

Review Article

The Rescuing of Muslim Anthropological Thought

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Akbar S. Ahmed, *Toward Islamic Anthropology: Definition, Dogma, and Directions*, Islamization of Knowledge series (2) New Era Publications/International Institute of Islamic Thought 1976, 77 pp.

Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Center for contemporary Arab studies, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 1986, 22 pp.

I. The Malaise and its Remedy

Both of these scholarly publications may be seen as statements of the need for Islamic anthropology. They contain expressions of the discontent of Muslim anthropologists with the state of the art of contemporary anthropological studies. Many Muslim anthropologists and other social scientists share in the feelings evident in these essays and well stated in the late Dr. Ali Shari'ati's *Civilization and modernization*:

When I feel my own religion, literature, emotion, needs and pains through my own culture, I feel my own self, the very social and historical

self (not the individual self), the source from which this culture has originated. . . . But certain artificial factors, probably of a dubious nature, creep into a society which has well defined social conditions or social relations, developed through a specific historical framework, and acquaint it with pains, sufferings, emotions and sentiments which have an alien spirit and are a product of a different past, a different training and society. . . . Then when I wish to feel my own real self, I find myself conceiving another society's culture instead of my own and bemoaning troubles not mine at all. I groan about cynicism not pertinent to cultural, philosophical and social realities of my society. I then find myself harboring aspirations, ideals and anguishes legitimately belonging to social, economic, and political conditions of societies other than mine. Nonetheless, I treat these desires, ideals, and anguish as if they were my own. . . . Another culture has alienated me. (From English translation published by Houston, TX: Free Islamic Literatures, Inc. '79: pp. 7-8.)

The comprehensive analysis of this general malaise afflicting the worldwide Muslim *ummah* and its contemporary leadership as well as the framework for the rescue of the Muslim intelligentsia from the pitfalls of religious isolation and fanaticism, cultural and emotional alienation, self-contempt, and loss of self-esteem is most forcefully stated in the work and academic leadership of the late Dr. Isma'īl Al Fārūqī and his colleagues, students, and associates. Dr. Fārūqī's thought pointed out that the academic labor of the Muslim scholar and his/her participation in the rituals of scholarly productivity, debate, and discussion bereft of Islamic soul and spirit is like the native American ritual of couvade. Like the husband in couvade who lay in his bed and pretended to experience the pains of childbirth while it was in fact the wife who was going through the pains of giving birth, too many Muslim scholars have been only pretending to be productive.

The remedy that has been proposed in the "Islamization of Knowledge" initiative (as stated in, International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), *Islamization of knowledge: General principles and workplan*, Herndon, VA. (1987) requires as an initial step the mastery of a significant Western discipline. The authors of both books under review have satisfied that requirement admirably in that they are both British trained and highly recognized in their fields of anthropological specialization.

The remedy also seeks resolution of the problem of lack of illumination in materialist social sciences by resort to classical Islamic thought methodology. Dr. Ahmed as well as Dr. Asad recognize that new thought and fresh perspectives are sorely needed in anthropology even when considered in its own terms, i.e., without particular concern with Islam. Dr. Asad has provided some fresh air to the ongoing debates on the sociology and anthropology of Islam

(conceptually a different variety of subject matter from Islamic anthropology) in outlining a notion of "discursive tradition" (pp. 14-77). This concept may prove helpful in revitalizing Islamic anthropology and is discussed below. However, neither publication deals explicitly with questions pertaining to Islamic thought, methodology or its history. In fact Dr. Ahmed laments the fate of the "Muslim intellectual" as wandering "between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." (p. 61).

I trust that the dead world he means is not the world of the knowledge of the Islamic scholars of the past. (May Allah's blessing be always upon them). To assume that they and their knowledge is dead is only an assumption. For Allah states in the Qur'an that many whom people assume to be dead are not in fact dead. This verse in the Qur'an is usually interpreted as referring to those who sacrificed their lives in battles for Islam. Is it not also applicable to those who spent their lives developing the rational thought basis for the survival of Islam in the centuries that have passed since the era of our Prophet Muhammad (SAAS)?

