

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's¹ Views on Nature: A Critical Evaluation

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Introduction

Nature is one of the broad issues of Islam, which illustrates to determine the perception of the natural beauty. It is manifested in the laws of Allah in which the reality, truth and His authority should be discovered. It is created, purposive and subservient, which possesses a beginning, surviving and ending in accordance with His Will, Wisdom and Mysteries. Man may accordingly take discretionary measures and study His manifested laws in order to develop the perceptions of nature towards a comprehensive understanding. With his substantive ideas man will have the capability to realize and determine what integral system runs the universe and its relationship with the Creator and man. One observer considers nature as a closed system of the universe, which obeys certain laws of mechanics and physics in the system of the manifested laws. The system is considered as the principle or touchstone of the sovereignty of the Creator. It is invariably characterized by a uniformity behaviour in which there cannot be any exception and alteration. It, in fact, is so well knit and it works with regularities. It is autonomous but not autocratic and tyrannical because it works by its own innate laws.

The Muslim scholars have used the term 'nature' for different meanings and purposes. It is all living things of the world, or the existing physical world. It is a complete order and a complete system manifested and designed by the command of Allah with a specific purpose. It is obviously true that Allah as the

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Creator, man as the central created being and nature as the subservient created thing are all interrelated.

In its broader sense, nature appeals to all human intellect in understanding the manifested laws and unalterable laws. It provides explicit guidance, as the touchstone of the truth, in conformity with our nature. It also develops the perception of nature's magnificent display that there must be the Designer, the Originator, the Cherisher, and the Cause of all causes, whom we usually call Allah. But in the usage of the Muslim Scholars, the term 'nature' being used in different ways has led to different approaches adopted by the Muslim scientists and theologians with the specific meaning in their scientific and intellectual description.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan uses different terms and provides different meanings towards understanding nature (*fitrah*) such as *al-ayât*, *al-bayyinah*, *al-malakât* in Arabic, and nature and naturalism in English². He also describes the word, *Uabiyîn* from *tab*, used by the Arabian Muslim Philosophers, *Nechariyîn* from nature, used by the western scientists, philosophers and naturalists, *Fitriyîn* from *fitrah*, used in the *Qur'ân*³. He classifies natural scientists as *Dahriyyah* naturist who believe that every sphere of the universe exists from matter, *Ladriyyah* who neither believes in the existence of Allah nor deny it, and *Fitriyîn* (theists) who believes that there must be a Designer or Originator. His identification was with the last group that believed in the oneness of Allah as the creator of everything⁴.

In Sayyid Ahmad's understanding of nature, in accordance with the sense of the interpretation of the nineteenth-century scientists, nature is a closed system of the universe. It obeys certain laws of mechanics and physics, invariably characterized by a uniformity of behaviour in which there cannot be any exception⁵. He views that every organic and even human being is an integral part of nature and subject to these unalterable laws,

which are called laws of nature. In other words, what we find in the universe, what we see or feel, so much so that the functions, beliefs and actions are all different chains in the inexorable laws of nature.

Nature as Created Thing

Sayyid Ahmad refers to the *Qur'anic* verse 30:30 in the literal sense and holds that in the *Qur'anic* text, nature is creature or act of creating. His view of nature reflected in the view of Isma'îl R. al-Farûqi, who considers nature as a creature of Allah, who created it from nothing and commanded it to be and it came into being.⁶ According to the *Qur'an*, the totality of the whole creatures was created or came to existing form gradually through natural causes, by means of material, formal, efficient, and the final causes built by the Creator into nature.⁷ It is a great positive blessing and mercy from our Creator, who provides enjoyment in the worldly life and the rewards of paradise in the life after death. Happenings, accidents, incidents and occurrences take place in accordance with His will and manifested laws. It is orderly, but its orderliness depends upon its Creator.⁸ It is Allah's pattern and divine gift for mankind to understand His divine laws and fulfill their obligations⁹. Investigation of any natural phenomena reveals mysterious intricacy of determinants distressing it, and an equally inexplicable complicatedness of effects arising from it. The works of nature are an immeasurable proposition and unlimited knowledge.

Sayyid Ahmad views nature as an integral system of causes and effects without flaw, without gap, perfectly patterned by its Creator. He in his peripatetic works adopts the Aristotelian concept of the first cause of all causes. The idea is that a passage from nature to the Creator itself involves a process of negation and abstraction. The forms of things are changeable because whatever exists never really enters into nonentity. For instance, water in its liquid state changes into vapours, vapours change into

