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DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONALIST AND MODERNIST THOUGHT IN BRITISH INDIA: A STUDY IN EMERGING 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP

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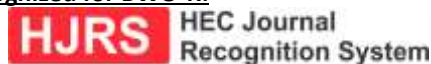
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Abstract

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During the 18th century, India was colonized by European and British powers, through trade and later by conquests. The disintegration and decline of Mughal rule resulted in the emergence of Europeans as a powerful force in the region. Later, the French tried to establish their hold but were categorically defeated. Britain excelled in strategy by using Indian rulers and by direct military intervention. In this study, the theme under discussion is the period from the 18th to the 20th century. The research work has covered the period of Islamic thought in British India in which traditional and modern approaches developed. Islamic thought was the product of both challenge and response encountering challenges—internal and external, faced by the Muslims. Several scholars from the traditional and modern strata provided their services to respond to this variety of challenges. This variation called for varied approaches from Muslim scholars. The research in hand has manifested that regardless of the methodology and response, Muslim endeavours and intellectual activism contributed immensely to the development of a specific pattern of religious thought in British India.

Key Words: Islam, Traditionalist, Modernist, Revivalist, Movements.

Introduction

Islam, for Muslims, is a comprehensive and complete code of life addressing both worldly as well as spiritual affairs. The various aspects necessary for human existence are interrelated and interconnected in Islamic thought. Islam is a monotheistic religion, promulgated by all Prophets and the Quran which was revealed to the last Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the Arabic language in the 7th Century. Islam derives its meanings as surrender, submission and peace, employing that the follower would surrender to the will of Allah Almighty. Spread and disseminated peacefully not through the force of the sword. 'Islamic Thought' employs contemporary meanings to the doctrines and philosophies nurtured in Islamic culture and civilization. It encompasses Islamic intellectuality, law and jurisprudence, theology, mysticism, art and philosophy, politics, revival and reformation based on Quran and Hadith. (Qausem, 1980). With time, new challenges and issues emerge which are addressed by Muslim scholars according to the two fundamental sources. As the issues keep on changing, the interpretation and explanation also keep on changing. (Tayob, 2009) Understanding Islamic Thought is essential for anyone interested in learning Islam and its teachings. Islamic thought represents awakening the young minds of our age for a more comprehensive and precise formulation of the Islamic ideology. (Ahmad, 1988) Islamic thought does not inspire any authentic or preclusive interpretation of Islam. Rather, it seeks to enlist the cooperation of all those who are convinced that the complexities that beset the modern age can be resolved only by such a balanced and harmonious approach which sees life as a whole and assigns to each aspect its natural and proper place in the scheme of things, which sacrifices neither the moral for the material nor the ethical for the political and who have faith in Islam as a social order and who realize the vital significance of devoted works on these lines. God, man, and

the universe are three problems of Islamic thought; these are also problems for intellectuals or spiritual traditions. (Ahmad, 1967) However, Islam has not kept them apart from each other but has brought them together in a harmony that is spiritual in so far as God is believed to uphold or sustain both man and the universe. So, Islam explains all reality or value that may be attributed to the world or humanity. (Metcalf, 2009)

Research Objectives

1. To identify the role and impact of traditionalism and modernism on Muslims regarding culture, society, and identity politics.
2. To highlight the development of Islamic thought in India during British India.
3. To investigate the contribution of traditionalist, modernist, and somehow revivalist scholars and highlight their approach towards responding to the various challenges, the Muslims faced during the British period.
4. To explore the present relevance of the corpus of knowledge developed in the 19th and 20th centuries.
5. To contribute to the body of existing literature on the Development of Islamic Approaches in British India.

Research Questions

1. How the Traditionalist Muslims, facing the identity and cultural crises, would be able to encounter the modern way of knowledge.
2. What were the approaches of different schools of thought prevailing in the subcontinent, especially how these approaches have been treated in due course of time?
 3. How has the relevance of modern approaches been justified?

