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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### SYED SHAYKH AHMAD ALHADY ON KNOWLEDGE

Adibah Sulaiman<sup>1,2</sup>, Latifah Abdul Latiff<sup>1,3</sup>, Izziah Suryani Mat Resad<sup>4</sup> and Ezad Azraai Jamsari<sup>4</sup>

1. Centre for Core Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800 Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.
2. Faculty of Major Languages, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800 Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.
3. Faculty of Leadership and Management, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800 Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.
4. Research Centre for Arabic Language and Islamic Civilization, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

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#### Abstract

This study examines Syed Shaykh Ahmad Alhady's perspective on knowledge, which discusses the nature, sources, hierarchy of knowledge and his position on both the traditional and modern knowledge. The article aims at identifying the conceptual basics and the structure of Syed Shaykh's thoughts relating to knowledge. The methods used to complete the writing comprise both the library and archive research, which involve the collection of data and its analysis in order to deduce Syed Shaykh's ideas on knowledge. It showed sound knowledge would provide man of reason with a clear concept and a good grasp of religious instructions. This article implies that one's failure to acknowledge the significance and relevance of any of the elements of knowledge, reason and religion would lead to deviations in behaviour and practice and would be incapable of understanding his duties towards his community and the nation.

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#### Introduction:-

The concept of knowledge may be linked to the philosophy of education of a country. A critical purpose of an educational policy is to produce a knowledgeable, morally upright and confident person. In a religious society, education aims to instil in man a strong faith and a deep conviction in God and a love to perform good deeds to the nation. These goals could be achieved through a proper understanding of the meaning of epistemology itself, as it may explain important concepts pertaining to knowledge. It provides much clarity towards a proper understanding of man and his relation to God and such understanding helps man to perform good deeds (al-Edrus 1993).

#### An Outlook of Knowledge:

A deep respect and love for knowledge is highly valued by Syed Shaykh Ahmad Alhady, one the Malay reformists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sulaiman et al. 2011a; Sulaiman et al. 2011b), as he tried to instil these values into the Malay mind and society through his writings. A similar attempt was carried out by his modernist colleagues, whose articles were published in *al-Imam* (The Leader). In its first issue, a writer maintained that love for knowledge would ultimately lead man to benefit its advantages, thus contributing to the establishment of a dynamic and

**Corresponding Author:- Adibah Sulaiman**

Address:- Centre for Core Studies, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 71800 Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.

progressive society. He took the example of early Muslims, their keen interest towards knowledge and their struggle towards eliminating ignorance among people. Unfortunately, the Muslims of his time showed little interest in knowledge. They did not give much attention to its quest nor its dissemination. They neglected the superiority of recently found knowledge, especially in the field of sociology, skills, science and technology, which would render them better job opportunities in the society (*al-Imam* 1906).

Having acknowledged the necessity of understanding a few concepts pertaining to knowledge, Syed Shaykh consistently showed a deep respect for knowledge. *Al-Imam* (The Leader), *al-Ikhwan* (The Comrade) and *Saudara* (The Brotherhood) were the three leading vehicles of his thoughts on knowledge and education. The role of these magazines is indicated clearly in their taglines; *al-Imam* was the magazine of education, knowledge and community (*majalah pelajaran, pengetahuan, perhimpunan*), *al-Ikhwan* was the magazine of education, knowledge, community and news (*majalah pelajaran, pengetahuan, perhimpunan, perkhawaran*) and *Saudara* was the magazine of general information, education, knowledge and news (*warta am, pelajaran, pengetahuan, perkhawaran*). The issues raised and discussed in these magazines focused on the need to educate the Malays through the means of knowledge since this is Syed Shaykh's key concern (Sulaiman et al. 2011c). His position towards knowledge and scholarship was also evident from one of the objectives of *al-Ikhwan*, which is to instil the love of knowledge into readers (Alhady 1926). In this respect, he maintained that this aim was in response to the dire needs at that time of emphasising the importance of intellectual learning and educating to produce a skilled workforce. As such, Syed Shaykh encouraged the Malays to acquire knowledge that meets the necessities of the day to facilitate them to make progress and to achieve success in the world, already enjoyed by the other communities in Malaya (Alhady 1926).

