

## The Science Of Kalam In The Indian Subcontinent

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the development process of the science of theology (Kalam) in the Indian subcontinent. The Indian subcontinent is an important intellectual center in the Islamic world in light of its contributions to Islamic sciences since the first century of the Hijri era and the fourteen centuries of experience that Muslims in the region have had with members of other religions. The religious and scientific tradition that developed in this geography has become evident especially since the 12th century of the Gregorian era and has maintained its continuity until today. This study aims to reveal the development of the science of theology in the Indian subcontinent. The study was conducted through a literature review of qualitative research methods. The examinations conducted on how Islamic thought took shape in the Indian subcontinent reveal the decisive roles of political structures such as the Delhi Sultanate, the Ghaznavids and the Mughals in the spread of Islam in this region. These states not only brought Islam to the region, but also played an important role in the formation of the intellectual and cultural identity of this region.

**KEYWORDS:** Indian subcontinent, theology, kalam, history of science

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### INTRODUCTION

The influence of Islam on the Indian subcontinent has deepened and been enriched both by the rapidly increasing Muslim population in the region and by the scientific activities carried out by Muslims. While Indian Muslims internalized the local culture and civilization on the one hand, they also maintained their connections with the geography where Islam was born and contributed to the development of sciences such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, theology and Sufism. They pioneered the spread of Islamic knowledge by providing religious education in the educational institutions they established. The theological approaches that emerged in India and Pakistan in the modern period are based on the rich theological heritage of these regions. The distinctive religious thought structure of the South Asian subcontinent holds an important place in the historical development of the science of theology. The originality that the Indian subcontinent displays in terms of theological thought reinforces the creative role of this region in the history of Islamic sciences. The science of theology holds an important place in a wide range of areas in the Islamic tradition. In particular, the science of theology stands out as one of the fundamental disciplines that determine the character of Islamic sciences. In this context, there is a strong relationship between the evolution of the science of theology and the different stages of the history of Islamic science. The development of the science of theology is intertwined with the different periods and social conditions of the history of Islamic science. As a result of our study, it is seen that in order to fully understand the evolutionary process of the science of theology, its ties and interactions with the history of Islamic science should be examined in depth. The Indian subcontinent is a vast geographic region that today encompasses India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It is bounded to the south by the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, and to the north by the Himalayan Mountains. Due to its geographic location, this region was included in the second climatic system identified by Ptolemy, considered part of the third climatic zone in Ibn Khaldun's climate theory, and classified as the second keshvar in ancient Iranian categorizations.

The Indian subcontinent was connected to the Islamic world via land and sea routes. By land, it linked northwest through Sind, and north and northeast through the Hindu Kush and Himalayas to Transoxiana and Turkestan. By sea, it connected through the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf to Iraq and Khorasan, and through the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden to the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. This strategic position allowed the region to integrate into both land and maritime trade networks, making it an important hub in global trade, particularly along the Northern, Central, and Southern Silk Roads.

Throughout history, the geopolitical and economic significance of the region prompted various civilizations to attempt to reach and control it. Prominent leaders such as Alexander the Great, Mahmud of Ghazni, Timur, and Babur undertook campaigns with this goal, playing decisive roles in shaping the historical dynamics of the Indian subcontinent (Macit, 2024). The region's geopolitical and economic appeal consistently motivated different civilizations to establish dominance, leading to political and cultural transformations. The conquests from Alexander to Babur were not limited to military achievements but also shaped the social structure and administrative traditions of the region. This process reinforced the multicultural character of the subcontinent

and brought significant changes to governance practices. Ultimately, the strategic location and economic potential of the region consistently attracted the attention of major powers, which became a determining factor in the political and cultural evolution of the Indian subcontinent.

