

## Two English Reviews

Now we can have a critical look at two English reviews published in two Western journals. It is interesting to note how a piece of writing is viewed by different reviewers in different colours, despite all the claims of objectivity and academic honesty.

It may, therefore, be held that ideological bias plays a dominant role in social sciences, humanities and philosophy, which is veiled under the pretext of scientific attitude in the writings of the Western trained social scientists and critics, and particularly Orientalists.

But the poor Orientals lacking training in hiding their beliefs and convictions under the pretext of scientific objectivity are dubbed as dogmatic or unscientific just because they are unfamiliar with the high sounding technical jargon of modern social sciences. Those who would consider the *Jumhuri Islami's* review as dogmatic and fundamentalist, I believe, would swallow the worst type of biased criticism of the so-called Western educated scholars without even realizing that they are given a dose of lies and prejudices in the name of intellectual treat.

Martin Kramer reviewed Hamid Enayet's book in the *Middle Eastern Studies*. His review begins with a resumably, funny anecdote, which seeks to indicate that Muslim theologians are no more 'simple mullas'. They have become politically conscious, have general ideas, and are familiar with Western political thinkers.

Kramer seems to lament over the supposed demise of the 'simple mullas' in the Muslim world. I have enough reason to believe that no non-Muslim scholar or politician is happy with the emergence of the new types of 'mullas', who are familiar with Western thinkers, ideas, and jargon, and who are products of 'what some call ferment'.

They are not even prepared to accept that a 'mulla' can acquire knowledge and insight into the Western modes of thought, which they consider to be the sole property of Western trained scholars. An evidence of this type of belief is provided by Kramer himself, who describes Martyr Mutahhari as "a professor of philosophy at Tehran University, who secured the rank of ayatullah after the Revolution". It is further added that "so convincingly did he embrace the [new] role that in May 1979, anti-clericalist guerillas

elected to assassinate him."

This shows the nature of the so called scholarship of a budding Orientalist, who instead of gathering correct information about such an eminent personality of modern Revolutionary Iran as Mutahhari relies upon his own ignorance and conjectures, and at the same time hopes to have a right to write on the most complex and intriguing issues pertaining to Islamic political thought, which is, on the one hand, related to Islamic metaphysics, and on the other, is related to the contemporary realities and ideals of the Muslim World and the Muslim psyche.

The complacency of the reviewer is amazing or rather alarming. He says that he is "again in the familiar company of Muslim thinkers", as if he is fully acquainted with all the Muslim political thinkers in general, and the Shi'i modernism in particular.

In fact, the Shi'i Imamiyyah Islam is still something unfamiliar to Orientalists, and even the most knowledgeable of them cannot claim to be familiar with the Shi'i thinkers.

Kramer is not pleased with Hamid Enayet for his omission to discuss the motives of the thinkers. His displeasure issues from his own habit of imputing ulterior motives to all the moves of reform and modernism in the Muslim World. His brief review is full of such attempts.

For instance, in his view, 'Ali `Abd al-Raziq's *al-Islam wa usul al-hukm* was written to thwart a scheme of the Egyptian royal house to claim the caliphate; a group of leading al-'Azhar `ulama' under the leadership of Shaykh al-'Azhar al-Izzawi and the president of the religious court, al-Maraghi, were accomplices of the Royal (Egyptian) Palace in supporting the move for abolition of the Ottoman caliphate; the famous ecumenical fatwa by Shaykh al-'Azhar Shaltut, which recognized the validity of worship according to Twelver Shi'i doctrine and denied the existence of sects within Islam, and paved the way for Sunni-Shi'i unity, had been issued with the approval of 'a calculating' President Nassir.

Kramer imputes ulterior motives to all these efforts in order to prove the validity of his thesis; i.e. mullas are not so 'simple' as they appear to be. And this means that all reform movements and all attempts towards the unity of Muslim Ummah were motivated by some ulterior designs. He uses words like 'political exigency' and 'guile' for all political thinking in the modern Muslim world.

Poor late Hamid Enayet, may God forgive him, in Kramer's view, wanted to dispense with 'that higher criticism which has interpreted the writings of Muslim reformists through their mundane transactions' in such a simplistic way.

The higher criticism, referred to by Kramer, is exemplified by his own criticism, which requires nothing but slandering in high sounding technical terms. Hamid Enayet tries to give an account of the development of modern political thought in Islam, but Kramer describes modern Islamic political ideas as 'mutations of Islamic political thought' -and 'attempts of striking balance between authenticity and accommodation'.

He finds only Enayet's doubts and fears acceptable, but readily rejects all his claims indicating hope for the Sunni-Shi'i unity. He views Shi'i appeals for conformity to majority norms as futile or worthless, because he cannot prepare himself for giving any credit to the 'troublesome Iranians'. Kramer ends his 'higher criticism' with a reference to Lord Cromer's comment on too-well-read al-Shaykh al-Bakri: 'Was this fin *de siecle* Sheikh, this curious compound of Mecca and the Paris boulevards, the latest development in Islamism? I should add that the combination produced no results of any importance'.

This observation seems to give the reviewer a hope that all modern thought in Islam would fail to produce 'results of any importance'. Such self-consoling remarks save him from facing the realities of modern revolutionary Islam. In short; Kramer's review throws light only on his own fears and hopes, and fails to give any idea of the book reviewed by him.