The logical basis and orientation of the "Islamization of Knowledge" program are summarized in Dr. Faruqi's Foreword to *Toward Islamic Anthropology*. The ideas presented in that Foreword as ingredients to a remedy for the malaise of the Muslim *ummah* and its intellectual leadership need to be commented on here as background.

A. Discipline

The formulation of the principles of Islamization of Knowledge took place within the context and format of modern university style education and scholarly exchange. The *status quo* notions of disciplinary distinctions among the scholars who took part in the exchanges was maintained. Following from that initial definition, Dr. Ahmed's book tries to look at anthropology as a discipline in itself, as well as at Islam and other abstractions that he is concerned with. The book is thus not problem-oriented except in the sense that there is a massive problem of the need for Islamic anthropology.

However, when I look at what has transpired since statements began to be made concerning "disciplines" within Islamic social sciences in activities of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists and in the formalization of the Islamization Work-Plan, it seems necessary to re-examine the concept of "discipline" itself. One of the reasons for this is the Eastern association of the concept of discipline and discipleship with the sacred art of learning and teaching within the environment of beliefs associated with spiritual control of the teaching/learning process. Such an association applicable to the idea of learning Islamic social sciences is completely inappropriate when used in conjunction with the contemporary definition and derivation of the term.

Another reason is that many, if not all, of the sciences of human behavior are constantly crossing each other's boundaries. The boundaries of separately defined social sciences, like those of ethnic groups, have shown themselves to be very fluid.

Anthropologists, in particular, are keenly aware of the multifaceted encyclopedic nature of their field of study. Dr. Ahmed has done proper justice to this aspect of the discipline (pp. 19-25) although like most British social anthropologists he prefers to ignore the vital link of the study of human beings to the natural sciences, well preserved in most schools of thought within American anthropology. In practice, as understood in contemporary academic settings, "disciplines" of various social sciences are idealistic abstractions. In concrete terms what we have are "programs" in anthropology, sociology, geography and so forth. These programs have specific ties to the history, faculty backgrounds, and other aspects of the environments in which they have developed. Anthropology at Harvard is not the same thing as it is at UCLA, LSE, or at Cheyney. As such, in the statement "Islamization of anthropology", the subject or object of Islamization is rather vague and obscure.

Disciplines of anthropology and other social sciences have developed in the social, economic, ideological, and professional environments of various nation-states. The thought structures characteristic of the profession of anthropology are tied to various local, economic, and other interests of the institutions that have fostered their development. The universalistic practice of Islamic social science, however, is at once for all nations and states and educational institutions and by the same token for no specific nation, state, or university. As an exhibit of such a social science Dr. Ahmed's book tends to be too vague and general in too many places. Perhaps in recognition of that Dr. Faruqi in his Foreword has included travellers and explorers, scientists and generals, colonial administrators, missionaries, mission physicians, Western social scientists, folklorists, historians of art and literature, linguists, ethnomusicologists, and their caricatures — the new breed of Western-trained Muslim scholars all in a pile to be called "anthropologists". Dr. Ahmed's book is a beginning toward answering the question of how a specialized Islamic anthropological discipline may emerge from the study of endeavors so disparate.

B. Islam and knowledge.

The assertion contained in the Foreword that "Islam regards all knowledge as critical, i.e. as universal, necessary, and rational" will come as somewhat of a surprise to most readers of English. In much of English language thought, the association of religion is with the lack of knowledge and its associated evils such as superstition, mysticism, magic, and irrational fears. The contemporary association of Islam as a religion is with all those things and worse

such as terrorism, despotism and other political irrationalities. Dr. Al-Faruqi, from the perspective of an enlightened vision of Islam, rejected such irregular associations in all his works, and demanded an analysis of the unity of anthropological and Islamic knowledge.

C. Islam as guidance and vision for anthropologists.

In Al-Fārūqī's words:

The positive direction in which a redressed anthropology may be directed must derive from the vision of Islam. This vision is determined by the unity and transcendence of God, reason, life—and world affirmation, universalism, *ummaticism*, and ethical service as the *raison d'être* of humanity. . . . Anthropology. . . should learn anew the simple but primordial truths of all knowledge that are equally the first truths of Islam, namely, the truth is one, just as God is one, and as humankind is one. (pp. 8-9).

