

## **Modernism and Postmodernism: A Study of the Islamic Teachings with Special Reference to the Related Issues of Pakistani Society**

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### **Abstract**

*This study elaborates the difference and connection between modernism and postmodernism eras while highlighting their backgrounds. The research highlights the teachings of Islam in terms of modernism and postmodernism. The research brings to light the influence of modernism and postmodernism on Muslim societies. What are the far reaching impacts of the modernism and postmodernism eras of Muslim societies and how well a common Muslim is equipped to address the issues related to postmodernism. The study primarily focuses on the related issues in Pakistani society and explains the role and the influence of religious scholars of their understanding of the terms modernism and postmodernism. The study focuses on the awareness of the 'Ulamā in addressing these global challenges and subsequently the future of Pakistani society. The study has an element of quantitative research and it indicates towards the on ground realities on the issue with the help of a latest survey on modernism and postmodernism.*

**Keywords:** *modernism, postmodernism, religion, religious education.*

### **Introduction:**

The conflict between religion and logic in the west is considered an important chapter of human history which had far reaching effects on the whole world. The background of this conflict was the untold modifications in the religions practiced in the west and they became very different from the religions sent by God. The universality of a religion is always lost when manmade modifications penetrate in it. 'It is necessary for a universal religion that its basic principles are unchanged and apply to all times and conditions. These principles are well equipped to address modern day challenges in a very comprehensive manner'.<sup>1</sup> The religions sent by God proclaimed monism but it was replaced by trinity and many other such manmade modifications were made in major beliefs. Christ is reported to have said, 'why do you deny the orders of Lord and associate partners

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with him with the help of fabricated commandments'.<sup>2</sup>

The altered form of religion gave space to priests to dominate and the direct link between God and his creatures was abandoned. Individuals were not allowed to interact with God directly rather they needed a connection to reach Him. The interpretations and explanations of matters related to religion could only come from priests and common masses had to accept these interpretations and explanations. The salvation of humans depended on one's on deeds in the real religion but in its novel form Christ had given his life as atonement for the sins of all the humans. Monasticism was practiced and preached by religious scholars which was not in line with the basic principles of the religion sent by Allah. Slowly and gradually people started to reject the new form of religion. This situation paved way for the birth of a new phenomenon called modernism.

#### **Modernism:**

Modernism is a philosophical movement consisted of many cultural and religious trends and transformation in the west in late nineteenth and early twentieth. The religion dominated by priests steadily became unpopular among common masses and ideological, cultural, political and social movements started as a reaction to traditionalism and to the authority of church in Europe in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These movements were to reject the narrow minded religious doctrines which were influenced by old Greek philosophy. These movements faced severe resistance as they were considered against the religion. People started to believe that the religion must be abandoned to establish justice in human societies.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand the interaction between the Islamic civilization of Spain and Christian world paved way for intellectual freedom and the church had to face a stern opposition and thus the movement of modernism started. Francis Bacon<sup>4</sup>, Rene Descartes<sup>5</sup> and Thomas Hobbes<sup>6</sup> are considered the founders of the modernism. And they were of the opinion that the whole universe can be discovered by the help of logic, experience and observations. All the realities of this universe can be perceived with the help of scientific methods and there is no need for any other sources. For instance Rene Descartes writes, 'I can attach existence to God in my thought even if no God exists'.<sup>7</sup>

Logic was considered as the only source of knowledge and this gave birth to rationalism and modernism. Religious beliefs were accepted after verifying them through logic and reasoning. Modernism advocated the concepts of freedom of thought and speech and human rights. The concept of absolute sovereignty by Thomas Hobbes was declared the basis of political philosophy.<sup>8</sup> It was believed that absolute sovereignty belonged to people and not to God. A state must empower the freedom of common men and their rights and a government should have limited

powers. The modernism movement advocated the concepts of nationalism and national states. Democracy was an outcome of such movements and sovereign, democratic and national states were established in Europe and North America.<sup>9</sup> Capitalism is also considered an outcome of modernism. Rejection of religion left west with no moral system to spiritually guide its people and western societies witnessed great downfalls in the spheres of ethics and morality. And a few of the outcome of this downfall were disappointments in individuals and increasing number of suicides, the collapse of family system, moral instability, feminism and homosexuality, urbanization, colonization by powerful nations etc. Modernism was also called enlightenment and renaissance. Democracy, freedom, equality of men and women, scientific thinking and secularism were the immediate outcomes of modernism.

