

# Introduction to Islam and Islamic Tradition<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Introductory section is based on her chapter, “Muslim Women and Islamic Religious Tradition: A Historical Overview and Contemporary Issues,” in *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*, edited by Sajida S. Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough (Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press, 2003), 145-180.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Islam, one of the fastest growing world religions, remains a mysterious, exotic, and strange religion for the majority of Canadians. In the media, distinction is rarely made between political/radical Islam (religion used for political ends) and spiritual Islam. Muslims are frequently projected as a threat to the civil society and termed bigots and terrorists – the perception reaching new heights of frenzy and hysteria after the tragedy of 11 September 2001 in New York. Naturally, such perceptions are offensive and hurtful to the adherents of this universal religion. The label of terrorism is especially denigrating when Muslims are mindful of the Qur’anic depiction of them as a “justly balanced” and moderate community (Q. 2:143, 57)<sup>3</sup> “Ye are the best peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and .believing in one God” (Q. 3:110, 151).

Muslims believe that Islam raises the Abrahamic ideal of human freedom to its climax. It liberates the human spirit from all strangleholds and controls imposed by social and political powers. In order to give maximum liberty to humans, Allah does not make decisions for humanity. Instead, He provides broad parameters for both men and women and gives them guidelines and full freedom to make decisions for themselves and be solely accountable for their actions. They are endowed with immense faculties and are encouraged to develop their potentialities to the maximum through choice and by developing their character and righteousness.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Qur’an, Text, Translation and Commentary* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, n.d., 2:143, 57. All citations from the Qur’an are from this text with minor changes. (Please note the sequence of the numbers given in this citation: Q. stands for the Qur’an; #2 stands for the second chapter; #143 for the number of verse in this chapter; and # 57 is the page number of Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation, *The Holy Qur’an*) This format is used in all references to the Qur’an in all sections of this chapter.

## 2.0 Evolution Of The Muslim Community

The formation of Muslims as a group and their lunar calendar begins with the year 622 AD, when the Prophet Muhammad led his followers out of Mecca to establish a new form of community life in the city of Medina. The revelation of the Qur'an had proclaimed the setting-up of a new path for human beings — one that would help them relate to their Creator and final Judge (Allah). Allah is the only one with the power to reward or punish them for their deeds (Q. 90: 4-20, 1737-40; 53: 39-42, 1449; 76: 3-6, 1655-56). For anyone seeking to achieve an integrated personality, remembrance of Allah is important. It provides meaningfulness and purpose in life (Q. 59:18-20, 1526-27). The new community was open to all who would accept the one God as their Creator, and acknowledge Muhammad as the last of the Prophets.

The new community developed distinctive characteristics such as a non-hierarchical framework that sanctified an individual's right to equal treatment before the law, freedom of conscience, and the right to own property. Membership in the new community for both men and women was based on belief in one God, acceptance of the Prophet Muhammad as the final Prophet to humanity, and accountability for one's deeds to God alone, as is clearly stipulated in the Qur'an:

The Believers, men  
 And women are protectors,  
 One of another: they enjoin  
 What is just, and forbid  
 What is evil: they observe  
 Regular prayers, practice  
 Regular charity, and obey  
 God and His Apostle.  
 On them will God pour  
 His mercy: for God  
 Is exalted in power, Wise. (Q. 9: 71, 461).

The Qur'an gave dignity and respect to women. It is not only in the Qur'an but in the words and deeds of its transmitter — the most "beautiful role model" for Muslims — that woman is treated with affection and respect. In the collections of *hadith* there are striking statements attributed to him concerning women, wives, mothers and daughters. The chronicles of early Islamic history provide abundant material to construct a fairly detailed picture of the Prophet's interaction with women.<sup>4</sup>

