

# *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī* سيد جمال الدين الأفغاني



*Known as Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn Asadābādī (سيد جمال الدين اسدآبادی), and commonly known as Al-Afghani (1838/1839 – March 9, 1897), was a **political activist** and **Islamic ideologist** in the **Muslim world** during the late 19th century, particularly in the Middle, **South Asia** and **Europe**. One of the founders of **Islamic Modernism** and an advocate of **Pan-Islamic** unity, he has been described as "less interested in theology than he was in organizing a **Muslim** response to **Western** pressure."*

## *Early life and origin:*

He claimed to be of **Afghan** origin most of his life and until recently there was some difference of opinion among scholars as to whether that was the case. Although claimed by some older sources that al-Afghan was born in a district of **Kunar Province** in **Afghanistan** which is also called **Asadabad**, a claim that was supported by scholars like **Ignaz Goldziher** and **J. Jomier** who noted that he spent his childhood and adolescence in Afghanistan, although asserted otherwise in some Shi'i writings evidence analyzed by **Nikki Keddie** shows that he was in fact born in **Iran**. Overwhelming documentation (especially a collection of papers left in Iran upon his expulsion in 1891) now proves that he was born in the village of **Asadābād**, near the city of **Hamadān** in

western Iran into a family of **Sayyids**. Records indicate that he spent his childhood in Iran and was brought up as a **Shi'a** Muslim. According to evidence reviewed by Nikki Keddie, he was educated first at home then taken by his father for further education to **Qazvin**, to **Tehran**, and finally, while he was still a youth, to the Shi'a shrine cities in **Iraq**. It is thought that followers of Shia revivalist **Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'i** had an influence on him. An **ethnic Afghan**, al-Afghan claimed to be an Afghan in order to present himself as a **Sunni** Muslim and escape oppression by the Iranian ruler **Nāṣer ud-Dīn Shāh**. One of his main rivals, the **sheikh** Abū l-Hudā, called him *Mutaʿafghin* ("the one who claims to be Afghan") and tried to expose his Shia roots. Other names adopted by Al-Afghani were *al-Kābulī* (the one from **Kabul**) and *al-Istanbul* (the one from **Istanbul**). Especially in his writings published in Afghanistan, he also used the pseudonym *ar-Rūmī* ("the Roman" or "the Anatolian").

### **Political activism:**

At the age of 17 or 18 in 1855–56, Al-Afghani travelled to **British India** and spent a number of years there studying religions. In 1859, a British spy reported that Al-Afghani was a possible **Russian agent**. The British representatives reported that he wore traditional cloths of **Noghai Turks** in **Central Asia** and spoke **Dari, Arabic** and **Turkish language** fluently. After this first Indian tour, he decided to perform **Hajj** or pilgrimage at **Mecca**. His first documents are dated from **autumn** of 1865, where he mentions leaving the "revered place" (*makān-i musharraf*) and arriving in **Tehran** around mid-December of the same year. In the spring of 1866 he left Iran for Afghanistan, passing through **Mashad** and **Herat**.

*After the Indian stay, all sources have Afghānī next take a leisurely trip to Mecca, stopping at several points along the way. Both the standard biography and Lutfallāh's account take Afghānī's word that he entered Afghan government service before 1863, but since document from Afghanistan show that he arrived there only in 1866, we are left with several years unaccounted for. The most probably supposition seems to be that he may spend longer in India than he later said, and that after going to Mecca he travelled elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. When he arrived in Afghanistan in 1866 he claimed to be from Istanbul, and he might not have made this claim if he had never even seen the city, and could be caught in ignorance of it.*

He was spotted in Afghanistan in 1866 and spent time in **Qandahar, Ghazni**, and **Kabul**. He became a counselor to the King **Dost Mohammad Khan** (who died, however, on June 9, 1863) and later to **Mohammad Azam**. At that time he encouraged the king to oppose the British but turn to the Russians. However, he did not encourage Mohammad Azam to any reformist ideologies that later were attributed to Al-Afghani. Reports from the colonial British Indian and **Afghan**

government stated that he was a stranger in Afghanistan, and spoke the Dari language with Iranian accent and followed European lifestyle more than that of Muslims, not observing Ramadan or other Muslim rites. In 1868, the throne of Kabul was occupied by Sher Ali Khan, and Al-Afghani was forced to leave the country.

He travelled to Istanbul, passing through Cairo on his way there. He stayed in Cairo long enough to meet a young student who would become a devoted disciple of his, Muhammad 'Abduh.

He entered Star of East Masonic Lodge in 7 July 1868 during staying in Cairo. His membership number was 1355. He also founded the Masonic Lodge of Cairo and became accusations of atheism and He had been excluded from the Scottish Masonic Lodge. He joined the French Grand Orient and became Grand Master of it.