The consonance of Dr. Ahmed's views with such a vision for Islamic anthropology is debatable. The recommendations he has made for Islamic Anthropology (pp. 65-66), are chiefly oriented toward the production of text-books and other pedagogic material rather than toward the engagement in the exercises of bringing anthropological thought, from its roots, within the focus of the Islamic vision of man and God and their mutual relationship. While Dr. Faruqi's fondness was for the latter pursuit his direction during the later years of his life was to encourage scholars of the calibre of Dr. Ahmed to begin the former task.

In considering tasks such as rewriting anthropology text-books in a medium suitable for colleges and universities in Muslim lands, it is necessary to keep in mind the different levels at which Islamization of anthropological thought may occur and their logical sequence. Thus one may conceptualize a level "A", an epistemological level of pure thought and reason in which the idea of "humankind" as conceptualized within modern Western anthropology is washed, and redressed and brought within the meaning of the concept of *Tawhid*. Such rethinking is apparently part of the, albeit, private and unpublished, social thinking of many Muslim social scientists. But, as far as I know, it is only in the work of Dr. Isma'il Al-Faruqi that any reasoning for even elementary concepts in social science as perceived from a *Tawhid* perspective can be said to exist in published form. That foundation that he has laid, the way he has opened for Islamic social scientists, needs to be embellished and strengthened for each subway of the social sciences. Anthropology, also arising from a number of "oneness" hypotheses, such as one human species, psychic unity of mankind, common denominators of all cultures, unilinear

evolutionism, and so forth seems fertile ground to till and sow the idea of *Tawhid*, i.e. to develop the epistemology of Qur'an-based sciences. For such development we have to await the further works of scholars like Akbar Ahmed and Talal Asad.

At another, practical level, Level "B", necessarily involving the inclusion of funding agencies, colleagues, universities etc. are the tasks of engaging in research and the teaching and sharing of new knowledge brought about as a consequence of level "A".

Insofar as the activities at level (B) have to take place within the control of established scientific and educational establishments, some kind of self-assessment of the need for Islamic anthropology, and resources that could be made available for its development by Muslim educational institutions would seem necessary. Thus, for instance, we may all laud Dr. Ahmed's interest in producing "one major standard anthropological text book" to be translated and used for B.A. level education in all Muslim colleges. However, the intelligent way to go about engaging in such production is to go to the undergraduate faculty in those universities and request them to review their undergraduate general education curriculum and educate them in the value of incorporating Islamic anthropology into it, and in the processes by which such incorporation may be accomplished. Producing text-books is only one segment of that process. The retraining of existing faculty in anthropology departments would be another crucial segment.

Dr. Ahmed himself in one of his early works has lamented the Pakistani government's typical lack of attention to servicing even the basic educational needs of the population. Political power structures in Muslim lands, except for a few exceptions, have generally demonstrated their unwillingness to educate their subjects, particularly, in the social, philosophical, and political sciences. The development of Islamic social scientific thought in that kind of political milieu—where the rulers are afraid of their citizens and the free thought of their *ulama*—can only take place at the risk of the lives and careers of the scholars who engage in such an endeavor. This has been well demonstrated in the experience and sacrifice of so many Imams in the history of Islamic thought, as well as in the "brain-drain" of the contemporary Muslim intelligentsia to Western societies, which nevertheless accept, and welcome independent thought and provide support and avenues for its expression.

