CHAPTER 2

ISLAMIC MODERNISM: DIFFERENT APPROACHES ON THE THEME

Introduction

The age of European expansion and extension, penetration and dominance – which is called the ‘Age of Discovery by Europeans’ - began in the sixteenth century but came to end results in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. So, by the nineteenth century the balance of power had clearly shifted towards Europe; and much of Muslim world found itself dominated by the European imperial powers, demonstrating its political, economic and military impotence and challenging the reliability of Islam itself. It was during this period of European colonial expansion that the modern Islamic thought emerged. This European penetration of the Near East and India and the decline of Muslim ascendency in these regions in the nineteenth century reduced the crisis by the responses of Muslim intellectuals to European modernity.

It is found that the Western Europe’s Renaissance, reformation and early scientific revolutions passed largely unnoticed in Muslim lands. The West’s military and political dominance accelerated the decline of the three great Muslim empires of the early modern period, the Ottoman, the Persian and the Mughal. Western expansion also brought about the collapse or colonisation of a host of smaller Muslim states in Africa, the Middle East and Central, South and South East Asia. With these events, one thousand years of Muslim dominance came to an end. As well as European trade missions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries progressively expanded so that by the eighteenth century many areas of the Muslim world had felt the impact of the economic and military challenge of Western technology and modernization. By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Europe (particularly, Great Britain, France, and Holland) had penetrated and increasingly dominated much of the Muslim world from North Africa to Southeast Asia (the French in North Africa, the British and French on the Middle East and South Asia, and the Dutch and British in Southeast Asia).

There started a series of revivalist movements in the Muslim world in general like Wahhabi in Saudi Arabia, Sanusi in Libiya, Mahdists in Sudan and the Shah
Waliullah’s reformist movement in India, on the basis of the common ground to return to the original faith that is based on the Qur’an and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). For instance, Islam, according to Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (d. 1792), is based on the rejection of all gods except Allah. He said assigning partners (shirk) to Allah, “is evil, no matter what the object, whether it be ‘king or the Prophet, or saint or tree or tomb’; to worship pious men is as bad as to worship idols.” He argued that the true Islam was that of the first generation Salaf al-Salih and protested against all those later innovations that had in fact brought other gods into Islam. Similarly, Shah Waliullah declared that Muslim jurisprudence should be totally subordinated to the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). He insisted that the meanings of the Qur’an were accessible to the ordinary audience,¹ and its message is as applicable today as it had been in the days of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). In his endeavour to make the Qur’an easily understood, he translated the Qur’an in Persian that was spoken by the Muslims of his period. Moreover, Shah Waliullah described Islamic culture as-- the Sunnah and Shari’ah minus the innovation (bid’ah). In the Indian environment bid’ah became a synonym for the Hindu customs and traditions which were retained by the converts and thus diffused into Muslim society. Consequently, social reform meant a greater Islamization of society to keep Islam free from shirk—from ‘associations’ of all kinds with Divine Unity, Divine Will, and Divine Power. In his reformist efforts to bring the religious law of Islam into the open fully dressed in reason and argument, Shah Waliullah initiated a revived approach toward ijtihad by emphasis on independent reasoning as “an exhaustive endeavour to understand the derivative principles of legal law.” This emphasis on ijtihad remained Shah Waliullah’s main contribution to modernist thinking in Muslim India. His works inspired the neo-Mutazilite modernism of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Chiragh Ali’s legal reforms and religious reconstruction in the thought of Muhammad Iqbal. In short, his principles of exegesis favoured a modernist Muslim approach to the Qur’an because they cleared the way for the reading and understanding of the Qur’an by the “average educated Muslim.”

More specifically, the modernists faced a challenge that earlier reformers had not, namely the imperialist expansion of Christian Europe, which threatened Islam in at least five categories; first militarily, modern means of warfare allowed Europe to conquer vast regions of the Islamic world. This trend had begun in the seventeenth
century but gained such momentum by the nineteenth century that modernist Muslims worried about the view of complete suppression; second economically, modernity appeared to generate wealth and commodities that the Islamic world lacked and desired. Muslim visitors to Europe in the early and mid-nineteenth century, wondered at the gas street lamps and other indicators of prosperity. Modernist Muslims attributed this prosperity both to European increases in productivity and to the exploitation of other regions, including Islamic homelands; third cognitively (judgement, reasoning), modern science challenged other worldviews with its vivid claims of success. Modernist Muslims accepted these claims and some emphasized the medieval Islamic roots of modern science, while others emphasized the seemingly miraculous advances made in recent years. All, however, recognized science as a challenge to Islamic understandings of the world; fourth politically, modern institutions of government seemed, to maintain social peace and build national unity in ways that contemporary Islamic states could not; last culturally, modernity introduced novel patterns of behaviour that threatened to displace existing practices. In sum, the challenges of modernity appeared to threaten the very existence of Islam.

