

Islamic Modernist and Reformist Thought: A Study of the Contribution of Sir Sayyid and Muhammad Iqbal

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Abstract: Muslim modernists, from Middle East to South Asia, asserted the need to ‘reinterpret and reapply’ the principles and ideals of Islam, formulating new responses to the challenges of Europe and of modern life. In South Asia, it was Sir Sayyid and Muhammad Iqbal who pioneered the modernist visions and agendas, during the 19th and 20th centuries. This paper attempts to make an assessment and analysis of the response of these two South Asian thinkers to modernity and their contribution to ‘Islamic modernism’. Sir Sayyid - devoting his life to religious, educational and social reform - called for a bold ‘new theology/ reinterpretation’ of Islam and acceptance, not rejection, of best in the Western thought; and Muhammad Iqbal - judging the conditions of the Muslims as one of five centuries of ‘dogmatic slumber’ as a result of *taqlid* (blind following) - called for the ‘reconstruction’ of religious thought (in Islam) to revitalize the Muslim *Ummah*. The paper concludes (among others) with the arguments that it is the thinking of these pioneers that is still relevant to reformist and modernist discourse in the entire Islamic world in general and in South Asia in particular.

Key words: Islamic modernism • Reformism • Sir Sayyid • Muhammad Iqbal • Ijma • Taqlid • Ijtihad

INTRODUCTION

From 16th to the 20th century CE, Muslim societies throughout the globe have passed from subjugation to European colonialism to national independence, from remnants of medieval empires to modern nation-states, from a transnational but somewhat regionally fixed community to a global community not only of Muslim-majority communities in Africa, the Middle East and Asia but also of significant Muslim-minority communities in Europe and United States.

History has witnessed the emergence of Islam, its rapid and dynamic spread, the spawning of vast Islamic empires and sultanates and the florescence of a rich and varied Islamic civilization, but colonialism brought it all to a halt and turned its tables upside down. The age of European expansion and extension, penetration and dominance - euphemistically called the Age of Discovery by Europeans - began in the 16th century but came to finishing point (end results) in the 19th and 20th centuries. So, by the 19th century the balance of power had clearly shifted toward Europe; and much of Muslim world found itself subjugated to European imperial powers, demonstrating its political, economic and military impotence and challenging the veracity of Islam itself.

It was during this period of European colonial expansion that the modern Islamic thought emerged. To put in simpler words, the European penetration of the Near East and India and the decline of Muslim ascendancy in these regions in the 19th century precipitated the crisis that defined the responses of Muslim intellectuals to European modernity.

The Emergence of Islamic Modernism: Modernism - a movement to reconcile Islamic faith with modern values such as democracy, rights, nationalism, rationality, science, equality and progress - emerged in the middle of the 19th century as a response to European colonialism, which pitched 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; constitutions that sought to limit state power; and social welfare agencies that brought state power into even more sectors of social life. Thus, Islamic modernism began as a response of Muslim intellectuals to European modernity, who argued that Islam, science and progress, revelation and reason, were 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. In a nutshell, as a reaction to the penetration of Western capitalist modernity into all aspects of Muslim society from the Arab world to Southeast Asia, a significant number of Muslim intellectuals began to write down the general outlines of a new intellectual project that is often referred to as “Islamic modernism”[1].

The most prominent intellectuals who pioneered the modernist visions and agendas were Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) in the Middle East and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) in South Asia. Despite some distinctive differences, each argued that Islam was a dynamic, progressive religion that was made stagnant and moribund 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, spawning 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 [2].

Meaning of Tradition and Modernity: Before going into details on the theme of this paper, here it is necessary to define tradition and modernity as they are related to this topic (i.e. in the context as was understood by these modernists).

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’an, hadith (Prophetic traditions) and the dictates of Muslim law 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’an 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? Embracing the ideas of *islah* (reform), *tajdid* (renewal/revival) and *ijtihad* (independent judgment and interpretation), the modernists promoted Muslim unity and resistance to western cultural hegemony by adopting the fruits of science and technology while overwhelming Muslim educational, legal and political institutions [3].

Is Islam compatible with modernity? How do Muslims respond to the continuous change of the world? How do we resolve the problem of maintaining the legacy of the past in our religious tradition and integrate change into society and our lives? How do we introduce change smoothly, which is rare and difficult, without disrupting societies and dislocating values? These are some questions that trigger and elicit the discussions on the relations between Islam and modernity.

It is well-known that terms like modernity and modernism are continuously contested in contemporary Islamic discourse. Modernity is a way of thought and of living in the contemporary world and of accepting change, as part of political and cultural processes by integrating new ideas into society. How do Muslims react to this modernity? There are several forms of reactions, but are mainly grouped into two: the reformist/modernist and the fundamentalist. The modernists are those modern knowledgeable Muslims whose mission, according to Dr. Mir Zohair Husain (Political Science professor in the University of South Alabama), is: (a) to define Islam by bringing out the fundamentals in a rational and liberal manner; (b) to emphasize, among others, the basic ideals of Islamic brotherhood, tolerance and social justice; and (c) 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 [4]. 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” [5]. In other words, Muslim modernists-in-contradistinction to traditionalists and fundamentalists/revivalists-proposed to rescue Islam from cultural stasis and political implosion through a program of “adaptation and accommodation” [3].

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 Qura’nic verses, like (13: 11). 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 [5]. For example, in the South Asia, Sir Sayyid, tracing his intellectual heritage to Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dehlvi (India, 1703-1762, an Islamic scholar and reformer who worked for the revival of Muslim rule and intellectual learning in South Asia, during a time of waning Muslim power), argued that the Qura’nic world view was entirely compatible with science and rational thought. He categorically dismissed 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 Ulema, but the right of all devout and enlightened believers to interpret the Qur’an in the context of the prevailing environment [6]. 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 [3].

