

# ISLAM AND MODERNITY, TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM\*

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.....it is a magnificent feeling to recognize the unity of a complex of phenomena that to direct observation appear to be quite separate things. A. Einstein<sup>1</sup>

But it is precisely the loss of connection with the past, our uprootedness, which has given rise to the "discontents" of civilization and to such a flurry and haste that we live more in the future and its chimerical promises of a golden age than in the present, with which our whole evolutionary background has not yet caught up. C. G. Jung<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Dwelling on the problem of relationship between Islam and modernity, this talk attempts to explore critical avenues leading to reconciliation of the two paradigms. Some conceptual tools are suggested that might be of some consequence and interest in the present context. Foremost of these is the notion of world picture or paradigm, for which chief inspiration is sought from Thomas Kuhn's work. The crucial part of the argument is this: Modernity emerged with the claim of providing an enduring and aesthetically more beautiful world picture after the decline of the religious picture in the sixteenth seventeenth centuries. This has not turned out to be the case, while serious flaws have emerged in the intellectual structure of modernity. A similar destabilization in the world picture of Islam can also be noticed. This double upheaval provides us with a unique opportunity to re-draw the map of thought on a new pattern.*

## The Problem

The problem we are dealing with today, the relationship of Islam and modernity, derives its relevance and legitimacy in the context of a wider problem. This is about the very nature of reality itself and which can be posed as: What kind of world we are living in today? Far from being an academic question being the concern of a few specialists, the truth is that this is the kind of question never absent from the life and mind of any living human being, whether adults or children. Anthony Giddens observed instructively that "All human beings routinely 'keep in touch' with the ground of what they do as an integral element of doing."<sup>3</sup> He called it 'reflexive monitoring of action'.<sup>4</sup>

However, it seems that such monitoring is carried out in a still wider context of what I would describe as 'reflexive monitoring of the world,' that in the end engenders every human action. This is because it is not just that only human beings live in the world. Rather the world lives in human beings too. It is therefore part and parcel of their everyday activity to keep a watch on their world, or lifeworld, to use a better term, in order to be cognizant of not merely what is happening outside but also inside of them. The world inside is not just in the head. It constitutes our sentiments, feelings and emotions which for the most part exercise far greater control over us than what is in our minds. Such examination takes place on various levels. The more popular level is keeping oneself abreast with the latest news. Aside from newspapers and magazines,

there are now hosts of 24 hour news channels to satisfy this rising demand in an increasingly eventful, fast changing world.

On a higher plane, the most significant contribution in this direction is made by the intellectual community, or the knowledge producing community, residing and working largely in the schools, universities and research institutes. Perhaps it would not be an overstatement to suggest that this community not only monitors but in a way constructs the world we live in. This two-fold activity may not be going on as a conscious, fully organized programme. Still, from teaching in a classroom to writing papers and books, organizing conferences and seminars, like the present one, all these activities are devoted to the same cause, namely, comprehension, or making sense of the world we are living in, and which involves both deconstruction and construction of it.

Among the larger intellectual community, it needs to be emphasized, it goes to the philosophers to make this process as conscious and deliberate as they can. By philosophers, I must hasten to add, I do not mean necessarily those from the departments of philosophy; rather anyone who gives serious thought to the world we inhabit and consciously engages him or herself towards the revelation of its workings. Needless to say, the universities can play their role more effectively in this direction if they are aware that provision of labour force may be their great contribution to the society, but by no means the primary one.

The hypothesis that I want to explore in this regard derives from a current in philosophy of science which was initiated by E. A. Burt early last century and later fully developed by Thomas Kuhn. Burt in his phenomenal *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* observed:

In the last analysis it is the ultimate picture which an age forms of the nature of its world that is its most fundamental possession. It is the final controlling factor in all thinking whatever.<sup>5</sup>

So what is being suggested is that as human beings we are endowed and possessed with a picture of the world in which we live, or which gives meanings to our world. This world-picture or paradigm, which emerges with our interaction and experience of the world, is our most cherished and prized possession. We live and die for it. It gives purpose to our lives. We think and act, sleep and awake with and in it. We engage with our selves and with each other within the framework of this picture.

