

Root philosophies of Islam and Modernity: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

Modernity and religion are absolutely two approaches of life. Both are based on separate philosophies. The one is known for its positivist, secular, non-spiritual, amoral and mechanical view of the world and the other for its supreme, moral, absolute and teleological world view. Both the attitudes are the fruits of the knowledge unusual to them. Golden sciences or modernity is based on knowledge which is devoid of meaning and purpose. It is value free or value neutral, given to the Big Bang theory of creation and behind evolution as it is. The religion promotes a technical world view; believe on the Superior, revelation by God to his prophets. Its knowledge is meaningful and eloquent. The commanding defense in the struggle for existence both for modernity and religion is knowledge. Human reason cannot arrive at ultimate truth without the aid of Revelation. Both can prove better when they are together. Revelation bestows a sense of purpose and direction to the knowledge assimilated by man with his own surveillance and intelligence. However, nowadays weightage is given to modernity by the west, as they do not believe on unseen and revelation as a source of religion. Some Muslim intellectuals are ready to accept modernity but not all that it has in its cup. There are great debates among Muslim intellectuals, theologians and jurists as to what to accept from modernity and what not, even though some are not willing to accept it altogether. We can understand the reasons for this when we understand modernity and its roots.

Keywords: Islam, Modernity Philosophy, Mechanical, Teleological, Divine Revelation.

Modernity

The origin of Modernity may be indebted to the rise of science as an intellectual and social force. Modernity believes in present and recent times and thus dismisses past. It is a revolt against tradition and authority of all kind especially the religious authority. Modernity moved ahead in west by giving a setback to religion. It limited the scope of religion. It completely displaces emotion by reason. Modernity is rationalist and nationalist. It is rationalist as it makes reason the solitary authority in the tracking down of knowledge and is nationalist in that it seeks to explain inner and outer nature without mystical assumption and without any reference to divine existence. Thus we see that modernity is bound by rationalism on one hand and Nationalism on the other. The world, it asserts, came to be an accidental association of the blind forces of nature and supporting string, swaying this way or that way, as wind blows in the sky ⁱ.

Modernity is a social manifestation, an analytical instrument to describe and investigate social truth, and it is also a mean and a thought or an ideology by which reality is valued and judged.

Modernity is, therefore, treated here by N. Haneef at three different levels of its validity:

Modernity as an analytical instrument, as a social instrument, as a social fact and as an ideology.

Modernity as an analytical instrument is such type of concept which is used to consolidate knowledge about society. It is a logical mechanism which is used to explore and examine society or an effective tool by which we can establish knowledge about society. It is an operative tool to distinguish one class of phenomenon from another and is employed however more in the field of social change. Modernity has no meaning without the concept of the social dynamique. It will remain an empty word. The theoretical validity of the word "modern" as an analytical instrument largely rests upon its efficacy to organize and deepen one's knowledge of social change. In this context, modernity is not considered as an ideology but purely as a concept, as a rational tool to simplify and convey order to own awareness of change in society.ⁱⁱ Modernity as an analytical instrument

implies thereby four major kinds of phenomena's; they are speed, convergence, involvement, collectivization and alienation.

We can say that it is based on assured facts of social change. The facts of change are of different but inter related orders. The first order of facts of change consists of highly universal and basic conditions. the first is speed [*an increasing degree of mobility of men, objects, information, knowledge interests,*], convergence [*global interdependence in economy, politics and war; international co-operation, tension and conflict; cross cultural, inter- epoch, and interpersonal contact, association and dynamique of interaction*] and involvement [*co-operation for peace and engagement for war; involvement of the individual man in the total and the plural culture of man*]. The second order of facts of change refers to the type and the mode of organization through science and technology. The latter, among other things, brings about concentrated masses of mankind and alienated communities and individuals.ⁱⁱⁱ

