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## **Pioneering Apologetic Rationalism in the Sub-Continent: Syed Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali**

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## **Pioneering Apologetic Rationalism in the Sub-Continent: Syed Ahmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali**

### **Abstract**

Islamic Modernism has been a dominant and effective discourse in the Muslim world since the arrival of modernity. It is multi-dimensional, encompassing rationalists, nationalists and even socialists. Apologetic rationalism is one of the early dimensions developed primarily as a response to the onslaught of modern scientific theories and the scientific method which seemed to threaten the Islamic way of life, thought and belief system. While taking a defensive and apologetic position, Muslim apologetics tried to prove the superiority of Islam on all other creeds and religions by declaring natural laws to be in sync with Islam, and all scientific discoveries and inventions as continuation of the scientific and rationalistic spirit endorsed by all the prophets and the Qur'ān. Secondly, all apologetics elevated the persona of Prophet Muḥammad PBUH and tried to prove that he was a true leader in the modern sense of the term and was undoubtedly progressive and enlightened. In the sub-continent, this effort was led by two towering pioneers: Sir Syed Aḥmad Khan and Syed Ameer Ali. This article is an insight into the apologetics of these two influential pioneers and Muslim Modernists. Sir Syed's name is heralded as one of the foremost modernists whose efforts in construction of new *ilm al kalam* led him towards a controversial and heterodox position. Sayyid Ameer Ali, a jurist and trained through western education, produced the influential apologetic work on Islamic history and Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH).

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**Keywords:** Islamic Modernism, Apologetic Rationalism, Naturalism, Syed Ameer Ali, Sir Syed Ahmad

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Discourse of Islamic Modernism

Islamic Modernism developed as an intellectual discourse across the Muslim World and the sub-continent as result of the infiltration of Western ideas during colonial times. It looked for ways and means to accommodate modern ideas in an Islamic framework in response to the onslaught of modernity and western hegemony. As an intellectual activity engendered by western ideological movements and foundations, “Islamic Modernism produced a new worldview, which sought expression in hostility to imperialism, love for nationalism and an urge to modify Islamic tradition.”<sup>1</sup> Advocates of this thought posed fundamental theological question which “revolved around the question of the validity of knowledge derived from the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, the consensus of the theologian (*ijma’*), and juristic reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*).”<sup>2</sup> In order to answer this question, they tried to “interpret the first two sources and “transform the last two in order to formulate a reformist project in the light of prevalent standards of scientific rationality and modern social theory.”<sup>3</sup> The modernists accepted the concepts associated with Western Civilization, such as scientific progress and individual freedom on one hand and on the other hand their sincere .connection with Islamic beliefs provided them with strong cultural identity. Muslim Modernists accepted the Qur’ān as the word of God and its interpretation as the word of man subject to change according to the changing circumstances and context. The Islamic Modernist discourse doubted the authenticity of Ḥadīth as the word of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) on account of addition of fabricated traditions, criticized the blind acceptance of *Fiqh*,

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and labelled it as outdated. “They preached the need and acceptability of a selective synthesis of Islam and modern Western thought; condemned unquestioned reverence 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 Muslim community.”<sup>4</sup> Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, a renowned historian commented on this line of thought in the following words:

“It has been recognized in all Muslim countries that in many respects the mutable part of the Shari’yyah requires considerable overhauling and the immutable bases need a new interpretation — (Islam is) not a code of certain rigid laws or even legal concepts but a dynamic force, a concept of life, not of law, a guidance for the springs of thought and action and not a static code of action. In other words, Islam is alive and dynamic ideology and not a dead unprogressive and static collection of injunctions and prohibitions. It requires a new interpretation at every stage of our development and cannot be content merely with precedents and past usage. Islam does not discard precedents and traditions, but it lays emphasis upon the progressive unfolding of the creative instincts of mankind in accordance with eternal principles defined by revelation.”<sup>5</sup>

