

Comments on: -

A review of: Pervez Hoodbhoy's 'Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality' - By: Dr. Ahmad Shafaat, Advocate, High Court of Pakistan.

By Fatemolla 25 April 2005

Although I am yet to read Dr. Hoodbhoy's book and cannot relate it to (click to get Dr. Shafaat's article) [Dr. Ahmad Shafaat's review](#) of it, I am taking the opportunity to comment on some general aspects of the review. Forceful, and probably correct in certain sections, the review also seems quite misleading in some aspects.

For starters: blindness of "religious orthodoxy" is not an assumption, but hit and heat of the day. A copy is blind by its attribute. Religious orthodoxy's claim of "purity" of their interpretation of Islam is but a copycat of a distant past. Inordinate amount of time, energy, attention, devotion and other resources are spent combing through volumes of information, only to confirm who did what 1400 years ago. Those findings are imposed on us as Islam, as if past people's thought and behaviour, except Prophet's (SA), builds Islam. In that process personal choices and even camel riding of the Prophet (SA) take the essence of Islamic faith as Sunnah for some Muslims, so much so that even the water of Jamjam and Arabian date offer some Sawab.

About the Nobel Laureate Dr. Abdus Salam, suffice to say that a fish can never understand a bird's life. To experience an inferno is quite different if being there and if watching it in TV. When 15000 of one's own people (Kadianis aka Ahmadis) are butchered and raped in three days (1953 Lahore, Pakistan), religious places are destroyed and right of religion is abolished, the "grey area" disappears and everything becomes black and white. Salam's "cure" of "the second class of 'ulama'" is not easy. Maybe Dr. Shafaat is able to prescribe one to develop a "not so hopeless" tool to deal with the Saudi Chief-Educationist who claims "Slavery is Islam's part;" the Spanish Maolana's book teaching how to beat wives without leaving scars on their bodies; the NWFP's parliament-decision to ban women on TV/radio from advertisement/singing/dancing; Dubai's law allowing wife-beating; Malay-court's acceptance of instant divorce by leaving message in answering machine; French Maolana's support of wife-beating and Raj'm; Bangladesh-mullas' roar of killing university-professors; Sudan-parliament's law of excluding women from jobs that need gender-mixing, without keeping some jobs only for women (think of single parents!); UK-Maolanas' declaration of Jihad and celebration of 9/11 etcetera. Lest we forget human rights are not negotiable, even in the name of Islam. Lest we forget human rights don't have to pass the test of scriptures. Rather, scriptures have to pass the test of human rights.

We may not sweat our heads for qualification of condemnation of takfir (a tool for declaring others as Apostates?) because it is already qualified by the holy Qura'an: see Suras Munafiqun 3, 4 – Tawbah 66, 78 - Nahl 106 – Nisa 137, - and especially Yunus 99, plus by the Prophet, see Sirat of Ibn Hisham/Ishaq page 667 and Sahi Bukhari (of Muhsin Khan, Medina Univ.) Vol 1 Hadiths 122, 130. Dr Shafaat concludes, "Hoodbhoy's perspective on

"Islam and Science" comes from a lost faith". I don't know if Dr. Hoodbhoy declared his "lost faith" openly and clearly. If not, then Dr. Shafaat missed the elemental conception of the Qura'anic message, and Prophet's examples shown above, by taking the unIslamic authority to declare "lost faith" for others. Note that the word "Ridda" (root-word of Murtaad - apostates) signifies a self-inflicting act like "Suicide"; none from outside can do it. This practice of "Owning Islam" has caused immense bloodshed in Muslim history and is still continuing, as the Jamat Chief of Bangladesh declared on April 1 that criticizing Jamat tantamounts to criticizing Islam. Both the Chief and Dr. Shafaat seem to have missed the Islamic ethics that people's lives and beliefs are not anybody's toys to play with, even in the name of Islam.

Dr. Shafaat asked - "Does not a group, whether religious or secular have the right to define itself"? Actually he emphasized in "Yes". But we say a big No. If the group in question is named after Islam, certain Qura'anic codes must be observed without tampering. Besides, the world has the right and obligation to oppose it when an insane group imposes its brutality on others. That is why we and good people of other faiths screamed at burning widows in India; that is why we and good people of other faiths scream about genocide in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Gujarat and Bosnia.

Islamic orthodoxy tells us a lot in the fact that not only Imam Hanbal (assassinated) but also most of our Imams were tortured and killed by orthodox power. Imam Hanifa was imprisoned and poisoned to death, Shafi'i was imprisoned, Malik's hand was severed in public, Taymiyah was imprisoned and killed, Bukhari was sent to exile to die, et. al. Muslim history is filled with heroes, villains and their hybrids; it is often difficult to make clear demarcation between the persecutors and the persecuted on the basis of ideology. Jamal and Siffin wars are good examples.

