

THE INFLUENCE OF JAMALUDDIN AFGHANI ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENTS IN IRAN AND TURKEY

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Abstract

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was a prominent Islamic thinker and activist who had a significant influence in both the Qajar era in Iran and the Ottoman Empire during the late 19th century. His impact on the Turkish Constitutional Movement and the Iranian Constitutional Era made important contributions to how Islamic identity could be preserved amidst the modernization and reform processes in these two countries.

In the Ottoman Empire, al-Afghani promoted reformist ideas, inspiring political awakening and the quest for independence within the Islamic world. In Iran, he provided moral and intellectual support to the Constitutional Movement, emphasizing the need to balance Islam with modernization.

This article compares al-Afghani's influence on Turkey and Iran, examining how his ideas shaped the constitutional movements in both countries. It also considers al-Afghani's significant and noteworthy role in the emergence of political Islam in the modern era.

The aim of this article is to re-evaluate the ongoing issue of "Westernization" in the Middle East from an epistemic perspective. By analyzing al-Afghani's thoughts, this study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of the intellectual and political interactions between the West and the Islamic world. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to Middle Eastern studies by providing a broader perspective on the effects of the Westernization process on Islamic thought.

Keywords: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, constitutional movement, Islamic thought, Iran, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) is regarded as one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of the nineteenth century. He played a significant role in both the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran, contributing to the modernization processes of these two states. Afghani's ideas on how Islam could be reconciled with modernizing trends inspired various reform movements of the period. His influence was felt not only in Iran and Turkey but across the entire Islamic world, shaping numerous reformist currents (Nasr, 2006, p. 210).

Afghani's concept of "Islamic Unity" paved the way for political awakening and independence movements within the Islamic world. In the Ottoman Empire in particular, his reformist thought resonated strongly during the Second Constitutional Period and was embraced by Ottoman reformists (Algar, 2002, p. 112).

In Iran, Afghani's ideas formed the intellectual foundation of the Constitutional Revolution and provided moral and ideological support to the reformist movements of the era. Comparing Afghani's influence on constitutional movements in both Iran and the Ottoman Empire is crucial for understanding the modernization trajectories of these two countries (Beddie, 1971, p. 45).

Analyzing the interaction between these two regions and the way Afghani shaped this interaction also reveals the universal dimensions of their reform movements.

This article examines comparatively how Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's ideas were received in the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran in different ways, and to what extent these ideas had practical effects on political reform movements.

While Afghani's concepts of Pan-Islamism and Islamic modernism were transformed into an official ideology by the central government in the Ottoman Empire, in Qajar Iran they remained confined largely to intellectual circles and served primarily as a spiritual impetus for the Constitutional

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Movement. This divergence can be explained by the differing political structures, religious institutions, and external influences shaping each country.

1. Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's Life and Thought

1.1. Early Life and Education

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was born in 1838 in the town of Asadabad near Hamadan, Iran. Raised in a deeply Islamic milieu, Afghani began his education at an early age and, in his youth, engaged in extensive studies particularly in Islamic theology, philosophy, and politics. His interest in Western intellectual traditions alongside Islamic scholarship positioned him as a pioneering figure in the modernization and reform movements of the Islamic world (Nairn, 1977; Miller, 1994; Saeed, 2011).

Afghani's formative intellectual development was significantly shaped by his educational background and travels during his youth. He lived in India, Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe, observing firsthand the political and social dynamics of these regions. These experiences profoundly influenced his conviction regarding the necessity of modernization in the Islamic world (Schimmel, 1990, p. 67).

Afghani's engagement with Western thought played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for his leadership in Islamic reform movements. During his time in India, he acquired deep knowledge of Indian political and social structures and reflected extensively on local reform movements as well as British colonial policies (Akbar, 2010, pp. 90–95; Chatterjee, 2005, pp. 40–47).

His years in Egypt enabled him to further familiarize himself with Western intellectual systems, facilitating a synthesis between these perspectives and Islamic traditions. In Egypt, his ideas on modernization and reform gained both local and broader influence. His efforts to integrate Western scientific and technological advancements with the traditional values of Islam became fundamental pillars of his intellectual framework (El-Sayed, 2008, pp. 65–75; Khalil, 2012, pp. 110–115).

