Dr. Fazlur Rahman’s Discourse On Islamic Intellectualism, Knowledge And Education

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Abstract

Islam is the only civilization which has a fourteen centuries’ fluctuating history with Christian West; its earlier westward expansion was at the expense of Christendom which was destined to transpire into seven centuries rule of Spain and unsuccessful invasion of France; had there not been a challenge of Safavid’s Iran at home the whole Europe would have been in the political domains of Islam under Ottomans writes Bernard Lewis to whom Islam despite its turmoil and travails still poses a great challenge to the power, efficacy and viability of Western civilization. Yet, the onset of European Renaissance in 15th century with Protestant Revolt culminates into Enlightenment Movement that triggers scientific revolution, a sure way to industrial revolution turning porcupine posture of Europe into an aggressive imperialism and the whole Muslim Africa and Asia submerges into Western colonialism. European hegemony and successful occupation of the Muslim world was initially perceived in terms of its scientific and technological progress, military discipline and paraphernalia. Ottomans initiative to train militaries on modern lines and, of the establishment of scientific and technological institutes was in the most part intended to counter the same but proves an utter failure. It was Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani who perceived European power and hegemony in terms of its socio-economic and political modernization and to address the challenge squarely asked his community to raise its intellectual and moral standards. Iqbal’s “Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” was a first kind of serious attempt in this direction.
However, being a true heir to Afghani and Iqbal’s legacy Dr. Fazlur Rahman is the first serious Muslim scholar who with the systematic analysis of the intellectual heritage of Islam with Quran and Seerah as central coordinates defined the decline of Islam in intellectual terms. To him, it was medieval Muslim intellectualism divorced from the original élan of the Quran which sowed the seeds of the Muslim decline and as Islamic theology and law had failed to weave genuine world view of Islam, remedy lies in addressing the same. This paper intends to bring forward Dr. Fazlur Rahman’s view of Islamic weltanschauung, the state of mind i.e. Islamic Intellectualism that Islam wants to nurture and the epistemology it suggests. This article is based on qualitative research.

**Keywords:** Islam, modernity, Enlightenment, medievalism, Quran, Ethics, theology, law, metaphysics, Islamic intellectualism, hermeneutics, knowledge, education, Epistemology, scientific revolution, Industrial Revolution, Western colonialism, traditionalism, revivalism, Islamic modernism,

**Introduction**

Islam emerged on the realm of history with a moral program of socio-economic justice and essential egalitarianism enveloped in a grand ethical principle of monotheism, geared to social action with the indispensable instruments of politics and jihad (all out struggle). It escorted an intense spiritualism and rigorous pragmatism so much so that it not only turned its program into reality within 23 years in the premises of its birth but was bound to assume the steering wheel of history after bringing Persian and Roman empires in its political domain. It struck transformation on the level of human consciousness and on the basis of a true appreciation of the human nature, with its idealism maximized and with realism released the creative moral energy of its adherents to such a level that history became a field of Divine activity and, life all round shone like a multi-facet diamond. Giving birth to inductive logic Islam laid the basis of cognitive revolution making Muslims the patron in chief of all sciences. To the older religions, abnormalities being irreversible, history was deemed an irredeemable phenomenon; to redress the balance expecting to the coming of Reformer being popular inviolable law had become a psychological disease of history. Islam cured the malaise by the idea of the finality of the prophecy and with the birth of inductive logic, reason or critical faculty; the non-rational modes of consciousness (Revelation) were locked, to nurture and mature the human rationality, man was put back on his own resources. Be it the constant appeal to reason and experience and/or an invitation to ponder over Natural phenomena and operations of History in Quran all are the different facets of same reality that man being equipped with the faculty of creative knowledge is bound to decipher the mysteries of universe to both actualize his potentials and truly appreciate the meaning of God for the world. In sharp contrasts to traditional static and stationary weltanschauung Islam presented the dynamic, evolutionary and ever-expanding view of the universe, history, life, knowledge and ethics that was destined to inculcate and catalyze the scientific spirit in mankind – a sure road to the genesis of the modern world. So original, creative and tremendous in magnitude and grandeur was the moral initiative of Islam that though its original ethical impulse of socio-economic justice and essential
egalitarianism gradually loses luster and ceases to throb due to earlier religio-political wars, with ensuing history of dictatorship and the establishment of the institution of orthodoxy under its patronage, yet the momentum of its other salient cultural features and their cumulative vitality and prod to action was sufficed enough to keep the Muslims on the helm of the world affairs for almost a millennium.

Before Islam, history had never seen an organic fusion of the idea of monotheism and socio-economic justice, metaphysics and social fact, spiritual and temporal, ideal and real, this worldly and that worldly life, for to Islam life after death instead of being separate or disparate was essentially an organic extension of this-worldly life. In ancient world the two great streams of thought i.e. theology and sociology had flowed independently as a corollary their intellectual activities had been hopelessly out of proportion to their political wisdom and their morality. The sui generis feat of Islam was to bring about the real fusion of the both streams. For In Muhammad’s religious experience history and theology interact. With an intense idealism being a great challenger to the status quo he was almost hounded to death but the rigorous pragmatism with which he took the plunge having not even an iota of doubt to succeed, ultimately the tide of justice rise, and hope and history rhyme.

The practical temperament of the early generation of Islam was least interested into the metaphysical enquiries, the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the prophet as an organic intellectual rather than an aspiring careerist for a top-notch social status was, for the most part precious enough for them to design, organize and constantly persuade for moral imperative, they would always ready to receive and execute the Divine commands. Text was a pragmatic test and, deeds rather than words interpret the same, for it is a passionate character and all out unceasing endeavors which snatches secrets from the heart and memory of the universe and unravel its mysteries. Be it the Quran’s appeal of pondering over the natural phenomena or deliberations on man’s own true inner psychic whispers or contemplative study of the history i.e. social fact, and an emphasis on the overriding principle that in final analysis the results derived from nature, human inner perception and history instead of contradicting each other, enhance, augment and clarify each other, echoing and mirroring each other speak of the One, state that genuine knowledge to Quran is not based on conjectures or pure speculations rather which is testified by observation and induction (53:28-30). Ignoring scientific method and observation the sole avenue of materials of human knowledge, in the pursuit of reality is to erect a wall on the edge of water -worn, crumbling river- bank bound to tumble down with its architects as well (9:109).

Hume and Kant present the thesis that reason has its limitations to reach an ultimate truth for whatever the truth it establishes is prone to be refuted by the reason itself. It is a partial reality or a specious argument at best. The faculty of reason has two constituent parts i.e. perceptive and formulative. In other words reason consists in a faculty of intuition and faculty of rationality both having their own respective spheres of scientific and empirical methods for sifting the fact from the fiction. The faculty of “intuition being only the higher form of intellect” has in its folds both
the discoveries of its own and of pure reason as well while the intuitive acumen are for the most part inaccessible to pure intellect. This is because to Sufis, pure intellect is not a serious way of dealing with the Reality. When Quran says “it is not the physical eyes that grow blind but it is the hearts which are within breasts that grow blind (22:64) explains it is myopic moral vision, or reason divorced from faith which does not turn the physical eyes blind and physical eves deaf but distorts or obstructs the faculty of the heart to “really see”, “really listen”, and “really understand” the signs of God in the universe, the Scripture, the inner selves and proper laws of history obtaining and unfolding before their very eyes and minds. Hence, it is faith grounded in knowledge that supplies man or community with an inner torch to see the right as right and false as false to chart their destiny on the firm basis. Thus in the parlance of Quran reason is essentially the fusion of perceptive and formulative faculties, and only one equipped with the both zeroes in on and hits at the very heart of the Truth in such a way that the Truth itself speaks out “His eyes neither swerved to the right or the left or the below or the above of the Truth” (53:17). In this way acquiring responsibly the right knowledge- religious or scientific per se is not the be-all-and-end all, equally arduous is the task of wielding that double edged weapon responsibly and employing the same in proper and constructive channels to steer the course of history towards positive moral ends. No form of knowledge is banned in Islam; indeed all knowledge is beneficial, as Quran terms knowledge as Nur (light), or Hidaya (guidance) the only dominating principle is that it should be employed for salutary ends and not be allowed to run riot with the moral destiny of man; its proper role is to “save man from himself by himself and for himself”.  

As the all forms of individual and communal rise and fall are organically linked to the intellectual foundations which an individual or a society has, therefore it was necessary to shortly portray what sort of intellectualism Quran was inspiring to the first generation of Islam who left indelible marks on the galaxies. However, “about two decades after the Holy Prophet’s demise (to be more exact, after the death of Umar) the political form of pristine Islam began to be corrupted and the original program began to recede into obscurity. Clannish wrangling for power took the place of a free agreement of free men and women; hereditary kingship, as inimical to the political concept of Islam as polytheism is to its theological concept, came into being with the accession of Muawiyah; and with it, dynastic struggles and intrigues, tribal preferences and oppressions, and the usual degradation of religion to the status of a hand- maiden of political power; in short, the entire host of “vested” interests so well known to history. History knows no malaise greater than dictatorship which obstructs the creative genius of the people leaving no possibility to redress the balance of society. So, for almost two or three centuries the original impetus and impulse of Islam, so tremendous and enormous it was at the outset that proved sufficed to carry the Muslim community to great cultural and civilizational triumphs – to that exalted vision of scientific, literary and artistic achievement which we term “the Golden Age of Islam” but within a few centuries this impetus died down for want of spiritual nourishment and the world of Islam became more and more stagnant, stolid, sterile and barren on the realm of creative knowledge for “ in the later medieval ages, the Muslims turned their backs almost completely on scientific and inductive knowledge gained through experience and observation and have been indulging in pure
speculation. When they turned the Quran’s precept of using the inductive and empirical method for acquiring knowledge upside down and inside out the empty thought shell of theological speculation, mystic deliriums and law and theology divorced from the actual touch with reality was a forgone conclusion.

