



# **BANGABANDHU MEMORIAL LECTURE**

11 May 2022 • IIUC Auditorium, IIUC

*Title of the Lecture*

**Decolonizing the Muslim Mind:  
Islam and the Path to Intellectual Emancipation**

*Speaker*

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*Organized by*

**Bangabandhu Research Centre for Islam and  
Interreligious Dialogue (BRCIID)  
International Islamic University Chittagong**

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### **Publisher**

Bangabandhu Research Centre for Islam and Interreligious Dialogue (BRCIID)

International Islamic University Chittagong

### **First Published**

May 2022

### **Printed by**

NOKSHA

Anderkilla, Chattogram-4000, Bangladesh

[www.nokshaworld.com](http://www.nokshaworld.com)

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## **Bangabandhu Research Centre for Islam and Interreligious Dialogue (BRCIID)**

The Bangabandhu Research Centre for Islam and Inter-religious Dialogue (BRCIID) is designed by International Islamic University Chittagong Trust (IIUCT) in order to contribute to the original humanitarian welfare intention of world religions particularly of Islam through a deeper and mutual understanding of the great religions of the world. This centre is being initiated at the auspicious moment of the Celebration of Golden Jubilee of Independence of Bangladesh and the 100th Birth Anniversary of the father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This glorious moment with its breadth and depth demands critical reflections on the historical evolution of various religious communities particularly that of historically distinctive Bengali Muslim community as well as on the Bangabandhu's life-long pursuit for non-communitarian and humanitarian ideals.

From a cursory observation it is evident that Bangladesh has an intrinsic relationship with Islam. This relationship is particularly characterized by the ideals of humanity, tolerance and justice propagated by medieval Muslim spiritual pioneers. Their deep care, apprehension and empathy for people irrespective of race, caste and religion have marked the very core of the personality of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Shéikh Mujibur

Rahman. In the possible widest sense, the Liberation War of 1971 conceived his twin ideals of non-communitarianism and humanitarianism. As a person, he adhered to the religion of Islam very fondly and sincerely, but he had deep sympathy and respect for the people of all religions. The people of all communities, including Muslim-Hindu-Buddhist-Christian participated in the War of Liberation at his call.

A deep religious crisis is being experienced world-wide due to the loosening soundness of all religions owing to the thick encrustation of time-old outdated customs and usages around the pure doctrinal virtues, people's reliance on a monolithic and literalist interpretation of the scriptural texts and the adoption of a particular interpretation as a wholesome ideology for the redemption of the world. On the top of it, the unprecedented scientific and technological development of this information age has blinded a great majority of human race to the virtues of morality and religion even though a deep-seated religious feeling resides at the core of every human heart. To reclaim these, we have to make a call to deluded and derailed literalist and truculent, peaceful and dialogue-loving people to the fold of moral and spiritual values. Thus, material facilities of religions have to be broadened.

The scriptural texts of great religions are invaluable treasures of wisdom and doctrinal aphorisms. They are deeply interspersed with ethical principles. The design of the Research Centre, therefore, envisages introducing the scholarly appraisal of these scriptural ethical principles.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, it has been observed throughout the world with dismay and apprehension that there is a serious lack of mutual understanding between the perspectives of two peoples or communities; i.e., between the religious and the atheist, between a Muslim and a Hindu, between a believer and an agonistic etc. The centre will work to foster respect for one another through dialogical initiatives. The more we

understand one another's religious perspective, its innate values and resultant traditions; the better will be our ability to work together.

### **The aims and objectives of the Centre**

- a. The Centre would be an ideal platform for disseminating scholarly ideas of Islam and other religions. In this regard, it will open the door for dialogue for creating just and fair societies locally and globally. People regardless of race, region, belief and religion will get the opportunity to exchange their views in dialogical initiatives, lectures, conferences, seminars and symposia;
- b. The Centre shall organize lectures, conferences, seminars and symposia; In Particular, the Centre shall organize Bangabandhu Memorial Lecture at regular intervals;
- c. The Centre shall publish books, monographs and pamphlets;
- d. The Centre shall establish a good research library;
- e. The Centre shall establish contact with similar centres, institutes and other organizations in and outside Bangladesh;
- f. The Centre shall institute scholarships, fellowships etc. for promotion of research;
- g. The Centre will execute any other function to be decided upon later keeping the aims and objectives of the Centre in view.

# **Decolonizing the Muslim Mind: Islam and the Path to Intellectual Emancipation**

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## **I**

Let me begin with a note of thanks to the organizers of this seminal event, especially Mohammed Sarwar Alam, Director, Bangabandhu Research Centre for Islam and Interreligious Dialogue, IIUC, who has been instrumental in bringing me to Bangladesh to deliver the inaugural Bangabandhu Memorial Lecture. I would like to profusely thank Professor Dr. Abu Reza Md. Nezamuddin Nadwi MP, Honorable Chairman, Board of Trustees, International Islamic University Chittagong Trust (IIUCT) and Professor Md. Anwarul Azim Arif, Honorable Vice-Chancellor, IIUC. Let us also take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the brave men and women who sacrificed their precious lives during the defining moments of the Language Movement and Liberation War that eventually gave birth to a free Bangladesh. Most of all, the Bengali nation is forever indebted to the architect of the Liberation War, namely Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose visionary leadership made it possible to

have a free Bangladesh where we can have events such as the present one to discuss some of the deep challenges of our time.

With this prelude, let me now turn to the topic of this particular lecture. Looking at the title, I thought I would begin with an analogy. Imagine once upon a time your forefathers had a magnificent mansion in which life flourished in every way conceivable. The inhabitants of the mansion were confident about their place in the world. They knew what their own tradition, culture, literature, science, art, architecture, philosophy, religion, etc. meant for them. However, at some point in the not-too-distant past the inhabitants of the mansion were brutally attacked by foreigners, who with time managed to alter and transform every facet of the mansion. Although these foreigners did not completely destroy the mansion, they succeeded in altering the very aesthetic essence of the structure itself. But more importantly, they succeeded in distorting the intellectual identity of the natives of that mansion and replacing it with a fragmented image, so that the present generation which still dwells in the mansion no longer recognizes the language and tradition of its own ancestors. What is perhaps very sad in all this is that due to their fragmented self-image, the present generation does not even care to know who they had been in history and why this knowledge matters as they ponder the questions of self-identity and human flourishing.