The first and essential ingredients of this picture, or the first raw form of this picture is handed down to us by our parents, and larger or extended family if it exists, and following this, the immediate society. Of the latter the most important role is played by the school and the university. With it the other three institutions, the mosque, the media and the nation state are also operating. But the pre-eminence of the family, school and the mosque lies in that they give us history, which plays immensely in the framing of our world picture. This picture forms the frame of reference that determines our perceptions, and therefore largely determines our actions and our behaviour.

Apparently it may sound strange, but the reality is that the boundaries of this picture are far stronger than, say, the ones of a modern state. A country can be attacked and manipulated and disfigured. Many of the states in the non-Western world are

artificial creations of the colonial era. Similarly, an individual or a community can be enslaved and their freedom of action curtailed. But the picture of the world they carry within them is hard to be influenced let alone snatched from them. It is only lately that the West has discovered to their astonishment the discovery of this indestructible picture in the people of foreign descent living in their midst for the past two or three generations. The truth is that a non-Westerner migrating to the West might be carrying on board apparently a small baggage, he is in truth carrying a whole world of his in his mind and heart, without which it would be as impossible for him to get on board as without his body.

At this juncture we gather a critical, perhaps the most characteristic feature of the world picture, and which is that it is not merely a rational structure residing in our minds, a property of the educated people alone. On the contrary, it has its roots in our hearts. It is there, deep inside us, in our sentiments, feelings and emotions where its ultimate contours are engraved, for it is the world picture that gives every human being his or her self, identity, self-image and self-respect.

As we grow up the essentials of our world picture are nearly complete even before we enter adolescence. However, while its enlargement continues for fairly long, conversion is very rare after the onset of the middle age. By this stage of life a large part of this picture is eventually dropped into the unconscious, and whatever we are assimilating into it also becomes largely an unconscious process. Material concerns and worldly occupations make people less attentive to the contours of their world picture, with the result that confusion in society too rises in the same proportion. And one would hardly disagree that this is indeed the situation we are in presently. The problem then is to become fully conscious of the picture of reality we live with, to be aware of its contents and of the relations between them. An educated person, no, a thoughtful person, then, can be defined as one who is fully aware and conscious of the thought-world she or he is living in.

As we embark on the path of examination, what is the most outstanding fact that we encounter? This is that we do not have a uniform world picture any more. Actually there is not one but two pictures, one framed by Islam, the other by modernity. And by various techniques of survival we are managing to live with both of them, as if trying to walk on two ropes that at times get too wide and at others too narrow that does not make our exercise in acrobatics a pleasant sight.

Now supposing that we all have the necessary information about the origin of Islam, a brief word on the definition of modernity is called for in order to facilitate discourse. What is modernity, when did it originate, and what are its primary presuppositions?

Deriving from Hegel, Habermas relates that by 1800 “modern times” were understood to be already three hundred years old. ‘The discovery of the “new world,” the Renaissance, and the Reformation – these three monumental events around the year 1500 constituted the epochal threshold between modern times and the middle ages.’<sup>6</sup>

Giddens looks at modernity as referring 'to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence.'<sup>7</sup>

**And in Lyon's words:**

The term refers to the social order that emerged following the Enlightenment. Though its roots may be traced further back, the modern world is marked by its unprecedented dynamism, its dismissal or marginalizing of tradition, and by its global consequences.<sup>8</sup>

The most important aspect of modernity, we must remember, is its rejection of or break with tradition, which is also emphasized by Foucault when he observed that 'Modernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment.'<sup>9</sup> It was put more succinctly by Giddens when he remarked that 'Inherent in the idea of modernity is a contrast with tradition'.<sup>10</sup>

To be more precise, modernity as a world picture is constituted or characterized by five elements. These are science, technology, industrialization, the nation state, and large scale urbanization. To these must be added two more features which bring about modernity's alienation with the Islamic world into sharp focus. First secularism, that essentially reflects modernity's materialist orientation and, second, its Eurocentric character in that it is firmly embedded in the historical trajectory of Europe.

