

ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON MISLIM THOUGHT

Thesis

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my individual research and that it has not been submitted concurrently to any other university for any other degree.

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Abstract

The Enlightenment, an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th century made the Christian Europe go through a prolonged period of critical examination of the validity of its superstitious beliefs and spiritual vision. Challenging the blind following of both the monarchs and church's power and authority it promoted independent thinking and made science and reason the basis of the human society. Introduced into the Islamic world as a movement of tolerance, and free will after Napoleon's expedition to Egypt (1798) it succeeded in making the Muslims skeptical about their religion, civilization and thought. In fact Islam, a very progressive religion of peace and broadmindedness has an extremely sophisticated inbuilt system of keeping abreast with the evolutionary changes and urges every Muslim to use his intellectual powers, free thinking contemplation and reflection within the prescribed limits. Unlike Christianity there is absolutely no conflict between religion, science and research in the tenets of Islam and its traditional worldview. According to the divine teachings of Islam, education, the enlightenment and attainment of spiritual knowledge or insight is compulsory which frees man from a closed mind and all kinds of dogmas, doctrines and ideologies. This study looks for the Islamic roots of the Enlightenment in addition to tracing its effects on the Muslim thought. The findings of the study indicate that the colonizers of the Enlightenment harnessed Muslims and their resources for their self interests and capitalist expansion and imposed a colonist mindset among the intellectuals and scholars of the era. Despotism, fanaticism, economic poverty, under-development, political social and economic suppression are the by-products of the Enlightenment in the Islamic countries.

Dedicated

to my Beloved Parents, who always supported me throughout the life

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my sons Ans, Usama, and all those who love and take care of me and

are a source of motivation for me.

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Introduction

The term Aufklärung was used in German states which later came to be known as The Enlightenment. According to it true knowledge can be gained through reason. The Enlightenment, a movement of thought and belief was based on the relationship among God, man, reason and nature. It had multi dimensions and various interests, however it criticizes the ways of life in Europe. This movement aspired to gain man's happiness through victory of freedom. According to it true knowledge can only be gained with reason.

There are various opinions about the beginning of the age of Enlightenment; the opening of the 18th century (1701) or the middle of the 17th century (1650) are frequently used as an estimated starting point. If we consider the mid of 17th century its starting point, Descartes' Discourse on Method published in 1637 would form its origins. Some authors claimed that the Enlightenment began in Britain's Glorious Revolution of 1688 or in 1687 with Isaac Newton's Principia Mathematica. Jonathan Israel argues, "after 1650, everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of

philosophic reason"¹ For the end of Enlightenment most scholars frequently consider the last years of the 18th century, the French Revolution of 1789 or the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars (1804 – 15) the most suitable time.

The eighteenth century is given the name of The Age of Reason or The Age of Enlightenment due to this movement. Renaissance, Scientific Revolution and Reformation were the origins of this movement as man began to feel that knowledge could be extended through different means. This movement relying solely on reason and science worked against the superstitions. It was a rebirth and an exercise of a new world view brought about by the Scientific Revolution. It was a desire for human affairs to be guided by rationality, rather than faith. This world view was based on science and reason.

Enlightenment was the name of a cultural philosophical, political and religious program. It consisted of criticism, independent thought, tolerance and progress. Before this movement Christianity had kept its culture united, but Enlightenment assaulted it. According to a well-known writer Peter Gay, Enlightenment was hostility to religion and it changed the relationship of man with himself as well as society by using reason. It also worked for freedom and progress. Peter called this movement a liberal reform program.

Another dominant philosopher, Immanuel Kant saw Enlightenment positively. According to him, it was man's release from his self-incurred immaturity, through the use of reason, and without any external guidance from others. His famous words 'Sapere aude' (Dare to know) was the motto of the Enlightenment. According to him man's use of reason must always be free. Answering the question, "What is Enlightenment?" Kant listed six main features of Enlightenment. First of all reasoning is an activity to present a man's views. As exercising reason is a requirement for Enlightenment, we can overcome the causes of immaturity with reason. He argued that it was not only a theoretical affair, but it has practical aspects too. Another important point he makes in his essay is that without reason a mind remains passive and submissive to others' guidance, which is a hindrance to Enlightenment. Human decision

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment. (accessed February, 2012).

has a great role in progress. Moreover Kant thought that like a machine, mind contrasts automatic reasoning with the voluntary exercise of man's reason.

I have studied the movement of Enlightenment in this work in order to establish a relationship between the Muslim thought of that period and the Enlightenment. I divided my work into three chapters which are further divided into headings and subheadings. The first chapter is about the Enlightenment Movement. I discussed its time period, themes, definition in the first heading. Its origins and legacy is discussed in the second heading. The main people who worked for it are illustrated under the heading of philosophies.