**Western and Islamic Concepts**

It is quite difficult to establish the proper boundaries of Islamic modernism, as it has been envisioned that it leads the way to the legacy of Islamic thought in the modern era. Many Western scholars (such as Bernard Lewis (b. 1916) and others) have seen modernity as an exclusive offspring of the West. As a result, they see any other civilization that engages modernity through the lens of "Westernization." There is no doubt that the encounter with Western institutions and thought has had a profound impact on Islamic modernism both positively (emphasis on human rights, constitutional forms of government, adoption of science, etc.) and negatively (colonialism, support for autocratic regimes). At the same time, many of the issues that Islamic modernism engaged today, such as human rights, democracy, gender equality, and the like, are truly seen as universal struggles. Furthermore, most Muslims who engage these issues frame their own discourse not as a borrowing or "influence" from Western discourses but rather as a part of native Islamic interpretations.
Muslims mostly recognize modernity in terms of Western modernity and vary in their views on its relevance and compatibility to Islam. Muslim modern trends range from reform to total rejection of either tradition or modernity. There are various discourses on reform, and they differ in their understanding of modernity and tradition. This chapter examines Islamic modernism, one of these reform discourses. The first discourse, often described as revivalism and reform, continues from pre-modern times. It calls for the revival (ihya) of the practice of the salaf, (the first three generations of Muslims) and reform (islah) of religious practices such as visiting of graves for intercession, health, and prosperity, celebrating birth and death anniversaries of saints, and adherence (taqlid) to schools of law. The Wahhabi movement in the Hijaz (as it was discussed above) revived this discourse in the late eighteenth century. The second discourse concerns adherence to tradition and religion as the main cause of backwardness of Muslims. It is a non-religious approach, sometimes also called ‘Western modernist,’ or simply modernist discourse. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (d. 1938), who abolished the Ottoman caliphate, closed religious institutions and adopted European codes, is often mentioned as an example of this discourse. This approach is not essentially anti-religious but does not derive its justification from Islamic tradition.

The third discourse, which is the focus of this chapter, is generally designated as ‘Islamic modernism,’ as it aims to root ‘modernism’ in Islamic tradition. It shares with the other two discourses the urge to reform Muslim society, but disagrees with their rejection of modernity or tradition. Instead, it affirms that modernity is compatible with Islam, and a new scholastic theology (‘ilm al-kalam) is required in order to justify this compatibility. Basically, the terms kalam (theology) and mutakallim (theologian) were first used with reference to the Mu‘tazilah, who held that the idea of accountability on the Day of Judgement required belief in human free will. The Mu‘tazilah named this theology the (science of reasoning) ‘ilm al-kalam. The systematic development of theology started under the patronage of the caliphs al-Ma‘mun (813–32) and al-Mu‘tasim (833–42), when the Mu‘tazilah borrowed heavily from Greek metaphysics and logic. Abul-Hasan al-Ash‘ari (d. 936) criticized the Mu‘tazilah for relying on non-scriptural sources and called for a new theology based on Islamic traditional beliefs, which should be given a fundamental position in the religious sciences similar to logic in philosophy. Ibn Khaldun (d. 1382), defining
'Ilm al-Kalam as ‘a science that provides rational proofs about faith and refutes the innovators who deviate from the path of the ancients,’ describes al-Ash’ari’s ‘Ilm al-Kalam as a turning point in its history of Islamic theology.⁹

The discourse of Islamic modernism appears contradictory and apologetic on some points. For instance, it admires Western sciences and technology, but is mostly critical of the West. Islamic modernism explains this uncertainty by distinguishing ‘modernization’ from ‘Westernization.’ For instance, the changing perceptions of modernity as science, nationalism and human rights coincide with the shifting emphasis on ‘Western modernity.’ Thus, in the nineteenth century, Muslim scholars made a serious attempt to bridge a gap between Islam and European enlightenment, giving rise to Islamic modernism.

According to Shireen T. Hunter there are three responses to modernity; total embrace, rejection and synthesis. The first reaction total embrace of Western style modernity has been identified in the elites educated in a Western style institution or West, for example, Ata Turk in Turkey, Pahlavi in Iran, Bourghiba in Tunisia, and Suharto in Indonesia. The total modernizers viewed Islam as practiced and implemented in the educational and judicial spheres of their respective countries as a major cause of Muslim’s decline. The second, rejectionist response was represented by the uneducated massed and the clerical establishments. From this perspective, the main cause of the Muslims decline had been the erosion of Islamic values and piety, and the failure to manage and govern society according to Islamic law. The third reaction that is synthesis, they maintained that Islam is not a hindrance to scientific and other progress and they advocated reform in Islam for the restoration of Islam’s rationalist and scientific spirit and the interpretation of its basic tenets in ways more suited to Muslim’s current condition and needs.¹⁰

Factors Leads to Islamic Modernism

The origins of Islamic modernism can be traced to at least four interrelated factors. First, a sense of decline was felt in the eighteenth century in the Muslim world in general and led several thinkers like Shah Waliullah (d. 1762) in India and Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (d. 1792) in Saudi Arabia to stress the need for reform.¹¹ This sense generated reform movements in the nineteenth century in several
Muslim societies. Islamic modernism was one of several reform discourses that sought to answer this decline.

