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ISLAMIC MODERNISM: EXIGENCIES OF CONTEMPORARY ERA

Abstract:

Muslim modernists, from Middle East to South Asia, asserted the need to 'reinterpret and reapply the principles and ideals of Islam, formulating new responses to the challenges of Europe and of modern life. This paper attempts to make an assessment and analysis of the response of Islamic scholars and their debate to modernity and their contribution to 'Islamic modernism'. The moderate and reformist calls are overshadowed by the fundamentalists, revolutionists and jihadists; so the current research will try to explore the concepts of reformists and modernists to make Islamic modernity as a reality that could meet the exigencies of modern era. Islam has been subjected to the effect of modernism and encountered the influence of modern life and its challenges in varied forms and manners. That is the reason that for many centuries the analytical elaboration and rationalization has been the fundamental genre of Islamic law in its quest for legal identity. The present study explored the response to the perception about Islam as conservative and extremist religion. An analysis of renowned Muslim scholars was included to elaborate the modernist trend in Muslim world and to point out which reformist trends actually create confusion about Islam in layman's opinion. This investigative evaluation formed a major approach of this research. The Muslims' response to the challenge of modernity and struggle to reconcile the requirements of modernization with their cultural and religious values will be the main focus of the study. The research will conclude by identifying the commonalities, comparisons, and trends in the modernizing movements in contemporary era.

Keywords:

Islamic Modernism, Conservatism, Islamic Revival, Fundamentalism, Extremism

JEL Classification: D63

Introduction

A general perception about modernity is that Islam and modernity oppose and challenge each other. This view holds that Islamic approach and values are not congruent with modernity. This incongruity of principles and values are highlighted by traditionalists, political figures as well as theologians.[1] A large majority of Muslims living in USA and European countries contradict this statement of incompatibility as an active member of society. Their participation in community construe that they don't have any difficulty in merging the Islamic values and the values of modernity. This attitude reveals on one side the pragmatic attitude of those citizens to forsake some principles of Islam to practically deal with modernity while others see modernity values as contradicting and conflict of values between the two. This problem is countered by scholars by various discourses on Islam and modernity.

Numerous discourses about Islam and modernity are taking place between Muslim Ulema, traditionalists, modernists and secularists since late nineteenth century. The secularist Muslims emphasize religion as an individualistic practice and just deals with morality, thus they staunchly support impersonation of scientific, technological, and political models of West. On the contrary, the traditionalists urge to establish the state based on models of early Muslim community at the time of Holy Prophet (PBUH). Modernity is a concept that combines these two extremes.

There are three discourses on reform that can be related to Islamic modernism. First discourse on this can be termed as revivalism and reform. It emphasize on three points. Revival (Ihya), reform (*Islam*) and adherence (*taqlid*). Revival of ancestral practices and reforming the innovations and wrong practices in the name of religion and strictly following the school of law are its main focus.[2] This discourse was supported by Wahhabi movement in Hijaz leading to discussions and claims on self-criticism and individual responsibility. Radical expression of this discourse led to popularize a general opposition to modernity in Islam. Another debate relegates the backwardness of Muslims as the cause of holding on to religion and traditions and norms. This Western modernist approach is not anti-religious but does not derive its justification from Islamic tradition. Islamic modernism is best advocated through the third discourse which urges to reform Muslim society by enrooting Islamic modernism in Islamic tradition. Contrary to the other two discourses, it does not reject modernity or tradition, rather it assert that modernity is perfectly

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[1]K. Jehan, shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/70423/3/chapter2.pdf
[2]Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Islamic Modernism", In Islam and Modernity Key Issues and Debates, Edited by Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 237

compatible with Islam and a new Islamic theology need to be enforced for justifying this compatibility.[3]

Objectives

• To bring fore the consequences of the modern trends of understanding Islam

• To elaborate the modernists trend and reforms in Muslim world

• To illustrate some root notions of modernity and Islam to facilitate their comparative study

• To analyze the major intellectual positions in the philosophical debate on Shariah

• To evaluate exigencies of modern era in relation to modernity

Methodology

The basic methodology to be used in the research is descriptive, analytical and comparative. The research analyzes two forms of literature. Technical Literature that includes scholarly books, journals, and newsletters; university catalogs and websites; government reports; class syllabi and popular literature includes newspapers and books; interviews published in general magazines; speeches and writings by politicians; websites. The research is qualitative in nature.

