Modern Islam versus Islamic Modernity

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Abstract. Islam and modernity in their historical encounter have experienced different days. Success and failure of this historical interaction have been owed to the level of recognition of Islamic and modern west scholars from each others' essence and main attributes of spiritual property. Nonetheless, to be fair, the inherent nonconformity of some of Islamic and modern affairs has been another reason to make this communication rough. However, what has been recorded in history is the impatience of Islam and modernity to break their geographical borders. The reciprocal influence of Islam and modernity has made each one to host another inside its borders. In this regard, the concerns of Islamic scholars ('ulamā") and intellectuals in confronting the modern affair have created a set of vectors with different magnitudes and directions whose ultimate results are different reactions of people in Islamic territories and all the Muslims in the entire world towards the modernity. Undoubtedly, reconcilable points in the communication of Islam and modernity are not so much of a serious challenge. Naturally, the efforts of Islamic scholars and their Westerner counterparts are dedicated to study the segregation points between Islam and modernity. Admittedly, study in no field is as enlightening as history. Among the mainstream Islamic scholars this question has been always a major topic of discussion: "which one should be characterized by the other: Islam or modernity?". A historical review reveals that Islamic scholars have not been unanimous on answering this question and both answers have been always existent. Anyways, discussion on the quiddity of modern Islam and Islamic modernity as well as historical research provides a basis for a true analysis on the reality of interaction between Islam and modernity. Besides, this study could provide a set of solutions making this communication smooth.

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1. History of modernity

Neither "modern" for Islam nor "Islamic" for modernity are considered necessary accident (*'arad lāzim*) for each other. That is, genesis and retro-gradation of Islam and modernity have no vital relationship to each other. Hence, since separation of each one from the subject of another is not rationally impossible, "modern" for Islam and "Islamic" for modernity are considered parting accident (*arad mufāriq*). Therefore, an independent historical overview to the very modernity and the confrontation of Islamic world with that is recognized.

Historians have distinguished different periods for history of modernity. Based on a classification proposed by [1] written in one of Marshall Berman's books [2] modernity is periodized to the following stages:

1- Early modernity: 1500-1789 (in traditional historiography, this period is between 1453-1789)
2- Classical modernity: 1789-1900 (according to Hobsbawm's model this period corresponds to long 19th century (1789-1914))
3- Late modernity: 1900-1989

Many believe that modernity has been abolished in mid or late 20th century and since then human lives in a new period, namely post-modernity. Some other theorists like Giddens consider the period from late 20th century to present to be merely another phase of modernity. This period is called "High" modernity by

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Giddens [3]. Modernity could be historically studied from political, sociological, scientific, and artistic viewpoints.

The birth of political modernity is simultaneous with Niccolò Machiavelli's statements frankly attacking on medieval and Aristotelian analysis of political affair. The groundwork of his works is based on comparing ideas about how things should be, in favor of realistic analysis of how things really are [4]. New Machiavellian realism in addition to doctrine of constitutional "separation of powers" in government first coined by Montesquieu is the cornerstone of most modern democracies [5]. The second phase of modern political thought begins with Rousseau who questioned the natural rationality and sociality of humanity. He believed that human nature was much more malleable than had been previously thought. By this thought, what makes a meritorious political system or human is a chance path that people has taken over history. Such an insight into human culture resulted in movements such as Romanticism, Historicism, Communism of Karl Marx, and the modern forms of Nationalism inspired by French revolution, including, in one extreme, the German Nazi movements [6].

From the viewpoint of sociology, the aim of modernity is to generate a "progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality" [7]. Philosophically, modernity era has witnessed "the loss of certainty and the realization that certainty can never be established, once and for all" [8]. Loss of certainty leads to a pernicious impact on the body of religion. Intellectuals of 19th century from Auguste Comte to Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud put their efforts to present their scientific and/or political ideologies in the wake of secularization. The basis of modernity for Marx was the emergence of revolutionary bourgeoisie which led to unprecedented outbreak of productive forces and to the creation of the world market. For Max Weber, modernity is closely associated with the processes of rationalization and disenchantment of the world [9].

