# Feature

*In this issue we compare Islam in four different countries. Alan Black looks at Islam in Pakistan tying it in with society and the political situation; Morris Lee looks at neighbouring Bangladesh and particularly the mystical Islamic groups; the other two papers look at countries where Islam is the minority religion - Peter Riddell at China, Peter Sales at the Phillipines - and the development of the religion there. Perhaps one of our members who feel a certain competence in this area could do a piece on the Australian Islamic scene for our next issue.*

## Religion, Politics and Society in Pakistan

*Alan W. Black*
*Sociology, UNE*

For a full understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between religion, politics and society in Pakistan, one needs to look not only at events which have happened since that nation's inauguration in 1947 but also at prior history. It then becomes apparent that although the unfolding of events at any particular time has its own specific characteristics, there have also been recurring patterns. These recurring patterns relate to the significance of Islam, as well as of other factors, in social and political processes.

After examining the earlier history of Islam on the Indian subcontinent, this paper analyses the part played by religion in the movement for the formation of Pakistan as a separate nation, the place accorded to religion in successive Pakistani constitutions, the use made of religion by various political leaders and parties, the growth of religious fundamentalism, the social and political consequences of sectarianism, and the situation of religious minorities.

Islam first reached the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent through Arab conquests in the Indus Delta in the 8th century C.E. However, the major period of Islam's expansion on the subcontinent dates from the 11th century and especially from the late 12th century, when many parts of the subcontinent came under Muslim hegemony. Through immigration and through conversion, especially as a result of the preaching of wandering Sufis, Muslims steadily increased in number, so that by the beginning of the 16th century C.E. they constituted a majority of the population in what is now Pakistan, even though

they always remained a minority in the subcontinent as a whole (Schimmel, 1980; Faruki, 1987).

The zenith of Muslim rule prior to the partition of India came with the establishment of the Mughal Empire (1526-1761). Given that the majority of the Indian population was non-Muslim, the Muslim rulers were faced with a dilemma: were they to be impartial rulers of a multi-religious community, or was Islam to be accorded primacy, with non-Muslims being treated merely as conquered subjects? Whereas some of his Muslim predecessors had enacted laws which discriminated against non-Muslims, Emperor Akbar, who ruled from 1556 to 1605, repealed these enactments. His liberal policy was continued by the next two Emperors: Jahangir, ruler from 1605 to 1627, and Shah Jahan, ruler from 1628 to 1658. Had Shah Jahan been succeeded by his eldest son, Dara Shikoh, a Sufi thinker and writer, it is quite likely that a liberal policy would have been maintained. However, when Shah Jahan became seriously ill in 1657, his four sons became involved in a struggle for power, which was eventually won by the third son, Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb saw himself as a champion of orthodox Sunni Islam. He persecuted Shi'a and punished heresy, blasphemy, slackness in fasting during the month of Ramazan and failure to observe the prescribed five periods of prayer daily. To stamp out drinking, gambling and sexual immorality, he appointed a censor of morals in every large city. He also reimposed the *jizyah*, a poll tax on non-Muslims, and made them subject to other legal disabilities, thus reversing the policy instituted a century earlier by Akbar. In short, Aurangzeb insisted that he was the ruler of an Islamic state, rather than being simply the Muslim monarch of a multi-religious empire (Schimmel, 1980; Ahmed, 1986; Srivastava, 1992).

Although the Mughal empire achieved its widest geographical spread during Aurangzeb's reign, the severity with which he pursued his policies led to widespread discontent and numerous rebellions, which eventually began to sap the empire of its strength. Hindu revivalism increasingly became an anti-Muslim movement. The Sikhs, whose religion contained elements drawn from both Hindu (Vaishnava) and Islamic (Sufi) sources, moved closer to the former in their ideological and political position and engaged in armed struggle against the Mughals, as did other ethnic groups such as the Pathans and the Marathas. After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, these and other conflicts, coupled with incompetent leadership by his successors, led to the collapse of the Mughal empire by the mid-18th century (Schimmel, 1980). Eventually British rule, not a Muslim state, was established throughout the subcontinent.

Faced by the less auspicious circumstances in which Muslims found themselves as a result of the decline of the Mughal empire, various Islamic reform movements developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although there were differences of emphasis among these movements, they all sought the revitalisation of Islam. An intellectual progenitor of several of the movements was Shah Wali Allah (1703-62), who sought to synthesise and systematise the whole range of Islamic knowledge, showing how apparent conflicts among the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad could always be reconciled if sayings only of unquestioned authenticity were accepted and if these sayings were properly understood. Shah Wali Allah also translated the Qur'an from Arabic into Persian, believ-

ing that Muslims would be more likely to live according to Holy Writ if they could understand the text rather than relying simply on commentaries. He expounded the ideal of a State in which *'ulama* (Islamic teachers) would play an important role in guiding an enlightened Muslim ruler, who would appoint officials to enforce the *shari'a* (religious law as laid down in the Qur'an and Sunnah) and to achieve, as far as possible, an Islamic organisation of society (Schimmel, 1980: 153-159; Metcalf, 1982: 35-43).

In the early part of the nineteenth century, a less scholarly and more militant Islamic revival movement was led by Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (1786-1831). He and his followers denounced beliefs and practices which in any way compromised the absolute monotheism of Islam, such as the veneration of saints, apostles or martyrs, or the adoption heterodox accretions from Hinduism. The militancy of this revivalist movement escalated during the 1820s, when Barelvi committed himself to *jihad* (holy war) aimed at overthrowing the rule of the Sikhs in the Punjab. To launch this *jihad*, he and his troops first migrated to the Pathan borderlands, where they initially won support from some of the local tribes. This support soon eroded when an attempt was made to replace the tribal social order with a structure similar to that of the first Muslim community in Mecca, and especially when they tried to collect *zakat* (the canonical alms tax) from tribespeople who were unaccustomed to any tax at all. Although Barelvi succeeded in suppressing this opposition and establishing himself in Peshawar in 1830, he and many of his followers were killed by the Sikhs in the Battle of Balakot (1831). Some of his surviving supporters migrated to Mecca rather than continuing to live among a people whom they regarded as infidels. Others who remained in India converted their struggle to one against the British infidels rather than the Sikhs (Schimmel, 1980: 180-184; Metcalf, 1982: 52-63).

As the British, whether rightly or wrongly, tended to regard Muslims as being disproportionately, though not solely, responsible for the abortive Indian mutiny of 1857, restraints imposed upon them in the aftermath of the mutiny were particularly severe. In Delhi, for example, the mosques were occupied by the British: the Jami' Masjid for five years, the Fatehpuri Masjid for twenty. Various Muslim *madrasahs* (religious academies) were destroyed. In the face of such subjection, two major reform movements developed among Muslims in India in the following decades. These movements were closely associated with two particular educational institutions: one at Deoband, the other at Aligarh (Ahmad, 1967, 1969; Schimmel, 1980; Metcalf, 1982).

In 1867, there was established at Deoband, near Delhi, a *madrasah* designed to train *'ulama* (Islamic teachers) in traditional Islamic theology and law. The curriculum, originally ten years in length but later reduced to six years, was based on a study of 106 classical Islamic books. As none of these was in English and none contained modern scientific perspectives, it was unlikely that graduates of the academy would find employment in government service. They were destined, rather, to become prayer leaders, writers, preachers and teachers within the Muslim community. The academy at Deoband, and others modelled on it, was thus dedicated to the maintenance of traditional Islamic orthodoxy, making no concessions to Western culture (Schimmel, 1980: 209-211; Metcalf, 1982).

A different approach was adopted by Muslim modernists, who incorporated certain Western values, especially contemporary scientific perspectives, into their world-view. In 1875, largely as a result of the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College was founded at Aligarh, classes beginning in 1878. There, in contrast to Deoband, the predominant medium of instruction was English and students imbibed liberal ideals and a scientific outlook. Muslim civil servants, landed gentry and princely rulers gave enthusiastic support to the college, hoping that its combination of English education and Islamic values would help Muslims in India to regain some of the power and prestige they had lost since the decline of the Mughal empire. Of the four hundred or so graduates of the college in the nineteenth century, about two-thirds entered the civil service (Metcalf, 1982).

In short, the educational institutions at Deoband and Aligarh represented and reinforced two rather different perspectives among Muslims in India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: the one traditionalist and dominated by *'ulama* (Islamic teachers), the other modernist and led by educated laypersons (the Muslim salariat). Although the leaders of the movement which eventually led to the formation of Pakistan were drawn largely from the latter group, this should not be interpreted to mean that antipathy to British colonialism developed earlier among the latter group than among the former. Prior to British rule, the Muslim *'ulama* and Hindu *pandits* (priests) held lucrative and influential positions in the judicial system and the educational system in India. With the transplantation of British legal and educational institutions to that country, the traditional religious leaders lost ground to a new class of judges, lawyers and teachers trained in British ways. Resenting their loss of status and income, the *'ulama* found common cause with those Hindus who wished to see an end to British rule. By contrast, Muslim members of the new class which had prospered under British rule were wary of any attempt to overthrow that regime, fearing that their position in society would be threatened by the Hindu majority which would then be in control of the government and the civil service (Alavi, 1986).

As movements to institute a more democratic political system developed in India in the twentieth century, there was an increasing awareness among Muslims that the only way in which they could avoid being subjugated to the Hindu majority was by some form of political separation between Hindus and Muslims. The Muslim League, founded in 1906, initially sought the creation of separate Muslim electorates, a right that was granted in 1909. Although, in an address to the All India Muslim League in 1930, the philosopher and poet Muhammad Iqbal presented a vision of a self-governing nation in the predominantly Muslim provinces which now make up Pakistan, it was not until 1940 that Muhammad Ali Jinnah persuaded the Muslim League to adopt this particular political goal, which by then had been enlarged to include also the area which later became Bangladesh.

Given the importance of Iqbal and Jinnah in the movement which ultimately led to the formation of Pakistan, it is useful to examine their views on the relationship between religion, politics and society. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, based on lectures he gave in 1928-29, Iqbal argued for the concept of *ijtihad*, the right to go back to the foundation of jurisprudence and not necessarily

to adhere to the conclusions reached by one of the traditional Islamic legal schools. Sunnis considered *ijtihad* permissible only on points not already decided by recognised authorities; on points already decided, they demanded *taqlid* (strict conformity to tradition). In Iqbal's view, this had resulted in the ossification of Islamic law, preventing its adaption to new social and political situations. Whereas traditionalists had stressed that *ijma'* (consensus) among religious scholars was required for *ijtihad*, Iqbal gave a more radical and more political interpretation of *ijma'* using it to refer to a consensus reached through a parliamentary legislative system in a Muslim state (Ahmad, 1967; Schimmel, 1980: 266; Metcalf, 1982: 363).

Like Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, revered by Pakistanis as the Quaid-i-Azam (Great Leader) and founder of Pakistan, was a Western-educated Muslim modernist. There is considerable controversy among later commentators as to the precise role Jinnah envisaged for Islam in the new nation. Writers such as Sharif al Mujahid (1981) argue that Jinnah had in mind what was latter called an 'Islamic State' even though he might not have used this particular term. Other writers, such as Munir (1980) and Alavi (1988), present evidence which indicates that Jinnah had in mind not a theocracy but a secular democratic state, one in which the essential principles of Islam could be freely maintained but where there would also be full freedom of religion. Although religion was to play a central role in determining which parts of India would be hived off to form Pakistan, there was among Islamic traditionalists, such as the Deobandi *'ulama*, and among Islamic fundamentalists, such as members of the Jama'at-i-Islami, strong opposition to the Pakistan movement as embodied in Jinnah and the Muslim League. The core of the Pakistan movement's support came from the Muslim salariat, whose modernist leanings were anathema to the traditionalists and the fundamentalists. It was only on the eve of partition or afterwards that many members of these latter two groups were willing to throw in their lot with the new nation (Alavi, 1988). Presumably they then hoped that their vision of the proper relationship between Islam and the State would eventually, if not immediately, be fulfilled in Pakistan.

Given the history which has been outlined above, it was inevitable that there would be differences of opinion within Pakistan as to the new country's Constitution. The concept of an Islamic State as envisaged by the conservative *'ulama*, which would have meant unflinching application of the *shari'a* (Islamic law) and formal empowerment of religious scholars to veto any legislation not in conformity with Islamic teaching, was unacceptable to the Western-educated, Western-orientated modernists. The Objectives Resolution adopted by the Constituent Assembly in March 1949 attempted an accommodation between religious conservatives and modernists. The Resolution began with the declaration that 'sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone, and the authority which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him is a sacred trust'. The Resolution spoke of Pakistan as a sovereign independent State

*Wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed;*

*Wherein the Muslims of Pakistan shall be enabled individually and collectively to order their lives in accord with the teachings and requirements of Islam, as set out in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah;*

*Wherein adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practise their religions and develop their cultures... (quoted in Choudhury, 1969: 35)*

Because the Resolution's references to Islam were capable of either a fundamentalist or a more liberal reading, they masked rather than resolved the deep divisions of opinion as to the place religion should occupy in Pakistani polity.

With some modifications, the 1949 Objectives Resolution was incorporated into the preamble to the Constitutions of Pakistan adopted successively in 1956, 1962 and 1973. The 1956 Constitution specified that the name of the State was the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and that the Head of State must be a Muslim. At the same time, in a Part dealing with Fundamental Rights, the Constitution stated (section 18) that

*Subject to law, public order and morality -*
*(a) every citizen has the right to profess, practise and propagate any religion; and*
*(b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.*

In Section 22, the Constitution also guaranteed the right to move the Supreme Court by appropriate proceedings for the enforcement of these Fundamental Rights.

Under the heading 'Directive Principles of State Policy' the Constitution stipulated (Section 25) that the State shall endeavour, as regards the Muslims of Pakistan -@QUOTE = (a) to provide facilities whereby they may be enabled to understand the meaning of life according to the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah;
(b) to make the teaching of the Holy Qur'an compulsory;
(c) to promote unity and the observance of Islamic moral standards;
(d) to secure the proper organisation of zakat, wakfs and mosques.

However, it was specifically stated (Section 23) that these particular provisions were not enforceable in any court. The 1956 Constitution also stipulated (Section 198) that no law should be enacted that was repugnant to the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah and that existing law should be brought into conformity with such injunctions. A Commission was to be established to make recommendations to the National Assembly (Parliament) on these particular issues.

The Constitution of 1956 remained in force for only about two and a half years, being abrogated in October 1958, when President Iskander Mirza declared martial law and appointed the army commander-in-chief, General Muhammad Ayub Khan, the Chief Martial Law Administrator. About three weeks later, Ayub Khan deposed Mirza and declared himself President. As well as being the beginning of a long period of military rule in Pakistan, Ayub Khan's accession to power was regarded by religious traditionalists and fundamentalists as a major reversal of Pakistan's progress toward becoming a truly Islamic State. His main priority was to build a 'modern, progressive, united and strong Pakistan' (quoted in Ahmad, 1991; 472). Although he regarded Islam in its original form as being a 'dynamic and progressive movement', he felt that in its more dogmatic forms Islam had failed to keep pace with developments in modern science and philosophy (quoted in

Munir 1980: 89; see also Ayub Khan, 1967: 195-204). In this respect, he belonged to the ranks of the Muslim modernists. He introduced humane reforms to Muslim family laws (e.g. laws on polygamy, divorce, and maintenance provisions for women), thereby incurring the wrath of Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists. Under his regime, the government took over the administration of major religious endowments that had previously been controlled by hereditary custodians (Ahmad, 1991: 472). Despite his modernist predisposition, Ayub Khan believed that parliamentary democracy of the Westminster style had proved unworkable in Pakistan, and that it must be replaced by a different system.

As well as legitimising the role of a powerful President and providing for a system of 'Basic Democracies' whereby members of the National Assembly would be elected, the second Constitution, promulgated by Ayub Khan in 1962, gave the name of the country as the Republic of Pakistan, not the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Constitution nevertheless specified that the President shall be a Muslim. Under the heading 'Principles of Law-Making', it stated that 'no law should be repugnant to Islam' and that no law should 'prevent the members of a religious community or denomination from professing, practising or propagating, or from providing instruction in their religion, or from conducting institutions for the purposes of or in connection with their religion' (reproduced in Schuler and Schuler, 1967: 266, 268). While stipulating that it was the responsibility of each legislature to ensure that proposed laws did not violate these Principles, the 1962 Constitution also stated that the validity of a law shall not be called into question on such grounds. Hence, resort to the courts to enforce the right to freedom of religion (and other Fundamental Rights specified in the 1956 Constitution) was not provided for.

Whereas the Directive Principles in the 1956 Constitution (Section 25) stated that 'steps shall be taken to enable the Muslims of Pakistan individually and collectively to order their lives in accordance with the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah', the Principles of Policy in the 1962 Constitution spoke simply of enabling Muslims to order their lives 'in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam' (reproduced in Schuler and Schuler, 1967: 271). Religious traditionalists and fundamentalists regarded the new wording as insufficiently specific. They noted, too, that unlike its predecessor, the 1962 Constitution did not specify that existing law should be brought into conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.

There was considerable public criticism of various aspects of the 1962 Constitution, especially of its failure to provide legal guarantees of fundamental rights. Religious traditionalists also clamoured for a restoration of those Islamic features of the 1956 Constitution which had been omitted. A private Bill was introduced into the reconstituted, but scarcely democratic, National Assembly, seeking to amend the New Constitution accordingly. Although he would have preferred not to make such changes, President Ayub knew it was not long before he would need to face a Presidential election. Rather than resist the proposed amendments, he judged it more politic to accept them. Passed by the National Assembly in December 1963, and receiving Presidential assent in January 1964, the first amending Act changed Part II, Chapter 1,

of the 1962 Constitution from 'Principles of Law-Making' to 'Fundamental Rights', these rights becoming enforceable at law. Also as a result of this amending Act, the country's name again became the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and other Islamic features of the 1956 Constitution were substantially restored (Choudhury, 1969: 184; Feldman, 1972: 25-27).

Despite his own modernist learning, President Ayub was not averse to making use of conservative interpretations of Islam when it suited him. In the 1965 Presidential election, when the opposition candidate was Miss Fatima Jinnah (sister of M.A. Jinnah), he succeeded in getting a *fatwa* (religious decree) from a gathering of conservative *'ulama* that under Islamic law a woman could not be head of state.

The 1962 Constitution, with various amendments, remained in force until 25 March 1969, when widespread protests focusing on issues of socioeconomic justice, political participation and regional autonomy led to Ayub Khan's resignation as President and a reimposition of martial law under General Yahya Khan (Feldman, 1972; Choudhury, 1974: 1-45). Although opposition from Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists probably contributed, at least indirectly, to the end of the Ayub regime, this was a much less important factor than the more mundane considerations mentioned in the previous sentence. Indeed, in the later stages of the anti-Ayub agitation, the Jama'at-i-Islami, a bastion of Islamic fundamentalism, was so alarmed at the rise of secular, socialist and regional political forces that it swung in favour of the existing power structures, which paid at least lip service to Islam (Jalal, 1990: 307-308: Ahmad, 1991: 474).

