BOOK REVIEW


There are three broad and distinct groups of Muslim scholars in the contemporary world—the traditionalists, the modernists and the fundamentalists. They are sometimes confused with one another as there are no clear-cut lines of distinction and also because there are areas where exists a commonality of ideas between them. Still, every group possesses certain distinctive features.

The book starts with a definition of traditional Islam which, according to the author, is the way of life practised for centuries by the majority of the adherents of faith. The first section of the book is taken up by a discussion of some of the matters relating to the subject. After delineating the spiritual significance of Jihād, he gives his views on the Islamic work ethics. In his opinion, in the contemporary world, the Muslim workers are dominated by forces blind to moral considerations; their relations with nature have been severed; traditional modes of production have been replaced by impersonal machines and alien laws have supplanted Divine Law and destroyed the homogeneity of the Sharī'ah; a master craftsman, who was also a religious and ethical teacher, has become rare. The next chapter is devoted to the male/female relations from the Islamic point of view. In the last chapter he has dealt with the role of traditional Shi'ism in the Šafawid period and its contribution to Islamic scholarship and has described the contribution of the intellectuals of the Šafawid period in the development of some Sufi orders like the Nowbackshi and Dhahabi. The contribution of the great philosopher Mir Dāmād and his well-known disciple Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, the greatest metaphysician of his age, has also been mentioned.

The second section presents a general discussion on Islam in the present-day Islamic world and, inter alia, the role of the modernists and the fundamentalists. In the latter group, the author has dealt with the Wahhābi movement in Saudi Arabia, the neo-Wahhābism in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and other countries of the Arab Near East; the Jama'at-i-Islāmi in Pakistan, the Ikhwān-al-Muslimīn in Egypt, Persian Gulf and North Africa; the Fadā'iyan-i-Islām founded in Iran in the 1940s on the model of Ikhwān; and the other offshoots of fundamentalism in Turkey and some other Muslim countries, such as the Sudan, Nigeria and Afghanistan. He
refers to the "Islamic Socialism" or "Islamic Marxism" in some countries of the Middle East, especially, Algeria, Libya, Syria, Iraq and Iran—"the desire to promulgate (social) justice in their own societies". Lastly, he has mentioned the force aimed at "the revival of the Islamic tradition from within." (p. 91) Obviously, the author himself belongs to this last group of Muslim scholars, i.e. the traditionalists.

In the third section, the author has made a detailed survey of the tensions present in the various cultural domains including the Islamic education, philosophy and science. Here he has given the Islamic philosophers' views on education and most importantly the traditional texts used in the Persian Madrasahs. According to the details given by the author, their curricula included both the Transmitted (naqliyyah) and the Intellectual ('aqliyyah) Sciences. The former consisted of morphology (sarif), syntax (nahu), the literary sciences (ma'din wa bayân and badi'), jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, the Qur'anic Sciences (tafsir), and the Sciences of Hadith. The Intellectual sciences comprised logic, philosophy and theology (kalam), Islamic mysticism (tasawwuf and 'irfan), (oriental) medicine (tibb) and mathematical sciences (riyādiyyah).

Commenting on the fate of this educational system—in vogue until a couple of generations ago embracing all the intellectual disciplines (of that time)—the author admits that this system did not come to terms with the modern scientific disciplines, but the fault, according to him, "lies [as much] with the educational authorities who sought to establish separate education systems". (p. 178) The remarks are applicable to madrasah system still prevailing in some of the Muslim countries like Pakistan.

The author's concluding remarks, in this chapter, are of great value to those who are earnest in bringing about fundamental changes in the present educational system of these countries. He says: "Today, there is educational havoc nearly everywhere throughout the Islamic world with contending and often contradictory educational systems vying for the souls and hearts of the new generation." (p. 178)

The author, in the same section, has dealt with philosophy in the present-day Islamic world and its relevant problems, and the architectural transformation of the urban environment and the author's comments thereon in the light of the principles of Islamic architecture.

The last (fourth) section has been devoted to some of the leading Western interpreters of Islam who, in one way or the other, have introduced and studied some aspects of the real traditional Islam. They include Louis Massignon, Catholic scholar, Islamicist and mystic, Henry Corbin, "the Occidental exile in quest of the Orient of Light" and Titus Burckhardt, a Swiss of Protestant background who left Western academic circles to embrace Islam . . . a person of exceptional intellectual and spiritual gifts who went to the Islamic world as a young man to master the
Islamic disciplines from within at the feet of masters of both the exoteric and esoteric sciences.

In the Postscript (or chapter 18 of the book), the author has described the existing tendencies in the Islamic world and looked at the trends which in future, in all probability, may dominate the Islamic world.

In short, the book provides very important and useful information for all who are interested in studying the basics of traditional Islam with particular reference to its position in the modern Muslim world as well as its in-depth study, comparing it with the other groups, especially the fundamentalist and the modernist Islam.

Ali Raza Naqvi