

Muslim Intellectuals' Response to the European Cultural Colonization in Muslim Lands

Shaukat Ali

To an average individual intellectual is a person who deals with human intellect. This would, however, be a sacrilegious over simplification. In the history of thought and letters, it is a brand name for a certain type of learned men who play a decisive role in shaping the ideological landscape of a society, and through their enlightened and insightful criticism correct its mistakes and poor decisions and keep civilizational environment vibrant and progressive. Thus the role and position of an intellectual in a society is always as a beacon of light and guidance in a world where life is often punctuated with darkness and confusion.

Muslim intellectuals, the focus of the present study, are a breed of the men of knowledge who have existed in every Muslim society and the history of intellectualism in Islam is as old as the religious doctrine itself. In other religions, like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, search for knowledge and truth was confined only to the priestly classes, and the knowledge itself was imprisoned with the limitations of the theological studies. Islam introduced revolutionary changes into the conceptual framework of human intellectuality first by eliminating priesthood, and second by widening the scope of knowledge to include the study of any subject to scientific or social nature that strengthens believer's faith in the sovereignty of God and the wisdom of the al-Qur'an.

The existence of vast intellectual heritage in Islamic civilization is also an indication that Muslim scholars played a decisive role in the socio-political process of the Muslim community. The pre-modern intellectual

* This article will be published in two parts.