A Muslim woman who was brought up knowing Qur'anic teachings understood that she was worthy of respect. The first Muslim women believers — those who accepted the new teachings brought by the Qur'an to transform the older tribal society — understood themselves to be independent individuals, liberated from the shackles of pre-Islamic customs and a degrading social status. With the knowledge that she was accountable for her deeds, the Muslim woman was given responsibility to consent to her marriage, and to initiate divorce if it seemed necessary. She was entitled to a share of her own in any inheritance forthcoming from her parents, and was ultimately responsible to God for what she did with her life. She was free to develop her intellectual, personal and economic potential. This newfound role made it possible for Muslim women to become more sure about their personal dignity and status than had been the case in the pre-Islamic period. Some of these rights have survived fourteen hundred years of the stormy and revolutionary twists and turns of political power, major disruptions in social order, and the impact of modernity in recent times. Others however have been lost at the altar of culture and tradition.

Muslims subsequently traveled to many parts of the globe, establishing several different forms of Islamic civilization in the process. They have generally been able to adapt to many diverse cultural contexts, and

<sup>4</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Translated by M.J. Lakeland. (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 49-140; Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1997), 26-68. For more bibliographic references, see "Select Bibliography".

have shown great flexibility in developing patterns of existence to relate their values to different situations. At the same time, however they have kept intact their firm belief in the reality of the one God, the significance of the Qur'an as a guide for humanity and the importance of the Prophet Muhammad as a moral exemplar. These were the most important factors providing constancy, continuity and unity within the Muslim universal community (*ummah*) through the centuries irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic and cultural orientation and geographical location.

The focal point of the message transmitted in the Qur'an, and the practical manifestation of that message in the Prophet's life, suggest a purpose to human creation in this world. As described in the Qur'an:

We have not created the heaven and the earth and whatever is between them in sport. If We wished to take a sport, We could have done it by Ourselves [not through Our creation]—if We were to do that at all. (Q. 21:16)<sup>5</sup>

Do you then think that We have created you purposelessly and that you will not be returned to Us?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> English translation is taken from Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Q. 23:115, Rahman, *ibid.*

### 3.0 Islamic Religious Tradition

Islam is an uncompromisingly monotheistic religion. Belief in the oneness of Allah, the proper name of God in Islam, is its cardinal principle. There is a living God, the originator of everything. For Muslims, every thing in the universe, including human beings, are signs of God. Muslims believe that “No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things” (Q. 6:103, 319-20). An erudite jurist and mystic of the twelfth century, Imam al-Ghazali (d. 1111), exclaimed that “Man’s soul is like a mirror in which any one who looks sees God.” Nonetheless, the yearning to feel, to know, and to see the “Face”<sup>7</sup> of the invisible and yet so visible Allah has found intense expression in philosophical discourses, mystical practices, literature in all genres, music and Islamic art and architecture.

The term Allah (the proper name of God in Arabic) is mentioned in the Qur’an well over 2500 times.<sup>8</sup> Among these descriptions of Allah is included the following:

Allah is the Light of heavens and the earth.  
 The parable of His Light is as if there was a Niche and within it a Lamp:  
 The Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star:  
 Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West,  
 Whose oil is well nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it:  
 Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light:  
 Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things. (Q. 24:35, 907-908)

#### 3.1 The Prophet

The transmitter of the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 569 or 570 as an orphan child, and after a remarkable career as a Prophet and statesman he passed away in 632. The Prophet’s sayings (*hadith*) and his tradition (*sunnah*) are the major sources of Islamic law after the Qur’an. Over the centuries, writers, poets, jurists and Sufis have sought to preserve the Prophet’s countenance by providing minute details and graphic descriptions of his habits, his preferences, his humility in particular, and his compassion and affection for his wives. After all, he is the “beautiful role model,” for Muslims.<sup>9</sup> The poetry written in the veneration of the Prophet in all dialects and languages of the Muslim peoples over a span of over fourteen hundred years transcends the barriers of time, space, race, color, and language.<sup>10</sup>

In expressing their devotion to the Prophet, the faithful attributed superhuman feats and qualities to him that he never claimed for himself. He was and wished to remain no more than the servant of God to whom the revelation came. In the Qur’an, there is a categorical statement to this effect:

Say thou: “I am but a man like you: It is revealed to me by inspiration, that your God is One God: So stand true to Him, and ask for His forgiveness.” And woe to those who join gods with God. (Q.41:6, 1288).

