
SAYYID JAMAL AL-DIN AFGHANI'S REFLECTIONS ON WESTERN IMPERIALISM — AN ANALYSIS

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SAYYID Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), a leading Muslim thinker and activist of the nineteenth century needs no introduction. Born in 1838, he travelled extensively in all the heartlands of Islam — Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Afghanistan and the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent and everywhere found the *Ummah* threatened by the imperial West. The threat was not confined to political independence, as the Muslim world also faced a great challenge to its economic, religious and social institutions. Jamal al-Din was perhaps the first Muslim who fully grasped the impending peril of Western domination and devoted his entire life to warn the Islamic world of the all-pervasive danger and suggested elaborate measures for its defence.¹

The need for evolving a defensive mechanism against this threat by the Muslim world had never been more imperative than in the nineteenth century. The discovery of the Cape sea route to the East by Portugal (1497-98) led to the Western economic and political penetration in the Asiatic regions south of Suez, which had hitherto been largely under the Muslim political control. The Portuguese were soon followed by the Spanish, the Dutch, the Scandinavian, the French and finally by the British who emerged as the greatest colonizing power in the East by the middle of the nineteenth century. The motives behind the European expansion in the East were initially proselytization, superseded by a desire for commercial and political gains which led to military exploits and empire-building. Tsarist Russia also joined in the bid after the reorganization and reorientation of the Russian Empire on European models by Peter the Great (1682-1725). So enormous was the power of the Western nations and the corresponding plight of the Muslims that by

the end of the nineteenth century Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan were left with only a semblance of independence, and even in these countries the shadows of Western dominance were getting larger and thicker.

As to how the Christian West could extend its sphere of influence at an unprecedented scale and built up magnificent empires, Jamal Al-Din had a simple explanation: by economic buildup and expansion through commerce. The entire system of life in Europe revolved around economic growth and the voyages to the far off lands were also made with the object of finding new markets for the procurement of raw materials and the sale of finished goods prepared from them.² Evidently, Britain was no exception to this rule. Being the foremost colonizing power, she was the main target of Jamal al-Din's criticism, and consequently, his chief persecutor as well as to the other two imperialist powers, Russia and France, Jamal al-Din had a different perception of them. Although aware of the threat inherent in the Russian expansion in the adjoining Muslim lands, he found it useful to remind the British authorities of the possibility of Russian invasion of India and repeatedly advised them to come to an understanding, and possibly forge an alliance, with the regional Muslim States subject to the recognition of their territorial integrity and sovereignty.³ Similarly, he tried to project France as a natural ally of the Muslims against Britain because of the traditional hostility between those two countries, and strongly advocated a firmer action by the French against the expansion of British influence in the Egypt and elsewhere in the Muslim lands. It was a sound approach in view of the sharp differences between Paris and London on colonial questions. To have a better understanding of Jamal al-Din's attitude

towards these three Powers, it is appropriate to discuss his activities under three separate heads.

Jamal Al-Din Afghani and The British

In the introduction to his *Short History of the Afghans*, Jamal al-Din viewed Britain with suspicion and described her as "a dragon which had swallowed two hundred million people, drunk up the waters of the Ganges and the Thames, but was still unsatiated and ready to devour the rest of the World and to consume the waters of the Nile and the Oxus."⁴ He had come to this grave realization after a close study of British policy in India, Afghanistan, Egypt and the Sudan and did not hesitate in frankly expressing his utter dislike and distrust of Great Britain to Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of the State for India in Salisbury's caretaker government (1885). His fears were not unfounded for history was a living record of the harm the British had done to the world of Islam. The British, who came to India first as traders (1600) soon managed to become the revenue collectors of the Mughul Empire (1716) and with gradual enhancement of their influence and power finally emerged as the real masters of the land after defeating the Muslim rulers of Bengal in the battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764). In a similar manner, they expanded their influence in Egypt through financial investments, purchase of the Khedives shares of the Suez Canal Company (1875), the control of Egyptian finances and the ultimate occupation of Egypt in order to safeguard their interests.

"In old times", observed Jamal al-Din, "it was easy for every one to recognize the invader. However, the times have changed; now anyone who intends to commit aggression can produce a heap of arguments and reasons in a cogent and convincing manner."⁵ The earlier invaders used to kill, or get killed by the enemy, but the Britishers were the first who occupied one third of the world without any substantial loss, for they differed in their technique which centred on peaceful and gradual penetration.⁶ Whenever they wanted to occupy a land, they created conditions which necessitated their interference for the preservation of law and order. Against their cherished goal, they always showed a reluctance to take the administration of a country directly in their own

hands and preferred to administer it through native agents. This served them excellently well as it shifted all these evils and hardships of an imperialist rule over to the native agents; and in case of good administration, earned the British a name for their benevolent interference. In Egypt which had become virtually their protectorate and its government a puppet in the hands of the British, Jamal al-Din could not help ridiculing the observations of the British Minister of Interior, who stressed that Egypt with its European based system of administration could only be governed by a popular form of government.⁷ He was amazed because it was an open secret that the Egyptian ministers were not even free to travel without permission of the British authorities. Even at places where the British had taken the administration in their own hands directly, they were always at pains to convince the natives and other European powers that they were there only to introduce reforms in the country in order to ensure the welfare of the people.⁸

Evidently, it was not an easy task for Jamal al-Din to understand and evaluate the principles of British foreign policy in relation to the Eastern countries. In fact, it was such a tricky issue that at times it even baffled the minds of the policymakers in London also. Lord John Russell, the British Prime Minister, in a reply to Queen Victoria on 29 December 1851 had admitted that it was "very difficult to lay down any principles from which deviations may not frequently be made."⁹ However, what Jamal al-Din found to be a constant element in the British foreign policy was desire to increase the material welfare of the British people through commerce or colonization and elate them morally by giving a conviction that they were the civiliziers of the world, carrying with them successfully the 'white man's burden.' Lord Granville in a general statement on British foreign policy, on 12 January 1852, observed that "...considering the great natural advantages of our Foreign Commerce, and the powerful means of civilization it affords, one of the first duties of a British Government must always be to obtain for our Foreign Trade that security which is essential to its success."¹⁰ What Jamal al-Din believed to be the real object before the British was to exploit

men and natural wealth of the East by establishing a colonial empire and make every effort to spread Christianity in order to 'civilize them.'¹¹ In order to achieve these objectives the British indulged in all kinds of deceitful and fraudulent practices in their relations with the people of the East. The security which they sought for their trade ultimately led them to interfere in the internal affairs of the Eastern countries where they had commercial interests.

