CHAPTER-III

LIFE OF DR. AHMAD AMIN AND HIS CONTRIBUTION
UNIT-I

LIFE OF DR. AHMAD AMIN
Life of Dr. Ahmad Amin:

Dr. Ahmad Amin was one of the foremost Egyptian scholars and writers in the second quarter of the twentieth century and played a leading role in modern Arab Culture. Dr. Ahmad Amin, the Egyptian autodidact, historian and linguist began lecturing at Cairo University in 1926 and thereafter rose to the rank of dean of its social sciences faculty. He assumes a place of honour among those Egyptian intellectuals of his generation, such as Dr. Taha Husain, Muhammad Hussain Haykal, Salma Musa, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad etc. who are largely responsible for forging the image of modern Egypt. His influence extends beyond the boundaries of Egypt; his books and his many articles were read in all the Arabic speaking countries. Moreover, in his role as director of the Arab League’s Cultural Board (Al-Idara al-Thaqafiyya fi al-Jamia al-Arabiyya) between 1947 and 1952, he laid the foundations for cultural activities that spanned the entire Arab world. The pinnacle of his literary oeuvre is the monumental serious in the history of Islam, which was published over 26 years and is considered the first attempt by a Muslim writer to research Islamic history using scientific tools. The series is comprised of *Fajr al-Islam* (The Dawn of Islam), *Duha al-Islam* (The Morning of Islam), *Zuhr al-Islam* (The Noon of Islam) and *Yawm al-Islam* (The Day of Islam). Most of Amin’s influential articles from 1933 onward which were published in *Al-
Risala, Al-Hilal and Al-Thaqafa and later it was published as Faid al-Khatir (The Overflow of Thought).

**Birth and Early Life:**

Dr. Ahmad Amin was born October 1, 1886 in the Manshiya Quarter in the Khalifa district of Cairo, a neighborhood he describes as very little changed from medieval times. There was no electricity and as a boy he witnessed the laying down of water lines for running water. Life in this quarter was as it had been in the middle Ages when neighbors played an important role. The approximately 30 houses represented members of the middle class, such as government employees in the *Waqf* or perhaps in the public records department and lower classes, such as masons, tailors and owners of little cafes.¹ His father had been from a small village in *Al-Buhayra*. His family had owned a small piece of land, but harsh economic conditions had forced him and his brother to flee to Cairo. As a teacher at *Al-Azhar* and Imam al-Shafi‘i mosque as well as prayer leader in another small mosque, Amin’s father was comfortably placed in the Middle class, earning about 12 pound a year which sufficed for his family’s simple needs. His mother’s family was from *Al-Manufiyah* province and his uncles worked in the spice trade. Amin’s father was a serious, deeply religious man who sternly watched over the education and moral

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¹ Amin, Ahmad, *Hayati*, p. 230
upbringing of his six children, even sending his daughters to school. He often retreated to his room where he studied his many books, but he also encouraged his son to make use of this library. This home Dr. Ahmad Amin calls:

The most important schools in which were formed the elements of my body, my character and my spirit. If they ever changed ... they did in nonessential matters that did not touch the core ...²; religious feeling pervaded our home.³

His Education:

The early educational of Dr. Ahmad Amin was taken place in Kuttab, the traditional education of Azharite education system. At the very beginning, he joint many schools but unsuccessfully spent five years. His teachers were very strict as well as rude and proud one he even saw many boys leaving the education due to the behavior of the teachers. As a result his father sent him to a new school where he learned his lessons and finally, he was sent to a government school which was more modern. He took the teachings of the holy Quran and prophetic tradition in Arabic. He also learnt there about geography, history, arithmetic and French. Dr. Ahmad Amin loved this school where he was able to put on western dresses and played with children from the middle as well as upper classes, but after much

². Ibid, p. 20
³. Ibid, p. 18
vacillation his father decided to take him out and enrolled him in Azhar University; while Dr. Ahmad Amin was 14 years old at that time.\textsuperscript{4}

The Azharite method of study using marginal notes and glosses did not appeal to Dr. Ahmad Amin. He found the sheikhs’ lectures almost unintelligible; but when a friend encouraged him to attend lectures by Muhammad Abduh, he understood what had previously been unclear. Unfortunately he was able to attend only two of Abduh’s lectures before the Sheikh was dismissed from the university, but he continued to come into contact with and be influenced by men who had enjoyed more sustained contact with Abduh. His father also helped him with his lessons at home instruction using books without glosses and with clarity of expression. Dr. Ahmad Amin, however, was miserable at the school and felt distressed and ashamed as he walked through his neighborhood with his turban, cloak and gown. He became so desperate that he applied for and received a job teaching in Tanta, but his wretched living situation and home-sickness drove him back to Al-Azhar. A second attempt at escape, to teach at Dar al-Ulum, failed because he could not pass the eye examination in spite of his glasses. Finally, after four years at Al-Azhar, he secured a teaching post in Alexandria.

