

Book Review

Jasser Auda (2021). *Re-Envisioning Islamic Scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a New Approach*. UK: Claritas Books & Maqasid Institute. 282 Pages. [ISBN: 978-1-80011-977-2]

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“Re-Envisioning Islamic scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a new approach” is a remarkable book of Dr Jasser Auda. The book was originally in Arabic with the title “*al-Manhajiyah al-Maqasidiyyah*” which he himself later wrote in English with considerable additions and modifications. The book fundamentally deals with the question of knowledge and Islam. It is well-known that the question of knowledge and Islam or the question of knowledge and revelation has been among the most favourite and most significant questions for many Muslim scholars since the wave of enlightenment and the advent of modernity roughly from eighteenth century. The movement of Islamization claimed that modern and conventional knowledge has epistemological and methodological flaws and conflicts with Islamic ethos and hence, it is among the responsibility of Islamic scholars to tackle the issue and come up with something in the epistemology and methodology of knowledge which is more in conformity with Islamic principles or worldview. Islamization of knowledge as a movement went through many phases and took various institutional forms starting from International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), and many more institutes and universities during the last over half century of journey. It is difficult to give an overview of and appraisal of what all took place in these initiatives in the name of Islamization of knowledge but to cut a long story short, the scholars and leaders of IIIT have realized that the very original idea of Islamization of knowledge is not workable and it needs to be fundamentally revised¹. Since then, many scholars within and outside IIIT have been trying to present more consistent, feasible and pragmatic alternatives to the idea of Islamization of knowledge. The book in hand by Jasser Auda should be seen against the same backdrop. The book “Re-Envisioning Islamic scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a new approach” is unique and unprecedented in its approach to the question of knowledge and revelation. In this review article we will first give an overview and summary of the book and then we will choose some of the propositions and formulations of the book for critical analysis.

The book starts with (re)defining basic concepts of Islamic scholarship most importantly the concept of ‘*Fiqh*’ which contains according to Auda: “(1) a deep understanding of Islam as a *din*, i.e., way of life and a worldview, (2) a deep understanding of the proofs/signs (*ayat*) of Allah, (3) a high capacity for sound judgment and leadership, and (4) the ability to teach knowledge and (5) realise knowledge for the benefits of Muslims and humanity in this life and the next”. Hence, Fiqh for Auda include every knowledge whether it be knowledge of Shariah or knowledge of nature i.e., natural, and human sciences. According to Auda, in the beginning Fiqh was perceived in this sense only and that’s why we see in the first phase of Islamic history that most of the institutions and persons of Fiqh were also expert of other human knowledge such as philosophy, logic, medicine, law, sociology, history and so on. Later the scope of *Fiqh* was much reduced and there took place a separation between ‘*Fiqh*’ and ‘*Ilm*’, and the reason behind this separation and distinction was how *din* and *ayat* were understood. These three concepts are pivotal in Islamic scholarship vis a vis knowledge. In this milieu, Jasser Auda has written the book “Re-Envisioning Islamic Scholarship” as a project to restore the original approach of Islam towards knowledge.

Maqasid Methodology: Distinctive Features

What distinguishes Auda’s approach from all preceding efforts in methodological inquiry of Islamic scholarship is his discovery of connectivity and holism in the Quran and Sunnah. He found that there is

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¹ See for detailed discussions on rethinking the idea of Islamization of Knowledge, for example: Mohammad Nejatullah Siddiqi (2011), “Islamization of Knowledge: Reflections on Priorities,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 15-34; Islamization of Knowledge: A Response, Fazlur Rahman (2011), “Islamization of knowledge: A Response,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3-4, 449-457; Ziauddin Sardar and Jeremy Henzell-Thomas (2017), *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge*, London: IIIT.

a web-like pattern of meanings in the Quran in itself, in the Sunnah and in both together which guides to seven fundamental elements of methodology for Islam scholarship namely, concepts, objectives, values, commands, universal laws, groups and proofs. This approach or methodology Auda has named it as Maqasid approach or Maqasid Methodology.

Moreover, Auda outlines three distinguishing features of this approach as follows:

Futuristic approach: here Auda differentiates between the logic of causality and that of teleology as cause is related to the past events that result in present reality while a purpose is related to the future so that present can be constructed accordingly. Auda lamented that “generally, current Islamic discourses have a past orientation in their explanation of and reaction to the present”. On the other hand, “Maqasid Methodology infuses purpose, future perspectives and long-term planning into the very core of its approach”.

