

**The Universal Message of
Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din Assadabadi,
a Reformist from West Asia**

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Introduction

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din Assadabadi (1838-1897) was a personality from the region of West Asia¹ disposing of universal ideas and a spiritual and humanitarian message, who greatly influenced the culture of the eradication of ignorance and the awakening of the people of the region, and who endeavoured to convince the people and the clergy to reform their societies on the basis of their own norms and values. In this regard Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din is considered to be one of the pioneers of reform in the Islamic world during the past 150 years, whose universal ideas have such relevance that they could serve as a model for the solidarity of Islamic countries in the present day.

At the 34th session of its General Conference in November 2007², UNESCO decided to associate itself with the 150th anniversary of the active life of Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din, which is considered relevant to the ideals of the Organization due to the fact that he “spent a great deal of his life to invoke the sense of freedom and understanding among the nations, democracy and human rights, particularly the right of women to education and knowledge”³. As a teacher in Al-Azhar University in Cairo, he was directly involved in education - which is one of the domains of competence of UNESCO - and discussed the issues of education and learning in his work *Neycheriyeh*; he was also multilingual, learning the languages of each of the countries in which he lived so that he would be able to talk to the people directly and thus understand their problems. He is also of relevance to UNESCO through his emphasis on the importance of dialogue and ethics throughout his personal, political and social life, proposing that one should search for and focus on commonalities rather than differences. He also tried to develop a new plan in which the societies of West Asia could adapt to modernity and constitute civil society, and had a holistic interpretation of Islam which was against extremism, and it is for these reasons that he is presented as a great personality of the Islamic world. His legacy surpassed both his geographical location and his era; while at the cultural, civilizational, spiritual and religious level Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din was based within West Asia, his ideas were taken into account beyond the region in the Islamic world as a whole. What remains important today is his intellectual basis which is founded on the renewal of Islam according to new and changing circumstances, and for this reason his ideas have thematic value, particularly as they also correspond to the needs of our society at the present time.

The universality and spirituality of his character, coupled with the global nature of his ideas, brought him renown throughout the world. He does not only belong to the Islamic civilization but to civilization in its entirety due to the wide-ranging themes of his thought, as he wished to reconcile tradition with modernity, encourage people towards a democracy based on social norms, and eradicate colonialism in all its forms, namely political, cultural and economic. Believing in the necessity of a return to oneself and a reliance on the intrinsic values of Islamic societies, Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din reaffirmed the elimination of internal despotism and external colonialism. His theory on the unity of the Islamic world forms a considerable intellectual basis for the reawakening of Muslim nations and the construction of a comprehensive movement in the region of West Asia, and even in the entire Islamic world.

¹ West Asia is composed of 5 sub-regions which encompass 24 countries, which are as follows: Afghanistan; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Georgia; Iran; Iraq; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kuwait; Kyrgyzstan; Lebanon; Oman; Pakistan; Palestine; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Syria; Tajikistan; Turkey; Turkmenistan; United Arab Emirates; Uzbekistan; and Yemen.

² UNESCO 34C/Resolution 56

³ See: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=41426&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Among his beliefs were the reform of the structure of the political system based on social values and norms; the promotion of public awareness by mobilizing all reference groups, especially the clergy and religious intellectuals, based on his idea that each current of reformism required a pioneer from among the social elite; and the establishment of the linkage between modernity and social traditions, while negating modernistic bigotry and religious extremism. He also insisted on the possibility of constructive interaction between patriotism, regionalism and even trans-regionalism, while negating ethnic, racial and geographical bigotry; explained the social and political aspects of the pure idea of Islam in order to confront the West's negative propaganda against it; and emphasized pan-Islamism by the convergence of Shiite and Sunni schools of thought and establishing cultural and spiritual unity against ignorance, bigotry and extremism, uniting them in respect of the diverse social and cultural norms of Islamic societies.

Overall, he took a civilizational approach to Islam, seeing it as a religion surpassing geographical borders and having a systematic and dynamic approach encompassing all political, economic, intellectual, cultural and social precepts and perspectives, assuring the continuity and sustainability of movements and the right of nations to self-determination.

