

# A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES FACING THE MUSLIM NATIONS IN THE WORLD

Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri

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## Abstract

Social philosophy is the study of social behavior of people and their ethical values which helps in understanding the nature of human societies. In other words, social philosophy is the study of our social world. This research paper is a case study of Muslim societies around the world to assess the current social and political crisis faced by almost all the Islamic nations and suggest areas of improvement so that they come close to the social philosophy of Islam. It is important research for all those who are interested in this subject.

*Keywords – Sociology, Philosophy, Religion, Islam, Wahabism*

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## Philosophical Sociology

Social philosophy is also known as normative (standardizing) philosophy as it observes and evaluates the behavior of the people. It is the study of interactions and relationship among people with reference to their behavior patterns, ethical values, and foundations of their social institutions. With this in view, a society's political, legal, moral, and cultural patterns are evaluated to judge their theoretical frameworks.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) is regarded as a social philosopher as he defined the doctrine of the nature of state' in his work 'Politica'.

French social philosopher Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857) is known as the founder of modern sociology who articulated the doctrine of positivism. As per Comte, sociology is the study of evolution, structure, and functioning of human society. Positivism is a philosophical theory which asserts that authentic knowledge is positive because it is derived from natural phenomena. The information derived from sensory organs and interpreted with reason and logic is considered as

authentic knowledge. Comte's sociology and positivism theories gave birth to his 'Religion of Humanity' (Humanité or église positiviste). In Comte's religion of Humanity, theology, metaphysics, introspective and intuitive knowledge, are denied as he claimed that these cannot be verified scientifically. As per Comte's argument, the society operates much like the physical world. Meaning, as the physical world operates within the parameters of the laws of nature, human societies also operate as per their general laws.

Positivism is based on empiricism. Empiricism is the theory that all knowledge is based on the experience obtained from the senses. The data so collected is referred as 'verified data' or 'empirical evidence'. Empiricism theory was the basis of development of 'experimental science' during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## Historical Sociology

Historical sociology relates to the sociological and historical assessment of peoples' behavior and their interactions to understand how societies have developed and how the present-day societies are shaped from the events of their past. It is also the study of mechanisms and structures that obstruct certain areas of human development and allows other areas to flourish. Meaning, it is a correlation between sociology of history and history of society in which diverse range of people were involved in influencing the formation of the society to its present form.

## Sociology of culture

German philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918) defined 'culture' as the cultivation of individual

members of the society through the activity of external forms which were objectified in the course of history. The culture of a society is analyzed based on thinking, communicating and acting patterns of people that shaped the way that they live. Simmel is famous for his innovative analysis of social 'individuality' and 'fragmentation'.

Social individuality or individualism is an ideology and a political philosophy that emphasizes the inherent significance of the individual. The followers of this philosophy emphasize the importance of individual goals, desires, independence, and self-reliance. They promote the interest of individual without restrictions of social or statutory institutions. This is the basis of capitalism which is contrary to the concept of corporate social reformation, collectivism, and authoritarianism.

Fragmentation means absence of contacts or fewer connections between the society and certain groups / individuals. These may relate to culture, race, language, occupation, religion, income, etc.

There are two concepts, (i) Sociology of culture, and (ii) cultural sociology. These look similar, but sociologists have defined them differently. The 'sociology of culture' means some topics or objects in a society are cultural, and others are not. They identify cultural phenomena at individual or group level as a product of social process, and differentiate between economic factors and social factors, which are interconnected in the culture of a society.

The 'cultural sociology' means all or most of the phenomena is inherently cultural at some level. For them culture is the primary component of explanations of social phenomena that includes economic disparities between the people.

## Sociology of deviance

The sociology of deviance relates to the actions of individuals or groups that violate the established social norms of a society. Two types of deviant actions have been identified by the

philosophers, (i) *mala in se*, and (ii) *mala prohibita*. Both are Latin phrases.

'*Malum in se* (plural *mala in se*) means, actions which are accepted by all as 'evil or wrong', like killing a person without reason. '*Malum prohibitum* (plural *mala prohibita*)' means, wrong because it is prohibited, like violation of a traffic rule. Both are treated differently and are punished differently.

Deviances are classified as (i) formal, and (ii) informal. Formal deviance is a crime that violates a statutory law in a society. Informal deviance is breaking social norms, like opposing societal taboos. Taboo is an implied ban on a behavior or expression which is considered excessively abhorrent.

Deviances in a society are treated as offences committed against the 'collective conscience' of the society. French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) described 'collective conscience' as a set of social norms followed by the members of a society. He asserted that sociology is the science of social institutions that follow the modes of behavior instituted collectively by the members of the society.

Deviants justify their behavior by providing alternative definitions and explanations for their actions to show lack of guilt. In philosophy, this behavior is known as 'neutralization theory'. There are different types of neutralizations, as follows.

(i) *Rejection of responsibility* - the deviant claims he was pushed into deviance.

(ii) *Rejection of harm* - the deviant claims that his deviance caused no harm to others.

