

Abdelkader El-Djazairi and His Reforms in Algeria

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research paper is to have an overview of the valuable contributions of Abdelkader El-Djazairi, one of the most powerful figures in the history of Algeria. Popularly known as the courageous resister against the French occupiers of his country and the savior of the Christians in Syria during his exilic stay in 1860, his Islamic insights and transformative measures, especially in the spiritual spheres, with the aim to revivify the dormant community which was nothing except a living corpse, are to be examined. Belonging to the spiritual chain of Muhyuddin Ibn 'Arabi (al-Shaykh al-Akbar) through his grandfather, he chose to implement the Akbariyya Doctrine (theosophical spiritualism) which he saw as the vigorous and effective solution to the cataclysmic condition faced by the Muslim community back then.

Keywords: Resister, Savior, Islamic Insights, Akbariyya Doctrine.

1. Introduction

There are histories that are more than just a history; ancient ages closer to yesterday and names that evoke more than a man. That is the nature of the following history. It started in the 19th century and continues to this day. It narrates about a man called Abdelkader, but it is more than just his history. Many people know him by the name of Sheikh Abdelkader, and some call him as Emir Abdelkader. Undoubtedly, this man was very famous, but who really knows about him? Some say that he was one of the founders of the Algerian state, being an important part of the popular resistance before the political struggle and the Algerian revolution. Some also say that he was a courageous man, a hero who fought to liberate Algeria from the French imperialism. Others state that he was one among those great figures like Nelson Mandela or the Argentinian revolutionary, Ernesto Che Guevara. Besides, what is surprising today is that this brave rival of the French became in time an epitome of virtue and honor among the leaders and notables of Europe. The French honored him with their uppermost mark of distinction and Abraham Lincoln gave him some precious gifts for what he had done for the Christians of Syria. Based on the opinions of the people, it indicates that Abdelkader was a man of great historical

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importance and his contributions are worth to be studied and to examine the real motives behind his success towards his nation as well as his people.

2. Early Life And Education

As often with great men, his history began in a modest place, but rich in knowledge. He was born in Guittena, in the Mascara Province in Algeria, in 1223 A.H or 1808 A.D.¹ The life of Abdelkader began in the state of faith, and in him, the faith of a nation is invested. Emir Abdelkader had his origins from the Berber tribe, Banu Ifran (Zanāta), and of course to the Prophet Muhammad ² ﷺ through Imam Hassan (peace be upon him). Therefore, he was certainly a product of an enriched past. Abdelkader Ben Mohieddine Ben Mostapha Ben Mohamed Ben Mokhtar El-Hasani El-Djezairi, son of Mohieddine and Zohra, one more leaf in the family tree not amounting to the first periods of Islam. His first spiritual master was his mother, who was among those who could read and write at that time. His father was a ‘Muqaddam’ (Representative), responsible for the great Tariqa of Qadiriyyah, which originated through Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (peace be upon him).³

The family bonds of Abdelkader with the spiritual orders stretched to his grandfather, who constructed a Zawiya (an Islamic religious school) in Algeria in the year 1791.⁴ Having said that, during the time of Abdelkader, the Zawiya of Guittena was the Centre of Qadiriyyah in Algeria. Students from all over Algeria flocked there to learn and study Fiqh, the Holy Quran and the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Sufi Tariqas were connected to each other; spiritual bonds and a spirit of complementarity prevailed, which united the various Sufi Tariqas. Therefore, we can say that Abdelkader was naturally a son of Zawiya. It is said that he could read at the age of 5. He was allowed to comment on the Holy Quran and the Prophetic Traditions at the age of 12. Furthermore, he memorized the Holy Quran at the age of 14.⁵ Abdelkader received his religious Sufi education from his father. He acquired a very enriching education which he completed by the help of many eminent masters in the Arzew/Arzeu district, situated in the Oran province. He learnt the Islamic sciences, Arabic Literature, History, Philosophy, Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine, Greek Philosophy (Plato and Aristotle), Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun.⁶ Apart from all theses, he also developed a love for and skill with horses. He performed the pilgrimage with his father in 1825 thus enabling him to come into contact with the East. He also met with Sheikh Shamil and Khâlid-i Baghdâdî who were two renowned personalities of their time.

3. Reactions To The French Occupation

After the capture of Alger in 1830, the Ottoman governor surrendered, but Mohieddine and the younger Abdelkader participated in the resistance. He was distinguished by his courage and intelligence. The local Arab and Berber tribes assembled and wanted to choose a leader to defend the country. Mohieddine refused to be the leader because of his old age and suggested them to appoint his son in his place. Abdelkader accepted and was elected as Emir by a large assembly in Mascara and later earned himself the title of "*Emir El-Mu'minin*" in November 1832.⁷ It is important to note that if he wished, he could have chosen or adopted the title of Sultan, but he preferred the title of Emir as he was not interested in power, but he had one goal; to fight the invader and liberate the entire territory of Algeria.

