

Shibli Nu'mani's Contribution to Revitalization of 'Ilm al-Kalām

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Abstract

The present research is an attempt to explicate Shibli Nu'mānī's contribution of *'ilm al-Kalām* which to Muslim is a pivotal matter in terms of both its doctrine and practice. This study attempts at examining Shibli Nu'mānī's views in dealing with religious problems in his community, and how he propagated his ideas in revitalization of *'ilm al-Kalām*. It seeks to discover several aspects of Shibli Nu'mānī's thoughts of *'ilm al-Kalām*, such as the coherent relationship of religion and science, Islamic culture, Islamic legal system, Islamic educational system, Islamic political science, reason and revelation, prophecy, and *tawḥīd*. This study concludes that Shibli Nu'mānī's understanding of *'ilm-al-Kalām* is in line with the teaching of *abl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*, and he was very much influenced by Imām al-Ghazālī's and Jalāl al-Din Rūmī's thoughts. He also succeeded in harmonizing traditional and modern system of thoughts as well as synthesizing the theologian's approach with the *ṣūfī* tradition.

Key Words: *'ilm-al-Kalām, relationship of revelation and reason, prophecy, tawḥīd*

A. Introduction

'Ilm al-Kalām is a branch of Islamic studies which is also referred to as theology. A great number of Muslim thinkers put efforts to reinterpret it in the light of modern knowledge to cope with the changing needs of time. In their opinion, for living intellectual traditions, the task of reinterpretation, reform, revival, and revitalize is necessary to make them relevant and sensitive to the changing circumstance. They felt a need for new trends of thinking since Islamic thought, during the nineteenth century had

faced a multitude of intellectual challenges from the Western philosophical and ideological assault. They attempted to combine religious values with scientific discoveries and to reconcile between reason and religion. Therefore, they have proposed a project of reconstruction of Islamic thought by producing some works on revitalization of *'Ilm al-Kalām*. The issues of revitalization of *Ilm al-Kalām* may be examined in several questions: What are the approaches in revitalizing *'Ilm al-Kalām*? And, what the selected issues related to new approach in revitalizing *'Ilm al-Kalām*?

This article is an attempt to highlight Muhammad Shibli Nu'mānī's¹ contribution to revitalization of *'Ilm al-Kalām*, who approached Western values from the view point of Islam and well-known of his works: *'Ilm al-Kalām*, *Al-Ghazālī*, *Al-Kalām*, and *Sawānīḥ Mawlāna Rūmī*. The major point that will be elaborated here are: His approaches to coherent relationship of religion and science, Islamic culture and its development, Islamic legal system, education system, Islamic political system as well as his new approach in issues of *Ilm al-Kalām* such as reason and revelation, prophecy and *Tawhīd*.

B. The Coherent Relationship of Religion and Science

Shibli gave emphasis on the doctrine of religion in the modern educational system, and did not reject it altogether. He defined Islam as consisting of three aspects: creed, worship and morals.² He viewed that religion is a way of life, the code, the prescribed path in all inclusive term. It includes all the above four aspects namely creed, worship, moral and a way of life, thus, standing for the sovereignty of Allah, acceptance of His authority, law or *Sharī'ah*, and ultimately accepting Him alone as the Lord of Day of Judgment.³ Therefore, religion is not just a set of belief but organic whole, an entity as such, in which theological and metaphysical ideas constitute an important

¹ Muhammad Shibli Nu'mānī was born in Bindwal, Azamgarh district, India, on the 3rd of June, 1857 C.E. His first teacher, Hakim Abdullah (d. 1890) said that the sings of perfection and love for literature were found in Shibli from beginning. See. Shibli Nu'mānī, *letter to Habiburrahman Sherwani*. 4th ed. (Azamgarh: Makātib-I Shibli, Dār al-Muṣannifin Shibli Academy, 1966).

² Anis Ahmad, *Two Approaches to Islamic History, A Critique of Shibli Nu'mānī's and Syed Ameer'Alī's Interpretations of History*, (Philadelphia: Temple University, Ph.D Thesis, 1980), 188.

³ Ibid, 186.

part but are not the be-all and end-all.⁴ Shiblī stressed that the best educational system should be harmonised between new and old system together,⁵ keeping the good of the old heritage system and taking into consideration the new and better one. Hence, the Muslim *ummah* actually need for revitalization in '*ilm al-Kalām* in order to face the challenges, as Sayyid A'Imad Kh'En said:

"Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology ('*ilm al-kalām*), whereby we should either refute doctrine of modern sciences, or undermine their foundation, or show that they are in conformity with Islam".⁶

In approach of modern science, Shiblī asserted to learn English language in order to defend Western ideas, and also '*ilm al-kalām* to revive Muslim's interest in the pristine civilisation that could provide the reformist model alternative to the model of Western civilisation. The aim of his new trend of thinking is to restrict sweep of Western civilization.⁷ Therefore, the consideration that assumes sciences and religion cannot be a trend of development is fault declaration.

This approach is an effort to build the best attitude in the soul, body and thought of Muslims in order to be the best *ummah*. Shiblī pointed out that subject matters and scopes of Greek philosophy cannot answer questions that are related to divinity such as, the existence of God, evidence of life after death, the reality of good and evil, or the truth of reward and punishment. The concerns, according to materialist scientists, are outside the realm of experiment and observation. Hence, they do not accept metaphysics as a form of knowledge. Hence, Shiblī stated that; 'take the non-existence of knowledge to mean the knowledge of non-existence'. Accordingly, '*ilm al-kalām* is included as one of the important disciplines for Muslims to learn in order to know the truth of knowledge based on the Islamic worldview.

⁴ Ibid, 110.

⁵ H.A. Mukti Ali, *Alam Pemikiran Islam Modern di India dan Pakistan*, (Jogjakarta: Mizan, 1993) 1st Ed, 135.

⁶ Faḍ al-Rahman, *Islām*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 2nd Ed, 217.

⁷ Qamar Hasan, *Muslim in India; Attitudes Adjustment and Reaction*, (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987), 16.

