

A History of Muslim Philosophy Volume 2, Book 8

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**A Compendium Of Articles On The
History Of Muslim Philosophy. In
This Book: Modern Renaissance
(Early And Later Centuries).**

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Part 1. Renaissance in the Near and Middle East

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

Muhammad Bin Abd Al-Wahhab and His Movement

A

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

B

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born about 1111/1700 in the heart of the Arabian Desert, the region known as Najd. This puritan reformer kindled a fire that soon spread to the remotest corners of the Muslim world, purging it of its sloth and reviving the fervour of the olden days. As a religious reformer, as

a standard-bearer of freedom, as an orator, he not only won and retained undisputed eminence but also left in all these fields a deep and lasting imprint of his pioneering individuality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A great change was brought about in the political and administrative set-up of the country. “Though possessing great military power, Saud always considered himself responsible to public opinion and

never encroached upon the legitimate freedom of his subjects. His government, though stern, was able and just. The Wahhabi judges were competent and honest. Robbery became almost unknown, so well was the public peace maintained.”³

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

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

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

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

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

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

It taught them that for the revival of Islam it was necessary to give up reliance on second-hand formulas and sterile conventions, and that it was equally essential to come back to the realities of Islam and build

only on the bases of these solid rocks new modes of thought and action. An attempt to slip away from the cultural forms and aims connected with Islam, and to accept aims of non-Islamic (often anti-Islamic) social organizations, would not spell regeneration but degeneration for Islamic culture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

be held final for all times.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

countries Arabia is the greatest country that is anchored in the traditional pattern of her past.

C

Role of the Arab Academy of Damascus in Syria

In 1336/1918, Muhammad Kurd Ali (1293/1876–1372/1953), a devoted scholar, founded the Arab Academy in Damascus (*al-Majma al-Ilm al-Arabi*). The Academy was endowed by King Faisal. It assumed charge of al-Zahiriyyah Library with 3,000 works, for the most part manuscripts. The Academy consisted of:

- (a) A literary linguistic committee (*lajnah lughawiyyah*) in charge of investigating linguistic problems, literature, and the ways and means of improving the Arabic language in order to make it an effective instrument for the expression of modern thought
- (b) A scientific committee (*lajnah ilmiyyah fanniyyah*) in charge of enriching the language and broadening its scope for the expression of the various branches of science.[7](#)

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

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

American University of Beirut

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since the rapid progress of the literary movement during the past few years one has been impressed by the practical results of the efforts of Arab writers in adapting the classical Arabic language to the

conditions of modern life, creating scientific terminology, and producing scientific works in Arabic, e.g., the various lexica of technical terms published by modern scholars, like Muhammad Sharaf, Ahmad Isa Bey, Maluf Pasha, Mazhar Said, and the scientific works of Yaqub Sarruf, Fuad Sarruf, al-Ghamrawaih, Musharrafah, etc.^{[12](#)}

Role of the Arab League in Unifying the Arab World

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Arab League had united the Arabs in their fight against Western domination; it had been called into

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

The recent unification of Egypt and Syria and the federation between Iraq and Jordan in 1957/1958 were also defensive reactions against political pressures. Neither their effect on the movement towards Arab unity, be it favourable or adverse, nor their impact on the development of Islam can as yet be assessed. [15](#)

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

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

D

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

The appointment of Egyptian teachers and experts in educational centres of Iraq, Arabia, the Yemen; the exchange of students; the organization of universities and the increase of new colleges; the dissemination of the wireless and its utilization for the propagation of cultural activities; the rising and

surging tide of new thought; the flourishing movement of translation of foreign literature, all indicate a noble intellectual awakening.”[17](#)

4. Intellectual renaissance in these countries is going hand in hand with national awakening and interest in language. Thus, for more than fifty years, Arab intellectuals have viewed intellectual revival and national consciousness from the standpoint of language and historical traditions. As a result, there is an agreement amounting to consensus that Arabic is not only the faithful register of Arab cultural achievements, but the pillar of politico-intellectual revival throughout the length and breadth of the Arab world. This awareness of the importance of language has been practically universal in most Arab countries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Chapter 73: Renaissance in North Africa: The Sanusiyyah Movement

A: Rise of the Sanusiyyah Order

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The founder of the Sanusiyyah Order, Sayyid Muhammad bin Ali al Sanusi (known as the Grand Sanusi), was born in 1202/1787¹ in the village of al-Wasita, near Mustaghanem, in Algeria. Politically, socially, and economically, this was a time of great instability and discontent in Algeria. The Ottoman governors, the *beys*, as they were called, had misruled the country and inflicted so many hardships on

the people that resentment had reached a high degree, and the very authority of the Sultan had become exceedingly unpopular in the country.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In pursuing his studies in Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt, Sayyid Muhammad had ample opportunity to examine the state of affairs into which the Muslims had drifted, particularly the state of decadence prevailing in North Africa at the time. Comparison between the glorious past of the Muslims and their condition in his time seems to have occupied his mind greatly, and the thought that the Muslims were in a state of material and spiritual degeneracy haunted him constantly.[7](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sayyid Muhammad's stay in Tunisia and Libya was relatively short, but even during this short period he remained actively engaged in the preaching of his ideas. Similarly, his stay in Egypt was brief, lasting only for a few weeks. He had originally intended to study at al-Azhar University in Cairo in order to improve his education, but he was soon defeated in his plans.

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

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

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

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

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

He, thus, concluded that his aim might be better served by his own superior education, by his striving to combat the influence of sectarianism and authoritarian regimes, and by the dissemination of knowledge that would include the teaching of technical subjects to all classes of Muslims. Moreover, he advocated

the popularization of sports, particularly the use of arms and horsemanship, and resolved, above all, to realize these aims without delay. [10](#)

It was with this in mind that the Sayyid set out for the Hijaz. There he stayed for six years, mostly at Makkah, where he resumed his studies and preaching. He developed close relations with many prominent Shaikhs in the Hijaz, but was particularly influenced by Shaikh Ahmad bin Idris al-Fasi, the fourth head of the Moroccan Order of the Qadiriyyah dervishes and later the founder of the Idrisiyyah or Qadiriyyah-Idrisiyyah Order. [11](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1257/1841, he left the Hijaz, accompanied by a large number of his disciples and followers, and headed for Algeria. After a few months' stay in Cairo, during which the Shaikhs of al-Azhar renewed their hostility to his person and movement, he continued his journey westward through Libya to Tunisia. Here he learnt of the recent French advances in Algeria, and, being fearful of their designs (he was apprehensive lest the French authorities should be planning to arrest him or in any case to crush his movement), he hurried back to Libya,¹⁶ now the only place to which he could go and where he could settle and extend his movement without arousing the jealousy and open hostility of the authorities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

began to disseminate Islamic teachings and to extend the influence of Islam.[22](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1294/1877, thus, they refused to accede to the Sultan's request that they should send troops to fight

for him in the Russo–Turkish war. Moreover, in 1301/1883 they denounced the rising of the Mahdi in the Sudan and refused to give him help in his movement against the British. The head of the Sanusi Order seems to have taken this attitude as a matter of principle, particularly in view of what he considered to be the “false pretensions” of the Sudanese Mahdi.[31](#)

In 1304/1886 the Ottoman Sultan sent General Sadiq Pasha to Jaghbub with presents for Sayyid al-Mahdi (al-Sanusi). Ten years later, Rashid Pasha, Governor of Cyrenaica, dressed in civilian clothes and unarmed, visited the Sayyid and paid him homage.[32](#)

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

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

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

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

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

This advance of the Sanusiyyah into the Sahara and the Central Sudan brought the Order face to face with the French, and Franco–Sanusi relations henceforward became greatly strained. In 1317/1899, therefore, Sayyid al-Mahdi moved the seat of the Order from Kufra to Qiru, in Kanem, in order to

organize resistance to the French, to administer the vast regions recently won by the Order, and to direct the propaganda activities of the Order in a more effective manner in the region.[39](#)

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

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

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

B: Teachings and Philosophy of the Sanussiyyah Order

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

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

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

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

The process of accomplishing this “salvation” is described by the Grand Sanusi himself in three of his nine books: *al-Salsabil al-Main fi al-Taraiq al-Arbain* (The Sweet Spring of the Forty Orders), wherein he describes seven stages through which the soul has to pass in order to become purified and united with God; *Kitab al-Masail al-Ashr, al-Musamma Bughyat al-Maqasid fi Khulasat al-Marasid* (The Book of the Ten Problems, Called the Purpose of Desires and the Summary of Intentions), in which he discusses ten of the problems which the Muslims encounter in their daily prayers), and *Iqad al-Wasnan fi al-Amal bi al-Hadith wal-Quran* (Awakening the Slumberer through Observance of the Hadith and the Quran), in which, in an effort to extol the virtue of following the Prophet's (S) sayings and practices, he deals with the various ways and means followed by the Muslim ‘ulama’ for understanding the Hadith.[43](#)

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

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

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

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

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

But although he studied all these Orders and was influenced by them, his own Order was not, as has been sometimes claimed, a mere conglomeration of them. On the contrary, it was a “consistent and carefully thought out way of life.”[47](#) Nor is his Order a mere offshoot of the Shadhiliyyah Order.[48](#) What

he in fact seems to have intended was to bring together and unite the various Islamic Orders and so, eventually, to unite all Muslims.[49](#)

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

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

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

C: Achievements: An Evaluation

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

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

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

What served to help the Order in this respect was the fact that when it emerged the Muslims in the countries to which it addressed its call were in a state of abject poverty and backwardness; they were,

indeed, ignorant of their religion and in dire need for some spiritual orientation, particularly when Sanusi teachings took as their basis the true and original tenets and rites of Islam. This, no doubt, made the Sanusiyyah teachings readily acceptable to these people, since it not only gave them the spiritual stamina they had needed, but also *reassurance and confidence in their own values by acknowledging and in fact reinforcing the true principles and rites of their own religion*.

