

**PROGRESSIVE ISLAM AMIDST THE CURRENTS OF MODERNIZATION: A
CRITICAL STUDY OF FAZLUR RAHMAN'S THOUGHT**Prakash Puhka¹, Dora Lil Muslim², and Firly Asfianto³¹ Delhi Technological University, India² Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus, Batusangkar, Indonesia³ Universitas Islam Negeri Mahmud Yunus, Batusangkar, Indonesia**Corresponding Author:**

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Received: May 15, 2025

Revised: May 27, 2025

Accepted: June 15, 2025

Online Version: June 30,
2025**Abstract**

Modernization has posed serious challenges to the continuity of religious values, including Islam, in responding to contemporary social and intellectual dynamics. One prominent figure who addressed these challenges constructively is Fazlur Rahman, a modernist Muslim thinker who offered a hermeneutical approach to Islamic texts. This article aims to critically examine Fazlur Rahman's thought within the framework of progressive Islam amidst the global tide of modernization. Using a qualitative approach through literature review and content analysis, this study reveals the relevance and significance of Rahman's ideas in constructing a dynamic and contextual Islamic paradigm. The findings show that Rahman's emphasis on the double movement hermeneutics, the distinction between the Qur'an's moral essence and its historical context, as well as the necessity for the reconstruction of Islamic thought based on ethics and rationality, effectively addresses the challenges faced by modern Muslim societies without detaching from traditional roots. These findings reinforce the argument that progressive Islam is not a form of Westernization, but rather a creative effort to preserve the essence of Islam within the framework of progress. Consequently, Fazlur Rahman's thought can serve as both a theoretical foundation and practical guide for the Muslim generation in building a civilization deeply rooted in spiritual values, yet open to the transformations of the modern age.

Keywords: Fazlur Rahman, Modernization, Progressive Islam, Qur'anic Hermeneutics



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Journal Homepage	https://journal.zmsadra.or.id/index.php/jois
How to cite:	Puhka, P., Muslim, D. L., & Asfianto, F. (2025). Progressive Islam Amidst the Currents of Modernization: a Critical Study of Fazlur Rahman's Thought. <i>JOIS: Journal of Islamic Studies</i> , 1(1), 46–57. https://doi.org/XX.XXXXX/jois.v1i5.1420
Published by:	Yayasan Zia Mulla Sadra

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humanity has continually undergone social, political, economic, and cultural transformations, all of which have directly impacted their value systems and worldviews (Tsourlaki, 2020; Wadud, 1995). Modernization, as a global phenomenon, has shaped a new face of civilization marked by technological advancement, scientific rationality, industrialization, and changes in social structures. This process is inevitable and has penetrated nearly all aspects of human life, including the realm of religion. Religion, once regarded as the central orientation of life, now faces serious challenges in the face of critical reasoning, moral relativism, and the demand for contextualization of values. For Muslims, modernization presents a dual challenge: how to preserve the authenticity of Islamic teachings while simultaneously responding to the ever-evolving demands of the times (Syafriion dkk., 2024). Amidst this dynamic, various reformist efforts in Islamic thought have emerged to address these challenges creatively and constructively.

One of the key reformist figures who has made significant contributions to the discourse on modern Islam is Fazlur Rahman. He is recognized as a Muslim intellectual who bridges the gap between tradition and modernity through a profound academic and spiritual approach (Sya'rani, 2017). His academic background in both the Eastern and Western worlds places him in a unique position to interpret Islamic texts contextually and methodologically. Rahman's thought not only offers a reinterpretation of the Qur'an but also presents a hermeneutical framework aimed at uncovering the universal meanings of Islam that remain relevant to contemporary problems. Within this framework, the concept of progressive Islam finds its context (Sutomo & Syukur, 2023). Progressive Islam is not a form of religious liberalism detached from its normative roots but rather a dynamic approach to reviving the substantive values of Islam in modern life.

