



The Prophet of Non-Violence

Spirit of Peace, Compassion
& Universality in Islam



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Preface

This is a collection of essays written during 2009 and 2010 that represent Islamic viewpoint of various contemporary challenges facing the humanity. No religion, according to me, has teachings only for one kind of people. Every religion addresses the entire humanity and must be seen as such.

But we must remember that each religion has a geographical background. A religion carries within it the elements from a particular time period which has its own cultural and linguistic specificities that may not be universal.

When one tries to understand any religion, one must separate the geographical background and the time period in which it started. The specificities must not be mistaken for universal and eternal. I also categorize them as contextual and normative. Many people including orthodox theologians refuse to make such distinction and consider all religious doctrines including those culture-specific and propounded in certain specific context as inalienable, and hence serious problems arise with changing context.

My endeavour in these essays is to separate the two elements, and while recognizing the importance of the context, I try to go beyond it and understand Islam in its universal aspects, which are moral, ethical and humanitarian. Also, there are certain doctrines which are not only specific to a religion but also most fundamental to it, and there is no question of any change in them. They make that religion a different one without narrowing down its horizon.

These essays are a humble effort to project Islam in all its universality and moral and ethical richness. I consider *Qur'an* as most universal in its teachings and indeed full of rich spiritual insights into human moral dilemmas. I also believe that no single interpretation of the revealed scripture should be considered as final and irrevocable, howsoever eminent and elevated status of that interpreter might have been.

If we make any one interpretation as final and irrevocable, we elevate a human endeavour to the status of Divine. All interpretations of the *Qur'an* are human endeavours and as such are subject to change and different intellectual influences. Also by accepting one particular interpretation as final, we are seriously limiting its universality. Had it not been so, various interpretations would not have been done by great commentators from time to time.

If the *Qur'an* is a universal guide for all times to come, it has to be understood in our own times in the light of our own problems and spiritual and moral dilemmas.

These essays must be seen as another human endeavour with all its limitations to understand the *Qur'an* in the light of modernity and contemporaneity. I am but a humble student of the *Qur'an* and Islam. I am pained when Islam is projected as most rigid, dogmatic, anti-modern and as a religion of violence

rather than a religion of peace and rich morality. If I have succeeded in portraying Islam in its true light, I will consider it as worth the effort made in these essays, and if I have failed, it is my own failure.

Asghar Ali Engineer

Section I
Introduction

Chapter – 1

The Prophet of Non-violence

THE TITLE might come as a surprise for many readers as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)¹ has been very frequently projected as the Prophet of violence by media and religious extremists. A Danish cartoonist even showed bombs in his turban. But here in this book I want to illustrate that the Prophet (PBUH) was indeed the Prophet of non-violence. For this, I would not fall on traditional sources such as *maulanas* and *muftis* (who give religious opinion) but use Qur'anic values and discuss circumstances in which the Prophet lived. And on these grounds there are no disagreements among Islamic scholars.

Before we embark on the subject, let us understand what is non-violence and if absolute non-violence is possible? Also, what are the pre conditions of practising non violence and if it can be practised in any given circumstance? Also, can non-violence

¹ 'Peace Be Upon Him'; a phrase uttered by practising Muslims after saying (or hearing) the name of Prophet of Islam.

depend on one person's philosophy?

Non-violence is not merely an act of no-aggression. A meek person lacking courage can also apparently be non-aggressive but this meekness or lack of courage becomes a store of aggression within him or her and strikes in devious ways including conspiracies, and mortal blows. Thus, absence of violence cannot be treated as non-violence.

Non-violence is based on deeper inner conviction of a person even if he cannot control all forces operating around him. We must remember that a non-violent person without such deeper conviction cannot be truly a non-violent person. This is a crucial point here. A person without such deeper conviction may not ever resort to violence if circumstances do not so dictate to him and a person with deeper conviction about non-violence may, in certain extreme circumstances, have to resort to violence. We have several examples of this in history.

This leads us to second crucial question: Is absolute non-violence possible in any society. I think the answer, contrary to my desire, is in the negative. Society around us is an extremely complex entity. Around us operate highly contradictory forces which go into dictating themselves on us. As it is said, human beings are neither absolutely free to act nor totally dependent on others.

A human being is a complex mix of freedom and restrictions. To the extent that there are restrictions our deeper conviction also cannot help. Thus, if a person is non-violent will have to be judged by his/her deeper conviction and to an extent what

strenuous efforts he/she puts in to check violence and simply not by whether one succeeds in creating a non-violent society.

Thus, even persons like Mahatma Gandhi, who undoubtedly had a very deep conviction for non-violence, failed to create violence-free India. Independence accompanied by Partition saw unprecedented violence. Yet, he is known as apostle of non-violence. Much before him, Christ, who is known as price of peace and love, ended violently himself nor his followers except for first three centuries during which there were highly persecuted minority, remain peaceful and even Church participated in crusades, bringing about killing of thousands of innocent people or Church even allowed burning at stakes of all those who deviated from the Church fiats.

Also, wide disparities and injustices make society less tolerant. Many movements that were launched to have a violence-free society failed. Those whose interests were hit did not allow these to kick off. Many peace activists who worked ceaselessly for non-violent struggles were killed at the hands of the vested interests.

All this is not to argue even for moment that we should resort to violence and give up non-violent, peaceful struggles. Far from it, it should be accompanied by deeper understanding for various forces working in the society and the extent they can go to ward off all threats to their interests. I would like to stress here that non-violence as a value, is absolute, not ensuring it in the society; society as a whole which is beyond our control.

To create a non-violent society, we have to create a just

society and creating a just society itself evokes at times rivers of blood as it happened in Muslim history (which I do not refer to as Islamic history as it creates needless confusion). This was deliberately or otherwise, a result of Islamic teachings and some Muslim scholars and historians are no less responsible for this. Jihad became much misunderstood word.

In the light of all this let us now turn to the Prophet of Islam and examine his convictions and his struggles and understand him whether he ever preached violent revolution or tried to employ violent methods to bring about transformation of Arab society. As I pointed out above, I am using here interpretative historical, social and political analysis to understand this rather than traditional sources which often Muslim scholars do.

We must divide the Prophet's struggle in two main phases. First, the Meccan phase—from his birth to his migration to Medina—which became his ultimate resting point and second, his stay in Madina until his death. Some point out that Meccan phase was peaceful in nature while Madina witnessed a lot of violence. I do not agree with this categorization of one phase being peaceful and the other violent. Basically, as far as the Prophet is concerned there is no such contradiction, Contradiction is of circumstances, not of choice.

As we all know, non-violence is not possible without truth. Truth and non-violence are inseparable. And there is complete unanimity among Muslim scholars, historians and non-Muslim historians that the Prophet was very honest and trust-worthy (*amen*). Thus, a truthful person cannot become violent at any

stage of life. He was as peaceful and non-violent in Madina as in Mecca, though, of course, in Medinese state circumstances changed drastically. Any discussion without proper social and political context becomes bereft of its roots and at best remains doctrinal. When the Prophet appeared on the scene in Mecca, he was in his prime youth and was very sensitive.

He was greatly distressed to see turmoil, social anarchy, sharp class differences between poor and dispossessed and the powerful tribal and clan chiefs in Mecca. Slavery added to the acuteness of the problem. Women, except for some powerful elite, were at their worst.

Distressed deeply by the turn of events, the Prophet began to retire in a cave, known as a cave of Hira, on the fringes of the Meccan city. He would contemplate for hours and days together, but he was no recluse. He prayed Allah to show him the way. It was his wife Khadija, 15 years his senior, who accepted him as a Prophet and congratulated him.

The Prophet, who was otherwise leading a peaceful life with his wife and four daughters, now began preaching his divine message and all the hell let loose. What the Prophet preached is summarized below:

Disunity of tribes across Arabia was causing so much conflict and bloodshed. Inter-tribal unity was greatly needed. Thus, he preached *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood-sisterhood as the word is inclusive of both the genders). This could best be realized by *tawhid* (oneness of Allah). It became basic doctrine of Islam. So many gods and goddesses were source of all kinds

of inter-tribal conflicts and superstitions at the cost of direct rational thinking.

Several Meccan chapters and verses of *Qur'an* are proof enough of this. He wanted to bring about redistribution of wealth to realize social peace and gave us the institution of *zakat*. Though the *Qur'an* did not set its quantum, the Prophet said it should be two and half per cent of one's wealth at the end of the year.

He worked towards uplift of women by giving them dignity and individual rights. What we say 'empowerment of women' was achieved by the Prophet way back, but later, as usually happens it was sabotaged by powerful and conservative Ulema. What the *Qur'an* did to enhance empowerment of women was indeed revolutionary.

He urged people to help establish just, peaceful and non-violent society and give every human equal dignity and rights irrespective of religious, linguistic or cultural differences.

The Prophet's teachings deeply disturbed the vested interests in Mecca who were engrossed in accumulating wealth, neglecting all their tribal social obligations and perpetuating gross injustices. These powerful traders and tribal chiefs gathered to silence the Prophet. When they failed, they approached his uncle Abu Talib, who, according to tribal tradition, was his chief protector.

When Abu Talib conveyed to him what the tribal chiefs wanted, he replied: "If they put sun in one hand, and moon on the other and ask me to shut up, I would not". When Abu Talib saw his deep moral conviction he assured him of full protection

and gave him complete liberty to preach his ideas. Not succeeding there, the tribal chiefs started insulting the Prophet, mocking at him and persecuting weaker sections severely.

One of his followers was an Ethiopian slave Bilal Habshi, who had embraced Islam right when he was small. He was one of his most loyal followers as he saw in the Prophet a great liberator of slaves. The Prophet too never neglected him and often preferred him over his other followers. He appointed him as his *mu'addhin* (caller for prayer) which was a great honour.

However, the Prophet never retaliated against his or his followers' persecution. He urged his followers to bear all this with patience. In fact, one of the Qur'anic *surahs* of Meccan period dwells on virtues of patience and makes it an inseparable part of truth. Truth and patience go together, Chapter 103 of the *Qur'an* says. The virtues emphasized are: truth, justice, humility, patience, compassion, wisdom and piety. Also emphasized is suppression of the feeling of revenge and anger. Revenge and retaliation were main ingredient of tribal behaviour and had already led to years of bloodshed among Arabs.

All of these virtues lead to non-violent conduct. The Prophet showed greatest forbearance in the Arab history and desisted from retaliating at any stage. When faced with gross brutalities he would often retire to himself, reflect deeply and come out with peaceful solutions. When prosecution became unbearable in Mecca both for him and his companions and tribal chiefs plotted to assassinate him while sleeping, he decided to migrate to Madina in the dark of night.

He bore all tribulations quietly. Reason, some suggest, was that the Prophet and his followers were a minority and dare not fight back in Mecca. This is gross distortion of Prophet's very character. He was meticulous follower of peace and non-violence. Had it been so he could have not only conquered Mecca earlier than he did, but could have also taken revenge from his persecutors, killing them and shedding their blood. He did not order killing of any of his foes or persecutors, which he could have, given the tradition of the then tribal society.

When he migrated to Madina, he was welcomed enthusiastically for he was their peace-maker. The inter-tribal feud had robbed Madina of peace for over 40 years. He succeeded in ending this feud and established peace between the two tribes. Thus, he entered Madina as an ambassador of peace.

In Madina, situation was entirely different partly under the Prophet's control and partly beyond him. He emerged in Madina as great moral, spiritual and ethical teacher who not only brought about unity among the people but also guided them in every walk of life. Another great virtue of the Prophet was his humility. He described himself as *'asbduhu was rasuluhu*, that is, servant of Allah and His messenger. He never tried to place himself above others. When he was constructing his house and mosque he himself took part, like others, in constructing it. He used to say, "I am not above you except as a messenger of Allah". A great teacher and so humble! Some Arabs tried to bow down before him. He strictly prohibited them from doing so and said you should bow before none except Allah.

But there were certain things that were beyond the Prophet's control. The Prophet's migration to Madina gave rise to hostility among the Jews, who handled trade and functioned as arbitrators to whom the Arab tribes would refer their disputes to. The Prophet's migration changed this situation. The Jews lost their pre-eminent position and over and above this their monopoly of trade was broken which hurt them deeply. Many of the Prophet's companions like Abu Bakr, Uthman and others were expert traders and since they also came along with the Prophet, they too began trading. This gave threat to the Jews' monopoly.

There in Mecca, the tribal chiefs were infuriated over the escape of the Prophet and his preaching in Madina. They vowed to eliminate him. When they failed they decided to pursue their animosity in Madina. Soon the Meccan chiefs secretly established contacts with the Madinese Jews and prepared to attack Madina. The Prophet, however, was very alert. Apprehending the possible attack, the Prophet sent some of his followers to a place called Badr to keep an eye on the tribal chiefs .

Meanwhile, the Prophet had entered into a covenant with all tribes including the Jewish tribes known as *Mithaq-e-Madina* and guaranteed full freedom of faith, tradition, culture and security of life and property. The Jews too had full freedom to follow their religion and all traditions without any interference from anyone. The only condition was that if Madina was attacked all would defend it together. It was a wonderful document, as modern as national and international declarations of today.

As per the covenant, Jews were obliged to join Muslims if

Madina was attacked. And Meccans did attack Madina. Jews had advance information of it as they were in secret negotiations with them. The Jews did not defend Madina and a hostile situation arose between Jews and Muslims. The battle of Badr took place in which 313 Muslims defeated about 1,000 Meccans, which was a great humiliation for them.

The Prophet cannot be in any way responsible for this battle. He left Mecca so as to avoid any violent conflict and even in Madina, he and his companions were not left in peace by the vested interests.

Of course, there are some vague, even dark areas about the fight between Jews and Muslims. As far as Jewish betrayal and conspiracy with Meccans is concerned, it is beyond doubt. However, certain narratives in *Ibn Ishaq*, *Tabari*, primary sources for the Prophet's life, have recorded certain events which need to be critically looked at. They have accepted certain Jewish historical narratives accusing the Prophet of killing more than 700 Jews after the battle of Trench (Khandaq) in which the Meccan Jews openly collaborated with the Meccan enemies of the Prophet.

There is no place to go into details of this here but suffice it to say that this whole episode does not concur with the character of the Prophet. One psychological reason for accepting this uncritical narrative by early Muslim historians is that they wanted to establish their superiority over their enemies who betrayed them. It also does not accord well with the Qur'anic description of the Islamic historians and scholars need to look into it very seriously and make critical appraisal of it. Unfortunately, all

scholars, Islamic as well as non-Islamic, keep on quoting from *Ibn Ishaq*, *Tabari*, etc., without seriously subjecting it to critical analyses in the light of modern historical researches.

The Prophet, it must be noted, never resorted to wars of aggression. There is specific prohibition in the *Qur'an* for wars of aggression. The *Qur'an* specifically says, "And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not aggressors." (2:190) The Prophet of Islam never violated this Qur'anic doctrine and this second chapter was revealed in Madina, not in Mecca. This is clear that war of aggression is not acceptable to Allah in any case.

I would like to give two major examples of non-violent ways of resolving highly complex issues which establish the Prophet as a major exponent of peace in a region like Arabia which had witnessed blood baths on minor issues. And their revenge and anger never came to an end. One example is that the Prophet, though head of a proto-state, never raised any army throughout his life. All the fights he was forced to fight were done by voluntary participation and hence came to concept of martyrdom—dying for a higher cause. Had Prophet had any aggressive intentions and had he been eyeing political power, he could have raised an army. Also, funds for weapons was collected through donations from his followers, never by any public tax.

Zakat money as clearly described in the *Qur'an* was meant for distribution among the poor and weaker sections of society and was never spent on preparations of war. Prophet never accepted *zakat* for himself or his family. Only a person of non-

violent intentions will desist from raising army while being surrounded by powerful and highly resourceful enemy.

Second proof of the Prophet's peaceful intentions is *Sulh-e-Hudaibiyah* (Peace of Hundaibiyah). Before he performed his last hajj after conquering Mecca, he intended to perform hajj a year before, but was apprehensive of armed resistance by the Meccans. He departed for Mecca with defensive preparations. He was stopped, as expected, at Hudiabiyah and asked not to proceed. Though the Prophet was fully prepared to take on Meccans, he started negotiating with the representative of Mecca. He accepted all their terms in the interest of peace, including giving up 'Messenger of Allah' from his name. This angered some of his followers but he persisted and avoided unnecessary bloodshed. This peace agreement favoured Muslims ultimately and next year the Prophet could enter Mecca peacefully without a drop of blood shed. There cannot be greater proof that peace and non-violence was not only the basic tenet of the *Qur'an*, but was embedded in the very character of the Prophet.

To conclude I would like to make few observations:

- Violence in Prophet's life was highly contextual and he had no control over it. Whatever violence took place was a result of vested interests in Mecca and Madina who obviously did not want development to take place because of the Prophet's preachings.
- There is no difference in Meccan and Madinese period as far as Prophet's approach is concerned. He followed policy

of peace and non-violence in both the phases. Whatever contradiction we find in Meccan and Madinese period is of the situation, not doctrinal, much less intentional.

- The *Qur'an* had to permit defensive violence without which Muslims could not have survived at all. Thus, absolute non-violence can only be doctrinal and cannot work in a highly complex world full of different interests and people who want to dominate. Absolute non-violence can be applied in a different world which is perfectly just and full of people willing to coexist without contradictions and evil intentions. Such a world has remained utopia so far.
- Islam is not a political ideology but a civilizational force with strong spiritual and moral doctrines. Its main aim is to exalt the human beings to highest levels of spiritual and moral conduct. Allah has created human beings in the best of mould but they descend into lowest of low to fulfill their ambitions and desires to have more and dominate others.
- The Muslims must understand that Islam will emerge in its best only when they pursue these higher values, not power. Pursuit of power caused enough bloodshed and is still causing in the Muslim world. Islam has great civilizational potential and has given great civilization to the world.
- And they can call the world to the way of Allah only through wisdom and good upright conduct.

Section II
Women in Islam

Chapter – 2

Women in the Light of Hadith

MUSLIM WOMEN are often deprived of their rights in the name of *hadith*¹. These are declared authentic even if they do not keep with the Qur'anic pronouncements. Often only those *hadith* are quoted which serve the mighty, and which help in maintaining man's authority over woman. Before we delve on the subject, we must throw some light on those *ahadith*² which are closer to the spirit of the *Qur'an*, and which help empower women. Unfortunately, such *ahadith* are often suppressed and discussed only by a select few in the comfort of their drawing rooms.

Unlike the *Qur'an*, there is no unanimity about *hadith* among Muslims. It is a highly controversial subject and not without ground. There used to be no criteria laid for the Qur'anic

¹ These are the narrations originating from the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad.

² Plural of *hadith*

text, as the Prophet (PBUH) used to recite *wahi* as soon as he received it. His companions would either memorize it or write it down on palm leaf or on camel bone or its skin. So there was no scope for controversies.

However, it is not so in case of *ahadith*. They were compiled more than 150 years after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), who himself never encouraged collection of *ahadith*. He was perhaps aware of controversies that it would generate. Similarly, Hazrat Abu Bakr and Umar also discouraged collection of *ahadith*. So, not much attention was paid to *ahadith* until the period of the four caliphs for 30 years after the death of the Prophet.

It was after them that all kinds of political controversies started and Muslims were divided into different groups and subsequently into sects. The Umayyads³ captured power and to the shock of Muslims, Ummah Yazid was nominated as the successor of the Prophet (PBUH) by Amir Mu'awiyah⁴. The Umayyads were conscious of their non-acceptance by Muslims and also by the fact that Yazid had brutally killed Imam Husain and his colleagues. So the Umayyads had to somehow win legitimacy and *ahadith* began to be fabricated. This was one reason why many *ahadith*—which were far from being authentic—came into existence.

Second reason why a large number of *ahadith* appear

³ Umayyad was the second of the four Islamic caliphates established after the death of Muhammad.

⁴ Amir Mu'awiyah was the first caliph of the Umayyad caliphate. He was succeeded by Yazid I.

fabricated is that Islam spread to vast non-Arab areas which were distinct in cultures and traditions. The Islamic teachings got moulded in the local customary mould. Not many *sahabah*⁵ were available to travel to these far-flung areas to propagate the teachings of Islam. This was particularly so in case of women. Each place had its own way of treating women. Being feudal in nature, it was difficult for the people to accept what the *Qur'an* taught them.

To give legitimacy to their patriarchal authority, a large number of *ahadith* came into existence. This alarmed many jurists and ulema⁶ and a science of *hadith* was developed to separate real from the unreal. This was not easy but nonetheless an attempt was made.

One of the ways developed was to examine the chain of narrators and the reputation enjoyed by them. Were they honest and truthful? This became the most important criterion rather than the text of the *hadith* itself, whether it was in keeping with the reason or the Qur'anic teachings. Thus, *riwayat*⁷ became more important than *dirayat*⁸. Also, if a *hadith* was narrated by a single narrator, it could not be as acceptable as the one narrated by several narrators. Most of the *ahadith* were judged on these criteria.

Those jurists who lived in Mecca and Madina like Imam

⁵ Companions of the Prophet

⁶ A community of legal scholars of Islam and the Shari'ah

⁷ What is traditionally narrated

⁸ Reason

Hanbal or Imam Malik used only those *ahadith* which were considered authentic there. Thus, very few *ahadith* were used. Imam Abu Hanifa was very careful in this respect, but since he lived in Kufa that was confluence of more than one culture (non-Arabs outnumbering the Arabs), he had to face several problems that the Madinese and Meccan jurists did not face.

With these introductory remarks, let us deal with those *ahadith* which are favourable to women than those that reduce a woman to man's subjugation. The *Qur'an* has not only given equal rights to women, but has recognized her as independent entity in her own right. However, it is not so with Shari'ah law where she is described as a mere appendage to her father or her husband.

The creation of Adam and Hawwa⁹ is another contentious issue. The Holy Book nowhere says that Hawwa was created from the rib of Adam and, yet, we find this in *hadith* literature, especially in the *Sahih Bukhari hadith*. This *hadith* is accepted by Muslims almost unanimously, and yet, this cannot be the reason for accepting it without criticism. The *Qur'an* while talking of creation of man and woman says in Verse 4:1:

“O People, keep your duty to your Sustainer, Who created you from a single being (*nafs*) and created its mate of the same (kind), and spread from these two many men and women.”

According to this verse, both man and woman were created

⁹ The first woman and the first Muslimah to be created by Allah, representing womanhood and literally means “the source of life”.

from one being and there is no question of one being superior to the other. But this was not acceptable to a culture which was patriarchal and wanted man to be invested with authority over woman. Hence, a *hadith* was needed to sanctify man's authority over woman and this *hadith* said that Hawwa was created from the rib of Adam. This belief was more popular among Christians (though it is not stated in the *Bible*) and is believed to have been borrowed from there.

In order to make woman subject to male authority, it must begin with her origin itself. If it is accepted as per the original teachings of the *Qur'an* that both man and woman were created from the same being and from the same kind, then how could one justify the superiority of man over woman? Also, unlike the *Bible*, Hawwa was not to be blamed for Adam's mistake. The *Qur'an* clearly says, "And certainly we gave a commandment to Adam before, but he forgot and we found in him no resolve." (20:115) Again the *Qur'an* says, "And Adam disobeyed his Sustainer, and was disappointed." (20:121)

In both these verses, the *Qur'an* blames Adam alone and Hawwa is nowhere in the picture. Thus, Hawwa did not, contrary to popular stories, induce Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. It is a very important verse that clearly demonstrates how the *Qur'an* treats woman.

According to the *Qur'an*, woman is neither posed against man nor is she his competitor. The Qur'anic philosophy says that both man and woman complete each other and are mutual companions, nothing less, nothing more. According to one

hadith, the Messenger of Allah said that both man and woman were equal in status. Yet, the *hadith* literature is full of *ahadith* according to which woman is not an equal partner but depends on the will of her husband, and that she has to be obedient to him and do nothing that is disapproved by him.

According to *hadith* literature, woman is temptress, who seduces man and often misleads him. Some *ahadith* pronounce severe punishment on a woman if she disobeys her husband. She cannot go out of her house without her husband's permission even if she has to go see her ailing parents.

The *Qur'an*, however, stresses mutual consultation. According to the *Qur'an*, even for a decision like weaning, a mutual consent is necessary, and the woman is equal partner in all such decisions. "But if both desire weaning by mutual consent and counsel, there is no blame on them." (65:6)

Many Muslims marry off their daughters without their consent or even without consulting them. It is surprising that even Shāfi'ī¹⁰, Maliki¹¹ or Hanbali¹² take such position which is found to be quite weak. Imam Taymiyyah and his disciple Ibn Qayyimj did not agree with them and refuted this position, considering that the daughter's consent is a must for her marriage.

According to one *hadith*, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is

¹⁰ School of Fiqh (i.e., Islamic jurisprudence based directly on the *Qur'an* and Sunnah named after Imam ash-Shāfi'ī.

¹¹ This religio-legal school of thought was founded by Imam Malik in Madina.

¹² One of the four schools of Fiqh, started by the followers of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal.

reported to have said that if woman becomes head of the state, the country will face disaster. A Moroccan sociologist Fatima Merrinisi has proved through meticulous research that this *hadith* appears 30 years after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) and its narrator is one Abu Bakrah who narrated this *hadith* after the Battle of Jamal in which Hazrat A'isha fought against Ali ibn Abi Talib. We do not find its narration by others. It is also important to note that Abu Bakrah was aspiring for a post in Hazrat Ali's administration. The Prophet (PBUH) had highest regard for women and he can hardly be expected to have said such a thing. Also, in a revelation to the Prophet, Bilquis (Queen of Shiba) overrules the opinion of her court nobles to fight against Solomon rather than make peace with him. Thus, Bilquis showed more wisdom than her male nobles.

One thing is to be noted here is that our *a priori* attitudes are reflected in the use of the *hadith* or the Qur'anic text. Those who support subordination of women to patriarchal authority search for such *ahadith*—irrespective whether it is weak or strong—or Qur'anic text by interpreting it the way they want. And those who are in favour of women's dignity and equal status search for the *hadith* or the Qur'anic text to suit their attitude.

Then what is the way out? How to determine what is really intended? We have to adopt proper criterion as well as methodology for that. In order to do so, first we have to carefully examine the core value system of Islam and then other factors like social, economic, political and contextual. These factors are contingent and not integral to the core value of Islam.