Civilization is a motion not a condition; a voyage not a harbor as Toynbee says, being an organism it had to grow, “organic growth implies not only an evolution of inborn qualities, but also the absorption of extraneous matter: and so it is only natural that in the course of time the civilization of Islam received certain additional impulses from other cultures and to some extent changed its original shape. Such effects of cultural environment on the growth of a civilization are very similar to the influence of physical and social environment on a growing child. But as all the effects of environment can not alter the fundamental structure of the personality which every child possesses at the moment it leaves its mother’s womb, so the later day changes in Islamic civilization could not fundamentally alter its original “predisposition”: the most they did was to obscure or to corrupt it. With all those changes, the fact remains that Islamic civilization was a distinct, self-contained organism at the very time of its meteoric birth, which, as we know, took place at a clearly definable, historical moment: namely, within the twenty three years of the Prophet’s ministry. The fact is all the intellectual, cultural and civilizational challenges which came its way, being the master of its destiny psychologically invincible Islam met all those successfully-assimilating, rejecting and adjusting itself to the new currents on its own terms. However, the onset of dictatorship was such a heavy blow to its political and communal integrity that gave birth to religio-political sectarianism which was in an embryonic stage soon after the sad demise of Umar, raised its head during Ali and Muayia wars and turned into hydra-headed monster amidst and after the tragedy of Karbala. The subsequent is the history of a dizzy headed Islam moving forward from one extreme to another, with the equilibrium the only missing element, the unmistakable hallmark of pristine Islam which earned it the title of the “gold median” and the “best community” which was functional yet taken as a privilege by the latter generations even to date.

On intellectual realm the first major blow received by Islam was the extreme, loose and liberal definition of the Muslim to counter the kharijite extremism which severing organic relation between faith and action came very close to the Christian doctrine of Justification by faith, a far cry from the stand of Quran which terms faith without action not faith at all (6:158). Faith severed from deed and knowledge divorced from scientific empirical pursuits is sure way to the abyss of pure speculation. On theological plane Mutazilla on the price of Majesty and Powers of God over emphasized human free will, robbed God of His prerogative of forgiveness, brought intellect at par with Revelation and it was the case mutatis mutandis with the Ashrite theology. The latter termed God the real actor, man a mere puppet in His hand to secure the Omnipotence and Omniscience of God (a view bound to rob man of all potency) a doctrine sure recipe to pre-determinism, fatalism and political cynicism being suited to the whims and eases of the rulers and supplied with the necessary content of Sufi-theosophy Asharite theology hold sway even to-date while Mutazilla despite their emphasis on the Command (of God, i.e. the moral imperative)
“and command good and forbid evil” are an extinct species. Sufism of Hasan al-Basari intended to resurrect the original élan and simplicity of Islam, in the long run turned neutral to social reality, with an utmost thrust on self-piety or personal-ism and failed to follow through on the hopes and commitments it inspired.

On an administrative plane, political dispensation sought host of compromises from the orthodoxy. Sunna or tradition to early generations was a natural process; metaphysics and social fact in each region were organically linked taking into account the necessary and relevant social conditions prevalent in respective spheres of activity and the general principles upon which the entire teachings of Quran converge, with the names of Sunna of Hijaz, Iraq and Egypt. If it attained the agreement of community it becomes Ijma (consensus) ever being subject to Ijtehad whenever would lose validity and Ijtehad would deliver a new Sunna that too if a attains public agreement would achieve the status of Ijma. This was the state of natural affairs in the major provinces of Islamic empire. Empire with a passage of time needed a uniform administrative set up. The state employed Shafi’i’s genius and principles of Islamic legislation. As J Schacht made an acute observation in his “Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence” that “ in the early decision making process in Islam, the Quran was invariably introduced at secondary stage” which means that early generation first observed through the entire framework of Quran harnessed the citation of particular verses only at a secondary stage as is evident from Umar’s refusal to divide lands of Iraq among conquering soldiers as booty, at face value repugnant to the practice of the Prophet and Divine Command but what transpires from the Quran and the Sunna is a fact that only after induction comes deduction, if followed the decision was concordant to the actual practice of the Prophet and the spirit of Quran. For Quran’s general and broader demand for social justice and fair play was observed in the judgment and at second stage Umar appealed to 59:7, 10 to justify his stand. Umar’s view was that Prophet’s practice concerning tribal territories with meager resources was no longer practicable now that whole countries with vast irrigable and cultivable lands were being conquered. How natural, articulate, organic and understandable this approach was but later under despots the principle of social necessity and public preference for political expediency was adopted for the interests of empire rather than the principles on which it stood assumed primacy. The first intense blow to the Islamic jurisprudence came from Shafi’i’s principle of law making. He introduces the principle of Nass i.e. An isolated Verse of Quran or Hadith of the Prophet is sufficed to formulate a law. On the other hand he reversed the organic relation of Sunna-Ijma-Ijtehad into Sunna-Ijtehad and Ijma giving finality to ijma once achieved. The consensus of the Companions of the Prophet was unconditionally termed binding on the community. The development triggered the movement of Hadith collection to compile compendiums and encyclopedias of Hadith. Empire’s administrative structure got uniform thus Islam succeeded in producing an unprecedented impressive uniform culture even to date from Morocco to Malaya uniformity abounds but on the cost of its originality and creativity. The ad-hoc measure in the short run served well but in the long run was bound to take its heavy toll on the creative genius and the destiny of the community.
To the early generations Hadith-Sunna, and Ilm-fiqh were synonymous terms - hadith was a knowledge or data and fiqh was exerting oneself to an utmost limits to deduce not only law but the general principles and teachings from the entire fabric of Quran and Sunna. Thus various Islamic disciplines like theology, law, hermeneutics of Quran, Islamic philosophy, philosophy of history, Islamic mysticism even natural sciences took birth as the Quran inspired the Muslim scientists to unravel the mysteries of the universe but in post-Shafi period the dynamic view of Quran and Sunna gradually comes to a grinding halt. Now what option was left except an absolute naked literalism? The weltanschauung of the Quran having no zeitgeist of obtaining social conditions, in such a scenario was bound to be reduced to the husk or restricted to the commentaries and the super-commentaries. When creative faculty the very source of life for all disciplines turns disciplina non grata and ceases to nourish the sciences it does not only hinder the growth and progress but at critical points the very death of those disciplines is a foregone conclusion.

The laws of history work slowly but surely. Just as a million tons gigantic ship covers hundreds of miles making a gentle curve to change its course, civilizations getting hollowed on the realm of creativity to deliver, on the basis of previous hard earned virtues enjoy a considerable respite but the term appointed is such a scientifically calculated which can neither be hastened nor postponed when reaches neither the earth nor the heaven weep on the plight because it is wrought by the very hands of mankind for an unalterable and an overriding law of history is that fossils cannot survive for long. When the unprecedented most sublime early community of Islam amidst all out struggle and sufferings was recurrently warned that there is no darling community of God, if you fail to deliver would be condemned to oblivion and substituted by others with credentials to deliver, and was remembered that trials, persecutions and pains are not only your lot the people before you have suffered far more turmoil, turbulence, tumults and travails upon travails (29:1-10). The popular course of the history is “when rot sets in, there is either a successful reaction against it from within or a power is imposed from without, the former being more commonly?” again a form of respite to bring the house in order or make a fresh start to build a clean civilization once again. The earlier religio-political sectarianism in Islam was but a failed attempt of setting things aright and rot was developing within the thought and institutions to ripe; then the break-down of Abbasid Empire was the first serious blow to the unity of Islam. The political fragmentation resulted in the rise of Ottomans in Turkey, the Safavids in Persia, Seljuk in the hinterland, and the Mughals in India. The internal conditions invoked invasion of pagan Mongols from the East and the Christian Crusaders from the West. The political expediency of saving respective territories transpired into the territorialization and relativization of the faith, as the dynastic concerns take the place of religious ones the “preservation of the empire became the primary concern of Muslim institutions rather than the principles on which it was founded”8. Orthodoxy proved instrumental in the process, its failure to articulate an all-embracing, all-enveloping and comprehensive Islamic worldview made the Islamic principles vulnerable to the vagaries of power politics on much exploited grounds of ‘social necessity’ and ‘public interest’.
All was not gone yet. The Crusaders despite protected wars were sent packing and the Mongols though initially turned successful on military cum political realms ultimately losing on religio-cultural planes emerged as the great guarantors and protectors of Islam. It was a respite for the Muslims so that regaining their composure they should get their act together to address the rot that had set in in their thought and institutions. Addressable issues went unheeded. After their turning into a spent force as the appointed term comes near, history stood intent on bringing others suitable to its purpose on the helm of the world affairs. There is never a ready-made replacement of the going powers and cultures. A great revolution was underway in the Occident and the West was on the toe to enter the world arena. European Renaissance sets in 15th century, gains boost from the fall of Granada and consequent ouster of the Muslims from Andalusia, and with afresh confidence on destiny great Protestant Reformation Movement challenging each facet of life transpires into Peace of Westphalia (1648) ending 30 years and 100 years wars of Europe, a fateful event poised to transform the subsequent history not only of the West but the world at large. It culminated into an Enlightenment Movement of 17th and 18th centuries triggering “Scientific Revolution” which was bound to transpire into Industrial Revolution. Generally exiting powers prove deaf and dumb to the revolutions occurring in their vicinities; the same happened to the world of Islam and was bound to become a hanging fruit for the mercantile, industrial Imperial West and due to the scientific, technological developments in the West with revolutions in socio-political and economic philosophies on its back the same was destined to be plucked with so ease and convenience unknown to the history of mankind and during 18th and 19th centuries till the first quarter of 20th century all the Muslim Asia and Africa along with the other communities of the “Orient” was submerged into European Imperialism.

