

CONTEMPORARY WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP ON ISLAM: AN APPRAISAL OF SELECTED ‘INTRODUCTORY’ REFERENCE WORKS ON ISLAMIC HISTORY

Tauseef Ahmad Parray

Assistant Professor, Islamic Studies,
Government Degree College Sogam,
Kupwara,
Higher Education Department, Jammu
and Kashmir, India
Email: tauseef.parray21@gmail.com

Paper received: 24 September 2021
Paper revised: 08-17 December 2021
Paper approved: 25 December 2021

ABSTRACT

Writing on Islam and things Islamic has a long history in the West, but has seen a growth in 20th century and an unprecedented surge after the events of 9/11 (2001)—both because of Islam’s ‘global’ spread and ‘growing global impact’ as well as its diverse interpretations and explanations. Among this plethora of literature, a major portion is devoted to the Islamic history and its inter-related aspects, in the form of ‘introductory’ reference books. These are primarily targeted for (under) graduate student community as well as for the general people interested in knowing about the faith and beliefs of 1.6 billion Muslims, living globally. This study, in this context, attempts to present an evaluation and brief content-analysis of four (4) latest works by the Western academics (mostly ‘Islamicists’) on Islamic history, published in between 2009 and 2016 (and referring to their latest editions as well). Theoretical in nature, following both descriptive and comparative methodological approaches, this study attempts to (i) get clues of the recent trends, tendencies and tenors in the English (predominantly American) scholarship on Islamic history; and (ii) identify the main topics, themes and issues covered under the broader rubric of Islamic history/ civilization in these works. The study agrees that such mins of appraisal and evaluation helps in understanding the main themes/ topics discussed under the broader rubric of Islamic history as well as helps in knowing and understanding the diverse scholarly approaches adopted in studying different aspects of Islamic history—from classical to contemporary eras.

Keywords: Islamic History, Western Scholarship, Islamicists, Introductory Works

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, enormous growth has been witnessed in the literature on Islam and things Islamic in general and on the ‘study of Islam’ in particular. A plethora of literature on Islam, Muslims and contemporary global trends and issues from publishing houses, globally. Predominantly, the premier Western publishing houses, with branches and offices in different parts of the (Muslim) world as well, have contributed tremendously in the production of literature about Islam and Muslims. Such is

the upsurge in the literature on Islam and things Islamic that “with every passing day, one finds a new book on Islam, its history, or any other aspect—classical or contemporary—published” (Parray, in *Greater Kashmir [GK]*, 2020: 7; Parray, in *The Freelancer*, 2021a).

Among this plethora of literature about Islam, Muslims/ Muslim world, a major portion covers Islamic history and its inter-related dimensions and aspects. A number of approaches have been adopted in this literature which fulfils

the demands of various types of audiences, but is mostly targeted for the (under) graduate students of various colleges and universities, both of West and East. This is impeccably offered by Alexander Knysh (2017: xv) in these words: In the 21st century, “Books on Islam are a legion. They take a wide range of approaches to the subject”. These different approaches used by scholars/ academics of Islamic/ Religious Studies, Middle East Studies, History, Political Science, Sociology, and other allied subjects for the study of Islam/ Muslims or Islamic history are described by Knysh (2017: 1-3) as ‘macro’, ‘micro’, ‘functional’ ‘pragmatic’, and ‘civilizational’ approaches, while as Clinton Bennett (2010) has described them broadly as ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ approaches to the study of Islam.

In the context of Western scholarly works—especially the works produced by the American academics, both non-Muslims and Muslims—on Islamic history and its changing trends in the second half of the 20th century, David Waines (*Lancaster University*, UK) aptly observed that the production of English introductory books on Islam “seems to have undergone a transition”, tremendously as can be seen in the form of books authored by H. A. R. Gibb (1980 [1949; 1961]), Alfred Guillaume (1954), M. Z. Khan (1962), and Fazlur Rahman (1979 [1966])—the last one being more persuasive and renowned one, for it provides an “insider’s engagement with and contribution to modern approaches and concerns” (Waines, in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies [BSOAS]*, 2012: 382). Though these “observations”, Waines further writes, “may be disputed or dismissed”, but what is undeniable is the fact that “over the past three decades or so the market has notably exploded with books published as modern introductory textbooks to Islam written by experts from widely varying academic backgrounds and perspectives”, mostly

by the American (Muslim and non Muslim) academics (Waines, 2012: 382-83). Shari Lowin (2006: 164-66) had also proposed almost similar collaborating with those provided by Waines (2012).

Within this context and framework, this study attempts to present the evaluation, appraisal and content-analysis of four (4) selected works by the Western scholars (most of them American academicians/ Islamicists) on Islamic history, published in between 2009 and 2016. The major aims and objectives for providing this evaluation and analysis are: (i) to get clues of, and be acquainted with, the recent trends, tendencies, and tenors in the Western (especially American) scholarship on Islamic history; and (ii) to identify the main topics, issues and themes covered under the broader rubric of Islamic history/ civilization—both past and present—in these works which are primarily targeted for the (under) graduate students of Islam—who study Islam either in the Religious/Islamic Studies, Middle East Studies programs, or in other allied subjects/disciplines, like History, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, etc.

Research Method and Literature Review

Theoretical in nature, the present study embraces both descriptive and comparative methodological approaches and presents an appraisal of these four (4) books: Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (2009); William Shepard, *Introducing Islam* (2009); Aminah Beverly McCloud, *et. al., An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century* (2013); and John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (2016).

The selection of these four books, among a number of such ‘introductory’ reference works (such as Ali and Leaman 2008; Sonn 2010; Esposito 2011; Knysh 2017), is made on these grounds: (i) that all these books have been reviewed

(individually) by this author (mostly) in between 2010 and 2014 in various academic journals based in Pakistan, USA, UK, and Malaysia, respectively, and in some local newspapers in 2020-21 (see, Parray, in *Islamic Studies [IS]*, 2010: 121-25; Parray, in *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences [AJISS]*, 2010: 117-120 and 2011: 150-52; Parray, in *Muslim World Book Review [MWBR]*, 2012: 20-23; Parray, in *Islam and Civilizational Renewal [ICR]*, 2014: 285-87; Parray, in *GK*, 2021: 7). In some instances, they have appeared in the form of articles and essays by this author as well (Parray, in *GK*, 2020: 7; Parray, in *TheFreelancer*, 2021a) with the dual-purpose: (i) to provide “some insights into the titles, coverage, objective, purpose, and readership of these books” (Parray, in *The Freelancer*, 2021a); and (ii) to highlight the point that almost all “the reputed Western publishing houses” (from *Ashgate* and *Brill* to *Wiley* and *ZedBooks*), “publish on Islam and things Islamic amply” (Parray, in *GK*, 2020: 7).

(ii) The present essay is in many ways a continuation of this author’s previous writings of same nature published either in *AJISS* (USA) or (mainly) in *Analisa* (see, Parray, in *AJISS*, 2015: 85-96; Parray, in *Analisa*, 2016: 1-18; 2017: 79-101; and 2019: 1-20); and (iii) All these books are recommended reference works in courses on Islam and Islamic History in various undergraduate courses, both in East and West. They are also running in their second to fifth editions which shows their praiseworthy reception in the academic circles. Also, a number of reviews have been published on these books and have been highly praised by the peers and reviewers equally.

