



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DR. FAZLUR REHMAN MALIK'S ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

In the modern political history of Islam the term Political Thought has acquired an important position that can be observed in the political ideas of Muslim fundamentalists, modernists and traditionalist. They use this term for enhancing and promoting their own political thought. Fazlur Rehman Malik also amplified this terminology to represent his point of view on Political Thought of an ideal Islamic state. An influential Muslim philosopher of the second half of 20th century, Fazlur Rehman Malik (1911–1988), was the only figure that contributed tremendously on the debate of understanding political thought in front of modern world in Islamic perspective. This article will examine the work done on political thought by him in most conveying way.

Keywords: Islam, justice, education, governance, modernity and Fazlur Rehman.

1. Introduction

The framework of Islam is based on Quran and Sunnah/Hadith. The Quran is indeed a collection of principles for credible Muslims faith, thoughts and actions as well as authorizing presence for the great moral struggle that elaborates religious affections. Undoubtedly, every religion has its some fundamental thoughts which act as a foundation for its existence. As regard to Islam, it also has its moral Thought which is used as a tool for understanding and interpreting as well as dealing with new situations and developing responses and policies. Muslim scholars have always been in serious concern to tackle out new challenges and for centuries they have behaved positively to their fullest capability in their respective time. In the present time the dynamic world which is moving in fast mode have to face new challenges with every second of time. The vast world is transformed in global village due to advanced means of communication and modern information but History is witness of the fact that in time of confusion and conflict, scholars were provoked to turn to Quran for guidance and succeeded by overcoming the possible problem.

The political thought of a religion acts as a fundamental stone for the state formation. The definition “Political thought” intend to answer the basic questions related to government as integrity, rules and to solve problems related with administration”. In the recent past, specifically after 18th Century, Muslims polity was threatened from west which affected the entire civilization. In the time of hurdles, the spectrum of Muslim responded by raising rejection, conservatism through modernization and synthesized culture manifested in political thoughts. Dr. Fazlur Rehman Malik (1919-1988) is one of the reformers of 20th century who performed vital role in the field of political thought. He focused on the issues that were faced by Muslims of sub-continent in modern times and made an effort to formulate an appropriate guidance from principles led by Primary sources. Moreover, in 20th century, Islam was also observed as the religion that had competency to interconnect logically with science, human rights and modernism and most important monarchy principles.

II. Literature Review

The word *politics* is derived from Greek word “politika” that means affairs related to cities¹. It is a collection of actions which helps in grouping of decisions or relating power with individuals². Leftwich further explains that studies relating to political issues of government are placed in political science i.e. a special branch of social science that is known as science of government³. Political thought is meant to answer the basic questions related to government as integrity, rules and to solve problems related with administration. Strauss and Leo have

¹ Adrian (2015). What is politics? : The activity and its study. Books, 2011.p.81

² Leftwich (2015), what is politics? : The activity and its study. Books, 2011.p.81

³ ibid

described political thought philosophically and concluded that it is the study of communication among people and authority of their fundamental rights, rules, justice and implementation of law. Besides, he explains the role of government towards its subjects by preserving their rights and certainty of their lives protection as well as monitoring over the government's performance (1959)⁴. The political system of modern age is a framework that is beyond to all types of uncertain boundaries which prefers proper political methods for the betterment of a society.

The background of political thought is deeply rooted to seminal work of Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Politics in the Greece.⁵ As approximately in 600 BCE, philosophers of ancient Rome and Greece started to sort out answers about organization of societies according to their ethics and life style.⁶ The term political Islam is explained as the philosophy that provides the road map for the construction of a state constitutionally, economically and judicially in accordance to Islamic principles and directly relates to sovereignty and human rights.⁷

III. Political Thought of Dr. Fazlur Rehman Malik

Dr. Fazlur Rehman Malik (1919-1988) has been a modernist scholar and philosopher of 20th century from today's Pakistan who has great impact on Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and other countries from the Islamic world along with Chicago, USA from the Western world. He is famous as a liberal reformer of Islam who not only devoted himself for educational reforms but also made revival of independent reasoning⁸. Rehman (1919-1988) was the important Muslim scholar who revived the Islamic thought and made a difference between "normative Islam" and "historical Islam" by rejecting the re-interpreting method of his fellows⁹. He gave the concept of a religious and fair community in which needy and unsafe would be safe and every person had freedom for self-grooming without any restriction. Also, he forced Muslims to reform the real Islam for the benefit of all members of a society¹⁰.

