



Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement (Socio-Historical) Hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT

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This article discusses the double movement hermeneutics proposed by Fazlul Rahman, one of the Muslim intellectuals who played a major role in the development of Qur'anic interpretation in the 20th century.

The idea of double movement is very important to study because it is a new approach that offers a renewal of Qur'anic interpretation, which was previously considered rigid and unresponsive to changing times. The background of this research highlights the intellectual background of Fazlul Rahman, as well as a discussion related to double movement.

The main objective is to analyze how Fazlul Rahman's intellectual background and life influenced his way of thinking and ultimately gave birth to the idea of the double movement. Through a qualitative analysis based on literature studies, this research explores the concept of the double movement as intended by Fazlul Rahman in terms of its mechanisms and application.

The results of the study show that the double movement is a very urgent approach in the modern era, where understanding the fixed nature of the Qur'an requires a double movement, namely studying the conditions when the verses were revealed and also studying the current conditions of society. This study concludes that the double movement proposed by Fazlul Rahman has a significant contribution to understanding the Qur'an contextually, making it one of the important approaches in the tradition of Islamic scholarship.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Muslim communities in the contemporary era face a complex hermeneutical dilemma in understanding and applying religious teachings amid rapid modern developments. Globalization has given rise to new issues that are not explicitly addressed in the Qur'an and Hadith, ranging from gender, democracy, and human rights to issues of muamalah. (Abdullah, 2015) This situation is partly attributable to the tendency among Muslims to regard the Qur'an merely as a legal text, leading to *partial* and *atomistic* approaches to Qur'anic interpretation that produce textual readings which are insufficiently responsive to the changing circumstances of the times. (Rahman, 1980)

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics has developed since the classical period of Qur'anic interpretation. However, classical methodologies are considered inadequate for addressing the complexity of modern issues because they generally rely on *bil ma'tsur* and *bil ra'yi* approaches that are *atomistic* in nature and provide limited space for readers to engage with the text within dynamic contexts. In response to these limitations, various modern Islamic hermeneutical approaches have emerged that seek to bridge the gap between text and context, and between the transcendental and the historical. (Syamsuddin, 2017) Thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Iqbal, as well as contemporary scholars such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammed Arkoun, and Muhammad Syahrur, have proposed alternative methodological frameworks with varying degrees of radicality. (Madjid, 1998) Amid these diverse methodological proposals, Fazlur Rahman's double movement hermeneutics has emerged as an approach that is considered moderate yet progressive, seeking to preserve the authority of the text without sacrificing its contextual relevance.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the discourse on hermeneutics, particularly studies of Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics, has attracted the attention of numerous scholars from around the world. Ulya, in her study, argues that the *double movement* method emphasizes the Qur'an's *ideal-moral* dimension, which is universal, rather than its *legal-specific* dimension, which is local and temporal. This approach has positive implications for the formulation of Islamic law with an ethical orientation. (Ulya, 2011) Similarly, Faiq Ainurrofiq applied this method to the interpretation of a hadith concerning women's leadership and concluded that the inability to assume leadership should not be determined by gender, but rather by leadership capacity itself. Such a conclusion can only be reached through an examination of the socio-historical context. (Ainurrafiq, 2019) Furthermore, a study by Yusuf et al. confirms that this method is not merely interpretive but also contributes to the development of religious moderation in the context of contemporary Islam. (Yusuf & others, 2021)

Although Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics has been extensively studied academically, the paradigmatic architecture underlying his approach has received comparatively little attention. Most existing studies tend to focus on applying this method to specific legal cases, while paying less attention to more fundamental questions, such as: How did Fazlur Rahman construct the intellectual foundations of his *double movement*? To what extent did his view of the Qur'an as a text, as well as divine speech conveyed through the heart of the Prophet, influence the formation of this method? These questions indicate that the theoretical architecture of the *double movement* still requires a more systematic and in-depth philosophical examination.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically analyze Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics, focusing on its underlying theoretical paradigm, the mechanism of the *double movement*, and its application to the interpretation of legal verses. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach based on a literature review of Fazlur Rahman's primary works, this study traces six paradigmatic assumptions that constitute the foundation of the *double movement*: his conception of revelation and the socio-historical context; the distinction between the *ideal* and the *contingent*; social justice as the primary moral orientation; and the urgency of connecting the past with the present. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive conceptual map of Fazlur

Rahman's thought while demonstrating its relevance as a methodology of Qur'anic interpretation capable of addressing the complexities of contemporary Muslim society without severing itself from the foundations of revelation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Fazlur Rahman's double movement hermeneutics have developed across various strands of research addressing its methodological dimensions, applications to legal verses and hadith, and relevance to contemporary socio-religious issues. In general, previous studies indicate that the double movement is a hermeneutical approach that seeks to bring the Qur'anic text into dialogue with its socio-historical context and the needs of modern society. The approach does not stop at a literal understanding of the text but seeks to identify the universal moral values underlying particular legal provisions.

