Syed Jamal Al-Din Afghani’s Gallant And Sir Syed’s Meek Response To Western Modernity

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Abstract

Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan led the 19th century Muslim world against Western imperialism with different strategy and modus operandi but similar selfless zeal and sincerity. Afghani’s theatre of action was the whole Muslim world or the whole “orient”, Sir Syed’s field of action was limited and confined to Indian Muslims. Owing to their intellectual backdrop and social milieu both reformers assumed different visions. Sir Syed in an attempt to integrate modern scientific world view with Islamic doctrine, instead of orthodox Islam, owed allegiance to the Hellenized content of medieval Muslim philosophers and to judge the contents of the system of belief sought safe solace in the criterion of conformity to Nature and struck harmony with the modern West a self-proclaimed heir to antiquity. Jamal judged his tradition with sympathy, compassion and criticism and to be consistent with own history and culture sought remedy in back to the normative Islam. This paper intends to delineate the legacy of two giant Muslim reformers. It is based on qualitative research.

Keywords: Islam, modernity, Religion, Education, Politics, Theology, Philosophy, Imperialism, Western-ism, Fundamentalism,
Introduction

The 15th century European renaissance with Protestant Revolt transpired into Peace of Westphalia (1648) whose natural outcomes i.e. political nationalism and secularism sealing the fate of transcendentalism led the West to Enlightenment Movement that triggered scientific revolution, the same materialized into Industrial Revolution that was in the long run bound enough to bid final adieu to the outworn order i.e. the classical cultures, the pastoral societies of the Eastern and Western hemispheres with effecting the complete hegemony of the Industrial, mercantile Europe on the world affairs. The Western imperialism subdued the foreign lands not only militarily and politically but equally stifled and strangulated native realities, cultures, norms, and modes of life that came its way for “imperialism and “episteme-cide” i.e. the destruction or murder of the knowledge of subjugated peoples, is an ineluctable trajectory of the Western modernity. While several cultures of Asia and Africa proved sand dunes to be shaped or dancing to the fast blowing winds of Western modernity pretty different was the case of Islam. Though it encountered Western imperialism in post-medieval period at various places in the beginning of eighteenth century, so vast was the hang-over of its post-glorious era that early impact of Western hegemony failed to cause a ripple in the somnolent waters of Islam. The first reaction was to play ostrich or draw more securely into its own shell. Resultantly, the whole of Muslim Asia and Africa from 18th to 19th centuries till the first quarter of 20th century was submerged in the Western aggression and Islam’s political power reached the lowest water mark in its chequered history of twelve centuries and it took another fifty years for Muslims to realize their position in the world.

The majority of historians and intellectuals attribute the decline of Islam to the military might and scientific technological supremacy of the West ignoring the fact that the decline of any form whatsoever its roots are intellectual. The Quran terms natural phenomena (Nature), laws of history (sociology) and inner constitution of human self (psychology) the sign of God just as it calls its own sentences “signs” (ayats). Man being the torch-bearer of “Trust” is responsible to create a moral social order on the earth (33:72) so “the Trust” is to discover the laws of, and thus to get mastery over nature- or, in the terminology of the Quran, “to know the names of all things”- and then use this mastery, under the human moral initiative, to create a good world order. Hence, “the scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer just as the Sufi seeker of the higher truth. For this adds to his power over Nature and give him that vision of the total infinite which philosophy seeks but cannot find. Vision without power does bring moral elevation but cannot give a lasting culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity”. The entire teachings of the Quran converge on the single principle how the unjust ones are to be divested of power to bestow the same on the real heirs of the earth the righteous who are on the constructive side of history to establish a just moral order on the earth. “For power and honesty are but rarely found together. When political authority is divorced from religion, or religion from political authority, people’s affairs get corrupted”, writes Iqbal. Hence, religion and state are inseparable. So acute and enormous was the pull of this reality and equally tremendous was the task of moral initiative
that the Quran did not present a \textbf{closed value} system; its \textbf{open values} system seeks an active cooperation of the people of the book for the establishment of an \textbf{ethical world order} (3:64).

The same reality unfolded itself in the whole drift of Prophet’s career. During first three centuries the creative formative period of classical Islam at least on intellectual plane with few exceptions is the retention of same spirit. Had the economic and democratic organization of the society the foremost concern of those at the helm and been effected as per letter and spirit of the Quran and Prophetic model quite different would have been the subsequent trajectory of Islamic history. The pleasant odor of these ideals would have been sufficed to win large swathes of lands to Islam as later happened in China, Malaya and Indonesia. Yet “territorial conquest was not part of the original program of Islam, I consider it great loss as the progress of Islam as a conquering faith” says Iqbal “stultified the growth of those germs of an economic and democratic organization of society scattered up and down the pages of the Quran and traditions of the Prophet. No doubt, Muslims succeeded in building great empire, but thereby they largely re-paganized the political ideals of Islam, and lost the sight of some of the most important potentialities of their faith”6. What paganism has to the theological realm of Islam, dictatorship has same relation to the political ideals of Islam.

To Islam community and Sunnah are identical just as the integrity of state and solidarity of community have seamless bond. “Under the Prophet and the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar, the integrity of the state and the solidarity of community were identical and, indeed, indivisible is obvious. Under the third caliph, the integrity of the state was, however, shaken, and so was that of community, while under Ali the state was dismembered, and so was the community.”7 Still inner immunity of the nascent community in lieu of the freshness of the Prophetic tradition was strong enough to sustain the religio-political blows. The momentum of severe challenges and creative responses continues for about three centuries which brought forth rich crop of religious disciplines like theology, law and Jurisprudence, hadith and Sunna, grammar and linguistics, Quran’s hermeneutics, schools of philosophy and science etc. Here in this period we find no discrimination of religious and secular. The principle that all knowledge-intellectual, scientific or intuitive- comes from God and its pursuit is a religious responsibility seems at work. However, since 4th /11th century rot sets in when community-tradition (Jamaa-Sunna) equation turns into innovation-sectarian (bida-firqa) equation. To Ibn Taimiyya the post-formative developments “neo-fiqh”, “neo-kalam”, “new-mysticism”, “neo-politics” etc. in post-classical Islam unravel and distort community-tradition identity and sects based on bidaa or innovation are at cut-throat war against each other with the art of disputation or mujadla and they became chaotic and irresponsible8. In fact this intellectual fragmentation led to the disintegration of the community. Al-Ghazali emerges to redress the intellectual balance of community but it was too late. He struck harmony among law, theology and mysticism but his valid skepticism of philosophy and science on some crucial points with precautionary note was misconstrued by the orthodoxy which dealt a decisive blow to positive sciences in Islam. It culminated into firm division of Sharia sciences and worldly sciences. This was the starting point of intellectual decline in Islam for the division not only sealed the fate of
positive sciences in Islam it dealt a blow to the orthodoxy itself. For “no structure of ideas can even hope to make good or even command respect for a long time—let alone be fruitful—unless it is in constant interaction with living, growing stream of positive and scientific thought. It is a sheer delusion to imagine that by stifling free, positive thought one can save religion by doing so, religion itself gets starved and impoverished. The result was that after a few centuries, the real “Dark Ages” of Islam, the orthodoxy was left with little more than empty shell, a threadbare formal structure with hardly any content.9"

