

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER



JULIAD

AND OTHER ESSAYS



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BookPeople

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE



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Now we are moving into English language and our new endeavor is called The Book People. The first title under this imprint is *Jihad and Other Essays* by Asghar Ali Engineer, a renowned reformist-writer and activist. We hope this imprint will prove popular in India and abroad and we are looking forward to publish new titles over the coming months and years – a brave new platform for open discussions.

**Publication Manager**

## FOREWORD



**A**sghar Ali Engineer is surely one of the most original and radical thinkers of our times who has written extensively about the need of understanding communities like Islam. It felt really important and political to be a part of this book when different societies of the world have less accessibility to the thoughts of Islam and its spiritual theories.

The last decade presented serious turbulences to Muslims world over. 9/11 raised severe questions but the answers left unattended. The attack from the sky demolished not only WTA but also the inner peace of every Muslim. The need for a Muslim intellectual became the most essential political need of personal Islam.

In this book, Asghar Ali Engineer examines how the word jihad is been used in various cultural and political contexts and how the western thoughts manipulated the world conscience. He comes up with indispensable observations, facts and arguments that would help a larger world understand the philosophy of jihad from the perspective of peaceful religion and not from a confused state.

These essays are written by one of the greatest humanists and an admirer of difference who has spent the best of his times to bring clarity into the issues related to Islam. We feel privileged to be a part of thisbook.

**Dr. KN Panikkar**

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# FROM JIHAD TO IJTIHAD



JIHAD', with its imbued wrong meaning, became a notorious word in the West after 9/11. Terror now has an overwhelming presence in parts of the Muslim world, including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. Violence there seems at times to be out of control as it is Muslims themselves who are targeted by terrorists.

The *ulamā* have repeatedly condemned suicide bombing and terrorism as un-Islamic. Several consultations and conferences of *ulamā* from different parts of the Islamic world have been held to make it clear that violence has no place in Islam. Last month prominent *ulamā* from several Islamic countries from Senegal to Indonesia gathered at Mardin, Turkey and unanimously rejected the medieval *fatwa* known as the *Mardin Fatwa* issued by Ibn Taymiyyah, saying it has no place in the contemporary globalised world which respects faith and civil rights.

The *Mardin fatwa* was quoted by Osama bin Laden to justify his terrorist attacks. Followed by this, on April 12, the highest religious body in Saudi denounced terrorism. This body issued a *fatwa* denouncing all acts of terrorism and even declared its financing as criminal. Those who finance such acts are also part of the crime, it said. Thus terrorists cannot find any justification in Islam for their acts. Their very support base has been knocked off. However, one can hardly expect much impact of such *fatwas* on terrorists, though

they would certainly help wean away those Muslims who justify such attacks on the basis of their religion. This is not a small achievement.

Our attention must now shift from 'jihad' to '*ijtihād*', which means to strive intellectually to comprehend problems facing the Islamic world and find their solutions in keeping with the basic principles and values enshrined in the Qur'ān. *Ijtihad* has been called by many scholars, including Allama Iqbal, the dynamic spirit of Islam and Islamic law.

*Ijtihad* was very much a living process in early Islam; its gates were shut, many scholars maintain, around the time of the sack of Baghdad in 1258 by Mongol Hordes. Ironically, it was half a century after that when Ibn Taymiyyah, defining his own Hanbali School of law, issued his *fatwa* on jihad. Thus the gates of *ijtihād* were closed and those of aggressive jihad flung open.

Now that jihad in its new incarnation as terrorism is being denounced by all prominent *ulamā* of the Islamic world. It is time the practice of *ijtihād* was opened and a fresh approach developed to solve the many legal and social problems affecting Muslim societies today. Blind imitation and stagnation have become the bane of Islamic law. While changes are taking place in the world around us, we continue to imitate the pre-1258 jurists in the religio-legal field.

We are unable to think afresh and derive inspiration from the Qur'ān. We keep on quoting only certain imams and medieval authorities who have become more sacrosanct for us than the Holy Qur'ān. I propose a few basic steps in developing a fresh approach and throwing open the gates of *ijtihād*.

Firstly, *ulamā* and Muslim intellectuals (and there are many who have been trained in the traditional Islamic literature of *Tafsir*, Hadith and jurisprudence and who feel the need for change) must show courage and come forward to develop a fresh approach, defying powerful vested interests manning the religious establishment as it were.

Secondly, we must transcend all existing schools of Islamic law and develop a unified law applicable to all Muslims. This will also give greater meaning to the otherwise hollow slogan of Islamic unity.

It does not mean that we reject all provisions of existing schools of law but that we select from all these that which is best in them and in keeping with the Qur'anic principles and values.

Thirdly, a new *ijmā* (consensus) should be developed on issues that are specific to our age and time. If the *ulamā* could do it in the first three centuries of Islam, why not us today? The past *ulamā's* *ijmā* was limited to their own school; today in a globalised world a much wider consensus across all Islamic schools of thought will have to be developed. Modern means of information and communication technology have made it much easier.

In medieval Islamic jurisprudence they used *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) and *ijmā*, and both are intellectual instruments to solve legal problems. Why can't we develop new analogies on a global scale today? What passes on as divine in the *ṣarī'ah* law is nothing but local, culturally embedded elements and practices, particularly of the Arab and Persian cultures, as they existed centuries ago.

We must transcend all such elements and, like the Qur'ān itself, develop a more universal outlook while formulating *ṣarī'ah* laws for our own time. While the sources of *ṣarī'ah* cannot change, *ṣarī'ah* laws must change based on the enshrined principles of *ijtihād* and *ijmā* for them to be responsive to the needs of Muslims today.



# IBN TAYMIYYAH AND HIS FATWA ON TERRORISM



**T**errorism has become a worldwide disease which is swallowing the lives of thousands of innocent people in certain intensive conflict areas like Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir, North East India, certain other parts of India, South Thailand and so on. There are different reasons for terrorist violence in different conflict areas which vary from political to socio-economic injustices.

However, it must be clearly understood that terrorism does not suddenly drop out of heaven; it originates here on earth in response to acts of omission or commission by the ruling classes. But soon it acquires, a dynamics of its own and ceases to be a mere retaliation. It becomes a phenomenon in itself and various vested interests, political, economic and those relating to arms market begin to support it directly or indirectly. No terrorist movement can survive long without such support and merely as a retaliation.

I would also like to say here that the very term 'Islamic terrorism' is a media creation and that it reflects, besides prejudices and ignorance, a hostile attitude towards anything Islamic or related the Muslim world. No religion can ever encourage mindless violence as terrorists resort to. Religion in its essence is nothing more than moral and ethical way of life upholding the highest values of life. Everything else is culture, politics or other interests. Any conduct or behaviour which does not reflect this moral and ethical core is anything but religious.

Here in this article we are concerned with the terrorist violence unleashed by Al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden with his attack on New York Business Towers in 2001. We are not going to analyze here why he did it. Rather we are concerned with what legitimacy he found to justify this attack.

All analysts and scholars agree that Osama and his followers used Ibn Taymiyyah's famous *fatwa* on use of violence against unjust rulers. Ibn Taymiyyah was born few years after the Mongol sack of Baghdad and the unimaginable savagery committed by them killing hundreds of thousands of people in most barbarous ways. Taymiyyah, himself a great jurist, was follower of Imam Hanbal. Imam Hanbal prohibits rebellion against unjust authority as it would result in anarchy and more bloodshed.

However, Ibn Taymiyyah, against the teachings of his own school issued a *fatwa* justifying violence against unjust and authoritarian rulers so as to re-establish the Islamic rule and rule of *ṣarī'ah*. This *fatwa* is being used by the terrorists to justify their attacks as 'Islamic' and many young Muslims who do not even know who Ibn Taymiyyah was and in what circumstances he issued this *fatwa*, get misled and find 'Islamic legitimation' in his *fatwa*.

Initially the *ulama*, though it did not necessarily approve the use of this *fatwa*, kept mum or just whispered their disapproval not loud enough to be heard. But when violence intensified and became uncontrollable, their conscience revolted and many of them decided to call Al-Qaeda's bluff by opposing the *fatwa*. Now many of them are coming forward condemning the use and misuse of Ibn Taymiyyah.

Ibn Taymiyyah, undoubtedly a great scholar and eminent jurist, had issued a set of four *fatwas* known as *Mardin fatwas*. Mardin was a Turkish fortress in South East Turkey with mixed population. And Osama had quoted this *Mardin fatwa* repeatedly in his calls for Muslims to overthrow the Saudi monarchy and wage jihad against the United States. Some prominent *ulama* from the Islamic world decided to meet in Mardin to discuss Ibn Taymiyyah's *fatwa* towards the end of March 2010.

These Islamic scholars took decisive stand against it. They said, "Anyone who seeks support from this *fatwa* for killing Muslims or non-Muslims has erred in his interpretation." They further said, "It is not for a Muslim individual or a group to announce and declare war or engage in combative jihad...on their own."

Those who use Ibn Taymiyyah's *fatwa* totally ignore the circumstances in which the *fatwa* was issued. Nothing can be valid unless seen in historically concrete circumstances. Ibn Taymiyyah himself, as pointed out above, had gone against his own Hanbali School in issuing the *fatwa*. Even then all Islamic scholars had not unanimously endorsed it. Moreover, as pointed out by an Islamic scholar from Belgium Prof. Yahya Michot, *Mardin fatwa* has some ambiguity which has been ignored both by terrorists as well as many western scholars and commentators.

It is important to note that the Mardin conference gathered 15 leading scholars from countries including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, India, Senegal, Kuwait, Iran, Morocco and Indonesia. Among them were Bosnian Grand Mufti Mustafa Cerić, Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah of Mauritania and Yemeni Sheikh Habib Ali al-Jifri.

It should be noted that while Ibn Taymiyyah was alone in issuing the *fatwa* here a galaxy of prominent *Ulamā* and *Muftis* from across the Islamic world from Indonesia in South East to Algeria in the West Africa gathered and refuted the *fatwa*. It is representative statement of the Islamic world rejecting terrorism.

Not that those terrorists are going to stop violence and come on table for negotiations for peace. There are too powerful interests that deter any such rejection from across the Islamic world but it certainly sets norms and indicates what the Islamic world stands for. For sure even then anti-Islamic tirade is not going to stop and many western commentators and anti-Islamic forces will continue to hold Osama bin Laden as real representative rather than this galaxy of *ulamā* from across the Islamic world.

It is not only these *ulamā* that met at Mardin who have condemned terrorism. Several other conferences and congregations have been

taking place in several Islamic countries condemning terrorist violence. Many books are also being written and discussed. One of the remarkable works is that of Maulana Tahirul Qadri of Pakistan who has compiled a six hundred page volume quoting authorities from the beginning of Islam through medieval ages to the present day, opposing terrorism. They vouch that and senseless killing of innocent people and non-combatants is strictly prohibited in Islam.

In another seminar at Oxford Islamic scholars discussed a book written by Prof. Yahya Michot, an Islamic scholar from Belgium who teaches Islamic History and Culture in Belgium University. This book, *Muslims Under non-Muslim Rule*, discusses the four *Mardin fatwas* issued by Ibn Taymiyyah, besides discussing his life and work.

Yahya Michot maintains that Taymiyyah issued these *fatwas* in certain historical context and hence it is imperative to study and explore his writings in the circumstances in which they were produced; otherwise one is not only likely to misunderstand but also to misinterpret them. His *Mardin fatwa* is a good example. Mardin occupies a strikingly strategic location. It is dominated by a fortress reputed to be unassailable, from which the view reaches deep into the vast plain of upper Mesopotamia.

Though the precise date of the *fatwa* is not known, Ibn Taymiyyah issued it in response to a request to clarify whether Mardin was a domain of peace (*dar al-salam*) or domain of war (*dar al-harb*). According to Prof. Yahya there is sort of ambiguity in this *fatwa* and there is no clear answer coming from the *fatwa*.

In his own words, "Is (Mardin) a domain of war or of peace? It is a (city of a status) composite (*murakkab*) in which both the things signified (by those terms are to be found). It is not in the situation of a domain of peace in which the institutions (*ahkam*) of Islam are implemented because its army (*jund*) is composed of Muslims. Nor is it in the situation of domain of war, whose inhabitants are unbelievers. Rather, it constitutes a third type of (domain), in which the Muslim shall be treated as he merits, and who departs from the Way/law of Islam shall be combated as he merits."

Thus it is important to note that Ibn Taymiyyah refused to say whether Mardin was a domain of war or of peace. This most significant aspect of the *Mardin fatwa* has been ignored by Osama as well as western scholars who demonise Ibn Taymiyyah. Today's world is almost entirely composite in nature. There are either significant Muslim majorities or minorities.

The *ulamā* opposing terrorism are repeatedly emphasizing this fact of religious plurality of world today and no medieval opinions expressed by jurists can be valid. No *fatwa*, like the Mardin one, can be issued without taking concrete conditions into account. There is unanimity among Islamic scholars that if Muslims are allowed to live in peace and are guaranteed religious freedom such a region is nothing less than *dar al-salam* i.e., abode of peace, in Taymiyyah's own words. No violence can be justified in such region. Thus terrorism has no place in the modern world.

# MAKING A MOCKERY OF JIHAD



Terror attacks in India and abroad have created an impression that jihad is central to Qur'anic teaching. First of all, as we have asserted repeatedly, in the Qur'an jihad does not mean war; there are other words for it like *qital* and *harb*. Jihad has been used in the Qur'an in its root meaning: to strive for betterment of society, to spread goodness (*maruf*) and contain evil (*munkar*).

Even if we grant that jihad means war, as some Muslims believe, it still isn't central to Qur'anic teachings. The word 'jihad' occurs in the Qur'an 41 times though not a single verse uses it in the sense of war. The four most fundamental values in the Qur'an are justice ('*adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*). Thus, the Qur'an is an embodiment of these values and a Muslim is duty-bound to practice them all.

One who fails to practice these values can hardly claim to be a true Muslim. Jihad is not even obligatory in Islamic jurisprudence whereas these values are indicative of a Muslim's character and hence quite important. It can be said that compassion is most central to Qur'anic teachings. The words 'compassion' and 'mercy' in their various forms occur in the Qur'an 335 times.

There is great emphasis in the Qur'an on justice in all social and political matters and it uses three words for justice - '*adl*, *qist* and *hikama*. These three words occur 244 times in the Qur'an. To seek

revenge is human weakness, not strength. Thus, a devout Muslim tends to forgive, like Allah who forgives his servants if they sincerely repent. Those who are waging jihad in the form of terror attacks are bent upon seeking revenge whereas a good Muslim would tend to forgive just as Allah does.

In *ṣarī'ah* law, jihad can be declared only by the state or those empowered by it. Terror attacks, on the other hand, are planned and executed by a few individuals unrepresentative of any state or state institution. So their attacks cannot be legitimate by any Islamic or *ṣarī'ah* law. That is nothing but committing the murder of innocent people. Also, according to Islamic laws, in jihad no non-combatant can be attacked, much less women, children and the elderly and no civilian property can be destroyed unless it is being used for military purposes or for purposes of combat.

It can be seen that the Islamic laws on the war are no different from modern laws of warfare or the Geneva conventions. But terror attacks are a gross violation of all these Islamic rules and there is no way these attacks can be characterized as jihad. The terrorists are described by the media as *jihadis*. This is a gross misuse of the word as there is no word like 'jihadi' in the Arabic language. It is in fact *mujahid* and it is used in a laudatory sense - one who devotes oneself to a good cause like fighting against social evils.

The Qur'ān advises Muslims: "And cast not yourselves to destruction with your own hands, but do good (to others). Surely Allah loves the doers of good." This advice of the Qur'ān not to throw oneself to destruction with one's own hands is important and relevant even today. What did the September 11, 2001 attack result in? Did Al-Qaeda not invite great disaster to the entire Islamic world, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq? Did they not throw themselves into perdition with their own hands? What good did that attack do to anyone? Was there any wisdom in that rash and ruthless attack?

Revenge only satisfies our ego and injures the ego of the enemy and thus the war of attrition continues. What terrorists are doing is seeking revenge, and from a weaker position. Every attack brings

nothing but disaster for themselves and others. Various verses quoted to justify jihad are generally taken in a literal sense and ignore the value system of the Qur'an. It is a well-known fact that be it Al-Qaeda or any other terrorist organization, they do not represent any government or larger Muslim organization. They succeed in mobilizing some angry youth carried away by "Islamic" rhetoric and commit terrorist attacks taking lives of innocent people. These attacks violate all Qur'anic values.

Seventh century Arabia cannot be compared to conditions in the contemporary world. Today's world is radically different from that period and we should go more by Qur'anic ethics than injunctions about war. There are several institutions now available for arbitration, reconciliation and solving disputes. One should not rush to resort to violence.

In the Indian context, one cannot avenge violence by terrorist attacks on innocent Hindus and Muslims in marketplaces. It is the same sin which was committed against innocent Muslims. Wisdom requires that one should patiently mobilize public opinion through democratic means, win over the hearts of common people and expose evil forces.

One hopes that the misguided Muslim youth resorting to violent actions will realize the futility of terror attacks and renounce such sinful and criminal acts, concentrating instead on excelling in learning and acquiring a superior moral character.

Did not the Prophet say that the "ink of a scholar is superior to the blood of the martyr"?



# TERRORISM AND GANDHIAN NONVIOLENCE



The extreme violence the world is experiencing in 21st century is of a bit different type – post-9/11 the world calls it 'terrorist violence'. In a way violence is violence by whatever name we call it. Wars until twentieth century were representative of aggressive invasions by some countries against the other, or some nations against other nations. However, terrorist violence has two characteristics: one, it is not frontal war (but not guerilla war either) and two, it is more of a reactive violence.

Recent terroristic attacks by Naxalites or Maoists, whatever we choose to call them, are of the intensity which has disturbed the whole country. The brutal killings of the Pak jihadis are highly disturbing as well. The attack on Ahmadi Mosques in Lahore killing 70 persons who were praying inside the two mosques shook the conscience of humanity.

India produced apostle of nonviolence in the person of Gandhi in the last century and he liberated India from the clutches of British colonialism through non-violent means. Many people begin to raise questions in the face of such terroristic attacks on innocent civilians as to the relevance of Gandhiji's nonviolence in our era. Has Gandhi become irrelevant? Is he fit only for paying rich tributes on his birth day or day of martyrdom, and nothing else?

It is for Gandhian philosophers to answer these questions. Do those who proclaim themselves to be Gandhians, take Gandhi and

his philosophy seriously? Or has Gandhism also become a sort of religion with certain rituals and priesthood with certain ashrams and properties thrown in? Where are active Gandhians? Gandhi was not a mere philosopher of nonviolence but an active practitioner who made it a way of life.

When I was visiting Gujarat during eighties when frequent caste and communal violence was taking place I did not find a single Gandhian in Ahmedabad (which has Sabarmati Ashram) who could dare communalists or even undertake an indefinite fast (as most powerful tool Gandhi employed to fight communal violence) to stop communal frenzy. In fact during 2002 those in charge of Sabarmati Ashram did not allow a peace meeting to be held on their premises by peace activists like Medha Patkar and others fearing state government may stop their grant. How such Gandhians who care for state grant can ever practice ideals of Gandhian philosophy based on the concept of human behaviour purged of all vested interests.

Let us first understand the crucial elements of Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence. Gandhiji always spoke of *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* i.e., insistence on truth and nonviolence. Both concepts are integral to each other. No nonviolence is possible without truth and no truth is possible without nonviolence. Also, we often say God is truth but Gandhiji reversed this and said Truth is God.

Why truth and nonviolence are integral to each other is because truth has to be non-coercive and based on deeper conviction. An element of coercion would contaminate truth. Violence, on the other hand, is highest degree of coercion and is used to make people believe what they do not want to believe and accept what they do not want to accept. Thus violence and truth are totally opposed to each other.

Nonviolence, on the other hand, guarantees freedom of conscience and people are free to base their behaviour on their deeper conviction. Self-interests would also contaminate truth and lead to unauthentic behaviour and hence violence. Thus a non-violent behaviour should have following attributes: 1) It must be based on genuine conviction; 2) it should be truthful and 3) it

should be based on freedom of conscience. Any behaviour lacking these attributes is likely to lead to violence.

It is also important to understand that by violence we should not only mean physical violence. Violence can be subdivided into three categories: 1) physical violence leading to injury or death; 2) violence by words and 3) violence of ethical norms and fundamental values. Physical violence could be either individual or of nations and communities; similarly violence by words also can imply individual or group or entire nation and of course violation of norms could be cultural norms of a civilisational group or those of an individual.

Non-violent truthful behaviour is possible only if an individual or a collectivity (a group, nation or religious or cultural community) is in constant communication with one's inner self and is very well conscious of one's own ethical norms and civilisational values. Such a communication is *sine qua non* of authentic behaviour.

John Merton, an American Jesuit and a Gandhian describes such a communication as encounter with solitude. One can deeply reflect and have encounter with one's self only when one communicates with oneself in complete solitude unaffected by what goes on out there and totally concentrates on what is inside one's own authentic self. That is why all *Rishis*, saints and prophets never neglected this deep reflection and communication with one's own self and thus discovered truth.

Of course people who pursue this authentic communication with self can be sub-divided into two categories: 1) those who do it for self-knowledge above and may or may not want to communicate with the world outside them and 2) those who not only want to communicate with the world at large but also want to transform the world. Many prophets and Gandhi himself in our own time falls into second category.

Gandhi was primarily an activist and was not only in search of truth but also wanted to see truth in action. For such people justice and freedom not only of the self but of the entire people or nation become central. Such people not only transform themselves but

know that individual transformation would mean nothing without transforming the world around them. This is what Gandhiji set about to do both in South Africa and in India.

Thus from the above discussion we can conclude that for a non-violent world following conditions must be fulfilled: 1) the world order has to be based on truthfulness and justice and 2) non-coercive and genuine convictions and freedom of self or of nations and communities. Since today our world lacks all these violence has become all pervasive: either aggressive violence of one nation against another country or nation, or reactive violence of resistance groups, freedom fighters or even of terrorists.

I would also like to say here that those who follow the founders of such movements often fail to rise up to the ethical standards of the founders and soon the movement develops vested interests and becomes a powerful establishment, the very anti-thesis of the original movement. Gandhian Movement could not escape this irony. Not only after Gandhiji's death but even when he was alive Gandhi had begun to grow irrelevant with the dawn of freedom. Gandhi was no more needed as freedom was there and now power was the goal. Gandhi's advice was no more needed as it could deliver values, not power.

And then Gandhian movement was soon transformed into an establishment with allotments of lands, formation of trusts, control over properties and so on. Even worse, it lost its dynamic spirit and became orthodox with its symbol of spinning wheel and *Khadi* without much relevance to new economic realities. Thus Gandhians, devoid of creative thinking became ritualistic.

Now coming to all pervasive violence in the contemporary world how relevant is Gandhism? Its relevance depends of course on truth, justice and freedom from coercion. Since these attributes are lacking how can we have a violence-free world? These attributes are *sine qua non* and despite everyone talking of Gandhian nonviolence, violence remains all pervasive.

Can we then say violence-free world is just a dream? In a sense yes but not quite so. One must dream a dream but one also needs an

activist like Gandhi with creative thinking and practical application. The concept of nonviolence has been there for centuries as all spiritual thinkers, Prophets, *Rishis* and *Munis* have emphasized it but it was Gandhi in twentieth century who practically and creatively applied it for freedom of the country.

The problem of violence has become much more complex with highly destructive weapons based on latest technology and hence results in heavy loss of life, less of actual combatants but mostly of non-combatants. It is, therefore, highly necessary that violence in our world which is highly unjust, highly unevenly developed and promotes greed among few, ignoring needs of vast majority of people and is heavily biased in favour of few rich nations, to creatively apply non-violent methods of resistance to save humanity.

Should we wait for another Gandhi? It will be our weakness to wait for one. We need collective value-based thinking. We must transform our education system and make it accessible to poorest of poor again through creative methods, an education system which is cooperative, not competitive. Gandhian concept of economy has to be just and need based and our education system has to promote this concept of economy with creative use of modern technology. We can then hope to contain violence at least on local levels.

# FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM



Fundamentalism and terrorism are widely used but loosely-defined terms in the media as well as academia. Many people describe anything religious as fundamentalism and any act of killing as terrorism. It is necessary to define these terms properly. In fact, the term fundamentalism is hardly applicable to Indian religions on the one hand, and to Islam on the other hand. It is American media, which started using 'Islamic fundamentalism' when the Islamic revolution was taking place in Iran in the late 1970s. Our media too started using the term and very soon it was being very widely used.

The current use of the term 'terrorism' too has its origin in American media after 9/11. We have had violence from across the border since 1990s but never used 'terrorist violence' for it. We called it either extremism or militancy. But now, we call it 'cross-border terrorism' after 9/11. Thus, American rulers and American media set the term for us to be used. America devises terms to reflect its own interests and not to make any academic sense. We should resist the temptation to use the terms loosely.

Let us try to define fundamentalism. It should not certainly be confused with fundamentals of religion. Even in America this term was not used in that sense in the early twenties of the last century. Those who believed that every word of the Bible is literally a divine word were called fundamentalist. One, it did not refer to

fundamental teachings of Christianity and second, it was never used in a derogatory sense. Now the term, especially 'Islamic fundamentalism,' is used in a derogatory sense and since it is used in a derogatory sense, we must separate it from religion per se.

To follow either Islam or Hinduism should not be described as 'fundamentalism'. Even to follow orthodox traditions of religion should not be dubbed as 'fundamentalism', even though one may not agree with orthodox practices. There are millions of people in every religious tradition who follow these orthodox traditions without being a nuisance to anyone in the society. Their practices could be quite harmless.

Therefore, one must distinguish between orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Fundamentalism in the sense in which it is being used in the media is, in fact, a political misuse of religion in a narrow sectarian manner. In this sense, there is not much difference between communalism and fundamentalism. Both the phenomena are based on political interests. Still there is a subtle difference between the two. While communalism is all about political or economic interests of a particular community, fundamentalism is enforcement of sectarianism with all rigidity for political mobilisation of a community for the power-goals of its elite. While communalism is the exploitation of sentiments of a religion-based community for a non-religious goal (i.e., political power) fundamentalism is enforcing narrow sectarian practices for strengthening religious orthodoxy as well as achieving political power.

While the BJP is closer to communalism in this sense, the VHP and Bajrang Dal are closer to fundamentalism. However, it must be said at the same time that the distinction is getting more and more blurred of late as VHP is setting the agenda for the BJP. Similarly, the pre-Partition Muslim League was closer to communalism and the Jama'at-e-Islami was closer to fundamentalism.

Communalism is more about non-religious (mainly political) of a religion-based community. Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is enforcement of narrow sectarian religion by misusing political power and that too with a view to consolidate political power.

Now let us define terrorism. One must admit, while defining terrorism that it is very difficult to reach any consensus about it. Even the UNO failed to evolve one despite great deal of debates. It is often said, and rightly so, that one's terrorist is the other's freedom fighter. Those who are freedom fighters for the Palestinians are 'terrorists' to be killed and eliminated for the Israelis. In Kashmir, those who are 'terrorists' for us Indians are freedom fighters for Pakistanis and even for some Kashmiris,

Even though it is difficult to define 'terrorism,' those who kill innocent and non-combatant people on a large scale could certainly be categorised as terrorists. Many Pakistan-based organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba who kill innocent citizens not only in J&K but also in other cities of India are terrorists.

Let us see whether fundamentalism necessarily leads to terrorism and what is the link between the two. Though logically fundamentalism should not necessarily and inevitably lead to terrorism, it often does. Fundamentalism involves enforcement of narrow sectarian practices using political power. In order to consolidate political power, extreme coercion becomes necessary and extreme coercion involves violence.

People do not easily accept such enforcement willingly (except a few) while the authoritarian forces use violence. Also, when it involves political power, political rivalries and secessionist movements, violence is inevitably used since democratic alternatives take far too long and test out patience. It should also be noted that all terrorist movements are not fundamentalist in nature though fundamentalism may also lead to terrorism. For example, the LTTE movement is a terrorist one but not a fundamentalist one.

Another important thing to be noted is that terrorists may use religion or religious terminology like jihad or *dharmayuddh* or holy war but their objective may have nothing to do with religious teachings as such. It would, therefore, be wrong to describe a terrorist act as religious terrorism just because of the use of religious terminology. Thus, Osama bin Laden's being a Muslim and his

attack on the WTC twin towers, New York, does not become an act of 'Islamic terrorism'.

Osama bin Laden has his own agenda and his acts by no means represent Islamic teachings. No religion in the world, much less Islam, teaches terrorism or inspires any one to kill innocent people. Though some Muslims may have expressed sympathy for Osama, so did some non-Muslims who resent America's policies and its pro-Israeli stance. Osama never had any official sanction from any Islamic establishment. There is no priesthood or church in Islam. No *fatwa*, howsoever eminent the institution issuing *fatwa* be, cannot be binding on any Muslim.

And in the case of Osama no such institution has issued any such *fatwa* supporting his act of terrorism. It is, therefore, not justified at all to describe 9/11 attack by Osama's men as an act of Islamic terrorism. Even if any eminent Mufti (one who issues *fatwa*) had issued such an opinion, it would not have been binding on all Muslims. And in this case no one issued such a *fatwa*.

Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda organisation does not pretend to have any mass base. No terrorist organisation, as a matter of fact, has a mass base anywhere in the world. It would otherwise seem to be a terrorist organisation. Osama does use Islamic terminology to gain the sympathy of Muslim masses but use of such a terminology does not make it an Islamic organisation. It remains basically a terrorist organisation. The religion practised by masses of Muslims is more spiritual than political and religion practised by likes of Osama is more political than spiritual.

The Qur'an clearly lays down that killing any person without a just cause amounts to killing whole humanity and saving one person's life amounts to saving entire humanity. This is truly humanistic and spiritual dimension of Islam and of any religion for that matter. Killing hundreds of innocent people can not qualify for being a religious act by any stretch of imagination.

Whether fundamentalism and terrorism (in the sense in which they have been defined above) are linked together or not, both are

curses for humanity. No truly religious person should approve of such a gross misuse of religion. A religious attitude has to be of humility, distance from political power and of nonviolence. The Sufi Islam which was truly spiritual Islam always maintained its distance from power centres and believed in the doctrine of what is called *sulh-i-kul* i.e., peace with all. True religion is one, which does not get politicised. Political Islam or political Hinduism became a great danger for peace and tranquillity in the society. It is political Hinduism (*Hindutva*) which caused havoc in Gujarat and many other places and it is political Islam which has resulted in bloodshed in New York or in Kashmir or in Algeria, for that matter. Muslims and Hindus should fight against politicisation of their respective religions.

# ON THE CONCEPT OF COMPASSION IN ISLAM



Is compassion central to Islam? Many people think jihad is more central to it than compassion. At least this is the general impression of people including of course Muslims. But this is not so. Compassion is far more central to Islam than jihad. This impression about jihad goes around certain happenings in the history of Islam and also in contemporary world.

Compassion represents the true spirit of Islam and compassion is far more vital to Islamic teachings than anything else. In fact compassion in Islam, after the concepts of *Tawhid* (unity of God) and *Risalah* (messengership of Muhammad) is as central to Islam as it is to Buddhism. We will throw light on compassion in Islam in the following pages.

There are certain key words in the Qur'an which are greatly stressed of which four are very often repeated i.e., *rahmah*, *ihsan*, *'adl*, and *hikmah* (compassion, benevolence, justice and wisdom). *Rahmah* (compassion, mercy) and its roots abound in the Holy Qur'an. Among Allah's own names are *Rahman* and *Rahim* (compassionate and Merciful). A Muslim begins everything by reciting *Bismillahi-r-Rahmani-r-Raheem* (i.e., begin in the name of Allah who is Compassionate and Merciful). Thus a Muslim is supposed to invoke Allah the Compassionate and Merciful at every step. He does not invoke Allah's other names (Allah has 99 names

according to the Islamic belief) as he invokes Him as Merciful and Compassionate.

The very first chapter of the Qur<sup>ān</sup> has the second verse as *Al-Rahman al-Rahim* (The Compassionate, the Merciful). The first verse too carries the sense of compassion when it describes Allah as *Rabb al-‘Alamin* (i.e., Sustainer of the whole world). The concept of sustenance of the whole world itself is based on His Mercy and Compassion for everything he has created. In fact *rahmath* is so central to Allah's existence that it embraces all that exists in the universe (*wasi'at kulla shay'in*) see verse 40:7.

In fact He sent His messenger Muhammad also as the mercy of the world (21:107). Thus the prophet of Islam also represents universal mercy. As the messenger of Allah he is representative of His mercy and hence the prophet himself is known as *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy of the worlds). Thus a true follower of the Prophet (PBUH) has to be merciful and compassionate to the extent humanly possible. Anyone who is cruel and has no sensitivity towards sufferings of others cannot be Prophet's true follower in any sense.

It is a great pity that Muslims, except the Sufis and their followers, have forgotten the emphasis of the Holy Qur<sup>ān</sup> on the quality of compassion. The Sufis lay tremendous stress on compassion. Their very fundamental doctrine is what is called *sulh-i-kul* i.e., 'peace with all' which means no violence and no aggressiveness. The majority of Muslims of course follow Sufi approach. It is only some frustrated fringe groups of Muslims who keep on talking of jihad and power. It is important to note that in Qur<sup>ān</sup> there is no concept of war of aggression and no concept of permissiveness of violence. Even where permission of war has been given it has been given to defend and protect rights of the oppressed and exploited, and not for achieving power. There is no verse in the Qur<sup>ān</sup> which permits violence for conquering territory or for achieving power. In fact war has been qualified in the Qur<sup>ān</sup> by the words *fii Sabilillah* i.e., in the way of Allah. Thus a war can be fought, if at all necessary, not for any personal ambitions or for

grabbing territory or not for personal animosity or for revenge, but only in the way of Allah.

And what is the way of Allah? Allah's way is of justice, Allah's way is of protecting the rights of the poor and exploited. In fact the very first verse in the Qur'an permitting the use of violence reflects this very well. It says: "And what reason you have not to fight in the way of Allah, and of the weak among the men and the women and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and grant us from Thee a friend, and grant us from Thee a helper." (4:75) (emphasis added).

Thus explaining the import of this verse, a noted commentator Maulana Muhammad Ali says in his *The Holy Qur'an* (Lahore, 1973, pp. 211) "This verse explains what is meant by fighting in the way of Allah. While most of the believers who had the means had escaped from Makkah, which is here spoken of as the city whose people are oppressors, there remained those who were weak and unable to undertake a journey. These were still persecuted and oppressed by the Makkans, as is clearly shown by the words of the verse. Not only men, but even women and young children, were persecuted. Fighting to deliver them from the persecution of the oppressors was really fighting in the way of Allah. ..."

Since any fighting has been permitted only in the way of Allah it cannot be a war of aggression in any case. It has to be only on compassionate grounds, not on any ground and hence the doctrine of compassion remains central. If there is no other way to liberate the oppressed except through use of force only then use of force will be justified; otherwise not.

The Qur'an again and again shows its sympathy for the weaker sections of the society in which it includes, among others, the orphans, the widows, the poor and the exploited, the slaves and other politically or socially or economically oppressed people. It emphasises different ways of helping them. This is all on the grounds of compassion. Compassion really means sensitivity to others' suffering. A person cannot be compassionate unless he/she

is sensitive to others' suffering. And this suffering includes, as we will see, not only human beings but also animals and plants

First, let us take suffering human beings. The Qur'an shows great compassion to orphans, the widows, the poor and the slaves. It wants to liberate these poorer and oppressed sections from their situation. *Zakāt*, a toll tax, has been made obligatory on all believing Muslims, men or women to help these sections. Thus the Qur'an says, "(*zakāt*) charity is only for the poor and the needy and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are made to incline, and (to free) the captives, and those in debt, and in the way of Allah and for the wayfarer – an ordinance from Allah. And Allah is Knowing, Wise." (9:60)

Thus all the categories indicated in the above verse except two i.e., those who administer it (i.e., collect the *zakāt* on behalf of the Islamic state or *baytul maal* (state treasury) and those whose hearts are to be inclined or won over (by Muslims for their help) all other categories are of weaker sections of society – those who suffer i.e., the poor, the needy, the captives (in war), those indebted (who but the poor are indebted), the slaves and the wayfarers. They all stand in need of help. A believer who is well off must be sensitive to the needs of these categories and must help them financially to remove their sufferings on compassionate grounds. Thus even for the payment of *zakāt* compassion remains central.

Not only that the Qur'an wants to remove those who are arrogant because of their wealth and power and empower the weak so that there is no suffering in the world. It says clearly and unambiguously "And We desired to bestow a favour upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and to make them the leaders, and to make them the inheritors." (28:5) Thus the Qur'an favours the *mustad'ifin* (the weaker sections) to the *mustakbirin* (those powerful and arrogant)

The powerful and the arrogant people are insensitive to others' suffering and want to grab as much as they can – be it wealth, be it territory or be it symbols of power. In the Qur'anic approach the

powerful are most insensitive and hence most uncompassionate. They are overpowered by the greed and hence can never understand other's needs. Therefore, the Qur'an says "And those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in Allah's way – announce to them a painful chastisement." (9:34) In several verses of the Qur'an one finds strong denunciation of the accumulation of wealth. The chapters 104 and 107 are devoted to denunciation of accumulation of wealth and not helping the poor and sufferers. Thus compassion becomes quite an important concept in all these verses. It is important to note that suffering could be both spiritual and material. Spiritual suffering certainly follows material suffering. It is also reflected in the Holy Prophet's famous saying *al-kalam ba'd al-ta'am* (i.e., first eating and then prayers. If one is starving one cannot pray with complete absorption

Even fasting during the month of Ramadan can be interpreted both spiritually and materially. Fasting in spiritual sense is a form of *ibadah* i.e., a form of prayer and an attempt to shun consumerism for cultivating one's spiritual potentialities. But it also helps make one sensitive to others' pangs of hunger and develop sensitivity to others suffering and this develop compassion towards the poor.

Compassion towards the poor is so important that the Prophet used to say that even if one person remains hungry in a locality no angel will descend in that locality until that hungry person is fed. Also the Prophet is reported to have said that it is more meritorious to feed hungry widow than to pray whole night. Thus one can see the intensity of the Prophet's compassion towards others' suffering, particularly those of the weaker sections of society. It was for this reason that even for expiation of one's sins the Qur'an as well as the Holy Prophet requires to feed the hungry or to liberate the slaves.

The Prophet not only asked people to treat their slaves in a humane way and give them to eat what they eat and give them to wear what they themselves wear but also encouraged them to liberate them and set example by liberating his own slave Zayd and adopted him as his son and treated him most affectionately. Zayd became so

attached to him that when his father came to take him away after the Prophet liberated him he refused to go with him and chose, instead, to stay with the Prophet. Not only this, the Holy Prophet married him to his close relative Zainab. But unfortunately it did not prove to be a successful marriage. But that is not our concern here

It was his compassion for the weaker sections of society that he not only got Bilal Habashi manumitted but gave him the highest honour of giving *azan* i.e., calling the faithful to prayer five times. This honour was denied even to his closest colleagues who intensely desired it. If it was not compassion for the weaker section what was it? It is this compassion which is the most desirable aspect of Islamic teachings.

Prophet was equally kind to animals. When a woman of disrepute came to him and said that she saved a thirsty cat from dying by fetching water from a pit with the help of her socks, the Prophet said Allah will pardon all your sins and you will go to paradise. The Prophet, according to one Hadith described entire creation (including humans, animals and trees and plants) as family of Allah (*'ayal Allah*) and all should be treated with compassion and sensitivity.

We find a Hadith in Bukhari and also in Sahih Muslim that the Prophet (ﷺ) told his companions that one previous prophet burnt an anthill because an ant bit him. Allah reprimanded the prophet for destroying the anthill as these ants also sang His praises. We are also reminded here of the story of a Sufi saint (Zubair) who became restless when he saw an ant crawling in his room. He feared that someone will tread on it and kill. He then gently picked up the ant and put it in a box containing wheat floor as he thought it would be safe there.

We find in Imam Malik's *Al-Muwatta* that the Prophet once was seen gently wiping the face and mane of his horse with his gown. On being asked by his companions he explained that he was admonished by Allah for neglecting his horse. Hazrat Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law used to admonish the Muslims not to eat too much meat and make their stomachs graveyards for animals.

Prof. Iqbal Ansari, in his paper "Religion and Animal Welfare – The Islamic View" says, "A large number of Prophet's traditions dealing with kindness and compassion to animals are included in the authentic Hadith literature. Cruelty to and torturing of animals, even the obnoxious ones in any form are forbidden. This criterion is so absolute that even when for valid reasons man is permitted to kill any animal for food or to save himself from its venom or other harm, he is enjoined to do so without causing avoidable pain or torture." The Qur'an, as pointed out earlier, uses the word *rahm* (mercy, compassion) repeatedly. This word and its various derivatives have been used more than 326 times. According to *Mufradat al-Qur'an* by Imam Raghīb, an authentic dictionary of the Qur'anic terms *rahmath* means softening of heart towards one who deserves our mercy and induces us to do good to him/her. It is interesting to note that the womb of mother is also called *rahm*. Mother is always very soft towards her children (*rafiq*) and showers love and affection on them. Thus anyone who does to others qualifies for *rahm*. Thus to cultivate *rahm* is to be faithful to one's mother.

The Qur'an also says that the believers (*mu'minin*) are merciful to each other. Allah is named by the Qur'an as *Rahim* and *Rahman*. And according to *Mufradat* of Imam Raghīb, *Rahman* is one whose mercy encompasses all - not just human beings but the entire creation. Thus only Allah can be *Rahman*, no one else. We human beings have our own limitations. We love our fellow religionists more than those belonging to other religious groups; we love those speaking our own tongue more than those speaking other tongues and we love human beings more than the animals.

But it is not so with Allah. Allah loves and showers His Mercy equally on all. And if we are really worshippers of Allah we too should not make such distinctions. We should love all human beings equally whether they belong to our religion or not, whether they speak our tongue or not and whether they have same colour of skin as we have or not. If Allah is *Rahman* (Compassionate) to all of us, His servants too should try to imitate Him as much as we can. True

*'ibadah* (worshipping) can be claimed only when we try to imbibe elements of His attributes.

Thus a real Muslim is one who despite being firm in his/her faith tradition shows equal love and compassion for all human beings whether they belong to his faith tradition or not. Every faith tradition is unique and should be recognised as such but it should not become a tool of discrimination. The Qur'ān itself declares that all human beings, all children of Adam have been honoured equally (17:70). Thus there is no justification in showing any discrimination on the basis of faith as far as the Qur'ān is concerned

Many prominent *ulamā* have argued that Allah is Rahman (Compassionate) in the sense that he provides for even *Kafirs*. There is an important Sufi lore which is pointer to this compassion of Allah. It is said that the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) would not eat unless there was some guest on his table. Once it so happened that there did not come any guest and Prophet Abraham was hungry.

Abraham then went out in search of a guest and he found one very old man in the nearby forest. He invited the old man to dine with him and the man agreed and started out with Abraham. On the way Abraham asked him about his religion and he said I am an atheist. Prophet Abraham was angry and cancelled his invitation. When he did so he heard a voice from above: Oh Abraham, We tolerated him (the old man) for seventy years despite his disbelief and you could not tolerate him for seven minutes. Abraham repented and took the old man home for dining.

The lesson is clear: what to believe and who is right and who is wrong should be left to Allah rather than our weak judgement. Our judgement is often influenced by several factors including our ego, our interests, our beliefs, colour of our skin and our ethnicity. Allah alone can judge most impartially. Thus our respect for others and our compassion should not be meant for limited number of groups. It should be as wide in sweep as possible.

When the Qur'ān refers to weaker sections (*mustadifun*) it does not qualify it with Muslim. It uses *mustadifun* as inclusive

of all human beings. And all of them are equally entitled to our compassion and Allah's mercy, no less, no more. The Qur'an nowhere uses words like Muslim orphans, Muslim widows or Muslim slaves. It uses these words in general without any qualification whatsoever. Similarly the Qur'an does not use any qualification for the powerful and arrogant *mustakbirun*. They can belong to any religion, race or ethnicity. Arrogance is condemnable anywhere.

The Qur'an's attitude is so compassionate towards all human beings that even in the matter of *wasiyyath* (i.e., making a will) it advises that if apart from your relatives, someone needy is present at that time, make some provision for them also. Also, the Qur'an uses the word *sadaqah* for charity which is derived from the root *sidq* which means truthfulness. Real charity (*sadaqah*) is one which is done with sincerity and truthfulness. Anything which is given to show off, or not with sincere and compassionate intention will not qualify as *sadaqah*.

Only that feeling qualifies for compassion, which moves our heart for the sufferings of others and that motivates us to help others. Thus the use of the word *sadaqah* for charity is very significant. It is the condition of a human person, rather than his/her religion that should move us to help. Compassion is the best quality one can have towards other creatures, particularly towards other human beings and animals. It is suffering which is most fundamental not one's religion, language or race.

A Qur'anic verse which describes some of the qualities of a good believer says, "Those who spend in ease as well as in adversity and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves doers of good (to others)." (3:133).

Thus it will be seen that those who control their anger and pardon others and do good to others are those whom Allah loves. And these qualities are very much the basis of compassion. Anger and violence are always denounced by Allah. They are just opposite of compassion. One of Allah's name is Ghafur i.e., one who pardons, one who is not revengeful. A compassionate person can never be revengeful.

Thus one can conclude from closer study of Qur'an and Hadith that compassion is the best human quality and no one deserves to be human unless he is compassionate. Thus it is quite central to the teachings of Islam.



# COMPASSION IN ISLAM – THEOLOGY AND HISTORY



Islam is generally associated with jihad. But it is more due to its history than its theology. It is interesting to note that while jihad in Islam is more historical than theological, compassion, on the other hand, is more theological than historical. The very opening of Qur'an, the holy book of Islam is with *Bismillahi-r-Rahmani-r-Rahim* i.e., I begin in the name of Allah who is Compassionate and Merciful.

Thus it will be seen that Compassion is one of the names of Allah and it is among the most popular names of Allah. Muslims always begin their name with this incantation i.e., 'I begin in the name of Allah who is Compassionate and Merciful'. A Muslim, who worships Allah has to be compassionate in his own behaviour else his/her worship would not be complete. There are four key values in Qur'an which are repeatedly emphasized are: Justice (*adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*) and compassion is one of them. Jihad, on the other hand, is not value but an instrument to realize certain objectives.

The Prophet of Islam too is described in Qur'an as *rahmatan lil ālamin* i.e., mercy of the worlds. Since Prophet is messenger of Allah he too has to represent His virtues on earth. Allah is perfect and so His Prophet has to be a perfect human being imbibing all the attributes of Allah. So other believers (*mu'minun*) also must, with all their limitations, imbibe these virtues.

A believer, who is not compassionate within possible human limits, is no believer at all. A true believer has to imbibe all those values represented by Allah and His Messenger. In other words Qur'an and *sunnah* (Prophet's sayings and doing) are binding on all Muslims and there is complete consensus on it among all Muslim theologians belonging to all sects of Islam.

Prophet lived in such historical situation and sociopolitical conjunction that occasionally he had to take to arms to defend himself and his community but this historical necessity cannot be counted as obligatory or value-oriented. At the most it can be called necessity-oriented. Al-Qaeda and some similar groups representing a miniscule minority among Muslims, are projecting jihad as if it is central value and obligatory. It is total falsification of teachings of Islam.

Let us remember necessity is situational and values are transcendent; necessity may compel human beings to do things which may not be strictly speaking desirable but values make society more *humane*. War, may become necessity at times but results in bloodshed and destruction and needs to be avoided as much as possible. Values, on the other hand, help purposefully construct society and are eternal.

It was due to historical necessity on one hand, and vested interests which used concept of jihad in a way that it appeared to be central to Islam where as values like compassion remained confined to one section of society represented by Sufis and weaker sections and hence never appeared on the pages of history which are reserved for the ruling classes. As we all know in history we read more about ruling classes than the ruled. And what rulers and ruling classes do is interest-oriented rather than value-oriented and it is for this reason that pages of history are red with blood.

Prophet's life history is full of value-oriented incidents but even biographers of the Prophet like Ibn-e-Ishaq or Ibn-e-Hisham have focused more on battles and wars than these events which would project the Prophet in true light. Prophet's name Muhammad (the praised one) was not because of his wars but because of his human

qualities and the Prophet came to be known as Muhammad much before he became head of the community.

These virtues were his truthfulness, wisdom and compassion. He loved justice and hence formed an organization called Hizb al-Fudul to help the victims of injustices in his society. He himself was an orphan and had suffered many tribulations in life and had great sympathy for the weaker sections of society he lived in. All this became part of his divine message also.

Allah chooses His prophets from among the weaker sections of society as only such persons can be value-oriented as they know importance of human values in life as against rulers and ruling classes who happen to be interest-oriented. Thus one would see in Qur'an that all prophets mentioned with the exception of David and Solomon (Daud and Sulaiman) (who were rulers) happen to be from weaker sections of society.

It is prophets from this section of society who can communicate with great conviction the divine message of truth, justice, benevolence, love, compassion, human dignity and equality. All prophets of Allah brought these values and exemplified them through their personal life. Prophet of Islam too was embodiment of these values, particularly compassion. There are numerous incidents from his life which show his compassionate approach towards fellow human beings irrespective of religion or station in life.

Once a woman was brought to his presence and was told she is sinner and must be punished. The Prophet, instead of asking her about her sins, asked her what act of compassion she had done to any fellow being. She said she could not recall any act of good towards any other human being. She reflected and said she couldn't recall any such incident. The Prophet again asked her whether you have helped any living being?

The woman thought for a while and said, yes, once a dog was thirsty and there was some water in a pit he was unable to reach with his tongue. I took pity on the dog, took off my sock and fetched some water from the pit and gave it to the dog. The Prophet said: "go

Allah will forgive all your sins for your act of compassion towards an animal.

A frail and sick person came to the Prophet and said: "I have committed a grave sin, please punish me." Prophet asked him what his sin was: There upon the person said: "I was sick and a woman came to inquire of my health and I committed an act of sin with her. Please punish me. Otherwise Allah will punish me eternally in the world hereafter." The Prophet once again asked him if he really did this to the woman so as to give him one more chance of denying. But the person persisted.

Since this person was too weak Prophet did not want to punish him with hundred lashes which is the Qur'anic punishment for adultery. Prophet thought for a while and asked hundred branches of palm date tree to be brought, he tied them together and delivered one soft blow and told the person: "so you have met with your punishment."

There is another often repeated story of a Jewish woman who used to throw garbage on the Prophet whenever he passed through that way. When no garbage was thrown one day he inquired about the woman and was told that she was sick. He went to her house to inquire about her health and prayed for her recovery. She of course was overwhelmed with this gesture of the Prophet and converted to Islam.

Needless to say it was not Prophet's intention to convert her but to show his deep personal concern for her illness. Had he not been compassionate he would not have done that. These stories make it clear that the Prophet of Islam felt others sufferings as his own and would try to do whatever he could to lessen or remove these sufferings. It is strikingly like the concept of *dukkha* in the Buddhist tradition and removal of *dukkha* is an act of religion.

Forgiveness is another quality essential for a compassionate behaviour. Allah is repeatedly described as *Ghafuru-r-Rahim* (Forgiver and Merciful) in the Qur'an. He is not so much as Punisher but Forgiver. Sincere repentance (*taubah*) on the part of human beings leads to forgiveness of Allah.

The Prophet too was great forgiver. As far as possible he would forgive even worst of his enemies. When he conquered Makkah without shedding a drop of blood, he declared he would not punish anyone provided they did not fight and gave up arms. His enemies who had indulged in inhuman persecution of the Prophet and his companions, feared for the worst but were pleasantly surprised that the Prophet pardoned all of them.

Abu Sufyan and his wife Hind who were in the forefront of persecuting the Prophet and his companions – Hind had eaten the liver of the prophet's uncle Hamza who was most dear to him were also pardoned. There can be hardly any better example of forgiveness and compassion. And think of Arab society with all its tribal customs which considered *qisas* (retaliation in equal measure) a basic necessity. The whole society considered the doctrine of *qisasi* central in the absence of any law enforcing agency.

Various Qur'an verses did sanction the doctrine of *qisas* (as there was no law enforcing machinery) but made it clear that forgiveness and compassion to the offender are superior values and who would practice these values if not the Prophet? He practiced them as the human exemplifier. Thus the Prophet did not teach anything but practiced it himself in most trying conditions. To forgive his worst enemies in Makkah was most challenging and no one would have complained if the Prophet had sought revenge. It was the norm of that society. But the Prophet wanted to establish superiority of higher values.

In Islamic world then there were two parallel streams and together they constituted Islamic mainstream. These two streams were sociopolitical stream and Sufi stream and both these streams had their own understanding of jihad. The sociopolitical stream consisted of ruling and upper classes. On the other hand, Sufis got support mainly from weaker sections of society though part of the ruling class also had faith in Sufi saints due to their popularity among masses of people.

The ruling classes understood jihad as defence of Islamic state and expansion of limits of Islamic state. A section of theologians

depended for their sustenance on the ruling classes and hence their discourse on jihad was mainly to promote interests of ruling classes. Thus the large part of theological discourse on jihad supported the point of view of ruling classes and they defended jihad in the sense of military operations.

Jihad, on the other hand, meant inner struggle to suppress desires and cultivate virtues of patience (*sabr*) and reliance on Allah (*tavakkul*), for the Sufi stream of Islam. There wasn't much support for war and political struggle among the Sufi saints. The Sufi saints tried to cultivate what Qur<sup>ān</sup> calls *nafs-e-mutmainna* (the contented soul) and not *nafs-e-ammaraḥ* (desiring soul). Since it requires great deal of struggle to cultivate *nafs-e-mutmainnah* it was real jihad for Sufi stream of Islam.

