Chapter-3

Islamic Modernism: Origins and Objectives
ISLAMIC MODERNISM: ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES

The term ‘modernism’ literally speaking is a mode of expression, peculiarity of style etc. which is a characteristic of modern time. Modernism signifies modern character or quality of thought, expression, technique etc. in short an affinity for what is modern.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries modernism began as a movement towards modifying traditional beliefs and doctrines in accordance with modern ideas. In the context of religion it was initially associated with the Roman Catholic Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. ¹

The Roman Catholic humanistic movement reinterpreted church teachings in conformity with developments in modern science and philosophy but was declared heretical in 1907 by Pope Pius. Modernism sought to reinterpret traditional Catholic teachings in the light of 19th century philosophical, historical, and psychological theories and called for freedom of conscience. Influenced by the non-Catholic Biblical scholar’s, modernist contended that the biblical writers of both the Old and the New Testaments were conditioned by the times in which they lived and that there had been an evolution in the history of Biblical religion. Modernism also reflected a reaction against the increasing centralization of church authority in Pope and the Roman Curia (Papal bureaucracy). ²

In France the movement was closely associated with the writings of Alfred Firmin Loisy, who was dismissed in 1893 from his teaching position at the Institute Catholique in Paris for his views about the Old Testament canon. These views, later expressed in La Religion d’Issal (1900; “The Religion of Israel”) and his theories on the Gospel in Etudesseveangéliques (1902; Studies in the Gospels’) were both condemned by Franciscus cardinal Richard, the archbishops of Paris. In England George Tyrrell, an Irish born jurist priest, was dismissed from his teaching post and from the jurists for his views on papal infallibility and for a doctrine, that minimized the intellectual element of the
revelation and thus seemed to contradict the teachings of the first Vatican council (1869-70). His theories influenced others all over Europe especially in France and England influencing both laymen and scholars alike. In Italy the writings of Lorry and Tyrrell influenced the priest scholars Erensto Buoncuiti and Giovanni Semeria, the novelist, Antonia Fogazzaro, and other’s catholics. In Italy as also in Germany, concern with reform of church institution was more prominent than rejection of doctrine.\(^3\)

The reaction of the Roman church included suspension or excommunication of certain priests and scholars associated with the movement, placing books on the index of forbidden books. The Roman church adapted various strategies in order to combat the spread of modernist thoughts but all methods proved to be of no avail. The overzealous methods adopted hindered rather than helped the combating of modernism.\(^4\)

**Concept of Modernization**

Modernization involves and is concerned with the modernization of societies at the national and international levels. Industrialization, commercialization, increasing participation and mobilization of population at large, secularization and rationalization of political, cultural and religious life etc.

The process of modernization involves a diffusion of world culture-based on advanced technology and the spirit of science, a rational view of life, a secular approach to social relations, a feeling for justice in public affairs.\(^5\)

**Modernism**

Modernism is a recent term used in Islam as Islamic modernism. Islamic modernists advocate flexible, continuous reinterpretation of Islam so that Muslims may develop institutions of education, law and politics suitable for modern conditions. Modernizing tendencies appeared in the last about ten years of the nineteenth century. In response to the westernizing regimes, and
European colonization elite Muslim culture was evolving into separate westernized and traditional spheres that modernists sought to unify.\(^6\)

Modernism's distinction among such movements lay in the philosophical and political liberalism displayed by its expositors in contrast to the tendency in late twentieth century Islamist discourse to regard liberalism alien to Islam. Modernism took the shape of a movement in the last quarter of the 19\(^{th}\) century and early 20\(^{th}\) century with the assumption that the Muslim world had become backward in comparison to the west therefore in order to restore the equilibrium between the two societies, it was necessary that the Muslim world adopts the practices, institutions, and artifacts associated with European powers but it should be within the Islamic framework. Thus the Ottomans were the first to begin with the adaptation of western ideas and institutions during the first half of the nineteenth century itself. Many other Muslim countries followed suit including Egypt and Iran. In 1860s, some Muslim ulama raised their voice against modernism because they thought that everything coming from Europe directly or indirectly effected on their (Muslim) culture and customs. Such limitations of Europe would lead to western culture supplanting Muslim culture and to the erasure of Islam. While some Muslim scholars argued for a more judicious selection of features to be adopted, for separating the kernel of modern practices and the husk of western culture. They held that the scientific and technological underpinnings of European power were reducible to the categories of knowledge and practice that Muslims could adopt without damaging Islam's integrity. Moreover, there modernists asserted that modern European science had developed on the basis of classical Islamic learning transmitted to Europe through Muslim Spain. Therefore, Muslims have to learn modern sciences so that they could reclaim their own heritage.\(^7\)

The earliest formulation's of Islamic modernism issued from Egypt and the Ottoman Empire which the first Muslim lands to initiate reforms of bureaucratic and military institution's on European pattern. In this regard the

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first school that combined Islamic and modern sciences was established by Khayr-al-Din in 1875. In the first half of the twentieth century, Indian Muslim modernist thinkers were facing the same challenges and they were reflecting upon how to protect the community and their faith under a non-Muslim regime. Among the Indian modernist thinkers was Muhammad Iqbal (1875-1938) who argued that Indian Muslims and Hindus are distinct nations and Muslims must live in a Muslim state where they govern their affairs according to Sharia.

