

# **SIR SAYYID AND GASPRINSKY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO MODERNIST CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS IN INDIA AND RUSSIA**

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## **Abstract:**

Amidst the rise of obscurantist trends in Muslim world during the last few decades, the violent rejection of progressive ideas and developments by hard-line orthodox circles has given the impression of a stagnant and intolerant Islamic culture. Some western scholars like Ernest Gellner have even labeled Islam as one ‘rival’ of modern civil society. In this context, there is a dire need to reemphasize that just like the earlier western societies, there have been serious and sincere attempts of modernization in Muslim societies of the east which had profound impacts in the nineteenth century socio-political scenario and have a potential relevance in the present scenario for the reestablishment of tolerant and progressive Muslim societies. In this backdrop this paper attempts to bring out the contribution of two amazingly comparable civil society movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Muslim world: One led by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan in India and the other led by Ismail Bey Gasprinsky in Russia. This is basically a comparative study which aims to explore some similarities and differences in these two movements and their impacts on their respective societies as well as the present day setting. The prime purpose here is thus not to give fresh breakthroughs in what has already been written on the either movement during the last century by writers like G. F. I. Graham, W.C. Smith, Marshall Hodgson, E. J. Lazzerini, Alexandre Bennigsen etc. but to highlight some interesting parallels in two completely disconnected civil society movements in two Muslim regions which seem to be so far away and isolated from one another. The objective is to assert the potential fertility of Muslim societies for modernist trends. The sources used for the study include *Maqalat e Sir Sayyid* (Urdu) and some English translations of Sir Sayyid’s and Gasprinsky’s writings as well as some secondary sources including biographies and theological analyses.

N.B: This year (2014) marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Ismail Bey Gaspirali (Gasprinski) (1851-1914). UNESCO participates in celebrating the life of Gaspirali by placing his name on the list of ["Celebration of Anniversaries in 2014,"](#) which includes eminent personalities whose anniversaries are observed by Member States of the United Nations

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Present day Muslim societies across the globe appear to be inclined towards obscurantism rather than modernism.<sup>1</sup> Some western scholars have even labeled Islam as a 'rival' of modern civil society.<sup>2</sup> This view seems to overlook the contribution of various modernist civil society movements in many Muslim regions during the 19<sup>th</sup> century which remain relevant and thought-provoking even today. Its true that amidst the gradual encirclement of the Muslim world by European imperialist powers, a socio-political 'dark age' had descended upon the Muslim societies. However, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the movement toward intellectual and socio-political awakening was resumed in many regions including India and Russia, noticeably with a Modernist approach. It is interesting to note that by that time the earlier approaches to revive the lost glory of Islam through a retrogressive puritanism had either failed or receded in significance and impact. Hence those of Arab and Indian Wahabism and of Senussiyya of Tripolitania were gradually losing ground as viable agents of change in the Islamic world. Consequently, a whole spectrum of reform movements appeared wherein a new generation of intellectuals and thinkers came forward with their modernizing missions. From Sheikh Mohammed Abduh of Egypt, Abdul Haque Hamid, Namik Kemal and Tevfik Fikret of Turkey, Sir Sayyid and Amir Ali of India, to Hajji Agus Salem of Indonesia, a galaxy of profound thinkers and reformers emerged and strove to reform the stagnant Muslim societies in their respective regions. These were the enlightened men who realized and pointed out despite severe opposition from some sections of their own peoples, that the traditional religious ideology was incapable of safeguarding the present and securing the future of the Muslim world in both spiritual and material sense. For the majority of these thinkers, salvation lied neither in religious revivalism nor in the outright repudiation of Islam but in its adaptation to modern life. Such movements were more or less successful in mobilizing the Muslim peoples in their respective regions, but without an organized and well-maintained connection with each other. Although some leaders like Jamaluddin Afghani endeavored to unite the *Ummah* (international Muslim community) on Pan-Islamic lines, most of these movements remained rather disjointed.

This paper is an attempt to bring to light two of such reformist movements that emerged in the same era but different areas, viz., South Asia and Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> These two regions that have been historically linked were separated, rather torn apart under two rival imperialist powers of Europe viz., the British and the Russian. Here in South Asia (or British India) Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and his colleagues launched a reform movement that inspired the dejected and defeatist Muslim community with confidence and self esteem. Across the Hindukush, Ismail Bey Gasprinsky (1851-1914) and his followers struggled to enlighten the backward looking Muslim population of the Russian Empire. These two 19-century movements have a number of similarities that surprise casual observers. However, a deeper study reveals a multitude of factors on the basis of which these similarities become quite understandable. The purpose of this paper is to draw some parallels between these two movements and their leaders viz., Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky. However, it must be noted that this paper does not attempt to probe into the deeper insights of the theological debates initiated by the two leaders which have already been discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Obscurantism is defined as an opposition to inquiry, enlightenment and reform. Modernism in current sense includes the modern views or method(s) esp. tendency in matters of religious belief to subordinate tradition to harmony with modern thought. See *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Current English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*, London: Hamesh Hamilton, 1994

<sup>3</sup> In fact Gasprinsky was a Crimean Tatar however his modernist movement spread to all Muslim regions within Russian Empire including Central Asia during his lifetime and remained a strong socio-political force till early twentieth century.

at length by scores of writers since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> It is rather a comparative study seeking to bring out the converging and also diverging areas of two very important movements which had a profound impact on the historical developments in Indian and Russian Muslim societies not only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century but also for a long time to come.

For this purpose the paper is divided into three main parts. First is a background study of the hopeless conditions in the two regions in which these movements emerged and flourished. The second is a study of the basic characters, aims and ideals of the two contemporary movements with an assessment of their mutual commonalties and differences, particularly focusing on their endeavors towards the religious, social-cultural, educational and political reform. The third section focuses on the overall impact factor, including achievements and failures of the two movements and the factors behind them.

#### Section I:

#### **LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: THE DECLINE LEADING TO MODERNIST REFORM.**

The virtual decline of the Muslim east can be traced to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the European Renaissance led to an age of geographical expeditions by Europeans, discovering new sea routes to distant lands. This shifted the focus of international economic activity from land-borne trade, previously monopolized by the Asians particularly the Arabs, the Central Asians and the Chinese, to the maritime enterprises dominated by the Europeans. These changes set in motion the multi-faceted forces that led to a long and gradual political disintegration and spiritual decadence. Noticeably, there were signs of an intellectual ferment marked by efforts for a socio-political awakening all over the Muslim lands which did have a semblance of the European enlightenment though such efforts were seized by the wave of Western colonialism that overwhelmed the Muslim regions. As in the words of an American historian, Michael Mazzaoui, "... the West came with its armies of occupation, its administrators and its new approach to life. Muslim ideas of change had under these circumstances no chance to develop and grow in their own homelands away from the new and different ideas imported from the west."<sup>5</sup>

Hence, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the collapse of the centuries-old political domination of the Muslim powers seemed complete and irreversible. By the turn of the century, the Ottoman decline was leading to the Near-Eastern Question in European politics while the Persian weakness was opening the doors of foreign intervention in that country. On the other hand, the disintegration of the Mongol and the Timurid Empires in Inner Asia followed by further disintegration of the later Uzbek state in the Transoxiana, and the Golden Horde in the Kazakh steppes paved the way for

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, B. A. Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1971, C.W. Troll, Sayyid Ahmed Khan – A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978, E. J. Lazzarini, Ismail Bey Gasprinskii's Perevodchick/Tercuman: A Clarion of Modernism, Alexandre Bennigsen and C. L. Quelquejay, Islam in Soviet Union, London: Pall Mall Press, 1967 etc.

