

## Social Reformative Thought of Mufti Mohammad Abduh (1849-1905)

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The personality of Mufti Muhammad Abduh has multi facets. He was known as a historian, teacher, writer, reformer and journalist at the same time. He wrote on various topics, but most of his time was spent in his efforts to reform the Muslims. This article deals with several themes that apparently seem different and scattered but inwardly they are interconnected. First of these themes is the conceptual definition of reformation and revival. For the reformation of society, the role of women is significant and this significance is highlighted through this article. The individual's training and upbringing is dependent upon the sincerity for his family and this positive role of family is conducive towards the harmony, unity and welfare of the society and broadly of Ummah. The positive role of family gets its start from the mother who is a woman. So, the rights of women especially the matters of divorce, bigamy and polygamy have also been discussed. The only condition which makes polygamy or bigamy permissible or lawful is the justice with all spouses. The detailed description of Mufti Muhammad Abduh's decree is also given to help the readers understand the perspective of Mufti Muhammad Abduh.*

### **Reformation Means:(جد الشيء)**

In dictionary reformation means to bring reforms and infuse spirit of revival or to make something up-to-date. As (جد الشيء) means a thing has become new<sup>(1)</sup>. It is opposite to old and it is said that so and so has given a new existence to something, has formed it a new when it had become old<sup>(2)</sup>. So, reformation, in dictionary means a change in something from its original shape because of any reason, then making it return to its original form before the change<sup>(3)</sup>.

### **Shariah's Definition of Reformation**

Any command of Shariah which had undergone a change because of circumstances, and attempt to make the command return to its originality is called reformation of Shariah<sup>4</sup>. According to scholars, the definition of

reformation contains various sayings and perspectives, but their essence is enclosed in three points.

Reviving a thing that had lost its existence from the signs of traditions and had become famous. It is also needed to motivate people for the earlier form.

Muhammad bin Abdul Rehman bin Ali bin Abu-bakkar Al-Aqli<sup>(d.666 A.H)</sup> says:

Reformation means reviving the thing from the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah, which has come to an end in terms of submission and obedience resulting into deeds of virtue.<sup>(5)</sup>

(2) Eliminating innovations and relations and disclosing the innovators, starting a protest even war against them and to purify practices from all such impurities which were injected in Islam and moulded them according to the standards of age of Prophet (Blessing and Peace of Allah be upon him) and Caliphate.<sup>(6)</sup>

Shamsul Haq Azeem Abadi<sup>(d.1911 A.D)</sup> said in/Aun-ul-Mabood/(عون المعبود) : Giving rebirth to the thing, through Quran and Sunnah, that was abandoned and eliminate those impurities which emerge from innovations and relations.<sup>(7)</sup>

Jalaludeen Suyuti (d.1505A.D/911 A.H) writes in his book الجامع الصغير (al-Jami'as-sagheer): Reformation of religion means reviving its guidance and explaining its true status, negating the objections raised about religion by the innovators and supporters of transgression removing the obstacles that come in the way to establish religion and giving concessions to masses in their expediences.<sup>(8)</sup>

Maulana Mododi (d.1979 A.D) says, " the true meaning of reformation is to purify Islam from all the ingredients of ignorance and to go greatest length to revive Islam by performing deeds of virtue."<sup>(9)</sup>

Dr. Yousaf Qarzavi (1926 A.D to till) says, "Reformation is to make something return to its first stage to the first appearance in such a way that it becomes up-to-date despite being old, modification something which was and torn into rags so that it may closely match its earliest form."<sup>(10)</sup>

(3) Application of religious commands to make troubles and mishaps come to an end and curing something through revelation.