After a period of martial law under Yahya Khan, general elections for a civilian government were held in December 1970. Despite its high hopes, the Jama'at-i-Islami fared poorly, winning only four of the 300 general seats in the National Assembly. Under the slogan *roti, kapra aur makan* (bread, clothing and shelter), Z.A. Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won 81 of the 138 seats in West Pakistan. Sheikh Mujib's Awami League, on a platform of maximum provincial autonomy, won all but two of the 162 seats in East Pakistan, giving it an overall majority in the Assembly. The prospect of a government dominated by Bengalis was unthinkable to the Punjabi-dominated military and civil service. After some futile attempts at compromise, General Yahya suspended the Assembly. East Pakistan went on a general strike and later declared itself the independent nation of Bangladesh, being aided in this process by the intervention of the Indian army (Choudhury, 1974; Feldman 1975; Jalal, 1990: 309-311).

The Pakistan army's failure to prevent the secession of East Pakistan marked the end of Yahya Khan's regime in what remained of Pakistan. After Z. A. Bhutto succeeded him as President, an all-party committee began work on a new Constitution. Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists, including the four members of the Jama'at-i-Islami who were members of the National Assembly, demanded that the Constitution embody the requirements of the *shari'a*. Parliamentarians from the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan contended that the Constitution should include Qur'anic punishments and should prohibit the taking of interest, the consumption of alcohol and the practice of any form of gambling. Some wished to have it made compulsory for

women to wear the *chador* (veil) (Zakaria, 1988: 233).

The Constitution finally adopted in 1973 was said to be 'the most Islamic constitution in the history of Pakistan' (Ahmad, 1991: 477). In essence, all of the Islamic provisions from the 1956 Constitution were adopted, and further provisions were added, although some particular suggestions, such as requiring women to wear the *chador*, were not adopted. In the 1973 Constitution, Islam was, for the first time, declared to be the State religion. Although Urdu was designated as the national language, the Constitution also specified that the State would encourage and facilitate the learning of Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. Notwithstanding the primacy accorded to Islam, the fundamental rights defined and made justiciable under the Constitution included the right of every citizen, subject to law, order and public morality, to profess, practice and propagate his or her religion. This right was, however, subsequently whittled away by amendments to the Constitution.

Although, or perhaps because, Bhutto used the term 'Islamic socialism' to describe his policies, he was not generally viewed with favour by Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists. He himself expressed the view that 'secularism, in the sense of tolerance and the rejection of theocracy, is inherent in Islamic political culture' (Bhutto, 1973: 11). Money flowing from OPEC countries to Islamic groups in Pakistan as a result of the oil boom of the mid-1970s gave a boost to Bhutto's religious opponents. These opponents' allegations that his policies were un-Islamic found a sympathetic hearing among the urban middle classes, who had benefited little from his policies, and among industrialists, big businessmen and especially small-scale entrepreneurs, who perceived his labour laws, nationalisation program and other socialistic leanings as threats to their economic interests. In 1974, in a cynical attempt to placate his religious critics, Bhutto had the Constitution amended so as to declare the Ahmadi sect to be non-Muslim. In his last few months in office, he made further concessions to the religious parties, introducing prohibitions on alcohol, gambling and night clubs, and declaring Friday rather than Sunday as the weekly holiday. This, however, did not satisfy his religious critics. In the March 1977 elections, Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party was opposed by the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), a hastily constructed nine-party coalition, comprising two traditional *'ulama* parties, the fundamentalist Jama'at-i-Islami, and six other non-clerical parties. When Bhutto won the election with 80 per cent of the seats, the PNA accused him of rigging the results. The widespread public disturbances which followed led Bhutto to declare martial law in the cities of Lahore, Karachi and Hyderabad. He unwisely ordered troops to fire on PNA supporters coming out of mosques, an order the army was reluctant to follow. Eventually, on 4 July 1977, in an operation code-named 'Fairplay', the army placed Bhutto and other PPP leaders under house arrest. The army chief, General Zia-ul-Haq, declared himself Chief Martial Law Administrator, promising to hold an election within ninety days, but he kept postponing this on various pretexts. Military rule under Zia continued under 1985, when there was a partial restoration of civilian rule, although Zia remained as President (Jalal, 1990: Lamb, 1991).

In contrast to Bhutto, whose Sufi sympathies and penchant for whisky were well known, Zia was a much more puri-

tanical and orthodox Sunni. Despite the non-democratic foundation of his regime, Zia's accession to power was hailed by Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists, who saw in him their best chance yet to achieve in Pakistan a truly Islamic State. Zia, in turn, sought legitimacy for his regime by embarking on a programme of Islamization. A book entitled *Pakistan: Return from the Precipice 1977-1979*, with an introductory chapter written by retired Major-General Shahid Hamid, reviewed the main achievements of the first two years of Zia's rule. Under the heading 'Religious Affairs', particular attention was given to a series of laws enacted in 1979, based on the injunctions of Islam. These provided for the introduction of two Islamic taxes - *zakat* (an alms tax) and *'ushr* (another welfare tax based on the value of agricultural production) - and the adoption of the harsh penalties prescribed in the *shari'a* for theft, adultery, fornication, making false accusations of sexual misconduct, or consuming intoxicants. In practice, these penalties, which included flogging (for various offences), amputation of the right hand or the left foot (for theft of property worth more than 4.457 grams of gold) and stoning to death (for adultery with a married person) were rarely if ever imposed, the judiciary being unwilling to do so when the law of evidence had not been Islamicized. This outcome was a profound disappointment to those Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists who had greeted Zia's coming to power (Weiss, 1986; Faruki, 1987; Ahmad, 1991).

Zia proceeded cautiously with the Islamization of the financial sector. Here, the main objective was the elimination of *riba* (interest). From the time of the 1956 Constitution onwards, the achievement of this objective 'as early as possible' had been stated as a directive principle in State policy but little had been done to accomplish this. In September 1977, Zia requested the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) to prepare a report on 'the Elimination of Interest from the Economy'. In May 1980, when the CII was almost ready to submit its report, a Committee on Islamization, appointed by the Minister of Finance in April 1980, published its *Agenda on Islamic Economic Reform.* The latter report recommended a very gradual process of implementing an Islamic economic order and cautioned against an undue or exclusive emphasis on *zakat* and on the elimination of interest. Indeed, the report noted (p.iv) that the latter might lead to a decidedly un-Islamic outcome: a 'rise in the economic exploitation of the poor by the rich'. The Zia government heeded the Committee's warning against abrupt changes to the economic system. In a series of steps, it introduced so-called interest-free banking, but in reality this was little more than a sleight of hand: what was once called 'interest' was now called 'mark up' or 'return' (Burki, 1986; Gieraths, 1991).

The Ahmadi religious minority fared badly under Zia. They had already been officially declared non-Muslim by constitutional amendments introduced by Z. A. Bhutto. In 1984, Zia issued an ordinance making it a criminal offence for them to use Islamic terminology, to use the Islamic call to prayer, to call their places of worship mosques, to propagate their religion or to engage in any conduct that 'outrages' a Muslim (Mayer, 1993). Criminal prosecutions of Ahmadis (also known as Qadianis) followed, as did attacks on them and their property. In a message to a conference in London in 1985, Zia promised to 'persevere in our efforts to ensure

the cancer of Qadianism is exterminated' (quoted in Lamb, 1991: 273).

Reform of educational institutions was another aspect of Zia's Islamization program. He directed that textbooks and curricula should be revised so as to conform to Islamic values, with religious education made compulsory for Muslims. He gave a boost to the work of the traditional schools of Islamic education (*deeni madaris*), the number of which increased greatly in the early 1980s. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, many of the *deeni madaris* in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) received large numbers of Afghan students and became at least indirectly involved in the *jihad* against the Soviets and the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Because they were seen as bulwarks against the spread of communism, these *madaris* received financial support from both at home and abroad. The movement of men and money into the NWFP was accompanied by a movement of arms and drugs. Thus emerged the 'kalashnikov culture' which is still a problem in various parts of Pakistan today. In particular, the stimulus and support given by the Zia government and by overseas supporters to the *deeni madaris* run by rival, militant Islamic groups paved the way for the violent sectarianism that has erupted in Karachi and elsewhere in recent years. Long-standing ethnic divisions and economic grievances provide additional elements in this explosive mix.

Overall, Zia's Islamization program probably served his immediate interests more than it did the objectives of the Islamic traditionalists and fundamentalists. Although these latter groups made some gains, the achievements fell well short of their hopes. Zia's claim that the process of Islamization was not yet complete provided a convenient reason for delaying a return to fully democratic government. One can only speculate as to what might have happened if he had not been killed, along with several other high ranking military officers and the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, in a mysterious plane crash in August 1988. In May of that year he had abruptly dissolved the National Assembly (which had been revived in 1985) and dismissed his own government, claiming that the Islamization process had lost momentum and needed to be given fresh impetus. In June he issued the Enforcement of Shari'a Ordinance which stated that the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Qur'an and the Sunnah shall be the supreme source of law in Pakistan and that laws found to be inconsistent with these Injunctions shall be nullified (see the full text in Choudhury, 1988: 245-249). The Ordinance provided, *inter alia,* for the appointment of experienced and well qualified *'ulama* as judges in courts subordinate to the High Court. This was a significant concession toward what the Islamic traditionalists had long been demanding - bringing the whole legal system under clerical control and making all laws, including the Constitution, subordinate to the *shari'a,* as had been done in Iran. Mayer (1993) speculates that Zia may have planned to use this ordinance as a way of disqualifying Benazir Bhutto from becoming Prime Minister, since it could be argued that this would contravene the *shari'a.* Having not been formally ratified before his death, the ordinance lapsed.

In the national elections held in November 1988, the Pakistan People's Party, led by Benazir Bhutto and running on an explicitly secular platform, won 93 out of the 205 Muslim seats. The next largest voting bloc, with 54 seats, was the

Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA), a loose coalition of nine parties committed to a continuation of Zia's Islamization policies. Most of the remaining seats were won by independents. Thus Benazir Bhutto became the first woman to be elected as leader of a Muslim country. Whilst the electoral trouncing given to the IDA can be interpreted as one indication of the relatively limited popularity of Zia's policies, it was no guarantee that the PPP under Benazir Bhutto would be able to deal effectively with the many problems facing Pakistan. Distrusted by both the President and the military, opposed by a non-PPP government in the numerically and economically dominant Punjab province, and surrounded by ministers who were as much interested in enjoying the spoils of office as in grappling with the country's problems, her wings were clipped. Problems of inflation and of law and order were rampant. She was unable to reverse the process of Islamization, of which she had previously been so critical. After only 20 months, the President dissolved the National Assembly and dismissed her government from office, allegedly for corruption, mismanagement and violation of the Constitution.

In the elections held two months later, the PPP won only 45 seats as against the 105 won by the IDA. Punjabi industrialist Nawaz Sharif became Prime Minister with the backing of the army and the civil service. Although he had been an associate of Zia and although segments of the IDA were strong advocates of Islamization, Nawaz Sharif was more a pragmatist than an Islamic ideologist. This was certainly the image he projected when trying to attract investment in Pakistan from Western countries and also when introducing into Parliament a Bill which led to the Enforcement of Shari'a Act 1991. While many of the provisions contained in this legislation were similar to what had been pursued under Zia - such as Islamization of education and the economy, promotion of Islamic values in the media, and the eradication of obscenity, immorality and vice — they did not go as far as was hoped by the religious parties. It has been argued that Nawaz Sharif introduced this legislation in order to forestall a proposed private Bill which would have gone much further in entrenching the *shari'a* as the supreme law in Pakistan (Mayer, 1993).

After his government was involved in a series of legal and constitutional wrangles, the military was heavily implicated in Nawaz Sharif's enforced resignation from the office of Prime Minister in mid-1993 and in Benazir Bhutto's re-elevation to that office following elections a few months later. Since then, the process of Islamization has neither moved forward nor been very significantly rolled back.

One continuing legacy of the Zia regime is the law on blasphemy. This law originally prescribed either the death penalty or life imprisonment for anyone found guilty of blasphemy. Subsequently the Federal Shariat Court ruled that under Islamic law the death penalty is mandatory in such cases. On the flimsiest of evidence, two Christians (one aged 14) were convicted in February 1995 of defiling the name of the Prophet Muhammad and were sentenced to death. On appeal, this conviction was overturned by the Lahore High Court. Whilst the result of the appeal was welcomed by the Bhutto government and by advocates of human rights, it was protested by some Islamic militants, who threatened to take the law into their own hands if they had a chance to do so. A third person accused of the blasphemy, but equally innocent, had been murdered prior to the trial.

In conclusion one can say that although over 90 per cent of the Pakistani population professes Islam, there are quite diverse views as to what Islam really is. Sufism was a major force in the spread of Islam on the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and this stream of influence is still evident in folk Islam with its saints and shrines. This form of Islam is generally viewed with disdain by those who claim to follow a purist tradition based on Scripture (the Qur'an) and Islamic jurisprudence *(shari'a)*. These Islamic traditionalists or fundamentalists are in turn regarded by Islamic modernists as out of touch with modern scholarship and contemporary realities.

Since Pakistan's inception as a separate nation, more political power has been wielded by the army and the civil service than by religious elites, but from time to time Islamic traditionalists or fundamentalists have helped to shape the political agenda, especially when governments have wished to assert or bolster the Islamic credentials of their particular regime. The most notable instance of this was during the Zia era, when a much vaunted program of Islamization was undertaken with mixed results. Division of opinion is likely to continue over the implications of Islam for public policy in Pakistan.

## References


Ahmad, Aziz (1967) *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857-1964*. London: Oxford University Press.

Ahmad, Aziz (1969) *An Intellectual History of Islam in India*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ahmad, Mumtaz (1991). 'Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat'. Pp. 457-530 in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds, *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ahmed, Akbar S. (1986) *Pakistan Society: Islam, Ethnicity and Leadership in South Asia*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Alavi, Hamza (1986). 'Ethnicity, Muslim Society and the Pakistan Ideology'. Pp. 21-47 in Weiss (1986).

Alavi, Hamza (1988). 'Pakistan and Islam: Ethnicity and Ideology'. Pp. 64-111 in Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi, eds, *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*. London: Macmillan.

Ayub Khan, Mohammad (1967) *Friends, Not Masters: A Political Autobiography*. London: Oxford University Press.

Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali (1973). 'Pakistan Builds Anew'. Pp. 8-19 in *Pakistan: Independence and Constitution Day August 14th, 1973*.

Burki, Shahid Javed (1986). 'Economic Management within an Islamic Context'. Pp. 49-58 in Weiss (1986).

Choudhury, G.W. (1969) *Constitutional Development in Pakistan*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

Choudhury, G.W. (1974) *The Last Days of United Pakistan*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press.

Choudhury, G. W. (1988) *Pakistan: Transition from Military to Civilian Rule*. Buckhurst Hill, Essex: Scorpion Publishing.

Faruki, Kemal A. (1987). 'Pakistan: Islamic Government and Society'. Pp. 53-78 in John L. Esposito, ed., *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Feldman, Herbert (1972) *From Crisis to Crisis: Pakistan 1962-1969*. London: Oxford University Press.

Feldman, Herbert (1975) *The End and the Beginning: Pakistan 1969-1971*. London: Oxford University Press.

Gieraths, Christine (1991). 'Islamizing the Financial Sector in Pakistan: Main Participants and Final Product'. Pp. 55-80 in André Wink,

ed., *Islam, Politics and Society in South Asia.* New Delhi: Manohar.

Jalal, Ayesha (1990) *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lamb, Christina (1992) *Waiting for Allah: Pakistan's Struggle for Democracy.* London: Penguin.

Mayer, Ann Elizabeth (1986). 'Islamization and Taxation in Pakistan'. Pp. 59-77 in Weiss (1986).

Mayer, Ann Elizabeth (1993). 'The Fundamentalist Impact on Law, Politics and Constitutions in Iran, Pakistan and the Sudan'. Pp. 110-151 in Martin E. Marty, eds, *Fundamentalisms and the State.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Metcalf, Barbara Daly (1982) *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Munir, Mohammed (1980) *Pakistan From Jinnah to Zia: A Study in Ideological Convulsions,* 2nd edition, New Dehli: Document Press.

Mujahid, Sharif Al (1985) *Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah: Studies in Interpretation.* Dehli: B.R. Publishing Corp.

Schimmel, Annemarie (1980) *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent.* Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Schuler, Edgar A. and Schuler, Kathryn R. (1967) *Public Opinion and Constitution Making in Pakistan 1958-1962.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Srivastava, A. L. (1992) 'The Mughal Empire, 1526-1761'. Pp. 68-76 in *Encyclopedia Britannica,* 15th edition, vol.21.

Weiss, Anita M. (1986). 'The Historical Debate on Islam and the State in South Asia'. Pp 1-20 in Weiss (1986).

Weiss, Anita M. ed. (1986) *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Zakariah, Rafiq (1988) *The Struggle within Islam: The Conflict between Religion and Politics.* London: Penguin.

# A study of some beliefs of mystical groups within the Muslim Community of Bangladesh.

*Morris A Lee*

## Introduction

The modern day republic of Bangladesh came into being some twenty five years ago, rising out of the ashes of a failed experiment in religious unity, namely East and West Pakistan. East Pakistan became Bangladesh in 1971.

The peoples of this area have a long and complex religious history. Many scholars have noted that the people of the Greater Plain of Bengal had a peculiar and distinctive culture from that of the Aryan Hindus. Before its submergence under Brahmanical domination, this area was the seat of a civilisation different in significant respects from that of the vedic Aryan[1]. Buddhism and Jainism had their origin in the area east of the middle Gangetic plain which was the orthodox centre of Brahmanical culture. The above two systems emphasised the primacy of human spirit in contrast to vedic theology[2]. Dr. Ahmed Sharif, in commenting on the philosophical and religious background of greater Bengal, has written:

*Shankya, Yoga and Tantra are the ancient local beliefs and writings. Shankya is the philosophy whereas Yoga and Tantra are sacred ritual and practice.*[3]

Some scholars have called Tantra Bengal's original religion. S. B. Das Gupta describes Tantra in Bengal as the 'original non Aryan cult belief'[4] and Samaren Roy[5] insists that the key to the history and culture of Bengal lies hidden in Tantra. Dr. Ahmed Sharif maintains that despite the coming of the Jain and Buddhist religious systems, Shankya thought and Yogic and Tantric practice strengthened. Their later inclusion in Brahmanical writings also did not prevent their continuation in undiluted form[6]. Samaren Roy comments[7]:

*Brahmanism, as we know it today, was the last to enter the religious scene in Bengal; and even when it did, it generally remained as a sort of super-religion dominating the outer forms, but beneath its surface the original faiths and practices of the land remained dominant.*

### The Advent of Islam

Though Bengal had begun to feel the influence of Islam from the 10th century (and possibly earlier) through Arab traders and merchants, the real impact of Islam came in the wake of the Turkish conquest towards the beginning of the 13th century[8]. Because of the change in political control with the independent Sultans and later the Mughals(from the 16th century), a new framework was provided for the dissemination of Islam in the region. The new Muslim rulers replaced the Hindu kings, allowed migration of Muslims from the west (eg. Turks, Persians, Arabs, North Indians) and allowed the mystics of Islam, the sufis, to propagate Islam amongst the masses of the people.