Discussion and Analysis

Islam has been subjected to the effect of modernism and encountered the influence of modern life and its challenges in varied forms and manners. That is the reason that for many centuries the analytical elaboration and rationalization has been the fundamental genre of Islamic law in its quest for legal identity. The present study explored the response to the perception about Islam as conservative and extremist religion and elaborated the modernist trend in Muslim world to point out which reformist trends actually create confusion about Islam in layman's opinion. This investigative evaluation is followed in discussion.

Islamic Modernism

Modernism in Islam invokes a reinterpretation of Islamic principles to cope up with the modern values and demands. These modernists' ideas were formulated in 19th century

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[3] Ibid, p. 238

on the grounds that since Muslims have lost their high political and intellectual position in the world, its reason lies in lack of modern and pragmatic understanding of scientific knowledge.[4]These modernists' trends got wide acceptance among various scholars like al Tamimi and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, who re interpreted the application of Islamic philosophical principles by asserting that divine principles and rational principles codified by jurists can synchronize and termed western scientific knowledge in congruence with Islamic principles of knowledge. In Turkey, too, Jamal al-din al-Afghani condemned colonialization and subjugation of Muslim states by the West, yet he emphasized the need for acquiring modern scientific knowledge to compete with the West in terms of knowledge. In the sub-continent, Sir Syed Ahmad khan was a political conformist, who emphasized on educational reforms and emancipation of Muslims from British rule in order to implement modern curricula combining religion with modern sciences.[5]

Fundamentalism, Conservativism, Extremism and Modernism in Islamic Law

Fundamentalism is a term that put a label on various movements and philosophies.[6] This term was first used in 1920 for Protestants who opposed modernized traditions, though they disapprove the term and tend to identify as being conservative rather than 'fundamentalist' [7]

Conservative is a term employed for anything that resists change or strives against change.[8][9]When it comes to Islamic law, conservatism is attached to this term in the sense that Islamic law is viewed as confined and restricted. Islamic law is not viewed on flexible spectrum. It presents a negative picture of Islamic law because no matter what it is the last among the revealed religions so in this regard it is the most modern one.[10] Its rulings encompassed more modern concepts than did the other revealed religions as it was solely based for human welfare and their guidance. No ruling was against the human interest. Each and every ruling was in accordance with the human way of lives. One of the example of conservatism is that Islam sticks to rulings of prohibition of adultery, homosexuality, etc. It is considered a conservative perspective of Islamic law.[11] Another example of conservatism is that it is the ruling of Shariah to wear hijab for women. It is

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[4]http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t253/e9
[5]Mazheruddin Siddiqi, Islamic Modernism, Islamic Studies (Islamabad) 12:3 (1973), p. 180
[6] Simon A. Wood, Rethinking Fundamentalism: Ruhollah Khomeini, Mawlana Mawdudi, And The Fundamentalist Model, *JCRT* 11.2 Spring 2011, p.7
[7]David H. Watt, ―Meaning and End of Fundamentalism,‖ *Religious Studies Review* 30 (2004): 271-274.
[8]https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conservative (Retrieved on 11-04-2018)
[9]O'Sullivan, Noël. "Conservatism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. 1976, 67.
[10]Strawson, John. "Islamic Law and English Texts." *Law and Critique* 6, no. 1 (1995): 21-38.
[11]İlkkaracan, Pınar. "How adultery almost derailed Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union." In *deconstructing sexuality in the Middle East*, pp. 53-76. Routledge, 2016.

made incumbent upon them to be in hijab. It also falls under the category of conservatism in Islamic law.[12]

