

# Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni: An Exploratory Study of his Place in the *Tajdid* Movement and Position towards the Sudanese Mahdiyya

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## ABSTRACT

*Much had been written in Islamic (notably in Arabic and Persian) and Western (particularly English and French) languages about the monumental mujaddid (Islamic reformer) and political activist Jamāl al-Dīn al-Husaini (1838-1897), popularly known by his self-styled pseudonym “al-Afghāni”. Nonetheless, this article revisits him mainly because the challenges that the Islamic world faced and which he tried, in vain, to address during his turbulent time remain basically the same in our chaotic time, even in a much acute form after the historic September 11, 2001 incident. Chief among those are the devastating Shi'i-Sunni conflict and the accelerating Western cultural and physical invasion of the Muslim world. The article attempts to give a fresh interpretation and assessment of Afghāni's complex character, stormy life and religio-political legacy. The study also poses a presumably interesting question, namely, why Afghāni's visionary thought was not acclaimed during his life, and may it be recalled now to address the stubborn problem that the Muslims are currently facing, particularly the Muslim-Muslim confrontation in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere, and the general disarray of the Ummah?*

*In a related vein, the paper dwells at some length on the position of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghāni towards the Mahdist revolution (1881-1885) that erupted in the Sudan almost at the same time of his arrival in Europe, an issue that has hardly been addressed in the in all the scholarly works on the Sudanese Mahdiyya. The study argues that the assertion of some European writers that al-Afghāni had viewed himself as a “messianic saviour”, a “Muslim Luther” or even a “Mahdi” goes too far and appears to be engendered by over-reading of some of his literature. Depending on some of al-Afghāni's articles in his organ al-Urwah Al-Wuthqa and other related literature, the study maintains that he tried, also in vain, to channel the spectacular victories of the Mahdist revolution in the service of his ambitious political agenda. Chief among those were to recharge self confidence in the then apathetic Muslim masses, and hence to end European political imperialism, cultural domination and economic exploitation of the Muslim world. Besides, al-Afghāni seems to have considered to use his alleged, but unfounded, ‘paramount influence’ and ‘extensive contacts’ with the Mahdists to score a diplomatic victory over the British i.e. to offer to be a go-between the British and his presumed ‘friends’- the militant Mahdists. But the British governments quickly realised the gross inaccuracy of al-Afghāni's jargon, and discarded once and for all its initial notion of al-Afghāni mediation.*

Al-AfghĒnĒ lived his life very publicly, and was indeed a source of heated controversy in the Muslim world of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and afterwards. Even his origin was a source of furious debate. Having an axe to grind, his numerous adversaries among the ruling elite, the court ulemĒ' and even the ultra-secularists orchestrated a campaign to discredit him, particularly among the Sunni Muslims. They claimed that he was Persian by birth, in the Iranian town Asadabad, and that he received his formative education at the hands of ShiĒni instructors. As Albert Hourani plausibly maintained, there may be some internal evidence to support this view, mainly derived from AfghĒnĒ's own writings and speeches. He was, for, example, well versed in Islamic philosophy, particularly the Avicennian thought which was more readily available in ShiĒni's centres of learning than in those of Sunni Islam.<sup>1</sup> However, by emphasizing, in fact overemphasizing, his Persianism and ShiĒnism, his enemies were seemingly not essentially after the truth, but wanted to refute AfghĒnĒ's claim to be the spokesman of Sunni Muslims amongst whom he spent the greater part of his life. Moreover, they aspired to demonstrate that he was subservient to the Persians, "*Kalb al-ĒAjam*" (the Dog of the Persians), as one of them had rudely recorded.<sup>2</sup> This charge of being a "stooge" was also extended to the Europeans where he was asserted to have been at one time or another in the pay of the French, the British or the Russians. Paradoxically, AfghĒnĒ was also attacked by the militant secularist elite for whom he was no more than "an ignorant reactionary."<sup>3</sup>

To counteract this persistent campaign, AfghĒnĒ and his disciples insisted that he was a Sayyid (descendant of the Prophet) and a doctrinal Hanafi Sunni who was well versed and faithful to Islamic tenants and principles.<sup>4</sup> In response to the sarcastic appellation that his archenemy Shaykh AbĒ al-HudĒ al-SayyĒdĒ<sup>5</sup> attached to his name, i.e. "*al-Mut' affghin*" (the false Afghani), Jamal al-Dein and his students insisted that he was born to a princely Afghani family in an Afghan village, and that he moved with his family at the age of eight to Kabul. However, another version claims that he was Persian by origin but an Afghani by upbringing, in the sense that his Persian family migrated to *BilĒd al-AfghĒn* where he was born.

AfghĒnĒ maintained a very low opinion of the Muslim rulers of his time, both in Sunni and ShiĒni countries, who, to him, suffered from the tyrant delusion that only God can take them from power. He accused them of despotism, corruption, selfishness and total betrayal of the Muslim populace. Moreover, being straightforward and courageous, he never told the powerful what they wished to hear, and was usually bold and unceremonial, even blunt, with them.<sup>6</sup> His rocky relations with the rulers were appropriately summarised by Albert Hourani in the following long passage that deserves to be recorded in full:

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<sup>1</sup> Hourani Albert, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Oxford University Press, 1970), 108. According to Nikki R. Keddi, Some Persian works maintain that AfghĒnĒ was born and spent his childhood in Iran. For a summary of the key points on the subject in these sources, see Keddie Nikki R., *Sayyid Jamal al-Din al- AfghĒnĒ, A Political Biography* (California University Press, 1973), 427-33. *Hereafter Biography.*

<sup>2</sup> Al-QinawĒ, ĒAbd al-QahĒr: *TaldhĒr al-Ummam min Kalb al-ĒAjam.*

<sup>3</sup> Vatikiotis, Panayiotis Jerasimof, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, 1969), 303-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Shaykh AbĒ al-HudĒ al-SayyĒdĒ of the RifĒni Sufi order was an Arab by origin. He traveled to Constantinople where he established a personal ascendancy over the Ottoman Calip-Sultan Abd al-Hameid II (1876-1908), and was very instrumental in formulating his religious policy.

<sup>6</sup> Conversely, AfghĒnĒ was reportedly gentle, courteous and encouraging to his followers and seekers of knowledge. RĒda Muhammad Rashid, *Ta'rikh al-Ustadh al-ImĒm MuĒammed ĒAbduh*, vol.1 (Cairo: n.p., 1931), 46-48.

“Al-Afghani did not belong to the quietist majority of Muslim thinkers, who believed that they should protest against injustice but submit to it; he accepted rather the view of the minority who believed in the right to revolt. Each time then a ruler disappointed him he turned against him violently, and his opposition served to strengthen the constitutionalist and nationalist movements which had begun to appear. For their part, the rulers, who had hoped that he would rally Muslim sentiment behind their thrones, found that his real intention was to use their power in the service of Islam.”<sup>7</sup>

What had further complicated Afgh n s relations with the ruling elite was his complex character, for he was seemingly full of himself, obstinate, short-tempered and untamable, in the phrase of his British friend Blunt,<sup>8</sup> “a wild man of genius”. Afgh n  “difficult” character was also confirmed by many of his biographers, including his loyal disciple Muhammed  Abdu, who described him by such phrases as “* ad d al-miz j*” and “* na abi damawi f  miz jih*”,<sup>9</sup> i.e., short tempered.

