

## Modernism According to the thought of Fazlur Rahman

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### Abstract:

Contemporary modernism is primarily concerned with reform and internal reconstruction, seeking to develop a critical attitude towards the West and its own historical heritage. Muslims must study Western ideas objectively, as well as Islamic religious history and ideas. If not, success in facing the modern world would be impossible, and survival as a Muslim would be highly doubtful. The first and most basic task of contemporary modernists is to develop a correct and logical methodology by studying the Qur'an for guidance on the future of Islam. The methodology developed by Fazlur Rahman in several of his intellectual works can be divided into two, namely contemporary modernism and classical modernism. Fazlur Rahman promised that the methodology he offered could avoid the arbitrary and uncontrolled growth of *ijtihad*. This research is a descriptive qualitative research that examines the problems of modern thinking Fazlur Rahman. This type of research is normative or library research. The primary material in this study consists of norms (basic), works of Fazlur Rahman, research results, works of experts, and others. Meanwhile, secondary and tertiary materials are in the form of dictionaries, encyclopedias, cumulative indexes, and so on. This research concludes that the reformulation of classical modernism has at least attempted to carry out internal reform, namely instilling rationalism as an initial solution to intellectual stagnation and decline. By relying on the belief in the universality of the Qur'an in responding to the challenges of the times. Interpreting the Qur'an on the basis of normative Islam to answer modern issues in the context of modernity is the central idea for the construction of Islamic thought by Fazlur Rahman.

**Keywords:** Modernism, Thought, Fazlur Rahman

### Introduction

The presence of Fazlur Rahman as a reformer of the twentieth century, made a very valuable contribution to reform in Islam. Many of his works have been the topic of research for Islamic intellectuals and non-Muslim intellectuals. This cannot be denied, because for his services in providing new innovations in re-actualizing and interpreting the Qur'an, *Sunnah*, and *Ijma'* in their *ijtihad* method, resulting in modern thinking in Islam.

For this reason, it is very important for Islamic jurists and researchers to know and understand the thoughts of the spectacular figures of the Islamic world, such as Fazlur Rahman. The purpose of this research is to explore and describe the thoughts of Islamic law Fazlur Rahman in the actualization and contextualization of Islamic law that is relevant to the present.

### Research Methods

**Paradigm** This research is a qualitative research. This study examines the problems of

modern thinking Fazlur Rahman, so the authors use this type of normative research or research conducted by examining library materials (secondary data), also known as library research. The primary material in this study consists of norms (basic), works of Fazlur Rahman, research results, works of experts, and others. Meanwhile, secondary and tertiary materials are in the form of dictionaries, encyclopedias, cumulative indexes, and so on (Suerjono Soekanto and Sri Mamudji, 1985: 14-15). The method used in this library research is literature research, data collection to answer research questions (Burhan Bungin, 2020: 239).

The data analysis uses descriptive method, namely by describing systematically, factually and accurately, by taking the problem or focus on the actual problem as it was at the time the research was carried out (Sofyan AP K., 2013). The method of thinking used is inductive reasoning, namely departing from modernism and thought. After the data is collected, analyzed, and reduced, the authors conclude and make a research report in the form of this scientific journal.

### **Modernism and Its Development**

In delivering to modernism Fazlur Rahman's thought needs to first examine the development of modernism. According to him, the development of modernism can be divided into two, namely classical modernism and contemporary modernism (Fazlur Rahman, 1982: 85). Both have different backgrounds and tendencies.

Fazlur Rahman revealed that the background of Western colonialism and political independence distinguished classical modernism and contemporary modernism. Classical modernism emerged in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries under the influence of Western ideas. Classical modernism is truly concerned with internal reforms, new expansion of the contents of *ijtihad*, such as the relation of reason to revelation, social reform in the field of education and the status of women, political reform and representative and accountional forms of government. For example Muhammad Abduh and Ahmad Khan appear to be against the West. Because the situation is different between classical modernism and contemporary modernism, so that classical modernism can only act partially, not systematically and slowly (Fazlur Rahman, 1982: 85).