In *al-Imam* (The Leader), Syed Shaykh maintained that the lack of knowledge within the Malay community in particular worried him because this was the main cause that placed them behind in terms of progress. To him, the main key that determined the true place of man and his community in the 'eyes of the world' was his possession of knowledge (Alhady 1907). Having seen the 'progress' of Malays for almost 20 years, he, as published in *al-Ikhwan* (The Comrade), called upon the Malays to have deep love and respect for knowledge. He says, "Education. Education. Knowledge. Knowledge. Immerse yourself in the realm of knowledge, expend your energy in gaining employment, and nurture your children to love both education and knowledge from their very young age" (Alhady 1926). We can say that his repetitive usage of the terms education and knowledge highlighted his emphasis on these two concepts. This could be linked to his view in *al-Imam* that knowledge and education were indispensably useful and advantageous in order to place any particular community at par with other well-developed communities. Individuals, according to him, were only to be respected for their knowledge and intellectuality, and for their capability to compete with others. For him, this enabled them to work closely with developed communities, and exchange knowledge and expertise in extracting the benefits from their countries' natural resources (Alhady 1907).

In fact, Syed Shaykh's view on the significance of both knowledge and education could also be influenced by what he saw in his society. It apparently was swamped with the backwardness of the Malays. The situation was made especially difficult to swallow when he saw the Chinese being more prosperous and more successful than the indigenous Malays. In this respect, he says, "indeed the Chinese were not content with the gains thus acquired in our country. Their leaders and their wealthy men bonded together to form organisations for the welfare of their own people, and they built schools all over Malaya for the education of their children; theirs is the best of works" (Alhady 1907; Gordon 1999a). This scenario was probably the strong impetus that prompted him to bring change within the society through knowledge and education.

In an article entitled *al-Sharf: Kemuliaan atau Kehormatan* (*al-Sharf: Glory or Honour*), Syed Shaykh explained the true meaning of dignity and nobility and it was expressed as follows, "Have we ever heard of persons, who have left a good name in this world due to their medals and ranks? No! A person is remembered for his lifetime of work and knowledge that has benefited his community, leaving behind a foundation for others to continue the good work after his death" (Alhady 1927). It follows from here that to him, a medal, status, property and wealth were not regarded as true glory. Instead, man's lifelong effort and sound knowledge that benefited his community were the true marks of a man's honour. This honourable man, as he maintained, made full use of his knowledge to contribute to the nation and country. The practice of contributing one's service towards one's nation was to be looked upon by later generations with deep respect and admiration (Gordon 1999a; Alhady 1927).

The opinion that knowledge was considered as a true mark of one's glory and honour was pretty much established and repeatedly stated in another magazine of that time, named *Pengasuh* (The Educator). It was, in fact, a traditionalist-based journal, which at times published issues pertaining to Malays' education. In one of its articles, it acknowledged that knowledge is the key and the requirement for one to achieve honour, dignity and happiness in the world and next. It, however, asserted that man's true honour did not rely on his knowledge alone but it also lied in his ethics (*adab*), and civilised customs and moral (*tamadun*). A community was only to be organised and developed if its members were armed with high education. They were also encouraged to practice sound ethics and morals in daily life. These were to create a civilised society (Mahmud 1918). The idea of true honour demonstrates that advocators of traditionalist thoughts also regarded knowledge as a weapon to bring change and improvement in the community. It could be that they all saw knowledge being used by another well-developed community as a vehicle to progress in Malaya. Unlike the reformists, who emphasized on knowledge per se as a mark of one's true honour, it is apparent that man's honour and dignity, in the eyes of the traditionalists, lay in three elements. They were knowledge, ethics and civilised customs.

Syed Shaykh believed that one's honour and self-esteem was closely associated with his knowledge. As such, an intellectual is respected for his scholarship and to Syed Shaykh, this would bring about his honour and self-esteem. To him, a knowledgeable and hardworking man was to be regarded as a leader to the ignorant, uneducated and the lazy. The former, as he maintained, was to be honoured for his intellectuality and his awareness of his responsibility towards the nation while the latter lived in regret and loss because of his disinclination towards knowledge. In this respect, the learned were to play a significant role in improving and developing the nation (Alhady 1926). This statement concurs with his viewpoint that anyone, armed with sound knowledge and reason, was to be responsible to improve his people, as he says in an article entitled *Teriak Sebenar* (The Real Cry):

Make up your minds, look around you with discernment and know that you are the pillars and the spirit of your people and country. They only live as you live, and they will surely die if you waste your lives. You are their honour and wealth and also the cause of their suffering and humiliation... but you must have faith and realise that any honour and glory not based upon the honour and glory of your people and country is but false honour and glory to you. He who sees himself as totally helpless to do anything to uplift his people and country is unthankful of the gift of reason (*al-Ikhwan* 1926a).

