

**Maryam Jameelah's Study of "Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" by Allāma Muhammad Iqbāl and "The Spirit of Islam" by Sayyid Ameer 'Alī**

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**Abstract**

Maryam Jameelah is a well-known literary figure and she wrote on diverse topics regarding the Islamic thought. She was a critique writer of the west but with that she also wrote about the subjects that are conflicting the Islamic conventional view. As she pointed out various weaknesses in the Muslim Ummah regarding their imitation of western ideas in the name of reformation and in order to get themselves modernized in the current era and the conduct of their political regimes under the influence of western political thought or under the influence of imperial powers. In this article her view of Iqbal's reconstruction of Islam has been critically analyzed, so this is a critique of his book "Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam," with this the book by Sayyid Ameer Ali entitled "The Spirit of Islam" also critically analyzed by her. She also included in her critique the views of H.A.R. Gibb a well reputed orientalist who has discussed the approach of both the above mentions works in his book "Modern Trends in Islam"

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and found some diversions from the traditional Islamic belief. Being a professor of Arabic at Oxford University his arguments are also very critical on the subject.

**Keywords:** *Maryam Jameelah, Iqbāl, Sayyid Ameer 'Alī*

### **Introduction**

Maryam Jameelah was a famous scholar of Islam. She wrote continuously in English about various aspects of Islam which were published by his husband Muhammad Yusuf Khan. Many highly educated people from different countries entered Islam and became faithful Muslims. She gained fame all over the world through the written service she performed in English about Islam. "Reconstruction in Religious Thought" is a famous work by Allama Iqbal similarly another book "The Spirit of Islam" is written by another renowned Muslim, Sayyid Ameer Ali. Both of these books were critically evaluated by Maryam Jameelah. Here in this article it is aimed to unveil the findings of these works by Maryam Jameelah.

### **Methodology**

This research article is based on an analytical and critical study. The religious thought of Maryam Jameelah has been qualitatively analyzed with her views of "Reconstruction" by Allama Iqbal and of Sayyid Ameer Ali's "Spirit of Islam." She has pointed out the theological flaws in the both works and on the basis of her critical analysis recommendations have been obtained.

### **Maryam Jameelah**

Margaret Marcus was born in New York America in 1934 to a German Jewish family. From her childhood, she authored more than 30 books on Islamic thought, some narcissistic, shy, but conscious Margaret's mind

was thinking beyond blur, she was not an ordinary girl. Home environment and her view of religion seemed to be something far beyond what it was taught to her, a discovery that caused anxiety in her heart. She was influenced by Asian and Arab culture even then when she was in school she remained busy in writing. On May 24, 1961, she became a Muslim and migrated to Pakistan and married here to Yusuf Khan of Jamaat-e-Islami. Maryam Jameelah was not an ordinary woman, for the process of becoming a Muslim, God gave her a chance, to understand herself, to know all the facts about Islam, how lucky she was to have a prudent conscience. A deep sense of wisdom and intellect had been flourished in her and the way Jameelah differentiated between Islam and other religions in her publications and articles with solid arguments seems remarkable. Condemnation of materialism and the secularism opened the portfolio with perfection for Jameelah. Above thirty books she wrote that were printed with translations of Urdu, Bengali, Turkish, Bhasha and Indonesian. Jameelah is considered one of the perfect Muslim women who made the Muslims aware with the conspiracies against Islam. On October the 31<sup>st</sup>, this majestic lady died in Lahore.