Scientific modernity appeared in 14th century when Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo and some others introduced novel approaches to physics and astronomy which led to alteration of people attitudes towards the universe. Copernicus proposed new models of the solar system which no longer placed the earth in the center. Making use of mathematics, Kepler discussed on physics and described regularities of nature. Galileo also proved the uniform acceleration in freefall process [10]. Nonetheless, the challenges of these scientists with natural sciences have been much easier than confrontation with ruling Dogmatism at that time. René Descartes who was influenced by Galileo and Bacon argued that as mathematics and geometry could lead to appearance of scientific knowledge, human being can be also studied as a complex machine.

After modernist political thinking had already become widely known in France, Rousseau's re-examination of human nature led to a new criticism of the value of reasoning itself which in turn led to a new understanding of less rationalistic human activities especially the arts. This thought was the bedrock of the modern art from which movements like German Idealism and Romanticism appeared in 18th and 19th century [6].

Despite the fact that modernity could be divided by various categories, the beginning point of modernity can be considered the 16th century [11]. Many major events caused Europe to change among which are the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the fall of Muslim Spain and the discovery of Americas in 1492, and Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation in 1517. Early modern European history is usually seen to span from the turn of the 15th century, through the Age of Reason and Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century.

2. Islam's historical encounter with modernity

Napoleon Bonaparte's army occupied Ottoman province of Egypt in 1798. Although this occupation took no longer than three years, people of Egypt faced with European enlightenment and modern technology. The values of European enlightenment challenged the power of religion. At the very beginning, many were reluctant to new changes such as 'Abd al-Rahmām al-Jabartī who was a Muslim intellectual and wrote critically of the French calling them "Materialists". However, facing with authority and ideas of Europeans caused Muhammad 'Alī the ruler of Egypt to be inspired from them and found a modern Egypt. In the late 18th century, Ottoman Empire began to open embassies and send officials for education to Europe. This

resulted in gradual appearance of a generation of reformers who were familiar with modern science and convinced that the empire should be equipped by that. One of the intellectuals who was sent by Muhammad 'Alī to Europe in 1826 was Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī. His five year stay in Paris was deeply influential on him such that he translated many European works after his return. He was also profoundly affected by European technological and scientific advancements as well as western political philosophy. Having studied Islamic law, he concluded that Shari'ah should be adapted to new circumstances. Like al-Tahtāwī, Khayr al-Dīn was also sent to Paris where he spent four years. After his return, he wrote a book explained in which that the only solution to strengthen Islamic states was by borrowing European ideas and institutions and that it did not contradict the spirit of Shari'ah. Among Muslim intellectuals Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī is one of the vanguards of the Islamic modernism (1838-1897). He believed that Islam has complete conformity with science and reason and in order to counter the European authority, Muslims had to go toward advancement. Muhammad 'Abduh who was one of disciples and colleagues of Asadābādī was also among the founders of Islamic modernism. He was even more influential than his master such that he is often called the founder of Islamic modernism. He taught at al-Azhar and in 1899 became the Muftī of Egypt. He believed that Muslim world was suffering from an inner decadence and required a revival. He believed that Islam could be the moral basis of a modern and advanced society. He was critical of both secularists and conservative 'ulamā. He called for legal reinterpretation of Islamic law according to modern situation. In the other points of Islamic world were also evidences of tendency toward modernity. Among the other Muslim modernist, Rashīd Ridā, Sayyid Ahmad Khān, and Muhammd Iqbāl in Indian subcontinent were notable intellectuals. Like Asadābādī and 'Abduh, they also believed that Islam was in need of a new reinterpretation according to modern conditions [12].

3. Modern Islam

In the most Islamic territories, due to the thought of Muslim intellectuals, Islam had to adapt itself with modernism. Hence, basically the modern Islam could be historically regarded as a religion whose Sharī'ah and laws are subject to modification upon necessity in favor of modernity whereas modernism has its own constant principles. For many Muslims, the very Islam is regarded as a modern religion although the majority of Muslims do not believe so. However, the Muslims who in defense of Islam call it a modern religion have their own newfangled definition of "modern affair" regardless of its western classic definition. For instance, many of them recall cases in treatment of Prophet Muhammad, his family (Ahl al-Bayt), and his companions (al-Tatābah) with non-Muslims and pagans as a proof on modern nature of Islam. By and large, what these Muslims believe in as the modern essence of Islam is that in contrast to the vision of dogmatic followers of Islam, this religion contains a set of laws which are subject to change in time and space. Albeit, the owners of this thought do not see any relationship between modern nature of Islam as they say and reinterpretation (Ijtihād) as a jurisprudential and classic concept.