<sup>5</sup> Michel M. Mazzaoui, "Islamic culture and literature in the early modern period", Robert L. Canfield (ed.), *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 84-89

the Russian occupation of this region.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the decline of the Mughal Empire in India put a seal on the fate of the Muslim domination there with the eventual rise of British as the paramount power in India.<sup>7</sup> While India became the brightest jewel in the British Crown, in the Eurasian Heartland<sup>8</sup> the Muslim regions of the Ural-Volga basins, Caucasus, Crimea, Kazakhstan and Central Asia proper<sup>9</sup> fell a prey to the Russian expanding might with an equally spectacular speed. The aftermath of this simultaneous subjugation of two previously Muslim dominated regions to two rival Western powers eventually affected the rise of modernist reform movements thereby. This aftermath carried a number of astonishing parallels:

First, since the beginning of the European domination, the loss of political power was accompanied with the socio- economic dispossession of the Muslim aristocracy in both regions. In India the princes who had resisted the British had already been eliminated one by one.<sup>10</sup> Later, Wellesley's system of subsidiary alliances atrophied whatever courage or political imagination was left.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the large-scale post- mutiny persecutions and confiscations rendered the upper classes high and dry. The ruin of thousands of well to do Muslim families in Delhi, Lukhnow and other cities and rural areas of UP, Bihar and Bengal following the upheavals of 1857-8,

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<sup>6</sup> By 13<sup>th</sup> century the warlike tribes from Mongolia had swept the northern steppes and the deserts of the stretch of land south of Siberia, sometimes called Inner Asia. They had destroyed the Muslim Abbasside Empire in the Middle East and after capturing the Eastern parts of today's Russia were actually extracting tributes from the Duchy of Moscow. Later, the majority of Mongols themselves converted to Islam. The 14<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a disintegration of the Mongol Empire and its virtual replacement by the Timurids in the Eastern lands of Central Asia. Later, the Timurid decline led to the rise of tatar Golden Horde in steppes and Uzbek Empire in the Central Asia proper or Turkestan or Tansoxiana. By 18<sup>th</sup> century the Golden Horde disintegrated in the various Kazakh hordes and the Uzbek Empire broke into three Uzbek principalities thus making it convenient for the Russian expansion up to the borders of Afghanistan by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The march of the Muscovy that started in 16<sup>th</sup> century with the capture of the Tatar Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan in the Ural-Volga region, resumed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the Russian subjugation of Crimea and the Siberian and the Kazakh steppes. The process was eventually completed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the seizure of Trans-Caucasus lands, annexation of the northern Caucasian region and the remaining parts of Kazakh lands and the subjugation of Central Asia proper or the historical Transoxiana. However, the Muslim emirates of Bukhara and Khiva remained as semi-independent states under Russian tutelage till the Bolshevik Revolution after which they were annexed to the Soviet Union.

<sup>7</sup> The disintegration of the Mughal Empire in India led to a power tussle between various local and European contenders which eventually ended in the predominance of the British in the region after the retrogressive attempt to revive the Mughal Empire through militancy failed in 1857. Now the British Indian Empire and the Russian Empire were separated by the small and negligible state of Afghanistan that was left as a meek buffer till the next century.

<sup>8</sup> Eurasian Heartland denotes the central portion of the Europe-Asia land mass as suggested by Halford Mackinder in his seminal article, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4 (April 1904), pp. 431-437, <http://www.jstor.org/journals/rgs.html> accessed 2-2-2012

<sup>9</sup> The term 'Central Asia proper' is usually applied to the desert belt between the Caspian and the Pamir Mountains, south of the Kazakh Steppes. Presently this region includes the Republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan and parts of Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>10</sup> Since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century a number of Muslim princes such as Sirajuddaulah of Bengal, Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan of Mysore etc. had stood against the wave of British expansionism but failed. The armed resistance continued intermittently till mid 19<sup>th</sup> century when the suppression of the Mutiny finally ended all prospects of a successful native insurgency against the British which had emerged as the predominant power in India.

<sup>11</sup> M.Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, Lahore: Book Traders, p. 505

appeared as a great loss to the community.<sup>12</sup> Further, the loss of hold over the chief offices of the state, also contributed to the destruction of this class. Since the beginning the British monopolized these posts for themselves leaving the Muslim upper classes to jostle for subordinate posts with Hindus, or else to stand aloof in pride and poverty.<sup>13</sup> On the other side of the Amu Darya,<sup>14</sup> the Russian policy in the occupied Muslim regions generally incorporated the destruction of the governing classes. After the dispossession of the resisting Khans and taming of some others, the attention was shifted towards the feudal nobility that was considered the “most dangerous enemy”.<sup>15</sup> Hence it was physically destroyed, deprived of its feudal rights, dispossessed of its property and ruined.<sup>16</sup>

Second, both in Indian and the Russian empires the *Ulama* (Muslim religious scholars) were the first to respond to the Western challenge through a dual path of religious revivalism and resistance. With the loss of political power the *Ulama* filled the vacuum of leadership. In the eyes of these early reformers the task of preserving the identity of the Muslim community needed a passionate revivalist spirit. Hence the *Waliullahi* Movement in India (which later on took a path of resistance against the local infidels like the Hindus, Sikhs etc.)<sup>17</sup>, and the Wahabi movement of early 19<sup>th</sup> century emerged with this ideal but failed to achieve their goals. Similarly in Russian Empire, the earlier puritanical efforts<sup>18</sup> failed to strike a change while the Muridi movement of the Naqshbandiya sufis of the Northern Caucasus focused on a holy war against the Russians, which could only be subdued with great difficulty by late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, the religious reform movements also resulted in the division of Muslim society between the fundamentalist and the traditionalist schools. The rise of Deobandi and Barelvi sects in India and the traditionalist school of Russian *Ulama* particularly those serving in the state sponsored Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration<sup>19</sup> can be cited as examples. It also becomes clear that the groups of *ulama* that abstained from politics did not come into direct collision with

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 507. W.W. Hunter has illuminated the wretched conditions of Muslim nobility in his book, *The Indian Musalmans*, Calcutta: ...1945. Thompson and Garrat also quote a letter by Lord Wellesley to the Directors of the East India Company, dated 22 April, 1799 admitting that “... we have excluded (the Muslims) from all share of emolument, honour and authority, without providing any adequate corrective of those passions incident to the loss of dignity, wealth and power.”. See Edward Thompson and G. T. Garrat, *Rise and Fulfillment of British Rule in India*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1934, p. 231

<sup>13</sup> V. A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, London: Karachi, 1981, p. 802

<sup>14</sup> Amu Darya (*River Oxus, Gr.*), was the historical border between Afghanistan and the Russian or Soviet dominated Central Asia until the breakup of USSR in 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Muslim Aristocracy as well as clergy were considered as the ‘most dangerous enemies’ by the Russians. Hence during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Tatar, Bashkir and Crimean elites were almost crushed. Alexandre Bennigsen and C. L. Quelquejay, *op.cit.* pp. 11-12

<sup>16</sup> See Hina Khan, “The Russian Expansion in Central Asia and the Local Response”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.49, No. 2, April, 1996, pp. 33-58

<sup>17</sup> The revivalist movements sometimes included programs for armed resistance against the infidels, such as the Faraizi movement of Bengal, and *Jihad* (holy war) Movement of Syed Ahmed and Shah Ismail against the Sikh rule in Punjab. See M. Mujeeb, *op.cit.* pp. 396-399

<sup>18</sup> For instance, the uprisings of Wahabis in Andizhan (Central Asia) and that of the Vaisis in Kazan (Ural-Volga region) whose doctrine amalgamated the puritanical ideology with militant methods. Bennigsen and Quelquejay, *op. cit.* p. 32