Secondly, this sense of decline was further aggravated by the colonial rule in the Muslim world in the nineteenth century, either directly, as in India and Egypt, or indirectly, as in Iran and the countries under the Ottomans. Justifying colonial rule, most European scholars described political and social systems in the Muslim world as essentially backward, tyrannical and unreasonable and explained that Islam was unable to respond to modern challenges. William Hunter (d. 1900), an official of the East India Company, identified religious attitudes as the main cause of the revolt in 1857; Muslims were religiously bound to oppose non-Muslim rule. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) rebutted Hunter, clarifying that it was a revolt against bad colonial governance and that all Indian soldiers, Hindus and Muslims alike, participated in that revolt.

Similarly, in France, Ernest Renan (d. 1892), the well-known French Orientalist, blamed Islam for opposing reason and science. In 1895, Gabriel Hanotaux, a French cabinet minister and historian, justified French colonial rule in Africa by arguing that Islam opposed reason and reform and supported tyranny. In response to this criticism, Muslims felt obliged to defend their religious identity.

Thirdly, Christian missionaries who arrived in the wake of colonial adventures attacked Muslim beliefs in Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and the Qur’ān. They pointed to Islamic teachings on jihad, slavery, polygamy and the condition of Muslim women and they claimed that Christianity was a superior religion, as it did not allow such beliefs and practices. William Muir (d. 1905), Secretary of the Frontier Province in India, shared this missionary zeal. On the suggestion of Revd C. G. Pfander,¹² he wrote a biography of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in which he criticized Prophet Muhammad’s (S.A.W) marriages and wars from a Christian viewpoint.¹³ Consequently, mostly Muslims perceived modernity and colonial reforms as the promotion of Christianity.

Fourthly, Muslim youth educated in modern institutions believed that modernization meant Westernization; they disregarded and often ridiculed Islam and Muslim practices. Islamic modernists regarded this development as a threat to their
religious and cultural identity and found it necessary to explain that modernity was not in conflict with Islam.\textsuperscript{14}

The discourse did not start simultaneously in the Muslim world, yet it manifested two main concerns: reform in education, and the need for a new theology. In addition, this scholastic theology (\textit{ilm al-kalam}) in Islamic tradition evolved as a defensive science to respond to two needs: one is to justify Islamic beliefs and second to justify reason. In this way the diversity of religious, cultural and political conditions led to varying responses to modernity. Largely, the challenge of modernity was perceived in terms of conflict between science and religion.

Muhammad Khalid Masud writes that modernity is hard to be defined because its perceptions have been changing with time. There were several reasons for it. One main reason was continuing quest for one universally accepted assumption or agreed norm in the definition of modernity on the basis of which Islam could be defended as modern. Actualisations of modernity, therefore, changed from science to reason in the nineteenth century, and from development to economic and social justice in the twentieth century. The other reason was the search for an agreed idea or institution in the Islamic tradition on which a modern Muslim community could be found. Actualisation of modernity from this perspective varied between those who wanted to root modernity in Islamic tradition and who did not.\textsuperscript{15}

The Emergence of Islamic Modernism

Islamic modernism is a movement that has been described as “the first Muslim ideological response”\textsuperscript{16} to the Western challenges or a movement to reconcile Islamic faith with modern values such as democracy, rights, nationalism, rationality, science, equality and progress\textsuperscript{17} -- emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century as a response to European colonialism, which pushed the Muslim world into crisis. Islamic modernism generated a series of novel institutions, including schools that combined Islamic education with modern subjects and pedagogies; newspapers that carried modernist Islamic ideas across continents. Thus, Islamic modernism began as a response of Muslim intellectuals to European modernity, who argued that Islam, science and progress, revelation and reason, are indeed compatible. They did not simply wish to restore the beliefs and practices of the past; rather they asserted the
need to ‘reinterpret and reapply’ the principles and ideals of Islam to formulate new responses to the political, scientific and cultural challenges of the West and of modern life. It featured a “critical re-examination of the classical conceptions and methods of jurisprudence” and a new approach to Islamic theology and Qur'ānic exegesis. The central theological problems that engaged these reformists and modernists revolved around the questions of the validity of the knowledge derived from the sources external to Islam and the methodological adequacy of the four traditional sources of jurisprudence: the Qur’ān, Hadith, the consensus of jurists (ijma‘), and juristic reasoning by analogy (qiyas). They resolved to reinterpret the first two sources and to transform the last two in order to formulate reformist project in the light of the prevailing standards of scientific rationality and modern social theory. The reforms they proposed challenged the existing conditions maintained by the conservative Muslims scholars (‘ulama), who saw the established law as the ideal order that had to be followed and upheld the doctrine of taqlid which refers to simply “following” or “imitation” of a legal expert or school of Islamic law. Muslim modernists saw the resistance to change on the part of the conservative ‘ulama as a major cause for the problems the Muslim community was facing as well as its inability to counter Western domination.

