



AL-SHAJARAH

ISTAC Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization

Published by IIUM Press
Special Issue 2024

AL-SHAJARAH

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The journal is published twice a year, June-July and November-December. Manuscripts and all correspondence should be sent to the Editor-in-Chief, *Al-Shajarah*, F4 Building, Research and Publication Unit, International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), No. 24, Persiaran Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Taman Duta, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. All enquiries on publications may also be e-mailed to alshajarah@iium.edu.my. For subscriptions, please address all queries to the postal or email address above.

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MODERN REFORMS IN THE ISLAMIC THOUGHT WITH REFERENCE TO SCIENCE: A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Zain Razzaqⁱ and Dr. Rab Nawazⁱⁱ

Abstract

Orientalist scholarship in Western academic literature has portrayed Islam as ignorant, backward, and anti-science. However, there has been a paradigm shift in this monolithic approach to the academic study of Islam. The modern interpretation of Islam supports science and shows the face of Islam as being in harmony with Western practices and procedures. The new representation of Islam has further been categorised into friends and foes. This paper consists of three sections, one of which is based on a study of some of the key reforms proposed by Muslim modernists regarding Islam and modern science. The second part aims to present the Islamist response to modern science, a group that is often presented as an opponent and foe of Islamic modernism. It also includes a comparison between Islamic modernist and Islamist approaches to highlight the differences in their methodology. The final section proposes a new methodology to address the issue of the incompatibility of Islam and modern science. The study employs an analytical research methodology with a qualitative approach. It prioritises primary sources but also uses secondary sources when needed. Books, research papers, and online resources are utilised to analyse differing viewpoints and approaches. Books, research papers, and online resources have been used to explore various methods adopted by Muslim scholars in the Indian subcontinent regarding the relationship between Islam and modern science.

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Keywords: Reform, Islamist, Islamic Modernist, Modern Science, Islamisation, Modernisation

Modern Reforms: Paradigms Shift in the Studies on Islam and Modern Science

In the Indian subcontinent, *‘Ulamā* and their institutional continuity of *madrāsas* have long been significant in shaping and transmitting Islamic thought. However, their unprecedented importance has been affected by the advent of modern knowledge and ongoing changes – thus losing its centrality over time. The majority of the *‘Ulamā* have become conservative in response to losing their influence and have adopted a rejectionist attitude towards reform. On the other hand, a small group of scholars, influenced by modern science and education, sought to reconstruct Islamic thought. The fundamental problem in front of them was to show the harmony between Islam and modern science. This section consists of a careful evaluation of modern reforms in relation to modern science.

Reinterpretation of Islam: Sayyid Ahmad Khān

Sayyid Ahmad Khān (d. 1898) is the pioneer of modern reforms in Islamic thought in the Indian subcontinent. He belonged to a high Mughal family and experienced many spheres of power and influence, including serving as a judge for the British East India Company.¹ He had a profound impact on how the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent understood modernity and how they dealt with the challenges of modern science. Ahmad Khān observed the steady decline of Muslim influence in India and initiated Muslim reforms as the situation of the time demanded that some measure should be taken which would divert the attention of the Muslims to the demands of the time and the future.² Since the political and social

¹ For a detailed biography of Sayyid Ahmad Khān, see Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-e-Javed* (Lahore: Urdu Academy Pakistan, 2020). See also Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800026519>.

² Syed Nazeer Niyazi, *Iqbal Kay Huzoor*, vol. 01 (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1981),

status of Muslims was dependent on their religion – as they are guided by Islam in worldly affairs – Ahmad Khān took it upon himself to engage in religious debates to reform their condition. This took place from 1857 onwards³

Modern science, according to Ahmad Khān, has revealed the reality of many secrets of the past. In this age, whoever claims something to be true, even if it is a religious truth, is not considered true unless he proves it to be true.⁴ He claimed that modern science has conclusively established the truth. Although this truth has only recently been discovered, it is perhaps the intention of God for it to be as such.⁵ Modern science does not merely possess a degree of doubt and conjecture, it is also based on the experience of facts in accordance with the law of cause and effect, on permanence and uniformity of events, different forms of induction, repeated observation, and observation by way of refined instruments.⁶

In most of his writings, Ahmad Khān repeatedly emphasized the reconciliation of Islam with modern science, as he considered both to be divine.⁷ Principally, there is no conflict between Islam and modern science because both are two different ways of expressing the same truth; Islam is the word of God while science is the work of God.⁸ Furthermore, he suggested that the word of God must be followed only to the extent that it is consistent with nature (work of God).⁹ For him, it is quite apparent that denying the work of God

<https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/iqbal-ke-huzoor-volume-001-syed-nazeer-niyazi-ebooks?lang=ur>.

³ Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-e-Javed* (Lahore: Urdu Academy Pakistan, 2020), 573.

⁴ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Maqalat-e-Sir Sayyid: Volume 03*, ed. Muhammad Ismaeel Panipati, vol. 03 (Lahore: *Majlis-e-Taraqqi-e-Adab*, 1984), 148.

⁵ Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 165-68, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800026519>.

⁶ Khan, *Maqalat-e-Sir Sayyid: Volume 03*, 286-300.

