

ACADEMIC RESEARCHES ON FAZLUR RAHMAN: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), a liberal and modernist thinker of the twentieth century, was an influential scholar from Pakistan. He was a notable scholar of Islamic philosophy and was a prolific writer. Without any exaggeration, it can be asserted that Fazlur Rahman produced such a revolutionary and marvelous literature which made his thought a fascinating subject for research and analysis. Throughout the Globe, attempts have been made to conduct researches in order to assess his contribution in the varied disciplines of Islamic scholarship. This has continued in the last century and is continuing in the present century as well. Numerous researches have been carried-out on different aspects and dimensions of Fazlur Rahman's thought and contribution. In this backdrop, this paper anticipates to present an appraisal and assessment of those academic researchers in order to gain acquaintance of the varied dimensions of Fazlur Rahman's religious thought. This paper is qualitative in nature and in order to assess the academic works done on Fazlur Rahman, a descriptive and explanatory-cum-analytical approach was followed. This review paper will help in apprehending the different approaches and methodologies employed by different scholars in understanding the multi-dimensional aspects of Fazlur Rahman's religious thought and provide an assessment of his contribution in different realms of Islamic scholarship

Keywords: *Fazlur Rahman, Modernist, Pakistan, Islamic Thought*

INTRODUCTION

Abdullah Saeed considers Fazlur Rahman as “one of the most daring and original contributors to the discussion on the reform of Islamic thought in the twentieth century” (Saeed 2006: 37). According to Safet Bektovic, “Fazlur Rahman represents a transitional figure between Islamic modernism and neo-modernism” (Bektovic 2016: 160). Undeniably, many Islamic thinkers, scholars, and writers have been highly impressed and mesmerized by Fazlur Rahman's writings and his methodology of reform. There has been so much focus on his thought and writings that a lot of research has been carried-out on him in order to assess his contribution to Islamic scholarship and bring that into limelight as well.

This is evident from the titles of many research articles and book chapters written by different scholars of India, Pakistan, Germany, Turkey, Indonesia and the rest of the World. For instance: Frederick Mathewson Denny, “Fazlur Rahman: Muslim Intellectual”, in *The Muslim World* (1989); Tamara Sonn, “Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology”, in *The Muslim World* (1991); Necmettin Gokkir, “Western Impact on Contemporary Qur'anic Studies: The Application of Literary Criticism” in *Usul* (2005); Abdullah Saeed, “A Framework for Interpreting the Ethico-Legal Content of the Qur'an” in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an* (2006); Fatima Kizil, “Fazlur Rahman's Understanding of the Sunnah/Hadith-A Comparison with Joseph Schacht's Views on the Subject” in *Hadis Tetkikleri Dergisi*

(HTD) (2008); Farid Panjwani, "Fazlur Rahman and the Search for Authentic Islamic Education: A Critical Appreciation" in *Curriculum Inquiry* (2012); Shagufta and Aneeqa Batool, "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism: A Critical Study of Fazlur Rahman's Article" in *Al-Hikmat* (2013); Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Transmission of Islamic Reform from the United States to Indonesia" in *Indonesia and the Malay World* (2013); Katharina Volker, "Two Accounts of Qur'anic Revelation" in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (2015); Safet Bektovic, "Towards a Neo-Modernist Islam: Fazlur Rahman and the rethinking Islamic Tradition and Modernity" in *Studia Theologica-Nordic Journal of Theology* (2016); Navin G. Haider Ali, "Placing his Thoughts in Perspective: A Survey of Works on Fazlur Rahman" in *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (2016); Ali Akbar, "The Origin of Fazlur Rahman's Theory of Revelation" presented in the Third International Conference on Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization (2016); Megan Brankley Abbas, "Between Western Academia and Pakistan: Fazlur Rahman and the fight for Fusionism" in *Modern Asian Studies* (2017); Ali Akbar, "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought" in *The Muslim World* (2020).

Besides the above mentioned research papers, a lot of articles are still available which discuss Fazlur Rahman's contribution and legacy. It is pertinent to mention here that a special issue of *Journal of Islamic Research (Islami Arastirmalar)* [Vol. 4, no. iv, 1990. "Special Issue: In Memory of Fazlur Rahman"] was dedicated to Fazlur Rahman's contribution and was edited by A. Acikgenc. A great number of scholars contributed their research papers on Fazlur Rahman to that issue. For example: Personal Anecdotes on a Great Scholar, Teacher and Friend by Dr. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud; The Thinker of Islamic Revival and Reform: Fazlur Rahman's Life and Thought (1919-1988) by Alparsalan Acikgenc; Fazl al-Rahman as a Philosopher by Charles J. Adams, etc. In addition to these research papers and journals, numerous academic researches i.e. Masters and Doctorates

