

# Typology of Contemporary Islamic Movements

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## Abstract:

Islamic Movements are of significant players of international arena. Numerous strides have been taken to identify and study effective conditions, elements and incentives on formation of such movements. These movements are seeking for revive Islamic identity in concurrent world relying on Islam as an intellectual origin and saviour paradigm. They have been emerged in response to one or more factors such as West colonization, intellectual decline and domestic autarky, hasty secularization of Islamic societies, military defeats of Muslims from aliens.

Some authors employ various terms such as fundamentalism, radicalism to present such movements; however, such terms are not viable to represent detailed and comprehensive nature of contemporary Islamic movements. Principally, contemporary Islamic movements may be categorized to various factions depended on their intellectual foundations and theological approaches and each of them contains multiples groups in turn. This study tries to categorize such movements concerning their intellectual foundations and to examine their common and segregation points, comparatively.

Key words: , *Islamic Movements*, international relations

## Introduction

Islamic movements are well-organized, democratic movements which look for the current situation to be replaced by an ideal situation in Islamic societies based on Islamic Shari'a laws at all intellectual, political, social, and doctrinal levels through peaceful and non peaceful methods. The formation of Islamic movements is on one hand affected by objective factors like the western colonization, domestic intellectual decline and dictatorship, fall of Ottoman Caliphate, hasty secularism in Islamic societies, Muslims' military defeats by the enemies, failure of rival models such as Arabic nationalism and socialism, and domestic corruptions (legitimacy crisis, identity crisis, unfair distribution of wealth, corruption, and suppression) (Dekmejian, 2004); and on the other hand it is influenced by subjective and intellectual factors like Islamic reformist instructions and religious orders concerning fighting against oppression, paganism, and blasphemy, and attempting to establish a society bound

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together by religious values. Therefore, all these movements stress on returning to Islamic values and reviving the original Islam as the only way out of the current crises in Islamic societies (Enayat, 1991).

Islamic movements have diverse and different specifications, scientifically considerable regarding the form and organization, intellect and beliefs, goals and interests, geographical and historical environment, function and contention, etc. In this study, we aim at discussing the typology of these movements. We actually intend to answer a pair of questions; firstly, how many significant trends are such movements divided to based on intellectual foundations?; Secondly, Which of the Islamic movements are more effective in presenting a mighty pattern in today's world?

### **a) Theoretical discussion**

Basically any categorization is in close relation with the objective meant by the researcher of the given categorization. Why and for what aims the researcher embarks upon categorizations can give us clues on how different typologies occur. For instance, some western scholars concern with perception of the encounter between these movements with the west, and how they deal with modernism and modernity. Based on this goal, they refer to these movements as Modernist, fundamentalist, pro-West, and anti-West (Movasseghi, 1384).

Some others consider their campaign method, and categorize them as radical, moderate, and conservative. These movements are also possible to be categorized according to their geographical regions and continents (North Africa, South East Asia, Middle East, Central Asia, and Indian subcontinent, etc) or according to their type of activity (cultural, military, political, or a combination of all).

Therefore, before any categorization and classification, we need to determine our goal of classification, so that we reach a suitable typology.

Our goal in this study is to recognize the capabilities of these movements in solving the problems of the Islamic world, and also to show their efficiency to present a capable pattern in the Islamic world. In fact we want to deal with the question concerning which of the movements possesses a higher intellectual potential to elevate the Islamic civilization and to present a mighty pattern in today's world. Consequently,, we will attempt to classify the contemporary Islamic movements based on the intellectual foundations.

Basically, studying the roles of these movements in creating civilizations and strengthening the Islamic nation is in close relation with theoretical fundamentals of these movements as religious,

jurisprudence, epistemology, and the theological bases of these movements. Understanding their orientations and strategies is naturally impossible without considering their intellectual fundamentals as these movements are movements of belief, and their forces justify all their political and social activities according to their beliefs. Therefore, we should consider the theoretical potentials and capabilities of these movements.