C. Islamic culture and its development

Let us now turn to Islamic culture, Shiblī interpreted an Islamic culture may be reviewed on content of the Qur’anic revelation of *wahy* and the nature of prophethood in Islam. In the Qur’an as revelation, in which he emphasized that the Qur’ān has to be the central source of inspiration and action in Islam. No other objects are more important and valuable toward the Muslim attitude and behavior except those from the Qur’ān. It is the bedrock of the Muslim’s faith, the corner stone of his conscious life. It is the work of God in His Own words.⁸ Consequently, the uniqueness of the Qur’ān as “divine writ” implies, according to Muslim scholars, that the “writ” as such cannot be rendered into translation. This does not mean that the meaning of the book cannot be communicated in other languages. Therefore, the Qur’ān then informs us that the Prophet (p.b.u.h), with all possible care and responsibility, communicated the revelation. He did not substitute, alter, delete, or add a single letter to it. “And recite that which has been revealed to you of the Scripture of your Lord. There is none who can change His words...” (*al-Qur’ān*, 18:27). Here, Shiblī presented the classical view that the Qur’ān being the *kalām Allāh* (Allah’s speech) and a miracle, contains only divine writ and, as such, is not translatable.⁹

Regarding the nature of prophethood in Islam, he hold that prophethood is neither a product of some kind of mystical experiences that were achieved or acquired by individual effort. On this aspect, Shiblī provided us with a systematic and in depth review of positions taken by classical Muslim thinkers. This includes al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Maskawiyh, al-Rawandī, al-Ash’arī, al-Rāzī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ḥazm, and Shāh Walī Allāh.¹⁰

Shiblī further tells us regarding family into specific topics such as role of Moslem women, legal right and polygamy. Perhaps instead

⁸ Muhammad As’ād, *The Meaning of al-Qur’ān*, vol 1, (Macca, The Muslim World League, 1964), p. XIX

⁹ Amīr ‘Alī, *The Spirit of Islām*, (London, Chatto and Wisdus), 351. In another logical consequence of the temporal origin of *wahy* (revelation), Amīr ‘Alī suggests a differentiation between “qualitative” and “quantitative” prohibition in the Qur’an such as *ṣalāh*. He interprets *ṣalāh* in a rather confusing way as “presence of the heart”. It is similarly with Shiblī interpret *ṣalāh* as five time obligatory prayer prescribed by *al-Qur’ān* and *al-Sunnah* in a give form, (Anis Ahmad, op.cit, 119).

¹⁰ Shiblī, *al-Kalām*, (Karachi: Mas’ūd Publishing House, 1976), 214-250, quoted by Anis Ahmad, op.cit, 119)

of dealing at systematic and historic level, he was simply responding to certain criticism made by Western Orientalists.¹¹ On role of Muslim women can be divided into two major categories. The first is dealing with the ideal-historic aspect and the second is dealing with the contemporary situation of women in Muslim societies. He interpreted marriage as the most natural relationship between male and female at a systematic level. One major reason for marriage is to achieve *sakīnah* (peace), *mawaddah* (love) and *rahmah* (bounty and blessing of Allah).¹² These philosophical principles do not only provide a healthy basis for family life but also help in structuring a society with moral and ethical orientation. In the legal right and status enjoyed by a Muslim female before and after her marriage, Shiblī dealt with various questions such as *ṭalāq*, children upbringing, and so on.

As a historian, Shiblī thought that it was his responsibility to correct some historic misconception of the most representative and authentic spokesmen for the Western-educated elite. He confined his discussion to two basic historic questions. First, Islam enjoins the covering of face and other parts of the body. Second, Islam permits free mixing of the sexes in social activities. Dealing with the first issue, he showed that even in pre-Islamic Arabia, noble families observed *ḥijāb*, such as, covering the face with a veil and covering the whole body with a loose dress. Naturally, it observed nobility in front of strangers. He defined two aspects of *ḥijāb*: i) covering of the face and the whole body, ii) participation in mixed gathering¹³. Therefore, he supported the idea that Muslim women, though observing *ḥijāb*, have been throughout history active in social life.

Next, in issues of war and peace in Islam, Shiblī recognised the necessity of war not only in self-defence but also for the establishment of justice and security. He agreed that one of the major objectives of Islam was to end exploitation and injustice in Arabia as well as in other lands. He called this necessity as the establishment of "*tawāzun and tawāsut*" (equilibrium and moderation).¹⁴

Meanwhile, Shiblī said that one of the essential of progress is that the political system should be democratic. Islam laid so much

¹¹ Anis Ahmad, 121

¹² Shiblī, *al-Kalām*. (Lucknow, 1906). Mas'ud Publishing House, 262.

¹³ Shiblī, *Ma'qulāt*, vol I, (Azamgarh: 1954). Matba' Ma'ārif, 263.

¹⁴ Anis Ahmad, op. cit, 131.

stress on this that it ordered the Prophet (p.b.u.h) himself to consult his followers, although no such consultation was necessary in the presence of revelation. To further strengthen this principle, the Qur'an laid down that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Muslim is that they consult each other in all affairs.¹⁵ Praising the governmental system of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, Shiblī said that his system agreed with the principle laid down by Islam.¹⁶

Shiblī stressed on the importance of public virtues as against private personal virtues. He said that one of the major causes for the progress of English, France, and Italy nations is that they accorded recognition to the public workers. If a person has done in affairs of his personal life, he may be a wicked man. Commenting on this, He saw that in our own country if someone dedicates his life for his nation, the nation will never talk of his virtues but will always have an eye on his personal foibles.¹⁷ From that point, he aimed to elaborate that the virtues of man who have dedicated to his nation must be preserved as a respect of his virtues towards the nation. Therefore, building the proper nation should be formed in a true nationality. Shiblī said that nationality intimately bound up with religion. The word 'Muslim' does not refer to any race, family, or country or any population, rather Muslim nationality depends on religion. Once religion is taken away, Muslim nationality goes to pieces.¹⁸

On relations with non-Muslims, Shiblī elaborated on the justification of *jizyah*. He said that under the Islamic political systems, all Muslims were expected to serve in the army so no security tax was charged.¹⁹ He demonstrated that Islam strongly protects the rights of non-Muslims. Islamic law accordingly guarantees the sanctity and protection of life, property, honor, and freedom of a *dhimmi*, "...if a *dhimmi* is killed by a Muslim, the latter is liable to the same penalty as in the reverse case".²⁰

Shiblī was fully aware of the Islamic history and the practice of slavery in Judeo-Christian tradition. He interpreted the practice

¹⁵ Shiblī, *al-Kalām*. (Lucknow, 1906), 236, quoted by Mazheruddin Siddiqi, op.cite, 123

¹⁶ Shiblī, *Maqālāt*, vol IV, (Azamgadh, 1934). Matba' Ma'ārif, quoted by Mazheruddin Siddiqi, op.cite, 124

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Shiblī, *al-Kalām*. (Aligarh), 2. ibid, 145.

