

Revisiting Islam: Contemporary Dimensions

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Abstract- Much has been in question when it comes to Islam as a religion and its practical aspects because of the obvious reasons. The idea is to explore the 'modernist' trends in Islam which have historically been embedded into its psyche and thought. Islamic scholars have praised Sufism for its magnanimity and altruism and adding an inclusive dimension to this age-old religion. Does Politics (regional or international) create the imbalances and unleashes erratic insecurity could be the most delectable question for unraveling the contemporary Islamic discourse.

Keywords: Islam and its challenges, Religious dialogue, Politics, Indian Sufism, Modernist trends, Syncretism.

One of the most discursive, complicated and yet so simple, polemical is the discourse on the actual format of Islamic studies having such a wide range of its interpretations that the whole humanity at large gapes at the shift of international events which are entirely intriguing and yet so discernible from all points of view. It could not be denied that with the catastrophic 9/11, the global civilizational perspectives have developed an angular view and the perspectives have developed an angular view and the concerned literati have produced reams of seamless analysis about how the puritan religion of Islam is to be understood and what are the ways by which we must try to follow the teachings of Holy Prophet. 'Islam : the Essentials' by Tariq Ramadan is a simplicity driven presentation of content on the core principles of Islam, its rituals and history, its evolution and the challenges faced by it. The founding texts are the most basic principles in Islam.

One of the most important one of the revealed word of God. The traditions of the prophet have been known and understood as 'Hadith' and its depth is to be unravelled with deft seriousness. The contemporary outcome of the religion of Islam is the emergence of the multiple schools of thought including the Salafi or Wahabi endorsing the true or strict adherence to the principles of Islam, some of them are very nonpolitical deriving quiet and idealistic notions and some strongly politicized who have resorted to violence. Tariq Ramadan goes on to proclaim that Islam has no clergy or unified structure. He further touches upon the need to develop those mechanisms which can foster an intra- religious dialogue amongst the believers of Islam. Such dialogue is the exigent need of the day because the existing sects of Shia and Sunni have gone to the most stress driven levels - the dialogue which seems to be wanting has been relegated aside and such divisions are exacerbated by relegated aside and such divisions are exacerbated by the other political and cultural considerations. Who than commands the authority to derive the plausible solutions and interpret the significance of Islam ? The interpretation by other scholars too sound in the same direction where the Islamic texts being approached too democratically can cause lot of confusion rather than solving the riddle (Ramadan 15).

The other complex question which deals with contemporary discourse is the thought of feminism and Islam and the embedded complexities of the question. Asma Lemrabet quotes from the sacramental text :

And the believers both Men and Women -are close unto one another they all enjoy the duty of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong and are constant in prayer and render the social purifying text and pay heed into the God and his messenger. (9:71) It obviously requires a detailed re-interpretation of the text for appreciating the notion of equality embedded in the scholastic tradition of Islam. The Islamic scholarship states that the texts are detailed and explicit as both Shia and Sunni scholars are agreed on a point that contraception is possible and that abortion must be treated on a case by case basis or the ability or economic positions of the persons in question could be noticed. Still there are static and 'literalist' perceptionists of Islam who don't intend to budge and perceptionists of Islam who dont intend to budge and look at the evolution of the religion with a brighter eye ("religion and birth control").

Karen Armstrong too mentions that through the Quran, women got the right to inheritance and divorce much before the western women were given such status. The customs of veiling and seclusion were copied from the Greek christians of Byzantium. Quran considers men and women, the equal partners before God with the system of polygamy getting organized at a point when the muslims were killed in the Meccan wars and women were left without protectors. It could be enlightening for almost all the scholars of Islam that the women of the first Ummah in Medina were active in public life and even participated with men in battles. (Armstrong 16).