Emir Abdelkader engaged himself to direct the war against the foreign occupation. He organized the national state, constituted the government, designated the Khalifahs to administer the provinces, mobilized the combatants, created a regular army and rendered justice. It was such a massive mobilization which could move anywhere. The Emir also led several victorious battles. The General, Louis Alexis Desmichels, was sent to seize Oran and Arzeu, Mostaghanemi; the army of Abdelkader attacked Desmichels and surrounded him. The latter wished to have some sort of negotiations. However, the Emir refused which as a result led to a battle which took place on 2nd September 1833, where the Emir emerged triumphant. A treaty was concluded between the two on 24th February 1834 (Desmichels Treaty). It recognized the authority of Emir Abdelkader in Mascara and the independent sovereign ruler of Oran in Algeria. However, this treaty was repealed by the then French government in 1835. General Desmichels was replaced by the General Camille Alphonse Trézel. The Algerian army and the troop of Trézel fought a battle which came to be known in history as the '*Battle of Macta*.' The Algerian fighters emerged as winners once again and many French crusaders were put to death. In short, Emir Abdelkader engaged himself properly to direct the war against the foreign occupation.

This victory depicted the exceptional genius of Emir Abdelkader which captured the mind of the world because he was only 26 years of age back then. He maintained his continual process of unifying the lines to fight against the French corruptors. He introduced a new system, which was formerly unknown, called '*The Mobile Administration*.' It referred to the movement of people from various locations to fight the foreign invaders. Emir Abdelkader, along with his

administration, moved from one place to the other thus causing confusion for the French troops for years. The French occupiers had faced a number of defeats which ultimately compelled them to make another peace treaty with the Algerians. However, as usual, they breached it quickly. Then, General Thomas Robert Bugeaud, appointed in Oran, negotiated a new treaty with Emir Abdelkader, which was known as '*Treaty of Tafna*,' signed on 30th May 1837. Emir Abdelkader now controlled two-third of the country. He consolidated the state, built fortified cities, established military workshops and gathered the rebels and collaborators.

Not being strangers to wars, another one broke out again in November 1839. General Bugeaud, being the governor, now wanted to occupy the whole country. He implemented a policy called '*The Scorched Earth Policy*,' destroying all cities, burning their villages, crops or harvests, flocks and others. He committed the most heinous crimes that Algeria has ever witnessed. Emir Abdelkader resisted and earned brilliant successes. But one saddened fact which remained was that the country was in a cataclysmic situation. The tribes were not less either; the support of Morocco was absent. The Emir turned towards the British and even the Spanish people but did not obtain any kind of help. In order not to witness any further sea of bloodbath, Emir Abdelkader took the decision to surrender himself to the French colonialists. He could not see atrocities being inflicted upon women and children.

On 23rd December 1847, an agreement was reached with General Christophe Léon Louis Juchault de Lamoricière so that the Emir could be transferred to Acre or Akka or he could go to Alexandria, but they did not keep their word and he found himself landed in Toulon in a war prison, then later at Pau and then finally transported to the Château of Amboise. The chivalrous behavior, the moral grandeur and humanity of Emir Abdelkader were recognized by his enemies. Many high-profile personalities of that period such as Émile De Girardin and Victor Hugo, called for broader clarifications over the condition of Emir Abdelkader. The then future French Prime Minister, Émile Olivier, also played an important role to raise reactions over the fate of Abdelkader. His imprisonment led the international communities as well to pressurize the government over the matter. Lord Londonberry, a British aristocrat, diplomat and statesman, paid a visit to Abdelkader and subsequently addressed to the then-President, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, in written form thus demanding or appealing to the release of the Emir.

After spending 5 years in prison, and the failure of the promises given to the Emir by the François Pierre Guillaume Guizot government and the Second Republic to transport it with him to Alexandria. Eventually, on 16th October 1852, the Prince-

President, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, (Napoléon III) himself came forward to announce his freedom but on the condition that he would not return back to Algeria. He therefore moved to Bursa in Turkey. The third and final period of his life that is from 1852 to 1883 the Emir spent it in the Near East. He left Bursa in 1855 with 111 people to move to Damascus.

Having settled in Damascus, he gradually became a spiritual master and his teaching gathered many disciples. He also took, under his protection, the Christian and European community during the riots of July 1860. He allowed them to escape the massacres that took place between the Maronite Christians and the Druze Muslims. He also saved 15,000 Christians. Many Heads of State had shown their respect for him by sending the Emir hundreds of letters of gratitude and friendship. He also received valuable gifts and has been attributed several times to the greatest distinctions and ranks. In this attitude described as tolerant, the Emir merely obeyed or followed the Quranic and Prophetic precepts and nothing more. The verses and the Prophetic teachings about tolerance are abundant and the Emir has only done his duty as a simple believer to preserve the right of religious minorities in the land of Islam. He lived in Damascus until he passed in 1883.

As mentioned above, Abdelkader was a man of a strong intellect who excelled in all the fields that he studied or took part in life. During his struggles against the foreign forces, he showed positive traits in his behavior which compelled his enemies to respect him more and even reward him with different ranks and status. Emir Abdelkader was a noble rival who never backed off from his words. He was indeed a courageous man as well as a faithful hero for his people and to a very large extent for the whole world as well.

Emir Abdelkader is an example of sincerity, tolerance, perseverance and kindness in the modern period. He was a prominent figure of the 19th century who inspired many people with his physical strength and ethical bravery, his knowledge, academic and mystical profoundness, capped by a sense of understanding, righteousness and limitation towards his opponents. Such brilliance in these traits is impossible to be visible without a proper guidance or influence of some great figures. It exists. Now, the question which arises is that, who molded his personality or inculcated these excellent qualities in him?