After al-Ghazali an aversion to positive sciences became a vogue, all subsequent great minds in Islam deemed it necessary in varying degrees to discourage and disparage reason and science10. Moreover, Ibn al-Arabi’s gnostic principle of knowledge rendered even traditional sciences almost ineffectual, by removing the difference between good and evil religion itself was put on ventilator. The pull of monistic idea i.e. the God-world identity was so strong that even its harsh critic Sheikh Ahmad condemns ulama for “attributing real existence to this world besides God11” though otherwise he “is attempting to establish the real existence of the world which was being doubted by the Sufic-Vedantic monism12”. He did his best to resurrect the moral élan of the Quran but the community at large refused to slough off monistic doctrine. A century and a half later Shah Wali Allah though emphasized the full reality of moral order yet he retained the premises of Ibn al-Arabi’s monism.

This was the sorry state of intellectual affairs and their material results on the ground from Morocco to Malaya when the Muslim Asia and Africa confronted western imperialism on their soils. Invaders do never come of their own choice internal crisis of communities invite them. Muslim’s decline had set in long ago when dichotomy of sharia and worldly sciences was effected Western military might, scientific progress and technological supremacy only matured it and till the end of 18th century almost all the Muslim world was colonized and it took further fifty years for Muslims to realize their position. This was the context in which Sir Syed Ahmad Khan leads Indian Muslims and the leadership of the Muslim world at large fell on Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani.

Yet the history of original reforms in Islam finds its early traces and sparks in the words and actions of Ibn Taimiyya a signpost for almost all pre-modernist and modernist movements in Islam. Born in Hamblite tradition he not only questioned the finality of schools to secure freedom of Ijtehad by taking recourse to the first principles i.e. the Quran and Prophetic model for a fresh start, he broke with Ibn Hanble on the matter of Sufism and in contradistinction to al-Ghazali’s personal-ism he resurrected Islamic positivism i.e. the integrally reconstituted community of Islam tasked with moral imperative. Ibn Hanble rejected Sufism wholesale and endorsed Kalam, Ibn Taimiyya comes hard on Kalam and not only accepts non-extremist Sufism but claims Kashf (intuitive revelation) for himself. He endorsed al-Ghazali’s choice of Sufi path against theologians, Batanis and philosophers yet sorrowfully points he had another path of the Quran and Sunna which he condones on the premise of his lack of knowledge in these disciplines. Hence, Ibn Taimiyya and
Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya against common perception are neo-Sufis pioneers of neo-Sufism in Islam which employs Sufism for social reconstruction.

However, “while al-Ghazali’s influence was almost immediate, Ibn Taimiyya’s message lay dormant through the centuries”. Still in subsequent history whenever and wherever orthodox Islam took the plunge to reassert itself it was the spring of Ibn Taimiyya’s thought where the caravans of original thinkers landed to fuel their grueling souls. Be it the 17th century’s reassertion of orthodox Islam in India due to the political and spiritual crisis there or 18th century’s Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahab’s thrust for reforms in Arabia or Muhammad al-Murtadha (d. 1790) and Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Shawkani’s push for the revival of Islam in the Middle East with varying degrees all seemed converged on the legacy of Ibn Taimiyya. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhandi and Shah Wali Allah in India instead of al-Ghazali’s personal-ism invoked Ibn Taimiyya’s Islamic positivism in their intellectual constructs and political dynamism. Al-Shawkani in his twelve volumes commentary titled Nayl al-Awtar on the legal work of Ibn Taimiyya’s grandfather Majd al-Din Ibn Taimiyya refuting acceptance of the authority in religion writes:

“[This work of Ibn Taimiyya] has become a source book for the majority of the Ulama when they are in need of finding a legal proof-especially in this region and in these times; upon this sweet spring, the eyes of original thinkers collide with one another and the steps of investigators vie with one another in entering its gates. It has thus become a resort for thinkers whither they repair and a haven for those who wish to flee from the bonds of slavish and blind acceptance of authority.”

However, it was Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahab of Najd who in 18th century discovered Ibn Taimiyya’s message from the debris of history with such a “zealot-ism” and “herodianism” that “Wahabism” became a byword or an umbrella term for all those movements and personalities who rejected second hand Islam i.e. medieval constructs and instead of relying on legal authorities, commentaries and super commentaries rushed forward to the primary sources securing the right of free thinking to build Islam anew to reassert and make a fresh start. “The spirit of Ibn Taimiyya found fuller expression” writes Iqbal “in a movement of immense potentialities which arose from the sands of Nejd, described by Macdonald as ‘the cleanest spot in the decadent world of Islam. It is really the first throb of life in modern Islam. To the inspiration of this movement are traceable, directly or indirectly, nearly all the great modern movements of Muslim Asia and Africa, e.g. the Sanisi movement, the pan-Islamic movement, and the Babi movement which is only a Persian reflex of Arabian Protestantism. To Fazlur Rahman even when it was “discovered” by Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahab and his followers in 18th century Arabian peninsula, It was miserably truncated. The Wahabi version totally lost the vision of an integrally reconstituted Muslim community, which was at the center of Ibn Taimiyya’s entire endeavor, even though, in its own right, it became seminally influential in modern Islam.

Thus, 19th century reformers Sir Syed Ahmad khan and Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani consciously or unconsciously are heir to and continuation of Wahabi movement yet both are poles apart in vision, intellectual bearings and strategy for actual reform is like Jazz: a constant improvisation on a
theme. However, whereas the puritanical reformer Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahab either misunderstood or ignored the centrality of Ibn Taimiya’s message i.e. to rediscover and intellectually reconstitute the early normative community of Islam based on the Quran and Sunna, and by rebelling against Muslim rulers defied his push for Islamic reciprocity i.e. the rulers and the ruled have their beings and mutual rights (4:58; 4:59), Ibn Taimiyya speaks in a fuller sense in the words and actions of Syed Jamal though his Wahabi version seemed at play in Sir Syed’s early career of reform which too was shunned away at the altar of sheer pragmatism when he accepted Western humanism, Naturalism and Cartesian approach as central coordinates of his thought lock, stock and barrel and indeed he threw the baby with bath water when he judged his tradition on the criterion of Nature and only Quran could sustain the shocks of his Procrustean bed oriented critique while everything else stays a historical garbage. Tradition can neither be changed nor replaced it can be reformed, “when customs do become distorted, says Shah Wali Allah, they ought to be reformed rather than abrogated and replaced179, “It [tradition] is a reasoned and restraining force, a rope by which each generation of believers is threaded to each other180”. But dazed to the dazzling exterior of western culture the half learned quakes tradition as a rope of sands. Yet, in so far as Sir Syed is concerned problem lies in approach not in sincerity of purpose which is perhaps beyond doubt.

