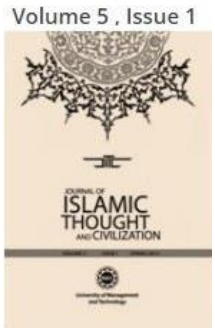

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The Works and Contributions of Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi in Islamization of Knowledge

Abstract

This paper analyses the works and contributions of Prof. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in Islamization of knowledge and its critical impact and ramifications in the Islamic world. It discusses the method and framework he developed in IOK's project as illustrated in his works such as Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan, Islamizing the Social Science and Toward Islamic English. The discussion also compares his ideas with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman. Highlighting al-Faruqi's fundamental approach and worldview and its contemporary relevance to reclaim the ideal of tajdid and reinvigorate the spirit of reform and reconstruct the Islamic epistemology of knowledge and projecting the tawhidic vision and Ummatic world order.

Key Words: *Isma'il Rají al-Faruqi, Islamic Science, Islamization of Knowledge, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Fazlur Rahman*

Introduction

This work attempts to analyse the substantial contribution of Prof. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in Islamization of knowledge. It provides a brief review of his works and analysed his impact on the movement. Al-Faruqi's magnificent contribution to the project includes publication of many books such as *Islamization* of *Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan, and Toward Islamic English, and articles such as Islamizing the Social Sciences, Islam and the Social Sciences, The First Principles of Islamic Methodology, Islamizing the Secondary School, Aslimat al-Ma'rifah, Nahwa Jami'ah Islamiyah, Islamization of Knowledge: Problems, Principles and Prospective, Defining Islamic Traditionalism: First Principles in the Islamization of Thought* and the establishment of institutions to realize this ideal such as International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

These works formed the groundwork of Islamization reflecting his progressive and dynamic paradigm of Islamic science and knowledge, which aspired for the Islamization of thought and renewal of ummatic spirit and culture, as demonstrated by Stefano Bigliardi (2012) in his article, "Barbour's Typologies and the Contemporary Debate on Islam and Science":

An Islamization of science that is regarded (by al-Faruqi) as the preliminary and most important stage in the regeneration of the Muslim community, a step not to be neglected because of other apparently more important or urgent problems in Muslim societies. It is the starting point and the backbone of a more general process of Islamization, aimed at restoring the centrality of Islam on all fields of life. Al-Faruqi also outlines practical measures to support this process: action should be taken by a group of intellectuals conscious of the problem and eager to spread awareness of; links should be established to Muslim universities.[1]

This work surveys *Al-Faruqi's* major ideas and contributions on the *Islamization of Knowledge* project, by focusing on his leading works upon *Islamization of Knowledge such as Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan, Toward Islamic English and Islamizing the Social Sciences.* It illustrates his tremendous efforts to inspire the profound ideal of Islamization and its defining importance for cultural reform and intellectual renewal in the Muslim world. The study will also discuss some critics of his ideas of IOK, and other significant efforts by principal proponents of IOK such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman, and their pioneering works that inspired major reform in Islamic thought and education and their defining role in the movement for IOK.

1. Definition and Background

In 1982 Al-Faruqi wrote a monograph that outlined the comprehensive framework of Islamization that was later published by IIIT as the *Islamization of Knowledge.* The monograph was based on the discussion in the first Seminar on the *Islamization of Knowledge* held in Islamabad from 4-9 January 1982 (7-12 Rabiul-Awwal 1402), and jointly-sponsored by National *Hijra* Committee, Pakistan and International Institute of Islamic Thought, Wyncote, Pennsylvania, USA. The key papers were published in the seminar's proceeding entitled "Knowledge for What." Al-Faruqi's work presented a decisive breakthrough and radical shift of paradigm in projecting the Islamic worldview and reform of contemporary knowledge, as argued by Anne Sofie Roald in *Islamic Studies* (1998):

A major focus of al-Faruqi's work was the education of a new generation of Muslims, schooled in modern methods, but Islamically oriented. Believing that many of the problems of the Muslim world are due to its elites and the bifurcation of education in Muslim societies, he addressed this problem in a variety of ways, combining thought with action, and ideology with its institutionalization and implementation...at the heart of his vision was the Islamization of Knowledge...the purpose being to arouse Muslims to become active participants in man's intellectual life and contribute to it from an Islamic perspective. Although 'the Islamization of knowledge' of Faruqi might now appear to some as not all that mature, one has to remember what a sensation it created about two decades ago when it was first published and found its way to Muslim academicians all over the world.[2]

Al-Faruqi proposed a systematic framework of Islamization and crafted the principle vision and philosophical ground of the movement. He presented a fundamental argument for the Islamization of thought:

> *The great task facing Muslim intellectuals and leaders is to recast the whole legacy of human knowledge from the standpoint of Islam. The vision of Islam would not be a vision unless it is a vision of something, namely, life, reality, and the world. That vision is the object of study of various disciplines. To recast knowledge as Islam relates to it, is to Islamize it; i.e., to redefine and reorder the parameters and the data, to rethink the reasoning and interrelationships of the data, to revaluate the conclusions, to re-project the goals, and to do so in such a way as to make the reconstituted disciplines enrich the vision and serve the cause of Islam.*[3]

2. The Principles

In his paper presented at the International Seminar on *Islamization of Knowledge* (1982), and partly published by the *Journal of Islamic Thought and Scientific Creativity*, entitled, "The First Principles of Islamic Methodology," Al-Faruqi established a systematic principle and comprehensive framework for *Islamization of Knowledge*, that strived to dismantle the western ideological claims and reassert universal Islamic principles and values:

> *As pre-requisite for the removal of dualism from the educational system, which is in turn a prerequisite for the removal of dualism from life, for the solution of the malaise of the ummah, knowledge ought to be Islamized. While avoiding the pitfalls and shortcomings of traditional methodology, Islamization of knowledge ought to observe a number of principles which constitute the essence of Islam.*[4]

He emphasized on five key principles of Islam, i.e. (1) The Unity of Allah (*SWT*) (2) The Unity of Creation. (3) The Unity of Truth and the Unity of Knowledge (4) The Unity of Life (5) and The Unity of Humanity that defined the Islamic principles. These principles were elaborated in detailed in his article "Defining Islamic Traditionalism: First Principles in the Islamization of Thought" that furnished significant framework of Islamization of thought and outlined the principle task of Islamization and its systematic work plan:

> *To this end, the methodological categories or methodologically-relevant principles of Islam, namely, the unity of truth, the unity of knowledge, the unity of humanity, the unity of life, the telic [purposeful] character of creation, and the subservience of creation to man and of man to Allah (swt), must replace the western categories and determine the perception and ordering of reality...these values, especially the usefulness of knowledge for man's felicity, the blossoming of man's faculties, and the remoulding of creation so as to concretize the divine patterns, should be manifested in the building of culture and civilization and in human models of knowledge and wisdom, eroism and virtue, and pietism and saintliness.*[5]

3. Islamizing the Social Sciences

In his profound work, *Social and Natural Science*, which he co-edited with Abdullah Omar Nascef, Al-Faruqi had contributed a major article entitled *Islamizing the Social Science* that argued for the need "to develop alternative paradigms of knowledge for both natural and social sciences and to conceive and mould disciplines most relevant to the needs of contemporary Muslim societies."[6] It presented a comprehensive framework of Islamization and discussed its fundamental construct and worldview as an alternative to the western convention and system "because western social science is incomplete and 'violates a crucial requirement of Islamic methodology.' The work was crucial to demonstrate the principle philosophy of Islamic science and in stressing "the importance of spirituality as a valid aspect of social science and in suggesting that the Muslim social scientist must be trained in axiology, deontology, theology and esthetics, in order to develop his capacity for the apprehension of value", which traditionally was accomplished through "the science of the Holy Qur'an, *Hadith*, *Usul*, and *Fiqh* (and) *Adab* (Humanities)."[7] This position was constructively argued by Al-Faruqi:

> *We have an extremely important task ahead of us. How long are we going to content ourselves with the crumbs that the West is throwing at us? It is about time that we make our own original contribution. As social scientists, we have to look back at our training and reshape it in the light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This is how our forefathers made their own original contributions to the study of history, law and culture. The West borrowed their heritage and put it in a secular mould. Is it asking for too much that we take this knowledge and Islamize it?*[8]

4. Islamization of English

In his principle work on the Islamic English, *Toward Islamic English*, Al-Faruqi provided a constructive analysis of the nature of linguistic distortion of the English language that needed rectification in transliteration (of letters and words) and translation (of Islamic words/concepts and terms/expressions relevant to the Islamic sciences). It strived to enrich the English language with Islamic vocabulary and "injects into them new vision and new spiritual sensitivities," as he clearly has stated in the introductory part: "the English language modified are to enable it to carry Islamic proper nouns and meanings without distortion, and thus to serve the linguistic needs of Muslim users of the English language."[9] This book strives to reformulate and reconstruct the translation of basic terms and concepts that have been reduced, and often ruined, through translation such as *salah*, *niyah, zakah, hajj, taqwa, siyam, fiqh, usul al-fiqh, hadith*, etc. (of Islamic vocabulary). This was illustrated in his contention with regard of *salah:* "consider for instance the word *salah,* which is often translated as "prayer." "Prayer" is any communication with whatever is taken to be one's god, even if that is an idol."[10]

