Khalid Masud's Multiple Worlds

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Since childhood, Muhammad Khalid Masud has inhabited multiple social and intellectual worlds. Born in 1939 in Ambala, in the Indian Punjab (now called Hariana), his family emigrated in 1947 to Jhang, in the Pakistani Punjab. In a literal sense, the designation *muhajir* encompassed Punjabi-speaking emigrants such as Masud's family, although today the term refers primarily to Urdu-speaking refugees who fled to Pakistan after India's independence.

Masud's early schooling comprised both Islamic and more or less secular state studies. A complementary major influence was his home environment. His father lacked formal schooling, but studied medicine as an adult at Bhopindra Tibbiya College Patiala, Indian Punjab, from where he graduated with a degree of Hadhiq al-Hukama with a clinical and surgical specialization. He was considered a *hakim* and *tabib* for his mastery of Arab-Greek medicine. Although not madrasa-educated, his father studied religious books on his own in Urdu and personally knew many of India's prominent *ulama*. Thus Masud, from his early childhood, became familiar with the milieus of traditional learning. He also memorized parts of the Qur'an and studied Persian and Arabic on his own.

The other major intellectual formation was state-run primary and secondary schooling. Masud studied for part of a year with Ghulam Husayn, the local mufti in Jhang Sadar, but stopped because the mufti was only irregularly available for lessons. Concurrently he taught at the Islamiya high school in Jhang Sadar from 1957 to 1962, later taking his B.A. degree as a private candidate (one who sits for the degree examination without college affiliation or formal classroom experience) from Punjab University, Lahore. Masud's 1962 M.A. thesis from the same university, 'The Attitude of Panjab University Students toward Religion', won a gold medal and also suggested his early interest in social science methods for understanding the contexts of religious ideas and experience.

The learning environment at McGill University's Institute for Islamic Studies provided an almost unique bridging environment between Western- and Islamic-style scholarly traditions. With early support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Institute's graduate student body was almost equally divided between students from Muslim-majority countries, especially India and Pakistan, and 'the West'. Masud thrived in this environment.

Contextualizing al-Shatibi

Masud's 1973 thesis on Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's idea of the common good (*al-maslaha*) first appeared as a 1977 book that, once significantly revised and published with a new title in 1995, showed the influence of heavy immersion in Western-style social thought over the intervening years.[1] In his lifetime, al-Shatibi (d. 1388) grappled with significant issues of political, economic, and social change in his native Andalusia. After an eclipse in influence that lasted for hundreds of years, Shatibi's work returned to prominence in the late nineteenth century when Islamic reformers such as Rashid Rida (1865–1935) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) made it a major reference point for their own thinking. Shatibi, argues Masud, 'develops the concept of *maslaha* as the basis of rationality and extendibility of Islamic law to changing circumstances, but also presents it as a fundamental principle for the universality and certainty of Islamic law'.[2] Shatibi's most important text was the *Muwafaqa*, neglected by many jurists because readers needed a background knowledge of the political, economic, and social circumstances of the times in which Shatibi lived in order to understand his argument. Without such knowledge, not a normal part of convention-

Over the last years Dale Eickelman has been in close contact with Muhammad Khalid Masud while at the ISIM. Often, while travelling the globe and changing flights at Amsterdam's international airport, the two would meet over lunch or breakfast. Eickelman paid frequent visits to the ISIM office, also in his capacity as member of the ISIM Academic Committee, and participated in several of its workshops. The friendship between the two scholars dates back to the 1980s. On the occasion of Masud's retirement, the anthropologist reflects on his career and their mutual interests.

al jurisprudence, Shatibi's views on *maslaha* appear 'contradictory, vague or abstract, and hence difficult to follow'.[3]

In Masud's view, Shatibi goes further than many modernist jurists in seeing Islamic law as adaptable in theory as well as practice, with *maslaha* as an independent principle of jurisprudence rather than merely a justification for expediency. Of Shatibi's 40 known legal opinions, 34 deal with cases of 'social change' – Masud's reserved way of referring to the increasingly chaotic political and social conditions of Shatibi's native Andalusia in the fourteenth century. In Masud's view, these concerns prevail equally in the contemporary Muslim majority world. In the *Muwafaqat*, Shatibi endorses flexibility and the use of human reason as elements integral to developing and interpreting Islamic law, the goal of which is to realize the human good, and Masud emphasizes the necessity of placing these opinions in their political and economic contexts in order to make sense of them.[4]