Whether the great library of Alexandria was burnt by Omar (RA) or by Christians may be debatable. But we cannot ignore our own records. By referring to Muslim history I by no means demean our second Khalifa, but stress on reconciling contradictory Islamic documents. One may not like the information, but documents say Omar effected the first selection of Khalifa in a highly questionable manner (Sahi Bukhari, Tarikh Al Tabari Vol X last pages and Vol XI pages 1-3). Islam was not to be spread by sword; yet, without any provocation he invaded Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Iran engendering genocides of significance. He never punished Khalid Bin Walid for committing genocide of 30, 000 people in Madhar, Iran, that earned the name "Blood Canal" for big flow of human blood (Tabari Vol. 11, page 24) and 100,000 in Al Firad (Ibid, page 115). These I quoted from THE earliest and THE most dependable history of Muslims, as Dr. Shafaat stressed on timeline being the yardstick of confidence on historical documents. Tabari (839-923) recorded the history centuries earlier than did Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406).

And what about the famous "Omar's Pact" of 6 conditions that he imposed on conquered Syrian non-Muslims? Non-Muslims were (1) not to build monasteries, churches, convents, or monk's shells, and not to repair the existing ones; (2) not to teach the Qura'an to their children; (3) not to manifest their religion publicly or convert anyone but not stop anyone from embracing Islam; (4) to rise from sits when a Muslim entered; (5) not to resemble Muslims in names, garments or way of behaviour; and (6) not to display their scriptures

publicly – (“Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism”-Dr. Abdulaziz Sachedina). Imam Shafi’i used this document to prepare his own version that requires non-Muslims’ wearing visible strap (and we blamed poor Talibans for imposing the same on Afghan non-Muslims!). Also, Omar is recorded as not giving a government job to the best candidate only because he was non-Muslim, on the ground that “It would be a betrayal to the Qura’an”.

We can argue over these documents *ad infinitum*, especially with Omar’s generous treatment to non-Muslim of Jerusalem but the fact remains it was Islamic Orthodoxy that not only generated contradictory documents but also made some blunderous decisions. A bright example thereof: “According to the Jurists the tolerant verses are abrogated by the Sword Verse, Tawbah 29” – (Ibid, page 48). That means human decisions defeated about 114 Qura’anic peace-verses by few “Sword-Verses”. So Islam turns from peace to war.

The following quote is from page 1081 of “SUMMERIZED SAHIH AL BUKHARI” By Al Imam Zain-Ud-Din Ahmad bin Abdul Lateef Az-Zubaidi, translated by Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Islamic University Al-Madina Al-Munawara. QUOTE:

"So Allah ordered: - “And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you.....” (V 2:190). Then Allah revealed in Sura Tawbah the order to discard (all) the obligations (covenants etc.) and commanded the Muslims to fight against all the Mushrikun as well as against people of scriptures (Jews and Christians) if they do not embrace Islam, till they pay Jizya (tax) with willing submission and feel themselves subdued (as it is revealed in Verse 9:29). So they (Muslims) were not permitted to abandon "the fighting" against them (pagans, Jews and Christians) and to reconcile with them and to suspend hostilities against them for an unlimited periods while they are strong and are able to fight against them (non-Muslims). As it is now obvious, at first "the fighting" was forbidden, then it was permitted and after that it was made obligatory - (1) against them who start "the fighting against you (Muslims)" (2) and against all those who worship others along with Allah - as mentioned in Sura Bakarah, Al-Imran and Tauba and other Sura. -UNQUOTE.

Dr. Hashim Kamali, one of present few top Islamic Jurists also objects to this blunder in his “Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence” in page 507, QUOTE: -

“To say, for example, that the verse of the sword has abrogated the Qura’anic address that validates peaceful relations with non-Muslims is not only neglectful of the time-space factor, but totally unwarranted. This claim does not end with this, but goes on to maintain that the verse of sword has abrogated over one hundred verses in the Qura’an which advocated a wide range of moral values including mercy, forgiveness, peace, fair treatment and tolerance towards non-Muslims” – UNQUOTE.

Thus orthodox Islam declared a permanent informal war against world’s all non-Muslims. In reality of this, how we can claim Islam as a religion of peace. In the current version the above paragraph is reported to have been taken out for obvious reason. Sanitation continues with Imam Ghazali as well in recent editions, especially in parts dealing with women’s rights. What does it tell us? Dr. Shafaat often refers to Western scholars (that we habitually

condemn) but conveniently bypasses our own documents, such as Bukhari-Muslim-Masnad-Muatta-Tirmidhi-Abu Dawood-Nisa'i, Tarikh Al Tabari, Sirat (Ibn Hisham/Ishaq), Maghadi of Wakidi, Tabaquat of Ibn Sa'ad, etc that are among the earliest of Islamic records.

