

## “Islamic Modernism (الحدائثة الإسلامية)”: An Attack on the Prophetic Sunnah

Islamic Modernism (الحدائثة الإسلامية) refers to an idea that seeks to reinterpret Islam to align with the values and frameworks of the Western liberal world order. Emerging in the 19th century, this wave of reform was driven by influential figures such as Jamal ud Din Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and Syed Ahmed Khan. Their efforts were aimed at reconciling Islam with evolving modern political, social, and economic systems. This reinterpretation, however, often involved the distortion of Islamic principles in order to fit the evolving norms of the modern world, including Western concepts like nationalism, capitalism, human legislation, human rights, gender equality, and interfaith harmony.

One of the central challenges modernism poses is the attempt to reshape Islam to justify Western notions like the invasion of Muslim lands, privatization of public resources, a Riba-based economy, and the establishment of nation-states, which are foreign to the Islamic thought. The modernist agenda, therefore, involves modifying Islamic teachings to make them appear compatible with Western ideologies and systems.

Modernism aims to find space within the Noble Quran and Prophetic Sunnah for the values of the Western world order. This process includes twisting the interpretation of Islamic texts in order to accommodate ideas such as occupation, economic exploitation, and the promotion of individual freedoms, all of which run counter to Islamic fundamentals. Proponents of modernism argue that Islam should adapt to the modern world, yet they often overlook the fact that the fundamental human needs have not changed. Humans still need to trade, own property, appoint rulers, and regulate social relations, etc. What has changed, however, is the means and styles by which these needs are fulfilled, thanks to technological advancements.

One of the key arguments presented by modernists is the claim that Islam does not provide detailed guidance for various systems, such as governance, the economy, or the legal framework of society. This assertion, however, fails to acknowledge the rich intellectual tradition within Islam, which offers extensive elaboration on these matters.

For example, classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Mawardi, Ibn Taymiyah, and Abu Yousaf wrote comprehensive works on governance, economics, and societal organization. *Ahkaam Sultaniya* by Al-Mawardi addresses the details of governance, including the qualifications of rulers and the rules of leadership in an Islamic state. *Al-Siyasah al-Shariyah* by Ibn Taymiyah offers insight into the role of the state and its relationship with the governed. *Kitab Al-Khiraj* by Abu Yousaf, a student of the renowned scholar Abu Hanifa, provides a detailed examination of economic practices, particularly regarding land taxation and public finance.

Additionally, the Hadith literature, records of the sayings, actions, and consent of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (saw), offers detailed guidance on governance, economics, social relations, and even individual conduct. So there are Ahadith which provide specific instructions on matters of ruling, like putting the qualification of being a male for rulers in the hadith «لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ وَلَوْ أَمَرَهُمْ» «A people who appoints a woman as guardian (ruler) of their affairs will never be successful», singularity of rulership in the hadith, «إِذَا بُويعَ لِخَلِيفَتَيْنِ، فَاقْتُلُوا الْآخَرَ مِنْهُمَا» «If two Khulafa are contracted, kill the later one», and on delegation of authority on state matters as in the hadith «بَعَثَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ عُمَرَ عَلَى الصَّدَقَةِ» “Messenger of Allah (saw) appointed Umar (ra) on Sadaqah”. Similarly, we find details on matters of economy, how land should be owned and distributed, and how markets and trade should be regulated. For example, the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said, «النَّاسُ شُرَكَاءُ فِي الثَّلَاثِ: الْمَاءِ وَالْكَلْبِ وَالنَّارِ» “The people are partners in three things: water, pasture, and fire.” This statement outlines the concept of shared public resources, an essential aspect of governance and economic policy in Islam.

Sunnah also addresses matters such as the prohibition of monopolies like in the hadith, «مَنْ» «Whosoever monopolized is upon error», indicating that monopolistic practices are forbidden in Islam, on matter of price-fixing, as in the hadith «بَلَّ اللَّهُ يَخْفِضُ وَيَرْفَعُ» “Allah reduces and raises the prices,” on matter of currency like in the hadith, «الْوَزْنُ وَزْنُ أَهْلِ مَكَّةَ وَالْمِكْيَالُ»



highlights the meticulous documentation efforts that were undertaken to preserve the teachings of the Messenger of Allah (saw) for future generations.

The modernist effort to undermine the authority of Hadith disregards the fact that Hadith is an indigenous legal source within Islam, on par with the Quran itself. Numerous Quranic verses emphasize the importance of obeying the Prophet Muhammad (saw) and following his teachings. For instance, Allah says, ﴿وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا﴾ **“Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it, and whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from it”** (TMQ Al-Hashr: 7). Similarly, Allah (swt) said in another verse, ﴿وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ \* إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ﴾ **“Nor does he speak of his own desire. It is only a revelation that is inspired”** [TMQ Al-Najam 3-4]. These verses confirm that the Prophet’s actions and sayings are not just guidance, but Divine Revelation.

The Sunnah also addresses crucial legal and societal issues that are as binding as Quranic injunctions. For example, rules regarding the prohibition of free-mixing of genders, the regulation of economic transactions, and the proper conduct of marriage contracts are all derived from the Sunnah. Similarly, the Sunnah provides detailed rules for the appointment of rulers, the conduct of warfare, and the management of public affairs. These are all central to the functioning of a just and effective Islamic state.

The modernist movement often seeks to undermine the authority of Hadith, arguing that traditional Islamic teachings are outdated and incompatible with modern life. This argument is exemplified by the *Civil Democratic Islam* report<sup>i</sup> published by the RAND Corporation in 2004, which explicitly states in the appendix-A titled *“The Hadith Wars”*, that a body of “counterhadith” should be created to support more liberal, egalitarian, and democratic interpretations of Islam. This effort reflects the West’s desire to shape Islam in a way that aligns with its own values and systems, particularly its commitment to liberal democracy and secularism.

However, such efforts fail to recognize that Islam is a complete system of guidance, capable of addressing the needs of humanity, both in the past and present. The fundamental needs of humans—such as the need for justice, economic stability, governance, health, security, education and social cohesion—remain unchanged. The only aspect that has evolved is the means and styles by which these needs are addressed. Whether through modern banking systems, advanced communication technologies, or contemporary warfare, Islam remains adaptable to new methods and tools of the time. The traditional Islamic system, based on the Quran and Hadith, continues to provide relevant and comprehensive solutions for contemporary society.

“Islamic Modernism’s” attempt to reinterpret Islam in light of Western liberalism poses a direct challenge to the authenticity and authority of Hadith. By undermining the importance of the Sunnah, modernists seek to strip Islam of its comprehensive guidance on all aspects of life. However, the traditional Islamic system, rooted in both the Noble Quran and Prophetic Sunnah, remains a complete and viable framework for addressing human needs. The re-interpretation of Islam to fit modern Western ideals is not only misguided but also fails to recognize the timeless relevance of Islamic teachings. Through a rigorous process of preservation and authentication, Hadith remains as valid, relevant and authoritative today as it was during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), offering timeless solutions to the challenges of the modern world.

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<sup>i</sup> [Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies](#)