solid snow. This is how the process of cosmic evolution goes on. If the entire transient forms are taken away from the universe, the residue, according to Khan, will be permanent, which will be indestrucable and he further elaborates that there exists the unbroken chains in His creation. His theistic view is that "everything will be perished but not He", He is the Beginning and the End.¹⁰ The Sunni Theologians differ with Sayyid Ahmad's views concerning the above. To them, casualty is the absorption and assimilation of the finite, immediate causes of things into the transcendent cause. Allah is the cause of all things without any partnership and association with others. For instance, fire burns things, but it is not because it is its nature to do so, but it is the will and intention of Allah.¹¹ Such views also have been found in the Sufi doctrines. To Sufis, at every moment, the creator destroys and recreates the universe, so that every being at every moment of time is absolutely dependent upon Him. They refute his view regarding Allah as the first cause on the basis of *al-Qur'ân* 67:37 and argue that He must be uncaused because if He has the possibility of having any cause, He rationally, would be dependent on other existing things. Thus, to them it is impossible.¹² Sayyid Ahmad also refers to al-Kindi's definition of nature and uses a different term meaning nature as being of all material and physical things. It is the primary principle of movement and rest. George N. Atiyeh commented on al-Kindi's definition that nature closely resembles Greek physics, which means a self-existent and immanent force to reach their natural form or destination, but al-Kindi and Sayyid Ahmad do not accept the idea of self-existent. The process of the creation of nature is a stable system, which has been created by the cause of movement and rest by the command of the Almighty.¹³ To Sayyid Ahmad, matter as created thing is the integral part of nature because every sphere of the universe has been created from matter and it is impossible for anything to exist in nature besides matter.¹⁴ There

is no mind existing as an entity and no spiritual substance whatsoever without nature. All pleasures and pains, all ideas, thoughts and revelations could be explained in terms of matter or its movements or simply in terms of the attributes of matter. There, in general, can be no change or movement of any kind in matter unless another material object comes into contact with it and moves it. For instance,¹⁵ a magnet attracts a piece of iron from a distance, because something of the nature of electricity emitted by the magnet reaches the iron through "ether" and operates on it so that it moves towards the magnet but nobody knows, how the magnet was formed. His argument shows that the creator of the magnet was the first cause of all causes whom we usually call Allah.

Nature as a Complete Order

Sayyid Ahmad views nature as a complete order of the God, who created every thing, either organic or inorganic by His order (*amr*), which is unchangeable.¹⁶ It is an order, by which all events run in accordance with His manifested command and nothing stands outside of them. Nothing can escape from His knowledge and everything stands under the pertinent laws.¹⁷ An event occurs as a result of its cause and in turn, its occurrence is the cause of another event.¹⁸ His arguments show that a complete order of Allah reflects within the regularity of cosmos and its knowledge is the object of human knowledge, which is observable and measurable through rational examination with its functions in accordance with its laws and patterns. The *Qur'ān* addresses to man's intellect to investigate and discover the significance of natural order. Islam fully affirms cosmic regularity or causality within nature. His order is perfect and systematic in nature. The processes of its perfectness and system are determined for man's welfare. But some events, for instance, earthquakes, explosion, floods, droughts, fire and other natural occurrences and accidents, are not for the service of man but His signs for man's

understanding. All unusual events are also ordered by Him to show His power and to remind man's duties on earth as the vicegerent of Allah. So what is important here is that the process of nature is inter-related to provide its continuity and regularity.¹⁹ It can be inferred from the *Qur'anic* verse; for instance,²⁰ the celestial bodies such as the sun, the moon, and the star are swimming in their rounded courses beautifully through space with perfectly smooth motion according to the perfect law, ordered by Him. Abdullah Yusuf Ali explains the verse of the *Qur'an* 21: 33 that when the sun and the moon are on the same side and in line with the earth, there is a solar eclipse, and when on opposite sides in a line, there is a lunar eclipse, but there is no clash.²¹ It shows regularity and conformity of His complete order.

Sayyid Ahmad views that natural order is not certainly tyrannical but the command of the Powerful. It does not run automatically. Fazlur Rahman views, which is supportive of Sayyid Ahmad, that it is not certainly despotic in its own functions in the manner viewed by the western scholars. To Fazlur Rahman, it is autonomous but certainly not autocratic because it works by its autonomous laws. It does not contain its own ultimacy or final rationale as an integral part of its being. He argues that its incomprehensible vastness and regularity as natural signs should reflect the signs of designer and sustainer of the universe for humans. To him, for instance, even some irregular natural causes, which are also persuaded by His commands, like floods, hurricanes, violent earthquakes or torrential rains are all signs of Allah for wise people who have capability of realization. Such signs are not contrary to the course of natural order but are prodigies that may be called "Portent signs" or "historical signs". The exceptional signs are apparently against the regular course of natural order, these are termed as, miracles as when fire became cool and safe for Ibrahim when he was thrown into it to be burnt or when *Musa's* rod turned into a

serpent. Such signs are miracle par-excellence, manifested at the hands of the Messengers of Allah to support their Truth, claims and teachings.²² Sayyid Ahmad believes that the processes of the heavens and the earth are primeval and eternal. He does not agree blindly without justification with all scientific ideas. According to scientists, the natural order means a system of natural processes, not only a collection of the natural objects. Nature is self-contained as a system with reference to the furnishing of natural explanation.²³ Sayyid Ahmad refutes the above idea and argues that the process of the evolution of human being as well as all other things is developed gradually by His direction, design and command. Allah is the Creator of every thing and perfect, so He is able to manage the perfectness of His creation. We are asked to observe and study Allah's creations again and again. Whatever, closely we observe it, even with the most powerful telescopes and our powerful wills, we shall not find any defects in Allah's handiwork.²⁴ It may thus be concluded that the perfection of nature with its independence ultimately reduces the relationship of Allah to nature as one of mutual externality. Because the perfection of natural order would qualify it as long as it exists and the laws of Allah will always be the same according to the patterns of His creation, which are immutable. He does not change His ways because He stands beyond change.²⁵