II. Comparative Study of Islam.

Dr. Ahmed has also recommended that "a simple, lucid sociological account of the life of the Prophet (ṢAĀṢ) be prepared by a Muslim." His reasoning for this deserves comment. He assumes that hagiography is inadequate for

the rendition of the *sirah* while sociology is adequate and necessary. "For our purposes what is needed is sociology not hagiography" (p. 65). What is the basis for this reasoning? Even in English, Carlyle's biographical appreciation has generally been received better by the Muslim public than social science based approaches. Within sociology and anthropology it is only after the 1960s, in the work of ethnomethodologists and related schools of thought, that the usefulness of utilizing life-story materials in understanding history and other social phenomena has begun to be appreciated. It would be well worth it to get into the substance of that school of thought, not even noted by Dr. Ahmed, prior to taking a position on the mutual relevance and relationships between hagiography and sociology or history. The *sirah* of *Rasullullah* (*ṢAAṢ*) as rendered in an Islamic hagiographical style by Ibn Hisham (now available in an English translation by Alfred Guillame) and in the numerous other accepted early compilations has been adequate for Muslims for the development of their piety as well as knowledge for many centuries. Any subsequent work has to build on that foundation and not negate or ignore it.

Sociology has its many uses, but has proved methodologically insufficient to grasp Islam even in its most superficial forms. The lamenting of the inadequacies of the so-called comparative study of Islam by Western social scientists is a constant theme in both publications being reviewed (See Ahmed: pp. 50-65; & Asad: pp. 1-14, which includes a brief but cogent reply to an earlier contribution to this focus of study by the late Dr. Abdul-hamid El-Zein) and significantly in Dr. Fārūqī's Foreword. Perhaps understandably, the Western social science tradition of scholarship about Islam has been unable to approach the meaning of Islamic behavior at any level beyond that of the essentially bloodstained metaphors of kinship, tribe, caste, race, nation, and empire. The Islamization of Knowledge program seeks to remedy the methodological weaknesses of disciplines arising from the tradition of Western social sciences so that they will become useful in the understanding of Islam. To attempt to sociologize the *sirah* before Islamizing the methodology of that discipline may prove to be worse than putting the horse behind the cart.

In Pakistan the brief but important contribution of Dr. Basahart Ali toward Islamizing sociological thought predates the more systematic internationally based attempt coming from IIT. Dr. Ahmed seems unaware of his own countryman's work, as he is unaware of other works on Islamizing anthropology published prior to his attempt. As such an important recommendation should be for the setting up of lines of proper communication amongst scholars who are working in this field so that there will be adequate bibliographic dissemination.

It is obvious that Dr. Ahmed, like many other present day Muslim intellectuals, is perturbed by views such as those of Montgomery Watt and even embarrassed by blasphemies such as those of Crook and Crony that he has

cited. There are worse caricatures of the name and fame of our Prophet (ﷺ) coming out of the Indian press. But these would be disturbing to us only if we ourselves had not read and believed the original versions of the story of our Prophet as told in Ibn Hisham for instance. I don't believe we can put ourselves in the position of cleaning up after the mess that some of these so-called scholars are making for themselves. In fact, as far as Western literatures are concerned Montgomery Watt is a considerable improvement over Dante and Milton.

Further, anthropological analyses of the times and environment of the Prophet (ﷺ), as in the work of Eric Wolf and Barbara Aswad which Dr. Ahmed seems to summarily dismiss, contain certain kinds of information on the material circumstances surrounding the earthly existence of the Prophet, conceptualized within the framework of anthropological-ecological notions, which many traditional *sirah* scholars either did not see or ignored. These modern ecological notions may be usefully compared with Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the peculiarities and uniqueness of the physical environment of the Hejaz. It would behoove the Muslim anthropologist to attempt to explain the conceptual basis of such analyses to his/her fellow Islamic scholar schooled in the traditional *madrasah* tradition. Such exchange may prove to be an antidote to the excesses of *taqlid* and traditionalism of the *madrasah* system of education. Insufficient attention to material conditions and circumstances and excessive attention to supra-material conditions is a problem that envelops present day Muslim life and world-view. What we can and should learn from Western civilization emanates from its material advancements and achievements.

