

**RECENT *QUR'ĀNIC* SCHOLARSHIP: A CRITICAL  
EVALUATION OF ZIAUDDIN SARDAR'S '*READING  
THE QUR'ĀN*'**

**DR TAUSEEF AHMAD PARRAY**

Assistant Professor, Islamic Studies  
Govt. Degree College, Pulwama  
Jammu & Kashmir, India  
e-mail: tauseef.parray21@gmail.com

The Noble Qur'ān, no doubt, provides guidance in all domains of life, both individual and collective. This Divine Writ/Sacred Text is relevant for all time and place. Thus, there have been attempts and efforts, from classical to contemporary eras, to write on the varied aspects of the Qur'ān broadly termed as the Qur'ānic Studies. It is an interesting and exciting academic discipline, spread over a number of branches, to which Muslims and non-Muslims have contributed extensively: some branches include *Tafsīr (Uṣūl-al-Tafsīr)*, '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', translations of the Qur'ān, Qur'ānic hermeneutics, Contextualist approach to Qur'ān, thematic interpretations of Qur'ān, simple introductions to the Qur'ān and personal wrestling(s) with the Sacred Text.

Engaging with the Sacred Text is a substantial category, and one recent substantial addition in this category is Ziauddin Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam* (2011/ 2015). In this essay, a critical assessment of Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān* is presented. The major objective of this essay is three-fold: (i) to identify precisely its subject-matter; (ii) to assess Sardar's approach and the conclusions he draws from his personal engagement with the Divine Text; and (iii) to highlight its merits and demerits, positive and negative aspects, with a critical approach.

**Key Words:** Noble Qur'ān; Qur'ānic Studies; Contextualism; Thematic Study; Ziauddin Sardar; Reading the Qur'ān.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Noble Qur'ān is the Divine Writ and the Sacred Text which forms the basis of Islam, its law, morality, politics, etc. It is "*Guidance*

unto Mankind” (Q. 2: 185)<sup>1</sup> providing guidelines in all domains of life, both individual and collective; and is relevant for all times and places. The scholarship on the Qur’ān (or *Qur’ānic Studies*) is an interesting and exciting academic discipline, spread over a number of branches, to which Muslims and non-Muslims have contributed extensively. Besides the *Tafsīr* literature,<sup>2</sup> ‘*Ulum al-Qur’ān*,<sup>3</sup> translations of the Qur’ān in various languages (especially English)<sup>4</sup>, and other inter-related aspects, many new trends in this field that have emerged during the last few decades ranging from *Qur’ānic* hermeneutics and Contextualist approach to Qur’ān,<sup>5</sup> to thematic interpretations of Qur’ān,<sup>6</sup> Simple introductions to the Qur’ān, and personal wrestling(s) with the Sacred Text.<sup>7</sup> The last category is a substantial one, and one recent exemplary addition in this category is Ziauddin Sardar’s *Reading the Qur’ān: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam* (2011/ 2015).<sup>8</sup> In this essay, an assessment of 2015 edition of Sardar’s *Reading the Qur’ān* is presented by reading as well as reflecting on its theme, objective, and major conclusions. The major objective of this essay is three-fold: (i) to identify precisely its subject-matter; (ii) to highlight Sardar’s approach and the conclusions he draws from his personal engagement with the dynamic Divine Text; and (iii) to assess its merits and demerits, positive and negative aspects, with a critical approach. For this, it is better, and much apt to start with a brief academic introduction of Sardar.

### **Ziauddin Sardar: A Brief Profile**

One of the present-day influential scholar-critic,<sup>9</sup> Pakistani-born Ziauddin Sardar (b. 1951), who grew up in London, is an internationally renowned writer (on Islam and contemporary issues), broadcaster, and cultural critic. Described as one of the ‘leading contemporary Muslim intellectuals’, Sardar is presently the editor of the *Critical Muslim*, London an influential quarterly magazine of “ideas and issues showcasing groundbreaking thinking on Islam and what it means to be a Muslim in a rapidly changing, increasingly interconnected world”.<sup>10</sup> The biographical details on his personal website (<http://ziauddinsardar.com>), mention that Sardar is Chair of the *Muslim Institute* (London), “a learned, fellowship society that promotes knowledge and debate”, and is the Director of the *Centre of Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies*, East West Chicago.<sup>11</sup>

Described as a “critical polymath”, and author (editor and co-editor) of about 50 books, he has written on a number of disciplines ranging

from Islamic studies and futures studies to science policy, literary criticism, information science to cultural (relations, art criticism and critical theory). Sardar's scholarly contribution falls broadly in six areas: Islam, Islamic Science, Futures, Post-modernism and Trans-modernity, identity and multiculturalism and Post-normal Times. He is the author of such influential works as: (i) on the future of Islam, his pioneering works are *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (1979), *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come* (1985), and *Future: All That Matters* (2013); (ii) his seminal works on science in Muslim societies include *Science, Technology and Development in the Muslim World* (1977), *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values and the Environment in Islam and the West* (1982), and *Explorations in Islamic Science* (1989); (iii) on Post-modernism and Orientalism, he wrote *Postmodernism and the Other* (1998), *Orientalism* (1999), and *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader* (2003); (iv) his two volumes of biography and travel, which received wide acclaim, include: *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim* (2004) and *Balti Britain: A Provocative Journey Through Asian Britain* (2008); (v) on Islamic history, his major works are: *Islam: Outline of a classification scheme* (1979), *Muhammad: Aspects of a Biography* (1978), *Hajj Studies* (1979), and *Mecca: The Sacred City* (2014); and (vi) his internationally best seller book is *Why Do People Hate America?* (2002); and his collection of essays and critical writings includes *How Do You Know: Reading Ziauddin Sardar on Islam, Science and Cultural Relations* (2006).<sup>12</sup> Besides, he has also many co-authored works with Merryl Wyn Davie (b. 1948; a Welsh Muslim scholar, writer and broadcaster), and has published in many reputed journals, magazines, and has been a regular contributor (and columnist) with *New Statesman*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Times*, *New Internationalist*, etc. Thus, Sardar's contribution to critical scholarship ranges far and wide.

### **Reflecting on Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān***

In his *Reading the Qur'ān*,<sup>13</sup> Sardar eloquently mentions that he writes and reflects on the Qur'ān as every Muslim; he thinks in Urdu and English; and builds on, and blends, the scholarship of classical to contemporary East and West (produced by Muslims and non-Muslims equally). He also mentions that he has read, among the modern intellectuals, Syed Abul A'la Mawdudi, Amin Ahsan Islahi, and Sayyid

Qutb; he utilizes the translations and commentaries of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, A. J. Arberry, Muhammad Asad, M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, and Tarif Khalidi; and is critical of Alexander Ross and N. J. Dawood.<sup>14</sup>

Besides this, Sardar also states, at the very outset, in the ‘Preface’ and ‘Prologue’ that “*Reading the Qur’ān* grew out of my ‘Blogging the Qur’ān’ project for the British newspaper, *The Guardian*”;<sup>15</sup> wherein he has “attempted to read the Qur’ān to uncover what the text communicates” to him as an ordinary Muslim, and not as a special reader. To put in his own words: “Indeed I have no qualms in admitting that I am not the most qualified person to talk about the Qur’ān, let alone offer my own particular reading of the text and its meaning. I am not a *hafiz* [one who memorizes Qur’ān by heart], an Imām [one who leads the prayers], or an *‘ālim* (a religious scholar trained for years in religious seminary); although on certain bad days, I do imagine myself as a Muslim thinker of some repute, Worse! I don’t even speak Arabic”.<sup>16</sup> That is why Sardar bypasses the classical scholarship on *tafsir*, hadith and *fiqh*, and instead he prefers to write about what the Qur’ān means to him in today’s context; and thus points out that he writes “as Every Muslim”; i.e., “as an individual trying to understand what the Qur’ān means to me in the twenty-first century”, by identifying, combining, and exploring various “methodologies and approaches” to show its relevance in the light of the “needs and requirements in contemporary times” and of “changing circumstances”.<sup>17</sup>

Sardar believes that the Qur’ān is a “dynamic” and inter-connected Text which: *promotes* “thinking and doing” simultaneously; *demands* “to stand up for justice and equity irrespective of circumstances”; *seeks* “change not through revolution but through renovation and evolution of human thought and action”; *urges* “communities constantly to scrutinize themselves and guard against all forms of inhumanity”; and, above all, *polishes* “the souls of individuals so that their humanity can shine” (*italics added*).<sup>18</sup> He also believes that we should approach the Qur’ānic Text with “fresh eyes” to make an effort “to distinguish the possible and potential shades of meaning from the various interpretations that have accumulated over centuries”, and “to read the Qur’ān on its own terms, to engage with its text unencumbered by prejudices and preconceived ideas”, so that “to understand, and encounter its words anew”.<sup>19</sup>