On the other hand, the poverty, backwardness, and ignorance of the Muslim peoples at the time must not be carried too far as an explanation for the rapid progress that the Sanusiyyah Order achieved. For, then, the success of the Order would (unjustifiably) be attributed rather to the naïveté of these people than to the rational appreciation on their part of the intrinsic values of its teachings.

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

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

Considered in this light, the Sanusiyyah Order is far from deserving the accusations of extreme puritanism and fanaticism which H. Duveyrier^{[55](#)} levelled against it. He asserted that the Sanusiyyah prohibition of drinking and smoking is a reflection of this fanaticism. He even went to the extreme of saying that assassinations of Europeans in North and Central Africa at that time could have been committed by none other than the Sanusi agents, and even considered that the Sanusiyyah propaganda was in fact at the root of every misfortune which befell the French interests.^{[56](#)}

Similarly, Professor Arnold J. Toynbee^{[57](#)} has accused the Sanusiyyah of “Zealotism,” that is, “archaism evoked by foreign pressure” seeking, in self-defence when encountering Western civilization, to take refuge from the unknown into the familiar. In his opinion when it joins battle with a stranger who practises superior tactics and employs formidable new-fangled weapons, it finds itself getting the worst of the encounter, and, therefore, responds by practising its own traditional art of war with abnormally scrupulous exactitude.

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

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

common and widespread throughout North Africa.[58](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The distribution of the lodges was carefully planned by the Sanusi leaders. They were designed to

comprehend the principal tribal groupings, the more important lodges being built at the centres of tribal life, while most of the other lodges were placed on important caravan-routes. Professor E. E. Evans--Pritchard, while commenting on the wisdom of the Sanusi leaders for constructing their lodges on Graeco-Roman foundations in conformity with a "politico-economic plan," remarks that "where the Greek and Romans and Turks found it convenient or essential to build villages and posts was where the Sanusiyyah established its lodges."[62](#)

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

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

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

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

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

Even the head of the Order possessed no authority to interfere directly in the administration of the

estates of the lodges. Members of the Sanusi family and the teachers and administrative officials of the Order usually lived at Jaghbub and Kufra, and the lodges used to supply them regularly with gifts of various products, local or imported, such as skin, wool, grain, butter, honey, meat, rice, tea, sugar, and cloth.[67](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the contrary, they were (in addition to being centres for religious instruction and missionary propaganda) community centres bustling with great educational, economic, and agricultural activities.

The Sanusi lodges provided the countries in which they were founded with a unique educational machinery which served to instruct both tribesmen and townsmen (but more the former) in their language, history, and religion, as well as to teach them purely secular subjects, including mathematics, chemistry, agriculture, and the use of weapons.⁷¹

The Sanusi leaders are, in fact, known for insisting that their followers should work hard and avoid accustoming themselves to a lazy and leisurely life. Agriculture and commerce, thus, progressed, and Libya in particular experienced a degree of material progress that it had not known for centuries.

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

D: Decline and Recovery

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

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

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

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

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

Turkey.

The Italians had estimated that the Arab inhabitants of Libya would take the only course open to them, namely, complete surrender and the acceptance of the Italian rule. However, as events proved, the Italians had miscalculated the feelings of the Arabs about the Italian adventure, for as soon as hostilities began, the Libyans, Cyrenaicans, Tripolitarians, and Fezzanese hastened to join the Turkish force, rising as one man in an effort to repulse and drive out the invading gentiles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

By March 1916 the Turks and Libyans were in retreat. By this time, too, the differences of opinion

between Sayyid Ahmad and Sayyid Idris had become too great to be in any way bridged.⁷⁸ This was all the more evident since these differences were of a basic nature and reflected the difference in outlook and in the basic philosophy with which each of the two Sayyids looked upon the task of continuing the war against Turkey.

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

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

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

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

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

In April 1921, the Turkish Parliament nominated him as King of Iraq. He proved to be a staunch supporter of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and later tried to work for the restoration of the *Khilafat* to Istanbul. He went afterwards to Damascus in order to bring about a reconciliation between Syria and Turkey, but was forced by the French authorities to leave Syria in 1343/1924. From there he went to the Hijaz, where he was well received by King ibn Saud, and remained there until his death at Madinah in 1352/1933.[81](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This *baiah*, in fact, proved to be a deadly blow to Italy's prestige and chances in Libya. It was now obvious that Italy's position in Tripolitania had become greatly jeopardized.⁸⁵ Even Amir Idris, under pressure from the Cyrenaican tribes, could not suppress the military camps and other formations within eight months in accordance with the Agreement of al-Rajma.

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

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

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

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

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

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

On December 22, 1930, a Royal Decree was issued, whereby the various pacts between the Italians and the Sanusis were formally revoked and the lodges were closed. The sequestration of the estates and goods of these lodges was ordered. By this Decree all movable and immovable property of the lodges

was confiscated and transferred to the patrimony of the “Colony” (i.e., Libya). The Decree even expressly forbade any recourse to the courts against seizures thus made by the Italian administration.

The Sanusiyyah Order itself was considered by the Italians to be an illegal association.⁸⁷ By the outbreak of the Second World War the Order had been finally crippled both as a spiritual and as a political force. It was not until August 1939 that the Sanusi leaders again began to recover their lost position as liberators and leaders of Libya. And it was not until December 1951, following many internal and external developments, that Libya emerged as an independent and sovereign State under the political and, to a much lesser extent, spiritual leadership of the Sanusiyyah Order.

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¹. This is the date given by Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif al-Sanusi in his book, *al-Anwar al-Qudsiyyah fi Muqaddamat al-Tariqat al-Sanusiyyah*, and also by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, Oxford University Press, London, 1946, p. 11, and by M. Fuad Shukri, *al-Sanusiyyah Din wa Daulah* (The Sanusiyyah as a Religion and as a State), Cairo, 1948, p. 11. Other authorities, however, mention other dates: 1206/1791, 1207/1792, 1211/1796, and 1218/1803.

². Salim bin Amir, “*al-Sanusiyyun fi Barqa*” (The Sanusis in Cyrenaica), *Majallat Umar al-Mukhtar*, Benghazi, Vol. I (September 1943), p. 6. See also Shukri, op. cit., p. 13.

³. Salim bin Amir, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴. Ibid., p. 12.

⁵. Ibid., pp. 5–6.

⁶. Evans-Pritchard, op. cit., p. 12.

⁷. Mustafa Bayyu, *Dirasah fi al-Tarikh al-Lubiyy* (Studies in Libyan History), Alexandria, 1953, p. 23.

⁸. Salim bin Amir, op. cit., p. 12.

- [9.](#) Bayyu, op. cit., p. 24.
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- [11.](#) Evans–Pritchard, op. cit., p. 12.
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- [23.](#) Ibid., p. 53.
- [24.](#) Evans–Pritchard, op. cit., p. 17.
- [25.](#) Ibid., pp. 17–18.
- [26.](#) Ibid., p. 70.
- [27.](#) Shukri, op. cit., p. 30.
- [28.](#) Evans–Pritchard, op. cit., p. 91.
- [29.](#) Shukri, op. cit., p. 55.
- [30.](#) A summary of this firman is given by Salim bin Amir, op. cit., Vol. II (May), pp. 5–6. The issue of this firman seems to have been necessary because the Turkish administration appears to have considered the earlier firman to be covering only the Sanusi lodges in Cyrenaica; a new firman was to cover the Tripolitanian lodges as well as those to be established in future by Sayyid al-Mahdi. See M. Tayyib al-Ashhab, *al-Mahdi al-Sanusi*, Tripoli, 1952, pp. 149, 157.
- [31.](#) Shukri, op. cit., pp. 70–73.
- [32.](#) Cumming, op. cit., p. 22.
- [33.](#) Ibid. See also Shukri, op. cit., pp. 69–70.
- [34.](#) See Evans–Pritchard, op. cit., p. 21.
- [35.](#) Cumming, op. cit., p. 22.
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- [37.](#) Ibid., pp. 21–22.
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- [40.](#) Cumming, op. cit., p. 24. See also Shukri, op. cit., pp. 63–66.
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Chapter 74: Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani

A: Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

"Throughout the Muslim world in general and the Arab world in particular this relentless political

penetration galvanized Muslims into a reaction consonant with Islam's politico-religious structure. This structure being both a religion and a State at the same time, weakness in one was deemed by the Muslims weakness in the other and *vice versa*" (Nabih Amin Faris).