With such high esteem and highhandedness, Afgh n  had throughout his career focused on appealing, even guiding, the very traditional rulers, whom he disrespected, to attain his revolutionary programme of reform. But he hardly cared to appeal to the people, and had totally neglected to establish for himself and his movement a popular organisation. This lifelong mistake was probably the major factor for his misfortune of not seeing during his lifetime the fruits of his ideas, i.e., the awakening of the Muslim populace. Towards the end of his life, Afgh n  seemed to have realized this mistake as he bitterly recorded in a letter sent from prison to an anonymous Iranian friend,

“Would that I had sown all the seed of my ideas in the receptive grounds of the people’s thoughts! Well would it have been had I not wasted this fruitful and beneficent seed of mine in the salt and sterile soil of that effete sovereignty! For what I had sowed in that soil never grow and what I had planted in that brackish earth perished away. During all this time none of my well-intentioned counsels sank in the ears of the rulers of the East, whose selfishness and ignorance prevented them from accepting my words....”<sup>10</sup>

However, as expected, this defiant, but seemingly short-sighted, strategy of reform drastically failed, and Afgh n s relations with each and every ruler that he dealt with quickly broke down. They found it easy and convenient to indiscriminately declare him as a *persona non grata*, and expel him from their countries. The outcome was, as explained below, a troubled life and career that was characterised by endless wondering in Muslim and European countries. While exposing al-Afgh n  to considerable

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<sup>7</sup> Hourani, 117.

<sup>8</sup> Wilfrid Blunt was a poet, a romantic who was shocked by the vulgarity of the 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism. Between 1877-1879, he traveled to Syria and Arabia, and in 1880 he settled for a while in Egypt to improve his Arabic and to be acquainted with the problems of the Muslim world. It was there that he met Muhammed  Abduh and heard of Afgh n . His close observation of the events in Egypt that culminated in the British occupation of the country in 1882 propelled him to sympathize with the nationalist movements in Egypt and India, as reflected in his book, *The Future of Islam*, published in 1882.

<sup>9</sup> For details, see, Muhammad, 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Nikki, *Biography*, 419.

hardship and was probably a factor for his sparse writings,<sup>11</sup> this obligatory mobility had, nonetheless, advertised him and his ideas in many corners of the world.

Our first information about AfghÉnÊ was during his early youth, around 1856/57, and in India. Having already been well versed in Islamic knowledge, he devoted his over one-year stay in India to establish his first contact with the scientific and mathematical knowledge of modern Europe. His next destination was Hijaz where he stayed for a year after which he left to Afghanistan. He indulged himself there in the troubled local Afghan politics, but was eventually deported because he backed the wrong side in the civil war of 1863-65.<sup>12</sup> Hence, he returned, around 1866, to India, but, pressured by the British authorities, he restricted his movements and contacts. After a one-month stay in India, he moved to Egypt where he stayed for a very short duration (forty days or so) during which he met for the first time his future loyal disciple Muġammed ŃAbdu, then a young Azharite student, and interacted with other students of al-Azhar, including some Syrians. Subsequently, he moved to Istanbul, where he was initially protected by the liberal minister Riad Pasha, and was employed in the board of education. But the revolutionary ideas that he exhibited and voiced aroused the bitter hostility of the conservative and orthodox ŃulemÉ', led by the then *shaykh al-ŃulemÉ'* Hassan Fahmi Afendi,<sup>13</sup> who accused AfghÉnÊ of insulting the prophethood in a public lecture on industries that he gave in the University off *DÉr al-FunĒn*. Thus, he was expelled from Istanbul to arrive in Egypt in 1871.

The circumstances that brought AfghÉnÊ to Egypt and the conditions for his stay there were a source of controversy. His best known disciple Muġammed ŃAbdu maintained that his master came to Egypt as a tourist, and without any intention to stay there. But he did so on the plea of the minister Muġġafa RiÉd (1834-1911), who admired AfghÉnÊ's scholarship since his days in Istanbul. In recognition of his eminence, ŃAbdu continued, Riá allocated for him an unconditional gratuity of 1,000 piaster. But another source claims that the sum was in fact a salary that was given to him, with a room in al-Azhar dormitory, on condition that he teaches in al-Azhar strictly according to the principles of the sharÉŃah and religion. However, AfghÉnÊ eventually vacated his Azhar lodging and took a house in the Jewish quarter of Cairo, which, with a nearby café, became the meeting places with his followers and admirers among the elite.<sup>14</sup>

Whether a tourist or an asylum seeker, the personal prestige of the charismatic AfghÉnÊ had steadily increased among the elite during his eight-year stay in the country, thanks to his magnetic personality as well as some important developments. First was the accelerating intervention of European powers, particularly Britain and France, and their tight control, since 1876, of the finances of the Egyptian government under the guise of recovering the huge amounts of loans that the "impatient modernizer", i.e. Khedive IsmÉŃÉl, had recklessly borrowed from European banks and creditors. In his desperate attempt to restore his power, the Khedive had tactically put a nationalist face and cautiously welcomed AfghÉnÊ, who was known for his adamant opposition to British and other European meddling in the affairs of the Muslim countries, particularly Egypt and India. But the fundamental differences between the positions and outlooks of the despotic IsmÉŃÉl and the shuratic AfghÉnÊ were irreconcilable; hence, as expected, they soon departed. However, AfghÉnÊ's presumed membership, or presidency, of the secret Arab Masonic society, which advocated modernist and reformist ideas, put him in touch with

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from newspapers and magazine's articles, AfghÉnÊ wrote only one book, entitled *Refutation of the Materialist*. For a discussion of its content, see below, 10-12.

<sup>12</sup> Albert, 117, and Muhammad, 28-29.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Elie, 8, quoting Anhuri, S.R.J. *Siġr HÉrĒt* (Harut's Magic), (Damascus: n.p., 1885), 178-79.

some eminent Egyptian politicians, administrators, journalists, army officers and the like. But AfghénÊ's most important success and impact was among some young intellectuals, Azharites and otherwise. Prominent among those were his principal disciple Mu'ammad ÑAbdu (1849-1905) and, later Mu'ammad RashÊd Ri'la (1865-1935), the owner and editor of the famous Journal *al-ManÊr*, who had both upheld and advertised their mentor's legacy. They also included Sa'Ñad ZaghlÊl (1857-1927), the undisputed leader of the post world war one Egyptian nationalist movement, and the eloquent orator of ÑUrÊbi's revolution ÑAbdullah al-NadÊm.

In his biography of the UstÊdh<sup>15</sup>, ÑAbdu admirably reported that the charismatic and learned AfghénÊ introduced them to mathematical subjects such as algebra and geometry as well as the discipline of philosophy and its offshoot logic. He also gave them a unique insight on the Islamic disciplines of *KalÊm* (theology), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *TafsÊr* (exegesis), *xadÊth* and Sufism, and persuaded them to actively engage in *al-KhiîÊboh* (oratory) and "*fan al-KhiîÊbah*" (the art of writing) that was at the time mastered by very few Egyptian literates.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting here that while in Egypt, and indeed afterwards, al-AfghénÊ gave a push to non-governmental and non-official press. Some journals were founded in the 1870s and 1880's by his followers and associates e.g., the weekly *Jaridat Mi'ir*, founded in 1877 by SalÊm al-NaqÊsh, *Mi'ir al-QÊhira*, published in 1880 in Paris by AdÊb IsÍÊq, the famous first satirical paper in Egypt Abu *Na'Êrah* of Jacob (James) Sanua<sup>17</sup> and *Mir'Êt al-Sharq* of IbrÊhÊm al-LaqqÊnÊ in 1879. Over and above all these papers was, of course, AfghénÊ's own magazine *al-ÑUrwah al-Wuthqa* that was subsequently published in Paris.<sup>18</sup> These and other papers had, directly or indirectly, played a significant role in blossoming AfghénÊ's image<sup>19</sup> and supporting his major theme, namely opposition to absolutism and foreign intervention in the entire Muslim world. In the light of these facts and the political realities of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Prof. Elie Kedurie's assertion of "Afghani's ...mediocre Journalism"<sup>20</sup> seems to be unfair.

