

Suliaman Nadvi on Religion, Reason and Science

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At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Muslim intellectuals tried to defend Islam and its basic dogmas from the severe criticism of the Orientalists and other critics. The primary purpose was to make a statement that Islam is a progressive religion and its principles are relevant to the requirements of our contemporary age. The Western philosophical and religious debates, development in science and technology compelled the Muslim elite to discover a new approach—a new *kalam* to save Islam from these new threats. Competition with the Western thought forced them to re-examine their religious doctrines, disciplines, methods and to evolve a new methodology to maintain their religious identity and socio-cultural institutions.¹

The first Indian Muslim who faced the situation boldly was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan² (1817-1898 C.E.). He was the first who felt the need of a new *kalam*, to start the study of the Western sciences and English education immediately among the Indian Muslims. His main aim was to prove that there is no conflict between Islam and modern sciences. The other aim was to convince the Muslims, not only of the truth of Islam, but its superiority over all other creeds. In one of his lectures he said, “today we are, as before, in need of a modern *ilm al-kalam* by which we should refute the doctrines of modern science and undermine their foundations or show that they are in conformity with the articles of Islamic faith.”³ Transformed into a naturalist under the impact of the West, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan made bold attempts to interpret the Qur’an purely on rational grounds.⁴ His commentary on the Qur’an created a rift between

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him and the orthodox section of the Muslim society on one hand and the common masses on the other. This was one of the causes of the failure of his neo *ilm al-kalam*, which in fact was a restatement of classical rationalism of the Mutazilites.⁵

The other outstanding Indian Muslim intellectual to respond to the modern challenges and to lay stress on the necessity of a neo *ilm al-kalam* was Shibli Numani (1857-1914 C.E.) – a close associate of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He later disassociated himself because of the mounting criticism by orthodox sections of society and the *fatwa* of *kufir* issued by *ulama* on Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Shibli in his search for a solution did not discard totally the medieval scholastic efforts. He believed in the continuity of the thought and therefore did not cut himself off totally from medieval scholastic efforts.

He was keen to redefine Islamic thought according to the needs of the modern age, which is clear from his strong belief in ‘old principles and new taste.’ While attempting to evolve such a methodology he turned to medieval Muslim scholasticism and evolved an approach, which could help him in tackling the contemporary situation.⁶

His moderate approach could satisfy modern sceptics on the one hand and orthodox (the ‘*ulamā*’) on the other. It appears that he was keen to create a perfect harmony between rational (*ma‘aql*) and traditional (*manqul*). He did not find Asharism useful for this purpose because Asharites failed to maintain the balance between *ma‘aql* and *manqul* and ended up against reason in certain issues of theology, like vision of God and miracles. Moreover, he felt that their arguments on the concept of God, Prophethood and life-hereafter were unconvincing.⁷

Though appreciative of the Mutazilites view, Shibli refused to identify himself with them, because the orthodox circles had already rejected it, and also because he had seen the fate of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Shibli, therefore, preferred Maturidite approach, in the development of his new *ilm al-kalam*. But due

to the non-availability of the Maturidite sources, he turned back again to the Asharite school of Muslim philosophy.⁸ The Asharite scholars whom he consulted in evolving his own neo-ilm al-kalam were: al-Ghazali (1058-1111 C.E.), Fakhruddin Razi (1149-1209 C.E.), Jalaluddin Rumi (1208-1273 C.E.) and from among Indian scholars he referred to Shah Wali-Allah (1703-1763 C.E.). He preferred these intellectuals because their mystico-philosophical ideas were of great help in explaining the supernatural aspects of Islam. Shibli also studied Muslim philosophers like Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 C.E.), Ibn Miskawiah (941-1030 C.E.), Ibn Sina (980-1037 C.E.), Shaikh al- Ishraq Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul (1153-1191 C.E.) and also Ikhwan-us Safa (10th century C.E.).⁹ Shibli did what he could in his short span of life by adopting a multi-pronged approach, drawing inspiration from different medieval theological expositions, and from the divergent doctrines, to re-interpret the religion of Islam and its dogma, and in trying to meet the intellectual demands of contemporary age. His approach became more popular when compared to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

