

# 1) On Islam and Violence in the Muslim South of Thailand

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This short paper on Chaiwat Satha-Anand examines his approach to the study of violence in the Muslim south of Thailand. Chaiwat's approach to the study of violence in the Muslim south has been to examine how the Muslim perpetrators of violence in the south use Islam as a tool to justify the violence as well as to win support and sympathy amongst the Thai Malay-Muslim population which has seen itself as discriminated against by the Thai-Buddhist state and state officials. In this sense, Chaiwat provides the only work that looks closely at the use and abuse of Islam in the violent areas of southern Thailand. While older and more recent works have tried to understand the incidence of violence in the south by examining issues of economic deprivation, discrimination and influence of global Islamic *jihadi* movements, Chaiwat delves deep into the religious psyche of the Muslim perpetrators to understand how their interpretations of Islam have justified their use of violence against the Thai-Buddhist state and its agents with a stated aim to "liberate" the Muslim south from the Thai state.

## Introduction

"I think Mohammed was a terrorist. I read enough of the history of his life, written by both Muslims and non-Muslims, that he was a violent man, a man of war."

Jerry Falwell, televangelist, fundamental Baptist pastor and founder of Moral Majority,  
a fundamentalist Christian group.  
(Zion's Christian Soldiers CBS News June 9 2003. Interview with Bob Simon)

Since 9/11, a new kind of bashing has become popular especially in America, viz. Islam-bashing. Websites have sprung up with ever-increasing fervor denouncing Islam and its alleged promotion of violence. Qur'anic quotes like the following are often brazenly taken out of context and offered as justification for the promotion of violence in and by Islam.

“And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you (there) then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers” (2: 191).

“But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” (9: 5).

“Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain...” (9: 111)

“Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens” (47: 4).

“The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter...” (5: 33)

And there are so many others where those came from, and so many a Hadith on the order of Sahih Muslim 1: 33, in which Muhammad says:

“I have been commanded to fight against people till they testify that there is no god but Allah, that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah...”

So, a civilization that made significant contributions to the fields of mathematics, chemistry, medicine, astronomy and philosophy has not only regressed into one that is “anti-meritocratic, one that oppresses and torments women, mocks the rule of law, [and] neglects education... [and is] flawlessly intolerant and blithely cruel” (Peters 2002: 7) but has also become a promoter of violence. How and why did this happen? Is violence an intrinsic part of Islam as argued for by the modern know-all pundits of good and evil? Or can Islam maintain its status as a *deen*, a complete prescription for living, whose followers can deal with the challenge of assaults on their lives and societies in a nonviolent manner? Chaiwat Satha-Anand poses the first question to non-Muslims who believe in the alleged affinity between Islam and violence, and the second question he issues as a challenge to his fellow Muslims,

some of whom may resort to violence as a remedy for problems or may confront violence with violence. In this paper, I address these two issues with reference to Chaiwat's work on violence in the Muslim south of Thailand.

Political scientist Chaiwat Satha-Anand has always been a peace activist at heart. In fact, his doctoral dissertation, *The Nonviolent Prince* (nominated for the 1982 Microfilms International Dissertation Award), in which he offers the ruler religious, practical and ethical reasons for adopting nonviolent strategies to solve societal problems, is testimony to his attempt to walk his talk, i.e. to theorize about and spread the message of nonviolence through academic writing. From his early work on peace and nonviolence in a non-religious context, Chaiwat moved on to talk about peace and nonviolence in Islam. This was a subject close to his heart as he was raised in a devout Muslim family in Bangkok.

As he told me at our first meeting in Bangkok about 10 years ago, Chaiwat's focus on violence in the Muslim south of Thailand stemmed primarily from his academic and personal conviction about nonviolence. This is an important point to note because he neither approached the subject matter at hand as a southern Thai scholar nor as an Islamist scholar. His primary concern was with nonviolence and this then dictated much of his thought and writings on the subject of Muslim violence in southern Thailand.