Among the most important effectual factors in this area is religious, jurisprudential, and theological epistemology of these movements. In general, the way the three important sources of knowledge in the religion, i.e. narration, ration, and intuition, are prioritized plays an important role in how the movements in question interpret the Sharia fundamentals as the major building blocks of belief among their members. The main reason is these factors form many of the jurisprudential perceptions a Muslim observes. Besides, this way their theological fundamentals (as the belief in Divine unity, prophethood, Imamate, Divine justice, etc.) give them the grounds for supporting certain political models. Hence, studying the differences in this regards can be influential in how individuals view religion, and how they decide what the religiously acceptable action is. This is one of the causes for different behaviors and different goals in various movements, and it is also what ultimately forms different movements.

Therefore, based on these theological and cognitive fundamentals, we could divide movements, each of which is of course possible to be divided into smaller subcategories. We further try to classify Islamic movements.

## **B) Typology of contemporary Islamic movements based on their intellectual fundamentals**

Based on different views on the basics of religious and jurisprudential epistemology of these movements on one hand, and their theological fundamentals on the other hand, we can identify five major trends in the Islamic world each of which being based on one of these sources as the major origin of religious cognition, which results in different interpretations of the religion. These different interpretations determine different goals, orientations, and attitudes in political behavior and objectives for them. We survey these interpretations in order to fully understand the trends:

### **1) narration-based movements**

As an explicit dialect, definitive scripture is the main axis of all jurisprudential inferences among Muslim jurists, and in this regard, Quran is of considerable significance as the book revealed by Allah, coupled with the narration as the behaviors and words of the Prophet and his companions and Imams as the interpreters of the Divine revelation. Although all Muslims maintain great importance to the definitive scripture [of Quran], they have different views on that. The trends known

as narration-based consider the definitive scripture beyond an ordinary piece of writing, but transhistorical entity which needs not interpretation, with whose appearance thoroughly revealing the reality of Divine revelation. Ignoring the differences between the scriptures, they consider all of them as some verses admitting of no interpretation, which are obligatory to be implemented regardless of times and places (Rabani Golpaygani at <http://www.bashgah.net>).

The Narration-based movement in the history of Islam was an exemplification of this interpretation of the scripture [of Quran]. This trend was formed in very early days of Islam based on superficial interpretations of religious scriptures, and stressed the prohibition of any interpretation of the scriptures. In the contemporary time, too, there are many Salafi groups with the very same perception of the scripture and narrations.

The term Salafi is a word denoting a vast spectrum of Islamic trends and Sunni scholars who ascribe themselves to the Salaf of Islam (Sunni leaders during the early post-Islamic centuries). They consider Salaf as the embodiment of true Islam to which the society must return so that it regains its grandeur and honor. But inside this vast spectrum, there are different ideas and functions. But what we mean by the term Salafi in this article is a trend which considers itself merely bound by the façade of Quran and narration, considering whatever type of religious jurisprudential as heresy. They can be called narrational Salafis. Their method in understanding Islam can be summarized in points as direct reference to Hadith, trust in one single narration in beliefs and jurisprudential laws, refraining from interpreting religious scriptures, and rejecting the use of ration in religious inferences.

Nowadays Salafis can be divided into two major branches including moderate Salafis and radical Salafis, whom we will study further.

### **1-1) Traditional narration-based movements**

Traditional narration-based movement is a jurisprudential trend among Muslims which dismisses the role of ration in religious inferences, denies any sort of interpretation and allegorical explanation, and fights against philosophy and mysticism, authenticating the appearances of the religion, causing a specific view towards the religion. Although such trends are noticed among different Islamic Sunni and Shiite sects, certain Sunni sects like Hanbalis and Malikis show greater tendency toward this trend. Ibn Hanbal was *ahl al-Hadith* [people of Hadith] and ignored the opinion. To prove himself and his beliefs, he merely relied on Quran and those Hadithes quoted from and the Prophet. Hanbali sect is based on five principles: God's scripture, Prophet's tradition, *Fatwas* [religious decrees] by prophet's companions, some companions' quotation if compatible with the scripture, and all the *Dai'f* [a Hadith not perfectly meeting the requirements of a reliable, valid one] and *Mursal* [a Hadith leading to the Prophet, but missing the name of a *Sahabi* who reported it] *Hadith*, and *Fatwas* by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal

which were supported by the Hadith and narration and works of pious ancestors [*salaf-e sāleh*] (Rabani Golpaygani, *ibid*). This type of Islamic trends interpreted the religion based on their intellectual principles, and they have an important role in forming some Islamic movements across the Islamic world. Currently many of these movements are active more as cultural movements and less as political ones, and they have a moderate and conservative nature, trying to familiarize people with Islam, and to promote religious and jurisprudential values through the society, preserving the Islamic identity. Examples of such trends can be observed in numerous religious establishments in Islamic societies of Central Asia, Balkans, and South East Asia.

### **2-1) Radical narration-based movement**

Radical Salafi, also referred to as Jihadi or Takfiri, is a part of narration-based trends which is mainly influenced by Ibn Taimiyyah (died in 728 AH). His way of understanding Islam was later promoted by a group as Salafism. Some of Ibn Taimiyyah's intellectual and personal characteristics are as follows: He strongly disagreed with logics, philosophy, mysticism, and scholastic theology. He believed that great philosophers like Avicenna and Farabi had deviation in their beliefs. He considered mystics and Sufis like Ibn Arabi, Sadr ad-Din Qunawi, Afif al-Din al-Talmasani as pagans. He showed strong enmity towards Shi'ism and Mu'tazilism. He also rejected the beliefs of Ash'rites. He thought of pilgrimages made to the tombs of the Prophet and Imams (PBUT) as *Haram* [juridically forbidden]. Irascible in scholarly discussions, he strongly disapproved interpretation and allegorical explanation of the verses of Quran, stating that it will suffice to apply merely the façade of verses. These are altogether the reasons why he expressed such beliefs which necessitated believing in corporeality of God. These beliefs stirred great disapproval on the side of Islamic scholars (Movaseghi, *ibid*). After Ibn Taimiyyah passed away, this version of Salafism was not vastly popular until Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab revived it, and he managed to unite with Muhammad ibn Saud in order to promote it in Hijaz. Having fought other sunni sects, Wahhabis Wahhabism in Arabia. Enjoying the support of Arabia's rich government, they promoted their agenda with the attractive motto of returning to *Tawhid* [the belief in unity of God] and original Islam, and fighting against heresies in all Islamic regions, in a way that nowadays they have advertising organizations and activities in almost all Islamic countries, benefiting from media and financial supports of the Saudi government.

With its superficial interpretations of the theological dialectics of Islam such as the issue of God's unity, this intellectual trend considers many other Muslims who are of different frames of reference as polytheist and idolater, and even sometimes excommunicate them and sentence them to death. (see Abdul Aziz Bin Abdullah Bin Baz's website). These viewpoints clearly brings about conflicts

between them and other Muslims, insomuch as contemporary Islamic reformers have been targets of strongest negative propaganda by Wahhabis, and have even been occasionally excommunicated.

They allow all kinds of violent actions, and some of them even call themselves as “Jihadi Salafis” and take violent or armed actions. Instances of this intellectual trend are Deobandis in the Indian subcontinent, Taliban, and some violent movements like Al Qaeda, and Pakistan’s Sipah Sahaba, together with some excommunicative groups in Egypt and some other Arab countries, and also in Central Asia and Caucasus (Farmanian at /www.bashgah.net/pages-14990.html).

## **2- Rationalist movements**

As opposed to the mentioned narration-based trend, the majority of Muslims supports the role of ration, and tries to establish an appropriate relation between the context of Shari'a and ration (Matin, number 17).

These rationalist groups are in turn divided into two major groups known as “modern rationalist” and “Ijtihadi rationalism” which will be discussed.

