herself the right to drastic *ijtibād*, to reinterpret Qurʾān in the light of feminism, to sit in judgment over Islamic society, culture and civilization. The result is a most unfair and distorted appraisal.

Maryam Jameelah


Iqbal Hussain’s book is a collection of essays written on the subject of Islam and terrorism. Since the 9/11 terror attacks were perceived to be in the name of Islam, a number of Muslim scholars have tried to deal with the political nature of the Islamic faith. This book is one such attempt. The author appropriately points out that Islam has been on the defensive since 9/11. He laments that: “Presenting the Islamic perspective today in increasingly hostile conditions becomes exceedingly difficult and at the same time increasingly imperative” (p. 14). The author thinks that “a war on Islam” is being waged by the west in general, and the US in particular (p. 30). He points out the crimes of the US which “under the pretext of fighting terrorism” is attacking Muslim countries. Muslims all over the world are convinced, according to the author, that it is not war on terrorism but a war against Islam (p. 30).

The author correctly explains that *jihād* is much more than killing, which is only permitted in certain special circumstances, such as defence of Islam when it is under attack by an enemy. *Jihād* is to be understood as a continuous and life-long struggle for self-improvement as well as for improving the world in which one lives. The true message of *jihād* has been distorted by the western powers. The west wants to undermine the Muslim identity. The US is targeting Muslims as never before in history. The author claims that the Bush administration desires to strengthen pro-American regimes in the Middle East and Asia and at the same time change any regime which does not follow it (p. 31). The Muslim world is not only subjected to aggression by the US but also “endangered by internal state of inertia and lack of purpose and determination” (p. 32). The author, while castigating US arrogance says: “The most outstanding feature of the current US policies is the lack of compassion.
The American politics has become increasingly devoid of sympathetic consideration for the problems facing the world and innumerable ills facing the developing states” (p. 65). What does all this mean for Islam? Are we entering into some sort of a grand clash between Islam and the West? (p. 47). The idea of a threat posed by a monolithic Islamic fundamentalism has been deliberately spread (p. 47). The author implies that some western politicians are guilty of this as a part of their political agenda:

Western politicians insist on magnifying the dimensions of Islamic terrorism. Insisting on his presumptions Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, declared that the assault on New York and Washington was not an attack on America but on western democracies. Repeating such pronouncements with the devotion of a mantra incantation Blair and his likes continue to express their impatience to deal immediately and militarily with the threat of Islamic terrorists—real or imagined (pp. 50–51).

The author’s warning is appropriate and was proven true by later events. The mess in Iraq is the creation of American and the British military occupation forces. They are responsible for the wanton killings and destruction going on in Iraq. Thousands of civilians have been killed and much property destroyed as a result of the war. Many analysts, both inside and outside the US, are convinced of the folly of the American-led ‘war against terrorism’ in Iraq. The author is right to point out that very early on during the Iraqi crisis, Tony Blair, among others, was itching for a fight in Iraq and so was George Bush. The flimsy excuses for attacking Iraq have now been fully exposed. Such was the desperation, impatience and sheer arrogance of these two western leaders that they launched a war on Iraq without taking into account its fearful consequences. The world has suffered much as a result of the arrogance and thoughtlessness of the American and British leaderships.

The author also writes about the western imperialism of the 19th and 20th centuries. In his opinion, Western imperialism went hand in hand with the Christian missionary enterprise. This explains the cry of 1864: “Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to War, with the cross of Jesus, Going on before” (p. 54).

The author recounts Rudyard Kipling’s plea that the rest of humanity should share Christian values (p. 55). He appropriately notes that western high-handed use of power caused a severe reaction in the Muslim world. Deprived of the power to chart their own course and suffering humiliation at the hands of western colonialists also bred a sense of inferiority, cynicism, and resentment in the Muslim world. It is obvious, in the author’s view, that western hatred and ignorance should have nurtured radicalism in Islam (p. 58).
He says: “The western attempt to impose its values and systems on Muslims in particular and other communities in general caused a serious rupture in social, political and cultural structures” (p. 58). The author quotes the famous British writer Karen Armstrong who thinks that Muslims perceive the west to be guilty of perpetuating falsehood and ignorance, especially about Muslims’ religion and Prophet (peace be on him). In her words, as quoted by the author, “part of the western problem is that for centuries Muhammad has been seen as the antithesis of the religious spirit and as the enemy of decent civilization. Instead, perhaps, we should try to see him as a man of the spirit, who managed to bring peace and civilization to his people” (p. 58). Muslims only wish that many more western writers were as fair-minded as Karen Armstrong.

The author blames the US for the events of 9/11. He says: “According to an overwhelming majority of world observers the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington would not have taken place if America had not indulged so excessively in the Middle East supporting Israel and relegating the Palestinian interests in the background” (pp. 64–65). Other words, these tragic events had their roots in the injustice underlying the policies of the dominant powers of the world, especially US. The rise of Islamic extremism is a direct result of this attitude.

