



MODERNITY: A STUDY OF SELECTED MUSLIM
SCHOLARS' RESPONSE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes Western modernity's impact on the Muslim world. Though the issues related to modernity had been addressed by several Muslim intellectuals and revivalists in the past, most of this was carried out during the period of colonization. The issues related to modernity in the past (during the period of colonization) and the issues addressed after most of the Muslim world has gained political freedom have very different aspects. This thesis examines those issues which the Muslim intellectuals addressed to free Muslim societies. It aims to see the vision of the Muslim intellectuals and revivalists for the cause of the Muslim societies, when this vision is observed from the Western point of view, positively or negatively or both. Thus, this thesis has made its scope to study the ideas of Abul Ā'ālā Mawdūdī, Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Naquib al Attas. These intellectuals and revivalists interacted with current modern Western civilization and became a bridge between the West and the free Muslim societies. This study finds that the impact of their observations and their treatment of Western Modernity somehow are different from the observations and treatment by the revivalists and intellectuals during the period of colonization. This thesis also examines the relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations based on the mutual attainment of knowledge. It sees how great Muslim civilization contributed in the development of the current modern Western civilization. The edifice of the current modern western civilization stands on those foundations, which were laid by the influence of the great Muslim civilization which passed through a long period for the development of philosophy, theology and other rational sciences. The study concludes with an observation, which sees a lack of an appropriate appraisal of the modern Muslim intellectuals and revivalists and finds that there are few shortcomings in the approach of the scholars. It finds that there are many issues, which most of the revivalists and intellectuals did not address and thus their honest efforts to revive the Muslim ummah bring less impression. This study invites modern Muslim scholars to review the ideas of current scholars and modern thinkers in the land of Islam.

ملخص البحث

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل أثر الحداثة الغربية على العالم الإسلامي. على الرغم من أن هذا الموضوع قد تناوله بعض المفكرين والمجددين المسلمين سابقاً، وقد كان ذلك في عهد الاستعمار، ويلاحظ أن تناول الموضوع كان ذا وجهات نظر مختلفة بين الفترتين: فترة الاستعمار، وفترة ما بعد استقلال الدول الإسلامية. فهذه الرسالة تبحث عن تلك القضايا التي تناولها المفكرون المسلمون في محاولتهم لتحرير المجتمعات الإسلامية، وكان الهدف من ذلك استكشاف رؤية أولئك المفكرين والمجددين المسلمين من أجل إنقاذ مجتمعاتهم، وإلى معرفة رد فعل الغرب لهذه الفلسفة سواء أكان ذلك إيجابياً أم سلبياً. لذلك يسلط البحث الضوء على أفكار أبي الأعلى المودودي، فضل الرحمن، السيد حسين نصر، ونقيب العتاس. فهؤلاء المفكرون درسوا ووجهوا عنايتهم إلى الحضارة الغربية الحديثة، وأصبحوا جسراً على الفجوة الموجودة بين الغرب والمجتمعات الإسلامية الحرة. وجد الباحث تأثير ملاحظتهم ومعالجتهم الحداثة الغربية تختلف نوعاً ما عن ملاحظة ومعالجة المجددين والمفكرين الإسلاميين الذين ينتمون إلى حقبة الاستعمار الغربي. وهذه الرسالة تبحث أيضاً في العلاقة بين الحضارة الإسلامية والحضارة الغربية بناء على تواصلهما العلمي. كما تكشف القناع عن إسهام الحضارة الإسلامية في تطوير الحضارة الغربية الحديثة، فهذا الصرح الهائل للحضارة الغربية الحديثة قائم على الأساس الذي وفّره الحضارة الإسلامية العظيمة التي انتقلت من جيل إلى جيل عبر عصور مديدة شاهدة على التطور الفلسفي والديني والمعرفي. ينتهي البحث بخاتمة ترى أن مقارنة المفكرين الإسلاميين المعاصرين في تقييمهم للقضايا العالقة بالحضارة الغربية تنقصها الصحة والدقة أحياناً، فالباحث يرى أن هناك كثيراً من القضايا لم يتعرض لها هؤلاء المفكرون رغم جهودهم المخلصة في سبيل إحياء الدين الإسلامي الحنيف. وأخيراً يوصي الباحث العلماء المسلمين المعاصرين أن يُعيدوا النظر في أفكار المفكرين الإسلاميين المعاصرين نظرة مراجعة وتقييم.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Dedicated to
My Grandfather Shaykh Mawlānā Muḥammad ‘Abdul Ḥaq Ghāzīpūrī (former administrator at prestigious Dār al-‘Ulūm, Deoband, India) and my beloved father Shamsul Ḥaq (school teacher) (May their souls rest in peace) whose lives were full of knowledge and wisdom.