While inciting through personal contacts, speeches and writings the Egyptian populace against European encroachment and its *raison d'être* Khedive IsmÊ'ÑÊl, al-AfghénÊ tried to develop a working relation with his son and heir apparent, who was said to be a member of al-Sayyid's masonic lodge. TawfÊq seemed to have promised al-AfghénÊ and the nationalists in general that he would undertake serious reforms

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<sup>15</sup> This biography was first recorded by ÑAbdu at the beginning of his translation of his mentor's only book, entitled *Al-Radd ÑalÊ al-DahriyyÊn*. (See below), and was reproduced with some additions by Mu'ammad RÊshid Ri'Ê in his *Ta'rÊkh*. It is interesting to note that ÑAbdu distinguished between what he called *al-mudhÊkarah*, the teaching methodology in Afghani's study circles, and its counterpart *al-dars* that was practiced in the traditional schools. See Muhammad, 26. While the former may be equated to the modern innovative teaching method called "student based" learning, the latter is near to its counterpart, the dry "teacher-based learning".

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad, 32.

<sup>17</sup> James Sanua (d.1912) an Alexandrian Jew, who is better known by his pen name *Shaykh Abu Na'Êrah*, was active during the 1870s and 1880s in both Journalism and the theatre. For more information about him, see Panayiotis, 107, 139.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> They had, for example, hailed him as *ÍakÊm al-sharq* (the "sage of the East"), "repository of wisdom's secrets" and "a miracle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century". For further details on al-AfghénÊ's role in promoting Journalism in Egypt, see Muhammad, 45-48.

<sup>20</sup> Elie, 29-30.

that would establish the *shĒrĒ* and the rule of law if and when he ascends the throne. Hence was their tacit blessing of the Sultan’s firman of June 1879 that summarily dismissed Khedive IsmĒnĒl and appointed TawfĒq in his place.

TawfĒq had initially put a liberal face, nominated Sharif Pasha, nicknamed “father of the Egyptian constitution”, to the premiership and allowed him to draft a constitution. However, it soon became apparent that this move was just a clever piece of eyewash, and that the new Khedive was simply buying time. For once he was on the saddle, he rejected SharĒf’s project to enact a constitution, and dismissed him in mid August from the premiership to be followed by RĒal, who was recalled from exile. TawfĒq, who had by then become a virtual stooge of Britain, next targeted AfghĒnĒ whom he thought to be a danger to his regime, even harbouring to change it into a republic. This was particularly so after a series of powerful speeches in which AfghĒnĒ said that Khedive TawfĒq was “compelled to serve, consciously or not, British ambitions”, and ended “by a war cry against the foreigner and by a call for a revolution to save the independence of Egypt and establish its liberty”. However, the official reason given for his arrest and deportation to Hyderabad in India, as elaborated in a long document signed by the Director of Publications and published in the press on 28 August 1879, was his alleged organization of a secret society composed of “*ShubbĒn dhawĒ al-battsh* (young thugs), whose aim was “to ruin religion and rule”.<sup>21</sup> AfghĒnĒ and his disciples vigorously, but to no avail, denied this accusation, and, in protest, some of the papers that were published by his followers refused to publish the press release.

During his crucial nine years in Egypt (1871-79), AfghĒnĒ had, no doubt, left his fingerprints, and was instrumental in the intellectual renaissance of the country. His major success was among the elite of whom many were bound to him by strong ties of love, even adoration. But in Egypt, as elsewhere, he neglected to establish for his movement a popular political base, and entirely depended on his presumed ability to control and guide the Khedives. As suggested above, this lack of realism and tact had cost him and his movement dearly.

After his ordeal in Egypt, the disillusioned and frustrated AfghĒnĒ was sent to India where he stayed for three years, from late 1879 to late 1882, mainly in the Muslim southern state of Hyderabad and in Calcutta, then the capital of British India. Our limited information about this transitional sojourn is mainly derived from British documents and from AfghĒnĒ’s own writings, speeches and interactions with some thinkers.

It is worth dwelling at this juncture on the conflicting positions of al-AfghĒnĒ and the Indian reformist Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) on the issue of the British presence in India. While AfghĒnĒ continued his anti-British agitation on the grounds that political independence is a pre-requisite to all kinds of reform, Ahmed Khan maintained that the British were too strong to be dislodged and that violence against them will aggravate the already grave misery of the Indian Muslim community. He continued to argue that the British, who had favoured the Hindus in the past because they mistakenly viewed the Indian revolt of 1857 to be solely Muslim, appeared to be increasingly inclined to reverse this policy to rally Muslim support “as a conservative counterweight to the more nationalist middle-class Hindus”.<sup>22</sup> Hence, Ahmed Khan advocated what he considered to be tactical cooperation with the British, founded the Anglo-oriental College to offer British-style education and encouraged Muslim to increasingly enter government service. By the end of the day, his moderate programme “far overshadowed AfghĒnĒ’s anti-

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<sup>21</sup> Concurrently, AfghĒnĒ’s chief aide, Muhammed ĒAbdu, was banished to his village, while his loyal servant Abu TurĒb was imprisoned for two years, and later went to Beirut.

<sup>22</sup> Nikki, *Biography*, 154-55.

British programme among the Indian Muslims of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>23</sup> Once more, as was the case in Egypt and elsewhere, AfghĒnĒ’s overwhelming dependence on the elite was arguably instrumental in his failure to enlist popular support among the Indian Muslim community. Not many seemed to have cared about his harassment and expulsion from India by the British authorities. AfghĒnĒ was so disheartened that he sought asylum in Europe, to be the earliest, or one of the earliest, Islamist reformers to be a political refugee in the West in modern times.

AfghĒnĒ brutal attack on Ahmed Khan was not only verbally, but also in writing. While in India and afterwards, he wrote many articles against Ahmed Khan and his supporters, whom he belittled by giving them the appellation the *neicheriyya* (i.e., the naturalists) sect or group, and the “Aghuris”, who were reputed to be the least respected caste in India. An examples of such articles was a piece published in India under the title “The Aghuris with Pomp and Show,” and an article subsequently published *al-ŃUrwah al-WuthqĒ* under the title “*al-DahriĒn fĒ al-Hind*” (The Materialists in India). But his most severe onslaught on the “naturalists” was his major book written in Persian in 1881, entitled in English rendering by Prof. Nikki Keddie, “The Truth of the Naichiri Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris.” The book was also translated in Urdu in 1883, and in Arabic in 1886. The latter translation was undertaken by Muhammed ŃAbdu with the help of Afghani’s niece and confidant, ŃArif Affendi, popularly known as Abu TurĒb, under the title “*Al-Radd ŃalĒ al-DahriyyĒn*” (Refutation of the Materialists), Beirut 1886. Under the guise of answering a question by a Muslim from Hyderabad, AfghĒnĒ elaborately discussed in this book the issue of the *neicheriyya* throughout history, and came to the conclusion that it has always represented a serious threat to the fundamentals of all religions, including Islam. To AfghĒnĒ, the pillars of all religions that had been consistently undermined by the materialists were six in number: three “beliefs” and three “qualities”. The former were “man is the noblest of all creatures”, “his community is the noblest one”, and that “he has come into the world to acquire accomplishments worthy of transferring him to a world more excellent, higher, faster and more perfect than this narrow and dark world that really deserves the name of the Abode of Sorrows”. The three “qualities” that arise from these three “beliefs” are consecutively “shame” (*hayĒ*), “trustworthiness” (*amĒna*) and “truthfulness” (*ġidq*). Ahmed Khan’s materialist sect was nothing but a continuation of this historical atheist drive. The book even claims that “The first doctrine of this sect is the overthrow of religions.”<sup>24</sup>

Ahmed Khan had admittedly been accused of heresy by some religious quarters, so had AfghĒnĒ himself.<sup>25</sup> These charges and counter charges of atheism or agnosticism (*al-Riddah* in Islamic Jargon) had been, and are still, so ridiculously prevalent in the Muslim world that they should not always be taken seriously.<sup>26</sup> For they were usually heavily politically loaded, and AfghĒni’s accusation to Ahmed Khan did not seem to have been an exception. However, the book under discussion served the cause of AfghĒnĒ to demonstrate his strong Sunni beliefs and to pose himself as a genuine defender of Sunni Islam, even

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 154. For the English translation of this book, see Keddie Nikki R. *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-“Afghani”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1883), 130-187.