Nature as Proportion and Measure

Allah Almighty created all things in proportion and measure.²⁶ His Messengers and the last revealed Book explain to mankind His integral system of nature to the people. Sayyid Ahmad argues that His creation is not haphazard. It has its appointed time, place and occasion, as well as its definite limitation. Nothing happens but in accordance with His will and unique plan. Every deed, work and thought of man has its fullest consequences. Nobody can interfere with Allah's work or plan. The *Qur'ân* addresses that every single thing is before His sight, in

due proportion. Fakhruddin Razi's view of "*miqdâr*" is being justified by Sayyid Ahmad on the basis of the verse of al-*Qur'ân* 13: 9.²⁷ The word "*qânûn-i-qudrat*" to him, is laws of the Authority, which is in proportion and unchanged. He, for instance, argues that what occurs in mother's womb, it is an extreme secrecy, no body interferes in this secret process. Not even mother knows whether the foetus will develop into a male or female in early stages of the pregnancy. All are unknowable but each one is generated and regulated by Allah's plan and will in due proportions.

Based on the above perception, he differs with Muslim commentators of the *Qur'ân* about miracles and rationalized and philosophizes them. The *Qur'ânic* story of miracles, to him, is esoteric and abstruse, which should not be understood literally but one must understand the context of the events. Miraculous happenings are not all the essential characteristics of the prophet²⁸. He argues that strange happenings, which are called miracles, occur every day, although we do not count them as miracles and they pass as usual events. Such as the rising and setting of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon, the floating of massive clouds in the air, the birth of children and the production of very complicated machines by human intellect and so on. Allah never departs from His promise because the violation of His promise does not fit in the scheme of His "*qudrat-i-kâmila*" (Omnipotence ability) and "*qânûn-i-qudrat*" (regulating in proportion).²⁹ The word '*amr*' is a natural order, which is orderly pronounced without any cause by Allah by the word '*kun*' (Be).³⁰ His order encompasses the physical world as well as spiritual world and their functions, which can be understood by human intellect and sensorial knowledge through observation and experiment. The whole universe follows one system and one command in which Allah has created every thing.³¹ The realm of His order, in true sense is not inconsistent with divine nature.³² There is no

interposition of time or condition or instruments or means between His will and its consequences, for He is the ultimate Reality. He is independent of the proximate or material causes, for He Himself creates them and establishes their laws as He pleases.³³ The word *amr* implies that all His created things are regulated and maintained by His order and everything will return to Him. Man will be brought back to Him and he is answerable and accountable to Him alone. His order is undeniable power, which reflects in His creative artistry and design as is evident in every phase of natural phenomenon. Sayyid Ahmad criticizes scientists who said that man is not wholly an integral part of this natural world and he is only an incidental product of the world process.³⁴ To him, man is created by the order of the Creator with a particular purpose, not an accidental product. Scientists denied that the universe has been created by the divine order. Their perception is that evolutionary process of the universe is automatic and natural. The natural world, its objectives and events in space and time are all real and true.³⁵ In this regard, he also differs with the ideas of the scientist. Newton about the regularity of the laws of nature,³⁶ because Newton had considered Allah as a Mechanic and found certain irregularities in the motion of the planets for which he could not account for in terms of his law of gravitation. These alleged irregularities, if they cumulated would pile up to such a great extent that they would upset the entire solar system but this actually never happened. Newton believed that God intervened; whenever there was "digression" in order to put back once again the stray planets on their regular paths. Sayyid's argument is that Allah is not like other ordinary mechanics because the universe is originated by His command and regulated by His permission. Nobody can change its regularity, even He Himself as the Creator of everything, will not change His own created laws that are already in effect in the universe. He exhibits full confidence in the fact that the natural

order cannot be changed. It is a very strong and unchangeable order and system and nobody can violate it.³⁷

Nature as a Closed System of the Universe

To Sayyid Ahmad, nature as a closed system of the universe obeys certain laws of mechanics and physics, which is also invariably characterized by a uniformity of behaviour in which there cannot be any exception. Based on his mechanistic views of nature, every organic thing and even human being is subject to these unalterable laws. All levels of existence to him are subject to this system. He states:

In the beginning, the knowledge of nature was limited but with more research and investigations, the sphere of nature has correspondingly increased and it is established that whatever things have been perceived or known are part of nature. So much so that even the actions and thoughts of man and his beliefs are all different chains in the inviolable laws of nature".³⁸

His argument shows that the closed system of the whole universe exists in the objects whether material or non-material, which not only imprints upon our minds but it can also imprint upon our actions and thoughts according to the principles of nature, which are true and perfect.³⁹