Fazlur Rahman's thought becomes especially relevant at a time when contemporary Islamic discourse is trapped between the dichotomy of textual conservatism and extreme liberalism. Rahman offers a middle path that emphasizes the importance of returning to the ethical foundations of Islam while recognizing the necessity of historical and rational approaches in understanding sacred texts (Roxborough, 1988; Shilliam, 2010). His "double movement" hermeneutics demands a historical reading of the Qur'an to extract its core values, followed by their contextual application in the modern age. This approach not only paves the way for a more functional reinterpretation of Islamic teachings but also promotes a spirit of responsible *ijtihad*.

In the Indonesian context—as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world—the study of progressive Islam is strategically important. On the one hand, Indonesian society remains deeply rooted in tradition; on the other, it is increasingly open to global change. The tension between traditional and modern values often creates polarization, even ideological conflict, within society. It is in this space that Fazlur Rahman's contributions become significant, as his discourse extends beyond academic debate to practical applications of how Islamic values can serve as a moral compass in a pluralistic and dynamic society. Progressive Islam, as understood by Rahman, is not a secularization project but rather an effort to foster Muslims' moral and spiritual consciousness (Qodir & Sight, 2023), enabling them to engage actively with modern socio-political realities.

Amidst the waves of modernization and globalization, Muslims are confronted with the complex task of maintaining their religious identity and values (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997). The ever-changing social reality necessitates the reinterpretation of Islamic teachings, which are often understood in a static and textual manner. In this context, progressive Islamic thought emerges as a response to the community's need to reformulate an understanding of Islam that not only adheres to normative principles but is also responsive to the demands of the time. Progressive Islam should not be seen as a form of religious liberalization or secularization but rather as a revival of the spirit of *ijtihad* and *tajdid* (renewal) within Islam. This is vital to ensure that Islam is not merely positioned as an isolated doctrine but as an ethical, spiritual, and social force capable of guiding humanity in confronting the challenges of modernity. Contemporary issues such as social inequality, corruption, intolerance, and moral decay call for an Islamic presence that is solution-oriented and justice-driven (Pędziwiatr, 2011). Therefore, studying progressive Islamic thinkers is particularly relevant in formulating a visionary and contextual paradigm of Islam.

Fazlur Rahman, one of the most prominent figures in the renewal of Islamic thought in the 20th century, was a Pakistani Muslim intellectual who spent much of his academic career in the United States. His thought serves as a critical milestone in advocating a rational, historical, and contextual understanding of Islam. In many of his works, Rahman criticizes rigid traditionalist approaches to Islamic texts and rejects modernist-liberal interpretations that tend to reduce the spiritual dimension of Islam (Munir dkk., 2021; Ohlander, 2009). By developing the double movement approach—a methodological dynamic that moves from the text to the historical context and then returns to the contemporary context—Rahman offers a hermeneutical method for interpreting the Qur'an that is both relevant and dynamic in modern life. This concept forms the foundation for building a contextual Islamic social ethic and provides a meaningful response to modernity's challenges without abandoning core Islamic values. Through this vision, Rahman not only proposes a methodological solution but also demonstrates that reforming Islamic thought must be a systematic endeavor rooted in tradition while open to contemporary developments.

Rahman's ideas have generated mixed reactions. Some regard him as a bridge between tradition and modernity, while others view his approach as overly bold or deviating from traditional Islamic frameworks (Mumisa, 2002). Nevertheless, his contributions to contemporary Islamic discourse are undeniable. His seminal works—such as *Islam* (1966), *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982), and *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1980)—have become essential references for Muslim scholars and thinkers worldwide. Through these works, Rahman argues that Islam should be understood as a living ethical system rather than a rigid legal code. He also stresses the importance of education and reforming the Islamic intellectual tradition to create a generation of critical and progressive Muslims. In doing so, Rahman seeks to revive an Islamic intellectual heritage that has stagnated under the dominance of literalist and *fiqh*-centric approaches that are ill-suited to social change.