Even one of the most liberal British statesmen of the late nineteenth century, William Ewart Gladstone (1809-98), who came to office four times as Prime Minister during 1865-95, could not avoid being ambiguous in his policy postures towards the Afro-Asian people because of the inherent compulsions of British colonial interests. Jamal al-Din condemned all who appeared in a garb of piety, posed like reformers and when firmly established in a country behaved like the worst of imperialists by dividing and occupying that country. He was particularly disappointed with Gladstone, in whom he saw an uncompromising spirit of Christian fanaticism and a desire to resume Crusades against the Muslims.¹² Gladstone's expressions of deep satisfaction at the Ottoman reverses against Russia and his support for the Christian people of the Balkans against the Turks were frustrating, as was his speech of 27 November 1879, delivered at West Calder, Midlothian, and reported in the *Times*, of the following day, wherein he emphasized that the principal objective of his foreign policy was "to preserve the nations of the world especially the Christian nations..." He further added that "I attach the greatest value in the principle of the equality of nations.... the principle of equality among nations lies, in my opinion, at the very basis and root of a Christian civilization."¹³ In practical politics, Jamal al-Din found that the terms 'equality' and 'preservation of nations of the world' were applicable only to the European nations and Gladstone's declaration that the "foreign policy of England should always be inspired by the love of freedom"¹⁴ had little significance in practical terms for if it was of any value, his Egyptian adventure of 1882 had totally negated it.

If a man like Gladstone who was avowedly

following a 'policy of peace, retrenchment and reform' could be so contradictory, Jamal al-Din had little hope from other more bellicose elements of British ruling circles. He regarded all the British parties and press, despite their internal differences, as committed to the policy of seeking domination in the East. He ridiculed British Foreign Secretary George Canning's (1770-1827) policy assertion, reaffirmed by Prime Minister Palmerston (1784-1865) that "the contraction of a loan by a British Government with an undeveloped power was undesirable because it ultimately involved interference with internal affairs."¹⁵ This was negated, too, as the British money-lenders continued to invest in India and Egypt and the British Government itself followed the same policy by purchasing the Egyptian shares of the Suez Canal Company and provided monetary subsidies to the Afghans. Increased British involvement in Egypt, India and Afghanistan was sometimes criticized in the British liberal circles for the evident contradictions in the British foreign policy, but this all enabled the British to build a global empire. Jamal al-Din's particular concern was as to how the British entered into the Muslim lands and what were the reactions of the local population.

The first cardinal principle of British colonial policy was 'divide et impera.' This policy of divide and rule was accomplished by fanning sectarian differences, encouraging religious strife, magnifying racial enmities and by taking sides in the quarrels of the native princes. This was very significant, especially at a time when political awakening among the masses was almost negligible and the native princes, jealous of each other, were engaged in fighting for power and supremacy among themselves. The British in the garb of friendship for one or the other offered help which intensified the internecine struggle and consequently destroyed the military strength of the parties. In India, besides encouraging the native rulers to fight each other, the British tried to weaken their bonds of loyalty with the Emperor by instigating them to rise against the central authority of the Mughul Empire. They pursued a similar policy in Egypt and the Sudan by denying the Sultan of Turkey his legitimate right to exer-

cise his authority in the affairs of these regions which were then constitutionally party of the Ottoman Empire. Convinced of the existence of an insidious hand in every local conflict in Muslim lands, Jamal al-Din claimed that during the Afghan-Sikh Wars also the British played a subtle mischievous role which ultimately led to the annihilation of the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab and the consequent expansion of the British Empire in India upto the Khyber Pass at the expense of Afghanistan.¹⁶

The British money, according to Jamal al-Din, had been no less effective in expanding the frontiers of the Empire. Many prominent nobles of the Princely States, including those of India and Afghanistan, were bribed with money and promises so that they could interfere in the affairs of these countries with ease. Extremely suspicious of the mischievous role of the British money, Jamal al-Din even did not spare Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of the accusation that he collaborated with the British for monetary gains. His sharp criticism of Nubar Pasha of Egypt for his subservience to the British in order to attain worldly benefits was equally without substance. Yet there could be no denying the fact that close collaboration of certain local dignitaries did help the British to establish their rule over vast areas with comparative ease.¹⁷

In keeping with this policy of divide and rule, the British, in India, encouraged, the Shi'a population and rulers of Oudh, on religious grounds, to break off their links with the Sunni Mughul Emperors of Delhi. Likewise, they fanned hostility between the Arabs and the Greeks of Egypt by celebrating with pomp and circumstance the national days of the latter. They further rekindled the animosity between the two by reminding the Greeks of the maltreatment which they had suffered at the hands of the Arabs under Ibrahim Pasha. The British also endeavoured to drag the unwilling Egyptians to fight against the Sudanese in order to generate regional rivalries and thus to weaken both Egypt and the Sudan and bring them under their own imperial rule. These moves inevitably resulted in local unrest and caused endless quarrels between the natives and the foreigners in almost all the cities and towns of Egypt. General Gordon was also sent to the Sudan