¹⁹ Shiblī, *Maqālāt*, vol IV, 225. quoted by Anis Ahmad, op.cit, 119

²⁰ Amīr 'Alī, *The Spirit of Islām*, (London, Chatto and Wisdus), 275.

of slavery during the life-time of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his companion by pointing out that the moral pressure placed by Islam contributed more to the total elimination of slavery than any legal steps taken to counter the problem.²¹

In Shiblī's essay about the rights of non-Muslim in a Muslim State, he listed eleven assurances given by the Prophet (p.b.u.h) to the non-Muslim inhabitants of Muslim territories. The non-Muslims were granted security of life and property in which they were assured that no harm will be done to their cross or idols, and their priest would not be dismissed from their posts.²²

Shiblī referred to an incident of Caliph 'Umar's period in which a Muslim was handed over to the relatives of a non-Muslim for *Qiṣaṣ*, the tradition according to which kith and kin of the murdered person had right to take revenge by killing the murderer. In addition, furnished a number of instances of non-Muslims' appointment to the high post of administration. As regard to the living of Muslim in a non-Muslim State, Shiblī cited the example of Abdul Raḥmān bin 'Auf, a companion of the Prophet (p.b.u.h), who migrated to Habbash ruled by a Christian monarch. When the country was attacked, 'Abd al- Raḥmān offered the service of an army of volunteers, kept himself informed about the proceeding of war and prayed for the victory of the king of Habbash. Shiblī quoted the *fatwa* (religious decree), issued at the time of Mongol occupation of Iran and Iraq. It directed Muslims to continue with their religious practices and also reminded of their obligation to the rules.²³

On the issue of eschatology, Shiblī actually did not hold traditional views about it. He said that al-Qur'ān has explained about eschatology in which talking about *malā'ikah* (angels), *waḥy* (revelation), and *waqi'āt al-Qiyāmah* (hereafter) that will necessary condition for being a Muslim. However, most of his theological works *al-Kalām* and '*Ilm al-Kalām* deal with systematic treatment of the existence of God, prophethood, miracles, and topics on moral in Islām. Although when he wrote on Rūmī and Ghazālī's idea on the life hereafter, Shiblī did not give any details of his own stand. However, he declared his disagreement on religious belief with

²¹ Anis Ahmad, op.cit, p. 138.

²² Qomar Hasan, *Muslim in India, Attitudes Adjustments and Reaction*, (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987), 16.

²³ Ibid

Sayyid Aḥmad Khān.²⁴ Finally, Shiblī's approach to Islamic culture may be categorized as an evolutionary approach. He saw that cultural, intellectual and economic evolutions determine the cycle towards better human life. He did not take into consideration negative aspects of evolution.

D. Islamic legal system

Shiblī emphasized on the need to preserve the Islamic culture by stressing the use of *ijtihād* based on al-Qur'ān and al-Sunnah both are considered as vehicles through which modernisation and development as well as new solutions can be achieved; not by breaking away from the past but by utilising past experiences to constructing a new future. He began his article by starting:

“Our opponent have said it hundreds of times before and say it even now that *Islām ka qānūn* (masā'il al-fiqhiyyah) is a dead limb which cannot move by any means; that is, it does not have the capacity for progress and cannot go along with the needs of the time.”²⁵

Responding to this assumption, Shiblī defended that *ijtihād* and *ra'y* can be established based on new customs and circumstances. Hence, the society will change in time but the process of the change should be referred to *al-dalīl al-shar'ī* as the main *naṣṣ*. The custom will be uphold, provided it is common, as the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* (particulariser) of *al-dalīl al-shar'ī*.²⁶ He concerned for the reconstruction of religious thought and revival of Islamic culture in the subcontinent. Reconstruction, according to him, is a twofold process; first, it calls for an analysis of the existing situation, thus indicating shortcoming, weaknesses, and causes for slow development, and second, it calls for delineating of a possible strategy for change.²⁷

Shiblī quoted from Shāh Walī Allāh that a *mujtahid* should have sufficient knowledge of at least five items, namely, the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth, earlier decisions, Arabic, lexicon, and use of analogy.²⁸ This also tells something of Shiblī's own understanding of *ijtihād*. He conformed to traditional view of *ijtihād* that, in the absence of a clear

²⁴ Shiblī, *al-Kalām*, op. cit, 294, quoted by Ahmad anis, op.cit, 141.

²⁵ Mazheruddin Siddiqi, op.cit, 84

²⁶ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *'ilm al-kalām*, 17-19, translated by Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shiblī Nu'mānī*, 49.

²⁷ Anis Ahmad, Op.cit, 153

²⁸ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Sīrah an-Nu'mānī*, (Lahore: M. Thanauallah, 1953), 183.

instruction in the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth, an analogy should be made. In *ijtihād*, he concurred that not only the four sources of *fiqh* (*al-Qur'ān*, *al-ḥadīth*, *al-Ijmā'*, and *al-Qiyas*), but also the usage and custom (*'urf*) of a people should be considered before making new legislation.²⁹ According to Shiblī, both the-Qur'ān and the ḥadīth transcend all other sources of legislation. If a custom does not contradict the *nuṣūṣ* (clear injunctions), it may be used as source of law. The implications of this discussion are as follows. First, the need for new legislation due to changes in society is not a new phenomenon.³⁰ Secondly, *ijtihād* or the use of individual research for new legislation does not grant a legislator freedom from the injunction of al-Qur'ān and al-Sunnah. So long as his deductions do not contradict the first two sources there is no problem. But if a contradiction arises, the *nuṣūṣ* will supersede. And thirdly, even when a *naṣṣ* is the basis of a deduction, the jurist should not depend only on its *ẓahir* (visible meaning), but also take into consideration the *'urf* and comfort of a people.³¹ In his *al-Kalām*, Shiblī approached the problem of continuity and change from a general philosophical point of view.