In Indonesia, Fazlur Rahman's thought has found resonance, particularly among Muslim intellectuals and academics involved in contemporary Islamic studies. His contributions enrich the discourse of progressive Islam that has long evolved in the country since the reform movements of figures like HOS Cokroaminoto, Ahmad Dahlan, and KH. Hasyim Asy'ari. Rahman's methodological innovations offer a framework for developing Islamic thought that is not only textual but also contextual and socially engaged. His double movement concept, for instance, is highly applicable in thematic *tafsir* studies that seek to interpret the Qur'an in light of modern societal issues (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007). Furthermore, his critique of the scholastic and non-interdisciplinary nature of Islamic education provides a critical reflection for reforming the *pesantren* and *madrasah* systems in Indonesia. Thus, analyzing Rahman's

thought is essential not only in academic terms but also in shaping a practical, social, and cultural Islamic renewal.

Progressive Islam emerges as a relevant discourse as Muslims face the challenge of upholding Islamic values in a rapidly changing world. Modernization—with all its effects on social, economic, and political structures—demands a renewed interpretation of Islamic teachings to ensure their contextual relevance. Fazlur Rahman, as a reformist of contemporary Islam, introduces a bold and systematic methodological approach to meet these challenges. He critiques the tendency among Muslims to focus on textual legalism while neglecting the broader moral and ethical purposes of the Shari'ah. In his view, Islam must not be confined to a static set of laws but recognized as a dynamic, living ethic. This perspective is crucial in fostering critical awareness of the present, where Muslims must be capable of articulating Islamic teachings in transformative and solution-oriented ways. Consequently, Rahman's thought can be seen as a concrete expression of progressive Islam—adaptive to the times yet deeply rooted in its foundational values.

Rahman's interpretive method, famously known as “double movement,” refers to the dual motion of moving from the text to the historical context of revelation and then back to the present context (Harrison, 2010; Huntington, 1971). This approach offers Muslims the opportunity to reinterpret the Qur'an in a manner that is both contextual and relevant to modern needs. He rejects literalist and textualist readings, which he argues hinder intellectual reform. Instead, Rahman emphasizes the importance of understanding the core values of the Qur'an and implementing them in modern life. His approach not only opens a space for dialogue between text and reality but also encourages Muslims to avoid rigid religious forms that lack ethical and social depth. Within this framework, progressive Islam emerges as a synthesis between fidelity to normative Islamic values and openness to ongoing social and cultural transformation.

Nevertheless, Rahman's ideas about progressive Islam have not been without controversy. Some conservative circles regard his approach as overly liberal and threatening to the purity of Islamic teachings. These criticisms often stem from his vocal critique of Islamic practices that are no longer relevant in contemporary contexts. He argues that intellectual stagnation among Muslims results from an inability to engage in critical and contextual *ijtihad*. For Rahman, continuous *ijtihad* is essential to respond to the demands of the era (Goorha, 2017). Therefore, his thought does not merely offer a new interpretation of texts but also calls for a profound reconstruction of Islamic thinking. This is a vital contribution in the age of modernization, which often questions the relevance of religion in contemporary social and intellectual life.

In Indonesia, as the world's most populous Muslim nation, Fazlur Rahman's thought has gained increasing attention among Muslim scholars. His concepts are widely referenced in the discourse of Islamic thought reform in the country. This reflects the pressing need to develop an interpretation of Islam that is not merely textual but also transformative. Progressive Islam in Indonesia continues to evolve both in intellectual discourse and in social practice. Amid the country's cultural, ethnic, and religious pluralism, Rahman's approach—emphasizing universal Islamic ethics—remains particularly relevant. Hence, Rahman's thought serves not only as an academic discourse but also as a practical guide for building an inclusive, humanistic, and civilized Islamic society.

In the academic sphere, studying Rahman's thought makes a significant contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic epistemology. His works bridge the gap between classical tradition and modern needs. Through historical and philosophical approaches, Rahman invites Muslims to reexamine the historical context of Islamic teachings without falling into past glorification. He offers an integrative understanding of revelation and reason, of text and social reality, of the normative and the empirical. Consequently, Rahman's ideas present a methodology that enables Muslims to not only understand texts holistically but also

to interpret them creatively and responsibly. A critical study of his thought is essential for formulating a conceptual framework of progressive Islam based on a critical reading of the dynamics of the present age.

