

Reinterpreting Moderate Islam – A Study in Social Science Perspective

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Islam *Hadâri*

The Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had always been reaffirming adherence to *Islam Hadâri* (civilized or moderate Islam), even as the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the main political party within the governing *Barisan Nasional* (B.N. or National Front) coalition, was once again expressing itself against corruption in public affairs. Neither of these two commitments was directly related to the international environment - the London bombings on July 7, 2005 and failed attempts that were blamed on "Islamic extremists", besides the impact of the Chinese currency valuation- change on the Malaysian Ringgit, as P.S. Suryanarayana analysis.

The campaign to refurbish the image of UMNO should be seen in the context of what some Malaysian experts such as K.S. Nathan characterized as the sustained "re-engineering of the UMNO" under the leadership of Mr. Badawi, who led coalition to a massive victory in the 2004 parliamentary polls after succeeding long time Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad.

While Patricia Martinez and other analysts identify Badawi's "sense of leadership" as a key factor at work at the ground level, three issues dominate Malaysian politics at this time – the continuing relevance of PAS despite its dramatic loss of parliamentary seats; the corrosive effect of alleged "money politics" in a situation of dominance by the so-called "UMNO-putras" and the possible political re-emergence of the former

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Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim after his current statutory ban from any elective office, imposed on account of his earlier imprisonment for an alleged "corrupt practice" is lifted, as Suryanarayana concludes.¹

The activists, however, rejected *Islam Hadârî* slogan as an official tactics to dilute the political tension between liberals and Islamists in the country on the issue of *Sharî'ah* and Islamic penal code. The feminists for example led massive protests in 2002 against the new legislative measure permitting polygyny without prior permission of the first wife. With the passage of time Mahathir Muhammad in his Islamising scheme was convinced to transcend the Islamic personal law from marriage and inheritance in order to accommodate the Islamist electorate and to combat P.A.S. (the Islamist political party in opposition) through its own Islamisation agenda.

Badawi's assertion for an *Islam Hadârî* was basically an effort to provide the alternative of the Islamists' agenda concentrating on the significant value of education, economic development and minorities rights. Wan Ahmad Farid Wan Salih, the advisor of Prime Minister in religious affairs asserts, "It is quite possible to become liberal and Islamist at the same time". He was of the view that those Muslims who apostated must be brought home through persuasion and not through forceful means.

Malik Intiaz Saroora, a leading advocate in Kuala Lumpur, however, raised the question, "What to do with those Muslims who apostated and are not convinced to return? The Islamic courts of Malaysia treated them apostates while the civil courts avoided the issue because the constitution has granted all the rights to religion and belief to all the citizens including those retreating from their faith".²

Bali Bombings' Affects

Badawi's stress on 'moderate Islam' may also be analysed in the perspective of suicide bombings being serialized in Bali, Indonesia on October 1st, 2002 that claimed 202 lives and then in October 2005 when at least 26 persons were killed and over 120 injured and two Malaysians were suspected of triggering explosions in this tourist site namely, "Moneyman". Noordin Mohammad Top and Azahari bin Husen, known as "Demolition Man" for his knowledge of explosives, via the key figures of *Jama'ah Islamiyah* accused for the bombings.³

According to a columnist in the *Guardian*, the Bali bombers did not need *al-Qâ'idah*. Islamic militancy in Indonesia was not new, it certainly far pre-dated Osama bin Laden. Islam was a rallying flag for resistance to Dutch colonization in the 17th century. Frequent suicide attacks involved young men charging headlong into the "enemy ranks" to kill as many as possible before being martyred. After the Second World War, cells of radical Indonesian Muslims again fought to free their nation from Dutch control. Their aim was to create a *Dâr al-Islam* or Land of Islam where Islamic teachings could be implemented. Over the next thirty years Indonesian militants struck against central government and were used by it to combat communists. Even after the establishment of democracy in 1998, powerful interests in politics or the army used *jihadis* to serve their interests. The new democratic government treated the militants carefully.

According to the *Guardian*, the most important lesson from the earlier Bali bombing could be analyzed, chosen by the militants themselves. The tourist night clubs they hit were obvious and vulnerable. The clubs and the tourists were seen as alien intruders - "dirty people" committing "adulterous practices". The latest attacks would be born of the same feelings. They show again that killing militants or jailing them could only be a short-term

solution. They would also demonstrate the fundamental moderation of the most of the 270 million Indonesians who might have little sympathy for the killers in their midst, the columnist concludes.⁴

Mr. Shaukat Aziz, the Prime Minister of Pakistan denounced the suicide attacks on the island of Bali while speaking at International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur. "Terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists will not win support for their cause but will only tarnish the religion's image. All they achieve is to equip our detractors with grist to malign Islam and the Muslims".

Australian Prime Minister John Howard asserted that the bombers were trying to undermine Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono who represented a "threat to Islamic extremism" and such acts of terrorism would only hurt the Muslim world. Malaysia's former Prime Minister, Mahathir Muhammad commented, "People will perceive Muslims as being very bad people but that is not Islam at all". OIC also denounced the bombings as "terrorist acts" which contradict Islamic teachings.⁵

Post 7/7 Projection

Whatever the nature of factors might be: political, security or reformative, *Islam Hadârî*, as advocated by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, is a serious matter of debate among Muslim intellectuals, politicians, activists and 'Ulamâ' all over the world. The Western media and political leaders also are projecting a modern, moderate Islam as acceptable to them. In the post-7/7 blasts in London's underground train network, in which fifty five people were killed. Mr. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister before introducing some new legislative measures in the Parliament to combat terrorism reacted against the "Muslim extremists" and declared that his proposals directed "against terrorism and terrorism only whatever forms it takes and whichever faith it

claims". They were not aimed at "decent law-abiding British Muslims or Britons of any other faith". To Blair, there is an almost universal agreement - among the two-million strong British Muslim community as much as any other group - that "we cannot allow extremists to abuse our freedom and the spirit of tolerance in our society". Indeed it is the Muslim community "who understand more than most what a menace these fringe fanatics are to good relations and to cohesiveness of our country", he added.

