



Globalization and the Muslim World: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Globalization, the concept which became a mode of life, has spread with an immense speed that on greater scale it is affecting the world structure and on a minute level, the individual day to day life decisions. It is very difficult to avoid or overlook the impacts of globalization. Muslims are the followers of the second populous religion after Christianity in the world. They are also the inhabitants of sixty or more independent Muslim majority states. This study highlights the basic features of globalization that include how and when it took birth, different opinion about the term by various scholars, Muslims point of view and their historical linkage with globalization and what challenges and opportunities it poses to the Muslim world/community. The study addresses the question of what role Muslims can play to have their voice listened in the modern world that has become virtually a global village. Furthermore, it also focuses on the challenges of globalization to the Muslim world and identifying opportunities Muslims can avail in this globalised world.

KEYWORDS: Globalization, Muslim World, Challenges, Opportunities.

1. INTRODUCTION

One perception is that the word or term globalization is the brain child of Reiser and Davies that took birth in 1944 (Reiser & Davies, 1944). While some linked its origin with Ted Levitt, a Professor at Harvard Business School, who for the first time introduced the term in his article with the title "Globalization of Market" that was published in 1983 in the Harvard Business Review (Abushouk, 2006). Globalization became the centre of attraction for academicians around the world soon after the fall of Soviet Union and the transition of world power structure from bipolar to unipolar. Researchers of different backgrounds explained it according to their own ideological affiliation. This diversity in the approaches of the researchers helped generating a variety of definitions of globalization. Some of these definitions are interrelated and to some extent overlapping, but their importance is to a large extent different (WittKopf and Kegley, 2004; 484).

1.1. Conceptualizing Globalization

Thomas Friedman, an American political journalist, laid down the definition of Globalization when he was asked about the globalization in 2002 and his reply was accurate:

The shortest answer is that the globalization is the integration of everything with everything else. A more complete answer is that globalization is the integration of markets, finance, and technology in a way that shrinks the world from the size medium to the size small (Witt Kopf & Kegley, 2004; 266).

He further elaborates his definition stating that globalization gives people the freedom to live and to settle anywhere in the world, as surfing around the world has become more economical, faster and more within the reach of the common man. Similarly, Manfred Steger terms globalization as:

"a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify world-wide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant" (Steger, 2003; p.13).

On the other hand, economists consider globalization to be completely an economic phenomenon as they define it in these simple words

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“Globalization is the falling cost of distance.” By that they mean to say that soon after the world had become a global village and with the increase of interdependency among the states in comparison to the past, products can be produced anywhere in the world as well as the labours and experts can be hired from any nook of the world at much lower cost than ever before” (Sargent, 2009; 49).

Jan Art Schulte labels globalization rather to be a “Deterritorialisation.” His analysis of world relations comes from a “*trans-border exchanges without distance*” perspective. His perspective cannot be overlooked, as it is of an immense importance due to the fact that if one analyses the present world structure, it is clearly evident that the territorial restraints over manufacturing and communication not only at states levels but also at individual levels are hardly seen anywhere. Moreover, a large number of international organizations and multi-national corporations are freely serving their interests, even in the countries who give a cold shoulder with each other which validates the global and interdependent structure of the world. Globalization gets its strength not only by its own, rather it has the backings of ideologies like capitalism and democracy which themselves are the popular choice of the modern unipolar world of ours; these forces fully endorse the message of globalization. Moreover, globalizations is also entailed with slogans, like humanity and universal welfare phenomena to make it more presentable to the people and gain maximum support worldwide (Scholte, 2000).

2. Islam and Globalization: An historical perspective

Islam since the day of its birth has preached and portrayed itself as a religion possessing a global vision. It claims to be the religion for the people of all races and creeds. The authenticity of Islam as being a global religion can be extracted from the writings of its holy scripture, the Quran in which time and again there are verses revealed, that address the whole of mankind, rather than Muslims only. They completely nullify the concept of racial discrimination, as it never existed in the religion Islam. If one enters in it he/she enjoys the luxury of equality. The yard stick for measuring one's status is only through his/her deeds and how pious a person is, rather than one's affiliation to a particular caste, family or language etc. There are clear Hadiths (Traditions) of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) that all Arabs and *Ajam* (people belonging to other races especially Persian) are equal and no one has superiority over other and the best amongst the group is the one who is the most pious one. This feature of equality was the sole reason that people embraced Islam in large numbers (Abushouk, 2006; 490).