Sardar also believes that the Sacred Text “requires effort and [such an effort] is not easy” and “demands an open mind and a modicum of

effort”. Though, it “does not provide us with ready-made answers”, but it does guide us “towards a fresh understanding and appreciation of our eternal ethical and moral dilemmas and what it means to be human”.<sup>20</sup> Sardar believes in the thesis, and applies the same in this work as well, that “the Qur’ān has to be interpreted from epoch to epoch, generation to generation”; and the “natural corollary of this thesis”, for Sardar, “is that it is legitimate for Muslims to reject, enhance, go beyond and differ significantly from the interpretations of earlier times”.<sup>21</sup>

Adopting this approach, *Reading the Qur’ān* is divided into four parts; viz. Overview; By Way of Tradition; Themes and Concepts; and Contemporary Issues, and includes, among others, a Preface, Prologue, and Epilogue. ‘Part One’ provides an overview, discussing the style, nature and structure of the Qur’ān, how the Qur’ān has been read and interpreted conventionally, problems and strengths of translations, and the burning question: *who has the authority to interpret the Qur’ān?* In other words, in this introductory part, Sardar provides an autobiographical note of his Islamic upbringing and learning to read the Qur’ān. In the second part, “By Way of Tradition”, commentary on first two chapters of Qur’ān *Surah al-Fātiḥah* and *al-Baqarah* is provided. Among these two chapters, the first is “the summary of the Qur’ān”, “*Umm al-Kitāb*: ‘Mother of the Book’;...[and] summation of God’s message to mankind, summary of the essence of the whole, the source from which all that follows flows”.<sup>22</sup> The second is the longest chapter in the Qur’ān which provides “a compendium, or précis, of the themes and concepts of Qur’ān teachings” ranging from basic beliefs, fundamental Islamic practices, to basic legal injunctions related to various aspects of human life individual and collective, which in fact “serves as a précis of the Qur’ān as a whole”, dealing with “topics which cover the entire gamut”.<sup>23</sup> It is on these bases that Sardar chose these two chapters as “the most direct way to establish a foundation for understanding the style and import of the Qur’ān as a whole”.<sup>24</sup> And this interpretation, as well as categorization, is Sardar’s own “interpretation”, which he has acquired through the study of Qur’ān, the “translations” and commentaries he consulted.<sup>25</sup> In this part, thus Sardar attempts “to engage directly with the Qur’ān” and to “search beyond the impasse of an idealized but unrealistic understanding and discover how the Sacred Text speaks to the pressing concerns” of the present times, “and the predicaments of the world” (the author lives in).<sup>26</sup> He thus looks at diverse themes such as ‘Attributes of God’ and ‘The Straight Path’ in *Al-Fātiḥah* in the light of verses I: 1-4 and 1: 5-7, respectively;<sup>27</sup> and as many as nineteen themes from *Surah al-*

*Baqarah*, which include: The Qur'ān and Doubt, The Hypocrites, Paradise, Fall and Evil, Children of Israel, A 'Middle Community', Virtuous People, Law of Equity, War and Peace, *Hajj*, Apostasy and Migration, Marriage and Divorce, Qualities of Leadership, Majesty of God and Freedom of Religion, Arguing with God, Charity and Usury, Witness, and Prayer. These 19 themes are taken from these groups of verses, respectively: II: 1-7, 8-20, 21-29, 30-39, 255-57, 258-60, 261-81, and 282-86.<sup>28</sup> Sardar opens each section by quoting selections from the first two chapters of the Qur'ān thus an attempt at a thematic study of Qur'ān, and not the traditional way of verse-by-verse, or 'atomistic', translation and interpretation. In the translations of these two chapters of the Qur'ān, Sardar has utilized and consulted six translations namely of Arberry, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, Asad, Haleem, and Khalidi simultaneously, which made him obvious "the same words rendered differently by different translators", and thus he realized "the significance of these differences". Sardar here presents to the reader "with the sense" he derives "from reading these translations together".<sup>29</sup>

A reading of these two chapters brings Sardar to conclude that both these chapters are a "summation and overview" of the whole Qur'ān, and "they communicate the essential message, illustrate the extraordinary nature of the text and the special character of the style". Indeed *Al-Baqarah* introduces and covers, he continues, "the gamut of the themes, injunctions and principles" that he highlights and describes in the coming parts, whether themes, concepts, or contemporary issues/ topics.<sup>30</sup> Sardar reads the Sacred Text which he believes can be, and is, read at different levels 'to tease out contextual and deeper meaning, to gain guidance for contemporary problems'; and he puts it in these words:

The Qur'ān can be read on various levels. It can simply be an act of worship and devotion: as *al-Fātiḥah* is read during daily prayers, or the verse of the Throne [*Āyat al-Kursi*, Q. II: 255] is used in devotional recitation. It can be read for religious guidance: to discover the articles of faith and importance of performing certain obligatory acts of Islam such as *zakāt*, *hajj*, and fasting. Moreover, the Qur'ān can be read, as we have been trying to read it, to tease out contextual and deeper meaning, to gain guidance for contemporary problems, and to think with. ...And, of course, as with all religious texts ... it can be studied as a scholarly endeavor, which requires some training, expertise and considerable study. What one takes from the text depends on how one reads, the purpose and effort invested in engaging with the Qur'ān.<sup>31</sup>

By looking at the noble Qur'ān as a whole, an integrated Text and

reflecting on the principal technique of ‘context’ and ‘contextualization’ of this Text the major ‘*Themes and Concepts*’, explored in Part III, range from Prophets and Revelation, Time and History, Truth and Plurality, Humanity and Diversity, Individual and Community, to Reason and Knowledge, Crime and Punishment, Rights and Duties, Nature and Environment, Ethics and Morality, and Reading and Writing. These are the themes, in Sardar’s assertion, not normally addressed individually in conventional commentaries.

In many ways Sardar is correct, as when we look at the contents of the works on the thematic study of the Qur’ān,<sup>32</sup> like Fazlur Rahman, Abdel Haleem, Abdur Raheem Kidwai, etc., what becomes evident is that they highlight as their titles clearly reveal different kinds of concepts, terms, themes, and teachings of the Qur’ān. A passing look at the titles of these works on the ‘thematic’ study of the Qur’ān, gives an impression that they (collectively) highlight major themes or basic terms, some essential teachings or main/ key concepts, etc. altogether. It also gives the impression that it depends on the author’s choice and the expertise, as well as on the circumstances and requirements (or more specifically on the need of the hour) which topics (terms, concepts, and themes) he selects, prefers, and highlights and which not.

For instance, Fazlur Rahman’s *Major Themes of the Qur’ān* focusing on the concepts of God, Man (as individual and his role in society), Nature, Prophethood and Revelation, Eschatology, Satan and Evil explores the theological, moral and social teachings and principles of Islam, by engaging in a systematic study of the Sacred Text according to specific themes, instead of individual verses. The purpose for writing this book is highly noteworthy: the “extensive Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship on Qur’ān”, in Rahman’s opinion, especially the “innumerable Muslim commentaries”, which follows the style of verse-by-verse interpretation the ‘atomistic’ approach does not yield an effective *weltanschauung* and “insight into the cohesive outlook on the universe and life which the Qur’ān undoubtedly possesses”. So, by following a “synthetic exposition” and thematic approach, he authored “an introduction to major themes of the Qur’ān” for giving the reader “a genuine taste of the Qur’ān”.<sup>33</sup>

Abdul Haleem’s *Understanding the Qur’ān: Themes and Styles* discusses in an easy-to-understand manner and providing the reader with useful insights some major themes of the Qur’ān that are pertinent to modern debates on Qur’ānic interpretation, like: The Qur’ān; *Al-Fātiḥah*: The Opening of the Qur’ān; Water in the Qur’ān; Marriage and Divorce;

War and Peace in the Qur'ān; Tolerance in Islam; Life and Beyond; Paradise in the Qur'ān; The Fate, Divine and Human, in the Qur'ān; Adam and Eve, and The Story of Joseph in the Qur'ān and the Bible; The Qur'ān Explains Itself: *Surat al-Rahmān*, and Dynamic Style. It is “intended to help the general reader, and also the scholar, to understand the Qur'ān by combining a number of approaches: thematic, stylistic and comparative”; because such kind of approach “is the only approach that can give a balanced view of what the Qur'ān says on any given topic”.<sup>34</sup> Kidwai's *The Qur'ān: Essential Teachings* mainly deals, in a lucid and coherent manner, with the articles of faith, basic Islamic Pillars, and with social ethics. Addressed to “the English-speaking reading public interested in grasping the meaning and message of the Qur'ān”, Kidwai's work is “intended to help readers get an idea of the Qur'ānic worldview”: and thus covers these concepts and themes: Almighty Allah, Allah's Messengers, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), Life and Afterlife, the Qur'ān, *Al-Ghayb* (the Unseen), Creation, Mankind, Prayer (*Ṣalāh*), Fasting, Charity (*Ṣadaqah* and *Zakāt*), Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), Believers, the Straight Way, Man's Obligations towards his fellow human beings, Treating Parents, Children, Husbands/Wives, Good Social Behaviour, and making Supplications to Allah (*Duā*). In brief, it is “intended to help readers get an idea of the Qur'ānic worldview” and thus contains and covers topics on the articles of Islamic faith, God-man relationship, religious duties, and the Islamic value system.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, having a look on the themes and contents comparatively, Sardar's assertion seems more than justified that his selection of themes is unique and that these are the themes not normally addressed individually in conventional commentaries.