<sup>7</sup> “Send not away those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face.” (Q. 6:52, 302. For further discussion, see Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 107-122; and Andrew Rippin, “Desiring the Face of God: The Qur’anic Symbolism of Personal Responsibility.” Issa Boullata, ed. *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 117-124.

<sup>8</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> “Ye have indeed in the Apostle of God a beautiful pattern (of conduct).” (Q. 33:21, 1109).

<sup>10</sup> For details, see Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1987).

The Prophet Muhammad claimed not that he founded a new religion but that he had brought the fullness of messages by earlier prophets such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus.<sup>11</sup> There are also clear instructions for Muslims not to dispute with the People of the Book:

And dispute ye not  
 With the People of the Book,  
 Except with means better  
 (Than mere disputation), unless  
 It be with those of them  
 Who inflict wrong (and Injury):  
 But say, "We believe  
 In the revelation which has  
 Come down to us and in that  
 Which came down to you;  
 Our God and your God  
 Is One; and it is to Him  
 We bow (in Islam). (Q. 29:46, 1041-42)

Yet another example of the Qur'anic position on earlier religious traditions:

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful.  
 Say: "We believe  
 In God, and in what  
 Has been revealed to us  
 And what was revealed  
 To Abraham, Isma'il,  
 Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes,  
 And (in the Books)  
 Given to Moses, Jesus,  
 And the Prophets,  
 From their Lord:  
 We make no distinction  
 Between one and another  
 Among them, and to God do we  
 Bow our will (in Islam)." (Q. 3: 84, 145).

### 3.2 The Qur'an

The Qur'an, the revealed scripture to the Prophet Muhammad the "words of God," as Muslims believe, is also called the "Mother of Books." It unravels the mysteries of nature. It contains graphic description of heaven and hell among other things but not the physical characterization of God or metaphors for the Person of God. The imagery illuminates God's infinite majesty and power but does not exhaust His infinite signs.

The Qur'an has inspired and guided this diverse and global community through all times and in all places. It focuses on the guidance of the humankind and is valid for all times, according to the Muslim belief. It is the primary source of Islamic law, not a legal code in itself. Its main objective, rightly pointed out by the acclaimed poet-philosopher of the twentieth century and the spiritual founder of Pakistan, Muhammad

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<sup>11</sup> For details of the Christian–Muslim relations from classical to pre-modern period, see an excellent recent publication, Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York: Allen Lane, 2003).



Iqbal (d. 1938), is “to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his relation with God and the universe” (Iqbal 1989, 131).

The Muslims copied the Qur’anic text and perfected a variety of calligraphic styles to present the divine words. Islamic calligraphy developed into one of the most beautiful artistic forms representing the might, power and beauty of God as well as Muslims’ soul as it was transmuted by this divine and sacred text. It evolved into the most sublime non-religious “art of the book,” synthesizing highly stylized calligraphy with miniature painting and beautiful illustrated borders in the same folio. It reached its epitome during pre-modern highly cultured and powerful Muslim empires such as those of the Ottomans in Turkey and the Middle East, the Safavids in Iran and the Mughals in India.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.3 Islamic Law

The *shari’ah* – meaning the path leading to water (interpreted as ocean of Truth) – is the term used for Islamic law. Muslims worked out early on a method of deciding how to implement their values. While the Prophet Muhammad was alive, he served as head of the community, and also as the final authority on the more controversial issues brought to him. He was therefore the primary interpreter of what the Qur’an really meant in the actual context of situations faced by believers in his day. After his death, the community chose various individuals to serve as caliphs (*khalifahs*, or successors of the Prophet only in his role as leader of the community). Each subsequent caliph was the political head of the community, but did not exercise any exclusive authority to interpret the meaning of the Qur’an. In the first instance, those who had been members of the first generation of believers made such decisions. After two hundred years, i.e., in about the middle of the ninth century, there began to be demands for more authoritative guidance to the community. The collections of sayings of the Prophet (*hadith*), which had been preserved by oral tradition, were at last written down and collected. Once this was done, several devout believers worked out a logical system of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This system became the framework within which the various schools of Islamic law developed. Muslim jurists played a dynamic role of mediators between social structures and political structures in the medieval period.

