

Book Reviews

Shaukat Ali, *Islam and the Challenges of Modernity: An Agenda for the Twenty First Century*
Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research,
Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2004
xii+467 pages, Price: Pak Rs.500/-, US\$ 30/-

In his posthumously published book, *Islam and the Challenges of Modernity: An Agenda for the Twenty First Century*, Dr. Shaukat Ali recounts the recent history of the worldwide *Ummah's* response to the affront of aggressive Modernization. The Tenth Edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary states that the word "challenge" is derived from a Latin word *calumninari* meaning "to accuse falsely", and that it means 'to demand as due or deserved; to order to halt and prove identity; to dispute, especially as being unjust, invalid or outmoded; impugn; to question formally the legality or legal qualifications of; to confront or defy boldly; to call out to duel or combat; to invite into competition; and to arouse or stimulate by presenting with difficulties.'

The various divisions in the body-Islam presented in Dr. Ali's book are provoked to one or more of these meanings. The apologists have halted and are trying to prove their identity. The reformists are flying to jettison parts of Islamic culture they consider unjust, invalid and outmoded. The fundamentalists feel called to combat. The ulema are buttressing themselves with legal briefs. Rulers are trying to appear bold and defiant leaders of their peoples. As the author is a true academic, and therefore objective, it is difficult for the reader to discern which meaning he identifies with, but through a close analysis of the order of information within the chapters and the book as a whole, one can appreciate that for Dr. Ali, the difficulties of challenge are an arousal and stimulation — one that he is confident that Islam is "up to."

This fine, scholarly book is comprehensive and lyrical in presenting its research. Rather than chronological, it is organized by topic, beginning with “Muslim Modernism; Rationalists and Apologists”, the initial Muslim response to what rulers and the educated class saw as the wonders of the West. Although the audience Dr. Ali had in mind was the Muslim community, i.e. those directly affected by and responsible for responding to the challenges, the book is a valuable source for anyone who wants to understand the developments in the Islamic world in the last two centuries. We in the West are woefully short of dependable information and are accustomed to getting our images of others served with a gloss of condescension and titillation.

From awe at Europe’s military might in the early 19th century, to consternation and embarrassment when confronted with the West’s material progress, to bitterness and rage during the colonial phase of their histories, Muslims reacted to the hegemony of Modernism. Initially the educated classes were enthralled by some aspects of modernism like organization, rationalism and scientific principles, and apologists were quick to point out that these qualities were no strangers to Islam, having been embraced and used to construct a luminous culture during the Abbasid Caliphate. Other aspects, specifically secularism, nationalism, liberalism, democracy, and materialism were less easily harmonized with the Islamic values of the time, and though supported by the elite and some monarchs, were viewed with suspicion from the earliest introduction to the present by the ulema and much of the *Ummah*. Nevertheless, struggle with these “isms” continues to reverberate in all Muslim countries and will continue their din until Quranic ideals of equality, justice and social stability are realized.

As Dr. Ali so clearly delineates, the struggles regarding Modernism are less with the West than between the various factions of Muslim society. Internal friction regarding modernism began when the often Western-educated reforming elite came into direct conflict with the ulema, who understood their position as interpreters and defenders of the faith to be the same as being defenders of cultural tradition. To the reformers, the ulema have caused the decay of Islam’s progressive propensities, and to the ulema the reformers represent social and moral lawlessness. Ruling groups of whatever title, trying to hold-on to power in the face of external threats and internal strife, have tried to find a balance between the two, sided with

the more powerful, or toggled from one viewpoint to the other. A fourth interest group, the radical fundamentalists, was sickened by the increasing decadence, despotism and economic poverty of Islamic civilization and by the inability of any of the other three parties to effect a solution. They advocate returning to the “pure” Islam of the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions. The lives of the *Ummah* pay the price for the continual and often violent instability as power shifts and each side blames the others for everything from political to natural crises.