However, whereas Sir Syed is in full glare of history; friends and foes know him by actual substance of his words and conduct, Syed Jamal is according to Churchill’s phrase a “riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma” even to his community at large for his intellectual portrait has been painted bleak in the war of narrative with a common misperception that Sir Syed’s pragmatism won Pakistan while Jamal’s idealism fizzled out leaving no tangible results. “Of course, if one wants to push back the sharp Muslim-Hindu division in the sub-continent, and hence trace back the seeds of the Indian-Pakistan partition, one can logically go back to the Mujaddid’s [al-Sirhind] teaching.199”…. “Sheikh Sirhindhi is a bold thinker. He ranks among the class of reformers before him like Ibn Taimiya; his style is at times unusually telling and modern. In this sense, with all the richness of his thought, Iqbal has but simply rendered in magical poetry what Sheikh Ahmad, the Muaddid, had preached as his central theme three hundred years before.200”

Thus Iqbal the dreamer of Pakistan who made the idea a rallying cry of Indian Muslims and influenced the architect Jinnah to turn this into reality was an heir to the legacy of Ibn Taimiya, Sheikh Sirhindhi, Shah Wali Allah and last but not least of Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani, in whose magnum opus “Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” Sir Syed fails to find place even in the footnote. It was an audacity of hope and courage of conviction in Iqbal’s poetry and prose that turned the docile class of Aligarh into vanguard of freedom movement neither the curricula of Aligarh nor the vision of Sir Syed that sought so called British glorious just rule blessing in disguise, a husband for widow India.

Jamal left no stone unturned to secure the independent status of the Muslim world but took both Western imperialism and native despotism by the horns when they failed to follow through on their commitments. So he earned the wrath of both. Almost all western accounts of Afghani’s life
are misleading, disparaging and distorted in favor of Western imperial corporate interests and local despotism. He is either painted as a dissimulated Shia of Iranian nationality to waylay his following in majority Sunni Islam or portrayed as Free Mason agent who worked for imperial powers. He went missing from the memory of post-colonial Muslim world for his thoughts pose a severe threat to the vested interests of ruling cliques. On the other hand Sir Syed not only entertained the support of British establishment still enjoys good part in educational curricula and the goodwill of ruling aristocracy in Pakistan. Genuine scholarship terms Afghani as father of Islamic modernism, “a general summons to the Muslim community to raise their intellectual and moral standards in order to meet the dangers of the Western expansionism was issued by Jamal al-Din Afghani, the first genuine Muslim modernist...he made powerful appeal for the cultivation of philosophic and scientific disciplines by expanding the curricula of the educational institution and for general educational reform… he aroused the Muslims to develop the medieval content of Islam to meet the needs of modern society.” His stormy political career deterred him to propound intellectual modernism himself yet he produced hundreds of Jamal and inspired variety of intellectual and political movements in the Muslim world. Still, the intellectual gap he left was a great loss. “Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of new spirit in him was Shah Wali Allah of Delhi. The man, however, who fully realized the importance and immensity of the task, and whose deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life, combined with a broad vision engendered by his wide experience of men and manners, would have made him a living link between the past and future, was Jamal al-Din Afghani. If his indefatigable but divided energy could have devoted itself entirely to Islam as a system of belief and conduct, the world of Islam, intellectually speaking, would have been on a much more solid ground today.”

“He was a man of enormous force of character, prodigious learning, untiring activity, and dauntless courage, extraordinary eloquence both in speech and writing and an appearance equally striking and majestic.

Al-Afghani was a fearless activist to the marrow of his bones as a free thinker, world citizen, a man of prodigious learning, son of free soil and ancestry ever ready to pay for political freedom while Sir Syed was a pacifist apologetic to the finger tips on account of being a self-taught half learned reformer of a subject land and a docile lineage. Jamal had a profound grip on Muslim history, theology, Sufism, logic, philosophy, physics, metaphysics, astronomy, medicine, anatomy, world history, philosophy of history and various other subjects along with keeping an eye on the inner meaning of Europe’s advances in political thought, constitutionalism, representative governments, cultural progress and their scientific technological prowess. Being an organic intellectual equipped with zeitgeist he was a stimulator, designer, organizer, and permanent persuader, royal guest in Muslim countries yet in constant interaction with the masses he was an agitator of the first order equally dreaded in the Western capitals. He born at Asadabad near Kanar in the district of Kabul, Afghanistan to one Syed Safdar who became a political suspect in the eyes of Amir Dost Muhammad khan, with his lands confiscated he was forced to move down to Kabul when Jamal was only ten years old. After Amir’s death Jamal was adviser to new Amir Sher Ali khan, in which capacity he was instrumental in persuading the Amir to grant permission
for a newspaper and to enact reforms in the army, education system, communications and post, and also to set up schools, hospitals and advisory council. But when against his advice Sher Ali attacked his three brothers in other provinces and civil war ensued Jamal attached himself to Muhammad Azam Khan and when the latter became Amir he made young Jamal his prime minister and was guided by his wise councils. However, when Sher Ali supported by the English entered Kabul triumphant, Jamal remained in Kabul protected due to the prestige he enjoyed among people and what would be the possible reaction of the vengeance on part of Amir. He left Afghanistan for pilgrimage, and afterward the world was his field of activity as Keddie defined him an “Islamic response to imperialism” with conspicuous absence of “Western” and tried her best to mistreat the facts of his nationality and motivations to tilt the balance in favor of his birth in Iran and Shia persuasions and precursor of al-Khomeni’s revolution in Iran, however, not without some rare insights of his personality and thought. Had she not had compromised integrity and consulted thoroughly Sharif al-Muahid’s theses on Al-Afghani delivered at McGill’ institute of Islamic Studies in 1954 under the wise supervision of Director institute Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith and visiting Associate Professor, Dr. Fazlur Rahman, or benefitted from Qadi Abdul-Ghaffar’s work on Afghani which Sharif terms only reliable and thoroughgoing work so far, or had consulted Iqbal’s views on Afghani in his prose and poetry a pretty different Afghani would have been emerged from her Doctoral thesis on Afghani. She had plenty of resources on her disposal almost visited every country wherever Afghani went and cannot entertain any excuse of inaccessibility to these original works.