On these grounds, collectively, it is fair to assert that this essay—and the descriptive appraisal and content analysis it provides—will be helpful in

understanding the diverse scholarly approaches adopted, by these scholars, in studying Islamic history and its various inter-related aspects—from past to present. Before providing this evaluation and assessment, it is necessary, and apt as well, to begin by providing a brief overview of the 21st century Islamic scholarship on (study of) Islam/ Islamic History.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Brief Overview of the 21st Century Western (American) Scholarship on Islam

Writing on Islam, Muslims, and their wide-ranging dimensions, including the contemporary trends, issues and discourses, has seen remarkable outpouring over the past few decades, and more expressively in the last two decades of the 21st century. This has unquestionably resulted in an astounding growth in the production of literature on Islam and Muslims vis-à-vis contemporary trends and discourses from publishing companies/ houses, globally—either based in the West, or in the Muslim world and/ or rest of the world. Some of the renowned Western publishing houses—having established their branches/ offices in different parts of the world (including Muslim countries) as well—publishing on Islam and its diverse aspects significantly and immensely are mentioned here in alphabetical order: ABC-CLIO, Ashgate, Bloomsbury, Brill, California University Press, Cambridge, Chicago, Continuum, Edinburgh, Fortress, Gale, Georgia, Greenwood, Hurst, I. B. Tauris, Lynne Rienner, Macmillan, Oneworld, Oxford, Palgrave, Penguin, Peter Lang, Polity, Princeton, Routledge, Sage, Springer, SUNY, Wiley-Blackwell, Yale, Zed Books, etc. Such has been the surge in the production of literature about Islam and Muslims from these publishing houses that hardly a day passes without noticing publication of a new book on Islam or Muslims (Parray, in *GK*, 2020:

7; Parray, in *The Freelancer*, 2021a).

Among this plethora of literature, a significant quantity of books focuses on the Islamic history or study of Islam and its varied dimensions and has seen an increase and upsurge from the last many years. This is neither randomly nor unreasonably, but there are strong reasons; and two main reasons are stated below:

The primary reason is that Islam is currently a 'global' religion, having its followers through out the globe—living both as majority and in minority contexts. Peter Mandaville (*George Mason University*, USA) is of the opinion that *Islam* “constitutes one of the great world religions today—and certainly the fastest-growing” religion, which is often “represented as a ‘comprehensive’ way of life that pervades all sectors of human activity and experience among its adherents [Muslims]” (Mandaville 2020: 4, 14). Currently, Muslims comprise “approximately 1.6 billion people across almost every continent” on the globe; and among these, Indonesia (in Southeast Asia), and Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India (all in South Asian region) are “the four countries with the greatest number of Muslims” (Mandaville 2020: 4).

Writing on similar lines, Aminah McCloud, *et. al.* (2013: 5) stated: “Significant Muslim populations can be found in countries across the planet. [As per the statistical data provided by PEW, 2009] 1.54 billion Muslims in the world live on every continent as majorities and minorities. While historically centered in the Middle East and North Africa [MENA], today the largest populations are found in Asia”, followed by MENA countries like Egypt, Nigeria, Iran, Turkey, Algeria, and Morocco.

Daniel Brown (2009: 5-8; 2017: 5-7) also echoes similar views: “The contemporary

Muslim community, the *umma* [*Ummah*], is worldwide. Muslims live, work, raise families, and pray everywhere, from China to California [USA], from Chile to Canada; there is almost no place on earth where Muslims have not settled. [...] But while Islam is worldwide ... Muslims are heavily concentrated in Asia and Africa. More than 50 percent of the world’s Muslims live in just eight countries: Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt”. In sum, for him, “the Muslim community—the *umma*—truly spans the globe” (Brown 2009: 5-8)

While resonating almost similar views, John L. Esposito (*Georgetown University*, USA), highlights that Islam is not only “the second-largest religion in the world (after Christianity)”, both “globally as well as in Europe”, but is “the third-largest religion in America” and is “among the fastest-growing religions in Africa, [and] Asia”. Thus, Muslims currently live not only “within some fifty-seven Muslim-majority countries” worldwide, but “constitute significant minorities” in Europe, America, and rest of the world as well (Esposito 2011: xiii, 3, 4; Esposito 2013: 4). In other words, it means that in the current scenario, the “world of Islam is global; its capitals and communities are not only [such Muslim cities as] Cairo, Damascus, Mecca [Makkah], Jerusalem, Istanbul, Islamabad, Kuala Lumpur, and Jakarta but also [metropolitan cities of West and Europe as well, including] London, Paris, Marseilles, Bonn, New York, Detroit, and Washington” (Esposito 2011: xiv). Elsewhere, Esposito (2010: 4) puts it as: “Islam is more dispersed around the globe and interactive with other faiths and societies than at any other time in history. Its capitals and major cities cover a global expanse”, both in the Muslim world and in the West. In his *Islam: The Straight Path*, Esposito (2016: xi) writes about global presence and impact of Islam and Muslims in these words:

Few religions have had a *greater impact as a faith* and on world affairs, past and present, *than Islam*. ... Islam, the second largest of the world religions, *has a global presence*. Muslims live in some fifty-seven Muslim countries ... [as well as] live as religious minorities from Europe and America to Asia and Australia ... [and thus, Islam has now] grown ... [not only in]to a world religion with followers across the globe ... [but has] developed [into] a spiritual path with law, ethics, theology, and mysticism ... (italics added).

The second important (and more apparent) reason responsible for the surge in the literature on Islam is that nowadays Islam is discussed and construed not only as a religion and civilization but as a philosophy, worldview, and (political) ideology as well that too variedly within the diversely socio-cultural and intellectual contexts. In other words, “the topic of Islam and of Muslims is [interpreted and expounded both in] political [terms] as well as [in] religious [perspective]”. Islam, as professed by its adherents (Muslims), “is not only a faith that inspires personal piety and provides meaning and guidance for this life and the next”, but acts as “an ideology and worldview that informs Muslim politics and society” as well—in a phrase, it is a ‘complete and comprehensive way of life’. Because of the growing global impact of Islam, it “has been and continues to be a concern [not only] for policy makers, political analysts, and commentators”, but for numerous academics and researchers as well (Esposito 2013: 4). All this results, collectively, in the production of more and more literature. It is, thus, in this context that Richard C. Martin (*Emory University, Atlanta, USA*) emphasizes that currently there is a “growing demand for accessible knowledge about Islam” and things Islamic, which has resulted in the publication and production of more books on Islam, including a “number of histories, encyclopedias, and dictionaries”, and numerous

other types of works. These works not only cover “Islamic cultures, religion, history, politics”, but give space to the discussions on Muslims, Muslim societies/ world, and the diverse issues and challenges they confront in the present global world (Martin 2004, I: x).

Of equal relevance and significant are these statements:

Throughout history, Islam has been discussed as a religion, civilization, and ideology, and has been analyzed and evaluated through different perspectives both by Muslims and non-Muslims. ... Especially with the onslaught of colonialism and Islam being confronted with developments such as modernization and Westernization, rigorous scholarship has been produced on Islam and its varied dimensions, ranging from the history of its foundational texts, Islamic law, culture, and civilization to contemporary issues (Parray, in Sunar, 2021b: 59).

Regarding the current unprecedented growth in the academic scholarship on Islam, Martin is right in his analysis when he declares that a number of scholars, pundits and analysts have declared the 21st century as “*the era of Islam*”, keeping in view the major “events” that occurred from 2001 onwards, that “have underscored the importance of knowing about Islamic history and [in] understanding the great diversity and richness of Muslim social, cultural, and religious practices ... [as] a global religious and political phenomenon”. Thus, “*Islam increasingly is recognized as a vital force in the contemporary world*, a source of collective social identity, and religious expression”. Moreover, the “Public interest in learning about Islam is a very recent phenomenon” because the events of the past few decades in general and of the current century in particular, “have generated a demand

for information about Islam on an unprecedented scale in the history of Islamic studies”. One clearly perceives that “Scholars, journalists, and writers of all sorts have responded robustly to this newly recognized importance of Islam and the Muslim world, thus *creating a wealth of information about Islam*”, which is now available in bookstores, libraries, and other such places around the world (Martin2004, I: ix-x; italics added).