Extremism is another concept closely associated with Islamic law. As the word indicates, it implies to exceed the limits or to be out of normal range, something surplus in any manner or having the least one, without being within normal limits.[13] It has been established that extremism does not pertain itself to being normal or moderate. In the context of Islamic law, extremism implies to manipulate the teachings of Islam i.e. Islamic law for one's own hidden motives.[14] These motives, most of the time, do not represent the true spirit of Islam. By no means can they be assumed to fall under the umbrella of Islamic law.[15] For example, the best example in this regard is the suicide bomber attacks on innocent civilians in different countries in the name of Islam, forcing it to restore peace and order in the society.[16] By inculcating fear among the masses to abide by their rules via sugarcoating the reality. The reality, in this sense, is none other than the fabricated Islamic law by the tyrant or oppressive groups who intend to accomplish their hidden motives. This presents an Islamic view that does not reflect the true Islam.[17]

Modernism, as the name indicates, is the face of Islam in the modern perspective. Islamic law is viewed in the modern context. Modernity implies that Islamic law has been unbound to a broad spectrum which brings up a new picture of Islamic law on the canvass.[18] This picture is entirely different from the conservative or extremist one because modern outlook of Islamic law gives an edge to it. It becomes not only conspicuous but also offers room for continuous refinement of the purposes of law.[19] So Islamic law, according to modern perspective, is not static in nature but dynamic. It is subjected to evolutionary changes and incorporates those changes without changing the basic fixed rulings by exercising Ijtihad. So, Ijtihad is a new facet of modernity in Islamic law that lends room for being up-to-date with the changing times.[20]

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[12]McIntosh, John C., and Samia Islam. "Beyond the veil: The influence of Islam on female entrepreneurship in a conservative Muslim context." *International Management Review* 6, no. 1 (2010): 102.
[13]Lake, David A. "Rational extremism: Understanding terrorism in the twenty-first century." *Dialogue IO* 1, no. 1 (2002): 15-28.
[14]El Fadl, Khaled Abou, and L. Carl Brown. "The great theft: Wrestling Islam from the extremists." *New York* (2005): 26-44.
[15]Wiktorowicz, Quintan. *Radical Islam rising: Muslim extremism in the West.* Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, 2005, 67-89.
[16]Atran, Scott. "Genesis of suicide terrorism." *Science* 299, no. 5612 (2003): 1534-1539.
[17]Gupta, Dipak K., and KusumMundra. "Suicide bombing as a strategic weapon: an empirical investigation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 4 (2005): 573-598.
[18]Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, and Barbara FreyerStowasser, eds. *Islamic law and the challenges of modernity.* Rowman Altamira, 2004, 45.
[19]Chapra, Muhammad Umer, Shiraz Khan, and Anas Al Shaikh-Ali. *The Islamic vision of development in the light of maqasid al-Shariah.* Vol. 15. Iiit, 2008, 76.
[20]Saeed, Abdullah. "Ijtihad and innovation in neo-modernist Islamic thought in Indonesia." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (1997): 279-295.

On the contrary, modernism in Islamic law also refers to modernists or reformists, persons who do not strictly adhere to Islamic law but find a way that overlaps between the conservativism and extremism. It dwindles between the two. Modernism is a way that somehow expresses the moderate approach in Islamic law.[21]

On the whole, conservatism can be summed up as the fixed part of Islamic law that does not change at any cost but the world sees it through a narrow-minded lens. Extremism provides a facet of Islamic law that portrays a forged version of Islamic law according to the needs and desires of the manipulators who intend to use it. Modernism pertains to the midway path between the two extremes. By no means is Islamic law is confined to its own rulings but the room of flexibility does operate and modernism is the key representation of this.

Re-interpretation of Islamic Principles and Challenges in Present Era

"And that there is not for man except that [good] for which he strives, and that his effort is going to be seen -Then he will be recompensed for it with the fullest recompense".[22]In Quran, Allah says again and again that to understand Quran and go beyond its meaning.

