Islam and Modernity

KEY ISSUES AND DEBATES

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Introduction

The experience of modernity in Muslim societies has varied from a sense of total disruption of their life world to recognition of progress and improvement in their political economies (Jami’a 1984: 4). Muslims mostly perceive modernity in terms of Western modernity and vary in their views on its relevance and compatibility to Islam. Muslim modern trends range from reform to total rejection of either tradition or modernity. Discourses on reform also differ in their perception of modernity and tradition. This chapter studies Islamic Modernism, one of these reform discourses. It is an interactive discourse that revisited the notions of compatibility, modernity and tradition during its debate with others.

Studying Islamic modernism is quite problematic; no Muslim thinker calls him or herself an Islamic modernist. Also, it overlaps with at least three other discourses on reform. The first discourse, often described as revivalism and reform (Voll 1982; Rahman 2000), continues from pre-modern times. It calls for the revival (iḥyāʿ) of the practice of the Ancestors (ṣalaf), the first three generations of Muslims, and reform (iṣlah) of religious practices such as visiting of graves for intercession, fertility, health, and prosperity, celebrating birth and death anniversaries of saints, and adherence (taqlid) to schools of law. The Wahhabi movement in the Hijaz revived this discourse in the late eighteenth century, and it survives today in various Salafi movements. This approach paved the way for other reform discourses, as it promoted the ideas of self-criticism and individual responsibility. Radicalised forms of this discourse in the twentieth century, however, popularised opposition to modernity.

The second discourse regards adherence to tradition and religion as the main cause of backwardness of Muslims. It is a non-religious approach, sometimes also called ‘Western modernist’, or simply modernist discourse. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938), who abolished the Ottoman caliphate, closed religious institutions and adopted European codes, is often mentioned as an example of this discourse. This approach is not essentially anti-religious but does not derive its justification from Islamic tradition.

The third discourse, the focus of this chapter, is generally designated as ‘Islamic modernism’ (Aziz Ahmad 1967; Rahman 1970; Moaddel 2005), as
it aims to root ‘modernism’ in Islamic tradition. It shares with the other two discourses the urge to reform Muslim society but disagrees with their rejection of modernity or tradition. Instead, it affirms that modernity is compatible with Islam, and a new Islamic theology is required in order to justify this compatibility.

The discourse appears paradoxical and apologetic on some points. For instance, it admires Western sciences and technology but is mostly critical of the West. Islamic modernism explains this ambivalence by distinguishing ‘modernisation’ from ‘Westernisation’. Nevertheless, Muslim perceptions of what constitutes the core ideas of modernity seem to be informed by how ‘Western modernity’ unfolded itself in their experience. For instance, the changing perceptions of modernity as science, nationalism and human rights coincide with the shifting emphasis in ‘Western modernity’. These paradoxes must be studied with reference to the debates in which reform discourses developed in Muslim society. The chapter suggests that, since this discourse is primarily addressed to Muslims, it must adopt a methodology that is familiar to Muslims. This is necessary also because, during its interaction with others, it realised that other discourses rejected modernity or tradition because of their inefficient methods of reasoning. In Islam, theology had evolved historically as a methodological framework to deal with intellectual challenges. Modernity posed challenges to which the old theology could not respond. This theology not only refused to recognise these challenges but also rejected modernity. Islamic modernism, therefore, called for a new theology. Despite its pivotal significance, this call has not been studied properly. The chapter proposes to underscore Islamic modernism as a movement for a new Islamic theology.

Before we begin an analysis of these new theologies, a brief account of the development of Islamic theology in the pre-modern period is given first, to illustrate that, because of the continuous search for universal principles, Islamic tradition has been continuously renewing itself.

**ʿIlm al-kalam**

Theology (ʿilm al-kalam) in Islamic tradition evolved as a defensive science to respond to two needs: to justify Islamic beliefs and to provide a framework for justificatory reasoning. The terms kalam (theology) and mutakallim (theologian) were used first with reference to the Muʿtazila (al-Ashʿari 1990, vol. 2: 20, 124, 150), who held that the idea of accountability on the Day of Judgement required belief in human free will. They also believed that the Qurʾan was not co-eternal with God; it was created and appeared in a concrete historical context. The Muʿtazila named this theology the science of ʿilm al-kalam (al-Shahrastani 1975: 32). The systematic development of theology started under the patronage of the caliphs al-Maʾmun (reigned 813–32) and al-Muʿtasim (833–42), when the
Mu‘tazila borrowed heavily from Greek metaphysics and logic (al-Shahristani 1975: 32). This theology was defeated by the hadith group, which held that the Qur’an was eternal and thereby was and is universally binding. Official imposition and Abbasid patronage of the Mu‘tazila theology and court trials of leaders of the hadith movement like Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855) led to the unpopularity and eventual defeat of the Mu‘tazila.

Abu’l-Hasan al-Ash‘ari (d. 936) criticised the Mu‘tazila for relying on non-scriptural sources (al-Ash‘ari 1990, vol. 2: 50) and called for a new theology based on Islamic traditional beliefs, which should be given a fundamental position in the religious sciences similar to logic in philosophy (al-Shahristani 1975: 32). Ibn Khaldun (d. 1382), defining theology as ‘a science that provides rational proofs about faith and refutes the innovators who deviate from the path of the ancients’, describes al-Ash‘ari theology as a turning point in its history of Islamic theology (Ibn Khaldun 1989: 458).

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) found theology and jurisprudence in his time critically deficient. Since theology functions as a universal framework (al-‘ilm al-kulli) to all religious sciences, its premises (kulliyat, muqaddimat) must be definitive to arrive at conclusive proofs (al-Ghazali 1970, vol. 1: 5), whereas it employs merely widespread popular premises (muqaddimat mashhurat), which are insufficient for this purpose (al-Ghazali 1970, vol. 1: 48). He added logic to the list of religious sciences. Al-Ghazali’s theology employed logic as a method of reasoning. Ibn Khaldun (1989: 466) called it modern theology (and their practitioners muta‘akhkhirun), distinguishing it from the earlier ones that relied on philosophical premises.

Causality was one of the critical issues in Ash‘ari theology. Divine commands could not be rationalised for the purpose of analogical reasoning (qiyas), because God cannot be said to act under causality. Ash‘ari jurists suggested that the middle term or cause (‘illā) must be discovered in the Divine text. Al-Ghazali (1970, vol. 2: 230) clarified further that reason given in a Divine command is not a cause; it is only a sign. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210) explained causality as accidental; humans observe two events happening at the same time repeatedly (‘ada) and mistake one for the cause of the other (Masud 2000: 144). Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) disagreed and faulted al-Ash‘ari theology for confusing the two realms of nature and morals. Human agency is not required in the execution of laws of nature, but it is necessary in religious and moral laws (Masud 2000: 149). Ibn Taymiyya’s reconstruction of Islamic theology paved the way for further discussions on rationality and authenticity.

Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 1388) explored the concept of the intent of the Lawgiver in divine commands as the ground for legal reasoning and developed a jurisprudence of the objectives of law (maqasid al-shari‘a). He distinguished between ‘ibada (religious obligation) and ‘ada (customary obligation). The former is prescribed only by revelation as human reason cannot determine the
good and bad in such matters. ‘Ada – which also means recurrence, nature, habit, practice, and custom – is the area where good and bad are determined by human reason on the basis of recurring experience. Shari‘a, or Divine Law confirms human experience and commands as good what is so in its absolute meaning. Instead of deduction, al-Shatibi employed the method of induction to discover universal rules (kulliyah) in the Qur’an and hadith as well as in habits and customs. These universal rules were more exact (qat‘iya) and conclusive than selective texts. He also suggested the concept of ‘common good’ (maslaha) as a universal principle which is authenticated inductively by human experience (‘ada) as well as by revelation. Humans infer universal principles by a discursive process which is essentially inter-subjective i.e. validated via interaction between discerning subjects. Laws are for the good of mankind, not because they are absolutely and inherently good, but because humans have found them so.

Shah Waliullah of Delhi (d. 1768), claimed by some scholars to be the ‘father of Islamic modernism’ (see, e.g., Ansari 2003, vol. 2: 274), also rejected the old theology. He found it irrational to believe that divine commands obliged humans to obey for the sake of obedience, not for their good. One of his major works, the Conclusive Proof of God, offers rational explanations (asrar) for Islamic beliefs and practices, providing historical context, and references to human nature and social history. He also provides intra-textual references to Jewish and Christian scriptures. He relies, however, for his rationalistic world view and belief in universal principles on Greek metaphysics, ethics, philosophy and logic as adopted by Islamic tradition. Debates on modernity found this reliance on Greek metaphysics in traditional theology inadequate to meet modern challenges.

Origins of Islamic modernism

The origins of Islamic modernism can be traced to at least four interrelated factors. First, a sense of decline was felt in the eighteenth century in the Muslim world in general (Masud (ed.) 2008) and led several thinkers like Shah Waliullah (d. 1762) to stress the need for reform (Naz 2008: 186). This sense generated reform movements in the nineteenth century in several Muslim societies. Shakib Arslan’s (d. 1946) Our Decline and its Causes, published in 1939, among several others, sums up this continued concern most eloquently. Islamic modernism was one of several reform discourses that sought to answer this question.

Secondly, this sense of decline was further aggravated by the colonial rule on the Muslim world in the nineteenth century, either directly, as in India and Egypt, or indirectly, as in Iran and the countries under the Ottomans. Justifying colonial rule, most European scholars described political and social systems in the Muslim world as essentially backward, tyrannical and unreasonable and explained that Islam was unable to respond to modern challenges. William
Hunter (d. 1900), an official of the East India Company, identified religious attitudes as the main cause of the revolt in 1857; Muslims were religiously bound to oppose non-Muslim rule. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) rebutted Hunter, clarifying that it was a revolt against bad colonial governance and that all Indian soldiers, Hindus and Muslims alike, participated in that revolt.

Similarly, in France, Ernest Renan (d. 1892), the well-known French Orientalist, blamed Islam for opposing reason and sciences (Renan 1883). In 1895, Gabriel Hanotaux, a French cabinet minister and historian, justified French colonial rule in Africa by arguing that Islam opposed reason and reform and supported tyranny. In response to this criticism, Muslims felt obliged to defend their religious identity.

Thirdly, Christian missionaries who arrived in the wake of colonial adventures attacked Muslim beliefs in Prophet Muhammad and the Qur’an. They pointed to Islamic teachings on jihad, slavery, polygamy and the condition of Muslim women and claimed that Christianity was a superior religion, as it did not allow such beliefs and practices. Sometimes, the colonial administrators in British India, Egypt and North Africa also officially patronised debates organised by the Christian missions. William Muir (d. 1905), Secretary of the Frontier Province in India, shared this missionary zeal. On the suggestion of Revd C. G. Pfander (Troll 1978: 113), he wrote a biography of Muhammad in which he censured Muhammad’s marriages and wars from a Christian viewpoint (Muir 1861, vol. 4: 308). Consequently, most Muslims perceived modernity and colonial reforms as the promotion of Christianity.

Fourthly, Muslim youth educated in modern institutions believed that modernisation meant Westernisation; they disregarded and often ridiculed Islam and Muslim practices. Islamic modernists regarded this development as a threat to their religious and cultural identity and found it necessary to explain that modernity was not in conflict with Islam.

The discourse did not start concurrently in the Muslim world, yet it manifested two main concerns: reform in education, and the need for a new theology. Usually, Jamaluddin al-Afghani (d. 1897) and his disciple Mufti Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) are credited as founders of Islamic modernism, but this is probably due to an exclusive focus on thinkers in the Arab Middle East. Arguably, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the first to write on the subject. His Mohammedan Commentary of the Holy Bible (1862), in which he sought harmony between science and scriptures, and Life of Mahomet (1870), in which he critically studied the issues of polygamy and jihad, appeared much earlier than the main writings of Afghani and ‘Abduh, which were published during 1881–6.

Appraising Ernest Renan’s account of Islam and sciences, al-Afghani clarified that Christians had been more hostile to the Greek sciences than Muslims; in fact, they learnt the Greek sciences from the Muslims. In al-Afghani’s words, ‘the Europeans welcomed Aristotle, who had emigrated and become Arab;
but they did not think of him at all when he was Greek and their neighbor’ (Keddie 1968: 185). ‘Abduh (1897) argued that, whereas religious authority in Christianity was founded on opposition to reason, the tenets of Islam were based on reason. The context of these debates consisted of recent discoveries in the natural sciences, especially Darwin’s theory on the origin of species, which impacted on the Christian and Muslim scriptures directly. Al-Afghani rejected the materialist view of modern science and criticised Darwin for degrading humanity. Khan, on the other hand, took science discoveries as a challenge and proposed a new theology harmonising science and scriptures.

Trained in traditional sciences, Sayyid Ahmad Khan joined the judiciary as a sub-judge under the East India Company in 1840 and remained loyal to the company during the 1857 Indian revolt – but the event transformed his personality deeply. As an author of several scholarly works on religion, history and archaeology, he was proud of his heritage. He believed that Muslims and Europeans must share their heritage of sciences with each other. His personal experience of modernity in 1857 made him critical of British perceptions of Islam and Muslims. To promote mutual appreciation of each other’s heritage of sciences, he founded a Scientific Society in 1867 to translate Arabic books on natural sciences into English and works on modern science into Urdu. A visit to Britain in 1869 left him greatly impressed by English culture and educational institutions. On his return, he launched a journal on moral reform (Tahdhib al-Akhlaq) in 1870 and founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh in 1875, India’s first Muslim university, which emulated Cambridge and Oxford and was intended to educate a new class of modern Indian Muslim gentlemen.

