



convincing and argumentative. The text is garnished with scores of contextual and relevant Quranic verses, historical facts and anecdotes from the lives of the Holy Prophet, his companions and the various Muslim jurists and theologians.

Unlike what the Islam-bashers do, attack Islamits Prophet and scripture for the violation of human rights and all the prevalent vices present among Muslims, Fatemolla has consistently defended the Quran and the Prophet. The main thrust of his argument is that the Quranic verses and the authentic sayings of the Prophet should be taken contextually and that the Muslims in our times should apply common sense and reasoning (*aqel* and *ijtihad*) to get the right meaning and message of the Quran. He has argued that nothing short of an Islamic Reformation can salvage the downtrodden Muslims who have been one of the most backward, illiterate, superstitious, poor and stigmatized communities in the world. He thinks that Muslim orthodoxy and stubborn mullahs' obduracy to reform and re-interpret the teachings of Islam in the light of new knowledge and changed circumstances are mainly responsible for the appalling image of Islam and its adherents throughout the world.

The title, *jamatepislami* (literally stands for "the slimy *jamaat*"), might be misleading, as it rhymes with "Jamaat-e-Islami", an Islam-oriented ultra-rightist political party of Bangladesh (and Pakistan and India), which is stigmatized among the average Bangladeshi for its active collaboration with the Pakistani occupation army during the Liberation War in 1971. Some readers might consider it only as an anti-Jamaat platform of Fatemolla, who has been campaigning against "political Islam" for quite some time. Once they have gone through his various well-written essays on the inherent dangers posed by "political Islam," they would appreciate its real value.

Although some peripheral discussions about the Shariah-based autocracies are there in *jamatepislami*, yet Fatemolla's main focus is on the ludicrous idea of Shariah as a universal code for all Muslims for all times everywhere. He has skilfully pinpointed the ambivalence of the Shariah code by exposing its contradictions with the teachings of the Quran and the Holy Prophet. He is dead against the literal interpretations and out of context citing of some Quranic verses, which might justify polygamy, slavery and cohabitation with slave girls, wife beating, killing of non-Muslims and other inhuman practices. In short, this is an attempt to re-open the doors of *ijtihad* both *qias* and *ijma* (individual and collective re-interpretations of the scripture) -- by shunning the Shariah as much as possible. He has exposed many un-Islamic teachings of the so-called *hadises* and the reactionary Shariah law, created in the medieval era by agents of patriarchy, monarchy and autocracy in the name of Islam.

Some of the very interesting essays and articles by Fatemolla are: *Mukh Kholo* (To Open One's Mouth), *Khamba* (Pillar), *Pislami Syllabus* (A Critique of Al-Azhar University's Reactionary Syllabi) and *Ke Murtad?* (Who is a Murtad?). The other pieces on female leadership, honour killing, polygamy, female testimony, arbitrary issuance of *fatwas* (religious decrees) by the mullah to the detriment of women and minorities are thought provoking, very well argued and reflective of his missionary zeal to save Islam as well as the victims of "political Islam." While on the one hand he is critical of some of the modern stalwarts of "political Islam" for their denial to separate religion from politics; he on the other hand takes certain Islamic groups like the *Al-Mohajeroon* of Britain to task for considering those Muslims who take part in the British Parliamentary elections as apostates, as the Parliament enacts secular laws, which often go against the Fatemolla has consistently defended the Quran and the Prophet. The main thrust of his argument is that the Quranic verses and the authentic sayings of the Prophet should be taken contextually and that the Muslims in our times should apply common sense and reasoning (*aqel* and *ijtihad*) to get the right meaning and message of the Quran. He has argued that nothing short of an Islamic Reformation can salvage the downtrodden Muslims who have been one of the most backward, illiterate, superstitious, poor and stigmatized communities in the world. He thinks that Muslim orthodoxy and stubborn mullahs' obduracy to reform and re-interpret the teachings of Islam in the light of new knowledge and changed circumstances are mainly responsible for the appalling image of Islam and its adherents throughout the world.

