**The Making of Jihadis**

[Aliya Anjum](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/aliya-anjum/)

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My father read every day, and he inculcated in me, the reading habit, which has benefitted me tremendously in life.

In my childhood, I enjoyed reading both English books and Urdu story books, which was a great blessing.

If Enid Blyton’s enchanting fictional world was full of engaging characters then Dastaan Ameer Hamza with Umro Ayyar was equally intriguing. Replete with the battle tales of noble Abrahamic warriors, the machinations of sorcerers and their nemesis the crafty ayyaars or con men interspersed with the accounts of beautiful princesses, the Daastaan tradition subliminally instilled civilisational pride in me – which would have been lacking had I only read children’s English literature.

In English comics, the non-whites were showcased as an intellectually and culturally inferior race. I was a single-digit age then and it would have been easy to internalise the belief of being inferior to the white European race. The treasure chest of Urdu literature in Urdu – owing to our rich Mughal heritage – made me mentally rebuff the subliminal conditioning being imparted by the white supremacist western books.

We are privileged due to Urdu literary fiction. However, the same cannot be said of our non-fiction writings.

The Turkish drama, Ertugrul, was wildly popular because it was playing out the Jihadi fantasy on screen.

This month at the Karachi International Book Fair, I picked a collection of children’s books. They were short biographies of prominent Islamic warriors and rulers such as Tariq Bin Ziyyad, Muhammad bin Qasim, Nooruddin Zangi etc.

I am fairly well versed in Islamic history owing to western writings. I was keen to learn the Islamic narrative through easy reads.

The books were a long information dump, which was neither engaging nor educational.

It was a one-dimensional linear narrative instilling the Jihadi mindset.

The nobility of thought, spirit and action was conspicuous by its absence. Discretion is the better part of valour and no warrior or ruler can be devoid of it. However, these real-life characters were portrayed as warmongers prone to impulsive lethal violent rage and devoid of wisdom, tolerance and mercy.

Children idealise these figures as role models. Some books glorify negative traits and unbecoming conduct, falsely attributing it to these great men from Islamic history. Innocent young minds internalise negative traits when they read such books. Moral strength is a prerequisite to a noble character. Moral strength is gained by submitting to an honour code. These writings do not teach honourable conduct. They teach bigotry, intolerance, impulsiveness and militancy.

The writings were a confusing mess of propaganda, which was historically vague. There were no maps, no timelines and no clear guidelines for the various Islamic empires and their historical counterparts. Iraq, Spain, Egypt, Makkah and Syria were casually mentioned concerning military campaigns. The one-dimensional militant depiction of these historical figures dulls the natural curiosity of a young mind. It grooms young minds for global dominance through jihad.

These children’s books impart a worldview where holy war is the only noble aspiration in life. It is the solution to all problems currently faced by the Muslim ummah.

This instils tunnel vision, bigotry, intolerance and militancy in one go. No enlightened child can emerge from it.

To reap the harvest sown early in children’s minds, every Friday sermon in the mosque highlights the cause of Kashmir and Palestine. This jihadi spirit banks on the grooming that takes place in childhood.

The Turkish drama, Ertugrul, was wildly popular because it was playing out the Jihadi fantasy on screen. It was allowing each TV drama viewer to vicariously wage jihad on horseback, emerge victorious and feel like they rule the world. This medieval jihadi mindset can be witnessed nationwide.

The jihadi mindset is the greatest asset of political Islamic parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, TTP and TLP among others. The red herring of jihad enables them to avoid the hard work needed to address real and pressing issues. Islamic political parties skilfully avoid serving the social sector by keeping all attention on jihad. They shout from the rooftops about the suffering of women and children in Palestine. This is done to avoid addressing the plight of the widows, orphans and the destitute in their neighbourhoods. Edhi, Saylani and Ansar Burney rescue the poor and serve the weak, whereas these so-called Islamic parties only talk about the need to wage war.

Perhaps, the greatest payoff of such books is that jihadi aspirations allow us to be lazy, dishonest and irresponsible as citizens. Islamic nations are backward and illiterate. The west rules the world through the global banking and financial system; aviation and weapons industry; the tech giants; and the medical and pharmaceutical industry. However, all of these pillars of western power rely on their nation’s superior academia. They are knowledge-based economies.

Knowledge is taught in childhood and requires hard work both from adults and children. No Islamic nation can become powerful while being dishonest, lazy and irresponsible.

Doreen Kingsley (DK) books, Smithsonian Musuem’s children’s books, other western publications and even the Indian Goodword publications established by the late Maulana Wahiduddin, offer great educational books for children. These books aid in developing intelligence, wisdom and knowledge.

Western children’s historical books have maps, charts, timelines and other tools to familiarise children with empires, rulers and the state of the world in various eras. They are factual and instructional while being engaging and enjoyable. Pakistani school texts and non-fiction books do not even come close to this, as no intellectual effort is employed at any level.

Some years ago, I researched and wrote a children’s book in English on the Muslim world’s scientific history. I submitted it to a competition by the National Book Foundation (NBF). In a breach of trust, the project in charge handed over my manuscript to a local publisher. I then approached the Managing Director of NBF and thankfully, he took timely action. The same project in charge did not publish any of my books, despite one of them winning a first prize, where publication was part of the prize. Due to corruption in the state machinery, I then approached private publishers but they were similarly unethical and greedy.

Jihad, being the paradigm of convenience, is, thus, Pakistan’s priority. Knowledge and learning require hard work and are hence avoided.

*The writer is an independent researcher, author and columnist. She can be reached at aliya1924@gmail.com*