This feeling culminated in a form of movement that aroused the Muslims on the one hand to defend their lands against the inroads of Western imperialism and on the other to save their faith against the aggression of the Christian missionary. That is how the Muslims came to realize that they could not, even if they wanted to continue to live as they had hitherto lived, be complacently secure in the illusion that the pattern of life accepted as valid in the past must for ever remain valid, for that complacency, that security of convictions and illusions, was shattered to pieces by what had happened to them in the last few decades.

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

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

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

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

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

This "wild man of genius," as Blunt called him, always refused to consider money or honours, and

preferred, without doubt, to preserve his liberty of action in order to serve better the ideal to which he devoted his whole life, namely, the rebirth of the Muslim world.

During his stay in Paris in 1301/1883, al-Afghani met Ernest Renan on whom he made such an impression that the illustrious French writer could not but express his enthusiasm in these terms: "The freedom of his thought, his noble and loyal character made me believe during our conversation that I had before me, brought to life again, one of my old acquaintances, Avicenna, Averroes, or another of those great infidels who represented during five centuries the tradition of the human spirit."

B: Life

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

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

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

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

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

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

him until the defeat of Arabi.

Then followed a period of three years in Paris, fruitful for the publication of his ideas. In 1301/1883, he carried on a controversy with Ernest Renan on "Islam and Science," and in 1302/1884, published with his disciple Muhammad Abduh, exiled from Egypt for his complicity in the Arabi uprising, an Arabic weekly *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* (The Indissoluble Link) aiming at arousing the Muslims against Western exploitation. The British soon banned the paper in Egypt and India; nevertheless, in its short life it did exercise some influence in these countries.

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

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

C: Philosophy

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

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

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

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

Moreover, true civilization, he held, is that which is based on learning, morality, and religion, and not on material progress such as the building of great cities, the accumulation of great riches, or the perfection of the engines of murder and destruction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

D: Political Thought

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

some temporary benefit, for they become thus the agents of their own destruction.”

The Occidentals, according to al-Afghani, adopt in the East strange methods for suppressing the patriotic spirit, stifling national education, and destroying Oriental culture. Thus, they incite the Orientals to deny every virtue and every value in vogue in their respective countries. They persuade them that there is not, in the Arabic, Persian, or Indian languages, any literature worth mentioning, and that in their history there is not a single glory to report.

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

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

E: Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A: Life

Nobody has contributed to the renaissance of Muslim thought in modern Egypt more than Muhammad

Abduh. He was a great Egyptian philosopher, sociologist, and reformer, and is ranked as one of the most remarkable figures in the modern Muslim world. On his death in 1323/1905 he left numerous disciples and many works of real interest and inestimable value. He was, and still is, commonly given the superb title “al-Ustadh al-Imam” (The Master and Guide); this title alone shows the influence that he had upon his contemporaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In his book, *The Egyptian Empire under Ismail*, Dr. Muhammad Sabri observed: “They overloaded the memories of the pupils with a welter of grammatical knowledge and theological subtleties designed to narrow the mind and prevent its development.” While at al-Azhar, Abduh went through an inner crisis; he was then to be seen indulging in ascetic exercises and even trying to isolate himself and shun the

world. But again the wise counsel of Shaikh Darwish aided him to emerge from this mystical crisis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then occurred the *coup d'état* of 1296/1879, which precipitated the fall of the cabinet of Nubar Pasha, and some European ministers, the first consequence of the nationalist movement that was beginning to

develop. Another, more serious, consequence was the revolt of the Egyptian army under Urabi against the Turko–Circassian officers; it developed into a revolution that resulted in the occupation of Egypt by the British troops in 1300/1882.

After Urabi's failure, Muhammad Abduh, accused of conspiring with the revolutionaries, was condemned to three years' exile. For, although he had not at first been a partisan of Urabi whom he considered to be the mouthpiece of purely military ideas, Abduh with the further development of events, came wholeheartedly to support his cause and became one of the chief voices of the revolutionist government, fighting energetically for the liberty and independence of the Egyptian people.

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

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

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

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

It is thus that Muhammad Abduh returned to Egypt in 1306/1888. He was appointed, a Judge in the Native Tribunal and then a Counsellor at the Court of Appeal. As a magistrate he was well known for his sense of equity and independence of his spirit that were never encumbered with the forms of judicial

procedure. He now concentrated his efforts on the awakening of Egypt by the spreading of knowledge, by moral education, and by the adaptation of the traditional social institutions to the demands of contemporary life.

Nominated as a member of the Administrative Council of al-Azhar University, Muhammad Abduh threw himself into an indefatigable activity in order to renew and raise the material, cultural, and moral standards of this old Islamic University. The influence of the liberal doctrines he professed was readily felt. He instituted courses in the secular sciences such as history, geography, natural history, mathematics, and philosophy, sciences that had not previously appeared in the curricula of this University.

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

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

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

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

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

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

France of Islam.

In another polemic on the philosophy of ibn Rushd, Muhammad Abduh defended a thesis dear to him, that the fatalism with which Islam is reproached is only a distortion of the Muslim religion, a distortion due to the misunderstanding of the very fundamentals of the faith. On another occasion, an article on ibn Rushd published by the Christian editor of the review *al-Jamiah* drew a reply from Muhammad Abduh which, published at first in a series of articles in the *Manar*, then collected in one volume, *al-Islam wal-Nasraniyyah* (Islam and Christianity), constitutes a piece of the modern Muslim apologetics of great value.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B: His Philosophy

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

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

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

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

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

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

He regarded logic not as an academic exercise, but as a positive instrument for true and constructive thinking that led to action. This view rendered the pursuit of logic obligatory for one's moral life. Shaikh Abduh, however, repeatedly expressed the opinion that, to liberate oneself from vulgar prejudices and idols, to be in a position to cultivate a science, in brief to be able usefully to seek the true and the good, force of the intellect in itself is insufficient. Necessary also, and above all, are moral qualities, principally courage, the will for action, integrity, and the love of truth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Abduh, in the second phase of his intellectual activity, preoccupied more with ethics than with pure metaphysics, rapidly passes over a thousand and one controversies raised by the question of free-will

which, in Islam, has set the partisans of free-will (the Qadarites) and the partisans of predestination (the Jabrites) one against the other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He points out that the Prophet and his Companions were men of action whose lives expressed an unshakable faith in the freedom of the human will. In fact, "fatalism" associated with Islam was a later

distortion which well served those rulers whose interest lay in exploiting the Muslim peoples. The evil effects of that enervating doctrine were only too visible in Abduh's own time, and supplied a living argument in favour of his pragmatic appeal to return to the vitality and freedom of the original faith.

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

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

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

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

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

Quite on the contrary, it is the religious Law, the divine decree, which confers on actions their character of being good or evil which we recognize in them. A reversal of values thus remains conceivable, if the will of the divine legislator (*al-Shari*) is pleased to reverse the order and criterion of his judgments and to

arrange that good shall become evil and vice versa, as it happens, for example, in the abrogation (*naskh*) of a prohibition (*hurmah*) to make it an obligation (*wujub*).

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

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

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

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

And Abduh manifestly considers that reason can take him a long way on this path. "Natural morality," he says, "is not only possible in theory, but it has been applied by certain individuals of the *elite*."

Unfortunately, not all humanity is constituted of sages. Man is not a simple creature, and his needs are not as limited as those of animals. Moreover, humanity does not always allow itself to be guided by reason alone; there are other faculties, other factors which exert an influence no less great on the conduct and judgments of men; from them comes the possibility of error and evil; and, besides, reason alone, with rare exceptions, is not sufficient to lead to happiness.

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

“The sacred Law,” writes Muhammad Abduh in his *Risalat al-Tauhid*, “came simply to show us what existed in reality; it was not this Law which created either the good or the evil.... At the same time as the sacred Law imposes certain beliefs on us, it makes their beauty accessible to reason.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

in the same year, namely, "The Philosophy of Society and History.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To Abduh, the evolution of human society has known three stages. The first stage is the age of the

senses, when preoccupations of men scarcely rise above physical cares and their beliefs are animistic. The second stage is the age of prophecy, in which men have already been prepared by the experience of the preceding age to gain some understanding of the laws of nature and of the constitution of society. Corresponding to these stages, the first step in the education of society is the experience that it progressively acquires, and the second is the teaching of the prophets who serve as guides to society and adapt their missions to its conditions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“This state of affairs has so influenced the majority of reasonable men that they have tended to serve

humanity without attaching themselves fanatically to one race, or one religion, or one doctrine.” If humanity conducted itself by following its nature, and in recalling the good that is innate in it, it would possess the social virtues such as strengthen in people’s minds the consciousness of their original identity, which consciousness would inculcate in them the spirit of concord, sympathy, and peace. Muhammad Abduh even declared in *al-Urwah* in 1302/1884 that virtues in the human race are common; they preserve human society and protect it from dissolution.