Islamic Modernism presented a wide diversity of thought ranging from harsh critics of Western Colonialism and imperialism to advocates of reformation in Muslim societies. Among them were severe opponents of Muslim intellectuals compromising with imperial leaders and adopting European ideological premises.<sup>6</sup> However, all of them tried to find the causes of Muslim deterioration and European control. Some of them attributed it to the lack of progress in science and technology; others mounted a fierce defense of Islam and tried to prove its compatibility with technology, and that of the Qur’ān with scientific truths. All of them concurred that Muslim societies needed a major Reformation on the pattern of Christian

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Reformation by Martin Luther (1483-1546).<sup>7</sup> They challenged the orthodox interpretations of Islam by traditional ulama and preached renewal and reform in Islam.

Early modernists such as Sir Syed Aḥmad Khan (1817-1898) and Muḥammad Abduh (1849-1905) can be identified as rationalists. They tried to infuse Western rationalism and modern practice in Islamic thought by operating at social and intellectual levels. They were eclectic in their interpretation and particularly applied the spirit of rationalism which is characteristic of the *Mu'tazila*.<sup>8</sup> “At intellectual level, they wanted to reconcile Islamic beliefs with Newtonian Physics which was the dominant paradigm of the day. At social level, they were willing for a complete reformation of Muslim societies along the lines of European society. They idealized the social organization of European society and they labeled all those customs of Muslim society against the true teachings of Islam which were not in vogue in Europe or clashed with the changing times.”<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2 The Discourse of Apologetics

Early modernists from Sub-Continent and Egypt while aware of the decline of Muslim civilization responded to West in an apologetic manner. This defensive attitude rested on the belief of eternal validity of Islam and took pride in its relevance for all times and areas.<sup>10</sup> These apologetics tried hard by what can only be described as bending backwards to show the applicability of Islam to western elements.<sup>11</sup> Jamal ad Din Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, early modernists argued that Western science is borrowed from the Arabs; hence contending that Islam as a religion, far from being in conflict with science, encourages and nourishes it.<sup>12</sup> Although the argument was true but “little attention was paid by the apologists to explain the actual role of science in Muslim societies and its relation with

authorities; great attention was called to the mere fact that Arab science existed.”<sup>13</sup> Most of the literature of apologetic modernism bore testimony to man’s struggle in current times: quest for leadership and the need for a way of life and attitude to Islam that can be embraced in the modern epoch.

A prolific orientalist A. R. Gibbs comments on this method where apologetics leaving a side the essential questions and focusing on “the perfection of the Qur’ān and the personality of Muḥammad (PBUH). Both of these were old and familiar themes in Islam, and modern writers thus elaborated upon an extensive literature which went back to the early centuries.”<sup>14</sup>

This article attempts to provide an insight into the thoughts and arguments of Syed Aḥmad Khan (1817-1898) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928) who were the original torch bearers of the Muslim apologetics. Both men were the earlier modernists in the sub-continent and influenced later thinkers substantially.

## **2. Reformulation and Radical Reinterpretation of Beliefs in the Light of Modern Science: Syed Aḥmad Khan**

Syed Aḥmad Khan (1817-1898) was indeed the most influential thinker and reformer in the Indian sub-continent. His intellectual works include *Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind* (Reasons of the Indian Revolt, *An Account of the Loyal Mohammedan of India* in 1860, *Review of Hunter’s Book* in 1872, in which he proved that India was not *Dar-al-ḥarb* in 1872, *Tabyīn al-Kalam* (explanation of words) 1862-63, *Essays on the Life of Mohammed* (1870), and *Tafsīr-al-Qur’ān* (1880-89). He also wrote many articles in his famous Journal *Tahdhīb-al-Akhlāq* (The Refinement of Manners). All his writings reflect his desire and effort to convince Muslims not to consider western knowledge as anti-Islamic.<sup>15</sup> He was not a traditional *ālim* and was not deeply religious but was raised and trained in the traditional Muslim environment. He was eventually swayed by Western supremacy