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 potent force. In Iqbal’s mind, Islam’s dynamism had been corrupted and ossified by the ulema, sequestered behind the walls of their *madrasas*. He denounced the conservative *mullahs* saying that their obscurantist worldview served no other function than “sowing corruption, perseverance and disruption in the name of God” [7]; and for considering Shari’ah to be “sacrosanct”. He appealed to use *ijtihad* judiciously, to

revise the *Shari’ah* in the light of the Qur’an 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” [8]. According to him, writes Riaz Husain, *ijtihad* should reflect the opinion of society and meet its interests. Rejecting the closing of the doors of *ijtihad*, therefore, he called for an end to “conservatism, inflexibility and intellectual stasis” [9].

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’an afresh to the problems of the time. Lily Zakiyah Munir (a leading Indonesian Muslim human rights activist and Islamic feminist) writes that all pioneers of modernity were extremely critical of Ulema (religious scholars) that discouraged any new and creative thought. They argued that Islam must be active and energetic, supporting this principle by quoting the Qur’an (*sura al-Ra’d*, 13: 11) that “God does not change men’s condition unless they change their inner selves” [10]. 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 welcome non-Islamic ideas and practices that they consider beneficial to the progress and prosperity of Muslim societies. They inventively synthesized, argues Husain, Islamic and Western ideas to produce a reasonable and relevant reinterpretation of Islamic thought with “enlightened cosmopolitan, liberal and realistic perspectives”, believing that this tolerance for diversity and willingness to adjust rapidly to a changing environment contributes to the “emancipation of the individual Muslim and to the progress of Muslim societies” [10, 4]. In this respect, for Hafeez Malik, they lived up to Iqbal’s belief that: “The West’s typhoon turned a Muslim into a true Muslim... [in the] way waves of the ocean nourish a pearl in the oyster” [11]. 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 “reappraise and reform a comprehensive religion” revealed to mankind more than 1400 years ago, so that “constructive and feasible solutions to the new problems of a dramatically changed socio-economic and political environment can be found” [5].

Pioneers of Islamic Modernism and Reformism: An

Introduction: Although modern Islamic reform is often simply presented as a response to the challenge of the West, in fact its roots are both Islamic (its revivalist tradition) and Western (a response to European colonialism). Islam possesses a rich, long tradition of Islamic revival (*tajdid*) and reform (*islah*). Down through the ages, individuals' and organizations undertook the renewal of the community in times of weakness and decline, responding to the apparent gap between the Islamic ideal and the realities of Muslim life [12]. As with all things, a return to the fundamentals of Islam - the Qur'an, the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the early Muslim community - offered the model for Islamic reform.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, revivalist leaders and movements had sprung up across the Islamic/ Muslim world. In other words, in diverse circumstances, Muslims initiated various revival and reform movements in the 18th and 19th centuries. Stretched across the Muslim world from North Africa to South and Southeast Asia, Muslim responses to colonialism and imperialism were conditioned, both by the source of threat and by the Islamic tradition-ranging from holy war (*Jihad*) to emigration (*hijra*), non cooperation to adaptation and cultural synthesis. Some Muslims, ranging from secular to Islamic modernists, pursued a path of accommodation to harness the West's scientific and technological power to revitalize the community and to regain independence. That is, Muslim views of the West and the responses to its power and ideas varied from rejection and confrontation to admiration and imitation. And in the words of John L. Esposito, four diverse responses to the West took shape: rejection; withdrawal; secularism and Westernization; and Islamic modernism [12].

In the emergence of Islamic modernism, it is evident that it called throughout the Muslim world, for a reformation (*islah*) and reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islam. Responding to the plight of Muslim communities and the intellectual and religious challenge of the West, Islamic modernism sought to bridge the gap between Islamic traditionalists and secular reformers or conservative religious scholars, characterized by following and emulating the past blindly (*taqlid*) and western secular elites, regarded as uncritical in their imitation of the West and insensitive to Islamic tradition. The blame for the backwardness and plight of the Muslim community was credited to the Ulama's static sanctification of Islam's classical or medieval formulations and their resistance to change; so Islamic modernists wished to produce a new

synthesis of Islam with modern science. John L. Esposito, regarding this situation, claims:

“Islamic modernists of the nineteenth and twentieth century, like secular reformers were open to accommodation and assimilation; they wished to produce a new synthesis of Islam with modern sciences and learning. Thus they distanced themselves from the rejectionist tendency of religious conservatives as well as western-oriented secular reformers who restricted religion to the private life and they looked to the west to rejuvenate state and society.” [1]

Islamic modernism had an ambivalent attitude toward the West, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion. Europe was admired for its strength, technology and political ideas of freedom, justice and equality, but often rejected for its imperialist goals and policies. Reformers like Afghani, Abduh, Sir Sayyid and Iqbal, argued the compatibility of Islam with modern science and the best of Western thought. They preached the need and

“selective synthesis of Islam and modern Western thought; condemned unquestioned veneration and imitation of the past; reasserted their right to reinterpret (*ijtihad*) Islam in light of modern conditions; and sought to provide an Islamically based rationale for educational, legal and social reform to revitalize a dormant and impotent Muslim community. ... Islamic modernism [in contrast to 18th century revivalist movements which sought to restore a pristine past] wished to reformulate its Islamic heritage in response to the political, scientific and cultural challenge of the West. It provided an Islamic rationale for accepting modern ideas and institutions, whether scientific, technological, or political (constitutionalism and representative government). For most of these reformers, the renaissance of the Muslim community was the first step to national independence or liberation from the hated yoke of colonialism - the restoration of Muslim power. Muslims, they believed, must look to Islam, their source of strength and unity, but learn the secrets of Western power in order to cast off foreign rule and regain their identity and autonomy” [12].