The core value of Islam is gender equality and human dignity (2:228, 17:70). Thus, if other factors do not impinge on the situation, gender equality and women's dignity will prevail and laws made will have to reflect them. When jurists of classical Islamic period (1st–3rd centuries of Islam) were compiling the Shari'ah laws, there were certain contingent factors they had to take into account that resulted in gender inequality. But since these Shari'ah laws were based on those contingent factors and not on core values, they could not have the status of permanence. If such contingent factors are no more valid, the laws may have to be changed in keeping with the core values of Islam.

Firstly, when classical jurist were formulating laws, the very social ethos was to subject woman to male authority. Secondly, there was no concept of rights of woman as an individual entity and this certainly influenced Islamic jurists while making laws. Since the *Qur'an* had clearly pronounced their rights, they could not completely ignore the rights but did find ways to make woman subordinate to man through arguments such as she is biologically different and as a mother she has duties towards her children, or by using a weak *ahadith* or the Qur'anic text through their own interpretation.

Thirdly, women in those days were economically totally dependent on man, and hence, they could hardly assert their independence. They were brought up in such a way so as to accept their subjugation to man. They accepted it as natural and divine order. Though there were a few women who understood both the *hadith* and the *Qur'an*, they were far and few

in between. Such women preferred to take the prevailing social conditions into account.

For instance, it was said that a *mehram* man¹³ must accompany his woman when she goes out. She was barred from going out alone. In those days, social conditions were such that there was no security outside home. The woman was considered weak and unable to defend herself from sexual attacks or molestation. And thus, it was pronounced that a man must accompany her to protect her. Even today, in many places, women are generally unsafe and are often sexually attacked and hence someone may accompany her as a precautionary measure.

But this cannot be elevated to a level of principle which is what our jurists do and consider as a divine injunction. In principle, a woman should be free to go out alone, if she deems it fit and social environment is secure.

Further, the *muftis*¹⁴ and jurists insist that a woman cannot earn her living and it is the man who will earn and look after his wife and children. This also has been elevated to the level of principle and many men do not allow their spouses to work. It is true that it is the Qur'anic injunction that husband should maintain his wife and children, but it is equally true that the *Qur'an* allows women to earn and also says that whatever she earns will be hers and the husband cannot take it away except by her consent (4:32).

¹³ Man relative who is prohibited to the woman by way of marriage

¹⁴ An interpreter or expounder of Islamic law

Sometimes extremely weak and fabricated *hadith* is quoted to reduce the woman's status and deprive her of her just rights unequivocally described in the *Qur'an* or the *hadith*. For example, she is not allowed to enter mosque for prayer. There is absolutely nothing in the *Qur'an* or in the authentic *hadith* to prevent her from entering the mosque. Yet, it is rigorously enforced in South Asian countries but not in Southeast Asian countries. In the Prophet's (PBUH) time, women used to go to mosques for *Fajr*¹⁵ (early morning) and *Salatu-l-Isha*¹⁶ (late evening) prayers. The *Sahih Muslim* states that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Do not prevent Allah's female servants from entering the mosque."

Another two *ahadith* often quoted to reduce woman's status are that she is *naqis* (deficient) in intellectual capacity and *iman* (faith), and that Prophet (PBUH) said that if it were permissible for human being to perform *sajdah* (prostration) before other human beings. He would ask women to prostrate before their husbands. Both these *ahadith*, as Yusuf Qardawi, a well-known *'alim* from Egypt (now living in Qatar), says, are baseless. But they are often quoted to degrade women.

Similarly, Yusuf Qardawi points out the falsity of another *hadith*. This *hadith* states that the Prophet (PBUH) asked his daughter Fatima Zahra what was best for a woman, and she replied that she should not see any man and that no man should

¹⁵ It is the first of the five daily prayers recited by practicing Muslims; it means 'dawn' in Arabic language.

¹⁶ Late evening prayers

see her. The Prophet (PBUH) kissed her and said “you are my daughter”. Qardawi says this *hadith* is baseless and is not even worth the ink it is written with.

The *Qur'an*, on the other hand, says that when Moses met two daughters of Prophet Shuaib and gave water to their sheep, they talked to him and he talked to them and then one of them said, “O’ my father, employ him; surely the best of those that thou can employ is the strong, the faithful one.” (28:26)

This verse shows two things: one, women can talk to men who are strangers and that women’s counsel can be sound. This is further reinforced by the story of Queen of Shiba as quoted earlier. Similarly, it is well known that in Hudaibiyah, when companions of the Prophet (PBUH) refused to sacrifice animals as he had agreed on humiliating terms for peace with non-believers of Mecca, he sought advice of his wife Umm Salma and her advice proved to be very useful. Despite all these, some people maintain not to consult their womenfolk. It is a great insult to the intelligence and dignity of women.

Similarly, one saying is ascribed to Hazrat Ali that women are total evil and whatever they do is evil. How could Ali, whose wife was Fatima, Prophet’s daughter, whom the Prophet (PBUH) loved intensely, have said this? All this is reflection of what was thought of women in medieval societies and how men treated women. The *Qur'anic* teachings and those of the Prophet (PBUH) about women were totally disregarded in view of the prevailing social ethos.

It is true that it is very difficult to change social conditions

through mere exhortations. It takes not only sincere efforts and commitment but also objective socio-economic conditions. The Islamic teachings could not be implemented and women continued to be treated with contempt and degradation for following reasons:

- When the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions departed from the scene, there was none left with strong commitment to Islamic ideals to supervise Islamic values and ideals.
- Islam spread to areas far and wide with culture in which women had much lower positions and they accepted Islam more for convenience than conviction, while remaining immersed in their own cultural values and social ethos. Hardly anyone, except some ulema, knew the *Qur'an* and *hadith* and they too were surrounded by cultural traditions alien to the Qur'anic teachings and hardly could do anything to change it.
- The prevalent socio-economic conditions were also not at all favourable to raise women's status. Mere religious teachings could hardly have brought about the necessary change.
- Islam conquered parts of Byzantine Empire and Sassanid Empire, both feudal empires. Thus, Islam entered a feudal society and got itself feudalized and women were further subjugated by these feudal cultures.
- Islam could not emerge from feudal societies until modern times. In modern times too, no capitalist or industrial revolution could take place in the entire Islamic world.

- Those who migrate to western countries today belong to these semi-feudal countries. They have their own traditions which remain part of their cultural baggage when they go there and attract severe criticism. Since the Muslims living in western societies are hardly acquainted with the Qur'anic status of women, they consider such harsh criticisms as 'attack on Islam' and are hardly able to respond creatively to such attacks.

We, therefore, have to go back to the *Qur'an* for restoring woman's rights and promote gender equality and reject all those *ahadith* which are weak and fabricated. We have to develop proper criteria to advance new legislative parameters.

Chapter – 3

Violence Against Women and Religion

RELIGION IS believed to be inextricably linked with the Divine. It is divine in more than one sense. Firstly, its teachings are motivated by the purest of intentions. Secondly, its teachings are transcendental since religion exhorts us to transcend what exists, what it should be in society as well as in personal conduct. But soon after its birth, religion gets mixed up with customs and traditions already existing in society on one hand, and on the other, powerful interests, often very negation of its teachings, begin to control it.

Thus, what reaches us is far from the religion in its divine form but a mixture of several things. Its divine teachings are diluted, or even negated, and we begin to perpetrate certain dogmas in all their rigidity resulting in several problems and resisting all changes. We even forget that what is divine cannot be against reason and human progress, both material and spiritual.

Rigid dogmas and doctrines are not products of religion, as

we often believe, but of human mind which itself is a product of existing social ethos. Also, theologians and priests acquire the status of demi gods for followers of religion. An ordinary follower entirely depends on these scribes and priests for his understanding of religion. Also, psychologically speaking, most human beings feel highly secure by following some 'leader' or 'authority'. To think or act by oneself is quite onerous and avoided by ordinary human beings.

However, true religiosity consists in knowing, thinking and taking responsibility for one's own actions. *Taqlid* (mechanically following) is not a religious act as responsibility for what one does is not on oneself but on the leader whom one follows. Thus, leaders acquire vested interest in their followers and anyone who refuses to follow becomes a heretic, and is denounced, even ostracized.

I have said these prefatory words so that we understand real import of religion as against prevailing practices in the name of religion. Unless we discover the real spirit of original teachings, we would continue to follow something far away from religion. It cannot be expected of any existing religious establishment to represent true spirit of religion. No establishment can ever represent true spirit of religion. They negate each other. An establishment represents some form of interests and religion negates all forms of interests. It is an individual spiritual quest.

Today, in all established religions, we find women having secondary position. Religious leadership itself has become a male prerogative. All established religions represent patriarchal values,

and hence, women cannot enjoy same rights and dignity as men. And this secondary position of women is sanctified through theological doctrines. No religion in its divine form can assign secondary position, much less vilify women. All human beings are creation of the Supreme Being. If at all, woman must have higher position as she partakes creation through giving birth. If creation is a divine act, women perform this act.

However, established religions which strayed from divinity lost this divine dimension and patriarchy overtook divinity. Women became subordinate to men and, at best, became instrument of production rather than being partaker of the divine act. Conceiving and giving birth became her weakness rather than her divine strength and even means of subjugation. And subjugation in its extreme form was enforced through violence.

Since subjugation was theologized, violence against her too became theologically justified in different religious traditions. Here, we will discuss violence against women from Islamic theological point of view. When the Government of India passed the Domestic Violence Act in 2005, *Inquilab*, an Urdu paper from Mumbai, reported a statement of General Secretary of Muslim Personal Law Board that the government is depriving the Muslims of their Islamic right to 'beat their wives'.

It was a shocking statement. There cannot be divine right to beat one's wife. What is the source of this statement? It is a Qur'anic verse 4:34. According to all traditional commentators like Tabari, Zamakhshari, Ibn Kathir and others, this verse was revealed when a woman complained to the Prophet that her

husband slapped her unjustly and she does not know what to do. The Prophet, who always gave priority to justice over anything else and also always accorded equal dignity to women, asked the woman to go and retaliate.

This created a crisis in the patriarchal society of Arabs and men surrounded the Prophet and asked, ‘If our women have right to retaliate, how will we control our families?’ It was a natural concern in a patriarchal society. The Prophet had to wait for divine intervention to tackle the crisis. The revelation came in the form of Verse 4:34.

This story also shows that many verses were revealed in response to certain social situation and hence importance of those verses could be understood only in that context. In other words, such verses cannot be absolute, as our jurists and theologians tend to believe. This verse today is being debated between modernists and traditionalists and is being differently interpreted.

First, let us take traditionalist point of view in understanding this verse. The verse has been translated as under by Maulana Muhammad Ali, whom I can describe as semi-modernist, that is, neither completely traditionalist nor completely modernist:

“Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah have made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and chastise them. So if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is ever Exalted, Great.”

There are some words in this translation which are crucial

in determining the position of women in this divinely revealed book. We have already seen the context in which this verse was revealed. And to a great extent, its meaning would also relate to the context. Traditional theologians and jurists read into it clear statement of subordination of women to men.

If we take traditional translation, it would be even more problematic from feminist viewpoint. The first word in this translation is *qawwam* which the Maulana has translated as 'maintainer' but traditionalist translate it as 'ruler' or 'authority'. So translated, it would mean 'men are authority over women'. However, root meaning of the word is maintainer and protector. So the Maulana is much closer to the root meaning than traditionalists. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's translation in Urdu also supports this meaning.

The other words are *ba'duhum 'ala ba'din*. Muhammad Ali has translated it as "some of them to excel others". However, Muhammad Asad, in his *The Message of the Qur'an*, displays greater bias towards men when he translates these words as "God has bestowed more abundantly on the former (that is, men) than on the latter (that is, women). But again, Maulana Muhammad Ali is much nearer to root meaning of *ba'dahum 'ala ba'din* than Muhammad Asad.

Next, the words 'good women are obedient' are interpreted as 'obedient' to men. The Arabic word in the *Qur'an* is '*qanitatun*', which can only mean obedient to Allah not to men. And to be fair to the Maulana, he has explained, "Obedient here signifies obedience to Allah". Muhammad Asad has translated it

as 'devout', which is closer to the root meaning of *qanitat*.

Another controversial interpretation is of the word what Maulana translates as desertion and Muhammad Asad as 'ill-will'. In the *Qur'an*, the Arabic word for this is *nushuz*. The root meaning of this word is 'to rise, to protrude'. Thus its more acceptable translation would be to rise up against husband. It can be interpreted as desertion or also, as one Maulana Shoaib points out sexual misconduct. For this meaning of the word, he refers to Prophet's (PBUH) use of this word in his address after last Hajj known as '*Hajjat al-wadda*'.

The *Qur'an* in this verse tells men that in case of *nushuz*, first they should admonish them, failing which, they should be isolated in bed, and even then if they continue their *nushuz*, then chastise (or beat) them. The Arabic word for chastisement used in the *Qur'an* is *wadribuhunna*.

The traditionalists argue that the *Qur'an* clearly permits men to beat women (or their wives) though the *Qur'an* does not use the word wife. And that is why, General Secretary of Muslim Personal Law Board gave a statement that this Act against Domestic Violence deprived the Muslims of their God-given right to beat their wives. However, this translation (that ~~is~~, to beat them) is highly controversial and Muslim feminists and modernists are challenging it.

The first major commentator of the *Qur'an*, Tabari, points out to few traditions (*ahadith*) of the Prophet which say that beating should be mere symbolic, very light so as not to injure them. The Prophet was brushing his teeth. He lightly struck the

brush on his body and said this much, no more. According to a similar *hadith* referred to by Tabari, the Prophet had a kerchief in his hand and he struck with kerchief and said this much and no more.

It is for this reason that most of the translators write in the bracket while translating *wadribuhunna* 'so as not to injure them'. But the question asked is if they are to be struck so lightly like with the brush or kerchief, what is the use? Beating is supposed to be a physical punishment and punishment for rebelling or sexual deviancy (if at all *nushuz* means that as Maulana Shoaib believes) cannot be as light as that. It should be such as to physically hurt.

Thus one should rethink the meaning of *wadribuhunna* here. It seems the Prophet's traditions referred to by Tabari may be later inventions. The word *daraba* translated to 'beat' has several meanings. The meaning chosen should jell with the overall Qur'anic approach to women and not conflict with it. If *daraba* is translated as beating, it certainly conflicts with the overall Qur'anic approach towards women.

If one carefully studies the Qur'anic verses about women, it becomes clear that the *Qur'an* gives equal status to men and women and equal dignity to both as human beings. The *Qur'an* does nowhere distinguish between men and women except in matters of function. The *Qur'an* even refrains from using the words 'husband' and 'wife'. It often uses the word *zawj*, that is, 'couple', which is much more equitable expression of marital relationship than 'husband and wife'. The phrase 'husband and

wife' indicate dominating and dominated relation.

Also, the entire discourse in the *Qur'an* about women is 'right-based', that is, it talks of their rights only and the entire discourse about men is 'duty-based', that is, it talks of their duties and repeatedly exhorts them how to behave with their wives. This was because in pre-Islamic Arab society women enjoyed no rights and were expected to discharge their duties towards their husbands. The *Qur'an* disapproved of this unequal relationship and enhanced their status by insisting on their rights rather than duties.

But the patriarchal Arab society was not ready to accept such total transformation and with lapse of time again reversed the relationship and went back to the original set-up. Hence, Shari'ah discourse is full of discourse about woman's duties towards her husband rather than rights though in view of the Qur'anic verses, jurists could not ignore her rights.

Also, the Qur'anic verses talk of qualitatively different relationship between man and woman. For example, Verse 30:21, "And of His signs are this, that He created mates for you from your own kind that so that you might find quiet of mind in them and He put between you love and compassion. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect."

In this verse, we find the true Qur'anic approach towards husband-wife relationship which is neither of domination nor of the dominated. It is love and compassion towards each other. It is not about sexual pleasure or procreation. Men can find peace of mind in them (*li taskunu*). Thus there is no question of the

Qur'an allowing men to beat their wives even in the event of differences between them.

Also, the Prophet (PBUH) never ever beat his wives. Who knows the *Qur'an* better than the Prophet? If the *Qur'an* allowed beating of wife, Prophet would have surely known this and in the event of differences with his wives he could have used physical force, even symbolically as *hadith* ascribed to him shows. But we do not find any such event in his life. But Prophet (PBUH) treated his wives respectfully and with dignity as he knew that the *Qur'an* does not permit wife-beating under any circumstances.

The *Qur'an* refers to his differences with his wives when they demanded more material benefit from him which he could not afford. He did not even quarrel with them on the issue and only withdrew himself and sat in a room alone. When Umar whose daughter Hafsa had married Prophet, came to know about this, he came to meet him (and Prophet met him rather reluctantly). Umar advised the Prophet to beat his daughter Hafsa as she had defied him. One finds reference to this in the Qur'anic Verses 33:28-29.

Umar was known for beating his wife since his pre-Islamic days but the Prophet (PBUH) refused to accept his unsolicited advice. The tension between the Prophet and his wives was soon resolved and normal relationship resumed. Yet in another verse, men and women have been described as each others' friends. Thus, the *Qur'an* says, "And the believers, men and women, are friends one of another." (9:71)

Thus we should try to understand one verse of the *Qur'an* with another verse or verses rather than with the help of the *hadith*. The *Qur'an's* authenticity can never be doubted though many *ahadith* are of controversial nature. Also, the *Qur'an* gives norms and values and has transcendental dimension. The *ahadith*, on the other hand, are often product of patriarchal society, and hence, are to be treated with extreme caution.

Unfortunately, all the commentators on the *Qur'an* rely more on these *ahadith* than on the holistic approach to the *Qur'an* as pointed earlier. Even in formulation of Shari'ah laws, more reliance has been put on *hadith* than even the *Qur'an* when several problems arose after the demise of the Prophet (PBUH). Most of the Arabs who embraced Islam were not in fact qualitatively transformed and social ethos and cultural values could not be easily cast away.

Thus, patriarchy asserted itself again and again and even jurists could not completely disregard patriarchal values. Also, a theory was developed that the Shari'ah could incorporate the *aadaat*, that is, customs and traditions of the Arab society in which Islam was born. This opened the door for pre-Islamic practices to be incorporated into Shari'ah laws. Often in this process, the *Qur'anic* transformative values were compromised.

Thus, the word *wadribuhunna* also came to be understood under prevalent cultural and social ethos of pre-Islamic society. In fact, Meccan society was more patriarchal than Medinese society, which showed some matriarchal traces and treated women with more dignity. Many of the prominent companions

of the Prophet originally belonged to Mecca who had migrated to Madina either along with or after the Prophet. They wielded great influence in reporting the *ahadith* and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses.

A careful exegetical literature would show that no scripture can be understood in the absence of existing social cultural practices. In other words, understanding of scripture is culturally mediated. Thus, no commentary on the *Qur'an* can be an exemption. Though the *Qur'an* is divine, its understanding is surely human and not binding. Human understanding can change in changed circumstances.

A modernist or a contemporary commentator may differ from earlier interpretations. Many modern scholars of Islam maintain that the Qur'anic values can be much better appreciated and understood in today's circumstances when there is much greater awareness about women's rights and dignity. And surely the *Qur'an's* transcendental approach can find much greater acceptability today.

Thus *wadribuhunna* should not be understood as chastisement but its other meanings must be explored to understand the *Qur'an's* transcendental dimension. Even in the Medieval Ages, Qur'anic scholar Imam Raghīb Asfahani pointed out in his dictionary of the *Qur'an*, *mufradat al-Qur'an*, that *daraba 'ala* in Arabic meant 'male camel going near female camel'.

Thus an American Iranian commentator Laleh Bakhtiar, who has created a comprehensive database on the *Qur'an*, translates it as:

“But those whose resistance (*nushuz*) you fear, admonish them and abandon them in their sleeping place, then go away from them (*wadribuhunna*), and if they obey you, surely look not for any way against them; truly God is Lofty, Great.” (4:34)¹

Thus the medieval understanding of the *Qur'an* on women issues must make way for more modern and contemporary approach so as to give women their due which has been denied to them for centuries. The old approach cannot be sustained for long as women today are getting more educated and are active members of human workforce.

I hope Muslim intellectuals and supporters of women's rights within the Qur'anic framework would go for *ijtihad* (intellectual exertion for fresh approach) as it is long overdue.

¹ Laleh Bakhtiar's *The Sublime Qur'an*

Section III

War and Peace in Islam

Chapter – 4

Theory of War and Peace in Islam

ISLAM HAS been much maligned today as the religion of war. The acts of terrorism on the part of some international terrorist groups who indulge in needless and wanton killing has further reinforced this image in the contemporary world. Even during the Middle Ages, crusades threw up an image of Islam which pictured Muslims as sword in one hand and the *Qur'an* in the other.

It would be interesting to note that both during medieval and contemporary times, the image of Islam thrown up was not based on the holistic study of the *Qur'an* but on situation of war and conflict between Christians and Muslims. Huntington's theory of 'clash of civilizations' too is based on situation of conflict between the western and Islamic worlds. Crusades, as well as today's confrontation, are primarily political in nature and not religious, though they would appear to be.

Let alone common people, even scholars, historians and

political scientists confuse political for religious despite the obvious difference between the two. For example, in the *Qur'an*, both Judaism and Christianity have been accepted as religions sent by Allah through His prophets Abraham, Moses and Christ, and yet we find clashes between Muslims, Jews and Christians in history.

With Jews and Christians, the Prophet (PBUH) himself entered into treaties and gave followers of both religions guarantee of freedom to follow their faiths. The Prophet (PBUH) had entered into such a pact with the Jews of Madina and Christians of Najran. He even insisted that the Christians say their prayers in his mosque when a delegation of Christians came to meet him in Madina. What more tolerance and respect one can show to other religions?

Though there were no clashes with Christians during the Prophet's lifetime, Muslims later fought against the Roman Empire and conquered many of its territories. But in case of Jews, clashes were witnessed during the Prophet's lifetime. Although Judaism was shown due respect and the Prophet (PBUH) even prayed for a few years facing Jerusalem, Jews resented Muslim domination in Madina and betrayed the *Mithaq-e-madina*¹ and conspired with *kuffar*² of Mecca to attack Muslims.

Thus, in no way these clashes were religious in nature. These were political, and yet they are often portrayed as religious. It is

¹ Covenant of Medina.

² It is Arabic word for 'nonbelievers'.

nothing but biased and sectarian view of history. Islam has always recognized other religions as equally respectable. It believes all religions were sent by Allah through His 124,000 prophets. So from where does the question of fighting with people of the other religions arise?

All the wars in history are for political power which result in clash of interests between rulers fighting for political supremacy. One should not go by the declaration made by these rulers that they are fighting for their religion. The use of jihad by these rulers is nothing but a religious cover for their political designs.

Before we discuss theory of war as described in the *Qur'an*, it is important to note that many formulations of theologians and jurists are contextual and secondary to the *Qur'an* and cannot be treated as normative pronouncements. Hence, these formulations cannot be binding on subsequent generations. Also, there are significant differences and conflicts between various jurists in this respect. Thus, theories of jihad developed by jurists of the Middle Ages cannot be cited to discuss the Qur'anic theory of war and peace. Thus, we have to formulate the theory of war—one, in the light of the *Qur'an*, and two, in the context of our own situation.

Now coming to the Qur'anic theory of war, it is important to say that war is sanctioned only in exceptional circumstances and peace is the norm. The permission for war in the *Qur'an* is given reluctantly and under extreme conditions of persecution and oppression. War is not permissible if people of other persuasions, religious faiths and nationalities are part of any treaty,

or cause any kind of harm to Muslims. To begin with, even Muslims should preach only their faith peacefully and even put up with resistance and opposition, and bear adverse conditions with patience and endurance of high degree.

Patience (*sabr*) is projected as a great virtue and the *Qur'an* says, “*innallaha mas sabirin*” (surely Allah is with those who are patient). The *Qur'an* also says, “By the time, surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good and exhort one another to Truth, and exhort one another to patience.” (Chapter 110) Thus, it would be seen that truth and patience go together and one cannot be the bearer of truth without inexhaustible patience. Truthful people often have to suffer as they come in clash with those whose interests are harmed.

Also, truth takes long time to bear fruit; sometimes entire lifetime or even more. Thus, those who are eager to see immediate result often get frustrated and lose faith, and hence the *Qur'an's* emphasis on patience along with truth. All the prophets, saints and sages have shown great patience and have never lost faith in their mission even during the most adverse circumstances.

Thus, the *Qur'an* resorts to morality. War advocated in the *Qur'an* is not for propagation of truth as alleged by those who promote stereotype of the sword and the *Qur'an*. ‘Truth’ and ‘War’ can never go together. Truth goes only with patience. War is advocated, as we will see, to fight oppression and persecution only, in addition to defending against aggression.

In Mecca, the Prophet (PBUH) and his followers bore utmost humiliation and persecution with great patience and hence

did not retaliate. The Prophet (PBUH) himself suffered insults and personal injuries from the hands of his persecutors. He was prevented from offering his prayers, He allowed himself to be spat upon, to have dust thrown upon him, and to be dragged out of Ka'ba³ by his own turban fastened to his neck.

The Prophet bore all this with utmost patience as he was convinced of the truth of his message and did not retaliate even once. After the death of his uncle Abu Talib, who had extended his protection to him, a conspiracy was hatched to assassinate him and had he not fled from his bed in the dead of the night, he would have been assassinated. Along with the Prophet, his followers also bore indignities and tortures but never gave up their faith.

Islam had given them a new spiritual message and it was the moral and spiritual teachings of Islam which had given them inner strength to bear all sufferings. Sir William Muir writes:

“Few and simple as the positive precepts of Mahomed up to this time appear, they had wrought a marvelous and a mighty work. Never since the days when primitive Christianity startled the world from its sleep, and waged a moral combat with heathenism, had men seen the like arousing of spiritual life, the like faith that suffered sacrifice and took joyfully the spoiling of goods for conscience sake.”

Thus, even Sir William Muir, who was not very favourably

³ Ka'ba is a cubical shrine in Mecca which is sacred to Muslims. Prior to Islam, it had been a centre of idol worship but tradition has it that Muhammad cleansed it of its polytheistic context and made it the focal point of Muslim religious practices.

inclined towards Islam, accepts that Islam was a great spiritual movement for which its followers, like early Christians, were ready to sacrifice everything, even their lives. So there was no question of preaching it with sword. They suffered rather than make others suffer.

