Islamic Reform Movements Essay, Research Paper

Behind all Islamic reform movements is the rejection of the western idea of nation-state and the principle of separation between the church and state.

All Islamic reform movements seek to change Islam and society on the basis of a return to a strict adherence to the Qur’an and the Hadiths. To reform Islam and society, reform movements advocate the taking of political power in order to command that which is proper and forbid that which is reprehensible. In brief, this means that life and societies have to be governed by the Shari’a. Governance according to the Shari’a can only be realized and guaranteed by a government based upon it. An Islamic government ensures the application of the Shari’a thereby preserving the moral order upon which the integrity of the community of believers depends. Contemporary

The following beliefs provide the ideological framework for Islamic reform movements:

? Islam is a total way of life. Therefore religion is integral to politics, state and society.

? The political, military, and economic weaknesses of the world of Islam are due to having strayed from Islam and followed western, secular and materialistic ideologies and values. Both western liberal nationalism and Marxist socialism have failed, because they are antithetical to Islam.

? Islam as found in the Qur’an and the Hadiths, and in the example of the early Islamic community/state provides the true alternative ideology for Muslims.

? Muslims must re-establish God’s rule, the sovereignty of God on earth by re-instituting Islamic Law, the blueprint for society for all time.

? The new Islamic order does not reject science and technology. However, modernization is subordinated to Islam to guard against the westernization and secularization of Muslim society and community.

? The process of Islamization requires organizations or societies built around dynamic nuclei of committed and trained believers who call on all to repent and turn to Allah’s path and who are prepared, when necessary to fight against corruption and unbelief.

? The method for renewal and reform of Muslim society is an Islamic political and social revolution, like the prophet Muhammad and later 18th century Islamic movements that cause an Islamic system of government and society.

Besides the above characteristics, “radical Islam” assumes a kind of culture that can be summarized in the following way:

? A jihad mentality that pits Islam against a western Judeo-Christian conspiracy.

? Legitimacy for Muslim governments is based on the Shari’a.

? Jihad against unbelievers is a religious duty.

? Christians and Jews are considered unbelievers rather than people of the Book.

The realization that Islam may serve as a powerful spiritual and political force or help catalyze such forces is much in our minds these days. In a large part, this phenomenon is given attention, because of the contemporary developments in the Islamic world, especially, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Libya and other Middle East and Asian countries. Throughout the Western world there is a spreading awareness that Islam is resurgent. It is accompanied, however, by a sense that this development is somehow fearsome and ominous, to say the least.

Wherever Islam manifests itself politically or religiously in the contemporary world, popular Western and Christian perceptions of these developments are either distorted or antagonistic. The first contributing factor to this type of perception is the negative view associated with Islamic revolutions in Iran and Libya. The second is the whole legacy of adverse Western and Christian attitudes towards Islam since the time of the crusades. Such distortion and antagonism certainly affect the reporting about the Islamic revival which has begun in the early ‘70s. Media headlines continue to highlight the Western perceptions of fanaticism and Puritanism that accompany the Islamic reform/revival.

THE ISLAMIC RESURGENCE

Islamic resurgence is a puzzling phenomenon in the contemporary world – a world which is dominated by consumerism and secularism. The Islamic resurgence takes in a strong and militant protest against the status quo and refuses to take the direction that the modern world pursues. To understand this Islamic militant protest, there is a need to look into the matrix that has given birth to the diverse modern Islamic movements.

First, there is a deep crisis in the modern Muslim world. In fact, a fundamental malaise ails both the Muslims and their communities. Muslims sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The roots of this malaise stem from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world He controls.

The glorious Islamic empire is there no more. As a matter of fact, from the 18th century, the Muslim world began its serious decline. There was a disintegration of military and political power. There was enfeeblement of commercial and political power. Intellectual effort stagnated. Religious vitality ebbed. An effete decadence infected art. The writings of the great masters elicited commentaries rather than enthusiasm. And the classical systems were used to delimit the road that one must travel rather than provide the impetus of one’s journey.

In brief, the Muslim world, that once gloried in its grip on the world and history from the fall of Constantinople in 1453, seemed to have lost the capacity to order its life effectively by the beginning of the 18th century. Worst, the degeneration of the Muslim World coincided with the exuberance of the West. At about this time, Western Civilization was launching forth on the greatest upsurge of expansive energy that human history has ever seen. Vitality, skills, wealth and power vastly accumulated. With them, the West began not only to shape its own life but also the life of all the world including the Muslim World.