Next let's review Dr. Shafaat's opinion about Imam Ghazali, whose specialty was multi-nested classifications of conceptual phenomena such as Ilm, Akidah, education, soul, worship, devotion, and Sawab, etc., which cannot be either proven or unproven. This is by no means to denounce the respected Imam but to consider him a fallible human scholar, not a divine entity. Dr. Shafaat's comment: "a large number of other statements by al-Ghazali that point in the other direction" clearly show serious self-contradiction of the Imam. He also comments: "al-Ghazali had a similar criticism for sciences of Shariah" and "He went through an agonizing ordeal in search of truth". Next it seems that, in the end, Ghazali's "Truth" leads Muslims to serious violation of human rights in unacceptability of non-Muslim doctors' witness, in cases of medical legalities (Ulum Al Deen, Vol. 1) and, in Vol 2: "A wife goes into slavery of her husband after marriage," "A wife's gratitude to her husband cannot be fulfilled even if the husband's body is covered with pus and the wife licks it", - "A husband is owner, so he has to be concerned about the subjects, women", - "One has to divorce his wife if his father dislikes her" ...indeed a long list.

We don't accept this violence towards our women. For far too long we have been inspired by our Ghazalis, playing gods in our women's lives in the name of Islam. It must end now. Here are some more:

FROM VINNOMOT.COM: - The Ashariyya led by Ghazali and Rumi rejected the rationalists Mutazilis whom, in their view, had forsaken religion and had detracted from God and his revelation. Thus rational objectivism was quashed, the books of rationalists such as Zakaria Razi were destroyed and they themselves had to hide for their safety. Thus most likely the Islamic Renaissance that was about to be born 1000 years ago did not. We shall never know the extent of the harm that these celebrated religious zealots caused to mankind's civilization.

Dr. Shaffiee Kadkani wrote: "If it wasn't because of Ashariyya our history might have evolved differently". [Creation and History, (Afarinesh VA Tarikh, p.50) - Massoume Price). When Ibn Khadon in his 'Introduction (Mogadameh) mentioned that Africans are black because of geographical and environmental conditions, it was the Ashariyya who ended such scientific observations by declaring people are black because God created them as such. When Physicians tried to find the connection between the brain and hand's movements, it was Ghazali who mocked scientific inquiry and stated "hands move because God wants them to move" (Alchemy of Happiness, Kimiyaya Saadat).

Dr. Shafaat did not disclose that, although the Imam described mathematics and medicine as Fard-E Kefaya, (Ibid, Vol, 1) he decisively placed those as secondary to religious-Ilm. Thus Ghazali needlessly made one branch of knowledge compete with another. Look at the great Ibn Sina. Muslim civilization owes so much to this physician-philosopher; we Muslims are

so much proud of this revolutionary scientist. But who called him “Kafir” – unbeliever? None but Imam Ghazali (The Islamic Weekly Bortoman Songlap 3rd March 2005).

He subtly glorified poverty in the name of worship; see bellow. Following are quotes from pages 36 - 37 of “Criminals of Islam” - By Shabbir Ahmed M.D. referring to Ghazali’s famous book Ehyaul Ulum - “THE RENAISSANCE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE” (Ahmed says the name should have been “THE DEMISE OF COMMON SENSE”).

- “The messenger of Allah said “No work is dearer to Allah than remaining hungry and thirsty”. Salat, Saum and service to humanity do not come close to Ascetism – Kimiya-E Sa’adat, Madina Publishing Company, Karachi Pakistan. Page 483.
- Men of knowledge sleep on their right side, kings sleep on their left and Satan sleeps with his face down - Ehyaul Ulum page 39.
- Going for bath without breakfast and then delaying breakfast kills a person – Ibid page 39.
- The best among my friends is the one who overeats and places big morsels in his mouth (Referring to Imam Ja’afar Sadiq) – Ibid 2:12.
- Don’t marry a woman who is infertile – page 75. (How he knew it before marriage of virgins and why so cruel to infertile widows?).
- When a man’s organ is in erection, two-thirds of his mind and two-thirds of his religion have departed from him- Vol 2 page 52. This is the wisdom of our “Hujjatul Islam”. (How he weighs those?).
- After finishing your meal lick the cup or plate and drink its washings. That becomes a marital gift to the hoors -page 13. (What a trivial bargain!).
- During Ramadan Hazrat Omar Farooq used to have intercourse with three concubines before Isha-prayer -2:52. (Should we follow?)
- Sahabi Maaz bin Jabl was dying of Plague. He said – “Have me married, because I hate to meet Allah while I am single” –Ibid page 42. Ah! The poor woman, marrying for instant widowhood! .
- Imam Hassan used to divorce four women and marry four women at the same hour. That is why the Prophet has said – “Hassan is from me” - page 55. But according to the Prophet the most undesirable among permissible acts is divorce.