Muslim reformers emphasized the “dynamism, flexibility and adaptability” during the early development of Islam. This time period was distinguished by Islamic accomplishments in the sciences, law and education [13]. In the Middle East, Afghani, who epitomized the concerns and program of Islamic modernism, argued that reason,

philosophy and science were not strange to Islam, were not simply the products of West, or as Adeed Dawisha writes, he argued that “Islam was in harmony with the principles discovered by scientific reason, [it] was indeed the religion demanded by reason” [14]. Afghani advocated for an Islamic renaissance, which would unite the Muslim world while simultaneously confronting the cultural threat posed by adaptation of Western ideals. Abduh, on the other hand, was the developer of the intellectual and social reformist dimensions of Islamic modernism. Afghani is considered one of the catalysts of Islamic modernization, with Muhammad Abduh seen as one of its great synthesizers. Abduh is even seen as the “Father of Islamic Modernism” in the Arab world. They sought to reform Muslim’s “clinging to the past” and “backwardness,” which had been brought on by a retreat into orthodoxy caused by Mongol domination. Afghani and Abduh did so by attempting to reach a medium between Islamic law and modernity [13]. While in South Asia (or Indian Sub continent) Sir Sayyid - devoting his life to religious, educational and social reform - called for a bold new theology and reinterpretation of Islam to respond to modern change; and acceptance, not rejection, of best in the western thought; and Muhammad Iqbal - combining what he thought to be best of the East and the West, his Islamic heritage and Western philosophy to produce his own synthesis and reinterpretation of Islam - called for the reconstruction of religious thought (in Islam) to revitalize the Muslim *Ummah*.

The theme of this paper is to make an analysis of the contribution of two Modernist thinkers of Indian subcontinent and their response to modernity and modernism. That is, it makes a study of two South Asian pioneers of modernity: Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who called for a bold new theology or reinterpretation of Islam and Muhammad Iqbal, who called for reconstruction of religious thought in Islam. It is the thinking of these pioneers that is still relevant to reformist and modernist discourse in the entire Islamic world in general and in South Asia in particular.

Both these thinkers discussed in the coming pages have at least, not to mention the differences, two salient common characteristics: firstly, both have struggled with the issues of power and powerlessness, identity and assimilation and modernity and traditionalism; and secondly, both have been determined to stimulate new thinking on contemporary issues and to demonstrate that Islam is a dynamic religion that calls for continuing intellectual review of both “normative” and “historical” Islam, in order to construct “modernist, enlightened, just, forward-looking and life-affirming Muslim societies” [15].

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan: His Philosophy, Methodology and Reforms Sir Sayyid - the chief organizer of the 19th century modernist Islamic movement in South Asia, Islamic modernist writer, educational and political activist and reformer and jurist - was the product of post-Mughal India, ruled by Britain. Sir Sayyid was born in Delhi, then the capital of the Mughal Empire. His family had migrated from Herat (now in Afghanistan) in 17th century CE. Sir Sayyid was born at a time when rebellious governors, regional insurrections and the British colonialism had diminished the extent and power of the Mughal state, reducing its monarch to a figurehead status. He received an education traditional to Muslim nobility in Delhi and later studied mathematics, astronomy, medicine and Islamic jurisprudence. In a nutshell, Sir Sayyid had a formal education (strictly traditional) which was never completed as he ceased his schooling at the age of 18, but he reached out, through his personal study and independent investigation, to new horizons of intellectual creativity and laid groundwork for a modern interpretation of Islam, especially after the Mutiny of 1857 [16]. Under British rule, Indian Muslims’ social, economic and political positions had been severely eroded. This reality had a profound impact on Sir Sayyid’s intellectual development.

Sir Sayyid is the eldest of the five prominent Muslim modernists whose influence on Islamic thought and polity was to shape and define Muslim responses to modernism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Like the other modernists of his time - like Sayyid Amir ‘Ali (1849-1928), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Namik Kemal (1840-1888) and Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh (ca.1850-1905) - Sir Sayyid was deeply concerned with the state of Muslims in a world dominated by European colonizing powers.

Being an educational and political leader of Muslims, who were living under British colonial rule in India, he developed the concepts of religious modernism and community identity that mark the transition from Mughal India to the rise of representative government and the quest for self-determination. In other words, Sir Sayyid surveyed the abysmal state of Muslim community in India after the Sepoy Uprising of 1857, which resulted in formal British colonial rule and the end of Muslim dominance in the Indian Sub-Continent. The Sepoy Uprising, or the War of Independence as Indians call it, was a crucial event in the history of Indian Muslims and it deeply influenced the evolution of Sir Sayyid’s thinking. Most important, it convinced him that the best of western civilization could and should be assimilated by the Muslims because the “pure” Islam taught by Qur’an and lived/ practiced by Prophet was not simply unopposed to Western civilization but was, in fact, its ultimate source

and inspiration. To put in other words, the first two decades after 1857 witnessed Sir Sayyid's increasing preoccupation with the prevailing conditions of Muslims in India. He perceived Muslims as backward and in need of education. This period also saw an increasing degree of public involvement in educational and social arenas and Sir Sayyid undertook three major projects:

- To initiate an ecumenical movement in order to create understanding between Muslims and Christians; that is, he spearheaded a modernist movement that saw no genuine conflict between Islam and Christianity because of their common moral message;
- To establish scientific organizations that would help Muslims to understand the secret of west's success; that is, the establishment of Aligarh Scientific Society in 1865 - a translation society to make western thought more accessible; and
- To analyze objectively the causes for the 1857 revolt [16].

For Sir Sayyid, Muslims needed to change the way they saw and responded to the modern world; he devoted his life to religious, educational and social reform. Like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh, he called for a bold new theology or reinterpretation of Islam and acceptance, not rejection, of best in the western thought. In Esposito's words, he called for a new theology to respond to the modern change [12]. He wanted to show that he was reclaiming the original religion of Islam, which God and His Messenger have disclosed, not that religion which the Ulama and the preachers have fashioned. His interpretation of Islam was guided by his belief that Islam was compatible with reason and the laws of nature and therefore in perfect harmony with modern scientific thought. He argued that Islam's teachings concerning God, the Prophet and the Qur'an are compatible with modern science, which involves discovery of the work of God in natural laws; in other words, Sir Sayyid argued that Islam is "in full correspondence with reason" [17]. Furthermore, he equated reason with understanding and considered it an acquired quality that enables human beings to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, proper and improper. According to him, who used terms like understanding, reason and intellect interchangeably, the only criterion for a person having reason intellect, or understanding is behavioral rather than substantive.

