

A POLITICAL HISTORY OF ISLAMIC RESURGENCE IN EGYPT

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Introduction

Due to intellectual, literary, and religious leadership throughout the ages and more particularly in the modern age, Egypt is regarded as the vital centre of the Arab and Islamic world. Its political events, social changes and other developments in the religious dimension have a great and direct impact on the Muslim World in general and the Arab world in particular. Thus the observers of Egyptian history and specifically, the Western scholars, keenly watch the day-to-day socio-political developments in Egypt for their own interest. This article analyses various causes and effects which were directly responsible for the emergence of a new vision, direction and revivalist trend in Egypt in the middle of the twentieth century. This revolutionary trend in fact generated profound religious consciousness and created unity among the masses and led to the fight for independence of Egypt and abolition of the monarchy in the early 1950s.

In this article among various crucial aspects, special emphasis is placed on the political, social and religious features to underline the causes that led to religious revival and social reforms. In order to understand the true situation, at the outset it seems appropriate to survey the historical episodes, events and political developments in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries.

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Political Life

Contemporary historical arguments manifest that during the last part of the eighteenth century, France contemplated Egypt with earnest interest. It seemed to have competed with Great Britain in devising plans against Egypt and eventually colonized it with the concerted effort of Napoleon who invaded Egypt in 1798. It remained under the French control until 1801 CE.¹ Then Muhammad Ali ruled Egypt as a governor of Osmanli (known as Ottoman) caliphate after the expulsion of the French. Eventually, he became independent as his relationship with the Caliphate weakened and it is believed that gradually he came into contact with the Western World, particularly France and Great Britain.² This attempt resulted in the gradual modernization of Egypt.

It is also a historical fact that with the support and blessing of these two colonial powers, the rule of Ali family continued. The Khedives were not independent in running the state administration and government; rather they were in total dependence on foreign experts, particularly the French and the British. They neither possessed strength nor confidence in themselves. They felt that they were entirely dependent upon the West. Truly speaking, they were neutralized and spiritually defeated by the rising tide of modern, materialistic, secular, Western civilization. They called the West the 'illuminated world' and christened Paris 'a city of illumination.'³

Some historians have regarded the rule of the Khedives as a misfortune for the people of Egypt, so much so that the Egyptian people despised them. It is stated that the Khedives were notorious for their extravagance. It is argued that Khedive Ismail borrowed millions of pounds

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1. 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Rafi'i, *'Asr Muhammad 'Ali*, 2nd edition, *Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyyih*, 1951, pp. 341-242
 2. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb al-Shahid al-Hayy*, pg. 18
 3. Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahim Mustafa, *Misr wal Mas'alah al-Misriyyah*, Egypt: *Dar al-Ma'arif*, n.d., pp. 18-81

from the West and wasted the money on his pleasures. Thus the Egyptian treasury was burdened with exorbitant debts to the West. When Egypt became weak in the repayment of debts, the Western countries formed a council, forwarded a recommendation on the national expenditure of Egypt, and facilitated the repayment of its debts.⁴

In 1881, Ahmad Urabi, an officer of the Egyptian army, advocated a revolution against Khedive Tawfiq, which was later on known as the Urabi Revolution. The majority of the army officers and people supported the revolution. The revolution would have been successful, if Britain had not interfered and defended the ruler. Britain adopted various strategies and measures to suppress it. The British army landed in and proceeded towards Cairo, defeated Urabi forces, and eventually entered Cairo.⁵ They put an end to the process of revolution, exterminated the revolutionaries and exiled leaders of the revolution like Ahmad Urabi and Mahmud Sami al-Barudi from Egypt, and once again installed the Khedives in power.⁶

After this incident, Egypt came directly under British rule. British forces were deployed in all parts of the country and they determined whether to detain nationalistic groups which awakened people's national consciousness or exile them. Parliament was dissolved. Britain did not confine itself to its military occupation of Egypt alone, but it colonized Egypt politically, economically, socially, and intellectually. Experts and consultants were freely imported and were appointed in the ministries, in the establishments and in the administrations at the expense of the Egyptian treasury. Britain wished to visualize Egypt excelling in everything during its rule. Among the famous consultants were Zwemar, Lord Cromer and Dunlop who laid the foundation of secular modern education in Egypt. In the presence of such secular colonial experts, a wave