Then when does war come in the picture? Not until the Prophet (PBUH) migrates to Madina and the context changes entirely. It is true that Muslims after going to Madina did attack some trade caravans of Meccans. But this was not war in any sense of the word. First, it was in keeping with the *ghazwa* (attacking caravans) tradition of tribal Arabia. Secondly, the Meccan migrants had lost everything they had—their homes, their trade and their economy was ruined completely—only due to Meccan *kuffars* who had persecuted them in the most inhuman ways.

The tribals used to survive in Arabia through such attacks only and hence Muslims used this tradition to find their bearings in Madina and to establish themselves there. This also delivered a blow to Meccan economy and these Meccan Arabs felt that their lives and trade were insecure. The first permission in the *Qur'an* to fight also came under similar circumstances. The *Qur'an* 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)

This verse states all the conditions under which Muslims should fight. Also, justice is very central to Islam and is one of its most fundamental values. Only when Muslims are subjected to gross injustices are they allowed to fight. Again the words of the verse clearly show that it has nothing to do with spreading of religion.

Had people of Mecca not committed such gross injustices and persecuted helpless Muslims, there was no question of permission being granted to fight. And for war, if it is war and not mere *ghazwa*, the *Qur'an* clearly lays down that “Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you and do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not love aggressors.” (2:190)

From the above verse, it is clear that in Islam, nature of war can only be defensive and not aggressive. And during Prophet’s (PBUH) lifetime, Muslims fought all wars in defence. It was the people of Mecca who attacked Muslims in Madina without any provocation. What Muslims did after the death of the Prophet is a different story. Islam cannot be held responsible if Muslims behave otherwise and violate norms laid down by their religion.

Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore observes, “This is one of the earliest revelations permitting the Muslims to fight... It is remarkable that fighting in the way of Allah is here expressly limited to fighting in defence. Muslims were required to fight in the way of Allah but they could fight only against those who waged war on them. Exactly the same limitation is placed on what was in all probability the first revelation permitting fight-

ing: ‘Permission to fight is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressors.’” (22:39, *The Holy Qur’an*, Lahore, 1973)

It is also important to note that fighting in defence of faith is not mentioned even once in the *Qur’an* as alleged by opponents of Islam. Fighting has been permitted to defend those who believe in Islam. These two things are very different. And as for faith, the *Qur’an* clearly lays down that “there is no compulsion in religion” (2:256). If there is no compulsion, from where does the question of spreading it with sword arise? Moreover, for spreading faith, the *Qur’an* says, “Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner.” (16:125)

The opponents of Islam or those with half-baked knowledge of the *Qur’an* do not read the *Qur’an* in totality but in pieces, and pick and choose verses as suits them, which are at times out of context. That is how they prove their case.

The next verse, that is, 2:191 appears to be disturbing, if not read in proper context. The very fact that it is in continuation to Verse 190 shows that it talks of state of war, not peace. The verse says: “And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, and persecution is worse than slaughter.”

Here when the verse says “kill them wherever you find them”, it obviously refers to those who are at war with Muslims and not those unbelievers who live in peace with them.

This is proven by the fact that Muslims entered treaties

with many non-Muslim tribes. Further, the *Qur'an* lays down in Chapter 109 that disbelievers can worship the way they like and the Prophet and his followers will worship the way they like. So there is no question of killing any disbeliever. Only those non-believers are killed who are at a state of war with Muslims.

This verse also says that *fitnah*, which according to many lexicologists means persecution, is worse than slaughter because it takes place due to one's faith when the person is driven out of his home and place of worship. This persecution referred to here is not of one or two persons but the entire community of Muslims. Thus, permission to fight was given to Muslims because they were being persecuted and driven out of their homes.

The Verse 2:191 is often misused to prove that the *Qur'an* believes in indiscriminate violence against disbelievers and non-Muslims, and that proves the thesis 'sword in one hand and the *Qur'an* in the other'. Nothing can be further from the truth. No such religion can be accepted by large number of people which advocates such violence as religion is generally accepted by virtue of its spiritual appeal. And Islam was accepted by almost all Arabs except Arab Christians who had their own revealed religion.

Islam became a political power much later. It originated in Mecca as a result of general spiritual and moral degeneration and hence its whole emphasis was on justice, equality of all human beings, doing away with distinctions of low and high, of colour and caste, and of tribal affiliations and nationalities. Hence, equality and brotherhood are very important aspects of Islamic teachings.

Also, it is important to note that the *Qur'an* would not have referred to war and violence had it not existed in the Arab society. What was from heaven was compassion, mercy, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness, and what was from earth, especially Arab part of it, was violence, conflict and revenge. As opposed to immediate earthly conditions, the *Qur'an* presents a transcendent moral view of the world to come. Unfortunately, this part is the most neglected, though valuable. What was highly contextual in view of the then existing condition of Arabia had been overemphasized as it totally distorts the view of Islam.

Early Muslims in Mecca were confronted by die-hard tribal chiefs who were powerful, arrogant and proud of their tribal affiliations rather than their human origin, having no mercy and compassion towards their unfortunate sisters and brothers. When an orphan, having no wealth and power, challenged them, their anger knew no bounds. How can a poor and helpless orphan teach them how to behave and share their wealth with the weaker sections of the society?

As the wealthy and powerful often do, they too tried to silence the Prophet (PBUH) and his followers by inflicting inhuman torture on them. But when they did not succeed, the Prophet (PBUH) and his followers were driven out of their homes and hearth, and most of them migrated to Ethiopia and then to Madina. They were not left in peace even there as their moral and spiritual superiority could not be accepted vis-à-vis their material superiority.

It is in this background that one has to understand the

Qur'an's permission to fight. These wealthy and powerful Arabs were totally a lawless horde as there was no state which could regulate them and enforce rules and regulations. As against that, the Muslims in Madina were busy establishing a state structure based on laws with their own political theory, which was partly based on revelation and partly on their own experience and wisdom.

It is for this reason that the Prophet (PBUH) repeatedly tried to develop a model of peace from which the Muslims can derive inspiration. First, for the sake of peace, he preferred a treaty with the disbelievers of Mecca at Hudaibiyah (a step that was considered as humiliating by his most prominent companions) rather than go to war for which all Muslims were prepared. Secondly, when he finally conquered Mecca, he preferred reconciliation with the worst of his enemies rather than revenge and bloodshed. It won over all people of Mecca to his religion.

Subsequent writings on war or jihad (which does not mean war in the *Qur'an* at all) by various jurists and *ulema* cannot be taken as the real Qur'anic teaching or based on *sunnah* of the Prophet (PBUH) and does not draw any inspiration from Hudaibiyah or Meccan model given by him. These theories reflect Muslim situation in the Middle Ages and struggle for power among Muslims, and Muslims and non-Muslims (especially Christian).

Though these theorists, jurists and scholars quoted the *Qur'an* and referred to *sunnah*, their main preoccupation was facilitating their own political situation rather than the Qur'anic

or Prophetic model. There is an urgent need to develop theories of war and peace on the basis of the Qur'anic model and the Prophet's *sunna*. Unfortunately, even today the *ulema* and jurists of Islamic world are preoccupied by the medieval theories and hardly do any original thinking.

Opponents of Islam like al-Qaida and other terror groups also quote the Qur'anic verses very selectively and very cleverly to mislead young Muslims. There is great need to refute their point of view which is only political and not at all religious, spiritual and moral as advocated by the *Qur'an*. The verses on war dealt with the then situation prevailing in Arabia and applying it to today's situation will be erroneous. They are thus doing the greatest disservice to Islam than all opponents of Islam put together.

It is for young scholars and intellectuals to come forward and study the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* in totality and develop Islamic theory of war and peace. Let us not forget that Islam is primarily a religion and its religious, moral and spiritual teachings must get absolute priority over political situation. It is only then that Islam as a religion can challenge what is politically contingent and transient.

Eternal message of Islam is spiritual and not political, and we must disabuse Islam from this political misuse.

Chapter – 5

Centrality of Jihad in Post-Qur'anic Period

JIHAD HAS acquired centrality in the history of Islam. In the *Qur'an*, it is not jihad but values like justice, compassion and forgiveness that are given more prominence. While these values are permanent and transcendent, war (the *Qur'an* calls it *qital*), is contextual and defensive. *Rahmah* (compassion) is central to Islam and is one of the most prominent names of Allah. Compassion, in fact, is as central to the Islamic value system as it is to Buddhism. But then the question arises that why jihad, in the sense of war, became central to Islam?

The whole problem begins with the doctrine, though not Qur'anic, that in Islam, religion and politics cannot be separated. This assumed importance more so in Muslim countries where all sorts of rulers, monarchs, sultans and sheikhs exploited it to the hilt to establish authoritarian regimes violating all Qur'anic values.

This was a result of religion becoming an instrument of

seeking power rather than seeking the truth (*haq*). Though ideally power must be based on truth, in reality it is not. Power often results in serious compromises with truth and hence truth is compromised in search of power.

How did religion in Islamic history come to be associated with power? At the time of the Prophet (PBUH), there was no state structure. All services were performed by the people purely voluntarily, including war services and services for maintaining order in the society. It was a people's state, if at all we could call it a state. But after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), the character of the state began to transform and by the time of the second caliph, it acquired all the features of a formal state structure.

Before we proceed any further, we must note that when the Prophet of Islam began to preach in Mecca, Mecca was a stateless tribal society governed by tribal customs and traditions and through consensus of tribal chiefs in policy matters. There was no ruler or ruling class. Tribal chiefs and traders formed their own inter-tribal trade corporations that wielded tremendous clout.

Thus it is seen that Islam appeared in a society which had no state structure, no army, no policing and no bureaucracy. The Prophet's (PBUH) mission was to cleanse the society of all moral corruption, obsession with material wealth, neglect of weaker sections of society and to promote belief in one God (*tawhid*). This was so because the belief in multiple Gods in the Arab society in general and at Mecca in particular, resulted in mutual tribal conflicts and superstitious practices, some of which has been mentioned in the *Qur'an*.

Thus, it was difficult to build unity among people who worshipped different Gods and associated different practices and superstitions with different Gods. It resulted in moral corruption and accumulation of wealth which underwent strong denunciation as it had divided the society into rich and powerful on one hand and the weak, orphans, widows and slaves on the other. The weaker sections of the society had no human worth or dignity. They were simply a cheap source of labour.

Islam's main concern was to promote belief in one God, build unity among all people irrespective of tribal and other affiliations and restore human dignity to all. Piety and moral rectitude guaranteed nearness to Allah, not riches or tribal affiliations. The Prophet's whole struggle was to set up such a society of good human beings and hence emphasized equality of all human beings, including of men and women, Arab and non-Arab, rich and poor.

It is for this reason that the *Qur'an* made it obligatory for all men and women to contain evil. It is not state's duty but an individual moral obligation. This also shows that there is no concept of state, only the concept of a society. Also, the individual is responsible for his/her own good or bad deeds before Allah. The state's function is to maintain law and order alone.

But, after death of the Prophet (PBUH), there was no great moral authority to influence people and it became necessary to evolve a formal state structure. Much had to be copied from Persian and Roman state structures as there was no available model among Arabs. Since there was no fixed model of deciding

as to who will head the new fledging state, Muslim opinion got divided, some accepting the Prophet's son-in-law Ali as head of the state and some wanting Prophet Abu Bakr to succeed him. Shi'ahs accepted Ali as their successor while Sunnis accepted Abu Bakr as theirs to tackle the affairs of the new community.

However, pursuit of power or building up a state was not and cannot be the purpose of any religion. In case of Islam, it was merely historical circumstances that brought emerging religion and the fledgling state together. It cannot be treated as doctrine but as a historical coincidence. It was a struggle for power, which sharply divided Muslims into two major sects that resulted in a civil war that killed 70,000 Muslims.

This was the most tragic phase in the early history of Islam. Though the state had become a historical necessity for Muslims in Madina, it emerged as a centre of power after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). Its association with Islam was neither inevitable nor desirable. However, pursuit of power rather than the pursuit of truth and moral obligations became the main preoccupation of many Muslims.

Thus, despite the doctrine of fusing religion with politics, the urge for power remained strong. Religion and religiosity did not dominate but urge for power did. Ultimately, the institution of *khilafah*¹, which was more democratic and was based on religious values, was soon replaced by feudal monarchy on the

¹ The Caliphate system: The leadership system of the Muslim nation (*ummah*)

Roman and Sassanid pattern, and monarchy based on power alone and religious element disappeared. It turned into dynastic rule, first of the Umayyads and then of the Abbasids.

The first casualty of the transformation of *khilafah* into monarchy was the battle of Karbala. It was greed for power on the part of Yazid—son of first Umayyad ruler Mu'awiyah—that led to martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet (PBUH). Hussain stood for Islam and Islamic values and Yazid for power. It was Umayyad's greed for power which resulted in the killing of members of the Prophet's family.

It is unfortunate that these wars for power were often called jihad. The meaning of jihad, which originally meant struggle for truth, was corrupted to mean war that led to the path of Allah. The Qur'anic doctrine does not require war to spread Islam. So, all conquests that took place had nothing to do with religion and were anything but jihad.

In fact, the series of conquests begin with the Second Caliph Umar and Sassanid wherein parts of the Roman Empire were conquered. Unfortunately, we do not find reasons for these conquests in early sources. It was certainly not for spreading Islam or spreading the truth. The text of treaties mentioned by Baladhuri, the author of *Futuh al-Buldan* clearly indicate that conquered people were not asked to convert to Islam but the terms of *jizya*² were negotiated with them, along with supply of military provi-

² It is a tax paid by non-Muslims living in Islamic lands to the state through which they are exempt from the duties of Islam like military service and *zakat* and are protected by the state as well.

sions, slaves etc. Nowhere were they invited to convert to Islam. If some converted, it was purely a voluntary act.

Yet, for all these wars, Tabari (the eminent historian) and others have used the term jihad, which comes nowhere near the sense in which the *Qur'an* uses the term. The act of conquest was thus a political act and not religious. The Prophet's whole struggle (jihad) was for creating a new human being who would be morally upright, imbibing values of the *Qur'an* like justice, equality, compassion, wisdom, knowledge truth etc.

It is important to note that for this new human being, the *Qur'an* uses the word *mumin* or believer. But the Qur'anic term *mumin* is far more comprehensive and refers to the qualitative transformation of a person's inner being. *Mumin* refers to a new human being fully transformed qualitatively and who would be engaged with his society to fight all that is evil which leads to conflict, oppression and exploitation.

However, this project of creating new human beings with inner qualities of heart and mind was seriously compromised with the pursuit of power. The word jihad which was originally meant for this inner struggle for moral transformation and for the creation of a new human being, came to be used for wars of conquests and desire for more and more power. The *Qur'an* was basically addressing the issues of moral and ethical values and permitting war only in defence. This permission was also granted as the rich and powerful of the Quraysh were against the qualitative transformation of the society as it seriously affected their vested interests.

Their preoccupation was accumulation of wealth by exploiting and oppressing the weaker sections of the society, thereby being indifferent to their sufferings. The new human being (*mu'mins*) posed a great danger to their interests and hence they intensified their opposition against the emergence of a movement based on justice, equality and compassion.

When the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Madina, this movement still posed a danger to *kuffar*³ of Mecca. They knew Muhammad (PBUH) would be safe and at ease in Madina and will consolidate his position. Hence they entered into an understanding with the Jews of Madina who were also unhappy with the new community of believers which was becoming dominant and was posing a threat to their interests (though much closer to them religion-wise but it is conflict of interests which mattered, not similarities of religion).

The *kuffars* of Mecca began attacking Madina to harass the Prophet (PBUH) and his followers and made success of the new movement most difficult, if not impossible. Thus, the *Qur'an* permitted the Muslims to fight in the way of Allah with those who fought against them (Muslims) but cautioned them not to be aggressors as Allah does not love aggressors. Thus, no war could not be waged by Muslims unless they were attacked.

But most of the wars fought by Muslims after the death of the Prophet (PBUH) were not defensive wars as permitted by the *Qur'an* but aggressive. Moreover, the *Qur'an* never used the

³ Unbelievers, rejecters or opponents.

word jihad for war, it used the word '*qital*' for such wars. The word jihad had a religious appeal and was used in the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* for striving for good, for justice, and for ushering in a non-discriminatory and non-hierarchical society.

Since jihad had great religious appeal, the word was used for all such wars and this is how jihad began to be used very loosely by Muslim rulers. It was even used for wars of aggression and territorial aggrandizement by the Umayyads and the Abbasids and subsequently by other rulers who multiplied with the weakening of the centralized Abbasid state after the later half of the 10th Century. Even when ambitious ruling dynasties of Muslims fought against each other it was called jihad.

Since these rulers were highly influential even among theological circles and subsequent generations were highly ignorant of original meanings of the Qur'anic words and terminologies, jihad came to be accepted as religious war and any war became religious war in the subsequent history of Islam.

Islam had originally emerged among the community of traders and it had adopted a middle path as the *Qur'an* had described Muslims as *ummatan wasatat* (community of middle path). We also find in *hadith* literature that morally and ethically, the middle path is the best path. The middle path always leads to stability and extremism leads to turmoil and upheavals. Moreover, the middle path is the most desirable path for a trading society that prefers stability and seeks to avoid extremes.

But with wars of conquests and expansions of empires, the trading society transformed into a community of warriors. Arabs

indulged in inter-tribal *ghazwa* (raids) but had no trained armies and the Quraysh of Mecca, who initially became the principal opponent of Islam, were mostly traders and were not interested in warfare. But when their interests were threatened, they assembled some loosely fighting force and attacked Madina.

When parts of the Roman Empire and Iran were conquered during Hazrat Umar's time, even then the Muslims had no trained or disciplined army. Bedouins and urban Arabs constituted a loose fighting force and it was merely zeal and determination along with the support of the common oppressed people of these countries that they could win against powerful and well-trained armies. It was nothing short of a miracle.

However, such miracles do not recur and nor does such enthusiasm and determination last for ever, and once the Arabs tasted political power, they were tempted to acquire more and more power and gradually that became their preoccupation. Thus, the nation of traders was transformed into a nation of conquerors. Soon people of conquered countries began to embrace Islam for a variety of reasons and they joined Muslims with their martial traditions.

Now, the Muslim ruling classes acquired all the traits of the martial races along with hierarchical feudal values and Islamic values began to be sidelined. Islam had laid great emphasis on equality and the new martial cum feudal society replaced original Islamic society with its own *weltanschauung*. The new society was hierarchical with emphasis on superiority of the ruling class rather than superiority of the pious.

Compassion, mercy, benevolence and wisdom were less important than war like virtues and ruthlessness of rulers. Exploitation and oppression are characteristics of those with lust for power and wealth. Centrality of compassion and mercy that are divine virtues was lost and centrality of war in the garb of jihad occupied its place. Islam now became a religion of rulers rather than that of the oppressed as in the *Qur'an*.

It was not something unique to Islam. Other religions like Christianity had met the same fate earlier. Like the *Qur'an*, the *Bible* also talked about the meek inheriting the earth. The Christians remained oppressed for about two to three centuries.

However, when the Roman emperor embraced Christianity, its character transformed and from being a religion of the oppressed, it became a religion of oppressors and subsequent history of Christianity became a history of bloodshed and warfare. Its central values were also sidelined. Those who were sincerely religious among Christians began to live life of renunciation, retreats and isolation.

Likewise, among Muslims, there emerged a group of Sufis who equally resented warfare and bloodshed for political power. It initiated among the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and subsequently spread among other non-Arab Muslims who adopted a simple Islamic way of life. For Sufis, therefore, real jihad was fighting against one's own desire and lust for power and this was termed as *jihad-e-akbar* (the greatest jihad). They battled their own desire so that they could imbibe Islamic values and create a society based on compassion, justice and equality.

Their religion, unlike the religion of rulers, was not a religion of mere rituals but of values. For the ruling class, religion was merely a bundle of rituals but for those who resist lust for power and battle their own desire, religion implies imbibing values. For them, all human beings are worthy of respect irrespective of their station in life, their ethnic origin or religious persuasion.

Today in our own times, jihad is being grossly misused by power seekers. Highly destructive weapons like bombs are being used to kill innocent people to cater to the political struggle of a few rich people. The *Qur'an* calls this *fasad*⁴ and not jihad. Thousands of innocent people are being killed and many youth are made to lay down their lives in the hope of getting paradise in the life hereafter.

In fact, these brainwashed youth, falsely enticed by powerful vested interests, waste their lives and kill innocent people and cause mass-scale destruction of life and property. It is all because of the misuse of the Qur'anic term jihad which the *Qur'an* uses for creating a just, peaceful and compassionate society sensitive to others suffering.

Now it is for the youth educated in Islamic values to dedicate themselves towards promoting compassion and respect for human life, thereby bringing an end to monstrosities being committed in the name of Islam. It is this jihad which will earn the whole humanity paradise. A truly Islamic society

⁴ When something goes beyond moderation and causes disorder and mischief.

will be one where all are free from fear, from oppression and from exploitation.

To pursue such a goal one has to use religion for the pursuit of truth, not pursuit of power. When religion is used for the pursuit of power, it results in bloodshed and war, and when religion is used for pursuit of truth, it results in peaceful and compassionate society. Unfortunately, the ruling classes use religion for pursuit of power by projecting themselves as champions and protectors of religion.

Those who use religion in pursuit of truth carry on their struggle and dedicate themselves for removing sufferings from the society and make the society humane and worthy of peaceful coexistence for all. Let us bring the values of justice, equality, compassion and peace at the centre as it was intended by Islam.

Chapter – 6

Jihad? But What About Other Verses in the Qur'an?

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

But supposing jihad means war—as many Muslims believe, especially those who want to use it for their own political agenda—still jihad is not 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). There are other keywords in the *Qur'an* representing values such as justice (*'adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*).

These are also Allah's names in the *Qur'an*, that is, Allah is Just, Benevolent, Compassionate and Wise. Thus, the *Qur'an*

is an embodiment of these values and a Muslim is bound to practice and prioritize these values. 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.

Compassion is central to the *Qur'an* 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 (that is, '*I begin in the name of Allah Who is compassionate and Merciful*'). The words compassion and mercy in their various forms occur in the *Qur'an* 335 times as against jihad that occurs only 41 times.

The word *ihsan* occurs in the *Qur'an* 194 times. Similarly, the word wisdom and its derivatives occur 101 times. The *Qur'an* lays great emphasis on wisdom and considers it superior to reason in a way. While wisdom includes reasons and values together, reason alone can be misused by people. The *Qur'an* repeatedly advises Muslims to act with wisdom. It asks them to call Allah with wisdom and kind words, not with threats or force.

Also, there is great emphasis on justice in all social and political matters. The *Qur'an* uses three words for justice, '*adl, qist* and *hikmah*, and these three words put together make 244 words for justice in the *Qur'an*. This highlights the concept of justice and implies that no innocent person will be punished.

In the *Qur'an*, Allah is described as *Ghafur al-Rahim*, that is, 'Forgiver and Merciful and not one who seeks revenge' as many as 33 times. To seek revenge is human weakness and 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 always forgive like Allah. It is true that Allah punishes oppressors (*zalimun*), but no individual can dispense punishment. Only Allah or the state or representatives of states can dispense punishment.

That is why in Islamic jurisprudence (Shari'ah law), jihad can be declared only by the state or those empowered by the state. Terror attacks, on the other hand, are planned and executed by a few individuals, not representatives of any state or state institution. Thus, their attacks are not legitimate by any Islamic or Shari'ah law and amount to nothing but murder of innocent people. According to Islamic laws, in jihad no non-combatant can be attacked especially women, children and elderly persons, and no civilian property can be destroyed unless it is being used for military purposes or for purposes of combat.

It should be noticed that rules laid down for war by Islamic laws are no different from modern laws of warfare. However, terror attacks are a gross violation of all these Islamic rules and there is no way these attacks can be named as jihad. These terrorists are described by the media as jihadis, which is a gross misuse of the word as there is no word like jihadi in the first place in Arabic language. The word, in fact, is *mujahid* and is used in a 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 there it speaks of a brave person who is fearless, wages war only

for a good cause and fights only on the war front.

I would also like to shed some light on the word jihad as understood and explained in Islamic literature. If these Qur'anic values are important, then real jihad would undoubtedly mean to cultivate and promote these values with utmost efforts. Sufi saints are considered real jihadis only in this sense. After all, Islam came in this world through the Prophet to combat all social evils prevalent in Arab society in general, and in Mecca, in particular.

Since Qur'anic teachings emphasize these values, a true Muslim would devote himself/herself to fight all evil in the society which negates these values. The Prophet devoted his entire life in practising and promoting these values. He was, therefore, rightly described in the *Qur'an* as *Rahmatun lil 'Alamin* (that is, mercy of the worlds) since mercy can prevail in the world only if one eliminates all evil.

The Islamic history during the Prophet's life is to be seen in two important phases, that is, the Meccan phase, 13 years after Muhammad became the Prophet and then 10 years in Madina after his migration. In the Meccan phase, the Prophet and his followers were the most oppressed minority and yet the Prophet did not ask his followers to use violence in any form. On the contrary, the *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, insults and humiliations and strode ahead on his mission. His followers were subject to great hardships but he always advised

them to be patient. Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) guided Muslims on how to behave in adverse conditions and how to ensure peace despite such hardships. However, 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, the Meccan model of Islam can be very useful for those Muslims who are facing similar situations in different parts of the world. As the *Qur'an* lays great stress on *hikmah*, one has to act wisely and carve out a proper strategy of survival rather than plunge into violence by throwing 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* to not throw oneself to destruction is relevant even today. What did the 9/11 attack on New York towers result in? Did Al-Qaida not invite greater 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? How can one be a true Muslim without following the *Qur'an* in every sphere of life? To launch such attacks recklessly will bring nothing but disaster for Muslims and Islam.

The *Qur'an* is clearly advising Muslims to win over the hearts of others by doing good to others and thus ward off evil. Both the peace of Hudaibiyah (name of the place where the

Prophet signed a peace treaty) and the behaviour of the Prophet after the conquest of Mecca are shining examples of exemplary conduct of a great and generous leader. It is in this sense that the *Qur'an* describes the Prophet as *uswah husnah*, that is, a good role model for all.