He was convinced that Muslims needed religious reform, especially in theology and jurisprudence. Addressing a gathering of Muslims in Lahore in 1884, Khan said: ‘Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology [jadid ‘ilm al-kalam] whereby we should either refute the doctrines of modern sciences, or undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with Islam’ (Troll 1978: 311). He chose the third option, as the Muslim theologians had done in early Islam adopting Greek sciences. He said that the old theology founded on Greek metaphysics was no longer sufficient, because, unlike the old, the new sciences relied on experiment and observation (Rahman 1979: 217; Baljon 2003, vol. 1: 287). Khan’s Principles of Exegesis (1892) proposed a new theology that discarded the notion of conflict between science and the Qur’an, because science stands for nature and its laws, which are the creation of God. The Qur’an as the word of God cannot be in conflict with Nature as the Work of God: ‘There is no matter in the Qur’an disagreeing with the laws of nature’ (Khan 1970: 30). He rejected the supernatural character of miracles by saying: ‘We declare openly that there is no proof of the occurrence of anything supernatural, which, as it is asserted, is the miracle’ (ibid.: 31). The Qur’an, 18: 110, clarifies that the Prophet Muhammad did not claim any miracle. Khan
explained that the earlier scholars described these events as miracles because ‘the natural sciences had not progressed and there was nothing to draw their attention to the law of nature and to make them aware of their mistakes’ (ibid.: 35).

Khan proposed a rule in case of perceived conflict between a law of nature and the Qur’anic verse: the Work (nature) qualifies the Word (verse) of God (Khan 1970: 34). According to Khan, a verse cannot be taken in its literal meaning if the context requires other meanings, or if the words are used as metaphor. If a verse refers to something that is contrary to the laws of nature, then we must regard the statement as a metaphor. For instance, statements about God sitting on the throne or about God’s hand were not taken in their literal meaning even by ancient theologians.

Khan held that miracles may be extraordinary, but they are not supernatural: first, because the Qur’an declares specifically that Divine Laws do not change; secondly, because modern scientific discoveries have demonstrated that these events were not supernatural. His focus on nature, especially with reference to miracles, attracted the ulama’s bitter criticism in India. The reformist Deoband School, established in 1867 as a centre for revivalist discourse, was foremost in this opposition. In 1886, Ashraf ʿAli Thanawi (d. 1943), a mufti associated with this school, issued a long fatwa condemning Khan as a heretic (mubtadi’) and his associates as a ‘new naturist sect’ (firqa muhditha nechariyya) on the basis of fifty ‘heretical’ statements in their writings (Thanawi 1992, vol. 6: 166–85). The term nechariyya (naturists) derives from the English word ‘nature’. In 1890, Mawlawna Qasim Nanawtawi (d. 1879), the founder of the Deoband school, wrote a treatise titled Assessment of Religious Tenets strongly refuting Khan’s ideas on theological grounds (Aziz Ahmad 1970: 60–76).

Jamaluddin Afghani was in Hyderabad in India from 1879 to 1883 when controversy against Khan began. On a request from Muhammad Wasil, a teacher in the Madrasa A’izza in Hyderabad, al-Afghani wrote a fatwa against Khan and his followers, branding them as materialists. This fatwa was first published in Persian in Hyderabad in 1881 with the title Haqiqat-i Madhhab-i Nechari wa Bayan-i Hal-i Nechariyan (Truth about the Naturist Sect and a Description of their Views); its Urdu translation was published in 1884 from Calcutta (Chauhdari 1999: 216). Its Arabic translation by Muhammad ʿAbduh (published in Beirut in 1885) had a more threatening title: Risala fi ibtal madhhab al-dahriyyin wa-bayan mafasidihim wa-ithbat anna al-din asas al-madaniyya wa-l-kufr fasad al-ʿumran (A Treatise in Refutation of the Materialist Sect, an Account of their Evils and the Proof that Religion is the Basis of Civility and Disbelief destroys Society), shortened in later editions to al-Radd ʿala al-dahriyyin.

In this treatise, al-Afghani defines nature as matter and nechariyya as materialists, arguing that materialism has destroyed religious and moral values. Tracing materialism to the Greek philosopher Democritus, he identifies Darwin as a
modern materialist scientist whose theory of evolution degrades humanity. Clearly, al-Afghani had not read Khan’s writings; he relied on the information he received from the ulama. He condemned Khan as a ‘collaborator, who threw off his religion, adopted Christianity, and claimed that all the prophets were Necharis and did not believe in God’ (al-Afghani 1884). al-Afghani’s perspective on modernity was essentially political; he abhorred Khan for his loyalty to the British.

Arab and European scholars who did not have access to Khan’s original writings were widely influenced by al-Afghani. Gibb (1945: 58) cites Afghani, saying: ‘the Necharis present themselves before the eyes of the fools as the standard-bearers of science, but only give a wide range of treachery. They are deluded by catchwords; call themselves guides and leaders when they stand in the lowest grades of ignorance and lack of intelligence.’

Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905) came under al-Afghani’s influence during the latter’s stay in Cairo in 1871. Expelled from Egypt in 1882 for political activities, ‘Abduh joined al-Afghani in Paris in 1883. He worked as editor of the journal al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqa, a reform journal with pan-Islamic objectives. He returned to Egypt in 1889 and gradually distanced himself from his mentor’s political activities.

Despite their different approaches to reform, Khan and ‘Abduh both offered rational explanations of Islamic beliefs and practices, called for reforms in education, language and legal systems, and deeply influenced respectively Urdu and Arabic language and literature. ‘Abduh introduced reforms in religious education and judicial training programs at Al-Azhar University.

‘Abduh developed a new theology in al-Islam wa al-nasraniyya ma’a al-‘ilm wa-al-madaniyya (Islam and Christianity in Relation to Science and Civilisation), published in 1897, and Risala al-lawhid (Theology of Unity) published in 1902. The former was his rejoinder to Hanotaux, as already mentioned, and the latter consisted of lectures that he delivered in Beirut in 1886. ‘Abduh explained that, unlike other scriptures, the Qur’an gave authority to human intellect because humanity had reached maturity and Prophecy had ended with Muhammad. Thus reason and revelation came together in the Qur’an for the first time in human history. Islam removed racial discrimination and stood for social justice, and that is why it spread so rapidly.