<sup>19</sup> Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration was founded in Ufa, through a decree issued in 1778 by the Russian Empress Catherine II. Later the Administration evolved to comprise four Sunni and one Shia' Spiritual Boards in various Muslim cities of Russia. These boards continue to work throughout the Soviet and later period and in 2013 the Russian Muslims celebrated the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Administration with President Putin as the chief guest.

the colonial masters but were rather supported by them. However by mid 19<sup>th</sup> century certain socio political factors led to an outright confrontation with the rulers. In India, these include replacement of Arabic and Persian languages by English as the language of political and legal transactions, and introduction of a new legal system, in which the English educated lawyers and judges took over from the *ulama* snatching their high-status and lucrative jobs in judiciary as well as education field.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, in Russian Empire the official *ulama* remained loyal to the Government while many parallel groups continued to struggle for socio-political rights of Muslims side by side with the secular movements.<sup>21</sup>

Third, efforts of religious assimilation of locals also remained a common feature though varying in extent and intensity. Though it was never declared as a policy, the evangelical zeal was common among the civil and military officers of the East India Company who were constantly being inspired by the statements made in the British Parliament asserting the notions of *white man's burden*<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, the era of Russian expansion prior to the enlightened despotism of Catherine II is particularly marked by a proselytizing zeal. As soon as the Ural-Volga regions were captured (16<sup>th</sup> cen.), forced conversions to Christian Orthodox religion were commenced. According to estimates about 400,000 Tatars were converted though many of them were animists or only superficially Muslims. For a long time it was a state policy that only the converted non-Russians were entitled to rights equal to those of Russians. Hence between 1738 and 1755, 418 of the 536 mosques in Kazan were closed and *waqf* (Religious endowments) properties were secularized while special schools were opened under the direction of Russian missionaries for the children of the converts.<sup>23</sup> Catherine's Manifesto of 1783 granted equality of rights to the Russian Muslims including that of retention of property and religious freedom. However that equality was rather illusory owing to continuous Russian colonization and confiscation of choicest of Tatar lands by a highly oppressive Russian regime. As a result many Tatars were compelled to migrate to some *dar-ul-aman*<sup>24</sup> like Turkey or Bukhara and Khiva, the Muslim principalities of Central Asia which were still outside Russian yoke.

Here indeed we can point out a couple of dissimilarities in the two regions:

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<sup>20</sup> Hamza Alavi "Pakistan and Islam: Ethnicity and Ideology" in Fred Halliday and Hamza Alvi (eds.), *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*, London: Macmillan Education, 1988, p.81-4

<sup>21</sup> The *ulama* working with the Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration were custodians of the so-called 'official Islam' and naturally remained loyal to the Russian and later Soviet governments. However, there had been a 'parallel Islam' wherein many individuals and groups of religious scholars, mystics and activists continued, often clandestinely to preach Islamic injunctions to masses, and many were even involved in Pan Islamic movements. However, albeit being the most influential group among the Muslims, the *ulama* lacked a concrete political program other than a general commitment to the defense of the spiritual supremacy of Islam. Serge A. Zenkowsky, *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1967, pp. 227-233

<sup>22</sup> I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent*, Karachi: BCC & T, University of Karachi, 1977, pp. 256-7

<sup>23</sup> Bennigsen and Quelquejay, op. cit. pp.12-13

<sup>24</sup> According to the Islamic jurist Imam Abu Hanifa, 'dar-ul-aman' (land of peace) is a land where the Muslims can live and worship without fear of oppression while a 'dar-ul-harb' (land of war) is a place where peaceful living and worship becomes impossible for the Muslims who are then obliged either to wage a war against the oppressive regime, or migrate to some other land. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Leiden Brill, Vol. 2, p. 128. For the details of Tatar emigration from Russia see Bennigsen and Quelquejay, p.8

First, Russian imperialism in Muslim Asia is marked by a large-scale colonization of the vast expanses, which were termed as the *virgin lands*. Such massive colonization is not witnessed in British Indian Empire.<sup>25</sup>

Second, the Indian Muslims, as a community had little aptitude for trade and commerce.<sup>26</sup> Particularly in Northern India that later became the seat of Muslim renaissance the loss of political power and official jobs resulted in an overall collapse of socio-economic order. Hence the modernist reform was delayed for several decades until a new class of metropolitan bourgeoisie or to be more precise, the salariat<sup>27</sup> as identified by Hamza Alvi, emerged to lead this movement. On the other hand, the Tatar bourgeoisie that had been a vibrant trading class since medieval times led the Russian Muslims. Tatars had been subjected to Russian oppression since 16<sup>th</sup> century and though the Tatar nobility had been weakened by colonial policies, their merchant class successfully endeavored to regain their lost position through fruitful dialogue with Catherine in late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Soon they became strong middlemen monopolizing the trade in the Central Asian markets.<sup>28</sup> Accumulating considerable wealth Tatars were swift enough to switch on to the new arena of industry enterprising in textile, soap and leather, mining and later oil industries. Though the Russian occupation of Central Asia proper, temporarily brought a setback as the Russian merchant no longer needed a middleman in Central Asian markets which were now dominated by Russians themselves. Nevertheless, the Tatars not only explored other avenues of economic activity but also were fully prepared to lead a movement for the socio-political uplift of Russian Muslim community. However, apart from the vibrant Tatars the Muslim population under the Russians was still backward and it took them several decades to emerge from their feudal and pre-feudal cultures.<sup>29</sup>

Hence by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Muslim communities of India and Russia both fitted Ambedkar's description of being sunk into the "lowest depths of a broken pride."<sup>30</sup> At that crucial movement the vigorous modernist movements emerged as watersheds in the histories of their particular regions. At last there was light at the end of the tunnel. The nature and the impact of that light are discussed in subsequent sections of the paper.

## Section II

### **TWO PARALLEL EFFORTS: NATURE, AIMS AND IDEALS**

Since here we are concerned with two such movements that flourished in India and Russia almost simultaneously, this section will tend to compare their nature, goals and the dynamics of these two movements.

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<sup>25</sup> Russian immigration to the Muslim lands of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Central Asia proper continued till 1980s. By the time of Soviet breakup in 1992, about ten million Russians had settled in these republics while a large number of Russians inhabit the Muslim regions which are still a part of Russia such as North Caucasus and the Ural-Volga basins. On the contrary, the British presence in India, remained limited to a handful of British officials and their families concentrated in the power nodes of their Indian Empire.

<sup>26</sup> Apart from certain local communities like Gujrat and Bombay etc, trade remained an uncommon pursuit among the Muslim classes. See Hamza Alvi, *op.cit.* pp74-78

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp.68-73

<sup>28</sup> Zenkowski, *op.cit.* pp. 18-20

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, Thoughts on Pakistan, Bombay: ...1941, p. 43

Let's begin with a little understanding of the concept of Islamic Modernism as perceived by the leaders associated with these movements. Modernism is defined as "a tendency in matters of religious belief to subordinate tradition to harmony with modern thought."<sup>31</sup> Like many other societies Muslim societies also witnessed a number of modernist approaches which in one way or the other aimed at modernizing the state of mind, the tools of knowledge and the methods of interpretation of knowledge, allowing room for the human development. The Muslim Modernist Reform in both India and Russia was primarily a response of the Muslim communities to the challenge of Western political, economic and intellectual domination. In fact there had been a series of responses to this challenge, ranging from the early military resistance, to a defeatist retreat and withdrawal, to a conservative reaction with the slogan "stand fast where you are" which in fact led to a retrogression manifested in the upheavals of 1857.<sup>32</sup> Simultaneously, the radical revivalist response calling upon the *Ummah* (worldwide Muslim community) to 'go back to the roots', also emerged, popularized and eventually failed.<sup>33</sup> With this came the next response of acceptance of western supremacy with an effort to assimilate the new ideas coming from overseas into the cultural pattern of the Islamic society.