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

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

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

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

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

Hence his concentration on moral and educational reform after the disappearance of *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*. For him, theory and practice were always intimately related, and it was only arbitrarily that one could separate one's ideas from one's actions. Abduh was, in fact, a born moralist, and he wished to act directly on people's conscience rather than to isolate himself to construct a more or less coherent theological system.

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

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

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

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

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

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

For him, then, an exegesis drawn from all sources would very likely mislead the believers and make them stray away from the true aim of the Quran that is, above all, the guidance of conduct. The understanding urged by Abduh is thus that which rises in the depths of a sensitive and circumspect

conscience, and is the fruit of meditation on the Book itself. The effort of Muhammad Abduh tends to eliminate from his to/sir all the questions giving rise to differences between the commentators.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is the same with the verse which follows immediately: “To the unjust We have brought down torment

from heaven,” where Abduh, in accordance with his method, abstains from determining the nature of the torment; that, he would have said, has no practical importance. The *tafsir* of Muhammad Abduh shows a constant concern for affirming the universal message of the Quran, while always fitting this belief into an evolutionistic and progressive conception.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ignorant of the needs and aspirations of their time, they lived almost on the fringe of society. Hence he

urged his countrymen to realize their social responsibility towards their country, instead of waiting till reform came to them; he further urged them to build up their culture progressively upon their own institutions rather than blindly imitate Western ideas and customs in a superficial manner. He wanted a real reform from within, rather than the outward show thereof.

C: The School of Muhammad Abduh in Egypt

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

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

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

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

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

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

Between these two opposite schools, the modernist and the traditionalist, there was formed a third school mainly recruited from the most important writers of our time, all of whom, in different ways, were disciples of Muhammad Abduh. Egyptian thinkers before Abduh's time were in fact not inspired by any well-defined ideal. And there is good reason to say that Muhammad Abduh gave unity and precision to Egyptian thought.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meditating upon the evils from which Egyptian society suffered, he perceived that half the nation was

gripped by a general paralysis of social life, a paralysis the cause of which was the ignorance and mediocrity in which women were kept in the country.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rashid Rida contacted Muhammad Abduh as soon as he arrived in Cairo. He followed the Master, he

said, like his shadow. In March 1898, he founded the review *al-Manar* that aimed at arousing the desire for education and at reforming textbooks and teaching methods, besides denouncing the innovations that had been introduced in religious beliefs and criticizing customs and practices foreign to the spirit of Islam.

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the Egyptian University was officially founded in 1344/1925, Mustafa Abd al-Raziq was called upon to teach there. He became the first Professor of Islamic Philosophy in that University. In his lectures at the Faculty of Arts, later published under the modest title of “Prolegomena to the Study of

Islamic Philosophy,” he traced the main trends of Muslim philosophy; while throwing light on the various aspects of the principal problems, he met, with calm and serenity, the attacks of certain Orientalists who had denied the originality of Muslim thought.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As this transformation is still going on and the two features mentioned above have not yet obtained an all-encompassing hold over the society and the individual, the state and the tradition of philosophical

thinking in Turkey cannot be expected to be comparable to what they are in the West. Nonetheless, as several other Muslim nations are facing or are going to face the same conditions that gave rise to modern philosophical thinking in Turkey, it can be instructive to study that thinking.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The philosophical manifestation of the new mode of thinking and contacts with the European philosophy were seen in the rise of interest in two philosophical tendencies. One was scientism and materialism, the

other the philosophy of natural rights and social contract. We find the first expressed by a former member of the '*ulama*' corps, Tahsin Hoca, and the second by Namik Kemal, one of the leaders of the constitutional movement in Turkey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This review is itself the best example of the craving, now established, for a new philosophical orientation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His was a daring experiment, to work out a philosophical view, not by the mere repetition of the Muslim or Western philosophies or by a juxtaposition of both in a syncretistic manner, but by blending them together through a creative synthesis. In spite of the fact that his philosophy aimed at teaching certain

definite beliefs and value judgments derived from his own philosophical speculation, it did great service to philosophical thinking by stimulating the rise of rival philosophies.

Gokalp's intellectual integrity and personality played a decisive role in his contribution to thought. His great respect for philosophy, his emphasis on independent thinking, and his freedom from philosophical fanaticism prevented the utilization of his philosophy as an instrument for the suppression and persecution of the rival philosophies. In reality, all the subsequent philosophical trends took their initial clues from Gokalp's thinking or were direct continuations of some aspects of his analysis. Another contribution of Gokalp's personality to the Turkish mind was the road he prepared for closer contacts with Western philosophy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gokalp himself taught none of these, he was a Professor of Sociology, but he was the patron behind all, even though the men who taught these were his philosophical adversaries. A further step was taken in the modernization of philosophical teaching during World War I with the appointment of German

professors. Although these German professors of philosophy contributed nothing to the content of philosophical thinking in Turkey, they were useful in introducing the scientific treatment of the history of philosophy for which the Germans are reputed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The instability just illustrated was an inevitable consequence of the Turkish thinkers' plunge into the

world of Western philosophy supported by a long tradition as well as by a constantly changing cultural and scientific background. It has shown that Turkey has not yet reached the stage of having genuine philosophical schools and representatives and that there is still a long road to travel.

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

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

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

Bibliographical Note

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

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

1. *Pre-Nineteenth Century* – Some of the *madrasahs* of the capital of the Ottoman Empire were institutions of higher learning. In the early stage of the history of this Empire teaching in them was more legal and scientific than philosophical in tenor. In course of time, these institutions lost their interest in science and confined themselves to the study of law, with the so-called “religious sciences” as subsidiary disciplines. What we might call “philosophy” was connected with *tasawwuf* that was cultivated outside the *madrasahs*. Ibn al-Arabi and Rumi were the thinkers having the greatest influence on the educated classes. See Katib Chelebi (Hajji Khalifah), *Mizan al-Haqq fi Ikhtiyar al-Ahaqq*, translated by G. L. Lewis as *The Balance of Truth*, London, 1957; A. Adnan Adivar, *Osmanli Turklerinde Ilim*, Istanbul,

1943, particularly pp. 105–06. There arose during the eleventh/seventeenth century a strong fundamentalist opposition to philosophy and mysticism both of which were branded as *ilhad*. This was followed in the twelfth/eighteenth century by the trends of scepticism, deism, and even atheism, perhaps as a reaction. No study of these is available.

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

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

4. *The Constitutional Period* – After 1908, various philosophical tendencies came to light. Two philosophico–sociological reviews were published: *Yeni Felsefe Mecmuasi*, Salonika, and *Ulum–u İctimaiye ve İktisadiye Mecmuasi*, Istanbul. The major trends were (a) evolutionism, (b) positivism, and (c) idealism. There was also a weak and vague interest in socialism. See H. Z. Ulken, “Bizde Fikir Cereyanlari,” in *Felsefe ve İctimaiyat Mecmuasi*, Istanbul, 1927, Vol. I, No. 4, pp. 311–14; “Turkiyede Positivizm Temayulu,” in *Insan*, Istanbul, 1939, No. 11, pp. 849–53; “Turkiyede Idealism Temayulu,” *ibid.*, Istanbul, 1939, No. 12, pp. 929–38; C. O. Tutengil, *Prens Sabahaddin*, Istanbul, 1954. The works

produced by writers and translators such as Baha Tevfik, Ahmed Nebil, Haydar Rifat, Subhi Edhem, Mustafa Subhi, Edhem Necdet, and others were not original but transmitted mostly Western philosophical ideas. The idealistic trend was ushered in by Zia Gokalp; see his *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization*, translated and edited by N. Berkes, London and New York, 1959, pp. 46ff.

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

Chapter 77: Renaissance in Iran: General

In early thirteenth/nineteenth century, Iran presented a gloomy picture of political and social decline. After the collapse of the Safawid power (907/1501–1135/1722) it was never able to regain its old glory.

The military achievements and political consolidation under Nadir Shah (1149/1736–1160/1747) were short-lived, and the admirable efforts of Karim Khan Zand (1164/1750–1193/1779), to restore the country's old prestige did not produce lasting results.

A new dynasty was founded in 1211/1796 by Aqa Muhammad Qajar, a great despot and a sadist of the worst type. It was under this new dynasty that Iran was reduced to a mere shadow of its past. The disaster came through internal disorder and foreign interference. During this period the Anglo–French rivalry in Europe and Napoleon's grandiose plans to conquer India in early thirteenth/nineteenth century dragged Iran into the orbit of international diplomacy. Again, the new Western influences awakened the people to their miserable plight and led them to the assertion of their basic rights.