### **Postmodernism:**

Postmodernism is known as a reaction to the modernism which emerged in the late twentieth century. In modernism people once again felt an unrest which they felt in the reign in the era of the dominance of church. This time it was the unlimited freedom and downfall of human societies and moral instability which caused the strife in the minds of people and ultimately paved way for postmodernism. Postmodernism is not a specific or integrated philosophy rather it is a denial of all the ideologies developed in the era of modernism. People could not find the truth in pre modernism and in modernism eras so they started to believe that there is no truth at all and truth was seen as utopia. One thing in different timings and in different situations can be right and wrong as well. There is nothing in this world which is always true in all the circumstances. According to postmodernism development, democracy, freedom, religion and God are just like fairy-tale and meaningless convictions. And all such claims are mega narratives.

The postmodernism did not accept science as an ultimate truth. Jean Francois Lyotard<sup>10</sup> a French best known scholar of postmodernism says that scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with another kind of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Postmodernism caused disbelief of people in ideologies and perceptions and they longed their own ideas more than the established ideologies and that is why postmodernism is also called an age of no ideology. Unity of religions is an old notion and it got stronger in the era of postmodernism. People started to believe that all the religions of the world are true and accurate. And that is why this age is known as the age of desecularization as well. In order to attain inner peace and satisfaction one can retreat to any religion, any God, priest, rabbi etc. Family systems and rules and regulations of marriages can be accepted and rejected at the same time. Marriages can be

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between a man and a woman and it can be between two men. And there is no problem if a man and a woman wants to live together without a marriage. Postmodernism did not proclaim any set rules of clothing and one can wear anything he wishes and there is no trouble if there is no clothing. According to Gopi Chand Narang<sup>12</sup> postmodernism insists on creative freedom without any limitations.<sup>13</sup> In the light of postmodernism theories fine arts should not be confined to any literal, religious or political limitations.

### **Modernism, Postmodernism and Islam:**

Islam being the final universal religion of the world has a complete system which guides men in all the spheres of life. Whether it is about the basic doctrines, social values, moral, political, social, economic systems or anything else, Islam provides directions in all walks of life. Being a divine religion all the guidance is heavenly and logic and reasoning has a limited role to play. All the early and late scholars elaborated this viewpoint of Islamic teachings. For instance *Imām Ghazālī* has criticized Aristotle with the help of principles set by Aristotle that the facts determined with the help of logic are limited and human mind cannot encompass the vastness of this universe.<sup>14</sup> Like early scholars of Islam the contemporary scholars are also of the same opinion about human mind. Human logic is limited and is obsessed by flaws and that is why dependable of the heavenly guidance. The knowledge of God is unlimited and absolutely correct as well and it is for all the times and conditions.<sup>15</sup>

### **Modernism and Qūrān:**

As the final book of Allah *Qūrān* contains guidance for all times and conditions. Quranic verses elaborate the absoluteness of the knowledge of Allah. Allah Almighty says in the Holy Book;

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ<sup>16</sup>

There is nothing hidden from Allah in the earth and in the heavens.  
And again;

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ<sup>17</sup>

He knows what happens to them in this world, what will happen to them in Hereafter. And they will never compass anything of His Knowledge except that which He Wills.

Allah Almighty says that He has sent down a book which has everything for his followers and time to time developments can be addressed in the light of the teachings of this book.

وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَانًا لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ<sup>18</sup>

And We have revealed on you the Book in which everything is clearly explained.

And again;

سُنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ<sup>19</sup>

And We will show them Our signs in the universe and in their own selves, until it becomes clear to them that it is the reality.

According to Islamic teachings the knowledge bestowed by Allah is absolute truth and knowledge other than this is either absolute false or relative truth.

### **Modernism and *Hadith*:**

The sayings and the doings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are the practical forms of the theories presented in the Holy Book. Quran says that there is a good example for everyone on the life of the Prophet. And he does not say anything out of his own will.

وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ<sup>20</sup>

And he (Muhammad) does not speak out of his own will, it is not but revelation, revealed to him.

In regard with the guidance about time to time developments and global challenges Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has given a complete direction. He is reported to have said;

تركت فيكم أمرين لن تضلوا ما تمسكتم بهما كتاب الله وسنة رسوله<sup>21</sup>

I have left two things among you, you will never go astray until you follow the two, the book of Allah and the practice of his Prophet.

In regard with the false interpretations of Islamic teaching the Prophet is reported to have said;

يحمل هذا العلم من كل خلف عدوله ينفون عنه تحريف الغالين وانتحال المبطلين وتأويل الجاهلين<sup>22</sup>

This knowledge would be transferred from every right descendant who will wipe out the deformations of the excessive ones, the false claims of the people on falsehood the false interpretations of the ignorant people.

Islam being a complete code of life encompasses all the spheres of human life in all the times and situations. Where it is modernism or postmodernism, *Qūrān* says that there is nothing hidden from Allah in the earth and in the heavens. Allah knows what happens to them in this world and what will happen to them in Hereafter. Allah says that He has revealed a Book in which everything is clearly explained. And if there is anything new like modernism or postmodernism one can get guidance from two things the book of Allah and the practice of his Prophet. There is no

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concept of an indirect relationship between Allah and his creatures like pre-modernism claimed. Logic and reasoning has a limited role to play in Islam as it is based on divine revelation from Allah while modernism focused more on logic and reasoning. And there is no concept of the unity of all religions in Islam as postmodernism claimed.

#### **Influence of Modernism and Postmodernism on Muslim Societies:**

Europe in fifteenth and sixteenth century started colonizing other countries of the world and at the end of the nineteenth century Europe ruled a greater part of the world which included many Muslim countries as well. It was not only a political rule but an ideological rule as well. And there were four major reactions to the ideological reign of Europe;

- Absolute pursuance of western ideologies
- Absolute denial of western thoughts
- Attempts to make amendments in Islamic rulings
- Adaptation of positive aspects from western ideologies.

The first reaction came from the elite of Muslims who partially or impartially accepted the western mindset and the second reaction was from the traditional Muslim scholars who completely denied this mindset. The third reaction came from modernists in Muslim world especially in sub-continent and Egypt for instance Sir *Sayed Ahmad Khān*,<sup>23</sup> *Ṭāḥā Ḥusyn*,<sup>24</sup> *Ghulām Ahmad Parvaiz*<sup>25</sup> and others who attempted to make changes in the basics of Islamic teachings. And the last reaction came from those reformers who had a complete understanding of the global changes happening around them. These scholars had a balanced approach and they criticized the western thoughts of modernism with a positive stance and did not come up with an apologetic approach. They rather tried to present Islam as a progressive religion.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that Muslim societies knowingly or unknowingly were greatly influenced by the phenomenon of modernism and postmodernism. 'Today's world is directly or indirectly ruled by Europe. Muslim countries are under the influence of western theories and civilizations'.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Reactions of Muslim Scholars:**

'Modern day Muslim scholars could not come up with writings which could address the mindset of modern day men. In my opinion from *Shāh Walīullah*<sup>28</sup> to *Sayed Quṭab*<sup>29</sup> no one could prepare a single book which could meet today's standards. Most of the writings of Islam by Muslims are not on the level of current thought. These scholars had no idea what a reasoned statement is and the traditional Muslim scholars had no thought of what was happening around them at all'.<sup>30</sup> For instance *Mūlānā Mūdūdī* criticizes Europe for blaming Islam for political gains that Islam has spread with the help of sword. He is of the opinion that it is a pure allegation and should have come at the time when there were wars

and Islam was spreading.<sup>31</sup> Now there are two different things; one is a mere allegation that Islam spread with the help of sword and secondly it is not about the allegation itself but the allegation should not come now. There are many other such examples and that is why the narrative of the modern day Muslim scholars did not get popular. Malise Ruthven<sup>32</sup> an expert in Middle Eastern affairs elaborates the situation by saying, 'Largely ignorant of Western high culture and intellectual traditions, their views are mostly picked up, second hand, from reading articles in newspapers about various social problems. They never apply the same canons of criticism to contemporary Muslim societies; the perfection of Islam is forever compared with the actual imperfections of Western society; like is not compared with like'.<sup>33</sup>