It is not very difficult to see where I am going with this example. So, the remainder of my lecture will be devoted to unpacking the symbolism involved in the above analogy. That is to say, in order to be able to relate to our ancestors in the mansion, we must free our mind from centuries of colonization. But let me quickly add that I do not mean here “political colonization,” since our country is no longer under colonial rule, although many would argue that the new world order imposes economic and political colonialism through the backdoor. Be that as it may, when I put

the phrase “decolonizing the Muslim mind” in the title, I had in mind what can be called “epistemic colonization.” Before getting into more technical discussions on epistemic colonization, let me provide a simple example to explain what I mean by epistemic colonialism. Take the example of “education” in our post-colonial world. Nearly all “formal” educational systems worldwide are based on Western models and Western curricula, even if they are taught in other languages. In this setting, Western civilization is conceived of as *the* civilization against which all others appear as failed attempts that must therefore fall under its rule. Similarly, the Western academy, science, and educational systems are simply “the academy,” “science,” and “education,” while all the world’s other intellectual traditions are mere “religious training” or “informal education.” More importantly, modern education or modern science generally pays no attention to the relationship between knowledge and ethics, even though the power of knowledge, e.g., knowing what forces govern the working of an atom, is too obvious to ignore. All this is to say that even though modern education is governed by its own particular ideology and provincial history, it is presented as neutral and universal, as if no other paradigm is possible within which one can think about education or science. For instance, education in the Islamic tradition has a deep moral and ethical dimension and is related to the ideas of self-cultivation and human flourishing, all of which seems more and more irrelevant today as universities are eager to pursue skills and excellence at the expense of ethical formation (i.e., to form a complete human being through moral and intellectual training).

I hope the above example goes some way toward explaining how epistemic colonization colors our vision and prevents us from seeing the world as it is. The idea of epistemic colonization is deeply related to the phenomenon of Eurocentrism, and we cannot talk about decolonizing the Muslim mind

if we fail to offer a diagnosis of this disturbing doctrine. To see how Eurocentrism is built into our recent history, let me begin with the famous quote by the British historian and politician T. B. Macaulay, who sought to establish the need to impart English education to the people of the Indian subcontinent:

I have never found one among them who could deny that a *single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia*. The intrinsic superiority of Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect (*Minute on Indian Education*, 1835).

Thus spoke Macaulay as far as his verdict on the worth of the entire Indian intellectual tradition in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, etc. was concerned! Basically, Macaulay and his cohorts thought that the literatures and traditions of the Hindus and Muslims were worthless and outdated superstitions that delayed the advent of modernity in the subcontinent. Lest one thinks this is coming from some obscure colonial administrator whose words have little relevance today (note, however, that Macaulay and his colleagues did succeed in changing the educational system in India by replacing Persian with English), let me present to you a claim from the well-known English cultural critic Roger Scruton:

The roots of Western civilization lie in the religion of Israel, the culture of Greece, and the law of Rome, and the resulting synthesis has flourished and decayed in a thousand

ways during the two millennia that have followed the death of Christ. Whether expanding into new territories or retreating into cities, Western civilization has continually experimented with new institutions, new laws, new forms of political order, new scientific beliefs, and new practices in the arts. And this tradition of experiment led, in time, to the Enlightenment, to democracy, and to forms of social order in which free opinion and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the state (“Foreword” to *The Closing of the Muslim Mind*).

“Why did not something similar happen in the Islamic world?” asks Scruton. Why is it that this civilization, which sprang up with such an abundance of energy in the seventh century of our era, and which spread across North Africa and the Middle East to produce cities, universities, libraries, and a flourishing courtly culture, is now in so many places mute, violent, and resentful? Scruton ponders. Why does Islam today seem not merely to tolerate the violence of its fiercest advocates, but to condone and preach it? Scruton asks further. Why is it that Muslim minorities in Europe, who migrate in order to enjoy the benefits of a secular jurisdiction, call for another kind of law altogether, even though so few of them seem able to agree what that law says or who is entitled to pronounce it? Scruton wonders.

Scruton then sets out to provide a response. He wishfully speculates that Islamic civilization underwent a profound intellectual crisis in the eleventh century when it turned its back on philosophy and took refuge in dogma, and it never really recovered from that. Notice that Scruton, who is not a specialist in Islamic history, is not, however, alone in claiming that Islamic civilization lapsed into a period of long stagnation after the theologian al-Ghazālī’s famous attack on philosophy and reason. There is a venerable list of both Western and Muslim historians such as T. J. de Boer, Ibrahim

Madkour, Montgomery Watt, and others, who have put forth the same thesis of a grand narrative according to which the Islamic world preserved and interpreted the Greek philosophical heritage during the European “Dark Ages” and later handed over this heritage to the Latin West in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At this point, however, the role of the Islamic world in the narrative was over, and little scholarly attention was given to later Islamic thought. This is because—due to the disapproval of orthodox theologians, these scholars claim—the intellectual tradition died out in the Islamic world in the twelfth century so that, by a stroke of luck, the Latin West managed to take over the Greek philosophical heritage just in time, before the Islamic world itself rejected this heritage and sank into fideist darkness. And this has led to an “intellectual suicide,” to a “dysfunctional culture based on a deformed theology,” and to “the moral infantilization of many Muslims,” the claim goes (more on this later).

If one pays close attention to the above quote, it does not take too long to notice the triumphalist, teleological tone in it. For instance, the last sentence reads “And this tradition of experiment led, in time, to the Enlightenment, to democracy, and to forms of social order in which free opinion and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the state.” As I alluded to earlier through the example of “modern education,” one wonders how one gets around one’s present historical situatedness, which is shaped by the ideologies of the Enlightenment and Eurocentrism that seem to thoroughly distort our understanding of the past? To give you a more concrete example, here is a sentiment offered by the Princeton historian Jonathan Israel, which is based on the supremacy of his conception of the Radical Enlightenment [i.e., the Enlightenment of Spinoza, Bayle, and Diderot as opposed to the moderate Enlightenment of Locke, Hume, and Newton]. In his *Enlightenment Contested* Israel declares:

For anyone who believes human societies are best ruled by reason as defined by the Radical Enlightenment, ordering modern societies on the basis of individual liberty, democracy, equality... clearly constitutes a package of rationally validated values which not only were, but remain today, inherently superior morally, politically, and intellectually not only to Postmodernist claims but to *all actual or possible alternatives*, no matter how different, national, and Postcolonial and no matter how illiberal, non-western, and traditional. The social values of the Radical Enlightenment, in short, have an *absolute quality* in terms of reason which places them above any possible alternative... (*Enlightenment Contested*, 869).

In other places, Israel conceives of the Radical Enlightenment as a package that includes, *inter alia*, (1) adoption of philosophical (i.e., mathematical-historical) reason as the only and exclusive criterion of what is true; and (2) rejection of all supernatural agency, magic, disembodied spirits, and divine providence.