From Shatibi to Shahrur

I have worked closely with Khalid Masud since the early 1980s in planning conferences and editorial projects, but I did not get a concrete understanding of Masud's method of interpreting and analysing texts until March 1996 in Islamabad. Our primary activity was conducting interviews with publishers and distributors, and supervising a survey of bookstores in Islamabad. Our goal was to explore how print media was being used to disseminate new religious ideas and movements and to sustain older ones. In off-hours we read Muhammad Shahrur's second book, *Contemporary Islamic Studies on State and Society*,[5] which applied arguments made in his earlier best-selling *al-Kitab wa-l-Qur'an: Qira'a Mu'asira* (The Book and the Qur'an: A Contemporary Reading) to issues of political and social authority.[6]

We both saw Shahrur as a maverick who offered major interpretive challenges to the world of established religious scholars, and Masud drew strong parallels between Shatibi and Shahrur. Both writers insisted that the interpretation of jurisprudence and tradition in Islam was a continuous process requiring close attention to the contexts in which interpretations were made. Shahrur argued that any act of interpretation involves the author, the text, and the reader or listener. He bluntly argues that in the case of the Qur'an, God is the author so that no one, even at the time of its first revelation, could claim to understand it in its entirety without also claiming to be a partner to God in knowledge. Therefore the reader or listener is obliged to use his or her intellect and knowledge of context to interpret the text. Yet when it comes to the Qur'an and to the interpretation of religious tradition, Shahrur argues that many people fall back on religious authority alone.[7]

Rather than thinking of the sayings and actions of the Prophet's companions and the deliberations of the first jurists as the 'foundations' of Islam, Shahrur argues that Muslims should regard them as the products of human action, subject to error and to interpretation, abandon the authority-oriented view of religious knowledge as fixed and immutable, and replace it with a collective, critical approach in which there is a freedom to argue, interpret, and adapt within the worldview (*wa'i*) and knowledge of a particular time and place.[8] Mutual consultation (*shura*) is integral to proper interpretation, and it is always linked to historical practice: 'Forbidding *shura* is like forbidding prayer.'[9]

Masud sees strong parallels between Shahrur and Shatibi, who argues – although without Shahrur's characteristic directness – that laws,

Khalid and Ashraf Masud at the post-doctoral workshop on 'The Public Sphere and Muslim Identities', Berlin, August 2001.

including the *shari'a*, become embedded only through social habits and customs (*'ada*).[10] I would argue that the importance of understanding the social context of Islamic jurisprudence and tradition is also a major theme running through Masud's own work. Masud never argues as bluntly as Shahrur that Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is paralysed to the extent that it ignores these changing frameworks. Nor does he directly link the authoritative habits of *fiqh* to political authoritarianism, as does Shahrur. Nonetheless, these central and consistent threads also run through Masud's thought.

In reading Shahrur in Islamabad, Masud intercalated comments on his style – that of a secularly educated civil engineer rather than a traditionally educated Islamic scholar. Each chapter of *Dirasat Islamiya*, like Shahrur's other books, begins with an engineer's draft of the points to be covered, and then meticulously elaborates them.[11] Shahrur's approach also lends itself well to lectures in modern secular universities and audiences. My sense is that Masud was especially sensitive to Shahrur's style because he faced similar challenges in his own career. Masud's 1995 book on Shatibi, like its 1977 predecessor, makes no explicit reference to Western-style social science. But the 1995 argument relating Shatibi's judicial opinions to their social and political contexts is considerably stronger than in the earlier volume, and Masud's later work, including that achieved during his appointment as ISIM Academic Director, explicitly incorporates such approaches.

Masud's scholarship in Leiden

Masud's analytic signature is a combination of authoritative immersion in key Islamic ideas and texts and the judicial use of the concepts in the social sciences. His three decades at the Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, instilled recognition of the diverse audiences for Islamic studies in Muslim-majority countries – and the political risks inherent in direct expression. This is a negative element of his sensitivity to audience. The positive element has been a consistent one to make texts accessible to audiences from both Islamic studies and the social sciences everywhere.

Masud's characteristic scholarly approach seeks carefully to define terms rather than assume that audiences both in the Muslim-majority world and in the West share the same background scholarly understandings. Consider, for example, the long opening essay to his edited volume on the Tablighi movement, *Travellers in Faith* (2000).[12] It begins with an extended discussion of terms and concepts, including 'transnationalism'. Masud first shows how the concept has been used in social sciences, referring to historical phenomena that preceded the rise of nationalism in the West and generally downplaying the importance of religious movements. Turning specifically to the Muslim world, he indicates how Muslim transnationalism does not necessarily threaten the state or nationalist movements. Likewise, key terms such as 'renewal' (*tajdid*), 'communication' (*tabligh*, from

which derives the name of the movement), and 'call' (*da'wa*) are carefully spelled out.