We can indeed continue about the Imam. But we should be more concerned with not what the Imam said, but with his impact on Muslim-society. A champion of revelation over reason and a mesmerizing debater/orator (like Mawdudi), he killed the Mutazilite’s approach of rationality and virtually blocked Ijtihad.

About the mystic Dr. Iqbal mentioned in Dr. Shafaat’s article I want to add one unrelated fact. As the President of All India Muslim League Conference in Allahabad in 1930, he adopted the conception of a sovereign Muslim country in free India (for prosperity of Indian Muslims) but his dream-country did not include Bengal, where 39% of Indian Muslims lived. Probably a human error impacting millions,- no pun intended to the close-to-heart mystic poet. But politicians of his region (West Pakistan since 1947) continued with this attitude of neglecting and depriving Bengal (most of it as East Pakistan since 1947) of her right for long 25 years. The episode ended with one of the most massive genocides and

mass rapes of human history committed by Pakistan army on the populace of East Pakistan who took up a bloody Liberation War and defeated Pakistan to create their own sovereign Bangladesh. So much about Muslim Brotherhood.

About secular humanism Dr. Shafaat comments:

“The author (Dr. Hoodbhoy) seems unable to admit the possibility that religion might be able to provide a better alternative to secular humanism”.... “As for the list of the bloody battles in which followers of various religions have been involved, certainly secularism has not prevented people from similarly bloody wars”. ... “Well, many religious groups also claim that if a true form of their religion was in practice somewhere they will not do some of the wrong things that they now do”... “There is here the same "absolute belief" in the "superiority" of secular humanism that religions are criticized for.”

My comment: Religions have had a very long time to prove their worth in social governance. But human experience of god’s law is extremely scary, to say the least. Memories of European Church-states, Indian Temple states and violation of human rights by Sharia the so-called Allah’s Law that violates the Qura’an and justice still chill our spines. We don’t want to play that losing game anymore. With so many religions around, secularism is not a choice but mandatory in today’s world. True that through secular democracy we recently saw rising demons in the shape of the foreign policies of the USA and UK. But it is likely it can be worked out. For centuries we experimented with tribalism, feudalism, communism etc. to get here. Secularism must be allowed at least half of many centuries religions enjoyed for social governance. It may not be the only way but religious theocracy is certainly not any way at all. When we claim to establish Islamic States in Muslim majority countries we automatically encourage Hindu-Raj in India, Jews-State in Israel and Christian theocracy in the West. That is a suicidal approach orthodox Muslims take.

One may wonder how Dr. Shafaat missed the big difference between "absolute belief" in the "superiority" of secular humanism and of religions. The former is by the people, of the people and for the people--to create and update according to changed circumstances. But the later is the property of few grim-looking clergies, who always see “Islam in danger” and react to keep their claim to represent the will of Allah that cannot be challenged. Often they are void of poetic approach to life, valuing scriptural letters over human life. Their attitude of “Silencing the others” is historically proven in all those civil wars and in so many bloodstained power-conspiracies of Muslims’ past and present. But a secular state permits people to practice their religions in safety and harmony, with special privileges for, and discrimination against, none.

Dr. Shafaat concluded with -“Islamic civilization, after its present ruin, will once again vibrate with life as an authentically Islamic civilization, not only overcoming some of its deep problems but also guiding humanity to a vastly better alternative to the existing world order”. What he missed is that by calling the civilization “Islamic” he runs the risk of defaming Islam when the civilization collapses. A civilization that can flourish and decline cannot be “Islamic”. Islam’s enemy Firaun created one of the greatest civilizations that built the wonderful Pyramids. Does it make his ideology better than Islam’s? Human civilizations

are not consequences of faith-systems; those have existed with or without faith. Islam is about moral guidance, not about birthing civilizations. Islam is complete with or without, before or after any civilization. By claims of “Islamic Civilization” we inadvertently encourage Christians and Jews to claim the present civilization to be “Christian” or “Judeo-Christian”.

Dreams are life’s driving forces. It is good to have a dream. But the nightmare of “Islam wants to eliminate all other governments from the face of the planet and establish the power of Islam in their stead” (Jihad in Islam – Mawdudi, page 6) is a disastrous way of “guiding humanity.” It is suicidal for Muslims and the worst unIslamic cultural threat humankind ever experienced.

Salaam to all.