Mr. Blair warned all those involved in instigating or preaching hatred against the faith of others as:

Coming to Britain is not a right and even when people have come here, staying here carries with it a duty. That duty is to share and support the values of freedom and tolerance that sustain our shared way of life. Those that break that duty and try to incite hatred or engage in violence against our country and its people have no place here.⁶

Before that Mr. Blair had already called for a "battle" to win the "hearts and minds" of Muslims in the campaign against terrorism as Britain's top Muslims had condemned it as "utterly criminal and absolutely un-Islamic". Denouncing terrorism as an "evil ideology" Mr. Blair said it had to be pulled up "by the roots" and dismissed suggestions that the July 7 attacks were a "revenge" for the British-U.S. invasion on Iraq.⁷ Adam Curtis, the British writer and political analyst, criticized Blair and centralized his discussion on the "problem with creating Islamist phantoms". He warned, we dreamed up *al-Qâ'idah*. Let us not do it again with "evil ideology". He suggested, we may not agree with the "reactionary vision" of the "political use of Islam and the pessimistic, anti-progressive beliefs" of Islamists but it is essential to realize that "there is no inherent link between these ideas and terrorism". By lumping Islamism into a frightening, violent, anti-

Western movement led by the "preachers of hate" the journalists basically risk "exaggerating and distorting the threat yet again".⁸

Varying Brands of Moderation

'Moderation' literally means an avoidance of extremes in one's actions or opinions and thereby a 'moderate' is one who is average in his thoughts and actions and is not following the line of extreme. As a term in political or philosophical literature the word remains relative to be defined varyingly and it has become even more relative in the so-called "war on terror" with its aim of putting an end to violence rather than engaging in the more complex task of tackling ideas and issues that breed it. So, "anyone who does not advocate violence, *ipso facto*, becomes a moderate and any ally even if he or she holds potentially obscurantist views on important issues such as individual freedom, women's rights, and freedom of speech, among others", as Hasan Suroor comments. To him, moderation has come to be defined in such narrow terms in the post- 9/11 climate that "many of those who are now hailed as moderates by Western governments, desperately seeking Muslim allies in their campaign against terrorism, would have been judged rather differently in more normal circumstances".⁹

The writer while defining a moderate Muslim has his own reasons to believe and his own criteria to measure the dimensions and qualifications of a moderate Muslim. He, instead declared the prominent Indian "Muslim reformers" like Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Dr. Zakir Husain (1897-1969), as moderates who came from the traditional background deeply rooted in religious outlook; they acknowledge the importance of religion but at the same time were able to mobilize the community around the modernizing agenda.

Rifa'ah Tahtawi (1801-1873)

Mr. Surman the French scholar in one of his recent publications now translated into Arabic by Maram al-Misri entitled *Abnau Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi - Muslimun wa Hadathiyun* (the generation of Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi - Muslims and Modernists) has criticized Mustafa Kamal of Turkey (1881-1938), Reza Pahlavi of Iran (1878-1944) and Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia (1901-2000) who ignored the religious beliefs of Muslims and were victimized in their scheme of modernization and enlightenment in the Muslim world. Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi conversely followed a moderate line. Being a religious scholar and modernist he tried his best to eradicate all the inconveniences between the Holy *Qur'an* and the modern technological developments that provided for the West a base for material supremacy and not spiritual highhandedness.

The French scholar is unambiguously supportive to Tahtawi's moderate views and methodology in the course of modernization. The writer ascribes to him the on-going movement of the enlightenment all over the Arab and Muslim world. To this analysis Tahtawi led successfully an Arab renaissance, the impact of which transcended the Arab boundaries and was near to modernize the whole Muslim world, then the military-men occupied and captured the power in most of the Arab/Muslim countries and interrupted the socio-intellectual awakening. They built up nationalism and socialism respectively. The Arab world, according to this analysis, could not since resuscitate from this blow.

The French scholar comments that after completing studies in Paris for five years Tahtawi came back to Cairo in 1831 C.E. with the thesis that a re-conciliation between Islam and modernity was possible and that no verse in the holy *Qur'an* might be quoted against modernizing the Islamic knowledge. He devoted himself

in the advocacy of the western knowledge, science and technology without sidelining the *Qur'anic* revelation in letter and spirit.

The author admits the possibility of extremism in every place and that the European ideologies in the previous century caused the damage and destruction against humanity more than the terrorist movements did, and that most of the terrorists were not Islamists at all. The writer further says that the Russians, the Japanese and the Tamils in Sri Lanka and other nations and peoples exactly did what today the Palestinians are doing against the occupation and colonisation. The billions of Muslims sharing us in this world, according to French scholar, are in search of peace, security and for a better standard of life and more freedom like other communities.