Islam after its establishment over the land of Saudi Arabia adopted the policy of expansionism. This was the time when it had to confront and come face to face before the other civilizations of the world. This was considered politically first step towards its global vision. In those times exchange of ideas and sharing of the knowledge was the process of continuous interaction among the Muslims and other ancient civilizations. They enriched each other cultures, knowledge and traditional values. Moreover, a great Muslim civilization was fully established and recognized across the globe in the first five centuries of its birth on the fundamental principles of Islam. The main contributors behind this great success were the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks. During that span of time Muslims produced great philosophers of their times, an unmatched and mesmerizing architecture skills, and effective war strategies along with modernized weaponry. They were way ahead of their contemporaries in all fields and by the end of 13th century Muslim empires were completely established in the regions of Africa, Indian Sub-Continent and far-East Asia. That was the time when Islam had got a global recognition religiously as well as politically (Abushouk, 2006; 490). This was the reason that compels Carlton, the western historian to state that:

“Conversion of large numbers in the conquered areas was not a feature of early Islam. That came later when Islam was more firmly established as a government, when its brilliant material success gave it added prestige, and when the civil rights and privileges enjoyed by all the faithful tempted many unbelievers into conversion to Islam” (Carlton 1962; 140).

The above mentioned acknowledging remarks falsifies the negative propaganda of the Orientalists school of thought, who propagates the negative visualization of Islam by labelling it to be a religion that was spread through the use of violent means and now it should be demolished by the use of violence. It is a known fact that the expansion of Islam was through peaceful means rather than violent ones. It was the social principles of equality, justice, and respect in Islam that people in a large number embraced the religion of Islam. Along with these factors, it was the true implementation of Islam in its letter and spirit upon the leaders as well as the masses. These features of Islam were so tempting that compelled G Bernard Shaw to express his thoughts by saying that the Islam would soon influence over Europe (Shaw, 1936).

This glorious empire started to fall in the 17th century for multiple reasons that includes a losing control over the large territory it occupied. The decline of Ottoman Empire started with the increasing territorial disintegration that

ultimately resulted in the collapse or weakening of the Muslim empire. Parallel to this decline the signs of the emergence of new global empire in Europe were evident at that time. New ideas were floating and gaining popularity among the people, while the role of religion was eliminated from politics. Under the Treaty of Westphalia, nation as a state concept, and people representations were the slogans that attracted both the rulers and the masses' interests all these events accompanied by the industrial revolution were the catalytic events towards the modernization process (Palmer, Colton, & Kramer, 1978).

This process was further boosted in the twentieth century as USA emerged as the new global power in world politics. The introduction of the word 'Western World' was the product of that era where this term was specifically used for USA and its European allies. To put it simple the world was divided into two categories: the developed and the under-developed one. Most of the Muslim countries were kept in the under-developed group because of their economic, social and political status. They were further downtrodden as they lost control over their natural resources which were exploited to its fullest by the new masters of the world. Secondly, they were purposely kept in ignorance as the Sharia laws were transformed on the principles of secularism and so was the case of education. The radical changes in the curriculum became the reason that an alienated majority of Muslims from the new pattern of education adopted on western lines. The third phase of the Western globalization started with the collapse of Soviet Union. The power structure of the world shifted from bi-polar to uni-polar one. In this uni-polar structure of the world, those who have difference of opinion with 'the new world order,'¹ force is used against these opposing political actors by labelling them as axis of evil, a threat to democracy or global humanity etc (Abushouk, 2006).

The masses of the Muslim world popularly oppose this neo-colonization of USA and come up with three different types of reactions to the domination from the Muslim world. The first group includes the people who fully endorse the concept of Westernization; they go to the extreme and suggest that Muslims should transform themselves on the principles of western culture. The group is so fascinated by the western culture, society and progress that they consider it to be the only way forward and without the adaptation of these values, progress is nothing but an impossible ambition. The reason behind this mind set is that most of the people belonging to this school of thought are overwhelmingly the breed of the educational institutions of the West or either they are second generations of the immigrants. They know less about the glories of their ancestors. The glaring example of this mind set is that of the Mustafa Kamal Atatürk of Turkey, who demolished the institution of Caliphate and laid the foundation of secular Turkey with an ambition to develop his country upon Western traditions (Abushouk, 2006).