Toynbee says invaders never come on their whims but the internal conditions of the community invite them. Muslims became colonized because they had become “colonizable”. The invasions and destructions of the hordes of Huns, Hyksos and Mongols are exceptions not the common course of history, the fundamental feature of man is the faculty of creative knowledge that stays him superior to the angels therefore knowledge rules the world and keeps its capitals changing from East to West and North to South and vice versa. In fact, history follows three patterns to switch the saddle. As earlier said when the rot sets in either a successful reaction comes from within or power is imposed from without and the symbiosis of the decadent and the virile takes root i.e. the popular course of history. “The Quran sometimes talk as though there is an essential discontinuity between a decrepit and decayed civilization and its successor: often no ready-made and quick succession can be assured to a decaying civilization. God would rather clean the slate and make a new beginning than tolerate a symbiosis of a decadent and the virile. Such was the case when Islam assumed the reigns of the world history. Almost same was the case when Europe came on the helm with the power of cognitive revolution, vibrant epistemology and struck transformation on the level of human consciousness. The change of baton on the stage of world history though involves a certain loss for mankind, judging from the Quran the phenomenon on the whole is good, “since the very struggle brings fresh blood to the veins of an aging humanity-it is as though dead earth has quickened and blossomed once again. This struggle between good
and evil, fresh and stale, new and decrepit, between the vigor of moral youth and the dotage of senility, is of positive benefit, for it keeps the perennial moral values alive (22:40-41; on the pronouncement of jihad against pagan Arabs see 2:251)\textsuperscript{11}.

This broader context was necessary to contextualize Dr. Fazlur Rahman so that the Sitz im Liben of our intellectual cum reformer should facilitate to understand the methodology he devised, the conclusions he reached and the role he played in resurrecting normative Islam from the debris of history and renewing and revitalizing the intellectual tradition of Islam, particularly his view of Islamic intellectualism which he means Islam’s world view of knowledge and education. His methodology to distinguish normative Islam from the historical Islam and the double movement theory is his single most contribution that inspires the entire universe of scholarship though is a nightmarish phenomenon to his native traditional and revivalist circles of Islam. His methodology falls not only within the parameters of Islamic tradition but also the modern scientific method. Tradition and modernity blend and fuse in him falling in their proper place in such an organic finesse that defies description.

He was heir to almost 100 years legacy of Muslim modernists which he terms classical modernism. He terms Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani (1839-97) the first genuine Muslim modernist who convincingly asked the world of Islam “to raise their intellectual and moral standards in order to meet the dangers of the Western expansionism\textsuperscript{12}”. Western imperialism was a double edged sword militarily cutting geographies and intellectually terming Islam a bedouin phenomenon, an anti-civilization incurable enemy of the reason and science. Afghani responded on both realms. “If to state that Islam is not against reason and science was the task of al-Afghani, it fell to the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh and the Indian Syed Ahmad Khan to prove this statement\textsuperscript{13}”. However, learned in traditional theology Abduh found sympathizers at traditional seats but ordinarily schooled at home and having no considerable modern education, closely allied to the power corridors Sir Syed assumed the status of all round especially educational reformer. Al-Afghani’s was a thesis that political emancipation must be the first step forward towards devising an independent educational policy informed by the Quran and Islamic tradition for the secular education under foreign rule could be nothing but the factory of producing spooks and spies or the minds only serving the interests of their colonial masters not of their community and land at large\textsuperscript{14}. On Afghani’s proposal Osmania University was established at Hyderabad, India to deliver education to the Muslim and Hindu masses in Urdu the lingua franca of India to equip the young Muslim and Hindu generation with their joint cultural heritage and tradition so that they become instrumental in the common cause of freedom. A translation house was established to translate the modern works exactly on the pattern of Bait al-Hikma (the house of wisdom) built at Baghdad by Abbasid Caliph al-Mamoon. It was so far the only serious attempt toward education, if fared well quite different would have been the trajectory of the subsequent history of India. But the idealism failed against Sir Syed’s pragmatism. The utilitarian purpose of education tied to economic value as it was, the poor quality of English at Osmania failed its students to get jobs against those trained at secular institutions, even Muslims in swarms rushed to Ali Garh.
In so far as the system of genuine education is concerned, to Rahman in the Muslim world all the endeavors have been directed towards juxtaposition of modern and traditional instead of a genuine synthesis that should have integrated the modern ideals with Islamic ethos. In other words whatever the efforts have been made so far were nothing but the mechanistic approaches to combine Islamic tradition and modernity. At Ali Garh department of Islamic studies was tendered to traditional Ulama. At Deoband, a traditional curriculum was padded with the elements of modern educational management, such as examination, annual reports and record keeping. The attempts to Islamize the modern educations by means, that were not clear to anyone including their advocates proved nothing but the play of terms or purely regurgitation of Western ideas in Islamic terms (Islamic banking and finance).

Since to Fazlur Rahman the remedy of the malaise was neither in importing the Western education system locks, stock and barrel nor juxtaposition of the traditional and the modern, nor in superficial recasting of madrassa education nor in the hotchpotch ad-hoc measures of Islamizing the modern systems but lay in philosophical task of evolving an Islamic Weltanschauung for education to which he terms “Islamic intellectualism” or “Islamic modernism”, the lack of this fundamental element and concern in the classical Islamic modernism was bound to split it into two opposing extremes i.e. secular modernism attracted by the West and fundamentalism rode on revivalist impulse haunted by anything or idea called Western. “It was perhaps natural that that the none-too-sober character of the initial modernism should provoke a comparably non-too thoughtful radical reaction.15” The legacy of Abduh and Sir Syed in Egypt and Pakistan has culminated into these two opposing extremes. Those who obliged to Western modernity were termed by Wilfred Smith in his “Islam in Modern History” as apologists: people who wish to build pride and admiration regarding Islam, while the underlying standards by which they interpret it are really modern and Western. For them Islam is an object for approval and new interpretations to combat alienation rather than a force for action16. They went as far as to assert that “Muslim history actually foreshadowed gender equality, democracy and scientific spirit17”. In fact, the rigged and contrived Orientalist’s presentation of Islam “stunted the creative and critical impulses of modernist Muslims by activating their defensive instincts18.”

However, it fell on Iqbal to reorient and put Islamic modernism on the right track. He was the first modernist who made serious attempt to formulate the philosophic statement of Islam, in “Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam”. The conspicuous absence of Sir Syed or other apologists’ names even in the footnote is telling but not heeded so far by the managers of Pakistan of which Iqbal dreamt and inspired the Muslims of India for whom his poetry and prose became a rallying cry, a pathway to ultimate destiny. Iqbal is known only as the spiritual disciple of Murshid Rumi, his Imam (the spiritual cum political leader) a symbol of socio-political activism al-Afghani has been condemned to oblivion on obvious grounds. However, as a philosopher rather than theologian questions raised by him in his magnum opus are more significant than the answers he tendered. Careful perusal of the book reveals he was destined to set the dimension of Islamic thought rather to construct Islamic metaphysics in concrete terms. All endeavors seem directed
toward re-construing the constituting elements of Islamic metaphysics in contemporary stock of philosophical ideas. The relentless orientalists’ presentation and dominant Western perspectives on Islam putting dampers on original creative thinking has brought a vast body of literature which symbolizes the futility of corrective and defensive responses, in Iqbal, however, Islam takes a fresh breath of life assuming aggressive tone instead of porcupine posture against Western civilization and begins an independent career toward its ultimate destiny i.e. Pakistan to play its role in world-history, to realize its ideals and potentials for the Muslims in particular and the world at large.

But despite his swaggering confidence on the ultimate destiny of Islam, Iqbal seems skeptic about his intellectual credentials and prowess to weave the warp and woof of Islam, a fact palpably intelligible from the statement which reveals his moans and groans regarding the severity of the task “perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of new spirit in him was Shah Wali Allah of Delhi. The man, however, who fully realized the importance and immensity of the task, and whose deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life, combined with a broader vision engendered by his wide experience of men and manners, would have made him a living link between the past and the future, was Jamal-ud-Din Afghani. If his indefatigable but divided energy could have devoted itself entirely to Islam as a system of belief and conduct, the world of Islam, intellectually speaking, would have been on a much more solid ground today19. Thus he finds not only him-self humble to the task but also the entire world of Islam around him that his “If” stays put to al-Afghani.