Meanwhile, Shiblī narrowed down the general philosophical interpretation of the modernity of Islam to a few comprehensive principles. These include, first, that Islam inculcates the idea that man is the crown of all creation based on the Qur'anic verse: "Surely We have created man of the best stature".³² The second, the major principle observed by Islam for the progress and development of human cultures, according to him, is equality.³³ There is no superiority of one over the other due to color, race, language, or social status. The third major principle, according to him, on which Islam tries to build a modern culture, is religious freedom and a democratic political structure. Islam, in his opinion, recognises differences in talents, living conditions, economic status, and so on.³⁴ Lastly, Shiblī discussed the principle of intellectual activity and liberty in Islam. He recognised the fact that for several centuries, a gradual decay has over shadowed Muslim societies.³⁵

²⁹ Anis Ahmad, *Op.cit*, 159.

³⁰ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt*, vol I, 75.

³¹ *Ibid*, 78.

³² The Qur'an At-Tin; 4.

³³ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Kalām*, 314.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 322.

³⁵ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt*, *op. cit*, pp. 80-81.

Accordingly, *ijtihād* is becoming a way of life of Muslim societies matters in which Shiblī wanted to highlight. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) was fully aware that for many new situations, his own companions and those who were to follow them would have to pursue a logical reasoning or *ijtihād*. In the practical realm, due to development and progress in society, the companions did practice *ijtihād*. No one could be more aware of the intent and word of the *aḥkām* of the *sharī'ah* than the first four caliphs.³⁶ *ijtihād* is a methodology for change within the framework of a larger, more encompassing continuity.³⁷ This is why the companions could not dissociate themselves from al-Qur'ān and al-Sunnah, nor was it the intent of the prophet (p.b.u.h) himself when he underscored the importance of *ijtihād*.

Shiblī was on the opinion that some ideas of *ijtihād* have been continued even in periods of stagnation. He thought that, if not *ijtihād muṭlaq*, at least *ijtihād muqayyad* was taking place in all and every Muslim society.³⁸ He assigned a central place to *kalām* (rational exposition of Islam). He interpreted *fiqh* on the basis of a new *kalām* which he has tried to develop. He informs the flexibility, rationality and modernity in Ḥanafi's *fiqh*.³⁹ Finally, Islamic legal system, according to him, lies in the practice of *ijtihād* in solving new problems. *ijtihād* is not pure rational deduction (*muṭlaq*) and the use of *ijtihād* must be based on al-Qur'ān and al-Sunnah.

E. Education system

Since Shiblī worked in the Aligarh University, his residence at Aligarh brought him many benefits. At Aligarh, he became acquainted for the first time with Western ideas and modern methods of research. He realized the need of Western learning for the Muslim and particularly the need of acquaintance with the English language. In his letters which he wrote that he constantly dwelled on the desirability of learning science.⁴⁰ He said that the worldly progress of the Muslims depends upon their learning Western science. Every Muslim child should learn English, but in spite of this, we can find a place for Oriental learning. Thus it was his desire for reviving and

³⁶ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Sūrah al-Nu'mānī*, pp. 272-273.

³⁷ Anis Ahmad, Op.cit, 163.

³⁸ Mehr Afroz Murad, Op.cit, 164.

³⁹ Ibid, 165.

⁴⁰ Mazheruddin Siddiqi, 218.

safeguarding oriental learning that led him to found the new institution of Nadwa at Lucknow. The main objective of founding it, according to him, was to improve and reform the curriculum prevailing in the Oriental seminaries of learning. He said that the present curriculum was defective from the very beginning. The proof of this lies in the fact that the Muslims intellectual deterioration began the very day when this curriculum was carried into effect. This deterioration has continued up to our own times. The 'ulamā' of the past were men of high intellectual caliber and their pupils and disciple could not be compared with them. The next generation touched even a lower mark until we come to our own times when it is impossible to find a scholar of high caliber. This is the fruit of the seed sown a hundred years before.⁴¹

Accordingly, Shibli divided few principles for the framing of a new curriculum, i.e. i) The aim of education should be to concentrate on one particular science; ii) The problem of the science selected for study should be studied exclusively. If the problems of different sciences are mixed up, learning in any one science will not reach the degree of perfection desire; iii) When different sciences are studied, one of sciences, should be given priority over others. In other words, some sciences have to be studied for their own sake, while other sciences are studied as means. In existing curriculum, he said, the majority of books contain mere verbal discussions explaining the meaning of words. These discussions have nothing to do with the problems of the sciences on which the book has been ostensibly written.⁴²

Shibli remarked the greatest defect of present curriculum is that it contains a majority of books which deal not with one science but with many sciences. As a result the minds of the students are confused when they study these books and do not know upto the end which science are learned. He also identified another defect of curriculum that a far greater time is spent on instrumental sciences, that is, on sciences which are means to the study of other sciences extremely important to themselves.⁴³

Meanwhile, he established a new group of 'ulamā' who were well acquainted with their traditional sciences as well as the modern

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Shibli Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt*, vol I, (Azamgardh), 146, it quoted by Mazheruddin Siddiqi, op.cit, 219

sciences and the English language. ⁴⁴ He listed four objectives of the Nadwa, i.e. i) to create among 'ulamā' a spirit of self-sacrifice, ii) to produce 'ulamā' who are well acquainted with English, iii) to produce from among the 'ulamā' set of people who are good speakers or good writers, iv) to produce a set of 'ulamā' who may travel abroad and propagate Islam in foreign countries. In Nadwa, the curriculum was improved and reformed. Some books on logic and philosophy which were considered to be of little use were removed from the syllabus. The portion dealing with the Quranic exegesis and Arabic literature was expended. English language was made compulsory. ⁴⁵