In contrast to the modernists thoughts, fundamentalists held that Muslims should not look to the west for solution’s to their problems. Nonetheless, modernist ideas survived among contemporary thinkers who held that exercising independent reasoning in legal matters would lend Islamic law to flexible interpretations according to changing circumstances. Another enduring modernist notion is that of public maslahah (public welfare). It is the general principle that guides the evolution of Islamic law. Legal reform along lines advocated by the modernists has achieved modest results in laws effecting the status of women in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. In the field of education modernism has prevailed gradually and has been able to bring a degree of modern learnings alongwith religious sciences, in some religious schools and Egypt’s prestigious al-Azhar is a great Example.8

However the modernist education agenda in Pakistan recumbbed to pressure from conservative quarters in the view of Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), a leading contemporary modernist who lost the battle for educational modernism in Pakistan. The integration of Islam with modern scientific education has not yet taken place. Fazlur Rahman also believed that Islamic theology required a new ideas of formulation. Perhaps theological modernism has receive less emphasis in recent years because of a decline in missionary attacks on Islam and because of a decline in fatalistic attitudes that nineteenth century modernists felt compelled to combat Fazlur Rahman’s work indicate that in the last decade of the twentieth century
modernism is alive among Muslims thinker's but not widely influential in Muslim societies. ⁹

**The Young Ottoman's and Modernization**

Most antagonists of Tanzimat were the young Turk critics who accused the bureaucrats of being more interested in imitating the west than in creating a new Ottoman society. Most of these young men were a part of the same bureaucracy, and some of them had worked in the translation bureau of the porte and had received their education in west. They were familiar with the west and were anxious to shape the destiny of the Ottoman empire. A number of them formed a secret society in 1865 by the name of Patriotic alliance along the lines of similar groups in Europe at that time. They were the forerunners of a new breed of young men who were not satisfied with the modernizing machinery of the state, but wanted to establish a constitutional monarchy and revitalize Islam. They may properly be called “Young Ottomans” to distinguish them from the Tanzimatists. ¹⁰

The young ottomans, like many similar intellectual groups of Europe were vague about their methods. Some were in favour of terror, others supported infiltration into the government, still others voted for converting the Sultanate. They had divergent ideas and methods. They managed to meet in secret societies and were ready to work together. The young ottomans used an Islamic vocabulary whereas the intellectuals of the medieval Ottoman Empire based their ideas on such diverse works as the Qur'an, Islamic political philosophers, the practical counsels, and the Turko-Iranian secular legislation. The young ottomans based their ideas almost entirely on the Qur'an. Like many Muslim reformers who came before and after them, they wanted to go back to the time when Islam was "pure" i.e. the time of the medinan caliphate, which was idealized and used as an illustration.¹¹

Possibly the most important intellectual, theoretician and writer of the young ottomans and Namik Kemal who was an effective critic of Tanzimat. He

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in his opinion had achieved a degree of modernization that neither freed the individual from internal tyranny, nor freed the nation from foreign domination. All his life he tried to blend Islam and the ideas of enlightenment. He wrote extensively in the newspaper named *Hurriyet*, which was the mouth organ of the young ottomans and which approached the problems from Islamic point of view. Unlike the Young Turks who come after him, he was not interested in the Turks as Turks or in the pre-Islamic Turks of central Asia. Unlike the Tanzimat bureaucrats who preceded him, he talked about the importance of the Sharia and the observation of the basic principles of Islam. He was an Ottoman and is credited with having used the word “fatherland” and *millet* (nation) in their modern sense soon the former was used throughout the middle east and the latter mostly among the non-Arabic speaking peoples.¹²

The Islamic learning of the Young Ottomans attracted some of the ulama to their groups but their number was insignificant. On the whole, the activities of Young Ottomans were suspect in the eyes of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, therefore the headquarter of the Young Ottomans was raided by the police. Nevertheless young Ottomans such as Namik Kemal, the liberal statesman Midhat Pasha, the journalist Zia Pasha, and others, helped in bringing Abdul Hamid II to the throne in 1876. The wily Sultan, in order to rid himself of the conference of European powers gathered in Istanbul to review the future of the Balkans, ratified the constitution that was drawn up by the Young Ottomans on December 3, 1876. He appointed Midhat Pasha as Prime Minister and promised to appoint Namik Kemal as his personal secretary. Almost as soon as the conference of European powers adjourned thinking that they had a liberal Sultan in Abdul Hamid II, the Sultan shelved the constitution and exiled Midhat Pasha and Namik Kemal soon he suspended the assembly, and one by one the rest of the leaders were jailed or sent into exile.¹³

The Young Ottomans were possibly the first ideologues of Islam in modern times who tried to take the best of the west and graft it into Islam. They failed because their picture of the “purity” of the medinan caliphate was
figment of their imaginations. Furthermore, they distorted Islamic theories to make them fit the concept of democratic popular Government for example, the practices of allegiance and consultation were applied, respectively, to the modern concepts of popular sovereignty and Government by the people. In Islam the principle of paying allegiance to a newly elected caliph was prerogative of only a few and the idea of consultation was to strengthen the Government for the people and not by them. It goes without saying that in Islam, Government is most certainly of God and not of the people. Hence the idea of a government of the people, for the people, and by the people does not fit in Islamic teachings. The phrase must be changed to the Government of Allah, by his designated representatives, and for the people.\textsuperscript{14}

Though the Young Ottomans failed to graft the western ideologies to the body politic of Islam but they were successful in introducing new values to the Turks. Time and time again Ottoman writers, in imitation of the men before them, had counseled the sultan with advice that should be familiar to the reader by now. "No government without an army, no army without money, no money without subjects towards the last third of the nineteenth century, the young Ottomans used the same format as above "No security without freedom, no endeavour without security, no prosperity without endeavour, no happiness without prosperity.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Muhammad \textsuperscript{4}Ali}

Muhammad Ali was one of the few who understood the source of that strength and attempted to bring Egypt into the modern world by borrowing from the west.