In 1871, Al-Afghani moved to Egypt and began preaching his ideas of political reform. His ideas were considered radical, and he was exiled in 1879. He then travelled to different European and non-European cities: Istanbul, London, Paris, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Munich

In 1884, he began publishing an Arabic newspaper in Paris entitled al-Urwah al-Wuthqa ("The Indissoluble Link") with Muhammad Abduh. The newspaper called for a return to the original principles and ideals of Islam, and for greater unity among Islamic peoples. He argued that this would allow the Islamic community to regain its former strength against European powers.

Al-Afghani was invited by Shah Nasser ad-Din to come to Iran and advise on affairs of government, but fell from favor quite quickly and had to take sanctuary in a shrine near Tehran. After seven months of preaching to admirers from the shrine, he was arrested in 1891, transported to the border with Ottoman Mesopotamia, and evicted from Iran. Although Al-Afghani quarreled with most of his patrons, it is said he "reserved his strongest hatred for the Shah," whom he accused of weakening Islam by granting concessions to Europeans and squandering the money earned thereby. His agitation against the Shah is thought to have been one of the "fountain-heads" of the successful 1891 against the granting a tobacco monopoly to a British company, and the later 1905 Constitutional Revolution.

### Political and religious views:

Al-Afghani's ideology has been described as a welding of "traditional" religious antipathy toward non-Muslims "to a modern critique of Western imperialism and an appeal for the unity of Islam", urging the adoption of Western sciences and institutions that might strengthen Islam.

Although called a liberal by the contemporary English admirer, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Jamal ad-Din did not advocate constitutional government. In the volumes of the newspaper he published in Paris, "there is no word in the paper's theoretical articles favoring political democracy or

parliamentarianism," according to his biographer. Jamal ad-Din simply envisioned "the overthrow of individual rulers who were lax or subservient to foreigners, and their replacement by strong and patriotic men."

According to another source Al-Afghani was greatly disappointed by the failure of the **Indian Mutiny** and came to three principal conclusions from it:

- That European **imperialism**, having conquered **India**, now threatened the **Middle East**
- That Asia, including the Middle East, could prevent the onslaught of Western powers only by immediately adopting the modern technology of the West
- And that Islam, despite its traditionalism, was an effective creed for mobilizing the public against the imperialists.

He believed that Islam and its revealed law were compatible with rationality and, thus, Muslims could become politically unified while still maintaining their faith based on a religious social morality. These beliefs had a profound effect on **Muhammad Abduh**, who went on to expand on the notion of using rationality in the human relations aspect of Islam (*mu'amalat*).

According to a report, from a man who must have been an Afghan with the local government, Jamal ad-Din Afghani was: "...well versed in geography and history, speaks **Arabic** and **Turkish** fluently, talks **Dari** like an **Irani**. Apparently, follows no particular religion."

In 1881 he published a collection of polemics titled *Al-Radd 'ala al-Dahriyyi* (Refutation of the Materialists), agitating for pan-Islamic unity against Western Imperialism. It included one of the earliest pieces of Islamic thought arguing against **Darwin's** then-recent **On the Origin of Species**; however, his arguments allegedly incorrectly caricatured evolution, provoking criticism that he had not read Darwin's writings. In his later work *Khatirat Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani* ("the Ideas of Al-Afghani"), he accepted the validity of evolution, asserting that the Islamic world had already known and used it. Although he accepted **abiogenists** and the evolution of animals, he rejected the theory that the human species is the product of evolution, arguing that humans have **souls**.

Among the reasons why Al-Afghani thought to have had a less than deep religious faith was his lack of interest in finding theologically common ground between Shia and Sunni (despite the fact that he was very interested in political unity between the two groups).

### *Death and legacy:*

He was invited by **Abdulhamid II** in 1892. He went to Istanbul and was granted a house and salary. Abdulhamid II's aim was using Afghani for Panislamism propaganda. However, he was put probation at a mansion in Nişantaşı, a borough in Istanbul, after assassination of Nasser al

Din, Shah of Iran due to he was accused of becoming British spy and instigating this assassination in 1896. Al-Afghani died of throat cancer on March 9, 1897 in **Istanbul** and was buried there. In late 1944, due to the request of the Afghan government, his remains were taken to Afghanistan and laid in Kabul inside the **Kabul University**, a mausoleum was erected for him there. In **Tehran**, the capital of **Iran**, there is a square and a street named after him (*Asad Abadi Square* and "Asad Abadi Avenue" in **Yusef Abad**).

### Works:

- Sayyid Jamāl-ad-Dīn al-Afghānī: ", 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 (calendar)
- Sayyid Jamāl-ad-Dīn al-Afghānī: Brochure about Naturalism or materialism, original in Dari language: **رساله نیچریه** (Ressalah e Natscheria) translator of **Muhammad Abduh** in Arabic.

Reference; Wikipedia