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Blessings and peace of Allah be upon His most righteous and guided servant, the mightiest and the last in the line of His Apostles and Messengers, whose name is Muhammad; May Allah be pleased with his pious companions, his pious concerts, his progenies and all of those who follow him guided until the Day of Doom.

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CHART OF TRANSLITERATION

Arabic letters	Trans. in Roman	Arabic Letters	Trans. in Roman	Arabic Letters	Trans in Roman	Arabic Letters	Trans in Roman
ء	'	ب	B/b	ت	T/t	ث	TH/th
ج	J/j	ح	H/h	خ	KH/kh	د	D/d
ذ	DH/dh	ر	R/r	ز	Z/z	س	S/s
ش	SH/sh	ص	Ş/ş	ض	Ḍ/ḍ	ط	Ṭ/ṭ
ظ	Z/z	ع	'	غ	GH/gh	ف	F/f
ق	Q/q	ك	K/k	ل	L/l	م	M/m
ن	N/n	و	W/w	هـ	H/h	ى	Y/y

Vowels:

Short Vowels		Long Vowels	
ـَ	A	اَـ	ā
ـِ	I	اِـ	ī
ـُ	U	اِـ	ū

Examples

فَرِحَ	<i>fariḥa</i>	الى	<i>ilā</i>
ذهب	<i>dhahab</i>	مكة	Makkah
ديوان البحري	<i>Dīwān al- Buḥturī</i>	احمد	Aḥmad
مؤمنون	<i>mu'minūn</i>	الدليل	<i>al-dalīl</i>
أقرأ	<i>aqra'u</i>	مرعى	<i>mar'ā</i>
ركوع	<i>rukū'</i>	مرجوة	<i>marjuww</i>
الشافعي	<i>al-Shafi'ī</i>	الرضي	<i>al-Raḍī</i>
الرحمن	al-Raḥmān	للاستفسار	<i>Li al istifsār</i>
اليهم	<i>ilayhim</i>	علينا	<i>'alaynā</i>

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the present arena one common use of term ‘modernity’ is to describe the condition of Western history since the mid-1400’s, which has been characterized by the rise of the nation-state, capitalism and industrialization, the emergence of representative democracy and socialist states, the increasing role of science and technology, urbanization, mass literacy, the fundamental rights of man, the equality of all human beings—including the equality of man and woman—and the proliferation of mass media. Amid these consequences of modernity there is an ongoing debate about the relationship between modernity and traditional societies. The debate poses an important question with regard to the Muslims: Is modernization as developed in Europe over the last five centuries desirable for their societies? A second question rises: Do new phenomena such as globalization, the end of the Cold War, the rise of ethnic conflicts, and the proliferation of information technologies, along with the abovementioned characteristics of modernity, make a convincing case for Muslim communities to accept modernity as a package?

Despite the acceptance of modernity in general, there are certain areas where Muslims are reluctant to open their doors completely to modernity because in such areas they want to follow their traditional values and practices; it is observed that the general attitude of modernity toward religion is antipathetic, at least toward its traditional form. The development of modernity in Europe steadily reduced the influence of religion on human behavior and ideas. This trend of modernity poses a secularizing threat to traditional Muslim societies, which have deep-rooted loyalties to

traditional religious values. Modernity's skepticism toward religious traditions is definitely proving an obstacle between Eastern Muslim societies and the West. This blockade has created a rift between the two strong civilizations; a state of confusion, suspicion and uncertainty has brought on appalling experiences for the last several decades.

It is apparent that modernity's approach is extremely limited; it insists only on material and scientific achievements, leaving religions no place for accommodation parallel to it on a societal level. This serious confinement of the sphere of religion and modernity's definition of moral conduct leave scant space for dialogue between Muslim societies and the Western world. Therefore, as the rift between Islam and Western modernity persists and widens, an assessment of modernity has become a crucial necessity. It has become essential that a place be made for the adjustment of religion in its crude form and fundamentals along with the functions of modernity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In light of the present developments, both in Western and Islamic societies, one may argue that the basic assumption of modernity is based upon hegemonic thoughts and ideas. It declares its own standards of human mental, social, economic and even moral ideals. What one observes in the Muslim world is quite contrary to the assumptions of modernity about religion and faith. It is observed that people who submit to God are not placing their creative power outside themselves; rather they develop a tendency that makes them struggle willingly against the forces of hegemony and imperialism, and they are not ready to accept the domination of any force, culture or political power. They present themselves to be genuinely liberated and feel themselves a responsible power over worldly affairs as creative and imaginative beings.