The *shari’ah*, according to Muslim belief, provides a comprehensive system for maintaining a balance in their spiritual and temporal life. The five essential practices of Islam (belief in the unity of God and the prophet-hood of Muhammad, praying five times day, fasting in Ramadan, paying religious tax (*zakat*) to ensure fair distribution of wealth, and making pilgrimage (*hajj*) once in one’s lifetime, if circumstances permit) focusing on human-God relations are immutable for all times all places and binding on all Muslims. Conversely, the inter-human relations (*mu’amalat*) are based on reason and subject to change and evolve according the dictates of locale and time. This dimension of the code of religious law has been elaborated through the intellectual processes outlined in the principles of jurisprudence.

In the Middle Ages, there emerged four major legal schools of *shari’ah law* acknowledged by Sunni Muslims, as well as separate schools of Shi’i (a major sect of Islam) religious law. (For distinctive features of the Shi’is, see below “Sects of Islam”, in “Doctrines and Beliefs of the Majority” by Mumtaz H. Rehman.) There is diversity in matters of detail among these various schools, but the underlying perspectives are similar. Medieval Muslim states also availed themselves of customary law (*’adah*) in addition to the *shari’ah* in the formulation of their ruling institutions.

We conclude this section with the definition of the essence of *shari’ah* by the fourteenth-century jurist, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 1350):

The *Shari’ah* is God’s justice among His servants, and His mercy among His creatures. It is God’s shadow on earth. It is His wisdom which leads to Him in the most exact way and the most exact affirmation of the truthfulness of His Prophet. It is His light which enlightens the seekers and His guidance for the rightly guided. It is the absolute cure for

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<sup>12</sup> For specimens of calligraphy and miniature paintings, see *The Emperors’ Album: Images of Mughal India*, compiled by Stuart C. Welch, Annemarie Schimmel, Marie L. Swietochowski, and Wheeler M. Thackston (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987).

all ills and the straight path which if followed will lead to righteousness.... It is life and nutrition, the medicine, the light, the cure and the safeguard.... If God would wish to destroy the world and dissolve the existence, He would void whatever remains of its injunctions. For the *Shari'ah* which was sent to the Prophet ... is the pillar of existence and the key to success in this world and the Hereafter.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.4 Sufism and Islamic Law

Another equally important intellectual and religious tradition, complementing the *shari'ah* is mystical thought, known as *haqiqah* (Reality), or perception of Reality (*ma'rifah*), commonly called mysticism (*tasuwwuf*). It represents the spiritual face of Islam. From early on, Sufi brotherhoods, known as Sufi orders (*tariqahs*), emerged in various Muslims lands. Many Sufi orders were formed and they played a crucial role in the expansion of Islam through conversions in countries like India and Indonesia. *Shari'ah* and *tariqah* are supposed to be two integrated elements of one reality but in modern period, they are often identified as two parallel traditions.

Sufism is a form of free thought and is based on rationalism. It emphasizes integration of external behavior (*zahir*) and inner thoughts (*batin*) of an individual. And it has created an attitude of indifference and despise to all that applies to appearance and not to reality.<sup>14</sup>

*Shari'ah* and *haqiqah* are supposed to be two integrated elements of one reality but in the modern period, they are often identified as two parallel traditions. The Sufis believe that realization of the purpose of life and the integration of character is not possible without spiritualism. The spiritual aspects of life can be revealed and felt by sensual images and Divine love. Even ritual duties can be interpreted beyond their external importance. Prayer, for example, is a loss of one's self for a short time in communion with the overpowering and most compassionate Allah; fasting teaches one to live on less, to sacrifice, to care for others, and to praise Allah as do angels; and pilgrimage is a perpetual journey of the soul towards its fountainhead. Those who dutifully fulfill the prescribed rituals without looking for their deeper meaning feel that by doing so they have obeyed Allah, and have thus prepared themselves for the way that leads to happiness in this world and the hereafter.