Similarly, in part IV, ‘*Contemporary Issues*’, the issues and topics highlighted are: the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law), Power and Politics, Polygamy and Domestic Violence, Sex and Society, Homosexuality, the Veil, Freedom of Expression, Suicide (and suicide bombing), Science and Technology, Evolution, and Art, Music, and Imagination. He has done this by bringing together verses from various parts of Qur'ān, to explore “the position of the Qur'ān and its possible potential meaning in relation to some of the pressing issues of our time”.<sup>36</sup> Parts I—III, each, are preceded by a brief Introduction as well.

“Every Muslim can reel”, roll, and read out, as Sardar puts very eloquently and articulately in the initial pages, under the heading ‘The Qur'ān and Me’,<sup>37</sup> “a string of commonly held attributes about the Qur'ān”; such as: It is Divine, Eternal, Timeless, Unique, Perfect, a Literary Miracle, and

in précis, the Final Word of God. Yet “they forget” and overlook, Sardar prompts, “an obvious” and multi-dimensional fact: Sacred Texts, by their very nature, are “complex, multi-layered, allegorical, metaphorical, and an embodiment of pluralistic meanings. Divine Text does not yield divine meaning: the meaning attributed to it can only be the product of human understanding. A timeless book has meaning only in time. It can only speak to us in our own time and circumstances. Our understanding of the ‘Final Word of God’ cannot be final. It can only be transitory and limited by our own abilities and understanding”. Forgetting such undeniable fact underlines, Sardar continues to accentuate, that the “struggle to understand and interpret Scripture is perpetual”; because the “Qur’ān does not [and cannot] change”, but evidently the “potential” of thought and action of human life, and the “circumstances” and multifaceted “conditions” one faces, do change for they are “ever changing”, and always in move, movement, and modification.<sup>38</sup>

*Reading the Qur’ān*, in this approach and on these criteria (standards and yardsticks), leads Sardar to conclude that the “Qur’ān is a dynamic, interconnected text” that “does not provide a static [standing and stagnant] view of society; but actively encourages change, evolution, progress, and asks us constantly to adjust to change”. It also urges “to discover the underlying dynamics of the Qur’ān”, by connecting “one segment of the text to the next, and many other segments throughout the Sacred Text”. As an ‘eternal’ and ‘religious text’, it is “a source of guidance for Muslims everywhere at all times”, inviting them “not to look backward but to see ahead”, to the future, so that “to change individual and social behaviour and transform society things that can only be accomplished in the future”. Looking at this Text with afresh, anew, and “with new determination”, leads one to realise, in Sardar’s lexis, that it is “not a one-dimensional, reductive act” but is “a process, involving synthesis, looking for inter-connections, discovering context, wrestling with contradictions, and asking complex questions” and above all, as an “eternal text”, which by definition, “is open to all methods of reading”.<sup>39</sup>

### **Reception of, and reviews on, *Reading the Qur’ān*: Assessing the assessment**

There have been a number of reviews, both praise-worthy as well as critical, on Sardar’s work,<sup>40</sup> which shows both the reception as well as reaction of the readers and reviewers. Besides these reviews, there

is only one essay by Steven D. Ealy (Senior Fellow, Liberty Fund Inc., USA) which engages Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān*.<sup>41</sup> Here, in this section, an assessment based on these reviews (and excerpts from them) is presented, so that to get an idea of what Sardar writes and how it has been received and perceived.

In his detailed critical review, Abdur Raheem Kidwai (Professor of English at *Aligarh Muslim University*, India) and a frequent reviewer and writer on Qur'ān translations and works on Qur'ānic Studies published in the quarterly journal, *The Muslim World Book Review (MWBR)*,<sup>42</sup> is of the opinion that Sardar's book "is highly ambitious in its conception, seeking to establish the relevance of the Qur'ān, ..., in the face of numerous challenges and concerns of our times".<sup>43</sup> For Kidwai, "Sardar's critique of the English translations of the Qur'ān is on the whole somewhat balanced and insightful", and his "comments" and criticism on Alexander Ross, N. J. Dawood and his "disapproval of large scale revision in the posthumous edition of Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali...by Saudi Arabia are well substantiated and perceptive".<sup>44</sup> His translation and interpretation of *Surah al Fātiḥah* and *al-Baqarah*, in part II comprising of "neat thematic divisions" goes "a long way in familiarizing the readers with the meaning and message of the Qur'ān as elucidated by him".<sup>45</sup> His "exposition of major Qur'ānic themes and concepts" is no doubt noteworthy, but some of his views—for example, regarding Prophet's personality simply as a "human being", his views on religious pluralism, *ḥudūd* and crime and punishment, etc.<sup>46</sup> are "patently unconventional, even outrageous".<sup>47</sup>

However, Kidwai lauds Sardar for his valuable contribution in bringing about a "universal, eternal message of the Qur'ān" through elaboration of themes like "Qur'ānic 'Theology of Ecology',<sup>48</sup> exhorting that all God's creations be treated with respect and reverence", and he finds topics/ themes like 'Ethics and Morality'<sup>49</sup> by Sardar "full of insights", in which he elucidates the concepts of "charity, gratitude, moderation, and humility".<sup>50</sup> In Kidwai's assessment, Sardar's examination of some contemporary issues in the light of his (own/ personal) reading of the Qur'ān is "blatantly discordant with the consensus view of the Muslim community down the ages ... and some of his conclusions are even downright scandalous". Examples, highlighted by Kidwai, in this regard are: Sardar's interpretation of *Sharī'ah*; institution of Caliphate; his interpretation of *Q. IV: 34* as "one of the problematic verses of the Qur'ān," his assertions about *Q. XXIV:31* and *XXIV: 60*; on gays, lesbians and homosexuality; *ḥijāb*; freedom of expression; music;<sup>51</sup> and many

other issues.<sup>52</sup> However, Sardar's stance views and interpretations on suicide and abhorrence of suicide bombings,<sup>53</sup> against the backdrop of the current debate on this issue, are "remarkably faithful to the original Islamic belief about the sanctity and sacredness of life" and are equally valid, for such "monstrous deed has no sanction in Islam".<sup>54</sup> However, his overall assessment of Sardar's book is that it is a "tendentious work which presents a garbled and twisted understanding of the Qur'ān which will certainly offend Muslim readers", as Sardar "has not spared anyone: God's scheme of things, the Prophet (ﷺ) as a role model, the *Shari'āh*, ..., and *fiqh*. Worse, he has the cheek to do so without having any grounding in the *tafsīr* scholarship and without any knowledge of Arabic",<sup>55</sup> which Sardar has confessed in the beginning of his work, and was quoted above in this essay as well.<sup>56</sup>

Malise Ruthven (an Anglo-Irish writer, academic and journalist; and a specialist of religion, Islamic affairs, and the Middle East)<sup>57</sup> is of the opinion that Sardar believes that "the Qur'ān is above all an 'open' book, a spiritual and moral resource that, properly understood, provides Muslims with useful guidance through the complexities of modern life". For Ruthven, Sardar writes "as 'Every Muslim' with a deep love" for the sacred Text, and "rises to this challenge, wrestling with problematic passages that would seem to run counter to his generally progressive and enlightened outlook". Sardar is "to be commended", in Ruthven's suggestion, "for opening the doors of a text" which "understood comprehensively, celebrates the divine in nature and emphasizes social justice, human responsibility and the wholehearted pursuit of knowledge". Ruthven also lauds Sardar for his "efforts to dispose of problematic issues such as intolerance and gender inequality", even though these efforts "will not satisfy everyone". However, it is pertinent to mention that Ruthven censures Sardar for ignoring the "recent revisionist views" on the Qur'ān's origins: "Sardar does not engage with recent revisionist views of early Islamic history suggesting that the Qur'ān may have originated in the strophic hymns of Aramaic-speaking Christians in Palestine rather than Arabia".<sup>58</sup>

In her review in *The Independent*, Mona Siddiqui (Professor of Islamic Studies at *Glasgow University*)<sup>59</sup> regards Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān* as a book that "seemingly promises much at a scholarly level" with a "discursive and conversational" style, thus "inviting the reader to walk and talk with Sardar on his personal journey through the Qur'ān, an exploration of how the text speaks to him", or by that way to any

person, as a common Muslim. Professor Siddiqui very briefly puts forth the overall theme of the four parts, in which Sardar's work is divided, which "are fairly short and reflect a varied stylistic mix of the personal, the anecdotal, the occasional musing on the philosophical and the simply descriptive", wherein one finds "a more inclusive, moral and pluralistic meaning in the Qur'ān". In Siddiqui's assessment,