In her article entitled "Hermeneutika Double Movement Fazlur Rahman: Menuju Penetapan Hukum Bervisi Etis," Ulya discusses the double movement as a method for developing Islamic legal rulings oriented toward ethical values (Ulya, 2011). The study emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the legal-specific and ideal-moral dimensions of the Qur'an. According to the study, legal provisions that emerged within particular contexts need to be understood in light of broader and more universal moral objectives, thereby allowing Islamic law to remain relevant amid changing social contexts. Ulya's study thus provides an important foundation for understanding ethical orientation as a central characteristic of Fazlur Rahman's methodology.

Faiq Ainurrafiq extends the application of the double movement method to hadith studies, particularly the hadith concerning women's leadership. The study demonstrates that understanding hadith cannot be adequately achieved through textual reading alone but must also take into account the socio-historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of the hadith. Through this approach, Ainurrafiq concludes that leadership should not be determined solely on the basis of gender but also on the basis of leadership capacity and competence. This study demonstrates that Fazlur Rahman's principle of contextualization can be applied to issues extending beyond the direct interpretation of Qur'anic verses (Ainurrafiq, 2019).

Furthermore, Muhammad Yusuf and colleagues examine the contribution of Fazlur Rahman's double movement to the development of religious moderation. Their study demonstrates that Fazlur Rahman's approach serves not only an interpretive function but can also contribute to the development of a more moderate religious outlook in addressing contemporary issues. By relating the moral values of the Qur'an to social realities, the double movement can serve as an instrument for avoiding excessively literalist religious interpretations while maintaining the connection between interpretation and the sources of revelation. (Yusuf & others, 2021)

Rahmi and Novizal Wendry's study of the double movement in Tafsir Al-Misbah demonstrates the application of Fazlur Rahman's methodology to Qur'anic interpretation in the Indonesian context. The study shows that understanding Qur'anic verses requires consideration of their historical contexts as well as the moral values embedded within them. This indicates that the double movement is relevant not only as a hermeneutical theory but also as an analytical framework for examining contemporary exegetical works. (Rahmi & Wendry, 2019)

Meanwhile, Susanti Vera and Fuad Hilmi's study on the actualization of ideal moral values in Surah al-'Alaq employs the double movement method to explain the relevance of Qur'anic values to contemporary life. Their study reinforces the understanding that the first movement of the double movement is directed toward understanding the historical circumstances underlying the revelation of a verse and identifying its general moral principles, whereas the second movement directs those principles toward addressing the problems of contemporary society. (Vera & Hilmi, n.d.)

Fadhli Lukman's study also constitutes an important contribution to the development of scholarship on Fazlur Rahman and the double movement. The study situates Fazlur Rahman's thought within the broader discourse of Qur'anic hermeneutics and demonstrates the importance of a historical approach in understanding the relationship between the text, context, and moral message of the Qur'an. In the present study, Lukman's work

is used as one of the references for explaining the development of Fazlur Rahman's thought and the methodology of the double movement. (Lukman, 2020)

In addition to studies focusing on methodological applications, Abdul Mustaqim's *Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer* provides an important theoretical framework for understanding Fazlur Rahman's position within the development of contemporary Qur'anic exegesis. Mustaqim emphasizes that an atomistic reading of the Qur'an can obscure the interrelationship among verses and neglect broader moral objectives. In the context of Fazlur Rahman's thought, the Qur'an needs to be understood integratively, such that verses are interpreted not only on the basis of their literal meanings but also in relation to the *Weltanschauung* and moral values underlying them.

Based on these studies, scholarship on Fazlur Rahman's double movement can generally be classified into three tendencies. First, studies that examine the double movement as a hermeneutical method for developing ethically oriented understandings of Islamic law. Second, studies that apply the method to particular issues, such as women's leadership, polygamy, and the actualization of Qur'anic moral values. Third, studies that examine the relevance of the double movement to contemporary socio-religious issues, including religious moderation.