1.2. Afghani's Ideas on Islamic Unity and Reform

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's concept of "Islamic Unity" resonated widely across the Islamic world and inspired numerous reform movements of the time. Afghani argued that Islamic societies could attain modernization and independence only through a unified Islamic front. This idea had a profound impact in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran, shaping the ideological foundations of several reformist movements (Nasr, 2006, pp. 77–80; Mahmoud, 1999, pp. 58–62).

As one of the pioneers of Islamic reform, Afghani proposed far-reaching ideas regarding the position Islam ought to assume in the modern world. He asserted that the Islamic world should not lag behind the West in the fields of science and technology, but modernization must remain in harmony with the preservation of Islamic identity (Hamid, 2008, p. 154).

Afghani's views on Islamic Unity were particularly embraced by reformist thinkers within the Ottoman Empire. His influence paralleled the development of the Second Constitutional Period, and his perspectives on modernization contributed significantly to Ottoman reformist thought. In this context, Afghani's role in the Ottoman modernization process is essential for understanding the social and political transformations of the era (Zarif, 2013, pp. 112–118; Karpat, 2006, pp. 135–140).

In Iran, Afghani's ideas formed the intellectual backbone of the Constitutional Period. His thought provided moral and ideological support for reformist movements and helped establish the intellectual foundations of the Constitutional Revolution. His contributions to Iran's modernization highlight the importance of his intellectual legacy (Jafari, 1995, pp. 85–90; Moussavi, 2010, pp. 95–100).

By advocating for the unity of the Islamic world, Afghani developed an ideology later known as "Pan-Islamism," which argued that Muslims must unite and resist Western imperialism. To

disseminate these views, he engaged with numerous intellectual and political leaders in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran, supporting their reformist initiatives (Shah, 2010, p. 39).

Afghani's influence in these two countries is crucial for understanding the universal dimensions of constitutional movements in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Analyzing the interaction between these two regions and Afghani's role in shaping this interaction reveals the broader, transregional dimensions of these reformist movements (Hosseini, 2001, pp. 120–125; Fattah, 2007, pp. 140–145).

1.3. Afghani's Role in the Iranian (Qajar) Constitutional Movement

Afghani's political career demonstrates the extent of his influence across the Islamic world. In the Ottoman Empire, he forged relations with key figures such as Sultan Abdülhamid II in an effort to disseminate his reformist ideas. During his time in Istanbul, he contributed to the intellectual foundations of reformist movements and influenced constitutionalist thought within the empire (Rodinson, 1974, p. 88).

In Iran, Afghani became known for his criticism of Nasreddin Shah. As one of the intellectual leaders of Iranian reformist circles, he emerged as one of the principal thinkers behind the Constitutional Period. His ideas played a decisive role in shaping the religious and political foundations of the Iranian constitutional movement (Al-Khatib, 1986, p. 142).

Afghani's influence in Iran's Constitutional Revolution became particularly evident toward the end of the nineteenth century. His efforts to promote constitutionalism in Iran contributed to the broader modernization and reform initiatives of Iranian society. As both a religious and intellectual figure, Afghani earned considerable respect among Iranian thinkers and became an important contributor to the ideological foundations of reformist movements (Bahar, 1997, pp. 90–95).

Afghani's role in Iran was not limited to intellectual influence alone. His explicit support for the Constitutional Movement resonated within the intellectual circles that advocated for fundamental political change in the Iranian state structure. His ideas centered on "ummah" (community) and "justice" helped reformist leaders communicate the necessity of constitutionalism to broader segments of society. In this regard, Afghani's contributions to the emergence of constitutional monarchy in Iran were integral to the intellectual infrastructure of the Constitutional Period (Ashrafi, 2005, pp. 110–115).

Afghani's intellectual impact in Iran was strongly tied to his stance against the West. His critiques of Western imperialism and his emphasis on unity within the Islamic world were well received among Iranian constitutionalists. These ideas are essential for understanding how the Iranian Constitutional Movement developed within the broader context of the Islamic world (Nurbakhsh, 2002, pp. 70–75; Kamali, 2008, pp. 89–94).