The writer claims that the "puritan Islam" might have led to extremism and violence while the possibility of an emancipating and enlightening Islam might not be overlooked. Today the new generation from Taha Hussain (1889-1973) till Najib Mahfouz (b. 1911) or Jamal al-Ghitani, all the enlightened and modern Arabs are following the line of thinking marked by Tahtawi in the nineteenth century. They, as the author asserts, are inclined to their faith and culture, supportive to the spirit of enlightenment and vocal to oppose openly the religious extremism. The writer calls to support these "moderates" whom he thinks the natural ally to the West and questions surprisingly "in order to aid these elements and make a compromise between the West and the Muslims, we are waiting what for?" The French scholar claims, his direct visits frequently to these "followers of Tahtawi" in various Arab countries and Indonesia, Turkey, Iran and Bangladesh probably after 9/11, 2001 terrorist attacks on Pentagon and World Trade Centre of United States.¹⁰

Tahtawi regards the social order as being established by God and the ruler as God's representative. He believed that the

only limitations on the ruler's authority were the dictates of his conscience. The ruler should rule with justice and strive to foster their material well-being. The people in turn should consciously fulfill their duties to that end. Tahtawi's modernism is expressed in his conception of the material progress that could be possible within the framework of a harmoniously functioning government and society, achieved with the aid of western technology.¹¹

Ziauddin Sardar

Ziauddin Sardar¹², who has lived in Saudi Arabia (1975-80) and is now based in London, is a prominent writer on the future of Islam and science and technology. He often writes columns in *The Observer*, a British Sunday newspaper, and the *New Statesman*, a weekly magazine. He is a writer, broadcaster and critic. He is a leading liberal writer on the future of Islam and has published widely on science and technology. A visiting Professor of Postcolonial Studies, Department of Arts, Policy and Management at City University, London, has published over 40 books on various aspects of Islam, science policy, cultural studies and related subjects. Professor Sardar is the editor of *Futures* since 1999, the monthly journal of policy, planning and future studies and co-Editor of *Third Text*, the critical journal of visual art and culture.

Sardar's most recent books include *Postmodernism and the Other* (1998), *Orientalism* (1999), *Aliens R Us* (2002), *The A to Z of Post-modern Life* (2002) and the international best seller, *Introducing Islam* (1992; 2001).¹³

Sardar is exposed in the western media as ultra-moderate who thinks in changing Islam itself. In the words of Sardar, "much of the attention is focused on reformulating the *Shari'ah*, the centuries-old body of Islamic law deeply embedded in a medieval psychology". The *Shari'ah* is state law in many Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and Sudan. For

many conservative and radical Muslims, Sardar comments, the *Shari'ah* is Islam. It can not be changed, and must be implemented in exactly the shape it was first formulated. To the writer, "since 9/11, there has been a seismic shift in this percept; more and more Muslims now perceive Islamic law to be dangerously obsolete; and these include the 'Ulamâ', the religious scholars and clerics, who have a tremendous hold on the minds of the Muslim masses".¹⁴

Sardar in his analysis of the changing interpretation and mind set of the Muslims according to the contemporary requirements as being historically normal phenomenon, does not differentiate between unchanged texts of Islam preserved in the form of *Qur'ân* and *Hadith*, and the juristic human explanations made by the 'Ulamâ' throughout the ages enriching Islamic law. It is very interesting to note that few years back Sardar himself had demarcated a line between 'changeable' and 'unchangeable' in Islam. He asserted earlier:

the cordinal framework (of Islam) is external. Truth remains unchanged; but the human condition does not. It is the principles of Islam that are eternal, but not their space-time operationalisation. The Beloved Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself as well as the Rightly-Guided Caliphs varied the application of the principles of Islam as the circumstances changed, but always with the parameters of Islam. They had fully understood the spirit of Islam.¹⁵

Then Sardar, very surprisingly, dares to title the 'Ulamâ'—the harbingers of "permanent Islam" as he defines them - as the "mullahs" who are "still predominantly hard liners and are locked in a virtual civil war with "reformers" in case of *Hudud* Ordinance in Pakistan, which states the maximum punishments for adultery (stoning), false accusation of adultery (80 lashes of the whip), theft (cutting off the right hand), drinking alcohol (80 lashes) and apostasy (death). The Ordinance was imposed in Pakistan by the

military ruler Muhammad Zia al-Haqq. General Pervez Musharraf, the present ruler has often promised to repeal the laws but always caves in under pressure from Islamic parties. He wants the Council of Islamic Ideology to decide otherwise on the issue. But, according to Sardar, "mullahs" who dominate it have never previously voted for justice and women's rights, and they can not be left out of equation. Without the cooperation of the religious scholars who bestow the legitimacy of all reforms and changes, the masses will not embrace the change.