Critical approach: the question of why which is the starting point of Maqasid approach automatically opens the door for critical engagements with every aspect of the issue in hand. The Quran and Sunnah have always encouraged the question of why and critical engagement in every domain of knowledge. However, Auda delineates the reality of Muslim scholarship saying: “despite the pervasiveness of the justification of ‘why’ in the revelation according to the revelational *maqasid*, such questioning is generally unpopular in mainstream Muslim cultures and scholarship”. Critical approach is not exclusively meant for Islamic scholarship in its narrow meaning rather it is related to the whole domain of knowledge as explained by Auda: “The Maqasid Methodology’s critical orientation is directed at two broad approaches. The first is concerned with Islamic thought, both inherited and contemporary... likewise, concern with secular thought, whether it agrees wholly or partially with Islamic thought on some aspects”.

Comprehensive approach: since the book starts with redefining the concepts of *din* and *Fiqh* so that they can be comprehensive in their scope and connotations. Comprehensive approach in two senses: firstly, it covers every branch of knowledge and every aspect of human life and secondly, the outcome of this approach will have universal appealing not limited to Muslims only. He says: “Islam addresses all of humanity. Islamic approaches that speak only to Muslims neglect the comprehensiveness of the textual sources and the express mission of Prophet Muhammad who was sent as mercy to the worlds and to all people entirely”.

Limitations of Contemporary Approaches in Islamic Scholarship

Jasser Auda before putting forward the details of his approach and Maqasid Methodology carries out an assessment of existing approaches in Islamic thought. However, this seems very wise of the author that he has skipped classification and categorization or labelling of different schools, trends and approaches in Islamic scholarship and focused on limitations which are quite common and shared among all or most of them. Auda further stressed that this discussion on limitations include conventional Maqasid approaches also as he says: “the Maqasid Methodology seeks to address the limitations of contemporary approaches to Islamic thought, including contemporary Maqasid Studies, so that we can greatly enhance the process of reasoning or *ijtihad* and its output of *fiqh*”. Five major limitations are observed by Jasser Auda as follows:

Imitation (Taqlid): Auda highlights the subtle difference between learning and benefitting from great legacy of past and imitating it. After reckoning a great number of contributions by classical scholars he comments: “there is no doubt that this huge, diverse, and magnificent body of inherited Islamic knowledge is a necessary background. This necessity, however, does not equate with infallibility, sacredness or even relevance”. He further adds: “contemporary scholars who endorse or quote seminal historical works as “primary” references and evidence (*hujja*), fall into the error of imitation. This is because the primary and hegemonic reference in Islam, in all fields of knowledge, is the Revelation and the revelation alone”. Auda also notes that unquestioning or blind imitation has many severe consequences on Muslims’ mindset. Three of them are noteworthy: (1) a general absence of an ethics of disagreement, (2) the diminishing or neglecting of direct studies of Revelation, and (3) a lack of critical awareness of Islamic history.

Partialism (Tajzi): one of the very fundamental and widespread flaws in approaches of Islamic thought is partialism or fragmentation. In Auda's words, partialism is unfounded divisions in the Quran and Sunnah that distort wholistic meanings. Realization of this limitation goes back to the discovery of the theory of connectivity and holism which implies that any question must be seen in the light of coherence, holistic and interconnected way in the Quran and Sunnah. Notwithstanding the importance of holism and connectivity there was no concrete theorization of it in huge, rich, and glorious Islamic heritage until Hamiduddin Farahi expounded the remarkable theory of Nizam al-Quran in the last century. Auda interestingly, extends the notion of partialism in human thoughts at large and traces its reasons, inter alia, in the imposition of strict and closed disciplinary boundaries in scholarship and academic educational institutions, and in professional and social life more broadly.

Apologism (Tabrir): This limitation got more to do with the developments of modernity and making them Islamized either through legal justification and juridical correspondence (*takyif fiqhi*) or through legal circumventions (*hiyal fiqhiya*) and they are mostly manifested in Islamic banking and Islamic nation-state. The main reason behind this limitation is lack of critical approach, absence of wholistic view of Shariah and life and assumption that whatever modernity is producing is inevitable and irresistible. Auda comments on this trend saying: "it is necessary, however, for Islamic scholars to critique practical outcomes of modern institutions and other expressions of modernity. Even with an intention to make such expressions 'Shariah-compliant', apologists consider these institutions to be necessary part of today's reality, and thus, fail to recognize that at a deeper philosophical level, and indeed even in lesser ways, many expressions of modernity cannot be "Islamised" due to irreconcilable contradictions with Revelation and the Islamic worldview". When it comes to Maqasid studies, they are more pernicious as they can easily play with objectives of Shariah and justify modern products.

