

Major Trends Of Muslim Responses To The Challenges Of Modernity

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Abstract

Modernity has been posing serious challenges to the Muslim world and its society since the eighteenth century. However, these challenges took on a more definite shape in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The challenges were complex and covered all facets of Muslim life. This paper tries to explore how Muslims can respond effectively to those challenges posed by modernity, and what are the main responses of modernity formulated over the past century. The response to the challenges of modernity, in fact, may be considered as one of the characteristics of Islam as a religion that has always shown a living awareness of contemporary intellectual issues.

Abstrak

Aliran modern telah merupakan suatu cabaran serius sejak abad kelapan belas bagi dunia Islam dan masyarakat Muslim. Walau bagaimanapun cabaran ini telah kelihatan lebih jelas pada abad kesembilan belas dan awal abad kedua puluhan. Cabaran dari aliran modern agak kompleks dan telah meliputi segala aspek kehidupan seorang Muslim. Memandangkan cabaran yang dihadapi dari aliran modern agak ketara, makalah ini merupakan suatu usaha untuk menerangkan bagaimana Ummat Islam boleh bertindak secara efektif terhadap cabaran yang datang dari aliran modern. Selain daripada itu, makalah ini juga mengupas cara-cara yang telah diguna pakai di abad yang lalu untuk menghadapi cabaran dari aliran modern. Respon terhadap aliran modern merupakan salah satu daripada ciri-ciri Islam sebagai agama yang mampu menghadapi cabaran semasa yang datang dari dunia intelektual.

INTRODUCTION

For almost one thousand two hundred years right from 7th century until 17th century Muslim dominated the world from all angles, political, social, economic, educational, intellectual, and religious. Now for the last two and three centuries, they are dominated by others, politically, economically, culturally, and socially. The modern ideas, concepts, philosophies, and principles have now become intrinsic parts of Muslim thought and civilization. Modernity, as in mostly other cases, may have its pros as well as its cons. Muslims need to be clear on whether each

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and every single component of modernity is to be forthrightly rejected or there are constructive elements that may not have any conflict with basic Muslim philosophy of life. Muslim scholars seem to be fully aware of the challenges posed by modernity to Muslim world. They have reacted variously. An analysis of these thoughts and responses to the modernity is pressing need of the time.

Understanding Modernity

The word modernity is synonym to the modern Western thought because it is rooted in the Western culture. It is usually used in Western literature to denote certain cognitive, normative, and structural changes that emerged in modern history in contrast with what existed in classic and medieval world¹. The ideal of modernity consists of two distinctive aspects. The first is technical, relating to production and organization skills and techniques. The other aspect of modernity is normative, associated with the values and beliefs of a specific culture². Technical and normative aspects of modernity are spread by the expansion of Western powers to the non-Western areas including the Muslim world³.

There have been various definitions that characterized Islamic modernism given by contemporary writers. For instance, Charles Adam has defined it as a religious reformism dominated by theological considerations to free Islam from the rigidity of Islamic orthodoxy and to show Islam as a religion adaptable to the demands of modern life. Adam used the term Islamic modernism widely in his book *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, and also referred to it also as Mohammadan modernism⁴. R. Hrair Dekmejian outlined the difference between Islamic modernism and modernists with Islamic conservatism and conservatives. The former tried to reform and adapt Islam to modern life, and the latter did not. Dekmejian stated that:

¹ Louay Safi, *The Challenge of Modernity: The Quest for Authenticity in the Arab World* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994), p. 12

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*, p. 14.

⁴ He wrote, "Mohammadan modernism constitutes an attempt to free the religion of Islam from the shackles of a too rigid orthodoxy, and to accomplish reforms which will render it adaptable to complex demands of modern life. Its prevailing character is that of religious reform; it is inspired and dominated chiefly by theological considerations". See Charles C. Adam, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh* (New York: Russell and Russell Publications, 1968), p. 1.

The clash between Islamic modernists and conservatives has been a persistent feature of contemporary Muslim society. While the modernists seek to reform and adapt it to the contemporary life, the conservatives cling to the traditional Islamic precepts and reject Western and other influences⁵.

Meanwhile, Hisham Sharabi contrasted Islamic modernism with Islamic traditionalism. He divided Muslim responses to modern thought and institutions into two broad trends, modernism and traditionalism. He explained their difference by stating that:

Modernism is to be understood as a positive attitude toward innovation and change and toward Western civilization generally; while traditionalism is to be viewed as a negative attitude toward all types of innovation and toward the West. Modernism, thus, represents a dynamic outlook, essentially pragmatic and adaptable; while traditionalism is a static position, fundamentally passive and hardly able to react to external stimuli⁶.