(1877) with the same purpose so that those who were fighting against the British may fall apart in disunity.¹⁸

It was unfortunate that in mundane Islam the institution of Kingship had taken deep roots and had created a halo of sacredness and a tradition of popular support. When the Mughul Empire, which had created similar loyalties became an easy prey to the British, the whole of India accepted foreign rule despite sharp difference of its people with the British in temperament, mental attitudes and the way of life. Similarly in Egypt, Jamal al-Din believed that the British would use Tewfik Pasha as an instrument to calm down the anger and hatred of the people against the British paramountcy in the country. However, once the people were pacified, the British would supplant the Khedive by his minor son Abbas Hilmi, in order to take the government effectively into their own hands. It was interesting to note that Abbas Hilmi II became Khedive at a very young age after the death of his father (1892) and during his reign the British influence steadily increased in Egypt culminating in his deposition (1914) and establishment of British protectorate over that country.¹⁹

In India, the British Government of the East India Company and later of the Crown meted out no better treatment to the petty Hindu Rajas and Muslim Nawabs. At times of succession to native thrones, the British, with absolute disregard to the local traditions and laws used their own discretion. In the Princely States of Baroda (Central India) Chamba (Himalayas), and Kapurthala (Punjab), the rulers were arbitrarily deposed and minor princes were nominated to succeed them which for all practical purposes meant the taking over of these States by the British Indian Government. The sole idea of making these changes was to demonstrate publicly that the real power rested with the British,²⁰ and to convince the people that if their rulers and protectors were helpless, who else could resist the might of the British power. The object was to create a spirit of resignation to the British rule.

The British were not unsuccessful in achieving their objectives. Whenever they set their eyes on some principality they created conditions

under which it became extremely difficult for its ruler to govern. In such difficult circumstances they never missed the opportunity to offer their assistance and always tried to convince the concerned ruler that to run a state was highly difficult and specialized job, and, that it was they only who could offer him the best advice in this direction. Using all the methods of persuasion, conviction and coercion, they finally succeeded in making the ruler agree to retire. Such rulers invariably disappeared from the pages of history after taking a paltry amount of pension.²¹

The native rulers in the East had, no doubt, contributed to the uplift of their subjects, but at the same time, it was those very people who through their follies had brought about their decline and defeat as well. Jamal al-Din declared emphatically that the sad state of affairs faced by the *Ummah* was the direct result of the moral depravity, degeneration and cowardice of its rulers. Greatly impressed by the discipline and administration of the British soldiery and paying no heed to the organization of their own armies on their pattern, the native rulers stationed the British army units near their capitals, thus willingly accepting the yoke of the British rule. In fact, the native princes of India were sharply divided among themselves; they were too busy in internecine warfare to pay any heed to countering the dangers ensuing from the ever-increasing military ventures of the British East India Company. Their eyes were opened only when the British Governor General Lord Wellesley (1798-1805) introduced the policy of Subsidiary Alliance which made it incumbent on the native rulers to station and maintain a unit of the British army within their states. The maintenance of British army was a financial burden on the native states but, it also afforded protection to them against deparadation by other native states of India. The British also encouraged the native rulers to be extravagant which led to confiscation of their states as no other means were available for them to pay back their loans with interest. To console them at these losses the British authorities cleverly bestowed upon them honorific titles, such as Amir Sahib, Nawwab Sahib, Wazir Sahib, Raja Sahib, Khedive Sahib, and Sultan Sahib. Unfortunately, the na-

tive rulers took these high-sounding empty titles too seriously and looked at them as a source of satisfaction for their inflated prides.²² The subordination of native princes to the British rule was followed up by efforts to subjugate the people at large by practices not much different from those applied to the former.

As they had already done in the case of Indian rulers, the British tried to persuade the Egyptian rulers also to 'request' for the deployment of British army in Egypt for defence of the country. This had become imperative, in British opinion, because of the inefficiency of the Egyptian national armed forces. In order to build up pressure in their own favour, the British also resorted to a campaign for obtaining signatures from the local population for stationing British troops in the country. General Graham followed the same policy in Sudan by calling some tribal chieftains to give a written request for British military help. This campaign of getting signatures or written requests of the local population for British help and protection was an attempt to befool the world, especially the Big Powers that the British intervention in Egypt and the Sudan had popular native support. This was a well-known technique of the British to extend their imperial sway in the East.²³

Not satisfied with the success of these moves, the British tried to weaken the strong religious feelings prevalent among the Muslims. The religious cohesiveness of the Muslims of India who had close religious and cultural bonds with Muslims of the neighbouring countries, was a matter of great concern and anxiety for the British, who saw in it a potent threat to their own hegemony. In order to break or weaken these bonds of unity, every kind of pressure and persuasion was applied. The Muslims were deprived of economic opportunities. Government service was almost denied to them. The land and property attached to mosques and *madrassahs* were confiscated, and hand was laid upon the *awqaf* property as well. In Egypt it was proposed to issue a loan by Britain on the Security of *awqaf*, which meant that the British looked to control all Muslim religious institutions through their say in the administration of *awqaf*.²⁴

To weaken the hold of religion on Muslim mind, the British brought a large number of Christian missionaries in India and the Sudan who wrote books denouncing the life and mission of the Prophet of Islam (Peace be upon him) and made efforts to convert the Muslims to the Christian faith.²⁵ However, they found it more fruitful to attain their objectives through Muslim innovators; Jamal al-Din considered Sayyid Ahmad Khan to be one of those who willingly played in the hands of the British.