It is to bear in mind that Emir Abdelkader belonged to the Qadiriyya Sufi Order. Therefore, it was the traditions and teachings of the 11th century Sufi master, Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (peace be upon him), founder of the Qadiriyya Order of Baghdad that inspired him. The Sheikh inculcated in the minds of the Muslims that

it is their incumbent duty to pray for the welfare of all people. Secondly, the values, lessons and impact of his parents highly contributed to the construction of these traits. They laid emphasis on the importance of acquiring knowledge, the purification of the heart and dislike for material possessions. Thirdly, since Emir Abdelkader grew up as Bedouin hunter and being a master of horsemanship in his early days, this taught him perseverance, tolerance, audacity and warrior skills. Ultimately, he possessed a genuine devoutness and solid moral compass which could be found in the teachings or propagations of all the Messengers of God (Torah, Psalms, Gospels, Quran).⁸

4. Quest Of Knowledge

Furthermore, Emir Abdelkader was of the viewpoint that the quest of knowledge is the uppermost good and the pivotal objective in life because knowledge is the best medium to develop a proper and authentic comportment. However, he compared this with his period where almost everything was hierarchical in nature and so was knowledge. Furthermore, in a famous letter written by the Emir to the French in 1856, he explained his comprehension of how man is dissimilar from all the other creations. He says that man's adoration for knowledge and the quest of realities are behind this difference which excel the senses. He also maintains that one of the most significant kind of knowledge is political knowledge because it depicts the way people reside together. As famously known, man is a social animal who can survive only by cooperation. No knowledge can hold more significance than that required to live in the political society and guide human conduct rightly. In order to reach that level, higher wisdom is required, which is conveyed through the prophets, who are but the mediums of teaching the wisdom of God. They all carry the same message – worship God and be kind to all His creatures.⁹

5. Pluralism

Emir Abdelkader realized the importance of the fact that examination of existence is allied to the query of reverence for pluralism. Confronted with melange, Emir Abdelkader set out to overcome diversity, dissimilarities, reverence for divergences and the base of civilizations. He believed that culture becomes compatible only if it is knotted to the mutual good. Synchronicity, respecting the differences that exist between cultures and religions and the quest for cooperation via dialogues fascinated Abdelkader. His method is on the basis of hearing and the discipline of arguments to construct or solidify the bond.

Being both an intellectual and a leader, he desired to act as a role model to bring reconciliation between individuals, societies and human factions. In order to achieve this objective, he says, it important to study the profound significance and definition of the sacred text (the Holy Quran), the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the positive humanist approaches. It is to teach the people about the concept of Al-Ihsān, that is, the good act.

In the educational sphere and deed, Emir Abdelkader opted to draw from the assemblage of various Sufi sources. He portrayed the mystical national signification on the basis of the Maliki Jurisprudence, the way of life of Al-Ash‘ari and the methods of Junaid al-Baghdadi. Simultaneously, he depicted great concern for science and practical development, with knowledge to construct an educated society.

His major work, *‘The Book of Halts’ (Kitab al-Mawaqif)* depicts his profound thought. The necessity to comprehend diversity as wealth, safeguard the liberty of worship, liberty of conscience and human dignity is the prime responsibility. Emir Abdelkader states that respecting the liberty of thought and worship is one of the most important basics of Islam as mentioned in the Holy Quran where Allah says:

“And say, "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills- let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve.”¹⁰

“There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion.”¹¹

“Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.”¹²

He depicts the point by saying that the Holy Quran issues warning regarding the open definition of the universe, of life and death with the objective to make people aware of their duties and that every individual should respond in accordance to his conscience. The Holy Quran says:

“Say, "I only warn you by revelation." But the deaf do not hear the call when they are warned.”¹³

“And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind as a bringer of good tidings and a warner. But most of the people do not know.”¹⁴

Therefore, the Emir maintains that everyone should respect the diversity of countries and civilizations because it creates mutual appreciation.

These verses become the reason for Emir Abdelkader to derive the notion that war is valid only when it concerns self-defense and in dire circumstances to establish harmony and prosperity. In his book, *'Kitab Al-Mawaqif'*, he reveals that the 'greater fight' means to rectify our own weaknesses and show kindness to others as per the teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

“And were it not that Allah checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned.”¹⁵

According to the Emir, religion is something which is unique in its nature. He is of the viewpoint that the reflection of God can be felt in deeds of existence and all the notions. The Holy Quran says:

"We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him." ¹⁶

Furthermore, when Emir Abdelkader rescued the lives of many Christians in 1860, the Bishop of Algiers, Louis Pavy, wrote a thanking letter to him. However, in response to the letter, Abdelkader discussed about his vision and lambasted the radicalism or fanaticism within the community. He admits that the Muslims themselves have corrupted the religion and that is why they are nowadays wandering like lost sheep. He said that whatever he did for the Christians, he did it to show his loyalty towards the Shariah as well as to respect the human rights. Islamic laws lay emphasis on the significance of kindness and clemency, all that contributes to harmony and opposes cacophony and everything that safeguards social unity. All shall be rewarded according to their deeds.

6. Civilizational Dialogue

Emir Abdelkader opines that dialoging is the best method to provide clarity in instructions. The Holy Quran says:

“And speak to people good [words]”¹⁷

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best.”¹⁸

“Be just; that is nearer to righteousness.”¹⁹

Simultaneously, he knows that the Holy Quran recommends carefulness so as not to get deceived by others or fall into futile controversies.