Many Muslim modernists have been careful to cast their movement in decidedly Islamic terms. Perhaps the most common strategy for presenting modernism as an indigenously and authentically Islamic movement is through the framework of *ijtihad*. The concept of *ijtihad*, derived from an Arabic root meaning “effort” or “struggle,” was for centuries limited to a fairly technical meaning, referring to the intellectual effort of trained Islamic scholars to arrive at legal rulings on matters not covered in the sacred sources. The modernist Islamic movement of the nineteenth century adopted the term as a rallying cry, transforming its meaning into the more general task of “rational interpretation” or critical, independent reasoning in all domains of thought and that they held to be incumbent upon all educated Muslims. In other words, the proper domain of *ijtihad* was taken to be not just Islamic law but rather all aspects of thought. In a self-governing rule, modernists often hold that it is not just jurists but all Muslims who have the responsibility to carry on *ijtihad*. The opposite of *ijtihad*, in this view, was *taqlid*, literally “following,” which modernists took to mean “blind obedience to authority.”
Muslim modernists engaged in a process of reform through interpretation or individual investigation (*ijtihad*).

Modernists find Qur’ānic preference for their own critique of tradition embedded injustice by pointing to Qur’ānic voices [such as Ibrahim A.S and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)] who challenged their own community, which had insisted on continuing “the ways of the forefathers.” In appealing to Prophetic legitimization, many modernists have recorded the conversation between Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his Companion named Hazrat Mu‘adh Ibn Jabal (R.A) (d. 627). Hazrat Mu‘adh (R.A) stated that if he found no explicit guidance in the Qur’ān or the Prophetic Sunnah, he would rely upon his own independent reasoning. While, the systematic nature of this anecdote may well belie a later juridical desire to legitimize their own methodology, it has served as a powerful tool for modernists to approve their own appeal to *ijtihad*.

For Muslims everywhere, tradition serves as a key organizing principle, an inspirational rallying cry and a blueprint for social action. Muslims universally look to the Qur’ān, Hadith and the rules of the Shari‘ah for guidance and inspiration. Muslim modernist reformers, while responding to the challenges posed by European colonialism and modernism, made the rallying cry that “go back to the Qur’ān and go forward with *ijtihad*.” These pioneers of Islamic modernism focused on a central question: How can Muslims be true to the enduring values of their own past while living in the modern world? The modernists advocated the ideas of *islah* (reform), *tajdid* (revival) and *ijtihad* (independent interpretation). The modernists promoted Muslim unity and resistance to Western cultural supremacy by adopting the fruits of science and technology with regards to Muslim educational, legal and political institutions.\(^{23}\)

Modernists - being opponents of *taqlid* and proponents of *ijtihad* - disagree with the traditionalists who believe in the dogma of *taqlid*. Instead, they hold the view that Islam is a progressive, dynamic and rational religion in which the inhibiting dogma of *taqlid* holds no place; and lay much emphasis on the restoration and exercise of *ijtihad* and were against the belief that “gates of *ijtihad*” were “closed,” based on Qur’ānic verses, “verily Allah will not change the condition of men, till they change what is in themselves.”\(^{24}\) For them, Islamic law must be carefully revised in
order to be flexible and adaptable enough to incorporate modern political, economic, social, cultural and legal conditions. For example, in the Subcontinent, Sir Sayyid, tracing his intellectual legacy to Shah Waliullah (d. 1762), argued that the Qur’ānic world view was entirely compatible with science and rational thought. He firmly opposed the beliefs that the “gates of ijtihad” were eternally sealed a millennium earlier and denounced the inhibiting force of taqlid. For him, ijtihad was not an exclusive right of a privileged few ‘ulama, but the right of all devout and enlightened believers to interpret the Qur’ān in the context of the prevailing environment. Through his writings and institution building, he struggled to meet the challenges of modernity by appropriating Western education and ideology while giving new direction to Muslim social, educational and religious ideals. Likewise, Muhammad Iqbal, inheriting the legacy of Shah Waliullah and Sir Sayyid, gracefully combined Western and Islamic thought. For Iqbal, Islam was a dynamic religion-- and throughout his philosophical magnum opus ‘The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam’ he describes his vision of Islamic history as a dynamic, creative and adaptive tradition - and it was Islam’s dynamism that had made it a powerful force. In Iqbal’s mind, Islam's dynamism had been corrupted and hardened by the ‘ulama, isolated behind the walls of their madrasahs. He denounced the conservative ‘ulama saying that their inflexible worldview served no other function than “sowing corruption, perseverance and disruption in the name of Allah” ; and for considering Shari’ah to be “sacred.” He appealed to use ijtihad wisely, to revise the Shari’ah in the light of the Qur’ān and Sunnah, in order to meet the requirements of contemporary Muslim societies. He views the Shari’ah as the “cultural backbone” of the Muslim community, arguing that it provides both an “anchor of stability and a blueprint for adaptive change.” For the pioneers of modernity --being the foremost believers in reason - ijtihad (independent judgment and interpretation) was a necessity and the duty of man is to apply the principles of the Qur’ān afresh to the problems of the time. These reformers of Islamic thought and practice were knowledgeable not only about Islam but also about modern non-Islamic Western ideas. They believed in the convergence of Islamic and universal ethics and eager to introduce them into their own societies; and they welcomed non-Islamic ideas and practices that they considered beneficial to the progress and prosperity of Muslim societies. All the pioneers of modernity were filled with the ideas and insights after exposure to the West and more eager to introduce the best of them into their own societies. They
struggled to “re-appraise and reform a comprehensive religion” revealed to mankind more than fourteen hundred years ago, so that constructive and practical solutions to the new problems of a dramatically changed socio-economic and political environment can be found.