‘Abduh defined theology as a science that deals with the belief in the existence of God, His attributes and His prophets, and examined what must be affirmed and denied. In his view, theology plays the same role in religious sciences as logic does in rational sciences. Unlike Khan, who was inclined to the Mu‘tazila, ‘Abduh remained closer to the Ash‘aris in his view of the limited capacity of human reason. Man should believe only in those Divine attributes whose knowledge is revealed; it is sufficient to believe that He exists. ‘Abduh and Khan both held that the laws of nature are unchangeable. ‘All created things’, said ‘Abduh,
'follow natural law. Every being must conform to law or it would be destroyed' (cited in Hourani 1970: 137). ‘Abduh, nevertheless, believed that the laws of nature are created by God and He can cause them to deviate from the routine when He wishes. He, therefore, held that miracles are not impossible and that they must be supernatural and extraordinary in order to prove God’s power and support for His prophets (‘Abduh [1902] 1956: 80–1). ‘Abduh admired the natural sciences, but, unlike Khan, he was not in favour of interpreting the Qur’an in their literal sense (at-tafsir al-‘ilmī). While Khan’s approach became immediately controversial, there was very little opposition to ‘Abduh.

It was, however, Shaykh Husayn al-Jisr (d. 1909), who popularised modern sciences among the traditional Muslims. In his treatise Kitāb al-risāla al-Hamidiyya (1889), he offered scientific proofs of Islamic beliefs. He explained Prophet Muhammad’s miracle of the splitting of the moon (inshiqaq al-qamar) in modern scientific language (al-Azmeh 1993: 120). It was a physical phenomenon, which is admissible according to modern physicists (al-Jisr 1889: 35). Jisr was certainly not an Islamic modernist; he used science and its discoveries to justify Muslim practices, including veiling (ḥijab), polygamy and slavery (al-Jisr 1889: 113, 120) as natural, and refuted naturists as materialists (dahriyyin), defining them as ‘those who regard matter as eternal and uncreated and who do not believe in God or the Prophet’ (al-Jisr 1889: 138).


Influenced by Jisr’s epistle, Mawlana Ashraf ‘Ali Thanawi wrote al-Masāliḥ al-‘aqliyya li-t-ahkam al-naqliyya (Rational Grounds for the Traditional Laws) and al-Intibahat al-mufida li ishkalat al-jadida (Useful Notes on Modern Problems) to prove the rationality of Islamic beliefs and practices. As to the conflict between science and the revelation, he argued that new scientific theories are only hypothetical and not based on certainty or conclusive proofs. His criteria of rationality are, however, derived entirely from formal Greek logic and metaphysics.

Debates on nature, science and Islam produced several scholarly writings in Turkey as well. In his Yeni ilm-i-kelam (New Islamic Theology), published in 1920, Izmırli Ismail Hakki (d. 1946) argued that traditional kalam could not respond to the challenges of scientific materialism, and therefore a new ilm-i-kelam was needed (Özervarlı 2007: 86). According to him, methods and presuppositions of theology must conform to contemporary needs and philosophical principles, as they have been doing so over time (Özervarlı 2007: 85). He admired the writings of al-Afghani and ‘Abduh. Probably under al-Afghani’s influence, he was
concerned about the rise of materialism in modern Muslim thought. He did not mention the name, but his criticism apparently addressed Khan. He observed that developments in physics in the twentieth century had questioned the deterministic views about matter propounded in the nineteenth century. Hakki affirmed the belief in miracles but required their rational interpretation. He was opposed to positivism but recognised the theory of evolution.

To sum up this section, the diversity of religious, cultural and political conditions led to varying responses to modernity. Largely, the challenge of modernity was perceived in terms of conflict between science and religion. Khan’s new theology not only offered harmony between nature, science and the Qur’an, but also enabled his associates Shibli Nu’mani, Amir ‘Ali, Chiragh ‘Ali, Mumtaz ‘Ali and Altaf Husayn Hali to develop critical perspectives, respectively, on historiography, Muslim intellectual history, Islamic law, women’s rights and Urdu language and literature.

Old theologians and the political modernists like al-Afghani opposed the new theology, because it taught harmony between religion and science but separated religion from politics. Under al-Afghani’s influence, the separation between religion and science encouraged employing modern technology without integrating it into thought and culture.

**Growth**

The growth of Islamic modernist discourse was influenced by at least three major developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, the rapid scientific discoveries and progress of knowledge led to a dynamic rather than a mechanical view of the universe and nature. Secondly, the rise of movements for national identity introduced an element of subjectivism in the discourse instead of objectivism. Thirdly, movements for liberation popularised an oppositional, or rather hostile, attitude to the West and Western modernity. Muslim thinkers like al-Afghani spoke about political renaissance in terms of the unity of the *umma*. Most Europeans called it pan-Islamism, and considered it a threat to the West.

These three developments generated paradoxes in Islamic modernist discourse. Muslim thinkers developed a high regard for modern concepts of liberty and constitutionalism. Despite their hesitations about territorial nationalism, most Muslim thinkers appealed to a territorial idea of the homeland (*watan*). Freedom movements opposed the West bitterly but admired the modern concepts of liberty (*huriya*), republicanism and democracy (*jumhuriyya*), and constitutionalism (*mashrutiyya*), which were validated by relocating them in Islamic tradition.

In his *Aqwam al-masalik* (The Straight Course), published in 1867, Khayruddin Tunisi (d. 1889) justified the necessity of parliamentary government and a free
press on the basis of the Islamic principle of public interest (maslaha). ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi’s (d. 1902) Taba‘ī al-istibdad (Attributes of Tyranny) and al-Afghani’s Al-hukuma al-istibdadiyya (The Rule of Tyranny) criticised despotism as un-Islamic and pointed to its devastating effects on Muslim societies.

In Iran, Muhammad Husayn Nai‘ni’s (d. 1936) Tanbih al-umma wa tanzih al-milla dar asas wa usul-i mashrutiyat (An Admonition to the Nation and an Exposition to the People Concerning the Foundation and Principles of Constitutional Government) argued that constitutional government provides an Islamic solution, as it removes tyranny and promotes the well-being of the community. The principle of democracy solves a crucial political problem in Shi‘a theology, which regarded a legitimate rule impossible in the absence of the Imam (Hairi 1977). Muslim opinion was divided on the question of the Ottoman caliphate in the twentieth century; some called for its preservation and others for its abolition. Abu-l-Kalam Azad (d. 1958) launched a movement in India for the preservation of the Ottoman caliphate. It also declared India a territory from which Muslims must migrate to a Muslim country. In his Mas‘ala-i Khilafat (The Issue of the Caliphate), published in 1920, Azad defined caliphate as an essential Islamic institution that ensured the unity of the Muslim umma and guaranteed democratic governance against tyranny and absolutism. His political theory was essentially founded on the classical doctrine with some major revisions. Analysing the sayings of the Prophet cited in old theologies according to which a Muslim ruler must be from the tribe of Quraysh, he argued that the hadith was not prescriptive; it only stated a fact of history (Azad n.d.: 87–111). The treatise indirectly denounced nationalist movements in the Arab world and in the Balkans, declaring them rebellions against the Ottoman caliph (Azad n.d.: 58–87). To him, the institution of the caliphate was democratic and suited the modern context.

