

THE MARGINALIZATION OF ISLAM – A QUEST OF SACRED SCIENCE

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Abstract. Science has been considered inferior to Islamic Shari'ah by modern Islamic thinkers. The vision of Islam surrounds all domains; therefore, science ought to be Islamized according to ideas of Islam. Their foremost concern is to confine secular science and society beyond which they do not corrupt Muslim Ummah. Islamization, an alternative paradigm to western epistemology, is based on the view that all knowledge should be within an Islamic view. The goal of Islamizers is to generate new consensus, jurisprudence and methodology that do not violate Islamic laws. This paper discusses i) the Islamization of education agenda; ii) the prospects and problems associated with Islamization project; iii) and aims to understand that whether we are really in need of Islamization? Does an ideal of sacred science is possible or it is a kind of Platonic utopia? Shouldn't science be treated separate from religion? Finally, iv) I will provide alternatives to Islamization supported by solutions provided by anti-Islamizers.

Key Words: Islamization, Secular, Science, Malaise, Islamic, Education, Truth

Islamization of Education Agenda

The common view shared by the western and eastern thought is the emphasis on acquiring knowledge. Since modern technology and science has empowered all the horizons of human lives, the Muslim scholars believed that the present cause of ‘malaise of Muslim Ummah’ is the secular educational system that is endorsed in Islamic countries. Their poor economic conditions and lack of proper defense mechanism are all resultant factors of secularization of knowledge. For this reason, they proposed to seek renewed methods; return to Ijtihad and coordinate scientific method with the Islamic limits accordingly.

Moreover, an ‘Islamized’ structure of modern knowledge¹ would also be acceptable by traditionalists as this system would always consider ethics prior to knowledge, curiosity or power; and would confine all those scientific methodologies and domains of education that are contrary to the values and norms of Islam. Thus binding the divine and sacred to modernity is the chief task of Islamization² that has been discussed in six conferences up to this day. The voices in the discourse are Ismail al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ziauddin Sardar, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Syed Ali Ashraf, Muhammad Nijatullah Siddiqui, Maurice Bucaille, Abdus Salam³, Bassam Tibi and Fazlur Rahman.

The Objectives of Islamization

The rationale behind the attempts at Islamization of disciplines is as follow:

¹ The main focus of Islamization is on social science, psychology, economics, anthropology, history. However, Islamization of knowledge includes the Islamization of science as well.

² The initial phrase “Islamization of knowledge” was coined by the Malaysian scholar Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in his book “Islam and Secularism” first published in 1978. It was also proposed by the Palestinian philosopher Ismail Al-Faruqi, in 1982, in response to what he called ‘the malaise of the Ummah’.

³ Abdus Salam is a Nobel laureate (1979) in physics who addressed this issue recently.

- i. The gap between the western and the Islamic curricula cannot be mended as they have no reference to metaphysical realm. While in Islam, the primary source of knowledge is revelation.
- ii. Western education is utilitarian in character that is acquired for attaining best career outcomes. Whereas, in Islam, education encompasses all aspects of life_ intellectual, material and spiritual.
- iii. Modern epistemologies like that of Karl Marx, Darwinians and Neo-Darwinians, and Freud makes no room for spiritual and ethical values. Hence, either a modification or rejection is required regarding physical; some science topics such as sex education; music and drama education etc.
- iv. The marginalization of Islamic education is a consequence of poor educational system in Muslim countries and unquestioned adoption of western curriculum.
- v. The focus is mainly to Islamize social science; and to develop a new paradigm, epistemology and methodology for social science on the basis of Islam.

Proponents of Islamization

In this paper we will concentrate on these proponents of Islamization_ Ismail al-Faruqi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Maurice Bucaille, Fazlur Rehman and Ziauddin Sardar.⁴

- Abu Sulayman and Ismail al-Faruqi are the founders of Islamization project.⁵ Their effort established IIIT in 1981. For al-Faruqi Islamization entails to reconstruct the every domain of human knowledge systematically that are either derived or else based on the Islamic worldview. Hence, any vision that is foreign to Islam ought to be prohibited.
- Hossein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar share some common propositions. The key ideas of their views are:

⁴ Al Faruqi and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) proposed Islamization of knowledge. Nasr's main focus was on interpretation of 'Caliphs'. Ziauddin Sardar advocated the creation of modern Islamic science to tackle those problems which Muslims are facing today. Nijatullah Siddiqui specifically focuses on Islamic economics. While Maurice Bucaille declared Islam as an original religion that is based on facts akin to scientific facts.