Nevertheless, previous studies leave room for further development. Many studies focus primarily on applying the double movement to particular cases or verses, whereas the paradigmatic architecture underlying the methodology has not received commensurate attention. Fundamental issues such as Fazlur Rahman's conception of revelation, the relationship between the Qur'an and its socio-historical context, the distinction between the ideal and the contingent, the orientation toward social justice, the identification of moral principles, the position of hadith, and the relationship between the past and the present still need to be understood as an integrated paradigm.

Accordingly, this study situates itself within this gap by examining not only the mechanism of the double movement but also the paradigm underlying it. This focus is important because the first and second movements cannot be separated from Fazlur Rahman's epistemological and ethical assumptions concerning the Qur'an. The first movement proceeds from the contemporary situation toward the historical context in which revelation occurred in order to identify general moral principles, whereas the second movement brings these general principles back into the contemporary context through the formulation of provisions relevant to present social conditions.

Therefore, this study seeks to complement previous scholarship by providing a more systematic mapping of the paradigmatic foundations, mechanism, and application of Fazlur Rahman's double movement hermeneutics. It is expected to demonstrate that the double movement is not merely a technique for understanding verses contextually, but a methodology constructed upon the interrelationship between revelation, history, morality, social reality, and *ijtihad*. Within this framework, the understanding of the Qur'an seeks to preserve its universal values and ideal-moral principles while simultaneously enabling their actualization within the context of contemporary social life.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research as its research design. The data sources consist of Fazlur Rahman's works and various relevant scholarly literature on double movement hermeneutics and contextual Qur'anic interpretation. Data were collected through documentary research by reading, identifying, and classifying various sources related to the double movement paradigm, the socio-historical context of revelation, moral principles, and the relationship between the text and social reality. The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach through two principal movements. The first movement examines the text in light of the socio-historical context of revelation in order to identify general moral principles. The second movement contextualizes these principles in relation to the conditions and problems of contemporary society.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Biography Of Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman was one of the leading Muslim intellectuals of the twentieth century. He was born on September 21, 1919, in Hazara, a district in the northwestern region of Pakistan (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Historically, the region was known as a center of Islamic intellectual activity that produced a number of prominent thinkers, including Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi (1703–1762), Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898), Sayyid Amir Ali (1849–1928), and Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938). (Sonn, 1991) The strong scholarly tradition of the region contributed to an intellectual environment that was conducive to the subsequent development of Rahman's thought. Raised in a deeply religious family, Rahman received intensive religious education from an early age. His father, Maulana Shihab al-Din, was a traditional scholar and a graduate of Darul Ulum Deoband who taught him the classical Islamic sciences, while his mother, identified in some sources as Bibi Rahman, also instilled religious values in his daily life. (Moosa, 2000) This family background, deeply rooted in the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, constituted an important foundation for the development of Fazlur Rahman's intellectual personality and orientation.

Rahman's formal education began with the study of the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, and Arabic under the direct guidance of his father. By the age of fourteen, Rahman had memorized the Qur'an and mastered various classical texts within the madrasa tradition. This traditional education provided him with a profound understanding of the classical Islamic intellectual heritage, which later became the basis for his critique of literalism and formalism in contemporary Islamic thought. After completing his basic religious education, Rahman continued his studies at the University of Punjab in Lahore in 1933, where he obtained a BA in 1940 and an MA in Arabic philosophy in 1942. At the university, Rahman was introduced to modern Western thought and academic methodologies that differed from the madrasa tradition. This experience broadened his intellectual horizons and contributed to the development of the synthesis between tradition and modernity that became a distinctive feature of his thought.