⁷ See for example, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Aakhiri Mazameen (The Last Articles) (Lahore: Mansoor Press, 1897); and Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tahrir Fi Usool-Ul-Tafsir (Writings in Usool-Ul-Tafsir)* (New Delhi: Maktabah Jamia Limited, 1995).

⁸ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tahrir Fi Usool-Ul-Tafsir (Writings in Usool-Ul-Tafsir)* (New Delhi: Maktabah Jamia Limited, 1995), 50.

⁹ Mohammad Imteyaz, *Indo-Muslim Religious Thought in 19th Century: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and His Critics* (Aligarh Muslim University, 2008), 156.

is impossible. Consequently, to believe a contradiction between the two would lead to rejecting the word of God. The contradictions between Islam and science, according to Ahmad Khān, only occurred due to misinterpretation of the revealed text¹⁰ that can be resolved by reinterpreting the Qur'anic text.¹¹ Ahmad Khān was the first in modern India to realize the necessity for a new interpretation¹² as for him, the existing Islamic thought cannot meet modern challenges caused by science. However, the emergence of a new *'Ilm-ul-Kalām* is needed.¹³ The purpose of the new *'Ilm-ul-Kalām* is to show that religious truth is not incompatible with science. For Khan, this purpose can be fulfilled;

1. either by proving that what religion says is the truth and science and philosophy really agree with religion; and by refuting science and philosophy where they disagree with it.¹⁴
2. or by showing that the domain of religion is different from that of science and philosophy;¹⁵ and where religion speaks of things with which science deals with, its purpose in speaking of them is not the same as that of science, i.e. it does not aim at telling us what the nature of such object exactly is (like science). It only aims at the moral and religious conclusion.¹⁶

By employing the second method, Ahmad Khān addressed the question of whether the earth is stationary or in motion from the

¹⁰ Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology*, 169.

¹¹ Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *Quran Aur Musalmano Kay Zinda Masail (Quran and the Real Problems of Muslims)* (Lahore: Ilm-o-Irfan Publishers, 1989), 222.

¹² Bashir Ahmad Dar, *Religious Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1957), 262.

¹³ Imteyaz, "Indo-Muslim Religious Thought," 162.

¹⁴ Khan, *Tahrir Fi Usool-Ul-Tafsir (Writings in Usool-Ul-Tafsir)*, 31-62.

¹⁵ The former course is relatively complicated because, despite the resemblance in the problems of religion, science, and philosophy, it is full of apparent contradictions that require the extraordinary capability to resolve. See Muhammad Suheyl Umar, *Iqbal's Sermons: A New Perspective*, 3rd ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2018).

¹⁶ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Aakhiri Mazameen (The Last Articles)* (Lahore: Mansoor Press, 1897), 84.

Qur'anic perspective. For him, the Qur'ān neither proves that the earth is stationary, nor does it prove that the earth is in motion. Similarly, it cannot be proved from the Qur'ān whether the sun is stationary or moving. The Qur'ān did not address these problems of astronomy because it believed that human knowledge would resolve them by itself as it progressed. The Qur'ān describes such scientific matters as people observe them. The real purpose of religion is to promote morality and not to raise questions that hinder the achievement of this aim.¹⁷ Similarly, in response to another question, Ahmad Khān asserted that the Qur'ān does not prove Geocentrism. People believe in the motion of the sun because they believe it is moving around the earth. The Prophet's duty was not to explain the actual reality of the phenomenon, nor was it deemed necessary for those people; instead, the purpose of mentioning the motion of the sun in this verse is to illustrate the omnipotence and majesty of God.¹⁸

Ahmad Khān's thought had several weaknesses that were frequently identified and criticised by both his contemporaries and later Muslim scholars. The major weakness is that in the case of the conflict between Islam and science, Ahmad Khān condemns and critiques the Islamic tradition only. Although he should have dealt with modern science in the same way, he embraced it uncritically. Many of his contemporaries, such as Sayyid Mehdī Alī and Alī Bakhsh Khān, heavily criticised Khan for prioritizing modern sciences over religion.¹⁹ By applying this principle in his *Tafsīr*, he rejected the hadiths and traditions related to physical ascension to be unreliable and contradictory to reason and the laws of nature. He rejected the miracle of physical ascension by preferring the laws of physics over Islamic tradition and interpreted it as a dream journey.²⁰

¹⁷ Khan, 84.

¹⁸ Khan, 82-83.

¹⁹ Inteyaz, "Indo-Muslim Religious Thought in 19th Century: Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and His Critics.", 152-66.

²⁰ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tafsir-Ul-Quran with Usool-i-Tafsir* (Lahore: Dost Associates, 1995), 1075-1197.

Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts: Muhammad Iqbāl

Muhammad Iqbāl (d. 1938) is the most prominent Islamic poet and philosopher of India. He was born and brought up in a family that was a follower of Ahmad Khān. He was influenced by Ahmad Khān from the very beginning as the influence of the *Alāgarh* Movement was dominant at the time of Iqbāl's birth. He was a part of the process of reconstruction of Islamic thought in India which Ahmed Khān started.²¹ For Ahmad Khān, the new arrival situation was only a matter of changes in certain cultural conditions and social problems, while Iqbāl realized that instead of such superficial interpretations of the situation, we must go deeper and see whether Islam can accept Western civilisation in terms of its essence or not. For this, it is necessary to revise the concepts of life and universe, time and space, spirit, and matter, etc. which existed in the traditional religious culture, and they should be redefined in such a way that they can be able to absorb the progress of Western civilisation.²² Iqbāl claimed that the Islamic world is rapidly moving towards the West, which is changing the mindset of Muslims. In this situation, there is a need to save Muslims from chaos and confusion.²³ In this regard, it should be remembered that in the West, empirical sciences were shaped by the scientific ideas of Muslims during the Renaissance period. Therefore, according to Iqbāl, there is nothing wrong with Muslims being influenced by them because the intellectual side of the West is only a continuation of some of the most significant stages of Islamic culture. The only fear is that because of the stunning external side of Western culture, Muslims may fail to reach the true interior of this culture.²⁴ More importantly, to what extent can the consequences of Islamic cultural influence in

²¹ Sagheer Afraheem, 'Sir Sayyid-o-Allama Iqbal: Humahangi-e-Fikr-o-Amal', accessed 29 March 2023, <https://www.rekhta.org/articles/sir-sayyad-aur-allama-iqbal-hamahangi-e-fikr-o-amal-sagheer-afraheem-articles?sort=popularity-desc&lang=ur>.

²² Saleem Ahmed, 'Islam Aur Hind Islami Tehzeeb', *Neya Dour*, n.d., 257–65, <https://www.scribd.com/document/248637139/اقبال-اور-ہند-اسلامی-تہذیب-سليم-احمد>.

²³ Faruqi, *Quran Aur Musalmano Kay Zinda Masail (Quran and the Real Problems of Muslims)*, 66.

²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 6.

Europe support the reconstruction of modern religious thought, and how much can it help understand the meaning of Islam as a universal message to humanity? For this purpose, Iqbāl considers it necessary to reconcile religion with science.²⁵ Iqbāl is criticised for claiming Islamic teachings as the basis of scientific epistemology.²⁶

At *Alāgarh*, Iqbāl delivered six lectures on “the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam”, in which the biggest problem before him was to identify the principle of movement (*usūl al-harkah*) within the structure of Islam and Islamic civilisation keeping in view the specific situation that has arisen with the advent of Western civilisation. In these lectures, Iqbāl adopted the reconciliatory method proposed by Ahmad Khān, a tacit assumption of which is that the problem, method, solution, and aim of religion, and science are identical.²⁷ This reconstruction consists of reconciling Islam with knowledge (scientific and metaphysical) because both religion and knowledge are human values and cannot be retained side by side unless they are reconciled, while on the face of it, they seem to be in conflict.²⁸ He attempted to prove on the basis of the common elements of Western and Islamic civilisations that there is nothing in Islam and Islamic civilisation that is incompatible with the modern mind accustomed to the senses, which is concerned with the world of things and events. His lectures are an attempt to reconcile the mechanical principle of causality with free will, creation with evolution, life after death with human mortality, and the religious experience with sense perception as a source of knowledge. This conciliation attempt is an accusative response to those minds who consider recognition of the findings of empirical sciences to be a deviation from Islam and do not find room in Islam for the acceptance of these findings or recognize Islamic concepts as unscientific in comparison to the validity of these findings.²⁹ In his lectures, he adopted a conciliatory style in order to bring modern

²⁵ Faruqi, *Quran Aur Musalmano Kay Zinda Masail* (Quran and the Real Problems of Muslims), 222.

²⁶ Ansari, *Capitalist Values and Ideologies: An Islamic Approach*, 15.

²⁷ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1.

²⁸ Faruqi, ‘A Critique of Iqbal’s Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam’, 4.

²⁹ Faruqi, *Quran Aur Musalmano Kay Zinda Masail* (Quran and the Real Problems of Muslims), 223.

civilisation closer to Islam.³⁰ The addressees of these lectures are mostly Muslims who are influenced by Western philosophy, and who wish to explain the philosophy of Islam in the language of modern philosophy, and if there are flaws in the classical thoughts, they should be resolved.³¹ Since Iqbāl himself was influenced by Western philosophy, he also studied Islam from the perspective of Western philosophy.³²

The fundamental weakness in Iqbāl's conciliatory attitude toward modern science is that he is in difficulty grasping the nature of the fundamental implications of Islam and science and the limits of their validity and has consequently ended up obliterating their fundamental distinctions.³³ So, when the distinctive aspects of the Qur'ān were overlooked and it was framed on the principles of man-made knowledge, it became a knowledge of exegesis, interpretation, causation, and analysis that failed to produce the desired results.³⁴

Domains of religion and science are separate: Burhān Ahmed Fārūqī

Burhān Ahmed Fārūqī (d. 1995) was born in *Amroha*. He received his higher education from *Aligarh* Muslim University and received special training in the subject of philosophy from Syed Zafarul Hasan (d. 1949).³⁵ Unlike Iqbāl, Fārūqī attempted to show that there is *no incompatibility* between modern science and religion by following the second course suggested by Ahmad Khān, according to which the scope of religion is different from that of modern science. Fārūqī's distinction is that instead of religion and science, he compiled his response in terms of "Divine Knowledge" and "Man-made

³⁰ Muhammad Suheyl Umar, *Khutabat-e-Iqbal: Naey Tanazur Main*, 3rd ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2018), 172.

³¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *Iqbalnama: Majmooa Makatib-e-Iqbal*, vol. 01 (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1951), 210.

³² Iqbal, 46.

³³ Faruqi, '*A Critique of Iqbal's Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*', 43.

³⁴ Faruqi, *Minhaj-Ul-Quran (Methodology of the Quran)*, 9.

³⁵ For a detailed biography of Burhān Ahmed Fārūqī, visit <https://tanzeeloriwayat.com/dr-burhan-ahmed-farooqi/> (accessed 25, March, 2023)

Knowledge”.³⁶ Man-made knowledge informs about the exact nature of a thing or idea, whereas revelation does not aim at what the nature of a thing is; it only aims at the moral conclusions - how man-made knowledge is to be reformed under the guidance of revelation.³⁷

The problems and purpose of the Qur’anic knowledge and Man-made knowledge which seem to be identical need to differentiate.³⁸ For him, the Qur’ān has knowledge that cannot be obtained through science. Consequently, considering religion as the source of science can cause the stagnation of scientific enhancement.³⁹ According to Farūqī, Qur’anic knowledge is the knowledge of the objectives and the plan that guarantees the attainment of these objectives. How to develop intellectual, moral, artistic, religious, and spiritual values in life is the key concern and purpose of the Qur’ān.⁴⁰ This knowledge is productive and can ultimately achieve the desired results. Man-made knowledge is the knowledge of the nature of things, which is different from that of Qur’anic knowledge.⁴¹ Seeking this knowledge in science instead of religion can lead to deprivation of religion.⁴² So, there are basically two types of knowledge, one which is given by the Qur’ān and the other which is acquired by human beings.⁴³ For example, the main problem of economics is the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth, which is organized under the values and ideologies of each economic system while ‘Qur’ān-based economics’ deals with the problem that how to prioritize the attitude of helpfulness, selflessness, and empathy over acquisitiveness and

³⁶ The central point of Fārūqī’s work is the Quranic concept of revolution and ‘*Minhāj-ul-Quran*’ is a key work in which the entire system of Fārūqī’s concepts has come to the fore.

³⁷ Faruqi, ‘*A Critique of Iqbal’s Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*’, 40.

³⁸ Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *Minhaj-UI-Quran (Methodology of the Quran)* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986), 72.

³⁹ Faruqi, *Quran Aur Musalmano Kay Zinda Masail (Quran and the Real Problems of Muslims)*, 41.

⁴⁰ Faruqi, 103.

⁴¹ Faruqi, *Minhaj-UI-Quran (Methodology of the Quran)*, 9.

⁴² Faruqi, *Quran Aur Musalmano Kay Zinda Masail (Quran and the Real Problems of Muslims)*, 41.

⁴³ Faruqi, *Minhaj-UI-Quran (Methodology of the Quran)*, 74.

covetousness.⁴⁴ Similarly, sociology deals with the problem of what is society, and on what basis is a society formed. What are the reasons for the rise and fall of societies? whereas the problem of ‘Qur’ān-based sociology’ is how to reform social life and how to prioritize the attitude of fraternity over racism.⁴⁵ The problem of political science is what the state is, and on what basis the state is formed. What is its purpose and how it achieves that purpose? Lust for power gives rise to political antagonisms, in turn, the demand for rights becomes the driving force of action. The one who demands rights is regarded as an offender of lawlessness and the one from whom rights are demanded is a persecutor and oppressor and thus this conflict never ends. Qur’anic polity creates a social contract between the ruler and the subject by declaring the fulfilment of duty as the motive of action.⁴⁶

The separation between Islam and science is possible only at the level of empirical observation. However, due to the differing scientific approaches and varying ways of understanding knowledge in Islamic schools of thought, this separation often turns into conflict.⁴⁷ This is why many Muslims, as well as atheists, believe that religion and science cannot co-exist. For example, Richard Dawkins argues that one can either be a religious person or an evolutionist, but not both.⁴⁸ Similarly, Ansari claims that Islam and social sciences are diametrically opposed to each other. Islamic identity neither survived nor flourished within capitalism.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Faruqi, 80.

⁴⁵ Faruqi, 79.

⁴⁶ Faruqi, 81.

⁴⁷ Omar Qureshi, Afifi Al-Akiti, and Aasim Padela, ‘Islam and Science: Reorienting the Discourse’, in *Islam and Biomedicine*, ed. Afifi Al-Akiti and Aasim Padela (Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 245–54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53801-9>.

⁴⁸ Shoaib Ahmed Malik, *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazali and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*, *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazali and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm* (Taylor and Francis, 2021), 5, accessed doi:10.4324/9780429345753.

⁴⁹ Ansari, *Capitalist Values and Ideologies: An Islamic Approach*, 265.