Rashid Rida’s (d. 1935) Al-khilafa aw al-imama al-‘uzma (The Caliphate or the Supreme Leadership), written in 1923 before the abolition of the caliphate, also supported its preservation. It was also a restatement of the classical doctrine with some amendments. The ideal universal caliphate was no longer possible and it was imperative to transform it into a democratic consultative system of government that can modernise the shari‘a. He regarded the caliphate as necessary for the spiritual and political independence of Islam but proposed to locate it in the core regions of the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Iraq and Palestine. He revised the condition of ijtihād for a ruler and the concepts of consultation (shura) and authority (ahl al-hall wa-l-‘aqd), transforming them into democratic principles of checks and balances on the caliphal authority. The focus on shari‘a stressed the Islamic identity of this republican form of government. Rida found the framework of the nation state too restrictive to suit an Islamic polity.

Muhammad Iqbal’s (d. 1938) Lecture on Ijtihād of 1924, on the other hand, welcomed the abolition as a transformation of the Ottoman caliphate into a
Republican government. In a lecture that he delivered in Lahore amidst a public demonstration against the abolition, he called it an *ijtihad* because it shifted the right to govern from an individual to an institution. He expounded the idea of a democratic Muslim state where the elected assemblies would have the right to legislate *shari‘a*.

Iqbal’s support for Turkish republicanism was the result of a long and continued deliberation on the issue. In *Khilafat Islamiyya* (Islam and the Islamic Caliphate), written in 1908, he argued that the political sovereignty belonged to the Muslim people, not to a specific individual. Iqbal believed that a universal caliphate was no longer possible. There were three different views on the caliphate in Islam. The Khawarij did not consider *khilafa* as a universal institution. The Mu‘tazila accepted a universal caliphate as a matter of expediency only. The majority of the Sunnis believed that the universal caliphate was a religious necessity. The Shi‘a defined the nature of governance (*imama*) as divine. In Iqbal’s view, modern Turkey had shifted to the view of the Mu‘tazila.

According to him, secularism in Turkey did not mean abandoning Islam. The idea of separation of church and state is not alien to Islam. The difference between the European and Islamic framework of separation is that in Islam it is a division of functions, while in Europe it was founded on a metaphysical dualism of spirit and body (Iqbal [1930] 1986: 122). Islam was, from the very beginning, a civil society with laws civil in their nature though believed to be revelational in origin (Iqbal [1930] 1986: 123).

In Egypt, ‘Ali ‘Abd Al-Raziq’s (d. 1966), *Al-Islam wa usul al-hukm* (Islam and the Foundations of Governance), published in 1925, also endorsed abolition, arguing that political authority and the state, and hence the caliphate, were not essential in Islam. The Qur’an and the Sunna provide no specific instructions on this subject. During the subsequent debates, religious political thought generally stood for pan-Islamism, while movements for nationalism regarded religion as an unsuitable foundation for national identity. Muslims in South Asia were divided on the question of nationalism; however, the majority defined national identity in religious terms.

Muhammad Iqbal formulated the idea of Muslim nationalism as he found in faith a source of individual autonomy. He was among the few who defined the concept of identity in the nineteenth century in terms of self-consciousness. The religious identity provided the Muslims with a basis for national identity. He observed that identity is essentially the concept of the self as the essence of being and true self-empowerment is rooted in the belief of *tawhid*. He developed the idea of the dynamic self (*khudi*) that resisted and reformed the fatalistic decadent view of tradition and called for a will-rooted ethical community. His idea of Muslim nationalism was territorial. In his Allahabad address in 1930, he demanded ‘the formation of a consolidated Muslim state in the best interest of India and Islam’. It was to provide peace and security for India and ‘for Islam,
an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that Arabian imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilise its law, education and culture and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with it the spirit of modern times’ (cited in Masud 2003: 119).

Diverse discourses on nationalism made the notion of national identity quite ambiguous among Muslims. Abu-l Kalam Azad and a majority of the ulama in India were pan-Islamists as they strove for the preservation of the Ottoman caliphate. Yet, in India, they supported a composite territorial nationalism. Iqbal was also a great admirer of al-Afghani and romanticised pan-Islamism but proposed Muslim nationalism and supported the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims in India. Mawlana Mawdudi opposed territorial nationalism in any form.

Muslim national identity was part of Iqbal’s new theology, which he developed in The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam published in 1930. He rejected old theology as ‘concepts of theological systems, draped in the terminology of a practically dead metaphysics’ and invited a new Muslim identity between tradition and modernity. He said: ‘The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us’ (Iqbal [1930] 1986: 78).

Iqbal saw the question of religion and modernity as a problem of the impossibility of reliving the special type of inner experience on which religious faith rests, which had become further complicated for modern man, who has developed habits of concrete thought and suspects that inner experience is liable to illusion. In his view, intellectual thought and religious experience were complementary to each other. Religion is not the product of pure rational argument, yet it stands more in need of rational foundations of its principles than science. A rational examination of religious experience must acknowledge the centrality of religion. The old theology, relying on cosmological, teleological and ontological approaches to religion, took a limited and mechanistic view of things. Similarly, the classical rational and natural sciences such as physics, biology and psychology also had a static and sectional view of the universe. Modern science rejects the old concept of matter and defines it in terms of a relationship between changing space and time. To Iqbal, modern sciences can help us better to understand human religious experience, but old theological frameworks limit the application of modern sciences in this regard.

Iqbal examined several philosophical issues where old frameworks restricted modern thought. The concept of time is one of such issues. Iqbal differentiated between different experiences of time. He proposed that religious experience shows that time is an essential element in reality. Real time is not serial time, to which the distinction of past, present and future is essential; it is pure duration
– that is, change without succession, pulverised by thought – a kind of device by which reality exposes its ceaseless creative activity to quantitative measurement. It is in this sense that the Qur’an says: ‘And of Him is the change of the night and of the day’ (Iqbal [1930] 1986: 47). He called for restructuring Muslim mind according to this consciousness.