In fact it was not a novel idea. All over the world the peoples under the colonial garb were witnessing the gradual replacement of their traditional values by western ideas and institutions. These radical changes had created a serious crisis of conscience and caused anguish to the local intelligentsia that was caught in a dilemma: "it could neither stop the process of change, nor accept it in toto."<sup>34</sup> Hence, from Jamaluddin Afghani and Sheikh Abduh to Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Ismail Bey Gasprinsky all tried to resolve this dilemma in their own ways. Similarly, many non-Muslim societies under colonial rule, like Hindus in India and Buddhists in Sri-Lanka were also going through the same experiences, facing similar dilemma and trying to resolve it according to their own perceptions.<sup>35</sup> The various efforts to resolve this psychological, intellectual, social and political dilemma were based on the premise that the modern age has come to stay, and its denial is futile. Hence, some kind of adjustment with the new situation was imperative. The question was how to reconcile East's traditional culture, values and religious beliefs with the overwhelming Western civilization.

In many colonial societies in general, and in the Muslim communities of India and Russia in particular, the most effective answer to this dilemma was found in acceptance and acculturation. That entailed an acknowledgement of new realities and modernization of the Muslim communities enabling them to play a constructive role in this new frame of reference. In these regions, however, the dilemma of total acceptance or total rejection was a crucial one and the modernist leaders like Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India and Ismail Bey Gasprinsky (or Gasprali) of Russia both tried to resolve it in their own struggles towards modernity. Surprisingly, their

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<sup>31</sup> Concise Oxford Dictionary, OUP, London.

<sup>32</sup> Percival Spear, India, Pakistan and the West, Cambridge: Home University Library of Modern Knowledge, 1948, p.180

<sup>33</sup> For instance, the revivalist movements across the Muslim world such as Wahabi and Senussiyah movements emerging in Arabia and Tripolitania and the puritanical movements in India had failed to create a widespread impact in their regions that was required to liberate these lands from the foreign influences.

<sup>34</sup> Sibte Hasan, The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan, Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, 1989, p. 158

<sup>35</sup> Reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Rama Krishna Mission, Theosophical Society, Temperance Movement (Sri Lanka), etc had been initiated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century all trying to meet the western challenge in one way or the other.



modus operandi was not very different, which in each case was based on a four-way reform process: Religious reform; socio-cultural reform; educational reform; and a rather inevitable political movement that definitely carried a nationalist tilt.

In the opinion of Percival Spear, “the advocates of acceptance rather than the mutineers were the real revolutionaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Those who were labeled as eccentrics, agents of the West, or even heretics, but were “perhaps only rather more than a century ahead of their times.” Who clearly understood that a wholesale rejection or even a wholesale acceptance of the western worldview would be equally unrealistic and for whom answer lied in a synthesis which might be called “the working faith of modern Islam”.<sup>36</sup> In this context interesting parallels can be drawn between the contemporary modernist movements of Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky:

In India, Sir Sayyid was preceded and in many ways influenced by Ram Mohan Roy and his Brahmo Samaj<sup>37</sup>. However he had virtually no predecessor among Muslims except for a little part Maulvi Karamat Ali of Jaunpur, Bengal (d. 1873). The latter though had a puritanical approach to religion and customs, was a critique of fanaticism and religious extremism. His traditional approach to religion did not stop him from thinking that “there were problems and subjects worthy of serious study apart from those dealt with in Muslim theological literature”.<sup>38</sup> Many such problems and subjects later became the core of Sir Sayyid’s modernist reforms. On the other hand, Gasprinsky was preceded by a galaxy of Muslim intellectuals who prepared the ground for his movement: Nazir Kursavi (1775-1813), a profound critique of Bukhara theologians, Shahabuddin Mirjani(1815-1889), the first modern Tatar historian and reformer, Abdul Kaium Nasyri(1824-1907), an enlightened writer, printer and grammarian, Hussein Feitskhani (1826-1866), a lecturer in Kazan and some others. Shahabuddin Mirjani was the first to initiate a reform of Muslim schools in Volga region and “sought to replace the formal scholastic study of the Koran and Islam by a less theoretical and more practical approach”<sup>39</sup>. He insisted particularly on two positions: first, as the centuries old traditional text books that were being taught in the schools of Bukhara and elsewhere fail to clarify the original content of Koran and Prophet Mohammed’s teachings, there should be a room for fresh interpretations and that every true believer could be an interpretator himself. Second, the contemporary education and the knowledge of Russian language were not harmful but in effect useful for the Muslims to understand their religion and to come out of their cultural stagnation. His belief in pragmatism led him to open some new schools and to convince many Tatars to shed their prejudice against Russian language and modern education. Further, the Tatar history written by him rekindled interest in the past and brought national consciousness among the Tatar community. Abdul Kaium Nasyri, who not only printed scores of text-books, calendars, dictionaries, etc., in the spoken Tatar language but also compiled a Tatar grammar and Russian to Tatar and Tatar to Russian dictionaries.<sup>40</sup> Hussein Feitskhani (or Faizkhanov) who served as a lecturer in Kazan and St. Petersburg Universities, gave an elaborate program for modernizing *madrassas*. Moreover,

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<sup>36</sup> P. Spear, *op.cit.* pp. 182-183

<sup>37</sup> Hmza Alavi, *op.cit.* p. 89

<sup>38</sup> The work of Maulvi Karamat Ali provides an example of earlier attempts to purify Muslim society from the Indian or Hindu influences without succumbing to the extremist tendencies which had rendered the reform movements (like those of Shah Ismail and Syed Ahmed of the northwest and Faraizis of Bengal) a rather reactionary and disrupting character. See Mujeeb, *op.cit.* 446-447

<sup>39</sup> Zenkowski, *op.cit.* p. 25

<sup>40</sup> Zenkowski, *op.cit.* pp. 25-26.

since the enactment of Catherine's tolerant policy towards Russian Muslims (since 1788) a number of printing licenses had been issued to the Muslim printers and the number of printed books including the Koran was swelling. Hence in this background Ismail Bey Gasprinsky, the Russian educated Crimean Tatar commenced his modernizing mission while in India Sayyid Ahmad Khan embarked upon his work with equal vigor and sincerity.

It must be noted that in India Sir Sayyid was leading a community that was not only dispossessed by a colonial power, but also had threat perceptions regarding the role and intentions of a large Hindu majority that had its own worldview and was rapidly assimilating the modern ideas of rationalism, progress, nationalism and democracy. On the contrary, the Russian Muslims, though as much diversified in their linguistic and cultural patterns, being in majority in their regions had no local competitors like the Hindus. Hence their quest for a better future was more or less an even-minded struggle against the colonial power.

We have already identified four major steps in the discourse of modern reform wherein different reformers played their particular roles. In the versatile personalities of Sir Syed and Ismail Gasprinsky an all-encompassing multi-dimensional enterprise is evident. However, for the sake of convenience we will assess their ideas and work in each of the above mentioned four areas separately.

### **1. Religious Reform:**

Since 18<sup>th</sup> century religious reformers had been active all over the Muslim world. But with the inception of modernism this arena became highly controversial and a ground for perpetual conflict. Modernist religious reform sought to break with conservative traditionalism without repudiating what was fundamental, to render Islam capable of surviving in a modern world dominated by reason and a spirit of criticism. In this context the missions of both Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky aimed at reconciling traditional Islam with modern needs, in the leading light of the philosophy of rationalism. It must be noted that both were appealing to general principles outside the scope of the four recognized schools of Islamic theology. None of the two proclaimed himself a religious scholar<sup>41</sup> but in one way or other their ideas stirred the religious atmosphere of their times.

