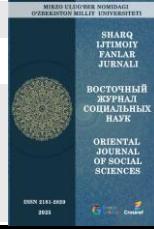




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## ISLAMIC REFORMISM AND PEDAGOGICAL THOUGHT: THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MUHAMMAD ABDUH'S VIEWS

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### ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** Muhammad Abdo, Islamic reformism, socio-political thought, religious and ethical philosophy, education and upbringing, pedagogical reform, al-Azhar reform, ijтиhad, imitation (taqlid), collective spirit, spiritual development, modern Islamic thought.

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the socio-political, religious-ethical, and pedagogical views of Eastern thinkers, with particular emphasis on Muhammad Abdo, a prominent Islamic philosopher and reformer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The study examines the intellectual sources shaping Abdo's thought, his reformist program grounded in Islamic principles, and the decisive role of education in social development. The article highlights Abdo's approach to adopting the achievements of Western civilization without compromising the fundamental values of Islam, as well as his call to abandon blind imitation in favor of ijтиhad and critical thinking. Special attention is given to his educational ideas expressed through his journalistic activities and reforms, including his role in the reform of al-Azhar and his contributions to publications such as al-Ahram, al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya, and al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa. The article argues that Abdo's understanding of education as the primary means of social reform, his emphasis on strengthening collective spirit, and his pedagogical vision aimed at nurturing morally mature generations remain highly relevant today.

## ISLOMIY ISLOHOTCHILIK VA PEDAGOGIK TAFAKKUR: MUHAMMAD ABDUH QARASHLARINING IJTIMOIY AHAMIYATI

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## МАQOLA HAQIDA

**Kalit so'zl:** Muhammad Abduh, islomiy islohotchilik, ijtimoiy-siyosiy tafakkur, diniy-axloqiy falsafa, ta'lim va tarbiya, pedagogik islohot, al-Azhar islohoti, ijтиҳод, taqlid, jamoaviy ruh, ma'naviy rivojlanish, zamonaviy islom tafakkuri.

**Annotatsiya:** Mazkur maqolada Sharq mutafakkirlarining ijtimoiy-siyosiy, diniy-axloqiy va pedagogik qarashlari tahlil qilinadi hamda XIX asr oxiri — XX asr boshlarida faoliyat yuritgan mashhur islom faylasifi va islohotchisi Muhammad Abduh qarashlariga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Tadqiqotda Abduh tafakkurining shakllanishiga ta'sir ko'rsatgan intellektual manbalar, islomiy tamoyillarga asoslangan islohotchilik dasturi hamda jamiyat taraqqiyotida ta'limning hal qiluvchi o'rni yoritiladi. Maqolada Abduhning islomning asosiy qadriyatlariga putur yetkazmagan holda G'arb sivilizatsiyasi yutuqlarini o'zlashtirishga bo'lgan yondashuvi, shuningdek, ko'r-ko'rona taqliddan voz kechib, ijтиҳод va tanqidiy tafakkurni rivojlantirishga chaqirushi ta'kidlanadi. Uning publitsistik faoliyati va islohotlari orqali ifodalangan ta'limiy g'oyalariga, jumladan, al-Azhar islohoti jarayonidagi ishtiroki hamda "al-Ahram", "al-Vaqo'i al-Misriyya" va "al-'Urvat ul-Vusqo" kabi nashrlardagi faoliyatiga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Maqolada Abduhning ta'limni ijtimoiy islohotlarning asosiy vositasi sifatida talqin qilishi, jamoaviy ruhni mustahkamlashga qaratilgan yondashuvi hamda axloqan yetuk avlodni tarbiyalashga yo'naltirilgan pedagogik qarashlari bugungi kunda ham dolzarbligini saqlab qolayotgani asoslab beriladi.

## ИСЛАМСКИЙ РЕФОРМИЗМ И ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКАЯ МЫСЛЬ: СОЦИАЛЬНОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ ВЗГЛЯДОВ МУХАММАДА АБДО

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## О СТАТЬЕ

**Ключевые слова:** Мухаммад Абдо, исламский реформизм, социально-политическая мысль, религиозно-

**Аннотация:** В статье анализируются социально-политические, религиозно-этические и педагогические взгляды

этическая философия, образование и воспитание, педагогическая реформа, реформа аль-Азхара, иджтихад, подражание (таклид), коллективный дух, духовное развитие, современная исламская мысль.