Now, this is an extraordinary claim, especially in light of the grand failures of modernity, namely slavery, colonial genocides in Africa and India, the wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, racism, fundamentalism, and the environmental crisis. Yet scholars like Israel do not hesitate to invoke the framework that takes the Enlightenment ideas of reason, history, and society *as the norm against which the history of all other cultures should be studied and assessed*. The profound limitations of such Eurocentric thinking dating back to Hegel should be evident as we proceed further in our analysis, but very briefly, let me mention the Harvard historian Khaled El-Rouayheb concerning this point, who in his recent book on seventeenth century Ottoman intellectual history rightly questions the hidden teleological

assumption at work in the Enlightenment models, according to which human scientific and philosophical development *could only develop or progress in one direction*, namely the direction that western Europe actually took since the seventeenth century. So, any intellectual development that does not conform to the European model is ultimately written off as a form of obscurantism and religious fanaticism. Unsurprisingly, then, Israel ends up reiterating the decline thesis when he comments on Islam in the book.

## II

The falsity of the Enlightenment ideology should be evident to students of the Islamic and Indian intellectual traditions. Yet the sad truth is that most of our intelligentsia have lost interest in our own intellectual tradition of science, literature, and philosophy, presumably because a random man like Macaulay with no knowledge of Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic told us that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” The blind acceptance of European theories by our intellectuals across science and the humanities needs no mention. Controversial doctrines such as “modernity,” “progress,” “development,” and “scientific empiricism” are a staple of our intellectual thinking beyond any critical interrogation. In fact, we have become so accustomed to European ways of thinking that even our “literary theory and criticism” in the humanities derive from the work of such Western critics as Foucault, Derrida, or Bakhtin. This is in spite of such a rich history of literary traditions in both India and the Islamic world. As Sheldon Pollock notes:

It's not as if we do not have the materials to make some serious sense of culture and power in early modern India (understood here as the period from about 1500 to 1800, after which British colonial power consolidated itself in the subcontinent and changed the rules of the knowledge game). In the sphere of imagination and its written

expression, South Asia boasts a literary record far denser, in terms of sheer number of texts and centuries of unbroken multilingual literacy, than all of Greek and Latin and medieval European culture combined. (*Forms of Knowledge*, 4).

One also recalls here the observation of the eminent, post-colonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, who laments the fact that few if any Indian social scientists or philosophers are capable of seriously arguing with the thirteenth-century Nyaya thinker Gangesa or with the grammarian and linguistic philosopher Bartrihari (5th to 6th centuries), or with the tenth- or eleventh-century Shaivite philosopher Abhinavagupta, as they set out to study social practices in modern India. “Sad though it is,” Chakrabarty notes, “one result of European colonial rule in South Asia is that the intellectual traditions once unbroken and alive in Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic are now only matters of historical research for most—perhaps all—modern social scientists in the region. They treat these traditions as truly dead, as history” (*Provincializing Europe*, 5-6). In other words, the interlocutors that our social scientists look up to are a Hegel, or a Marx, or a Weber rather than the aforementioned figures. As scholars have pointed out, colonization denies the epistemically colonized access to their own past. By imposing a colonial mode of thinking through language, it restricts the capacity of indigenous languages to represent reality. The colonialist project claims that the languages of the colonized lack “technical” or “scientific” vocabulary (recall Macaulay’s verdict). Epistemic colonization thus removes the archives, renders history as blank, and blurs faces and names. It destroys the capacity of the colonized to represent their own tradition in categories other than those given to them by their European benefactors.

I am not as pessimistic as Chakrabarty, but let us acknowledge that in light of such a deeply entrenched epistemic colonialism, the call for a

decolonization of the Muslim mind cannot be more urgent.<sup>1</sup> The word “decolonization” is closely related to the term “decoloniality,” which goes back to the writings of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Sylvia Wynter, Sabelo Gatsheni, and others in the postwar (i.e., WW II) period. As Mignolo explains, decolonial thinking aims to dissociate the rest of us from the epistemic suppositions common to all the areas of knowledge initiated in the Western world since the European Renaissance and consolidated through the Enlightenment. It is to dissociate ourselves from the preposterous stance that a specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnicity should be taken as universal rationality, even though such an ethnicity is called Western Europe because this actually pretends to impose a provincialism as universalism (as Chakrabarty and others have argued). Moreover, decolonial thinking involves attaining what Gatsheni calls “epistemic freedom.” For Gatsheni, epistemic freedom is fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop indigenous methodologies, and write from one’s historical situatedness while unencumbered by Eurocentrism.

So, decolonizing is about liberating the “colonized mind” from its Eurocentric, epistemic shackles. In a way, decolonial thinking had begun much earlier. For example, one may think of Muhammad Iqbal from the subcontinent and his critique of Western epistemology and the need to rethink Islam. But in my view, Iqbal concedes too much ground when he says that the teachings of Islam must be understood and interpreted “in light of modern knowledge.” Briefly, he tells us that modern humanity faces a crisis because of progress in modern science, which challenges the conventional understanding and interpretation of religion. The solution, for Iqbal, does not consist in a complete break with the past. Rather, the

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, what I have to say on this topic concerns, *mutatis mutandis*, other traditions such as Hinduism or Buddhism as well.

modern Muslim must confront the challenge of modern science and must endeavor to rethink the entire tradition of Islam while refraining from rejecting it *in toto*. And as I have shown in a recent article, Iqbal provides numerous instances of what such a reconstruction or reinterpretation should look like in practice. Thus, for Iqbal, interpreting Islam in light of modern knowledge means reading and explaining the poet-philosopher Bedil in light of Bergson, the Sufi philosopher ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili in light of Hegel, ideas such as selfhood and consciousness in light of Einstein’s theory of relativity, and Sufism (the doctrine of the perfect human for example) in conversation with Nietzsche.

For all these reasons, I find Iqbal’s perspective highly problematic. It essentially asks us to subject our own intellectual tradition to the “litmus test” of Western modernity, which asserts that modern Western episteme is somehow superior to traditional Islamic and Indo-Islamic episteme. And this is to fall back on Macaulay’s colonialist and Eurocentric narrative mentioned earlier. Also, I must summarily distinguish my own position from that of the contemporary decolonial theorists before moving on to discuss how we can fruitfully decolonize the Muslim mind. Although I agree with decolonial theorists that we must disengage from the corrosive effects of the Eurocentric episteme, we need not go too far in rejecting anything Western, e.g., the contributions of Greek philosophy. From my vantage point, the Greek tradition is part and parcel of the broader Islamic tradition, and in fact, there is every reason to think that the Greek world also belongs to Muslims given their preoccupation with Greek thought for more than a thousand years. Moreover, sometimes decolonial thinkers generalize their reading of Western colonial history and tend to blame Christian theology for all the ills that the Europeans brought to the Americas. It is true that there were murders in the name of Christianity, but there were also Las Casases from the same religion. Furthermore, when

decolonial theorists perform genealogies of crucial terms such as “human” or “nature,” they simplify a lot and portray the Western tradition as an absolute anomaly in human history.