Classical modernism has influenced the neorealist movement, such as the idea of democracy and reforms in the form of Islamic education. Under the influence of neorevivalism gave rise to neomodernism. According to Fazlur Rahman, classical modernism is true in its spirit, but there are two fundamental weaknesses that cause the emergence of neorevivalism. The first weakness is that classical modernism semi-implicitly does not completely describe its method of dealing with specific problems and the implications of its basic principles. The second weakness, the problems of democracy and the status of women are problems in the Western world, so that it seems that classical modernists have been westernized and are agents of westernization (Taufiq Adnan Amal, 1994: 19).

The Islamic modernism movement arose from the impact of Western penetration, since the 17th / 12th century H. Military and Western superiority brought back the backwardness of Islamic society, fostering a spirit of Islamic revival. Islamic society at that time was like a semi-dead society, receiving destructive blows or oppressive Western influences. In fact, this kind of intellectual crisis and cultural clash had been faced by the Muslim community from the 2nd / 8th century AD to the 4th / 10th century AD. At that time they were faced with

"Hellenic" intellectual challenges. But they can overcome these collisions and challenges in a creative-assimilationist way. The success factor is the domination of Islamic politics. Practically Islam at that time was the world's largest political ruler, another factor was the condition and situation of Islam when it had not been burdened by the traditions and situation of Islam in the 17th century AD and more specifically at the end of the 18th century AD (Ghurfon A. Mas'adi, 1998: 49).

As a result of defeat and political surrender, the Muslim ummah was psychologically unable to reformulate their legacy constructively, so that the modernization efforts that developed at that time seemed to be merely borrowing the progress of Western civilization. The newly awakened and awakened Muslims were not ready to undertake a bigger and more basic modernization which required a long process and time.

The objective condition of the Islamic community which was experiencing stagnation was not only in the external sphere, but also in the intellectual field, so that the political and technological domination of the Western colonialists immediately received a response from modernist figures. Ultimately, the ideas that developed were intellectual modernism and political modernism. In order to overcome stagnation in the intellectual sphere, all classical reformers emphasized the importance of reason (thought) and rationalism, albeit in different settings. Started by Jamaludin al-Afghani (1255-1315H / 1839-1897M), who called for an increase in moral and intellectual standards to counter the dangers of Western expansionism, but he himself did not undertake intellectual modernization. All of them upload Muslim societies to develop and spread philosophical disciplines, and it made little effort in general educational reform. Furthermore, Muhammad Abduh (1261-1323 H / 1845-1905 AD) in Egypt and Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1232-1316 H / 1817-1898 AD) in India continued. They both proved Al-Afghani's claim that reason and science were not in conflict with Islam (Fazlur Rahman, 1982: 64-67).

According to Fazlur Rahman, until the end of this period the intellectual reform efforts were still piecemeal, in certain cases and not systematic. The spirit of *ijtihad* and the call for achievement has not yet been seen. Even though this intellectual modernism movement called for the spirit of nationalism, in fact they did not develop a legacy of Islamic philosophy, so the reformation of this period tended to be slow. This is due to the absence of a systematic philosophical thought that is fully imbued with the Koran, especially among orthodox circles. He gave an example of al-Azhar as an Islamic higher education institution that did not change except only in terms of its arrangement and teaching, not in the spirit of teaching substance. So that Abduh said that al-Azhar was expected to be an "agent of change", which often became a barrier. For example the case of Ali Abd al-Raziq, who experienced a storm of attacks from al-Azhar scholars. It was only in the first quarter of the 20th century that philosophical thoughts emerged, which were distinguished by Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938 AD) with his book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. So the real intellectual modernism of this period is in the field of Western practical knowledge with a passion for advancing the civilization of Muslim societies (Fazlur Rahman, 1982: 64). Has not worked on fundamental intellectual modernism. The ideological problem between religion and the state is still the great work of modernism in the next period, namely contemporary post-independence modernism.

Along with intellectual and political modernism, there was a struggle towards socio-cultural change in the context of adjusting to the new social ethics. Western criticism of the socio-

cultural conditions of Islamic society illustrates a serious problem, so that almost everything the West knows about Islamic society can be summed up in two words "harem polygamy" and "purdah or veil" (Fazlur Rahman, 1982: 231).