### **Related Issues in Pakistani Society:**

In Pakistani society there are two extreme reactions to modernism and postmodernism. On one hand modernism is totally rejected and on the other it is wholeheartedly welcomed. It is a matter of fact that Pakistani society is still under the influence of west which ruled it for more than two hundred years. Anything which comes from the west is mostly welcomed. And the same happened with modernism and postmodernism theories. Without having any idea of the pre and post modernism eras and without comprehending the backgrounds of the actual situations modernity is either fully rejected or fully accepted.

Whether it is liberalism or secularism everything from the west was treated very wholeheartedly. The freedom of thought and expression was sought in the imitation of the west without knowing or understanding the situation and circumstances of the west in regard with the freedom of thought and speech. Attempts were made to adopt the models of human rights and women rights of the west. Islam has very clear commandments in connection with human rights, women rights, religious identity and nationalism. The freedom of thought and expression has also been clearly defined in the teachings of Islam.

The church in its efforts to influence societies in the pre modernism era had four gospels the Matthew, the Mark, the Luke and the John and with no specific and comprehensive system the church did not succeed and ultimately modernism emerged. The Holy book of Islam is safe with an all-inclusive structure but the chaos in Pakistani society is worse than the west. There are more disappointments in individuals which is resulting in increasing number of suicides. The family system is also becoming unpopular and people love to live in isolation. Moral instability is not hidden from anyone and the new generations have very little idea of ethics and values practiced by their forefather.

The biggest dilemma of the Pakistani society is lack of education and it becomes worse when this country has a division of religious and

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otherwise education. This had far reaching effects on Pakistani society such as sectarianism, instability, extremism, terrorism etc. The difference between the sayings and the doings of some of the religious scholars worsened the situations in Pakistani society. There are big question marks on the awareness and understanding of today's 'Ulamā in addressing these global challenges such as religious and cultural pluralism, modernism and postmodernism. And this has resulted in two extremes; one is the religious extremism and the other is bunch of secular mindset which is on a role to criticize Islam and even make fun of its teachings.

### **Survey:**

A latest survey was conducted specifically for this research in the University of Haripur, KPK. The participants of this survey were tested in their knowledge about modernism and postmodernism. 216 people having qualification between BA/BSc and PhD participated in the said survey. 140 of these were female and 76 were male. The questions asked were;

1. Do you know what exactly modernism and postmodernism is?

35% people answered in a YES while the rest 65% said NO.

2. The religious system of the west is better than ours?

32% said Yes, while 68% answered it with, No.

3. Life is better in the west or in our country?

61% said Yes, while 39% answered it with, No.

4. Are you happy and satisfied with the role of religious scholars in the reformation of our society?

21% said Yes, while 79% answered it with, No.

5. How many times do you offer prayers in a day?

None: 12%, Once: 4%, Twice: 7%, Thrice: 19%, Four Times: 28%, Five Times: 30%, (70% do not offer prayers regularly)

### **Findings and Conclusion:**

Majority of the participants of the survey had no idea of modernism and postmodernism phenomenon and it reflects why everything coming from the west is accepted without knowing the background or the essence of the matter. Because of our spiritual affiliation with our religion, our religion is the best in the world but when it comes to living, west is preferred. Bulk of the people is not happy with the role of the religious scholars in terms of guiding people in the matters related to spatiality. There are complaints against religious scholars but the religion is not practiced in its true sense by the majority. This sums up the situation. Those who have to guide a common man on such complex issues are not able to guide him on ordinary matters. It seems that no one is doing his part of the job and the consequences are very obvious.

### **Recommendations:**



Muslims will have to prove that they really believe in their religion with complete faith in it. And show firm belief in the sovereignty of the Almighty and follow his commandments. Practice the religion in their daily lives in which they claim to believe. Follow the all lawful and abandon the unlawful. There is a dire need for a critical and constructive movement for this revolutionary task.<sup>34</sup> The Holy Book asserts the said viewpoint in the following verse.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ<sup>35</sup>

O you who have believed, believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Book.