<sup>25</sup> AfghĒnĒ and his student Muhammed ŃAbdu were blatantly accused of atheism. For extensive elaboration on this charge, see Elie, passim. In his book *Sġr HĒrĒt*, SalĒm al-ŃAnhĒrĒ accused AfghĒnĒ of atheism, but he later publicly retreated from this charge. For details, see Muhammad, 50-51.

<sup>26</sup> The Sudanese respected scholar Malmud MuĒammad Taha was a victim of this charge. In 18 January, 1985, he was publicly hanged in Khartoum in the presence of a crowd of fanatics shouting: Death to the enemy of God.

its spokesman. As argued below<sup>27</sup>, this book and other writings might have also facilitated Afgh n 's plan, then in the making, of working with the Sultan – Caliph  Abd al-Hameid II.

Apparently concerned about his personal safety *vis a vis* the harassment of British interrogators, who viewed him as an envoy of  Urab  to incite the Muslims against the British government in India, Afgh n  voluntarily left India for Paris via Port Said and London. While transiting across Port Said, he sent letters to former friends and patrons in Cairo requesting protection for two of his close disciples, Mu ammed  Abdu and Ibr h m al-Lagg n , and help for his emissary Ab  Tur b, whom he was sending to Cairo to recover some cash arrears that the Egyptian government owed him, and his books that were confiscated at the time of his expulsion from Egypt. During his brief stay in London, Afgh n  was hosted in the house of his friend Blunt, and was mainly engaged in writing violent anti-British articles for a London-based Arabic newspaper *al-Na la*, under such titles as “English policy in Eastern Countries” and “The Reasons for War in Egypt”.

However, throughout his eight years stay in Egypt and for the most part of his sojourn in India, Afgh n  had hardly talked about or wrote on Muslim Unity. The focus of his attention was the formation of a united front of all the inhabitants irrespective of their religious beliefs, which was glaringly reflected in his repeated appeals to the glories of ancient Egypt and the glorious Hindu past. The prevailing conditions in the two countries seemed to have convinced him that an appeal to cultural or linguistic nationalism, rather than Pan-Islamic ideas, would be a more effective anti-imperialist weapon. Unlike the 20<sup>th</sup> century two most prominent Indian Islamic revivalists, Mu ammed Iqb l (1877-1938) and Ab   Al  Mawdud  (1903-1977) who viewed nationalism and Islamism to be at loggerheads, Afgh n  seemed to have been of the opinion that they were different but not necessarily contradictory, and could be used together as communal strategies against imperialism. In any case, Afgh n  advocacy of Hindu-Muslim cooperation negated the presumption that he was the originator of an Indian-Muslim state that materialised by the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

However, towards the end of his stay in India, Afgh n  seemed to have experienced a major change in strategy and conviction. Rather than focusing on national unity, he switched to Pan-Islamism as the best means to end the shackles of imperialism, and to restore the dignity of the Muslims. Thus, since 1881, he presented himself to the Muslims as the defender of Islam and the champion of Muslim unity. Similarly, by then a significant shift in his position towards the Ottoman Sultan could be detected. While viewing the Sultan suspiciously in the past, even a stumbling block in the way of the implementation of his revolutionary programme, Afgh n  had now felt that  Abd al-xameid II had become too prestigious and popular to be ignored or antagonized. Hence, he started to appease him by various ways and means, and to explore the possibility of working with him. A close look at *the Refutation of the Materialists* shows that it included some remarks that could have been incorporated to please the Sultan. He explicitly, and for the first time, used the Quranic phrase “*al- Urwah al-Wuthqa*” (The Indissoluble Bond) to describe the Caliphate, and claimed that the true reason for the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 was to counter the resounding success that Sultan  Abd al-xameid had had in rallying the Muslim behind the Caliphate. When Blunt sought Afgh n 's advice about his projected visit to Istanbul in late 1883, the latter cautioned his friend not to say anything negative about the Sultan, and to be cautious about his pet idea of the establishment of an Arab Caliphate in Mecca, that had apparently appealed to the British government to counter the influence of the Ottoman Sultan.

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<sup>27</sup> See Nikki, *Biography*, 10.



But AfghénÊ's two-year or so stay in Paris, March 1883 – 1884, was of outstanding significance to his career and legacy. Paris was convenient for his anti-British and revolutionary political plan because of the then strained relations between Britain and France resulting from the British unilateral occupation of Egypt in 1882 that infuriated both the French government and public opinion. AfghénÊ hoped for and got French support, but it was not as extensive and conclusive as he wished. It basically did not go beyond turning a blind eye to some of his activities, and extending some facilities to him, perhaps including a modest subsidy. However, "the great JamÉl al-Dein" was enthusiastically welcomed and supported by two political refugees residing in Paris, the Egyptian James Sanua and the Ottoman dissident KhÉlid Khanim, and their Paris-based Arabic newspapers, respectively *Abu NaïlÉrah Zarqah* and *al-BaîÊr*. While in Paris, AfghénÊ had also established postal contacts with some of his followers in Beirut, ÑAbdu, AbË TrÉb, al-LaggÉnÊ and AdÊb IshÉq, who were all exiled to the town after the failure of ÑUrÉbi's revolution. AfghénÊ also had support and sympathy from some opposition groups and reformers in different Muslim capitals, e.g., the great Tunisian-Ottoman statesman Khayr al-Dein al-TÉnisÊ (1810-1889) and the famous leader of the Algerian Muslim revolt against the French, ÑAbd al-QÉdir al-JazaÑirÊ (d. May 1883).

However, AfghénÊ's activities in Paris were primarily journalistic. They included French language articles published in Parisian newspapers, and Arabic articles in the two abovementioned Paris based newspapers under such titles as "*Al-Sharq wa al-SharqiyyÊn*" (the Orient and the Orientals). But his most important endeavour in this respect was the founding in France of the weekly Arabic Journal *al-ÑUrwah al-WuthqÉ* (The Firmest Bond), a phrase that AfghénÊ borrowed from the Qur'Én (Surat NuÑmÉn, verse 22). AfghénÊ called his most favoured disciple, MuÍammed ÑAbdu, to Paris to be the editor of this journal. Being a renowned Arabist, ÑAbdu was the architect of the linguistic composition of the journal's articles, but the thought, particularly in the politically focused pieces, was that of Afghani as it reflected the ideas he wished to advertise to the general Muslim public.<sup>28</sup> The sources of financial support for the periodical, as well for AfghénÊ and ÑAbdu's living cost in Paris, cannot be conclusively ascertained, but it is reasonable to assume that they were meager and derived mainly from Muslim opposition groups and personalities like Prince ðalÉm and the deposed Khedive IsmÉÑil, who both had a greedy eye on the Khedivate of Egypt. This financial constraint was apparently the main reason for the magazine's short seven-month existence, 13 March – 17 October 1884. The main themes of the eighteen issues of *al-ÑUrwah* were hostility to British imperialism, advocacy of pan-Islamism,<sup>29</sup> and the interpretation of Islamic principles to demonstrate their applicability to urgent contemporary needs.

Notwithstanding the ban and restrictions imposed by the British authorities on the distribution of the journal in the Muslim territories that they controlled, *al-ÑUrwah* was extensively circulated and widely read in the Muslim world in general, but Egypt and India in particular, thanks to the determination of the editors and the dedication of their followers in many Muslim capitals, which once more exhibited their appreciation of the efficiency of this brand of mass media in popularising ideas and political programmes. For both its thought and language, *al-ÑUrwah* was seemingly the most influential journal of all the Arabic periodicals of its time. It, furthermore, had profound impact on thinkers of subsequent generations. The 20<sup>th</sup> century prominent Islamic revivalists, RashÊd RÊla, the owner and founding editor

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<sup>28</sup> Nikki, *Biography*, 220. The policy of *al-ÑUrwah* as well its objectives and methodology were outlined in "*FÉtiáh al-JarÉdah*", i.e. its opening article. For the full text of this article, see AfghénÊ, J. and ÑAbduh, *Al-ÑUrwah al-WuthqÉ*, (Beirut: n.p., n. d), 41-48.