And let us remember it is *nafs-e-mutmainna* (contented soul) which also creates attitude of compassion. A grabbing and greedy soul which is *nafs-e-ammaraḥ* can never show compassion towards the suffering of others. Ruling classes and their supporters have this kind of soul as their greed can be fulfilled only by inflicting suffering on others. Thus it will be seen that jihad in the Qur<sup>ān</sup> is not in absolute sense of war or fighting against *Kafirs* as usually understood.

Jihad is, on the other hand, layered concept and has been interpreted very differently by different classes of Muslims. Jihad is mainly spiritual and the Prophet of Islam had very complex kind of challenges both material and spiritual and hence he and his companions used jihad in both material and spiritual senses. However, its centrality lay in spiritual struggle and Sufis were basically enchanted by spiritual struggle of the Prophet and hence jihad for them was a supreme and most challenging struggle to suppress *nafs-e-ammaraḥ* (desiring soul) and hence for them jihad had significance as a spiritual struggle.

Sufis had very caring and sharing attitude which is an important ingredient of compassion. They expressed their solidarity with suffering people and weaker sections of society and that is why

thousands of people had great reverence for them. Though they received lot of money from their devotees including members of ruling classes, they never spent it on their self.

They used to open what is called *Langar* i.e., a common kitchen where anyone irrespective of caste and creed could eat any time of the day. Thus they had very compassionate attitude towards suffering people. They derived their inspiration from a *Hadis-e-Qudsi* (a divine Hadith) which is as follows: Allah would ask on the Day of Judgment "I was hungry and you did not feed me, I was thirsty and you did not quench my thirst and I was naked and you did not clothe me." The person being held to account would say "Oh! Allah you are the Provider of food how could I feed you?" Allah would say, "My servant (*abd*) was hungry and you did not feed him. If a human person is hungry it is as if I am hungry and if a human person is thirsty it is as if I am thirsty, and if a human person is naked it is as if I am naked." Thus the Sufis always saw to it that any human being who came to them should not go back hungry. They would do everything possible to feed him/her.

They would even go hungry and feed the person who happened to be hungry. And this compassion extended to even animals and plants. The Prophet once saw a donkey who was indentured on its face. He berated its owner that you have no compassion for this poor animal. You have disfigured its face. The owner said it is required for identifying the animal. Prophet told him not to disfigure its face and do it on some other part of the animal.

Sufi Junaid once saw an ant crawling in his room. He got worried that someone would trample it underfoot and ant will be killed. He thought for a moment how to save its life. He saw a container with wheat flour lying in the room. He gently lifted the ant and put it in the container. Such was the compassion of Sufis towards human beings, animals and even an ant.

Compassion is highly necessary for sustenance of life on this earth. A compassionate approach only can make our life rich. It is greed which makes human beings ruthless towards others as one

can fulfill once greed only by inflicting suffering on others. For a compassionate person thus it is necessary to lead need-based life, not greed-based life. The Qur'an exhorts believers to give away their surplus to the needy people (2:219).

Qur'an also levies a tithe on Muslims called *zakāt* which has to be spent on orphans, widows, poor, needy, wayfarers and for releasing of prisoners. All these are helpless sections of society and hence need our compassion. It is obligatory for all Muslims to spend their wealth on these helpless sections of society. It is not possible without having compassion towards them.

Thus it is compassion which makes us real human being. A human being who is not sensitive towards suffering of fellow human beings or animals and plants cannot be human being indeed. Thus there is constant struggle between greed and need and generally it is greed which triumphs and result is lot of suffering of large number of human beings on earth.

We can triumph over greed only through compassion. In fact all religions want to enrich our spiritual life and thus teach compassion. There is no religion which does not teach compassion. No religion promotes greed. But history of that religion is often history of its ruling classes and ruling classes are overpowered by greed for power and self and thus often we find lot of bloodshed and wars in history of these religions including that of Islam.

However there is always a parallel stream which is never highlighted in history which is that of Sufis and saints engaged not in struggle for power but struggle to overpower, over power their desire and greed and cultivate compassionate attitude towards others. It is this section of people who are salt of life and who find eternal reverence in the hearts people, though not in their history.

We are also increasingly becoming insensitive to suffering of our own climate. We want to live greedy life and do not mind even destroying our environment. It is our over consumption which is leading to destruction of our environ and our sensitivity towards it. Thus we have to cultivate an attitude of compassion towards

our environment also. Reducing our consumption would achieve two purposes: one, helping needy people on earth who are deprived of their just right to exist and secondly, would help normalize our climate.

Thus compassion towards others' suffering can result in enriching our life both materially and spiritually. Today ours is consumer society and whole emphasis is on consumption and the capitalist system draws its dynamism from ever increasing consumption and it is sought to be boosted through high-powered advertisement. This race for ever increasing consumption has made us increasingly insensitive towards others' suffering.

It is not easy to reduce our consumption as a whole though some individual may succeed in doing that. We have to carefully cultivate the attitude of compassion towards suffering of others to achieve this objective. According to me religion can become a rich resource for cultivating compassion in human beings. This can happen only when our understanding of religion is transformed by religious leaders.

Our understanding of religion is entirely ritual centred today. We have to go beyond rituals and religion should be our active guide for transforming our inner self, a contented inner being wholly occupied with values like love, selflessness, compassion and truthfulness. This in fact is real religiosity, not merely performing certain rituals. This also often leads to competitive religiosity and tension between communities.

Qur'an repeatedly talks of *istibaq al-khayrat*, i.e., excelling each other in good deeds and what are good deeds, if not deeds based on these values of love, compassion and truthfulness. The Prophet is reported to have said that it is more meritorious to feed a hungry widow than to pray whole night. Thus compassion towards a hungry soul is more important than prayer. Allah hardly needs our prayer.

And actually prayer and fasting has also been prescribed to cultivate with these values, not because Allah needs them. Rituals are a means to an end, not an end in themselves but we have reduced

them to an end itself. We must urgently revise our attitude towards ritual-oriented religion and replace it with value-oriented one, if we have to reduce suffering of humanity. Buddhism and Islam both greatly complement each other in cultivating compassion among their followers. Christianity and Hinduism too with their emphasis on love and nonviolence can be valued associates and we can transform our world. Will these religions join hands to reduce suffering of our earth?



# THE BURQA CONTROVERSY



The recent utterances of French President Sarkozy that burqa will be banned in France and that wearing veil is not religion but torture and punishment for women, have caused great stir among Muslims and lot is being written in the media on this subject. As it is expected most Muslims, men and women have come out in support of wearing veil and are defending it in various ways theological as well as non-theological.

Earlier French Government had banned wearing veil or scarf over head by Muslim girls in schools. The Sikhs also suffered as their children were banned from wearing turban in schools. At that time also there was strong reaction from various sections. Sikhs were also greatly agitated and Sikhs from various European countries and even from North America demonstrated on the streets of Paris but nothing came out of it.

There are two things involved here. One, the question of democratic rights and two, theological arguments. As far as democratic rights are concerned all Muslims as well as non-Muslims, should thoroughly debate this issue. As far as theological arguments are concerned the Muslim theologians as well as Muslim intellectuals should equally thoroughly debate it and see whether covering of whole body from head to toe including the face is divine ordained or is cultural and patriarchal practice being justified in the name of religion.

First, let us examine the issue in the light of democratic rights. One perspective in this regard is that it is democratic right of an individual what to wear and what not to wear. A government cannot dictate citizens in matters of what to wear and what to eat. The French Government, if at all it bans *burqa* (still the issue is under discussion and a parliamentary committee is examining whether to ban or not to ban), it will go against democratic norms and practices.

In this regard I would like to point out that countries like France are yet to come to terms with pluralism and multi-culturalism. Europe, throughout centuries has been mono-cultural and mono-religious (Catholics and Protestants are offshoots of Christianity and both are embedded in Western culture). It was with migration from Afro-Asian countries, mainly former colonies to Europe after Second World War when de-colonization began, that European countries experienced pluralism and multiculturalism.

The argument by French President that wearing *burqa*, a religious apparel cannot be permitted in 'secular' France is based on this mono-cultural practice of secularism. France too, is multi-cultural today as many African Christians and Muslims from its former French colonies have come to France. But unlike UK, France has really not come to terms with multi-culturalism. French culture really reigns supreme. It is intolerant of other cultural practices though tolerance is a great democratic value. It is surprising how intolerant French Government is towards other cultures and religions.

A truly democratic nation would respect other cultural and religious practices and would not treat its own citizens as aliens and ban their practices. If some Muslim women decide to wear *burqa* covering their bodies from head to toe, it is their decision even if it tortures them. Indian Court has also approved of right of Jain monks to go on fast unto death as their religious practice though it involves extreme torture to the body. After all they are torturing themselves, not others and particularly because it is their religious belief. Thus French Government will be better advised if it becomes more tolerant of other cultures and other religious practices.

Now coming to Islamic theological argument it is not correct to believe that Qurʾān prescribes covering of women's body from head to toe and also the face. What Qurʾān advises is not to display their adornments publicly and the word used in verse 24:31 is *zeenah* (adornment), not *hijāb* (veil). And the words of the verse are only advisory, not obligatory. It is better if they do not display their adornment (*zeenah*) publicly but they can do so privately in their own homes and before their own people, like parents, parents in-law, uncles, other women and children.

There is no mention of *hijāb* in the sense of covering face in Qurʾān at all. All Muslim jurists and theologians agree that according to verse 4:31 women can keep their face open and apply collyrium to their eyes and can also keep their hands open and wear rings on their fingers. However, they insist on covering their heads and hence in Iran women are officially required to cover their heads with what they call chador but can keep their face open. This verse also asks women to cover their breasts.

This clearly shows that in pre-Islamic Arab society women were keeping their breasts at least partly, if not wholly, open as many women in western societies do today. Also, there is debate between theologians whether this verse refers to external adornment or beauty of the body itself, which would necessitate covering of whole body from head to toe so as to hide the beauty of the body.

The other view is that it refers to only external adoration, not the beauty of the body and this view is supported by what is said in the end of the verse i.e., "Let them not strike their feet so that the adornment that they hide may be known." Many Arab women used to wear anklets and strike their feet to attract attention to their adornment which the Qurʾān advises them not to do.

This verse 24:31 makes an exception for covering and says, "...do not display their adornment except what appears thereof". Throwing light on this exception Tabari, one of the noted early commentator on the Qurʾān says what she may not cover under this exception 1) adornment of dress or the clothes that a woman wears i.e., she need

not cover the clothes she wears; 2) also she is not required to cover adornment like collyrium, rings, bracelets and her face. In support of his view Tabari also says while praying a woman does not cover her face and her hands up to her elbow while she covers rest of her body.

There is also a Hadith the Prophet (PBUH) told Asma, his wife 'Aisha's sister, when she appeared wearing thin clothes, "Oh Asma, when woman attains her puberty it is not proper that any part of her body should be seen except this, and he pointed to his face and hands." (*Sunan Abu Daud* 31:30). This Hadith settles it conclusively that face and hands up to elbow need not be covered.

However, the *burqa* which covers woman from head to toe including face is widely spread in Islamic world. What is its origin? It is certainly more cultural than religious. One eminent scholar and judge Ameer Ali who wrote extensively on Islam and Islamic history maintains that it originated much after the Prophet i.e., around 7<sup>th</sup> century Hijra (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) that is after the sack of Baghdad. It was unknown during the early period of Islam.

However, another eminent Islamic historian Maulana Shibli who was also Justice Ameer Ali's contemporary challenged this position and wrote, in his article on *purdah* that it existed in pre-Islamic Arab society and Islam simply accepted it. Whatever the position one thing is absolutely clear that Qur'an does not recommend covering of whole body from head to toe, nor it requires covering of face. And whether Shibli is right or Justice Ameer Ali, it became part of Islamic culture.

Today many Muslim women wear it out of social or family compulsion and many wear it voluntarily as a mark of Islamic tradition. There are other reasons too. For many *purdah* is mark of Muslim identity but then it is also justified as protective of woman's dignity. These women say they feel quite safe and have nothing to fear and no one can molest or rape them. They are taken as serious and no nonsense women. May be to some extent; but women can be much more safer if proper social environment is there and enforcement of law and order is stricter.

Many women wear *burqa* as a matter of tradition and some under family compulsion. These women also say it is not in any way hindrance for their work. Well, may be it is rationalization of a tradition. Also, sometimes what appears to be out of choice may not really be so. Choice is also dictated by the environment we live in. In consumer society we feel choosing out of free will but often our choice is dictated by high pressure advertisement of products.

Cultural traditions also exert silent pressure and what appears to be 'choice' is really not free choice. Whatever the case *burqa* or *hijāb* for Muslim women in their own cultural environment is not really burden or chain as it appears to those totally alien to this tradition. Westerners are shocked because their cultural traditions are radically different. The contemporary western culture revels in exposing larger part of woman's body than hiding it. Eastern tradition is just the opposite.

In my opinion neither woman's body should be exposed nor completely covered. They should be neither treated as object of man's lust nor something to be hidden or imprisoned. She should dress to maintain her dignity and individuality as a free agent that is what is most desirable and that is what her status is in Qur'ān. Her sexuality should neither be feared nor used as lust but celebrated as a divine gift.



## ON THE MULTI-LAYERED CONCEPT OF JIHAD



Jihad is projected as an integral part of Islam - as an obligatory duty of all Muslims to fight against infidels. To say the least, this is a highly improper representation of the concept of jihad in Islam. The multi-layered concept of jihad has been projected as a one-dimensional concept - to fight with the sword against all infidels. What happened on September 11 year has further harmed the prospects of a correct understanding of the concept.

The first step towards such understanding is to situate the concept of jihad in its historical context. One is often historically determined, without an understanding of how one is historically situated. Qur'anic pronouncements are multi-layered and multi-dimensional - some of these dimensions are historical, some social, others ethical. To understand the Qur'anic verses in a unidimensional manner is to do great injustice to them, and also misapply them - either because of a wrong understanding of the verses, or on account of some selfish motive.

To understand the Qur'an better, it is important to understand the pre-Islamic Arab society. Violence and inter-tribal wars were rampant. Reconciliation and conflict resolution through negotiations was virtually unknown. Though the pre-Islamic Arab society was not exactly immoral, it did have tribal traditions and customs that ignored certain ethical aspects. Peace, though appreciated, was not

always practised. As there was no rule of law in pre-Islamic society, things were settled through inter-tribal wars or tribal customs and traditions. This resulted in a great deal of bloodshed.

This prevailing historical situation was not acceptable to Islam, but some of its elements did persist in Muslim behaviour. Also, we have to bear in mind that it was not a modern democratic society, but a tribal society with its own outlook and intellectual understanding. We cannot apply modern norms to the tribal society, nor should we perpetuate tribal practices in modern times. Islam, while constrained to retain some of it, rejected most of these practices, and provided for transcendent norms and ethical standards. What some Muslims do (and many non-Muslims too) is ignore the historicity of some Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic and Hadith pronouncements, and place them in an ahistorical context, thus causing great deal of misunderstanding about the Islamic ethics of jihad.

A careful study of the Qur<sup>ā</sup>n and Hadith makes it clear that the concept of jihad is far above mere violence and war. Unfortunately, Islamic history was fraught with wars for several reasons (certainly not for religious reasons), hence the unidimensional concept of jihad. The Sufis, who kept themselves aloof from power-struggles and attempts by rulers at territorial expansions, realised the dangers of misapplying the concept of jihad. They thought it necessary to emphasise the other social and moral aspects of jihad. It is for this reason that they described *jihad bi al-sayf* (i.e., war with sword) as *jihad-e-asghar* (i.e., small war), and jihad to control one's greed and selfish desires as *jihad-e-akbar* i.e., great jihad. This was important because Muslim leaders and their cohorts were ignoring the moral precepts and ethical constraints imposed by Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic pronouncements to fulfil their greed for power and territory.

The Sufis had based the concept of the great jihad on the basis of Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic pronouncements, and had not formulated a precept of their own. Jihad, as is well known to any student of the Arabic language, means to make utmost efforts. One must look at the authentic Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic dictionary *Mufradat al-Qur<sup>ā</sup>n* by Imam

Raghib Asfahani (Urdu translation by Sheikh Muhammad Abduh Firozपुरi, Lahore, 1971).

Imam Raghib first discusses the meaning of the root word *jahd*, which means working hard or making utmost efforts, and *juhud*, which means one's utmost capacity. The two together would mean making utmost efforts to one's best capacity. Then he goes on to say that *jihad wa al-mujahidah* means to spend one's utmost capacity in defending oneself in the face of an enemy. Then he divides jihad in three categories: 1) to fight against enemies, i.e., unbelievers; 2) against shaitan (Satan) and 3) against one's own self, i.e., one's own greed and selfishness.

Imam Raghib also maintains that the Qur'anic verse 22:78 ("And strive hard for Allah with due striving. He has chosen you and has not laid any hardship in religion.") comprises all these three categories. The Qur'an also says, "And strive hard in Allah's way with your wealth and your lives. This is better for you, if you know." (9:41). One also finds in the Qur'an, "Those who believed and migrated (from their homes), and strove hard in Allah's way with their wealth and their lives, are much higher in rank with Allah. And it is these that shall triumph." (9:20)

It will be seen that all these verses in the Qur'an do not use the word jihad in the sense of war, but in the sense of striving with wealth and one's own life. Muslims were a persecuted lot in Makkah, and many of them faced severe persecution, and strove hard in the way of Allah with their own lives, and those who were wealthy, spent all their wealth for that cause. Thus, it was all about suffering and striving. This is real jihad. Nowhere in the Qur'an is jihad used either in the sense of war, or for seeking revenge. Seeking revenge amounts to using concept of jihad for selfish ends, even if the revenge or retaliation is for one's group or community.

In Hadith literature, we find a Hadith, which prohibits Muslims from seeking revenge. Thus in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, we find the Hadith of Miqdad Ibn Amr al-Kindi. Amr al-Kindi asked the Holy Prophet (PBUH), "Suppose I met one of the infidels and we fought. He struck

one of my hands with his sword, cut it off and then took refuge in a tree and said, 'I surrender to Allah'. Could I kill him, Oh Messenger of Allah, after he had said this?" Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "You should not kill him." Al-Miqdad said, "Oh Allah's Messenger, but he had cut off my hands, and then he had uttered those words." Allah's Messenger (PBUH) replied, "You should not kill him, or you would be in his position where he had been before uttering these words." Thus it will be seen that in matters of war also, Islam teaches higher morality, the essence of which is not to seek revenge or retaliate. This is what I call the transcendent morality.

In matters of jihad, Imam Raghīb quotes an interesting Hadith, which says, "Fight your desires as you fight your enemies." The Sufi concept of *jihad-i-akbar* the great jihad to fight ones own vain desires has been based on this Hadith. According to the Qur'ān, man's life is a constant struggle in the way of Allah, be it through sword or through one's hands or one's tongue. Thus there is a Hadith which says, "Strive against unbelievers with your hands and your words."

Thus this constant jihad, constant struggle in the way of Allah implies multi-layered efforts. The believers have been charged, by the Qur'ān, with the important mission of spreading good and fighting evil (*amrbi'lma'rufwanahi'an al-munkar*). In this mission, a believer has to engage himself continuously, controlling his own desires, spreading justice, equality and compassion with wisdom ('*adl* - justice, '*ihsan* - benevolence, '*rahmah* - compassion and '*hikmah* - wisdom are concepts of goodness in the Qur'ān which are repeatedly stressed).

As it is duty of believers to engage in spreading what is good, it is also their duty to engage in containing what is evil. Thus, a believer has to constantly strive to fight against oppression, injustice, iniquity and cruelty. All these result in spreading evil on earth. The world, as we all know, is full of injustices and oppression, and it will be a lifetime mission of a believer to contain them. This is real jihad.

A fight is not always with weapons. It could equally be through moral and intellectual means - through persuasion, wisdom, spreading the good word, and setting good examples. It is for this

reason that the Prophet has said that the ink of a writer's pen is more sacred than the blood of a martyr. The word written with ink lasts longer than a martyr's blood. The Qur'an says, "And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors." (2:190) One has to strictly observe these conditions in jihad.

The noted Urdu poet Iqbal has beautifully described the meaning of jihad in day-to-day life in one of his couplets as follows:

*Yaqeen muhkam; amal paiham, mohabbat fath-e-alam  
Jihad-e-zindagani main hain ye mardon ki shamshirain*

(For a man with strong inner conviction, constant efforts and universe-winning love are the real weapons in the jihad of life.)

The meaning of jihad is not complete without the Qur'anic injunction for believers (men as well as women) to enforce good, and contain evil, and this is the lifelong mission of all the believers. To achieve this objective, believers have to use their persuasive skills, wisdom and godliness. One cannot enforce good with sword. Goodness prevails only with goodness. What the Qur'an calls *maw'izahhasanah* (i.e., exhortation with goodness) and *hikmah* (wisdom) is more lasting than enforcing something forcibly.

The Prophet (PBUH) always tried all possibilities of negotiated settlement, and resorted to war in self-defence only if all efforts to find a negotiated settlement failed. The best example of this is what is known in the history of Islam as *Sulh-i-Hudaybiyyah*. He even accepted terms, which were not apparently favourable to Muslims to avoid human slaughter and in the interest of peace. The terms of peace appeared to be even humiliating to his senior companions.

We find mention of this in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Abu Wa'il narrated, "We were in *Siffin* and *Sahl Ibn Hunayf* stood up and said, 'Oh people! Blame yourselves! We were with the Prophet (PBUH) on the day of *Hudaybiyyah*, and if we had been called to fight, we should have fought.' But *Umar ibn al-Khattab* came and said, 'Oh Allah's Messenger! Aren't we in the right and our opponents in the

wrong?' Allah's Messenger said, 'Yes'. Umar said, 'Then why should we accept hard terms in matters concerning our religion? Shall we return before Allah judges between us and them?' Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, 'Oh Ibn al-Khattab! I am the Messenger of Allah and Allah will never degrade me.'"

*Sulh-i-Hudaybiyyah* is of fundamental significance in the interest of peace. Peace is the real objective, and war only a necessary evil in certain unavoidable situations. Also, it is a wrong assumption that it is duty of the Muslims to fight against all nonbelievers or *Kafirs*. The Qur'an itself mentions treaties with unbelievers, and according to the Qur'an and Hadith, it is the duty of all Muslims to honour all treaties and alliances with nonbelievers. All such alliances must be respected by the Muslims as long as they are honoured by non-Muslims.

Thus we find again in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "The pagans were of two kinds as regards their relationship with the Prophet (ﷺ) and the believers. Some of them were those with whom the Prophet was at war, and used to fight against, and they used to fight him; the others were those with whom the Prophet (ﷺ) made a treaty, and neither did the Prophet fight them, nor did they fight him.

Those who work for social justice are as good as *mujahideen* i.e., warriors in the way of Allah. Thus we find in *Sahih al-Bukhari*: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The one who looks after and works for a widow and for a poor person is like a warrior fighting for Allah's cause, or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all the night."

Thus any one striving for social justice and working to ameliorate the plight of the poor is like a warrior in the way of Allah. Thus, those who spend their own money or collect from others and spend for the poor in the way of Allah is no less than a *mujahid*. According to the Qur'an, *zakāt* money is to be spent on poor, widows, needy, paying off the debt of indebted and for liberation of slaves. These are all weaker sections of society. It is thus a great merit to help these poorer and weaker sections and to work for them is as meritorious as waging jihad in the way of Allah. One should wage war against

poverty in all possible ways - by increasing production, by bringing about redistribution of economic resources and by not allowing wealth to be circulated only among the rich. (59:7)

Even when first permission was given to fight in the Qur'anic verse 4:77, it was basically to defend the rights of weak from among the old men, women and children. In some extreme situations, it might mean fighting a war, but it could be a fight in various other ways, particularly in a democratic and modern society. It could be through democratic movements or parliamentary debates also. In those days, when the holy Qur'ān was being revealed, such possibilities did not exist. Today, we will have to creatively re-interpret such Qur'anic provisions as above.

The *ulamā* and jurists in early Islam had divided the world in *darul harb* and *darul Islam*. The countries where Muslims could not enjoy the freedom of their faith, and were persecuted were declared by the Muslim jurists as *darul harb*. And it was thought necessary for Muslims to wage war (jihad) in such countries. However, it is important to note that the Hanafi jurists had also created a third category of *darul aman* i.e., those countries where Muslims, though in minority yet, could enjoy freedom of religion and were not persecuted because of their religious beliefs. India was always considered as *darul aman* by Islamic jurists, as Muslims here were not persecuted for their religious beliefs. India was always a pluralist society.

But in today's conditions when, democracy prevails, even if Muslims are persecuted in any country or any place, democratic remedies will have priority over waging war. Terrorism involves shedding the blood of innocent people, and can never be elevated to the category of jihad in any sense of the Qur'anic term.

Also, a few individuals cannot get together and decide to wage jihad. The decision to wage jihad can be taken only by a properly constituted Islamic government ensuring that there is no other way left but to declare jihad. This can be done after due deliberation, and examining all possible consequences, including loss of human lives. In the modern democratic world such decisions can be arrived

at only by a duly-elected government. And as far as the Qur<sup>ʾ</sup>anic injunction on jihad is concerned, it should not in any case involve a selfish motive like grabbing the territory of others or consolidating any group's rule, but should be strictly for higher goals, like justice and fighting persecution.

It should also be noted that peace is far more fundamental to Islam than war. War at best could be an instrument of establishing peace in some exceptional circumstances, or for defending against aggression. It is unfortunate that some youth come together, and decide that there is no way out but to use violence, and call it jihad. These youth ultimately shed a great deal of innocent blood, without achieving the ultimate objective. Such extremist violence results in more in-group fighting. Such extremist violence is not jihad.

In a modern world, real jihad is to use democracy and democratic institutions to realise the noble goals for which the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) struggled all his life.



# SOME THOUGHTS ON CONFEDERATION IN THE SUB-CONTINENT



**T**he partition of India has been a great tragedy and it has caused more problems than it could solve. The decision to partition India was taken by some Indian leaders at the time not only in the heat of the moment but without seriously examining the serious consequences of the partition. Also, the British rulers were determined to partition India before they leave as they wanted their military domination in the sub-continent. They cleverly used our leaders to agree to partition.

However, today we are in a much better position to judge the consequences of the partition. Even Jinnah had realized before his death that partition was not best of the solution and it should be re-thought and he had told his physician that if he happens to be alive he would like to meet Nehru and talk to him again about partition. Partition hardly solved any problem.

However, there is no question of undoing partition. Sovereignty of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh has to be maintained and the slogan of *Akhand Bharat* is a dangerous slogan, which results in more animosities than otherwise. What seems to be desirable is confederation of three sovereign nations or, if possible, of entire South Asia which will also include Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Firstly religion by itself is not a strong enough bond to bind a nation together. We saw it in case of Pakistan that its Muslim population was not homogenous one as the leaders thought then. Bengali Muslims are quite proud of their language and culture and they refused to compromise on their cultural and linguistic autonomy. Even before partition the Pathan leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan had refused to accept partition on the ground that Pathans' Pakhtun identity would be seriously compromised. In cwc meeting where partition resolution was passed, his was the lone vote against it.

Maulana Azad had very well understood this that Islamic Pakistan will not be a homogenous state but Muslims of different ethnic groups like Bengalis, Pashtuns, Baluchis, Sindhis and Punjabis will fight among themselves. Maulana had told many Muslim league leaders from U.P. that when common enemy 'Hindu' will not be there they will fight among themselves.

As in India upper caste Hindu nationalism tries to act as hegemonic, in Pakistan, Punjabi feudal class Muslims try to establish their hegemony and it leads to unrest. And Indian experience shows democratic secularism proves to be stronger cement than religion alone. Only in crisis situation like religious polarization in 1947 both sides felt religious divide is a reality but soon its fallacy became manifest.

Since Pakistan was created we have been facing acute problems. Since Pakistan was not a result of democratic movement but consequence of communal politics on both sides and certain demands, it could not develop political democratic culture like in India. Soon military and other vested interests captured power and feudal classes established strong grip. The Pakistani military conjured image of India as enemy number one and continued to rule over Pakistan in the name of 'protecting Pakistan'.

Also, Kashmir became bone of contention and India also did not honour the Nehru-Abdullah pact of 1953 and Kashmir remained on the boil and it became cause of wars between India and Pakistan. India is also facing ethnic conflict of serious nature on its

North East border but Kashmir problem has become much more complex on account of religion and secondly Pakistan.

Partition led to race for arms in both the countries. Pakistani military rulers want to even with India in military strength and want to acquire arms saying India has more arms. India does the same thing. Today our defence budget is one lakh forty thousand crore and Pakistan spends almost one third of its budget on defence. It is certainly not healthy and both countries acquired nuclear arms also saying the other has it. All this money can be spent on welfare of people.

And then Pakistan has become pawn in the hands of USA and other western powers. US armament industry is making hay at our cost. And now Pakistan has become a front state for USA to fight its Afghan War. It is very unhealthy situation. America has its own imperialist design in Afghanistan and West Asia and Pakistan unfortunately is helping USA in this regard. Also in the name of strategic depth Pakistan wants to retain its stranglehold on Afghanistan.

But if we work in the direction of forming a confederation of India-Pakistan and Bangladesh our resources which are being burnt on gun powder today can be saved and used for healthy economic development and elimination of poverty. All the three countries have huge problem of poverty and crores live below poverty line whereas we are busy fighting each other.

The problem of terrorism has also developed due to our mutual animosities and is resulting in killing of thousands of innocent people. It means additional expenditure of valuable resources and both for Pakistan and India it is a massive challenge, which cannot be met without solving political problems confronting us. Confederation can be much better solution for this challenging problem also.

What steps are necessary to bring about the confederation? The very first step is to ensure mutual confidence and agree to certain measures like giving visa on arrival and facilitate more goodwill missions in different fields like sports, journalism, film and T.V.

productions, better facilities for literary conferences, seminars etc. Some of it is being achieved through SAARC agreements but that is hardly enough.

Also we have to start discussions about confederation, its possible modalities holding seminars and conferences on the issue. Today even the very idea of confederation is not being touched by a barged pole as if it would mean doing away sovereignty of federating units. It has to be made absolutely clear that sovereignty of all federating nations will be ensured in any case.

We have European model before us. The idea of European Union was also not realized in a day. It began in early fifties and could be realized only in nineties. It was not easy to create this union among nations which had fought like cats and dogs until Second World War but today European Union is a reality with visa less regime and common currency. It is no mean achievement.

One can travel across Europe today with one currency Euro and no visa at all. When I was travelling from Austria to Germany by road and I enquired how far the German border is I was told we have already crossed it. I enquired about check post, I was asked 'what for?' There is no separate visa so no check post is needed. If it ever happens between India and Pakistan it would be a dream come true for millions of people who are either divided between two countries (thousands of families have been divided) or want to visit the other country for one reason or the other. Today even near relatives do not get visa to visit their family members without producing any proof of marriage or sickness.

In European Union each nation maintains its own sovereignty and yet they have European parliament to discuss their problems of common interest. Elections to EU Parliament are also held along with elections to National Parliament and there is no tension whatsoever between the two. National Parliament has its own sovereign role. Each member country maintains its own army and has its own priorities and foreign policy. European nations have united in most democratic way.

What is being suggested here does not mean we are going back to Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946. No it is out of question. According to the Cabinet Mission Plan federating units had to have a union government which would handle three subjects i.e., defence, foreign policy and communication. What we are advocating here is something entirely different. Cabinet Mission Plan is now a history.

All the federating nations in this confederation would have their own armies, their own foreign policies and their own communication system as is happening with EU nations. We also have ASEAN model. In ASEAN countries they have agreed to visaless regime though not to common currency. There are series of agreements between ASEAN countries and all the ASEAN countries are beneficiary of their union.

In South Asia we can achieve even better integration. ASEAN countries could not agree to have single currency but it would be easier for us to have common currency. We have had common currency and though degree of development differs in all three countries but due weightage could be given as it happened in European countries to achieve this goal. All this could not be achieved in one go.

We will have to work very hard indeed to achieve even elementary agreements between all three countries. But it is not something impossible to achieve. There is considerable public opinion in both the countries in its favour. But unfortunately no systematic efforts have ever been made to tape this opinion. Given sincerity and determination it is not something impossible to achieve though it may be very difficult. Let us make a beginning at least by initiating the discussion.



# MUSLIMS AND TERRORISM



**T**he bomb explosion in the Sankat Mochan Temple and Varanasi Railway Station on 8th March once again has shaken the country. These criminals against humanity often invoke Islam for their dirty criminal deeds and assume Arabic sounding names and call themselves '*mujahids*' to pass their misdeeds as an act of jihad. It can deceive no one and least of all Muslims. In fact these terrorists have their own political agenda and to promote this agenda they do not mind disgracing fair name of Islam. If we doubt anything it is their Islam. Either consciously or unconsciously they are promoting the agenda of enemies of Islam. The repeated acts of terrorism on their part have indeed done great damage to the image of Islam.

No religion promotes violence and any religion, which does, cannot qualify for being a religion. All religions lay great stress on nonviolence and peace be it Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism or Sikhism. And for Islam peace is most central. Allah, whom Muslims worship as the only God, one of His names is Peace and thus worshipping Allah means worshipping peace. Any Muslim who causes hurt or injury to any other human being without justification should be punished in equal measure.

The Qur'an clearly says in verse 5:32 "... whosoever kills a person unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he had killed entire humanity. And whoever saves a life, it is

as though he had saved the entire humanity." Such is the sanctity of life in the eyes of Allah. Thus these so called '*mujahidin*' are openly defying the injunctions of the Qur'an and slaughtering innocent people in places of worship. Even under the rules of jihad (although the Qur'an does not use the word jihad for war even once) the holy Prophet required Muslims not to kill any non-combatant or women or children or destroy any property or standing crops in the field.

These so called *Jihadis* defy every rule of the *shari'ah*. How can then they be described as 'holy warriors'? They are nothing more than murderers. If they are killing for revenge then that is also not considered a praiseworthy act in Islam. Allah is repeatedly described by the Qur'an as *Ghafoor al-Rahim* i.e., the Pardoner and Compassionate. Then how can those who worship a pardoning and compassionate God kill innocent people as they often do in the name of jihad?

All this clearly shows that what these various terrorist organisations do in the name of jihad is far from any religious act. No one can accept indiscriminate acts of violence as integral part of religion. All such acts should be strongly condemned.

It is a matter of pride that generally Indian Muslims are not involved in such acts of terrorism nor are they part of Al-Qaeda. However, there may be some exceptions. All such terror organisations breed under authoritarian regime. Indian Islam is no purist nor is obsessed with restoration of early days. It is product of a multi-religious ethos which were nurtured by Sufis whose universal doctrine has been *sulh-i-kul* i.e., total peace and peace with all. Indian Islam has richly contributed to the composite culture. Apart from Sufis even the traditional *ulamā* in India accepted secular democracy and composite culture and did not support separatism. Jami'at al Ulama played glorious role in Indian independence and supported the Congress nationalism without any reservation. Thus Indian Islam never supported extremism of any kind in the name of Islam.

It is unfortunate that many people in India do not understand this and after every such incident demand proof of Muslim loyalty and want 'moderate' Muslims to condemn it as Muslims. This is not in

keeping with secular ethos. Why Indian Muslims should be required to condemn such acts of terror as Muslims and not as Indians. Such an attitude keeps us divided. The underlying assumption is that Muslims are not part of national mainstream. It really irritates when such demand comes even from otherwise secular people.

Also the word 'moderate' Muslim also conveys certain mindset. The underlying assumption is that all other Muslims are 'extremists' and support such acts of terrorism whereas fact is that overwhelming majority of Muslims are peace loving as demonstrated both in Delhi in October and in Banaras in March when bombs exploded in the Sankat Mochan Temple. The large number of Muslims and Hindus showed great solidarity and frustrated the designs of communalists to use the opportunity to provoke communal violence.

The Mufti of Banaras issued a statement strongly condemning bomb explosion in the Sankat Mochan Temple and on request from me issued a *fatwa* against the bomb explosion. Also Muslim women took out a *morcha* against the explosion and demanded strong punishment against the culprits. Muslims also queued up for donating blood for the injured so much so that the blood bank officials had to plead with Muslims that we cannot take more blood as their capacity was no more. What better example of human solidarity?

The Hindu masses also frustrated the political designs of communalists and did not express any support for the *Yatra* announced by the BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani. BJP also demanded in this hour of grave crisis dismissal of Mulayam Singh Yadav Ministry. This also did not go well with the masses and they reacted against such politicising of a grave human problem. Instead of sincerely helping the people affected by the tragedy they were busy playing their politics.

Our politicians hardly ever measure up to standards of democracy. They want to exploit every event for their purposes. It is indeed politicising of every such events that creates conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Left to themselves they will never fight. If people were inclined to fight there would have been immediate

outburst of communal violence in Banaras. Despite efforts by the communalists people refused to be provoked.

People have also learnt from various communal conflicts that how communal politicians play with their religious sentiments and make them fight. The BJP all along played this game sometimes in the name of 'pseudo-secularism' and sometimes in the name of 'appeasement of minorities'. Even Ram temple issue no longer appeals to Hindus. The communal elements are at the end of tether.

The elections in U.P. after few months, on the other hand, are making them restless and in view of their lowest ever popularity are at their wits' end as how to entice the Hindu masses. Even their allies like JD(U) and Trinamul Congress are no more enthusiastic about various BJP plans. Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar has not approved of Advani's Yatra after the Banaras bomb blasts and he categorically said that he will not support it as and when it passes through Bihar. Nitish Kumar is busy wooing Muslims in Bihar. He has even reopened communal riots cases of Bhagalpur.

Even Lalu Prasad Yadav did not reopen these cases as he did not want to displease his Yadav voters who were mainly involved in Bhagalpur riots. Nitish Kumar, in order to woo Muslims away from Lalu Prasad is reopening these cases after sixteen years. Thus though still allied to BJP he is clearly cold-shouldering it. TDP has already broke away from NDA after facing defeat in general elections in 2004. TDP lost elections in Andhra Pradesh for aligning with the BJP.

Thus it is period of isolation for the BJP. Its communal politics paid dividends for sometime but it is finding it difficult to exploit communal issues. If the BJP does not give up its communal politics, it will find it increasingly difficult to win elections. At one time it exploited backward caste votes in the name of Ram and now backward castes are being wooed by number of other secular parties. Even Mayawati is seeking votes of backward caste and Rajputs and even Brahmins.

The Muslim leaders also have learnt after demolition of Babri Masjid that politics of confrontation would no longer pay and are

keeping low profile. It is very much in the interest of Muslim masses. Muslim masses also can no longer be swayed by communal appeals. It is interesting to note that Yaqub Qureshi, the minister from U.P. was isolated when he announced that he would pay Rs. 51 crores to one who kills the Danish cartoonist who pictured the Prophet (PBUH) in a depriving manner.

The Muslims showed total indifference to him, which he eminently deserved. It was at best a political gimmick. He too had an eye on coming elections in U.P. He wanted to emerge as champion of Muslims and acquire a national stature. He should have been dismissed from the cabinet, as he not only brought disgrace to Islam but also to our country in the eyes of other nations.

We are a secular democratic nation and our father of nation is Mahatma Gandhi who was apostle of nonviolence and peace. How can a minister from this country announce monetary reward for killing a foreign national, whatever his crime? One should protest against it with dignity and demand Danish Government to take action as per their law. What he announced was also totally against the principles of Islam, as pointed out above. It is unfortunate that Mulayam Singh kept quiet about such a grave pronouncement by his cabinet minister. He should have at least warned him. But Mulayam Singh is no angel and not above electoral politics.

Banaras undoubtedly has acquired a status of a political model for whole country that people could maintain calm in view of gravest threat to peace. Let us hope the country will follow it.



# MUSLIM WOMEN BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY



Recently in a poetic recital on T.V. in Saudi Arabia a Muslim poetess Hissas Hilal burst out against the strict control regime for women in her country. It was voice of protest and very bold protest at that, perhaps unthinkable in her regimented society. It was of course in verses of her poem. She said through veiled face about Islamic preachers, “who sit in the position of power”, but are “frightening” people with their *fatwas* and “preying like a wolf” on those seeking peace.

What is equally important is that she got loud cheers from the audience and won her a place in competition’s finals. It also brought her death threats posted on several militant web sites. The Saudi regime controlled by Salafi *ulamā* in religious matters are adamant on retaining strict control over women in the name of Islamic traditions. Women are denied their rights and free choice according to their conscience.

This may not be the condition in all Islamic countries but traditional Muslim societies impose several restrictions and still are not ready to relax. The kind of *hijāb* many Muslim women wear covering their faces and looking at the world only through two eye holes remains controversial among Muslim scholars, theologians and modern intellectuals. Question is, what is to be done.

No one can deny the fast pace of change in the globalised world and it is becoming increasingly challenging to retain present controls exercised on women in traditional societies. This controversy has been going on ever since modernity asserted itself since 19th century. Many reforms took place in Muslim countries and women could win a degree of liberation.

However, the later part of twentieth and beginning of twenty-first century saw re-emergence of traditional Islam, particularly Salafi Islam. No society registers linear progress and progressive measures, in turn bring more challenges. Reasons, not to be discussed here are both economic and political, apart from social and cultural. This complex nature of tension between tradition and modernity is both challenge and opportunity.

What is important in this debate, which is often ignored in these debates, is that what we practice in the name of Islam is more cultural than religious or scriptural and also that we depend too much on tradition while defending or opposing the restrictions applied on women. A good example of this is a recent book published from Pakistan on "*Chehre ka parda wa jibya ghair wajib*" (Face Veil – Compulsory or Not) compiled by Prof. Khurshid Alam. It is a very scholarly debate between two learned scholars one defending and the other opposing face veil.

However, the book depends entirely on contradictory traditions of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions cited by various medieval scholars. You find in abundance both kinds of traditions (Hadith) insisting on face veil or thinking it unnecessary and both the scholars use these traditions to strengthen their position. This approach only reinforces traditional cultural Islam.

We should not ignore the fact that the most of the traditions (except those on moral, ethical or pertaining to *ibadat* (matters of worship) reflect Arab culture on one hand, and medieval west Asian or central Asian culture, on the other. The jurists have also maintained that Arab '*adat*' (customs and traditions) could become part of *shari'ah* law and many *shari'ah* laws incorporate the Arab '*adat*'.

In the book I am referring to, there is very little direct approach to the Qur'an or fresh reflections on the relevant Qur'anic verses. Let Muslim jurists and scholars realize that Arab *'adat* are far from divine and should not necessarily form the basic structure of the *shari'ah* law. Today we must change this cultural base through direct reflections and fresh understanding of the Qur'anic verses relevant to women. This attempt would establish individual dignity and freedom of choice for women. Freedom of conscience is an important doctrine of the Qur'an and so is the individual dignity. Qur'an is far more in harmony with human dignity and freedom than the traditional medieval cultural practices.

This approach will in no way, injure the divine nature of *shari'ah* and also would liberate it from its traditional cultural basis incorporating patriarchal values of Arab culture rather than the divine spirit of the Qur'an. This would liberate Muslim women and give them a sense of dignity and freedom reducing tension between tradition and modernity. This opportunity should not be lost causing more agony to women and creating dilemma of choice for them. Most of the Muslim women want to follow their religion and also enjoy certain benefits of modernity. The Muslim scholars and jurists should end this agony.



# MUSLIM WOMEN AND CHANGE



Mostly people think Muslim women are oppressed and forced to wear veil and confined to the four walls of their houses. This is mainly because we read every day in papers that Taliban force women into veil, burn down girls schools and always portray them wrapped completely in black cloth from head to foot. This image of Muslim women was further reinforced by the *burqa* controversy which erupted in France.

This image would be justified if all Muslim women followed the strict dress code propounded by Muslim theologians which was evolved in medieval ages and which they keep on justifying even today. But there is big difference in what is theologically projected and ground reality. It may not be wrong, if I venture to say, Muslim women have been defying theological code for more than a century now.

And now a century later, Muslim women have gone even further in their public achievements. It is true even today some Muslim theologians debate whether women are *naqisulaq* (defective reasoning power) or not but many Muslim women have superseded even Muslim men in several fields. In Saudi Arabia where women are not even permitted to drive cars, a woman became a licensed pilot and has been flying air crafts.

Now we got news from Malaysia that Farah al-Habshi, an engineer by profession, has been appointed deputy of weapons and

electrical officer in spanking new Malaysian warship KD Perak. Today she is donned in white and blue Royal Malaysian Navy uniform. What is interesting is that she also wears *hijāb* to cover her head though not her face. She feels her *hijāb* in no way comes in the way of performing her duties.

Malaysia is an Islamic country and orthodox *ulamā* exercise great deal of control over people's lives. Recently even the Government of Malaysia chickened out when *ulamā* took stand that Christians in Malaysia cannot use the word Allah in their religious literature or in their newspaper. Muslim women face several problems in that country at the hands of conservative *ulamā* in respect of family laws.

It is in the same country that a woman has been appointed naval officer on combat duty. Even in India women have not won the right to be on combat duty in navy or are not permitted to fly fighter planes or serve in combat arms. They are also not allowed seafaring in warships. Ms. Farah al-Habshi, on the other hand, recently participated in Milan naval exercise along with some other women.

Ms. Farah is also highly articulate and answered all the questions put to her by the journalists. And it is only one example out of many. There are several other examples. Many Muslim women have excelled even in theological fields and quite independently of the traditional theologians. They have shown courage to challenge orthodox *ulamā*. Here I can give example of Amina Wadud of USA who teaches Islamic Studies in Washington.

She believed women can lead mixed congregation in prayer and she led around 100 persons, men and women in prayer a few years ago and that too on Friday and delivered Friday *khutba* (sermon), quite unthinkable in traditional Muslim world. It raised a storm of controversy and even Yusuf al-Qaradawi, otherwise a moderate theologian from Qatar, wrote an article, opposing a woman leading mixed congregational prayer.

Some Kuwaiti women, elected to Kuwaiti Parliament after great deal of struggle, refused to wear *hijāb* and fought for their right to go

to parliament sessions without wearing one and fought their case up to Supreme Court of Kuwait and won. Many more examples can be cited of Muslim women daring authorities for their rights.

But media, which is interested in sensationalising issues, refuses to highlight Muslim women's achievements and continues to portray them as submissive to traditional authorities and meekly accepting their situation. This image of Muslim women has to change and reality, which is much more complex, has to be understood.

This is not to deny that in many countries Muslim women are facing difficult problems and their liberation is not a foregone conclusion. However, it is also true that many of them are fighting and refusing to submit meekly. What gives us hope is their continued struggle and defiance of traditional authorities.

It should also be mentioned here that many *ulamā* and jurists also have realized that medieval *ṣarī'ah* formulations about women cannot be enforced easily any more and some of them like Muhammad Abduh of Egypt, Maulavi Mumtaz Ali Khan of India and Maulana Umar Ahmed Usmani of Pakistan have expressed their serious reservations about traditional theological formulations on women. The determined struggle on the part of Muslim women will force many more theologians to revise their position and take Qur'ān, and not medieval theology, more seriously on women issues.



# TERRORISM AND EDUCATED YOUTH



In the recent attempted terrorist attacks in Central London and on Glasgow airport, it is alleged, Kafil Ahmed of Bangalore is involved though his brother Sabil Ahmed is not likely to be directly responsible. While Kafil is aeronautical engineer who has done his M.Phil. in the subject, Sabil Ahmed is a medical doctor. Another doctor also from Bangalore and cousin of Kafil and Sabil, Mohammad Hanif was also suspected but he is also not suspected to have played central role. Other persons involved are doctors from Iraq, Bilal Abdulla and from Jordan Mohammad Asha.

The fact that Kafil, an Indian Muslim, and a highly educated youth is involved has started two controversies – one that Al-Qaeda has reached India and two, that not *madrassa* product but highly educated youth with technical accomplishment, is involved.

The concept of jihad has come to be inalienably associated with *madrassas* and it is generally believed that *madrassa* youth brainwashed in *jihadi* outlook are involved in acts of terrorism. This is very erroneous concept. In all major acts of terrorism, whether by Muslims or by others, only modern educated youth is generally involved. Those who plan such attacks are never uneducated or *madrassa* educated or illiterate poverty ridden youth. No where in the world has this happened.

Who was involved in bombings in 1990s in Aum Sinrikyo of Japan? They were all educated middle class people. The entire ULFA leadership consists of modern educated youth. Same is true of LTTE leadership. The Naxalite Movement was also started by University educated people and some of them in the beginning were had Oxford and Cambridge University degrees.

Marc Sageman in his book *Understanding Terrorist Networks* published in 2004 also concluded that it was not the *madrassas* that were closely correlated with terrorists or terror, but modern western institutes where students from abroad can end up turning to militant Islam as a way to counter the alienation they experience or the anger they have against the government of the country.

Thus having established that it is highly educated youth who conspire to plan acts of terror it is also necessary to understand why are such educated persons involved? In fact they even make supreme sacrifice of their lives in the process. Firstly, it is only highly educated who understand the policies governments pursue to which they violently react. An illiterate person does not have such understanding and awareness. It is education which brings such awareness to them.

Secondly, why is it that those who are engineers or doctors or computer specialists that are more involved in such acts? Answer is not very difficult to find. Modern education as such is hardly based on humanitarian values and technical education, not at all. Thus they become technical experts, good engineers or doctors but have not much awareness about humanities. Their technical expertise is not tempered with higher spiritual values of love, compassion and wisdom.

These days education has become highly competitive and everyone wants to achieve at the cost of others. Competition, not cooperation, is the spirit of our education. And it is competition all the way – from degree to highly paid jobs. Widespread consumerism; and rat race it promotes, make people more and more greedy. They want more income, more comfortable life which comes only through often (immoral) competition. Humanity and human compassion is the loser.

Also, our modern education system promotes information, not knowledge. There is great difference between information and knowledge. Information is necessary part of knowledge but not sufficient for it. Higher knowledge always combines values with information along with deeper understanding of issues. As once Herbert Marcuse, an American philosopher in sixties who inspired revolutionary and humanitarian spirit among students and youth, said – our universities are centres of acknowledgment, no more centres of knowledge and they are centres of recognition, no more centres of cognition.

The university degrees thus no more provides in depth understanding and humanitarian perspective but only sufficient information for students to obtain a technical job. Such people can easily be swayed by campaigns of hatred especially if it also gives them sense of some 'higher cause.' Many supporters of Hindutva in USA are also highly qualified people who are made to think Hindus are suffering 'injustice' in their own country due to minority aggressiveness. And thus they finance Sangh Parivar in India.

Such an ideology of hate becomes more deadly, if the youth happen to come from an authoritarian culture where there are no basic freedoms in the society. There are no avenues of protest available except to take to violence and much more so if violence can be justified ideologically as in the case of 'jihadī Islam'. Such anger is expressed through acts of violence (ideologically justified) in places where they feel great injustice is being done to members of their community.

It is important to note that terrorist attacks are taking place mainly in countries like USA and UK which were involved in committing aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq. Why countries of Western Europe like France, Germany, Italy etc. are not being targeted? Because these countries not only refused to join USA and UK in attacking Afghanistan and Iraq but had serious reservations of their own.

Australia's citizens also paid with their lives in terror attack in Bali a few years ago because Australia also jumped to extend its

support to US war of aggression against Iraq and sent its troops. Now an Australian minister admitted that it was mistake on the part of Australia to have supported Iraq war because we thought we too will get share in Iraqi oil. Thus these terror attacks, however condemnable, have justification of their own in the eyes of these young terrorists.

The timing of terror attack in Central London and Glasgow Airport is also important. Blair had just resigned and Gordon Brown had taken over. Perhaps it was warning to Gordon Brown that he should keep his hands off Iraq and withdraw British forces from there. Gordon Brown is not expected to follow Blair's policies and hence advanced warning to him.

Terror attacks can never be justified whatever the cause. Violence, however, important the cause, can never be justified. Violence is destructive of all values and totally brutalizes those who commit it. One cannot bring about justice by killing others or can never serve any cause. One must learn lesson from Iraq also. Shīahs and Sunnis are killing each other most brutally. It appears they have lost all sense of compassion for human life. While the Qur'ān says that to kill one person is to kill entire humanity these so called followers of Qur'ān are killing Muslims by hundreds.

Any version of religion which promotes intolerance and violence cannot qualify for being religion. Religion promotes nothing but truth, justice, love and compassion. Devoid of these values it could perhaps qualify for political ideology but not for being religion. The Salafi Islam is highly intolerant and ideological and hence promotes narrow sectarian attitude. The Qur'ānic statements about justification of war are highly contextualised and could not be read to use them for justification for killing innocent people.

Any innocent life taken by act of violence is a crime against humanity and an unpardonable sin against Allah. Taking revenge is not what Qur'ān preaches nor Prophet (ﷺ) ever urged his followers to do that. Qur'ān repeatedly describes Allah as *Ghafoor al-Rahim* i.e., the pardoner and compassionate and Qur'ān describes the Prophet as *Rahmatan lil Ālamin* i.e., mercy of the worlds.

Then can such acts of terror resulting in loss of innocent lives be ever justified in the name of Islam? Those who brainwash these educated youth have their own political axe to grind. The USA killed more than a million people in Vietnam but did these Vietnamese youth resort to any such terror bombing taking innocent lives of ordinary American? Let those Muslim youth who become victims of hate campaigns ponder over this?

Salafi Islam condemns Sufi Islam but it is Sufi Islam which is highly tolerant, peaceful and respectful of human lives. The violence torn Islamic World needs much more Sufi Islam than highly ideological Salafi Islam. A great majority of Muslims in India fortunately follow Sufi Islam and it is further tempered with secular democracy of India and hence Al-Qaeda by and large has not succeeded to penetrate Indian Islam.