### **Allama Muhammad Iqbal**

Allama Iqbal (1877 - 1938) was a Muslim poet, writer thinker<sup>2</sup> philosopher and politician, his Urdu poetry is of the greatest of 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> As an medal of honor he was often called as Allama which means a person

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<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, trans. Khushwant Singh and Zakaria, Rafiq (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981)

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, Francis, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 283.

having a lot of knowledge. Iqbal was born in Sialkot Pakistan his forefathers belongs to Kashmir. He got his early education from Sialkot and went to Lahore for graduation, then in England and Germany. After returning back home he volunteered himself for law, but also focused on writing poetry on various topics but a religious influence can be seen in his poetry. Other includes the love of the homeland and the recognition of inner self that lead the people towards the existence of Pakistan

Iqbal is most reverend person in Iran as his poetry got its expression through the Persian language also. More people in Iran recognized him as Iqbal of Lahore, as his Persian work is highly valued. Rumi's thought had a profound effect on him. From early age, Iqbal was very religious and began to study Islamic history, its political scenario, Islamic culture, and civilization, and recognized Rumi as his spiritual guide in the field. Iqbal's work aims to remind people of the glory of historical Islamic culture and to convey the pure spirituality of Islam through social and political freedom and greater sovereignty. He always condemned the Muslim political divisions around the world, and he constantly spoke about in favor of the unity of world Muslims in the shape of single community or ummah.<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal was a staunch supporter of the political and religious restoration of Islamic civilization around the world, especially in South Asia. His series of speeches on the subject was published on the theme of a formulation of Islamic ideology. In his 1930 speech as the president of Muslim League he introduced an independent political structure for British-controlled

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<sup>4</sup>Annemarie Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: a study of the religious ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* ( Brill : Archive., 1962), 34-45.

Muslim regions in India. After the founding of Pakistan, he was officially given the title of National Poet. His birthday, November 9<sup>th</sup> is celebrated as Iqbal's Day and the public holiday is observed throughout Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

### **Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam**

The Six Lectures of Iqbal was published in English in Lahore in 1930, and then in 1934 by the University of Oxford as a book on Islamic thought. These lectures emphasized the role of Islam as a religious, political, and legal philosophy today. Iqbal vehemently opposed the political views and actions of Muslim statesmen, and he described them as morally unwise. They were supposed to be considered strong and visionary who remain in the close contact of the Muslims. During the Reconstruction, Iqbal sought to reform Islamic philosophy, according to reformation he prescribed after re-assessment the intellectual footings, this book is a major work of modern Islamic thought. As this has greatly influenced other modern Islamic reformers, such as the Iranian philosophers Ali Shariati and other scholars like Tariq Ramadan.

Iqbal had concerns that secularization will not only undermine the fundamental principles of Islam, but will also strengthen the traditional, cultural and political influence of Hindus. During his travels to different Islamic countries, he called for expanding political alliances and Islamic unity and ending national divisions.<sup>6</sup> He also spoke about various political measures to gain political power for Muslims. He discussed this matter

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<sup>5</sup>"Birthday of Iqbal", Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, Fourth Edition, Omnigraphics, Inc., 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Schimmel, Gabriel's Wing: a study of the religious ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, 34-45.

with Dr. Ambedkar and Iqbal communicated his wish to perceive the Indian states as independent entities directly controlled by the British rule, without the influence of central government of India. In India, the Islamic independent territories were predicted by him. In the same union in India, he was afraid of Muslims and who will suffer in many situations, especially for their existence as Muslims there.

According to the teachings of Quran there are entrusted rights over men and women and both are not equally treated in the Quran for example according to the rules of inheritance given by the Quran, men's share is double to that of the women but Iqbal denied this basic Quranic rule by saying that it is not in accordance with the Islamic principals, in other words he is denying the superiority of men over women in this case. D. S. Margoliouth a professor of Arabic and an orientalist stated that here Iqbal's views are contrary to the teachings of the Quran.<sup>7</sup> Similar views have been put forwarded by Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi in his book "The Glory of Iqbal" as he states that there are certain things in which he doesn't agree with Iqbal. And so is his idea of reconstruction to which he doesn't agree.