Now, if to set the dimension of Islamic modernism in right direction was the task of Iqbal it fell on Dr. Fazlur Rahman to reconstitute the fundamental elements of Islam as an integrative balanced mean and an organic whole system of belief and conduct. It seems he consciously assumed the task. His temerity, courage of conviction, audacity of hope and sui generis scholarship earned him laurels, so far, unmatched in the universe of scholars on Islam. Like Iqbal, al-Afghani was a major signpost for him that on his suggestion and Supervision along William Cantwell Smith an astute Pakistani historian Sharif al-Mujahid tenders thesis titled “Syed Jamal al-Din Afghani: His Role in the Nineteenth Century Muslim Awakening” in 1954 at Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Canada. So far, the only account of Afghani’s life that not only establishes Afghanistan as his country of birth and brought up but also highlights his successful attempts of bringing Ottomans and Safavids on united platform to counter Western Imperialism and charting common curriculum for Shia and Sunni madrasas. A conference of Ottoman and Persian jurists was held at Nejef in 1911 to smooth out doctrinal differences between the two sects 20, it might be termed the first serious attempt to bridge the gulfs between Sunni and Shia after the tragedy of Karbala with such an efficacy that later years the Shia populace of Subcontinent under Aga Khan the head of Ismaili sect and Syed Amir Ali himself a Shia - the author of famed Spirit of Islam was watched protesting against the disintegration of Sunni Ottoman Empire. The Western accounts of Afghani’s biography are misleading intent on proving him Iranian Shia disguised in Sunni garb, of which except his black turban no valid argument is available. The vicious propaganda has been made on
such a massive scale that considerable opinion of the Islamic world terms him Freemason agent and/or clown Shia spy of Western Powers.

Dr. Fazlur Rahman is heir to the legacy of Afghani and Iqbal. He is theorist and activist rather than an ivory tower thinker. For to him in Quran inspiration and history interact, in Prophet of Islam seer and reformer walk hand in hand, in the message of Islam metaphysics and social fact combine. So, his intellectual venture is a harmonized blend of faith and reason so much so that the intellectual prowess of the philosophers and the faith inspired dynamism of the theologians come alive in his constructs in such a way that faith and knowledge, instead of being separate and disparate seem same and one.

The fulcrum of Rahman’s “Islamic Intellectualism”, “knowledge” and “education” like his all-out endeavors is the Quran’s conception of God, universe and man. The Quran is not a treatise about God as it avoids speculative theology, theoretical discussions about the nature of God and His powers with a simple assertion that God is all powerful and man is endowed with choice and charged with responsibility. Allah (God) is mentioned more than six thousand times apart from other names like Rahman, Rabb etc. all these statements are actually statements about man- the center of interest in Quran. Hence Quran’s concept of God is purely functional. “the goal of human life is neither philosophic contemplation of God nor the mystic type of love of him- for each of these leads to the doctrine of Unity of being, of the identity of the world and God and so to the absolute inanity both of God and man- but the active concept of Ibada, a knowledge of God’s will and its fearless implementation in life. God is not something to be merely perceived, or admired and cherished but must to be recognized as the One whom alone our allegiance is due. This recognition alone is describable as Tauheed and it alone can inspire the attitude of Ibada21”. Hence, Quran’s functional concept of God state, whatever the position right or wrong wherein man entrenches himself being a co-worker God makes the way easy (92:5-11) yet the criterion on which judgment comes rests with God, therefore “God is needed not for what He is or may be but for what He does22”.

The universe is to God what character is to man, their (God and man) persons and characters are neither identical nor separate; both cannot dispense with yet in so far as their Egos are concerned transcend the character, being creative of it. Hence, ever growing and expanding are the horizons and orders of God’s and human persons for though determined and finite are human potentials with reference to God, yet infinite in human perspective are the potencies, powers, dispositions and tendencies of man which man cannot exhaust to the fullest so does God transcend the universe ever busy in creative acts of expanding the universe (51:47) and not slumbering or sleeping (2:255) adds to His creation whatever He wills (35:1).

Quran though attributes all natural processes of gigantic machine of universe, rise and fall of communities, natural processes and events to God yet “indeed, in all the Quranic statements where God appears as the real subject, one can so far as the factual content goes, eliminate God and translate these statements into perfectly “naturalist” ones without any loss whatever. This is
because God is not a fact among other facts, an item among items, an existent among existents. God is rather that which bestows meaningfulness on facts, gives them a new dimension and integrates them into order. What we shall lose by eliminating God is meaningfulness, order and purposiveness …those who forget God, ultimately forget themselves (59:19) i.e. their personality (individual and corporate) disintegrates, because they cannot meaningfully integrate themselves into the totality of being. “Aristotle compares God with the general of army. For the general (in Aristotle’s concept) is not a soldier among other soldiers- just as God is not an extra-fact among facts- but represents “order”, i.e. the fundamental function of holding army together. Indeed without him the order, says Aristotle would collapse.

The universe to Quran being automatic yet not autocratic is cosmos, an order, growing, developing with signs pointing towards an ultimate reality. When God creates something (Khalq), invests it with its inlaid laws, potencies (command, taqdeer), gives it direction (Hidaya) in such a way that it integrates into the totality of being, universe and becomes factor, it constitutes its hidaya, direction or the goal towards which it tends (87:1-3). Taqdeer here denotes potencies, powers; potentials and dispositions cum-processes rather than events or happenings. Hydrogen and oxygen have potentials under some conditions to make water, this is their taqdeer but actual event of their so being mixed is not predetermined and remains an open possibility like other alternatives depending on various factors. All the universe except man is Muslim in a sense it surrenders to its inlaid laws. Man is a bearer of Trust (al-amana). “Trust” is to discover the laws of, and thus get mastery over nature- or, in the Quranic terminology, “to know the names of all things”- and then use this mastery, under the human moral initiative, to create a good world order. For, man being equipped with the faculty of creative knowledge is distinguished from the rest of creation and asked to furnish the complete picture of universe through his creative scientific knowledge of the “Nature” (physical science), Man’s inner constitution (Psychology) and his outer behavior as a continued process in time (Historical science). Thus man is charged with double responsibility first to furnish the scientific picture of the universe then harness the same towards positive ends, creation of a world moral order. This second task cannot exist without, but must emerge from and supervene on the first, i.e. scientific structure. However, the scientific knowledge without underlying value of harnessing it towards moral ends, in the terms of Quran is abath, vain, dangerous and satanic pursuit. Our world standing on the precipice of total annihilation on account of nuclear arsenals and climate change wrought by the very hands of man speak volumes about the hazards which the knowledge divorced from moral connotations bring. Quran’s entire teaching is directed towards practice, i.e. provides guidance for man, which insinuates that the goal of man is to hone, vet and ground himself in the study of universe, man’s constitution of inner psyche, sociology- philosophy of history i.e. laws governing the rise and fall of societies and for that only scientific investigation informed by empiricism rather than hypothetical conjectures could be the safe prop to rely on, then press this knowledge in the service of the good and that this purposeful venture i.e. Ibada is the purpose of man’s creation and, indeed the purpose of all creation and this is in fact the fulfillment of the Primordial covenant, man’s surrender to his own nature for which
he has a choice to obey or disobey but must remember in the whole gamut of his double responsibility the sins of omissions are as bad as the sins of commission.

Man’s psyche reveals that it constitutes moral tensions. It consists in two nihilistic extremes of arrogance and hopelessness, all his ideas and operations oscillate between these two extremes, while an integrated golden mean is required for going to either extreme constitutes kufr. Power, peace and prosperity the more cherished goals of mankind are the net-result of this ‘balance”, “mean” or in Quranic terms Taqwa i.e. man’s surrender to his normative nature a slight deviation from which is kufr having commensurate consequences. History tells, man is more often incapable to wield his hard won achievements, and something impels him to deviate from the normative conduct losing all three. Man invites his destruction, betrays its existence, and indeed ceases to function properly when a point on either of the two extremes is reached either by being devoid of hope or essential humility i.e. the necessity to submit to an order or standard which is outside him. For, when the Quran states the “death of individuals like Pharaoh or Korah , it is basically talking about the self-destructiveness of a way of life of a society, of a type of civilization”. Why the results of both extremes of the “middle” state are same? The model before Quran is of Satan who through excessive pride disobeying God refused to humble himself before the superior knowledge of Adam, thus the result of this over-asserting ego was his total isolation from the positive forces of nature, his failure to keep himself intact and integrated to the cosmos, order or totality of being resulted into a fragmented existence, secularized life and isolated personality condemned to utter and inevitable hopelessness which was a complete loss of faith that he cannot recover his personality.