What is necessary, therefore, is not to re-write a new fangled, sociologized or anthropologized *sirah* but to make certain that students of Islamic social sciences learn to think critically, and to master the basic sources of Islamic knowledge such as the *sirah* as part of their general education and as a prerequisite for pursuing studies in Islamic social science. For such purposes modern English language works such as the translation of Dr. Muhammad Husayn Haykal's interpretation and the more recent excellent original work of Dr. Seyyid Abubuckr Sirajuddin (Martin Lings) are adequate and need not be dismissed lightly as Dr. Ahmed does. It would behoove anthropologists who are attempting to Islamize their disciplines to also first master the sources in *usul al-din* and *usul al-fiqh*. In the final analysis the understanding of the life and times of our Prophet (ﷺ) is as much a spiritual exercise as it is an intellectual one. Understanding the spirituality of Muhammad requires spiritual effort: devotion, prayer and worship.

It is the spirituality of the Prophet (ﷺ) as a worshipper, as one who communed directly with the Almighty Allah (S.W.T.), and became the vehicle for the transmission of the commandments of Allah to all human beings

after him until the Day of Judgement that envelops his earthly role as Messenger, just as the heavens envelop the earth. Unfortunately, many scholars, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, make the mistake of using what they have come to know of his temporal role as *amir al mu'minin*, as judge, commander and statesman, to mask his spiritual rank and position as the Final Prophet, the *hudah* of all prophets, and as the one who asked for and received the blessing of Islam for his *ummah* directly from Allah (*S.W.T.*). That mistake of not understanding the differences among the levels of significance between the spiritual and eternal on the one hand and the historical and socio-political on the other, leads to a short-sighted view. In my opinion it is not reasonable to expect non-Muslims or non-practicing Muslims to learn to appreciate the Prophet of Islam in the total earthly and heavenly senses. But miracles are always possible!

III. Defining Islamic Anthropology.

Dr. Ahmed's book is presented as "speculatory" and "incomplete" (p.13). From such a position of hesitancy, the author provides a definition of Islamic anthropology which is rather awkward in formulation (cf. for instance p.17 with p.56). The formulation is in two parts: The first part defines and traces the history of the development of British social anthropology. The brief overview (pp. 13-28) is in summary fashion and should have included references to at least some of the available, more exhaustive, studies of the subject. In the second part, a "loose" definition of Islamic anthropology is provided as follows:

the study of Muslim groups by scholars committed to the universalistic principles of Islam—humanity, knowledge, tolerance—relating micro village tribal studies. . .to. . .historical and ideological frames of Islam (p. 56).

To me, the implication of his approach that British and "Islamic" anthropology are essentially, conceptually, and substantively different and disconnected pieces is illogical and contrary to the principle of the unity of knowledge. Both British and Pakistani-British-Islamic anthropology (as presented by Dr. Ahmed) are parts of human thought, the history of which follows the rules of the development of human *aql* provided to humans by their Creator. The method and style of the worship of the One God by Muslims is significantly different from the methods and styles of worship accepted by the British precursors to Dr. Ahmed's anthropological thought. If patterns and procedures of worship—*ibadah* is to be a criterion in the definition of anthropology, then the way in which Islamic anthropology promotes, explains, elaborates, evaluates or otherwise takes a position in regard to the patterns and processes of worship

of God needs to be explicated. If that is done it would imply a significant separation of Islamic from other anthropologies.

In one sense Dr. Ahmed has tried to do this by quoting Ali Shariati (p.61):

Religion is . . . a road or a path leading from clay to God and conveying man from vileness, stagnation and ignorance, from the lowly life of clay and satanic character, towards exaltation, motion, vision, the life of the spirit and divine character. If it succeeds in doing so, then it is religion in truth. But if it does not, then either you have chosen the wrong path, or you are making wrong use of the right path.

Is it Dr. Ahmed's position that anthropology can assist in "illuminating the right path"? If so, how? There is an important question here, and it remains unanswered in the manner in which he has projected Islamic anthropology.

