brief survey of the broader history of the Muslims and can be used for general reading but not as a source book.

Saad S. Khan


Dr Murad Hofmann is an increasingly familiar figure in Islamic scholastic circles to which he has contributed not only through his extensive writings but also his frequent lecture tours. Naturally, the fact of his having been an eminent figure of one of the leading industrialist members of the Western Alliance — a former NATO Director and German Ambassador to Algeria and Morocco — has contributed to his public stature.

Having come to Islam almost a quarter century hence, Dr Hofmann joins a group that, by now, comprises a substantial number of Western writers and scholars of Islam like Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Sirajuddin), Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood and Gai Eaton who enjoy the distinction of being able to see Islam and Muslims from a unique vantage point of newly-incarnated “insiders” who, for varying periods, were “outsiders”. This is a view that bounds on the picture of the earth taken from outer space showing the physical West-East divide as day and night clearly divided by a single line running from north to south that appears on the title cover of this book.

The importance of such Western scholars, who have reverted (the current term for “conversion”) to Islam, in jump-starting a new intellectual movement amongst the Muslim intelligentsia cannot be exaggerated in view of the inferiority complex (vis-à-vis the “developed” West) from which many “modern” Muslims suffer. Thus many Muslims, especially the younger members of the Muslim diaspora in the West and the Westward-looking youth in the home countries, are more likely to be influenced by scholarly works of persons like Dr Murad Hofmann than by persons who are otherwise recognized as intellectual giants of classical Islamic learning in various parts of the Muslim world.
Another reason for the popularity of Western Muslim revert attempts to lead a Muslim intellectual revitalization is that religious and cultural analyses made by non-Muslims born and bred in the Western tradition of detached criticism with its roots in a long established secular enlightenment are quite often anathematic to Muslims who, more often than not, put down their shutters in a bid to ward off negative comments and views that appear to them a mere restatement of historical bias clothed in modern academic discourse. Indeed, at times, such as present-day, non-Muslim Western scholars come down so heavily in their reviews of the sad current state of the Islamic world that Muslim readers are more likely to turn violent and abusive than make any attempt to go behind words that they perceive as outcomes of past prejudice and deep-rooted hatred, and undertake any effort to understand the Western mind and its intellectual conventions. On the other hand, analyses by Western Muslims are greatly welcomed as being positive works inspired by empathy and comprising largely of partisan guidance that is seen to be essential for an Islamic Renaissance. This book is precisely that: full of empathy and partisan guidance; it is a fresh new look inspired by a burning desire to put the present state of Muslim intellectual degradation right.

The present volume came out three years ago, appropriately enough at the time of the start of the new millennium to which it refers in its sub-title: Islam in the Third Millennium. Thus while this review may seem to be at least three years late, it may be said that based on the author’s deliberate choice of the sub-title — as well as a cursory look at the contents — the book has been written with a view to provide new insights on Islam and Muslims for the next 997 years!

Staying with the rather strongly worded title, it must be said that it does not go fully with the contents but seems more of an expression of the author’s enthusiasm and his vision for the creed of his choice. Possibly, it may be a reflection of the demand of marketing people who wish for a title that sells the contents and not the other way around. However, this is not to denigrate the contents which, while certainly pointing out that “the growth of Islam will certainly continue, if only due to the Muslim birthrate” (p. 183), do not very precisely define the way in which the author sees the rise of Islam in terms other than demographic — like political, sociological and intellectual, for instance. Of course, the clues to the author’s thesis and main title of the book abound but have not been brought together in a well-integrated unit (even a paragraph) — for example, “Nobody ... will deny that the future development of his (sic) world is going to be influenced, if not determined by what will happen in the Muslim world and to Islam itself.... Will Islam continue to spread in the West as it did during the last third of the past century? And will
this be a peaceful process?” (p. 4). Perhaps Dr Hofmann would add such a chapter in a future edition that clearly spells out his vision of an ascendant Islam and the reasons thereof.

Although the book is dated 2001, it is clear from the Preface that the author signed it off on the 1st of September 2000, technically still in the last millennium (even though on page one the author mistakenly attributes the start of the new millennium to January 01, 2000) and just slightly over a year from the cataclysmic events of and subsequent to September 11, 2001. All the same, it is striking that the author begins the book in quite a prophetic fashion. Page one of the Preface reads,

Is the future still what it once was? The turn of the millennium was indeed fraught with signs heralding crises whose amplification through the media had the potential to whip up apocalyptic frenzies and irrational doomsday anxieties. However, having faced imminent catastrophe all too long, the Western attitude towards scheduled disaster had been shifting ... (giving way) to a cavalier equanimity (p. 1).

