



Editor:

Dr Saeed Shehabi

A bi-monthly newsletter

Published by the

45 Crawford Place,

London W1H 4LP

Tel: 020 7724 3033

Email:

Abrarhouse

@hotmail.com

Website

www.abraronline.net

Charity no. 293802

We stand for:

- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
- *High standards of spirituality*

In this issue

Local Events	2
Muslim Affairs	3
Nur ad-Din Jami	4
Religious traditions lead to better life	5
Women protest India's citizenship law	6
Feminist who converted to Islam	8

Abrar

Vol 16, No 14 (374)

16th -31st January 2020

Wars often exacerbate crisis; best to to avoid them

The celebrations to mark the New Year are always accompanied by high hopes for a better future to the individual, the group and the human race at large. After all hope is what preserves the will to live. This year the celebrations were marred by sad episodes which threaten the welfare and security of people. The wild fires engulfing the whole continent of Australia are the latest warnings that this planet is facing catastrophic consequences of man's own making. Up to one billion animals may have perished in the fierce fires caused by serious drought that has continued for four years. Scores of people have lost their lives as a result of intense heat and pollution. It is one of worst natural disasters in modern times. Scientists have long warned of the negative consequences of the culture of limitless consumerism in the world. This has pushed to unorthodox production methods of crops to provide for the expanding population of the planet. This is another dimension of the problem as production methods often led to unhealthy products. Cancers are now widespread as well as reduction of immunity and other forms of diseases linked to the overproduction of GM foods.

The human deficient approaches to life have led to conflicts and wars. Greed is what drives many of those man-made conflicts. The current upsurge of hostilities in the Gulf region is yet another example of the inability of mankind to live in harmony and love. Hatred is often a by-product of greed that drives politicians to wage wars and spread mayhem among the people. At a time when calls for more understanding, bridge-building and dialogue among the members of the human race, political and military conflicts often render these approaches ineffective. Blood-letting is a common phenomenon afflicting the modern world. Whether it is the culture of knife killing that is spreading fear in London for example, or the use of drones to assassinate people as has happened in Iraq this month the human race pays the price for the absence of morals and values. When anyone has excessive powers evil intentions may push him to commit criminal acts whether as a show of power or a manifestation of arrogance, prejudice or greed. In all these cases the human race has to pay the cost. Modern statehood dictates that voluntary workers will spearhead efforts to improve

the welfare of mankind. Yet these efforts are dwarfed by the emergence of what Jack Hobbs calls "the Leviathan". There is no chance, under the present leadership of the world, for Plato's Republic to emerge. The loss of life in man-made conflicts or disasters is heart-breaking. The absence of real and effective efforts by people with religious and moral principles leaves the path of modern-day monsters unhindered. Yet the feeling of human and religious responsibility dictates that complacency must be abandoned and replaced with action and collective approaches to social and political crisis. The Middle East, in particular, has suffered the most for decades. Oil has been at the heart of these crises as well as the Palestinian problem that has defied all efforts to contain its spill overs.

While religion is often presented as a contentious issue, the reality is that the essence of those conflicts is linked to the desire for domination and subjugation of others. Adherents and proponents of these religions must continue to propagate the sacred divine values, engage in serious debates with other religious groups and reject attempts by politicians to present their wars within religious contexts. Wars are not the solution to the ongoing problems of the modern world. Superior fire power cannot guarantee moral victory. Three quarters of a century after the end of the most destructive warfare in the human history should have been enough to deter anyone from resorting to war in order to settle accounts with foes. The lessons do not seem to have been learnt. Should the world bleed to death under the mercy of those vying power, domination and excessive consumerism? No effort must be spared in the struggle to achieve a more prosperous, peaceful and fraternal world.



Martyrdom anniversary of Fatima

The demise anniversary of Fatima, Mohammad's daughter was marked by Abrar On Thursday 9th January. Sayed Ali Al Mayyali delivered a Hussaini session with lamentations



for Fatima. He said that Fatima had given a lot despite her short life (under 20 when she died). Some Imams also died at early age like Imam Mohammad Al Jawad and Hassan Al Askari but gave too much to humanity. The Quran refers to Fatima in some verses.

Those noble people were praised by the Quran for what their good deeds not for family links. Prophet's companions are described as people who loved and were generous to each other. They were succeeded by others of the same values and will continue to come until the Day of Judgement. The Islamic school produces good people of high moral calibre. One of Mohammad's companions called Khaithama was asked by the prophet: How is your day? Khaithama said: I can see the day of judgement and the process of interrogation and I can also see the people of paradise enjoying it. Because he was interactive with the Quran he could feel the unseen. Mohammad said: You know so uphold (this knowledge). Khaithama said: Pray for me to gain martyrdom. In the first battle of Islam Khaitham achieved his wish. Islam has always achieved victory; so to be pessimistic has nothing to do with Islam. Our weak faith causes us to feel frightened. Martyrs of the faith have given their lives to good religious causes. This why millions commemorate them. Fatima has remained a symbol of giving and a beacon of hope despite her short life. She was under 20 when she passed away after fulfilling her responsibility. Mohammad and Ali were the same. The battle continues between God who defends the people and their freedoms, and the evil forces which defend their rule. The Holy Quran hails Fatima and her family in several verses. She was cleansed and purified by God Almighty.

