



## *On Irshad Manji's "Project Ijtihad"*

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### **On Ijtihad**

Linguistically in the language of the Arabs ijtihad means "to expend efforts in order to reach some difficult matter.

Its religious meaning as understood through shariah (revealed law) it is "expending efforts to arrive at a Sharee'ah ruling. And the Mujtahid is the one who expends efforts for this purpose.

So now the question remains who can do this ijtihad and what are its qualification before it could be attested to as to whether or not someone has reached this level.

According to authentic sources even in the "age of itjihad" that Manji calls as part of her current hype, the one who does ijtihad is called a "Mujtahid". Below are some of the mandates or conditions that are to be met before the rank of being a mujtahid could ever be acceptable in the Islamic nation.

Being a mujtahid has conditions, from them:-

- 1) That he knows the Sharee'ah proofs which he needs in his ijtihad - such as the verses and ahaadeeth pertaining to rulings.
- 2) That he knows what relates to the authenticity or weakness of a hadeeth, such as having knowledge of the isnaad and it's narrators and other than this.
- 3) That he knows the abrogated and the abrogating, and the places where there is ijmaa - such that he does not give a ruling according to something that has been abrogated, nor give a ruling that opposes the (authentically related) ijmaa.
- 4) That he knows from the proofs that which causes the rulings to vary, such as takhsees (particularisation), or taqyeed (restriction), or it's like. So he does not give a judgement which is contrary to this.
- 5) That he knows the Arabic language and usul al-fiqh, and what relates to the meanings and indications of particular wordings - such as the general, the particular, the

absolute and unrestricted, the restricted, the unclarified, and the clarified, and it's like - in order that he gives rulings in accordance with what this demands.

6) That he has the ability to extract rulings from the evidences. And ijtihaad may be split up, such that it may be undertaken in one particular branch of knowledge, or in one particular issue.

What is essential for the Mujtahid

It is essential that the Mujtahid strives in expending his efforts to arrive at knowledge of the truth, and to give rulings in accordance to what is apparent to him. If he is correct, then he has two rewards: one for his ijtihaad, and the other for arriving at the truth - since arriving at the truth means that it is manifested and acted upon. If, however, he is mistaken, then he has a single reward, and his error is forgiven him, as the Prophet (saw) said:-

*When a judge judges and strives and is correct, then he has two rewards. If he judges and strives and errs, then he has a single reward*

Let us review Manji's understanding of "Ijtihaad" and contrast that with the actual progressive understanding of the authentic Sunnah of Islam.

She says

Ijtihad (pronounced "ij-tee-had") is Islam's lost tradition of independent thinking. In the early centuries of Islam, thanks to the spirit of ijtihaad, 135 schools of thought thrived.

1. Islam never lost the tradition of Ijtihaad. Ijtihaad had always existed through its qualified experts. There are sub issues revolved in this mere statement of hers by which her clear lack of understanding of Islam would not be able to entangle constructively in thought. Some of these matters are
  - A. There is a rift between orthodox Sunni Traditionalist which is usually referred to by the west as "Fundamentalists" and the Sufi heretical sects among the Muqalidoon (blind followers) which is commonly referred to by the uninformed west as "traditionalists", amongst which some, a minority rather, of the Imaams have played a role in the propaganda of Muqallid indoctrination. That indoctrination is the lie that people of knowledge among the schools must be followed even from the avenue of taqleed (blind following). It is from this aspect that Manji's view of Ijtihaad and Islam's supposed "abandonment" of it is derived from. However the stance of the orthodox sunni's is quite different with only few similarities with the muqalidoon. Had Manji acquired even a shred of knowledge of Islam she would have understood this clearly as it is as well made clear from a historical perspective.

- B. Most of the Imaams were of the opinion that taqleed was prohibited and that ijtihaad was the key through the understanding of the source legislation. However the difference between orthodox Sunni Imaams and this heretical view of Manji's is that these imams even in that glorious age that Manji praises have understood that the gates of ijtihaad were only accepted and correct upon those who adorned themselves with the qualifications to perform this great and monumental task. Where as in the view of Manji, this specialist field is left up to be practiced by the ignorant and any Joe Blow on the street which only reveals the lack of respect and uncompassionate feelings towards the fields of knowledge and science since the avenue of "ijtihaad" is itself an Islamic science, and like any science requires years and years of sincere and progressive efforts, particularly in the realm of psychology. To demonstrate to non muslims the preposterous affair that Manji wishes for us to adopt as a way a clear modern day analogy would be that of someone wishing for anyone on the street to perform the science of surgical procedures. No sane person in any country nor on any planet would accept this theory as a way of progression. This is the exact analogy that best describe Manji's plot in her theory of "Project Ijtihaad"
- C. The abandonment of "Ijtihaad" as Manji refers it as, was nothing more than a manhaj (methodology) employed by some of the Imaams of Islam for a number of reasons by which she only reduces to be only as "political" which is itself a clear inaccuracy of relaying historical information particularly to non muslims.
- D. Had Manji been informed even in the basics of Islam she would have come across that ijthaaad has different classifications, the two well known ones are
1. Mujtahid Mutlaqa (Mujtahid in the absolute sense)
  2. Mujtahid Muqayyida (Mujtahid in the restricted sense)

