

A.G. Noorani. *Islam and Jihad: Prejudice Versus Reality*. London & New York: Zed Books. 2002. ISBN 1 84277 271 6. Pp. 162 pp. Paperback. Price US \$ 17.50.

This small but elegant volume entitled "Global Issues in a Changing World" falls in a series which states that it is directed to the inquiring reader and social activists in the North and the South, as well as students. This book is a journalistic account of the subject of *jihad* in the modern world and the main readership is primarily for the non-experts.

*Islam and Jihad* is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter "The Spectre of Islam" deals with the global scenario that developed in the aftermath of the events September 11th, 2001. There are references to hawkish thinkers like Samuel P. Huntington and Bernard Lewis who assert that the problems of global radical Islamist movements and then, there are scholars of Islam such as John L. Esposito and Karen Armstrong who argue against viewing the world in dichotomous terms. While appreciating the justification of American anger at what was clearly an act of war, according to Noorani, westerners do not have the serious depth of, and reasons for, anger and resentment against US policies that prevail in the Arab and Muslim world. He notes that the war against terrorism cannot be won through military might, but only through winning the hearts and minds of people, and according to Noorani there is clearly stated goal in US effort towards that end. Noorani compares Western antipathy toward Muslims, which he claims has historical roots in the Crusades, with that of Hindu fundamentalist fears of Muslims in twentieth century India.

In the second chapter "The Long March of Prejudice," Noorani attempts to trace the current state of Islamophobia in western media to medieval polemics against Islam and the Prophet (peace be on him). Noorani believes that historical prejudices have continued to proliferate despite numerous sober voices that have advocated a more objective and sometimes positively appreciative understanding of Islam and Muslims. Within this complex matrix of anti-Islamic rhetoric, Noorani argues that most Indian journalists mimic western Islamophobia to their own context and rhetoric, which continues the remanufacturing of negative stereotyping. While this is widely argued assertion by South Asian Muslim experts and non-experts alike, Noorani does not elaborate on this analysis nor does he critically challenge the assumptions for a more serious discussion.

The third chapter, perhaps the most significant part of the book, entitled "The Meaning of *Jihad* and Fatwa" attempts to examine the core issues. While

the author tries to dispel western myths about the threat of Islamic "holy war" by quoting modernist interpreters of Islam such as Moulvi Chiragh Ali and Muhammad Asad, he does not mention the fact that western fears have justified reason especially in the earlier period of Islam when *jihād fi sabīl Allāh* (struggle in the cause of God) seemed to be equivalent to wars of conquest, domination, and expansion. The Qur'ān itself uses the word *jihād* in a wide range of meanings, including but not limited to warfare (for which it prefers the word *qitāl*). However, the post-Qur'ānic development of *fiqh* took place under the informal direction of a set of political interests that were increasingly becoming imperialistic in nature, particularly under later Umayyad and more obviously under Abbasid rule. *Fiqh* developed in that period tended towards *post facto* legitimization of wars of conquest under the conveniently available title of *jihād* which became synonymous with military action, thereby neglecting the wide semantic field of the Qur'ānic usage of that term. Noorani correctly notes: "The wars launched by the imperial Muslim dynasties were not exercises in *Jihad*" (p. 46). However, it is important to recognize that the original fault lies in classical Islamic sources themselves rather than in western prejudice; as a result, it is not only non-Muslims but also many Muslims who sincerely believe that *jihād* has to do with establishing *Muslim* rule over all others.

After arguing the misuse of *jihād* in contemporary times, Noorani quotes Iranian President Khatami as saying: "Vicious terrorists who concoct weapons out of religion are superficial literalists clinging to simplistic ideas. They are utterly incapable of understanding that, perhaps inadvertently, they are turning religion into the handmaiden of the most decadent ideologies" (p. 58). Noorani fails to view the complexities of *jihād*, specifically the use of *jihād* is less concerned with anti-imperialism and more a manifestation of the nationalistic sentiment in the postcolonial situation where the use of hegemonic violence by superpowers has created an "equal and opposite" reaction from those who resent and wish to resist that domination. This use of *jihād* has a precedence in the nineteenth century anti-colonial movements in different parts of the Muslim world; however, the recent "progress" in technology has converted this mode of resistance into an extremely destructive force that does not differentiate between combatants and noncombatants, and which contributes to a spiral of ultimately uncontrollable and self-defeating violence from both sides. The Islamic justification for this sort of resistance is therefore a highly problematic area that needs to be squarely faced by both jurists and ethicists.