Muhammad Ali was born in Albania in 1769 and he was an important officer in 1799 when he went with the Albanian contingent to Egypt. Muhammad Ali filled the vacuum after the French army left.\textsuperscript{16}
Modernization by Muhammad Ali

Muhammad Ali was a great modernist his first achievement was the establishment of Egypt as a distinct nation entity, and power in its rule and not a mere province of the Ottoman empire. Although Muhammad Ali was nominally viceroy of the Turkish Sultan, he was virtually independent. Since he had been able to create a more efficient army, and the Sultan, unless supported by foreign powers could neither control no coerce Egypt. Muhammad Ali was therefore able to built up a state administration and established a native dynasty which continued until the days of his Great Grand king Faruq.

Secondly by his energy and ability, Muhammad Ali thoroughly reorganized and modernized the country give it internal peace, order and stability and restored its prosperity to achieve this. He had first to crush the power of mamluks and this he did by two measures which though ruthless and drastic, were indispensable necessary. The first was the massacre of the leading Mamluks beys and the second the expropriation of their vested interest in land.

In the period of Muhammad Ali very soon Egypt regained her position in the Muslim world. Not only did she preserve its ancient civilization for the East but also to transmit it to modern Europe.

Muhammad Ali's military reform and modernization

Biggest achievement of Muhammad Ali was military reform. With departure of the French and their British conquerors Egypt relapsed once again into anarchy. The Turks having sent troops into the country to help in driving out the French were determined to make Egypt once more an affective province of the empire. The Mamluks were equally determined to regain their former control. There issued a struggle which was both grim and indicisive, as the mamluks were themselves divided into rival partners while the Turks troops composed of contingents from many races and in arrears of pay were...
disaffected to the Turkish Pasha and ready to supported anyone who would pay them.

After taking over the office of the viceroy Muhammad Ali devoted his attention in building of a large army which later overran the Sudan, Arabia and advanced into Asia minor. As Ibrahim, son of Muhammad Ali, occupied the morea in Greece thanks to the military achievements of Muhammad Ali and Egypt become a great power shining testimony to the vitality of Egyptians and then ability in short time.¹⁸

He sent mission not only to study military science and Art in Egypt, but also to study medicine, pharmacy and engineering. He also invited expert particularly from France and England and others European countries in order to develop his military strength, to advice him harness the natural resources of his country and especially to saw the seed of modern European sciences one the fertile soul of Egypt.¹⁹

**Educational reform**

He wants to improve the condition of the fallani education for the masses necessity and this was one of the chief preoccupation of viceroy. The difficulties to overcome were innumerable though he opened schools all over the country. Parents could not be brought to send their children not even with the inducement of having them clothed and fed at the expense of the state. Muhammad Ali decreed that all children who attend school should receive monthly run in cash infact pocket money, as sort of bribe. Notwithstanding that children had frequently to be brought in chain to school, he began by establishing fifty primary school in the centers of the various districts accommodating about 9000 children.²⁰

The college where his own sons were brought up numbered 1500 and was called the school of the princes. He established the following sixteen schools.

1. School of Military Music established in 1824
2. Preparatory Military School at Qasar al-Aini
established in 1826

3. School of Chemistry
established in 1826

4. School of Medicine at Abu-Za-bal
established in 1826

5. School of Infantry
established in 1831

6. School of Cavalry
established in 1831

7. School of Artillery
established in 1831

8. School of Navy
established in 1831

9. School of Veterinary
established in 1831

10. School of Mining
established in 1834

11. School of Engineering
established in 1834

12. School of Agriculture
established in 1837

13. School of Midwifery
established in 1837

14. School of Accountancy
established in 1837

15. School of Languages and translations
established in 1837

16. School of Industry and Art
established in 1839

SIR SYED AHMAD KHAN (1817-1898)

He was one of the greatest reformers of the 19th century. He had a multidimensional personality and a heart full of sincerity towards his nation especially for his community. He did all he could for the educational upliftment of his Muslim brothers. Sir Syed foresaw the emancipation of Indian Muslims in his educational movement and devoted himself for this noble cause.

Syed Ahmad was born in Delhi on the 17th October 1817. On his father's side he was Husaini Syed. His lineage can be traced back through 36 generations to the holy Prophet. It is likely that Sir Syed's ancestor first came
to India during the reign of Shahjahan, and from that time until the reign of Akbar Shah II maintained more or less permanent connection with the royal family. He was a follower of the mystic, Shah Ghulam Ali whose Khangah was renowned in the city of Delhi. Shah Shahib treated Mir Muttaqi like his own son from his childhood. Sir Syed had been brought up to honour and serve saints and holy men. He often went along with his father, Mir Muttaqi, when the latter visited the saints so that he could himself observe their practices closely.22

Sir Syed’s early education began under Shah Ghulam Ali who taught him the Bismillah. After the Bismillah ceremony Sir Syed began to read the holy Qur’an to a lady teacher. Sir Syed was a product of Indo Islamic culture and civilization and embodied its noble traditions and values. By the age of eighteen he had studied traditional subjects in both Arabic and Persian in the academic milieu of Delhi. Apart from religion language and literature, and philosophy he paid special attention to the study of mathematics and history. At a young age he started writing articles on serious topics. He was an avid reader and this interest continued till his last breath.

