Muslims presently number anywhere between 1.2 and 1.6 billion in the world and thus account for between one fifth to one fourth of the world population. However, their influence in shaping the present world order is not commensurate with their numbers. Take any indicator, for instance, the gross GNP of the Muslim world, the Muslim countries’ share in international trade, the voting power of the Muslim countries in the United Nations Security Council (not one of the five permanent veto-wielding members is a Muslim state), the number of Universities in the Muslim countries, the scientific or research output (as calculated by the number of publications in refereed journals, or by the number of patents, or by the cumulative Journal Impact Factor), etcetera. There is not one area where the Muslim countries’ presence or contribution is commensurate with their proportion of the world population. Rather, the Muslim states and Muslim peoples fare poorly on all these counts.

Where does the fault lie? Why are the Muslims so backward? Why are the Muslim countries mostly underlings? Why does a Muslim country not make it to the permanent member status of the UN Security Council? Why do the Muslim scientists and scholars not rise to win the Nobel Prize?

These questions have boggled the minds of many Muslim intellectuals and thinkers in the past two centuries and most of them have penned their thoughts as well. Iqbal S. Hussain’s book is an addition to the available literature on the subject. Hussain’s understanding of the present state of the Muslim world is obvious right from the title cover of the book, where the subtitle of the book reads “Muslims in the 21st Century: Sorrows and Suffering,” end-cover. While one may agree or disagree with the notion that the Muslims are, in general, in a state of suffering the world over, it is very difficult to dispute that Hussain is not alone in such beliefs. The man on the street in Muslim metropolises from Jakarta in the Far East to Casablanca in al-Maghreb, and Bokhara near the Northern frontiers of the Islamic world to Eden at the southern tip of the Arabian peninsula, is deeply depressed at the painful sights of brutalities in Palestine, Kashmir and Chechenya, not to mention the recent civil wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. The communication and internet revolution of the past one decade or so has made the world smaller. The television channels broadcast and the websites permanently document the live video images of bloodshed in many Muslim lands.
It is not that the Muslim lands are, proportionately speaking, at a higher risk of warfare. Rather, there are examples galore in Africa (such as Congo and Rwanda), East Asia (Vietnam and Korea) and Latin America (Nicaragua and Columbia) where most brutal and savage wars of the 20th century have taken place, but the propensity of the electronic and print media to give disproportionately high coverage to subjects of interest of their viewership, leads the Muslim world media to show more footages of conflicts in Muslim countries than in the non-Muslim ones. This, in turn, has imbued and deepened a sense of victimhood among the Muslim public. The role of the Muslim intelligentsia including writers, analysts, television talk show hosts, researchers and scholars is to rise above the ordinary perceptions and see the world in a much broader perspective and inform their co-religionists accordingly. This is where the Muslim intelligentsia is failing miserably. The book under review also suffers from the same defects and the author has not given any additional insight to the worldview from the pulpit.

The author claims that in the wake of 9/11, “without establishing any concrete evidence, the Americans launched brutal attacks in which thousands of Muslims have been killed and symbols of Islamic culture destroyed” (p. 22). As a scholar, it was incumbent upon him to have mentioned the US viewpoint as well, even if only to rebut that, that the Americans have placed the lives of thousands of their men and women at risk, to establish democracy and rid the regions of oppressive regimes. It is true that the much trumpeted weapons of mass destruction were not found in Iraq and Osama bin Laden could not be located in Afghanistan, but there is another side to the story too which should have at least been acknowledged, even if not appreciated or empathized with. After all, many people in the Muslim world are happy that the tyrannical regimes of Saddam Hussain and Taliban have been dislodged.

The author tries to search the Mard-e-Momin (literally: the man of faith) without explaining what he means by the term except suggesting that this concept has been propounded by Maulana Rumi and Dr Mohammad Iqbal (p. 24).

Although the author claims that he has “tried to bring the Muslims out of their self-imposed confinement and to propose remedies whereby some maladies may be cured” (p. 15). However, after going through the whole voluminous treatise, one does not find any SMART suggestion, that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound. Generalized sweeping statements asking the Muslims to concentrate on education and be united mean little in the real world. There is nothing new, nor unique in such rhetoric that has been used ad nauseam for the past several centuries. No nation in the world has prospered by relying on hackneyed clichés; rather, its
the reverse is true. Read the Jewish or the Christian religious literature of the Middle Ages and you will find nothing but sloganeering and jingoism. These nations prospered when they got fed up with empty talk and started concentrating on education and research. Verbosity neither prevents nor rescues a nation from decline!

Saad S. Khan