Having provided this contextual and methodological framework for this study, it is apt here to provide a brief academic introduction of the authors (and editors) of the four (4) books evaluated in this study.

Brief Academic Profile of the Authors/Editors

Daniel W. Brown (b. 1963): Brown is serving (since 2011) as the Director of the *Institute for the Study of Religion in the Middle East*, Istanbul, Turkey (ISRME; www.isrme.org) after having previously taught Islamic Studies at *Mount Holyoke College, Amherst*, and *Smith College* (USA). He has also served as a Visiting Scholar at *Islamic Research Institute* (IRI) and *Institute of Islamic Culture* (IIC), based in Islamabad and Lahore (Pakistan), respectively, and at the *Cairo University* (Egypt)—thus he has spent a good time in the Muslim societies. His major areas of interest are: modern Muslim intellectual thought, Islamic modernism, Hadith studies, Christian-Muslim relations, and Islam in the Subcontinent. Brown is author of *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (1999), editor of *Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith* (2020), and his major work, evaluated in this essay, is the second edition of *A New Introduction to Islam* (2009)—first published in 2004 and its third edition was published in 2017.

William E. Shepard (b. 1933): Shepard has served as Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the *University of Canterbury*, Christchurch, New Zealand (now retired). His major interests are modern Islamic ideologies, Islamic tradition and radical thought of Sayyid Qutb. He is author of *The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual: Ahmad Amin* (1982), *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism* (1996), and his major book, evaluated in this essay, is *Introducing Islam* (2009) with its second edition published in 2014.

Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud: McCloud (b. 1948) is Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Islamic World Studies program in the Department of Religious Studies at *DePaul University*, Chicago (DU-C; USA). An expert in diverse areas like Islam in America, Muslim Women, and Islamic history, and author of a number of books on these themes, she is described as ‘one of the most eminent scholars of African American Islam’. She also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*. Hibbard (b. 1962) is currently Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science at *DU-C* (USA). He has also served as a program officer in Washington DC-based think tank, *United States Institute of Peace* (USIP). He specializes in the Middle East politics, American foreign policy, and religion and politics. Saud (b. 1978) is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at *DU-C* (USA) and specializes in Islamic political thought. He has previously served as a contributor for *al-Jazeera*. McCloud, Hibbard, and Saud are co-editors of (and contributors to) *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century* (2013)—their main work evaluated in this essay.

John L. (Louis) Esposito (b. 1940): Esposito is currently Professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies,

Georgetown University, USA. Having studied under Professor Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (at *Temple University*, USA), he is accepted as one of the leading and most respected authorities on Islam. A recipient of 'American Academy of Religion's 2005 Martin E. Marty Award' and 'Pakistan's Quaid-i-Azzam Award', he has (co)authored and (co)edited over fifty (50) books and encyclopedias on Islam, Islam and politics, Islamic movements, political Islam, Islamophobia, Islam and gender, etc. In this essay, Esposito's *Islam: The Straight Path* (2016)—first published in 1988 and presently running in its 5th edition and is his main work on Islamic history—is evaluated.

An Appraisal and Evaluation of the Selected Introductory Reference Works on Islam

1. Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (2009)

A New Introduction to Islam is an excellent (under) graduate textbook which presents a thorough history of the Islamic faith; introduces students to the history and development of Islamic studies as a discipline, and examines how the vibrant religious culture of the Near East produced a unique and brilliant intellectual and religious tradition spanning the fields of Islamic law, theology, philosophy and mysticism. The book also surveys the ways in which Islamic tradition has enriched the world and vice-versa. Furthermore, it considers the opportunities and challenges facing Muslims today and offers a cogent account of the origins, major features, and lasting impact of the Islamic tradition. The development of Muslim beliefs and practices are explored against the background of social and cultural contexts, extending from North Africa to South (east) Asia, and by providing a new and illuminating perspective.

The book was first published in 2004, its

second and third editions appeared in 2009 and 2017, respectively. However, in this essay second edition of this book is evaluated.

It consists of seventeen (17) chapters covered under four (4) parts: Part-I, *The Formation of the Islamic Tradition* (6 chapters); Part-II, *The Expansion of Islam*, and Part-III, *Islamic Institutions* (3 chapters each); and Part-IV: *Crisis and Renewal in Islamic History* (5 chapters). These chapters are preceded by List of Illustrations (diagrams, pictures, and maps); Preface to the Second Edition; Source Acknowledgments, and are followed by Glossary, Bibliography, and Index.

How Islam came to be “what it is today in all of its variety and its paradoxical unity”? This is “the story” that has been “set out to tell in this book”; a “story that is first of all rooted in history” (Brown 2009: 15).

Part-I begins with Pre-Islamic Arabia and explores the historical and religious context of the rise of Islam, makes a survey of the central elements of the Islamic tradition, and raises the critical questions regarding the significance of the Arab background for understanding the rise of Islam and for producing a vibrant civilization (Brown 2009: 15). These questions are answered in chapter 3 by providing an exploration of the Near East—which was dominated, on the eve of rise of Islam, by two great empires: the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine Empire), centered on Constantinople, and the Persian (or Sasanian Empire), with its capital at Ctesiphon near present day Baghdad—its civilization and religions that dominated it before the rise of Islam; and in chapter 4, “The Life of Muhammad [pbuh]”, it examines the sacred history of Islam by focusing on the key events of this era. Chapters 5 and 6, focus on “The Quran” and “The Tradition Literature”, respectively, and are described by

Brown as “two thorniest questions in the field of Islamic Studies” (Brown 2009: 15). Adopting a ‘revisionist’ approach here, he discusses, respectively, how the Qur’an came into its present form, and the authenticity of the hadith literature on which the traditional story of Islamic origins, including the life of the Last Messenger (pbuh) is based. For Brown (Brown 2009: 69-70), the “Qur’an is no ordinary book”; and there are many “approaches to the Qur’an”: one, “the Qur’an is a sacred object”; second, “to view it not as a sacred object, but as a historical artifact”; and third, “to focus on what it says”. Similarly, in the conclusion of 6th chapter, Brown writes that the Islamic tradition was not fully formed but “grew, took root, and flourished over the course of several turbulent centuries” (Brown 2009:100).

In Part-II, the focus has been turned “from sacred history and the formative elements of Islam to the complex historical context in which Islamic civilization grew to maturity” (Brown 2009: 15), beginning with the Arab “Conquests” (in chapter 7) which stand as one of the ‘turning points’ of the world history. Chapter 8, “Religion of Empire”, examines the worldview of the early Arab conquerors” and in the 9th chapter, “The Caliphate”, the focus is on the history from the rise of the ‘Abbasid caliphate, the maturing of Islamic political thought and the emergence of the major schisms in Islam.

Part-III, surveys the great institutions of Islamic civilization in three separate chapters (10-12), viz, “Islamic Law”, “Islamic Theology and Philosophy”, and “Sufism”: these are labelled, respectively, as the “elucidation of God’s law”, “articulation of a distinct Suuni worldview”, and the “spiritual center of Islam” (Brown 2009: 16). Brown describes all these institutions as the “defining features of Islam in its maturity” that “gave it the coherence, the brilliance, and the resiliency that marked Islamic civilization at its

height” (Brown 2009: 16).