Chaiwat's foray into the academic study of the violence in the Muslim south of Thailand followed that of several others who had been actively writing about the violence in the area. Many of these works have Thai-Buddhist authors (here I am restricting my research only to materials in the English language) as well as some foreign authors and they look at the violence from the perspective of the problems of assimilation of the southern Thai Malay-Muslims into the wider Thai polity. Many of these works focus on the economic, political and social reasons as to why the separatist movement took root amongst the Thai-Malay-Muslims of Thailand. Foremost among these works is the two-part journal article by Nanthawan Haemindra (1976, 1977). Note that unlike other authors, Haemindra uses the official term Thai-Muslims to refer to these people to clearly refer to their status as a Thai people. This is made clear in her statement about the "independence enjoyed by the Malay population in olden times, which passed away forever, over a century ago" (1976: 225). This then dictates her perspective on the separatist movement, which she attributes to the elites of Pattani who lost power and independence following the greater exertion of bureaucratic control and authority over the Muslim population in the southern provinces. Coupled with the economic problems experienced by a people who look across the border to see their fellow Malay brethren leading better lives than them, the separatist movement will continue to plague Thailand as long as they feel they are a minority not worth any serious consideration, says Haemindra (1977: 105).

A similar analysis can be found in the works of writers like Astri Suhrke (1970/71) and Ruth McVey (1989) who convincingly focus on the attempted eradication of Malay-Muslim identity brought about by the harsh policies of the Thai government's assimilation efforts and the eroding economic conditions and discrimination faced by the Muslims to give fodder to their call for separate statehood. The erasure of a distinctive Malay identity brought about by the forced learning of Thai and the ban on learning Malay in schools as well as the forced closure of *pondoks* or institutions of Islamic instruction further fuelled the irredentist ambitions of the Thai-Malay-Muslims of the area. The attempts at assimilation by local Thai-Buddhist officials which included granting employment in the civil service to those with Thai names rather than Muslim names and the reported practices of some teachers forcing their pupils to pay obeisance to the Buddha further added to the view of threat to Thai-Malay-Muslim identity and discrimination of a people in a region of the country where they were a majority. All these factors allegedly gave rise to the secessionist movement amongst a people whose liberty to govern themselves had been taken away from them, so argue these works on the separatist violence in Thailand. The poor economic situation in the region as a cause of violence there is echoed by a recent work by Nidhi Aeusrivongse (2005) which attributes the violence to a peasant movement by rural folks whose economic livelihoods have been negatively impacted in recent years.

Works by Thai-Muslim scholars such as Surin Pitsuwan (1985) and Arong Suthasasna (1989) examine the use of religion, viz. Islam, to justify violent actions. However, an analysis of HOW Islam is used to justify violence is not discussed by these scholars (Chaiwat 1987: 1).

This is where Chaiwat's work comes in.

Chaiwat's attempt to understand Thai-Malay-Muslims resorting to violence to achieve their political aims of retaining administrative, juridical and economic control over the lands they inhabited as well as to preserve their cultural and religious identities is provided for in his 1987 monograph *Islam and Violence: A Case Study of Violent Events in the Four Southern Provinces, Thailand*. This is a very important contribution not just to understanding Muslim-inspired violence during the height of the separatist movement in Thailand in the 1970s and early 1980s, but it also gives us a frame to comprehend the mechanics of justification for the terrorist acts unleashed by some Muslims today. This work represents the first and only attempt that I know to theorize Thai-Muslim resorting to violence. While the earlier works gave excellent representations of the reasons for southern Thai Malay-Muslims to turn to violence, Chaiwat, for the first time, looks deeply at "the ways in which political actors rationalize the use of violence and especially the religious basis upon which such rationalizations rest" (Chaiwat 1987: 2). In doing this, Chaiwat does not talk only about the external factors impinging on Thai-Malay-Muslim society, as presented by the earlier authors, but instead gives pride of place to their Islamic

identity and investigates how these Thai-Malay-Muslims use Islam to justify their turning to violence to deal with all forms of discrimination that they encounter in Thai society. As Chaiwat says, “It is not sufficient to comprehend the problems of Islam and violence in southern Thailand simply by discerning who or what causes these events. Simply to point out that government coercion causes Muslim violence is but a minute portion of the whole story.” In order to understand the whole story then, one needs to understand how Islam links with violence and look at the meaning of Islam as understood by violent actors (1987: 2).