From the above explanations, we may say that Islamic modernism is contrary to Islamic traditionalism in its basic characteristics. In its approach, it attempted to show the compatibility of Islam with modernity, thus, asserted the need to revive the Muslim community. This can be done through a process of reinterpretation or reformulation of Islamic thought to accommodate with the intellectual, educational, political, cultural, and social challenges of the West and modern life.

The Muslim modernists regarded the attitude of the conservative traditionalists, who wished to close their eyes to the modern Western challenges and opposed all forms of borrowing Western ideas and institutions, not only as a negative and self-defeating attitude, but also as dangerous to the very existence of Islamic society. Unlike the conservative traditionalists, they were aware of and reacted to external cultural, social, and political challenges presented by Western civilization⁷.

⁵ R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 21.

⁶ Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 6.

⁷ They maintained that Western civilization was based largely on what Europe had borrowed from Islam. Therefore, they took all the Western challenges squarely in order to defend Islam.

Two Major Muslim Reactions

The following discussion will elaborate on two major divisions of Muslim responses to modernity; first, the rejection of modernity, and second, the assimilation of modernity with different degrees and approaches. However, it must be remembered that those classifications are theoretical categories only. People, in the realities of their life situations, can rarely be fitted neatly into one position or the other. For instance, ideally, one might be modernist, but practically, he or she might be a traditionalist. Thus, the classification of Muslim responses is only helpful to indicate tendencies, but rarely adequate to constitute a full analysis.

1) The Rejection of Modernity

The idea of rejection or negative attitude towards modernity has been proposed by some of the conservative or traditionalist Muslim thinkers. They understand that Islam must be free from any influence. They believe that Islam can grow by itself and not by considering surrounding factors of changes to happen in the society.⁸ They denied all values to modernity and saw it as the root cause of all modern troubles. In addition, they believed that an adaptation of Islam to changing conditions of modern society as *bid'ah* (deviation from Islamic tradition). Thus, they criticized all religious, legal, educational and social reforms in the light of modern world and knowledge as un-Islamic. Western Christian practices to infiltrate Islam. For instance, they condemned modern European and Western education as alien, superfluous, and a threat to religious thoughts. For them, any form of cooperation with the West or adaptation of its culture is betrayal and surrender. In this sense, they advocated a policy of cultural isolation.

This group contains within it many of the learned scholars (*'ulamā'*), and other religious and traditional authorities in general, many of the mystically oriented Sufi groups and the vast majority of those who have not been exposed to modern education, and thus to a great extent have not experienced the challenge of modernity. For them,

⁸ The probable reason is their dissatisfaction towards the past Muslims who were very much influenced by the external influence and later to form a 'mixture' understanding of Islam. Osman Bakar described this to be the 'response of people who have lost their self-confidence to face the challenge of alien cultures. Osman Bakar, 'Muslim Intellectual Responses to Modern Sciences,' in *Tawhid and Science*, (Kuala Lumpur: Secretariat of Islamic Philosophy and Science, 1991), p. 220.

all these issues are irrelevant and insignificant. The basic orientation of this group is traditionalism, that is, it derives its inspiration and strength from a historically evolved tradition and in its intellectual attitude, it always assumes a backward-looking stance. For the traditionalists, the past was the locus of the Golden Age⁹. Change is to be rejected, thus, they believed that human social structures have not undergone any basic changes especially since the time of the Holy Prophet, and that there is no possibility of such a change in future either¹⁰. In this regard they claimed that the Islamic social structures developed during the early days may not be altered, and the legal structures as well are to be taken as immutable. Thus, their major hallmark here is their rejection of *ijtihād* and belief in the dogma of *taqlīd*. Irfan Abdul Hamid Fattah defined this group as:

A traditional imitative stand, a forthright absolute rejection of Western modernity, affirming that what is worth knowing is in the accumulated and amalgamated historical traditional sciences. Therefore, knowledge of another sort, under auspices bore no value. It was an ideology which confiscates both the present and the future for the sake of the past¹¹

In illustrating the traditionalists' position, Sayyed Hossein Nasr wrote:

For the traditional Muslim, Islam is unchangeable and stable like the *Ka'ba* toward which he prays and for him, the traditional doctrine of eternity and the temporal order cannot itself change or evolve because it belongs to the eternal order¹².

The traditionalist ideas of the group can be best referred to the famous movement in Arabia in the eighteenth century which was known

⁹ Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914*), p. 6. In this sense, they tend to conserve and reserve not only the Islamic laws, customs and traditions practiced during the early period of Islamic history, i.e during the time of the Prophet, and the first four pious, but in the middle period of Islamic history as well.

¹⁰ Shah Waliullah admits the possibility of such change before the time of the Prophet, thereby necessitating changes in the *sharī'ah* laws of various prophets. See his discussion on this matter in his *Hujjat Allah al Bālighah* (Bayrūt: Dār al- Ma'rifah, 1979).

¹¹ Irfan Abdul Hamid al-Fattah, *Islamization: The Meaning, Purpose and Process of Islamization*, unpublished paper. p. 1.