Dr. Ali traces the positions, politics and clashes of the interest groups through the books’ chapters, illuminating the intersections of Islam and Fundamentalism, Nationalism, Law, Economics, and finally, *Taqlid*, *Tajdid* and *Ijtihad*. Of special interest are the recent and current experiments of different nations to enact or reinterpret different aspects of *Shari‘ah*. But what, exactly, is Dr. Ali’s “agenda”? It is not a personal agenda, but one submitted in behalf of the *Ummah* who are caught between the extremes of staunch Islamists and reformists, neither of which they can support. In a most balanced and inferential way, with respectful appeal to each faction of Muslim culture, using supports from the Quran and from Islamic history, Dr. Ali advocates the reopening of the gates of *Ijtihad*. He is very specific regarding who, for the purposes of public policy, should be allowed to pass judgment: only those with deep knowledge of the Quran, *Sunnah*, *Shari‘ah*, and the major juridical decisions of one’s predecessors. As Dr. Ali reminds us, *Ijtihad* is nothing more than the process carried out by early jurists during the expansion of Islam from the Arabian peninsula into new lands and cultures, or a tool allowed in the Hanbali school of jurisprudence. He is ever mindful of the charge of *bida‘h*; what he advocates is that the jurists and other learned and qualified Muslims examine the accretion of juridical pronouncements and clear away those that no longer apply at present, as long as their elimination does not contradict the Quran and *Sunnah*. In the same manner, the same examiners could formulate new and needed pronouncements based directly on the Word of Allah (*swt*) and the example of his Prophet (pbuh).

Dr. Ali does not recommend the above process in the name of “modernism” or “progress”, or because he has no respect for tradition, but because he sees Islam as a dynamic, vital force. He includes in his book a beautiful quote from Jamal al-Din Khalid which goes to the heart of the point I am trying to make:

History in the Qur'an becomes unified time — the walls that separate the past, the present and the future collapse and the three times commingle in a common destiny ... the Qur'an remove(s) the boundaries which separate time and show it as a contiguous living unity. The movement of history which encompasses creation becomes one movement, beginning with the day of God's creation of the heaven and the earth and moving towards the Day of Judgment. The Islamic interpretation of history is different from other interpretations because it gives great leeway to the unknown (*ghayib*) factor, past, present and future, and makes it one of the fundamental principles of the faith. (p.112)

One of the surprises and joys which I have experienced since conversion to Islam is the discovery of the timelessness of the Quran, clear even in translation. It is perfect in its illumination of “modern” psychology (among other topics) and is clearly a *dīn* for all times. Though conditions and cultures encountered through distances and through the ages might seem vastly different to other members of the human community, the human heart is transparent to Allah, and it is to that which He addresses His Word. Interpreting His word is not a temporal matter; it is a matter of humility, of recognizing the *ghayib* factor and the limits of human understanding in any age. *Ijtihad* judgments are revocable judgments. Those Muslims concerned with tradition and *bida'h* must know that Allah (*swt*) makes known His will to the sincere seeker through His Word and the life of his Prophet (pbuh), though our fallibility interferes with our reception. A formal *Ijtihad* could only be better than the informal verbal and physical battles that go on every day among Muslims as to what constitutes “true” Islam.

But these last are my words, and not Dr. Ali's. He is not so immodest as to offer his interpretation of aspects of Islam. His is the scholar's route, and what he does is quote others. On page 370 he includes *hadith* of the Prophet (pbuh):

On being appointed Governor of Yemen, Muadh bin Jabal was asked by the Holy Prophet as to the rule by which he would adjudicate. He replied, “By the law of the Qur'an.” “But if you don't find any direction in the Qur'an, how would you decide,” asked the Prophet. He replied, “I will apply the Hadith Sunnah.” “But if you don't find any guidance in the Sunnah as well,” he asked. “I will then exercise my judgement and act on that,” came the reply. The Prophet raised his hand and said, “Praise be to Allah who guides His Messenger as He pleases.”