have been carried-out by scholars belonging to both orient and occident on Fazlur Rahman's contribution and legacy in different universities. A humble attempt has been made in this study to assess and examine the academic researches done so far on Fazlur Rahman's thought and contribution.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this paper, an attempt has been made to provide an assessment and appraisal of academic researches conducted on thought and contribution of Fazlur Rahman. This paper is primarily theoretical in nature and the methodology espoused for this study is descriptive and explanatory-cum-analytical in nature. It presents an appraisal of dissertations on Fazlur Rahman compiled by scholars from McGill University, Montreal, Canada; International Islamic University, Pakistan; The University of Birmingham, England; University of Cape Town; Walisongo State Islamic University, Semarang, Indonesia; and others. Here, a methodological question can be raised that why the scope of this study is limited to "dissertations" only? Though the articles also come under the ambit of academic works but as far as the thesis and dissertations are concerned they provide more elaborative discussion regarding the results and findings comparatively than research articles wherein only selected findings are presented, thus, it can be said that the dissertation is a more in-depth scholarly research paper. This is the simple reason why this study skips other academic works on Fazlur Rahman. This descriptive and explanatory assessment helps in understanding the diverse scholarly approaches, followed by different scholars, in studying varied dimensions and aspects of Fazlur Rahman's thought, be it his philosophical and theological thought or his reformist paradigm or his methodological aspect of Qur'anic study, or any other aspects.

This paper consists of four parts. The first

part is an introductory section which will be followed by the biographical sketch of Fazlur Rahman and his writings in the second part. The discussion in the third part will be focused on academic researches on Fazlur Rahman and their assessment. Finally, a conclusion will bring the discussion to an end.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fazlur Rahman: His Brief Biographical Sketch and Oeuvre

Fazlur Rahman Malik is considered as one of the towering personalities of Islamic scholarship of the twentieth century who did not study at a traditional *Dar ul Ulum* but still was trained even mastered in the science of *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh* and *kalam* (Volker 2015: 271). He completed his B.A. Honor's in Arabic in 1940 and acquired Masters in Arabic in 1942 standing as a class first from Punjab University, Pakistan (Ahmad 2017: 18). Then, he embarked on a journey to Oxford University wherein he was nominated for a scholarship for pursuing research and, eventually he gained his PhD within three years in 1949 on Avicenna's Psychology from Oxford University carried under supervision of Simon van den Bergh (Saeed 2004: 37). His PhD dissertation was basically a translation and critical rendition on a section of *the Kitab al-Najat* of the famous eleventh-century Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina who is often known in the West as Avicenna. It was published in 1952 by Oxford University Press.

From 1950-1958, Fazlur Rahman began his teaching career by teaching Islamic Philosophy as well as Persian Studies at Durham University, U.K. Thereafter, he was appointed as an Assistant Professor at the Institute for Islamic Studies at McGill University, Montreal, Canada where he remained till 1961 (Rahman 1999:2). In August of 1962, General Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan appointed Fazlur Rahman as the Director of Central Institute of Islamic Research in Pakistan (Bektovic 2016:161). For

those political parties and Ulama, which were opposed to Ayub Khan's modernization program of Pakistan, Fazlur Rahman became a scapegoat. Staunch opposition to Rahman's reformist thought emerged when his book, *Islam: A General Introduction* (1966) came into forefront in which he advocates dual character of the Qur'an which incorporates both a divine and an anthropological nature of the Qur'an and criticized the orthodox conception of revelation and prophecy (Volker 2015: 272). Fazlur Rahman was perceived as a "Western Orientalist agent" (Ahmed 2017: 26) and was considered as an atheist and enemy of Islam by Muslim religious groups of Pakistan. On September 6, 1968, Fazlur Rahman resigned from the Directorship of the Central Institute for Islamic Research after realizing that the intellectual atmosphere in Pakistan is not conducive to his reformist thought (Ahmad 2017: 30). He left Pakistan in 1969 and moved to United States, where he was appointed as a visiting professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Later, he was appointed as Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Chicago, Illinois in 1969 and was devoted to it until his death on 26th July, 1988 (Rahman 1999: 3). It was during his professorship at Chicago University that Rahman served as an advisor to the Indonesian Government (Waugh 2008: 410).

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), a Canadian theologian and the founder of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, Montreal, Canada commented on Fazlur Rahman as:

"He was a person of integrity; a religious man with a brilliant mind using it as part of his religion. He was a moral person; a serious Muslim motivated by deep concern for his culture and his people" (Jesse 1991: 15).

Fazlur Rahman was a prolific writer. Until his death on 26th July, 1988, he wrote extensively on different Islamic themes and subjects covering almost every aspects of his thought and message. His prominent works which have received accolade from eminent scholars like Abdul Karim Soroush (1945; 75 years), Arash Naraqi, Abdullah Saeed (1960; 61 years), Nurcholish Madjid (1939-

2005), Farid Esack (1955; 66 years) and Amina Wadud (1952; 68 years) are cited below:

- *Avicenna's Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 1952.
- *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, London, 1958.
- *Avicenna's De Anima*, Oxford University Press, 1959.
- *Islamic Methodology in History*, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, 1965.
- *Islam: A General Introduction*, London and New York, 1967.
- *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, Iqbal Academy, Karachi, 1968.
- *Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, State University of New York Press, 1975.
- *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.
- *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, University of Chicago, 1982.
- *Health and Medicine in Islamic Tradition*, New York: The Cross-Road Publishing, 1987.
- *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*, 1988. [Posthumous publication edited by Ebrahim Moosa].

During his Directorship (1962-1968) at Central Institute for Islamic Research, he instituted three journals: *Islamic Studies* in English, *Fikr-o-Nazr* in Urdu and *Darasat al-Islamiyya* in 'Arabic (Ahmad 2017: 25-26). In these journals, Fazlur Rahman has written a large number of research articles and papers on diverse Islamic themes and concepts.