¹² Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 245.

as *Wahhābī* movement¹³. It was also known as the fundamentalist movement, which was established by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1793)¹⁴. His followers call themselves the *Muwahhīdīn*, that is, believes in *Tawhīd*, but they were commonly known as *Wahhābīs*. By accepting only the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the material sources of religion, they inevitably resulted in almost absolute fundamentalists and literalists as far as the body of the Qur'an is concerned. They even rejected *qiyās*, the analogical method of reasoning.

In the long run, the teachings and writings of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and his followers provided as inspiration for twentieth century Muslim thinkers, particularly in the movement that came to be called the *Salafīyyah*. Because of the movement's general fame and its location at the center of Islam, the *Wahhābī* movement has come to represent the prototype of rigorous fundamentalism in the modern Islamic experience.

2) The Assimilation of Modernity

This group of thinkers is aware of the circumstances surrounding Muslims in order to present Islam as a universal as well as practical religion. Their main concern is to reconcile Islam with any challenges including the Western modernity. The group can be divided into two main trends of thinking; the absolute assimilation of modernity and the selective assimilation of modernity.

A) Absolute Assimilation of Modernity

The idea of absolute assimilation of modernity is best referred to a group of extreme Muslim secularists who endeavored to prove the supremacy of modernity. This group passed judgment upon Islam solely on the basis of those ideas imported from Europe or the West¹⁵ which they consciously or unconsciously assumed superior. This means that they derived their central assumptions from the Western thought, which

¹³ See the general principles of *Wahhābī* movement in Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 42-44.

¹⁴ He was born in central Arabia to a family of teachers attached to the Hanbali school. He was trained in the strictest of the Sunni schools of law and then went to Makkah and Madinah for more education. Through his studies in Madinah, he had been influenced by the thought of Ibn taymiyyah. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 37.

¹⁵ The identification of the terms Europe and the West are briefly elaborated by Fikret Karcic in *The Bosniaks and the Challenges of Modernity: Late Ottoman and Hapsburg Times*, pp. 22-25.

resulted in secular patterns of thinking. All aspects of life including the military, religious, educational, and economic were strongly influenced and inspired by Western modernity. Their attraction to Western ideas of science and civilization prompted them to reject Islamic civilization as the ultimate significance in human advancement and progress.

Before discussing some of the secular modernists' point of views, let us see the major examples of secular responses occurred in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. Modernization program in both countries began with the military structure, whereby Muslim rulers like the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) and Muhammad Ali (1805-1849) in Egypt tried to emulate the Western modern armies. Thus, they created military training schools staffed by Europeans. Military modernization was accompanied by government attempts to modernize their central administration, law, education, and economy¹⁶. It was Muhammad Ali who pursued science and modernization strongly without any particular regard to religion¹⁷. He founded schools on the European patterns where European sciences were taught, at first by European professors whom he had specifically invited, and later by Egyptians trained in the West¹⁸.

The program of modernization was developed and systematized during the later half of the nineteenth century through an ambitious series of reforms known collectively as *tanzīmāt*. During this period,

¹⁶ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, p. 41.

¹⁷ H.A.R Gibb, S.J. Show and W. J Polk (editors), *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 247.

¹⁸ At the intellectual level, the defense and justifications of modern sciences were mainly provided by Arab Christian thinkers. Their ideas were channeled through some periodicals, such as, *al- Hilāl* and *al- Muqtataf*. For example, Darwinism was introduced into the 'Arab world by Shibli Sumayyil (1860-1916) who, in his numerous articles dealt with the social and philosophical meanings of Darwin's scientific discoveries. In 1910, he published a book on Darwin's theory of evolution entitled *The Philosophy of Evolution and Progress*. In his view, only knowledge attainable and verifiable through the methods of physical sciences can truly be called knowledge. Thus, for him, ultimate validity consisted in scientific (verifiable) validity. Shumayyil also made a clear distinction between science (natural or physical sciences) and what he called the human sciences (*al 'ulūm al- bashariyya*). He subordinated the human sciences to the physical sciences as he claimed natural science is the source of all the sciences. It constitutes the grounding of the human sciences; they must precede everything else. See Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haikal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), pp. 97-98.

Islamic institutions were challenged by the support of modern elements, for example, land reforms, new legal codes and courts to adjudicate civil, commercial, and penal affairs. Traditional institutions of the Islamic state moved to a gradual process of secularization; that was the separation of religion from the institutions and functions of the state. As a result, the ideology, law and institutions of state were no longer Islamic legitimated, but were indebted to imported models from the West. Rather than turning to their Islamic past and to the '*ulamā*' for advice, the secularists looked to the West. With the elements of secularism in all spheres of life, Muslims had tended to restrict Islam to the personal and moral sphere of life. Islam, for them, was merely a private religion, and it is not directly involved in social and political life. They turned to the West to rejuvenate the socio-political areas of life.