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and accepted the dominance of the European way of life and institutions. However, his real motivation was the uplift and progress of the Muslims of India. He had come to the conclusion that the new age was defined by Western domination and Muslims must embrace modernity in order to thrive. He too faced the dilemma that Muslims are facing even to this day; embrace modernity but not lose their religion. However, he did not see any essential dichotomy between the spirit of Islam and modernity. However, according to him, the current perceptions and practices of Muslims needed to be reformed.<sup>16</sup>

Sir Syed was of the view that the root problem of the decline of India and particularly Muslim India was not British domination as assumed by thinkers and reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The root problem was the cultural, intellectual and moral decadence of the Muslim community. There was no problem with Islam but the problem was with the Muslim understanding of Islam. The real Islam, according to Sir Syed was compatible with all the cultural and intellectual advancements of European nations. Muslims in their golden age possessed characteristics and outlook like that of contemporary Europeans.<sup>17</sup>

Under the impulse of uplifting Muslims and in order to prove the harmony of Islam with modern science and modernity, he ventured into constructing a modern *Ilm al-Kalām*. In one of his addresses, he summed up this task, “Today we are, as before, in need of a modern *Ilm-al Kalām*, by which we should refute the doctrine of modern science and undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with the articles of Islamic faith. When I am endeavoring to introduce these sciences among the Muslims, then it is my duty to defend the religion of Islam, and to reveal its original bright face.”<sup>18</sup> In an effort to prove to compatibility of Islam with modern science, he derived all arguments from the traditional orthodox literature.<sup>19</sup>

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While outlining fifteen principles for his project of *Tafsīr*, he considered *Wahī* and natural law as identical.<sup>20</sup> He wrote a commentary on the Qur'ān<sup>21</sup> and introduced previously unknown novel themes in his *Tafsīr*. Sticking to the principle of *Tafsīr ul Qur'ān bil Qur'ān*,<sup>22</sup> he was very critical of classical exegetes for placing too much focus on Scholasticism, incorporating weak and fabricated Hadīths and deriving material from untrue and baseless stories of Judaism known as *Israiliyyat*. Sir Syed understood the central position of the Qur'ān in the lives of Muslims and therefore, he accepted the immutable nature of Qur'ānic text but as an apologist, he tried to justify religious dogmas of the Qur'ān in the light of modern science. He gave precedence to the scientific truths wherever he found an apparent incompatibility with science. In his quest to harmonize the meaning of Qur'ān with modern scientific discoveries, he took into consideration the parts dealing with literary aspects of the Qur'ān of classical commentaries despite his criticism on the subject matter of the exegesis. In his opinion, while interpreting the Qur'ān modern scientific inventions and discoveries must be taken into account as Qur'ān does not clash with the laws of nature. Modern scientific discoveries are the manifestations of God's promises in reality, while the Qur'ān presents God's promises in words; former is the *Word of God* while the latter is the *Work of God*. In his quest of equating laws of nature in accordance with religion, he advocated that prophets were the foremost promulgators of immutable laws of nature and the concept of miracle therefore, contradicts laws of nature. To believe in any miracle amounts to repudiation of faith and accuse God of falsehood.<sup>23</sup> Therefore anything contradicting the laws of nature is untrue. This methodology led Sir Syed to deny miracles, supernatural beings, and other.<sup>24</sup>

He opposed the literalist understanding of Qur'ānic expressions and tried to take evidence from the example of classical *ulama*. The Qur'ān often uses allegories, metaphors and indirect expression and when this happens, then if



anything contradicts common sense and human intellect, then common sense and intellect is being given precedence.<sup>25</sup> Qur'ānic descriptions which he considered 'supernatural' in their literal sense were described as metaphors and indirect expressions of reality according to him.<sup>26</sup> Classical *ulama* and exegetes could not deny miracles because of insufficient scientific advancement at that time. "However, since very little was known about pre-Islamic Arabic literature, he concluded that it was possible for words and phrases to have meanings other than those explained by lexicologists. Hence, it is imperative also to apply other sources and to accept meanings of the Qur'ān which are based on such sources, even if these are absent from the dictionaries."<sup>27</sup> He proved that the Qur'ān can never contradict the laws of nature.