восточных мыслителей, с особым акцентом на Мухаммада Абдо — выдающегося исламского философа и реформатора конца XIX — начала XX века. В исследовании рассматриваются интеллектуальные источники, сформировавшие мировоззрение Абдо, его реформаторская программа, основанная на исламских принципах, а также решающая роль образования в социальном развитии. В статье подчеркивается подход Абдо к заимствованию достижений западной цивилизации без ущерба для фундаментальных ценностей ислама, а также его призыв отказаться от слепого подражания в пользу иджтихада и критического мышления. Особое внимание уделяется его педагогическим идеям, выраженным в публицистической деятельности и реформах, включая его участие в реформировании аль-Азхара и вклад в такие издания, как «Аль-Ахрам», «Аль-Вакай‘ аль-Мисрийя» и «Аль-‘Урва аль-Вуска». В статье утверждается, что понимание Абдо образования как основного средства социального реформирования, его акцент на укреплении коллективного духа и педагогическое видение, направленное на воспитание нравственно зрелых поколений, сохраняют высокую актуальность в современном мире.

**Introduction.** The socio-political and spiritual views of Eastern thinkers play a significant role in the development of society. Their reformist ideas have contributed substantially to addressing the problems of development, socio-political organization, and education in countries of the Islamic world. In the socio-political thought of Eastern intellectuals, the Islamic factor has undoubtedly occupied a central position. Among the prominent representatives of twentieth-century Arab philosophy, Muhammad Abduh made a notable contribution to the development of reformist movements in the Arab world through his socio-philosophical and religious-ethical views. His ideas have not lost their relevance even today.

In accordance with Section V, “Ensuring Spiritual Development and Advancing the Sphere to a New Stage,” of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyev entitled “The Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026” [1], higher education institutions and research centers have been assigned the key task of “conducting in-depth studies and widely promoting the rich scientific heritage of our great ancestors.” Pursuant

to Goal 73 of this section, the task of producing accessible translations of 100 works authored by distinguished scholars of our land and creating scholarly and popular publications based on them not only encourages the study of the heritage of great ancestors, but also promotes research into the intellectual legacy of scholars from the Middle East. Furthermore, the adoption of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. LRU-901 of February 1, 2024, "On the Status of Teachers" [2] reinforces the necessity of studying and researching the pedagogical views of Eastern thinkers. Indeed, in the Islamic world, socio-political ideas within Muslim societies developed in close interrelation. From this perspective, the study of Muhammad Abduh's socio-philosophical and religious-ethical views is essential not only for understanding the history of Arab philosophy, but also for comprehending Islamic civilization and culture.

The new era in human history necessitates prioritizing spiritual and moral issues. Practical experience demonstrates that individuals possessing a high level of spirituality are capable of addressing socio-political and economic challenges. Today, enhancing the social consciousness of a well-rounded generation has become a key priority of state policy. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has emphasized: "Our great scholars made their globally significant discoveries and inventions at your age—during their youthful and energetic years. You, too, should take inspiration from your great ancestors and strive earnestly to create wonders in life" [3].

**Main part.** Muhammad Abduh was one of the central figures of modern Islamic thought that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, he was among the most widely read authors throughout the Islamic world. It is particularly important to note the profound influence of Abduh's reformist ideas on the Arab world in the twentieth century, especially their role in shaping modernist trends in Arab philosophy [4, 5]. Alongside his political, religious, and social ideas, his views on education and educational reform attracted considerable attention across the Islamic world.

Muhammad Abduh, a great thinker, sociologist, and reformer, is widely recognized as one of the most significant figures of the modern Islamic world. He articulated that he devoted his life to two principal struggles. First, he sought to liberate thought from the chains of blind imitation, open the path to independent reasoning, comprehend religion in its true essence, emulate the righteous predecessors (salaf al-ṣāliḥ), demonstrate the place of positive sciences within Islam, encourage Muslims to attain the level of Western progress, and thereby enable them to free themselves from Western domination. Second, he aimed to reform the style of the Arabic language, liberating writing from its obscure and tedious form.

Abduh's engagement with the West allowed him to acquire knowledge not only of the Islamic world but also of Western societies. According to Abduh, the dire condition faced by the Islamic world necessitated change, and the reforms to be implemented were required in several domains: the reform of Islam by returning it to its original foundations; the renewal of the Arabic language; educational reform; the reform of al-Azhar and the incorporation of modern sciences into its curriculum; and political reform through the recognition of popular rights.