Besides, it is also said that Fazlur Rahman has learned German whilst in Pakistan before pursuing doctorate at Oxford University and has translated Ignaz Goldziher's (1850-1921), the famous Hungarian Orientalist, fundamental study of classical Qur'an commentary, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* into English but this manuscript has been lost during India's

partition in 1947 (Ahmad 2017: 19).

Academic Researches on Fazlur Rahman

It is Fazlur Rahman's marvelous contribution to Islamic scholarship which made him a fascinating subject for research and analysis. Throughout the Globe, attempts have been made to conduct researches in order to assess his contribution in the varied disciplines of Islamic scholarship. In the following pages, an assessment of the academic researches carried on Fazlur Rahman will be provided. The academic researches pursued related to Fazlur Rahman can be divided into two categories i.e., Master Thesis and Doctoral Dissertations.

Master Thesis:

1. *A Modern Muslim Intellectual: The Thought of Fazlur Rahman with Special Reference to Reason*, Mary Catherine Jesse, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Regina, 1991).

In this thesis, Mary Catherine Jesse has attempted to examine the position of reason which Fazlur Rahman vouchsafed to it in his thought and writings. This thesis commences with a brief biographical sketch of Fazlur Rahman. While delineating upon significant factors that led to the evolution of Rahman's thought, Jesse put-forth that Rahman's intellectual approach was shaped by a blending of influences (Jesse 1991: 27) and he could be characterized as one who examines the modern Muslim attempt to harmonize Islam and the West, specifically Western methods and Islamic values (Jesse 1991: 27). Thereafter, author analyzes the Rahman's perspective of four important concepts of Islamic thought i.e., the Qur'an, the *Sunnah*, *Ijtihad* and *Ijma* which are regarded by Rahman as "the principles of Islamic thought". According to Rahman, these inter-related principles form an "Islamic Methodology" (Jesse 1991: 29).

Jesse deliberates on the concepts like Unity of the Qur'an, *Living Sunnah* and the organic link among *Sunnah*, *Ijma* and *Ijtihad* which are

promulgated by Rahman in his eminent writings. She elucidates his understanding and use of reason vis-à-vis his writings. Author has also elaborated on the Rahman critical evaluation of development of Islamic legal framework and its ossification. Besides, she also dilates on the critique carried out by Rahman on the formalization of Islamic theology. According to Rahman, there are inadequacies present in both legal and theological framework for both Muslim legalists and theologians show low regard for reason and pure thought, thus, he proposes a new approach for integrating law and theology under the ambit of ethical and rational system.

Jesse presents a theoretical overview of Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics and delineates on his *Double-Movement Theory*. She also illustrates his interpretative methodology by presenting his discussion of polygamy in order to show how his inferred interpretation is both in conformity with the Qur'anic intent and also relevant to the needs of modern world. Lastly, she dealt upon Rahman's approach to knowledge and posits that "Rahman's views regarding knowledge are closely related to his emphasis on modernity and Islamic reform" (Jesse 1991: 112). She also throws light on the Rahman's proposal for an integrated educational system which according to her can produce rationally well-trained and ethically sound Muslim scholars. The crux of this thesis is that Rahman does not discuss rationalism as such rather he applied rationality in solving problems of contemporary times. He considered reason as an integral to his own approach and asserted that the Qur'an considers knowledge as a creation of ideas which is possible only by applying reason.

This work has made a significant contribution by contextualizing importance of reason vis-à-vis Fazlur Rahman's thought and works. But she has not discussed the Rahman's works in entirety rather she has focused on those spheres of his thought where his rationalistic approach is evident.

2. Some Qur'anic Legal Texts in the Context of

Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutical Method, Amhar Rasyid (Unpublished M.A. Thesis; Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 1994).

The thesis of Amhar Rasyid is based on the critical exposition of Fazlur Rahman's paradigm of the divine revelation of the Quran and its application to the hotly debated issues of Muslim World i.e., *zakat* and *riba*. Through a balanced style, author in the first chapter of his thesis has examined and analyzed the Rahman's hermeneutical philosophy and has also referred to the views of Schleimacher, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Emilio Betti while emphasizing his notion of "effective history". Further, author in this chapter has also portrayed the Rahman's critique of the traditionalist approach to the Quran and his solution in order to address the weaknesses found in their views.

In the second chapter, author has tried to critically evaluate the pros and cons of Rahman's Qur'anic methodology by applying it on two legal issues i.e., *zakat* and *riba*. Author's core argument is that Rahman's methodology is not free from subjectivism. While analyzing Rahman's sociological approach to the Quran, author argues that "it is only the sociological aspect of the sacred text, not the theological which concerns him to minimize this subjectivism".

The author's scholarly application of Rahman's Double Movement Theory to the cases of *zakat* and *riba* makes this thesis a must read for comprehending and understanding the dynamic nature and implementation of Rahman's Qur'anic methodology. Despite this, there are certain loopholes in the work i.e., author has streamlined from time to time that Rahman's methodology is subjective in nature but he has not taken a single attempt to deliberate upon the ways how to obliterate rather diminish subjectivism in the hermeneutical philosophy. Moreover, according to the author Rahman was influenced by Habermas which is paradoxical with Fazlur Rahman's disapproval of Habermas's theory in his renowned work *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an*

Intellectual Tradition.