The thinking about the subject of religion in the book is rather confusing. Earlier in the book (pp. 41-44) Dr. Ahmed has discussed "Beliefs, Magic, and Religion", without any reference or use of Sharati's or any other Islamic thinker's views on religion or on paths right or wrong. Can Islamic anthropology illuminate and improve on the age-old, worn-out concepts derived from Durkheim, Freud, and Evans-Pritchard that he has uncritically adopted and seems to hold onto? In this regard, should we not look deeper into the relationship of the religions of these authors – sometimes overtly Christian as with Evans-Pritchard, sometimes Judaic, Marxist, humanist or in some other variety – to their theories of what were to them, religions other than their own? There may be much to gain from formulating a method of academic interaction with not only Western anthropological theorists of religion, but also with the Western humanist and other theological students of religion. It is in the latter disciplines that the methods by which modern Judeo-Christian rationality, and educated, rational religious opinion developed, are most clearly articulated. The little from the genius of an Isma'il or Lamyia Al-Faruqi that came to be known to most Muslims, regarding Islamic rationality, and its methodology, was, in the wider context, of their (the Faruqis') interaction with representatives of Western theological and other humanist disciplines. It is also the common experience of many Muslim graduate and undergraduate students in American anthropology departments who have worked with professors whose respect for Christianity and devotion to the rational, and unfettered analysis of Truth in human religiosity as a whole is as deep as it is personal. Talal Asad, whose preoccupation in recent years has been issues in the history and anthropology of medieval Christianity may well be on the right track.

IV. Participant Observation in Cultural/Social Anthropological Research

Dr. Ahmed's idea of the observation of human behavior, the principal anthropological research tool, as presented in this book is archaic and inadequate, to say the least. This is surprising since he has a broad reputation for having done much field-work. Contrasting participant — observation (or field-work, pp. 28-31 & *passim*) with experimental methods is pointless. One can observe experimental social situations, as well as natural ones. The methodologically significant issues are controlled vs. uncontrolled observations, and the problems in the delineation of variables for control. In social science the delineation of variables is almost always, and by necessity, only an approximation. In experiments done in the laboratory, usually in the physical and biological sciences, the variables are more exactly defined. In both instances, however, human observation of the interaction of the variables is the key to the next steps: inference, deduction, conclusion and so forth. During the last twenty years or so advances in "field-work" methodology have been primarily directed by the need to critically evaluate the percepts and concepts that guide the field-worker's observations. In assuming a contentious position toward Professor Frederick Barth, who has made some significant contributions in this regard, Dr. Ahmed seems to have ignored this entire line of recent development in the sciences of the observation of human behavior.

Some relevant aspects in these developments should be noted here, so that other Muslim anthropologists also do not throw away the baby with the bath-water. Perhaps more than anything else, the anthropological research experience points to the value of information regarding human behavior that comes from inferences made from the direct observation of actual walking, talking, working, dating, bathing, dining, praying, sleeping, singing, dancing, fighting, teaching, learning and other forms of human activities. It is the experiences of engaging in such observation that makes the anthropologist a specific kind of social scientist. That experience is something to think about for most other kinds of specialists, including our traditional *ulamah*, who seem to arrive at inferences and assumptions regarding human behavior almost entirely from what they read in books. Reading human behavior requires training and experience in a script so totally different in structure from any in which books are written. As Dr. Ahmed has also noted, there is a strong scholarly foundation for this method of study in the history of Islamic thought such as in the works of Al-Biruni and the well-known Muslim world-traveller authors. However, the methodologies for the critical evaluation of what people say, as developed by the *muhadithun*, for instance, is also part of this tradition. Present-day developments in the sciences dealing with the collection of information from direct observation, interviewing, opinion-polling, surveying, and so forth should

become an important point of focus in any future development of rational Islamic social thought.

Additionally, observation as a data-gathering technique is not restricted to lonely anthropologists sitting in tribal surroundings in Borneo or the Amazon as Dr. Ahmed seems to imply. It is now widely practised in the United States, for instance, in educational and industrial settings for the gathering of information relevant to the evaluation of programs and productivity. It is becoming increasingly common to require training in techniques of human behavior observation for workers in government, medical, industrial, and other agencies servicing multicultural clientele.