Middle Eastern crisis

Yahya Harb, a prominent journalist, presented an account on the current situation in the Middle East following the assassination by US forces of two

prominent military commanders; Qassim Soleimani (head of Quds Force in Iran) and Abu Mahdi Al Mohandis (deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Organisation) on 2nd January. The speaker assessed the balance of power between the various foes in the region, arguing that the American action may have solidified the polarization and may lead to further conflicts and confrontations. He urges unity, greater awareness and more vigilance to avoid more bloodshed despite the American continued provocations and unilateral approaches especially to the Palestinian problem.



Zainab's birth advent



The birth anniversary of Zainab bint Ali was marked by Abrar on Thursday 2nd January. Sheikh Hassan Al Taraiki delivered a short speech about her life and struggle. She is the daughter of Imam Ali and had accompanied her brother, Imam Hussain to Karbala where she played her major role. She was taken hostage by the Yazid's army and paraded from Iraq to Damascus for forty days. Her role as a leader at a time of crisis was exemplary. Imam Zain Al Abideen who accompanied Zainab in the long journey from Karbala said to her: Aunt, you have real knowledge with no need for more teaching. She was a jurisprudent with deep knowledge of the religious doctrines especially in the sciences of Quran. It is said that she had travelled to Egypt where she has a shrine. She held teaching sessions there and is called by the Egyptians: the Diwan (lecture theatre) lady.

Absence of Arab elites from the cultural struggle

Abbas Al Murshid delivered a talk on the crisis of the elite in the Arab and Muslim worlds. He said that if there was a football match or a concert in this room it would have become overcrowded and the streets around it would also have been congested. But the lack of audience when talking about intellectualism is a symptom of the cultural crisis we are facing. The system of superficiality is now dominant in the world. In 2015 a Canadian philosopher suggested this term to describe the cultural standard of the world. This condition is dominating

societies and producing its superficial culture. He said that the world which had been overwhelmed with struggle and freedom values has been completely destroyed. There are no philosophers or thinkers who shoulder the responsibility of promoting these values. A book by Ann Dillon wrote a book arguing



that the crisis is not Eastern or Western but is international. It was well received by those disappointed by the present cultural status quo. The crisis is linked to the world view, the unseen, spirituality and morality. Dr Ali Shariati had spoken about these issues before. We do not want to exercise self-flaggeratio; it is a common crisis. Since the sixties scholars felt that people had felt they were strangers. Some may ask: is it a crisis or a problem? The body may reach a state of inaction and is not able to get out of the situation it is in. The society is also governed by the physical laws of the body. Most societies experience crisis, but those that are able to work their way out do survive the crisis. Three causes force the society to crisis point: Is it an internal problem or caused by outsiders? A footballer attracts the major news media whilst a scholar gets no mention by them. Four decades ago labour was divided in accordance with qualifications of the workers who worked with conscience and performed well. Now this is not the case. You may get a job but without a social role. This has deprived the labour market of the motivation. Companies do not have moral values but only exploitation. Modern forms of slavery have removed the moral value of work. In Tunisia there are 3500 PhD holders without work. In Egypt 152,000 and 3500 in Saudi Arabia. Thousands of fake certificates have been uncovered in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There are now beaurocratic class system. There is also the phenomenon of atheism which destroys the moral grounds of societies. When there is no God there is no place for conformity. The elites do not feel moral duty to take up people's grievances. Some elites joined the revolutions of the Arab Spring, not out of conviction but to make personal gains. The crisis of the elites is the lack of the moral void. The religious intellectual is no longer attracting attention because he is far from the people's causes. He does not share the pains of the people. Some prefer to stay home reading books away from the people.

Pope appeals to U.S. and Iran to pursue dialogue, self-restraint



Pope Francis on Thursday urged the United States and Iran to avoid escalation and pursue "dialogue and self-restraint" to avert a wider conflict in the Middle East.

The pope made his appeal, his first direct comment on the current crisis, in a yearly speech that has come to be known as his "State of the World" address to ambassadors accredited to the Vatican.

Speaking for nearly 50 minutes in the Vatican's frescoed Sala Regia, the 83-year-old Roman Catholic leader offered a mostly grim overview of 2019, speaking of wars, global warming, xenophobia towards migrants and the danger of nuclear weapons. "Particularly troubling are the signals coming from the entire region following the heightening of tensions between Iran and the United States," Francis told the diplomats from more than 180 states.

He said the tensions risked "compromising the gradual process of rebuilding in Iraq, as well as setting the groundwork for a vaster conflict that all of us would want to avert".

"I therefore renew my appeal that all the interested parties avoid an escalation of the conflict and keep alive the flame of dialogue and self-restraint, in full respect of international law," he said.

UK calls on Israel to halt settlement expansion in West Bank

Britain called on Israel to immediately halt settlement expansion in the West Bank, affirming the UK's longstanding position that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-state solution.