Methodology

The above literature review reveals that the area of the Growth of Islamic Religious thought in Subcontinent has not yet been elaborated in a detailed way. Therefore, a research gap arises, which needs to be filled at the academic

level. The research under process is a humble attempt to highlight the theme "Comparative Study of Traditionalist and Modernist Approach in British India". This research is a deep examination and analysis of the socio-political, religious, and economic situation of India during the British period. In doing so, the focus will be placed on the vast literature produced by Muslim scholars during this period. The aim will be to analyze the differences in the approaches of various scholars who were heavily engaged in redefining and reconstructing Islamic thought. Therefore, the methodology employed in the present study will be historical as well as comparative.

Literary Survey on the Development of Traditionist Thought in the Subcontinent

The historical literature has been produced in abundance in India by traditionalist, modernist and revivalist scholars, concentrating mostly on the development of Islamic religious thought in British India. The different approaches and ideologies to the study of Islamic theological thought have been the subject of several scholarly and popular publications. Following the emergence of British power in the subcontinent, the concept of Islamic thought and ideologies were put into the debate differently. A valuable work of Abdullah Saeed titled *Islamic Thought-An Introduction* is an effort to study contemporary Islam with a solution-oriented approach. It encompasses several shades of Islamic thought. He entails a detailed discussion of Islamic law and jurisprudence, theology and philosophy, culture and mysticism in modern-day interpretations. He focuses on the development of Islamic thought through the ages, especially the modern period and explains how these trends became popular in due course of time. (Saeed, 2006). Another significant work, compiled in the early sixties by Abul Ala Maududi is *The Islamic Law and Constitution*. The work is essentially a compilation of speeches and articles relating to

the subjects of Islamic law and Constitutions. In this book, Maududi highlights the comprehensive nature and the guiding principles of Islam regarding political affairs. He not only discusses the literal concept of the term fan but also denies the notion of Islam-politics segregation. He emphasized the need for an Islamic state, and what should be its nature and structure, referring frequently to the Quranic texts and Prophetic sayings. (Maududi, 1960) The author chiefly deliberates on the Islamic concept of nation, the rights, and duties of citizens, the status of women and non-Muslim citizens, Islamic legislation, the difference between Islamic and Muslim governments, and other related concepts of statecraft. Besides discussing the principles and structure of the state, he underscores the fundamental principles that should be mentioned in the Islamic constitution like the Sovereignty of Allah, Status of Prophethood, fah, and principles of the constitution, the Islamic Law, Legislation and Ijtihad in Islam, the first principle of an Islamic State, Fundamentals of Islamic Constitutions, the Problem of Electorate and Some Constitutional proposal. The primary focus of the book is Islam, as a better and peaceful way of bringing a revolution and establishing the Divine Command on Earth. (Ahmad, 2013). On the contrary, Shaikh Jamil Ahmad's work titled *Islamic Thought and Movement in the Subcontinent* is an effort to highlight the contributions of some significant personalities, especially Maulana Maududi and Maulana Abul Hassan Nadwi. He appreciates the efforts of these personalities for the revival of Muslim society. (Ahmad, 2000) *A Concise History of India* written by Barbra Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf. It provides details about all events and movements in the history of India. It also provides details about the education setup of Muslims in pre-colonial and British India. (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006). *The History of Education in India* by Naik and Nurullah is a good account of the history of education. It

provided and compared the systems of Muslim education in different eras of history. It also provides a detailed description of the educational policies of the British government. (Nurullah & Naik, 1943). *Madrassa Education in India: A Study of its Past and Present* by K. Kaur is an account of the history of *Madrassa* education from the sultanate period to the twentieth century. It also explained the structure and workings of *Madrassahs*. (Kaur, 1990). *Madrassah Education in Pre-Colonial and Colonial South Asia* by Ali Riaz is valuable research regarding the evolution of *madrassah* education from the sultanate period to the twentieth century. It also explained the British educational policies. (Riaz, 2010). *Bastions of Believers: Madrasah and Islamic Education in India* by Yoginder Sikand is an excellent account of the study of the evolution of *Madrasah* education. It also explained the impacts of colonial policies on *madrassah* education. (Sikand, 2005). In addition to the above work, several articles have been written to explicate various dimensions of Islamic Thought in British India. Some of these articles are Sayyid Waheed Akhtar, "Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Approach to Religion" and Mahmudul Haq's "Reason and Tradition in Islamic Thought and so on. Some unpublished thesis dedicated to this field include Muhammad Azam Qasimi's "Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi's Contribution to Islamic Thought with Special Reference to Al-Kalam and Asiya Yusuf's work "Islam and Modernism: A Study of Muslim Scholars of Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent".