3. *Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Philosophy*, Fatimah Hussein, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis; Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Canada 1997).

In this thesis, author makes a comprehensive as well as concise analysis and exploration of Fazlur Rahman's philosophical thought. The thesis commences with a brief preliminary discussion on the development of *falsafah* and *kalam* in Islam followed by interpretations and explanations of Islamic philosophical doctrines held by prominent scholars like Toshihiko Izutsu, Henry Corbin, Majid Fakhry, and Syed Hosein Nasr. Thereafter, author analyzed Rahman's understanding of the development and history of Islamic philosophy and thus argues that he was not of same view as held by the above mentioned scholars that Islamic philosophy consists of pure metaphysics. Moreover, she argues that Rahman's thought is to be called "philosophy", rather than "theology" as theology comprises discussions and debates related to the theoretical foundations of the Islam like God's existence, His attributes, creation of World by God, prophecy and revelation while as philosophy deals with comprehensive issues of practical life besides classical *kalam* which are found extensively in the writings of Rahman (Hussein 1997: 32-33). She also mentions that, "Fazlur Rahman regards Islamic Philosophy as a combination of Aristotle and Neo-platonism" (Hussein 1997: 36).

Author, while deliberating upon the relationship between Rahman's philosophical thought and his Qur'anic methodology, put-forth that Rahman advocated moral-philosophy which is practically based on the precepts of the Qur'an instead of philosophy based on meta-physical notions. Besides, she presents an overview of Rahman's criticism of Muslim philosophers for their sole focus on metaphysical issues as well as on the negligence of ethics. Rahman's thought is an integration of his religious belief and philosophical thought and, Qur'an-centered ethics holds an important place within his framework of philosophical discourse.

Also, author lucidly elucidates the ambivalent nature of Rahman's position concerning the legacy of Muslim philosophers. On the one hand, he applauds them for their philosophical proclivities and appreciates their understandings of the philosophical doctrines and on the other hand, he criticized them for their whole dependence on reason and rationality and also for their negligence towards ethics and morality. Author has asserted that "Rahman's approach to the Qur'an has played a central role in his understanding of the value of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary World" (Hussein 1997: 101).

Fatimah Husein's scholarly reflections on the philosophical thought of Rahman in her work makes *Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Philosophy* a must read for comprehending and understanding the dynamic nature of philosophy exhibited in Fazlur Rahman's oeuvre. Moreover, the work is a worthwhile contribution to the literature produced on thought of Fazlur Rahman. It is pertinent to mention here that many scholars like Charles J Adam, etc. do not consider Fazlur Rahman a philosopher in lieu regard him "a historian of philosophy" (Adams 1990: 226), though the author has mentioned such opinions in her thesis but she has not put-forth his own position regarding them.

4. *A Critical Reading of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology: The Case of the Living Sunnah*, Mohamed Shaid Mathee (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, 2004).

This Master's thesis by Mohamed Shaid Mathee basically deals with a critical evaluation of the "Concept of Living Sunnah" put-forth by Fazlur Rahman in his celebrated work, *Islamic Methodology in History*. This consists of four chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. After discussing some preliminary points regarding the *Sunnah* in the introduction, author in the first chapter first elucidates the linguist meaning of *Sunnah* followed by delineating on the understanding and usage

of *Sunnah* by early Muslims. Thereafter, he discusses and analyzes the concept of *living Sunnah* as enunciated by Fazlur Rahman whereby author streamlines Fazlur Rahman's notion of organic relationship between *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma*. Author also deliberates on the "Rahman's Ideal Sunnah Notion". In the second chapter, author had tried to expose the incoherence and inconsistency of the concept of living Sunnah. Author holds a view that the living Sunnah was in essence, though not exclusively, a political disposition and regards this as Fazlur Rahman's failure that he was not able to comprehend the fact that the interpretations of early generations were politically driven.

The author in the third chapter endeavors to examine the relationship between the scholars and the political authority of early Islam. He investigates that who impacted decisively on the development of intellectual tradition of Islam whether Islamic scholars or the political heads of the state. He came with the conclusion that no doubt both of them have contributed but mostly it was the political authority who contributed towards framing Islamic epistemology. As far as the contribution of scholars is concerned, that too flourished under the patronage of state. In the last chapter of his thesis author has first tried to identify those assertions of Fazlur Rahman which are in contradiction to Shafii's *bayan* paradigm and then criticized them. He has vindicated main argument of Shafii that the Prophetic Sunnah acts as legislative supplement to the Qur'an.

This work is a significant contribution as it is rich not only in its contents but also in its analysis. The author's scholarly analysis of both Shafii's stances and Rahman's position on Sunnah makes this thesis a must read for apprehending the dynamic nature of Sunnah. But at the same time, author has not traced the impact and influence of orientalist understanding on the Rahman's paradigm of *Ijtihad* and *Living Sunnah* especially the impact of Joseph Schacht's (1902-1969) work *Origin's of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.

5. *The Concept of Battle against Non-Muslims in the Holy Qur'an (Application of Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement Method*, Emi Irfa (Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis, UIN Walisongo, Semarang, 2015).