"The UK condemns the Israeli government's advancement of yet more plans for over 1,900 housing units across the West Bank," Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs at the British Foreign Office Andrew Morrison said in a statement issued Wednesday by the British Consulate General in Jerusalem.

"It is the UK's longstanding position that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine the viability of the two-state solution," he said, adding: "We call on Israel to halt settlement expansion immediately."



Sudan: Intercommunal clashes displace thousands in Darfur

Around 40,000 have been displaced in Sudan's West Darfur State in recent days, following intercommunal clashes, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said on Tuesday, citing Sudanese Government data.

"Violence between communities in and around El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur State, had reportedly killed at least 54 people, injured 60 and displaced 40,000, since 28 December," OCHA Spokesperson Jens Laerke told reporters in Geneva, adding that humanitarian partners were working to verify the displacement figures.

There have also been reports of attacks on camps for internally displaced people, and homes being burned. Humanitarian partners are closely monitoring the situation and gathering information on needs to respond as soon as the security situation allows.

"Thousands of people had crossed the border into Chad seeking refuge in villages near the border," Laerke said, adding that the displaced within West Darfur had taken refuge in schools and government buildings, while the UN and partners were supporting the government response and that of national partners.

Algerian president calls for 'review of governance system'

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune said that building the new Republic requires a "review of governance system through a profound amendment to the Constitution."

Chairing a Council of Ministers meeting, President Tebboune stressed the need for "reconsidering the system of governance, through a profound amendment to the Constitution, regarded as the cornerstone for building the new Republic and of certain key laws such as the organic law on elections."

In the same regard, Tebboune called for "moralizing the political life by separating money and politics, and eliminating mismanagement practices".

He pointed out that the new Republic "should be founded on Rule-of-Law state that guarantees the independence of the Judiciary and truly participatory democracy that grants opportunities for social and political progress for all."

The Algerian president instructed the government members to be attentive to the concerns and the needs of the citizens and continue working for the State and the people, pointing out that this can only be achieved through perfect behaviors and the goodwill to preserve public

money, combat bureaucracy and respect State's commitments. He added that the challenge is to "address the country's overall situation by restoring the authority of the State and regaining the confidence of citizens".

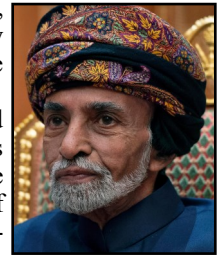


UN chief pays tribute to Oman's late Sultan Qaboos

UN Secretary-General António Guterres extended his profound condolences to the Royal family, the Government and people of Oman on the death of Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, who passed away late Friday at the age of 79.

"Sultan Qaboos led Oman for 50 years and spearheaded the transformation of Oman into a prosperous and stable country," the Secretary-General said in a statement issued by a UN spokesperson. The UN chief said the Sultan was also committed to spreading messages of peace, understanding and coexistence in the region and globally, earning the respect of his people and those in the region and beyond.

"The Secretary-General pays tribute to His Majesty's enduring contributions in the field of regional and international diplomacy," the statement concluded.



Bloomberg: 'I'm spending all my money to get rid of Trump'

U.S. presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg said he is ready to spend much of his vast fortune to oust Republican President Donald Trump from the White House in 2020, rejecting criticism from rivals for Democratic nomination that he is trying to buy the U.S. election. Ranked by Forbes as the eighth-richest American, Bloomberg has flooded U.S. airwaves and social media feeds with messages that he stands the best chance to beat Trump, spending more on campaign ads since he launched his campaign in November than his main Democratic rivals have over the last year.

"Number one priority is to get rid of Donald Trump. I'm spending all my money to get rid of Trump," Bloomberg told Reuters aboard his campaign bus on Saturday, during a nearly 300-mile (483-km) drive across Texas, one of the 14 states that will vote on Super Tuesday on March 3. "Do you want me to spend more or less? End of story."

Nūr ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī Persian mystic, poet and sufi advocate

Maulana Nur al-Din Abd al-Rahman Jami (1414-1492) is usually described as the last of the great classical Persian poets. He was a mystic and a member of the Nakshibandi Sufi order, an influence vital to understand when reading his poetry. He was born in the district of Djam in the province of Herat in what is today Afghanistan. His father came from the district of Dasht around Isfahan, and thus the first takhallus (poetical name) Jami adopted was Dashti. This he later changed to Jami.

Early in his life Jami was given to a strong interest in mysticism. Contrary to what one might expect, this was quite natural for intellectuals in his day. Mysticism was popular during the time Jami lived, because life in general was in such turmoil. Thus Jami became a follower of the disciple who had succeeded the great saint Baha al-Din Nakshiband, the founder of the mystical Sufi order of Nakshibandis. This was to affect his later writings by means of philosophical innuendo.

The great portion of Jami's life was spent in Herat. He was not a great traveler, like Sadi or Rumi. Apart from two pilgrimages, one to Meshed in Persia and another to the Hejaz in 1472 with a side trip to Baghdad, Damascus, and Tabriz, he stayed at home and lived a quiet, introspective life. It is said that in his later years, after his writings were completed, he suffered from senility and eventually went mad.