It is also relevant to note that field-work research is physically and emotionally more taxing on the individual than library research. Several books on how to do field-work have appeared recently in the market, none of which Dr. Ahmed makes reference to. Ideally, however, field-observation and analysis of resulting data cannot be learnt from books. It is most profitably learnt in practice within the conditions of apprenticeship with somebody who has already gone through its trials and tribulations. One of the chief gaps in the communication between anthropologists and Islamic Studies specialists as well as with the orientalist type of scholars is precisely due to the differences that accrue from field-work training. The former would tend to treat the latter as somewhat of a book-worm. The latter tend to treat the former's enterprise as attempts to bring knowledge soiled by street dirt into the "clean" environment of their academies. Given the importance of field-work training for excellence in anthropology as well as several other human sciences, it is incumbent upon Islamic anthropologists to develop systematic procedures of field-work training, focused on its value for Islamic social science, that would bridge the gap between the two cultures of scholarship.

V. Islam as Discursive Tradition.

In the conclusion to his analysis of recent anthropological approaches to the study of Islam, Dr. Talal Asad concluded:

The most urgent theoretical need for an anthropology of Islam is a matter...of formulating the right concepts (p. 14).

He proposes such a concept, named "discursive tradition". In his view, Islam is to be analysed as a tradition (or traditions) founded on the basis of the Qur'an and *Hadith*, and subsequently communicated through a series of methods. I will attempt to re-state his thesis in a briefer version using his own words:

A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and practice of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. . . . An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. . . . A practice is Islamic because it is authorized by the discursive traditions of Islam, and is so taught to Muslims. . . . (pp. 14-15).

Dr. Asad sees the value of this approach primarily in regard to the furthering of anthropological analyses and knowledge. It may also be usefully seen as a focus for the development of Islamic thought on crucial questions of contemporary practice and behavior by Muslims themselves and by Islamic anthropologists.

In order to do that, however, we need to first formulate a further questions that Dr. Asad does not seek to answer in his publication. Why does an anthropologist learn one's own or other peoples' traditions? Part of the answer to that question may lie in what he points out in regard to the "interest" of anthropologists in Islam: That, in spite of pretensions to the contrary, there is no guarantee of political or moral innocence in the attitude of the conventional anthropologist student of Islam (p. 17).

Another significant aspect of the answer may be derived from a basic Islamic premise: that the human search for knowledge, including anthropological knowledge, like all human activities, has purpose, and all purposes have to be categorized within a framework of relationships to the fundamental purpose in the creation of humankind, namely the worship of God. Viewed from this perspective the basis of the traditions of practice that Dr. Asad seeks to learn about, need not be something separate *sui generis* from the basis of the thought, rationality, and analytic categories that one employs to learn, study, evaluate, compare, and analyze those traditions. The appropriate route to discover the place of "argument" and "reason". (p. 16) in the development of Islamic traditions is via the authority for them in the same Qur'an and *Hadith* which we accept as the basis of the traditions, as well as via the socio-behavioral positions from which statements of the "argument" or "reason" are made.

The "traditions" that Dr. Asad mentions seem to be the same as, or approximations of, the "paths" that Dr. Ahmed, following Shariati, wishes to learn. For analytical purposes such paths and traditions may be conceptualized:

- (a) as observable in human interaction at the level of behavior;
- (b) at the level of *fiqh* (i.e. the understanding of Islam appropriate for a specific time and place),
- (c) as having evolved historically as a pattern of community behavior; and
- (d) as requiring a fresh Islamic anthropological analysis.

Such new perspectives will be subject to verification and validation according to the norms of the Muslim public as well as of social and behavioral sciences.

By so re-defining the analysis and including the need for Islamic validation, I mean to take the idea away from the possibilities of likely pitfalls that, in the past, have beset the type of approach that Dr. Asad has proposed. In the 1950s, at Harvard and other US anthropology departments a movement was initiated for the study of the Great Religions as the comparative, empirical analysis of their Sacred Traditions with their little versions "on the ground". Von Grunebaum's initiatives in the cultural anthropological study of Islam (as of a host of others whose analytic bent has been summarized by Asad, (p. 6), arose out of this movement. In my opinion, the movement fell short of its promise because of an inability to face the reality of the sacred beliefs of people in their traditions which surpassed the anthropologist's scepticism. Although arrived at from a different place, Dr. Asad's approach as presented in the publication under review seems rooted in a similar, limited meaning space. To uproot it from there and replant it in the wide-open meaning space of *Tawhid* would seem to hold a different promise and open up further possibilities.

