BOOK REVIEW 1000 years of Conflict author Yacoob Ghanty

At 71, Yacoob has produced his sixth work titled: 1000 years of Conflict. It has been a laborious effort of research spread over years all noted and piled in his “carnet la boutique”. The sources are rich and varied: Weeklies such as Newsweek and Time, History books, Memoirs, Biographies and Cabinet papers, all publications of the Western world.

The book is a treasure trove for readers interested in world affairs who want to get an insight into the causes of present-day conflicts and acts of terrorism. The author, as the title says, dwells on the Islam versus Christian antagonism.

The writer sets the roots of the conflicts between the two great monotheist religions since the crusades when the Pope was more the Head of country than that of a religion. The quarrel was fuelled on the ownership of the Holy land of Jerusalem, sacred both to Muslims and Christians. The peaceful and acceptable outcome of the bloody wars was conceived by the farsighted and enlightened Frederic II and some Muslim rulers who concluded that Jerusalem should be a free land for all faiths and that in peace both antagonists would be winners. That understanding paved the way for an exchange between Christian Europe and the Middle East Muslims. The West was enlightened with the influx of Philosophical and Scientific writings of the Middle East so much so that the learning of Arabic became a must in European Centres of Learning.

The author delves lengthily on the transformation of the causes of the East-West conflict from religion to the exploitation of natural resources, especially oil with the coming in of the toxic marriage between the USA and Western Europe and the carnage that followed: the plunder of Africa and other colonies, slavery, the extermination of ancient cultures and peoples and the creation of a belief in a superiority of the Western White World.

With the collapse of the Communist Block, the West, always in need of an enemy, has the choice of creating and targeting a new one: should it be Yellow [China] peril or the Green [Muslim] peril? Since the Muslim world which extends from the Middle East to Asia has the largest amount of oil reserves, it becomes an ideal target and needs to be dispossessed of this natural resource as the world has an oil-based economy. China has been side-lined a bit and its neighbours, like India, is tempted into joining the West with all kinds of promises to “contain” China.

The West is using all arms at its disposal to demonise the owners of the hydrocarbon fuel and appropriate it: its state-of-the-art arms industry, Israel as their agent in the Middle East which uses pre-emptive wars and the most savage treatment to dispossess and enslave the Palestinians; the most lethal one chosen is the art of the hidden persuaders. The Muslims are painted as bloodthirsty barbarians who hate the freedom of the West and keep their womenfolk into near slavery. They are further fuelled by their blind belief in an outdated religion which is anti Christ. This modern crusade is led by the Neo-Cons headed by the Bushes and Blair and the latest US poodle recruited, Sarkozy.

Yacoob gives a balanced assessment of the two protagonists. The West is led by the adepts of the End of History but also at times, Icons like Clinton, Carter and Obama and the civil unequalled do-gooders like Warren Buffet and Bill Gates.

The non-monolithic Muslim world, inhabited predominantly by dictators and an illiterate mass does not allow debates and dissent, is scared of an open world, has an ambivalent attitude towards modernization and is tempted to camp in isolation.

This book would be a good source of inspiration for world leaders, especially the Muslim world, where there is a dearth of democracy, debates and idea industries. It would be an eye opener for readers who are baffled with the mass flow of news about bombing and maiming in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Indonesia and other Muslim lands. As Christians and Moslems make up half of the world population and are present in all corners of the Globe, there is a pressing need for mutual understanding to lead to peaceful living; Muslims should shed intolerance, should try to raise the status of women, intelligently combat Islamophobia and present the correct image of Islam; the West, led by Bush’s “you are with us or against us” should reengineer its foreign policy from confrontation to collaboration. The alternative is “an eye for an eye policy” which, as said Gandhi, will leave the whole world blind.