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Islamic Psychology and the contribution of Islamic psychologists in Social Sciences

Dr Ajaz Ahmad Lone¹

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Suhailah Hussien²

Abstract

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Indexing & Abstracting



Western historians of psychology trace the beginning of the discipline in ancient Greece and then leaping from 3rd century BCE to the 16th Century BC, concentrating only on the period of renaissance and the enlightenment. Ignoring the middle ages in which the actual seeds of the enlightenment were sown. The common belief towards the Islamic scientists is negative and it is believed that the origin and the transmission of knowledge is limited to the Greeks and the West. However, it is also consensually accepted that Muslim intellectuals, scholars and scientists from the 8th, 9th and 13th century made a remarkable progress in the numerous scientific fields including psychology. More than thousand years ago Muslim thinkers and physicians made a seminal contribution to psychology psychotherapy and psychiatry. The restructuring of psychology and other sciences in the Islamic framework entails the identification of the works of Muslim scholars, thinkers and physicians of earlier times which deal with the themes of psychology and psychotherapy. The paper shall focus on the major works of some of the Islamic scientist's, scholars and the modern Islamic psychologists towards the discipline of psychology. The paper shall also focus on the analysis of original Arabic texts and the resent studies of psychologists. We shall put light on the criticism of western scholars on Islam and Muslims, as the Islamic scientists and scholars made an important advancement in field long before psychology's actual birth.

Key words: Renaissance, Enlightenment, Renaissance, psychotherapy, psychiatry.

¹ Dr. Ajaz Ahmad Lone, Higher Education Jammu and Kashmir, India. ajazlone88@gmail.com

² Dept. of Social Foundations & Educational Leadership, Kulliyah of Education, IIUM, Malaysia



Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes. Behavior is anything an organism does—any action we can observe and record. Mental processes are the internal, subjective experiences we infer from behavior—sensations, perceptions, dreams, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings³. In 1879 at Leipzig Germany Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychological laboratory and marked the beginning of scientific psychology. Before long, this new science of psychology became organized into different branches, or schools of thought, each promoted by pioneering thinkers. These early schools included structuralism and functionalism, Gestalt psychology, behaviorism, and psychoanalysis. Soon after receiving his Ph.D. in 1892, Wundt's student Edward Bradford Titchener joined the Cornell University faculty and introduced structuralism. Titchener aimed to discover the structural elements of mind. His method was to engage people in self-reflective introspection looking inward training them to report elements of their experience. Introspection required smart, verbal people. It also proved somewhat unreliable, its results varying from person to person and experience to experience. Philosopher-psychologist William James thought it more fruitful to consider the evolved functions of our thoughts and feelings. Under the influence of evolutionary theorist Charles Darwin, James assumed that thinking, like smelling, developed because it was adaptive—it contributed to our ancestor's survival. Consciousness serves a function. It enables us to consider our past, adjust to our present circumstances, and plan our future. In 1920s a group of German psychologists Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler established another approach to psychology. They believed that there are experiences that cannot be broken down into separate elements, therefore they are grouped. Analyzing these whole units they name it as Gestalt German word which refers to whole. The behaviorist approach was introduced in 1920s by American psychologists John B. Watson and later by the equally provocative B. F. Skinner, dismissed introspection and redefined psychology as “the scientific study of observable behavior.” After all, said these behaviorists, science is rooted in observation. You cannot observe a sensation, a feeling, or a thought, but you can observe and record people's behavior as they respond to different situations. Humanistic psychology rebelled against Freudian psychology and behaviorism. Pioneers Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow found behaviorism's focus on learned behaviors too mechanistic. Rather than focusing on the meaning of early

³Stangor. C , Introduction to psychology,2011.

childhood memories, as a psychoanalyst might, the humanistic psychologists emphasized the importance of current environmental influences on our growth potential, and the importance of having our needs for love and acceptance satisfied. In the 1960s, another movement emerged as psychology began to recapture its initial interest in mental processes. This cognitive revolution supported ideas developed by earlier psychologists, such as the importance of how our mind processes and retains information. But cognitive psychology and more recently cognitive neuroscience the study of brain activity linked with mental activity have expanded upon those ideas to explore scientifically the ways we perceive, process, and remember information.