It is doubtful whether Kafil has acted on behalf of Al-Qaeda. Even British sources doubt this as the device used in Glasgow attack was rather crude whereas Al-Qaeda uses much more sophisticated and effective devices. And even if it is Al-Qaeda which is involved in this instance, it is an exception rather than the rule. Pakistani Muslims too love Sufi Islam but it is politicisation and militarisation of Islam which has made Pakistani society so violent as we witnessed in the case of Lal Masjid. Indian Islam, I am sure, will remain much more peaceful.



# ISLAM AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



**T**he question of religious freedom has assumed great significance in the modern world, particularly so in the post-modern period. During the medieval ages, and particularly before the period of renaissance the question of religious freedom did not arise. The religious authorities had either political power to enforce their doctrines or dogmas or they had close collaboration with political authorities. Thus a person was not free to believe what one liked to believe. He had to conform or pay heavy price – often with his life – if he did not. We know of hundreds of cases of execution of religious dissidents during that period. One reason for this was that religion, during medieval ages, was closely associated with the state. Thus religious dissidence was construed as rebellion or sedition against the state.

However, things began to change with the renaissance and religious freedom acquired great importance as Martin Luther challenged the supremacy of church and the rulers became independent of papal authority. Secularism arose as a new political doctrine in the post-renaissance period. Also slowly kings were replaced by elected heads of the state and democratic polity came to be widely accepted. When religion was separated from politics, religious freedom acquired fundamental importance. Secularism was either thought to be atheistic or was interpreted as a philosophy,

which assigned religion to personal domain. Thus religious conformism lost its significance and religious freedom came to be accepted as the most fundamental doctrine.

However, these developments were not uniformly reflected in all societies. In many countries religion is closely associated with the state even today. The state authorities issue the religious dictates. Any non-conformism in these sociopolitical set ups is considered as disobeying the state and hence severely punishable. This is not so particularly in Islamic societies as is often thought. It is found in all those societies where religion is closely associated with state. However, it so happens that in many Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, religion is an integral part of the state and any religious dissent is interpreted as sedition against the state. Even liberal interpretation of religion is considered as a cardinal sin. But it would be a grave mistake to think that this is inherent in Islam and that Islam does not tolerate religious freedom.

What is then position of religious freedom as far as Islam and Islamic jurisprudence is concerned? It is crystal clear to those who study Islam carefully that Islam upholds religious freedom as far as some basic frame-work of its teachings is not violated. But no religion, or any political ideology for that matter, can permit violation of its basic framework. If the very basic framework is violated the religion will cease to exist. In other words religion cannot be reformed out of existence. As we say a person cannot sign his own death warrant, a religion cannot allow itself to be done away with. However, one should be free to renounce his/her religion if it ceases to appeal to his/her conscience. A religion which does not appeal to ones conscience or does not form part of ones inner conviction can have no meaning for that person. But does Islam permit this freedom of conscience? In my considered opinion it does. But why then do some Islamic countries insist on a punishment of death for renouncing Islam (i.e., *irtidad*)? We will throw light on this a little later. However, such a punishment for renouncing Islam cannot be supported from the Qur'anic teachings.

There is no verse directly supporting such punishment. Of course there are Ahadith quoted in its support. But these Ahadith need to be examined carefully. Not only their authenticity but also their context needs to be looked into.

The most important thing is that religion is an integral part of ones inner conviction and is a matter of ones conscience. Even according to a Hadith mere confession by tongue (*iqrar bi' al-lisan*) is not enough. It must be followed by an inner endorsement or ones conscience (*tasdiq bi' al-janan*). Mere confession by ones tongue will not acquire the status of truly held conviction. The Qur'an clearly declares *la ikraha fi' al-din* (2:256) i.e., there cannot be compulsion in religion. Some commentators maintain that this verse was aimed at early converts and that it was later abrogated. But there is absolutely no basis for such an assertion. It is a declaration of a universally valid principle rather than any contextual statement. It is valid until today and will remain valid in future also. It is also substantiated by the fact that Islam accepted validity of other contemporary religions like Judaism, Christianity etc. and even permitted marriages with them. They were not coerced into accepting Islam at all. Any coercion would lead to acceptance by tongue, not endorsement by heart.

Here in the above verse the word used is *din* which is usually translated as religion. But it has wider meaning. The word *din* not only includes the moral law but also pertains to its doctrinal contents and their practical implications, as well as to man's attitude towards the object of his worship, thus comprising also the concept of 'faith'. Thus according to the Qur'an human being is absolutely free to pursue religion of his/her choice. And this freedom does not pertain to only acceptance or non-acceptance of Islam; it also pertains to renunciation of Islam. Many Muslim jurists may reject this outright and maintain that though one is free to accept or not accept Islam but having accepted it one is not free to renounce it. Thus according to them freedom is limited to only acceptance or non-acceptance of Islam but does not extend to its renunciation. This position does not appear to be logical. Freedom of conscience

cannot be a one way traffic. Obviously the freedom of renunciation was curtailed for political and not religious reason.

If the Islamic jurists seek to circumscribe the freedom to renounce Islam the question is whether it is based on Qur'ān or on Hadith (i.e., the Prophet's sayings). A careful study of the Holy Qur'ān shows that there is no basis whatsoever in it to sustain such a position i.e., *qatl-e-murtad* (i.e., slaying of one renouncing Islam). On the contrary there is a verse in the Holy Book which leaves one in no doubt that such a punishment has no basis and that it is based on the opinion of jurists and that these jurists took this position to protect interests of state rather than those of Islam. Thus we find in the verse 4:137 in the Qur'ān "Those who believe then disbelieve (*kafaru*), again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them or guide them in the (right) way."

If the punishment for *irtidād* had been death this verse would have clearly mentioned it. The above verse (4:137), on the other hand, says that even those who believe and then disbelieve and again believe and then again disbelieve Allah will not pardon them and will not show them the right way. Had Allah wanted to punish *murtad* (i.e., renouncer) of Islam by death He would have clearly mentioned it. But He simply says He would not pardon them and would not show them the right path. The Qur'ān firmly believes in the doctrine of the freedom of conscience and forcefully states it in the verse 18:29 thus: "And say: The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve." This verse, is clear proof that freedom of conscience cannot be made available one way only. It has to be both ways. If one renounces Islam it is for Allah to punish him or not but certainly not for human beings to do so. If some one feels strongly about renunciation of Islam by one's friend, neighbour or relative, one may try to persuade him or her not to do so. But certainly he or she cannot be killed. Islam is quite modern in this respect. It upheld the doctrine of freedom of conscience many centuries before modernists and secularists did. It is unfortunate that what some jurists maintained primarily for political reasons is sought to be perpetuated.

The Qur'an repeats the doctrine of freedom of conscience so often that it cannot be ignored by any student of the holy scripture. It says in 6:105, "Clear proofs have indeed come to you; from your Lord; so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm. And I am not a keeper over you." Again in the same chapter verse 108 Allah says, "And if Allah had pleased they would not have ascribed divinity to aught beside Him (*ma ashraku*); hence We have not made thee their keeper, and neither art thou responsible for their conduct." And the next verse (109) goes on to say: "But do not revile those (beings) whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance..."

As pointed out above the word *din* (religion) includes not only moral law but also ways of worship and related matters. As the Qur'an believes in freedom of religion it also repeatedly says that let people worship the way they want; do not quarrel over it. However what is important is to excel each other in good deeds. Thus the Qur'an says: "for every community faces direction of its own, of which He is the focal point. Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works." (2:148) Thus there is no compulsion in the ways of worshipping Him also. It is also a matter of ones conscience. However, what is most important is to excel each other in good deeds. Thus whatever way we look the Qur'an upholds the doctrine of freedom of conscience. The Qur'an's approach is remarkably modern. One cannot doubt about its openness to other faiths and traditions. Its doctrine of *da'wah* (mission) is also not burdened with any doctrine of compulsion of any kind. It exhorts the faithful to "Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner." (16:125). Thus according to the Qur'an preaching also should not have any manner of compulsion. It should be done in a way which will appeal to the conscience of one to whom *da'wah* is directed. Thus *da'wah* should not encroach upon any ones freedom of conscience.. It is most fundamental right and is worthy of respect in all circumstances.

Then the question arises why the Islamic jurists prescribed punishment of death for *irtidad* (i.e., renunciation of Islam)? It was, as pointed out, more for political than religious reasons. This juristic opinion was not based on any religious injunctions but on political environment. The state always has its own reasons, its own considerations of security and stability. It was feared that a person renouncing Islam is likely to collude with the enemies of the state and thus pose a danger for it. Anyone renouncing Islam and adopting Christianity, for example, could collude with Christian rulers with whom the Islamic State of the time was at war and pose great danger. Thus in an Islamic state renunciation of Islam was equated with sedition against the state and sedition is often punished by death. Many juristic opinions of this nature like the concept of *dar al-Islam* or *dar al-harb* need to be re-examined in this context. Today people live in secular democracies and equal rights, including the right to profess, practice and propagate ones own religion are fully guaranteed by the constitutions. Such countries cannot be construed as what the Islamic jurists called *dar al-harb*.

Today in many Muslim countries, which are ruled by authoritarian dispensations, Muslims are not as free to follow their religion as in many secular democracies. In Saudi Arabia Muslims who do not subscribe to Wahabi brand of Islam are certainly not free to proclaim their deeply held religious convictions which clash with the Wahabi doctrines. The Shīah Muslims in the southern part of the Saudi regime cannot take out Muharram procession in keeping with their religious convictions and Sunni Muslims cannot pray on the grave of the Holy Prophet as it is thought to be 'un-Islamic' practice. Could it then be construed as *dar al-Islam* for non-Wahabi Muslims? In India, on the other hand, being a secular democracy, all Muslims, Shīah, Sunni or Wahabi are free to pursue their own religious convictions and practices. In medieval ages the concept of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-Harb* had some relevance but not in modern democracies.

Thus the punishment for *irtidad* or renunciation of Islam also has to be seen in this context. Today in democracy the concept

of human rights is quite central to it. All citizens, irrespective of their religious persuasion are equal. Freedom of conscience is most fundamental to secular democracy. All citizens are free to pursue their own religious convictions or change them, if they please. Also, every citizen is free to renounce his or her religion and adopt any other or none, for that matter. There is no question of anyone being punished for this. Similarly in the Muslim countries if any citizen renounces Islam, he or she is not going to be for that reason enemy of that state. Today international law governs the relations between various countries and the United Nations play increasingly important role in governing international relationships. In medieval ages renunciation of Islam could very well be construed as sedition but it is no more valid in our own times. During that period Christians were also not free to renounce their religion. They were burnt at stake for this crime. Thus entire juris corpus needs to be revised in this respect.

Thus in the whole debate the inner conviction is most fundamental and any law which violates the doctrine of inner conviction cannot be accepted. The Qurʾān also bases acceptance of religion on this doctrine and hence gives full freedom of religion. According to the Qurʾān anything based on inner conviction leads to what it significantly calls *Sakinat al-qalb* ( i.e., peace of heart). The word *Īman* (faith) also indicates this. The root meaning of this word is security and deep conviction. No one can be true Muslim without *Īman* (faith). Mere profession without inner conviction is not accepted even by the Qurʾān as genuine faith. Thus the Qurʾān says, “ The Bedouin say, ‘We have attained faith.’ Say (unto them Oh Muhammad): ‘You have not (yet) attained to faith; you should (rather) say, ‘We have (outwardly) surrendered (*aslamu*)’ – for (true) faith has not yet entered your hearts.” (49:14). From this verse it is very clear that genuine faith is based on deeper and inner conviction, not merely on surrender or verbal profession. The threat of death can merely make a person retain his her religion without any inner conviction. That is anything but genuine faith. But what the Qurʾān

aims at is genuine faith and genuine faith is possible only in a truly free society. Freedom of belief is very fundamental to genuine faith.

There are other aspects of religious freedom and we would like to throw some light on these aspects also. In Islam there is no concept of church. No central body is authorised to control religious doctrines. In fact there is no concept of priesthood in Islam. Every individual is free to, and responsible for, his or her own faith. Allah provides guidance (*hidaya*) to everyone through His prophets. It is for an individual to accept or reject the guidance. If he accepts, it is for his spiritual good and if he rejects, he will face the consequences thereof in this life and in the life to come (*ākhirah*). It is individual who will be held accountable before God on the Day of Judgement. His argument that the leader misled him would simply be rejected. This approach of the Qurʾān, it will be seen, is also remarkably modern. The very concept of modern secular democracy is based on individual rights and responsibilities. This concept is very central to the Qurʾān.

It will be seen that there is no single school of jurisprudence in Islam. There are eight surviving schools – Hanafi, Shafiʿi, Hanbali, Maliki and Zahiri in the Sunni Islam and Jaʿfari, Zaydi and Ismaʿili in the Shīah Islam. Besides these there were many more schools in early Islam – some think more than hundred. But these schools didn't survive. Every eminent *ālim* (who had Islamic learning in Qurʾān and Hadith) had his own interpretation of various juristic problems which arose from time to time. And other Muslims were free to follow one *ālim* or the other or find his own solution based on Qurʾān and Hadith. But because Muslims followed these schools in large numbers mentioned above that they became well recognised ones in times to come. But even today a follower of one school of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) can renounce it and adopt another school without any constraints. Some people even take from one or the other school what suits them although the *ulamā* (the learned theologian) do not approve of it. According to them one should follow one or the other school in its entirety. But that is also one opinion among others.

Thus not only that a Muslim is not bound by one school or the other he is not bound by *fatwa* (legal opinion) issued by any mufti (jurist). He is free to reject it and go to some one else, if he is not satisfied by the *fatwa*. He has full latitude in the matter. Also, no Muslim is bound even to ask a juri consult about anything. He might find his/her own answer and be satisfied as long as it is based on authoritative sources and not merely on his convenience. The Qur'an, as pointed out above lays full responsibility on the individual, not on the community or the body of any juri consults. This does not apply to mere legal questions but to all theological ones. For example there are no fixed dogmas about questions like freedom of will or determination or nature of the Qur'an. In the first century of Islam there were different schools of thought on these questions. One school led by the noted Sufi saint Hasan Basri believed in freedom of will whereas another school believed in determination. This question of freedom of will and determination had political rather than theological overtones. Those who supported the Umayyad rule believed in determination implying thereby that Umayyad rule is result of divine determination and any opposition to it amounts to challenging divine determination.

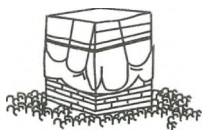
However, the opponents of the Umayyads thought they were usurpers and one must actively oppose their role and they subscribed to the doctrine of freedom of will. There was a third school called Murjia<sup>1</sup> who believed that one must postpone any action as Allah will decide who is right or wrong. All three schools existed side by side and people freely subscribed to one or the other. The Mu'tazilah school was a rationalist school and for them reason was primary in deciding what is good and what is evil. They argued that *ṣarī'ah* held something to be good because reason held it to be good. The Ash'ari School, on the other hand held that something is good because *ṣarī'ah* held it to be good even if reason contradicted it. Similarly the Mu'tazilah (the rationalists) held that the Qur'an was created by Allah and is not co-eternal with Him. The orthodox believed, on the other hand, that it is the speech of Allah and hence co-eternal

with Him. There was heated controversy about it in early Islam but there was no church to impose these dogmas on the entire body of Muslims. Different schools of thought contested with each other.

Similarly, there was no fixed meaning of the Qur'an universally accepted by all. There were literalists (*Ahl al-Zahir*) who stuck to the literal meaning of the Qur'an. On the other hand there were *Ahl al-Batin* also known as Batinis who believed in the hidden meaning of the scripture. The Batinis of course developed a church like structure with their own hierarchy. The Batinis also known as Isma'ilis developed church like structure because they constituted an underground movement centrally controlled by the leaders and the leadership was provided by a fixed hierarchy. However, the Batinis were themselves divided in several groups contesting each others positions. The Orthodox too did not have uniform position on important questions – be they theological, juristic or political. They themselves were divided in several schools.

Having stated all this in favour of freedom it must be stated that every school of thought gathered their own followers and over a period of time became rigid orthodoxy. No deviation was permitted. In all these schools the doctrine of *taqlid* (imitation) was enforced by the *ulamā* of subsequent generations. Even the Batinis and Isma'ilis who were rational and generously borrowed from Greek philosophy, developed rigid orthodoxy and even in these schools the role of reason became suspect. Any new thinking was frowned upon. Freshness and creativity was lost. Each school of thought became a powerful establishment and every establishment developed its own vested interests. It is the vested interests who fear freedom and change. The people of inner conviction and commitment welcome it. One has conviction and commitment for values and principles, not dogmas.

## PAKISTAN, JIHAD AND ETHNICITY



**T**he militants are roaming the streets of Karachi, Lahore and other major cities of Pakistan raising the slogans of 'jihad' as if 'jihad' is their mental and spiritual diet. It is, to be honest, a dangerous state of affairs for the Pakistani society and its health. There are a number of reasons why Pakistan is passing through the jihad mode today.

Pakistan was conceived as a homeland for the Muslims. There were so many contradictions in this concept of Muslim homeland which were totally ignored at the time. The heat of partition melted all such contradiction. But these contradictions are surfacing with all intensity. The concept of Muslim homeland implied that all Muslims are united merely on the basis of religion and there are, among them, neither ethnic differences, nor class or sectarian differences. And that all Muslims will equally benefit from this homeland.

Religion is very vital force in human life but it is so on spiritual plane. There are several factors on the secular plane which motivate human behaviour. Human behaviour, it must be remembered, is not determined by religious beliefs alone; rarely it so happens. Human behaviour more often is determined by worldly interests. Muslim homeland itself was product of worldly interests rather than spiritual homogeneity. It was thought by Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League colleagues that Muslim political and economic

interests would not be taken care of in the 'Hindu India' and that a separate homeland for Muslims is needed.

The underlying assumption was that a community of people who follow same religion will automatically have uniform interests. But this has been totally belied today as it ought to have been. Religion can never ensure unity of interests. In a democratic society various divisions surface which also become political fault lines. No truly democratic society can suppress these divisions which also ensure formation of identities. Diversity, in other words, is the lifeline of democracy and genuine national unity can emerge only from respect for this diversity.

But in an authoritarian society these diversities are considered as sign of danger and is sought to be suppressed. The authoritarian society seeks uniformity and confuses uniformity with unity. In all authoritarian societies all other identities - ethnic, linguistic or sectarian, is sought to be suppressed and only one identity - be it national identity or racial or religious is enforced from above to ensure unity. But as soon as authoritarian structure is demolished and replaced by democratic or even proto-democratic structure, these identities emerge to the surface and tend to assume more volatile form after a prolonged period of suppression.

Pakistani society has undergone similar process. It was for long under military dictatorship which tried to suppress all other identities except either over arching Pakistani identity or Islamic identity. But ethnic identities exploded the moment first general elections were held in 1969. The Bengali identity was feeling suffocated and the first election itself provided an opportunity for it to break loose from the over arching Pakistani identity. The Pakistan went through great crisis during seventies when a kind of proto democratic structures were surfacing in that country. It was a period of semi-democracy for Pakistan.

Different identities began to emerge and ethnic identities began to submerge the over arching identity after a long period of suppression. While all people of Pakistan are proud of their Islamic identity they

are not prepared to barter their regional or ethnic identity for the Islamic identity as the Punjabi ruling classes would like them to do. The ethnic identities become quite explosive even if they are sought to be hegemonised by one particular ethnic identity, the Punjabi identity in case of Pakistan. The Sindhis, the Baluchis, the Pathans and the Urdu speaking Muhajirs who, ironically are also referred to as Sindhis by domicile, are sought to be dominated by the Punjabis. Even within the Punjab the Saraiki speakers are resenting Punjabi domination. The Saraiki speakers claim to be 60% of the Punjab province.

The ultra rightist party of Pakistan - the Jama'at-e-Islami is almost exclusively Punjab based party now and it is the Jama'at which wants to bulldoze all other identities in the name of Islamic identity. It is the Jama'at which is raising the slogan of jihad, jihad to save not the Pakistan but the Punjabi domination. And there is silent collusion of the Punjabi ruling classes with the Jama'at and its attempt to bulldoze all other identities in the name of Islam.

It is also to be noted that the word 'jihad' is being utterly misused by the Pakistani religious fanatics. It is interesting to note that one does not find in the Qur'an the word 'jihad' in the sense in which it is being popularly used i.e., 'holy war'. The word in the Qur'an for war is '*qitaal*' and not jihad. The word 'jihad' is used in its literal sense i.e., to strive, to assert or to make efforts. Thus jihad in the Qur'anic terminology means to assert oneself or to make efforts to promote what is right and to prohibit what is evil.

And in Qur'an *qitaal* is permitted against persecution and to establish justice, not for territorial aggrandisement. Even if the word 'jihad' is used, it is also for defence of faith and not for annexation of territory or to solve territorial dispute. Killing innocent civilians as the extremists are doing in Jammu and other parts of J & K cannot be jihad. It is against all principles of Islam. Thus to wage 'jihad' in Kashmir is a total misnomer. Kashmir is a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan which has to be resolved between the two countries. There is no question of religious persecution as far as the Kashmir question is concerned. The Muslims of Kashmir under

Sheikh Abdullah had clearly supported the National Conference and its programme of alliance with India. In fact the Kashmiris from the valley fought against the raiders from Pakistan and checked their further advance. It was a purely political move in order to annex territory and could not be construed as jihad by any stretch of imagination.

Similarly, the intrusion in Kargil is also part of territorial dispute and cannot be called 'jihad' at all. It is real irony that the intruders are described as *mujahidins* (i.e., those waging jihad). Are these *mujahidin* defending the faith of Islam in any sense in Kargil? On the other hand, the people most affected by their 'jihad' are the Muslims of Kargil. Their homes and hearths have been destroyed by the relentless shelling in Kargil. The Kargil Muslims have resented the Pakistani intrusion most. Who would, any way, like their homes being destroyed and their normal life completely disrupted? To disrupt the lives of fellow Muslims cannot be a part of jihad anyway.

The Pakistani society is undergoing a violent phase. There are several factors responsible for this. The Taliban is one. Many sagacious thinkers, writers and journalists from Pakistan, the noted anthropologist and scholar Akbar Ahmad being one among them, had pointed out that supporting highly orthodox religious students who have undergone rigorous and rigid religious training in *madrassas* in the North West Frontier province, to fight a partisan war in Afghanistan, would not be in the best interest of Pakistan.

The Taliban have not only tested the gun, they have tested the power of religious orthodoxy also. And religious orthodoxy and power of the gun is a heady mix. The Taliban after finishing their job in Afghanistan are returning to Pakistan and wish to recreate Afghan society there. It must be said that compared to many Islamic countries Pakistan is far more 'secular' and 'modern'. The military dictators, after all, were not religious fanatics with the exception of Zia. In fact Ayub resisted the influence of orthodox *ulamā* and introduced many modern laws. Yahya Khan too, by and large, refrained from invoking religious orthodoxy for legitimising his rule.

It was General Zia who, for the first time, invoked religious orthodoxy to perpetuate his rule and to legitimise it. He also welcomed the Afghan War as a godsend and got much help from CIA which was interested in defeating Soviet Russia. The Afghan Mujahidin too had to invoke Islamic orthodoxy to fight against the atheistic Russians. All the training to them was imparted on the territory of Pakistan adjacent to Afghanistan. Thus it was General Zia who systematically injected religious orthodoxy in Pakistani politics.

The Taliban phenomenon was its natural outcome. And the *madrassas* then set up in the North West Province are churning out large number of 'Taliban' every year. These religious students are being injected with the heavy dose of jihad and what is worse, along with the religious training, they are also being given military training in these *madrassas*. Thus the emphasis is more on jihadist mind set rather than on truly religious mind set. These *madrassas* have acquired vested interest of their own as they receive funds from various sources, including some Islamic countries.

It is, to say the least, not in the interest of Pakistani civil society. It amounts to spreading cult of violence in Pakistan. The ruling classes want to use these *mujahidin* to suppress ethnic unrest and to maintain the Punjabi hegemony. But so far there is no sign of success. The cult of violence is spreading fast in the civil society without there being any sign of ethnic unrest vanishing. The ethnic groups have their own legitimate aspirations and no amount of jihadist mind set, being promoted by powerful vested interests, can suppress these aspirations. The suppressed ethnic groups, particularly the Sindhis, the Baluchis and the Muhajirs, have acute political consciousness and they will not barter away their legitimate aspirations for an illusionary Islamic identity. However, this does not mean that they are not good Muslims. In fact they are much better Muslims than those selling 'Islamic' identity to them.

In Pakistan unfortunately the military is not under civilian control and has autonomy of its own. It is also thus interested in

keeping the Jihadist mind set alive and spreading the cult of violence. It is only through this strategy that the civil society will remain under its thumb. The civil society will have to wage many a struggle to liberate itself from the hegemony of the armed forces.

# ON RELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE



I ncreasing inter-religious and intercultural conflicts throughout the world has made it very necessary to promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. The reasons of these conflicts are many. The world has been divided into north south poles, north being highly developed and south afflicted with underdevelopment and mass illiteracy and poverty. The educated youth in the South does not find jobs to fulfil its aspirations. It looks to the North for better paid jobs. Also, most of these underdeveloped countries were once colonies of the North and hence people from these former colonies are attracted towards the metropolitan countries. When large number of people migrate the native white people resent and racial tensions intensify, specially when there is economic downturn in the metropolitan countries and available jobs are few to go around. Though the underlying causes may be economic or political, the conflict expresses itself through religious or cultural channels. Though ultimately tensions could be reduced only by addressing economic causes, its religio-cultural tensions also need to be tackled effectively. The religious and cultural expressions do great deal of damage and spread misunderstanding even among others who are not affected directly by the economic downturn. Due to high pitched propaganda by extremely vocal sections of fundamentalists, cultural and religious prejudices spread like wild fire.

The media also plays very important role in spreading these prejudices. The media, needless to say, is more interested in sensational news than sensible constructive news. Repeated negative reportings in the media leads to widespread prejudices against certain religious or cultural groups. It is well known fact that Islam-bashing goes on in the western media. It is very important to understand that the western countries led by the USA adopt extremely hostile attitude towards certain Islamic countries like Iran, Libya, Iraq who dare defy the USA authorities. The USA not only punishes them severely (as for example bombings on Iraq or on pharmaceutical factory in Sudan etc.) but also starts a propaganda war against Islam and Islamic countries in their media. Also, out of sheer frustration, some militant youth carry out violent attacks on some American establishments (for example, explosions on the World Trade Centre a few years ago). As a result of all this an average American has terrible prejudices against Islam and Muslims. Islam is thought to be a religion of fanaticism and violence.

Similarly the internal extremist violence in Algeria has spilled over to France. The Algerian extremists carried out some bombing attacks in Paris too as it believes the Government of France collaborates with the Algerian authorities in wiping out Muslim militants. Naturally this leads to strong prejudices among the French against Islam. The Germans are facing a severe economic recession these days and there is wide ranging unemployment touching as high a level as 12%. But during the sixties when German economy was booming and foreign labour was needed large number of Turks were brought to Germany. Now with economic recession the Turks are looked down upon and tensions between the Germans and Turks has increased.

Due to ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka a large number of Tamils have also migrated to several European countries including Germany. In last few years quite a few attacks have taken place on Tamils by neo-Nazis. It is strange but true that it is in East Germany which was formerly under the Communist rule that

neo-Nazi movement is spreading and the East German Youths are involved in the attacks on the Tamils and Turks. This is because the levels of unemployment among the East Germans is far higher than the national average. It is supposed to be as high as 20-25%. And hence like an average American, an average German is highly prejudiced against Islam and Muslims as well as against Tamils. The migration of Muslims from Bosnia has further aggravated this religio-cultural conflict.

Apart from the religious and cultural conflict in the west there is increasing conflicts among different religious and cultural groups within the developing countries in Asia and Africa. Hindus and Muslims in India (and now Hindus and Christians too), Muslims and Christians in some African countries like in Nigeria and Sudan are embroiled in conflict. Similarly various ethnic and cultural groups within these countries are involved in mutual violence. For example, Bodos versus other tribals in Assam, Nagas and Meitis in Manipur, Bengalis and tribals in Tripura and so on. There are also prejudices against South Indians in North and Western India. The Shiv Sena is a militant Maharashtrian Hindu organisation in Mumbai which attacks both Muslims and South Indians. It has spread militancy among the Maharashtrian youth.

There are various reasons for such conflicts mainly political and also economic in some cases. The developmental processes are quite uneven and leads to in-migration from rural to urban and from less developed urban to more developed urban areas. Thus one finds different religious and cultural groups jostling with each other in these urban areas. Thus one finds more conflict in Urban than rural areas. Rural areas are more homogeneous and less amenable to such conflicts. Many urban areas have become real hotbeds of ethnic or religious or cultural conflicts. Each religious or ethnic group wants to establish its own domination in a particular area and wants to cleanse it of other 'polluting' groups. And to mobilise members of their own group religious or cultural discourse is used thus creating strong prejudices in the minds of the other religious or cultural groups.

It should, however, be noted that it is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history there have been such migrations from one country to another and from one area within a country to other areas. These conflicts are also not new. The Christians and Muslims fought on the question of control over Palestine and these wars in history are known as the crusades. The zeal with which these wars were fought between Christians and Muslims made 'crusade' synonymous with zeal and a new phrase 'crusading spirit' came into existence.

It was these crusades which caused great deal of misunderstanding about Islam in western countries during the medieval period. The image of Muslims Qur'an in one hand, and sword in the other, was creation of these crusades. Similarly, the Muslim invasions on North India led to image of Islam as violent religion in the minds of many Hindus (though quite a few Hindus were collaborators in these invasions). These images are being revived in the modern context to serve contemporary political interests. However, due to propaganda hype an average Hindu thinks of Muslims as fanatic and violent. The media again plays an important role in spreading such ideas and images. The whole Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid movement drew its vigour and zeal from such images. Muslims were seen as fanatical Hindu-temple-bashers by an average Hindu. The BJP, itself a Hindu fundamentalist party, played an important role for mobilising the Hindu electoral support. In medieval ages such mass mobilization for political purposes was not required and the monarchs could maintain inter-religious balance in their own interests. In modern times compulsions of democratic mobilization has its own logic. Masses are sought to be manipulated by political interests. This manipulation is made easy by the might of mass media. Such medium did not exist in the old times. Thus we see that need for manipulation of the masses and the role played by the media - and now not only print but also electronic media - plays great role in spreading inter-religious and inter-cultural prejudices.

The images about some religion or culture built by media may not be true but can play absolute havoc by spreading strong

prejudices against particular group. The role of media has become extremely crucial in modern times. Electronic media is even more so. But the media can play very constructive role too provided it has interest in promotion of better inter-religious or inter-cultural understanding. It should also be pointed out that entire media is not responsible for sensationalising the conflict. A section of print and electronic media does play a very positive role in this regard. It is for those interested in inter-religious or inter-cultural dialogue to make proper use of both print and electronic media. We have to do everything possible to promote this dialogical spirit among the conflicting groups.

Dialoguing is the only way out for promoting better understanding between the conflicting groups. As the spread of misinformation through whatever means is largely responsible for misunderstanding, dissemination of correct information is highly necessary to contain the conflict. This can most effectively be done through dialoguing. We would like to throw light on the rules and processes of such inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues.

The dialogue can take place between different kinds of groups: 1) political groups; 2) religious groups and 3) supporters of political or religious groups. Also, there are different levels of dialogue and a comprehensive process of dialoguing will involve all these levels. It can take place at the level of political or religious leaders; at the level of intellectuals from different groups and also at the level of masses. The nature of dialogue will vary at these levels.

At the level of intellectuals it will be more of analysis of events and understanding of the nature of forces involved in promoting conflict. At this level the dialogue will also deal with the strategies of promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural harmony. At the political level the dialogue may deal with those politicians who believe in secular politics and based on ideological convictions, oppose the politics of religious or cultural confrontation. At political level the dialogue may comprise strategies of bringing secular alliances to isolate the communal and fundamental forces.

At the religious level, the dialogue, on the other hand, will have to deal with religious and theological aspects. A religion too has to be understood at different levels i.e., at the level of rituals, theology, institutions and values. While rituals, theologies and institutions might vary from religion to religion, values are bound to be complementary. For example Hinduism emphasises nonviolence and Buddhism compassion; Christianity emphasises love and Islam justice and equality. It will be seen that all these values are complementary to each other.

Rituals, theologies and institutions are unique to every religion and this often leads to misunderstandings. Each religious tradition emphasises importance of certain rituals and theological dogmas as central to that religious tradition and also exerts superiority of its own rituals and theology. For example the Islamic system of worship prohibits worshipping or bowing before idols. Islam lays central stress on unity of God and considers associating any other being with Him as a sin. The Hindus, on the other hand, believe in idol worship and bow before idols. These differences often lead to violent conflict between the two communities in India. However, it is also to be noted that this conflict is not promoted by religious leaders as much as by political leaders who hardly care for religious rituals and dogmas.

But that does not mean that religious leaders do not differ. These differences, for a proper dialogue, have to be understood and appreciated rather than fought about. Many Sufis and *Bhakti* saints did precisely that. They not only tried to appreciate these differences but also often tried to even reconcile them. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, for example, showed great respect both for Islam and Hinduism and worked out a creative synthesis between the two. He had great regard for Sufis of Islamic tradition and included the verses of Baba Farid, a great Sufi saint from Punjab, into his *Adi Granth*.

Dara Shikoh, the Mughal prince who was greatly interested in Sufi traditions had deep appreciation of Hindu religious traditions and he wrote a treatise called *Majma'al-Bahrayn* (i.e., meeting of

two great oceans Hinduism and Islam). He compared, in this treatise, the terminologies of both the religions and showed striking similarities between the two. He also believed, and believed so on the basis of comparative study of Islamic and Hindu scriptures that Hinduism though apparently polytheistic, was not; and quoting Upanishads, the sacred Hindu scriptures, showed that basically Hinduism too is a monotheistic religion.

Another Sufi saint of eighteenth century India, Mirza Mazhar Jan-e-Janaan believed that idol worship among Hindus is not essentially polytheistic as idols are a way to reach God, not God by themselves. Much earlier, Muhiyuddin Ibn Arabi, an 11th Century Sufi Saint from Spain laid central emphasis on love of God and considered his heart as centre of love and hence centre of God. According to his doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* entire creation is the manifestation of God and hence all barriers between human beings following different religious traditions are artificial and needed to be demolished. His was truly a universalistic approach. These Sufi saints laid more emphasis on spirituality rather than rituals and hence they could visualise the basic unity among all faith traditions.

The Hindu scriptures also talk of equal respect for all religions and religious traditions. The *Bhakti* saints in the Hindu tradition laid great emphasis, like the Sufis, on intense love in the form of *bhakti* i.e., devotion to God, the Supreme Being. For them too rituals were secondary and it is spirituality which was fundamental. In the Christian traditions too, the mystics stressed spirituality and devotion to God.

But this does not mean that rituals and theologies do not matter for the people. There are millions of people who give great importance to their respective ritual and theological systems. An inter-religious dialogue should, as the very basis of the dialogue should accept the central importance of the ritual and theological systems. Here I would like to lay down some ground rules for inter-religious dialogue. The following rules would be of great help in carrying on inter-religious dialogue:

1. Those who enter into dialogue should be firmly rooted in their faith tradition and should have inner conviction. It is true conviction without being sectarian which becomes the firm ground for dialogue.
2. There should not be any feeling of superiority of their respective traditions in the minds of dialogue partners. The feeling of superiority can mar the very spirit of dialogue.
3. Dialogue should never become polemics. Polemical style is the very anti-thesis of dialogue. Polemics try to prove the other wrong while dialogue is conducted to understand the other.
4. Dialogue should not only be conducted to understand the other but also should respect the integrity of the other. No dialogue can be conducted if there is no respect for integrity and convictions of the other.
5. The idea of dialogue should be to explain one's point of view and not to convert the other one's point of view. Even a slightest attempt to convert the other to one's point of view will destroy the spirit of dialogue. It will then be an attempt at conversion and this will lead to resentment. Attempt at conversion also implies that the person sought to be converted has a belief system not as good as that of the convertor.
6. The dialogue partners should be prepared to recognise the uniqueness of the other's belief, ritual or theological systems. It is this uniqueness which makes it different. It is not the question of right or wrong, but rather of uniqueness and diversity.
7. The dialogue partners should also recognise that diversity is the very basis of life. Without diversity life will become drab and would lose all its charm. The Qur'an not only accepts this diversity but also legitimises it. It is Allah's desire to have diversity (5:48; 2:148). Lack of diversity and enforcing one faith system or one ideological system can ultimately lead to fascism

and authoritarianism. Thus theological states, like ideological ones, tend to be highly authoritarian.

8. Dialogue should promote the spirit of accommodation and adjustment to minimise conflict in the society. The dialogical spirit consists in appreciating others difficulties and complexities of their situation. Accommodation is the very essence of dialogical culture.
9. One has to understand the difference between dialogue and monologue for effective dialoguing. The desire to dominate in the dialogue leads to monologue. Each dialogue partner should get equal opportunity to explain her/his point of view. Dialogue can take place only in true democratic spirit recognising the rights of all concerned in the dialogue.
10. Lastly one must understand that an effective dialoguing is possible only when not only listens to the others point of view but understands and appreciates it in the given context. Even the scriptural text has to be situated in a particular context unless it be a value-statement. Criticism of the text is often based on ignorance of the context.

If these ground rules are followed in inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues the result will be quite encouraging. No country today can boast of being strictly mono-religious and or mono-cultural. The rapid means of transportation have brought most diverse religious and cultural groups together in every country. Whether one wants it or not one has to live with such diversity. One cannot wish it away. Some groups will be in numerical majority, others in minority. Or several minorities put together can constitute majority as is likely to happen in Canada in near future. The mosaic model of society can retain its beauty only in harmony; conflict will only reduce this mosaic into complete disjunction due to stress and strain.

Lastly I would also like to refer to what is called the dialogue of life and this dialogue is continuously taking place at the level of the

masses. The dialogue of life consists in living together with all its problems and stresses and strains and sharing each others joys and woes in human partnership. We witness this living in togetherness and celebration of life at the level of masses. There are no theories, theologies and concepts to quarrel about; there are only problems and difficulties to be shared together. This is the real dialogue of life, a dialogue through living together and sharing together.



# ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN INDIA

## – PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY AND EXISTENCE



### Introduction

Islam entered into India almost in the lifetime of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam. Generally it is thought that it came into India by way of invasion by Muhammad bin Qasim, a young general sent by Yusuf bin Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq during the Umayyad period in the later part of the 7th century A.D. But this is not true. Islam entered India through Kerala on the West Coast through the Arab traders in a peaceful manner. The region called Malabar in Kerala is Indianised form of *ma'bar* which in Arabic means passage. Since the Arab traders passed through that region often it came to be known by that name. The Arabs, in fact, had been trading since pre-Islamic days and then embraced Islam after the Prophet began preaching. They married the local women in Kerala and their offspring spread in different parts of that region. Also, later they were accompanied by Sufi saints who converted many local people, mainly from lower classes to Islam. Thus this was the real entry point of Islam into India.

However, as far as north India was concerned Islam entered into India through invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim and it has become the sore point in relations between Hindus and Muslims. The invasion by Qasim was followed by many other invasions, including those of Shihabuddin Ghauri and Mahmud Ghaznavi and they later

demolished the temple of Somnath which rankles in the memory of upper caste Hindus. This is projected with prominence in the textbooks of history which perpetuates the bitter memory of hostility and animosity. Such events are not projected in proper context and are ascribed to Islam's 'hatred of Hindus and Hinduism.' However, such hostile projections are the products of colonial period from nineteenth century onwards. It is not true that the Muslim rulers simply hated the Hindus and humiliated them throughout their rule. It is later construction. The Hindu and Muslim rulers had mutual alliances as well as hostilities depending on struggle for power.

In fact many Hindu rulers invited the Muslim invaders including Babar in order to settle scores with local rulers. Also, one ruling Muslim dynasty fought against another ruling Muslim dynasty. When Babar, the first Mughal ruler invaded India, Ibrahim Lodhi was ruling over India and Babar was invited by Rajput rulers who were, by themselves, unable to defeat the Lodhi dynasty. Still Babar is projected in contemporary school textbooks as invader and strongly condemned for his invasion of India. These constructions and re-constructions of medieval history are done to cater to contemporary political needs. The period between 10th and early 19th century is often described in these textbooks as 'Muslim Period' and the period before as the 'Hindu Period.' The historians maintain that these periods cannot be described by religious denomination of the ruler, as there were serious differences, hostilities and conflicts between the rulers following the same religion. Muslims fought against Muslims and Hindu ruler against Hindu ruler.

It is important to note that neither Muslim nor Hindu community was homogenous one. Both the communities were highly stratified horizontally as well as vertically. Medieval societies were hierarchical along caste and class lines and the lower rungs of the community did not exactly harmonise with the upper rungs. Even the upper caste upper class Muslims hated their brethren of lower castes and class. There was greater harmony between Hindus and Muslims of lower castes than between lower and upper castes of

the same community. Common customs and traditions and mutual influences among these lower castes and classes amply demonstrate it. However, it is totally ignored in the contemporary history writing especially at school levels. These history textbooks have become breeding ground of communalism and communal hatred between these two communities.

The British rulers initiated this kind of history writing in order to divide their subjects so that they could rule without serious challenge to their colonial power. They also deliberately or innocently homogenised the two communities ignoring all differences and as if their interests were uniform. The Indian National Congress, which was an umbrella organisation of freedom fighters wisely adopted political philosophy of secularism as its foundational philosophy. It helped bring the elite of two communities together to fight for freedom. When Mahatma Gandhi appeared on the scene he involved the masses of people in the freedom movement by championing their causes. He also tried to weld Hindus and Muslims together by taking up religious issues like the Khilafat issue after the first world war when the British sought to dismember the Turkish empire. The Muslims responded enthusiastically to Gandhiji's call and even traditional *ulamā* fraternised with him on the issue and supported the Indian National Congress and its concept of secular composite nationalism.

However, soon after the Khilafat Movement serious differences developed between a section of Hindus and Muslims mainly on power-sharing formula. The Motilal Nehru Committee was appointed to solve the 'communal question' but both Hindu and Muslim leaders of communal dispensation opposed its recommendations vehemently and the report consequently drew a blank. Three round table conferences in early thirties also failed to work out any satisfactory formula to resolve the question of power sharing between the two communities. The last attempt to build a political alliance between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1937 also came to a naught. The Congress after the elections

refused to take two ministers nominated by the League in its cabinet on the grounds that it had failed to win majority of Muslim seats. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who later became founder of Pakistan, was furious and vowed to teach the Congress a lesson. He propounded the two-nation theory and sowed the seed of partition of the country. Partition, justified or not, became the cause of animosity between the two communities in India. The upper caste Hindus never forgave Muslims for this.

It would also be wrong to blame all Muslims for the partition of the country. Indian Muslims were divided on the issue. The lower caste Muslims saw no benefit for them in creating a 'new homeland' as it would benefit only upper class Muslims. In fact a section of lower caste Muslims represented by the Mu'min Conference demonstrated against the two-nation theory propounded by Jinnah on 23rd March 1940 in Lahore. The Muslim *ulama* too vehemently opposed it and declared their support for composite nationalism of the Congress and also justified it on religious grounds. Thus it shows clearly that all Muslims were not unanimous on the question of two-nation theory and that the theory was not based on Islam but on the political needs of the Muslim elite. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, a prominent theologian and rector of the Darul Uloom, Deoband, a premier Islamic seminary in India was on the forefront of the opponents of the two nation theory and he even wrote a book *Muttahida Qawmiyat aur Islam* (Composite Nationalism and Islam) to refute it. He also undertook a whirlwind tour of India to appeal to the Muslims not to be misled by Jinnah and his two-nation theory. This is clear proof of the fact that a section of Muslims strongly opposed creation of Pakistan. But it is strange irony of politics that the Indian Muslims as a whole are being held as guilty of dividing the country and paying the price for it.

Partition resulted in human massacre on both sides of divide. More than a million people were killed and many more were displaced and cut off from their roots. The ruling classes in Pakistan mainly comprised the feudal lords, military and bureaucracy and

never shared power with the masses. Its Islamic foundation also proved quite fragile and it broke into two in 1971 when the Bengali Muslims seceded from Pakistan and formed Bangladesh. The Pakistani ruling elite led by ZA Bhutto refused to share power with the Bengali Muslims and tried to suppress their legitimate aspirations by sending army to former East Pakistan. Pakistan founded as it was, on the aspirations of Muslim power elite had often to resort to hate India campaign to divert attention of the Muslim masses from their real problems. Pakistan faces great challenges today in the form of ethnic and sectarian conflicts.

Partition as pointed out above, far from solving the communal problem in India, further aggravated it. The innocent Muslim masses in India continue to pay heavy price for creation of Pakistan. It created hatred in the minds of upper caste Hindus towards Muslims. These Hindus are even unable to distinguish between the interests of upper class Muslim elite who created Pakistan and the backward illiterate Muslim masses who were victims of partition. In many communal riots the fanatics raise the slogan *Muslims jao Pakistan aur qabrastan* (i.e., Oh Muslims go to Pakistan or to cemetery).

Thus partition neither solved the problems of Muslims in Pakistan nor of those in India. It rather shattered the unity of Muslims in the sub-continent who are now divided in three units - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Partition had sought to create homeland for Indian Muslims. Far from it; Indian Muslims are not only divided in three units but today, of all these three countries, number of Muslims is highest in India for whom the Muslim homeland was meant. The Muslim masses in all these three countries are facing problems of acute poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. If at all anyone benefited from partition it was the elite Muslims who created the so called Muslim 'homeland' in the name of Islam.

Indian Muslims faced problems of security and identity from the day one after India became independent. First partition riots made them terribly insecure. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims were killed during the partition riots in India as Hindus were killed

in Pakistan. Thus independence brought a great calamity for both Hindus and Muslims in India. Moreover Indian Muslims were totally confused and did not know what to do. They lost even the sense of confidence. It was leaders of the stature of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who instilled sense of confidence and made them proud of their Islamic heritage in India. Maulana Azad's speech from the steps of Jama Masjid, Delhi acted as a balm and had a healing touch. However, Muslims had hard days to face after partition in India.

The Constitution was drafted and adopted on 26th January 1950 declaring India a republic. The Constitution declared all citizens of India equal in every respect without any distinction of caste, creed or race. The Articles 25 to 30 of the Constitution also gave special religious and cultural rights to minorities. The Article 25 thus declares: "Subject to public order, morality and health and to other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." This article even allows the Sikhs' wearing and carrying of *kirpans* (a weapon) to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion."

Under cultural and educational rights of minorities articles 29 and 30 are very important. According to Article 29 (1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same. (2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them."

The Article 30 is also of fundamental importance. This Article is entitled "Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions." It says: (1) "All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. (2) the State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions discriminate on the grounds that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language."

Needless to say, these provisions of the Constitution are of fundamental importance for preserving the religious practices and

identities of minority communities based on religion or language and culture. The Indian Muslims and other religious minorities like the Christians, Sikhs and neo-Buddhists highly value these provisions of the Constitution of India. For the Muslims in particular who constitute the largest religious minority these provisions are of special significance. The Muslims have resisted and preserved - this we will discuss in some more detail in the subsequent pages - their personal laws or *shari'ah* laws under the Article 25 which allows all persons to profess, practice and propagate their religion. However, there are differences among legal luminaries whether State can regulate or legislate in respect of the personal laws or not in view of the Article 25. Muslims of course maintain the State cannot.

Articles 29 and 30 are also of great importance for preservation of minority languages and cultures and the Hindu communalists often attack these provisions and want them to be done away with. But it requires two-third majority in the Parliament to change the Constitution and hence the Hindutva forces have not succeeded so far in tampering with these important provisions. However, there are violations of these provisions in practice and there are numerous grievances in this respect. But it is another story altogether.

While incorporation of these articles in Indian Constitution instilled a sense of confidence among Indian Muslims in post-independence period their loyalty to India remained suspect in the eyes of most of the people of majority community, particularly of north India. As pointed out before, it is sociologically and politically wrong to homogenise any religious community, but 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' became political categories since the British days in Indian political discourse as if they were monolithic bloc without any political, religious, linguistic and cultural differences. Commonality of religion, as the two-nation theory also assumed, does not lead to commonality of politics, nor does it lead to commonality of culture. The north and central Indian Muslims who spoke Urdu were distinctly different from Muslims from south who speak different south Indian languages. They have their own political inclinations and compulsions.

The Muslims from the south were indifferent to the question of Pakistan right from the beginning. They did not support the partition with same enthusiasm as the Urdu speaking Muslims of north India. Communalism and communal violence remained centred in the north right from the British days. Even in the post-partition period the south was relatively free from communal violence until late eighties. It spread in south only during late eighties. Until then there were hardly any communal riots in the south except in Hyderabad which had been the centre of Urdu speaking Muslims and was under the Nizam rule. However, after late eighties the communal situation deteriorated very fast in some parts of South, particularly in the state of Tamilnadu.

### **Communal violence**

In north India too there was relative communal peace during the fifties as the entire focus during this period was on linguistic re-organisation of states. In parts of India there were linguistic riots, particularly between Gujarat and Maharashtra on the question of inclusion of Bombay. However, an unending cycle of communal violence began from early sixties. The first major riot took place in Jabalpur in 1962 which shook the whole country. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was also thoroughly shaken. He did not expect communal violence on such massive scale as he thought the communal question was 'resolved' by partitioning the country on communal lines. His illusion was thus shattered. Communalism and communal violence was here to persist as partition had not changed the communal mind-set of some people. It had, on the other hand, aggravated it.

However, Nehru was committed to secular politics. Shaken by the events in Jabalpur, he formed national Integration Council after Jabalpur riots and Chinese invasion of 1962. However, unfortunately the Council remained only a paper organisation and could not become an active agent of promoting secular values and communal

harmony. Most of the Congressmen were communal at heart and never had commitment to secularism as Nehru had. Many Congress leaders were known sympathisers of Hindu communal outfits. They were opposed to Nehru's policies both internal as well as external i.e., his policy of non-alignment. The Jabalpur riots shook Indian Muslims' confidence in Congress as well as in secularism.

It was commitment to secularism that had inspired minorities to stand by the Indian National Congress and thousands of Indian Muslims had supported Indian freedom struggle because of Indian National Congress adopting secular philosophy. Indian secularism of course was far from being atheistic or antagonistic to religion like secularism in the Soviet Union. Indian secularism guaranteed religious freedom to all and it was this concept of religious freedom which made Indian Muslims feel Islam was safe in India. However, their confidence was shaken with every major communal riot. During Nehru period too several large communal riots took place. The situation was greatly aggravated after his death.

Nehru's death in 1964 left a great void but Indian democracy proved to be vibrant enough to overcome this crisis. Lal Bahadur Shastri took over as Prime Minister but did not live long and died of heart attack after signing peace treaty in Tashkent after 1965 war between India and Pakistan. On his death Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister and to strengthen her position she tried to win over minorities by strengthening secular forces in the country. Thus she succeeded in winning over minorities who were feeling quite unsafe after series of communal riots in the country since Jabalpur riot.

However, Indira Gandhi had to face enormous challenges from her opponents both from within the Congress and outside it. The Congress bosses opposed to her split the Congress and Indira's faction became the ruling Congress. To make her position shaky all those ranged against her engineered a communal holocaust in 1969 in Ahmedabad in Gujarat (western India) where the Congress faction opposed to her was ruling. The Ahmedabad communal

riots spread to other parts of Gujarat State and were much worse in intensity than the Jabalpur riots. The Jan Sangh which was the Hindu rightist and communal outfit was actively propagating against Muslims and doubting their loyalty to India in those days. It passed a resolution for 'Indianising' the Indian Muslims as if they were not Indian enough. Its president in those days was Balraj Madhok who was known to be extremist in his views. The print media played up the resolution and some papers like The Times of India even editorially supported the resolution.

The Indian Muslims were feeling terribly insecure and felt their very existence was in danger. And it was in this suffocating atmosphere that Ahmedabad holocaust occurred in which more than thousand Muslims were killed in Ahmedabad city alone. And the Ahmedabad riots were followed with equally ferocious communal riot in Bhivandi in 1970. Another communal outfit called Shiv Sena came into existence in Maharashtra in late sixties and some senior Congressmen of Bombay were supposedly behind it. These Congressmen who were nursing grievances against Nehruvian leftward policies lent their discrete support to a Marathi demagogue Bal Thackeray. Thackeray aroused both strong regional as well as communal feelings among the Maharashtrian youth. Bal Thackeray was also staunch enemy of communists and it was at his instance that a communist activist Krishna Desai was murdered by Shiv Sainiks.

It was Shiv Sena which was behind the Bhivandi riots of 1970. Bhivandi is around 40 miles from Bombay city and is centre of power looms mostly owned by Muslims. It has Muslim majority. It is reported that more than 400 persons, mostly Muslims, were killed in these riots. What was worse which made Muslims more insecure was the biased role of the police in these riots. In all these riots there were instances of unabashed partiality of the police towards the Hindu communal elements. However, it must be said that only a section of Hindus took communal positions and showed anti-Muslim bias, not all Hindus. Many Hindus, perhaps a great

majority, either remained neutral or stood on the side of Muslims or fought communal forces in their own community. Shiv Sena in Maharashtra was backed either by communal elements or by those Congressmen who were nursing grievances against Indira Gandhi.