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Contesting the legitimacy of the "sixth pillar" of Islam, as espoused by Baana-Qutb-Mawdudi type Islamist thinkers (vide *Khamba*), which does not separate religion from politics, Fatemolla reiterates his point quite convincingly that the prophets did not come as politicians or administrators but guides for mankind. He thinks it is high time that Bangladeshi Muslims stop "Jamaat" or "political Islam," the "dangerous transgressor of the teachings of the Quran, Islam's enemy number one."

His *Pislami Syllabus* is another eye-opener for the ordinary Muslims who are awe-stricken by the sanctity of the famous Al-Azhar University of Egypt. This article reveals the obscurantist and pre-modern syllabi of the university, which among other things justify: a) conversion of non-Muslims by force, death being the other option for them; b) jihad against the non-Muslims as obligatory; c) treating the non-Muslim subjects as *dhimmis* or "protected people," forcing them to cut their fringe on the forehead as their symbol of identity, denying them the use of horse but donkeys instead; and e) the ban on music and musical instruments. Fatemolla has rightly compared these draconian rules with the edicts of Mullah Umar of Afghanistan under the Taliban.

The moral of the story is that unless Bangladeshi Muslims are saved from the hands of the obscurantist mullah, a replication of the Al-Azhar dogma of hate and violence is possible in Bangladeshi *madrassas* or Islamic seminaries. Fatemolla has pointed out (vide *Ke Murtad?*) how very similar to Al-Azhar mullahs, who never stop from issuing *fatwas-to-kill* Egyptian "*murtads*" Nagib Mahfouz, Nawal Sadawi, Nasr Zaid and their likes, Bangladeshi mullahs have been issuing such *fatwas* against several prominent poets and writers for alleged blasphemy and apostasy. He has cited Quranic verses, including 4:137 (Sura Nissa), in buttressing his argument that the Quran does not prescribe death penalty for apostasy at all. His logical justification for female leadership in Islam, rejection of polygamy as un-Islamic, and advocacy of equal rights and opportunities for women and minorities in Muslim countries are too difficult to demolish by the conformist, traditional Muslims. The *ulama* are simply not equipped with enough of an arsenal to confront Fatemolla, unless they resort to take cover behind the corpus of the problematic *hadis* literature and the obsolete Shariah.

The latest addition in the list of Fatemolla's tirade against obscurantism and un-Islamic preaching and practices by the mullahs is the series of commentary on retired bureaucrat, Shah Abdul Hannan's recent book, *Bidhibaddho Islami Ain* (The Prescribed Islamic Law or Shariah). This monster of a book, 2300 pages in several volumes, published by the Islamic Foundation in Dhaka (this autonomous body like the Bangla Academy is very generous to the authors whose remunerations depend on the length of their respective worksmore pages simply mean more money) is another example of what closed minds can produce and do to the detriment of human progress and knowledge.

The blind followers of the Shariah, including people like Shah Abdul Hannan, neither apply reason nor the teachings of the Quran to evaluate (accept and reject) the man-made Shariah law. Fatemolla has skilfully exposed this flaw in the *Islami Ain*.

He has correctly pointed out the main flaw in Hannan's exposition that Imam Abu Hanifa and his companions not only codified the Shariah for their age but for the Muslims everywhere in all ages. He has buttressed his argument that Shariah is obsolete in our times and has no eternity like the Holy Quran by citing several Islamic scholars of our time. They include Hashim Kamali, Abdur Rahman Doi, Abdul Aziz Sachedina, Fazlur Rahman and others who have all rejected the divinity of Shariah law. While Hashim Kamali has pointed out the inadequacies of the Shariah in meeting the needs of modern Muslims, and has suggested drastic changes and modifications in the so-called Islamic code, Sachedina has succinctly stated that the needs of the past and present are very different.