"The first is an overview in which Sardar provides an autobiographical note of his Islamic upbringing and learning to read the Qur'ān. ... The second part looks at diverse themes. ... Sardar opens each section by quoting selections from the first two chapters of the Qur'ān [*Surah al-Fātiḥah* and *al-Baqarah*]. In part three, Sardar aims to reconnect more timeless themes such as community and prophecy to contemporary times by looking at the Qur'ān as a whole. In the final part, 'Contemporary Topics', he looks at a wide range of more controversial topics including the Veil, Homosexuality, Assisted Suicide and Evolution".<sup>60</sup>

However, this is only one side of the coin; the other side shows that Siddiqui is highly critical of Sardar's work on many points; she says: (i) "Sardar is wrong to assume that his approach, stressing the historical context, makes 'his reading different from others'"; (ii) "in reading the Qur'ān without the 'weight of the tradition' where 'great jurists supposedly gave unalterable opinions and interpretations', Sardar misunderstands the purpose of much of the Muslim intellectual tradition. The writings of jurists within their own scholarly traditions were always tentative, discursive, allowing for debate and human vulnerability"; and (iii) "The insistence on individual engagement which Sardar advocates may sound laudable but also runs the risk of even more fundamentalist and extreme interpretations of the Qur'ān".<sup>61</sup>

In this context keeping both positive and especially (above mentioned) negative aspects in mind Siddiqui is of the opinion that "Sardar's book will appeal to a certain intelligentsia", who think and perceive things in line with Sardar's thinking, and thus she points out its strengths and weaknesses briefly as: "The strength of this book is that it is accessible to a wide audience; its weakness is that it also tries to maintain a scholarly undertone where the conclusions often sound a little hackneyed ... [as] in the section on [woman as] witness, ... homosexuality, ..., assisted suicide,..."<sup>62</sup>

Faizur Rahman (general secretary of the Chennai-based Forum for the *Promotion of Moderate Thought in Islam*) is of the opinion that Sardar's work is, in post-9/11 scenario, is a "prescription for anyone

willing to embark on an interpretive journey with Ziauddin Sardar into the heart of the locus classicus of Islam, to find out what control it exercises over the Muslim mind”. Lauding Sardar on highlighting various aspects, and on smashing the misogynist, orthodox, and other such conservative readings and interpretations, Rahman sums up his assessment of this work in these words: “In short, *Reading the Qur’ān* is an intrepid attempt to force open the doors of *ijtihād* (independent thinking) which were slammed shut centuries ago by the conservative Muslim clergy. It is a read for anyone interested in liberating Islam from the ‘weight of tradition and classical commentaries’ that seek to discourage Muslims from opening their minds to new knowledge”.<sup>63</sup>

In his critical review, Maqbool Ahmed Siraj (in *Islamic Voice*, India) evaluates critically Sardar’s work in these words: “*Reading the Qur’ān* is a systematic dissection of the contemporary Muslim thought as well as the classical interpretations and a bold attempt to prepare the template for blending the ideals, ideas and ideologies that rule the current human mind with Qur’ānic teachings. Sardar rubbishes with ease pet passions of leading Islamic movements and trashes much of the mumbo-jumbo that has got associated with the text in pursuit of transforming the Scripture from a book of guidance to Code of Law, Constitution et al.” However, Siraj does not stop appreciating what Sardar’s overall contribution through this book. He writes: “Written in impeccable English, Sardar ... has done a commendable job in demolishing several myths surrounding the Holy Qur’ān owing to the absence of intellectuals who could contextualize the teachings”.<sup>64</sup>

Nidhal Guessoum (an astrophysicist and Professor of Physics at *American University of Sharjah*, and the author of *Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*),<sup>65</sup> in his assessment of Sardar’s work, calls him a “progressive” thinker, and makes his opinions based on a reading of first two parts of Sardar’s work.<sup>66</sup> From the reading of these chapters, Guessoum notes the following interesting ideas: (i) Sardar adopts a highly personal style, oftentimes it is even autobiographical in presenting his own relation to the Book, as is evident from the chapter ‘The Qur’ān and Me’; (ii) He insists on the need to approach the Text with fresh eyes, both by Muslims and non-Muslims, and stresses the need for Muslims to perform a personal reading and understanding of the Book, keeping “authority” at arm’s length; (iii) he insists that every commentary of the Qur’ān (produced from classical to contemporary eras) must be read as a subjective and ideological

interpretation; (iv) the most interesting chapter, in first two parts, is 'Limits of Translations', where Sardar explicitly shows a number of cases where the translation of the Qur'ān was used for reprehensible ideological purposes (like N. J. Dawood and Abdullah Yusuf Ali).<sup>67</sup>

From a number of other reviews and endorsements, the excerpts of which are available on Publishers' website, it becomes evident that Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān* "performs the essential democratic function of suggesting that the Qur'ān can and indeed ought to be read intelligently by the lay Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and effectively debunks the myth that the sacred book of Islam is only accessible through the medium of Arabic". It makes not only "many timely and necessary points", but is also "highly readable", as it is "punctuated by beautiful metaphors ... and witty, sometimes even risqué comments".<sup>68</sup>

As per the review in *Booklist*, Sardar's passionate approach in this work will "appeal to many open-minded readers of other faiths and those generally interested in spirituality". *Islamic Horizons* assesses this book in these words: "Sardar explores the Qur'ān from a variety of perspectives, drawing fresh and contemporary lessons from the Sacred Text." For *Library Journal*, Sardar's work is a "helpful book for opening the minds of spiritually engaged readers interested in the place of holy books in today's world".<sup>69</sup>

For Karen Armstrong (author of *A History of God* and *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*), Sardar's book is a "lucid, scholarly and exciting book", which "takes the reader on a spiritual and intellectual journey that is essential for Muslim and non-Muslim alike and addresses some of the most pressing needs of our time". For Professor Farid Esack (*University of Johannesburg*, South Africa), Ziauddin Sardar's book is "the most exciting book on the Qur'ān in recent years; it is a poignant and intimate work on Islam's central text. Sardar approaches the Qur'ān both as a lay believer, like the majority of Muslims, and an astute scholar of Islam ... [making it] a wonderfully intelligent reading of a complex text within a contemporary context. ... By providing the Qur'ān with a dynamic and empathetic voice on issues such as domestic violence, suicide, evolution, sex and sexuality, art, politics and power, Sardar ensures the Qur'ān remains a warm, relevant and vibrant force within contemporary Muslim discourse". And for Professor Bruce Lawrence (Duke University), "If one could pick just one book to connect the Muslim past with its complex present and future potential, *Reading the Qur'ān* would be that book".<sup>70</sup>

In my previous writings on Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān*, I

concluded that though one cannot swallow easily all what Sardar reads and understands from Sacred Text, but, what is undeniable is that, it is a work to be read, re-read and worthy to reflect by every common Muslim, especially youngsters, and by those who have little or no knowledge of Arabic.<sup>71</sup>

### **Sardar's interpretation in conformity with the conventional thinking: Some examples**

Placed below are some excerpts from various sections / topics, so that to give a clear idea of what Sardar believes, how he interprets the Qur'ān and things Qur'ānic, in the second decade of third millennium. The excerpts related to such concepts and topics like Life, *Taqwā* (God-consciousness), *ʿIlm* (Knowledge), History, Ethics/Morality, *Ijtihād*, *Shūrā*, and Pluralism are provided first, because these are the topics, the interpretations of which, by Sardar, are in harmony and congruency with the conventional thinking, and has been appreciated by the reviewers<sup>72</sup> as well. This is followed by some excerpts on some hotly/variedly debated topics and on which Sardar holds an opinion that is 'unconventional'. These include: *Sharīʿah*, Prophet-hood, Caliphate, *hudūd*/crime and punishment, *hijāb*, freedom of expression, his interpretations and assertions about music, gays, lesbians and homosexuality, and many other such 'crucial' and 'critical' issues. On the interpretation of these issues, Sardar's book has been labeled and branded as a "tendentious work which presents a garbled and twisted understanding of the Qur'ān which will certainly offend Muslim readers".<sup>73</sup>

### **LIFE**

Sardar believes that "Life is one of the most precious gifts of God"; it is "sacrosanct", and Qur'ān emphasizes "overall importance of preserving and conserving life" as in Q. V: 32.<sup>74</sup> Life, of this world, is a journey, and "merely an amusement and a diversion" (Q. XXIX: 64); and in this journey we come across "many wonders that delight us as well as many sights that upset us"; we face happiness and grief, bliss and agony, pleasure and pain. In this life we face, as Sardar compares it, like a play, "twists and turns" which comes as a test from God.<sup>75</sup> Sardar also believes, as do every Muslim, that this life "is not ours. It does not belong to us. It is not our property or possession. ... Rather it is an *amānat*, a trust from God. We are merely trustees of our lives. We

have the responsibility of looking after this trust". Moreover, life is not meaningless, but has purpose (*Q.* XXIII: 115). The purpose of life is, among others, "to seek justice and equity, to pursue knowledge and virtue, [and] to worship God".<sup>76</sup> He thus finds the rationale of committing suicide as a sin, as a violation of this trust, and as a denying of life's purpose as well.