Dr. Asad also needs to clarify his meaning of the concept of "unlettered Muslims", as for instance in:

...I refer here primarily not to the programmatic *discourses* of "Modernist" and "fundamentalist" Islamic movements, but to the established *practices* of unlettered Muslims (p. 15).

The emphasis on such a category smacks of a kind of anthropological romanticism of a bygone era. "Unletteredness" could be a sacred category in an Islamic normative framework, in that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was an unlettered person. What should be attempted is the understanding of the tremendous paradox of the fact that that unlettered person brought to this world a Book, which in its revelation began with the command to "read!" and again to read in the name of the Lord who taught man "by the pen"! He brought a religion which like no other religion of its scope and significance appeals to human rationality, and thinking and reasoning ability.

There is however, a different kind of illiteracy that should be a primary variable in any analysis of contemporary Islamic traditions. It is the lack, among too many Muslims, of even a reading knowledge of their *din*. There are literally millions of Muslims in the world, who when asked, would claim to be Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, or of another *madhab*, but who have never seen even the color of a page in a book which marked the origin of the thought foundation of their *madhab-tradition*. During the centuries that have elapsed, especially during and after periods of alien political domination, they have

made so many changes in their practices, and have somehow rationalized, but not reasoned out, the changes they have made, nor have they expressed their reasoning in a manner appropriate to the canons of thought by which their *madhab* was originally formulated. It is not unreasonable to assume that this condition is an important part of the many noticeable irrationalities of Muslim life in our times. The arguments that one occasionally hears in defense of either side in the Iran-Iraq war as having a basis in *Shi'a & Sunni* theologies is a case in point.

In the more general issue that I am referring to here, is a core problem for the Muslim anthropologist, i.e., to challenge the doctrinaire insensitivities, and other irrationalities and impurities which always creep into religious behavior in its interaction with the processes of wordly life and times. Facing up to such a challenge, and not limiting Islamic anthropology to the challenging of "places like Oxford, Harvard or UCLA" (Akbar: 67 quoting Edward Said), would require not only skills in anthropological behavior analysis, but also a sound foundation in the sources of knowledge for Islamic behavior. Unless Muslim anthropologists seek and find that Islamic knowledge and utilize it appropriately in their studies, their work will only add to the burdens, confusion, and doubts that have been successfully sown into the hearts and minds of Muslims by orientalist fabrications and partial truths, and by the uncritical acceptance of such "research" as authoritative by the educated, but intellectually and emotionally dependent, "third-world" Muslim public.

VI. the Rescue of Muslim Anthropological Thought.

The theme of the Andalusian tale of *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, glorified in several English language adaptations as the Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, since the 18th century, seems appropriate as a description of the present state of the art of Muslim anthropological thought. In the original version of that tale, a shining but aloof and alone state of human intelligence, having reached brilliant heights of spirituality seeks, and after much trial and tribulations finds, a needed rescuer in the normal processes of Islamic *ibadah* and appreciation of community. The Islamization work-plan referred to at the beginning of this essay, is best seen as a plan, which has among its aims, the rescue of Western trained Muslim anthropologists from the traps that beset their territories, regardless of how high they may have climbed on its cliffs. In this review, as in my previous papers on the Islamization of anthropology, I have attempted to emphasize the commonality of the objectives of the rescue ship, and of those Muslim social scientists who are working their way out of the lonely islands of thought that they have developed from their positions within secular, Westernized social thought. The points of origin are different. But the destination is one and the same for all.

In the widest sense, the Islamization work-plan is a beckoning from that same source, a call to perform one's duty from that same Being, which has time and again sought to establish the good and forbid the evil among nations and communities, including communities of scholars. As is evident in these publications, and in developments world-wide, the potential for the Islamization of anthropology looms larger and larger every time one examines it. It is also very evident that the potential will not become an ability, or develop into an achievement, unless priorities and procedures are constantly placed under careful scrutiny.



Is not God enough for His servant?