Contradiction (Tanaqud): This limitation is concerned with the question of epistemology and methodology of knowledge. In Auda's words: "contradiction manifests in scholarship when there is an attempt to integrate two bodies of knowledge that do not emanate from the same basic beliefs and worldview. The principles upon which Islamic and non-Islamic knowledge are based differ in some fundamental respects. Yet the contradictors claim to combine two fields: transmitted knowledge (*naqli*) and rational knowledge (*aqli*), Shariah-based (*Shari*) and contemporary (*Asri*), Islamic (*Islami*) and life (*Hayati*), religious (*dini*) and worldly (*dunyawi*), or text (*nusus*) and context (*waqi*)".

Deconstructionism (Tafkik): deconstructionism is a by-product of post-modern approach. The problem with deconstructionism approach is that they don't differentiate between human thoughts and Revelation while dealing with their analysis. The logical consequence of this approach is that it denies the very authority of revelation and considers the revelation as mere cultural products of humans. Eventually they may go to the extent that the very words of revelation can be changed with the change of time and space.

Reorienting the Islamic Worldview

The third major theme of this book deals with an alternative to contemporary scholarship through three fundamental aspects namely Knowledge, reality, and scholarship. When it comes to knowledge, Auda presents three propositions. Firstly, Revelation is the central to knowledge. It means that revelation is indisputable source of all knowledge, and all other sources must comply with the Revelation to achieve their authority and legitimacy. Secondly, higher objectives of revelation are central to revelational logic which means "to argue via a purpose or objective is the most central deepest logical argument in the Quran and Sunnah". Thirdly, centrality of authoritative names (*asmaa dhat sultan*) in theoretical and practical conceptualisation. It entails that all the concepts must be either directly extracted from revelation or implicitly derived from it, otherwise those concepts will be invalid in Islamic worldview. For example, the concept of gender is something not derived from revelation and in conflict with the spirit of revelation, so it is an irrelevant for Muslims. When it comes to second fundamental aspect namely reality, Auda stress on three important dimensions. Firstly, redefining the Islamic history where he proposes to start Islamic history not from the Prophet Muhammad but rather from the time of Adam himself. Similarly, he invites to look at history from much wider lens than merely from political or military standpoint. Secondly, assessing the lived reality using a wholistic framework rather than looking at it as different fragmented realities, and finally envisioning the future considering the higher objectives of revelation. Finally, as far as the third fundamental aspect is concerned namely scholarship, Auda describes it through three concepts. First is the scope where Auda broadens the scope of Islamic

scholarship to encompass every branch of knowledge and every aspect of life. Second is the scholars which not only denotes to those who are seeking Shariah knowledge but everyone who is seeking any kind of knowledge. Third is outcome which covers theoretical formations to practical applications.

Next chapter deals with the elucidation of Maqasid Methodology. Maqasid Methodology is defined through five elements or five steps namely, (1) purpose of the research, (2) going through cycles of reflection and contemplation in Revelation, (3) applying framework on the research questions, (4) carrying out critical studies of existing literature and lived realities and finally (5) discovering formative theories and principles. In the next chapter, he lays down Maqasid composite framework in details. The composite framework comprises of seven elements namely, Concepts, Objectives, Values, Commands, Universal Laws, Groups and Proofs. Auda believes that the Quran is designed on a web-like pattern of these seven elements on every topic and one needs to find out all these seven elements of any particular topic to deeply understand Quranic approach to it. The book also presents empirical examples of how to apply this framework on specific topics.

In the last chapter, Jasser Auda proposes a unique classification of disciplines in Islamic scholarship where he suggests classification of disciplines at four levels: (1) Usuli studies which includes *usul al-tafsir*, *usul al-hadith*, *usul al-fiqh* and *ilm al-kalam*, (2) Disciplinary studies, where Auda suggests to reorient modern academia and professional specialisations according to the Islamic world view, (3) Phenomena studies which is already a stablished method in Western universities and probably this is the first time that a call is given to include it in Islamic scholarship and (4) Strategic studies which is more kind of application of all other kinds of studies to enhance the productivity and efficiency of Muslim organizations, associations, institutions and movements etc in formulating their long-term goals and making them achievable.

In conclusion, Auda suggests three-level engagements to actualize Maqasid Methodology which are research, education, and action. He explains: “research is necessary for generating the knowledge and ideas required for education and action; education is necessary for qualifying researchers and people of action; and action is necessary for keeping both research and education oriented towards changing the reality”.

This was the summary and an overview of the book where the novelty of the book can be realized easily. The book attempts to bring about a paradigm shift in Islamic scholarship through formulating several new ideas and concepts. Nonetheless, there are many fundamental questions and discomforts with many premises and propositions of the book which need serious considerations. Some of them will be discussed here.