The Concept of Battle against Non-Muslims in the Holy Qur'an (Application of Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement Method) is basically compiled by researcher for fulfilling the requirements of Undergraduate Degree of Islamic Theology. It seems appropriate to review it here under the section of Masters dissertation rather than in PhD dissertation section. So, the thesis reviewed here is a significant addition to the corpus of works on Fazlur Rahman's Qur'anic methodology and addresses the subject from a practical perspective. The thesis contains five chapters including an introduction. After an introductory chapter, author provides a brief outline of Fazlur Rahman's life and works and then discusses the etymological derivative of the word *hermeneutics* – "derived from the Greek language *hermeneuen* in which means to translate and interpret (Irfa 2015:31) and then explains three methods of hermeneutics: i) objective hermeneutics developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and Emilio Betti (1890-1968); ii) subjective hermeneutics developed by modern figure especially by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004); and iii) the liberation hermeneutics developed by Muslims especially Hasan Hanafi (b.1935) and Farid Esack (b.1955) (Irfa 2015: 33-38). Author asserts that simply the hermeneutics is a method of finding the meaning of vague and unclear things (Irfa 2015: 40). After deliberating upon the above-mentioned things, author provides a succinct description of Fazlur Rahman's Double-Movement Theory (Irfa 2015: 41-50).

Author in the third chapter enriches the value of this thesis by shedding light on the terms like *Qital*, *Jihad* and *Harb* from the Qur'anic perspectives and asserts that each term has a special connotation which differs from one

another (Irfa 2015: 62). Author also deliberates on for levels of Jihad which have been put-forth by Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350) in his *magnum opus Zad al-Ma'ad (Provisions of the Hereafter)* i.e., jihad against lust, jihad against temptation of Satan, jihad against infidels and hypocrites and jihad against injustice and wickedness (Irfa 2015: 85-86). Author concludes this chapter by exhorting that the jihad does not mean killing and fighting by using hostile approaches without any clear objectives like the people who are advocates of terrorism and are using warfare and hostile methods of achieving their ends, they leave clearly a negative impact on image of Islam. Rather jihad in Islam is clearly different from terrorism and is subjected to sincere intention and is associated with the meaning of *fi sabilillah*. Author also emphasizes on the fact that the purpose of jihad in Islam is not to force non-Muslims to convert to Islam but the purpose is to fight against tyranny and oppression.

In the last chapter, which is the main part of this thesis, authorities to understand the verses of the Qur'an related to jihad in the light of Fazlur Rahman's Double-Movement Theory (Irfa 2015: 118-122). Firstly, author highlights the socio-historical milieu of Arab society at the time of revelation and then applies Double-Movement theory and finally argues that the interactions which took place between the revelation of the Qur'an and socio-cultural situations of the Prophetic erawas wholly focused on solving problems of that era and thus, the Qur'an prefers to choose the way that was appropriate with the development and the necessities of the times. Thus at that time, Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) chooses the way of war because war was the part of the culture at that time. But times have changed and present era is very different from that time because today we have general agreements of both national and international levels especially about human rights, security, freedom of religion, etc. (Irfa 2015: 144-148).

This thesis provides a commendable and intellectually engaging account of practical implication of Fazlur Rahman's theory. However,

there are some limitations to it. Though rich in its contents but the language of the thesis is poor. Besides, there are plethora of grammatical errors and spelling mistakes as well.

6. *The Theological Thought of Fazlur Rahman: A Modern Mutakkalim*, Ahad M. Ahmed (Kuala Lumpur, Islamic Book Trust, 2017)

The Theological Thought of Fazlur Rahman: A Modern Mutakkalim by Ahad Maqbool Ahmed is originally based on his M. Phil Thesis conducted at International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan. The first chapter of the book, "Fazlur Rahman's Life: A Biographical Overview", opens up with an overview of Fazlur Rahman's biography and his major works. Author has categorized academically Rahman's life into five distinct phases i.e., 1st phase extending from 1919-1946, 2nd from 1946-1958, 3rd from 1958-1961, 4th from 1962-1968 and 5th from 1968-1988 (Ahmed 2017: 17-35). Author has also categorized his writings into four time periods i.e., 1) Initial Pakistan Period, 2) UK and Canada period, 3) Final Pakistan period, and 4) American period (Ahmed 2017: 36). Finally, the chapter presents an outline of Rahman's Islamic Thought and its sources. In the second chapter, "Emergence and Development of Islamic Theology", which is based upon Fazlur Rahman's work – *Revival and Reform in Islam* and *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, author analyses the Rahman's understanding of emergence and development of Islamic theology. Further, author elucidates the Rahman's conception of major doctrines of theology and the role of the major theological groups and scholars in the development of theology during the formative and post-formative stages of kalam. In this chapter, author has put-forth an argument that Rahman's analytical method is to seek "a synthesis between Modern Orientalist methodology and the history of *kalam* literature" (Ahmed 2017: 71).

The author in the third chapter, "Concept of God", endeavors to present the Fazlur Rahman's concept of God. As per author, Fazlur Rahman

attempts to formulate his concept of God based upon how the Qur'an presents certain ideas to establish the existence of God and lastly states that the Qur'anic concept of God is functional. In this chapter author also compares Rahman's notion on the concept of God to Ibn Sina and ultimately posits that undoubtedly the Rahman's ideas are influenced by Ibn Sina but his concept of God is different from him and different from Sufis as well. According to Ahmed, Rahman's theological thought is representative of two criteria: firstly fulfilling the demands of the Qur'anic message and secondly satisfying the needs of a contemporary modern Islam (Ahmed 2015: 156).