Re-interpreting Islamic Principles

Islam covered each and every aspect of life under two commandments i.e. Beliefs and Acts, belief cannot reinterpret but the commandment regarding acts can reinterpret. *Ijtihad* is the best way re-interpreting Islamic Principles. *Ijtihad* was used by the time of Prophet (P.B.U.H) when he sent *Muadh bin Jabal* as *Qadhi* to Yemen, Prophet (P.B.U.H) said, "How would you take decision when case will arrived before you? *Mua'adh* said, "From Qur'an". Then Prophet (P.B.U.H) said, "When you didn't find any explicit rule from Quran then how would you take decision"? *Mua'ad* said, "From the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). Then Prophet (P.B.U.H) said, "When you didn't find any explicit rule from *Sunnah* how would you take decision"? *Mua'ad* said, "From my own reasoning in the light of Quran and *Sunnah*". Prophet (P.B.U.H) approved and pleased with him. *Ijtihad* was also used by the Companions *(R.A),* at the period of *Hazrat Umar(R.A)* famine came then he ordered that not to cut the hand of thieves. *Ijtihad* exercised by the scholars in all the periods until 15th or 16th[23] century when Western dominance started and Muslim's became reserved to protects Islam and became conservative then the use of *Ijtihad*

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[21]Masud, Muhammad, ed. *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates: Key Issues and Debates*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 123.

[22]*Surah Najam:* 39-41

[23] Tauseef Ahmad Parray, "Islamic Modernist and Reformist Thought: A Study of the Contribution of Sir Sayyid and Muhammad Iqbal," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no.2 (2011): 79.

becomes less and less but in nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim scholars served much effort in the re-interpretation and reapplication[24] of Islamic principles.

Re-apply Islamic Ideals to the Challenges of Modernity

In twentieth century Muslims intellectuals raised and served much effort in the re-interpretation of Islamic principles and that period was the start of Islamic modernism[25]. Islam is dynamic religion[26]; it has capacity to absorb new things without changing its roots, so there is no place of *taqlid* but the need of *Ijtihad*. Allama Muhammad Iqbal also gave the concept of *Ijtihad* as a tool for modernity, that jurists take decision in the light of Quran and *Sunnah* according to the need and requirement of contemporary era. Allama Iqbal also re-establishes of the principle of *Ijma,* also gave a new concept that the right of doing *Ijtihad* of Individual transferred to Muslim legislative assembly that takes decisions on behalf of all Muslims i.e. *Ijma*, helps this collective Ijma would then constitute the authoritative consensus of community[27] also helps in answering opponents[28].

Contribution and response of Muslim scholars on the issue of modernity

Modernity here actually means modernize or re-interpretation of Islamic principles, the concept of modernity starts at that time when western colonialism affected Islamic principles then many scholars, thinkers and philosophers served much effort in modernizing the Islamic principle through their writings, constitutions, social welfare agencies, novel institutions etc. These intellectual thinkers tell west that Islam covers each and every aspect of life and compatible with all ages, Islam is a dynamic religion. Some of these intellectual thinkers are Jamal al-Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Amir Ali, Namik Kemal, Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan, and Allama Muhammad Iqbal.[29]According to these thinkers reason, religion and science are compatible with each other. These thinkers left a positive effect on Muslims as well as on Westerns.

Evaluating scholarly discourse on this issue

The most important effect of modernity is the emphasis on not to blindly follow *taqlid*, rather interpret Islamic principles through *Ijtihad* and *Ijma.* Another big effect of modernism is that they changed thinking of Muslims about West, both are compatible

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[24] Ibid, p.80.
[25] Ibid, p.80.
[26] Iqbal S.Hussain, *The Quran and Modernism*. (Lahore: Adabistan, 2000), 116.
[27]Tauseef Ahmad Parray, "Islamic Modernist and Reformist Thought: A Study of the Contribution of Sir Sayyid and Muhammad Iqbal," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no.2 (2011): 89.
[28] Ibid, p.89.
[29] Tauseef Ahmad Parray, "Islamic Modernist and Reformist Thought: A Study of the Contribution of Sir Sayyid and Muhammad Iqbal," *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 1, no.2 (2011): p.79-80.

with each other. The negative type of Islamic modernism is "fundamentalist" that this type of modernity takes Islam in another way that is much different with traditional Islam[30]. Another negative impact of modernism is loss of sense of sacred[31].