"We cannot take our own life, simply because it is not ours to take. We have no choice. To commit suicide would be to violate the trust. It would be an act of monumental ungratefulness. It would be taking something that belongs to God. It would not be just be killing oneself but like killing all of humanity. Hence, the unambiguous, categorical instruction in the Qur'ān: '*Do not contribute to your destruction with your own hands*' (*Q.* II: 195). ... To commit suicide is to deny that life *your* life however meaningless it may appear. It is to fringe the right of the true author of life, who is the only One who can write an ending for your life. It is an act of usurpation, a vain attempt to acquire the attributes of God, this is why when you face God, after committing suicide, '*He will say: Begone! Do not speak to Me*' (*Q.* XXIII: 108)".<sup>77</sup>

This, for Sardar, is one of the rationales for declaring 'suicide bombing' as an un-Islamic practice: "To consider suicide bombing as a military tactic, or as a way of fighting, is to violate everything that the Qur'ān and Islam stand for".<sup>78</sup>

### **TAQWĀ**

In Sardar's interpretation, *Taqwā* (God-consciousness), which is central concept of Islam is "consciousness, an awareness of the certainty, reality, and presence of God that is experienced intellectually, spiritually, [and] emotionally"; it is the "basis of faith, the certainty on which belief is founded"; it is "the moment of insight"; and is the "reasoning consciousness", which leads to "belief in 'the unseen' [*al-ghayb*] that which is beyond our physical and material perceptions".<sup>79</sup> Besides having the "personal dimension" of strengthening man-God relationship through prayers and devotion, it is the concept of *Taqwā* that "relates individuals to society".<sup>80</sup> On this aspect of *taqwā*, he says:

"Most of the Muslims think that *taqwā* is acquired through prayer

and devotion, reading the Qur'ān and engaging in extra worship (*dhikr*, remembering God), in the middle of the night. Now, of course, *taqwā* has this personal dimension, which is about strengthening our relationship to God. But I think *taqwā* must also manifest itself through our human relationships, our relations with all of God's creations. ... [for] *taqwā* is a sign of how you treat those who are less fortunate than you, how loving and caring you are, how you display your humility and respect, how you interact with your environment, [and] how you participate in building a viable and dynamic community. And it is not something that you acquire or advertise; it is something that is recognized in you by others, the community and society".<sup>81</sup>

### ***'ILM***

*'Ilm*, the Qur'ānic word for Knowledge, signifies that "knowledge is a form of remembering God... [and thus] the pursuit of knowledge becomes a form of worship which is accorded special status in the Qur'ān". But for Sardar, the "Conventional types of worship does not necessarily make the worshipper intelligent, clever or wise", but "knowledge can increase understanding, comprehension, and lead to wisdom".<sup>82</sup> The "emphasis on knowledge in the Qur'ān" (as, for example, in *Q.* X: 5; XIII: 3; XXIX: 20; XXXIX: 9),<sup>83</sup> "is an eye-opening: again and again, we are urged to study nature, explore the cosmos, measure and calculate, discover the situation and histories of other nations, travel the earth in search of knowledge, learning and wisdom".<sup>84</sup> Also, he emphasizes that Qur'ān (in *Q.* XXXIX: 9) says, "*how can those who know be equal to those who do not know?*" And on this, he deduces that:

"The Qur'ān seeks to establish a society of 'those who know', a knowledge society, [and] a society where reason and reflection, thought and learning, are not only valued but grounded in everyday reality. The situation in the Muslim world today, where science and learning are conspicuous by their almost total absence, where irrationality and fanaticism are the norm, indicates just how far many Muslims have deviated from the teachings of the Qur'ān".<sup>85</sup>

### ***HISTORY***

On the topic of "Time and History",<sup>86</sup> Sardar is of the opinion that

the “themes of time, the dynamics of change, and processes and patterns of history are interwoven throughout the Qur’ān”.<sup>87</sup> *Al-‘Aṣr*, as in *Sūrah al-‘Aṣr* (Q. 103),<sup>88</sup> which in every day parlance is translated as “afternoon” (as in the ‘*Aṣr* Prayer), is a term that embodies the “notion of movement”.<sup>89</sup> The Qur’ān asks the human being again and again to go through the world with open eyes and diligent hearts. “History in the Qur’ān”, in this context, thus “provides narratives of caution, seminal lessons in hubris and folly”; serving “as building blocks for the future”.<sup>90</sup> No doubt, the “Qur’ān gives particular consideration to history and is full of historical passages”; “the Qur’ān uses history as a guide to the pitfalls of the future” and the emphasis is always “on the lessons that can be drawn from the historical narrative”, however, for Sardar, “it is not history as we know it: chronological, detailed analysis of events and personalities, a comprehensive narrative of good and bad old days. Rather the Qur’ān uses history as a guide to the pitfalls of the future. The emphasis is always on the lessons that can be drawn from the historical narrative”.<sup>91</sup> He supports his viewpoint by the opening verses *Sūrah al-Fajr* (Q. LXXXIX: 6-10)<sup>92</sup>: “This *sūrah* goes on to contrast history with human nature. The main theme is how oppression, greed and love of wealth destroy people and places, cultures and civilizations, converting their glory and greatness to decay and destruction”.<sup>93</sup>

He further adds that the noble Qur’ān presents history as a “motor of change”, which leads “either to progress or to decay”. In Qur’ānic terms, thus progress is “not based on wealth, technology or splendor. Civilizations rise and fall; cultures flourish and decay; ebb and flow in power are transitory fluctuations. All superpowers and technological civilizations have allotted periods: *‘there is an appointed term for every community, and when it is reached they can neither delay nor hasten it, even for a moment’* (Q. X: 49). What matters in the final analysis is not might, power, the affluence of material means or even the accumulation of knowledge, but right conduct”.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, about ethics to which he devotes a full chapter, entitled as “Ethics and Morality”<sup>95</sup> Sardar mentions that the Qur’ān is the source of Islamic ethics, yet it is not a book on Islamic ethics. However, it is true that a “book of guidance is ultimately a book about ethics and morality. So it should not surprise us to discover that the Qur’ān contains numerous verses and passages about moral and ethical concerns”.<sup>96</sup>

Also, for Sardar, the basis of *Ijtihād* is the Qur’ānic verses of *Sūrah Al-‘Ankabūt* (Q. XXIX: 69), which states: “*But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard [Jahadu] for Our cause:*

*God is with those who do good*". For him, who defines *Ijtihād* as the "systematic original thinking, based on the Qur'anic injunctions to think and reason", traces its origins from *Q. II: 164*, "those who use their minds".<sup>97</sup> Similarly, regarding *Shūrā*, Sardar is of the opinion that "the only term with any specific political connotation that appears in the Sacred Text is 'shūrā' or consultation: "consultation in running the affairs of the community" (as in *Q. III: 159*). For him, it is a paramount principle in all affairs of the state which gives "legitimacy to political authority", as *Q. IV: 59*, which states: "You who believe, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you".<sup>98</sup>

Writing on "Truth and Plurality",<sup>99</sup> Sardar initiates in this way: "The *plurality of religion* is a constant and recurring theme in the Qur'ān. Far from adopting a hostile attitude to other religions, the Qur'ān promotes acceptance of *religious plurality* and treats other religions with equality (*italics added*).<sup>100</sup> The "Qur'ān envisages", Sardar emphasizes by way of conclusion, "a religiously plural world, where different communities share different aspects of the Divine Truth".<sup>101</sup> He also highlights that the "Qur'ān's pragmatic approach to religious pluralism is really quite amazing", as "Believers of all faiths, and none, are urged to recognize that religious differences exist and will continue to exist. They are asked to put their differences aside and collaborate with each other", and as *Q. III: 64* elucidates: "Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all'".<sup>102</sup>

### **Sardar's 'unconventional' interpretation regarding 'controversial' issues: Some examples**

Though the above examples show that Sardar interprets these terms and concepts in 'conformity' with the traditional/conventional thinking, however, there are certain themes and issues which, being both contemporary and controversial as well, show his 'unconventional' interpretations and thus unacceptable to the traditionalist Muslim majority. Below are provided some examples of such kind of issues, some of which include: *Shari'ah*, institution of Caliphate, veil/*hijāb*, freedom of expression, and homosexuality. These are the issues which Sardar examines in the light of his reading the Qur'ān but are, as Kidwai puts it, "blatantly discordant with the consensus view of the Muslim community down the ages" and the conclusions Sardar draws from his understanding and interpretation are "even downright scandalous".<sup>103</sup>