Umar Ubaid Katib (d.644 A.H) writes "Ijtihad or reformation do not mean exceed or innovate or surpass or modify something. It means a new and novel thinking which strengthens the verse and guides a Muslim in decision-making and problem-solving matters in his coming life. It is a way of treatment that is achieved from revelation."<sup>(11)</sup>

Abdul Fatah Ibraheem(d.1951 A.D) writes modernization of religion means to return to things that have been abandoned and to remind people about forgotten things. These things belong to their lives. We need to mould these things in the light of religion and not to mould religion in the light of these things .<sup>(12)</sup>

### Difference between Reformation and Modernization

Normally people do not regard reformation and revival as two different and distinct things, and start labelling a modernizer as a revivalist in simplicity. They misconceive that every person who introduces a new way and method and follows it to the greatest extent is a revivalist. Specially the ones who try to support the Muslims in terms of their religious status by finding them under a cloud. They prepare a new blend of Islam and Jahiliyah by having made adjustments with the flourishing Jahiliyah of their age or they paint the whole nation in the colour of Jahiliyah wrapped under the label of Islam. Such peoples are granted the title of revivalists; indeed, they are not revivalists, they are just modernizers. Their aim is not revival rather reformation. Revival is a different task altogether. The efforts to make possible adjustments with Jahiliyah is not revival. It is also not equal to make a new mixture of Islam and Jahiliyah. Revival is equal to purification. It is to purify Islam from the elements of Jahiliyah, and to strive to make it flourish and propagate after making it occupy its pure and earliest position.<sup>(13)</sup>

There comes a time in the history of religions when the principles on which the religion was founded are rejected, and the history occupies that place. The end result of this is total chaos and decline of people because of the absence of true religion. At present same is the case with the Muslims, if looked deeply, the golden principles revealed by Allah to the Holy Prophet (Blessing and Peace of Allah be upon him) that came to us through the Holy Prophet (Blessing and Peace of Allah be upon him) have been put aside, and there is a dispute amongst us regarding, "So and so reported, so and so said."

As we see that the enlightened section of our society is against this blind obedience. Similarly, many famous scholars of 19th century protested against this dispute of blind obedience. Egyptian scholars also supported this movement raised by the scholars of Indo-Pak. So, a group of reformers there started a war (Jihad) against the overwhelming stagnation of the Muslims. There came a wave of commotion in the inert Egyptian society and the enlightened section of society was forced to think about the future of Islam as well as their own progress and well-being. The name of Mufti Muhammad Abduh is at the top of the list of people who revived Egyptian thinking.<sup>(14)</sup>

Mufti Muhammad Abduh was a multi-dimensional personality, a collection of various and numerous characteristics and traits. He was an able teacher, literary person, research scholar, historian, journalist, reformer and an intellectual. It won't be wrong if we regard him as an octagon personality and scholar. No one knew that a baby, born in an ordinary farmer's house, will illuminate the world through his thoughts and ideas, and his philosophy will serve as the lighthouse for the beings thirsty for knowledge and for the researchers who have lost their way. His personality was felt and realized that old thoughts and beliefs needed to be collaborated in one to one situation with new thoughts and beliefs. He utilized his foresightedness and reached the idea

that there existed severe extremism in society, therefore he was supposed to adopt such a calculated approach so that there may not be any harm or threat to the teachings of the Holy Quran and Sunnah, this calculated approach is dominant in his creative work. He wanted change in this extremism without making any claims like a reformer. He thought it appropriate to serve like a guide so that his disciples might extend his originated work. He made his life the centre of guidance and enlightenment through his pen and preaching. These two traits of his personality took the form of reforms and consequently freed wisdom from the restraints of imitations, and awakened the Muslims regarding performance of virtuous actions after having got an understanding of Islamic teachings through all their senses. He had come to know through many baseless customs and rituals that great sensibility was required to make Islam according to the true spirit of Islam. It was a task needing extreme cautiousness.

Mufti Muhammad Abduh had a desire that being the Muslims they should have awareness of their responsibilities and they should understand that their religion, Islam, is not the cause of backwardness. On the contrary, Islam desires social development and Islam is a matchless force as far as the solution of worldly problems is concerned. Therefore, we should make certain adjustments and modifications in our system in the light of religion. We should reform ourselves inwardly and must not support to adopt an unfamiliar system. The aim he had is not that we should accept and follow this modern world, rather he had the aim that whether Islam understands and comprehends the demands of modern era? In this sense, he had to prove that Islam is only such religion as serves the motives of life in all ages. He emphasized that only Islam could replace the impurities and evils of modern era by promoting virtue and piety.

