Western Influence on Muslim Societies: Transformation and Responses in the 19th (1870-1890 Century

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KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

The 19th century was a period of profound transformation for Muslim societies, marked by significant encounters with Western influences that reshaped social, political, and economic structures across various regions. This study seeks to address the multifaceted effects of Westernization on Muslim societies during a critical 20-year period, specifically exploring how the introduction of Western technology, military strategies, educational reforms, and legal systems impacted the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Egypt, and the Indian subcontinent, resulting in significant changes to traditional structures and ideologies. Key questions raised include: How did Westernization influence the political and social landscapes of these regions? In what ways did reform movements, such as those in the Ottoman Empire, attempt to reconcile Islamic values with the challenges posed by modernity? What were the various responses to these changes, ranging from enthusiastic adoption to fervent resistance, and how did these reactions shape the trajectory of Muslim societies in the modern era? This research employs a historical analysis methodology, examining primary sources such as writings from key intellectual figures like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and other reformist movements. The study also analyzes secondary literature to assess the broader societal reactions to Westernization across the regions in question. By exploring the responses of these societies—whether through adoption, adaptation, or resistance—the study aims to highlight the complex and often controversial relationship between Western influences and Islamic traditions during this pivotal period.

Introduction

In the late 19th century, specifically from 1870 to 1890, Western powers profoundly impacted Muslim societies, reshaping their political, economic, and cultural landscapes through the pervasive influence of colonialism and imperialism. This era was marked by dynamic change, driven by the expansionist agendas of European powers like Britain and France across vast regions of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Motivated by a blend of economic interests, geopolitical ambitions, and ideological fervor, Western imperialism left an indelible mark on Muslim-majority regions.

Similarly, in South Asia, the dominance of the British East India Company and later direct British rule

ushered in an era of colonial dominance, fundamentally altering governance, economy, and society.

This period witnessed the dissemination of Western political ideologies such as nationalism, democracy, and secularism, sparking varied responses among Muslim societies ranging from eager adoption to staunch resistance. Nationalist movements in places like Egypt and Algeria emerged, advocating for independence and self-determination in the face of colonial rule. Leaders like Ahmed Urabi in Egypt and resistance fighters in Algeria exemplified the struggle against Western domination and the quest for sovereignty.

Economically, Western imperialism brought about profound transformations, reshaping traditional economies and social hierarchies. Industrialization and capitalism led to a shift towards export-oriented agriculture and resource extraction, often at the expense of local livelihoods and sovereignty. The discovery and exploitation of oil in regions like the Middle East during this period altered economic fortunes, fueling rapid growth but also exacerbating inequality and dependency.

Culturally, interactions between the Western and Muslim worlds fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas, traditions, and values. Western education, literature, and media permeated local societies, reshaping social norms and cultural practices. Figures such as Jamaluddin Afghani and Muhammad Abdah emerged as prominent voices advocating the synthesis of Islamic principles with modern ideas.

The tension between preserving Islamic "Heritage" Before 1870, even though many Islamic kingdoms faced political problems and decline, the core parts of Islamic heritage stayed strong, kept alive by dedicated communities and scholars. The Qur'an, which is central to Muslim life, remained unchanged. The hadiths, which are the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, continued to be studied and respected. Islamic law (Sharia) and theology were maintained by scholars from various schools of thought. The Golden Age of Islam (8th to 14th centuries) left a lasting impact with significant achievements in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy. Architectural wonders like the Alhambra in Spain, the Blue Mosque in Türkiye, and the Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali showcase the beauty of Islamic art and architecture. Sufi traditions, focusing on personal spirituality and mysticism, also helped sustain the cultural and religious life of Islamic societies in different regions. and embracing Western ideals underscored the complexity of cultural changes in Muslim societies during this period. Responses to Western influence varied widely, reflecting diverse ideas, interests, and aspirations. Reformist and modernist movements sought to reconcile Islamic principles with the demands of modernity, advocating for social and political reforms that harmonized Western and Islamic values. Conversely, conservative, and revivalist movements emerged, rejecting Westernization in favor of preserving traditional norms and institutions.