**SHARĪ'ĀH**

For Sardar, as he defines and interprets in a chapter on ‘*The Sharī’ah*’,<sup>104</sup> “strictly speaking, *Sharī’āh* is not a Qur’ānic concept”, however the word occurs twice in the Qur’ān (Q. V:48 and XLV: 18). Although it literally means “the way”, or “the path of the Qur’ān and the guidance it provides”, the term came into vogue in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, and thus “was socially constructed in history not just as law but also as morality”.<sup>105</sup> For him, what is regarded as Islamic law (*Sharī’āh*) nowadays is “essentially a body of juristic opinion that began to be socially constructed during the early Abbasid period ... [and thus] what is understood as the *Sharī’āh* [in present times] incorporates layer upon layer of classical legal rulings, known as *fiqh*, or jurisprudence”. He thus sweeps as:

So the legal injunctions developed to solve the problems of a bygone era based on the social and cultural circumstances and understanding of a medieval society have come to be seen as the law and morality of Muslim societies for all times! It is hardly surprising then that not much of the *Sharī’āh* has any contemporary relevance and bears little relationship with to what the Qur’ān actually says. This is why wherever the *Sharī’āh* is imposed... it reproduces the conditions of medieval times.<sup>106</sup>

He further argues that “the *Sharī’āh* is almost totally a human product”; it “has been turned into an ‘iron collar’ around the neck of Muslim societies, and keeps them [far away] from moving forward into the twenty-first century”; and has thus “become truncated with history”. What is needed, he suggests, is that the “*Sharī’āh* has to become a vigorous, dynamic work of human reason”.<sup>107</sup>

**CALIPHATE**

For Sardar, the term Caliphate which, in the specific sense of the political institution, does not occur in the Qur’ān is derived from *khalīfah*, which he translates as the “vicegerent”, “trustee” and “trustee of God”.<sup>108</sup> “the second most important concept in the Qur’ān” after *Tawhīd* (as in Q. II: 30: “*And when your Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth’...*”).<sup>109</sup> This term connotes that man “comes as a representative of a higher authority”,<sup>110</sup> however it has “no connotations of a political authority, or political representation, or political organization”,

and therefore, the “conceptual introduction of the term *khalīfah*” has no political connotation, nor is it a political institution.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in a similar tune (as above related to *Sharī‘āh*) in a chapter on “*Power and Politics*”<sup>112</sup> he writes about Caliphate in these words: “As a political theory, I would argue, the Caliphate has no redeeming features, nothing to recommend it. ... Just as the *Sharī‘āh* turned the believer into an empty vessel, so the political theory of Caliphate transformed the citizen of a Muslim state into passive, obedient servants”.<sup>113</sup>

### **HIJĀB/VEIL**

Devoting a full chapter on “The Veil”,<sup>114</sup> Sardar says: The term *hijāb*, occurring eight times in the Sacred Text, literally means “a curtain, partition, or screen”, and in “none of the verses *hijāb* is used in the sense conventionally understood by Muslim societies as a piece of clothing covering the head and entire body; nor indeed he items such as *burqa*’, ... nor *niqāb*,... black *chādor* .. nor the ‘*abayā*... . *Hijāb* is something different all together”.<sup>115</sup> For him, *hijāb* is used (as in *Q. VII: 46-7; LXXXIII: 15; and XLII: 51*) “metaphorically to refer to a separation”.<sup>116</sup> “But the verse particularly associated with the veil, the *hijāb* verses, is XXXIII:53”, which reads as: “*Believers, do not enter the Prophet’s apartment .... When you ask his wives for something, do so from behind a screen*”. Thundering against both the Islamic command and practice of *hijāb*, Sardar dismisses this relevant Qur’ānic verse by saying that it “an exception that is particular, time-bound and distinct from the general rule”.<sup>117</sup> And thus he contextualizes and interprets it as: “In practice, it has led to a vast and generalized injustice to women since it has been used to justify not only the seclusion of women but also a denial of education to women as well as other limitations”.<sup>118</sup> For him, *Q. XXXIII:59*, wherein the term *jalābīb* (sing. *jalbāb*) meaning either the ‘outer garment’, or mantle and cloak, occurs is “*not seclusion from society but specifically going out and about which is the context in which mode of dress is mentioned*” (*italics added*).<sup>119</sup>

On these bases, the conclusions he derives are: (i) the different forms of *hijāb*, “the *niqāb*, the *burqa*’ or the *chādor* derive from the cultural traditions of regions beyond Arabia not anything from the Qur’ān it says”; (ii) there is “no Qur’ānic warrant for *burqa*’s, *chādors*, ‘*abayās* and *niqāb*. There is no legal requirement, sanctioned by the Qur’ān or by the Prophet (ﷺ) that compels Muslim women to wear specific dress,

to hide their faces from public, or to shroud themselves from top to bottom”; and (iii) *Hijāb* is “a private and personal matter for each woman; the choice will no doubt be conditioned by culture, circumstance and history, and the choice of each individual should be respected”.<sup>120</sup>

## HOMOSEXUALITY

Sardar devotes a chapter to “*Sex and Society*” and one to “Homosexuality, in the fourth part/section of his work, under ‘Contemporary Issues’ category.<sup>121</sup> He lays the grounds for the homosexuals (gays and lesbians) on these assumptions: “The term homosexuality does not occur in the Qur’ān. But the Qur’ān does mention ‘*men who have no need of women*’ [or ‘*men who have no sexual desire*’, *Q. XLII: 31*: which is not explicit and clear] who these men are, but we can guess: either they have no sexual desire at all or they desire other men. ... [and thus such men] can be elderly, impotent ... or homosexuals”.<sup>122</sup> He finds “Oblique references to homosexuality” in *Q. XLII: 49-50* (where in mentioned, among others, that ‘*God grants both male and female [offspring] to whoever He wills*’) which, in Sardar’s strange consideration “suggest that a male could have a female sexual orientation and a female could have a male sexual orientation; or at least their sexuality is ambiguous”.<sup>123</sup>

To homosexuality, the other reference occurs in *Q. XXIV: 60*, which states: “*No blame will be attached to elderly women who are not hoping for sex*”. Though this verse has been translated variedly, but for Sardar “the essential message being conveyed here is that these women are not going to bear children and are not interested in sexual intercourse with men. The men could have passed the natural child-bearing age, or they are so old that they have no sexual desires, or they are mystic celibates but the description can apply to *lesbian women*” (*italics added*).<sup>124</sup> He thus finds grounds for his opinion that “homosexuality is a natural God-given dispensation, part of the *fiṭrah* or innate human nature of an individual”<sup>125</sup>; and here he agrees with, and openly confirms it as well, with Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, the author of *Homosexuality in Islam*, who argues that “some human beings simply are homosexuals by disposition rather than by choice”; and also emphasizes that “Whether the ‘cause’ of God’s creation, biological variation, or early childhood experience, homosexuals have no rational choice in their internal disposition to be attracted to same-sex mates”.<sup>126</sup> After presenting such tenuous

and vague grounds for taking gays and lesbians as ‘a natural disposition of God’, Sardar goes a step further, and questions the divine dispensation in these words: “It would be an unjust God who, after having given no choice to the individuals concerned, condemns them for being homosexuals. Indeed such a condemnation would go against all the overwhelming emphasis on justice and equity that we find in the Qur’ān”.<sup>127</sup>

His justification of homosexuality is outrageous and indeed a distorted reading of the Sacred Text as well as of the history: “the widespread and rampant homophobia of Muslim societies cannot be justified either on the basis of Qur’ānic teachings or the example of the Prophet Muhammad [ﷺ]. On the contrary, the Qur’ān portrays homosexuality as a natural disposition and the *Sunnah* is exemplary in its toleration of sexual orientation. The demonization of homosexuality in Muslim history is based largely on fabricated traditions and reconstituted prejudices harbored by most Muslim societies”.<sup>128</sup>

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In a chapter on “*Freedom of Expression*”,<sup>129</sup> Sardar begins with the argument that “Freedom of expression begins with total freedom of belief and conviction” as in *Q. II: 256*.<sup>130</sup> He further argues that “freedom of expression is sacred”, on the basis that Qur’ān asks us “to argue in the ‘best way’ (XXIX: 46) and ‘most courteous way’ (XVI: 125)”.<sup>131</sup> He is also of the opinion that he finds “the whole idea of blasphemy irrelevant to Islam”; and even goes further in his contention when he writes: “God, ‘the Self-Sufficient One’ in His Majesty, is hardly going to be bothered if a few insults are hurled at Him. He can certainly look after himself: ‘the Most Excellent Names belong to Him ... (VII: 180)”.<sup>132</sup>

These are only a few examples, from a long list of crucial topics and critical issues raised and highlighted by Sardar. Besides these, there are some controversial and unconventional arguments put forth in the ‘*Epilogue*’ as well.<sup>133</sup> Some of these arguments are:

1. “We find some *contradictions in the Qur’ān* ... [though] they serve a special purpose”;
2. “Context is everything in the Qur’ān” (*italics added*);<sup>134</sup>
3. “I have offered a *historical reading* of the Qur’ān. ... Without the weight of tradition, I have encountered the Qur’ān anew. ... by largely ignoring the classical commentaries, I discovered that a

