

MUHAMMAD ABDUH'S RELIGIO-POLITICAL IDEAS OF REFORMATION

By:

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Abstrak

Artikel ini memfokuskan pembentangan tentang idea-idea reformasi yang dikemukakan oleh Shaykh Muhammad Abduh dalam bidang sosio-keagamaan dan sosio-politik yang terpancar dalam pemikiran pembaharuannya hasil dari pengamatan terhadap situasi kemunduran dan kelemahan umat Islam berdepan dengan penjajahan dan penguasaan Barat. Hasilnya Shaykh Muhammad Abduh mencadangkan agar dilakukan reformasi-modenisasi khususnya yang melibatkan beberapa aspek utama pemikiran Islam, sama ada aspek dalaman ataupun luaran seperti pembebasan pemikiran dari taklid buta, membuka seluas-luasnya ruang ijtihad, reformasi pendidikan dan penggunaan Bahasa Arab dan mencadangkan bagaimana seharusnya respons umat Islam terhadap cabaran Barat (penyeruan kepada pan-Islamism, al-Shūra, al-Watan dan hak-hak pemerintah dan rakyat).

INTRODUCTION

Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1260-1322 A.H. / 1849-1905 A.D.) was a dominant personality in Egypt and Muslim world during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He was regarded as an architect of Islamic Modernism¹ and one of the most

¹ Prof. Esposito calls him, the Father of Islamic Modernism, J.L. Esposito (1985), *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p. 48. To get a brief ideas of modernism, I quote some of the definitions put forward by the well-known scholars:

Islamic Modernism, essentially refers to those Muslim scholars or religious thinkers who having acknowledged the position of inferiority of Islam *vis a vis* the West in the nineteenth century, then argue for active rectification of the *status quo ante* and the restoration of Islamdom to positions of power.

C.C. Adams writes: Muhammadan Modernism ... constitutes an attempt to free the religion of Islam from the shackles of a too rigid orthodoxy, and to accomplish

prominent Islamic reformers.² He was also described as a nationalist who influenced and inspired, not only the whole school of thinkers and reformers, including many graduates of al-Azhar University, but a number of non-Egyptians and non-Muslims as well.³ From the achievements and contributions that Abduh made, all over the Islamic world especially concerning the programme of Islamic reformation, he was

reforms which will render it adaptable to the complex demands of modern life. Its prevailing character is that of religious reform. It is inspired and dominated chiefly by theological considerations, C.C. Adams (1968), *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, New York: Russel I & Russell, p. 1.

Muslim modernists, according to F. Rahman, "those who have made an articulate and conscious effort to reformulate Islamic values and principles in terms of modern thought or to integrate modern thought and institutions with Islam," Fazlur Rahman (1979), *Islam*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 222.

Gibb writes of the modernists: Those who do care, and sometimes care deeply, about their religion but who are, in various degrees, offended by the traditional dogmatics and by the insistence of the conservatives upon the sanctity of the traditional institutions in the Muslim world. For the majority the issues in dispute are mainly those relating to the practical duties and the social institutions of Islam. See, H.A.R Gibb (1972), *Modern Trends in Islam*, New York: Octagon Books, p. 11.

Ibrahim Abu Bakar tries to show a slight difference between modernism and reformism: Even though Islamic modernism shared some of the characteristics of Islamic reformism, it is also differed from Islamic reformism in certain aspects. Islamic reformism was concerned only with reformism but Islamic modernism was concerned with both reformism and modernism. However, while Islamic reformism responded to the internal problems of the Muslim community, Islamic modernism responded to both internal and external threats to the Muslim community. See, Ibrahim Abu Bakar (1994), *Islamic Modernism in Malaya: The Life and Thought of Sayid Syekh al-Hadi 1867-1934*, Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya Press, p. 28.

² In Arabic, a few words synonymously and interchangeably used to describe 'reformation' are *Islāh* and *Tajdīd*. Al-Maududi defines *Tajdīd* is striving with a view to bringing about the revival of Islam in all its various aspects and its true form and spirit against modernization and innovation. See, Sayyid Abu al-'Ala al-Maududi (1963), *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, Lahore: Islamic Publication, p. vii.

³ Many studies had been made by researchers concerning the impact of Abduh's reformation thought in Islamic world and especially in Nusantara, for example Mohamad Aboulkhir Zaki (1965), *Modern Muslim Thought in Egypt and Its Impact on Islam in Malaya*, (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of London; Sidek Fadzil, *Ash-Shaykh Muhammad Abduh: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis Terhadap Pemikirannya dan Rumusan Mengenai Pengaruhnya Dalam Masyarakat Melayu*, M.A thesis, Univ. Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1997/98); Hamka (1958), *Pengaruh Muhammad Abduh di Indonesia*, Djakarta: Tintamas, and others.

given the honorary title *al-Ustādh al-Imām* (the Master and the Guide)⁴ by some Muslim scholars and thinkers. His tireless effort in reformation could be seen in four main fields; theology, politics, culture, Arabic language and educational system. Politically, he announced the independent movements and Muslim nationalism from North Africa to Southeast Asia⁵ influencing not only the Arabs but the Indonesians and Malays.