Why did I choose this topic specifically the nineteenth century period 1870-1890?

After reading some books and articles, I chose the topic that Muslim society was under the influence of the West for many centuries, but especially in the late nineteenth century, the West exerted a great influence on Muslim society. During this period, movements and figures emerged that

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sought to reconcile traditional Islamic values with modernity or colonial rule. This period saw important political developments. And contemporary accounts are well documented, and include political history, cultural studies, economics, and sociology, of what Western influences brought to Muslim societies. And under what conditions and how these societies dealt with the challenges posed by such influence, that is why I have chosen this topic.

Literature Review

In reviewing the existing literature on Western influence in Muslim societies, I find that scholars have approached the topic from different angles focusing on different regions and eras. Although numerous works reflect the Muslim community's reaction to Westernization, such as the scientific awakening in 19th-century North India and Bengal highlighted by Syed Ahmad Khan and Abdul Latif Khan, there is a notable lack of comprehensive studies that Specifically address social issues. (Biswas:2013) Political and economic changes in the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, by exploring the works of prominent thinkers such as Syed Jamaluddin al-Afghani, (Keddie:1083) who discussed political, economic, and social reforms in the context of colonialism, my study will demonstrate that Afghans And how others reconciled traditional values with modernity.

Research Objectives

1)An examination of the policies and practices of the British colonial administration, and their effects.
2)Studying the impact of the western education system, literature, and media on Muslim societies, changes in social norms, cultural practices, and identity formation.

3)A study of the reaction of the Wahhabi movement to Western influences, and its efforts to preserve Islamic traditions and resist Westernization.

Research Methodology

This term paper uses a qualitative historical analysis to explore "Western Influences on Muslim Societies: Change and Response in the 19th (1870–1890) Century" Primary sources, including official documents, personal accounts, contemporary newspapers, and religious texts, will be examined, along with secondary sources such as historical studies, biographies, Thematic analysis will identify modernization efforts, resistance movements, etc. This approach aims to gain a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between Western influence and the responses of Muslim societies.

Global changes in Muslim societies

After 1870, the world underwent significant transformations that profoundly influenced Muslim societies. These changes were part of broader global trends, including the expansion of European imperialism, the spread of industrialization, and the diffusion of Enlightenment ideas. These forces not only reshaped political and intellectual landscapes but also sparked debates about identity, tradition, and modernity, contributing to the ongoing evolution of Muslim societies in the contemporary world.

Global influences and changes

Cultural and Social Changes

The encounter with the West also led to significant cultural and social changes within Muslim societies. New forms of art, literature, and music emerged, reflecting the

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encounter with Western culture and the search for modern identities. The Nahda, or cultural renaissance, in the Arab world is a case in point, where intellectuals sought to revive classical Arabic literature while incorporating Western literary forms and themes.

Moreover, the adoption of Western legal systems and educational models led to changes in gender roles and family structures. While these changes were often contested, they contributed to the gradual emergence of women's movements advocating for greater rights and participation in public life. (Ahmed, 1992)

The late 19th century saw the zenith of European colonial expansion, with Muslim-majority regions such as North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia coming under the direct or indirect control of European powers. This period of imperialism had far-reaching consequences. European colonial administrations introduced new systems of governance, legal codes, and economic policies that often replaced or significantly altered traditional institutions. (Ahmed, 2013) For example, the British in India and the French in North Africa imposed their legal systems, which persisted in various forms even after decolonization.

Moreover, European powers often justified their colonial rule by claiming a civilizing mission, which involved the promotion of Western education, cultural norms, and values. This led to significant changes in the social fabric of Muslim societies. The introduction of Western-style education systems, for instance, created a new class of Western-educated elites who were versed in European languages, sciences, and philosophy. These individuals played a crucial role in mediating between

indigenous cultures and Western knowledge, influencing the development of nationalist and reformist movements. (Commins, 2009)

Changes in Governance and Legal Systems

The imposition of European colonial rule led to significant changes in governance and legal systems across Muslim-majority regions. Colonial powers introduced Western-style legal codes and administrative structures, which often replaced or coexisted uneasily with traditional Islamic legal systems.