Another review, published in the *Iranian Studies* (Winter 1984) by Mangol Bayat, is less hostile. The reviewer's restraint is due to Hamid Enayet's sudden and untimely death a few months after the publication of this book.

Nevertheless, she has not spared the book, and, despite giving credit to the author for his vast knowledge of contemporary political polemics in Persian, Arabic and English, considers the book another apology for recent developments in Islamic thought. The reviewer, a research associate at the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, feels that the book lacks consistency in historical detachment and objectivity.

Here again, a reviewer seems to be obsessed by the myth of objectivity, without realizing that what one considers to be objective is his or her own subjective response to an issue. For instance, she regards *ijtihad* as 'originally a minor legal device' which was 'transformed by the force of circumstance into an important function'; while Hamid Enayet explains it in its correct perspective.

But for the reviewer what is her notion of *ijtihad* is an objective reality, and what others think of it 'lacks objectivity'. Hamid Enayet defined *ijtihad* as 'the logical and imperative concomitant of the Shi'i creed, as much part of the Shi'i concept of the law as the doctrine of the Imamate'. Hamid Enayet also concedes the right of leadership to a *mujtahid*, as it is inherent in the Shi'ah doctrine.

The reviewer criticizes the author for neglecting 'the fact that centuries of religious institutional development accompanied by fierce power struggle led to the *mujtahid's* rise to prominence'. Enayet claims that, as a natural corollary, *ijtihad* led to a system of government which was, if not democratic, then at least accountable to people.

Bayat demands evidence for this claim. On the one hand, she wants to study ideas in the light of historical changes, and on the other, she denies the role of the Usulis in bringing about progressive changes in Iranian politics, and concludes that 'the Usuli concern was not to reformulate rigidified legal formulae' or restore 'the true function of *ijtihad*', or adapt the law to changing social conditions, but rather to consolidate the jurisconsult's authority over the religious dissidents.

Her view may be her own subjective response to the Usuli *Akhbari* controversy, and lacks both objectivity and consistency. However, she calls Enayet's interpretation 'an unfortunate historical misconception', and goes on to remark that the book is replete with such 'misconceptions.'

Bayat is worried that Enayet nowhere advocated separation of temporal from religious affairs. And perhaps because of this alleged lapse on the part of the author his treatment of the issues seems to her 'not thoroughly thought out'. At the end the reviewer condescendingly consoles the author that 'future historians who will study the role of the modern educated lay intellectuals in the Islamic revivalism will find in his book an ideal primary source.' This left-handed compliment negates all that the reviewer wrote earlier in praise of the book.

A balanced review of Hamid Enayet's *Modern Islamic Political Thought* appeared in the *Nashr-e Danish*, the journal of the Markaz-e Nashr-e Danishgahi, Tehran. The editor of the journal, Nasr Allah Pur Jawadi, reviewed the book sympathetically in spite of his ideological differences with the author on many points. He compares this book with Hamid Enayet's earlier work, *Sayri dar andisheh-ye siyasi-ye 'Arab* (A survey of Arab political thought), and recognizes its importance in the present context.

Though he concedes that the major part of the contents of the two books is not much different, the present work is different in approach. The first book concentrated on the Arab world, while this one covers a much wider scope, for it deals with Islamic political thought beyond the confines of the Arab world, including the Indian Sub-continent.

But the reviewer, I am afraid; was misled by the title of the first book, for its coverage of Indo-Muslim thought is more comprehensive than that of the book under review. For example, the *Sayre dar andisheh-ye siyasi 'Arab* deals with the religious and political ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan at some length in the context of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-'Afghani (Asadabadi) and his criticism of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, while there is no mention of his name in the present book in spite of his influence on the modern Islamic thought in India and Pakistan.

Of course, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* has discussed the ideological positions of many Muslim leaders and intellectuals of the Sub-continent with reference to the issue of *Khilafah*, and has also paid due importance to Abu al-'A'la Mawdudi's political thought in the context of recent developments in the Islamic world. Anyhow, in some respects the earlier book is more comprehensive than the present one.

The real worth of the present book lies in its approach, which is different from that of the first one. *Sayri dar andisheh-ye siyasi-ye 'Arab* concentrated on the individual thinkers, while, as rightly pointed out by Nasr Allah Pur Jawadi, the book under review is concerned with issues. In this book Enayet's approach is problem-oriented, but he has not ignored the historical development of the ideas also.

Another and probably the most distinguishing feature of this book is its exposition of Shi'i thought, which has been till recently completely ignored by the Orientalists. The reviewer has highlighted this distinction of the book, which has greatly enhanced its value as the first authentic exposition of Shi'i thought, both

metaphysical and political. It is also acknowledged that the author's strength lies in his direct acquaintance with the original Sunni and Shi'i sources.

The book is recommended as a must for all persons interested in Islamic thought. This review is brief, and the reviewer has not gone into details and has also abstained from indulging in ideological discussion of some controversial conceptions or misconceptions regarding the Shi'ah faith and Shi'i attitude towards politics.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol-2-no-4/book-review-modern-political-islamic-thought-dr-sayyid-wahid-akhtar/two-english>