Despite the current disharmony and violence in the Muslim world, Dr. Ali is certain that Islam has within it the elements to meet the challenge of modernity if only the faithful would realize this. One

hopeful sign on the practical level is that the educated elite have become disillusioned with Western culture and its inability to establish peace, order, justice or morality in the world. One chapter ends with these inspiring words:

The best course of action would be to prove that Islam encourages men to be creative, innovative, and action-oriented. It equips human beings with a discerning eye to distinguish between right and wrong, and guides them on the straight path so that they are not deflected by ghoulish materialism. If this attitude is adopted, there is no reason why the Muslims of today should not be able to accomplish what their predecessors did immediately after the inception of Islam. If we were to approach the contemporary problems with such a frame of mind, we would be able to delete the term westernization from discussion on Islam. The real thrust will be towards Islamization, which would automatically mean rational and scientific understanding of issues and resolution of human conflicts through amity, peace and goodwill. (p.73)

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Dr. Tahir Masood, *Urdū Sahāfat Unnīswīn Sadī Mein (Urdu Journalism in the 19th Century)*,
Karachi: Fazli Sons (Pvt.) Ltd., (n.d.), pp.1281, Price: Rs.800/-

In his *Theories of Mass Communication*, Melvin de Fleur points out that the study of the press in terms of societal variables comes after, and not before, the delineation of the historical development of the press. In the work under review, Tahir Masood attempts just that — a delineation of the Urdu press in the 19th century. Originally, it was his Ph. D. dissertation in Mass Communication.

Among the historians of the Urdu press in pre-partition India three names stand out: Muhammad Atiq Siddiqi (*Hindustani Akhbar Nawisi Company kay 'Ahd Mein*, Delhi, 1957); Imdad Ali Sabri (*Tarikh-i-Sahafat-i-Urdu*, Delhi, five volumes, 1953-1968); and Abdus Salam Khurshid (*Sahafat Pakistan wa Hind Mein*, Lahore, 2nd revised edition, 1969). And with the present publication Tahir Masood adds his name to this list.

Siddiqi covers the initial phase of Urdu journalism till 1857, Sabri delineates the growth of the Urdu press from its fitful inception to 1947, while Khurshid attempts to cover its entire span of some 125 years. And Tahir Masood focuses on the first 75 years of Urdu journalism only. What, however, sets him apart and above other historians except for Siddiqi (especially in terms of analytical vigour) is that Tahir Masood is more comprehensive, more authentic, more systematic, and more credible, the last one if only because of the heavy documentation he provides to his statements in the text.

By any standards, Tahir Masood's is a huge tome — comprising 14 chapters, spread over some 1280 pages. The chapters cover the origins of newsgathering in the subcontinent, Indian journalism before the advent of Urdu journalism, Persian journalism, the beginning and the first phase of Urdu journalism, the goal-oriented journalism of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, political and “social” journalism, journalism in the Indian states, religious journalism, bilingual journalism, satirical and humorous journalism, daily journalism and specialized journalism, climaxed by a brief conclusion. Of the fifteen appendices, fourteen provide the list of newspapers under various categories, which are extremely valuable and call for the recognition of the measure of the author's commitment to meticulous research. Remember, Tahir Masood had spent some four years merely collecting the material, and had visited most of the public libraries and had scanned a considerable number of private collections in Pakistan and northern India. Who else do you expect to go on such a long-winded, exhaustive research safari, but an extremely dedicated soul? The bibliography runs to ten pages and the Index to some 76 pages; probably the most comprehensive in any of the Urdu books published thus far. Some 50 pages cover the facsimiles of 19th century, Urdu papers, mostly of the title pages.