Muslims' first contacts with India began with the commercial activities of Arab merchants in the region, and these interactions later took on political and military dimensions. The Umayyad Caliph Walid. During the expansionist military policy of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, the refusal of the Sind ruler Raja Dahir to return Muslim prisoners and commercial goods led to rising tensions between the two sides. Following this development, the Umayyad army under the command of Muḥammad ibn Qāsim conquered Sind, establishing the foundation of Islamic presence in the region, and later advanced to Multan, reaching the borders of the Kashmir Kingdom. These military successes marked the beginning of Muslim political influence in the Indian subcontinent. In subsequent periods, significant Turkic-Islamic states such as the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Delhi Sultanate, Khalajids, Tughluqs, and Lodi dynasties extended their dominion over the region (Işık, 2019). The empires established during this era left a lasting imprint not only through their political power but also via contributions to Islamic sciences, culture, and civilization. Notably, the Mughals built a lasting Islamic civilization in India through both their military achievements and cultural heritage, playing a crucial role in shaping the subcontinent's multicultural structure.

Islam was first introduced to the Indian subcontinent during the Umayyad period under Caliph Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik, with the entry of the armies led by Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-Thaqafi in 711 CE. The Ghaznavids and subsequent Indo-Turkic states facilitated the consolidation and spread of Islam in the region, profoundly influencing its political and cultural landscape. Over approximately 1,300 years of Islamic presence and 700 years of Turkic rule, religious and scholarly activities developed through traditional educational institutions, contributing significantly to the institutionalization of Islamic education (Pakdemirli & Birşik, 2013).

The Indian subcontinent has historically hosted numerous ancient civilizations, featuring significant ethnic, religious, and sectarian diversity, which facilitated interactions among different cultures. One of the most influential factors shaping the region's cultural fabric was the Aryan migration, beginning around 1250 BCE. Aryan culture profoundly influenced the foundational religious and cultural structures of India, impacting the early forms of Hinduism such as the Harappan religion, Brahmanism, and later Hinduism. Interaction between the Aryans and the indigenous Dravidian culture gave rise to the doctrine of reincarnation, which became a core belief system in the subcontinent, and established a caste-based social hierarchy that remained entrenched over time. This cultural heritage extended beyond the Indian subcontinent and manifested in some esoteric Islamic sects in the form of beliefs in reincarnation and social class distinctions (Küçüköner, 2018). This demonstrates the mutual influence between the Islamic world and Indian belief systems.

Before the arrival of Islam, the subcontinent was under the influence of ancient religious systems such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism, with its egalitarian approach opposing the caste system, gained widespread adoption and became the most prevalent religion in the region. Some Hindu communities migrated to Buddhist areas to escape the rigid social divisions of the caste system, thereby embracing Buddhism. However, the encounter with Islam represented a critical turning point in religious preferences. Islam's principle of universal equality, emphasis on social justice, and recognition of religious freedom for non-Muslims attracted broad attention and offered an alternative to Buddhism. Additionally, the Islamic governance model, prioritizing social welfare, accommodating religious pluralism, and upholding economic justice, resonated strongly with the local population (Chowdury, 2023). In this context, the social and ethical values of Islam gradually diminished Buddhism's influence and accelerated the adoption of Islam among the people of the subcontinent.

The religious understanding that developed in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in popular religious practice, revolves around three main actions. Its influence becomes particularly prominent. This religious understanding can be said to draw on the theological teachings of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arī, the Sufi approaches of Ibn 'Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, and the Illuminationist (Ishraqī) philosophy of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī. This intellectual heritage has left a profound impact on Islamic thought and practices in the region. Additionally, local mystical beliefs and practices, rooted in the subcontinent's pagan culture, have played a significant role in shaping regional religious practices.

The experience of kalām in the Indian subcontinent is observed to be of a later period. The region's kalām literature reflects clear influences from the Hanafī-Maturidī, Shafī'ī-Ash'arī, Shī'ī, and Hanbalī traditions, indicating that it drew from diverse intellectual and sectarian currents (Zafar, 2023). This diversity has further enriched Islamic thought in the Indian subcontinent.

## REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Following the death of the Great Mughal ruler Aurangzeb Alamgir in 1707, the forces of long-suppressed anarchy were unleashed, plunging the region into deep chaos. During this period, the political and military power of the Mughal Empire weakened significantly, facilitating the expansion of British dominance in the subcontinent. The collapse of the Mughals accelerated in part due to intensifying imperialist activities by the British, while the resulting political crisis deeply affected various segments of society. The infiltration of foreign elements into the social and cultural life of the Muslim community, combined with the escalation of Shia-Sunni conflicts, further destabilized social order. In 1803, Hindu sovereignty was completely eliminated through a puppet kingdom serving British imperial interests. During this chaotic period, Islamic scholars adopted diverse approaches to the prevailing political situation; some resisted the authorities, while others chose a conciliatory stance. Shah Waliullah is considered a pioneer of the political movements responding to the Mughal decline, and his ideas and calls played a significant role in the social and political transformation of the era (Karasakal, 2016).

Before Muslim political dominance was established in the Indian subcontinent, many Muslim traders, Sufis, and travelers traveled to the region to spread Islam, trade, and cultural values. From the early years of Islam, following the era of Caliph 'Umar, it is known that many Companions of the Prophet reached the region during the periods of Caliphs 'Uthman, 'Alī, and Mu'āwiya. Subsequent generations of Tabi'īn and Taba'ūt-Tabi'īn also sent numerous scholars and Sufis to propagate Islam in the region. From the 11th century onwards, especially Sufi saints and Arab traders began actively spreading Islam throughout the subcontinent. Muslim conquests in the region primarily began in the 12th century and continued until the 16th century, laying the foundation for the rapid expansion of Islamic influence. Early scholars and Sufis preached Islam in coastal regions such as Sindh, Karachi, Kashmir, Bengal, Gujarat, Kerala, and Ceylon. Muslims settled in these areas, established close relations with the local population, and became part of society through intermarriage (Chowdury, 2023).

Sufis played an extremely important role in the spread of Islam. They were not only influential among elite circles but also reached large rural populations, conveying Islam's message. Their teachings, based on tolerance and love, attracted the attention of people from different faiths, facilitating widespread acceptance of Islam in society. Concepts such as love, tolerance, and humility emphasized in their sermons highlighted the mystical and spiritual dimensions of Islam, increasing public interest in the religion. This process became a cornerstone for the deep-rooted establishment of Islamic civilization in the Indian subcontinent.

Alongside the conquests, Sufi orders such as the Chishtiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qadiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya played a crucial role in the conversion of Hindus to Islam. These orders influenced social structures and played a crucial role in the spread and acceptance of Islam, presenting the religion in a way that was compatible with local culture. However, within the Mughal Empire, Islamic belief and Sufi thought were challenged, particularly due to state policies and the influence of Indian religious culture. Contradictory beliefs to tawhid, innovations (bid'ah), and superstitions incompatible with Sharia became widespread, leading to deviations from the essence of Islam.

In the later period of the Mughal Empire, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi initiated a renewal (tajdīd) movement in response to these developments. In 1731, during his murāqabah in Medina, he assumed the responsibility of religious renewal, inspired by guidance from the Prophet. After returning from the Hijaz in 1733, he encountered political instability in India, the proliferation of false spiritual leaders, increasing influence of Indian religious thought on Muslim society, and the spread of innovations and superstitions. Shah Waliullah responded to these conditions intellectually, practically, and spiritually, launching a large-scale reform movement aimed at improving societal morality, purifying Islamic Sufism from local mysticism, and reinstating the Sharia. This effort marked a significant turning point in restoring Islam to its essence and reshaping Islamic thought in the Indian subcontinent (Zhalilov, 2023).

The role of Sufi orders in spreading Islam in the subcontinent represented an important dimension of religious and cultural interaction. During the Mughal period, however, the influence of local religious ideas and the proliferation of bid'ah led to deviations from core Islamic principles. Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's reform movement sought to cleanse Islam of indigenous mystical elements and realign it with Sharia, becoming one of the most important examples of religious renewal. His reform efforts facilitated the transformation of Islamic thought in the subcontinent and inspired subsequent revivalist movements.