The most important effect on secularism, which was experienced by all Muslim countries, is in the sphere of education. The significance of religious education has been diminished within the establishment of secular schools. From the nineteenth century onwards, there happened to be a dual system of education in the Muslim world namely religious and modern secular education. Religious education was normally available and aimed specifically for religious basis, for example, learning Arabic and memorizing the Qur'an, the syllabus of modern knowledge was totally neglected. Meanwhile, modern secular education only emphasized on modern secular knowledge following the Western educational philosophy. This new kind of education represents an important factor in the introduction of secularism¹⁹.

One of the main characteristics of secularists' outlook is its influence of modern Western rationalism and scientific developments. It is no doubt that Islam, in general, is compatible with reason and science,

¹⁹ This is especially true not so much because of the subject-matter (such as mathematics and natural sciences) taught but because of the point of view from which subjects are taught. The modern subjects taught are not simply the continuation of the Islamic sciences. Islamic sciences always relate to the existence of God and His authoritative power, whereas for the modern sciences, God is irrelevant to sciences. That is the reason why the majority of Muslim students studying them tend to cause a dislocation with regard to the Islamic tradition. Therefore, by teachings the various modern European arts and sciences, which are for the most part alien to the Islamic perspective, the curriculum of the schools and universities in the Muslim countries has injected an element of secularism into the mind of some Muslims. See Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p.13.

but some modernists have gone further by over emphasizing on the role of reason and science in Islam. For example, an Indian sub continent scholar Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) has laid down what he termed the criterion of 'Conformity to Nature'²⁰ to judge the contents of systems of belief and concluded that Islam justified itself on this principle²¹. Being influenced strongly by nineteenth century Western rationalism and natural philosophy, he argued that Islam was the religion of reason and nature. The Qur'an must be interpreted in accordance with reason and nature, and the legal and moral code must be based on nature. Nature has been declared as a close-knit system of causes and effects, which allows no supernatural intervention. In this regard, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was implying that there was nothing, which transcended the world of nature, and that man was the judge of all things²². Clearly, he was influenced by a kind of deism²³, which was fashionable among the nineteenth century scientific circles of the West.

The influence of modernity was also observable in the socio-cultural and political domain. In this sphere, he undertook the reformation of Muslim society in India by publishing a journal, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, in which he discussed the prevailing customs and social habits of the Muslims from a rationalistic and utilitarian viewpoint.

²⁰ This idea began to be introduced by him after his visit to England in 1867-70, whereby he applied the term 'nachariyya' to Islam (Some said the term 'nachariyya' is derived from the English word nature).

²¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p. 218.

²² Jamal al Din al Afghani saw it as a new expression of a way of thought which had endangered true religion. For Afghani, Ahmad Khan seems to be too materialistic. He reflected it in his largest work, *al-Radd 'alā al-dahriyyīn* (the Refutation of the Materialists). Those whom he attacked under the name of 'materialists' included all from Democritus to Darwin with their equivalents in Islam, who gave an explanation of the world not involving the existence of a transcendent God. Al Afghani seemed to complain the influence of nineteenth century Western Materialism in Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He said, "Materialists like Sayyid Ahmad Khan are even worst than the materialists in Europe for those in Western countries who abandon their religion still retain their patriotism and do not lack zeal to defend their fatherland, while Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his friends represent foreign despotism as acceptable". See J. M. S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), pp. 117-119.

²³ Deism is naturalistic belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. It conceives of God as totally apart from the universe; God presumably created a well-ordered universe endowed with immutable laws, which has thereafter operated without further divine intervention. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 8, p. 644.

More importantly, he introduced among Muslims, the Western educational system in order to transform their mentality and to enable them to enter government service. His Aligarh College, modeled on Cambridge University, aimed at liberation of ideas and inculcation of a scientific worldview and a pragmatic approach to politics. It gave a new direction to Muslims, politically and culturally. His visit to England was intended to study the culture and institutions of Europe for the progress and betterment of India²⁴. It, however, influenced him strongly. The most objectionable element of Ahmad Khan's thought was his dismissal of the *shari'ah* as irrelevant to the Muslims of modern India.

Another secular modernist who shared a positive attitude towards Western civilization is an Egyptian writer, Taha Husayn, especially known through his book entitled *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr*. Providing an introduction to the liberal secularist ideas of the time, his book was written to identify Egypt culturally as part of Europe and outline a program of public education accordingly. He argued that Egypt has always been an integral part of Europe as far as its intellectual and cultural life is concerned in all its forms and branches. In one statement, for example, he wrote:

Al Azhar will fail unless the culture that it propagates throughout the Islamic world is attuned to the personality of the modern Muslim molded nowadays by secular education and modern life²⁵.