Two diverse views exist regarding the primary goal of the religious reform initiated by Sir Sayyid as well as Gasprinsky: One, that the efforts of both of these leaders were a product of the socio-political circumstances in which they lived and worked and thus their religious writings espoused attempts to reconstruct Islamic thought according to the changing times.<sup>42</sup> Other, that both of them were genuinely interested in the religious reform of their respective communities and wanted to purify their religious concepts from the 'accretions of later development'. This is more apparent in case of Sir Sayyid as pointed out by C.W. Troll that though Sir Sayyid had started writing on traditional religious subjects in the 1840s, in the post-Mutiny period he "entered the field of 'theology proper', that is a rational interpretation of religious faith, practice

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<sup>41</sup> None of the two received a religious education as recognized by the traditional Islamic schools but learned later from some recognized teachers in order to pursue their respective missions.

<sup>42</sup> For instance see Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India*, Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 20-24

an experience”.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand the writings of Gasprinsky though occasionally focused on some doctrinal issues like position of women in Islam, seemingly centered on socio-political themes rather than attempting reinterpretation of religious scriptures.<sup>44</sup> In any case, the major emphasis of both reformers remained on rationalistic explanation of Islam in the light of new challenges from the west and hence spared a large part of their time and endeavors in studying Islam and exploring its propensity to be adapted to the challenges of modernity. For this endeavor, both faced vitriolic opposition from within their societies and were labeled as ‘apologetics’ and even ‘heretics’ by the critics.

Sir Sayyid for instance, in his *Tabyin-ul- Kalam* not only rejects the general Muslim suspicion regarding the “authenticity of the Biblical text”, but also attempted to corroborate its teachings with abundant references from the Quran and the Islamic Tradition, highlighting the similarities of Christian and Islamic scriptures and their differences with other faiths.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, he despite being so deeply imbued with the love of the Prophet of Islam and a staunch believer in the sanctity of revelation, “placed alongside it (revelation) the principle of reason as its defender and interpreter.”<sup>46</sup> To him, the mindless faith in the Prophet Mohammad’s tradition, the *hadith* had led to a practice of blind *taqlid* (following without question) and closed the doors of *Ijtehad* (reinterpretation of religious injunctions in the light of the changing conditions), which has been a recognized practice in the early days of Islam.<sup>47</sup> Pinpointing some major flaws in the method of compilation of the *hadith*, Sayyid concludes that “in any sound presentation of Islam the role of *hadith* must necessarily be a minor one” as compared with that of the Quran. Further, a mere *taqlid* of the tradition hampers the progress of Muslim society and thus must give way to *Ijtehad*. Nevertheless, this does not belittle his position as a staunch believer and his passion for the Prophet of Islam which was reflected in his bold move to travel all the way to London in order to search for undeniable material to refute William Muir’s charges against Islam and its Prophet.<sup>48</sup> Further, Syed felt the need of reinterpretation of a number of subjects which had either created cleavages between the Muslims and the Christians in the past or were likely to raise controversies in the present and the future. His attention for the sensitive issues from the dogmatic question of jihad (holy war in Islam) to the social matters like dining with Christians, reflects his urge to effect meaningful rejuvenation in the stagnant Muslim society. For this rejuvenation he adopted a two-pronged strategy: first, to eliminate misunderstandings about

<sup>43</sup> Prior to Mutiny (1857), Syed did produce some religious tracts on traditional subjects like the *Jila ul Qulub* (1841), *Tuhfah-e-Hasan* (1844), *Kalimat-ul-Haq*, (1849), etc. but it was later that he embarked upon extensive and almost unprecedented theological projects like the *Tabyin ul Kalam* (A commentary on Bible and its comparison with the Quran, and the much criticized *Tafseer* (the rationalistic reinterpretation of Quran) See C.W. Troll, *op.cit*, pp. xxvii-xviii, 36-57

<sup>44</sup> Very little of Gasprinsky’s writings have been translated in English. However, unlike Sir Sayyid, he is not known to have endeavored into a full-fledged theological discourse. However, he has appreciated the efforts of some other contemporary Tatar reformers like Shihabeddin Marjani, Rezaeddin Fakhreddin oglu, Musa Yarullah Bigi, etc. who have produced a large number of theological works aimed at a modernist reinterpretation of Islam.

<sup>45</sup> See “Deebacha Ahd e Atiq” in *Tabyeenul Kalam Fi Tafsir Al-Taurat-o wal Injeel*, (English and Urdu), Aligarh, 1865, pp. 7-23, [www.sirsyedtoday.org/books/read/](http://www.sirsyedtoday.org/books/read/) accessed 6 October, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, see Sayyid Ahmed Khan, “Haqeeqat-e-Shaqq-ul-Sadr wa Mahiat-ul-Meraj”, in *Al-Khutbat-ul-Ahmadiya fil Arab wal Seeratul-Muhammadiya* (Urdu), Aligarh: Sir Sayyid Academy, Muslim University Aligarh, 2003, pp, 408-436.

<sup>47</sup> Mohammad Ismail Panipati (ed.) *Maqalat-e-Sir Sayyid - Part I*(Urdu) , Lahore: Maktaba-e-Jadid Press, 1984, pp. 260-278

<sup>48</sup> Abdul Hamid, *op.cit*. pp. 22-23

Islam from the minds of the Europeans; second, to convince the Muslims to give up many irrational and reactionary thoughts and practices which have crept into their religious perceptions over centuries. Unlike Syed, Gasprinsky was preceded by a number of modernist religious reformers in his region and hence was more content to embark upon the socio-cultural, educational and political reforms.

## 2. Socio-Cultural Reform:

It is interesting to note that the desire to transform the traditional literary culture was the driving force behind the second stage of both reform movements. For both the reformers development of a versatile literary language was an indispensable imperative. Sir Sayyid was convinced that just as the glory of English civilization lied in the fact that “all the arts and sciences are in the language of the country”, the Indian renaissance must also encompass the promotion of the local languages.<sup>49</sup> By that time Urdu had evolved as the literary language of the Muslims particularly of northern India. The Arabic and Persian had already been ‘dethroned’ and replaced by English by 1830s. The Muslim literary elite had gradually shifted to Urdu as a lingua franca and medium of self expression in poetry, and prose. Sir Sayyid was aware of the significance of this new language in the Muslim cultural rebirth. The establishment of the Scientific Society in Ghazipur (1863) and later in Aligarh aimed not only at the promotion of modern natural and social sciences, but also at the translation of such subjects to local languages particularly Urdu.<sup>50</sup> However, later he realized through experience that translations though useful in the promotion of learning, could not furnish the sole basis of higher education as the rapid advancement in knowledge might render a translation “out of date before it sees the light of the day”<sup>51</sup> Hence learning of English language was also emphasized. Nevertheless, the writings of Sir Sayyid and his contemporaries opened new vistas for the literary development of Urdu prose and poetry. His periodical *Tahzeeb-ul-Ikhlāq* made a far-reaching contribution to the promotion of Urdu besides the dissemination of modernist ideas.