Sir Sayyid's Views on *Taqlid* and *Ijtihad*: In promoting religious or Islamic modernism he drew inspiration from Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762) and emphasized on rational approach to Islam and social reforms in Muslim culture and till his death in 1898, devoted his life to modernizing the life of Muslims in the Indian Sub-Continent [16].

For Baljon - presenting Sir Sayyid's overall picture, his political, social and educational work - his undaunted confrontation with modern thought was no less than a "revolution in Muslim theology", because he worked out, by it, a "modern vision of Islam" [18]. Aziz Ahmad and Fazlur Rahman both have discussed Sir Sayyid's achievements as a religious thinker in the context of Islamic modernism and more specifically Islamic modernism in India. For Aziz Ahmad, Sir Sayyid is its first representative. His theological modernism, thinks Aziz Ahmad,

"can be discerned as grappling with two broadly distinct problems: the rationalization of the minutiae of non-essential dogma and the liberalization of Islamic law. In regard to the first of these he shows signs of psychological pressures which occasionally result in some easily avoidable apologetics as well as certain extreme rationalist positions which were repugnant to the traditionalists. In regard to the second, his work is dynamic and constructive and as such it has made a tremendous impression on modern Islam in general and on Indian Islam in particular. ... He tried to resolve the difficulties inherent in the four traditional sources of Muslim law by a dialectical rationalist exegesis of the Quran; by historical skepticism in scrutinizing the classical data of the *hadith*; by an almost unlimited emphasis on *ijtihad* as the inalienable right of every individual Muslim; and finally by rejecting the principle of *ijma* in the classical sense which confined it to the Ulama" [19].

The modernists adopted the term *ijtihad* (an Arabic term, literally meaning "exert" or "effort" and generally translated as independent reasoning) - the intellectual effort of Muslim jurists to reach independent religio-legal decisions, a key feature of modern Islamic reform; also a technical term of Islamic law that describes the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah - as a rallying cry, transforming its meaning into the more general task of "rational interpretation" that they held to

be incumbent upon all educated Muslims. Historically, *ijtihad* has been perceived as a concern primarily of the individual scholar and mujtahid, whose doors were closed in 4th century AH and a long period of *taqlid* followed. Later, post-colonial Islamic thinkers used *ijtihad* as shorthand for intellectual and social reform and as a break from *taqlid* or blind imitation of the past legal rulings.

The relationship between *taqlid* and *ijtihad* during this period became less judicial and more symbolic: the former referred to the general deterioration of everything Islamic and the later to its reformation. In general, *ijtihad* served to “validate the reformist’s efforts”, claims Muneer G. Fareed, “to sub-ordinate the sacred texts to the exigencies of a modern context” [20]. In the modern times, *ijtihad* has become a collective endeavor that combines the skills and contribution not only of the scholars of *Shari`ah*, but of experts of experts in various other disciplines, because acquiring a mastery of all skills that are important to a society is difficult for any one person. It is also regarded as the calling on the believers to draw independent conclusions and judgments on legal and other issues. For Mehran Kamrava, the Reformists embrace a “dynamic and context-driven” approach to *ijtihad*, calling for interpreting the text based on changing and evolving circumstances [21]. The Holy Qur’an repeatedly asks Muslims to change themselves and to constantly strive to change the world so that it could become a more just, equitable and peaceful abode for humanity (e.g. Holy Qur’an, *Surah An-Najm*, 53: 39-41). This is why at the core of *Shari`ah*, argues Ziauddin Sardar, we find the “principle of *ijtihad* (sustained and reasoned struggle)” which is concerned primarily “with change and with shaping and reshaping the future” [22]. The opposite of *ijtihad*, in this view, was *taqlid*, literally “imitation” or “following” - and in Islamic legal terminology it refers to the practice of following the decisions of a religious authority without necessarily examining the scriptural basis or reasoning of that decision and opposite of *ijtihad* - and closing the doors of *ijtihad* - which modernists took to mean “blind obedience to authority”. Sir Syed praised the broadening use of *ijtihad* by Shah Wali Allah.

Sir Sayyid decried *taqlid* which in his opinion was responsible for the decline of Islam. For Sir Sayyid, *ijtihad* (innovation, re-interpretation with the changing times) is the need of the hour. Give up *taqlid* (copying and following old values). He gave a call that the Muslims could not progress without acquiring knowledge of

modern sciences and technology. He asserted the simple truth that knowledge is not the exclusive preserve of any nation; it belongs to the whole mankind. He maintained a valiant posture and succeeded in realizing the intellectual energy of Muslims and they started getting education of science. They rightly felt the need of *ijtihad*. But, alas, powerful lobby of Ulema overpowered them and opposed all attempts to move towards *ijtihad*. In keeping with his rationalist mindset, Sir Sayyid stressed the importance of *ijtihad* and a rational interpretation of Islamic religious sources and thought. He believed as well as considered this to be necessary, in order to make Islam acceptable to the new age and because he believed that Islam would not be understood by Muslims and appreciated by others unless it was presented in a rational way. He also stressed the importance of relying on the Qur’an and sifting the false *hadith* from the reliable ones. He tried to remove “the corrosive elements” and accretions that he believed were seriously detrimental to Islam in his day [15].

With regard to the religious thought of Sir Sayyid, Muhammad Umar al-Din - one of the three scholars after Hali (the other two being Mawlana Sa`id Akbarabadi and B.A. Dar) who made efforts to show in great detail, how Sir Sayyid’s attempt to reformulate Islam can be placed in the broader context of the history of Islamic thought - argues that Sir Sayyid maintained that Islam is the only religion that can go together with changing conditions and with a new age. For Umar al-Din, Sir Sayyid presented

“a new conception of Islam and laid the foundation of a new [Islamic] theology (*Kalam*). As in former [intellectual] movements Islam had been presented in the form of law, or in the form of philosophy, or again in the form of a Sufi system [of thought], in the same way Sir Sayyid, keeping in mind the scientific spirit of the modern age, presented Islam in the form of a scientific theory” [23, 17].