Though over the years there has been some debate about the origins of the large masses of Muslim converts in Bengal[9], most historical and anthropological studies agree that by far the major proportion of the Muslim community in Bengal came through conversion from other religious communities rather than through migration from outside. Salahuddin Ahmed writes[10],

*Although a considerable number of Muslim immigrants had come to Bengal at different times and from different parts of the Islamic world during about six centuries of Muslim rule, the bulk of the Muslim population of Bengal were of indigenous origin being converted from the Hindu and Buddhist elements.*

Hardy[11],quoting the 'Report on the Census of Bengal 1901', says that perhaps one-sixth of the population of the Presidency of Bengal at that time could lay claim to some foreign blood in their veins.

## Role of the Sufis

Muslim saints or sufis took their message to the cultivators and rural people of Bengal in areas where Brahmanism had not succeeded in gaining dominance. The influence of these sufi's (or *pir'sas* they were and are more popularly known by the rural people living in the area occupied mostly now by present day Bangladesh) was the major factor in the ultimate conversion or change of religious and so-

cial allegiance of the majority of the population. But such a change, rather than an immediate, complete philosophical and theological turn-around, was probably a slow gradual process. Ashim Roy[12], in discussing the development of Muslim tradition in Bengal, postulates three stages namely:

(1) a mass movement of people to Islam with conversion probably being largely a 'change of fellowship'[13] or community.

(2) a syncretism of the endogenous traditions of the converted masses with the exogenous tradition of Islam to overcome the dichotomy between the two.

and (3) a striving for a deeper Islamic consciousness beginning in the early part of the nineteenth century with the rise of various fundamentalist and revivalist Islamic movements with the result that there have been various degrees of attack on the syncretistic and acculturated tradition postulated in stage (2) above.

The very nature of the sufi movement within Islam was such that it displayed an openness and tolerance to include 'outside practices' and ideas[14]. Haque[15] claims that the sufi's who came to Bengal were those of North India and had already absorbed aspects of Indian thought and practice. In Bengal, local beliefs and practices were assimilated with exogenous Islam[16]. Haque[17] makes the comment that associated with the preaching and spread of Islam in Bengal, the Indian methods of Shahajiya and Yoga overwhelmed Sufi beliefs. Gradually Sufi beliefs and rituals were syncretised with Yoga and other rituals of Hinduism. The writings of the Muslims of Bengal, particularly those that have survived or have been passed on from the era when Islam was becoming established in the hearts of the rural people, bear adequate testimony to the intermingling of exogenous and endogenous religious traditions[18].

## Recent Islamic Ferment

The last two hundred years have seen various movements to encourage greater conformity to the ideals of Islam as interpreted by the leaders of these various movements. These movements seem to have had little long term effect in weaning the population away from practices which were deeply ingrained into the local Muslim religious consciousness but not really finding orthodox approval eg. devotion to a *pir*[19].

During the Pakistan period constant pressure was exerted on the people of East Pakistan under the guise of national and religious unity to forsake their language and culture. This pressure effectively amounted to cultural and economic imperialism[20]. Commenting on the emergence of Bangladesh as a nation-state in 1971, Salahuddin Ahmed has written[21],

*.... the entire historical perspective of the subcontinent has undergone a change. The rise of the new Bengali nationalism cutting across (the) religious barrier has added a new dimension to [the] social and political reality. ..... People living within the geographical limits of the present state of Bangladesh were aroused by a new and unprecedented patriotic feeling, a purely secular sentiment. Love for the land and love for the people who inhabit this land, and love for the language and culture of the people of this land.*

Rural Bangladesh is a face to face society in which people are mainly concerned with survival in a hostile environment. There is little interest in abstract, metaphysical, formalised doctrines but in common with many other folk societies, the religious-cultural world is dominated by an instinctive search for a deeper reality beyond, but also within, the everyday. Ashim Ray in his study of the syncretistic tradition of Bengal shows that there is evidence in the folk literature of a search for divinity, religiosity, and godliness in the supernatural and fantastic[22]. Studies such as those done by C. Maloney, K. M. Ashraful Aziz and P. C. Sarker[23] and T. Blanchet[24] show that ancient beliefs have persisted strongly in the everyday lives of people. Common and widespread examples of such ancient beliefs and associated practices are devotion to a *pir*, the saint or holy man; visitation of the *mazar* , that is the tomb of the dead saint[25] and concepts of ritual pollution[26].

## Interaction of Beliefs

It is against this background of interaction of endogenous and exogenous belief systems that the author of this study has conducted interviews with rural Muslims and studied some of the published works of those espousing a particular mystical religious expression. The author has sought to examine the following:

(a) The persistence of an endogenous belief system amongst people who claim to be and are known as Muslims in Bangladesh.

(b) The use of Islamic terminology, that is the terminology of a tradition exogenous to the area, in the expression of these endogenous beliefs.

The particular group under study call themselves *marphati. Marphot* is a word which has come into the Bengali language from the Arabic, *ma'rifat*[27]. This word has the meaning of knowledge or gnosis. It is used by all Muslims but for Muslims of Sufi persuasion it has a particular significance. In Bangladesh it is rare for the word Sufi to be used. It may be used in literature or in debate but ordinary Muslims of Sufi persuasion use the following terms, *marphoti, tariqa* and *faqiri. Faqiri* comes from the Arabic, *faqir* meaning poor. The suffix *i* is Persian which gives the abstract noun. This indicates the Sufi or ascetic way of life[28].*Tariqa* means path or system to be followed for the gaining of spiritual perfection[29]. Indispensable within the Sufi systems followed throughout the Indian sub-continent is the spiritual guide usually called *murshid* or *pir* [30]. The disciple who places himself under the instruction of a guide (*murshid* or *pir*) to travel the path (*tariqa*) is known as *murid* .

The words '*marphot*' and '*tariqa*' have widespread usage within Islamic theology particularly in the Sufi systems but they are two very important key or code words to gain entry to a whole belief system. A very important aspect to emerge from this study is the recognition that these beliefs are esoteric.

There are intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for the beliefs of the *'marphoti'* groups of Bangladesh to be esoteric in nature. The major intrinsic reasons for the esotericism are:

(1) The true knowledge (inner reality) has to be passed on by personal contact and not through any outward means[31].

(2) A spiritual guide or *pir* is therefore necessary for the communication of this knowledge[32].

(3) The nature of the beliefs in particular those that involve intimate sexual practices.

The major extrinsic reason for the esotericism is that the beliefs are offensive to the Muslim community in general. Historically, dating back to the first establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal in the thirteenth century which allowed migration of Muslims from Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and North India, there has always been a condescension if not contempt on behalf of the Muslim immigrants into the area for the endogenous beliefs and language of the people of Bengal[33]. Even Brahmanical Hinduism considered the *lokayat* (atheist) beliefs of the area to be demonic[34].

Following the establishment of British rule in the sub-continent, the differences and distrust between Hindu and Muslim communities were exacerbated. Increasingly definition of the Muslim community was seen in its difference from the Hindu community[35]. As has been mentioned before, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, there has been, in the area occupied by present day Bangladesh, a heightening of Islamic consciousness. This has resulted in attempts at suppression of any beliefs or practices that seemed to conflict with the recognised Muslim identity. Thus social pressure has increased the innate tendency for these beliefs to be 'underground'.

Apart from the antagonism of sections of the Muslim community to the beliefs endogenous to the region, the educated sections of both the Hindu and Muslim communities often ignored or knowingly or unknowingly misrepresented some of these beliefs. This was done usually by including only those concepts present in the folk beliefs which fitted the liberal, tolerant, 'enlightened' outlook of the Bengali intelligentsia, post nineteenth century. This can be seen, for example, in the attitude of Rabindranath Tagore to the songs of the Baul sect of Bengal[36]. Tagore emphasised the longings of the human heart for union with the 'Man of the heart' found within the songs of the Baul sect. However he made little mention of the doctrine and practices of the esoteric cult involving sexo-yogic relations.

## *Marphat* and *Tarika*

By far the majority of the Muslims of Bangladesh are classified as *Sunni*[37]. The number of people in Bangladesh claiming to be *Shia*[38], the second major grouping within the worldwide Muslim community or *Umma*, is unavailable but it is certainly not very large. There is one substantial mosque for this community in a suburb of Dhaka but apart from that, their presence is not obvious.

*Sunni* and *Shia* have been concerned not only with religious belief but also with the leadership or political element of the life of the community. The movement which has had an enormous impact on the expansion of Islam but has not primarily been concerned with political issues has been *Sufi*-ism[39]. It was through the *sufis* that Islam really spread into India, Central Asia, Anatolia and Africa. But *Sufi*-ism in its formative stage was 'mainly an interiorisation of Islam, a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of *tauhid*, 'to declare that God is One'.'[40] Schimmel has described *Sufi*-ism as the 'generally accepted name for Islamic mysticism'[41].

From its earliest times, the distinctives of *Sufi*-ism can be summarised as follows[42]:

*(1) Emphasis on intimate knowledge and experience of God as compared to theological learning.*
*(2) World denying*
*(3) Veneration by the mystic for his teacher/shaikh/pir.*
*(4) Willingness to include 'outside practices' and ideas provided that they seem to produce results in the spiritual quest.*
*(5) Spontaneous missionary endeavours often penetrating to areas far from the centres of power and learning. They did not always insist on a total and immediate abandonment of old habits and social ties upon the acceptance of Islam and they were tolerant of deviation.*

In ordinary Bangladesh society, particularly in the rural areas, the larger groupings within the worldwide community of Islam, the issues of interpretation of law and the different modes of practice are not the matters of extensive discussion. Some debate can be found regarding different ways to stand and in what position the arms should be held during the times of ritual prayer[43]. These may reflect some of the minor differences between the different *Sunni* schools (*madhhab* pl. *madhahib*)[44] but they are not of widespread significance and debate in most areas of rural Bangladesh.

The most common classifications that are mentioned in the rural areas are *shariati* and *marphati* or *tarikat.* Anne-Marie Schimmel[45] in a chapter devoted to Sufism in Indo-Pakistan in her book, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, refers to the large body of mystical poetry and folk songs as *marifati.* An indication of this division can be seen in the book *'Sharaful Insan* which propounds the necessity of following a religious teacher (*pir*) and joining a *tarika* or path. There is a chapter devoted to explaining the difference between *shariat* and *marphat.* The author writes of them as distinct communities, even exhibiting some mutual antagonism[46]

*Brother, within the different communities of modern Islam, there are different opinions and criticisms regarding shariat and tarikat. One community's opinion is this that if the shariat is present, then there is no necessity for the tarikat and there is no hint of the tarikat in the Hadith and the Quran.*

There is a whole *genre* of songs in Bangladesh known as *pala gan*, songs in turn or 'narrative opera'. In the songs, two singers will conduct a debate about the relative merits of two subjects. One of the favourite topics for this sort of dialectic is *shariat* versus *marphat.* Conversations with followers of the *marphat* show the antagonism to the those whom they regard as *shariati.* This is particularly focussed on the Muslim religious teachers, *Munshis, Maulobhis, Mullahs.*

However the tradition of criticism of religious leaders or clerics did not begin with the advent of Islam to Bengal but seems to have been directed at formal religion in general. There is an unconventionality to the *marphati.*

Ashim Roy in surveying the penetration of Islam into the masses of Bengal notes that both Brahmanical Hinduism and the Islam of the *shariat* rejected the language and culture of the people of Bengal. Both were exogenous traditions. To the Hindu elite, Sanskrit was the 'divine language' and the language of the area was 'local' or 'natural' language[47]. Within the Muslin community throughout its history in Bengal, there has always been a tendency amongst a selection of the community to regard the expression of Islam in Bengali language and culture as compromising that religious faith. Certainly those sections of the Muslin community in Bengal who regarded their

family origins as being outside Bengal exhibited this tendency[48]. This resulted in a 'total rejection of the local language as their own religious-cultural medium'[49].Roy's thesis is that Islam only became enculturated in Bengal through people whom he calls the 'Muslin cultural mediators'. As the elite of Hindu Brahmanical culture with Sanskrit as its language was forced to come to terms 'with the little traditions of Bengal through the recognition and adoption of the local Bengali language'[50],so the Muslim cultural mediators were forced not only in the use of language but also in the use of idioms and concepts to adapt to the folk milieu of Bengal [51].

The literature of the Muslim mystical writers of Bengal as well as the material collected in personal interviews emphasises the mystical esoteric approach to religion as compared to the doctrinal, formal and hieratic. The *shariat* represented the formal aspects of Islam. All knowledge obtained through scriptures, *sastra*, including both the Hindu scriptures and the Muslim was not to be compared with that of the secret esoteric knowledge [52].

The formal does have a place in the writing of thew mystics of the past, the *shariat* is described as one of the stages (*manjil*) on the journey to the truth. The four stages are *shariat*, *tariqat*, *haqiqat*, and *marphat*[53]. In fact Ali Raja, a renowned poet and *pir* of the middle eighteenth century from the Chittagong district, in his work *Agam*, though highlighting the independence of each stage, also says that the four are essentially one[54]. Literature readily available today in Bangladesh emphasising the mystical path also stresses that the *shariat* is not to be denigrated but is to be seen as a stage along with the *tariqat* or is to be seen as something for those who are simple and cannot cope with the profound and complex[55]. However it is clear that to the mystics concentration on the *shariat*, the formal, is not sufficient[56].

Within the Bangladesh Muslim community there have been sections in the past, as there are in the present, who would refuse to accept any division of the Muslim community into groups. Historically, certainly the sections of the Muslim community in Bengal who had a foreign orientation and rejected the local language and culture, would have denied the validity of the esoteric mystical movements. In modern day Bangladesh, those who have been influenced directly or indirectly by the ongoing efforts to raise Islamic consciousness[57] have claimed that the beliefs within the *marphati/tariqat* movement are heavily influenced by non-Islamic beliefs.

In the article in *tarika*[58] i n the *Sankhipta Islami Bishwakosh*(The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam) published by the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh the Islamic organisation in Bangladesh enjoying government support, the following comment is found regarding some of the popular movements using this term:

*Among these, pantheism, nature worship and many other doctrines have entered.*

Extreme criticisms of beliefs associated with the *tarika* movement can also be found[59].

On the other hand books written at the popular level in Bangladesh proclaiming the benefits of following a *pir* or *murshid* and joining a *tarika* group, seek to answer the criticisms that the above comments typify[60]. The defenders of mysticism within the Muslim community seek to show that *tasawuff*, or in the language of

rural Bangladesh *tarika*, is not only legitimate but also 'fulfilment' of Islam. The following are presented as the main reasons for this:
(1) It is in the Quran and Hadith,
(2) It was practiced by the Prophet,
(3) The explanation and interpretation of the Quran has always been done by special people devoted to the Prophet beginning with his immediate family namely Ali,
(4) The spiritual knowledge cannot be give directly to ordinary people who are not familiar with spiritual things.

There is and always has been a tension within Islamic thought regarding the exoteric and the esoteric. It has been universally acknowledged that it was through the renowned Al Ghazali that Sufism really attained a secure position as a valid expression within Islam[61]. AnneMarie Schimmel writes that though al-Ghazzali repudiated the tendency to concentrate on gnostic knowledge, a phenomenon common among some mystics during his lifetime, he stressed 'heart' religion and was not averse to using the Sufi experimental methods[62]. Arguments are put forward by both sides ie those favouring the exoteric and those the esoteric, as to the contribution of al-Ghazzali and the purifying of Sufism from non-Islamic influences. Thus it is not surprising to find the following comment by Rizvi regarding criticism of the Bengali mystics[63]:

*Some Muslim Bengali scholars characterize the mystic themes in Bengali works as heterodox but the term is hardly applicable to the sufi movement in any region. Sufism had had a long tradition of borrowing both ideas and practices from other non-Islamic mystical systems and Bengali sufis did not depart seriously from the path shown by their predecessors.*

## Summary of Major Emphases within the Study Group

Some of the major emphases identified within the *marphati* beliefs are:
* The importance of a *pir*, master as
(1) Giving form to the formless One,
(2) Being a mediator,
(3) The repository of mystical knowledge.
* The body as a microcosm of the universe and an associated mystical physiology.
* The importance of love in the apprehension of reality. For some this is found in the union of man and woman.
* The use of linguistic co-incidence and similarity as evidence for the interpretive system eg *dam -adam, nor, nari, nur, nir.*

## Summary

In summary the reasons for the nature of religious expression among the *marphati* in Bangladesh are:
(1) The nature of sufism particularly North Indian sufism;
(2) The manner in which Islam was enculturated in Bengal;
(3) The use of language from one tradition, the exogenous, to express the meaning of another, the endogenous;
(4) The conservative nature of the agrarian society in which survival values and associated beliefs are strongly entrenched.