In the Subcontinent the key figures of modernism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and his associates Maulvi Chiragh Ali (1844-1895), Sayyid Ameer Ali (1849-1928) and the poet and thinker Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) presented ‘ilm al-kalam in a manner consistent with modern rationalist ideas. They all argued that Islam, as a world religion, is thoroughly capable of adapting itself to the changing conditions of every age. The Islamic modernists tackled such complex intellectual questions as the rise of the rational sciences and their implications for the Islamic belief system, the historical roots of Muslim decline, the apparent contradiction between Islamic tradition and the principles of social organization supporting European civilization, and Islamic conceptions of sovereignty and political theory.

Despite some distinctive differences, each argued that Islam was a dynamic, progressive religion that was made stagnant and declining by the forces of history and the mind-set of many ‘ulama. They identified the sources of Muslim weakness and asserted the compatibility of religion, reason and science; they reclaimed the glories of Islamic history, reminding Muslims that they had once been very strong, generated vast empires and an Islamic civilization whose wonders included major achievements in science, medicine and philosophy. They set out to initiate a reformation, to boldly redefine or reconstruct Islamic beliefs and thought, to reform Islamic theology and law. At the same time, they emphasized Muslim pride, unity and solidarity to face the political and cultural threat of European colonialism. In the words of Javed Majeed although there were some differences between these modernist thinkers, their work was governed by the “same project,” which was to show that Islam was consistent with the rationality of the European enlightenment and the development of modern science. As such, they argued that there was “no fundamental incompatibility” between modernity and its narrative of progress and Islam as a religion.29

The modernists earnestly make efforts to reconcile differences between traditional religious doctrine and secular scientific rationalism, between unquestioning
faith and reasoned logic and between continuity of Islamic tradition and modernity. Thus, the position of Muslim modernists is two-fold: first, “to define Islam by bringing out the fundamentals in a rational and liberal manner and to emphasize, among others, the basic ideals of Islamic brotherhood, tolerance and social justice” and second, “to interpret the teachings of Islam in such a way as to bring out its dynamic character in the context of the intellectual and scientific progress of the modern world.”³⁰ In other words, Muslim modernists in contradiction to traditionalists and fundamentalists /revivalists proposed to rescue Islam from cultural inactivity and political blockage through a program of “adaptation and accommodation.”³¹

Although Islamic modernists were subject to the criticism that the reforms they promoted amounted to Westernizing Islam, their legacy was significant and their thought influenced future generations of reformers.

**Different Approaches**

The challenges of modernity and the Muslim responses to modernism and modernization in modern India may be studied, for a convenient analysis through various approaches and methods applied by the modern Muslim ‘ulama and the intellectuals as well. Shireen T. Hunter categorized two main discourses in the Islamic world—Reformist/Liberal Islam and Conservative/ traditionalist/ literalist Islam and they are different in their philosophical outlook, methodology and modes of operation.

Reformist thinkers vary in their methodology of analyzing Islamic scriptural and legal sources, in their view of the allowable scope for interpretation and in their opinion regarding what aspects of Islamic scriptures and laws may be reinterpreted. Some reformists favour only a limited reinterpretation of these sources and exclude the fundamentals of the faith. They may use traditional methodologies in their interpretations, such as those embodied in the *usul al- fiqh*. They prefer gradual change in those Islamic laws seen as not responsive to the Muslim current condition and need. The other reformist favour broader scope of reinterpretation of the basic Islamic sources in the light of the new circumstances. On the other hand traditionalists adhere to literal and narrow interpretation of Islam’s major scriptural and legal sources, oppose change to the existing laws, notably the penal code and even oppose
exercising caution and leniency in the application of existing laws through a more liberal interpretation.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Modernist Approach}

The Islamic modernists developed a new set of ideas in relation to several distinctive ideological targets. One was the discourse of Islamic orthodoxy, which claimed a monopoly of legitimate religious expressions. The others were the secular discourses and religious ideologies that, as a result of the European interventions, started to invade the cultural landscape of Islamic countries with powerful force from the late eighteenth century onwards. These included the secular discourse of the enlightenment, the narrower Europe-centred rationalist discourse of the British colonial administrations and Westernizers and the cultural and religious discourse of Christian Evangelicals. Islamic modernism was an ideological resolution of a group of Muslim intellectual who attempted to address the intellectual problems that assault Islam as a result of the sweeping criticism levelled against it by adherents of these discourses. These criticisms by arousing the need among Muslim thinkers to defend their faith, compelled them to take new positions on various issues facing Islam, which resulted in the emergence of and Islamic modernist discourse.

