

## **Islamic Revivalism: Its Concept, Scope, and Challenges in the Modern Period**

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### **Abstract**

*Islamic revivalism in the Muslim world becomes a heated debate among the scholars both in East and the West because of the existing diverse interpretations in the Islamic scriptures (Qur'an and Hadith). The fact is that the process of Islamic revivalism has remained the continuous effort of the revivalists throughout history, which depicts its relevance and scope for the succeeding generations of Islam. However, the commencement of Western ideologies and the evolution of contemporary challenges marked the great impact in the thought and practice of Muslims in the modern times. In this connection the paper is a humble and preliminary effort to define the concept of Islamic revivalism. Regarding the scope of Islamic revivalism the aspects of life where the revivalists could make their contribution for the rejuvenation of Islamic message will also be highlighted. Moreover, the intensity of the challenges faced as well as facing by the Muslim revivalists in the present day world will also be critically analyzed.*

**Keywords: -Islam, revival, relevance, modern Muslim world**

### **Introduction**

Islamic revivalism has remained the continuous effort of the revivalists in the history of Islamic civilization. Again, in the modern times it remains a serious concern within and outside Muslim academia, because in the modern times the revivalists perceive Western thought and practice in contrary rather alien to the Muslim thought and practice. Islamic revivalism generally means withdrawal from the process of Westernization and concentrated on preservation and protection of Muslim legacy. They sought to go back to the original message of Islam; to discover its contemporary relevance and to strive to change the status quo; to rebuild the society and its institutions in the light of the Islamic spirit. In the modern times, Islamic revival has faced certain challenges from the mutable religious observances and developments in and outside Muslim world. In order to make Islam relevant in all times to come, several revivalists of Islam have put forward their ideas and efforts for the rejuvenation of an actual message of Islam.

## **Concept of Revivalism (*Tajdīd*) in Islam**

The dictionary has defined the co-related terms of revivalism as revive means to return to consciousness or life, become active or flourishing again, to restore from a depressed, inactive or unused state; revivalist means one who conducts religious revivals or one who revives or restores something disused; revivalism means the spirit or methods characteristic of religious revivals or a tendency or desire to revive or restore” (Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2009:1068). The another dictionary defines the term revival as it means an improvement in the condition, strength, or fortunes of someone or something while as revivalism means belief in or the promotion of a revival of religious fervor, or a tendency or desire to revive a former custom or practice (Soanes and Stevenson, 2005:1509).

In Islam revival is being considered as the comprehensive process of maintaining and sustaining the real spirit of Islam in all times to come. Revival and renewal is an English equivalent to Arabic terms *ihyā’* and *tajdīd* respectively. The scholars of Islam generally use the term ‘revival’ for *tajdīd* because both the terms renewal and revival constitute *tajdīd* in Islam. Putting it in Islamic terminology, the word *tajdīd* (renewal or revival) is derived from the root word *j-d-d* which means to make new, to innovate, to refresh, and to resuscitate (Moosa and Tareen, 2013:462). The term *tajdīd* (revival or renewal) is derived from the *Ḥadīth*(sayings) of Prophet (SAAS) i.e., “At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this *ummahs* omeone who will renew its religion” (Al-Ash‘ath, 2008, 512).In addition to the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet (SAAS), the Qur’an also motivates the people in general and responsible persons in particular for the transformation of their (and others’) heart, mind, and actions in accordance with the spirit of Islam.

The Qur’an says: “*Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves*” (Al-Qur’an, 2002: Chapter 13 Verse 11).

This verse of the Qur’an directly motivates people towards the enlightenment of self as well as society as a whole. The revivalists of Islam have undertaken the same assignment for the rejuvenation of an Islamic message in the different situations of the Islamic history.