The Life and Travels of Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din was born in 1838 in Assadabad in the province of Hamadan⁴. After completing his elementary studies he went to Ghazvin and Tehran, and from there to Iraq. After staying there for a period of four years and studying under the supervision of Sheikh Morteza Ansari and Akhund Mullah Hossein Gholi Hamedani, he attained the degree of *ijtihād*. After returning to Iran he left via Bushehr for India, where he had the opportunity to become acquainted with new sciences and European culture. He next travelled to Mecca and then, via Iraq and Iran, to Afghanistan, where he remained for five years and was appointed a position in a ministry. He then went to Bombay and Istanbul, where he met the pioneers of the reformist movement, and from where he was expelled through the provocation of the fanatical elements of the clergy. He subsequently travelled to Cairo, where he taught in Al-Azhar University for a period of eight years, after which he was expelled from Egypt due to Great Britain's opposition to him. After returning to India, Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din travelled to Europe, where he spent time in France and the United Kingdom. He next went to Iran, where he met Nasser ed-Din Shah; following a trip to Russia, he was dispatched by the Shah to Basra. In the final period of his travels he went to Istanbul on the invitation of Sultan Abdul Hamid, where four years later he passed away due to cancer of the throat in 1897⁵.

The Necessity of Reform

This reformist from West Asia has made a valuable contribution to the elaboration of the concept of reform, which is opposed to corruption, in the culture of the region. This concept - which is inherently Islamic - connotes social reform, so that the structure of the political

⁴ Various opinions exist concerning the birthplace of Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din, which has been described as either Assadabad in the province of Hamadan in Iran, or Asad-Abad, near Kabul, in Afghanistan. Credible documents certify that he was born in the former town (see Pakdaman, Homa: *Djamal-ed-din Assad Abadi dit Afghani*. Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1922, Chapter One). However, what is of more importance than his hometown is his intellectual thought, which is situated in West Asia and the Iranian cultural world, and what should be focused on today is the current generation's need to assess his thought and ideas.

⁵ According to another point of view, he was poisoned.

system is directed towards good governance and is also compatible with the social and cultural norms of each society.

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din played an active role in the awakening of Muslims in West Asia. His perception allowed him to identify and understand the social suffering of Muslims, while his realism and rationalism enabled him to elaborate the way in which to reform these societies; this movement was both intellectual and social. He did not remain in one particular country, but rather travelled to Asia, Europe and Africa to understand the problems of Islamic societies at first hand and also to understand the nature of the movements and personalities of these regions.

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din knew that the most significant problems of Islamic societies were twofold in that they were the result of both internal despotism and external colonialism. Regarding the first, at that time there existed a widespread sense of fatalism in the Islamic lands in which Muslim decline was accepted as being a natural process⁶. Moreover, the educational systems in place were ineffective in that they were not conducive to rational investigation and were therefore not adapted to the acquisition of new scientific understanding and progress. Furthermore, the region's rulers were more engaged the pursuit or consolidation of their own power and self-interest than in the common good and welfare of the communities they administered. Thus, the main crisis afflicting the Islamic world was disunity; the emphasis placed on nationalism led to these lands being submerged in religious, ethnic and sectarian conflicts.

Concerning the second problem with which the region was afflicted, the general decline of the Islamic lands had facilitated the encroachment of colonial powers, whose military invasion and subsequent exploitation of these territories compounded a general sense of defeatism and passivity. While the impact of Western colonialism had thrown the Islamic lands into disarray; Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din dedicated his life to the promotion of the political consciousness of Muslims concerning the contemporary situation of their civilization. He declared that the manner in which to overcome despotism and colonialism was through the return to Islamic principles and to the people's own roots, a precondition of which he also believed to be the elimination of superstition.⁷

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din enjoyed first-hand knowledge of both Shiite and Sunni societies and understood the differences between their respective clergies. He was aware that the Sunni clergy was not an independent institution, as it is related to the government; therefore, in the cause of reform, in Sunni societies it was preferable to address oneself directly to the people, as the Sunni clergy did not possess an independent base from which to effectively combat despotism. However, in the case of Shiite societies, the independence of the clergy enabled it to arouse people against despotism and colonialism. To this end – that is, the awakening of the people - he wrote an influential magazine entitled “Al-Urwat al-Wuthqah” during his first stay in Europe.