From the above statement, it can be concluded that Syed Shaykh's view on the intimate connection between knowledge and service towards one's nation was in fact exemplified by the classical Muslim scholars and thinkers. They, as indicated by Bakhtiar in his work on the concept of knowledge, are famed for two factors: their mastery of science, and their contribution towards prosperity. According to him, these people were aware of the role and status of knowledge, which "makes a man truly human, a creature of high ideals and values, and the moral agent of God on earth. Knowledge truly beautifies one's life and infuses him with the spirit of godliness" (Sdiddiqui 1991). To my mind, this could be achieved only by the realisation of God, Who is the source of all knowledge and, Whose knowledge is infinite. It must also be borne in mind that a man achieves such realisation, is one who truly understands the true status of knowledge, and this understanding is gained only by sound knowledge and education.

#### **Sources of Knowledge:**

According to Syed Shaykh, the Qur'an is regarded as the written scripture of the words of Allah. He maintained that the Qur'an is permanent and its recitation becomes a religious ritual (*'ibadah*). Furthermore, a man is obliged to believe in the Qur'an and its contents that include law, narration, lesson, wisdom and so on. Being convinced in the authenticity of the Qur'an, man is to take it as a guidance for his actions and expression in this life (Alhady n.d.a). Besides, Syed Shaykh believed that the Qur'an always encourages Muslims to make use of reason and to work hard to succeed in this world and the Hereafter. In order to achieve such a success, Islam does not ask man to focus only on his spiritual needs but it also calls upon him to look through the Qur'an to seek its relevance to one's material needs. He asserted that this suggests that both traditional and modern sciences are important as they represent their own particular significance to human beings. In this respect, Syed Shaykh maintained that the traditional knowledge equips man with spiritual qualities while the modern science provides him with the opportunity to achieving success in this world (Alhady n.d.b).

In his article entitled *Menuntut Ketinggian Akan Anak-anak Negeri* (The Demand for the Improvement of the Sons of the Soil), Syed Shaykh said:

Look at the Chinese, who left their country to come to Malaya, most of them came with only rolled-mat, a pair of shorts, and a singlet. Whenever they feel a grip of hunger, they tightened their belts. They came to our country to rid themselves of that hunger, yet in a few years what has become of them? They have become owners (*taukeh*s), landowners and millionaires, and why? Because they work and work with a determination to succeed and possess a spirit by no means weakened by the fact that they are strangers in our country! So, is it right and proper that we should be less than them in our effort, intellectual capacity, knowledge, will, generosity, and affection amongst us, even as we, being Muslims believe in the Qur'an which commands the achievement of every excellence in life? (Alhady 1907).

The above statement reveals that Syed Shaykh's Qur'anic position on progress and development heavily relied on knowledge. He maintained that in the first revelation of the Qur'an, it invites man to seek and acquire knowledge. He believed that the Malay backwardness of his time was attributed to their lack of reliance on the Qur'an. They, according to him, failed to understand the significance of many Qur'anic verses that deal with science and knowledge. The Qur'an, from his viewpoint, provides the people who study it with a wide range of diverse branches of science and knowledge (Alhady n.d.a.; al-Qur'an, al-'Alaq: 1-5).