Part-IV focuses on the ‘Crisis and Renewal in Islamic History’ and spans over 5 chapters (13-17) which are devoted to the study of Islam in pre-modern and modern developments: “Turks, Crusaders, and Mongols”; “Revival and Reform”; “Islam and the West”; “The Turbulent Twentieth Century”; and “Islam in the Twenty-First Century”. This part examines Muslim responses to the challenges of history and patterns of renewal and reform in Islam. In the Introductory chapter, he writes that after facing the challenges of the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, Muslim world witnessed “a florescence of great Islamic empires on the eve of modernity” that is, the three great ‘gunpowder empires’: the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Mughal, which “arose simultaneously with the overshadowing of Western power, and the religious environment in these empires had a profound effect on Islamic responses to Western imperialism” and from 18th century onwards, “the power and pervasiveness of Western civilization has proven to be a challenge unlike any in Islamic history” (Brown 2009: 16). All the three great ‘empires’, Brown states, were rooted in Mongol-Turkish synthesis and all of them were spectacular in their accomplishments, whose grandeur is still visible in the “architectural treasures of Istanbul, Isfahan, Agra, and Lahore” (Brown 2009: 234).

In the final chapter, he discusses the Challenge of Pluralism, Wahhabism, Islamic Liberalism, Islam in the West, Islamic Feminism, and the Challenge of Islam, stating that the most “urgent set of theological, ethical and political problems” faced by the Muslim community in the contemporary world is posed by the “challenge of pluralism” (Brown 2009: 283); and in the conclusion, writes: “Clearly modern Islam has been deeply impacted by the presence of Muslims in the west and by the challenge of pluralism.

Contemporary Muslims are faced with a rather striking range of alternative visions both for the place of Islam in a pluralist world and for the place of pluralism in Islam" (Brown 2009: 298).

Building on the success of the first edition, the second edition offers additional material on Islam in the West, gender and women, and on recent trends in Islamic thought, making it more comprehensive and up to date. Moreover, additional (pedagogical) features such as detailed chronologies, tables summarizing key information, useful maps, diagrams and illustrations, and resources for further study (at the end of each chapter) further enhance this critical introduction to the major issues in Islamic studies.

It is interesting, and apt, to add here that its third edition was published in 2017 and besides updating and revising some topics, it includes 'Resources for Further Study' (providing a succinct overview on the importance of each book mentioned), and 'Questions for Study and Discussion' at the end of each chapter.

Another remarkable feature is a section on "Essential Resources for the Study of Islam" (Brown 2009: 16-17) in chapter 1, 'Islam in Global Perspective' (Brown 2009: 3-18), which provides a list of encyclopedias, books and compendiums necessary for the study of Islam and Muslims. This list, along with a brief description of their merits and guidelines on their use, is very informative, helpful and beneficial for the students embarking on the journey to study, learn and understand Islam, Muslims, and Muslim world.

However, at the same time, it is equally noteworthy that he reminds the students, especially beginners, that if such a long list seems

"daunting" for them, then they must remember that: "the development of Islam spans fourteen centuries"; and "the Islamic world encompasses a vast range of languages and cultures which now span the globe from China to North America", and also reminds of the diversity in the practices and thought (Brown, 2009: 18).

The third edition (published in 2017) spans over 430 pages (in comparison to about 360 pages of 2009 edition) with a number of additions, both in the content as well as features.

However, one of the major drawbacks of Brown's book is the use of 'revisionist' approach to the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions (*Ahadith*). This approach is overall problematic, and is criticized by the Western scholars as well (see, Shepard, 2014: 404-406). Especially for an introductory work like this, it should not have been given such a hype—a glimpse of this can be seen by a reader in the length and sub-titles of the chapter on the Qur'an in 2009 and 2014 editions (Brown 2009: 69-87; Brown 2014: 77-101). Another major shortcoming of this book is that it has discussed the 21st century issues/ challenges, like "Pluralism", "Islamic Liberalism", "Islam in the West", and "Islamic Feminism" in a single chapter, though such topics/ themes/ discourses, owing to their prominence, need more details, discussion and space.

Keeping aside these reservations, Brown's *A New Introduction to Islam* can be fairly described as one of the most lucidly organized introductions to Islam, informative and clear on almost all the major issues and historical events pertaining to Islam—in a nutshell, a thoughtful and a comprehensive guide to the study of Islam. Elegantly written, it is easy to read and is a useful and practical guide for students and teachers of the field alike.

2. William Shepard, *Introducing Islam* (2009)

An outcome of the author's over three-decades of teaching and research experience about Islam within the context of Religious Studies, *Introducing Islam* is a comprehensive and concise model textbook and an ideal introduction for students wishing to gain a 'sympathetic' understanding of Islam, as it seeks to present the Islamic religion and its culture (of different Muslim countries) in a 'sympathetic way'.

The author traces the history of Islam, from its early environment and origins in the life and career of Muhammad (pbuh), through its classical expressions to its interactions with the West in the modern world. Devoting a chapter each to important topics such as the Qur'an, Islamic law, Islamic theology, and the Sufi movement and to studies of Islam in individual countries (like Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Indonesia), it explores Islamic civilization through discussion of Islamic art and culture, and community rituals as well.

The book was first published in 2009, and its second edition appeared in 2014, however, in this essay 2009 edition is evaluated, with brief references given to its new edition as well.

Consisting of a Preface, Introduction, three (3) Parts (which are divided into nineteen [19] chapters, 2-20), the book also contains a number of salient and pedagogical features like Illustrations (maps and figures), text boxes, summary charts (key points at the end of each chapter), a glossary of key Arabic terms, and a list of further reading to benefit students understanding and revision.

In 'Introduction: Approaching the Subject', the introductory chapter, the appropriate approach of the subject is discussed and a synopsis of Islam (as a Muslim might give) is

provided (i.e., through an 'insider' approach). The book focuses on Islam "as a religion", presenting the symbols, ideas, practices and institutions of which it is composed, and tracing their historical developments as much as possible (Shepard 2009: 2).

Part-I, 'History of the Community', consists of 3 chapters (2-4) and gives a historical overview from the pre-Islamic period to about 1700 CE. It deals with the history of the Hellenistic-Iranian world and of Islamic civilization from 700 to 1700 CE, providing an essential overview of Islamic history from its beginning up to the eve of modern period, including Umayyads, Abbasids, Ottomans, Saffavids, from Central Asia, China to South and Southeast Asia and North Africa.

Part-II, 'Aspects of Islam', consists of ten (10) chapters (5-14) and presents the Islamic tradition as it has developed over the centuries usually with some attention to modern developments at the end of each. These chapters deal, respectively, with the Qur'an; the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]; Rituals and Ceremonies; Divisions in the *Umma*, the various Sects: Kharijis, Shi'is, and Sunnis; the 'Ulama' and their role; Islamic Law—Shariah and Fiqh, forms of *usul al-fiqh*: Shi'i and Sunni, Sunni Schools (*madhabs*) of *fiqh*, Theology and Philosophy, their main schools, issues, and teachings; Sufism and the history of the Sufi movements; three major figures: Ibn Sina (98—1057), Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111), and Ibn Taimiyya (1263-1320); and 'Culture and counter-culture—Literature and other Arts', a selective overview of the art (visual art: arabesque, calligraphy and pictures), architecture (especially mosques), literature (prose and poetry) and music, argues that the "artistic culture sometimes directly expresses religion, sometimes reacts against it or flouts it and sometimes does both" (Shepard 2009:190).