Sir Syed applied western historiographical critical methodology while writing a biography of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), titled *Essays on the Life of Muḥammad* (1870) in English and *Khutbat-e-Aḥmadiyya* in Urdu, on the pattern of traditional *Seerah* writing. This discourse was primarily aimed at refuting the polemical work of William Muir's *The Life of Muḥammad*.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless it was inspired and intellectually benefited largely from manuscripts of the British Libraries and other sympathetic Western works on Islam such as that of Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). He declared that Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) sided with reason and intellect.

"We will compare his moral code with the law of Nature. We will judge it in the light of Knowledge, reason and experience that man has been able to gain. If the moral code is quite true to Nature, we shall accept the prophet as true...A French scholar has said that nobody was as truthful as the prophet Muḥammad who neither showed any miracle nor claimed a rank for himself which is beyond human nature to attain. He only claimed to be a moral preacher who taught right conduct and warned us of wrong path. For these things, he is above all comparison. His religion is a religion of Nature."<sup>29</sup>

While writing this biography in refutations of the polemical claims of Muir, he very much accepted his objections on *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah*.<sup>30</sup> This work set the pattern for the apologetic approach regarding Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH).<sup>31</sup> He accepted most of the allegations of Muir on the *Ḥadīth* tradition and tried to present the Prophet (PBUH) in a manner acceptable to Western critics.<sup>32</sup>

“He critically examined the second source of Islamic knowledge, *Sunnah* and was largely influenced by Biblical criticism of the transmission of the ḥadīth’s reports by European scholars like Carl Pfander (1803-1865) and William Muir (1819-1905), he “eventually came to reject almost all ḥadīth as unreliable.”<sup>33</sup> He did not reject *Sunnah*, even though Ḥadīth is the source through which *sunnah* is conveyed.<sup>34</sup> He believed that Qur’ān is a miracle due to its universality as it allows every generation to interpret and find meaning according to the epoch. On the other hand, tradition and Ḥadīth based interpretation limits on the meaning of Qur’ān to particular time, “thus obscuring its universality.”<sup>35</sup>

In his response to William Muir on slavery, he identified freedom and slavery as two exclusive categories which cannot exist together in divine approval. A person is born free and no one is allowed to take another man as slave. However, in earlier societies both religious and secular slavery was sanctioned. It is only a credit to Islamic tradition which not only rejected it on moral grounds but also limited it by giving incentives to release slaves. Actually, there is no place of slavery within Islam.<sup>36</sup>

Sir Syed defended *Ijtihād* and condemned *taqlīd* in unmistakable terms. In his words: “The *Ahl-i-Sunnah wal-Jama’* of the later ages have evolved the strangely erroneous concept that the principle of *ijtihād* is no longer to be acted upon and now no one can become *mujtahid*. This error in belief has done us great spiritual and worldly harm. It is, therefore, essential that we should give up this belief and resolve upon investigating all matters, whether they concern religion or worldly life. We must remember that circumstances keep on changing and we are faced

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daily with new problems and needs. If, therefore, we do not have living *mujtahids*, how shall we ask those who are dead about questions which were not material facts of life in their time. We must have a *mujtahid* of our age and time.”<sup>37</sup>

In order to bring about social reform, he issued a journal *Tahdhib ul Akhlāq* named after the ethical treatise of Ibn Miskawayh in which he made a case for adopting Western habits and manners. The journal published articles on variety of topics ranging from hygiene to dogma and rationalism. This served the dual a purpose: social reformation and breaking down of Western values as foreign. Syed wrote extensively on the concept of *Jihād* in Islam. He argued that the wars waged by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) were defensive in nature and that Islam forbids the use of violence as an instrument to convert other people. Sir Syed also emphasized that the events of 1857 could not be regarded as *Jihād* because the protected cannot wage *Jihād* against the protectors and Muslims were living under the protection of the British in India.<sup>38</sup>