Yes, the “apocalyptic frenzy” and the “imminent catastrophe” came and went leaving behind doomsday anxieties. The scene has now shifted to a ‘cavalier equanimity’ of the 3-Bs: Bush, Blair and Bremer. Keeping up the fight in between Washington and Baghdad, Guantanamo and Abu Gharib, are the likes of neo-cons like Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, and Ashcroft.

As the author notes in the Preface, the book has grown out of his extensive lecture tours that he has undertaken since his retirement from diplomatic service in 1994 and which have taken him all over the world (179 lectures in 10 Western and 11 Muslim countries between 1994 and 1999). These tours were undertaken with the sole purpose of “building bridges of understanding and of allaying the pent-up feelings of anger and aggression to be found on both sides” (p. 5). Interestingly, the Preface is signed off from the one city that has long symbolically represented the interface between the Occident and the Orient: Istanbul. Even though some of the lectures later appeared in Islamic journals, Dr Hofmann notes that the material of the lectures has not been used “integrally” in the book. Thus the book is not a collection of old articles and lectures but a new work built around thought processes emerging over a period of time through his dialogues on the State of Islam at the turn of the second and third millennia. He further states that his observations and opinions, as expressed in the book, are not merely derived from his extensive reading but are based on his experiences as a “Muslim activist.”
Although the book seems to have a scholarly bent (through, for instance, the rare if not a unique case of the five-page Preface itself having 21 endnotes), the author has stated that his intent is not to make it scholarly — but rather an enjoyable reading (assuming perhaps that the two are mutually exclusive). This cannot be denied, that in spite of the extensive references that he gives — covering the whole spectrum from classical Islamic texts to the latest Western works — the book does not come across as a heavy academic volume. Thus the book is for the ordinary reader, albeit one with a slight academic orientation.

Dr Hofmann further clarifies the possible contradiction between his statement that “bibliographic references have been used sparingly” (p. 5) and the extensive bibliography at the end which covers 20 pages and includes “just about any author who has significantly contributed to the world-wide discussion on Islam over the past three decades” (p. 4) by saying that “The size of the bibliography ... is not intended to impress, but to offer an impressions (sic) of the intensity and frankness of the intra-Islamic discussions on crucial issues ... (ii) the growing visibility of Islam ... and, (iii) the increasing role of the English language even in intra-Islamic discourse” (p. 5). With reference to the last aspect, he notes that by now English has replaced Arabic as the lingua-scholaris of Islam.

In fact, the long-established Western intellectual tradition has trickled down to even those segments of society that cannot be called intellectual or scholastic, so much so that even popular books primarily addressed to a non-academic audience, like the present one, are presented in a manner that appears quite scholarly while primarily intending to appeal to the average educated person. Thus, not surprisingly, the fifteen chapters of this book are so cleverly titled that they seem more to be have come from a slick copywriter than the usual academician.

The book is essentially a survey of the current state of the West, Islam, Islam in the West and how may the relationship between the two entities undergo transformation over the new Millennium. The fifteen chapters of the book, while not linked together in any immediate way, are designed to address most of the issues that trouble “modern” educated Muslim minds. These issues include the great civilizational divide between the West and the East increasingly made more prominent by Samuel Huntington with whose quotation the author begins chapter one entitled “Destination West”. This is paired off with chapter two predictably entitled “Destination East.” Other issues include the fallout from the long years of the imperialist onslaught against Muslims and their lands (chapter three), the role of mass media, human rights, democracy in Muslim political tradition, and gender issues especially the status of women in Islam, (chapters four through seven), the
acknowledgement of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and de-divinization of Jesus [peace be on him], race issues, role of the Muslim diaspora in the West, Islam in America, and future of the two camps, Islam and the West as “Petitioners or Partners”.

Though not formally so divided, the book follows a thematic scheme in which the first part comprising four chapters is devoted to placing the issues in the context of conventional logic (West vs East, read Islam). The next three chapters concern the demands that the West addresses to Islam (human rights, democracy, and the status of women). The third part comprises the three demands that Muslims make of the West i.e. that they acknowledge the true status of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), re-evaluate the Trinity in which the identities of God and Jesus (peace be on him) have been jumbled up, and “a more mundane demand: to fight racism more effectively.” The fourth and final part concerns the present role and status of Muslims in the West and their relationships with their Western host nations and their people in the times to come.

Dr Hofmann comes across in the book both as a historian tracing the past fourteen centuries of Muslim-Western relations (assuming that an “other” or a predecessor of the present-day West existed beyond its early borders) and as a visionary reformer who simultaneously addresses, admonishes, and attempts to lead and plead with his two divergent audiences.