The modernists are committed to the reform of Islamic thought, both legal and theological and place great emphasis on \textit{ijtihad}. Modernism is in a part of the continuation of the reformist movement of Islam in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth centuries, and is seen as a way to address the challenges posed by modernity while remaining faithful to the basics of Islam. As many Muslim thinkers saw it in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the impact of the West on Muslims required a response appropriate to the extent of the challenge.

Among the key concerns of the modernists is the reform of Islamic thought through an emphasis on \textit{ijtihad}. They believe that the modern context demands a reassessment of the intellectual heritage of Muslims and this requires giving up the blind imitation of earlier scholars. They believed that revelation does not clash with reason and that an effort should be made to revive Islam’s rationalist philosophical tradition. They argue for a flexible interpretation of Islam and its sources in order to develop institutions proportionate with modern conditions, and that social change
must be reflected in Islamic law. They believed that a return to Islam, as it was originally practiced, would introduce into Muslim societies the intellectual dynamism required to grasp with the West. They emphasized scientific knowledge as a way to compete with the West through reform of Islamic education.\textsuperscript{33}

The Aligarh Movement led by the modern Muslim ‘ulama and the intellectuals as well. The Aligarh movement led by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, further intensified by Maulvi Chiragh Ali and Sayyid Ameer Ali and many others basically formed the modernist approach.

**Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898):** He was an Indian educator, rationalist, an Islamic reformer and modernist.\textsuperscript{34} Sir Sayyid pioneered modern education for the Muslim community in India by founding the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, which later developed into the Aligarh Muslim University. His work gave rise to a new generation of Muslim entrepreneurs and scholars who highlighted the rationalistic approach of Sir Sayyid and spread the message of the Aligarh movement for socio-cultural development of Indian Muslims. He called for a bold “new theology” or reinterpretation of Islam and the acceptance, not rejection, of the West in Western thought. He insisted that he was reclaiming the “original religion of Islam, which Allah and the messenger have disclosed, not that religion which the ‘ulama and the preachers have fashioned.” His reason and the laws of nature were in perfect harmony with modern scientific thought.\textsuperscript{35}

**Maulvi Chiragh Ali (1844-1895):** Maulvi Chiragh Ali was an Indian Muslim scholar of the late nineteenth century. He followed the school of Muslim Modernists and is most prominently known for his association with Sir Sayyid and his Aligarh movement. His interactions with Christians in British India also marked him as a Muslim apologist with a particular focus on the wars of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). His goal in the criticism of the Qur'ān as well as the Shari‘ah is to justify contemporary Western ideals through the Qur'ān and wanted to present a reformative thinking about the Qur'ān. In his writings, Chiragh Ali sought to correct what he perceived to be misperceptions of Islam and jihad. These misunderstandings, he argued, came from the historical development of Hadith and the activities of Muslim jurists. He believed the jurists had taken justice into their own hands and in doing so misused or completely ignored the Qur'ān. In following these beliefs, Chiragh Ali was
committed to offering a fresh interpretation of the Qurʾān and a moderated version of *jihad*. Chiragh Ali maintained that Islam introduces no set of political or social system and that the school of Islamic law, as a human institution, but they were subject to revision.  

**Sayyid Ameer Ali (1849-1928):** Ameer Ali who was a disciple of Karamat Ali and like him, an orthodox *Shiʿi*. Inspired by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, he became the chief polemist of Islam in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. His principle objective was to reconcile classical Islam with modern needs. He contended that Islam was a positive force, adaptable to contemporary conditions and necessary for spiritual enlightenment and practical advancement. He also viewed that Islam as a vehicle of rationality and dynamism during the age of European barbarism and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) as a messenger of moral humanism and progress entirely in tune with modern age.

**Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938):** One of the few Islamic modernists with serious interest in poetry and mysticism, he is remembered for having argued for the importance of dynamism in Islamic thought. He judged the Islamic community as one of five centuries of “dogmatic slumber” as a result of the blind following of tradition and he called for the “reconstruction” of religious thought for the revival of the Muslim community. He distinguished between eternal, immutable principles of Islam (*Shariʿah*) and those regulations that were the product of human interpretation and thus subject to change. Iqbal believed that Muslims must once again reassert their right to reinterpret and reapply Islam to changing social conditions. He reinterpreted or redefined *ijtihad* (individual interpretation) and *ijma* (consensus), suggesting that the right to interpret Islam for the community be transferred from the ‘*ulama* to a national assembly or legislature. This collective or corporate consensus would then constitute the authoritative consensus of the community.