Dr. Ahmad Amin was much happier here. He enjoyed teaching and going to the sea-side to read books on philosophy and history. He came under the influence

\textsuperscript{4} Amin, Ahmad, \textit{Hayati}, p. 230
of a man, Abdul Karim ibn Muhammad, whom he called his second father, a
teacher of Arabic and a graduate of *Dar al-Ulum* who belonged to the
*Naqshbaniyah* sufi order. Dr. Ahmad Amin’s mind was opened to new horizons
beyond books and in his words he was liberated from slavery to tradition by being
encouraged to think critically about social and other issues. This friend supported
Abduh’s reforms as opposed to Mustafa Kamil’s one.

His philosophy was that it was necessary first to achieve internal
reform by spreading good education and raising the morals of the
people and that independence would follow that as a result.\(^5\)

By his own account, Dr. Ahmad Amin’s nationalistic feelings were not very
strong at this time, but it was here in Alexandria that he began reading *Al-
Mu’ayyad*, Arabic Journal of Ali Yusuf, which he preferred for its Islamic
character and *Al-Muqattam* (identified with British sympathies and gradualist
reform). After the *Danshaway* incident in 1906, however, he confessed he was
more responsive to the sentiments in *Al-Liwa* of Mustafa Kamil.

After two years his father’s efforts to have Amin transferred back to Cairo
were successful. By happy coincidence he became a teacher at the government
school of his childhood, but he became ill with typhoid after a year. When he

\(^5\) Amin, Ahmad, *Hayati*, p. 56
recovered, he applied with trepidation to the newly opened *Madrasat al-Qada* (1907), fearing the medical examination more than the admissions test. Only five passed the entrance test and because Dr. Ahmad Amin was third the principal allowed him to enter in spite of his poor eyesight. He was very happy that he would be to study organized sciences in an organized school.

Three groups of teachers taught at this school. The best of *Al-Azhar* sheikhs taught the traditional sciences, using the texts which included commentary and glosses. On the one hand, here the students were conditioned to place great weight on the words of an author; yet they also became accustomed to adherence to logic and accuracy of expression which served them well. Those teachers who were graduates of *Dar al-Ulum*, the second group, were disciples of Muhammad Abduh, presenting what was perhaps old material but using the new principles and methods which the Sheikh had advocated. The third group was leading men of the judiciary who taught law, court systems and other modern sciences. Many of these men had received at least part of their education in a European school and would use French or English sources in their lectures.

In this crucible consisting of all these elements, the students were placed so that each of them took his share according to his natural disposition.
and predilection. All this was surrounded by an ethical frame implemented under the supervision of the school principal.6

The school director was Muhammad Atif Barakat, a nephew of Sa‘ad Zaghlul and whose brother, Fatullah, was to be a prominent figure in Wafd politics in the years to come. Barakat became an important friend and mentor to Dr. Ahmad Amin. He taught the ethics course at the school using as sources English books like McKenzie’s Manual of Ethics and J. S. Mill’s Utilitarianism. He would hold spontaneous discussion groups and on Tuesday afternoons leading figures were asked to give talks and men like Sa‘ad Zaghlul or Qasim Amin would attend. Later, when he became an instructor at the Madrassa, Dr. Ahmad Amin was asked to help prepare Barakat’s ethics lectures. Gradually, he took over teaching this course by himself, along with jurisprudence and Islamic history. As they prepared lessons together, their discussions often took them too social, religious and political subjects.

It was while he was still a student here that Dr. Ahmad Amin attended occasional lectures at the new National University. He heard the lectures of Nellino on Arab astronomy and of Sandilands on Islamic philosophy and he was impressed with the research methods of the European orientalists who taught there.

6. Amin, Ahmad, Hayati, p. 64
After four years as a student, Dr. Ahmad Amin became a teacher at the Madrasat al-Qada from 1911-1921 with a three month interlude as a judge in Al-Kharija oasis so that he could secure a permanent position without passing the medical examination. He had little work in such an isolated spot, but his observations of life there reinforced his view that people will not be reformed unless their environment is reformed.