## Notes

1. Samaren Roy. 1981. *The Roots of Bengali Culture*. Calcutta, Firma KLM Private Limited: 1
2. ibid
3. Ahmed Sharif. 1969. *Banglar Sufi Sahitya.* Dacca 2 Banglar Academy: ii

4. S B Das Gupta. 1962. *Obscure Religious Cults as may be culled from Bengali Literature.* Calcutta, Firma KLM Private Limited: 27

5. Samaren Roy: 16

6. Ahmed Sharif: e

7. Samaren Roy: 16

8. Abdul Karim. 1959. 1 History of the Muslims of Bengal. Dacca, The Asiatic Society of Pakistan: 18

9. Abdul Momin Choudhury. 1986. 'Conversion to Islam in Bengal: an exploration' in S R Chakravarty and Virenda Narain (eds) *Bangladesh: History and Culture.* New Delhi, South Asia Publishers. Vol 1: 1

10. A F Salahuddin Ahmed. 1987. *Bangladesh Tradition and Transformation.* Dhaka, The University Press Limited: 5

11. P Hardy. 1972. *The Muslims of British India.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 7

12. Ashim Roy. 1983. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal.* Princeton, Princeton University Press: 253

13. Hardy: 8

14. H A R Gibb. 1969(2nd edn). *Mohammedanism.* Oxford, Oxford University Press: 96

15. Muhammad Enamul Haque. 1975. *A History of Sufi-ism in Bengal.* Dacca, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh: 144. See also discussion: 59-142

16. Ahmed Sharif: xxxi

17. Mohammad Enamul Haque. 1935. *Bange Sufi Prabhar.* Calcutta, Mahsin and Co: 38

18. Ashim Roy: 142

19. A F S Ahmed: 41

20. K M Mohsin. 1986. in Chakravarty and Narain op cit Vol 1: 29

21. A F S Ahmed: 90

22. Ashim Roy: 81

23. c Maloney, K M Ashraful Aziz and P C Sarker. 1981. *Beliefs and Fertility in Bangladesh.* Dacca, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Research, Bangladesh

24. Therese Blanchet. 1984. *Meanings and Rituals of Birth in Rural Bangladesh.* Dhaka, University Press Limited

25. Suraiya Begum and Hasina Ahmed. 1991. 'Beliefs and rituals in a shrine in Bangladesh', *The Journal of Social Studies,* 53: 68

26. Blanchet: 30, 31. She writes:

Still, in Bangladesh and possibly elsewhere in Muslim India, the notion of purity and pollution appears in another guise, mainly that of a pervasive philosophical outlook which links purity with auspiciousness and impurity with misfortune, illness and catastrophe. This pervasive philosophical outlook is shared by both Muslims and Hindus and, in Bengal, it may be said to form part of the common 'Bengali' heritage which belongs to the two religious communities.

27. Hillali: 224

28. Hillali: 174; Ashim Roy: 143

29. Hillali: 120, Mahfuz ul Haq. *Sufism*: 97

30. Haq: 99

31. Kahn Saheb Maulovi Hamidur Rahman. *'Sharaful Insan.* Dhaka, Kazi Muhammed Ba'sir Provincial Library, 1381 BS: 152

32. Begum and Ahmed: 74

33. Ashim Roy: 65

34. Ahmed Sharif: vii

35. David Abecassis. 1990. *Identity, Islam and Human Development in Rural Bangladesh.* Dhaka, The University Press: 16

36. Shashibbusan Das Gupta. 1976. *Obscure Religious Cults.* Calcutta, Firma KLM Private Limited: 161

37. *Sunni* refers to the community of Muslims who follow the *sunna,* that is the custom or code of behaviour in particular the Prophet Muhammad's example as embodied in the *Hadith* and as generally agreed by the community. See C E Bosworth 'Sunna' *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions* (John R Hinnells (ed); Harmondsworth, Penguin 1984): 315

38. *Shia* is an Arabic word meaning party or faction and was originally used of the *Shi'atu 'Ali* the party of Ali. See Bernard Lewis. 1993. *Islam and the West.* Oxford, OUP: 155. Fazlur Rahman, in his book *Islam,* writes that

the dispute concerning the legitimate headship of the Muslim community after the assassination of Ali was the beginning of the schism from the rest of the community.*Shi*'ites claim that the Caliphate should have been restored to the house of Ali. Rahman claims that *Shi*'ites have '... evolved a doctrine of Divine Right(both with regard to religion and political life) that is irreconcilable with the very spirit of Ijma [consensus].' Fazlur Rahman. 1979 (2nd edn) *Islam.* Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 170

39. Rahman: 6

40. Annemarie Schimmel. 1975. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam.* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press: 17

41. ibid: 3

42. H A R Gibb. 1969(2nd edn). *Mohammedanism*: 92-97

43. Ritual prayer in Arabic is *salat.* In Bangladesh, the word most commonly used is the Persian term *namaz.*

44. There are four major schools (*madhab*), *Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i* and *Hanbalite.* See Rahman: 83. Bangladesh Muslims would generally be considered to be of the *Hanafi* school.

45. Schimmel: 401

46. Hamidur Rahman: 90

47. Ashim Roy: 79

48. The author came across this sentiment in Bangladesh, even in the late '80s, in a pamphlet setting out the ideology of a Bangladesh political party, The Freedom Party. One of the themes of the pamphlet was that the origin of the majority of or perhaps the 'real' Muslim community of Bangladesh was outside Bangladesh.

49. Ashim Roy: 67

50 ibid: 79

51. Blanchet: 11. She makes the following comment on this phenomenon:

...beneath a cover of prohibitions and proscriptions, one easily finds the old Bengali man who has not so much discarded as cumulated the influence of successive civilisations that have prevailed in Bengal.

52. Ashim Roy: 143

53. Haji Muhammad. '*Char Manjil*' in *Suratnama or Nurjamal,* and Ali Raja, '*Char Manjil*' in *Agam.* Ahmed Sharif (ed): 171-74 and 336-43 respectively.

54. Ali Raja op cit: 335 'The basis of the doctrine is that all are one of this I am witness. The *shariat, marphat* the four types are four aspects, four doors to basically the same house.'

55. Hamidur Rahman: 125-6 'Therefore if we obey and follow this *shariat,* then we will gain heaven in the afterlife'

and

'Therefore, the *shariat* is the simple straight path which is for ordinary followers.

56. ibid: 127 In the *Fik*/law the indication of continuous searching and the rules of progressing are present. However it lacks the teaching and the strength to progress. The *shariat* is not able to arouse the will and desire. The *tariqat* meets that lack.

57. Mohsin in his article has enumerated some of these.

58. '*Tarika*' in *Sankhipta Islami Bishwakosk* 2 vols A F M Abdul Haque Faridi et al (eds) Dhaka, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1982 vol 1: 456

59. Hafez Hossain. 1987. *Fakir o Majar theke Shabdhan.* Dhaka, Hafez Hossain, Vol 1: 87 'Amongst all these idiots it is possible to see those who when walking on the road near a *majar* remove their shoes because they think it is disrespect not to. They walk with their shoes in their hand and with obeisance salute, give a salam, kiss their hand and place it on their forehead and chest.'

60. For example: Hamidur Raman: 91-134; Mahfuz ul Haq. 1985. *The True Way: Introducing Biswa Zaker Manzil.* Dhaka, Pirzada Mustafa Amir Faisal Brothers Publishers Ltd

61. J A Subhan. 1960(2nd edn) *Sufism Its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India.* Lucknow, Lucknow Publishing House: 25

62. Schimmel: 96

63. Rizvi, vol 2: 353

# Chinese Islam in the Nineties: A View of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region

*Peter Riddell*
*World Vision Australia*

## 1 Introduction

The worldwide Islamic resurgence in recent decades has captured the attention and imagination of both the media and populations in the West. This Western observation of, and at times preoccupation with, the seeming rise of Islam after a period of relative dormancy has been focused very much on events in the Middle East. The ongoing conflict and more recent moves towards peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours is a major focus of attention, as are events within the Arab world related to the clash between rising Islamic radicalism and governments of a more nationalist, secular bent, such as Egypt and Algeria.

The attention of the Muslim world itself has also been focused on such events. Indeed, the Islamic world may be seen as a large arena, with the spectators aligned in rows at ever increasing distances from the centre, but with the attention of all focused on that central stage ie the Middle East. This has the effect of placing certain actors, such as the Israelis and the Palestinians, under continuous scrutiny, while other member groups, such as the Muslim communities on the geographical periphery of the Muslim world, receive considerably less attention from their Muslim confreres or the world at large.

Yet there is much to be learned from events on that periphery. Indeed, the Islamic revival in recent decades has not limited itself to the Middle East. The world has witnessed in recent times conflict between governing authorities and radical Muslim groups in areas as distant from the Middle East as Malaysia and the Southern Philippines. However one Muslim region which continues to rest in the shadows of international attention is represented by those areas of the People's Republic of China (PRC) where Muslims are found in significant numbers.[1]

### 1.1 Brief Historical Background to Islam in China

Islam reached China from the Middle East and Central Asia in the early centuries of Islam. A number of military clashes occurred between Muslim armies from the Middle East and forces of the Tang Dynasty (7th - 10th centuries CE), including the defeat of the Tangs at Talas in 751 CE. The entry of Islam to Western China was facilitated by the existence of the Silk Road, a trade route which had been established much earlier in the first centuries of the first millennium CE and which stretched from the area covered by the present day city of Xi'an in the East to Rome in the West. This trade route wound its way through the rugged terrain of Central Asia, to Persia, the Fertile Crescent, leading to the shores of Asia Minor and on to various points in the Roman Empire. This route had been established during the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE). Such trading contacts facilitated the entry of Islam to the region of China, and one can trace influences upon Chinese Islam in examining archaeological artefacts

uncovered in Western China. Museums in this region, such as that housing an excellent collection in Guyuan, present an array of artefacts from the early Islamic world, including swords, gold-plated silver goblets, gold wedding rings, coins and other items deriving from Islamic Persia, Afghanistan, and other areas of Central Asia.

By the time of the late Tang Dynasty, the overseas trade of China was largely in the hands of Muslim Persians and Arabs[2], and the later Mongols who dominated China also engaged foreigners, including many Middle Eastern Muslims, in a type of international civil service to govern the Chinese[3]. Religious pluralism was allowed to flourish under the Mongols and religious establishments, including those of the Muslims, were granted exemption from taxation[4]. Foreign trade for China continued to be carried out largely by Central Asian Muslims engaged by the Mongol overlords, and Ibn Battuta, the famous Arab traveller and writer, recorded that mid-14th century China contained significant numbers of Arabs resident in that country[5]. These influences led to a substantial process of conversion during the first half of the second millennium CE, especially during the period of the Ming Dynasty (1368 -1644)[6].

Relationships between the minority Muslim community and other Chinese communities were not always to be harmonious, however. There were several periods of open revolt, especially during the centuries of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), such as the abortive Muslim revolt in Chinese Turkestan in 1758-59, the rebellion in Gansu in 1781, and the widespread sporadic Muslim revolts against the Qings in Sinkiang during the period 1855-1873.

Thus by the time of the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Muslim communities, though comparatively small in number, had been firmly established as part of the Chinese multicultural scene for almost one thousand years. The communist authorities were concerned to establish national stability and to avoid the communal disputes which had plagued relations between the State and minority groups in the past. In this context, the communist authorities took a range of steps, including the establishment of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in its provincial planning, with this region being accorded a measure of autonomy in recognition of the fact that it housed a significant minority group; i.e. the Muslim Huis.

### 1.2 Population Distribution

The Chinese Government conducted a nationwide census in 1990, which revealed important information about the size of the various Muslim minority groups in the PRC. Ten of China's minority nationalities are predominantly Muslim. The census provided the following numbers for each of these groups: Hui (8.6 million); Uygur (7.2 million); Kazakhs (1.1 million); Dongxiang (375,000); Kyrgyz (375,000); Salar (88,000); Tajik (33,500); Uzbek (14,500); Bonan (12,000); and Tatars (4,873)[7]. Thus Muslim nationalities accounted for 17.6 million people, or approximately 1.75% of China's population.

With regard to the most populous of the various Muslim groups, the Huis, their numbers are spread throughout China, though a substantial group resides in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. In 1988, the population of Ningxia stood at 4,150,000. Of this number, approximately thirty-two percent (1,238,000) were Muslim, around sixty-seven percent

(2,731,000) were majority Han Chinese, and the remainder comprised various other minority groups[8].

The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is divided into two prefectures and sixteen counties. The Muslim population is more concentrated in the central and southern counties of Ningxia; i.e. Jingyuan (where they represent around 97% of the county population), Haiyuan (approximately 70%), Xiji, Guyuan and Tongxin counties.

## 2. Islamic Practice in Ningxia

The Hui emergence as a distinct group was consolidated during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and subsequent Ming period. During this period, the Hui spoke a variety of languages - Arabic, Persian, and the Mandarin language of the majority Han Chinese - but gradually the Hui assimilated to the ways of the Han, especially in the area of language, with the result that eventually the Hui came to speak Mandarin as their mother tongue[9]. This tendency towards assimilation to Han ways has been a cause of criticism of the Hui by their co-religionists among other minority nationalities in China. Nevertheless, it has also enabled the Hui to act on many occasions as a mediator between Han China and the various Muslim minorities.

Like the majority of Chinese Muslims, the Hui are predominantly Sunni, though Shi'ite influences can at times manifest themselves[10]. Moreover, Sufi mystical orders have exerted a strong attraction for Chinese Muslims, including the Hui. The most influential of these orders have been the Naqshbandiyya, Qadariyya and Kubrawiyya[11].

Though the Hui represent a part of the Islamic mosaic of China, their practice of the faith, and the social context in which they locate Islam, makes their Islamic profile distinctive in both Chinese and world Islamic terms.

### 2.1 Mosques: Form and Function

Mosques in Ningxia exist in abundance. Whether found in County capital cities, townships or in remote villages, there are certain characteristic features which mark Chinese mosques as unique.

The roofs of mosques typically represent a range of architectural styles. All display the characteristic Islamic crescent, usually placed on the most prominent point of the roof. Many also include a dome or domes, creating the Islamic roof profile so characteristic of the Middle East. However, all will also include the pointed roof-ends reminiscent of Buddhist pagodas which are so typical of Chinese architecture. This serves to remind the faithful that although the origins of the religion lie elsewhere, the framework in which they worship is firmly grounded in Chinese tradition.

Mosque walls are typically made of brick, or mud-brick in the case of village mosques. These walls will often include engraved inscriptions, sometimes in Arabic but usually in Chinese. The walls are often also adorned with the beautiful wooden lattice work which typifies other Chinese architecture.

Within the prayer hall of the mosque itself one is again struck by the combination of styles. The walls usually display an array of wall hangings, made of woven material or paper. These depict exhortations to action by the faithful, may be either in Arabic or Chinese, and include messages such as the Islamic witness[12] and calls to spread the faith around the world. The floors are covered by a combi-

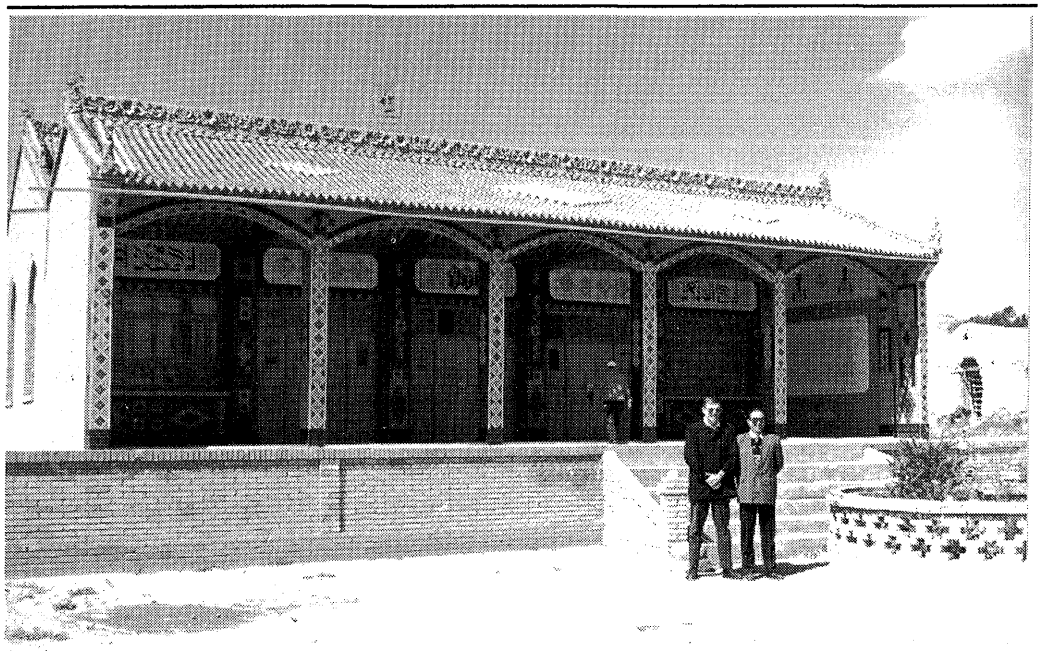

Fig. 1. Exterior of Bai Tang Mosque

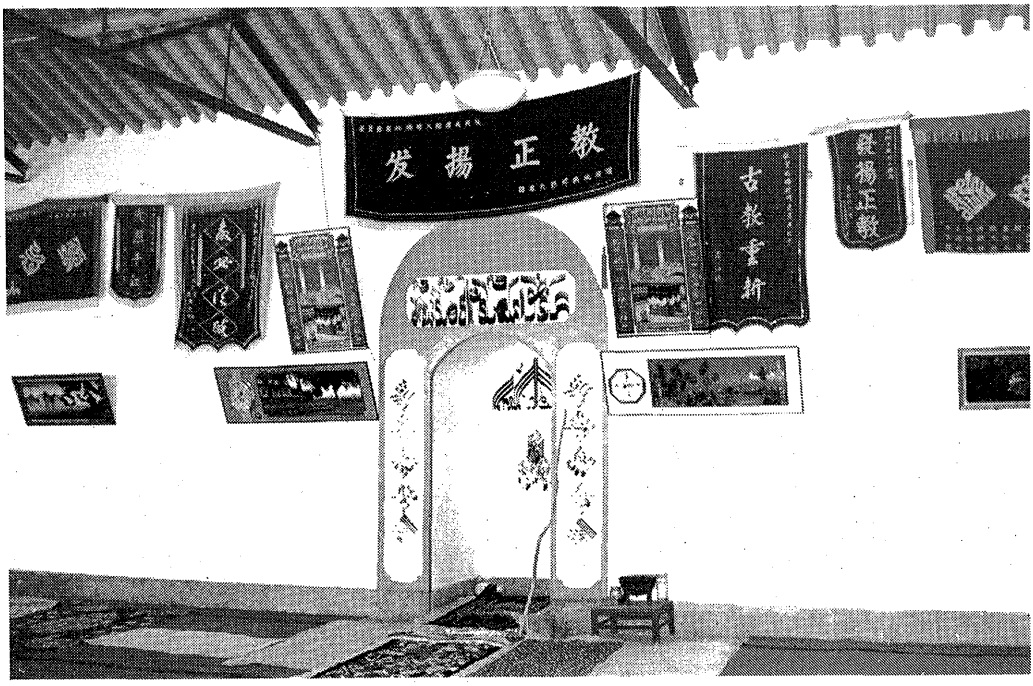


Fig. 2. Interior of Bai Tang Mosque, showing the mihrab

nation of rattan mats and woven carpets; the latter may be particularly prized by the local community. Such is the case with the beautiful carpet placed just in front of the *mihrab* [13] in the Great Mosque in Tongxin County Centre. The local community proudly points out to the visitor that this carpet is valued at 170,000 Renminbi[14] and was presented as a gift to the mosque by the Government of Saudi Arabia.