Industrialization and technological progress

Industrialization and technological progress that began gradually spread to other parts of the world, including Muslim societies. The adoption of industrial technology and the expansion of trade networks led to economic changes and urbanization. These changes were often uneven, with colonial economies restructured to serve the interests of the colonized, resulting in displacement and new social inequalities. (Kasaba, 2008)

Changes in Education and Intellectual Lif

The introduction of Western education systems and the spread of Enlightenment ideas led to significant changes in education and intellectual life within Muslim societies. Western Education Systems: Colonial and post-colonial governments established schools and universities that adopted Western curricula, languages, and pedagogies. This led to the emergence of a new class of Western-educated elites who were instrumental in mediating between indigenous cultures and Western knowledge. (Commins, 2009)

Diffusion of Enlightenment Ideas

The spread of new communication technologies such as the telegraph and later radio also had a profound impact. These technologies facilitated the spread of ideas and information, connected Muslim societies to global intellectual currents, and contributed to the rise of nationalist and reformist movements. The printing press in particular played an important role in the spread of Enlightenment ideas and the emergence of a public sphere in Muslim societies. (Hourani, 199)

Western influence on Muslim society
European Imperialism and Its Impact

After 1870, the effects of global influence on Muslim societies are multifaceted which have affected political, legal, educational, cultural and social dimensions. These effects have been so profound that they have reshaped the landscape of Muslim majority areas as well.

Implications For Governance and The Legal System

The introduction of Western governance and legal systems had significant effects on Muslim societies.

Colonial Legal Legacy

The imposition of colonial legal systems created a dual legal legacy in many Muslim societies, where Islamic law coexisted, sometimes uneasily, with Western legal codes. This legal pluralism has implications for national identity, governance, and social cohesion. (Ahmad, 2013)

Effects on education and intellectual

and the spread of Enlightenment ideas had far-reaching effects.

Emergence of a new elite

The establishment of Western-style educational institutions led to the emergence of a new class of elites who were versed in both Islamic and Western knowledge. This group played an important role in mediating between traditional and modern influences, shaping nationalist and reformist movements. (Cummins:2009)

Political Fragmentation

When European countries took control of Muslim lands, they divided them up into smaller countries that did not always make sense. This caused a lot of problems because the new countries were often weak and could not govern themselves properly. (Eickelman:2004)

Economic Exploitation

European countries took advantage of the resources in Muslim lands for their own benefit. They made unfair trade deals and took valuable things from these countries, making it hard for the local people to prosper.

Transformation of Key Regions Ottoman Empire

Persia: The Qajar Dynasty and European Interactions

The Qajar dynasty in Persia (Modern Iran) faced significant challenges during the 19th century as European powers sought to expand their influence in the region. The Qajar rulers navigated a complex political landscape by balancing relations with European powers such as Britain and Russia. European interactions with Persia during this period often involved economic agreements, trade agreements, and

sometimes military intervention. Signing unequal treaties with European powers undermined Persian sovereignty and contributed to economic exploitation. The Qajar dynasty's struggle with modernization and European intervention set the stage for later political developments in Persia. (Melville:2013)

Egypt: Modernity and the Suez Canal

In Egypt, the influence of European imperialism was particularly prominent during the 19th century. During the reign of Muhammad Ali and his successors, a process of modernization began in Egypt that included reforms in the military, economy, and administration. One of the most important developments during this period was the construction of the Suez Canal, a major waterway that connected the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, facilitating trade and transportation between Europe and Asia. went. The construction of the Suez Canal had a transformative effect on Egypt's economy and strategic importance. However, Egypt's modernization efforts were accompanied by increased indebtedness and dependence on European powers, particularly Britain and France. This eventually led to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, ushering in a new phase of direct colonial rule in the country. (Smith: 2014)