The Indian subcontinent has maintained its importance as an integral part of the Islamic world from the advent of Islam to the present day. This significance has been reinforced by both the rapidly growing Muslim population and the scholarly contributions made by this population. Muslims in India, while assimilating local culture and civilization, maintained their ties to the region where Islam first spread, making substantial contributions to the development of Islamic sciences. They advanced key disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), hadith, jurisprudence (fiqh), theology (kalam), and Sufism, and provided religious education through institutions they established. Many of these scholars originated from Central Asia and significantly enriched the region's intellectual heritage. After 1857, the expansion of British political and de facto control in the subcontinent deeply affected Indian Muslims, prompting them to develop new scholarly, social, and political structures to preserve their identity. This period marked a phase of both challenges and opportunities for the Muslim community in the subcontinent (Bulgur, 2012).

The vast geography known as the Indian subcontinent was partitioned in 1947 into two separate states, India and Pakistan, while the region known as East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. Despite some cultural and political differences, these three countries share significant demographic similarities. From the perspective of Islamic studies, they exhibit similar religious and intellectual characteristics due to their shared historical and scholarly heritage. However, notable distinctions exist in terms of political and religious identity: Pakistan and Bangladesh stand out as nations with Islamic identities, whereas India, with a predominantly Hindu population, functions as a secular and democratic republic. Nevertheless, India's approximately 150 million Muslims constitute the largest minority group in the country, representing an important component of the region's Islamic intellectual and cultural legacy. It continues to serve as a carrier of Islamic intellectual and cultural heritage (Birişik, 2004).

Among the significant Islamic thought schools that emerged in the Indian subcontinent, Ahl al-Hadith and Ahl al-Qur'an represent contrasting perspectives, yet converge on a shared fundamental objective: directing Muslims directly to the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Ahl al-Hadith school maintained that hadiths are the primary source for understanding religious rulings, whereas the Ahl al-Qur'an school regarded the Qur'an as the sole binding source, assigning secondary status to hadiths. Adherents of the Ahl al-Qur'an school agreed on the divine nature of the Qur'an and its lack of abrogated (nāsikh-mansūkh) verses. However, they differed in their approaches to interpreting and understanding the Qur'an. Representatives of this school adopted a method based on direct comprehension of the Qur'an, emphasizing reason and individual reflection in the correct understanding of religious rulings (Ahmetoğlu, 2018). In doing so, the Ahl al-Qur'an school both critiqued traditional interpretations and pioneered a text-

centered approach to religious understanding within the Islamic thought of the Indian subcontinent.

## DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC SCIENCES IN THE REGION

The Indian subcontinent, with its rich scholarly tradition developed since the first century of the Hijri era and fourteen centuries of coexistence with diverse religious communities, has served as an important center of knowledge and culture contributing significantly to the Islamic world. This deep-rooted intellectual heritage produced numerous esteemed Islamic scholars whose works and scholarly activities profoundly influenced not only their local communities but also intellectual circles across other Islamic regions. The subcontinent's accumulation of knowledge in a context of religious and cultural plurality substantially enriched and diversified Islamic thought (Karasakal, 2016). The Islamic tradition in the region fostered both intellectual engagement and societal transformation, leading to the development of a distinctive local understanding. These interactions transformed the subcontinent not only religiously but also culturally, linguistically, and philosophically.

From the first Hijri century, as parts of the Indian subcontinent came under partial Muslim governance, it became a hub for scholarly and religious activity centered around mosques and madrasas. Systematic religious education took on an institutional character during the Ghaznavid period. The Ghaznavids established four major madrasas in their capital Ghazni, known as Beyhakiyye, Saidiyye, Abu Sa'd al-Isterabadi, and Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayini. According to the historian Firishta, the viziers and leading statesmen of the period modeled Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni's mosque and madrasa constructions. A formal system was created for these institutions, including structured curricula and classroom arrangements. Under Sultan Masud, madrasa construction continued at a steady pace, with new mosques and madrasas built across various regions of India, further expanding scholarly activity (Birişik, 2004). The Ghaznavid era marked the institutionalization of religious education in the subcontinent and its emergence as a key center for Islamic sciences.

The Indian subcontinent's religious and sectarian diversity gave it a rich and multi-layered cultural fabric. India, with roots in an ancient civilization, became a center of intellectual and societal transformation: encountering Muslim thought in the 8th century and Western thought in the 18th century. These historical processes shaped a complex societal structure that deeply influenced the region's political and cultural identity. In particular, in the last century, Indian and Muslim communities jointly resisted British colonialism, giving rise to anti-colonial movements and independence struggles.