“And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion.”²⁰

Emir Abdelkader affirms that the Holy Quran is the sacred text which reminds, certifies and excels and does not neglect the various historical phases of salvation and earlier revelations. In short, the Holy Quran can be termed as an indicator, validation and reprise of previous revelations.

“And each [story] We relate to you from the news of the messengers is that by which We make firm your heart. And there has come to you, in this, the truth and an instruction and a reminder for the believers.”²¹

The Holy Quran therefore reminds, commands, explains and interprets them as well. The much it is for the Muslims, it is as much for the non-Muslims also.

Furthermore, the Sacred Text provides a summary of the method of monotheistic and global religion. Emir Abdelkader says that Faith is a matter of intimacy or a personal concern. He appealed to the Muslims not to disrespect diversity and to encourage that which brings togetherness and freedom.

Undoubtedly, Islam refers to the correct religion (*Din al-Qayyim*) and discusses about the ancient periods with the objective to lay emphasis on the fact that God expressed in different manners to all the civilizations in order to help them fulfilling their missions as representative on earth. It refers to man gifted with liberty, motive and heart, who holds the cord of truth firmly and depicts an exemplary behavior towards other fellow beings. For Emir Abdelkader, the attitude of human camaraderie and the uniqueness of people can help to construct a solid basis in developing an open bond between people of different communities as well as nations. He says that interconnection is a prerequisite of coexistence. Where there is mutual exposition, there is fraternity.

In addition, to recognize the welfare of the racial, social and cultural pluralism, Abdelkader says, is one of the foundations of the global and humanistic essence of Muslims. He categorizes the fraternity in three parts:

1. Fraternity among all human beings.
2. Fraternity between Ahl al-Kitāb, the monotheisms and the Abrahamic communities.
3. Fraternity among the Muslims themselves.

The Emir secures a notion by stating that Islam is the flawless and ultimate character and the truthful religion approved by God.²²

Regarding plurality of beliefs, Emir Abdelkader says that it reflects the infinite nature of God and the endless ways to praise God. He is of the viewpoint that there

exists no clash between religion, politics and science. Religion should teach a sane and sound lesson of moral values which connects every individual positively. Politics should be practiced with the purpose to show people how to reside in prosperity. As for Science, it should teach people how to get hold of the basic accord of humanity.²³

7. Statesmanship

Shortly after the Treaty of Tafna was concluded, Abdelkader acquired even more headship supremacy via the veneer of Islamic legitimacy. His political struggle was on the basis of the Muslim faith. He himself belonged to an aristocratic family who followed the Qadiriya Sufi Order. The pledge of allegiance that had taken place was characterized as a re-enactment of the pledge of the Holy Companions to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Hudaibiyyah before the Muslims conquered Mecca thus titling him as the Commander of the Faithful (amir al-mu'minin) and the leader of Jihad. Being strongly and strictly religious, he devoted his time in bringing a moral rejuvenation among his people by laying emphasis on the importance of the Quranic spirit and the successful paths of the Salaf al-Salihīn (predecessors).²⁴

It is clearly visible that the statecraft of Emir Abdelkader was profoundly rooted in an Islamic outline. His major aim was to drive the foreign invaders out of his land. As division was clearly rampant among the local tribes, Emir Abdelkader had to take the initiatives to bring them under the umbrella of unity through the help of Islam which proved to be effective as Islam acted as the clarion call to eradicate Algerian tribalism or groupism.

Administratively speaking, it will not be wrong to say that Emir Abdelkader ruled over his native quasi-state under clear Islamic rules and regulations. Besides the above-mentioned points, he also did not spare those who refused to mark their presence when called for Jihād and also those who would not pay zakat. Additionally, justice based on the Islamic law was also one of the most important elements in his rule. He thoroughly set out to apply the Islamic teachings in his political rule thus paying utmost attention to make sure that people establish their prayers regularly, women are dressed properly in public and banning negative habits such as gambling, drinking and smoking. Detractors were also not spared either. They were to earn corporal punishments if found guilty via genuine causes.²⁵ Women who were suspected of being immoral were forced to tie the knot.

Emir Abdelkader, as Pessah Shinar points out, removed the officers who were loyalists to the Ottoman regime and appointed marabouts and sheriffs. The lower

officials were principally chosen on the basis of their piety towards the religion. However, many of the selected candidates of the Emir soon demonstrated their incompetency and inefficiency in their civil duties, but nevertheless, Shinar states, what really saddened or disappointed the Emir was that some of those whom he had chosen to occupy the dutiful posts for political causes, had as if walked upon the religion with their feet.

After the Treaty of Desmichels, Emir Abdelkader introduced a novel significant position in his government; the consul or representative. While selecting the consuls, he laid less emphasis on the appointee's devout position and focus more on his worthy abilities that he can bring to ameliorate his nascent state. The first person he appointed was an Algerian Jew called Juda Ben Dran, who was a scion of a family of rabbis and has been very famous in the Jewish community in Algeria for years. Likewise, other appointees were selected on the basis of how positive their family relationships and individual character have stood to fulfill the requirements of his administration. By this, it then looks like that Emir Abdelkader focused to choose his professional employees based on merits rather than marabout ranks.²⁶

Thus, it is evident that Emir Abdelkader applied the Islamic legal codes in his statesmanship. He was more pragmatic than dogmatic. Based on the above-stated points, it will not be wrong to conclude that the policies adopted by the Emir were aimed at revitalizing his people through the implementation of the Quranic commands and the following of the predecessors. He was undoubtedly rigid in applying the Islamic rules and regulations in every sphere of life because he believed that nobody can attain success until and unless he leads his life in conformity with the Holy Quran and Sunnah.