Monotheistic Revolution of Islam and Modern Science: Wahīduddīn Khān

Wahīduddīn Khān (d. 2021) renowned Islamic scholar, spiritual mentor, and ambassador of peace, who presented Islam in a modern context to engage modern minds. He was born on 01 January 1925 in Badharia, a village near Azamgarh. In 1938, his uncle admitted him to *Madrassa-tul-Islāh* in *Sarāi Mīr*, near Azamgarh which laid the foundation for his religious base.⁵⁰ Just like Ahmad Khān, Wahīduddīn Khān advocated for a new interpretation of Islam and encouraged acceptance, rather than rejection, of the beneficial aspects of Western culture. In his writings, he attempted to reconcile religion with science, and he successfully proved that Islam is the only religion that conforms to the standards of modern science.⁵¹ He claimed that Islam is a monotheistic revolution that separated nature from its sacred foundation and opened the way for investigation, research, and discovery.⁵² Arab Muslims were the ones who initiated the modern scientific revolution, but the initial inspiration came from the new way of thinking that Islam had made possible.⁵³ As all the phenomena of nature were sacred, natural sciences had turned into a forbidden field. The root of all evil is a perception that something is sacred when it is not that is called Polytheism. For Wahīduddīn Khān, polytheism or superstition was not only a theological issue but was related to all human affairs which made nature sacred and vanished the idea of exploring it because what is sacred cannot be investigated.⁵⁴ Modern science is a by-product of the Islamic Revolution that has been cut off from its totality.⁵⁵ Therefore, if Islam is removed from human history, all civilisations and human

⁵⁰ For a detailed biography of Wahīduddīn Khān, visit his official website; <https://www.cpsglobal.org/life> (accessed 30, January, 2023)

⁵¹ Rafique Anjum Awan, *Revisiting Islam : The Reformist Thought of Wahiduddin Khan* (New Delhi: Adam Publisher & Distributors, 2018), 280-81.

⁵² Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam: Creator of the Modern Age* (New Delhi: Al-Risala Books, 1997), 7, <https://www.cpsglobal.org/books/islam-the-creator-of-the-modern-age>.

⁵³ Khan, 7.

⁵⁴ Khan, 7.

⁵⁵ Wahiduddin Khan, *Paighambar-i-Inqilab* (Lahore: Fiction House, 2013), 204, <https://cpsglobal.org/read-online-book/pyghmbr-anqlab-paighambar-e-inqilab>.

advancements will have to be erased along with it and after that, the world will return to the dark age that existed before the Islamic Revolution.⁵⁶ He claimed that innovative people in the past were also born who thought independently of their surroundings, but because the environment was not responsive, their individual thoughts were unable to develop. The Islamic revolution provided a favourable environment due to which numerous fields of knowledge flourished.⁵⁷

Islam made this revolutionary distinction between religious and physical knowledge for the first time. The source of religious knowledge is revelation which is preserved in the form of the Qur'ān. However, in the field of physical knowledge, complete freedom has been provided to conduct independent research.⁵⁸ For him, the subject of science is not the discovery of the Creator, but the material world, which in religious terms is called 'God's creation'. Since the Creator is not separate from His creation, it can be indirectly said that science is the study of God's creation. The facts that science discovered through its studies are all the manifestations of God's signs, which are called *Ayātullāh* in the Qur'ān. A scientist may deny the existence of God but cannot negate his sign which has been explored by modern scientific research.⁵⁹ Wahīduddīn Khān emphasized that when the God who created the universe has also revealed religion, then how can there be a contradiction between true religion i.e. Islam, and science?⁶⁰ For him, although the Qur'ān is far from being a book of science, modern scientific discoveries are highly beneficial for the proper understanding of the Qur'ān. For instance, the Qur'ān states: that God made from water every living thing.⁶¹ In the past, readers of the Qur'ān had a basic understanding of this concept. However, when present-day readers explore such verses in combination with the latest scientific discoveries, they gain

⁵⁶ Khan, 'Islam: Creator of the Modern Age', 160.

⁵⁷ Khan, 52.

⁵⁸ Khan, 36.

⁵⁹ Wahiduddin Khan, *Khuda Ki Daryaft* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2020), 147.

⁶⁰ Wahiduddin Khan, *Islam Aur Asr-e-Hazir* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2018), 111, <https://www.cpsglobal.org/books/islam-aur-asr-e-hazir>.

⁶¹ *Al-Anbiyā'*: 30

additional details. It enhances their belief in the authenticity of the Qur'ān.⁶²

Modern Science and Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Jāvēd Ahmad Ghāmidī

Jāvēd Ahmad Ghāmidī is a Pakistani Muslim theologian, Qur'ān scholar, Islamic modernist, exegete, and educationist. He was born on April 7, 1952, in a village called *Jīvan Shāh* in District *Sāhīwāl*, Punjab. In 1983, Ghāmidī decided to establish a foundation for learning and research by the name of Al-Mawrid. The vision behind its organization was to facilitate research in Islamic sciences and its dissemination and publication.⁶³ In TV programs and YouTube sessions, he often expresses his opinion on the relationship between Islam and science, for which he adapts the second principle proposed by Ahmad Khān. Like Fārūqī, Ghāmidī also believes that the description of scientific realities and historical events is not the real concern of the Qur'ān at all. The core concern of the Qur'ān is to inform mankind about the oneness of God, and about the Day of Judgment. He said that “sometimes the secondary comments in the Qur'ān serve to strengthen the concept of the Oneness of God and the Day of Judgment, providing additional reasoning for these fundamental beliefs”. Ghāmidī emphasized that if the factual realities stated in the Qur'ān appear to be consistent with the facts concluded by modern science, it will confirm the facts stated in the Qur'ān. However, regardless of such affirmations, the primary concern of the Qur'ān is moral. He also provided an example to illustrate this point. The chapter in the Qur'ān, *As-Sajdah* describes the story of the creation of man, it can be said that current scientific research conforms to a great extent to these details, although this was not the intention of the Qur'ān. Since it is the Word of God which cannot be untrue; many such Qur'anic truths have been verified by scientific research over time. So, the Qur'ān and modern science can be

⁶² Wahiduddin Khan, ‘The Scientific Exegesis of The Quran’, *Divine Revelations*, accessed 30 January 2024, <https://www.cpsglobal.org/articles/scientific-exegesis-quran>.

