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BOOK REVIEWS

Culture, Science and Violence - The Qura'nic Approach
By Obaidullah Fahd, 2009, New Delhi, Jnanda Prakash (P&D), Price. Rs.700/-

Culture, Science and Violence are among the leading themes and varying ingredients of a dynamic collective life in the contemporary world and numerous rational approaches have been put forward in their explanation in which most of them seems to be incomplete and insufficient. To provide a Qura'nic approach to these fields, Dr Obaidullah Fahd - Associate Professor of Islamic studies, Aligarh Muslim University who has published extensively on modern Islamic movements, Islamic political thought and Qura'nic studies more than a dozen of books and 125 papers both in Urdu and English - has come up with a considerable approach in this regard by presenting a comprehensive, unique and systematic work entitled, *Culture, Science and Violence: The Qura'nic Approach*.

The present book is analogous in style and ambitious in scope wherein the author provides a scholarly, comparative and accessible survey of Culture, Science and Violence in the Islamic perspective that has been presented in a distorted form in West. The book consists of seven chapters - five of which have already been published in various research journals. The chapters are preceded by a Preface (vii-x) and Introduction (pp. 1-17) and followed by Biographical notes (pp.182-206), Glossary (207-245) and Index (pp.246-255) at the end.

In the Introduction, it shows Qura'nic approach towards the monasticism and excessiveness in religion and how Qur'an denounces both the two in a logical manner; and the author provides here an adequate number of references from the Qur'an. It also offers a decent overview of the six varieties that are mentioned in the Quran (57:25) for the activation and realization of a social and reformative life as opposed to both the luxurious and monastic one. The six varieties are *al-Bayyinah*, *al-Kitab*, *al-Mizan*, *al-Qist*, *al-Hadid* and *al-Gaib*. In short, it analyzes how Surah *Al-Hadid* offers "a model that links the Culture, the Science and the Violence in a system" (pp.77).

The first two chapters entitled, "Concept of culture and ethics in Qur'an" (pp. 18-32) and "Islamic Culture: Basic Features and Future Prospects" (pp.33-48) - originally published both in *Insight Islamicus* (University of Kashmir) - include a detailed discussion on culture with reference to the anthropologists views and the defects in their concepts; later the author comes up with Islamic culture and explores how Qura'nic parables like biological ability, creative ability (*Takhliq*), nourishing ability (*Inbat*), beautifying ability and purifying ability explain the nature of our present life. It also discusses the Qura'nic sense of aesthetics. Second chapter mostly focuses on the

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understanding of the basic features of Islamic culture. An analytical description such features like freedom, order, discipline, peace, harmony, equality, knowledge, scientific awakening, and dynamism. Besides, it discusses agenda for future that includes human dignity, dignity for women, religious tolerance and continuation of universal civilization.

The third chapter, "*Islam & Muslims Societies*" (pp.49-70) - originally brought into light with a different title, "*Equality of sex in Islam*" in *Islam & Muslim Societies* (New Delhi) - deals with the gender equality in the Islamic perspective since this forms an ingredient of Islamic culture in the Qur'an. It also includes the misperception of Western and other non-Muslim scholars and their indiscriminate remarks and partial propaganda on Islamic women and answers them by elaborating the gender equality in Islamic perspective.

The fourth chapter, "*Rational thinking in the Qur'an*" (pp.71-84) - originally presented in the National Seminar held at Aligarh Muslim University on 8th January 2003 bearing the title, "*The Quran and Science*" and the chapter 5th, "*Qur'an and Science Discourse - A Study of Syed Qutb*" (pp. 85-121) - published in *Studies in Islam* (New Delhi) - shows how Qur'an emphasizes on the comprehensive approach of knowledge throughout its verses and a discourse is offered to present a proper Qura'nic outlook in this regard. For this approach, Syed Qutb (d. 1966) is chosen as a model, in the words of author, for two reasons: one is that he is the "most popular and authoritative scholar and an activist" who has greatly influenced the modern Islamic thought and dynamism especially in the Arab world, secondly his personality has received a "distorted coverage in the west and has been a misunderstood writer there" (pp. viii).

The 6th chapter, "*True Meaning of Jihad*" (pp.122-139) - originally published in *Studies on Islam* (New Delhi) - explores the meaning of jihad both literally and technically and how Qur'an appreciates and recognizes the right of due response to any injustice and the retaliation against the aggression and how it approves all legal means of self defence through the institution of *jihad*, but at the same time how it hates terrorism and all invalid means and methods of fighting and declares them illegal and shows that there is no room for any violence and terrorism in the noble Qur'an.

The 7th and last chapter, "*Violence and the Qura'nic Irhab*" (pp.140-181) provides an innovative, solid and detailed discussion on violence and Qura'nic *Irhab*, and how Qura'nic *Irhab* is reformative and peace oriented and violence is fatal and destructive for humanity. Though the term *Irhab* in the modern Arabic usage differ from the Qura'nic usage, as in the modern Arabic, the word is frequently used to convey the "connotation of terrorism" (p.160) whereas in Qur'an it is used in a constructive way. He makes a comparison between both the Qura'nic *Irhab* and the violence in a very detailed manner. It also explores the abhorrence of mischief and *fitna* in Islam and presents in the views of some prominent scholars like Amin Ahsan Islahi (d.1997) and

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Syed Abul A'la Maududi (d.1979) in this regard. The chapter also throws light on the Islamic principles, doctrines and precautions of war.

Culture, Science, and Violence are three different themes and do not suit in a single book. Further, the book ends without a conclusion to tie up the themes discussed in the book.

Despite these two shortcomings, the book is a great endeavor and will prove useful and helpful to the students and academics in general and to the researchers working on the contemporary issues related to Islam. The author deserves special appreciation for bringing out such an endeavoring, contemplating and commendable book.

(Reviewed by **Mohammad Irshad ul Haq**, Ph.D research scholar, Department of Arabic, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. Email: irshadul.haqq@gmail.com)