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

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

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

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

Power was abused in strange ways as Court decisions were sold and robbers were licensed.^{[3](#)} Public offices were monopolized by a host of princes – Fateh Ali Shah (1212/1797–1250/1834) alone had one hundred and fifty-nine children^{[4](#)}, who in the absence of a strong and efficient central government plundered the helpless peasants with impunity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was followed by military colleges in Teheran and Isfahan in 1301/1883 and 1304/1886 respectively. The first school for girls was opened in Chaltas near Kirman in 1315/1897. The next year a society was

founded for the express purpose of coordinating the working of various schools as well as for the unification of educational standards. A school of political science was founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1317/1899. This was followed by a school of agriculture in 1318/1900. That is how Iran was slowly struggling ahead in the field of education.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Amongst the modernizing influences in Iran one cannot ignore the part played by the telegraph line. The Iranian Government, conscious of the role of telegraph in modern communications, built the first line in 1275/1858 between Teheran and Sultaniyeh. This was later extended to Tabriz and Julfa. The British Government was interested in the extension of telegraph lines in Iran because it lay on the direct route between Europe and India and formed a vital link in the new international telegraphic network.

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

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

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

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

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

He had a dynamic personality. A peerless orator, he swept the masses off their feet with his

impassioned speech. He cut across the frontiers of nations, and revolutions followed in his footsteps. Iran, Egypt, and Turkey felt the full impact of his personality. The Young Turk Movement of 1326/1908 owed most of its dynamism to the overwhelming influence of his teachings during his stay at Istanbul.

The Egyptian national movement and to no less a degree the intellectual awakening represented by Shaikh Muhammad Abduh were the direct outcomes of his creative genius. Most of the future leaders of the Iranian revolution in its early phase were inspired by him. Sayyid Jamal al-Din's eloquent sermons created amongst the Iranians a devotional attachment to him. He awakened them to a sense of dignity and freedom and to the dangers of internal despotism and foreign exploitation.

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

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

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

In return for the Russian and British-Indian loans almost the entire customs revenues of the country had been mortgaged to the two powers. The financial chaos had been accompanied by administrative crisis that drove people to organize an anti-government movement in the country. A secret society was formed by the name of Islah Talaban¹⁴ or "the reformists" under the leadership of Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, which rendered considerable service to the cause of freedom. Along with Tabatabai the other most prominent religious leader was Sayyid Abd Allah Bahbahani.¹⁵

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

Encouraged by the policy of the Prime Minister Ain al-Daulah to terrorize the divines and merchants who

were in the vanguard of the movement, the Governor of Teheran found a pretext to bastinado a well-known merchant. This provided the people with an excuse to intensify the political movement. The market was closed down and a stormy meeting was held in the Masjid-i Shah. The same night the '*ulama*' decided to lodge the customary form of protest, that is, to take "*bast*" in the sanctuary of Shah Abd al-Azim in the outskirts of Teheran. The scheme to launch a revolutionary movement was almost complete. This incident hastened its implementation by three months. It was Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai who had prevailed upon the '*ulama*' to start immediately the movement that, according to an earlier decision, was to be launched three months hence. [17](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Shah had to concede to the irresistible popular demand. The Governor had to go. The '*ulama*' made a triumphant return from Qum and on Jamadi al-Thani 14, 1324/August 5, 1906, the Shah issued orders for the establishment of the National Parliament. The nation succeeded in attaining its goal after a relatively short struggle. Elections were soon held and the Shah inaugurated the *Majlis* (Parliament) in Shaban/October of the same year. It did not take long to draw up and ratify the constitution. Thus, the Iranians won the unique distinction of becoming the first nation in the East to attain the parliamentary form of government.[20](#)

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

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

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

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

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

After the October Revolution of 1917/1336, however, the Russian policy completely changed. The Russian forces withdrew from Iran and the new government gave up all territorial claims and all

economic concessions except fishery rights in the Caspian Sea. The vacuum created by the departure of the Russian troops was immediately filled up by the British army.

In 1338/1919 the British concluded an agreement with the Iranian Government headed by Wuthuq al-Dauleh, which virtually meant the complete political and economic domination of Iran by Great Britain. The Parliament, however, refused to ratify the agreement and be a party to surrendering the sovereign rights of the nation. This shows that the national will for survival had triumphed even in the worst hour of political crisis.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reza Khan, the dictator, was now faced with the question of the future constitution. In spite of 2,500 years of its monarchic traditions, the Iranian nation, or at least a section of it, was now seriously

advocating the establishment of a republic. After World War I the ideas of political democracy swept the whole world and the Iranians who had won constitutional government much earlier were now thrilled at the prospect of a republican form of government.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the present Shah and the memory of the philosophers ibn Sina and Nasir al-Din Tusi and the poet Rudaki has been similarly honoured in recent years.

A society known as the “Anjuman-i Athar-i Milli”²⁸ was formed in 1345/1926 to look after the mausoleums of eminent writers, poets, and philosophers. It has so far repaired or reconstructed the mausoleums of Firdausi, ibn Sina, Khayyam, and a few others. A tribute has also been paid to poets and scholars by associating the broad modern avenues of Teheran with some of the immortal names in Persian literature. Thus, we come across Hafiz Avenue, Sadi Avenue, Firdausi Avenue, etc., which happen to be amongst the finest in the city.

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

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

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

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

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

To give an idea of progress in the spread of education it would suffice to say that the number of elementary and secondary schools, which at the end of World War I was nearly three hundred, was raised to five thousand in the next decade and a half. Ever since it has made rapid strides forward. In

1376/1957, there were 7,301 elementary and 842 secondary schools in the country with 910,000 and 163,000 students respectively.³⁰ The stress now is on village schools and on manual and technical training.³¹

A special Act was passed by the Parliament in 1347/1928 according to which one hundred students were sent to Europe annually for higher studies by the Ministry of Education at State expense. This was particularly welcome as no university existed in the country. Besides, the Ministries of War, Posts and Telegraphs, and the Departments of Agriculture, Justice, Finance, and Industries also sent abroad a number of students to ensure the supply of trained personnel. To have an idea of expansion in higher education, it may be noted that the number of students studying abroad in 1376/1957 was about four thousand.³²

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

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

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

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

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

Other Ministries also run their own colleges. The Ministry of Agriculture has an agricultural college at

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

There is co-education in elementary schools and at the university stage. The doors of all the colleges have been flung open to girl students and today there are a large number of girls studying in various colleges, especially in the departments of Medicine and Fine Arts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the fundamental changes in the Iranian society in recent history has been the emancipation of women, who had for long been deprived of their legitimate legal and social rights accorded to them by

Islam. The late Shah, inspired by the example set by Mustafa Kemal, whom he looked upon as his model and whom he visited in 1353/1934, introduced far-reaching social changes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The changing fortunes of Iran's political history continued to find an echo in the contemporary literature, and the poets violently reacted to the inroads of Western imperialism during World War I and the

immediate post-war years. It was, however, after long years of suffering that stability and freedom of the country were restored under Reza Shah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

into Persian what is regarded as valuable and fascinating in Western thought.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[5.](#) Ibid.

- [6.](#) Some authors have paid great tributes to him: see E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 4, p. 152; Robert Curzon, *Armenia*, p. 55; R. G. Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 264; Bahar, *Sabk Shinasi*, Vol. 3, p. 401.
- [7.](#) V. Sheean, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- [8.](#) Bahar, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 344.
- [9.](#) This paper was started by Mirza Malkom Khan who had been dismissed from the office of the Iranian Ambassador in London on account of his pronouncedly patriotic stand on the issue of tobacco concessions. His newspaper turned out to be the best contemporary Persian journal for its splendid expression. See E. G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 19.
- [10.](#) E. G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia*, p. 17.
- [11.](#) According to G. N. Curzon, the influence of the telegraph on Iran has been enormous. "I am disposed to attribute to it," he says, "more than to any other cause or agency, the change that has passed over Persia during the last thirty years ..." It is an exaggerated statement, yet it cannot be gainsaid that the telegraph played a substantial part in indirectly enlightening the Iranian mind.
- [12.](#) W. S. Haas, *Iran*, p. 35.
- [13.](#) The Iranian writers like Mirza Lutf Allah, the author of *Sharh-i Hal-o Athar-i Sayyid Jamal al-Din*, and Mirza Sifat Allah, the editor of *Maqalat-i Jamaliyyah*, claim Sayyid Jamal al-Din, who was born at Asadabad in 1254/1838, to be of Iranian origin. Mirza Lutf Allah describes himself as the son of the Sayyid's sister.
- [14.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *Tarikh-i Mufasssal-i Iran*, p. 532.
- [15.](#) Habib Allah Mukhtari, *Tarikh-i Bidari-i Iran*, pp. 39-40.
- [16.](#) Both of them lost their lives after the bombardment of the Parliament in 1326/1908; see Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 521.
- [17.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 509.
- [18.](#) During the thirteenth/nineteenth century, when the capitalist financial ideas of the British and Russian imperialists dominated the history of Iran, certain small European nations also came forward to share the grab-scramble, so that Belgium succeeded in taking over the management of the Customs in 1316/1898.
- [19.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 512.
- [20.](#) E. Groseclose, *Introduction to Iran*, p. 61.
- [21.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 532.
- [22.](#) "The sovereignty of Iran was violated with less compunction than that of Belgium, and with probably greater loss of life and property and greater disorganization of society" (E. Groseclose, *op. cit.*, p. 72).
- [23.](#) "To bring the agreement to a conclusion the British had to resort to bribery on a large scale. Three cabinet members, one of them the Prime Minister, were paid handsomely" (W. S. Haas, *op. cit.*, p. 140). "The British negotiators (Sir Percy Cox and Lord Curzon, presumably) ... paid 750,000 tomans to the three Persian statesmen" (V. Sheean, *op. cit.*, p. 23).
- [24.](#) "It had been created in 1290/1878 as a brigade. Russian officers traditionally held key positions in this unit, and during the period of Russian political ascendancy the brigade served as an additional safeguard to Russian interests in Iran" (George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, p. 157).
- [25.](#) *Modern Iran*, p. 69.
- [26.](#) E. Groseclose, *op. cit.*, p. 124. In the words of William S. Haas, "It is at least doubtful whether Reza Khan was ever attracted to republicanism, despite the example of Mustafa Kemal. Reza's ambition and idea of power fitted better with a monarchy" (*Iran*, p. 142).
- [27.](#) It derives its root from the word "Parthawa" which evolved itself into various forms, to wit, Parhawa, Palhawa, Palhaw and Pahlaw. Apart from Pahlawi, the word Pahlawan is also derived from Pahlaw and means brave and heroic like the members of the Pahlaw (Parthian) tribe.
- [28.](#) *Rahnuma-i Iran*, pp. 85-87.
- [29.](#) *Modern Iran*, p. 136.
- [30.](#) D. N. Wilber, *Iran, Past and Present*, p. 204.
- [31.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- [32.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- [33.](#) Abd Allah Razi, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