<sup>29</sup> It is claimed that the concept of Pan-Islamism was first put in place by the Turkish intellectual Namik Keamal, and that the term was an imitation of Pan-Slavism that was coined in 1877 by the German philosopher Von Warmer.

of *al-ManĒr* magazine, and Hassan al-Bana (1906-1949), the founding *murshid* (general guide) of the society of the Muslim Brotherhood, should be specifically acclaimed in this respect.

The “revolutionary” Pan-Islamism that AfghĒnĒ forcefully advocated in *al-ŅUrwah* and other platforms was in many ways radically different from the “official” Pan-Islamism that started with 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Sultans, and was then energetically patronised by Sultan ŅAbd al-xameid II, with the full support of the court ŅUlemĒ, particularly Shaykh Abu al-Huda al-SayyĒdĒ. “Official Pan-Islamism” had, to a large extent, concentrated on the unity of the Sunni Muslims who were called upon to rally around the Ottoman Sultan and his Caliphate that was “proclaimed a necessity of faith, transmitted legitimately from Abu Bakr down to the Ottomans, the caliph is the shadow of God on earth, the executer of his decrees; all Muslims should obey him, being thankful if he does right, patient if he does wrong; even if he commands them to break God’s laws, before disobeying they should begin with advices and prayers, confident that God is better able to judge him than are they”.<sup>30</sup>

While sharing with Sultan ŅAbd al-xameid the concern of uniting Muslims in the face of a common danger, and willing, though hesitantly, to work with him to serve this cause, AfghĒnĒ wanted this unity to be on his own revolutionary terms and to serve his own purposes that were not identical with those of the Sultan. First, the focus of unity should be the religion itself, and not a person or a dynasty; hence political factionalism and dynastic interests should not be allowed to stand in the way of unity. Secondly, unity should outweigh doctrinal and traditional enmity, and encompass all Muslims, Sunnis as well as ShiŅis. Since what unite these two groups, one God, one Prophet and one Book (the Qur’Ēn), is much more than what divide them, AfghĒnĒ tried to bridge the doctrinal gulf between the two groups. To extend Pan-Islamism to the ShiŅi world, AfghĒnĒ proposed a reconciliation conference to be held in Istanbul and attended by all Muslim leaders, where the Ottoman Sultan would recognise the Shah and give him the ShiŅi holy places in Iraq in return for the latter’s recognition of the Sultan as Caliph. However, the Caliphate should have some sort of spiritual authority over the Muslims, but not necessarily political and military domination. Thus, AfghĒnĒ did not want to revive the united caliphate of the past or to impose a single Islamic state. If the spirit of cooperation existed, he optimistically argued, a confederation of Islamic states could be formed under the spiritual guidance of a devout, just and tolerant ruler. But these conditions were too drastic to be even discussed by the autocratic ŅAbd al-xameid II, and AfghĒnĒ’s revolutionary Pan-Islamism had to wait for a chance of success in the distant future, i.e., the formation in 1969 of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (O.I.C.), a platform in which the ShiŅi and Sunni states have tried to cooperate on issues upon which they agree, and to forgive each other on matters in which they disagree.

At this juncture, it may be useful to dwell at some length on the position of JamĒl al-Dein al-AfghĒnĒ towards the Mahdist revolution (1881-1885) that flared in the Sudan almost at the same time of his arrival in Europe, an issue that had hardly been addressed in all the scholarly works on the Sudanese Mahdiyya. In defiance of the Ottoman Caliph and the court ŅUlemĒ, the charismatic and pious leader of this movement, MuĒammed Āmad ibn ŅAbdullĒh, declared himself the Mahdi, and waged a *jihĒd* against the “infidels”, who, to him, included all non-believers in his Mahdiyya. The followers of the Mahdi, styled by their leaders as the “AnĒr” in obvious parallelism with the Prophet, inflicted heavy defeats on the Ottoman forces, that were often led by British generals. They captured some European priests and adventurers, and killed a couple of British officers, notably General Hicks Pasha in the battle of Shaykan in 5 November, 1883, and the legendary General Gordon on 26 January, 1885. These and

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<sup>30</sup> Nikki, *Biography*, 107, quoted from Abu al-Huda al-SayyĒdĒ, *DĒŅĒ al-RashĒd*, passim.

other dramatic events brought the Mahdi to international prominence, and aroused tremendous concern, anxiety and alarm in Europe.

Some European writers maintained that Jam'el al-Dein al-Afghani viewed himself "a messianic saviour", a "Muslim Luther" or even a Mahdi. Admittedly, the man thought very highly of himself and his abilities to effect revolutionary change presumably single-handed, but these apocalyptic charges seemingly went too far; and appeared to be engendered by the "over reading" of these writer's of some of Afghani's literature.<sup>31</sup> The man appeared to have seriously doubted, or altogether rejected, the religious legitimacy of the Mahdist notion, and certainly did not believe in the religious pretensions of the Sudanese Mahdi. But it was quite natural that he tried to channel the spectacular victories of this revolution in the service of his ambitious political agenda to end European political imperialism, cultural domination and economic exploitation of the Muslim world.

The general Muslims were by the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century dominated by the perception that Europe was predestined to be superior. Hence, apathy, indifference and helplessness towards European domination in general, and that of Britain in particular was the rule of the day. To recharge self-confidence in the Muslim masses, al-Afghani and his students emphasized, often exaggerated, in *al-Nurwah* and elsewhere the scope and significance of the Mahdist victories against the British. They forcefully argued that these victories illustrate the Muslim long-held presumption that the British military might was too strong to be defeated was nothing but an illusion and a dangerous one. The Mahdist victories showed what Muslims could do if only they were awakened.<sup>32</sup> Had Egypt and India been really awakened and united, Britain could never have secured a foothold. This and other views may have been expressed in a too sweeping way, but this jargon must be viewed with the aims behind it, namely to arouse men's spirits, and to propel them to give up once and for all their damaging defeatism and fatalism. Only then could the Muslim expel the imperialists from their land, and restore their glorious past. For, as the Qur'an vividly says, "Verily God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly". In other words, Afghani strove to employ the Mahdist impressive victories in his psychological war against the British, in particular to secure the withdrawal of their occupation forces from Egypt and India.

Besides, al-Afghani tried to make use of these victories in the diplomatic front. Though under great pressure to avenge the "brutal" murder of the "great son of the British Empire", General Gordon, the British government had briefly and hesitantly explored the possibility of a truce or a negotiated deal with the Mahdi. On a few occasions, Gladstone's government hinted to Blunt that it might be interested to use him and "his Muslim friends" for dialogue with the Mahdi.

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<sup>31</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, the chief autobiographer of al-Afghani, had, for example, exaggeratedly commented on a letter that al-Afghani wrote on his extremely harsh treatment by the government of the Shah of Iran by saying, "This letter is one of several statements from Jamal al-Dein which voice a messianic and martyred lane with regard to his own role. "In the letter, his two chief captors are repeatedly called Shimr and Umar Ibn Sa'ud, the names of the generals who conquered and slew the great martyred Imam Hussain." Nikki, *Biography*, 328.

<sup>32</sup> Several articles were written in *al-Nurwah* on the Sudanese Mahdiyya, which had all highly praised it and attacked its enemies. One of them described the revolt as "the English volcano in the Sudan".

Blunt, who was strongly against the British occupation of Egypt, took these seemingly casual hints seriously. In June 1884, he brought ṢAbdu to London, and by February 1885, he traveled by himself to Paris to discuss the issue of the Mahdi with al-AfghĒnĒ. The latter came to London in July, 1885, where Blunt gave him an entrée to the British ruling circles. In a meeting on 23 July, 1885 with Lord Randolph Churchill, then at the height of his brief power, AfghĒnĒ discussed the affairs of the Sudanese Mahdi, even suggested an Anglo-Muslim alliance against the Russians. Blunt had, in fact, proposed that AfghĒnĒ, or one of his aides, would be the right emissary to the Mahdi, and asked that Britain guarantee his safe passage down the Nile through British lines to the Mahdist capital Omdurman.