### III

Be that as it may, let me still acknowledge that my own humble thinking on this issue parallels the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism, but I propose a different model of “pluralism” as a way forward (not the one which completely alienates anything Western):

Cultural and epistemic pluralism is the recognition that fundamental questions of philosophy, science, and spirituality have been addressed by major cultures, and that there are multiple valid epistemological frameworks to address the questions of truth, knowledge, and being.

Now the above framework would only make sense if we are able to overcome Eurocentrism and delink ourselves from the hegemonic discourses of the Enlightenment and modernity, which encompass such purportedly “universal” ideas as progress, individualism, equality, empiricism, instrumental rationality, scientism, development, human rights, etc. In other words, we cannot take the *Weltanschauung* of modernity for granted, which is based on the ideology of the Enlightenment, the mechanistic paradigm of modern science, and the Renaissance aggrandizement of human nature. To forestall a misunderstanding at this point, let me make it very clear that critiquing modernity and the so-called Enlightenment (which many in our parts of the world simply accept on “blind faith”) does not mean we have to go back to the times of horses and buggies and stop utilizing technology and other facets of modern life. Rather it is a question of “provincializing” Europe and its modern ideas that are passed off as universal and timeless while originating from very

particular intellectual and historical contexts. Given my time frame, I will not be able to elaborate on all the crucial aspects of the genealogy of modernity, although one cannot think of decolonizing the Muslim mind without going into the very roots of modernity, whose ubiquitous presence affects all our present thinking on important social, economic, political, religious, and spiritual matters. If we are really serious about “delinking” our present and past from the all-encompassing nature of the Western episteme and think about facing the challenges of modernity, we have no choice but to ask the following question about Europe posed by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his *A Secular Age*: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in [...] Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?” That is to say, we have to begin with late medieval thought and the debate between the realists and nominalists on the nature of the universal. We should then proceed to analyze the proliferation of eclectic thinking during the Renaissance. In particular, we should pay attention to the Renaissance’s aggrandizement of human nature, its birthing the idea of the “individual” by way of Petrarch, and its mantra of power and domination over nature. The list can be exhaustive, but one has to understand the contexts of the seminal events of the Protestant Reformation, the Copernican Revolution, the sectarian wars, and the Scientific Revolution—all of which paved the way to the European Enlightenment. To the extent possible, one has to familiarize oneself with the influential writings of Machiavelli, Montaigne, Galileo, Hobbes, Descartes, Boyle, Leibniz, Locke, Newton, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and many others.

There have been numerous critiques of modernity from multiple standpoints, so we can pass over some of the details and simply note that it would be hard to find any serious intellectual who still believes in the

Hegelian myth of the modern age as the creation of great human beings, of extraordinary scientists, writers, philosophers, and pioneers who vanquished the religious superstitions of their time and established a new world based on reason, progress, and freedom. As mentioned earlier, the recent memory of colonialism, slavery, racism, wars, genocides, and climate disasters is enough reason to think that modernity is not so great, although there are still those like the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas who see it as an “unfinished project.” Regardless, there are different ways one can interpret the rise and crisis of modernity. While some see it as the result of the secularization of Christian ideals, e.g., the doctrine of progress as the secularization of Christian millenarianism, others think of it in the more Nietzschean way of identifying it with self-assertion and self-creation. Others hailing from the decolonial tradition link the rise of modernity to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, subjugation of nature, and European colonialism. Still others argue that the fault lines of modernity lie in the great theological struggles that marked the end of the medieval world and that transformed Europe in the last few centuries separating the medieval and the modern worlds.

Be that as it may, for our purposes in this lecture, we need to critically evaluate the notion of progress, which is often seen as essential to the modern self-understanding and the place of science, which is the backbone of modern culture. The notion of progress has come to dominate nearly every facet of modern life, from the division of nations into “developed” and “developing,” to economies based on growth and expansion, to government policies and scientific theories measured in terms of empirical success. As alluded to earlier, the concept of progress can be traced to Christian millenarianism and certain strands within Calvinism that emphasize releasing human energy to transform society and the face of the earth. Or it may be understood in a spiritual sense as in John Bunyan’s 1678

Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In addition to their theological roots, the writings on progress during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment drew inspiration from the scientific achievements of the 16th and 17th centuries, especially the Copernican Revolution and the Newtonian synthesis. The rapid advances in empirical science— e.g., Newton's law of universal gravitation—encouraged an optimistic view of human beings' capability to understand, control, and shape their world. French intellectuals such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and Marquis de Condorcet sought to capitalize on new scientific discoveries, which they incorporated into their writings on progress. In his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* for instance, Condorcet provides numerous examples of recent scientific discoveries that build on earlier forms of knowledge. In general, the popularizers of progress argue that European science, culture, and institutions are the most superior in the world, setting the standards for the rest of the world to eventually be part of the civilized order. Some take things in new directions by arguing for the biological superiority of the European race, as one sees in the writings of such Enlightenment thinkers as Hume and Kant (e.g., Kant's *Physical Geography*). Others such as Auguste Comte draw simplistic conclusions about the ascendancy of “scientific progress” by appealing to the idea that history advances through three successive stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific.

As the Columbia professor Wael Hallaq notes in a recent interview, modernization theory continues unabated in almost every academic field. And foundational to every modernization project is what Hallaq calls a “theology of progress.” This theology is founded on the assumption that time has a linear teleological structure, that this structure is unavoidable, and that the earliest phases of history were preparatory for the later ones, which were in turn simply the means to reach the ultimate summit of real human progress, namely Western modernity. Integral to this understanding

is the notion that no culture or civilization outside of and prior to modern Europe possessed the same validity, competence, and moral and scientific development. Whatever these civilizations had at their disposal, culturally or otherwise, was consumed in the process of preparing for a higher goal, outside and beyond themselves. The telos was Western modernity, which had to be imposed on the rest of the world by colonialism, coercion, and hegemony. I will comment more on the dangerous implications of the modern doctrine of progress, but for now let us focus on the metaphysical foundation of modernity, which comes from the mechanistic worldview of modern science. Few today would deny the global popularity and influence of modern science, so much so that even our ethical aspirations tend to be guided by scientific findings. Take the case of “selfhood” for example. Since the Enlightenment, we have tended to define human identity and worth in terms of the values of modern science, as if it alone could tell us who we are. In the wake of post-Darwinian biology, we are content to quantify and locate human nature inside the cell nucleus. Thus IQ becomes a measure not of what you do, but of who you are—a score for one’s inherent worth as a person. Nonetheless, in the face of colonialism, slavery, and ecological crises, the idea that Western science and technology are the only reliable sources of selfhood and self-knowledge is no longer tenable. Moreover, most of these Age-of-Reason notions of selfhood and identity, and the dominant science-fiction scenarios of post-human futures, have been developed by university-educated men who hailed from the middle and upper classes of wealthy nations of the global north. Their ideas reflect not only the findings but also the values of those who have for too long commanded the science system: positivist, reductionist, and focused on dominating nature. So, it is not difficult to see how defining the self only in scientific terms tends to obscure other forms of identity, such as one’s labor, social role, or moral and spiritual values.