Quran shows least interests in the problems of free-will and predestination but focuses on the release of maximum creative moral energy on the basis of a true appreciation of the human nature, and its entire teachings converge on striking balance a between nihilistic extremes of arrogance and hopelessness. “Determinism and free-will, potency and impotency, hope and fear are, in human case, not contradictions but rather God-given tensions within whose framework people must work; should they violate either side of the tension and think themselves to be either omnipotent or impotent, they fall into a Satanic condition that the Quran calls Kufr”. Whenever a man does an evil act, his chances of repeating that kind of act increase and chances of doing good decrease proportionately until a time comes, when, by constantly practicing evil, he apparently reaches a point of no return. That is where his heart is sealed, his ears deafened to the truth. This is a psychological law whose operations, like the operations of all laws are attributed to God by Quran. Yet “there is no point of no return for human behavior: genuine repentance can turn an apparently wholly evil man into a paragon of virtue; on the other hand, although this is much more rare, an apparent paragon of virtue (even a prophet!) can turn into a near evil enmeshed in carnal pleasures (see 7:175-76).”

Thus from the Quranic concept of God, the universe and man Dr. Fazlur Rahman develops his theory of Islamic intellectualism i.e. Islamic viewpoint about knowledge & education, a ballast, a
safe prop to rely on, on which he raises the splendid edifice of his concept of Islamic education which he was marvelously capable enough to present in an all-inclusive single liner pithy statement that “the purpose of education, according to the Quran, is to develop the inner faculties of man- in such a way that all the knowledge gained by him will become organic to his total creative personality”. To Quran, as earlier said, the knowledge is to be accrued from three sources i.e. Nature, human psychology and history for there is no other independent source of knowledge, with the overriding principle and emphasis that entire universe was created in order to be conquered by man. Hence, science must be used for the salutary purposes. The study of human mind requires the scientific investigation of its working, motivation moral as well as psychological then data must be employed to address the imbalances, delinquencies, obliquities and in raising the moral standards. This is indeed a subject of higher psychology i.e. Sufism provided pursued with scientific and empirical techniques. Muhammad at 8 years age was tempted to attend marriage where drunkenness and lack of restraint prevailed but slept in his way and woke at dawn by the sun rays. His Protector, the Educator protected him from his own instincts by gentleness and diversion. This natural initiation into morals, later on greatly influenced Prophet’s educating techniques. “With a teaching method relying on gentleness, on the common sense of individuals, and on their understanding of commands, the prophet also strove to teach his followers how to put their instincts to sleep, so to speak, and how to resort to diversion to escape evil temptations… this method reminds us that a moral sense should be developed not through interdiction and sanction but gradually, gently, exactly, understandingly, and at a deep level”. History and geography necessarily involves comparative study of religions and cultures i.e. sociology for self-criticism and self-assessment.

Along with three sources Quran equally emphasizes three characteristics of knowledge. First, knowledge must be rooted in observation and experimentation rather than conjectures or speculations. Second, as the universe and life patterns are subject to evolution, thus knowledge by its very nature is ever growing, ever expanding, dynamic and an endless creative process. “Above every knower there is always another knower” (12:76) strengthens the case. The third fundamental characteristic of the knowledge is that as life despite its diversity is unity so knowledge despite apparent diversity is unity, it is a developing and yet an organic whole. Specializations and isolated researches are needed to create new data and increase the volume of knowledge “but at each step there must be creative minds sufficiently endowed with power of thought which can integrate the various threads of this knowledge into a total organic picture for it is thread not flowers which makes a necklace. To Dr. Fazlur Rahman, fragmentation of knowledge is the unprecedented crisis of our age. “Indeed, the amoral knowledge or immoral knowledge (the end of both being the same) is also the result of a fundamental fragmentation of knowledge to which the modern world has largely fallen a deliberate prey in the name of certain extremes forms of “liberalism”. Whereas modern science has provided the glitter of life and has put on the disposal of man vast potentialities, formative and destructive; modern civilization tends, as a whole, to be blind to genuinely moral bases of life. It is this kind of purely technological life, devoid of human and moral depth, which the Quran denounces as “stuck to the exterior of life (30:7)”
As earlier said, an earnest and urgent task of defining Islam as a system of belief and conduct on intellectually defendable and historically justified grounds was marked out by Iqbal in his magnum opus, with Quran being his central coordinate. Dr. Fazlur Rahman takes the plunge with temerity and conviction that Islam can recover its initiative to steer the wheel of history again, metaphysics and social fact can combine, modern ideals can integrate with Islamic ethos, genuine synthesis of Islam and modernity is possible and hope and history can rhyme again, as an intellectual cum reformer as his intellectual endeavors and role reflect he emerged equal to the task. Anamnesis, case history and assessment of the malaise is the first step forward towards cure. In his “Islamic Methodology in History” Rahman particularly laid bare the facts of what went wrong with Islam though it remains a general concern interspersed in his all works, however he addresses the issue thoroughly in his “Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Traditions” and it too pervades his all works. He understood the Muslim decline in intellectual terms and concluded that Muslim theology and law failed to evolve a genuine Islamic worldview. He put his weight in Ibn Taimiyyah’s assessment that how one and the same person when he is theologian, believes in a rigorous determinism and impotency of the human will, but when he behaves a faqih – either in the capacity of a Qadi or a Mufti, he has to assume freedom and efficacy of the human will. Despite an inherent anomaly this theology is supposed to be the intellectual defense of creed and fiqh, still the “crown of the Sharia sciences”. On the other hand though Ghazali with an acute perception remarked that since philosophers were scientists as well, and since their philosophic statements conflict with religion some fool friends of Islam reject their scientific propositions, the self-evident truths. He rightly remarked that many people impressed by the scientific prowess of the scientists take their philosophic assertions as indubitable truth. But the fatal conclusion he reached was, that people should be discouraged from studying the scientific works of philosophers, this was the first blow explicitly and formally dealt to positive knowledge, the attitude becomes organic to the subsequent generations of Islam, and orthodoxy by some inexorable law felt impelled to crush positive thought out of existence, it was a development bound to divide knowledge into artificial boundaries of religious and rational sciences by the 10th century. Fusion of two mutually independent intellectual streams i.e. religious and purely intellectual, combination of metaphysics and social fact was a hard won unprecedented achievement of Islam now faces reversals at the hands of orthodoxy and Sufi-theosophy- strongly opposed to education and intellectual culture in interest of spiritual path. “No structure of ideas can ever hope to make good or command respect for a long time- let alone fruitful- unless it is in constant interaction with living, growing stream of positive and scientific thought…the result was that after a few centuries, the real Dark Ages” of Islam, the orthodoxy was left with little more than an empty shell, a threadbare formal structure with hardly any content³³. He remarks, cognizant of the spiritual, psychological and practical importance of the Quran early intellectuals and jurists have looked upon the Quran as a unique repository of answers to all sorts of questions but as the context in which Muslims lived became more and more distanced from the context in which Quran was revealed- the approach faltered, there arose a need for a “method and hermeneutics”, which was never squarely addressed by the Muslims.
Hence, as conventional and modern Muslim scholarship riddled with inconsistencies was, the foremost concern of Dr. Fazlur Rahman was to develop a proper methodology for a systematic study of Quran, making the results a criterion to judge the intellectual heritage and tradition of Islam. To him, Procrustean bed orientation, and cherry picking attitude and to approach the Quran arbitrarily to find what suited their ideology was not limited to the revivalist approaches; modernists too have become a deliberate prey to such easy going schemes to strike rapprochement between Islam and modernity. Quran recommends a sort of punishing measures against wives on misconduct (4:34) which is incompatible to the values of western modernity, to mitigate the recommendation of Quran modernists invoke the example of the Prophet who never punished his wives despite some rare circumstances led to such situations. In case of adultery prophetic example is rejected by the lenient approach of Quran (24:2). To justify the secular atheistic values of tolerance of different beliefs or communism’s relativism of values verse 109:6 is quoted with no reference to the context, polygamy (5:38) is explained away by appealing to historical context. These are a few examples among numerous, classical Islamic modernism is pitted with such apologetic approaches.

The situation can be turned around, thought Fazlur Rahman provided a sharp line is drawn between normative Islam and historical Islam, what is essential and what is historically accidental, what was essence and what form it assumed, what universal value a moral principle has and what particular form history necessitated. This comprehensive study would lay bare the difference between general principles of Islam and their specific/historic application in the past. By normative Islam he means as it was in the mind of the Prophet and in the Quran, historical Islam on the other hand, was Islam as understood and practiced by Muslims, “the career of Islam at the hands of the Muslims”, Islam as a social norm or proposition and its pragmatic application in history. But the major question posed is how and under what parameters normative Islam can be found from beneath the debris of historical Islam and would it be a one-off venture or an ongoing process? He was uniquely poised to address the issues like these and much more in both Islamic and scientific terms. What he found amiss in the intellectual heritage of Islam “was a general failure to understand the underlying unity of the Quran, coupled with practical insistence upon fixing on the words of various verses in isolation…the philosophers, and often the Sufis, did understand the Quran as a unity, but this unity was imposed upon the Quran (and Islam in general) from without rather than derived from a study of the Quran itself.34” Failure to understand the Quran as a deeper unity was bound to play havoc with theology- organic to all disciplines of Islam. Consequently the instruments for deriving law and other social institutions, called qiyas, or analogical reasoning, public preference ( istehsan), social necessity ( masaleh marsala) enunciated for the convenience of administration produced “law neither Islamic nor yet secular35”. Just as a weak heart tax heavily comparably proportionate to its weakness on the rest of the body organs Asharism, the dominant Sunni theology since its inception was bound to take a heavy toll on Islam’s view of social morality, political order, socio-economic justice and essential human egalitarianism, law and jurisprudence, hermeneutics, mysticism, philosophy, epistemology and education and what not else.
Still, since the dawn of modernity receiving blow after blow from its arch-rival Judaic Christian West, being incessantly harangued that it cannot reconstitute itself and like an inert mass is destined to receive destructive or formative blows from the West, some so vast and vital elements it has in its folds that Islam the stricken Titanic not only refuses to sink but seemed intent to recover its voyage not only for the Muslims but the world at large for “if Islam should have only a past and no future, Muslims, as such, will have little to live for, but Western scholars of Islam might also have little to live by”. The decline of Islam according to Fazlur Rahman is deeply rooted in its post-formative developments—medieval intellectualism, remedy lies in resurrecting the original Islam of the Prophet’s mind and the Quran from the debris of history. Therefore he insists that he is not in process of creating, but merely making explicit what is implicit in Islamic methodology. He terms this endeavor to be an intellectual Jihad i.e. Ijtehad – “the effort to understand the meaning of a relevant text or precedent in the past, containing a rule, and to alter that rule by extending or restricting or otherwise modifying it in such a manner that a new situation can be subsumed under it by an extension.”