Nature and Religion

According to Khan there are two types of creations; one is His works, called as the physical manifested laws and the second is His words, called as laws of the *Shari'ah*. Both are in conformity with human nature but the difference is that the first is followed by man willingly and unwillingly such as the process of man's development from his birth to death while the second implies to follow as an obligatory with the freedom of man's choice. He states: "It would be clearly absurd to assert that Allah's action is different from His words. All creation including man is the works

of Allah and religion is His words. So there is no contradiction between the two"⁴⁰

He argues that Islam is a natural religion. If something is bad it is because it is so by nature, and if something is good, it is because it is so by nature. In Islam, certain things are considered good or bad, because they are good or bad by nature.⁴¹ Based on the above, he believes that nature and religion is inseparable and twin. He draws a clear distinction between worldly affairs and the religion and prevents to heave into the domain of religion because all religious aspects are unchangeable while worldly affairs are ever changing.⁴² He cites the example of Mûsâ (A.S.) who as a Prophet of Islam was forced to take up the position of the head of the Muslim state, which was not part of his prophetic mission. It was a custom among Arabs that they followed the head of the tribe in all matters of worldly concerns. Allama Iqbal views that the objective of Islam is a fundamental reform of man's collective life, which may change his racial and parochial outlook by awakening his purely human conscience. Islam abolishes the concept of nationalism and racism. Ghulam Ahmad Pervaiz also disagrees⁴³ to separate religious aspects from worldly life in order to maintain the conformity and relation between the religion and man's collective life such as the historical events mentioned in the *Qur'ân* about the destruction of some ancient nations like 'Âd and *Thamûd* were man's natural acts.⁴⁴ To him, the law of Allâh is supreme in the universe. Allâh administers the world in accordance with His manifested laws because everything happens in accordance with the laws of causation. The system of the universe is working under the chain of cause and effect.⁴⁵

Khan rationalizes that the destruction of the nations of 'Âd and *Thamûd* was caused by their own misdeeds, which are inseparable from natural cause and effect. If, similarly in the future, misdeeds are perpetrated by other nations, they will meet the same fate.⁴⁶

Sayyid Ahmad argues with his full confidence based on the *Qur'anic* verses that nature and religion are not separable because religious laws are unchangeable as well as natural orders.⁴⁷ Indeed His laws and ways of dealing are all directed to prove His uniformity irrespective of time and space. Human idea, to him, may falter or turn away from its course but the Almighty's will forever follow its course and cannot be turned away by any cause whatever.⁴⁸ On the basis of his own conviction, he identifies the scientific observer of nature with the seeker of religion of the truth, though this identification could not be realized unless the scientific attitude remains mechanical or quantitative. To him, natural scientists may discover a true religion because natural science talks about the nature of existing things and religion talks about the originator of things.⁴⁹ One does not oppose the other. He states:

The object of natural science is to explain the nature of existing things e.g. how did water come into being and how are the clouds formed, while the object of religion is to explain about the originator of things and the attributes of things such as who created matter and its attributes. How erroneous it is to call two totally different things opposite or contradictory to each other. Natural science does not discuss things which are the issues of the religion.⁵⁰

Nature and the Laws of *Shari'ah*

Sayyid Ahmad, opines that the laws of nature and laws of the *Shari'ah* are similar. The significant difference between the two is that laws of nature are the practical promise of Allah and laws of the *Shari'ah* are verbal promise, which are unchangeable and interrelated.⁵¹ Both laws have been derived from the same source because Allah as the lawgiver manifested His will both in cosmos as well as in human domain by His commands. *Shari'ah* (Laws) and *Minhâj* (Way of life) have been sent for every nation for the development and prosperity. There are, for instance, different sets

of laws manifested for all creations with different orders from Allah such as laws for animals, plants, astronomy, men, *jinns* and all other creatures in universe. Laws of the *Shari'ah*, therefore have been obliged for man on earth as His vicegerent for developing society, culture and nation. The aim of natural laws is to know and discover the true nature of things as given by Allah while the aim of laws of the *Shari'ah* is to know its Creator, origin, function and final destiny. The *Qur'an* implies that Muslims must submit their mental and physical elements completely to the will of the divine laws, which have been promulgated for them. Obedience and submission to the divine laws is man's inborn natural quality. The ordinances of Islam and the laws of the *Shari'ah* cannot be against the laws of nature. Whatever Islam has called as good, must be good in accordance with nature, and whatever Islam regards as evil, that must be evil in accordance with nature. Thus, Sayyid brings out the correlation between Islam and nature. When he says, "Islam is nature and nature is Islam", because nature denotes the works of Allah and Islam expresses as the words of Allah. Both works and words are natural orders. It shows that there is an agreement between the two.⁵² Sayyid Ahmad, on the question of distortions of Torah by Jews, claims that they have distorted the real words of Allah but those laws of the *Shari'ah* are His natural disposition.

Synonymous Words of Nature in the *Qur'an*

The synonymous words of nature, such as *ayâh*, *al-malakût* and *al-sultân* demonstrate the uniformity of the laws of the physical universe as well as the spiritual reality behind the natural phenomenon.⁵³ The '*ulamâ*' are unanimous that all synonymous words of nature, in the *Qur'an*, constitute the ultimate and comprehensive meanings of nature in order to realize wisdom behind creation of the world of nature for investigating and observing the natural beauty and its manifested laws to discover His mysterious authority.