Sir Sayyid on Religion and Science Compatibility:

Sir Sayyid believed in the compatibility of religion and science and considered natural law and divine law to be the same, because according to him revelation cannot be opposed to scientific actuality since an agreement between God’s word and work is essential. For him, between the word of God (Scripture) and the work of God (nature) there can be no contradiction. Furthermore, he believed that when there appeared a contradiction between a scientific fact and a religious rule then the latter

must be reinterpreted according to scientific evidence. Finally, Sir Sayyid concluded that “if we keep in view the principles deducible from the Qur’an itself, we shall find that there is no contradiction between the modern sciences, on the one hand and the Qur’an and Islam, on the other” [15].

Applying his naturalistic rationalism to his exegesis of the Qur’an, he arrived at fifty-two points of divergence from traditionally accepted Sunni Islam [19, 15]. Moreover he advised that in secular matters where Islam is silent, Muslims should emulate western practices. He believed in religious pluralism and considered it absurd to believe that God’s Prophets appeared only in Arabia and Palestine to reform a handful of Arabs and Jews and that other peoples were denied of knowledge of the divine. He added, whoever followed the prophets achieved salvation. In this regard, his views are on a par with the more liberal contemporary reformist thinkers. He may be considered as a pioneer in what is now called “Inter-faith Dialogue” and he worked for “greater understanding and goodwill” and harmony among Muslim sects and between Muslims and non-Muslims [15].

Educational Reforms: Sir Sayyid’s educational program which was meant to change the intellectual, political and economic destiny of the Muslim India had its humble beginnings in 1859 and in 1864 he founded a Scientific Society for the introduction of western sciences primarily among Muslims in India [24]. During his visit to England in 1869-70 (from May 1867 to October 1870), he internalized positive aspects of British culture including the value system of modern scientific education; and in order to study British educational institutions, he visited the universities of Cambridge and Oxford. Fully equipped with modern ideas and orientations, he returned back on 2 Oct. 1870 and prepared his blueprint for the higher education of Muslims and in 1874, he laid the foundation of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, modeled on Cambridge University; and it soon assumed a form and a personality of its own [24]. and in 1920 the College became Aligarh Muslim University. Sir Sayyid devoted most of his energies to promoting education among Muslims. He also founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental Educational Conference for the general promotion of western education in Muslim India, for the enrichment of Urdu through translations of indispensable scientific works, to formulate a policy for the higher education of Muslim students in Europe. Then

he began the publication of a journal, *Tahzib al-Akhlaq*. It covered articles on a wide range of subjects “from public hygiene to rationalist speculation on religious dogmas”. In its brilliant pages “modernism emerged as a potent force and considerably changed the course and the direction of Islam in India” [24]. In short, *Tahzib al-Akhlaq* was meant to educate and civilize Indian Muslims.

- John L. Esposito, regarding the educational reforms of Sir Sayyid, writes that he combined

“theory with practice, seeking to implement his idea and train a new generation of Muslim leaders. His prolific writing was accompanied by his leadership in many educational reforms: a translation society to make western thought more accessible, the introduction of their own journals and the formation of Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (later named as Aligarh Muslim University), which was modeled after Cambridge university” [1].

Sir Sayyid helped the Muslims in India to emerge again. Various writings have emphasized different areas of Sir Sayyid’s thought and activity - social and political, educational and cultural - in which he made reforms. But almost all agree that his prime achievement was a revival of Muslim morale and prestige in British India and that to him goes the credit for having re-established the dynamism of the Muslims in India as a social and political force. His efforts are regarded as a “dynamic and constructive achievement” that made a tremendous impression on modern Islam. In the words of A. H. Albiruni (the pseudonym of Pakistani historian, S. M. Ikram), Sir Sayyid not only filled the big void created in the life of Muslim community by the disappearance of the Muslim rule, but he did more. He bridged the gap between medieval and modern India and gave the Indian Muslims “a new cohesion, a new policy, new educational ideals, a new prose, a new approach to their individual and national problems and built up an organization which could carry on his work” [25]. Altaf Hussain Hali (in *Hayat-i-Jawid*) after presenting Sir Sayyid’s overall view sets out to describe his various “services to country, community and religion”; and denotes his work by the term “Reformation”, calling him a reformer [26]; while as Allama Iqbal credits Sir Sayyid as being the “first Modernist Muslim” of South Asia to catch a glimpse of the positive character of the modern age. For him, Sir

Sayyid's "real greatness" lies in the fact that he was the "first Indian Muslim" to catch a glimpse of the positive character of the age which was coming and who felt the need for a "fresh orientation of Islam" and worked for it; and there is no denying in the fact that this sensitive soul was the "first to react the modern age" [27, 17].

Some European writers (like John Strachey and Sidney Low) during his life time characterized Sir Sayyid's thinking as "liberal", "progressive", or "enlightened" (that is, the one who tried to prove Islam to be the liberal, rational and progressive religion) and these labels have continued even after his death [28, 17]. This European view was shared by many Indian writers - Hali and Justice Shah Din (1868-1918), for example. Shah Din, although did not consider Sir Sayyid a great scholar of Arabic, or a well-versed theologian, nevertheless, he maintains:

"the fact remains, that in his power of grasping the fundamental principles of our Islamic system of faith and in his keen insight into such of his features as have made it a great motive power in the world, he has been hardly excelled by the most learned theologians of modern times" [29, 17].

B.A. Dar projected this image in a concise statement: "He was the first man in modern India to realize the necessity for a new interpretation of Islam that was liberal, modern and progressive" [6].

It clearly reveals that Sir Sayyid's entire intellectual energy was devoted to trying to resolve the conflict between religion and science and to reconcile the best of both for the younger generation of the Muslim elite whom he wished to attract. Thus, Sir Sayyid was the first representative of Islamic modernism in South Asia who presented a new orientation of Islam and reacted to the modern age.