This article seeks to explore and analyze more deeply Fazlur Rahman's thought as a foundation for constructing progressive Islam amidst the currents of modernization. This study employs a qualitative approach through literature review and textual analysis of Rahman's works and his central ideas. The focus is on his methodology of Qur'anic interpretation, the concept of *ijtihad*, and the practical implications of his thought in responding to the challenges of modernity. Rather than merely describing Rahman's views, this article offers a critical analysis of the consistency and relevance of his ideas in today's context. Thus, it aims to contribute to the development of a more applicable and grounded discourse of progressive Islam in contemporary Muslim societies.

The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to elaborate Rahman's thought more holistically within the context of a practical progressive Islam in the digital and globalized era. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on theological or historical aspects of his thought, this article seeks to bridge Rahman's ethical-normative ideas with the current challenges facing the Muslim ummah—such as moral crises, social polarization, and digital transformation. The critical approach employed here also allows for an evaluation of how far Rahman's version of progressive Islam can offer solutions to the stagnation of Islamic thought and practice. By situating Rahman's ideas within the complex framework of modernity, this article endeavors to meet the present need for an Islamic paradigm that is progressive, inclusive, and oriented toward social justice and civilizational advancement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-critical qualitative approach aimed at exploring and analyzing the thought of Fazlur Rahman in relation to the idea of progressive Islam in the context of modernization. The qualitative approach was chosen as it enables the researcher to interpret the meaning of non-numerical data in depth, particularly in understanding the intellectual constructs and philosophical ideas proposed by the thinker (Feldman & Hurn, 1966). This approach allows Rahman's thought to be examined not only on the surface level but also from various perspectives: historical, methodological, and sociological. The study is descriptive in that it seeks to depict and formulate Rahman's key ideas, and critical as it includes an evaluation of how his ideas are applied in the modern world. His thought is positioned as the main data source, which is then contextualized within the realities of contemporary Muslim society.

The method used in this research is library research, drawing from both primary and secondary sources of Fazlur Rahman's works. The primary sources include major books authored by Rahman, such as *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, and *Revival and Reform in Islam*. The secondary sources consist of journal articles, dissertations, books, and previous studies that discuss Rahman's thought from various perspectives. This literature study is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical and methodological foundations of Rahman's ideas (Fazlurrahman, 2018). Data collection was carried out systematically by recording, classifying, and categorizing the key ideas found in the relevant sources.

To analyze the data, the researcher employed content analysis, which involves identifying, examining, and interpreting the content of the reviewed texts. The objective is to uncover the deeper meanings behind Rahman's scholarly and philosophical ideas. The analysis focuses on key terminologies such as *ijtihad*, contextual interpretation, double movement, and Islamic social ethics—integral components of Rahman's framework. Content analysis enables the mapping of Rahman's logical structure and argumentation, as well as evaluating their

relevance in addressing the challenges of modern times. This approach also pays close attention to the historical aspects of the texts to avoid ahistorical interpretations.

The research procedure began with determining the focus of the study: Fazlur Rahman's perspective on progressive Islam within the context of modernization. The next step involved searching for and collecting relevant literature from both physical libraries and online databases. This was followed by careful reading, annotation, and identification of key ideas within the texts. Ideas were then categorized according to themes such as interpretative approaches, Islamic thought reconstruction, and responses to modernity. Once this process was completed, the researcher began constructing an academic narrative that elaborates on the relationships between different concepts. In the final stage, a critical reflection was conducted to evaluate the strengths and limitations of Rahman's ideas.

This research also employs a hermeneutic approach as a tool for interpreting Rahman's texts. Hermeneutics, as a method of interpretation, helps the researcher delve deeper into the meanings of texts, especially in understanding the dynamic relationship between text and context. Through this approach, Rahman's thought is not merely seen as a normative discourse but also as an active response to contemporary developments. This is essential to avoid static and formalistic readings, and to allow for contextual interpretations that resonate with the current lives of Muslims. Hermeneutics also enables the articulation of Rahman's ideas in a more contemporary language.