### **1-2) Modern rationalist movements**

Mainly supported by modern Islamists, this viewpoint does not recognize ration as merely a method, but as an epistemological source. Moreover, based on a specific interpretation the group has about the ration, they eventually claim ration as independent of revelation and self-founded (Sharq Daily, Dec. 22, 2003). In recent decades, we have witnessed the creation of modern and reformist Islamic groups in the world, who on one hand try to rebuild Mu'tazilist ration and its position in Islamic thoughts, and on the other hand look for religious instructions to fit the modern era in order to orientate Islam to the modern civilization (Political Science magazine, 2005).

This intellectual trend has been strengthened. Contemporary Neo-Mu'tazelists consider themselves as opposing the followers of the text (Gheravi, 2004). These religious avant-garde thinkers are to find the relation between tradition and modernity, and to clarify the functions of religious thoughts in the contemporary time. Thus, the principles and thoughts of this trend can be referred to as the historical and rational interpretation of religious instructions and texts as well as an attempt to make Islam and its traditions compatible with the new modern life and civilization. sooth trend accordingly stresses freedom, human rights, Islamic secularism, and cultural and religious pluralism.

We still cannot call these intellectual trends as Islamic Movements, but we can consider them as modern thoughts which are on agenda in the intellectual mindsets of some elites as well as among

some scholarly circles. Though yet not popular with the public, they marginally affect Islamic movements.

## **2-2) Ijtihadi rationalist movements**

Together with the mentioned rational trend, another rational trend can be mentioned in Islam which plays a much more significant role in Islamic movements. This group is known as the supporters of Ijtihad in Islam, and is the origin of another major trend in the Islamic world.

This intellectual trend considers ration as a medium to infer Shari'a laws, and thus approaches Islamic narrations and interprets them. The group's assumption is that Shari'a laws are in very close relationship with the judgments of ration. But rationalism does not mean to accept ration as an epistemological source independent of revelation; rather, ration is considered as a method to learn the religious instructions and jurisprudential laws. Based on their beliefs, since God is the creator of ration, He never issues orders against ration. Thus, ration can be an authentic medium to understand the Shari'a, and on the other hand it can determine the instances of the Sharia laws and orders. It can even issue independent judgments affirmed by Shari'a. Therefore, the mutual relationship between ration and the religion has constantly been highlighted. This viewpoint towards the relationship between ration and religion gives this group a great variety of potentials in confronting new problems insomuch for them as to claim that Shari'a can answer new requirements of any place and circumstances. This group tries to use ration as a tool to discover the principles and trace the branches of Islamic law through the principles. The group also believes that religious scholars must embark upon Ijtihad in proportion with the time and place, and must not limit themselves to the understandings and perceptions of the past scholars from Quran and the tradition of the Prophet

Although this intellectual trend encompasses a variety of trends concerning the relation between ration and religion, in such a way as some are closer to narration-based trends and some to modernity, but the major part of those who follow this trend try to be moderate and make a balance between fundamentalism and rationalism.

In general, these Ijtihadi movements are regarded as an important part of Islamic movements among Sunnis and Shiites, including Shiite's major movements in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and some Sunni movements in Egypt, Indonesia, Middle East, and north of Africa who try to protect their Islamic identity in the changing global circumstances, and to present a wise and efficient image of the Shari'a in accordance with time and place through rational strategies.

## **3- Sufist movements**

Sufism is among the origins of Islamic intellectual movements, which considers *Shohud* [mystic intuition] as the original path to know and reach the truth. A considerable number of influential trends in the Islamic world are affected by the mystical approaches, and thus form their political attitudes.

Sufism fundamentals common among all cults and branches of Sufism are built in four bases: 1. Release from appearance and human sense, 2. doing specific tasks (austerity) in order to reach purification stages; 3. Suppressing the selfishness and the self; and 4. Reaching the divine truth, and annihilation in God (Abdol-Qader, 2001).

Over the course of centuries, popularity of Sufism hit the peak, and Sufism gradually attracted great scores of people.