Dissatisfied with the educational opportunities available in Pakistan, Fazlur Rahman decided to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Oxford in England in 1946. His academic experience at Oxford was highly significant in shaping his hermeneutical approach, as it was there that he learned to examine classical Islamic texts through historical-critical methods, which he subsequently applied to Qur'anic studies. This period also marked Rahman's transition from a traditionally trained scholar into a modern Muslim intellectual capable of engaging in dialogue with Western intellectual traditions without abandoning his Islamic roots. (Faruqi, 2004)

After completing his studies at Oxford, Rahman taught at several institutions in the West. In 1961, he returned to Pakistan and was appointed to the Advisory Council of Islamic Ideology of Pakistan. However, his progressive ideas, particularly concerning the reinterpretation of Islamic law, the status of hadith, and his rejection of literalism, generated intense controversy among traditional religious scholars and conservative groups. Political pressure and physical threats eventually compelled him to leave Pakistan in 1968 and accept a professorship at the University of Chicago, where he remained until his death in 1988. (Gusmian, 2013) Fazlur Rahman's life, shaped by movement between East and West, tradition and modernity, and academia and practical politics, profoundly influenced the perspective that later found expression in his *double movement* hermeneutics. Rahman maintained that the Qur'an should first be understood within the socio-historical context of its revelation and subsequently actualized within the contemporary context through a systematic and responsible process of *ijtihad*. This approach was deeply rooted in the intellectual and biographical struggles that characterized his own life.

4.2. Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement Paradigm

In the process of interpreting the Qur'an, the central problem concerns the attribution of meaning: is meaning confined to what is explicitly written in the text (literal meaning), or does it also reside in what lies behind the text (contextual meaning)? In this regard, Fazlur Rahman can be categorized as a contextualist exegete. He begins from the assumption that the Qur'an represents God's response to the problems faced by seventh-century Arab society, while also being intended for contemporary society, whose problems and challenges differ substantially from those encountered by the Arabs at that time. (Mustaqim, 2010) Undoubtedly, the primary objective of the Qur'an is to establish and create a just and egalitarian social order. Rahman therefore argues

that the Qur'an is always capable of responding to contemporary problems when understood contextually. Accordingly, he considers it crucial to make a clear distinction between moral values and *legal-formal* provisions, so that the distinction between *eternal-universal* values and *temporal-particular* values becomes apparent. (Rahman, 1980)

The development of original and adequate Islamic thought is a concept that Fazlur Rahman refers to as Islamic intellectualism. One phenomenon that he observed for a long time was the widespread failure of Muslims to understand the Qur'an as an integrated whole. Instead, it has often been approached in a *partial* and *atomistic* manner, resulting in legal rulings being derived from verses that were not necessarily intended to function as technical legal provisions or that may even conflict with the moral spirit of the verses themselves. (Rahman, 1980) One example can be found in the interpretation of the verse on polygamy in Q.S. al-Nisa' [4]: 3.

If the verse is understood in a *partial* and *atomistic* manner, one might conclude that polygamy is encouraged. However, when it is understood holistically and comprehensively by taking into account the circumstances and conditions of Arab society at the time, the underlying moral ideal pursued by the verse is the importance of treating orphans under one's responsibility and wives justly, while the basic principle of marriage is monogamy. Unfortunately, the requirement of justice is not treated as the principal clause. This results from interpreting the Qur'an in a *partial* and *atomistic* manner. (Mustaqim, 2010)

Therefore, in order to realize a life fully guided by the Qur'an, an atomistic understanding of the Qur'an is inadequate. Rather, the Qur'an should be understood as an *integrated* whole, in which word by word and verse by verse form an interconnected web of meaning, thereby producing a coherent and comprehensive worldview (*Weltanschauung*). To establish such an integrative understanding, Fazlur Rahman subsequently developed the concept of the *double movement* as a logical, critical, and comprehensive method for understanding and actualizing the message of the Qur'an. (Rahman, 1980)

This situation was further complicated in the modern era, when Muslims faced the pressure of Western ideas. This resulted in a division between those who readily accepted Western ideas by seeking justification in Qur'anic verses and those who rejected them entirely without a strong methodological framework. According to Rahman, this situation contributed to a prolonged crisis within the Muslim community. He therefore emphasized the urgent need to develop an adequate hermeneutical method. Through the concept of the *double movement*, he offered a blueprint for transforming Islamic intellectual life. (Rahman, 1980) More systematically, the paradigm underlying Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* can be described through at least six key aspects, as follows. (Faroqi, 2004)