Stressing the significance of self and its autonomy, Iqbal explained that it was difficult for a natural scientist and a theologian to understand the autonomy of the self; they described it either in mechanistic terms or as a simple illusion. The self is the centre of perception, and its reality is too deep for the intellect to appreciate. The Qur’an makes a distinction between creation and direction; the sciences study creation and the self belongs to the realm of direction. The Qur’an shows how prophecy as a fundamental religious experience transforms itself into a living world force. The end of prophecy, as the core concept of Islamic culture, affirms the appearance of inductive reason to guide humans to knowledge. The Qur’an’s invitation to study of history and natural phenomena stresses change, diversity and dynamism in the universe.

*Itthād* as a principle of inductive reasoning demonstrates in the eyes of Iqbal the dynamism of the universe in Muslim perception but also its own role as a principle of movement in the social structure in Islam. Ever since the establishment of schools, the law of Islam was reduced to a state of immobility. Iqbal argued that the Qur’an is not a legal code; its purpose is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his relation with God and his creations. He pleaded for collective *ijtihad* and the institutionalisation of the principle of consensus (*ijma*), suggesting that modern parliaments can play the latter role. Iqbal’s criticism of the West, admiration of the Muslim past and call for Muslim unity gained some popularity. His ideas of self-autonomy, *itthād* and social sciences did not appeal to Muslims in the subcontinent, but, as we shall see in the next section, they influenced a number a Muslim intellectuals, especially in Iran, to engage in the new epistemologies.

The Muslim societies of South East Asia did not produce great modernist thinkers comparable to Khan and ‘Abduh, but the Islamic modernist ideas that spread there from Egypt influenced important reformist movements that are without parallel elsewhere. The Indonesian associations Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah (established in 1911 and 1912, respectively) became mass movements that combined the call for *ijtihad* with that for social and economic reform. Some of the South East Asians studying in Mecca or at al-Azhar were strongly influenced by the ideas of ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida. In South East Asia itself, Islamic modernist thought first found a following in the cosmopolitan environment of Singapore and Penang and among the outward-looking Minangkabau ethnic group of West Sumatra.

Two men who had actually studied with ‘Abduh in Cairo, Syed [Sayyid] Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi (d. 1934) and Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin (d. 1954),
Islamic Modernism launched the first reformist magazine, *al-Imam*, in Singapore in 1906. This was soon followed by *al-Munir* in West Sumatra (1911). Both magazines were modelled on ʿAbduh’s and Rida’s *al-Manar* and dedicated themselves to the struggle against innovations (*bidʿa*) and superstitions (*khurafat*). The influence of ʿAbduh was perhaps felt even more in educational reform than in religious thought. Much of the energy of South East Asian Islamic modernists went into the establishment of a new type of schools, which combined Islamic with general subjects and used modern didactic methods (Noer 1973; Laffan 2003; Noor 2004).

To sum up, modernity in this phase unfolded itself in terms of a conflict between religious and national identity; Muslim thinkers mostly rejected the idea of separation between religion and politics. It generated political theologies of nationalism but also a deeper examination of subjectivism, self-autonomy, rights and governance.

**The end of Islamic modernism**

After independence, Islamic modernist discourse was engaged in two very complicated tasks: the critical analysis of colonialism and the reform of Muslim society. We call this period the end of Islamic modernism, as it was superseded by movements of fundamentalism or Islamism that were opposed to modernity but whose interaction produced several new interpretations of tradition. In general, human rights, law reforms and secularism remained the central issues of debate between Islamic modernists and Islamists. Islamic modernist discourse entered into more sophisticated discussions on Islamic subjectivism, self-knowledge and post-colonial epistemology.

In Algeria, Malek Bennabi (d. 1973) studied the impact of colonialism on the Muslim mind. In his *Les Conditions de la Renaissance* (1948), he diagnosed that the inferiority complex among Muslims living in the underdeveloped world inhibited them to realise the significance of new ideas. In the nineteenth century, power was defined by industry and military strength, but in the twentieth century it was the development of new ideas that influenced international relations. Awed by the superpowers, underdeveloped countries continued defining arms, oil revenues, airplanes and banks as indices of power and progress. In *Vocation de l’Islam*, Bennabi (1954) explained that colonised Muslim minds do not realise that only a dynamic society produces new ideas that can lead to a cultural renaissance. Muslim writers keep digging up past treasures instead of bridging progress with new ones.

Islamists expounded Islamic ideology based on the supremacy of *shariʿa* and the sovereignty of God against secularism and democracy. They opposed reform, especially in Muslim family laws. The Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt), Jamaʿat-i Islami (India and Pakistan), Masyumi (Indonesia) and PAS (Malaysia)
all called for the Islamic state and gained popularity by opposing modernity as materialism and secularism.

Sayyid Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi (d. 1979) of the Jama-at-i Islami and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) of the Muslim Brotherhood developed their respective theologies of the sovereignty (hakimiyya) of God and supremacy of shari’a to counter the idea of the sovereignty of the people and the nation state. However, gradually their demand for implementation of the shari’a by the state left the concept of the nation state rooted in this political theology. They contested with Islamic modernists on the issues of jihad, polygamy, the status of women, and ijtihad.

Mawdudi equated modernity with secularism, which he translated as ‘denial of religion’ (la-diniyyat). To him, the Islamic state is a theo-democracy (ilahi jamhuri hukumat) as opposed to secular democracy (la-dini jamhuriyyat). In Islam, people are not absolutely free to make their own laws; there are Divine limits (hudud) on human freedom. In his ideology, the economy is regulated through the principles of private property, the collection of Islamic taxes and the replacement of banking and usury by contracts of business partnership (mudaraba). Family life is governed by the laws of veiling and segregation between men and women (hijab), male supervision, rights and duties according to social status, and laws about marriage, divorce and a qualified permission of polygamy. Laws about crime and punishment are divinely prescribed; there is no place for human legislation.

Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), who, as a member of Pakistan’s Council of Islamic Ideology, provided scholarly support for reforms in Muslim family laws, became the target of the ulama’s severe criticism. The campaign against him included threats to his life and ended with his resignation and flight to Chicago, where he taught until his death.

Fazlur Rahman’s Islamic Methodology in History in 1965 called for a new approach to Islam and modernity by historicising Islamic law and legal theory. The Qur’anic injunctions can be understood and extended to modern situations only by placing them in historical context. He applied this methodology to analyse the Qur’anic verses about the status of women’s legal evidence, age of marriage, polygamy and divorce.

Rahman defined modernity with reference to specific forces, which were generated by, and were also responsible for, the intellectual and socio-economic expansion of the modern West. He argued that, although the impact of the West cannot be denied, Islamic modernism cannot be properly understood unless seen as the continuation of the reform movements of the eighteenth century. Islamic modernism, in Rahman’s view, continues to confirm the hold of religion over all aspects of life. He disagreed with the secular modernists, who found life bifurcated into religious and secular compartments. For Rahman, this separation is accidental because Islam is not yet truly the basis of the state in Muslim countries; Islam has been applied only to a narrow religious sphere like personal laws (Rahman 1969: 253).
Rahman disagreed with those who considered secularism to be the ultimate phase of modernity. He explained that secularism in Muslim societies appears imminent because of the rigidity of the conservative ulama. He also held the Islamic modernists responsible for an ‘apologetic-controversial literature’ that romanticised Islamic civilisation and ‘created a barrier against further modernist development’ (Rahman 1969: 252).