Without sacrificing the fundamental principles of Islam, Muhammad Abduh sought to internalize Western civilization and harmonize these two worlds. His ultimate objective was to strengthen and preserve Islam as a religion in the face of Western encroachment. Although Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani shared similar goals—namely, liberating Muslims from foreign domination and reviving the Islamic world through its own internal strength—their approaches differed significantly. Al-Afghani favored immediate revolutionary change, whereas Abduh maintained that altering external forms alone was insufficient without transforming the intellectual mindset of the people.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Muhammad Abduh was among the leading scholars who felt a profound responsibility to establish a civilization grounded in Islam. Through the ideas he advanced during this period, he made a major contribution to the formation of modern Islamic thought. He believed that the essential need of the Islamic world was to develop a system of thought capable of addressing contemporary problems while simultaneously advancing traditional theological ideas. This conviction is consistently reflected throughout his works.

Abduh's decision to write his works in Arabic enabled them to be read and disseminated across a vast geographical area both during his lifetime and afterward, thereby amplifying their influence. It would not be an exaggeration to assert that Abduh was the most widely read thinker throughout the Islamic world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This widespread interest also made him one of the most closely observed figures by Europeans in both political and academic circles.

### Educational Thought

Abduh initially articulated his views on education through the press. In the Cairo-based newspaper *al-Ahram* (الأهرام), founded by two Lebanese brothers, he published an article entitled “Writing and the Pen” (الكتابة والقلم), in which he emphasized the human need for literacy and the necessity of education for social life. Subsequently, four additional articles were published highlighting the importance of modern sciences and the necessity for Muslims to comprehend them.

In his writings, Abduh stressed that indifference toward modern scientific developments was untenable and that remaining detached from contemporary knowledge was impossible. Consequently, reforms in education and culture were imperative. Nations, he argued, advance only through the elevation of their level of knowledge. Therefore, the foremost task was to educate citizens, create opportunities for them to seek knowledge, and, in short, to “spread knowledge widely.”

Indeed, after his appointment as editor-in-chief of *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣriyya* (الواقع المصرية), Abduh continued to write extensively on educational issues, playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion. In three articles entitled *al-Ma'ārif* (ال المعارف), published in the newspaper, he emphasized the necessity of reforming the educational system.

التربيّة في المدارس والمكاتب (الإدارية), In the article *at-Tarbiya fī al-Madāris wa al-Makātib al-Miṣriyya* (الإدارية), Abduh devoted particular attention to the spiritual education of students. He argued that the educational system should aim not only at intellectual development but also at spiritual maturity. Children should be oriented toward obedience to God and religious devotion, as their lack of experience prevents them from discerning what is beneficial or harmful to their spiritual and personal development. Worship and adherence to religious principles, according to Abduh, contribute to the formation of a strong and stable personality.

His journalistic and literary activity in the official newspaper lasted for eighteen months. Although his connections with al-Azhar and other educational institutions were severed during this period and his opportunities to pursue reform as a teacher were restricted, he nevertheless continued to address social and political problems and propose solutions as a scholar-journalist. Usman Amin summarized Abduh's activity in the official newspaper as follows: “Abduh was both a reformer and a teacher in the newspaper. His aim was to elevate the general level of the ummah, strengthen its moral character, and realize gradual social progress without abrupt upheavals or violence. He believed that the most effective means of achieving this was through education and culture. Moreover, he was firmly convinced that imitating the West without deep understanding, and clinging to the outward forms of material civilization while remaining ignorant of its spiritual essence, was of no benefit.”

Despite working within an official newspaper, Abduh did not refrain from writing critical articles on issues related to education and upbringing. Although he maintained contact with al-Afghani during this period, his writings gradually developed an independent style and perspective. He increasingly emphasized that Egypt's progress required not revolution, but education and upbringing aimed at cultivating statesmen capable of reforming governmental institutions.

Abduh also addressed educational issues in several articles published in the journal al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqā (العروة الوثقى), which he co-edited with al-Afghani in Paris. In the article entitled “The Past of the Ummah, Its Present Condition, and the Cure for Its Illnesses,” he examined the historical achievements of the Islamic community, its contemporary decline, and possible paths to recovery.

Accordingly, he states:

“Some believe that the salvation of a nation spread across vast territories of the earth can be achieved merely by opening schools. At a time when the members of the ummah are fervently pursuing their selfish desires, submitting in humiliation to those who neither belong to them nor share their school of thought or orientation—people who were once under their patronage and influence—and seeking livelihood, prestige, and honor through such subjugation, they imagine that this disease can be cured solely by establishing schools!