## Definitions of Tajdīd

- Abul Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad commonly known as ibn al-Athir (1160-1232 CE) a famous historian, biographer, and the author of *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* said that *tajdīdis* accordingly equated with the revival (*Iḥyā'*) of the legacy of the leading *madhāhib* (schools of thought). The *mujaddid*(revivalist) or carrier of *tajdīd*, is thus described as a prominent leader who emerges at the head of every century to revive the religion for the *ummah*(community)and preserve the *madhhabs* of their following under the leadership of their respective Imams (Kamali, 2013:485).
- Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (1445-1505 CE) an Egyptian religious scholar, jurist, *mufassir* (exegete),and the author of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* wrote that *tajdīdin* religion means renewal of its guidance, explanation of its truth, as well as eradication of pernicious innovation (*bid'ah*) of extremism (*al-ghuluw*) or laxity in religion. He went on to add that *tajdīd*also means observance of people's benefits, societal traditions and the norms of civilization and *sharī'ah* [Islamic law] (Kamali, 2013:485).
- Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903-1979) an Islamic thinker, theologian, journalist, and the author of more than one hundred books on Islam, said that Islamic revival is neither striking compromises with un-Islam, nor preparing new blends of Islam and un-Islam, but it is cleansing Islam of all the un-Godly elements and presenting it and making it flourish more or less in its original pure form (Maududi, 2010:37).
- Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (b. 1925) a well known Islamic thinker of the contemporary times defines revival (*tajdīd*) in an easy way that it means the teachings of Islam shall be interpreted again at their original spirit. Moreover, Islam is to free from the human adulteration and present it as it was presented during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad [SAAS] (Khan, 2015:5).
- Yusuf al-Qardawi (b. 1926) an Egyptian Islamic theologian and jurist juxtaposed *tajdīd*with *ijtihād* (individual opinion)and added that *ijtihād* captures the intellectual and knowledge dimensions of *tajdīd*, but *tajdīdis* wider in the sense that *tajdīd*also encapsulates the psychological and practical dimensions [of revival]( Kamali, 2013:485).

- According to John O Voll (b. 1936), a professor Emeritus of Islamic History at the Georgetown University USA, says that there are three main themes of revival (*tajdīd*) in the Islamic history: (i) The call for a return to, or a strict application of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (actions) of the Prophet (SAAS); (ii) The assertion of the right of independent analysis (*ijtihād*) of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in this application, rather than having to rely upon and imitate the opinions of the preceding generations of the learned men of Islam (which is called *taqlīd*); (iii) The reaffirmation of the authenticity and uniqueness of the Qur'anic experience, in contrast to other Islamic modes of synthesis and openness (Voll, 1983:35).
- Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962), a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford says that the term '*tajdīd*' literally means 'renewal', or even 'rebirth' and 'regeneration'. This renewal of religion (*tajdīdad-din*) does not, of course, entail a change in the sources, principles, and fundamentals of Islam, but only in the way the religion is understood, implemented, and lived in different times or places. This is precisely the point, scriptural sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah) remain the primary references and the fundamentalism of faith and practice are left as they are, but our reading and our understanding of the texts will be 'renewed'. *Tajdīd* is thus a renewal of the reading, understanding, and, consequently implementations of texts in light of the various historio-cultural contexts in which Muslim communities or societies exist (Ramadan, 2009:12-13).

Islamic revivalism literally means a new birth of Islam or the phenomenon describes the rebirth of the importance of Islam or it simply means Islam revives so as to regenerate the awareness of the essence of Islamic teachings. To describe the phenomenon of Islamic revivalism, it might be assumed that there is a rising, a motion or movement on the part of Muslims. There is a desire to take Islam in a state of sensibility and free it from mental bondage and stagnation. Islamic revivalism is hence a religious phenomenon resulting from the rise of Muslim awareness of Islam and a return to Islam as a way of life solving their worldly affairs in all aspects of life (Abdullah, 2003:120). The traditionalists or revivalists focused on the isolation and withdrawal from the process of Westernization and concentrated on preservation and protection of the Muslim legacy. They sought to go back to the original message of Islam; to discover its contemporary relevance and to strive to change the status quo; to rebuild the society and its

institution in the light of the Islamic milieu; and to inspire the individual with the pristine vision of Islam. This process of Islamic thought has been described as revival (*tajdīd/ihyā'*) in Islamic history. Generally, the work of Islamic revival in the modern times is not confined to any particular person rather it is the team work done by any group, a *fiqh* (jurisprudence) academy, a research center or a center of studies. *Tajdīd* may accordingly be attempted by one person or a group of persons, party or movement. Notwithstanding, the emergence of individual *mujaddids* (revivalists) that featured prominently in the writings of early commentators, modern interpretations of *tajdīd* favour collective *tajdīd* undertaken by groups of '*ulamā'* (religious scholars), specialists and scholars in various disciplines. One *mujaddid* may be a jurist, another political scientist, yet another economist and so forth (Kamali, 2013:490).