On his part, al-AfghĒnĒ posed himself as the best go-between because of his alleged paramount influence and extensive contacts with the Mahdi through some of his close followers who studied under him in al-Azhar. Concurrently, AfghĒnĒ cautioned of the dire consequences that would be fallen on Britain if it missed this diplomatic opening. A further serious Mahdist victory, he insisted “would incontestably pass, in the eyes of the Muslims, for a second miracle”, and “would have as a fatal consequence not only the provocation of an insurrection in the Islamic countries under Ottoman domination, as well as in Baluchistan, Afghanistan, Sind, India Bukhara, Kokand, Khiva – but also lead to troubles in Tripoli, Tunisia, Algeria, and as far as Morocco. For all Muslim await the Mahdi and consider his arrival as an absolute necessity”.<sup>33</sup> Another article published in the last issue of *al-Ūrwah al-Wuthqa* (18 October, 1884) concludes, “If the Mahdi should advance and gets the support of the courageous peoples of upper Egypt, then uprisings would break out in India, and Russia would advance and free the Indians from the yoke of slavery”.<sup>34</sup>

While exaggerating the significance and impact of the Mahdist revolution in the Muslim world, al-AfghĒnĒ claimed that the Mahdi would be reluctant to negotiate after his dramatic capture of Khartoum. Nonetheless, AfghĒnĒ insisted that his presumed good offices with the Mahdi would guarantee peace if Britain becomes conciliatory towards the Muslim. In particular, he demanded that Britain abandon the Sudan, hand over the port of Suakin to the Ottoman Sultan, use its influence with Italy to withdraw from the port of Massaowa, and, above all, evacuate Egypt and place its government under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan. However, the British government abruptly called off this diplomatic maneuver, and eventually, on 2 March, 1896, decided to crush the Mahdiyya by force. While a friend of Blunt considered the whole episode “humbug” on Gladstone’s part, Blunt felt that Cromer, Britain’s Consul-General in Egypt (1883-1906), was behind the decision to close the chapter. The Sultan may have also played a role as he was known for his mistrust of AfghĒnĒ, whom he suspected to be a partisan of the Mahdi. But apparently the root cause for giving up this attempt, which, anyhow, was not taken seriously, was Gladstone’s realisation that AfghĒnĒ and his associates had no influence or contacts whatsoever with the Mahdi, a fact that is conclusively established in the Mahdist literature. However, on the part of AfghĒnĒ, these wild assertions appear to be a sheer publicity stunt.

Science, the urgency of the acquisition of scientific knowledge by Muslims and the benefits of modern science constituted a major theme in AfghĒnĒ’s speeches and writings. Being a religion that is based on knowledge, Islam, he forcefully argued, prepared the way for science and philosophy, and was the prime mover of the Muslim early drive to acquire scientific knowledge from different sources and nations,

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<sup>33</sup> Nikki, *Biography*, 208, quoting a three-part article that AfghĒnĒ wrote on the theme of Mahdism to the leftist Paris newspaper *L’Intransigeant* in December 1883. The late Prof. Elie Kedourie should be commended for being the first to draw attention to this long article, which he printed as appendix II in his above-mentioned booklet *Afghani and Abduh*, 70-86.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Ūrwah*, October 18, 1884.

particularly the Greeks and the Persians. His unequivocal support for modern science, and sharp criticism of the then *ÑulemÉ*'s "blindness" and hostility to this discipline was articulately expressed in a lecture, entitled "On teaching and learning", that he delivered in Calcutta, India in 1880. It deserves to be quoted at length here:

"The strangest thing is that our *Ñulema*' of these days have divided science into two parts. One they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences. They have not understood that science is that noble thing that has no connection with any nation, and is not distinguished by anything but itself. Rather, everything that is known is known by science and every nation that becomes renowned becomes renowned through science ... The truth is where there is proof, and those who forbid science and knowledge in the belief that they are safeguarding the Islamic religion are really the enemy of that religion. The Islamic religion is the closet religion to science, and there is no incompatibility between science and knowledge and the foundation of the Islamic faith."<sup>35</sup>

Al- AfghÉni's conviction of the total compatibility between Islam and science was further articulated in a heated dialogue that he had on the subject in Paris with the French philosopher Ernest Renan. In a lecture entitled "Islam and Science", delivered in the Sorbonne University on 29 March, 1883 and published in the *Journal des Debats* of the same day, Renan maintained that Islam and science, and implicitly Islam and modernity, are at loggerheads. Being by its very nature a dogmatic religion that imposed heavy restrictions on the human mind, in his words, "the heaviest chain that humanity has ever borne", Islam, in Renan's view, is squarely unscientific. It, he added, "had done nothing but harm to human reason."<sup>36</sup>

While happily agreeing with Renan and other European free thinkers that Christianity is unreasonable, even the enemy of science and progress, al-AfghÉnÉ persuasively argued in his response of 18 May, 1883, entitled "Answer to Renan,"<sup>37</sup> that the case of Islam is completely different. Its essence is the same as that of modern rationalism, thus it is in complete harmony with the principles discovered by scientific reason. Being neither irrational nor intolerant, Islam, he added, is a thinking religion that is demanded by reason. It encourages human beings to use their minds freely, and is alone among the great religions that "liberates the human mind from illusions and superstitions". In other discourses, al-

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Nikki, *Biography*, 162-63.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Elie, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Afghani's Answer was apparently written originally in Arabic, as both his written and spoken French were imperfect. In its issue of 18 May, 1883, the *Journal des Debats* published what it claimed to be a "faithful" translation of the Arabic text. But however "faithful" a translation may be, it is likely to be inaccurate and misrepresentative. However, seemingly based on this questionable translation, Prof. Elie Kedourie objects to labeling Afghani's response as "an answer or a refutation" of Renan's lecture. Rather, he argues that Afghani concurred with Renan's position that Islam, like all religions, was "reactionary and obscurantist." (Elie, 41). Prof. Nikki Keddie expressed a similar view by claiming, "The exchange between Afghani and Renan has been distorted by some who have not read Afghani's response to Renan, and assume that, since Renan had called Islam hostile to science, Afghani must have said that Islam was friendly to the scientific spirit. No part of Afghani's actual argument can be remotely construed in this sense, as a reading of the whole answer shows. Afghani in his "Answer" was just as categorical as Renan about the hostility of the Islamic religion to the scientific spirit" (Nikki, *Biography*, 189).

AfghĒnĒ emphasized some Qur'Ēnic phrases that firmly, but sarcastically, order the Muslims to reflect and comprehend e.g., “*afĒlĒ tatafakarĒm*”, “*ifĒlĒ tubĒirĒn*.”

Whilst expounding the virtues and indispensability of science, AfghĒnĒ had, to his credit, his own independent ideas on the discipline. He stressed that science needed another “comprehensive science” so to speak, which would enable human beings to know how to apply each field of science in its just and right place. This is the vital field of *falsafa* or *hikma* (philosophy), which, in his words, “shows the sciences what is necessary .... (and) employs each of the sciences in its proper place.”<sup>38</sup>

Al-AfghĒnĒ's failure to use the Mahdist card to pressurise Britain to evacuate Egypt and other Muslim territories had certainly frustrated him. Nevertheless, he did not give up the struggle, and tried to attain the very same objective through another maneuver, namely an anti-British Muslim – Russian alliance. Hence, was his plan to leave England in the spring of 1886 to Russia via Iran. However, while temporarily in Bushehr, probably to collect his books, already shipped by AbĒ TurĒb from Egypt to this Persian town, AfghĒnĒ was invited to Tehran by the minister of press on behalf of the Shah, NĒsir al-DĒn ShĒh. Thus, instead of directly traveling from Bushehr to Russia, as originally planned, al-AfghĒnĒ remained for a lengthened one-year stay in Iran, May 1886-May 1887.