Like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Shibli Numani another brilliant scholar who took up the incomplete task of his master Shibli Numani was Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi. A major project left incomplete by Shibli was the compilation of the *Sirah*—biography of the Prophet (SAAS). Shibli defined the *Sirah* differently from the generally conceived one. He said, it is not merely a biography or a life sketch, or a history of the events chronologically arranged but a work which would reflect all aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life. *Sirah* should encompass each and every aspect of the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) said Shibli. He was of the view that the Western scholars are keen to probe the different dimensions of the Prophet's personality. They are probing the impact of his message on political, social, economic and other aspects not only on the Arabian society but also the world societies at large.¹⁰

Shibli was keen to write five volumes covering these aspects but was able to complete only the first two, covering the biographical aspects of the Holy Prophet (SAAS). In the remaining three volumes he intended to cover the beliefs and practices, but his untimely demise did not permit him to complete the work. These volumes were completed by Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi. Instead of five volumes the project went into seven volumes, but the seventh volume dealing with the political aspects remained incomplete.¹¹

In evolving and defining his religious thought, Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi upheld the methodology of Shibli Numani and also maintained a 'middle-of-the-road' approach. In his approach Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi preferred the opinions of the early generations of Islam (*ahl-i-salaf*). Unlike Shibli, Suliaman Nadvi had a puritanic – reformist background as he belonged to a family of practicing Sufis of Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order.¹² During his early age he was exposed to works like *Taqwiyat al-Iman* of Sayyid Ismail Shahid, which had created a deep impact on his mind. This orthodox revivalist tradition took its shape and came to the fore in the later stages of his life, specially after his association with Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi. Personally he had a strong leaning towards Naqshbandi - Mujaddidi *silsilah* and therefore, he made an attempt to revive the religious views of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Wali-Allah.¹³

In his interpretations of super-natural and super-sensible concepts of Islam, like his master Shibli, Suliaman Nadvi also took resort to mystical views as and when the pure rational approach failed him. To substantiate his views he depended upon the Traditions of the Prophet. In all probabilities this approach was adopted to save himself from the bitter criticism of the orthodox '*ulama*' and the wrath of the common man which was meted out to Sir Sayyed and to a certain extent his master Shibli Numani.

Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi was keen to train a new breed of

writers who could meet the Western canons of criticism and who could adopt a new approach, a new methodology. His approach to a new methodology can be seen in the editorial of the journal *Ma'arif*, the organ of Dar al- Mussanifin from Azamgarh and also in his treatise called *Risalah i-ahl-i-Sunnat wa al-Jama'at*.¹⁴

The intellectuals of our country, writes Nadvi, are divided into two groups. Firstly, the proponents of rationalism who do not hesitate to ridicule the religion and religious sciences and secondly the defenders of religion and religious sciences i.e., the orthodox who outrightly reject the necessity of rational thinking. Apart from them the 'middle-of the road,' declared Sulieman Nadvi, proclaims a general reconciliation. Change in outlook and ideas is essential, said Nadvi, but not at the cost of our intellectual heritage. We are keen to start a system by bringing the two divergent viewpoints together but certainly not by sacrificing the treasures of our great men of the past (*buzrugan ka andokhta*).¹⁵

It is essential he said to become fully aware of the changes taking place in the society in order to update ourselves and to lay down the foundations of a new intellectual interpretation. History provides us information about the splendid achievements of our early generations (*salaf*) and we should take help from the past to meet the challenges faced by Islam today. He reminds the Muslim modernists who were influenced by the Western canons of rationalistic thought, to look into their own glorious past in the fields of science and technology. He reminds them of the translations undertaken into Arabic language from Greek, Sanskrit and other languages and the treasures produced by Muslim scholars of the past, specially in Medicine, Ophthalmology, Mathematics, Trigonometry and other sciences. In fact, Sulieman Nadvi reminds the blind followers of the Western canons of the self-sufficiency of Islam in different aspects of our lives. He also reminds them that in

this process of academic development, our medieval scholars never became the slaves of foreign influences, rather they rectified the errors whenever required. Instead of following them blindly, medieval Muslim scholars tried to create a compatibility with our own traditions.¹⁶