All major Sufi orders (*tariqahs*) base their spiritual ascendancy on the solid foundation of *shari'ah*. None of its cardinal principles are compromised in the name of spiritual sublimity. As an example of a Sufi-*'alim's* views on the subject, cited below are Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's statements on *shari'ah*, the form and essence of *shari'ah*, and the purpose of prayer. *Sirhindi* (d. 1624) is chosen because of his special position in the history of Sufism in India, where Muslims were and still are a minority. He reformed the Naqhbandi Sufi order (of Central Asian origin) known as the Naqhbandi Mujaddidi order, of which he is regarded as its founder. His contemporaries honoured him with the title of Mujaddid Alf Thani (Renewer of the Second Islamic Millennium). The Mujaddidi branch became popular in India and Central Asia during the life of Sirhindi, and in the Arab lands later on.

#### (i) *Shari'ah* and *tariqah*:

Sufi *tariqah* and *haqiqah* are subservient to the *Shari'ah*: they are meant to produce sincerity (*ikhlas*) which is one of the three parts of the *Shari'ah*, the other two being faith (*iman*) and action (*'aml*)... unless you fulfill the demands all these parts you do not obey *the shari'ah*....The *tariqah* and the *haqiqah* for which the Sufis are known, are subservient to the *Shari'ah*, as they help to realize its third part, namely sincerity.... The raptures and ecstasies which the Sufis experience ... are not the goals of Sufism. They are rather myths and fancies on which the children of

<sup>13</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in* (Cairo), 3:5, taken from Khaled Abou El Fadl. *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Edited by M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), 119, (paraphrased).

Sufism are fed.... The purpose of traversing the stages of *tariqah* (path) and *haqiqah* is nothing other than the realization of *ikhlas* which involves the attainment of *rida* (satisfaction).<sup>15</sup>

(ii) The application of shari'ah in one's personal life:

Let it be known that Shari'ah is both form and a reality, the form is the outer Shari'ah, and the reality is the inner Shari'ah. Therefore the shell and the kernel are both parts of Shari'ah, the truths which are clearly defined (*muhkam*) and those which are put in symbolic language (*mutshabih*) are equally its parts. The scholars of the outer Shari'ah ('*ulama' zahir*) attend to the shell; and the scholars who are well established ('*ulama' rasikhin*) attend to the shell as well as kernel – they are grounded in the form as well as the essence. The Shari'ah should be considered as a person made up of a form and reality. Some people mind only the form and deny the reality, they follow none other than *Hidayah* and *Bazdawi*. They are the scholars of shell.<sup>16</sup>

(iii) The purpose of worship:

"The service and [worship] (*'ibadat*) which the Shari'ah of the Prophet speaks of (as the purpose of man's creation) is for the good of man and for the fulfillment of his life. It is not at all for the good of God.... God does not need our obedience, yet He has bestowed on us a Code of Law which we absolutely need."<sup>17</sup>

(For details, please see sources on Sufism cited in the Bibliography). Today, Sufism is a popular and living tradition across the globe including Europe and North America. In our religious sites in Montreal, we have included a Sufi Centre (Centre Soufi Naqshbandi – Masjid Al-Iman).

### 3.5 Qur'an, Islamic Law and the Interpreters

In view of the current controversies on the interpretation of the Qur'anic text and Islamic laws on issues such as gender equity, human and minorities' rights, a brief discussion is added here. Like the adherents of other faiths and their interpretation and translations of their sacred scriptures, Muslims translated Qur'an in all major languages and interpreted the text over the centuries to be compatible to the exigencies of their respective times.