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4. 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Rafi'i, "*Thawrah 'Urabi wa al-Ikhtilaf al-Inkalizi'*", Vol. I, n.d., pg. 3. Also See: Hana Abu Rashid, *Tarikh Nahdah Misr al-Hadithah*, n.d., pp. 90-92
 5. 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Rafi'i, *ibid.*
 6. Muhammad Husayn, *Al-Ittijihat al-Wataniyyah fi al-Adab al-Mu'asir*, 3rd edition, Beirut: *Dar Al-Nahdah al-Arabiyyah*, Vol. 2, 1972, pp. 406-407.

of Egyptian political and ideological leaders graduated from their modern universities. Most noted among them were Sa'ad Zaghlul, Ahmad Lufti al-Sayyid and 'Abd al-Aziz Fahmi.⁷ Thus nationalism and secularism began to spread and dominate the westernised Muslim elites and large segments of the Egyptian people.

As a consequence of their subjection, it is said that a group of opportunists considered themselves secure under the British domination. Therefore, they dedicated their lives to serving the British interest. They implemented the British plans and programmes with utmost commitment. This group represented various sections of the society. There were chiefs of the ministries, ministers and leaders of political parties and various factions, politicians, economists, founders of organizations, thinkers, and intellectuals. Due to their efforts, the period of British occupation extended and achieved victory in all its goals.⁸

During this interval, many political parties emerged in Egypt. The majority of them designed their programmes and objectives from a Western perspective. It is observed that the majority of the founders of political parties and leaders were spiritually bankrupt. And they focused a great deal on making friendship with affluent people. Members and supporters of political parties manifested lust for government positions and official jobs. To obtain favours, it is highlighted that many of them raced in securing the friendship of the British High Commissioner and his colleagues and pledged to implement whatever programmes they directed.⁹

The Nationalist Party founded by Mustafa Kamil in 1907 was one of the earliest political parties aimed at generating nationalistic sentiments and consciousness among Egyptians. As Mustafa Kamil's sincerity was unquestionable, he emerged as a respectable and unchallengeable leader

7. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, op. cit., pg.20.

8. Muhammad Husayn, op. cit., pp. 424-425.

9. 'Abd Rahman Al-Rafi'i, *Mustafa Kamil*, n.d., pp. 408-433.

of the masses who strongly advocated the expulsion of the British from the country. Unfortunately, he did not live long but died after one year of the establishment of the party.¹¹ Three more political parties with almost similar goals emerged in 1907: the National Liberation Party under the leadership of 'Abd al-Khaliq Tharwah and Muhammad Farid, the *al-Ummah* Party under the leadership of Hasan 'Abd al-Khaliq and Mahmud Sulayman and the *al-Islah* Party under the leadership of 'Ali Yusuf.¹²

During this period Saad Zaghlul emerged as a famous and charismatic leader and eventually founded the Wafd party, which consisted of the elite. He held the positions of a minister more than once and was part of the Egyptian cabinet many times. Among Abduh's pupils, it is believed that Saad Zaghlul was the most prominent.¹³ However it is also argued that Saad Zaghlul established his cordial relationship with Lord Cromer, initiated a move towards Pharaonism, and gradually slipped away from Islam in his perceptions and morality. He subsequently championed the cause of separating religion from the state and called for re-enforcement of the Arabic language.¹⁴ By advocating this trend he moved towards secularisation of Egypt. It is believed that he set out to serve political goals based on deceit with his unique style.

Meanwhile, Khedive Abbas Hilmi II joined hands with Turkey in its fight against the Allies when the First World War broke out. Dissatisfied with this step, Britain removed him and appointed Husayn Kamil in his place.¹⁵ Thus Egypt was forced to enter the war to assist its allies and became a stable base for Britain. Subsequently, the people joined the

11. Mahdi Fadlullah, *Ma'a Sayyid qutb fi Fikrihi al-Siyasi wa al-Dini*, Beirut: *Mu'wassasah al-Risalah*, 1978, pg. 24.

12. Muhammad Husayn, *op. cit.*, pg. 392.

13. 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Rafi'i, *Muhammad Farid*, 2nd edition, Maktabah al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah, 1948, pg. 80

14. *Ibid.*, pg. 348

15. Muhammad Husayn, *op. cit.*, pg. 142

campaign and it is said that Egypt's resources were used for British forces. Consequently, the British army was able to proceed to Palestine and Syria. This was due to the fact that Egypt was compelled to function as a centre of conspiracy to act against the *khilafah* (Islamic Caliphate).