## Scope and Relevance of Islamic Revivalism

As far as the scope of Islamic revivalism is concerned, it encompasses all the aspects of the Muslim life whether it is social, political, economic, cultural, educational, ethical, and spiritual. The relevance of Islamic revivalism is maintained through the fact that the history witnesses the changes in the day to day affairs of human life and Islam as the divine religion permeates change and formulates the tendencies which accords change and makes the path relevant to the human life. Islam wants change in the human behaviour according to the divine entities. The Islamic teachings convey on the whole a certain awareness and insight into one's inner self and outer environment, informed and enlightened in the meantime by a set of principles and sound human reason. The external dimension of this awareness is a civilisational mission pertaining to relations among human individuals and communities and how they relate, in turn, to their earthly habitat and living environment. This is the focus of Islam's teachings on the vicegerency of man in the earth (*istikhlaf fi al Arḍ*) and his responsibility to build it and create a just social order that is ethically grounded and enriched by the spirit of beneficence [*ihsān*] (Kamali, 2013:502).

The application of *tajdīd* to the dogma and basic pillars (*arkān*) of Islam is apparently limited. But since *tajdīd* can engage in matters outside this sphere and issues of concern to human relations and *muamlat* with greater flexibility, its relevance to the concerns of modernity and civilisational renewal is not difficult to see. Islam accepts both the approaches of *tajdīd* and *islah* for rejuvenation of an Islamic message. It is not concerned with personal spirituality alone, and unless this is manifested in the outer conduct of individuals and in societal relations, spirituality

by itself can be subjective, misinterpreted, and even seen to be anti-social. For mainstream Sufism, this integration of the inner spiritual self with outer conduct is in line with Islam's overarching principle of *tawhīd* (unity of God). Hence, it is not difficult to see that *tajdīd* and *islah* should be integral and a logical extension of one another (Kamali, 2013:490). Furthermore, *tajdīd* is not confined to traditional disciplines, such as theology, *fiqh*, or *Ḥadīth* but also extends to science and technology, economics and other fields of learning that are meaningful for the revival of the *ummah* and Islamic civilization. Another point of interpretation arising is whether it is the religion of the time in which the *mujaddid* lives that he is supposed to revive in the light of the conditions of that time, or that of the Islam that prevailed during the lifetime of the Prophet (SAAS). The wording of the *Ḥadīth* confirms the former meaning: that is the phrase 'yujaddidlahadinaha' thus means that the *mujaddid* revives for the *ummah* the religion that they practice at the time when the *mujaddid* emerges. The *Ḥadīth* did not say for instance 'the religion of Allah, or of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), or Islam as such,' but visualized instead the religion that the *ummah* observes (Kamali, 2013:490). But the principles followed by *mujaddid* should be in consonance with the basic sources of Islam- Qur'an and Sunnah and the eternal message of Islam should be made relevant to the contemporary times. Renewal in Islam is not confined to the material aspects of life only but also on spiritual and intellectual basis. Intellectual renewal in Islam does not abrogate existing notions or establish a new system of thought. Rather, it involves rediscovering and developing already existing ideas in keeping with the needs prevalent in our own times, and based on relevant rules, methodologies, and recognized constants. As for its authoritative points of reference, they are: the Qur'an, the Prophetic Sunnah, tools and mechanisms for understanding Islamic principles (reason, consensus, and the like), and the Islamic intellectual and juristic heritage.

The social affairs of Muslim life generally include family, marriage, and coordination among the persons living in the same society or the other. The family is an institution wherein the bonds of relationship can be tied with proper rules and regulations. Social setup as the part of Islamic way of life is being oriented by revivalists in consonance with the divine message. The ethical relationships play an important role in the formation of an ideal society. The marriage being the basic institution of family life is discussed by Islam in a very clear manner. The human being is said to be the social being which means that he cannot live the life of isolation. The political

sphere of Muslim life demands the proper implementation of divine commands in all walks of life. Man being the vicegerent of Allah on earth can maintain the public order in letter and spirit. The economic activity is the engine of the society through which the human needs and facilities can be maintained. Islam provides the well oriented solution to all these needs of human beings. Culture is also the basic need of Muslim society. It includes all the etiquettes like eating, drinking, dress, behaviour and other personality traits of an individual. Education is the primary need for the all-round development of an individual. The two main sources of knowledge are revelation and reason. Islam incorporated both of them but the reason should be in subordinate to revelation. Ethics remains priority of the work in Islam. The ethical standards of Muslims are emphasized in both Qur'an and Hadith. The model for ethical standard of the Muslims should be the Prophet (SAAS). The spiritual elevation of a Muslim is the main motive of Islamic message. The person spiritually high is dearer to Almighty Allah. The process of Islamic revivalism is working on different aspects of Islamic civilization. A professor of Islamic Studies has summed up such program of Islamic revivalism as:

- “Diagnosis of the current ailments: to examine thoroughly the circumstances and conditions of the time and ascertain exactly where, how and what extant *jahiliyyah*(ignorance) has crept in, what and where are its roots and what position Islam occupies at the time.
- Scheme of reformation: to determine exactly where to strike the blow so as to break the power of un-Islam and enable Islam to take hold of life as a whole.
- Estimation of one's limitations and resources: to weight and estimate power at one's disposal and determine the line of action for bringing about reforms.
- Intellectual revolution: to share the ideas, beliefs and moral view points of the people into the Islamic mould, reform the system of education and revive the Islamic science and attitudes in general.
- Practical reforms: to eradicate evil customs, cleanse morals, regenerate the spirit of practicing the *sharī'ah*, and prepare men capable for Islamic leadership.
- *Ijtihād*: to comprehend the fundamental principles of religion, judge contemporary culture and its trends from the Islamic view point, and determine the changes to be effected in the existing patterns of social life under the

*sharī'ah* with a view to attaining its ends and enabling Islam to assume world-leadership in the reformed social- set-up.

- Defence of Islam: to encounter political forces seeking to suppress and finish Islam and break their power in order to make Islam a living force.
- Revival of Islamic system: to wrest authority from the hands of un-Islam and practically re-establish government on the pattern described as 'caliphate after the pattern of Prophethood'.
- Universal revolution: not to rest content with establishing Islamic system in one or more countries already inhabited by the Muslims, but to initiate such a strong universal movement as may spread the reformatory and evolutionary message of Islam among mankind at large, and enable Islam to become a predominant cultural force in the world and capture the moral, spiritual, intellectual, and political leadership of mankind" (Fahd, 2010:29-30).

## Challenges and Responses

Islam being the divine religion while interpreted by the human faculties in the free environment emerges certain clashes with the divine message and becomes a pressing challenge for the contemporary Muslim *ummah*. It should be accepted that the nature of human being is subordinate to the divine will. The encounter of reason with the revelation sprouts many issues and challenges since the inception of divine message, but the intensity of challenges become high to higher in the modern times both from within and outside Muslim world because the developments in the West makes profound influence on the thought process of the East. The challenges from within the Muslim society include sectarian issues or schools of thought; the diversity of interpretations within which the consensus among the religious scholars is itself lacked; and the impact of Westernization. The challenges for the revivalists of Islam from outside the Muslim world include secularism; democracy; nationalism; conventional banking; and feminism.

Nowadays, the Muslim *ummah* is divided into certain schools of thought; each of them claims to be the right in disseminating the true message of Islam which results the exclusion of the real message of Islam. This thing itself becomes very difficult to interfere with because the *taqlidi* (blind imitation) paradigm is staunchly accepted by the modern Muslim world. The initiative

regarding this serious issue was taken by an Indian subcontinent thinker, revivalist and the author of *Hujjatullah-i-Balighah* named Shah Waliullah (1703-1762). He defined an approach to Islamic law that could combine the different schools of law in a broad-based legal synthesis while recognizing the legitimacy of some diversity of views among the scholars. His teachings were important in providing a foundation for subsequent Muslim thought in South Asia, but he himself did not create a formal reformist organization or lead an activist movement (Voll, 1999:514).

In the twentieth century, Islamic revivalism gained its impetus through the efforts of Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) the most influential activists of Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt who moved Islamic revival from the realm of individual reforms to a popular movement by introducing the concept of mass organization and the restoration of an Islamic order in letter and spirit. Islamic revivalism in this century laid more emphasis on the restoration of Islamic order because they are of the opinion that ordered society plays an important role in the attainment of ideals which Islam prescribes from a human being. In the middle of twentieth century another revivalist Maulana Sayyid Abulala Maududi (1903-1979) an Islamic thinker and political theorist emerged in the Indian subcontinent who worked for revival and reform in Islam and presented the thought in which the main concern was the revival of the political order of Islam.