Quite simultaneously and similarly, with the imposition of Russian as the official language the Arabic and Persian languages had been limited to the handful of *madrassahs* in Muslim regions under Russian domination. To some extent the Chaghtai Turkish remained the language of literature and scholarship in the region. However, the masses were disunited and ignorant and scores of local languages and dialects never assumed the status of literary languages. In such circumstances Ismail Gasprinsky with his slogan ‘*dilde, fikirde, ishte birlik*’ (unity of language, of thought and of action) initiated his Pan-Turkic movement calling for the unity of Turkic peoples under the cultural leadership of Ottoman Turkey. His periodical *Turjuman* and other writings endeavored to develop a common language based on Osmanli (Ottoman) Turkish “but much simplified” and cleansed of Arabic and Persian loan-words. A simple language that would be understood “by all Turks from Balkans to China, by a boatman of the Bosphorus to the cameleer of Kashgar”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Sayyid’s letter from London proposing the establishment of a Vernacular University of Northern India to the Government (1869), cited in G. F. I. Graham, *Life and Work of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909, p. 132

<sup>50</sup> The publications of the society included treatises in Urdu on chemistry, physics, mathematics, law, history and politics etc. Abdul Hamid, *op.cit.* p. 5

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>52</sup> Bennigsen and Quelquejay, *op.cit.* pp. 38-39

## Educational Reform:

Both Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky gained the major part of public praise as torch bearers of modern education in a dark age of ignorance. Quite interestingly, both boldly criticized the traditional system of *madrassah* education in their respective regions and both traveled to Europe in their mid-careers and returned with a profound appreciation of modern western education system. Sir Sayyid's trip to England in 1869 opened a new world of awe and inspiration reflected in a number of his writings and culminated in the eventual establishment of the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh in 1877.<sup>53</sup> Between these years he continuously prepared the ground to convince the government as well as the Muslim stake-holders for the need of a modern educational institute.<sup>54</sup> Though faced severe criticism from the rightist *ulema*, the leftist historians, as well as the Hindu press, the Aligarh miracle proved to be the first step towards a national rejuvenation of Indian Muslims.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Ismail Bey Gasprinsky, wary of the Bukharan model of Islamic education, reorganized the teaching system from top to bottom through establishment of new reformed schools based on '*usul-e-jadid*' (the New Method). The first school was founded in his home town, Bakhchisarai, Crimea, which was soon to be followed by hundreds of New Method schools, across Crimea, Ural-Volga region and Central Asia.<sup>56</sup> Like Sir Sayyid, he believed modern education to be the only way to the Muslim renaissance and '*usul-e-jadid*' became "the slogan of progressive Tatar reformers and they themselves began to be called '*jadids*' that is 'innovators'.<sup>57</sup> In these schools, Koran and Moslem law was taught side by side with the modern subjects like mathematics, history, geography and natural sciences. And just like Sir Sayyid's Aligarh Movement, Gasprinsky's *Jadid* Movement invoked bitter criticism from the Orthodox *ulema* and their traditionalist supporters, who came to be called the '*kadimists*' (those following '*usul kadim*' or the old method)

## Political Reform:

Intellectual movements all over the world have a tendency to transform into a political reawakening. Likewise in the 19<sup>th</sup> century India and Russia the political resurgence of Muslims was but a natural outcome of the linguistic and educational reform movements (discussed above) which in fact proved to be the self-explorative as well as preparatory phase for the subsequent

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<sup>53</sup> Sayyid was extremely impressed by the socio-economic progress of England and was convinced that the secret of civilizational ascendancy of England lay in its advancement in educational and scientific arenas. He personally visited the Cambridge University to note the quality and variety of formal education as well as cultural grooming availed by the scholars there. See Abdul Hamid, *op.cit.* pp. 10-11

<sup>54</sup> For instance, his efforts in the establishment of the Committee for the Better Diffusion and Advancement of Learning among the Mohammadans of India and his own extensive report submitted to the Committee highlighted the short-comings of both the traditional Islamic education as well as the government sponsored English medium education. See *Ibid*, p. 12

<sup>55</sup> *Agra Akhbar*, 20 June 1873, *Selections*, L/R/5/50, IOL, pp. 453-4, cited in Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 68. For the leftist criticism, see S. Abid Husayn, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1965, pp. 32-33.

<sup>56</sup> Gasprinsky's 'New Method' school system was also followed outside Russia, in Turkey, Persia and even India. Bennigsen and Quelquejay, *op. cit.* p.39

<sup>57</sup> Serge A. Zenkowsky, *Pan Turkism and Islam in Russia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 34

political movements. In both regions the intellectual movements generated a painful awareness of the root-causes of the socio-political decline of Muslims as well as a rationalistic desire to recover. It was soon realized that the recovery could not be achieved without a redefined political role of the community in the changed scenario. The question of the basic denomination for the community (religion, race or nation?) in this redefined political role was rather more painful and led to the emergence various and at times confronting ideologies such as Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism, along with the local brands of nationalism.<sup>58</sup>

In India the dilemma led to the rivalry between the religious and the secular political ideologies. The Islamic revivalist movements had already brought forth a number of freedom fighters who had raised the banner of '*jihad*' (holy war) against the infidel forces.<sup>59</sup> Although by 1858 all the armed resistance had come to an end, the ideological resistance had continued in the form of Muslim seminaries struggling against the onslaught of Christian missionaries and the government policies viewed as anti-Muslim.<sup>60</sup> On the international front, the Pan-Islamist Movement of Jamaluddin Afghani had attracted a large section of Muslim populace in many countries including India. Overall there was a general atmosphere either of active antagonism or passive retreat among the Muslim community undergoing the trauma of disempowerment and marginalization. Under such circumstances, Sir Sayyid's effort of reconciliation with the British government led to a new rationalistic and secular approach to politics among the Muslim educated classes. His political ethos premised on two basic principles: the imperative of cultivating good relations with the British Government; and a refrain from political activism likely to lead to a head-on collision with the government. In the wake of the Indian Mutiny the publication of *Risala Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind* (Causes of the Indian Revolt) in 1858 was the beginning of his career as a political thinker. In the monograph, Sayyid boldly highlighted the abuses of the '*Ancien*' regime' the rule of East India Company which eventually led to the mutiny. In many of his statements he even more boldly appreciated the British government's ability to rule the "vast and varied masses of India" far better than the previous Hindu and Muslim aristocracies, as well as any contemporary European power like Russia or Prussia though criticizing their "methods of carrying out their good intentions."<sup>61</sup> In the series of pamphlets called the *Loyal Mohammadans of India* Sayyid further proved the loyalty of Muslim subjects regardless of some limitations of the British Raj and that by origin the Islamic and the Christian faith were closely affiliated having common spiritual ground to seek coordination and cooperation.<sup>62</sup> Further, he also had a close watch at the foreign affairs and criticized the contemporary Muslim press and leadership to mindlessly support Turkish policies in Balkan.<sup>63</sup>

Simultaneously, there in Russia the Muslim armed resistance to the Muscovy had almost died down though the intellectual and ideological front was still open and a general anti-Russian

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<sup>58</sup> In other parts of the Muslim world similar dilemma also resulted in the rise of Pan Ottomanism (Turkey) and Pan Arabism (Arab countries) etc.

<sup>59</sup> For instance the jihad movement of Sayyid Ahmad and Shah Ismail in North Western regions

<sup>60</sup> Among those seminaries the role of Dar-ul-ulum Deoband is worth mentioning in this context.

