

SHIBLI NU'MĀNĪ AND MODERNISM

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates modernism, with its philosophical roots in the West, in terms of modernists' ideas on modern issues, and Shibli Nu'mānī's (1857-1914) approach to such issues as an example of an Islamic response, divided into three essential focuses. Firstly, it examines the notion of modernity through the historical process of how the Western understanding of epistemology and ontology altered over time, from Augustine (354-430) to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and later modern Western thinkers. In addition, it explores the approaches of early Islamic modernists, such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in Egypt, and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) in India, in terms of their approaches to modern problems, showing some similarities between modernity and modernism, and introducing the effect of scientism on Muslim modernists' minds. Another essential subject of the study is to analyse the modernists' interpretation on traditional understanding of Islam, revelation, and hadith, based mainly on analyses of the case studies of Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988). Moreover, it explores Shibli Nu'mānī's establishment of an alternative thinking system on epistemology and ontology, comparing those of the West, based on Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), Abu Hanifa (699-767), and their *Ilm Al-Kalām*. Furthermore, the study indicates Shibli's approach to traditional thinking and his middle-road approach, harmonizing modern and traditional needs. Finally, the study searches Shibli's attitudes and contribution to politics and education. In education, it depicts applying of his own methodology based on rationality, modern science, and the demands of the time, coherent with traditional Islamic thoughts, manifest in the curriculums of Aligarh and Nadwat-ul-'Ulama. The study demonstrates that his application of Islamic rational analysis in politics and education was geared to protect Muslims' rights, with compatibility between human values of the period such as justice, liberty, democracy, and Islamic tradition. This is clearly seen in his ideas about pan-Islamism and the Indian National Congress. The textual analytical method is employed in the thesis, based on exploration of encyclopaedias, articles, books, and Shibli's own works. This study presents an Islamic analysis of opportunities and possibilities to intellectually respond to the challenges of modernity based on the case of Shibli Nu'mānī.

خلاصة البحث

يتناول هذا البحث مسألة الحداثة بمفهومها المتجذر في الفلسفة الغربية من حيث أفكار الحداثيين في القضايا المعاصرة ونهج شبلي النعماني (١٨٥٧-١٩١٤م) مثلاً للاستجابة الإسلامية تجاه هذه القضايا، ويقسم البحث إلى ثلاثة محاور رئيسة؛ يدرس المحور الأول مفهوم الحداثة من خلال اختبار العملية التاريخية لتغيير الفهم الغربي لنظرية المعرفة وعلم الوجود من أوغسطين (٣٥٤-٤٣٠م) إلى توماس الأكويني (١٢٢٥-١٢٧٤م)، ومن وليهم من الماديين المعاصرين، ويستكشف المحور الثاني مقاربات الحداثيين الإسلاميين الأوائل من مثل جمال الدين الدين الأفغاني (١٨٣٩-١٨٩٧م)، ومحمد عبده (١٨٤٩-١٩٠٥م) في مصر، والسير سيد أحمد خان (١٨١٧-١٨٩٨م) في الهند؛ من حيث مقارباتهم للمشكلات الحديثة، وإظهار التشابه بين الحداثة والتحديث، وإدخال تأثير العلم على عقول الحداثيين المسلمين؛ في حين يُعالج المحور الثالث تفسير الحداثيين للفهم التقليدي للإسلام، والوحي، والحديث، من خلال دراسة حالي محمد عبده وفضل الرحمن (١٩١٩-١٩٨٨م)، علاوة على ذلك يستكشف البحث تأسيس شبلي النعماني نظام تفكير بديل في المعرفة وعلم الوجود مقارنةً بالغرب استناداً إلى أبي حنيفة (٦٩٩-٧٦٧م)، والغزالي (١٠٥٨-١١١١م)، وموقفيهما من علم الكلام، ويُشير البحث إلى نهج النعماني في التفكير التقليدي ونهجه الوسطي في موازنة الاحتياجات الحداثية والتقليدية، وأخيراً، يُبين البحث مواقف النعماني وإسهامه في السياسة والتعليم؛ إذ يرسم شبلي منهجيته الخاصة في التعليم قائمة على العقلانية والعلم الحديث ومتطلبات العصر بالاتساق مع الأفكار الإسلامية التقليدية التي تُظهر في مناهج عليكرة (من مُدُن الهند) وندوة العلماء؛ ويوضح البحث أن تطبيق النعماني للتحليل العقلاني الإسلامي في السياسة والتعليم كان موجهاً لحماية حقوق المسلمين بالاتساق مع القيم الإنسانية السائدة آنذاك؛ من مثل: العدالة، والحرية، والديمقراطية، والتقاليد الإسلامية، ويتجلى ذلك واضحاً في أفكاره عن القومية الإسلامية والمؤتمر الوطني الهندي، وقد توّسل البحث طريقة تحليل النصوص للموسوعات والمقالات والكتب وأعمال النعماني الخاصة؛ ليُقدم تحليلاً إسلامياً للفرص والإمكانات المتاحة للاستجابة الفكرية لتحديات الحداثة بناءً على حالة شبلي النعماني.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History and Civilization