In constructing the conceptual framework of this study, the researcher draws upon socio-religious theories related to modernization, social change, and intellectual reform. Social change theory is used to understand how Rahman's ideas seek to bridge Islamic teachings with contemporary demands (Farid Esack, 2018). Discourse theory is applied to examine how Rahman's ideas evolved within the context of intellectual debates, both in the West and the Muslim world. Additionally, a normative approach is employed to explore the ethical and value-based aspects of the progressive Islamic ideas he proposes. These theoretical foundations allow for a more structured analysis that touches on both philosophical and practical dimensions.

Data validity is ensured through the technique of source and thought triangulation. This involves comparing Rahman's ideas with those of other prominent Muslim thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Iqbal, and Nurcholish Madjid. Comparisons are also made with contemporary figures such as Amina Wadud and Khaled Abou El Fadl to identify continuities and distinctions in Rahman's thought. This technique aims to strengthen the researcher's interpretation and avoid bias in evaluating the thinker's ideas (Duderija, 2018; Eisenstadt, 1974). By comparing various perspectives, the study gains a more objective and comprehensive view of Rahman's position within modern Islamic intellectual discourse. In addition to validity, reliability is maintained through systematic documentation and record-keeping. Each data point is clearly cited, including direct quotations and paraphrases that are referenced in footnotes and the bibliography (Campanini, 2005; Duderija, 2011). This documentation ensures that every argument and conclusion can be traced and verified. The use of reference management software such as Zotero or Mendeley supports efficient and organized source management. Thus, the article is not only valid in content but also methodologically reliable.

To maintain analytical objectivity, the researcher makes an effort to keep a critical distance from the subject of study. While Fazlur Rahman is the central figure under analysis, the researcher does not automatically endorse all of his views. Each idea is analyzed openly and critically, considering its historical, sociological, and philosophical context. This critical stance is part of academic ethics to avoid apologetic tendencies and to provide a balanced evaluation. Reflective questions are posed throughout the process to delve deeper into the meanings and impacts of Rahman's ideas on various aspects of religious and social life. Ultimately, the results of this analysis are presented in the form of a systematic academic

narrative, ranging from description and interpretation to critical evaluation. The article is structured according to scientific writing conventions, including abstract, introduction, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. This narrative is expected not only to enrich academic discourse but also to offer new directions in the development of progressive Islam based on the thought of Fazlur Rahman. Therefore, the method used is oriented not only toward textual understanding but also toward real intellectual and social transformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Fazlur Rahman's thoughts on progressive Islam present a synthesis between traditional Islamic values and the demands of the modern world. This study reveals that Rahman offers a deep and contextual framework for interpreting Islamic texts, especially the Qur'an, by emphasizing the importance of understanding the historical meaning and moral spirit of revelation, rather than merely its literal text. His development of the double hermeneutic approach serves as a crucial tool in bridging the gap between the past and the present. In the context of modernization, his views offer guidance for Muslims not to be trapped in intellectual stagnation but to pursue renewal based on the universal normative principles of Islam.

This study finds that Fazlur Rahman places great importance on *ijtihad* as a means to shape adaptive Islamic thought. He believed that Muslims should not be confined by traditional understandings that are no longer relevant to contemporary realities. For him, *ijtihad* was not merely a legal method, but a creative mechanism for addressing the challenges of the times. Amid the surge of modernization, Rahman sought to integrate the values of faith with those of rationality and scientific progress, without losing the spiritual roots of Islam. This forms the basis of progressive Islam—teachings that remain authentic yet capable of speaking the language of the age.

Furthermore, the findings show that Fazlur Rahman did not reject tradition but rather sought to reconstruct it. He critiqued conservative models that often constrained the intellectual development of Muslims and encouraged the emergence of new, more contextual ideas. One significant aspect he advocated was the active involvement of Muslims in social, political, and economic issues as part of their faith practice. He rejected the dichotomy between religion and worldly life, urging Islam to become a force for social transformation. This idea positions Islam not merely as a ritualistic religion but as a value system capable of driving real change.