It was early in his tenure as a teacher that he came into contact with the men associated with the Al-Jaridah paper, the Ummah party and its editor-In-chief, Lutfi al-Sayyid, whose office functioned as a club for this group of young intellectuals. He maintained that he benefitted from the political and social education he received there.

After an unsuccessful attempt to learn French he embarked on an effort to learn English so that he could finally see with two eyes instead of only the one eye of Arabic. Miss Powers, an older, educated English woman who treated him as a son as well as a pupil, made a deep impression on him as she encouraged him to be less somber and to open his eyes to aesthetic beauty around him. Under her guidance he read books on ethics and human society like Plato’s Republic. This was supplemented by lessons from another Englishwoman in exchange for lessons in Arabic. He describes this opening of his mind which his knowledge of a
European language made possible as critical in his development as a writer and a scholar.

If I had not passed this stage but became a man of letters, I would have been a reactionary man of letters concerned with embellishing words not with seeking excellence in thought; I would have depended on the literature of the ancients and excluded that of the moderns; I would have turned in thought towards the former not the latter.\footnote{Amin, Ahmad, \textit{Hayati}, p. 106}

Dr. Ahmad Amin acquired two circles of friends, one whose orientation took its direction from English culture and the other which discussed scholarly works etc. drawn from French culture. The former consisted of students, many of whom were candidates for a verse as education missions but who were unable to go due to the outbreak of World War I. Their conversations made references to authors such as Dickens, Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. They met for discussions in cafes or had weekly outings and activities at a sports club. He relates the somewhat humorous image of a turban-clad young man entering the club, donning shorts and runners to play football etc. and afterwards emerging once more from the club a dignified venerable sheikh.
Some law students eventually joined the English circle and suggested that they form committees to examine various problems and prescribe their treatment. All of these eventually died out except for the Lajnat al-Ta'rif wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr (Committee of Authorship, Translation and Publication). The acceptance of our serious, quiet, turbaned sheikh by this circle is proved by the fact that they re-elected him chairperson every year until he died. They published, edited and translated books, expanding until they had their own press and had produced more than two hundred books by the year 1953. Many of the best scholars and writers of Egypt eventually joined this committee, including Taha Husain, Lutfi al-Sayyid and Mansur Fahmi. Their views ranged from conservative to secular.

He never became as involved in politics as some of his friends; blaming his academic temperament and pity for his parents should they suffer repercussions for his actions. Nonetheless, due to his association with these controversial matters, he was transferred in 1921 from his teaching position to work as a judge in the shariyah courts. This was a matter of some disappointment for him, but he did learn of some of the social problems facing Egyptian families at that time. In his decisions he tried going beyond the set prescriptions of the law and seeking reconciliation wherever possible.
Literary Life:

Dr. Ahmad Amin started writing articles from his tender age. In 1926, he joined College of Arts at Azhar University as a lecturer by the request of Taha Husain and served there for twenty years as a full-time lecturer in Arabic language and literature. Dr. Ahmad Amin was quick to join in the activity which he discerned to be the main difference between the university and the Judicial School, namely research. He undertook an historical study of dictionaries. This prepared him for a proposed joint project in research with Dr. Taha Husain and Dr. Al-Abbadi; the former would study Islamic life from the aspect of literary life, Dr. Al-Abbadi would specialize in history and Dr. Ahmad Amin would cover intellectual developments. His two companions were prevented from completing their contribution to the project, but after two years Dr. Ahmad Amin completed *Fajr al-Islam* (1928), the first of his famous series on the cultural history of Islam. Taha Husain wrote its introduction and generously praised Dr. Ahmad Amin’s meticulous method which he had learned from European sciences. Husain wrote:

> Dr. Ahmad Amin has become expert in science with its methods as he was already expert in the scientific methods of the ancients in ... the sciences of religion. He handles these literary, philosophical and linguistic problems, firmly, expertly and with a mind that knew how to
work and proceed from one problem to another with excellently balanced judgment, avoiding both short-coming and excess.\footnote{Najla M. Izzeddin, \textit{Taha Hussain and the Dawn of Islam}, pp. 30-31}