The ulema were also compelled to fall in line with the British policy or at least to say nothing in public which could create public antagonism towards the British rule. Those who did not oblige were tracked and bullied, and if they still persisted in an independent course they were sent on one charge or another to the Andaman Islands. The exile of prominent ulema was also aimed at depriving the Muslims of the opportunities to get proper religious education.²⁶ The local newspapers which could have been another source of political education were gagged and the entry of foreign papers like *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*, which could enlighten the people about their political plight were banned. By employing secret police the British not only paralysed the political liberties but also stunted the creative faculties of the people under constant fear of the presence of the government spies. In a friendly talk with a British sympathizer, W.S. Blunt, Jamal al-Din told him how he lived in permanent fear while in India, "almost a prisoner in the house and had left India through fear of worse."²⁷

The policy of peaceful penetration paid rich dividends to the British in the expansion of their Empire in rich and populous lands of the East. But at times peaceful means were not enough, and military force had to be resorted to. The singular success of the well-organized British army against the ill-equipped and indisciplined forces of the native states in the East created an impression of their invincibility and a legend that they were backed by some supernatural powers. As a matter of fact the military successes of the British were largely the result of burgeoning differences as well as subversion within the ranks of their enemies. Though comparatively weak in their land forces

they intelligently magnified their number, showing them far more strong.²⁸ Actually their popular and time-tested method was the use of threat which normally produced excellent results; for every power in Europe or Asia saw them keeping under their imperial control hundreds of million of people: a deceptive evidence of the British military might.

But Jamal al-Din was not the man who could be impressed by the size or strength of the British Empire. The British reverses in the First Afghan War (1839-42), according to him, shattered the myth of invincibility of the British arms. The subsequent failures of the British forces in the Second Afghan War (1878-81) and in the Sudan (1882-5) administered further blows to the military prestige of Britain. The British defeat in Afghanistan was primarily the result of the inevitable will of the Afghans to remain free and independent. They were repulsed from the Sudan because their aggression in Egypt had given momentum to the Mahdist Movement in the Sudan. Jamal al-Din had little doubt that the British shall meet the same fate in Egypt and elsewhere as soon as the people were united and they resolved to shake off their ignorance, credulity and fear of British power. Who could be blind to the reality that they were ruling over 250 million people in the East with a small British army of 50,000 and had been able to send only 20,000 men to Egypt and the Sudan; whereas, even the smallest country in the East could muster at least 300,000 men strong army.²⁹ It must have been evident to every intelligent mind at that time that the British could not maintain their hold over such vast areas in case of a general uprising there. The millions of their subjects, which appeared to be a source of strength to the European powers were actually a source of weakness as everyone was waiting for an opportunity to shake off the alien yoke. The extension of British military power over large areas, Jamal al-Din pointed out, had actually weakened their ability to keep vast areas under their control.³⁰

Jamal al-Din's name as a dangerous agitator and conspirator though appeared on the files of the British Foreign Office in 1883, his anti-British activities had begun much earlier. The Af-

ghan hostility towards the British in the wake of military clashes between the two and the strained political atmosphere in India before and after the Indian nationalist uprising of 1857 had undoubtedly influenced Jamal al-Din to such a degree that he became the arch enemy of the British imperialism. In late 1868 or early 1869, when he visited India on his way to Hijaz, he perhaps, for the first time, raised his hostile and militant tone publicly against the British.

Addressing hundreds of native religious and political dignitaries, who came to see him, he said:

Follow the path of righteousness. (Remember) if you, who are tens of million in number, turn out to be bees, the Englishmen along with the few thousand of their servants who rule you, can become deaf with your voice; and if you attack the British Isles, they are likely to sink into the sea under your weight, and, yet, you may return to your land in freedom.³¹

Jamal al-Din's speech was highly allegorical and romantic, but he did try to raise the badly shattered morale of the people by inspiring and convincing them that Britain was hardly anything more than a paper tiger, and the phantom of British military might nothing but a work of imagination. The British Indian authorities lost no time in deporting him to Suez.³²

The misconception about exaggerated estimates of British strength, Jamal al-Din thought, could best be removed by dissemination of knowledge among the Muslims through modern education, which at the same time would help people realize the gravity of the social, religious, and above all, political conditions prevailing around them. In Egypt, the slow awakening of the people manifested itself in the working of Hizb al-Watani, a society established and directed by Jamal al-Din. Though the movement of national emancipation inspired by Jamal al-Din and spearheaded by Arabi Pasha did not succeed in extricating Egypt from the British sphere of control, yet Jamal al-Din always remained sanguine about its ultimate success.³³

The said turn of events in Egypt which culminated in its British occupation after the defeat of Arabi Pasha at Tel al-Kabir (September 1882) had a depressing effect on the Muslim intelligentsia all over the world especially in India and

Egypt. There was a pressing need of working not only for the restoration of self-confidence but also to inspire hope of a bright future among the Muslims. It was with these aims that Jamal al-Din started the publication of *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* (1884) with the help of his prominent disciple, Sheikh Muhammad Abduh. The paper was hostile to Britain in its tone and spirit and preached revolutionary ideas. Its policy was to expose the British machinations against Islam and warn the Muslims of the underhand methods the British imperialists had been employing against the Eastern people. Through *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* Jamal al-Din did his utmost to assure the Muslims that they were by no means inferior to the Christians of the Western hemisphere; they had instead had the advantage of professing a better religion. He kindled the hope among his readers by emphasizing that their misfortunes would end if they re-adopted the religious principles and practices of their forefathers. This would lead not only to the regeneration of Islam, but might also help in bringing the Muslims of the world closer to each other, and, thereby, produce unity which was an essential feature in his scheme of self-defence. Without unity, he saw no hope of success in resisting the political and military penetration of the West, particularly that of the Great Britain. Jamal al-Din looked on the unity not followed by joint action as a fruitless tree and hence attached no importance to it. He repeatedly advised the Muslim potentates to close their ranks and called upon the Muslims of India and Egypt to defy their British rulers at an opportune time when the latter were engaged in military ventures elsewhere. Speaking to a gathering, he reminded his sobbing audience that instead of weeping the most befitting thing for a man was to strive for the attainment or preservation of his independence.³⁴

