

# KATHA

## Journal of Dialogue of Civilisations

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## Editorial

The contributions to this edition of *Katha: Journal of Dialogue of Civilisations* have a topical focus around different aspects of the Islamic faith and civilisation.

In the lead article, Vivienne SM Angeles begins with a focus on the Malay Moro<sup>1</sup> population in the Southern Philippines. The term 'Moro' was used by the Spanish in a derogatory sense to refer to the local Muslims, "with negative connotations of backwardness, being uncivilized, pernicious and indolent, among others" (p.1). Despite concerted efforts of the Spanish colonizers to convert Filipinos to Christianity, the Moros have remained Muslims until the present day. The author posits that globalization, as manifested through both Spanish and American colonial policies, gave rise to the Malay Moro identity construction as an oppositional identity in the midst of a larger Christianized Filipino population. According to Angeles, the Spanish promoted a view among the natives that they must become Christianized in order to be civilized. This created a mindset among the converted that they were more civilized than those who had remained Muslims which, according to Comaroff & Comaroff,<sup>2</sup> constitutes a 'colonization of the consciousness.' According to the author, however, after Philippine independence, the Moro Muslims, and the term Moro itself, have come to be seen as the epitome of bravery, of resistance against colonization, and as representing the aspirations of Filipino Muslims.

Islam in the Philippines today is strongly influenced by Saudi Arabia. People are adopting Middle Eastern clothing; in addition, they are learning more about Islam due to the Filipino-Saudi Arabian nexus, and

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<sup>1</sup> According to the author, although Muslims were lumped together by the Spanish as "Moros," they actually come from 13 different ethno-linguistic groups.

<sup>2</sup> Comaroff, Jean & John Comaroff. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

through the translation of Islamic texts into the Philippine language. The internet, as well, has become a powerful tool for Muslims to learn more about Islam and Islamic identity. The combination of these external influences has helped make Filipino Muslims more aware of their membership in the *Ummah*, helping Filipino Muslims move from a localized ethnic identity to a global Islamic identity.

For the second contribution, Idris Awang *et al* provide an interesting analysis of the Islamic concept of *Wassatiyyah* (moderation), and how it delimits the ways in which Muslims are able to enjoy listening to music. The authors suggest that Muslims can be deeply involved in music as long as it does not contravene the teachings of Islam, pointing to the importance of moderation for Muslims wishing to enjoy music, within Islamic parameters, since music of an acceptable sort is able to fulfill human aesthetic needs. According to the authors, Muslim thinkers al-Ghazali, Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut, Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi and Dr. Ahmad Sharbasi among others, have established important parameters within which Muslims can enjoy music; these parameters are aimed at ensuring that the music is *harus*, or permissible according to Islamic teachings.

In the third article, Engku Ahmad Zaki Engku Alwi examines Islamic ethical codes concerning what the religion teaches about how to handle disagreements, and the place that disagreement and discourse have in the Islamization of knowledge. The author views 'the disease of disagreement and discord' (p. 26) as a challenge afflicting the Muslim *Ummah* today. In the overview of how pious Muslims have handled disagreement over the centuries, the author points to the tradition of consulting the Qur'an and the Hadith concerning any issue that might arise. Furthermore, Muslim thinkers have historically been careful to accord due respect and appreciation to the viewpoints of others, and to avoid fanaticism concerning potentially controversial issues. For dealing with disagreements arising among the believers today, the author suggests that young Muslims need to study both religious and secular knowledge. Contemporary Muslim intellectuals should study diverse sources of knowledge and seek to Islamize it; universities should provide integrated sciences and, most importantly, Muslims need to refer to the Qur'an and the Sunnah as their guidelines for day-to-day living, regarding Islam as a way of life.

Adi Setia's article focuses on the applications of Islamic science and technology for current worldwide efforts toward environmental wholeness and sustainability. She suggests that the current natural and

cultural crises brought about by Western science and technology, along with neoliberalism, needs to be addressed by thinking Muslims who can develop an alternative science and technology based on Islamic values. She contrasts Islamic science - which is appreciative of divine bounty, with *kafir*<sup>3</sup> Western science (pp. 40, 42), meaning that Western science inherently denies divine bounty. The author writes that Islamic Green energy was used in the great city of Baghdad, as well as in present-day India under both Muslim and Hindu rule. She then talks about 'biomimicry,' where the processes of nature are imitated in environmentally friendly ways. She points out many examples of the wisdom offered by the Qur'an about not generating waste, and about respecting the Earth and her non-human communities as well. Adi Setia speaks of an original 'Green Revolution' arising from the agricultural practices of Muslims in Andalucia, India, Yemen and the Malay peninsula. She values the concept of *hima*, which is a symbiosis of nature and culture. The term *hima* refers to an Islamic system of environmental protection, first instituted by the Prophet (PBUH) in Madinah or arguably by Abraham in Makkah. The author exhorts Muslims scientists and technologists to follow the wisdom that has been offered by Islamic science and technology over the centuries, suggesting that they incorporate those aspects of Western science which fit within the ethical frame of Islamic teachings concerning the environment as well. The areas of current science which Adi Setia finds acceptable are Biomimicry; Biomimetics; Permaculture; Biointensive and Organic Agriculture; Green Chemistry and Manufacturing; Wind, Water, Tidal and Solar Energy; and the *Hima* System of Nature and Culture Conservation.

The current edition of *Katha* also offers a rare and fascinating interview with Seyyed Hossein Nasr, conducted by Nevad Kahteran. Prof. Dr. Seyyed has written extensively on Islamic science and civilization, as well as studying the concept of nature as understood in the Muslim tradition.

In the interview, Prof. Seyyed speaks of *philosophia perennis*, referring to the belief that there is universal wisdom to be found in the great faith traditions, as well as in the world's primal and mythological traditions. At the heart of this wisdom, he finds a 'pure metaphysics,'

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<sup>3</sup> "Meaning a science that essentially expresses *ingratitude* (Arabic, *kufir*) for the boundaries of the natural world; hence it is *exploitative* rather than *appreciative* approach to the study of nature..." (Footnote 7, p. 40).

to which he refers as *scientia sacra* which, despite the differences among traditions, is based on a Supreme Principle as espoused by the aforementioned traditions. Prof. Seyyed advocates for the recovery of non-Western intellectual traditions, and for 'renewing the search for truth, goodness and beauty' as the discipline of philosophy moves forward. Prof. Seyyed advocates for the formulation of "a global and universal expression of perennial philosophy which *is* itself the only legitimate world philosophy" (p. 58). Such a form would not be based on "the rejection of traditional forms of wisdom but on reaching the truth they hold in common in their inner depths" (p. 58). The interview ends with Prof. Seyyed suggesting that a compilation of the world's greatest philosophical texts should be carried out, along the lines of the already-existing *Western Spirituality Series*, devoted to Christian, Jewish and Islamic mystical traditions. In this process, he insists that careful efforts should be made to write a truly inclusive in-depth history of traditional philosophies, including those arising from the world's diverse faiths and civilisational traditions.

**We are happy to present all these contributions under one cover so that they may foster further discussion.**

**Editorial**