Development of Modernist Thought and Literature in the Subcontinent

As far as the development of modernist thought is concerned, several scholars and experts have given their input. They include Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Aziz Ahmad, Mazheruddin Siddiqui and many others who presented their critique on the works and services of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan,

Shibli Naumani, Maulvi Chiragh Ali, Syed Ameer Ali and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his famous work *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* deals with the ideological issues of "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" and examines the movements that have flown and are flowing. Smith at this time also offered a comprehensive social analysis of religio-political developments in the context of modernism. The future of the Muslims in India is a problem, so the problems deserve attention, men of goodwill hardly deny. In the 19th century, people were backward with traditions of past grandeur today parts of it. The book addresses multifarious questions: some of them are: how did this development take place? How did Islam, recently the religion of a medieval community, become the religion of capitalists, liberals, implacable nationalists, and social dreamers? In what ways have Indian Muslims struggled and organized in attempting to pursue their changing goals? And what are the ideas and categories of thought, aspirations, and frustrations, of the modern Muslims of this distressed earth? (Smith, 1943), Muhammad Qasim Zaman's *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age, Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* is marvellous. He, in this work, focusing on the endeavours of different Deobandi scholars, interprets and addresses contemporary issues the Muslim World has been facing for the last two centuries. It also highlights that there is a lack of consensus among different scholars on the treatment and solution of contemporary issues. (Zaman, 2012). Aziz Ahmad in his prolific work *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan 1857-1964* introduces the development and proliferation of Islamic thought in the subcontinent after the War of Independence 1857. He points out the inherent problems in Islamic Law which gives way to philosophical ideals by rejecting all unrelated motivations and insists on securing guidance from the orthodox or traditional sources like the Quran, Hadith, Ijma, and Qiyas.

The work analyzes the thoughts of Sir Syed Ahmad, Maulvi Chiragh Ali Chiragh Ali, Allama Shibli Numani, and Syed Ameer Ali. (Ahmad, 1967). Mazheruddin Siddiqi is a distinguished Islamic scholar. His work *Modern Reformist Thought in the Subcontinent* describes the intellectual, political, economic, social, and educational views of traditional thinkers whose interpretations are equally appraisable by the modernists. (Siddiqi, 1967). Modern Muslims cannot claim finality in the understanding of Islam, because the coming generation of Muslims will have a far larger fund of knowledge at its disposal and their understanding of Islam will be shaped by their greater knowledge. This book mainly highlights the ideas of Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi which helps to correct appropriate opinions about his great personality and thought. Sindhi has made a great contribution to Religio-Political thought fundamentally based on the teachings of the Holy Quran and the philosophy of Shah Waliullah. (Kurzman, 2002). *Aligarh Tehreek: Samaji or Siasi Mutalaa* by Mazhar Hussain is a well-researched work on the Aligarh movement, its impacts, and the efforts of S.S.A. Khan for the education of Muslims. For historical and research work on pre-colonial and colonial education, details are available in the form of primary and secondary sources about Muslim educational systems as well as their evolution. To develop a comparative critique regarding the impact of colonial policies on the Muslim education system it is necessary to identify the characteristics of the Muslim education system and then compare it with the modern education system. (Hussain, 1993)

Compendium of the Parallel Streams: Traditionalist and Modernist Interaction in the British India

Based on qualitative research, mainly primary and secondary sources have been thoroughly examined. The following structural framework leads to a detailed argumentation and examination of how both domains of thought

developed in the British period and what the contribution of the Muslim scholars in this regard:

1. Socio-Religious Environments of the Muslims in British India

The decline of Muslim Power with the advent of the East India Company was a great setback to the Muslims, who had lost their political, social, cultural, and religious authority. This change was a serious threat to Muslim cultural identity. The West had already crippled Muslim political and cultural supremacy and efficacy. (Hardy, 1972) The emergence of the West as a powerful force, dictating the terms in every field is it political, social, cultural, economic, or educational domains. It was an alarming situation or in other words situation full of crisis for the Muslims. The situation became graver because the secularists from the Muslim community were in favour of accepting the Western Culture as the popular one. They also advocated the separation of religion and politics as parallel domains. (Haq, 1970). These collective efforts and struggles of the Indian Muslims to safeguard their social-cultural and religious identity in the 20th century are the focus of this research. It also examines the influence of the local and non-Muslim cultures and customs of the Muslim population besides examining the impact of British encroachment upon the Muslims and their reaction towards the same.