Initially, the Shah had seemingly positive interest in al- AfghĒnĒ, to whom he was introduced as a renowned intellectual, and a defender of Muslim states against foreign intervention, and may have thought of using his reputation to consolidate his rule. But the autocrat and the revolutionary were bound to clash, and very quickly. Right from the beginning, and in the first and only audience that the Shah gave to AfghĒnĒ in Tehran, the former was reportedly “frightened and repelled” by a remark that the latter said to him, namely that he was like a “sharp sword”<sup>39</sup> who should not be idle but given an important task to do,<sup>40</sup> presumably to be used against foreign encroachment. Furthermore, the Shah was disturbed by AfghĒnĒ's extensive contacts with the public and the notables in Tehran,<sup>41</sup> where he advocated his revolutionary ideas, particularly the importance of the rule of law, and ferociously attacked the foreigners, particularly the British, with whom the Shah was trying to cultivate friendly relations. All in all, the Shah viewed AfghĒnĒ as a potential danger to his throne, and soon broke up with him. With the possible encouragement, or the instigation, of the British, the Shah ordered the expulsion of al- AfghĒnĒ from Iran, but directed that the deportation be undertaken in “an informal and friendly manner”, and the man was actually taken “gently” to the frontiers. His Majesty had reluctantly allowed this superficial courtesy because AfghĒnĒ was his “guest”, and in case that he would need his services sometime in the future. Anyhow, as explained below, this development prepared the ground for AfghĒnĒ's second, but dramatic, coming to Iran, in 1889. On his part, AfghĒnĒ may have been willing to quit the country because he was unable to achieve the main target of his sojourn, namely to enlist the support of the Shah to his projected Muslim - Russian alliance. A British report recorded AfghĒnĒ's

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<sup>38</sup> Azizan Baharuddin, “Al-Afghani and the scientific spirit” (paper presented in the international conference on JamĒl al-DeĒn al- AfghĒnĒ and the Asian Renaissance, Kuala Lumpur, March 23, 1998), 15, quoting AfghĒnĒ's lecture on “Teaching and Learning”, Calcutta, 1882.

<sup>39</sup> According to Prof. Nikki Keddie, “This psychologically interesting image of a sharp sword being in the hands of a leader's hands” was later repeated by AfghĒnĒ to Sultan ĒAbd al-Hameid in Istanbul in the 1890s. Nikki, *Biography*, 277.

<sup>40</sup> Some of AfghĒnĒ's disciples claimed that the Shah had initially planned to appoint their mentor to the premiership or some other senior post.

<sup>41</sup> Amongst the notables that AfghĒnĒ approached was the powerful Prince Zill al-Sultan, the oldest son of the Shah and the governor of most of southern Iran, who aspired to succeed his father, though he was not the heir apparent because of his mother's low birth. Nikki, *Biography*, 274.

desire to leave Iran in the following diplomatic words," He found Persia too hot for his advanced ideas."<sup>42</sup>

On the invitation of a Russian friend since his days in Paris, Katkov, who was also a prominent journalist and a close friend of the Tsar, Afgh n  headed from Iran to Russia where he stayed, first in Moscow and then in St. Petersburg, for about two years, from the spring of 1887 until mid 1889. Previously, Katkov had incited to Russia an Indian chief, Maharajah Dalip Singh (1838-1893), the last ruler of the Sikh Kingdom of the Punjab who had been deposed by the British in 1849. Having an axe to grind with the British, and anxious to restore his lost throne, the Maharajah cooperated with Afgh n  in his anti-British enterprises. From Moscow, they issued and distributed manifestoes, signed by the so-called Executive of the Indian Liberation Society, that called for a general uprising in India and the speedy end of British rule in the country.<sup>43</sup> While in Russia, Afgh n  was also reported to have been connected with the Islamic League, aspired for an official post in Russian Turkistan in order to propagate Islamic unity there, and entertained the idea of starting "an Arabic Persian newspaper in favour of the Russian Government."<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, to counter the strong and rising Russian economic and political influence in Iran, the British government intensified its effort to have a stronger footing in Iran, which culminated in the appointment, in 1888 and up to 1890, of the prominent British statesman Henry Drummond Wolff as the British minister to Iran. Wolff's aggressive diplomacy in support of British interests, coupled with the Shah's desire to be in accord with Britain, earned the latter some important economic concessions in Iran. To the grave concern of Russia, the Shah had, for example, succumbed to British pressure to open in 1888 the Karun, Iran's major navigable river, to international commerce, and to give Britain virtually all the mining rights in Iran. Iran gave Britain "the Imperial Bank Concession of 1889", which invested in a British company the right to "build the first modern bank in Iran with a monopoly of the issuance of paper money."<sup>45</sup>

Being already in sharp disagreement with the Iranian government over its resistance to reform and compromise on the country's sovereignty and independence, al- Afgh n  was furious by this accelerating Anglophile policy of the government. Hence, he tried to resist it by some newspaper articles and speeches in which he tried to impress upon the Russian public that these concessions would strip their country from its historical power and influence in Iran. His ultimate objective was to provoke the Russian government into war with Britain, which, he expected, would incite a general uprising in India against British rule.

Through completely informal and unofficial discussions, Afgh n  may have established contacts with some Russian officials, and could have had a kind of impression on the Russian society. But his two years mission in Russia, like all his previous and subsequent periods of sojourn in eastern and western capitals, failed to accomplish anything substantial. A combination of factors were at work. The death of his host Katkov immediately after his arrival at the country had practically left him in the wilderness. Russian

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<sup>42</sup> F.O. 60/594, a memorandum by the India office, March 6, 1896, quoted in *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>43</sup> However, according to a British report, Afgh n  soon overshadowed Dalip Singh, resulting in a tussle and a complete estrangement between the two refugees. When questioned about the Maharaja's influence in India, Afgh n  reportedly replied that he had "not even a dog with him", and that the new generation "knew nothing about him". F.O. 60/594, memorandum on Jamal al-Dein, March 6, 1896, 183, quoted in Nikki, *Biography*, 292.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

officials had on the whole given him the cold shoulder, and turned down his repeated pleas and hints to give any official nature to his presence in their country. The government refused his request to be appointed in a post in Russian Turkistan in order to propagate Islamic unity there and elsewhere because this “would be utterly inconsistent with the official tradition and usages of Russia.”<sup>46</sup> More importantly, notwithstanding the accelerating anti-British feeling in Russia, particularly over Iran, the country had no stomach for a new war. For it had recently emerged from a costly war with the Ottomans, and was experiencing difficult financial constraints. Thus, Afgh n ’s repeated pleas for a Russo-British war fell on deaf ears.

Faced with this deadlock that made his further stay in Russia virtually meaningless, Afgh n  had no immediate option except to try once more to appease the Shah, and to get back in the good grace of his main advisers in as dignified manner as possible. He took the opportunity of the Shah’s brief stop at St. Petersburg, in the summer of 1889 on his way to an official trip to Western Europe, to try to see His Majesty, and to approach some of his entourage requesting appointments “to refute with sure proofs the lies that liars had spread about him”.<sup>47</sup> He even left Russia in mid 1889 and joined the Shah’s party in Munich, Germany. However, in another letter to a wealthy and well connected Persian merchant, dated 27 March, 1889, Afgh n  proudly said that all he had said and done was in the interest of the Muslim community, and that “God knew the righteous of his deeds and ways”. If Iran or anybody in Iran harms him, he warned, God will severely punish him, as he did to his prior persecutors, the Ottoman government, the Khedive of Egypt and the Afgh n  Am r Sh r N i .<sup>48</sup>

On his part, Sh h N sir al-D n seemed to have felt that the continued presence of Afgh n  in Russia would aggravate hostility to him in that country. Moreover, since Afgh n  posed to have personal ties with top Russian officials, the Shah and his ministers may have entertained the idea of using his presumed good offices to help smooth the Russian recent anger at them. Though he continued to mistrust Afgh n , the Shah chose the lesser of the two evils so to speak, and invited him back to Iran. Thus started a new chapter in the man’s turbulent life.