While acknowledging the social, cultural, historical, ethnic, linguistic and economic roots to the conflict in southern Thailand, Chaiwat looks deeper at how this conflict translates into violence. For this he turns to the Islam that the Muslim perpetrators of violence use to justify their violent acts. This is done through an examination of the pamphlets issued by the Thai-Malay separatist organizations. An examination of 27 of these pamphlets, all of which decry state actions towards Thai-Malays, showed that many of these actions were interpreted as affronts to Islam. One example is as follows:

A pamphlet dated January 14, 1979, issued by Jeh Long, considered a religious ceremony where Buddhist monks and Muslim Imams sat and prayed together as blasphemous because the Imams were praying where the Buddha image and pictures of Their Majesties were in the middle (Chaiwat 1987: 31).

In the most daring attack by the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) against Thai authority where two bombs were set off within 110 meters of the visiting royal couple in Yala on September 22, 1977, the pamphlet issued emphasized that:

... the royal visit to Narathiwat took place during the month of Ramadan during which most Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. During this time, the Muslim will take neither food nor drink of any kind among other things. But, as tradition required, the Muslims came out and waited for the King in the hot sun while iced water was being served to the dignitaries. In such a situation, the pamphleteer asked, “How could Muslims fast properly?”

The Muslim perpetrators of violence often referred to the *Qur'an* and the Hadith to justify their actions. Chaiwat lays out the steps by which the perpetrators achieved this. First, they pointed out that Buddhists are different from Muslims. Next they stressed the superiority of Islam. Then they referred to the unity of the Muslim *ummah*. To preserve these beliefs, the perpetrators called for battle against the infidel Buddhists by pointing out that it was wrong to be under the governance of non-Muslims.

Chaiwat points out verses from the *Qur'an* and the Hadith that the perpetrators used to claim legitimacy and thereby invoke support for their violent

actions against the Thai state and its agents. One of the most popular phrases used, which calls for *jihad* against the Buddhist *kafir* or infidels, is as follows:

Fight those who believe not  
In God nor the Last Day  
Nor hold that forbidden  
Which hath been forbidden  
By God and His Apostle,  
Nor acknowledge the Religion  
Of Truth, (even if they are)  
Of the People of the Book,  
Until they pay the *Jizya* (compensation)  
With willing submission,  
And feel themselves subdued  
But when the forbidden months  
Are past, then fight and slay  
The Pagans wherever ye find them (*Al-Qur'an* ix:5).

Chaiwat then goes on to analyze whether Islam justifies violence. Again turning to a nuanced reading of Qur'anic verses, Muslims are entreated by their faith to fight injustice. "Muslims cannot be passive recipients of injustice. They must fight against injustice," Chaiwat concludes (1987: 38).

However, being the peace activist at heart Chaiwat interrogates to seek if this fight against injustice can be nonviolent. Referring to the *Qur'an* and the Hadith, Chaiwat shows that this is indeed the case:

The Prophet is reported to have said: "He who helps tyranny (violence) being promoted or seeks help to promote tyranny (violence) is forever under the wrath of God." (Quoted in Unnithan and Singh 1973: 230 fn 19.) According to this Hadith, violence is to be shunned. (Chaiwat 1987: 39).

He therefore exhorts his fellow Muslims, "As such, Muslims need to think about alternative actions in order to fight injustice so that a better society, which is conducive to Islamic way of life, could be realized" (ibid.).

This important analysis helps understand how Islam, a *deen* or total way of life, can be used to justify violence just as any ideology can be used to justify violence. In fact, Chaiwat's analysis becomes important in demonstrating how the portrayal of alleged violation of Islam is able to conjure up fervor and support for a violent reaction by Muslims. Such an appeal can serve as a very powerful impetus for inciting Muslims to pursue violent ways to avenge the perceived assault on Islam. In fact, as Chaiwat shows, this is the extra ingredient that is needed in order to change a conflict ridden situation into a violent one.