If Modernity is made to indicate something different from the fact of social change, it will become an ideology and after this it will conclude to function as an analytical tool. Modernity in its ideological content is principal cultural form of our present times. What does then Modernity as an ideological value imply? N. Haneef answers this question in his „Islam and Modernity” in three different ways; ideological, institutions and utilitarian. The virtuously ideological framework of Modernity consists of certain comprehensive conjectural and sociological interpretations of reality. They are positivism, materialism, empiricism, scientism, secularism, pragmatism, sociologies“, humanism, individualism and existentialism. The institutional concept of Modernity lies in nonspiritual organization, social justice, democracy, substantial education, and freedom of thought and expression. The utilitarian concept of Modernity is something different. It was in fact Wilfred Cantwell Smith who first gave this kind of understanding of the concept of modernity. Mr. Smith considers modernity as such form of behavior and action which bear a resemblance to and are parallel with, the existing body of the human knowledge. Smith mentions that Modernity lies in utilizations, consumptions and operations. To elaborate, Mr. Smith's thesis does not only provide us to use this knowledge to central and transform the physical and the material environment but also to renovate the human attitude in communication with the prevailing knowledge as such.^{iv}

Root Philosophies of Modernity

Modernity has its roots in positivist, empiric rationalist epistemology. It declares sense experience to be the only source of the knowledge of reality and marks science the solitary standard of knowledge. It not only separates reason from Revelation, but declines to admit Revelation as a source of knowledge. The epistemology on which it is based is reductionist through and withdraws it of a universal view of life. Similarly, its compendium is also reductionist which elucidates all phenomena in terms of matter.

It makes matter in contrast to spirit by declaring matter as the standard of reality and affirms that the real is apparent or visible and the apparent is real. It denies the existence of another world, a world which is believed as invisible, spiritual world after or beyond the visible world of matter. This reductionist anthology condenses the question of otherworldliness an excessive one. This reductionist epistemology and anthology as described above, highlights one sidedness and fanaticism as the illustrious mark of Modernity. This solidify its world view as awfully narrow, disconnected and incomplete. Thus we can say that Extremism being the base of Modernity, deprives from it, an all-inclusive approach to life.

The revolutionary mindset of Modernity divorces epistemology from anthology – knowledge from being. This takes an abridged, disorganized and confused view of reality. It is unable to perceive things entirely and consequently cannot construct the indispensable link between being and knowledge on its own i.e. without conceiving of the world as creating of the supreme power.^v

Modernity is based on knowledge which is empirico – rationalist and open – ended. It is subject to change, addition and modification and is the light of future research. Ours is an age of explosion of knowledge, Which demands nothing short of openness to change, rapid change, all round change in individual attitudes, social behavior, economic pattern, political set up and particularly, in educational planning. Western culture consist inherent dynamism and activism^{vi} which prepares it to adjust to new conditions of life. It makes an advantage of necessity, and long-lasting in its structure or outside it which may give it a footing in a world of everlasting change and direct the process of change in accordance with it. It has within it, elements of

permanence also. But there is nothing permanent in the ever changing structure of modernity, which is born of extremism.

Professor Siddiqui writes, as Modern society is ethnocentric. Ethnicity is a state of mind in which the supreme allegiance of the individual is felt to be due to nation – state. Ethnic patriotism promises subjugated people their right to freedom and reorganization, thus it has come to be the new God of modern times. This is also the ethnicity which offered intensification to unnecessary superiority in one's own nationality and unpardonable hatred for other races and nation. The social horizon of the ethnic group is restricted by placing the ethnicity above humanity.^{vii}

N. Haneef in his book, "Islam and Modernity"ⁱⁱⁱ mentions that modernity has the concept of knowledge which is very different from our concept of knowledge. For the western mind knowledge is a vibrant set; it propagates, it changes, it is liberal, it is acknowledged from time to time. Since Knowledge is increasing, for each new discovery in a given discipline, the entire knowledge in that discipline has to serve as a background and a source. There is a history of the western knowledge. Its history is designed with the development of the technical aids, the symbolic tools, the operative models and institutional facilities that a given society evolves gradually.^{viii} This collective and the historical nature of the western knowledge is of great significance in matter of culture. This nature of knowledge placed man in a negative relationship with his cultural heritage. Past civilizations, prophets and sages, religion and literature are rejected as it is assumed that they are based on ignorance, superstitions and fantasy. In the age of Modernity, Evolutionism is given the great importance. It has been made the concept which is applied to all the fields of culture, civilization, philosophy, religion, arts, science, morals etc.