Apart from the Qur'an, the Prophetic sayings are also the sacred source of knowledge. A large number of Prophetic sayings discussed knowledge, its value, the way of pursuing it, the manner of its dissemination and practices, and so on. This, as Syed Shaykh maintained, could be discerned from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet that calls upon the Muslims to acquire knowledge (Syed Shaykh 1930), as the Prophet (PBUH) says: "Seek knowledge even unto China", and "Seeking of knowledge is compulsory upon the Muslim man and woman". One could thus deduce that *Sunnah* could be taken as a primary source of knowledge after the Qur'an. The citation of these *ahadith*, according to Syed Shaykh, was for the purpose of instilling in the Malays the love of seeking many branches of knowledge. Besides, the citation also aimed at explaining that knowledge is not confined to *fiqh* (Islamic law) alone, as understood by the majority of the Malays. Syed Shaykh believed that this obsession was evident among the religious traditionalists of his time, who restricted the meaning of the earlier mentioned Prophetic sayings to *fiqh*. He viewed that their act of restricting one's acquisition of knowledge to *fiqh* only indirectly denied the significance of other sciences in the Qur'an which comprise approximately three quarter of the sacred source of knowledge (Gordon 1999a; Syed Shaykh 1930).

As far as the faculty of reason is concerned, Syed Shaykh maintained that it is placed at a high position from an Islamic perspective. Islam honours reason in its capacity for man to recognise God's existence, oneness, power and mercy (Alhady n.d.b.). Apart from this spiritual advantage, reason is also useful in the process of seeking knowledge. Islam, according to Syed Shaykh, invites man to learn various disciplines in traditional knowledge and modern science, and reason is needed in order to gain a proper understanding of these disciplines. He believed that man's effort combined with the use of reason and sound knowledge, creates more opportunity for success. The use of reason would bring about new developments in science that offer much advantage to the development of human capital. He saw that modern science has significant benefits that facilitate man to fulfil the demands of the time. In spite of the fact that modern science relied on the faculty of reason to verify its validity, Syed Shaykh asserted that reason will not accept any opinion or facts that are logically and rationally conflicting with the contents of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (Syed Shaykh n.d.). One could deduce from here that although he placed a great emphasis on the use of reason, it was to a certain extent restricted to logical reason and the use of reason is not to be superior to either the Qur'an or the *Sunnah*.

#### **Hierarchy of Knowledge:**

Knowledge, according to Syed Shaykh, falls into two principal classifications: knowledge of certainty (*'ilm yaqini*) and knowledge of probability (*'ilm zanni*). He maintained that *'ilm yaqini* is knowledge that is solely derived from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Thus, the knowledge is valid in itself. It is also called religious knowledge. The second category of knowledge called *'ilm zanni* is the modern science that is based on man's rational faculty and hypothesis deduced from reasons, which presupposes the element of doubt. As such, the approval and verification of reason is not absolute and to ascertain its total reliability is somewhat impossible. Therefore, he insisted that reason could not be superior to the authority of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* in the attainment of knowledge (*al-Ikhwān* 1929).

The above classification of knowledge is somewhat different from that of 'Abduh's as he divided knowledge into three categories, namely the Islamic sciences (*al-'ulum al-islamiyyah*), the narrative sciences (*al-'ulum al-naqliyyah*) and the acquired sciences (*al-'ulum al-wad'i*). 'Abduh acknowledged the traditional classification of

knowledge done by al-Ghazali and Fakhruddin al-Razi, and he maintained that the Islamic sciences are deemed as individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) while the latter two are collective duty (*fard kifayah*). However this classification is subject to change ('Abduh 1993). Al-Ghazali, for instance, maintained that knowledge whose acquisition is *fard 'ayn*, is those works which are well known to be obligatory on every Muslim. On the other hand, science whose knowledge is deemed as *fard kifayah*, which renders that its fulfilment by a sufficient group of individuals excuses the other individuals from carrying it out, comprise those science which is indispensable for the welfare of the world such as medicine and arithmetic (al-Ghazali 1964). These thoughts of both 'Abduh and al-Ghazali on knowledge were not at all discussed by Syed Shaykh.

With regards to his classification of knowledge, one could deduce that Syed Shaykh placed revealed knowledge at a higher level than acquired science. The former, as he maintained, becomes a 'protective covering' to modern science as reason used in modern science needs to be properly guided by revelation. According to him, the place of religious knowledge is above that of the acquired science as it offers a bright future, prosperity, happiness and progress both in this world and the next (*al-Ikhwān* 1928a). To Syed Shaykh, the teaching of religious knowledge is important as it serves as the foundation for the other disciplines of knowledge. He believed that religious knowledge may ensure that one's conduct does not stray from true faith and the doctrine of Islam, and it puts the belief in God and the Prophet as the focal point of one's behaviour, effort, and endeavour in this life (Alhady 1930).