In the following lines the work of Dr. Fazlur Rehman Malik on Political Thought is going to be discussed in detail: Rehman proclaims that the main objective of Islamic education is to civilize the Muslim and to be coherent to God in order to reconstruct the nature of prophecy. In his book Islam, he describes that for factual study of Quran, limitation is needed and also this study enforces Tawheed and social justice with everlasting moral law. It is known as Islam where people do not try to change or omit the Moral laws but submit their will to Allah.¹¹

⁴ Strauss, Leo (1959). An introduction to Political Philosophy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p. 10

⁵ Kabashima and White (1986) *Kabashima, Ikuo; White III, Lynn T., eds. (1986). Political System and Change: A World Politics Reader. Princeton University Press.*

⁶ Kelly, P. J. (Paul Joseph) (2013). The politics book. DK. p. 18.

⁷ Megoran, Nick (2009). "Theocracy". International encyclopedia of human geography. N. J. Thrift, Rob Kitchin. Amsterdam.

⁸ Sonn, Tamara. (1995). "Rehman, Fazlur". In John L. Esposito. The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ Earle H. Waugh, 'The Legacies of Fazlur Rehman for Islam in America,' The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences 16, no. 3 (1999): 27-44.

¹⁰ Frederick M. Denny, 'Fazlur Rehman: Muslim Intellectual,' The Muslim World 79, no. 2 (1989): 91- 101.

¹¹ Islam, Fazlur Rehman. (1979). University of Chicago Press.,p. 34.

In his article Islam and Modernity, Rehman mentions that the main objective of Islamic education is to impart the traditional values by moral teaching and also to spotlight the development of psychological observation demanding educational system to be modern¹².

For Rehman, the purpose of education is to teach the human beings in a positive way so that they can impose for justice, peace and hierarchy in world which will, eventually, develop a sense of utilizing natural resources for good cause of humanity. He also highlights the moral values by characterizing the responsibility of educationist to prepare moral ground for students mind by introducing Islamic ideology. In this perspective, avoiding people from the egoistic approach is the fundamental objective of education system.

Additionally, Rehman provokes Muslims to understand the value of science in contemporary circumstances where development in every walk of life has become inevitable. In spite of that, the focal point of education must be the enhancement of moral values and ethical characterization of pupils who understands the value of science under the ideology of Islamic philosophy.

Fazlur Rehman's political thought has also comprised the term Shura. He proclaims his view that for developing and survival of a state, term Islamic Republic should be applied in true sense and revivalist should confidently argued while talking about progressive Islam, otherwise, the extremes of revivalism and communism will be faint¹³.

While discussing the objectives of an ideal Islamic community, Rehman says that mutual cooperation, self-sacrifice and brotherhood is the milestone of a society that can only be attained if the people are bestowed with socio-economic justice and are free from spiritually, economically and socially exertions. He also suggests that Islamic state should establish some defensive and social welfare developments to assist the higher authority by the cooperation of citizens.¹⁴

Fazlur Rehman makes an opinion that Muslim should follow those principles that are elucidated and illustrated in the Quran and Sunnah of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). For Muslim people are self-modified and law-maker and the institution through which these laws are derived is known as "Shura". In addition, for the sake of rights of people, a democratic land need to be built by Shura that will ensure the mutual understanding necessary for the working of democratic Islamic state. Among the positive aspects, discussion and consultation of people on social issues in a productive way is a chief merit of Muslim Shura where they do not create exploitation with one another as is observed in the modern Western societies¹⁵.

In "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu", Rehman suggests the ways through which the selection of head would be done. He says that election should be held directly or indirectly according to the situation. For this, he gave reason that the educated class will use the 'dumb masses' for their personal interests, so, in this situation the direct method for the participation of people is voting¹⁶.

In the "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan", Rehman proposed the criteria for the concept of an ideal Islamic country. He enforces the equivalency of human beings and explains through the Quran that God is one and there is no division among the humans. He further says that Islam could be defined as the movement of social reform whose main objective is the comfort and prosperity of ordinary man.