Thus we see that the term Modernity being western in origin is complex and multidimensional. This term is based on various factors and has various aspects. It believes in reason, progress, present and science. The Modernity has its own concepts of knowledge, society liberalism, secularism; democracy, human rights especially women rights. These concepts originated in west that has isolated state from Religion and thus give no importance to religion. Other countries or civilization, if we talk of Islam, have not separated Religion from state and thus have their own concepts about these terms. There can be similarity at certain points but there are differences also. Now the question arises, if western concepts of democracy, secularism, and women rights do not totally resemble the Islamic concepts of these terms, then can it be said that Islam can adopt Modernity? Is there any compatibility between Islam and Modernity? What Islam says, we have to first look at it.

Islam

Islam is a polity, a faith and a religion and is based on ethical ideal. This ideal is based on the concept of one God. Islam can be studied from three points of view; metaphysical, institutional, and historical.

In "Islam and Modernity", N. Haneef writes that religion is like art, the art is interpreted according to its own culture. Thus religion should also be interpreted according to its own cultural horizon. He mentions that the metaphysical concept of Islam has with it the conception of truth, its viewpoint open the universe, its definition of man's being and his ultimate destiny. Muslim can't deny these supernatural things. If he denies, he will no more remain a true Muslim. The institutional content involves the way of life a Muslim is living in a society by performing various forms of prayer, ritual, laws, morality and authority. We can find laws relating to this institutional context, given in sources of Islam [which are Quran and Sunnah]. The third one is historical context which refers to the changes the above-mentioned contexts of the religion undergo. There is close connection between religion and the third context which is history. The religion and history confront with each other at every place. History meets religion at the mode of politicization, disintegration, communalization, philosophizing ethnicism etc. In other words we can say that it is the religion which brings forward all the faces [like philosophizing, fragmenting etc.] of history before the authority of human. History thus affects religions very deeply. And religion in turn is also affected by history. Each and every religion started by a man for the wellbeing of humanity, became the system in history with well build rituals, customs, tradition, laws, memories and legends. Thus all the religions were effected by history and all religions are affected by the facts of social change either through ultranationalism, fanatical patriotism or through apology. Same was the case with Islam. Islam has a book of guidance i.e. Quran, as a source of law. Along with it we have Sunnah. In the time of prophet and Khulafai-Rashideen people consulted book and the Sunnah. They got the best results as we see the Muslims reached greater heights like as golden age, but after a great time, the social political and other

conditions changed. The issues that aroused at prophets time also changed (as the society changed). Now to draw the conclusion From the Quran and Sunnah became difficult. People stopped interpretation in the light of Quran and Sunnah. The result was that Muslim societies stuck there and became stagnant. The societies, the civilizations and the nations moved on but the Muslim civilization was not knowing whether to move or not (as it might harm their faith). If Muslims had pondered over the Quran and Sunnah they could have gained the best results as Quran does not stop us from progress in legal ways. It never obstructs the development of knowledge and at various places stresses a man to ponder over the mysteries of universe and be thankful to your lord. Islam like Christianity has never persecuted people like Copernicus and Galileo. Islam neither had any bodies nor any queries with science.

Islam gives human freedom by submission to one God only. In Quran there is only fear of God and no one. Islam does not support any superior like of race, color, tribe, or nation but the superiority of morals. And we know the good morals can do no harm to any ideology like,modernity. Islam liberates man from bandages of man. Quran and Sunnah both stress man to gain knowledge (Rabi Zidni Ilma), but the knowledge which is fruitful and helpful to whole humanity.

Sciences propose two different things at one time. It gives independent and metaphysical outlook. Islam has no objection with the objective account of science. If science rests within its epistemological limits, and avoid ideological assurances, it is not in contradiction with Islam, but if it passes its limits like there is no world after, no spirit, and poses questions on the existence of God, It will create an inordinate problem between the two. No Muslim will like this. The issues of faith should not be affected as apparently there does not seem to be any connection between these questions and progress (as modernity believes in progress).In Islam this is called the *Iman* of a believers and it remains with him and it can't cause any harm to the rest of society.