First, revelation and the socio-historical context. Rahman strongly criticizes the *dictation theory* of revelation, which regards the Prophet merely as a receiver of the message who seeks to transmit the divine message to humanity, much like an audio recorder that simply records a message exactly as it is given. From Fazlur Rahman's perspective, revelation is considerably more complex. He seeks to demonstrate the creative psychological process of prophetic reasoning in the experience of revelation, in which the source and origin of this creative process involve *human agency* exercised by the Prophet. Although this conception initially generated considerable controversy, Rahman's argument was essentially intended to distinguish the character of divine revelation from other forms of inspiration and to demonstrate that the Prophet was not entirely passive in the process of revelation. For Fazlur Rahman, the Qur'an is the word of God and, at the same time, consists entirely of the words of the Prophet Muhammad; more precisely, it is divine speech flowing through the heart of the Prophet. From this definition, a relational pattern can be assumed among the Qur'an as *the text*, God as *the author*, and the Prophet Muhammad as both *the reader and the author*. Conceptualizing Muhammad as both reader and speaker emphasizes that, psychologically, the Prophet participated both mentally and intellectually in receiving revelation. Understanding Muhammad's participation in the reception of revelation is important for determining how the Qur'an should be understood. The Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum; rather, it emerged as a response to the moral and social realities of the Muslim community at that time. Therefore, understanding the Qur'an requires an approach capable of capturing the universal moral message underlying its historical context. (Susanto, 2016)

Second, the *Ideal* and the *Contingent*. Fazlur Rahman rejects the common view that the Qur'an is a book of law and maintains instead that it is a source of moral guidance (*budan li al-nas*). Accordingly, most Qur'anic injunctions are ethical in nature. Rahman maintains that the Qur'anic ethical-legal injunctions operate at two levels: the *ideal* and the *contingent*. The *ideal*, according to Rahman, represents the Qur'an's ultimate objectives toward which Muslims should orient themselves, and this *ideal* may not necessarily have been fully attainable during the period of revelation. The *contingent*, on the other hand, refers to what could be realized during the period of revelation within the structural limitations of the society at that time. Distinguishing between the *ideal* and the *contingent* requires historical criticism.

Third, social justice as the primary objective. According to Fazlur Rahman, the primary objective of the Qur'an's ethical and legal teachings is to establish social justice. In his view, every effort to understand the Qur'an, regardless of when or in what context it is undertaken, must take into consideration the Qur'anic conception associated with social justice. Furthermore, he argues that establishing human equality is a fundamental objective of the Islamic movement and the teachings of the Qur'an. This objective cannot be realized without genuine freedom, understood as freedom from all forms of exploitation.

Fourth, the identification of moral principles. One issue Fazlur Rahman regarded as particularly regrettable was the neglect of ethics within Islamic scholarship. Works on ethics were not sufficiently developed within the Islamic legal sciences but were instead developed primarily on the basis of Greek or Persian traditions. In his view, the fundamental *elan*, or core, of the Qur'an consists of moral values, from which the Qur'an's emphasis on *monotheism* (*tanbihid*) and social justice subsequently emerges. (Rahman, 1979) To approach the Qur'an from a moral perspective, Rahman argues that Muslims should not represent the Qur'an merely as a legal document regulating what is permissible and impermissible. Rather, Rahman explicitly emphasizes that the Qur'an is a text fundamentally concerned with morality and ethical issues.

Fifth, caution in the use of hadith. In Fazlur Rahman's formulation, *Sunnah* encompasses two dimensions, which he refers to as *prophetic Sunnah*, namely the ideal legacy of the Prophet's activities, and *living Sunnah*, namely the Prophetic Sunnah that was creatively elaborated and interpreted in response to changing circumstances. Furthermore, Fazlur Rahman maintains that the Qur'an and Sunnah are mutually dependent. He criticizes those who argue that the Sunnah is unnecessary for interpreting the Qur'an. Fazlur Rahman argues: (Farooqi, 2004)

"It would be highly irrational to suppose that the Qur'an was taught without involving the activity of the Prophet as its central background activity, including policies, commands, decisions, etc. Nothing can give coherence to the Qur'anic teachings except the actual life of the Prophet and the environment of Arabia at that time."

In addition to emphasizing the connection between the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah, Fazlur Rahman also advocates a prudent approach to the use of hadith, particularly because hadith were compiled after the Prophet's lifetime and therefore have a significant potential for incorporating elements that may not be authentic. Accordingly, hadith should be used only after undergoing historical criticism.