Both at Hudaibiyah and after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet, rather than dictating terms or seeking revenge, showed generosity towards his enemies and won over their hearts. At Hudaibiyah, the Prophet had enough strength to dictate terms to the unbelievers of Mecca but instead he accepted certain humiliating terms dictated by them. Ultimately, the treaty benefitted Muslims, but it required wisdom of the Prophet to enter into such a treaty which was apparently humiliating but proved to be otherwise.

Similarly, after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet forgave the worst of his enemies who had insulted and humiliated him and had oppressed his followers in the most inhuman ways. Had he chosen to seek revenge, which was customary to Arabs, another bloodbath would have occurred and Islam would not have won so many adherents. Thus, moral victory is far more superior than seeking revenge. Revenge only satisfies our ego and injures the ego of the enemy and thus the war of attrition continues.

What terrorists are doing today is seeking revenge and that too from a weaker section 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. Conduct-

ing *ummah's* affairs with wisdom would be far more beneficial to Muslims. It does not imply surrendering to unjust powers, instead it implies to fight for justice.

The question here is also of the methodology for interpreting the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* was revealed to the Prophet over a period of 23 years and most of the verses were revealed in response to certain situations and the relevant verse had to be understood in the context in which it was revealed. Every text has a context and only the context can explain how to understand the text. While understanding the text it is also necessary to judge whether the context has changed or whether similar conditions prevail.

Various verses quoted to justify jihad are generally taken in the literal sense and ignore the value system of the *Qur'an*. It is not only the context but also the value system of the *Qur'an* which must be kept in mind while applying the injunction contained in the verses. When the *Qur'an* was being revealed, the revelation was from Allah to the Prophet and both were fully aware of the value system and hence they knew when war became absolutely necessary.

But when human beings, other than the Prophet, apply the Qur'anic injunctions, it is very different. Ordinary Muslims are neither infallible nor thoroughly immersed in Islamic values because unlike the Prophet, they are not a role model (*uswa-e-husnah*). And when someone applies these Qur'anic injunctions without any consensus of *ummah*, it is all the more unacceptable. And this is exactly what terrorists are doing today.

It is a known fact that any terrorist organization does not represent any government or larger Muslim organization. They succeed in mobilizing the angry youth who have no maturity and are carried away by 'Islamic' rhetoric. Terrorist attacks by these people violate all the Qur'anic values.

Apart from this, the conditions as obtained in the 7th Century Arabia cannot be compared to the conditions of 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 the *Qur'an*, and in this context alone permitted *qisas* with the strict condition that it will be strictly in equal measure in the interest of justice, and also advised forgiveness as a better option.

Today several institutions are available for arbitration, reconciliation and solving disputes. One cannot and need not resort to violence. All Muslim countries are members of the UNO and no other action should be contemplated without referring any international dispute to it.

Extremist organizations can point out that the UNO is dominated by the US and other western nations and thus one cannot get justice from it. Though true, this fact needs to be exposed. The UNO today works in the interest of the US and not justice. The US waged war against Iraq despite UNO's refusal, which only shows the helplessness of the UN before dominant powers like the US.

Also, if one really wants to solve the problem, one must understand that violence will only damage the cause and make

the world opinion adverse. The greatest strength of a cause in the contemporary world is favourable public opinion. Non-violence is more likely to win public opinion than violent actions.

Today, media is very powerful in creating public opinion and non-violent actions will certainly impact the media. Unfortunately, the youth being impatient with the democratic processes and under the illusion of following the Qur'anic traditions rushes to resort to the so-called jihad and antagonizes world opinion. What they do not understand is that other Muslims have to face adverse consequences.

Such thoughtless violence as committed by Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups in Pakistan has created an image of Islam as a violent religion, a 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. The Muslim youth should thus see the adverse image of Islam being created by them.

These youth are so brainwashed by certain vested interests that they think jihad is obligatory on Muslims and that it is the only way out. They are totally ignorant of the Islamic value system and the importance of moral superiority over superiority of weapons. The examples of Hudaibiyah and peaceful Meccan conquest clearly show that it is moral superiority that matters. The powerful can be disarmed by the might of moral stand.

In our own time, Gandhiji showed the effectiveness of truth and non-violence. The mighty British Empire had to

bow down before truth and non-violent action. Unfortunately, many consider non-violence to be a cowardly act born out of weakness. However, it is only the most courageous and truthful person who can practise non-violence. Violence is borne out of anger and revenge, not out of a truthful stand.

The Prophet (PBUH) once defined jihad as ‘telling the truth in the face of a tyrant ruler’. This requires tremendous courage and only a coward will kneel on his knees before a tyrant. One who is convinced of the truth (*Haq* in the Qur’anic terminology) will stand by it most courageously and endure all hardships patiently. The Muslims in Meccan period of Islam endured unimaginable hardships with the greatest degree of patience and most steadfastly. They never got provoked into violent action.

Meccan Muslims are the best example of how to endure hardships in challenging situations. Today we have many countries with Muslim majority and it is the Muslim youth who have to put pressure on the rulers of their countries to unite and fight against any injustices being perpetrated by the US and other powers. If the rulers are pro-US and do not take any action, they must launch public agitation peacefully. It will expose the rulers who serve their personal interests rather than the Muslim *ummah*.

One can argue that such agitations do not produce immediate results and no one knows what effect it will have on the ruling class. This argument is, however, only partly true. One would also ask how effective are terrorist attacks. Do they suc-

ceed in achieving the desired goal? One has no such example. And again, violence against whom? Violence only invites greater counter-violence and it turns into a vicious circle. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan (and now also India), hundreds of innocent people have died and yet violence continues.

It becomes more of an ego fight rather than a fight for any cause. Wisdom (which is one of the important values in the *Qur'an*) requires that one should thoroughly and objectively assess the situation before adopting any strategy. Those resorting to violence are no match for the superior might of these western nations they are fighting against. 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, the wiser course will be to fight democratically by mobilizing public opinion in their favour. The Meccan model of Islam is far more useful than any other model. The verses relating to war in the *Qur'an* were revealed in Madina because Muslims were being attacked by Meccan again and again, and in those days, the 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 US 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 a licence to any group to launch violent attacks.

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 the public.

One hopes that the misguided Muslim youth resorting to violent action would realize the futility of terror attacks and renounce such sinful and criminal acts, and concentrate on acquiring a superior moral character, thus truly following the transcendent Qur'anic moral precepts. The Prophet has rightly said, 'ink of a scholar is superior to the blood of the martyr.'

Chapter -7

Islam, Democracy and Violence

I WAS invited to Indonesia for a series of lectures by *Asia Calling International Radio*¹ to speak on Islam, democracy and nation state. In those days, Indonesian intellectuals were rocked with questions we were facing in the early 50s in India. The question being asked in the Islamic world was whether Islam is compatible with democracy and nation state or not. In Indonesia too, the largest Islamic country in the world, the radical Islamists have raised this debate.

In one of the *Asia Calling* talk shows, where a number of prominent public figures and diplomats were present, this question was raised by many. I even spoke at Wahid Institute, founded by former president of Indonesia and a leading scholar of Islam, Abdur Rehman Wahid, on experiences of Muslim minority in secular India. Indonesia, though the largest Muslim

¹ *Asia Calling* is a weekly radio programme from Indonesia's Radio News Agency KBR68H.

country in the world, is still a *Panchshila* state. The doctrine of *Panchshila* was adopted during President Sukarno's time.

But now, Indonesia is under pressure to become an Islamic state where Shari'ah law would be the official law and religious minorities like Christians and Buddhists and others would become second-class citizens. Still, it seems Indonesians are resisting this demand and are hence keen to know the experiences of secular countries like India. I was also asked to speak on the concept of human rights in Islam as human rights have fundamental importance in a democratic country. Indonesia is also faced with this question as minorities are coming under attack and their human rights are being violated.

Of course, it is not correct to say that Islam is incompatible to democracy, I said in my talk. This myth is being spread by the supporters of authoritarian regime in the Islamic world. Kings, sheikhs and military dictators are spreading such ideas, and it does not matter if Islam gets a bad name in the process. I firmly refuted this myth and maintained that Islam does not come in the way of democracy; it is dictators and monarchs who come in its way.

We should remember, I said, that the *Qur'an* does not give any concept of state but a concept of society. The *Qur'an* wants to establish a just society and the best way to do that was through a democratic society. Also, the *Qur'an* emphasizes equality of all human beings and equal dignity for all despite different languages, colours, race and nationality. How can it be achieved except through democratic society?

The authoritarian societies negate all these and hence not democracy but monarchy and dictatorship is un-Islamic. During the Middle Ages, the concepts like equal dignity, gender equality and human rights were just non-existent and hence monarchy was quite acceptable. But it no longer is. The modern society is emphatic about human equality without any distinction and human rights and gender equality are of great significance and hence democracy is the only way out for Qur'anic concept of just society. Some people, especially radical Islamic groups, argue that the only just government could be through institution of *khilafah*. Let me say that the institution of *khilafah* has not been sanctioned by the *Qur'an* as pointed out above. It does not recommend any form of government at all. The institution of *khilafah* was a result of historical situation. It was not even a part of the Prophet's *sunna*.

That is why there were differences among Muslims about the question of succession. Even the most prominent companions of the Prophet were not sure about the mode of succession of the successor. Shi'ahs maintain that the Prophet appointed his cousin and son-in-law Ali to succeed him. But only the supporters of Ahl-e-Bait² agreed with this view and others gathered in Saqifa Banu Sa'ida to discuss the question of his successor. There was no unanimity, and after a lot of suggestions and debates, Umar proposed the name of Abu Bakr and did *bay'ah* on his hand and others followed.

² Ahl-e-Bait are the descendents of Prophet Muhammad

Then there was no unanimity in electing the Caliph. Many said the *khalifah* could be only from the tribe of Quraysh of Mecca and Ansar of Madina, whereas those who were from other tribes like Khazraj and Aus maintained that the caliph should be from among them as they had helped the Prophet (PBUH) in Madina. It was also suggested that two persons should be elected: one from Quraysh and one from Ansar. But this viewpoint was also rejected and ultimately Abu Bakr of Quraysh was elected.

Then it was said that there could be only one caliph at a time but this concept also proved to be fragile as when the Abbasid defeated Umayyads, one of Umayyad's family fled to Spain and founded another empire there. At a time, there came into existence two caliphs, and when Buwahids captured power and caliph became merely a nominal head, caliphate turned into sultanate. The institution of caliphate lasted only for 30 years and Mu'awiyah captured power without any sanction from Muslims as in the case of first caliph. What was more, he nominated his own son Yazid against the wishes of all Muslims and prominent companions of the Prophet many of whom were then alive.

All this clearly shows that the institution of *khilafah* was a tentative historical construct, not the result of any divine injunction based on the *Qur'an* or the *sunnah*. Thus it cannot be argued that *khilafah* should be restored and that it is the only way out. Also, the institution of *khilafah* was more democratic than monarchy or sheikhdoms and dictatorship, which have no sanction of any kind at all.

Also, in case of electing a caliph, tribal experience of the time was used as successor to a tribal chief was elected by the members of the tribe. There was no concept of 'one man, one vote' in those days. In the institution of modern democracy, 'one man, one vote' is the tried and tested method for electing public representative. New historical experience has resulted in new methods of election. There should be no hesitation except in assimilating new experiences. During the period of *khilafah*, many institutions were readily borrowed from Roman and Sassanid Empires like keeping salary register for soldiers from Iran. Earlier, only a share in the loot was given to those taking part in the fight.

Another question which is raised by Islamists is the imposition of the Shari'ah law. They argue that in democracy, there are man-made laws and Shari'ah law is a divine law. Thus in an Islamic state only Shari'ah law should be enforced. This is also an erroneous concept. Shari'ah laws can be divided into two categories: *'ibadat* and *mu'amalat* (that is, laws pertaining to *salah, saum, haj*, etc., which are part of *'ibadat*).

Then the laws pertaining to *mu'amalat* include relations between human beings. Such laws about *mu'amalat* cannot be permanent. Of course no changes can be made as far as the Shari'ah laws concerning *'ibadat* are concerned but as for *mu'amalat*, laws cannot be permanent and the parliament should be empowered to make laws in those respects. All modern democracies allow people to pursue their respective religions and do not interfere in their religious affairs. In all secular democracies, right to religion

is a fundamental right.

As far as *'ibadat* is concerned, it does not require enforcement by any state but its importance lies in its voluntary nature. *'Ibadat* pertain to one's heart and soul and real *'ibadat* is the one which is done most sincerely and from one's core of heart. It cannot be enforced. And it will cease to be *'ibadat* if it is enforced by any state machinery. This is what the *Qur'an* also maintains when it says that there is no compulsion in matters of religion.

Thus no Islamic state is required to enforce provisions of the Shari'ah. An Islamic state would mean that the majority of Muslim sect who live in that country would enjoy real freedom and those Muslims who belong to other sects would be persecuted. We see this right in the beginning of Islamic history. The Abbasids initially subscribed to the doctrine of createdness of the *Qur'an* and all those who rejected this doctrine were severely persecuted. Even eminent Imam Abu Hanifa was flogged for rejecting this doctrine.

In modern Islamic states too, we see this phenomenon. In Saudi Arabia, only Wahabi Muslims enjoy real freedom of religion. Those who do not subscribe to this doctrine are persecuted or do not enjoy freedom like Wahabis to practice their religion. Similarly, the Shi'ahs are persecuted in Sunni majority states and Sunnis in Shi'ah majority states. In Iraq, a Sunni minority dominated and persecuted Shi'ahs, and in Syria, Alawi minority dominate the Sunni majority as it wields political power.

Real freedom of religion is possible only in democratic state where all enjoy equal rights irrespective of caste, creed

and colour. Large number of Muslims today live as minority in various secular democratic states in various Asian, African and western countries and enjoy right to freely practice their religion. This it is not correct to maintain that one needs an Islamic state to practice Islam freely.

Every democratic state permits Shari'ah laws pertaining to personal laws like marriage, divorce, property, inheritance, etc. In secular India too, Muslims are completely free to practice these laws. Indian Muslims refuse any reform in their laws and the state does not insist on that though in many Muslim countries these laws have been reformed.

Now the question about criminal laws. Should criminal laws be permitted in a secular democratic state? The answer is certainly no. In India, the Britishers had abolished Islamic criminal laws in 19th Century and enforced a criminal code drafted by their parliament. The Muslim *ulema* agreed to abolition of the Islamic code and enforced common criminal code. Today in the modern world, many Muslim majority countries have also taken similar steps. Criminal punishments are largely contextual. In the tribal Arab society, certain punishments were thought to be more effective and hence they were recommended. The main purpose is to prevent crime and nature and extent of punishment can certainly change. Also, there is provision for *tazir*³ punishment also in Islam and the rulers did enforce *tazir* punishments. So

³ It refers to punishment, usually corporal which can be administered at the discretion of the judge called Kadi.

it is not matter of principle whether *hudud laws*⁴ are enforced or not. Main thing is to check crimes.

Thus it would be seen that a secular and democratic state is equally good as long as it permits Muslims to practice their religion. It is also important to note that the Indian *ulema* voluntarily opted for a secular state as opposed to an Islamic state in the form of Pakistan in 1947 when India was divided. They vigorously opposed creation of separate Muslim country and preferred to have a secular, democratic and multi-religious, multi-cultural country. And who knew Islam better than the Ulema of Darul Ulum Deoband.

An Islamic state itself is a historical construct and not a *Qur'anic* concept and hence it is in no way obligatory for Muslims to set up an Islamic state. Those who argue in favour of Islamic state cannot produce any argument from the *Qur'an* and the *sunna*. In every country, there are certain forces which adopt majoritarian aggressive postures and want their religion to be associated with the affairs of the state. In India, for example, a section of Hindus want India to become Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) but secular Hindus resist that demand.

In any religious state, all citizens of different religious persuasions cannot enjoy equal rights and no modern state can allow this. The very essence of modern polity is that all citizens irrespective of their religion should enjoy equal rights. Maulana Maududi of Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan had argued

⁴ These laws deal with offences and punishments interpreted by Muslim juristic scholars and are derived from the *Qur'an* and the *sunnah*.

that no non-Muslim can become head of the state or Prime Minister of Pakistan. He or she cannot even hold any key post in the government. Sure in secular states also no person from minority religion will find it easy to become head of the state, but theoretically it is not ruled out. In India, a Sikh, a non-Hindu, became the prime minister and three Muslims have held the post of President of the country.

Another objection raised by Islamists is that in secular democratic states, human rights are sacred and the very concept of human rights is un-Islamic. This is also not in keeping with the Qur'anic teachings. Firstly, most of the Islamic countries, with few exceptions, have signed the UNO's Human Rights Declaration. Some countries who did not sign the Declaration objected that one who renounces Islam cannot be put to death as freedom of religion is a fundamental principle of human rights.

However, the *Qur'an* itself upholds right to freedom of religion and it pronounced it much before modern world realized its significance. It is very strange that now some Muslims in contradistinction to the *Qur'anic* principle, of which they should have been justly proud, reject the doctrine of freedom of religion as modern western and hence unacceptable. The Shari'ah rule that one who renounces Islam should be given death sentence is highly controversial and there is no unanimity on this among Muslim jurists. Maulana Aslam Jairajpuri, for example, disagrees with it and advances several arguments from the *Qur'an* and the *sunna* to show death punishment for renouncing Islam is not justified.

In fact, freedom and faith go together. One cannot genuinely believe in any religion unless one is completely free to accept or reject it. If one is forced to accept a religion, it cannot be accepted by his heart and soul. He may accept it outwardly but his heart and soul may resent it. It is precisely for this psychological reason that the *Qur'an* made principle of freedom of religion so important. The Shari'ah provision for death sentence was more for sedition than for renouncing religion. It was feared that a Muslim living in an Islamic state, if renounces Islam, he may join hands with the enemy and conspire against Islamic state. Punishment for sedition world over is death.

The fear of sedition was genuine because Muslim states were surrounded by Christian states and there was direct political confrontation between the two. Hence, there was genuine fear that anyone renouncing Islam may help the Christian state. The crusades are well known from 11th–13th centuries. That period of confrontation between Muslims and Christians was most intense. Thus death punishment for renouncing Islam made sense during that period. But in the long run, the Qur'anic doctrine of freedom of religion must be upheld.

As for other principles of human rights, even the most orthodox Muslim cannot object to them. For example, equality of all human beings is very central to the Qur'anic teachings. Human dignity is sacred in Islam as well. Gender equality is also clearly enunciated in the *Qur'an*. Moreover, woman has been given equal rights for contracting marriage, and husband and wife have been described as each others garment. All these are

enshrined in declaration of human rights issued by the UNO. Those Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia who did not sign Human Rights' Declaration also did not object to these provisions.

Those who argue that implementation of Shari'ah is an obligation of Islamic state should understand that Shari'ah evolved gradually and there were great deal of differences among the Muslim jurists on many issues. Thus Shari'ah, as one Islamic scholar Prof Muhammad Mujeeb maintained, is a human approach to divine injunctions. That is very apt description of Shari'ah laws as evolved by many eminent jurists during first four centuries of Islam.

The great Urdu poet Iqbal from Indian sub-continent also maintained that every generation of Muslims should be entitled to rethink Shari'ah issues and in a Muslim majority country, the parliament will be the right forum to do so. He also maintained that *ijtihad*⁵ is the dynamic principle in Islam and *ijtihad* becomes necessary in changed conditions in modern society. Thus a democratic society with an elected parliament would be a better institutional arrangement for making Shari'ah more relevant to our contemporary world. Many new issues have arisen which need use of *ijtihad* quite urgent.

And where Muslims are a minority, secular democratic state should evolve their own forums to bring about necessary changes. Today more Muslims live in minority situation than in majority

⁵ In Islamic law, analysis of problems not covered precisely in the *Qur'an*, the *hadith*, or scholarly consensus is called the *ijma*.

and hence they would have to evolve their own institutions to do *ijtihad* with the cooperation of ulema and modern scholars. No secular democratic state can stop them from attempting these creative changes in their laws. All this has to be done within the framework of Islam. No changes can be brought outside this framework if they are to be accepted by Muslims at large.

To accept democratic state would be far more beneficial to Muslims and would enable them to practise their religion faithfully and fearlessly than in so-called Islamic state where sectarianism and fundamentalism will prevail. A democratic state is much better guarantee of genuine freedom of religion than a state based on any religion. This seems to be contradictory but, in fact, true.

Thus we must educate Muslim masses and prepare them for acceptance of democracy in Islamic world. They should be made aware that those who oppose democracy in the name of Islam are serving certain vested interests rather than Islam. Islamic world is still reeling under the impact of feudal and medieval forces who serve their own interests in the name of Islam. Islam is compatible with democracy. It is the interests of rulers of Muslim countries which are not compatible with democracy.

States like Indonesia, which have achieved democracy after a long spell under dictatorship, also should be guaranteed full freedom to follow their respective religion. Tolerance of differences is an important principle of democracy and due tolerance should be shown to all different religious opinions too. It will not violate any Islamic principle at all.

Chapter – 8

A Critical Look at Qur'anic Verses on War and Violence

CERTAIN VERSES of the *Qur'an* are repeatedly quoted by the critics and enemies of Islam to show how Islam is intolerant of its opponents and wants them to be eliminated. Also since the days of crusade, the West has projected image of Islam as 'sword in one hand, and the *Qur'an* in the other'. This image has stuck in the minds of many non-Muslims throughout the world. It got refreshed after 9/11, resulting in a spurt of news reports and articles in media and TV news channels on terrorism and Islam. It is, therefore, necessary to have a critical look at these verses.

Before we deal with these verses, we wish to make two important comments. First, the critics and opponents of Islam deliberately ignore hundreds of other verses which talk about tolerance, forgiveness, humane treatment of enemies and so on. Besides even in the Prophet's (PBUH) life, there are several events which could be model for anyone to imitate. However, critics and opponents of Islam seem to be quite selective in picking up

certain verses out of context and quote them to show intolerance of Islam towards its enemies. In most of the cases it is deliberate, in others, perhaps it is out of ignorance.

Second, the Muslim theologians and jurists are also to be blamed. They still continue to imitate the medieval jurists (*fuqaha*) in giving doctrinal status to war and violence. It was understandable in the medieval times when wars were considered quite legitimate and were resorted to by people following any other religion. Even then Islam had permitted violence with certain reservations and conditions. Thus violence or war never had doctrinal status in Islam. It was permitted only for defence, and never for aggression. The Qur'anic position is clearly stated in 2:190¹. This verse has doctrinal status.

According to this verse, two conditions are required to be fulfilled for war: one, it should be in the way of Allah, and not for any personal ambition, revenge or territorial grab; two, it should be strictly in defence, not by way of aggression as Allah does not love aggression and aggressors. I do not think any other religion or ideological system before Islam had laid down any such conditions restricting wars. Sword was considered decisive especially while dealing with the opponents.

The critics should note that Islam did not appear in vacuum; no religion does. Each religion carries birthmark of its concrete historical and social conditions. Islam appeared in Arabia of 6th and 7th centuries where ferocious tribal wars were order of the

¹ Fight against those who fight against you in the way of God, but do not transgress, for God does not love transgressors.

day. The main preoccupation and challenge before the Prophet of Islam was how to restore peace in a society wherein violence was a norm, not an exception.

Prophet's hands were forced by the circumstances. He had limited choices. When he and his followers were severely persecuted, when they faced violence, they had to resort to violence as no other alternative was available. Thus, in Verse 4:75, the *Qur'an* 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.”

The verse shows how helpless Muslims had become in face of oppression by enemies of Islam. Islam was, let us remember, a religion which not only confined itself to moral exhortations, but in view of the given circumstances was also a social revolution. There were strong vested interests of those who accumulated great deal of wealth, and whose greed drove them to accumulate more and more, totally neglecting the poor and the other weaker sections of society. Accumulate, accumulate and accumulate (as Karl Marx says in *Das Capital*) was their religion.

The Prophet (PBUH), a great lover of justice from pre-Islamic days, (he had formed *hilf al-fudul* to help the victims of injustices much before he was appointed a prophet) was deeply concerned with social justice as most of the Meccan *surahs* clearly point out. And when someone challenged the vested interests,

and that too from their own class, they spared no efforts to wipe out that person, especially, if they failed to co-opt or buy off that person, or silence him in any other peaceful manner.

Islamic historians tell us that the rich merchants of Meccans offered the Prophet (PBUH) enough for him and his coming generations to live on, but the Prophet replied: 'if you put sun on my one hand and moon on the other, even then I am not going to give up what I am preaching.' Thus the Meccan merchants, failed to co-opt or buy off him and then they declared an all out war against him and his movement.

Even then he advised his followers to remain peaceful and bear hardships and persecution but not to yield. His followers did put up with severe persecution. Muhammad (PBUH), was against idol worship as the very basis of his religion, was *tawheed*². Still, he declared that non-believers can continue to worship as they worship and for them is their faith and for him it is his (chapter 109).

But real opposition was not, as far as the rich merchants were concerned, to the way of worship. It was to the attack on their greed and accumulation of wealth in the face of great misery and poverty of people at lower rungs. They did not stand any check on accumulation of their wealth. They were not willing to undertake any measures for poverty alleviation. The only method they knew was to co-opt or wipe out the opponents of their designs.

² Oneness of God

The Verse 4:75 quoted above shows desperation of the situation. Persecution went beyond all limits of human tolerance and no other alternative was available. There was no democracy that one could sit on *dharna* or organize demonstration to get the grievances redressed. Even in democracy we know how police fires on demonstrators, killing several people, or batons them brutally.

The Prophet even then chose another alternative, that is, to migrate to other place which was more hospitable like Ethiopia first and then to Medina. However, the vested interests in Mecca knew that Muhammad (PBUH), with his powerful appeal to the weaker sections of society, would be a great danger for them. They knew that their trade caravans could come under attack. So, they decided not to leave him in peace in Madina. His migration was not a good riddance for them. It was a different challenge, perhaps more difficult challenge now than before.

The Prophet, on the other hand, in pursuance of justice and peace, entered into a covenant with Jews and pagans of Mecca and gave them equal rights and freedom to pursue their respective faiths. Not only this, he called all those who were signatory to this covenant as one people (*umma wahidah*)³ with an obligation to defend Madina, if attacked by outsiders, especially Meccans. This *umma wahidah* comes very close to modern day concept of a nation bound by obligations of a constitution. This covenant was the constitution of Madina.