His interest to the influence of the West also appeared in his political approach to his country. For instance, he said:

We seek no guidance in our government from the Caliphate. Instead we have set up national, secular courts and enacted laws in conformity to Western rather than Islamic codes²⁶.

²⁴ Aslam Siddiqi, *Modernization Menaces Muslims* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1981), p. 47.

²⁵ See Sidney Glazer (trans), *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (Washington D. C: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954), p. 136. This book is a translation from the writing of Taha Husayn entitled *al-Mutaqbal al-Thaqāfah*, which consisted of two volumes and which was published in Cairo in 1938.

²⁶ Quoted in Nadav Sadran, *Egypt in Search of a Political Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 157. Taha Husayn also believed that the political system of early Islam was not prescribed by God through His Revelation to the Prophet, thus, had no divine sanction behind it. Therefore, he saw it as not significant. See Taha Husayn, *al-Fitnah al-Kubrā* (Cairo: n.p, 1962), pp. 26-27.

The secularist standpoint in politics was also shared by ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq in his book *al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* (Islam and the Bases of Rule) which argued that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) had not established a formal system of government and that no such system was defined in the Qur’an and Sunnah. He seemed to challenge that the sources of authority in Islam are no longer valid and that democratic principles are superior to the Islamic ones. According to him, the Caliphate was not an obligatory or a necessary institution of Islam. Far from being a source of strength, he believed the historical Caliphate was a source of weakness and it gave rise to many evils²⁷. He also rejected the theory that the Prophet was a ruler, and claim²⁸ed that the Prophet had no coercive authority; he was only a preacher²⁹.

In contemporary times, the example of secular and liberal understanding of Islam is Islam Liberal in Indonesia which is represented by a movement called as Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL). The main task of JIL is to introduce Islam through their new interpretation of religion, and it was mainly expressed by its co-ordinator Ulil Abshar Abdalla³⁰ in an article presented in *Harian Kompas*, a formal newspaper in Indonesia on 18th November 2002. For him, understanding on Islam is ever-changing with the development of human civilization. Issues like female head covering, the amputation of hands (for theft), retaliation (for death or injury), stoning (for adultery) should be changed. Under the label of humanism, the ban on inter-religious marriage, in case between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, is no longer relevant.

Ulil observed that the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was only a historical figure who should be the object of critical study and not an admired mythical figure whose human aspects and possibly weaknesses should be ignored. He further expresses that the Muslims are not obliged to imitate the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) literally. Other figures that are related

²⁷ Ali Abdul Raziq, *Al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* (Cairo: n. p, 1952), p.38.

²⁸ Refer to Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1982), p. 157.

²⁹ The claim that the Prophet possessed no coercive authority sounds impossible. The Qur’an prescribed punishments for many crimes such as theft and adultery. How could these punishments have been administered if the Prophet had not the necessary authority to punish the criminals? It is also clear that the Prophet entered into treaties, such as Hdaybiyah with the Jews of Madinah and non-believers of Mekah. If he had been merely a preacher, how could he have made these treaties?

³⁰ Ulil received his first education from a pesantren, then continued at Lembaga Pendidikan Bahasa Arab (Arabic Language). Later, he pursued at STFD (Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Driyarkara).

to Liberal Movement in Indonesia are Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi and others. Other than opening Islamic decisions to reinterpretation more than what is agreeable to others, they are also using minimal reference to the Prophetic traditions³¹.

In short, the group of secular modernists clearly preached the complete adoption of Western culture and not only a total break with traditional Islam but also as far as possible to shaken and take out conclusions available in Islam as decided by al-Qur'an and Tradition of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.).

B) Selective assimilation of modernity

This group of thinkers undertook the task of modernizing only in a special sense and a limited degree. As an intellectual movement, Islamic modernism did not produce a unified movement on enduring organizations; its legacy was substantial in its influence on the Muslim community's development and its attitude toward the West. This stand was started by Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1838-1897), the father of Islamic modernism. He believed that Muslim strength and survival could be achieved not by ignoring the West, but by direct, active engagement and confrontation. Muslims could claim and re appropriate the sources of Western struggle because, he asserted, that those sources had also been part of their Islamic heritage as witnessed by the past contributions of Islamic civilization in philosophy, medicine, science, and mathematics³². Therefore, al-Afghani, like most Muslim modernists, strongly recommended acquiring Western learning, technology and services, as long as borrowing from the West was selective and served the basic needs and inspirations of the Muslim people³³. The ideology and method of Muslim modernists could be further reflected through their intellectual responses to certain particular issues they were dealing with.

³¹ Greg Barton, "The Emergence of Neo-Modernism: A Progressive, Liberal Movement of Islamic Thought in Indonesia", Ph.D Thesis, Monash University, 1995, p. 17.