Today we are faced with a similar situation, said Suliaman Nadvi and we are face to face with the European or Western culture. Therefore, while we need to familiarize ourselves with the modern methodology and arrive at rational interpretations of the Islamic dogmas, as per the requirement of the time, we should not ignore our past and our traditions enshrined in our system. While re-writing our past history, biographies, polity, economics and society, we must adopt new canons of the western criticism without sacrificing our own deep rooted traditions. Last, but not the least the historical, moral and literary debates about the Qur'an should be replied effectively by applying the new cannons of the western criticism.¹⁷

Suliaman Nadvi, traces the impact and influence of the alien culture upon Muslims in his work *Risalah ahl-i-Sunnat wa al-Jama'at*.¹⁸ He writes that as Islam spread both in the East and the West, a number of townships became a meeting point of different religions and cultures, leading to the intermingling of the Arabs and *ajamis*, and as a result of this the Arabs soon lost some of their best qualities, specially the practical approach to life. This intermingling of faiths led to arguments and counter arguments and soon a number of sects emerged like the Khawarij, the Hashwiyyah and the Jabriyyah. Debates on clearcut verses of the Qur'an (*muhkam*) and ambiguous verses of the Qur'an (*mutashabih*), abrogating verses (*nasikh*) and abrogated verses (*mansukh*) other theological, philosophical and mystical issues created divisions within the ranks of the Muslims society. Suliaman Nadvi, writes that the development of speculative thought was responsible for the emergence of different sects and theological divisions within

the Muslim community. While the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet (SAAS) restrained Muslims from indulging in arguments on abstract passages and on issues like God's Essence and attributes (*Zat wa Sifat*), anthropomorphism, beatific vision (*ruyat i-bari-ta'ala*), free will and pre-destination (*jabr wa qadr*) and createdness of the Qur'an etc., Muslim philosophical sects indulged in interpretations of these issues under the influence of the Non Arabs (*ajamis*), discussions and debates and doubts (*istidlalat i-fasid*) affected their beliefs (*tawilat i-fasid*) leading to their ultimate deterioration.¹⁹

Examining at length the drawbacks of the medieval *kalam* Suliaman Nadvi states that though the Greeks produced a number of philosophers during the ancient period they failed to create the same impact, which modernists of our times have created. He suggests that the modernists of our times must examine the drawbacks of the medieval *kalam* and must differentiate between the beliefs and practices, which have come down to us from the Qur'an and Hadith.²⁰ He warns the modern Muslims of the blind imitation of the European vocabulary and the western neologism and its application in interpreting the issues of Islam. These Western parameters, according to Suliaman Nadvi, do not suit the religion of Islam due to their different contexts, leading to distortion of the original Islamic spirit. He draws a clear distinction between Islamic culture and the western culture. The former he said stands for transcendence of God in human affairs but the latter stands for its mixup with mundane materialistic laws.²¹

Suliaman Nadvi's purificationist-reformist family background, Shibli's conservative modernism, his training at Nadwah, which was founded as a 'middle-of-the-road' institution, his dislike of Sir Sayyed and the *fatwas* of *kufr* against Shibli made him cautious in his approach.²² From classical *salafism* he assimilated the principle of primacy of the tradition over reason. But unlike the *salafis* who considered

ilm al-kalam an innovation (*bida'at*) or forbidden (*haram*) he made use of the interpretations of certain medieval scholasticians. Like other modernists he also felt the need of preserving the original character of Islam and its compatibility with reason and science.

In his discussion on the conflict between religion and science, Suliaman Nadvi states that Islam as a religion is not antagonistic to science. The allegation of modernists that Islam is anti-science is based on the definition of the religion given by medieval Christian scholars which the Muslims had adopted. His main addressees were the Muslim youth who were disenchanted with Islam under the cultural influence of modern Europe.²³ Through his works he tried to convince the Muslims that the Qur'an contains a number of verses, which encourage Muslims to pursue scientific enquiry.

The Qur'an says:

... travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who rejected truth.²⁴

Say: travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who rejected truth.²⁵

Similarly the Qur'an encourages the study of subjects like History and Archaeology. It encourages man to observe nature and to probe into the internal and external world. It encourages man to probe in to what exists in the skies and under the earth. The Qur'an refers to subjects like Geography, Geology, Psychology, Anthropology and Astronomy and states that they are to be studied for man. The Qur'an refers to man as *ashraf ul-makhlukhat* or as a sublime being because he is endowed with the knowledge of nature and the qualities of the things.²⁶ The Qur'an also differentiates between the literate and the illiterate.