For the purpose of better understanding of Abduh's thought, I will sketch in brief, his childhood and the background of Egyptian society at that moment. Muhammad Abduh belonged to an Egyptian modest peasant family, he was born in 1849 in a village in the Nile Delta (lower Egypt).⁶ Abduh received an early religious education from his parents who were a devout people of a good character although not formally attending any formal education. He learned al-Qur'an and completely memorized it before he reached the age of nine. At the age of thirteen (1862), he went to study at the theological school of Ahmadi Mosque in the city of Tanta and completed at the University of al-Azhar. He studied many subjects in Islamic sciences including theology, logics, philosophy, and mysticism. In his twenties, while he a student at al-Azhar University he came completely under the influence of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1837-1897 A.D.), a man who travelled in many parts of the Islamic world enchanting Muslims to unite in order to resist the influence of Europe and the West.⁷

During the 1870s the spirit of nationalism and sense of belonging emerged widely among the Egyptian nations. It was expressed in the periodical *al-Ahrām* in which Abduh wrote reflecting al-Afghani's political views, and also criticizing the growth of foreign influences and the corruption of local rulers. In view of these criticisms, al-Afghani was expelled from Egypt in 1879 by the ruler, Khedive Tawfiq,

⁴ The title that given to Abduh by his disciple, follower and biographer, Shaykh Rashid Ridha, see Elie Kedourie (1966), *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., p. 1.

⁵ John L. Esposito (ed.) (1986), *Introduction: Islam and Muslims Politics in Voices of Resurgent Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 6.

⁶ According to 'Abd 'Ati Muhammad, his full name is Muhammad 'Abduh Hasan Khairullah. Specifically, he was born in the village Mahallah Nāsr, Syubrahkhit province of Buhairah in Egypt, in Abdul Shukor Husin (undated), *Tajdid dan Reformasi: Menurut Perspektif Muhammad Abduh*, Bangi: Jabatan Usuluddin dan Falsafah, p. 7.

⁷ William M. Watt (1988), *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, London & New York: Routledge, p. 14.

Abduh was dismissed from his teaching post at Dar al-'Ulum and sent to his village⁸ for association with al-Afghani. In 1880 Abduh was called back to Cairo by Riyadh Pasha (Prime Minister of Egypt) to be the editor of the official gazette *al-Waqā'i' al-Misriyyah* (The Realities of Egypt) in which he published a number of articles calling for reformation in various fields such as political, religious, and social reform. As a writer, he played an important role in forming public opinion through a series of articles on the social and political order, particularly on national education.⁹ Referring to Lord Cromer's (British Resident in Egypt from 1883-1907) opinion, "Muhammad Abduh was one of the leading spirit of the (national) movement".¹⁰

Opposing the revolutionary violence of the nationalists led by al-'Urabi (Revolt), Abduh, nevertheless took the side against the Khedive who openly collaborated with British. Consequently, after the al-'Urabi rebellion was crushed and the British occupied Egypt in 1882, Abduh was sent into exile for a few years. After a short stay in Beirut he rejoined his old mentor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Paris and collaborated with al-Afghani on a number of activities, including the publication of a popular journal *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā* (The Firmest Bond).¹¹ This journal lasted for 18 issues in 1884 and Abduh went to Beirut again, where he taught in an Islamic school. In 1886, he returned to Cairo and devoted himself to reform within the existing political and religious framework.¹² Then, he was appointed as a judge of the Shari'a Courts (Native Tribunals) in 1888, and after that, he seems to be less interested in the political endeavour and became interested merely in educational and legal reforms. From 1889 to 1905 he was appointed as a Grand Mufti of Egypt (jurisconsult) and had considerable political influence.¹³ Malcolm H. Kerr explains about Abduh's involvement in politics as follows: 'after taking much interest in politics in his early years he underwent a change in attitude and confined his writing to social, religion,

⁸ Albert Habib Hourani (1970), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 133.

⁹ A.P. Hourani (1970), *Arabic Thought*, p. 133.

¹⁰ Charles C. Adams (1933), *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, New York: Russell & Russell reprinted 1968 p. 53. Taken from *Modern Egypt: The Earl of Cromer*, London, 1911, 1, p. 255.