A revolution broke out in Egypt against Britain in 1919 and the people from all corners of the country took part in it. Every individual repeated the name of Saad Zaghlul as the leader of the revolution. The revolution lasted a long time. However, Britain suppressed it and leaders of the revolution like Saad Zaghlul and 'Abd al-Aziz Fahmi were exiled from Egypt.¹⁶ The Wafd party later on became the party of the common people of the country, in view of its active role in the revolution. The party won a majority of seats in Parliament and formed the cabinet more than once. After the death of Saad Zaghlul, Mustafa al-Nahhas was chosen as the leader of the party. He maintained its leadership until the Revolutionaries banned it along with other parties in 1952.

Realizing the sad political conditions of his country, Hasan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood movement (*Harakat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) while he was working as a teacher in Ismailiyyah, a town in Egypt, in 1928. He delivered innumerable public lectures and sermons calling upon the people to adhere to the teachings of Islam, and started training the Muslim youths and organized them as a community. It is obvious that this movement had positive effects on the political, religious, and intellectual life of Egypt and the Arab world in the forties and the early fifties.¹⁷

In 1937, Mustafa al-Nahhas, the leader of the Wafd party, signed a treaty with Britain underlining independence for Egypt. However, the treaty remained only in word and the presence of Britain continued on the borders of the Suez Canal. Hasan al-Banna opposed this treaty, organized

16. Muhammad Shawki Zaki, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin wa al-Mujtama' al-Misr*, n.d., Also See: Ishaq Musa Husayni, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin Kubra al-Harakat al-Islamiyyah al-Hadithah*, 1st edition, Beirut, 1952

17. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, op.cit., pg. 22

public rallies to protest against the treaty and criticized the presence of the colonial power. It is observed that the rallies and demonstrations led to individual and collective sacrifices.¹⁸

It is reported that circumstances necessitated Egypt to join Britain in the Second World War against the Axis countries: Germany, Italy, and Japan.¹⁹ In February 1942, Britain directly interfered in the internal affairs and policies of Egypt. With its tanks, the army surrounded the palace of the King. The British special envoy warned the King and ordered him to allow Mustafa al-Nahhas, the leader of the Wafd party, to form the cabinet. It is important to note here that until the mid-forties, there was neither clear direction nor clear vision in the minds of the people. On the contrary, they glorified Pharaoism and popularised the slogan 'Egypt for Egyptians.' Besides this trend, there emerged the Muslim Brotherhood movement, an Islamic group leading Egypt in the direction of religion. Its basic principles and objectives were drawn to make it an Islamic mass movement, which called on people to follow Islam in place of Pharaoism and parochial nationalism. This movement drew the attention of big groups among various sections of the society. Britain faced a great challenge from this movement whose strength grew rapidly. The movement projected and declared that parochial nationalism generated among the people by the secular nationalistic forces would never provide peaceful solution to their problems. It proclaimed that such trends would only disunite the people.²⁰

After a thorough study, Britain discovered its objective of a long cherished goal in nationalism as a new force. It subsequently operated covertly in founding the League of Arab Nations, whose aim was to keep people away from religious consciousness. Cairo, which then called for Pharaoism, became the headquarters of this League. Both the Egyptian Government and the political parties championed the cause of national-

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Muhammad Husayn, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-148 and pp. 172-183.

ism. Nationalism was gradually transformed towards a guiding principle for Arab nationalism. It is argued that the people were inspired into believing that the League of Arab Nations would be the only suitable way to solve their problems and achieve their aims and objectives. It is observed that there was a gradual and systematic process of indoctrination that in Arab Nationalism, there was a miraculous solution for all their problems and issues.²¹

During this period, clashes between the Palestinian people and the immigrant Jewish guerrillas continued. The Muslim Brotherhood, with its branches in Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, unique among the organizations, societies and political parties of Egypt and the Arab world, took an active part in *Jihad* on the land of Palestine. It earnestly fulfilled its Islamic duty in this direction, established para-military units for training, dispatched its members to the field of *Jihad*, and led volunteers among the common masses, including people who were not members of the movement. The volunteers of the movement were conspicuous for their courage in the fight and according to some statistics; almost all of them became martyrs.²² Despite their inadequate armament and financial resources, they caused fear, anxiety, and alarm among the Jews in Palestine.