During the 19th century, Western pressure and domination increased. The Dutch in Indonesia, the British in the subcontinent of India and Malaya, Russia in Central Asia; the British and French in North Africa and the Middle East. All at once, the western powers ruled Muslim society in full formality. While the Ottoman Empire retained political sovereignty up to World War I, it was independent without being free. Apart from the matter of political control, Muslim society, once forceful, dynamic and alert, was everywhere in drooping spirits, and subject both in initiative and delivery to forces outside Islam.

It is the contemporary manifestation of this problem and crisis that is paramount in the understanding of the modern phenomena like Islamic revivalism, activism or modern aggressive Islamic movements.

The first Islamic movements in the modern period were protests against the internal deterioration. They were calls to stop the decadence in Muslim society by summoning back the believers and the community to the first purity and order of Islam. One of the earliest and the most major of those movements was the Wahhabiyah in 18th century Arabia. It was puritanical, vigorous, simple. Its message was straightforward: A return to Islam during the Medinan period. It rejected the corruption and laxity of the contemporary decline. It also rejected the accommodations and cultural richness of the Islamic empires – the Ummayads, Abbasids and the Ottomans.

The Wahhabis insisted on the Shari’a, the Hanbalite version stripped of all innovations developed through the intervening centuries. Obey the pristine law – fully, strictly, and singly – is Islam; all else is superfluous. This interpretation of Islam is strictly and seriously to be implemented.

The second dominant Islamic movement that dominated the scene was the Pan Islamic Movement of Jamalud-din Afghani (1839-97). It was an Islamic revival movement that sought to reawaken the Muslims’ consciousness of how they had once been mighty, but now are weak. This recalling of erstwhile Muslim grandeur incited the Muslims to discard resignation in favour of plunging into the task of creating the kind of Islamic world that ought to be. The Qur’an verse: “Verily, God does not change the condition of people until they change their own condition” (13:11 ) had become the inspiration for the Muslim resolve to take into their own hands the refurbishing of the Muslim world and its earthly history.

Indeed this call to action was the transition from a nonresponsible quietude to a self-directing determination. The Pan Islamic Movement believed that Islamic history shall once again march forward in full truth and full splendour.

The bitterness of the Muslim disillusionment in the West has gone very, very deep. The West is perceived as working against them. It is accused of engaging on a deliberate vast enterprise to disrupt Islam. Apart even from military and political domination, Western power has other manners of imposing its weight. The most pervasive is economics.

The Muslims perceive that the West has been bearing down upon the Muslim World with what appears to be saying in effect: “give up those antiquated ways, those superstitions, those inhibitions; be modern with us, be prosperous, and be sophisticated. Emancipate your women, your societies and yourselves!”

Many Muslims do succumb or see their children succumb. The West continues to seduce them from their traditional loyalties.

The reaction to this perceived western attack is very visible, in the activist movements, chiefly the Ikhwan al Muslimun (the Muslim Brotherhood). This activism represents in contemporary times the new determination to sweep aside the degeneration and stagnancy in the Muslim world. It aspires to get back to a basis for Muslim society – a vision, and go forward in transforming the Muslims to become an operative force at work in modern times.

Unfortunately for the adherents of this activist movement the re-affirmation of Islam has become an outlet for emotion. It has become the expression of the hatred, frustration, vanity and at times destructive frenzy of a people who have long been the victims of poverty, impotence and fear. The vehemence and hatred in their literature point more to a group of people who have lost their way, whose heritage has proven unequal to the challenges of modernity. The Pakistan counterpart of Ikhwan is the Jama’at group.

The common recurrent themes in these Islamic revival movements are the following: Modernization is seen as a westernization and secularization; a sense that existing political, economic and social systems have failed; a disenchantment with, and at times a rejection of the west; and the conviction that Islam provides a self-sufficient blueprint for state and society.

The contemporary Islamic revival movements have common grounds. The key-components of their program are: (1) Islam is the answer; (2) a return to the Qur’an and the Sunnah (traditions) of the prophet; (3) the community is to be governed by the Shari’a (Islamic Law); and (4) all who resist, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, are enemies of God.

Similarly, the da’wa(h) phenomenon in many Islamic communities is seen as an integral component of Islamic political revival that threatens the existing order that is more associated with the West. What is or should be clear is that simplistic accounts based on that legacy of anachronistic preconceptions will not do. As a matter of fact, da’wa(h) has become the subject of much concern inasmuch as “foreign” observers see in it shadows of the turmoil in Iran.

In Southwestern Philippines, the establishment of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the continuing Moro struggle for self-determination have, for all purposes, been viewed within this world-wide resurgence of Islam. Thus, this development exacerbates further the already tense situation in the region, particularly the Muslim-Christian relations.

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