Discussion

One of the very basic premises on which the whole Maqasid Methodology is based is that knowledge in all its fields must be constructed on and around Revelation, in other words, Revelation is central to every knowledge. This was the same premise on which the idea of Islamization was developed. There were many serious engagements of prominent Muslim and non-Muslim scholars with reference to this assumption especially during last two decades. I will point out two of them only. First was by Fazlur Rahman in his article “Islamization of Knowledge: A Response” and second one by Nejatullah Siddiqi in his article “Islamization of Knowledge: Reflections on Priorities”. Both concluded that the scholars and pioneers of ‘Islamization of Knowledge’ neglected the differences between creation of knowledge and beneficial use of knowledge. The former requires freedom of thought and discussion. Knowledge is product of human’s capacity of intellect as humans have been discovering knowledge because of intellect or ‘*aql*’. The question of religion has more to do with morality and responsibility in the use of knowledge. Unfortunately, this book didn’t touch upon the questions directed earlier to the discussion of knowledge and Islam. I think there is another aspect to look at the issue of knowledge and that is through the questions which any discipline or branch of knowledge deals with. Every discipline deal with some particular questions and for those questions it develops some tools and methods. Those questions and those tools are contingent on spatial and temporal realities. The question arises here is does the framework of Islamization of knowledge or more specifically the Maqasid Methodology have any thing concrete in terms of tools or methods or dealing with those questions? If we assess the book in hand through what it presents in terms of concrete examples, methods, tools and answers it is evident

Book Review: *Re-Envisioning Islamic Scholarship: Maqasid Methodology as a New Approach* that it adds nothing in any discipline of knowledge except what I would call Islamic studies or Islamic sciences and I think it is essential here to differentiate between the nature and requirements of Islamic sciences and other sciences. Islamic sciences or Islamic studies in my humble view, fundamentally deals with the understanding of Revelation and the guidance embedded in it. There has always been discourses among Muslim scholars to revisit understanding of Revelation in changing milieu and context. Changing context has bilateral relationship with the Revelation as development of new sciences and new research skills opens new horizons of understanding the Revelation and on the other hand, new understanding of Revelation helps guidance in more relevant ways. Hence, it is important to incorporate new developments in research skills and methods especially in humanities and philosophy to better connect Revelation with contemporary life. I think there is another aspect which needs to be clarified at this point and that is the difference between ideas and assumptions of people vs knowledge. In chapter 4 under section ‘critical engagement with non-Islamic scholarship’ Auda has discussed six assumptions of ‘scientific discourse’ which I think not even non-Islamic scholarship hold upon and that’s why no proper scientific sources are cited for them. In the same context, there is another very important question regarding Maqasid Methodology of this book that when Auda talks about redefining Islamic History he proposed looking at Islamic history from Adam and not from the Prophet Muhammad which is a wonderful idea but at the same time when he talks about centrality of Revelation in knowledge there, he refers to Revelation sent upon Muhammad only. And I think this contradiction is also by-product of confusion between Islamic studies and other sciences. For Islamic studies all previous revelations are considered abrogated as they no longer serve the purpose for which they were sent because of distortions and manipulations took place in them, changes of context which made it irrelevant etc. but as far as knowledge in general is concerned it was not and cannot be abrogated at all. Knowledge has its own mechanism and methods through which it evolves, refutes parts of it and adds other parts in it.

Another critical discomfort is related to proposed classification of disciplines in Islamic studies. Auda proposed classification of disciplines in Islamic studies at 4-level. First is Usuli studies which comprises Usul of all kinds including Usul of tafsir, hadith, fiqh and then ilm al-Kalam which makes much sense. Second is disciplinary studies where Auda talks about reorienting modern academia. Here the question is that at the first level he talked about studying fundamental sciences of Islamic studies but where is the place of fundamental sciences and philosophical studies of modern disciplines. How can a researcher reorient modern academia according to Islamic principles, if we assume that he should do it, without mastering the philosophical and fundamental studies of that academia? Here is the observation of many critical scholars on Islamization of knowledge which I think is not irrelevant to Maqasid Methodology that those who talk about Islamization of any particular discipline none of them are recognized and endorsed in their own disciplines at all. For example, a person who is not recognized and endorsed in sociology in general how can he be expected to reorient sociology? Phenomena studies and strategic studies are well-placed in the sense that they are incorporated from modern developments in research and sciences to better understand Revelation.

These were some discomforts and questions on Maqasid Methodology. However, if Maqasid Methodology reduces its scope to Islamic scholarship or Islamic studies with clear distinction between Islamic studies and other sciences and disciplines of knowledge as all the concrete and established examples and tools discussed in the book are related to the former only, it is a great contribution and has a lot of potential to revive Islamic studies and make it relevant and alive. I strongly recommend that this book should be part of research methodology in the departments of Islamic studies. The book is full of new ideas and novel thoughts. It would have been great if English edition had professional editing of the book as there are issues with the language which sometimes cause discomforts while reading.

Reference

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