Al-Ayâh (sign)

Sayyid Ahmad argues that the word 'Ayâh' (sign), mentioned in the *Qur'ân* is the synonym of nature. It prompts the understanding of natural phenomenon through observation and realization by the use of man's intellect. The *Qur'ân* says:

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, in the alternation of the night and the day, in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind, in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead, in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth, in the range of the winds and the clouds which trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth, are signs for a people that are wise".⁵⁴

He argues that when Pharaoh asked who was Allah? Mûsâ (A.S.) invariably referred to the laws of nature and implied that Allah is He who changes night into day and day into night, who gives life to the dead and death to living. All are His signs.⁵⁵ The signs provide the necessary indication in order to realize the natural order such as rain from sky, is a sign of the grace and goodness of Allah. It falls from the clouds, absorbed by the earth. It also flows through rivers, or underground streams to the sea, where it again rises as vapour and forms clouds. Then it fertilizes the soil and the seeds that leads to the production of several kinds of food and fruits for the benefit of men, animals and other living creatures. All are instituted by His divine command.⁵⁶

He emphasizes on scientific research and opines that Muslims must do research and investigate with the dictates of the *Qur'ânic* natural order since it must consist of measures that serve the ideal knowledge of the scientific discoveries and the uniformity of the natural laws. He rationalizes many *Qur'ânic* stories as signs of Allah towards understanding the glory and the power of Allah. One of the examples is the dialogue between the Prophet Mûsâ and the Pharaoh, when the Pharaoh asked Mûsâ

about the existence of the Sustainer, the reply was that Allah is the sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is in between them. However, the Pharaoh turned his face from the truth with his arrogant attitude.⁵⁷

Al-Malakût (authority)

Al-malakût, to Sayyid Ahmad means, nature, authority, and laws of nature, power, and signs. The authority of Allah for instance, showed the mysteries and the domination of the heavens and the earth to Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.) who realized the uniformity of laws of the physical universe. To him, the appearance and disappearance, rising and setting of the sun, the moon and stars in the heavens led to the development of his spiritual enlightenment into his heart, intellect and understanding. He literally did not worship stars or heavenly bodies. Having seen through the folly of ancestral idol worship, he began to see the futility of worshipping distant beautiful things that shine, which the vulgar endue with power that does not reside in them. Superstitions might read fortunes in rising and setting of the sun, but the true knowledge of Ibrahim (A.S.) shows that it rises and sets according to laws of Allah ﷻ. The story of Prophet Ibrahim is highly instructive for all men in quest of truth. He offered admonition to his people and arguments that should bring his community the clearness of truth instead of the vagueness and mystery of superstition, the security of faith instead of haunting fear of those who have no clear guidance or power. According to some commentators, the whole thrust of Ibrahim's reasoning in verses 6:76-78 is directed against the superstitious belief of his people and demonstrates the folly of worshipping the heavenly bodies. His arguments were against polytheism.

light of his Lord on the mount in order to strengthen his faith toward the Creator through the observation of nature.⁶¹ Abdullah Yusuf comments that when Moses gained consciousness, he saw the true splendor of the reality and the Truth.⁶² Al-Qurtubi argues that Prophet Mûsâ (A.S.) was shown the great signs and the manifestation of the works of Allah. After realization, he repented and turned his face to his Lord with regret because he understood the impossibility of seeing Him with his physical eyes in this world.⁶³ Sayyid Ahmad provides another example from the *Qur'ân*, when Mûsâ (A.S.) invited Pharaoh to believe in the existence of God. Pharaoh, then, asked him, "who is your Lord?" and the reply was straightforward and dignified that our lord is He who created all beings and things in their forms and nature and further gave guidance.⁶⁴ Another dialogue between Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.) and Namrûd was about the existence and power of the lord of the universe. When Namrûd disputed with Ibrahim about his Lord, Ibrahim argued that his (Ibrahim's) Lord is He who has given life and death. The reply of Namrud was that he is able to give life and death as well. Prophet of Islam argued again that it is Allah who created the sun and directed it to rise from the East, could you change its course? Namrûd was then confounded who in arrogance rejected the reality.