The problem, therefore, is for Islamic intellectuals to adopt rational, empirical and democratic ways and means to change the society around them without losing their spiritual and ethical ideals. They get energy to do so from their faith in God and His guidance. In this entire struggle for survival and development they do not abandon rational and empirical tools. It seems that their response to modernity and globalization is twofold. On one hand, they use rational and empirical intellectual tools to critically assess the underlying ideas of modernity and globalization and the societies that result from them. On the other hand, they derive their basic understanding of reality and of social mores from the Islamic sources, heritage and present Muslim societies. It may be further contended that as the Islamic resurgence has progressed, primarily due to its acceptance of spirituality and claim to universality, it has developed its own idea of modernity and globalization. In this way the Islamic resurgence has dismantled the premises and foundations of modernity and globalization as understood and implemented in the West.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After discussing the problem, the following questions arise:

1. What are the implications of modernity's secular approach; does modernity's opposition to so-called religious dogma and its insistence on rationality and self- defined moral values pose a serious threat to Muslim civilization and culture?
2. Is there any scope for reconciliation between Western modernity and the Islamic resurgence that is taking shape throughout the Islamic world?
3. What are the cultural and social implications and the scope of the process of globalization, particularly for local Muslim cultures?

4. What are the views of contemporary Muslim intellectuals, scholars and reformers of the concept of Western modernity and its impact on the Muslim world?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. to look into the history of Islamic intellectual glory during the marvelous medieval Islamic civilization, which later became an icon for the European Renaissance;
2. to study modernity, its nature, history and basic characteristics, as developed in Europe;
3. to analyze various components of contemporary Western as well as Muslim thought which are causing conflict between modernity and Muslim societies;
4. to explore the causes of the hurdles and stumbling blocks to evolving a harmonious synthesis between modernity and Islam: the cultural and social challenges of the era of globalization.

METHODOLOGY

This study is analytical and comparative and is based on available literature pertaining to medieval Islamic scholarship, modernity, globalization and modern Islamic thought. Essentially, the study undertook critical appraisal and evaluation of some available materials in the area of contemporary Islamic thought and modernity. Thus, the analysis is of both Western and non-Western materials in order to highlight the phenomena of modernity, globalization and Islamic resurgence from a wider perspective.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research proved its significance from the perspective of Islamic thought in the modern period as a movement of self-assertion based on the Islamic world view. For example, in India movements like the Deoband movement of Muḥammad Qāsim al Nānawtawī (d. 1880) began to revive Ahl al Sunnah wa al Jamā'ah. The movement of Tablīghī Jamā'at then developed out of the Deobandi movement. These and the Ahl al Ḥadīth movement brought about a massive revolution of self-assertion in the Muslim community. This research also discussed the broad scope of comparative religion by analyzing the components of modernity versus Islamic thought. It is hoped that the study will contribute to clarifying the process of emergence of Islamic thought in the face of the challenge of modernity and globalization and, further, that it will provide the reader with a useful perspective for understanding the development of Muslim thought in the modern period. The research also showed the relationship between modern thinking that emerged in Europe and the scientific enquiry of the great medieval Muslim intellectuals.

JUSTIFICATION

Research justified its scope through the thoughts of some renowned Islamic intellectuals, reformers and thinkers who have tried to synthesize modernity and the Islamic tradition; this includes: Fazlur Rahman; and those who provided Islam's own worldview against the Western modernity they include: Abul A'lā Mawdūdī, Naquib Al-Attas and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though this research is intended to explore Western modernity's impingement upon Muslim societies and its implications, it commences with the history of Islamic intellectual growth during the medieval period of Islamic civilization and its relation with Europe, which helped shape the European 'Period of Enlightenment'.