The period between 1970 and 1977 was comparatively peaceful and there were no major communal riots during this period for various reasons. It was during this period that the liberation movement in erstwhile East Pakistan started and Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan through active intervention of Indian Army. The attention of whole nation was in that direction. Mrs. Gandhi's stature was boosted tremendously and she emerged as a great heroin of Indian politics. However, this proved to be quite short-lived and soon opposition gathered momentum. Jayprakash Narayan, a socialist leader of great stature in Indian politics, launched an anti-corruption movement against her and her prestige went down considerably. She also lost an election petition in Allahabad High Court and was unseated. She declared emergency in 1975 and large number of opposition leaders were arrested including Jayprakash Narayan. Most of the Jan Sangh and RSS leaders were also rounded up and there was complete political vacuum. Thus there was no one left to provoke communal violence.

However, emergency was lifted in 1977 and in the ensuing elections Mrs. Gandhi and her party lost heavily and the newly formed Janata Party formed the government of which the Jan Sangh was a constituent. The Jan Sangh ostensibly renounced its communal philosophy and pledged at Gandhiji's Samadhi (where his funeral ashes lay buried) to be secular and votary of Gandhian socialism. The north Indian Muslims who had greatly suffered during cleansing programmes in emergency overwhelmingly voted for the Janata Party knowing fully well that the Jan Sangh was part of it. It was the first and last time that the Muslims voted for the Jan Sangh in sheer desperation. They expected the Jan Sangh to reciprocate this gesture towards Muslims but were soon disillusioned. A series of communal riots followed from 1978 onwards. Major riots took place in Jamshedpur, Aligarh and Varanasi in north India. Many innocent lives were lost.

The RSS which provides ideological direction to Hindu communal forces was quite unhappy at the Jan Sangh renouncing communalism and adopting secularism which is perceived to be anti-Hindu. The Jan Sangh members were forced, by their RSS mentors, not to renounce their RSS membership. All the top leaders of the then Jan Sangh were also members of RSS and the socialist leaders like Raj Narain in the Janata Party raised this issue - known as the dual membership issue - and asked the Jan Sangh members in the Janata Party to resign their RSS membership. The RSS made it plain to their members not to resign and planned several communal riots in Aligarh, Varanasi, Jamshedpur etc. to display its strength. The Janata Party government fell apart on this question in 1979 and was replaced by the government led by Charan Singh which also lasted only for few months. In the ensuing elections in 1980 Mrs. Gandhi came back to power though with less popular vote.

The Jan Sangh after break up of the Janata Party took a new avatar now calling itself Bharatiya Janata Party and adopted moderate posture still claiming to be committed to 'secularism' and Gandhian socialism. To symbolise its commitment to these ideals, a moderate leader like Atal Bihari Vajpayee was made its president. But this strategy soon came to naught as Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in order to compensate for her loss of Muslim votes, began to mobilise Hindu votes adopting Hindu communal postures from behind the scene. This upset BJP's apple cart and it lost its own ground. They faced threat from Mrs. Gandhi and lost heavily in the general elections of 1984 when they got only 2 seats in Parliament. The BJP was thus forced to rethink its strategy to keep its political base intact and seen to widen it.

Thus it began to adopt its earlier aggressive communal postures once again. Vajpayee was replaced by Shri LK Advani as president of BJP who is known for his strong Hindutva proclivity. In order to compete with the Congress soft communalism the BJP adopted hard Hindu communalism from the early eighties and even began to question the Nehruvian concept of secularism. Now a debate took

place publicly whether Nehruvian secularism was at all relevant to India, it being a western notion. The BJP, under the leadership of Advani even dubbed Nehruvian secularism as nothing more than a policy of 'appeasement of Muslims'. The only example the BJP could give of appeasement of Muslims was that of Muslim Personal Law under which a Muslim man could marry four wives whereas the Hindus cannot. They can marry only one wife. It greatly appealed to the Hindu middle class.

The BJP also aggressively propagated that the Muslims do not practise family planning and that their population is increasing much faster than that of Hindus and that the Muslim population will take over the Hindu population by 2050 and India will become part of Pakistan. The Vishva Hindu Parishad, a member of the Sangh Parivar (The RSS, the Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal apart from the BJP constituted what is called the Sangh Parivar or the saffron family) took much more militantly communal posture on this issue. It distributed pamphlets throughout India showing a Hindu couple with two children and a Muslim man with four wives and host of children with the legend that 'we five our twenty five'. Also, after conversion of a few Dalit families to Islam in Meenakshipuram (Tamilnadu) in 1981, the VHP launched an aggressive movement against conversion to Islam as currently it is attacking Christians for conversion.

All this greatly communalised the situation in the country and communal riots increased both in numbers and intensity. The Muslims naturally began to feel highly insecure and thought their Islamic identity is in danger. Secularism, needless to say, has been a great source of strength for minorities in India, particularly the Muslims. If secularism comes under attack, the minorities feel quite insecure. The militant attack by the saffron family on Nehruvian secularism and the VHP campaign against conversion and myth of multiplying population of the Muslims not only weakened Indian secularism but made the Muslims feel politically suffocated. It was under these circumstances that the Supreme Court delivered what

has come to be known as The Shah Bano judgement regarding the maintenance of a Muslim divorcee.

The judgement upheld Shah Bano's contention under the secular law that she was entitled to maintenance for life and not for only the *iddah* (waiting period before re-marriage after the divorce which is three months) period. This judgement delivered in 1985 was thought to be another attack on Islam and Muslim identity in India. The Muslim leadership across the political parties and sectarian divide unitedly opposed the Supreme Court judgement and launched an aggressive movement to reverse it. This added to already aggravated communal situation and went a long way to further intensify hostility between two communities.

It was under these circumstances that the BJP launched a new agitation: to demolish the Babri Masjid and construct a Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in its place. The BJP maintained - though without much justification - that Babar, the Mughal ruler, after whom the mosque in Ayodhya was named, had demolished the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple and constructed the mosque. So now that the Hindus were in political command, had right to demolish the mosque and reconstruct the temple dedicated to Ram and take historical revenge. This too greatly appealed to the Hindu middle classes and the BJP, which had a narrow political base among the upper caste Hindus earlier began to expand it among the middle and even backward caste Hindus in the name of Ram.

The Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi agitation was not only historically unjustified, it launched a frontal attack on Indian secularism. The Muslims began to fear that it is the beginning of the end of secularism in India and that the Sangh Parivar would demolish all historical mosques one after the other and that Constitutional guarantees are quite hollow. The Sangh Parivar had prepared a list of 300 such mosques and this was enough to frighten Muslims. Muslims were furthermore perturbed by the fact that the ruling Congress Government headed by Rajiv Gandhi could do nothing to stop the tide of Hindu communalism. Not only this.

Rajiv opened the lock over the Babri Masjid and allowed the Hindus to worship Lord Ram's idol planted there in 1948 by some RSS enthusiasts. This aggressive Ram Janmabhoomi Movement resulted in a series of communal riots in various parts of India in which hundreds of innocent lives were lost most of whom were Muslims. The 1987 riots in Meerut and 1989 riots in Bhagalpur sent shock waves throughout India making Muslims feel terribly insecure.

The Babri Masjid was also demolished by Karsevaks (voluntary workers) of the Sangh Parivar on 6th December 1992 when Narasimha Rao was the Congress Prime Minister of India. Many secular Hindus also felt that it was a terrible tragedy and it was not only destruction of a mosque through political hooliganism but also a terrible blow to Indian secularism. The demolition of Babri Masjid was followed by riots in Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Delhi and several other places. Communal holocaust, as if, swept throughout the country. The Bombay Riots of 1992 and 1993 were mainly organised by Shiv Sena, a regional, fascistic and communal outfit led by Bal Thackeray who cried for the blood of Muslims. The Bombay riots in particular had international repercussions. They tarnished the secular image of India.

### **Post-Babri situation**

Though as a result of Ram Janmabhoomi movement the BJP gained tremendous political ground and ultimately succeeded in capturing political power as a major coalition partner, the communal situation eased in the post-Babri demolition period. The decade of eighties was the most dangerous communal decade in post-independence period. It witnessed the most aggressive form of communalism after the partition of the country. The Sangh Parivar went all out during this period to expand its political base by misusing religious and communal issues one after the other.

However, once it came to power at the Centre at the head of coalition it began to downplay communal issues. It wanted to

maintain law and order situation under control and also wanted to give a message to Muslims that they will be safe only if the BJP is in power. It even promised to Muslims a 'riot-free' India in its election manifesto of 1999 if it comes to power. Some politicians who made an alliance with the BJP even argued that to ensure riot-free India one should keep BJP in power and hence these otherwise secular parties legitimised their alliance with it.

However, it would be knave to think that BJP can become 'secular' if it is voted to power. BJP had been provoking communal hatred in order to get Hindu votes but as a ruling party obviously it cannot risk provoking communal violence. It will tarnish its political image. As a ruling party it has to ensure communal peace. But communal peace or absence of communal violence should not be mistaken for communal harmony. To spread communal feelings is the very ideological basis of Sangh Parivar. If communalism and communal ideology remains alive communal violence can be incited whenever needed. The BJP itself is not indulging in communal propaganda. The other members of the saffron family - RSS, the Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal - fill this void. Of late the Christian community has come under attack for conversions.

The BJP for the time being is going soft on Muslims. It is even following Mrs. Gandhi's policies of early eighties in reverse. Mrs. Indira Gandhi who traditionally depended on minority votes tried to switch over to the Hindu votes to compensate for its loss of popularity among the Muslims. The BJP who is witnessing loss of popularity among the Hindus is now appealing to Muslims to come closer to it and repose confidence in it. The wooing of Muslims by the BJP thus can be compared with the wooing of Hindus by Mrs. Gandhi. These are political games which the politicians play to come to power. People of this or that community are used as vote-banks and object of rather than subject of politics.

Democracy should be an effective tool for empowerment of people but it is rather used for empowering politicians at the cost of the people. The Congress always used Muslims as vote-bank.

The Congress in its long rule hardly did anything to solve acute problems of Muslims. Muslims in India are very poor and backward. Their main problems are economic and educational. But the ruling parties did nothing substantial in these fields. Only promises were made. The literacy rate among Muslims tends to be around 35% and among Muslim women it is even more depressing - not more than 18 per cent. Their share in political power and in government jobs is also very dismal. Though the Muslim population is more than 12 per cent (according to 1991 census) and may touch 15% level in 2001 census, number of MPs (members of parliament) is usually around 5 per cent. In state assemblies also it is no different.

Even at the lowest level of government jobs - class three and class four jobs - their share does not go beyond 6 to 7% and at the level of higher administrative positions like the IAS it is no more than 3-4 per cent. It is true it is difficult to find qualified Muslims for various jobs and the Muslim leaders also have done near to nothing to disseminate education among the Muslim masses. But Union and State Governments have also done nothing to redeem the situation. They make all promises at the time of elections but except repeating these promises during next elections hardly anything happens. The Muslim grievances are quite justified. They hardly have any share in power as the largest minority in India. The share, if any, is woefully inadequate.

## Conclusion

Thousands of Muslims not only participated in freedom struggle in India and made great sacrifices but also vigorously opposed creation of Pakistan. They dreamt of secular India hoping for creation of just society where they will be not only able to follow their religion but also share power on equitable basis. However, things did not go that way. Though Jawaharlal Nehru was committed to justice to minorities in independent India other Congress leaders were not. The majority in the Congress did not share Nehru's commitment.

Also, creation of Pakistan marred to an extent, the future of Muslims in India. It created powerful prejudices in the minds of Hindus and Indian Muslims were seen as more loyal to Pakistan than to India and they generalised few such instances to reinforce the conclusion which they already had drawn.

The Muslims also did not draw up proper strategy for their own advancement in secular India. Their leaders, as pointed out before, cared more for religion and identity-related problems than the education and economic progress-related ones. These leaders always looked to the past than to future. They negotiated deals with political parties - mainly the Congress - to preserve their past heritage than to build future for the Muslim masses. Now it is dawning on Muslims that apart from preserving their Islamic identity they also have to carve out their niche in democratic secular India. Though still the emphasis is on building *madrassas* but more and more secular educational institutions are also coming up. More and more Muslims are realising that girl education is also very important for their progress. A new middle class is also slowly coming into existence which is increasingly championing the cause of modern education. Pressures are also building up from below for certain necessary changes in the status of women, particularly certain necessary changes in the *shariat* law as it operates in India.

Though still there is mass poverty among the Muslims, particularly among the lower caste Muslims, they have turned the corner and many of them are striving for upward mobility. However, they have miles to go and many powerful obstacles to overcome. It is certainly convoluted way to forge ahead. Even the BJP has discovered that anti-Muslim tirade cannot yield more results and is negotiating a new political space which is likely to have some place for Muslims though it is not easy for it to do this. It is ideological mentor RSS may not allow it to do this. Much will depend on the response of its Hindu voters to this new orientation of the moderate section of the BJP leadership. It will be tested in coming elections particularly in U.P.

Whether the BJP forges ahead with its new Muslim policy or not, the Muslims have to sink or swim in the Indian political ocean, and from all available signs it appears Muslim masses have decided to swim even if the ocean is choppy. If right now the future of Muslims is not bright, it is not dismal either. Given a little more wisdom and pragmatic approach Muslims can succeed in shaping their future in democratic India even if its secularism is undulating.



# MINGLING OF THE TWO OCEANS – HINDUISM AND ISLAM



**D**ara Shikoh has made seminal contribution to the composite culture of India. He was appointed heir apparent by Shah Jahan. Had he become emperor of India it would have certainly made much difference to religio-cultural scene in India. Dara Shikoh had learnt Sanskrit and studied the Hindu scripture in original. He translated Upanishads into Persian directly from Sanskrit and called it *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Great Mystery). And in introduction to this work he says that one finds in Upanishads the concept of *Tawhid* (the doctrine of Unity of God, the most fundamental doctrine of Islam) after the Qur'an and perhaps the Qur'an refers to Upanishad when it refers to *Kitab al-Maknun* (The Hidden Book). His work *Majma'ul Bahrayn* (Mingling of the Two Oceans i.e., Hinduism and Islam) is very seminal work in the history of composite culture of India.

Dara Shikoh who was the disciple of Mian Mir, the great Sufi saint who had laid the foundation stone of the Har Mandir in Amritsar at the instance of the Sikh Guru shows in this book that there is great deal of similarities between these two great religions Hinduism and Islam. He divides his tract into twenty sections like The Elements, The Senses, The Religious Exercises, The Attributes, the Great Resurrection and so on. In each section he discusses similarities between Hinduism and Islam.

For example, in the first section "Discourse on the Elements" he compares the concept of these elements in Islam and Hinduism. They are five in number i.e., *Arsh-i-Azam* (The Great Throne); secondly the wind, thirdly the Fire; Fourthly the water and Fifthly the Dust. In the Indian language these are called *Panchbhut* namely *akas*, *vayu*, *tejas*, *jala* and *prithvi*. He then discusses these elements and their similarities in both the traditions. Dara Shikoh for example compares *Ruhi-i-Azam* with *Jivatma*.

Then coming to *Sifat-i-Allah Ta'ala* i.e., 'Divine Attributes' he says in Islamic Sufi tradition there are two-Beauty (*jamal*) and Majesty (*jalal*), while in Indian tradition it is three called *Triguna* – *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* which signify Creation, Duration (Existence) and Destruction. Then he goes on to compare Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara with Jibril, Mika'il and Israfil. He says that Brahma or Jibril is the Superintending angel of Creation; Vishnu or Mika'il is the angel of Duration (or Existence) and Maheshwara or Israfil is the angel of Destruction. Dara Shikoh further says that water, wind and fire are also allied with these angels. Thus water goes with Jibril, fire with Mika'il and air with Israfil. Similarly Brahma is water, Vishnu is fire and Maheshwara is air.

In all these 20 sections in *Majma'ul Bahrayn*, Dara Shikoh finds similarities between both Hindu and Islamic (particularly Sufi) traditions. The fanatics and fundamentalists in both the traditions denounce each other and try to prove the truth of their own religion. In such circumstances it is highly necessary to popularise writings of persons like Dara Shikoh who uphold the truth of all religious traditions. The Sufi Islam has been a bridge between Hindus and Muslims in India. The very fundamental doctrine of Sufism has been *sulh-i-kul* i.e., peace with all.

The Sufis go with essence, not with phraseology or terminology. The Sufis studied the local traditions and adopted many of them. Even in the Qur'an one finds remarkable similarities between some of the Hindu traditions and Islamic tradition. For example in Indian tradition we find *Satyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram* for God. One finds

in the Qur'ān *Huwa'l Haq* (He is Truth ), *Jamil* (Sundaram) and *Jabbar* (Shivam). All three Attributes are there in the Qur'ān.

Also, the often quoted saying that *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (entire universe is a family) finds its reflection in the Holy Prophet's saying *Al-khalqu Iyalullah* i.e., entire creation is Allah's family. These are remarkable similarities between these two traditions. It is on these similarities that the Sufis and others built the bridges between the two communities. However, it is some political interests, which selectively and superficially use some traditions to divide Hindus and Muslims. Thus one can easily say that while religions unite the politics divide.

Among the *ulamā* persons like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad came out with the doctrine of unity of religion (*wahdat-i-din*) which is also very constructive approach. There have been many Sufi saints in India like Mazhar Jan-e-Janaan who accept Ram and Krishna as the prophets of God as Allah has stated in the Qur'ān that He has sent prophets to all nations. Thus we must promote similarities between Hindus and Muslims and there are abundant examples of these similarities in our scriptures.



# THE POLITICAL UNIVERSE OF ISLAM



The political universe of Islam has never been a fixed entity. It has been continuously changing depending on locale and time. Also, it is difficult to trace any fixed notion of Islamic state either in the Qur'an, in Hadith literature or in any political theory propounded by any Muslim theologian. Popularly it is believed that in Islam, state and religion cannot be separated. It is more of a theological and historical construct rather than a scriptural injunction. It is true in the sense of Islamic values, which must be associated with the state.

It is a well-known fact that there was no state structure in pre-Islamic Arabia. The tribal chiefs in Makkah led by the tribe of Quraysh made all important decisions. These tribal chiefs constituted a council of their own called *mala'* (senate) and all decisions had to be unanimous, else they could not be implemented by dissenting tribal chiefs. Also, there were no institutions like the police or the army for law enforcement as only the tribal customs prevailed. In pre-Islamic Arabia all the wars were inter-tribal and all adult male members of the tribe participated in it. There were no wars with other countries outside *Jazirat al-Arab* i.e., Arabian peninsula.

The outside rulers had to deal with tribal chiefs as there was no head of the state. Also, for outside rulers no need arose for invasion of this area and hence no army was needed. Thus both the institution of army as well as that of police (*shurta*) came into

existence only in the post-Islamic period when a primitive state structure came into existence. The state structure which, came into existence after the death of the Holy Prophet could be described as proto-democratic. As long as the Prophet was alive all decisions were made by him be they political or civil in nature. He of course consulted his companions when the need arose. The Qur'an also exhorts him to consult his companions (see 3:159)

On the death of the Holy prophet of Islam, Muslims differed on the issue of succession; Sunnis maintained that he left no successor or any will to that effect. The Shi'ahs, on the other hand, maintained that he did appoint his successor and that both in spiritual and political sense the successorship will continue in the progeny of Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and Fatima, his daughter.

Thus it would be seen there were no agreed views about the successor, much less on its mode. There was no pre-Islamic model to follow. The Sunnis followed the pre-Islamic tribal tradition and elected the chief of the state as tribals used to elect a successor to the deceased chief. But that election was also not smooth there being many claimants and each claimant laying claim on some or the other merit. The Quraysh laid their claim on the basis that theirs was the most experienced tribe in diplomatic sense and that the Prophet was from amongst them. The Ansar, on the other hand maintained that they were the first to help the Prophet and thus had greater claim to being his successor. Some even suggested that let there be one co-ruler from the Quraysh and one from the Ansar.

Since there was no institution of monarchy in pre-Islamic Arabia and all decisions were taken with mutual consultation, and there being no authority like the Prophet any more, all decisions were taken by the succeeding caliphs through mutual consultations with the senior companions of the Prophet. There was no clarity about the powers of the caliph and also about duration of his regime. However, one thing was clear that the caliphs had to rule according to the Qur'an and Sunnah and prophet's companions had to assist him in discharging these duties.

Both the Qurʾān and Sunnah were the most progressive and liberative sources of legislation at the time. Islam came as a liberating religion for the weaker sections of society including women. No doubt the people embraced it in large numbers. Not only this history tells us that the poor and unprivileged people of Roman and Sassanid empires even welcomed Muslims as conquerors. They opened the doors of the forts and even guided them through secret routes to enter into the city. Thus the Islamic State of the time was a revolutionary state.

Even the first Caliph Abu Bakr is reported to have said while assuming the charge of caliphate, "Oh people! Behold me – charged with the cares of Government, I am not the best among you; I need all your advice and all your help. If I do well, support me; if I do mistake, correct me. To tell the truth to a person commissioned to rule is faithful allegiance; to conceal it, is treason. In my sight, the powerful and weak are alike; and to both I wish to render justice. As I obey God and His Prophet, obey me; and if I neglect the law of God and the Prophet, I have no more right to your obedience." (Syed Athar Husain, *The Glorious Caliphate*, Lucknow, 1947, p-19)

This was an excellent doctrine of governance for a revolutionary state. To dispense justice to the weak and powerful alike and to ask the governed to speak truth to the ruler and to treat it as a true allegiance. The Qurʾān laid maximum emphasis on justice to the weak, to bring about redistribution of wealth in favour of the poor and the needy and to create the institution of *bait al-mal* (state treasury) to achieve such redistribution. And these caliphs tried to follow the spirit of the Qurʾān as rigorously as they could.

However, it was possible within smaller area and more or less homogenous population of Makkah and Madina (though it was not as homogenous as one would like to believe). But as the Islamic empire spread to Egypt, Syria, Palestine and other parts of Roman Empire on one hand, and Iran and Central Asia, on the other, diversity increased tremendously and size of population too. Also, there were diverse customs and traditions and liberative aspects

of Islamic teachings were not acceptable to all, particularly to the former ruling classes.

Thus it was no longer possible to enforce the Islamic doctrine of justice and redistribution of wealth in favour of the weak as rigorously as it was possible within a small area with a more homogenous population. The fissures began to develop with the increase in size of the Islamic Empire. Here before we proceed, we would like to deal with an important issue for a, Islamic state.

Those ideologues of Islamic state who fervently advocate its establishment has to seriously reflect on the question whether it is possible to establish an Islamic state like the one which was established immediately after the death of the Holy Prophet? Firstly, there was no unanimity among the Muslims as to the question of succession as pointed out above. The Muslims were vertically divided on the question of succession. Secondly, within less than thirty years of establishment of caliphate, civil war broke out among the Muslims leading to great deal of bloodshed.

The first Caliph Hazrat Abu Bakr had clearly stated the principles of transparent governance which could be applied for a very limited area and limited period. Also, all the present rulers who claim to establish an Islamic state never refer to the principles laid down by the first caliph for governance. They only apply certain parts of *shari'ah* law that too as it was developed during medieval ages without re-thinking it. Such mechanical application of the law creates anomalies difficult to resolve. No rulers of the present day Islamic state follows the Qur'anic values of *'adl*, *ihsan*, *rahmah* and *hikmah* (justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom) besides those of equality, human dignity and brotherhood. It is these values which are more fundamental to the Islamic state than any thing else. No Islamic State in contemporary period has established a welfare state, let alone bringing about distribution of wealth among the poor and the needy. (59:7)

An Islamic state cannot be merely based on some selected aspects of *shari'ah* law like dress code for women and other restrictions on

them, *hudud* laws (laws of punishments), blasphemy law, personal law and so on. These laws were based on the interpretation of the Qur'anic verses in the then prevailing cultural ethos and hence need to be rethought to accommodate modern problems.

Also, in the medieval political theory there was no concept of citizenship, let alone citizens' rights. The values of governance as developed by the first caliph on the basis of the Qur'an and Sunnah were soon abandoned by the Muslim rulers. The third caliph was murdered apparently because he did not apply the principles of justice very rigorously and the fourth caliph because he applied them too rigorously. The character of the Muslim *ummah* had drastically changed due to conquests of large areas of Roman and Sassanid empires and it was very difficult in these circumstances to apply any coherent political theory, let alone the fundamental principles and values.

Here we would also like to deal with the concept of *ummah*. This concept of Muslim *ummah* has also undergone change from its early usage in the Islamic history. According to Imam Raghib any community whether based on religion or geography and contemporaneity, be it optional or non-optional, it is not even limited to human community, even the birds belonging to same group can constitute *ummah* (6:38). The Qur'an describes entire humanity as one *ummah wahidah* (2:213) (i.e., one human community). (See *Mufradat al-Qur'an*, Lahore, 1971, under *ummah*)

The Qur'an also expresses in the verse 5:48 that if Allah so desired He could have created all human beings as one community and the Qur'an also says that from amongst you, should be a group (*ummah*) who should become role model for goodness to others (3:104). Thus we see that the Qur'anic usage for *ummah* is not only for Muslims but much wider in its scope.

*Ummah* in the sense of Muslim community alone became current much later. The Prophet of Islam drew up *Mithaq-e-Madina* which included various Jewish and pagan tribes besides Muslim tribes and this conglomeration was also referred to as *Ummah*

*Wahidah* i.e., one community. It is important to note that Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani of Jami'at al-Ulamā-i-Hind opposed two nation theory on the basis of this Medinese covenant saying when the Prophet of Islam called the composite community as *Ummah Wahidah*, how can Jinnah describe Hindus and Muslims as two separate nations.

Thus it is only in spiritual and religious sense that Muslims can be described as one *ummaḥ*, not in political sense. In political sense Muslims constitute *ummaḥ* separately in every country along with others, may they be Hindus or Christians or Buddhists. Today majority of Muslims lives as minorities in various Asian, African and western countries including Europe and North America. How can these desperate groups of Muslims living in these countries constitute one *ummaḥ* in political sense? Culturally, linguistically and ethnically they are much closer to those non-Muslim groups with whom they live in those countries.

In medieval ages, countries were not divided into nations. Today's political realities are very different from those of medieval period. And even during medieval period all Muslims were not under one caliph. Earlier political theory of Islam had proposed only one caliph but this state of affairs did not last more than a century. Gradually, a number of rulers came into existence in the Muslim world and that reality had to be accepted by the Islamic theorists.

Also, there was no single method by which even the first four caliphs – called *Khulafa-i-rashidun* could be elected. The fourth caliph Mu'awiyah, belonging to the Umayyad clan, seized power even without popular sanction and he nominated his son Yazid to succeed him thus introducing the monarchical institution in the world of Islam. Many prominent companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) refused to acknowledge Yazid as a legitimate successor and the Prophet's grand son Imam Hussain gave his life but not his hand into the hand of Yazid. He became the great martyr in the cause of Islam.

Thus we see that no single political theory worked in the world of Islam. Drastic changes have taken place in political institutions

from caliphate to monarchy to army dictatorship to democratically elected governments. Of all these, one can say that democratically elected governments can be said to be closest to the spirit of Islam.

The contemporary scenario in the world of Islam has no uniformity either. There are all forms of governments in the Islamic world today from monarchy to military dictatorship to controlled democracy. No Muslim country has free democracy. It is also true that in these countries traditional and orthodox *ulamā*, wield tremendous influence. They strongly resist any attempt at modern legislation. They represent orthodoxy and dogmatism. The noted Urdu poet Iqbal describes Islamic *ṣarī'ah* as dynamic and names one of the chapter of his book 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' as "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam".

However, we hardly see this in practice in Islamic countries. What we see in these countries is stagnation and opposition to meaningful change. The women continue to suffer gender-based discrimination. Any progressive legislation giving even Islamic rights to women is fiercely opposed by the conservative *ulamā*. The latest example can be given from Egypt. When the Husni Mubarak Government in Egypt introduced a legislation for giving women right to divorce (which is sanctioned by the Qur'ān) the Islamic clergy opposed it on the grounds that women are hasty in decision making and any such right given to them would destabilise the family life.

Thus the *ṣarī'ah* law has become totally stagnant in the hands of these conservative sections of *ulamā* and its dynamic spirit has been totally lost. What is needed today is progressive changes in the *ṣarī'ah* law in keeping with the spirit and fundamental values embodied in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān lays so much emphasis on justice and equality but these values are not reflected in the *ṣarī'ah* law in the sense in which these values are understood today. In all Muslim countries (with the exception of Pakistan and Bangladesh) on the other hand, there is great emphasis on *hijab* for women. Wearing *hijāb* has been made compulsory in almost all Muslims countries.

What is very interesting to note in this respect is that there is no uniform application of *ṣarī'ah* law in these Muslim countries. There is great deal of differences in interpretation of these laws. As for example in Kuwait women are not allowed to vote as it is considered against Islamic law. The Kuwaiti women have been struggling for right to vote. But no luck so far. On the other hand, in Pakistan and Bangladesh they are not only allowed to vote they became even prime ministers of the two countries. And in Bangladesh women hold both positions that of prime minister ship and that of leader of opposition.

In Saudi Arabia women cannot drive cars whereas in other Islamic countries they are free to do so. The Taliban in Afghanistan when they were in power, did not allow women to come out of their houses and go for education. In some Islamic countries women are not allowed to go to market or any other public place without being accompanied by a male relative, even in the case of emergency. And all this is done in the name of Islam.

There is no possibility of change unless there is democratisation of these regimes. The colonial legacy is still going strong in these Muslim countries. The colonial powers had propped up some monarch or sheikh or even military strongman in power to serve their political hegemony. They are still propped up by these western powers. These rulers frustrate any attempt at democratisation of their regimes and seek Islamic legitimation through the conservative *ulama*. It is these *ulama* who provide support to these rulers and these rulers in turn wield tremendous political clout and resist any change in the *ṣarī'ah* law.

Thus conservative ethos rule the roost in most of the Islamic countries. Secularism and democracy are considered anti-Islam in such atmosphere. The earlier military regime in Pakistan is a good example of this politically created religious conservatism in an otherwise modern state. Thus there is great need for thorough democratisation in all these Muslim countries.

It is only through democratisation that peoples of these countries will enjoy democratic freedoms and only through

democratisation that these countries will get rid of pro-western regimes. These regimes cause so much anger among the people who are even unable to express their opinions freely and the pent up feelings lead to acts of terrorism as in the case of Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda group. One can usher in modern secular polity with the concept of citizenship and respect for human rights only through democratisation of these regimes.

And when the rulers do not depend on the support of *ulamā* they will be able to, with the help of popular support, bring about modern legislation making the *ṣarī'ah* law really dynamic as it was in its earlier days. *Ṣarī'ah* law can respond to the needs of modern times only in a democratic regime. Islam permits *ijtihād* (dynamic and creative interpretation of Islamic law) and it is conservative *ulamā* who do not permit carrying out of *ijtihād*. In a democratic regime popularly elected parliament can appoint expert committees to examine the orthodox law and the much needed changes to make it respond to present times. And on recommendations of these committees the parliament can enact necessary legislation.

Not only that the Islamic teachings do not come in the way of democratisation it is in fact very much in keeping with the spirit of Islam to bring about democratisation in the Islamic world. In fact all the modern changes depend on that. Also, the institution of caliphate represented, as pointed out earlier, proto-democracy. If Mu'āwiyah had not interrupted the process and introduced the institution of monarchy full-fledged democracy could have flowered in the Islamic world much earlier.

Now the time has come that what was interrupted should be re-introduced and thus democracy can fructify in Islamic world. It is feudalism and colonialism, which robbed Islam of its dynamism. Unfortunately Islamic world is still labouring under feudalism and semi-colonialism. There was time when Islam had come as a liberating religion. However, it lost its liberating thrust altogether in the last one thousand years and much more so during the colonial period. It is high time that Islam re-appropriates its liberative role.

With democratisation the political universe of Islam will undergo a through change and whereas it is stagnating today, it will acquire much needed spirit of dynamism and change.



## MUHAMMAD (PBUH) AS LIBERATOR



**W**hy liberation and from what? are important questions to be answered before we get on about Muhammad (PBUH), the Prophet, (peace be upon him) and his liberation movement.

For any liberation movement the existing situation, social, political, religious, cultural or economic, is extremely important. Any liberation movement actually takes off from these situations. It is therefore, necessary to take of the *sociocultural* and politico-economic situation existing before the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) appears on the social scene of Makkah. Only then we can understand the significance of Muhammad (PBUH) as liberator.

First, let us take the social scene on the eve of Prophet's appearance. Illiteracy was widespread. It is thought by the noted historian Tabari and others that there were hardly 17 persons who were literate at the time. The Arabs, in fact, considered it a waste of time to learn to read and write and even took pride in their being 'illiterate', they were extremely fond of poetry which was something to be recited and heard, not written, no other genre had developed, except poetry in Arabic literature of the time. It was said of Arabic language that it was sacred to the ears, not to the eyes. Written prose was almost unknown. Arabic was mere a spoken language.

It was not for nothing that the period before Islam was called a period of *jahiliyah* (i.e., ignorance). It was not mere illiteracy which

mattered most. The social outlook was very narrow. In fact they hardly ever saw beyond their own tribe. Their code of conduct too was limited to unwritten tribal customs. There was no written laws. The Arabs at the same time took great pride in their ancestry. If the tribal pride was hurt it would result in prolonged bloodshed, at times lasting over generations.

The religious scene was even worse. Each tribe had its own idol. Historians tell us there were more than 360 idols in Ka'aba, the holy abode of God. Tribal gods brought about even sharper divisions. There was no concept of humanity beyond ones tribe. The whole existence of an Arab was circumscribed by tribal limits. Superstitions were a great religious force. These superstitions have been referred to in the Qur'ān and condemned. There was no attempt whatsoever to widen the frontier of knowledge. Their whole life was governed by superstition.

The position of women was very unenviable. Though there was no practice of veil like feudal society, they were socially and economically unfree. They could not play independent role in social, economic or political affairs. Their marital status was even worse. They had to live, at times, with more than a dozen co-wives. Also, they were considered a burden and in many cases an attempt was made to bury them alive to which the Qur'ān also refers in a verses (And when the one buried alive is asked. For what sin was she killed, 81: 8-9).

Economic scene as no less depressing. The social woes of the weaker sections were indescribable. Tribal structure was collapsing (in economic sense) and a commercial oligarchy was coming into being. This oligarchy was motivated by material greed and was blatantly disregarding even tribal obligations. As a result the orphans, the widows and the needy (*miskin*) greatly suffered. Also, there was innumerable slaves and slave girls. They were condemned to work without any reward. The slave girls were compelled to cohabit with their masters. These slaves existed on the periphery of the society. They had no human dignity.

Also, among the free there were many who had been completely marginalised. They were condemned to provide cheap labour. The commercial caravans passed through Makkah. The camels carrying commercial goods had to be loaded and unloaded. This cheap labour was provided by the poor and the needy, those existing on the margin of the society. Neither could they protest or unionise. Such a concept did not exist at that time. The artisans too were condemned to struggle for bare existence. They included tanners, smiths, carpenters and others. The neo-rich, on the other hand led life of luxury.

Politically the situation was less dismal. Arabs were fiercely independent people and jealously guarded their independence. No attempt to subjugate them ever succeeded whether at the hands of Romans or the Sassanids. They thus lived independently in Arabian peninsula. However, as pointed out earlier, there was no unity among the Arabs divided as they were among various tribes fiercely fighting against each other. Moreover, there was no concept of unity beyond ones own tribe. Such a unity was considered blasphemous, to say the least. Only few tribes in Makkah tried to form inter-tribal corporations for commercial purposes. The commercial caravans were oftenly owned by individuals belonging to different tribes.

Muhammad (ﷺ) appears on the social scene of Makkah in such despicable conditions. He had no schooling as neither was it encouraged (as pointed out earlier) nor it had any functional value (except for commercial contracts, a need which was newly emergent and was met with the help of a few literates in Makkah). He was orphaned at an early age, led life of penury and was steeled through struggles of life. He married a rich widow at the age of 25 and began to lead the life of a recluse in the cave of Hira where he spent time brooding over the social, religious, political and economic situation around him. He then literally burst over the Makkahn scene at the age of 40 to liberate his people as well as the whole humanity.

Liberate from what? whom? and why?. Liberation from ignorance, superstition, oppression, slavery and injustice. Liberation to give dignity and freedom of thought and action. These are the

noble ideals which not only provide inspiration to live but also encourage creativity and purposeful action. Also, Muhammad worked for the liberation of the oppressed, the poor and the needy and the ignorant. He was, in this project of liberation, not only a teacher and philosopher, but also an activist, participant and fighter. Under his inspiration the Arabs not only liberated themselves but also sought to liberate others by shattering the two greatest oppressive empires of the world then i.e., the Roman and the Sassanid. Their stormy victories were ensured as they were seen by the oppressed of these mighty empires as liberators.

We would now discuss the liberative elements and liberative aspects of Muhammad (PBUH) the Prophet's teachings and actions. For any liberative praxis, knowledge is a must. In fact it is knowledge which provides perspective for liberation and for liberative actions. It is thus not for nothing that the very first revelation (see chapter 96 THE CLOT) came with the word *igra* i.e., read. The following verses in the chapter also lay stress on acquiring *ilm* (i.e., knowledge). The verses run as follows: "Read in the name of thy Lord who creates (the implications being one should study and acquire knowledge of creation), creates man from a clot; Read, thy Lord is most Bountiful One who has taught (man) the use of pen, taught man what he did not know."

It is important to note here that there was no concept even of pen among the Arabs, literacy being very rare. Here the Qur'an stresses the use of pen as it is through pen that knowledge is transmitted from one place to another and from one generation to the other, thus revelation to the Prophet began with stress on knowledge and its transmission to others. Elsewhere the Qur'an also likens knowledge to *nur* (light). Thus Allah led the Arabs (as they were the immediate people around the Prophet then) from darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. One can understand what liberative effect this acquisition of knowledge must have had on the minds of the Arabs. The Prophet further reinforced this by making acquisition of knowledge obligatory (*faridat*) for both men

as well as women. The Prophet also induced his followers to acquire knowledge even if it be in China (Sin).

Undoubtedly these exhortations by the holy and the Prophet had great liberative effect on the Arabs and his other followers. The Arabs who had nothing but abhorrence for knowledge became masters of learning within a century. During the Abbasid period the Arabs and the other Muslims acquired the entire treasure of Break knowledge so much so that they were referred to as its foster father. Not only this they produced great philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes and several other philosophers, masters of medicine, chemists, geographers, physicists and mathematicians to whom even the west is indebted. The Muslims could have hardly achieved this excellence in knowledge but for the exhortations of the Qurʾān and the Prophet. The Arabs thus were completely liberated from ignorance.

### **Social Liberation**

Liberation from ignorance had deeper consequences in other areas. The Arabs, as pointed out earlier, were greatly constrained by tribal outlook. This outlook was completely shattered by the Qurʾānic teaching that entire human kind has originated from the same man and woman and no one has any distinction over the other on the basis of tribe, nation, race or colour. These divisions only serve the purpose of identification. The most honoured is the one who is most just and most pious. The Qurʾānic verse runs thus, "Oh humankind! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might recognise one another, verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is one who is most righteous (and just)."

This was most revolutionary concept not only for the Arabs, but for entire human race. The barriers of colour and race are powerful even today so much so that the UNO had to stress equality of all irrespective of caste, creed and colour in its charter of human rights which is considered most liberative and rightly so. But the Qurʾānic charter anticipated this by several centuries. The Prophet

demonstrated this by elevating an emancipated Negro slave Bilal to the status of his *muaddin* (i.e., caller to the prayer), an honour coveted by many free men among the Arabs. It is after him that some black Muslims in these states have formed a Bilalian society. By elevating a freed Negro slave to this status the Prophet clearly demonstrated that human dignity is above all, colour as well as social status. There can't be more liberative act than this.

The Prophet also fought against superstitions and supernatural beliefs. He refused to perform miracle. He projected himself not as a supernatural being but as a human like any one else. The Qur'an was very categorical about it. The Qur'an ridicules any demand for miracles. In chapter 17 there are several verses to this effect (see verses from 90 to 95). The unbelievers demanded miracles like causing a spring to gush forth from earth, or to create garden of palms and grapes among which rivers flow forth abundantly, or cause heaven to come down upon us in pieces or bring Allah and the angels face to face or you create for yourself a house of gold or thou ascend into heaven and so on. Allah wants people to accept the guidance as it comes to them through the Prophet. Had there been angels living on earth we would have sent down an angel for guidance. Among human beings only a human being would be sent as Prophet. Thus the Qur'an rejected the demand of unbelievers to perform miracles. The only miracle was the Qur'an itself.

The Qur'an's style was simple, fluent and powerful. It was the first example of a powerful purposeful prose. Its diction was urbane and classical. Its style and power simply astounded the Arabs who were so proud of their inimitable style and diction. They could not rival its style despite repeated challenge. Still they continue to deny the truth of its message.

A revolutionary, radical and liberative movement stresses reason as reason teaches one to question and critically examine. The Qur'an revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) lays stress on reason, not on mystery or miracles. The Qur'an repeatedly calls upon the people to think and addresses them as *ulil albab* which means 'of reason'. *Lubb*

in Arabic means an essence of a thing and reason is considered as essence of humanity and thus by inference *lubb* is used for reason, its plural being *albab*.

Also, those who follow ancestral tradition and do not change are called *a' am* (blind) and those who think as *basr* (i.e., one who can see). It goes on to say, "Say (Oh Muhammad (PBUH)): I say not to you, I have with me the treasures of Allah, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel; I follow only that which is revealed to me. Say: Are the blind and the seeing alike? do you not them reflect." (6:50)

In this verse once again Muhammad (PBUH) is asked to deny all supernatural powers and preference is given to one who sees and reflects. Thus appeal is to reason, not to tradition. In another verse the Qur'an says; "Does one of you like to have a garden of palms and vines with streams following in it - he has therein all kinds of fruits - and old age has over taken him and he has weak offspring; when (lo!) a whirlwind with fire in it smites it so it becomes blasted. Thus Allah makes the signs clear to you that you may think." (2: 266)

Here a very earthly example has been given which is often experienced and there is nothing supernatural or superstitious about it and then the Qur'an invites us to think and reflect on it. Nowhere the Qur'an requires us to accept anything blindly. Signs are made clear and then we are urged to think over it. Islam was a revolutionary movement which wanted to liberate people from shackles of tradition and irrational conventions perpetrated through ages. Hence it invites its addressees again to reflect and think, not to follow blindly. It had liberative effect on thousands of the Prophet's followers.

Muhammad(PBUH) was basically engaged in liberating the weaker sections of the society, both those who were sexually weaker and economically weaker. Women, as pointed out earlier, suffered great disabilities in Arabia in particular and in the whole world in general. Muhammad(PBUH), announced through the Qur'an a charter of rights for women. Qur'an for the first time gave them rights, never conceded them before in any legal code. Women's

individual existence as a legal entity was accepted without any qualification for the first time. As far as the Qur'ān was concerned she could contract marriage (without any marriage guardian), could divorce her husband without any condition, inherit her father, mother and other relatives, could own property in her own absolute right (neither her father nor her brother or husband could tamper with it or deprive her of it), could have custody of her children (upto certain age after which children would exercise their option) and could take her own free decisions.

It is also laid down in the Qur'ān that her male relatives cannot coerce her in anyway even in matters of marriage. No legal charter before Islam gave these rights to women. In Europe women could not even own property in their own right even upto late nineteenth century. In fact the Qur'ān announced in clear words that in her rights and obligations she is equal to man (see the Qur'ān 2: 228). It was nothing short of revolution for her. For the first time in history she was given legal status equal to that of man and she was liberated from the clutches of male domination.

The only stigma she can be said to have suffered was permission given to man to marry more than one wife (upto four). This no doubt detracts from her status of equality with man. However, one has to take a historical view of the matter. The Arabs married any number of wives; Islam restricted it to four. Earlier multiple marriages were just for the sake of pleasure and without any reason. Islam put strict conditions. The marriages were not to be allowed just for pleasure. It was permitted strictly in case of orphans and widows, to take care of such unprotected women (both the Qur'ānic verses on polygamy are with reference to the orphans and widows and their properties. Also, the Qur'ān lays down a strict condition of equal treatment in all matters including in the matter of love. Thus the Qur'ān says, "And if you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, or three, or four, but if you fear that you will not do justice, then (marry) only one or that which your right hands posses." (4:3)

Thus it would be seen that it is not a general license to marry more than one wife for pleasure. Also, it was historical necessity. It is no more necessary. As it militates against the more cardinal principle of justice, there would be nothing un-Islamic to either ban it or severely restrict it and permit only in exceptional cases. Many Islamic countries have done it. Also there is no concept of purdah (veil) in Qur'ān. Qur'ān had only prescribed pulling down a bit the head gear in order to discriminate free women from slave-girls as unbelievers used to tease Muslim women and when caught used to get away by saying "we thought she was a slave-girl". The Qur'ān nowhere requires women to cover their faces or hide themselves.

These mild disabilities on women should also be seen in sociological context. If the society, or sociological context changes these disabilities should no longer be imposed. It is important to note that the Qur'ān first accepts the concepts of freedom and individual dignity of women and then, in view of the historical and sociological context, proceeds to impose these mild disabilities referred to above. Basic principle of freedom and individual dignity is more important than the sociological disabilities. The earlier concept would have precedence over the latter as it is fundamental, not contingent.

## Economic Justice

The Qur'ān lays great emphasis on distributive justice. It is totally against accumulation and hoarding of wealth. It condemns accumulated wealth as strongly as possible. It also exhorts the people to spend to take care of orphans, widows, needy and the poor.

It does not want the wealth to circulate only among the rich (59:7). Also, it warns the people that wealth should not be counted again and again nor one should think it can give eternal life. One who accumulates and counts again and will certainly be hurled into crushing disaster and what is this crushing disaster? It is hell fire, which rises over the heart (see chapter 104). Again in chapter 9, verse

34 it gives severe warning to those who accumulate wealth and do not spend it in the way of Allah. The Qurʾān also exhorts the believers to spend whatever is surplus (after fulfilling basic needs) (2:219).

The practice of usury in Makkah was back-breaking and a great many people were in debt. The Qurʾān strongly denounced usury and warned those who perpetrates it to be prepared for a war with Allah and His Messenger (see verses 275 to 278 in chapter 2 and verse 39 of chapter 30). Many scholars strongly feel that *riba* means not only usury but exploitation in general and include exploitative profit.

The Prophet also disapproved of share-cropping (*mukhabira*, *muhaqila*) which again is an exploitative practice. He also banned speculation in every form to prevent exploitation of the poor at the hands of the rich and powerful. For example, he banned buying of unripened standing crop as it often results in exploitation of the needy peasant. He approved of only legitimate margin of profit (as a reward for one's work and entrepreneurship) and strongly disapproves of hoarding, black-marketing etc. he not only permits the hungry to snatch food from one who has excess of it but also declares him a martyr if he dies in the process of procuring it.

Also, the Qurʾān strongly denounces *zulm* (injustice, oppression) and permits the oppressed to fight against oppression. It says, "And what reason have you not to fight in the way of Allah, and of the weak among the men and the women and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and grant us from Thee a friend, and grant us from Thee a helper." (4:75). Thus one who fights for the weak is the helper and friend of the Lord. The Qurʾān not only includes believers to fight for the weak and oppressed, but promises that the oppressed would lead and inherit this earth (28:5).

Thus it would be seen that the Qurʾān is a charter of liberation for the oppressed. Islam exercises its option for the poor and the oppressed and has no kind words for *mutrifun* (i.e., those live in luxury). When we wish to destroy a town, The Qurʾān says, we induce its rich to transgress all limits and we destroy that town with

utter destruction (17:16). Thus it is clear that when the rich become insensitive to the sufferings of the poor and needy the whole social structure becomes topsy-turvy and is ultimately destroyed at the hands of the revolution.

### Attitude Towards other Religions

Openness, tolerance and respect for other religions is another important liberative element. The Qur'ān makes it clear there is no compulsion in religion (2:256) and that for you is your religion, for me is my religion (109:6). Qur'ān also exhorts Muslims not to abuse those who call upon besides Allah lest they abuse Allah through ignorance (6:109). Also, Qur'ān teaches that a believer should show equal respect to all the prophets) They all believe in Allah and his angels and His books and His messengers. We make no distinctions (4:150-51).

That is why a Muslim shows equal respect to all the Prophets right upto Muhammad whether named or not in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān also declares unequivocally that paradise is not that the monopoly of any religious group. Whosoever submits himself entirely to Allah and he is a doer of good (*muhsin*), he has his reward from his Lord (2:112).

Thus the Qur'ān did not condemn any religion as false but stressed that the priests have corrupted the teachings for their own interest. All the prophets had brought Allah's message. Qur'ān never preached disrespect, let alone hatred or violence against any religion.

However, within three decades after the death of the Prophet, Islam lost its liberative and democratic character and became part of monarchical establishment under the Umayyads. Prophet had gathered the poor, the oppressed and the slaves around him and never hesitated to suffer along with them. Now the Umayyad emperors gathered powerful tyrants and oppressors around them and ruthlessly suppressed all those who challenged their oppressive rule. Number of slaves multiplied, women subjugated

and confined to harems, female slaves sexually abused, non-Arabs discriminated against and liberative teachings of Islam replaced by fatalistic outlook. Dogma of *jabr* (determinism fatalism) was actively propagated and that of *gadr* (freedom to act) was suppressed. After development of monarchy feudal values became supreme. Power hierarchy developed, sociopolitical equality was lost and equality confined only to the lines of prayers in the mosque, women came to be completely subjugated and their social status was very much eroded and Arab domination established firmly.

It was steep decline down and Islam lost all its liberative thrust (except in dissident movements and rebellions) and could never recapture its earlier spirit when Muhammad (PBUH) preached and practiced.



# RECONSTRUCTION OF ISLAM THOUGHT



**H**ow do we look at a religion? As a set of rituals, dogmas and institutions? Or as values and thought system? Some emphasise the former and others the latter. Generally the masses of people are more concerned with rituals, dogmas and institutions whereas the intellectuals lay more emphasis on thought system and values, particularly on the thought system. For the masses, religion is nothing but performance of certain rituals as laid down and to have belief in certain dogmas formulated by the learned scholars. For them anyone who deviates from performance of these rituals or questions any of these dogmas is a 'heretic' worthy of condemnation.

The intellectuals may lay more emphasis on the thought system of a religion but there are those who accept the thought system as inherited and there are those who are intellectually quite active and consider it necessary to rethink the thought system of the religion they have inherited. In a dynamic society, there are much greater possibilities of rethinking the thought system. In a stagnant or a closed society such possibilities are smothered. The early Islamic society was highly dynamic and full of vitalities. Islam was a great revolution, not only religious but also social and economic. It had upturned all old ideas and ideologies. It gave human society a new value system and heightened the human sensitivity for change for the better. Islam put greater emphasis on change and called

everything old into question. It encouraged people to rethink the beliefs of their ancestors. All that ancestors believed in was not necessarily right and beneficial.

Thus in early Islam change was never thought to be a 'sin'. The Qur'an laid great emphasis on 'ilm as well as 'amal (knowledge and practice). The Arab peninsula was an area of darkness in many ways. Only poetry was their passion. The other area of information they were proud of was what they called *ansab* i.e., the family tree. For them the nobility (*sharf*) of ancestors was more important than their own. They were greatly proud of their ancestry. Islam changed all this. It brought about complete revolution in the Arab mind set which spread to other areas conquered by the Arabs. The emphasis was on present and future, not on the past. The Individual was brought at the centre, not the tribe. The individual was made responsible for everything, not the tribe one belonged to.

### Knowledge and practice

There was no quest for knowledge in the pre-Islamic Arabia. In fact any knowledge except that of ones tribal ancestry was derided upon. The Qur'an, on the other hand, put all the emphasis on 'ilm (knowledge) which is a very comprehensive word in Arabic. 'Ilm is used for science as well. It includes knowledge of everything created by Allah including the knowledge of creator himself. Allah invites human beings to think, to brood and to reflect on the whole universe, on the creation of Allah, the stars, the earth, the plants and the animals. Also, the Qur'an lays great emphasis on induction rather than deduction. The former leads to objective knowledge of the universe and latter to speculation. Modern science is based on induction rather than deduction.

Also, knowledge was given further practical orientation by laying equal emphasis on 'amal (practice). 'Ilm without 'amal was projected as bereft of any benefit to humanity. Correct knowledge ('ilm al-yaqin) and healthy practice ('amalsalih) is the most desirable synthesis. The word 'ilm al-yaqin (i.e., knowledge with conviction)

is of great value. It is thus clear that the Qurʾān neither encourages superficial knowledge nor allows its instrumentalisation. Qurʾān has been described as *hudan lil muttaqin* i.e., a guide for the God fearing or the pious. Thus the term *ʿilm* is not only comprehensive but also value-oriented. Knowledge must not only be true but should also be based on conviction; it should not only advance the state of information about the universe but should also serve the humanity.

Similarly *ʿamal* (practice) as pointed out above, has to be nothing but *salih* (healthy). The practice, based on knowledge and conviction, must promote the health of society. What kind of revolution it was in a stagnant society of Arabian peninsula whose whole universe was its own tribe cannot be easily imagined by us today. It was nothing short of a total break from the past; a break which changed the whole quality of social life and brought about tremendous advancement in knowledge. The ritual system of Islam - *ibadah* - was also not devoid of value-system.

Islam does not accord any priority whatsoever to race, tribe, language, creed or colour. The Qurʾān makes categorical statement to this effect (see 49:13 and 30:22). It also strictly forbade the Muslims from making any distinction between an Arab and non-Arab and a white and a black. The Prophet, in order to effectively demolish any such hierarchical distinctions, appointed a black liberated slave from Ethiopia, Bilal Habshi, to give *adhān* ( i.e., call Muslims to prayer), a distinction, many Arabs close to the Prophet, intensely desired. But the Prophet accorded this distinction to a black slave to emphasise the importance of equality of all human beings.