- great deal of historic interpretation has taken Muslim societies in the wrong direction” (*italics added*);<sup>135</sup>
4. “In interpreting the Qur’ān, we must differentiate between *legal requirements and moral injunctions*”, for “legal injunctions in the Qur’ān are relatively few; and most of them are quite specific and specifically time-bound” (*italics added*);<sup>136</sup>
  5. “There are legal injunctions in the Qur’ān for example, those relating to crime and punishment and female witnesses that are deeply rooted in context of time of revelation. These legal injunctions made sense within their context; they are specific and not eternal”;<sup>137</sup> and lastly,
  6. “with much determination, ..., we Muslims have to teach ourselves to read and think about the Qur’ān, liberated from the weight of tradition and classical commentaries. ... We need to read and think for ourselves, rather than simply repeat. [Depending entirely on the scholars and scholarship of past] raises traditional scholars above the Sacred Text itself”.<sup>138</sup>

All these above mentioned points/arguments though exceptional are ‘unconventional’ and thus unacceptable to the conventional thought. It is, however, considerable that Sardar highlights those themes and issues in Parts III and IV of his work in the light of the Qur’ān, which are faced by Muslims (in present times) and confronted by humanity at large thus aptly showing the relevance of the Divine Writ in present times, and by that way, for all times. It also brings to the fore the fact that the noble Qur’ān is indeed “*Guidance unto Mankind*” (Q. II: 185), providing guidance on all aspects of life—both individual and collective. It is, therefore, worthy to quote Sardar’s observations on what the message of Qur’ān is all about, and what is nowadays justified on the basis of this Sacred Text.

The Qur’ān emphasizes on justice and equity, truth and plurality, ethics and morality, humanity and diversity, reason and knowledge, rights and duties, and reading and writing [and many such important themes]... are nowhere reflected in the contemporary Muslim world. On the contrary, injustice and inequity, ignorance and illiteracy, oppression and inhumanity seem to be the norms. ...A great deal of what is justified nowadays on the basis of the Qur’ān from autocracy to theocracy, suppression of freedom of expression, obscene accumulation of wealth to gross inequity, oppression of women to the denial of rights of minorities, exclusive

ownership of truth to suicide bombing has no relationship to the Sacred Text whatsoever.<sup>139</sup>

### Conclusion

The above assessment i.e., summary of the major arguments put forth by Sardar in this work and from the views and reviews of various scholars and writers reveals that Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān* has been appreciated as well as criticized. It is appreciable that Sardar writes and reflects on the Qur'ān as ordinary Muslim approaches it as a Muslim living in a situation full of problems, challenges, and issues of diverse nature (related to all of us as humans). His approach and inter-connecting guidelines of this Divine Writ, which was revealed in 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and has effective answers for the problems we face today in this second decade of the third millennium an age of Information Technology, Globalization, and what not.

The arguments, statements, and the excerpts related to different terms, concepts, themes and issues clearly reveal what Sardar believes, and how he interprets the Sacred Text in the present times. Though one cannot absorb and imbibe easily all what Sardar reads and understands from Sacred Text. What is also true is that his approach regarding the crucial and controversial issues like the *Shari'ah* and Caliphate, veil/*hijāb*, freedom of expression, gays, lesbians and homosexuality, music, etc., cannot be accepted and recognized easily by every Muslim for these are the 'unconventional' views which are 'discordant with the consensus view of the Muslim community down the ages', and thus deplorable for the conventional Islamic thinking.

### Notes & References:

1. The phrase "Guidance unto Mankind" (*Huddan Lil-Nass*) is taken from the Qur'ānic verse 185 of *Surah al-Baqarah*, Chapter 2. The English rendering of the verses, in this essay, are taken from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'ān: A New Translation*, Oxford, Oxford World Classics, 2004 & 2005. However, where the verse/ part of a verse occur in a quotation, Sardar's (own) translation, or the translation he has adopted, has been retained.
2. Recent works on the *Tafsir* literature include: Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its Interpreters*, vol. I, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1984; Ghulam Ahmad Hariri, *Tarikh Tafsir wa Mufasirun* [History of the Exegesis and

- the Exegetes], Faisalabad, Pakistan: Kashmir Book Depot, 1999-2000; Feras Hamza, Sajjad Rizvi, and Farhana Mayer, *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries*, vol. I, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010; and Walid Saleh, "Qur'anic Commentaries", in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Editor-in-Chief), *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*, New York, Harper One, 2015, pp. 1645-1658
3. Some of the recent works (in English) on 'Ulum al-Qur'an are: Ahmad Von Denffer, *'Ulum al-Qur'an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1983); Abu Ammar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an* (Birmingham, UK: Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999); Recep Dogan, *Usul al-Tafsir: The Sciences and Methodology of the Qur'an* (Clifton, NJ: Tughra Books, 2014); and Israr Ahmad Khan, *Qur'anic Studies: An Introduction* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Maven International Kuala Lumpur, 2016)
  4. On English translations of the Qur'an, see for example, Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Bibliography of the Translations of the Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an into English, 1649-2002, A Critical Study*, Riyadh, King Fahd Qur'an Printing Complex, 2007; *Idem.*, *Translating the Untranslatable: A Critical Guide to 60 Translations of the Qur'an*, New Delhi, Sarup Books, 2011.
  5. On Qur'anic hermeneutics/ Contextualist approach to Qur'an, see, Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Chicago, Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980; Suha Taji-Farouki (Ed.), *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004; *Idem.*, *The Qur'an and its Readers Worldwide*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015; Jane D. McAuliffe (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006; Andrew Rippin (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, UK, Wiley-Blackwell, 2006/ 2009; Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, London, Routledge, 2013.
  6. On thematic interpretations of Qur'an, see Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Taddabbur al-Qur'an*, vol. IX., Lahore, Maktaba Anjum Khudaam al-Qur'an, 1967; Lahore, Faran Foundation, 2009); Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an* (trans.) Ashore Shamis, Herndon, VA: IIIT, 2000; Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, [1966] 2004); *Idem.*, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, Tokyo, Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964; rpt. 1980; B. A. Dar, *Qur'anic Ethics*, Lahore, Institute of Islamic Culture, 1960; Qamaruddin Khan, *Political Concepts in the Qur'an*, Karachi, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1973; Abu al-A'la Mawdudi, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms: Ilah, Rabb, 'Ibadah, Deen* (trans.) Abu Asad, Lahore, Islamic Publications Pvt Limited, [1977]); T. B. (Taleem 'Ali) Irving, *et. al.*, *The Qur'an: Basic Teachings* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1992); Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001 [1999]); Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *The Qur'an: Essential Teachings* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2005); Massimo Campanini, *The Qur'an: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2007)
  7. On Qur'an for daily recitation, see, for example, Mohamed Elmasry, *The Qur'an: 365 Selections for Daily Reading* (Ontario, Canada: M.I. Elmasry, 2003); Sharif

- Chaudhary, *Meaning of the Magnificent Qur'ān*, Lahore, Pakistan: S. N. Publications, 2010; Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Daily Wisdom: Selections from the Qur'ān*, Leicester, Kube Publishing Ltd., 2011; *Idem.*, *365 Sayings of the Qur'ān*, Mumbai, Jaico, 2014. On simple introductions to the Qur'ān and personal engagements with the Sacred Text, see, Abdul Rahman I. Doi, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, Lagos, Islamic Publications Bureau, 1976; Khurram Murad, *Way to the Qur'ān*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1985; Farid Esack, *The Qur'ān: A User's Guide*, Oxford, One world Publications, 2005 & 2007; Hasanuddin Ahmed, *Introducing the Qur'ān*, New Delhi, Goodword Books, 2005; Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'ān: A Biography*, London, Atlantic Books, 2006; Mona Siddiqui, *How to Read the Qur'ān*, London, Granta Books, 2007.
8. Ziauddin Sardar, *Reading the Qur'ān: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam*, London, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2011; New York, Oxford University Press, 2011. Its two Paperback Editions were published, respectively, by Hachette Book Publishing India Pvt Ltd., India in 2015, and second by Oxford University Press in February 2017. All the references in this essay are from paperback edition of 2015, and here in after is cited as Sardar, *Reading the Qur'ān*.
  9. For biographical details, academic positions, and other details, see his personal website, <http://ziauddinsardar.com/ziauddin-sardar-biography> (last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017)
  10. For details about *Critical Muslim*, see <http://criticalmuslim.com/home> (Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017)
  11. For details, see Sardar's personal website, <http://ziauddinsardar.com/ziauddin-sardar-biography/> (last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017)
  12. *Ibid.*
  13. My previous writings on Sardar's *Reading the Qur'ān* include: Dr. Tauseef Ahmad Parray, "(Re) Reading and Reflecting on Ziauddin Sardar's '*Reading the Qur'ān*'", *Kashmir Reader [KR]* (Daily Newspaper from Srinagar, J&K), 3rd Feb. 2017, Friday, p. 7, available online at <http://kashmirreader.com/2017/02/03/re-reading-reflecting-ziauddin-sardars-reading-qur'an/> (last accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2017); *Idem.*, "Reading and Reflecting on the '*Reading the Qur'ān*'", *The Muslim World League Journal [MWLJ]* (Makah), 45, 6 (March 2017): pp. 58-63; *Idem.*, "Thematic Studies of the Qur'ān: An Assessment", *MWLJ*, 46, 7 (April 2018): pp. 52-55 [hereafter cited as Parray in *KR*, Parray in *MWLJ2017* and *MWLJ2018* respectively]
  14. Sardar, *Reading the Qur'ān*, pp. 39-54, 59.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 11. *The Guardian* is a famous British Daily Newspaper, published from Kings Place, London (UK): [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)
  16. *Ibid.*, p. xiv
  17. *Ibid.*, pp. xv, xviii, xix
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 11
  19. *Ibid.*, p. xiv
  20. *Ibid.*, pp. xxi, xxii
  21. *Ibid.*, p. xx
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 60