[34.](#) A veil or mantle used by Iranian women to cover their body.

[35.](#) Naficy, A General Survey of the Existing Situation in Persian Literature, p. 2.

Chapter 78: Renasissance in Iran: Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari

A: Life and Works

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

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

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

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

Nasir al-Din Shah in his visit to Meshed in 1274/1857–58 came especially to the city of Haji in order to

meet him in person. In Sabziwar, away from the turmoil of the capital, Haji spent forty years in teaching, writing, and training disciples, of whom over a thousand completed the course on *Hikmat* under his direction.

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

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

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

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

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

This work has been so popular that during the hundred years that have passed since its composition many commentaries have been written upon it including those of Muhammad Hidaji and the late Mirza Mehdi Ashtiyani as well as that of Muhammad Taqi Amuli whose commentary called the *Durar al-Fawaid* is perhaps the most comprehensive of all. The other writings of Haji, especially the *Asrar al-Hikam* which is of special interest because, as Haji himself writes in the introduction, it is a book

concerned with the *Hikmat* derived from the Islamic revelation (*hikmat-i imani*) and not just with Greek philosophy (*hikmat-i yunani*), and the commentary upon the *Mathnawi* are also of much importance, but the fame of Haji is due primarily to his *Sharh-i Manzumah*.

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

Approach

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

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

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

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

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

C: Teachings

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

unity and gradation of Being, substantial motion, the union of the knower and the known.

There are only two points on which Haji criticizes his master: first, on the nature of knowledge which in some of his writings Akhund considers a quality of the human soul while Haji considers it to belong to its essence, like Being itself, above all the Aristotelian categories such as quality, quantity, etc.; and secondly, on Mulla Sadra's doctrine of the union of the intellect and the intelligible which Haji accepts, criticizing, however, his method of demonstrating its validity. Otherwise, the principles of the teachings of Haji in *Hikmat* are already to be found in the writings of Akhund.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Haji divides reality into three categories: the divine essence which is at once above all determinations including Being and is also the principle of all manifestations of Being Itself; extended being (*wujud al-munbasat*) which is the first act or word or determination of the divine essence and is identified with light; and particular beings which are the degrees and grades of extended being and from which the quiddities are abstracted.⁸ All these stages of reality are unified so that one can say that reality is an absolute unity with gradations, of which the most intelligible symbol is light.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Haji, like the other Hakims, rejects this reasoning and argues that in the statement "God is," by "is" we mean either non-being in which case we have denied God or something other than what we mean in the

statement “man is” in which case we have denied our intelligence the ability to attain a knowledge of God. Since both of these conclusions are untenable, “is” in the case of God must share a meaning in common with “is” in the case of this or that creature.¹¹ The truth is that Being is one reality with degrees of intensity and not many realities from which the mind abstracts the concept of Being.¹²

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

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

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

Reality, then, is a unity comprising stages or grades of intensity¹⁴ the source of which is the divine essence that we may consider to be Pure Being without quiddity if by quiddity we mean the answer to the question *quid est* – “what is it?” or identical with its quiddity if by quiddity we understand that by which a thing is what it is.

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

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

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

And in the world of bodies, if the quiddities possess a subtle form of matter, they belong to the world of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

universal soul and the soul of the heavenly spheres, the inverted forms of the world of imagination, nature, form, and matter.

These stages, although distinct from one another, do not destroy the unity of God's acts. God's essence, attributes, and acts all possess unity, each in its own degree. The lowest stage of unity is the unity of the acts and the highest that of the essence, the realization of which comes at the end of the spiritual journey.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the chapter on prophecy²⁷ Haji discusses the qualifications and characteristics that distinguish a prophet from ordinary men. The prophet is the intermediary between this world and the next, between the world of the senses and the spiritual essences, so that his being is necessary to maintain the hierarchy of Being. The prophet is distinguished by the fact that he has knowledge of all things which he has acquired by the grace of God and not through human instruction, by his power of action which is such that the matter of this world obeys him as if it were his body, and by his senses which are such that he sees and hears through them what is hidden to others. He is also marked by his immunity from sin and error (*ismah*) in all his acts and deeds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D: Post-Sabziwarian Hikmat

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

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

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

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

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

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

position has been accorded to Haji in Persia.

[2.](#) There is an account of the life of Haji by himself on which we have drawn much for our information. See M. Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *Tarikh-i Falasifih-i Islam*, Ilmi Press, Teheran, 1336–37 Solar, Vol. 2, pp. 131ff.; and also by the same author *Life and Philosophy of Haji Mulla Hddi Sabziwari*, Tahuri Bookshop, Teheran, 1955. The story of the life of Haji as related by his son as well as a summary of some of Haji's doctrines not all of which, however, can be considered to be authentic is given by E. G. Browne, in his *A Year Amongst the Persians*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1950, pp. 143–58. Accounts of his life are also found in the usual sources like the *Qisas al-Ulama*, *Matla al-Shams*, and *Riyad al-Arifin*. When Gobineau visited Persia, Haji was alive and at the height of his fame; he is mentioned with great respect in Gobineau's writings; see Comte de Gobineau, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*, G. Gres et Cie, Paris, 1923, pp. 113–16. There are also references to Haji in A. M. A. Shushtery, *Outlines of Islamic Culture*, Bangalore, 1938, Vol. 2, pp. 452–54; and in M. Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, Luzac & Co., London, 1908, pp. 175ff.

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

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

[5.](#) See M. Mudarrisi Chahardihi, *op. cit.*, pp. 63ff.

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

[7.](#) See the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

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

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

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

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

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

[13.](#) For this view Haji is indebted partly to Mulla Sadra and partly to Jalal al-Din Dawwani.

[14.](#) In his commentary upon the *Mathnawi*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1285/1868, p. 8, Haji names these stages as the divine essence or ipseity; its first determination; the archetypes (*al-ayan al-thabitah*); the world of the spirits (*arwah*); the world of inverted forms or similitudes (*amthal*); the world of bodies (*ajsam*); and, finally, the stage which is the summation of all those before it, i.e., the stage of the perfect man (*al-insan al-kamil*). In other places Haji considers the seven stages of universal existence to be the divine essence that is the Principle, the world of divinity, of the intelligences, of the angels, of

the archetypes, of forms, and of matter. This descending hierarchy is also mentioned in E. G. Browne, op. cit., p. 150; A. M. A. Shushtery, op. cit., p. 454.

[15.](#) Sharh-i Manzumah, pp. 131–40.

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

[17.](#) Sharh-i Manzumah, pp. 140–51.

[18.](#) Ibid., p. 157. M. T. Amuli, Durar al-Fawaid, Mustafawi Press, Teheran, Vol. 1, pp. 480ff. It is in this discussion that Haji criticizes Mulla Sadra for having proved the identity of the knower and the known in the Mashair through the argument of relation (tadayuf) that Haji considers to be insufficient.

[19.](#) Asrar al-Hikam, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1286/1869, pp. 83ff.

[20.](#) This knowledge, Haji compares to the point of the Pen before writing which contains all the letters of the alphabet before they become distinct on paper. The Pen is the same as the reality of Muhammad (al-haqiqat al-Muhammadiyah) and the first victorial light (nur al-qahir) of the Illuminationists.