Naturally, these schools are expected to be modern like those in Europe; education will spread rapidly among all members of the ummah and become its collective property; morality will improve, divisions and conflicts will disappear, and unity and power will emerge. How remote such expectations are from reality!

Such a monumental task can only be completed by a strong and powerful ruler. For this, the ruler’s will must be capable of compelling the people. Moreover, the realization of such a project requires enormous financial resources sufficient to cover the expenses of schools. Yet our discussion concerns diseases, weaknesses, and their remedies. Can vast capital reserves and powerful authority realistically coexist under such circumstances? Had these conditions existed, the ummah would not have fallen behind nor reached its current state.” [6]

The ummah remains entirely ignorant of sciences that are foreign to it—how their seeds were sown, how they were cultivated, how they branched out and expanded, by which waters they were nourished, in which soil they were rooted, and what their origins and outcomes are. Even the limited knowledge it possesses in this regard amounts to nothing more than empty and meaningless imitation. Given this condition, can such assumptions ever materialize? Can the transmission of these sciences by individuals who have not sufficiently mastered them, and who convey them to minds preoccupied with other concerns, suffice to correct ideas, reform morals, benefit fellow believers, and ultimately guide them to the right path?

From within such an ummah emerge individuals who merely reproduce and transmit these sciences. At times, influenced by their own immature fantasies, and at other times by misconceptions ingrained since childhood, they excessively glorify the societies from which they have acquired their learning. As a result, they appear among their own people as strange and

alien beings. This, in turn, serves only to push the ummah into even deeper disorder and fragmentation.

Even when sincerely motivated to serve their homelands, what can those who are incapable of expressing the essence of the knowledge they convey truly accomplish? They merely attempt to replicate what they have learned and memorized verbatim. They transmit knowledge without considering its relationship to the ummah's sources, traditions, and nature, nor do they reflect on its appropriateness or contextual relevance. Being unaware of the past and future of these sciences and acquainted only superficially with their present state, they regard them as the highest universal objective and the most correct principles for sustaining life. Consequently, they demand from the young what is appropriate only for the mature, and from the mature what is expected of the young.

They are unable to penetrate beyond the external shell of what they have learned. They completely disregard the characteristics of those being educated, never questioning whether such knowledge will benefit them or instead exacerbate their existing deficiencies. This is because they are not the true possessors of the knowledge, but merely its carriers and transmitters.

With the exception of a small minority whom God has guided, the rest resemble a well-meaning mother who feeds an infant whatever food she finds appetizing, without considering whether it can be digested, thereby causing the child to fall ill. The position of such individuals within the ummah resembles machines whose sole function is to divide and fragment. If any bonds of unity still remain within the ummah, they destroy them under the illusion of "serving national interests." While divisions and conflicts might still have been resolved in time, these individuals expand them excessively. Ultimately, under the pretext of correcting corruption, they prepare the ground for foreign intervention and lead their own communities toward ruin.

The Ottomans and Egyptians established numerous modern schools following new methods and sent individuals to Europe to acquire what they considered necessary knowledge, culture, industry, education, and "civilization." However, all of these were phenomena peculiar to Western societies, having emerged gradually through natural historical development and shaped in accordance with Western nature and disposition. Despite the passage of considerable time, did the Ottomans and Egyptians truly benefit from these endeavors? Is their present condition better than it was before they embraced these new instruments?

Were they able to free themselves from the grip of poverty and deprivation? Did they escape the mire of domination into which foreigners had pushed them? Did they strengthen their fortresses and borders to repel enemy attacks? Did they reach a point where they could thwart the ambitions of hostile powers? Were they able to cultivate from among themselves selfless

individuals who would place national interests above personal ones and, if necessary, sacrifice their lives for their homeland?

Anyone who seeks to reform an ummah in such a condition through means other than this method—that is, the correct and natural path of education—will lead it astray. Such a person acts against the order of existence, reverses cause and effect, misconstrues education, exacerbates the misfortune of the ummah, and offers it nothing but a perilous exit [6:91-98].

In the article entitled “Islam and Christianity,” the following is stated:

“Especially when an incorrect path is chosen in education and upbringing, and official education is founded upon a series of fallacies, even books written to explain to the people the true essence of religion as conveyed by the Prophet and his Companions lose their influence. The truths that those on the path of righteousness seek to teach remain confined within a very narrow scope. Perhaps this is the primary reason for stagnation—the fundamental cause that led Muslims to decline, weaken, and face extinction. All the difficulties we endure today stem from this very cause. We ask God to deliver us from it.”