What we get in this interesting web page is that:

- a) Shariah or the predominantly *hadis*-based code often goes against the teaching and spirit of the Quran, protects the institutions of slavery, absolute monarchy, patriarchy and misogyny, concubinage and illicit sex with slave girls and many other revolting and inhuman institutions and practices.
- b) The fundamental problem with both the *hadis* literature and the Shariah is their being equated with the Holy Quran as divine and eternal by the bulk of the *ulama* throughout the Muslim world. It is a pity that Muslim theologians, jurists and philosophers during the heyday of the Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties, as subservient employees of the autocratic rulers (also known as caliphs), justified autocracy, patriarchy, polygamy, slavery and other vices through the so-called sayings of the Prophet or *hadises* and the Shariah. Thus the compilers of the *hadises*: Imams Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Tirmizi and others as well as the Muslim jurists like Abu Hanifa and Shafi have occupied the stature of saints, almost with the infallibility of the Holy Prophet. Meanwhile, Sufis and saints like Abdul Qadir Jeelani, Mansoor Hallaj, Rabiya Basri, Muinuddin Chishti, Bahauddin Zakariya Multani, Nizamuddin Aulia and many others tried in vain to stage an Islamic Reformation, promoting anti-feudal, liberal doctrine of love and peaceful co-existence of Muslims and non-Muslims, believers, agnostics and non-believers in the true spirit of Islam.
- c) Unless the Muslims learn about the flaws of the *hadis* literature, including the unreliability of many *sahih* or "authentic" *hadises*, and the limitations of the man-made Shariah, there is no way out for them towards freedom from the clutches of autocracy, terrorism and "mullahcracy" almost everywhere in the Muslim world, including Bangladesh.

In sum, although Fatemolla's *jamateislami* is not a comprehensive, flawless compendium of ideas to eradicate terrorism and inhuman laws created and nourished in the name of Islam, through his incisive writing he has taken a bold step towards reason and rationalism, always inculcated by Islam.

*Taj Hashmi writes from York University, Toronto.*

## 2. REMARKS IN NFB (NEWS FROM BANGLADESH)

## Readers' Opinion

### Fatemolla: Getting the Slime out of Islam

Wednesday April 06 2005 17:56:01 PM BDT

<http://bangladesh-web.com/news/view.php?hidDate=2005-04-07&hidType=OPT&hidRecord=00000000000000000040316>

#### Mohammad Zaman

I was pleasantly surprised to see the article “Jihad against partisan political use of Islam” by Dr. Taj Hashmi in 03-27-2005 issue of the Daily Star. My comment is not a response but an echo of what Dr. Hashmi asseverated so well.

Sapid and luculent – Fatemolla writes with ease. My first encounter with his Bangla prose was in an Internet Forum. It was vibrant and rooted with a deep love for home. His language flows with a purpose seeded in his unflinching love for “what we were and what we ought to be”.

Later I learned of his almost-one-man-jihad for rooting out the pestiferous and decadent cannons that has proven nothing more than stygian for the entire Islamic Ummah for centuries. A self taught man, Fatemolla writes with knowledge and unambiguous brio. He speaks against specific aspects of a frozen-in-time system-of-law that perhaps has outlived, even its most perfunctory usefulness.

Over time, I had a few exchange of poetry and other thoughts. In general, I knew most of his views. But I got to know his ideas and philosophies in details when I tried translating one of his play where he labored very hard to get a clear sense of Hudud Laws as it relates to the issue of “Hila Marriage”.

He argued back and forth, but a clear understanding was stymied by conflicting opinions from various religious authorities. It seems that the whole exercise was meant to denigrate a woman for no fault of her own. Fatemolla painstakingly reviewed the Islamic literature on this issue and sharply pointed at the inconsistency and injustice. This play, to my understanding, is in the process of becoming a movie. I hope, it does!