¹¹ *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, (ed. Mircea Eliade), vol. 1 (1986), New York: Mac-Millan, pp 5-6. See word "Abduh".

¹² P.J. Vatikiotis (1980), *The History of Egypt*, second edition, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, p. 194.

¹³ W.M. Watt (1988), *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, p.15.

and judicial matters'.¹⁴

BACKGROUND OF THE EGYPTIAN SOCIETY

'Abdul 'Ati Muhammad categorizes three main factors of the situation in the Egyptian society at that time which have a great impact in Abduh's attitude and thought; society, knowledge and culture, and politics. I'll try to summarize the background of his society in specific and the Muslim ummah in general, comprising economic, politic and sosio-culture in a few points:

a. There is no doubt that under the Ottoman Turks, the Egyptians had reached a very low political and cultural level of development. They seem to remain more or less Medieval or pre-modern up to the beginning of 19th century in many aspects of their life. H.A.R. Gibb's opinions in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire that, "the keystone of Ottoman administration was conservation, and all government institutions were directed to maintain the *status quo*,"¹⁵ lacking any real consideration for the welfare of Egyptians.

b. In economic sector, the agricultural activities contributed most of the Egypt products but the mode of production remained unchanged or basically the same as those prevailing in the Medieval time, except minor alterations in urban areas. However, from the early nineteenth century onwards, the Western impact generally felt particularly in economic system. The growth of British industry in this period served to bring about fundamental changes in the Egyptians' social polity. The process of industrialisation spread gradually as a result of the increased inflow of British manufactured goods in the Egyptian market.¹⁶ The Egyptian society underwent profound social and economic transformations. All systems by which Egyptians ordered their lives were greatly affected during this period by the frantic attempts of the Khedive Ismail (1863-1879) to make Egypt "a part of Europe" by extensive activities of a vast largely foreign entrance. He founded new businesses, opened modern schools, brought Western technology and introduced new organisations by the policies of a reforming British administration that controlled Egypt after 1882, and by the effort of

¹⁴ Malcolm P. Kerr (1966), *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 146.

¹⁵ P.A.R. Gibb and P. Bowen (1950-57 & 1962), *Islamic Society and the West*, vol. 1, part 1. London: Oxford University Press, p. 200. Cited in Khaldun S. Al-Husry (1966), *Three Reformers: A Study in Modern Arab Political Thought*, Beirut: Khayats, p. 2.

¹⁶ Daniel Crecelius, "The Course of Secularization in Modern Egypt," in J.L. Esposito (1980) (ed), *Islam and Development: Religion and Socio-Political Change*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 49-70.

a modernizing native elite.¹⁷ Another important change in Egyptian society was the increase of foreign influences, accompanied by immigration of foreigners. Foreign interests in Egypt was the result of the great financial and economic opportunities connected with the cotton-boom and manifold projects of the Ismail government.

Unfortunately, the modernization in economic sector that Muhammad Ali and Ismail have done by introducing the new law of land (The Law of Said) which gave absolute power to the government in taking over the lands, increase the taxes and as well as open the door to land-lord (feudalism system) in monopolizing the farmers' land¹⁸ arouse the farmers' anger who felt that they were victims of corrupt rulers. Apparently, the government policy also brought new economic and political developments through the monopolization policy and the domination of the British in Egypt resulted in the inferiority image of the Muslims in general *vis-a-vis* the West consequently the whole process of Egyptian political thinking in 19th century based on the feeling of superiority of Europe and the desire to catch up with it.

c. In another aspect, the great progress in socio-economic give an impetus to the change of attitudes, values, habits, and beliefs specifically among the urban social groups and native Egyptian elites who have contacts with foreigners. Hisham Sharabi mentions: "The dawning of critical consciousness brought about the disintegration of the old system thought: the habit of single way minded thinking began to disappear, fixed categories to crumble, and divergent modes of thought to emerge".¹⁹

Furthermore, this development built up the conflict between two methods of thoughts: traditional and modern. The resistance of traditional ulamas from the process of modernization mainly based on the argument that most of the new ideas do not fit Islam. Conversely, the modern educated people were extremely astonishing with European civilization and easily accepted all things which come from the West as good without censorship. Some of them accused religion and tradition as an obstacle and impediment to the needed programmes and actions connected with development and change. Against both of the above thoughts Abduh offered new dimension in pragmatic measures which were derived from the Islamic principles. Abduh recognized the diversities and shortcomings of the Egyptian society during that time and

¹⁷ Daniel Crecelius, *The Course of Secularization in Modern Egypt*, p. 50.