8. Jihad Against The Invaders

In the process of combatting the foreign invaders, Emir Abdelkader illustrates three very important points:

1. He has been elected, on the basis of the people's trust, as the authentic leader.
2. He will uncompromisingly rule according to the Islamic laws and principles and expect the people to do the same in their day-to-day life.
3. He would declare Jihad against the foreign occupiers.

Now, after having an abstract of his objectives, the main question which roams around in our mind is that, *what is Jihad for Emir Abdel Kader?* Basically, the

common meaning to which we are all familiar to is that Jihad means to struggle. Generally, most of the Muslims refers to it as an individual moral struggle, that is, against enticements, negative intentions and devilish deeds. It is anything that would deteriorate the virtuous features of being a good Muslim. His mother, Zohra, used to say: *“ritual purity is only half the faith, a reminder of the harder half – to purify one’s inner self. To be a true instrument of God’s will, it is necessary to be free from egoistical desires and violent passions of hatred, anger and revenge. This is what Prophet Muhammad ﷺ called the Greater Jihad, not physical combat, rather wrestling with the demons within.”*²⁷ However, Jihad does also possess an external mien, which leads towards actual confrontation. In such instances, the struggle must be for the sake of the religion, precisely labelled as to defend Islam and the Muslims.

Indeed, for the Algerians under the shadow of Emir Abdelkader, Jihad was verily a ‘holy war.’ However, it did not refer to convert the Christian occupiers to Islam nor to harm the Christian Europe. Instead, Jihad was the name to defend the Muslims against the external non-Muslims. If needed, defense could even refer to offense; pursuing aggressive operations against the hostile forces.

9. Spiritual Exposure

When Emir Abdelkader undertook a journey with his father in his early days, both were blessed to have met and study under the guidance of the then great Sufi master, Sheikh Khālid, who belonged to the Naqshbandīyya-Mujaddīyya order.²⁸ This was a time when Sheikh Khālid were active in propagating his reformist mystical thought in the Ottoman Empire. During their stay, Sheikh Khālid warmly welcomed both father and son towards the Naqshbandīyya way. Hence, this meeting with Sheikh Khālid and the exposure to his pietistic and spiritual rejuvenation had a significant and determinative role to play in the later career of Emir Abdelkader as a devout reformer during his exilic stay in Damascus.²⁹

Emir Abdelkader was a strict follower of the Qadiriyya Sufi Order. Apart from his Qadiri attachment, it is important to mention that he also belonged to the spiritual chain of Ibn ‘Arabi, through his grandfather who had received it in Cairo from the famous 19th century scholar, Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi. However, when Emir Abdelkader was in confinement for 5 years, he passed through a severe spiritual cataclysm. After his release in 1852, he wandered to different places and ultimately landed in Damascus in 1855 for his exilic residence. There, he undertook a spiritual and religious journey thus ultimately leading him towards the thoughts of Sheikh

al-Akbar (the Greatest Master), Ibn ‘Arabi. On the edge of a serious spiritual predicament, he viewed the theosophical spiritualism of Ibn ‘Arabi as the essential and fundamental solution to the dilemma that the Muslims were facing at that time.

After his arrival in Damascus, Emir Abdelkader got the invitation to teach in the Umayyad Mosque, which was also the main mosque of the city. His teachings proved to be successful as he gained many disciples who learnt the theosophy of Ibn ‘Arabi under his supervision. In a prolonged pilgrimage voyage in 1862-63, Emir Abdelkader adopted a Sufi path, landing up to the Cave of Hira where Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself used to spend his time in isolations.³⁰

10. Intellectual Contributions

Whenever the name of Abdelkader El-Djazairi is mentioned, he is mainly recognized as either a freedom fighter or a nationalist leader who set out with the aim to drive the foreign occupiers out of his country. He is also known as the savior of the Christians during the 1860 massacre in Syria. However, very few are aware of the fact that Emir Abdelkader did also possess a mammoth intellectual treasury which has been hardly or partly discussed in the course of history. He was a man of high intellectual background whose thoughts and ideas were to demonstrate the implementation of refreshing measures in order to practice the religion as per the perquisites of time. His intellectual contributions are illustrated in the following:

1. Al-Miqrād al Hādd: Li-Qat‘ Lisān Muntaqis dīn Al-Islām bi-al-Bātil wa-al-Ilhād (Sharp Scissors to Cut the Tongue of the Slanderer of the Religion of Islam)

This work was written by Emir Abdelkader when he was under the French confinement. In this book, he introduces novel aspects into the profoundness of his theological thought development. The book is a refutation to the allegations made by a Catholic priest by labelling Islam as an immoral religion. Emir Abdelkader presented the notion of both the beingness of God and the genuineness of prophethood. He states that reason is the feature which differentiates man from other creatures.³¹ Emir Abdelkader considers reason to be of complete superiority in comparison to physical senses as well as a crucial faculty in order to comprehend God. To produce much more clarity, he says that reason only is insufficient in order to have a proper conception of God because reason is not a foundation of moral principles and does not contain any knowledge regarding the Divine. Therefore, he continues, man needs the guidance of the prophets to find out about the details of the Unseen. Having said that, though reason itself does not possess the capability

to replace the prophetic message, it is the sole ability which is in availability to man, qualified of grasping the logic of the guidance of the prophet. ³²