Biography of the Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (born 1838, died in Asada bad, Fars. Maulana Afghani was a Muslim statesman, political agitator, and journalist whose belief in the power of a revived Islamic civilization in the face of European domination shaped Muslim thought in the 19th century. significantly influenced the development of the early 20th century (Keddie:1983, pg:15). Despite the

name Afghani, which he adopted and by which he is best known, some scholars believe that he was not an Afghan, but a Persian Shia is a member of one of the two major sects of Islam) near Hamadan. Born in Asada bad (Bashiri2000). An appreciable part of Fars-Afghani's activities took place in areas where Sunnism (the other major branch of Islam) was dominant, and this was to conceal his Persian and Shia origins, which would have raised suspicion among Sunnis that he adopted the name Afghani. As a young man he visited the Shiite centers of Karbala and Najaf in southern Mesopotamia, to expand and complete his religious and philosophical education, and Afghani then traveled to Istanbul in 1870 where he lectured.

Books

1) Sayyid Jamāl-ad-Din al-Afghani:", Continued the statement in the history of Afghans Egypt, original in Arabic: تتمة البيان في تاريخ الأفغان Tatimmat al-bayan fi Tarikh al-Afghan, 1901 (Mesr, 1318 Islamic lunar year.
2) Sayyid Jamāl-ad-Din al-Afghani: Brochure about Naturalism or materialism, original in Dari language: رساله نیچریه (Ressalas e Naushera) translator of Muhammad Abduh in Arabic.

Date of death

Al-Afghani died of cancer of the jaw on 9 March 1897 (. Keddie:1983, pg:15) and was buried there. In late 1944, at the request of the Afghan government, his remains were flown to Afghanistan via British India. His funeral prayer was performed in front of the Afghan Consulate building in Peshawar's Qisa Khwani Bazar. After that, their bodies were kept inside Kabul University. A

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mausoleum was also built there in his memory.

Contributions

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was a prominent figure in the 1870s, noted for his contributions to Islamic political thought and activism. His efforts primarily focused on promoting Pan-Islamism and modernist reforms within the Muslim world. One of his significant contributions during the 1870s was his collaboration with Muhammad Abduh in publishing the revolutionary journal "al- 'Urwat al-Wuthqa" (The Firmest Bond). This journal, written in Arabic, was instrumental in advocating for the political unity and revitalization of the Islamic world. (Yusuf:2012)

Al-Afghani's writings in this period emphasized the importance of adopting scientific knowledge and modernist ideas to counter Western colonialism and to reform Islamic societies from within in addition to his literary contributions, al-Afghani was actively involved in political activism. He traveled extensively across the Middle East, India, and Europe, engaging in debates and fostering intellectual movements that sought to challenge both colonial domination and internal stagnation within Muslim societies. His speeches and public addresses often criticized the complacency and conservatism of contemporary Muslim rulers, urging them to embrace reform and modernization. (Imady:1993)

Furthermore, al-Afghani's influence extended to his interactions with key political figures and his attempts to galvanize support for anti-colonial movements. His efforts in Egypt, for instance, were marked by his opposition to foreign control and his calls for educational and political reforms, which eventually led

to his expulsion by the Egyptian authorities in 1879. Al-Afghani's legacy in the 1870s set the groundwork for future Islamic modernist movements and highlighted the potential for intellectual and political revival within the Muslim world through unity and reform. His ideas continued to inspire generations of reformers and activists long after his time.

Critique of imperialism, Pan-Islamism

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was an important figure in the 19th century in the criticism of imperialism and the promotion of Pan-Islamism. His efforts were important in shaping modern Islamic political thought and promoting resistance against colonial powers.

Criticism of Imperialism

Al-Afghani was a strong critic of Western imperialism, especially the British colonial system. He believed that European domination was a threat to the Islamic world and Muslims needed to unite to counter this threat. His criticism was not only political but also intellectual. He argued that Western imperialism had its roots in the superiority of Western scientific and technological progress. (Keddie:1983)

Therefore, he advocated the adoption of Western sciences and institutions to strengthen the Islamic world and reduce its dependence on the West. Al-Afghani's opposition to British rule was particularly evident in his activities in India and Egypt, where he urged unity between Hindus and Muslims to resist British control.