Iqbal mentions at various places in his "Reconstruction of religions thought in Islam", how Quran asks man to ponder over the universe like. "We have not created the heavens and the Earth and whatever is in them, in sport: we have not created them but for a serious end. But the greater part of them understand it not^{ix}". At another place "verily is the creation of the heavens and of the earth and in the succession of the night and of the day, one signs for men of understanding: who, standing and sitting and reclining, bare god in mind and reflect on the creation of the heaven and of the earth and say, oh, our lord,! Thou hast not created this in vain^x. God caused the day and night to have their turn, verily in this is teaching for man of insight^{xi}". In these verses Almighty declares that he has created heavens and earth and everything which it has and stress man to understand it. This means to explore the knowledge of universe.

There are various differences between Islam and modernity. Some differences can be accommodated but at some places no compromise can be made. Like in Islam we have dualist reality. Islam believes in spirit and matter which is reverse of modernity that believes only on matter. Epistemology of Islam comes from anthology. Here source of knowledge is senseperception, intellection and intuition besides revelation. Thus this epistemology is comprehensive and many sided (gives importance to thought, feeling and action).These things make the epistemology of Islam moderate and balanced. Whereas epistemology of modernity is empirico-rationalist. Here the source of knowledge is only reason. Here the feeling and action are not considered

As far as we look into the ideology of modern social science, Islam does not accept its philosophical basis as it rests on materialism, evolutionism, positivism and socialism. Islam has its own concept of social science. It is more concerned with modern philosophy of history. Quran quotes again and again rise and fall of civilization and says that the fall was because of their wrong relation with the world. The modern concept of social science does not give the man such validity of a universal being as is given in Quran. There is no verse in Quran or Sunnah of prophet which stops man from acquiring knowledge and spreading it. However concept of knowledge of west and Islam is different.

Modernity is revolt against tradition and authority. It believes in present and advances forward with unknown destination. It gives great importance to change. It left very before, its tradition and culture. Last we can say, no importance is given to religion here. But in Islam Muslims want to go ahead with religion. By conserving its culture, it tries to reinterpret and reconstruct tradition by the tool of Ijtihad and Ijma.

Modernity is man centric but religion is God centric. In modernity everything is done for the betterment of man and this life. Final authority is man himself who judges by reason. Modernity is oversight this world, but in religion Islam, final authority is God who does everything for betterment of man. Instead man has to thank

Allah for all these things. God is the creator and sustainer of whole universe. Islam believes in life here after. Here we are accountable for our deeds. We do well for betterment of life here after, moreover Islam gives the concept of human brotherhood. Here is no nationalism, but love for one's people and country, and does not favor the hatred for other nation countries. ^{xii}

Hence we perceived the innumerable differences between Islam and modernity. They contradict with each other at place of faith. But the faith of Islam has nothing to do with modernity. Islam has no concern with the intellectual humanism of modernity. Modernity also should have nothing to do with the emotional humanism of Islam.

The professor Siddiqui in his article "Islam and Modernity; a dialogue" makes it clear that with the origin of life and Adam, who was Muslim, the knowledge of diverse directions also originated. Thus according to him, Islam and knowledge are going together from the first day of man's existence. This knowledge made progress with the life of man by man's observation and intellect. Many generations and many civilizations of diverse religions passed and this knowledge went into the hands of those civilizations where it was most respected. We can say that civilization which used his intellect more became the owner of the knowledge of the day. This knowledge made progress during the great civilizations which belonged to different beliefs. The progress was in all aspects like science, reason, and rationality and gave birth to various sciences and philosophies. ^{xiii}

Keynotes

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- ii N. Haneef, *Islam and Modernity*, Sarup and Sons, 1997, p.40 iii Ibid.p.12 iv Ibid. p.41
- v Professor B, H. Siddiqui, *Islam and Modernity: A Dialogue* p.4
- vi Allama Muhammad, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (ed.), M. Saeed Sheikh Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1986
- vii Professor B, H. Siddiqui, *Islam and Modernity: A Dialogue* op.cit
- viii N. Haneef, *Islam and Modernity*, op.cit, P.1-20 ix The Quran 44;38
- x Ibid, 3;188
- xi Ibid, 24;44
- xii Professor B, H. Siddiqui, *Islam and Modernity: A Dialogue*, op.cit
- xiii Ibid