Do they not travel through the earth and see what was the end of those before them, they were superior to them in strength.²⁷

On the earth are signs for those of assured faith.²⁸

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day – there are indeed signs for men of understanding.²⁹

...Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?...³⁰

God did confer great favour on the believers when sent among them the Apostle from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs of God, sanctifying them, and instructing them in scripture and wisdom (Kitab & Hikmah)...³¹

Nadvi criticized the western scholars who called Islam outdated and a backward looking religion. To prove his point he highlighted the achievements of the medieval Muslim scholars to different sciences like Medicine, Astronomy, Mathematics and Trigonometry. It was infact Muslim scholars, said Nadvi, who infused the spirit of enquiry among different races of the world.³²

Knowledge ('ilm), wisdom (hikmah) and the reason ('aql) are the necessary ingredients of the religion of Islam says Suliaman Nadvi. He explains that Adam was assigned the duty of the promulgation of knowledge, which continued through the cycle of prophets till Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). Apart from these Qur'anic verses there are a number of Prophetic sayings (Hadith) which insist upon the Muslims, the significance and importance of the acquisition of knowledge.³³

The Muslim 'ulamā', from the mosques and the *madrasahs* and Sufis from the *khanqhas* performed the function of dissemination of knowledge. A scholar of the caliber of Ibn Rushd (1126-1196 C.E.), delivered lectures in the mosque of Cordova, performed the functions of a *qadi* and issued judgments settling the cases referred to him on one hand and wrote commentaries on the books of Aristotle on the other. Imam Razi (1149-1209 C.E.) compiled *Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah* and *Sharh i-Isharat* in philosophy and wrote also the *tafsir* of the Qur'an in eight volumes on the other. Al-Farabi,

was known for his efforts to reconcile the views of Aristotle and Plato. Ibn Haytham, was a physicist and a scholar of optics. Ibn Sina (980-1037 C.E.), the great philosopher evolved and elaborated a complete system of philosophy. Nadvi points out it was due to their investigations and researches that the foundations of modern research were laid down. Similarly Imam al-Ghazali, Imam Ibn Taimiyya, Ibn Hamam, Ibn Qayyim, Shah Wali-Allah and many others were Traditionists (*Muhaddithun*), Jurists (*Fuqaha*) as well as renowned philosophers. Based on this account Sulieman Nadvi writes that the religion of Islam was never against research, investigations and scientific spirit of enquiry.³⁴

It is important to note, says Sulieman Nadvi, that at no point of time in the history of Islam any scholar dealing with any science was persecuted or punished, in fact they were encouraged and patronized by Muslim rulers and nobles. This, he says, is a proof in itself to show that neither the religion of Islam nor its propounders were ever opposed to the spirit of enquiry and application of reason. In the entire history of Islam we do not come across any 'inquisition' against Muslim scientists, unlike the enquiries made against Copernicus (Polish physicist and astronomer 1473-1543 C.E.) who was declared a heretic. Galileo (Italian physicist and astronomer 1564-1642C.E.) was forced to retract his discoveries by the Holy Office of Inquisition; Bruno (Italian Philosopher 1548-1600C.E.) was condemned to death and burnt alive for his doctrine of infinity of worlds (*ta'adud i-'alam*). In short the Inquisition in Europe within eighteen years of its formation (1481-1499 C.E.) declared thousands of scholars as heretics and their teachings were banned and many of them were burnt alive. This was the state of affairs in the West says Sulieman Nadvi, because they believed that science and philosophy are antagonistic to religion. This state of affairs reached its zenith in the later part of the nineteenth century culminating in the

work of J.W.Draper under the title *The Conflict Between the Religion and Science*, published in 1876 from London.³⁵

Suliaman Nadvi states that, while territories of Islam expanded both in the East and West it carried with it, the zeal and zest of the spirit of enquiry. It was able to bring about a new intellectual awakening in Arabia, Persia, Central Asia (*Mawara-un-Nahr*), India, Egypt, Turkey and Spain. Scholars of very high caliber like al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Shihab Zuhari, Imam Bukhari, and many others were born, who brought about a new awakening through their research and findings.³⁶