This contemporary era, is the era of big changes, in this era, Islamic law should reinterpret Islamic principles because of the need of time. The best way of reinterpretation is Ijtihad.[32] Islam is the religion that Allah sends to Muslims, that is perfect[33]. Islam has no need to change like other religions, when West reforms their religion they says that Muslims are orthodox and extremist because they don't like to reform their religion. Islamic principles have the capacity to reinterpret without changing its root, but not possible totally change its shape. An important movement that started in nineteenth and twentieth century to modernize Islam is Islamic Modernism. Many Muslim modernists like Abduh, Jamal-ul-din Afghani, and Rashid Rida gave the modernist approach to Muslims some trends of modernism, in the modernists views are:

• To modernize Muslims in the field of science

• Invocation of Objectives of Sharia with public interest

• Re-interpreting Islamic law through five sources i.e. Quran, Sunnah, Ijma, Qiyas and Ijtihad

• Re-interpretation of the authoritative sources on radical issues such as interests on loans etc.

Jamal al-Din Afghani asserts that reason, philosophy and science are not new terminologies for Islam. According to him science is not purely made by westerns but Muslim scientist started working on science, philosophy and reason and later westerns adopted them.[34]Muhammad Abduh is recognized as the developer of intellectual and social reforms in Arab.He was the founder and considered as the father of modernism in Islamic world. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, spend his life for reforming social, religious and educational condition of Muslims. He is known for the reinterpretation of Islamic principles[35] and also known as New Bold Theologian. Allama Iqbal combines the East and West's thoughts and reinterpreting Islamic principles in his famous book'Reconstruction of Religious Thought'.[36]

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[30] Sayed Hossein Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*. (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1997), 18.
[31] Ibid, p.108.
[32] Maulana waheed ul-Din khan, *Fikr-e-Islami*. (New Delhi: Good word Books, 2008), 9.
[33] Iqbal S. Hussain, *the Quran and Modernism*. (Lahore: Adabistan, 2000), 115.
[34] Ibid, p.83.
[35]Mazheruddin Siddiqi, Islamic Modernism, Islamic Studies (Islamabad) 12:3 (1973), p. 180
[36] Ibid, p.83

A new blend of reforms emerged as result of modernists scholars debates merged with nationalist reforms by Mustafa Kemal 'Atatürk' in Turkey and Reza Shah Pahlavi in Persia. Due to their secular reforms, they were strongly criticized by Ulema. In turkey, political reforms included declaring Turkey as a Republic state, while economic reforms promoted industrial development. The cultural reforms however has more significant effects, abolishing caliphate, declaring Sufi orders as illegal, Swiss model legal code replacing family law of Shariah. Right to vote, gender equality and other reforms were also introduced.

In Persia, however, the reforms focused on reducing their influence of Ulema, declaring a monarchy in 1925, and secularization of religion. No uniform political reforms were introduced while state took control of religious funds. [37] Similar modernizing reforms affected the military, the administration, the economy and education.

Revival, Reform and Adherence in Islamic Law

Reform or *Islah* is the reformation of something damaged or lost its proper shape. It is used sometimes as a synonym of revival. As in this the reconstruction of religious beliefs occur. Reformation is important to cope up with the challenges of modern world. There are basically different views regarding Islamic reforms as there are different approaches viz; fundamentalism, liberal position and moderate approach.

The Fundamentals rejected reforms and they take Islamic law as immutable. The Liberals opines that the classical Islamic law is out dated and it must be secularized with time to give solutions for the problems of current world. While the Moderate approach tells that the Islamic law should be reinterpreted.[38] So, basically, reformation is the not anything but just the reinterpretation of the existing law. So, in Islamic law there is wide space for this.

