The Politics of Islam, Non-Violence, and Peace
The Thought of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in Context

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal E, Humanisthuset, torsdagen den 12 december, kl. 13:00. Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor emeritus Jan Hjärpe, Lunds universitet.

Institutionen för idé- och samhällsstudier
This is a study of the multifaceted thought of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (b.1925–), Indian writer, public intellectual, and Muslim religious leader. Khan has been a prolific writer since at least the 1970s and is also an ālim, a Muslim scholar learned in religion. His reputation is based on his public presentation of Islam, non-violence, and peace – a position he has defended in his monthly journal, al-Risāla (Eng. version: Spirit of Islam), a large number of published books and pamphlets, and recently also through use of the internet and social media. Furthermore, as a religious leader and debater Khan has been active as a commentator in Indian national media and through religious dialogue meetings, for which he has received national awards and honours. Khan’s religious thought may be summarised as a thorough attempt at presenting Islam, the Quran, and the example of the Prophet Muhammad as a systematic message of peace. Islam is described as a divine message calling for individual commitment and knowledge. Hence, Islam requires a setting of freedom, peace and stability so that believers can choose its message without restriction. The Quran is regarded as highlighting non-violent patience as the most significant virtue and peace is both a divine quality as well as a requirement for salvation. The religious ideal of the Prophet Muhammad is not his political achievements. Instead, the Prophet’s message is understood as peaceful negotiation and success through turning conflict into friendship as the ultimate path to end hatred, violence, and persecution. The concept of jihad is seen as essential to this type of peace-building struggle; spreading Islam only through preaching, as well as overcoming the hurdles of the self and ego, for instance anger and violent impulses. By situating Khan’s thought in a context of historical and contemporary debate on the meaning of Islam, this study argues that he continues and develops the nineteenth century Indian Islamic Modernist tradition of presenting Islam, non-violence, and peace in relation to issues of the modern state and the minority situation of Indian Muslims. This type of religious position became nationally prominent from the 1920s during the Indian independence movement. In the contemporary Indian political and social situation however, Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim rhetoric is being followed by large-scale violence. Khan’s thinking aims to dissociate the rhetorical connection between Islam and violence, while supporting the democratic, pluralist, and secular trappings of the state. The analysis of Khan’s thought considers Islamic Modernism and unmarked reform Sufi Islam, alongside the secularism, democratic liberalism, and reform socialism of the Indian constitution. However, these thematic and discursive structures of thought are formulated by Khan with regard to a certain historical situation, and address particular political and social issues. Studying the various connections between Khan’s thought, the ideological and religious debates, and the historical context of Indian and global society, the final analysis of this study takes on the theoretical issue of whether contemporary and globalised religion can be a force for the development of more democratic and peaceful societies.