He further argues that it is not fair on the part of modern philosophers and scientists to discard religion in favour of modern scientific approaches, because these modern researches are subject to change and therefore, cannot be treated as final. Hence we can never conclude that a final word has been said or its truth and certainty have been completely manifested or proved, or that we have finally conquered the nature.³⁷ Science is an ongoing process said Nadvi and it has to go a long way to discover the mysteries of the nature. It has still to probe into the depths of the cosmic order, fullest potentialities of energy, nature of soul, and solve the concept of life, life after death, etc. When scientific findings are still in a conceptual stage it is unfair to pass such verdicts against religion, a point, which he repeated throughout his discussion on various issues of religion.³⁸

He also pointed out that there cannot be any apparent conflict between religion and science, because both of them have their own requirements and areas to deal with. For example science deals with material objects, their properties and laws of the material world. Supernaturalism (*ma wara i-madda*), metaphysical aspects and spiritualism are issues, which fall within the purview of religion. If the functions of science and religion are restricted to their realms, there will be no apparent conflict between religion and science.³⁹

There are many religious issues like the existence of God, concept of miracles, revelations, soul, ascension and life here after, etc., with which science has little to do. As Geology has little or nothing to do with Astronomy or Botany, so also these issues have little to do with issues which relate to the mundane world. The existing conflict between religion and science vanishes if the interferences of one into the other is avoided said Suliaman Nadvi.⁴⁰ Against those who believed that the conflict between science and religion is everlasting, Suliaman Nadvi, said it is due to the rigid medieval religious conception that knowledge acquired through human reason and experiment alone can be the criterion for testing the validity of information.⁴¹

The modern cosmologists believe that the universe was a huge fireball (primary nebula) and all the planets including the earth came into existence from a cataclysmic blast. It became cooler through dissipation of its heat.⁴² Suliaman Nadvi cites the Qur'an to describe this process :

Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? ⁴³

Geologists state that before the inception of this world there was nothing except ether i.e., very small particles, lighter than the air. After a long time nature created in these tiny particles the power of attraction and repulsion resulting in the formation of solid, liquid and gas, leading to the creation of the heavenly bodies.⁴⁴ The Qur'an sheds light on this theory as well:

Moreover He comprehended in His design the sky and it had been (as) smoke: He said to it and to the earth 'come you together willingly or unwillingly.' They said: We do come together, in willing obedience. ⁴⁵

The Qur'anic phrase *dukhan* (smoke), is the perfect phrase to explain the origin of the world and the diversity of things, said Nadvi. It resolves the problem of qualitative distinctions

in the physical world.⁴⁶

Recent studies show that the sedimentary rocks are stakes that hold the solid exterior of the earth, give stability (*thaqal*) and provide foundation to it.⁴⁷ The Qur'an says:

And the earth we have spread out (like a carpet);
set thereon mountains firm and immovable.⁴⁸
And we have set on the earth mountains standing
firm lest it should shake with them⁴⁹

Discussing the rotation of the sun about its axis, its completion of circular motions, which the modern astronomy has discovered, the Qur'an says:

And the sun runs his course for a period
determined for him that is the decree of (Him), the
Exalted in might the All-Knowing.⁵⁰

The scientists today, after a lengthy debate and discussion have concluded that the faculty of sense (*ihsasat aur idrakat*) are found not only among the human beings but also in animals. Through this elementary physical phenomena, the scientists have concluded that they can discover the environment and also recognize changes in their body.⁵¹ This particular ability of perception has been mentioned in the Qur'an in the following words:

Seest thou not it is God whose praises all beings in the heavens and on the earth do celebrate, and the birds (of the air) with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And God knows well all that thou do.⁵²

There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth nor a being that flies on its wings, but (form part of) communities like you.⁵³

The scholars of Botany with their untiring efforts have discovered that the plants have male and female reproductive organs and reproduce and bring fruits and seeds through proper pairing.⁵⁴ The Qur'an says:

Glory to God, Who created in pairs all things that

the earth produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things of which they have no knowledge .⁵⁵