Politics is much more a pertinent issue than religion and that is where the nations following Islam have been able to fare up too well, the Islamicized nations have not gelled in with the democratic values through- out the world, this needs a more serious exploration of the nature and piety of Islam. Dictatorship rules the roost in certain societies. The reasons for the absence of 'democratic transparency' are to be found not in religion but in the human nature of corrupting the prevailing procedures of public policy. A revolution of liberal intellect is the need of the hour where the religion of Islam can be a guiding force but the liberal decisions for governance of muslim societies could be decisions for governance of muslim societies could be more inclined towards worldly ethos (Ramadan 230). In the contemporary perceptions the dogma of Islam must be looked at with a fresh vision, the Islamic text 'Sharia' literally means the way that leads to a source of water, with the larger look at the Sharia and the notions of a much contested word 'Jihad' - this paper aims to reiterate the long forgotten motives like the objectives of Jihad highlighted as 'Peace and Freedom' (ibid 160).

Quranic injunctions regarding obtaining the knowledge of the world far and wide which gets summed up in the muslim parlance as 'go till any point even from cradle to grave' to gain knowledge - not only religious but also worldly and secular one. The survey of Islam in South Asia exhibits that though it towed the invasive barbaricness to make inroads inside the territory of the Hindukush mountains, there was a negotiating element of religious Sufism which very subtly touched the heart of the populace at large and gradually created a successful niche in the Indian subcontinent. A careful scrutiny of the advent of Islam in India shows that the sufi traditions were the leading phenomenon in the development of Islam in Indian subcontinent. During the Sultanate phase the Sultans drew their legitimacy from the Sufi saints and the ones like Balban were related to them through matrimony. Sheikh Muinuddin Chisti came to be regarded as the father of Indian Sufism was in the process of settling down in the town of Ajmer in Rajasthan, where a down in the town of Ajmer in Rajasthan, where a terrible contestation is going on between the forces of Muhammad Ghor and Prithviraj Chauhan, Muinuddin finally addressed by his followers as 'Gharib Nawaz' was able to exhibit his charismatic miraculous powers, thus establishing a Chisti pantheon of demiGod like saints who were able to influence a large populace through Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar, Sheikh Farid, Nizamuddin Auliya and Nasiruddin Chirag Dilli (Aquil 38). This Sufi tradition of the Chishti Silsilah or order was often times challenged by the conservative Ulema labelled as 'heretics' as they followed the traditions of music and Qawwalis (Ibid 39).

The pre Islamic Arabia belonged to the tradition of such tranced spirituality, the cultic officials of the pre Islamic phase in Arabia were called 'Kahins' (Aslan 58), who were supposed to be soothsayers and they distinguished their orders of spirituality for the benefit of mankind. Since the prophet exhibited a pathway and the religion of Islam has been a theme of perfection for all to follow. Annemarie Schimmel has charted a long history of Islam not only in the metropolitan domain in India but also in the regional centres like Kashmir, Jaunpur, Bengal and Deccan (Schimmel 51). The saints and warriors accompanied the neo-colonizers to the Bahamanid empire (which got splintered later on into the 'Shahi' dynasties) the masses of which also embraced Islam through the influence of another Sufi saint Sayyid Muhammad Gesu Daraz or 'Bandanawaz' Gesudaraz - with his spiritual insights became an apt Gesudaraz - with his spiritual insights became an apt interpreter of prophetic traditions commenting upon the Islamic texts. Akbar the Great (as he expressed his greatness in religious amalgamation) the Mughal emperor is known for accentuating the process of religious melting pot. His ideas of the 'House of worship' built in 1575 and Divine monothiesm (Tauhidi-Ilahi) (Armstrong 125). Together with Sufism, Islam in India moved on to the process of modernism straightaway into the Modern history through the Aligarh movement of Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College later rechristened as Aligarh Muslim University. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan - a towering figure who excelled in Islamic theology, expressing his willingness to be loyal and obedient to the British regime in India and espoused the cause of educating the muslim 'Sharif' class through the mannerisms of British society in English medium. David Lelyveld is the most interesting and path-breaking in this regard (Lelyveld 1970).