This is the theorization of change and reform made by Sardar in his own perspective and through his own mind set. For decades the core debate in the Muslim world was about establishing an "ideological Islamic state" and returning to *Shari'ah*, the historical body of Islamic law, Sardar's confused thinking is elaborated again. "This debate, often led by "so-called Islamic movements" produced a "narrow, intolerant, obscurantist, illiberal, brutal and confrontational interpretation" of Islam. It is the interpretation that gave rise to what is known as "Islamic fundamentalism". Now it is being challenged by emerging alternative visions of Islam, each taking shape in different ways in different countries. In this new discourse, "*Shari'ah* is not divine but a "jurist law" that was formulated and socially constructed during the early phase of Islamic history. It can be changed, modified and reformulated in its entirety".¹⁶

Sardar in an interview conducted by Hasan Suroor in a major intervention on the controversy over the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم published in September 2005 first in *Danish* and then in other western newspapers, explored both sides of the debate and called for "reformulating" Islam in contemporary terms. He declared the Muslim response all over the world as "excessive". Threats and burning down embassies only further enforced the image of Muslims as "violent and

uncivilized" people. The cartoons were not about freedom of expression. They were all about naked use of power and demonisation. They were not just maligning the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, they were communicating that he was intrinsically violent, that the creed he preached was violent, and hence all those who followed him were violent. "In other words, Muslims are inherently violent and evil. No culture or people can tolerate such a level of demonisation. Last time Europe demonised a people to this extent that we ended up with the Holocaust". "As far as I am concerned", Sardar elaborated explicitly, "these cartoons are a reflection of racism and Islamophobia that is now running rampant in Europe".

Sardar in the course of varying reactions against the cartoon debate needed a more considered response. "We need to rethink and reformulate Islam as a contemporary worldview. This does not mean we need to change or modify our religious notions; but it does mean that we need to use Islamic ideas and concepts to reformulate Islam as an outlook that goes beyond instrumental modernity and fashionable post modernism", he clarified.

Asked by the interviewer, "How do Muslims get out of the 'bind' in which they find themselves, partly as a result of their own conduct and partly because of anti-Muslim prejudice? Sardar replied, "I think the best way to do that is for Muslim societies to discover a contemporary meaning and significance of Islam. Indeed, in my opinion, serious rethinking within Islam is long overdue. Muslims have been comfortably relying, or rather falling back, on age-old interpretations for much too long. This is why they feel so painful in the contemporary world, so uncomfortable with modernity. Scholars and thinkers' have been suggesting for well over a century that we need to make a serious attempt at *ijtihad* at reasoned struggle and rethinking to reform Islam. Reform, in my opinion, is long overdue. It is time we make serious attempts to rethink Islam in contemporary terms", he concluded.¹⁷

Americanised Islam

The "moderate" version of Islam as propagated by the Western intellectuals or modernized Muslim thinkers and journalists in the pre and post 9/ 11 situation, remained the "American interests-serving Islam" - as coined by Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) in one of his articles published in June 1952 entitled as *Islam Amrikani (The Americanised Islam)*. This brand of Islam highlighted by America and its allies and planned to be executed in the West Asia was opposed to communism only for the sake of balancing the power in the world. The *Americanised Islam* might have guided in the family planning issues, in the democracy and political mobilization, in the teachings of justice, freedom and equality, in the economic prosperity and collective security system. But this American version of Islam could not lead the society in combating the colonisation, in establishing an Islamic state and government, in confronting the socio-political issues. It could neither legislate in the parliament nor dominate the culture and civilization.¹⁸

In the contemporary world the "western Islam" highlighting the moderation and modernisation tries its utmost to replace the Islam that might have resisted the occupation and the colonizing policies of America or the West. Any version of Islam that has potential to check the American interests or to insist on safeguarding the interests of Muslim community by and large, is not acceptable to the West/America and therefore is not free to avail the fundamental rights even in its domain and consequently it must be moderated and modernized. Neil Clark, the writer and broadcaster specializing in Eastern European and Middle Eastern (West Asian) affairs addressing the rulers, has very clearly commented: "If you orient your foreign policy towards the U.S., you will be a "reformer", "moderate" or "moderniser" - regardless of how extreme your policies are. The rule applies even if you

served in an SS unit (like the neoconservatives' favourite Islamist, the late "Bosnian leader Alija Izet Begovic) or, like the Shah of Iran. On the other hand, if "you run your country for the benefit of your people and refuse to pay Danegeld to the most powerful empire the world has seen, you will be called a hardliner".

The writer quotes various cases to prove his thesis. Mahmood Ahmadi Nejad, the newly-elected president of Iran is "hardliner" not for the social and religious conservatism he shares with the non-"hardliner" leaders of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, but for his policy of empowering Iranian working class people and defending his country's right to develop nuclear power.

To this analyst, Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus in Eastern Europe is "hardliner" not for his authoritarianism, but because he wishes to maintain the last planned, socially owned economy in Europe, an alternative economic agenda that has seen his country climb from 68th to 49th in the U.N. human development index.

Hugo Chavez of Venezuela also is "hardliner" not because he once led a failed military coup, but because he wishes to use his nation's vast oil wealth to benefit his country and not U.S. oil corporations. The writer concludes his analysis offering a suggestion to the politicians, For those genuinely concerned with social justice, derailing the U.S. behemoth and creating a world in which people come before profits, the more "hardliners" - and the less "moderates" and "reformers" - that are elected to power, the better.¹⁹

Applying the same theory to "moderate Islam" the neo-colonial American agenda defying the "resistant Islam", "political Islam", "Islamists' Islam", "Islamic fundamentalism", "violent and obscurantist Islam" and other mistakenly coined terms plan to achieve the following objectives as discussed by the Muslim scholars:

- I. To maintain American hegemony in politics and to ensure its supremacy in the twenty first century and to suppress all the potential rivals.
- II. To sustain the American military and strategic power and keep it irresistible and its surrogates inaccessible and ensure to eradicate any possibility of equation with America and its allies so that no challenge might be imposed on it or Israel.
- III. Occupation of the economic resources of the world by America, its allies or multi-national corporations and NGOs active for the colonial objectives of the West.
- IV. The global domination of western culture and civilization on the world, and undermining the possibilities of establishing the society on the basis of Islam.²⁰