However, the overriding principle he seems to adopt in this whole venture is that the solution of the concrete case in our situation is to be sought not from the meaning of particular verses of the Quran and their content but the Quran as a whole, that is, as a set of coherent principles or values where the total teaching will converge, in the same vein emphasis must be put not on the literal meaning of an individual hadith or Sunnah but rather on the model and general directives of the Prophet or the outlook which transpires from the totality of his life and conduct. Again, the view is not an outcome of the methodologies he learnt at Western academia, but inherent and embedded in Islamic tradition itself. Unfortunately, so far, no one has tried enough to understand that be his thematic study of the Quran and Sunna or his “double movement theory” has its basis generally in Islamic tradition particularly owes much to the method and hermeneutic spelt out by Spanish Maliki Jurist al-Shatbi (d:1388), quoting a lengthy paragraph from his “al-muwafiqat” Rahman not only gets endorsement but also acknowledges that he has not created a new process but employing the same method as suggested by al-Shatbi in his “Islam and Modernity”. Yet, he equally benefits from the Western methodology called historicism i.e. a true understanding of ideas and theories cannot be gained unless the historical circumstances surrounding the articulation of these ideas and theories are taken into account. Thus being a fusion of traditional and modern his methodology is Islamic and scientific. Let us have a look on Shatbi’s statement

After establishing that eternal validity belongs only to “general principles” (usul kulliya) not to the particulars of the Quran al-Shatbi goes on “this being so, i.e., that pure reason divorced from the Sharia principles is unable to yield religious-moral values, reliance must be placed primarily on Sharia proofs in deducing law. But according to their common use; these latter even have no certainty at all or very little- I mean when Sharia proofs are taken one by one. This is because if these proofs are in the category of Hadiths coming from single or isolated chains of transmission, it is obvious that they yield no certainty. But if these hadiths are traceable to an overwhelming number of chains of transmission [mutawatir], certainty with regard to them, i.e. their meaning,
depends upon premises all or most of which are only conjectural. Now which depends upon what is uncertain is inevitably itself uncertain as well. For a determination of their meaning depends upon the correct transmission of linguistic usage, grammatical opinions, etc.; thus taking all these factors into consideration the possibility of establishing with certainty the meaning of these hadiths is nil. Some jurists have taken refuge in the view that although these Sharia proofs are in themselves uncertain, when they are supported by indirect evidence or concomitants [qarain] they can yield assurance. But this occurs rarely or not at all.

The proofs considered reliable here are only those inducted from a number of conjectural proofs which converge upon an idea in such a manner that they can yield certainty, for a totality of proofs possesses a strength which separate and disparate proofs do not possess. This is the reason why an overwhelming tradition possesses certainty and this, i.e. the case under discussion here, is such a case. When through inducting from a whole range of conjectural proofs of a certain point a coherent totality emerges that can yield sure knowledge, that constitutes the desired proof… it is in this way that the obligatoriness of the five principles- like prayer, zakat, etc. – has been absolutely established. Otherwise, if someone were to argue for the obligatoriness of prayer basing himself only on God’s repeated statements in the Quran: 2:43, 83, 110; 4:77; 6:72 etc. “And establish prayers”, this kind of proof, taken by itself, would be open to several objections. But then this proof is supported all round by other indirect evidence and well-ordered rules whereby the duty of prayer is rendered absolutely obligatory in religion, such that a person who doubts it is like one who doubts the very basis of religion… when you consider why consensus is an irrefutable proof or a report from a single chain of transmission or reasoning by an analogy can become an irrefutable proof, it is all reducible to this method. For in all these cases, i.e. a consensus, an isolated report or an analogy, proofs are adduced from places that are innumerable, and also they come from different kinds of sources which cannot be reduced to a single type. And yet they all converge upon one idea which is the object of all probative reasoning. Thus when various proofs concerning a certain matter abound and are mutually corroborative, through their total effect they produce certainty.

This is the case with sources of proofs used in this book—they are the sources whence principles are derived. But the earlier jurists often left this fact unmentioned and did not explicitly state it, so that some later jurists ignored it together. Consequently, arguing on the basis of individual verses of the Quran and individual hadiths became difficult, since such a jurist did not argue on the basis of their cumulative force. Thus, the opponent was able to attack each individual textual proof separately and weakened its probative value in accordance with rules governing principles that are supposed to guide certainty. Yet, if these texts are taken in this way, i.e. in their totality and cumulative effect, there is no difficulty. But if the Sharia proofs for general principles as well as particulars are taken as such an opponent takes them, we should be left without any certainty at all with regard to Sharia rule whatever- unless we bring in reason as a partner. Reason, however, can play its role only after the Sharia bases are there. It is necessary, therefore, to follow this convergence principle in order to establish the fundamental proofs.38
The name “Al-mawafiqat” itself points to the “convergence principle” so uniquely employed by the author in his work. Fazlur Rahman employs the same with the modern “historicism” as a ballast to construct his intellectual edifice by his “double movement” methodology. To him, the general notion that the Quran gives us “the principles” while the Sunna or our reasoning embodies these fundamentals in concrete solutions is considerably less than half truth and dangerously misleading. “If we look at the Quran, it does not in fact give many general principles: for the most part it gives solutions to and rulings upon specific and concrete historical issues, it provides, either explicitly or implicitly, the rationales behind these solutions and rulings, from which one can deduce general principles.” “Generally speaking, each legal or quasi legal pronouncement [in the Quran] is accompanied by a ratio legis explaining why a law is being enunciated. To understand a ratio legis fully, an understanding of the socio-historical background (what the Quranic commentators call “occasions of revelation”) is necessary. The ratio legis is the essence of the matter, the actual legislation being its embodiment so long as it faithfully and correctly realizes the ratio; if it does not, the law has to be changed.” Now, intellectual cum reformer Fazlur Rahman takes a giant leap forward to set forth a methodology to distinguish clearly between normative Islam and historical Islam. He terms his methodology the only sure way to obtain the real truth about the Quran. He says “One must generalize on the basis of Quranic treatment of the actual cases- taking into due consideration the socio-historical situation then obtaining- since although one can find some general statements or principles there, these for the most part are embedded in concrete treatments of actual issues, whence they must be disengaged. The conclusion drawn from these considerations takes him to the methodology to churn normative Islam from the Quran and Muslim history, which is “in building any genuine and viable Islamic set of laws and institutions, there has to be a twofold movement: First one must move from the concrete case treatments of the Quran- taking the necessary and relevant social conditions of that time into account- to the general principles upon which the entire teaching converges. Second, from this general level there must be a movement back to the specific legislation, taking into account the necessary and relevant social conditions now obtaining.”

He believes the success depends on the successful execution of the task “to the extent that we achieve both movements of this double movement successfully, the Quran’s imperatives will become alive and effective once again. While the first task is primarily the work of historian, in the performance of the second the instrumentality of the social scientist is obviously indispensable, but the actual “effective orientation” and “ethical engineering” are the work of ethicist.” Now, imagine the magnitude and grandeur of, and workforce involved in the task for which Iqbal deems an international board of ulama, particularly of al-Azhar was fair enough and to this effect he writes a letter to the Rector al-Azhar and very soon his hopes deflate that the “social change” and new socio-economic and political realities have rendered our ulama irrelevant to the task. However, the activity proposed by Fazlur Rahman is not a one-off venture, or a once and for all solution, as orthodoxy attribute to the medieval Islam, but is an ongoing process. For to him there was no fixed content to Normative Islam; each generation is entitled to make fresh endeavors to discover normative Islam and apply it to its own situation, what is fixed is the correct methodology
he puts forward, not a particular interpretation, élan or weltanschauung conceived and distilled from the Quran which is influenced by the particular trends, denominators, currents and cross currents of specific history and age; “it is obviously not necessary that a certain interpretation once accepted must continue to be accepted; there is always both room and necessity for a new interpretation, for this is, in truth, an ongoing process.” Literalism and static view of Quran necessarily defies its dynamic moral impulse and is akin to, to use A.J Arberry’s phrase “crush its gossamer wings to powder”.