³ Literal meaning is "One Community", and it refers to the whole unified Islamic world.

But what was feared did happen. Madina was attacked by powerful merchants of Mecca and the Prophet was forced to defend it. However, it must be noted that there was no regular army, and it was voluntary to participate in the battle. In the absence of any state structure, neither Meccans nor Medinese had any regular army. Both ways participation was voluntary. But there was one vital difference.

The Meccan merchants were not only united but also had all the resources, material as well as human. Also, they were defending their wealth and 'right' to accumulate without any social intervention. The Muslims in Madina, on the other hand, had severe problems. The Jewish tribes, though signatory to the covenant of Madina, were not only unwilling to fight but also willing to collaborate with the merchants of Mecca. They were resentful of intrusion of Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers in Madina. They had lost their privileged position as leaders due to intrusion of Muslims into that city.

Second great difficult situation for Muslims was lack of resources both material as well as human. Thus we find several verses in the *Qur'an* imploring Muslims to donate generously, telling them that Allah will reward them seven folds if they did. Yet another difficulty was that Muslims in Madina had either migrated from Mecca and left everything behind, or they belonged to poorer sections of society and had very little to donate. The Ansars of Madina (those who had embraced Islam from Madina) too were not well off and had little to spare. These were formidable challenges for Muslims.

But Muslims had little choice but to fight and in the battle of Badr they were hopelessly outnumbered. There were only 313 Muslims as against a 1,000 Meccans, that too without proper weapons and line of supply. Still it was their faith and strong commitment which ensured victory to them. They fought with great determination and strong resolve.

But this is not to glorify war and violence. It was forced on Muslims and they bravely faced it. Had Meccans not attacked them, they would not have gone to Mecca to fight against them as it was clearly against the Qur'anic injunction. Even today, when we talk of democracy, nations fight not only when attacked but even in anticipation of any such attack, or even forging false grounds. America attacked Afghanistan and Iraq, not because it was attacked by these two weaklings but by falsely forging documents that Iraq possessed 'weapons of mass destruction'.

Thus the *Qur'an* neither glorifies violence nor makes it essential for a believer to resort to it as a religious duty. It permits it as a necessary evil in case of defending oneself against aggression. It should not be elevated to the status of doctrine. I do not want to discuss the question of jihad as much has already been written on it and suffice it to say that jihad does not mean war in all 41 verses of the *Qur'an* where it has been used.

What About These Verses?

But then critics quote some verses from the *Qur'an* to prove that it believes in violence against kafirs and requires believers to kill them wherever found. One of these verses is:

“They long that you should disbelieve so that you might be on the same level; so take not from among them friends until they flee (their homes) in Allah’s way. Then if they turn back (to hostility), seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no friend nor helper from among them.” (4:89)

To many, the words “seize them and kill them wherever you find them” may appear very disturbing. They may argue that these words clearly establish that according to the *Qur’an*, kafirs should be killed wherever they are found and also this shows that Muslims went out with sword in one hand and the *Qur’an*, in the other. However, this interpretation of the verse ignores the fact that it does not describe normal situation, but situation of active hostility. The following verse makes it clear.

The verse which follows the above verse says:

“Except those who join a people between whom and you there is an alliance, or who come to you, their hearts shrinking from fighting you or fighting their own people. And if Allah had pleased, he would have given them power over you, so that they would have fought you. So if they withdraw from you and fight you not and offer you peace, then Allah allows you no way against them.” (4:90)

This verse hardly needs any explanation. It certainly shows that the above verse indicate war situation and situation of active hostility. It is also said in this verse that if some people join those unbelievers with whom Muslims have an alliance, or if they sue for peace, then Muslims should not fight them.

These verses do not apply to times of peace. Even in modern times, the nations at war treat each other as enemies and armies kill soldiers of enemy nation. There is nothing odd about it.

According to the second verse, even waverers are not to be fought or killed, if they refrained from fighting. Any civilized nation would approve of this and even applaud it. Unfortunately, those hostile to Islam refuse to see even such obvious things and attack the *Qur'an* and accuse it of teaching intolerance against all non-believers.

It is also important to note that we should read one particular verse in conjunction with all other verses on the subject if we want to understand actual intention of the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* nowhere teaches to go to war with the others simply because they refuse to believe. It allows freedom of religion or freedom of conscience (2:256) and also emphasizes justice to the extent that justice must be done even if it goes in favour of the enemy. The verse reads as follows:

“O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty.” (5:8)

Another verse is 4:35, which also exhorts believers to be just even if it goes against themselves or parents or near ones. So, how the *Qur'an* can incite Muslims to kill any unbeliever simply because he/she is unbeliever? Also, there are other verses which clearly contradict such position. In this connection, the Verse 8 of Chapter 60 is also very important. This verse tells Muslims that:

“Allah forbids you not respecting those who fight you not for religion, nor drive you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly. Surely Allah loves

the doers of justice.” (60:8) Is any further explanation needed? Those non-believers who do not fight Muslims and do not drive them away from their homes, should be treated kindly and in a just manner.

Here again, I would like to submit that we must distinguish between Islam as a religion, a belief system, and Islam as a social movement which was challenging powerful vested interests in Mecca and allies of powerful merchants of Mecca. Islam as a religion is spiritual and moral movement which exhorts Muslims to follow moral and spiritual teachings; but as social movement it pitted itself against powerful vested interests, that is, the enemies, and it allowed Muslims to meet the situation like in times of hostilities and wars.

The Verse 60:8 is on moral and spiritual teaching. But what we find in verses like 4:89 and 4:90 is war-like situation, and one cannot teach in a violence-infested region like Arabia to surrender to the enemy. It would have been unacceptable. In the *Bible* too, one finds such contradicting verses. While as a moral teaching it talks of love and presenting another cheek if slapped on one cheek, but also that one should sell one's coat to buy a sword.

While requiring believers to fight if under attack, the *Qur'an* also exhorts them to be just and kind and not to abuse others' gods, lest they should abuse Allah (6:109). The moral and spiritual teachings are eternal; and teachings and exhortations about war or situation of hostilities are contextual and will apply only in a particular context. To quote those verses as if they are eternally applicable is not correct. It is deliberate distortion of

the Qur'anic teachings.

The concept of *dhimmi* (one whose responsibility to protect is on Muslims or 'one who is to be protected by the Muslims', ask the author) is both moral as well as political. It is binding on Muslims to protect the *dhimmis* in the same way as they would protect Muslims, and also to ensure complete freedom of faith, including protection of their places of worship. The *Qur'an* itself guarantees protection to all places of worship whichever religion they belong to (see Verse 22:40), It also says Allah has created a law and a way for every nation (5:48), and everyone is free to follow one's own law and the way. There is no compulsion to follow anyone only.

Also, each one has one's own direction to pray and one should not quarrel over it but excel each other in good deeds (2:148). The Prophet himself was a role model in this respect. When a delegation of Christians of Najran visited the Prophet, he made them stay in his mosque and allowed them to pray therein. They used to pray in one side of the mosque and the Prophet and Muslims on the other side. What could be a better example of respect for others faith?

When Tartars arrested Muslims, Jews and Christians, they were willing to free only Muslims. It was then that Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, a great scholar of Islam, told the leader of the Tartars that they would not accept freedom without the Jews and Christians, as it was their responsibility to protect them (*ahl al-dhimma*). This is not to say that excesses have not been committed in the history of Muslims. Muslims have killed Muslims

most brutally. When Abbasids overthrew Umayyads, they even dug out the graves of Abbasids and dishonoured the dead. Similarly, the Kharijites (Khawarij), the extremists among Muslims, considered it permissible to kill all other Muslims who were not khawarij. Hajjaj bin Yusuf⁴ killed thousands of his opponents in Iraq and threw more than 100,000 (120,000 men and 30,000 women) people into prison.

It will be naïve to deny such excess in the history but responsibility for this cannot be inflicted on Islam. The onus is on those Muslims who perpetrated these crimes against humanity. It is indeed quite wrong, as many scholars do, to foist its responsibility on Islam. Islam should be judged by its teachings, not by what happened in its history. Human actor is not motivated by religious teachings in his/her behaviour, but by his/her own vested interests and aspirations for power. It is like blaming a country's constitution for torturing of prisoners by some police officers.

Some Muslim scholars and theologians try to overlook, even ignore, these facts of Muslim history. It is as wrong as holding Islam responsible for what happened in Muslim history. We should be fair and just in judging the Muslims as we judge the non-Muslims. It is the Qur'anic teaching as we have already referred to. This is also the requirement of unbiased scholarship and the principles of higher criticism.

⁴ An Arab administrator and politician during the Umayyad Caliphate.

Section IV

Justice and Compassion in Islam

Chapter – 9

Concept of Justice in Islam

ISLAM IS hardly known as the religion of justice even though justice is its most fundamental value. Islam had appeared in a tribal society wherein justice as value was almost unknown. Tribal society has no written law but certain oral conventions that develop over a period of time and the need for justice, as such, is hardly felt. One more reason for this is that private property and wealth does not exist in such a society. The only persistent law is that of revenge and retaliation. The *Qur'an* refers to it as law of retaliation.

However, situation in Mecca was much more complex as Meccan tribals had taken to international trade and Meccan society was in transition from a tribal to a mercantile society, and the institution of property and wealth had already developed. This resulted in many disputes arising between traders from time to time. But, there was no legal framework to resolve them. One such dispute before Islam was referred to the Prophet (PBUH)

and he solved it using justice as a rule. It was on this occasion that he is reported to have said that he would not accept 100 red camels in lieu of that.

This particular dispute involved a Yemeni trader who was cheated by some Meccan traders. This incident shows that trade and property disputes had begun to take place in Meccan society which had developed into a centre of international trade and finance. Thus the *Qur'an* made justice the central value and made it a part of Islamic morality. As it was not easy in that society to get the concept of justice accepted, the *Qur'an*, in order to emphasize its importance, made it Allah's name. Allah is called '*Adil*, that is, Just. Thus if one worships Allah, the person must be doer of justice.

The *Qur'an* also made it an integral part of Islamic morality and declared that "Be just, it is nearest to piety" (5:8). Now piety is a moral concept and the word for this in the Qur'anic language is *taqwa*. Actually, the word *taqwa* means to refrain, that is, to refrain from evil, and thus one who is *muttaqi*, that is, observant of *taqwa*, refrains from all that is evil. So, a Muslim who is *muttaqi* refrains from injustice. Thus justice became a part of Islamic morality.

Unfortunately, in later days, when rulers became highly unjust and turned into oppressors of their opponents, *taqwa* lost its original meaning and came to be associated with ritual piety. A *muttaqi* Muslim became one who prayed five times and fasted during the month of Ramadan and performed all Islamic '*ibadat* devoid of social morality. But the *Qur'an* clearly

pronounces that *taqwa* is much more than ritual observations and is integrally connected with justice. Thus a pious Muslim has to be just and his moral integrity should also be beyond any ken of doubt.

In tribal morality, *qisas* (retaliation) was the central theme. There was no place for justice and the rule was eye for eye and nose for nose and life for life, justice or no justice. The *Qur'an* exhorts believers to go beyond the concept of *qisas* and observe cannons of justice even if it goes against oneself or one's parents or one's tribe. Thus the *Qur'an* says:

“O you who believe, be maintainers for justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives—whether he be rich or poor, Allah has a better right over them both.” (4:135)

Thus the words that “Allah has better rights over them” again shows that justice is part of Islamic morality and people cannot be getting away from it, if they want to be pious Muslims who keep their duty to Allah. Also, in a tribal society, there was no concept of rule of law, and emphasizing the role of justice was highly necessary for establishing the rule of law. In this respect also the *Qur'an* says, “And if you judge, judge between them with equity. Surely Allah loves those who are just” (5:42).

Thus in the Arab society, the rule of law began with the revelation of the *Qur'an*. Since international trade was developing fast and was expanding, tribal customs and traditions could not suffice any more. Establishing certain legal concepts beyond and transcending tribal limits became a social need. A universal

society cannot be bound by narrow tribal limits and Islam was nothing if not universal. Thus Islam adopted universal standards of law and morality, and concept of justice was very important for such morality.

Islam had to spread beyond the limits of Arabia and it did so within a few years of its origin. Thus tribal morality was of hardly any use any more. Islam was anything but tribal religion. There were far more advanced civilizations than Arab tribal culture. So, all its laws and standards of morality had to be universal in nature. Islam spread across civilizations and appealed to people as far as India and China, countries which had far more richer and complex civilizational institutions.

To begin with, all Arabs adopted this religion since for them it became the national religion. However, even for the Arabs, Islam had to appeal to all their tribes. But tribal norms, customs and traditions varied from tribe to tribe. These tribes had fought each other for decades and maintained their separate identities for centuries. Even to unite all these tribes was a grave challenge. To meet this challenge, Islam had to be one that would have its appeal to all the tribes. If it had adopted norms of only Quraysh, a leading tribe in which Islam first appeared, other tribes would have outright rejected it.

Islam transcended all narrow limits and easily united all tribes through its universal standards of morality. Quraysh was the most dominant tribe among the Arabs and Qurayshites looked down upon other tribes. Islam, though it appeared among them, gave no place of distinction to them and once a person

entered in Islam, he had no superiority over others even if they happened to be from Quraysh.

There lies the reason why Islam spread so fast among weaker sections of the society. Islam became a powerful magnet for all the weaker sections of the world. Among the principles of social justice and morality was the principle of equality and equity. The *Qur'an* states that all are equal in the eyes of Allah and one closest to Allah is one who is most pious, that is, the most just. The universality of Islam could be judged from the revolutionary declaration of the *Qur'an*:

“O humankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely, the noblest of you with Allah is the most pious of you. Surely Allah is knowing, Aware.” (49:13)

Thus it made it evident that tribes and families were not marks of distinction over the other, but they existed only for the purpose of knowing or identifying each other. Otherwise all have been borne of male and female and there is no question of superiority of one tribe or family over the other. The only mark of distinction could be *taqwa*, that is, being a highly moral person observing high norms of justice, and only such persons are closest to Allah.

It was this approach of Islam and high standards of morality and justice that endeared it to people across the world. And it would be seen that mostly the weaker sections of society were greatly attracted to Islam. The privileged and ruling classes who already enjoyed high prestige had not much attraction for this

religion. During Hazrat Umar's time, an Arab prince from a border area adopted Islam. When he came to perform *haj*, he expected privileged treatment. But when he had to perform *haj* like all other Muslims, he returned to his native country and renounced Islam.

Hazrat Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet (PBUH), was so rigorously just that he did not spare his own brother Aquil when he demanded some greater share from *Bayt al-Mal* (state treasury). He alienated his closest ally Abdullah bin Abbas, who had stood by him through thick and thin, when he failed to account for money he had drawn from the state treasury as governor of Basra.

Moreover, the *Qur'an* clearly expressed its sympathy for the weaker sections and strongly reprimanded the powerful for their unjust actions. Thus the *Qur'an* says:

“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 heirs.” (28:5)

Thus Allah favours those who are weak, and desires to bestow favour on them to make them leaders and the heirs of this earth. Allah thus is on the side of the weak and not on the side of the powerful and arrogant (*mustakbirun*). And this is in the interest of justice that those who are weak and oppressed be liberated and made leaders and rulers in place of powerful who totally ignore principles of justice in governance.

It is not without significance that all the prophets named in the *Qur'an* (with the exception of David and Solomon) are from

among the shepherds or weaker sections of society. It is only a sufferer who knows the suffering of the weak and the oppressed, and it is only such people who can truthfully and justly become bearers of Allah's message and lead and liberate the poor.

Thus Allah fulfils His own promise that He makes in the *Qur'an* to favour the poor and the weak, and to make them the leaders and heirs of this earth. The prophets were indeed the leaders of humankind who taught justice and morality to human beings. We all revere these prophets for their high standards of justice and truthfulness. Also, justice cannot be separated from truth and there cannot be religion without truth. Similarly, any untruth and unjust act cannot be a religious act. Thus justice becomes inherent in all religions as all religions accept truth as the fundamental value. But Islam emphasizes justice unambiguously and separately through clearly pronounced injunctions and commands.

The *Qur'an* does not limit itself only to saying 'do justice', which, if done, would have been a very generalized statement. But it covers various areas of life and wants justice to be done in all these areas. The *Qur'an* emphasizes on gender justice which was totally unknown in that era.

In pre-Islamic era, women had no rights at all, be in marriage, divorce, property or custody of children. It is well-known that Islam gave well-defined rights to women in all these areas and gave gender-just laws. Marriage was a contract even before Islam, but on the woman's behalf, the contract was entered into by the father and her grandfather or uncle in the absence of the

father. In the absence of all of them, even the woman's younger brother could become her marriage guardian (*wali*).

The *Qur'an* gave this right to contract marriage to women without intervention of anyone else, and her consent became absolute for marriage to take place. The *Qur'an* also tried to do away with all marital abuses through various pronouncements:

“And of His signs is this, that He created mates for you from yourselves that you might find quiet of mind in them, and He put between you love and compassion. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” (30:21)

It made divorce and separation between husband and wife also subject to rule of justice. First, it desired arbitration before divorce:

“And if you fear a breach between the two, appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people. If they both desire agreement, Allah will effect harmony between them” (4:35). Here, it must be noted that the wife was also given the right to appoint her own arbiter so that justice is done to her and not at the cost of her interest. In those days, one could hardly think of giving the wife equal rights like this.

And even if divorce is to take place, it should be smooth and in proper manner. The *Qur'an* thus says:

“Divorce may be (pronounced) twice; then keep them in good fellowship or let (them) go with kindness. And it is not lawful for you to take any part of what you have given them.” (2:229)

In pre-Islamic tribal society, there were no rules safeguarding women's rights. Customs and oral traditions had made men all

powerful. Here the *Qur'an* gives certain rights to women even in divorce and exhorts men to treat them fairly and justly. Also, men cannot take back what they had given by way of *mehr* to their wives when they divorce them. The *Qur'an* also mentions in this verse the right of woman to divorce. It says:

“Then if you fear that they cannot keep within the limits of Allah, there is no blame on them for what she gives up to become free thereby.”

Thus if she so desires, she can return her dower money and become free from marital bond. That her right in this respect is absolute is evident in *hadith* from *Sahih Bukhari*, according to which a woman called Jamila was granted *khula'* (woman's initiative in dissolving marriage) as she feared she could not observe Allah's limits (rules) if she continued the marriage after returning the orchard which was given to her by her husband. Jamila had approached the Prophet (PBUH) and he had granted her *khula'*.

Before the advent of Islam, a woman had no right to property and inheritance at all. The *Qur'an* granted her absolute right to property. Neither her father nor her husband could take away her property unless she gave them of her own will. Also, whatever she earns will belong to her, and not to her father or husband (4:32). She was also given a portion in inheritance as daughter, as wife, as mother, as sister. None of these existed before Islam.

Even in case of taking more than one wife (which was permitted only in case of war) and to take care of widows and

orphans, justice was made an absolute condition. Both the verses, Verse 4:3 and Verse 4:129, have made justice an integral part of polygamous marriages without which no one is permitted to take more than one wife. The Verse 4:129 is very emphatic about justice, and this verse is often ignored by Muslims. They take to polygamous marriages ignoring all the Qur'anic injunctions that are clearly laid down as if polygamy is their birth right. The conservative Ulema are also to be blamed as they deliberately or otherwise fail to educate men in this respect.

It is true that treatment of women in Muslim societies is far from desirable and that gives an impression as if Islam robs women of all their rights. It is true that in our patriarchal society, Muslim men have never conceded the Qur'anic rights to their womenfolk. Shari'ah formulations were also heavily influenced by the Arab customary laws and patriarchal feudal values. Thus the original spirit of justice in the *Qur'an* was seriously harmed in the Shari'ah formulations.

And it is not only in respect of gender justice but in other areas too that the Qur'anic spirit of justice suffered seriously in actual historical practices. After the death of the Prophet (PBUH), when Islam spread to the other non-Arab societies with advanced feudal civilizations and monarchical societies, Islamic practices began to imbibe the un-Qur'anic practices and the spirit of justice was totally lost.

Once the Umayyads introduced monarchy in the name of *khilafat*, there was no looking back, and the ruler began to be nominated by the preceding ruler, making it a dynastic rule.

This dynastic rule brought all feudal values as now what the *khalifa* ruled became justice. Shari'ah rules were observed only in respect of *ibadat* (acts of worship), and there was no more respect for social and political justice.

Dynastic wars—wars of succession in the same dynasty like among non-Muslims—became the rule. Bloodshed, torture of political opponents, revenge and everything the *Qur'an* had condemned were resorted to. Justice, mercy, compassion, suppression of anger and greed, all were thrown to the winds. So much so, that in order to avoid anarchy, Ulema began to rule that any ruler who establishes prayer must be obeyed.

This was totally against the Qur'anic concept of a just society. Scriptural injunctions are totally ignored in human affairs, and followed only in respect of ritual practices which pertain to the other world. As far as these worldly affairs are concerned, they are determined by interests rather than scriptural pronouncements.

It is very unfortunate that Islamic countries are so immersed in feudal values that social and political justice remain a distant goal even in the 21st Century. There is not so much as political democracy and freedom of conscience which is the requirement of the *Qur'an* (2:256) and is often quoted by Muslim Ulema as well as Muslim intellectuals.

What Islam means to Muslims even today is essentially ritual practices and nothing more. What is needed today is to expand notion of social justice as incorporated in the Qur'anic teachings. All those laws which are being recommended or en-

forced in keeping with the notions of justice must be accepted. The UN Charter of Human Rights, for example, must be accepted by all Muslim countries as it is based on human dignity which is equally fundamental to the Qur'anic view (17:70).

Similarly, the notion of gender justice must be further expanded in respect of all gender laws and Shari'ah formulations in Islamic societies. The notion of justice is often influenced by the prevailing social mores and ethos. Today, notions of social, economic and gender justice have greatly expanded, and in today's society, justice can be said to have been done only when these notions are incorporated in the prevailing laws. What was thought to be just until yesterday does not necessarily mean just in today's society.

The medieval notions of justice had to be discarded. The Qur'anic idea of justice can best be served only by rethinking medieval practices and notions of justice. There is a wrong notion among orthodox Muslims that any reform or rethinking in laws thought to be just cannot be revisited. Divine injunctions and human interpretations cannot be equated in the way it is being done in Muslim societies.

Divine pronouncements are far beyond narrow human limitations and can and must be rethought with fundamental change in what we call social paradigms. Social paradigms have undergone great changes, and hence expanded notions of contemporary society which helps usher in better quality of life must be accepted. No one can challenge the fact that the *Qur'an* gave humanity the notion of absolute justice. But comprehension of

this notion is always limited by social conditions, and a true believer has to engage with society to keep on expanding them.

To engage with unjust social structures and make constant efforts to make life richer and more liveable in terms of justice and human dignity is true jihad. It should be the duty of every Muslim to wage this jihad through his/her intellectual exertions. A life spent in this jihad would be the truest Islamic life and it is in this sense that the Prophet (PBUH) said that an 'Alim's ink is holier than a martyr's blood'.

Chapter –10

Love in Sufi Poetry Maulana Rum, the Poet of Love

GHAZAL POETRY in Arabic/Persian and Urdu in general and Sufi poetry in various genres is basically love poetry. 'Ghazal' is an Arabic word and has several meanings. One of them is talking to one's beloved. Many Sufis wrote in *ghazal* form and many others used some other forms like the *masnavi* (duet). Sufis belonged to many *silsilas* (different schools) of thought. These schools differed on certain other issues, but were one on core issues.

Islam, however, became part of the ruling establishment, and hence in popular and even theological stance came to be associated with power. Belief grew in the minds of the general people that religion and politics cannot be separated in Islam. This formulation, though not correct, turned into people's belief. This association with power politics began to influence religious outlook.

As there was complete legal vacuum in the Arab society

before Islam, a whole new legal system had to be worked out based on the Qur'anic pronouncements and the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings and doings (*sunnah*). And since political rule had to be based on some written laws, Islamic legal corpus called Shari'ah—developed by several imams, both Sunni and Shi'ah—became central to Islamic establishments.

The Sufis, on the other hand, were basically spiritual personalities and did not like association with any political establishment. They wanted to spend their time on spiritual matters, like controlling the desire, concentrating on inner discipline and spending their time on remembrance (*dhikr*) of Allah. Though they did not renounce the world altogether as renunciation of the world is not preferable (though not forbidden), their involvement with worldly issues was minimum.

Psychologically speaking, when we want to concentrate on someone, we end up developing unbreakable attachment leading to intense love for and involvement with that person. And in case of Sufis, that person was none other than Allah. Thus Sufi poetry is full of love for Allah. And to express their love of Him, Sufis had to use existing genres of poetry, that is, *ghazal* or *masnavi*.

But traditionally, love in poetry represented love for a human beloved. Sufis also had to use existing human terminology while expressing their love of Allah. In other words, Allah had to be personified, though He is beyond all perceptions and cannot be likened with human form. Thus, in Sufi poetry, though the beloved appears to be human, it is due to the constraints of

human language. The actual beloved is Allah. Thus, one finds Sufi poetry as deeply immersed in the love of Allah.

Thus it will be seen that there is a basic difference in the concept of Sufi's and theologian's Allah. While Sufis stress love of Allah and invoke this love again and again, theologians Allah is centralized to fear. A theologian always asks us to fear Allah, talking of consequences of disobedience; whereas a Sufi asks us to love Allah and be immersed in the love of Allah.

This difference is quite understandable. A theologian, directly or indirectly, is associated with the ruling power and has to be concerned with maintaining order in society. He is entrusted with the enforcement of law and order, and hence has to create an ambience of fear of authority. This probably explains why the theologian is so concerned with fear of Allah, for Allah also personifies authority.

As the situation of the then Arab society was very complex, the *Qur'an* contains both types of verses: evoking fear of Allah, and evoking love of Allah. There was no ruling establishment and society often allowed licentious behaviour within the limits of tribal customs and traditions. However, new commercial relations that were breaking tribal customs needed to mind more complex social order. Hence, the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* met this demand by giving clear legal instructions.

A tribal society, where social order was the last thing on their mind, needed fear of authority. So, a strong centralized state structure emerged within a few decades of Prophet's (PBUH) death. The legal structure of Islam also developed in this political

atmosphere, and hence its emphasis on fear of Allah.