This second reactionary group adopts a radical approach against this western domination. Their agenda is to revive the era of pure Islam. They are strictly against the adaptation of western values in the social, political and educational setup of the Muslims; they show no compromise over this stance. To achieve their desire they have adopted a top-bottom approach i.e. that all the state affairs should be handed over or being captured by them and then they would transform the state into a purified society along with that they would also eliminate all the evils of western society over the Muslims society. They claim to derive their principles of rules from the teaching of Quran and Sunnah. The use of force is their tool to acquire power and they consider it to be a legal tool not only against the non-Muslims but also against those Muslim leaders and individual whose beliefs according to them are polluted by the Western influence. The prominent examples of this mind set, can be seen in the establishment of the state of Taliban in Afghanistan and on organizational level the anti-western activities of AL-Qaeda all across the globe (Rashid, 2001).

The second faction of this group comprises of those who adopt bottom-up approach i.e. they believe in the principle that by educating people about the values of Islam and by practical demonstration of these values would help in educating the people that would ultimately result in the mass awareness of the people and once the society is Islamized the state would itself transform into an ideal one. They are completely against the use of violent means and they do not criticize the government of their respective countries e.g. Tabligh-i-Jamaat, and different Sufi Movements (Murden, 2002).

The third group is of the opinion there is no harm in adaptation of western values until or unless they are not contradictory to the basic beliefs of the Islamic principles. There are number of organizations relating to all walks of life that include social, educational, and even political organizations who share this ideology. The reason for their belief is that the opening up of Muslim societies to the western norms would help in transforming Islam according to the needs of the time and rather than polluting it would help in keeping intact the Muslim community from dispersing as they still have the faith that their system is going through evolving process and it should be given time. The follower of this group actively participates in the affairs of the government, they highly criticize and support the policies of the government on different time and occasions, they are one of the vocal pressure groups of their

¹ The Bush Doctrine, to assert US hegemony as a sole super power.

country and in some cases can even acquire the full control of the government as was seen in Iranian Revolution of 1979 when Shah of Iran's government was toppled by the religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini (Abushouk, 2006).

3. Challenges to the Muslim World

Muslim countries have to counter various challenges to gain prosperity in the present era of globalization. Presently globalization poses a threat of survival for the Muslim world that is passing through economic, political and social crisis. The Muslim world is still suffering these problems due to colonial rule that kept them deprived of development and consumed all their resources for the development of colonial powers (Amnah, 2009). Apparently almost all of them got independence after World War II, but their economies and government policies are largely controlled by their patrons from the Western world through what is known as neo-colonialism. This study highlights the major five issues that are needed to be addressed. They are cultural, economic, social, political and developmental issues.

As stated before, the majority of the Muslim countries come in the category of an under-developed or third world countries group. Similarly, just like any other under-developed country the residents of most of the Muslim countries have to face the issues of poverty, lack of education facilities and basic health needs. This bleak social structure results in creating a lot of confusions and disappointment among the citizens, especially the younger generation of the countries who are pushed to think that either they should stick to the traditional social system of their ancestors or they should transform it in accordance to the need of the modern times. This confusion and disappointment is the reason that most of Muslim societies are static (Ahmed, 2006).

As the world has become global village and soon after the boom of the information technology industry, no one can live in isolation because in this global structure of the world, no matter how remote one's location is or restricted the society one lives in, no one is alien to the different cultures of the world. People adopt various traditions from the others' cultures, so this "pollutes" the originality of their culture. If this adaptation is done towards positive goals, then there is no harm in it. Just like any other culture, the Muslim world should also transform their culture according to the need of the times keeping in mind the basic principles and structure of the Islamic values because there are serious threats to its sustainability (Roy, 2006).

Unlike the Western countries where a vast majority of the countries are assembled under the flag of democracy, the system of democracy that had been framed by the westerners for themselves and they ensured their people that democracy is the path that would lead them towards prosperity and success. It is the building of consensus upon the principle of democracy and the faithful dedication of their leaders that they are on the path of prosperity and success politically as well as economically. Looking around the Muslim world, there is a lot of diversity in their political setups including military dictatorships, monarchies passed down from generation to generation and in a few countries limited and unstable democracies. It is an irony that even after almost 90 years of the demise of the Caliphate no Muslim country has come up with an alternative political system for the unification of the Muslim Ummah (Murden, 2002).

Most of the Muslim countries are resourcefully rich countries, they are blessed with natural resource of oil in a huge bulk and they outnumber all the western countries when it comes to oil production. In spite of world dependency over their product, they have been unable to develop a strong economic structure and living under the clutches of western countries' dependency. They should be the one to dictate their terms, however, in reality it is the other way around. The sole reason behind that is their technological dependency upon the western countries. If they would have a strong technological setup and farsighted economic aims, they would have invested in their technological up-gradation to minimize their dependency upon the West, in turn saving them from external exploitation (Osama, 2006).