On the other hand, Sir Syed had was neither entrenched in traditional education like Shibli, Hali nor trained in Western learning he learnt at home as was the prevalent trend of Muslim aristocrats. Muslim aristocracy had been the hotchpotch of Iranian, Turkish and Central Asians etc. connected to Mogul royal court and was teetering at the edge of extinction just as Mogul Dynasty itself. Abul Kalam Azad’s family had been in-charge of education ministry in Mogul rule and bore the brunt of British wrath after 1875’s Hindu-Muslim mutiny and had migrated to Arabia where Azad was born he lit the candle of Ibn Taimiyya’s thought and though later instead of religio-moral intellectualism of the Quran fell into the booby trap of Ibn al-Arabi’s aesthetic intellectualism that stays good Muslim and good Hindu equal yet from the start to the end of his career he remained unequivocal supporter of freedom against foreign rule and intermittently was incarcerated and his intellectual drafts confiscated by British authorities. Pretty different was the case of Sir Syed’s family. “Sir Syed (1817-1898) was born of noble parentage in Delhi, with a long line of officials at the Mogul court on both sides”24, grew up in traditional atmosphere, educated in the old school, although introduced to Western learning and civilization through his maternal grandfather, Khwajah Farid al-Din, he had neither a thorough nor a systematic grounding25”. He himself having represented his father at the Mogul court several times...; also had realized the growing power of the British. He joined British service as a clerk and later qualified for sub-judge. Before him his maternal grandfather was an employee of East India Company. However, 1857’s mutiny extended the scope of his activities and work and he sided with the British26.
He deemed “the British rule in India the most wonderful phenomenon the world has ever seen”\(^{27}\), hence he believed with all his heart, “to make Indian Muslims worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown\(^{28}\).” He wrote Risala –i-Asbah-i-Baghwah –i-Hind (“Causes of Indian Mutiny) to dispel British wrath against Muslims and through “Loyal Muhammmans of India” displayed to British gaze all those Muslim notables who sided with them in the mutiny. Moreover, wrote a series of articles on Hunter’s Our Indian Musalmans to refute him that the Muslims are bound in conscience to rebel against the Queen. He tried to dispel the notion throughout his life that Islam is an advocate of independence, and jihad is one of the foremost duties of Muslims. This he did with the belief “that the British power had come to stay in India, that the recovery and regeneration of his fallen people lay in coming to terms with the ruling nation\(^{29}\).” He wrote commentary on the Bible, Tabyin al-Kalam, to promote social intercourse between the invaders and the subjects. Completely Dazed to the dazzling exterior of the West, Sir Syed writes “without flattering the English, I can truly say that the nation of India, high and low, merchants and petty shopkeepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners, and uprightness, are like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man…the English have reason for believing us in India to be imbecile brutes…what I have seen and see daily, is utterly beyond the imagination of a native of India… if Hindustanis can only attain to civilization, it will probably, owing to its many excellent natural powers, become, if not the superior, at least the equal of England.\(^{30}\)” He doubted his tradition neither like al-Ghazali or Mulla Sadra to make the verities of faith an experienced truth nor to reform it from within on its own terms but from the angle of Western naturalism. He warned “if people do not shun blind adherence, if they do not seek that Light which can be found in the Quran and the indisputable Hadith, and do not adjust religion and the sciences of today, Islam will become extinct in India.\(^{31}\)” Aware of the cumbrous medieval formulations anonymous to original Islam he tended to remove the dust of historical Islam from the eyebrows of pristine Islam to reveal the true Islam not only to Muslims but non-Muslims as well. Sir Syed wrote: “Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology, whereby we should either refute doctrines of modern sciences, or undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with Islam. If we are to propagate those sciences amongst the Muslims, about which I have just stated how much they disagree with the present day Islam, then it is my duty to defend as much as I can the religion of Islam, rightly or wrongly, and to reveal to the people the original bright face of Islam. My conscience tells me that if I should not do so, I would stand a sinner before God.\(^{32}\)”

Sir Syed raised a genuine question but devoid of essential credentials he acted like a quack who addressing one malady lays foundation of multiple diseases. His apologetic approach almost endorsed Orientalists’ narrative of portraying Islam as a Bedouin phenomenon anti-science, anti-civilization and anti-progress religion. “Influenced strongly by 19th century European rationalism and natural philosophy (He had visited England in 1867-70), he laid down what he termed the criterion of ‘Conformity to Nature’ to judge the contents of the system of belief and concluded that Islam paramountly justified itself on this principle…to integrate the modern scientific worldview with the Islamic doctrine, resurrected and fell back upon, not the orthodox interpretation of Islam,
but the basic tenets of the medieval Muslim philosophers. Oblivious of the tremendous immensity of the task which requires modest intellectual tools, a class of sober historians, social scientists and ethicists he deemed it a one man adventure. Hence, “at his instance, Muhammad Shibli wrote two books in Urdu- a history of theology in Islam called Ilm al-Kalam, and a systematic theology called Kalam- wherein he attempted to restate arguments for God’s existence, prophet-hood, revelation, and such, relying heavily, like Sir Syed himself, upon medieval Muslim philosophers like Ibn Sina.” The result of this saltus mortalis was a personal interpretation of Islam buried in the debris of history rather than its restatement as Iqbal endeavored in his magnum opus or as later Fazlur Rahman humbly yet with the force of faith and argument formulated the restatement of Islam in his constructs.

Sir Syed at the outset in the spirit of pre-modernist reformers insisted on distinction between genuine and non-genuine Hadith but later he sacrificed the whole corpus on the altar of western modernity. This wholesale rejection of Hadith transpired into Ahl al-Quran who neither have awareness of the historical development of Hadith nor of what their claim implies, the literature of Hadith has its problems which have not been squarely addressed by Muslims as yet but to reform Islam discarding Hadith is like Nero’s playing flute to save the burning Rome. As cultural reformer by necessity he accidently wore the garb of religious reformer as well for religion produces cultures thus his half-baked religious ideas were bound to perturb the nucleus of Islam. Dazed to the dazzling exterior of Western culture Sir Syed failed to grasp the inner meaning and history of that culture and made a deadly jump to conclude that “India needs not only Steele and Addison (the editors of The Tattler and The Spectator), but also holy Luther,” a move hell bent to culminate into cultural schizophrenia in the community. Luther was a child of Protestant Christian reformation movement that transpired into utter loss of transcendentalism in the West. Iqbal was scared lest the same phenomenon should repeat itself in Islamic reformation yet he claimed with certainty that there is no place of religious clergy or of Luther in Islam.

On the other hand Syed Jamal al-Din was religious reformer to finger tips and an activist to the marrow of his bones. He “called people to action, not to an admiration of Islam. Those doing the latter are largely those characterized by Wilfred Smith in his Islam in Modern History as apologists: people who wish to build pride and admiration regarding Islam, while the underlying standards by which they interpret it are really modern and Western. For them, unlike Afghani and recent Muslim revivalists, Islam is an object of approval and new interpretations to combat alienation rather than a force for action.” Being a man of enormous character and prodigious learning, well entrenched in his tradition and well versed with intellectual developments of modern West he was in a safe position to weigh down pros and cons of his own tradition and the strengths and the weaknesses of the modern West. He was the prophet of new age and prime mover and father of liberationist, constitutionalist and intellectual movements in several countries. Sir Syed limited himself to the betterment of Indian Muslims Jamal felt a pain and sought a balm for the wounds of not only Muslim World but the entire colonized East. Being a world citizen he said “I have no need whatsoever to associate myself with any one country.” The majesty and esteem he
held among the community at large he was Ghazali of his time, in spirit and fearlessness he was reincarnation of Ibn Taimiyya, to Iqbal he was a living link between past and future. He led his community with compassion, sympathy and criticism.