⁶ See Safi, Louay: “From Reform to Revolution: a Critical Reading of the Political Discourse and Actions of the Islamic Movement in Egypt”, in *Intellectual Discourse*, 1995, Vol. 3, No. 1. http://Isinsight.org/articles/1998_Before/Reform.htm

⁷ See Motahhari, Morteza: *Islamic Movements of the Last Century*. Tehran: Sadra Publications, 3rd edition, 1998. (In Persian).

One of the defining characteristics of Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din was that he was a modernist; while defying Western encroachment in the region, he called upon Muslims to learn and adopt the new sciences and technologies of Western countries, as well as to overcome the problems of illiteracy and technical and industrial incapacity. Another of his characteristics was that he not only combated the political but also the cultural manifestations of colonialism, as the colonial powers wished to exploit the countries of West Asia by alienating them and detaching them from their cultural and social background and heritage.

In total, Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din believed the ills afflicting Islamic societies to be despotism, ignorance, superstition, disunity and colonialism. To overcome them he advocated the struggle against despotic monarchs, the learning and adoption of new sciences and technologies, the return to a pure form of Islam through casting off superstition and obscurantism, and the possession of an Islamic ideology with which to fight despotism and colonialism.

The Nature and Role of Islam

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din understood that much negative propaganda existed concerning Islam, which defined it as a religion which is deterministic and opposed to science. An example of this attitude was to be found in the lecture of the Orientalist Ernest Renan⁸, to whom he replied that Islam does not stand against science, and that the regression of the Islamic world was not due to the nature of Islam itself but was rather the result of the imposition of colonialism in the region⁹. He therefore tried to present a modern form of Islam, and prescribed this as another manner in which to fight colonialism - not only in the political arena but also in the economic and cultural domains. This was in the context of the colonial powers' exploitation of the resources of Islamic countries, coupled with the intention of alienating them from their own Islamic culture in order to more easily achieve their domination over them; the arrested progress of these countries was due to this onslaught, which was facilitated by ignorance in the region. He thus recommended a linkage between religion and politics as he did not believe that secularism was the way in which to successfully overcome colonialism, but that instead solidarity should be created between religious figures and politicians so that they may together think of ways in which to fight the external intervention of certain powers in the destiny of Islamic societies.

In this connection he stressed the unity of Islam, that is to say, both the unity between Shiite and Sunni, and the unity between the religious and political domains. In emphasizing pan-Islamism he envisaged the convergence of Shiite and Sunni schools of thought in which sectarianism would be surpassed, thus leading to the establishment of cultural and spiritual unity against ignorance, bigotry and extremism, uniting them in respect of the diverse social and cultural norms of Islamic societies. In this manner it would be possible to reestablish the historically glorious period of Islam. Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din thought that what was important in this regard was to be moderate, rather than extremist or strict in one's interpretation of religion; in fact, he believed that such religious extremists were an obstacle to the unity and integration of the Islamic world, and advised that they should be controlled by the countries of the region¹⁰. Overall, Islam should present itself as a moderate religion which is capable of engaging with and entering into dialogue with other religions and societies.

⁸ Ernest Renan's lecture "Islam and Science" was delivered at the Sorbonne and subsequently published in the *Journal des Débats* on 29 March 1883.

⁹ Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din's reply was published in the *Journal des Débats* on 18 May 1883.

¹⁰ See: http://www.lakzaee.ir/persian/index2.php?option=com_content&task

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din tried to explain and expand Islamic thought, as can be seen in his philosophical expression in the work *Neycheriyeh*. He believed that while we witness only the surface of Islam, we should go beyond this to gain an understanding of its very core. More broadly, he understood the problems facing Islam at that time to be superstition in various schools of thought; the concept of materialism in the Indian sub-continent; the anti-philosophical and anti-mystical thought present in Egypt; intellectual fanaticism in the Ottoman Empire; and political despotism in Iran. Under these circumstances thinkers could be divided into three groups; some, such as Tahtabi in Egypt or Shebli Shamil in Syria, believed that Islamic lands should benefit from Western civilization; others, such as Mustapha Kemal and Saad Zaghlul, advocated nationalism and ethnicism; while the third group, led by Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din, evoked the idea of a return to oneself through a return to pure Islam, which would radically change society. He believed such reform to be in conformity with Islam, as both are opposed to corruption, and reform finds its roots in the Quran and the traditions of the prophet; thus, he was following the precepts of his ancestors, that is, an ancestry leading back to the Prophet himself, in devoting his life to reform.