This struggle formed a significant chapter in the collective resistance against British colonialism. It stands as an example of diverse social groups uniting around the ideal of independence (Ahmetoğlu, 2018). The joint efforts of Hindu and Muslim communities against British rule can be understood not merely as a political movement for independence but also as a multidimensional dynamic that triggered processes of societal transformation. In this context, the collaboration of different ethnic and religious groups in anti-colonial movements accelerated the construction of a national identity and strengthened anti-imperialist discourse. Moreover, this period demonstrates that anti-colonial resistance cannot be understood solely through military or political frameworks but must also be analyzed in its cultural, economic, and social dimensions.

## THE SCIENCE OF KALAM

The science of kalam refers to the study of religious creeds (Gölcük, 2016). It is defined as the branch of knowledge that systematically explains, defends, and resolves theological issues arising within Islam using both rational and transmitted evidence (Ardoğan, 2021). Kalam emerges as one of the most important and dynamic elements of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Forming as an independent discipline from the 2nd century AH onward, kalam undertook the role of preserving Islamic creed and protecting Islamic civilization from all internal and external influences. Kalam is not merely a defense of a belief system; it is also an intellectual response to the political, social, and cultural challenges faced by the Islamic world. This discipline arose from the need to rationally substantiate the core tenets of Islam in encounter with various philosophical currents and religious doctrines. The most common definition of kalam, according to its content, is: "The science that deals with Allah's essence and attributes, matters of prophethood and mission, and the condition of created beings from beginning to end within the framework of Islamic law." This definition highlights kalam's theological as well as ontological and epistemological dimensions. Additionally, kalam aims to demonstrate the principles of faith through rational proofs, eliminate doubts, and protect Islamic belief from deviations (Altıntaş, 2003). In this context, kalam is not only a theoretical field but also a discipline that historically contributed to shaping the intellectual identity of Muslim societies.

Kalam is considered one of the primary disciplines addressing the systematic relationship between reason ('aql) and transmission (naql) in Islamic thought. Although its founders are generally regarded as the Mu'tazila scholars, kalam passed through three major stages until the formalization of Mu'tazilite thought. During this process, early discussions on the principles of faith in Islamic society were not limited to textual proofs but were also supported by rational methodologies. In this sense, kalam became an essential field laying the foundations of rational methodology in Islamic thought. Thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun, Al-Shahrastani, and Ibn Maimon analyzed in detail the debates emerging in the 1st century AH, which played a critical role in shaping kalam. Key issues during this period included anthropomorphism, partial free will/destiny, and major sins.

Following the battles of Jamal and Siffin, political and theological disagreements deepened within the Muslim community, creating fertile ground for the development of kalam issues. Scholars participating in these debates not only relied on the Qur'an and Sunnah but also began employing rational interpretive methods. The use of qiyas (analogical reasoning) by jurists in deriving legal rulings was adopted by theologians as a method for analyzing doctrinal matters. Applying qiyas to theological issues provided the foundation for the emergence and development of kalam. This new approach transformed kalam from merely a mechanism for defending beliefs into a systematic discipline for engaging with religious thought.

The emergence of kalam was the product of an effort to balance reason (‘aql) and transmission (naql) within Islamic thought. Initially inspired by juristic methodology, kalam gradually became an independent discipline, assuming the task of explaining and defending Islamic tenets on a rational basis. This process acquired a systematic structure with the contributions of the Mu‘tazila, and various intellectual schools played significant roles in the historical development of kalam (Pashl, 2023).

Throughout its history, the core issues addressed by kalam remained largely consistent, but the methods and approaches applied evolved according to the needs of each period. Kalam scholars drew upon the scientific knowledge of their time while explaining Islamic beliefs and responding to doubts and criticisms, thereby developing both rational and methodical defenses. Moreover, by taking into account the intellectual, volitional, practical, and emotional dimensions of Islam—the last revealed religion—they went beyond a purely defensive stance, enriching the Islamic belief system at both theoretical and practical levels through original thought (Pashl, 2023).