His position at the university afforded him opportunity to travel both in the Middle East and in Europe. In 1928 he and a colleague went to Istanbul to examine some libraries there, but also to view first-hand some of Kamal Ataturk’s reforms. He was favorably impressed with much that he saw, especially the new freedom that women enjoyed. Dr. Ahmad Amin, in his lifetime, was also an advocate of language and literary reform and during one conversation his attention was directed to observe how the Turks had used their language and literature to reform their social, intellectual and psychological affairs. He also met those who feared for the direction of society and the condition of Islam. In route to Syria in 1930 he noted Zionist settlements in the Gaza area of Palestine. He met with some political leaders in Palestine and deplored their divisions over personal interests, expecting the worst for that country. He had listed in his book \textit{Fajr al-Islam} his criticisms of the \textit{Shi`ah} in a manner that he himself felt was academically true and in no way implied that the Sunni were without fault. However, in Baghdad Dr. Ahmad Amin attended a ceremony where, when the speaker noted Amin’s presence, he then proceeded to incite the audience with quotes from Dr. Ahmad Amin’s book, necessitating a hasty exit through a side door.
He was also able to see the West first-hand. In 1932 Dr. Ahmad Amin attended the Congress of Orientalists in Leiden, taking time to visit other European countries: France, England and Italy. He delivered his speech on the rise of the *Mu tazilah* but was very uncomfortable lecturing in English. When he was again elected by the university to attend this conference in 1938, this time in Brussels, he was able to deliver his paper in Arabic. He even experienced air travel when in 1946 he was asked to be a delegate at the London Round Table Conference on Palestine. Thus he was able to make observations and comparisons about aspects of social life and culture between countries of the Middle East and between the East as well as the West.

Just as learning English had opened new horizons, he describes his travels as giving him two eyes and two perspectives instead of only one.

Dr. Ahmad Amin also made the *Hajj* (Pilgrimage) in 1937 which he described in several places in his writings and on a radio broadcast series. The strong religious emotions of the pilgrims are related, particularly the sense of purification and renewal that comes from one’s review of his past life. He emphasizes also the importance of the *hajj* as a symbol of inter-class unity and a means of contact among Muslims from all parts of the world. He was also critical of the way the Pilgrimage Administration felt short in its handling of the logistics
surrounding the visit to the holy sites and submitted a report recommending reforms. It should be added, however, that other prescribed rites of Islam did not receive as much attention from Dr. Ahmad Amin. He observed the Ramadan (Fasting Month of Islam) fast until he was discovered to have diabetes in 1935 and thereafter simply made a symbolic one day fast at the beginning of the month. After the religious attention he gave to the performance of the salat (Prayer) as a child under his father’s supervision. It is perhaps surprising that he did not practice this rite regularly in his mature years, although in his writings he did recognize the value of such an outward act, especially because of its collective aspect. This omission was not uncommon among educated Muslims of Dr. Ahmad Amin’s day, but he did not entirely escape criticism on this point.⁹

He was generally a quiet man with a shy manner but could be surprisingly outspoken when it came to defending a cause or principle he believed was right and this quality caused him problems in his professional life. Even though he did not agree with Taha Husain on all issues, he supported the latter in the controversy which led to Husain’s dismissal from the university in 1932 and so had difficulty in achieving the rank of full professor. Although the university’s constitution did not stipulate that instructors had to have a Ph. D to become full professors, it seems his lack of a degree was the excuse offered to Amin when denying him this status.

⁹. Amin, Ahmad, *Hayati*, p. 230
When someone else became full professor without a Ph. D, he protested and recommended that two Orientalist professors, Schade and Bergstrasser, examine his books *Fajr a1-Islam* and *Duha al-Islam* in lieu of the degree. Their report was favorable, but the Ministry of Education suppressed it. His friends of the Committee for Authorship held a protest party in his honour, but it was not until he threatened resignation in 1936 that he achieved his goal. It is probably no coincidence that in this same year the *Wafd* returned to power and Taha Husain returned to the university. Dr. Ahmad Amin finally received an honorary doctoral degree, along with the Fu‘ad I prize for literature, but in 1948, two years after he had retired.

**His Literary Contributions:**

As a successful writer Dr. Ahmad Amin contributed a lot for the development of Modern Arabic Literature especially in the field of Arabic Prose. He wrote on Islamic Civilization, Islamic History and many other genres of fiction. His remarkable contributions are as follows:

1. *Fajr al-Islam*
2. *Zuhr al-Islam*
3. *Duha al-Islam*
4. *Faid al-Khatir*
5. *Hayati* etc.
UNIT-II

CONTRIBUTION OF DR. AHMAD AMIN
Contribution of Dr. Ahmad Amin:

Dr. Ahmad Amin occupied a unique position among the contemporary Arabic writers. He left no stone unturned for the development of Modern Arabic Prose and Islamic Civilization. As writer he concentrated on Islamic Civilization, Islamic History and Islamic Heritage. Dr. Ahmad Amin’s writings contained valuable insights into the historical changes experienced by Egypt and the various issues which he felt required addressing. Dr. Ahmad Amin touches on a very wide range of subjects. These include specific and general questions of Arabic literature, education, great historical figures, literary reform, politics (especially those relating to international events and colonialism, less often to Egyptian polities), questions of ethics, individual morality in connection with the community, the problems and duties of leaders and many other subjects that interested him, either because they caught his scholarly attention and he wanted to popularize his knowledge or because he considered them as important in connection with the deep structural changes that were affecting his society.10

He did not view himself as a crusading reformer, but as a scholar and some of his essays are more the reflections of an artist than the strictly erudite critiques of the professor. Dr. Ahmad Amin was an advocate of reform although much of

what he proposed was formulated in general principles rather than specific proposals for the use of politicians. Categories and labels are always in need of qualification, but perhaps the designation social critic and intellectual describe Dr. Ahmad Amin the best.

Dr. Ahmad Amin worked during a period when experimenting in different literary forms was encouraged by the various journals and newspapers established in Egypt in the first half of this century. Journalistic writing and the essay became popular vehicles for advocating solutions to the problems faced by Egypt. Dr. Ahmad Amin wrote hundreds of essays, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Most of these have been collected and published as Faid al-Khatir. The title comes from the word Faydan used to describe the overflowing of the Nile. A person’s fayd, moreover, is sometimes equated with the outpouring of his very self, the fullest expression of which is the detonating of the body after death.\textsuperscript{11} Al-Khatir is an ideal notion or inclination, not necessarily implying intellectualizing or self-conscious philosophizing. Most of the essays were written for the popular medium of journals and papers i.e. Al-Sufur, Al-Risalah, Al-Hilal and Al-Thaqafah; their editorial comment is a valuable index to the emotions and attitudes which made up the stuff of events. Its continuity not only keeps the thread of popular thinking

\textsuperscript{11} Kenneth Cragg, \textit{Then and Now in Egypt: the Reflections of Ahmad Amin}, The Middle East Journal IX, 1955, p. 28
through the sequence of time but also ensures or so it would seem, that literate opinion in the nation is made accessible.\(^{12}\)

An important background source is to be read in conjunction with his other writings i.e. his autobiography. This genre literature is not traditionally part of Arabic belles-lettres and even though the reader is not given the answer to every question on the thoughts and attitudes of Dr. Ahmad Amin, the work’s simple style is nonetheless sincere and uncontrived. Scattered among the related events Dr. Ahmad Amin also discusses some of his views on the need for reform in various areas of society.

Dr. Ahmad Amin’s intellectual history series has been hailed by many as an important contribution to scholarship. It is perhaps the most important production during the period he calls the progressive phase, even though much of it was written at a time when he claims the reaction had set in.\(^{13}\) H. A. R. Gibb considers it as the first comprehensive attempt to introduce critical method into modern Muslim Arabic historiography.\(^{14}\) *Fajrul Islam, Duhaul Islam* and *Zuhrul Islam* provide a study of the intellectual developments of Islamic society. They cover religion, theology, jurisprudence, historiography and other aspects of the first four

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 29


\(^{14}\) *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Ed., s.v. Ahmad Amin, by H. A. R Gibb
centuries of the *Hijra*. These are set against a backdrop of the changes in political and social life, highlighting the ways in which the Muslims borrowed from other ethnic and cultural groups. Taha Husain in his introduction to *Fajrul Islam* praises the scientific approach of Dr. Ahmad Amin, how he traces back to what extent and in what proportion various elements have contributed to the intellectual life: pre-Islamic, Persian, Jewish, Greek and finally giving the Arabic mixture which resulted from the combination of these elements.\(^\text{15}\) The series provided valuable support to many of the main themes of the intellectual leaders, particularly to their positive attitude towards Western culture, their natural, earthy humanistic ethics, their assertion of the rights of reason and their advocacy of a secular national state.\(^\text{16}\)

Dr. Ahmad Amin was for the greater part of his life a supporter of Western liberal political ideals, although he himself withdrew from active participation in polities. He even declined an invitation to become editor-in-chief of the Sa’dist Party paper *Al-Asas* because he felt it would compromise his scholarly neutrality. He did, however, continue to deal with political matters and offer advice to political leaders. For him the political leader was or at least ought to be a leader of

\(^{15}\) Nejla M. Izzeddjn, *Taha Husain and the Dawll al-Islam*, University of Chicago, 1931, p. 29

social reform and he was very much interested in this aspect of his task. As far as his personal sympathies were concerned, he favored Zaghlul and the Wafd until around 1918 when he supported the Sa’dist offshoot.

