

# Essay on impact of modernity on islamic ethics

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## **Impact of Modernity on Islamic Ethics**

Modernity refers to the state of being present after a transition from traditional or original status to the current trends. It tends to emphasize on social relations with reference to rise of capitalism. Capitalism is a system in economy in which resources are privately owned and run for a gain. In Islam, ethics and Islam law are one and the same. So we cannot separate the two whenever an analysis is being made (Abdullah, 1987: pp. 102). Muslims from time immemorial get the Islamic ethics from the Quran and Hadith. The Quran is a holy book which has several laws that the followers of Muhammad are expected to obey. The Hadith portrays Muhammad as a prophet of God and a perfect example that should be emulated by all the followers of Muhammad.

Pursuing Islamic ethics, Muslims view Muhammad as the perfect human being that all people should strive to emulate. The Five Pillars of Practice observed by the Muslims highlight the major Islamic ethics. Apart from providing inspiration for the need to have ethical behavior in the society, anticipation of final judgment is the most revered. These five pillars include; shahadah, salat, akāt, hajj and fasting. Shahadah is a saying that emphasizes commitment to only one religion which is Islam and fully accepting Allah's will. Allah is the name that is religiously used to refer to the Muslim god. Shahadah is recited in Arabic language and states that, there is no other god but God and Muhammad is his final messenger (oxfordislamicstudies, Dec-2010). It is required that when dying, in prayer and when one is converting to Muslim one has to recite this statement of faith and wholly believe in it. Salat is the Islamic word for prayer which is

made up of five daily prayers: Dhuhr, Fajr, Isha'a, Maghrib, and Asr. Fajr is done very early in the morning, Dhuhr and Asr are done in the afternoon, Maghrib is performed at sunset, and Isha'a is the night prayer. All these prayers are made daily and while facing in Mecca. Muslims are required to wash themselves before these prayer sessions and must accompany them by a sequence of set body positioning including; placing hands on knees then bowing, standing, bending and sitting in a special recommended position, normally with one foot tucked under the body. Muslim fast during Ramadhan whereby they skip the daytime meals and pray. This is meant to take them closer to Allah. Akāt is Arabic for alms which encourages charitable giving especially for the under privileged. Hajj is the pilgrimage which should be made at least once by a devote Muslim. It involves visiting the holy city of Jerusalem for prayers (Aldridge, 2000: pp. 89).

Modernity has affected Islamic Ethics in various ways through several modes such as; technology and globalization, education and democracy.

Technological advancements and scientific discoveries in the last century have changed the ways of most human population all over the world. These innovations and creativity expressed in the communication sector makes it possible for a few individuals to reach, influence and control the thinking of the vast population. Communication media like the internet and television makes it almost impossible to separate any part of the world from the rest. Muslim form part of the world society and since the world has become smaller through globalization, mingling of Muslims and sharing about their ethics, has become easier. It is agreed that human nature at least change or not at all, however, in the world there have been changes which require

adjustments in the laws and therefore the original assumptions of Islam that unchangeable nature of men blinds them to new problems that arise as a result of technological advancement. To counter this, some Muslim reformists like Egyptian Tahar Hussein and others who moved to the west believed it was adequate to take the principles for achievements of the western civilization and use them in Muslim states (Cooper, Nettler, & Mahmoud, M. 2000: pp. 160).

Technology ensured swift communication and transfer of the knowledge gained from success of western civilization. Through watching western programs on various issues, young Muslim reformists adopted some western values and have tried to share with the old Muslim conservative population, hence, with time this has led to slight adjustments in how the ' Sharia' Laws are applied. This specifically makes secularism to be applied effectively to Islamic societies where religion overlooked all happenings of daily life. The Islamic view of education is still strongly adhered to whereby teaching emphasizes the memorization of content rather than understanding the meaning. To keep up with the world trends, Muslim society had to embrace western systems of education to be globally competitive in order to have relevance in issues, especially in world trade. The young Muslims are forced to go to foreign institutions to acquire relevant knowledge gradually embraced bits of western culture, for instance culture in their religion code of dressing. When they cleared school and went back to their countries, they slowly infiltrated the western culture and blend it with Muslim ethics. They also learned how to comprehend and put emphasis on applying reasoning and logic in solving conflicting situations. Naturally, they started deviating

from the Islamic traditional norms of education which strongly focused on memorization as opposed to understanding of the taught content. There are two directly affected Muslim ethics by education. Feminism which originally denied women their say on issues and taught them to always be submissive without questioning their men., has changed over time. Women now work in organization and supervise men. The Muslim holy wars known as Jihad that binds them to the course of fighting their religious enemies perceived as terrorism by non Muslims, have been effective. Education has provided an avenue for Muslims to infiltrate into p[erceived enemy territories with minimal suspicion, and be groomed to carry out Jihads (Esposito & Voll 2001: pp. 240).

In the Islamic world, leadership was dictated by the Sheria laws which in some cases suppressed the large population being ruled. The Muslims over time have interacted with the western way of ruling and they tackle issues through democratic means. This has appealed to many Islamic state citizens who formed rebellious groups and carried out revolutions to do away with the Islamic dictatorial rule. This is very evident as seen in the recent uprisings and government overhauls in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya among other states. Consequently, the Muslim leaders have embraced dialogue in how they administer Sharia laws in relation to dispute in leadership and other areas of governance (Ahmad, 1976: pp. 196).

Modernity has brought about existence of freedom of press among journalists as they have been able to freely express and highlight public views regarding the dictatorial governance and the Sharia laws in Islamic countries (Ali & Effendi, 1986: 157). Modernity has also led to equality in

judgment in both men and women through non gender based fair trials. These views were expressed in the journal of Turkish modernist movement known as Narmik Kemal. The journal has promoted the development in Turkey as compared to other Muslim countries such as Syria. Modernity has also created the Muslim girl-child to access education like the boy counterpart. Initially the sharia law denied the girl the right to attend madrasas which is the Arabic word for classes. Through the acquired knowledge and accepting scientific methods in production, it has led to expansion in agriculture, industrialization and trade for instance in Qatar and united Arab Emirates. These skills have led to general development of these nations as compared to other conservative Islamic countries such as Syria and Yemen (Abdullah, 1987: pp. 102).

Modernity however, has also led to negative consequences. These include, increase in hostility by strict Muslims to any individual or agency that tries to change or adjust their religious ethics. This is viewed to be the major factor that has fuelled jihads that if violent, non Muslims refer to as terrorism. Technology has also been used to spread the orders and instructions to carry out this organized acts of resistance in favor of Allah (islamonline. net /Contemporary/2002/05). The internet has been able to erode the morality level in former strict Islamic countries since the Islamic people get to view or access behaviors that are discouraged globally but errant individuals from other regions abuse their freedom to the internet to share globally like pornography (Islam and Modernity: pp. 495-503).

In conclusion, modernity cannot be totally overlooked in the way in which sharia laws are applied. Global development and international trade success

heavily relies on open interaction, sharing of tradition and religious ethics. It is therefore mandatory for parties involved to develop a mutual compromise and tolerance in order to keep these trading associations.

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