Muhammad Iqbal: Reconstruction of Religious Thought:

Muhammad Iqbal (commonly known as Allama Iqbal) - poet-philosopher, lawyer, Muslim reformer, great political ideologist/activist, outstanding man of letters and one of the most distinguished and dominant figures of 20th century - in contrast to Sir Sayyid, belonged to a generation that was exposed to modern education.

Allama Iqbal was born in 1877 in Sialkot, Punjab (whose ancestors were Kashmiri Brahmins) and was educated initially by tutors in languages and writing, history, poetry and religion. His potential as a poet and

writer was recognized by one of his tutors, Sayyid Mir Hassan. Iqbal entered the Government College in Lahore where he studied philosophy, English literature and Arabic. While studying for his master's degree, Iqbal came under the wing of Sir Thomas Arnold, who exposed Iqbal to Western culture and ideas and served as a bridge for Iqbal between the ideas of East and West. At Sir Thomas's encouragement, Iqbal travelled to and spent many years studying in Europe, obtaining a Bachelors degree from Trinity College at Cambridge in 1907, while simultaneously studying law at Lincoln's Inn, from where he qualified as a barrister in 1908. The same year he was awarded the PhD for his thesis on *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* by the University of Munich, Germany.

Having studied in British-ruled India, Cambridge (England), Munich (Germany) and Heidelberg, Iqbal took a more critical approach to Western ideas and institutions than did Sir Sayyid. Neither had he rejected the positive aspects of Western civilization, nor had he supported their blind emulation by Muslims. Instead he wanted to create a new intellectual framework for a more authentic Islamic modernity and searched for ways to regenerate Muslims and their civilization on the basis of their own religious and cultural heritage. In other words, Iqbal combined what he thought to be best of the East and the West, his Islamic heritage and Western philosophy (Hegel, Bergson, Fichte and Nietzsche), to produce "his own synthesis and reinterpretation of Islam" [12]. It is this aspect of Iqbal's thinking, claims Riffat Hassan, that makes his discourse so relevant to those contemporary Muslim thinkers who are trying to balance the requirements of modernization with those of cultural authenticity. He judged the conditions of the Islamic community one of five centuries of 'dogmatic slumber' as a result of *taqlid* (blind following of tradition) called for the 'reconstruction' of religious thought to revitalize the Muslim Ummah [15].

Iqbal's life was spent exclusively under British colonial rule (as India became free from this colonialism in 1947), during which Muslims in the Indian Sub-Continent were profoundly influenced by the religious thought of Shah Wali Allah and Sir Sayyid and Iqbal inherited the legacy of both these intellectuals.

Between 1915 to 1938, Iqbal wrote twelve volumes of poetry (7 in Persian and 5 in Urdu) and the Prose - one, his famous lectures on the *Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam* in English, making him the most

important poet-philosopher of his time, not only in India but in world and second, a book on economics in Urdu. Many of these works are on religious reform and self-advancement. For most of his life, his profession was law and his passion, writing prose and poetry. He studied both Islamic sciences and western philosophy. His writings were indebted to two principle sources: his Islamic heritage and the western philosophy he studied at Cambridge, Heidelberg and Munich. That is to say he combined modern western philosophy (that of Nietzsche, Bergson, Hegel and Fichte) with his Islamic tradition and constructed a modern dynamic, Islamically informed worldview. To put in other words, his writings reflect the influence of the Qur'an, hadith and Muslim thinkers like the great jurist Ibn Taimmiyya, the Indian reformer Shah Wali Allah and the renowned Sufi sage Jalal ud Din Rumi.

Iqbal's philosophical and prose works are actually very few. Most notable among them are the following three works:

- The Development of Metaphysics in Persia (Cambridge, 1908), originally a dissertation submitted to Munich University;
- Presidential Address to the Annual Meeting of All-India Muslim League, 1930, a very extensive review of the interaction among the British, the All-India National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, from the perspective of a Muslim thinker who was anxious about the political and cultural future of Muslims in the Indian sub-Continent; and
- The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (Lahore, 1930 & London, 1934) is a collection of 7 lectures delivered in December 1928 in Madras. Iqbal took three years to compose these lectures and considered them reflective of his mature philosophical and rational approach to Islam.

In the words of David Lelyveld, *The Reconstruction* sets forth Iqbal's social and religious philosophy, which seeks to "construct a concept of a dynamic, democratic society inspired by the Qur'an and the life of Prophet Muhammad" (pbuh) [16]; and according to Javed Majeed, it emphasizes "Islamic modernisms response to European modernity" both in its style and its content. It purports to show how the Qur'an is entirely consonant with the major discoveries of European science and it is wide ranging in its "eclectic use" of European thinkers [2]. He wrote that Muslims could achieve economic gains by embracing

science and technology. And for Majid Fakhry, in *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal argued that religion is "not in opposition to philosophy but is rather the core of that total experience upon philosophy must reflect", as borne out by the Qura'nic exhortation to reflect upon God's creation and to pursue knowledge for the ideal and the real coalesce [30]. While as, in view of William C. Smith, theologically Iqbal "wrought the most important and the most necessary revolution of modern times". That is to say, he called for a reinterpretation of Islamic tradition as a way to create new social and political institutions. He believed that modernization of Islam held the key to Muslim advancement and in this way, his thinking helped to shape modernist Islam in the broader Muslim world [31].

Iqbal distinguished between eternal, immutable principles of Islam (*Shari'ah*) and those regulations that were the product of human interpretation and thus subject to change. In contrast to the *'Ulama*, whom he charged had halted the dynamic process that originally produced Islamic law and instead were content to merely perpetuate established traditions, Iqbal believed that Muslims must once again reassert their right to reinterpret and reapply Islam to changing social conditions [1].