Part-III is devoted to the 'Modern Developments' and consists of six (6) chapters (15-20) which deal with the modern challenges, with particular references to religion (Islam) and politics in Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Indonesia and a chapter on disparate aspects of globalization.

While chapter 15 traces the history of European colonialism/ western imperialism from the beginning of the 19th century and discusses the challenges faced by Islam and Muslims, chapters 16-19 are devoted to four country studies, viz., Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Indonesia: Chapter 16 traces the history of Ottomans, "Turkism", nationalist and secularist republic established by Atatürk, and Alevi revival, arguing that in general, the Turks have come to accept both "secularism and Islam", but they are still trying to work out exactly "how to relate them" (Shepard 2009: 225); Chapter 17 discusses modernization and all *-isms* (secularism, nationalism, and Islamic modernism vis-à-vis Muhammad 'Abduh), Egyptian Muslim Brothers (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) and Islamism, revolution and resurgence of Islam; Chapter 18 traces out the history of Iran from Qajars to Pehalvis, from Iranian nationalism to White Revolution, and from Islamic opposition to Islamic Revolution and the creation of Islamic Republic (of Iran); Chapter 19 focuses on the Islamization of Java, Samutra and other islands, Dutch imperialism continuing Islamization, independence and the issue of an Islamic state.

The final chapter (chapter 20) of this Part—which is also the last chapter of the book—discusses meaning and examples of Globalization; Global jihad; Why Martyrdom operations?; Muslim Diaspora in the West; and Liberal/ Progressive Islam. For example, in the final section of this last chapter, he throws light on the views of some Muslim "Liberal/ Progressive" thinkers (Shepard 2009: 288), like Fazlur Rehman (d. 1988), Nasr Abu Zayd (d. 2010), Abdulkarim

Saroush (b. 1945), Abdullahi An-Na'im (b. 1946), and Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962), whom he defines in these words: "There are a number of intellectuals, mostly not trained as '*ulama*' and often with degrees from Western universities, who have undertaken or are undertaking radical reinterpretations of Islam. They are often referred to as 'liberal' or 'progressive' Muslims and represent continuations of the secularist and modernist tendencies under contemporary globalized conditions" (Shepard 2009: 288)

In this work, besides using wide range of sources—from encyclopedias, anthologies, studies on Islamic civilization and history, to books on contemporary issues—the author makes significant, but careful (for accuracy of facts and figures), use of the "Electronic resources" as well (Shepard 2009: 317-18).

Some of the limitations of this book are: it ends without a conclusion/ epilogue which could have connected the past and present of Islam and Muslims with a focus on future prospects; the overview of 'Philosophy' provided in chapter 11 is brief and thus unsatisfactory and same is the case with a section on 'Literature: prose, poetry' in chapter 14 where the development of 'Prose' is discussed very briefly. Owing to their importance, both these topics need more elaboration and space.

However, it is remarkable to add here that owing to the overwhelming response and well-reception of this book in academic circles, its second edition was published in 2014 with a lot of revisions, additional and updated material as well as new features like discussion questions. The second edition spans over 424 pages, while as first edition was over 350 pages. A glimpse of these changes can be assessed from the Publisher's description of the 2014 edition (Shepard, 2014: iii). Also, in the 'Preface to the

second edition' (Shepard 2014: xviii-xx), he refers to all these additional changes, both in text and features of this book, which include correcting "typographical and factual errors"; rewriting "some paragraphs for greater clarity or precision"; additional material and summary points especially "in the chapters dealing with the modern period" (i.e., Part-III); introduction of "a number of 'critical thinking boxes' [as a pedagogical tool] to encourage the reader to delve more deeply into aspects of the material presented in the book"; and an additional new chapter (no. 21), *Three cultural flashpoints: Gender, democracy and human rights*' (Shepard 2009: 342-68).

Another significant feature of this book (more vividly seen in the new edition) is the 'Further Reading List' provided at the end of each chapter and the general 'Further reading' list/ Bibliography (Shepard 2014: 404-6) which is divided thematically.

In sum, keeping in view the content, coverage, and features (of both editions), it is fair to assert that Shepard's *Introducing Islam* is a remarkable and excellent source on Islam—its history, culture and on modern trends—and a beneficial work for students and scholars alike.

3. Aminah Beverly McCloud, et. al., *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century* (2013)

After the publication of *The Oxford History of Islam* (Esposito, 1999), there was no comprehensive reference book, covering and encompassing the Islamic history from its classical to contemporary era, with regional/ case studies, and at the same time throwing light on contemporary challenges as well. *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*, edited by McCloud, Scott, and Saud, suitably filled that gap as it provides an overview of the Islamic tradition

that captures its diversity, debates, and regional differences. Providing an introduction to Islam within the context 21st century developments, it examines the different interpretations and debates that characterize its tradition, and addresses some pressing topics and debated issues, like "the phenomenon of militancy, Islamophobia, and the teaching of Islam in the West" (McCloud, et. al., 2013: 3). The central theme of the book is to reveal that the "image of Islam (particularly in the West) is very different from the lived reality of over a billion adherents around the globe" (McCloud, et. al., 2013: 4).

Divided into four parts, the volume consists of 15 chapters, excluding the conclusion: Parts-I and III consist of 5 chapters each and Parts-II and IV of 3 and 2 chapters, respectively.

Among these fifteen chapters, the editors have contributed first two chapters and conclusion jointly: "Introduction" (McCloud, et. al., 2013: 3-12), "The Historical Context" of Islam (pp. 13-29), and "Conclusion: Image and Reality Reconsidered" (McCloud, et. al., 2013: 309-14); they have also contributed three chapters each, individually, falling in their areas of interest and specialization: chapters 8, 12, and 14 by McCloud, chapters 6-7 and 15 by Scott, and chapters 3-5 by Saud.

The book provides an overview of the basic structures and debates within Islam in Part-I, 'Overview—Islam: Image and Reality'; examination of 'Islam and the Modern World' in Part-II. Part-III focuses on 'Regional Studies' and covers Africa, South Asia, Soviet Republic, Indonesia and Malaysia, Latin America and Caribbean; and 'Islam in a Globalized World' is examined in Part-IV. Some of the chapters (of each part) are briefly outlined and analyzed below so that to get glimpses of each part and its contents clearly:

Chapter 2, for example, provides a brief overview of Islam—from classical to contemporary era—ranging from the historical context in which “Islam emerged and evolved as a religious tradition” to the emergence of European colonialism and its legacy. It argues that the “the story of Islam is in essence a story of the effect that a profound revelation—and a new prophet—had upon the world” and central to this history is a “dramatic and ongoing narrative of different communities struggling to interpret the Revelation, while synthesizing their indigenous cultures with Islamic ethos”, resulting in “diversity of religious experiences and practices that, combined, mark Islam as a world religion” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 14). Chapter 5 discusses the development of “Islamic Political Theology” or “the rise of Islamic ‘sects’” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 82). Tracing its history from its origins to its development in (pre and post) modern periods, this chapter makes an “unorthodox approach to the phenomenon of Islamic ‘sects’” by exploring “the meanings of [these] ‘sects’ as different spiritual types ... shaped by [their] beliefs” rather than discussing them in the conventional method of “pointing out a few fundamental beliefs with bullet points” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013:107).