No doubt, Indian Muslims found selfless, altruist, sincere and pragmatic leadership in Sir Syed who safeguarded their interests against Hindus who staged 1857’s mutiny along with Muslims and left the latter on the mercy of rulers to bear the brunt of Mighty British. The blood curdling events of mutiny had shaken him to the core. He felt India unlivable for self-respecting Muslim and wished to settle in Egypt. But stimulated by the noble motives and ideals he said “it would be an act of cowardice and selfishness to seek a haven of peace, when one’s people were in a desperate condition”.

What vested pecuniary interests or of higher posts Sir Syed could have entertained when he had to sell his personal library to visit England to benefit from libraries there so that he could answer Sir Muir’s allegations against Islam and the Prophet.

However, on multiple issues Afghani and Sir Syed enhance and augment each other, their sincerity is beyond question, their disagreement speaks of their learning and social milieu. Comparison of Afghani’s answer to French philosopher Renan and Sir Syed’s response to British Sir Muir is sufficed to understand their vision and approach to address the orientalist’s propaganda that Islam being a Bedouin phenomenon is inherently anti-reason, anti-progress and anti-civilization. While Afghani seemed proudly defending Islam’s glorious past and auspicious future as a free thinker, fair historian, keen sociologist and genuine humanist Sir Syed presents his thesis as an apologetic not by choice but due to poor groundings in his own tradition and the laws of history which make or break communities. Renan appreciated Afghani’s response and tendered apology on his miss-quotations no such reply was invoked on part of Muir, but on the contrary Sir Syed seemed to pick him back the missed arrows to retry the target.

We can judge Afghani and Sir Syed’s legacy on the premises of their religious, philosophical sociological, cultural, political and educational views. Jamal was theologian par excellence well-entrenched in the metaphysics of the Quran, the inner meanings of Islamic history, the unfolding of Islam on the realm of history, and long developing Islamic tradition thus Quran stays the fulcrum and matrix of his world-view and reforms. His cognizance of intellectual developments in the West and contemporary world speaks volumes of his zeitgeist and the reforms he proposes insinuate his titanic grasp of the matrieux and forces of history which he seemed hell-bent to employ as judiciously as possible for not only Islamic renaissance but to address the predicament of all colonized world and came to be known as “Pan-Islamist” and “Pan-Orientalist.” He was indeed “centuries ahead of his community” which either clung to dumb heritage or accepted Western modernity lock, stock and barrel. So far as reforms are concerned “no significant change occurs unless the new form is congruent with the old. It is only when a transplant is congenial to a soil that it works. Therefore, it is very important to know the transplant as well as the native soil.” In Islam whereas the traditionalists are rooted in fundamentals lack historicism and sense of history the modern elite nurtured in secular educational system know more about the West, modern
history, the ideas of Enlightenment than about its own history and culture. Understanding the past requires serious soul search. Unless the historicism and the warp and woof of someone’s own history and culture is not first known instead of genuine reforms the cultural schizophrenia takes roots. French scholar Jacques Berque acutely states the dilemma of reforms in the Muslim world in his terse remarks that “Today, all too many militants and intellectuals are proponents either of an authenticity with no future or of a modernism with no roots.” By “proponents of authenticity” he implies traditional circles, ulama, and neo-traditionalist revivalist movements and by “proponent of modernism” he means secular educated Muslims who resist tradition and interpret Islam by Western standards to combat alienation.

Here lies the nub of the problem of Islamic reforms that distinguishes Afghani from Sir Syed. Afghani well-grounded in Islamic history and culture and equipped with zeitgeist i.e. European thought and development presents creative, an integrative and well balanced synthesis of the modern and the old hence termed as “first genuine Muslim modernist” and “father of Islamic modernism” while Sir Syed neither trained on traditional lines nor educated in modern system though being a visionary leader succeeded in securing a peaceful prosperous future of Indian Muslims was ill-equipped to assume the role of a religious reformer. In his attempt to integrate modern scientific world view with Islamic doctrine Sir Syed instead of orthodox interpretation of Islam owed an allegiance to the content of medieval Muslim philosophers while Afghani stood on the side of orthodox interpretation of Islam resurrected the original élan of Quran and by eliminating the alloys of superstitions, illusions and Magian crust from the Islamic tradition he fell back upon pristine Islam organically linked and compatible to modern scientific world view.

Afghani invokes al-Ghazali the giant figure of orthodox Islam to establish his thesis who says “someone who claims that the Islamic religion is incompatible with geometric proofs, philosophical demonstration, and the laws of nature is an ignorant friend of Islam. The harm of this ignorant friend to Islam is greater than the harm of the heretics and enemies of Islam. For the laws of nature, geometric proofs, and philosophic demonstrations are self-evident truths. Thus, someone who says, “My religion is inconsistent with self-evident truths”, has inevitably passed judgment on the falsity of his religion.” Hence, to Afghani Islam cannot, and must not and does not contradict science and scientific truth. The scale of his intellectual horizons could be gauged from Sir Renan’s remarks after a brief meeting with Afghani. He was forced to acknowledge that “The freedom of his thought, his noble and royal character, made me believe during our conversation that I had alive in my presence one of my old acquaintances, Avicenna, Averroes, or any other of the great infidels who during five centuries have represented the traditions of the human spirit.” On the other side Sir Syed was not theologian his agenda of educational and social reforms having some essential religious connotations pushed him to religious affairs. He writes “in a dormant and decaying society like Indian Muslims where all kinds of anti-social customs and traditions pass off as religious principles, any effort at the refinement of character and morals leads one into so called religious roadblocks. So that any discourse, even in regard to the most trivial matters, brings in a reference to religious principles and, thus, one has, perforce, to deal sometimes with the fiqh and sometimes with the principle of fiqh; sometimes with the Hadith,
and sometimes with the principle of Hadith; sometimes with the tafseer and sometimes with the principle of tafseer. Hence, India needs, Sir Syed concludes “not only Steele and Addison (The editors of The Tattler and The Spectator), but also holy Luther."^45^

This seemed a wholesale subservience to the Christian reformation that sealed the fate of transcendentalism in the West which Iqbal condemned and was afraid of such development in Islamic reformation and with an utter certainty declared that Islam has no place for Luther. But Sir Syed needs to be treated with sympathy, compassion and criticism for western rigged scholarship; academic orthodoxy and orientalist’s representation of Islam had stunted the creative and critical impulses of the classical modernists of Islam by activating their defensive instincts and they were desperate to communicate to the West, in Western terms, pride in their devalued culture, distorted history, and maligned religion. Realistic and far sighted as he was the blood curding events of the mutiny led Sir Syed to believe that pragmatism is better to idealism. As Western civilization is an heir to Greek thought Sir Syed approached Western modernity not through the orthodox interpretation of Islam but through the constructs of medieval Muslim philosophers who following Greek philosophy stayed “God - as a principle which explains this world, rather than a Creator who directs this world; as an intellectual formula rather than as a moral and dynamic imperative”^46^, testified to Aristotle’s notion of God’s knowledge of the universals not particulars, eternity of the universe and denied bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgment.