2. Dhikrā al- ‘Āqil wa-Tanbīh al-Ghāfil (Reminding the Rational Man and Altering the Neglectful Man)

This was basically an essay written four years later, on the recommendation of the French-scientific committee who elected Emir Abdelkader as the consul of the Muslim state. He recaps the significance of the rational sciences, which is, for the time being, in contradistinction to the threats of emulation (Taqlīd). He says that a man who is intelligent must take into consideration the statement instead of the one who is stating it. ³³ This is so because blind imitation unacquainted by the mind can land the Muslims into cataclysmic conditions. He is of the opinion that the prophetic sciences are far more superior compared to the rational knowledge, considering the usage of the unchecked logic to the barring of the guidance of the prophet no less challenging than unacquainted imitation.

“Those who are leaders from among the people can be divided into broad categories. The first are those who are knowledgeable and beneficial to themselves and others. These come to know the Truth through demonstrative proof and evidence, not by blind emulation (al-taqlid), and encourage the people to also seek the truth by demonstrative proof and evidence and not by simply following others. The second group are destructive to both themselves and others. These are those who blindly emulate their forefathers in what they believe and what they consider to be correct, abandoning rational investigation and calling the people to emulate them rather than think for themselves.” ³⁴

Emir Abdelkader opinionates that people who invite others to assume a pure emulative knowledge and reject the use of rationality are ignorant where as those who are pleased with rationality at the expense of the sciences which have been revealed are misled. Therefore, he insisted that both approaches should be combined as the rational sciences as well as the revealed sciences balance and develop each other intermutually.

“The rational sciences are like nourishment and the revealed sciences are like medication. The sick may be harmed by food if they neglect their medicine. Similarly, the minds of all creatures are sick, and there is no treatment for them but the medications prepared by the prophets, namely the duties of worship. Those who are satisfied with rational knowledge will be harmed by it like the sick person who is harmed by food; as happens to some.” ³⁵

Another important theme discussed in the *Dhikrā* is the essential accord between Islam and other religions. Emir Abdelkader was famous for his compassionate attitude towards the non-believers. He says that the truth adopted by monotheistic religions is basically one. Implementing a comprehensive dialect and constantly referring to the prophets, Emir Abdelkader clearly advocates that although differences exist between Islam and Christianity on the doctrinal basis, yet Muslims and Christians are fundamentally brothers.

“For all prophets have proclaimed that the true religion is one, even if they disagree in some of their particular laws. They are like men of one father and different mothers: to deny all of them, or to deny some and affirm the truth of others, is deficient. If the Muslims and Christians listened to me [on this matter], the differences between them would disappear, and they would become brothers—outwardly and inwardly alike.”³⁶

Emir Abdelkader was a supporter for the usage of ‘aql. He appealed to the devotees and those who follow the prophets to adopt the profits of modern science instead of avoiding them. He lambasted the religious scholars who extremely depend on Taqlīd and reminds his readers that complaining against the purported immorality of modern science is not within the sphere of the prophetic track. The prime focus of the prophetic science is the welfare of humanity thus teaching them how to be successful both in the material world as well as in the Life Hereafter.

He further states the prophets did not come into existence to oppose the philosophers or the discoveries of various sciences until and unless they do not transgress the concept of the Oneness of God, instead to attribute all the spectacles of the universe to the power and will of the Lord.³⁷ Emir Abdelkader depicted that science does not harm the religion until and unless it goes against its religious teachings and to complain against science as hostile to religion is to commit a dire sin.

From the above-mentioned two works, we find that the religious ideas of Emir Abdelkader surpass the distinctiveness of his role as a leading resistance in the French-occupied Algeria. Undeniably, in criticizing the illogical shrinkages placed on the Muslims by Taqlid, in stressing upon the vital compatibility between revelation and reason, in adopting the material welfare of scientific methods and in praising the fraternity between Islam and Christianity, the message of Abdelkader talks about religious revivalism in a larger scope. His religious viewpoint looks like bringing a new critical engagement with the Islamic teachings

after the emergence of modernity. He opted for a religious renewal which is clearly apparent in his *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*.

3. *Kitāb al-Mawāqif al-Wa‘z wal-Irshād* (The Book of Stops for Preaching and Guidance / The Book of Halts)

The profound spiritual perceptions of Emir Abdelkader can be abundantly found or have been discussed in his third and decisive book, *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*. It contains a massive compilation of the elucidation and commentary upon the verses of the Holy Quran as well as the Prophetic Traditions that clearly bear the influence of the theosophical spiritualism of Ibn ‘Arabi. The *Mawāqif* is a term which denotes the stops between the stations on the spiritual path. These interpretations were experienced by Emir Abdelkader as a straight spiritual inspiration from the Divine. The *Mawāqif*, therefore, depicts an exceptional coup d’oeil of his spiritual growth. The writing has been expressed in an extremely associative language, dissimilar from Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Futuhāt al-Makkiyya*, upon which it was eventually modelled. This book also portrays the specific and significant emphasis laid upon the spiritual transformation procedure.