His writings did not explore the Neo-Pharaohnic themes and the ideology of Arabism as did some of his contemporaries. As a youth he was acquainted with the traditional world-view of his father which did not encompass the idea of nationalism in the way Dr. Ahmad Amin’s generation came to see it. While he was a teacher at the judicial school Dr. Ahmad Amin was caught up in the independence movement and supported Egyptian nationalism. He also admired what nationalism in Turkey, together with Ataturk’s reforms, was able to accomplish there, yet he also criticized the particularism which is part of the Western concept of nationalism. In *Al-Sharq wa al-Gharb* he states:

Nationalism, the creation of modern civilization, is one of the worst afflictions of the contemporary world and does not merely mean the defense of the fatherland rather it is chauvinism at its worst and attempts to dominate other countries..... This brand of nationalism

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combined with the chauvinism of language and religion is in reality nothing but the lackey of imperialism.\footnote{Amin, Dr. Ahmad, \textit{Orient and Occident: an Egyptian’s Quest for National Identity}, Berlin, Adiyok, 1984, p. 27}

He demanded that Muslim nationhood lift itself above nationalist evils to merge itself into a universal humanity. He viewed his world as beginning with Egypt, then going to the larger Arab world, the Islamic world and then the East as a whole. The concern with the issues facing the broader Orient, became more prominent as the years went on, culminating in Al-Sharq wal Gharb, although it is true that his references to the East still focused primarily on the Arabs. The East and the West are described in his writings as having particular character traits which aid or hinder their respective progress. For example he calls on people of the East to unite individual interests with those of the welfare of the nation as people in the West do, for each society in the East and the West has its merits and its faults and the most obvious of our faults is the weakness of social sentiments and the weakness of the feelings and the strength of the feelings. Dr. Ahmad Amin is also occupied by the relatively advanced progress of the West and the reasons for the lack of parallel progress in the East. He admits that blind adoption has produced bewilderment and reservation among Orientals because the science and technology which have been employed did not have an indigenous source. This confusion is further aggravated because it was largely imposed forcibly by the colonial powers.
to facilitate their exploitation of the East. Dr. Ahmad Amin does not, however, entirely despair of his hope that, given judicious selection of Western ideas and technology, the East can take its turn again in leading the progress of the human race. Indeed progress in the last 50 years contradicts the Western perception that the East is moribund and incapable of change.\(^{19}\)

The theme of Eastern spirituality versus Western materialism is also addressed by Dr. Ahmad Amin. A 1939 article *Between East and West or Materialism and Spirituality* was a rebuttal of Taha Husain’s *The Future of Culture in Egypt*. He agreed that the West is not purely materialistic, but continued that the East is less inclined to make a *God/Caesar* distinction and contrary to this sacred/secular contrast, to take into account this world and the one beyond in deciding its actions. Dr. Ahmad Amin also disagreed with Dr. Taha Husain’s argument that Egypt should be considered as part of the West. It is true that, especially in his later years, Dr. Ahmad Amin developed a simultaneous admiration and contempt for the West, but the hope that the East and the West can fruitfully learn from one another is the dominant end-note. Materialism and spirituality have their strengths and weaknesses and the pursuit of mutual

interaction may be difficult, but in the end they can cooperate for the good of all mankind.  

The relationship between religion and politics in Dr. Ahmad Amin’s writings is closely linked with his concern with ethics. In Dr. Ahmad Amin’s book on ethics, *Kitab al-Akhlaq*, he states that the purpose of government is not just to rule, but to realize justice and freedom, even for the underprivileged and that a political party could be thought of as a group of people united for action by a common idea of the public good. Dr. Ahmad Amin and his colleagues are criticized for giving more emphasis to political ideals which become ethical values and not enough attention to how these ideals are to be realized. Religion is clearly to be the support for these ethical ideals and for reform, but there is some tension in his thought on the relation of religion and politics. On the one hand, insofar as religion is related to and supports ethics, he wants it to be connected with politics. On the other hand, insofar as it goes beyond this to impose details of belief or provokes undesirable results, it should be separate from politics. The separation of religion and politics in his writings decreases as his attention is increasingly focused on the problems of social reform. He makes a rather broad statement near the end of his life when he writes:

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Separation of religion from polities ... is not something Islam requires, because it is necessary that religion enter into politics to correct as well as to refine it and to set right the intentions of the political leaders and to direct them toward that which benefits their subjects. Europe has fallen into continual wars only by separating politics from religion, for by being separated from religion it was separated from ethics too.\textsuperscript{21}

This last, questionable statement is also cited by Safran to show how Dr. Ahmad Amin revoked his former western-style nationalism this excerpt, however, was written during a period of ill-health which seemed to affect Amin negatively and cannot be taken as consistent with the bulk of his writings.