Members of the League also sent troops to the campaign with the purpose of safeguarding Palestine. Egypt despatched some military units to South Palestine and contributed out-dated weapons. Egypt faced a massive defeat at the hands of the Jewish guerrillas.²³ As for the sincere *mujahidin* (those who struggled in the cause of Allah) on the front, they were able to face the conspiracies of the powerful Jewish force. They were almost on the verge of victory. At this juncture, as mentioned by Muslim historians, representatives of Britain, France, and the United States met in the camp of the British army in David in Egypt and decided to propose an

21. Ahmad Nawawi, *Madhabih al-Ikhwan*, n.d.

22. Kamil al-Sharif, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun Fil Harb Filistin*, n.d.

23. See Zaki, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa al-Mujtama' al-Misri*, n.d, pp. 29-31; Jabir Rizd, *Madhbahat al-Ikhwan fi Sujun Nasir*, n.d, pp. 13-14.

instant plan to put an end to the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which due to its dynamic strength posed a great threat in Palestine.

Consequently, these three nations called upon Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi, the then Prime Minister of Egypt, to take stern action against the Muslim Brotherhood movement which posed a big challenge to the Jewish forces.²⁴ Al-Nuqrashi never hesitated to implement the demands of his masters, and subsequently, he was engrossed in manipulating things. Thus he fabricated some charges against the Muslim Brotherhood and finally banned it. All branches of the movement were closed and the members were put behind the walls of the prisons. The people involved in the fight in Palestine against the illegal Zionist occupation were disarmed and were forcefully taken away from the field of Jihad to the prison cells and were physically weakened by wounds being inflicted on them.²⁵ Moshe Dayan, an Israeli minister of defence, once said:

Israel was not afraid of the entire Arab world, but it was afraid of the enthusiastic, ardent and sincere supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood movement.²⁶

The above statement substantiates the true contributions of the Brotherhood towards achieving victory for the people of Palestine. As stated above, while all others were detained, Hasan al-Banna, the founder and General Guide of the movement, was not arrested, but was left by the state administration in order to be the victim of its assassination plan, as mentioned by some historians. As a result of the plot, he was shot in the middle of a street in Cairo on the night of the birthday of King Faruq and eventually became a martyr.²⁷ Subsequently, the Arab armies faced a massive defeat in Palestine. The Jews achieved success. And Israel was established on the land of Palestine in 1948 under the full patronage of

24. Kamil al-Sharif, *op.cit.*, pp. 221-223 and pp. 228-291.

25. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, *op. cit.*, pg. 24.

26. Hasan al-Banna was assassinated on February 12, 1949.

27. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, *op. cit.*, pg. 25.

the United Nations Organization.²⁸

In 1951, after their release from prison, members of the Muslim Brotherhood organized and led the people's resistance against the British occupation in Egypt. This time they openly stood against it. There was a great sacrifice by the movement. They demanded total withdrawal of British forces from Egypt. Meanwhile various crises were witnessed. The political parties were engaged in the game of forming new governments. In one year, many governments were formed. Dignity and prestige of the Palace gradually declined. The King virtually lost control over the country and his survival was in doubt.²⁹

The Muslim Brotherhood was climbing the ladder of popularity and its dynamic existence was pragmatically felt in almost every national issue, whether it was Palestine against the Jews or the banks of Suez Canal against British occupation. Through such activities, it was realized that its goal of establishing an Islamic community in the country was soon going to be materialized. The external anti-Islamic forces constantly observed the ongoing incidents in Egypt. They were not only afraid of but also very sensitive to Islamic rule for they believed that it would put an end to their plans, schemes, aspirations, and goals.

On July 23, 1952, a military revolution broke out. Muhammad Najib was chosen as its leader. Following that, monarchy was abolished in the country. After the success of the revolution, Muhammad Najib was appointed as the first president of the republic. Political parties were banned. Then differences emerged between the leaders of the revolution and the Muslim Brotherhood. A conspiracy was orchestrated. As a result of it, the Muslim Brotherhood was accused of making an assassination attempt on the life of the president of the republic.³⁰ One of the members of the Brotherhood was named. Consequently a massive war was declared

28. For further detail read Kamil al-Sharif, *Al-Muqawamah al-Sirriyyah Fi Qanat al-Suways*.

29. For further detail of the truth and reality of this incident refer *Madhabih al-Ikhwan fi Sujun Nasir*, n.d., pp. 20-26.

30. 'Abd al-Mut'al al-Jubri, *al-Nasiriyyah fi Qafs al-Ittihad*, n.d., pp. 118-120.

against the Muslim Brotherhood and thousands of its members were again thrown into prison.

It has been stated that the political prisoners were brutally and mercilessly tortured. Some of them became martyrs in prison as a result of ongoing persecution. Special courts were formed for the trial of members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Many were sentenced to several years of imprisonment with hard labour. Seven leaders were initially sentenced to death. Death sentence was executed on six of them. Punishment for the seventh person was reduced to a life imprisonment. Thus, a serious conflict between the Egyptian nationalists and Islamists gathered momentum. The anti-Islamic forces achieved a temporary success in suppressing this global Islamic movement.