One has to note though that it is not only the Muslims who turn to their religion to find justification for their violent acts, Chaiwat argues. Islam is a religion that encourages its followers to fight tyranny and oppression and one way they do that, as seen in Thailand, is through violence. However, as Chaiwat clearly shows, action against oppression is what is called for in Islam and this action can be clearly nonviolent. As Chaiwat points out, it is not only the followers of Islam who resort to violence to solve their issues. Hindus in India burnt the Babar mosque in Ayodhya claiming that the site had earlier housed a Hindu temple which was destroyed by the Muslims to make way for the mosque. The assault on Hinduism had to be answered with an assault on Islam and Muslims. The carnage that followed left 2,000, mostly Muslims, dead. As Stanley Tambiah clearly shows in his book *Buddhism Betrayed?*, Buddhist monks were at the forefront of the promotion of violence and hatred against the minority Tamil population. In Israel, the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, a right-wing Jew who believed that Rabin was ceding too much to the Palestinians. He is said to have announced after the assassination, "I acted alone and on orders from God." Asked where he got his ideas, Yigal Amir told the magistrate that he drew on the Halacha, which is the Jewish legal code. "According to the Halacha, you can kill the enemy," Amir said. "My whole life, I learned Halacha. When you kill in war, it is an act that is allowed."

Besides followers of religion who resort to violence to solve their issues, states also use violence in the name of counter-terrorism, as seen today in the case of the US destruction of lives and property and the physical, psychological and emotional scarring and amputation of a generation of Iraqis as well as in Israel's over-zealous and often overly harsh retaliations against Palestinian attacks on Israel. America's terror tactics in Vietnam was a complete failure in that it failed to drive out the communists compared to the British tactics of winning hearts and minds and eradicating the social conditions that would serve as fodder for communism to hold sway (see Tom Marks p. 198). Seen in this light, Islam cannot be singled out for the perpetration of violence by some of its followers. Yet, in a world where an enemy has to be constructed in order to justify one's efforts against so-called tyranny, Islam becomes the scapegoat and one turns to the *Qur'an* for justification of violence as if none of the other religions justifies this.

In fact, violence is inherent in all religions. If we refer to the Old Testament, four of the five first books are basically all about these laws and penalties for not following them. The Old Testament presents God as a virtual punisher for the slightest deviation from his laws. In Leviticus, chapter 10, two of Aaron's sons offered "strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not," and they were immediately consumed by a fire and "they died before the Lord." Pharaoh's Egypt was visited with seven plagues for refusing to "let my people go." One of the Ten Commandments speaks of punishment even unto the third and fourth generations. Even in the New Testament Annanias and his wife Sapphira were killed for not disclosing and



surrendering to the church the entire sum of money for which they sold their house. Religions also condone violence in the form of human sacrifice. Followers of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) believe that God accepts human sacrifice when he asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac (even though it was only a test of faith). Many violent words originated from religious contexts. A “thug”, in its original meaning, was a Hindu worshipper of Kali who believed in human sacrifice – and in the 1200 years existence of the Thugs, over a million human sacrifices were offered in a most violent manner by waylaying and strangling innocent passers-by. And an “assassin” was a radical Islamic (Ishmaili) person who took an intoxicant before embarking on a religious mission of murder.

Because of the heavy blame increasingly assigned to Islam, Chaiwat has dedicated his later works to advocating nonviolence by both Muslims and non-Muslims, including state governments that reciprocate violence with violence. He has repeatedly tried to emphasize how the *Qur'an*'s exhortation to Muslims to act against oppression and tyranny is not tantamount to a call to violence. In an article entitled “The Nonviolent Crescent: Eight Theses on Muslim Nonviolent Action” (1990), Chaiwat reiterates the message that Islam's call for battle against oppression and tyranny need not be violent. Therein, he examines the Muslim concept of jihad, sometimes considered the sixth pillar of Islam, translating it as “an effort, a striving for truth that need not be violent” (Chaiwat 1990: 27). In fact, Chaiwat goes further in this work to argue that violent solutions to fight oppression cannot be justified in Islam. As he says, “Because nonviolent alternatives do exist, an argument can be made that for Muslims to be true to their faith, they have no alternative but to utilize nonviolent action in the contemporary world” (1990: 33). This is an extremely strong call to Muslims to abandon violence altogether in their struggle against tyranny. This follows from the Gandhian principle of nonviolence which Chaiwat says was influenced by Islam. Through his emphatic stipulations, Chaiwat puts out a strong message to Muslims that they cannot be Muslims and resort to violence at the same time. As Muslims they should fight oppression but this fight has to be done in a nonviolent manner.