¹² Islam and Modernity, 1982, p. 62. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637 The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London @ 1982

¹³ Rehman, "Muslim Modernism in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent. Bulletin: School of Oriental and African Studies, vol. XXI. Part:1 (1958): 82-99.

¹⁴ Fazlur Rehman "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu," Islamic Studies 6, no. 3 (1967): 207-8; Italics are ours

¹⁵ Fazlur Rehman "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu," Islamic Studies 6, no. 3 (1967): 209; Italics are ours

¹⁶ Fazlur Rehman "Implementation of the Islamic Concept of State in the Pakistani Milieu," Islamic Studies 6, no. 3 (1967): 205-224; Italics are ours

Rehman suggests the removal of manipulation as the third criteria of Islamic state for the all mankind and this eradication will be processed not only in economically, politically and socially emphasized fields but also be benefitted on moral and spiritual grounds.¹⁷

Fazlur Rehman made an effort to introduce the nation with theory of justice in Islam and his work shows that how he interprets theory of justice. While in his article “Islam and the Problem of Economic Justice,” he argues that in Quran, social justice and Tawheed are related to each other and act as two sides of same coin. Actually, Rehman is impressed by the Aristotle’s concept that states, “God is needed not for what He is but, perhaps, for what He does”.¹⁸

Rehman says that justice is done when a person studies positive sciences of universe and assembles true knowledge of it. Moreover, he criticizes on the modern Muslim behavior towards knowledge and its importance, because their injustice and non-serious attitude to the positive and logical science is the reason of exclusion of science from madrasa system as being non-sharia.¹⁹

In the book ‘Islam and modernity’, Rehman analogies the intellectual modern leaders as a doctor who does not understand the actual illness of patient and only cures the external illness that is developing the new generation into animals.²⁰

On the doctrines and minds of ordinary Muslims, Islamic traditions have great influence that is another important political thought of Rehman. At this time, the image of Islam is of great importance because in modern contemporary world, Western observers are focusing on Islamic conventional. Rehman makes a request to Muslims to overview their Islamic practices at the first priority because the problems, facing now a days by Muslims are mainly due to the new inventions in Islam ignoring the actual and exact perception of Islam. Therefore, he molded the minds of people towards the concept that the perception of our forefathers was true and unchanged. Moreover, Rehman says that Quranic understanding could not be developed when there is no conception of tradition because those are the sources of knowledge about biography of prophet, companions of prophet and the commentators of Quran and historians who have effort to preserve the historical background for upcoming followers of Islam.²¹

Rehman is impressed by the ethics and laws of Quran which are actually its essence and also form a strong chemistry between belief and constitution. In reality, Quran tends to interpret the ethical into juridical or semi juridical commands that is not satisfied with the ordinary social suggestion but eager to convey in actual meanings. Rehman further pointed out that Quran always elucidates the aims or laws that are real essence of its laws.

Rehman further pointed out the failure of Muslims in clarifying the morals and principles that has created confusion between the assumptions and suggestions of Quran. Both the ethics and legislation have become controversial because Islamic law is collection of lawful material that is formed by long discussion of endless century and serves as a milestone for modern Islamic system.²²

¹⁷ Fazlur Rehman, “Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan,” *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1967): 105.

¹⁸ Rehman, “Islam and Problem of Economic Justice,” *Pakistan Economist* XIV, no. 34 (1974).

¹⁹ Rehman, “Islam and Problem of Economic Justice,” *Pakistan Economist* XIV, no. 34 (1974).

²⁰ Rehman, Fazlur (1982) pg.15 .Islam and Modernity; Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition. Chichago and London: University Press

²¹ Rehman, Fazlur. (1982) p. 143. Islam and Modernity; Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition. Chicago and London: University Press

²² Rehman, Fazlur. (1982) pg. 154-155. Islam and Modernity; Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition. Chicago and London: University Press

The fundamental scheme of Rehman's political ideology is Revival and Reform that serve as the cover page of contemplating Islam. He pointed out that the customary and conservative education by "Ulema" was the most neglected reform in Islam because only this dogmatic class used to resist the intellectuality and modernity in customs. In Fazlur Rehman and contemporary philosopher's opinion, the Muslim societies were lagging from modern world politically, economically and scientifically due to the resistance by such conservative scholars who neither played their role socially nor supported the new modern scholars.

He believed that Islamic legacy are the fundamental part of the system that could be revived and updated when modern educated scholarship will help to nurture them in the Muslim world.

