



Essential Principles for Reviving the Ideal Ummah in the Exegetical Thought of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asad Abadi

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi was a prominent intellectual of the modern era, active during a period marked by foreign domination over Islamic lands and widespread socio-political upheaval among Muslim societies. His approach to Qur'anic interpretation signaled the emergence of a socio-reformist paradigm—commonly described as contemporary, guidance-oriented, and educational in nature—which significantly influenced subsequent exegetes. This study aims to extract and analyze Qur'anic references and insights within Sayyid Jamal's writings to reconstruct his vision of Qur'anic thought concerning the foundations of civilizational progress and the attributes of a reformed Ummah. Employing an analytical-descriptive methodology, the research demonstrates that Sayyid Jamal viewed the early Islamic Ummah as a model of spiritual and social excellence. He endeavored to revive this ideal by reinterpreting Qur'anic verses and identifying the key drivers of national advancement. The study ultimately proposes fifteen principles for achieving an ideal Ummah, classified into theoretical and practical dimensions. Central to Sayyid Jamal's thought is the pivotal role of Qur'anic scholars and exegetes, who, beyond intellectual and theoretical competence, are called to active societal engagement. These scholars must first comprehend the pressing challenges facing their communities and then strive to address them across political, educational, and social arenas.
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1. Introduction

1-1. Problem Statement

Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi advanced groundbreaking and influential ideas in the field of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) during the modern era, significantly shaping the hermeneutical approaches of later interpreters. Although he did not produce a comprehensive or independent Qur'anic commentary, his exegetical thought can be systematically reconstructed through a critical examination of Qur'anic references and interpretive insights dispersed throughout his writings. At the core of al-Asadabadi's thought was the belief that the early Muslim community (*al-Ummah al-Ūlā*) represented the ideal model of Qur'anic fidelity, attaining civilizational elevation (*ta'ālī*) and social perfection (*takāmul*) through their earnest implementation of divine guidance.

1-2. Purpose

This study aims to identify and systematize the foundational principles for reconstructing the "Ideal Ummah" (*al-Ummah al-Mī'yār*) within the exegetical framework of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi.

1-3. Research Question

What are the essential principles for reviving the Ideal Ummah according to Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi?

1-4. Hypothesis

Al-Asadabadi proposed a dual-axis framework for the reconstruction of the Ideal *Ummah*, integrating epistemic-theoretical principles—such as a hermeneutics of civilizational advancement—with practical-behavioral principles focused on sociopolitical reform. This model aims to emulate the excellence of the early Islamic *Ummah*.

1-5. Background

Previous scholarship on Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi has primarily focused on two main areas:

1. His role in Islamic revivalism (*al-Šāhwah al-Islāmiyyah*) and his broader intellectual legacy—including critiques of colonialism and advocacy of pan-Islamism.
2. His exegetical methodology in relation to both classical and modern *tafsīr* traditions.

Notable studies include:

Shiroudi (2019), *Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi and the Foundations of Islamic Civilizational Revival*; Highlights al-Asadabadi's call for a religiously grounded caliphate (*khilāfah dīniyyah*) as the foundation for cultivating a virtuous and just society.

Asdaqpur (2019), *An Analysis of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi's Qur'anic Views* (and the related 2016 article, *His Exegetical Opinions and Their Social Dimensions*); Emphasizes his reformist vision centered on Islamic unity (*wahdat al-ummah*), employing documentary analysis to identify Qur'anic conditions and obstacles to communal solidarity.

Al-Dughamin (2005, 2007) *Modernist Trends in Sayyid Jamal's Qur'anic Thought* examines his hermeneutical objectives and methodological innovations. *His Impact on Contemporary Exegesis* traces his influence on later reformers such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida, while engaging with contemporary critiques.

Gap in the Literature: Despite these valuable contributions, prior studies tend to either:

- Focus on his philosophy of history, particularly concerning civilizational decline and revival; or
- Analyze his exegetical style and hermeneutics in relative isolation from their practical applications.

Contribution of This Study: This research bridges the existing gap by integrating both dimensions. It:

- Reconstructs Sayyid Jamal's Qur'anic derived principles for civilizational excellence; and
- Systematizes his applied model for societal reform, offering a holistic understanding of his vision for an ideal *Ummah* grounded in both theory and praxis.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology to systematically examine the works of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi, with the aim of extracting Qur'anic references and theoretical propositions related to the factors of civilizational advancement (asbāb takāmul al-umam). The primary source material comprises Qur'anic citations and exegetical insights drawn from the nine-volume collection Al-A'māl al-Kāmilah (The Complete Works). These data were subjected to rigorous analysis and subsequently synthesized into a coherent theoretical framework.

3. Findings

Theoretical Principles for Reconstructing the Ideal Ummah

Al-Asadabadi's framework outlines the following epistemic and normative foundations:

1. **The Sufficiency of Islam for Civilizational Perfection:** Islam offers a comprehensive system for achieving societal excellence.
2. **The Law-Governing Nature of History:** The rise and decline of civilizations occur according to divine laws (sunan ilāhiyyah).
3. **Divine Testing of Believers:** Trials (ibtilā') serve as mechanisms for communal purification and refinement.
4. **Agency and Determinism:** The collective destiny depends on human choice and effort (jihād al-nafs wa al-ijtimā').
5. **Divine Promises of Revival:** Hope (rajā') is rooted in Qur'anic eschatological assurances.

Applied Principles for Societal Reform

For practical implementation, Al-Asadabadi emphasizes:

1. **Unity (wahda)** as a theological and political imperative.
2. **Civilizational Superiority (tafawwuq dārī)** achieved through intellectual and military preparedness.
3. **Race-Blind Meritocracy (shā'istukrāsiyya):** A rejection of ethnic chauvinism in favor of merit-based advancement.
4. **Qur'anic Governance (hukm al-Qur'ān):** Institutionalizing divine injunctions within political structures.
5. **Justice ('adāla) and Consultation (shūrā)** as fundamental operational norms.

Scholarly Engagement (dukhūl al-'ulamā' fi al-siyāsa): The active involvement of 'ulamā' in shaping policy and governance.

4. Conclusion

Sayyid Jamal's Paradigm

Sayyid Jamal's framework asserts that Islam's ontological supremacy makes the attainment of civilizational excellence possible, though not inevitable. Central to reversing societal decline (inhibitāt) is human agency, particularly the active role of scholars ('ulamā').

This study reconstructs his revival model along two main axes:

1. **Theoretical Axis:** An epistemology of progress firmly rooted in the Qur'an.
2. **Practical Axis:** Institutional reforms that require:
 - **Scholars as Public Intellectuals:** Combining *ijtihād* (independent legal reasoning) with active political engagement.
 - **Elite-Popular Mobilization:** Strategic coordination among scholars, political leaders, and the broader populace.

The Dual Role of the 'Ālim:

- **Epistemic:** Employing Qur'anic hermeneutics (istinbāt) to diagnose and interpret civilizational challenges.
- **Political:** Enacting solutions through legitimate governance practices (siyāsa shar'iyya).

Only such “scholar-reformers” ('ulamā' muṣlihūn) possess the capacity to restore the ideal of the Ummah as modeled during the Salaf era.

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