“Naturism” which to Afghani is essentially atheism and had been instrumental in the decline and decay of civilizations was not the thought product of modern West it finds its traces in the Greek philosophy. He views ‘naturism’ and materialism as “the pit of corruption, the source of countless tragedies and ultimately the ruin of the society”^47^”. Islam stands and falls with its ability to shape society and to direct activities of its members. “Have you ever considered him who tries to prevent a servant [of God] from praying (96:9-10)? “It applies to all attempts, at all times, to deny to religion (symbolized in the term “praying) its legitimate function in the shaping of social life-attempts made either in the conviction that religion is every individual’s “private affair” and, therefore, must not be allowed to “intrude” into the realm of social considerations, or, alternatively, in the pursuit of the illusion that man is above any need of metaphysical guidance.”^48^ “And when they are told “do not spread corruption on earth” they answer “we are but improving things (2:11)”.

It implies secularism which instead of Scripture relies on positive law deeming it most suitable to improve things but which ultimately contributes to the moral and social confusions and decadence. As ‘naturism’ is and historically had been claimant of materialistic view of life and positive law Afghani terms it as an essentially atheism which ultimately ruins societies and civilizations. The medieval Muslim philosophers in borrowing such metaphysical Greek thought which demolish the very basis of religion were termed heretic by orthodoxy specially al-Ghazali who accepted their scientific theories and “Al-Ghazali should be classed not with the anti-rationalist, but with those concerned to keep philosophy in its proper place”^49^”. Thus Sir Syed’s approach to Western modernity through the content of medieval Muslim philosophers was shunned by the community
at large yet his socio-cultural pragmatism succeeded since the conspicuous absence of genuine Islamic reforms left spiritual void to be filled by the Western modernism.

Having a “deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought” the fundamental assumption with al-Afghani, as with all reformers, is that Islam as a world religion, suitable for all peoples, all times and all cultural conditions, adjustable to human needs of every country and every age and lends itself to most liberal developments and beneficial results. Before Islam, religions were based on territorial and racial basis (Like of Moses and Jesus) when mankind with monotheistic teachings of Judaism and Christianity crossed a necessary threshold of human evolution stood in the need of universal religion, “say o mankind of course I have been sent as an Apostle of God to all of you (7:157 ).” To Afghani Islam being a universal religion has all prerequisites for communities “to scale the heights of perfection, to realize truths and subtleties and to attain religious and worldly felicity50”. Jamal delineates these prerequisites as follows:

1) Minds of the people must be purged of all false beliefs and superstitions.
2) In Islam every individual irrespective of sex, race and wealth is entitled to attain all possible human virtues and excellences except that of prophecy which is a divine gift.
3) One’s belief should be based on “solid evidence and rational proofs since reason is man’s first drawing board”; blind imitation to authority leads nowhere but to stolid and sterile traditions.
4) In every community, there should be one group devoted to the education of people and another to the building up of character and morals, these two functions, viz., the education of the community and the enforcement of Amr bil-maruf wal-nahy an al-munkar (command good and forbid evil) are among the most important provisions of Islam. (9:122; 22:40-41 etc.).

Afghani condemned “naturism” for it undermines religion which has deposited three beliefs and three qualities in man, each one of which serves as community’s undergirding, socio-economic and political stability and progress, for civilizations a safe prop to rely on. Three beliefs are 1) that man is noblest of all creatures 2) the belief by every individual that his community is superior to all others 3) man’s mission on earth is self-perfection. Here he seemed to draw this view from the Quran (5:48) wherein a multi-religious world is portrayed as a necessary instrument, and communities are asked to compete each other in goodness. “The Quran so often points out- those among them who believe uncompromisingly in the One God and the Day of Judgment and live righteously “need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve” (5: 69)”. Yet, no less important are three virtues which religion deposits in man. Firstly, religion bestows on man a sense of shame or guilt which forbids him from indulging in meanness and wickedness and calls for self-control, dignity and decency. The whole edifice of human civilization rests on this pillar. Secondly, religion cultivates honesty in its adherents. Thirdly, religion emphasizes truthfulness and sincerity. The last two attributes are fundamental elements of social reconstruction, mutual transactions, inter-communal and international relations.
However, either due to being ill-equipped with religious weltanschauung or British Subject Sir Syed could not risk mutiny once again, the fulcrum of his intellectual endeavors remained to combat alienation, communicate to the West, in Western terms, interpret Islam with Western standards and last but not least to get registered the Muslims as loyal to the British and all the while in so far as cleansing Islam from superstitions, blind imitation or Islamic reforms at large are concerned he threw the baby with the bath water. “His task was to prepare the Muslims for a political allegiance to the English. He convinced British that independence is not basic to Islam that Jihad is not made incumbent on Muslims against a ruling nation which guarantees religious freedom and justice, and, more, that Muslims are bound by their religion to be loyal to such a just, tolerant, and generous ruler as the British authorities in India.⁵¹” He discouraged Indian Muslims for their exuberant enthusiasm over the Turkish victory in the Balkan War. He asked Muslims to keep aloof from Indian National congress (1885) and himself founded The Indian United Patriotic Association (1888). Some leftists believe that Sir Syed on British instigation deepened Hindu-Muslim divisions to mar the prospects of Hindu-Muslim unity against British imperialism. They say Hindi-Urdu controversy was a step in this direction while other view is that Sir Syed fought for Muslim’s socio-cultural rights. The difference of approaches speaks volumes about the learning backdrop of both reformers. Afghani had a thorough and “remarkable” grasp of theology, philosophy, vast knowledge of history and sociology, due understanding of psychology and modern thought hence being essentially a religious reformer he would weigh every doctrine from an Islamic viewpoint; Sir Syed neither did receive a systematic religious education nor was a theologian by choice, being a cultural or “communal” reformer he approached Islam from the angle of 19ᵗʰ century western humanism, Cartesian mindset- a popular European approach and Darwinism- a dominant cult shaped him “Naturist” and he laid down the ‘Criterion of Reason and Nature’ a sole testing ground for the truth of a belief, this red herring multiplied the confusions and in the long run was bound to transpire into cultural schizophrenia.

On educational front Jamal differed widely with Sir Syed on justified grounds. He proposed religious and moral rectitude first step forward towards education which is impossible in an iniquitous state of affairs and called for the resuscitation of Islamic ideals. He said: “the unity of language is more durable for survival and permanence in this world than unity of religion. We see that a single people with one language in the course of a thousand years change its religion two or three times without its nationality, which consist of unity of language, being destroyed." While in Hyderabad, he advocated an establishment of Urdu university in India through his articles in the various papers to resurrect a thousand years shared history and culture of Muslims and Hindus to join hands against foreign rule. He says “The British, can earn their (Indians’) goodwill by introducing modern arts and sciences to them, by helping them translate the various branches of knowledge and sciences in their own national language (i.e. Urdu), by showing the same consideration to the Indians as they would to themselves, by exorcising all the prevalent differences and distinctions between the ruling and the ruled by taking “Indians as their colleagues in all spheres, even in Parliament.” From Paris he asked Blunt to draw the attention of Lord Rippon towards an Urdu University. Blunt, during his stay in India consulted the idea with Lord
Rippon and other notables of India. Nizam of Hyderabad accepted the idea and Osmania University was established in Hyderabad where Afghani had mooted the idea.