The type of work Jami produced is considerable and varied. It is typified by a depth and variety of knowledge and a finely honed mastery of diction and style. Although he wrote a great deal of prose, it is for his poetry that he is known mainly. He used the theme of the court epic to great benefit as had his predecessor Firdausi. Most famous of these are his stories "Salaman and Absal," "Yusuf and Zulaikha," and "Laila and Majnun." These are three of the seven long tales that make up his famous literary series called The Seven Stars of the Great Bear. All of these works appear on first observation to be love stories of young couples. But when considering the serious nature of Jami's mysticism, it is realized that in fact these works are meant to be read as object lessons for teaching pupils a unique Sufi way to approach God. Like many of his contemporaries, Jami must be read on many philosophical levels.

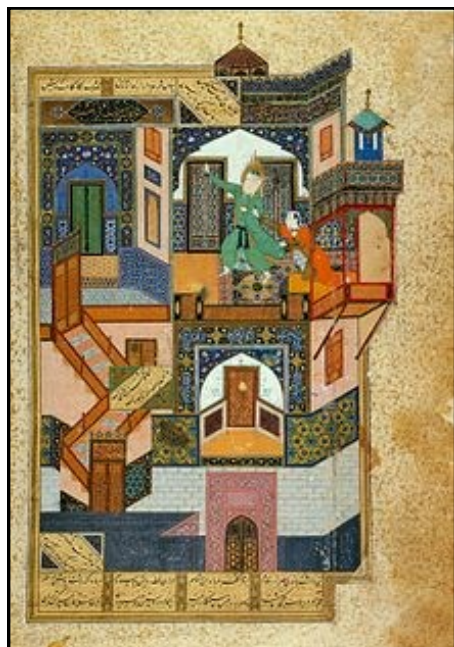
In the field of lyric poetry he wrote late in life three diwans (collections of poetry): Beginning of Youth (1479), Central Part of the Chain (1489), and Close of



Life (1491). Finally he wrote in prose the Baharistan, an imitation of Sadi's Gulistan, and the Zephyrs of Intimacy, a compendium of biographies of many Sufi saints.

Thus it may be said of Jami that he brought a fresh, subtle, and graceful style to his writing. His theme was usually on a philosophical-level, pantheistic mysticism. He deserves comparison with the greatest of the Sufi poets. His death in Herat marked the passing of the last great mystical Persian poet.

Among the several facets of Jāmī's persona and career—Sufi, scholar, poet, associate of rulers—it may be permissible to award primacy to the first mentioned. This would certainly correspond to Jāmī's own view and to that of one of his closest disciples, 'Abd-al-Ġafur Lāri: both the practice of scholarship and the composi-



Yusuf and Zulaikha (Joseph chased by Potiphar's wife), miniature by Behzād, 1488.

tion of poetry served for Jāmī, Lāri reports, as veils for his inward state, as guarantors for the concealment of spiritual absorption that is mandated by the Naqšbandiyya (Lāri, p. 3, 9; Bā-ḡarzi, p. 125). As for Jāmī's dealings with rulers in Herat and elsewhere, they generally consisted of interventions on behalf of petitioners seeking the redress of grievances or the remission of taxes (Urunbayev and Epifanova, pp. 156-59), consonant with the practice of his friend and fellow Naqšbandi, Ḳvāja 'Obayd-Allāh Ahrār (d. 1490; see further below). It must also be said that Jāmī was by no means averse to receiving of costly gifts from the powerful.

Jāmī's affiliation to the Naqšbandiyya, an order swiftly rising to prominence at the time in both Transoxiana and Khorasan, was central to his understanding and practice of Sufism. His association with the order began when he was still a child: when Ḳvāja Moḡammad Pārsā (d. 1419), one of the principal associates of its eponym, Ḳvāja Moḡammad Bahā'-al-Din Naqšband (q.v.; d. 1389), was passing through Herat in 1419 en route to the Hajj; Jāmī's father had hoisted him onto his shoulders to receive Pārsā's blessing. Recalling the event in later years, Jāmī affirmed that this encounter had already linked him indissolubly to the Naqšbandiyya (Kāsefi, I, p. 242; Jāmī, Nafaḡāt, pp. 397-98). The linkage became manifest when Jāmī joined the following of Sa'd-al-Din Kāšġari (d. 1456), who was joined to Bahā'-al-Din Naqšband by two generations in the initiatic chain. Jāmī had with difficulty extricated himself from an amorous attachment in Herat in order to follow a course of study in Samarqand, and one night, when tormented by the pangs of separation, he dreamt of Kāšġari who instructed him to take God as his beloved and as the one indispensable (nāgozir) companion. Hastening back to Herat, he submitted himself to Kāšġari with immediate and permanent transformative effect. This was an outcome Kāšġari himself had long desired. It was his wont to hold forth in the Masjed-e Jāme' of Herat before and after each of the five daily prayers, and whenever Jāmī passed by, before his departure for Samarqand, he would remark to his followers: "This is a young man of remarkable talent; I am enchanted by him, and know not how to ensnare him." After Jāmī's return, he proclaimed with satisfaction: "Now a royal falcon has fallen into my trap; God has granted me a favor with the company of this young man" (Kāsefi, I, pp. 239-40). The tie thus forged between the two men was soon palpably fortified by Jāmī's marriage to a granddaughter of Kāšġari.