The Great Mosque in Tongxin is undoubtedly one of the principal Islamic landmarks in Ningxia. Built during the Ming dynasty and renovated during the Qing dynasty, it is the largest and oldest mosque in Ningxia. It is located within a compound which is elevated above the surrounding countryside and which therefore captures the attention of Tongxin residents both as they arrive in the city and as they move within the city precincts. The compound itself consists of three parts: the mosque with the adjacent student dormitory and religious leader's residence, the yard of the compound and the area where the ritual ablutions are performed prior to prayer. Just outside the compound is found the Muslim cemetery, which itself contains an impressive shrine amidst the various graves. The Tongxin mosque serves as a prime focal point for all Ningxia Muslims, as well as an important centre for study of the Hanafi school of Islamic Law which predominates in Ningxia.

In addition to the large mosques situated in the cities, one finds mosques of varying degrees of beauty even in the most remote villages in Ningxia. An example is that found in the village of Bai Tang in Guyuan County. Though the village itself is very poor and lacks some of the most basic civic and health services, the community has devoted a significant portion of its meagre resources to constructing a small but beautiful mosque, with adjacent residential quarters for the local religious leader. The mosque and its surrounding area is kept meticulously clean, and represents the most splendid building in the village. The *mihrab* is bedecked above with various signs, including a large sign in Chinese calling for Islam to be spread throughout the globe. The floor is covered by a collection of rattan mats and beautifully woven carpets.

Similarly, the village mosque in the very poor village of Qingyangquan in Tongxin County has received priority in the community's allocation of its limited resources, though it is much simpler than that in Bai Tang. The floors are covered mainly by rattan mats, and few signs are displayed on the walls. Nevertheless, it occupies a position of prominence within the village location, and resources have been devoted to constructing residential quarters adjoining the mosque to allow for the stationing of a religious leader in the community.

The prioritising of the mosque in receiving meagre village resources reflects the fact that the mosque is the centre of each Hui community. The religious community, or *Jiaofang*, is the basic unit of Hui society, and is organised around the mosque, which functions as both a site for worship, and also as a venue for significant public gatherings of many varieties, be they economic or social in nature. This is a characteristic feature of Hui society.

**2.2 Community Participation and Support**

Community support is vital for both the establishment and maintenance of the local mosque and its services, whether at city, township or village level in Ningxia. Each family in village communities and also those members of the Muslim com-

munity in larger centres are expected to contribute to the upkeep of the mosque and its religious leader. In some communities, this takes the form of a cash contribution; in some instances this may be as high as thirty Renminbi per family member at intervals according to the need of the mosque and its religious leader. In other instances in village settings, community support for the mosque and its religious leader may be in the form of a grain contribution of one kilogram of grain per family member per annum or very poor families may be able to meet their obligation towards the maintenance of the religious leader by hosting him to dinner on a monthly basis, or more frequently if possible. At the village and township level, mosques thus receive a significant proportion of their funding from the community.

In return for these contributions from limited resources, community members receive a range of services from the mosque and its religious leader. These services include instruction in the Islamic sciences, guidance and counselling, and of course organisation of worship services. The principal service, the Friday noon prayers, receives the full participation of men in the respective community, though women also attend as observers. In the case of the larger mosques, the Friday prayers thus provide a venue for the gathering of large numbers of Muslims. The Great Mosque in Tongxin attracts around six hundred worshippers to its Friday prayers, with even larger numbers attending services held to commemorate the special feast days, such as the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and the feast of the Sacrifice[15]. Nevertheless, it is in the village communities that worship services can be considered to attract the highest proportion of local Muslims. In the larger urban centres, where populations are more mixed between Han and Hui Chinese, the level of observance among Muslims is lower due to a greater level of secularisation among urban Chinese.

### 2.3 The Religious Leader

Thus the Islamic leader, or Ahung (Imam), attached to mosques in Ningxia is dependent for his sustenance to a large degree upon the local Muslim community. While there are significant numbers of Ahungs available for the Ningxia Muslim community, in certain areas Muslim communities are served by itinerant Ahungs, owing to the unavailability of a resident religious leader or the inability of the community to fund a full-time Ahung. In remote areas, there is an average of one mosque per administrative village[16]. Where a mosque does not have its own resident Ahung it will draw on the services of an Ahung who is responsible for covering a number of different areas.

The Ahung must be sufficiently versed in Arabic to lead the worship services in that language. However, for the benefit of his constituency, he often translates the prayers into Chinese after initially pronouncing them in Arabic. This is especially the case in remote areas of Ningxia. Apart from his responsibilities in leading worship, the Ahung devotes a significant proportion of his time to providing instruction to children who are sent by their parents to the mosque to learn the Qur'an. This study may take several forms. It may be individual; one informant related that as a child he had received individual instruction for three months in reading the Qur'an from his local village Ahung. The Ahung's teaching methods were of interest: using the scapula bone of a cow in place of a blackboard, the Ahung would write a verse of the Qur'an which the student was then required to memorise.

When the student had successfully mastered the verse in this way, the writing was erased from the bone and replaced by another verse which in turn the student repeated after the Ahung. Though both boys and girls studied with this particular Ahung in this way, the ratio of boys to girls was heavily weighted towards the former[17].

The Ahung resident among the Qingyangquan community indicated in interview that he himself had acquired his knowledge of Arabic and the Qur'an by studying at the mosque in the Haiyuan County centre under the resident Ahung there. The Qingyangquan Ahung, a young man in his twenties, reported that he provided instruction in the Qur'an and Arabic to a group of twenty children from the village for eight hours per day. Many students would study with him for several years, with this instruction representing an alternative system of education available to children whose parents could not afford to pay the tuition fees levied by the mainstream education system. The tuition in Arabic and the Qur'an at the Qingyangquan mosque was provided by the local Ahung free of charge[18].

In addition to providing religious instruction and leading in worship services, the village Ahung has a range of other functions, both in the religious domain, but also in overseeing aspects of general community welfare. He witnesses Hui weddings and presides over funerals, where the Ahung ensures that the body of

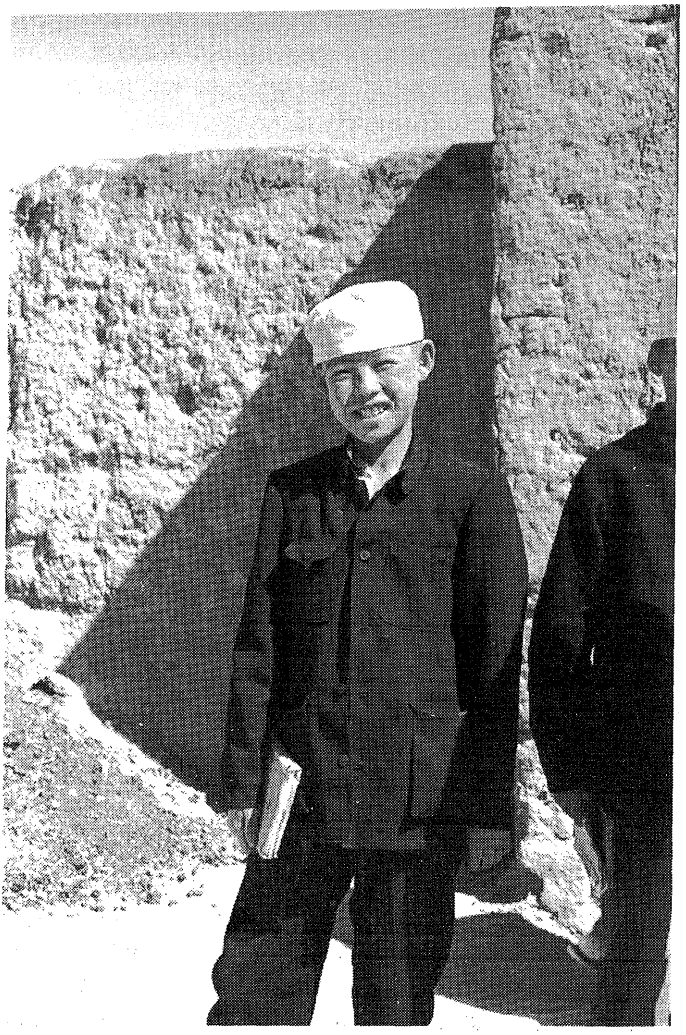

Fig.3. Ningxia muslim boy preparing for lessons in qur'anic recitation at Qingyangquan mosque

the deceased is wrapped in a white cloth and buried promptly without a coffin[19]. The Ahung is also responsible for giving a name to newborn children soon after birth[20].

Though there is some inter-county movement by the Ahungs in Ningxia, mosques in Ningxia especially in remote locations are typically staffed by an Ahung who comes from the local region. However, at the provincial level and even at the level of the county urban centre, some Ahungs are not native to Ningxia but have come from the broader Chinese Muslim community.

**2.4 Education Programs**

With regard to the educational process which Ahungs must go through in order to be properly qualified to practise their profession, the first step occurs with training during childhood in Arabic and the Qur'an, as described above. At this stage, the child may not know he wishes to become an Ahung, but when this latter decision is made, the path is quite clearly defined.

The aspiring student will attach himself to one of the principal mosques in Ningxia, such as the Great Mosque in Tongxin. This mosque includes dormitory facilities for around fifteen students, who undertake a course of study lasting at least four years, but in some cases extending up to seven, in order to gain a qualification as an Ahung. Days are spent in study and reflection; the day commences with a period of worship, and is followed by many hours of tuition in Arabic and Persian languages and the Islamic sciences, with a special emphasis on the Qur'an and its commentaries. A facility with Persian is required in order to be able to access some of the principal Qur'anic commentaries written in that language. In order to gain entry to this program of study, students should have already completed a period of secondary studies and demonstrated their capacity for further education.

At the Tongxin mosque, the teaching staff are most commonly drawn from Chinese specialists, though guest teachers pay occasional visits from countries as far afield as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Japan, and the USA. The duration of the study program is determined by the individual progress of each student. Upon successful completion of the end of course examination, the student graduates and has several options available to him. He may choose to take up a position as an Ahung in a village mosque, and is now qualified to do so. Alternatively, if a student has performed satisfactorily in his study program at the mosque, and has good Chinese, Arabic and Persian language skills, this study program may serve as a pre-requisite for further studies in a specialist tertiary institution, such as the Arabic Language College in the Tongxin County centre. This College offers intensive preparation in Arabic, Persian and Islamic sciences, and after four years of study, the graduate is entitled to automatic employment in the Government bureaucracy as an interpreter or in other specialist functions. Alternatively, a graduate from this College may seek a position as a religious leader in one of the more prestigious mosques in one of the larger urban centres in Ningxia or elsewhere in China.

**2.5 Religious Obligations and Customs**

With regard to observance of religious obligations among Muslims, the instruction which many Ningxia Muslims receive during childhood includes a focus upon the five basic duties of Islam[21]. Nevertheless, observance of these five duties

as a central part of daily life does not appear to be widespread among the Muslim community at large in Ningxia. Non-specialist Muslims in the community consulted were not able to identify the five duties beyond the first two relating to witness and prayer which they listed as the principle obligations which a Muslim must fulfil. Nevertheless, there is an increasing consciousness of the significance of the pilgrimage to Mecca. However, its cost is prohibitive for most Muslims in Ningxia, especially the large numbers living in rural locations, and thus it is not foregrounded as a concept in their perception of their faith[22]. Though there has been a significant increase in numbers of Chinese Muslims undertaking the pilgrimage, from 19 in 1979 to 6,000 in 1992[23], the proportion of the total Muslim population involved is minuscule.

In the area of more general custom, Islamic practice in Ningxia closely parallels that followed in other parts of the Muslim world. For example, in mixed marriages, it is expected that the non-Muslim will adopt Islam, rather than the reverse. The convert is expected to participate in preparatory courses for becoming a Muslim, which include studying basic Islamic beliefs and practices with the local Ahung.

As is the case with other agrarian communities elsewhere in the Muslim world, gender roles tend to be very clearly defined amongst the Chinese Muslims of Ningxia. Women's participation in worship during the Friday prayers is more as observers, as described previously. Even with regard to participation in the health system, women's roles are largely determined by religious factors. For example, deliveries of newborn babies tend to be performed among the Muslim communities by the village midwives, rather than the village doctor, who is more commonly male. This is less common among majority Han Chinese communities, who are less resistant to male village doctors performing this particular task. The same constraint prevents many Muslim women residents in villages from choosing to give birth in better equipped township hospitals, because of the lack of control they will have over selecting the gender of the hospital staff delivering the baby.

Muslim communities in villages are very open and hospitable towards foreign visitors, and typically react quite openly to questions about their faith. Likewise, foreign visitors are welcome to view and photograph mosques. Though this is also the case in other parts of the Muslim world, Chinese Muslims, especially those in the more remote areas, are either unaware about or unconcerned with certain constraints existing in other parts of the Muslim world, such as that requiring entrants to the mosque to take off their shoes before entering the worship hall[24].

**2.6 Islamic Materials and Resources in Ningxia**

The student of Islam, whether an aspiring Ahung or student destined for other appointments, depends for his Islamic materials and resources upon a range of generalist shops dealing in Islamic matters at various points throughout Ningxia. A perusal of several of these shops revealed that a range of materials were held, as follows:

a. *Books*. As would be expected, each collection contained copious quantities in several editions of the Qur'an. This was available both in all Arabic format as well as in bilingual editions, in Arabic and Chinese[25]. In addition to the text of the Qur'an, the shops examined also contained sets of complete recordings of the Qur'an on cassette.

To complement this central work, various commentaries upon the Qur'an were available for purchase. These included the multi-volume commentary entitled *F_ zilāl al-qur'ān* (Under the Shade of the Qur'an) written by the twentieth century radical theologian Sayyid Qutb, who was executed for subversion by the Egyptian Government of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966. Another commentary which appeared to be popular was *Tafs_r Hussain_*.

In addition, there were various books in Arabic devoted to other Islamic sciences, including *Kitāb al-ma'ān_* (The Book of Meanings), *Qisās al-nab_ Muhammad* (Stories of the Prophet Muhammad), *Durrat al-nashaz* (Pearls of the Heights), *Kitab al-kabā'ir* (The Book of Sins), and *Asās al-'ul_m* (The Foundations of Knowledge). These holdings demonstrate an interest on the part of the local Muslim population, particularly the specialists, with works addressing the three principal focuses of the Islamic sciences: theology, law and narrative. These works in Arabic were supplemented by various works in Chinese also dealing with matters such as the basics of Islam and the four schools of law in Islam.

Finally, the shops consulted all contained within their collections a three part series on Arabic language, a locally produced bilingual work with exercises in Arabic and grammatical explanations in Chinese which appears to be a standard text used in Arabic language classes throughout the autonomous region. One shop in Guyuan County centre indicated that it regularly provided copies of this text for use in classes in the Arabic Language College in Tongxin.

b. *Other materials.* In addition to book holdings, which appear to be drawn upon more by specialists among the Chinese Muslim community, the shops in question also sold other items of more general interest among the Ningxia community. These included the characteristic white hats worn by both male and female Muslims in Ningxia; posters of various shapes, sizes and motifs of the type on display in mosques but also visible in private homes; woven prayer carpets; pieces of crockery, such as teapots, bearing Islamic phrases in Arabic; knives with Arabic inscriptions on the handles, and a range of other assorted items.

Thus these shops serve as general stores, providing a wide range of materials for use among both the specialists in the Ningxia Muslim community as well as the broader society itself. Staff in the shops indicated that members of the general community provided a continuous supply of clientele, especially for the assorted items, but also for some of the books, particularly the Qur'an, a copy of which was reportedly held by most Ningxia Muslim households.

## 3. Ningxia and the World Islamic Resurgence

### 3.1 The Nexus between Islam and Communism

The relationship between the Muslim community and the Communist authorities of the PRC since 1949 has been characterised by periods of stability interspersed with periods of communal strife. During its forty-five years of existence, the Communist government has from time to time expressed a desire to preserve the rights of the more than fifty minority groups in China and to provide them with certain advantages to ensure that they do not suffer from their minority status. In the case of Hui Muslims, the Chinese Government established the

Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region as a device to protect them from being submerged within the much larger Han community. It also took specific measures designed to win Muslim support, not only among the residents of Ningxia but also among Chinese Muslims in other locations. The authorities stimulated the formation in 1957 of the China Islamic Association, an officially sanctioned umbrella body which has served as an interface between the government and the Islamic Community, and which has official endorsement to oversee Muslim affairs, co-ordinate publication of Islamic literature, and arrange for the training of Muslim leaders and Ahungs. In this latter context, the government, through the Islamic Association, has provided assistance to the Chinese Institute of Islamic Theology, which has as its principle purpose the training of Islamic scholars who will serve Muslim communities around China[26].

An autonomous region in the PRC, such as Ningxia, derives certain advantages from this status not accorded to fully fledged PRC provinces. The advantages available to minorities in such regions include the following:

a. They are free to have up to three children, whereas majority Han Chinese are limited to the one child per family regulation determined by the national government[27];

b. They can gain entry to Chinese universities with a lower entry mark than that set for Han Chinese[28];

c. They benefit from a tax waiver during the first five years in establishing private enterprises;

d. They are given tax relief on agricultural produce[29].

With regard to the interface between the Communist authorities and the Islamic worship community, the national government allows a measure of autonomy, up to a point. There are no restriction on the number of mosques within a given area; the number will depend upon the respective community's wishes and its capacity to support the mosques and attached Ahungs. Though it is largely the community's responsibility to provide the sustenance for the Ahungs, in the case of some Islamic leaders in the larger cities in Ningxia, the government contributes to their salary. Moreover, as seen previously, the government guarantees employment for graduates from the Islamic stream of education in Ningxia, such as the program at the Tongxin Mosque followed by the Arabic Language College, in the same way that employment is guaranteed to university graduates from the mainstream education system.

Nevertheless, the government maintains a watchful eye on the activities of the Muslim community and its leaders, especially with regard to the level of material and financial support expected of the community by its religious leaders. The government has created coordinating committees at the county level to monitor the level of support exacted from peasants by Islamic leaders, as a device to ensure that the religious institutions do not squeeze the peasants too hard by expecting unreasonable or burdensome contributions.

Indeed, many Muslims are also members of the Communist Party, and in order to advance within the bureaucracy, membership of the Party is virtually mandatory. This parallel membership in what appear to be two mutually exclusive groups suggests several factors:

a. Those Muslims with dual membership see no clash in such an arrangement, which itself suggests that their under-

standing of the basic duties and beliefs of Islam is superficial;

b. Islamic revivalism from outside China, which would be opposed to basic tenets of the Communist ideology, is still slow to filter in at this stage of the development of the PRC;

c. The government still maintains a tight control over Muslim activity at the macro level to ensure that it operates in a way which is consistent with general national government policies and ideologies[30].