Adherence or *Taqlid* is basically following the path which is laid down by a certain school of thought. All persons which have no qualification of a *Mujtahid* must follow certain school of thought. Some of the earlier jurists opines that after the proper formulation of different schools of thoughts the door of ijtihad is closed and *taqlid* is open. Rashid Rida of Egypt and other scholars started discussion on the ijtihad and *taqlid*. In the light of these discussions many scholars then opine the door of ijtihad will never closed for mujtahids. There are different types of *taqlid*. For example, it can be in the form that person follows totally a particular school of thought and it can be that person follows the way which he likes from all school of thoughts. So, in both cases he follows some way

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which is already laid down. *Taqlid* also gave methodology to the *faqih* to derive laws on the basis of principles set by the *mujtahidmutlaq* of the *madhab* or school of thought. *Taqlid* is permissible or recommended by Islamic law for a lay man and sometimes even for jurists as following the sayings of companions, *Ijma`*, *Shahadah* of an `*adil* person and jurist, so, these are the permitted form of *taqlid* and necessary sometimes.[39]

Islamic Revival

Islamic Revival, provides a progressive plan covering aspects from politics, economy and society. It provides a practical framework that 1) give a proper plan to understand the ideology, 2) work on the practicability of the workable ideas through debate and arguments, 3) emphasize the correlation of these ideas with Islamic ideals for universal acceptability and dissemination. [40]Islamic revival passed through three different eras of development that depict the constituents of Islamic revival and modernity contributing and complimenting each other. First period was the development phase (1950-1980) on the issues of capitalism, communism and political development. Second Phase was democratization phase (1980-2000) emphasizing on democracy, economic development and human rights. Third phase (2000 – present) focus on civic engagement and citizenship. These eras form the evolution of Islamic Revival from its reactive past to proactive present. [41]

Islamic revival movements were first originated in 1920s and 1930s when Hassan al Banna founded *Ikhwan al Muslimeen* in Egypt and Maulana Maududi laid the foundation of Jama'at I Islami in Pakistan. These movements were suppressed, when the national states were dominated by secularist and socialist inclinations. In 1970s these movements were revived by the new generation, like Muslim Brothers in Egypt, FIS in Algeria, Hezbollah in Lebanon etc. [42] The objective of these movements is to return to the teachings of Prophet (SAW), and its moral principles in society and application and implementation of Shariah Law.[43]Thus the movements of Islamic revival in the contemporary era not only represent the Muslims' response to modernity, but also provide a clear idea and framework of adapting with the changing political, economic and cultural realities. Thus Islam represents a 'modern' religion in this perspective. [44]

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[39] Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, *Islamic Jurisprudence*, Rawalpindi: Federal Law House (2013) pp. 375-378.

[40]ErminSinanović(2012)Islamic Revival as Development: Discourses on Islam, Modernity, and Democracy since the 1950s,Politics, Religion & Ideology,13:1,3-24,DOI: 10.1080/21567689.2012.659500

[41]ErminSinanović (2012) Islamic Revival as Development: Discourses on Islam, Modernity, and Democracy since the 1950s, Politics, Religion & Ideology, 13:1,DOI:10.1080/21567689.2012.659500 p. 3,9

[42] Ayyub, N.M. 1980 "The Political Revival of Islam: The Case of Egypt." International Journal of Middle East Studies 12: 481-99.

[43]Ira M. Lapidus, Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1997), pp. 445

[44] ibid

Conclusion

Islam has been subjected to the effect of modernism and encountered the influence of modern life and its challenges in varied forms and manners. That is the reason that for many centuries the analytical elaboration and rationalization has been the fundamental genre of Islamic law in its quest for legal identity.The present study exploredthe response to the perception about Islam as conservative and extremist religion. An analysis of renowned Muslim scholars was included to elaborate the modernist trend in Muslim world and to point out which reformist trends actually create confusion about Islam in layman's opinion. This investigative evaluation formed a major approach of this research.

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