⁵ See (Dangor 2005)

Science brought Muslim states to threatening apex of decadence. Furthermore, it is cultural bound from the evidence that the present-day science is western in character. Hence it is possible to create Islamic science. The history of Islam is conceived as a sacred ideal. They endeavor to seek authentication by idealizing models of Prophet (PBUH) and the Caliphs. For instance, Sardar maintained that the foundation for ethics, norms, even scientific methodology and framework ought to be based on terminologies that are extracted from the Quran. Although his concept of Islamic science is vague for he merely tends to conceptualize terms from the Islamic terminology that were being misused. Nasr carries out a similar work calling it secularization of language; but he used terms that came from the Sufi and Shiite tradition. However, this discussion regarding the correct interpretation has a large space among them.

- To find an epistemological framework of science never hold an interest to Maurice Bucaille. His concern was merely to homogenize certain scientific facts with both verses of Quran and Bible. His main work in this aspect is *La Bible, le Coran et le Science*. He, therefore, tends to harmonize science and Islam. In this book he argued that the Qur'an is a true revelation and the bible is a book of inspiration. According to his study modern science can clarify and validates certain verses of the Qur'an which Bible cannot. He considers it as an evident that Quran is the word of God rather than of Prophet (PBUH).⁶ Although, inclusion of Bucaille's work seems unjustified as his examination of Quran is the result of his spiritual quest. It represents a trend rather than a position in the discourse of Islamization.⁷
- According to Fazlur Rehman, we should re-examine Muslim tradition in its historical content.⁸ In his double-movement theory he suggested that modern knowledge would be assessed in terms of normative Islamic principles after which we would be able to categorize what is genuine Islam, only then an Islamic curricula is possible.

⁶ Bucaille grew up in an environment hostile to Islam; his initial knowledge regarding Islam was ill-informed as he was taught by French orientalist that Quran has been written by Prophet Mohammed. He was a surgeon and became interested in Islam in late 40's. So he learned Arabic and studied Quran scientifically.

⁷ See (Stenberg, *The Islamization of Science* 1997)

⁸ He stressed that Quran ought to be understood in its complete historical text.

However, no productive progress has been envisioned with the application of this theory in educational practices of Muslim countries. His aim was to bring modern institutions and modern values (freedom and responsibility) to Muslim nations that are embodied in Islam. He is appreciated for his adoption of holistic approach to understand Quran rather than atomistic approach. Yet he failed to explain how his ideas are to be implemented in actual educational context. Despite weaknesses, “many of his followers, particularly those working on extremely sensitive matters like gender and sexuality, and who wish to engage with modernity as a challenge and an opportunity, draw upon his work.”(Panjwani, 2012)

ii. Complexities faced by Islamizers

The project of Islamization faced various problems not merely from people who reject this view but also from scholars within the same project. The disagreement between the scholars is due to the fact that each responds differently to the problem of Islamization. Although they support the basic tenets of Islamization, but they are skeptical that would a new paradigm or methodology is achievable.

Where AbuSulayman and al-Faruqi stressed to create a new methodology; some scholars do not think that it is essential. Fazlul Rahman disagreed with the Islamization of knowledge approach. He believed that one should nurture the human mind in such a way.⁹ Furthermore, no official support has been provided by governments for this project, apart from Malaysia.¹⁰

Critique on Islamization

Islamization remained an individual enterprise for the last two decades. In six conferences, the scholars could not devise a workable plan. Due to this reason, the view is proposed to numerous criticisms.

- a) The role of Islamic education as suggested by Islamizers is to cover all facets of life which is utterly one-sided. Even western education consider metaphysical realm. Eradicating western curricula from syllabus would be repeating the error of al-

⁹ See (Dangor 2005)

¹⁰ Due to current economic crisis the Malaysian project has been stopped as well.

Ghazali.¹¹ It is far better to modify it rather than rejecting it completely.

- b) According to Taha Hussein, the western success is the by-product of their intellect and spirit. Such positive voices have been silenced by Islamizers.
- c) Instead of devising a workable plan to Islamize they tend to explain terminologies in the light of Quran. Moreover they neither provide a precise version to explain the concept of an Islamic Science nor did they backup with a plausible implementation. They tackled the problem of Islamization in an irrational and illogical way, i.e. either it focused on secularization of language like positivists; or else they discussed scientific progress of past Muslim philosophers. Here too, they emphasized on past rather than on opening doors to science and philosophy. One may learn from past mistakes while referring to history, but not from praising past achievements neglecting current demise.
- d) Furthermore it is notable that none of them agrees with each other views in the discourse of Islamization. And no one has showed any remarkable progress of note in science. It is evident from writings that Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar vehemently opposed each other as both rebuked each other in an illiterate fashion.