3. The Thinker Evolved

Having briefly surveyed different views and responses with respect to Fazlur Rehman's thought and viewpoint, let us now turn this articles that give an overview of Fazlur Rehman's political thought. A study of this article is important because it elaborates the vast thinking of Fazlur Rehman's ideology towards political system.

Rehman criticizes the defensive educational policies that made human mind inactive for modern revolutions uprising in west. In other words, he provokes Muslims to understand the worth of scientific development along with moral and ethical values of Islamic philosophy. Muhaimin (1999) in his research "Fazlur Rehman's Controversy Thought: The Critical Study of Renewal of Islamic Education" elaborated the thought of Rehman that education system should be psychologically burden free and based on Islamic teachings of Quran. Muslims should positively response towards science for better understanding of Quranic verses.²³

Then, Rehman foregrounds the responsibilities of government and citizens in a state. As far as government is concerned, it should provide the fundamental amenities of life to its public and make them comfortable by making easy and practical policies. When it comes to duties of populace, he instructs them to behave positively and cooperate with Government and all its related members. Islamic Shura is an institute that welcomes the criticism and expression of one's conviction but it does not allow the people to enter unconstitutionally in the government to systemize it and to develop a sense of disappointment in its people.²⁴ In Rehman's point of view, all the administrative control should be empowered to the head of society that could be the chief executive.

For an ideal Islamic State, Rehman emphasizes on the equivalency of human beings and explains through the Quran that God is one and there is no division among the humans. He also preferred the social justice that occupies the central position in Islam by creating a link with kutba Hujja tul-wida, the last sermon of Prophet (PBUH). He says that Islam could be defined as the movement of social reform whose main objective is the comfort and prosperity of ordinary man.²⁵

Rehman is disappointed by the performance of Ulema. He believed that Islamic legacy are the fundamental part of the system that could be revived and updated when modern educated scholarship will help them to reappear in the Muslim world. According to Acikgenc (1990), the roots of Revival and Islam are extended to the ancient time of Islam and firmly related to all that events which have been took place in time of Prophet (SAW). He praised Fazlur Rehman for spending a huge part of life in studying this Revival and Islam. Thus, he deserves the title of 'thinker of revival and reform'.²⁶ Moreover, Rehman says that justice is done when a person studies positive

²³ Muhaimin. (1999). *Kontroversi Pemikiran Fazlur Rahman: Studi Kritis Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam*. Cirebon: Pustaka Dinamika.

²⁴ Fazlur Rehman, "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1967): 210.

²⁵ Fazlur Rehman, "Some Reflections on the Reconstruction of Muslim Society in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1967): 105.

²⁶ Alparslan Acikgenc, "The Thinker of Islamic Revival and Reform: Fazlur Rahman's Life and Thought (1919-1988)," in *The Journal of Islamic Research*, Vol 4, No 4 (1990): 232-48.

sciences of universe and assembles true knowledge of it. Moreover, he criticizes on the modern Muslim behavior towards knowledge and its importance, because their injustice and non-serious attitude to the positive and logical science is the reason of exclusion of science from madrasa system as being non-sharia²⁷

Rehman has paid much attention to the *Socio-economic Justice*. In Rehman's words: "However, without establishment of socio-economic justice, it is inconceivable that individuals of a society as a whole can develop". By applying methodology of Rehman, it is clear from Quranic verses that Islam prefers the circulation of wealth among all individuals of society (59:7).

4. Conclusion

To recapitulate the whole discussion, it can be said that the legend is marvelous in his contribution to humanity. In order to avoid the ambiguity and absurdity, some important points are concluded:

The main characteristic of Fazlur Rehman's Islamic thought is his Double movement theory which clearly sheds light on the true motive of Jihad that is not destined to spread anarchy and differences in society, rather, it aims at the reinforcement of brotherhood, sincerity, respect, tolerance and love among its members. Moreover, one must identify the need of Jihad in connection with the development of Science and Information Technology in the contemporary era where success and refurbishment of any state is impossible with the negligence of these fundamental tools. Besides, he emphasizes the teaching of Islamic philosophy so that the coming generations may understand it and equipped themselves with new trends.

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²⁷ Rehman, "Islam and Problem of Economic Justice," Pakistan Economist XIV, no. 34 (1974).



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