A critical study of his thought reveals that Fazlur Rahman viewed modernization not as a threat but as an opportunity to strengthen Islam's position in the global arena. In this regard, he proposed that Muslims construct a new epistemology rooted in the Qur'an while remaining open to modern scientific knowledge. He emphasized the development of Islamic social, human, and natural sciences—not merely rationally oriented but also grounded in moral and humanitarian values. This effort reflects Rahman's aim to build a synergy between revelation and reason, between tradition and innovation.

Another part of this study highlights Rahman's strong commitment to education. He saw Islamic educational reform as the key to building a critical, open, and progressive Muslim society. According to him, Islamic education must strike a balance between religious studies and general knowledge while promoting critical thinking toward Islamic texts. He proposed curriculum reform to align more closely with contemporary demands without abandoning the core teachings of Islam. This educational reform serves as a vital pillar in his vision of progressive Islam.

In terms of intellectual freedom, Fazlur Rahman strongly emphasized the importance of dialogue in Islamic discourse. He criticized the exclusivism of thought that often monopolizes truth. For Rahman, the diversity of opinions within Islam is a wealth to be nurtured, not suppressed. He called on Muslims to reread the intellectual heritage of Islam critically and

historically. His approach paves the way for the development of an inclusive and dynamic Islamic discourse, one in harmony with the pluralistic and open spirit of the contemporary world. The analysis of Rahman's thought also shows his rejection of rigid fundamentalism and scripturalism. He believed such approaches restrict interpretive space and narrow the intellectual horizon of Muslims. For Rahman, the Qur'an is an open text to be read contextually, so that its moral message can be translated into various aspects of life. Thus, Islam becomes not only a religion of the past but a solution for the future. This idea forms a crucial foundation for constructing a humanistic and relevant progressive Islamic theology.

The study also finds that Rahman's views on ethics are highly relevant to contemporary contexts. He emphasized morality as the core of Islamic teaching. According to him, many of the problems facing Muslims today are not due to a lack of religious knowledge but a moral crisis. Therefore, he proposed that moral education become an integral part of all aspects of life. In this respect, Rahman sought to refocus Islam on the formation of moral, responsible, and socially just individuals. Rahman's ideas on *maqasid al-shariah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) are also essential in building a progressive Islamic approach. He stressed that Islamic law should be understood in terms of its broader objectives—namely, safeguarding human well-being. His emphasis was not on textual legalism, but on the moral and humanistic essence of the *shariah*. Rahman developed a framework suggesting that Islamic law must be continually evaluated to remain relevant in addressing the challenges of the times. Thus, legal reform is not, in his view, a deviation but a moral responsibility toward the *ummah*. He urged scholars not to be content with preserving classical *fiqh* but to boldly engage in reformulation through a historical-critical and *maqasid*-oriented approach.

The study also highlights how Rahman connected Islam and democracy. He argued that democratic values such as justice, participation, freedom of expression, and social responsibility are aligned with the fundamental principles of Islam. Within this framework, Islam need not be allergic to democracy; rather, it can strengthen it through spiritual and moral foundations. Rahman strongly criticized authoritarian political systems that invoke religion to legitimize oppression and called on Muslims to build inclusive, just, and participatory political governance. For him, Islam should be a moral force that supports democratization—not a tool for perpetuating tyrannical power. In his economic thought, Fazlur Rahman emphasized social justice and equity as the essence of Islamic economics. He rejected interpretations of Islamic economics that focus solely on symbolic elements such as *zakat* and *riba* while neglecting the substance of justice. For Rahman, an Islamic economic system must address issues of poverty, social inequality, and exploitation. He advocated for a reconstruction of Islamic economic thought grounded in progressive Qur'anic values and siding with the marginalized. In the modern context, this idea provides an ethical foundation for economic development that prioritizes not just growth, but also fair distribution and collective well-being.