In Part-II, chapters 6 and 7, “Islam and State”, take into consideration discussions on the ongoing debate about the proper relationship between Islam and political authority, or more specifically, on the “differing ways” for understanding “the proper relationship between Islam and the modern state” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013:112). These chapters conclude with these argument that “Religion may have an enormous impact upon politics”, but the fact is that “political manipulation has impacted religion adversely” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 155).

In chapter 8, the question of “Muslims as Minorities in the West” is examined, with USA

from the West and UK, France, and Germany from Europe as the countries with “largest Muslim populations” as case studies (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 157, 58). Discussing various challenges associated with integrating into the Western society while retaining one’s cultural and religious heritage, issues like “education, the building of masajid (mosques), freedom of religious expression, and political opportunity” are broadly discussed (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 159).

Chapter 10, “Islam in South Asia”, focuses on India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and discusses the historical background, Islamic movements, political Islam and gender issues in South Asia—which is “home to one of the largest Muslim population in the world” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 203). It is described as a region having “tremendously diverse Muslim society, featuring a mosaic of ideological, political, cultural, and economical complexity” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 204, 215), and concludes that adapted “to local demographic and socio-cultural realities”, the form of Islam practiced in modern-day South Asia “attests to the vibrant and at times volatile interaction this faith with other religious traditions of the region, as well as contesting and negotiating its own internal tectonic plates” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 214-15).

Part-IV examines Islam in a globalized world. Chapter 14, “The Ecology of Teaching about Islam and Muslims in the 21st Century”, views the challenges of teaching Islam in the post-9/11 West. Seeking to offer a positive alternative for teaching about Islam in 21st century, the chapter examines the “ecosystem”—or the “ecology” which provides a broader lens for “exploring adaptations, movements, and relations of humans along with their interaction in and with a common environment [Islam]” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013:273)—of the class and

how this can be reconstructed in a more open manner. It argues, by way of conclusion, that the “ecology of teaching about Islam and Muslims is a fragile one, as the history and the civilizational contributions of Islam and of Muslims continue to be maligned in ways from which there is no apparent recovery” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013: 283).

In the ‘Conclusion’, the editors summarize the main arguments, very succinctly, presented in the preceding chapters of this volume and highlight the ‘uniqueness’ as well as novelty of the book. In this work, they discuss Islam from the vantage point of multidisciplinary approach in a more effective and accurate way, especially to the Western audience (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013:309).

Some of the salient/ pedagogical features of this book are: Discussion Questions and Suggested Further Readings (at the end of each chapter); Sidebars (providing succinct information about personalities, events, famous places, books, etc., relevant to each chapter); a comprehensive Bibliography, and Index.

Keeping in view the diversity of topics, multidisciplinary approach, comprehensives of topics, additional features, expertise of each contributor, *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*, as a whole, fairly justifies its claim to have offered “an accurate, comprehensive, and nuanced introduction to Islam for the 21st century” (McCloud, *et. al.*, 2013:314). In sum, it is a comprehensive reference works on introducing Islam, past to present, with a diverse range of topics and issues of contemporary relevance.

4. John L. Esposito, *Islam—The Straight Path* (2016)

First published in 1988 (with subsequent editions in 1991, 1998, 2011 and fifth edition—which is evaluated in this essay—in 2016), *Islam—the Straight Path* is a clear account of

Islam and its contemporary developments by a sympathetic Western scholar of Islam. This book has enjoyed, over the years, a “broad audience as a textbook and as an introduction to Islam” not only in the English-speaking world, but also through translations in various languages. Providing an “essential coverage of the origins, spread, and development of Islam and its roles in Muslim societies”, this book offers an updated information and material on recent developments (Esposito 2016: ix). Addressing a variety of questions that “underscore the strength, vitality, and diversity of Islam as well as its role in Muslim history”, this book contributes “to a better understanding of the faith of Islam” (Esposito 2016: xii, xv).

The book consists of six (6) chapters, preceded by a Preface and Introduction and followed by Timeline, Glossary, Bibliography, and Index. In the Preface (Esposito 2016: ix-x), Esposito highlights the overall reception of its previous editions and focuses on the changes made in the current edition. In ‘Introduction’ (Esposito 2016: xi-xv), he highlights the growth and spread of Islam and Muslims from 7th century Arabia to a “world religion with followers across the globe” in the 21st century (Esposito 2016: xi).

Chapter 1, “Muhammad and the Quran: Messenger and Message” (pp. 1-36), describes the emergence of Islam with a particular focus on the life and role of the Prophet (pbuh) and the teachings of the Qur’an under three main sections: ‘Muhammad [pbuh] and the Muslim Community’, ‘Muhammad and the West’, and ‘The Quran: The Word of God’. It concludes that “the message of the Quran and example of the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh] constitute the formative and enduring foundation of faith and belief” and both serve “as the basic sources of Islamic law and the reference points for daily life” (Esposito 2016: 34).

Chapter 2, “The Muslim Community in History” (Esposito 2016: 37-91) discusses the emergence, development and phenomenal expansion of Islam and the Muslim community, development of Islamic empires and states in medieval and pre-modern eras, and the florescence of Islam as a world civilization which contributed significantly in various branches/disciplines—be it natural, social, or religious sciences. It also discusses ‘Islam and/ in the West’ as well, and concludes that currently “Islam is a major and fast-growing religion in the West, and Muslims are increasingly an integral part of the mosaic of Western societies” (Esposito 2016: 89).

Chapter 3, “Religious Life: Belief and Practice” (Esposito 2016: 92-147) highlights the development of Islamic theology, philosophy, law/ jurisprudence, and mysticism with a specific focus on the ‘Five Pillars of Islam’ under two major headings: Theology and Islamic Law.

Chapter 4, “Modern Islamic Reform Movements” (Esposito 2016: 148-193)—consisting of three major sections, viz., ‘From Imperial Islam to Islamic Revivalism’; ‘Revivalism in Islam’; and ‘Modern Islamic Movements’—narrates the emergence of Islamic movements across the Islamic world (in 18th-19th centuries), which serve as the forerunners to the 20th century ‘Islamic revivalism’ and ‘revivalist movements’, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) and the *Jamaat-i-Islami* of the Sub-Continent that have had a profound effect on 20th and 21st century Islam—as faith, worldview, ideology and civilization. It concludes with the argument that since the 18th century, “Revival and reform have been dominant themes in Islam”, as Muslims have responded to both “internal and external forces that challenged their faith and social order” (Esposito 2016: 191).

Chapter 5, “The Resurgence of Religion

in Politics”(Esposito 2016: 194-258) presents a historical outline of the causes, worldview, and expressions of Islamic revivalism and resurgence (also named as Islamic fundamentalism, Islamism, and political Islam) through a series of case studies from Middle East. By this, it demonstrates the diversity of ways in which Islam has been ‘used’ by governments, mainstream and extremist opposition groups, and/ or by the religious authorities, etc. It also deals with the issue of “Global Terrorism” and focuses on the relationship of Islam to violence and terrorism, the meaning of jihad, the origins of a global jihad ideology, the role and influence of ‘Islamist’ movements on Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda as well as ISIS in Syria and Iraq. In the final section, “Arab Spring/ Arab Winter?” it highlights the role of religion and politics in the Arab uprisings.

The focus of the 6th Chapter, “The Struggle for Islam in the Twenty-First Century” (Esposito 2016: 259-306)—which is self-revelatory—is the process of modern reform by focusing on the “Contemporary Islamic Religious Reform”, and on defining ‘the reformers’, as well as on describing the parameters and direction of Islamic reform. It also highlights “A Spectrum of Reformers and Approaches” (Esposito 2016: 264-69) and “Critical Areas of Islamic Reform” (Esposito 2016: 274-87) by addressing the implications for democratization, pluralism, gender issues, religious minorities, and interfaith relations vis-à-vis reform and reformation.