His career started as a legal official at court soon he qualified judicial services competition and was appointed Munsif in Delhi. Notwithstanding his job he continued authoring books, for example, he produced some works on religious and legal issues. In 1847 his widely acclaimed Athar al-Sanadeed appeared. It stands out as a major academic accomplishment. It was lavishly praised not only in scholarly circles in India but also in British and French academic institutions.

Having recognized the steady decline in Mughal political power, Sir Syed entered the British East India Company’s civil service. He was appointed serestadar at the court of law in Agra responsible for record keeping and managing court affairs. In 1840, he was promoted to the post of munshi. In 1858, he was appointed to a high ranking post at the court in Moradabad, where he began working on his most famous literary work.23
Acquainted with high ranking British officials, Sir Syed obtained close knowledge about British colonial politics during his service at the courts. At the outbreak of the Indian rebellion, on May 10, 1857, Sir Syed was serving as the chief assessment officer at the court in Bijnori Northern India became the scene of the most intense fighting. The conflict had left large numbers of civilians dead. Erstwhile centres of Muslim power such as Delhi, Agra, Lucknow and Kanpur were severely affected. Sir Syed was personally affected by violence and the ending of the Mughal rule. Sir Syed and many other Muslim took this as a defeat of Muslims society. He lost several close relatives who died in the violence.\(^{24}\)

**Sir Syed Ahmad’s thoughts on Modernism**

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who realistically grasped the challenge of modernization which the British rule had brought to India. Then he led the Muslims to enter the stream of modernization through four avenues of reform: political, educational, religious and social. Like other pioneers of modernism in Asia and Africa, he used journalism to communicate with fellow Muslims. His intellectual legacy is abiding even though his tactics are no longer relevant. However, in order to appreciate his role it might be well to define modernization its limitations and promises for the Indian Muslim society.\(^{25}\)

For the Muslims, Sir Syed believed an encounter with science was not a new experience. During the period of Abbasid caliphate (750-1258) Islamic civilization had been enriched by Greek sciences. Muslims also made their own original contributions and then via Spain transmitted this intellectual legacy to Europe where it proved to be the catalyst for the renaissance.

Sir Syed grasped the challenge of modernity slowly, and appreciated its possibilities for the Muslims after his visit to Britain in 1869. During his formative years (1817-1857), which were mostly spent in Delhi, he remained a traditional Muslim, largely seeking validation of his convictions and behavior by reference to generally established prescriptive Islamic norms. Most of his
historical and religious treatises including particularly trivia on Sufism, such as
Namaqa (1864) and kalamat al-Haq (1850) and the biographical sketch of
Prophet Muhammad, Jila al-Qutub bi Dhikr al-Mahhub (1842) reflected
traditional views on mysticism, and the supernatural powers of the Prophet.
Subsequently, most of these views disappeared under the scrutinizing glare of
rationality. Sir Syed and the Muslim society in Delhi were exposed to
modernity by virtue of their contact with the tiny British society and modern
Delhi College which were established in Delhi with the advent of the British
rule in 1803. The British rule not only introduced Delhi’s citizens to a new
subject culture, but also initiated a period of social mobilization which prepared
the Indian Muslims, especially after 1857, to accept the process of change from
traditional to modern ways of life. A glimpse of traditional Delhi confronting
the careers of modernity would shed light, on the early environment of Sir
Syed.26

Religious Modernism of Sir Syed

Sir Syed was deeply influenced by Shah Waliullah and adopted his
rational approach to Islam and particularly his view on Muslim’s social and
religious reform. India Islamic culture, despite some violent reactions against
the infusion of certain modern elements within its fold, continuously
accommodated itself to the introduction of modern education, and a rational
approach towards the Islamic convictions and social reforms. Regarding the
latter however, the ulama made their contributions within the framework of
traditional Islam and were not at all influenced by western rationalism. The
movement for Islamic reformation was undertaken by Shah Wali ullah (1703-
1762) and developed by his followers including Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1831),
Sayyid Ahmad Shaheed (1786-1831) and Mawlana Ismail Shaheed (d. 1833).27

Essentially Islamic mythology had developed through hadith (the
prophetic traditions) literature and the Prophet’s biography. Twisting any
Qur’anic statement regarding the Prophet, the traditionists and biographers
often allowed their imaginations to take irrational flight. To the believer these
stories become a source of delight, but in the age of reason they embarrassed the educated. Sir Syed experienced both sentiments in his intellectual development. As a traditional believer from 1842 to 1863 Sir Sayyid wrote in 1842 the Prophet’s profile *Jila al-Qulub bi Dhikr al-Mahbub* (delight of the hearts in remembering the beloved), and reproduced all traditionally accepted, miracles.  

In the first of scientific approach Sir Sayyid saw an alliance between science and religion. Like Victorian theologians he argued that whatever science one chose, it disclosed the power, wisdom and goodness of God. Moreover, science and religion had two different sets of concerns, but they were not dialectically opposed to each other. While religion dealt with the ultimate cause, the scientists carried out observations and experiments to reach for networks of connections among data i.e. how is water made, and how are clouds formed. He saw nature as “the work of God”, and defined religion as “the word of God”, and maintained that as a natural religion contained no dichotomy between the “word” and the “work” of God.  