Another important aspect uncovered by this study is how Rahman interpreted revelation as a historical and dynamic process. He rejected the view that revelation ended in a static, literal text. Instead, he saw revelation as a moral communication between God and humanity that occurred within a particular historical context. Therefore, understanding the Qur'an cannot be separated from its socio-historical background. Within this framework, Rahman emphasized that each generation of Muslims must reinterpret the Qur'an according to the challenges of their time. This perspective liberates the *ummah* from rigidity and opens the door for continuous renewal.

The findings also show that Rahman placed great importance on social ethics in the lives of Muslims. He asserted that one's religiosity should not be measured merely by ritual performance but by its impact on society. For Rahman, *amal salih* (righteous deeds) means concrete contributions to social improvement. He harshly criticized religious practices that were individualistic and apathetic toward injustice. For him, true spirituality is grounded in spirituality—expressed in care, service, and social justice. This represents the actualization of

faith that characterizes Rahman's vision of progressive Islam: a form of Islam that shapes pious individuals who are also actively engaged in advocating for human values.

In the area of gender, Fazlur Rahman adopted a critical stance against traditional interpretations that discriminate against women. He asserted that the Qur'an, in essence, upholds the principles of gender equality and justice. Therefore, he advocated for the reinterpretation of verses historically used to justify female subordination. Rahman encouraged Muslims to distinguish between the universal moral message of the Qur'an and patriarchal cultural practices disguised as religion. His ideas open the way for creating more just and humane social relations between men and women in contemporary Muslim societies.

Finally, the findings emphasize that progressive Islam, according to Fazlur Rahman, is a continuous effort to actualize the universal values of Islam in an ever-changing reality. He offered a synthesis between text and context, between revelation and reason, between tradition and modernity. Rahman was not merely a thinker but a reformer who positioned Islam as a force for liberation and transformation. He taught that piety should not be measured solely by ritual obedience but by the courage to respond to contemporary challenges with justice, freedom, and noble humanity. His thought makes a significant contribution to the global Islamic discourse of the 21st century.

Discussion

Fazlur Rahman's thoughts on progressive Islam did not merely emerge as a response to modernity, but as a creative reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in facing contemporary challenges. Rahman offered a bold yet deeply rooted synthesis grounded in authentic Islamic values. He believed that Muslims could not continue living in nostalgia for past glories or remain trapped in rigid traditionalism (Bernstein, 1971). Instead, the Muslim community must possess the intellectual courage to explore the values of the Qur'an in a profound and socially relevant manner, particularly in light of current socio-political realities. This forms the foundational basis of the progressive Islamic approach he developed.

In the context of hermeneutics, Rahman employed the "double movement" approach—a back-and-forth process between the historical context of the verses and their present-day application. Through this method, he sought to transcend the dichotomy between fundamentalism and liberalism. He neither rejected tradition outright nor treated it as absolute. Rahman proposed that religious texts must be read dynamically, taking into account their socio-historical background and moral objectives. This represents an innovation in Islamic studies, where interpretation becomes not merely an academic endeavor but a visionary tool for social transformation. One of the most significant aspects of this discussion is how Rahman repositioned the role of reason in Islam. He rejected the view that reduces Islam to lifeless dogmas. For him, reason is a divine gift that must be maximized in understanding revelation. Through reason, Muslims can extract the wisdom embedded in the Qur'an and translate it into thought and policies responsive to societal needs. This perspective liberates Muslims from intellectual stagnation and opens the door to dialogue between Islam and various modern disciplines.

Furthermore, Rahman was highly critical of religious practices oriented solely toward legal formalism (Abu-Zayd, 2010). He observed that many Muslims have become entangled in ritualism devoid of strong ethical substance. In progressive Islam, what is emphasized is not mere legal formalism, but a moral essence that affirms human dignity. This is why he underscored the importance of *maqasid al-shariah* as a foundational principle in understanding Islamic law. In his view, the law should promote justice, freedom, and well-being—not merely adhere to rules without considering their context or social consequences. Rahman's view on democracy is also noteworthy (Barlas, 2001). He did not see democracy as a Western concept opposed to Islam, but as a system most compatible with the Islamic values of justice, consultation (*shura*), and accountability. He called on Muslims not to be allergic to democracy,

but rather to integrate Islamic principles into strengthening democratic practices. This effort aims to build an ethical, inclusive, and welfare-oriented political order—one aligned with the spirit of the Islamic message.