Religious traditions are a salve for the woes of modern youth, study says

American media are forever fascinated — or frightened — regarding what teens and young adults are up to, especially in matters linked to morality and religion.

My Oct. 24 Memo highlighted an important new survey showing, for instance, that only half of “mainline” Protestant young adults still uphold the very basic belief that God is “a personal being involved in the lives of people today,” which is affirmed by virtually all evangelicals.

Now comes a comprehensive survey of 5,600 U.S. teens who were tracked from 1999 into young adulthood.

The topline: Those who were raised to attend worship (of whatever faith) on a weekly basis, and to pray or meditate daily, show notably favorable life outcomes compared with others.

This is highly newsworthy. But, as often the case with academic research, it will be brand new info for most or all journalists, though reported a year ago in the American Journal of Epidemiology. The authors are Professor Tyler VanderWeele (tvanderw@hsph.harvard.edu or 617-955-6292) and doctoral student Ying Chen of Harvard University’s School of Public Health. The project was supported by the federal National Institutes of Health and the Templeton Foundation.

The investigators found that in comparison with non-attenders, later outcomes for young adults who worshipped weekly as teens showed greater satisfaction in life, volunteering, sense of personal mission and forgiveness, a lower probability of drug abuse, early sexual initiation and sexual infections, fewer lifetime sexual partners, possibly less depression and higher rates of voter registration, etc.

The cautiously worded conclusion: Results “suggest that religious involvement in adolescence may be one such protective factor for a range of health and well-being outcomes. ... Encouraging service attendance and private practices may be meaningful avenues of development and support, possibly leading to better health and well-being.”

In the past, most studies of this sort have examined the favorable impact of religious involvement with adults rather than teens and young adults, and the effects on physical health, not mental or psychological well-being emphasized in the new study. (The article’s 48 footnotes cite such past research.)

So striking were the results that the headline on a (paywalled) Wall Street Journal religion analysis about this by Jewish psychoanalyst Erica Komisar said “Don’t Believe in God? Lie to Your Children.” Here’s the nub of her point.

Nihilism is fertilizer for anxiety and depression, and being ‘realistic’ is overrated. The belief in God — in a protective and guiding figure to rely on when times are

tough — is one of the best kinds of support for kids in an increasingly pessimistic world. That’s only one reason, from a purely mental-health perspective, to pass down a faith tradition.

Thus when parents who are atheists ask Komisar how to talk to their children about God and death “my answer is always the same: Lie.” (!!!)

One seemingly anomalous finding was that frequent prayer or meditation may be associated with more physical health problems. The authors suggest this could be “reverse causation” in which those

who already have medical challenges are more likely to pray.

The article notes limitations in the study. To further understand these dynamics, researchers should examine the impact on religious practice from parents’ pressure and peer influence in religious youth groups. And the youths studied were mostly white, and children of mothers who were nurses, so the results “may not be generalizable to other populations.”

This piece first appeared at Get Religion.



UNESCO Director-General reminds US of responsibility to save cultural sites



The Director-General of UNESCO Audrey Azoulay said in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador Ahmad Jalali on Monday that the US is responsible to protect cultural heritage in possible hostility.

The Director-General recalled the provisions of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, two legal instruments that have been ratified by both the United States and Iran.

After assassination of Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, US President Donald Trump wrote in a series of tweets that if Iran makes a move to avenge the assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani,

the United States will “target 52 Iranian sites” and that some were “at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself.”

The 1972 Convention stipulates, inter alia, that each State Party “undertakes not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage [...] situated on the territory of other

State Parties to this Convention.”

UNESCO Director-General also recalled the terms of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 adopted unanimously in 2017, which condemns acts of destruction of cultural heritage.

Ms Azoulay stressed the universality of cultural and natural heritage as vectors of peace and dialogue between peoples, which the international community has a duty to protect and preserve for future generations.

Trump’s threats against Iran’s cultural sites caused widespread backlash from various international organizations and personalities including senior American politicians and diplomats from across the globe.

Women at center stage in protests against India's Citizenship Law

By Anjana Pasricha
NEW DELHI - Chanting "freedom," FoZIA stands among the sea of student protesters in New Delhi loudly demanding that the government scrap a new law that introduces religion as a criterion for citizenship for persecuted minorities from three neighboring countries.

"India will accept people from all faiths except Muslim. This is creating inequality," says the undergraduate student of Jamia Millia Islamia University that has spearheaded the protests against the new law. Wearing a black veil and giving only her first name, she refers to the country's constitution that guarantees equality. "It is damaging the country's basic structure," she says.

India's new citizenship law that excludes Muslims from six religious groups who will get expedited citizenship if they fled religious persecution in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, has unleashed public anger across several Indian cities and many university campuses for being discriminatory.

But this protest at Jamia Millia, where many Muslims study, is unusual — on the front lines are hundreds of Muslim women from conservative homes who have traditionally stayed away from public places. As housewives and mothers join students to sing songs and hold placards on the street outside the university campus, some keep their faces covered or refuse to reveal their names. Muslims have almost never led protests in India but fears that the new law will relegate them to second-class citizens has brought many into the streets.