In justifying the establishment of Nadwa, Shiblī had to fight with two problems, first against those, like Sir Sayyid, who were opposed to all Oriental education and secondly, against the conservative 'ulamā' who opposed all changes and reforms in the existing system of Oriental education. About the first group. He did not agree with this point and pointed to the fact that in our educational institutions, much less attention was paid to al-Qur'an that it deserves, being the source and foundation of Islam. Therefore, he said that today Muslim are engaged in a hard struggle. Their countrymen belonging to other communities are advancing in the field of Western education. If the Muslims remain backward in this field, their national life will suffer. However, Muslims need English, Arabic as well as religious education due to their identity as a nation is bound up with this education. Muslims will soon realize that for the preservation of their religion and nationality, it is essential to have a team of Islamic missionaries. ⁴⁶

F. Islamic political system

Shiblī did not write extensively on the subject of contemporary Islamic politics. In fact, it is noteworthy that except for a few articles and few references in his letters, all that he has written on politics is in poetry, though he is reported to have talked a lot about it in private meetings. ⁴⁷

In Shiblī's article on Islamic politics namely '*Musalmānon ko Ghayr Madhhab Ḥukūmat kā Maḥkūm ho kar kiyon kar Rahnā*

⁴⁴ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt*, vol III, (Azamgardh), 11, Ibid, 220.

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Mazheruddin Siddiqī, op.cit, 222.

⁴⁷ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Hayāt*, 590, quoted by Mehr Afroz Murad, 57.

Chāhiye," in which he tried to show, based on *al-Qur'ān*, *al-Hadīth*, *al-Fiqh*, and history, that Muslims should remain loyal to whichever government they might have occasion to live under. He saw in the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution described a model of the politics of Islam. In his reaction to the news of Ottoman Constitutional of 1908: "Muslim recalled the lesson of *amruhum shūrā*...Ābd al-Ĥamīd stoned for the sins of Mu'āwiyah."⁴⁸

Politics in India began with the establishment of India National Congress'. In 1885 C.E, Sir Sayyid advised the Muslim against joining it. Evidence concerning Shiblā's reaction to Sir Sayyid's policy and his early attitude towards congress is contradictory. It seems clear that if Sir Sayyid conformed to it in the beginning, Shiblī gradually moved away from Sir Sayyid's position to a more and more pro-congress stance.

According to Shiblī, the reason for the political backwardness of Muslims of this area is that they were kept away from politic, Shiblī said:

"The thing which we took to be politics was an insult to politics. Our politics whose voice fell into our ears, like *Kalimah Shahādat*, since the day of birth was only this: the time has not yet arrived; right now we should make ourselves fit for politics: only education is needed now: our numbers are small, therefore, representative government is not suitable for us. These words were repeated so many times that they fused into the anatomy of the nation...when the word politics is mentioned in the midst of the general body of Muslims, one is astounded to see that the best educated young man repeats them like a gramophone."⁴⁹

From that point, Shiblī had very definite observation on the question of political leadership. He elaborated that the leaders must have leadership skills, free from title, property, wealth and all other ties; is zealous, bold and, at the same time, an expert in politics and long-time student of political literature.⁵⁰

Shiblī was a democrat in Indian politics. Apparently the only authority that he looked for, and managed to find, was in historical precedents of Indian Islam. According to his own statement, the Indian Muslims have two statuses; first, that they are the subjects of

⁴⁸ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Makātib*, 218, *ibid*, 60.

⁴⁹ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Maqālāt*, VIII, 115, *Ibid*, 65.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 182.

the British Government; second, that they are Muslims. He insisted that in politics the former has precedence over the later. Indeed at one place, he went so far as to suggest by implication that religion and politics are no longer combined as they were in medieval times. Therefore, reasonably infer that Shibli was influenced in his nationalist thinking by the progressive Muslim school of politics of Bombay, a counterpart of the Madras and Calcutta school. Thus, he may be a romantic when it came to extra-Indian Islam or Islamic past, but he was a realist in contemporary Indian politics.

G. His new approach in issues of *Ilm al-Kalām*

Reason and revelation

We have so far discussed Shibli's approaches to revitalization of *'ilm al-kalām* in several fields. Here, the elaboration of his approaches will be focused on *'ilm al-kalām* issues. He divided the rational *kalām* into two parts i.e. affirmation of Islamic beliefs and refutation of *falsafah*, *malāḥidah* and other religions. At two different places, he called each of these two subdivisions, to the exclusion of the other, the essence of *'ilm al-kalām*.⁵¹ In the first subdivision, Shibli included the following as the legitimate concerns of *kalām*, such as, affirmation of the Creator, of the unity of God, of prophecy, of the Qur'an as the word of God and of the Hereafter. He regarded the rest as irrelevant or inessential. He mentioned the irrelevant issues such as whether the attributes of God are, or are not, identical to His essence, whether the Qur'an is created or uncreated, whether actions are part of faith or external to it, etc. He also mentioned inessential issues which resulted from trying to determine the nature or reality of the invisible world, namely angelology and eschatology.⁵²

The second subdivision is the refutation of *falsafah*, *malāḥidah* and other religions. Shibli compared the standpoint of *kalām* with the Greek *falsafah*. He said that the *mutakallimun* committed blunders in their refutation of Greek *falsafah*. The issues which they thought belonged to Greek *falsafah* did not really belong to it, and those which really belonged to it were more probably not against

⁵¹ Shibli Nu'mānī, *Ilmu al-Kalām*, 90. It quoted by Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shibli Nu'mānī*, 10.

⁵² *Ibid*, 196.