It has been argued that Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din espoused pragmatism, and can be seen as a political rather than a purely religious reformer, seeing instead in religion a means of preserving society and its values. In one of his works he stated that, historically, through religion people have succeeded in “avoiding the evil and corruption that are the destroyers of the social order. As a result they enlightened their minds with that knowledge which is the cause of happiness and the foundation of civilization.”¹¹ His reasoning was thus more firmly grounded in the social and political aspects of Islam, rather than its theological investigation; he believed Islam to be a template for living in the contemporary world, and considered it to be compatible with modern scientific and technological progress. Indeed, rather than simply adopting the scientific knowledge of the West, Islam would provide the impulse to give direction to a new, specifically Islamic progress, which would be a reflection of West Asia’s former position at the forefront of the development of knowledge and science in the earlier periods of Islamic history. As he noted, “The first Muslims were strangers to all scientific knowledge, but they were able, thanks to Islam, to acquire a philosophical spirit which gave them the possibility to be listened to in discussions on world affairs and expound on the needs of humanity.”¹² While in the opinion of Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din the stagnation of Islamic societies of the era had led some people to interpret Islam as being “an obstacle to scientific development”¹³, he believed that, if properly directed, religion could serve as a powerful motivational force in the service of scientific and social development and progress.

From Nationalism to Pan-Islamism

Nationalism was a product of Western political philosophy with which it was the intention of the colonial powers to divide the Islamic lands on geographical and racial bases¹⁴, which was consolidated by the unwillingness of the rulers of these territories to give up their personal

¹¹ Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din: “Refutation of Materialism”, in Keddie, Nikki: *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. Cited by Costa, Danielle: “Afghani’s Vision of a Pan-Islamic Civilization”, <http://www.indyflicks.com/danielle/papers/paper13.htm>

¹² Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din: “Speech on Teaching and Learning”, reproduced in Pakdaman, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

¹³ Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din: “Reply to the Lecture of Renan” in *Journal des Débats*, 18 May 1883, cited in Homa Pakdaman, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

¹⁴ Malik, Saeed: “Muslim Political Thought during the Colonial Period”, in *Renaissance*, <http://www.monthly-renaissance.com/issue/content.aspx?id=973>

power and status. Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din believed that the nationalism seen in the region during that period increased disunity and led to the division of Islamic countries, whereas if nationalism was in the service of the unity of Islamic countries, patriotism would not negate regionalism or trans-regionalism. He also was of the opinion that alienation was a problem in Islamic countries, and that observing the attraction of Western civilization should not lead to Islamic countries' abandonment of their own culture.

Having identified the sources of decadence in the Islamic world, which we have previously noted, he sought to bring about the restoration of its former strength and glory, so that it would be able to withstand the threats posed to it by the West which were evident not only in the material exploitation of the colonized countries, but also in the undermining of Islamic identity.

Central to his view was the importance of pan-Islamism, in which – by removing the sources of decadence and returning to its origins – the Islamic world would unite and withstand threats to its autonomy, which it was presently unable to do as a result of its being riven by division. In addition to the removal of the colonial powers and corrupt Islamic leaders, he advocated the construction of a federation of Islamic states which, united, would be able to counterbalance the influence of the West, while at the same time taking up the West's technology and utilizing it to this end.¹⁵ He believed that such a system should be founded on Islamic law, which contained “all the elements of civil, administrative and public law”¹⁶, and with its ruler bound to serve the interests of the community as a whole, which would be ensured through a system of consultation¹⁷. While he recognized the vital role that educational reform had to play, pan-Islamism was, in his view, the cornerstone and most effective means for the revitalization of the Islamic world.