According to him,³⁵ there were three prerequisites for the Muslims to preserve their independence, namely recourse to the fundamental principles of Islam, unity among the faithful; and collective action in order to resist the British imperialist intrusions. This, he believed, could easily be achieved by following the Holy Quran and by gaining an understanding of the British methods of penetration through close observation. Con-

sidering the call given by al-Afghani to his co-religionists through *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* seditious, the British Government banned the paper in Egypt. This, coupled with the difficulties encountered in sending it to India, the other country primarily aimed to be influenced by its writings, made the continuation of its publication impossible.

The closure of *al-Urwat al-Wathqa*, with the publication of its last issue on 16 October 1884, heralded a new phase in Jamal al-Din's attitude towards the British Government. He significantly reduced the vehemence of his hostility to and violent criticism of the British policies in the East. The change was, however, not sudden. Even earlier, during his stay in India (1879-82), also he had given indications of a soft attitude towards the British rule in that country by suggesting, rather constructively, that proper representation should be given to the Indians in the governance of their country and good economic opportunities should be provided to them through the establishment of educational institutions and by giving due recognition to Urdu as the official language of the country.³⁶ But it may be argued that he had said all that while he was in India, where he could not have preached any of his revolutionary ideas or his hatred of Great Britain. However, by 1885, the change was more manifest in his attitude. His stay in Europe and his study of the British polity had convinced him of the need to adopt a more constructive and moderate attitude towards Britain. On his visit to London in 1885 he met Randolph Churchill, the then Secretary of State for India, and expressed his desire to see an alliance established between the Muslim countries and England on the basis of non-interference in the affairs of Muslim states, British evacuation from Egypt and relaxation in British authoritarian rule in India. He thought that if the British were really desirous of improving relations with the Muslims of India, they could achieve this objective by giving salaries to the *imams*, *mu'azzins* and keepers of the mosques, restoring *auqaf* property, repairing mosques, and giving senior posts to the Muslims in the army. It appears that like Syed Ahmad Khan, Jamal al-Din was also coming to a realization that the Muslims might be better able to

progress by cooperation rather than confrontation, with the British. Basically a defence strategist as he was, he continued to passionately believe that cooperation between the two could possibly emerge only if the Muslims were not asked to do away with any part of their glorious Islamic heritage.³⁷

A healthy cooperation, however, was possible only if the atmosphere was free from mutual suspicions and the partners were more or less of equal strength. Both these conditions were non-existent. In late nineteenth century the Muslim world presented a scene of destitution, whereas the imperial Britain was at the height of her glory. In addition to the absence of any balance of power between the two, Jamal al-Din could not completely get rid of his time-old suspicions of Great Britain. Replying to a question asked by Randolph Churchill as to the possibility of sending troops to Afghanistan to help the Amir against the Russians, Jamal al-Din said that any such attempt would produce quite opposite results and that the best course would be to attack the Russians from some other quarter, without crossing the Afghan territory. Jamal al-Din's readiness to help Drummond Wolff in his mission to the Porte was only a manifestation of his desire to work in harmony with the British officials if the welfare of the Muslims could be secured by such efforts. But despite all his sincerity, he was unable to get necessary assurances and was deeply disappointed with the handling of affairs by the British Foreign Office. At the end of 1885 he left England in anger to find new spheres of activity and new friends to help him. He went to Moscow.³⁸

From 1886 to 1889 Jamal al-Din roamed in Russia. In July 1889 he was in Munich, whence he accompanied the Shah of Iran to Tehran. His later activities in Iran indicate that by that time he had grown in his conviction that not one individual country, but the West as a whole posed a threat to the few Muslim states which still maintained some semblance of independence. As early as 1884, he had warned Turkey not to rely on Bismarck's (German) support, and had asked Egypt not to hope for any aid from France for the restoration of her independence. He instead exhorted both to depend upon their own strength

and resources. In 1885, while hinting at the Russian threat to Afghanistan, he appeared quite agreeable to work with any Western power to ward off the dangers threatening the Muslim world.³⁹ After the failure of his efforts with France, Great Britain and Russia, he was disappointed to discover that no real or honourable understanding was possible with these powers. In Iran he found the Western financial, economic and political interests dangerously compromising the independence and integrity of the country and thus decided to raise his voice against the ruling monarch for facilitating the Western penetration and strengthening of Western financial interests in the country. An idea of the fierceness of his criticism can be gained from the tenor of his famous letter to Hasan Shirazi, the Chief *Mujtahid* of Sammara, wherein he recounted the dangers threatening Iranian independence, owing to Western interference in the internal affairs of that country.⁴⁰

After his expulsion from Iran, Jamal al-Din went to London and resumed his efforts to convince the Muslims through his articles published in the *Dia al-Khafikain* (1892) that the best method of self-defence was self-reliance. He believed that it was not sufficient to demand from Great Britain the evacuation of Egypt without securing national unity, which could be a sound barrier to any future aggressor. Advocacy by some political figures for a Belgium-type neutrality for Egypt was not popular in Europe and Jamal al-Din feared that Egypt would be possibly re-occupied by some other European power in case the British evacuated it. In his defence of the continued presence of Great Britain in Egypt, Jamal al-Din appeared to be over-enthusiastic in recounting the advantages it had conferred. Though difficult to justify his attitude, one may say that his political experiences had convinced him that without any satisfactory international arrangements Egypt could not have maintained its independence, and if left alone, due to its strategic importance and military weakness, it was most likely to have fallen prey to some other Western power. If it was to be so, why not prefer the British, who had, after all, tried to develop its economic potential, maintained friendly relations

with Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey and had also begun to treat the Indian Muslims well by ensuring their religious freedom and security of life and property.⁴¹