Therefore, the aim of Mufti Muhammad Abduh's reformative programme and as the revivalists thinking was to make Islam return to its effectiveness and unique simplicity along with motivating the Muslims to follow Islamic teachings and commands after having accepted this pure and true religion. This reformative programme of Abduh was a revival of Islam with new meanings and in a new way so that the Muslims may get rid of their backwardness and declined situation and make them to return to their old dignity.

The circle of Mufti Muhammad Abduh's thinking is not confined to only one topic or issue, rather it encloses religion, society, economy and politics. He has expressed his revivalistic thoughts about all mentioned issues or topics.

The traces of his thoughts reveal to us the concern and arrangement of reformation of family system. Because the foundation of family is laid on perfect grounds which assure the reformation of society as well as Ummah. It will create a desired or aimed social set-up, and family is the first brick in this

huge construction. He says about it.

“Verily, nation is composed of families. The reformation of Ummah depends upon the reformation of families. The being without family has no Ummah because the features of mercy, kindness and co-operation naturally exist among children and parents, and transfer into relatives through them. A person with a spoiled nature is void of sincerity and good wishes for his family. So, a person void of welfare for others can't be the part in the composition and development of Ummah. One, who cannot benefit one's blood relations, can never be fruitful for others. The thing pleasing his family will surely please, the Ummah. The thing afflicting his family is bound to afflict the Ummah. Therefore, it is appropriate that one must consider the profit of his Ummah as the profit of his family, and the loss of his Ummah as the loss of his family. It is obligatory on all members of the Ummah”.<sup>(15)</sup>

According to his opinion, the family relation is the first stage of being helpful to the needy and the poor living in the surrounding society. The reformation of a family at the lowest level strengthens the reform at the highest level. When a family co-operates with other families because of closeness, these co-operating families will spring as a greater power. This grown power will make the care possible for those who have no family to support them. Next, the cooperation and care will not be confined to clan or family relationship. It will end all bias, and will serve the unity and harmony of society.

Mufti Muhammad Abduh has laid great emphasis on the reforms within the family and clans. Infact, there lie many factors and causes in its background some of which are related to ideas and thoughts, while others are related to that common welfare of society which are generated from family unity and relationships. These were the factors that moved Abduh's perspective to the direction that he considers the reformation of Ummah dependent upon the reformation of family. Specially, all those cases which relate file against each other destroy the harmony of relationships and families become scattered and divided. Mufti Muhammad Abduh often used to mention this issue in his scholarly seatings. He says in one of his lectures.

“When I was a judge in a court of civil cases, I, through much labour, inferred that 75 out of 100 cases were filed by one's relatives against one self. The only cause of these cases was the undue jealousy, ego and lack of love and welfare feelings. It is against wisdom that the jealousy and ego among relatives reach such an extent that they file cases against one another. How it is possible that we may talk about the harmony and unity of Ummah before establishing a love and caring relationship among families and clans. It is as same as to cut the roots of a tree to make its branches and stem dried up, and then hope for the fruit from the dried-up branches”.<sup>(16)</sup>

The illustration of family bondage and relation in such an exemplary way explains his perspective regarding the reformation of family. He belonged

to a countryside where the family relations were highly honoured. These are the relations that industrial and commercial or business minded societies want to achieve from branches rather than from roots. Usually in an urban society, relations are based and established on wealth and respect and prestige. Contrary to this, M. Abduh was fond of such exemplary relations and bondages which were based on sincerity in the earlier ages. The materialistic approach and modernism have made those relations roots dried up. That's why both of these relations have a tension between them and they are far apart. The lack of love, sympathy, care and harmony among relations is, in fact, based on the matters and disputes of property and inheritance, and these matters normally donot happen with common people. There fore, he presented his perspective about it in detail and put the best of his efforts for this cause. Therefore, whenever there came a case of such kind to him, he tried to reform it to the possible extent because according to him it is a fact that the reforms of a family play a vital role in the reformation of the society where a man lives. No sensible person can deny the fact that woman plays the most fundamental role in the rectification (reformation) of the family as she performs the obligatory duty of the breeding, training and education of the off spring. Therefore, M. Abduh highlights the rights of a woman and declares it necessary to fulfil those rights so that she may play an exemplary role for the growth and development of coming generation. He has described several rights of women, but here we focus only three rights and present a revived perspective of Abduh about them.