Science has produced the law of conservation of mass (matter) which says that matter is neither created nor destroyed during any physical or chemical change and the sum total amount of mass in a given system remains constant.⁵⁶ The Qur'an says:

We already know how much of them the earth takes away: with us in a record guarding (the full account).⁵⁷

... at length We made them as a tale (that is told) and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments ...⁵⁸

It is a known fact today that the sun generates its light and the moon is an inert body which does not generate light but merely reflect the light received from the sun.⁵⁹ The Qur'an distinguishes this nature of the two celestial bodies naming the lights of the sun as *zia* and *nur* for the reflected light of the moon:

... It is He who made the sun to be a shining glory and the moon to be a light (of beauty)....⁶⁰

The scientist unanimously agree that, there exists a natural law in the world and a chain of causes and effects and a necessary connection between them.⁶¹ The Qur'an refers to this phenomena in the following way :

Behold in the creation of the heaven and the earth, and the alteration of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding. Men who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the wonders of creation in the heavens and the earth (with the thought "Our Lord! not for naught Hast Thou created (all) this !...⁶²

...and sent down rain from the heavens, and brought forth there with fruits for your sustenance....⁶³

The aim of quoting these Qur'anic verses, says Suliaman

Nadvi, is not the scientific analysis of the Qur'an, because the Qur'an is basically a book of guidance, ethical values and social aspects of human beings. Its relationship with science is secondary (*zinni*) and meant for the manifestation of God's Power (*Qudra*), delicacy (*Latafat*) and artistic skills (*San'at*).⁶⁴ The main aim is to highlight the point that the Qur'an stands in harmony with science and not in conflict. It makes every thing subservient (*mussakhar*) to man as he is the vicegerent (*khalifah*) of God on earth. Human beings with endowed faculties have discovered many things and are required to investigate many more things in nature, through their scientific instincts.⁶⁵

While discussing the Darwin's theory of evolution, his mentor Shibli says that the creation of the universe in this manner apparently, seems to be more reasonable or *qarin i-qiyas*.⁶⁶ Shibli depends on Rumi's explanation of cosmic order. In Rumi's system cosmic order is found to be indicative of a progressive dematerialization of things, which may be denoted in the philosophical terminology as *tajarrud 'an-al ma'ddah*. Originating from the low elemental stage of inanimate being (*jamad*), it passes through the first compound stage of the vegetable world (*nabat*). With the onward evolutionary journey the things will become less and less material until it reaches the animal world (*hywan*), where it acquires perception (*idrak*), which Rumi identifies with soul".⁶⁷ Suliaman Nadvi states that the first principle of evolution is, man was not born instantly but in several stages, i.e., from low elemental stage of inanimate beings (*jamad*) to compound stage of vegetable world (*nabat*) until it reaches the animal world (*hywan*) and finally the stage of *insan*.⁶⁸ Nadvi traces these stages from the verses of the Qur'an. The Qur'an says:

. . . He that has created you in diverse stages.⁶⁹

It is clear from the above verse that man was created in stages. The second principle of evolution is that man was born

out of non-living things (*jamad*), referred to in the Qur'an as clay. The Qur'an says:

He who has made everything which He has created most of good. He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay.⁷⁰

At yet another place the Qur'an mentions :

How can you reject the faith in God ?-seeing that ye were without life and He gave you life...⁷¹

These two verses of the Qur'an not only deal with the evolutionary process of the creation of man but also confirm his origin from non-living matter i.e., clay.⁷² The second stage of his evolution from minerals to vegetables has been mentioned in the Qur'an in the following verse:

And God has produced you from the earth growing (gradually). And in the end He will return you into the (earth) and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection).⁷³

For those modernists who argue that the living things were created from water the Qur'an says,

... We made from water every thing. Will they not then believe? ⁷⁴

The Qur'an also explains the different stages of the evolution of man. It says:

Man We did create from a quintessence (of clay). Then We place him as a (drop) of sperm in a place of rest firm fixed. Then We made the sperm into a clot We made a (foetus) lump; Then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature so blessed be God the Best to create.⁷⁵

This verse of the Qur'an collectively provides explanations of various stages involved in the process of birth. Sperm/ovum (*nutfah*) and flesh and bones are all elements that lead finally into the another creature.⁷⁶

Suliaman Nadvi states that the evolutionist research speaks

of various embryological developments in the foetus (*janin*). Such features are also mentioned in the Qur'an :

...He makes you in the womb of your mothers, in stages one after another in three veils of darkness .