Islamists' Approach

Equally important to note is the Islamic movements' reaction in respect of projecting a 'moderate Islam' by the West in general and American lobby in particular. The Islamists form the main stream Islam opposed to the West and taking their views into consideration while initiating a discourse on the theme is unavoidable. Mr. Tony Blair and his supporters in the post 7/7 climate have sought cooperation from the moderate practising Muslim leaders in their campaign of war on terrorism with the rationale that these Muslims had sufficient influence in the community. It was no good to promote leaders who might be epitomes of moderation but were not taken seriously by fellow-Muslims whose views they wanted to change. According to the analysis of Hasan Suroor,

what western governments are looking for are orthodox but non-fanatical "insiders" (as against secular "outsiders") - people who have enough acceptability within the community and can invoke the authority of Islam to denounce terrorism. It is argued that a

message couched in an appropriately religious tone and delivered by seemingly "devout" Muslims who are in "communion" with the community has a greater chance of being given a hearing than a lecture on reforms by secularists whom the community regards as too elitist and detached.²¹

The analysis seems to be individual and reflective to personal views; it may however, be representative to some extent. Applying this to the Islamists, their reactions and perceptions about the "moderate Islam" - if seriously considered and genuinely weighed - may be proved more useful and ensuring in maintaining peace and security across the globe. In this context Dr. F.R. Faridi, a renowned scholar and Islamic activist of India is examined to some extent.

Dr. F.R. Faridi

Dr. Faridi explains the climate of projecting a "moderate Islam" by the West and America in terms of the backdrop of a "hegemony politics" and the claim of the "modern thought" that truth and reality is owned by none but itself and the culture and civilization is borrowed only from it. "Being harassed with the campaign of accusations against Islam and Muslims", says Dr. Faridi in one of his editorials published in *Zindagi e Nau* monthly, N. Delhi, August 2002, an unofficial organ of *Jama'at-i-Islami* of India", few insiders are portraying varying novel images of Islam. Though the apologetic approach and opportunism are very tactfully covered under these images but the real objective is always to be disclosed. Recently a Muslim journalist from Karachi has unleashed the news, "the Muslim world is retreating from extremism to moderation". The journalist credits this retreat to General Musharraf in addition to America, the magnificent. He has tactfully offered the gift of flatter and wax to those in power! He was not hesitant to victimize even the holy *Qur'ân*. He consequently justified his theory of "compromising Islam" against

the Qur'anic term *Ummah wasat* (the moderate group). Dr. Faridi analyses the situation, to him, these portraits painted in different colours and by varying canvases have different and sometimes contradictory titles; "Islam is moderate it is peace-loving and compromising, it leads a tolerant life; it may adjust with all plural societies without any conflict and tension, it teaches its followers living in the world of co-existence to maintain their entity and identity to the extent acceptable to the world, and so on".

Dr. Faridi does not negate the moderate role to be played by Islam. He affirms its moderation, its peace-loving and tolerant image, its denial of clashes between various opportunist groups, its denouncement of compulsion in the matter of religion and belief, its falsification of defaming others on the basis of any creed and its nullification of any attack on the life, property and dignity of others.

But the moderation, the peace-loving and the projection of the status of *Ummah wasat* as qualified by Islam, Dr. Faridi asserts, is different entirely from those portraits painted above. The "Muslim surrogates", as the analysis adds, "are preaching us these as the "Islamic essence"; to them those misguided who are hurting it are basically tarnishing the image of Islam itself. According to them, the Islamists are unaware of the consequences as well as unaware of the world. They are in darkness about a plural society; here the comfort lies in the toleration to the all and in the willingly adjustment with the all, the urgent requirements of this adjustment may be fulfilled through a coalition of good and bad and through building the society on such assumption that each of the good and bad equally enjoy the right of survival on the one side and Muslims must opt and follow only those ideologies - deciding good or bad - followed and propagated by the dominant forces of the present world on the other", Dr. Faridi puts in detail the rationale of these "surrogates".²²

Then what does qualify "the moderate Islam"? Dr. Faridi explicitly defines the term as the way of life - persuaded by Islam being categorized as the only method to achieve the pleasure of God - which is "neither excessive nor reductive in the thought and action". The scholar then quotes in detail the Islamic texts to prove his views.

The man in the universe is created to serve God by his sincere following, according to the *Qur'ân*. This service to God (or worship) is, however, required with moderation and not to the extreme extent, as beautifully narrated in *surah al-Muzzammil*. The Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ and a zealous group of his companions, were often up, two-thirds of the night, or a half, rejecting sleep and driving themselves up to prayer and praise and the reading of the *Qur'ân*. They were told to give some time to devotion, as might be most easy and convenient to them, in various circumstances of health, travel and the performance of various duties keeping in view a moderate and balanced way:

Your Lord does know that you stand forth (to prayer) nigh two thirds of the night, or half the night, or a third of the night, and so does a party of those with you. But God does appoint night and day in due measure. He knows that you are unable to keep count thereof. So He has turned to you (in mercy): "read you, therefore, of the *Qur'ân* as much as may be easy for you. He knows that there may be (Some) among you in ill-health; others traveling through the land, seeking of God's bounty; yet others fighting in God's cause. Read you, therefore, as much of the *Qur'ân* as may be easy for you".²³