The second chapter discusses the connection between Islam and Enlightenment. Islam encourages Muslims to study nature. The First Divine revelation of Islam asked man to read. Allah ordered man to read, observe and discover the universe in order to recognize the Creator. The Holy Prophet (SAW) also emphasized seeking knowledge. The first part of this chapter covers some great works of the Muslims which lay the foundation of the modern world view. The Muslim civilization rose to its peak when Europe was still wandering in the Dark Ages. Muslims produced great astronomers, physicians, mathematicians and scientists. Modern European civilization has learnt a lot from the Arab civilization. Muslims introduced geometry on which Copernicus' work is based. Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali and other Muslim Philosophers had also a great influence on Enlightenment philosophers and other scholars of the West.

The role of Muslims in the inductive method of learning has been highlighted in the second part of this chapter. Modern science is based on inductive reasoning. The Holy Quran used inductive reasoning fourteen hundred years ago. Man becomes the master of his surroundings through this method. Allama Iqbal mentioned in his sermons that the birth of Islam actually was the birth of inductive reasoning and progress. Europe displayed a manifestation of the Quranic spirit. At the end of this chapter the impact of Ghazali on Descartes's skepticism has been highlighted. Iqbal has also mentioned this in his book Reconstruction of Islamic Thought. A lot of work has been done on it in the West too.

Enlightenment and its Impact on Muslim Thought

The Third chapter of this study is Enlightenment and Contemporary Muslim Thought. This chapter depicts the influence of Enlightenment on Muslim thought. I described in this part how Islam faced Enlightenment from two sides. This chapter is divided into three parts. Firstly it discusses famous scholars of the Sub-continent. Some Muslim scholars have been discussed here who wanted to bring a change in the Muslim society of the Indo Pak Sub Continent. Secondly it describes the Arab scholars and in the last Turkish scholars has been discussed. Muslims did a lot in their peak time, but then there came a time when Muslim intellectual and cultural creativity became vacant of productive assets. Some Muslims started work for the revival of Arabic culture and literature. Sir Syyed, Afghani and, Abduh's effort for this revival has been described in this work.

They wanted the Muslims to get modern education and become a part of the modern civilization. Sir Syyed was faithful to the British during the War of Independence in 1857-8. He thought that all Muslims in India needed the freedom for public religious rituals. So the British should protect the Muslims rather than suppress them.

Afghani is considered the founder of Muslim modernization. Afghani's views of current Islamic philosophy significantly enhance his confidence in recent scientific and technological advancement. Abduh's description was published under the name of tafsir-al-manar and was based upon his class lectures and the texts of his legal decisions. It is identified by moderate rationalist spirit and connected with emphasis on moral thought and education in compliance with the spiritual and religious guidance of the Quran.

The second heading describes the Arabic thought of Tahtawi and Taha Hussain. Tahtawi's visit of Paris had a deep effect on his thought. There he read geography, Greek philosophy, French poetry and French thought and main works of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. Taha Hussain a blind Egyptian scholar who worked a lot for Egyptians was an eminent writer of his time. His thought is also accredited in this work.

The third part of this chapter discusses the post-enlightenment Muslim thought and work. Kamal Atta Turk of Turkey created a secular state unique among Islamic countries. His modern vision laid the foundation of a new country and nation with great aims of success.

Enlightenment and its Impact on Muslim Thought

The Turkish republic achieved a legal transformation in a very short period from 1926 to 1930 which may require more or less a hundred years in other countries. Religious laws were removed and a secular system came into operation. The progressive thrust of Attaturk's more harmonious concepts, the texts and context of laws in Turkey brought about a huge change.

According to Iqbal human beings must try to shape their own destiny. He thought that man is a creative activity as the Quran conceived. Allah will never change the condition of man/nation till they do not try to change their own condition. Thus man has to work for his own betterment.

In the writings of Said Nursi one can find a serious effort on his part to reunite science and religion, or in other words, to make reason- revelation beneficial. He sought to bring about friendly relations between Islamic and the Western civilizations.

I wish that this thesis would prove a humble step in the direction of an improved understanding of the views of the West.

Chapter I

The Enlightenment Movement

The Enlightenment Movement

a) Enlightenment

Enlightenment was a rebirth and an exercise of a world-view brought about by the scientific revolution. There is little agreement about the start and end of the age of Enlightenment. Some historians simply start it since the beginning or the middle of the 18th century. Some scholars take it back to the mid 17th century; some define the beginning of Enlightenment in Britain's Glorious Revolution of 1688. According to some other scholars 1789 the year of Revolution in France was the end of Enlightenment and some point out the Wars of Napoleon as the ending of Enlightenment.