In 1957, after the declaration by Jamal 'Abd Nasser, the then President of the Republic, of the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the third conflict arose between the British, the French, and the Israelis on one side and Egypt on the other. Consequently, Israel occupied Sinai. Several negotiations were held to evacuate the occupation forces from Egypt. The United States of America put great pressure in this direction. Israel withdrew from Sinai after taking from Egypt the price for its withdrawal. This price was paid in the form of a secret treaty between Jamal 'Abd Nasser and the United States of America. Jamal 'Abd Nasser agreed to have reinforcement of military forces on the borders of Israel for ten years. International emergency forces were also deployed at all borders and Israeli ships were allowed to pass by the Gulf of *Aqabah*.³¹

The unity and solidarity pact between Egypt and Syria was proclaimed in 1958. Egypt started to incline towards a socialist campaign and wore the robe of the leftists. Russia was generous in extending its assistance. Later, the establishment of the Arab Socialist Union was announced as a unique political forum in the country. The communists penetrated into the state machinery and administration, particularly in the field of information and mass media. It is argued that Jamal 'Abd Nasser

31. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, *op. cit.*, pg. 27.

provided all sorts of avenues and assistance for them. In 1961, the Socialist resolution was declared.

From the above exposition of political life of the later part of 19th century to the second half of the 20th century, it is apparent that the Egyptian common people experienced a series of political injustices, threats, and repressions throughout this period. They faced it in the regime of Muhammad Ali and his family, from the masters of British Colonialism and the leaders of the Revolution. It is worth mentioning at this juncture that the people sacrificed a great deal and fulfilled their obligations. Nevertheless, these changing political trends of direct or indirect colonial interference, and political corruption, in spite of the people's sacrifice and their resistance paved the way for confusion and unrest.

The political situation outlined above depressed many people, a situation which ultimately gave birth to the revolutionary trend. The common people as well as the educated were annoyed over such happenings and the circumstances that propelled Egypt into a state of utter instability, chaos, and international concern. Hence there was contemplation for a new strategy and many were waiting for a positive transformation of the country from instability and chaos to stability and peace.

Communist Influence

According to some historians, the communists played a big and direct role in the operation of the massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1965. It is also stated that the communists gradually infiltrated various ministries and government establishments; they ultimately dominated the Arab Socialist Union and seized control of the information media. It is observed that power was in the hands of the communist 'Ali Sabri, the then Prime Minister. And the Arab Socialist Union was under the control of kamal Rafa'at, another communist.

Prior to the massacre, on 25 April 1965, the Egyptian newspapers published a surprising statement by the Egyptian Communist Party declaring its admiration for and high opinion of the rule of Jamal 'Abd Nasser and the role of the Arab socialist Union. It further declared that

the Party had dissolved its organization and merged its members into the system of the Arab Socialist Union to accelerate the process of Socialist transformation in Egypt. Through such tactics, the communists dominated the Arab Socialist Union.

In addition to the communist influence on the state machinery, a serious struggle between various centres of power that ruled the country was on the rise. Every individual centre pressed ahead to strengthen its own power base at the expense of the others. Each was trying to overtake the others in order to come closer to Jamal 'Abd Nasser and to win his confidence. Fabrication, lying and forgery were the means employed to achieve this end.

The struggle continued to worsen and eventually reached the climax prior to the conflict between the public Investigation units and the Intelligence bureau, whereby the military Investigation unit fabricated charges against the civilian Intelligence agencies. Consequently, it accused the machinery of civilian public Intelligence agency as not fulfilling its responsibility and obligation. It submitted to Jamal 'Abd Nasser a report, which was said to be false, about the alleged conspiracy, hatched by the Muslim Brotherhood against the security of the state and urged the President to give it absolute power to act against the Brotherhood and the Islamists in order to maintain security and defend the new system. It is believed that Jamal 'Abd Nasser approved whatever was requested. And this resulted in the destruction of Islamic forces.