Based on Syed Shaykh's concept of knowledge, there exists a hierarchy within the religious knowledge, which includes the disciplines of traditional knowledge such as Islamic theology, Islamic law, the Qur'an, and the hadith. This is evident from the statement of Ibrahim when he mentions:

In his classification of the sciences, al-Hadi placed Islamic theology in the highest place or at the centre of all sciences. The other sciences supported and strengthened Islamic theology (*Tawhid*) and occupied an auxiliary position. Among these sciences were physiology, surgery, history, mathematics, physics and others which improved the mind. They also supported Islamic law (*fiqh*)...(Bakar 1994).

Ibrahim's above statement concurs with Syed Shaykh's own statement on the subject when he said:

Indeed, the doctrine of Islamic theology (*Tawhid*) and Islamic law (*fiqh*) would not benefit provided that it is preceded by the understanding of general sciences and of objectives of other various branches of knowledge. Is not doctrine of Tawhid the essence and the end of all knowledge? And is not *fiqh* which regulates the relationship between God and Man? These two types of knowledge are meant to perfect and illuminate other branches of human knowledge, like surgery, history, mathematics, physics...(Alhady 1930b; Gordon 1999b).

It could be inferred from the above statement that theology, in Syed Shaykh's opinion, is the centre of all sciences and it is in the highest hierarchy of knowledge. Although Ibrahim is a scholastic theologian and he thus promoted scholastic theology, he does not discuss on the limitation of Syed Shaykh's hierarchy of knowledge. It is important to mention that as far as *Tawhid* is concerned, within it, there are other disciplines of sciences such as metaphysics (*usul al-din*) and *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). They each must have had a certain place within the hierarchy of *Tawhid*. Syed Shaykh, however, neglected this point of view.

In reference to Syed Shaykh's above statement, he perceived knowledge as one single entity. According to him, it could be portrayed as a tree with its attached branches and trunk that are connected to its one root. All the branches gain food from its one singular root, which enables the tree to then bear fruits. For him, Islamic theology is the root of knowledge and it is termed as the understanding of the reality of every existing creature of the universe. He viewed other sciences as the branches of Islamic theology and the fruits of this tree, as he maintained, could represent the advantages of these sciences and knowledge to one's life in this world and the next. As man's acts and deeds are related to his knowledge and intellect, Syed Shaykh believed that the study of *Tawhid* (Islamic theology) would create the sense of fear in God in man's daily conduct as *Tawhid* geared man to recognise God's presence with their use of reason (Alhady 1930b). To conclude, one could say that although Islamic theology has a distinct quality and a significant place within the hierarchy of religious knowledge, it must be supported by another knowledge that is the Arabic language (*al-Ikhwān* 1928a).

**Traditional Knowledge vs Modern Science:**

Knowledge is a gift from Allah to men, who are blessed with that knowledge and, who are given the intellect, which is one of the sources of knowledge. In Islam, it places God as the centre of all knowledge; whether they are religious or the modern sciences (Siddiqui 1991). This concurs with the viewpoint of Syed Shaykh that both traditional knowledge and modern science focus on one central point that is the concept of unity of God (*Tawhid*). He said, “the doctrine of Tawhid is the essence and the end of all knowledge” (Alhady 1930b).

According to Syed Shaykh, a man of reason would acknowledge the necessity of arming himself with a sound concept of *Tawhid* in acquiring both traditional and modern sciences. *Tawhid*, as he maintained, would become the ‘protective covering’ of one’s learning of the modern science to ensure that man could enjoy both the material and spiritual benefits of knowledge. This has been mentioned and discussed earlier. Having acknowledged the significance of learning both traditional and modern knowledge, Syed Shaykh asserted that one’s disinclination to learning is in fact a clear departure from proper Islamic teachings which encourage man to seek and acquire knowledge. He saw that the Malays of his time were simply not interested in knowledge, especially the modern science. He maintained that they showed lack of concern towards intellectual learning, but were instead keen on pursuing leisure (Alhady 1907).

