

Remembering Yusuf al-Qaradawi

By [Md Mahmudul Hasan](#) - October 7, 2022 @ 3:01pm



(FILES) Egyptian Muslim scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi addresses Muslims at Al-Azhar mosque during the weekly Friday prayer in Cairo. (Photo by AFP)

I ONCE met a man known as an Islamic leader. He is not a writer but has a journalistic background, so he is no stranger to the world of writing.

I thought his life story would make a fascinating and successful book. I requested him to write his autobiography. He told me that he was old and could not write. He was in his late 60s at that time.

I tacitly disagreed, remembering Doris Lessing who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2007 at the age of 88 and continued writing beyond that year. He stood his ground, and our conversation ended.

I have the example of another writer, Yusuf al-Qaradawi. He died on Sept 26 at 96, leaving five of his manuscripts in press. He was most probably working on various projects in the last days.

Qaradawi was not a man to use age as an excuse for withdrawal from writing. He produced roughly 200 works of varying lengths. Some of them are very thick and multivolume, and most are landmark publications.

Qaradawi was not a scholar of my field, English literature. Nor was he Western-educated. Many may find it strange that I put pen to paper to write an essay on a writer who is not a prominent figure in my discipline.

It is the magnitude of his scholarly legacy that interests me most. I regard Qaradawi as a man of letters, and I am impressed by the rigour, worth and extensiveness of his scholarly contributions.

Among the contemporary scholars I have studied, Qaradawi stood out for the splendour of his reasoning, the strength of his arguments and his courage to tell truth to power. His intellectual tenacity, perseverance and diligence and sense of purpose were, in my opinion, unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries.

He was imprisoned multiple times, given the death sentence by one regime and banned by many governments – all for his dedication to the craft of writing and for the exercise of his freedom of expression.

I did not hear any notable free-speech organisations standing by his side or making statements to protect his right to write what he believed. Self-styled defenders of free speech are mostly vocal about the freedom of writers of their own ideological orientation. This complicates the discourse of freedom of expression.

I became familiar with the writings of Qaradawi in the 1990s when I was an undergraduate student. His *The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam* (in Bangla), *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism* and *The Status of Women in Islam* were among the many books that my Islamic teacher, Shah Abdul Hannan (1939-2021) gave me to read.

It was a unique and exhilarating experience to peruse and digest the contents of these works. Especially after reading *The Lawful and Prohibited*, I felt that I made a significant leap in my understanding of Islam.

His discussion of the philosophy behind the Islamic rulings of halal (permissible) and haram (impermissible) is original and illuminating. He regards the parameters of halal and haram in Islam as a manifestation of God's compassion and mercy to humankind.

In regard to the principles of halal and haram, Qaradawi quotes verse 16:116 of the Quran which reads:

Hence, do not utter falsehoods by letting your tongues determine [at your own discretion], "This is lawful and that is forbidden", thus attributing your own lying inventions to God: for, behold, they who attribute their own lying inventions to God will never attain to a happy state!

Qaradawi argues that the right to make something lawful or prohibited belongs to God alone; no human has the authority to determine halal or haram in the Islamic sense of the terms.

This particular discussion in the book struck me, as I knew there were people in the habit of declaring halal and haram without adequate knowledge of Islam or without proper study and investigation. Such unwarranted exercise of authority or arbitrary judgment creates chaos and confusion in the lives of Muslims.

When I was a PhD student in the United Kingdom, I came across Qaradawi's *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*. In this book, he differentiates between the "content" and "form" of ibadat (Islamic rituals). He maintains that in ritual worship, the content is of primordial importance and must be embraced by all Muslims.

There may be differences in form or in the method of performing rituals, depending on the understanding of various schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence. There are Muslims who see their "form" of worship as the only way and that of others unacceptable. Such dogmatic attitudes sow the seeds of potential discord and conflict among Muslims. Therefore, this particular argument of Qaradawi constitutes a panacea to address issues of division and internal strife within the Muslim community.

Shah Abdul Hannan introduced me to Qaradawi's *Fiqh Al Zakah: A Comparative Study of Zakah, Regulations and Philosophy in the Light of Quran and Sunnah*. Spanning about 1,000 pages in two volumes, this monumental work was Qaradawi's PhD thesis that he completed at al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1973.

In a very surprising manner, this book came to my aid during the early days of my doctoral studies when I was struggling to present a well-structured research proposal to my supervisor. My PhD guide refused to spoon-feed me. She provided me with signposts and let me discover my own pathways to solutions.

This strategy made my learning experience more meaningful and rewarding, as it helped me find my own voice and develop a suitable and workable research outline. I submitted a few drafts of my research proposal, and none were acceptable to her.

One day, I visited a library and saw a copy of the first volume of *Fiqh Al Zakah* that included the research proposal that Qaradawi wrote for his doctoral project. It was well-written and clearly presented. It piqued my interest. I followed the format and revised my research proposal.

Bingo! My supervisor happily accepted my proposal. When I first came to know about Qaradawi, he was in his late 70s. Since then, I had been preparing myself for the day when I might hear the sad news of his death.

So, the report of his death did not affect me so hard. What makes me melancholic is the insufficient number of competent scholars among Muslims to guide and represent them. One hadith of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reads:

"Verily, God does not take away knowledge by snatching it from people; rather, He takes away knowledge with the death of the scholars until ... people turn to the ignorant as their leaders. They are asked, so they give religious judgments without knowledge; thus, they are led astray and lead others astray."

A certain level of scholarship and sincerity is required to preserve and promote the legacy of Qaradawi. Are those who consider themselves his successors confident enough to sustain it?

Nowadays, media affordances have made it easy to read and listen to speakers and scholars, including those who are deemed to be the defenders and custodians of Islam. The complacency and mediocrity of many of them are baffling. An intellectually emaciated Muslim community is bad for Muslims and for others.

Despite the desperate circumstances in which we find ourselves these days, we do not lose hope. We believe that more Qaradawis will emerge as intellectual torchbearers from some corners of the world.

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