¹⁸ Abdul 'Ati Muhammad, transl. by Abdul Shukor Husin, *Tajdid dan Reformasi: Menurut Perspektif Muhammad Abduh*, p. 19-23

¹⁹ Hisham Sharabi (1970), *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years 1875-1914*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, p. 3.

offered both criticism and constructive suggestions in his writings and lectures. He talked on a wide variety of topics, some at length and some more in brief, but the central themes were religious and political: how to bring about the revival of Islam, how to deal with the treat of European civilization, how to strengthen ties between the nations of the Muslim world and how to bring about pan-Islamic unity. To keep in mind, it would be difficult to try to present Abduh's political ideas in a systematic structure because his views were fragmentary, changeable and even contradictory according to the situation.

RELIGIO-POLITICAL IDEAS OF REFORMATION

Abduh's religio-political thought in many respects were a reflection of the circumstances of his environment. In his early days, he concentrated on the politics of Egypt and looked upon the problems of Egypt in term of national interest transcending religions and racial boundaries. He conceived, like al-Afghani, world politics as a struggle between an aggressive West and a victim East (Egypt). Abduh reformation was to protect the Muslims society in general and the Egyptians in particular by responding to the Western challenge in a "positive way". It strove to re-institute and strengthen their Islamic truth, but at the same time, not to expose it to free criticism. In this way, reformism focused on the essentially conservative and restorative effort to bring back the faithful to the "straight path". Abduh's paradigm was primarily based on the argument that religion is an important component of any socio-political system (one that can neither be ignored nor easily done away with). On this count, Abduh belief the principles of Islam must be properly understood to avoid any inconsistencies with scientific facts.²⁰ Islam in its essence was as valid as ever, only the Muslim's understanding of it was wrong; this Muslim backwardness was not caused by Islam but rather by the Muslim's ignorance of its truth.²¹ He realized that there is a strong link between political decline with moral and religion, and stressing the importance of modernizing society which could be carried out only by learning from Europe. He accepted the principle of borrowing, while insisting that secular reform (i.e., social and political reform) should go hand in hand with religious (i.e., spiritual

²⁰ Seyyed Vali Reza N. Nasr (1985), *Religious Modernism and its Echo in the Political Development of the Islamic World*, *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. VIII, No. 3, p. 3-41. Abduh believes that "in Islam there had never existed a dichotomy between faith and reason as in the West", p. 15.

²¹ Hisham Sharabi (1970), *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, p. 27.

and moral).²² From the religious point of view, his aim was, firstly:

To liberate thought from the shackles of imitation (*taqlīd*) and understanding religion as it was understood by the community before dissension appeared: to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, which has created in order to prevent excess or adulteration in religion. So that God's wisdom may be fulfilled and the order of the human world preserved: and to prove that, seen in this light, religion must be accounted a friend to science, pushing man to investigate the secrets of existence, summoning him to respect establish truth and to depend on them in his moral life and conduct.²³

He wanted to free the Muslims mind from shackles of "taqlīd" (blind acceptance) and demonstrated the compatibility of Islam with modernity. The decadence of the Muslim world lies in the incorporation of alien elements into Islam, excessive asceticism - saint worship and mixing up the essentials of Islam and trivial aspects. For him, the cure for the ills of Muslim societies lay in a return to true Islam through the recovering of its essentials in the al-Qur'an and Sunnah and interpretation of those texts in the light of modern times. Besides that, the Muslims need to modernize the Islamic law and introduce the ethical and philosophical learning, which would enable them to appreciate the vitality of reason. He attributed the stagnation of Muslim society to *taqlīd* the dead weight of scholasticism:

We must, however, believe, that the Islamic religion is a religion of unity throughout. It is not a religion of conflicting principles but is built squarely on reason, while divine revelation is its purest pillar ... the Qur'an directs us, enjoining rational procedure and intellectual inquiry into the manifestations of the universe It forbids us to be slavishly credulous Well is it said that traditionalism can have evil consequences as well as good ...²⁴

Muhammad Abduh reformation of thought basically referred to traditional starting points in terms of inference the intellectual and spiritual inertia of traditionalism. He argued that the positive and pragmatic aspects could still be derived from Islamic teachings but the rational approach and analysis must be a precondition in interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Secondly, Abduh, persistently encouraged the Muslim to exercise the *ijtihād* in

²² Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West*: , p. 27. From Rashid Ridha, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh* 1, p. 309.

²³ Albert Habib Hourani (1991), *A History of the Arab Peoples*. London: Faber Press, p. 308. From Rashid Ridha, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh* I, II.