In this framework, Afghani's influence on the Iranian Constitutional Movement illustrates how reformist thought was blended with Islamic values. His impact extended beyond intellectual circles and became widely embraced by the public, triggering a significant transformation within Iranian society (Mirza, 2001, pp. 135–140; Tavakoli, 2011, pp. 145–150).

2. The Turkish (Ottoman) Constitutional Movement and Afghani's Influence

2.1. The Second Constitutional Era

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's influence on the Ottoman Empire became particularly evident during the Second Constitutional Era. As an inspirational figure for Ottoman reform movements, Afghani advocated for the modernization of the Islamic world. His ideas left a profound impact on Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen alike. During the reign of Abdülhamid II, Afghani's anti-Western views were closely followed by the Ottoman intelligentsia (Karpat, 2002, pp. 84–87).

The Second Constitutional Period, proclaimed in 1908, marked a major turning point in Ottoman history. It was a time when modernization efforts accelerated and the constitutional order was re-established (Hourani, 1991, p. 302).

Afghani's influence in the Ottoman Empire was most visible in the Second Constitutional Movement and in his intellectual impact on Ottoman thinkers. As a prominent contributor to the modernization efforts of the late nineteenth century, Afghani advanced ideas on reconciling Islam with the modern world—ideas that were eagerly embraced by Ottoman reformist intellectuals (Küçük, 2000, pp. 55–60).

During his stay in the Ottoman Empire, Afghani built close relations with various intellectuals and reformists, spreading his anti-Western views and advocating for unity within the Islamic world. These ideas resonated strongly among the thinkers who spearheaded the Ottoman Constitutional Movement. Afghani's emphasis on Islamic unity and religious reform became central themes of the Second Constitutional Era (Çelik, 2003, pp. 72–77).

Afghani's influence in the Ottoman context was not limited to intellectual debates. His ideas on forming a unified Islamic political front aligned with the rising sentiments of nationalism and anti-Westernism within the empire. In this sense, his impact contributed to shaping the intellectual groundwork that prepared the way for the Second Constitutional Period (Ergin, 2004, pp. 102–107).

Afghani's role in the Ottoman modernization process extended beyond his support for constitutionalism. By asserting that Islam could support political and social reform, he played a significant role in the development of Islamic reformist thought within the empire. His ideas spread notably among reformists during the reign of Abdülhamid II and held an important place in the political discourse of the Ottoman state (Kara, 2005, pp. 180–185; Kafadar, 2010, pp. 92–98).

Throughout his time in Ottoman lands, Afghani left a profound influence on Ottoman intellectuals and reformists. As a strong advocate of Pan-Islamism, he emphasized the necessity of unity and solidarity within the Islamic world, a message that found wide resonance among Ottoman thinkers (Martin, 1999, p. 119). The Second Constitutional Era represents the period in which Afghani's ideas translated into concrete reforms within the Ottoman Empire.

Afghani's anti-Western stance and his call for resistance against imperialism gained further momentum following the proclamation of the Second Constitutional Period. His views inspired Ottoman reformists and contributed to the intellectual foundations of the reformist movement. Afghani's notion of Islamic unity reverberated not only throughout the Ottoman Empire but across the entire Islamic world (Davison, 1970, pp. 245–249).

2.2. Afghani's Role in Turkey

During his stay in Istanbul, Afghani established close relationships with the Ottoman intelligentsia and exercised considerable influence particularly on young intellectuals. At that time, debates among Ottoman thinkers centered on the necessity of modernization and renewal within the Islamic world. Afghani took an active role in these discussions and argued that Islam could be reconciled with the modern world. His ideas in the Ottoman Empire left a significant mark on the Young Turk movement (Mardin, 2004, pp. 114–118).

Afghani's influence in the Ottoman Empire extended beyond reformist thought and inspired political awakening as well. His criticisms of Abdülhamid II's rule and his support for independence movements across the Islamic world gained wide acceptance among Ottoman intellectuals. Afghani's ideas heightened demands for liberty, equality, and constitutional governance, thereby forming the intellectual foundation of the Ottoman constitutionalist movement (Sardar, 1999, p. 76).