Hence, the application of his theory led Fazlur Rahman to the view that the be-all-and-end-all of Islam was Tauheed i.e. belief in one God and ceaseless social activism i.e. striving for social justice. For the first eleven years of the Prophet’s mission Islam had only one pillar, tawhid, along with push and exhortation against the acute socio-economic disparities, exploitation of the poor, destitute, orphans, women and other disenfranchised segments of the society to strike a socio-economic equilibrium the foremost requisite of social justice a panacea to essential egalitarianism.

“Have you ever considered him who tries to prevent a servant [of God] from praying (96:10)”?

Though conventionally it is conceived to be the Abu Jhl’s denial of Muslims to pray before Kaba yet Asad writes “it applies to all attempts, at all times, to deny to religion (symbolized in term praying) its legitimate function in the shaping of social life-attempts made either in the conviction that religion is every individual’s “private affair” and, therefore, must not be allowed to “intrude” into the realm of social consideration, or, alternatively, in the pursuit of the illusion that man is above any need of metaphysical guidance.” Thus to Rahman Monotheism and socio-economic justice are two sides of the same coin “Muhammad’s monotheism, from the very beginning, linked up with a humanism and a sense of social economic justice whose intensity is no less than the intensity of the monotheistic idea”. Asad has made a sublime effort in his “Message of the Quran” to distinguish between the historical bearings and eternal import of the verses of Quran but to bracket the verses of Quran in a one-off interpretation restricts their scope, meaning and posturing. Dr. Fazlur Rahman’s view seems more appropriate and convincing that the multitude of Quranic Revelations took place “in, although not merely for, a given historical context. Muslims must recognize the essential feature in the revelation which is meant not only for the specific context in which it was revealed but is intended by the Creator to “outflow through and beyond that given context of history.” However, the principle constructed by the orthodoxy regarding asbab al-nazul that although an injunction may have been occasioned by a certain situation, it is nevertheless universal in its application, it works on the cost of ratio-legis, rationales behind solutions and rulings given by the Quran, which is an essence of the matter; and safeguards form rather than substance. In this swirling cosmos every age is characterized by special kind of knowledge in the distribution of the mercies of God. Sometimes the metaphor of rain in the Quran is employed to bestow upon mankind special kind of consciousness or new unsullied springs of knowledge (67:30). In any rain of new knowledge, circumstances, eras and epochs Quran is pretty enough to present a rainbow of its themes in such a marvelous array that responds to new challenges provided proper intellectual tools (especially methodology devised by Fazlur Rahman) are applied and literalism or assigning universality to interpretations is avoided.
If reliance on one-off interpretation and literalism is a sui generis problematic legacy of the medieval Muslim thought that continues with zeal and fervor, the bane of orientalists’ approaches to the Quran is to put reliance on the loom rather than the fabric being woven, they prefer skinning to shearing. The view that the Quran is ever susceptible to new interpretations is not unique to Fazlur Rahman, the companions of the Prophet differed in interpretation, and it was in his knowledge but he never discouraged them. In modern times, to Iqbal it was Afghani who narrates the mysteries of Quran with such a faith inspiring dynamism and intellectual prowess that even Gabriel seems spellbound to the novel and an in-depth creative treatment of the Quran’s world view in the modern parlance. Afghani writes “if the four Imams had been alive today, they would have continued to make deductions from the Quran, and their knowledge of these things would have, thereby continued to increase. These Imams tried to explain the mysteries of Quran but what they have actually achieved is a drop out of an ocean…this great book is such a permanent guide for this world that there exist in it all kinds of words and phrases, (and) all kinds of lines for the individual, pages for the community and explanations and marginal notes for every movement and change…if all the philosophers, both of the past and the present, are each given the life of a Noah and if every one of them solves a thousand riddles and expounds one thousand secrets every day, even then they shall be unable to cover even a part and admit their mistake (in trying to cover the whole of the Quran)”. In this statement a rhetorician seemed swept away on a wave of similes and metaphors, but shorn of all its similitudes, hyperboles and eloquence, it boils down to saying that the former interpreters, theologians and philosophers of Quran have taped the resources of Quran to the fullest of their capacities, yet the Quran abounds with the pearls of wisdom. It is susceptible to and capable of progressive interpretation as its unsullied springs are always there at our disposal to be exploited and utilized.

However, the fusion of metaphysics and social fact, integration of religious and intellectual streams, and an interaction of revelation and history through the Prophet’s mind which once sprouted an exuberant culture not restricted to single city or country that spread like a prairie fire from Baghdad eastward to India, Transoxiana and further still, and westward to the very edge of the world, over the time falling prey to the forces of history i.e. political, mercantile and religious elites, was in a disarray that Fazlur Rahman sought to revive and reform not only for the Muslims but the world at large. To him God was neither an intellectual abstraction, as Muslim philosophers construed Him; nor an object of personal experience, as the Sufis conceived Him but “[t]hat dimension which makes other dimensions possible; He gives meaning and life to everything. He is all-enveloping, literally infinite and He alone is infinite…God is not an item among other items of the universe, or just an existent among other existents. He is “with” everything; He constitutes the integrity of everything…God then is the very meaning of reality, a meaning manifested, clarified, and brought home by the universe, helped even further by man”. Rahman’s systematic study of the Quran and Seerah brought him to the conclusion that “a God to whom it is, in the final analysis, indifferent whether He is effective in History or not is certainly not the God of Muhammad and Quran. If history is the proper field for Divine activity, historical forces must, by definition, be employed for the moral end as judiciously as possible”. The Muslim philosopher’s
Hellenized idea of bloodless God - as a principle which as an intellectual idea “explains” this world must give way to the full blooded God of theologians Who as a Creator, moral and dynamic imperative intervenes in history, “speaks and acts”, directs this world. The theologians must know that knowledge kneaded in faith leads to social reconstruction, faith divorced of knowledge yields only ecstasies, deliriums and pure speculations. “The Muhammad beloved one of the Sufis…must give way to the Prophet who inaugurated a new society through a revelation essentially geared to action”. The mere devotional and personal pietistic Quran of the orthodoxy must give way to the Divine Text named al-Furqan (the standard of True and False), a pragmatic social proposition, a moral vector intended to shape society, its norms and institutions in a concrete and communal sense.

Crises haunt our planet across the board; whereas the world of Islam has fallen prey to void spirituality, the West has succumbed to spiritual void. The loss of faith inspired dynamism has rendered Muslim minds stationary who are trying to grapple with problems of 21st century using tools and concepts developed a millennium ago while the loss of transcendence has snatched away the principles of foundation, stability, intention and purpose from the Western minds with no foothold or definite enough anchoring point. Hence the crisis and the chaos of the Western mind are no less severe than that of the Muslim mind. The modernist philosophical “assertion that truth is made not found” was a sweet/sour fruit of the Enlightenment that led to the belief that human salvation lies in conquering nature not in obeying religion which in turn led to epistemological and social fragmentation. The development was destined to land modern mind in the seismic zone of instability i.e. post-modernism where “all truth and knowledge are purely subjective”.

Now before the earth gushes forth its springs and sky opens its gates- modernity sweeps away everything moral, some sensitive minds in the Europe came forward to build Ark of Noah i.e. “the Transcendent is the only certain foundation on which man can build his future”, which he is incapable of doing by secularist thought- to Rahman secularism is the bane of modernity, essentially atheistic for being the vehement force against moral values. Hence the school of perennial philosophy deems that despite its mastery of the nature, the intellectual currents and crosscurrents of Western world being deprived of the pearls of transcendental values essentially make it an abnormal civilization. Rene Guenon defines normal civilization as “one that is based on principles in the true sense of the word, one where everything is arranged in hierarchy to conform to these principles, so that everything in it is seen as the application and extension of a doctrine whose essence is purely intellectual and metaphysical.” On this premise the basis of the Western civilization are neither purely intellectual nor metaphysical. Hence the saner voices in the West seek and suggest the combination of metaphysics and social realities. On metaphysical plane religion is universal and transcendent; on social plane religion is “subject to diversity and particularism”. Rahman’s endeavors to formulate a coherent methodology are directed to the same end- a search for the “transcendent”, “authentic”, “normative”, “essential”, “general” etc. distinguished from the “relative”, “historical”, “accidental”, “particular”, and “specific”.
He writes “no systematic attempt has ever been made to understand the Quran in the order in which it was revealed, that is, by setting the specific cases of “occasions of the revelation” in some order in the general background, that is not other than the activity of the Prophet (Sunna) and its social environment. If this method is pursued, most arbitrary and fanciful interpretations will at once be ruled out, since a definite enough anchoring point will be available. It is only because the Quran was not treated as a coherent whole by many Muslim thinkers that the metaphysical part, which should form the necessary backdrop to a coherent elaboration of the moral, social and legal message of the Quran, in particular received the wildest interpretations at the hands of the so called esoteric school, be they Sufis, Batnis, philosophers, or even some mutakallimun (theologians), while the majority of the orthodox became dusty-dry literalists far removed from any genuine insight into the depths of the Quran54a. Here, again attention is drawn to the conspicuous absence of an organic relation between the metaphysical and social fact in the Muslim’s world view. The literature of seerah, the literature on Hadith and Sunna, the commentators’ endeavors of collecting ashab an-Nazul (the occasion of revelation), all provide the Prophet’s Sitz im Liben – sociological and historical background that essentially combines metaphysics and social fact for through the Prophet’s mind revelation and history interacted as a corollary the fusion of religious and intellectual streams was effected to create a world just moral order the necessary elements required for the enterprise were monotheism and unceasing social activism.