In the last chapter of the book, "Concept of Prophethood", author deliberates on Fazlur Rahman's concept of Prophethood whose roots according to author are found in the thinking and writings of Ibn Sina and some elements are incorporated from Shah Wali ul lah and Allama Sir Mohammad Iqbal regarding revelation. Besides, author also underlines Fazlur Rahman's understanding of Prophetic miracles, intercession and prophetic infallibility.

Undoubtedly, this book is rich in its content and analysis but at times it seems that the way of writing is confusing in nature as author has often referred to ideas and concepts of other scholars, whom Fazlur Rahman has discussed in his works. Moreover, occasional typographical errors are present too. Shortcomings apart, the book is an important contribution in highlighting Rahman's theological thought.

Doctoral Dissertations:

1. *The Thought of Fazlur Rahman as an Islamic Response to Modernity*, Donald Lee Berry (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990).

This dissertation is a daunting work comprising of four chapters along with a preface. In this dissertation, author has explored succinctly various dimensions of Fazlur Rahman's modernist thought. This dissertation majorly

focuses on the response advocated by Fazlur Rahman for addressing the dilemma posed by modernity. In the first chapter, "The Dilemma of Religious Traditionalism within the context of Modernity" (pp.1-46), author has deliberated on the varied problems which are associated with the modernity in one way or the other. Besides, author presents a brief review of Peter Berger's five dilemmas which are imposed by modernity on religious traditions i.e., abstraction, futurity, individuation, liberation and secularization (Berry 1990: 13-41). These dilemmas are mentioned by Peter Berger in his work, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics and Religion*. Author has tried to assess the impact of these five dilemmas of modernity upon religious traditions and asserts that "each of these dilemmas represent a major force that must be dealt with by any contemporary religious community" (Berry 1990: 13).

In the second chapter, "A Call for Rediscovery and Reconstruction in the Thought of Fazlur Rahman" (pp.47-119), author analyses Rahman's paradigm of Reconstruction of Islam vis-à-vis his Qur'anic hermeneutics and posits that according to Rahman only way to reform and reconstruct Islam in the modern world is to rediscover the basic elan of the Qur'an. According to author, Rahman has insisted throughout his works that "only by employing *Ijtihad* and *Shura*, the dynamic message of the Qur'an can become the catalyst for social, political and economic change" (Berry 1990: 119). Besides, author has dilated on Rahman's theological, social, political and economic thought as well in this chapter.

In the third chapter, "A Response to Reconstruction in the Thought of Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi" (pp.120-162), author has enriched his thesis by comparing Fazlur Rahman's call for "reconstruction" with Maulana Maududi's call for an "Islamic Revival". Author asserted that both Rahman as well as Maududi believed that the Qur'an could be used to revitalize the social, political and economic situation in Pakistan; however, they differed greatly in the response to the challenge of modernity. Rahman saw

modernity as a challenge and Maududi saw it as a threat (Berry 1990: 120). In this chapter, author has also highlighted theological differences that exist between Fazlur Rahman and Maulana Maududi.

In the last chapter, “The Significance of Fazlur Rahman’s Thought in the Dilemma of Modernity” (pp.163-237), author has deliberated in a detailed way on different Islamic and Christian responses to modernity by assessing works of Muslims and Christians on theme of modernity. He has also sheds light on common missiological dilemma posed by modernity. He has endeavored to categorize some of the varied responses to the dilemma of modernity in order to decipher the dilemma’s which are faced by all religions throughout the Globe. Author has streamlined varied number of religious responses to modernity put-forth by: i) John F. Wilson in his article *Modernity and Religion: A Problem of Perspective* (Berry 1990: 165), and, ii) H. Richard Niebuhr in his eminent work, *Christ and Culture* (Berry 1990: 166). At last, author enumerates four different responses of Islam to modernity in the contemporary world i.e., Secularist, Modernist, Traditionalist and Neo-fundamentalist mentioned by Fazlur Rahman in his research paper – *Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism* (Berry 1990: 166). Author in this chapter has also dealt with responses to modernity presented by both Semitic i.e., Islam, Judaism and Christianity and non-Semitic traditions i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto and Zoroastrianism.

This dissertation is a significant contribution as far as the response put-forth by Fazlur Rahman to modernity is considered. Author has asserted in the last section of this thesis that “the goal of Fazlur Rahman was not only to save religion from modernity rather to save modern man from himself through religion” (Berry 1990: 204). The lacuna which exists in this dissertation is that the author has not framed any conclusion at the last, which is a part and parcel of any work, whether that may be dissertation or any book. Besides, author has not dilated on how Rahman’s

modernist thought emerged and evolved over a course of time.

2. *Fazlur Rahman: A Reinterpretation of Islam in the Twentieth Century*, Christopher Thomas Radbourne Hower (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Theology, the University of Birmingham, April 1998).