Kalam, when examined in terms of its emergence and historical development, can be considered in two stages based on its primary focus and unique methodology. The first stage is the period during which kalam emerged as a methodology to analyze differences and disputes among Islamic intellectual schools. This period, lasting until al-Ghazali and known as classical kalam, primarily functioned to defend the correctness of Islamic beliefs against rival schools of thought. The second stage emphasizes the effort to preserve Islamic creed against philosophical reasoning and misinterpretations of textual sources. During this period, kalam evolved from a mere method of debate into a more systematic framework for establishing and defending Islamic doctrinal principles (Şahin, 2011).

Regarding the understanding and practice of religion, as emphasized by al-Maturidi, every believer’s Lord is Allah and their teacher is the Prophet Muhammad. In his evaluation of the sources and methods of knowledge, al-Maturidi stressed that rational knowledge (istidlal) is indirect, reaching unseen and unknown truths not directly from things themselves but through observable and known entities (Maturidi, 2007). This approach, which integrates both rational and transmitted evidence, deepens human reflection on existence and truth while providing a rational foundation for religious knowledge

#### 4.1. Kalam Activities in the Indian Subcontinent

The period beginning with the entry of the Umayyad army into the Indian subcontinent and continuing until the Ghaznavids gained full control over the region can be regarded as the institutionalization phase of the religious and intellectual structure. During this period, the foundational infrastructure of Islamic education was established. Particularly after the early conquests of the 8th century, various educational centers focused on Qur’an and Hadith instruction were founded in Sindh and Punjab. Through these centers, as Muslims settled in the region, Islamic sciences—especially tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and kalam—were introduced to the Indian subcontinent and began to develop there (Pakdemirli & Birişik, 2013).

In the Indian subcontinent, many kalam scholars aiming to develop a rational and innovative approach to modern Islamic issues sought to bring about a profound intellectual transformation in education, thereby introducing new methods and content to kalam. Among the leading figures in this process, Sayyid Ahmed Khan advocated an understanding of Islam guided by reason and science, reevaluating traditional kalam methods from a rationalist perspective. Shibli Numani combined kalam with history and literature, making significant contributions to the intellectual heritage of Islamic thought, while Emir Ali sought to reconcile the historical development of Islam with the modern world. Muhammad Iqbal, through his poetic expression and philosophical depth, emphasized Islam’s dynamism, highlighting the importance of individual freedom and ijtihad. Abul Kalam Azad developed a Qur’an-centered understanding of kalam, calling for a return to Islam’s foundational sources. More recently, Fazlur Rahman, with his historical approach, advocated for reinterpreting the Qur’an in a modern context, while Vahiduddin Khan promoted a peaceful and da’wa-oriented Islam to address contemporary issues (Altıntaş, 2003; Kocabıyık, 2025). These thinkers played a crucial role in shaping modern kalam in the Indian subcontinent, preserving the traditional intellectual heritage of Islam while providing rational and systematic responses to the challenges of the modern world. Thus, kalam evolved from being purely theoretical to serving as a tool for social transformation and intellectual development.

Islamic works produced in India are not only valuable for understanding the religious and cultural life of the Muslim community in the region but also for examining the intellectual influence of the Indian subcontinent within the wider Islamic world. In this context, one of the leading scholars of the era, Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi, stands out not only for his scholarly contributions but also for his stance in the face of political developments. During this period, many madrasas were active in Delhi, serving as important centers for teaching Islamic sciences, particularly Qur’an, Hadith, and kalam. Shah Waliullah’s work on the Qur’an and Hadith, along with his major kalam text *Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*, left a lasting impact not only on the scholarly life of the time but also on the development of Islamic thought (Karasakal, 2016). In this regard, Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi aimed to purify Islam from local mystical influences and reshape it within the framework of Sharia, making his reform movement one of the most significant examples of religious renewal. The reform initiatives he led facilitated the transformation of Islamic thought in the Indian subcontinent and inspired subsequent revivalist movements.