Islam. Shiblī mentioned, on the authority of al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd, several views which were mistakenly attributed to Greek philosophers, for instance, that Aristotle and Plato did not believe in reward and punishment, and that their interpretation of *wahy* and *ru'yah* was against Islamic belief. Therefore, according to them, *wahy* and *ru'yah* are not the knowledge and it cannot be analysed logically. Shiblī also listed those issues which did concern Greek *falsafah* but were mistakenly regarded as being against Islam, for instance, the eternity of the world. Thus, according to Shiblī, *falsafah* or Judaism or Christianity did not really pose a problem for the science of *kalām*. Refutation of the *falsafah* should not indeed be regarded as proper *kalām*.⁵³

Meanwhile, the reason becomes an actual discussion in which science as a result gained from the role of reason. Shiblī mentioned this discourse on *ta'wīl* that derived from al-Ghazālī. He recognized three historic positions related to the *ta'wīl* namely literal, metaphoric and spiritual interpretations. Those had taken on the question of the reality of *mutashābihāt* (unclear matters) in Islam; he regarded the defining of the scope of *ta'wīl* which increases gradually with the literalists, the common *ash'ariyyah*, *maturādiyyah*, *mu'tazilah* and *hukamā'* as pertinent to this question and to this end he quoted al-Ghazālī extensively. He differed from al-Ghazālī's elaboration of principle of *ta'wīl* in a number of matters. Al-Ghazālī is against employing *ta'wīl* in matters eschatological on the basis of the principle that they are not rationally impossible. Shiblī would not permit this stand to go unchallenged. First, he pointed out that al-Ghazālī's views on his works are meant for general consumption whereas in other works he has covered the secret. Second, he showed al-Ghazālī's inconsistency in those very works where he employed *ta'wīl* in certain matters which are not rationally impossible. Finally, he criticized the concept of *muḥāl* itself from two angles. At best it is a relative term, the referent of which may differ from person to person.⁵⁴

From a great many of the apparently irrational things in the *sharī'ah*, Shiblī would explain two expressions. First, metaphorical expression, for example, the covenant of mankind with God in eternity, God's sitting on the throne, etc. and second, material

⁵³ Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shiblī Nu'mānī*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 30

expression of spiritual things, for example, rewards and punishments. But this still leaves out great a number of those spiritual things or meanings (*ruḥānīyat* or *ma'ānī*) which appear to the Prophets in material form.⁵⁵ Shiblī's quest did not end here, he tried to view Rūmī's ideas that he had already become acquainted with in the course of his earlier works on *kalām*. He argued from Rūmī's point of view on a few occasions. He must have realized the potential of Rūmī or rather of his *mathnāwī* for the new *kalām*.

The mystical rationalism of Rūmī was a logical next step from the philosophical rationalism of the Muṅtazilah and of Islamic philosophy. Shiblī saw that Rūmī achieved this by using *qiyās tamthīlī* instead of the usual *qiyās shumūlī*.⁵⁶ Therefore, he admitted that it was not possible for Rūmī to be completely immune from Ash'arism and consequently he often based his doctrines on Asy'ariyyah's principles. He discovered in Rūmī a better, more convincing way of argumentation, a clearer, more appealing presentation of several tenets of faith. He preferred Rūmī's positive argument and the way that Rūmī argued for that plausibility of resurrection from the process of evolution in life.

This point, Shiblī said that in consonance with modern science which holds that matter and energy are indestructible. Another instance of Shiblī's preference for RĒmian interpretation is seen in the question of the reality of angels. Shiblī had already assigned them to a dream-like existence; he went further and clearly stated with reference to Rūmī that they are nothing but powers emanating from man himself.⁵⁷ However, the most important substantive contribution that Rūmī made to Shiblī's theological thought was Rūmī's elaboration of the cosmic order in which the concepts of soul and evolution played an important part.

Rūmī viewed the cosmic order as denoting a progressive of things, called *tajarrud 'an al-māddah*. It means beginning from the low stage then going up and up. Rūmī made instance of *tajarrud 'an al-māddah* as the following, the first is an element stage of inanimate being (*jamād*) and going through the first compound stage in plants (*nabāt*), things become less and less material as they go up and up

⁵⁵ Ibid, 31

⁵⁶ Shiblī Num'ani, *Sawānih Mawlāna Rūmī*, (Lahore, 1909), 35

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 145-147.

until they reach the animal (*hayawān*) stage where they acquire a soul or perception. The evolution continues in the soul where the human soul or prophetic soul are only stages in this process till one arrives at the pure, sublime God.⁵⁸ Indeed, Shiblī presented this scheme not so much as an argument for the existence of God but at least it can combat the pervasiveness of materialism which is undermining the roots of religion.

God is non-material, non-sensible and most sublime existence. Hence, God is different to materials that could be lost anytime. Shiblī preferred this argument to those of the *mutakallimīn* since it affirmed not merely a cause for the causes but a God with sublime attributes. In Rūmī's concept of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, he saw that to find a satisfactory solution to the problem in this world that humankind should not to ever regard the world as an eternal place even should consider world as created by God. It can be so regarded because it is not an effect but a manifestation of an eternal God. Therefore, Shiblī said that as far as the *falsafah* is concerned, then there is no alternative except for the doctrine of the *Sūfīs*. But even the *sharī'ah* and *nuṣuṣ Qur'ānā* are not against it.⁵⁹ However, he had never asked for scientific certainty in the matter of religious belief. He, in fact, when started with an attempt to differentiate between the quality of scientific and religious truths, he reached Rūmī to have become more convinced of the fact that one can never establish religious truths in any scientific sense; one can only create the necessary condition for beliefs. In short, religious truths are not empirical but emotive.

Regarding religion, there are many interpretations on the contemporary issues of revelations. The revitalization of Muslim's interest in the pristine civilization requires a reformist model as an alternative to the model of Western civilization.⁶⁰ Shiblī dealt with contemporary issues such as fate and free-will under Muslim government. His discussion on fate and free-will is of modern relevance. He began his discussion by stating that Muslims' backwardness had been attributed to their belief in fate. He pointed out that like any other culture, Muslims have to be updated on current ideas, one emphasizing man's autonomy and freedom and the other

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 162-172.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 204-206.