As anthropologists tell us, in a tribal society the main fulcrum of knowledge is knowledge of received traditions and tribal customs. Any other knowledge which is not related to the tribe is totally meaningless. The ideas of cosmos, creation and all related notions originate from the tribal practices. The frontiers of knowledge, in other words, cannot transcend the boundaries of the tribal universe. Islam, however, broke these tribal boundaries and made knowledge coterminous with the universe i.e., the entire creation of Allah.

It is also very interesting to note that the Arab world which had never known beyond tribal customs and traditions, became the fore-runner in the world of jurisprudence. We may have several problems today with the *ṣarī'ah* formulations. But, the juris corpus of Islam, was a highly progressive body of laws in those days.

## Justice

The notion of justice is very central to Islam (5:8). And it is justice in its absolute and varied sense. The Qur'ānic notion of justice is quite comprehensive. No Muslim jurist could ever ignore the significance of justice in his legal formulations. But how justice was understood to have been done has of course been debatable. There may be arguments about how justice was thought to have been done in medieval ages and what is modern notion of justice. But that does not reduce the significance of justice as a Qur'ānic doctrine. The relativity of medieval notion of justice and its modern notion is understandable.

The Qur'ānic notion of justice was not tribal but universal. And this made all the difference. The Qur'ānic notion of justice is so universal that it laid down that even the enmity with any one else should not come in the way of dispensing justice (5:8). In a tribal society justice was confined to within the tribal limits. There was no question of justice vis a vis other tribes. Islam, on the other hand, lays down that justice be done even to an enemy. The Qur'ān gives the principle of justice as a norm; the legal doctors applied it to various issues which arose from time to time, according to their own ability, understanding and sociocultural background.

It is necessary to understand that it is justice which has to be rigorously applied to all the issues in framing laws. It is the very foundation of the juris corpus of Islam. It is more central than the corpus of laws inherited by us. As the legal doctors applied the notion of justice in keeping with their own circumstances we must rethink the issues in *ṣarī'ah* laws based on the notion of centrality of justice particularly in the sphere of family laws.

## Women

Here we would like to point out that the position of women in the Qur'ān is not subordinate to that of man. Certain verses (like 4:34) are used selectively, and out of context, to project subordination of woman to man ignoring several other verses (like 2:228, 9:71, 33:35 and others) which clearly indicate equality of man and woman. The verses 9:71 and 33:35 are quite central in this respect. In verse 9:71 men and women are not only shown each others friends but also charged with equal responsibilities of enjoining good and forbidding evil, keeping up prayer and paying the poor-rate (*zakāt*). How could then women be inferior to men?

Thus we should not hesitate in having a second look at the *ṣarī'ah* laws which have in built medieval biases towards women. The Qur'ān was the first scripture in the world to accord equal dignity to man and woman. Prior to Islam even great Greek philosophers thought that animal and women have no soul and hence women deserve no legal rights. Women could not inherit, let alone holding property in her own right, even in Roman law, prior to Islam.

The spirit of the Qur'ān is more important than the opinions of medieval legal doctors and hence entire corpus of *ṣarī'ah* laws in this regard should be re-examined and re-thought. Also, as pointed out in some of my books (*Rights of Women in Islam*, *The Qur'ān*, *Women and Modern Society* and *Status of Women in Islam*) there never was unanimity on these issues among the legal doctors themselves. The opinions differed from one legal doctor to another and on several issues even the disciples differed from their masters. While some legal doctors do not even admit women's evidence on hudud matters, others, like Imam Abu Hanifa, maintain that a woman can even become qadi on the basis of verse 9:71. The *ṣarī'ah* laws as formulated by early Muslim *fuqaha'* (i.e., legal doctors) need to be thoroughly reviewed. The centrality of justice must be asserted.

## Rationality

Knowledge, as pointed out above, was quite central to Islam. Some of the *ulamā*, however, confined knowledge to knowledge of *din* (i.e., religion of Islam). But there is no strong evidence in the Qur'an or *sunna* in this respect. It is product of theologians' own mind. Since theologians were primarily concerned with religious or theological matters, they tried to confine knowledge to theological issues alone. Imitating these theologians many people still argue that 'ilm should be confined to the 'ilm al-din and reject other spheres of knowledge. But this view is no more a central view in the world of Islam today.

In fact this view that knowledge in the Qur'an is confined to the knowledge of *din* did not go uncontested even in the early history of Islam. Knowledge from different sources and from different fields was not only accepted by early Muslims but was also creatively advanced by them. The entire corpus of Greek knowledge in various sciences, mathematics and philosophy was transferred into Arabic language and passed on to Europe. No wonder than that HG Wells, the noted British historian, has described Arabs as foster father of knowledge. The Europe had lost contact with the Greek treasure of knowledge and they re-established contact with it only through the agency of Arabs. The House of Wisdom (*Dar al-Hikmah*) established by the Abbasids fulfilled this task.

The Muslims assimilated this knowledge and also enriched it immensely. Their own contribution in enriching the Greek knowledge acquired by them was no mean contribution. Also, they imbibed knowledge from other sources as well i.e., Persian and Indian sources, besides their own Islamic sources. The Mu'tazilah were a party of rationalists who gave primacy to reason. For them reason was the test of faith and not vice versa. Thus if reason holds something good, *ṣari'ah* will also hold it good. The Asha'riyya, on the other hand, held something good because *ṣari'ah* held it good even if reason contradicted it.

The Mu'tazilah also gave primacy to justice along with reason. This is what the modern rationalists also plead. Thus the Mu'tazilah

were as fervent advocates of reason and justice as the modern rationalists are. But the modern rationalists tend to be atheists which Mu'tazilah were not. Mu'tazilah were also known as the party of *Tawhid wa al-'adl* i.e., party of unity of Godhood and justice. Thus Mu'tazilah were essentially theists but also rationalists.

Islam, as all of us know, had arisen in Arabian peninsula and had its vitality and practicability. Practical rationality remained quite central to it. But when it spread to the ancient centres of great cultures like parts of Eastern Byzantine Empire, or Persian Empire and India, it was confronted with entirely different mind set. These great civilizations were based, as pointed out before, on speculative reason and sophisticated intellectual achievements. This had both positive and negative impact on Islamic thought.

### Resisting outdated cultures

The Islamic thought became inward looking on one hand, and, lost some of its most fundamental concerns like justice for weaker sections of society. These centres of civilization were centres of feudal culture and along with feudal sophistication, feudal values were also imbibed. Thus what Islamic thought gained in swing, lost in its sweep. Islam spread with great rapidity because of its great concern with justice for weaker sections of society but now it became an integral part of a huge Islamic empire and nearly lost its sensitivity towards suffering of the downtrodden of the society.

The Qur'an which was so direct and simple in its teachings, became a target for exercises in sophisticated inner meanings justifying hierarchical values which came to be acquired through feudal cultures of Roman and Persian empires. Monarchy became an acceptable institution and blind and uncritical obedience to the ruling monarch on one hand, and religious establishment of the time, on the other, became very common. Disobedience to them was construed to be disobedience to Allah and His Book. The earlier critical faculty and concern for justice was totally lost. It was in this atmosphere that Islamic thought

became totally stagnant and part of oppressive establishment. There is great need to recapture its earlier vitality, dynamism and sensitivity. Critical evaluation and not blind obedience, is closer to the Islamic spirit. What predominates today, however, is Islamic theological thought, on one hand, and, age-old *ṣarī'ah* formulation, on the other. It has made Islamic thought totally stagnant.

What is to be noted is that what goes in the name of theology is human construct and divine commandments as understood by human agency under a set of *sociocultural* influences. For example, *ʿIlm al-Kalam* (Islamic dialectics) came into existence as a reaction to the widening influence of Greek philosophy and Greek sciences during the Abbasid period. This became an integral part of Islamic theology. Kalam, undoubtedly influenced the great minds of Islamic world of the time and also the succeeding generation for several centuries. But now Kalam cannot be treated as unchangeable. There is urgent need for a new *ʿilm al-kalam* in the light of modern corpus of scientific knowledge.

### Advocating a change culture

A religion consists of several sub-systems like ritual system (*ʿibādat*), institutional system (like *zakāt*, etc.), thought system and value system (like equality, justice, compassion etc.). Of these ritual and value-systems are permanent and cannot be changed under any circumstances. But the thought system could and must change, if religion has to keep pace with time, its thought system should change. There is misconception among Muslims about the Qurʾānic verse 5:3 (i.e., This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you...). They think that now what we have inherited is perfect in every respect and there is no need for re-thinking in any sense at all. Our *din* is perfect. The *din* is undoubtedly perfect but the meaning and significance of *din* should be understood properly. One cannot include the *kalam*, for example, in *din*. The Islamic thought system has been evolved by theologians

who are human beings and no human person can ever be perfect. Human beings think under certain influences which they cannot transcend as human beings. All divine commands are sought to be understood by human agents under certain sociocultural influences and these influences are reflected in the religious-thought system. Once we understand this there will be no resistance to change in the thought system. This will bring about a great revolution.

The Islamic *ṣarī'ah* is also an embodiment of Islamic values. Islamic *ṣarī'ah* is nothing but a sincere attempt by the *fuqaha'* (Islamic jurists) to apply divine commands and the Islamic values to a number of issues like marriage, divorce, inheritance, nature of evidence, crimes like theft, rape, adultery, division of property etc. This attempt to approach these issues in the light of Islamic values and divine commands was also influenced by the sociocultural circumstances of the time. They could not have applied Islamic values and divine commands to these issues in vacuum. There is great deal of change in these external influences and hence many of these *ṣarī'ah* formulations stand in need of change. This change does not amount to tempering with the divine commands but making yet another human attempt in the light of our own experiences and our own circumstances.

If we evolve this understanding of religion the dynamics of problem changes and religion will be even greater force to bring about spiritual transformation for the better. Naturally there will be differences in opinion while bringing about these changes. We should not be afraid of differences. These differences, if honest and sincere, provide greater vigour to human thought. The founders of the different schools of jurisprudence during the second and third centuries of Islam were not afraid of differences. Why should we be?

## MEANING OF ISLAMIC WORSHIP



Every religion prescribes its own prayer system, Islam also does. Every religion has its own unique system and it is this uniqueness which is precious. Islam prescribes its prayer system without challenging prayer systems of other religions as it recognises the uniqueness of prayer systems of other religions. It puts it succinctly as under: "And everyone has direction to which he turns (himself), so vie with one another in good works." (2:148). Thus it is clear that everyone has ones own way of worshipping and one should not denounce each other's way of worship. According to Imam Raghīb the word *wijhat* is more comprehensive. It means not only direction but also entire *ṣari'ah*. Thus according to Raghīb what Qur'ān states in the above verse is that each religion has its own *ṣari'ah* which has its own uniqueness.

There are different words used by the Qur'ān for worship, the most frequent being *'ibādah*. The word *'ibādah* is also used in senses more than one. It is derived from the word *'ubudiyyah* which means to express ones humility and humbleness.' But the word *'ibadah* carries in it even greater sense of humility; it, in fact, carries the utter sense of humility. Thus the first requirement of worship in Islam is to feel utterly humble before the Greatest Being and Most Powerful Allah. Human beings are created by All Mighty Allah and to worship Him they must develop within themselves

the utter sense of humility. Thus the Islamic concept of worship implies humility. Thus by implication it also becomes an essential part of Islamic ethic. Thus arrogance is unethical. No wonder then that Qur'an repeatedly denounces arrogance and calls it *istikbar*. Its opposite is both '*istid'af* (to be weak) and '*ubudiyyat*.

Pharaoh (Fir'aun) has been described in the Qur'an as *mustakbir* (having arrogance of power) as also the Satan. The direct implication is that those who are arrogant are like Pharaoh or Satan. The true servant of Allah has a sense of utter humility and believes that only Allah is the Greatest – *Allahu Akbar*. This is very basic formula of Islamic worship. Anyone who is arrogant and has a feeling of powerful cannot be true worshipper of Allah. A true worshipper of Allah is one who has no trace of arrogance, of *ananiyyah* or egotism. This has another important implication. It negates the very concept of one being ruler over the other and thus creates democratic ethos and human dignity. Elsewhere also the Qur'an lays emphasis on dignity of entire humanity – children of Adam when it says: "And surely, We have honoured the children of Adam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We provide them with good things, and We have made them to excel highly most of those whom We have created." (17:70)

Thus once we accept Allah as the Greatest by implication all human beings are His humble servant without any distinction of caste, colour, creed or race and all are equal before Him and no one is superior to the other. The Qur'an clearly states that "Oh mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made your tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most pious (God-conscious) of you." (49:13).

It will be seen that it is very important statement of the Qur'an and is quite fundamental to the concept of worship in Islam. All human beings are equal in the sight of Allah and distinction of tribes, families etc. are only to know each other and not to take pride – leading to arrogance in ones belonging to one nation or the

other, or one tribe or family or other. The real distinction could be only of piety, honesty and integrity of character and most honoured in the eyes of Allah is one who is most pious. Any Muslim who feels superior to the other on the basis of tribe or family or nation or colour cannot be true worshipper of Allah as this air of superiority leads to arrogance which is quite contrary to the very concept of *'ibadah* and *'ubudiyyah*. One who worships Allah must intrinsically subscribe to the concept of equality of all human beings. There is no place in Islam of 'lowly' or 'high' status at all.

This is further symbolised by the congregational prayer in Islam. All have to stand in one line in Islamic congregational prayer. A true worshipper of Allah would show equal respect to all human beings irrespective of their origin, their identity and their status. Any worshiper who apparently stands in one line but carries the feeling of superiority over others in his heart, cannot be construed as true and free worshipper. Such a person is not bondsman of Allah but of his vain desire. He who is bondsman of his own desire cannot be a free person and can never claim to enjoy the pleasure of a free man's worship. Thus a false sense of superiority is the very negation of true worship. A free man's worship is based on passionate belief in freedom and dignity of all human beings as Allah alone is creator of all and He alone is real object of worship.

Thus a passionate belief in one God also assumes great significance in Islamic tradition, because only such belief in oneness of God leads to the negation of worshipping lesser beings. Lack of this belief can lead to worship of human being by another human being and thus deifying some among us or deifying some other objects. This would also lead to superiority of some over others negating the concept of equal dignity for all children of Adam as stated in the Qur'ān. The Sufis – the mystics of Islam – base their concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (unity of Being) on this concept of *Tawhid* (unity of Godhood) and it is this concept of unity of Being which demolishes all distinctions. The concept of Absolute Being is possible only if we believe in the concept of absolute unity of

humankind. And Sufis made no such distinctions. Distinctions invariably lead to a sense of superiority and hence go against the concept of worship of a True Being.

In Islam an act of worship is a means, not a goal. The goal is a true moral and ethical conduct. The Qur'an says "Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil; and certainly the remembrance of Allah is the greatest (act)." (29:45) Many treat prayer *salah* as a goal, not a means as stated in the above Qur'anic verse. A real worshipper would never indulge in any indecent act (*fahsha*) or would never go near an evil. The important question is what is evil? The word used for evil here is *munkar* i.e., anything which is rejected by the society as harmful. Anything which is harmful to human society must be rejected and must be desisted from. There are some evils which are absolute in nature and must be avoided irrespective of time and place. Injustice and falsehood are such evils. The greatest evil thus is being untruthful.

One of the names of Allah is *haq* i.e., truth. Thus truthfulness becomes the important element of Allah's worship. Anyone who deviates from the path of truth cannot claim to be worshipper of Allah. A true worshipper of Allah will never compromise on the question of truth. He will gladly sacrifice his own interests to uphold the cause of truth. Those who sacrifice everything including their own lives deserve to be true worshipper of Allah. A true worshiper would not entertain falsehood in any form. A true worshiper's tongue will speak nothing but truth. He will never utter anything which is not truth. One has to be fearless to be truthful. Only one who fears Allah and no one else can speak truth and avoid falsehood.

Also, Allah is Just and one who worships Allah cannot be unjust. Justice is part of worship and one who works tirelessly for establishing justice in the society is real worshiper of Allah. The path of truth and justice is paved with difficulties and sacrifices. A true worshiper does not mind in the least to face these difficulties and make sacrifices for the cause of justice and truth. To court martyrdom for the cause of truth and justice is the highest form of

worship one can think of. Thus the Qur'an describes true worshiper as follows: "The patient and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend and those who ask divine protection in the morning times." (3:16). Truth requires inexhaustible degree of patience and hence the above verse refers to the quality of patience along with truthfulness.

Allah has been described as *Rabb al-'Alamin* in the Qur'an i.e., sustainer of the universe. *Rabb*, according to Imam Raghīb, is one who takes a thing from one stage of perfection to another stage until it reaches the final stage of perfection. Allah is *Rabb* in this sense and any of His worshiper has to work tirelessly for achieving this objective. He or she will do nothing which will obstruct this path of perfection. This also includes the protection of environment and ecological balance. For the perfection of our world its ecological balance is very vital. The greed for consumption leads to destruction of ecological balance. Thus a worshiper cannot be insensitive to the destruction of environment.

The quality of *rububiyyat* (sustaining) will be incomplete without mercy and compassion. Thus in the very first chapter of the Qur'an Allah is described as *Rabb*, Merciful and Compassionate. Only one who is merciful and compassionate can take this universe from one stage of perfection to another stage until it reaches the ultimate stage of perfection. And one who engages oneself in this work on human plane has to have qualities of mercy and compassion for all i.e., for entire humanity on one hand, and, for all the creation of Allah, on the other. A person who is compassionate will not wantonly destroy anything and would show feeling of loving care for all creatures. Thus a worshiper has to be compassionate and merciful towards all.

The Qur'an also makes it clear that the act of prayer is not merely a ritual to be performed. It is an act which transforms ones inner being and makes him or her a perfect person. Perfection of inner being is very important aspect of act of worship. Thus Qur'an describes the act of worship as under: "It is not righteousness that

you turn your faces towards the East and West, but righteous is one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict; and these are they who keep their duty." (2:177)

This is very seminal verse which describes the basic features of worship. Thus worship is not a mere physical act of bowing and prostrating; it is much more than that. The Islamic concept of *'ibadah* is as much social as spiritual. Thus among *'ibadat* are included fasting, *zakāt* and Hajj. These have their own significance. Fasting (*saum*) again is not merely an act of going hungry from sunrise to sun set. It is to learn to control ones desires and make ones soul pure by removing all impurities. Controlling ones desires (what the Qur'an calls *nafsammarah*) is very important element of fasting. It amounts in fact to developing a spirit of renunciation in the midst of having and developing sensitivity towards others suffering. To be sensitive is very important element of *'ibadah*. And fasting is meant to sensitize the people. Only a sensitive soul can stand up and fight against untruth and injustice. Thus the real significance of fasting is to develop sensitivity towards misery and suffering and devote oneself to eradication of all forms of suffering and misery.

Thus in the above verse (2:177) describing the act of true worship emphasis is laid on spending ones wealth out of love for Him for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free. In those days of slavery Islam talked of dignity of all human beings and repeatedly laid emphasis on setting the slaves free. Here in the above verse setting slaves free has been described as an act of worship. Slaves suffer intensely and slavery deprives human beings of their human dignity and hence setting slaves free is an important ingredient of act of worship. A believer or a worshiper would not tolerate any act

of indignity to any human being. Thus he has to be passionately committed to human freedom and dignity and has to work to abolish all forms of human unfreedom, slavery being the most abominable form of human indignity.

The above verse also emphasises the need for spending for the poor, the orphans, the widows and the wayfarers. This is precisely what the payment of *zakāt* (poor rate) is meant for. Thus the Qurʾān says: "*Zakāt* (charity) is only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth), and (to free) the captives, and those in debt, and in the way of Allah and for the wayfarer – an ordinance from Allah." (9:60).

Thus it will be seen that *zakāt* is basically meant for the weaker sections of society so that their sufferings could be minimised. *Zakāt* is also required to be spent on paying off the debts of indebted. It is poor who are indebted. The poor are generally indebted and they must be freed of it if their sufferings are to be eliminated. Again, it is for this reason that the Qurʾān prohibits interest. It is the poor who have to pay high rates of interest for fulfilling their basic needs. Those who charge high rates of interest on consumption loans are real blood suckers and they can never qualify for worship. On the other hand, Qurʾān warns them to be prepared for war with Allah if they do not waive off interest on such loans. In fact war against interest is war against poverty and suffering. Thus it will be seen that establishing social justice is as important part of act of worship as an act of praying. It also has a macro dimension. Entire third world is poor and indebted today. It is the rich countries of the West who exploit the people of the third world and put burden of indebtedness on them. There is need for setting up funds on the line of *zakāt* to waive off debts of third world countries and interest thereon. This would greatly relieve the third world of its suffering and for the West it will be an act of worship. But all of us know that Western countries are not going to oblige the third world. This socio-economic dimension should not be lost sight of.

The Qur'ān is so sensitive to various dimensions of suffering that it specially mentions the problem of wayfarers also. In those days the wayfarers had to face number of difficult problems while travelling. No basic facilities were available on the long and arduous course of journey. The Qur'ān thus required a part of the *zakāt* fund be spent on alleviating the sufferings of these wayfarers. It indicates the degree of sensitivity Qur'ān desires to create in us. It is, therefore, highly necessary that a worshiper be hyper sensitive to others' sufferings in every form. He should work tirelessly for the welfare of an entire humanity.

Hajj is also included in the act of Islamic worship. It is desirable that Muslims should go, if he has means, for Hajj once in life time. What is its significance as an act of worship? What is its social dimension? As pointed out earlier Islam teaches equality of all human beings irrespective of tribe, nation or family. When one meets other human beings one should meet them on plane of equality. Hajj provides this opportunity to a Muslim. Muslims from all over the world congregate for Hajj in Makkah. They belong to different nations, different tribes, different races and colours. Also they are made to wear a simple un-sewn white cloth to further emphasise their equality before God. This huge congregation of human beings from all over globe without any distinction of nation or tribe, caste or colour is recognition of equality of all human beings and it is a practical lesson in ordering a world free of ethnic, national or racial distinctions. This is a great act of worship and the greatest service of humanity, provided it is taken in that spirit. Ka'ba is a house of Allah and all those who come there are equal before Him in every respect. If the hajj is taken in its real spirit it can lead to creating of a world free of all ethnic and racial tensions.

Thus it will be seen that an act of worship is not merely a ritual as it has come to be widely practiced. A real act of worship is much more than mere physical act of bowing and prostrating, or fasting mechanically as a ritual or performing hajj by merely going to Makkah. These acts of worship have other dimensions, which are

very important in reordering and refashioning our world, a world without suffering, a world without discrimination, a world without inequalities and without bondage. Such a world can be created only with a passionate commitment to dignity and freedom of humanity. It is this passionate commitment with humility before Allah which can constitute a real act of a free man's worship which has spiritual as well as social dimension.



## A NEW APPROACH FOR THE ISLAMIC WORLD



The world of Islam is in turmoil today. The events of 11th September year in New York have given it a new jolt. The Muslim world was far from stable even before that. It had experienced many crises, conflicts and revolution. The post-colonial phase in whole of Africa and Asia that way has not seen long lasting stability.

There have been frequent changes of regimes and revolutions. Most of it has been due to post-colonial problems, lack of economic development and widespread discontent. The Islamic world, particularly the West Asian region, has been more conflict prone due to its sensitivity because of oil.

It is oil politics, which has caused much turmoil in this region and from Islamic point of view it is the core area of Islam. It is this core area of Islam, which has been much in turmoil. The western powers prop up in the countries of this region either puppet rulers or support dictators, monarchs and sheikhs who have no popular political base. Iraq, Iran and other countries in the region have witnessed several revolutions or political turmoil. And it being the core area of Islam, the political developments are foisted on it. Islam, thus becomes the cause of dictatorships and it is argued that Islam does not admit of democracy.

These monarchical or dictatorial regimes often survive by enforcing medieval theological formulations, which are based not

on core teachings of the Qur'an and term it Islamisation of politics. Thus this legitimisation game by unpopular rulers has serious social and political repercussions of their own. These rulers then enforce measures which look anti-modern, anti-secular and anti-women and bring upon harsh criticism on Islam.

The media also has its own anti-Islamic prejudices, which make media comments on Islam even harsher. Instead of looking at things in political and social perspective every thing is blamed on Islam and its bigotry. Or *madrassa* system of education comes under attack. It is not *madrassa* system per se which is responsible for social bigotry. On the other hand, *madrassas* are themselves reflection of political manoeuvrings by the undemocratic rulers.

The *madrassas*, which produced Taliban were dominated by people with political aspirations. In fact these *madrassas* were created for producing students who would wage jihad against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. These *madrassas* with *jihadi*-orientation were financed by CIA and Saudis to meet their political needs. *Madrassas* by themselves do not produce bigoted students. *Madrassas* are basically meant for religious education. Pakistani politicians, particularly Zia-ul-Haq, was instrumental in promoting Islamic orthodoxy for his own purposes.

His entire Islamisation project was inspired by his political needs. He promoted Islamic orthodoxy and *jihadi* mentality in Pakistani army also. The ISI was nothing if not political instrument of military rulers. All these had no popular sanction of Pakistani people. There has been no truly democratic regime in Pakistan. During so called democratic spells in between military rules in Pakistan it has always been a controlled or rather authoritarian democracy.

The Taliban regime, which was ultra-orthodox regime in Afghanistan, was backed up by Pakistan, not because it was religiously needed, but because it was political necessity to perpetuate Pakistani hegemony in the region. And jihad has been nothing but legitimisation of political violence in the region.

It is also true that the Saudis have financed extremist Wahabi groups in South Asia region, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight other political influences, particularly Soviet influence during the Soviet period and Iranian influence during the post-Soviet period. The Saudi rulers were shaken by the Islamic revolution in Iran and wanted to counter it by financing extremist Sunni outfits in the region. The Sipah-e-Sahaba and other similar groups depended for their finance, apart from internal sources (ISI or donations from people) on sources such as Saudi.

Also, the Pakistani politicians directly or indirectly incited feelings in Kashmir, not because they really wanted it 'liberated' but it paid rich political dividends internally. And this also could be legitimised through the Islamic idiom of jihad. It does not mean there is no discontent among the Kashmiri people and their grievances are not to be redressed. It is a different issue altogether. The Kashmiri Islam, being Sufistic Islam, has no place for *jihadi* mentality. Its outlook is *sulh-i-kul* (peace with all). But *jihadi* outfits were created and financed to suit political requirements of the Pakistani rulers. The *jihadi* idiom caught on easily among the educated unemployed youth that could let out their frustrations through armed fight.

It is also important to note that there is potential for violence in all societies, including industrially highly developed societies. In American societies too one finds great deal of internal violence as witnessed from time to time. As pointed out by Khaled al-Maeena, editor-in-chief of Arab News, there are many instances of inhuman violence in the American society.

He writes, "Before advising Saudi Arabia on how to monitor its Islamic seminaries, the US should take stock of its own schools, a breeding ground for scandals." He points out that Charles Whitman, the University student who climbed up the university tower in Texas in 1966 with an arsenal of weapons, and then killed 17 of his fellow students and teachers and followers of Charles Manson, who believed the latter was God and blindly obeyed his orders to go on killing spree were not product of any Islamic *madrassa*.

Or violence in Palestine particularly by Hamas is not product of Islamic *madrassa* system. It is product of Israeli policies in Palestine. The media after every suicide bombing rushes to denounce Islamic militancy but hardly says a word about Israeli ruthlessness and overuse of violence against Palestinians in the name of its security. Some papers even go to the extent of saying that the state of Israel is surrounded by number of militant Arab states out to destroy it and it has to take steps to ensure its security. No one points out that Israel alone has capacity to destroy all those states put together and has powerful backing of American arms.

Having said all this it is necessary to urge upon the Muslims to reflect deeply about the state of affairs in Islamic world today. May be the world media over-projects its anti-Islamic biases. Also, it is true that instability in the region is more because of oil politics and western interest but Muslims themselves also cannot escape all responsibilities for promoting peace and development-oriented politics in Muslim countries.

The times are changing fast and there is great deal of necessity for re-thinking the issues. The rulers have their own interests but the Muslims have to work for their own political and social liberation through modern education, on one hand, and, ushering in democratic culture, on the other. It is not enough to say Islam stands for peace, one also has to promote peace in Muslim societies. The *jihadi* discourse will have to be countered by discourse of peace and democracy. Islam itself was a revolution against injustices and ignorance in the Arab society of the time. The Islamic revolution gave values of justice, peace, human dignity and wisdom.

It is thus duty of all Muslims today to create societies in keeping with these fundamental values of Islam and fight, through democratic struggles, for realising these values. The *jihadi* discourse must be replaced by democratic discourse. Violence will not solve any problems of modern society. Industrial and technological development can take place only through education and proper developmental perspective.

In critical periods the societies have thrown up leadership with future vision. Militancy and extremism must be completely shunned and Muslim youth must be inspired by these fundamental values for its struggles for better and more just societies. To raise cry for jihad is to play in the hands of vested interests that oppose any structural changes to perpetuate their own rule.

Persons like Osama bin Laden are not going to liberate Islamic countries. They will bring only more destruction and war. Frustration cannot be equated with change. What Osama and his supporters represent is anger and frustration. Jihad is not use of violence in the state of anger and frustration. Such violence is totally destructive not of ones enemy but of oneself. Real jihad will be against ignorance and vested interest using all available democratic space in ones society. Medieval theological idiom with an air of finality and dogmatism will not be an effective weapon. Such theological discourse will only breed stagnation.

The whole spirit of the Qur'an is dynamic as pointed out by so many great Islamic thinkers like Jamaluddin Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Sir Syed and Muhammad Iqbal. They waged real jihad against stagnation, dogmatism, ignorance and superstition in the name of Islam. It is highly necessary to revive the spirit of these great Islamic thinkers and activists. Their jihad was real jihad. Their main weapons were knowledge, understanding and constant efforts to change.

Iqbal represented this spirit in his much quoted verse which says "Firm conviction, constant efforts and overpowering universal love are the weapons of men in jihad of life." This is a challenge for us all Muslims. We must turn into a great opportunity and change the image of Islam in the modern world.

## POLITICS OF VIOLENCE



**T**he burning alive of the Australian missionary Dr. Graham Staines and his two children in the village of Mohapur in Orissa was the cruellest and most barbaric act. The President of India rightly described it as 'monumental aberration.' No decent human being would ever think of our country going into the hands of such utter fanatics. The VHP and the Bajrang Dal which have provoked this fanaticism are now trying to dissociate themselves from such horrifying killing of innocent people. They are coming out with incredible explanations.

Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the BJP Minister of State in the Union Government, described it as a 'conspiracy to defame India. He said that it is part of 'international conspiracy to defame India." He further said "This conspiracy also has a national angle and is aimed at disgracing India's image and culture." Naqvi does not understand that not even a cretin would believe in such fantastic explanations. Acharya Giriraj Kishore, the General Secretary, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, on the other hand, described the incident as a result of 'political rivalry between the Orissa Chief Minister JB Patnaik and his deputy Basant Biswal. Such explanations can satisfy only the Sangh Parivar faithful, no one else.

What is more surprising and what gives the game away is that all these members of the Sangh Parivar simultaneously attack the Christian missionaries for conversion and strongly condemn them.

This clearly establishes their sympathy for the doers of such cruel deeds. No one from the VHP or the Bajrang Dal or the RSS has categorically condemned such barbaric acts. They show their discrete, if not open, approval of these dastardly acts. Even if the Australian missionary was indulging in conversions, could he be burnt alive along with his two children while sleeping in his jeep? And of course there is no shred of proof that he was converting people even through persuasion, let alone through fraud or inducement. He was silently serving the most hated people in our society i.e., the lepers for more than twenty five years. His wife also showed grace expected of a Christian believer and pardoned the killers of her husband and children. The barbaric act has angered the allies of the BJP like the Trinamul Congress and Telugu Desham Party. They are demanding ban on the VHP and Bajrang Dal. Mamata Banerjee said that "the rabid and communal elements in the BJP Government are slowly spinning out of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's control." She also demanded a national government led by Vajpayee rather than the BJP led government. She also said that the BJP government has completely failed to give protection to India's minority community.

What is more surprising is that even the Home Minister LK Advani gave a clean chit to the VHP and the Bajrang Dal saying that these organisations have no such record. The Home Minister has no right to issue such statements when the inquiry is going on. His statement can obviously influence the police officers inquiring into the matter. This clearly shows that the hawks in the BJP approve of violence against the minorities.

What is more shocking is that such a gruesome violence has taken place on the eve of 50 years of Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom. The Mahatma was a great apostle of nonviolence. Nonviolence is the highest human value. Violence is degrading for humanity. Any noble cause, if sought to be achieved through violence, would get mortified. However, it is a great tragedy that while we adorn the Mahatma and his philosophy of nonviolence we resort to violence even for most petty objectives.

We will be solemnly observing 30th January as the martyrdom day of the Mahatma. But it is mere ritual for us now. What is needed is deep reflection on the relevance of nonviolence for the process of nation-building. Of course for democracy and democratic functioning nonviolence and tolerance are *sine qua non*. Yet our democracy has seen so much political violence since independence. Communal pogroms became, as if a way of life for us. Hundreds of communal riots took place in which thousands of innocent people were brutally massacred. Can we call ourselves a tolerant and civilised society?

Along with communal violence ethnic violence broke out particularly in Kashmir and the North East of India. In the North East each tribe is flying at the throat of another tribe. Bodos are engaged in ethnic cleansing. If once violence is legitimized by a section of society, it becomes the way of life to other sections of society. Mahatma Gandhi had great insight in this matter and he, both as a matter of belief and as a matter of strategy, rejected violence totally. He withdrew the non-cooperation movement after the Chori Chora incident in which some constables were burnt alive by the agitating mob. The non-cooperation movement was at its height and the Mahatma suddenly withdrew it. Everyone was stunned but the Mahatma insisted on withdrawing the movement as people could not remain non-violent. Mahatma was right. Once violence is legitimised it multiplies and spreads like wild fire. If the Mahatma had not insisted on withdrawing the movement, violence would have spread and given a chance to the British to suppress it ruthlessly on one hand, and violence would have found national acceptance, on the other. Its long term repercussions on the process of nation building would have been extremely negative. But there is no Mahatma today in our midst to check the spreading violence.

We have still not inculcated the true spirit of democracy even fifty years of our democratic efforts at nation building. When violence is resorted to by a section of the majority community to retain its hegemony it is even more dangerous. It vitiates the whole

process of peaceful process of nation building. Once you resort to violence it is very difficult to end it. Those who resort to violence feel a great sense of power which they do not want to give up. And it has been repeatedly observed that those who resort to violence soon get divided into number of factions and start killing each other. This is what has happened in Kashmir and the North East. These factions kill members of each other more than their common enemy.

There cannot be a greater danger for a democracy than resorting to violence by any section of the society. Today very lethal weapons are freely available in the market. If we resort to violence for petty reasons, the result will only be a disaster for the nation. Let not that section of the majority community resorting to violence think that it can impose its hegemony through violence and teach the minority a lesson. It never works that way. When during the eighties many communal riots took place, a large number of Muslims were killed; some anti-social elements also resorted to violence and planted a bomb in March 1993 in Bombay in which again more than 300 innocent people were killed. Same thing happened at Coimbatore. Some fanatics of Hindu Munnani used violence against Muslims in November 1997 and then some Muslim fanatics planted a bomb in February 1998, when LK Advani was to address an election meeting in Coimbatore, killing many innocent people.

Violence today has vitiated our society. We are committed to democratic way of nation building and for this secularism, tolerance and nonviolence are our tools. It not only wins us international acclaim but also strengthens and stabilises our society. Mahatma Gandhi was an embodiment of all these qualities. Today in the vitiated atmosphere of all round violence - communal, criminal and ethnic, we need the Mahatma more than ever. The Hindutva forces believe in violence to maintain their hegemony and hence consider Gandhiji as their enemy and it was for this reason that the apostle of nonviolence was eliminated violently. He was assassinated brutally.

The communal and fundamentalist forces find it very difficult to find democratic acceptability. The BJP also could come to power

(and that too with the help of other allies) only by moderating its Hindutva agenda. Without diluting its Hindutva agenda it would never have secured the position of power. This is a tribute to the peaceable masses. When the fanatics and fundamentalists find it difficult to get elected they use violence to achieve their objective. There is no doubt if the conversion issue is placed before the nation through referendum before the nation, the VHP will lose. It is hardly an issue for the Indian people. A small fraction gets converted, that too on account of its miserable socio-economic situation. If the tribals and the scheduled caste people find some opportunities in life through the endeavours of the Christian missionaries why should one object? At the most one could make similar endeavour to give a sense of dignity to these most harried people in life. Thus excelling each other in providing dignified life to the most exploited in the society is the only democratic answer to the problem. But those who have no patience for such efforts and want to retain their hold on them resort to violence.

In Pakistan too the fanatics and fundamentalists utterly failed to capture the imagination of the people. The Jama'at-e-Islami of Pakistan could never win more than a couple of seats in Parliament. It then began to dissociate itself from the elections. Similarly many extremist groups among the religious organisations were completely frustrated and gave up electoral politics and set up their own armed units. Today in Pakistan there are more than twenty armed groups fighting for supremacy. It is for this reason that the Pakistani society is witnessing so much violence. Religious fanaticism can never produce true religiosity and spirituality. Fanaticism, let us remember, is born out of frustration and anxiety and can never produce positive result. Fanatics are frustrated because people at large refuse to accept what they believe to be true. Fanaticism is bound to result in violence as fanatics think they can succeed only if they forcibly impose their ideas and ideologies. A truly religious person, on the other hand, will opt for persuasion with all possible humility. Thus violence becomes most abhorrent to him. A religious

person is dedicated to the cause with all sincerity whereas a fanatic displays only anxiety and coercion.

Thus it will be seen that compassion, tolerance and nonviolence which are our primeval values can only lead us to our chosen goal of democratic nation-building. We have set example in many ways for the whole world, let us not squander it with such violent acts. It will be in the interest of our country to restrain the extremists and fanatics in the Sangh Parivar and follow strictly the constitutional path for the solution of all our maladies.



# ATTACK ON WORLD TRADE CENTRE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS



The attacks on the two World Trade Centre Towers in New York on 11th September 2001 was, what can be said to be terrible and horrible. No words can be adequate to condemn these attacks specially as they were directed at innocent civilians who are in no way involved in political decision making or matters of state policy. These towers were chosen by the terrorists probably because they are symbols of American economic domination and imperialistic designs. The terrorists wanted to convey the message that even a mighty power like America is not invincible.

The modern technology by its very nature cannot be confined to a particular area and a country. This is the mistake the USA is making. Its own technology was used against it. However, it is beyond belief that a few Arabs and Afghanis could master such advanced technology and could accomplish such well co-ordinated and precision task. It requires great skill and advanced knowledge of technology. I wish these young men who destroyed their own lives, besides those of six thousand innocent people had utilised their skills in developing technological base for their own countries and then engaged American military might.

It is also to be borne in mind that the young men who sacrificed their lives for a 'cause' were not mere unemployed youth who did it merely out of frustration. They were highly trained and skilled pilots

and other technologists who were capable of precise planning. They were highly motivated and strongly believed in their cause. Modern technology in the hands of such highly ideologically motivated individuals can prove as disastrous as in the hands of a country. The USA should also bear in mind that many victim nations of its policies may remain silent for the interests of their ruling classes coincide with those of US ruling classes, but some angry victim citizens of these nations can retaliate with deadly efficiency and may bring disaster. Besides destruction of lives and properties, it can also use biological weapons with much more disastrous results.

The reaction of the US rulers to the deadly attacks was not of wise mature people but of those who know only of revenge and retaliation. If the terrorists had something bad, America wants to do something worse. Its anger can involve many countries of South and West Asia in a needless war causing thousand fold more destruction of lives and properties. And still the desired result may not be achieved.

Also, declaring war against Afghanistan would hardly do much harm to it even if it is bombed to the stone-age as Bush, the President of mighty America says. Afghanistan has already been reduced to stone age by the policies of super-powers on one hand, and, the fanatical Taliban, on the other. What more the people of Afghanistan will lose than they have already lost? Moreover the people of Afghanistan can fight guerrilla war for their independence for another hundred years. The Afghans, their history shows, have not submitted to even their own co-religionists from outside. The Mughal rulers of India could never hold the Afghans under their own tutelage. They are known to be the fierce fighters for their freedom all through the history.

Another thing we must remember here is that Islam, however it is used for legitimization of the actions of the terrorists' act, is not the issue. Also, we must make a difference between religion as faith and religion as an identity. Religion as a faith has largely a spiritual function and religion as an identity acquires political

overtones. The terrorists are using Islam as an identity as ethnicity becomes a powerful function of identity. The ethnic terrorism is as dangerous as religious terrorism. The western and Indian media, some subtly, some more openly, began to target Islam as a religion of fanatics and violence. It is co-incidental that the terrorists in this case happens to be Muslims (though yet not conclusively proved but in all probability, yes). In case of Oklahoma they were Christians.

The terrorists, it must be noted, are not product of religion, they are product of certain state policies. The USA has made this grave mistake. It thinks these terrorists are product of Islam, not of its own policies in the Middle East. Osama bin Laden, if he is involved in the terrorist attacks on New York Towers, has not carried out these attacks as Islamic theologian. The foremost Islamic theologian of Saudi Arabia Bin Baz, has issued no such *fatwa* to carry out attacks on World Trade Centre. In fact Osama has been thrown out from Saudi Arabia. He is a rebel. All Afghans do not even agree with him. There is already civil war going on in Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance is a sworn enemy of the Taliban. There are thousands of Afghans who hate Taliban but are helpless. The Taliban's Islam is Islam of fanatical fringe and any violent group is always in need of such fanatical interpretation of religion to bind their followers together. Again we should remember that such violence and fanaticism are not products of religion but such religion is product of desperate need of such fringe groups.

Most of the Muslim *ulamā* have condemned these terror attacks. The leaders of the Islamic Movements have also issued a statement which says, "We have un-equivocally condemned the dastardly terrorist attack on establishments in New York and Washington, whose victims belong to some forty countries and major religions of the world. Islam upholds sanctity of human life as the Qur'an declares that killing one innocent human being is like killing the entire human race. The tragedy of the 11th September is a crime against humanity and the Muslims all over the world mourn all victims of this aggression as a common loss of America and the

whole world." The above statement should make it clear that there is absolutely no Islamic approval behind what has happened on 11th September. One has to see these events in the light of the policies USA has been following in the Islamic world today. There is no other light in which it could be seen.

America thus rather than planning a war against terrorism should dispassionately think of policy measures which can ultimately end this brutal kind of terrorism. Its arrogance of power could not defeat Vietnamese and will not be able to defeat Afghanis. Its bombing to stone age of Baghdad (significantly this statement of bombing Iraq to stone age was also made by the father of Bush the then President Bush on 11th September 1998 in the UNO) did not overthrow Saddam. It made its position stronger, if any thing.

Thus America should not think of either bombing Afghanistan to stone age or launching war against terrorism and long war at that. America is a mighty nation, no doubt what might, despite the age-old adage, can not make it right in any case. Let it remember that violence will produce more and much more viscous violence. America, as pointed out before, has been humbled several times before and will be humbled even more if it continues to follow the same policies.

In 21st century problems should be solved in more civilised and intelligent ways. Wisdom, if sincerely used, can become much more powerful weapon than even a hydrogen bomb in human affairs. By declaring war against Afghanistan the USA will fuel more anger in the Muslim world and will have to pay much greater price in coming days. New security measures being devised will be as fragile as the existing measures have proved to be and some way again will be found out to penetrate through even the tightest security. That is absolutely no guarantee for absolute safety.

In fact USA should drastically review its policies in the Middle East. Its blatant pro-Israel stance may have some internal compulsions but cannot win it friends among Muslim countries. It will be more and more alienated from the peoples of these countries, if not the ruling classes. The repeated Israeli aggression against

the Palestinians will alienate it more and more from these peoples of Muslim countries. No amount of media management can save it. The CNN or the New York Times or other US and global media cannot stand it in good stead. This media management can save America only among the American people who, in any case, do not matter, in the Middle East.

The events in New York should also serve a wake up call for the ruling classes in the Muslim countries. They are sitting on volcano. The American alliance or American weapons cannot save them. The Shah of Iran's fate should be a lesson for them. It was no mere exception. Such a thing can repeat in countries like the Saudi Arabia. It would be wrong to think that mere suppression of democratic rights and brutal oppression can save them. The SAVAK of Shah's regime was most brutal and barbarous and yet could not save the Shah from being overthrown. Let America not delude itself by declaring that it would wipe out terrorism from all countries. Its arrogance can only intensify it. Thus USA will lose more allies as in Iran.

India should also not entertain delusion that USA will help it fight out terrorism in Kashmir. If Kashmir is to be retained as integral part of India it will have to drastically revise its policies towards the people of Kashmir. It also requires wisdom rather than suppression and violations of human rights. The RSS hawks like Gurumurthy even declared on Zee TV that India has fought "Muslim terrorism" for one thousand years and now there is chance to send Indian forces to Pakistan to wipe out training camps. Such utterly hawkish and aggressive attitude will make the Kashmir problem thousand times more difficult to solve. Kashmir can be retained as part of India only if India is secular and democratic. The RSS training camps within India also need to be closed down for solving the Kashmir problem.

# ON THE MULTILAYERED CONCEPT OF JIHAD



Jihad is projected as if it is integral part of Islam to fight against unbelievers and as if it is the obligatory duty of all Muslims to fight against infidels. To say the least, it is not proper representation of the concept of jihad in Islam. In fact it is a multi-layered concept which has been projected as a one-dimensional concept – to fight with sword against all infidels. What happened on 11th September 2001 in New York has further given a wrong twist to this very important but complex and multi-dimensional concept of Islam. It must be understood in proper perspective to do full justice to this concept.

Most important thing first of all is to situate the concept of jihad in its historical situation. What is important is to be historically situated, not historically determined forever. What we often do is to be historically determined without ever probing how we are historically situated. Jihad in the sense of fighting with swords or with whatever weapons of war available should also be understood historically.

The Qur'anic pronouncements are also multi-layered and multi-dimensional, some dimensions are historical, some social, some ethical and some eternal. To understand the Qur'anic verses in uni-dimensional manner is to do great injustice to them and also to misapply them either because of wrong understanding or on account of some selfish motives.

The most important thing in this respect is to understand the pre-Islamic Arab society. Violence and inter-tribal wars were rampant. Reconciliation and conflict resolution through negotiations was virtually unknown. Though pre-Islamic Arab society was not exactly immoral, it did have tribal traditions and customs which ignored ethical aspects. Peace, though appreciated but was not always practised. As there was no rule of law in pre-Islamic society, things were settled through inter-tribal wars or through tribal customs and traditions. This resulted in great deal of bloodshed.

This prevailing historical situation was not acceptable to Islam but some of its elements did persist in Muslim behaviour. Also, we have to bear in mind that it was not a modern democratic society but a tribal society with its own outlook and intellectual understanding. We can not apply the modern norms to it nor should we perpetuate its practices in modern times. Islam while constrained to retain some of it, rejected most of it and provided for transcendent norms and ethical standards. What some Muslims do (and many non-Muslims too) is to ignore historicity of some Qur'anic and Hadith pronouncements and take them in an a-historical sense thus causing great deal of misunderstanding about Islamic ethics of jihad and makes jihad a uni-dimensional concept.

A careful study of Qur'ān and Hadith makes it clear that the concept of jihad is far above mere violence and war. Unfortunately wars persisted in Islamic history for several reasons (but certainly not for religious reasons) and hence it came to be reduced to Islamic teachings. The Sufis who kept themselves aloof from power-struggles and attempts by rulers at territorial expansions realised the danger of misapplying the concept of jihad and they thought it necessary to emphasise other social and moral aspects of jihad. It is for this reason that they described *Jihad bi al-sayf* (i.e., war with sword) as *Jihad-e-Asghar* (i.e., small war) and jihad to control ones greed and selfish desires as *Jihad-e-Akbar* i.e., great jihad.

This emphasis was greatly needed as the concept of jihad with sword had become quite uni-dimensional and was being misapplied

for selfish reasons and for inter-group wars among the Muslims. The moral precepts and ethical constraints imposed by Qur'anic pronouncements were being totally ignored by Muslim rulers and their cohorts to fulfil their greed for power and territorial aggrandisement. It was for this reason that the Sufis intervened at this stage and tried to bring out moral and ethical dimensions of the rich concept of jihad.

The Sufis had not added any thing from their own wish but had based the concept of the great jihad on the basis of the Qur'anic pronouncements. Jihad as is well known to any student of Arabic language means to make utmost efforts. One must look at the authentic Qur'anic dictionary *Mufradat al-Qur'an* by Imam Raghīb Asfahani (Urdu trn. By Sheikh Muhammad Abduh Firozpurī, Lahore, 1971).

Imam Raghīb first discusses the meaning of its root word *jahd* which means working hard or making utmost efforts and *juhud* which means one's utmost capacity. The two together would mean making utmost efforts to one's best capacity. Then he goes on to say that *jihad wa al-mujahidah* means to spend one's utmost capacity in defending oneself in the face of an enemy. Then he divides jihad in three categories: 1) to fight against enemies i.e., unbelievers; 2) against *Shaytān* (Satan) and 3) against one's own self i.e., one's own greed and selfishness.

Imam Raghīb also maintains that the Qur'anic verse 22:78 ("And strive hard for Allah with due striving. He has chosen you and has not laid any hardship in religion") comprises all these three categories. The Qur'an also says "And strive hard in Allah's way with your wealth and your lives. This is better for you, if you know." (9:41). One also finds in the Qur'an, "Those who believed and migrated (from their homes), and strove hard in Allah's way with their wealth and their lives, and are much higher in rank with Allah. And it is these that shall triumph." (9:20)

It will be seen that all these verses in the Qur'an do not use the word jihad in the sense of war but in the sense of striving with wealth and one's own life. The Muslims were persecuted lot in Makkah and

many of them faced severe persecution and strove hard in the way of Allah with their own lives and some of them who were wealthy spent all of their wealth for that cause. Some of them suffered personally as well as spent their wealth for the sake of Allah. Thus it was all suffering and striving. This is real jihad. Jihad nowhere in the Qur'an is used either in the sense of war or for seeking revenge. Seeking revenge amounts to using concept of jihad for selfish ends even if revenge or retaliation is for one's own group or community.

In Hadith literature we find Ahadith which prohibit Muslims from seeking revenge. Thus in *Sahih al-Bukhari* we find Hadith of Miqdad Ibn Amr al-Kindi. Amr al-Kindi asked the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) "Suppose I met one of the infidels and we fought. He struck one of my hands with his sword, cut it off and then took refuge in a tree and said, 'I surrender to Allah'. Could I kill him, Oh Messenger of Allah, after he had said this?" Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said, "you should not kill him" Al-Miqdad said, "Oh Allah's Messenger, but he had cut off my hands, and then he had uttered those words." Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, "You should not kill him, and you would be in his position where he had been before uttering these words."

Thus it will be seen that in matters of war also Islam teaches higher morality the essence of which is not to seek revenge or retaliate. The Prophet (ﷺ) makes this abundantly clear in reply to Miqdad bin Amr's query if that the unbeliever surrenders even after cutting off a Muslim's hand with his sword, the Muslim should not kill him. Then there will be no difference between a Muslim and an unbeliever.

This is what I call the transcendent morality. The prevailing practice in the pre-Arab society was retaliation in equal measure – nose for nose and eye for an eye. But this Hadith rejects the concept of retaliation and teaches instead higher morality of pardoning the enemy and magnanimity of treatment.

In matters of jihad Imam Raghīb quotes an interesting Hadith which says "fight your desires as you fight your enemies." The Sufi concept of *jihad-i-akbar* i.e., the great jihad is to fight one's own vain

desires has been based on this Hadith. According to the Qur'an man's life is a constant struggle in the way of Allah be it through sword or through one's hands or through one's tongue. Thus there is a Hadith which says "strive against unbelievers with your hands and your words."

Thus this constant jihad, constant struggle in the way of Allah implies again multi-layered efforts. The believers have been charged, by the Qur'an with the important mission of spreading good and fighting evil (*amr bil ma'ruf wa nahi an al-munkar*). In this mission a believer has to engage himself continuously, controlling his own desires, spreading justice, equality and compassion with wisdom ('*adl* – justice, '*ihsan* – benevolence, '*rahmah* – compassion and '*hikmah* – wisdom are concepts of goodness in the Qur'an which are repeatedly stressed). The goodness of humanity lies in this.

As it is duty of believers to engage themselves in spreading what is good it is also the duty of the believers to engage themselves in containing what is evil. Thus a believer has to constantly strive himself to fight against oppression, injustice, iniquity and cruelty. All these result in spreading evil on the earth. The world as we all know is full of injustices and oppression and it will be a lifetime mission of a believer to contain them. This is real jihad.

Fight is not always with weapons – with sword or with guns. Fight could be through proper means which includes moral and intellectual means – through persuasion, through wisdom, through spreading good word and through setting good examples. It is for this reason that the Prophet has said that the ink of a writer's pen is more sacred than the blood of a martyr. The word written with ink is more lasting than martyr's blood.

Jihad is not merely a fight with swords or other weapons. Though jihad also means that but only for self -defence. Jihad is never permitted for aggressive purposes. Then it will not be jihad in any sense of the word at all. The Qur'an is very particular about it. The Qur'an says, "And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors." (2:190)

Thus from the above verse two things are clear: 1) fight only those who fight you and 2) do not be aggressive, as Allah does not love aggressors. One has to strictly observe these conditions in jihad. Then it is also to be noted that jihad does not only mean fighting with sword or other weapons. It is constant struggle for whole of ones life.

The noted Urdu poet Iqbal has beautifully put the meaning of jihad in day to day life in one of his couplets which is as follows:

*Yaqin muhkam 'amal payham muhabbat fatihi 'alam  
Jihad-e- zindagani mein yeh hain mardon ki shamshiren*

The meaning of this verse is that for a man with strong inner conviction and constant efforts and with universe winning love are the real weapons in the jihad of life. The meaning or the essence of the verse is that sword is not the only weapon for jihad. It is but one of the weapons. The real weapons are inner conviction and constant efforts with love and sensitivity.