In one of his articles,⁶⁵ Khan argues that it is one of the signs of Allah, who has created man from dry dust and water, and created his partner with love and affection, compassion and mercy. He also made him in different colours, different voices and different faces. He also created day for earning man's subsistence and night for taking rest, which all are the signs of Allah,⁶⁶ through all these people may understand and realize the existence and glory of Allah.⁶⁷ He cites another example that man is created from his mother's womb as a consequence of the wonderful mystery of sex. In the mother's womb there are three veils of darkness. (Q. 30:21). Children arise out of the union of sex, and

sexual intercourse brings a child forth either male or female. Ears, eyes, hearts, intelligence and mind are created by the command of Allah so that man may understand the reality by using his senses. Therefore, man should be grateful to his Lord. In, the *Qur'ân* (16:78), and (32:7-9) Allah mentions the process of man's creation which is natural process. The child is born, it grows, it decays and dies (Q. 23:12-14) but after death (Q. 22:5, 23:12-14, 40:67) another chapter opens for the individual. It is to remind us of this most momentous chapter that the previous stages are recapitulated. The wonderful sign here is that the growth in the fetal stage is silent and unseen. The fetus is protected in the mother's womb like a king in a castle. It is firmly fixed and gets the protection of the mother's body, on which it depends for its own growth till its birth. Sayyid Ahmad cites another argument to understand nature and its purposes through the understanding of human life, human intellect, human analogy, human heart, and human thoughts. All are in relation to nature, because to him, the universe could not be understood without these.⁶⁸ He holds that Muslims are naturalists and have natural beliefs. He argues that when a man searches for his lord's glory, he is shown the *malakût* of the heavens and the earth, which may promote him to discover the reality. Sayyid Ahmad strongly believes that man should realize Allah's power, glory and goodness by the use of *'aql*. This is an approach to Allah's most wonderful universe that convinces people of thinking. Wise people study the great signs and messages of Allah towards understanding Him. Therefore, he argues that belief in the existence of Allah and His unity does not depend only upon revelation because the whole panorama of nature as it manifests itself before us is a sufficient clue to His being.

Sayyid Ahmad's Cosmological Teachings in Relation to Nature

In the historical and social context, nature has the two main aspects; one is cause and another is effect. Sayyid Ahmad does not blindly accept the Western naturalism and rationalism

which propagates that nature, or universe works on its own like a machine, independently of any transcendent source. He holds: "The chain of cause and effect is extended in time in a way that cause always comes before and the effect later".⁶⁹ He argues that the cosmological world or natural phenomenon proves the existence of Allah as the first Cause, and the existing things and events around us, have a chain of cause and these causes are the effects of certain causes of their own. The unending character of this receding series of causes and effects is unthinkable. Rational approach demands that we should stop at an uncaused cause which itself may be understood as the cause of everything. This supreme Cause is Allah who is the cause of all causes.⁷⁰ He argues that Allah must be uncaused because if He is possible and contingent, He would have been dependent for His existence on a cause external to Him. To Him, from necessary Being, it follows that He is without beginning and without end, primordial as well as everlasting.⁷¹

The *Qur'ân* guides: "It is He who creates from the very beginning and He can restore life."⁷² He believes in Allah as being Original Cause. The whole creation took effect at His command and thus entered its life. The whole fabric of the universe is supposed to stand to Allah in the relation, which the instrument bears to its maker. He also argues that it is like work of the watchmaker. As the craftsman determines the characteristic properties of his machine, the correlation of its parts, their position and their functions, so has Allah conceived to have dealt with the world.⁷³ Based on his rationalistic approach, he says that Allah is the cause of all causes logically and it could be identified with the working of nature. He states "We see the universe as actively existent and according to law of nature its ultimate cause must be actively and dynamically existent and causeless. Because the question is raised that if it had another cause which cause was the effect of a non-existent therefore, the first cause in the chain of

causes and effects stopped. We call this first cause as the cause of all causes and this refers to is Allah.⁷⁴

He argues that modern natural philosophy has firmly established that laws of nature govern the universe, which is identical for Him with the universal, valid and uniform law of cause and effect.⁷⁵

The *Qur'ân* guides: "There is no change in the creation of Allah".⁷⁶ His argumentation has been established by the empirical and observational science beyond doubt. All events that take place in this world are necessarily linked with one or more causes for their inception. In another words, he says:

We can understand and imagine in some ways through observation that all existing things are linked by a connecting chain. By necessity, this chain ends in a final being or cause or final reason: the Creator, Allah, God and the Lord of the worlds."⁷⁷

Sayyid Ahmad follows the Aristotelian concept of the cause of all causes. He points out that a passage from nature to Allah itself involves a process of negation and abstraction. He argues that the forms of things are changeable because whatever exists never really enters into nonentity. On the basis of certain *Qur'ânic* verses (55;26-27 and 28;28). Khan opines that everything or everyone will be destroyed but Allah who is the first cause of all causes.

Sayyid Ahmad refutes the objection against secondary causality and argues that the totality of existence needs a cause which is not itself contingent. And infinite regress is self evidently absurd.⁷⁸ He continues that in the creation a thing that exists is an effect of some causes and that cause is itself effect of another cause and thus the chain continues in a way that this chain must be in accordance with law of nature and itself is the effect of the cause of all causes. The proof and evidence of this lies in the laws of nature itself.⁷⁹ Sayyid Ahmad on the basis of the following reasons argues that Allah is the first cause of all causes.

1. One is His existence that He exists.
2. The second is His eternity, He has existed all along.
3. The third is His immortality or infinite future.