Female students at the university, many with hijabs covering their hair, have been at the forefront with their male counterparts since the protests erupted last week. FoZIA for example ignores the chill in New Delhi's winter air and arrives every morning at 7 am to organize the rally and ensure that arrangements are made to distribute water and food to those who camp here for several hours.

Among the protesters is 55-year-old Rabia, who gives only one name and says her son was among those who sustained injuries when police entered the university library where students were working.

"Those of us who wear these clothes seldom come out of our homes," she says pointing to her black veil on which she has pinned a huge poster, "Save the Constitution." But her son's experience has been a tipping point for her. "The situation has gotten now out of hand that is why we are out. Till they don't scrap the bill, I will be out protesting," she



says. Police say they used maximum restraint and their action was meant to curb violence.

The government has called the law a compassionate measure for minorities such as Hindu and Christian refugees who have no place to go. But many non-Muslims, both from Jamia and other colleges, who have joined the protests, fear it damages India's tradition of a pluralistic society.

"I am a Hindu but this bill is affecting me because my fellow citizens and my fellow students are being affected by this," according to Sumedha Poddar. "In my entire one, one and a half year in Jamia, I have been with my Muslim friends. I have shared my lunch with them, I went to their

home in Eid and I have celebrated their festivals."

Poddar was present on the campus when police stormed inside. She locked herself in a room to save herself.

The chants being raised here are not just opposing the citizenship law, but also plans by the government to roll out a citizens' register that will require all Indians to submit proof of their nationality. The government's assurances that Indian Muslims do not risk losing their

citizenship has failed to calm fears that their exclusion from the new law makes them vulnerable. And many are anguished.

"Why, why do we have to prove your citizenship first of all? Our forefathers have fought for this nation," says Roohi. "Then why do we have to prove our loyalty to the country?"

It remains to be seen whether these protests — the most widespread witnessed in recent years — will continue or slowly fizzle out. But they underline a loss of confidence among Muslims in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government and growing fears that he is pressing ahead with a Hindu nationalist agenda.

I am a feminist and I converted to Islam *Continued from P 8*

As a new Muslim, I knew there was a better way to look for love and a life-long partnership. I decided that if I wanted a serious relationship, it was time to get serious about finding one. I wanted an arranged marriage.

I made a list of "30 Rock"-style deal breakers. I searched. I interviewed. I interrogated friends and families of prospects.

I decided I wanted to marry another convert, someone who had been where I was and wanted to go where I wanted to go. Thanks to parents of friends, I found my now-husband, a convert to Islam, in Mobile, Alabama, two hours from my New Orleans home. Twelve years later, we are living happily ever after.

Not every Muslim finds a mate in this manner, and I didn't always see this for my life. But I am glad Islam afforded me this option.

Living in a post-9/11 world

I never had to give up my personality, American identity or culture to be a Muslim. I have, at times, had to give up on being treated with dignity.

I have been spat on, had eggs thrown at me, and been cursed at from passing cars. And I have felt terror when the mosque I attended in Savannah, Georgia, was first shot at, then burned down. In August 2012, I moved back home to

New Orleans, where being different is the norm. I finally felt safe -- for a while. But now, with the continuous news coverage of the un-Islamic group known as ISIS, I have been subjected to much of the same treatment I received in other cities. And I now feel less safe than I ever have.

It enrages me to know there are some who call themselves Muslims and who distort and misappropriate Islam for political gains. It weighs on me knowing that millions of my countrymen see only these images as a representative of my religion. It is unbearable to know that I am passionately hated for my beliefs, when those hating me don't even know what my beliefs are.

In my journey to Islam, I learnt that Muslims come in all shapes, sizes, attitudes, ethnicities, cultures and nationalities. I came to know that Islam teaches disagreement and that shouldn't lead to disrespect, as most Muslims want peace. Most of all, I have faith that my fellow Americans can rise above fear and hatred and come to learn the same.

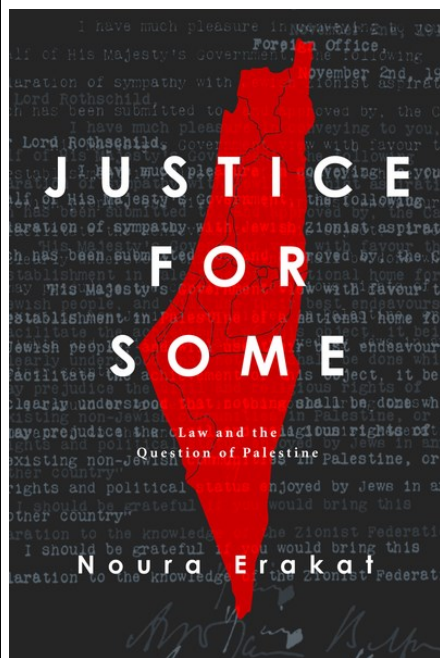
Theresa Corbin is a writer living in New Orleans, Louisiana. She is the founder of Islamwichee and a contributor to On Islam and Aquila Style. A version of this piece first appeared on CNN iReport.