Social Life

Another critical situation that Egypt faced was in the social dimension. Therefore the social life of Egypt needs to be evaluated to underline the then prevalent trend and people's thinking and culture. According to historians, two economic classes emerged in Egypt and they were classified as the Haves and the Have-nots. The Haves manipulated all resources and owned most of the land. The Have-nots were the workers, employees, and peasants of the feudal lords subjected to an inferior status to that of others. They never enjoyed any human rights. Of course, they were under the control of the feudal lords. They were deprived of

education. No opportunity was given to them for intellectual understanding and enhancement. Education was confined to the elite alone. Education became the property of the Haves. The Haves had a luxurious life. Cairo, the capital of Egypt, was regarded as their paradise on earth. Their children obtained higher education both inside and outside Egypt. Upon completion of their study, they returned and occupied key positions in government.

The Have-nots lived in rural areas. The illiteracy rate was high among them. They never had the means to send their children for higher education. Therefore, when the children became adolescents, they either worked on the land with their families or migrated to cities in search of employment. The establishment of industries in the capital and other big cities encouraged more and more internal migration. It is observed that they lived a life of moral decadence, because when the youths came to big cities, they never knew anyone and were bold enough to engage in vice. It was a misfortune that upon employment, they spent their earnings to engage themselves in sexual lapses. The moral condition of these youths deteriorated day- by- day.³²

After Mustafa Kamil came to power in Turkey, the caliphate was abolished in 1924. Islam was despised. Muslim women were not allowed to wear the 'veil'. Women came out into the streets. The Arabic script was gradually withdrawn and the Roman script replaced it. Egypt, being a neighbouring country, was naturally influenced by the happenings in Turkey. Prior to this development, the Egyptian women observed Islamic code of dress including the hijab. They were also not seen interacting with men in the work place and the markets. Gradually, they used to attain their education at home.

Then Qasim Amin, an advocate of liberalism, emerged in Egypt. He was educated in the West. Upon his return to Egypt, he began to call for abolition of the 'veil' and idealized the concept of a working woman. He claimed to emancipate women from injustice in the name of 'emanci-

32. Muhammad Husayn, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

pation of women.' The Egyptian people were divided by his opinion. One group followed him while the other group disagreed with him. However, many women responded positively to his call.³³

Huda Sha'rawi came to the forefront and supported the views of Qasim Amin. She also propagated his call. Gradually, this trend received wide coverage. As a result of the impact of this call, Egyptian women removed their veils and took pride in becoming objects of beauty in the markets. Many magazines specialized in women's affairs advocating the call of women's liberation. Women started joining the work force without Islamic norms and etiquettes of dress and social interaction. Thus this call of women's liberation resulted in the dissemination of corrupt morals.³⁴

When the Egyptian University was opened, Lord Cromer and those who followed him decided to implement the policy of free mixing in the University. Consequently, co-education was introduced. Both male and female students were seated side by side.³⁵ Obviously free mixing and co-education led to moral decadence in the society.

Several resorts were built in Alexandria, Baltin and Sidir Bishr. Egyptians from all walks of life used to make excursion to these places wearing short and revealing dresses. In the resorts, total moral decadence could be observed. This negative development worried the Islamic scholars. Consequently, they called on the people to return to their religion. However, people were totally lost in their new life style that eventually led to moral deterioration.³⁶ The moral corruption paved the way for economic and political corruption.

Besides, as stated above, Communism spread in Egypt and found

33. Ibid., pp. 248-257.

34. Ibid., pp. 260-263.

35. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah Al-Khalidi, op. cit., pg. 33.

36. Jubri, *Limadha Ughtuyila Hasan al-Banna*, n.d, pp. 17, 40-42 and 66-68.

Egypt a fertile soil for its propagation. Since a great number of Egyptians were poor, many of them became supporters of Communism, particularly farmers and workers. It is reported that Jews and Christians contributed to the dissemination of Communism. They founded a Communist party and called on the people to support it.

It may be pointed out here that during this period, Egypt was the heartland of many foreigners. Many foreigners lived in Egypt. It is said that they virtually ruled the country. They lived in Egypt as though they had every right over its resources. The Egyptians, the sons of the soil, were forced to serve them. These foreigners who were Jews, Greeks, Italians, Armenians, and British treated them like bonded slaves and they had a big role in the dissemination of moral corruption in the country.

