struggle for final freedom from colonial rule tremendously increased the political consciousness of the Indonesian people and their passionate desire to guard their newly won freedom jealously.

The post revolutionary period has created new problems and posed new challenges, but the natural resilience of the people and their determination and eagerness to face these problems with courage and equanimity after having buffeted many storms have been the secret of their success during this difficult period.

The Hague Agreement of 4th May 1949 provided for the establishment of an independent, sovereign, and legal democratic federal State known as the United States of Indonesia.

The official flag of the R.I.S. (Republic of Indonesia) was to be *sang merah putih* (red and white); the Indonesia Raya, the national anthem; and Jakarta, the capital of the State. The State was free to decide its own official emblem.

A great majority of Indonesians, both in the old republic of Indonesia and in all the fifteen Dutch created

States, were profoundly dissatisfied with the federal system of government.

After several weeks of negotiations between the leaders of the R.U.I.S. (Republic of the United States of Indonesia) and the Government of Indonesia, an agreement on the formation of a Unitarian State was finally reached on 19th May 1950. The country, after years of experimentation in the field of constitution making, has reverted to the constitution of 1364/1945 still clinging to the Pantjasila enunciated by Soekarno in 1364/1945 in a speech which will go down in history as “one of the great pronouncements of democratic principles” and which the Indonesians cherish as their Bill of Rights.

The Pantjasila has become a national document in the sense that it is quoted as the authority for the principles behind action and is pictorialized in the Indonesian coat of arms. “Indonesians understand their coat of arms; it came into being out of the experience of living men; it links their past with their present; and to hear any school boy describe it is to realize that it also speaks out their hope for the future.

The bearer of the coat of arms is a mythological eagle, the *garuda*; its flight feathers are seventeen and its tail feathers eight, signifying the date of Indonesian independence, the seventeenth of the eighth month. The shield portrays the five principles of the Pantjasila: the central field with the star stands for faith in God; the head of the native bull for the principle of sovereignty; the banyan tree for nationalism; the sprays of rice and cotton for social justice; the linked chain for humanitarianism; while the black line across the centre represents the equator; and the device bears the old Javanese words meaning unity in diversity.”

From the above account it will be clear that Indonesia has been, right down to the recent past, struggling for political independence and that from the time she succeeded in achieving it, she has been going through the traumatic experience of her own rebirth. It is for this reason that philosophical and scientific thought has hardly had any chance for development. It is only now that the country is showing signs of settling down and attending to her social and intellectual renaissance.

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[1.](#) For the role of tariqahs in general, see H.A.R. Gibb, *An Interpretation of Islamic History*, p. 11; *Muslim World*, Vol. 14, No. 2, January 1955, p. 130.

[2.](#) Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam, Shirkat–i–Qualam*, Lahore, p. 407.

[3.](#) *Indonesia Today*, Vol. 2, No. 6, Nov.–Dec. 1959, p. 19.

[4.](#) For details, see Vlekke *Nusantara, A History of the East Indian Archipelago*, pp. 1, 265–69, 281.

[5.](#) Nur Ahmad Qadri, *Tamaddun–i Indonesia*, Vol. I, pp. 464–68.

[6.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 449–52.

[7.](#) Concerning the influence of the West upon Indonesian Islam, see C. C. Berg, "Indonesia" in H. A. R. Gibb, *Whither*

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[8.](#) G. M. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, Cornell University Press, New York, pp. 87–88. See also Bousquet, *A French View of the Netherlands Indies*, pp. 2–5.

[9.](#) Quoted by M. Eostein, *Statesman's Year Book*, 1937, p. 1176.

[10.](#) G. M. Kahin, *op. cit.*

[11.](#) Ubani, "On Indonesian Language," *Merdeka*, No. 17, I. S. I., New Delhi, 12th November 1947, p. 8.

[12.](#) The hoisting of the Red and White Flag was prohibited by the Dutch, but it was flown publicly in Jakarta in October 1928 during the Indonesian Youth Congress.

[13.](#) In 1939, there were 400 Indonesians and 100 Dutch who took the examination for entrance to the Government School of Civil Service: 23 Dutch and 3 Indonesians were accepted.

[14.](#) John Gunther, *Inside Asia*, 1942, p. 349.

[15.](#) Members of the Communist Party attended the Pan–Pacific Labour Conference under the Comintern auspices at Canton in June 1924. The Indonesian nationalists were represented at the Conference of the League against imperialism in Brussels in February 1927. It coincided with large–scale arrests and deportations of the nationalist leaders of the revolution in 1926–27 in Java and Sumatra.

[16.](#) G. M. Kahin, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–89.

[17.](#) Sultan Shahriar, *Out of Exile*, Jakarta, 1936, p. 88.

[18.](#) Letter to the British Foreign Secretary by the Indonesian Association for Independence, quoted by Kaushak, *The Indonesian Question*, Thacker & Company, Bombay.

[19.](#) Takdir Alishahban, "The Indonesian Language – By–Product of Nationalism," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Dec. 1949.

[20.](#) "The Press Under the Japanese," *Merdeka*, 15th May 1947.

[21.](#) In 1943, Soekarno went to Tokyo to offer thanks at the Yusukuni Shrine to the spirits of the Japanese who fell in the course of Indonesia's liberation. He was decorated by Hirohito.

[22.](#) Hatta, because of his relationship with the underground leaders, had come to be considered dangerous by the Japanese authorities in Java.

[23.](#) G. M. Kahin, *Major Governments of Asia*, p. 501.

[24.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 508.

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