Compared to the brackish histrionicity of Taslima, Fatemolla is composed. He does not trash Islam. He rather draws his arguments from Islam itself. Like Asra Nomani (WSJ reporter and author of recently published book Standing Alone in Mecca), he may not be intra-mural, but his logic flows from within the bounds of Islam. And this is his biggest strength.

As a believer and as a Muslim, I salute Fatemolla for his common sense approach to Islam. This is much more salubrious for the Muslims as a whole than the slithering “slime” being tossed around for so long by so many of Islam's hegemons. Fatemolla, like Asra Nomani (as she recently argued for in an National Pubic Radio interview), is out there to get

the "Slime out of Islam."

Mohammad Zaman, MD  
03-28-2005

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The way Jamat/Fundamentalists are getting powerful in Bangladesh is really a matter of great concern.

<http://bangladesh-web.com/news/view.php?hidDate=2005-03-29&hidType=OPT&hidRecord=0000000000000000039079>

Sunday March 27 2005 16:31:25 PM BDT

[Mohammad Arafat from USA](#)

Jihad against Political Islam: A Review of WWW. Jamatepislami.com

It is very important that we take lesson from our past history. The way Jamat/Fundamentalists are getting powerful in Bangladesh is really a matter of great concern.

Unfortunately some of us are ignoring the fact and remain quiet. We may have a dangerous future if we do not take action right now. The action of Jamat may not affect me right now but will do in future. They will not leave anybody, not even BNP and the so-called moderate Muslims. Let me cite some words from Rev. Martin Niemiller where it is depicted how inactive attitude against the extremist may put us into grave situation in the long run.

First they came for the socialists, and I didn't speak out  
-because I was not a socialist.  
Then they came for the trade unionist, and I didn't speak out  
-because I was not a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out  
-because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for me,  
-and there was home left to speak for me.

Rev. Martin Niemiller

I would like to ask the readers and contributor of the NFB to go to [www.jamatepislami.com](http://www.jamatepislami.com) and read the authentic materials to realize how dangerous the Jamatees are. How they are not only the enemy of the country but also the enemy of the Islam as well.

Mohammad Arafat  
Houston  
USA

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<http://bangladesh-web.com/news/view.php?hidDate=2005-03-29&hidType=OPT&hidRecord=0000000000000000039075>

Thank you for the wonderfully elaborate and indepth review of JamatePislami.com

Sunday March 27 2005 16:17:48 PM BDT

[Potheek Aami](#)

Jihad against Political Islam: A Review of WWW. Jamatepislami.com

Mr. Hashmi:

Salam.

Thank you for the wonderfully elaborate and indepth review of JamatePislami.com that you published in NFB.

I loved reading it. I saved it so that I could read it later at my convenience. Today I did and I had to send you a note thanking you. PLEASE continue doing such great works.

I would also like to thank NFB for publishing such quality material.

If we all share this wonderful site's address with two other people and ask them to share it in turn, then I think we can publicize this a lot more.

Potheek Aami

Edinboro

USA

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<http://bangladesh-web.com/news/view.php?hidDate=2005-03-29&hidType=OPT&hidRecord=0000000000000000039062>

REF : Jihad against Political Islam:-I feel that Islam became more radical than it was i,e in 1965 to 1980.

Sunday March 27 2005 15:35:30 PM BDT

[Naseruddin from UAE](#)

REF : Jihad against Political Islam: A Review of WWW. Jamatepislami.com

Dear Mr. Taj Hashmi,

Thanks for your letter about Fatemolla.

In my childhood I still remember our family has suffered by fatwas given by Village Mosque Mollahs against my father though my father was an educated Muslim. He was very honest, soft-minded, without hatred to any religions. As he studied in the Islamic College he could speak, read, translate Arabic, Farsi, Urdu as well as Bengali and English. He got good knowledge about Islam. But the village Mollahs isolated him for their narrow interest and mind.

For this reason I never visited Mosque but accepted from the Islam the good qualities and I am benefitted.