²⁴ J.L. Esposito (1994), *Islam: The Straight Path*, Oxford, p. 129.

order to produce fresh interpretations of Islam and to demonstrate the relevance and validity of Islam for modern life. The exercising the *ijtihād*, as Abduh saw, was not simply to use reason to get back to original interpretations of Islam covered over by 'ulamā' scholasticism, but boldly re-interpreted Islam in the light of its revealed sources. Thus, it is not strange that, Abduh went so far to say: "in case of conflict between reason and the apparent meaning of the sacred text, reason will have priority over the letter of the text; the text shall, therefore, require a metaphorical interpretation when the literal interpretation conflict with reason".²⁵ Abduh prolongs his argument to claim that revelation (*wahy*) and reason are complementary ways to reach truth, then each of them to a certain extent work at different levels instead.

Lastly, the Muslim hardly ever able to distinguish between the essentials and in-essentials of religion, so to speak the prevalence of un-Islamic popular religious belief and practices among Muslim throughout the world; saint worship, intercession, and miracles, and the stifling of creativity and dynamism to Sufi passivity and fatalism. All these factors could cause the degeneration and backwardness of Muslim, despite the fact the real Islam, Abduh maintained, had a simple doctrinal structure: it consisted of certain belief about the greatest questions of human life, and certain general principles of human conduct which are immutable and others of fast majority of regulations concerned with social affair (*mu'āmalat*) were open to change. Abduh's opinions on *tawhīd* would be seen clearly from his famous book *Risālah al-Tawhīd* (Treatise on Oneness).

Now, let us examine the reformation ideas of Abduh's relating to his political thoughts and activities. However, it would be good to keep in mind from the beginning that his political views which we will disclose, suitable only for Abduh's early life and career at the young age during his contact with al-Afghani and became al-Afghani's disciple.²⁶ After, Abduh was exiled from Egypt between 1882-1888 (during this period he teach in Syria and stay in France) and return to Cairo, his thoughts and efforts were drawn increasingly toward education and renewal of Islamic theology.²⁷ Even though, to the certain extent, there was an essential difference between

²⁵ 'Uthmān Amīn (1944), *Muḥammad 'Abduh*, Qaherah, p. 91.

²⁶ Muhammad Abduh seems to have accepted al-Afghani's reformist ideas and political activism before and immediately after the Urabi Revolt of 1882, but once he returned to Egypt, specifically after 1888, he devoted himself to reform within the existing political and religious framework. (Charles D. Smith (1983), *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 18).

²⁷ J.L. Esposito (e.d) (1995), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Muslim World*, jil. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 11.

Abduh's programme and that of al-Afghani, the latter was a revolutionary who aimed at a forcible upheaval, Abduh, on the other hand, held that no political revolution could take the place of a gradual transformation of mentality.

Abduh's in his political call, presenting a concept of *al-Waṭan* as a weapon to unite the whole Egyptian. In one important article entitled *al-Ḥayāh al-Siyāsah* (The Political Life) published in November 1881, Abduh made a passionate call for national unity. In it, he described the concept of *al-Waṭan* as follows: The word *al-Waṭan* as used by those who study politics means the place after which you are called, where your right is safeguarded, and the claim on you is known, where you are secure in yourself, your kin and possession. It has been said: there is no *al-Waṭan* without freedom.²⁸ He declared that loyalty to the *al-Waṭan* was based on three things: "first, that it is the place of residence in which food, shelter, family and children exist: secondly, that it is the place of right and duties upon which political life revolves and thirdly, it is the place to which the person belongs and from which the individual derives glory or shame".²⁹ Then, in order to attract the people to love *al-Waṭan*, Abduh as A.H. Hourani advocates in his book *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, published an article in *al-Aḥram* which I quote;

... talks of the great past of the kingdom of Egypt and he always conscious that the common history and interests of those who lived in the same country created a deep bond between them in spite of differing faiths. The sense of the important of unity, which affected his view of Islamic reform, coloured also his view of the nation. Unity, he maintained, was necessary in political life, and the strongest type of unity was that those who shared the same country - not only the place they lived in but the locus of their public right and duties, the object of their affection and pride. Non-Muslims belonged to the nation in exactly the same way as Muslims, and thus should there be good relations between those who differed in religion.³⁰

The call for national consciousness and patriotism of Egyptian people by Abduh, not only confine to Muslim community but also to the Jews and the Christians who are the citizen of Egypt. Osman Amin explains further about Abduh's

²⁸ Mahmudul Haq (1970), *Muhammad Abduh: A Study of a Modern Thinker of Egypt*, Aligarh: Islamic Studies Publisher, p. 22, From *Tarikh al-Ustadh*, II, p. 194.

²⁹ Zaki Badawi (1976), *The Reformers of Egypt: A Critique of al-Afghani, Abduh and Ridha*, U.K.: The Open Press, p. 15.