The spiritual project discussed in the book was highly inspired by a powerful sense of purpose to save the Muslim community from declination and to guide it back to the true teachings of Islam. Emir Abdelkader is highly indebted to Ibn ‘Arabi and the responsibility he took to apply the teachings of his spiritual master to the modern circumstances are all discussed within the book via a dream. He narrates that he witnessed Ibn ‘Arabi in the shape of a lion, which had a big chain in its hand. He was commanded by the lion to insert his hands in its mouth and the Emir, though being in a frightening state, obeyed its commandment. After having done so, the lion reverted to the human shape of Ibn ‘Arabi, recognized by the Emir from his various former dreams. This time, he saw his spiritual master in a confusing state or in a condition of incoherence (*majdhūb*), reiterating many times that he was going to expire, before eventually falling on the ground.³⁸

The fall of Ibn ‘Arabi on the floor awoke Emir Abdelkader and he decided to interpret the dream that he saw. He says that the reverting of Ibn ‘Arabi to the shape of a lion refers to the rank he holds among the Sufi saints and the chain in his hand signifies the Shari‘ah. Having his hand placed in the mouth of the lion symbolizes the devotion and reliance of Emir Abdelkader to the teachings of the Sheikh al-Akbar, as he stated that his spiritual perceptions are derived from him. The confusing state was an indication to the dilemmas of the time, where moderation and loyalty towards the Islamic laws had vanished amidst changes. The

proclamation he made that he was about to die indicates that the Muslims had ceased to follow the commandments of Allah and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and ignored their religion.³⁹

Therefore, Emir Abdelkader engaged himself in the task of bringing back the Muslim community towards the authentic teachings of Islam. In his very first *Mawāqif*, he set up the Akbarian-inspired system to achieve religious revitalization. He believes that the Sufi masters do not bring novelties in the religion but rather possess a new comprehension of it. Their spiritual perceptions do not transgress or denounce the literal definition of the Holy Books. Instead, they bring extra inner definitions which were previously undisclosed. Emir Abdelkader further states that the spiritual revelation may expose a complete novel comprehension of a verse or tradition that could not be perceived by former generations of scholarly and Sufi commentators. According to him, the Holy Quran forms a source of continuous rejuvenation in Islam, paving the path for novel elucidations which do not oppose the tradition and bring to it fresh layers of definition in accordance to the spiritual saint's revelations in every generation.⁴⁰ The *Mawāqif* largely consists of such new explications of the book and tradition as exposed to the Emir by the spiritual inauguration along the Sufi path.

It is indeed due to his firmness that every generation of spiritual masters commands the ability to rejuvenate the tradition of Islam that Emir Abdelkader is so hostile towards the religious scholars of his time. They blindly accepted or followed the old scriptural commentaries which pointlessly hindered all the possible ways to regenerate the tradition. Emir was categorically against blind imitation (*Taqlid*) and immensely lambasted its followers as well. He termed them as '*Ulamā al-rasm*,' (The Formal Scholars), that is, those scholars who are satisfied just only with the name of knowledge.⁴¹ Therefore, he clearly warned his followers to eschew any sort of conflict with them.

Emir Abdelkader did not spare either the rationalist theologians (*Mutakallimūn*). He criticized them for trying to know God via their brainpowers instead of via His divine wisdom. It is not to forget that in his previous works, he deterred the usage of 'aql as he sees its use as a religious prerequisite for the Muslims. However, having said that, he warned his readers about the limitations of reason. In his *Mawāqif*, Emir Abdelkader repetitively states that reason can only make one acknowledge the beingness and unity of God and therefore, divine guidance is required. Reason is enough to deal with the worldly affairs but is not a substitute to obey revelation. The dependence on unrestrained reason by the rationalist

theologians is, in the eyes of Emir Abdelkader, very challenging as the limits of their rational ideologies cannot provide a clear view of their approaches in comparison to his ever-revitalizing method to the exegesis of the scripture.

He believes that the insights of the rationalists vis-à-vis God is something restricted by their rational ideologies. However, the God of the prophets and their followers is boundless, limitless and possesses the capability of executing anything He wants, even those things which the rationalists claim to be not possible.

Emir Abdelkader is of the viewpoint that intellectual restrictions hinder the process of revitalizing the traditions of Islam in order to accomplish the requirements of every generation. Instead, it can only be possible and achievable via the unlimited potentials provided by the spiritual exposure of the Divine knowledge. Emir Abdelkader says that the discursive method of the rationalists is innately limited whereas the experimental process of the spiritual path is not.

11. Akbariyya Doctrine

After making the revitalization of the Holy Book as his foundational methodology, Emir Abdelkader carries on positing the concept of Wahdat al-Wujūd of Ibn ‘Arabi which he considers to be the backbone of the Akbariyya doctrine. He considers this concept as the spiritual station of segregation (*furqān*) in which the earthly creatures of God are recognized and understood as subsisting in Him. Within this station, both the godly attributes as well as the relative diversity are concurrently present, and it becomes incumbent to accomplish the directives as well as fulfilling the worldly responsibilities as per the requirements of the Islamic Law.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s principle of Wahdat al-Wujūd implies that there is a mutuality between God and His creatures. He opines that both as if have a mutual dependency. While the creatures of God need Him to be fulfilled (*Wujūd al-a‘yan al-thabita*), similarly God is in need of His creatures to manifest His manifestations (*zuhur mazahirihi*). On the basis of this mutual relationship, Emir Abdelkader is of the viewpoint that practical knowledge of God as revealed via the spiritual path (*ma‘rifa*) is unveiled by combining both insights, the divine and the earthly. Therefore, those treading on the spiritual path are not exempted from their material duties to involve in their worldly matters.