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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This study has been carried out under the scholarship of Ministry of Education of Republic of Turkey. The thesis is dedicated to my country and precious family that encouraged me to research

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TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Arabic Transliteration Scheme (According to IIUM Thesis Manual)

Consonant

Arabic Term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration
ء	‘	ز	z	ق	Q
ب	B	س	s	ك	K
ت	T	ش	sh	ل	L
ث	Th	ص	ṣ	م	M
ج	J	ض	ḍ	ن	N
ح	H	ط	ṭ	ه	H
خ	Kh	ظ	ẓ	و	W
د	D	ع	‘	ي	Y
ذ	Dh	غ	gh		
ر	R	ف	f		

Vowel

Arabic term	Transliteration	Arabic term	Transliteration
َ	A	ا +	É
ِ	I	ى +	Ê
ُ	U	و +	Ë
اِي	Ay	او	Aw

The transliteration above is not applied when the context calls for localized terminology derived from Arabic terms, such as Aceh Darussalam Sultanate, ulama, and adat.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

“Modernity” is essentially concerned with socio-cultural, economic, and technical phenomena associated with the emergence of industrialized societies in the West from the 18th century onwards. In non-Western cultures colonized by Western states during the era of modernity, it is associated with European political, economic, and ideological colonialism and hegemony. Non-Western world civilizations, including Confucian China and the Islamic world, mainly responded to this crisis by one of three options: abandoning the precepts of their traditional cultures and wholeheartedly embracing European culture and secularism; clinging to tradition; or a middle course of reviving Islamic jurisprudence and thought to develop internal solutions to the problems of modernity. From the mid- to late-19th century famous Muslim scholars emerged advocating revivalism, including Jamāl al-Dīn al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India, who initiated the project of Islamic modernism.¹

Traditional Islamic sciences have always exerted great effort to verify the authenticity of sources and then to determine their position within established schools of jurisprudence, with numerous interpretations possible within those schools. In response to the challenges of modernity, some Muslim modernists brought hadith into question, not only based on their provenance (as in traditional hadith criticism), but also

¹ *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*, “Modernism”.

based on their conformity with reason, natural sciences, and Western values, under the banner of furthering reason and incapacitating *taqlid* (blind acceptance of authoritative belief), which was traditionally understood as submission of one's desires to the edicts of a school of jurisprudence for those unqualified to interpret jurisprudence individually, but which modernists castigated as slavish conformity to ways of the past.² Conversely, others absolutely refused to acknowledge inferiority to European culture, and sought to respond to modern issues by staying within a traditionalist approach, genuinely reviving Islam *per se* and not capitulating to the charge sheet of European "civilization". This study explores this issue with regard to the case of Shibli Nu'mānī.

Born at Azamgarh, India, to a distinguished Muslim family, Shibli Nu'mānī was a charismatic Muslim scholar viewed as unique due to his razor-sharp intellect and command of modernism while remaining rooted in tradition at the same time. His genius was internationally recognised, particularly his biography of Umar ibn Al-Khattab, entitled *Al-Faruq*, and he was a major historian and scholar of Urdu in addition to his seminal role in Islamic education and political influence in the Indian Home Rule movement. His essential approach was as a historian who could synthesise traditional and modern approaches.³ He criticized the modern Western methodology in writing the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), particularly its disregard for the moral and ethical authority of human beings:

One of the causes of their crooked approach is that their principles of judging evidence differ from those of ours. The European does not care whether the reporter is a man of truth or is given to lies; he cares little for his morals or his memory. To him such research is neither possible nor necessary; he merely sees whether the incidents reported by a narrator are in accord with existing reason, the circumstance, and the trends of events. Suppose a most notorious liar narrates an incident which fits itself into the setting of attendant circumstances conforms to the prevailing trends

² *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*, "Hadith".