Sixth, linking the past and the present. Fazlur Rahman's paradigm and the theoretical assumptions outlined above ultimately converge in his theory of interpretation, namely the *double movement*. The *double movement* is a method for connecting the Qur'anic teachings of the period of revelation with the needs of Muslims in the modern era. Through this theory, Fazlur Rahman seeks to integrate all elements of his intellectual framework so that the interpretation of Islamic ethics and law does not become trapped in historical literalism while also remaining connected to the sources of revelation. The *double movement* constitutes the core of Fazlur Rahman's conception of Islamic intellectual renewal. Accordingly, its mechanism will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

4.3. Mechanism And Application Of The Double Movement

The Qur'an is *shalibun li kulli zaman wa makan*, meaning that it remains relevant and applicable across all times and places. According to Fazlur Rahman, such an understanding is difficult to find in the history of classical Qur'anic exegesis, as earlier *mufasssirun* tended to interpret the Qur'an rigidly by focusing primarily on its textual content, to the extent that the Qur'an appeared to function merely as a rigid legal text. This occurred because an adequate interpretive approach was lacking. Therefore, Fazlur Rahman argues that the only interpretive

method capable of accommodating the application of the Qur'an to the complexities of contemporary problems is the socio-historical approach that he introduced as the *double movement*. (Anwar & Muhammad, 2022) The *double movement* is a method of Qur'anic interpretation formulated on the theoretical premise that what should be understood and applied from the Qur'an within human life is not merely its literal meaning (*legal specific*), but also its conception of the worldview (*Weltanschauung*) and the *elan* (*ideal moral*) underlying the verses. In simple terms, Fazlur Rahman defines this approach as understanding the Qur'an by moving from the present situation back to the period in which the Qur'an was revealed. The *double movement* is carried out by taking into account the historical context of the verses in order to establish a connection between the *ratio legis* (the rationale underlying a legal determination) and contemporary circumstances. (Rahman, 1980)

The phenomenon of exegetes becoming trapped in the Qur'anic text without being able to understand the spirit underlying it tends to narrow the scope of Qur'anic meaning. This is because the Qur'anic text is constituted through a linguistic system, while language is itself subject to cultural systems and contexts and has limitations in expressing the ideas conveyed by God. Therefore, understanding the Qur'an requires going beyond the boundaries of its textuality in order to identify its more universal *ideal moral*. (Mustaqim, 2010) The following describes in greater detail the mechanism of Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics. (Rahman, 1980)

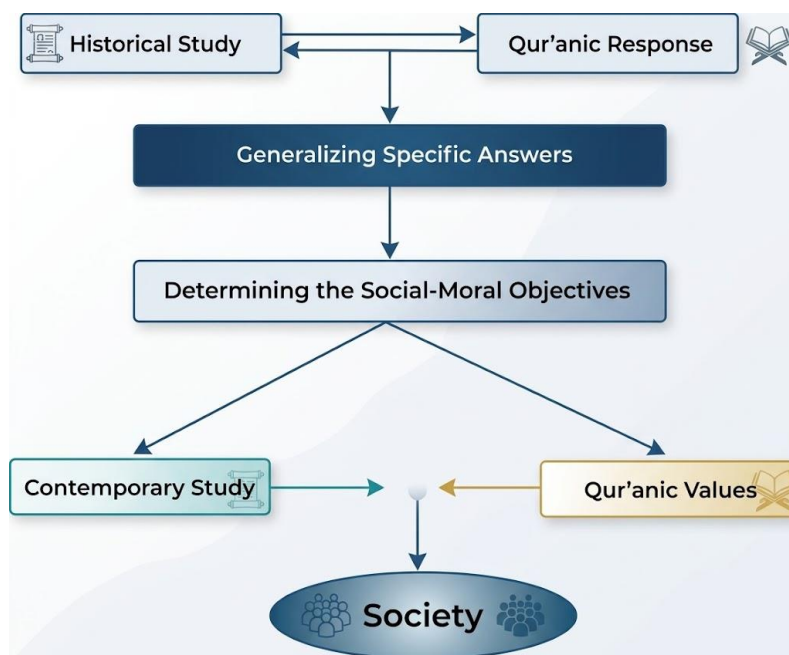
1. The First Movement (From the Present Situation to the Period of Qur'anic Revelation)

The first movement consists of two steps. The *first step* involves understanding the meaning of Qur'anic statements by examining the historical situations or problems surrounding the text, whether specific or general. Fazlur Rahman refers to these as the *macro* situation (sociological conditions) and the *micro* situation (the circumstances of revelation) underlying the revelation of the verses. (Vera & Hilmi, n.d.) Thus, this first step begins with specific Qur'anic texts and proceeds toward identifying and formulating the Qur'an's general principles, moral values, and long-term social objectives. In other words, the first movement requires an understanding of the Qur'anic text as a whole while simultaneously examining its specific context, and then deriving general principles from specific cases understood as conveying a moral message.

