

Islamic Reform: The Way Forward viz., Society, Environment, Medical Science Etcetera

Raja Raies Ahmad Shah

Research Scholar at Shah i Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir

ABSTRACT

Islamic reform is a constant theme in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Scholars of Islam have engaged with the texts of Islam and the context has also affected their understanding of Islam. Problems prevalent in the early period of Islam or for that matter in the pre-modern period are not the same as to be found in the modern period. New conditions demand new solutions. Therefore, there is a way that is to be located and walked upon to enrich and make the tradition of Islamic reform relevant to the contemporary situation.

Keywords: *Islamic, Intellectual, Problems, Tradition, Scholars*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that we are living in the 21st century. We need to know the meaning of Islam for our times. As Muslim intellectuals it is our responsibility to define Islam for the 21st century. We need to know how Islam wishes to interact with the modern world. For instance, what is the relationship between Islam and politics? What is the relationship between Islam and environment? What is the relationship between Islam and human rights?

I am writing this paper to inform the audience about the meaning of Islamic reform and its importance and meaning viz., society, environment, medical science etcetera as indicated in the above paragraph.

I.I Justification

People (scholars and common Muslims) need to know about what is important to them. Muslims should know what they are losing in the absence of a genuine Islamic reform otherwise it affects our being in a negative way. There are problems and we need answers.

II. ISLAMIC REFORM: PAST AND PRESENT

One can say that Islamic reform means to realize Islam in its essence in the present circumstances. It means approaching Islam from a realistic perspective. It is concerned with Muslims. It is an obligation and for that,

knowledge of Islamic texts and contexts is very essential. The question is: are we seriously engaged with the Islamic texts?

We are aware of the concept of Islamic revival. Islamic tradition has engaged with this concept for a long time. [1] It has produced fine scholars and it continues to produce them. The difference is, one may say, that of methodology. Its meaning and importance is known to the scholars of Islam. This concept is once again the need of the hour. The important question is how it should manifest itself in the contemporary times. Its methodology is going to determine its consequences: positive or negative. One thing that is important is Muslims should learn lessons from their history. Only then can we as Muslims authenticate our presence in the contemporary world. As Muslims are living in different contexts, it is a must that they should know their successes and failures in their respective contexts. Muslim intellectuals need to balance between context of Peace and War, Reason and Revelation, and Man and Woman.

The next point is to appreciate the forward thinking of Muslim intellectuals in the past and the future. One is sure to find out towering figures in the entire timeline of Islamic traditions who understood the text and the context and realized the nature of truth as much as possible. It only goes on to show the robustness and thinking capacity of the scholars of Islam who by their dint of imagination realized what people of science are realizing only now and it also goes on to show how text and contexts helps to guide theories that are apparently looked upon with disdain in the modern period in the realization of the man of God. What I am trying to say is that people should open their hearts to Islamic tradition in its manifestations and appropriate it accordingly and faithfully in the light of their genuine needs without making them more than necessary and disfiguring the Islamic worldview. This last point is of immense importance in order to realize the mission of Islam which is to reform man.[2]

Islamic reform has surfaced over the entire face of the planet. The need is to contextualize it. The need is to formulate different questions in different contexts. This is what is on the ground. This is what the meaning of the universal message of Islam is. Scholars of Islam are expected to answer their particular communities, audiences in giving them relevant answers and not transposing an alien concept on their consciousness. This if we could magnify in terms of how literalism managed to sap the intellectual creativity of Muslim thought may seem a lesson for all of us to learn from. The point is to answer the right question in the right place. What may be an Islamic need in the context of India, for instance may not be felt in any other part of the world. This will also ensure the relevance of Islam to the contemporary issues. When we try to speak on Islam, the first thing we need

¹ "Islamic Reform." *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. . Retrieved July 10, 2018 from Encyclopedia.com: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/islamic-reform>

² According to Fazlur Rahman, the aim of the Qur'an is the moral reformation of man. see: *Major Themes of the Qur'an*.

is to understand what Islam is? Only then will it become possible to understand the texts of Islam and the context would be then appreciated in a better way so that problems that have to do with culture are not read into the Qur'an. Also, if there is a certain point that modern psychology finds difficult to accept, one cannot ignore the fact that the case for universality of certain ideas takes time to disperse in an ocean of time and space. The point is to collect all evidence on an issue and guide gently, carefully, with the right speed in the right direction without killing or injuring people in the path. We need to appreciate everything that revolves around an issue and try to understand each element in its proper context and try to separate the essential message of Islam from non-essential elements and as for as cultural or social elements of the case are concerned one can learn from them and according try to reform the condition for the better in the case at hand.

III. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Lack of peace affects all of us. Muslims also face educational problems. One of the objectives of Islamic reform is individual and collective peace. The other objective is creating an educated society. Our boys and girls need the right kind of education-good for this world and good for the hereafter. Being Muslim can be a challenge in the modern world. In this manner, we can formulate a proposal. The first is that negative thinking is to be avoided because it is not the way of the educated. The point is to encourage creativity. Islamic reform is happening in every part of the world more or less. It is a means of salvation in the world and in the hereafter. It is about approaching the problems from a comprehensive perspective. Islam is very encouraging in guiding us to resolve our problems. It has been taking place from the first generation of Muslims to the present generation. It is about realistic appraisal of the situation. It also helps to understand different perspectives of different Muslim thinkers. In the absence of Islamic reform, its opposite would happen and that is certainly not healthy for anyone. It gives the history of Islamic reform. It discusses its different contexts. Muslims have written on the concept of reform and revival in Islam. It is also contributed by the writing done in the West. It is also written for a Western audience. Islam has many interpretations and many meanings. We have to get our facts correct. We have to analyze the situation as it is. There are many reformers working in many contexts. Muslim thinkers do it as their duty and also that they owe loyalty to the message of Islam. This engagement will lead to a meaningful conversation. One can say that a genuine Islamic reform should be faithful to the universal principles of Islam such as the Oneness of God and belief in the hereafter.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY OF MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS

As Muslim intellectuals it is our responsibility to correct wrong interpretations of Islam that would imbalance the relationship between the above mentioned suggestions. There is nothing wrong in taking help from the modern concepts of life as long as they interact in a meaningful dialogue with the Revelation of Islam. This is a long journey, but one that must be taken. We as Muslim intellectuals are together in this journey along with brothers and sisters in Islam and humanity.

There is the question of wishes. We as Muslim intellectuals cannot simply wish the world to become a better place to live in. We need scholarship and social activism. Muslim scholarship must take note of its weaknesses. One can argue that every unislamic practice has a contribution from Muslim scholarship. At least, some problems are there due to the nature of Muslim scholarship. Those problems are to be identified and addressed. Muslim scholarship need to look out for better alternatives. Options are to be valued and chosen in the light of genuine needs. In order to appreciate the concept of need, education in the right sense of the word is the prerequisite for the emergence of genuine Muslim scholarship and their audiences. If a certain methodology has not produced positive results, it must be discarded. We have to survive, death is not the option. Options that lead to nonexistence must be minimized.

Muslim intellectuals are to understand the nature of modern life. That would lead to a meaningful dialogue between Islam and modern life. This was tried by our predecessors, but it has to be dealt with more seriously than ever in the light of the problems faced by Muslims in India and other parts of the world.

V. FAITHFULNESS TO THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

Islam is our bedrock. Solutions, whatever they may be, are to be rooted in the Revelation of Islam. Islamic tradition in its complete historical manifestation must have answers for our genuine questions. It will also reveal the rich nature of Islamic tradition and the need to engage with it seriously. Islamic scholarship is not a simple task. And the complex nature of the contemporary society has only added to it. In the process of interaction, the essentials of Islam cannot be sidelined, negated or diluted. We must never abandon our roots. Our roots do not stop us from appreciating the positive elements of modern life.