Yet Emir Abdelkader clearly points out this existential cooperation is totally vested in God, the sole One who is genuinely in existence. He continues by stating that everything on earth is nonexistent and the insight of existence is only an illusion of

the senses or of the intellect.⁴² However, Emir Abdelkader differentiates between the two degrees of inexistence:

- a) Relative (fanā' or thubūt)
- b) Absolute ('adam mahd)

The spiritual masters, he clarifies, do not refer that the world is imaginary; instead they mean that real world is dissimilar from the way people think it to be, since its appearance is creation and its essentiality is God or one may also say the vice-versa. The universe is like imagination the which every intellectual person discovers within himself. One must not state that the universe is the essential reality ('ayn al-haqq) nor that it is false (ghayr al-haqq), but that within the reality one portion is described as created and the other as God. Beyond that, there is the absolute beingness of God within Himself, which cannot be grasped, and against which stands nothingness.⁴³ Therefore, in the factual truth (al-wujūd al-haqīqī), only His glorious essence is there whereas the rest of the universe is nothing but just a fanciful reality (ala-wujūd al-khayālī).

Based on the notion of Isti'ād, which refers that the factual features of this world are regulated by the amalgamated skills of the unchallengeable essences, upon which Emir Abdelkader wanted to realize his objectives by adapting the Akbarian system as well as applying the Islamic teachings to meet the prerequisites of the modern generation. Of course, he remains loyal to the scriptural commandments. He says that if God is revealed in the unchallengeable essences as per their inbuilt tendencies, it means that the Creator rules over the universe via the natural laws. From this, Emir Abdelkader is of the opinion that God cannot alter the predestined tendencies because it originates from his internal nature instead of from his cognizant volition. Hence, he infers that while man resides in the fanciful reality, he must comply to his nature which requires him to become self-independent, instead of asking the Creator for what is unsuitable for him. Extensionally, this notion may be therefore expressed that since it is incumbent upon man to consider the truth in its original shape, it is mandatory upon him to operate within it instead of seeking shelter from it in the Creator.⁴⁴

On the basis of this rationalist-oriented comprehension of Isti'dād, the outline of Emir Abdelkader consists of three main points; the first one was to emphasize upon the significance of science and reason for the welfare of man as well as on the requirements of the believers to make a useful utilization of to achieve material progress. This viewpoint is compatible with both the discussion of Isti'dād and

with the content of his two former books, in which he advised the Muslims to utilize their reasoning aptitude.

Furthermore, the second point was to be kind to the Christian community. To provide a more clarified elucidation, Emir Abdelkader is of the viewpoint that Jihad is to be waged only when the anti-Islamic people refuse to pay the poll-tax and are subdued. He depicts this situation to be not an easy one because it is the toughest condition for the spiritual masters to oblige and nevertheless lays emphasis on the necessity to be especially compassionate towards the People of the Book. This is the ethical beauty of Emir Abdelkader which saved the lives of thousands of local Christians and European consuls from the 1860 massacre.

The third and final point, he says, is to have an absolute nonparticipation in the political matters. Emir Abdelkader, mentioning the famous saying of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, that is, commanding the Muslim community to enjoin good and prohibit what is evil, whether by hand, tongue or heart, advocates that the spiritual masters, inasmuch as they recognize the status of man as simple receptacles for pondering upon the manifestations of the Creator (on the basis of his Isti'dād), are free from this prerequisite to eradicate evil altogether. Moreover, the appeal of Emir Abdelkader to the people to shun such politics was apparently intended to prohibit religious oppositions to the pursuit of the then Ottoman government for modernization. (Tanzimāt reforms).

12. Conclusion

Having analyzed the essential tenets and the transformative methodologies of Emir Abdelkader, one can deduce the fact that his life story is an inspiration for the modern generation. It can be picturized as an anti-Islamophobia linctus for those non-Muslims who are merely aware of Islam through the social media. Mohammad Sammak, advisor to the Grand Mufti of Lebanon stated in 2011: *“The spirit of Abdelkader is the spirit of liberal and tolerant Islam. I believe we Muslims should do something together to revive Abdelkader’s spirit to guide our societies out of the tunnel.”*⁴⁵ Pakistani Scholar and editor of *al-Sharia*, Mohammad Khan Nasir said: *“He is not only a symbol of the Muslim concept of resistance and struggle against foreign domination, but an embodiment of true theological and rational ideas taught by Islam.”*⁴⁶ Emir Abdelkader was both a unifier and a reconciler who aimed to achieve everything on the basis of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. He was a man who was ever ready to sacrifice himself to maintain the dignity of Islam. His contributions have also been internationally recognized by various dignitaries

of his time. Emir Abdelkader considered it an incumbent duty not to cause any sort of trouble to other religions. The protection he provided to thousands of Christians in Damascus during the pogrom of 1860 was an act of compassion and mercy which, he says, Islam lays massive emphasis upon. Emir Shamil, who was then known as the Lion of the Caucasus, wrote to Emir Abdelkader and said: *“May the laurels of distinction always bear fruit for you. You have put into practice the words of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (to protect the innocent and minorities) and set yourself apart from those who reject his example. May God protect us from those who transgress His law.”*⁴⁷ At the end, I quote one of the most important sayings of Emir Abdelkader whose relevance today is obvious: *“Those who belong to the religion of Muhammad ﷺ have corrupted it, which is why they are now like lost sheep.”*⁴⁸

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