Islamic Psychology:

“Islam is an Arabic word and denotes submission, surrender and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah—that is why it is called *Islam*. Such a life of obedience brings peace of the heart and establishes real peace in society at large, “Islamic Psychology (Ilm Ul Nafs) is the study of the “self” (nafs) or the “psyche” including the unseen influences, the impact of destiny, and the sway of the shaytaan and the inclusion of the soul. In various verses of Holy Quran terms are mentioned that speak about the state of the human self, such as nafs, spirit, aql, qalb, fitrah, fujura, taqwa, fuad and so on. The term nafs, including the word most often mentioned by the Quran, is more than 300 times. Islamic Psychology also addresses topics within psychology with Islamic teachings, history, values and ideas as the basis such as neuroscience, philosophy of the mind, psychiatry, medicine and therapy. The history of psychology began with the ancient Greeks, but it is what the Middle Eastern scholars of that time took to their houses of knowledge and wisdom that shaped psychology which would later influence Europe as it underwent the first renaissance.¹

The contribution of Islamic psychologists.

Ibn Sina (981-1037 CE) was the major influence upon the history of Islamic psychology. He began with Aristotle's idea that humans possessed three types of soul, the vegetative, animal and rational psyches. The first two bind humans to the earth and the rational psyche connects them to God. In the same way, Avicenna's Islamic psychology proposed that the five senses, shared with animals, were bound to earth. He believed that the ability to reason gave humanity a unique connection to the divine. Avicenna also proposed that humans have seven inner senses to complement the outer

senses.² In the long history of psychology, this was one of the first attempts to try to understand the way that the mind and reasoning operate.

Common Sense: This sense collates the information gathered by the external senses.

Retentive Imagination: This sense remembers the information gathered by the common sense.

Composite Animal Imagination: This sense allows all animals to learn what they should avoid and what they should actively seek in their natural environment.

Composite Human Imagination: This sense helps humans to learn what to avoid and what to seek in the world around them.

Estimative Power: This is the ability to make innate judgments about the surrounding environment and determine what is dangerous and what is beneficial.

Memory: The memory is responsible for remembering all of the information developed by the other senses.

Processing: This is the ability to use all of the information and is the highest of the seven internal senses. The Islamic scholar also understood the importance of the link between mind and body, proposing that a person could overcome physical ailments through believing that they could become well. Conversely, Ibn Sina believed that a healthy person could become physically sick if they believed that they were ill, adding psychosomatic illness to the vocabulary of the history of psychology.³ This mental and physical linkage formed the basis of his approach to mental disorders and he meticulously documented many conditions, including delirium, memory disorders, hallucinations, fear paralysis and a host of other conditions. Certainly, Avicenna stands in the history of psychology as the scholar who first used an approach recognizable to modern clinical psychologists.⁴

Muhammed Zakariyah-E-Razi (864-930CE), known as Razi or Rhases in the West, was one of the great Islamic polymaths who contributed too many fields. In addition to his volumes of work in other areas, Rhazes made some interesting observations about the human mind. In his book, *Teb al-Fonoon*, he made some postulations concerning human emotional conditions and made suggestions for their treatment. In addition, he contributed to the history of psychology with astute observations concerning medical ethics and the use of conditional therapy, centuries before the behavioral psychologists of the Twentieth Century.⁵

The great scholar and Sufi mystic, **Al-Ghazali (1058 - 1111CE)**, wrote the book *Ihya*, which pointed out that children were naturally egocentric. His Islamic psychology proposed that children's desires rarely included the potential consequences to others. Al Ghazali also believed that fear was a learned condition, either taught to children or gained through negative experiences. Al-Ghazali was a firm believer that introspection and self-analysis were the keys to understanding mental issues and unlocking hidden reasons. He also brought into the history of psychology the idea of needs, proposing that the human personality had urges to fulfill certain desires, based upon hunger and anger. Hunger drove such emotions as sexual urges, thirst and hunger, whilst anger drove rage, frustration and revenge. This division is very crude, certainly when compared to relatively modern ideas such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but it did provide some guidelines towards categorizing mental constructs.⁶

