

## **Tajdid, Islah, and Civilizational Renewal in Islam**

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Mohammed Hashim Kamali, an Islamic scholar and specialist in Islamic law and jurisprudence, possesses higher degrees in Comparative Law from University of London, and taught at McGill University (Canada) and International Islamic University, Malaysia for most of his academic career. Since 2008, he is the Founding Chairman and CEO of International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS), Malaysia and editor-in-chief of its journal *Islam and Civilizational Renewal* (ICR) (for details, see [www.iais.org.my](http://www.iais.org.my) and [www.hashimkamali.com](http://www.hashimkamali.com)).

Kamali has published widely on various ‘Shari‘ah topics’ and many of his books, including *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (1991), *Shari‘ah Law: An Introduction* (2008), and *A Textbook on Hadith Studies* (2009), are used as reference works in English-speaking universities worldwide (v). In his numerous writings, Kamali has unequivocally expressed his views on the reformation of Islamic law; over the years, he has developed a philosophy of, and has been engaged, in research on diverse topics within the paradigm of civilizational renewal (*al-tajdid al-hadhari*) (see, for example, his 2008 *Civilizational Renewal: Revisiting the Islam Hadhari Approach*). A recent addition to this corpus is his “Occasional Paper” reviewed here.

A slim booklet of over 50 pages, with 100 references and notes from classical Arabic and English sources, the basic theme of work under review is that “civilizational renewal is an integral part of Islamic thought” and that looking into the origins, history, and interpretation (classical and contemporary) of *tajdid*, *islah*, and their relationship with *ijtihad*, will help in developing “*tajdid*-related formulas and guidelines” leading to “forging the objectives of inter-civilizational harmony and their cooperation for the common good” (v). Divided broadly into two parts, this paper first looks into “an analysis of *tajdid*, its definition and scope, its textual origins and the impact of scholastic developments thereon” and then throws light on “*islah* in conjunction with Islamic revivalist movements, interactions and responses to western modernity and secularism” (1). This is followed by a brief discussion exploring the relevance of *maqasid* to *islah* and *tajdid*, and “an overview of the Western critique and responses it has received from Muslim thinkers” (1). The concluding sections “address the question as to how civilizational renewal (*al-tajdid al-hadari*) is to be understood in its Islamic context”, and finally ends with a conclusion and recommendations (1).

This text begins with the bold claim that the “history of Islamic thought is marked by a continuous tradition of internal revitalization and reform embedded in the principles of *islah* and *tajdid*,” and it is the “tradition of *islah-tajdid*” which has “consistently challenged the Muslim status quo and prompted fresh interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah” (1). Shedding light on the lexical meaning as well as technical definitions of *tajdid* by classical, medieval, and contemporary scholars—including al-Zuhri, Ibn al-Athir, al-Suyuti, al-Qaradawi, etc. (2-6)—and on the “textual origins” of *tajdid* (6-13)—wherein he focuses on its keystone *hadith* and varied interpretations—Kamali argues that “*Tajdid* accordingly implies renewal and regeneration of the applications of Islam in society, returning it to the path of Islam anew, as it was originally,” with an emphasis “on the revival of Islamic tenets and principles that have been neglected, marginalized or forgotten under the weight of new conditions and developments” (7). On the authority and interpretation of al-Shatibi and Abid al-Jabiri, he also states that “renewal and *tajdid* in our time means finding practical solutions to the issues of common concern, issues that were not encountered in the past” (12-13).

With reference to twentieth-century developments in *islah* and *tajdid* (13-17), and referring to the views of Muhammad ‘Abduh, Rashid Rida,