It is said that human mind has a natural drive towards unity, for it hates disorder and chaos. Thus we, the universal Islamic community, have in the past two or three centuries endeavoured, both consciously and unconsciously, to make a unified picture out of the two apparently conflicting structures. From Jamal al Din Al Afghani (d.1897) and Muhammad Abduh (d.1905) to Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and Muhammad Iqbal (d.1938) all laboured hard to grapple with the task. But have we had any success in this endeavour? Hardly of much significance. The truth is that if we analyze the hotchpotch that we have got, and compare it with the uniform, coherent picture our ancestors possessed before the onset of the revolution we call modernity, we must be the laughing stock for them if they happen to be watching us from the heavens.

In view of this dire state of ours, we, the overwhelming majority of the universal Islamic community, are being urged by one faction, the modernists of liberal or Marxist persuasion, to renounce religion and tradition to embrace modernity, while the other, the so-called Islamist faction, is calling to shun modernity and return to the ancient, pristine Islam. A clear world picture is promised in return by either side. But our instinct as *ummat al wasat*,<sup>11</sup> the community of moderation, tells us that extremism, as much in thought as in action, is a sure path to doom. So this talk is a part of the endeavour to explore the middle way, or the third way, or what I have called a new paradigm that might give us a comprehensive picture of reality that a partisan perspective cannot by its definition offer.

As we proceed to make apparent the legitimacy of this endeavour, we may quickly recap what we have stated in the foregoing. I began with the assertion that human beings act according to the knowledge, paradigm, picture or vision of the world that they

form by virtue of their interaction with the world. This is not a mere copy or reflection of the visible world. It is a lot more than that. For there are certain essential components of it, whether it is God or our ideals and values not directly to do with God, which cannot be traced or reduced to the visible world. I further argued that our conduct ensues or is determined by this picture of the world that we have in our hearts and minds.

### **Changing the Concept of Change**

At this point you would have noticed what logically follows from this assertion. This is that if we need to change the world, we must change the world picture we are living in. If there is a true modernist in our midst today, whether of Marxist or liberal persuasion, he or she must be very apprehensive of this assertion. For it goes against the very logic of modern thought, insofar as it does not accord thought or mind the independence that my assertion or proposition presumably takes as self evident. But where did I get this proposition from? Evidently from the pre-modern tradition, and the onus is on me to bring in the right evidence to demonstrate that I am not repeating the same that modernity supposedly proved nonsensical long ago.

To this I would turn in a moment, though briefly. Here I wish to share with you my excitement that comes with the hypothesis that I have just proposed, and which is that in order to change the world we must examine and change the world picture we are possessed with presently. If to those of you who are familiar with the philosophical tradition it reminds of Socratic dictum, knowledge is virtue, then I would have brought you to the point I am trying to refer to. And this is that I am not merely drawing from the religious tradition but also from the Greek philosophical tradition of thought of which the great Socrates was the founder. But unfortunately this is not the time to go further on this aspect of our discourse.

As we embark on this course, we realize that the first thing we have done, or are proposing to do, is to change the very notion of change itself. For the established notion of change, whether liberal or Marxist, and to be honest, Islamist too that our brethren are pursuing with great vigour and belief, asserts and demands to change the world in order to bring about change within us. One need not be very intelligent to discern that the only method to realize such notion of change is physical force and violence. And there is plenty of evidence to suggest that even if one does not openly profess or advocate this method, it inevitably follows from the prevalent notion of change.

The novelty of pursuing a non-violent course of change in this exceedingly violent world of ours is itself a sufficient source of excitement. But even more it gives us, the intellectual community, a new self-consciousness as we reflect upon fresh evidence for the old belief that knowledge is power. Never before had this belief looked so self-evident. Today we live in what we call knowledge society, in which information, idea or knowledge has replaced the production of goods as the driving productive force. But at the same time this does not contrast well with the powerlessness and insignificance of the intellectual community in relation to the power and influence enjoyed by the political and

business communities. The reason for this is not hard to fathom. And which is that the intellectual community has not been able to question the given notion of change and of power, both of which involve material sources such as physical force and wealth as their chief determinants. The self-consciousness of intellectual community as independent from the political and business communities is therefore directly dependent on its ability to develop a non-violent, essentially intellectual, knowledge oriented notion of change and power.