Uniting the different Islamic nations also meant overcoming the divide between Sunni and Shiite in order to come together, focused around the common threat of external attack. At that era, according to some scholars, religious identification was still usually stronger than national identification¹⁸, so that such an appeal for unity would strike a common chord. To this end he attempted to convince the ruler of the Ottoman Empire that its autocratic system of government was undesirable and damaging to the interests of the Islamic world, and should instead be replaced by a constitutional monarchy with a consultative body of representatives from the Islamic territories. He similarly attempted to convince the leaders of Egypt, India and Persia of the benefits of such an Islamic system of governance, but it quickly became apparent that they were uninterested in ceding their power and implementing Islamic reform; as he believed in radically changing the political structures of these countries, which would in turn lead to the reform of their societies, he was perceived as a revolutionary by the political powers of the age. Thus, after his consequent expulsion from Egypt, notably through his Paris-based journal *al-Urwat al-Wuthqah*, he disseminated his theories of reform to a wider audience of Muslim intellectuals and the public at large¹⁹. As he later expressed in a personal letter, “Was it not worth more that I sowed the seed of my ideas in the fertile earth of popular thought rather than in the arid earth of the royal courts? All grows and flourishes in the first and all decays in the second.”²⁰

¹⁵ See Malik, Saeed, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Seyyed Jamal-ed-din: “Speech on Teaching and Learning”, reproduced by Homa Pakdaman, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

¹⁷ See Safi, Louay, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ See Costa, Danielle, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ See Safi, Louay, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Seyyed Jamal-ed-din's personal letter to a friend, undated, reproduced in Homa Pakdaman, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

He envisaged a West Asia in which racial, linguistic, regional and ethnic antagonisms would be replaced by spiritual, cultural and ideological unity; it could be an independent region from which ignorance, colonialism and despotism would depart, and to which dignity and honour would return. Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din should thus be recognized as the pioneer of reform in West Asia. In his view such a return to Islam did not mean a shift towards fanaticism or fundamentalism, but was rather the reconciliation of Islamic principles with the modern era.

Despite himself being a Shiite, Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din was the pioneer of reform in Sunni societies, and in this regard he influenced such personalities as Sheikh Mohammad Abduh in Egypt and Abdurahman Kavakabi in Syria. His endeavours were directed towards the construction of an Islamic identity in Western Asia opposed to the other ideologies common to that era, in particular capitalism and, later, communism. His contribution to the realization of a modern Islamic identity would prove to be a model in Iranian society for the creation of movements opposed to despotism and colonialism; indeed, Iran's later Islamic Revolution was also promoted on the foundations of his thought, as it is on the basis of self-consciousness and consciousness of God that the human being can attain a state of purity and advocate truth.

The Characteristics of a Successful Reform Movement

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din saw that reform could be attained through gaining an understanding of the following seven axes, namely: factors relating to society - the subsistence of society, the relations between the individual and society, and the role of the elite; in social evolution, the priority of culture and change in people's minds, intellectualism and pragmatism; the reasons for the stagnation of Islamic society – the distortion of religious thought, the non-existence of experimental knowledge, incompetent leaders, colonization, lack of cooperation and disunity; the reasons behind the West's progress – religious reform, new science and technology, and civil society; criticism of Western colonialism and culture; retracing an appropriate form of society and governance; and renovating the life of Islam through according priority to political evolution, intellectual resurrection, and pragmatic upheaval.

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din also taught us that a successful reform movement should have a leader from the avant-garde class who is capable of awakening the people and bringing them out of ignorance. A populist movement cannot attain its objectives without a leader to awaken, guide and encourage the people and provide them with methods with which to fight against despotism and colonialism. At the same time, he believed in the importance of the masses and the general public as well as the elite, and thought that in order to achieve progress in the Islamic world one should always be aware of both these categories. The elite itself could be divided into two groups, namely the scientific and religious elite, who played an important role in the mobilization of the masses, and the governmental elite, with whom he was in permanent contact. In his own life he realized that he should not solely have relations with intellectuals and political governors, but also directly with the people, although he recognized that he only had limited success in this regard. He also advocated a dialogue between East and West, playing a key role in dialogue among civilizations.

In his view, such reform movements in West Asia should lead to the establishment of institutions; that is, a movement should not remain spontaneous, but rather have a sustainable ideology and a systematic approach, so that it may continue its existence by coming into power. Islamic movements should therefore not always be found solely in the form of civil

society, but should rather move from the public sphere to the sphere of government. The institutionalization of power does not, however, mean that it should become static; on the contrary, it should endeavour to remain dynamic, in order that it may be capable of meeting the challenge of reconciling change and continuity, or unity and diversity. This means that there are diverse ways in which objectives may be attained, and thus the instruments or means used to attain them can similarly change over a period of time, even while the objectives themselves remain unaltered – that is to say, social reform and the elimination of corruption and alienation.

