

What's Inside Muslim Mind ?

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Multiple meanings and interpretations of Islam are possible. The two main interpretative approaches are those of the apologists who strive to reconcile Islam with modernity and the Islamists who fiercely oppose it. John Locke famously postulated that the human mind is a tabula rasa—a clean slate... with nothing written on it. Whatever is fed to the human mind become its frame of reference and a source of values and beliefs. Hence what is in the mind is what has gone into it. Distinguished Pakistani sociologist Professor Emeritus Riaz Hassan has undertaken one of the most extensive studies of the religious consciousness of Muslims: *Inside the Muslim Minds* (Melbourne University Press, 2008). It has recently been published under the title *Muslim Zehn* from Lahore (Mashaal Books, February 2012). It covers seven countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Iran and Turkey — and is based on the evidence of 6,390 Muslim respondents. The research was conducted in cooperation with research institutes in the respective countries. The themes include issues of personal piety, conscience, philanthropy and social justice, veiling, blasphemy, hudood laws, jihad, political order and religious institutions, globalisation and the Islamic ummah, Islam and civil society, mutual suspicions between Muslims and the West. The author has adhered to the highest standards of honest and qualified research. The result is a mine of information and profound insights. He makes it clear at the outset that multiple meanings and interpretations of Islam are possible. The two main interpretative approaches he identifies are those of the apologists who strive to reconcile Islam with modernity and the Islamists who fiercely oppose it. It is the latter's influence that has been growing currently and the book highlights the problematic aspects of this.

With regard to women Hassan remarks, “In Islam, women are seen not only as sexual beings but also the very embodiment of sex...Consequently, men view women as objects that exist and retain value only in relation to themselves. Women are to be owned and controlled...The practice (veiling) is in keeping with the supremacy of male over female as postulated by the Qur'an” (pages 182-83). The author notes that the efforts of Muslim feminists and the modernist elite to attempt alternative interpretations of Islam to reform women's rights have been pushed to the margins because of burgeoning and militant Islamism. Violence against

women, including so-called honour killing, derives from the dogmatic and literalist interpretation of the Quran, which permits beating of disobedient wives. On the whole, women were considered sexually too attractive to be allowed a presence in the public sphere.

Turkish and Kazakhstani respondents were the least convinced that veiling and segregation of women was necessary to protect men from the lure of women, while surprisingly, Indonesian and Malaysian respondents were the most in favour of it. Pakistan and Egypt were somewhat less and Iran even lesser, though the majority of respondents favoured segregation and veiling.

With regard to the doctrine of jihad, the author shows that it has multiple meanings and not just holy war. Primarily it means a “struggle against unbelievers to convert them to Islam” (pg 104). It includes peaceful persuasion as well as the use of force. The former is considered the greater jihad and the latter smaller jihad. However, after the Muslims established the State of Medina in 622 ACE, the use of force became closely associated with the notion of jihad. In an interesting table on page 108-109, the author traces the historical trajectory of jihad — both defensive and offensive forms of it have existed depending on the balance of power between Muslims and non-Muslims. In recent years, offensive jihad has also targeted modernist government elites in the Muslim world and their Western allies. The doctrine of jihad was given dogmatic shape in the 9th century on the basis of the dichotomous distinction between Dar-ul-Islam (Abode of Islam) and Dar-ul-Harb (Abode of the Enemy). The author, however, notes that actual participation in jihadist terrorism was small and most people who were interviewed justified jihad only when peaceful means of international disputes failed. The continuing oppression of Muslims by Israel, the invasion of Iraq, the bloody conflict in Chechnya, Kashmir and so on render the jihad argument extra attractive.

With regard to the type of political system compatible with Islam, the author notes that contemporary Islamist movements are fiercely opposed to any separation of state and Islam and idealise the authoritarian Islamic state model. Malaysia, Indonesia and Egypt displayed very high levels of trust in religious scholars, while in Kazakhstan and Turkey, where religion and state have been separated; there was low trust in religious institutions. In Pakistan and Iran, there was very little trust in religious institutions, something the author found to be counterintuitive (unexpected). That is an interesting finding indeed.

On the whole, Turkey and Kazakhstan display fewer proclivities towards extremism, misogyny, and dogmatic Shariah. Concerns for blasphemy were also the weakest in them.

Kemal Ataturk's social revolution and the long period of Soviet rule have created conditions for a modern type of society that is more in tune with contemporary standards and values of democratic and rationalistic development. Ummah consciousness was found to be strong in all the countries except Kazakhstan. These are some of the main findings.

In my opinion, the real problem between the world of Islam and the West is that science has supplanted the Bible as the authority for cognising and transforming the physical world, though there is a flat earth society in London, and Darwin's evolutionism is not taught in some US states. The Bible's authority has greatly reduced on social and political matters, and secularization of society and state has made possible liberal democracy and broad enjoyment of human rights. Religious authority is not completely absent, however. Sympathy for Zionism and Israel was present in the British establishment in the early 20th century and exists as a solid support base among Evangelical Christians in the US, who support Israeli occupation policy because in the Old Testament God declared Judea and Samaria as the land of the Jews.

The authority of the Quran is more totalist, covering all phenomena: the physical world, the social world, law, politics, culture and so on. The age-old argument that revelation is perfect, and absolute knowledge and reason and science imperfect, continues to apply to far more social, legal and political matters than is the case in secular-democratic societies. Such argumentation effectively defeats calls for fundamental change and reform. Vain formulae of so-called spiritual democracy and Islamic human rights have proved to be neither fish nor fowl.

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