When Dr. Ahmad Amin travelled to Turkey in 1928, he observed the many changes and reforms implemented by Kamal Ataturk, including those in the realm of language and literature. It seems that the words of a fellow Egyptian residing in Istanbul echoed Dr. Ahmad Amin’s thoughts when he observed: There is no hope of reforming Egypt as long as there is a language for learning and another for conversation. Either the language of conversation should rise or that of learning should come down so that the two may become one. Only then will there be true thinking and a language that derives its soul from real life.

\textsuperscript{21} Yawm al-Islam, p. 189, cited in Shepard, Faith, p. 75
The wide gap between the colloquial language and the written language hindered the spread of literacy and culture. On several occasions Dr. Ahmad Amin proposed making the written language easier.

I suggest that we adopt a people’s language which we would purify from vulgar terms *harafish* ...and drop declension at the ends of words. This language will be that of education, conversation and writing for the masses.... Both the colloquial and the literary languages will gain by this. The literary language is not much nourished now by the daily use of words which, by nature, gives more life to the language than do books and elite circles. The colloquial will make progress and approach the literary and this will enable us to spread culture and education quickly among the masses and present literary nourishment to people who have been so far deprived of it. And that is as great a crime as the imprisonment of the innocent or the starving of the poor.²²

Just as *Ijtihad* had been closed in the development of jurisprudence, in Dr. Ahmad Amin’s view, the Arabic written language had not kept up with economic, social and cultural changes, especially those of the modern period. There were too many words relating to Bedouin life and too few relating to urban life. The remedy

²² Amin, Dr. Ahmad, *My Life*, p. 200
lay in amplifying the vocabulary, Arab zing foreign words when necessary in addition to creating new words by derivation and analogy. The classical language with its lexicons and other tools would continue to be used in the universities by those wishing to study scholarly texts. When Dr. Ahmad Amin gave radio broadcast talks, he self-consciously treated his subject in a simple style, using language which approached the colloquial out of pity for the illiterate and semi-literate who had limited access to intellectual nourishment.

Perhaps also in keeping with Dr. Ahmad Amin’s concern for democracy is his aversion to inter- or intra-communal strife. Dr. Ahmad Amin frequently praises the Sufi tradition for its religious tolerance. He writes about the conflict between the Sufis and the Fuqaha in Zahrul Islam, noting that each went to extremes but that society has need of both the emotional and the intellectual temperament. He often expresses his concern to reconcile intra-communal differences. Dr. Ahmad Amin was deeply pained by the reaction of some Shi‘ah to his comments in Fajrul Islam. He writes:

The truth is that I have no bias for Sunna or for Shi‘ah, for I criticize some doctrines of the Sunna people no less than those of the Shi‘ah.23

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23. Amin, Dr. Ahmad, *My Life*, p. 173
When the king of Iraq wanted to punish the orator who had incited the crowd against Dr. Ahmad Amin, Dr. Ahmad Amin requested that he not do so.²⁴

His modernist ideology would also include the principle of religious tolerance, influenced by Western liberal ideas, which emphasized a communal view of Islam. Islam is still the pinnacle in the evolutionary development of religion and he does not reject the idea that all people ought to become Muslim, but he frequently makes the point that Islam is a religion for all time and places in contexts where he is urging the idea of tolerance or equality over against national and racial animosities. In this context such a statement is quite consistent with the communal image of Muslim-non-Muslim relations. Jews, Christians and Muslims are spoken of as separate nationalities. His willingness to cooperate with Christians was demonstrated in his life when he participated in demonstrations together with Coptic clergy. Islam and Christianity are frequently linked in his essays. Their respective terms, such as church and mosque are linked together and Dr. Ahmad Amin is equally critical of both in their tendencies to asceticism and authoritarianism. He even holds up European clergy and churches as examples at times. Dr. Ahmad Amin often makes the assumption that the followers of all the various early prophets have fallen short of their respective teachings, although he also singles out the Muslims for their failure to remain faithful to the prophetic

²⁴ Ibid, p. 48
message. In discussing the main communities he does not compare specific doctrinal differences; for example, in his history books *Fajrul Islmd* and *Duhaul Islmd* he treats Christian doctrines in a strictly historical manner.