...⁷⁷

Three layers of darkness are *shikam* (anterior abdominal wall of mother), *rahm* (the uterine wall), and *jhilli* (the amino chronic membrane).⁷⁸

Nadvi concludes by saying that these details in the Qur'an about the evolution of man help us in reconciliation (*tabiq*) between religion and science as it is evident that the Qur'an does not forbid us from pondering over the issue of creation. After discussing the issue of evolution from the point of view of the Qur'an, Nadvi turns his attention to the discussions of modernists on this issue. Though the theory of evolution may be true but evidences and proofs in its support are so weak that Suliaman Nadvi writes, it does not lead us anywhere.

Darwin in his book titled *Descent of Man*, discusses this issue and writes that all creatures and living beings were basically one in nature and developed gradually into different species. Man infact is the last stage of this development.⁷⁹ To support his argument, Nadvi extends the following evidences.

- i. Physical resemblance between the body of man and animals.
- ii. Resemblances in diseases among man and animals.
- iii. Similarities in tastes especially among the apes.
- iv. Similarities in sex, progeny etc.
- v. Similarities between embryological development of man and animals are arguments forwarded by the Modernists who defend the Darwin's theory of evolution.

An objective mind, states Nadvi, will not accept readily these arguments, but Muslim modernists blindly concur with the arguments given by the Western Scholars.⁸⁰

It can be concluded from the above discussion that Sayyed Suliaman Nadvi was keen to prove that neither the Qur'an nor the *Shariah* is against the application of reasoning and that there exists no conflict between religion and science. While discussing the theory of evolution and other scientific issues, Nadvi talks of the limitations of the scientific knowledge. Science for him is not free from then possible errors of perception, therefore, cannot provide a complete insight into the real nature.

References and Notes

1. M.Sait Ozervarli, "Attempts to Revitalize Kalam in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," in *The Muslim World*, vol. lxxxix, no.1, January, 1999, pp. 90-93.
2. As rightly pointed out by Bashir Ahmad Dar that the catastrophe after 1857 was averted because of the efforts of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He further writes that "the story of post-1857 struggle of Muslims for regaining their position of vantage in all spheres of life religious, political, educational and cultural-revolves round the life of this one man." B.A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Lahore, 1957, preface, p.v (henceforth *Religious Thought*). For further detailed discussion on Sir Sayyid's theological speculations see also, Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964*, London, 1967, pp.31-57 (henceforth *Islamic Modernism*); J.M.S. Baljon, *Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Leiden E.J.Brill, Netherlands, 1986, pp. 91-92.
3. *Religious Thought*, p.135.
4. Ibid., see also Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, *Muslim Mumalik mein Islamiyyat aur Maghrabiyat ki Kashmakash*, Majlis, Tahqiqat wa Nashriyat -i- Isalm, 2003, p.105; Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shibli Numani*, Lahore, 1976, pp.2-4 (henceforth *Intellectual Modernism*).
5. M.Ahmadullah, *Shibli Numani: An Exposition of his Socio-Religious and Political Thought*, Silverline Printers, P.S. Nagar, Hyderabad, 2003, pp.6-7 (henceforth *An Exposition*).
6. *An Exposition*, pp.8-10.
7. Ibid., pp.9-10.
8. Ibid., p.9.
9. *An Exposition*, pp.11-12.
10. In the past biographical accounts was written taking into account the history and events only. It had nothing to with 'Ilm al-Kalam. If religion means only belief in God then the debate would end here itself. But belief in prophethood is also an essential part of the faith. Therefore, it is essential to probe the details of his life said Shibli. Shibli Numani, *Sirat al-Nabi*, Darul-Musannifin, Azamgarh, 1352 A .H.vol.I, pp.5-6 (henceforth *Sirat*), see also Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi, *Hayat-i-Shibli*, Ma'arif Press, Darul -Masannifin, Azamgarh, 1979, pp.705-706 (henceforth *Hayat-i-*