In this case it is useful to again state that an Islamic movement, although it can be institutionalized as a form of governance, can continue its existence in a dynamic manner so that it is in a position to create waves of reform appropriate to the different characteristics and challenges of each period of time. If such a movement wishes to continue its existence, it should also be understood that it can change its nature to the point of becoming completely transformed. However, at the level of pathology one should endeavour to retain the purity of an Islamic movement, and in order to achieve this it is desirable to avoid the influence of foreign ideas which could misguide or divert such a movement.

Challenges Facing Reformist Movements

Several challenges to a successful reformist movement have been identified²¹. Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din recognized the principles of Islam as comprising a civilization inclusive of such diverse aspects as culture and politics, and not as an “ism”: if Islam becomes Islamism, this means that it has become ideologized and consequently that its vision has narrowed, whereas in fact Islam enjoys a broad vision encompassing all aspects, including philosophy, history and culture.

The second problem which may potentially affect a reformist movement is to be found in the form of extremist modernism, namely the effort to adapt tradition to modernity; sometimes it is possible that Islamic intellectuals in fact prefer modernism to tradition, and are unduly influenced by the attractions of modernism.

Thirdly, a movement may be threatened by incompleteness; that is, it may not continue on its chosen path. Many movements have existed that were temporary in nature and only active during a specific period of time, in relation to certain circumstances. An example of this is the tobacco movement, which occurred during the reign of Nasser ed-Din Shah; once the people and the clergy had attained their objective – the abolition of the tobacco concession – they no longer pursued their endeavours for the reconstruction of a society free from despotism and colonialism.

The fourth challenge that a reformist movement may encounter is its infiltration by opportunists. These may penetrate the revolutionary camp while presenting themselves as believers in the movement, but may finally try to alter it from the inside, diverting it from its objectives.

The fifth issue which may prove a threat to a reformist movement is that of ambiguity regarding future plans. In the case that a reformist movement holds ideals but does not know

²¹ See Motahhari, Morteza: *op. cit.*

how to realize them and lacks a clear programme for attaining its objectives, such ambiguity can be turned against it.

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din's Legacy and Relevance

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din was one of the most influential thinkers of the age and a visionary reformist. He was considered the spokesman of the Muslim world during this period, and he himself surpassed the limitations of national boundaries in not choosing to identify himself as the national of one particular country, but rather travelling widely and choosing to present himself as an Islamic citizen.²²

He wished to not only safeguard the Islamic heritage in the face of the onslaught of European colonization, so that Muslims could again take pride in the achievements of their civilization, but furthermore that in possessing the dynamism to adapt to changing world conditions, and in utilizing the tools of modernity to achieve unity, the Islamic world would be revitalized and prove an effective counterbalance to the power of the West. Furthermore, he believed that through the means of pan-Islamism and educational reform, the Islamic world could enjoy a renaissance and Muslims could regain their earlier position as intellectual and scientific innovators at the world level.

In his campaign for reform Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din advocated self-reliance and the taking back of control over one's political life, the active participation in one's destiny, and self-determination, for which Islam served as a "cultural umbrella"²³. His effects of his teachings were far-ranging, and he provided the foundation on which Muslim intellectuals developed innovative concepts and approaches with which to meet the challenges threatening the Islamic world, its cohesion and its identity.

His thought had a great impact on the region of West Asia, notably in Iran, where he is considered as the pioneer of its constitutional movement in 1906²⁴. His movement also became a template for this country's Islamic Revolution in 1979, in which Imam Khomeini appealed to the masses as well as the elite, in an effort to mobilize the people as a whole. He had a similar intellectual impact on the movement of Arabi Pasha in Egypt, which was opposed to British domination. He established various journals in Islamic countries, and has been called the founder of political journalism in the Islamic world, as he used journals as a tool in the service of the enlightenment of the people. He also established the association of the Union of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, which was the first such attempt organized in the region, as well as establishing the patriotic association and gathering al-Urwat al-Wuthqa in Egypt.