Indeed, advances in printing technologies constituted one of the decisive factors in the process of cultural awakening (renaissance) in the Islamic world.

During his stay in Paris, Abduh witnessed new inventions and developments, conducted observations, met with Orientalists, and traveled between Paris and London. He visited Oxford and Cambridge Universities, where he carried out scholarly investigations. His personal library contained Rousseau’s *Emile*, Spencer’s *Education*, and various didactic writings, clearly demonstrating Abduh’s interest in modern Western philosophy—particularly moral philosophy, educational theory, and social philosophy [7].

Following the closure of the journal *al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqā*, Abduh returned to Beirut in 1885. By this time, he had become firmly convinced that progress could not be achieved through political means. Having personally experienced the failure of revolutionary paths, he resolved to pursue reform through education, planning to serve as a modest scholar and teacher.

Abduh taught at the Sultaniyya Madrasa in Beirut, reformed its curriculum, and sought to transform it into a high-level educational institution. There, he taught monotheism, logic, rhetoric, Islamic history, and legal sciences based on Hanafi jurisprudence. Similar intellectual endeavors later emerged in certain Islamic countries, such as Pakistan.

In Beirut, Abduh inspired students with strong intellectual energy and enthusiasm. His home was frequently overcrowded with visitors, prompting many students to gather at the residence of the city governor to listen eagerly to the Islamic-based views of this learned Egyptian scholar. Shakib Arslan described him as follows:

“In Abduh, we encountered a cultured and enlightened attitude that we had not previously seen among other scholars. He harmonized rational and transmitted sciences at the highest level, analyzing every issue with a philosophical insight that transcended conventional perspectives. We had never before encountered such a viewpoint” [8].

After returning to Egypt, Abduh’s relationship with al-Afghani deteriorated. Al-Afghani accused him of cowardice, collaboration with enemies, and abandoning political ideals and governance based on popular will. Abduh, however, maintained that Egypt’s most urgent need was comprehensive education and upbringing. In his view, all political and social issues should be evaluated through this lens.

While al-Afghani believed that education and reform would be futile unless colonialism and despotism were eradicated, Abduh, conversely, regarded the elimination of colonialism and despotism as the outcome of education and moral cultivation. This intellectual divergence led them along different paths: al-Afghani toward politics, and Abduh toward knowledge and culture.

Abduh clearly understood that the true factor rendering the West superior to the East was its high level of education and knowledge. Therefore, he considered the reform of educational institutions to be the foremost priority. Among these institutions, al-Azhar occupied a distinctive position, as its conservative and dogmatic structure mirrored Egyptian society of the time. Abduh believed that reforming al-Azhar would inevitably lead to the reform of society as a whole.

After being appointed as a lecturer at al-Azhar, Abduh immediately sought to initiate reform, though his efforts were obstructed by conservative scholars. In 1895, upon joining the al-Azhar Administrative Council as a government representative, he succeeded—after extensive deliberations—in introducing subjects such as mathematics, literature, and geography into the curriculum and establishing the al-Azhar library. These reforms met with strong resistance; one shaykh even accused him of turning al-Azhar into “a philosophical center that corrupts religion”.

**Conclusion.** Nevertheless, Abduh’s ideas ultimately prevailed among critically minded circles. His educational method emphasized Islam as the foundation of education—a foundation that supports individuality rather than erasing it. He viewed education as the primary source of changes in social customs and morality. Education, he argued, first prepares the ground for change and then brings it into effect; the laws that shape society are, in essence, its educational laws.

Within his pedagogical framework, Muhammad Abduh emphasized two fundamental principles:

1. awakening the spirit of community and solidarity, and

2. abandoning imitation in favor of ijтиhad, particularly in addressing social problems.

He stressed the necessity of weakening individualism and fragmentation while strengthening communal spirit, achievable only through genuine education grounded in Islamic teachings. As he stated:

“A human being becomes truly human only through education, and this is possible only through obedience to the laws brought by the prophets and messengers. When we are educated on this foundation, common conditions arise that unite our consciousness and needs, enabling each of us to recognize our responsibilities toward ourselves and others” [9].

Thus, Abduh linked the erosion of communal substance and spirit to the misinterpretation of Islam. He believed that the remedy for the maladies afflicting Egyptian society lay in educating a devout and responsible younger generation and grounding the first stage of education firmly in Islamic principles. He called upon individuals to cultivate independent character and thought, develop critical reasoning, and consciously choose interpretive approaches.

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