The holy *Qur'ân* emphasizes upon a moderate view to be taken between the spiritual life and the worldly needs; the two are not considered contradictory and conflicting but complimentary, supplicating and interdependent, both are equally estimated. Some oft-repeated *Qur'ânic* assertions are given below:

Behold, his people said to him: exult not, for God loves not those who exult (in riches). But seek with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on *you*, the home of Hereafter, nor forget your portion in this world: but do you good as God has been good to *you*, and seek, not (occasions for) mischief in the land, for God loves not those who do mischief.²⁴

O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer, eat and drink but waste not by excess for God loves not the wasters. Say: who has forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of God which He has produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure (which He has provided) for sustenance? Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgement. Thus do we explain in the signs in detail for those who understand. Say: the things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are: shameful deeds, whether open or secret; sins and trespasses against truth or reason; assigning of partners to God, for which He has given no authority; and saying things about God of which *you* have no knowledge.²⁵

The verses quoted above guide clearly about the unambiguous stand of Islam having no contradiction between the religious and worldly dealings simultaneously. Concentrating on anyone by avoiding the other is not a pleasing trend to God. Neither covetousness is tolerable nor excessive use of resources. Both the monasticism and modern consumerism are undesirable to Islam.

Islam describes the excess in the worships and religious performances as displeasing on the one hand, and some human engagements and worldly businesses as a part of worship on the other. Good conduct and soft-heartedness is prescribed as the recognition of a believer. The life of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is regarded exalted Standard of character²⁶ dealing gently with the human beings²⁷; and being a mercy to all creation²⁸, all are reckoned as one of the Mercies of God. According to *Hadith* "One who struggles for the sake of widows and poor is equated with a

mujâhid (who battles in the way of God) or a religious man who stands the whole night and holds fast in the day".²⁹ The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in a directive ordered the Muslims "to invest the wealth of an orphan in the business so that *sadaqah* might have not exhausted it".³⁰

Dr. Faridi quoting all these texts concludes that the monasticism is in a clear violation of Islamic teachings. God preaches a novel "moderation" which is very far from the so-called "intellectual exercises", the exploitation of the rulers and the self acclaimed "champions" of the spirituality and the religion.

Recognising Others

The *Qur'ân* while addressing the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, as Dr. Faridi asserts, admits and recognizes the freedom of thought and action and respects wholeheartedly other faiths and religions:

If it had been God's plan they would not have taken false gods: but we made you not one to watch over others' doings, nor are you set over them to dispose of their affairs.³¹

You give admonition for you are one to admonish. You are not one to manage (men's) affairs.³²

Say: "The truth is from your Lord. Let him who will believe, and let him who will reject it".³³

He who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deed.³⁴

Revile not you those whom they call upon besides God, lest they out of spite revile God in their ignorance.³⁵

Say: "With God is the argument that reaches home: if it had been His Will, He could indeed have guided you all".³⁶

According to the analysis provided by Dr. Faridi, these divine verses do not only formally prevent reviling others' faiths and religious dogmas, these instead guide to respect and recognize others and to accept eagerly their right to dissent. Dr. Faridi asserts that Muslims throughout the ages have taken these

teachings into active consideration. They survived other's worshipping places in their domain, safeguarded their right to religion, respected their culture and civilization, ensured their personal law, did not hit their economic and commercial life, banned all kinds of atrocities and encroachments to them and did not hammer their fundamental rights. If any spot on the dream image of Islam in the history was seen, it was not because of the following, Islam; it was *vice versa*, infact. That was rulers' own playing with the religion, Islam is sacrosanct and repudiative to those vulgarities.³⁷

Basics of Islamic Moderation

In order to understand the boundaries of moderate and peace-loving Islam, Dr. Faridi convincingly argues that the following basic points must be taken into account:

1. The *Qur'ân* as its first principle declares unhesitatingly - and the Muslim Ummah firmly believes in - the religion of Islam as *al-Din* (the religion desirable to God and the only way of success in both the worlds)³⁸
2. The religion in entirety must be followed wholeheartedly; there should be no division and partition in the obligations and ordinances and "pick and choose" policy must be avoided and the individual or collective choice should not play any role in following the Islamic texts.³⁹
3. The Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* must be accepted as the final authority in all the disputes, and doubts whose decisions must be followed with the fullest conviction and no resistance against them is to be observed, because the test of faith is not mere lip profession but bringing all the

reservations and confusions in one whom a man professes faith.⁴⁰

4. There must be no alteration or replacement, minimization or maximization, undue relaxation or excuse in the religion. No ingenuine justification and opportunistic interpretation is qualified. A moderate view or trend does not necessitate developing any understanding based on vested interests.⁴¹
5. This religion transcends the boundaries of formal worship to a collective society, a system of thoughts and priorities. It advocates a specific culture and civilization, a conclusive system of values, a set of definite objectives for individual and collective life⁴². If any alteration in its system of priorities is accepted, the system of its values is compulsorily disturbed.
6. The society evolved on the Islamic principles builds its prime relationship with a non-Islamic people on the humanitarian basis. It regards all the human beings as the creation of God and treats them as equal without any classification and does not make any distinction while ensuring their human rights.⁴³

Islam's relationship with other faiths is determined by its entitling Muslim community as *Ummah wasat* (the balanced group) which is created by God as "the witness over the nations".⁴⁴ So this divine responsibility requires a straight-forward and uncompromising following of the religion. In order to appease the addressees or being harassed with the exploiting powers, no initiative to any partial modification in the text is permissible. The

Muslims have to follow the *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ in all spheres of life:

But when *our* clear signs are rehearsed unto them, those who rest not their hope on their meeting with us. Say: "Bring us a *Qur'ân* other than this, or change this", say: "It is not for me, of my own accord to change it. I follow not but what is revealed unto me. If I were to disobey my Lord, I should myself fear the penalty of a Great Day (to come)".⁴⁵

And had we not given you strength you would nearly have inclined to them a little. In that case we should have made you taste an equal portion in death: and moreover you would have found none to help you against us.⁴⁶

Their desire is that you should be pliant so would they be pliant.⁴⁷

It is to be comprehended carefully, Dr. Faridi concludes, that "taking into consideration the feelings and psychology of the addressees as per practical wisdom and beautiful preaching enshrined in the *Qur'ân*⁴⁸, is a desirable act entirely different from any modification in the message itself. It should also be noted that understanding and interpretation of the *Qur'ân* and the Prophetic sayings being absolutely human may and should accept the contemporaneity, time factor, knowledge and experiences and public interests and exigencies. The religion of Islam is not rigid and static. The great jurists and worthy scholars of Islam have proved it by their attitude and exercising the *ijtihad*. That attitude did not reflect any modification in the basic teachings and values nor any flexibility towards principled priorities of Islam, instead that attitude represented the application of juristic principle of *La dharar wala dharar* (neither tolerate any harm nor cause that) and is based on worldly needs and religious requirements".⁴⁹

Dr. Faridi while criticizing the western projection of a 'modern Islam' reasserts his clear stand by saying that, "God has revealed this religion in order to establish the justice (*qiyam bi al-qist*) and for that purpose He has revealed Divine Guidance also. If

'moderation' implies in the following of 'guide map' of modern age, it would result in the withdrawal from our missionary role and in the dismissal of promoting a Justly balanced society after uprooting tyrants and oppressors".⁵⁰

The "moderate Islam" coping with the contemporary situations and recent challenges was not only highlighted by the intellectuals, journalists and activists alongwith the varying interpretations, but was also advocated by Organization of Islamic Conference, the most authoritative body of the Muslim world, which claims to be the representative of the universal Islam in the modern world (in its declaration signed in Makkah in December, 2005).

References and End Notes

- ¹ *The Hindu*, 25 July, 2005.
- ² *Al-Majalla*, The International Magazine of the Arabs, No. 1322, 12-18/6/2005, pp. 38-39.
- ³ *The Hindu*, October 3, 2005.
- ⁴ Jason Burke, "Bali bombers did not need Al-Qaeda", *Guardian*, October 2, 2005.
- ⁵ *The Hindu*, October 3, 2005.
- ⁶ *The Hindu*, August 23, 2005.
- ⁷ *The Hindu*, July 17, 2005.
- ⁸ *Guardian*, August 30, 2005.
- ⁹ *The Hindu*, September 1, 2005. The writer has quoted in this case the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The largest Muslim organisation and officially recognized as the most moderate face of Islam in the country. Its general secretary Iqbal Sacraïne has been knighted in recognition of his contribution to inter-faith dialogue. The writer is surprised to see his official recognition because Iqbal Sacraïne had once condemned Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* and had supported Imam Khumayni's *fatwa* in this regard. So these 'misdeeds' should have disqualified him from being a moderate Muslim, as the writer has argued. Salman Rushdie also, as quoted by the writer, in *The Times* argues that the choice of Sacraïne illustrated the "weakness of the Government's strategy of relying on traditional, but essentially orthodox Muslims to help eradicate Islamic radicalism".
- ¹⁰ See a review of the book by Mazin Hijazi, *Al-Majalla - The International Magazine of the Arabs*, No. 1322. 18/6/2005/5-11 Jamada-al-ûla, 1426 A.H., p. 22. This issue of the Magazine mainly highlights the crisis of Arab Enlightenment (*al-Tanweer al-Arabi*) between reactions and deviations and offers the reflections of the prominent intellectuals from different groups like that of Faraj Ismail, al-Sayyid Zaid, Mustafa Sulaiman, Dr. Mahmood Ameen al-Alim, Hasan Hanfi, Dr. Salah Qunuwah, Dr. Jabir Usfur, Dr. Rafiq Habib, Dr. Atif al-Iraqi, Dr. Abdul Ghani, Dr. Sayyid Yasin, Usman Tazghart, 'Ahd Fadhil and so on. See for detail, *Ibid*, pp. 12-23.
- ¹¹ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 2, p. 998.

¹² Sardar's major works related to European science and related issues are: (1) *Science, Technology and Development in the Muslim World*, Croom Helm, London; Humanities Press, New Jersey 1977. (2) *Science and Technology in the Middle East: A Guide to Issues, Organisations and Institutions*, Longman, Harlow, 1982. (3) (editor) *The Revenge of Athena: Science, Exploitation and the Third World* Mansell, London, 1988; Third World Network, Penang, 1988. (4) *Exploitations in Islamic Science*, Mansell, London, 1989. (5) (with Merryl Wyn Davies and Ashish Nandy) *Barbaric Others: A Manifesto on Western Racism*, Pluto Press, London, 1993; Westview Press, Boulder Colorado, 1993. (6) *Decolonising the 21st Century*, Grey Seal, London, 1996; Institute for Policy Research, Kuala Lumpur, 1996.