In fact, Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din has been called the circle in which all the reformists of his epoch are related,²⁵ particularly on the basis of the following ten themes: a return to pure Islam and its purification from superstition; condemnation of blind traditionalism and mere imitation; advocating the unity of Muslims, combating local nationalisms which were weakening Islam in the face of a common enemy and attempting to form a common Islamic

²² See Saeed Malik, "Muslim Political Thought during the Colonial Period", in *Renaissance*, <http://www.monthly-renaissance.com/issue/content.aspx?id=973>

²³ Farhang Rajaei, *Islam and Modernism: the Changing Discourse in Iran*, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2007. p. 10, <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/excerpts/exrajis1.html>

²⁴ See Saeed Malik, *op. cit.*

²⁵ See: <http://www.irdc.ir.event.asp?id=111>

identity based on solidarity; combating despotism in the region; attempting to reconcile new sciences and technologies with the precepts of Islam and interpreting these precepts in a scientific and rational manner; combating colonialism as the first step in the social and intellectual resurrection of Muslims; rationalism; the avoidance of a uniform religious vision; combating the surrender to determinism and isolationism; and bringing about openness and expanding the area of *ijtihad* in all relevant issues relating to urban society.

In this connection we can refer to three main locations in terms of his specific influence on other prominent figures. The first of these is Iran, where he was notably involved in mobilizing opposition to the tobacco concession²⁶ by writing a letter to Mirza Shirazi in which he advocated the prohibition of the use of tobacco. Furthermore, through his emphasis on the three concepts of freedom, law and justice, he provoked a spirit of protest in such intellectuals as Sheikh Hadi Najdmabadi and Mirza Mohammad Hussein Naini, who played a key role in the constitutional movement of Iran; it is for this reason that he is considered not only the pioneer of reformism but also that of constitutionalism and legalism, namely governance through law, and the national intellectual movement flourished on the basis of such of his ideas as a modernist view of religion which considers that Islam in itself contains the principles of democracy.²⁷

His second area of influence was Egypt, where Sheikh Mohammad Abduh was inspired by his ideas, particularly his expression of the acceptance of new sciences as a means to renew the life of Islam. Other reformists he influenced include Mohammad Rashid Reza in Egypt and Abdurahman Kawakabi in Syria. Finally, turning to the Indian sub-continent, a prominent reformist who was inspired by his thought is Mohammad Iqbal Lahori, who wrote a book on the revitalization of religious thought, which constituted a great step in the elaboration of Islamic epistemology.²⁸

Conclusion

Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din enjoyed a very comprehensive and insightful understanding of the problems facing the Islamic world, which was well adapted to his era. He not only understood the exact problematic of the region, but also realized that knowledge of his audience and interlocutors, who were both the public and the elite, was necessary. The reappraisal of Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din's ideas in the present situation can more than ever clarify the pioneering role of West Asia in the process of the integration of the Islamic world, the promotion of the historical place of Islamic culture and civilization, and the preservation of its intangible and spiritual heritage. In the changing global circumstances in which the need persists for the integration of Islamic countries in the world, and especially in the great region of West Asia, the necessity of reviewing the ideas of great thinkers such as Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din Assadabadi is reaffirmed, so that the present generation may benefit from their intellectual contributions in the perspective of the solidarity of the Islamic world.

He played a key role in dialogue among civilizations, advocating such a dialogue between East and West, and it is important to scrutinize his philosophy and the universal message

²⁶ Nasser-ed-Din Shah granted the tobacco concession to the British Imperial Tobacco Company, which enjoyed a monopoly on the production, sale and export of Iranian tobacco. Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din requested Mirza Shirazi to write a decree prohibiting the use of tobacco and asking people to break their water pipes, and the consequent popular movement resulted in the cancellation of the concession.

²⁷ See: <http://www.yaghish.ir>

²⁸ See <http://khouznews.com/pages/1064.php>

which he tried to disseminate around the world. His message continues to be relevant in the present day as we are currently witnessing many movements attacking Islam and the culture of the region, a manifestation of which is Islamophobia, which disseminates a distorted image of Muslims in the world, and particularly in West Asia. Equally, at this time certain movements are attempting to portray Islam as being opposed to science and progress, whereas in the thought of Islamic scholars such as Seyyed Jamal-ed-Din there is no contradiction between Islam and science. We can find responses to many of these current problems through examining his active life, which contains many as yet unrevealed truths; such an academic and comprehensive view of his life and works can shed light on the way of reform, Islamic society and those who are devoted to the spiritual and material progress and prosperity of Muslims. He can thus serve as a valuable model for the education of a new generation in the way of unity, solidarity and the integration of the Islamic world.

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