The three rights are:

- (1) Education of women.
- (2) Limits for divorce of women.
- (3) Number of spouses.

At first, we quote the thoughts of him about the matter of education for women. He wrote while discussing the ignorance of his area in which the women were suffering.

"There has been a veil between women and their obligations about knowledge and education. How will it be removed. No. one thinks that women should have the knowledge about beliefs and religious obligations, and also perform other religious obligations except fasting.<sup>17</sup>

He refuses to accept ignorance as the cause of chastity and modesty. That is the thinking of opposers of women education that ignorance ensures chastity and modesty. About it, Mufti Abduh writes that women protect and keep that chastity and modesty intact which is caused by the guards of chastity. The belief in lawful and unlawful becomes the cause of chastity is very rare, rather this ignorance has stuffed the brain of woman with superstitions and obscenity. First of all, he raised his voice in favour of women's education. He desired that a small group of intelligent girls should form an organization. The purpose of this orgnisation should be to establish new schools and colleges for

the education of girls. According to him that age for women will be wonderful when they will take part in politics and the common issues will stand up to welcome them.

Mufti Muhammad Abduh kept defending the right of education for women along with his desciple Qasim Ameen while being in the background. Syed Qasim Ameen compiled a book with the title "Tehreer-ul-Mara't" for the objective of education for women.

Mufti Muhammad Abduh often kept describing the confinement limitations of Divorce in his speeches. When he was serving as a member of legislature for Shariah courts, he handed over the cases of divorce in many matters to the Qazi because of the loss of women. For example, if the husband of a woman is unknown etc. He considered the harm caused to the wife by the husband equal to (1) abusing and beating without any Shariah reason, without any Shariah cause. Therefore, he handed over the divorce in many matters to the Qazi.<sup>(18)</sup>

He formulated a legal way to check the increasing number of divorces as well as the wrong practice of divorce in the society, which can be adopted for the divorce matters. Without practising this method, the divorce will not rather it would afflict pain and suffering. The method of divorce formulated by him is given in the following steps.

#### **First Step**

The husband wishing to divorce his wife must appear before Qazi or judge or the person authorised by the Qazi, and will discuss the dispute between him and the wife.

#### **Second Step**

Qazi or the authorised person must guide the husband and explain to him in the light of Holy Quran and the Sunnah that divorce is the most unliked action in the eye of Allah. They should advise him and explain to him the consequences of his decision of divorce. They should command him to revise his decision for one week at least.

#### **Third Step**

After one-week consideration and deliberation, if the husband still insists on divorce, the duty of Qazi or authorised person is to nominate a facilitator from each family (the family of the husband as well as the family of wife). This facilitator will try to make reconciliation possible between the two. If the intimate relations of the two are not there, the Qazi or authorised person can nominate two strangers as the facilitator but they are bound to be just.

#### **Fourth Step**

If the facilitators fail to achieve success regarding reconciliation between the two, now the duty of both wife and husband is to apply to the Qazi or authorized person for the demand of divorce Now, the Qazi allows the husband and grants him the right of divorce to practise.

### **Fifth Step**

The divorce will be considered as lawful as it is practised in the presence of Qazi or the authorised and two witnesses. There must also be a Govt. document for its approval and verification. <sup>(19)</sup>

Mufti Muhammad Abduh goes two steps ahead than this and suggests that such type of exercise is obligatory on those who possess authority as well as on the whole Islamic society. It means that if this practice or exercise is ignored or not followed in the true sense, the whole society including the ruler as well as the subordinates all will be sinners because the disregard of this arbitration causes a discord situation among children and relatives in family. This discord permeates gradually in the Ummah and the Ummah suffers. We have been suffering from it for a long time because of this disregard of arbitration. We have put it aside as it has not been revealed in the Holy Quran.