The historian begins by citing Renan’s proclamation of 1862 in which he had said, “Islam represents the fullest negation of Europe” while the visionary follows immediately thereafter by asking the leading questions like, “Could ... (Islam) become a world religion, even the dominant one of the 21st century?” and “Could Islam ... turn out to be the very therapy that could save the West from itself?” (p. 4) Dr Hofmann clearly states that this is the background of the book and questions like these are the ones that the book discusses.

The chapters in which Dr Hofmann argues for a progressive new reinterpretation of Islam should be read by all Muslims who have traditionally believed that their creed offers — at least theoretically — solutions for all times to come. Yet when it comes to taking actual practical steps for finding those solutions, the majority of Muslims — even those educated in the Western secular tradition — hide behind age-old interpretations and ritualistic Islam. In chapter 12, the author argues for a reassessment of the sunnah and renewal of fiqh and quotes Shaykh Taha Jabir al-‘Alwani, “Without reevaluation, no reform; without reform, no revival” (p. 175).

Although the book predates 9/11 and thus misses out on the massive breakdowns that have hit the mutual relationship between Muslims and the
West (like the present crises in Iraq and Afghanistan including Abu Gharib and Guantánamo and the siege in Palestine, the search for Osama bin Laden, the immense difficulties of Muslims in America, etc), it is, all the same, a must read for all Muslims who wish to understand the West and all enlightened Westerns who desire to make sense of this “threat to Western culture” (as 48 percent Germans considered Islam to be in a survey cited by the author) (p. 219). Dr Hofmann ends by saying that “one way or the other, Islam is going to play a major role in [the Third Millennium].” This forthright determinism is the bold expression of the fresh blood that has always invigorated Islam and which Dr Hofmann represents. He argues that for Islam’s role in the future to be a positive one, both parties — the West and Muslims — will have to undertake efforts to establish and maintain an understanding that is vitally needed by both.

Unfortunately for the reviewer, the canvas of the book is so large that it defies attempts to confine it within the narrow bounds of a review. Yet, that perhaps is the beauty of the book: the bringing together of issues so vital and themes so significant to the future of Islam and its role in the Third Millennium in such a small volume that lends itself to a range of understandings by a number of divergent audiences from an easy reading by a popular audience to a scholastic engagement by trained academics. The only weakness of the work is a thin spread of the material and this is naturally inherent in any work that is so broad-ranging. Another fact that necessitates a revised edition of the book is that events over the past few years have moved so rapidly that what to speak of Dr Hofmann, even a mystic or a trained futurologist would have failed to paint a fuller vision of the future. Besides, a millennium is one very big chunk to put on one’s plate, let alone to swallow in one go. We must, all the same, praise Dr Hofmann for leading us on to the path on which numerous analysts, writers, politicians, historians, futurists — both religious and secular — would continue to tread for long in new millennium in which we live.

The book is enjoyable yet persuasive reading — at least for “modern” Muslims who must come to grips with the new world in which they live and begin the transformation towards a just order in their own polities and societies. It is here that democracy, human rights and gender justice must now come to the forefront of our discourse and collective consciousnesses. As for the West, it must come to grips with the problems of its self-proclaimed high stature as the citadel of civilization, enlightenment, reason and humanity. To the Muslim world, these seem nothing but tall claims that are not matched by either by way of the double-speak and dual-standards in social issues or the realpolitik of several generations rolling out their zero-sum anti-Muslim
strategies. The author cites not only the now well-documented and widely perceived biases of Western media but also the absence of due procedure and administrative restrictions when it comes to constructing mosques and allowing prayer-calls to be made from them which are treated as threats to public order. Dr Hofmann also refers to the controversy over the Muslim women’s headscarf stating that “a small piece of cloth seems to shake the foundations of entire republics” (on both sides of the divide, whether it is secular France or secular Turkey).

In concluding, it must be said that Dr Hofmann has admirably succeeded in all his aims: showing the mirror to both the West and the Muslims in terms of their fault-lines and also showing them the way forward to self-improvement and mutually beneficial interaction. Undoubtedly Dr Hofmann is a very versatile scholar of Islam — truly amongst the best resource-persons that Muslims can boast of anywhere.

Syed Akif


The dawn of Islam in the Near East, its proliferation in the region, and the subsequent social and religious developments influenced by it is a subject which enthrals many scholars of Islam, and Jonathan Berkey, the author of the book under review, is one of them. Presently, he is Associate Professor of History at Davidson College. The book deals with the religious and social history of the Near East and covers a period of twelve centuries, beginning from roughly the 7th century and coming down to the 19th century. The key question addressed in the study revolves around the issues of religious identity and authority, though the work touches on quite diverse themes.

Highlighting the gradual evolution of Islam over the centuries, the author questions the dominant view of the suddenness of Islam’s appearance in Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century CE. The central argument of the work is that the rise of Islam was not sudden but an outcome of a protracted process. The emergence of a self-conscious Islamic polity and the articulation of a