**Framework of Modernity by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan**

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan realistically grasped the challenge of modernization which British rule had brought to India. When the British East India company conquered Bengal in 1756, but it was not until after 1857 that the Muslims in India significantly responded the cultural thrust of the west. Out of the traditional dynamics of traditional Muslim society appeared. Sayed Ahmad led the Muslims to enter the stream of modernization through four avenues of reform: political, educational, religious and social. Like other pioneers of modernity in Asia and Africa, he used journalism to communicate with his fellow Muslims. His intellectual legacy is abiding, even though his tactics are no longer relevant. However, in order to appreciate his role, it might be well to define modernization, its limitations and promises for Indian Muslim society.
With the liquidation of empires after World War II, scholars began probing west’s impact on Asia. Arnold Toynbee led the way in his phenomenal work, *A Study of History*. For Toynbee, modernity had begun towards the end of the fifteenth century when the western man “thanked not God but himself that he had outgrown his medieval, Christian discipline”. The development of a rational outlook is then the watershed between the traditional and modern eras of societal development. It was marked in the west by the advent of science. Toynbee assigned to middle classes the decisive role in evolving modern institution to the middle classes the decisive role in evolving modern institutions from their medieval settings. However during the sixteenth century the dynamic movement toward the understanding of nature was well underway. Consequently, western society coped with the challenge of modernity at a leisurely pace, over a period of several centuries.\(^3\)

**Development of M.A.O. College**

Aligarh cannot easily forget the role of Theodore Beck in the development of M.A.O. college and the evolution of its cultural traditions. He applied himself with singular zeal to expand the M.A.O. college and increase the number of its student and thus widen the area of its impact on Muslim community. Syed Ahmad Khan no doubt wanted the Indians to adopt western education and acquire proficiency in the western sciences, literature and technology, but he never advised them to break completely with their past or lose faith in the achievements of their forefather’s. He was critical of the intellectual isolation which was bound to spell seen to the Muslim community at the same time. He was proud of his historical heritage and when Ghalib tried to battle the achievements of British rule, he resented it.\(^3\)

This most respected and important educational centre for Indian Muslims was initially founded as Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875 and subsequently raised to the status of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in 1920. Aligarh Muslim University, known more as a movement than an academic institution, is one of the most important chapters
of Indian history as far as the sociology of Hindu Muslim relation is concerned. Sir Syed said: “This is the first time in the history of Mohammedans of India, that a college owes it nor to the charity or love of learning an individual, nor to the spending patronage of a monarch, but to the combined wishes and the united efforts of a whole community. It is based on principles of toleration and progress such as finds no parallel in the annals of the east. Sir Syed’s famous speech which he delivered when the foundation of MAO College was laid down by Lord Lytton on 18th January, 1877 is the soul of Aligarh movement. Sir Syed said: from the seed which we sow today, shall in their turn strike firm root into the earth, and themselves send forth new and vigorous saplings. 33

It’s a common misconception that Sir Syed and Aligarh Movement is anti-oriental studies (Islamic and eastern studies) and MAO college was started in reactionary movement to counter the religious school, Darul Uloom Deoband, started by Maulana Qasim Nanotvi (another student of Sir Syed’s teacher Maulana Mamlook Ali Nanotvi). In fact Sir Syed had a broader vision and had forwarded the need of the hour to get equipped with the modern education to improve the social and economical conditions of Muslims of India. He never discouraged or denied the importance of religious and oriental studies. By his individual means and with the help of Muslim educational conference he always tried to modernize the Madarasas, update their syllabus as per the need of the hour. 34

Muhammad 'Abduh – Modern Thinker of Egypt

Life of Muhammad 'Abduh:

Muhammad 'Abduh was a pioneer amongst Muslim modernists at the turn of present century. At this period of penetration of western culture the reformer, through his liberal and humanitarian interpretation of Islam, prepared the mind of Muslims and particularly of his countrymen to accept modern science and rationalism and give up the moribund tradition of the past. 35
Muhammad ‘Abduh was born in 1849 into a fellah family in the Nile delta. It was the period of Muhammad ‘Ali’s reign. Muhammad Abduh was born during the period of wandering. The peasants of that period were very much oppressed and they had to suffer from corvees and requisitions. Thus, the unbearable conditions of life compelled many peasant families to desert their lands. ‘Abduh grew up after the manner of life common to the children of fellah family. But as the child grew he was given the traditional education of those days preparing him for the famous al-Azhar university which he entered later.36

Muhammad Abduh’s contribution as an Islamic modernist is so significant that a close study of his system of thought seems viable for an understanding of the development of modern Islamic reform movement not only in Egypt but also in the Muslim world in general. The history of Islamic liberalism of the later 19th and early 20th centuries can not be completed without a comprehensive study of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s ideas and achievements.37

Abduh was an Egyptian and took part in the nationalist Urabi rebellions against the Khedive and the foreign powers. He was proud of the glories of ancient Egypt and as such his ideas may be a slight modification of the superanationalism of the Muslim ummah. He considered the unity of Muslims in one country as a strong link in the chain of unity of all Muslims. This was orthodox Pan-Islamism, but the modification introduced by Muhammad Abduh was that when both Muslims and non-Muslims belonged to the same nation there should be unity between them regardless of differences in religion. On the other hand, he was critical of doctrinaire nationalistic thinking, ‘He was a disciple of Afghani but more of a thinker, and he had greater influence. Unlike his inherent teacher, Abduh was rooted in the life and culture of Egypt. Although he was drawn for a time into Afghani’s political activities, his heart was not in them and he spent his fruitful years in education and reform. He believed Islam was misunderstood mostly because of the conduct of the
Muslims themselves. Abduh believed that Islam should respond to the challenges of the west not so much through a return to political power, but through reform within Islam. Consequently Abduh founded the first benevolent social services society in the modern Muslim world and sent energies in educational reform in Cairo at al-Azhar University and in social and religious reforms in Islam. He rejected the purely political intrigues that Afghani was promoting in the capitals of the Muslim world and instead angered his former teacher by suggesting that he should persuade the rulers to inaugurate educational reforms.\textsuperscript{38}