It is unfortunate that jihad has been used in Islamic literature in a very narrow and constricted sense. This narrow understanding of jihad must change. The meaning of jihad is not complete without the Qur'anic injunction for believers (men as well as women) to enforce good and contain evil and this is life long mission of all the believers and to achieve this objective believers have to use their persuasive skills, wisdom and goodliness. One cannot enforce good with sword. Goodness prevails only with goodness. What the Qur'an calls *maw'izah hasanah* (i.e., exhortation with goodness) and *hikmah* (wisdom) is more lasting than enforcing something forcibly.

In war or war-like situation efforts to avert bloodshed and find out ways to promote negotiated settlement is far more important. The Prophet (ﷺ) always tried all possibilities of negotiated settlement and resorted to war in self – defence only if all efforts to find a negotiated settlement failed. The best example of this is what is known in the history of Islam as *Sulh-i-Hudaybiyyah*. This is major contribution by the Prophet of Islam in promoting negotiated settlement and avert needless bloodshed. He even accepted terms,

which were not apparently favourable to Muslims. The terms of peace appeared to be even humiliating to his senior companions. The Prophet accepted these terms to avoid human slaughter and in the interest of peace.

We find mention of this in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Abu Wa'il narrated: "We were in Siffin and Sahl ibn Hunayf stood up and said, "Oh people! Blame yourselves! We were with the Prophet (ﷺ) on the day of Hdaybiyyah, and if we had been called to fight, we should have fought. But Umar ibn Al-Khattāb came and said, 'Oh Allah's Messenger! Aren't we in the right and our opponents in the wrong?' Allah's Messenger said, 'Yes'. Umar said, "Then why should we accept hard terms in matters concerning our religion? Shall we return before Allah judges between us and them?" Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, Oh ibn Al-Khattāb! I am the Messenger of Allah and Allah will never degrade me."

*Sulh-i-Hdaybiyyah* is of fundamental significance in the interest of peace. Peace is the real objective and war only a necessary evil in certain unavoidable situations. Also it is a wrong assumption that it is duty of the Muslims to fight against all non-believers or *Kafirs*. The Qur'an itself mentions about treaties with unbelievers and according to the Qur'an and Hadith it is the duty of all Muslims to honour all treaties and alliances with non-believers. All such alliances must be respected by the Muslims until they are honoured by non-Muslims.

Thus we find again in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "The pagans were of two kinds as regards their relationship to the Prophet (ﷺ) and the Believers. Some of them were those with whom the Prophet was at war and used to fight against, and they used to fight him; the others were those with whom the Prophet (ﷺ) made a treaty, and neither did the Prophet fight them, nor did they fight him.

# JIHAD FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



Those who work for social justice are as good as *mujahidin* i.e., warriors in the way of Allah. Thus we find in *Sahih al-Bukhari*: The Prophet (PBU) said, "The one who looks after and works for a widow and for a poor person, is like a warrior fighting for Allah's cause or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all the night." Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet said as above.

Thus any one striving for social justice and working for ameliorating the plight of the poor is like a warrior in the way of Allah. Thus those who spend their own money or collect from others and spend for the poor in the way of Allah is no less than a *mujahid*. According to the Qur'an *zakat* money is to be spent on poor, widows, needy, paying off the debt of indebted and for liberation of slaves. These are all weaker sections of society. It is thus a great merit to help these poorer and weaker sections and to work for them is as meritorious as waging jihad in the way of Allah.

One must remember that much of the conflict in the world is because of poverty, hunger and unemployment. If these problems are solved much of the conflict will be resolved. One should wage war against poverty in all possible ways – by increasing production, by bringing about redistribution of economic resources and by not allowing wealth to be circulated only among the rich. (59:7)

Even when first permission was given to fight in the Qur'anic verse 4:77 it was basically to defend the rights of weak from among

the old men, women and children. In some extreme situations it might mean fighting a war but it could be fought in various other ways, particularly in a democratic and modern society. It could be through democratic movements or parliamentary debates also. In those days when the holy Qur'ān was being revealed such possibilities did not exist. Today we will have to creatively re-interpret such Qur'ānic provisions as above

The *ulamā* and jurists in early Islam had divided the world in *darul harb* and *darul Islam*. The countries where Muslims could not enjoy freedom of their faith and were persecuted were declared by the Muslim jurists as *darul harb*. And it was thought necessary for Muslims to wage war (jihad) in such countries. However, it is important to note that the Hanafi jurists had also created a third category of *darul aman* i.e., those countries where Muslims, though in minority yet could enjoy freedom of religion and were not persecuted because of their religious beliefs. India was always considered as *darul aman* by Islamic jurists as Muslims here were not persecuted for their religious beliefs. India was always a pluralist society.

But in today's conditions when democracy prevails even if Muslims are persecuted in any country or any place democratic remedies will have top priority and not waging war and indulge in bloodshed of innocent people. Terrorism which involves shedding blood of innocent people can never be elevated to the category of jihad in any sense of the Qur'ānic term.

Also, few individuals cannot get together and decide to wage 'jihad'. The decision to wage jihad can be taken only by a properly constituted Islamic government ensuring that there is no other way left but to declare jihad. It could be done after due deliberations and examining all possible consequences including loss of human lives. In the modern democratic world such decision can be arrived at only by a dually elected government. And as far as the Qur'ānic injunction on jihad is concerned it should not in any case involve any selfish motive like grabbing others territory or consolidating any

groups' rule but it should be strictly for higher goals like justice and fighting persecution.

It should also be noted that peace is far more fundamental to Islam than war. War at best could be an instrument of establishing peace in some exceptional circumstances or for defending against aggression. It is unfortunate that some youth come together and decide that there is no way out but to use violence and call it jihad. And these youth ultimately shed great deal of innocent blood without achieving the ultimate objective. Such extremist violence results in more in-group fighting and killing each other. Such extremist violence cannot be entitled to be called jihad.

In modern world real jihad is to use democracy and democratic institutions to realise the noble goals for which the Prophet of Islam struggled all through his life peace and social justice.

# ISLAM AND SECULARISM



Is Islam compatible with secularism? This question is quite important in the present context, particularly in 21st century. Both non-Muslims and orthodox Muslims feel that Islam is not compatible with secularism. Fundamentalist Muslims totally reject secularism as anti-Islamic and haram. Maulana Maududi, founder of Jama'at-e-Islami Hind had said, while leaving for Pakistan in 1948, that those who participated in secular politics were raising flag of revolt against Allah and His Messenger. The Saudi *ulama*, too, denounce secularism as strictly prohibited in Islamic tradition.

The fundamentalist Hindus, on the other hand, say that Muslims support secularism while in minority in any country and oppose it while in majority. But this is not wholly true. Some Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia and others do reject secularism but all Muslim majority countries do not. For example, Indonesia does not reject secularism though its 85% population comprises of Muslims. However, by and large, it is true that many Muslim majority countries opt for Islamic state or at least make Islam as state religion.

It is important to note that there is some difference between an Islamic state and Islam being a state religion. In Islamic state all laws must strictly conform to Islamic *shariah* but if a country declares 'Islam as its religion', it means that Islam is preferred to all other religions and it enjoys itself more privilege than other religions in the country. In 1948 Islam was declared as state religion in Pakistan,

but Pakistan did not become an Islamic state until Zia-ul-Haq declared it to be an Islamic state in late seventies. He then began to enforce *ṣarī'ah* laws in Pakistan.

Islam is declared to be incompatible with secularism because in a secular state there is no place for divine laws, and secular laws are unacceptable to Islam. Also it is believed that in Islam religion and politics cannot be separated. On these grounds secularism is totally rejected by orthodox Muslims. They also think that secularism is atheistic, and atheism has no place whatsoever in Islam. Islam strongly emphasises faith in Allah. These are some of the grounds which make orthodox Muslims uneasy with the very word secularism. Islam emphasises life hereafter and secularism means only those matters which pertain to this world. There is no place for the world hereafter as far as secular philosophy is concerned.

We would examine here whether these assertions are true and whether Islam is really incompatible with secularism. Firstly, we should make a distinction between what is theological and what is historical. The concept that religion and politics cannot be separated is more historical than theological. In fact the Holy Qur'an, as we have pointed out elsewhere too, does not give any concept of the State; it only gives the concept of the society. The Qur'an is concerned with morality rather than polity. An upright conduct, justice, truth, benevolence, compassion and human dignity are very basic to the Holy Scripture. It repeatedly asserts these values. Thus it clearly means that these values are very fundamental to an Islamic society rather than to a State.

The view that religion cannot be separated from politics in Islam is due to this primary concern with these Islamic values. It was thought by early Islamic *ulamā* and jurists that if religion was separated from politics, the rulers would totally neglect these fundamental Islamic values and would behave in a manner which would only satisfy their greed for power. In fact in those days there was no concept of secularism as a philosophy of humanism. The *ulamā* were afraid that if religion and politics were separated there

would be absolutely no check on the conduct of the rulers. In fact, one does not find clear articulation to this effect (that religion cannot be separated from politics in Islam) in any early Islamic source. This formulation itself is of nineteenth century origin when colonial powers began to impose secular laws in Islamic countries i.e., the laws which were not basically derived from *ṣari'ah*.

In the early Islamic period there were no other laws than the *ṣari'ah* laws. And since there was no such concept of the State in Qur'an, the Islamic State itself is a historical construct. The structure of Islamic State evolved over a period of time. The Qur'an and Hadith were the primary sources for the new State. It is important to note that before Islam there was no State in Makkah or Madina. There was only a senate of tribal chiefs who took collective decisions and it was tribal chiefs who enforced those decisions in their respective tribal jurisdiction. There were obviously no written laws but only tribal customs and traditions. Any decision had to be taken within the framework of these customs. There was no other source of law.

However after Islam appeared on the social horizon of Makkah, the scenario began to change. In Madina the Prophet (ﷺ) laid the framework of governance through what is known as *Mithaq-e-Madina* (Covenant of Madina). This Covenant also basically respects tribal customs to which adherents of Judaism, Islam and pre-Islamic idol worshippers belonged. Each tribe, along with the religious tradition it belonged to, was treated as an autonomous unit in the Covenant, which has been described in full details by Ibn Ishaq, the first biographer of the Holy Prophet. Thus the Covenant of Madina respected both the tribal as well as religious autonomy of the inhabitants of the town. It can also be said to be the first constitution of the state in making. The Covenant laid down certain principles which are valid even today in a secular state. When the covenant was drawn up by the Prophet of Islam, *ṣari'ah* as a body of law had not evolved. In this important Madinian document what is most important is that the Prophet (ﷺ) did not compel the different tribes of Jews and idol worshippers to follow the Islamic law.

A state structure began to evolve only after the death of the Holy Prophet when vast areas of other territories were conquered and new problems began to arise. During the Prophet's time the governance was limited to almost a city. He did not live long after the conquest of Makkah. But after his death the jurisdiction of the state expanded much beyond the frontiers of Arabia. During the Prophet's time people were more concerned with day to day problems of marriage, divorce, inheritance etc., on one hand, and problems like theft, robbery, murder and some similar problems for which the Qur'an and the Prophet were inerrant source of guidance. The people asked the Prophet for guidance and followed his pronouncements or the Qur'anic injunctions voluntarily. There was no state machinery to enforce it. There was neither any police force nor any regular military. There was no separate judiciary either. As far as the Prophet was concerned he was legislator, an enforcer of laws (executive) and also a judge (representing judiciary). He combined all three functions.

Thus it will be seen that there was no regular state structure during the Prophet's own time as he was a unique personality who could combine all these functions for judicious governance, in addition to being a source of law. However, the death of the Prophet (PBUH) created a vacuum and no other person could fill it. Also, as pointed out above, the conquest of other territories created more complex problems. Now there was need for enforcement of laws as people in far off places with no commitment to Islam would not follow the laws voluntarily as they did in Madina in the Prophet's time. Thus a police force was needed to enforce the laws. Also, during the Prophet's time people volunteered for fighting against enemies of Islam and there was no need for a paid regular army. Now after his death need was felt for paid regular army. The border areas had to be guarded constantly. There were no such borders before.

The corpus of *shari'ah* was being evolved and for new situations guidance could no more be had from the Prophet. One either had to look for verses in the Qur'an or in Hadith which Prophet's companions remembered or one had to resort to analogy keeping

analogous situations in mind. That was how the corpus of the *ṣarī'ah* law evolved slowly. The primitive Islamic state was democratic in spirit and the caliphs often consulted their colleagues and companions of the Prophet while making any decision so as to conform to the Qur'anic values. Thus Qur'ān and Hadith then were the main sources of law. But in secular matters like building up institutions like army or police or bureaucracy, they did not hesitate to borrow concepts from other sources like Roman or Persian. Thus Hazrat Umar borrowed the concept of Diwan (i.e., maintaining records of salaries to a paid army and bureaucracy). Similarly the caliphs were called upon to legislate on matters like land ownership, suspension of certain punishments during times of emergency like famine etc.

The conquests, internal strife among the Muslims, struggle for power among different tribes, groups and personalities and many other factors created strong pressures so much so that the institution of Caliphate itself did not survive. It was ultimately replaced by monarchy and dynastic rule. This was totally against the spirit of the Qur'ān. These changes became inevitable under the fast developing situation. The Islamic jurists had to come to terms with these new developments and to legitimise them somehow. Once the institution of Caliphate was replaced by dynastic rule, it could never be restored throughout Islamic history. The monarchy and dynastic rule persisted until the Western colonial rule took over.

It was under colonial rule that Muslims began to discover the virtues of democracy and saw in the Caliphate a 'golden period of Islamic democracy'. It is true that during the dynastic rule *ṣarī'ah* law could not be ignored and the rulers had to keep the *ulamā* in good humour. However, they often found ways to go around and violate the spirit of the *ṣarī'ah* law. But they never ceased to pay obeisance to it. But the situation changed drastically with the onset of colonial rule during the nineteenth century in the Islamic world. Many laws were enforced by the colonial rulers which were secular in origin. The Western countries themselves were once governed by the Church and it was the Church law which was supreme. But the reformation

changed all that and the struggle against the Church gave rise to the concept of secularism. Thus there was intense fight between the Church and the ruling princes who desired independence from the hegemony of the Church. The emerging bourgeois class too wanted to be free of the sacred rule and saw immense benefits in secularisation of politics and society. Thus it took more than three centuries in the West for secularisation of society and marginalisation of religion and religious institution. When the colonial rule was established in Asian and African countries many of which happened to be Islamic countries, the process of secularisation had traversed a great distance in the metropolitan countries.

Thus the colonial countries posed a great challenge to Islam in the colonised countries through their technological supremacy. The religious leaders and intellectuals in these countries found refuge in the 'glory of the past' and some were overwhelmed by the supremacy of the West and began to advocate secular modernisation. Many reform movements thus were born in Islamic countries. Jamaluddin Afghani and Muhammad Abduh of Egypt were among them. Some others, however, totally rejected secularism of the West and launched intense efforts to revive the past. Revivalist and reformist movements jostled with each other for social and political space. Among those who faced the Western challenge there were those who rejected religion altogether and adopted secular humanism of the West. However, they remained in small minority.

Islamic societies, however, found it more challenging to adopt change and adjust to it smoothly. Many sociologists ascribe this resistance to change inherent to the teachings of Islam. This, however, is not true. No religion including Islam is prone or opposed to change. The causes of resistance to change lie in the society, not in religion. In fact most of the Muslim societies were led by feudal lords and failed to produce modern bourgeois class. In these societies there was no well-entrenched mercantile or industrial class. It is as much truer of Indian Muslims as of other Muslim countries. The Hindus, on the other hand, had centuries old merchant class,

which smoothly adjusted itself to modern industrial capitalism. Thus those who took to modern industrial capitalism felt need for secularisation and social change. The pressures for change were the result of the changing ground reality for them.

The Muslims, on the other hand, felt no such need for change, as there was no well-entrenched mercantile class to feel the need for effecting smooth change over to modernity. Also, in most of the Muslim countries, including India, Islam was embraced by weaker and poorer sections of society, for it appealed to those sections due to its emphasis on equality and justice. Those sections had no felt need for modernisation and they remained under the tight grip of traditional *ulamā* who were anyway opposed to the process of secularisation.

Also, unlike other religions, Muslims had well-developed *ṣari'ah* law which was unanimously accepted as divine in origin. Most of the religious leaders thus rejected the very concept of secular law as unacceptable. The *ulamā*, as pointed out above, had strong grip over the hearts and minds of the poor and illiterate masses and used the social base to oppose any change. The feudal lords, too, had not much use for secularism and readily struck an alliance with the *ulamā* giving them full support. Thus the *ulamā* strongly resisted any change in the *ṣari'ah* laws. Not only that, they would not even admit of any reform. Those like Muhammad Abduh and others who advocated *ijtihād* (creative interpretation of *ṣari'ah* laws in view of modernisation and change) were marginalised. Those important socio-economic factors cannot be ignored while discussing Islam and secularism.

Before we proceed further I would like to throw some light on some inherent limitations of secularism also. In nineteenth century rationalism became a dogma. The rationalists and secularists almost began to worship reason and dismissed religion with contempt. In fact the rationalists have been as contemptuous of religion as the faithful have been of secularism. Both have refused to admit limitations of their respective positions. One can say that as there are religious fundamentalists there are rational or secular fundamentalists also. These secular fundamentalists have no respect

for believers whom they consider as nothing less than 'superstitious'. Even certain cultural practices are considered as such. Some of them even refuse to admit the emotional richness of life.

There has to be a balance between reason and faith. Faith is as important to human existence as reason is. Reason, in fact, is a tool humans use to achieve their goal. Reason can never become absolute though its usefulness as a tool cannot be minimised. Faith, on the other hand, is not tool but belief in higher values. These values are fundamental to a meaningful life on this earth. Reason at best ensures 'successful' life but not meaningful one. It is faith in values like compassion, justice, equality, nonviolence etc., which make human life meaningful. Thus a creative synthesis between reason and faith is absolutely necessary for successful and meaningful life on this earth. Sacral and secular should not be treated as antagonistic to each other. They are rather complimentary to each other.

The faithful should also bear in mind that faith should not mean blind imitation of the past traditions. Faith has to be in values, not in past traditions. As absolute secularism could lead to a life devoid of meaning and responsibility towards fellow human beings absolute faith also could lead to blind surrender to an authority which leads to highly exploitative practices. One has to guard against such possibility by employing ones rational faculty. In other words while reason would not become arrogant, faith should not become blind.

If understood in this sense one will not find any contradiction between reason and faith and between religion and secularism. Islam is also compatible with secularism, seen from this perspective. If secularism is interpreted as an atheistic philosophy, no believer in religion would accept it, let alone a believer in Islam. Islam, as pointed out above, lays strong emphasis on belief in God and unity of God. Muslims believe in divine revelation of Qur'an and in Muhammad being Messenger of Allah. One need not challenge these beliefs in the name of secularism. Secularism should be taken in political rather than philosophical sense. Secularism in political sense creates social and political space for all religious communities.

The nineteenth century rationalism and modernism are themselves under challenge today. Our period is characterised as post-modernist period in which religious pluralism rather than rejection of religion is accepted. Post-modernism recognises limitations of reason and accepts validity of religious ethos. We are now in a world which is far removed from struggle between the Church and lay people. Church has also accepted the inevitability of secularisation of society. It no longer enjoys the hegemonic position it enjoyed before reformation. It has also apologised for persecution of scientists for discovering new scientific truths. It has also accepted the concepts of democracy and human rights. There is, thus, no serious contradiction between Church and secularism.

Islam, it must be noted, has no concept of organised church. No single religious authority is considered absolute. There has been, on the other hand, the concept of consensus (*ijmā*) among the *ulamā* (the learned men of Islam) which is quite democratic. In fact consensus has been considered as one of the sources of Islamic law in the Sunni Islam. Also, there is concept of *ijtihād* which infuses the spirit of dynamism and movement, though, of late, the *ulamā* have refrained from using it for change. However, pressures are building up in Islamic societies for using the concept of *ijtihād*. All Islamic societies are in throes of change and modernisation. Islamic laws are no more a stagnant pool of old traditions. Changes are being effected.

As there is no organised church in Islam the *ulamā* are divided on the issues of modernisation and change. In Iran too intense struggle is on between the conservatives and the reformists. In Saudi Arabia too the process of change is for anyone to see though the monarchy is quite cautious and wants to carry the orthodox *ulamā* along. But social pressures are building up in the Saudi society in favour of change and modernisation. Even in Afghanistan the Taliban rule is more coercive than consensual. The Taliban enjoy political and not social hegemony.

Islam admits of freedom of conscience and democratic rights and there are no two opinions about it. Islam also officially accepts

religious pluralism in as much as it is Qur'anic doctrine to hold other prophets in equal esteem. The Holy Prophet provided equal social and religious space to all religions present in Madina, as pointed out above, through the Covenant of Madina. The leaders of Jamī'at al-Ulamā in India rejected the concept of two nations and supported the composite nationalism on the basis of this Covenant. Religious pluralism and composite nationalism, which is the very spirit of secularism today in India, is not incompatible to Islam at all. All Islamic leaders of India have accepted Indian secularism. Even the Jama'at-e-Islami Hind has not only accepted Indian democracy and secularism but has set up a democratic and secular front.

The other characteristic of secular democracy is a respect for human dignity and human rights. The Qur'an expressly upholds both. It is true some rulers in the Islamic world reject the concept of human rights as Western in origin and not fit for their society. But it is to preserve their own absolute and unchallenged rule rather than upholding Islamic doctrinal position. It is cultural and political rather than religious problem. There are different political systems in different Islamic countries from monarchy to military dictatorship to limited democracy to democracy. But it will be naïve to blame Islam for this. One has to look into the political history of the country rather than search for its causes in Islamic doctrines. Islamic doctrines do not nurture any concept of absolutism as perhaps no other religion does. In fact the Qur'an's emphasis is on consultation (*shura*), and even the Prophet used to consult his companions in secular matters.

It will thus be seen that Islam is not incompatible to secularism if it does not mean rejection of religious faith. Throughout the world today there is increasing emphasis on harmonious coexistence of different religious faiths and Islam had inculcated this spirit from the very beginning of revelation of the Qur'an. The doctrine that religion and politics cannot be separated in Islam is a later historical construct rather than the Qur'anic doctrine. It is human construct rather than a divine revelation. One of the important

aspects of modern secularism is of course separation of religion from the state. While the state should not interfere in religious autonomy, religious authorities should not poke their nose in affairs of the state. The Indian *ulamā* had accepted this position with good conscience throughout freedom struggle and it was on this basis that they became allies of the Indian National Congress.

In Muslim majority countries there is problem of autonomy of state. Again, one should not look for causes into religious teachings but in the sociopolitical history of those countries. These countries have hardly emerged from their feudal past. There is no history in these countries of democratic struggles of the people. Also, most of these countries have very small religious minorities and these minorities too have historically accepted religious hegemony of Islam. It will take quite sometime for this position to change as feudal past has strong presence in these countries. But there is strong pressures building up and human rights movements are emerging in all these countries. Globalisation may not be desirable for many other reasons but it is creating conditions for close interaction among various cultures and political systems. Information revolution also is a tide which cannot be stopped and this revolution is creating deep impact on every aspect of life. Muslim countries cannot remain aloof from this and has to open themselves to new ideas and forces.



# ISLAMIC ETHIC



Every religion lays great emphasis on ethical aspects of human conduct in its own unique way. Generally there is great commonality between different religions as far as moral and ethical questions are concerned. In fact to mould a moral character is the most fundamental function of religion. All other functions are subsidiary to it. But it is also true that each religion has unique way of doing it and every religion puts differing emphasis on different aspects of human morality. Islam is also unique in this respect. It has its own ethical values and moral concepts, which are universal as well as specific to Islam. This paper will throw light on Islamic ethics.

Islam has unique morality of its own. It puts great deal of emphasis, for example, on equality and justice and emphasises dignity of all human beings. We will deal with these issues in the course of this paper. However, there are also universal moral values, which Islam lays emphasis on. The Qur'an gives us the concept of what it calls '*amal salih*' which, translated into English, would mean 'good deeds'. But this translation does not adequately convey the meaning. The key word here is '*salih*'. The root of the word is *sulh* from which are derived many words with the meaning to be good, to repair, to mend, to improve, to be righteous, to be efficient, to be suitable, peace and friendliness, reconciliation etc.

Thus it will be seen that '*amal salih*' leads to a society which is reformed, good, efficient, suitable (to humanity), improved and

above all which is peaceful and friendly to all human beings. The Qur'ān uses the word '*amal salih*' repeatedly. For a moral conduct, according to the Qur'ān, '*amal salih*' is very necessary. In the chapter 103 the Qur'ān says, "By the time! Surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good work ('*amal salih*'), and exhort one another to Truth and exhort one another to patience." Thus the key ethical concepts here in this chapter are 1) '*amal salih*'; 2) to be truthful and 3) to observe patience. One can say that these are key elements of Islamic ethics. Man is surely in loss but those who perform good deeds, are truthful and patient would not be. Thus for '*amal salih*' truth and patience are highly necessary. One can say that this is most comprehensive statement of the Qur'ānic ethics.

Here important question is why so much emphasis on 'patience'? Why truth and patience are made integral to each other? Because to be truthful is most arduous and challenging. One has to face great problems in order to be truthful. One will have to face opposition, even intrigues, from vested interests. It is, therefore, necessary, to be steadfast and patient and face all these challenges with fortitude and courage. All this requires great deal of patience. Hence the Qur'ān lays so much emphasis on being steadfast and patient to follow the path of truth. Only a man of great patience can be truthful.

Truth is a universal value in all religions. Some religions like Hinduism also maintain that truth (*satyam*) is God. The Qur'ān also elevates truth (*haq*) to the status of being God. Allah has been described as *haq* in the Qur'ān. No human being can claim to be Truth in absolute sense. Mansur al-Hallaj, the famous Sufi saint who claimed to be *anal haq* (I am the Truth) was hanged because it meant claiming to be God. Thus truth has great significance in the Islamic ethical system. Here it should be remembered that truth is not mere conformity with observable facts as in empirical sciences. Truth in moral sciences, especially in religion, has moral or ideological dimension also which is not necessarily verifiable. It is this aspect of moral or religious truth, which separates religion from science. However, it should also be born in mind that truth

should not be contrary to observable facts also. All one can say is that truth, in moral and religious discourse, is not mere conformity with fact. It is more than mere conformity with fact.

In Islamic system of morality, as in some other religions too, it is establishment of a moral society is very fundamental. The emphasis of Islamic teachings is not personal salvation but establishment of a society that is just and free of *zulm* (oppression). Here we will like to deal with this aspect of Islamic ethics in greater detail, as it is most central to Islam. The Qur'an lays great emphasis on '*adl*' (justice). It is the central value in Islamic ethics. The Qur'an says "Be just; it is closest to being pious." (5:8). Thus in Islam there is no concept of piety without being just. The opposite of '*adl*' is *zulm* (oppression). *Zulm* is derived from the root *z.l.m.* that has several shades of meaning i.e., to do wrong, injustice, darkness, iniquity, oppression etc. The Qur'an often uses it in the sense of wrong doing and oppression.

Islam basically lays emphasis on establishing a just society free of all forms of oppression. The Prophet also says that a society can live with unbelief (*kufr*) but not with oppression (*zulm*). Thus Islamic ethics conceives of a society which will be free of all forms of exploitation and oppression. Islam basically is a non-violent religion. It does not approve of violence at all. The most basic attribute of Allah is mercy and compassion of which we will talk more a little later. But Islam approves of violence (in a highly controlled sense, of course) only to remove *zulm*, the structures of oppression.. Thus the Qur'an says, "And how could you refuse to fight in the cause of Allah and of the utterly helpless men and women and children who are crying, "Oh our Sustainer! Lead us forth (to freedom) out of this land whose people are oppressors, and raise for us, out of Thy grace, a protector, and raise for us, out of Thy grace, one who will bring us succour!". (4:75)

Thus the Qur'an's emphasis is on fighting against injustice, against oppression. Everyone has right to live in peace in ones own country. If someone tries to throw them out just because they have

their own inner conviction, they cannot be thrown out of their homeland. And if someone tries to do that, one has to stand up to that and fight against this injustice. Islam does not permit violence in matters of preaching of religion. It believes, as is obvious from the above verse also, in full freedom of conscience. In fact if this freedom is violated then Islam permits use of regulated force. As for preaching of religion it has to be done only through 'goodly exhortation and wisdom' (16:125). There is no question of use of violence for that purpose. If some one does that it is against the divine injunction. It is *zulm*.

There is much misunderstanding about inter-connection between Islam and violence which needs to be clarified here since we are dealing with the question of Islamic ethics here. Islam does not approve of violence except in certain extra-ordinary circumstances. The word Islam has been derived from the root *s.l.m.* which means to escape danger, to be free from fault, to deliver or hand over, to commit oneself to the will of God, to lay down arms, to establish peace. Thus the best meaning of the word Islam will be to establish or promote peace in harmony with the Will of Allah. Thus a Muslim is not a true Muslim if he commits acts of violence either for spread of Islam or for purposes of achieving power be it in the name of Islam. His primary duty is to establish peace so that justice prevails and humanity prospers. The Prophet has also said that the best form of jihad is to say truth in the face of a tyrant ruler. Tyranny could be both physical and psychological.

The Qur'ān says that no human life can be taken except in keeping with law. Thus we find in the Qur'ān that "whoever kills a person, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he had killed entire humanity. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved lives of all men." (5:32) The Qur'ān, it will be seen, is against violence against humanity. Violence could be resorted to only for a just cause that too after great deliberation and if all other doors are closed. It is true the Qur'ān has permitted retaliatory violence (for *qisas*). But the Qur'ānic statements should

also be seen at various levels. At the level of the Arabian society, with its customs, norms and traditions, permitting *qisas* (retaliatory violence) was necessary. The Qur'ān had to deal with a given society. But at the higher moral level retaliation is not a good moral practice. It may be necessary in a society which is not highly morally developed. But in a morally developed society the virtue of pardon is the highest virtue. There is great moral worth in the act of pardon. One of Allah's attributes is that He pardons. He is *Ghaffar* i.e., He is forgiver. Forgiving is the great moral virtue. Retaliation may be human, but forgiving is divine. Retaliation amounts to giving vent to ones anger; but forgiving amounts to suppressing ones rage and suppressing ones rage is described as great virtue by the Qur'ān. Those who suppress their anger are called *Kazim al-Ghayz*. On moral level the Qur'ān deals with this issue in the verse 3:133. The verse reads, "Those who spend in ease as well as in adversity and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves doers of good (to others)."

This verse (3:133) deals with the moral aspect whereas the verse dealing with the question of *qisas* deals with the prevailing practice. The Qur'ān's intention is not to perpetuate the practice of retaliation but to build a human character on the basis of restraining anger and forgiving. To absolutise the verse on retaliation and to maintain that it is the ultimate divine will is to do injury to the spirit of the Qur'ān which is to cultivate higher morality among human beings. It is the verse 3:133 which represents this higher morality. This is further reinforced by Allah's own attributes of being Merciful and Compassionate on the one hand, and repeated assertion by the Qur'ān of the concept of *ihsan* (doing good to others). Thus it will be seen that the Islamic scripture does not morally approve even retaliatory violence which has at least some justification.

Thus the question of violence has to be dealt with great caution as far as the Islamic tradition is concerned. At the level of the value Qur'ān upholds nonviolence and exhorts Muslims to use wisdom and benevolence (*hikmah* and *ihsan*) while dealing with

others. Whatever violence has taken place in the Islamic history it is Muslims and the then Arab society and their norms that could be held responsible than the teachings of the Qur'ān. It is highly necessary to make this distinction in order to properly understand the essence of the Islamic ethics. Certain concessions to the situation should not be mixed up with the transcendental ethical norms given by the Qur'ān. In this connection it should also be borne in mind that the Qur'ān's repeated advocacy to fight (*qatilu*) is not to give permanence to violence or to glorify it; but in the situation the Qur'ān was dealing with, there was absolutely no other alternative but to fight. Inter tribal wars went on for years. Violence, in other words, was very much in the air. Also, there were powerful vested interests who were out to destroy Islam in its infancy and to eliminate the Prophet physically. Any moral discourse would not have influenced such people. The only alternative was to first defeat or subdue such elements and then to build new moral human from out of the believers. It was very difficult task indeed.

If there has been blood shed, and there has been, in the history of Islam the problem lies with the type of the society rather than the quality of the religious teachings. Most of us read into religion what suits our interests. In other words we often instrumentalise religion for our own purposes. There is abundant proof in history if we care to examine it carefully. Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity laid great deal of stress on compassion, nonviolence and love and yet these religions put together could not build a society based on these values. Society still is full of violence, conflict and clash of interests. However, there is one more aspect we have to deal with to clear Islam of the charge that it promotes violence. It can be said that the Buddhist, Jain or the Christian scriptures do not permit or talk of violence where as the Islamic scripture does. But here one has to keep in mind the historical and social situation those scriptures were dealing with and the Islamic scripture was called upon to deal with.

Here one has to refer to the Makkahn context also. In Makkahn verses there is absolutely no mention of meeting violence with

violence. Therefore some of the religious thinkers like Mahmoud Mohammed Taha of Sudan have laid emphasis on the Makkahn Islam. The Muslims were a persecuted minority in Makkah and they bore with great patience all the persecution let loose on them. Islam in Makkah was a great spiritual force. Those who lay emphasis on Makkahn Islam would argue that had Muslims not migrated to Madina Islam would have remained a passive spiritual force like Buddhism or Christianity. There is great deal of truth in this argument. But there are some problems, if not flaws, in it. Firstly, even in Makkahn stage Islam was not a religion of individual salvation. Right from beginning Islam laid great emphasis on building community. The concept of *ummah* was a collective concept. The concept of the community was always at the heart of the Islamic movement. In tribal society in which Islam arose in Makkah, individual is always subordinate to the collectivity. If Islam had laid emphasis on individual spiritual salvation the Makkahn tribal lords would have hardly bothered to oppose it.

However, Islam had a social agenda. It aimed at reforming not only the individual but also the whole society. It knew that the roots of exploitation and oppression lay in social structure, not only in individual avarice. So it aimed at transforming the society along with the individual. If the Makkahn verses are examined carefully the transformatory agenda of Islam becomes very clear. It forcefully attacks accumulation of wealth and exhorts the believers to spend their wealth on the poor, needy and orphans and widows. The rich of Makkah were neglecting them. Thus the Islamic agenda even at the Makkahn stage was to set up a society which was based on socio-economic justice. Look at this powerful denunciation of accumulation of wealth in one of the Makkahn chapters (104):

1. Woe to every slanderer, defamer!
2. Who amasses wealth and counts it –
3. He thinks that his wealth will make him abide.
4. Nay, he will certainly be hurled into the crushing disaster;

5. And what will make thee realise what the crushing disaster is?
6. It is the Fire kindled by Allah,
7. Which rises over the hearts.
8. Surely it is closed on them,
9. In extended columns.

More such chapters and verses could be cited from the Makkahn verses. Thus it becomes clear that Islam was attacking the very roots of social and economic exploitation and trying to lay foundation for a just society. The Makkahn lords were, therefore, determined to throw out such a movement lock, stock and barrel. They, therefore, severely persecuted Muslims and forced them to migrate. When the Prophet migrated to Madina he seriously busied himself in laying the foundation of a just society. In doing so he became threat not only to the Jews of Madina whom he had given full religious freedom in his covenant with them (known as *Mithaq-e-Madina*) but also continued to remain a threat for the Makkahn vested interests. The Makkahn vested interests were determined to thwart any attempt to set up a just society even in Madina as successful experiment in Madina could pose serious challenge to their own interests. They were lording over an exploitative system. Thus they went in full force and attacked Madina. The Prophet was again faced with a violent situation and had to defend himself and urge his followers to fight for defence of Madina and for defence of Islam. The Jews and hypocrites betrayed him and thus he had to face internal strife also. He had to mobilise forces to fight the Jews with whom he had no religious quarrel. The Jews, who were otherwise free to practice their own religion, felt threatened that they could no longer dominate the Madinese market. The migrants from Makkah too were expert traders and were now posing challenge to the dominance of the Jews.

The Prophet of Islam had hardly any choice. In an attempt to set up a just society based on high ethical standards, integrity of character and spiritual values he had to take on most powerful vested interests out to rack his movement. Thus violence appears

in the history of Islam not out of choice but out of compulsion. It is certainly not prescriptive violence but imposed one. Now as for the instances of Makkahn model of Islam we do come across them in history, particularly in Sufi Islam. Sufi Islam is essentially built around the theory of individual salvation. A Sufi saint is engaged more in individual character building and spiritual practices and hence his whole emphasis on *'ibadat* (prayers). The Prophet of Islam, it is interesting to note, was a perfect synthesis of a Sufi and an activist engaged in building a just society. That is why the Sufis consider the Holy Prophet as their Master from whom they derive their spiritual practices. But in later history of Islam we find either the Sufis or the activists or the *ulamā* (theologians) who theorised on the basis of the Qur<sup>ān</sup> and available reports of the Prophet's sayings and practices. The problem with the *ulamā* was that they froze Islam in its first century and lost track of its fundamental vision. Thus they could not keep pace with the changing society or new challenges emerging from different historical situations. The Prophet combined in himself both the Makkahn and the Medinese Islam and thus he became a perfect model to follow. However, for those who came after him the Makkahn Islam lost all relevance and they became more involved with building up a political community. The overemphasis in history of Islam on building up a political community created several problems and Islam became politicised rather than spiritualised. Hence its critics usually maintain that Islam is integrally associated with power.

However, it would be a serious mistake to associate Islam with power. Islam, like any other religion, has strong spiritual and ethical base. Its basic emphasis on ethical foundations of individual action cannot be ignored. The *'ibadat* (which include praying, fasting, giving alms and performing hajj – pilgrimage - ) are very central to Islam. It is these *'ibadat* which, according to the Qur<sup>ān</sup>, lead to inner peace (*sakinat al-qalb*). Thus the Qur<sup>ān</sup> says "He it is who sent down inner peace into the hearts of the believers that they might add faith to their faith." (48:4). Inner peace and spiritual solace are the very foundation stones of an ethical conduct.

Here we would like to point out that compassion like in Buddhism, is very central to Islam also. The key word for this is *rahmah*. This word has been derived from its root *r.h.m.* which in its root meaning means womb of the mother. And one of the ethical concept of Islam is *sila-i-rahmi* i.e., maintaining close relationship with those connected with ones mother's womb i.e., close relatives. Since mother nurtures and sustains life, she is more compassionate than man. Thus compassion and mother's womb are derived from the same root in Arabic. God is most compassionate (*arham al-rahimin*) as he is the creator and sustainer of all life. His Mercy and Compassion envelop everything in this universe (7:156). Thus a Muslim who worships Allah has to display compassion by all his actions. True worship does not mean merely physically bowing down before Allah. It means bowing down to His attributes and to imbibe these attributes in ones life. Thus a true Muslim is compassionate to all forms of life and he is committed to remove suffering from this earth. In other words a Muslim is quite sensitive to sufferings of all living beings and he should never be a cause of suffering to others. The Prophet is reported to have said that a good Muslim is one at whose hands others are safe.

The Islamic prayers (*'ibadat*) sensitivise Muslims to others' suffering. The *salat* makes him sensitive to equality of all human beings since all Muslims, irrespective of their social status have to stand in one line to pray; fasting during the month of Ramadan makes him sensitive to others' hunger and thirst and *zakāt* makes him conscious of others' financial needs. And we need these prime virtues in human beings to make them righteous and conscious of their duties to other human beings. The Qur'an also lays great stress on spiritual freedom and accepts different ways of worship. Spiritual freedom is very basis of a free human person responsible to himself as well as to whole humanity.



## PLURALITY OR POLARITY?



**N**ation formation and nation building are two distinct processes. Both are difficult and complex, nation- building specially so. Nation formation generally is a period of struggle against external challenge while nation building is a struggle against internal one. India was, under the British rule, an administrative unit rather than a nation. British rulers treated India as a colony rather than a nation. It was precisely for this reason that the highly diverse elements came together under the charismatic leadership of Tilak, Gandhi, Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel and others and vowed to form a nation and challenge the British rule. We did so successfully.

However, the process of nation formation was not without challenges. Communal fissures did appear and in this struggle two nation theory also surfaced and we were divided along the communal lines. However, many of us thought that if this was the price to be paid for our nation formation so be it and we paid the price. Our main objective at the time was independence from the British rule, which we achieved. Some people think that we could have avoided partition if we had shown patience and perseverance. But it is at the best a debating point and rest is history.

After independence though Pakistan opted for a religious state we did not swerve from our secular course and opted, with wisdom and determination, for a secular polity. Partition, it must be noted, had not reduced the degree of our diversity.

Hardly fifty percent of our Muslim population went over to Pakistan. Rest remained in India as they had great faith in secular democracy of India. And today there are, according to some estimates, more Muslims in India than in Pakistan thus invalidating the theory of two nations, if it was ever valid. Formation of Bangladesh had already dealt a death-blow earlier to that theory.

Our diversity, as pointed out above, remained intact despite the formation of Pakistan and secular democracy was the best creative response to our bewildering diversity. However, secular democracy remained more of a conceptual anchor for our diversity rather than a philosophy in action. Many of our internal challenges stem from this. Diverse interests emerged in the process of nation building, which posed a grave challenge to our secular democracy.

The first grave challenge was the tendency to majoritarianism. Nehru had this fear all along. Nehru, who was leading the process of nation building in the post-independence India, stood by fair share for all in power including minorities. This was the only fitting answer to two-nation theory. After all it was for fear of denial of this share that this theory came into existence. Nehru was well aware of it and therefore his concept of secular democracy meant justice to minorities in the process of nation building.

However, Hindu communalism, like Muslim communalism, was not at all happy with the concept of secular democracy and began putting spokes in its way. Like Islamic Pakistan they wanted to create Hindu Rashtra consigning minorities to a secondary position. The RSS ideologues rejected the concept of plurality and opted for polarity, which was sought to be created by two-nation theory. Thus there are clearly two contradictory political processes in operation during our process of nation building: those trying to weld together diverse elements in the country to meet the internal challenges of development and formation of civil society.

It is also important to note that communalism is not only negation of pluralism but also opposed to modernity and the concept of civil society and its political freedoms. If for one Islam

is the core of political discourse for the other it is dharma which is central to its polity. For them there is no space for modern political discourse at all. The supremacy of dharma is the essence of their politics. And if religion or dharma is the essence of politics non-believers can hardly have any place. Thus in the course of our process of nation building all these internal challenges have emerged and with the passage of time these challenges are becoming graver and graver. The emergence of Ram Janmabhoomi politics was not accidental or even an exception. It was the result of continuous and systematic challenge to secular democratic polity as enshrined in our constitution. The secular forces must take this grave challenge to the concept of modern secular polity very seriously. It is the most serious challenge modern democratic India is facing today. It negates the very fundamentals of our political philosophy.

Nothing can be more valued than our diversity. Our diversity is the core of our democracy. Freedom becomes meaningless without respect for this diversity. Fundamentalism and fanaticism are becoming stronger in all the countries of Indian subcontinent or South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan. Forces of fanaticism are gaining upper hand. In my opinion this is as grave a challenge as the challenge of freeing our country from the British rule. It requires mass mobilisation once again on the scale our leaders of freedom struggle did during the British rule. It was easier however, to mobilise the masses against British rule; it is much more difficult to do so against our own internal enemy. There were clearly defined sentiments against the British rule; there are no such sentiments against fundamentalism and religious fanaticism, which is eating into the vitals of our politics of secular democracy and democratic freedoms. I, therefore, consider this internal challenge as much more serious than the struggle against colonial rule.

No political party in India is prepared to face this challenge and defend secular democracy with full vigour and untarnished commitment with honourable exception of parties on the left. But the parties on the left do not have all India presence to take up this

challenge. There is violence in the air everywhere. Our plurality and diversity are being threatened. The RSS chief has even given a call to Hindus to acquire arms. Thus an attempt is being made to make majority feel insecure.

Thus secular forces have to meet this challenge by strengthening our plurality and diversity. Polarity is the enemy of our unity. Even in medieval ages such a polarity never existed as is sought to be created today. Our culture is a pluralist culture and we have deeply influenced each other in practically every field. We have several communities, which can neither be characterised as Muslim or Hindu. They profess mixed religions. In the *People of India* published by Anthropological Survey of India we find that there are 87 communities which profess Hinduism and Sikhism, 116 communities which adhere to Hinduism and Christianity, 35 communities which follow Hinduism and Islam and 94 communities which practise Christianity and Tribal religions. The caste scenario is no less interesting. There are twelve communities among Muslims who profess to be Brahmins, 24 communities who declare themselves as Kshatriyas, 6 as Vaishyas and 11 Muslim communities as Sudras. Among Christians too we have such caste groups, 8 professing to be Brahmins and 48 as Sudras.

This plurality of caste and communities makes India the most interesting as well as challenging country as far as the process of nation building is concerned. The purists among Hindus, Christians and Muslims try to purify their respective communities but it has hardly ever succeeded. There is constant attempt going on to re-write our history to polarise communities. Such re-writing of history is clearly aimed at polarisation through creating false consciousness. The process of polarisation before independence resulted in partition. Now there is no question of partition but it creates tension, which often burst into communal violence. Each bout of violence results in greater polarisation between communities and this polarisation helps secure votes of polarised communities. This internal challenge can be met only if sense of unity born of

our composite culture and sharing common historical bonds is strengthened. This shared historical bonds will create plural rather than polarised identity.

Without shared historical bonds and sense of composite culture a sense of nationhood cannot be induced among the people. In fact religion can never be a basis of nationhood. Cultural and historical bonds are far more viable for secular politics than common religious bonds. Common religious bonds are valuable on a different plane. A religious community is different from a political community. A nation is a multi-layered community. It has several layers political, social, historical and cultural. Thus many people feel today that partition of Indian sub-continent was not a sound political decision. Despite religious differences our common cultural and historical bonds are far stronger. It was for this reason that great Islamic scholars like Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad cautioned Indian Muslims against religious nationalism. Secular nationalism can be an effective antidote to religious fanaticism if our political processes are guided and controlled by political philosophy of secularism. It is only when communal forces seize control of political processes that fanaticism raises its head. It is unfortunate that this seems to be happening today in our country. Or is it weakness of secular forces that has become strength of communalism?



# TRAGEDY OF KARBALA AND IMPORTANCE OF MARTYRDOM



Imam Hussain, who laid down his life in Karbala on 10th of Muharram along with several members of his family to save Islamic revolution, is considered as the greatest martyr in the world of Islam. He is referred to as *Shahid-e-Azam* (the greatest martyr) in Islamic literature. There is near unanimity on this question among all Muslims – Sunnis as well as Shīahs. Both Sunnis and Shīahs observe 10th of Muharram as *Yaum-e-Shahadat* (i.e., the day of martyrdom). However, the Shai'a Muslims observe it somewhat differently than the Sunni Muslims. For the Shīahs it is the greatest tragedy of Islam which occurred within the few decades of the death of the Holy Prophet and so they observe it with the greatest degree of solemnity and weep and do *matam* (beat their breasts), often with chains and knives. Blood oozes out of their bodies. But some other Shīahs do *matam* with their hands and do not use any external object.

There are some controversies about the martyrdom of Imam Hussain in the world of Islam which are of general interest also. Some Muslims (a minuscule section, of course) have argued that the Imam should not have challenged the authority of Yazid who had usurped power illegitimately and became ruler of the Muslims. According to this argument Hussain was in no position to challenge Yazid who was very powerful and challenging him amounted to throwing oneself into peril. These people base their argument on

a Qur'anic verse 2:195 which says, "Do not throw yourselves into destruction with your own hands".

These Muslims argue that Imam Hussain threw himself into destruction with his own hands by challenging a powerful ruler like Yazid. He should have kept silent and thus saved himself and his friends and relatives from sure death. Firstly, the argument is flawed as the verse was revealed in a very different context. According to all commentators of the Qur'an this verse was revealed when some Muslims during the Prophet's time hesitated to contribute money for preparation for defensive measures against impending battle. Allah warned them that by not contributing for preparations for proper defence they are throwing themselves into destruction. Thus the verse is quoted out of context by these people.

Now let us examine the argument itself whether it has any merit. If a person feels strongly that something wrong is being done by powerful vested interests or those who wield political power, should one silently submit to it just because one is too weak to challenge it and suppress one's own voice of conscience? Or should one challenge the wrong even if it results in sacrificing one's life for the purpose? Do we fight against the wrong after weighing pros and cons or do we fight against the wrong just because it is wrong? People do draw up strategy with a view to maximise the chances of victory. But that is when the question of gaining or losing is uppermost in the mind.

But if victory is the ultimate aim morality is lost. When one fights for the truth one does not fight for any gain and martyrs are highly valued because they fight for truth and not for any material gain. One has to lay down one's life in defence of truth, otherwise martyrdom will lose all significance. Yazid, like Ravana, represented the forces of evil and it was necessary to challenge him, come what may. Yazid was destroying all that Islam stood for. Islam had given a new morality to humanity, it had restored the sense of dignity among all human beings, had done away with the discrimination of the rulers and the ruled. It had given the message of equality of all

human beings and rejected the distinctions between Arabs and non-Arabs, black and white, belonging to this ethnic or that ethnic group.

Yazid was restoring all that prevailed before Islam in Arabia, a period referred to as *jahiliyah* i.e., a period of ignorance. Should the Imam who was grandson of the Prophet (PBUH) have witnessed all this corruption of Islamic teachings and restoration of pre-Islamic practices silently? Should he have allowed pre-Islamic ethnic and tribal pride restored again? Islam had given great importance to weaker sections of society, to the oppressed (*mustad'ifun*) and Yazid was oppressing the people. Could any person of conscience keep silent? Yazid represented stark materialism and consumerism and Hussain represented spiritualism. Could challenging Yazid in these circumstances amount to throwing oneself in self-destruction? Is there any difference between self-destruction and sacrifice? Those who keep on calculating the chances of victory and defeat will never appreciate the spirit of sacrifice. Martyrdom, according to the Qur'an ensures eternal life and Hussain chose eternal life by defending the truth in Karbala. And Yazid could opt for eternal damnation.



## TWENTY FIRST CENTURY, RELIGION AND PEACE



The new millennium is about to dawn and it would be interesting to see how religion faces new challenges of the coming century. The World Conference for Religion and Peace (WCRP), an international organisation based in New York organised a four day international conference in Amman, Jordan from 25-29 November 1999 to define the role of religion in promoting peace in the world in the twenty first Century. Some fifteen religions from 100 countries were represented in this exercise. Top religious leaders and heads of religious communities participated in the discussion. What was most interesting was that the Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders from the conflict torn Bosnia and Kosova were also present and they talked to each other face to face and vowed to promote peace in the region.

Raisul Ulamā Mustafa Cerić, the chief Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina made some interesting remarks. He pointed out that it is too dangerous to leave politics to politicians alone and similarly too hazardous to leave theology to theologians alone. It is, needless to say, professional politicians and theologians who are at the root of the problem. It is very true that politics or theology should not be left to professionals. People themselves have every right to be involved both in politics as well as in theology. It cannot be done over their heads. When left to only the professionals they ignore interests of the people and promote their own interests.

Another important question to be answered is, 'is religion alone responsible for the conflict in the world?' Conflict in many parts of the world like Bosnia or Kosova appear to be due to religion? Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan maintained that it is not religion but politics that is guilty. Hassan Talal said that "we believe in positive engagement as partners in a world which is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, and where borders are becoming less meaningful, or even disintegrating." He also maintained that "We are moving toward a 'single world' with a single agenda. But we want all peoples and all cultures to contribute to the formulation of this agenda' so that it will reflect our mutual interests and concerns." He also made a significant remark that "For a 'single world' with a single agenda formulated according to the value system of one culture – to the exclusion of others – will be a world in which injustice and marginalisation will inevitably lead to conflict and, further, to war. However, a 'single world' built upon ten thousand cultures, a world in which commonalties are the foundation and particularities are the cornerstones, will be characterised by co-operation. This is the only basis for common living and a joint effort necessary for the construction of a brighter future in which all individuals and all communities have the means to achieve their potential."

There is much truth in what Hassan bin Talal observed. The problem is precisely what he pointed out. The west has its own agenda and wants to impose it on the unwilling peoples of Asia and Africa. All those who participated in the conference felt that mutual respect for each others religious traditions and cultures is very necessary for peace. It is when the west determines the agenda for the whole world that Osama bin Laden are born who, in order to fight western hegemony, promote religious hatred and extremism. The likes of Osama use religious vocabulary that is as dangerous as armament. In a lighter vein Mustafa Cerić of Bosnia suggested that there should be disarmament of extremist vocabulary like 'holy war' and 'holy peace' should take its place.

Rabbi David Rosen from Israel was of the opinion that though it is important that one should love ones neighbour but then this principle can be applied by some one negatively and say if my neighbour hates me I will also hate him. This will again promote conflict and bloodshed. So he felt it is essential to emphasise that regardless of how the other behaves and regardless of the pain of your own experience, one must not loose sight of the fact that every human being, regardless of race, colour, creed or sex, is of inestimable transcendent divine value. Accordingly, we must behave with respect for each person's life and dignity regardless of whether or not they behave correctly and regardless of one's own bitter experiences. But this is too moralistic to work successfully in the world of ordinary mortals. One wishes all human beings were like the ones Rabbi David Rosen suggests. The Rabbi also said "The challenge of common living is precisely the ability to overcome our own sense of pain and alienation so that we may see the other as a child of God. He was right in pointing out that "an overwhelming number of the members of our religious communities are trapped in their own very real historic and even contemporary sense of victim hood. This is true in Northern Ireland, in the former Yugoslavia, in Sri Lanka, in the Middle East and throughout the world where territorial conflicts exist involving human identities, inextricably bound up with religious cultural factors. In all such contexts and beyond them, the various protagonists feel that they have been someone's victims and they are not genuinely accepted and respected by the other."