Abduh has focussed on certain issues of divorce keeping the mentioned factor in mind.

(1) He declares the intention as the core term for divorce. The divorce will not occur with just verbal performance without intention.

(2) The intention of separation between the spouses is also necessary for divorce.

(3) He regards the three utterances of the word in one seating as a retraction of divorce. He follows the opinions of various sects of Islamic Ummah while having focussed on the factor of kindness and sympathy because he wants to decrease the harms and damages afflicted on people caused by divorce. <sup>(20)</sup>

The point of view, that Mufti Muhammad Abduh has given, has not been propagated and facilitated by various sects and schools of thought. The reforms pointed by him is a matter of more than a century, but no one has developed a consensus so far about that.

He has set a point of view about the number of spouses that it is unlawful and prohibited except a compulsion and this compulsion is also enclosed in a certain condition. That condition is the sterility and barrenness of the wife. He had a firm belief about this perspective. He had this idea since the time when he was a minister. He remained unmoved and firm till his death. In 1881, he preached to limitize and confine the human sexual desires. He opined that wife and husband should be limited to each other for their sexual gratification. He further says:

"Economy, the good luck of a human being, the survival of humanity depends upon the limitization of human lust through a clause of law which be applicable and it should describe the limits of sexual lust. Every person should obey this clause, and this clause must declare the sexual lust lawful for only wife and husband." <sup>(21)</sup>

When Mufti M. Abduh presents the clause of Islamic Shariah regarding the number of spouses, he says with great conviction that the lawfulness of



number of spouses rests on the justice with all spouses. He also says that this just treatment is not easy as it is commonly observed. Therefore, the point of view of one spouse is necessary as long as there is a chance of injustice. He says about it.

The Shariah of Prophet Muhammad (Blessing and Peace of Allah be upon him) has allowed four spouses at one time if a husband knows that he can treat each of his spouse with justice. If he has no such belief, more than one spouse is unlawful. <sup>(22)</sup> ﴿فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً﴾<sup>23</sup>

The contentment with one spouse is obligatory as the power of justice is not in command. A husband should have consideration about all those aspects where justice is obligatory. The perspective adopted by Abduh in this context is of great significance. He himself has presented his perspective on several occasions with apt detail. Keeping this significant perspective in view we are quoting here the detailed decree of Mufti Sahabin which he has raised three questions about the issue of more spouses. The answer to those questions hold arguments which have successfully explained all the aspects of this confusing issue of number of spouses.

(1) The system of more spouses and transformation of this system into habit is not a distinction of Eastern countries and the dwellers there which makes them unique and honoured as compared to western countries and the dwellers there. The system of more spouses is not found in the tribes of Tibet and Mughal Dynasty. The west had come to know the reality of this system in the earlier stage of their progress. Then other countries got it known from the west such as Germany etc. After the advent of Christianity in Europe certain churches have declared the number of spouses for kings as permissible for example for the king of France, Sherlimon, although it occurred after the advent of Islam. Hence, we can say that the system of number of spouses is dependent upon certain conditions which can not only occur to the East and the dwellers of Eastern countries, and can also happen to the people of west. Therefore, we can diminate this system by getting rid of these conditions.

(2) This system originated in those societies which were ancient warrior societies. The reason for it was the number of female members was more than the number of male members. Those people have also played their part in propagating this system in those societies who were the claimant of wealth and richness. They allowed the entry of women to meet their lusty desires.

(3) European authors have supposed that Islam has given the name of religion to the rituals of Jahiliah and the people of that era. But this supposition is not true and Islam has introduced and established a reformation process for this system and has gradually achieved the peak of its perspective. Before Islam the number of spouses in society was permissible without any limits. Islam set the limits of four. The effect of this limitation was long

lasting. Often, such people entered in Islam who had more than four spouses for example ten wives. They separated 6 spouses showing submission to Islamic command. This is the point that misled the European authors and they were forced to say that Islam gave the status of law to the rituals of Jahiliah. It is the product of their conjecture which is against the spirit of Islam.