The Sufis, on the other hand, were more concerned with the inner spiritual being and hence their priority was love rather than fear. Thus we find in popular legend about Rabi'ah Basri, a noted woman Sufi saint, that one day she was seen carrying a bucket of water in one hand, and a burning rag wrapped around a rod in the other. Someone asked Rabi'ah why she was carrying water in one hand and fire in the other. Rabi'ah replied that she wanted to put out the fire of hell with this bucket of water so that people do not worship Allah for fear of hell, and that she would set fire to paradise so that people do not worship Him for greed of paradise. The message was that Allah should be worshipped for pure love, nothing else.

Unfortunately, due to political struggle between a section of Muslims and western powers, particularly represented by the US, today violence and fear have come to be associated with Islam. This unidimensional approach to Islam has done all the damage to the understanding of the rich and complex world of Islam. Islamic civilization is far too rich and carries various trends within it.

Scholars like Prof Huntington, the author of *Clash of Civilizations*, have created unidimensional Islam to be condemned for promoting violence and terror. They have done such damage to Islam to fulfill USA's political ambitions.

One needs to focus on other aspects of the rich heritage of the world of Islam. Sufi Islam is Islam of love and universal humanity. We must come out of our obsession of political Islam,

which is advocated and practised by a small section of Muslim elite, whereas Sufi Islam inspires the silent majority of Muslims, who are a victim of political Islam.

Here, I would throw light on Sufi Islam and its doctrine of love. The Great Sheikh, popularly known as Ibn Arabi (he was born in Spain in AD 1165 and died at the ripe age of 76 in AD 1240), was the founder of the famous Sufi school known as School of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being). The real being, according to this school, is one and the entire creation is His manifestation. This is the most universal in its outlook and demolishes all barriers of religion, race and nations.

Sheikh-i-Akbar (the Great Sheikh), as he is known as, was a great poet and a prolific writer. He is said to have left some 800 works, though not all authenticated. Love was central to his philosophy and to his understanding of religion. Thus he writes in one of his poems: 'I believe in religion of love. Whatever direction its caravans may take. For love is my religion and my faith' (*hubbi dini wa shari'ati*). In one place, he writes:

Now I am called the shepherd of gazelles,
Now a Christian monk,
Now a Zoroastrian,
The Beloved is Three, yet One;
Just as the three are in reality one.

In his poem "*My Heart Can Take on Any Appearance*", he writes:

"My heart can take on any appearance. The heart varies in accordance with variations of the innermost consciousness. It

may appear in form as a gazelle meadow, a monkish cloister, an idol-temple, a pilgrim *Kaaba*, the tablets of the Torah for certain science, the bequest of the leaves of the *Qur'an*.

“My ditty is the debt of Love, I accept freely and willingly whatever burden is placed upon me. Love is the love of lovers, except that instead of loving the phenomenon, I love the Essential. That religion, that duty, is mine, and is my faith. A purpose of human love is to demonstrate ultimate, real love. This is the love which is conscious. The other is that which makes man unconscious of himself.”

Yet, in another poem “*While the sun’s eye rules my sight*”, he says:

“While the sun’s eye rules my sight,
 Love sits as sultan in my soul,
 His army has made camp in my heart—
 Passion and yearning, affliction and grief,
 When his camp took possession of me
 I cried out as the flame of desire burned in my entrails.
 Love stole my sleep, love has bewildered me,
 Love kills me unjustly, and I am helpless,
 Love has burdened me with more than I can bear
 So that I bequeath him a soul and no body.

We find many more such verses penned by Ibn Arabi which indicate that love is the most fundamental in his understanding of relations between human and the Ultimate Being. He clearly distinguishes between ‘phenomenon’ and ‘essential’. He reaches for the ‘essential’, not ‘phenomenon’. Phenomenon is bound to vary but essential is one. Ghalib, the great Urdu poet, who was also essentially a Sufi in his approach, says in one of his verses:

“Nahin kuch subh-o-zunnar ke phande mein geerai,
Wafadari mein hai sheikh-o-barehman ki azmaish.”

It means that there is not much in the knot of rosary or the thread (which a Brahmin wears), but the real trial of a Sheikh (a Muslim priest) or a Brahmin (a Hindu priest) is in their loyalty to what they believe in, that is, God. Rosary, a Muslim symbol, and thread, a Hindu symbol, differ in form but the Essential, the Ultimate Being whom they worship, is One. Thus, their trial is not in carrying a rosary or wearing a thread but in their steadfast love or loyalty to God.

This was the approach of Sufis to religion. They were not enamoured of the form but were concerned with the content. Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, who is known for his seminal work called *Mathnavi M'anavi*, which many Muslims considered as the *Qur'an* in Persian, also lays emphasis on love. He was a greatly revered 'alim and a jurist, and had his place of honour in the court of Quniya, a town which his father migrated to.

He had thousands of disciples who regularly attended to his sermons. But once he came in contact with a Sufi, Shams Tabriz from Syria, everything changed. Shams Tabriz cast his spell on him and he was completely transformed. From an 'alim and a jurist issuing fatwas, he turned into a Sufi absorbed and immersed in love, leading a life of ecstasy.

Afzal Iqbal, a noted scholar of Islam, writes in his *Life and Work of Jalaluddin Rumi*:

“A person who was once considered the last word on religion by his own generation, and who had, according to his own light, ruled

out music as undesirable, had now become so enamoured of it that he threw all 'decorum' to the winds, listened to music with rapt attention at odd hours of the day and danced in ecstasy."

Afzal then quotes his son's description of his father (translation from Persian verses):

Day and night he danced in ecstasy,
 On the earth he revolved like the Heavens.
 His (ecstatic) cries reached zenith of the skies,
 And were heard by all and sundry.
 He showered gold and silver on the *mutriban* (singers);
 He gave away whatever he had.
 Never for a moment was he without music and ecstasy,
 Never for a moment was he at rest.
 There was an uproar (of protest) in the city,
 Nay whole world resounded with that uproar.
 (They were surprised that) such a great Qutb and Mufti of
 Islam
 Who was the accepted leader of two Universes?
 Should be raving like a madman in public and private.
 The people turned away from religion and faith (on his
 account)
 And went crazy after love.

Such was the impact of Shams Tabriz that a great mufti and '*alim* turned into a mad mendicant. Such was the appeal of love of Allah on Jalaluddin Rumi that an '*alim* and theologian of Rumi's standing now had a very different view of religion: from one centred on legalistic Shari'ah, he had shifted to that of spiritual love. It was a great change indeed, and it was due to Rumi's meeting with Shams Tabriz that the world was rewarded with *Mathnavi* full of gems of wisdom.

The transformation was so complete that the Maulana addressed Muslims as:

What is to be done, O Muslims? I do not recognize myself

I am neither Christian, nor Jew,

nor of Gabr, nor Muslim.

I am not of the East, nor of the West,

nor of land, nor of the sea;

I am not of Nature's mint, nor of the circling heaven

I am not of earth, nor of water, nor of air, nor of fire;

I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust,

nor of existence, nor of entity.

I am not of India, nor of China,

nor of Bulgaria, nor of Saqain.

I am not of the kingdom of 'Iraqian,

nor of the country of Khorasan

I am not of this world, nor of the next,

nor of paradise, nor of Hell.

I am not of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and Rizwan'.

My place is placeless; my trace is Traceless;

This is neither body nor soul,

for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.

I have put duality away;

I have seen that the two worlds are one;

One I SEEK, One I know; One I see, One I call.

He is the first, He is the last,

He is the outward, He is the inward;

I am intoxicated with Love's cup,

the two worlds have passed out of my ken;

If once in my life I spent a moment without Thee,

From that time and from that hour I repent of my life.

If once in this world I win a moment with Thee'

I will trample on both worlds; I will dance in triumph forever.

This poem is of great importance to understand Maulana

Rum's philosophy and his being drunk with love. It is a fundamentally different view of religion. When religion becomes theologians' play and dogmas rule our lives, and we seek power by reducing religion to mere instrument of our quest for power, rather than quest for truth, we have all the complex problems on hand including hatred and violence.

One may argue, however, if, as Maulana Rum says in the above poem, human beings lose all their identities and are immersed in the ocean of love, how can one live? To live conscious life on this earth, we need certain identities, certain distinctions and certain goals. Otherwise, how can we function? What Maulana Rum says is mere utterance of a mendicant absorbed in love of God.

This is absolutely true. But if we reflect on Maulana's utterances, we will find great relevance in our life. If Maulana is immersed in love of God and has lost all sense of identity and duality, we too are immersed in this world and give excessive importance to identity and duality. The outcome is so much conflict, so much violence in the name of these identities. These identities, and interests linked up with these identities, have caused much havoc in the history of the world.

Apart from the other major wars of the past, in the last century alone we saw two world wars causing death of millions of people. Are such identities leading to such barbarism worth its while? Yes, we all cannot become mendicants, we have to live in this world and identities are important; but Maulana makes us conscious of limitations of these identities and wants us to

remember we all have emanated from that Ultimate Being and will return to It. This also should never be lost sight of.

And this approach which Rumi and Sufis of his ilk preached is so close to what we have come to know through science about our Universe. It is so huge, so large, its dimensions expanded over billions of light years, beyond all our imagination. We human beings are like tiny specks on this earth which is nothing more than tiny dots, even smaller than that, and still we fight so fiercely for worldly possessions to grab other's properties other's territories.

If we remain even slightly drunk with the love of that Ultimate Being, Who has created us all, we will love all His creation and not destroy even a speck of those who co-exist with us. Our sense of identity should also be inclusive of sense of non-identity. If we remain conscious of non-duality between this universe and its creator, we can shed so much hatred and destructive actions.

As we get one-sided view of Islam—Islam of political world, Islam of violence and war—there is need to understand and know this Islam too where power plays no role, only love and complete identity with the Creator remains at the centre-stage. In our over-politicized world, rich contributions made by highly revered Sufis, philosophers and scientists have been totally forgotten or deliberately avoided.

Our view of Islam is so one sided that any alternate view based on love and peace is disbelieved. Here I have quoted from the most respected Sufis, who are followed by millions of

Muslims, to draw attention to this alternate Islam. On ground, it is this Islam which is followed by and is the deep source of inspiration for vast masses of Muslims throughout the world, irrespective of the country they live in.

Let us hope that slowly this alternate Islam will displace political Islam from space in the media, and the world will come to know more and more of this Islam of peace and love. Of course media will not easily yield space to this alternate Islam. That remains our main problem.

Chapter – 11

Compassion in Islam—Theology and History

ISLAM IS generally associated with jihad. But it is more due to its history, than its theology. In this context, it is interesting to juxtapose jihad with Compassion, a laudable value in Islam.

Jihad is more historically contextual than theological, but compassion is more theological than historical. The *Qur'an*, the holy book of Islam, opens with the words *Bism Allahir Rahmanir Rahim*, that is, I begin in the name of Allah who is Compassionate and Merciful.

Thus, Compassion is one of the most popular names of Allah. Muslims always begin their name with this incantation, that is, 'I begin in the name of Allah who is Compassionate and Merciful'. A Muslim who worships Allah has to be compassionate in his behaviour, else his/her worship will not be complete. There are four key values in the *Qur'an* which are repeatedly emphasized upon: justice (*'adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*). So, it is clear that 'compassion'

is included in the list of key values, but jihad is not considered a value. It is just an instrument to realize certain objectives.

The Prophet too is described in the *Qur'an* as *rahmat lil 'alamin*, that is, mercy of the worlds. Since Prophet is the 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 (*muminun*) also must imbibe these virtues with all their limitations.

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, the *Qur'an* and the *sunnah* are binding on all Muslims and there is complete consensus on it among all Muslim theologians belonging to all sects of Islam.

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

Let us remember that necessity is situational and values are transcendent. Necessity may compel human beings to do certain things which, strictly speaking, may not be desirable, while values make society more 'humane'. War may become a necessity at times, but it results in bloodshed and destruction. So, it needs

to be avoided as much as possible. Values, on the other hand, help to construct a society and are eternal.

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

Prophet's life history is full of value-oriented incidents, but even biographers of the Prophet like Ibn Ishaq or Ibn Hisham have focussed 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. He came to be known as Muhammad much before he became the 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 the society he lived in. All this became part of his divine message.

Allah chooses His prophets from among the weaker sections of the society as only such persons can be value-oriented, for

they know the importance of human values in life. Thus, in the *Qur'an*, all prophets, with the exception of David and Solomon (Daud and Suleman, the rulers), happen to be from the weaker sections of society.

It is these prophets 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. The Prophet of Islam too was the embodiment of these values, particularly compassion. There are numerous incidents from his life which show his compassionate approach towards fellow human beings, irrespective of their religion or station in life.

Once a woman was bought to him who was declared to be a sinner ought to 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 replied that she could not recall any act of good towards any other human being. The Prophet again asked her whether she had 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. It was unable to reach the water with its 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 sin for this 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." The Prophet asked

him, “What sin have you committed?” The person replied, “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, the Prophet did not want to punish him with 100 lashes which is the Qur’anic punishment for adultery. The Prophet thought for a while and asked 100 branches of palm date tree to be brought. He tied them together and delivered one soft blow and told the person to leave as he had received his punishment.

There is another oft-repeated story of a Jewish woman who used to throw garbage on the Prophet whenever he passed through that way. One day when no garbage was thrown at him, 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 felt others’ sufferings as his own and tried 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. Thus Allah is repeatedly described as *Ghafurur Rahim* (Forgiver and Merciful) in the *Qur'an*. He is not a Punisher but Forgiver. Sincere repentance (*taubah*) on the part of human beings wins forgiveness of Allah.

The Prophet too was a great forgiver. As far as possible, he would forgive even the worst of his enemies. When he conquered Mecca without shedding a drop of blood, he declared that he would not punish anyone provided they 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 when the Prophet pardoned all of them.

Abu Sufyan and his wife Hinda¹, who were in the forefront of persecuting the Prophet and his companions, were also pardoned. There can hardly be any better example of forgiveness and compassion. And think of the Arab society with all its tribal customs that 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'ans* 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 practise these values if not the Prophet? He practised them as the human exemplifier. Thus the Prophet did not teach anything but practised it himself in the most trying conditions. To forgive his worst enemies in Mecca was the greatest challenge

¹ She had eaten the liver of Muhammad's slain uncle Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib

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

The ruling class understood jihad as the defence of Islamic state and expansion of the limits of Islamic state. A section of theologians depended for their sustenance on the ruling class, and hence their discourse on jihad was mainly to promote interests of the ruling class. Thus the large part of theological discourse on jihad supported the viewpoint of the ruling class and defended jihad in the sense of military operations.

On the contrary, for Sufi stream of Islam, jihad meant inner struggle to suppress desires and cultivate virtues of patience (*sabr*) and reliance on Allah (*tavakkul*). There was not much support for war and political struggle among the Sufi saints. They tried to cultivate what the *Qur'an* calls *nafs-e-mutmainna* (the contented soul) and not *nafs-e-ammarah* (desiring soul). Since it requires great deal of struggle to cultivate *nafs-e-mutmainnah* (contented soul), it was real jihad for Sufi stream of Islam.

Let us remember that it is *nafs-e-mutmainnah* which also

creates attitude of compassion. A grabbing and greedy soul, which is *nafs-e-ammarah*, can never show compassion towards the suffering of others. The 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'an* is not in absolute sense of war or fighting against kafirs as usually understood.

Jihad is, on the other hand, a layered concept, and has been interpreted very differently by different classes of Muslims. It is mainly spiritual. The Prophet had to face very complex challenges, both material and spiritual. 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. Hence jihad for them was a supreme and the most challenging struggle to suppress *nafs-e-ammarah*.

Sufis had a caring and sharing attitude which is an important ingredient of compassion. They expressed their solidarity with suffering people and the 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 the ruling classes, they never spent it on themselves.

They used to open what is called *langar*, that is, a common kitchen where anyone, irrespective of caste and creed, could eat at 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 *hadis*) 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, O’ 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 as if I am hungry and if a human person is thirsty as if I am thirsty, and if a human person is naked 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 or her.

They would even go hungry and feed a hungry person. And this compassion was extended to animals and plants also. The Prophet once saw a donkey which was indentured on its face. He berated its owner that he had no compassion for the poor animal and had disfigured its face. The owner said it was required for identifying the animal. Prophet told him not to disfigure its face and to 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 the ant will be killed. He thought for a moment how to save its life. He saw a container containing wheat flour lying in the room. He gently lifted the ant and put it in the container. Such was the compassion of the Sufis which not only extended towards human beings, but even to small creatures like an ant.

Compassion is highly necessary for sustenance of life on this earth. Only a compassionate approach can make our life rich. It

is greed which makes human beings ruthless towards the others as one can fulfil one's greed only by inflicting suffering on the others. For a compassionate person, it is necessary to lead a need-based life, not a greed-based life. The *Qur'an* exhorts believers to give away their surplus to the needy people (2:219).

The *Qur'an* also levies a tithe on Muslims called *zakat* that has to be spent on orphans, widows, poor, needy, wayfarers and for the release of the prisoners. All these are helpless sections of the society and hence need our compassion. It is obligatory for all Muslims to spend their wealth on their well-being. It is not possible to do so 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 become true human being. Thus, there is constant struggle between greed and need, and generally it is greed which triumphs and results in a lot of suffering for a 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 the history of a religion is often the history of its ruling classes, and the ruling classes are obsessed by greed for power and self. Thus we often find lot of bloodshed and wars in history caused by different religions including Islam.

However, in Islam, there always flows a parallel stream which is never highlighted in history. It is that of Sufis and saints

engaged not in struggle for power, but in struggle to overpower 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 of people, though not in their history.

We are increasingly becoming insensitive to the suffering of others. We want to live a greedy life and do not mind even destroying our environment. It is our over-consumption which is leading to the destruction of it and our sensitivity towards it.

So, 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, helping normalize our environment.

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

It is not easy to reduce our consumption as a whole though some individuals 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 today entirely ritual-centred. We have to go beyond rituals and religion should be our active guide for transforming our inner self into 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.

The *Qur'an* repeatedly talks of *istibaq al-khayrat*, that is, excelling each other in good deeds. Good deeds are based on values of love, compassion and truthfulness. The Prophet had said that it is more meritorious to feed a hungry widow than pray for the whole night. Thus compassion towards a hungry soul is more important than prayer. Allah hardly needs our prayer.

Prayer and fasting have been prescribed to cultivate these values, and not because Allah needs them. Rituals are a means to an end. But we have reduced them to an end. 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 compliment each other in cultivating compassion among their followers. Christianity and Hinduism too, with their emphasis on love and non-violence, can be valued associates, and together we can transform our world.

Will these religions join hands to reduce suffering on our earth?

Chapter – 12

Islam and Compassion—Scriptural, Historical and Contemporary Perspective

ISLAM IS generally associated with jihad that is popularly interpreted as war. But a careful understanding of the *Qur'an* in its totality clearly establishes that mercy, compassion and peace are the predominant values in Islam. There are a few verses in the *Qur'an* on war and killing, and those verses have been overemphasized both by some Muslims as well as antagonistic non-Muslims.

Muslims did it as they wanted to justify war for territorial conquests, and non-Muslims did it as they wanted to show Islam as a religion of war and violence. These Muslims and non-Muslims had strong vested interests in understanding the *Qur'an* in their own ways. They simply wanted to promote their interests. However, those who have no such interests would like to understand the *Qur'an* in its real spirit.

Before we proceed further, I would like to emphasize that Islam is a religion, and not a political system or ideology as some

Muslims and non-Muslims would like to project it. It is also not true that in Islam politics cannot be divorced from religion. But Islam as a religion had always been twisted to suit political ends, and that would be abundantly clear if we examine Islamic history. It is politics which always reined supreme, subordinating religion to its interest.

Religion represents human beings' inner and spiritual needs. It always stresses spiritual values and practices designed to realize these spiritual values. Spiritual values can be realized only when there are conditions of peace, both inner and outer. No religion thus will promote war and destruction.

It is only the rulers and conquerors who resort to war and often use religion or certain aspects of religion for the justification of territorial war. But a truly religious person who takes spiritual aspects of religion seriously would not only shun war but oppose it, whatever be its justification by the rulers.

The Prophet was an intensely spiritual person and hence the *Qur'an* describes him as *Rahmatun lil alamin* (Mercy of the worlds). Had he been in pursuit of power, he would not be described as such. The whole biography of the Prophet (PBUH) shows that he never went in pursuit of power. He never raised an army for that purpose. He remained committed to peace.

However, there were occasions in his life when he had to fight; fight in defence of himself and the fledgling community of Muslims as unbelievers of Mecca never left him in peace. He had to migrate from Mecca when oppression by Meccan unbelievers became intolerable. It speaks volumes for the Prophet (PBUH)

and shows that he never prayed against them even during the worst situations he faced.

When he entered Mecca during the last years of his life, the Prophet never sought revenge against anyone.¹ He showed compassion to the worst of his enemies like Hinda, who had chewed the liver of his Uncle Hamza. The tribal law of Arabia required that she be killed and her liver also be chewed. However, Prophet (PBUH), being a highly spiritual man, resorted to compassion rather than *qisas*.

The Prophet never declared war against any nation, or against any tribe. But when attacked, he fought for his defence. All such verses in the *Qur'an* about war pertain to such situations. In many cases, the tribes with whom the Prophet had entered into a peace treaty broke it and treacherously attacked Muslims. It was only then that the *Qur'an* ordered him to fight in self defence.

I would like to quote some such verses so that we can understand its context. In this context, the Chapter 9 known as *Surah Bara'* or Chapter on Immunity is relevant. This chapter mainly deals with the problem of some tribes breaking their treaty with Muslims repeatedly, and it advises Muslims to declare immunity (*bara'*) from such treaties which were being violated by others.

Maulana Muhammad Ali, a noted commentator on the *Qur'an*, observed in the opening statement to this chapter:

“The title of this chapter is taken from the opening statement,

¹ See Ibn Ishaq I, *Sirah Rasulallah* and *Tarikh-e-Tabari*.

which contains declaration of immunity from obligations with such of the idolatrous tribes as had repeatedly broken their engagements. This declaration is one of the most important events in the history of Islam, for hitherto the Muslims had constantly suffered from the hostility of the unscrupulous idolatrous tribes who had no regard for their treaties, dealing a blow at the Muslims wherever they had an opportunity of doing so.”

Thus it should be remembered that in this chapter, there are verses asking Muslims to fight and kill wherever they find members of the tribe who had broken the treaty and dealt heavy blow to the Muslims. Taken out of this context, the verses will surprise any reader as to how a compassionate and just God could order such killings. But these verses must be read in the context in which they were revealed. They must be read in the context of utter adversity which Muslims were facing in that society where violence was the very way of life.²

Thus Chapter 9 opens with these words, “A declaration of immunity from Allah and His Messenger to those of the idolaters with whom you made an agreement.” (9:1) This statement explains why Muslims were allowed to fight against idolatrous tribes. The fact that Muslims had entered into a treaty with these tribes clearly shows that they wanted to coexist with these idolaters provided they reciprocated. Peaceful coexistence was the main objective.

But when these tribes broke their promise, the *Qur’an* said to the Muslims:

² Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur’an* (Lahore, 1973), p 383.

“Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first. Do you fear them? But Allah has more right that you should fear Him, if you are believers.” (9:13)

Thus this verse clearly states that Muslims have been attacked first and hence they should defend themselves and fight back fearing only Allah and not the enemy. It is a well-known principle of the civilized world to defend oneself if attacked. How can then one say that the *Qur'an* promotes war and bloodshed and requires believers to kill kafirs? The verses in isolation may seem to mean that, but one must understand significance of these verses only in totality of the Qur'anic verses including value-giving or normative verses. They cannot be taken in isolation.

What is often quoted is Verse 9:29 from the *Qur'an*. It is apparently shocking, but only if read in isolation, that is, without the historical context or normative of the Qur'anic verses. The verse reads:

“Fight those who believe not in Allah, not in the last Day, nor forbid that which Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor follow the Religion of Truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgement of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.” (9:29)

Obviously, this verse refers to Christians and not idolators as it uses the words ‘those who have been given the Book’. The *Qur'an* validates the religions brought by previous prophets from Adam to Christ and calls their followers as people of the Book. And hence, there is no reason to declare war against them on the grounds of idolatry. The only reason to declare war against them

then was the determination of the Roman Empire, which was Christian, to uproot Islam. Hence the *Qur'an* wanted Muslims to fight and finish them off.

There are other verses in the *Qur'an* which clearly say that Jews and Christians are also believers and Allah has sent His prophets with truth to them and Muslims must respect them. The Prophet extended a hand of friendship to the Christians of Najran and met their delegation inside his mosque and insisted that they (Christians) should pray inside the mosque. He also signed a treaty with them guaranteeing them freedom of their religion and protection of their churches.³

Also there are verses in the *Qur'an* which guarantee paradise to Jews and Christians if they do good deeds. Thus in Verse 2:62, we read:

“Surely who believe, and those who are Jews, and Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.”

If the above verse clearly states that those Jews and Christians who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do good deeds shall have their reward with their Lord, then why the *Qur'an* asked Muslims to fight the followers of the Book and defeat them, unless they were trying to wipe out Muslims and uproot Islam as the Roman Empire wanted to?

The *Qur'an*, in fact, is a book of guidance, not of war. It

³ Ibn Ishaq op.cit

encourages Muslims to live in peace and harmony and coexist with all people, be they non-believers or Jews or Christians or of any other persuasion whatsoever. It is thus highly necessary that we understand the *Qur'an* and the purpose for which it was revealed. Through the Meccan period, the *Qur'an* kept on advising Muslims to bear all problems with patience and steadfastness and not to retaliate. The Muslims followed and bore all oppression with the greatest patience.

In fact, the *Qur'an* stresses on compassion (*rahmah*), forgiveness (*'afw*) and patience (*sabr*). The *Qur'an* opens with four words, *Bism Allah al-Rahman Al-Rahim*, that is, I begin in the name of Allah who is Merciful and Compassionate. Thus mercy and compassion are Allah's names among others. And Muslims begin all their work with these words. This is to make Muslims aware of the importance of mercy and compassion.

I can say without any hesitation that peace, mercy and compassion are very central to Islam, and not fighting with the non-believers as one finds in the theology developed during the Middle Ages. We must thus explore why mercy, compassion, steadfastness, justice and benevolence lost their importance while 'jihad' acquired prominence. In the contemporary world also, some misguided youth who commit acts of terrorism continue to draw heavily from this theology.