⁶⁰ Qamar Hasan, *Muslim in India, Attitudes Adjustments and Reaction*, op.cit, p. 16

emphasizing compulsion of destiny. He cited Qur'anic verses that support both line of thinking. On analysis of these verses, he concluded that the world is based on the principle of cause and effect. He argued that since man's desire may be considered as the cause, man is the author of his behavior. Nevertheless, since human nature is given by God, He is the Creator (*khāliq*) of actions.⁶¹ Therefore, he reconstructed Islamic thought in the light of a new philosophy that is suited to modern demands. However, he did not ignore the metaphysic aspect of the religion and supported the man's autonomy and compulsion of destiny as the primary lines of thinking.

On causality, Shiblī went so far as to explain the military victories gained by the Prophet (p.b.u.h) of Islam and his immediate successors in terms of natural cause and effect series. He said that it is no doubt true that the incidents in the lifetime of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his immediate successors were the outcome of divine help but who can say that they were divorced from or had nothing to do with the causal nexus. The truthfulness, the sincerity, the devotion, the enthusiasm, the uprightness and sense of justice that were employed in these wars, will produce the same results at any time in history whenever similar virtues display themselves in a band of warriors. If cause and effects had no part in these wars, how could the Muslims suffer defeat in the Battle of *uṣud*, why should thousands of Muslim had been slain in the Battle of *Jasr*, why should Muslim have beat a retreat in Yarmuk.⁶² Therefore, divine help is not impossible even though its occurrence cannot be predicted. Moreover, cause and effect absolutely exist due to God as the Creator of acts in this universe as well as revealing a secret with His power to the beloved slaves who believe that help is coming.

Accordingly, Shiblī explained the divine reward and punishment in the Hereafter in terms of natural cause and effect series. Just as cause and effect series work in the physical realm, he declared that it works also in the spiritual realm. All good and evil acts of man produce their appropriate effects on the soul of man. Evil acts produce a feeling of filthiness and these are the consequences which can never be disjoined from the acts. This is the essence of reward and punishment, and both are the inevitable results of human

⁶¹ Ibid, 17

⁶² Mazheruddin Siddiqi, op.cit, 8.

acts. Generally, people think that because a sick man does not obey the physician, therefore he suffers a relapse. But the real cause of the relapse is not the disobedience to the physician but the non-observance of certain rules, for example, non-observance of dietary regulation. Suppose the physician does not warn the sick man against the non-observance of dietary regulation, still such non-observance is bound to have its effect. Similarly, even if God had not prohibited the commission of sins, the commission of sins would have brought the appropriate punishment.⁶³

Prophecy

In the prophecy, Shiblī hold neither product of some kind of mystical experience nor can it be achieved by individual effort. He also did not deny the possibility and occurrence of miracles like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's principle in which the possibility of miracles is rejected. Probably, because he is being more thoroughly consistent that he did not make the illegitimate distinction between *'ādat* and natural law.⁶⁴

Regarding prophecy, prophets have the extra ordinariness of mystical experience (*kharq al-'ādat*) as compared to human being, such occurrence cannot be denied. Shiblī said:

Kharq al-'ādat is a necessary element of all religions, and it cannot be denied that in Islām too there is some trace of it....no doubt, the Ash'ariyah excess in this matter has gone to the extent of childish superstition, but total denial (of miracles) is also nothing short of obstinacy.⁶⁵

Shiblī took the modern Group (*firqah jadīdah*) for denying the occurrence of contrary position to the credulous Muslims by indulging in *ta'wīl* of al-Qur'ān and appeared the problem in determination of law of nature. He answered that the investigation and experiment of modern science have discovered hundreds of laws of nature which were totally unknown before. He said that things which were regarded as impossible are being proven to be possible.⁶⁶ In this connection, he pointed out the results of experiments in spiritualism.⁶⁷ He said:

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shiblī Nu'mānī*, op.cit, 25.

⁶⁵ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Kalām*, 115

“No intelligent person can deny the *khawāriq al-‘ādat*, but the difference is that superstitious and credulous people believe that they happen directly by the *qudrat* of God and the elite (like al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, Shāh Walī Allāh and Ibn Sīnā) believe that since everything in this world is bound up with causes, therefore, there is one reason or another for these *kharq al-‘ādat*”.⁶⁸

Shiblī suggested on the authority of Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī that the miracle of the Prophets occurred due to their developed psychic power.⁶⁹ Several ‘*ulamā’*’, such as, Qaffāl, Abū Muslim Iṣfahānī, and Abū Bakr Aṣamm argued that it occurred as a specific miracle, but Shiblī would not take it as a miracle, not to speak impossible things that are affirmed by Ash’ariyah and the general Muslims.⁷⁰ Although Shiblī admitted the prophecy with qualification, the possibility and occurrence of miracles, he still would not regard them as proof of prophecy. He viewed that not only can miracle be offered as proof of prophecy but it has no essential relationship with prophecy. Accordingly, he said following Rāzī’s hypothetical objector, it has nothing to do with the prophet’s ability to lead people to happiness in the world and the Hereafter. Also, he is fond of quoting a statement of al-Ghazālī saying, “hence, seek belief in prophecy through this method and not through the turning of a stick into a snake or the splitting of the moon.”⁷¹ It is this ‘other method’ which is the object of Shiblī’s positive concern in the question of prophecy a method preferred by the *Muḥaqqiqīn*. Therefore, this method is to know the reality of prophecy and its function in human life and, then, to see whether the Prophet’s teachings and his role are consistent with this reality and function.

Meanwhile, Shiblī quoted al-Rāzī, Sh’Éh Walī Allāh, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Ḥazm at length to elaborate his point. The idea is that just as man has many other faculties or power (*quwwatun*) he has been endowed with a spiritual power (*quwwat qudsiyah ya mālikah nubuwwāt*) to perceive the ultimate realities and moral concept. According to Shiblī, the Prophet’s power is not something acquired

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 117-126.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 126.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 128.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 129.