#### **Sayyid Ameer Ali:**

Sayyid Ameer Ali (1849-1928) was an Anglo-Indian Muslim figure of Oudh state of India, whose father moved to live there at the Presidency of Bengal. He is a renowned political leader and jurist also for his contributions to Indian law, especially personal Muslim law and Islamic jurisprudence, and is the author of several significant books on Muslim

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<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* ( Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 161.

history and the modern development of Islam, especially on molding the political Muslim philosophy under the British rule. He was one of the founders of the All India Muslim League, who signed the Viceroy's petition in 1906. He played a major role in strengthening the independent Muslim constituencies in South Asia and supporting the Khilafat Movement.

Sayyid Ameer Ali considered that as a weaker sect of the country, Muslims can gain more advantages by becoming sincere to the British rule instead of resisting against it. To this end, he appealed to his followers to mobilize their strength and dynamism to spread English learning and training amongst the Muslims. This feeling and the activities associated with this thinking are recognized as the Aligarh Movement.<sup>8</sup>

Sayyid Ameer Ali is a descendant of Indian Muslims who strived for the protection of their belief in Islam. This was the time when the Mughal Empire had recently been disintegrated in 1857, and Muslims were the main opponents to the British colonial forces. So the general atmosphere is often at odds with the Muslim. This was the reason that few Muslims evolved a perception that he is apologizing to Britain for what he was saying about the history of Islam. Like other writers of that period, he sought to show that Islam is a religion of wisdom. That was a tough period for the Muslims and there were only few well-published publications on Islam. His works gave hopefulness to young Muslims and opened up the historical perspective of Islam in the colonial India under Britain.

### **The Spirit of Islam**

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<sup>8</sup> Bangladesh: Political Parties". South Asian Media Net, 29 March 2007.

Sayyid Ameer Ali had a critical view about Islam and his approach was scientific during this study same was rendered while studying Muhammad ﷺ. He answered to the opposition of Islam and the Prophet ﷺ with his logical discourse. Meanwhile history was an essential subject that remained included in his works.

His masterpiece is his famous book entitled as "The Spirit of Islam." He also wrote a book on the same subject when he was living in England for education and later added to it. A new edition of one hundred pages was published. Ameer Ali freely interpreted Islam in this book. When Islam was competing with other religions, Europe accused Islam of spreading by sword. He strongly denied all such type of propaganda in this book.

"The Spirit of Islam" is the most important work of Ameer Ali The first part of it contains the beginning of the life of Prophet ﷺ and the events of his death. The Khilafat has since been discussed also while in the second part Islamic teachings, Sharia and matters relating to worship have been described. The main aspect of the book is the comparison of Islam and Islamic teachings with Christianity and its teachings.

### **An Overview of the Religious Thought of Maryam Jameelah on "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought" by Iqbal**

With all his poetic genius, however, Allama Muhammad Iqbal was not immune from error and unfortunately, there are disagreements in his work. Throughout his career, he went through various stages of psychological change, and in the last years of his life he was able to instill

in his mind an indomitable concept of Islam. Initially, many foreign ideologies and influences merged generously with Islamic perceptions.<sup>9</sup> His most serious mistakes were the objectionable passages as widely circulated in two of his prose works in English supporting the modernist movement in the Muslim world with particular reference to Kemalist Turkey, in his lectures. Afterwards these essays were collected and edited by his son, Javid and printed in a book form. The second work in question was a pamphlet, "Islam and Ahmadism with a Reply to Questions Raised by Pundit Nehru" this contains a long apology for the Kemalist reforms in Turkey in which he attempts to prove they are not un-Islamic. Christian missionaries Western orientalis and our homegrown modernists alike never fail to quote from these works to support their destructive arguments against Islamic values. Just because the contents of these books come from a man of such stature, has only increased the impact of the harm they have done. Worst of all, the English-speaking world, ignorant of his poetry in Persian and Urdu, believe that these books accurately represent Allama Muhammad Iqbal's ideas, thus doing irreparable harm to the very cause the writer himself so fervently believed in and fought for.<sup>10</sup>