Chaiwat goes on to describe nonviolent protests that the Thai-Malay Muslims have engaged in successfully in the past. The killing of 5 Malay-Muslim men by security forces in Narathiwat in November 1975 led to a peaceful demonstration by Muslim activists and university students, which was reacted to by the security forces with violence. Chaiwat also talks about the nonviolent struggles of the Ban Krua Cham Muslim community of Bangkok whose members sought to prevent the construction of a highway through their village. A more recent incident that comes to mind is the protest staged by southern Thai-Muslim villagers at the provincial office (*salaklang changwat*) in Pattani on June 11-14, 2000 to protest against the push-net and trawler boats that were destroying the coastal environments and destroying the livelihoods of small-scale fishermen. The peaceful protest brought



the Minister of Agriculture to Pattani and he promised to forcefully carry out the ban against push-net and trawler boats from operating in the vicinity of the traditional fishing grounds of the small-scale fishermen. When Thai-Buddhist politicians in Bangkok condemned the protest by labeling Muslims as troublesome, a Muslim politician from Pattani, Muk Sulaiman, is said to have responded that the protest was particularly peaceful because it was carried out by Muslims who did not destroy any public property or cause hurt to people. Informants told me that he had added that if the protest had been carried out by Thai-Buddhist men known for their penchant for alcohol, the protest would have turned violent. This retort supposedly silenced the Buddhist politicians.

Having clearly laid the foundations for Muslims to engage in nonviolent action, Chaiwat then turns his attention to call upon nonviolent reactions by states to violence against Muslims. In this, he focuses on the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Chaiwat (2003: 30) is clear about the fact that the 9/11 terrorist attacks are morally unacceptable on religious grounds since the *Qur'an* teaches that:

....whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other wicked crimes, should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and that whoever saved a human life, should be regarded as though he had saved all mankind (*Al- Quran* V: 32).

Thus, the US reaction that has sought to repay violence with violence is clearly in need of condemnation. In his peace advocate role, Chaiwat then proposes a Truth and Justice Global Commission where the voices of both the victims and perpetrators of violence who are often victims of injustice can be heard (Chaiwat 2003: 39). This is the best way to solve a crisis where both victims and perpetrators will receive justice. It is interesting to note that Chaiwat views the perpetrators as victims as well, victims of a system that metes out injustice in a Manichean world that views victims and perpetrators as exclusive with one being blameless and the other being aggressive. Such a perspective, which comes out of his concerns with nonviolence, shows not only a humane response to the problem of violence but definitely one where peace can be achieved.

## Conclusion

Can a scholar infused with a normative ethic write objectively? Does he retain his scholarly position and worth or does he denigrate into the position of a preacher and advocate while contributing little or nothing to the promotion of knowledge and scholarship?

The phenomenon of combining scholarly knowledge and community work is not unusual at all in Thailand, where activist-intellectuals (Costa 2002) or academic-

NGOs (Dorairajoo 2002) who engage in both scholarship and activist work are a common sight. In fact, such intellectual activism is quite common in places where the social scientists are seen as doctors of society and as offering cures to social malaise.

At a time when the world is in need of solutions to the changes that are coming about combined with the repercussions of 9/11, a humanistic science may be the greatest contribution that scholars can offer to the archeology of knowledge – for scholarship that is meant not just as a vestibule of purely intellectual exercises but also as a means to advance human and humane society. This, it appears, is Chaiwat's greatest contribution to knowledge and scholarship.

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