Moreover, with modern science Eurocentrism comes full circle. Truth be told, the topic of modern science, about which a lot can be said, is complicated, and I have a forthcoming book that deals with the philosophy of science as it relates to the nature of reality. Nonetheless, since what I am trying to do here is to deconstruct Eurocentrism so that we can begin to reconstruct our own intellectual tradition, I will offer some cursory remarks. Science (i.e., Western science) has a very complicated history. What many students of science have forgotten today is that the word “science” is fairly new (William Whewell coined the term “scientist” in 1834), and it meant something very different for Newton and Boyle and, of course, for Plato and Aristotle, since the term that was current in Newton’s time was “natural philosophy” while it was “*epistēmē*” in Aristotle’s time. Moreover, science often presupposes a worldview, e.g., reductive materialism/physicalism or methodological naturalism, as in the case of modern science. In contrast to the Eurocentric narrative, one may assert that other cultures also have (or had) “science,” and Western science happens to be one among many others with its particular assumptions. That is to say, science does not take place in a vacuum, as it is colored by a set of epistemological assumptions. At the most basic level, scientific thought presupposes a “subject-object” dichotomy about the world (i.e., realism about the world) that obscures a more basic form of consciousness which I have called “non-reflective consciousness” in my recent book, and which is also discussed by philosophers such as Heidegger by way of the category “presence-at-hand” in his ontology. Following Galileo, Descartes, and Locke, scientific thought also proceeds on the very problematic assumptions of the primary and secondary qualities distinction and the Cartesian bifurcation between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Moreover, in the wake of the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution, a mechanistic understanding of the world came to be dominant, which sees the universe as a self-subsisting machine or a pre-ordained clock. Over time the

scientific worldview also came to deny vertical causality, teleology, and transcendence. And in its extreme form, many claim that science is the only reliable form of knowledge (or that science can explain everything)—a doctrine known as scientism. Although scientism is common among many popularizers of science such as Richard Dawkins, there are others within the scientific community who feel disturbed by such an attitude. For instance, speaking of the ignorance of his colleagues on philosophical matters, the great physicist Erwin Schrödinger says:

It is certainly not in general the case that by acquiring a good all-round scientific education you so completely satisfy the innate longing for a religious or philosophical stabilization, in face of the vicissitudes of everyday life, as to feel quite happy without anything more. What does happen often is that science suffices to jeopardize popular religious convictions, but not to replace them by anything else. This produces the grotesque phenomenon of scientifically trained, highly competent minds with an unbelievably childlike—undeveloped or atrophied philosophical outlook (*Nature and the Greeks*, 12).

Similarly, the Princeton-trained scientist David Berlinski has the following to say about scientism:

Occupied by their own concerns, a great many men and women have a dull, hurt, angry sense of being oppressed by the sciences. They are frustrated by endless scientific boasting. They suspect that as an institution, the scientific community holds them in contempt. They feel no little distaste for those speaking in its name (*Devil's Delusion*, “preface”).

Likewise, in a recent interview with “Scientific American,” influential Harvard physicist and astronomer Avi Loeb comments on the dismal state of the current scientific paradigm:

Too many scientists are now mostly motivated by ego, by getting honors and awards, by showing their colleagues how smart they are. They treat science as a monologue about themselves rather than a dialogue with nature. They build echo chambers using students and postdocs who repeat their mantras so that their voice will be louder, and their image will be promoted ... Which is the other problem with science today: people are not only motivated by the wrong reasons; they are also no longer guided by evidence. Evidence keeps you modest because you predict something, you test it, and the evidence sometimes shows you’re wrong. Right now, you have many celebrated scientists doing mathematical gymnastics about lots of untestable things: string theory, the multiverse, even the theory of cosmic inflation (*“Scientific American”*).

#### IV

One can go on to show many similar pronouncements on the current paradigm of science, but the abovementioned quotes should be sufficient to dismantle the triumphalist vision of modern science. Still, one must be careful here to distinguish between science itself and the scientific worldview, for the latter involves the philosophical ideas of materialism, reductionism, scientism, etc., which are beyond the purview of science per se. In any event, the purpose of the above analysis was to show the epistemological tyrannies of Western science, not to reject science in general. This is because scientific activities in Islam were conducted under a different set of metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. As explained

by Islamic philosophers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic science exemplifies the unity, hierarchy, and interrelatedness of all that exists in both the natural world and beyond (see Fig. 1). Islamic science is grounded in the worldview of *tawhid* or the oneness of reality into which various perspectives from foreign civilizations, e.g., Greek and Indian, were historically integrated. The scientific impulse is driven by the search for truth, as al-Kindi says:

We should not be ashamed to acknowledge truth from whatever source it comes to us, even if it is brought to us by former generations and foreign powers. For him who seeks the truth there is nothing of higher value than truth itself (*On First Philosophy*, 57).

One can contrast the Kindian spirit reflected in the above quote with the Eurocentric mindset of the Macaulays and their likes, who would fail to see anything scientifically substantial in cultures other than their own. It is thus no surprise that Islamic philosophers and scientists enthusiastically embraced all forms of scientific and philosophical knowledge from Late Antiquity, forming a necessary link between Graeco-Roman culture and Latin, Western Christendom. The following quote by Alvarus of Cordoba (9th century) summarizes the Christian attitude toward Muslim science and culture in the Middle Ages:

The Christians love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books;

they gather immense libraries at great expense; they despise the Christian literature as unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their own language. For everyone who can write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are a thousand who can express themselves in Arabic with elegance, and write better poems in this language than the Arabs themselves (*Indiculus Luminosus*, PL. CXXI, 555).