He also followed the Wahhabi's in idealizing the "purity" of Islam in the first century, but unlike them accepted modern science, new method of education, and even modern patterns of philosophy in expounding Islam. He was opposed to taqlid, imitation of past writers, and believed that the door of ijtihad, interpretation of the Qur'an, was not closed. This last was a heretical belief in sunni Islam. But he was not for imitations of European educational aims. He felt that the Muslim must borrow European methods and go through the same sacrifices as the Europeans had in the evolution of their aims. He held Islam to be a universal religion, and his important commentary on the Qur'an is tolerant moral and pragmatic. It is inclined toward both a voluntarist and an activist ethics. For Abduh, as for countless Muslim thinkers after him, there was always tension between the demands of Islam that men should live according to the dictates of God, and the irresistible demands of modern civilization which forced them to live in a different way. He maintained that the two were not incompatible. Whenever they did differ, he believed that the moral and doctrinal imperatives of Islam could not be compromised. Nevertheless the tension was ever present and in time he was rejected both by the orthodox because he had gone too far, and by the modernists because he had not gone far enough.\textsuperscript{39}
Abduh’s ideology of Development

The question whether there is a complete and coherent framework of thought in Abduh’s work is directly related to the question whether there is a viable ideology for development in Islam, since what clearly emerges from a study of ‘Abduh is that his whole thinking revolves around Islam. Aside from his concern with Islam from an individual believer’s point of view, he clearly saw in it an ideology capable of mobilizing people and advancing their social conditions here on earth. To the extent, therefore, that one finds a coherent framework in Abduh, one may conclude that he succeeded in demonstrating the potential of Islam as an ideology for development.  

Although Abduh relied on the elite, intellectuals, and rich to initiate reform, the subject matter of his concern was the entire Muslim population. In his active career, he was involved in Egyptian politics down to its smallest details. He was also party to Al-Afghani’s ambitions to rouse anti-British feelings even in non-Muslim Asian countries. His predominant concern, however, remained with Islam. The social base of his thought is, therefore, Muslims everywhere. Although he directed most of his concrete reformist suggestions to his Egyptian audience, the vision he drew on was that of the ideal Muslim. The ultimate authority he spoke of was the Qur’an. Drawing his principles from this source and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad, Abduh hoped to rouse Muslims to a better future. He felt they were capable of achieving it. He had a humanitarian concern for the minorities under Islamic rule and for non-Muslim communities with whom he thought Muslims should establish open and friendly relations his humanitarianism. However, never strayed far from Qur`anic verses and Islamic principles as he understood them. There is no doubt therefore, as to the existence of a broad social base in the framework of Abduh’s thought.  

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Abduh’s political thought was a reflection of the circumstances of his environment. In his early days, he like Al-Afghani, concentrated on the politicism of Egypt and for many years after Al-Afghani’s departure he continued this interest in his capacity as the editor of the official magazine. He looked upon the problems of Egypt in terms of national interest transcending religions and racial boundaries. He conceived, again like Al-Afghani, world racial politics as a struggle between an aggressive west and victim East to him this struggle was about a chapter in a long drama in which the two actors, for ever antagonistic, win or loss in accordance with the conditions and implements at their disposal. In an article he published in Al Ahram in December 1876 he says: This antagonism [between East and West] were hereditary and worthy of consideration but as power has become western centered and the East has grown defenceless the west marched in attack and the East could offer no resistance. He continued in the vein of Al-Afghani what made the last reach this law ebb was nothing but disunity to the extent that some people derive pleasure from having other orientals beset with misfortune through enemy conquest.42

Like Al-Afghani, ‘Abduh opposed autocratic government and subscribed to the idea that legitimate authority was conditioned by the just application of the law. He believed that rebellion against unjust rulers was legitimate so long as it does not bring greater disasters in its wake. In other words, the potential rebel must weight carefully his chances of success before embarking on the act of rebellion. He must do so not merely to save his neck but also to save his soul. For it seems as a logical consequence of this view that failure in a noble endeavor is more sinful than not endeavouring at all. Perhaps Abduh was not thinking on these lines. He may have had in mind to express the importance of careful weighing of the consequences of rebellion so that legitimate rebellion may not become a licence. Otherwise the whole fabric of political life would disintegrate and anarchy would prevail.43
The caliph, in Abduh’s concept was bound by law, deprived of absolute powers, obliged to consult with Muslims, but further he was a civil and not a religious leader. In his reply to criticism of Islam, he states that the common criticism of Muslim’s political institutions among Christians, that Islam supports the identity of religious and political authority, was unfounded. He reasons that caliph was simply the political head of the community, he was not its pope. He did not have a power or the position of the chief priest, nor did he have the exclusive right of interpreting the will of God. Abduh felt, therefore, that occidentals were unjust to Islam. There is in fact a certain justification for Abduh’s position. Western scholars apply to their studies of Islam principles derived from their own society. The separation between the state and church in the west was simply at least originally a separation between institutions, a definition of functions it was not intended for the abandonment of Christianity.44