About his later activities and policy towards Great Britain our information is meagre. However, it may be assumed that his advocacy of Sultan Abdul Hamid's Caliphate and his efforts to get it recognized by the Muslims of the world, majority of whom were then under British sway, would not have been liked by the British, who looked to all such pretensions as dangerous for the loyalty of their Muslim subjects. Yet, with all the hostile propaganda, which Jamal al-Din must have made against Great Britain, he viewed her as a dispenser of justice and defender of public liberties.⁴² There was a good reason to believe that his earlier suspicion and intense hatred of Great Britain had mellowed down by the last years of his life. The chief influence which gradually brought a moderation in his views was apparently his greater understanding of the colonial policies of the European states, which convinced him that other European imperialist powers were no better than England. He was disappointed to find that all of them were alike in their aims, methods and policies.

Russia in Jamal Al-Din's Scheme of Defence

Jamal-al Din's fear of Russian expansion in the Muslim East was no less acute than that of the British imperialism. He believed that while Britain had done great harm to the Muslims in the past, Russia would pose a greater danger to them in the future.⁴³ His fears were largely the result of the upsurge of Pan-Slavism and the Russian ambition to become the "Third Rome" reviving the imperial glory. These fears were further strengthened by the advance of Russian armies towards Asia Minor, Iran and Afghanistan in the Eighteenth century. In her southward march Russia met no formidable resistance as the Ottoman Empire, which could have possibly mustered enough strength to check its advance was on a steady decline. In 1771 the Ottomans lost Crimea, and in 1774 many of their important fortresses on the Black Sea were occupied by Russia. The Caucasian territories of Turkey and even its capi-

tal was sometimes threatened. Iran, the second important Middle Eastern country was in no shape to stop the Russian incursions and had suffered significant losses of territory as a consequence of Treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkomanchi (1828). By 1885 Russia had not only subjugated the Khanates of Khiva, Khokand and Bokhara—the three princely states of Turkistan—but had also extended its sway upto Panjdeh on the Afghan border. Military weakness of the Muslim states was highly alarming; and what Jamal al-Din feared most was the political consequences of this weakness, which could be as worse as the loss of political independence.

The Russian penetration in the Middle East was mostly facilitated by the continuing strained relations between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Afghanistan, and Iran and the Turkomans of Turkistan. The Ottomans showed an absolute lack of political wisdom by opening hostilities with the Iranians at a time when Abbas Mirza (1783-1833) was fighting the Russians in order to expel them from his country. The war between Turkey and Iran (1821) weakened Iran's defensive capability, allowing Russia to take undue advantage of it by occupying many cities of Iranian Azerbaijan.⁴⁴ As the mutual jealousies and hostilities increased, so did the Russian encroachments in the Muslim lands. The people of Bokhara were delighted at the news of Russian occupation of Khokand (1865) and the Turkomans were glad to hear that Russia had occupied Bokhara (1868). The Iranians and Afghans did not hesitate to express their profound satisfaction at the extension of Russian sovereignty over the Turkomans of Khiva (1873). The Muslim states fell one by one to Russia because the Muslim rulers and princes stood indifferent to each other's fate, totally forgetting the fundamental rule of international politics that annihilation of their neighbour was a threat to their own safety.⁴⁵

Jamal al-Din was quick to draw the attention of all Muslim states bordering on Russia about her subversion and aggression which had caused great mischief and unrest in areas of Muslim pre-dominance. The Russian subversion in the Ottoman provinces of the Balkans which took the form of incitement to the Ottoman subjects of

Greek, Rumanian, Serb and Bulgarian origins to revolt, and her open aggression in Turkistan, Azerbaijan, Caucasia and Crimea were examples which Jamal al-Din hoped should be thought-provoking. He was equally apprehensive of all Western imperialist powers who, he believed, had strong points of resemblance in their policies and attitudes towards the people of the East.⁴⁶ Jamal al-Din had good reasons to assert that Russia, which had occupied Turkoman provinces after taking advantage of the native Shi'a-Sunni sectarian hostility, would exploit the religious difference of the Afghans and Iranians in order to prepare a ground for its interference. The well-known hostility between the Sunni Muslims of Iranian Turkistan against the Shi'ite Iran and the hatred of the Shi'ite Herat tribe, who inhabited a large hilly tract between Hazara and Kabul, against the Sunni state of Afghanistan could be easily further augmented and the people attached to itself by Russia. Following the pattern of British policy in India, Egypt, the Sudan, Afghanistan and elsewhere, which implied divide and rule, the Russians could also secure cooperation of the capricious native chiefs by distribution of money—typically the way the British did during their invasion of Afghanistan.⁴⁷

To stop the Russian incursions, Jamal al-Din called upon all the Muslims to join hands in order to defend themselves successfully. The Muslim states, he believed, had identical problems, ties of common faith and were faced with aggressive Russian designs. He referred to Russia as "the most backward among all the European nations, its industrial potential under-developed and with no [great] source of wealth . . . yet . . . Russia strikes awe among the nations of Europe." It had come to that because, he added further, "the Russians were able to understand their conditions [in a true perspective] successfully moulding themselves into a unified whole and had [combined with it] determination to work."⁴⁸ Moving with the same spirit of unity and determination, Jamal al-Din could see no reason as to why the Muslims should not be able to hold their own. Jamal al-Din's understanding of the Russian policy in the East was mixed with feelings of "caution, suspicions and fear." Despite his deep-seated dis-

trust of Great Britain, he did not hesitate to warn British of the grave dangers which the Russians posed to their Eastern dominions, where the Muslims were in large numbers. Once he told the British Government that the Russian influence was increasing in the East because they were following more moderate policy as compared to the British. They tried to pacify both the religious and martial instincts of the Muslims, who came under their rule, by giving salaries to the ulema, *mu'azzins* and the keepers of the mosques and by providing them opportunities to attain higher ranks in their armies.⁴⁹