The author argues that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and hence the US invasion and occupation of the country were altogether illegitimate. Many observers across the globe will completely agree with this statement. The author says that the US and British motives to invade Iraq and Afghanistan “are the same, which prompted the old colonial powers to capture the colonies in their days” (p. 68). America, however, is acting quite differently. The author thinks that “America, in the new geopolitical situation, may not go out to create an empire on the exploitative pattern of British colonialism, but the national interests that it tends to promote remain the main motivating factors for its imperialist policies” (p. 69). Indeed, the US goal of establishing a permanent base in Iraq and Afghanistan has been borne out by many post-9/11 developments. The author is right here too. The American crusade has many components. It has “very effective channels like the CNN, NBC and a huge range of print media to propogate its views and justify its policies” (p. 74).

Concluding chapter six, the author says:

America may not be the Great Satan as some critics in the Middle East prefer to call it, or the motives of Mr. Bush may not be as evil as he vows to oppose. But his intentions are alarming and his plans to destroy structures of human existence are dangerous. At the same time Mr. Bush may not be a natural hawk with growing appetite to devour human beings. Yet he is entrapped in a network,
which is not of his own making. Events, terrorist operations and hawkish doctrines have put him in a cage, which might be too big for him to escape. ... Physical horrors of New Yorkers cannot be different from the immense sufferings that Afghans or Iraqis feel when their homes and lives are destroyed by the US forces. “Suffering is the epitome of a common experience that is universal and cannot be lessened by transposing it form one to the other section of mankind. It is an experience that terrifies us as human beings and colors every earthly hope with a shade of absurdity”, as a sage said. Hence, even September 11 cannot grant Mr. Bush a global license to kill and maim anyone anywhere in the world, and even a lesser pretext to build empire on the bones of human beings (pp. 76–77).

This outright condemnation of the US does not mean that the author approves of the attacks against US on 9/11. The author certainly does not approve that. In fact he vehemently condemns these acts, branding them as opposed to Islamic teachings.

In chapter 21 the author addresses an important problem facing the Muslims: the current dichotomy between Islam and science in the Muslim world. This is one of the best chapters of the book. Here the author urges Muslims to adopt an enlightened approach to solve their contemporary problems. He recommends that Muslims should adopt a “balanced and pragmatic approach based on intellectual and rational realization of the basic imperatives of religion and modern requisites of materialistic civilization” (p. 234). In other words, Muslims are urged to deal with the present age in an enlightened and rational manner. But this is easier said than done. The author is at a loss to explain how to exactly proceed in the matter. He says: “In Islam there is no conflict between reason and revelation. The imperatives of Islamic faith do not impede the process of progress and development in the sector of science and technology. Faith and reason, education and science can go hand in hand without creating any problems for the fundamentals of Islam” (p. 234). This is one of the common Muslim modernist pleas. It is argued that there is no clash whatsoever between faith and reason. More explanation was required to clarify this important point.

The author avers that Muslims have failed to live up to their own teachings. But the question is: why? More importantly, what can be done about it and how? The author is defensive about Islam and laments that the post-9/11 media in the West has launched a “fresh tirade” against Muslims who have been wrongly portrayed as terrorists and extremists. He says: “The way invectives against Islam have been fabricated and the way new misunderstandings have been created to spread negative assertions are the well-
known facts not hidden from the eyes of keen observers all over the world” (p. 235).

The author believes that one can be a fundamentalist Muslim and at the same time employ reason to resolve the issues of the contemporary ummah (p. 235). The Muslims, however, should not plan to bring about rapid changes, as they can be disruptive of the tradition. The suggestion of cautious change with an eye to preserving the Islamic tradition and legacy is well made. This is followed by the warning that the challenges of creeping western ideas, which are “gradually penetrating into the vitals of Islamic culture and educational institutions” (p. 237), should be met boldly. The author thinks that the “malady” of agnostic ideas is “seriously polluting the mental horizons of young Muslims” (p. 237). Apparently, the author is quite concerned about the danger of Muslim youth being corrupted by the west. The question is: how should the Muslim world respond to the challenges that it faces? The author is seemingly correct in suggesting that since Muslims lack modern knowledge, they are failing to respond to the challenges of the age (p. 238). Muslims, according to the author, feel “a sense of inferiority” vis-à-vis the west (p. 238).