Ibn-Khaldun (1332 - 1406CE) further added to the store of knowledge, by proposing that an individual's surroundings and local environment shaped their personality. This insightful view acted as a precursor for modern ideas, such as cultural relativism and the age-old [Nature vs. Nurture](#) debate. He followed the lead of Aristotle and Ibn-Sina in believing that the mind was a *Tabula Rasa*, and that human behavior was shaped solely by experience and education. Najubud din Muhammed, who lived at the same time as al-Razi, wrote extensively about many mental disorders including depression, paranoia, persecution complex, sexual dysfunction and obsessional neuroses, amongst a host of other mental ailments. His observation-based approach certainly influenced many other scholars in the field of Islamic psychology.⁷

Abu Zaid Al-Balkhi (850-934) Abu Zaid al-Balkhi is probably the first cognitive and medical psychologist who was able to clearly differentiate between neuroses and psychoses, to classify neurotic disorders, and to show in detail how rational and spiritual cognitive therapies can be used to treat each one of his classified disorders. Al Balkhi classified neuroses into four emotional disorders: fear and anxiety, anger and aggression, sadness and depression, and obsessions. He also compares physical with psychological disorders and showed their interaction in causing psychosomatic disorders. He suggested that just as a healthy person keeps some drugs and First Aid medicines nearby for unexpected physical emergencies, he should also keep healthy thoughts and feelings in his mind for unexpected emotional outbursts.⁸ Al-Balkhi classified depression into three kinds: everyday normal huzn or sadness, which is today known as normal depression, endogenous depression and reactive depression.

Endogenous depression originated within the body while reactive depression originated outside the body.⁹

Abu Nasr Mohammad Ibn Al-Farakh (Al-Farabi) (870-950) Al Farabi, also known as Alfarabius, Avenasser, or Abynazar was Turkish. He wrote his treatise on Social Psychology, most renowned of which is his Model City. Al Farabi stated that an isolated individual could not achieve all the perfections by himself, without the aid of other individuals. It is the innate disposition of every man to join another human being or other men in the labor he ought to perform.¹⁰ Therefore, to achieve what he can of that perfection, every man needs to stay in the neighborhood of others and associate with them. Al Farabi also wrote a treatise on the Meanings of the Intellect and the therapeutic effects of music on the soul.¹¹

Malik Badri, an internationally renowned Sudanese born Muslim psychologist and psychotherapist is the one of the few contemporary Muslim scholars. Badri's writing and his psychotherapeutic career reflect a vision which is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition. He has demonstrated effectiveness and efficacy of some of the therapeutic methods and techniques such as prayers and meditation which are the part of Islamic tradition.¹² His work on it is *Contemplation: an Islamic psycho spiritual study* 1993. Badri developed the cognitive systematic desensitization which aims at electing the participation and involvement of the patient through an interactive and dialogical with him has been particularly effective with Muslim patient's (Badri 2014).¹³

Conclusion:

Ethnographic and sociological studies of Muslim societies have acquired considerable prominence and silence in the past few years. The literature on Muslim societies and the sociology of Islam is steadily growing. Many universities in Europe, USA and Canada as well as in some Muslim countries have introduced courses on contemporary Muslim societies. Scores of doctoral dissertations and research projects are being carried out at leading universities in the west. A few Muslim sociologists have focused attention on the restructuring of sociology in an Islamic framework and on formulating the principles and premises of Islamic sociology. The material in this area is rather sketchy and scattered and is not easily accessible to students and researchers. By and large, the response of the Muslim elite to the appropriation of science and technology,

modern education and legal and political institutions was far more favorable than to the adaptation of western culture. Islamic reform and rejuvenation movements were launched in various parts of the Muslim world to counter and combat what was seen as the immoral effects of western culture.

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