Afghani termed freedom and independence first prerequisite for genuine education. To him modern education rooted in and endemic to European soil and experience would bear no fruits for us except an inferiority complex. Intellectual elite nurtured in this system play the role of scouts for the dominant powers, smooth the way for (Western) invaders and help the latter in the consolidation of their conquests. He cited the experience of Egypt and Turkey where modern schools have produced individuals who imitate the West...have not only attempted to change the size and structure of their houses, but also their food, clothes, even utensils, who mouth slogans as liberty, nationalism and patriotism without grasping their significance, thinking as if the mere catch phrases shall redeem and retrieve their nation from its wretchedness, shall herald the much-cherished millennium for their nation.

However, true to his intellectual credentials Sir Syed accepted modern education lock, stock and barrel. He established Aligarh College in 1881 which became university in 1920, with the slogan that “philosophy will be in our right hand, natural sciences in the left and the crown of Kalimah (“there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger) on our head”. He kept English as the medium of instruction in keeping with his life-long opposition to imparting university education in Urdu. “Although modern sciences were taught at Aligarh- especially in the early stages- by British and other European professors, the teaching of Islam had to be given to a traditionalist scholar from Deoband owing to large-scale opposition to Syed Ahmad khan’s personal religious views and to those of his nuclear group. As a result, the modern never really met with traditional, which remained extremely peripheral to the academic life of the institution. As is very well-known, however, it was Aligarh that produced bulk of Muslim graduates in modern learning up until 1947 and that also served as the nerve center of the Muslim nationalist movement leading to the creation of Pakistan”. It must be remembered that after Iqbal made dream of Pakistan a rallying cry of Indian Muslims Aligarh abandoned Sir Syed’s pro-British policy. In Iqbal’s mind and heart Ibn Taimiyya, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, Shah Wali Allah generally and Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani particularly found sound expression and spoke louder than Sir Syed and acted decisively which Jinnah turned into reality. “Concerning the dream of Syed Ahmad khan, however, to re-fertilize Islamic thought and create a new science of theology vibrant with a new and potent Islamic message, Aligarh was doomed to failure from the very start.”

Osmania University, Hyderabad delivered education in Urdu but its lower English standard could not compete with other institutions with English as medium of instruction, in jobs consequently Muslims and Hindus rushed to other institutions. Had Muslims and Hindus showed a little patience to stabilize Urdu as a medium quite different would have been the subsequent history of India. Today, indeed if the sub-continent is a land without language, it is due to that historic wrong. “Those Indo-Pakistani Muslims who criticize the Turks for cutting themselves off from their past by adopting a new script should rather search their own hearts and see if they have not cut
themselves off far more effectively from the whole of their own religious-intellectual higher cultural roots by practically refusing to develop Urdu into an adequate medium of higher instruction and of scientific and philosophic thought. In the long run, this approach resulted in “an extremely debased materialistic and worldly outlook which hampered their (students’) religious progress and spiritual training.” The college produced and strengthened spiritual void. “The people who got their education sitting on the mats in the mosque, produced statesmen and administrators like Sir Syed, Muhsin al-Mulk, Viqar al-Mulk; the persons who were almost unacquainted with English and to whom all the Western learning was (so to say) hidden treasure, laid the foundations for ‘natural poetry, and a new literature and composed books like Ab-i-Hayat, Shir-o-shairi, Musaddas-i-Hali; but the enlightened brains who got education in the magnificent buildings of the college and who had access to the best tutors of the West and learning and literature of the whole world, they, because of debasement in the ideal and weakness of character became only suitable to become the part of the machine in an ordinary office.” So distressing was the failure of the college that Hali and Shibli got disappointed with it. Even Sir Syed himself burst out “strange it is that those who get educated and through whom national good was expected, themselves became satans and the worst in the community.” This statement vindicates Afghani’s thesis that moral and religious rectitude and political emancipation are the foremost prerequisites of education. Muhammad Asad’s “Islam at the crossroads” endorses and amplifies it. It was a lip-service to Islam in Aligarh’s curricula that emboldened revivalist Mawdudi in an address at Aligarh Muslim University to remark: “a particular type of revolution demands the same type of movement, the same type of leaders and workers, and the same type of social consciousness and cultural and moral atmosphere…the education which is imparted in your colleges and universities can doubtless produce, for an un-Islamic government… but I hope you will not be offended if I say that it cannot produce even peons for Islamic courts nor constables for the Islamic police.”

The tragedy is that though the pre-Pakistan and an immediately post-Pakistan leadership expressed enthusiastic concerns to devise an education policy which should reflect Islamic ethos and ideals but as the genuine leadership subsided; the foreign surrogates in power surrendered to mean pragmatism, the ideology of Pakistan was bestowed on private entities i.e. madrasa and national education curricula was only an extension of Aligarh legacy which though produced world-class doctors, engineers and scientists yet failed to produce a social scientist or Islamic scholar of repute, all that it produced was destined to be no more than a cog in the gigantic wheel of production. About three decades after the independence, I.H. Qureshi, the veteran educator and educationist who lived through it all, moans and groans regarding the product of national education “our secular educated elite is the most spineless, the most unscrupulous and the most mercenary in the world…what has gone wrong during this quarter of century that has eaten into the vitals of our society and the grit of its leaders except the continuation of a faulty, aimless, and diseased system.
of education that has bred no social virtues, no depth of feeling, no sense of responsibility—nothing except selfishness, corruption and cowardly lack of initiative and courage. He equally lambasted traditionalists “the seminaries are doing useful [!] Work in the preservation of the classical theological learning and providing ill-paid, ill-educated and ill-informed Imams of the mosques…such education cannot help the growth of religious consciousness.

On political plane, whereas Sir Syed aligned himself with an international and domestic status quo Afghani though held political parleys with the ruling elite (both foreigners and local despots) for the just solution of Muslim lands he came hard on them when they failed to follow through on their commitments. He had an unshakable belief on the vitality, viability and superiority of Islam viz. modern West and harnessed (13:11) for political awakening and “was apparently the first to cite this passage of the Quran as an admonition to modern change and progress. It has since become a favorite of the modernists.” Dispelling inner dissensions (3:103) he inspired pan-Islamism for communal solidarity to combat imperialism for the Quran ordains Tauheed a Lien Indissoluble, a firm hand-hold which shall never give way (2:256). Afghani brought Sunni Turks and Shia Iran together, resultantly in 1906 a congress at Kazan agreed on joint school books and a conference of Ottoman and Persian jurists was held at Nejef in 1911 to smooth out doctrinal differences between the two sects.