Pan-Islamism

Al-Afghani is often considered a pioneer of pan-Islamism, a movement that aims to

unite Muslims across national and sectarian lines to form a cohesive and powerful Islamic bloc. He believed that the fragmentation of the Muslim world had made it vulnerable to external domination and internal degradation. His call for pan-Islamic unity was expressed through his collaboration with Muhammad Abdah in the publication of the journal "Al-Arut al-Waqqa" (The Greatest Bond), which advocated the political unity and revival of the Islamic world. (Chowdhury:2012)

Al-Afghani's views on pan-Islamism were also reflected in his interactions with various political leaders and reformers. For example, during his tenure in Egypt, he opposed foreign control and pushed for educational and political reforms. His influence spread to Persia (Iran), where he joined opposition movements against the Shah's rule. His advocacy of pan-Islamism was evident in his efforts to create unity among the various Islamic states and in his efforts to establish a caliphate that would lead the Islamic world.

Muslim intellectuals' response to Western influences and changes in Muslim society

During the 19th century, the response of Muslim intellectuals to Western influence in Muslim-majority regions and to changes in the contemporary political, economic and cultural landscape was complex and multifaceted. Intellectuals faced the challenge of reconciling their Islamic heritage with the new realities imposed by European colonialism and the spread of Western ideas and technology. Their answers varied widely, reflecting different perspectives on how best to navigate this period of change. Meanwhile, some important responses of Muslim intellectuals are as follows:

Adoption of modernization and reforms

Many Muslim intellectuals advocated modernization and reform as a necessary response to the challenges posed by European imperialism and technological progress.

One of them was Jamal al-Din al-Afghani

A prominent figure, al-Afghani emphasized the importance of adopting modern science and technology for the unity of the Muslim world (pan-Islamism) and resistance to Western hegemony. He argued that Islam was compatible with reason and progress and criticized traditionalist Muslims who resisted change and Westerners who saw Islam as inherently backward. (Kounsar:2017)

Muhammad Abduh

A student of al-Afghani, Abduh promoted a rationalist approach to Islam. He tried to harmonize Islamic education and jurisprudence with modern values while maintaining the basic principles of Islam. Abduh's work laid the foundation for future Islamic modernism, emphasizing the need for Muslims to engage with contemporary scientific and intellectual developments. (Yusuf:2012)

Batrus al-Bustani

Often considered the pioneer of Nahda, al-Bustani advocated education, linguistic reform, and the translation of European works into Arabic. His efforts helped create a new intellectual environment that fostered dialogue between Islamic and Western thought.

Rifa' al-Tahtawi

After spending time in Paris, al-Tahtawi returned to Egypt with a vision of modernizing Egyptian society. He translated several works from French into Arabic and emphasized the importance of science, technology and modern education. (Parnell:2016)

Syed Ahmad Khan

In British India, Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Aligarh Movement which aimed to modernize Muslim education while upholding Islamic values. He encouraged Muslims to learn English and Western studies to counter the British but also emphasized the importance of maintaining an Islamic identity. (Davison:1061)

Rashid Rida

Influenced by both Abduh and al-Afghani, Rida was a prominent proponent of Salafism, which sought to return to the ways of the early Muslim community (Salaf). He believed that Islamic law needed to be reinterpreted in the light of modern conditions but without abandoning its fundamental principles. (Griffel:2015)

Conclusion

The late 19th century saw Muslim societies significantly influenced by Western powers, resulting in extensive political, economic and social changes. Reform efforts in the Ottoman Empire, such as Tanzimat, aimed to modernize while balancing Islamic tradition and Westernization. Intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdah advocated the harmonization of Islamic principles with modern ideas. British colonial rule in India changed governance and society, giving rise to resistance and reform movements. In Egypt, modernization efforts led to British occupation, while Persia struggled with European intervention. This period marked a dynamic dialogue between Western influences and Islamic traditions, which shaped contemporary Muslim societies.

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