#### 4.2. Pioneers of Kalam in the Indian Subcontinent.

The encounter of the Indian subcontinent with Islam brought not only religious transformation but also profound changes in the region’s social, cultural, political, and economic structures. Muslim rulers such as the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, the Delhi Sultanate, and the Mughals influenced the region not only through military conquest but also via scholarly and cultural contributions. During this period, Islamic thought and institutions interacted with the existing social fabric, developing a distinctive character.

With the Mughal domination, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries, reformist ideas began to emerge among Muslim scholars. The Sunni kalam tradition was reinterpreted through the commentaries and marginal notes on the works of scholars such as Devvani, Jurjani, Taftazani, and Hayali, including those by Ijci and Umar al-Nasafi. These works became foundational references for scholars in the region. While this period aimed to preserve classical Islamic thought, it also paved the way for new intellectual explorations.

By the 18th century, with the rapid decline of the Mughal Empire, Muslim communities in the subcontinent faced increasing political and economic pressure. During this time, institutions such as Firangi Mahal and Madrasa-i Rahimiyya adopted a conservative educational approach, assuming the mission of preserving and continuing Islamic thought. Firangi Mahal, in particular, is credited with laying the foundation for systematic rationalist theology in northern India. This institution combined kalam and philosophical traditions, reinterpreting Islamic thought from a perspective rooted in classical sources while adapting to the requirements of the era (Işık, 2019; Kocabıyık, 2025).

In the Indian subcontinent, significant scholarly work was carried out in various Islamic sciences, particularly in kalam. The region preserves hundreds of thousands of manuscripts and printed works that demonstrate this intellectual heritage. Among these, Shah Waliullah's *Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*, which addresses the essential objectives of Islam, has been regarded by Shibli Numani as superior to the works of Ghazali, al-Razi, and Ibn Rushd. The influence of this work is evident in the ideas of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Rashid Rida, and Muhammad Abduh. In this work, Shah Waliullah aimed to restructure Islamic thought within a systematic framework while preserving its traditions. Another of his key works, *Izalat al-Khafa*, examines the institution of the caliphate both religiously and historically, emphasizing that the caliphate should hold an active role in the social and political life of Muslims, rather than being merely symbolic. Shibli Numani's Urdu work *Ilm-i Kalam* also made a notable contribution to the field (Birişik, 2004).

Muhammad Idris Kandhlawi is another prominent scholar in the field of kalam in the Indian subcontinent. His works defend the foundations of Islamic beliefs and guide discussions on kalam. Notably, his *al-Kalam al-Mawsuq fi Tahqiq Anna'l-Qur'an Kalamullahi Ghayru Makhluq*, influenced by Bakillani's *Kitab al-Insaf*, argues that the Qur'an is uncreated, presenting key theological arguments in support of this view (Işık, 2019; Kocabıyık, 2024).

Other major works in the history of kalam and sects in the subcontinent include: Nurullah Shushtari's *Ihkaqu'l-Haq*, Imam Rabbani's *Risalah fi Isbati'n-Nubuwwah*, Abd al-Haqq Dehlavi's *Risalah-i Nuriyah al-Sultaniyah* and *Kitab al-Makatib wa'r-Rasa'il*, Dara Shikuh's *Majma' al-Bahrain*, Muhsin Fani's *Debistan al-Mazahib*, Shah Waliullah's *Wasiyyatnama* and *Tuhfat al-Muwahhidin*, Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlavi's *Tuhfat al-Isna 'Ashariyah* and *Mizan al-Aqa'id*, Shah Ismail Shahid's *Takviyat al-Iman*, Rahmatullah Hindi Kayranvi's *Izhar al-Haq*, Mian Wali's *Insaf-name*, Sayyid Hand Mir Siddiq's *al-Mi'yar*, Sayyid Qasim's *Anwar al-Uyun*, Sheikh Mustafa Gujarati's *Jawahir al-Tasdik*, and Shah Abdurrahman's *Sirat al-Imam Mahdi al-Maw'ud*. These works are invaluable not only for the study of kalam but also for understanding the historical development of Islamic thought and the rich scholarly tradition in the Indian subcontinent (Birişik, 2004).