Ignoring the harsh criticism towards his approach and works, Sir Syed took upon himself the onerous task of convincing young Muslims that the truthfulness and superiority of Islam towards all other creeds was never in doubt.<sup>39</sup> In order to prove this, he opted for the apologetic and defensive approach. Basit Bilal Koshul while commenting on Sir Syed writes, “In his efforts of reconstructing theology, he tried to show that there was nothing in the theology of 'true' Islam which was hostile to science and modernity in general. The result of Syed Aḥmad's religious endeavors was therefore chiefly negative: he produced an Islam which was not against modern scientific progress. Sir Syed defended Islam in a such a way that it came out as a collection of negative attributes which does not allow the oppression of women, does not allow slavery and most importantly does not oppose modern science.”<sup>40</sup> Dr Fazlur Rahman writes: “By this method he tried to show that there was nothing in the theology of 'true' Islam which was inimical to science and modernity in

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general. The result of Syed Ahmad's religious endeavors was therefore chiefly negative: he produced an Islam which was not against modern scientific progress."<sup>41</sup>

### **3. Projecting Prophet Muḥammad as Modern Progressive Leader - Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928)**

Syed Ameer Ali was a political leader and prominent Muslim historian in British India. He was disciple of Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, and carried on the tradition of Shia 'modernism.'<sup>42</sup> Syed Ameer Ali rose to higher legal position in Calcutta after receiving his education in Law from England. He was a passionate admirer of Sir Syed's thought and carried forward his apologia of Islam with intellectual zeal and fervor. He wrote *The Spirit of Islam*<sup>43</sup> which ran in six editions between 1922 and 1961 and represented the culmination of Indian Muslim apologetic approach. Besides this, *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Muḥammad*, *A Short History of the Saracens*, and *The Ethics of Islam* are his prominent intellectual works.<sup>44</sup>

The *Spirit of Islam* and the *A Short History of the Saracens* have been quite influential on the Western educated Muslim intelligentsia of India and Egypt.<sup>45</sup> Syed Ameer Ali acknowledged all the moral, social, and political democratic values of the modern West and identified them with Islam.<sup>46</sup>

He was concerned with reconstructing Islamic history and keen to present a favorable picture of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which commensurate with modern Western ideas of progress. "He recognized all the individual virtues of a modern leader of a progressive society and attributed them to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)."<sup>47</sup> His work received favorable acceptance from traditional ulama as he identified the abilities and virtues of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the concept

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of *Insan-e-Kamil* [the Perfect man] which is traditionally attributed to the life and persona of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH).<sup>48</sup>

While accepting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s dual role as Prophet and statesman, he categorizes a few of his decisions as falling within the domain of statesmanship.<sup>49</sup> The inherent dynamism of his keen intellect is certainly for People: "The mind of this remarkable Teacher [Muhammad] was, in its intellectualism and progressive ideals, essentially modern. Eternal 'striving' was in his teachings a necessity of human existence: 'Man cannot exist without constant effort'; The effort is from me, the Fulfillment comes from God.'<sup>50</sup> In his repeated comparison between Prophet Muḥammad and Jesus he established the superiority of Muhammad on Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

"... The influence of Jesus himself was least among his nearest relations. His brother never believed in him, and they even went so far as once to endeavor to obtain possession of his person, believing him to be out of his mind. Even his immediate disciples were not firm in their convictions. Perhaps his unsteadiness may have arisen from weakness of character, or it may have resulted, from the varying tone of Jesus himself; but the fact is undeniable. The intense faith and conviction on the part of the immediate followers of Mohammed is the noblest testimony to his sincerity and his utter self-absorption in his appointed task."<sup>52</sup>

In his comparison of early Islam with Christianity, he drew parallels between them as they existed in different eras. "Early Islamic quasi-democracy is with Western despotism, later Islamic scientific and cultural flowering then narrow-mindedness of Christianity, and so on."<sup>53</sup> He established Islam as the continuation and completion of previous religions through the use of examples.<sup>54</sup> Christianity remained an incomplete religion due to the brief life of Jesus and Muḥammad completed his mission and religion.