This doctoral thesis is the most exhaustive research carried-out on Fazlur Rahman comprising approximately 80,000 words. This thesis is divided into three parts and also includes an introduction and conclusion. Besides, five appendices are attached in the last section which includes Fazlur Rahman’s Curriculum Vitae, catalogue of his personal library, newspaper cuttings from Pakistan Press (1961-1968), indices of Western scholars and Qur’anic verses cited in the works of Rahman, etc. Basically, in this dissertation, the researcher endeavors to present a critical analysis of the works of Fazlur Rahman vis-à-vis background of his life. In the first part of this thesis, which is divided into three chapters, the researcher throws light on early life and education of Fazlur Rahman spanning from 1919-1961. Furthermore, the researcher streamlined Fazlur Rahman’s perspective on Prophecy in this part by assessing his celebrated work, *Prophecy in Islam*. Christopher not only accentuates Rahman’s conception of Prophecy but also deliberates upon the impact which this kind of thinking left on his religious rather philosophical thought. Afterwards, the researcher endeavors to explore at length the Rahman’s idea of Revelation, the principle source of which is his book *Islam* and his views on the Concept of Divine Revelation was the main issue because of which he was labeled as *Munkir-i-Qur’an* and which ultimately led to his resignation from the Directorship of Central Institute of Islamic Research in 1968.

The second part of this thesis is the longest part comprising of six chapters (from chapter four to chapter nine) in which his works compiled in Pakistan are analyzed in a detailed way vis-à-vis highlighting Pakistan’s political and Islamic context. Christopher tries to highlights

Rahman's methodology for reinvigorating Islam in the twentieth century by delineating on his interpretation of the key sources of the Islam. For this, researcher analyzed his prominent work, *Islamic Methodology in History* published in 1965 and describes his understanding of *Sunnah*, *Hadith*, *Ijma* and *Ijtihad*. Besides, author has dealt with Rahman's conception of various issues of legal nature like family planning, divorce, polygamy, mechanical slaughter, Islamic penal laws, *zakat* and *riba*, etc. His views were repudiated and denounced by Ulama regarding these issues.

In the third chapter, an assessment of Fazlur Rahman's works is provided which he compiled during his tenure at University of Chicago. Christopher analyses Rahman's magnum opus *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* and his celebrated work, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. He delineates on *Double-Movement Theory* which Rahman propounds in *Islam and Modernity*. Besides, he accentuates the importance of socio-historical context for understanding and interpreting the Qur'an as put-forth by Rahman. Further, he highlights Rahman's Qur'anic Methodology of Qur'anic ethics and reviews Rahman's paper "Law and Ethics in Islam" which was presented by Fazlur Rahman in Ninth Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference in 1983. Author has also highlighted Rahman's perspective on the concept of women in Islam and interfaith relations.

This dissertation is a sort of encyclopedia as far as life and works of Fazlur Rahman are concerned. Author has enumerated eighty research papers of Fazlur Rahman published in different journals and edited books. The work has systematically analyzed the contribution of Fazlur Rahman vis-à-vis reinterpretation of Islam in the modern period. Although the author has aptly described Rahman's modernist interpretation of varied issues ranging from legal to theological but he has hardly analyzed them critically. He simply has restated the opinions and statements of Rahman on varied socio-economic issues without evaluating and analyzing them.

3. *Qur'an and Reform: Rahman, Arkoun, Abu Zayd*, Katharine Voelker, (Peter Lang Academic Research: Frankfurt, Germany, 2017).

This work is basically the Ph.D. thesis of author which she undertook at the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Otago, New Zealand in 2012. In this thesis, Voelker investigates the reformist thought of Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd vis-à-vis the centrality of the Qur'an. This thesis commences with a brief preliminary discussion on the different challenges which are posed to religious thought particularly to Islamic thought by ever-changing circumstances in politics, society and economy in the contemporary times. Thereafter, author anticipates that all the three thinkers i.e., Rahman, Arkoun and Abu Zayd believe that for rethinking of Islam in the modern times, rethinking the Qur'an is *sine qua non* (Voelker 2017: 33). She dilates and compares the accounts of the Qur'an presented by Rahman, Arkoun and Abu Zayd in their works and thus, she inferred that all the three accounts of the afore-mentioned scholars allow for the createdness of the Qur'an (Voelker 2017: 60).

She also investigates how Rahman, Arkoun and Abu Zayd envisage the role of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in the revelation process and asserts that their views on the Qur'an depend upon their conception of revelation and prophecy. She traces the influence of Ibn Sina's understanding of intellectualization on Rahman's account of revelation. Further, she dilates on Arkoun's anthropological and philosophical approach to revelation and Abu Zayd's notion of *Shifra* (code). While concluding their views on revelation, she posits that Arkoun has generally refrained from speculations about the revelation process and as far as Rahman is considered, he believes that non-acoustic idea-words were revealed to Prophet Muhammad's heart and mind, without specifying how Prophet Muhammad formulated those into clear Arabic (Voelker 2017: 92). On the other hand, Abu Zayd believes that the Prophet received non-verbal inspirations which he then

clothed into Arabic and language expressions which were common at that time and place of revelation (Voelker 2017: 92).

Voelker deliberates on the reformist vision of Rahman, Arkoun and Abu Zayd whose epicenter she believes is Qur'anic vision of justice, values and ethics. She presents a brief summary of Rahman's ideas on education, state, law and family. In the last chapter of her thesis, Voelker elucidates upon the hermeneutical methodologies espoused by Rahman, Arkoun and Abu Zayd while approaching and interpreting the Qur'an. Besides, she also provides their thematic interpretations of certain selected Qur'anic verses in order to show how their interpretive methods function in practice.