This is, needless to say, heart of the matter. Unless we accept the other with all sense of his/her dignity there cannot be peace. Mutual acceptability and respect for others' dignity is what is lacking and we often end up blaming the religion. Religion and religious values can only be a guide for us. What is important is to bring revolution within us and develop a culture of respecting the others and accepting them as they are. It is sense of our superiority over the other that brings us in head on conflict with them. We think that the other threatens

our existence, our domination and hence we seek to maintain our domination through assertion of our superiority which is often imaginary. It results in rejection of the other and hence conflicts.

Arch Bishop of Canterbury, Carey posed a question, like Prince Hassan bin Talal: 'do religions cause conflict?' But he also posed the question 'can religion resolve conflict?' While the answer for former is in negative, the one for the later can be positive if religion is not made an instrument of promoting selfish interests. Though to promote selfish interests is quite contrary to the very spirit of religion this is what is sought to be done by human beings championing their own vested interests. Similarly the Grand Mufti of al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi profusely quoted from the Qur'ān and the Prophet's traditions to show that Islam means peace and there is no place for belligerence of any kind.

What role can religion play in the coming century? Will religion be sidelined in view of the breath taking technological progress or will it be a valuable resource for peace in the coming years or a source of conflict? These are the questions which have to be grappled with and one has to find answers to them. Religion is not a source of conflict but it can be a valuable resource for peace. Religious identities clash as these identities signify much more than mere religious beliefs. A religious identity signifies, besides religious beliefs, cultural and territorial hegemony, a conflict with the other who competes for these cultural and territorial spaces. Also, religious identities are, more often than not, the signifiers of specificities that are sought to be contested by other cultural identities. The battles for political or cultural supremacy are fought through assertion of religious identities. This possibility has tremendously increased in view of globalisation. Globalisation seeks to steamroll all other cultures and impose western secular and consumerist values over the peoples of Asia and Africa who not only are rich in their own traditional cultures but also are having a feeling of deprivation vis-à-vis the developed western world which has pushed them to the margin of existence.

It is this marginalised sense of existence and acute sense of exploitation that fuels violent conflicts in the region. Unless this imbalance is corrected there cannot be hope of meaningful coexistence. One also has to bear in mind that today's world is basically pluralist in character. Rapid means of transportation cause mass migration both within and outside the country. Large number of people is migrating to other (western countries) for better prospects. The migrants either compete with the local people for jobs or become a source of cheap labour causing deep resentment among the natives. These battles are often fought under the garb of religious or cultural identities. Thus globalisation on one hand, and, mass migration on the other, is fuelling religious and cultural conflicts both in Asian and African countries as well as in western countries.

In coming days when we enter the 21st century this process will be intensified causing more religio-cultural conflicts. More the conflict greater the need for coexistence. However, coexistence will be difficult if there is no sincere attempt to build a just society. It is in this respect that religion can become an important resource for justice and peace. If religious values, rather than religious rituals, are asserted, there will be greater possibility of building a just and peaceful society. It must be noted that the core values of all religions are complimentary rather than contradictory. If Hinduism and Jainism stress nonviolence Buddhism stresses compassion. If Christianity stresses love, Islam stresses justice and equality. These core values can become an important resource for a more meaningful and peaceful society.

But besides this there will be more important challenges facing the religion in coming days. These challenges are already surfacing. One of the greatest challenges is that of gender justice. There is not a single gender just society today neither in the 'advanced' western society nor in traditional Asian and African societies. Unfortunately the World Conference for Religion and Peace (wcrp) also did not address this question adequately. Though some people did refer to it was only in passing. The women in this conference did not even have important role to play. The question of gender justice will be most

fundamental question in coming century and without addressing this question it will not be possible to build a just society, much less a peaceful one. Gender in justice is quite rampant in all the countries of the world, particularly the developing countries of Asia and Africa. In many societies the problem is very acute. There is what is known as 'honour killings'. Those women who marry against the will of the parents or even develop some kind of relationship with men of their choice are killed in the name of honour of the family. This is quite rampant in tribal areas of Pakistan. Only recently when a married woman from North West Frontier Area of Pakistan wanted divorce from her husband it was thought to be against the honour of the family and was shot dead at the instance of her own parents in the office of her lawyer. The parents were in this case highly educated and well off. This is called 'honour killing' and the culprits escape clutches of law.

It is legally condoned in many Muslim countries like Egypt and even in a liberal country like Jordan. When a bill was brought in the Jordanian Parliament to amend the criminal procedure code 360 to punish the guilty of 'honour killing' as ordinary culprits, the conservatives opposed it saying it will increase the cases of illegitimate sex and corruption of morals and threaten the very basis of family life. The amendment of course could not be passed. The conservatives carried the day. In Sindh, Pakistan, the feudal lords have devised ingenious way to save their land being divided through inheritance of their daughters. They marry off their daughters to Holy Qur'an and thus deprive them of their legitimate right to marry a man. The woman has to lead a life of virginity and 'piety'. She cannot even protest, let alone break the shackles of her 'marriage' with the Holy Book.

Such killings and such marriages have, of course, no justification in the Islamic law and is yet widely practised in several Islamic countries. And even when these practices are totally contrary to Islamic teachings the *ulama* either keep silent or lend their support to them in the name of 'purity of morals' and sanctity of family life. Now with greater democratisation of societies and greater awareness of women

of their fundamental rights such antediluvian practices are causing grave social tensions and great injustice to women. The theologians and Islamic jurists have to meet this challenge and banish such grossly unjust practices. No religion, much less Islam, comes in the way of gender justice. It is only customs and traditions of patriarchal society, which have accorded the status of sanctity to these practises. In view of increased awareness of rights among women these practices can not and should not be perpetuated. But our traditional societies are still not prepared to abolish them. And yet we are boasting of preparing ourselves to face the new century or new millennium.

In India too if a woman marries with a man of inferior caste – she is often beheaded in villages in front of all. At times even the man is also executed for daring to marry the woman of higher caste. Also, in certain parts of India there is the custom of child marriage. Infants still in the lap of their mother are married off. In these cases also it is woman who suffers more in her adulthood as man is free to marry a woman of his choice, if he does not like the one whom he married in his infancy. A woman cannot. Of course such marriages are not sanctioned by the scriptures but are part of social baggage. Also, there is more horrifying tradition of *sati* (burning the wife on the funeral pyre of her husband). Though not widely prevalent still one comes across instances of *sati* here and there. What is more painful is its celebration by men and women and even constructing a temple on the site to worship the *sati*. Then there are more widespread instances of bride burning for the sake of dowry. These are of course legally punishable but yet glorified by the society or condoned by it. It is a great challenge before the religious people. They must see that these practices are abandoned being basically against the spirit of religion. No religion, much less, Hinduism, would permit taking human life. Religious people, being compassionate, should not withstand taking of human life. If they want religion to survive with dignity in the next millennium they should bring about psychological as well as spiritual revolution and restore the right to women to live with full dignity and honour.

Compassion for life and full honour and dignity for all human beings including women, is the part of basic religious attitude. One must enter new century with this religious attitude.

Yet another challenge before the religious people is that of spoiling of environment. Industries and motor vehicles have made our environment unfit for healthy life. It is greed of the few rich who pollute so that they can live in luxury and consume beyond all limits. It is the rich countries who are consuming beyond all limits. In fact their greed knows no limit. But also the rich in developing countries imitate the ways of their counterparts in the west. It is having adverse effect especially on the poor. Many schemes of industrialisation or of big dams bring immense misery to the people living in that area. The forests are also indiscriminately destroyed by launching such schemes. Religious people would not approve of such destruction of nature and resultant problems. The environmental destruction is one of the gravest challenges before humanity today and religious people cannot escape their responsibility in this regard. Universe is the creation of God and God's creation must be respected as well as loved. In fact, as pointed out above, it is over consumption of the rich, which is responsible for the grave danger to our environment. However, all religions in the world stress austere living and avoid overindulgence. It is this fundamental principle of religion that must be propagated by truly religious people. Again, over consumption, apart from polluting the environment, deprives the poor of their right to livelihood. And every religion sensitises its followers to the needs of the weaker sections of society.

Thus religious people in the world should come together to protect the environment on one hand, and to empower the weaker sections of society, on the other. While there is so much production and much more potential for more, the poor continue to suffer. The science and technology has great potential to solve the problems of poverty and hunger but the vested interests come in its way. The WTO regime is also essentially against the poor of the world and it is precisely for this reason that trade unions and other NGOs are

demonstrating against the WTO meeting in Seattle in USA. The people of religion, whatever religion they belong to, should throw their weight behind those fighting against the WTO and similar other regimes. But it is unfortunate that the religious heads either consider it beyond the scope of religion or keep silent in order to serve the needs of the powerful vested interests rather than those of the poor. The religious establishments should dissociate themselves from these interests. Either they can serve these interests or the interests of religion. The poor are becoming more and more aware of their rights and would question the religious authority if they ignore their interests. In the coming millennium the poor are likely to increasingly question the religious authorities on their attitude about the interests of the poor.

There is another important question – the question of faith and reason which has to be tackled to the satisfaction of the people in the new millennium. The medieval age was the age of faith; nineteenth and twentieth centuries the centuries of reason. However, our experience in twentieth century, particularly towards the end shows that reason alone cannot meet the challenges of human existence. Human existence is full of complex challenges and these challenges cannot be met with the help of reason alone. Reason, it must be noted, is a tool, not the goal. Goal is meaningful human existence in this world. Faith is equally necessary to achieve this goal. Neglecting faith resulted in more complex problems. We witnessed religious extremism throughout the world. The revivalist and fundamentalist movements surfaced posing great challenge. These movements became violent, as they could not persuade those at the helm of affairs to listen to their point of view. This violence, it is important to note, is the violence of frustration. And violence in the age of technology can be much more devastating than one can imagine.

Faith, in human existence, plays very important role. Without faith in values, or in higher reality or God, life would be devoid of meaning. Life without faith would be mere hedonism for some and mere animal existence for many. But faith alone cannot, like reason, enable human

beings to live purposeful life. Blind faith can only be exploitative and superstitious. Faith to many is mere solace and comfort of mind. An inquirer's mind, on the other hand, is restless and devoid of comfort which a believer experiences. Nietzsche, in a letter to his sister in 1865 wrote, "...if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; but if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire." However, Nietzsche made this observation in nineteenth century which was essentially a century of reason and revolt against blind faith. But by the end of twentieth century we can say that neither superstitious faith nor instrumental reason can serve our purpose. It is creative synthesis of faith in values and reason as an enlightening tool of inquiry that is needed for purposeful human existence.

Thus religion has to enter the twenty first century with a new agenda: a creative blend of comforting faith in values and an inquiring reason to construct a meaningful and humane society. A truly religious person should not escape from the responsibility of inquiry after truth. While faith determines the purpose and meaning of life reason unfolds the hidden mysteries of universe. Also, new technological breakthroughs have raised new ethical questions which people of faith have to tackle. Be it cloning or be it unravelling the genetic code new ethical problems are arising and in coming years many more will arise. The people of faith will have to meet them in the light of their values and with an open and liberal mind, a mind that accepts truth, not mere dogmas, a mind that is dynamic, not static, a mind that is rooted in faith, not in past traditions. People of faith should have mind free of traditional encumbrances, a mind that is fearless and free. With such mind the people of faith should enter the twenty -first century.



# ISLAMIC WORLD AND CRISIS OF MODERNISM



The rising tide of what is called by the print and electronic media as 'fundamentalism' in the Islamic world from Indonesia in the East to Algeria in the West has created many problems in the world at large. The attack on the WTC in New York on 11th September 2001 has further aggravated the matter and people have come to believe that Islam really is against modernity and stands for jihad. This view is being spread by various comments and articles appearing in the media. It must be said that due to these happenings Islam has evoked tremendous interest among the people.

What is the relation between Islam and modernity? Is Islam really against modernity? First let us see what modernity is. According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Delhi, 1993) modern means 1) "of the present and recent times" and 2) "in current fashion; not antiquated." Keeping this definition in view the question arises can there be any relationship between religion and modernity?

The next question then arises what is religion. What constitutes religion. Is religion of permanent nature and what is that in religion which ensures its permanence? These are important questions to be dealt with if we have to grapple with the problem of Islam and modernity.

Religion is not only set of rituals but also set of beliefs, values and institutions. A religion also gives a thought system to its people.

Any religion, despite its eternity carries the birth-marks of its historical circumstances. This social and historical contextuality is as important in understanding religion as its eternity. Since followers of religion have strong emotional bonds with their religion they accept whatever reaches them as permanent lock, stock and barrel. They often refuse to take notice of changes in historical contextuality.

Here arises the question whether everything inherited by a faithful by way of religious rituals, institutions, values and thought system as permanent and immutable? The religious leaders and faithful would say yes. The reformers, on the other hand, would advocate changes in certain practices and traditions. Modernity, as pointed out above, relates to what is recent as opposed to what is ancient or old. Thus there is bound to be some kind of incongruity between religion and religious traditions and what is construed as modernity.

All religions, not only Islam, face this problem earlier or later depending as when modernity dawns in the area where that religion has its sway. Christianity in the West faced it much earlier than other religions in the East. Here we should keep in mind that modernity cannot be defined only something temporal or related to time. It is to be dealt with also as something to do with mental approach and way of accepting or rejecting a proposition. In other words we have to speak of modernity as value.

Also, it would be wrong to think that modernity was accepted by other religions without struggle whereas Muslims resisted it. All religions went through crisis of modernity though the degree of crisis might have varied. It would also be wrong to think that any religious community accepts or rejects modernity uniformly. The intellectual elite of the community as well as other beneficiaries accept it more readily than others.

It is also true that the Islamic world in general has been very late in accepting modernity. Other religions or other peoples did it earlier or with less resistance. But nowhere it was accepted without struggle or resistance. We would like to discuss, later in this paper, the reasons why Islamic world has been late comer in the modern era.

Of all the religions, Christianity in the west was first to accept modernity but not without struggle. In fact there was fierce struggle and great deal of bloodshed before western Christianity embraced modernity. Still sections of Christians in the western world continue to reject it. In fact Christianity went through throes of great crisis due to the complete domination the Catholic Church had over the Christian community during the medieval ages. The dogmas evolved by the Church could not be questioned by anyone and no one had right to interpret Bible except the Church hierarchy. And it was not easy to challenge the authority of the Church, neither for religious persons like Martin Luther nor for scientists like Galileo.

Galileo was severely persecuted for his proposition that earth goes round the sun rather than otherwise. He was blinded by the Church so that he could no more observe natural phenomenon and come forward with 'heresies'. However, scientific truths not only prevailed but were found of immense benefits for the emerging ruling classes in the west. Their acceptability became possible not only because of their demonstrable truth but also because of immense benefits accruing to the emerging European business and political leaders. The discovery of steam engine ultimately led to inventions of steam ships and this in turn made colonisation possible for Western European powers. Gun- powder was also invention of modern science leading to political domination of the west.

Colonisation of the eastern countries included large number of Islamic countries from Indonesia to Algeria. For them the experience of colonisation was most humiliating one as the rulers became the ruled. They found modern science, an important parameter for modernity, to be a powerful instrument of subjugation. The Catholic Church had rejected modern science as it challenged its dogmas and Muslims rejected modernity as it brought to them colonial humiliation and complete loss of their hegemonic control.

While the European people left their poverty behind and began to become prosperous as the wealth plundered from the colonies was transferred to the metropolitan countries, the peoples in colonial

countries began to be impoverished. Impoverishment made them more insecure and insecurity made them cling to their traditions and customs more tenaciously. It really became very difficult to break this vicious circle. Though there is no church in Islam and no priestly hierarchy, the theologians lost out power and influence they wielded during the Muslim rule and thus they became hostile to modern science and modern rationality.

Another thing we have to keep in mind while discussing Islam and modernity is that apart from colonial plunder and transfer of wealth from colonial to colonising countries Islam was generally embraced by poorer and weaker sections of peoples in various countries. Most of them happened to be either poor peasants or artisans. They constituted the overwhelming number of Muslims all over the Islamic world and it is so even today. These poorer and weaker sections embraced Islam as it laid great emphasis on social justice, equality and dignity of all human beings.

For these poorer and weaker sections of society religion means more as an inner solace and spiritual balm than rationality and modernity. They find this inner solace more by clinging to age-old traditions and customs than by indulging in intellectual quest. In fact intellectual quest leads to more uncertainties and tensions. The clergy also basically came from these poorer sections as after colonisation clergy was downgraded and ceased to wield political influence.

The clergy's intellectual universe was very traditional one and it wielded tremendous influence on poorer and illiterate masses. On top of it colonial experience which led to more impoverishment particularly of the artisan classes led to fear of modern sciences. As initially the workers in Europe had launched attacks on machines, which they thought were the cause of their woes the artisans in the colonised Muslim countries developed fear of modern scientific inventions and the Muslim clergy further reinforced their fears and legitimised it through use of religious traditions. It is important to understand this social and intellectual universe prevailing in the colonised Muslim world for understanding the causes of crisis of modernity.

But we find both revivalist as well as modern movements during nineteenth century in almost all the Islamic countries. In Egypt number of modern reformers like Mohammad Abduh, Ahmad Amin and others launched movements for spreading modern ideas and modern reforms in Egyptian Islamic traditions. In Iran and Afghanistan and also Turkey Jamaluddin Afghani worked tirelessly for promoting modernity. Mohammad Abduh was his disciple. While Jamaluddin Afghani was political activist emphasising pan-Islamic movement to fight against western colonialism Abduh concentrated on educational and religious reforms in Egypt. He had spent number of years in France as an exile and he imbibed many modern ideas from there.

In India Sir Syed's contribution to modernisation of Islamic society was very seminal. He also reached conclusion that rejection of modernity will lead Muslims nowhere. He founded scientific society and began translating into Urdu books on modern sciences. He was of course pioneer in promoting modern education among Muslims. He was followed by many illustrious modern reformers like Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk, Maulavi Chiragh Ali, Justice Ameer Ali and several others who advocated modern reforms. However, they had impact more on intellectual elite, which was coming into existence through colonial education system and western ideas of science and rationality.

It is another important fact to be borne in mind that in Islamic countries due to widespread poverty and illiteracy accentuated by colonisation emergence of educated middle class was painfully slow and this further impeded growth of modernity and rationality. Existence of strong middle class is highly necessary for modern reforms. Throughout Islamic world there was widespread poverty and illiteracy. Due to oil revolution in early seventies prosperity was experienced only in some Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and some other Gulf countries. Also except in Egypt there was no democratic tradition anywhere and no concept of civil society.

The colonial legacy still persists in Islamic countries and after colonial powers withdrew they set up either dictators or kings of

their choice. It was so specially because Middle East was particularly very sensitive area in view of its oil wealth. The USA assumed political role in the area and never allowed any genuine democracy to flower. The State of Israel was also created to keep the Arab countries under tight leash. When Mosaddeq took over in Iran in early fifties through genuine democratic revolution and nationalised the oil- company the CIA plotted to overthrow him by mobilising Lumpen elements and the Shah's rule was re-established. The Shah throttled democracy and continued to rule and serve American interests until the Islamic revolution in 1979.

In the entire Islamic world there is poverty and backwardness on one hand, and absence of democracy, on the other. A study conducted by the us based Freedom House circulated on network muslimindians@yahoo.com dated December 16, 2001 makes interesting revelation. The survey called "Freedom in the World 2001-2002" concludes that there is a dramatic expanding gap in the levels of freedom and democracy between Islamic countries and rest of the world. The study found that "a non-Islamic country is more than three times likely to be democratic than an Islamic state."

The survey shows that "Of the 192 countries in the world today, 121 are electoral democracies, but in countries with an Islamic majority, only 11 of 47 have democratically elected governments, or 23 per cent." In the non-Islamic world there are 110 electoral democracies out of 145 states, over 76 per cent, the report said. The report also said, "within the Islamic world there are nine countries with authoritarian presidencies, there are seven with dominant party states in which opposition parties are nominal, there are six with presidential-parliamentary systems with features of authoritarian rule, there are nine traditional monarchies, there are three one party states, there is one military ruled state, and, until November there was one fundamentalist theocracy, Afghanistan under the rule of Taliban." It is of course no more.

Thus it will be seen that Islamic world cannot boast of free democracy which is one of the criteria for modernity. The lack of

people-oriented polity in the Islamic world has again serious social, economic and educational consequences. The authoritarian regimes do not permit free inquiry, which is necessary for growth of science, technology and rationality. Social sciences also can flower only if political freedom is guaranteed. Also, education is strictly controlled and has heavy dose of medieval theology.

The lack of freedom and absence of democracy is sought to be compensated by declaring the state as Islamic. And then under the garb of Islamic state and in the name of Islam medieval theology is imposed, freedom of thinking even on Islamic issues severely curtailed and *ṣarī'ah* law is applied mechanically. It has happened in several countries in last few decades. Because of this Islamic theocracy becomes all-powerful and all state institutions slip under their control.

It has already been pointed out that the Muslim theologians come from poorer and backward strata of society and their intellectual universe is severely limited to medieval theology. This medieval theology becomes their power and anyone opposing it is declared heretic. The finest minds that questioned validity of these medieval theological formulations and stressed the need for creative rethinking on these issues had to flee their countries to some or the other western countries. They could write their much-appreciated works only in free environs of those countries. Thus from Egypt, from Algeria, from Pakistan and from several other Muslim countries finest minds had to migrate to western countries.

However, the blame does not go to Islam per se as is often thought. There is absolutely nothing in the Qur'ān, which puts restriction on freedom of thought. On the contrary the Qur'ān encourages knowledge equating it with light (and equating ignorance – *jahl* – with darkness. Knowledge – *'ilm* – is key word in the Qur'ān. Also, knowledge is not possible without free inquiry. It is a creative process and free intellect is *sin qua non* for it. Also, knowledge has not been used in the Qur'ān only for matters of religion and *ṣarī'ah* as the theologians began to argue later. The Prophet also

made acquisition of knowledge obligatory on all believers, men and women (see *Sahih Bukhari*). And according to yet another tradition the Prophet said "acquire knowledge, even if it be in China..." Naturally no religious knowledge, as far as Islam was concerned, was available in China as there was not a single Muslim then there.

In fact the Qur'an does not hit for religious knowledge but knowledge in general, including secular and scientific knowledge. It is interesting to note that in those days the most advanced knowledge was available in Greece. The Greek philosophers, however, stressed deductive rather than inductive knowledge. Deductive knowledge leads to speculative knowledge as deduction depends on the basic premise and basic premise may or may not be based on empirical observation.

However, inductive knowledge is based on observation of empirical facts and is the very basis of modern science. The Qur'an repeatedly stresses observations of nature and reflection on nature and thus encourages scientific observations. It was Bacon who stressed inductive knowledge and he is considered as the father of modern science. But the Qur'an, as pointed out, had already led emphasis on inductive knowledge much before Bacon. We find in the Qur'an verses like this: "Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were closed up, so We rent them. And we made from water everything living. Will they not then believe?" (21:30). Many more such verses could be quoted from the Qur'an.

Here in this verse also there is stress on seeing and observing. The statement that every thing living was made from water which also is in keeping with modern theories of origin of life. The Qur'an also denies existence of miracles which again is in keeping with the rational attitude.

As Islam spread into different cultures and different societies at different levels of knowledge – from superstitious to advanced stages of knowledge – Islam acquired different hues and different meanings in these different cultural settings. Thus Bassam Tibi, a Syrian Arab scholar teaching in Germany, rightly observes in his

book *The Crisis of Modern Islam* (University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 1988), "There is no unified Islam in reality or in religious doctrine. What was initially an Arab Islam was assimilated into the cultures of Islamized non-Arab populations and thus de-Arabized. West African Islam, for example, has been fully integrated into the West African animistic cultures, even though in its original Arab version it was vigorously monotheistic." (p-56)

It is not all. Islam was also thoroughly feudalised when it spread to old feudal empires like the Sassanid and Roman empires. All the traditions of these empires and subsequently other empires like the Mughal Empire in India were integrated into Roman, Iranian or Indian Islam. In feudal cultures dominated by monarchy and feudal lords free inquiry was not permitted. Submission to the authority was the rule. This became part of feudal Islam and free inquiry so pervasive in Prophet's time and subsequently during the early period of Islam until complete feudalisation of Islam with the Umayyad period (later part of 7th Century A.D.) came to an end.

Be it *shari'ah* law or other theological formulation early history has recorded many free debates but after feudalisation of Islam these debates became rarer and submission to earlier theological authorities became the rule as submission to religious authorities was the rule. The feudal culture so stuck to Islam that it has not been able to shake it off even in post-modern period. The Islamic countries are still in feudal or semi-feudal era and have failed to imbibe democratic culture. The Islamic thought is deeply sunk in autocracy and theocracy and there is absolutely no place for creative re-thinking or re-formulations.

What is needed is thorough democratic revolution in the Islamic world for which there is no immediate prospect. Modernism imposed from above as we saw in case of Iran (The Shah imposed modernism through his authoritarian edicts) does not succeed. A thoroughgoing and pervasive modernisation is possible only with equally thoroughgoing democratic revolution and industrial revolution. Without such thoroughgoing democratic revolution

mere acceptance of modernisation for infra structural purposes (providing roads, flyovers, skyscrapers, computers, and printing technology) will not bring about intellectual modernisation. Through democratisation culture of submission must be done away with. Culture of dissent cannot prosper in authoritarian polities.

Lastly, I would also like to point out another important dimension of this problem. The ruling classes of the Islamic countries are still dependent on support of Western colonial masters, particularly, the USA politico-economic interests. They support authoritarian rulers and are interested in perpetrating highly authoritarian power structures and culture of submission. Free democracies in oil rich Islamic world will hurt their economic interests. This is preventing thoroughgoing democratic revolution in most of the Muslim countries. Also, countries like Iran are stuck with theocracy punishing freedom of thought.

Also, the Iranian Islamic Revolution and earlier oil revolution in the Islamic world gave an new sense of pride in Islamic identity which was also hijacked by the ruling classes and what could have led to renaissance was turned into sheer revivalism by these rulers. The process of globalisation is also not very helpful in this direction. It is further strengthening western economic domination and is making western American culture hegemonic culture bulldozing all other identities in the process. This has led to strengthening of Islamic identities and symbols of Islamic identities like *hijab*. By itself there is nothing wrong with these symbols of Islamic identities but it is leading to other less desirable consequences namely revival of feudal traditions and theocratic structures. This will hardly help flowering of modern Islamic culture.

## TALIBAN-ANOTHER ACT OF FANATICISM



The Taliban, after demolishing the statues of Buddha has now issued a decree that all Hindus in Afghanistan should wear a yellow badge so that they be recognised. They have done so naturally in the name of Islam. Justifying this act they have said that since Muslims have to observe a dress code, have to keep beard and have to offer prayers at appointed times and those who do not do so will be punished. Since Hindus are not bound by these regulations they should be recognised as Hindus or non-Muslims and hence the necessity to wear the yellow badge.

They have also said that it is requirement of Islamic *shari'ah* that non-Muslims should wear a distinct dress and hence Mulla Umar has asked the department of Enforcement of Good and Eradication of Evil to enforce this dress code. Needless to say most of the people in the world have condemned this discriminatory decree. Pakistan has also condemned it though it recognises the Taliban regime.

Firstly it should be made clear that there is no such *shari'ah* requirement that non-Muslims be compelled to wear a distinct dress or a badge. In 1400 years of various Islamic regimes one can hardly cite any such example of specific dress code for non-Muslims. Neither is it found in the Qur'an nor in Hadith. There is only one instance during the Fatimid regime in Egypt in early 11th century that such a decree was issued. Imam Hakim bi Amrillah, the then

Fatimid Caliph required the Christians to wear a cross of particular weight (so that it is not very small) so that they could be recognised as Christians. And this decree was also an administrative decree and had nothing to do with *ṣari'ah*.

It is important to note that even the first four rightly guided caliphs had issued number of decrees for administrative reasons and in view of the situation prevailing then. It does not automatically become part of *ṣari'ah* unless it is based on some *ṣari'ah* principle. One has to distinguish between administrative decrees and principles of *ṣari'ah*. As in democracy we have to distinguish between an ordinance and a law passed by parliament based on principle of justice. An ordinance is generally issued to take care of an emergency situation and a law is passed to fulfil principle of justice.

Non-Muslims have been described in Islamic *ṣari'ah* as *zimmis* i.e., those whose responsibility to look after their welfare is on Islamic regime. There are number of Holy Prophet's sayings that those who neglect *zimmis* will not be from his *ummah* (i.e., community) and they will not be able to join him and his band of followers on the Day of Judgement. Thus to look after welfare of non-Muslims is very fundamental responsibility of an Islamic regime. No Islamic government worth its salt and aspiring for the Mercy of Allah and His Prophet can neglect, let alone oppress, the non-Muslim people of an Islamic regime.

The fact is that the Taliban regime is entirely a bookish regime. It appears that the Taliban leaders look into some medieval book of rules and try to apply them quite mechanically without even caring to look for its relevance. No regime can work smoothly and justly if entire approach is based on rule book compiled centuries ago rather than the present requirements of people today.

If *ṣari'ah*, it should be remembered, has to be a living and dynamic guidance for people today it has to be creatively and thoughtfully applied in today's circumstances. Any law is a complex statement of principle and present situation. It can neither be mere underlying principle nor the present problem. In any legislation an

underlying principle is most important, more important than the problem which motivates the legislator to undertake legislation. Legislation can change but not the principle. In *ṣarīah* too principles (*usul*) are more important than the law itself. The Taliban just refuse to understand this.

Moreover in democratic set up today there is no question of *zimmis*. All are equal citizens and there should not be any discrimination on the basis of religion at all. Democratic and human rights should be enjoyed by all whether one is in majority or minority from religious point of view. But the problem with the Taliban is that they do not believe in democracy. They believe in medieval theocracy. Leaders like Mulla Umar who have no understanding of modern democratic world (they have no interaction with the outside world at all) are at the helm of affairs in Afghanistan. It is people of Afghanistan who suffer rather than others. Others can only sympathise with their plight.



# ON DEVELOPING THEOLOGY OF PEACE IN ISLAM



Islam is being associated with violence and jihad in the minds of not only non-Muslims but also of many Muslims. The slogans of jihad are being raised by frustrated youth unable to find any other way and also by those who are fighting for national liberation and regional autonomy. Such slogans create strong images of holy war being ordained by Islam and Islam being religion of violence. And now what has happened in New York on 11th September 2001 and in Pentagon i.e., attacks on World Trade Centre with the help of hijacked planes will greatly strengthen this stereotype in the minds of people of the world in general and in the minds of Americans, in particular. The attack on WTC in New York and Pentagon in Washington is, to say the least, horrific and must be condemned in strongest possible and unambiguous terms.

It should be remembered that there is no relation between religion and violence, neither in Islam, nor in any religion for that matter. Violence is a social and political phenomenon. It is true that there is mention of war in scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Qur'an. But this mention is not to establish any integral link between religion and violence but to portray certain social and political situation that prevailed at that time. It can be called integral only if these scriptures mandate violence as a desirable solution.

It is important to distinguish between what is empirical and

ideological. The twain do not always meet. While violence is empirical, peace is ideological. All scriptures, particularly the Qur'an while permitting violence in some inevitable situations, ordain peace as a norm. The great religions of the world came to establish justice and peace, not to perpetrate revenge and violence. Revenge and violence can never become part of any religion, much less that of Islam. Allah has created both in human beings – tendency for aggression and violence and exalted feeling for serenity of peace. Allah, according to the Qur'an, created human person in the best of mould (*ahsan-i-taqwim*) and then rendered him lowest of the low (95:4-5)

In fact it is this dynamics of human personality i.e., being created in the best of the mould and then being reduced to the lowest of the low that we have to understand the dynamics of peace and violence also. Allah desires peace and created us, for that purpose, in the best of the mould but our greed, greed for both wealth and power reduced us to an instrument of aggression and violence. For a human being there will always be an internal jihad, an internal struggle to rise to the level of *ahsan-i-taqwim* (best of the mould) and continuously resist the temptations of wealth and power.

The Qur'an strengthens the social roots of peace by emphasising the role of need based economy and resolutely opposing greed based one. The roots of violence, as pointed out above, lie in human greed. Thus we find in the Qur'an, "They ask thee what should we spend. Say what is surplus." (2:219) It is obvious from this verse that you spend on yourself according to your personal needs and give away the surplus with you to other needy people. Similarly the Qur'an prescribes in yet another context that the wealth should not circulate among the rich only. (59:7). And it also exhorts Muslims that those who hoard gold and silver and do not give them away in the way of Allah announce to them the painful chastisement. (9:34)

Thus the Qur'an wants to establish peace not superficially by exhorting the believers to love peace but tries to tackle the very socio-economic roots of conflict. If few people or countries grab largest part of the resources of the world and live in all comfort and

deny other people even their basic needs violence and conflict will result whatever the pleadings for peace. Or, if some people commit aggression unjustifiable against others to keep their own dominance and deny others their very basic rights, it will be impossible to maintain peace in such unjust political order.

The Qurʾān draws our attention to such a situation also as the Prophet and his followers were persecuted by the powerful and the rich chiefs of Makkah to maintain their own hegemony and were forced to flee from that town which was rightfully theirs. It is such persecution by the powerful, in order to maintain their hegemony that violence results. The Qurʾān is opposed to an unjust order and domination by few powerful whom it calls *mustakbirun* (i.e., arrogant and powerful). They persecute the weak (*mustadifun*). If such an unjust order persists violence will result, however undesirable it may be.

Allah thus says in the Qurʾān, "And what reason have you not to fight in the way of Allah, and of the weak (*mustadifin*) among the men and the women and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of the town, whose people are oppressors, and grant us from Thee a friend and grant us from Thee a helper." This verse in the Qurʾān combines both what is empirical and what is ideological. The weak when oppressed are more likely to fight and resist an unjust order. This is empirical. But the above verse also makes an ideological statement when it says that the weak among men, women and children pray that our Lord take us out of this town (Makkah) whose people are oppressors and grant us from Thee a friend and a helper. Thus the Qurʾān makes it clear that one must not live in an unjust order and seek helper from Allah to relieve them of injustice.

It is also important that the Qurʾān more than once focuses our attention on the ongoing conflict between *mustakbirun* and *mustadifun* i.e., between the arrogant and powerful, and the weak and the oppressed. The arrogant and powerful is represented by Nimrod and Pharaoh and the weak and oppressed by Abraham and Moses. Both Abraham and Moses were liberators. But they liberated

their oppressed people not through violence but through struggle leading them out of the unjust order, unjust situation.

There will always be struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed, the powerful and the weak but this struggle need not be violent. It much depends on situation. The Prophet (PBUH) himself prefers peace at Hdaybiyyah (*Sulh-i-Hdaybiyyah*) than war even at the cost of pride of Muslims. The peace conditions (I need not go into details of those conditions here, which are quite well known) were far from favourable to Muslims but the Prophet of Islam accepted those conditions in order to avoid bloodshed. However, the Prophet could do so as the other side also, due to certain constraints, accepted peace on their own terms.

If the other side was bent upon war there would have been no choice for the Prophet but to accept the situation and fight the war. It much depends what situation you are facing. One cannot talk of war and peace quite in an abstract manner. Thus sociopolitical and socio-economic context plays great role in deciding whether peace will prevail or not.

One thing is sure: Islam does not even indirectly hint at coercion, let alone violence, when it comes to any religious or spiritual question. Thus it becomes quite clear that Islam does not approve of violence at all in any religious matter. However, if Muslims are put in a particular situation which is unjust (not only for them but for humanity as such) they may have to struggle peacefully (and if violence is thrust on them, reluctantly through violence) to remove the cause of injustice.

It is quite important to note that liberative struggle should never be confined to Muslims alone. It is quite significant for theology of peace in Islam that throughout the text of the Qur'an we find the words *mustakbirun* and *mustadifun* i.e., arrogant and the weak or oppressors and the oppressed without any qualification of being Muslim or not. Thus even if arrogant and oppressor is a Muslim, one will have to struggle against him and even if an oppressed and persecuted is non-Muslim Muslims will have to wage struggle for him.

Thus the struggle nowhere involves Islam as a religion but Muslims as upholders of peace and justice. Yes, it is true justice and peace (and for that matter compassion) are also Islamic values; but they are also universal values applicable not only to Muslims but to all whether they be Muslims or not. Thus, as far as justice and peace is concerned the clash is not between Islam and any other religion but it is primarily between oppressors and the oppressed. It is wrong to implicate Islam if some Muslims choose to adopt violent means to achieve their goal. Islam does not automatically approve of violent means if any injustice or exploitation is to be fought.

The Qurʾān does not permit use of violence as a norm at all. All the verses involving permission to use violence is preceded by the words “if they commit violence against you...” Thus we find in verse 2:190 “And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah does not love aggressors.” (emphasis added)

Thus it is very clear from this verse that Qurʾān does not permit unconditional war and aggression and Allah does not love aggressors. But permits fighting in the way of Allah only if war is imposed by others. The words ‘in the way of Allah’ are also very important here. Fighting in the way of Allah would restrain Muslims from committing aggression and excesses. Fighting in the way of Allah would mean fighting only for a just cause, not for power and wealth, fighting only if war is imposed on them and not involving personal or collective feeling of revenge. When Ali the son-in-law of the Prophet (ﷺ) defeated a powerful foe in the battle and was about to kill him he spat on Ali’s face. Ali immediately got off his chaste and let him go. The defeated foe was greatly surprised as he expected greater violence from Ali after he spat on him. Ali told him, “if I had killed you after you spat on me it would have been an act of revenge.” Thus Islam does not permit killing for revenge. Revenge killing is not a religious act; its main reason is human tendency to retaliate. Arabs used to call it *qisas* and Qurʾān permits it in keeping with the prevailing tradition as it tolerated slavery as a concession to the prevailing system. But it makes clear that human dignity and equality is the norm, not slavery.

Similarly while it permits *qisas* it makes it clear that one should not be revengeful and should suppress anger. One who suppresses anger (*Kazim al-Ghayz*) is a person of great merit.

The Qur'an says, "Those who spend in ease as well as in adversity and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men." And Allah loves the doers of good (to others)." (3:133). Thus it becomes clear from above verse that to restrain ones anger and to pardon is an act of merit, a religious act. Thus one should not use violence even as an act of revenge. To restrain anger and to pardon are great acts of merit. Violence in any form, except in defence, is most deplorable. Humanity cannot flower in an atmosphere of violence.

The pre-Islamic Arab society was highly violent society. Various tribes fought against each other for decades on end. Thus before the Holy Prophet migrated to Madina the two principal pagan tribes of Madina Khazraj and Aws had been fighting against each other for more than four decades. The Prophet was invited there by the members of these two tribes as peace maker and the Prophet did bring peace between these two tribes and old enmity was happily resolved. But to stamp out violence from the Arab psychology and Arab society was not an easy project. Many Arab tribes had economically survived through raids on other tribes (it was called *ghazw*)

The pre-Islamic Arabs, as pointed out, not only indulged in *qisas* but were used to settle all questions through use of violence and thus violence continued in the society. There was no concept of spirituality and higher morality. It is Islam, which brought, for the first time, the concept of higher morality to the Arab society. Peace (*salam*) was part of this higher morality. It was in view of the violence in the Arab society that even greeting between two Muslims was made as *Al-salamu Alaykum* (i.e., peace be upon you) and it is the principal form of greeting among the Muslims.

However, the post-Islamic Arab society did not easily imbibe the higher Islamic morality. It required inner struggle to control oneself and it was for this reason that many Muslim thinkers, particularly the Sufi thinkers called this inner struggle to control ones desires

and raw passions as *jihad-e-akbar* (i.e., the great jihad and real jihad) and described war with sword as *jihad-e-asghar* (i.e., small jihad). The Sufis were the pacifists of Islam and those who kept themselves away from the violent struggle for power and also practised great restraint. They thus could imbibe the higher morality of Islam.

One can understand the nature of Arab society and the deep stamp of violence on it from the fact that after the death of the Holy Prophet his successors – caliphs hardly got time to promote higher Islamic morality *akhlaq-i-karim*. The Holy Prophet himself was described as *Uswa-i-hasanah* (best exemplar) by the Qur'an. Thus Qur'an says, "Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah and the Latter day, and remembers Allah much." (33:21)

But the Arabs with few honourable exceptions hardly followed this best exemplar in the true spirit. Civil war broke out soon after his death (war of *riddah*) as many tribes wanted to return to their ancestral religion and refused to pay *zakāt* the Islamic tax. Four of the three *Khulufa-i-Rashidun* (the rightly guided caliphs) were murdered. The third and fourth caliphs (Uthman and Ali) had to face tumultuous times and rebellions resulting in more than one hundred thousand deaths.

Thus one can understand the great gap between what was ideological – peace – and what was empirical – violence. The great tragedy of Karbala on 10th of Muharram when the grand son of the Prophet was martyred by the forces of evil as he tried to revive the higher Islamic morality. The Umayyads usurped power and indulged in violence and terror to retain it. Yusuf al-Hajjaj, governor of Iraq, during the Umayyad period, was a great terror and was quite ruthless in eliminating his enemies. The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs with some exceptions had no compunctions in resorting to violence. The founder of the Abbasid dynasty was known as al-Saffah, which means one who sheds blood.

Before Islam there was inter-tribal violence. After Islam the social and political scenario changed. All tribes embraced Islam and

the very nature of their economic sustenance through inter-tribal raids changed but inter-tribal rivalries persisted. One more factor was added to this. Now centralised state came into existence, which did not exist before Islam and inter-tribal struggle for power to capture the state began often resulting in great blood bath. Thus when the Abbasids captured power from Umayyads the Abbasids hunted down all Umayyads including their children and killed them. This violence was direct result of struggle for power.

All inter-tribal violence in the post-Islamic period was result of struggle for power and had nothing to do with Islam. In other words it was empirical rather than ideological. In history, there is hardly any evidence of violence for spreading of Islam. As far as spreading of Islam was concerned the Qur'anic directive was very clear that "call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the best manner." (16:125) One can argue that this again is an ideological statement and that empirical reality was different in the sense that Islam spread through sword. This is simply not true. Firstly, no religion can spread through bloodshed and terror and secondly there is hardly any evidence of this in history.

Islam either spread through Sufi saints who were good exemplars of Islamic morality rather than the rulers who were any way seen as tyrants. It was Sufi saints who were carriers of real message of Islam and peace by keeping their distance from the power centres. Also, many people adopted Islam simply because it was religion of the rulers and had many advantages. Also, once a prominent member of the community or a tribal chief adopted Islam other members of the community or tribe followed. Thus it is not borne out even empirically that Islam spread through violence. There is even the instance of the Umayyad Caliphs stopping conversion to Islam as their treasury was getting depleted as the converts stopped giving *jizyah*.

# ISLAM AND PEACE



**T**he Qur'an, as pointed out above, tried to spread higher morality of which peace was the most important component. In fact the word Islam itself is derived from the root *slm* which is the root letters for peace. Islam means establishing peace as well as surrendering to the Will of Allah. One of the Allah's names is Salam i.e., peace. Many Muslims are named as Abdu Salam i.e., servant of peace which also means servant of Allah as Allah is peace.

In Qur'an there are repeated references to the concept of peace. Significantly the Qur'an calls upon Muslims, "Oh you who believe, enter into complete peace and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Surely he is your open enemy." (2:208) Entering into complete peace here means entering into peace whole-heartedly. It would also imply surrendering to Allah whole-heartedly. Acceptance of violence as the other part of the verse says, is like following in the footsteps of devil. Violence is devil and devil is violence.

In the verse 2:131 Allah says 'submit' and reply is given 'I submit myself to my *rabb* of the worlds.' Now *rabb* in Arabic means one who is sustainer or one who takes us step by step from one stage of perfection to another stage of perfection. Thus submitting to Allah, or accepting His authority means dedicating oneself to the cause of peace so that this universe reaches perfection. Perfection is possible only if there is peace, not otherwise. In fact violence destroys all the achievements of culture and civilisation. Since Allah is *Rabb*

i.e., the Sustainer and Perfecter, he ordains peace and those who surrender to His Will have to work for peace so that perfection could be reached.

We find in the Qur'an (14:23) "And those who believe and do good are made to enter Gardens, wherein flow rivers, abiding by their Lord's permission. Their greeting therein is Peace!". Thus it will be observed that *jannah* (Garden) is so as there is peace therein. Thus the main quality of *jannah* for which all Muslims aspire is peace. This world can become like *jannah* only if there is peace in the world. For entering the *jannah* Allah says, "Enter it (i.e., *jannah*) in peace and security." (15:46) Thus peace and security are the main attributes of paradise.

Muslims invoke peace for all Allah's messengers because they brought the message of peace for entire humanity. Thus Muslims always write 'peace be upon him' after the name of the Prophet, in fact all prophets of Allah. All Messengers of Allah are messengers of peace as Allah Himself, as pointed out above, is peace. Again in the verse 56:25-26 we read "They hear therein (i.e., Paradise) no vain or sinful talk but only the saying, Peace! Peace."

Thus peace is so vital for converting this world into paradise. Its opposite i.e., violence is sin. Sin is nothing if not selfish behaviour. We have converted this earth into a violent place because of our interest-oriented behaviour. The harmony of interests is possible only in need based economy. Clash of interests result from greed-based economy. Our world today is full of violence as we clash with each other for our greed. Islam wanted to establish peace on this earth and hence it emphasised need-based economy and condemned accumulation of wealth, circulation of wealth among the rich. The chapter 104 clearly says that obsession with wealth results in fire kindled by Allah.

Same thing happens if we are obsessed with power. Thus this earth can enjoy peace only if some people are not obsessed with wealth and power. Islam laid equal emphasis on justice (Allah's name is also Just *ʿAdil* along with Peace, *Salam*). Thus justice and peace go

together. There cannot be peace without justice. Today there is no peace on earth as there is no justice. We are living in a violent world because we live in an unjust world. The Muslim world is also full of injustices and hence of violence. Islam did its best to emphasise justice and peace but a section of Muslims, particularly Muslim rulers remained obsessed with wealth and power and perpetrated injustices and violence. Thus the blame for violence lay on the doors of some Muslims not on Islam. As far as Islam is concerned justice and peace are integral parts of its teachings.

Moreover for millions of Muslims Islam is a deep spiritual experience. They pray, fast, perform Hajj and all other spiritual practices and feel deeply satisfied. They pray for peace. Such Muslims are in overwhelming majority. They have nothing to do with politics, violence or use of Islam for ones interests. It is these Muslims who seek deep spiritual fulfilment who matter, and not the few who use or misuse it for political purposes. For millions of Muslims Islam, like any other religion, is a great source of inner peace.

Some countries like America bomb countries in the name of democracy and human rights; some Muslims commit acts of violence and terror in the name of Islam. Is there any difference between the two? How does it matter if the people are killed in the name of democracy and freedom or in the name of Islam? We must try to learn between ideals and their misuse by some vested interests or frustrated people.



## ON ABSENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN MUSLIM WORLD



In a TV programme senior editor of a well-known national daily threw a question at me why Islam is so undemocratic? It spurred me to write this article. The question must be answered. Is Islam undemocratic by nature of its teachings? Why no Muslim country has democratic set up? Almost all-Muslim countries are governed either by kings, sheikhs, military dictators or have semi-democratic set up? This is an important question, which must be satisfactorily answered. More important question in this respect is: Is Islam responsible for this state of affairs of Muslims? Can any religion be democratic or undemocratic? Or its followers make it so.

No religion, in my opinion, should be construed as democratic or undemocratic. Any religion is rooted in a social structure, not necessarily of its creation. A religion does give a vision of a new society transcending the given society but hardly succeeds in totally subverting the status quo. The new vision given by a religion succeeds or fails depending on how powerful are the vested interests controlling the society in which a religion is born. Stronger the vested interests more difficult it is to change the status quo. Not only that new vested interests develop in the new society which comes into existence based on new vision. New vested interests developed in the Islamic society also, as we will see while dealing with the subject further. The Qur'anic teachings are highly supportive of

democratic way of functioning. The Prophet (ﷺ) himself was required by Allah to consult his companions on worldly matters [*wa shawirhum* i.e., consult them (your companions)].

Islam was born in a society in which there was no formal political structure or the state machinery. It was essentially a tribal society without any ruler or formal state structure. It had no written laws, only tribal customs. Islam gave to that society not only a new vision more humane and guaranteeing freedom of conscience but also gave detailed laws both written and oral. The Prophet of Islam gave laws through his pronouncements, in addition to what was contained in the Qurʾān. This new vision of a society was far from being authoritarian. The Prophet (ﷺ) himself was essentially a true democrat in his behaviour. He never imposed his opinion on others except in matters of *deen*. He even discouraged his followers from asking many questions as his pronouncements will then become binding on them. He did not allow anyone to bow before him or even to stand up by way of respect when he enters the room.

He showed great respect for human dignity irrespective of a person's social status. His intention was to set up a society without any concept of social hierarchy. In those days it was really a revolutionary step. No society was without social hierarchy in those days. Even modern democracies have social hierarchy of their own. Modern democracies theoretically accord equal rights to all citizens but some citizens are more privileged than other citizens. The Islamic vision admitted of no such privileges. Even a black slave could claim same privileges as any other Muslim. It was not for nothing that the Prophet appointed a black liberated slave Bilal to be his *muaddin* (caller to the prayer), a high honour envied by many of his companions enjoying higher status in society. The Prophet did so to set an example. A truly democratic society should not only accord equal opportunities to all citizens and make them equal before law but should see that it is so in practice. In fact more privileged citizens are more equal than other less privileged citizens. While Islam tried to set up a society truly democratic in spirit the

Prophet of Islam practised this rigorously to set an example before others. He knew that some people will claim more privileges and tried to discourage them from doing so. He gave great importance to Ashab-e-Suffa who were quite poor and of low origin socially speaking but were highly dedicated to the cause of Islam.

The Prophet himself never assumed any political powers. He was essentially a spiritual guide who commanded a tremendous respect. His concept of *ummah* was also inclusive one. He included Jews, idol worshipers and Muslims in it. He gave them full freedom to follow their respective faith without any constraint. This was also most modern democratic approach. They were accorded equal rights in all matters along with equal obligation to defend the city of Madina when attacked. In no sense they were unequal citizens in the Medinese society.

However, the Muslim states today treat non-Muslims as secondary citizens and deprive them of equal rights. The modern democratic society accords Muslims wherever they are in minority equal political rights. But the Muslim countries, not all, but many, do not do so. It is not the question of reciprocation but of principle. Moreover the Prophet himself has set an example in this respect. He never gave any hint of treating non-Muslims as less privileged in any manner. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, a noted *Ālim* from Darul Uloom Deoband, inferred from the Prophet's *sunna* that a composite nation state is in keeping with the teachings of Islam.

Thus the Prophet's *sunna* is quite inspiring for Muslims in this respect. Unfortunately feudalising of Islam changed all this. Social hierarchy became the central principle of organisation of society and Muslims and non-Muslims both became subjects rather than citizens enjoying equal rights. We will throw more light on this as we proceed further. The institution of slavery also got reinforced though Islam had put so much emphasis on emancipating the slaves. The transcendent concept of Islam was to abolish slavery. Instead the status quo of rigid social and political hierarchy remained in place. The alien values became

part of Islamic society and were legitimised by invoking Islam. A new society did begin to emerge in first few years of Islam. However, the process of emergence of this society did not last long. The Umayyads, who belonged to a clan within the tribe of Quraysh, managed to capture power and converted a proto-democratic society into a feudal hierarchical one. The Prophet had enjoyed an immense moral authority but he never converted it into formal political power. He was succeeded by four caliphs referred to as rightly guided caliphs as they, despite tremendous problems tried to follow the vision of Islam and always consulted Muslims before taking any important policy decision. Though formally it was not a democratic society in the sense modern societies are, it was democratic in spirit during the first thirty years of rightly guided caliphs.

However, during this period vested interests of different kinds began to emerge throwing the society into political turmoil and this turmoil resulted in assassination of 3rd and fourth caliphs (though second caliph was also assassinated but by a slave labourer about a wage dispute). The causes of this political turmoil have been examined at great length by an Egyptian scholar Dr. Taha Hussein in his book *Al Fitna al-Kubra* (The Great Insurrection). He throws light in great detail how the Muslim society was divided into various groups, Qurayshis, non-Qurayshis, Ansaris, non-Ansaris, Umayyads and non-Umayyads, Arabs, non-Arabs and so on.

Their political and economic interests clashed with each other and helped create great crisis in the early Islamic society. It was this crisis which not only resulted in civil war in which more than 100,000 Muslims died but also the Islamic vision of a just democratic society was destroyed. Hazrat Ali tried his best to restore this vision once again but did not succeed and political power ultimately went into the hands of Mu'awiyah, a shrewd ruler, who converted Khilafah into a dynastic rule by appointing his son Yazid as his successor.

On account of these tumultuous social and political conditions the Umayyads succeeded in capturing power. They shifted the

capital to Damascus in Syria formerly ruled by the Byzantine Empire and adopted Byzantine ways, which were thoroughly feudal. The Islamic society which was quite democratic in spirit became feudal and hierarchical through and through. Mu'awiyah had adopted Byzantinian royal ways and began to sit on throne and wear expensive clothes and constructed palace for himself to live in and made courtiers to stand with folded hands before him when he was governor of Syria during Hazrat Umar's time. Hazrat Umar had even admonished him for adopting Byzantinian royal ways. However, he got away by saying that in this part it will not be possible to rule without adopting the Byzantinian ways. The people are used to those ways. Thus he legitimised his adoption of royal ways in flagrant contradiction to Islamic ways and Prophet's *sunnah*.