Justice for Some

Law and the Question of Palestine

NOURA ERAKAT

Justice in the Question of Palestine is often framed as a question of law. Yet none of the Israel-Palestinian conflict's most vexing challenges have been resolved by judicial intervention. Occupation law has failed to stem Israel's settlement enterprise. Laws of war have permitted killing and destruction during Israel's military offensives in the Gaza Strip. The Oslo Accord's two-state solution is now dead letter.



Justice for Some offers a new approach to understanding the Palestinian struggle for freedom, told through the power and control of international law. Focusing on key junctures—from the Balfour Declaration in 1917 to present-day wars in Gaza—Noura Erakat shows how the strategic deployment of law has shaped current conditions. Over the past century, the law has done more to advance Israel's interests than the Palestinians'. But, Erakat argues, this outcome was never inevitable.

Law is politics, and its meaning and application depend on the political intervention of states and people alike. Within the law, change is possible. International law can serve the cause of freedom when it is mobilized in support of a political movement. Presenting the promise and risk of international law, Justice for Some calls for renewed action and attention to the Question of Palestine.

Noura Erakat is a human rights attorney and assistant professor at George Mason University. She has served as legal counsel to the U.S. House of Representatives and as a legal advocate for Palestinian refugee rights at the United Nations. Noura's research interests include human rights and humanitarian, refugee, and national security law. She is a frequent commentator, with recent appearances on CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NPR, among others, and her writings have been widely published in the national media and academic journals.

"Noura Erakat's incisive exploration of the role of law in shaping the development of Israel/Palestine reveals the consistent genuflection of international legal institutions to Israel's reliance on well-established colonial practices. She also forcefully argues that the skillful use of international law as a tool of struggle can be generative of hope and possibility—for Palestine and the world. Justice for Some is precisely the book we need at this time." "Through a brilliant and bracing analysis of the Palestine question and settler colonialism, Noura Erakat offers a compelling story of how the antinomies of structure and indeterminacy shaped international law and its possibilities. Justice for Some is a vital lens into movement lawyering on the international plane. At once tragic and inspiring, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in decolonization and the politics of international law."

—Vasuki Nesiiah, New York University, founding member of Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAAIL)
"[A] major scholarly contribution to the critical literature devoted to resolving the Israel/Palestine struggle in line with the dictates of justice....[I] urge a careful reading of Justice for Some by all those interested in the Palestinian struggle as well as those curious about the way law works for and against human wellbeing."

—Richard Falk, Mondoweiss

—Angela Y. Davis, author of *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*
Publisher: Stanford University Press

Paper back 352 pages \$22.00

ISBN: 9781503613577

Publishing date: 2019

The Revival of Islamic Rationalism

Logic, Metaphysics and Mysticism in Modern Muslim Societies

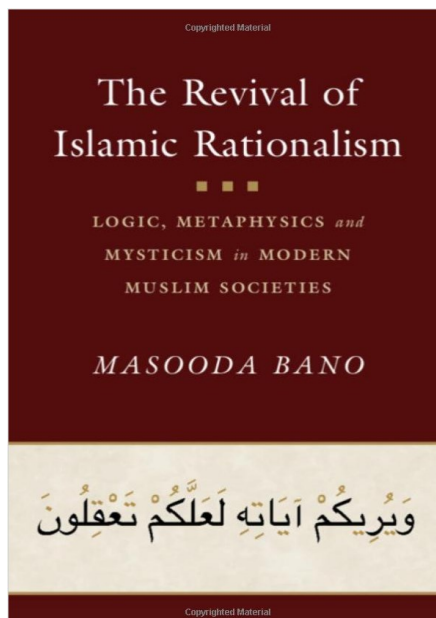
By Masooda Bano

In this book, Masooda Bano presents an in-depth analysis of a new movement that is transforming the way that young Muslims engage with their religion. Led by a network of Islamic scholars in the West, this movement seeks to revive the tradition of Islamic rationalism. Bano explains how, during the period of colonial rule, the exit of Muslim elites from madrasas, the Islamic scholarly establishments, resulted in a stagnation of Islamic scholarship. This trend is now being reversed. Exploring the threefold focus on logic, metaphysics, and deep mysticism, Bano shows how Islamic rationalism is consistent with Sunni orthodoxy and why it is so popular among young, elite, educated Muslims, who are now engaging with classical Islam-

ic texts. One of the most tangible results of this revival is that Islamic rationalism - rather than jihadism - is emerging as one of the most influential movements in the contemporary Muslim world.

Masooda Bano is Professor of Development Studies in the Department of International Development and Senior Golding Fellow at Brasenose College, University of Oxford. She is the author and editor of several books, most recently *Female Islamic Education Movements: The Re-democratisation of Islamic Knowledge* (Cambridge, 2017) and *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change, Volume 1 and 2* (2018).