While Western thinkers such as Scruton (mentioned earlier) recognize this fact, they wonder why Islam “failed” to keep the momentum of scientific inquiry alive after al-Ghazali’s supposed attack on philosophy in the eleventh century (I say “supposed” because al-Ghazali was not against philosophy in general). Now nothing could be further from the truth, although it is unfortunate that most Muslim intellectuals have fallen prey to this false narrative! Still now I hear Muslim intellectuals making the facile claim that “Islam had a so-called Golden Age somewhere back in the Middle Ages.” But even if we assume for the sake of argument that the Islamic intellectual tradition declined after the twelfth century, the Golden Age of Islam is of passing historical interest to contemporary Muslim thinkers. Whereas ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle still figure in Western curricula in, say, political science, such is not the case with Muslims when they study political science. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that we end up learning almost entirely about Western political thought through Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Schmitt, Agamben, etc., rather than about Islamic or for that matter Indian (Hindu-Buddhist-Islamic etc.) political thought when we study political science. Kudos to epistemic colonization!

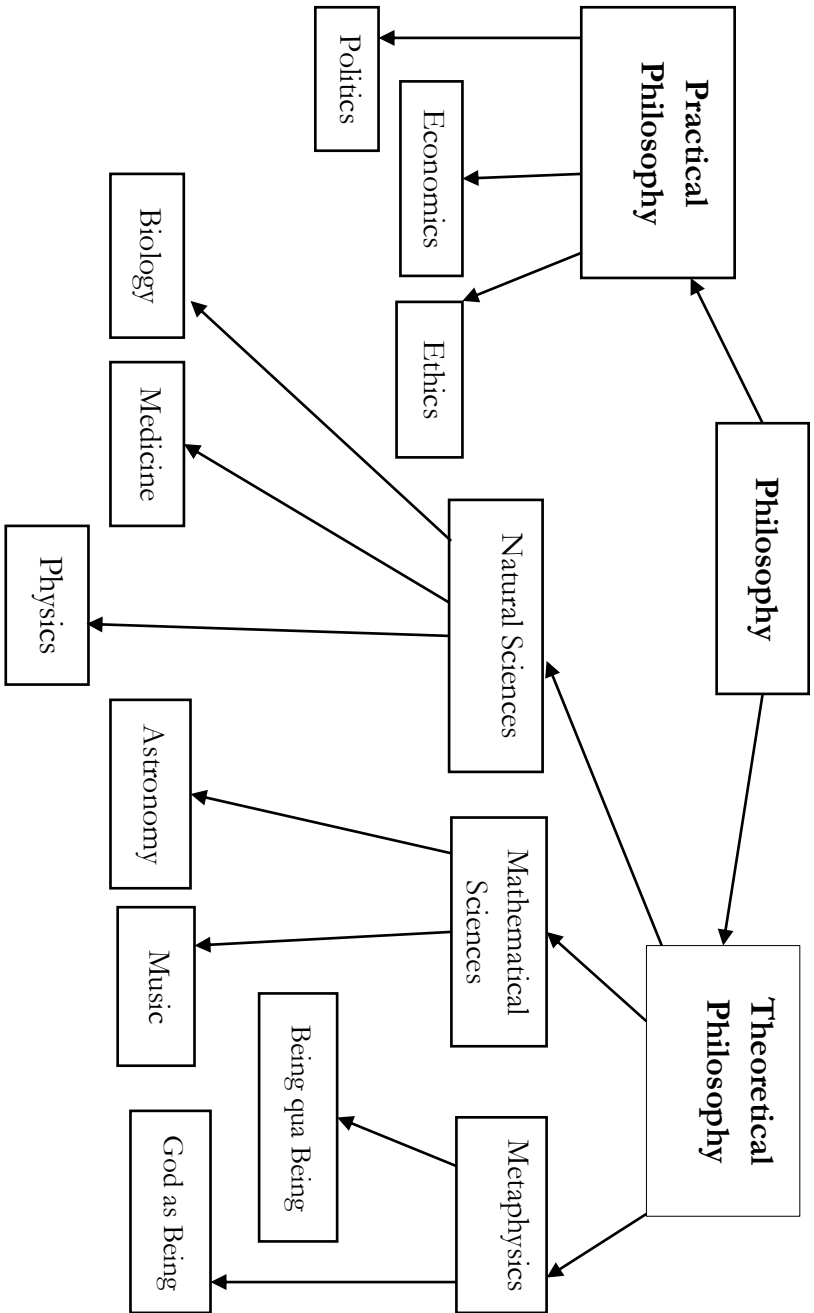


Fig. 1: Classification of the Sciences in Islam

Be that as it may, many Muslims still believe that the Golden Age of Islamic civilization had come to an end in the 12th or 13th century, giving way to a “dark age” of intellectual decline—an age of imitation and compilation—that lasted until modern times. Yet recent scholarship has shown that while different disciplines enjoyed varying careers at different times, on the whole, a serious and prolific rationalist enterprise in the Islamic world thrived well into the 16th and 17th centuries, and in some cases well into the 19th and 20th centuries. This is a topic for another day, but I can at least refer the reader to the works of George Saliba, Dimitri Gutas, David King, Jamil Ragep, Ahmad Dallal, Robert Morrison, Emilie-Savage Smith, Nahyan Fancy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Henry Corbin, Khaled El-Rouayheb, Asad Ahmed, Robert Wisnovsky, and others, who have made available mountains of evidence demonstrating this claim.

One can now see the problems of affirming the decline narrative, alongside assuming the Enlightenment adoption of mathematical-historical reason as the sole criterion of *what counts as intellectual progress*, as with Scruton and Israel. This narrative reduces the complexity of the multifaceted relationship between “religion and reason” in Islam to a series of simple assertions, e.g., that there existed an eternal feud between theology and philosophical reason or that Islamic philosophers would always hide their true beliefs for fear of persecution by religious scholars, and so on. More importantly, the decline narrative naively assumes that most of the issues associated with Islam today such as Islamism, extremism, and violence can be traced back to the simple fact that Muslim theologians in the past had succeeded in banishing “reason” from the sphere of religion, thereby paving the way to blind faith, bigotry, fanaticism, and intolerance.

And more often than not, such self-serving narratives provide the critic with all kinds of justifications to ultimately prescribe Western-style reform and enlightenment to Muslims, which may be seen as a form of cultural

imperialism. It is thus no surprise that prominent Western intellectuals such as Richard Rorty and Scruton have called for an Enlightenment in relation to Islam to overcome its present social and political ills. Needless to say, such simplistic readings of history only exacerbate the current problems with which these critics are concerned. This is because such explanations divert our attention from the real causes of many of these contemporary problems by substituting them with fictitious narratives that are based on a rather skewed, Eurocentric reading of historical data.