On one hand, Nasr states that Sardar is uneducated. In his eyes Sardar does not have the ability to make correct interpretations of the Islamic tradition and history. He accused him of just adding the word 'Islamic' to various disciplines. Likewise Sardar attacked Nasr's position due to his Sufi affiliation; and accused him of projecting science into Qur'an. However, many adherents to Sardar's position state that Nasr's work has led to an increase on this debate. Sardar describes Nasr's opinion under the Beatles-inspired heading 'Nowhere Man in Nowhere Land'¹²; and that he is taking us on a Magical Mystery Tour.¹³

¹¹ Instead of attacking philosophers, he attacked and then banned philosophy. Due to this reason Muslims lag behind in scientific and technological discourse.

¹² Sardar summarized his views as 'Ground Control to Major Tom' after David Bowie's song 'space oddity' where Major Tom is a lost astronaut in space in a defected rocket which lacks power.

iii. Need of Islamization - a genuine quest?

Regretfully the approach of Islamizers is to confine paradigms of knowledge within Islamic limits. They believe that if Islamization is instigated in all disciplines in an appropriate way; we would be able to comprehend the divine more vividly. Thus, only that science ought to be prevailing in Muslim countries that have been filtered through the gauze of Quran. It is noteworthy here that science which is contrary to the Qur'an will not be accepted. It is not a good science; however, it becomes good almost automatically when it is in accordance with the Qur'an. What a criteria to Islamize science!

Here I would like to quote Collingwood that every religion have its own magic. The magic of Islam is Tawhid. According to Munawar A.Anees Islam does not need an authentication from science or anything else for that matter, because it is a final and complete religion.

To me, there should be no concept as Islamic science or Christian science. For religions are normative parts of a being; whereas science is a man-made attempt to create a better world and to understand the cosmic nature of the universe in a scientific manner. Science itself is neither harmful nor does it influence a culture. Science have nothing to do with Westernization, it is entirely another debate. Islamization is, therefore, a futile attempt which will not produce fruitful results to the problem of decadence of Muslims. As Osman Baker acclaimed that the generalizations of Islamic science are not scientific but theological; and they cannot be practiced or formed into an established or working science. Its consequences are uprooting science and Islamizing culture and society instead.¹⁴

iv. Epilogue

The presumed certainties of modern science have eroding effects on the Islam. My question is even if we are at war between faith and science does Islamization of knowledge is a valid solution? Probably not, as I agree with Sarfaroze Niyozov that rather than promoting dichotomies between science and religion, Muslims and the West, sacred and secular, we need a constructivist synthesis. I propose two

¹³ See (Stenberg, *The Islamization of science or the marginalization of Islam: The positions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ziauddin Sardar* 1995)

¹⁴ See (Bakar 1991)

alternatives to Islamization here. First is to call for a truce and peace between faith and science. This can be established by unshackling our own orthodox Muslim minds and to overcome our religious prejudices. Secondly, to recheck the objectives of Islamization, i.e. their problem was the present demise of Muslim nations. They assumed that the roots lies in western curricula but I believe that there are various other factors that are causes of Muslim malaise, like religious orthodoxy, misinterpretation of Quran by halfwit mullas which disillusioned Muslim Ummah_ especially youth; and drove them away from Islam. Furthermore, lack of unity among Muslim countries, lack of technological growth and dependence on United Nation and numerous other political factors are involved that enhanced malaise of Muslim nations.

Even from an individual point of view our own character is not in accordance to Islam; our ethical values are void of Islam and we are Muslims in name only. The rise of civilization is only possible through prevalence of honesty, justice and hard work among its people. Where do we stand? Whether its Pakistan or U.A.E. what role are we playing except corrupting Islam by introducing alien concepts in it? Islam is a religion of peace; it never promotes extremism neither in the form of terrorism nor in the form of Islamization.

We should open our mind and hearts to modernize education, learn from it and should serve all our efforts in adding something new to these domains of knowledge. It is to be understood that science is an evolving study of cosmology, it is never static; while Quran is intransient, it is futile to collaborate the two together. Science is in fact, not our enemy, although it is true that through centuries both religion and science have tried to dominate one over the other. Perhaps, science is winning yet an approach to Islamization is misleading because if seen from this perspective all religions have been threatened by science, materialism and reductionism. Yet there are scientists who believed that metaphysical explanations are possible and liable.¹⁵ Therefore differences in scientific methodologies are itself a pursuit of acquiring truth. Instead of being threatened by this, I am of the view that Muslim scholars ought to focus on the issues which I mentioned above.

¹⁵ See (Peters 2010)

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