The only challenge came from the grandson of the Prophet who challenged the authority of Yazid who became the first ruler of Islamic world by virtue of feudal principle of succession rather than elective [principle like the first four caliphs. When Imam Hasan took over as fifth caliph after assassination of Hazrat Ali in Kufa his assumption of power was endorsed through bay'ah by all prominent Muslims of the time. No one hesitated to do so. But soon conspiracies began by Mu'awiyah to destabilise his rule and at last he agreed to abdicate in Mu'awiyah's favour on certain conditions. One of the conditions was that he will not appoint his son as next caliph and leave the matter to Muslims to decide. Mu'awiyah's apparently agreed to this condition but ultimately nominated his son Yazid and this was beginning of what Maulana Maududi calls *mulukiyyat* in his book *Khilafat Aur Mulukiyyat*.

However, When Yazid ascended the throne Imam Hussain refused to endorse his assumption of power through bay'ah and decided to oppose his rule. There was conspiracy to assassinate him in Madina by Yazid's forces and hence he left Madina and went to Iraq in response to Kufan people to lead them in fight against illegitimate rule of Yazid. However, the people of Kufa betrayed him as they had betrayed his illustrious father and brother. Imam

Hussain was besieged by Yazid's forces in Karbala and his mighty forces were no match for Imam Hussain's handful supporters who, like the Imam himself, were all martyred in Karbala. Thus Islamic revolution came under the shadow of Umayyad counter-revolution. The Islamic values of democracy and justice were pushed aside and now dynastic rule and oppression ruled the roost. Umayyads came to acquire a political clout and became most privileged people as against other Muslims. All believers were no more equal in practice though in theory they continued to be so.

The Islamic democracy as prevailed in the days of the Holy Prophet and the four caliphs could not be revived again. All succeeding regimes in the Arab as well as non-Arab world were dynastic and had nothing to do with elective principle. Islamic political culture got more and more feudalised. Perhaps it was historical necessity. There were feudal regimes all around and an attempt, howsoever earnest, to create a democratic political culture could not have succeeded in such feudal universe. It could succeed in Arabia of the Prophet's time for two reasons, one spiritual and another material. The spiritual reason was the Prophet's sincerity and truthfulness (he was known as Sadiq and Amin i.e., truthful and trustworthy even before he proclaimed his revelatory message to the people of Makkah). His commitment to a just society ensuring human dignity was beyond any ken of doubt.

The material reason was tribal nature of Arabian Peninsula where there was no agricultural production and canal system requiring a centralised rule and appropriation of surplus from peasantry. In fact both in Makkah and Madina no governmental machinery existed—no police force, no army, judiciary or bureaucracy of any kind at all. But when Islam spread to Byzantinian and Sassanid areas a rich agricultural civilisation existed there with feudal political culture. And soon the centre of gravity of Islam shifted to these agriculturally rich areas and political Capitals were established in Damascus and Baghdad. Makkah and Madina became holy cities of Islam and retained

only religious significance and politically lost out to agriculturally fertile areas with more revenue gathering potentialities. Thus Khilafah became merely symbolic and feudal dynastic rule became substantive in nature. The Muslim rulers symbolically assumed caliphal robes but did not adhere to its elective principle at all. Nor did they consult Muslims, like the earlier four caliphs, while taking policy decisions. Even their un-Islamic decisions got endorsed by the *ulamā* either through coercion or inducement and if they refused they were severely persecuted. This is why Imam Ghazzali advises Muslims not to see the face of such rulers.

‘The Islamic society thereafter never saw the return of early Caliphate period despite several attempts by idealists. Muslim society was thoroughly feudalised. Though the rulers in Islamic world often styled themselves as caliphs but in fact they were kings and emperors i.e., absolute rulers. These political developments also had its impact on Islamic jurisprudence in many ways. The *ulamā*, who interpreted the Qurʾān and Hadith did so under the influence of feudal values. Many of them went against the spirit of Islam and justified the feudal hierarchy and monarchical system. The few who resisted were isolated and lost out. The *ulamā* who sided with monarchy were often referred to as *ulamā-i-Su* i.e., bad *ulamā* but they wielded political clout.

The *ulamā* with integrity and character could not save early political structure of Islam though they had greater moral authority. The Islamic world was ruled by corrupt and power hungry monarchs and kings. The western imperialism in nineteenth century could not make much difference as the imperialist powers reinforced these Muslim rulers for their own selfish interests. The Islamic society was so thoroughly feudalised that even during the imperialist rule no charismatic mass leader emerged on the scene in any Muslim country. Even Jamaluddin Afghani, a charismatic figure in nineteenth century, had different priorities. He was more interested in pan-Islam and even wanted to take help from feudal monarchies like the Ottomans to overthrow the western imperialist

powers from Islamic world. Thus rather than succeeding he became victim of conspiracies hatched by Ottomans.

The Wafd Party of Egypt did throw a limited democratic challenge to the British rule and thanks to this democratic movement Egypt has a semblance of democracy today. However, it is also far from real democracy. Jamal Abd al-Nasir had a vision but he too centralised power in order to bring changes and reforms and that centralisation of power defeated that very purpose. His successors like Sadat did not have that vision also and became even more authoritarian.

The entire Arab world lacks any mass leader of any calibre as the authoritarian rulers use highly repressive policies and do not allow any such leader to emerge. What is more disturbing is that the *ulamā* in these countries are supporting the ruling establishment and using Islam to legitimise the authoritarian rule. Any movement for human rights is condemned as western conspiracy against Islam though human dignity and freedom of conscience is central to the teachings of Qurʾān. Iran has been holding regular elections but there too the orthodox *ulamā* have their stranglehold over judiciary and without free judiciary democracy remains nominal. Khatami's supporters who are reformists are being persecuted and many papers with reformist orientation are being shut down by the orthodox judiciary in Iran. They are undergoing harrowing times.

Malaysia too has limited democracy and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad dubs human rights as a western conspiracy. There is no real democratic freedom in Malaysia. Malaysia's is semi-democratic semi-authoritarian political set up. Indonesia remained for long under military rule and has now come under democratic spell but is undergoing a great political turmoil. It will take quite sometime for democracy to stabilise as powerful vested interests are out to sabotage it to re-establish their dictatorship.

It is thus social and economic conditions, which are more responsible for lack of democracy in the Islamic world and not Islamic teachings. However, the Muslim intellectuals must reflect

seriously on the question as to why still Muslim countries have not been able to usher in true democracy despite the claim that Islam is most democratic in spirit. Without democratising the Muslim world no worthwhile changes can be ushered in. Absence of democracy means subjugation of Muslim masses and modern reforms will not be possible without ushering in democratic governance.

And democratic governance is not possible without ensuring freedom of conscience, which does not exist in any Muslim country worth the name. Any independence of thinking even in religious matters is violently suppressed. The Islamic *ṣarī'ah* is sought to be enforced mechanically completely overlooking its real spirit of justice and human dignity. The principle of *ijtihād* is also discouraged by the *ulamā* saying there is no one having that qualification.

The Islamic *ṣarī'ah* was compiled in a different social and political environs and most of the inferences were drawn by the *ulamā* in their own sociopolitical conditions and hence needs to be reformulated. The inferences drawn by the *ulamā* or *Fuqaha* cannot be treated as divine. The expert jurists and modern lawyers need to come together to change some of the *ṣarī'ah* laws in the sphere of what is called *mu'āmalat* (i.e., interpersonal relations). The very foundational principle of democracy is, as pointed out above, freedom of conscience and freedom of conscience is not possible without re-thinking issues of *mu'āmalat* which also include relations between the two sexes. The *ṣarī'ah* laws, as they obtain today, are heavily loaded against women and sexual equality is an integral part of democratic culture. Some of the Muslim countries do not permit women to vote, in the name of Islam.

The overall approach of the Qur'an is of sexual equality but the *ṣarī'ah* reflects the medieval ethos and women are at a disadvantage. If democracy is ushered in, in Muslim countries women's issues will become quite central. Women's movements are strong even today in those Muslim countries, which have some semblance of democracy. Women scholars and activists would like to re-think issues in *ṣarī'ah* and evolve a new gender just culture in Muslim societies.

Many Muslim countries have substantial non-Muslim populations. In democratic governance it is necessary but not enough to ensure freedom of religion. The non-Muslims should also be ensured equal democratic and political rights. Muslim minorities enjoy equal political rights in several of non-Muslim or secular countries. This must be ensured to non-Muslims in Muslim countries not for the sake of reciprocation but on principle. However, in most of the Muslim countries even Muslims do not enjoy democratic rights, let alone non-Muslims. Separate electorate, if it exists in any country, should also be done away with. It breeds discriminatory practices. There should be a joint electorate for all, Muslims or non-Muslims.

Lastly, respect for human rights is highly necessary in a democratic political culture. Without human rights, there cannot be a truly democratic culture. Muslim intellectuals should ceaselessly strive to ensure human rights for all citizens in Islamic countries. It is this human rights culture which will strengthen democratic forces and do away with feudal culture which privileges some people over others.



## CLASH OF TERRORS?



Osama Bin Laden allegedly organised attack on World Trade Centre in New York and on Pentagon and the President Bush is bombing Afghanistan if not to win, at least to vindicate his and his nation's honour. Prof. Huntington may not be right about his hypothesis of 'Clash of Civilisation' but here at least there is 'clash of terror'. What Osama and his network Al-Qaeda allegedly did to America, Bush is doing much more in retaliation. Not only to them but also to whole country which has not only given refuge to him but is also protecting him which is of course an unpardonable sin in the eyes of President Bush.

President Bush's rage knows no limits. We all know the medieval doctrine 'eye for an eye and nose for a nose'. Mahatma Gandhi, an apostle of peace and nonviolence had said that if every one wants an eye for eye the world would be full of blind people. But Bush wants not only an eye for eye but many more human corpses. And this is happening at the very outset of the twenty-first century. The question arises 'is our claim to civilisation, western or eastern justified?' Is it clashing of civilisations or clash of terrors? The Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi even went on to say that the attack on World Trade Centre in New York has proved that the Western civilisation is superior and that Islam has failed to come to terms with modernity.

The problem is, there is high degree of prejudice among western rulers as well as academics against Islam. It is not an academic like

Huntington alone or politician like the Italian Prime Minister who hold such views. The kind of applaud Huntington's dubious hypothesis like 'clash of civilisations' got in the western world shows the widespread prejudice against Islam in the western world since the period of crusades. Even Bush used the word 'crusade' when talking of revenge against Laden's act of terror. The otherwise sober British weekly *The Economist* quotes Huntington with approval in its issue of September 22-28.

The image of jihad, of violence, of fanaticism, has stuck to not only Muslims but also to Islam. The most powerful media of the world, which is partly controlled by Zionists keeps on projecting this image of Islam and Muslims. This debate has been further invigorated now due to these terrorist attacks on New York Towers. One RSS man wrote to me that Muslim *mullas* keep on inciting Muslims on jihad. Do Hindu priests incite anyone to fight. I do not wish to enter into argument with that friend here but would only like to draw his and other's attention to a very significant *fatwa* issued by a panel of very prominent Islamic scholars headed by 'Allama Yusuf al-Qaradawi justifying war against terrorism.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, needless to say, is highly respected Arab scholar who is also respected world wide, particularly in the Middle East. He is the leading Islamic jurist (*faqih*) whose voice is heard with great respect. It is also important to note that this *fatwa* has been issued in response to a question by Abdul Rashid Muhammad who is a Muslim chaplain in the US Army. Today there are hundreds of Muslims in the US Army and the US Government had to appoint a Muslim chaplain to cater to religious and spiritual needs of these Muslim soldiers.

These soldiers might have been ill at ease in fighting the war in Afghanistan against their co-religionists and hence the question. The *fatwa* originally issued in Arabic has been translated in English also. This *fatwa* also assumes greater importance as Yusuf al-Qaradawi is not known to be pro-American in his views. He is quite an independent person who is not even patronised by any Arab

Government. The *fatwa* says, "We find it necessary to apprehend the true perpetrators of these crimes, as well as those who aid and abet them through incitement, financing or other support."

The *fatwa* further continues, "They must be brought to justice in an impartial court of law and punish them appropriately, so that it could act as deterrent to them and to others like them who easily slay the lives of innocents and destroy properties and terrorise people. Hence it is duty of all Muslims to participate in this effort with all possible means." The *fatwa* also says, that "all Muslims ought to be united against all those who terrorise innocents." It also notes that the US military action may also result in the death of innocent people but the Muslim soldiers, according to this *fatwa* must perform their duty despite their feeling of unease. (See Asian Age, 13th October)

Thus let alone entire Muslim community even all Islamic jurists and *ulama* are not united in their approach to this highly controversial problem. But here our academics and politicians homogenise entire community and label them with *jihadi* mentality and fanaticism. I would also like to emphasise that in this complex world religion is but one factor as far as human behaviour is concerned.

Various factors, particularly human interests play more cardinal role in determining human behaviour than religious beliefs or even political ideologies. It should be noted that not a single Muslim country, except Iraq (for understandable reasons) has supported Afghanistan, in its clash with the USA. Even the OIC countries who take up issues pertaining to Muslim countries have not condemned USA for its attack on Afghanistan although they have urged America to have a fresh look at its policies in the Middle East, particularly towards Palestine. Even Pakistan, the creator of the Taliban regime, ultimately decided to throw its fate with the United States as its political and financial interests lay in that course of action.

Let alone the entire Islamic world even Afghans are not united in their response to the acts of terrorism and the American invasion. It is well known that the Northern Alliance has thrown its lot with America and is actively helping it by launching operations against the

Taliban. The Taliban mainly represent only the Pashtun ethnicity, which constitutes just 37 per cent of the Afghan population. The Tajiks, the Hazaras, the Uzbeks and others together constitute majority of Afghans and these ethnic groups are opposed to Taliban and are fighting against each other. Not only this. There are liberals among the Pashtuns who are also vigorously opposed to the fanatical approach of Taliban. I would say even Taliban's approach is more strategic than fanatical. Perhaps for them religious fanaticism is the only desperate way of keeping their followers united under their political banner. Thus it is clear that it is not religion alone which is the final determinant of one's course of action.

I too hold that terrorism must be stringently fought and punished but not by declaring war against any country. It is equally brutal to punish another set of innocent people. Moreover Afghanistan is no match for American power. America is lowering its own position by taking on an impoverished country like Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion and the civil wars have hardly left anything worth fighting against.

If we live in the 21st century and really respect democracy, freedom and human rights we have to promote culture of peace. The US always maintains that these Muslims cannot tolerate our freedom and democracy. But question is, apart from veracity of this approach, is US itself promoting freedom and democracy outside its own country? Who does not love freedom and democracy – the Muslim masses or the rulers America supports? US even lifted all democratic bans imposed on Pakistan when General Musharraf had captured power just because it needed Pakistan's help in its fight against terrorism. Is it the way to promote freedom and democracy in the world?

Also, the way it attacked Afghanistan violates all norms of democracy and rule of law as well as international behaviour. War against terrorism could have been more effectively fought by winning over peoples of Muslim countries, by persuading them to isolate the likes of Osama, boycott them and create a strong public opinion against such highly condemnable acts of terrorism. It could

have launched intensive propaganda on these lines. All Muslims are far from unanimous about accepting such terrorist acts as jihad. The moderates are staunchly opposed to even the need for jihad (in the sense of war, though the holy Qur'an does not use the word jihad for war) in the modern world, let alone condoning individual acts of terrorism as jihad.

The us would have enhanced its appeal by following the path of peace, democracy and international law. It would have not only won tremendous and unqualified sympathy of Muslims throughout the world, it would have greatly served the cause of peace and culture of peace. By declaring war against a weak and impoverished country like Afghanistan it has not only lowered its own dignity; it has alienated itself from moderate Muslims. No one would approve if one uses sledge- hammer to kill a fly.

The declaration of war and raining of bombs will not ensure any success against terrorism. It might not only defeat the purpose but would also perhaps spread more terror, particularly against America. Simply dropping food packets along with bombs will hardly ensure any support for it much less endearing it to the people. Also, America can greatly help in promoting culture of peace in twenty-first century by thoroughly revising its policies and shedding its arrogance of power.

It is regrettable that America, which prides itself for values like freedom, democracy and human rights, has killed largest number of innocent people around the world after Second World War. Such behaviour naturally breeds terrorism in certain sections of population. Terrorism can never be fought with terrorism. This violence torn world needs more peace than ever before. America talks of freedom and democracy but freedom and democracy can flourish only if there is peace and justice in the whole world.

# ISLAM, MUSLIMS AND TERRORISM



Islam is being invariably associated with terrorism both in media as well as in political circles, especially in Western countries. When they hear it being condemned by Muslim theologians, it is celebrated as something unusual. It is strange irony of both misunderstanding and motivated propaganda that if a small band of Osama's followers give call for jihad, it is taken as authentic Islamic call and if it is condemned by mainstream Islamic theologians, it is accepted with mixed feelings of celebration and skepticism. The mainstream condemnation of terrorism is somehow not accepted with conviction.

When the Darul Uloom Deoband, a leading Islamic seminary in Asia, held an anti-terrorism conference the media spotlighted it and number of articles and editorials were written in mainstream media. There was underlying skepticism that how thousands of *ulamās* and imams could gather together in such large numbers, to denounce terrorism. In fact when media unceasingly targeted Islam for terrorism, these *ulamās* thought it necessary to do so to convince their non-Muslim friends that Islam does not stand for terrorism.

In fact it was hardly necessary to do so as all Muslim theologians know fully well that there is no link, whatsoever, between Islam and terrorism but due to such continuing attacks, Muslim theologians had to issue a declaration condemning terrorism. Let it be noted that not

only Osama bin Laden but not a single leading member of Al-Qaeda is a qualified theologian. They are all modern educated youth or politicians. Among Taliban too, there is no theologian of any credible standing. Some of them may be product of *madrassas* in North West Frontier province of Pakistan but they never went for higher Islamic studies. They never got beyond preliminary Islamic education. It was their political bosses who decided course of action and formulated policies invoking 'jihad' to justify their acts of terrorism.

Never any major theologian ever justified acts of terrorism. None of major Islamic thinker and theologian from West Asia issued any *fatwa* approving of terrorism as jihad. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a well-known theologian and highly respected by orthodox Muslims, condemned terrorism and suicide bombing killing of innocent people. A conference of leading Muslim scholars also condemned suicide bombing as un-Islamic. Qurʾān is so clear on the issue along with Hadith literature that save on political grounds, no one can approve of acts of terrorism.

There are in all 41 verses in Qurʾān on jihad and not a single verse uses it for war or violence. In early twentieth century when terrorism, like today, was not the issue, a noted scholar of Islam Maulavi Chiragh Ali wrote a scholarly book on jihad and showed that not even once the word jihad has been used for war or violence in Qurʾān. It is really a landmark work for those who want to understand the meaning of jihad in Qurʾān.

The prophet of Islam (PBUH) himself never fought any war of aggression; he fought battles only in defence. Most of the battles Prophet fought was in and around Madina where he had migrated to, to escape severe prosecution from his and Islam's enemies in Makkah. It is opponents of Islam who attacked Madina and Prophet fought back. He followed the injunction of the Qurʾān, "And fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah does not love aggressors. (2:190)

This Qurʾānic verse is self-explanatory and does not need any elaboration. How prophet could have violated this injunction from

high on in his own lifetime? The real problem is that one fails to distinguish what is theological and what is political. Many Muslims had their own political interests and they conveniently invoked doctrine of jihad for their political project as Osama bin Laden has been doing in our own times.

The invocation of jihad for political purposes is post-Qur'anic development. The Prophet would have never approved it. Those who kept away from political struggle for power like Sufis, gave jihad a very different meaning. According to Sufis love and peace is the basis of Islam and jihad is spiritual struggle to control ones desires. In other words real jihad is war against ones own desires, as it is selfish desires which require human beings to resort to violence.

In fact Sufis always kept themselves away from political power struggle and believed in leading peaceful life and emphasized doctrine of *sulh-i-kul* (total peace and peace with all). Since they never involved themselves in political power struggle they led simple life and busied themselves in suppressing their desires and tried to achieve what Qur'an calls *nafs mutma'innah* (i.e., peaceful and satisfied soul). This could be possible only if one controlled ones desires.

It was Sufi Islam, which was most popular among the masses, as Muslim masses also had nothing to do with wars for political domination. Sufis believed in controlling themselves rather than control others. One needs violence only when one wants to control others, rather than oneself. Since Sufis controlled themselves they avoided violence. Politicians desire to control others and hence justify use of violence.

All empire builders use violence and then justify it in the name of religion or patriotism or security. America today uses violence on largest scale imaginable and causes havoc because it wants to control whole world for its material resources. It attacked Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam before, only to control oil and other resources. And as Vietnamese were forced to fight in their own way now Osama and their followers are fighting against America.

Of course there is big difference between Vietnam's fight against American aggression and Osama bin Laden's use of violence. Vietnam was a country and it was defending itself and Osama is a fugitive from Saudi, represents no country and leads a group founded by him Al-Qaeda and uses hit and run tactics and involves innocent citizens in his attacks. Osama has not been authorized by any country, much less by any religious authority, to attack. All leading theologians always condemned him for his terrorism.

The problem with media is it never goes in depth. It has no time for it. Its news is related to events and particularly negative events. What we call investigative journalism is rare and again in depth analysis appeals to intellectuals, not to average readers. Then add to this hostile attitude, political agenda of certain vested interests, Zionist lobby in USA and USA's own justification of war of aggression against Muslim countries and one can understand why western media projects Islam as religion of jihad and terrorism.

There is great need to understand various parallel trends in the Islamic world today. Media reporting and statements of certain political leaders has developed a stereotype that Muslims are essentially jihadis and united in their fight against non-Muslims. When we are hostile to a community or a nation, we homogenize it and look for negative traits ignoring diversity and complexities.

It is no different when it comes to Islam and Muslims. Since theologians tend to speak of Islam and not Islams, a message goes that there is one single understanding of Islam and all Muslims fall in line with this theological Islam. Sociological and cultural differences in understanding of Islam is totally ignored. Apart from Sufis there are several Muslim sects who do not approve of use of violence as integral part of Islam.

It would be of great interest to know that among all other Islamic sects Isma'ilis consider jihad as one of the seven pillars of Islam (generally Muslims believe in five pillars) as at one time in history Isma'ilis were involved in long struggle for power with Abbasids and yet today Isma'ili communities throughout the world

are most peaceful communities. This clearly shows that violence is political, not religious necessity.

Christians too, despite Biblical doctrine of love and presenting other cheek if slapped on one cheek, came out with the theory of 'Holy War' during crusades and the Gita pronounced concept of *dharmayuddha*. We find so much violence in Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand. Thus it would be seen that all religions talk of love and peace and all religions permit use of violence in defence. But the followers often misuse the concept of defensive violence for aggressive purposes.

Media may have its own compulsions, politicians may have their own needs, but scholars should not buy their formulations. They must fight their own prejudices and go for in depth understanding of issues. Intellectuals and scholars should be committed to quest for truth as peace and nonviolence is not possible without truth. Gandhiji insisted on truth and even said truth is God in order to promote peace and no-violence.

War needs propaganda for its justification and propaganda is based on half-truths and outright lies and peace needs truth and nothing but truth. It is quest for truth which brings peace of soul – *nafs-i-mutmainnah* or shanty. Desire for controlling others and political power creates unrest and violence. Today Middle East is a war torn zone as it sits over unlimited source of oil. It is control over oil which tempts America to attack Arab countries and people like Osama indulge in reactive violence. Terrorism is reactive violence whereas state violence is active violence. Thus terrorism is not all about jihad but reaction to American violence for its lust for oil.

# ISLAM AND PLURALISM



Today's world is fast becoming pluralist with variety of religions, languages and cultures in one country particularly due to fast developing processes of modernization, liberalisation and globalisation. Also, feudal socio-economic and sociopolitical structures have either crumbled or crumbling very fast in the third world also of course with certain exceptions. In the past there was no concept of civil society at all and the state was all powerful. The subjects people did not enjoy any rights, they had to discharge only duties towards the state. The modern democratic state, on the other hand, has to concede well defined rights to the citizens. The civil society has its own autonomy in a democratic set up and the notion of human rights has acquired great significance.

The notion of human rights is quite fundamental to a society which is pluralistic. All religious, linguistic and cultural groups should enjoy well defined rights and should not live at the mercy of the state or the majority community. Thus it will be seen that the notion of civil society is very fundamental to the modern pluralist society. It is unfortunate that the Islamic world is yet to cope up with the notion of civil society. Most of the Islamic countries do not have full fledged democracy and there is no respect for human rights in these countries. In fact most of the rulers condemn human rights as a western notion and some, even 'un-Islamic'.

Here it is important to examine, from theological perspective, what is attitude of Islam towards pluralism? Does Islam approve of pluralism or promotes a monolithic society? Also, when we talk of pluralism, are we referring to political pluralism or religious and cultural pluralism? As far as this paper goes we are referring to religious and cultural pluralism though political pluralism has its own importance, it is very seminal for religious and cultural pluralism.

If one goes by the Qur'anic pronouncements Islam not only accepts the legitimacy of religious pluralism but considers it quite central to its system of beliefs. There are very clear statements to this effect. First we will refer to the verse 5:48 in this respect. The verse goes as follows: "Unto every one of you We have appointed a (different) law and way of life. And if Allah had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but (He willed it otherwise) in order to test you by means of what He has given you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto Allah you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ."

This is very seminal statement in favour of religious and legal pluralism which Muslims, specially the Muslim regimes, have not considered seriously. Many classical as well as modern commentators have commented on this significant verse. The most significant and operative part of this verse is "Unto every one of you have We appointed a (different) law and way of life. The term 'every one of you' obviously denotes different communities. Every community - obviously religious or religio-cultural community - has its own law (*shir'atan*) and its own way of life (*minhaj*) and it attains its spiritual growth in keeping with this law and way of life of its own. The term *shir'ah* or *sari'ah* signifies, literally, "the way to a watering place" (from which men and animals derive the element indispensable to their life), and in the Qur'an to denote a system of law necessary for a community's social and spiritual welfare. The term *minhaj* on the other hand, denotes an 'open road' that is a way of life. (See Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar, 1980, pp-153)

Thus it will be seen that the prophets of Allah sent to different communities (*ummah*) gave laws and indicated way of life to their people in keeping with their genius and that which could ensure their spiritual and material growth. This is further emphasised in the next part of the verse i.e., "And if Allah had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community". It was not difficult for Allah to make entire mankind one community. But Allah graced us with pluralism as it adds richness and variety to life. Each community has its own unique way of life, its own customs and tradition, its own law. But these laws or way of life should be such as to ensure growth and enriching of life, howsoever different and unique they might be. Allah does not want to impose one law on all and creates communities rather than community.

Allah has created different communities on purpose: to try and test human beings in what has been given to them (i.e., different scriptures, laws and ways of life). And that test is to live in peace and harmony with each other which is the will of Allah. The differences of laws and ways of life should not become cause of disharmony and differences. What is desirable for human beings is to live with these differences and vie with one another in good deeds.

In the last part of the verse Allah says that unto Him all will return and it is He who "will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ." Thus it is not for human beings to decide for themselves who is right and who is wrong. It will lead to disturbances and breach of peace. Thus it should be left to Allah to decide when they return unto Him. The human beings should only vie one with the other in good deeds. I think the Qur'an is pioneering in this idea. It is the best way to do away with inter-religious and inter-cultural conflict and to promote acceptance of the 'religious and cultural other' with dignity and grace.

This verse has also another important dimension. It leads to what some scholars like Shah Waliyullah and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad from India have described as the concept of *Wahdat-e-Din* i.e., unity of religion. The earlier part of this verse (5:48) says, "And We

have revealed to thee the Book with the truth, verifying that which is before it of the Book and a guardian (*muhayman*) over it." This is also very significant pronouncement and most modern in its approach. The Qur'ān has thus come to vouchsafe for what was revealed earlier to different communities through their prophets. The *ṣari'ah*, the law and the way of life may be different as we have discussed above, but the essence of all religions - *Din* - is the same. All religions are based on the revelation from Allah. The Qur'ān has come to be guardian of earlier truth revealed through other scriptures.

This is inclusive approach and is very vital for acceptance of the 'religious other'. The laws, the ways of life, may differ and yet *din*, the divine essence, the divine truth, is the same. It is reflected in all religions, in all spiritual traditions and we humans have no right to reject the other' as illegitimate, much less, false. Thus it is our human ego which rejects the religious other and not the falsity of other faith traditions. The Qur'ān has named several prophets and the list of prophets in the Qur'ān is illustrative, not exhaustive. Thus more faith traditions could be included in the list of those mentioned by the Qur'ānic commentators. The Sufi saints from India were inclined to include Indian religions also.

The Qur'ānic pluralism finds different expressions in different places. The Qur'ān does not maintain that there could be only one way of prayer to Allah. There could be more than one. Thus the Qur'ān says: "For each community there is direction in which it turns, so vie with one another in good works." (2:148) All commentators from companions of the Prophet down to others interpret this as a reference to the various religious communities and their different modes of 'turning towards God' in worship. Ibn Kathir, in his commentary on this verse, stresses its inner resemblance's to the phrase occurring in 5:48 (discussed above) "Unto every one of you have We appointed a (different) law and way of life".

This verse clearly refers to different directions different religious communities have adopted whereto they turn for prayer. All of them, however, submit to God and pray to Him. The Qur'ān conveys that

the direction of the prayer, whatever its symbolic value for a religious community, does not represent the essence of the prayer or faith. This is further corroborated by the Qur'an in the verse 2:177.

This verse also makes a very significant statement: "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to these who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict; and these are they who keep their duty."

Thus the above verse proves beyond any doubt that the real aim of the Qur'an is to produce an ideal human person who is virtuous, is sensitive to others suffering and hence spends of his wealth on the needy, on setting slaves free, taking care of orphans, is true to his word and is patient in times of distress and conflict. And only such persons are truly *muttaqun* i.e., God conscious and keepers of their duty to Allah. This verse too, needless to say, lends great support to the basic premise of religious pluralism by de-emphasising a particular way of prayer and extolling the importance of human conduct and sensitivity to others suffering and ones own steadfastness in the face of calamities and afflictions.

The Qur'an does not take narrow sectarian view as many theologians tend to do. Its view is very broad humanitarian and its emphasis is not on dogmas but on good deeds. And it strongly condemns evil deeds which harms the society and humanity at large. In this respect also it makes no distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus the Qur'an says in 4:123: "It will not be in accordance with your vain desires nor the vain desires of the people of the Book. Whoever does evil, will be requited for it and will not find for himself besides Allah a friend or a helper." Thus no one, Muslim or the people of the Book, can claim any exception from

this iron law of Allah; one who does good will be rewarded and one who does evil will be punished. Elsewhere the Qur'an states, "So he who does an atom's weight of good will see it and he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it." (99:7)

The Qur'an is very particular about freedom of conscience and freedom of conscience is key to pluralism. The Qur'an clearly states that there is no compulsion in religion (2:256) and maintains that all children of Adam are honourable (17:70). It does admit of inter-religious dialogue but with decorum: "And argue not with the People of the Book except by what is best, save such of them, as act unjustly. And Say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit." (29:46)

The Qur'an lays great stress on unity of humankind. It says in 2:213, "Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people concerning that in which they differed. And none but the very people who were given it differed about it after clear arguments had come to them, envying one another. So Allah has guided by His will those who believe to the truth about which they differed."

This whole verse is suffused with the spirit of pluralism and freedom of belief and conscience. According to this verse entire mankind is one but different prophets in their given situations come with revealed scriptures to guide them or warn them and thus, depending on their specific situation, different ways of life emerge. But then people start differing from each other and envying one another instead of respecting each others specificity and this people get divided. That is not the purpose of divine guidance. Allah guides those who believe to the truth about which they differed.

The theme of oneness of humankind is repeated in the Qur'an in different ways. We are told that all human beings have been "created of a single soul" (4:1); again that they are all descended from the same parents (49:13); still again that they are as it were

dwellers in one home, having the same earth as a resting place and the same heaven as a canopy.

Apart from oneness of humankind the Qur'an also lays stress on racial, linguistic and national identities. These identities are projected as signs of God. "And of His signs", the Qur'an says, "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for the learned." (30:22) Thus diversity is projected by the Qur'an as sign of God and hence to be respected. Different identities are for recognition and hence necessary. In the verse 49:13 it is said, "Oh mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may know each other." Thus national and tribal or for that matter other identities are necessary for knowing each other and it should not lead to any conflict. Thus different identities are product of national and tribal diversities and play a useful social role. Thus the Qur'an clearly accepts the legitimacy of diversity.

It also makes it clear quite forcefully that all places of worship should be respected and protected. The Qur'an states, "And if Allah did not repeal some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down." (22:40) It is significant that Qur'an maintains that be it church or synagogue or mosque, Allah's name is much remembered in these places. No single religious place is being privileged in this respect. Thus here too religious pluralism is stressed.

The Prophet of Islam when he migrated from Makkah to Madina found himself in a pluralist situation. There was religious as well as tribal diversity. He not only accepted this diversity but legitimised it by drawing up an agreement with different religious and tribal groups and accorded them, through this agreement, a dignified existence and rights of their own. This agreement is known in history of Islam as *Misaq-i-Madina*.

It begins thus:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

This is writing of Muhammad the prophet between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib (Madina) and those who follow them and are attached to them and who crusade along with them. They are a single community distinct from other people."

This agreement can be called the constitution of Madina and it was definitely a milestone which sought to lay the foundation of a new political and religious culture. What is significant to note in this agreement is that all together - Muslims of Quraysh from Makkah, Muslims of Madina belonging to the tribes of Aws and Khazraj and Jews belonging to different tribes - together constituted a single community - an *Ummah*. The agreement was also quite democratic in spirit. The Holy Prophet did not claim to be the ruler of this community. The emigrants (*Muhajirs*) were, in fact, treated as a clan, and the Prophet was their chief, and there were eight other clans with their chiefs. If the Constitution is a good evidence at this point, he was only marked off from other clan chiefs on two counts: firstly that for the group of believers i.e., Muslims he was a prophet and whatever was revealed to him was binding on the believers; secondly, the Constitution states that 'whatever there is anything about which you differ, it is to be referred to God and to Muhammad'. The idea seems that the holy Prophet should act as arbitrator between rival factions and maintain peace in Madina. The Qur'an also describes as one of the functions of the prophet as an arbiter. It says: "And for every nation there is a messenger. So when their messenger comes, the matter is decided between them with justice, and they are not wronged." (10:48)

It is interesting to note that the eminent Muslim theologians of India represented by Jami'at ul-Ulamā-i-Hind had cited this constitution of Madina drawn up by the holy Prophet in support of their acceptance of composite nationalism. They opposed separate nationalism based on religion advocated by the Muslim League. They argued, citing the Constitution of Madina, that the Prophet had accepted different religious and tribal groups as part of a single

community - *ummah wahidah*. The Medinese society was, thus, a democratic civil society which had tribal, religious and racial diversity.

The modern democratic civil society cannot become a strong stable and prosperous conflict free society unless religious diversity or pluralism is accepted as legitimate way of life. It is unfortunate that most of the Muslim countries do not adhere to this spirit of pluralism and diversity in the Qur'an and *sunnah*. The extremists and fundamentalists among the Muslims in these countries attack the spirit of pluralism and want to create a monolithic society.

Many sociopolitical doctrines which we consider as 'pure Islamic' and worthy of emulation today developed during medieval age when *mulukiyat* (personal and monarchical power structure) had become all pervasive and the Qur'anic values and Islamic spirit were hardly practiced. There was of course no question of any concept of civil society because the ruler was all powerful and followed his own personal whims or went by compulsions of power rather than the injunctions of the Qur'an. Also the arrogance of power and all pervasive authoritarian atmosphere too influenced for formulation of Islamic political doctrines. These medieval doctrines can hardly have any validity today.

It is for the Islamic political theorists of today to develop new political theories which are in keeping with the Qur'anic injunctions and *sunnah* on one hand, and takes the realities of modern world, on the other. There need not be any sharp contradiction between the two. The concept of civil society which respects autonomy of a citizen and his/her religious, cultural and political rights are does not, as shown above, in any way, contradictory to the Qur'anic injunctions. Human rights respect the dignity and freedom of conscience of every individual. The Qur'an clearly states that all children of Adam have been honoured (17:70). This of course includes right to live with dignity and to promote ones own religious, cultural and linguistic or ethnic interests.

We must enter the 21st century not with the imitative (*taqlidi*) mind set but with a creative and critical mind set which, while

adhering to the Qur'ānic values, enables us to live freer life and life of full dignity while, at the same time, accepting the dignity of the other. The Qur'ān, accepted, fourteen hundred years ago, the Christian other and the Jewish other with full dignity and respect for their beliefs. It later accepted to the Zoroastrians and even Berbers. Many *ulama* and the Sufi saints, extended it to the Hindus also.

It is interesting to note that the words 'Kafir' and 'Mushrik' have definite historical connotation and should be used with great caution and restraint. Unfortunately many Muslims use these terms very loosely and describe every religious other as *kafir* or *mushrik*. These being terms of contempt are resented by others. Only those who refuse to accept truth in any form and negate good (*ma'ruf*) completely and advocate *munkar* (evil) would qualify as *kafirs* and those who refuse oneness of God and associate partners with Him will qualify as *mushrik*. And, it is also important to note, even *Kafirs* and *mushriks* would have civil rights as long as they do not cause any disturbances in society and maintain peace. The Qur'ān has given the *kuffar* also the right to worship in their own way and have their own beliefs. The freedom of conscience cannot be taken away from any human person, whatever his or her beliefs. Thus it will be seen that Islam does not come in the way of promoting a pluralist civil society ensuring dignity and freedom of conscience to all.

But it has yet to be realised in all Muslim countries. In many Muslim countries like Turkey and Iraq, let alone non-Muslims, even Muslims of other nationalities and ethnic origin like the Kurds are severely persecuted. It is in clear violation of the Qur'ānic injunctions, as pointed out above. An Islamic civil society should treat all with equal degree of dignity and accord them equal citizenship rights.



## JIHAD? BUT WHAT ABOUT OTHER VERSES IN QUR'ĀN?



The terror attacks in India as well as abroad has created an impression as if jihad is central to Qur'ānic teaching. First of all, as we have asserted repeatedly, jihad does not mean war in Qur'ān as there are other words for it like *qital* and *harb* for war. Jihad has been used in Qur'ān in its root meaning i.e., to strive and to strive for betterment of society, to spread goodness (*ma'ruf*) and contain evil (*munkar*).

But supposing jihad means war, as many Muslims, especially those who want to use it for their own political agenda, even then jihad is not that central to Qur'ānic teachings. The word jihad occurs in the Qur'ān 41 times (though not a single verse uses it in the sense of war) there are other key words in Qur'ān representing values. As we have pointed out in one of the previous articles there are four most fundamental values in Qur'ān i.e., justice (*ādī*), benevolence (*ihsan*) compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*).

These are Allah's names also in Qur'ān i.e., Allah is Just, Benevolent, Compassionate and Wise. Thus the Qur'ān is the embodiment of these values and a Muslim is duty bound to practice these values above all. One who fails to practice these values can hardly claim to be true Muslim. Jihad is not even obligatory in Islamic jurisprudence whereas these values are indicative of a Muslim's character and hence quite important.

In Qurʾān compassion is quite central and Allah's names Rahman and Rahim (Compassionate and Merciful) are among the most important names. A Muslim begins his/her work by invoking Allah's names Rahman and Rahim (i.e., I begin in the name of Allah Who is 'compassionate and Merciful'). Thus it would be seen that Compassion is most central to Qurʾānic teachings and the words compassion and mercy in their various forms occur in Qurʾān 335 times as against jihad only 41 times.

The word *ihsan* (i.e., to do good to others) occurs in the Qurʾān 194 times which also greatly outnumbers jihad. Similarly the word wisdom and its derivatives occur 101 times. Qurʾān lays great emphasis on wisdom as wisdom is superior to reason in a way. Reason is also quite important but at times it can be misused by human beings whereas wisdom includes reason and values put together. Qurʾān advises Muslims again and again to use wisdom. It asks Muslims to call to Allah also with wisdom, not with threats or force. One cannot invite anyone to ways of Allah by use of force, coercion or threat but with wisdom and kind words.

Also, there is great emphasis in Qurʾān on justice in all social and political matters and Qurʾān uses three words for justice i.e., *ʿadl*, *qist* and *hakama* and all these three words put together there are 244 words for justice in Qurʾān. Thus it clearly shows that justice with all is highly necessary which clearly implies no innocent person would be punished in any case.

Also, Allah is thirty three times described in Qurʾān as *Ghāfur al-Rahim* i.e., Forgiver and Merciful and not one who seeks revenge. To seek revenge is human weakness, not strength of character. Thus a devout Muslim tends to forgive like Allah who forgives his servants if they sincerely repent. Those who are waging 'jihad' in the form of terror attacks are bent upon seeking revenge whereas a good Muslim would tend to forgive like Allah forgives. It is true Allah punishes oppressors (*zalimun*) but no individual or a group of individuals not representative of community or state can dispense punishment. Only Allah or state or its representatives of states can dispense with punishment.

That is why in Islamic jurisprudence (*ṣarī'ah* law) jihad can be declared only by state or those empowered by the state, no one else. Terror attacks, on the other hand, are planned and executed by few individuals unrepresentative of any state or state institution. So their attacks cannot be legitimate by any Islamic or *ṣarī'ah* law. That is nothing but committing murder of innocent people. Also according to Islamic laws in jihad too no non-combatant can be attacked much less women, children and old persons and no civilian property can be destroyed unless it is being used for military purposes or for purposes of combat.

It will be seen that rules laid down for war by Islamic laws are no different from modern laws of warfare or Geneva Conventions. But terror attacks are gross violation of all these Islamic rules and there is no way these attacks can be characterized as 'jihad'. These terrorists are described by media as *jihadis*. It is also gross misuse of the word as there is no word like *jihadi* in the first place in Arabic language. It is in fact *mujahid* and word *mujahid* is used in laudatory sense – one who devotes oneself for a good cause like fighting against social evils etc. At times it is also used for a warrior but in that sense it is used for a brave person who is not only fearless but also wages war only for a good cause and fights only on the front, not hit and run kind.

I would also like to throw some light on the word jihad as understood and explained in Islamic literature. If these Qur'ānic values are important (and they are, undoubtedly) then real jihad would be to cultivate and promote these values with utmost efforts and Sufi saints considered real jihad only in this sense. After all Islam came in this world through the Prophet to combat all social evils then prevalent in Arab society in general, and in Makkah, in particular.

Since primary importance in Qur'ānic teachings is for these values, a true Muslim would devote himself/herself to fight all evils in the society which negate these values. The Prophet (ﷺ) devoted his entire life in practicing and promoting these values. He was, therefore, rightly described in the Qur'ān as *Rahmatun lil*

*‘Alamin* (i.e., mercy of the worlds) because mercy can prevail in the world only if one eliminates all these evils.

The Islamic history during Prophet's life is to be seen in two important phases i.e., the Makkahn phase for first thirteen years after Muhammad (ﷺ) became Prophet and then 10 years in Madina after his migration. In Makkahn phase the Prophet and his followers were most oppressed minority and yet Prophet did not ask his followers to use violence in any form. On the contrary, Qur'an repeatedly advised Prophet and his followers to bear all hardships patiently and not to despair.

The Prophet bore with utmost patience all the hardships, even insults and humiliations and carried on his mission. His followers were subjected to great hardships but he always advised them to be patient and penitent. Thus the Prophet (ﷺ) guided Muslims how to behave in such adverse conditions and how to ensure peace despite such hardships. But when conditions became unbearable he advised some of his followers to migrate to Ethiopia and later he himself migrated to Madina with some of his followers.

Thus Makkahn model of Islam can be very useful for those Muslims who are facing similar situation in parts of the world. As Qur'an lays great stress on *hikmah* (wisdom) one has to imply wisdom and carve out a proper strategy of survival rather than plunge into violence and throw themselves into peril. The Qur'an advises Muslims "...and cast not yourselves to destruction with your own hands and do good (to others). Surely Allah loves the doers of good." (2:195)

This advice of the Qur'an not to throw yourself to destruction with your own hands is important and relevant even today in similar situations. See what the 9/11 attack on New York Towers resulted in? Did Al-Qaeda not invite great disaster to the entire Islamic world, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq? Did they not throw themselves in perdition with their own hands? What good did that attack do to anyone. Was there any wisdom in that rash and ruthless attack?

Qur'an repeatedly advises Muslims to use wisdom. Was there any wisdom in that attack on New York Trade Towers? How can one be

Muslim without following Qur'ān in every sphere of life? To launch such attacks recklessly will bring nothing but disaster for Muslims and Islam. On the contrary the Qur'ān advises Muslims to do good to others instead of throwing themselves into perdition (*tahlukat*).

Qur'ān is clearly advising Muslims to win over hearts of others by doing good to others and thus ward off evil from them. Also, both peace of Hdaybiyyah (name of the place where the Prophet signed a peace treaty) and behavior of the Prophet (ﷺ) after conquest of Makkah are shining examples of exemplary conduct of a great and generous leader. It is in this sense that Qur'ān describes the Prophet as *uswahhusnah* i.e., good role model for all.

Both at Hdaybiyyah and in Makkah after the conquest the Prophet (ﷺ) rather than dictating terms or seeking revenge showed great generosity towards his enemies and won over their hearts. At Hdaybiyyah the Prophet had enough strength to dictate terms to the unbelievers of Makkah but instead he accepted certain humiliating terms dictated by them. Ultimately the treaty benefited Muslims. But it required wisdom of the prophet to enter into such treaty which was apparently humiliating but proved to be otherwise.

Similarly after conquest of Makkah the Prophet forgave worst of his enemies who had insulted and humiliated him and oppressed his followers in most inhuman ways. That won over his worst enemies and all of them embraced Islam. Had he chosen to seek revenge which was customary to Arabs, another bloodbath would have resulted and Islam would not have won so many adherents. Thus moral victory is far more superior to seeking revenge. Revenge only satisfies our ego and injures the ego of the enemy and thus war of attrition continues.

What terrorists are doing is seeking revenge and that too from a weaker position and thus every attack brings nothing but disaster for themselves and others. Allah certainly does not like those who only seek revenge to satisfy their egos. Conducting *ummah's* affairs with wisdom would be far more beneficial to Muslims as a whole. However, it does not mean surrendering to unjust powers but how

to fight for justice must be decided through collective wisdom to minimize danger to the cause of Islam and Muslims.

Also the question is of methodology for interpreting Qur'ān. The Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) over a period of 23 years and most of the verses were revealed in response to certain situation and the relevant verse has to be understood in the context in which it was revealed. Every text has a context and only context can explain how to understand the text. And while understanding the text it is also necessary to judge whether context has changed and similar conditions prevail.

Various verses quoted to justify 'jihad' are generally taken in literal sense and also ignoring the value system of Qur'ān. It is not only context but also value system of the Qur'ān which must be kept in mind while applying the injunction contained in the verse. When Qur'ān was being revealed the revelation was from Allah and was being revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) and both were fully aware of the value system and hence they knew when war becomes absolutely necessary.

But when human beings other than the Prophet apply Qur'ānic injunctions it is very different thing. Ordinary Muslims are neither infallible nor thoroughly immersed in Islamic values because unlike the Prophet they are not a real role model (*uswa-e-husnah*). And when someone applies these Qur'ānic injunctions without any consensus of *ummah* behind it, it is all the more unacceptable. This is what these terrorists are doing.

It is well known fact that be it Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda or any other terrorist organization, they do not represent any government or larger Muslim organization. They succeed in mobilizing some angry youth who have no maturity or wisdom and are carried away by 'Islamic' rhetoric and commit terrorist attacks taking lives of several innocent bystanders. These attacks violate all Qur'ānic values.

Apart from this, the conditions that prevailed in 7th century Arabia cannot be compared to the conditions in the contemporary world. In those days violence could be met only with violence. The

Arabs had their age old tribal traditions of *qisas* (retaliation) and Qur'an, looking to the context permitted *qisas* with strict condition that it be strictly in equal measure in the interest of justice but also advised if you forgive it is better.

In those days there were no other institutions available and Qur'an permitted only defensive war and banned aggression even against enemy. And as the example of peace of Hudaibiyyah shows, war should be avoided wherever peace is possible even on enemy's terms and the Makkahn example shows instead of *qisas* one should better forgive and win over the hearts of the enemy. Both these models are part of the Prophet's *sunnah* and Muslims should follow Prophet's *sunnah*.

And today's world is radically different from 7th century Arabia and today we should go more by Qur'anic ethics than injunctions about war. Today several institutions are available for arbitration, reconciliation and solving disputes. One cannot rush to resort to violence. All Muslim countries are members of United Nations Organisation and without referring any international dispute to it no other action could be contemplated.

Well, the extremist organizations can point out that UNO is dominated by the USA and other western nations and one cannot get justice from it. It is entirely true but then this also has to be continuously exposed and world should know how UNO works in the interests of USA, rather than in the interest of justice. It is also known that USA committed aggression against Iraq despite UNO refusing permission to wage war against Iraq. It exposed USA and world at large knows today how helpless UNO is before powers like USA.

Also, if one wants to really solve the problem peacefully violence will only damage the cause and make world opinion also adverse. The greatest strength of the cause in contemporary world is the favorable public opinion. One must try and win public opinion. Non-violent action is much likely to win public opinion rather than violent actions. Killing innocent people through terror acts can never be effective against a very powerful enemy. And it also makes public opinion very adverse.

Today media is very powerful in creating public opinion and non-violent actions will certainly impact the media people. Unfortunately the youth being impatient with democratic processes and under illusion of following Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic traditions rushes to resort to so called jihad and antagonizes the world opinion. And what they do not understand, other Muslims, including Muslim countries, have to face adverse consequences.

Such thoughtless violence as committed by Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in Pakistan has created an image of Islam as violent religion, religion of jihad though the value system of Islam gives precedence to compassion and respect for human life and dignity. While Buddhism is being equated with compassion and Christianity with love and peace Islam is being equated with jihad and violence. Should these Muslim youth not deeply reflect what adverse image of Islam they have helped create?

These youth are so brainwashed by certain vested interests that they think jihad is obligatory on Muslims and that jihad is the only way out. These youth are totally ignorant of Islamic value system and importance of moral superiority over superiority of weapons. The examples of Hudaybiyyah and peaceful Makkahn conquest clearly show moral superiority ultimately matters. The most powerful can be disarmed before the might of moral stand.

In our own time Gandhiji showed the effectiveness of truth and nonviolence. The mighty British Empire had to bow down before the might of truth and non-violent action. Unfortunately many think nonviolence is cowardice and is born out of weakness. It is very erroneous view. It is only most courageous and truthful person who practices nonviolence. Violence is borne out of anger and revenge, not out of truthful stand.

The Prophet of Islam once defined jihad as 'telling truth in the face of a tyrant ruler'. Telling truth in the face of a tyrant ruler requires tremendous courage and a coward will only kneel on his knees before a tyrant. One who is convinced of truth (*haq* in Qur<sup>ā</sup>nic terminology) will stand by it most courageously and endure all hardships patiently.

The Muslims in Makkah period of Islam endured unimaginable hardships with greatest degree of patience and most steadfastly. They were never provoked into violent action.

Makkah Muslims are best example of how to endure hardships in the face of most challenging situations. Today we have so many Muslim majority countries and the Muslim youth have to put pressure on the rulers of their countries to unite and fight against injustices being perpetrated by the USA and other powers. If the rulers are pro-US and do not take action they must launch public agitation peacefully. It will expose those rulers who serve their personal interests rather than the Muslim *ummah*.

One can argue such agitations do not produce immediate results and no one knows what effect it will have on the ruling class. This argument is partly true. But then one would like to ask how effective is terrorist attacks? Do they succeed in achieving the desired goal? One has no such example. And again, violence against whom? So far there is not a single example that such violent attacks have forced us or any other power to come down on their knees. It invites greater counter-violence and it becomes a vicious circle. In Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan (and now also in India) hundreds of innocent people have died and yet violence has been going on.

It becomes more of ego fight than fight for any cause. Wisdom (which is one of the important values in the Holy Qur'ān) requires that one should thoroughly and objectively assess the situation before adopting any strategy. Those resorting to terrorist violence are no match to superior might of these western nations they are fighting against or any government for that matter. And in armed struggle they cannot involve masses. The violent actions, on the other hand, alienate the masses from violent groups for their arbitrary attacks.

Thus wiser course will be to fight democratically mobilizing public opinion in their favour. The Makkah model of Islam is far more useful than any other model. The verses relating to war in the Qur'ān were revealed in Madina because Muslims were being attacked by Makkah *kuffar* (unbelievers) again and again and in

those days only course of action available was to defend themselves. The Islamic history is witness to the fact that all the battles fought by the Prophet were defensive in nature.

And if the USA attacked Iraq and Afghanistan it was for the armies of these countries to defend themselves or devise other strategies, in case of defeat. It does not give license to any group to launch violent attacks. And these groups cannot attack the innocent civilians of their own countries.

In case of India one cannot avenge communal violence by such terrorist attacks on innocent Hindus and Muslims in market places. It is the same sin which communal forces committed against innocent Muslims. Wisdom requires that one should patiently mobilize public opinion through democratic means and win over hearts of common Hindus and expose communal fascist forces in the eyes of public.

One hopes the misguided Muslim youth resorting to such violent actions would realize the futility of terror attacks and renounce such sinful and criminal acts and instead concentrate on excelling in learning and acquiring superior moral character thus truly following transcendent Qur'anic moral precepts. Did not the Prophet say 'ink of a scholar is superior to the blood of the martyr?'



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