[21.](#) Sharh-i Manzumah, pp. 183–84.

[22.](#) Refer to the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul. This seven-fold hierarchy is essentially the same as mentioned above with only a change in terminology that occurs often among the Hakims.

[23.](#) Sharh-i Manzumah, pp. 284ff.; Asrar al-Hikam, pp. 152ff. These faculties are also outlined in Iqbal, op. cit., and Browne, op. cit., p. 157.

[24.](#) For the meaning of this expression that is taken from the terminology of the Illuminationists, see the chapter on Suhrawardi Maqtul.

[25.](#) See Iqbal, op. cit., pp. 185–86.

[26.](#) These stages have already been discussed in the chapter on Mulla Sadra whose terminology Haji has adopted directly. See also A. M. A., Shushtery, op. cit., p. 454.

[27.](#) Sharh-i Manzumah, pp. 318–29; also Asrar al-Hikam, pp. 307ff.

[28.](#) Regarding the question of the relation of Islam to previous religions and abrogation of older religions, see F. Schuon, Transcendent Unity of Religions, Pantheon Co., New York, 1953, Chaps. 5 to 7.

[29.](#) Haji considers the greatest miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (S), who is the Seal of Prophecy, to be the Quran, which in the beauty of language has no match in Arabic literature. He adds that in each period God gives those miracles to His prophets that conform to the mentality of the people of that age. That is why the miracle of the Quran lies in its language as the Arabs considered eloquence to be of such great importance; likewise, in the case of Moses (as) his miracle was in magic which was at his time one of the basic arts, and in the case of Christ (as) raising the dead to life because medicine occupied at that time an exalted position among the sciences.

[30.](#) This is with reference to the verse of Light in the Quran (24:35), in which the olive tree, from the oil of which the divine light emanates, is said to be neither of the east nor of the west.

[31.](#) By this symbolism Haji implies that the message of Moses (as) was essentially the exoteric aspect of the Abrahamic tradition, and the message of Jesus (as) its esoteric aspect, while Islam, being a totality, is the summation of the two, at once esoteric and exoteric. See also F. Schuon, op. cit., Chap. 6.

[32.](#) Asrar al-Hikam, p. 369.

[33.](#) Sharh-i Manzumah, pp. 329ff.; Asrar al-Hikam, pp. 261ff.

[34.](#) A list of some of these Hakims is given by Gobineau, op. cit., pp. 116–20. See also Itimad al-Saltanih Muhammad Husain Khan, Kitab al-Maathir wal-Athar, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1306/1888, pp. 131–226.

[35.](#) This great authority on Hikmat and gnosis has trained a generation of students in Teheran University and the Sepahsalar madrasah but has not written extensively on these subjects.

[36.](#) This sage whom we mentioned in the chapter on Mulla Sadra is the author of many important works in Arabic and Persian including the commentary al-Mizan, Usul-i Falsafih wa Rawish-i Realism with commentary by Murtida Mutahhari, a book on the principles of Shiism which came as answers to a set of questions posed by Henri Corbin and published as the Salanih-i Maktab-i Tashayyu, No. 2; commentary upon the Asfar, etc. Tabatabai has revived the study of Hikmat in

Qum, which is the most important centre of Shiah studies today and has produced many scholars who have themselves become authorities on the intellectual sciences.

[37](#). It is for this reason that with great obstinacy and despite some awkwardness we have refused to translate Hikmat and Hakim simply as philosophy and philosopher even if in Persia too Hikmat is often called falsafah. Philosophy in Western languages is almost synonymous with one form or another of rationalism, and recently irrationalism has been divorced from sapientia which Hikmat and even falsafah imply in Arabic and Persian.

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 *madrasahs* 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 self-contentment 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 point[23](#) 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 tafsīlī*). 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 (*taʿayyun-i ruḥī*) when Unity breaks itself into so many spirits, e.g., angels. The fourth descent is ideal determination (*taʿayyun-i mithālī*), whereby the world of ideas comes into being. And the fifth descent is physical determination (*taʿayyun-i jasādī*): 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 (*tajallī*) 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-Mukhtarat, 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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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-Akhbar*. 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 1289/1871, 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 under-developed.

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 reformatory. 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 adhesion 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 *mufthimun*. 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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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 preception 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 Schopenhauerean 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 probeest 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.
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- [14.](#) Ibid., p. 80.
- [15.](#) Ibid., p. 150.
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- [17.](#) Ibid., p. 16.
- [18.](#) Ibid., p. 20.
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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 “*pesantran*” 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 Pryayi* (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 *Banih 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 Perhimpoean 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 1931/1932. Early in 1937/1938, 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 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 1924/1925, 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 month 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 presidentship 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 1944, it numbered about 120,000–armed men. This was the “Peta” which was to become the backbone of the Indonesian Republic’s army. By 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 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 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 reinstalled 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 Lingaadjati 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 Shahriar 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-Qulam*, 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.

Conclusion

It is hazardous to foretell the future of peoples, nations, and cultures. This is particularly true in a world torn asunder by ideological conflicts and constantly under the shadow of a total war. As it is, the fate of the whole human race is hanging in the balance and one spark of folly may set the whole world ablaze, thus falsifying all normal conjectures.

However, unless such an all-pervading calamity befalls mankind, one could make a guess about the future of Muslim culture and philosophical thought.

The trends we have traced in the life of different Muslim countries in Book Six should give us a fair idea as to what the future may have in store for Muslim thought and culture.

During the period of decadence the Muslims had lost their great tradition of original thinking on the one hand and moral stability and rectitude on the other. Renaissance in various Islamic countries throws into bold relief the need for educational and intellectual progress and the compelling necessity for moral reform on which depends not only the rise but also the very existence of a people's culture.

Luckily, the political and social upheaval in Muslim countries has often been accompanied by a zeal for religious, moral, and educational reform. The role of the various political and social reformers in different Islamic countries provides an ample proof of this healthy attitude.

As the reader of this work must have noticed, after the fall of Baghdad, Muslim thought took a new turn in philosophy and scientific inquiry. Philosophy took either the garb of poetry as in Rumi and Jami or that of theosophy as in the School of Ispahan, Mulla Sadra, and Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, but the scientific study of nature gradually ceased and its place was taken by the study of spiritual experience.

While Leonardo da Vinci, Copernicus, Brahe, Bruno, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Kepler, and Newton were engaged in unravelling the mysteries of nature, the thinkers of Islam were busy fathoming the depths of the spirit. In the empirical knowledge of the external world, the Muslims were left far behind the West.

Since the beginning of the fourteenth/twentieth century, however, they have directed their attention to it, but they have discovered that they cannot make any headway without becoming the veritable disciples of the West. The West on its part has been paying the debt it owes to the Muslim East with compound interest.

There is hardly a Muslim thinker in this century who has not owed a deep debt of gratitude to Western thinkers. In fact, Muslim scholars have drunk so deep at the fountainhead of Western learning that many of them have lost the taste for appreciating the learning of their own ancestors. Thus, Muslim scholarship has been inspired by the urge to acquire new knowledge advanced by the West.

With the desire to receive higher education and have research degrees in the fields of arts, sciences, and humanities, thousands of Muslim students go to the universities of Europe, America, and the Soviet Union. On their return, most of them engage themselves in communicating their knowledge to their pupils in the universities of their respective countries.

There is a group of Muslim scholars who are trying to recapture their past heritage. This is being done by the collection, preservation, and publication of the classics of their ancestors. Cairo is the centre of this activity. Dairat al-Maarif of Hyderabad Deccan also did excellent work in this field up to the partition of the sub-continent of India in 1366/1947 when the organization ceased to exist.

Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey are also publishing translations of Arabic classics in their respective languages. In this connection the services of Munshi Newal Kishore, a Hindu by profession and a Muslim in spirit, cannot be ignored. He published Urdu versions of hundreds of Muslim classics and, thus, rendered invaluable service to the Urdu language.

The same desire to recapture the past has found expression in the celebration of Firdausi's and ibn Sina's millenaries and Nasir al-Din Tusi's seventh centenary at Teheran in 1934, 1954, and 1955, respectively; the International Islamic Colloquium towards the end of 1957 at the University of the Panjab, Lahore, Pakistan; Masudi's millenary in 1958 in the Aligarh Muslim University, India; al-Ghazali's ninth centenary in March 1961 at Damascus.

There are ambitious programmes of development and reconstruction in countries like Pakistan, the United Arab Republic, Turkey, Iraq, and others. In the implementation of their programmes these countries are getting economic and technical aid from foreign powers and international agencies. Education is receiving special attention. New universities are being built in different Muslim lands. Academies, associations, and research institutes are working in the field of science, history, philosophy, fine arts, and literature in general.

There is no dearth of talent. In fact, the progress that Pakistan, Turkey, the United Arab Republic, and some other countries have made in the field of thought and education during the last one decade is remarkable.

In Pakistan, for instance, there were only two well-established universities at the time of the partition of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent in 1947. Now there are seven including one agricultural university and the number is rapidly going up. There are plans to establish an engineering university in the near future. Some of the scholars have held professorships in universities considered to be amongst the best in Europe and America.

