Book Review


In the light of current widespread interest in Islam, particularly in the West after 9/11, this second edition of *Islam in Transition*, which comes twenty-five years after the first edition published in 1982, is a long overdue but very timely publication. In the last two and half decades since the publication of the first edition, there have been many significant developments and challenges in relation to Islam both within and outside the Muslim world, which are reflected in the sizeable increase in the contents of this second edition, especially in the section on contemporary issues. The book contains a representative collection of the diverse views of notable Muslim intellectuals, thinkers and ideologues dating from the nineteenth century to the present on topical social, economic, and political questions in relation to Islam. As rightly noted by the editors in the book’s preface, the strength of the book lies in “its scope, which encompasses the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries and documents the diversity of Muslim voices on topics ranging from responses to European colonialism and the rise of Islamic modernist and fundamentalist movements to issues of legal reform, gender, bioethics, violence and terrorism, globalization, and democratization” (p. xiii).

The book, which is well structured both chronologically and thematically, is divided into four main parts providing useful insights into different Muslim perspectives on many of the challenges of modernity confronting Islam and Muslims in the last two centuries or so. Apart from a general introduction at the beginning of the book, which gives a good background summary of Islamic civilization, the editors also provide a brief introduction to each of the four parts of the book, which gives a useful introductory insight of each of the parts. The editors do not provide any in-depth analysis or commentary on the texts, apparently leaving readers to form their own conclusions from the diverse views. This makes the book a good textbook, allowing for possible comparatives discourse of the relevant texts, especially in postgraduate courses.

The first part, entitled *Early Responses: Crisis and the Search for Identity*, contains the writings of nineteenth to twentieth century Muslim thinkers, namely, Rifāʿa al-Tahtāwī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muhammad Abduh, Ali Abd al-Rāzīq, and Sayyid Ahmad Khān. The materials in this section represent some of the early
Muslim responses to the challenges of colonialism and the search of an identity for the emerging Muslim States. As indicated in the editors’ introduction to this part, the selected materials in this part take the reader “through a century of Muslim contact with the West and Muslims’ reflection on their own plight” (p. 7) in their search for an Islamic identity within the challenges of modernization in the Muslim world. Although written long ago, the issues addressed by this generation of Muslim thinkers in the texts featured in this part of the book are still very relevant in contemporary Islamic discourse, with some of their views serving as watershed on some of the difficult questions at that time.

The second part is titled *Islam and the Modern State* and contains the writings of Muslim thinkers such as Rashid Ridā, Tāhā Husayn, Hasan al-Bannā, Muhammd Iqbal, Abū-l-ʿAlā Mawdūdī, Mahmūd Shaltūt, Muʿammar al-Qadhdgāfī, Sayyid Qutb, and Asghar Ali Engineer, among others, who address diverse issues regarding Islam and Nationalism, Islam and Socialism, and Islam and the Contemporary Secular State. A new inclusion in this part of the book is Ashgar Ali Engineer’s contribution on “Islam and Secularism”, in which he, *inter alia*, raises and searches for an answer to the topical question “Are Islam and secularism really incompatible?” (p. 136). He acknowledges the possible differences of views on this question by making an initial observation that “there could not be uncontested answers” to this question depending on whether it is answered from “a liberal and inclusive approach” or “interpreted rigidly”. His overall contention is that “(…) He if both Islam and secularism are interpreted liberally, there should not be any problem with Islam in a secular set-up” and that “if one studies the Qur’an holistically one can find strong support for “liberal or non-atheistic secularism” (p. 138). At the end, he cites examples from India to substantiate his view (pp. 141–142).

The third part is titled *Islam and Social Change* and features contributions from Subhi Mahmasānī, Āsif Fyzee, Amina Wadud, Ayatullah Tāliqānī, and Khurshid Ahmad, among others, who examine different topics relating to the Modernization of Islamic Law, the Changing Status of Women and the Family, and Islam and Economics. This is one of the two parts of the book that has been expanded with inclusion of a host of new contributions in this second edition. Some of the new additions in this part are Amina Wadud’s contribution on Rights and Roles of Woman, Ahmed Zaki Yamani’s contribution on The Political Competence of Women in Islamic Law, a contribution by Sisters in Islam, (a Malaysian NGO of Muslim professional women) entitled Chronology of a Struggle for Equal Rights, and a *Fatwa* on The Islamic Veil (*Hijab*) from the Islam Online *Fatwa* Bank, among others. This inclusion of material on women’s rights is very welcomed in the light of the topicality of the subject since the last edition of this book. In her contribution on the rights and roles of women in Islam, Amina Wadud rightly observes that “(…) Many popular or dominant ideas about the role of woman do