Ottoman intellectuals, influenced by Afghani's ideology of Pan-Islamism, began to view the empire's ethnic and religious diversity through a unifying lens. This ideology advocated reforms aimed at preventing the fragmentation of the Ottoman state and achieving unity within the Islamic world. These ideas provided both an ideological and strategic foundation for the Ottoman constitutional movement (Keddie, 2003, p. 101).

2.3. Islamic Thought and Reform

Afghani's influence on Ottoman reformist movements was centered on his vision of Islamic unity (Pan-Islamism). He advocated for the unity of the Islamic world and called for strong resistance against Western imperialism. These ideas gained particular relevance at a time when the Ottoman Empire was struggling to preserve its existence. Sultan Abdülhamid II utilized Afghani's Pan-Islamic ideas strategically, both in domestic politics and international relations (Göcek, 2011, pp. 203–206).

Afghani argued that Islamic thought needed to be reinterpreted in a manner compatible with modernization. His reformist approach emphasized that Islam could coexist harmoniously with modern science and technology, and even take the lead in these fields. These views were enthusiastically received by Ottoman intellectuals and reformists and became increasingly widespread during the Second Constitutional Period (Gellner, 1983, p. 57).

Afghani's efforts to create a balance between Islam and modernization became one of the essential principles of Ottoman reform movements. His attempt to reinterpret Islamic thought according to the needs of the modern world was of critical importance for the future of the Ottoman Empire. Many reforms implemented during this period were shaped by Afghani's ideas, leading to significant transformations within Ottoman society (Berkey, 2003, p. 122).

Pan-Islamism, as developed by Afghani, was used as an ideological tool by the Ottoman state. Abdülhamid II employed this ideology both as a counterbalance to internal opposition and as a defensive mechanism against Western imperialism. Afghani's ideas symbolized a political and ideological revival within the Islamic world at a time when the Ottoman Empire was entering a period of decline (Lewis, 1968, pp. 164–168).

3. Afghani's Influence on the Iranian Constitutional Movement

3.1. The Emergence of Constitutionalism in Iran

The constitutional movement in Iran began to take shape during the reign of Nasreddin Shah and culminated in the proclamation of the Constitution in 1906. This movement sought to establish a constitutional order and limit the powers of the monarchy (Karsh, 2009, p. 88). Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's ideas played an important role in laying the intellectual foundations of the Iranian constitutional movement.

Afghani's influence on the Iranian Constitutional Movement was directly linked to his efforts to inspire a broader reform movement across the Islamic world. His influence on Iranian intellectuals and political actors was decisive in shaping the development of modernist and reformist thought. His ideas on the political and social dimensions of Islam contributed to the growing demands for constitutionalism in Iran (Rahimian, 1995, pp. 210–213).

During his travels in Iran, Afghani left a lasting impact not only on intellectual circles but also on the general public. He engaged in extensive discussions on Iran's socio-political structure and familiarized people with ideas opposing absolute monarchy. These ideas played a significant role in the Constitutional Revolution that erupted in Iran in the early twentieth century (Shayegan, 1999, pp. 157–162). His anti-Western stance and advocacy of Islamic unity were acknowledged—and at times supported—by both modernist intellectuals and traditional clerical circles.

Afghani's engagement with Iranian intellectual circles contributed to the emergence of significant intellectual movements in major cities such as Tehran and Isfahan. His lectures and political speeches provided the ideological groundwork for the constitutional movement. His calls for political reform garnered broad public support against the traditional monarchical system, ultimately contributing to the success of the Constitutional Revolution (Bayat, 2001, pp. 45–49).

During his stay in Iran, Afghani cultivated strong relationships with the country's political and religious leaders and made considerable efforts to encourage their support for reformist movements...

4. The Iranian Constitutional Period and Afghani's Influence

4.1. The Emergence of Constitutionalism in Iran

The resonance of Afghani's ideas in Iran became particularly evident during the Constitutional Period. Iran's constitutionalists evaluated Afghani's thought within a reformist framework and debated how Islam could function as a political instrument. His anti-Western discourse gained popularity especially among Iranian intellectuals who were engaged in resisting Western imperialism at the time (Arjomand, 2008, pp. 117–121).