### **The Decline and Self-Contradictions of Modernity**

As we look at the world today, it is not hard to see that this might be the moment to seize. Modernity came to world power some three or so centuries ago with two claims: first, that the pre-modern world of religion and tradition had, in spite of their grandiose claims, failed to deliver peace, enlightenment, prosperity and unity to humankind. Its second claim was that it could do so. There were critics of these claims of course. Some of them challenged both; but there were others who accepted the first one while questioning the second. Again, in the latter group there were those, most notably Nietzsche, who denied any possibility of liberation as they could not see any in the fundamental premises of modernity. On the other hand were such thinkers as Marx and Engels who thought modernity was made evil only in its capitalist setting. That is, if the progress that it represented was led further to communist phase, modernity could fulfill its promises.

The First World War and the massive devastation it caused brought a severe setback to the claims of modernity. It was at such time that books like *The Decline of the West* by Spangler, and pessimist evaluations of modernity by Toynbee appeared. But the Soviet Revolution of 1917 kindled new hopes at the same time. Could the Marxist paradigm of modernity deliver the claims made on its behalf? The rise of Fascism, the Second World War, the Cold War, the fear of nuclear destruction of life from the planet, and then the collapse of the communist dream in 1989 was perhaps more than enough to suggest that what a writer calls the 'dark side'<sup>12</sup> of modernity had finally taken over, fulfilling the worst fears of the critics of modernity. A hundred million people were killed in wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone,<sup>13</sup> while the present rate of global warming, the worst consequence of modernity, is threatening to burn the world up in the span of next few generations. So much for the claims of the dawn of a new era. The fallout has caused havoc in the Western intellectual world in both liberal and Marxist camps. The intellectual dismemberment of modernity there has left hardly any discipline unaffected, especially amongst the human sciences.

When a cautious writer like Giddens observes that 'The world in which we live today is a fraught and dangerous one,'<sup>14</sup> I reckon it ill-advised keeping faith in the noble 'intentions' of the Enlightenment, as Habermas wishes us to.<sup>15</sup> Except for him, perhaps, there is near consensus in the Western world, as Foster put it, that 'the project of modernity is now deeply problematic.'<sup>16</sup> And remember it was over two decades ago, with the result that now cynicism and skepticism, even utter denial of the very possibility of knowledge, has become the dominant attitude among the Western intellectual community. Giddens captures the mood of nihilism and pessimism well in these words:

The disorientation which expresses itself in the feeling that systematic knowledge about social organization cannot be obtained, ... results primarily from the sense many of us have of being caught up in a universe of events we do not fully understand, and which seems in large part out of our control.<sup>17</sup>

We have seen that the rise of Marxism gave a new lease of life to the world picture of modernity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its collapse in the end of that century, not surprisingly, amounted to a call for the rise and resurrection of the forces it had supposedly buried ages ago. The popular term for these is fundamentalist Islam, whose adherents are also referred to as Islamists.

The war that has broken out between the decaying modernity and resurgent religious forces is intensifying by the day. As it accelerates further, we would be pushed even harder to take sides, making us believe that any thought of a third or middle path is a chimera, an illusion. Are we condemned to this enforced partisanship, then? The truth is that the reality of middle path, the way of moderation, depends ultimately on our critique of religion and tradition on the one hand and of modernity on the other. Each of the two parties idolizes itself while demonizing the other. Can we offer a critique that points to the underlying unity between these apparently irreconcilable entities? We are aware of such attempts in the domain of natural science, of which the most crowing instance was Darwin's unity of man, animal and rest of the creation. Even more fateful was Einstein's unity of mass and energy which was encapsulated in his famous equation of  $E=mc^2$ . I believe, however, that discovering or establishing relations between seemingly contradictory phenomena is vehicle for the development of all knowledge, and not of natural science alone.