As for theology and religious laws called Shari'ah, they were human product as human beings formulated them on selective readings of the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*. There is a definite difference between the Qur'anic pronouncements and theological

or the Shari'ah formulations.

As regard this difference, we must bear in mind that a religion is practised at various levels: by people of first generation who live and work with the founder, by ordinary people who convert to that religion for their own reasons or conviction, by ruling classes to suit their own interests, and by those who completely identify themselves with its spirit and renounce their worldly interests.

Among those who were of first generation and lived and worked with the Prophet (PBUH), there were those who imbibed true spirit of Islam and practised its values and virtues. Then there were those who developed political ambitions and interpreted religion in their own way, and yet tried to follow its spirit to a limited extent. Again, Islam kept on spreading outside Arabia and people of non-Arab origin embraced it for their own reasons.

Thus, various groups developed under the umbrella of Islam apart from the ruling class Muslims. Many 'ulema sided with the ruling class and did what was desired by the rulers. Some 'ulema however resisted temptations to side with the rulers and ruling classes, preferring to adhere to the spirit of Islam. Many Muslims withdrew from this struggle and began to live life in isolation from public view in *khanqah* (hospices).

The way those 'ulema siding with the rulers interpreted the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* satisfied those rulers, but it never became popular among the ordinary Muslims who rejected them. But those who developed Islamic laws or constructed Islamic theol-

ogy independently became acceptable and popular among the people, though they too carried stamp of their time on their legal and theological systems.

The entire legal and theological system was formulated in a situation in which Muslims were an overwhelming majority. Again, the time frame and the period in which the formulators worked had its own logic which could not be avoided. Though the *Qur'an* repeatedly stressed that all previous religions were also true and brought by prophets sent by Allah, the view that Islam was superior could not be avoided and so Muslims became more privileged than the others. The entire legal and theological system carried stamp of this thinking and is fully validated even today. Muslims belonged to the ruling majority and non-Muslims, even those described as people of the Book, faced the same fate. Though they were fully protected and their lives guaranteed, yet they were non-equal. I think according to the values of the time, it was the best bargain for them, as among other religious communities Muslims or people of other religions, that is, people belonging to non-ruling religious communities, were treated in a much worse manner.

But the world of Sufis was very different. Their lives were completely devoted to spiritual practices and there was no question of any discrimination against anyone. Muslim Sufis, Christian mystics and Jewish Cabala parishioners met and indulged in spiritual practices on equal terms. The Sufis were devoted to values and not rituals. The virtues promoted by the *Qur'an*—compassion, patience, humility and quest for

truth—were practised by them in their real spirit.

The Sufis were not drawn towards grandeurs of this world. They preferred utter simplicity and were content with basic needs. One can practise values in their true spirit only when one resists desires and greed. We find striking examples of compassion and forgiveness among these Sufis. They could not bear suffering of others.

A Sufi saint called Junaid once saw an ant crawling in his room. He thought he had unconsciously trampled upon it and it is likely to die. This thought made him very restless. He began thinking of ways and means to save the ant. He saw a vessel containing wheat flour and he gently lifted the ant and left it inside the vessel so that it can feed on it and also be saved.

The Sufis never wanted to possess anything beyond their basic needs and would give away the rest. They used to receive offerings from their followers and they spent all that by running kitchen called *langar* where all those who were hungry could eat whenever they liked. *Langar* was free for all. Even if they had little, they would share with those impoverished.

Once a poor man came to Nizamuddin Awliya, a great Sufi saint of 13th Century India. He wanted a few *tankas* (currency unit of the time) but Nizamuddin had none. He thought for a while and gave him his worn out shoe. The man was surprised as to how this is going to solve his problem. But as he had no other way, he took it and went out. On the way, he met a man and inquired about the worn out shoe. He said it was given to him by Nizamuddin. The other man asked him how much did he

need. When the poor man told him, he gave him twice as much and took away the shoe as something highly precious. Then the man understood why Nizamuddin gave him his worn out shoe. These Sufis would help all suffering souls in whatever way they could. They tried to control their desire and they interpreted, unlike the ruling classes, the word jihad as war against one's own desires rather than war against any external enemy. For them, the greatest enemy was one's own desire as this desire actually leads to war for grabbing others' territories, others' possessions. They called fighting against one's own desire as *jihad-e-akbar*, that is, the greatest jihad.

On their scale of values, compassion and forgiveness and reducing others' suffering stood much higher than fighting against the external enemies. They considered themselves as followers Prophet's companions who were poor and had no worldly ambition, ever ready to sacrifice everything they had. It is these Sufis who attracted non-Muslims to Islam by being role models.

Today in our contemporary world, consumerism and greed are our great enemies. We cannot avoid wars without resisting undue desire for luxury and comforts at the cost of the others. Gandhiji, the saint of modern India, observed that there is enough on this earth to fulfil our needs, but not enough to satisfy our greed. Only those devoid of compassion and blinded by naked desire are responsible for wars and destructions even in our age.

Islam's basic emphasis is also on compassion, human dignity,

justice and peace. Islam as a religion spread fast among people because of these values, not because of the sword. Sword was wielded by the rulers and they frightened rather than attracted people, whereas Sufis attracted rather than frightened people because of their emphasis on high values.

Those misguided terrorists need to coolly reflect on these values. Unfortunately, they hardly take into account Islamic values of forgiveness, compassion for human suffering and upholding sanctity of human life. These will be taken into account only when we separate religion and religious conduct from power. Powerfulness and religiosity can never go together. Power and arrogance go together. Any individual or nation drunk with power becomes arrogant.

Maulana Rum, a great Sufi of his time, chided his disciples when they started beating a drunkard who fell on them. He said that the drunkard was not in his senses, but they were the real drunkards as they were drunk with power that they used against a helpless person. We cannot be compassionate if we are too drunk with power.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from Maulana Rum who represents real spirit of Islam. He said, "Come to me if you are a Jew or Christian or a Muslim or even if you are a sinner as you are all humans."

Section V
Social Issues

Chapter – 13

Science, West and Islamic Origin of Science

I READ an excellent monograph in the form of a small book titled *Is Science Western in Origin?* by Prof CK Raju. This monologue is a significant contribution which tries to shatter the myth that science is western in origin.

I would throw more light on it little later. To begin with, it would be quite relevant to discuss whether Islam and science can go together, or whether Islam stands, as many believe, against science. The notion that Islam is against science was more relevant to 19th Century when the Muslim theologians (ulema) opposed science as against Islam. So, what is its relevance today when ulema no longer oppose science and its discoveries? But, that is not the end of the problem. There are still several problems in this debate which need to be discussed. Again, it is also true that some western scholars still believe that Islam happens to be inherently opposed to scientific progress.

I came across a book titled *Lost in the Sacred—Why the*

Muslim World Stood Still by Dan Diner. The theme of the book is how Islam and Muslims oppose progress, which is far from the truth. That is why it is necessary to throw light on Islam and modern science. Relevant to this is the monograph by Prof Raju, who tries to prove that science originated from India and Arab world, and the West simply imitated it. They then manipulated and interpolated it to show that modern science is of Greek origin.



Does Islam oppose science? The *Qur'an* is the main source of Islam and hence we would first see what the *Qur'an* has to say about this. In fact, pre-Islamic Arabs, either settled in urban areas like Mecca or Madina or Bedouins, were not interested in knowledge. According to Tabari, the noted historian, before the advent of Islam, there were only 17 persons in Mecca who could read and write. What they were proud of was their pedigree which they knew by heart for several generations. Learning and knowledge was hardly of any use for them, and hence pre-Islamic period was referred to as the period of *jahiliyyah* (ignorance).

The *Qur'an* laid great emphasis on '*ilm* (knowledge) precisely because Arabs were not only ignorant but also looked at learning with contempt. What mattered to them was their distinctive origin, not learning. As it has been repeatedly pointed out, the revelation to the Prophet began by the word *iqra'* (recite or read). Thus the *Qur'an* says, "Read in the name of thy Lord who creates. Creates human being from a clot." (96:1-2)

This statement means ‘in the name of the Lord who creates and creates from a clot’. This is an important scientific statement. Modern studies have developed how fertilization of man’s sperm and woman’s ova result in creation of human being. This science has now developed tremendously through modern technology. Of course, the *Qur’an* is a book of moral guidance and basic knowledge. It is certainly not the book of science. However, it does invite the believers to reflect and think about the creation and about our universe.

Knowledge, according to the *Qur’an*, is of vital need. If one wants to know one’s God (*Rabb*, Allah), one has to have knowledge of this universe as He is the creator of this universe. Thus the *Qur’an* says, “Those of His servants only who are possessed of knowledge fear Allah.” Lest one thinks this knowledge the *Qur’an* is talking about is knowledge of theology or *deen*, the preceding verse makes it clear that it is knowledge about the creation. It says:

“See you not that Allah sends down water from the clouds, then We bring forth therewith fruits of various hues? And in the mountains are streaks, white and red, of various hues and (others) intensely black.” (35:27)

Also, in the second chapter, it is stated that the believers believe in the unseen (*ghayb*). Generally, the theologians say that this *ghayb* is all about the other world, the world which begins after death. Well, maybe that is one of the interpretations and in those days, when knowledge had not developed much, it was perhaps the best available interpretation. But then divine scrip-

tures use metaphorical and symbolic language which provides scope for multiple interpretations.

Ghayb can also mean potential knowledge which is hidden from those who live in a particular period. Continuously developing knowledge keeps on bringing forth what was not known to those who lived in previous times. But that is known to us today. Maybe what we know today will appear to be quite primitive to coming generations. What they will discover is all *ghayb* to us. But Allah is described in the *Qur'an* as '*Alim al-Ghayb*' as He has knowledge of all these. But to us, His servants, it is just *ghayb*.

Thus what was known to the world when the *Qur'an* was revealed to the Arabs was quite primitive than what developed in few centuries during the Abbasid period and subsequently during the Fatimid period in Egypt. Great philosopher, mathematicians, chemists, geographers, astronomers and others discovered many things which were nothing more than *ghayb* just two centuries ago.

To make the believers (*muminin*) believe in the knowledge of *ghayb*, the *Qur'an* inspired Muslims to continuously develop knowledge. Allah's knowledge is without limits and so the believers should constantly pursue knowledge to infinity. No knowledge is final. The more one is puzzled about limitlessness of knowledge, the more knowledge develops. The Prophet rightly said that a moment's reflection by an '*Alim*' is more meritorious than praying for the whole night.

The *Qur'an* invites all believers to reflect about this universe.

So, an ignorant person cannot be a true believer. An ignorant person knows nothing about this universe created by Allah. If one tries to know this universe, she/he realizes how wonderful this universe is and only then does she/he realize the greatness of the Creator of this universe. Today scientists, physicists and astronomers tell us how bewilderingly large are the dimensions of this universe.

There is no single solar system as earlier believed. There are hundreds of solar systems, each billions of light years away from each other. The age of our universe was fixed by some Christian theologians in the 16th Century as about 4,000 years. It was all *ghayb* for them then. Today, the scientists fix the age of our universe as at least 20 billion light years. Every now and then, new stars are discovered billions of light years away from earth.

The Greek knowledge was basically deductive in nature and hence it had its limitation in understanding of the universe. Science develops with inductive knowledge, that is, through observations over a large period of time. Thus Iqbal points out in his lectures, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, that the *Qur'an* lays emphasis on inductive knowledge and he quotes Francis Bacon to the effect that modern science developed through inductive logic.

The *Qur'an* repeatedly invites believers to reflect over the creation of Allah and this itself could inspire believers to develop knowledge about this universe. For a period of time, they contributed richly to the knowledge about this world. The first impulse came when the Abbasids started *Darul Hikmah*

(House of Wisdom). The *Qur'an* lays great emphasis on *Hikmah* (wisdom). It is Allah's name (*Hakim*) and the *Qur'an* describes *hikmah* as *khayran kathira* (goodness in abundance).

The *Qur'an* says, "He grants wisdom to which He pleases. And whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a goodness in abundance." (2:269) Thus *hikmah* has great importance in the *Qur'an* because *hikmah* is not possible without knowledge. The Abbasids rightly called the place where books of knowledge from various countries were kept as House of Wisdom. According to Prof Raju, this house of wisdom became the epicentre of science and what we call western science today could not have developed without this house of wisdom.

Thus it is not true that Islam ever came in the way of development of modern knowledge or science. In fact it was the springboard, if we believe in Prof Raju's arguments, of development of modern science. Prof HG Wells, in his *The Short History of the World*, calls the Arabs as the foster fathers of modern knowledge. But it is only partly true. The Arabs were much more than foster fathers. Their own contribution was quite rich as we will discuss shortly.

It is true that after the 13th Century, there was stagnation in the Muslim world. The Muslim world was taken over by superstitious beliefs until the western colonization again awoke them from their slumber. The Muslim theologians also contributed to this stagnation a great deal. In order to maintain their hegemony, theologians opposed great philosophers and scientists like Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicena) or (Averros), Ibn Rushd and the

others. They even condemned them as heretics.

Also, people like Ghazzali had very different approach to knowledge. It was based on certainties rather than uncertainties of philosophy and constant quest for knowledge of science. Hence, he also opposed philosophers like Averros and there was great debate between the two. But after the attack of Helagu in 1258, the Abbasid Empire that was already on decline collapsed, and Baghdad ceased to be the centre of learning and development of science. Though other empires like that of Fatimid in Egypt survived a bit longer, it did not help much. Ghazzali's approach of inner certainty found much greater resonance and Muslims began concentrating on *'ulum al-Din* (that is, religious sciences), a tradition that still goes on. Ghazzali's *Ihya al-'Ulum al-Din* (that is, Revivification of Religious Sciences) indeed became a symbol of this revival.

II

In this background, we would briefly discuss the monograph of Prof CK Raju, *Is Science Western in Origin?* In this learned monograph, Prof Raju tries to show that science is certainly not western in origin but it owes much more to India on one hand, and Islamic centres in Baghdad and Spain. This monograph is part of the dissenting knowledge pamphlet series.

According to Prof Raju, it is a sheer myth to say that science is of Hellenic origin. He says, "The story of the Greek origin of science postdates the Crusades. Before the Crusades, Christendom was in Dark Age." Prof Raju also says that it was

the Roman Christian Emperor that ordered burning down of the Great Library of Alexandria, and he also says it was Justinian who ordered closure of all philosophical schools in 529 CE. In the footnote, Raju refers to Edward Gibbon, who in his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, dismisses the canard that burning down the Great Library might have been the work of Caliph Omar, or that it might have happened during a fire started at the time of Julius Caesar's attack.

Dr Raju also makes an interesting observation, "Ironically, this Christian Dark Age coincided with the Islamic Golden Age." Then he goes on to say that in sharp contrast to the book-burning tradition of Christendom, the Abbasid Caliphate had established the Baghdad House of Wisdom by the early 9th Century. This led to such an explosion in the demands for books that, along the lines of the *hadith* to seek knowledge, paper-making techniques were imported from China to set up a paper factory in Baghdad, which had a flourishing book bazaar.

It is not true, according to him, that books were brought only from Byzantine. They were also brought from Persia and India. Baghdad had scholars from all these countries. It became an important centre of intellectual debates, House of Wisdom, and centre for transferring knowledge from these sources into Arabic. He also points out that there was also striking contrast in wealth between Christendom and Islamic Arabs. Charlemagne's emissaries were dazzled by the splendour of Haroun al-Rashid's court, and the gifts they brought back were avidly imitated, and became models of Carolingian art.

It was only post-Crusades that the Church realized the importance of non-Biblical knowledge. In sharp contrast to earlier behaviour, the Church preserved the magnificent library at Toledo in the Muslim Spain when it was conquered during the proto-Crusades in 1085. Then the non-Biblical knowledge was accepted at the highest levels of the Church.

Prof Raju also points out that India had very advanced knowledge of arithmetic and astronomy. He says that while the Arabs valued the 'theology of Aristotle' for arithmetic, they turned to India, not to Greece. Arabs imported various Indian arithmetic texts, notably those of Aryabhata, Brahmagupta and Mahavira. These were digested and transcreated in the *Bayt al-Hikma*, by al-Khwarizmi, and became famous as *Algorismus* after his Latinized name. These 'Arabic numerals' use the place-value system which makes it very easy to represent large numerals. It also makes arithmetic very easy through 'algorithmus'. In fact, the legendary Barmakids (derived from *barmak-pramukh*), the viziers of Abbasids, were instrumental in importing knowledge from Persia and India.

Initially, many texts in Baghdad came from Persia where the same practice of collecting world knowledge was followed. But, even in Persia, knowledge of astronomy (translated as *Zij-i-Shahryar*) was imported from India.

Prof Raju also exposes the myth of Euclid as the writer of Geometry 'Elements'. He points out that nothing is known about Euclid. Interestingly, he also points out that the word Euclid is derived from Arabic *iklid* or *klid* which means 'key'

(here, 'key to geometry'). It could be because in Toledo, translations were done either by those who knew Arabic but not the subject, or those who knew Latin but not the subject and hence such howlers were common.

Raju also throws light on Copernicus who is considered as having revolutionized the knowledge of astronomy. He points out that Copernicus' mathematical model is a carbon copy of an earlier astronomical model by Ibn as-Shatir of Damascus (d.1375). Ibn Shatir used a technique developed by Nasiruddin Tusi (whose advice to Melagu led to the downfall of Baghdad, and who was rewarded with the Maraghah observatory). The Maraghah school raised new questions, and offered novel solutions. Copernicus mimics both the questions and answers. Copernicus's lunar model is identical to Ibn as-Shatir's. The question therefore is not whether, but when, where, and in what form he learned of Maragha theory."

Prof Raju provides answers to these questions though they are too technical for us. But it suffices to say that Copernicus is hailed as the father of modern astronomy. All further developments in the knowledge of universe, of stars, of solar system and so on, depends on Copernicus's revolution.

Prof Raju raises one more important question and says:

"The key questions, however, have never been asked: Could Copernicus have openly acknowledged his Islamic sources? Had he done that wouldn't someone have denounced him as a heretic? Would that have helped his case for theological correctness? So, Copernicus followed the tradition: he used Islamic sources, but refused to acknowledge them."

According to him, the western scholars have manipulated evidence in such a way as to hide this fact that Copernicus imitated the model of Ibn as-Shatir and maintained that it was original work by Copernicus. After quoting the sources that Ibn as-Shatir's manuscript was present in the library of the Church, he observes:

“Note a further subtle way in which the rules of evidence are being juggled. The appropriate standard of evidence for history is balance of probabilities, and there is ample circumstantial evidence that Copernicus’ model was entirely derived. So, the onus of proof is on western historians to supply solid evidence that Copernicus did not see that text! Instead, they shift the onus of proof, and demand further evidence! So the great Copernican revolution is better called the great Copernican Quibble!”

In conclusion, I would like to say that though what has been discussed here is historical truth, Muslims should not only celebrate this but use it as an occasion for serious reflection. Though the West borrowed much from the Muslim world, then why Muslim world is in such a pathetic condition today? For them, Islam is nothing more than a set of rituals and only an instrument for *najat* (emancipation) for the other world, and not for achievements in this world.

Today, Muslims are far behind the western countries. They depend entirely on the West for scientific knowledge. Christendom was passing through the Dark Ages when Islamic world was at its height of glory and achievements in the fields of science, mathematics and astronomy. Now it is just the reverse. Now the West (or Christendom) is at its height and the Muslim world

is passing through a Dark Age. The Muslim world now at best excels in religious knowledge (*'ulum al-Din*).

Ilm (knowledge) must be taken in its most comprehensive sense as this word has been used in the *Qur'an*. It should not be confined only to religious knowledge. The ulema should not mean only those who specialize in *diniyat* but all those who have expertise in modern secular sciences. The ulema who have no knowledge of modern sciences have no right to lead us. Only those who have knowledge of modern world along with that of Islam have right to show us the way. Otherwise, the ulema would be nothing more than what Iqbal called them: *do rak'at ka imam* (leader of prayer).

Chapter – 14

Opening Chapter of the Qur'an and its Ecological Interpretation

DIVINE SCRIPTURES are capable of a variety of interpretations, specially those verses which are not specific commandments of do's and don'ts. The first chapter of the *Qur'an* has seven verses in the form of prayer by human beings to Allah. Allah Himself has revealed this prayer to His Prophet (PBUH) so that Muslims could pray to Him. This opening chapter is of utmost significance in the *Qur'an* and Muslims repeat it in every *raka'* (unit of prayer). This prayer is rich in symbolic language and has been interpreted in various ways by different commentators.

Here I am attempting it yet in a different way to save the world from ecological disaster, which our world is headed to, if no attempts are made to check global warming. It is the beauty of the revealed scripture that when interpreted to tackle contemporary challenges, it does not, in any manner, lose its original meaning and significance.

Maulana Azad in the early 20s of the last century inter-

preted this chapter in his multi-volume commentary of the *Qur'an* to prove unity of whole humanity by emphasizing the importance of the words *rabb al-'alamin* (that is, nourisher of the whole universe). Maulana's contribution is indeed very important and will remain of great significance for a long time to come. His learned interpretation is very different from any earlier interpretations. It shows that succeeding generations has every right to understand the *Qur'an* in different ways to seek Divine guidance to solve their problems. This chapter, being in the form of prayer, provides greater inspiration.

Now, let us put it in the context of threats to our ecology.

According to *The Hindu* (28 May 2009), which quotes from the *Guardian*:

“Senior doctors in the UK recently published a report warning that climate change is the biggest threat to global health of the 21st Century. Rising global temperatures would have a catastrophic effect on human health, the doctors said, and patterns of infection would change, with insect-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever spreading more easily.”

This is just on health side. Other effects like shortage of water, an essential commodity for life, would be equally disastrous. There is complete unanimity among the scientists that glaciers even on the North Pole are melting. It will have disastrous effects in more than one ways. It would result in rise of sea levels, thereby submerging many coastal cities. Sea levels along some coastal towns have already risen, causing worries to its people.

Faced with such disaster to human survival, we have to

seek inspiration and succour from Allah's own words, for He is the Creator of this universe. The opening chapter of the *Qur'an* begins with the invocation which Muslims use before beginning of any work, that is, "In the name of Allah Who is the Beneficent, the Merciful." 'Beneficent' and 'Merciful' are translations of *Al-Rahman* and *Al-Rahim*. *Rahm* in Arabic signifies tenderness requiring the exercise of beneficence¹. Thus *rahm* comprises ideas of love and mercy. *Al-Rahman* is an intensive form and thus indicates greatest preponderance of the quality of mercy.

Thus Allah is the greatest benefactor and merciful. The Prophet is reported to have said, '*Al-Rahman* is the Beneficent God Whose love and mercy are manifested in the creation of this world, and *Al-Rahim* is the Merciful God Whose love and mercy are manifested in the state that comes after.'²

Now the first chapter says in the beginning, "Praise be to Allah the Lords of the worlds, that is, *Rabb al-'Alamin*". Here both the words *Rabb* and *'Alamin* have to be emphasized. *Rabb*³ in Arabic means not only fostering, but completing and accomplishing. Thus *Rabb* conveys the idea of evolution of things from the crudest state to that of highest perfection.

And if we praise to that Lord of all the worlds who is *Rabbi*, that is, Who evolves things from crudest state to its highest perfection, the praiser's duty is to be of assistance in achieving this stage of perfection. What are we praising the Lord of the

¹ See Imam Raghīb's *al-Mufrīdat*.

² *Bahr al-Muhit*, Commentary by Imam Athir al-Din al-Undalusi.

³ According to Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane.

worlds for? It is for His function as *Rabb* that we cannot act to the contrary. Our acts should also reflect the function of evolution towards perfection, not its destruction.

He is not only *Rabb al-'Alamin* but also *Al-Rahman* and *Al-Rahim*, that is, one Who is Beneficent and Merciful. It signifies His tenderness of love and mercy towards His creation to take it through various stages of perfection to ultimate perfection. And this not only for our world wherein we humans exist, but also all biological forms of existence, mountains, water streams, oceans, all forms of primitive life, animals and trees. All of us who praise Allah have to dedicate ourselves as agents of beneficence, mercy and perfection.

And, Allah, as this opening chapter says, is *Rabb*, not only of our world, our earth but of everything in this universe, of planets, stars, moons and black holes. He is the *Rabb* of whatever exists in this universe, visible or invisible to us or even of various planets to be discovered and which have not yet been discovered.

Adam's story in the *Qur'an* is also very significant in this respect. According to the *Qur'an*, Adam lived in paradise along with Eve and was provided with everything but was prohibited from eating the fruit of a particular tree. Adam would not have lost paradise, if he had not defied his Lord and ate the forbidden fruit. However, Adam was tempted to eat the fruit and was expelled from paradise.

What was that paradise? A perfect balance of needs and supplies. By eating the fruit, Adam (representing human race) destroyed that balance through his greed to defy the Lord and

violate the ban, which was imposed only for human benefit. It is very close to what human beings are doing with the earth they live on. They are trying to eat that forbidden fruit, that is, violating the balance of nature.

Allah is highly Beneficent and takes care of all the needs of the human beings He has created. Humans were living in the paradise. Paradise, here, is not a fixed place in the heavens but right here on earth. Maulana Muhammad Ali, a translator of the *Qur'an*, says:

“...paradise, according to the *Holy Qur'an*, is not a place for simple enjoyment or rest; it is essentially a place of advancement to higher and higher stages: But those who keep their duty to their Lord, shall have high places, above them higher places, built (for them).” (39:20)

He further says:

“This shows that not only does paradise admit the righteous to high places, but it is, in fact, the starting point for a new advancement, there being higher and higher places still, and it is in accordance with this that they are spoken of as having an increasing desire for attaining to higher and higher excellences, their prayer in paradise being: ‘Our Lord, make perfect for us our light.’” (66:8)

Thus if we have this understanding of paradise (quite in keeping with the verses of the *Qur'an*) on earth too, we can create paradise by being obedient to the laws of our Lord, the laws He has made for us. Had we observed these laws, we would find no change in these laws of the Lord. “(Such has been) the course

of Allah that has run before, and thou will not find a change in Allah's course."