³⁰ A. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 156, In *Tarikh al-Ustadh*, II, 15 p. 195-195.

view on other religions by saying that, "Muhammad Abduh together with Mirza Baqir founded a secret religio-political society which the objective was to unite the Islamic, Christian and Jewish faiths, to work towards a peaceful association of the adherents of these religions, and to co-operate in relieving the East of the pressure exerted by the West. This society attracted a number of Englishman, Jews and politician such as Mu'ayyad al-Mulk (a Persian Minister) and Hasan Khan (an adviser to the Persian consulate in Constantinople)"³¹

Proofs show that Abduh, played an important role in the Urabi Revolt in 1881; the articles which were written a few months before the rebellion played a considerable role in sowing the seeds of patriotism, he was also known as the spokesman and go-between of its leaders, and he was accused of administering unlawful oaths.

Abduh goes to speak about the rights and duties of the people *vis a vis* the rulers. He called Egyptian people to know their rights over their rulers (although the Egyptian nation have no or less idea of it) and vice versa. Muhammad al-Bahi cites:

دعونا الى الاعتقاد بأن الحاكم وان وجبت طاعته، هو من البشر الذين .
يخطئون، وتغلبهم شهواتهم، وأنه لا يرده عن خطئه، ولا يوقف طغيان شهوته
الا نصح الأمة له، بالقول والفعل.³²

Abduh's ideal government was more or less like that of medieval jurists. The just ruler ruling in accordance with a law and in consultation with the leaders of the people (*al-Shūra*), thus he wrote about (*al-Shūra*) in an attempt to prove the early Islamic tradition is equivalent to the modern system of national assembly or constitutional institutions. His attempt to relate constitutional advancement to Islam was perhaps motivated by his own need to relate development to well-founded traditional beliefs whenever possible. Rashid Ridha, the disciple of Abduh, noted that Abduh was the first person in Egypt after the exile of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī to raise his voice in favour of a national assembly and for putting limitations on the powers of the rulers:

³¹ Osman Amin (1953), *Muhammad Abduh*, transl. Charless Wendell, Washington D.C: American Council of Learned Societies, p. 72.

³² Muhammad al-Bahi (1970), *al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Hadīth wa Ṣilatuh bi al-Isti'mār al-Gharbī*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, p.123. Translation: We summoned it to believe that the ruler, even if it owes him obedience, is still human, liable to err and to be overcome by passion, and nothing can divert him from error or resist the domination of his passion except the advice of the people in word and deed.

Here, it must be noted that whereas Tahtawi³³ in previous years suggested that constitutional institutions did not conflict with Islamic tradition, Abduh has gone far to claim not merely lack of conflict but complete identity. The consultation or *al-Shūra* of the past was to be the consultative assembly of the present.³⁴

In practice when Abduh talked about the need for representative government and limited powers of the executive, he wanted this to become reality through a gradual process in the long term via training and education, because he did not believe that Egypt was yet ready for it. That is the reason why Abduh seems to support the despotic regime of Riyadh Pasha and rejected the Urabi party demand for the representative form of government. Abduh also believed that the Urabi party was motivated not by national cause but by the interests of the military junta. He was convinced that if any representative government was created under the shadow of the army, it could not become the instrument of the people's will. Urabi would use the members of parliament for the furtherance of his personal aims just as he had used members of the army for the same purpose.³⁵ In short, Abduh preferred the authoritarian type of government to a representative form so long as the people were unprepared to receive it. This is clear when he criticised the hotheads who wished constitutional government to be implemented at once.³⁶ In Abduh's mind, the Muslims must prepared themselves for it and the first essential thing to do is educating the people, so that the cadres might raised and carry out the responsibilities of a representative government to resort to follow justice and effect reform. In theory, the people and the government must be accustomed to discuss matters relating to public welfare and to consult each other by means of special council formed in the provinces and governorates.

Regarding the government under the constitution concept, neither the Shariah nor the juristic doctrine of Muslim scholars provide a specific pattern. Since there is no consensus on the essential features of such a state, the matter must, therefore, remain open to initiative and *ijtihad* among the statesmen and scholars in elaborating the themes and attributes of an Islamic polity. Thus, to justify the idea of government

³³ Rifa'i R. al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), the Egyptian scholar who was the first Arab to study in Paris in the 1825. He return to Egypt in 1831 with the intention of disseminating what he had learned in Europe (France).

³⁴ Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt: A Critique of Al-Afghani, Abduh and Ridha*, p. 16.

³⁵ Mahmudul Haq, *Muhammad Abduh: A Study of a Modern Thinker of Egypt*, p. 19. From *Tarikh al-Ustadh* 1, p. 202.