In search of a typology for Islamic ideology, our contemporary social scientists and humanists have coined various terms and labels such as "secularism", "Islamic modernism", "fundamentalism" "radical Islamism", "Islamic totalism", "traditionalism", "neo-traditionalism," and more currently the term "Islamism."<sup>18</sup> The reformers (sometimes called modernists), sensing the need to change how basic

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), 221-222. For the original text, see Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani*, Urdu translation by Qazi 'Alim al-Din. Lahore, Maktabah Madaniyah, n.d., 1:36, 91-92.

<sup>16</sup> Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah*, 226. For the original text, see Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani*, Urdu translation by Qazi 'Alim al-Din. Lahore, Maktabah-i Madaniyah, n.d. 1:276, 571-575. The *al-Hidayah* of Burhan al-Din 'Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Marghinani (d. 1196), and the *Bazdawi* of Fakhr al-Islam al-Bazdawi (d. 1089) are two popular works of the Hanafi school of law on jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence, respectively. For details, see Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah*, 226, note 56.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 230. For the original text, see Sirhindi, *Maktubat*, 1:73, 159. On the subject of renewal and reform in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, see Sajida Alvi, "The *Mujaddid* and *Tajdid* Traditions in the Indian Subcontinent: An Historical Overview." *Journal of Turkish Studies*- Schimmel Festschrift, 18 (1994): 1-15.

<sup>18</sup> William E. Shepard defined and applied some of these terms on the constitutions and governments of some Muslim countries as well as on Islamic thinkers, in "Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 307-336. Robert D. Lee analyzes the thought of Muhammad Iqbal, Sayyid Qutb, 'Ali Shari'ati and Mohammed Arkoun through the categories of his theory of authenticity that includes 'particularity, radicalism, autonomy, unicity, group action, institutionalization, etc. *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997).

Muslim values were being interpreted in their countries, argued that the role of traditional scholarship was becoming problematic. However, the influence they enjoyed during the colonial period has been on the decline since the 1970s. The traditional '*ulama*' on the other hand have gained power and control over the disenfranchised masses suffering from the failed economic and social policies of their respective governments. For more than two decades, modernists and traditionalists have lived in two solitudes.

It must be recognized, however, that new strategies are constantly being developed to regain the ground that modernists/liberals have lost to the traditionalists. These reformist Muslim thinkers, philosophers, and jurists aim to revise Muslim jurisprudence and legal systems to make them compatible with the exigencies of today's global realities, especially in the areas of human rights, Islamic values and Muslim family law. (An-Na'im 1990)<sup>19</sup>

There are, however, some serious attempts to introduce Islam to the general public in a simple and straight forward manner and a movement of "Progressive Muslims" was born in the US with its global network.

It is noteworthy that interest in the area of Qur'anic studies is growing rapidly. Solid studies on the themes, style, literary structure and interpretation of the Qur'anic text have recently been published.<sup>20</sup> A comprehensive encyclopedia of the Qur'an is, furthermore, in progress. Among the scholars of Islam who have suggested interesting approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an and whose works are available in the West, one can cite Fazlur Rahman (of Pakistan, d. 1988) and Asghar Ali Engineer (of India; though not a scholar of the Qur'an, he has studied it in the context of Muslim women's issues).

Rahman sees the Qur'an as "a divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia."<sup>21</sup> Some of the Qur'an's moral, religious and social injunctions are general laws while others are responses to specific situations arising from a concrete historical context. Therefore, Fazlur Rahman goes on to suggest that Qur'anic content should be studied as a whole and that its interpretation be undertaken in two steps: the first is to identify specific principles and values, and then move to general and long-range objectives and systemize them, while the second and more important step is to apply them – keeping in mind the present socio-historical context. This approach thus requires a careful analysis of current exigencies, a clear determination of priorities, and a fresh implementation of Qur'anic values. The goal of making Qur'anic imperatives alive and relevant for the present can only be achieved by the teamwork of a historian, a social scientist and an ethicist.<sup>22</sup>

Asghar Ali Engineer, like Fazlur Rahman, holds the view that the overwhelming emphasis of the Qur'an is on monotheism and social justice, particularly the rights and welfare of the indigent and weaker members of society – orphans, women and slaves. Engineer uses the terms "normative" and "contextual" in his interpretation of the Qur'anic text. By "normative" he means fundamental and universal principles applicable in all situations and times while "contextual" principles are specific and limited to a given situation that arose during the Prophet's time.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In addition to his *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, Abdullahi an-Na'im has written numerous scholarly articles and edited three collections of essays. The recurring themes in his writings are human rights, civil liberties and Islamic law.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999). It is published in the series, entitled London Qur'an Studies, sponsored by the Center of Islamic Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Issa J. Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000); and Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of and Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd., 1992), 6-17,42.