To quote a few instances, Dr. Ishtiyag Husain Quraishi was for some time a Professor at Columbia University, and after finishing a brilliant ambassadorial career, Mr. Burke worked as Professor and Consultant in South Asian Studies at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis in the United States of America. Dr. Abdus Salam, Professor of Mathematics at the Imperial College of Science, London, at a comparatively young age, has brought fame to his country.

Another young scholar Dr. Fazlur Rahman lectured for several years in Durham University, and has recently joined the Institute of Islamic Studies in McGill University, Canada, as an Associate Professor. Many scholars from other Muslim countries are also engaged in teaching in Western universities under exchange programmes.

Given zest for knowledge and peace for a couple of decades, the Muslims should be able to catch up with the advanced nations of the West. If the entire material resources of each Muslim country are pooled together, substantial progress can be made within a short period.

If one thousand promising scholars are sent abroad by a Muslim country for higher studies to the world's best universities and, what is no less important, are given on their return the facilities needed for carrying out research undisturbed, they should be able to raise to a very considerable extent the intellectual level of their fellow countrymen. The intellectual renaissance of Japan affords a remarkable example of such a

phenomenal advance.

Muslims all over the world are now realizing the dire need for scientific studies, which were completely ignored for several centuries and the neglect of which was one of the main causes of their political downfall. Technological advance, no less than theoretical science, is invaluable for acquiring power over nature and, therefore, the present emphasis on it in every Muslim State is most welcome.

Conscious of the wide gap left between the highly advanced technological civilization of the West and their own countries, the Muslims now seem resolved to catch up with the West in the shortest possible time. The tempo of life has, therefore, considerably increased since the middle of this century.

But for the revival of a culture this is not enough. What is needed most is a sound ideology and the moulding of life in accordance with that ideology. About the soundness of Islamic ideology no Muslim has any doubt. All that is needed is to bring its moral values home to every mind through universal education.

Yet Islamic ideology is different from Islamic practice. One is an affair of the intellect, the other that of the will. An enlightened intellect is not necessarily a dedicated will. Today we see a yawning gulf between belief and practice throughout the Muslim world.

As the President of Pakistan has said in one of his speeches, “unless ways and means for the practical application of the Quranic injunctions were found out, the gulf between theoretical faith and its practical application in life would never be bridged.” Complete revival of Islamic culture depends mainly upon the bridging over of this gulf. Therefore it should have the very first priority in the reconstruction programme of every Muslim State.

It is comparatively easy to develop intellectually. What is really difficult to attain and lies at the root of real progress is the moral stamina of a people. It is not the intellect but a dedicated will that puts energy into life and leads people and nations to the heights of glory. It is qualities like faith, unity, discipline, justice, courage, industry, and cooperation that act as spurs in the race of life.

During the period of their downfall the Muslims lost these qualities. There is an ever-increasing desire in the Muslim world today to root out social and moral evils and build a new society on sound moral foundations, a new edifice that should withstand the shocks of time. But the desire is yet far from realization and the process of moral regeneration is much slower than that of an intellectual revival. It is much more difficult to mould the will of a nation than to mould its thought.

The character of the masses can be built better by example than by precept. This is truer of the Muslim masses that are at present mainly illiterate. Literacy campaigns undertaken by many Muslim States, if pursued sufficiently vigorously, can remedy illiteracy, but that alone will not improve character. If the leaders in different countries set a good example to others and create in them a sense of true worthiness, they can do well in moulding their characters and inspiring them to enrich personal and

communal life. It is by imbibing basic human values that cultures arise and flourish, and it is without them that they fall and wither.

In the process of revival, however, one cannot lose sight of certain extremist tendencies that may adversely affect the solid progress, which is being aimed at in the Muslim world. In some Muslim countries there is a pronounced tendency to follow the Western pattern of life indiscriminately.

In others which are free from blind imitation there is a group of people who call themselves progressive but whose conception of westernization is again clouded by a restricted vision and who in their zeal for advancement can only imitate the superficial ways of Western life. This tendency is taken as a challenge by the conservative section of the people. Hence a rift between the two groups.

One group looks upon superficial imitation as a potent threat to their own cultural heritage and spiritual values. The other dubs this second group as reactionary and backward. Each of these groups assumes the role of reformers but while each stands for some ideals, each also unconsciously stands for some evils: the first for superficial mimicry, even irreligion and skepticism, the second for clinging to the stone-wall of conformism.

But if they want to advance the cause of Islam in any walk of life, both will have to modify their stands. The Quran describes the Muslims as people of the middle path (*ummat al-wusta*). Extremist tendencies must be shed off to restore Islamic values to their original purity and pristine glory.

Islam has given to its followers the right of personal inquiry (*ijtihad*) and the right to reinterpret the problems of life and religion in the light of changed circumstances and environments. Religious and social reformers in recent times have rightly emphasized the doctrines of free-will and personal inquiry, i.e., the rational nature of Islam, and, disgusted with rigid formalism, they have been preoccupied with the problems of reorientating religious and cultural values in accordance with the requirements of the present age. Iqbal's English work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, is a splendid contribution to this reorientation.

In this scientific age, attention is focused all over the world on science and technology and there is a general tendency to relegate philosophical studies to the background. But as full appreciation of true spiritual values and an overall view of life are as essential for a healthy society as science and technology, conscious effort is being made in certain quarters to counteract this unhealthy tendency.

In Turkey, this effort has been made by the Philosophical Society which was established in 1347/1928, and in Egypt by the Philosophical Society of Egypt of which Mustafa Abd al-Raziq was elected President in 1364/1945. In Iran, the followers of Mulla Sadra and Mulla Hadi Sabziwari are very active.

In Pakistan, this work is being done by the Pakistan Philosophical Congress, which is a very active body in the fields of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and education. It holds its sessions annually at different university centres. These sessions are attended by scholars from many countries of the East

and the West. The Congress is affiliated to the Federation Internationale des Societes de Philosophie. Its President is a member of the Committee of Directors of that international body; he is also a programme member of the East–West Philosophers’ Conference, Hawaii, U.S.A. and a foundation member of the International Academy of Philosophy, Ahmedabad, India.

The Congress publishes a quarterly journal and at least two philosophical works every year in the English language. Its most important publication has been the English translation of al–Ghazali’s *Tahafut al–Falasifah*. In a recent work, *Philosophical Activity in Pakistan*, a Belgian scholar writes: “By its annual sessions, its publications, its suggestions to the Government and Universities, and its delegations to Conferences held in foreign countries, this organisation has contributed to no small extent towards enlivening philosophical activity and re–establishing the importance accorded to Philosophy in the country’s Universities.”

The common leader of thought in the Muslim world today is Iqbal, the poet–philosopher of Pakistan. His poetical works composed in Urdu and Persian are being translated into the languages of Muslim countries, like Arabic and Turkish, and are inspiring Muslim readers with a sense of dignity, self confidence, and creative activity. This reception of Iqbal’s works shows a reawakening of interest in Islamic thought and a reorientation of our spiritual and religious values.

Some of Iqbal’s works have also been translated into a number of European languages. The works of the late Professor Nicholson and his successor Professor Arberry in England, Professor Baussani in Italy, and Dr. Schimmel in Germany are notable in this connection.

Owing to the developed means of communication, ideas travel easily nowadays from one place to another, but they always require time to take root in a new soil. The two recent Western philosophies, Existentialism and Logical Positivism, have come to the East, but it will be some time before they penetrate deeply into the Muslim mind. But when they do penetrate the Muslim mind they are likely to take, to a certain extent, a different shade.

“Nothingness” may be taken to be a category of thought or imagination but not of reality, and “dread” may lose the significance that Existentialism has assigned to it. The range of experience might be so broadened as to include extra–sensory perception and, consequently, “it is the case that” might be differently interpreted.

Some importance may be given to the entity, the individual self, that deduces tautologies from tautologies and apprehends and empirically verifies facts. The freedom of man may be interpreted differently from the freedom assigned to the free wheel of a bicycle or any other machine.

It is very doubtful whether the ideas of social history prevailing in the West will ever be accepted in the East, especially in the Muslim East. In the concluding remarks of part “E” of the Introduction we delineated the philosophy of history to which our study lends support. There we said that it has a negative as well as a positive aspect. Negatively, it is non–organismic, non–cyclic, and non–linear; and,

positively, it involves belief in social dynamics, in progress in human society through the ages by rises and falls, in the importance of the role of ethical values in social advance, in the possibility of cultural regeneration, in the environmental obstacles as stimuli to human action, in freedom and purpose as the ultimate sources of change, and in mechanical determinism as an instrument in divine and human hands.

This philosophy is as distinct from the philosophy of history advanced in Europe and the United States as from that which is accepted in the Soviet Union. We consider this philosophy in consonance with the teachings of Islam. We believe, it is this ideology in which lies the salvation of the world and not in the ideologies hotly defended and followed in the Western world.

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