Most writers on the Urdu press have unwittingly fallen for Khurshid's pet and plausibly argued equation of the hand-written “newsletters” of mediaeval India to 19th century Persian and Urdu journalism. So does Tahir Masood, contending vigorously that all the indispensable ingredients of today's journalism were also an integral part of the pre-print “journalism”, and that Persian and

Urdu print journalism was merely a continuation of the 17th century hand-scribed “newspapers” and not an extension of the English press. What makes this rash statement utterly untenable is the prime fact that the “newsletters” fail to meet the three critical attributes or requirements of a newspaper: (i) the particular taxonomy of contents, (ii) a regulated frequency: and (iii) free accessibility to the product by the public. Thus, the difference between Khurshid’s mediaeval “newsletters” and the last 18th century Indian journalism was not a mere lack/absence of a printing system, not a mere difference in the mode of production, but something much more and beyond. It concerns the taxonomy, the periodicity, and the reach of the two different genres of a seemingly similar product — the end-result of intelligence (or news) gathering in two radically different social and political milieus, which in turn were warranted by the prime dictates and requirements of the age in which it was done. Hence the present reviewer’s contention that the newspaper was not a product indigenous to the subcontinent but something altogether extraneous to it.

After all, the homo sapiens have progressed from the dreary stone age to the present glittering threshold of modern civilization only through borrowing, adapting and assimilating elements from each other. For that matter, the Muslims, when they were masters of half of the then known world, shone forth in the various branches of knowledge, in the arts and the sciences, and contributed, substantially and significantly, to the onward march of humanity, if only because they had borrowed, adapted and assimilated elements from the Greek, Syrian Iranian and Indian civilizations. Hence one need not unwittingly feel apologetic in borrowing something from others!

At one place, Tahir Masood remarks that the four-pager *Hickey’s Bengal Gazette* which merely lived for some 28 months caused a “tremendous stir” (*zabardast talatum*) in Calcutta’s (quiescent?) political and social life (p.55). But why? Because of the nature of its contents, its regulated frequency, and its easy accessibility to one and all. Had Tahir Masood only reflected for a while as to why it could cause a stir and why the newsletters could not, he would have easily arrived at the answer: because the

newsletters were meant only for “the emperor’s eyes”, or, at the most, for those at the apex of the administrative set-up, and certainly not for the public eye. And that, in large part, accounts for a cardinal difference between the two purveyors of intelligence. In that sense, the *Acta Diurna*, which used to be posted on the Roman Senate door during Julius Caesar’s time, was more of a newspaper than these newsletters.

One major weakness of the present work is that except for delineating the emergence of the Indian press (i.e., the English and the Bengali press which preceded the Persian and Urdu press) in the second chapter, it fails to take note of the developments in the English and Bengali press, and treats the Urdu press, more or less, in isolation. Hence the development of the Urdu press on a comparative dimension, and in analytical terms is missed out. But such an analytical framework would have called for a wider resource base, spatially, structurally, and theoretically, than Tahir Masood’s present first- information-level approach does. That apart, the work, even in its present format, needs to be more meticulously edited, to cut out extensive rambling and make it reasonably tidy and compact. At another level, the documentation needs to be streamlined, and bibliographical entries organized alphabetically and systematically. For instance, Siddiqi’s works are given at two different places; so also Samiullah’s Journals consulted have been listed, but not the authors and the titles of articles, in the bibliography. The omission of Sujjan Lal is rather inexplicable. Printing and publishing values (in terms of paper, printing and binding) leave much to be desired, and the price is rather hefty for this sort of poorly produced work.

However, all said and done, Tahir Masood has carved out for himself a place — not only as a historian of Urdu journalism, but also on the wider landscape of research oriented Urdu works. One only wishes that he also produces a complementary, but more analytical, volume on Urdu journalism till 1947, since, as of now, he happens to be the most competent person to undertake this onerous task.

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Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam Under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honour World*,
Oxford, UK: Polity Press in association with
Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003.

Akbar S. Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun Chair in Islamic Studies, American University, Washington DC, started his career as a public servant and rose to the highest echelons of Pakistani bureaucracy until 2001. Simultaneously, over the years, he succeeded in carving a niche for himself as an eminent anthropologist and acknowledged authority on Islam whose voice was, and is still, heard and opinions valued in halls of learning as well as of power both in the east and in the west. He has extensively written on the challenges facing Islam in the twenty first century and advocated persistently in favour of a dialogue among the major civilizations of the world in order to promote peace and harmony for the benefit of humanity at large. Published in 2003, *Islam Under Siege*, is his latest publication on the subject.