However recently I have the opportunities to be with Tabligi Jammata Peoples and I feel that Islam became

more radical than it was i,e in 1965 to 1980.

Up to the 14 Century Muslims were developed in Science and Technology, Industries and trading, bankings and in many other fields but nowadays We are in the back rows and this is very sad.If We believe only that our Pro-Parents were Adam And Eve and this is enough to live in this world like brothers and Sisters among the Muslims and Non-Muslims and to Accept the good from each other and through the bad.

Recently I thought and decided to talk and discuss with our Muslim brothers to be moderate . I understand that We can not blame the mass for this radicalism because due to the lagging in education and economy they blindly believe what Mollahs tell them and Mollah tell them just follow what We are telling you without thinking and asking the reasons.

Your letter has inspired me that I am not alone in the good mission.

Naseruddin  
Dubai  
UAE

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<http://www.bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidDate=2005-25&hidType=OP&hidRecord=42367>

Fatemolla: Filling the gap of poliarity between tradition and moderanity

Monday April 25 2005 15:17:22 PM BDT

[Abid Bahar from Canada](#)

Ref: Fatemolla: Getting the Slime out of Islam

It is true, every culture is comprised of religious and secular tradition. Both work in the confluence of modernity and tradition. In some societies modernity and tradtion work in their opposite poles and exert strong influence in the way groups believe and act. Like it or not due to society's evolutionary tendency they are there to stay and will continue to create tension.

Only witty reformers acting in the centre using appropriate symbols can generate dynamism in favour of either tradition or modernity. Bullying or incitement techniques such as by Taslima Nasrin or Humayun Azad often work negatively to their intended vision. The above two wanted to erase fundamentalism from Bangladesh but perhaps inadvertently helped to increase. But refomers like Gandhi that respect their tradition at the same time found ways to meet the modern needs/ the demands of their societies can help their own societies develop dynamism and growth.

Due to colonial influence Muslim intellectuals are bringing change from without even not knowing what is needed to be changed.They are throwing the baby (Islam) with the bath water. Fatemolla's approach is different. He is filling the gap of poliarity between tradition and moderanity. He is bringing change from within by getting the "slime out of Islam" giving it a firm and a solid foundation again.

In most dynamic societies contrary to opportunist leaders and the socalled reformers, there weere Fatemollas. Martin Luther King was a Black Christian Fatemola, Ghandi was a Hindu Fatemola, Mohatir was a Malaysian Fatemola and Bhasani a practicing Muslim who fought against the fanatics using Islamic ideas was a Muslim fatemola. We should have more Fatemollas in Bangladesh. Frankly speaking, before Dr. Taj Hashmi's introduction I thought Fatemola was a jester! Thanks Dr. and Good Luck to Fatemolla!

Abid Bahar from Canada

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2005/apr/18/fb.html>

# FEEDBACK

Dhaka Monday 18 April

‘Taj Hashmi’s invective:

Some factual errors’

This is in response to a rebuttal to my review of Fatemolla’s web page, Jamateislami.com.

Several renowned scholars from the US and UK, including the renowned Islamic scholar, Professor John Esposito, have acclaimed my review which came out in the Daily Star on the 27th March. John Esposito has asked me to write a longer version of my review for the second edition of his Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam. I hope our sincere effort will eventually change the mindset of dogmatic and uninformed Muslims about their religion.

I have no problem agreeing with Mahmudul Hasan that:

‘Hypocrisy and scapegoating seems to have blanketed the domain of international politics as well as certain genres of intellectual dialogues of the present time. The chaos, anarchy and mayhem being perpetrated by Bush-Blair’s neo-con hegemony, has engendered a dirty atmosphere of blaming the victims.’ I have been conveying the same message to Islam-bashers through my various writings in the last ten/twelve years. The Western prejudice against Islam predates Nine-Eleven by at least 800 years or so. And there has been hardly any abatement in this prejudice against Islam and the Orient, neither among Western intellectuals nor among politicians.