¹³ Some other books of Sardar are as follows: *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim*, Granta Books, 2005; (with Merryl Wyn Davies) *American Dream, Global Nightmare*, Icon Books, 2004; Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell (eds.), *Islam Post-modernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, Pluto Press, 2004; (with Merryl Wyn Davies), *Why Do People Hate America?* Icon Books, 2003; *Thomas Kuhn and the Science Wars*, Icon Books, 2000; *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to come*, Mansell, 1986. [edit] External Links: Ziauddin Sardar, *New Statesman*, June, 14, 2004, Is Muslim Civilization set on a fixed course to decline? Ziauddin Sardar, *New Statesman*, August, 2004, Lost in translation; Ziauddin Sardar, June 2002, *Rethinking Islam*; Ziauddin Sardar, *Medicine and Multiculturalism*, *New Renaissance*, Vol. 11, No.2, Issue 37, Summer, 2002.

¹⁴ See Ziauddin Sardar, *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journey of a Sceptical Muslim*, Granta Books, for a detailed account. The article first appeared in the *New Statesman* September 13, 2004. For the latest in current and cultural affairs subscribe, to the *New Statesman* print edition.

¹⁵ Ziauddin Sardar, "Permanence and Change in Islam", in *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, p.49.

¹⁶ Ziauddin Sardar, "Battle of Islam", broadcasted on BBC Two at 2100 BST on Monday, 5 September, 2005.

¹⁷ For the full text of the interview, see, *The Hindu*, February 13, 2006.

¹⁸ Sayyid Qutb, "The Americanised Islam", in *Dirasat Islamiyah*, translated in Urdu by Dr. Muhammad Raziul Islam Nadvi, *Islam Aur Maghrib Ki Kashmakash*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 126-131.

¹⁹ Neil Clark, "Reformers and Hardliners", *Guardian*, July 15, 2005.

²⁰ Prof. Khurshid Ahmad, *Amrika - Muslim Duniya Ki Be Itmenani*, Lahore, 2002, pp. 254-255.

²¹ Hasan Suroor, *The Hindu*, September 1, 2005.

²² Fazlur Rehman Faridi, Isharat (editorial), *Zindagi e Nau*, Monthly, New Delhi, Vol. 28, No. 8, Jamad al ûla-Jamad al-Thani, 1423 A.H/ August 2002, pp. 3-4.

²³ The *Qur'ân*, 73:20.

²⁴ The *Qur'ân*, 28: 76-77.

²⁵ The *Qur'ân*, 7: 31-33.

²⁶ The *Qur'ân* 68:4.

²⁷ The *Qur'ân*, 3:159.

²⁸ The *Qur'ân*, 21:107. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is sent by God as a mercy for all the creatures. There is no question of race or nation, of a "chosen people" or the "seed of Abraham"; or the "seed of David"; or of Hindu Arya-varta; of Jew or Gentile, Arab or Ajam (Persian), Turk or Tajik, European or Asiatic, White or coloured; Aryan, Semitic, Mongolian, or African; or American Australian or Polynesian. To all men and creatures other than men who have any spiritual responsibility, the description equally applies.

²⁹ *Tirmidhi*, Abu Isa, *al-Jami al-Sahih*, ed shaykh Hisham Samir al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Birr, Vol. IV, p. 346, No. 1974, Nasai in his *Sunan*, Kanpur, 1290 A.H., p. 412, has quoted the same Hadith with the marginal difference in the words saying that Abu Hurayrah reports that the Prophet ﷺ has said, "One who strives for the orphans and poor is as much desirable to God as a man fighting for the cause of God".

³⁰ *Tirmidhi*, *Ibid*, Vol. 3, p. 32, Hadith no. 640, The Hadith says: "Beware, a man who supervises an orphan who have riches with him, must invest it in the business and must not leave it untouched so that *sadaqah* (charity) might not have exhausted it".

³¹ The *Qur'ân* 06: 107.

³² The *Qur'ân*, 88:21-22.

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- ³³ The *Qur'ân*, 18:29
- ³⁴ The *Qur'ân*, 6: 108.
- ³⁵ The *Qur'ân*, 6: 108.
- ³⁶ The *Qur'ân*, 6: 149.
- ³⁷ F.R. Faridi, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-9.
- ³⁸ The *Qur'ân*, 3: 19, 85, 67; 5:44; 2:208, 85.
- ³⁹ The *Qur'ân*, 2: 208, 85.
- ⁴⁰ The *Qur'ân*, 4:65.
- ⁴¹ The *Qur'ân*, 2:256.
- ⁴² For a compact and complete image of a believer that Islam tries to build up see, the *Qur'ân*, 23: 3-8; 25:67-73.
- ⁴³ The *Qur'ân*, 95:4, 17:70.
- ⁴⁴ The *Qur'ân*, 2:143.
- ⁴⁵ The *Qur'ân*, 10: 15.
- ⁴⁶ The *Qur'ân*, 17: 74-75.
- ⁴⁷ The *Qur'ân*, 68:9.
- ⁴⁸ The *Qur'ân*, 16: 125.
- ⁴⁹ F. R. Faridi, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-15.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16. See also the editorial, *Isharat*, in *Zindagi Nau*, Vol. 28, No.7, Rabi al-Thani-Jamada al-Ula 1423 A.H/July 2002, pp. 3-10, where Dr. Faridi has criticized both the "western liberals" and Muslim "reformers". The last group is entitled by the scholar as "self-imposed reformers" who are frightened of the western dominance, or those who are educated and trained in the westernized institutions and, therefore, seek the remedy of each disease in the West.