Iqbal's Views on *Ijtihad* And *Ijma*: In Iqbal's judgment, one of the major reasons for the decline of Muslims in the past many centuries was their inability or unwillingness to subject the legal system of intellectual scrutiny, particularly with reference to *ijtihad*, which is one of the acknowledged sources of Islamic law. He saw *ijtihad* as the catalyst for Islam's intellectual resurgence For Iqbal, *ijtihad* is the principle of movement of and legal advance in Islam; and he desired to reconstruct Islamic law or Shari'ah according to the needs and requirements of modern times. Only religious obligations or *'ibadaat*, he argued, were beyond the law of change since they constituted the rights of God but mundane or worldly matters (*mu'amalaat*) relate to the rights of the people and are subject to change and modification. Seeking the re-evaluation and re-codification of the Islamic *fiqh*, Iqbal stressed the critical need for *ijtihad* by contemporary Muslims. What has gone wrong with the Islamic history is the loss of this dynamic element of its civilization, under the pressure of certain given historical situations, such as the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258. These historical situations stabilized in traditional Muslim theology the doctrine that the door of *ijtihad* was closed.

Ibn Taimiyya (1263-1328) and in his wake some Ulama, including the founders of pre-modern religious reform movements, Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1793), Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762) and others protested against this theological dogma and reasserted the right of *ijtihad*. Modernists in Egypt and Turkey closely followed the footsteps of these Ulama in exercising this right. Regarding *ijtihad*, Iqbal heavily relied on Shah Wali Allah, Muhammad b. Ali al-Shawkani (1760-1839, Yemen) and other older theorists of *ijtihad*. Challenging the notion that the gates of *ijtihad* were closed, he asked: "Did the founders of our schools ever claim finality for their reasoning and interpretations?" and answered this question with an emphatic "Never!" His oft-quoted concluding statement reads:

"The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the foundational legal principles in the light of their own experience and altered conditions of modern life is, in my opinion, perfectly justified. The teaching of the Qur'an that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems" [32].

In Turkey, as the idea of dynamic speculation in the evolution and adjustment of institutions has long been at work, so in this context, Iqbal emphasized that the Indian Muslims too should make their contribution. He writes: "We too one day, like the Turks, will have to re-evaluate our intellectual inheritance. And if we cannot make any original contributions to the general thought of Islam, we may, by healthy conservative criticism, serve at least as a check on the rapid movement of liberalism in the world of Islam" [32].

Iqbal accepted *Ijma* (consensus) as the most important legal notion in Islam, which remained practically a mere idea and rarely assumed the form of a permanent institution in any Islamic country. It is, however, extremely satisfactory to note, argues Iqbal, that the "pressure of new world forces and the experience of European nations are impressing on the mind of modern Islam the value and possibilities of the idea of *Ijma*" [32]. That is to say, Iqbal interpreted/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. In his own words:

"The transfer of the power of *Ijtihad* from individual representatives of [classical] schools [of law] to a Muslim legislative assembly which, in view of the growth of opposing sects, is the only possible from *Ijma* can take in modern times, will secure contributions to legal discussion from laymen who happen to possess a keen insight into the affairs" [32].

This he considers being the only way to blast a way out of the *cul-de-sac* of traditionalist Islam towards new avenues. Iqbal's special contribution to the development of Muslim legal thought was the re-establishment of the principle he advocated, i.e. the enlargement of the scope and authority of *ijma*. His view was quickly accepted by the "westernized Muslim intelligentsia" in the Sub-Continent and came to be equated with public opinion and parliamentary institutions. This view has its parallels in other Muslim lands, especially in Turkey and Egypt. But the "moderating conservatism" which forms the other half of his system of religious and political thought saw a difficulty in the unrestrained transfer of the right of constituting *ijma* to the masses of people or elite unschooled in religious law. On this point, "Iqbal faces and submits to, the inevitability of providing some representation for the 'Ulama in legislative institutions" [24]. Furthermore, Iqbal believed that if Qur'an were interpreted in an "enlightened, rational and liberal way", it could awaken man's higher consciousness in his relationship with God and other human beings and not only assist man in moving along with the "progressive forces of life, but also direct him into new and healthy channels in every epoch" [31].

It becomes clear that Iqbal's special contribution to the development of Muslim legal thought was the establishment of *ijtihad* as the principle of movement of and legal advance in Islam as well as the re-establishment of the principle of *ijma* with its enlargement of the scope and authority.

Views on Democracy: Although the views of Iqbal on democracy cannot be studied in isolation with his broad perception of Islam, his philosophy of (*Khudi*) selfhood,

his concepts of man of belief (*mard i mu`min*) or perfect man (*insan i kamil*) and his views on *ijma* and *ijtihad*, some of the important principles of democracy that are appreciated by Iqbal include 'freedom', 'equality' and 'election'. He finds these principles compatible with Islam to a certain extent. For instance, he points out that in Islam, although the interest of an individual is subordinated to the community but the individual is given sufficient liberty which is necessary for the development of his personality. He contends that the Western theory of democracy also protects the interest of the community while providing a conducive environment to individuals for their own development in the same way as Islam does. He writes that the "best form of government for such a community would be democracy, the idea of which is to let man develop all the possibilities of his nature by allowing him as much freedom as possible" [33].

Iqbal believed that Islam provided its own religio-political alternative for Muslim societies and thus he turned to the past to rediscover the principles and values necessary to reconstruct an Islamic model for modern Muslim society with Islamic versions of democracy and parliamentary government [1]. Thus, for example, Iqbal argued that the centrality of such beliefs as the equality and brotherhood of believers made democracy a political ideal in Islam, which, although historically unrealized, remained a duty for Muslims in the 20th century.

He explored, from the early 1930s, the prospects for establishing Islamic democracy. Considering Islam an egalitarian faith with no room for a clergy or an aristocracy, he recognized the importance of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and called for its democratization and institutionalization in a proper legislative assembly to bridge the theoretical gap between divine and popular sovereignty [34]. A strong advocate of freedom, individuality, equality and brotherhood, all of which are necessary ingredients of liberal democracy, he stressed equality and brotherhood and thus concluded that democracy was Islam's most important political ideal [35].