"There is little consensus on the precise beginning of the age of Enlightenment; the beginning of the 18th century (1701) or the middle of the 17th century (1650) are often used as an approximate starting point. If taken back to the mid-17th century, the Enlightenment would trace its origins to Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637. Others define the Enlightenment as beginning in Britain's Glorious Revolution of 1688 or with the publication of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* in 1687. Jonathan Israel argues, "after 1650, everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophic reason".^[19] Israel makes the detailed case that, from 1650 to 1750, Spinoza was "the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, morality, and what was everywhere regarded, in absolutist and no absolutist states alike, as divinely constituted political authority." As to its end, most scholars use the last years of the century – often choosing the French Revolution of 1789 or

the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars (1804 – 15) as a convenient point in time with which to date the end of the Enlightenment."¹

A development of revolution was at work in Europe which brought about a change in the contemplation of people. Enlightenment brought independent thought, tolerance and criticism on superstitions and rigid dogmas.

“In the modern period of the West, the term 'enlightenment' is primarily understood as a secular one, generally referring to a period in history sometimes called the 'long eighteenth' was feeling of optimism concerning a better life for mankind, and thus a belief in progress. In this way, 'Enlightenment' became the name for the cultural philosophical, religious, and political program of enlightened philosophers. This program comprises independent thought, criticism, tolerance, and progress, as well as the political translation of these ideals into a new rule of law, free of censorship by church or sovereign, in which the individual is free to express his or her opinion.”²

Enlightenment was a movement of thought. Before this movement Christianity had a united Western culture. Enlightenment produced the first widely read and an organized assault on Christianity starting from the educated people due to the Scientific Revolution.

“The roots of the Enlightenment reach back to the days when Greek philosophers discovered regularity in nature and concluded that its governing principle was reasoning mind and when, under the promptings of Socrates, they turned to consider man and ascribed a high value to his intellectual powers.”³

Pierre Bayle (1647-1705) was the pioneer of the French Enlightenment. He authored the famous Dictionary, *historique et critique* which read widely in Europe and much discussed. “It is impossible to reconcile reason with religion” was his famous catchphrase. John Locke (1632-1704) was probably the most read philosopher during the Enlightenment. His ideas were used to justify liberal revolutions in Europe.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment. (Accessed March 15, 2012)

² Lieven Boeve, Joeri Schrijvers, Wessel Stoker, and Hendrik M. Vroom, eds., *Faith in the Enlightenment? The Critique of the Enlightenment Revisited* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 1.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, (London: William Bentin Publishers, 1993), 7.

“The Enlightenment, when referring to a period in history, more-or-less precisely coincides with the 'long eighteenth century,' as mentioned earlier. It is generally taken to begin with the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in the writings of Locke (1632-1704) and Bayle (1647-1706). Its ending corresponds to the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Revolution (1789), the fall of post-revolutionary France (1815), and the reaction of Romanticism. In connection to the philosophy of religion, which has its roots in the Enlightenment, I would point to a forerunner, Herbert of Cherbury (1582-1648), who is often called the father of Deism.' By the very nature of the matter, no terminus can be given for the Enlightenment as a program. One could point to nineteenth-century thinkers such as Hegel and Marx, but the program of the Enlightenment is picked up again and again in new forms, not only by twentieth-century sociologists such as Luhmann and Habermas, but also by Derrida.”¹

The Enlightenment brought a period of reduction in government authority, increased liberty, enhanced toleration and enormously improved commercial freedom. Innovative entrepreneurs and thinkers got advantage from the Enlightenment. They used their new freedom to formulate new technologies and ideas, thereby starting the revolution in industry.

Definition of Enlightenment

Enlightenment was a movement of thought due to which 18th century was called “The Age of Enlightenment.” Educated elite of Europe showed supreme confidence in reason and they tried to show a rational analysis of institutions and beliefs.

“The Enlightenment has been defined in many different ways. Even in the eighteenth century, contemporaries were well aware that when an Italian called this movement of ideas Illuminismo, he meant something other than the word Lumieres which would have been used by a friend in France, or the Aufklarung current in the German states. With such diversity, it was no wonder that in 1783 the Berlinische a Monatsschrift set up a prize competition for the best answer to the question ‘What is Enlightenment?’²

A famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant also took part in that competition. He believed in the use of reason and he considered the reason as a light which brightened the

1. Lieven Boeve, Joeri Schrijvers, Wessel Stoker, and Hendrik M. Vroom, eds., *Faith in the Enlightenment? The Critique of the Enlightenment Revisited*, 2.

² Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.