an exhaustive list of Tipu’s grants to various Hindu temples in his kingdom, and also includes excerpts from the correspondence between Tipu and several Hindu priests. Of particular interest is the exchange of letters between Tipu and the priest of the Sringeri Math, one of the main Brahminical centres in South India. When the Math was attacked and looted by the [Hindu] Marathas, the priest appealed to Tipu for help. Tipu, in his generosity, provided the temple with immediate relief and a large grant in cash and kind.

Such was Tipu, a man clearly ahead of his times as this book shows. Little wonder, then, that he remains a thorn in the flesh of the Hindutva camp, being relegated to not more than a paragraph in most history text-books. This book is an admirable attempt to expand that paragraph into a comprehensive life story.

Yoginder Sikand


The new turn that the war in Afghanistan has taken has had serious consequences for the stability not only of the South Asian region, but for the entire world as such. The dangers of a global conflict have never seemed so real, as American war-mongers, Islamist militants and Hindutva hot-heads and other such traders in war threaten to drown the world in seemingly endless strife. As the “clash of civilisations” thesis threatens to turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy, millions of people, and not just in Afghanistan alone, have been rendered as hapless victims of the war over Kabul.

This slim book provides a general overview of the present conflict in and over Afghanistan and its implications for our part of the world. Written from a distinctly leftist perspective, it is a sharp critique both of American imperialism and the crude identity politics of Islamists and Hindutvawadis alike. Prashad argues that to assume that the war in Afghanistan is simply, as Islamists, Hindutvawadis and the dominant Western media insist, a clash of antagonistic civilisations and religions is misleading in the extreme. Rather,
Prashad argues, the present conflict must be seen in the wider political and economic context.

If the Taliban [Ṭalibān] and other assorted Islamic militants are today America’s most wanted villains, it is good to remember, Prashad tells us, that till recently they were their brave heroes against godless communism. Having outlived their usefulness, they have now been abandoned. Likewise, for militant Islamists, co-operation with America, today branded as the Great Satan, was prudent as long as it served their purposes, receiving generous doses of military and economic assistance in the war against the Russains. In politics, as in religion, it seems, there are no permanent allies, only permanent interests.

America, writes Prashad, was, till recently, quite willing to work along with the Taliban to pursue its own interests, in particular in accessing the Central Asian oil fields through Afghanistan while isolating Iran. When the tables turned against the Americans, he writes, the Taliban were hurriedly abandoned, and now a new government, pliable to American interests, is being sought to be installed in the country. As for the Taliban’s own rhetoric of Islamic revival, its pogroms against the Shias [Shī‘ah] and other non-Pathan ethnic communities and its own distorted vision of Islam are evidence enough, Prashad suggests, that its politics are a reflection more of its this-worldly interests rather than a passionate commitment to Islam as such. The same may be said about the role of the Pakistani state in the entire affair. Having come under extreme pressure from the Americans, the Pakistanis hurriedly left their erstwhile Taliban allies in the lurch, their much vaunted commitment to “Islamic brotherhood” and “jihād” notwithstanding. Meanwhile, the “jihadists” in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir have provided ample fodder to fascist Hindutva groups to carry on their hate-campaign against Muslims in India. All told, then, Prashad tells us, American imperialists and Islamist and Hindutva militants are wreaking havoc with the lives of millions, while the principal problems of the people of the region-stark poverty and continued oppression go completely unnoticed.

This book is an impassioned appeal for a new politics of socialism, a struggle against the twin menaces of American neo-imperialism, ultra-nationalism and religious fascism. The only way out of the “War Against the Planet” that threatens to submerge us all in its wake, the author suggests, is a mass movement for social justice and peace, based on dialogue between peoples of different faiths and cultures.

Yoginder Sikand