Seyyed H. Nasr, Murtaza Mutahhari, etc., Kamali defines *islah* as signifying “the broader meaning of ‘reconciliation’, ‘striving toward peace’, and ‘pious action’” (13). He also states that the dynamic “potency of *islah-tajdid* in Islamic history sprang from its scriptural origins and the evolving consensus that set the boundaries of Orthodoxy.” He thus argues, with reference to the “intimate relationship” of these terms, that “*tajdid* ... mean[s] little unless it is aimed ultimately at *islah*” (13). Elaborating further the 20th century socio-political and intellectual milieu of the Muslim world, the author explains the link between Islamic revivalism and *Tajdid*, referring specifically to the views/works of Muhammad Iqbal, Abd al-Mutaal al-Saidi, Fazlur Rahman, Jamal al-Din Atiyah, and Muhammad Salim al-Awa. This is followed by brief sections on “The Relevance of *Maqasid [al-Shari’ah]*” (22-23) and “A Critique of *Tajdid*” (24-27). The latter summarizes, under four points, Kamali’s assessment of developments in the *tajdid* discourse, as mentioned here in abridged form: (1) Precedent-oriented *tajdid* that mainly sought to address new issues through *ijtihad*, as manifested by Rida, Said Ramadan al-Buti, Mahmud al-Tahhan, etc.; (2) Advocacy of open-*ijtihad* (*al-ijtihad al-maftuh*) that read scripture and rationality side by side, as advocated by Iqbal, al-Saidi, Amin al-Khuli, and al-Qaradawi; (3) the Islamization of Knowledge and epistemological reform movements that sought to address a perceived crisis of civilization through methodological innovation and reform—as propagated by IIIT and its members; and (4) *tajdid*-cum-globalization, which seeks to address the challenges of modernity in their own context, and is advocated by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, Abid al-Jabiri, Muhammad al-Talbi, and Abul-Qasim Haaj Ahmad, etc. (24-25).

He also refers to Malek Bennabi and Mutahhari, who consider “poor planning and lack of direction” and “absence of a comprehensive plan and vision”, respectively, as the main reasons for the failure of Muslim revival movements (25-26). In the next section, “A Plea for Theological Renewal” (27-32), Kamali argues: “A renewed *kalam* must be rooted in the guidance of the Qur’an and traditions of Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]”; it should be ruled by “the practice of love, compassion, and service toward His creature”; and thus the “*kalam* of compassion should be grounded in the Islamic traditions of ‘renewal (*tajdid*) and scholarly spiritual striving (*ijtihad*)” (31).

By this discussion, Kamali prepares ground for addressing the broad “notion of civilizational renewal in Islam” (32). For him, civilizational renewal is “broad and comprehensive, and so is the role of *tajdid* therein” (33). Among others, these elements of renewal include: reciprocating with

what is better (cf. Q. 41:34); recognition and advocacy of pluralism in the cultural, political, and socio-legal components of Islamic civilization (Q. 5:48; 49:13); developing beneficial cooperation (*ta'awun*) and exchange with other communities and civilizations; enhancing and further developing the jurisprudence of minorities (*fiqh al-aqaliyyat*) for minority Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries, based on Q. 2:233; unwavering commitment to the advancement of equality, freedom, human rights, gender justice, and protection of the human dignity of women; and a resolute stand and commitment to the elimination of sectarian conflicts in cleaving to the Qur'anic vision by which "the believers are brethren" (Q. 49:10) (34-36).

Here he also locates the role, contribution, and achievements of *IAIS* and its journal *ICR* within the framework of civilizational renewal (36-37): "The Institute embraced the basic vision of civilizational renewal (*tajdid hadari*) that aims at widening the scope of the revivalist discourse of the closing decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century from its exceedingly narrowed focus on *fiqh* issues, ... over the broader themes and objectives of Islamic civilization" (p. 36).

In the final section, 'Conclusion and Recommendations' (37-40), Kamali argues that "the *tajdid* potential is a permanent feature of the Ummah" and Muslim scholarship, both in past and present, has "widened the scope of *tajdid* to matters outside the established text and precedent" (37). He also points out the enduring challenge of "establishing a correct balance of emphasis between valid yet also sometimes conflicting pulls of Islamic authenticity, and formation of adequate responses to contemporary issues." This ranges from the "challenges of good governance, economic development, science and technology" to "broader issues of science and civilization" (38). He thus proposes numerous recommendations, including among them:

*Tajdid* is an important instrument of achieving renewal and social progress in harmony with religious principles;

though Islamic discourse on renewal and *tajdid* has moved in tandem with the prevailing conditions of history and has exhibited internal diversity and scope to meet new challenges, yet it needs to be more engaging;

*Tajdid* is multi-disciplinary, not an exclusively *fiqhi* theme, and thus it should be accorded greater recognition;

*Tajdid* and *Islah* need to be expanded within the broader picture of Islamic civilizational objectives, and not to be confined to particularities of any discipline; and

*Tajdid* in the era of globalization should be given the opportunity to acquire international dimensions and find common solutions to the issues faced by humanity at large. (38-40)

Though the book is slim in size, it is rich in its contents and analysis. Keeping in view his scholarly profile and academic career of contributions on this theme, especially within the broader discourse of civilizational renewal, Kamali's *Tajdid, Islah, and Civilizational Renewal in Islam* is a must-read work for everyone interested in seeking solutions to the contemporary issues Islam is facing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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