Modernists immediately responded to this criticism by devising the idea of women's liberation and women's education on the basis of Islamic teachings. This idea was devised by Muhammad Abduh, who was followed up by his student, Muhammad Qasim Amin (1863-1908 AD) in Egypt, and by the Aligarh movement initiated by Ahmad Khan, in India. Among the articles that Qasim Amin spoke about was the issue of women's education (Qasim Amin, 1984). Then continued Sayyid Amir Ali looking for concepts for ideas put forward by his predecessors. The concept put forward by Amir Ali is the difference between moral teachings and the specific legal provisions of the Koran. For example in the case of polygamy, according to Amir Ali, Islamic law allows polygamy, but morally the Koran refers to the principle of monogamy (Amir Ali, 1978).

One of the weaknesses of the modernist view in resolving the harmony between a number of expressions of the Koran and the socio-cultural reality is the exclusion of socio-historical concepts in their modernization efforts. Without this concept, modernization of the specific utterances of the Koran tends to be apologetic, as seen in Amir Ali's arguments regarding the discovery of moral values on the provisions of the law in the Koran. This socio-historical concept is very important in efforts to modernize socio-culture, because it connects the iterative process between the expressions of the Koran and the socio-cultural elements of the revelation, present and future. This is an agenda issue that modernism in the contemporary period has to solve (Ghufron A. Mas'adi, 1998: 57).

The independence and political sovereignty of Muslim countries provide the opportunity to formulate policy steps to be taken, whether in ideological, political, educational, economic, legal and other policies. In a period of about 77 years (counted until now) has resulted in major changes. Development programs are generally aimed exclusively at economic and material progress, eventually moral values decline sharply. Development as an economic expansion and transfer of technology creates a materialist lifestyle, this is a new social phenomenon. Another phenomenon is the social expansion of women, which is a product of the launch of the emancipation program, which has been started since before. This is as a result of increasing awareness of human rights.

Modern globalization in the form of social interaction between the cultures of nations has increasingly accelerated the pace of social change. This change can create a gap between old values and new values, and create a gap between the established Islamic law (*fiqh*) and the changing social reality. All these are new problems added to the old problems that have not been resolved by classical modernism which demands hard work of contemporary modernists.

Fazlur Rahman is a reformist or modernist figure. It is different from other contemporary thinkers who make the empirical facts of modern life the central object of ideas. He made the Koran the center of research, to develop methodological concepts and a methodical formulation of the interpretation of the Qur'an (Yuyun Sunni Assumantri, 1993).

Understanding the Koran in the context of modernity is a goal that Fazlur Rahman intends to contribute through his hard work in building concepts and formulating his thoughts. Montgomery Watt commented that the two most famous contemporary Islamic thinkers were

Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Arkoun.

Fazlur Rahman realizes that it is an internal problem that must be resolved in the era of contemporary modernism. This problem is not sufficiently resolved through the modernization movement but must be resolved through the reconstruction of Islamic thought. It is in this context that Fazlur Rahman built and formulated his thoughts.

### **Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Thought**

#### **1. Scientific Methods.**

In his works, Fazlur Rahman often mentions two methodical terms, namely the historico-critical method and the hermeneutic method (Fazlur Rahman, 1982). These two terms are the "key words" in tracing Fazlur Rahman's methods of thinking.

*Historico-Critical* (the historical-point method) is an approach to history, in principle it aims to find objective facts as a whole and look for certain values contained in them (William Montgomery Watt, 1988). So, what is emphasized in this method is the disclosure of values in a number of historical data, not historical events themselves. When historical data is presented in chronological terms, such a model is called a historical approach. The historical critical method differs from the socio / historical method, although both methods attempt to answer the question "why". The first method seeks answers to the dominant values in historical data, while the second method seeks answers to the context and background of these historical events. It can be concluded that the two methods are closely related: the socio / historical method plays a role in leading to the historical critical method (Halle, 1990).