Hardly any sincere and serious effort one can quote has been initiated to remove all the barriers to the path of development. No serious efforts have been undertaken in the field of education, as in modern times there is hardly any example of Muslim university to compete with those of the Western world. Similarly, the technological dependency is also increasing day by day. All of these issues should be seriously addressed with the approach to maintain development for the present generation as well as for the generations to follow (Amnah, 2009).

4. Opportunities for Muslim World

Globalization provides great opportunities for the states if they are competent enough to utilize it in their favour. Muslim countries need effective planning and implementation by keeping in mind an approach of absolute gain for the community and the whole world as well. The major areas of cooperation among the Muslim countries would be trade, technology and political interdependency.

Mutual trade among the Muslims countries is far much less than if it is compare to the trade of Muslim countries with the non-Muslim countries. Though it is not suggested that Muslim should shun their trade relation with non-

Muslim countries, nevertheless, the trade ratio of Muslims countries with each other should be increased. Moreover, it is also a known fact that most of the Muslim countries spend a lot of their capital on purchasing commodities from Western countries at a higher rate, although they have the option to purchase it from the Muslim country (Murden, 2002).

The tool that can be used for the collective gain and strengthening of interdependency if barter trade system is revisited it would help the member countries who are not been able to pay directly in cash an increase in mutual gain and deepening of co-operation would be the ultimate result of such action. The world has seen a revolutionary developments in the field of information technology especially in 21st century the concepts like e-commerce and e-trade are increasing rapidly this area should also be explore and utilize for the collective good of the whole community (Ahmad, 2014).

Most of the Muslim countries are technologically at the mercy of the Western world they spend a large number of revenue on acquiring the services of these technologies (Osama, 2006). But there are some countries who deliver those services on much cheap prices similarly, exchange of expertise within the Muslim countries is on very low level this should also be increase. The lack of quality educational institutes is also a burning issue for more than half a century now. Although some of the Muslim countries are economically very much prospers but there is hardly any worth mention example of any educational institute to match the standards of world top institute. The lack of would to invest on the field of education is the reason that or resources are being exploited by the technologically advanced countries. This globalize structure of the world gives full opportunity to the Muslim world to utilize it in their favour as there are no restrictions over the transfer of knowledge in today's world (Nurullah, 2008)

Democracy is considered to be the standard of an ideal political system of globalization, but by looking around more than fifty countries of the Muslim world there is hardly any country with a democratic setup that can match the standards. Muslim countries are confused in adopting a political structure as there is lot of diversity in the political setup of the Muslim world it has dictatorships both of military and civilian structure, there are theocratic state, family monarchies, limited democracies and so on (Maisami, 2003). Same goes with the organizations of the Muslim world the largest organization with Muslim representation is that of OIC and when was last it played any role for the settlement of any issue of the Muslim world. The survival and revival of Muslim glory is only possible when consensus is made over the political structure of the Muslim world. Secondly, they should support each other interests on every provided platform. Thirdly, a combine military force would also help in ensuring the security of the Muslim world and would also give strong message of Muslims unification to the world (Roy, 2006)

5. CONCLUSION

Globalization an ideology is not something novel to Islam as since after its birth the message of Islam was and still is universal. It addresses the whole mankind rather than the Muslims only. The nature of its diversity can be measured from the fact that its message was conveyed and followed across the globe. During the phase of Islamic expansionism the footsteps of its empire reached to each and every nook of the world. Although both Islam and the West remained challenger to each other's supremacy from the early period of rise of Muslim political power, however the Islamic global power was ultimately defeated by the West in late 19th and early 17th Century as it emerged as a new power on the globe.

Now globalization is labelled more as a brainchild of the West and they are the one who sets the principles of the modern globalization. Despite the fact that the modern global power structure is dominated by the West and is mostly operates in their favour but still there is a huge window of opportunity for the Muslim world if they utilize it properly. Some of the features of Muslim world that gives them strength in the era of globalization are: firstly the religion of Islam is the second largest religion of the world it occupies 1/5th of the world total population. Secondly, there are more than fifty states which give them territorial strength. The only requirement is to properly utilize these strengths in their favour to give them proper direction. Moreover a true and sincere leadership is vital to serve the interests of the community as a whole on the global level.

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