You might have, at this point, guessed what gives us an edge or historical advantage over previous doomed attempts at reconciliation of tradition and modernity! It is what I have called the intellectual dismemberment of modernity. Even until the second last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity, still bearing the pretensions of a coherent picture, was on the offensive. Its self-assurance as a potent worldview, as harbinger of progress and enlightenment, whether in liberal or Marxist setting, was largely intact. The choice between the two settings was itself a mark of its strength. But since the last decade, especially after the waning of the Marxist alternative, modernity seems to have lost the plot as well as the direction.

We have in this short span of time witnessed one of the most marvelous spectacles of history. Until 1989, the two versions of modernity were locked in a life and death struggle, bringing the world to the brink of destruction, at least once more than on other occasions. We were told that this was the battle between good and evil. And lo! After the defeat of the evil, what we have found to our astonishment is that the life of the evil was the condition of the life of the good. To put it in other words, without the opposition that the so-called evil offered, the good can hardly be distinguished from the evil it exterminated. From the ashes of the labour camps has emerged Camp Delta. This self-contradiction of modernity, of which it was never aware, and perhaps is still unaware, casts a decisive doubt on its legitimacy as a viable worldview and, furthermore, which gives our critique the potential of developing into a fully-fledged paradigm.

But there are even more glaring self-contradictions of modernity which have been brought to surface in the last century, thanks to the discoveries in varied disciplines across the natural and human sciences. Let us recall that the chief tenet of modernity, the ultimate metaphysical presupposition around which the whole modern, scientific world picture was woven was the radical separation of the object of knowledge from its subject. This hypothesis can be stated in various terms, such as separation of subject and object, of mind and matter, of man and nature and so forth. But the essence of it all was the independence of the world from man, of the observed from the observer, of matter from mind. Underlying this premise was what is known as the mechanized picture of the world resulting from the newly-found perception of the world as a machine, of which man was a part. From the mechanical picture of the world was derived what can be stated as the principle of objectivity of the fact, which says that a fact pertaining to physical world would be registered by different observers in the same way in the same conditions of space and time.

This principle also defined the relationship of modernity with the pre-modern, traditional or religious picture of the world. For the sharp separation between the two worlds was brought into focus by the assertion that pre-modern world picture did not accept this separation of the subject and object, of the observer and observed, of mind and matter, man and nature and for which reason the knowledge of religious civilizations was largely rejected as dogmatic and spurious. The epistemological assumption on which the picture of modernity stood, in other words, was the ultimate reality of matter. Mind was the determination of matter but not vice versa. Modernity then refused and rejected the notion of reality that could be both mind and matter. Apparently it justified this belief on the so-called law of contradiction, or the principle of either this or that, which says that amongst the two opposites only one or the other can be true.

Of all the disciplines the first setback to this, mechanical picture of reality came from physics, the so-called queen of the sciences which the human sciences had been slavishly trying to emulate since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was the discovery of quanta by Max Planck in the year 1900. This discovery brought forth a bewildering aspect of nature that flew in the face of modern science. Defying the logic of either or, and of course all the common sense, it demonstrated that light could behave as both particle and wave. To this, a quarter of century later, De Brogli added the other side. He discovered that matter too behaved as both particle and wave.

The development of quantum theory, of which Heisenberg's uncertainty principle became the benchmark, and Einstein's relativity theory, both undermined the mechanical world picture of modernity and with it the hard and fast boundaries between the observer and the observed that it had created. Man emerged as a part of the reality that he was investigating and, along with it, the concept of world picture came into vogue in the world of science. Einstein made open his belief that it was theory, or the theoretical frame of reference, which determined the facts. He wondered if there was any scientist who went looking for facts without a theory in which he would fit his facts when he got them.