It is important to mention here that the term ‘Malays’ should not be referred to all Malay traditionalists. At that time, there is a segment of the Malay traditionalists, who also attacked their community for the latter’s wrong religious concept of predetermination and lack of interest to work hard. This group of Malays also encouraged their community, who were in deep slumber, to be armed with high education. We thus could say that several Malay traditionalists, though small in number, shared with the reformists several thoughts pertaining to education and religious practice. These, however, were not clearly indicated in any reformist-based magazine of the time.

The Malays’ negative attitude towards modern science was almost similar with that of the Muslim in other countries. According to Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muslims were not inclined towards knowledge. Further, he felt that Muslims were more inclined towards religious knowledge rather than recently found knowledge. He, as maintained by Sheikh Jameil, believed that all branches of knowledge including modern science are critical for the development of the Muslims and for their ability to compete with nations, especially the West. He saw that the Western domination over Muslims came about through their advance in learning and education, and the Muslims’ decline to engage themselves in these domains (Ali 2002). It follows from here that the acquisition of all disciplines of knowledge was seen absolutely necessary as knowledge was regarded as a tool to develop and to compete with other nations.

As far as the Malays were concerned, their negative attitude towards knowledge, as Syed Shaykh claimed, prevented them from recognising the triumph of past generations of Muslim and their great contribution in science and technology. As such, he highlighted the significance of knowledge in Islam when he says:

Two hundred years after Islam was brought to the world it was apparent that countries which had come under Islam were prosperous and advanced. The Muslims and their leaders did not neglect any branch of knowledge. On the contrary, they not only learned but also wrote and elucidated their findings for the benefit of humanity as a whole... the progressive movement of the Muslims served every branch of knowledge which could cross the mind, be seen by the eye, or be achieved by human beings (Alhady 1930b).

Being convinced in the capability of the Malays to develop in their own land, he said, “The Malays are people who possess the noblest feelings and intentions... Now those who are in the best position to draw them to the way of truth, the straight path leading to a good communal life in this world as required by Islam, or as required by God and His Prophet, are the religious leaders” (*al-Ikhwan* 1928b). However, he believed that the religious leaders were teaching false religious doctrine relating to knowledge. Syed Shaykh attributed the malaise of the Malays of his time to the teachings of these scholars.

Syed Shaykh blamed the Malays’ inclination to one-sided knowledge on those traditionalist scholars, who claimed that Islam called upon its believers to learn only the religious knowledge. Apart from their emphasis on learning religious knowledge alone, advocates of the traditional opinion did not encourage the quest for modern science. He claimed that from their viewpoint, seeking modern science that could improve the mind and benefit man materially was regarded as useless and unrelated to Islam. The modern science was also regarded as non-compulsory

knowledge and it was deemed as only a collective duty of the community (*fard kifayah*). According to Syed Shaykh, the traditionalists argued that man's effort with the use of that knowledge in this world is futile and vain as it is unrelated to Islam. Syed Shaykh maintained that they thought that "the highest of beneficial knowledge is to be able to recite in Arabic *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*" (In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful) (Alhady 1930b). Reading through Syed Shaykh's works, one finds that he simply used the term 'Malay religious leaders' to refer to the traditionalist scholars.

Syed Shaykh did not make any differentiation between true traditional scholars and those who taught false religious teachings. It is probably right to say that he was in fact not in line with those who were in astray and who taught religious teaching that was incompatible with Islam. However, true scholars, whether they were traditionalists or modernists, were "those who were in the best position to draw the Malays to the way of truth," as required by Islam. Islam, as Syed Shaykh believed, gives man the freedom to acquire modern science as much as the traditional knowledge. It requires them to learn knowledge developed by other nations if it is sound and useful to their own development (*al-Ikhwān* 1928a). This view on the permissibility of learning any useful knowledge concurs with al-Ghazali's principle on knowledge when he says, "be advised then that knowledge is not held to be blameworthy in itself. It is only regarded as such in the eyes of men, for of the three reasons: when it leads to any harm, when it is mostly harmful and when its pursuit does not benefit the practitioner any real scientific advantage" (al-Ghazali n.d.b; al-Ghazali 1997).