Secularism is not essentially a uniting force in Muslim societies:

Unless secularism can be made into an effective force for positive progress, the only way for these [Muslim] countries seems to be to accept religion as the basis of the state and to find within their religions not only adequate safeguards but formulas of genuine equality for minorities with the majority communities. Otherwise sooner or later, but probably in the predictable future these countries would break up into racial and linguistic units on the pattern of Europe. (Rahman 1969: 259)

Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jabiri (b. 1936) in Morocco also found the concept of secularism ambiguous. He clarified that the current ambiguity is created by its debatable definitions in the West, its introduction into the Arab world by Christian Arabs and its translation as *la-diniyya*. Further, Muslim and Christian experiences differ with reference to religious and political authority. In Islam, the political practice was never rationalised and religion always transcended politics. There is a need to stress that religion must be separated from politics.

Al-Jabiri may not be counted among the Islamic modernists, yet he did address the issue of new theology in his *Takwin al-‘aql al-‘arabi* (The Structure of Arab Reason), published in 1984. Developing a theology of democracy, he analysed the Islamic modernist discourse that justified democracy in Islam with reference to *shura* (consultation) and the modernist discourse that denied the need for Islamic legitimacy. Al-Jabiri disagreed with both and suggested a two-step solution. First, he proposed that democracy is not exclusive to the West, nor is it rooted in the Western tradition. It is a modern institution. Secondly, *shura* is neither a political nor a thoroughly democratic principle. Also, democracy did not emerge in the Islamic environment. Thus, *shura* is an ethical principle to keep a check on tyranny. It derives its legitimacy from its association with *ijma*, which is essentially an institution of consultation.

Al-Jabiri explained that the Qur’an does not address the question of political authority specifically, and that Islamic political theories are only legitimising the historical experiences of the community. The only thing we learn from history is that the community considered the institution of the state and the caliphate as necessities. Islamic political thought is insufficient today, because it takes historical experiences as facts of law and precedents, and lays emphasis on persons rather than on institutions. It makes separation between ethical ideals and actual political conditions lawful. The present ambiguity in Islamic political thought lies in the
fact that the concept of authority is confounded with that of sovereignty. Divine sovereignty is unique, any association with God means idolatry (shirk), but human authority cannot be absolute. The problem is caused by using the same term hakimiyya for these two distinct concepts (Filali-Ansari 2000: 159). This political ambiguity resulted in fundamentalist and Islamist trends in Muslim communities.

According to al-Jabiri, the reconstruction of the shari‘a is possible only by revisiting its foundations and the consequences of its implementation. When ijtihad was limited to the method of deduction by analogy, it led to rigidity among the schools of law. Instead of analogy, shari‘a today requires reformulation of the foundation (ta‘sil al-usul). The Qur’an speaks about two types of verses, clear (muhkamat) and ambiguous (mutashabihat). The clear verses constitute general universal principles. The Qur’anic verses gather ambiguities also by contradictions produced by historical experience, now by modernity. Al-Jabiri points to an epistemological crisis that has added ambiguities to our understanding of the current political and ethical issues.

The gap between clear and ambiguous verses, which classical hermeneutics believed to be impossible to bridge, is addressed by a number of other intellectuals in the Muslim world. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (b. 1943) in Egypt and ‘Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945) in Iran have made outstanding contributions to the analysis of epistemology and hermeneutics. Abu Zayd calls for an understanding of the Qur’an in its historical and cultural context. He suggests a new hermeneutical approach to the Qur’an; it must be read as a living discourse reflecting the arguments, debates and dialogue with its addressees. In this discourse, humanist hermeneutics on social and economic justice, and rights for women and the poor, override traditional epistemology.

Soroush’s Qabd wa bast-i ti’urik-i shari‘at, nazariya-i takamul-i dini (Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Shari‘a, A Theory of the Evolution of Religion), published in 1991, also explores the issue of the Qur’anic division of verses into clear and ambiguous. He explains that this division does not mean that the clear and ambiguous verses have been determined and can be differentiated (Dahlén 2001: 320).

Soroush belongs to a group of Islamic modernists that Cooper (2000: 39) calls ‘critical Islam’. He perceives modernity in the context of modern natural and social sciences and technology. The religious discussion must be distinguished at two levels: one deals with the sacred, essential and immutable and the other with the human. Islamic scholarship is a human product; it is not sacred. Ignoring this distinction, traditional methodology today stands outdated and fearful. The present scholarship on Islamic law offers two responses: traditional (fiqh sunnati) and dynamic (fiqh puya). He suggests that Islamic scholarship must transform its approach from revival to reconstruction. In this regard, he shows Iqbal’s influence not only in The choice of specific terminology but also in methodology. Reconstruction requires two types of scholars: the expert in tradition (‘alim)
and the enlightened thinker (rashanfikr). Soroush has developed his theory of reconstruction with a discursive reading of Iqbal, Ali Shariʿati and Muhammad Mujtahid Shabistari (b. 1936).

Shabistari considers Islam compatible with the modern natural sciences but asserts that Muslims must seriously examine the epistemological foundations of the modern humanities because they are in conflict with modern scientific methods (Dahlén 2001: 163). He calls for a new theology (kalâm-i jadid), which he defines as an evaluation of religious beliefs, practices, principles and institutions (Dahlén 2001: 166). Influenced by Iqbal, Shabistari observes that ījtihād in Islamic law is not possible without ījtihād in theology and anthropology (Dahlén 2001: 173).

This new theology in Iran is an attempt to understand subjectivity and universality as two pillars of modernity (Vahdat 2002). Current Islamic theology defends not only the faith but also the heritage and identity of the umma; its approach is both theological and sociological. Current theology distinguishes between faith and the science of faith; the latter is a human construction and cannot be sacred. It is based on an entirely new epistemological system.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, Islamic modernism appears to have receded when the movements for Islamisation spread in almost all Muslim countries. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, Islamisation in Pakistan, the jihad and then Islamic rule by the Taliban in Afghanistan called for the supremacy of the shariʿa. These movements not only radicalised Muslim politics, eventually leading to militancy and bitter confrontation with the West, but they also called for authenticity. One of their significant products was the Islamisation of knowledge. ‘Every discipline must be remoulded so as to reincorporate the relevance of Islam, along a triple axis constitutive of tawḥīd: three unities of knowledge, life and history (Faruqi 1982: preface). It called for the re-establishment of various disciplines of human knowledge on Islamic foundations (ibid.: 7). Critical studies of Orientalism such as Edward Said’s were used to critique Islamic modernism as a product of Orientalism. The new theology, essentially a political discourse (Nasr 1992), failed as an academic project but succeeded in marginalising critical studies of Islam.