Though apparently happy at the prospects of British discomfiture in any clash with Russia, Jamal al-Din was worried about the consequences of a Russian victory over England in India. He saw no advantage to the world of Islam by a mere change of masters. It was his uneasiness about the Russian expansion in the Muslim lands and his fears of the future which convinced him of the advantages of an alliance between Muslims and Britain against Russia. But he regarded it as a convenient arrangement only if England could be persuaded to accept the evacuation of Egypt and agree to pursue a more sympathetic policy towards her Muslim subjects. It was in search of such a possibility that Jamal al-Din held private talks with the British statesmen Randolph Churchill and Drummond Wolff.⁵⁰ However, these talks were fruitless, and, Jamal al-Din, annoyed at the British attitude, left for Russia.

While in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Jamal al-Din was said to have worked for the formation of an alliance between the Muslim world and Russia against Great Britain. It has been often pointed out that he was an intimate friend of pan-Slavist leader Katakoff and other Russian statesmen like Degiers, Zinoviff, Ignatiew, General Raktier, Uberchev and Madam Novikoff. Keeping in view his hostility towards Great Britain, one may be inclined to believe that he was hopeful of securing Russian co-operation for safeguarding the territorial integrity of the independent Muslim states against the ever increasing threat of British imperialism. In fact, before his arrival in Russia Jamal al-Din had tried for a rapprochement with Russia through his writings in *al-Urwat al-Wuth-*

qa and had repeatedly suggested co-operation between Muslims and Russia in order to drive away the British from India and elsewhere, but had, at the same time cautioned Russia to confine her interest only to the commercial sphere.⁵¹ But what Jamal al-Din more actively worked for was of much limited dimension. Instead of creating a general understanding between the Muslims and the Russian Government, he restricted his efforts to the removal of misunderstandings prevalent among the Iranian and the Russian Government.⁵² If Jamal al-Din was enthusiastic about a prospective Russian invasion of India in 1885 and asked the Afghans and the Persians to help it in the venture, he could hardly hope that the Russians after driving the British out of India would withdraw, handing over power to the native princes. The fate of Muslim Turkistan was not a secret, nor were the Russian aggressive designs on Iranian territories unknown to the world or unnoticed by Jamal al-Din. It appears that he viewed the Russian bear as less dangerous than the British whale, because the distance involved in a Russian march to India and the poor means of communications there available to her could have hardly induced her to stay there in military occupation. These factors combined with the apocryphal will of Peter the Great (1682-1725) laying down the economic principle as paramount in any Russian advance towards India⁵³ apparently prompted him to seek Russian assistance in driving out the British from there in return for economic concessions.

There might have been another plausible explanation for Jamal al-Din's complacency towards Russia. Throughout the nineteenth century the possibility of a Russian invasion of India had proved to be an extremely effective bogey against Great Britain. "The strength of the Russians for mischief [was] not material but moral," wrote a British analyst, W.T. Stead, and it was based, "not upon the proximity of their cannons, but upon the ubiquity of our alarmists."⁵⁴ Influenced by the prevailing political atmosphere in Europe, Jamal al-Din tried to exert pressure on the British statesmen to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards the restive Muslims under their domination by pointing out the dangers involved

in a Russian invasion. Jamal al-Din looked to the expansion of Russian power in Asia as a factor which could possibly ensure the maintenance of a balance of power between British and Russia, and, thereby, safeguard the independence of Iran and Afghanistan.

France and the Muslim World

In his search for allies who possessed will as well as power to preserve the world of Islam from British incursions, Jamal al-Din thought that France might also be helpful. France, despite her unsuccessful wars with the British in India, had important territorial possessions beyond Suez—such as Indo-China and Madagascar—and had considerable interest in Egypt even after its occupation by Britain in 1882.⁵⁵ Coupled with this traditional French interest in the East was the historical Anglo-French hostility, which encouraged Jamal al-Din to stay in Paris for nearly two years and start his revolutionary journal *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* from there in 1884.

Paris was an ideal place to direct his war of words against British imperialism. It was a centre of Muslim political refugees from Egypt and other Mediterranean countries who were free from fear of British persecution. Besides, Jamal al-Din hoped to influence the French political circles through local press to harden their attitude towards the British aggrandisement in the Muslim lands. France, despite her shattering defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1871 and subsequent loss of political prestige, was the only European country next to England to have overseas pensions and a colonial policy. The other two major European countries, viz Germany and Italy, had interests which, Jamal al-Din thought, could bring a greater harm to Islam. While Italy was engaged in occupying and robbing African territories for which she needed British support, the Germans were encouraging the Russians to direct their expansionist energies in the East and were likely to overlook her take-over of the Turkish dominions in order to placate her and isolate France. Jamal al-Din had the feeling that under these circumstances effective opposition to British imperialism could only come from the French Government and even went to the extent of observing that “only God Almighty could help us to

solve our problems through the instrumentality of France.”⁵⁶

The political atmosphere in Europe in the eighties was quite congenial to generate hopes of French resistance to the British expansionist designs. British indifference to the French defeat at the hands of Germany in 1871 had greatly annoyed the French, who looked on it as an Anglo-Prussian conspiracy to damage the role and prestige of France in Europe. Another reason which poisoned Anglo-French relations was the race for the acquisition of overseas colonies. It brought the two powers face to face in hostility with each other not infrequently in the same region. The Fashoda incident (1898) which brought the two powers on the verge of open hostilities, was just a reminder of the sharp and dangerous colonial competition which was going on between the two. Jamal al-Din reminded the French to be careful of British intrigues in Egypt and elsewhere and asked them to defend their rights strongly, which he thought to be as good as those of England. He hoped that the French would not be satisfied by their insignificant military successes in Tongking and Indo-China, as they had higher stakes in other parts of the world, especially in Egypt.⁵⁷