### 3.2 Recent Problems Among Chinese Muslims

The relationship between the communist authorities of the PRC and its Muslim subjects has had a chequered history, and it would be useful to briefly examine a series of incidents since 1990 which point to the changing nature of the relationship between Chinese Muslims and their communist government.

In 1990 a series of riots occurred in the Province of Xinjiang, which borders the Islamic republics of central Asia, formerly belonging to the now defunct USSR. Reports in the media indicated that this trouble in Xinjiang was aided and abetted by activists based in Turkey, with the riots being directed against ethnic Han Chinese resident in Xinjiang. The problems in Xinjiang in 1990 were evidently not resolved, as it has continued to represent a hot bed of resistance to communist authority. Reports from diplomats indicate that around one dozen bombs were detonated in various parts of Xinjiang during the summer of 1993, with these bombings killing a number of Han Chinese. Responsibility for these incidents was laid at the feet of the East Turkestan Party (ETP), a separatist group which wishes to break away from the PRC. The government of the PRC expressed concern at what they termed "hostile foreign forces" which had infiltrated the region; this referred to accusations that the ETP was based in Turkey and funded by sympathisers in neighbouring Kazakhstan. During 1993 the government of China approached Turkish and Kazakh authorities in an attempt to contain the activities of the ETP, evidently without success. Media reports indicate that the government of the PRC is concerned at likely connections between the ETP and international Mujahedeen groups which have provided arms to Chinese Muslim resistance groups. During 1993, the communist authorities responded to the emergency in Xinjiang by sending troops to that region to protect Han Chinese from attacks by local Muslims.

The year 1993 also witnessed disturbances among Muslim groups in the western province of Qinghai. Massive street protests by thousands of Muslims in Xining, the capital of Qinghai, resulted from the illegal publishing by a local publisher, the China Times Publishing Company, of a comic book from Taiwan entitled **A Swift Turn in Thinking**. This book depicted Muslims in prayer beside a pig. The protests in Qinghai overflowed to neighbouring regions, including the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu, Shaanxi and Sichuan. In response to these events, Muslims in Qinghai formed themselves into a group called the Qinghai Muslim Anti-Humiliation Committee which was promptly banned by provincial authorities in early September 1993. These authorities followed up this banning with raids on mosques, and there were violent clashes between police and rioters. The authorities in the province accused the Committee of illegal fundraising and incitement to protest. Although the provincial authorities issued a public

apology, arranged for the dismissal of the head and deputy head of the publishing company and banned the book, the situation remained tense for some time.

In mid-November 1993, matters came to a head once again with the publication of a newspaper article in Qinghai's capital which was entitled "The Woman Who Recites the Scripture and the Dog Who Listens to It". This precipitated a public demonstration which disbursed after police and army warnings. The licence of the newspaper containing this article was withdrawn and the editors were interrogated by police.

In response to these ongoing problems, the President of the China Islamic Association, Ilyas Shen Xiaxi, who was China's most senior Muslim, spoke out against the unrest by Muslims, blaming it upon agitators. He warned Muslims against using mosques to oppose the communist party[31].

These events point to the tenuous nature of relationships between certain groups of Chinese Muslims and the communist authorities. Nevertheless the degree of resistance to communist control does not appear to be uniform throughout the Chinese Muslim community. It would appear that separatist tendencies are much more pronounced in the western provinces which border the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union, while communities in regions such as Ningxia which are somewhat more remote from external Muslim groups may be less prone to communal problems at this stage. Nevertheless, the problems centred upon the provinces of Xinjiang and Qinghai in recent years did overflow to the southern counties in Ningxia, with several being closed to foreigners for several months in late 1993 during the height of the disturbances.

## 4. Conclusions

Islam has been a part of the Chinese multicultural landscape for around one thousand years. Unlike the case of the Moghul emperors in India, Chinese Muslims were never strong enough to constitute a governing dynasty in their own right[32]. Nevertheless, Muslims in China were an integral part of the worldwide Islamic community through trade and religious contacts for centuries, until the period of relative isolation after the establishment of the PRC in 1949.

It has been seen that Chinese Islam is distinctive in certain ways. This is well demonstrated in the architecture of the many mosques which exist throughout the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. The Muslim community has become largely self-sufficient through its relative isolation from the rest of the Muslim world during the last forty-five years. It has developed an active education system both for young children and adults which ensures a minimal level of understanding of the faith among members of the general community, and provides a degree of specialist training for those wishing to become religious leaders. Community support for this education process, and indeed for the broad activities carried out by the mosque, is essential.

Chinese government policy has effectively served as a type of cocoon to prevent Chinese Muslims from experiencing the same degree of instability which has characterised certain Middle Eastern Muslim communities, such as Iran, Egypt and Algeria during the last twenty years. Nevertheless, the early signs are there that this cocoon-like environment will not endure forever. The troubles experienced in various parts of Muslim China in late 1993 point to Muslim sensitivity which is

reminiscent of that found elsewhere in the Muslim world. The existence of the writings of leading radicals of the modern era, such as Sayyid Qutb, for sale among the general Muslim community also suggests the beginning of a process which may lead to instability in the future. Moreover, the Chinese government's own policy of slowly opening the county to economic and social reforms suggests that though Chinese Muslims have been somewhat sheltered from the dynamic of Islamic revivalism elsewhere in the Muslim world until now, the future may bring substantial changes and may lead to a reintegration of Chinese Muslims within the broader Islamic world in terms of religious and political currents and countercurrents.

## Notes

1. This article presents a report on two visits which I made to the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of China in October 1994 and March 1995. I am grateful to Gillian Dawes for providing several of the photos included herein. I am also grateful to Christy Fong, Mai Wong and Catherine Wong of the China office of World Vision International for their patient and excellent interpreting during interviews which I had with various Chinese informants. Last, but not least, I am also greatly indebted to the Chinese informants in the cities, townships and villages of Ningxia who so willingly and hospitably responded to my questions regarding Islamic issues in Ningxia.

2. Reischauer, Edwin O. and John K. Fairbank, 1960, *East Asia. The Great Tradition*, Allen & Unwin, London, p215.

3. Fitzgerald, C.P., 1966, *A Concise History of East Asia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, p72.

4. Reischauer and Fairbank, op cit, p277.

5. Stokes, G. and J. Stokes, 1964, *The Extreme East: A Modern History*, Longman, London, p19.

6. For a detailed study of the attitude of the Ming emperors towards Islam, refer Chang, Haji Yusuf, 1988, "The Ming Empire: Patron of Islam in China and Southeast and West Asia", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, LXI/2.

7. Gladney, Dru C., September 1993, "The Muslim Face of China", *Current History*, p276.

8. The encroachments upon Muslim majority status by Han immigration witnessed in Ningxia were also felt in other predominantly Muslim regions. The 1990 census demonstrated that by that year Hans had come to represent 49% of the predominantly Muslim province of Xinjiang [ibid, p278].

9. Yin Ma (ed), 1989, *China's Minority Nationalities*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1st edition, p98.

10. This is particularly evident in the domain of story telling, where stories about the fourth Caliph, Ali, are popular among Chinese Muslims. Refer Gladney, p280.

11. Ibid, p277. Levtzion makes a series of interesting observations about the influence of Sufism in China in the context of its international role in his fascinating paper: Levtzion, N., "Eighteenth Century Sufi Orders: Structural and Behavioural Changes" in P. Riddell and A. Street (eds), *Islam: Transmissions and Encounters*, (forthcoming).

12. The Shahadah: "There is no God except for God, and Muhammad is the prophet of God".

13. The indentation in the wall of the mosque to which worshippers direct themselves during prayer, and which itself is directed towards Mecca in the West.

14. US$1 = 7.93 Renminbi as at March 1995.

15. Idu'l-fitr and idu'l-adha respectively.

16. An administrative village consists of an agglomeration of several natural villages. Bai Tang, an administrative village with a population of 1,300, includes three natural villages and is entirely Muslim.

17. The informant in question estimated that the ratio of boys:girls was around 8:2.

18. Students undertaking such studies at local mosques were referred to by my informants as *ma-la-ze*.

19. Yin, Ma, op cit, p98.

20. Although the parents of the child accord this role to the Ahung, he does not serve a wider role in the birthing process. When questioned as to the relevance of the Ahung for providing ante-natal advice, my informants responded with great conviction that this was not the domain of the Ahung; rather they depended in this area on Government funded village doctors and village midwives.

21. These five duties are as follows: pronouncing the Islamic witness, daily prayer, the giving of alms, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage.

22. The cost quoted was 10,000 Renminbi per person. It should be remembered that China as a whole remains largely an agrarian society, and this is particularly the case with some poorer minorities, such as the Muslims. Thus few are able to raise the funds to undertake the pilgrimage.

23. Gladney, op cit, p279.

24. Of the mosques which I visited in Ningxia, it was only in the Great Mosque in Tongxin where I was asked to take off my shoes. I offered to do so in the other mosques, but the response was strongly in the negative, with the local Muslims evidently feeling that it would be an imposition to ask foreign guests to take off their shoes in such a situation. This may well point to the predominance of Chinese over Islamic culture in this particular circumstance.

25. For a fascinating study of the development of a Chinese translation of the Qur'an, refer Israeli, R., "The Qur'an in Chinese", in P. Riddell and A. Street (eds), op cit

26. Latourette, K.S., 1964, *China*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, p8.

27. Han families who live in very isolated rural locations may have a maximum of two children.

28. This is designed to address census statistics which point to generally higher rates of illiteracy and lower access to university education among Muslim minorities compared with the Han Chinese. Refer Gladney op cit, p279-80.

29. Note that this benefit had a precedent, as religious groups enjoyed a similar taxation waiver under the Mongols, as indicated earlier.

30. At the micro level of daily worship, the government does not intrude in the life and faith practice of the Ningxia Muslim.

31. The information contained in the preceding paragraphs is drawn from various reports in the *South China Morning Post* in issues printed in October and November 1993. For a detailed analysis of these recent events, refer Israeli, R. "A New Wave of Muslim Revivalism in China" (forthcoming).

32. Though Chang, op cit, argues that Chinese Muslims exerted a powerful influence on the Ming emperors.

# At the Edge of the Crescent: Islam in the Southern Philippines

*Peter Sales*
*History and Politics Wollongong*

*Those who attack the sanctity of Islam are evil*
*The Tausug are Moslems*
*The Spaniards are attacking the Tausugs*
*Therefore: The Spaniards are evil.*

*To be innocently killed is meritorious*
*A person is innocent if attacked by an evil person*
*Therefore: To be killed by the Spaniards is meritorious.*

'God did not create the world in jest', the Holy Qur'an cautions sternly (Surahs 21:16 & 44:38). Such an admonition has never been necessary for any student of the situation in the southern Philippines. Apart from the irrepressible good humour of the people themselves, little of the jocular is to be discerned in that unforgiving environment. The abiding concern has been survival, a goal achieved only after centuries of bloody resistance. Yet armed struggle itself has led to a general perception of the Moros as warlike, backward, and implacable. The image of the crazed, *kris*-wielding warrior running *amok* or performing *juramentado* has become at once a figure of terror and contempt.

Muslim demands have actually been quite straightforward. 'Our public land should not be given to people other than the Moros ... Our practices, laws and the decisions of our Moro leaders should be respected', a 1935 declaration stipulated. 'Our religion should not be curtailed in any way ... Once our religion is no more, our lives are no more'[1]. The urgent simplicity of the Muslim position, however, went largely unnoticed by outsiders, who saw only another example of the menace of resurgent Islam.

The demonisation of Islam in general scarcely requires comment. Nor is it especially safe to do so; considerable risk attaches even to suggesting that the barrage of adverse media coverage may not be wholly deserved. The West is the new god, triumphant over its communist rival, confidently supervising the Leninist extinction, arrogantly secure in its free market rationalism. It can do no wrong. Yet, as Edward Said recently suggested: 'Real intellectual analysis forbids calling one side innocent, the other evil. Indeed the notion of a side is, where cultures are at issue, highly problematic, since most cultures aren't watertight little packages, all homogenous, and all either good or evil'[2].

Such appeals tend to be swamped by the alarmist hysteria of Western reportage. 'The images of Islam prevalent in the world are of brutality, fanaticism, hatred and disorder', according to one commentator. 'Libyans killing policewomen in London, Palestinians hijacking passenger planes, Iranians seizing foreign embassies and Indonesians blowing up the

Borobudur temple in Java'[3]. As V S Naipaul reported after his own Islamic journey: 'Rage was what I saw ... Muslims crazed by their confused faith ... Islam sanctified rage -rage about the faith, political rage: one could be like the to her'[4].

Updating this theme (for there is truly nothing new under the sun), Bernard Lewis published 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' in *Atlantic Monthly* [September 1990]. Even more recently, an issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* [March 9, 1995] featured a cover story titled 'Rage of Islam'. The latest Frederick Forsyth thriller, *Fist of God* [London: Corgi, 1995] recounts a devilish plot by a Muslim leader (guess who?) to create *Qubth-ut-Allah*, a devastating Iraqui super-weapon for use against the West. The May/June 1995 number of the respected *Foreign Affairs* carries a series of articles grouped under the heading of 'The Islamic Cauldron'.

Whatever the validity of this scenario of anger and frustration, Mindanao appears to be a part of the Islamic crescent which is trapped in an endless nightmare of religious conflict. The past is too bloody to recall, the present remains fraught with danger, and the future only threatens worse to come. Conjuring up visions of *jihad* and crusade, the media has attributed the violence to a resurgence of Muslim-Christian frictions. Although such explanations are spurious and misleading, more level-headed discourse is rendered ineffective by a range of competing constraints and injunctions.

Much less noticed than Islamic movements elsewhere and very poorly understood in general, the *Bangsamoro* of Mindanao has religious and historico-cultural roots which stretch back for centuries, predating both the advent of Catholicism and the creation of the modern Philippine state. The population of Mindanao contains a vast cultural and ethno-linguistic mix. Especially significant is the fact that the Moro populace is far from homogenous. It is an amorphous collection of richly diverse communities which differ greatly one from another. These people exhibit what one observer has called 'internal divisions of seemingly endless variety'. Yet the press seizes upon the Christian-Muslim tensions with a certainty born of ignorance and blames militant Islam for most of the civil unrest, presenting every crime, ethnic dispute, or bandit's misdeed as akin to Saladin's revenge.

Muslim traders brought their faith to the Philippines along with a lucrative commerce at least half a millennium ago . Sharif Kabungsuwan is usually identified as introducing Islam to Cotabato from Johore early in the sixteenth century, but he was almost certainly preceded long before by intrepid Arabic voyagers. Although Kabungsuwan embarked on a period of conquest and proselytisation, the peaceful spread of Islam better distinguished the conversion of Mindanao.

These common ancestors have been of primary importance in establishing the myths of origin which endow legitimacy to Muslim Mindanao. As Devin DeWeese has noted about the faith elsewhere:

> *The conscious discursive act - which we witness above all in oral tradition - of attaching those mythic accoutrements to an ancestral figure accepted by or asserted for a community is itself a political statement on the ultimate legitimacy of that community, essentially marking an assertion that the community's origins are equivalent to the origins of the universe, or at least of the universe's significant and relevant component, that of human beings.*[5]

Legends about the coming of Islam to Mindanao, too, extend the collective memory beyond the historical text to serve nothing less than a sacerdotal function. Thus were certain narratives sacralised as part of a rehearsal for the social and political organisation of the *Bangsamoro*.

Islam flourished in its new home, despite the rigorous efforts of the Spanish conquistadors. Viceroys in Manila mounted frequent expeditions against the south. '[I]nasmuch as the chief of Mindanao has been deceived for some time by preachers from Borney who preach the doctrine of Mahoma, and it is said that there are preachers there endeavouring to convert them all into Moros', Governor Francisco de Sande in 1579 commanded the adventurer Grabiel de Rivera to seize the culprits, 'burn the edifice wherein the accursed doctrine was read and taught, and ... order that none other like it be built'[6].

The region continued to resist the government in Manila along with the militant Catholicism which it represented, recreating a conflict between cross and crescent which had begun with the Moorish occupation of the Iberian peninsula half a world away. Futile incursions were made by Spanish missionaries until the whole archipelago was lost forever in 1898.

In their turn, the Americans first suppressed Filipino revolts mercilessly, then set about preparing the country for independence. Washington promoted its policy of integration as a precondition for self-government and the Christian population largely accepted the validity of this objective. To Moros, however, integration was no more than assimilation; by either label, the process was tantamount to the destruction of their culture.

While the Moros never surrendered to the colonials, their resistance far transcended mere fighting and warfare. It went to the very core of the Muslim experience. That proud heritage has become an integral part of the way in which the people of Moroland define themselves. This is best encapsulated in some of the regional literature. For example, the Tausug ballads of *parang sabil* (literally, fighting for Allah) represent a tradition of heroic songs which emphasise important values and virtues demonstrated by the *sabilallah* (a person who dies for the faith).

In a well-known Tausug epic, the young lovers Abdullah and Putli' Isara decide to perform *parang sabil* after the girl is raped by a Spanish officer. Although her father condemns the plan, the pair go to the Spanish headquarters with concealed weapons and perish in a struggle during which they manage to kill thirty soldiers. The lesson drawn by the poem is that it is wrong 'to touch a betrothed girl'. The father refuses to collect the bodies because his daughter had defied him, but the mother goes to the fort, where she hacks a number of Spaniards with a sharp *kris* before herself being shot down. The stricken son follows his mother and also kills several of the enemy. But he is captured and subsequently adopted by one of the officers. The father, bereft of his family, soon pines to death. The dirge concludes that 'The song has ended/ Nothing more can we add to it/ We leave it as a reminder/ To relatives and friends'[7].

The *darangan* of the Maranao and Maguindanao is a similar epic. An entire dimension of the Islamic credo can be detected in such melancholy tales. In this literature, according to Samuel Tan, 'the Moro moves from one value configuration to another and yet something com-

mon runs through the diversity'. The actual worth of cultures is measured herein by their anti-colonialism and resistance to foreign intrusion. But other songs are sung and other virtues lauded. As Tan has emphasised: 'The various images of the many Moro personalities simultaneously portray the Moro as a lover of peace, a humanist interested in creativity and a person sensitive to the rhythm of nature and the universe'[8].

Orientalism has been a special transgression in the demeaning of Muslim cultures. Portrayal of the East as mysterious, voluptuous, and a place 'where sexual desires could be gratified to the hilt' has figured in the European imagination for centuries. Extending the work of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Rana Kabbani has conjectured about the myths of the Orient which build upon Qur'anic ideas of Paradise: 'Christians were morally refined and longed for a bodiless heaven; Muslims were spiritually coarse and could not envisage bliss that was not corporeal'[9].