Another point widely observed in Muslims lands regarding the modernization of Islam is existence of different social tolerances in these societies. Proportional to acceptance of modernism in Islamic societies, the people's religion of those lands has been affected by this affair. That is why what is known as Islam masquerades from Mauritania to Indonesia and from Kazakhstan to Tanzania.

Another significant point is the existence of diverse interpretations of Islam. These variant interpretations make Islam's encounter with modernity more complicated. This issue becomes more complex when the inherent nonconformities of sharī'ah and modernity are taken into account. While the main characteristic of modernity is questioning [13], there is no questioning in sharī'ah or at least it is not a main issue in sharī'ah. Thus, incorporation of Islam and modernity faces a serious contradiction at this dimension. In order to overcome this conflict, one must give up in favor of another. The indispensable commandment in thought of "modern Islam" is that Islam should give up in favor of modernity. However, the problem is not resolved this easily in practice. Generally, the serious points of challenge and disputation in religion are juridical laws. Individual or even plural laws of Islam like prayer and fast having no juridical dimension compared to others have never been a ground for quarrel whether inside Islam or in Islam's encounter with modernity. However, when traditional Islam faces with concepts like human rights, liberty of speech, and individual and public ownerships being mainly souvenirs of modernism to the world of Islam, the fire of debate is flamed.

Modern Islam whose basis has been established on modern rationality does not see agreement between the traditional interpretation of Islam and modernity. Consequently, proponents of modern Islam try to adapt the religion with modernity under this premise that principles of modernity are not supposed to change in encounter with Islam.

4. Islamic modernity

The advocates of Islamic modernity believe that tributaries of modernity passing through touchstone of Islam are reconcilable with that. In this thought, the Islamic principles are presumed strict and principles of modernity should adapt themselves with those of Islam. The ruling vision to modern affair is jurisprudential for the thinkers of Islamic modernity. That is, jurisprudent (Faqīh) and his science namely, jurisprudence (Fiqh) are in charge of refining the modern affair in conformity with religion. In this regard, there is also another important discussion on time-dependent interpretations of holy texts. Firstly, the very reinterpretation (Ijtihād) and its methods is a very serious issue on how to extract the sharī'ah laws. Secondly, the stream of intellectualism in history of Islam has always challenged the rulers and Islamic scholars ('ulamā).

Perhaps, Mu'tazilah could be named as one of the modern movements in the world of Islam. Insistence of Mu'tazilah on free will of humanity or at least illegitimacy of divine responsibility toward humans' sins was the point of dispute between them and Umayyads. Defending Islam against other religions was another reason that Mu'tazilah had a strong status of rationality. To get their reasoning accepted they had to rely on rationality in their discussions. Therefore, they showed interest to Aristotelian logic which was the dominant philosophical school of the time. A notable example of the thought of Mu'tazilah is the story of "Hayy-ibn-Yaqzān" (Alive son of the Awake) written by Ibn-Tufayl in 13th century which is an allegory of rationality. Dissidents of Mu'tazilah were traditionalist who believed in orthodox interpretation of all the verses of Qurān. Mu'tazilah criticized this method of interpretation which was considered as a religious task by traditionalists. Mu'tazilah beilved the real cognition has been dedicated by god to human by creation of wisdom and reason and this thought of traditionalists was a hurdle in destiny of human [14].

Here it is not intended to reject or accept the idea of Mu'tazilah. What really matters in this discussion is the rationality utilized by Mu'tazilah in studying human, language, and holy text. They emphasized that human is addressed by Qurān and its trainings and believed that Qurān has been created and is not the verbal and eternal words of god. They reasoned because language is the invention of human, those divine words obey the rules of language. Hence, a bridge between human wisdom and divine words should be constructed. Therefore they were against this idea that language is not the invention of human and it is merely a gift sent by god. According to this theory, the relationship between reason and meaning has a divine nature. Therefore, not only the words of god are not a created act, but they are signs on his perennity. This idea that Qurān is the word of god has been accepted for centuries among Muslims. However, the question whether Qurān is a perennial message or temporary has made hot debates [14].