⁶³ For a detailed biography of Jāvēd Ahmad Ghāmidī, visit his official website <https://www.javedahmedghamidi.org/#!/about-ghamidi> (accessed 30, January, 2023)

compatible, but it is important to interpret the Qur'ān based on its own statements and not impose contemporary understandings, as modern knowledge is constantly evolving, and interpretations may need to be revised.⁶⁴

Ghāmidī emphasized that when studying the Qur'ān and commenting on its interpretation, it is important to show that your interpretation reflects the original author's intent. In this regard, to understand the correct meaning of the Quranic words;

1. The *Mufasssir* has to determine how the Arabs used the words during the time of *Jāhiliyyah* when the Qur'ān was revealed (popular usage of the words).⁶⁵
2. If the word has multiple meanings and implications, the next step is to determine what meaning has been specified by the construction of the sentence and to what extent the connotation has been limited and bound by the context and coherence.
3. The issue is not whether the image formed in the *Mufasssir's* mind by the meaning of the word is compatible or inconsistent with any modern science. A *Mufasssir* must focus solely on understanding God's intention.

These modernist reforms never gained general acceptance among traditional Muslim scholars because of the uncritical acceptance of modern scientific epistemology, and instead of being influenced by it, Muslim scholarship was attempting to preserve Islamic epistemology from its negative effects.⁶⁶ Muqtedar Khān highlights some of the reasons why modernists have failed to gain mass influence and reach. According to him, most of the modernists do not come from within traditional religious academies and are therefore not considered as legitimate as traditional scholars. Mostly,

⁶⁴ In a YouTube video titled “*Kya Zameen Sakin hai?*” Ghāmidī answered some important questions about Islam and science. For the full video visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmJpHFF50sg> (accessed 01, April, 2023)

⁶⁵ Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, *Islam: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Al Mawrid, 2014), https://issuu.com/webmaster_jag/docs/05_islam_-_a_comprehensive_introduc.

⁶⁶ Javed Akbar Ansari, ‘Social Sciences Aur Islami Inqilabi Jidojohad’, in *Monthly Sahil* (Karachi, 2001), 7–17.

they are academics and researchers whose language, theories, and methodologies may seem either unfamiliar or too complex for widespread understanding among the general population. Islamic modernists also failed to establish influential institutions and movements capable of significantly impacting the Muslim masses and effecting the desired change. Perhaps the most important reason why Islamic modernism does not have appeal is that their demands for reform in Islamic thought are often seen as a call to ‘change Islam itself’.⁶⁷ They do not know how much damage is being done to the Islamic identity by adopting this conciliatory attitude. Ansari asserted that proposed modern reforms lead to the subordination of Islamic individuality, epistemology, society, and political authority structures within the Western system.⁶⁸ Islam has a self-sufficient ability that does not need any new interpretation in line with modern science. Hassan Ilyās highlighted some other reasons why the reforms proposed by Ghāmidī failed to gain popularity, which are summarized as follows.

1. In these reforms, the scholarly tradition of Islam is criticised, spanning fourteen centuries.
2. The scholars with whom the advocates of these reforms associated themselves were also not part of this Islamic scholarly tradition.
3. They present religion in a distinctive manner that Muslim communities are not accustomed to.
4. Many modernists do not even look like the traditional scholars trusted by the Muslim community.⁶⁹

Islamist Response to Modern Science

Like Islamic modernists, Islamists also try to deal with the same problem of incompatibility between Islam and modern science. However, they take another extreme position on the issue. Sayyid

⁶⁷ Muqtedar Khan, *Islam and Good Governance: A Political Philosophy of Ihsan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 59-60.

⁶⁸ Ansari, *Capitalist Values and Ideologies: An Islamic Approach*, 16.

⁶⁹ See the YouTube video titled “*Ghamidi sahab ki fiker aur ulama ky rawaay*”. For the full video visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_b5h0tRUZw&t=2s (accessed 29, April, 2024)