In this context, Noorani quotes from an important paper by Chiwat Satha-Anand (Qader Muheideen), titled "The Non-Violent Crescent: Eight

Theses on Muslim Non-Violent Action" (pp. 58-60), which is a preliminary attempt to claim nonviolent ethics and strategies for Islam. Modern Islamic movements have yet to pay sufficient attention to the potential of nonviolent action as a strategy for activism and resistance, an approach that does not involve the religiously questionable nature and strategically self-defeating consequences of indiscriminate violence or "terrorism."

The fourth chapter "The Very Modern Roots of Islamic Fundamentalism" attempts to deal with modern revivalism and literalism, commonly known as fundamentalism. Quoting Karen Armstrong, the author identifies religious fundamentalism as "... a world-wide response to the peculiar strain of late-twentieth century life" (p. 65), or as a response on the part of the faithful to the challenges of modernity. In defining fundamentalism, the author emphasizes that it "...banishes reason from religion" (ibid.) In this context, the author fails to notice that fundamentalism is very much a "rational" interpretation of sacred texts, and that, far from banishing reason, it has become what it is precisely because it puts too much emphasis on Western forms of rationality. This is evidenced, for instance, in fundamentalism's general hostility towards *tasawwuf* because of the latter's nonrational character, and its preoccupation with proving scriptural validity by appeals to the discoveries of modern science. It can be readily seen that fundamentalism has a predominant interest in material, as opposed to spiritual, reality, which is very much an unacknowledged reflection of post-Enlightenment Western thought.

Noorani goes on to argue that "...there is no such thing as an *Islamic State*; indeed, there simply *cannot* be one" (p. 78), the reason being that Islam does not give detailed prescriptions for constructing institutions of government. While the reason cited is correct, the conclusion does not necessarily follow. It can be argued that Islam does not give detailed instructions for *any* sphere of life, and that, while providing general principles and sometimes illustrative examples, it gives relatively free reign to its followers to evolve whatever pattern of life they deem to be most suitable, *provided they do so by following certain immutable guidelines and avoiding the violation of certain well-defined boundaries*. Consequently, as long as these divinely ordained boundaries (*hudūd Allāh*) are scrupulously respected, the human exercise of freedom in following divine guidelines remains an *Islamic* endeavour, both in individual and collective spheres. Unfortunately, several Islamic movements do make the mistake of identifying certain medieval juristic texts as blueprints for a modern Islamic State, or consider the execution of a particular interpretation of criminal law as the primary purpose of such a State. The intellectual incoherence of much of fundamentalist discourse has been exposed

by Olivier Roy in his *Failure of Political Islam*, as noted by Noorani. This, however, does not mean that the revivalist current in modern Islam is incapable of dialogue with its modernist and liberal counterparts, or that it cannot develop sufficient self-criticism to allow it to overcome its present intellectual stagnation and tendency towards violence. In this context, Noorani correctly emphasizes the importance of economic and social justice as the primary Islamic values that need to be cultivated in the modern world.

The fifth chapter "Human Rights in the Islamic Tradition" traces the currents of democracy and egalitarianism in the Islamic tradition to the Qur'anic notion of *sharī'ah* and the practical example of the rightly guided caliphs. However, the question of why these currents became limited to the realm of the ideal remains unexplored in the book under review. The author points out the importance of dealing with the issue of the status of non-Muslims under Muslim rule in a creative fashion that takes into account contemporary social and political realities. Citing the conduct of 'Umar bin Khaṭṭāb, he argues that there is no prohibition in the *sharī'ah* against the participation of non-Muslims in legislation that is in accordance with Islam, or against their participation in the administration of the State.

The sixth chapter "*Ijtihad* (Reason) and the Challenge of Modernity" serves to further clarify the author's standpoint. As an antidote to fundamentalism, he argues for a return to the Qur'anic text while paying particular attention to its context. He goes on to defend the modernist and liberal elements in nineteenth and twentieth century Islam, citing with approval the contributions of Al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Syed Ahmad Khan, Moulvi Chiragh Ali, Abul Kalam Azad, Muhammad Iqbal, Fazlur Rahman, and Shabbir Akhtar, with particular emphasis on the need to revitalize the practice of *ijtihad*.

The seventh chapter "Epilogue: Time for the Greater *Jihad*" sums up the contemporary situation of conflict between Islam and the West. The author argues that while there are legitimate causes for political discontent among Muslims that are exploited by extremist movements to justify their tactics, it is important that Muslims do not allow themselves to be seduced by such slogans. He calls upon Muslims to turn their attention inward, focusing on the rampant ignorance and moral evils within their own societies, and emphasizes the need to address injustices that plague these societies. Noorani's point, however, is and naïve because societies do not function alone, hence external influences of globalization and political economies of the developed world must be taken into full account in attempting to understand Muslim nations.

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