Jamal al-Din earnestly appealed to the French to adopt a tough line in their dealings with Great Britain. He pointed out to them that due to their mistakes and lack of statesmanship in the past, they had lost India to the British and had to console themselves only with the retention of insignificant Pondicherry. He believed that the French failure to display enough wisdom in their dealings with Great Britain would seriously jeopardize the former's possession of the few remaining territories in the East on account of the permanent British occupation of Egypt—the road to East. And if that came to pass, it would lead inevitably to the conclusion that the past events did cast their shadows on the future developments.

Despite his deep insight and persuasions to the French for an active role, Jamal al-Din miscalculated the strength of France, and was shocked to find a favourable tilt in the French policy towards Britain in the late nineteenth century. The

gradual change in the French foreign policy from hostility to cooperation with Britain was a logical result of her desire to recuperate after her defeat by Germany in 1871 by finding a powerful ally like Russia (1893) and by coming to an understanding with Britain (1904). Jamal al-Din was quiet enthusiastic about the idea of a Franco-Russian alliance against Britain.⁵⁸ But the grim political realities of France demanded quite a different arrangement. In fact Britain's friendship was more important to France because of her geographical proximity and command of the seas. An understanding with her would have left France secure in her colonial possessions and had rather provided an excellent opportunity for further expansion. Colonial expansion figured largely in French politics after 1871, because of her economic needs to avoid slumps by finding markets in the colonies. Overseas colonies were also desirable for the internal stability of its republican regime as these could easily provide an outlet to the discontented elements, the Royalists and the Catholic clergy, to find service abroad.⁵⁹

During the second half of the nineteenth century France became the second biggest colonial power after Great Britain. An anti-colonialist to the core, Jamal al-Din felt quite uneasy about the increasing French hunger for more colonies. The French colonial empire included many Muslim regions, and this was precisely what Jamal al-Din had been fighting against throughout his life. He was in India in 1881 when the French declared Tunisia to be their protectorate. On his way to Europe in 1882 he visited Algiers where he could make an on-the-spot study of the Muslim discontent against their French rulers after their suppression in the great uprising of 1871. He was critical of the French administration which led to the estrangement of the native Muslim population. While in Paris, he was said to have worked for the liberalization of French administration in Algeria. It was his criticism of the French policy in Africa which probably contributed towards the closing down of his Journal, *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa*.⁶⁰

Already worried about the bellicose tendencies in the French politics which were best represented by Ferry's government (1883-85), Jamal

al-Din was seriously disturbed at its campaign to dilute the strong religious sentiments of the Muslims in order to weaken their unity. Its deliberate efforts to break the bonds of Muslim brotherhood were aimed at advancing French national interests in the Muslim lands, particularly economic interests, which were thought to be best secured by sowing divisions and dissensions in the native ranks.⁶¹

Jamal al-Din's disappointment with France was gradual but definite. He was equally disappointed with Russia, because in his opinion, France and Russia had the power potential necessary to wage a war against Britain and, thereby to become indirect allies of the subjugated Muslims, but both were awed by the military might of Britain represented by her vast overseas colonies. No doubt France and Russia had in the past, jointly or individually, planned to attack India and strike a serious blow to the British power in the East, but they never went beyond threats. Jamal al-Din had come to the grave realization even long before his disillusionment with France and his departure from Paris (1885), that the Muslims must work for their salvation through their own united efforts⁶². This was what made him a great champion of Pan-Islamism and still more a potent influence in the upsurge of nationalist sentiments in the larger framework of Islamic unity. Directly through his revolutionary teachings and indirectly through the agency of his students and disciples, he was the prime mover of mass movements among the Muslims which greatly influenced the course of our recent history.⁶³

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ISLAM AS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAL

(Continued from page 41)

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THE PUNJAB AND THE SIMON COMMISSION

(Continued from page 53)

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SAYYID JAMAL AL-DIN AFGHANI'S

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THE present age is the most historically-minded of all ages. Modern man is to an unprecedented degree self-conscious and therefore conscious of history. He peers eagerly back into the twilight out of which he has come, in the hope that its faint beams will illuminate the obscurity into which he is going; and, conversely, his aspirations and anxieties about the path that lies ahead quicken his insight into what lies behind. Past, present, and future are linked together in the endless chain of history.

E. H. Carr:
What is History?

DEMOCRACY

All deductions having been made, democracy has done less harm, and more good, than any other form of government. It gave to human existence a zest and camaraderie that outweighed its pitfalls and defects. It gave to thought and science and enterprise the freedom essential to their operation and growth. It broke down the walls of privilege and class, and in each generation it raised up ability from every rank and place. Under its stimulus Athens and Rome became the most creative cities in history, and America in two centuries has provided abundance for an unprecedentedly large proportion of its population. Democracy has now dedicated itself resolutely to the spread and lengthening of education, and to the maintenance of public health. If equality of educational opportunity can be established, democracy will be real and justified. For this is the vital truth beneath its catchwords: that though men cannot be equal, their access to education and opportunity can be made more nearly equal. The rights of man are not rights to office and power, but the rights of entry into every avenue that may nourish and test a man's fitness for office and power. A right is not a gift of God or nature but a privilege which it is good for the group that the individual should have.

Will and Ariel Durant:
The Lessons of History.