In sum, the Muslim world is faced with an intellectual crisis. The author explains that a majority of Muslim scholars argue in a deficient manner only because they are subconsciously more inclined towards western thought than true Islam. Hence, they tend to depart from the original teachings of the faith and the adoption of an apologetic attitude (p. 239). The author claims that the Muslim world faces a malaise as those among them who can do something positive about clearing the mess are too “miserably docile and passive” (p. 239). Thus, the problem is compounded since intellectual failure and cowardice are among the reasons for the ummah’s sorry plight. But why should the Muslim thinkers be so intimidated? The degeneration of the Muslim ummah has been proceeding apace from the 19th century onwards. Why, then, should anyone blame the present generation? More importantly, how can the Islamic renaissance take place? Where is this most likely to take place and why? Unfortunately, we do not find sufficient discussion on this matter in the book. The author cautions that no matter what might be the challenges confronting the Muslims, they cannot “go beyond the pale of the Qur’an and the path of the prophet Muhammad [peace be on him]. Muslims must also make a conscious and intellectual effort to defend Islam and its values to keep them alive for all times to come. Due importance should be attached to the newly awakened self-awareness and worldwide Muslim solidarity, which nevertheless should not in the end move in the direction of extremism or militancy, but should pave way for self-critical appraisal, harmony and understanding” (pp. 239–40). Muslim can only wish this would come true.
The author also mentions Sayyid Maudūdī (1321–1399/1903–1979) and Sayyid Qutb [Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn] (1324–1386/1906–1966) in a hurried and brief manner. To him, they seem to be out of place. He also briefly mentions the al-Qaeda ideology. The author thinks that there exist understandable grounds why a number of Muslims feel attracted by al-Qaeda’s ideology. Muslims are resentful of the Western powers’ hold over their destinies and their support to tin-pot dictators, kings and tyrants ruling over their lands. Were it not for the support of the west, the Muslims could have gotten rid of their oppressors. This is something the west does not seem to understand. The oppressive nature of many US-supported regimes has angered the Muslims many of whom are questioning the American quest for introducing democracy in the Middle East through conquest and force. The American pretensions of bringing democracy to the Middle East will remain unconvincing to informed Muslims worldwide. Many in the US itself have taken the Bush administration to task for the mess that it has created in Iraq. Clearly, the problem cannot be resolved through the use of military force alone. Many people both inside and outside the US concede this. The book’s tone is sharp and the message on the issue, is clear. However, the reviewer thinks that this does not mean that the author supports al-Qaeda. The Muslim world needs to do better than springing out the likes of al-Qaeda. But given the intellectual vacuum and barrenness of the contemporary Muslim world this is unlikely to happen. The Muslim world has indeed been intellectually defeated by the west. Or so it seems at the moment. The current conflict in the Middle East has politicized the matter even further. War has its own logic and grave consequences flow from it. Events are moving fast and the region is being transformed right before our eyes. Islam needs to be defended more effectively. The responsibility, of course, lies on the shoulders of the Muslim intelligentsia.

The book, however, has numerous shortcomings. It lacks a coherent approach and loses focus at times. It is also very deficient in citations of sources. At times it is high in verbosity and employs worn out clichés. Essentially, the many sweeping statements of the author have not been substantiated by any hard empirical evidence. The author’s rhetoric is also at times bland. The book seems to be haphazard and has apparently been written in haste. However, it also has some merit. In the climate of Islamophobe sweeping across the west after 9/11, this book constitutes a defence of Islam for which the author deserves to be complimented. The book serves a purpose — the elucidation of the Islamic viewpoint. We wish that the author would undertake a more systematic and thorough analysis of the same theme in the future. There is already a plethora of literature on the subject. The subject is very complex and the number of high quality books are very few.
However, a vivid interest seems to have grown on the subject of global Islamic terrorism. The author has indeed successfully pointed out that Islam has been unfairly targeted in the west and that it is by no means synonymous with violence and killing. This viewpoint, to the author’s credit, is forcefully and convincingly presented. We would recommend the book for all those interested in understanding the dynamics of Muslims’ interaction with the rest of the world, especially the west.

Sohail Mahmood


‘Obayd Zakani, whose full name is ‘Obaydallāh [‘Ubayd Allāh] Zākānī Qazvini, was born in the eighth/fourteenth century, and lived part of his life in Shiraz, Tabriz, Baghdad, and Kerman. He was a contemporary of the great Persian poet, Hāfiz (d. 793/1391) and died in Shiraz sometime around 772/1370-1. He is one of the most famous and beloved satirical poets of the Persian speaking world. In many ways one may compare him to Bocaccio (d. 1375) who lived approximately the same time in Europe. ‘Obayd, like Bocaccio, was brave enough to make public the hypocrisy and insincerity which dominated certain social strata under the guise of religiosity, albeit, in satirical form.

Satirists by their nature are sharp tongued and witty. By reading them not only between the lines, but also the lines themselves, one can get an image of the society wherein the author lives. A society where the author himself is sometimes admonished and is under attack, for being fowl mouthed, going against the conventions of the society, and not following the order of the day. This we can find in many pieces of ‘Obayd’s work, where he expresses his utmost dislike for judges, where school becomes a holiday house, and teachers the head of failures. Where bribe becomes the savior of the weak and downtrodden, and tax collectors become the most dreaded elements of the society. These personages and ideas suddenly appear to be transcendental and transcontinental, and this is why ‘Obayd should be read. Be it China, Persia,