The *second step* is to generalize these specific responses and formulate them as statements of broader moral and social objectives that can be *distilled* from specific texts in light of their socio-historical background and *rationes legis*. In other words, once it is understood that particular verses constituted responses to concrete problems faced by society during the Prophet's time, the next step is to identify the core moral and social objectives underlying those responses while taking into account their historical circumstances and the moral rationale behind the establishment of those provisions.

2. The Second Movement (From Revelation to the Contemporary Context)

The second movement is a process that proceeds from general principles toward the formulation of specific views and provisions appropriate to the context of contemporary society, following a critical analysis of contemporary social reality. At this stage, Qur'anic values are not merely adapted to current conditions; they also possess the authority to evaluate, correct, and even transform social reality so that it remains consistent with the moral objectives of the Qur'an. This second movement functions as a corrective to the results of the first movement, namely understanding and interpretation. If the resulting interpretation fails when applied to contemporary circumstances, two possibilities may explain the failure: either the contemporary situation has been incorrectly assessed, or the Qur'an itself has been incorrectly understood. According to Fazlur Rahman, the Qur'an is an enduring source of guidance; therefore, it remains capable of addressing contemporary problems at any point in history when approached contextually. For this reason, the *double movement* approach requires interdisciplinary work. On the one hand, historical inquiry is necessary to understand the context in which revelation occurred; on the other hand, the social sciences are needed to analyze contemporary conditions, complemented by intellectual and moral *ijtihad* to formulate an ethical orientation that is relevant and operational in contemporary social life. The following presents the structure of Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics. (Mustaqim, 2010)



Picture. 1 The Structure of Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics

This structure leads to Fazlur Rahman's socio-historical approach, which constitutes a continuation and refinement of the *asbab al-nuzul* approach. According to him, classical *mufasssirun* paid insufficient attention to the socio-historical approach and generally stopped at the level of verbal historical context. Therefore, Fazlur Rahman was less appreciative of *micro asbab al-nuzul*, or verbal historical context, as traditionally employed by exegetes, because, in his view, accounts of *asbab al-nuzul* often contradict one another. As an alternative, he employed *macro asbab al-nuzul*, namely the immediate background that can be identified through historical inquiry. (Vera & Hilmi, n.d.)

The core of Fazlur Rahman's thought in the concept of the *double movement* is to formulate a comprehensive ethical vision of the Qur'an as a set of general principles and then apply those general principles to specific cases arising in contemporary circumstances. Fazlur Rahman's approach has the advantage of providing a framework capable of accommodating and offering fundamental solutions to various specific problems. If considered within the three basic concepts of hermeneutics, Fazlur Rahman may be positioned as a thinker situated behind Schleiermacher and Dilthey in seeking interpretive products that are objective. (Ulya, 2011)

On the basis of the *double movement*, Rahman clearly distinguishes between the Qur'an's *legal specific*, which establishes norms and legal rules, and the *ideal moral* underlying the Qur'an, which was revealed as a mercy for all creation and emphasizes the values of justice, brotherhood, and equality. According to Rahman, the Qur'an's *ideal moral* refers to its fundamental moral objectives, whereas its *legal specific* consists of particular legal provisions. In Rahman's view, understanding the content of the Qur'an should prioritize its *ideal moral*—that is, its ethical orientation—over its *legal specific*, because the *ideal moral* is general in nature and thus enables the Qur'an to remain applicable across different times and places. (Rahim, 2022)

A particular qualification should be noted: Fazlur Rahman's concept of the *double movement* is effective primarily for legal verses, rather than metaphysical verses. For metaphysical verses concerning concepts such as God, angels, and matters of the unseen, Fazlur Rahman does not employ the *double movement* but instead uses a thematic method based on the principle of *logical synthetic analysis*, in which the verses are understood through an intertextual method and their logical relationships are subsequently identified. Another important point is that the hermeneutical method of the *double movement* does not mean disregarding linguistic approaches, such as *nabwu-sharaf*, philosophical analysis, and *balaghah*. According to Fazlur Rahman, linguistic approaches remain important, but they occupy a secondary position; Qur'anic verses must ultimately be evaluated through an understanding derived from the Qur'an itself. (Mustaqim, 2010)

Through the method of the double movement, Rahman sought to cultivate an awareness in the Islamic world of its historical responsibility on the basis of a strong moral foundation grounded in the Qur'an. His method is applied particularly to legal verses. One example can be observed in his interpretation of the verse on polygamy (Q.S. al-Nisa' [4]: 3):

"If you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with the rights of orphaned women when marrying them, then marry other women of your choice, two, three, or four. But if you fear that you will not be able to maintain justice, then marry only one or those whom your right hands possess. That is more likely to prevent you from committing injustice."