Abul A'la Mawdūdī (d. 1979) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) are seminal figures who played a key role in developing Islamist ideology. They present Islam as a complete system of life. For Islamists, Islam possesses a self-sufficient ability that does not require any new interpretation to harmonize it with modern science.⁷⁰ They are highly antagonistic towards modernity and science. According to Mawdūdī, Islam has always been confronted with different forms of *jāhiliyyah* (ignorance) such as *jāhilyat-i-mushikāna*, and *jāhilyat-i-rāhibāna*.⁷¹ The modern *jāhiliyyah* dominated in the West is *jāhilyat-i-khālisah* (absolute ignorance). For Syed Qutb, *jāhiliyyah* is not a specific form of society or period of history but an essence. Although the external manifestation of *jāhiliyyah* may evolve with the condition of society and the change of time, the core value remains the same in all forms.⁷² Modern *jāhiliyyah* possesses more evil aspects in comparison to other *jāhiliyyah* because it consists of eye-catching material progress and scientific theories that do not believe in any reality beyond the senses.⁷³ Qutb claimed that Islam knows only two kinds of societies: the Islamic and the *jāhilī*.⁷⁴ *Jāhilī* society refers to any society that is not Islamic. An Islamic society can only be formed when everyone rejects the servitude of anyone except Allah and chooses to submit exclusively to Him, Who has no associates, and decides that they will organize their lifestyle on the basis of this submission.⁷⁵ The Islamic society, by its very nature, is considered the only civilized society, while *jāhilī* societies, in all their various forms, are regarded as savagery.⁷⁶ In contrast to Islamic society, a society is considered *jāhilī* if it does not commit itself to complete submission to Allah alone in its beliefs, ideals, worship practices, and

⁷⁰ Javed Akbar Ansari, *Rejecting Freedom and Progress: The Islamic Case against Capitalism* (Lahore: Kitab Mehal, 2016), 85.

⁷¹ Syed Abul 'Ala Mawdudi, *Tajdeed-o-Akhyā-e-Din* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2014), 12-21.

⁷² Sayyid Qutb, *Jahiliyyah-Ul-Qarn-Il-Ashreen (Ignorance of the 20th Century)* (Cairo: Dar-ul-Shuruq, 1992), 6.

⁷³ Qutb, *Jahiliyyah-Ul-Qarn-Il-Ashreen (Ignorance of the 20th Century)*, 10.

⁷⁴ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones (Maalim Fil-Tareeq)* (England: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006), 106.

⁷⁵ Qutb, 90-91.

⁷⁶ Qutb, 107.

legal codes. In this context, all the societies of today's world are considered *jāhili*.⁷⁷

Mawdūdī claimed that modern science has two aspects. One aspect contains empirical data acquired through observations and experiences of different ages about the universe and human beings, which is a global heritage. The second aspect consists of framing this data with respect to one's ideology or worldview.⁷⁸ He claimed that Islam has no enmity with scientific information, rather they are all beneficial.⁷⁹ The opposition is not between scientific information and Islam, but between the West (*jāhiliyyah*) and Islam, because the civilisation that the West has formed by compiling scientific data according to its own ideology is exactly opposed to Islam.⁸⁰ Modern sciences such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, economics, geography, history, physics, political science, zoology, etc., which developed and flourished in the West, are all *jāhili* sciences⁸¹ as they are taught without reference to God.⁸² The essential purpose of modern science is to legitimize and ensure the functionality and sustainability of the Western order (*jāhiliyyah*).⁸³ Mawdūdī emphasised that what is needed today is to frame all scientific data from the Islamic perspective,⁸⁴ which is known as the Islamisation of modern science. It is clear from the above discussion that for Islamists, Islam is the only source of truth and civilisation, while the West represents either ignorance⁸⁵ or savagery.⁸⁶ They entirely reject modern science and

⁷⁷ Qutb.

⁷⁸ Syed Abul 'Ala Mawdūdī, *Ilmi Tahqiqat Kyun Aur Kis Tarha? (Why and How Scientific Research?)* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-e-Islami, 1984), 1.

⁷⁹ Syed Abul 'Ala Mawdūdī, *Tanqihat* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1983), 286.

⁸⁰ Mawdūdī, *Ilmi Tahqiqat Kyun Aur Kis Tarha? (Why and How Scientific Research?)*, 12; Mawdūdī, *Tanqihat*, 18.

⁸¹ Mawdūdī, *Ilmi Tahqiqat Kyun Aur Kis Tarha? (Why and How Scientific Research?)*, 13.

⁸² Syed Abul 'Ala Mawdūdī, *The Education (Taleemat)* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2009), 62.

⁸³ Javed Akbar Ansari, *Rejecting Freedom and Progress: The Islamic Case against Capitalism* (Lahore: Kitab Mehal, 2016), 65-66.

⁸⁴ Mawdūdī, *Ilmi Tahqiqat Kyun Aur Kis Tarha? (Why and How Scientific Research?)*, 17.

⁸⁵ Syed Abul 'Ala Mawdūdī, *A Short History Of The Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2009), <https://archive.org/download/TheRevivalist>

seek to replace it with Islamic science.⁸⁷

In contrast to a reconstruction of Islamic thought, the movement for the Islamisation of modern science in the subcontinent gained a lot of popularity. However, it faced academic criticism from two sides: one from Islamic scholars and the other from scientists. The scientific community did not support this because Islamic science has directed its investigations to problems outside the domain of science and so far, it has not discovered any previously unknown facts.⁸⁸ Some scientists believe that there is no such thing as Islamic science. Science is universal and cannot be localised as Islamic, Indian, or Christian science.⁸⁹ Similarly, some scholars argue that the Islamisation of modern science is impossible as it is merely instrumental for articulating the capitalist system and the life world and can serve no other purpose.⁹⁰

Comparison between Islamic Modernists and Islamists

- Both the Islamic modernist and Islamist approaches address the same problem but propose opposite solutions.
- There is a conflicting relationship between Islamic Modernists and Islamists. Islamic Modernists interpret Islamic teachings on the basis of scientific epistemology while Islamists do the opposite. They justify practices and procedures as the basis of *Sharīa 'h*.
- Both approaches also identify the distinct cause of the problem. For Islam modernists, the cause for the problem of incompatibility is Islamic traditional thought while for

MovementInIslamSyedAbulAalaMaududi/The%20Revivalist%20Movement%20in%20Islam%20-%20Syed%20Abul%20Aala%20Maududi_text.pdf.