³ *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, "Şibli Numani".

and does not affect continuity and consistency, then such a statement shall pass muster for the European.⁴

This research aims to investigate different approaches to modernism and the original approach of Shibli Nu'mānī, with particular regard to the ethical foundation of his ontology, as opposed to relativism in post-Enlightenment European methodology. The secularization of methodology and culture enabled the secularization of cultural institutions and the whole appearance of the world, with disastrous consequences for the natural environment and human society, which have become clearer in the subsequent centuries. Science was the basis of European colonialism, and scientism supported the purported superiority of European secular ideology and the corresponding inferiority of other ideologies, worldviews, and races. The “modern” (i.e. Western or Westernized) interest in the philological and historical truth of the human world led to criticizing scholasticism and epistemological metaphysics. The inquiry concerning reasonably responsible doctrines of knowledge became more and more vital with the growth of natural science.⁵

However, despite purporting to espouse a transcendent objectivism, the implicit chauvinism and superiority complex of European culture was manifest in egregious instances of the Enlightenment and its aftermath, from the African slave industry to the “Final Solution” of the “Jewish Problem” under Nazism. While modern techniques can be useful in social science, including in describing history, to acquire the truth and reality, Shibli argued that different methods may be necessary apart from the secular,

⁴ Shibli Nu'mānī, *Sīrat-un-Nabī -Life of the Prophet (Peace be on Him)* translated from Urdu by M.Tayyib Bakhsh Budayūni, (St Delhi: Jayyed Press, v.1, 2009), 87.

⁵ Christoph Delius, and Matthias Gatzemeier, Deniz Sertcan, Kathleen Wünscher, *The Story of Philosophy from Antiquity to the Present*, translated from German by David Jenkinson, Michael Scufil, (China: H.F. Ullmann Publishing, 2014), 26, 29.

positivist methodology in order to further scrutinise and assay sources with a view to objectivity and to core truths in human values.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Aided by orientalists such as Ignācz Goldziher (1850-1921) and Joseph Schacht (1902-1969), who reinterpreted Hadith and Muslim history, some Islamic modernists have supported fundamental reorientations of Islam to upgrade institutes of education, law, and politics, appropriate to modern circumstances,⁶ while from within Islamic tradition subtle reinterpretations of Islam have been proposed.⁷ There were two main paradigms with which to approach Muslim social issues: modernist, and traditionalist. Shibli Nu'mānī could be described as someone in the middle, with a firm command of both perspectives and their implications. He offered effective solutions to modern issues without cutting connections with Islamic tradition. Instead of reinterpretation of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), his starting point was the reinterpretation of *Kālām* (systematic theological doctrines), which fundamentally distinguishes him from other Islamic revivalists.⁸

Mehr Afroz Murad argues that Shibli's understanding of modernism was inextricably linked to that of his contemporary and mentor Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in balancing traditional Islamic ethnics with Western values, especially in terms of liberty and humanism. However, it is not easy to characterize Shibli in this way, and he built a fundamentally new approach that differs from the modernism of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and other contemporary reformers such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgānī and Muhammad Abduh, all of whom were grappling with the same issues facing Muslim societies.

⁶ *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*, "Hadith".

⁷ *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*, "Modernism".

⁸ *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, "Şibli Numani".

When researched, it is clearly seen that there are many definitions of modernism. The question of what modernism itself is discussed in this study, along with in-depth analysis of Shibli Nu'mānī's unique approach to the concept in relation to tradition. Furthermore, this research tries to answer how Shibli Nu'mānī applied his own approach on politics and education.

1.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

From the 16th century onwards the Muslim world was gradually eclipsed in terms of material civilization by Europe, which from the 18th century began to be manifest in political and economic domination of the former, with a commensurate ideological critique, with many Muslims seeking to adopt Western values in an attempt to avoid the yoke of other forms of colonial domination. The Muslim response to Western colonization included perceived contradictions between modernity (i.e. Western values and science) and the revealed knowledge of Islam.