VI. MAKING ISLAM RELEVANT TO THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

What are called the “ideals of Islam” have to become meaningful in the way they should address modern conditions. Elements of modern life can be readily appreciated by Islam. Our reformers have pointed to that. Modern life has put its finger on issues important in the eyes of Islam such as artificial intelligence, bioethics, cloning, environmental degradation, feminism etcetera. To understand the nature of these issues, one has to understand the modern context of life and that is very important for the contemporary Islamic thinking. Here a relationship can be forged between Islam and modernity. Issues are many and many are the possibilities for Muslim intellectuals to drive the ship of Islam in the right direction. That direction goes into the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of man, woman and the society at large.

VII. WAY TO MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

As said earlier, balance is essential in the contemporary Islamic thinking. This would lead to a productive dialogue between the opposite sides of the spectrum. One can learn much if this conversation takes place on meaningful terms. What is the dichotomy in the contemporary Islamic thinking and how to overcome it? Our

religious scholars are not just the products of *madrasas* but they are also coming from modern universities. It is meaningful if conversation takes place between them in the hope of developing a coherent Islamic thought in different contexts. This would also lead to the transfer of important ideas in this two-way interaction, as an outcome, unity would start developing in the leadership and it would affect the followers in a positive manner.

VIII. ISLAM AND CHANGE

Our texts are still with us, that means they are as important as ever. But how should they interact in a period (21st century) beyond their revelatory period? That is one of the important questions, if not the most important question in the contemporary Islamic thinking. And fortunately there are thinkers who deal with it. This opens window for contemporary Islamic thinking. There is challenge and there is an answer. The challenge is to know the intention of the creator in the Islamic texts and making sense of it in the 21st century. So what are scholars of Islam saying? For that, we need to look at the relevant literature and that literature has implications for Muslims in different areas of life. Some things do not remain the same such as the literal implementation of some Islamic texts in the present context. Change is the key to flourish intellectually and spiritually in understanding some of the Islamic texts differently in the changed scenario of modern life. Change is not always negative. It is positive, in fact. One is looking for the right words to articulate thinking, if there is any. We have to break our illusions of mental and emotional character that imprison us in the unrepeatable past and start living in the present in the light of the past, the present and the future. This does not mean becoming unfaithful to Islam, God and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) but the opposite. Leaders will come and go, so is the case with Muslim intellectuals who would come, serve Islam and leave their legacy for the future generations. This sort of change is a natural one and that should be welcomed in the light of Islam to whose service in times of challenge they devoted their lives and it is a fact that Muslim intellectuals should accept the fact of change without betraying the essentials of Islam, without betraying their allegiance to the community of Muslims.

IX. SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

We need not to fear the rise of atheism and apostasy since Islam has in it to allow people to question the attitude of Muslims and there are scholars of Islam who are trying to serve the cause of humanity in this particular context. It also disfigures the message of Islam when we resort to emotional politics added with polemics that take us nowhere. The need is to hear out the problems of modern human beings and answering their questions in the light of authentic experience gained in the light of Revelation and Intellect. The problem is not atheism or apostasy; the problem is that of epistemology: what is the purpose of life and how are we going to define it without blinding ourselves to the fact of existential suffering in the human world. The point is not to ignore

atheism and apostasy; it is to engage peacefully, spiritually and meaningfully with their hearts and minds which seem to have accepted many alien ideas in the age of hyperinformation.³

X.CONCLUSION

The concept of Islamic reform is not new to the Islamic tradition. It has always been there. Muslim scholars have appropriated to deal with Islam, individuals and the society at large. It has resulted in a rich corpus of knowledge in this particular field of Islamic thought and the most important revelation is that man/woman and society are important in the eyes of Islam. Responses to local, national and international challenges from Islamic thinkers are there for everyone to see and the need is to continue with more vigor and faithfulness. What has this paper achieved? It gives the history of Islamic reform albeit briefly and roots it in Islamic tradition itself and thus authenticates it. It contextualizes Islamic reform in different and accordingly does away with producing simple answers to difficult questions and thus can be applied by Muslim scholars in their formulation of Islamic solutions to the contemporary problems.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, New Delhi, Kitab Bhavan.
2. Khalid Masud, *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Religious Thought*, Iqbal Lahore, Iqbal Academy.
3. Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World*, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute.
4. Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*, UK, Oxford University Press.
5. Abdul Karim Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, Brill.
6. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*.

³ <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/04/reforming-islam/>