Francis Robinson while interpreting the work done by Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan calls him to be a 'Macaulay's echo', the upbringing which the Aligarh College by Sir Sayyid Ahmed committed to provide was English in taste, in opinions and in intellect but Muhammadan in religion and Indian in blood and colour (241). The magnanimity and modernity of Islam is now challenged consistently but the notions of reason and faith in Islam are intricately interwoven and this and faith in Islam are intricately interwoven and this exhibitionism of fundamentalism is leaving a huge number of muslim gentry aghast over the complexities of horrible bloodbath wherever it takes place. The power dynamics led to violent schisms in Islam and various groups of Islamic identity rose up contesting the centrality of position in the Islamic world. The followers of the Prophet so faithful in nature got divided into as many as seventy two sects(Aquil 199).

Writing on eclecticism a Sunni revivalist scholar Imam Ghazali has 'praised' the Sufi system of Islamic rendering because the rest of the sects gave way to aggression and shrouded the truth(Ibid 203). The very basis of Islam's focus on egalitarianism, kinship and brotherhood but such kind social practices were soon lost because of the huge expanse which this religious domain had covered subsequently (ibid 203). When the broad based Sufi thought is to be understood, the crux of this theme of sufi emergence is to be learnt from the standpoint of a reactionary movement against the rigidities of orthodox 'ulema'. So with this it could be a notion that Islam when got 'informalized' gave rise to a 'medley of divergent philosophical and religious trends' thus giving rise to the amalgamation of Sufism and Christian identity together with Hindu Bhakti and Tantricism and also some central Asian Shamanism(Aslan 204,205).

Sufism could be credited with the emergence of Guru Nanak's religious thought into the 'Sufi Bhakti process' of Indian Sufi thought. Baba Farid or Sheikh process' of Indian Sufi thought. Baba Farid or Sheikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar of the Sufi Chisti Silsilah or the religious order is considered as a venerable saint through the traditions of Guru Granth Sahib as over a hundred verses are attributed to Sheikh Farid in the Guru Granth Sahib, including the rebellious poetic renderings of the gem of the Bhakti movement-Kabir. The hostility towards Islam which appeared in Sikhism is attributed to the political complications which arose in the Mughal rule unfortunately giving rise to the execution of the two revered Sikh Gurus by the Mughal emperors. Hence religiously a syncretic trend acquired a confrontationist perception(Aquil 162). Francis Robinson in '*Islam and Muslim history in South Asia*' cites the reasons for the Muslim separatism which started emerging in the Modern Indian ethos and all the reasons like separate electorates and Hindu revivalism (together with Hindi revivalism) with the upsurge of Muslim league have been quoted by the writer and in that way it could not be difficult for the revisionist scholar of Indian Islam to gauge the circumstances which brought a major chasm between a harmonious syncretism of the religious stronghold of Indian subcontinent (Robinson 241). The Sufi thought of Cosmology got developed by Ibn Arabi- so he profoundly wrote, that 'He' in the creation was a hidden jewel and wanted to be known'. For Ibn Arabi Muhammad was 'more than just a man', the ideal perfect man who the Prophet was, descended on ideal perfect man who the Prophet was, descended on the Earth to mirror the God(Brown 60).

CONCLUSION:

The underpinnings of religious autarchy has the political compulsions to let the status quo in a static vulnerability, this status faces constant attacks and convulsions but power dynamics and extremism have their own ends to fulfill and the end of this long journey seems to be darker when the present does not evolve into the future and the past regurgitates its worn out and cursory practices which no longer hold the justifiable terra firma. Islam has encountered more questions in the past two decades as compared to any other religion and its spirit continues to evoke curiosity and challenges. This paper explores the modernist trends in Islam and this is not from the history of Modern world that we can take a recourse to the modernist trends in this medieval religion but right from its inception and prior to its birth the evolution of thought and the the nature of amalgamation was very much embedded into its theory and practice. In India and Middle East the modernist thinkers have always illuminated the process of the development of Islam and this has exhibited in the areas of Education, culture, and social development. Any religion would always be influenced by power dynamics but its followers will have to take a call to agree or disagree with its ossified restructuring.

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