<sup>61</sup> Syed Ahmed Khan, Majmu'a Lecture hai Hounarable Doctor Sir Syed, Sadhora: Bilali Press, 1892, p. 236, cited in Abdul Hamid, op.cit. p. 2

<sup>62</sup> See Sayyid Ahmed Khan Bahadur, Review on Dr. Hunter's Indian Musalmans – Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen, Banares: Medical Hall Press, 1872

<sup>63</sup> Brutal Turkish suppression of Greek nationalist movement since 1830s was an irritant to the British government which had been supporting the Greeks.

sentiment existed in the Muslim societies from the Caspian to the valley of Amu Darya. The radically anti-West Pan-Islamism of Jamaluddin Afghani had also influenced some educated and activist circles in the region, but just like India the Muslims in Russia also were neither free nor strong enough to stand against the Tsarist Empire. Just like Sir Sayyid, Gasprinsky was farsighted enough to see the futility of direct confrontation with the colonial power as well as the chances of a fruitful cooperation between Russia and the Muslim World.<sup>64</sup> He insisted that “Muslims and Russians can plow, sow raise cattle, trade and make their livings together or side by side”..... “Such it was in the past, and in the future these peoples will understand that they must walk hand in hand in order to find the way of life they both need.”<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the nationalist ferment of the time did influence Gasprinsky who during his early career absorbed the Slavophil and Pan-Slavic ideas from Moscow and Pan Ottoman, Pan Islamic and liberal ideologies from Constantinople and Paris and eventually started thinking of uniting Russian Muslims on the similar lines.<sup>66</sup> It must be understood that unlike the British the Russian socio-political system in late 19<sup>th</sup> century was undergoing a stark decline and chaos. The general decadence had itself led to the rise of a vast variety of reactionary and revolutionary movements from destructive nihilism to organized socialism. Hence, unlike the British society, the Russian society did not present a good example to follow. However, the rising intellectual currents in Russia were as interesting and impressive for the educated Muslim minds. Gasprinsky tried to apply the modern political thought to train the minds of Russian Muslims. His ‘three principles of Unity’ viz. ‘unity of language, mind and action’ in fact envisaged a political unity of Russian Muslims in particular and of Muslim *Ummah* in general. Interestingly for the Russian Muslims unity at both of these levels did not pose a contradiction. Thus his Pan-Islam was by no means conflicting with Pan-Turkism as the majority of Russian Muslims were of Turkic origins. Similarly, an emotional and cultural unity with Ottoman Turkey was natural provided it did not antagonize the Russian government. He even tried to get himself recruited in the Turkish army to fight against the Greek nationalists in 1870 the latter being supported by the British. Gasprinsky also suggested that Russia should cultivate good relations with its Muslim neighbors like Turkey and Persia as with such a policy “Russia would become kindred to the entire Muslim East and would certainly stand at the head of the Muslim nations and civilization, which England is attempting so persistently to do”.

Hence, with such a broad visions Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky provided the most needed form of leadership to their respective peoples and cast a profound impact on the socio-political development of their respective societies. This impact would be studied in the next section.

## **IMPACT, ACHIEVEMENTS AND FAILURES:**

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<sup>64</sup> See Ismail Bey Gasprinsky, *Russkoye Musul'manstvo (Russian Islam)*, Simferopol, 1881, and *Russko-Vostochnoye Soglasheniye (Russo-Oriental Understanding)*, Bakhcheserai, 1896, cited in Bennigsen and Quelquejay, *op.cit.* p. 240, ff. 10

<sup>65</sup> S. A. Zenkowsky, *op.cit.* p. 33

<sup>66</sup> During his education in Moscow and even later Gasprinsky absorbed the liberal ideas of the well-known Russian intellectuals like Katkov, Cherneshevsky, Pisarev, Belindky, Herzen etc. While in Turkey he was influenced by the Young Ottoman movement of Namik Kemal, Shinasi Effendi and Zia Pasha. Further, the international popularity of Jamaluddin Afghani's Pan Islamism particularly when it was adopted by the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid and sponsored by the German Kaiser William also created an impact of Gasprinsky's mind.

As far as religious reform is concerned, Sir Sayyid seems to be far more active in bringing traditional Islam closer to the modern and rationalist version. His ‘excursions into the domain of religion’, reflected in his elaborate theological works<sup>67</sup>, definitely stirred the stagnant traditional religious thought burdened with irrational rituals and perpetuated by blind ‘*taqlid*’. Troll’s assertion that Sayyid’s work on religious reform was purely and intentionally theological though contradicts the dominant view that he only intended to bring about a socio-cultural renaissance in the Muslim society of India, seems to be substantiated by evidence of a wide variety of theological texts produced by him. However, as Troll himself admits that “Those studying Sir Sayyid, like those studying Muhammad Abduh, must not forget that these men intended, above all, to bring about theological solutions to immediate problems rather than to offer ultimate solutions to the perennial questions of theology”.<sup>68</sup> Very little attention has been paid to the Islamic modernist movements in Russia in English historical literature. It must be noted that the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed more or less a similar fervor in the field of religious movements in the Muslim lands under the Tsarist tutelage. There stalwarts like Shehabuddin Mirjani, and his disciples like Rezaeddin Fakhreddin Oglu and Musa Yarullah Bigi, attempted the task of religious reform and did ‘restore life and vigor to the Muslim Religion in Russia’. As for Ismail Bey Gasprinsky, he seems to be more focused on socio-cultural and educational reform rather than entering into endless theological debates. Nevertheless, in their efforts towards religious reform, both Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky used an enlightened rationalism as the cornerstone of their strategy. Their ideologies widely influenced the contemporary thought pattern of their countries and also crossed borders. However, both incurred a violent displeasure of the orthodox ulema whose authority on theological matters was hitherto unchallenged. In the words of Bennigsen, “it (the religious reform movement in Russia) brought in its wake violent polemics against that ‘class of parasites’ the Muslim clerics, who had corrupted the pristine purity of Islam—originally a religion without clergy”. In both regions the orthodox took up the challenge by charging the reformers of heresy and calling them names like the ‘*naturee*’ (one who worships nature) or ‘agents of imperialist powers’. In Russia the modernists were given the name ‘*jadids*’ (followers of modernism) while their detractors called themselves the ‘*kadims*’ (the orthodox). In India the orthodox resistance was centered in the seminaries of Deoband and Farangi Mehal as well as the traditional Barelvi schools. In Russia the *kadimists* were represented by a small but influential group of Tatar intellectuals as well as the Uzbek *ulama* who dominated the religious circles including the official ecclesiastical boards of Russia until 1917. In both cases the impact of the religious reform became evident only in the later periods when it led to socio-political awakening of the Muslim societies.

In the field of socio-cultural reform, the emergence of national literary languages in both Indian and Russian Muslim societies was a remarkable progress. The development of Urdu as a new medium for Muslim prose and poetry and prose is attributed to the galaxy of intellectuals of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The contribution of Sir Sayyid and his companions in this respect is particularly remarkable. In Russia, the popularity of the Osmanli Turkish as ensued in Gasprinsky’s writings provided an effective medium of communication with the neighboring Turkish intelligentsia. In both cases the new lingua franca was purged of the influences of medieval Arabic and Persian

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<sup>67</sup> For a reliable English translation of some of Sir Syed’s theological writings, see “Sir Syed’s Credo: The Texts Translated” in C.W. Troll, *op.cit.* (Appendices) pp. 233-251

<sup>68</sup> C.W. Troll, *op.cit.* p.223



and became the language of the masses<sup>69</sup>. In India, the Urdu came to be recognized as the language of the Muslims vis-à-vis Hindi (which is almost same as Urdu except for its different script i.e. Deonagri, and a partially Sanskritized diction), which later came to be known as the language of Hindus. This distinction later sowed the seeds of Urdu-Hindi conflict in the region. On the other hand, the Osmanli language “provided a concrete basis for the theories of pan-Turkism, which were destined to survive in the doctrines of national communism held by the first Bolshevik Muslim leaders”.<sup>70</sup>