Muslim scholars will have to focus on their basic role which is to gain and spread true knowledge of Islam and stay away from irrelevant issues. Modern day issues cannot be addressed without a through comprehension of the contemporary disciplines of knowledge. Muslim scholars will have to get rid of intellectual stagnation by opening the doors of positive criticism which will result in deeper insight. Despite difference of opinions, acceptance and tolerance may be given space.

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### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> *Amratsari, Thanāullah, Islam and Christianity, (Lahore: Nūmānī Kutab Khānah, 2007), p. 18.*
- <sup>2</sup> Gospel of John and Exodus: p. 20.
- <sup>3</sup> *Imtiyāz 'Abdul Qādir, "The Challenge of Modernism and Postmodernism and Islam" Iiqāz 104 (2016): 248.*
- <sup>4</sup> Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an English philosopher, statesman, scientist, jurist and author.
- <sup>5</sup> Rene Descartes (1596-1650) was a French philosopher, mathematician and scientist.
- <sup>6</sup> Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an English philosopher who is considered one of the founders of modern political philosophy.
- <sup>7</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p.24.
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (London: Oxford Printing Press, 1929), p. 88.
- <sup>9</sup> *Imtiyāz 'Abdul Qādir, op.cit., p. 249.*
- <sup>10</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) was a French philosopher and sociologist and an expert of modernism and postmodernism.
- <sup>11</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A report on Knowledge*, (Manchester: University Press, 1984), p. 7.
- <sup>12</sup> Gobi Chand Narang (1931) is an Indian theorist, literary critic and a well known scholar.
- <sup>13</sup> Gobi Chand Narang, *Shākhtiyāt*, (Delhi: National Council Publishers, 2004), p. 530.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ghazālī, Muhammad Ibn Muhammad, Tahāfat Al Falāsafah, (Cairo: Dār Al*

*M'ārif*, 1966), p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> *Abū 'Alā Al Mūdūdī, Dīne Ḥaq*, (Lahore: *Idārah Terjumān Al Quran*, 2006), p.22.

<sup>16</sup> Al Quran (3:5)

<sup>17</sup> Al Quran (2:255)

<sup>18</sup> Al Quran (16:89)

<sup>19</sup> Al Quran (41:53)

<sup>20</sup> Al Quran (53:3-4)

<sup>21</sup> *Mua'tta Imām Mālik, Ḥadīth* No. 1395.

<sup>22</sup> *Mishkāt Al Maṣābīh, Ḥadīth* No. 248.

<sup>23</sup> *Sayed Aḥmad Khān* (1817-1898) was an Indian Muslim philosopher and reformist.

<sup>24</sup> *Ṭāḥā Ḥusyn* (1889-1973) was one of the most influential 20<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian writers and intellectuals.

<sup>25</sup> *Ghulām Aḥmad Parvaiz* (1903-1985) was a scholar from pre independence India and later Pakistan.

<sup>26</sup> *Nadhīr, Muḥamad Mubashir, Iḥāde Jadīd Ke Atharāt*, (Lahore: Super Publisher, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Qutab, Muhammad, trans., *Jadīd Jāhiliyat*, (Lahore: *Al Badar* Publications, 1980), p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Shāh Walīullah* (1703-1762) was a prominent scholar and Sufi from Delhi.

<sup>29</sup> *Sayed Quṭab* (1906-1966) was an Egyptian author, educator, Islamic theorist, poet and a leading member of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>30</sup> *Khān, Waḥīd Al Dīn, 'Ulamā Aūr Dūre Jadīd*, (New Delhi: *Maktabah Al Risālah*, 1996), p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> *Abū 'Alā Al Mūdūdī, Al Jihād Fi Al Islām*, (Lahore: *Idārah Terjumān Al Quran*, 1988), p.15.

<sup>32</sup> Malise Ruthven (1942) is an Anglo-Irish academic writer and an expert in Middle Eastern affairs.

<sup>33</sup> Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p, 400.

<sup>34</sup> *Abū 'Alā Al Mūdūdī, Musalān Aūr Mūjūdah Siyāsī Kashmakash*, (Lahore: *Idārah Terjumān Al Quran*, 2006), p.174.

<sup>35</sup> Al Quran (4:136)