It is, however, too trite a platitude to establish among those who have read my postings on the NFB during the last eight years that I am dancing to the tune of the Islam-bashers and that Fatemolla is my guru. None of my gurus are alive today. Fatemolla is one of many who may be agreed with on many issues, not all. Most definitely, he is not my guru, although as friends, we mutually learn things from each other.

I beg to disagree with Hasan that ‘Fatemolla-Hashmi’s new approach’ by any means is aimed at harming or denigrating Islam. Partial or total rejection of ‘renowned Islamic personalities of past’ such as Imam Bokhari, Imam Ghazzali, Imam Abu Hanifa and others, including Banna-Qutb-Mawdudi, does not amount to the rejection of Islam. Contrary to what Maulana Nizami and other Jamaat-I-Islami leaders stipulate, drawing a parallel between Islam and their Islam-oriented party is similar to what Hasan tells us too. His not-so-subtle message is: ‘If you criticise Imam Bukhari or Abu Hanifa, Hasan Banna or Mawdudi, then you cease to be a Muslim’. Tawba Nauzubillah. They are not equivalent to the Holy Prophet and neither the Hadis literature (full of lies and vulgarities) nor the Hedaya or the collective works by Ghazzali, Abu Hanifa, Banna and Mawdudi are sacrosanct like the Holy Quran (period).

I fail to understand Hasan’s argument that a reviewer of a book or web page (as this is the case here vis-à-vis jamateislami.com) has to read all the sources cited by the author of the book or web page concerned. For Hasan’s information, I did not write an ‘article’ but a ‘review’ of Fatemolla’s web page.

I have neither the time nor any desire to read any rubbish that has come off the Islamic Foundation and similar organisations in Bangladesh or Pakistan. I have no problem in accepting Shah Abdul Hannan to be an honest person and good administrator. So what? An honest person is not necessarily a big scholar. I have a very big problem in accepting him and his co-authors of the 2300-page ‘magnum opus’, BidhiBaddho Islami Ain, including the late Gazi Shamsur Rahman (yes, he was a renowned lawyer) or Maulana Obaidul Haq, as ‘authorities’ on Islam or as great Islamic thinkers. No, they are not known anywhere in the world as Islamic scholars. I should have possibly mentioned some of the co-authors of the Islami Ain in my review.

I appreciate Shah Abdul Hannan’s efforts to write ten books on Islam and various other subjects despite

spending most of the thirty-odd years of his career reading mainly government files. I do not undermine his efforts, but question those works as by-products of any primary research or serious scholarship (period).

I have read a couple of Hannan's articles on Zakat and other Islamic issues. To my utter dismay, I found them not different from what the half-educated Maulanas-Muftis and so-called Allama like Delwar Hussein Saidi tell us about Islam. We simply cannot regard whatever Abu Hanifa and other Imams codified as Shariah law something eternal for all ages for all Muslims. If we want to do so, then we will have to re-introduce slavery, concubinage, monarchy and other vices, tolerated but not approved by Islam and the Holy Prophet. We simply cannot agree with the wrong notion that the rate of Zakat is only 2.5 per cent or a Muslim man can Shariah code.

In sum, my agreement with many things that Fatemolla talks about through his jamateislami.com does not mean that we hold the same political views or endorse the same ideology vis-à-vis Islam. I like his web page as it is thought provoking and critical of the prevalent vices among the Muslims, nourished and defended in the name of Islam. I believe that it is high time to purify Islam in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the Holy Prophet, not in accordance with what Imam Bukhari or Ghazzali or Abu Hanifa (let alone Banna-Qutb-Mawdudi) tells us to do. If we Muslims do not clean our own house and instead justify terrorism, subjection of women and minorities and other vices in the name of Islam, there is no way out for Muslims anywhere in the world.

**Taj Hashmi**

*Toronto, Canada*