

Book Review

**Thomas W. Arnold (2012). *The Spread of Islam in the World: A History of Peaceful Preaching*.
New Delhi: Goodword Books. 467 pages. [ISBN: 8187570229]**

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Upon the re-emergence of the Islamophobia syndrome, especially in the West after the tragedy of the September 11 2001, which draws back the tensed line between the Muslim world and the West, Professor Thomas Arnold's book 'The Spread of Islam in the World: A History of Peaceful Preaching' could be a worthy reading collection for younger generations today. The book which was firstly published in 1896 and reprinted several times, and also interpreted in 10 different languages had shown the significance of this masterpiece to be re-studied and re-analysed so that a clearer and comprehensive understanding of how Islam spread and has contributed towards the development of human 'religious' civilization can be comprehended better.

Certainly, Professor Arnold's book in no way reaches perfection, and even he claimed to be neither authoritative nor specialist on any period of history, but undeniably the book offers a balanced analysis and an alternative perspective for those who seek to find the truth about Islam. It has 13 chapters (including introduction and conclusion) and each chapter covers almost all regions that had interacted with Islam. The story line of the book begins with how Islam first established in Mecca and Medina, and later it spreads to all Arabian Peninsula and other corners of the earth encompassing western Asia, Africa, Spain Andalusia, central Asia, China, India, and Malay Archipelago. In the time of writing in 1896, Prof Arnold estimated that there were about 200 million of the followers of Islam. The references used in this book range from Arabic, Dutch, English, French and other sources.

The main strength of this book is it reveals with an avalanche data of how Islam peacefully spread to many places in the world. Professor Arnold has laid down the very fundamental vigour of Islam which is not entirely depending on the Muslim physical empires and dynasties but it solidly rests on its 'spiritual conquests', that is, *da'wah* conveying the message of Islam that went on uninterruptedly by the Muslim missionaries. In other words, although Muslims had lost a few mighty empires such as the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258, and Muslim Andalusia in Spain in 1492 but through the relentless efforts by the Muslim missionaries, Islam peacefully gained a footing in other places, namely in Sumatra and the Malay Archipelago, central Africa, China, East India islands, and some places in Europe such as Bosnia and the existing of polish-speaking Muslims of Tatar origin in Lithuania that inhabit in Kovno, Vilno and Grodno, and not to forget that Islam also found in England, north America, Australia and Japan.

Prof Arnold's key essence in this book is to not totally accept the allegation that the spread of Islam was achieved merely by the sword but he efficaciously countered this with a comprehensive analysis on what actually would happen when Muslim armies 'conquered' non-Muslim territories or what the Muslim missionaries had offered in their *da'wah* that attracted many people to embrace Islam? Irrefutably, war could not be avoided in the defence of Islam, such as in the Battle of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, and others. This was also to include when Muslim armies began their *jihad* in Europe which culminated with the victory of Sultan Mehmet Al-Fatih in overpowering the Byzantine Empire in 1453. With the Sultan Mehmet's victory, non-Muslims, however, were not forced to embrace Islam but their hearts won over to Islam was due to the beautiful teachings of Islam. Under Muslims rule, non-Muslims were allowed to practice their own religious faith freely, and this indirectly had breathed new life especially for other Christian sects that were considered heretic under Byzantine, namely the Christian Copts, Jacobites, Nestorians and others. Non-Muslims were also guaranteed their life and safety by paying *jizyah* a moderate tax which was less oppressive than before. To put in place, Muslims rule firmly uphold a freedom of religious practice, and a tolerant and equal opportunity for everyone for the attainment of the servitude of the God's *rahmah*.

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For other places where the spread of Islam was peacefully achieved, it boils down to the excellent character of Islam which called for the reinstatement of human's dignity and civilizations. People might wonder how Islam spread to Africa, China, East Indies and the Malay Archipelago? Indeed, it was very much by the work of the Muslim proselytizing missionaries, and not by the sword. Again, back to the fundamental teachings of Islam which promises equal status and religious way of life. As most of the inhabitants in these territories were facing the same oppressive rule of human laws which harnessed slavery and caste system, Islam on the contrary, opened new door for them to feel human again by the abolishment of exploitive slavery and the caste system. In Islam, irrespective of colours, and ethnicities, all Muslims are equal, and they are bound to form a stronger brotherhood in their relations.

In the case of the Malay Archipelago, it can be considered as the best example of how Islam was peacefully introduced in this place. Although, Prof Arnold is a bit sceptical on the role of the Arab traders and missionaries as the first carrier of Islam to this area but with the numerous mentions of the 'Syeikh' Arab names, it can be no longer disputed that the *Syeihkul* Arabs are the core progenitor of the Muslim communities in the Malay Archipelago. What interesting more on how Islam has contributed for the development of civilization for the people of Malay Archipelago is it drives them to build well-known Muslim empires and golden civilizations as manifested with the establishment of the Malay Malacca Sultanate, Malay Brunei Sultanate, Aceh Sultanate, Sulu Sultanate, Kingdom of Banjarmasin, Kingdom of Sukadana and others.

Despite this excellent work, some previous critiques are worthy here to be shared with. Among others, the spread of Islamic society is better term to be used than the spread of Islam as religion. Professor Arnold also did not elaborate enough on the use of sword in spreading Islam or the forced conversion in the Muslim world. From my point of views, Professor Arnold's preferable terms Muhammadans, Mahometans, Musلمان and Saracens, not Muslims, do not reflect the basic *weltanschauung* of Islam as this religion is not after a particular name as Christ for Christian, Gautama Buddha for Buddhism, Zoroaster for Zoroastrianism, and others. Islam firmly stands for the total submission to Allah s.w.t the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. Apart from that a few technical errors were found such as some verses, the name of surah and number of the verse were wrongly cited as in the pages of 3, 4 and 5.

After all, this book should become one of the major references for the scholars, the students of higher learning institutions and those interested individuals in discussing the nature of interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim world beyond the concept of *Kafir Dzimmi*, *Kafir Harbi*, and in particular the Islamophobia as Islam's noble mission is to call for all human beings to submit to Allah s.w.t and play the role as the Vicegerent on this earth.