He regards Allah as the Final Cause of everything based on the logical implication of the law of causation as well as on his motion of naturalism and rationalism⁸⁰. He firmly believes:

The foremost belief of the religion of Islam is that there is a creator of all beings. The existence of one thing depends on a second and on a third... and thus chain ends up with the final cause. It ends up with the creator, Allah and the Lord of the world.⁸¹

He explains that in the existence of cause and effect there must be a relation of priority and posterity. The effect cannot exist without the cause. The chain of the cause and effect exists in time, so that cause and effect can be termed as first and last, before and after, internally and externally.

Shibli No'mani, another Muslim scholar, views that the fixed laws of nature without Allah's interference dominate the processes of the universe arbitrarily. He argues that everything happens by cause and effect, called natural cause. Nobody can change it.

Conclusion

The need for the investigation and understanding this issue is particularly urgent in the field of rationalistic natural theology, where people are exposed to the clarification of the controversial opinions. It is in this area that the principle of the understanding of the issue of nature and its relation between Allah and man finds full expression in the *Qur'anic* description. The real concept of it, whose explanation is necessary for the welfare of the Muslim community as well as Western community, is derived from and defined by the divine laws. To determine this elaboration, the proper understanding of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Mohammad ﷺ is inevitable.

The need for the investigation, study of nature and the laws of the nature is perhaps more pronounced in the history of Islam, given the factual elaboration that nature as one of the creatures of Allah and subservient to man, is derived from Divine sources, and a set of permanently valid manifested laws, which human beings cannot change.

References and End Notes

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was born on 17th October 1817 in India. He claims his descent from the Prophet Muhammad (saw) from his father side in the 36th generation. He was known as Sir Sayyid. His forefather migrated to Persia and finally settled at Herat in Afghanistan. His father was a pious man and high administrative officials under Mughal Empire. His mother taught him Islamic manners and religious understanding. He had admitted that his mother's noble activities and works influenced him, which had been reflected through his whole life.

² Sayyid Ahmed Khan, *Maqâlât-i-Sir Sayyid*, art. *Ûlabiyyîn, yî, Nechariyyîn, yî Fitriyyîn*, vol.3, p. 227 and see also *Tawhîd al-Akhlâq*, vol.1, No.5, 1312, pp. 73-75.

³ *Ibid*, vol. 5 art Nature, December 1963, pp. 153-154. See also vol.3, p. 277. *Al-Qur'ân*: 30:30.

⁴ *Ibid*, vol. 3, pp. 277-278.

⁵ *Ibid*, vol. 3, p. 227 and also *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq*, vol. 5, pp. 73-75.

⁶ *Al-Qur'ân*:2:118, 3:47, 59, 6:73, and 16:40. See also Isma'îl R. al-Fârûqî, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, pp. 315-317. *Al-Qur'ân*:2:118, 3:47, 6:73.

⁷ *Al-Qur'ân*:2:118, 3:47, 6:73.

⁸ Isma'îl R. al-Fârûqî, *Islam and other Faiths in the Challenges of Islam*, (ed. Gauhar, A. Islamic Council of Europe, London, 1978), pp. 88-89.

⁹ *Ibid*, *Islam*, (International Graphics: Brentwood, 1984), p 56.

¹⁰ Sayyid Ahmed, *op. cit*, vol. 1, pp. 8-10. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 28:28.

¹¹ *Al-Qur'ân* 28:28 (Verily, when He intends a thing, His command is Be and it is).

¹² *Al-Qur'ân* 67:34 (look into His creation for any discrepancy and look again, your sight, having found none, will return to you humbled).

¹³ Al-Kindi, *Rasâ'il*, vol. 1, p. 40.

¹⁴ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit*, vol.: I, 1311, p.p. 26-27. See also *Maqâlât-i-Sir Sayyid*, vol.: 3, p.p. 229-232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.p. 229-2332.

¹⁶ *Al-Qur'ân* 30:30 (There is no change in the order of Allah (ﷻ)).

¹⁷ Isma'îl al-Fârûqî, *op. cit*, p. 314.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-316.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

- ²⁰ *Al-Qur'ân*: 21:33 (All the celestial bodies swim along, each in its rounded course). See also 36:40 (Each swims along in its own orbit according to Law.).
- ²¹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ân*, (Footnote: 3986), p. 1125.
- ²² Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ân*, (Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis MN, 1989), pp. 67-70. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 67:3-4. (He who created seven heavens one upon another, you shall not find in the creation of the merciful any dislocation).
In another verse, 27:88, (and you see the mountains and think them solid but they are fleeting like clouds, the creation of Allah who has well-completed).
- ²³ Ed. James Mark Baldown, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Psychology*, (art. Naturalism, np), p. 141.
- ²⁴ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, vol. 13, p. 4.
- ²⁵ *Al-Qur'ân* 48: 23.
- ²⁶ *Al-Qur'ân* 54: 59, 13:9. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 13:9.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, pp. 82-83. (that can not be increased and decreased). See also *Al-Qur'ân* 25:2)
- ²⁸ Sayyid Ahmad, *op.cit.*, vol. 13, pp. 92-103.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, pp 82-83. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 17:84.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, pp. 3-6.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 84. See also *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq*, Vol. 11, p. 16, & p. 304. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 30:6.
- ³² Sayyid Ahmad, *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq*, Vol. 11, p. 16.
- ³³ *Al-Qur'ân* 16: 40, 36:82 and 83.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 36: 79.
- ³⁵ Ed. James Mark Baldown, *op. cit.*, (art. Naturalism), pp. 140 141.
- ³⁶ Newton was a great scientist who had developed the theory of gravitation.
- ³⁷ *Al-Qur'ân* 30:30. (There is no change in the creation of Allah and there is no change in the universe of Allah.
- ³⁸ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol. 15, p. 154.
- ³⁹ Sayyid Ahmad, *Series of Essay on the life of Mohammad*, Vol. I, 1870, p. X.
- ⁴⁰ B.A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, (trans), p. 150.
- ⁴¹ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 24.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, pp. 4, 5.