Rahman's critique of patriarchy in Islamic tradition reflects his commitment to the principle of gender justice. He highlighted how religious texts have often been distorted to justify male dominance. In his view, gender equality is an integral part of the Qur'an's moral message. He asserted that women hold equal positions in spirituality, intellect, and socio-political life. Through contextual reinterpretation of the texts, Rahman opened the door to a more egalitarian and progressive understanding of gender in Islam. In the realm of Islamic education, Rahman also proposed significant ideas. He criticized traditional Islamic educational systems for being overly textual and lacking critical engagement. He advocated for an integrative curriculum that harmoniously combines religious and worldly knowledge. According to him, education should be a tool for empowering the Muslim community, not merely a means of transmitting classical knowledge. This perspective positions education as a key pillar in building a community that is intellectually, spiritually, and socially advanced. Progressive Islamic education, therefore, must nurture individuals who are critical thinkers, ethically grounded, and socially aware.

The spiritual dimension in Rahman's concept of progressive Islam is equally vital. He viewed spirituality not as an escape from the world, but as a transformative force that shapes social consciousness. Authentic spirituality, in his view, compels individuals to care for others, reject injustice, and advocate for truth. Thus, Islam manifests not only in mosques or private spheres, but also in the public domain as a liberating force (Alexander, 1996). This thought reintroduces the spiritual essence of Islam into concrete social interaction. Rahman also challenged Muslims to move beyond being mere consumers of civilization, urging them to become active agents in constructing a new civilization (Ahmed, 2013). He believed that Islam holds great potential to become a global force offering a moral alternative to a modern world often adrift in direction. However, this can only be achieved if Muslims are willing to embrace change, engage in critical reflection on their heritage, and boldly present fresh and applicable ideas. This constitutes the intellectual and spiritual mission of the progressive Islam he envisioned.

This discussion demonstrates that Fazlur Rahman made significant contributions to the revitalization of Islamic thought in the modern era. He did not propose a utopia, but rather a roadmap for realistic social transformation rooted in divine values. Through a rational, ethical, and historical approach, he showed that Islam is not an outdated religion but one imbued with vitality to guide civilization toward a more humane future. His thought serves as a bridge between text and context, between tradition and modernity, and between faith and reason.

CONCLUSION

A critical study of Fazlur Rahman's thought reveals that progressive Islam is not a form of religious liberalization detached from its traditional roots, but rather a creative effort to revitalize Islamic values so they remain relevant in addressing the challenges of the modern age. Rahman consistently constructed a rational, contextual, and spiritual framework, placing the Qur'an at the center as a living and dynamic moral compass. Through his hermeneutical approach of the double movement, he opened up space for a more critical and solution-oriented reading of the text in light of contemporary realities, while still honoring the historical context and the spirit of revelation.

Rahman's ideas present a synthesis between reason and revelation, between faith and social reality, and between tradition and transformation. His concepts of *maqasid al-shariah*, social justice, integrative education, democracy infused with Islamic values, and gender equality affirm that progressive Islam is capable of responding to the complexities of modern

life while remaining rooted in divine moral principles. He demonstrated that the reform of Islamic thought must begin with epistemological reform—that is, how we understand, interpret, and apply Islamic teachings in a relevant and responsible manner.

Thus, Fazlur Rahman made a significant contribution to the development of an inclusive, humanistic, and future-oriented Islamic paradigm. His thought serves not only as an intellectual oasis for a spiritually and mentally fatigued community, but also as a roadmap toward an Islamic civilization that is just, democratic, and oriented toward universal well-being. Amidst the tide of modernization and the crisis of religious identity, Rahman's progressive Islamic thought becomes a guiding light, helping Muslims remain steadfast in faith while being flexible and wise in engaging with the world. Therefore, developing and applying Fazlur Rahman's ideas across various areas of life represents a strategic step toward building a brighter and more transformative future for Islam.

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