Epistemologically, positivism was generally the accepted method in European intellectual life. Muslim scholars needed new methods to respond to their modern issues and to relieve the pressure of colonization intellectually. In this case, the most immediate concern was how to approach modern issues, and to avoid the eclipse of Islam and tradition in modern life.⁹ Generally, there are two main approaches to Muslim social issues, traditionalist and modernist, and there are many definitions of both; in particular, the notion of “modernist” or “modernism” is debatable. Thus, this study is significant in offering an Islamic analysis of modernism, and then in presenting a particular response to it by a Muslim scholar, Shibli Nu'mānī, who despite being one

⁹ Mevlut Uyanik, *Bilginin İslamileştirilmesi ve Çağdaş İslam Düşüncesi*. (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 3rd edn., 2014), 11, 14.

of the key intellectual figures in modern Islam and in Muslim anti-colonialism has not been extensively studied in the context of modernity, modernism, and traditionalism. Furthermore, to understand why he built his own approach to modernism, it is necessary to observe the process of his academic life and studies.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study concentrates primarily on Shibli Nu'mānī's modernist methodology and the concept of modernism to respond to the succeeding inquiries:

- What is “modernism” as a notion?
- What was Shibli Nu'mānī's approach to modernism?
- How did Shibli Nu'mānī's own approaches proceed in politics and education?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research are:

- To investigate the meaning of the concept of modernism, its basis, and its implications for Islam and Muslims.
- To study Shibli Nu'mānī's methodology concerning the concept of modernism and his approach to Muslim' modern issues.
- To find elements how Shibli Nu'mānī implicated his own method to bring solutions to the modern issues in politics and education.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

With the 19th-century escalation of European colonialism, Muslims sought to overcome their material weakness in numerous ways, including in the ideological realm of modernism and traditionalism. Among elites in the Muslim world, it was generally assumed that only modernist approaches could cope with modern issues, so the inquiry arises of what modernism actually is, and how Muslim intellectuals engaged with it, with this study analysing the particular case of Shibli Nu'mānī. Related literature is briefly reviewed in this section.

The literature review comprises two essential sections. The first tries to explain what modernism is in relation to Islam, with reference to key figures such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgānī and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, looking at their ideas about modernism and revivalism. Their books or articles are reviewed in this part. Later, books and articles written about Shibli Nu'mānī are examined to understand his approach to modernism. The secondary sources of this study include a number of essential books, articles, and conference papers published by specialists on the subject.

Charles C. Adams's *Islam and Modernism: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*¹⁰ is clearly relevant to this research. Generally, it gives information about the modernists who lived in Egypt, including Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgānī, but mainly focusing on Muhammad Abduh's modernist framework. According to him, Muslims were in trouble due to following a traditionalist methodology. He describes Abduh's modernism as a synchronization of the scientific ideas of the West and the fundamental ideas of Islam. The research is useful for this study, but it apparently disregards the potential of traditionalism, and presumes that

¹⁰ Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2010).

scientism is the ultimate arbiter of the complicated requirements of modern life. This study will look into these gaps.

Uyanik Mevlut's *Bilginin Islamileştirilmesi ve Çağdaş İslam Düşüncesi*¹¹ is a doctoral thesis about the “Islamization of Knowledge and Contemporary Islamic Thought”,¹² which explores attempts at Islamic reform and revivalism. According to this thesis, there are two main core intellectual regions in the Muslim world aiming to modernize in social and religious matters: The Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent. The main similarity in both regions is that there is a contradiction regarding what modernism itself is. Some describe modernism as development and advancement, while others equate it with Westernization, because the main basis of modernism consists of positivism and secularism. The thesis discusses the term in relation to its philosophy and considers the specific issue of the reliability of the Islamic sources and their correspondence with reason. This is the essential basis of Shibli Nu'mānī's approach to modernism, which makes this work particularly relevant to our research.

Moreover, it mentions the main differences between the two main core regions. The Indian Subcontinent has richly diverse religious and philosophical traditions, ensconced in an eclectic approach to ideologies dating back thousands of years. Against the cosmopolitanism of India, the philosophically crude positivism and secularism of Europe struggles to find fertile ground. In this case, the importance of bringing logical solutions for modern issues within traditional approaches is clear. Although it classifies the methodologies for modern issues, it does not give the final statement about solution. This research aims to explore solutions to modern issues represented in Shibli Nu'mānī's methodology.

¹¹ Mevlut Uyanik, *Bilginin Islamileştirilmesi ve Çağdaş İslam Düşüncesi*. (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 3rd edn., 2014).

¹² Mevlut Uyanik, 59.