The western ideas and ideologies have played a crucial role in deflating the thought of the modern Muslim minds. The people are adopting blindly the ideologies of the West without knowing the drawbacks among them. There is a tremendous amount of thinking to be done about developments and Islam, precisely because Muslims are forced by today's conditions to make the connection between two worlds. The Islamic economic doctrine of the *sharī'ah* is compromised by traditionalist-capitalist and secularist-socialist states alike. The socialists and secularists deny that religious law has strategic utility in modern materialism. The capitalists and traditionalists have the *sharī'ah* out of its original shape. This perceived irrelevance of Islamic precepts to present conditions, whether implicit or explicit, has not been accompanied by indigenous intellectual development (Said and Funk, 2012,n.p). Hence, the need is to reformulate an Islamic thought which could open the new vistas for the rejuvenation of Islamic ideals.

Secularism is the most burning challenge to the contemporary revivalist thought in the modern period, because it erodes the role of religion in the remaking of society which the revivalist uses as the main tool for the rejuvenation of Islamic ideals for making the ideal society. Secularism is generally termed as the separation of religion from politics; rather we can say that religion has no say in matters of legal affairs of the state norms. That is why, revivalists taking it a severe challenge regarding the revival of an Islamic model of Madinan society. Maududi said that secularism has two important aspects; firstly, secularism involves the rejection of religion as the principal guiding force of modern society and state. Secondly, it involves an understanding of religion as a private matter of an individual. The first aspect of secularism gives individual an absolute right to set the goals of his societal life. This understanding is regarded as the starting point of all the ideologies of the modern world (Maududi, 1998:17). Democracy and nationalism is another new challenge for the revivalists of Islam, because they are of the opinion that democracy and nationalism both an alien concept originated from the West which hinders in the legal and political matters of Islamic society. However, some scholars of Islam are not hesitating in determining the compatibility of democracy and Islam, because they think that democracy is itself imbibed into the principles of Islam. Maududi again was of the opinion that democracy in the modern civilization means the sovereignty of the people; that is to say, a collective will of a group of people in a particular territory being completely independent and free therein, the laws being subject to their wishes and not their wishes to the laws, and the sole aim and object of government consisting in, and its power of organization being used for the fulfillment of the collective desires of the masses. He while supporting the concept of democracy in Islam uses the term theo-democracy (Maududi, 1998:20).

Regarding the economic well being of the people Islam laid more emphasis on the economic model which generates a welfare and prosperous society. The Islamic economic institutions like *zakāt* (poor tax), *'ushur* (production tax), *baitulmāl* (house of treasury), and interest free banking (Islamic banking) are the model patterns of an Islamic society through which the guiding principles of an Islamic economy can be maintained with legal and moral genuineness. In the modern times the efforts have been utilized by the Muslim intellectuals and organizations for the regeneration of an interest free banking/Islamic banking in several countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Egypt. The western ideologies have influenced the several intellectuals of the modern

Muslim world who after exercising the apologetic approach vis-a-vis the developments in the West become a severe challenge as well for the Muslim *ummah*. Among them feminism erupts a big challenge for the revivalists of Islam in the modern period because they have posed such question marks to the divine message which leads to complete abstention from divine path. Although, in response to the feminists call, several revivalists of Islam have revisited the Islamic message and came up with the conclusion that somewhere the rigidity regarding the freedom and status of women is being employed. As the revivalists of Islam are not in contrary to change but the value oriented society is their main concern which could not be the hindrance in an application of the divine message.

## **Conclusion**

Islamic revivalism is an effort undertaken by the revivalists of Islam for the rejuvenation of both Islamic thought and practice in letter and spirit in the history of Islamic civilization. In the modern times, the necessity of Islamic revivalism gained more impetus because of the burning issues and challenges within and outside Muslim world. As the modern world is much prone to changes, the civilisational requirement to tackle such changes gets twofold because adaptation should complement to both rational and divine entities. Islamic civilization in the same way witnessed such changes as the challenge especially in the modern times. Islam being defined as the way of life must coexist with the modern challenges which the revivalists of Islam have worked and are working for. Moreover, Islam being the complete way of life presents the well defined structure for each and every aspect of life. The revivalists of Islam are analyzing the modern challenges and in turn presenting an alternative system in accordance with Qur'an and Sunnah. The alternative system presented by the modern revivalists of Islam comprises Islamic social, political, economic, cultural, ethical and spiritual system of life. Hence, the relevance of Islamic revivalism gets manifold with the changing situations of the Muslim world.

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