Masud's chosen vehicle of expression in Leiden has been short essays on topical themes, many related to the broad scope of his responsibilities in organizing and encouraging collective research projects and conferences over a wide spectrum of Islamic studies. Thus 'Hadith and Violence' begins with a denotative definition of 'violence' derived from *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, followed by an analysis of the term in a variety of cultural semantic fields. He then turns to a similar analysis of jihad and *fitna* (rebellion or civil war).[13] Whether the subject is naming the 'other' in European and Muslim languages, Sufi views of the *hajj* and Islamic rituals, or minorities in Islamic history, Masud's approach is consistently a careful examination of terms, both in English and in Muslim-majority languages, in order to examine the subject. The anchor is always specific historical texts rather than inferences about the nature of Muslim religious consciousness or Muslim societies.[14] Thus, after reviewing the ambiguities of defining 'minorities' in international law and nation-states, Masud, basing himself on a 1956 analysis and selection of texts by Muhammad Hamidullah, examines four Muslim documents: the seventh-century pact of Medina, defining the rights and obligations of Muslims and Jews; the pact of Najran, defining the status of Christians; Caliph 'Umar's pact of Jerusalem (638); and the pact of Granada signed in 1491 between the last Muslim ruler of Granada and the kings of Aragon and Castille. Masud's addition to Hamidullah's earlier work is to make the significance of these four pacts accessible through close reading to a general audience concerned with the sociology of minorities. A more ambitious essay on pluralism in Islamic moral traditions – Masud uses the plural – provides a framework for understanding the genres through which Islamic ethical traditions have been conveyed and the – perhaps surprising for some – spectrum of past and present thought on issues such as social control, citizenship, issues of life and death, and human sexuality.[15]

In scholarship as in developing ISIM's teaching agenda, Masud's consistent goal has been to find ways of opening Islamic scholarship to new ways of knowing, combining the strengths of the Islamic sciences with contemporary scholarship that uses other methods and techniques. The Netherlands in the last two decades has been a particularly apt locale for Masud's interest in Muslims in Europe and the development of a European Islam,[16] and his contributions over the next few years will add significantly to our understanding of these vital topics.

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Notes

1. Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Islamic Legal Philosophy* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1977); idem., *Shatibi's Philosophy of Islamic Law* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1995).
2. Masud, *Shatibi's Philosophy*, p. viii.
3. Ibid., p. 111.
4. Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Muslim Jurists' Quest for the Normative Basis of Shari'a* (Leiden: ISIM, 2001), pp. 8–9.
5. Muhammad Shahrur, *Dirasat Islamiya l-mu'asira fi-l-dawla wa-l-mujtama'a* (Damascus: al-Ahali li-l-tiba'awa-l-nashr, 1994).
6. See Dale F. Eickelman, 'Muhammad Shahrur and the Printed Word', *ISIMNewsletter* 7 (March 2001), p. 7.
7. Shahrur, *Dirasat Islamiya*, p. 30.
8. Ibid., pp. 92, 125–6.
9. Ibid., p. 150.
10. Interview with the author, Islamabad, 8 March 1996.
11. For example, ibid., p. 141.
12. Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies on Tablighi Jama'atas a Transnational Movement for the Renewal ofFaith* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
13. Muhammad Khalid Masud, '*Hadith* and Violence', *Oriente Moderno*, 21 (n.s.), no. 1 (2002): 5–8.
14. Muhammad Khalid Masud, 'Naming the "Other": Names for Muslims and Europeans in European and Muslim Languages', in *Muslims and the West: Encounter and Dialogue* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2001), pp. 123–45; idem., 'Sufi Views of the *Hajj* and Islamic Rituals', *Sufi Illumination* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 1–13; and idem., 'Minorities in Islamic History: An Analytical Study of Four Documents', *Journal for Islamic Studies* 20 (2000): 125–34.
15. Muhammad Khalid Masud, 'The Scope of Pluralism in Islamic Moral Traditions', in *The Many and the One: Religious and Secular Perspectives on Pluralism in the Modern World*, edited by Richard Madsen and Tracey B. Strong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 180–91.
16. Muhammad Khalid Masud, 'Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities', *ISIM Newsletter* 11 (December 2002): 17.