Afghani's ideas played a crucial role in laying the intellectual foundations of the Iranian constitutional movement. In Iran, his concept of "Islamic Unity" merged with local reformist perspectives and strengthened the religious and social bases of the movement (Farah, 2009, p. 142).

Afghani's contributions to the constitutional movement were not limited to the intellectual level; they also influenced political strategies and organizational efforts. During the Constitutional Period, his ideas helped unite different social groups in Iran under a common objective inspired by his reformist vision (Daftary, 1990, p. 77).

4.2. Afghani's Contribution to Reform Movements in Iran

Afghani played an active role in spreading reformist ideas in Iran and supporting the constitutional movement. His endorsement of these reform efforts enabled his ideas to gain considerable traction in Iranian society (Khamenei, 2007, p. 99).

Afghani's influence on the Iranian constitutional movement manifested not only on the intellectual plane but also at political and societal levels. By adopting Afghani's ideas, Iranian reformist leaders made significant contributions to the country's modernization process. This demonstrates that Afghani's impact was not merely theoretical but also profoundly practical (Arjomand, 1984, p. 124).

4.3. Afghani's Legacy and Influence

The influence of Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani extended beyond his lifetime. In both the Ottoman Empire and Iran, his ideas formed the cornerstone of modernization and reform processes, playing a pivotal role in shaping these historical transformations (Ghabbin, 2008, p. 104).

Afghani's Pan-Islamist and reformist ideas led to significant transformations in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran in the early twentieth century. His legacy profoundly shaped the modernization processes of these two countries and influenced the direction of their political and social reforms (Lacey, 2009, p. 211). The Iranian Constitutional Movement stands as a concrete outcome of Afghani's reformist vision. His mission to enlighten the public and his reform-oriented ideas became the driving force behind Iran's political and social reform movements. Afghani was not only influential at a theoretical level but also played a direct role in practical political developments in Iran (Keddie, 1983, pp. 98–102).

CONCLUSION

Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's influence in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran played a defining role in shaping the reformist movements of his era and guiding the course of modernization. His ideas contributed to profound political and social changes and established the intellectual and ideological foundations of the modernization processes in both societies (Ibrahim, 2011, p. 88).

Afghani's thought is widely regarded as pioneering within the modernization and reform movements of the Islamic world, and his legacy remains a crucial reference point in both historical and contemporary contexts. For this reason, a detailed examination of his ideas and influence is essential for understanding the dynamics of modernization in the Islamic world (Mernissi, 1991, p. 125).

Understanding Afghani's influence on both the Ottoman Empire and Iran provides not only a historical insight but also a deeper understanding of how modernization and reform took shape within the broader Islamic world. By inspiring constitutional movements in both societies, Afghani laid the groundwork for political, social, and intellectual reforms. His ideas on how Islam could be reconciled with the modern world significantly contributed to the emergence and spread of reformist thought across the Islamic sphere (Keddie, 1972, pp. 98–102).

His impact on the Ottoman Second Constitutional Movement reflects the strength and wide appeal of his reformist ideas. Afghani's emphasis on Islamic unity and independence served as a major source of motivation for Ottoman reformists. In Iran, his ideas formed the foundations of the Constitutional Movement, shaping debates on constitutional reforms and public participation in politics. Over time, Afghani's thought spread within Iran's intellectual circles and eventually transformed into organized political movements (Çelik, 1997, pp. 45–50).

Comprehending Afghani's influence on these two regions offers valuable insight into how modernization and reform took root throughout the Islamic world. The intellectual and political interaction between Iran and the Ottoman Empire accelerated both societies' modernization processes and contributed to the consolidation of reformist thought in the broader Islamic context (Mottahedeh, 1985, pp. 68–74).

Afghani's legacy continues to hold significance in contemporary debates on reform and modernization within the Islamic world. His ideas laid the foundation of modern Islamic thought and fostered a strong awareness regarding the necessity of political and social reforms (Hürriyet, 2001, pp. 120–125).

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