³² Due to this assertion, al- Afghani exhorted Muslims to look to their own glorious Islamic past as source for their inspiration, identity and unity. The reassertion of Muslim identity, according to al- Afghani, was a pre requisite for the restoration of political and cultural independence. See John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, p. 49.

³³ In this major undertaking, which al- Afghani believed would raise the standard of living of all Muslims; he struggled to initiate an Islamic reformation similar to the successful Reformation sparked by Martin Luther for Christianity. Refer to Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al- Dīn al Afghani: A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 141.

For the purpose of this study, some main features of this group were identified. They are as follows:

a) Empowering *Ijtihād* as a Means of Reinterpreting Religious Thought

The Muslim modernists believed in progressive, dynamic, and rational characters of Islam. Dynamic change in Islam, according to them, is not only possible, but necessary. Islam, as a cultural entity has always been able to cope with change and has built into its structure ways of dealing with change. New situations were ably managed by the institutionalized juridical system. Certainly, it is true that basic sources of Islam- the Qur'an and the Sunnah are viewed as unchanging, but the legal system of Islam must admit changes within its framework without deviating from its fundamental principles. In this sense, the Muslim modernists felt a need for the reinterpretation of Islamic laws in light of modern conditions, and they opposed strongly to the dogma of *taqlid*³⁴. Al Afghani was critical to those ulama who believed in the *taqlid* and discouraged any new and creative thoughts, as he claimed that Islam is the closest religion to knowledge and learning, and there is no contradiction between modern knowledge and the basic principles of Islam. Therefore, he acknowledged the role of human reason and it led him to proclaim that the door of *ijtihad* is not closed and it is the duty as well as the right of well-equipped scholars to apply the principles of the *Qur'ān* to the problems of their time. Al-Afghani chastised the Muslims, "to refuse to do this is to be guilty of stagnation... or imitation, and these are enemies of true Islam"³⁵. After all, al-Afghani saw the dynamic vitality, strength, progress and prosperity of the West as the result of its use of reason and the encouragement of scientific and technological processes which the impoverished and weak Muslim world refuse to adopt³⁶.

³⁴ Most of the Muslim modernists, in general, maintained that *taqlid* was the main reason for the decline of Muslims, whereby they were lack of critical and creative thought, as well as lack of vigorous discussion and debate about Islamic laws and issues. *Taqlid*, for them, would prevent Muslims to offer solutions to modern Muslim life and challenges.

³⁵ See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 127.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 109.

Like al-Afghani, ‘Abduh claimed that *ijtihad* was not only permitted, but it is essential³⁷ in circumstances where the Qur’an and the Sunnah gave no clear guidance, state an implicit principle or are just silent. In his legal reform, ‘Abduh divided two spheres of Islamic law. The first sphere includes beliefs and religious obligations, like prayer and fasting, which are immutable; the second sphere referred to social regulations and worldly affairs, such as civil, criminal, and family laws, which are subject to change. It is in this sphere that the practice of *ijtihad* should be applied in order to be flexible and adaptable enough in accordance with changing condition and needs, as well as, the requirements of the Muslim community. The same idea has been proposed by Muslim modernist of sub-continent, Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938)³⁸, who was highly critical to the stagnation of religious thought among the Muslims. Thus, he considered *ijtihad* as the means to the intellectual development of Islamic thought.

The most contemporary figure on the vitality of the *ijtihad* is Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi. His writings on different issues including the position of woman, the responsibility of man in social life and the concept of politics in Islam as well as on jurisprudence are serious call for Muslims to remain intact with *shari’ah* while facing all challenges in life³⁹.

In fact, thinkers under this category exist in all localities including Muslim minorities such as Balkans and West. In the Balkans, and Bosnia specifically, there are Fikret Karcic, Enes Karic, Adnan Jahic and others. These figures share with other Muslim reformers to highlight the true picture of Islam and at the same time focus on the challenges at Bosnia. Fikret highlighted the practicality of *shari’ah* in all spheres of Bosnian life. Enes, on the other hand highlighted the relationship of

³⁷ Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Risālat al Tawhīd* (The Theology of Unity) (al Qāhirah: Dār al Ma’ārif, 1971), p. 159. See also Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 147.

³⁸ Iqbāl has discussed this in the chapter “The Principle of Movement in the structure of Islam”, which stressed on *ijtihad* as the principle of movement, change, and progress in the structure of Islam. See Muhammad Iqbāl, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. This idea has also been stressed by almost all Muslim contemporary scholars, such as, Muḥammad al Tāhir Ibn ‘Āshur, *Maqāsid al Shari’ah al Islāmiyyah* (Tunis: al Sharikah al Tunisiyah, 1988), and Hassan al Turābi, *Tajdīd Usūl al Fiqh al Islami* (Jeddah: al Dar al Sa’udiyyah, 1984).

³⁹ Al-Qaradawi also responded to the challenge of globalization in his book *Khīṭābunā al-Islāmi fī ‘Asr al-‘Aulamah*, (al-Qahirah :Dar al-Shuruq, 2004).