Islam was, of course, a threat long before it became a problem. The Moro presence in Mindanao is most usually problematised as a persistent, unsolvable conundrum by those experts who study the situation in the southern Philippines. Islam itself appears to be most often considered in terms of resurgence or decline.

A more sensible approach would seem to acknowledge vitality as a force of resistance, first against the Spanish, then the Americans and Japanese, and now against Visayan and other Christian settlers as well as the Philippine state itself. Islam has served as a unifying force in Moroland, a divisive influence in the archipelago as a whole. The *Dar-al-Islam* has also established the *Bangsamoro* as an integral part of the enormous population of Muslims throughout Southeast Asia and beyond. Moroland is, after all, a near-neighbour to the Indonesian archipelago, which has the largest Muslim population in the world.

Yet recent trends in migration have made the Islamic communities of the southern Philippines into a minority in their own land. This has a very important impact upon the practice of the faith. Most Islamic communities enjoy numerical superiority within their own countries, which clearly raises many questions about the relations between religion and the state apparatus. Part of being a Muslim has been to live in an Islamic state and there is a certain compulsion upon those who live in enclaves to observe *jihad*; that is, seek a more accommodating place to live - and over quarter of a million Moros have moved to Sabah since the end of the Pacific war. This puts an exceptional burden of suffering upon those who feel ignored by their government - or even suspect that it is at war with them! - yet are too poor or otherwise do not wish to emigrate.

There is also a reverse aspect to their predicament. As John Esposito has noted: 'Without a new, revised Islamic position on the status of non-Muslims in a Muslim state, non-Muslim minorities may well wonder what the increased sense of Islamic identity and community may hold in store for them'[10]. This has been a major stumbling block to achieving harmonious relations in those few southern provinces with Islamic majorities and has made Christians very suspicious about agreeing to the extension of the size and authority of the Autonomous Region of Moro Mindanao (ARMM). Such sensitive issues are complicated extraordinarily by the incipient pressure of outside business interests.

In this context, Moroland has tended to experience modernity as a particularly insidious form of peripheral capitalism burdened with semi-feudal mechanisms together with an insistent process of Westernisation which threatens the communal life of the entire region. Moroland remains as troubled by the contradictions of Islamism as anywhere else, with a traditional and reactionary theocracy competing against radical fundamentalism and revivalism on one side and Islamic liberalism, reformism, and even feminism on the other.

Concerned about the prevalent notion of Western success, various Islamic progressives have confronted the challenges of modernity in the way their forbears responded to European colonialism. No less a figure than John Esposito has pronounced: 'Islamic modernism, like much of the modern Muslim response to the West in the twentieth century, had an ambivalent attitude toward the West, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion'[11]. While undoubtedly relevant to the situation in the southern Philippines, such a generalisation does not take the study of Moroland very far.

How, then, to engage the debate about local transformations within the so-called globalisation of modernity? For many Islamic observers, the modern remains no more than the European Other. There is a sort of double alienation from not only the foreign influence itself, but also from the subsequent medievalisation of Arabic culture. This response goes to the heart of postcolonial tensions between traditionalism and Westernisation. Ira Lapidus has discussed these issues in terms of Islamisation and secularisation:

*Apart from social institutions, Islam remains in the hearts and minds of individual Muslims an essential component of personal and political identity. To be a Muslim, after all, is not only a matter of state office, ulama colleges and Sufi hospices, but of individual morality, and personal and social identity. Islam is the name of the primordial personal and group sentiment that defines for the individual believer both personal existence and the existence of a truly human community. Thus the neo-Muslim movements are not only grounded in institutions but in the cultural and symbolic meaning of Islam.*

To Lapidus, then, there is an important academic challenge to examine the extent to which 'Muslim people still and will continue to constitute Islamic societies in the historic sense'[12].

Over recent times, Islam in Mindanao has been studied by a number of sympathetic outsiders. Prominent among these was the late Peter Gowing, an American missioner who came to the Philippines after serving as a chaplain in the US Navy. As the founding director of the Dansalan Research Center in Marawi City, he became an acknowledged expert on Muslim affairs. But he belonged to a period in which assimilation was still deemed possible. He wrote and preached the message of reconciliation. 'The Moros have not come empty-handed into the Philippine nation', he counselled distrustful sceptics. 'They contribute rich, bright colours to its tapestry of cultures; they add excitement and glory to the history of its struggle against foreign domination; and they enhance the intelligence, energy, and vigour of the nation's dynamic population'[13].

Unfortunately, Gowing and many others watching the situation during the ghastly bloodshed of the 1970s were not well placed to discern the broader context of the forces at work in Mindanao. They were, above all, unable to concede or conceptualise a Moro victory against the Phil-

ippine state. An important aspect of the anti-colonial project here as elsewhere has been the emergence of subnational groups based upon cultural, religious, and ethnic regionalism. This development has seemed on occasion to contain the threat of various types of extremism, political instability, and even the disintegration of nation states themselves.

'The Philippine movement for autonomy fits into ... the Islamic concept of *ummah* or commonwealth of Muslim believers, both as individuals and as entities organized as nations', Ralph Braibanti wrote recently. 'Ideologically the Muslim world senses a profound communion which has not been suppressed by modern nationalism but continues to exist as a powerful primordial sentiment of transcendent importance'. Nowhere is this expression of religious community stronger than in Mindanao, Braibanti noted, where the Islamic minority endures in *dar-al-harb* (literally, the domain of war)[14].

Nor have Muslims fared very well from their participation in national life. Their involvement in Filipino politics has been especially unfortunate. Moro leaders were compromised by their role in the notorious New Society movement of President Ferdinand Marcos, for example. Some local warlords were actually cronies of the dictator. But most of the current suspicion cast upon Islam in the southern Philippines resembles attacks made upon the faith elsewhere. There are first and foremost those criticisms which have been levelled at the faith in general.

A number of scholars - most notably Edward Said in several perceptive studies - have responded by criticising the way the Orientalised Other has been incorporated into Western discourse[15]. In similar vein, some observers have begun writing of Islamism as an alternative to pejorative and limiting terms like revivalism, fanaticism, and fundamentalism. Islamism specifically comprises the activities of militant Muslims seeking to promote their religious concepts as essential ingredients of both state and society.

Today there remains a tendency among outsiders not to take Islam in the Philippines seriously or otherwise to misunderstand it in significant ways. It has been identified as little more than a fragment of faith washed ashore rather uncomfortably in an island state which has since become a bastion of Catholic Christianity. Meanwhile, Muslims in Metro Manila constitute those most exposed to external judgment. This group comprises a high proportion of refugees and urban poor. They are largely confined to certain parts of the capital, often denied access to basic services like education, and held in fear and contempt by other residents.

Worse still, their adherence to Islam is frequently belittled. Even Peter Gowing could write of Moros in earlier times having 'only scant knowledge of their religion', but 'sticking fanatically to what little they knew'[16]. In another context, Devin DeWeese has noted Westerners casting doubt upon the 'seriousness' of Muslims in Inner Asia, implying pretence in regard to belief, and assuming some sort of 'light' or 'nominal' Islamisation[17]. This misreading of an alien faith could be due to no more than ignorance, but it might also indicate a clever device to delimit and trivialise a rival.

Part of the presumption that Islam in the Philippines is to some extent untrue to the faith, shallow, immature, or even out of place arises in the first instance as a reflection of a central concern of Catholicism. To all intents and purposes, the dominant religion of the archipelago lies

across a range of animist or other indigenous beliefs and superstitions with a lightness which at once confirms its religious hold over the country, but makes many adherents nervous about being challenged as themselves inadequate propagators of the mother church. Those sensitive about such accusations of deviance are quickest to see it in others.

Yet the very process of Islamisation is itself a problematic as well as inelegant term. It presupposes two contrapuntal developments: First, the introduction of the new faith into local communities, along with its normative modes of thought and action; and second, the incorporation of indigenous forms into Islamic principles and practices. Thus can a range of pre-or non-Muslim elements have a bearing upon Moro religious life.

The synthesis of Islamic adherence with pre-Islamic forms has tended to be of interest mainly to outsiders, although events since the early 1970s - which have conspired to make the Moro communities feel embattled and threatened - have undoubtedly led to greater emphasis on religious obligation and orthodoxy. The blending of Islamic ways with those of local tribes can be especially discerned in the 'rites of passage'. Ceremonies dealing with birth, coming of age, marriage, and death vary considerably from place to place, but they always retain a solid core of orthodoxy. The *pag-gunting* (or baptism) practised by the Tausug people is especially fascinating as the ritual of wetting the child's head strongly suggests a Christian borrowing. Throughout Mindanao, a range of diverse religious practices complements the central belief system of Islam.

This duality has been dubbed Folk Islam. It is reflected in the 'popular religiosity' of the broader, predominantly Christian Filipino community. This has led to an ostensible difference between 'Great Tradition' and 'Little Tradition' in both faiths. There is alleged to be a deep-seated sense of the supernatural along with a set of metaphysical beliefs underlying all religious life of the Philippines. The practices and artefacts of Catholicism are certainly widespread, but their meanings have long since coalesced with the indigenous belief systems of the archipelago.

Folk Islam is at once similar to this general Philippine phenomenon and something else as well. It has in the past been too quickly identified as some sort of mockery of the true faith. Much has been made of the fact that some Islamic practices are observed rather carelessly. Laxity of observance is, of course, a common human frailty and little or nothing should be implied from such behaviour. 'Let them cease to apply to their scanty observation of native life the test of their still more imperfect knowledge of the law and doctrine of Islam', a turn-of-the-century Dutch scholar warned Western visitors to Southeast Asia, 'in order to arrive at the surprising conclusion that the Malays, Javanese, Achenese, etc. are not nations of theologians and jurists or book-Mohammedans modelled from wax'[18].

In fact, recent scholars seem to go much further than Peter Gowing and his ilk in their attempts to conceptualise Folk Islam. The belief system which came to the Philippines through the crescent of Asia had already escaped the restrictions and narrow rigidity of the Arabic societies. Infused with Indian mysticism, the religion which literally washed ashore in Mindanao was a form of Folk Islam from the outset. Samuel Tan concludes 'that it is only possible to conceive of Islam or Is-

lamic civilization as a "*folk islamic* tradition"'[19]

In the Philippines no less than elsewhere, Islam is based upon belief or faith (*aqidah*) and action (*amal*). Neither has value without the other. The behaviour of the individual believer is governed by the *shariah*, the divine law of Allah. The jurisdiction of Islamic law has been a particularly contentious issue in dealings with the Philippine government; meanwhile, an increasing number of *shariah* lawyers are graduating from Mindanao State University (MSU).

According to a famous *hadith*, Islam is not intended to be a burden. Worship and ritual are based upon an austere simplicity. There is in essence only duty to Allah, personal obligation, and a collective response. *Dar al-Islam* (or the House of Islam) rests upon the five pillars of *Din* (those things which are done rather than believed); specifically, *takara* (witness), *salat* (prayer), *zakat* (alms), *saum* (fasting), and *hajj* (pilgrimage). The religion is a means by which to achieve divine grace and encompasses a wide-ranging set of attitudes and practices. Some of these are deemed praiseworthy within the *ummah* while others are merely tolerated.

Important in the story of Islam in the southern Philippines has been the role of Sufism (or Islamic mysticism). This manifestation of the spiritual relies upon the survival of traditional socio-economic structures. It does not flourish in the modern world. Sufism provides the mystical experience of an internalised relationship between the adherent and a personal God akin to similar forms of contemplation in other religions, although Islam actually encourages such encounters because it does not require priestly mediation. 'Sufism served to enrich Islam with many strains of cultural and social expression and liberated its common folk into a self-transcending intensity of spiritual life they could have reached in no other way', Kenneth Cragg has enthused. 'With its manifold energies of soul, its strenuous demands and its vast diffusion through the lands and centuries of Islam, the life of the Sufi Orders might lay claim to being the finest achievement of Islamic religion'[20].

In part a counter to the cold and erudite rationalism of scholarly pursuit, Sufism has developed over centuries as a means to personal enlightenment and the realisation of divine glory. It has been described variously as a type of disciplined vocation and the path to a life of devotion. Sufism has assumed many forms. One of these is *Naqshabandiyyah* (founded by Muhammad Naqshabandi, who died in 1389 AD). Itself a collection of divergent groups, *Naqshabandiyyah* spread early to the southern Philippines.

Although eclectic and discursive, Sufism responded with revulsion to moral laxity among secular Muslims. It has provided a quiet, gentle alternative to Westernising influences. There have been three major impulses for change. The first of these comprises the internal dynamics of the *Bangsamoro* itself. The ethnic, religious, socio-political, and economic cultures of this diverse region create a vibrant faith while providing a remarkable counterpoint to the dominant Philippine society. The second point has emerged from the range of hostile forces brought to bear against the Moro communities. Chief among these is the Philippine government. A final factor involves the rivalry between the previous two; namely, the essentially dynamic mechanism of action and reaction which has arisen in the recent past. Much of what the Islamic leaders decide to do is a response to gov-

ernment initiatives; administrative policy in turn being a reflection of the former. Everything is a cause as well as an effect in the evolution of the RP-Muslim dialogue.

At the same time, however, critics dismiss Islam as an imported faith lightly imposed upon what is still essentially a missionary environment. One of the more obvious reasons that Islam in the southern Philippines has often been presented as a foreign influence is its persistent reliance upon external inputs for religious instruction, explanatory literature, trained scholars and the like. This has been a major hindrance in the propagation of the faith and its ultimate emergence as an indigenous creed.

Significant efforts have been made to rectify the situation through various types of neo-revivalism. The *Tableeqh Jumaat* movement, for instance, was formed in the early 1980s as an expression of religious renewal. While it espouses a return to strict Islamic observance, the organisation resembles a middle way between traditionalism and modernity. Essentially an apolitical force with perhaps 300,000 young members, it has on several occasions run foul of the Philippine military and Christian vigilantes like *Alsa Moro*. Radicalisation has occurred in the face of an extremist brutality condoned or ignored by the authorities. Amilhussin Jumaani, a founder of *Tableeqh Jumaat*, subsequently rejected peaceful initiatives and helped to establish the notorious *Abu Sayyaf* [Swordbearer of Allah].

The Islamic experience in the south undoubtedly poses a direct threat to the Philippine state. As Samuel Tan has noted:

*The Moros of the Philippines are engaged in a struggle for an autonomous government in a separate territory. Believing that they are a different people with a unique history and values, they assert that, by the fact of their uniqueness as a nation, they have the right to self-determination. The Moros have sought their objectives for many centuries having endured deprivation, exploitation, and oppression under several alien regimes*[21].

The acquisition of the Islamic faith was itself an indication of the Moro ability to adapt to change.

The spread of the faith to the southern Philippines and its penetration of this part of the archipelago amply illustrate the extent of Islamic diversity and dispersal. One strand of the faith has remained 'an oppositional Islam', fiercely resisting inroads of Spanish Catholicism first, then the Protestantism of the Americans, and finally the dictates of conformity imposed by the Philippine state. Edward Said has noted a general trend in which Muslim groups gain a mandate from 'the oppressed, the urban poor, the landless peasants of the countryside, all those with no hope except a restored or reconstructed Islamic past'. He could be writing specifically about the Moro communities of Mindanao. And he has warned: 'Many people are ready to fight to the death for these ideas'[22].

Islam in the southern Philippines has gradually become a minority religion in a fiercely contested but Christianised area of a predominantly Catholic country. Even here, however, Islamic leaders reflected the pattern of quietism and submission to secular authority prevalent in many Muslim states. Emmanuel Sivan has noted succinctly:

*While the ravages of modernity were quite important, it is clear that traditional Islam still held its ground in certain key areas. The revival evident since the mid-1960s, and whose goal had been to stop the erosion, could oper-*

*ate from a solid enough basis, deeply steeped in medieval lore and behaviour. This is not to minimise the contribution of the radicals, nor to say that their holding operation did not imply departure from traditionalism in certain spheres. The pivotal departure is the passage from what one may call 'passive pessimism' to 'activist pessimism', analogous perhaps to differences between Old Right and New Right in turn-of-the-century Europe*[23].

The radicals of today recognise the onset of decadent trends along with the damage wrought upon Islamic societies by modernity, but they refuse to succumb to the quietism and submission advocated by mainstream leaders.

There is some validity to the claim that radical Islam is selectively receptive to modernism, basing its response upon a notion of essentialism (or 'Orientalism in reverse')[24]. In other words, a corpus of the true faith can be relied upon to withstand the impact of Westernising modernity. Such might very well be the case in regard to Islam itself, where revivalism has been most effective. Studies have revealed that even where change has occurred in sensitive areas like the family, education, and the status of women, religious matters have been the most resistant to transformation[25].

A useful measure of Islam in the southern Philippines has been provided in the conclusion to one of Kenneth Cragg's careful studies. Reflecting on the tragic aspect of Islam, he noted:

*It is a faith which has, historically, lived in and by success. It is a religion of confident power. Since it sees itself as religion perfected, it believes it is destined always to succeed. The sympathetic observer is moved to wonder whether it is ever seriously afflicted or ill at ease in the world. Islam expects the believer to be free from raibah, doubtfulness, of which there is none in the Qur'an. Yet a faith which never produces any loyal sceptics must seem to be 'out of this world'. Without inward doubters can any religion be safe even with itself? Do not all credal establishments need iconoclasts to call them into question? ... If there is an unexaminedness about belief, it means that there is a conspiracy of silence about latent, haunting questions. Islam has always been rigorous against apostasy, impatient with the doubtful*[26].

Cragg's words have gained in relevance and potency since he wrote them in 1975. But they only apply to the Islam of Mindanao in perverse and particular ways.

Yet Islam has produced a number of famous sceptics, despite the intolerance with which they have been met. And the lived experience of millions of Muslims have not reflected the optimistic assurances of their faith. Indeed, Cragg's own analysis readily conceded that the self-evident complacency of Islam was often contradicted by the ineluctable flow of history.

Despite ethno-linguistic and other tribal differences, Moro communities have achieved and maintained a significant degree of shared nationhood. The adopted religion actually strengthened many indigenous elements of their society. As T.J.S.George noted in his *Revolt in Mindanao*, the popular creed of the south gained adherents in a way entirely different to the faith imposed by the Spanish elsewhere in the archipelago. 'Muslims achieved a sense of identity which Catholics did not', he decided. 'In fact, the Catholics lost theirs because they were consciously Hispanized; the Muslims were never Arabized'[27].

After reading *Revolt in Mindanao*, the tireless ecumenical activist Fr Peter Geremia confided to his diary that it was an interesting study 'sympathetic with the Muslim suspicion toward a nation suppos-

edly independent but still named after Philip, the colonizer, with a flag copied from the American flag, and a national anthem borrowed from a Spanish royal march - not to mention the colonial education, economy and political system'. Geremia wondered whether the Muslims were 'challenging the rest of the nation to attempt independence again'[28].