**Traditionalist Approach**

The Deoband movement launched by Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and strengthened by the eminent religious scholars like Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi, Maulana *Mufti* Muhammad Shafi, Maulana Qari Muhammad Tayyib and others constituted the orthodox approach that emphasized mainly on a negation and refusal
of modernization and strict adherence to the traditional Islam. In the Islamic context “traditionalism,” or a “traditional” outlook, may be defined—as “a long-standing, clear fondness in diverse strands of Islamic life for recourse to previous authorities, above all the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and Companions (Sahabah), but also later figures... who are perceive as having revived... reformed... or preserved the vision and norms of true, pristine Islam, and thus as being in continuity and connection with the original community, or ummah.” In the words of W.C. Smith “the Muslim theologians of India have in the modern period, introduced or accepted little that is new in Islam. They attached ideologically and functionally to the old order of society and to the classical Islam. This resulted a great gulf between the ‘ulama and the modern educated Muslim and what most of the theologians have been able to accomplish is a purifying and refining the old Islam.” The ‘ulama has almost no part in transformation and tumultuous process of modernized Islam (except to oppose them) like important Deoband seminary, as accepting the older in principle but trying to revive and purify it. The famous Dar ul-‘Ulum at Deoband is only next to the Al-Azhar of Cairo is the most important and respected educational institution of the Muslim world. Its influence and prestige throughout India are, large and they are all the greater for the school’s long tradition of concern for the material condition of the Muslims. Its main aim is to resuscitate classical Islam; to rid the Muslims of the theological corruptions, the ritual degradations, and the material exploitation to which they have fallen prey since the British occupation. Moreover, the door of ijtihad is closely tight. Deoband maintains thoroughly the premises of Islam; and within the limits of those of premises it is relentlessly rationalist. It attempts to do away with deviations, compromises, and intellectual laziness. On the practical side, Deobandi ‘ulama are puritanically strict and they work attentively to overcome and destroy backsliding, superstitions, saint-worship, and all the belongings of ignorance, poverty, and fear in a depressed and decadent agrarian society. Their ideal is traditional Islam at its purest—with a strict enforcement of the Shari‘ah. Socially, Deobandi is progressive to the extent that it strives to eliminate superstitious beliefs and practices, but at the same time they strive equally to eliminate any advance to higher levels. It resists with and intense rigidity all bid‘ah and innovation indiscriminately; whether retrogressive or advanced. For example, it defends polygamy.
Maulana Qasim Nanautawi (1833-1877): Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, who founded the seminary at Deoband, both were the disciples of Shah Waliullah aim of promoting the traditional theological sciences in general and propagating certain elements of the teachings of the school of Shah Waliullah in particular. For instance, they emphasized the elements of orthodoxy in Shah Waliullah’s thought. They have two main objectives for the establishment of Deoband Seminary: to re-establish contact between the ‘alim and the average Muslim and to reorient the Muslim community to its ‘original’ cultural and religious identity. Moreover, a traditionalist course of studies was planned to the exclusion of modern sciences, and it was believed that the perfection of the Muslim community lay in the conservation of its traditional heritage in an age in which the modern physical or rational sciences (ma’qulat) could easily be learned in a number of government institutions, but the Muslim traditional sciences (manqulat) were undergoing an extraordinary and sudden decline. This school basically aimed at preserving the Islamic values from the corrupting influence of the West, particularly British.

Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1829-1905): He was an Indian Islamic scholar who co-founded the Deoband Islamic movement at the Dar ul-‘Ulm Deoband madrasah of which he became the central personality following the death of Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi. Among those who were educated in Delhi in the 1840s, there were three who later made important contributions to the reformist movement: Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Maulana Imaduallah (1817-1899). The early careers of these men epitomized the background of many ‘ulama of this period as well as the character of the religious life of Delhi at mid-century. Maulana Muhammad Qasim’s family had long been connected with the Delhi ‘ulama.

His personality is the sublime combination of the exoteric (Shari’ah) and esoteric sciences (tariqah). His days and nights remain occupied in seeking the pleasure of Allah and his Messenger (S.A.W). He is preoccupied with the teaching of Hadith. After Maulvi Muhammad Ishaq that kind of dissemination of the religious sciences has uniquely continued with Maulana Gangohi in the entire Subcontinent.
Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1864-1943): The most influential Deoband scholar and Sufi of the twentieth century. Maulana Thanwi had also initially supervised work on the *Ahkam al-Qurʾān*, a major exposition of the Qurʾān’s legal materials completed by Zafar Ahmad ‘Uthmani (d. 1974) in collaboration with some other ‘ulama a few decades after Maulana Thanwi’s death. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was a prolific author. His literary contributions are reported to be about one thousand, including sermons, discussions, discourses, treatises, and books. Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi said, “Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi was a translator and exegete (*mufassir*) of the Qurʾān; he explained its injunctions and wisdoms. He removed doubts and answered questions pertaining to it. “Thanwi was a scholar of Hadith (*muhaddith*) as well, and expounded its details and delicacy. He was a jurist (*faqih*) who issued thousands of legal rulings (*fatwa*) and addressed numerous legal problems in contemporary issues in Islamic law (*fiqh*).