(iii) *Shifting the responsibility* – The deviant claims that the complainants deserved the treatment meted out to them because they lacked virtue and morals.

(iv) *Condemning the complainants* - The deviant claims that the complainants are equally deviant and corrupt, and their complaints are sheer hypocrisy.

It is also the study of mechanisms and structures that obstruct certain areas of human development and allows other areas to flourish. Meaning, it is a correlation between sociology of history and history of society in which diverse range of people were involved in influencing the formation of the society to its present form.

### An overview of the Sociology of Muslim societies

The works of social theorists like Ibn Khaldun, Weber and Gellner are noteworthy in evaluating the sociology of Muslim societies. A brief account in this context is given below.

#### (i) Ibn Khaldun (1332 - 1406)

Ibn Khaldun was an Arab historian and sociologist who is an important theorist of Muslim society. In his monumental work 'Universal History', he wrote an 'Introduction' (مقدمة) in which he defined sociology as a subject which studies human society in its different forms. An analysis of these forms provides information about the basis of the development of these societies. A brief account of Ibn Khaldun's sociological principles is given below.

(a) Social phenomena are not as absolute as natural phenomena however these are generally coherent for the evolution of social events that are well defined and consistent in their patterns and structures. These phenomena control the masses and are less prone to be influenced by isolated individuals/groups.

(b) The laws behind the development of societies can be ascertained by gathering information through authentic historical records and past/present events.

(c) Societies do not remain stagnant; they change and evolve in view of contact and interactions between different people and groups. They also get affected from population changes and economic inequality.

(d) Sociological laws develop as per biological impulses, physical factors, and social forces.

(e) Ibn Khaldun introduced the concept of *Asabiyya* (عصبية) in the development of a society. He described that *Asabiyya* is 'a group feeling' or 'social cohesion' or 'social solidarity' which acts like the fundamental bond of society. It is the basic motivating force of history which is found strongest in a nomadic society. *Asabiyya* exists in cyclic form, at the start it is at its peak and gradually declines as civilization advances and eventually causes the downfall of the civilization. This is followed by another *Asabiyya* which gives birth to another civilization. History provides plenty of evidence of these cycles in human societies.

(f) In the development of a society, there is a need to have a common authority which is the basis of the formation of a State which is usually headed by a king or a constitutional authority. Ruling houses emerge on the heels of a stronger *Asabiyya* which is created for the purpose of change of leadership. This often results in massive bloodshed as new rulers depose the existing ones. Once the new rulers establish themselves at the center of the empires, they become only concerned with maintaining and increasing their power and gradually adopt extravagant lifestyle. Over a period, they become less disciplined, less coordinated and their lax attitude results in decline of the *Asabiyya* in the society and gives rise to factionalism and groupism which diminishes the central authority. This way conditions are created for another *Asabiyya* that requires change of leadership. This cycle continues in the history of mankind.

(g) The leadership is achieved through superiority, and superiority through group feeling, and it is a reward of social cohesive organization. Only those who can galvanize social cohesion become leaders.

(h) Civilization is essentially a 'state society' which consists of cities, rural areas, and tribes. Division of labor and specialization is the essence of city's life which is not compatible with *Asabiyya*. Therefore, there is a need to provide a new basis for social bonds. This is created by the religious affinity or strong nationalism which often proves to be a powerful force in holding the people together. As per Ibn Khaldun, this was the basis of the conquests of Muslim Arabs in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

### (ii) Max Weber (1864 - 1920)

Maximilian Karl Emil Weber, a German sociologist and historian, is among the prominent theorists responsible for the development of modern western society. He is regarded as one of the foremost figures in sociology, along with Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917).

Weber's understanding of Islam is based on his study of the link between the faith and modern socioeconomic establishments. Weber conducted a comparative study of religions of the world and claimed a correlation between certain religious ideas with a specific economic activity. He theorized an affinity between protestant religious beliefs and modern-day capitalism, and based on this theory, argued that capitalism could not flourish in Islamic societies in view of ideological bureaucracy. Weber saw Islam as a prophetic salvationist Abrahamic religion in which two prominent groups, viz., (i) authoritarian, and (ii) sufi, seemed to have been active. The authoritarian groups suppressed the freedom and development of financial Institutions, while sufi groups led people away from the worldly lives. This resulted in hinderance in the development of autonomous cities, independent middle class, and political stability.

Bryan Turner (born 1945), a British and Australian sociologist, criticized Weber's

assessment of Islamic society as factually wrong.

British-Czech sociologist Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) described Weber's concept a piece of 'Judo-Protestant Centristism'. He challenged Weber's claim that it was the ideological element (the protestant principles) that provided the stimulus, in conjunction with the organized prerequisites, in the creation of the capitalism miracle in the West. He asserted that the difference between the western capitalism and Islamic societies was more related to the functional apparatus rather than ideological, as ideological parallels can be found plenty in Christian societies as well.