The British soldiers who came to Egypt during the occupation period satisfied all their desires and lusts without difficulties. They enjoyed special concessions. They received maximum benefits. The poor Egyptian men used to stand in front of the British soldiers like slaves and serve them in their offices and their homes. The foreign consultants and experts in the ministries and the establishments acted as the real masters. The Egyptian employees and workers who worked under them were treated like serfs.³⁷

The Christian missionaries were also active in Egypt. They supported the Western Church and defended the British occupation of Egypt. They exploited the poor, the sick and the needy among the Egyptians. They entered into the society of the downtrodden to call them to Christianity through the door of poverty. They treated the individuals and extended financial assistance and food. Missionary hospitals, orphanages, and schools were opened for the Muslim people. The sole objective was to eradicate the beliefs of the Muslims and push them towards a secular way of life.³⁸

37. Muhammad Husayn, *op.cit.*, Vol. 3, pg. 323.

38. He is accused of affiliating with the Freemason movement. This aspect is not discussed in this chapter as it is beyond its scope.

Religious Life

Egypt was a part of the Osmanli (Ottoman) caliphate. The people of Egypt were by nature religious minded, and their Islamic feelings and commitments were profound and extensive, until Napoleon occupied Egypt and continued to strengthen his power and domination. He maintained strongly his close link with the common people. Many Islamic festivals and birthday parties were celebrated during his regime. It is stated that he ordered the French viceroys of various cities to participate in such celebrations to project a good image and sympathy for them. It is said that he even thought of wearing a turban and carrying a Muslim rosary to kindle the feelings of the Muslim people.

During the period of Osmanli caliph Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani³⁹ went to Egypt and remained there for a specific period. He was obviously calling and championing the cause of Islamic renaissance. He delivered lectures at the al-Azhar university where emerged a great disciple, Muhammad Abduh.⁴⁰ Abduh received the ideas of reform from his teacher. Thus, he subsequently delivered lectures at al-Azhar and became a grand *mufti* of the country. There were three significant and famous disciples of Abduh. They were Muhammad Rashid Rida, Saad Zaghlul and Qasim Amin.⁴¹ They belonged to different trends.

Muhammad Rashid Rida carried the banner of reform from his teacher. He felt it was necessary to generate this reform. He published the *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse) journal and consequently established the *al-Manar* press; he compiled *Tafsir al-Manar*. In addition, he composed numerous works including a biography of Abduh.

39. It is said that Abduh had cordial relationship with British occupied forces in Egypt, especially Lord Cromer.

40. Muhammad Husayn, *op. cit.*, pg. 301.

41. Zaki, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun wa al-Mujtama' al-Misri*, n.d, pg. 304.

When the Osmanli Caliphate was at its declining stage, there emerged a movement in the Islamic World expressing its obedience and loyalty to the Caliphate. There were also genuine attempts from within to revive the Caliphate. Egypt, due to its unique nature attracted many Islamic personalities from neighbouring Muslim countries. Muhibuddin al-Khatib emigrated from Syria and played a vital role in Islamic reform. He published two magazines namely, *al-Fath* (The Victory) and *al-Zahra*, and also founded the printing press which published a number of classical books. Likewise, the Muslim leader Mustafa Sabri migrated from Turkey after the abrogation of the Caliphate. Besides them, Muhammad Zahid al-Kahthari from Turkey, Muhammad al-Khayr Husayn from Tunisia, Muhammad Bashir al-Ibrahim from Algeria, Amir 'Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi of Morocco and others also migrated to Egypt and contributed to the reshaping of Islamic culture in Egypt.

Meanwhile, al-Azhar called for educational reform, which was pioneered by Abduh, and completed by his disciple Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi, the then rector of al-Azhar. Al-Azhar was at the peak of leadership for the people of Egypt in its struggle against the French. Sulayman al-Halbi, one of the Azharites, assassinated a leader of the French army in Egypt. Al-Azhar was committed to its religious and national responsibility against the occupying forces of Britain. Many rallies emerged from al-Azhar led by its *Ulama* (scholars) condemning the occupation. Therefore, al-Azhar served as a centre of resistance against the occupiers.

However, when a new generation of intellectuals came to al-Azhar, there was a change in their commitment. They were occupied with the worldly benefits. They were not intellectually independent and were great opportunists. They did not realize their duty towards the nation and the community. They began to compete to achieve the friendship of the King. They took part in royal functions sponsored by the Palace. They portrayed the King as the Muslim ruler implementing the Shariah (Islamic Law) of Allah. The King was further glorified with promoting *jihad* so much so that after the abolition of the Caliphate in Turkey, they called on the people to treat and accept King Fuad as the caliph of all Muslims. They invented for him a genealogy connecting him with the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him. But, he was actually of Greek origin.