Some would argue that, since the basic focus of this research is the modern dialectic between Islamic societies and modernity, it is not necessary to explore the medieval period of Islamic civilization. However, it should be remembered that the European Renaissance and the philosophical inquiries of the Islamic intellectuals of medieval Islamic civilization are closely related to one another. After the advent of the Messenger of Allah, Muḥammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the importance of knowledge was implanted in the Muslim mind, and the period of Arab ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*), which we could call the 'Dark Age' of Arabia, came to an end. The unleashing of intellectual energy led to exploration in new sciences. Muslims came into contact with Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic and Hellenistic philosophies, which had emerged in Greece (Europe), and it cannot be denied that Europe defeated its Dark Age after its intellectual interaction with Islamic intellectualism. That means the roadmap of modernity has a long-distance relation with medieval Islamic glory.

When the researcher began reading and reviewing the available literature on Muslim Civilization, Western Modernity and its impact on the modern world's civilization, he found that there is substantial literature available criticizing one another; thus, instead of opening the door of dialogue for a mutual and healthy co-existence this literature creates more suspicion. No doubt, in this available literature, a large amount of literature comes from Western scholars who deliberately criticize

Islam and make Islam an object of suspicion in their society. Therefore, the researcher sought to make the foundation of review such books which deal objectively with the issues of Muslims and Western societies throughout history and succeeded in the academic arena putting Islam and Muslim societies in their rightful place.

The literature review begins with those books which provide sufficient intellectual evidence that suggests that there are enough reasons for a healthy relationship between Islam and Western societies. Analysis of such intellectual discourses could prove helpful in providing this base that Islam has been viewed as a potential intellectual force by Western scholars, and they have realized that Western modernity cannot entirely overlook the values and ideals set by Islam for the uplifting humanity. The literature review also looks at the work of Muslim intellectuals who based on factual backgrounds critically appraised the ideals of Western Modernity.

An illustrious collection of renowned scholars' writings under the editorial work of MM Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*,¹ successfully traced those Western scholars who had an honest appraisal of Islamic history and invited Western communities to discuss the contributions of Muslims towards the development of world civilization. In this collection of essays, Gustave E. Von Grunebaum's *Medieval Islam*, published in Chicago in 1946, provided strong support to the originality of the Islamic faith. His serious work provides a challenge to anti-Islam in the West and that based on intellectual grounds Islam cannot be demonized in Western society. Similarly, in this collection of essays, we find Kant's affirmation "The religion of the noble and learned people".² MM Sharif's book also quotes the works of Auguste Comte and his admittance of Islam's crucial role in the development of the human

¹ M. M. Sharif, (Ed)., *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963).

² E. Kant, *La Religion Dans les Limites de la Simple Raison*, French Trans by J. Gebelin, J. Vrin, (Paris, 1943).

societies,³ and also, Oswald Spengler's evaluation of Islam as an illuminating and intellectual force necessary for the healthy development of the entire humanity. After the successful Muslim enquiry in rational sciences and philosophy, a bond between Muslims and Europe left an indelible impression on European society. In the coming centuries this European society would come to replace the Islamic civilization as the frontrunners in knowledge, sciences and advancement. The transfer of knowledge which proceeded throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE was a transfer from Arabic into Latin.⁴ This transfer later paved the way for establishing a strong European intellectual civilization which is still dominating the world. How it happened and what it really brought for Europeans is a question for fair discussion, because the empirical foundation of current European society is laid on this pragmatism, which they borrowed from their Muslim masters. Pierce Butler rightly said,

No historical student of the culture of Western Europe can ever reconstruct for himself the intellectual values of the later Middle Ages unless he possesses a vivid awareness of Islam looming in the background.⁵

An eminent mid-20th century scholar, George Sarton of Harvard University, traces the roots of Western intellectual development to the Arab tradition, which was “the outstanding stream, and remained until the 14th century, one of the largest streams of medieval thought.”⁶

Therefore, it is inevitable that the researcher must also aim to study the basic notions of the medieval Islamic intellectuals and their interaction with ancient

³ Auguste Comte, *System de la Politique Positive*, Vol III, 470; see in MM Sharif, 1351.

⁴ Alnoor Dhanani, “The Muslim Philosophy and Science”, in *The Muslim Almanac*, (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Inc, 1996), 189-204.

⁵ Pierce Butler, “Fifteenth Century of Arabic Authors in Latin Translation”, in *The McDonald Presentation Volume*, (New York: Freeport, 1933), 63.

⁶ George Sarton, *A Guide to the History of Science*, (Mass.: n.p., 1952), 27-28.