Partially based on the ideas developed from his lectures delivered at the RIIA, London, and the American University, Washington DC, and articles published in *The Muslim World Today* (London), *The Middle East Journal* (Washington), *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Washington), *History Today*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, the *Independent*, and the *Guardian* (London), the book comprises a rather longish introduction (pp.1-22), and seven chapters, namely 'Islam Under Siege' (pp.23-45), 'What is Going Wrong', (pp.46-73), 'The Failing of Muslim Leadership', (pp.105-22), 'Searching for a Muslim Ideal: Inclusion', (pp.123-38), 'Searching for a Muslim Ideal: Exclusion', (pp.139-50), and 'Towards a Global Paradigm', (pp.151-72).

The unimaginable plight and predicament of his coreligionists spread all over the globe, in the face of the hell let loose on them, under the dubious garb of "war on terrorism" declared by the US in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, recalled to Dr Ahmed's mind a prophecy of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) made during the 7th century AD, to the effect that, 'a time would come when the religion of Islam would become like a piece of coal in the palm of the believer's hand and no follower will be able to hold it.

Consequently, regardless of the unprecedented large number of its followers, the Muslim community then would be powerless like the foam on the ocean waves,' and in view of the helplessness, gloom and despair gripping the Muslim societies everywhere who found themselves in the dock, accused of belonging to a "terrorist", "fanatic", and "extremist" religion, he, like most fellow Muslims, was led to believe that the prediction of the Prophet was not after all off the mark and that Islam was, no doubt, definitely under siege.

It was in the backdrop of these developments that the anthropologist in him, compelled Akbar S. Ahmed, in the wider interest of universal peace and stability, to delve deep into the conundrum facing the contemporary world in the shape of a host of challenges with all their complications and intricacies and try to come up with a viable solution. The present book is the result of this exercise on his part, wherein he attempts to explain *what* is going wrong in the Muslim world; *why* it is going wrong, and *how* we, as citizens of this planet, irrespective of our colour, caste and creed, are to move ahead on the path of global stability and even harmony in the years to come. And in doing so, he takes recourse to the methodology of reflexive anthropology and far from claiming to have answers to the problems facing the Muslim community in particular and the world at large, he raises exploratory questions and suggests possible solutions to them.

According to him, in order to become God's deputy in keeping with the teachings of Islam, human beings are required to follow two categories of behaviour and ensure balance between them. The first relates to rituals and prayers and is primarily designed to create a relationship between man and God; while the second category creates, and is embedded in, broader social relations. Together, the two provide the conditions that go to create a just society. While the emphasis on the first category to the neglect of the second leads to a societal imbalance, the failure to follow the tenets of the second has its own serious drawbacks, as is amply illustrated by the injustice and maltreatment meted out to women and minorities by the Taliban and the negative image and publicity it brought back to Islam and the Muslim community at large. The first category, writes Ahmed, rests on a vertical axis and its

primary understanding is through the filter of theology; while the second is based on a horizontal axis and its primary filter is that of anthropology. Together, they form the Islamic ideal. Thus, to discover the ideal we need to go by a polythetic, and not a monothetic, analysis of the contemporary Muslim society.

If there was any doubt, the events of 9/11, according to him, ensured that the 21st century would be the century of Islam. The religion which looked upon itself as a religion of peace, henceforth, as a consequence of these events, overnight inexorably came to be associated with murder and mayhem. Apart from the fact that the Muslim world population is the fastest growing, these events in conjunction with a host of other unique geopolitical developments, conjure up the image of Islam as a grave potential threat to all other major world religions: Judaism in the Middle East, Christianity in the Balkans, Chechnya, Nigeria, Sudan and sporadically in the Philippines and Indonesia; Hinduism in South Asia, and after the Taliban blew up the statues in Bamiyan, Buddhism. And last, but not the least, the Chinese, whose culture represents an amalgam of the philosophy of Confucius, Tao, and Communist ideology, in their western province of Xinjiang Uygur. Luckily, though there is no imminent danger of the clash of any or all of these civilizations with Islam, but, nevertheless, the author believes that there is no denying the fact that the major world civilizations are not finding it easy to accommodate or even understand Islam, both within their borders, as well as outside them.