In the early twenty-first century, much of the debate in the Muslim world about the universality of human rights, self and gender equality has revived the focus on self and its empowerment as core concepts of modernity. A new theology is emerging, which is trying to root Islamic modernist arguments deeper into the Islamic tradition.

**Conclusion**

The above brief account of Islamic modernism illustrates how the political environment impacted on the growth of the theology of modernity (ʿilm al-kalam
Islam and Modernity

In the beginning, Islamic modernists focused on modern sciences and laws of nature, but political modernists opposed this focus, because in their eyes it supported Western materialism and imperialism. Although Islamic modernists admired the West and stressed allegiance to the West for peace and progress, uneasiness in these relations continued. In its period of origin, Islamic modernism gave rise to multiple debates between Western scholars of Islam and Westernised Muslim modernists, as well as traditionalist Muslims and revivalist-reformists. The common universal grounds in these dialogues varied with the multiple and changing perceptions of modernity and of Islam.

Claims of the comprehensive nature of Islam and of its compatibility with modernity proved mutually contradictory; nevertheless, Islamic modernism continued to insist on both. In the beginning, the traditional ulama in general had a narrow vision of religion. They believed in a separation between religion and politics. They resisted the introduction of modern sciences in their educational institutions in order to preserve religious tradition. Later, most of them adopted the view of a comprehensive Islam, unifying religion with politics. From then on, the modern sciences were resisted, because Islam had no need for them.

One must note, however, that not all of the ulama rejected the modern sciences. The Indian alim Abu-l-Hasan Ali Nadwi (d. 1999) approvingly wrote that the classical Muslim theologians used the Greek sciences as long as these were useful for rationalising Islamic beliefs and practices (Nadwi 1981). His reasoning came close to Islamic modernism but disagreed with it on a very significant point. The Islamic modernists insisted that the old theology based on classical sciences must be replaced by a new theology based on modern sciences. The ulama, who feared that Islamic modernism was leading towards secularity, succeeded in isolating the Islamic modernists from the masses. Rahman (1969: 254) remarked that the way for secularism was paved by the ulama, not by the (Western) modernists. He argued that, by rejecting the new theology and insisting on the comprehensiveness of Islam, the ulama caused intellectual frustration.

Islamic modernist discourse emphasised two points: the compatibility of modernity with Islam and the need for a new theology. When the implications of the various conceptions of modernity were unfolded, the discourse shifted from a deterministic and positivist to an introspective and subjectivist view of modernity. Consequently, post-colonial theologies of modernity have become increasingly subjective and rights oriented. They are largely reflective, self-critical and reform oriented. Being subjective and emancipatory, this discourse has been joined by other reformist groups who are critically reconstructing an authentic Islamic tradition (Baker 2003). They are focusing on the consequences of modernity rather than the concepts and ideals of modernity. These new theologies appear to have replaced the theologies of Islamic modernism.
Summary of chapter

Muslims have perceived modernity in various ways and have held different views on its relevance to and compatibility with Islam. Currents of modern Muslim thought have ranged from reform to the total rejection of either tradition or modernity. Discourses on reform have also varied in their perception of modernity and tradition. This chapter focuses specifically on the discourse of Islamic modernism, which stresses the compatibility of modernity with Islam.

The origins of Islamic modernism can be traced to the widespread Muslim sense of decline in the eighteenth century and responses to the nineteenth-century expansion of colonial rule over the Muslim world, the critique of Muslim beliefs, history and laws by Christian missionaries and administrators, and claims that modernisation equalled Westernisation. The chapter identifies three reform discourses that were in mutual interaction: revivalist, modernist and Islamic modernist.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan was the first to claim that the perceived conflict between science and religion was an artefact of the epistemology developed by classical theology; he stressed the need for a new theology (jadid ‘ilm al-kalam). He explained that, in Islamic tradition, classical theology was developed as a methodology to respond to challenges posed by the Greek sciences. Itself based on Greek speculative thought, epistemology and ontology, classical theology cannot appreciate the empirical methods of modern science. The challenges posed by modern science called for a new theology. Khan rejected the idea that modern science contradicted the scriptures. The laws of nature discovered by the modern sciences are the work of God. They cannot, therefore, contradict scriptures, which are the word of God. A number of other Islamic modernists have underscored the need for a new theology to review classical epistemology and ontology.

Three phases may be distinguished in the development of Islamic modernism (to be named simply origins, growth and end), in which Islamic modernists perceived modernity differently and accordingly offered different arguments in support of the compatibility of Islam and modernity. In the first phase, the focus was on the natural sciences and the Qur’an, in the second phase on nationalism and the universal caliphate, identity and autonomy of the self, and in the third phase on the social sciences and human rights. In the last phase, Islamic modernism was rigorously challenged by the quest for authenticity, which characterised this trend as Westernisation. This hastened the end of Islamic modernism, as most modernists and scholars of modern Muslim societies already believed that modernity was Western and Islamic modernists were merely apologists.

Questions

1. Generally, fiqh has been considered as the most fundamental of the Islamic sciences. Why did Islamic modernists focus on kalam rather than fiqh?
2. How important is the discourse on shari’a in contemporary Muslim societies? Is it a limited discourse focused on legal matters or does it signify the comprehensive concept of religion in modern Islam?
3. Who speaks for Islam? How accurate is it to say that the traditional ulama separate politics from religion?
4. Afghani’s strong criticism of Khan is described sometimes as reflecting a broader and more general divide between political modernists and Islamic modernists. Is it...
possible to describe either of them as purely political or Islamic modernist? What were the primary objectives of both types of (Muslim) modernists? Can the same or a similar opposition be perceived today?

5. How has the Muslim perception of modernity changed during the three phases of Islamic modernism identified in the chapter? How diverse is the movement for Islamic modernism in contemporary Muslim societies?

6. From an analysis of the political discourse by the Islamic modernists on constitutionalism, caliphate and Islamic state, what is the significance of the contemporary debates on caliphate?

7. Can Islamic modernism be described in terms of a pan-Islamic movement? Which ideas first formulated by Iqbal were developed further by Iranian thinkers? How can one explain this development?

8. Why does the author speak of the end of Islamic modernism? What has replaced (or suppressed) it?

9. In what sense is the movement for the Islamisation of knowledge a quest for authenticity? Is this quest a search for compatibility of modern sciences with Islam, as claimed by the Islamic modernists, or is it the rejection of this claim?

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