The application of this method to certain aspects of Islamic history by these orientalists produced several theses that shocked the traditional Moslem community which was full of enthusiasm. This is why the historical critical method did not develop at all among Muslim thinkers until the middle of the 20th century AD (William Montgomery Watt, 1988). They not only opposed Western orientalist thought, but also rejected the historical critical method. The attitude of Islamic thinkers against Orientalist thinking is quite reasonable, which is considered by Watt to be too much. Because, said Watt, some orientalist thought such as David S. Morgoliouth (David S. Moroliouth, 1953), motivated by a sense of hatred towards Islam, but other orientalist scholars most of their thinking is based on scientific interests (William Montgomery Watt, 1988).

In fact, Western thought has played a role in showing the distortion of the image of Islam in the middle period. In their capacity and identity as orientalists, it is natural for Western scholars to criticize or carry out the reconstruction of Islam. This latter effort should be the responsibility of Muslims themselves, after realizing their shortcomings and weaknesses.

The lack of development of the historical critical method in Islamic thought, HR Gibb, with great concern and hope revealed in the last pages of the book *Modern Trend in Islam*. That he did not want to say that the path to be taken for the advancement of Moslems was only through the takeover of the historical method from the West. The Islamic world should try to recreate it and build it on the foundation of its own historical criticism that existed in the early days of its history, as long as it is applicable and necessary. The Muslim historian wants to build a method based on the foundations of Islamic thought, let him not be tempted to reduce history into a pattern of abstarous concepts; Concrete historical facts must be seen in certain concrete relationships as well (HR Gibb, 2003).

The concerns and hopes of Gibb above, without it, Fazlur Rahman also felt and welcomed him. He realized that there was a lack of historical perspective in Muslim scholarship which in turn led to the lack of Islamic historical studies. According to him, Muslims need historical studies so that they can further weigh the historical development values in order to be able to reconstruct Islamic scientific disciplines for the future (Fazlur Rahman, 1982).

In this connection, Fazlur Rahman divides the category of Islam into two: "*Normative Islam*" and "*Historical Islam*" (Fazlur Rahman, 1982). In studying historical Islam, Fazlur Rahman used the historical criticism method completely in all its aspects. The development of this method is evident in his historical studies, such as in his book *Islam Methodology in History; Islam, and Islam and Modernity: Transformation of An Intellectual Tradition*. The application of the historical criticism method is always associated with the phases of development, progress and decline of the history of Moslems.

According to Fazlur Rahman, the flow of *Mu'tazilah* theology initially emerged from the problem of the concept of *manzilah baina al-manzilatain*. The subsequent development of this theological style was systematized in the concept of "God's justice". This concept gave birth to the notion of freedom of will and rationalism. The development of the philosophical movement was a further growth movement of the Mutazila understanding. The essence of the development of the Mu'tazila as a historical phenomenon is that the Mu'tazila has contributed greatly to Islam, not only in its efforts to uphold the image of God as a moral builder for advanced minds, this theological school also upholds the claims of reason in theology. The integration between Mutazili rationalism and the philosophical movement has left a number of advances for future generations. Initially, the formulation of the dogma of the *Asy'ariyah* theology was an attempt to present a synthesis of the orthodox view which had not been formulated with the *Mu'tazilah kalam*. But in fact what stands out is the *Mu'tazilah* reactive ethos, so that *Asy'ariyah* himself failed to avoid this ethos. The result is a half reaction and a half synthesis, what stands out more is the reaction. *Asy'ariyah* theology crystallized on the concept of "the omnipotence of God". As a result, this understanding rejects the teachings of human freedom, rejects rationalism and rejects philosophy. Not having this flow in answering questions or critical problems around theology encourages the search for theological satisfaction through Sufism. The three *Asy'ariyah* theology and Sufism developed rapidly, the history of the Islamic ummah was different (Fazlur Rahman, 1979).