A. N. Amir, A. O. Shuriye, and A. F. Ismail's *Muhammad Abduh's Scientific Views in the Qur'an*¹³ is relevant to this study in observing modernists' understandings of the Qur'an. It mentions Abduh's opinion of the necessity of scientific interpretation of the Qur'an on the subjects such as "miracles, prophethood, faith and reason, knowledge, philosophy and science", presenting Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgānī and Muhammad Abduh's Qur'anic perspectives as an outcome of a Western, scientific worldview. Abduh regarded his endeavour as a "purification" and return to the "original meaning of the Qur'an", reinterpreting the Islamic tradition with a scientific view. The study notes that Abduh explained the need to avoid using traditional understandings of the Qur'an, as evidenced by his own expressions. A notable example is his view on the Qur'anic account of birds carrying stones to destroy the army of the People of the Elephant in Surah Al-Fil; traditionally understood literally, Abduh's modern scientific approach led him to interpret the "birds" as a wind or mosquitoes spreading epidemic disease. This supposedly scientific explanation is not based on any proof, and it ignores historical interpretations and findings. Critical analysis of such modernist arguments in this work help comprehend how the founders of Islamic modernism understood the new worldview, but it is incomplete in terms of covering traditional aspects. Also, their scientific understanding requires questioning. It is not necessary to ignore the traditional way in addition to offering solutions for modern issues, as indicated by Shibli Nu'mānī's utilization of both the modern and traditional, based on criticizing scientific epistemology and analysing traditional understandings of Islam from the rational and traditional aspects.

¹³ A.N. Amir & A. O. Shuriye & A.F. Ismail, "Muhammad Abduh's Scientific Views in the Qur 'an", *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 2 (11), (January, 2012): 2034-2044.

A. N. Amir, A. O. Shuriye, and A. F. Ismail's *Muhammad Abduh's Contributions to Modernity*¹⁴ is related to this thesis in giving information about the definition of modernism, its changing meaning over the centuries, how Muslim intellectuals have evaluated new conditions, their reactions to it, and the particular role of Abduh. The article consists some description of Western intellectuals' views of Abduh, who is regarded as the first leader of modernist thought in Egypt. According to the article, his main aims were the liberalization of the education system, transformation of the Islamic worldview, restructuring the mufti (jurist consult) office, and the reconciliation of Islamic ideals with Western ideals. He placed himself out of tradition in his first book, *Risālat al-wāridāt (A Treatise Consisting of Mystical Inspiration)*, reputing his aspiration to be free of the chains of tradition.¹⁵ Also, he stated:

“[I am] one who has turned away from such subjects as dogmatic and dialectic and has freed himself from the chains of adherence to sects, to be at liberty to pursue the chase of knowledge.”¹⁶

One definition of modernism is that it is the movement of ideas conducive to humans creating and reforming their environment and ability to pursue development with the help of experimentation, scientific knowledge, and technology.¹⁷ According to this definition, modernism is merely a way to harmonise with contemporary times, but R. Hrair Deukmejian and Hisham Sharabi claim that modernism generally means renovation and conciliation with Western civilization and contemporary life, while traditionalism is understood as denying the West, renovation, and congruence with contemporary life in all aspects.¹⁸ Although this book is beneficial for this study, it is

¹⁴ A.N. Amir, A. O. Shuriye, & A.F. Ismail, “Muhammad Abduh’s Contributions to Modernity”, *Asian Journal of Management Sciences and Education*, Vol. 1. No. 1., (April 2012): 63-75.

¹⁵ Alexander Wain, “Muhammad ‘Abduh” in *Architects of Islamic Civilization*, edited by Alexander Wain and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Malaysia: International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, 2017), 255.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ A.N. Amir et al., “Abduh’s Contributions to Modernity”, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

limited in its dichotomy between modernist and traditionalist approaches pertinent to Shibli and this research.

Aziz Ahmad's *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964*¹⁹ includes some significant thinkers' approaches to modern issues. It is mainly interested in how Indian Muslim thinkers such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shibli Nu'mānī, Amīr 'Alī, and Muhammad Iqbāl struggled with the long scuffle between modernism and orthodoxy. Moreover, the book tries to answer the question "instead of following schools of Islamic jurisprudence, are only the Qur'an and Hadīth²⁰ adequate?", and "is it necessary to reinterpret the first two sources?" According to him, these questions arose in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. The process of the legalization of political reform caused Muslim scholars to reinterpret Islamic history based on two main paradigms, modernism and traditionalism.