Islam with the changes that take place through his Qur'anic study. While explaining his concept of Islam as a common culture, he clearly opposed the *Wahhabism* which he considered as an attempt to monopolize Islam⁴⁰. The same concern is shared by Tariq Ramadan in which he rejected the dogmatic and literalist approaches rather urged for historical and contextualized interpretation and critical reading⁴¹.

b) Reconciling Religion and Reason in Science and Other Disciplines

Another fundamental issues raise by Muslim modernists was the reconciliation between religion, science, and reason⁴², whereby Islam was viewed as compatible with reason and science. Responding to Western critics, such as from Sir William Muir (1819-1905) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892) who criticized that Islam and science were incompatible with one another, Al- Afghani argued that Islam was in harmony with the principles discovered by scientific reason and was indeed the religion demanded by reason⁴³. In one statement, al-Afghani claimed that,

“Our *ulama* these days have divided science into two parts, once they call Muslim science, and one European science. Because of this they forbid others to teach some of the useful sciences; they have not understood that science is that noble things that had no connection with any nation, and it is not distinguished by anything but itself... And those who forbid those sciences in the belief that they are safeguarding Islam are really the enemies of that religion. Islam is no incompatibility between science, and the foundation of Islamic faith”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Xavier Bougarel, “Bosnian Islam as ‘European Islam’”, in *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 107-109.

⁴¹ Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 15-16.

⁴² This issue was not raised for the first time. The Mu'tazilites and the philosophers had raised it earlier, and they had given their own solutions. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it acquired a new dimension, and it had been presented again by some of the modernists. The difference of approach in terms of moderate and extreme use of science and reason does not stop at a general level, but appears in detailed solutions to specific problems handled by them.

⁴³ See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1789-1939*, p. 123.

⁴⁴ His full text is translated by Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl al Dīn al Afghānī* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 107.

His disciple, Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) also rejected the view that Islam has been hostile to reason and science. Based on his premise that no differences exist between science and religion, ‘Abduh argued that both science and religion are rooted in reason, and that the Qur’an urges man to use his reason. According to ‘Abduh, God reveals spiritual truth through prophets, but the spirit of the religion is rational⁴⁵. Therefore, Islam was not only incompatible with reason but is the only religion, which calls upon man to use his reason and investigate nature. Since the Qur’aan persuades Muslims to study the universe, and does not apply any restrictions thereto, religion is a friend of all rational inquiry and all sciences. It will continue to support science and both will cooperate in reforming the heart and the intellect of man⁴⁶. Thus, ‘Abduh affirmed that Islam was essentially in accord with modern science and reason. Such was his respect of science, and he urged his fellow Muslims to acquire the knowledge of the sciences in which Western nations excel, in order to be able to compete with them.

In the later days, many efforts have been done not only to prove that Islam is in line with reason, but also to promote Islamic answers to problems facing the world. In the political fields, the main figure is Rashid Ghannoushi who talked on democracy in Islam and emphasized on the compatibility of *shari‘ah* and man’s vital interests.

c) Reforming Education

The most important objective emphasized by the Muslim modernists in their educational reform was to remove a dual system of education in the Muslim world, namely, traditional religious education and modern education. They were neither content with the former because it lacked of modern subjects nor with the latter because it lacked of religious subjects, which degenerated moral standards among the students. Therefore, they proposed to combine both types of education, so that the Muslim intellectuals would be able to trace the Western ideas and to participate in the development of their country and society, as well as, to maintain their religious beliefs and practices. In this sense, al-Afghani claimed that:

⁴⁵ See Malcom Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 109-111.

⁴⁶ Muhammad ‘Abduh, *al Islām wa al Nasraniyyah wa al ‘Ilm wa al Madaniyyah* (Misr: Matb’ah al-Mannar, 1931), p. 202. See also Charles Adam, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, pp. 153-154.

man is man because of education... Education, if it is good, produces perfection from imperfection, and nobility from baseness⁴⁷.

He also believed that a man could be educated to be part of a nation, and to serve its social order, which in turn will be his guardian⁴⁸. In order to achieve this, Afghani defended the necessity of Muslims to study Western education and science. As highlighted earlier, he acknowledged that Western nations had acquired power and progress because of their superiority in learning and the sciences, thus, he reminded Muslims about the importance of them as an effective force for freedom from decadence and servitude.