The book ends with these statements which summarize the essence of Islam and its dynamism as well as essence of the book:

The unity of Islam, from its early formation to contemporary developments, has encompassed a diversity of interpretations and expressions of faith. ... Today, the lives of one-fourth of the world’s population testify to the dynamism but also the struggle of Islam and the continued

commitment of Muslims to follow “*the straight path, the way of God, to whom belongs all...*” (Quran 42: 52–53) (Esposito 2016: 303; italics added)

All chapters, except second, end with brief ‘Conclusion’, summarizing impeccably and precisely the overall discussion of each chapter. Some of the important and significant common features of all chapters include (a list of) Key Terms’, (discussion) Questions, and Text boxes (containing extra information on key issues, concepts, personalities, etc.). These chapters are followed by a Timeline (of all the significant events of Islamic history, from 570 to January 2015); a Glossary of Arabic terms with a brief meaning/definitions; a ‘Select Bibliography’ thematically; and a general Index.

With reference to its third edition (Esposito 1998), Clinton Bennett (2013: 306) described it as a “widely used ... standard introductory text on Islam at College level”. He also praised it for presenting “a picture of Islam that moves closest to an insider view” though it “follows a somewhat traditional outsider format” (Bennett2010: 22). This equally, and more powerfully, applies to the fifth edition as well.

Thus, keeping in view the overall theme of this book, uniqueness both in style and presentation, and its (pedagogical) features, it is fair to assert that expansive in scope and coverage, meticulously presented, and lucidly written, the fifth edition of Esposito’s *Islam—The Straight Path* is a remarkable, balanced, simple but comprehensive introductory reference books on Islam and Islamic history.

A Comparison (of Contents, Themes and Features)

By way of comparison, it would be apt here to highlight the similarities and differences

in the contents and coverage as well as in the exceptional and pedagogical features of the four (4) books evaluated in this essay.

All these books, collectively, represent first two decades of the 21st century very fairly: out of four, two have been published in 2009 and one each in 2013 and 2016 (Brown2009; Shepard 2009; McCloud, et. al., 2013; Esposito 2016). All of them, except McCloud, et. al., (2013) are in between second to fifth editions: third edition of Brown’s book was published in 2017; second edition of Shepard’s book was published in 2014; and Esposito’s book is currently running in its fifth edition. In their revised editions, all these books provide an updated information and contents and one finds many additions and revisions in many topics—which are done keeping in view the changes that have occurred in the past few years: social, political and intellectual, etc. (see, Brown 2017; Shepard 2014; and Esposito 2016).

Another significant feature shared by these introductory/ reference works is that they have been published by three premier internationally Western publishing houses: two by *Wiley-Blackwell* (Brown 2009; McCloud, et. al., 2013) and one each by *Oxford University Press* (Esposito 2016) and *Routledge* (Shepard 2009). Though mainly based in USA and UK, all these publishing houses have well established branches in various parts of the world and have a global reach. Thus, as these books are predominantly targeted for the (under) graduate student community (especially those studying in the Western Universities), these books serve as ‘Books Recommended’/ ‘Suggested Readings’ for courses like ‘Introduction to Islam’ or ‘Islamic History and Civilization’ at global level. Moreover, almost all these works are helpful for the general readers wishing to gain basic knowledge about Islam (as a faith/ civilization) and Muslims—as they cover not only the basics of Islam and its foundational texts, but also acquaint

readers with the spread and growth of Islam—in different eras and regions—while not overlooking the modern developments, contemporary issues and challenges, and pressing issues.

All these books have many additional and pedagogical features like maps and illustrations, sidebars/ textboxes, chapter outline/ overviews, study/ discussion questions, chapter summaries, suggestions for further reading (on different topics/ subjects/ issues), etc.—thus, meeting the demands of current learning tools and pedagogy. This is shown below in the form of a table, in the Annexure-I, comparatively.

Bennett (2010: 16-17) writes about Esposito's approach to Islam in these words, and his statements apply almost equally to all the works evaluated in this essay: almost all these authors set out "to listen to Muslim voices, to enable readers to 'understand and appreciate what Muslims believe and practice'; they want their "readers to grasp something of the faith that 'has inspired and informed the lives of a major portion of the world community"; in describing and narrating the Islamic beliefs and basics, these authors try their utmost not "to offend or misrepresent" the faith of Muslims, and, thus, (by and large) pursue "a faith-sensitive approach" by taking "full note of Muslim sensibilities".

This becomes more evident by the statements of Shepard and Esposito as well: Shepard (2009:xviii,11) writes in clear terms that his book "seeks to give a sympathetic presentation of Islamic religion and relevant aspects of the cultures of which it is a part" and his "goal is at least empathetic, usually sympathetic, understanding of Islam and Muslims". Similarly, Esposito (2016: xii, xv) "seeks to explain the faith, the belief, and the doctrines of Islam", with the major goal "to contribute to a better understanding of the faith of Islam, which, as in the past, inspires,

guides, and motivates the vast majority of Muslims as believers and global citizens".

However, one major drawback and shortcoming found in Brown's book (2009) is the use of "New Introduction" to Islam in the title, giving an impression that other existing works on same theme are either obsolete (no longer needed) now or have turned insignificant—while the fact is that all the new works rely on previously published works and encyclopedias; and as Knysh (2017: xv) puts it: "It is difficult to write something fresh and original on the subject". Furthermore, Brown's adoption of "revisionist" approach for the topics and discussions related to the Quran, Hadith, and Seerah (Prophetic Biography), for an (under) graduate introductory/ reference book is not a welcome step at all. A comparative glimpse of the contents and topics, themes and headings, related to the Seerah (Prophet's Biography) from these books is provided below in the Annexure-II (Table-B).

CONCLUSION

From this discussion, it becomes evident that all these introductory works are primarily targeted for the undergraduate students and cover Islamic history from past to present, giving due space to the contemporary issues and events as well. The evaluation, assessment and brief content analysis of this type, helps in understanding the trends, tendencies and tenors in the 21st century scholarship on Islam/ Islamic history and offers various insights in understanding the themes, topics, and issues covered under the broader rubric of Islamic history/'study of Islam'—from past to present.

This discussion also reveals that various scholarly approaches have been adopted by these authors (Muslims and non-Muslims) in the 'study

of Islam'. These works, collectively, analyse, evaluate, and interpret different dimensions of the Islam/ Islamic history, and thus prove helpful in knowing and understanding Islam and Muslims both in broader historical perspective as well as in the contemporary global context.

Moreover, this evaluation provides distinct insights into the titles, coverage, objective, purpose, methodology, and targeted readership of these books. Last, but not the least, all these works prove expedient not only in knowing and understanding Islam as discussed, interpreted and presented in the 21st century Western academia, but also prove profitable in understanding the methodology, framework and other (methodological) nuances followed by these authors in the 'study of Islam'/ Islamic history in the 21st century.