Maulana Qari Muhammad Tayyib (1897-1983): Maulana Muhammad Qari Tayyib was *Hujjat al-Islam* Imam Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi's grandson. His father shaikh Muhammad Ahmad son of Imam Qasim was a notable Islamic scholar, who served *Dar ul-‘Ulam* Deoband as its rector and also served the state of Hyderabad as its grand *mufii*. During his education he was specially trained by *Imam al-Muhaddithin* Anwar Shah Kashmiri and later by *Imam-al Mujaddid Hakimul Ummat* Ashraf Ali Thanwi. Muslims of Indian Subcontinent remember shaikh Muhammad Tayyib as ‘Second Architect’ (*Ma’mar-e- thani*) of *Dar ul-‘Ulam* Deoband.

Islamist Approach

According to Abdullah Saeed the political Islamist choose Islamic socio-political pathway to change in Muslim communities, emphasizing “Islamic” values and institutions over what they see as Western counterparts. They are interested in establishing an Islamic state or an Islamic socio-political order in Muslim societies. Most argue for a gradual approach through education. They are particularly keen to project an alternative program to expand the scope of what Islam means and its role in society, as they see constantly being eroded. In their view, the roots of this erosion lie largely in the colonial period. They believed that in the post-independence period, the modern state continued to implement various colonial projects, including the marginalization of Islamic law, and this has to be reversed. They argued that Allah’s
sovereignty should be supreme in the state, in which case the state should enforce and implement Islamic law, not, as they saw, man-made law. Notable movements associated with this movement including the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, and Jama‘t-e- Islami of India. They have similar approaches to change, including an ideology that emphasized a more activist Islam that challenges the existing authorities, whether state or religion. They are determined to change Muslim societies from within. Sayyid Abul A‘la Maududi and his Jama‘t-e- Islami, Sayyid Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and others represents Islamists response to modernism.

Maulana Abul A‘la Maududi (1903-1979): Abul A‘la Maududi was an extremely important figure to present Islamist approach of Islam in the twentieth Century. Although his influence has often been overlooked, Maududi provides the missing link between the relatively vague programme of Hassan al-Banna’s Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) and the sophisticated ideology evidenced by the later works of Sayyid Qutb. Although both Maulana Maududi and al-Banna recognized the importance of science and technology, they agreed that technology could only profitably be harnessed by Islamic, not Western methods, as they believed the Qur‘ān and Sunnah provide a guide to all aspects of life, including government.

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (1913-1999): Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi more popularly known as Ali Miyan was born in 1913 at Takiya Kalan, also known as Daira-i Shah Alimullah, a village near the town of Rai Bareilly, U.P. He was one of the leading Indian ‘ulama of modern times, recognized in Muslim circles worldwide for his scholarship and dedication to the cause of Islamic revival. Also, his writings were concerned to present Islam as a comprehensive worldview. Among the several leading Islamic scholars and activists that the family had produced, and in whom Nadwi took great pride, was Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi.

In 1931, he went to Azamgarh to study with the noted Islamic scholar, Sayyid Sulamian Nadwi at the Dar ul-Musannifin, established by the renowned Maulana Shibli Nu‘mani (d. 1914). The next year he went to Deoband, where he studied Qur‘ānic commentaries under the noted Deobandi ‘alim, Maulana Sayyid Husain Ahmad Madani. A major turning point in Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi’s life came in 1934, when he was appointed to teach Arabic and Qur‘ānic commentary at the Nadwat ul-‘Ulama. The Nadwah was to remain central to his life thereafter, just as he was to
remain central to the life of the madrasah, turning it into a widely recognized centre for Islamic research.\textsuperscript{51} He continued teaching at the madrasah even after he was appointed its rector in 1961 after the death of his brother, a post that he occupied till his own death.

Having travelled extensively in the United States and Europe, Nadwi also penned several books and tracts on contemporary Western civilization, condemning it for what he regarded as its gross materialism, for what he saw as its immorality and godlessness, but at the same time insisting that Muslims should not hesitate to benefit from its scientific achievements.

He echoed the argument of the Islamists that an Islamic state was essential for the laws of Shari’ah to be implemented in their entirety. However, he was, at the same time, a realist and aware enough of the fact that this was out of the realm of human possibility in the contemporary Indian context. He argued that an Islamic political order could be established in India only in some remotely distant future. Rather than struggling directly for it in the present, he believed that the Indian Muslims should focus their energies on missionary efforts and trying to build what he saw as a truly Islamic society, on the basis of which alone could an ideal Islamic political order came into being.\textsuperscript{52}
NOTES AND REFERENCES

6. Ibid.
24. The Holy Qur’an, al-R’ad 13: 11
26. Bashir Ahmad Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 1st edition, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1957, p. 113
39. Ibid., p. 649
44. Ibid.


47. Referring to the great-grandson of Shah Walliullah Dahlawi, Shah Muhammad Ishaq Dahlawi, who was among the foremost authorities of *Hadith* in his time, the resort of the ‘ulama of his era and heir to his grandfather Shah ‘Abd al-’Aziz Dahlawi.


52. Abdullah Abbas Nadwi, *Mir-i Karavan*, op.cit., p. 48