⁸⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones (Maalim Fil-Tareeq)* (England: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006), 78-81.

⁸⁷ Mawdūdī, *Ilmi Tahqiqat Kyun Aur Kis Tarha? (Why and How Scientific Research?)*, 14.

⁸⁸ Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), 77.

⁸⁹ Abdus Salam, *Ideal and Realities: Selected Essays of Abdus Salam World Scientific*, ed. Choy Heng Lai and Azim Kidwai, 3rd ed. (World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 1989).

⁹⁰ Ansari, *Capitalist Values and Ideologies: An Islamic Approach*, 263.

Islamists the problem is with modern science that requires Islamisation.

- Both approaches have certain weaknesses that ultimately result in the subordination of Islam to modern science.⁹¹
- The Islamic modernists considered the global supremacy of the West as epistemic domination. In contrast, Islamists believe that Islam is the only source of truth and civilisation, and that the West represents either ignorance or savagery.
- Islamic modernists are very uncritical of modern science while the Islamists consider modern science to be an exclusive part of Western (*jāhili*) civilisation and reject it entirely.
- Islamic modernists consider science to be divine, they advocate a mutual harmony between Islam and science. In contrast, Islamists believe that Islam possesses a self-sufficient ability that does not require any new interpretation to harmonize it with modern science.

Our response to Modern Science

Islamists and modernists emerged in response to Western scientific practices and procedures, seeking to revive Islam either in the political⁹² or the epistemic domain.⁹³ In the scientific age, any attempt at Islamic revival is inadequate without responding to the Western challenges. Although both are relatively new to the field of Islamic thought, they have significantly influenced the Muslim way of thinking and discussing Islam.⁹⁴ Both groups hold opposite views on modern science—Islamists reject it entirely and try to Islamise it, while modernists seek accommodation with modern science. Our method of responding to modern science lies between these two extremes. Instead of gluing patches of Islam onto non-Islamic ideologies, as Islamists do, we must reflect on Islam independently.

⁹¹ Ansari, “Capitalist Values and Ideologies” 16.

⁹² Nazih N. M. Ayubi, ‘The Political Revival of Islam: The Case of Egypt’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 4 (1980): 481–99, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163131>.

⁹³ Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqi, ‘Islamisation of Knowledge: Reflections on Priorities’, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 28, no. 3 (2011): 15–34.

⁹⁴ Khan, *Islam and Good Governance: A Political Philosophy of Ihsan*, 49.

Islam also does not need to be adapted to modern times, as Islamic modernists suggest, because Islam has an inherent resilience to address modern requirements. Its eternal and permanent commands remain unaffected by the change in time. For those issues, which may be affected by changing times, Islam lays down rules and principles, which can be modified to show the right path.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Islamic tradition should not be uncritically accepted solely because it is our own heritage, nor should science be rejected simply because it originated and flourished in the West. In contrast, our methodology consists of a mixture of selective use of Islamic tradition as well as modern scientific procedures and practices with the direct guidance of the Islamic authoritative text. We must recognize the beneficial aspects of both modern science and Islamic tradition and avoid what is non-Islamic or against the Qur'ān and Sunnah. However, this is not an easy job, only those who have devoted their lives to the study of the Qur'ān and Sunnah and have a deep understanding of their true meanings are suitable for it.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that both Islamic modernist and Islamist perspectives address the same issue—the incompatibility between Islam and modern science—but propose opposing solutions. Islamic modernists try to harmonize Islam and modern science by reinterpreting Islamic texts, believing that the contradiction comes from misinterpretation of the texts. On the other hand, Islamists completely reject modern science and seek to replace it with Islamic science. Instead of accepting or rejecting the Islamic tradition and modern science in their entirety, the paper concludes by proposing a selective approach that critically assesses the issue, endorsing the positive aspects of both while avoiding their negative sides. This selective approach has ample room to adjust to changing circumstances while maintaining a deep commitment to the essence and fundamental principles of Islam.

⁹⁵ Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Our Socio-Economic Order* (Karachi: Idara-e-Islamiyat, 2001), 33.

	Modernist approach	Islamist approach	Our approach
Problem statement	Incompatibility between Islam and Modern Science	Incompatibility between Islam and Modern Science	Incompatibility between Islam and Modern Science
Problem Identification	Misinterpretation of Islamic Text	Absence of God from Modern Science.	Total acceptance or rejection of both Islamic Tradition and Modern Science.
Solution	Reinterpretation of Islamic text in line with modern science.	Reframing the Scientific data with respect to the Islamic perspective.	Selective use of both Islam tradition and modern science.

AL-SHAJARAH

Special Issue 2024

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WoS-Indexed under Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Current Contents/Arts and Humanities and Scopus

ISSN 1394-6870



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