⁴³ Ghulam Ahmad Parvaiz, *Islam Kiya Hai*, (Lahore, first edition), pp. 119-128.

⁴⁴ *Thamûd* people were the successors to the culture and civilization of the 'Ad people. They were cousins of them from the same race. *Thamûd* was son of Abir the son of Sam and the son of Noah (A.S.). Their seat was in the northwest corner of Arabia between Madina and Syria. *Thamûd* people became godless and arrogant and an earthquake destroyed them. Prophet Sâlih (A.S.) warned them about the punishment of Allah. Prophet Sâlih (A.S.) told them that a wonderful she-camel was a sign or symbol from Allah to understand His existence and His glory. But they did not realize and killed she-camel (*Al-Qur'ân*, 7: 73-80, 15:80, 26:155, 54:28-29, 91:14) and finally the *Thamûd* people were destroyed by a dreadful earthquake, which threw them prone on the ground and buried them with their houses and their fine buildings.

⁴⁵ Ghulam Ahmad Parvaiz, *loc. cit.*, pp. 119-128.

⁴⁶ 'Ad was fourth in generation from Noah. He was son of 'Aus, the son of Aram, the son of Sam, and the son of Noah. 'Ad people occupied a large tract of country in Southern Arabia, extending from 'Uman-at the mouth of the Persian Gulf to Haç'amawt and Yemen-at the Southern end of the Red Sea. Prophet warned them (*Al-Qur'ân* 26: 123-140, 46: 21-26, 7: 65-72) about the punishment of Allah but they were disobedient and they forsook the true God and oppressed their people. Finally a terrible blast of wind destroyed them and their land.

⁴⁷ *Al-Qur'ân* 35:43, 17:77, 48:23, 33:62, 33:38, 30:30. (No change let there be in the work wrought by Allah. That is the standard religion. But most among mankind understand not. In another verse, "No change wilt thou find in Allah's way of dealing, no turning off wilt thou find in Allah's way of dealing.)

⁴⁸ *Al-Qur'ân* 48:23, 33:62. (The practice of Allah, which has been already approved in the past, no change will thou find in the practice of Allah).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, (art. *Uabiyim, yi Necharyiyin yi Fitriyyîn*), Vol. 3, p. 281.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 282.

⁵¹ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol:13, p. 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, (vol. 2, *Qur'ân Majîd ke Tafsîr ke Usul*), pp. 206-207. See also *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 16-17.

⁵³ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol. 15, pp. 154-155.

- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 148.
- ⁵⁵ *Al-Qur'ân* 2:164.
- ⁵⁶ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol. 13, pp. 148, 150.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 13, p. 152.
- ⁵⁸ *Al-Qur'ân* 16:66, 23:21-22.
- ⁵⁹ *Al-Qur'ân* 36:73, 74, 75.
- ⁶⁰ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol. 13, p. 148.
- ⁶¹ Hafiz Ibn Kathir, *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*, (Egypt: *Al-Mansurah: Darul-Yaqin*, 2003, Vol.2), p. 148. See also *Al-Qur'ân* 7:144.
- ⁶² Mufti Mohammad Shafy, *Tafsîr Ma'riful Qur'ân*, (Dhaka, trans. By Mawlana Muhiaddin), p. 481. See also 7:143.
- ⁶³ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 384. See 7:143.
- ⁶⁴ *Al-Qur'ân* 20: 49-50.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-208.
- ⁶⁶ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, (1st ed. December 1963, Compiled by Maulana Ismail Panipathi, publisher, Sayyid Imtiyaz Ali Taj, Lahore), p.151. See also *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq*, p. 1.
- ⁶⁷ *Al-Qur'ân* 32:7-8; (He began the creation of man with nothing more than clay and made his progeny from a quintessence of the Nature of fluid despised).
See also 30:21.
- ⁶⁸ Fazlur Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 71. See also 2:23, 10:38, 11:13, 17:88, 52:33.
- ⁶⁹ Sayyid Ahmad, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 30-31.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 29-30.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
- ⁷² *Al-Qur'ân* 83:13, 2:117.
- ⁷³ Sayyid Ahmad, *Tahdhîb al-Akhlâq*, Vol. II, p. 206.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 304-305.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 241.
- ⁷⁶ *Al-Qur'ân* 30:30.
- ⁷⁷ Sayyid Ahmed, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pp. 240-243.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 241-242.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 303.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 8.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 872.