The educational reforms of Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky undoubtedly proved to be most successful. In India, the Aligarh College became the bulwark of modern education with a balanced emphasis on religious and secular subjects. The learned faculty which essentially included a number of European (mostly British) teachers and administrators inculcated a sense of confidence among the Muslim youth who availed the excellence of modern as well as religious education in a single institution. Although the *orthodoxy* continuously shunned the College and its founder as un-Islamic, and many families of UP seem to prefer sending their scions to Allahabad University rather than Aligarh, the latter continued to attract a considerable number of students from Punjab and other regions as well as from foreign countries like Somalia, Uganda, Mauritius, Cape Colony, Iran and Arabia.<sup>71</sup> In the words of W.W. Hunter, “The Aligarh society has indeed set an example which, if followed to any large extent, will solve the problem of national education...”<sup>72</sup>

The institution soon transformed into a full-fledged civil society movement which inspired the Muslims across India, changed their outlook on modern education and stimulated a large number of followers to open similar institutions in other regions including Hyderabad Deccan, Bhopal, Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi.<sup>73</sup> Simultaneously, the atmosphere at Aligarh signified a high degree of religious tolerance and liberalism. The Hindu students were exempted from Islamic learning and the close intellectual interaction actually convinced many orthodox Hindu families to shun their caste and religious inhibitions and encouraged them to allow their scions to proceed to Europe for higher education, regardless of the dictates of their religion.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, the Russian Muslim society was awakened to the need of modern education by the efforts of Ismail Gasprinsky and his disciples. Just like Aligarh, the Jadid schools founded by Gasprinsky at Crimea became a model for Muslim educational institutions across Russia where along with religion, secular subjects were taught. By 1916, the number of *Jadid* schools in

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<sup>69</sup> However, in case of Russia, the Osmanli language did not gain much popularity in Central Asia Proper including the Kazakh, Tajik and the Uzbek lands

<sup>70</sup> ‘Muslim National Communism’, though seems to be a self contradictory term, became the creed of many educated and enlightened Muslims of Tatar and Central Asian regions after the Bolshevik Revolution. Basically it was a sincere attempt to reconcile the Muslim nationalism that had already emerged in Russia to the socialist ideology. For a few years this group of Muslim nationalist communists successfully coordinated with the Bolshevik government but eventually it faced brutal persecution under Stalin’s purges of 1930s.

<sup>71</sup> Hafeez Malik, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernization in India and Pakistan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 213

<sup>72</sup> W. W. Hunter, *Report of the Indian Education Commission*, 1883, p. 493, cited in Rehmani Begum, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan- The Politics of Educational Reform*, Lahore: Vanguard, 1985, p. 260

<sup>73</sup> In present Pakistan, the establishment of Islamia College at Peshawar, Sind Madrasa-tul- Islam at Karachi, and various educational Institutions established by Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam in Lahore etc. marked the virtual expansion of Aligarh Movement to these areas.

<sup>74</sup> See Rehmani Begum, op.cit. pp.263-264

Russia surpassed the 5000 mark.<sup>75</sup> Comparably with Aligarh, Hyderabad Deccan, Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi, the cities of Russia influenced by the Jadid Movement, such as Kazan, Ufa, Orenburg, and Bakhchiserai etc. emerged as intellectual centers “capable of rivaling Constantinople, Cairo and Beirut”.<sup>76</sup> By the turn of the century Jadidism had transformed into a vibrant civil society movement in Russia and even spread to neighboring countries.

The modernist reform movements in both regions could not remain aloof of the political exigencies of their times. The religious, socio-cultural, and educational reforms soon led to a political reawakening. More or less comparable political thoughts of Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky stirred the contemporary atmospheres and created long term impacts. Both enunciated a kind of ‘bourgeoisie nationalism’ in their respective communities. Sir Sayyid’s journal *Tehzeeb-ul-Akhlaq* along with his other writings became the mouthpiece of Muslim nationalist aspirations which according to him had no clash with their loyalty towards the British government. His insistence on this loyalty and elaborated justifications of the British rule in India gained him a number of sincere friends in the government who not only appreciated his efforts but also lend generous financial support to his educational schemes.<sup>77</sup> His Mohammadan Educational Conference provided the first secular platform to the Indian Muslims to articulate their socio-political aspirations. His suspicions towards the Indian National Congress and advice that Muslims should abstain from Congressian politics kept the majority of Muslims out of Congress and later when All India Muslim League was established in 1906, his ideological followers filled its ranks. This consequently gave rise to Muslim separatism in India eventually leading to the Partition of India in 1947.

On the other hand Gasprinsky’s brand of nationalism though more inspired with Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic tendencies, did not bring him into a direct conflict with the Russian government thanks to his emphasis on loyalty to the Tsarist Empire. This thought guided the Russian Muslim intelligentsia and the political elite who chose to remain loyal even after the Russian Revolution of 1905. After the revolution Muslims opted for a cooperative policy with the moderate Russian Constitutional Democratic Party (the Kadets) which strove for a constitutional monarchy in Russia. The need for a Muslim political party at that moment led to the establishment of Muslim *Ittefaq* (unity) Party in 1906<sup>78</sup>, coinciding with the birth of the Muslim League in India.

## CONCLUSIONS:

The above comparison of the two modernist reform movements clearly shows that Muslim civil societies as early as 19<sup>th</sup> century had enough potential to generate progressive socio-political change. The movements initiated by Sir Sayyid and Gasprinsky were a result of more or less identical circumstances and their development in their respective regions show interesting

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<sup>75</sup> For instance, the madrassah Husseiniyaeh of Orenburg, the Muhammadiyeh of Kazan, the Aliyeh of Ufa, the Rasuliyeh of Troitsk and the Zinjirli of Bakhcheserai were some of the best secondary schools of religious and secular education in the Muslim World. See Bennigsen and Quelquejay, op.cit. p.39

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> For instance, the substantial financial support from Sir John Strachey, the Lieutenant-General of North-Western Provinces formed a major part of Aligarh College’s funds. The College received frequent visits and aid from various government officials including the viceroys, who according to Hunter, identified in Syed “an ally which the State has gained in the cause of education and advancement”. See Rehmani Begum, op.cit. pp. 258-260

<sup>78</sup> The *Russiiia Musalmanlarin ittifaki* was created by the second meeting (Congress) of Russian Muslims held in St. Petersburg in January 1906. See Zenkowsky, op. cit. pp. 40-41

similarities. The grave challenge of Western domination and the failure of religious revivalist and obscurantist responses to that challenge in both regions led the two reformers to envisage a new but much criticized solution through modernization and unity of language, thought and action (*dilde, fikrde, ishte*).

Even the paths chosen by the two reformers through attempts at religious, socio-cultural and educational reforms which inevitably culminated in political activism in Muslim societies of both regions were amazingly similar. Though Sir Sayyid seems to be ahead in religious research and reform as compared to Gasprinsky, the latter was not behind the former in his criticism of '*taqlid*' and the stagnant curricula of the traditional schools of thought and his assertion on '*ijtihad*' as an essential way to rationalize and harmonize religious thought and practice with the changing world conditions. For this both had to face severe criticism from the orthodoxy.

Despite relentless opposition the long-term impact of the two movements was considerably encouraging particularly for the rising generations belonging to the urban upper middle classes in both regions which later on provided the vanguards for political movements. In this context the emergence of two political organizations viz., All India Muslim League and the *Russiia Musalmanlarin ittifaki* in the same year (1906) can be seen as the political manifestation of the two apparently disconnected movements.

Lastly from the vintage point of twenty-first century, these two civil society movements are all the more relevant. The rise of fundamentalist movements informed by the obscurantist and extremist ideologies make it imperative for the Muslim civil societies to re-embark upon a wide-scale and multi-dimensional progressive reform.