Publisher:
Cambridge University Press
Hardback 266 pages £ 29.99
ISBN: 9781108485319
Publishing date: January 2020



I'm a feminist and I converted to Islam

33. O MANKIND! DO YOUR DUTY TO YOUR LORD, AND FEAR (THE COMING OF) A DAY WHEN NO FATHER CAN AVAIL AUGHT FOR HIS SON, NOR A SON AVAIL AUGHT FOR HIS FATHER. VERILY, THE PROMISE OF ALLAH IS TRUE: LET NOT THEN THIS PRESENT LIFE DECEIVE YOU, NOR LET THE CHIEF DECEIVER DECEIVE YOU ABOUT ALLAH.

34. VERILY THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOUR IS WITH ALLAH (ALONE). IT IS HE WHO SENDS DOWN RAIN, AND HE WHO KNOWS WHAT IS IN THE WOMBS. NOR DOES ANY ONE KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT HE WILL EARN ON THE MORROW: NOR DOES ANY ONE KNOW IN WHAT LAND HE IS TO DIE. VERILY WITH ALLAH IS FULL KNOWLEDGE AND HE IS ACQUAINTED (WITH ALL THINGS).

(LUQMAN)

www.abraronline.net

This is our website. Have visited it: It will put you face-to-face with an alternative world, full of spirituality, morality coupled with modern outlooks and perspectives. We want to hear your views on its contents, layout and general quality.

Join us in our Noon and Afternoon prayers
Everyday
at 12.00

Theresa Corbin, Special to CNN, 14/10/2014 (CNN) I am a Muslim, but I wasn't always. I converted to Islam in November 2001, two months after 9/11.

I was 21 and living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It was a bad time to be a Muslim. But after four years of studying, poking and prodding at world religions and their adherents, I decided to take the plunge.

I am the product of a Creole Catholic and an Irish atheist. I grew up Catholic, then was agnostic, now I'm Muslim.

My journey to Islam began when I was about 15 years old in mass, and had questions about my faith. The answers from teachers and clergymen -- don't worry your pretty little head about it -- didn't satisfy me.

So I did what any red-blooded American would do: the opposite. I worried about it. For many years. I questioned the nature of religion, man, and the universe.

After questioning everything I was taught to be true and digging through rhetoric, history and dogma, I found out about this strange thing called Islam. I learned that Islam is neither a culture nor a cult, nor could it be represented by one part of the world. I came to realize Islam is a world religion that teaches tolerance, justice and honor, and promotes patience, modesty and balance.

As I studied the faith, I was surprised many of the tenants resonated with me. I was pleased to find that Islam teaches its adherents to honor all prophets, from Moses to Jesus to Muhammad, all of whom taught mankind to worship one God and to conduct ourselves with higher purpose.

I was drawn to Islam's appeal to intellect and heartened by the prophet Muhammad's quote, "The acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim, whether male or female." I was astounded that science and rationality were embraced by Muslim thinkers like Al-Khawarizmi, who invented algebra; Ibn Firnas, who developed the mechanics of flight before DaVinci; and Al-Zahravi, who is the father of modern surgery.

Here was a religion telling me to seek out answers and use my intellect to question the world around me.

Taking the plunge

It was 2001 and I had been putting off converting for a while. I feared what people would think, but was utterly miserable. When 9/11 happened, the actions of the hijackers horrified me. But in its aftermath, I spent most of my time defending Muslims and their religion to people who were all too eager to paint a group of 1.6 billion people with one brush because of the actions of a few. I was done

being held hostage by the opinions of others. In defending Islam, I got over my fear and decided to join my brothers and sisters in the faith I believed in.

My family did not understand, but it wasn't a surprise to them since I had been studying religion. Most were very concerned for my safety. Luckily, most of my friends were cool about it, and even curious to learn more.

The scarf

These days, I am a proud wearer of hijab. You can call it a scarf. My scarf does not tie my hands behind my back, and it is not a tool of oppression. It doesn't prevent thoughts from entering my head and leaving my mouth. But I didn't always know this.

Studying Islam didn't immediately dispel all my cultural misconceptions. I had been raised on imagery of women in the East being treated like chattel by men who forced them to cover their bodies out of shame or a sense of ownership.

But when I asked a Muslim woman "Why do you wear that?", her answer was obvious, and appealing: "To please God. To be recognized as a woman who is to be respected and not harassed. So that I can protect myself from the male gaze." She explained how dressing modestly is a symbol to the world that a woman's body is not meant for mass consumption or critique.

I still wasn't convinced and replied, "Yeah, but women are like second class citizens in your faith?" The very patient Muslim lady explained that, during a time when the Western world treated women like property, Islam taught that men and women were equal in the eyes of God. Islam made the woman's consent to marriage mandatory and gave women the opportunity to inherit, own property, run businesses and participate in government.

She listed right after right that women in Islam held nearly 1250 years before women's lib was ever thought of in the West. Surprisingly, Islam turned out to be the religion that appealed to my feminist ideals.

Getting married

It might shock you to know that I had an arranged marriage. That doesn't mean I was forced to marry my father's first choice suitor, like Jasmine from Aladdin. Dad didn't even have a say. When I converted, it wasn't a good time to be a Muslim. Feeling isolated, alienated and rejected by my own society pushed me to want to start a family of my own. Even before converting I had always wanted a serious relationship, but found few men looking for the same.

Continued on page 6