“It is never possible to introduce only observable quantities in a theory,” he noted. “It is the theory which decides what can be observed.”<sup>18</sup>

The tremors caused by the scientific revolution of the early twentieth century, at the helm of which were the theories of quantum and relativity, were soon reverberated in the human sciences. The immediate sense was that the new science was being done with a philosophy radically different from the one underlying the scientific revolution of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, which had formed the bedrock of modernity. I have already mentioned Burt’s work that followed this line of thought. The most decisive piece of research in this domain appeared in 1962, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* by Thomas Kuhn.<sup>19</sup> Having grown up and educated in the milieu of new science, he opened his great work with this declaration:

History, if viewed as a repository for more than anecdote or chronology, could produce a decisive transformation in the image of science by which we are now possessed. That image has previously been drawn, even by scientists themselves, mainly from the study of finished scientific achievements as these are recorded in the classics and, more recently, in the textbooks from which each new scientific generation learns to practice its trade.... This essay attempts to show that we have been misled by them in fundamental ways. Its aim is a sketch of the quite different concept of science that can emerge from the historical record of the research activity itself.<sup>20</sup>

A physicist turned historian-philosopher of science, Kuhn was responsible for introducing the term paradigm in wider academic circles. By this he denoted a set of pre-conceptions, assumptions or the theoretical framework that guided scientists’ research and which operated largely on unconscious level. This was not a harmless observation.<sup>21</sup> For if scientists conducted their research in the light of or within the framework of some pre-existing paradigms, what clearly follows is that dogma must be at the very heart of scientific knowledge.<sup>22</sup> This was a nerve wrecking assertion for die-hard modernists because it was for the dogmatic character of religion that it had been disparaged by science. Was Kuhn trying to bring down the very boundaries between scientific and religious knowledge? Of course Kuhn was accused of it, but he had moved from physics to philosophy because he, as he himself put it, wanted to know the truth.<sup>23</sup> So he explained that far from being a shortcoming, dogma was the dynamic principle of all knowledge, whether religious or scientific, for it was the loyalty to the established truths that created the tension between the old and the new, the tension that finally brought forth revolution or paradigm shift in the way we think and see the world.<sup>24</sup>

He showed from the historical records of science that not only human thought was inalienably interwoven with material reality which was the object of scientific research. It was impossible that it could be otherwise. The most glaring example was that of the Copernican Revolution. The earth and sun did not change their places after Copernicus’ work. They only changed places in human thought, with the result that the world was no more the same as it was. Man had in fact performed a magic of colossal scale. For without moving a single piece in the furniture of cosmos, he was in a new, different world.

Kuhn drew support for his discovery from studies in psychology of perception where Gestalt psychologists had shown that human observation was directly affected by the mind or thinking of the observer. Thus the suggestion by Einstein that there was no

such thing as neutral observation, a chief dogma of science, was strengthened further by studies in experimental psychology. This is not time to speak of the discoveries of similar nature in other sciences such as history, sociology anthropology and philosophy,<sup>25</sup> but this account must be concluded with the contribution by Freud and Jung, who furnished conclusive evidence to demonstrate that the established boundaries between body and mind were not real.

Some of Freud's critics have found it hard to this date to rate his work as scientific. And this is for good reason. That a disease or physical deformity could be the result of a problem in the mind or that a piece of knowledge could cure a bodily malfunction is an assertion that reminds many of the pre-scientific age. This sums up well the point that I am trying to underline, and which is that the assumptions on the basis of which modernity repudiated religion and tradition have been turned upside down one after the other during the past over hundred years.<sup>26</sup> With these cracks in the world picture of modernity, some of which I have tried to highlight, it hardly looks like a coherent, aesthetically appealing worldview. In short, all these self-contradictions point to one direction: that the assumptions on which modernity built its case and sought its break with the tradition and rejected the whole edifice of the knowledge of the pre-modern civilizations are flawed and ill-founded.

### **The Transformation of the Islamic Paradigm**

I have argued that the exposure of the self-contradictions of modernity fulfills an important condition for reconstructing thought according to a new paradigm. But there must be other side of the coin, too. That is, what about the Islamic paradigm? What are its founding assumptions? To put it in another way, is this the pre-modern civilization which has survived intact, or has it undergone any significant changes after the onset of modernity? I believe this is the foremost issue that we have to grapple with, with a detachment of heart and mind if we are true in seeking the middle path, or the way of moderation at this crucial juncture in our history. My own research of the historical records has showed that the picture has transformed so much that to me it almost looks like upside down.<sup>27</sup> I hope that you would appreciate my predicament, for if the picture does appear to me the other way around, I have a hard job on my hands to prove that it is indeed the case.