At any rate, if the analyses in the preceding pages hold any weight, we should realize that we cannot hope to decolonize the Muslim mind if we fail to liberate ourselves from the grip of the all-encompassing Western episteme, which has managed to separate us from our own history, literature, science, and philosophy. We must be especially mindful of Eurocentric modernity and its ideas of progress and materialistic science. It is interesting to note that many recent Western thinkers themselves were able to see the dark side of the idea of progress. One thinks of Walter Benjamin, who went on to associate “progress” with “catastrophe” because it is the modern vision of progress that turns the past into ruins and that, in its incessant striving for the new, degrades what is new no longer. In his *Das Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin argues how a faith in progress seems no less to belong to the mythic mode of thought than does Nietzsche’s idea of the “eternal return.” Moreover, the quantitative notion of progress is in direct conflict with the idea of sustainability, which must ground any approach to dealing with the finite resources of the natural world. In his recent *Restating Orientalism*, Hallaq calls for a total demolition of the entire knowledge system of the post-Enlightenment West. Hallaq forcefully argues that Western episteme with its value-free economic and political rationalities has brought the world to the brink of destruction through rapacious capitalism

and genocidal colonialism on the one hand and through ecological disaster on the other.

Notwithstanding such critiques of the Western episteme, it might be argued that it is difficult to think of modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise without invoking categories and concepts that have their origin in recent European history. For some, modern civil life would be unthinkable without ideas such as citizenship, the state, civil society, the public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on—all of which bear the burden of their European footprint. While there may be some truth to this argument, recent increases in racial violence, Islamophobia, and the mistreatment of minorities in Western countries should provide sufficient ground for thinking that Western liberal modernity is far from being ideal, or even the best option we have. But as I said earlier, my approach to decolonization upholds a healthy pluralism that ultimately does allow one to incorporate positive elements from Western thought (but not its Eurocentrism!) into one's own worldview—political, scientific, or otherwise. What is deplorable, however, is the attitude of blindly following the West. As Ibn Khaldun notes in his famous *Muqaddima*, the conquered (read the “colonized”) always want to imitate the conqueror in their clothing, crafts, and customs. It is an unfortunate fact of history.

But why does one think that our own traditions have no equivalents for the various categories of political modernity? Is it not possible to revive the idea of “*sulh-i kull*” (peace with all), which was a key feature of Mughal pluralism? The well-known policy of *sulh-i kull* was a core element of the Mughal statecraft, one that made it arguably the most tolerant and inclusive state in the entire early modern world. As historians have documented, the

idea was used to express the ethos of civility, universal reason, and inclusiveness that Mughal emperors wanted to promote. Yet *sulb-i kull* is one of many such ideas of pluralism. If we study our heritage (including the Hindu and Buddhist heritages) in the Indian subcontinent, we will find numerous treatises expressing ideas of pluralism, tolerance, and justice. The perception of India as a pluralistic society is well-attested in various sources (that does not mean it was perfect), as can be seen in the following poem by Amir Khusrow—the famous thirteenth-century poet and musician:

If a Khurasani, Greek or Arab comes here,  
he will not face any problems,  
for the people will treat him kindly, as their own,  
making him feel happy and at ease.  
And if they jest with him,  
they do so with blooming smiles (*Nub sipibr*).

A recent book by Manan Asif entitled *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* argues how a European understanding of India as “Hindu” has replaced an earlier, native understanding of India as “Hindustan,” a home for all religions. Asif investigates the most complete idea of Hindustan, elaborated by the early seventeenth-century Deccan historian Firishta. His monumental work, *Tarikh-i Firishta*, became a major source for European philosophers and historians, such as Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, and Gibbon during the ensuing centuries. Yet colonialist historians managed to supplant the idea of Hindustan and install “India” in its place. We are thus content with the convention that while Bangladesh came into being in 1971, “India” is something that stretches back to an “ancient” period with thousands of years of history. That is to say, “Early Pakistan” or “Early Bangladesh” seems anachronistic, while “Early India” is a seemingly unproblematic periodization.

Be that as it may, Firishta's history is the first history of Hindustan as an idea and a place that contains multitudes of religions and polities. Unlike other grand history books written by his fellow Muslims that trace the beginning of history to Muslim prophets, Firishta seeks to provide a unified history of Hindustan, stretching back through Noah and Adam to the Indra. That is, in writing his *Tarikh-i Firishta*, Firishta was also consulting various works including the *Mahabharata* (translated as the *Razmnama* during the Mughal period) so that he could account for the intersection of time in both Hindu and Islamic sources. Since the *Mahabharata* talks about a cycle of four very long world ages (*krityug*, *tretayug*, etc.), it seemed difficult to reconcile its conception of time with the Islamic account, but Firishta narrates an incident in which a man asked Ali (the fourth caliph), "Who was there thirty thousand years before Adam?" and Ali responded by saying "Adam." The man kept on asking the same question to which Ali responded by saying "Adam" every time. By making use of this metaphysical account of origin, Firishta suggest that one can conceive of the creation of the Earth as having an unknowable beginning as far as dating is concerned. Adam is always the first regardless of the schema that is at play, and, for this reason, "the sayings of the people of Hind do not appear to be without merit" for Muslims. He then harmonizes the two temporalities by placing the lives of Adam and Noah within *dvaparayug*. One can thus see a brilliant effort to integrate one's Muslim identity into the Indian context. One can get an even better sense of such a pluralistic attitude in Abu al-Fazl's introduction to the *Razmnama* (i.e., the *Mahabharata*). Abu al-Fazl frames the rendering of the *Mahabharata* and many such works as motivated by Mughal pluralism. He relates how the Mughals sought harmony between the "nation of Muhammad, Jews, and Hindus" by making available their "authentic books" in clear and easy-to-understand translations. In Abu al-Fazl's view, the *Mahabharata* is a "work of wise sages," which covers many principles, including the smaller issues

and beliefs, of the Brahmins of Hind. Abu al-Fazl cautions those who display hostility toward other religions and deliberately use texts of religion that are inaccessible due to different languages. Thus, it was decided to translate the *Mahabharata* so that those who display hostility to religion may refrain from doing so and may seek after the truth. In the same breath, one can mention the contributions of Aurangzeb. Recent scholarship points out how Aurangzeb upheld equity, fairness, and a culture of pluralism. This is shown not only through his commissioning of the monumental *Fatwa-yi Alamgiri*, but also through his patronage of the translation of various Hindu texts. In light of the widespread recent sectarian violence in India, these examples cannot be more relevant.