These trends have an optimistic view towards human's nature, and believing in a kind of epistemological pluralism, they have a more suitable view point to organizing the Islamic world, and thus have been able to pioneer vast movements in the Islamic world.

As the Sufism schools have great diversity, they could bring many beliefs and traditions from older age together at the service of Islam, and they even proved willing to compromise and reconcile with ancient religious traditions and habits of other lands.

In fact the Sufism instructions make it universal, but most Sufist sects are included whether within Shiite or Sunni, and so they follow either in their Sharia laws.

At the moment, regarding the situation of Sufism in the world, we would say that although Sufism has been less welcome among Arab-originated Muslims, it has been very influential among Muslims in regions as far as Central Asia, South East Asia, Turkey, Balkans, and Africa, having been the root of many major Islamic movements in the past two hundred years.

### **c- Conclusion and future prospects**

Regarding the capabilities of the five above-mentioned movements in responding the needs of their time, and their efficiency to present an effectual pattern in today's world, we would say that even though the first trend can be an important factor in the mobilizing stage, but due to a superficial perception of the Shari'a, it lacks the necessary capability to present an up to date interpretation when confronting new situations. It emphasizes on fundamentalism and obsolesce, so it lacks enough attraction and capability in confronting new problems. We can just claim that more traditional and more conservative trends can marginally support some of the religious beliefs in a passive way. But narration-based radical movements cannot survive in today's world, because firstly they possess



shallow thought system, and secondly their emergence is under the influence of the crisis in the society, and as soon as the crises are over, there is no room for their development.

On the other hand, the trends which reiterate the independent ration separate from Shari'a texts cannot gain popularity among the followers, and they finally lead to secularism and laicism and a kind of individual Islam. These trends follow an optional interpretation mainly in accordance with western instructions, since they ignore the religious texts. This viewpoint towards religion is accepted by most of the Muslims who care about religious texts. Therefore, these trends are incapable of leading Islamic mass movement, and eventually channel Islamic movements towards a kind of secularism or laicism and extreme modernity.

Sufism can cause an internal revolution among Muslims and prepare the grounds for revolutionary moves, and it has high potentials in leading Islamic movements in every stage, but it cannot delineate a suitable pattern, and it has to appeal to models provided by other trends such as the narration-based movements, or rationalists. In fact, Sufism is based on individual believes, so it cannot present a certain political and social pattern, therefore it has to apply other jurisprudential patterns. That's why Sufis have a high penetration factor in many Islamic regions and they are so successful in mobilizing social movements, but when it comes to establishing and creating new patterns, they have to refer to jurists, and in this stage, they decline to rational or narration-based trends. Based on this assumption, Sufism cannot present a pattern in political and social arenas and also cannot present strategies independent of jurists' patterns, and so it is discussable within the two other forms.

Ijtihadi trend can be considered as the most important one, with other trends being affected by this one compatible with the situations while observing the principles. Basically, this trend stresses ration on one hand and on narration on the other hand, so it is highly flexible and enjoys a high degree of realism.

It is worth mentioning that based on the viewpoint towards ration and religion, this trend can form a range of minor trends built up on an axis one side of which is independent rationalism, and the other is narration-based trends. That is why Ijtihadi groups possess a special position, hence we would say that if we consider the main concerns of Islamic movements in recent centuries as the two subjects of maintaining religious identity and forming an advanced society, the result will be as follows: Some movements like the narration-based trend, which emphasized on keeping the original identity, had to abandon their idea of making progress, and they actually sacrificed progress for identity, though their Islamic identities were also based on a superficial perception of Islam. On the other hand, independent rationalists also sacrificed identity for progress and highlighted modernity and progression, and they thus gradually slaughtered religious identity and principles, replacing Islamic identity with western identity.

But Ijtihadi rationalist trends tried to make a balance between identity and progress, presenting a kind of religious identity compatible with the place, time, and ration. This view is a more complete view and thus enjoys better acceptance and maintaining capability, and it seems that the movements referred to as Ijtihadi rationalist movements will be lasting more in future in the Muslims' political and social arenas.

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