To dismantle the confusion of meanings "both in the religion and the culture" he has suggested that the terms:

Must be understood as it stands in its Arabic form...constant use of their Arabic form will help to shield the English-speaking Muslims from the onslaught of materialism, utilitarianism, scepticism, relativism, secularism and hedonism that the last two hundred years have established firmly in English consciousness. And it will – in sha'a Allah – inject a reforming and salutary influence into the consciousness of all English speaking Muslims, pulling them out of their tragic predicament in modern times.[11]

English literature, according to Dr. Md. Mahmud ul Hasan (2013) carries the "western ethos, values," and "retains its powerful remnants of multi-layered colonial paternalism." He argues "among all western disciplines, English literature is arguably the most culturally charged carrier of western value-laden ideas. As a result, looking at it from Islamic perspectives would allow Muslims to maintain their socio cultural and religious value and traditions." From this important ground, Al-Faruqi's attempt to reformulate and reconstruct the Islamic term based on the Qur'anic worldview was crucial to "connect the importance of Arabic-Islamic key concepts in the process of Islamization."[12]

5. Critique of al-Faruqi's Ideas on IOK

This part of the article examines the philosophical ideal and scientific framework of Islamization of Knowledge as systematically propounded by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman. It discusses the contentious issue on the real proponent of the ideas of Islamization of knowledge and analyse the response to Islamization of knowledge by Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman. In his work that discussed the philosophical ideas and practice of education of al-Attas, i.e., *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud disclosed that al-Attas was the first to coin the term Islamization of modern knowledge and has the legitimate claim as the genuine proponent and pioneer of original concept of IOK.

According to Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, there are many indications to suggest "al-Faruqi benefitted profoundly from al-Attas' writings." For example, in his ideas of *adab*, the concept of *kulliyyah* and *jami'ah,* the nature of dualism, the hegemony of science and modern secular onslaught, the reintroducing of all Arabic-Islamic key terms and concepts in discourses concerning Islam in English and the "deeper-lying malaise (of the *ummah*) on the intellectual and moral levels."[13] In this regard, Dr. Wan reiterated:

In the case of al-Faruqi, the suddenness of his devotion to the cause can be attributed to his direct acquaintance with al-Attas' ideas through many discussions and through an actual reading of the latter's manuscript dealing with the problems of the confusion in the minds of the Muslims due to secularization, Westernization and disconnectedness from their own heritage.[14]

In his *Islam and Culture*, published in 1980, al-Faruqi had manifested the influence of al-Attas' in his writing, for instances, in his preference for the translation of the key word *adab*, as culture: "Culture" is sometimes translated as *"thaqafah,"* which means the act of becoming more intelligent and knowledgeable. It is more proper to translate it as *"adab,"* which in the classical tradition means *husn* ("beauty, goodness") of word, attitude and deed, as the Prophet (*SAW*) had said of himself: "My God has given me my culture. He has made it a good culture."[15]

In 1976, as president of Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) al-Faruqi requested al-Attas to "write a book of 40,000 words entitled "Dialogue with Secularism."[16] This was simply indicated in his letter dated 17 February 1976 "your personal experience, especially your fight with the anthropologists, political scientists, men of linguistics and literature, secularists in all wakes of life, government, university, etc. – all this is very relevant and ought to be written down for the benefit of Muslims, everywhere."[17] The manuscript was completed by al-Attas within several months and dispatched to al-Faruqi, who acknowledged receiving it in his letter issued in July 11, 1977 "I read it through with delight; and I can say that I am truly proud of you and your writing. May Allah bless you and give you the life, vigour and strength to write a hundred more volumes as good as this one or better. I take no issue with you as to the content. For I agree with everything you say…" and in his correspondence with him in 30 August 1977: "I am happy to acknowledge receipt of your manuscript "Islam and Secularism"…I have read it through…and found it an excellent piece of work."[18]

It is evident that al-Attas was the prime source of al-Faruqi's works as demonstrated in his book *Islamization of Knowledge* which he published five years after al-Attas' *Dialogue with Secularism* that echos the ideas and concerns of al-Attas on issues such as secularization, westernization and modernization but, since after almost 15 years no acknowledgement was made to his specific writings, and "realizing that some of his major ideas have been taken without due acknowledgement."[19] Al-Attas was "compelled to mention briefly how the idea of the Islamization of present-day knowledge was taken-up by al-Faruqi as expressed in his preface to the second impression of *Islam and Secularism:*