Western (i.e. Greek) philosophy, for this later paved the way for European communities to learn from Muslims and reconstruct their civilization, which reached its zenith in the 19th and 20th centuries. The historical evidence for the relation between European modernity and Islamic intellectualism will also help contextualize its impacts on contemporary Muslim society.

Despite all these efforts, there is still literature available which is trying to decrease the impression of Islam on the West. For example, a nonfiction work of Fay Weldon, *The Sacred Cow*, is a bad test in which she has failed miserably to understand Islam's stance on the issue of extremism; thus, she proved that many of Western scholars shape their views about Islam based on certain happenings, which unfortunately, they associate with Islamic culture. These critics of Islam do not try to see the original references of Islamic texts and Islamic teachings; what is the response of Islam about such actions? They never try to acknowledge truth from original Islamic sources. Similarly Huntington and Fukuyama in their books *The Clash of Civilization and Remaking of the World Order*, and *The End of History and the Last Man* respectively have tried to give a wrong impression that Islamic civilization is a potential threat to the common world civilization. In their wrong perception of a collective world civilization, they have wrongly depicted Western civilization as the sole civilization of the modern world. This wrong notion appears from their conviction that Western civilization is taking over the indigenous civilizations throughout the world.

They claim that, because of its openness and adaptability, eventually this modern Western civilization will take over the world. Fukuyama claimed that the most ideal method of governance which brings people's superiority over the affairs of the state is Western democracy alone. According to him, all models of governance

have failed to represent public opinion entirely. Similarly, one common language and common world habits of eating, living and dressing are only imported from the West; thus, indigenous civilizations are dying. Huntington believed that Western Democracy, Capitalism and Liberalism have defeated many of the most powerful ideologies, such as, Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism; thus, the world successfully transformed to a normal state of affairs, but a cultural conflict was created. He argued that further conflict in the future will be pivotal to cultural and religious identities. He identified Islam and Muslim Fundamentalism as the most powerful threat to cause future clashes. Amazingly, Huntington viewed the Muslim world and China as potential allies against Western civilization. He identified common characteristics between the Muslim world and China. These common issues, which the Muslim world and China share, are weapons proliferation, human rights, democracy and the conflict on these issues with the West. He thinks that the Islamic world and China will cooperate with each other in the struggle against the universally shaping Western values and civilization.

What Fukuyama observed is that Islamic Fundamentalism is a single competent of Western democratic ideals. He puts Islamic Fundamentalism into a similar category as the West put Stalinist and Leninist Imperialism, but Fukuyama and Huntington both either deliberately ignored or were unaware of the fact that Islamic strength never can be analyzed through those aspects which were the source of analysis of the revolutions of Stalin and Lenin. Fukuyama and Huntington both failed to understand the strength of Islamic spirituality and Islamic fundamentals which govern the ideas and thoughts of the common Muslim. They simply tried to analyze Islam as a synthetic ideology and suggested that the Western powers go on fighting Islam with their material strength. Definitely, this is due to a lack of understanding

that Islam is the most powerful divine irrevocable ideology and is invincible. The West has declared Islam its foe and began an ideological, military and economic war against it, but such misunderstood thoughts about Islam will never make the West successful. Instead they will bring chaos and a state of suspicion. The theories of Huntington and Fukuyama shall be proven false that the world can be transformed into one civilization.

Is there any formula to check and balance man's ambition to conquer the world which is becoming a serious threat to world civilization? Modernity has brought serious dangers to world civilization through its unchecked ambitions. These ambitions are limitless and have no sense of accountability in front of the Supreme and Mightiest Power. What is the relationship between Modernity and religion? Can religion guide modernity's pursuits? Is there stop to the growing threat of modernity's materialism? '*Faith and Modernity*⁷' has tried to find the answers regarding the scope of faith and spirituality in Western society. The authors of the book also tried to combine modernity and spirituality. The book focuses on the relationship between Christianity and Modernity. It tried to balance between social and cultural features of modernity. The book tries to find the relationship between Christianity and Modernity. In this book very little has been said about the relationship of modern values and their encounters with Islamic values and Islamic societies.

How the Muslim world, and especially Muslim intellectuals, see the transformed Western world, predominantly Christian Western societies, is another important question. The Muslim intellectuals have viewed and analyzed Western modern thoughts during two different periods: the period of Western colonialism when almost the entire Muslim world was colonized by Western imperial powers and

⁷ See, *Faith and Modernity*, edited by Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden, (California: Regnum Books Int., 1994).