- Shibli*).
11. It is essential to point out that during his life time Shibli had constituted a committee called Majlis-i-Talif and Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi was a member of this committee. He had also accompanied Shibli to Bombay where Shibli compiled the first two volumes of *Sirat al-Nabi*. For further details Ibid., pp.705-712.
 12. Shah Moinuddin Ahmad Nadvi, *Hayat-i-Suliaman*, Darul Musannifin, Azamgarh, 1973, p.5 (henceforth *Hayat-i-Suliaman*).
 13. Ibid., p.5.
 14. *Hayat-i-Suliaman*, p.95.
 15. *Hayat-i-Suliaman*, pp.106-107. See also Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi, *Shazrat-i-Suliamani*, Darul-Masannifin, Shibli Academy, Azamgarh, 1990, vol.I, p.2 (henceforth *Shazrat*).
 16. *Shazrat*, vol.I, pp.3-4.
 17. Ibid., p.4.
 18. This *Risalah* is a collection of his articles which was published in *Ma'arif* in 1917 in response to a query made by some one on the group called *Ahl-i-Sunnat wa Jama'at*.
 19. Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi, *Risalah ahl-i-Sunnat wa Jama'at*. Ma'arif Press, Azamgarh, 1926. pp.8-26 (henceforth *Risalah*).
 20. Ibid., p.56.
 21. *Shazrat*, Darul -Masannifin, Shibli Academy, Azamgarh, 1997, vol. II, pp.214-215.
 22. Shaikh Ikram writes that apart from the factors mentioned above, his association with Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi was also responsible for his orthodox or traditional approach which is evident from the rejoinder published by Suliaman Nadvi indicating a complete change in his outlook on certain issues after his association with Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanavi. Shaikh Ikram, *Yadgar-i-Shibli*, Idarah i-Thaqafat i-Islammiyyah, Lahore, 1971, pp.8-13.
 23. Sayyid Suliaman Nadvi, "Mazhab Islam awr 'Ilm wa 'Aql," *al-Nadwah*, July, 1911, pp.17-18.
 24. Abdullah Yousuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Presidency of Islamic Courts and Affairs, State of Qatar, n.d. Chapter 3: Verse137 (henceforth Chapter and Verse only).
 25. 6:11.
 26. *Al-Nadwah*, July 1911, pp.15-17.

27. 30:9.
28. 51:20.
29. 3:190.
30. 39:9.
31. 3:164.
32. *Al-Nadwah*, July, 1911, pp.11-12.
33. *Ibid.*, pp.14-17.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.
36. *Ibid.*, p.13.
37. *Ibid.*, p.7.
38. *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.
39. *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p.7.
42. Shah Moinuddin Ahmad Nadvi (ed.), *Maqalat-i-Suliaman*, Darul-Musannifin, Azamgarh, 1968, vol. III, p.153 (henceforth *Maqalat*).
43. 21:30.
44. *Maqalat*, p.152.
45. 41:11.
46. *Maqalat*, pp.152-153.
47. *Ibid.*, pp.158-159.
48. 15:19.
49. 21:31.
50. 36:37. See also *Maqalat*, p.161.
51. *Maqalat*, pp.159-160.
52. 24:4.
53. 6:38.
54. *Maqalat*, pp.160-162.
55. 36:36.
56. *Maqalat*, pp.156-157.
57. 50:4.
58. 34:19.
59. *Maqalat*, p.156.
60. 10:5.
61. *Maqalat*, pp. 157.
62. 3:190-191.
63. 2:22.

64. *Maqalat*, pp.151-152.
65. *Ibid.*, pp.162-163.
66. *An Exposition*, p.24.
67. *Ibid.*, p.44.
68. *Maqalat*, pp.170-171.
69. 71:14.
70. 32:7. See also *Maqalat*, pp.170-171.
71. 2:28.
72. *Maqalat*, p.171.
73. 71:17-18.
74. 21:30.
75. 23:12.
76. *Maqalat*, pp.172-173.
77. 39:6.
78. *Maqalat*, p.174, n.1.
79. *Ibid.*, pp.164-165.
80. *Ibid.*, pp.166-167.