Here Maryam Jameelah pointed out an important argument that Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who went beyond his Islamic teachings and had a great impact on Ameer Ali and Abul Kalam Azad. Even Iqbal was not

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<sup>9</sup> Yusuf Khan & Sons, *Correspondence between Mualana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah* (Lahore :Yusuf Khan & Sons, 1986), 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Jameelah, Maryam, *Islam in Theory and Practice* (Lahore:Yusuf Khan & Sons, 1990), 247-248.

completely free from his impact, which is very clear in his "Reconstruction".<sup>11</sup>

The assessment and review, which have been presented by H.A.R. Gibb are those passages that are selected by him from Iqbal's under discussion work to represent them as an example of modernists' misunderstanding of Islam. He writes that:

The interpretation of the Qur'an is a representation of the mystical reality regarding Hell and Heaven. According to the Qur'an, hell is the fire of God that falls on the individual soul. Heaven is happy be attained by overcoming the evils. There is no eternal torment in Islam. Hell is not, as the Qur'an says, an abyss of eternal torment given by God but it is a rejuvenating experience that can transform a cruel, sensitive self into a noble living by the divine grace. Life is a matter of transition as it is constant and every action of a independent ego produces a new environment that provides more opportunities for innovative enlightenment.<sup>12</sup>

According to Gibb the thought presented by Iqbal here is a widespread fragility of all the reformers. Speaking of reviving the ideology of Islam, he quoted verses from the Qur'an to assist his claim. Are these references typical to the whole Qur'an? And weather the literal interpretation of the Quran is in accordance with the conception of Iqbal? Gibb then shows his concern by saying that he doubts that there is a misunderstanding of philosophy of the Quran, as in general there is a clear confusion between

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<sup>11</sup>Khan & Sons, Correspondence between Maulana Maudoodi and Maryam Jameelah, 65.

<sup>12</sup> H.G. R Gibb, Modern Trends in Islam, 116-117.

the apparent meanings of the original teachings of the Qur'an. There is a clear conflict between purpose and ideology developed by Iqbal. Quran supports the argument that liberalism cannot solve modern religious problems that are incompatible with its own capabilities, and that it is arbitrarily contradictory to the real meaning of the scriptures.<sup>13</sup>

Iqbal in his "Reconstruction" writes that the Muslim scholars affirm the ultimate status of the Islamic principles as final. But much time has been passed and things have been changed altogether, so I see no justification for Islam to maintain this unacceptable position of self sufficiency. Yes! Did the founders of our school of thought make their commentaries on the basic sources of Islam static or final? The answer is never! Then current liberals of Muslims demands that their daily life is facing the modern thought and that should be clarified by the basic principles of law after necessary interpretations. Thus the philosophical change in the modern environment is justified.<sup>14</sup>

It is evident from Iqbal's statement, that a review of the legal principles based on the demands of modern liberal Muslims means a small group of independent people announced that they would restore their own perceived social framework. Then what would be the moral and intellectual abilities of a small group of people incorporated in this work. Not surprisingly, traditional Muslims scholars are asking the question that who has given them the choice to do this philosophical change to make a way for them. They cannot claim to be under the authority of the Holy Qur'an or the Prophet's tradition at any cost in this way. Modernists are

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<sup>13</sup> Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, 83).

<sup>14</sup> Maryam Jameelah, *Islam and Orientalism*, 158-159.

mistaken by the notion when they believe that the main goal is the external goal as giving benefit to their society. But it overlooks the fundamental, geographic, economic, and ideological disparities between Muslims and Western civilization, and this can only be achieved by defending the concrete facts and avoiding certain matters of ignorance.<sup>15</sup>

Comments of Maryam Jameelah on above mentioned passages by Gibb are as follows, she states that "Islamic ideology has remained virtually unstable and static in the last five centuries. The Islamic world has influenced the minds of Europeans. However, the most difficult event in the modern history from Islamic point of view is a very rapid change by the Muslims to get themselves inspired by the west. In Islam, it is spiritually confronted with the West and not acceptable. According to Iqbal for the western civilization, this type of contribution don't harm but establish further important stages of Islamic culture.