As for the first, this is what many of the scholars had agreed that its age or its avenue to reach has ended. However there are a number of proofs that undermine this claim and many of the jurists have not accepted this as possible. So this claim is at best a mere claim with is doubtful. That is because while known have risen to be on par with the great mujtahid aimah like Ahmad Abu Haneefah and Abu Thawr, yet it does not mean that no one could ever reach the rank of Mujtahid Mutlaq. Example of people who have accepted some of the mujtahidoon as being Mutlaq are Imaam Ibn Juwayynee, Haafidh al-Imaam Junayd, and Shaykhul-Islam Ibnu-Taymiyyah, all of which their respective eras were past and outside the era of that great era of "ijtihaad" that Manji refers to for her argument which basically undermines her claim that "ijtihaad" was abandoned by Islam or at least the Muslims.

2. So then she says that due to the spirit of ijtihaad, 135 schools of thought thrived. We say this is not the reason for its thriving. Although it is a reality that many of the schools had suppressed through political reasons by which the staunch muqallid would simply oppose due to their limited and debunked knowledge of Islam, she on the other extreme give all the glory and victory of what she may view as liberty or diversity of thought all to “ijtihaad”.

So she continues with her escapade

Toward the end of the 11th century, the "gates of ijtihaad" were closed for entirely political reasons

A total blunder from reality as the above mentioned statements clearly shows

Now Irshad outlines her “Project”

Project Ijtihad is our foundation to spur a reform in Islam — a reform that enables the emerging generation of Muslims, especially young women, to challenge authoritarianism and restore Islam’s tradition of critical thinking

There are a number of issues regarding this

1. reformation of Islam
2. the encouragement of women of going beyond her bio psychological make up (fitrah)
3. linking this opposition of her natural fitrah (natural encoded way of life) with disobedience to those in authority.
4. calling all of that as “Islam’s tradition of critical thinking”

As to the first, Islam, logically, is not in need of reform. Islam clarified this from a religious and logical aspect. From the religious aspect, the proofs are too numerous to count that even the lay muslims have some knowledge regarding this reality.

As to its logical aspect, for on reforming Islam is like reforming water. You can purify it or filter it but it is what it is, water. Basically to explain in simpler terms, whatever islam mandates to do or not to do is adaptable in any time and place from the time of the prophet to the year 3150 C.E. or later. Islam is not an invention where it can be modified to “fit for the times” as some people are misled to believe. Rather Islam is already from

the get go standardized to be practiced wherever, whenever, however, with whoever. Islam already was revealed with a progressive manhaj (methodology) by which the adherent remains the same in spirit, thought, and livelihood while expanding the human capability of his mental process and innovative accomplishments in this worldly life and break through achievements.

So it is a fallacious fantasy through multifarious elements that “Fundamentalists” wish the muslims and the “whole world”, as the conservatives like to say, to live in “the 7<sup>th</sup> century”. The problem with this illogical mindset unfortunately streaming in the minds of such people is that culture and practices gets mixed up with extreme commitment through religious fanaticism. Thus when the “Sunni” whom the west refers to as “fundamentalists” commands, for example, for a muslim to grow a beard, logically such a command or the act thereof does not fit to be given the label “7<sup>th</sup> century” and likewise it does not fit with the label “it is regressive” since there is no proof whatsoever throughout the galaxy that growing a beard or a women covering has anything to do with the progressiveness or its digressiveness within society which only pinpoints to the fact that the call to the notion that “fundamentalism calls to living in the 7<sup>th</sup> century lifestyle” is nothing more than a false call.

So according to what has preceded then this statement of hers

Our mission is to build a world-wide network of reform-minded Muslims.

Turns put to be nothing more than a false call to find breeding grounds in the field of ignorants and callings such ignorants to be ‘reform-minded’ upon the acceptance of their false call.

Truly, indeed, this type of extremists thinking is loved and promoted by the West, in particular the neo cons whom Sufis exploit such opportunity to over throw the monotheism and sanctity of Allah (God) and his way, the way of Ibrahim (Abrahaam) and the Prophets . The fuel for such ideas is fed from the route of ignorance in the first place regarding what they erroneously think Islam to be or not to be. And in this case such compounded ignorance (jaahil murakaba) may have resulted in the very existence of her emaan (faith) for verily Allah has said which is applicable in every era without doubt

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا  
إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِئُونَ

“And when they meet those who believe, they say: "We believe," but when they are alone with their Shayatin (devils - polytheists, hypocrites, etc.), they say: "Truly, we are with you; verily, we were but mocking." (2:14)

And

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا كَمَا آمَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا آمَنَ  
السُّفَهَاءُ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَلَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ

“And when it is said to them (hypocrites): "Believe as the people (followers of Muhammad Peace be upon him , Al-Ansar and Al-Muhajiroon) have believed," they say: "Shall we believe as the fools have believed?" Verily, they are the fools, but they know not.” (2:13)

And

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَيَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ  
بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

"And of mankind, there are some (hypocrites) who say: "We believe in Allah and the Last Day" while in fact they believe not.” (2:8)