⁷¹ Ibid, 88.

through intellectual processes. It is beyond the realm of intellect and learning. It is inborn.⁷² Therefore, Prophets can be likened to geniuses in other fields of human activity. They are in a sense spiritual and moral genius. It is this genius or perceptive power called *ilhām* or *wahy* which operates as natural instinct in lower forms of life.⁷³

Shiblī is not like Sir Sayyid in pursuit of a natural religion. He showed a tendency towards a human religion. Following his medieval masters but perhaps inspired by modern humanism, he appeared to be turning the God-man relationship into a man-God relationship. It seems that in his understanding, it is man who reaches out to God rather than to man. It is man who is the centre of religious activity rather than God.⁷⁴ To prove the truthfulness of the Prophet (p.b.u.h), Shiblī has written many pages to show the excellence of Islamic teachings and prefaced the exposition with a general discussion of the principles of the Prophet's method of teachings mainly derived from Shāh Walī Allah as well as has underlined, in some detail, the excellence of the Prophet's teachings on the theology, ethics, social code and the principle of civilization as proof of his prophecy.⁷⁵

Tawhīd

Tawhīd produces a qualitative change in the behaviour of man in the realm of society, economy, religion, law and political life. Therefore, *Tawhīd* becomes a methodological of social change. Shiblī did not lengthen his consideration on this comprehensive role of *tawhīd* as a methodology of social change but he presented it as the basics of Islam. He defined Islam as consisting of creed, worship and moral that may modify in existing personal conduct of Muslim in a given society.⁷⁶

Realization of *Tawhīd* in the realm of the individual leads one to liberate oneself from the partricularisms of blood, colour, race, soil, language, tribe, or nation. Obedience to Allah *subhānah wa ta'āla*, the Creator of Universe, and not to one's economic, political, or social interests and benefits, become his one objective in life. A process of maturation in his outlook took place and he liberates himself from

⁷² Mehr Afroz Murad, op.cit, 27.

⁷³ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Kalām*, op.cit, pp. 89-102.

⁷⁴ Mehr Afroz Murad, op.cit, 28.

⁷⁵ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Kalām*, op.cit, 130-133.

⁷⁶ Anis Ahmad, op.cit, 188

the idol of utilitarianism which becomes his ultimate objective and ultimate good. A brotherhood on the basis of *ĒmĒn* and *ukhuwwah* is realized.

Tawhīd persuades a believer to indulge more and more in economic activity, though indeed with a full awareness of accountability in front of Allah *subhānah wa ta'āla* on the Day of Judgment. The significance of economic participation, production and economic action is impressed on the Muslim mind by placing it in the context of an important ritual, as the Qur'anic verse mentioned a relationship between economic activity and worship after *Jumu'ah* prayer:

“O you who believe when the call is heard for prayer of the day of congregation, haste unto the remembrance of Allah and leave your trading. That is better for you if you did but know. And when the prayer is over then disperse in the land and seek of Allah's bounty and remember Allah much that you may be successful”.⁷⁷

Here, the Qur'ān develops a harmony and balance between the spiritual and economic needs of man. Friday is not a day for rest and not a holy day. Therefore, as soon as the prayer is over, the believer is asked to resume his economic obligations. Seeking economic prosperity, in this context, is a continuation of prayer and worship. However, balance is to be maintained. Economic activity, even large scale production, should not lead him to wantonness.⁷⁸

Tawhīd in economic activities can persuade an individual to enter lawful economic competition for spiritual and material purification (*tazkiyah*). This purification is done by *zakāh*. In Islam, it causes wealth to grow as well as purifies earning. It is important to note that *zakāh* is not defined in the Qur'ān as charity but is an obligation. On more positive and constructive levels, the *zakāh* system provides incentive for investments and deters hoarding or any other artificial means for price manipulation. It represents the social justice Islam wants to implement. The social good, welfare of all members in a given society, enjoys centrality in the new socio-economic order created under the doctrine of *Tawhīd*.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Al-Qur'ān, *Ṣūrah Al-Jumu'ah*, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁸ Anis Ahmad, op.cit, 199.

Meanwhile, Shiblī emphasized the fact that the idea of oneness of God is universal to all religions; Islām's uniqueness consisting in the perfection of the idea. Perfect unity of God is also needed, according to him, for the spiritual and moral well-being of humans.⁸⁰ Moreover, he rejected the argument based on biological evolution and the perfect of evil in the world against the existence of a God attributed with power, wisdom, will, justice and mercy. He maintained that evolution, properly understood, is an argument in favour of His powers. He argued that it was impossible to create the good thing without necessarily interfered with the evil thing; however, it should not be judged on the basis of such a short span of life in this world.⁸¹

In the problem of existence of God, Shiblī felt that the belief in His existence is not based on really rational arguments. Hence, he starts by rejecting the old argument from the contingency and movement of the world due to positing the absurdity of infinite regress to which he did not subscribe. The former is all the more unacceptable to him because it further depends on the assumption, unsupported by experience, that matter itself is contingent. He saw that these arguments have the added weakness, that they affirm only a cause of the causes and not necessarily an efficient and powerful God. Therefore, He asserted that belief in God is part of human nature which prefers the Qur'anic argument from harmony in the universe,⁸² and *tawhīd* should be a role in theology and methodology for social change. Understanding *tawhīd* does not merely know the oneness of God as a term of monotheism belief but it means comprehensive understanding in which human beings should get through reason and revelation due to development of the belief and social systems that will influence the education, economy, social or politics.

Tawhīd is that revolutionary principle whose application in the personal, social and religious realms causes a total transformation in the vision and personality of the early Muslim *ummah* (global community). Therefore, no account of the dynamics of Islamic history can be complete without an appropriate treatment and understanding of this principle.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 200.

⁸⁰ Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Kalām*, op.cit, pp. 59-62.

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 57-59.

⁸² Ibid, pp. 30-34.

H. Conclusion

Shiblī Nu'mānī accords the approaches in revitalizing *'ilm al-Kalām* to demonstrate the harmonization of revelation and reason. He considers it to be compulsory for all to reconstruct Islamic thought and revitalize several issues related to *'ilm al-Kalām* in order to set up order in social, cultural, political and economic life of Muslim society. *'Ilm al-Kalām* may be received as revelation which enables al-mutakallimĒn to discuss the Divine message within as well as reason which enables Muslim society to apply it as their welfare in this life. Therefore, the synthesizing between religion and science take role in the life of Muslim society as well as the development of insight to confront further Western challenges.

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