Once we are past Eurocentrism and the Enlightenment ideology, it is necessary to retrieve and revive our own Indo-Islamic heritage in South Asia. We must have a grand vision to reclaim our own tradition. Although in the context of the present Bangladesh our starting point should be the Liberation War and the Language Movement, we cannot hope to sustain a deep Bengali identity without firmly grounding it in Islam and in our Indo-Islamic heritage (the same, *mutatis mutandis*, holds for a Hindu or a Buddhist Bengali identity). This is because Islam in Bengal has had a rich multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural career. For instance, one can mention the poet Alaol and his multi-lingual discourse on poetics and his literary genealogy, which included Sanskrit, Avadhi, Maithili, Persian, and Bengali authors. One can also point to the corpus of mystical texts such as the *Nurnama* and *Nabivamsa* traditions and authors such as Shaykh Chand, Muhammad Khan, Saiyad Sultan, ‘Abd al-Hakim, Shah Sagir, Gharibullah Shah, Muhammad Safi, Ali Raja, Shaykh Mansur, and numerous others. The contributions of these writers showcase Bengal’s rich literary history and point to Islam’s localization in Indian culture. Again, considering the

recent rise in sectarian violence, the revival of Bengal's pluralistic mystical tradition is of paramount significance.

However, it would be premature to limit the retrieval of the Bengali intellectual tradition to Muslim authors only. For Bengal was a place where both Hindu and Buddhist philosophy thrived—each in its own way. Space will not allow me to detail the rich tradition of philosophical thought in Bengal, much of which survives in manuscripts only, but I will at least attempt to mention some of the most salient intellectual currents and figures. During the reign of the Buddhist Pala dynasty (760-1142), Bengal witnessed the birth of the Mahamudra tradition, which produced some of the most sophisticated theories of consciousness and spiritual enlightenment in Buddhism. The origin of Mahamudra is attributed to the Bengali Brahmin Rahula, who later became known as Saraha. Saraha is said to be the source of the first song-poems on Mahamudra. These early songs were written in the vernacular languages of Bengal. Two very early forms of this literature survive—the charyapadas written in old Bengali and the *dobas* written in Western Apabhramsa. The Mahamudra tradition was later transmitted to Tibet and includes such luminaries as Milarepa. Mention must be made of the Bengali philosophers Shilabhadra (d. 652) and Dipankara Srijnana (d. 1054), who both became important figures in the Buddhist tradition. The famous Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang studied Yogacara philosophy for two years under Shilabhadra. He paid glowing tributes to his master as the most profound scholar and philosopher of ancient India. In addition, one should mention the Bengali philosopher Shantaraksita (d. 788), who was one of the most important and pivotal figures in the history of Indian and Tibetan philosophy. His contributions to Buddhist thought were particularly noteworthy due to his historical position as one of the later Indian interpreters of the Madhyamaka thought of Nagarjuna—arguably the greatest Buddhist philosopher. Similarly,

Bengal was a fertile ground for Navya Nyaya—the school of New Logic within Indian philosophy. And the most famous name associated with this school is the figure of Raghunatha Shiromani (d. 1547)—a native of Bengal. One should also mention Madhusudana Sarasvati (d. ca. 1640)—perhaps the most important Bengali philosopher in the Advaita, non-dualist tradition.

In addition to philosophy, Bengal was a land where both Tantric and Yogic thought flourished. The Tantric-Vaishnavi-Sufi synthesis of Lalana attests to the presence of a rich mystico-metaphysical thought in Bengal. But one observes such cross-pollination of ideas in many different places in India. Just as Muslim authors such as Saiyad Sultan or ‘Abd al-Hakim made use of “Hindu” vocabulary to explain Islam in Bengali (the word “Niranjan” for God used by these authors is a good example), there were many Hindu learned men who used Persian to explain Indian philosophy. Sital Singh was one such learned man, who defended the philosophy of Vedanta using terms entirely derived from Islamic philosophy. But Sital Singh was not alone in drawing upon the Persian intellectual tradition to explain forms of Indian philosophy. The famous Bengali reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a contemporary of Sital Singh, was in fact trained in the madrasa tradition, and his treatise *Tubfat al-muwahhidin* (Gift to the Monotheists) was written in Persian (with a preface in Arabic) to criticize superstitious practices in Hinduism. It is to be noted that during the height of Muslim power in Mughal India, Hindu and Muslim scholars worked collaboratively to translate a large body of Hindu Sanskrit texts into the Persian language. Recent scholarship has shown how these early modern Muslim and Hindu scholars drew upon their respective religious, philosophical, and literary traditions to forge a common vocabulary so that they could understand one another. This short foray into the intellectual currents of Bengal would remain incomplete if we do not mention the poet-emperor Rabindranath

Tagore and his deep love for the mystical tradition of Sufism and the great Persian poet Hafez. When Tagore visited Hafez's mausoleum in Shiraz, he was so captivated by his communion with the Persian poet's spirit that he said, "I am like one of those preceding Sufi saints, poets, and artists; only I have come with the language of today."

Let us come back to the analogy I mentioned at the beginning of this lecture. In order to decolonize the Muslim mind, we must be able to deconstruct the Western episteme, and this involves dissociating ourselves from the Eurocentric knowledge-system that gradually became ascendent since the Renaissance through such ideas as progress and modernity. However, this does not mean we need to discontinue dialogue with Western thought, as explained earlier. Rather it means retrieving and reviving our own intellectual heritage and being able to *think* with the categories and concepts derived from that heritage. Now in light of the postcolonial situation where the intellectual and linguistic connection with our own tradition is severed, this is a tremendous challenge. What is more, many of us simply think the Indo-Islamic heritage that I mentioned has little relevance to address contemporary challenges. Yet unless we are able to ground our self-identity in our own intellectual tradition, we will be held captive to the web of epistemic colonialism. We might be comfortable offering our prayers as Muslims, but our mental ambience will be permeated by devastating, Eurocentric ideas. We would hardly be able to overcome our fragmented self-image. For all these reasons, the decolonial project cannot simply be a matter of armchair thinking. It must also be a spiritual practice leading to a state of intellectual emancipation.

**Thank you!**





## **A Brief Profile of the Speaker**

### **Dr. Muhammad Umar Faruque**

Inayat and Ishrat Malik Assistant Professor  
University of Cincinnati, USA

Muhammad U. Faruque's research lies at the intersection of religion, science, philosophy, and literature, especially in relation to the Islamic intellectual tradition. He earned his PhD (with distinction) from the University of California, Berkeley, and served as an Exchange Scholar at Harvard University and as George Ames Postdoctoral Fellow at Fordham University. His highly acclaimed book "Sculpting the Self: Islam, Selfhood and Human Flourishing" (University of Michigan Press, 2021) addresses "what it means to be human" in a secular, post-Enlightenment world by exploring notions of selfhood and subjectivity in Islamic and non-Islamic literatures including modern philosophy and neuroscience. Dr. Faruque's work has been supported by Templeton Foundation, the Ames Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Bestway Foundation, among others and has appeared in a number of peer-reviewed journals such as *Philosophy East and West*, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* (Cambridge), *Brill Journal of Sufi Studies*, *Religious Studies* (Cambridge), and *Ancient Philosophy*.



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