The major task facing the liberal thinkers is how to make their new interpretations and approaches known to the students studying in *madrassahs* and masses living in Muslim countries. At this time Abu'l A'la-Mawdu'di (1903-1979) is recognized as one of the most influential Islamic ideologues. His Qur'anic exegesis, *Tafhi'm al-Qur'an* (6 volumes), written in Urdu, translated in various Islamic languages, is the most widely read exegesis. Traditional in orientation, it has significantly influenced Muslim activists in many countries engaged in promoting the teachings of Islam globally.

### 3.6 Epilogue: Canadian Muslims and Challenges of Their Adaptation and Integration

There are numerous challenges that Muslim immigrants face in a largely secular Canadian society. Many have had little or no experience of living in a western culture. Muslim men and women have to deal with the issues of adaptation, integration or assimilation in the host culture, and they are terrified by the fear of losing their religious and cultural identity. The relatively young and diverse Canadian Muslim communities are faced with another set of challenges related to interpreting the foundational sources of Islamic law to help shape their lives in their adopted home of Canada as minority.

Approximately 650,000 in number, Muslims are just about two percent of the Canadian population. They are still in search of their place in the Canadian society, and the development of their educational, community-welfare and cultural and social institutions has just begun.

In the mid-nineties, Dr. Gulzar Haider, a highly respected professor of architecture at Carleton University in Ottawa, and of Pakistani origin, thus expressed his optimism about the future of Muslims in the West:

Muslims living in the non-Islamic West face an unparalleled opportunity. Theirs is a promising exile: a freedom of thought, action, and inquiry unknown in the contemporary Muslim world. They are challenged by a milieu that takes pride in oppositional provocations. Those who break free of the inertial ties of national and ethnic personas will be the ones who will forge an Islamicity hitherto unexperienced. They have the freedom to question the canons of traditional expression. Their very exile, understood as a separation from the center, will make expressions of Islam more profound, whether in literature, music, art or literature.<sup>24</sup>

In 2005, the situation is quite different from what Professor Haider envisioned. The catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, in the U.S, and terrorist acts repeated in London, UK, on July 7 and 21, 2005 by the second or third generation British-born Muslim youth-turned suicide bombers, have created a sense of insecurity in the Muslim minorities living in Europe and North America. The factors contributing to this kind of violence are complex. However, Muslim communities living in Canada feel that these events might affect adversely the attitude of the majority non-Muslim Canadians about the Muslim minorities living amidst them.

Among the religious leadership in the mosques across Canada, it is hard to find scholars of Islamic civilization, theologians, and jurists trained in research, writing and publishing with sensitivity to Western civilization and culture. Such leadership in the mosques is needed badly at this time. It will greatly help the first generation and a segment of second generation of Muslim communities in Canada who are disenchanting and still struggling to resolve their dilemma of identity.

Having said that, it may be added that Muslims need not develop a siege mentality as a religious minority. It is heartening to see a substantial number of second generation young Canadian Muslims becoming part of the mainstream of Canadians and applying analytical and critical thinking in a systematic study of Islam in academic setting. They are passionate about mastering Islamic languages to help them understand their own cultural heritage as well as to have access to primary sources of Islamic law,

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<sup>24</sup> Gulzar Haider, "Muslim Space and the Practice of Architecture: A Personal Odyssey" in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 42-43.

jurisprudence, and unravel their magnificent Islamic heritage through understanding Islamic history and its multifaceted civilization.

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