> *The purpose of acknowledging the source of an important idea is - apart from the moral obligation to do so - to point those who pursue the subject for the sake of the Community to the right direction; so that they might not be misled concerning the value and validity of that idea, and its further development and clarification along logical lines which only the original source is justly capable of doing. But if Muslim writers, whether in English, Arabic, or other languages, are in the habit of either pointing to themselves or to others in respect of significant ideas not really originated by them, then they obliterate thereby the real source and deprive the Community of knowledge of the right direction.*[20]

Consistent with the ideas of *Islamization of knowledge*, al-Attas further articulated his project on Islamic University that has represented the concrete aspiration of the Mecca Conference on 1977 that substantially inspired from his conceptual framework of Islamic education. In his letter to Islamic Secretariat in 1973, he has consistently repeated this philosophical ideal for the accomplishment of Islamic University that reflected the ideal of universal or perfect man (*insan-e-kamil*) and projected its vision and rigorously sustained and inculcated Islamic *adab (ta'dib):*

An Islamic university be established whose structure is different from a western university; whose conception of what constitutes knowledge is different from what western philosophers set forth as knowledge; whose aims and aspirations are different from western conceptions. The purpose of higher education in Islam is...to produce the complete man, or the universal man...a Muslim scholar is a man who is not a specialist in any one branch of knowledge but is universal in his outlook and is authoritative in several branches of related knowledge.[21]

Perhaps, this ideal was embodied in the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), established in 1991. After contemplating this idea, for two decades it was realized with the historic opening of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), on 4th October 1991. In his welcoming address, he described its principle ideal and struggle, to reclaim the scientific glory and high achievement of the medieval Islam and to restore its dynamic creativity and rational foundation:

As its overall designer and planner, as well as its interior decorator and landscapist, I have attempted to convey an Islamic presence; an atmosphere of serenity wherein should issue forth lofty and noble thoughts; wherein meanness and pettiness and mediocrity shall have no place; wherein the noisy strife and anxiety of secular life may be shaken off; wherein intellectual quests may be pursued amidst beautiful surroundings. I have situated it [i.e., ISTAC] in such a manner that it faces the qiblah. The groundbreaking ceremony was performed on the 27th of Rajab, which commemorates the Night Journey of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to the Highest Heaven...the spot where the ground was first broken is where the bowl of the fountain now stands – water being the symbol of knowledge.[22]

The historical foundation of ISTAC since its inception in 1987 reflected the profound contributions of its Founder-Director - al-Attas - in the systematic planning and construction of its architectural landscape, the creative design of its façade, the projection of its philosophy, the setting up of its curriculum, and the designing of courses offered at its postgraduate level. ISTAC symbolized the true ideal of Islamic University he envisioned, that strived to restore the leading role of the *ummah* at global stage and to provide Islamic responses to the intellectual and cultural challenges of the modern world. This profound aim was reinforced with the rigorous works and intellectual formation of ISTAC to revive and revitalize the historical, civilizational and intellectual heritage of Islam and to reclaim the creative role of the *ummah* in the contemporary world.

ISTAC officially took off in 1991, "as a research and postgraduate institution offering a specialized program of studies"[23] in broad discipline, the courses and research in three main, yet overlapping, areas of study, Islamic thought, Islamic civilization, and Islamic science. Al-Attas led the institution from 1987-2002, as its Director-General for 15 years, and had lasting impact and profound legacy in its great intellectual tradition, in its inclusive philosophy and epistemological orientation, in inspiring and designing of its architecture, drawing of its courtyard, and in building its superb library collection. ISTAC was regarded as the nucleus of Islamic University, whose:

Aim is to create a learning institution which reflects the aspirations of man and the development of all his faculties, and not only that of the state and its limited functions; and to establish a true university to produce the perfect man who is accountable to God, and not merely the perfect citizen answerable only to the state.[24]

Fazlur Rahman's philosophical ideas and important works on *Islamization of Knowledge* can be reflected from his books such as *Islam and Modernity*: *The Transformation of Intellectual Tradition; Islam; Major Themes of the Qur'an* and in his brief articles such as *Islamization of Knowledge: A Response; The Qur'anic Solution of Pakistan's Educational Problems;* and *Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Method and Alternatives* that conclusively established his position and standpoint on Islamization. He wrote extensively on Islamic philosophy and metaphysic and the challenge of western modernity and analysed the rigorous movement of Islamic reform in the late 19s and the basic structures and themes of the Qur'an. Al-Attas highly regarded him as "one of the most illustrious Muslim scholars in Greek and Islamic philosophy, especially on Ibn-e-Sina."[25]