The author defends Islam vehemently against all wild charges of 'hate' and 'violence' and buttresses his arguments by quoting issues, episodes and examples of all hues and colours, and garnered from all times and climes, discussed at length, in the light of the fourteenth century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun's concept of '*asbiyyah*, the thread of which quite visibly runs throughout the book. '*Asbiyyah* literally means "group loyalty", "social cohesion", or "social solidarity" and in the present context connotes the fact that moral codes of the rich and poor alike were disrupted in times of change, and hence the fall in the standards of Muslim morality the world over. The upshot of the whole argument is that in order to gain access to a world permeated by complete harmony and

enlightenment, if on the one hand, respect for the individual regardless of his/her station in social life, will have to be ensured by the spread of education and awakening at the widest possible scale and level, on the other, the process of dialogue *between* and *within* different civilizations will have to be pursued vigorously and while doing so, all actors at the international stage will have to shun empty slogans and take a leaf out of the lives of the Muslim saints of South Asia who, centuries ago, through their precepts and practical examples, of “peace with all and malice towards none” popularized the creed of *sulh-i-kull* throughout the subcontinent the reverberations of which can still be heard in all clarity and loudness by all the genuine proponents of peace and stability.

Written in a racy style and imaginative in approach, the book will be read with interest and profit by all categories of readers and researchers for a long time to come.

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Dr. Riaz Ahmad



Tanvir Akhtar, *Political Organizational and Military Leadership in Pakistan*

Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research,
Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, 2004,
127 pages, Price Rs.250/-

Dr. Tanvir Akhtar’s book under review aims at establishing comparative psychological profiles of leadership in Pakistan. His analysis is framed on the conceptual model of leadership wherein the leaders, the followers and the situations form an ecosystem. In the ecosystem all these actors have close interaction.

The author analyses comparative psychological profile of leadership in the fields of army, politics and management. In each field, not only a theoretical model is explained, but by collecting the relevant data in every field, the author tries to

present his observations with reference to situation on the ground. He carries out this task with utmost objectivity.

The author maintains that Pakistan's dilemma since partition has been that she did not have the back up support of the ingrained practical values to match up to the task of nation building. At present, after a lapse of about half a century, the continuing social and moral deterioration has regrettably further polluted the overall ecology. It appears that top level political organizational and military leaders of Pakistan are not right up to the expectations of their colleagues and subordinates.

The gap between the words and deeds of the leaders and the followers has its effects on the overall progress of the system in which they have to function. Elaborating his point, the author maintains that leadership is a process of interaction involving the leader's attributes, followers' needs, and the situation in which leaders and followers both have to operate. Leader, followers and situation continuously keep on affecting each other and also are simultaneously being affected by each other. And, as the situations and followers in the political, organizational and military set ups are different, so the leaders with different sets of attributes or psychological profiles will be effective in political organizational and military set-ups.

The study under review indicates a new dimension for the understanding of leadership. It points out that leadership is a complex social phenomenon and it can only be well understood when the followers' attributions for the leaders are analyzed. Analysis of the data of the study indicates that these attributions for leaders are based on the needs of the followers and the situation in which the leaders and the followers have to operate. The importance of followers, their needs and the situation in which they have to function are integral ingredients for the understanding of leadership phenomenon. The ecosystem of leadership gives a new

direction for the study of leadership on the lines of holistic approach, and places emphasis on the simultaneous interaction of the leaders, followers and the situation.

In sum, the present study has completely encompassed the leader's traits, and the behaviour pattern, but the need still remains to control the intervening variables and the end result variables. So research problems like "how do the leader's personality, values and behaviour interact with followers' personality, values and behaviour" still remains to be researched. Hopefully, in the next edition, the learned author will look into this aspect.

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