Evidently the first difficulty is that I am already close to my allocated time. So what I can do is to do the first thing now and leave the second for some other day. That which I am going to leave out now is what I call the structure of pre-modern civilizations, especially its pluralist constitution, with special reference to Islam, of course, and which my published work covers. Presently I can try to give you a glimpse of the change which has occurred while emphasizing at the same time why this transformation was inevitable after we came under the occupation of modernity initiated by the West.

Once we examine the structure of pre-modern civilizations as a whole, while seeing Islamic civilization as a chief manifestation of it, we cannot fail to notice that what we possess today is in fact a modern world picture of Islam, that is, the picture of Islam as developed under the coercive influence of modernity, both consciously and unconsciously. I would mention two such influences which have contributed chiefly in

the making of modern Islam by modernity. The first one, paradoxically, is the so-called fundamentalist or what Aziz Esmail called 'totalist' definition of Islam,<sup>28</sup> so zealously propagated by the religious intelligentsia these days. The idea that modernity has generated the fundamentalist or totalist Islamic perspective, to the extent that it now seems to appear as the true Islamic picture, sounds as bizarre to modern ears as it would be offensive to those who adhere to this perspective. How could that which modernity has produced be hostile to modernity? But the mechanism underlying it is not hard to fathom.

We should remember that modernity did not come to us as a free choice; it was rather imposed upon us on the point of the gun with the great declaration that all pre-modern knowledge and tradition was obsolete and dead. Under occupation, then, with the threat of the loss of identity and which has not abated to this day due to continued Western domination, the vision of Islam turned inwards and changed into that of a closed, totalist society in which thought and behaviour of every member of society must be regulated and controlled through a rigid code which is being given the name of sharia. Seeing itself under siege, Islam seemed to reduce itself into a legal code of crime and punishment, in a set of habits of thought and practice frozen in time and space. This is made sensible if seen from the logic of resistance. When you are resisting domination, you hang on to that which identifies you most conspicuously, which defines your identity and binds you as a distinct community in minimum terms, whether it is beard, or headscarf, or shunning of music, zealous observance of the ritual and so forth. This phenomenon of what can be termed as self-reduction and turning to legalism and authoritarianism in the face of an external threat, whereby spiritual ethos of the community is surrendered for the sake of the demands of very existence, is not peculiar to the Islamic world. As Paul Tillich has shown, Christianity had to undergo this process more than once:

Both Protestantism and early Christianity can be called religions of the Spirit, free from oppressive laws and, consequently, often without law altogether. But when they had to defend themselves, early Christianity against the Roman Empire and its quasi-religious self-deification, early Protestantism against the absolutism of the Church of the Counter Reformation, and modern Protestantism against that of the quasi-religious Nazi-Fascism, both had to surrender much of their Spirituality and to accept non-Christian and non-Protestant elements of legalism and authoritarianism. Religions of the Spirit, in the encounter with centralized and legally organized religions are as fragile as the liberal humanist quasi-religions.... The real danger is not that they are overwhelmed by other less fragile forms of religion or quasi-religion,<sup>29</sup> but that in defending themselves they are led to violate their very nature and shape themselves into the image of those who attack them. In such a critical moment we are living today.<sup>30</sup>

'In such a critical moment we are living today,' could very well be the words of an Islamist today while defending his totalist vision of Islam facing the threat of modernity.