Actually the historical criticism method has been applied before by reformers since the time of Muhammad Abduh, even Ibnu Taymiyyah (661-728 H) has used it. They use this method to view the process of decline and the condition of the stagnation of Moslem thought. It seems that their efforts in applying this method tend to be sporadic so that they do not reach the root of the problem. It can be seen from the solutions offered by them that are not consistent (Muhammad Amin Suma, 1991).

The method used by Fazlur Rahman is the hermeneutic method (Sumarsono, 1993). This method is to understand and interpret ancient texts, such as scriptural texts, history, law, and in the field of philosophy. To understand and understand the text of the holy book, such as the Al-Qur'an Torah, Veda and others, an interpretation effort is needed. Historical texts written several centuries ago using complex language, cannot be understood in a certain period of time without proper interpretation. Solid legal language requires interpretation, because a legal provision contains two aspects, namely the express and the implied aspect, or between the sound of the law and the spirit of the law.

To interpret normative Islam, namely the Koran, Fazlur Rahman uses the hermeneutic method (Leonard Binder, 1980), regarding hermenetic principles: understanding the text as a whole, not in pieces, understanding the text according to the will of its creator, reviving it in the context of the interpreting subject. Fazlur Rahman uses this method with a two-step solution. First, by adhering to the general principles contained in the text of the Koran. Second, by considering the background or the objective situation of the time when the Qur'an was revealed, which is a response to the objective situation at that time.

With these two additional steps, it is hoped that it can produce an objective interpretation or at least reduce the subjectivity of the hermeneut (interpreter). The holding of general principles of the Koran is a normative value in Fazlur Rahman's hermenetic which binds the subjectivity of the interpreter and reduces the freedom of interpretation. This normative aspect does not exist in the thinking of Western hermeneutic figures who merely emphasize historical value (Wilhelm Diltey, 1911).

Western hermeneutic figures consider the creation and interpretation of texts as historical processes, the difference between the two lies in the opposite process: creation departs from the present to the future, while interpretation departs from the past to the present. Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics are "typical of Quranic hermeneutics" which are operationally different from Western hermeneutics.

Fazlur Rahman emphasized that the importance of this hermeneutic method in understanding the Koran. In his writings, he said that in addition to tafsir books, Muslims have formulated a large number of works on the methods or principles of interpretation of the Koran which are called ushul al-tafsir. In this case they are of great service to their efforts to understand the Koran, the use of harfiyah and its metaphorical language, as well as in distinguishing between verses that have general and specific meanings, and others. These efforts are very significant for understanding the text of the Koran. However, there is an urgent need for a hermeneutic theory, which is to help us understand the full meaning of the Koran. The theological, ethical and legal parts of the Koran become a holistic and unified whole (Fazlur Rahman, 1986: 45).

It can be understood from Fazlur Rahman's statement above, that the hermeneutic method is not a stand-alone method of understanding the Quran, but as a complement to the methods and principles of literal interpretation of the Quran that have developed in Islamic thought. The two methods, namely the historical criticism method and the hermeneutic method are closely related. The historical criticism method functions as an effort to deconstruct the methodology, while the hermeneutic method functions as an effort to reconstruct it. In normative studies (the application of the hermenetic method in interpreting the Quran), Fazlur Rahman uses the socio-historical method as a tool to assist in finding related social contexts. According to Fazlur Rahman, social sciences are very significant in providing information on people's behavior in certain matters. For example in political matters.

## **2. Configuration In Thought Field**

Broadly speaking, Fazlur Rahman's study can be divided into two, namely the field of historical studies and the field of normative studies. In historical studies, he tries to trace the long journey of Moslems in various aspects, to find the root of the gap in Islamic history between periods of rapid development and periods of intense decline. This historical study style can be found in many of his works, such as Islamic Methodology in History, Islam, and Islam and Modernity. He views that the problem of Islam is essentially a problem of

intellectualism. It is very influential in determining the progress or decline of Islam. The decline of Islam is identical with the dryness of intellectualism, and Islamic reform is also synonymous with reform of intellectualism.