They later had to deal with *modernist* challenges, besides *modern* challenges. Aziz Ahmad emphasized the importance of the adaptation of modern values with Islam during this period, citing Muhammad Iqbāl as particularly significant in this regard with his brilliant equation of *Ijma*²¹ with parliamentary democracy. It could be said that the harmony of ideas or thoughts with Western values is the key factor for the author. On the other hand, he asserts that Shibli Nu'mānī's mind was steeped in conservative classical Muslim scholarship, while being open-minded to the challenges and inspirations of Western orientalist: "*Basically his methodology was based on a*

¹⁹ Aziz Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

²⁰ "In Islam, Hadīth is the term applied to specific reports of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds"; see *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*, "Hadith".

²¹ "Ijma is an Arabic term referring to the formal consensus of Muslim scholars basically on religious issues" see *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World*, "Consensus"; *Osmanli Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, "Ijma".

synthesis of the traditional Islamic disciplines of chronicles and hagiography and the western discipline of objective analysis”.

Moreover, Shibli Nu'mānī critiqued Western prejudice and ignorance about Islam and Islamic history, especially with regard to the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), taking into account the reliability and authenticity of sources. He offered to use reason and rational thinking for the evaluation of the authenticity of hadith applied in the early period of Islam, whereas he advised using the canonical collection of six authentic hadith collections. Aziz Ahmad considered Shibli to be a traditionalist who took account of the modern approach, especially scientific facts. Also, he says Shibli was the first person to consider Darwin's evolution and Rūmī's evolutionism (of the soul) together. These distinguish Shibli from mainstream modernists and traditionalists. Overall, the book gives a general idea about why the necessity of a modernist approach was brought about, and how South Asian Muslim scholars reacted to the issue, which is of assistance in understanding the intellectual movements in modern Islamic reformism.

Mehr Afroz Murad's *Intellectual Modernism of Shibli Nu'mānī: An Exposition of His Religious and Political Ideas*²² illustrates an accommodation between some of Shibli's thoughts and Western values, noting some similarities and differences between Shibli and Sayyid Ahmad Khan concerning modern issues. Her argument is mainly based on Shibli's intellectual modernism in India. She first discusses whether Shibli Nu'mānī's Kalām (school of systematic theological doctrines) is old or new, giving some beneficial information comparing Shibli with Ibn Sīnā (980-1037), Al-Ghazālī (d.1111), and Ar-Rādī (d.1209). According to her, Shibli's Kalām is different from

²² Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shibli Nu'mānī and Exposition of His Religious and Political Ideas*, (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1996).

Ash'arite Kalām because he found the latter full of redundant, complicated, and unadaptable details, driving a wedge between Muslims, such as the arcane ontological discussion on the nature of the Holy Qur'ān (as the uncreated speech of Allah, or a created entity, the core of Mu'tazili controversies).

In addition, Shibli's idea about changing Kalām was based on the example of Al-Ghazāli. Murad maintains that Shibli successfully demonstrated the necessity of changing Kalām to respond to modern issues, but she questions whether this could be regarded as a new Kalām in itself, or a reiteration of Al-Ghazāli and Ar-Rādi, who criticized Ash'arite Kalām for similar reasons. She compares Shibli's arguments with Western values and tries to indicate how his ideas were based on a scientific approach and modern values, seeking to correlate Shibli's Hanafite positions with Western values. She considers Shibli's affirmation of traditionalism to be apologist, and a pragmatic way to engage with modernism without cutting contact with tradition.

Anis Ahmad's *Two Approaches to Islamic History: A Critique of Shibli Nu'mānī's and Syed Ameer Ali's Interpretations of History*²³ expresses that Shibli adopted a middle-road approach, but according to him this path was not a viable alternative for Muslims. He also he points out that Shibli interpreted Islamic history in apologetic way, and he could not succeed in preventing the Muslim's political decline. However, to us, when Muslims faced the problem of modernity, the most important problem was that they did not have a unique ontological and epistemological basis of their own for dealing with these problems according to their needs.²⁴ Therefore, they naturally experienced the threat of assimilation. Shibli, on the other hand, offered an

²³ Anis Ahmad, "Two Approaches to Islamic history: A Critique of Shibli Nu'mānī's and Syed Ameer Ali's Interpretations of History", (Ph.D. Thesis, Temple University, 1980).

²⁴ Aygun Akyol, 'Jabir Ibn Hayyan's Classification of Science and Its Place in Islamic Epistemology', *Marife*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (Summer, 2018): 12.