The other aspect of this defence mechanism, then, is to forego or expunge those principles, practices and attitudes that called for the unity and oneness of humankind on the one hand, and universal love and non-violence as the chief determinants of human relations, on the other. Iqbal, for instance, was convinced that in the age of resistance to the onslaught of modern West, Islam did not need Sufism with its ideal of selflessness and emphasis on such values as immateriality of land, race, religion and creed. And this

was in spite of the fact that he had learned all his early tools of thought and language from the Sufi heritage of Islam.<sup>31</sup>

The repercussions of this renunciation of our civilizational and spiritual achievements have been very unfortunate. For while the mainstream Islamic community has been largely weary of the totalist picture, it has not been able to shun what seems to me more all-pervasive and far reaching effect of modernity. This can be seen in world-worship and self-aggrandizement; in a quiet almost unconscious assimilation, on part of nearly every Muslim, of modernity's chief cultural value, that manifests in indisputable esteem and reverence for the world and worldly goods. The ideal of the free man, who is free from need, of whose embodiment was the saint, sounds an image reminiscent of some world of fantasy. In the pre-modern world even a king would have thought such unquestioned loyalty to this world as insane.

## End Notes

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\* An early version of this talk was given at a seminar on 'Islam and Modernity' at G. C. University, Lahore, Pakistan, on 11 April 2007 organized by the Department of Philosophy.

<sup>1</sup>G Holten, *Einstein, History, and Other Passions: The Rebellion Against Science at the End of the Twentieth Century* (NY: Perseus Books, 1996), p.114.

<sup>2</sup>C G Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), p. 263.

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<sup>3</sup>A. Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>E A Burt, *The Metaphysical Assumptions of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (London: Routledge, 1932), p.3.

<sup>6</sup>J Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p.05.

<sup>7</sup>Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, p. 01.

<sup>8</sup>D Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), p.25.

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<sup>9</sup>M Foucault, "What is Enlightenment" in M Drolet, (ed) *The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 46.

<sup>10</sup>Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup>*The Quran*: II:143.

<sup>12</sup>Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, p.37.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>J Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)* (MIT Press, 1985), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>H Foster, (ed.) *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup>Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity*, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Cited in W Heisenberg, *Encounters with Einstein, And Other Essays on People, Places, and Particles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 10; also see Einstein's letter to Popper in K. R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), pp. 458-9. Also see Popper's another work *Conjectures and Refutations* which is the most important contributions that highlight the role of theory in the determination of facts in particular and in the development of science in general.

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<sup>19</sup> TS Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.01.

<sup>21</sup>In this Kuhn was anticipated by Max Planck when, following the resistance that he faced from the scientific community over his discovery of the quanta, he observed: "A new scientific truth is not usually presented in a way that convinces its opponents...;

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rather they gradually die off, and a rising generation is familiarized with the truth from the start". Ibid., pp. 347-8.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Also see TS Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).

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<sup>25</sup>One must not fail to mention an important development in philosophy to this effect. This was initiated in 1912 by Cornford in which he challenged the reigning dogma of a radical break between Greek religion and philosophy in the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. Rather, he showed that there was "a real continuity between the earliest rational speculation and the religious representation that lay behind it". See for details, F M Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. xiii. Since this train of thought questions one of the founding assumptions of modernity, it has been largely ignored by contemporary philosophy.

<sup>26</sup>While Freud, who 'always made much of his irreligiosity', took pains to distance his work from religion, Jung attempted to show that this line of thought contradicted with the nature of the work that he himself had initiated through his discoveries into the nature of human psyche, especially that of the unconscious. The concept of the collective unconscious and the archetypes that Jung introduced demonstrated the continuity of human psyche and culture from the primitive times to the present day. For this and Jung's general critique of modernity see his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, and *Modern Man in Search of A Soul* (New York: Random House: Pantheon Books, 1973). For an excellent resume of his work and critique see his article (the last work of his life that he finished a few days before breathing his last), 'Approaching the Unconscious' in his CG Jung, M L von Franz, JL Henderson, et al. *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1973).

<sup>27</sup>S Alhaq, *A Forgotten Vision: A Study of Human Spirituality in the Light of the Islamic Tradition*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>28</sup>See Esmail F. Daftary, (ed.) *Intellectual Traditions in Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup>Following Tillich's line of thought, modernity would be termed as what he calls quasi-religion. He himself terms fascism, communism, liberal humanism and nationalism as quasi-religions, while asserting that 'the main characteristic of the present encounter of the world religions is their encounter with the quasi-religions of our time.' P. Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 5.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>31</sup>See Alhaq, *A Forgotten Vision*, vol. I., pp. 61ff.

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