Fazlur Rahman in his capacity as an Islamic intellectual realizes this, namely the decline of Islamic intellectualism in the last decades of Islamic history, and is called to rebuild the foundations of Islamic intellectualism. There are two findings that he highlighted in examining the stagnation of Islamic intellectualism, namely first, the historical evolution of the four foundations of Islamic thought which constitute the basic framework of Islamic thought: the Quran, *Sunnah*, *Ijtihad*, and *Ijma'*, second, the waning spirit of rationalism as seen in the Islamic higher education curriculum.

According to him "Historical Islam"-that is, Islam which is actualized by Moslems throughout history - is not entirely relevant to be applied in the present period of modern history. In fact, Fazlur Rahman's historical study aims to find the incompatibility between historical Islam and normative Islam. Since the first time the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, it has acted as a responsive solution and an indication of any gaps or inconsistencies in the patterns of pre-Islamic human life (Fazlur Rahman, 1996). Wealth towards the universalism of the Quran, It should be accompanied by an attitude of placing the Koran as its role was first revealed, namely as a responsive solution and a guide to mankind's problems throughout the ages, including the problems of modern life today. Since the mid-20th century-the decade after independence-the Islamic world has been faced with modern issues, such as the relationship between religion, law and politics, human rights, the position of women, the economic system, and other social issues (W. Montgomery Watt., 1996).

Fazlur Rahman's thought in the field of philosophy and theology is quite existing, both aspects of this thought do not seem so dominant in the configuration of Fazlur Rahman's field of thought. Philosophy only acts as a means of critical thinking, while theology acts as a basis for thought. These two aspects of thought are tools for formulating the interpretation of the Koran. The interpretation of Islam in the context of modernity is the final result of all Fazlur Rahman's thoughts.

To examine which aspects of thought are most dominant in the configuration of Fazlur Rahman's thought, several careful considerations are needed on several matters, namely first, since the middle of the 20th century AD Muslims have been faced with practical issues surrounding the problem of the relationship between religion and politics (state), the concept of an Islamic state and the design of an Islamic state legal system. Fazlur Rahman himself is involved in resolving these issues in Pakistan. That is why many of his writings lead to the interpretation of Islamic law in the context of modernity. Second, the *Ijtihad* method offered by Fazlur Rahman to overcome the crisis of Islam and modernity, even though he called it a "method of interpretation". Fazlur Rahman's design regarding two double movements of interpretation implicitly emphasizing aspects of Islamic legal thought. The first step of Fazlur Rahman's two interpretive movements is to understand the expressions of the Koran to be generated to social-moral principles by linking specific expressions of the Qur'an with its socio-historical background and by considering 'illat. law stated in the expressions of the Quran. The second step is to formulate these general principles into the current actual socio-historical context.

Fazlur Rahman's reason behind the mention of his method as a method of interpretation is the

prominence of "new nuances" which are more "interpretive" in style. Fazlur Rahman emphasized that intellectual effort which consists of the two interpretive movements is technically called Ijtihad or intellectual jihad (Fazlur Rahman, 1996).

"configuration fields of thought", especially based on the two considerations above, that Fazlur Rahman's most dominant thought is in the field of Islamic legal thought (*ushul fiqh*) and the field of *fiqh* (Islamic law).

### Conclusion:

It can be understood from Fazlur Rahman's statement above, that the reformulation of classical modernism has at least attempted to carry out internal reforms, namely instilling rationalism as an initial solution to intellectual stagnation and decline. Around the middle of the twentieth century saw the beginning of a period of contemporary modernism, because in particular Moslem countries gained political sovereignty in the range of 1945-1963. This period was marked by several new situations, some of which were a product or a logical consequence of classical modernization. Independence and political sovereignty themselves mean very broad changes, covering all aspects of the life of the nation and society.

These issues are a challenge for Moslem thinkers. By relying on the belief in the universality of the Quran in responding to the challenges of the times. Interpreting the Quran on the basis of normative Islam to answer modern issues in the context of modernity is the central idea for the construction of Islamic thought by Fazlur Rahman. The study of the Quran in the context of modernity which is the central idea of Fazlur Rahman's thoughts is also a sign of the totality of his thoughts in the fields of Islamic thought, because the Quran itself is the normative foundation of all areas of Islamic thought.

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