In *Islamization of Knowledge*: *A Response*, he discussed the fundamental philosophy and epistemology of knowledge and gave some perspective on the subject based on his own experiences "in both Islamic and Western learning."[26] He argued, "Knowledge is a tool the good or bad utility of which depends on the ethical quality of the user." In *Islam and Modernity*, he defined the struggle to Islamize education of the Muslims, as "to inform it with certain key concepts of Islam" which involve two intellectual aspects: first, to mould the character of the students with Islamic values for personal and collective life; second, to imbue higher fields of learning with Islamic values."[27] He also emphasized on the need for "an intellectual task of elaborating an Islamic metaphysics on the basis of the Qur'an" - the metaphysical conforming to the spirit of the Qur'an and informed by *the Qur'anic weltanschauung.*

His venture to reform education was to take precedence than to indulge in the strife of secular and Islamic knowledge, as illustrated by Dr. Wan Daud "it is due to Fazlur Rahman's rather justified frustration with the contemporary traditional Islamic learning that he regarded reforming it as more prior than to debate on the Islamization of secular knowledge."[28] He devoted such agenda of Islamization on social and political reconstruction, reforming of law, education, and metaphysics.

According to Prof. Dr. Wan, who had benefitted immensely from the teaching and supervision of Fazlur Rahman in the University of Chicago, "Fazlur Rahman is a late and indirect participant in this agenda of *Islamization of Knowledge.* His interest in Islamization, which began when he was closely associated with the Ayyub Khan regime in 1960s, centres mostly in the area of law."[29] The patronage he had received has made him Director of the Central Institute of Islamic Research (1961), which "promotes Islam in everyday life of the nation." In this political situation, that he attempted to Islamize law and articulated significant Islamic issues. Rahman's tremendous works on Islamic metaphysics and philosophical thought has great positive ramifications in the Islamic world although he did not produce any significant writing to articulate the philosophical and scientific ideas of knowledge and established fundamental text on *Islamization of Knowledge:* "the term "Islamization" used by Fazlur Rahman during this time is vague, with no positive meaning given to it; its structure and method is unknown to him."[30]

Perhaps it is instructive to sum up this exposition with the conclusion of Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud in his comprehensive survey on the principle works and contributions of al-Faruqi, al-Attas, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Fazlur Rahman in projecting the ideas of Islamization in their writings: "perhaps it might be worthwhile to mention that Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Isma'il R. al-Faruqi and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas are four of the widely respected and historically related Muslim scholars (who were provided with opportunities to carry out their Islamic educational ideas at an institutional level)."[31]

To conclude, such contention as to who first coin the idea of IOK has lost its significance, since it is parallel effort aspiring for the same goal, and not a clash of ideas or worldview, as articulated by DS Anwar (2013) in his exposition of the works of al-Faruqi and al-Attas in reforming Muslim education:

> *To my mind, and in this regard, it might constitute a contrarian view, rather than viewing it as a clash of views, I see a convergence of approaches between al-Faruqi and al-Attas. If I may use the analogy of the Baytul-Haram, there are various entrances to the holiest of holy sites in Islam but by whichever entrance used, the ultimate destination remains the Ka'aba. In both their approaches, we can discern a unified concern for the revivification of Islamic knowledge and thought.*[32]

Conclusion

From the discussion, we have exposed the tremendous efforts of al-Faruqi in gearing and inspiring the movement of *Islamization of Knowledge* and in inspiring *tajdid* and revival of science in the Islamic world as well. His contributions were instrumental in restoring the crucial element and essence of *tawhidic* consciousness and to reinvigorate the scientific spirit and indigenous knowledge and to dismantle the general confusion and malaise present in the *ummah*. The work has also compared his ideas with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman, and portrayed their important legacy and influences in the movement which was superior or parallel to that of al-Faruqi. The dynamic and substantive contributions of al-Faruqi, al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman in *Islamization of Knowledge* and their philosophical arguments and epistemological principles must be sustained and expanded. Their aspirations, works and struggle in championing IOK's project must be advanced to transcend the ideals and aspirations of IOK in contemporary times.

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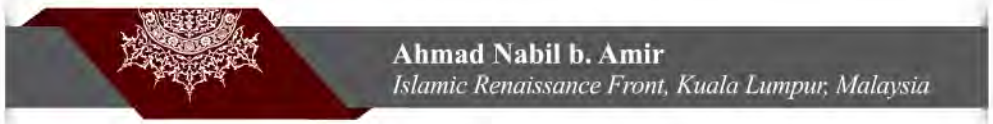
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