Dr. Ahmad Amin realizes that simply changing the institutions of society will not be sufficient if the moral and intellectual attitudes of the members of that society do not change so that they can accept these changes. In an article entitled *Modern Reform* he states: If you are not pleased with the fruit of a tree it is a useless wish to expect it in the future to be good and sweet as long as you preserve as they are its roots and sail, climate and nourishment. This concern for reform is not developed in his writings as specific proposals. Dr. Ahmad Amin presents a more general discussion on the necessity of reform, the nature of leadership needed to bring about change and comments on political developments. In earlier articles, where he speaks more generally of religion without emphasis on Islam in particular, the focus is much more on the need for social reform to be scientific, which is in keeping with Dr. Ahmad Amin’s gradualist approach. In the same article cited above, Dr. Ahmad Amin maintains that the course of action of modern reform is to follow up disease and to know its causes, then to make an effort to remove the causes to that the disease will go away.
Dr. Ahmad Amin was conscious of receiving many of his ideas about reform from the West, but here he makes explicit the Islamic ground work upon which they were based when borrowed and in terms which, to a great extent, they were understood. He is consistent with the modernist tradition; he sees no contradiction between religion and reason or between religion and science. However, according to Dr. Ahmad Amin, this resistance only serves the interests of the secularists. Gradually it came to be realized that the methodology of science was inapplicable to the areas with which faith is mostly concerned. He sees no reason for the traditional bitter conflict between faith and science as well as takes his stand upon the notion of the two provinces.

Dr. Ahmad Amin favored the idea that the door of *Ijtihad* should be open to allow for flexibility since outward circumstances are always changing; religion must learn to distinguish between the elemental obligations such as justice as well as honour and the detailed applications in a changing world. *Ijtihad* is the principle of movement in Islam. Dr. Ahmad Amin dealt with this principle from an historical point of view in his history series as well as from the standpoint that it is needed as a tool to meet modern needs, together with the Quran and with the Sunnah which is, after all, the *Ijtihad* of Muhammad (PBUH). This principle for our author essentially involves confronting a body of ideas and practices that come from outside Islamic culture with an Islamic moral sense and selecting from them or
modifying them in accordance with that moral sense, bearing in mind the needs of the practical situation. Dr. Ahmad Amin’s view differs from the traditional view of Ijtihad in that those who act as mujtahidun could be trained in the western sciences and be active in discerning what needs to be utilized from the West, but this is never separated from Dr. Ahmad Amin’s ethical-moral concern which he feels is best expressed in Islam. It is the spirit of Islam and the ethical norms stated in the Quran which are to guide the modern Muslim community and not slavery to every detailed verse. In Yawmul Islam Dr. Ahmad Amin comments that the circumstances experienced by the ummah in the last 1000 years since the death of Muhammad (PBUH) are certainly no less severe than those which in the lifetime of the prophet necessitated the abrogation of certain verses. In this understanding the Quran can be the authoritative guide even in changing circumstances. Standing still is as harmful as whole-hearted adoption of Western principles, making the necessity for the use of Ijtihad by those who fully know the spirit of Islam an urgent task.

The educational experience of Dr. Ahmad Amin in the crucible of the Madrasatual Qadha mentioned above, where the traditional and the modern sciences were brought together, was probably instrumental in his concern for finding the missing link between these two realms. In the former, Islamic scholars tended to be out of touch with present day problems and the mosque school system
tended to be suspicious of the modern emphasis on science, western philosophy and technology. Those educated only in the latter, modern, system lacked the theological and spiritual aspects of education, the necessary Arabic fluency and the ability to mediate between these two areas of learning. Dr. Ahmad Amin calls for intellectual integration, although he is not the first to recognize this need; Muhammad Abduh also saw the need to create a bridge linking Islam with the rapid changes modernization had brought about. Dr. Ahmad Amin blames the existence of a complete separation between traditional and modern systems of education for the lack of intellectual and cultural integration.

There is some change in the emphasis and the tone of Dr. Ahmad Amin’s writing over time, but he never went to the same degree of advocating secular liberal values as some of his colleagues. Therefore, to say that the change in expression or the weight given to religion over time in his writings constitutes a crisis of orientation would not be accurate. It is not the substance of his teaching that changes but the emphases and the degree of ambivalence towards the Western source of so much of his thinking. Over time Dr. Ahmad Amin becomes more explicit in linking Islam to his proposals and concerns, as opposed to speaking of
religion only in general terms or tacitly implying that Islam and its principles are to be the guiding moral framework.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{25} Amin, Ahmad, \textit{Hayati}, p. 235