Mu'tazilah concerning the classification of Qurānic verses to exoteric and esoteric, made use of metaphoric language and comparison for interpretation of Qurān which was used in their verbal language. Averroes a philosopher whose works in Arabic is as well-known as his translations and ideas on Aristotelian philosophy in western intellectual world, expanded the school of I'tizāl by philosophical interpretation of text. He believed that Qurān had three types of phrases. The first group is sermons addressing the omnibus. The second group is dialectical addressing theologians. Finally, the third group is discursive phrases addressing philosophers. This theory was expanded by Muhyī al-Dīn 'Arabī. He was a great Sufi who was born in Andalusia of Spain. In 1279, he wrote his most famous dissertation "al-Futūhāt al-Makkīyyah" in Mecca and passed away in Syria. Ibn-'Ārabī wanted to collect Qurān with all human sciences since Plato to Averroes in one place. He considered Islam as an ongoing project such that every individual could have his own understanding and conclusion from that. In fact, all the religions were one to him and he tried to reconcile the religions. In one of his poems he said: "Islam should be the religion of the sea of love".

In Persian intellectual geography also Avicenna, Suhrawardī, and Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī who were three vertices of golden triangle of Islamic-Persian philosophy appeared and granted an unprecedented formality to Islamic thought. Avicenna as the leader of peripatetic philosophy in Islam, Suhrawardī with his illumination

school (Ishrāq) and tasted philosophy (Hikmah dhawqiyyah) inspired from Islam and pre-Islamic Persian thought, and Mullā Sadrā with transcendent philosophy (Hikmah Muta'ālīyah) influenced the stream of Islamic though for centuries. Meanwhile, western philosophical thought has been also seriously affected by these persons. These preliminaries were stated to know that intellectualism and philosophical thought has had a long precedency in the world of Islam although it has been sporadic.

In the model of Islamic modernity, principles and permanents are in the house of religion and the guests of this house are modern concepts getting permission to enter. A notable example of Islamic modernity could be attributed to Iranian state after Islamic revolution of 1979. In this revolution, the ideology of founding an Islamic state had undeniably the central role despite the fact that this movement was pluralistic in nature. If Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī and Muhammad 'Abduh could be regarded as representatives of modern Islam, undoubtedly, in the other side Āyatollāh Khumiynī or even 'Alī Sharī'atī represented Islamic modernity. Āyatollāh Khumiynī was the leader of Islamic revolution and at the same time a theosophist, philosopher, and interpreter academically and classically. He was the heir of Mullā Sadrā's legacy in philosophy that nobody has effectively contributed in that since its proposal by Mullā Sadrā. Anyways, Islamic revolution of Iran had a leader who belonged to a passel of clergymen recognizing the stream of philosophical thought. In this society the modern affair could enter by permission of jurisprudence. What took place in Iran was hiring modernity in the service of religion. For instance, after 1979 revolution, elections with its western form were accepted in Iranian Islamic state. It should be mentioned that elections has a long history in Islam and by that its western form is intended. Besides, the impact of technology in the service of Islamic state and many other examples all emphasize that as long as principles of religion are not injured, modernity is welcome.

5. Analysis

What is obvious in the discussion on Islam and modernity is that the modern Islam is definable in the entire world. All the Muslims living in the entire world are familiar with the fact of modernity whereas Islamic modernity can merely be existent in Islamic territories. Definitely, the influence depth of modernity in Islamic countries is contingent on the resistance of those societies against change. To understand this issue, the modern world especially the west should recognize diverse Islams characterized by diverse cultures and traditions. Sunnī Islam, Shī'ī Islam, Wahhābī Islam, Salafī Islam, and south-east Asian Islam are just a few samples of the forms Islam has taken. In facing each of these Islams a specific type of language should be utilized. Recalling this fact is not also ungraceful that the most dictator regimes in confronting the social pressure imposed by public sphere are submissive to some extent. Hence, the social demand of people plays a key role in setting the behavior of states in accepting modernity. On the other hand, to reconcile Islam and west, recognizing the holy lands of Muslims where they can practice their religion with no friction by tedious modernity is of great importance for the modern world.

The best formula to construct a lucid dialogue between Islam and west is recognizing the sacred symbolism of both sides. Islamic scholars and intellectuals must fully understand that in non-revelational modern world also exist sacred concepts. When a principle namely freedom in the United States predominate the other principles, historical holiness of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all impressed by this late sanctity. This rule is expandable in the modern world to principles like human rights, women rights, and so on. In the modern world, sometimes symbols are represented more important than their principal concepts. The reason is that if faith pillars of people decay, the symbols are still signs of the power of states.

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