Rahman attempts to analyze this verse using the *double movement* method that he developed. The *ideal moral* of the verse must be identified by considering the socio-historical context in which it was revealed. According to Fazlur Rahman, the *ideal moral* of this verse is *monogamy*. The command to treat wives justly essentially reflects the Qur'an's deeper message, namely the principle of monogamy. The permissibility of polygamy arose from the problem of guardianship over orphaned girls, whereby some individuals sought to marry orphaned girls in order to gain control over their wealth. In addition, the permissibility of polygamy was related to the difficulty of immediately abolishing a practice that had already become deeply rooted in Arab society before the advent of Islam. Textually, the Qur'an appears to legitimize the practice. This was due to the practical impossibility of immediately eliminating polygamy, which had become deeply entrenched in pre-Islamic Arab society. (Rahmi & Wendry, 2019)

If the verse is understood textually, the legal ruling that can be derived from it is the permissibility of polygamy. According to Rahman, however, the primary issue is not its textual meaning but rather the *ideal moral* contained within the verse, namely the concept of *monogamy*. There was also another socio-historical circumstance underlying the revelation of this verse: it was revealed following the Battle of Uhud, when the Muslims suffered defeat. Many Companions were martyred in the battle, leaving behind wives and children. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad instructed some of his Companions to care for them. However, many did not comply with this instruction; some even exchanged the property of orphans for inferior property. Others consumed orphan property, married orphaned girls because of their beauty and wealth, but refused to pay them their dowries. Consequently, Q.S. al-Nisa' [4]: 2 was revealed as a warning from God. (Furhaniati, 2025)

From this historical perspective, it becomes possible to understand why the Qur'an provided such a response, namely permitting polygamy in the context of guardians who failed to treat orphaned girls justly. This makes polygamy an important and contested issue. Classical scholars generally agreed that polygamy was permitted on the basis of Q.S. al-Nisa' [4]: 3 and its accepted practice within the historical Muslim community, as reflected in classical jurisprudence. Rahman rejects this view. For him, the requirement of justice in the verse is impossible for a husband to fulfill, as indicated in Q.S. al-Nisa' [4]: 129. According to Rahman, the Qur'an seeks to maximize the happiness of family life by presenting monogamous marriage as the ideal. (Furhaniati, 2025)

5. CONCLUSION

Fazlur Rahman was a twentieth-century Muslim intellectual born in Hazara, Pakistan, into a religious family rooted in the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. He began his education at a traditional madrasa and continued his studies at the University of Punjab and Oxford. This educational background shaped him into a thinker capable of synthesizing the Islamic tradition with Western modernity. His life experiences between East and West gave rise to his *double movement* hermeneutical theory as a response to the failure of Muslims to understand the Qur'an holistically, particularly due to the tendency to interpret the Qur'an in a *partial* and *atomistic* manner. As a result, the Qur'an came to be viewed merely as a rigid legal text that was unresponsive to the challenges of changing times.

The paradigm of the *double movement* is built upon six key foundations: revelation and its socio-historical context; the universal *ideal moral* and the temporal *contingent*; social justice as the primary objective of Qur'anic ethics; the identification of moral principles as the core of Qur'anic teachings; caution in the use of Hadith through

historical criticism; and *linking the past and the present*, namely, connecting the past with the present. The mechanism of the *double movement* consists of two movements. The first proceeds from the present situation to the period of revelation through an analysis of the macro- and micro-historical contexts in order to identify general principles and moral values. The second proceeds from revelation to the contemporary context by formulating specific provisions through interdisciplinary *ijtihad* to evaluate and transform social reality so that it remains consistent with the Qur'anic ideal. This method is primarily applicable to legal verses. Overall, Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* hermeneutics offers a blueprint for the intellectual transformation of Islam by promoting an understanding of the Qur'an as a universal moral guide that remains responsive to the demands of changing times.

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