³⁶ Zaki Badawi, *Three Reformers of Egypt*, p. 14.

by consultation and representation, Abduh interpreted the traditional theory of the Caliphate. He contends that, the caliph, in accordance with the Qur'anic injunction to the prophet on consultation, is obliged to consult his subjects. From the purely theoretical point of view the following wordings of the *al-Shūra* support the contention of the obligation of the ruler to take counsel. These are "and consult them in matters, but when thou hast determined, put thy trust in God" (49:13 and 42:38). The practice of democratic consultation in principle allows any Muslim community to choose the best means to suit its requirements according to time and place. For instance, one community may decide to choose its leaders by direct election while other groups may prefer indirect elections by nominated representatives. However, Mazheruddin Siddiqi in his book, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World*, makes a comment on *al-Shūra* principal that Abduh and Rashid Ridha put forward on the ground that, it is not very clear and systematic:

He adheres to the institution of *Shūra* but he does not make it clear whether his *Shūra* will be nominated by the ruler or it will be elected by the people and whether the ruler would be bound by the verdict of the majority *Shura*. Similarly, he does not explain how the ruler will be deposed. If he rules unjustly, who will depose him and by what method?³⁷

In another view point, Abduh believes in just dictatorship. The just dictator will compel the people to observe justice among themselves. If the people do not follow their real interest, the just dictator will make them follow the path which is beneficial for them. He will not tread a step without looking to the interests of the people he governs. When the people have received proper training and are fit for freedom, representative institutions will be established in a gradual manner. First, municipal bodies will be formed, after a few years advisory councils to be established. Last of all will follow representatives assemblies. Fifty years will suffice for the completion of this process and then the people will enjoy their full rights.³⁸ On this issue also, Abduh does not treat it sufficiently, there is no idea how and what process the just dictator will come to power, whether by means of an election or revolution.

Finally we turn to the idea of Pan-Islamism and Caliphate which is genuinely propagated and popularized by al-Afghānī, Abduh's master, that he follows enthusiastically promoting throughout the Muslim world to strengthen the ties. Most European scholars and statesmen perceived Pan-Islamism to be a reactionary movement, a revival of Islamic fanaticism, a combination of Muslims under the leadership

³⁷ Mazheruddin Siddiqi (1982), *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World*, Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, p. 118.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

of the Turks which they saw as trying to rage aggressively against the European powers. On the other hand, Muslim intellectuals tend to look upon Pan-Islamism as essentially progressive movement, a perception of the increasing dangers to Islam from European penetration, and a movement aimed at uniting all Muslims in order to ensure free development of their intellectual and moral faculties.³⁹

At the same time, however, it must be made clear that Abduh in line with al-Afghani also supported the idea of a sort of nationalism; *Jinsiyyah* and *Waṭaniyyah* as already showed earlier. Both ideas could be interpreted as contradictory, if the reader did not understand the situation and context of Abduh experience and struggle, in order to 'reconcile' these apparent clashes. For example, the journal of *al-Urwah al-Wuthqā*, frequently published the opinion of al-Afghani stressing the importance of Islamic unity and solidarity of Muslim:

The Muslims had once followed their religion devoutly, and their state was strong, so that the foreigner had no hold over them because the religion preserved their unity and imbued them with solidarity ... it was the Islamic religion which earlier solidarity endowed the disunited Arab tribes with a strong enough solidarity and *esprit de corps* to enable them to conquer and maintain a powerful empire in less than eighty years. This empire decline and disappeared, in due course, but the reason was not that the Muslims had become fewer in number: on the contrary, their numbers were never greater than when they lost their power. Rather, the decline in power was to be attributed to the weakening of the influence of religion in the soul of the Arabs, a religion which had been able, better than any feeling of race and kinship, to unify them and make them into a great conquering force.⁴⁰

Clearly we can point out that, the call for *al-Waṭan* as a bond was now superseded by religion. The religious bond between them (the Muslims) is stronger than those of race and language. He argued that the *Ukhuwwah* (Brotherhood) of Islam obliterates racial and national boundaries and constitutes a bond which united all Muslims as one community. Thus, in one of his articles under the caption "nationality" (*al-Jinsiyyah*) and the Religion of Islam Abduh vigorously condemned the idea of racialism or nationalism. Nationalism or racialism, Abduh wrote, is not a natural

³⁹ Mohammad Redzuan Othman, "Afghani's Pan-Islamic Ideas and the Turks' Appeals: The Perception, and Influence on Malay Political Thought," *International Conference on Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the Asian Renaissance*, Institute for Policy Research (IKD), 23 Feb. 1998.