2. British India and the Islamic Approach

Shah Waliullah, the great scholar of the 18th century, was a key figure in developing Islamic thought in British India. His thought reflects the point of confluence between medieval and modern Islamic thought. He was an outstanding traditionalist, revivalist, rationalist personality, and the most important modernist scholar who witnessed the degradation of the Muslim Empire. Being a Sunni Scholar, he vehemently invoked upon the Muslims to accept the true faith of Islam. He was much impressed by the thought of Abul Hasan Ashari and was a close representation of the school of

the companions. (Halepota, 1977) He used to say that if you want to bring into consideration the way and method of companions, you will find only the Ashari school of thought for the guidance of the Ummah on the right path. At the same time, he strongly opposed the views of the Mutazilites and their rationalist philosophy philosophers, especially in matters of faith. (Chughtai, 2005)

3. Expansion of Traditionalist Thought in British India

It is pertinent to note that traditionalist theological thoughts developed in the subcontinent during the British period. As the study is an attempt to analyze the diversity in Islamic thought the attitude, approach, and role of the major contributors of this discourse are required to be highlighted. The movement initiated by Shah Waliullah and his followers and methods of reformation described by them and the social as well as moral uplift. (Siddiqui, 2001) The scholars whose contribution is immense in this regard include, among others, Maulana Qasim Nanautawi, Nawab Siddique Hasan Khan, Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi, Ashraf Ali Thanwi, Obaidullah Sindhi, Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, Hussain Ahmad Madani, Abdul Haye Farangi Mahali, and Abul Kalam Azad. These all are the outstanding traditional scholars who contributed to the development of Islamic thought considerably by using their thoughts on The Existence of God, Divine Attributes, Tasawwuf, Islamic Jurisprudence, Shariah, Fiqh, Taqlid, belief in Predestination, Religion, revelation, and reason. (Bhat, 2005)

4. Modernist Tactic to Islamic Thought

Here an effort has been made to explain how the modernists treated the issue of traditional face-to-face with modernity. The modern period produced several scholars and thinkers such as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Maulana Chirag Ali, Syed Ameer Ali, Shibli Numani, and Allama Mohammad Iqbal. (Ali, 2000) Bennett (2005) is of the view that

modernist scholars mainly focused on the development of Islamic thought on both traditional lines giving equal importance to theology and science, revelation and reason. He further explains that they tried to respond to contemporary issues instead of reacting against the influence of Western civilization. (Bennett, 2005) They worked for Islamic reformation and suggested alternatives to secular adaptations. According to W.C. Troll (1986), Islamic modernism is a staunch advocate of reform and revival and encourages self-criticism to offer solutions to contemporary problems. (Troll, 1986) They were highly conscious of the need for the renewal of Islamic thought and contributed towards Islamic political thought.

Conclusion

To yield the inferences from the above discussion, it is maintained that in the study of British India, Islamic thought developed through the ideologies and thought patterns espoused and advocated by the traditionalists as well as the modernists and somehow the revivalists. Scholars and intellectuals of great calibre contributed multidimensional to the development of Islamic thought to preserve, sustain, reform, and revive the Islamic ethos in contemporary times. The experience of healthy interaction between two main schools of thought gave way to the development of the modern body of knowledge, acceptable to diverse sections of society. For example, with the development of Madrasa Rahimiya in Delhi, Darul Uloom Deoband in UP, and Nadwatul Ulama at Lakhnow, UP, a great wave of change developed, and scholars offered their services and contributions in the development of a modern body of knowledge, new critical thinking patterns and solution-oriented approaches. They tried to create interaction and collaboration among different knowledge streams, apparently seeming parallel in nature and functioning.

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