On Afgh n ’s second coming to Tehran in December, 1889, the Shah, as suggested above, was not deadly against him. However, partially under the influence, perhaps the instigation too, of his excessively Anglophile chief minister, Amin al-Sultan, the Shah soon became bitter against his invitee. In a highly unusual step, he ordered in February 1891 that Afgh n  be forcibly and humiliatingly<sup>49</sup> expelled from a shrine near Tehran that he took refuge in, irrespective of the plea of Am n al-Sultan himself, who wanted the deportation to be undertaken in a quiet and unostentatious manner in order to avoid a possible outcry in the country and abroad. A more important factor for the Shah’s extreme position versus Afgh n  was his growing fear of his presence in the country, and that he might become the focus of the rising opposition to his regime. In particular, the Shah was apparently convinced that Afgh n  was the instigator, if not the actual writer, of some anonymous and widely distributed letters and leaflets

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<sup>46</sup> F.O. 60/594, Movier to Salisbury, March 21, 1887, quoted in Nikki, 285.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Keddie, *Biography*, 300.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>49</sup> In some letters, Afgh n  gave a personal account of his rough seizure and deportation to the Irano-Turkish border, the brutality of which had been confirmed in other sources. In one of these letters, al-Afgh n  bitterly complained “that 20 *farr sh* (royal guards) had broken into his house... and carried him with much violence ... and pulled him in such a haste that his collar almost suffocated him and he fell to the ground. He was unconscious for four hours... He was left with nothing, and delivered, sick and feverish, to five cavalrymen. Without any outer coat or covering, he was driven out into the bitter cold and snow on the very arduous journey to Kemanshah during which he experienced illness, deprivation and discomfort of all sorts”. Quoted in Nikki, *Biography*, 329.



that abused His Majesty and advocated an immediate overthrow of his corrupt regime. One such placard incited the Iranian ruling elite into revolt against the tyranny and treason of the Shah by saying:

“Before you become the slave of the foreigners like the natives of India you may find a remedy. Your silence and endurance have caused a great surprise to the ĀulemĀ and the people. The former have always protected the religion, should you show any energy they are ready to help you. If you do not fear for the destruction of the religion, you may, at least, care for your worldly affairs and fear the misfortune of your friends, the evil speaking of historians, the curse and derision of your descendants, and the contemptuous laughter which the foreigners now cast on you.”<sup>50</sup>

Even in hindsight, al-AfghĀnĀ remained extremely embittered about his degrading banishment to Ottoman Iraq. He voiced this bitterness in several newspaper interviews, articles and speeches that he delivered in his subsequent destinations, London 1891/92 and Istanbul since the summer of 1892, in which he gave his own story of his seizure and treatment, and held the Shah, personally and squarely, responsible for his ordeal. No wonder that AfghĀnĀ threw his lot during the remaining years of his life against the “blood thirsty tyrant”, the Shah, his “infidel” chief minister and his corrupt regime that AfghĀnĀ was determined to uproot once and for all and at all cost. To achieve this “noble” goal, AfghĀnĀ coordinated with all shades of the Iranian opposition within and outside the country, the religious, the liberals, the secular, the modernists and the westernizers. While in London, he was, for example, in association with the editor of a Persian London-based newspaper, *al-QanĀn*, Malkum Khan, a European educated son of an Armenian convert who had been dismissed from his post as the Iranian minister in London on charges of corruption.

Meanwhile, the Iranian resistance gained momentum by the so-called Tobacco concession of March 1890, which gave a British company monopoly on the purchase, sale and export of all Persian tobacco. Since many Iranians depended for their livelihood in whole or in part on tobacco cultivation and trade, mass and violent protest movements spread throughout the Iranian cities. The government was compelled to cancel the concession, but the tobacco revolt continued to reach its nadir by the assassination of the hateful Shah NasĀr al-DĀn in 1 May 1896.<sup>51</sup> AfghĀnĀ repeatedly denied complicity, but some compelling evidence, including the testimony of the assassin, MĀrzĀ RidĀ, who was said to be a disciple of AfghĀnĀ, supported his involvement, at least as an inspirer if not an instigator.

Though remaining suspicious of AfghĀnĀ, the shrewd Sultan ĀAbd al-Āameid recalled him from London to Istanbul. While primarily motivated by keenness to keep the outspoken AfghĀnĀ under strict surveillance, the Sultan may have also planned to use his good offices to persuade the ShiĀi ĀulemĀ to support his claim to the caliphate. Nonetheless, ĀAbd al-Āameid soon turned against al-AfghĀnĀ largely because of the influential Abu al-Huda who publicly accused AfghĀnĀ of irreligion. Moreover, AfghĀnĀ was suspected of intriguing with the Sultan’s opponents, notably the former Khedive of Egypt ĀAbbas ĀilmĀ (1874-1944), who was reportedly plotting for an Arab caliphate under his control, and Sayyid ĀAbdullĀh of Hijaz, an opponent of the Sultan. However, notwithstanding his turning down of the

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed study of this revolt, see Keddie Nikki R., *Religion and Rebellion in Iran, the Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892* (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

repeated demands of the Iranian government to extradite Afgh n  to face trial in Iran on the pretext of insufficient evidence and that he was an Afgh n  not a Persian, Sultan  Abd al-Hameid prohibited Afgh n  from conducting any anti-Iranian activity, refused his plea to leave Istanbul and kept him virtually under house arrest. The man died in Istanbul lonely and completely broken on 9 March, 1897.

## Conclusion

Jam l al-D n al-Afgh n  was indeed a man of vision, who devoted his life to caution his co-religionists of the evils and dire consequences of imperialism, and urged them to evict it from their homelands. However, the entrenchment of despotism in Muslim countries coupled with Afgh n 's own negligence to build an organisation for his almost exclusively elitist movement had sharply limited his political successes and influence during his lifetime. For most of his life, this gifted man was disappointed, frustrated and presumably bitter, and he died under conditions that tantamounted to solitary confinement.

Nonetheless, al-Afgh n 's sincerity and dedication to the Muslim cause as well as his religio-intellectual legacy were posthumously extensively studied and hugely admired and appreciated across the Muslim world. His career and thought constituted the theme of many international conferences, seminars and workshops that were held in many Muslim cities. The last major one that I know was held in March, 1998 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to celebrate Afgh n 's centenary under the title "Al-Afgh n  and the Asian Renaissance", and much of the debates that he began are still part and parcel of the contemporary intellectual climate of the Umma. Al-Afgh n  inspired, to varying degrees, many movements and personalities: the Islamists, the nationalists and even the socialists, who maintained that he advocated Muslim socialism. But his reformist project was particularly and enthusiastically taken up by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Islamic modernists, who shared his worldview that the twin sources – the Qur' n and Sunnah – provide the correct and lasting answer to the many predicaments of the Muslim world and humanity at large if properly understood and creatively interpreted. Around his vision, that had been articulated and fine tuned by his two major disciples, Mu'ammad  Abdu and Rash d Ri , emerged a new reformist school, the so-called neo-Salafiyah, which Hassan al-Bana tried to transform through his Muslim Brotherhood into a living tradition.

In a nutshell, al-Afgh n  was born well ahead of his time, and we have sufficient evidence to claim that he was the precursor of a variety of 20<sup>th</sup> century movements, including the all important 1919 national Egyptian revolution that was masterminded by his former student Sa'ad Zaghlul. His early call for a Sunni Shi'i reconciliation and a broad confederation of Muslim states may also justify calling him the "father" or "custodian" of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that was founded in 1969. One would, furthermore, really wonders whether Afgh n  proposed Muslim-Muslim rapprochement and pan-Islamic unity may constitute a basis for addressing the current devastating and spiral conflicts and disarray in the Muslim world. In this respect, it may be interesting to reflect on and comprehend some of *al-Urwah's* articles, two of which are entitled in English rendering, "The Past and Present of the Ummah and the Cure of its Diseases" and "The Backwardness and Apathy of the Ummah and the Reason for this."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> For the full text of these articles, see Afgh n  and  Abduh, *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa* (Beirut: n.d.), 53-62 and 70-75, respectively.