(4) When Islam has declared the number of spouses permissible to a certain extent, the purpose of it is to save humanity from a major tyranny and oppression. Because at that time people brought up the orphan girls and married to them to get hold of their property. Islam has addressed them and it says to them "If the weaknesses of orphan girls lead you to be cruel to them and you fear that you can not be just to them after having married them, and the monopoly of being the husband will over come, and you can usurp their possessions, and will humiliate and disregard them, then abstain from it. Except them, you can marry 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 those women whom you like for their beauty and riches. It is necessary to judge the commands of Shariah in the light of these conditions.

(5) Islam has set the condition of absolute justice for more number of spouses. If there is a slight chance of injustice, the contentment with one spouse is obligatory. It is such a perspective as makes one declined towards the number of spouses, rather one finds a feeling of contempt and dislike. If the condition of justice is fully followed there will be very few people who can have a second marriage.

(6) The system of slavery, which still exists in some Islamic societies in one or the other way, is displeasing for Islam. It is said about religious and political wars that the captivated women of religious wars were taken as maids. But religious wars mean the battles that were fought in defence of Islam or to preach Islam, but now these sorts of fights are extinct and they have been replaced by political wars and battles. The prisoners of political wars are different than those of religious wars. It is beyond Islam. Islam does not support or endorse it. Abduction of women and then selling them is a ritual of Jahiliah and is not among the teachings of Islam.

(7) Lastly, Mufti Sahab comes to the main point of his religious order in which a question was raised "can number of spouses be restricted?"

He replied it quite clearly that yes! one should be stopped and restrained as far as number of spouses is concerned because absolute justice is the essential condition; and it is not possible. The injustice causes certainly harm to spouses because of having more than one. The enmity and dislike among children is also likely to happen. On these basis, the ruler and the justice is bound to set restrictions for number of spouses. Only a second marriage can be allowed in the case of barrenness infertility of first wife. <sup>(24)</sup>

According to our thoughts, Mufti Muhammad Abduh has derived such commands from the Holy Quran through his perspective that are in accordance with the current period of movement because the Muslim women are leading a

miserable life as a result of more spouses. These commands always need efforts to make them coherent to the society. Mufti Muhammad Abduh has written many articles in *Waqay-ul-Mirria* (وقائع المرية) for social reformation.

Two of his articles are highly significant as they focus on the domestic laws. In first of his article he declared the marriage as an institution. In second article he highlighted the social injustice caused by polygamy and by acknowledging these issues he highlighted that this social injustice has a destructive effect on the family and the domestic life. He also condemned many customs and habits prevailed and practised in his society His articles had put great emphasis to reform them. He declared corruption and bribery as a fatal disease and pointed that bribery is accepted to implement any Govt. office orders or to get justice in minor issues. He suggested that it should be dealt with an iron hand.

He compiled several essays to negate many wrong practices, customs and levish spending of money which are against the spirit of Islam, and through his essays and articles made people aware of the harms caused by them.

His idea was that the progress of Ummah rests on adopting the path which may lead the individuals to an aimed high position. In this sense, it is necessary to make gradual changes in habits and customs, traditions and rituals; and adopt an easy and simple way of life. It is included in the most important duties of Ummah to beautify them with civilized manners and ethics; to strive for the refreshment of thoughts and character of the common masses. Without it the reformation is very difficult. But it is a vast task. The first step is the reformation of education system.

#### Conclusion

From this research article it can be concluded that

1. The reformation of Ummah depends on the reformation of family. Family includes husband, wife, children and all elders.
2. The members of family may be different from one another in respect of their understanding and action, but are equal in respect of rights.
3. If we study the thoughts of Mufti Muhammad Abduh deeply, it becomes clear that his thoughts have a prominent aspects of reforming society.
4. Only the training and steadiness of family on correct lines guarantees the reformation of Ummah.
5. The desired and intended society can be formed only through the enforcement of social reforms.
6. Islam negates different social classes and puts this responsibility on the ruling elite.
7. Islam offers a comprehensive system where in lies the prosperity of every section of society.

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