REFERENCES

- Ali Kecia, and Leaman, Oliver. 2008. *Islam: The Key Concepts*. Oxon, RN and New York: Routledge
- Bennett, Clinton. 2010. *Studying Islam: The Critical Issues*. New York: Continuum
- Bennett, Clinton. 2013. Ed. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic
- Brown, Daniel W. 1999. *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. UK: Cambridge University Press
- Brown, Daniel W. 2009. *A New Introduction to Islam*, 2nd Ed. UK: Wiley-Blackwell
- Brown, Daniel W. 2017. *A New Introduction to Islam*, 3rd Ed. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell
- Brown, Daniel W. 2020. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Hadith*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell
- Esposito, John L. 1998. *Islam: The Straight Path*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press
- Esposito, John L. 1999. Ed. *The Oxford History of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Esposito, John L. 2009. Ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 6 vols. New York: Oxford University Press
- Esposito, John L. 2010. *The Future of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Esposito, John L. 2011. *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, 2nd Ed. New York: Oxford University Press
- Esposito, John L. 2016. *Islam—The Straight Path*, 5th Updated Edition. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gibb, H. A. R. 1980 [1949; 1961]. *Muhammedanism: A Historical Survey/ Islam: A Historical Survey*. London: Oxford University Press
- Guillaume, Alfred. 1954. *Islam*. London: Penguin
- Hodgson, Marshal G. S. 1977 [1974]. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press
- Khan, M. Z. 1962. *Islam—It Meaning for Modern Man*. London: Penguin
- Knysh, Alexander. 2017. *Islam in Historical Perspective*, 2nd Ed. New York and Abingdon: Routledge
- Lowin, Shari. 2006. "[Review] Reviewed Works: A New Introduction to Islam by Daniel Brown [2004]; An Introduction to Islam by David Waines [2003]; Islam: Its History, Teaching, and Practices by S. A. Nigosian [2004]". *The Journal of Religion* [JoR]. 86 (1): 164-66
- Mandaville, Peter. 2020. *Islam and Politics*, 3rd Ed. New York and Abingdon: Routledge
- Martin, Richard C. 2004. "Introduction", in

- Richard C. Martin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Islam and Muslim World* [EIMW], 2 vols., I: ix-xii. New York: Macmillan
- McCloud, Aminah Beverly, Hibbard, Scott W. and Saud, Laith. 2013. Eds. *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell
- Muir, Sir William. 1861. *The Life of Mahomet*, 4 Vols. London: Smith, Elder & Co.
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2010a. "Review: Daniel Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 2nd Ed. UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009...". *Islamic Studies*. 49 (1): 121-125
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2010b. "William Shepard, *Introducing Islam*. Oxon, RN; USA & Canada: Routledge, 2009". *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* [AJISS]. 27 (4): 117-120
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2011. "Review: Daniel Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam*, 2nd Ed. UK: Wiley-Blackwell". *AJISS*. 28 (1): 150-52
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2012. "Review: John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*, 2nd Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011". *Muslim World Book Review* [MWRB]. 32 (3): 20-23
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2014. "Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Saud, Eds. *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013". *Islam and Civilizational Renewal* [ICR]. 5 (2): 285-87
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2015. "Encyclopaedic Works on Islamic Political Thought and Movements in the Twenty-first Century". *AJISS*. 32 (4): 85-96
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2016. "Recent Scholarship on 'Islamism' Discourse: An Evaluation and Assessment", *ANALISA: Journal of Social Science & Religion* [ANALISA]. 1 (1): 1-18
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2017. "Democracy and Democratization in the Muslim World: An Evaluation of some Important Works on Democratization in South/ Southeast Asia". *ANALISA*. 2 (1): 79-101
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2019. "Understanding Pakistan through Literature: An Appraisal of some Recent Works". *ANALISA*. 4 (1): 1-20
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2020. "A Portrayal of 21st Century Western Scholarship on 'Islamic History'". *Greater Kashmir* [GK]. 10th September, p. 7
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2021a. "21st Century Western Scholarship on 'Islamic History': An Evaluation of Some Selected Recent Works". *The Freelancer* (Online Portal, New Delhi), 25th January, <http://www.thefreelancer.co.in/eng/?p=83> (last accessed on 15th June, 2021)
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2021b. "Debates on Tradition and Modernity in the Subcontinent". In Lütfi Sunar (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Muslim Socio-Political Thought*, pp. 59-72. New York & London: Routledge
- Parray, Tauseef Ahmad. 2021c. "On Reading John Esposito's *Islam—The Straight Path*". *GK*, 14th January, p. 7
- Rahman, Fazlur. 1979 [1966]. *Islam*. 2nd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Shepard, William E. 1982. *The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual: The Religious Aspects and Implications of the Writings of Ahmad Amin*. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Islamic Studies in association with Vikas Publishing House
- Shepard, William E. 1996. *Sayyid Qutb and*

Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of "Social Justice in Islam". Leiden: E. J. Brill

Shepard, William E. 2009. *Introducing Islam*. Oxon, RN; New York & Canada: Routledge

Shepard, William E. 2014. *Introducing Islam*. 2nd

Ed. London and New York: Routledge

Waines, David. 2012. "Review: Alexander Knysh, *Islam in Historical Perspective*. xiii, 534 pp. New York & London: Prentice Hall, 2011". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies [BSOAS]*, 75 (2): 382-84

ANNEXURE-I

Table-A: Comparison of Additional and Pedagogical Features included in the Four Selected Books Evaluated in this Essay

Name	Brown (2009)	Shepard (2009)	McCloud, et. al., (2013)	Esposito (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maps/ Illustrations/ Figures ➤ Sidebars/ textboxes ➤ Chapter Outline ➤ Study Questions/ Discussion Questions ➤ Chapter Summaries ➤ Suggestions For/ Suggested Further Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • useful maps and diagrams • and many more illustrations • Detailed Chronologies • tables summarizing key information • Bibliography • Index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrations And Maps • Text Boxes • Summary Charts (Point-Wise) • A Glossary Of Key Arabic Terms • A List Of Further Reading • Index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrations and Maps • Chapter Outline • Sidebars (providing succinct information about personalities, events, famous places, books, etc., relevant to each chapter) • Discussion Questions • Suggested Further Readings (at the end of each chapter) • (Comprehensive) Bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maps, Illustration and Figures • Textboxes (providing extra information on key issues, concepts and personalities) • Conclusion (at the end of almost every chapter) • (Discussion) Questions • Key Terms (at the end of each chapter) • Timeline (of major events from 570 to Jan 2015) • Glossary (of Arabic terms with a brief meaning/ definition) • (Thematic/ Topic-wise) Select Bibliography

ANNEXURE-II

Table-B: Comparison and Analysis of the Contents related to the Prophet (pbuh) from Shepard (2009), Brown(2009), and Esposito (2016)

Shepard (2009/ 2014)	Brown (2009/ 2017)	Esposito (2016)
Chapter 3 The Beginnings of Islam: Muslim history to about 700 CE	Chapter 4 The Life of Muhammad	Chapter 1 Muhammad and the Quran: Messenger and Message
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>The Arabs before Islam</i> ➤ <i>The career of the Prophet Muhammad</i> ➤ <i>Conflict and conquest after Muhammad</i> ➤ <i>Some scholarly reservations</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Prologue and Setting</i> ➤ <i>Birth and Childhood</i> ➤ <i>Early Adulthood</i> ➤ <i>The Beginning of Revelation</i> ➤ <i>Opposition</i> ➤ <i>The Night Journey and Ascent to Heaven</i> ➤ <i>The Hijra</i> ➤ <i>The Battle of Badr</i> ➤ <i>Confrontation with the Jews of Madina</i> ➤ <i>The Battle of Uhud</i> ➤ <i>The Peace of al-Hudaybiyya and the Farewell Pilgrimage</i> ➤ <i>The Constitution of Madina</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Muhammad and the Muslim Community</i> ➤ <i>Muhammad and the West</i> ➤ <i>The Quran: The Word of God</i>
Key points Discussion questions Further reading	Evaluation Resources for Further Study	Conclusion