### (iii) Ernest Gellner (1925 - 1995)

Ernest Andre Gellner, a British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist's contribution to the sociology of Muslim societies is noteworthy. He provided a general interpretation of the past and present Muslims societies. He built his research upon the contributions of Ibn Khaldun, David Hume (1711-1776) and Marshal Hodgson (1922-1968). He identified varying features of Muslim societies that make them sensitive to general sociological analysis. He suggested that there existed a conflict between the cities and the tribes in Muslim societies. In cities, it was a high Islam of scholars while in rural areas it was folk (low) Islam of masses. The boundaries between these two were not distinct, but they projected distinctive traditions.

Within High Islam, there were some societies who prohibited the mediation between pious people and God and enforced their version of Islam forcefully on masses. Saudi Wahhabi ideology which has spread its following throughout the world is the best example in this context. They called themselves puritanical and literal (scriptural).

The traditional Islam consisted of two prominent groups, (i) superstitious, and (ii) moderates. The moderates consisted of the followers of Sufism.

Over the past 150 years, the Muslim societies in the world have undergone a massive change. The centralization of power structure, massive wealth, and the ability of the state to rule effectively with the help of modern technology and military has undermined the moderate Islam. Puritanism and scripturalism has transformed into the fundamentalist variant in some Muslim countries which has been exploited by vested interests in the world.

The Wahhabi revivalist and fundamentalist movement and its offshoots like Deobandi, Brotherhood, etc., have suppressed the original moderate nature of Islam. The critics of this variant of Islam complain that the Wahhabi political ideology and their offshoot movements are different from anything which represented the original Islam in the past. These groups fortify themselves by means of selective interpretations of the doctrines, beliefs and practices and project certain selective events of the past in a different light. With the help of charismatic and authoritarian leadership they impose their variant on masses. These groups usually contain inner core elites and organizations and a large population of sympathizers who can be used when needed. They follow rigorous socio-moral code and strategies in achieving their goals.

### Islamophobia – a new paradigm

The word Islamophobia was first used in a research study conducted at the University of California at Berkeley in which they claim that this word was used in Runnymede Trust Report, 1991 in which it was defined as 'unfounded hostility towards Muslims based on hate'. The report cited similarity of Islamophobia with 'xenophobia' which means racism, racial intolerance, prejudice, and chauvinism. Islamophobia affects all Muslims of the world, individually and collectively, and restricts their political, economic, social, and cultural progress.

The Center for American Progress claims that certain misinformation experts actively

promote Islamophobia in the West. There is an Islamophobic industry composed of well knitted think tanks, public figures, politicians, and media outlets who use Islamophobia for their political gains. Their primary aim is to create fear among Muslims and influence voting patterns in their countries for electoral gains. This has resulted in increased hate crimes against Muslims in US, Europe, India, and other places.

Numerous studies were conducted in this context which found that the racism, consistent demonization, and discrimination against Muslims has resulted in less opportunities for Muslims in areas like education, jobs, etc. Muslims are portrayed as a security threat, and based on these campaigns, legislations are made targeting Muslims. As a result of this victimization, the Muslim communities in the world live in constant state of fear.

Many law makers and Governments in the world use a strategy known as 'Islamophilia' in which they do not malign the religion of Islam, but they claim that there are extremists among Muslims who create terror. They claim that their war on terror is not against Islam rather on Muslims who create terror.

It is well known fact that there are good and bad people in every society. What these hate mongers do is they hire certain bad and downtrodden people, fund them, train them, arm them, and send them to certain targeted places to create terror. Then these incidents are portrayed in mainstream and social media. The politicians and religious extremist groups compete to get a piece of the pie. On the pretext of war on terror, millions of innocent people have been massacred and hundreds of millions have been displaced in many countries of the world. The huge refugee crises in the world are the result of these hate campaigns.

### Conclusion

It is important for Muslim societies in the world to find causes of their present situation. There are 57 countries in the world who are members of



Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Because of Wahhabi/Salafi massive dawa for the past 125 years, many Muslims have converted into Salafism or their offshoot groups like Deobandis, Brotherhood, etc. Together, they control 97% of the mosques and Muslim schools in the world. Most of the Islamic publishing houses are controlled by them. Most of the Governments are run by the members of these groups. The irony is that these groups have been divided into innumerable subgroups and all of them claim they are on the right path of Islam.

Despite so much *Dawa*, proselytization and control, where are the results? Why are Muslims subjected to humiliation of worst kind in the history? If they were on the right path, where is God's help?

It is important that everyone who calls him or herself Muslim, search their conscience, and subjects their beliefs to scrutiny in the light of Quran and Sunnah and come back to the right path of Islam and seek God's assistance for a peaceful and prosperous life in this world and Hereafter.

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## About the Author



Ash Shaikh Mir Asedullah Quadri is well known all over the world for his explanation of Islamic Tawheed, Sahih Iman, Sahih Islam and Sahih Ihsan. He is a scholar, historian, and poet. He is the author of Tafseer-e-Asedi, Irshad Al Asedi, Fusus Al-Iman and over 1000 books on various Islamic subjects. He has written many research articles on religion, history, and other subjects. He is also the Editor in Chief of CIFIA Global Journal.