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“One thing is certain, that had a longer career been vouchsafed to him [Jesus], he would have placed his teachings on a more systematic basis. This fundamental defect in Christianity has been, in fact the real cause of the assembling of councils and convocations for the establishment of articles and dogmas which snap asunder at every slight tension of reason and free thought. The work of Jesus was left unfinished. It was reserved for another Teacher [Muḥammad] to systematize the laws of morality.”<sup>55</sup>

He asserted that Islam essentially balances the escapism and asceticism of Christianity and brings peace. His defense of Islam essentially lies in mounting a fierce attack on Christian polemicists and the Church. “The Followers of the ‘Prince of Peace’ [Jesus] burnt and ravished, pillaged and murdered promiscuously, old and young, male and female, without compunction, up to recent times. And his vicegerents on earth, popes and patriarchs, bishops, priests, presbyters, approved of their crimes and frequently granted plenary absolution for the most heinous offences.”<sup>56</sup>

This strong criticism of Christianity made the defense of Islam easier for Syed Ameer Ali. He, like other modernists of his time, also believed that certain injunctions of the Qur’ān are limited to the Prophet’s (PBUH) time and area.<sup>57</sup> Islam’s main contribution to the world is ethical humanism and Islamic ethical life if analyzed, essentially directs to live in present an ethical life fulfilling one’s duties.<sup>58</sup> He considered Pan-Islamism as brotherly love in ethical terms and it includes all humanity. His formulation of Islamic ethics is more focused on charity than justice and else.<sup>59</sup>

On the question of slavery, Ameer Ali again credits Islam for treating slaves better than they were treated in Christian society. “In Islam the slave of today is the grand vizier of tomorrow. He may marry, without discredit, his master’s daughter, and become the head of the family... Can Christianity point to such records as these?”<sup>60</sup>

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Touching upon the status of women in society, he attributed the lesser status of women in Christian societies to Christianity's asceticism. However, on polygamy he took a defensive position and argued that the Qur'ān's injunction is clearly aimed at gradual eradication of this vice which was inherited from historical tradition.<sup>61</sup> But the "stark fact remained that all this was achieved through adopting in toto modern Western standards."<sup>62</sup> He employed the original apologetic arguments that became a major part of the Muslim discourses in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as it contained all arguments in favor of Islam.<sup>63</sup>

David Samuel Margoliouth in the preface of his book *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* wrote: "The charming and eloquent treatise of Syed Ameer Ali [*The Spirit of Islam*] is probably the best achievement in the way of an apology for Mohammed that is ever likely to be composed in a European language."<sup>64</sup>

Gibbs, appraises apologetic method and credits them for restoring the "faith in Islam among doubting Muslims by demonstrating the supreme excellence of their religion. Its second function was to persuade the "old fashioned" Muslims who in their social conservatism are sinning against the light according to these apologetics."<sup>65</sup>

Syed Hossein Nasr has criticized the apologetic attitude in the following words,

"Endless arguments have been presented for the hygienic nature of Islamic rites or the egalitarian character of the message of Islam, not because such things are true if seen in the larger context of the total Islamic message. But because hygiene and egalitarianism are currently accepted ideas and norms in the West- or at least they were before the Hippie movement. By affirming such obvious and too easily defensible characteristics, the apologetics have evaded the whole challenge of the West, which threatens the heart of Islam and which no attempts to placate the enemy can avert. When surgery is needed there must be a knife, they with which to remove the infected part. Also, when error threatens religious truth, nothing can replace the