The suggestion of separating Islam from politics would be tantamount to abandoning Islam itself, as there is no separate institution equivalent to the church for the Muslim religion. To deprive the Muslim community of the support of the political arm of their society to the tenets of their religion is to abolish the religion itself. As we noted earlier, Abduh was willing to incorporate western institutions into the body politic of Islam. In so doing, he opened the way for political developments within the Muslim community without the need for heart-searching. Political reform, he contended, is in accordance with the true spirit of Islam. The early Muslims employed institutions suitable to their time and conditions, but Islam as a timeless religion must permit various forms to fulfill the true aims of its principles.45

Abduh’s Impact:

The main impact of Abduh was on Egyptians and Muslims in general. No Egyptian in modern times has been so highly regarded as Abduh, both in Egyptian and foreign circles. It is important in assessing his contribution to the development of Egyptian and Muslim thought. He emerged in an Egypt
faltering under the impact of European cultural influences. He was fortunate in meeting the indomitable Al-Afghani who introduced him to western culture and instilled in him ideas of liberty and political reform, like all major Muslim thinkers, Sufism is the foundation of his ethical life and outlook. The rebellion against the orders and revulsion of their doctrine, characteristics of modernism in general, was not against Sufism but against the corruption and decadence of its institutions in the nineteenth century. He always recognized the sufis as the incomparable teacher of ethics.\textsuperscript{46}

\textbf{Ali Shariati}

Ali Shariati (1933-1977) was known as famous modernist in Iran. He was prolific writer. He has touched upon a variety of subjects from themes of cultural alienation of Islamic and eastern societies to the western cultural and intellectual imperialism to renaissance of the Islamic societies. Ali Shariati was one of the great ideologues of Iran in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. As a teacher, thinker and an erudite scholar of Islamic thought and philosophy, Shariati influenced several sections of Iranian society. His mysterious assassination in June 19, 1977 may be seen as a crucial factor in advancing the Islamic revolution of Iran considerably.\textsuperscript{47}

He was born in Mazinam, a small and traditional village on the edge of the Kavir desert approaching Mashhad. Although his first teacher was his father, he was also exposed to the modern system of education in the Ibn Yasin Primary School and Firdausi Secondary School at Mashhad. After completing his education in Islamic studies, he began teaching in small town, Ahmadabad, in the vicinity of Mashhad. It was during this period of his career that he translated \textit{Abu Dhar}, a treatise in Arabic by the well-known Egyptian scholar Abdal Hameedon the life of \textit{Abu Dhar Ghafaari}, the illustrious companion of the Prophet. Abu Dhar Ghafaari, in the period of Muawiya and even during the later half of the \textit{Khilafat-e-Rashidun}, had been highly critical of the tendency of amassing wealth by governors and some companions of the Prophet as a consequence of the conquest of Iran, Egypt and Syria.\textsuperscript{48}
He wrote several books, treatises and pamphlets on a variety of subject. Prominent among his writings are treatises on the Prophet. Ali, Fatima, Abu Dhar, Husain and on Islamic concept of justice, imamate and martyrdom. He also wrote a book on the great Urdu, poet, modernist Dr. Muhammad Iqbal. Ali Shariati come in contact with an organization known as Markaz-i-Tablighat-i-Haqiqat-i-Islami (Centre for the propagation of Islamic Truth). The movement of socialist worshippers of God (Nahat-i-Khadaparastan-i-Sositalist) served for him as the platform to discover his potentialities. Later on he joined Nahzat-i-Mogavamat-i-Melli (National Resistance Movement) and founded Hosayniya-i-Irshad. But Ali Shariati is believed to have been excessively influenced by Marx in his sociological thought. In many respects he adopted Marxist ideas and expressed them in Islamic terminology. However, he was great critic of Marxist concept of man. Shariati in his writings laid great emphasis on the Islamic concept of unity of God that is tawhid. According to him, the cause of every corruption, distortion and immoral behaviour in man is due to the ignorance, fear and greed. Tawhid alone eliminates these weakness. He calls the order established by the Prophet Nizam-i-Tawhid. He asserts that only tawhid, in its true connotations, perfects ethical consciousness in man. It endows him with the hidden power of wisdom, which nurtures and perfects him. Further, it gives man, a man worldview which is rational as well as ethical. The model is provided by the Prophet, the supreme exemplar who, besides being the law-giver and the last of the Prophets, was sent as God’s mercy to humankind.

Ali Shariati laid emphasis on Ijithad, in conformity with the traditions of Shia Islam, the continuous process and fundamental principle of perpetual revolution in Islam. He considered it the duty of an ordinary Muslim to exercise his choice in matters of Taglid. According to him one should follow opinions and not persons. He was against blind following and considered it an insult to human intelligence. Ali Shariati like Iqbal and other modern Muslim reformers, espoused ijithad with the great sense of urgency. He was also
critical of some of the Shia doctrines interpreted and practiced by the post
Safavid Iran. He attacked the religious class and their commentaries on Islam
and the History of Muslims. He found the post-Safavid Shia Islam vastly
different from the Abid Shi‘ism. He said that the scholar preachers during this
period lacked Qur‘anic comprehension and went about exercising ijtihad
without proper study of the Qur’an. His complaint was that the liberal and
social message of the Qur’an was not interpreted to the advantage of Muslim
community. He described the Safavid Shia Islam as institutionalized Shi‘ism.
He said that without a just Islamic social order the badge of Shi‘ism or Islam
could not be applied to any Muslim society. 49