It emerged as a prominent new research area. The educational methods and approaches of the missionaries encouraged Muslim scholars in the Indian subcontinent to examine religious texts more critically and to adopt systematic and methodical research approaches in Islamic sciences. This interaction laid the groundwork for the development of modernist and rationalist approaches in fields such as Kalam, jurisprudence, exegesis, and history, enabling Muslim thinkers to recognize Western science and thought systems and adapt them to their own religious and social issues (Kavak, 2003).

In conclusion, during the 18th century and beyond, Islamic thinkers in the Indian subcontinent developed modern approaches in Kalam, jurisprudence, and exegesis by taking into account both Western influences and regional socio-political changes. This process contributed to building a bridge between the traditional Islamic heritage and modern scientific methods. During this period, debates with different belief systems and comparative religious studies within Islamic scholarly circles diversified the orientation of intellectual thought and introduced new perspectives to the Islamic scholarly tradition in the region.

In the history of scholarship in the Indian subcontinent, the most enduring scientific activities were carried out by scholars who maintained a moderate stance while taking into account missionary and orientalist approaches. In particular, those working in Hyderabad Deccan contributed significantly to the intellectual accumulation of the period by publishing approximately 150 works and treatises under the *Dairatu'l-Maarifi'l-Osmaniyye*. During this process, a group that included figures such as Muhammad Hamidullah, under the leadership of Camia Nizamiyye instructor Abu'l-Vefa Afghani Kandahari, brought forth valuable works authored by Hanafi scholars. Additionally, the works of scholars like Shibli Numani, Abdul Majid Daryabadi, Abu'l-Kalam Azad, and the late-period exegete Abu'l-Ala al-Mawdudi are among the notable examples of this moderate scholarly tradition (Birişik, 2004).

Important scholars contributing to the renewal movements in Kalam studies in India include Shibli Numani, Syed Emir Ali, Muhammad Iqbal, Abu'l-Kalam Azad, Abu'l-Ala al-Mawdudi, and Vahiduddin Khan. Shibli Numani examined Kalam in depth through works such as *al-Kalam wa limu'l-Kelam*. Syed Emir Ali attempted to present Islam in harmony with the modern world in *The Spirit of Islam*, while Muhammad Iqbal took steps to reconstruct Islamic thought philosophically in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Abu'l-Kalam Azad contributed to the dissemination of Islam in India through *Tercümanı'l-Kur'an*, and Abu'l-Ala al-Mawdudi focused on social Islamic thought in *Diniyyat*. Finally, Vahiduddin Khan developed an innovative approach in Kalam with his work *Tecdid-i Ulum-i'd-Din*, addressing the challenges of Islam in the modern world (Pashl, 2023). These scholars sought to relate Kalam studies to contemporary issues while preserving the universal validity of

Islamic thought.

## CONCLUSION

Since its formation, the science of Kalam has undergone various stages of development, evolving significantly up to the present day. Its historical trajectory was shaped by the contributions of numerous prominent scholars, who developed original ideas and made substantial contributions to Islamic thought. Although periods of stagnation occasionally occurred, Kalam generally maintained a dynamic structure, undergoing the necessary internal changes and transformations. This demonstrates that Kalam scholars played a crucial role in responding to the needs of their time and defending Islamic beliefs. In this way, Kalam has continuously renewed itself both in terms of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and within the broader social context.

In the Indian subcontinent, Kalam developed in parallel with the evolution of Islamic thought in the region, creating significant theoretical and practical impacts. Initially, Kalam emerged as a tool to defend fundamental Islamic beliefs and resolve disputes among various sects. In the Indian subcontinent, however, it acquired broader functionality. During this period, Kalam interacted with local culture, contributing to the formation of a religious thought system unique to India, while also playing a key role in understanding the region's social structure and religious diversity.

The development of Kalam in the Indian subcontinent was particularly deepened under the influence of Sunni, Shia, and Batini traditions. Intellectual debates among these different sects enriched the methodological depth of Kalam. Islamic thinkers in the region utilized Kalam not only as a mechanism for defending faith but also as a framework to analyze social, cultural, and philosophical issues, integrating local and universal perspectives into their reasoning.

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