This is the favorite argument used by the modernists to justify the westernization of the Muslim world. The transmission of the Greek philosophy of the Mutazilites who were rejected by all the leading ulema as heretical, was merely a historical coincidence having nothing to do with Islam itself. Greek philosophy remains Greek philosophy even if those imbued with it happened to bear Muslim names. Paradoxically in the very same book, Allama Iqbal refutes the above argument, showing the utter futility of attempting to reinterpret Islamic doctrine in the light of modern Western philosophy. Today people are in a need of three ideas, spiritual understandings of the world, personal intellectual freedom, and basic principles of common sense that guide the transformation of the human

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<sup>15</sup> Jameelah, *Islam and Orientalism*, 159.

world on the spiritual basis. There is no doubt that Europe has developed a system of concepts in this area, but its understanding has proved that truth disclosed for pure reasons alone cannot extinguish the fire of living faith caused by individual revelation. Thus, while pure thought does not affect people much, religion always develops people and changes society as a whole. The European conception of idealism was not remained alive in her life. It is a reality today that Europe is the biggest obstacle in the way of growth of human moral values.<sup>16</sup>

We can also cite here many more passages from his book which shows his philosophy contrary to the teachings of Islam. Like the passage "Opening the Gate of Ijtihad" that is used by our modernists as a justification for abandonment of all genuine Islamic values for modern Western materialism. Modernists pounce on the prestige and authority of Allama Iqbal who in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* made the following statements, the error of which is as enormous as his poetic genius was great:

She further stated in this respect that throughout the centuries of our intellectual crisis, European theorists and scholars have been seriously considering the solution of major issues that had an interest for the Muslim thinkers also. Since the establishment of the Muslim theological school in the Middle Ages, there has been endless improvement in the field of human thought and understanding. Not surprisingly, the young Muslims in Asia and Africa are demanding a new dimension in their beliefs. Therefore, with the resurgence of Islam, it is important to study European views based on the idea of freedom, and the results, if essential,

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<sup>16</sup> Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice*, 248-249.

to the extent that they can help to express the views of Islam. However, the reforms are taking us away from what we thought of those who left before us.

Finally Maryam Jameelah opines on entire discussion as: By the close of his life, however, Iqbal had utterly reversed these views, regarding the Kemalist experiment in Turkey as nothing better than blind imitation of Western materialism of the most mechanical and uncreative sort.<sup>17</sup>

### **An Overview of the Religious Thought of Maryam Jameelah on "The Spirit of Islam" by Syed Ameer Ali**

The position of Muslim woman in Islam has constantly been remained under discussion throughout the Muslim history, many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have written on it. It is not clear whether the contents of hundreds of modern books and pamphlets can be treated or summarized here, hence Ameer Ali analyzed and dedicated a chapter on "The Status of Muslim Women in Islam" in his book under discussion. He took a rationalist and practical approach while writing on modern view and apologetic arguments on the subject, his effort hardly found a work better than this which is also followed by the most of the writers who later rewrote on this theme either with ferocious or with self-possessed manner. Gibb argues on the view of Ameer Ali regarding veil presented by him in his book that there is a possibility that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has ordered women of Islam to veil and to maintain their privacy solely due to their welfare because he considered veil at that time necessary because of the deteriorating moral standards of the people there. Further he insists that if the isolation of woman is still to be perceived in the same

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<sup>17</sup> Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice*, 253.

fashion as when Muhammadﷺ ordered it in its inelastic form then this would be contrary to his claim of reformation.<sup>18</sup>