A valuable treasure, the thesis basically deals with the question that how the reformist thought of Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is supported and based on their Qur'anic understanding. However, she does not analyze how their accounts of revelation are influenced by earlier perspectives of revelation held by medieval philosophers and modern scholars. Besides, she does not examine the impact which their perspectives of revelation have on their Qur'anic interpretation. Shortcomings apart, the thesis is a must read for the reason that the Katharine Voelker has analyzed with eruditeness the relationship that exist between reformist ideology and hermeneutical philosophy of Fazlur Rahman, Mohammad Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

4. *Contemporary Perspectives on Revelation and Qur'anic Hermeneutics: An Analysis of Four Discourses*, Ali Akbar (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2020).

This book is basically a revised version of author's PhD dissertation, which he completed in 2017 under the supervision of Professor Abdullah Saeed at the University of Melbourne. This book deals with the discursive analysis of Qur'anic discourses of Fazlur Rahman, Abdolkarim Soroush, Muhammad Mujtahed Shabestari and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. This book comprises

of five chapters, excluding an introduction and conclusion.

In the first chapter, author presents a succinct description of traditional perspectives of revelation and argues that the traditional theories of revelation have accentuated on the externality of revelation and they regard that Prophet has no role in shaping the content of revelation, thus, considers him a passive recipient of divine revelation (Akbar 2020: 17-18).

In the second chapter, he elaborates on Fazlur Rahman's account of revelation and exhorts that "there are three main elements in Rahman's argument that are closely associated with the notion that the Prophet played an active role as participant in the act of revelation: (1) Muhammad's personality, his life experience and his moral-spiritual consciousness played a key role in the content of the revelation; (2) the Prophet's mind was actively involved in the process of revelation; and (3) the Angel Gabriel was not a physical being (existing 'outside' of the Prophet) that mechanically delivered God's message to the Prophet" (Akbar 2020: 29). Besides, he delineates on sources of Rahman's theory of revelation and traces influences of medieval philosophers like Ibn Sina and al-Farabi on him as Rahman's humanistic approach to revelation is indebted to the philosophical Islamic discourse on revelation. Like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, Rahman believed that the Prophet was not a passive recipient of revelation, but had an active role in the process" (Akbar 2020: 41). Thereafter, author analyzes impact of Rahman's account of revelation on his interpretative methodology of the Qur'an and illustrates this by providing Rahman's conception of women rights and *shura*. Besides, he compares hermeneutics of Rahman with Emilio Betti and Hans-Georg Gadamer and asserts that "his hermeneutics resonates more with Betti's objectivity school than with Gadamer's subjectivity school" (Akbar 2020: 48).

In the same way, author discusses the perspectives of revelation put-forth by Abdolkarim

Soroush, Muhammad Mujtahed Shabestari and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in third, fourth and fifth chapter respectively. Ali Akbar's account of their theories will not be provided here as it is beyond the scope of this paper and the main focus here is laid on author's account of Fazlur Rahman.

Author has aptly highlighted the scholarly discourse of Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics but he hardly refers to the challenges to Rahman's hermeneutics, neither author assesses Rahman's perspective critically. Keeping aside these shortcomings, the book is an important contribution for highlighting contemporary perspectives on revelation. A lucid and detailed, written in simple language, casts on new light on the paradigm of revelation put-forth by Rahman, Soroush, Muhammad Shabestari and Abu Zayd. In sum, *Contemporary Perspectives on Revelation and Qur'anic Hermeneutics: An Analysis of Four Discourses* is attractive and beneficial in comprehending traditional understanding of revelation and modern Qur'anic hermeneutics.

Brief Comparison

By doing comparison, it would be apt here to map very briefly the above evaluated works. Few such remarks are:

Donald Berry, Mary Catherine Jesse, Christopher Thomas Radbourne Hewer's dissertations are both comparative and informative as far as the relevance of Rahman's thought in the contemporary times is concerned. They have deliberated very aptly that how the challenges of modernity were addressed by Rahman by placing special emphasis on reason and rationality. Fatimah Husein and Ahad M. Ahmed in their works have presented the theological and philosophical understanding of Rahman in a very fascinating manner.

Katharine Voelker, Ali Akbar, Emi Irfa and Amhar Rasyid has discussed in their researches Rahman's approach to the Qur'an. Katharine Voelker and Ali Akbar has presented the theoretical aspects of his *Double-Movement Theory* and his conception of revelation while

as Emi Irfa and Amhar Rasyid has attempted in their works to apply *Double-Movement theory* to different themes of the Qur'an. Lastly, Mohamed Shaid Mathee has provided a critical account of Rahman's paradigm of *Living Sunnah* by assessing his work *Islamic Methodology in History*.

In addition to the detailed assessment of each work, the above-mentioned points clearly show the uniqueness of these works.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study endeavored to contextualize Fazlur Rahman's contribution to varied realms of Islamic sciences through the academic researches done by different scholars across the World in different universities. This study reveals that different facets and aspects of Rahman's thought and contribution have been brought into limelight such as his philosophical thought, theological thought, modernist thought, reformist thought, rationalist thought, his understanding of the basic sources of Islam, paradigm of revelation, Qur'anic methodology, etc. But on the other hand some major aspects and dimensions such as his thematic approach to the Qur'an and evolution of his thought, have not been dealt upon in depth. Such sort of works/researches which will focus especially his evolution of thought and thematic approach to the Qur'an, needs to be carried out.

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