The compulsion of learning religious knowledge and the necessity of acquiring modern science, as demanded by Islam, prompted Syed Shaykh to insist on giving equal opportunity for boys and girls to learn both traditional and modern knowledge. He says, "Some of the Malays are aware of the necessity of giving better education for their sons. But, how about parents who have daughters; most of them [daughters] could only cook and do household work... how many of them are able to serve up their husband with 'intellectual meal' [knowledge]?" To him, girls could carry out the household task and the duties towards their husband successfully if they are armed with "knowledge that is congruent with their time, whether it is religious knowledge or the modern" (*al-Ikhwān* 1926b). It could be deciphered from here that Syed Shaykh's ideas on knowledge were targeted more towards the affairs of the Malays in Malaya. It could be understood that to his mind, the mastery of various branches of both the traditional and modern knowledge was to contribute towards the Malays' achievement and progress in this world.

The penetration of modern science into the Muslim world is of utmost relevance to that time in the eyes of several traditionalists in Malaya. In *Pengasuh* of 1918, Muhammad Daud Fatani called upon the Malays to benefit from what is good from the Europeans while avoiding their negative influences. He maintained that the Malays were thus to equip themselves with various knowledge that may benefit themselves and the society (Muhammad Daud 1918). It is significant to reiterate that the periodical called *Pengasuh* belonged to the traditionalists, who at times attacked the Malays for the latter's wrongful religious understanding that includes the wrong perception pertaining to one's acquisition of knowledge. Muhammad Daud's opinion that the Malays were to be armed with knowledge that are deemed as useful for themselves and the society is probably in reaction to the Malays' obsession in one-sided knowledge, as claimed by Syed Shaykh. The Malays consequently were behind in terms of material progress.

The view that the Malays were in backwardness due to their opposition to learn all knowledge was similar to that of Muhammad 'Abduh's, who identified that the shortcomings of Muslims as being closely related to their restriction of only learning the traditional science. 'Abduh showed his keen awareness of the need to teach modern science together with the traditional knowledge when he was teaching at al-Azhar in the late 1870s (Badawi 1978). This thought on the significance of modern science could be an influence of his mentor, al-Afghani, who promoted the learning of modern science. In a lecture, al-Afghani attacked the traditional religious scholars for their hostility towards modern science. The scholars, according to him, divided science into two parts; they are Muslim science and European science. Therefore, they forbade others to teach some of the useful science. al-Afghani, as mentioned by Sheikh Jameil, maintained that those who forbade science and knowledge in the belief that they are safeguarding the Islamic religion were really the enemies of that religion (Ali 2002).

It is almost clear that the reformists were concerned with the dissemination of modern knowledge amongst the Muslims. The importance of modern science could be discerned from the statement of 'Abduh as he says:

If this is our position in relation to disciplines which grew in Muslim environments for the last thousand years and which were inherited by us, what I wonder will be our position in relation to the new and useful sciences which are

essential to our life in this age and which is our defence against aggression and humiliation and which is further the basis of our happiness, wealth and strength. These sciences we must acquire and we must strive towards their mastery (Rida 1931).

The quest for modern knowledge would in fact bring modernization and progress in any nation. According to Syed Shaykh, Islam recognises modernization as a process that could make Muslims becoming more competent and well prepared to march in his time. He believed that the idea is in compliance with the Qur'an (*al-Ikhwan* 1928a) as it says, "But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, nor forget your portion in this world" (al-Qur'an, al-Qasas, 28:77). The verse illustrates the importance for Muslims to strike a balance between the spiritual and material aspects of life and this includes the acquisition of both religious and modern science.

### Conclusion:-

It can be concluded that although the reformists supported modernization relating to the acquisition of knowledge, for examples, in acquiring modern science, they, however, opposed westernization. Syed Shaykh himself believed that westernization, which implies that one embodies a westernized character, behaviour, ideas, belief, and worldview, may stray the Muslims from Islam. This could be deciphered from his statement when he says, "O you Muslim people of the East, who are deceived by the many influences from the West, you will stray far away from their own religion and you are in a state of loss" (*al-Imam* 1906). Such a deception of the West may be referred to the English schools, which played a role in disseminating missionary work among the Muslim people in Malaya. This probably compelled Syed Shaykh to stress on the acquisition of both religious and modern science in order to have a balance between spiritual and material aspects of life.

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