This is an example of defensive argumentation and conceding the views of the opponents by concocting such a reasons, weaknesses and the views that have been exaggerated or created to strengthen his point. Finally, he did another superficial argument that Muhammadﷺ was the creator of the Quranic legislation and it has its own standards, so it implies according to the needs and standards of particular time and age. This is what the modernism provides to he humanity, the confused intellectualism, romanticism and superficiality of thoughts. Realities are ignored, difficulties are avoided and the things which are attracting regardless of their theological implication have been accepted for the same of enjoyment. Maryam Jameelah says Iqbal was also a prey to such type of thinking and modern propaganda.<sup>19</sup>

In the end Maryam Jameelah summarizes the points raised by Gibb on the Status of Muslim woman propounded by Syed Ameer Ali by stating that he is in favor of the western life style of intermingling of the men and women freely and declaring it the real essence of Islam instead of the veil and segregation of the sexes. Furthermore he is of the view that Islamic Shariah don't provide the concept of polygamy but monogamy and the marriages like liberal Christians uphold it. In the Quran there are clear orders for Jihad, to fight against the people who aggressively refuted Islam and against the nonbelievers and it is a religious obligation of the Muslims and they will be rewarded for this great virtue but contrary to

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<sup>18</sup> Jameelah, *Islam and Orientalism*, 157-158.

<sup>19</sup> Jameelah, *Islam and Orientalism*, 157-158.

this vivid description of Jihad by the Quran Ameer Ali is on the view that all type of warfare has been restricted by the Quran and regarded as a great sin and peace is to be restored at any cost. She further described of Ameer Ali that there are infinite type of such fallacies and apologetic behavior in his book.<sup>20</sup>

### **Recommendations**

When the custodians of Islam, the interpreters of Islam and the ulema they make a controversy about the divinity and about the fundamentals of Islam, when they commit the insufferable scientific errors, ridiculous misunderstandings, misuse of language and rules and sometimes open distortions then such type of erroneous scholarship brings heavy damage to the integrity of Islam and should have been curbed because this gives a chance to anyone; anyone from our foes to blame our tradition.

We have endless examples of such type of deviations from the traditional stance of Islam but most of such writings have become popular in the Western and Eastern worlds which include a number of elderly knowledgeable works. But its inspiration does not come from the conventional sources are not relate to the basic sources of Islam. Western Orientalists who view Islam with their specific motives take the whole advantage of such type of writings to quote for the further confusion and to disseminate their propaganda. So any intellectual misconception gives our people a great intellectual loss. That is why such type of misrepresentation of Islam by our on scholars should be avoided and the true spirit of Islam should be personified.

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<sup>20</sup> Jameelah, *Islam in Theory and Practice*, 406.

This renewal and revival will obviously be in accordance with the principles and standards of the basic principles of Quran and Sunnah. If conflicting otherwise then it is in fact a process of distortion rather than renewal which has started in almost all Islamic countries.

Corrective measures after the confession of such type of deviations are sincere attempts to reinterpret religious thought in the light of existing experiences of religious teachings or through them try to understand new experiences in the light of conventional religious principles.

Reform and development in the Islamic world within a century and the reflection of this reformation taken by the orientalist will be clearly seen in their views, declarations and procedures as these views have been proliferated by the orientalist but even these views can be considered as the basic views of the Muslim scholars. So to avoid such type of misrepresentation by our own intelligentsia such practices have to be stopped and a solid and purified picture of Islam should be put forwarded regardless to any modern demand of the present era.

### **Conclusions**

In this matter the ample description on the topic has been provided by Maryam Jameelah which is a true guide for a common reader. Important point of the discussion is that, before we make something a part of our concept of good or bad, we should put this to criterion of Quran and Sunnah and if that thing doesn't collide with these two only then we should accept it as a part of our concept of good and our belief, no matter how a high profile personality and a scholar is saying that very thing. So Gibb rightly pointed out the errors in above discussed both the books, there are certain contradictory statements which are a blind imitation of

the western modern ideas and in the name of reforms that should not be done by the Islamic scholars of such a high stature.