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 60
24. *Ibid.*, p. 60
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60
26. *Ibid.*, p. 59
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-70
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-208
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 60
30. *Ibid.*, p. 211
31. *Ibid.*
32. See note/ reference 6 above.
33. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, p. v
34. Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Styles*, p. vi
35. Kidwai, *The Qur'ān: Essential Teachings*, pp. v-vi
36. Sardar, *Reading the Qur'ān*, p. xxi
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-11
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 369-374
40. A list of these reviews is here: Abdur Raheem Kidwai, "Review: Reading the Qur'ān, by Ziauddin Sardar", *The Muslim World Book Review [MWBR]*, 31, 4 (Summer 2011): pp. 19-25 [hereinafter cited as Kidwai, in *MWBR*]; Malise Ruthven, "Reading the Qur'ān by Ziauddin Sardar Review", *The Guardian*, Friday, 1st July 2011, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/01/reading-quran-ziauddin-sardar-review> [here in after cited as Ruthven, in *The Guardian*]; Mona Siddiqui, "Review: Reading the Qur'ān By Ziauddin Sardar", *The Independent*, Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2011, retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/reading-the-quran-by-ziauddin-sardar-2308561.html> [hereinafter cited as Siddiqui, *The Independent*]; A. Faizur Rahman, "Book Review: Reading the Qur'ān", *Daily News and Analysis (DNA)*, Sunday, 3rd July 2011, retrieved from [www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/rview-book-review-reading-the-quran-1561706](http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/rview-book-review-reading-the-quran-1561706) [hereinafter cited as Rahman, in *DNA*]; Maqbool Ahmed Siraj, "Contextualising the Holy Qur'ān", *Islamic Voice*, January 2012, retrieved from [www.islamicvoice.com/January2012/BOOKREVIEW/](http://www.islamicvoice.com/January2012/BOOKREVIEW/) [hereinafter cited as Siraj, in *IV*]; Nidhal Guessoum, "Ziauddin Sardar's interpretation of the Qur'ān", *Irtiqa*, Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011, retrieved from <http://www.irtiqa-blog.com/2011/07/ziauddin-sardars-interpretation-of.html> [here in after cited as Guessoum, in *Irtiqa*] (all accessed, last, on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2017); Parray, in *KR*; Parray, in *MWLJ*
41. Steven D. Ealy, "The Qur'ān's Guidance to Readers (through both principle and example) on How to Read the Qur'ān", *APSA [American Political Science Association] 2012 Annual Meeting Paper*, available on SSRN, [www.papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2110992](http://www.papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2110992), [SSRN ID: 2110992], posted on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2012 (last accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2017)
42. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, pp. 19-25
43. *Ibid.*, p. 19
44. *Ibid.*, p. 20
45. *Ibid.*, p. 21

46. For the details on these topics/ themes, see “Prophets and Revelation”, “Truth and Plurality”, “Crime and Punishment” (Chapters 29, 32, and 36 respectively) in Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 215-24, 235-40, 255-60
47. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, p. 21
48. For the details on this topic, see “Nature and Environment” (Chapter 38) in Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 265-271
49. See, “Ethics and Morality” (chapter 39) in *Ibid.* pp. 273-76
50. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, p. 21
51. For details, see, “The *Shari’ah*”, “Power and Politics”, “Polygamy and Domestic Violence”, “Homosexuality”, “The Veil”, “Freedom of Expression”, “Art, Music, and Imagination” (Chapters 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, and 52), in Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 285-368
52. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, pp. 22-23
53. See, “Suicide (Assisted or Otherwise)”, in Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 345-50
54. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, p. 23
55. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, pp. 23-24
56. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. xiv
57. Ruthven, in *The Guardian*, *op. cit.*
58. *Ibid.*
59. Siddiqui, in *The Independent*, *op. cit.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. Rahman, in *DNA*
64. Siraj, in *IV*
65. Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2011. For the thoughts and views of Guessoum, see, for example, Stefano Bigliardi, *Islam and Quest for Modern Science*, Istanbul, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul [SRII], 2014.
66. Guessoum, in *Irtiqa*, *op. cit.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. Excerpts from the review in a *The Times Literary Supplement*, available on Hurst Publications website at <http://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/reading-the-quran/> last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.
69. Excerpts from the reviews in *Booklist*, *Islamic Horizons*, and *Library Journal*, available on Hurst Publications website at <http://www.hurstpublishers.com/book/reading-the-quran/> last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.
70. Review Excerpts mentioned on the Back Cover of Sardar’s *Reading the Qur’ān*, 2015 edition.
71. Parray, in *KR*, *op. cit.*; Parray, in *MWLJ*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 63.
72. A list of these reviews was provided above in note/ reference no. 34; examples are: Kidwai, in *MWBR*; Ruthven, in *Guardian*; Siddiqui, *The Independent*; Guessoum, in *Irtiqa*; Parray, in *KR*; and Parray, in *MWLJ*
73. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, pp. 23-24
74. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. 345. The verse reads as: “if anyone kills a person

*unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind”.*

75. *Ibid.*, p. 346
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 345, 346
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, p. 349
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 73
80. *Ibid.*, p. 247
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Ibid.*, p. 253
83. For example, the verses Q. XXIX: 20 and XXXIX: 9 read as: “Travel throughout the earth and see how He brings life into being: and He will bring the next life into being. God has power over all things”; and “Say, ‘How can those who know be equal to those who do not know?’”
84. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. 252
85. *Ibid.*, p. 253
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-233
87. *Ibid.*, p. 229
88. Surah al-‘Asr (Q. CIII), in full, reads as: “By the declining day, man is [deep] in loss, except for those who believe, do good deeds, urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to steadfastness”.
89. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. 229
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 371-372
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 231, 232
92. These verses (Q. LXXXIX: 6-14) read as: “Have you [Prophet] considered how your Lord dealt with [the people] of ‘Ad, [or] of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, whose like has never been made in any land, and the Thamud, who hewed into the rocks in the valley, and the mighty and powerful Pharaoh? All of them committed excesses in their lands, and spread corruption there: your Lord let a scourge of punishment loose on them. Your Lord is always watchful”.
93. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. 232
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-276
96. *Ibid.*, p. 273
97. *Ibid.*, p. 355
98. *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296
99. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-240
100. *Ibid.*, p. 235
101. *Ibid.*, p. 237
102. *Ibid.*, p. 239
103. Kidwai, in *MWBR*, p. 23
104. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 285-291
105. *Ibid.*, p. 285
106. *Ibid.*
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 289, 90, 91

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 91, 297
109. *Ibid.*, p. 266
110. *Ibid.*, p. 266
111. *Ibid.*, p. 297
112. For details, see chapter 43, “Power and Politics”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 293-302
113. *Ibid.*, p. 299
114. For details, see chapter 47, “The Veil”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 329-335
115. *Ibid.*, p. 329
116. *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330
117. *Ibid.*, p. 331
118. *Ibid.*, p. 332
119. *Ibid.*
120. *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 34, 35
121. For details, see chapters 45 & 46, “Sex and Society” and “Homosexuality”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 313-321, 323-328
122. *Ibid.*, pp. 3243
123. *Ibid.*, p. 323
124. *Ibid.*, p. 324
125. *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325
126. Scott Siraj al-Haq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, Oxford, One world Publications, 2010, p. 2, as cited in Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. 325
127. Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, p. 325
128. *Ibid.*, p. 327
129. For details, see chapter 48, “Freedom of Expression”, in Sardar, *Reading the Qur’ān*, pp. 337-343
130. *Ibid.*, p. 337
131. *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339
132. *Ibid.*, p. 340
133. For details, see “Epilogue”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 369-374
134. *Ibid.*, p. 369
135. *Ibid.*, p. 371
136. *Ibid.*, p. 372
137. *Ibid.*, p. 372
138. *Ibid.*, p. 373
139. *Ibid.*, pp. 370-371