Yet George's study tends to be sublimely and unapologetically modernist in its message: 'As a community, Mindanao Muslims have remained static for too long, their own inward-looking disposition and reactionary leadership contributing as much to that condition as oppression by outsiders'. Having praised the Kemalist nation-building experiment in Turkey, George challenged the Muslims of the Philippines to 'become the pace-setting "Turks" of South-East Asia'. He is particularly critical of those Moro leaders who have blocked attempts at reform, although he appears reluctant to recognise this excessive conservatism as a generalised Philippine problem. 'All orthodoxies must change in time, or time overwhelms them', he concludes. 'Mindanao still awaits a Mustafa Kemal'[29].

There is a slight arrogance about such pontification. Indeed, the certainty of much previous research has been challenged over the last few years and academic attitudes have begun to moderate a little. 'Scholarly concern with the Islamic roots of culture and politics is very recent', declared Edmund Burke, III. 'Dominated by the paradigm of modernization, the academic literature until quite recently stressed the impact upon Islamic elites of European ideas and cultural models'. Burke has pointed out how nationalism became the dominant ideology of the Muslim world. 'Today, in the wake of the Islamic revival', he decided, 'we are inclined to wonder if the concern with secular nationalism was all a mirage'[30].

The situation in the southern Philippines must be fitted into the general discussion about Islam and modernity. An especially critical feature today is the tension between secularising forces and a process of heightened Islamisation. Two important aspects of the former have been the countervailing influences of Marxism and Westernisation. According to some *imams*, Marxism has assumed a deceptively Islamic veneer in Moroland. A number of religious leaders have attacked Chairman Nur Misuari for his leftist inclinations and criticised the MNLF for negotiating from time to time with the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Complaints about Westernisation range far more widely. Virtually anything which excites impressionable youth or threatens social disturbance of any sort quickly earns the disapproval of aging *ulama* in centers like the Islamic City of Marawi and is rejected out of hand as a challenge to the true faith. Such dogmatism is asserted with an increasing degree of doctrinal certitude. Quoting the Holy Qur'an - 'Truth hath come and falsehood hath vanished [Surah 17: 81] - to buttress their heavy-handed actions, these theologians struggle to maintain a religious purity based upon stasis, resignation, and a pessimistic acceptance that the world is largely as decreed by Allah.

Ethnolinguistic differences were always extremely significant in Moroland, though these have changed enormously over time. But with the decline of traditional customs, the incursions of various external influences, and the arrival of large numbers of Visayan settlers, Islamic systems of kinship, territorial jurisdiction,

and the like have come under extraordinary pressure. In some parts of Sulu-Mindanao, these established patterns have survived in modified form; elsewhere they have not.

The gradual breakdown of Islamic customs has occurred in many ways and for a variety of reasons. Yet the culture of Moroland has proved exceptionally resilient. It is also vital and diverse. The practices in one valley may not remain the same and might not be reflected in those of a neighbouring district. Nor has direct attack been sufficient to cause social dislocation. In some cases, indeed, a tribalism or communal reassertion based upon Islamic renewal has become an important form of political resistance[31].

A distinctive feature of Islam in the southern Philippines has been its remarkable growth in recent times. Early in the twentieth century there were only about fifty mosques in the entire country. A rapid period of expansion occurred in the 1970s, the number of mosques increasing to nearly 1500 by 1983. Today throughout Mindanao, even the smallest community has its own tiny mosque just as thatched-hut Catholic churches are a distinctive feature of most villages, too. The number of *madrasah* schools doubled during the eighties to over 2000. A couple of thousand people each year now make the *hajj* (or pilgrimage to Mecca).

This religious fervour has been aptly described as a form of 'muscular Islam'[32]. It is concerned with vigorous proselytising, winning over not so much 'converts' as 'reverts'. This notion of reversion is very important as many *ummah* dispute the historical record and argue that the entire archipelago was Muslim before the arrival of Christendom.

The growth of Islam in this place and at this time requires careful study. Does the *Bangsamoro* comprise or form part of an 'imagined community'? Or does it dissipate into too many nipa huts, herds of goats, village wells - and, of course, *madrasahs* and mosques? In his influential study of nationality/nation-ness/nationalism, Ben Anderson confronted aspects of Islamism, albeit with less than complete success. Are we truly to believe that Maguindanaons and Berbers communicate in Mecca because their ideographs are written in classical Arabic?[33] While much of Anderson's concept remains provocative, it seems to lack sufficient elasticity to be fully convincing in this case.

An adequate explanation must acknowledge a number of factors. In his provocative *Islams and Modernities*, Aziz Al-Azmeh has cautioned against a range of careless simplifications. His lament is about misunderstanding:

*Whatever is construed as itself rational never goes beyond the bounds of the singular event to which it relates. Islamic history thus becomes, at best, a ponderous tragedy, at worst a soap opera, and in all cases a misadventure. Decline thus becomes not a fact of the historical order, but a predictable event of the metaphysical order. Decline is here not essentially a historical fact, but is natural given the antithetical conception of Islam employed: the antithesis of normalcy and nature is anomaly and disnature. Decline becomes metaphysically necessary, a foregone conclusion underlined by an actual disparity in might. That racist stereotypes and historical justification are concordant comes as no surprise.*

Too often those who examine Islam from outside 'espouse a savage essentialism' which insists 'that a rigourist form of religiosity is the characteristic, the real'. Al-Azmeh concludes rather obtusely: 'Fundamentalists realize the wildest fantasies of orientalism; for the former, as for

the latter, the striving is for a myth of origin'[34].

A number of writers have perceived a Manichean disjunction in this regard. At one level, modernisation is no more than an Orientalising mentality. Turkish writer Nevzat Soguk has noted that even critical and sensitive writers like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, anxious 'to reappropriate an indigenous capacity to speak, might find themselves to be the unwitting agents of a new kind of "corrective project" outlining the qualities of a "heroic" Third World subject'. Soguk has written in scathing terms about 'Orientalised Orientals' who seek to transform their Islamised sites in the image of modernity, progress, and development.

Or again, Soguk has warned against fashionable notions of resistance defined merely in terms of the periphery against the center. Such subjectivity may appear to condone indisputably evil deeds. He warns against the inherent dangers of proclaiming (and then imposing) the correct path to salvation. The present activities of Abu Sayyaf in southwestern Mindanao and further afield serve notice that anti-Western postures are not sufficient to achieve genuine liberation and that an urgent need persists for engaged criticism of such forms of Islamic resistance (or what Edward Said has labelled more broadly 'sectarian nativism')[35].

The Moro struggle has acquired three distinct types of internal consolidation. First came the evolution of ethnic identity. A unity of effort was achieved through kinship, language, and location. 'What this means', according to Samuel Tan, 'is that the persistence of the ethnic factor indicates not so much the anti-modern or anti-progressive nature of Muslim aspirations as it is a means of survival in a society where nationalism has remained parochial and prejudiced'.

Religious identity also developed as a response to the inroads of colonialism. Hispanicisation implied conversion to Catholicism. Later the Americans sought to replace this with a healthy dose of Methodism. Confronted by Christianisation in one form or another, ethnicity was augmented by the tenets of Islam.

The third factor has been a search for national identity. While Muslims strive for recognition within the Philippine polity, they also realise that their culture and heritage binds them to the broader Islamic tradition. Samuel Tan has declared the *Bangsamoro* to be at a crossroad. The Moros confront two realities:

> *First, the outside world which represents the larger society has definitely and irreversibly followed the path of modernization, sacrificing some, if not many, of its traditional ways and features. As such, it has increased its resources, powers, and knowledge ... Second, history as a teacher of men points not only to the desirable answers of the past but also to its weaknesses, and the lessons of history must lead to better understanding of present problems and more effective ways to cope with anxieties, fears and frustrations.*

Tan believes that Moros can only secure their identity by resolving this dilemma. But having posed the great challenge for the people of Muslim Mindanao, he resorts in the end to vague ecumenical platitudes instead of suggesting a feasible way forward[36].

How much further can general theorising go except to caution against various pitfalls - like, for example, the warnings of Bhikhu Parekh, who has noted the 'tendency to use the term fundamentalism as a kind of hand grenade to be thrown at whoever is not whole-heartedly commit-

ted to liberal values'[37]. Not that an Islamic liberalism is inherently contradictory. The hegemonic West simply endows itself with greater objectivity than its Eastern rivals, trivialising in a myriad of ways the allegedly barbaric history of Muslim peoples.

In the southern Philippines as elsewhere, Muslim leaders have been able to attribute communal setbacks and reversals of fortune to religious laxity, the solution being a return to the basic principles of the faith and a rejection of secularism in all its seductive trappings. Such teachings underlie the persistent call to *jihad*, itself a complicated term for struggle which is only slighted by the glib interpretation as Holy War. Much of the believer's obligation occurs within the self -Greater *Jihad* - as opposed to fighting the external enemies of the *ummah* - Lesser *Jihad.*

The significance of the Islamic struggle in the southern Philippines cannot be doubted. In his lengthy study of Muslim separatism, W.K.Che Man points to the validity of ethnic, religious, and nationalist demands. He concludes forcefully that the people of Moroland regard their national self-determination as a fundamental right[38]. Perhaps Muslim Mindanao needs the sort of extra-electoral, self-critical leftward-leaning formation which leads by rational persuasion rather than by domination. This reincarnation of Gramsci's 'modern prince' probably accords closely to the vision of MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari.

Despite all its religious overtones, analysis of the Moro struggle must constantly be linked to the reality of Philippine politics. One commentator has noted: 'Political analysts err in concentrating all their attention on the burning, militant Islam in plain sight; other manifestations of Islam deserve to be more closely examined and better known to the public at large'[39]. Nevertheless, it can be difficult for the academic observer to make sense of Islamic resurgence in the southern Philippines when such revivalism intersects with armed struggle, kidnappings and banditry, massacres and the sacking of cities like Ipil, and the advent of the violent, wrathful *jihad* of Abu Sayyaf and other Moro 'lost commands'.

Yet, as Kenneth Bauzon has stressed, 'the conflict between the Muslims and the Philippine government is not so much caused by guns and bullets as by conflicting conceptions of nationality, each of which forms part of a larger set of beliefs'. The differences between the warring parties relate to varying cosmologies that too seldom intersect or overlap. Bauzon concluded:

*Clearly, the Muslims in the Philippines have been the victims - not the perpetrators -of historical circumstances. It is ironic that to a large extent their fate has been determined by false images masquerading as 'knowledge', much of it purveyed by the social sciences ... This intellectual climate, in turn, influenced the Christian Filipino intelligentsia with respect to the way they defined and found solution to their 'Moro Problem'*[40].

Those community leaders with sufficient clarity of vision and the requisite capacity for goodwill are clearly confronted by a divide which is both deep and wide.

A far more basic challenge is contained in the urgent simplicity of Moro demands. Their religion has come to represent and encapsulate the plight of the multifarious communities of the southern Philippines. These have already begun to redefine their past and reconstruct their present as the only means of reinventing their future. If this task fails, the aspira-

tions of the Moro people will not lie dormant. Vast armies of *mujahideen* are now being recruited from the orphans of those who died in the fighting of the 1970s and other disaffected youth. The debate as to whether theirs will be a religious war or a struggle for national liberation seems sterile, dangerous, and unnecessarily complicated. The hopes and dreams of the Muslims of Mindanao are quite straightforward: Above all, in the inspired words of Aime Cesaire, they want to be assured of a place at the rendezvous of victory.

## Notes

1. Quoted in Deliar Noer, 'Contemporary Political Dimensions of Islam' in M.B.Hooker (editor), *Islam in South-East Asia* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1988), 208.

2. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994), 89. Cf Daryush Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West* (London: Saqi Books, 1992).

3. Akbar S. Ahmed, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), 1.

4. V S Naipaul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 354.

5. Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 50.

6. Instructions of Dr Francisco de Sande to Captain de Rivera, Manila, January 15, 1579 in E.H.Blair & J.A.Robertson (editors), *The Philippine Islands 1493 - 1803* (Metro Manila: Cachos Hermanos, 1962; 1973 reprint).

7. Some of this oral literature was gathered, translated and examined in Gerard Rixhon (editor), *Sulu Studies*, 2 & 3 (Jolo: Notre Dame of Jolo College, 1973 & 1974). See also Jovita V. Castro, *et al, Anthology of Asian Literatures* (Quezon City: APO Productions Unit, 1985), 219-299.

8. Samuel K. Tan, 'The Moro Secessionist Movement in the Philippines' in Ralph R. Premdas, *et al* (editors), *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective* (London: Pinter, 1990), 72. See also Jainal D. Rasul, *Philippine Muslims: Struggle for Identity* (Manila: Nueva Era Press, 1970) and the interesting collection of articles in Peter G. Gowing (editor), *Understanding Islam and Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988).

9. Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of the Orient* (London: Pandora Press, 1988), 16-17. See Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Also useful is Glenn Jordan & Chris Weedon, *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World* (Oxford & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), especially 262-310 *passim.*

10. Introduction to John L. Esposito (editor), *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics, and Society* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 23.

11. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55. General studies of this dichotomous development include Habib Boulares, *Islam: The Fear and the Hope* (London: Zed Books, 1990); Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993); Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1994); and Chris Harman, 'The Prophet and the Proletariat', *International Socialism* (Autumn 1994), 3-63.

12. Ira Lapidus, 'Islam and Modernity' in S.N.Eisenstadt (editor), *Patterns of Modernity*, volume II: *Beyond the West* (London: Frances Pinter, 1987), 114. Note, *inter alia*, Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990) & Saree S. Makdisi, 'The Empire Renarrated: Season of Migration to the North and the Reinvention of the Present', *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1992), 804-820.

13. Peter G. Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos: Heritage and Horizon* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), 251.

14. Introduction to Kenneth E. Bauzon, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991), xvi.

15. See, *inter alia*, two definitive works by Edward Said: *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) & *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

16. Peter Gowing, *Mosque and Moro: A Study of Muslims in the Philippines* (Manila: Philippine Federation of Christian Churches, 1964), 64.

17. This present study has attempted to utilise and transfer some of the insights provided in DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion*, a study of similar developments in another part of Asia.

18. Quoted in Gowing, *Muslim Filipinos*, 69.

19. Samuel K. Tan, *Decolonization and Filipino Muslim Identity* (Quezon City: Department of History, University of the Philippines, 1989), 12.

20. Kenneth Cragg, *The House of Islam* (Encino & Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Co, 1975), 71. For background information, see *inter alia* A.J.Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969) and Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

21. Samuel K. Tan, 'The Moro Secessionist Movement in the Philippines' in Ralph R. Premdas, *et al* (editors), *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective* (London: Pinter, 1990), 71.

22. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 29.

23. Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), 184.

24. Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm, *Critique of Religious Thought* (Beirut: Dar al-Awdah, 1969).

25. See, *inter alia*, Dessouki (editor), *Islamic Resurgence*; and Emmanuel Sivan, *Interpretations of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

26. Cragg, *The House of Islam*, 123-124.

27. T.J.S.George, *Revolt in Mindanao: The Rise of Islam in Philippine Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), 27.

28. Peter Geremia, *Dreams and Bloodstains* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1987), 166.

29. George, *Revolt in Mindanao*, 273 & 275-276. Such thinking is challenged directly in works like Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), especially chapter 4: Prospects and Some Suggestions.

30. Edmund Burke, III, 'Islam and Social Movements: Methodological Reflections' in Edmund Burke, III, & Ira M. Lapidus (editors), *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 17.

31. Cf Bauzon, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity in the Philippines*, 143-166 *passim*.

32. Richard Martin, 'Resurgent Islam', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 17, 1994.

33. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1983), 20.

34. Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), 133-140 *passim*. Cf Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

35. Nevzat Soguk, 'Reflections on the "Orientalized Orientals"', *Alternatives* 18, no 3 (1993), 374-375 & 378. Cf Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

36. Tan, *Decolonization and Filipino Muslim Identity*, 73-77. Tan's work actually extends ideas advanced earlier in studies like Alunan

C. Glang, *Muslim Secession or Integration* (Metro Manila: Published by the author, 1969) and Cesar Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Asian Center of the University of the Philippines, 1973).

37. Bhikhu Parekh, 'The Concept of Fundamentalism' in Alexsandras Shtromas (editor), *The End of 'Isms'?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 105. See also Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1982); John J. Donohue & John L. Esposito (editors), *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); & Raphael Israeli (editor), *The Crescent in the East: Islam in Asia Major* (London: Curzon Press, 1989).

38. W.K.Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 179. Cf Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979).

39. Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 83.

40. Bauzon, *Liberalism and the Quest for Islamic Identity*, 165-166.

# Islamic Desk Reference - a review

Van Donzel, E, comp. Compiled from *The Encyclopaedia of Islam.* New ed. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994. 492 pp. price not reported cloth ISBN 9004 097384

A dozen pages in the middle of my review copy are blank. That is appropriate, perhaps: the *Islamic Desk Reference* leaves too many gaps untilled.

Every encyclopaedia is bound to fail; its editors neglect or exclude just those items which will prompt readers to consult their published work. How much more vulnerable, then, is a digest of an encyclopedia! Under the entry, 'Proverbs', this particular digest explains that 'the Arabic term [matha] includes proverbs, proverbial sayings, adages, set terms of speech, and parables or fables. There exist a great number of Arabic collections, and the genre is also practised in Persian, Turkish, Urdu and Swahili.' The necessity to include this surprising and invaluable information no doubt compelled the compiler to omit other data. I found, for instance, no entries for any of the following, all of which are key terms in understanding Islam: 'Abangan', 'Shica', 'Maghrib', 'Muhallil', 'Sharica' - this list could extend to dozens of entries.

The explanations given under 'Divorce' and 'Devil' strike me as trivial. I disagree with the editorial policy of using English terms for entries: 'Iblis' would have been a better entry than 'Devil'. Users would gain more from technical Islamic terminology.

What virtues are there in this book? It hints at a history of ideas and at a wealth of cultures; it carries fragments of Islamic lore enough to catch the interest of a casual browser. The sketch given under Talha b. eUbayd Allah, for instance, is loaded with potential drama. Talha was a Companion (a first follower of the Prop-bee in *pre-Hijra* Mecca. He lived through the triumph of Medina yet died defeated in rebellion. His story might excite a scholar or inspire a novelist. Enthusiasm would soon run cold, however. The *Islamic Desk Reference* does not list the Companions: it names only the four just Caliphs. It abounds in bits of deceptive

half information. 'Imami is an adjective derived from imamiyya' (p. 169) In fact both words are adjectival; both are formations from the strangely absent entry, 'imam'.

I have not seen the multi-volume *Encyclopaedia of Islam.* Nevertheless, I will wait till I can afford to buy it - and the magnifying glass necessary to read its fine and, I trust, precise detail.

*Peter Burns*
*James Cook University*