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sword of criticism and discernment. One cannot remove the negative effect of error by making peace with it and pretending to be its friend.”<sup>66</sup>

In the words of Wilfred Cantwell, “These kinds of writings hardly recognized that need in all its profundity, nor began to grasp how vast a transformation was required in the forms and paraphernalia of religion if it is to cross effectively the appalling chasm that separated modern man from it today.”<sup>67</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

It is easy to vilify or disagree with the approach of the early apologetics but one must understand the spirit of the times in which these men operated. They were witnessing what seemed to be unstoppable rise of the Western world and the fall of Islamic countries politically, intellectually and socially. How had this come about? Of course, through the loss of power of the church, the rise of European democracy, scientific advancement, and so forth? And what were the Muslims doing? Craving for a return to their lost glory but not taking any steps to reclaim their high pedestal! Can we really blame these men for trying to give Muslims a reality check – that nostalgia alone won’t uplift Muslims. They needed to wake up and adapt to the changing times and that meant, in their view, to learn and adopt whatever needed to be adopted from the very civilization that had crushed them.

In retrospect, Sir Syed’s contribution in the field of education and in creating awareness in relation to modernity is certainly laudable. He wanted Muslims not to reject science and progress in the name of faith but to make way to accommodate this with their faith. In similar vein, Syed Ameer’s Ali’s influential work on the life of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) impacted the whole lot of western oriented Muslims who ultimately took pride in Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). However, the fact cannot be denied that this apologetic approach made the defense of Islam easier



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but it was done in the light of modern science and every possible argument was used to prove the compatibility of Islam with progress and modern rationalism. The incidents from the Prophet's (PBUH) life were interpreted to fit into the modern scheme of things. It seemed that Islam was trying to catch up rather than lead and that was never really acceptable to the majority of ordinary Muslims who were, and still are, fiercely holding on to the tenets of their faith. The apologetic tradition did give a push in the right direction and restored a semblance of pride but that does not vindicate its proponents from the potent criticism levelled against it, namely, that its defense of Islam was through Western lens only.

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- 17 Aziz Ahmed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 41-44.
- 18 B. A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1957), 139.
- 19 Basit Bilal Koshul, "Recounting the Milestones: An Appraisal of Islam's Encounter with Modernity," Part II, 73; B. A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 221-226.
- 20 Aziz Ahmed, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*, 42-43.
- 21 Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Tafseer-ul-Qur'ān m'aa Tahrir fi usul al Tafseer* (Lahore: Dost Associates, 1994).
- 22 B. A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 140.
- 23 Aziz Ahamd, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*, 46.
- 24 "He explained the miracles of Prophet Musa (AS) splitting the Red Sea that a ford was developed when Musa (AS) reached the shore of the sea and eventually closed to engulf Pharaoh and his army. Regarding the miraculous birth of Prophet Isa (AS), Sir Syed argued that he was born of natural parents. He explained the "chasteness" of Maryam (SA) that is emphasized in the Qur'ān as being the absolute fidelity to her husband. He also denied the existence of jins and angels. He explained the Qur'ānic assertion regarding the existence of jinns as being a reference to "uncivilized" people or to man's propensity for evil." In Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, *Tafseer-ul-Qur'ān m'aa Tahrir fi usul al Tafseer*, 39-51, 52.
- 25 Aziz Ahamd, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*, 45-49.
- 26 Nasr Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought – A Critical Historical Analysis*, 30.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 30.
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- 29 Tahdhib al-Akhlaq, vol. II, 118-124 cited in B. A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 176.

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- 30 Jonathan A C Brown, *Hadith – Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: One world Publications, 2009), 205.
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- 33 Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 33.
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- 35 *Ibid.*, 28.
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- 37 Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 449, cited in Shaukat Ali, *Islam and the Challenges of Modernity: An Agenda for the Twenty First Century*, 61.
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- 41 Fazlur Rahman, “Muslim Modernism in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 21, No. 1/3 (1958): 83.
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