His recognition of democracy was Islamic, however, for he believed in the representation of God on Earth. As quoted by Abdullah Anwar Beg, Iqbal asserts that Divine vicegerency is the representation of God on earth as revealed in the holy Quran and aims at the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth - "the democracy of unique individuals" [36]. He also favored "spiritual democracy," a principle based on the assumption that every person is a centre of latent power, the possibilities

of which are to be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. Discussing this topic in his *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal wrote that contemporary Muslims should be allowed to "appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life" in the light of ultimate principles and evolve that "spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam" [32].

Here it may be remarked that Iqbal borrowed from the West but was not uncritical of it. He leveled sharp criticism at European colonialism and imperialism. Though an admirer of the accomplishments of the West, its dynamic spirit, intellectual tradition and technological advances, he denounced the excesses of colonialism and imperialism, the exploitation of capitalism, Marxist atheism and the moral bankruptcy of secularism and Western democracy (at least the variant practiced at that time). Here it may be pointed out that Iqbal did indeed write against democracy, but his criticism is not an outright rejection of the idea. As such he was not against democracy itself, but against the demerits of modern democracy of the west. He was critical of it in the prevalent form and bold enough to denounce it publicly. The modern western democracy, in his view, writes Abdul Aleem Helal, was a cover for far too many injustices. It was for instance, a weapon in the hands of imperialism and capitalism [37]. As he writes in *Bang-i-Dara*:

- The democratic system of the West is the same old instrument,
- Whose chords contain no notes other than the voice of Kaiser [imperialism],
- The demon of despotism is dancing in his democratic robes
- Yet you consider it to be the Nilam Peri [fairy Queen] of Liberty [38, 35, 36].
- In *Armaghan-i-Hijaz*, Iqbal asks the people of the East:
- Have you not seen the democratic system of the West?
- It has a shining face but it's within is blacker than Changiz [39, 37].

Like Sir Sayyid, Iqbal argued (writes Sayyid Abdul Wahid) that, contrary to the Western caricature of Islam as a "religion of holy war", Islam was a religion of peace: "All forms of political and social disturbance are condemned ... the ideal of Islam is to secure social peace at any price"

[40]. In contrast to Sir Sayyid and more like Afghani, Iqbal wanted to resuscitate the Muslim community so that it could reclaim its political independence and rightful place in history. Iqbal attempted to develop alternative Islamic models for modern Muslim societies. Drawing on Islamic traditions, argues Esposito, Iqbal “sought to ‘rediscover’ Islamic principles and values that would provide the basis for Islamic versions of Western concepts and institutions such as democracy and parliamentary government” [12].

In an essay entitled ‘Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal’, Iqbal stated that democracy is the “most important aspect of Islam regarded as a political ideal”; and added that “there is no aristocracy in Islam” [40]. For him, the two basic propositions underlying Muslim political constitution were: (a) that the law of God is absolutely supreme. Authority, except as an interpreter of the law, has no place in the social structure of Islam. Islam has a horror of personal authority. We regard it as inimical to the unfolding of individuality; and (b) the conviction in the absolute equality of all members of a community [41].

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, the emergence of Islamic modernism and the legacy of modernists it produced, as the foregoing account reveals, influenced the development of the Muslim community and its attitude and approach toward the West. Their vision inspired Muslim intellectuals and activists across the Muslim world to emphasize educational reforms that incorporated a modern curriculum, legitimated legal and social change and contributed to the formation of anti-colonial independence movements.

Muslim modernists were determined and stimulated, in the real sense, new thinking on contemporary issues demonstrating that Islam is a dynamic religion that calls for continuing intellectual review of both normative and historical Islam and they constructed modernist, enlightened, just, forward-looking and life-affirming Muslim societies. Sir Sayyid was the first Indian Muslim to felt the need for a fresh orientation of Islam and worked for it; while as Iqbal created a new intellectual framework for a more authentic Islamic modernity and searched for ways to regenerate and rejuvenate Muslims and their civilization on the basis of their own religious and cultural heritage.

The progressive spirit of the historic Aligarh movement founded by Sir Sayyid for the intellectual, moral and social regeneration of Indian Muslims and which Iqbal enshrined in the hearts of millions through his

passionate poems, remains a source of inspiration and empowerment for those who want to create communities and societies that embody the highest ideals and best practices of Islam. Iqbal’s special contribution to the development of Muslim legal thought was the re-establishment of the principle he advocated, i.e. the enlargement of the scope and authority of *Ijma*.

Muslim modernists rekindled the spirit of Muslim unity, solidarity and autonomy; they restored Muslim pride in Islam’s intellectual and scientific heritage; and above all generated modern ideological interpretations of Islam that incorporated modern concepts, disciplines and institutions, from textual criticism to nationalism, parliamentary government to democracy. Thus, these modernists introduced and reinforced a change-oriented mind-set that rejected *taqlid* (blind following of tradition) and accepted the necessity as well as legitimacy of reinterpretation and reform. Of equal significance, Islamic modernists reasserted the right to interpret Islam through *ijma* and *ijtihad*. Islamic modernism was primarily an “intellectual movement”. While it did not produce a “unified movement or enduring organizations”, its legacy was substitution in its influence on the Muslim community’s development and its attitude toward the West. Islamic modernism reawakened Muslims to a sense of past power and glory; reinterpreted and produced a modern ideological interpretation of Islam; and demonstrated the compatibility of Islam with modern Western socio-political reform. Most reformers distinguished between adopting Western ideas and technology and rejecting Western imperialism; indeed, they promoted the ideas of anti-colonialism and Muslim unity, autonomy and independence. For these reasons, men like Afghani and Iqbal came to be remembered as “fathers of Muslim nationalism” and along with Abduh and Sir Sayyid as the “pioneers” of Islamic modernism.

It is this writer’s conviction that the voices of such reformist and modernist thinkers, with their forward-looking, life-affirming vision, have prevailed and will prevail all the negative forces, internal and external; and their thinking - that is still relevant to reformist and modernist discourse in the entire Islamic world in general and in South Asia in particular - will remain as a source of inspiration for all the reformist thinkers, not only across the Muslim world from South and Southeast Asia to Central Asia and from Middle East to North Africa, but for Muslim thinkers of Europe and America (West) as well.

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