One of the sincere Muslim groups came up to establish the Muslim Youths Movement. The most prominent among them were Muhibuddin al-Khatib, 'Abd a'-Hamid Said and Muhammad Salih Harb and. But this organization had limitations and constraints in its objectives. It did not go beyond forming cultural and sports establishments. It did not work for elevating the behaviour of individuals and their practical training.⁴²

The Islamic arena remained unoccupied, anticipating a dynamic reform organization that would implement its stand and fill the vacuum. In 1928, Hasan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Ismailiyyah, the then centre of British occupation forces, which were spread over the banks of the Suez Canal. This organization presented the biggest Islamic challenge to British occupation.

The movement aimed at the establishment of an Islamic society, promoting understanding of Islam in a holistic manner, training of individuals, activating the elderly and the youths towards realizing Islamic teachings collectively. The Muslim youths of Egypt placed their hopes in the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. People from all walks of life such as the illiterate, the educated, workers, professionals, young and senior members of al-Azhar, graduates of the universities, physicians, and engineers and all other sections of the society became its members. The organization invigorated its influence in the society. It established schools, hospitals, mosques, libraries, factories and companies. It further consolidated the behaviour of its individuals and the victory of its workers. It envisioned the feasibility of the establishment of an Islamic community and the Islamic state in the twentieth century.⁴³

It was also seen as an Islamic response to the abrogation of the caliphate. Thus, Hasan al-Banna was considered, in reality, a revivalist of Islam in the twentieth century. The movement established by him was recognized as the true Islamic movement that manifested the necessary dynamism.⁴⁴

42. Zaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-204.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Kamil al-Sharif, *op. cit.*, pg. 24

In the Palestine war, the members of the movement effectively responded to the call of Islam. Their battalions proceeded to Palestine to take part in jihad during 1948-1949, and started their struggle.⁴⁵ They planned for the war. The Egyptian government, headed by al-Nuqrashi, in responding to the request of America, Britain and France decided to dissolve the movement and to confiscate its assets.⁴⁶ Thousands of devoted members were imprisoned and put in military prison cells. It is believed that the government devised a strategy to assassinate Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the movement, who provided dynamic leadership not only to the Muslim Brotherhood but also to the nation as a whole.

The Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in the face of trials and tribulations. The members came out of prison with greater firmness, strength, and commitment than before, and girded up their loins for the call of Islam on the banks of Suez Canal between 1950 and 1952. They dedicated their time and sacrificed their belongings in their resistance against the British forces there, at the cost of innumerable martyrs.⁴⁷ The movement began to dominate all activities in the streets of Egypt. A great multitude of people was attracted by it and readily joined the movement. The people realized the need for the implementation of Shariah and establishment of an Islamic rule.

Meanwhile, the anti-Islamic forces again planned different things. Egyptian military officers sponsored a military revolution on 23rd July 1952, declared Egypt a Republic, and appointed Muhammad Najib as its President. He did not last in this office for long. Jamal 'Abd Nasser succeeded him and ruled with abominable dictatorial characteristics and authoritarianism.

45 Ibid., pg. 24.

46. Kamil al-Sharif, *Al-Muqawamah al-Sirriyah fi Qanat al-Suways*; Dawj, Hasan, *Kifah al-Shabab al-Jami'i*, n.d.

47. Further detail about the persecution, see Jabir Rizq, *op. cit.*, and Kamal al-Farmawi, *Yawmiyyat Sijjin fi al-Sijn al-Harbi*.

It was incumbent upon the officers of the military to implement what they were instructed to. It is argued that after assuming office, Jamal 'Abd Nasser declared war on the Muslim Brotherhood. Some of the leaders were sentenced to death by his intervention in the judicial machinery. Assets were confiscated; thousands were detained and thrown into prisons. Against the international norms, political prisoners were persecuted and mercilessly tortured and assaulted in jails. Thousands of families were forced to live without the chief of the family and several children turned into orphans. The movement sacrificed numerous souls by way of martyrdom.

The trial continued nearly for a quarter of a century. The members of the Muslim Brotherhood faced all forms of physical and psychological tortures with strong faith in Islam. They inspired many intellectuals and they presented the philosophy of Muslim Brotherhood and its contributions to the development of the Islamic thought. Muslim intellectuals who are influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood have always taken an unapologetic stance on various contemporary issues.

Conclusion

The above brief and critical exploration of modern trends in Egypt apparently lead us to a conclusion that Egypt, which was a centre of the Muslim world, has suffered from various crises. Hence, it is but natural for a country or a society to give birth to new trends, which may otherwise be called revolutionary. One may agree or disagree with reasons and circumstances that gave rise to these new trends and their interpretations. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious from this short study that Egypt in fact faced a number of problems and challenges in political, social and religious dimensions.