⁴⁰ Haifaa Jawad, "Pan Islamism in the Middle East" in *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. XXXVII, No. 3, 1993.

feeling based on human nature but only an acquired state of feeling and the Islamic feeling transcend all the feeling of nationality.⁴¹ This concept could be justified, firstly in terms of utility, that is to say as the only possible way to unite the inhabitants of the country and propagating the national awareness to defend themselves from enemy threats. Secondly, the main purpose of Islam is common good to everybody regardless of religion and race and he believed, Islam regulates in detail the rights and duties of all in just and fair: Muslims or non-Muslims and also rulers and subjects.

Besides that, the feeling of superiority of European power over Muslim brought Abduh to worry that the spread of Pan-Islamism sentiment and manifestations may bring the wrath of Europe on a defenceless Muslim community. This is clear when he counselled the Muslims in Tunisia and Algeria to avoid political resistance against France and advised them to concentrate their efforts on education and social reform.

Concerning the Caliphate system, Abduh firmly believed that, the restoration of this classical system, would solve the problem of Muslim umma. This system also, is the only hope of preserving the unity and identity of Islam as well as guarding it against its enemies. In a letter addressed to the Sultan Abdul Hamid (Syeikh al-Islam) in Constantinople in 1886, Abduh according to Charles C. Adams strongly holds that "the preservation of the Ottoman Empire to be the third article of belief after the belief in God and in its prophet, because it alone protects the religion of Islam and guarantees the existence of its domains: 'this is our belief, praise to be God: in it we live and in it we will die', therefore, it is a mistake to suppose that regard for the Islamic caliphate arises from any other sentiment than that due to their religion: it does not come from the name of the fatherland or the welfare of the country or any other such high-sounding phrases".⁴² On the contrary, it is important to note that, Abduh personally was aware of the oppressive nature of the Ottoman government, and Rashid Ridha records remark on the Ottoman caliphate privately made by Abduh in 1897, in which Abduh declared that he gave no credence to Sultan Abdul Hamid's claim to the title of caliph because the claim was motivated only by his personal ambitions and desires to increase his prestige in European eyes not by any love for Islam.⁴³ Yet despite this realisation on Abduh's part, it was his firm conviction however defective the Ottoman Caliphate might be. It was, nevertheless, the only living institutions available to the Muslims to defend themselves from the grow-

⁴¹ Mahmudul Haq, *Muhammad Abduh: A Study of a Modern Thinker of Egypt*, p. 27.

⁴² C.C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p. 62. From *Tarikh al-Ustadh*, II, p. 359.

⁴³ Malcolm P. Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, p. 148.

ing menace of the European power. "I too, hate the caliph Sultan Abdul Hamid", he reported to have said, "but the caliphate is the only fence for the Muslims".⁴⁴

The Caliph in Abduh's concept was bound by law deprived of absolute powers, obliged to consult with Muslims which were entrusted to the people's representatives (*Ahl al-Hall wa al-'Aqd*), who could both elect and depose the caliph. Abduh was equally certain in his mind that the caliphate which he envisaged could match the modern European ideal of parliamentary democracy. This is what European scholars and statemen claim, such as Malcolm H. Kerr "in substance he proposed a parliamentary system on the British model, with Khedive reduced to a figurehead, legislative powers confided to a chamber of representatives, and the executive ministries answerable to the chamber".⁴⁵

At the end of his career, Abduh turned away from political activism and focused on intellectual, religious, educational (reformation of educational system and al-Azhar University and renovation of the Arabic language), and social reform. He adopted a much more conciliatory attitude towards the British than he had held formerly. C.C. Adams cites the Abduh words as follow "but the matters of the government and the governed I abandoned to the decision of fate, and to the hand of God thereafter to arrange".⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

Muhammad Abduh was a great and most influential figure in the Islamic they were reform movement who recognizes the backwardness of Muslims *vis-a-vis* the west. They were socially, morally, politically and culturally deplorable and were subjected to many weaknesses and the victims of many degrading customs. In view of these reality, on religio-political perspective, Abduh tried to provide us with a general framework to curb these problems, diseases and bring the Muslims the straight path, based on the Qur'an with a new interpretation. Reject the blind taqlid, open the door of ijtihad, maximise the use of reason and throw away the innovation (*bid'ah*) and superstition (*khurāfah*) are the spheria of religious reformation that Abduh's suggested.

In the political sphere, for example, Abduh interpretes the consultation or shura of the past was to be the consultative assembly of the present as understood in modern political system. Then, he explores the idea of Pan-Islamism and the Caliphate as a tool to restore the Muslim power as ever happened in the Golden Age of Islam.

⁴⁴ Mahmudul Haq, p. 29. From *Tarikh al-Ustadh* I, p. 910-12.

⁴⁵ Malcolm P. Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, p. 147.

⁴⁶ C.C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p. 63.