Like al-Afghani, 'Abduh also believed in the importance of reforming education for bringing Muslims out of their intellectual, moral, economic, and social backwardness. He observed that the experiment of modernism in his country-Egypt produced not only two systems of education but two educated classes, each with a spirit of its own. One was the traditional Islamic spirit, resisting all change; the other was the spirit of the younger generation that accepted all changes and all the ideas of modern Egypt⁴⁹. Thus, he found that the Egyptian society of his time turned into traditionalism and secular modernism. Due to this separation, he proposed to bridge this gulf by introducing the idea of reconciliation between the traditional religious educations with the modern one. Basing Islam as relevant to contemporary thought and life in the modern world, 'Abduh proposed the acquisition of modern knowledge in general. Besides, he introduced many reforms in the University of al Azhar. Since al Azhar had been the oldest and greatest center of higher learning for Muslims in Egypt and in the entire Muslim world, 'Abduh believed that 'if the Azhar were reformed, Islam would be reformed'⁵⁰. In order to achieve this, he tried to introduce a broader and more philosophical conception of religious education in Azhar⁵¹. For example, he changed the curriculum of the University, and included some of the modern sciences. He also suggested some improvements to

⁴⁷ Nikkie R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Barkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 123.

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 68.

⁴⁹ See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, p. 138.

⁵⁰ Refer to Charles Adam, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, p. 70.

⁵¹ H.A.R Gibb, *Mohammadanism: An Historical Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 120.

the methods of administration and teaching in the Azhar in order to make it compatible with a European University. His aim was to raise the prestige of al Azhar in reforming Islam in Egypt as well as in other Muslim countries. Thus, al Azhar would become a lighthouse and means of guidance to all Muslim worlds.

Muslim modernists attempted to establish continuity between their Islamic heritage and modern change. They based their principle arguments on Revelation and Islamic history, and identified themselves with their pre-modernists Islamic revivalist predecessors⁵². On the other hand, they applied selective values of modern Western thought and institutions. Therefore, not simply restoring the early Islamic practices, Muslim modernists advocated an adaptation of Islam to modernity, thus, possessed an outlook toward both the past and the future.

Starting from 1980s, a new wave of reforming education took place. The efforts were known as the Islamization of Human Knowledge. The main objective is to refurnish the Western theories of knowledge with Islamic values after acknowledging the contribution of Western theories to man's life. A lot of writings on Islamization of knowledge have been produced by were produced key figures, such as, Isma'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Abū Sulaymān, Ṭāhā Jābir Alwānī. Another relevant group of thinkers are Syed Naquib al-Attas, Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud and others who gave different emphasis and approaches of Islamization of knowledge. The idea of Islamization has even been institutionalized with the formation of International Islamic University Malaysia with its key figure of Mohd Kamal Hassan.

CONCLUSION

The researcher found that the responses of modernity came from different approaches. The two extremist groups could be categorized as those who refused any contact with modernity and those who accepted it blindly. The researcher found that both are inadequate positions, and not

⁵² For example Ibn 'Abd al Wahhab (1703-87) and Shah Waliullah (1703-.1762). The movements connected to them may be termed pre-modern in the sense that they developed before the impact of the industrialized West had been felt. They may best be termed puritanical movements and they certainly influenced for later social and legal change in the Islamic world. For the overall context of these pre-modernist groups, refer to John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdīd and Iṣlāḥ" in John L. Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 32-47. See also Yvonne Haddad, "Muslim Revivalist Thought in the Arab World" in *The Muslim World*, vol. 76 (n.p, 1986), pp. 143-167.

able to present a real solution for contemporary Islamic thought. Therefore, the researcher is in opinion that the best Islamic response is the third school of thought which preached the need for a selective synthesis of Islam and modernity. This group successfully identified the contradictory principles of modernity that could be in conflict with Islam and its acceptable values that could be compromised, for example, the views of its advocates on the reconciliation between religion and science. For them, science is a valuable part of human learning, and scientific discoveries and rational truths would not be opposed to Islamic principles. They strongly held that the knowledge of the existence of God, for example, could be comprehended and understood within the natural order of creation and science. Differing from those Western modernists who regarded science as an absolute reality, they were aware of the inherent limitations of scientific knowledge and explained that the laws of science are not eternal and absolute. It was an eternal and absolute God who established the patterns of behavior that we call scientific laws, and Who created a universe to act in accordance with those laws.

The advocates of this group have produced a balanced system of thought. As they belong to both of the intellectual realms; the religious tradition of Islam and the modern Western knowledge and culture, they have a tendency to differentiate between the positive and negative facets in each. Therefore, the most important aspect of their minds is their critical approaches towards both cultures. Due to this character, they are really suited to be placed within a mediating group. They are neither absolute traditionalists who totally oppose the values of modernity nor absolute modernists who totally assimilate modern values and civilization. At the same time, we should not deny the contribution of both the extreme stands towards modernity. Many of them had greatly contributed towards the world of Islam. It is very important to reinstate that this humble writing is not intended to be judgmental on the contribution of the scholars but quoted within this paper as examples of some issues that need to be highlighted. Lastly, this paper is not written in the spirit of discrediting the contribution of any scholar or criticizing all of his ideas presented through his literary works.