Fazlur Rahman was not an educationist; he was a professor of Islamic thought with great emphasis on “thought”. Hence his engagement and infatuation with Islamic education was to search “theoretical bed-rock”, “hand-hold”, “definite enough anchoring points”, of Islamic education which instead of mechanical juxtaposition of the old with the new could integrate modern ideals with the Islamic ethos. He clarifies “by “Islamic education” I do not mean physical or quasi physical paraphernalia and instruments of instructions such as the books taught or the external educational structure, but what I call “Islamic Intellectualism”; for to me this is the essence of higher Islamic education. It is the growth of a genuine, original, and adequate Islamic thought that must provide the real criterion for judging the success or failure of Islamic educational system55a. For this task he not only devised a methodology which to him though new in form has all traditional Islamic elements, but during his tenure as director Central Institute of Islamic Research, Karachi organized training workshops for which Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith and others from McGill Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Canada were invited to train and equip Islamic intellectuals with scientific research methodologies and modern intellectual tools. The major thrust and push of the move was to produce “some first class minds who can interpret the old in terms of the new as regards substance and turn the new into the service of the old as regards ideals. This, then, must be followed by the writing of new textbooks on theology, ethics, and so forth56a. For, “no significant change occur unless new form is congruent with the old.it is only when a transplant is congenial to a soil that it works. Therefore, it is very important to know the transplant as well as the native soil57.” His project here, though hit a snag due to reaction from the conservatives, yet the question of “the sequence of belief within the sequel of generations58a” kept this goal alive all his life to which he addressed in his many articles and one whole book “Islam and Modernity”.

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His methodology is the single most important and so influential contribution to Islamic thought that it could be seen as a major watershed in modernist discourse. So confident of the accuracy, precision and efficacy of his methodology he was that he writes “for if the results of understanding fail in application now, then either there has been a failure to assess the present situation correctly or a failure in understanding the Quran. For it is not possible that something that could be and was actually realized in specific texture of past cannot- allowing for the differences in the specifics of present situation- be realized in the present context” The Islamic and scientific credentials of his methodology that necessarily emerged from his totalizing view of the Quran and the scientific picture of the universe, strengthened his belief so much so that in his view, once normative Islam was found, it must be applied with strength: “the inertia and recalcitrance of people to the establishment of such a social order has to be overcome. People have to be made conscript in the path of goodness, so to say, if they suffer from inertia.”

Nevertheless, some valid questions arise against his methodology and works. The foremost among them is whether the idea of revelation as a “word of God” is tenable in context of modernity and Enlightenment or is mere a dogma, belief with no rational foundations. He says “The Quran, indeed, insists throughout that to read the signs [verses] correctly and to understand the Quran requires a mental-cum-spiritual attitude so that one may “really hear, really see and really understand”. For that matter, the signs do not become subjective for the Quran because many do not “see” them, any more than the sun becomes subjective because animals habituated to darkness cannot see it.” No less in importance is the question hurled at him by the “objectivity school” that how and to what extent one can access the objective meanings of the Quranic text as it was in the mind of the Prophet and intended by the Creator? For one is apt to reach the text with preconceived notions and expectations. The school insists that one must ascertain the meaning intended by the mind that authored the object of study. This would be the reversal of the original creative process: the forms we are understanding, in totality must led us back that how they originated in the mind who created it and how to live again by the understanding subject. Rahman contends that the unity of forms cannot simply attribute to the mind; the understanding of the situation is compulsory to which it is a response. “In the case of Quran, the objective situation is a sine qua non for understanding, particularly since, in view of its absolute normativity, for Muslims, it is literally God’s response through Muhammad’s mind (this latter factor has been radically underplayed by the Islamic orthodoxy) to a historic situation (a factor likewise drastically restricted by the Islamic orthodoxy in a real understanding of the Quran).” Rahman believes that context of ideas is not only mental but environmental as well. For while the ideas occur in mind their intentio or meaning is “referred” outside the mind. Gadamer asserts all experience of understanding presupposes a preconditioning of the experiencing subject and therefore, without due acknowledgment of this fact of being predetermined any attempt to understand anything is doomed to unscientific vitiation. Nothing can overcome this preconditioning hence there is no possibility of objective understanding of anything at all. This is such a far-fetched idea that desperately spoils human inherent optimism to unfold the mysteries of universe, laws of history and constitution of human self by which man is destined to realize his potentials. It is worth-
consideration that why a thinker like Betti rejects Gadamar’s view as hopelessly subjective. However, Rahman believes “if Gadamer’s thesis is correct, then the double movement theory I have put forward has no meaning at all63”.

The one more serious challenge to Fazlur Rahman’s methodology and work is not only posed by philosophers such as Hume and Kant but also by the theosophical Sufi tradition of Islam or more appropriately of Ibn al-Arabi. Long before Hume and Kant Sufi theosophy had termed reason fallible, erroneous and intuitive revelation (Kashf) the only sure source of cognition in its epistemological framework. Kant’s critique of pure reason perhaps coincidentally on the lines of Sufi theosophy revealed the limitations of human reason which he deemed double edged sword that though it has incalculable arguments to prove God comparably proportionate evidences it can marshal to refute the same. “He reduced the works of rationalists to a heap of ruins…Kant, consistently with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of knowledge of God64”. Fazlur Rahman being a man of broad gauged scholarship was not oblivious of these facts while putting forth his thesis of rational metaphysics i.e. reconciling knowledge and faith or which he pithily defines as knowledge kneaded in faith. The confusion multiplies when some great figures of Islam like Ghazali throw philosophy on a backburner and Ibn Khaldun endorsing him “refers to the intellect as like a balance which is meant for gold, but which is sometimes inappropriately used for weighing mountains. Logic cannot be applied to this area of inquiry, and must be restricted to non-theological topics.65 To Rahman, it was a lack of intellectual tools and an adequate framework that triggered confusions otherwise reason in essence is both perceptive as well as formulative, had orthodox “rehabilitated the Sufi intuition into reason, the Sufi intuition should have been made chargeable with publicity, so to say, and accountable to reason, as must be the case in the nature of things66.” Ibn al-Arabi’s acute statement that “God is a percept and the world is a concept67”, in fact is an acknowledgement that reason in its broader perspective is both perceptive and formulative. Moreover, Rahman clarifies that “theosophical Sufism was nothing more or less than pure philosophy masquerading under the name of Sufism…philosophy, after it had been attacked by al-Ghazli, went underground and reappeared in the name of theosophical intuitionism68”. To Iqbal, Ghazali’s philosophical skepticism is “rather unsafe basis for religion and not wholly justified by the spirit of Quran69.”

In so far as Hume and Kant’s critique of pure reason is concerned they too entertain a partial, atomistic and truncated view of reason. Like Mutazillah “They failed to see that in the domain of knowledge- scientific or religious- complete independence of thought from concrete experience is not possible.70” “Yet, higher religion, which is only a search for a larger life, is essentially experience and recognized the necessity of experience long before science learnt to do. It is a genuine effort to clarify human consciousness, and is, as such, as critical of its level of experience as Naturalism is of its own level.71” This gives credence to Fazlur Rahman’s thesis of rational metaphysics which reconciles knowledge and faith. Faith is a mental cum spiritual attitude “according to Quran which ‘sees’, and its reports, if properly interpreted, are never false72, thus says Rahman it is not subjective to Quran. It is required to “really see”, “hear”, and “understand”
for “to secure a complete vision of Reality, therefore, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of what the Quran describes as ‘Fuad’ or Qalb, i.e. heart73”.

Fazlur Rahman contends that “moral values cannot be made and unmade by man74” for being a party to his affairs he can abuse and misuse the same for the sake of expediency, it is an absolute prerogative of God with Whom lies the criterion of judgment on human performance. Moreover, “the religio-moral experience, although it certainly has a cognitive element, radically differs from other forms of cognition in the sense that it is full of authority, meaning and imperviousness for the subject whereas ordinary form of cognition is simply information.75” Regarding ethics and moral values says al-Ghazali “philosophers merely plagiarize from different religious sources and present the ideas as their own76”. Rahman without hurling allegations of plagiary see Muslim philosophers’ work shorn of faith and hope “the philosophers were intellectually clever, excelling in subtlety of arguments, but their god remained a bloodless principle a mere intellectual construct, lacking both power and compassion. Although intellectually less skillful, the theologians were nevertheless instinctively aware that the God of religion was a full-blooded, living reality who responded to prayers, guided men individually and collectively and intervened in history: “He speaks and acts” as Ibn Taymiya so poignantly put it.77” The success of Rahman lies in the fact that he harnesses the intellectual prowess of philosophers and faith inspired dynamism of the theologians in his works so much so that in the fusion the two instead of being mechanically juxtaposed come alive as an organic whole. Thus the rational metaphysics which emerges from his constructs is, in fact, the Bayeux Tapestry of how revelation and history interact, how Islam unfolded on the realm of history, how hope (faith) and history [can] rhyme. The one unmistakable impression a serious reader gets from his works is that it is author’s experienced truth.

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