He attributed Muslim’s decline to the desertion of the tenets of Islam for Islam includes all prerequisites that ensure success, progress, religious and worldly felicity, intellectual excellence, political ascendancy and moral refinement. Clinging to the normative Islam is a sure recipe to power for “might (Power) belongs to Allah, and to His messenger and to His believers (63:8). If believers excel in the tenets of Islam God shall bring them to the steering wheel of history (24:55). “He it is Who has sent forth His Apostle with [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He may cause it to prevail over all [false] religions…. (9:33)”. “To help believers is ever incumbent Upon Us (30:47)”. Activist to the marrow of his bones and romanticist to his finger-tips Afghani secured all round courage and logistics from the Quran for revival and reform in Islam for “it is a guidance and a balm for that which is in the hearts (10:57)”, i.e. a remedy for all that is contrary to truth and moral good. Afghani fought tooth and nail for the political independence of Islam; his firm faith in the substance and ultimate successful destiny of Islam challenged Western imperialism on external front and locked horns with native despotism for constitutional governments since “the gaze of Muslim kings is fixed at their own dynastic interests and they are prepared to sell their countries to the highest bidder in exchange of their own security and protection.” The Quran’s vision of such political re-awakening and Islamic renaissance lay dormant to the meek, docile and pliant Sir Syed whose pragmatism sought safe solace in harmony with the status quo to choke the prospect of further mutiny.

Like religious, educational and political views both differed widely on the realm of philosophy. While Sir Syed unconditionally bowing to the Western modernism built his philosophical thought on the basis of ‘natural philosophy’ in conformity to the ‘criterion of Nature’ and emerged with
Cartesian mind-set and Darwinian approach in Afghani’s philosophic thought come alive all the major branches of knowledge i.e. religion, metaphysics, history, philosophy of history, literature, sociology, psychology, nature, science and modern thought, and their sharp edges of differences become smooth in such a way that each science falls into its proper place for to him the governing soul of all these disciplines is the dynamic impulse and an inexhaustible intellectual character of the Quran. He termed philosophy a comprehensive soul and a preserving force which employs each of the sciences in its proper place. “The Ottoman Government and the Khedivate of Egypt have been opening schools for the teaching of the new sciences for a period of sixty years, and until now they have not received any benefit from those sciences. The reason is that teaching the philosophical sciences was impossible in those schools…undoubtedly, if the spirit of philosophy had been in those schools, during this sixty years they themselves, independent of the European countries, would have striven to reform their kingdoms. They would not send their sons each year to Europe and they would not invite teachers from there to their schools. If the spirit of philosophy were found in a community, even if that community did not have one of those sciences whose subject is particular, undoubtedly their philosophic spirit would call for the acquisition of all the sciences.”

He furnishes his theses with a strong argument: “The first Muslims had no science, but thanks to the Islamic religion, a philosophic spirit arose among them, and owing to that Islamic spirit they began to discuss the general affairs of the world and human necessities. This was why they acquired in a short time all the sciences with particular subjects that they translated from the Syrian, Persian and Greek into Arabic. This statement delineates the difference between Sir Syed and al-Afghani. The former being a cultural reformer tended to render the slate clean to build Islam anew on the Western standards the latter being a religious reformer struggled to make his community rise like a phoenix from the ashes, consistent with its history, culture and tradition.

Conclusion: Their strategies and approach differed yet both reformers thought and acted in the best interests of their community according to their intellectual anchorage and social milieu. Sir Syed succeeded in securing a peaceful and prosperous future of Indian Muslims but on the cost of spiritual void, Pakistan being his legacy needed to address the same but the state owned him with his credentials of being British subject and dithered to fulfill the task. However, Afghani was centuries ahead of his community. He inspired genuine Islamic modernism, he was pretty capable enough to render but due to his stormy career of political activism could not find time to formulate a comprehensive philosophical restatement of Islam. The non-too-sober initial modernism provoked a comparably none-too-thoughtful radical reaction. “The result was that the movement inspired by the initial modernist impulse split into two developments moving in two different directions: one in the direction of almost pure Western-ism and the other gravitating towards fundamentalism.” Today, on the one hand Islam has in its folds proponent of western-ism secular modernists with no roots and proponents of tradition or authority the revivalists, neo-fundamentalists with no future on the other. The best of communities, the gold median community of Islam is plunged in a chaos moving from one extreme to another. Afghani’s anti-imperialism and anti-despotism constructs are ill-suited to the local and international forces of status quo and could not find place in national educational curricula of Muslim lands yet the genuine Islamic
modernism he inspired can address the extremes of secular modernism and neo-fundamentalism, if followed in letter and spirit could unleash the forces of genuine Islamic renaissance to materialize socio-economic, political and cultural ideals of Islam. Afghani’s intellectual legacy might be traced in Muhammad Iqbal, Zia Gokalp of Turkey, Ali Shariati of Iran, Dr. Fazlur Rahman of Karachi and Chicago, Dr. Tariq Ramadan. “His spirit is (still) working in the world of Islam and nobody knows where it will end.” He started his mission audaciously on the lines of Ibn Taimiyya with an added benefit of modern thought and fearlessly ended like him in the custody of dictators, without an iota of remorse he wrote last words “I rejoice at my captivity and impending death…with a thousand threats and promises, they summoned me to Turkey, and then fettered and constrained me thus, regardless of the fact that to destroy the messenger is not to destroy the message, and that the page of Time preserves the word of Truth.”

References

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17) Ibid. p.192.
18) For a discussion on the rope of tradition see Ebraheem Moosa’s reimagining a dynamic and living tradition https://madrasadiscourses.nd.edu/module_attachments/2-3-1-reimagining-tradition/
28) This and above quote are taken from the address to the Viceroy, signed by the president, Vice-President and Syed Ahmad Khan, Honorary Secretary, on the occasion of laying foundation stone of the College, Jan 8, 1877. Given in Graham, op, cit.
29) H. Kraemer, Islam in India Today, Muslim World, xx1, 1931, p. 156.
35) Maqalat-i- Sir Syed, pp.48-49.
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50) Persian Maqalat, p.29.
51) See Akhiri Mazamin, pp. 31-44, 59-65.
53) Adams, op. cit., pp.61-64.
54) Arabic Maqalat, pp.122-123.
55) Ibid., pp. 118-122.
59) Ibid, p.75.
62) Ibid, p.152; see Iqbal’s Islam and Ahmadism, “Sir Syed, Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani and hundreds of latter’s disciples were not westernized. They learned in madrassa and contributed well to lead the community amidst crises.
66) Ibid., p.117.
67) An Islamic Response to Imperialism, Nikki R. Keddie, University of California Press Berkeley and Los Angeles, California. He engaged himself with Britain for constitutional
reforms in Egypt helped Taufiq to be elected. Britain and Taufiq failed to fulfill promise and earned ire of Jamal.

68) Ibid. p.83.
70) Islam and Ahmadism, Iqbal, pp.32-33.
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75) (quoted in Browne, op. cit. pp.28-29; see also Ghaffar, op. cit. , pp.296-297 ); Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani, Sharif al-Mujahid, 1954, McGill University. P.140...