He attacked the religious class and their commentaries on Islam and the
history of Muslims. We can say that as a thinker Ali Shariati exhibited a
paradoxical sensibility. He was an intensely private thinker engaged in a
lifetime search for truth through a mystical, intuitive understanding of the
world and God’s role in the scheme of things. The hallmark of his thought was
his conviction that religion must be transformed from a purely private set of
ethical injections into a revolutionary program to change the world. He was
always looking for what was fresh and original in Islam and had little patience
with traditional formulae and modes of thinking. He was in too much of hurry
to be able to work out an elaborate, internally consistent social theology. His
primary purpose was to exhort people to action in the mould of Imam Husain
who, Shariati believed, had consciously sacrificed his life on behalf of the
political and social liberation of his followers. In his view of Imam Husian, Ali
Shariati irked the traditional religious establishment, which felt that he had
converted their revered Imam into a vulgar power seeker and immature idealist.
In calling for liberation through reinterpretation of the faith, Ali Shariati clearly
rejects the fashionable Marxist revolutionary view that religion was the “opium
of the masses”. Religion, in Shariati’s perspective, binds itself to ideological
commitment for the emancipation of the individual believer from oppression.
In this respect, he had much in common with the contemporary Egyptian

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philosopher Hasan Hanafi. The project of both thinkers is to undertake a fresh reading of Islamic rupture in order to reconstruct Islam’s concept into a modern, autonomous, and progressive ideology of mobilization to enfranchise and empower the masses.  

Ali Shariati also emphasized the knowledge of Islamic history as a prerequisite to accomplishments of Islamic scholars. He maintained that a true religious scholar had to be conversant with and profound in the revealed knowledge of Qur’an and fully acquainted with the aspects of the personality and the example of the Prophet (SAW). The history of Islam, according to Shariati included knowledge about the Imams and other members of the Prophet’s household and his close associates, and considered it obligatory for Islamic scholars to specialize in the disciplines of Islamic philosophy, history or law, what was required from, and expected of such scholars was the method of the presentation of Islam that would appeal to the modern educated youth. His writings and speeches appealed to Iranian youth as they underscored the supremacy of Islamic revolution. He saw the youth of his age suffering from an inferiority complex, lacking in self-respect. He thought an Islamic revival alone could bring about the much needed transformation as the revival of pre-Islamic Iranian culture embarked upon by the Pehlavi reign had miserably failed to produce any effect. He set out to establish a discipline of ‘Islamology’ (Islam Shinasi) that is to apply Islam to needs of contemporary society rather than further contribute to the perfection of traditional “Islamic studies” (Maarif-i-Islami) for him. Islam was a bi-dimensional religion, which could meet the challenges of modern times.  

In the reflection of humanity and the visage of Muhammad, Ali Shariati has dwelt upon some of prime concern and understanding of Islam. The three major themes which dominate in the pamphlets include:  

- The primacy of class struggle as a vehicle for change.

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- The adversarial character of relations conflict between Europe and the third world.

- The legitimacy of a dialectical interpretation of religion.

He considered the semitic religion as the champions of the oppressed and the downtrodden with Prophet Muhammad. According to him political revolutions have often resulted in the transfer of power from the mutrafin (the wealthy) to the mustadafin (the dispossessed). Ali Shariati was influenced by prominent Mutazilite thinkers Ibn Rushd and Mulla Sadra, among others. Marx Heidegger and Sartre also influenced him. He fused the thought of Husain Nasr and the views of revolutionaries like Hanifnizhad and Rajavi, who saw in Shia Islam an expression of egalitarian values of modern socialism. Ali Shariati was admittedly influenced by Dr. Muhammad Iqbal.52

It is no doubt an irony of the situation that the leaders of the Islamic revolution did not translate Ali Shariati’s views into action as he was deemed anti-cleric. His had a vibrant and progressive ideology that encompassed matters of state and society within the framework of the Qur’an, life of the Prophet and the history of Islam. It remains a moot question whether he would have approved of the actions and policies of the government of Iran in the name of Islamic Revolution. But all said and done, His writings and speeches contributed significantly to transformation of Iranian society in the advent of Islamic revolution.53

His criticism of western:

A comparative study of Shariati’s criticism of western civilization on the hand and its criticism by various thinkers and reformist of Muslim world reveals that Shariati joined issues with the latter in many respects. But his approach is different. For example almost each and every Muslim reformist thinker whether of the 19th century or twentieth century criticized western civilization for its materialism and lack of spirituality. Even those thinkers who believed in the superiority of western culture and civilization for its
materialism and lack of spirituality like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan or Zia Gokalp or Muhammad Abduh have mentioned. Overemphasis on materialism and obvious absence of spiritualism as the greatest shortcoming of western civilization. Thinkers like Afghani, Kawakibi, Iqbal, Ahmad Amin had also considered materialism the greatest weakness of western philosophies and western culture. But Shariati did not talk in terms of materialism-spiritualism dichotomy. He was perhaps well aware of the material sources of some of eastern religions and cultures. Thus he never expressed such views as the west was materialist and the east was spiritualist in generalized terms – a typical assertion of earlier reformers and thinkers. He had also emphatically rejected another typical perception of Muslim thinkers that the west is rational, logical, scientific and so made progress whereas the east is superstitious, miraculous, mystic therefore backward. It is this perception that led many Muslim thinkers to recommend that adopting science, technology and modernity of the west will do better for the east whereas eastern spirituality will prove useful for the west. In Ali Shariati’s opinion such ready-made solutions were based on superficial understanding of the real problem.
References


41. Ibid., p. 115.


47. Ibid., p. 10.


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