Thus Allah has a fixed course for His creation. Anyone who defies this course pays for it. Today, we are disobeying our Lord and His fixed course and destroying the ecology of our earth, which was meant to be our paradise. We have eaten the forbidden fruit by overusing resources of earth, polluting it and destroying its ecological balance.

It is by these actions that we have been expelled from the paradise and now we are converting it into hell. In the fourth and fifth verses of opening chapter, we say, "Thee do we serve and Thee we do beseech for help." We say this five-times everyday in our prayers, but are we observing it in practice or saying so merely ritually? Obviously, we say so only ritually. While we say so in our prayers, we continue to violate course fixed by Him, we violate laws of nature on every step.

If we serve Him by saying so again and again, should we pollute His earth, should we overdraw from its resources? Can we still beseech Him for help? Certainly not. Are we not sinning against Him and still seeking His help? If we are serving Him, we must obey all His laws, the course fixed by Him, and then only we can beseech Him for His help.

Allah, in this opening chapter *Sura-i-Fatihah*, is described as the Master of the Day of Requit, that is, *yawm al-Din*. Din, according to Imam Raghīb, means recompense, requital. And *yawm* (day) in the Qur'anic terminology means any period of time from a moment (55:29) to 50,000 years (70:4), that is,

from an indefinitely small time to an indefinitely large one. So if we violate Lord's laws for a small amount of time to a large amount of time, we will be recompensed accordingly on the Day of Judgment.

We have been violating these laws to fulfil our greed and disturb the ecological balance. It is true that Allah is *Ghafur al-Rahim* (Forgiver and Merciful), but we can be forgiven only when we repent sincerely and never repeat our mistakes. Even today, the earth produces in abundance for our survival. If we give up our greed and check our consumption and reduce pollution of earth to the minimum, rising temperature will come down and our earth will become paradise again.

As we pray to Allah, as taught to us through this *Sura-i-Fatihah*, we say to Allah, "Guide us on the right path. The path of those upon whom Thou has bestowed favours, Not those upon whom wrath has brought down, not those who go astray." Allah is our Lord, our Sustainer and if we seek our sustenance from Him, we have to follow the right path shown by Him and pray to him to show us the right path.

Right path is the path devoid of greed and over-consumption. By forbidding Adam to eat the fruit of a tree in the paradise, Allah showed us this right path, and as long we follow this path, our paradise will remain intact and Allah's bounties will continue to be enjoyed by humankind. But we should not do anything to earn His wrath and follow the path of greed and over-consumption that will lead us astray.

This path of Allah's bounties had been available to the

whole of humankind as long as we followed *sirat al-mustaquim* of modest consumption of earth's resources, keeping earth pure *tayyib*, as long as we did not over pollute it. Can we now say we are following the right path, *sirat al-mustaquim*? We have to reflect on this serious question. We have violated this law and gone astray in a number of ways.

The poor of the earth, whom Allah calls *mustad'ufin* (weaker sections) and favours them, have been deprived of their just consumption by those whom Allah calls *mustakbirun* (the powerful, the rich), who have been unjust and monopolized over-consumption and have over-polluted the earth. As we know, the developed and rich nations are consuming more than 70 per cent of earth's resources and polluting it in that proportion.

How correct is the *Qur'an's* pronouncement when it says:

“And when We wish to destroy a town, We send commandments to its people who lead easy lives, but they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter destruction.” (17:16) What Allah says in this verse is that those habituated to easy life (that is, the rich) do not hear the words of wisdom and continue to violate it in sheer arrogance (what the *Qur'an* calls *istikbar*) and then Allah destroys them.

The rich of the earth, forgetful of final consequences of their lifestyle, continue to ignore all the warnings and ultimately face the doom. Are the rich nations of the West, particularly the US, not ignoring all the warning of rising temperature of earth and pushing us all closer to the disaster? They insist the poorer and developing countries to reduce their consumption. The G-8 nations which are all developed nations in their recent

conference in Italy once again did not agree to reduction of their consumption of earth resources.

The *Qur'an* repeats this warning when it says:

“Nay their hearts are in ignorance about it, and they have besides this other deeds which they do. Until, when We seize those who lead easy lives among them with chastisement, lo! They cry for succour.” (23:63-64)

Do we not find precisely same behaviour on the part of rich nations of the West? Are they not refusing to mend their ways and reduce their consumption of earth resources? Will they not push our earth to the brink of disaster by ignoring the warning?

Technological progress is always welcome, but it can be boon or curse depending how it is used by the rich and the powerful. The weaker sections and poor nations are, after all, totally helpless and their voice is never heard. But warning has to be repeated as the *Qur'an* says to the Prophet to warn as he has been sent as warner (*nazir*). If people listen to him, they will be rescued, if not, they will face doom.

Technological progress has enabled human beings to consume more and more and also to pollute the earth more. But this ability has to be used with wisdom. It is reason which enables us to discover new horizons and know more about our universe; and again it is reason which enables us to discover more and more natural resources below and above ground and use them.

But reason is, let us be clear, a double-edged sword, a mere tool, which could be used or misused. It is because of reason that

we have progressed tremendously from primitive to advanced human beings, from caves to skyscrapers. But then it is this reason which has given us tools to destroy our planet through over-consumption and over-pollution, leading us to disaster.

What is needed is what the *Qur'an* calls *hikmah* (wisdom). What is wisdom? Wisdom is reason plus values and experience. Without combining with values reason can play very dangerous role as it did in Europe through development of weapons of destruction, finally resulting in making all-destructive nuclear weapons. A good example would be bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that killed more than 200,000 people.

But if reason is used with values like justice, benevolence and compassion, it can prove to be a great boon and that is what the *Qur'an* advocates. According to the *Qur'an*, there are five key values: *haq* 'adl, *ihsan*, *rahmah* and *hikmah*, that is, truth, justice, benevolence, compassion and wisdom. These are Allah's names also. Allah's names are Haq, 'Adil, Muhsin, Rahman and Hakim, that is, Allah is Truth, Just, Benevolent, Compassionate and Wise. These values are extremely important for balanced progress of human beings.

The *Qur'an* gives great deal of importance to *hikmah* (wisdom) and *hikmah* is most fundamental value in human progress. The *Qur'an* goes on to say, "And whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good." (2:269) Unfortunately, human beings use reason for selfish ends and push themselves to the brink of destruction. But those who use wisdom behave according to the values of justice, benevolence and compassion

and become saviour of humanity.

Thus the path of wisdom is indeed path of bounties and divine blessings. We pray to Allah to guide us to that path on which He has showered His bounties. It is the path of wisdom. So if our prayer has to have any meaning we have to follow this path of wisdom and save our earth, created by *Rabb al-'Alamin*, and He has perfected it gradually until all forms of life appeared on it.

It took millions of years for perfect conditions for human life to appear but now because of our irresponsible behaviour we are destroying it. If we do not restrain our overdrive for consumption, human life may become extinct due to destruction of ecological balance. And this is not exaggerated statement in any way. This is already being predicted by the scientists. But *nutrifun* (those addicted to easy life) refuse to take heed.

As we say, we go to hell because of our sins. But what is hell? It is not something located on high heavens. It is around us, consequence of our own sins of over-consumption and destruction of our earth's ecological balance. The *Qur'an* describes Muslims as *ummatan wasantan* (community of middle path), and as believers in divine revelation contained in the *Qur'an* it is their duty to lead the world in reducing consumption of oil that results in emission of carbon and cause global warming.

The oil wealth is also hidden below deserts in Muslim countries of West Asia and they can certainly ration oil production in such a manner to reduce carbon consumption. It is they who pray five times everyday to Allah to guide them to the right path,

and thus it is for them to act in a responsible manner to compel the western nations to reduce their carbon consumption.

This will surely save our earth from impending disaster. True that it is extremely difficult and complex problem. There is every danger that western countries led by the US may invade the countries with oil resources as they did in Iraq. But then they can convene conference of all developing countries and seek their cooperation. Of course, it is easier said than done, but one has to find solution to what all of us know is sure disaster.

Surely, those who possess rich oil resources can play some responsible and creative role in the matter. We possess the *Qur'an* and the *Qur'an* shows us path of wisdom. Are Muslims going to use this wisdom specially as they also possess the oil wealth? So far the indications are not very encouraging. The Muslim nations hardly have courage to confront the US as they depend so much on it for technology and for weapons of destruction.

If we keep on praying five times everyday and this prayer does not reflect in any meaningful way in our conduct, our social responsibilities, what is the use of such mechanical prayers? The quality of our faith (*iman*) depends in our action which promotes good of the whole of humanity. After all, believers have been charged with the responsibility of what the *Qur'an* says *amr b'il ma'ruf*, that is, enforcing what is good and *nahi 'an'il munkar*, that is, fighting against evil. Is not global warming an evil, and if it is should we not struggle against it?

Chapter – 15

Islam and Contemporary Issues

ONCE I was invited to speak in a Prophet Day function. There were other speakers as well. As usual, the speakers before me indulged in rhetoric like ‘Islam is the solution’ and said the world economy has failed and slowed down as it is based on gambling and interest. Another person said Islam declared human rights 1400 years ago, whereas the UNO declared it only 60 years ago. Yet another speaker said Islam has given equal rights to women and made it obligatory for them to seek education. Also it was emphasized that Islam is a religion of peace.

All this provoked me to say, ‘All this is true and I can add much more to it, but have we ever seriously reflected why Islamic world is in such turmoil today? Why Muslims have totally failed to adopt these teachings in practice?’ I said if one casts a critical glance at Islamic world today, one finds exactly opposite of what the *Qur’an* teaches. If the *Qur’an* lays great emphasis on knowledge, Islamic world from Indonesia to Algeria has more

illiterates than any other community. If the *Qur'an* gives equal status to men and women, then why are the Muslim women in most of the Islamic countries the most suppressed lot? And why does the whole world think Islam deprives women of their rights? If Islam is a religion of peace, why Islamic world is in such a turmoil and is dogged with 'jihadi' movements? If Islam upholds human dignity and human rights, why is it that there is hardly any Islamic country which respects human rights? Why do we find human rights activists in jails in these countries?

I also said that we try to compensate for our failure in all these respects through rhetoric. Only those resort to empty rhetoric who have nothing concrete to show. Our ulema have brought us up on such empty rhetoric. Time and again, we hear 'Islam is the solution of all problems'. Let alone solution, these worthy beings are not even aware of what are the problems of the modern world.

Unless we go beyond such rhetoric and critically examine what is wrong with Muslim world, we will continue doing so without improving our condition. And if criticized for our failures, we will come out with our pet conspiracy theory or will blame the media for projecting adverse image of Islam and Muslims. We have fallen in love with these theories in such a way that we refuse to see the reality which is staring us in the face. We love rhetoric and hate reality.

We are adept at sectarian polemics and spend all our skills in proving followers of other sects as kafirs and only people of our own sect as *naji* (that is, who will achieve liberation). We

keep on reproducing medieval commentaries of the *Qur'an* without ever trying to understand the divine text in our own times. We consider it a sin to revisit the *Qur'an* and realize its great potential for our guidance in modern context. We quote more from medieval commentaries on the *Qur'an* than from the divine text itself.

Also, we are a most intolerant lot and suppress any new point of view. Our ulema have convinced us that any new thinking is a sin and amounts to innovation (*bid'ah*). And for our theologians, the only solution of all problems is to be regular with our prayers. They convince us that we are doomed today, not because of our ignorance or our refusal to understand modern world, but because we have neglected the five-time prayers.

This is the quality of our thinking about our problems. Not that one should not pray, but to hide behind it and neglect real problems is to fool ourselves. And when we talk of *amal* (actions or deeds), we refer only to prayers and some other ritualistic actions. We have totally forgotten the real meaning and significance of prayer. We are more than happy with symbolism as any concrete action requires totally different mind set.

It is unfortunate that our ulema are educated in a totally medieval atmosphere. We are even resisting any change in the madrasa syllabus which was evolved centuries ago. Our ulema are totally differently oriented and are incapable of understanding either the complexities of modern world or its highly complex modern problems. I have always maintained that our commitments should be to the *Qur'an*, not to its understanding by the

ulema and jurists in the past.

But unfortunately, we are more committed to how Tabari or Zamakhshari or Imam Razi understood it than to the *Qur'an* itself. In all our religious arguments, we quote from these and other medieval commentaries and reject any other argument based on the *Qur'an* or on fresh understanding of the *Qur'an*. And if we cannot make a point with the help of the *Qur'an*, our last resort is the *hadith*, however controversial or contradictory to the *Qur'an* it may be.

If any revolution in the Muslim world has to begin, it has to begin from our madrassa system. It has to be thoroughly overhauled so as to give training in modern subjects besides theological training. And modern subjects should not mean only social sciences, but also natural sciences. *Tafsir* literature (commentaries) should be taught only as history and they should be encouraged to develop new understanding of the *Qur'an*.

The whole theological training today is not only confined to medieval subjects but even *ma'qulat*¹. What an irony! The world of sciences has gone far beyond Greek period and our madrassas still consider it as the last word. All this either may be taught as history (so that they may understand evolution of modern sciences) or must be scrapped altogether.

I think our madrassas of higher levels like Darul Uloom Deoband should be converted into modern universities so that

¹ Rational sciences are confined to Greek sciences based on Plato, Socrates, etc.

the modern syllabus taught in other universities could be taught there while, of course, retaining theological courses. In these, some theologians should also be able to do their doctorate in either social or natural sciences. One may argue then why not join other secular universities for doing doctorate and why have these madrassas?

Yes, it is true that other secular universities are available for the purpose, but if these doctoral courses are integrated with theological sciences, it will create new intellectual capacities in our theologians and their medieval thinking will be reoriented. It will result in totally different intellectual products. And it will not be something new. We have very rich heritage in this respect which was lost completely when decline began and final blow was dealt by colonial rule.

All great philosophers and scientists that Islamic world produced like Ibn Sina (Avisina) or Ibn Rushd (Averros) and several others were also theologians in their own right. It was because of this tradition that then educational authorities began to teach *ma'qulat* (rational sciences) in the madrassas. However, this tradition unfortunately stagnated and Greek sciences are taught even today.

All we have to do is to integrate new social as well as natural sciences with the theological courses. Today, the madrassa graduates can either become teachers in madrassas or become imams in the mosque. And then they continue to teach in the same old ways they have learnt or continue to lead prayers including *tarawih* prayers. I have seen in many Islamic institutions

thousands of children committing the *Qur'an* to memory several hours of the day. It hardly serves any purpose. That time could have been utilized for imparting useful knowledge.

I am aware of the development, especially in Kerala and also in other parts of India, where some madrassas have switched over to teaching of modern sciences also. But they are few and far between. Moreover, we have to take the entire Muslim world to produce any worthwhile impact. In the *Qur'an*, the word *'ilm* (knowledge) is not restricted only to theological knowledge but knowledge about the whole universe.

Unfortunately, our ulema have restricted this knowledge to *Dini 'ulum* (theological sciences) only. Now, of course, attitudes are changing gradually, but until recent past, everything except *Dini 'ulum* was even considered false. One will still find resistance to change and insistence on continuity. There is hardly any rich intellectual debate as to what is worth continuing and what needs to be changed.

There is nothing wrong to emphasize healthy traditions based on principles and values, but tradition per se should not have any sanctity. Unfortunately, we always accord centrality to tradition. Rationality is, at best, of marginal value. In modern society, reason plays a central role while in traditional society it is tradition, which is accorded centrality. Change is possible only if reason acquires centrality.

Our madrassas and institutions of Islamic education are, as Herbert Marcuse, a noted American philosopher of the last century would have put it, centres of acknowledgement rather than

centres of knowledge. Or, they are centres of recognition rather than centres of cognition? In such centres, no new knowledge can be produced, only acknowledged traditions can continue. These centres cannot become centres of intellectual excellence but centres of traditional knowledge.

Such centres cannot bring about any qualitative change in the Muslim world. We urgently need new intellectual culture for this. And to create this new intellectual culture, we need thorough political changes as well. For new intellectual culture, we need freedom of thought and action. It is true the *Qur'an* stands for freedom of faith and conscience but with some exceptions there are no basic freedoms in any Islamic country.

In most of the Islamic countries, political class, while swearing by the *Qur'an* and Shari'ah, has never allowed fundamental Qur'anic values to be practised. Like five pillars of Islam, there are five Qur'anic values, that is, truth (*haq*), justice (*'adl*), benevolence (*ihsan*), compassion (*rahmah*) and wisdom (*hikmah*), and these are Allah's names as well. Allah is *Haq*, *'Adil*, *Muhsin*, *Rahman* and Wise.

If like the five pillars of Islam, these values are practised, the Islamic world would be leading the other countries of the world in ethical and moral values and also achieve, by rigorous practice of these values, what others have not. But the political class, while talking of Islam and Islamization, adopts, very shrewdly, a selective approach so that it enjoys all its privileges and political power and at the same time earns merit of Islamizing the society.

It is obvious that it is political class which controls education system and decides what is to be taught and what is not to be. The system imparts selective information, never holistic knowledge. Such a system can never produce creative and free mind to critically evaluate and bring about qualitative change in the society.

Thus a political revolution is needed before any revolutionary changes in the education system can be brought in Islamic world. But the chances of such a revolution seem very bleak. The western powers also need a compliant political class in most of the Muslim countries. In fact, these powers need such a compliant class that they do everything to support such a class in the Muslim world.

The oil revolution of the 70s of the last century coupled with globalization has converted the entire Middle East into a vast lucrative market for Japanese and western goods (though a current meltdown has somewhat adverse effect) and promoted unabashed consumerism in the Arab world. People are engaged more in competing for consumer goods than any moral and qualitative change in society.

Such a society finds traditional and ritualized religion quite harmless and political class finds it quite convenient to promote such a religion. Thus total lack of freedom, decline in values, and promotion of competitive consumer culture makes society quietly accept domination by political authoritarianism on one hand, and religion reduced to an opium pill, on the other.

Though this appears to be a very bleak scenario, those in-

tellectuals who believe in ushering in qualitative change in the society based on freedom, human dignity, equality and the five Qur'anic values, will have to pave way for this change peacefully and with total dedication. Then question arises what is to be done in these circumstances?

We have to have an action programme. Though it is difficult to evolve such a programme without thorough discussion, an outline for a discussion could be presented here. I would like to propose the following measures for those interested in value-based qualitative change in Muslim societies and countries:

- Modern intellectuals must learn and master Arabic language (for non-Arab countries and societies) and read and re-read the *Qur'an* along with traditional commentaries and reflect in new understanding in keeping with our situation and our problems. The old commentaries, it would be seen, were much influenced by the prevailing conditions and socio-economic problems of those periods. It is not necessary that there would be a complete agreement among all modern commentators. In the Middle Ages too, there was no such consensus. It would be more in keeping with intellectual freedom to arrive at different meanings though there may be a consensus about the methodology of understanding the *Qur'an*. Of course, these new commentators should be well versed in modern social or natural sciences.
- All such commentaries should be within the framework of the five values of the *Qur'an* mentioned above as these

happen to be most modern values too. Also, those *ahadith* (traditions) would not be taken into account which are in direct contradiction of the *Qur'an*. The Qur'anic values as traditional *tafasir* (commentaries) are full of references to such traditions, even if these traditions distorted the Qur'anic values.

- There is great need to improve the situation of women's rights in Islamic world and for that, we also need women perspectives for understanding the *Qur'an*, especially those verses which pertain to marriage, divorce and women's rights. So far, the *Qur'an* has been mainly interpreted by men. Though during the Prophet's time, and subsequent period lasting for a few years only, there was glorious tradition of women ulema, women narrators of *ahadith* and women commentators of the *Qur'an*. There is great need to revive that tradition, not in mechanical sense but with new perspectives gained during last 100 years or so.
- Along with women *'alimat* (scholars), there is need to go beyond patriarchal values and patriarchal culture. The *Qur'an*, while making few concessions to patriarchy in those days, tried to go beyond patriarchal values and usher in new culture based on human dignity, according full human dignity to women. However, very soon, women were subordinated all over again as men were hardly prepared to accept gender equality, and slowly even made the Qur'anic interpretation as their sole preserve. In those overwhelming patriarchal values, women hardly could assert themselves and also began

to interiorize the Qur'anic understanding as developed by men commentators.

- This is possible only if we promote the Qur'anic concept of women as free agents and decision makers in their own rights. This would also need special emphasis on female education. Though the Prophet (PBUH) made education obligatory on Muslim women (*muslimatin*), in ensuing feudal culture, women were required to mind domestic role and serve their husbands and bring up children. No need was felt for education for carrying this domestic role. This feudal culture has to totally change and women should acquire both secular and religious knowledge as much as men do reviving the true spirit of Islam.
- There is great need to usher in a culture of human rights in the Islamic world and Muslim societies. Though the *Qur'an* contains all provisions of declaration of human rights charter by the UNO, Islamic countries present a stark contrast and human rights record of Muslim countries is among the worst in the world today. It brings worldwide criticism and creates an impression that Islam has no respect for human rights. It is only modern intellectuals armed with the Qur'anic values and the Qur'anic respect for human dignity who can actively promote such culture.
- Also, we have to change our outlook towards other religions. We often denounce them as false and claim superiority for ourselves. We should not only accept pluralism but actively promote it through dialogue and mutual understanding

and harmonious coexistence. Though Islamic world does not have bad record in this respect, religious minorities do not enjoy equal political rights. We have to accept notion of citizenship which did not exist in the medieval world and hence we have different juristic pronouncements in this respect.

- Also, we should actively promote science and technology as we are too dependent on western countries for modern technology. Our record in this respect is the poorest in the world. In modern times, we cannot boast of a single revolutionary invention. Most of the Muslim countries are nothing but bazaar and are not capable of even producing a single modern gadget. Without excellence in science and modern technology, Islamic world will remain mere beggars. Most of the oil revenues are deposited in the US banks and not even one per cent is spent on research in these fields. A minimum 2.5–3 per cent of GNP should be spent on research in these fields. Institutions of excellence should be set up.
- Also, Islamic world today is torn with violence and some countries are notorious for what has come to be known as 'Jihadi culture'. We must go back to the real Qur'anic meaning of jihad as defined by the Prophet (PBUH) in which people are seen to be active promoters of peace and culture of dialogue in the world. We must understand the root causes of violence in Islamic world and do everything possible to remove these causes. If peace is central to Islam, what are Muslims doing to promote it? Why Islam is being

associated with 'jihadi culture', instead of culture of peace? We must seriously debate this question and take active steps to fight this 'jihadi culture'.

These are some of the suggestions to at least pave the way for new qualitative changes in the Islamic world. It would be the most challenging task for anyone to undertake. But there is no other way. These steps, if taken, will not only bring us out of the rut we have fallen in, it would release tremendous energy in the Islamic world for construction of the new world order. Today, we are mere prisoners of our own age-old traditions and are unable to contribute richly, which otherwise we could.

Chapter – 16

Religion or Secularism?

IN SEMINARS abroad, especially in the US and Europe, when I say, ‘In India, secularism is equal respect for all religions and harmonious coexistence of all religions,’ many express pleasant surprise. For them, secularism has always meant being either a-religious or anti-religious. Secularism in Indian and western contexts have very different connotations. And there are historical reasons for this.

In the West, secularism emerged as a result of a struggle against the domination of the Church. The emerging bourgeois class found in church authority a great obstacle for its unchecked growth. Capitalism cannot thrive under authoritarian set-up. It needs greater freedom to flourish. And in Europe, before the renaissance and emergence of bourgeoisie as an influential class, Church’s authority was supreme and unchallenged.

However, its authority came under challenge and there was a period of great struggle and persecution at the hands of the

Church. And hence, religion and religious authority came to be resented. People gradually became either indifferent or turned against religion, and for them, 'this' worldly affair became central, and the 'other' worldly affair lost its significance.

There are differences among scholars as to when the term 'secularism' emerged and who coined it. Some maintain that it was coined in England by George Holyoake in the 19th Century. But soon it became an ideology of the dominant capitalist class and part of the western political theory. And in the western countries, democracy and secularism became integral to each other. Not that religion ceased to have any significance in western life, but it was marginalized in politics.

However, Indian social and political reality was radically different. We Indians never had any 'church-like structure' to be challenged, and never had a mono-religious society. It was multi-religious right from its known history and it became even more multi-religious after the advent of Christianity and Islam. And all religions coexisted harmoniously.

When our struggle for freedom against British colonialism began in the 19th Century, we realized that unity of all religions is extremely important to challenge the colonial power effectively. And hence, for leaders of freedom struggle, it was a political necessity that followers of all religions, especially those of Hinduism and Islam, apart from others like Sikhism, Christianity and Zoroastrian, be united. Thus, to evolve an effective strategy for unity, respect for all religions became necessary.

So, our concept of secularism emerged not as struggle

against the Church, but as a result of our struggle against the colonial power. Our struggle against colonial power, far from resulting in opposition or indifference to religion, became an all-inclusive approach to all religions. Also, compared to Europe, we were far more backward industrially and technologically, and hence our people were far more religious and traditional in their approach, and religion was central to people's life.

In the West, civil society became more and more a-religious due to breathtaking progress of science and technology. That is why people of faith had to struggle against those opposing religion. Even in post-modern and post-industrial society of the West, there has been no effective reconciliation between religion and secularism. The debate between those who believe in secularism and those who have faith in religion still continues.

In India too, there are some, though very few, who too not only reject religion but also hold it responsible for many of our problems like communalism and communal violence. They think, 'if only we get rid of religion, communalism will disappear'. It is far from true. In poor countries, the well-educated middle class, who are otherwise least religious, have been far more communal than illiterate masses who tend to be under the influence of traditional religion.

Thus the question arises: to be religious or not to be religious? Should secularism mean being anti-religions or indifferent to religion or accepting certain core truth of religion? Of course, such debate can never be decisive and different viewpoints will remain. It seems while the West has problems of total lack of

religion, we in Afro-Asian countries are suffering from excess of religiosity. As they say, the poor die of lack of food (hunger) and rich of excess of it (indigestion).

In the West, total indifference to religion has created a vacuum and some are now arguing in favour of religion. Recently, I came across an interesting book *Postsecularism—The Hidden Challenge to Extremism* by Mike King*. This interesting book throws light on the debate raging in the West between secularists and those who have faith in religion. I would throw some light on the contents of this book. It is of some relevance to modern India as well despite our substantially different orientation.

The title of the book itself is quite interesting. The West has gone through the phase of secularism, and like post-modernism, some scholars like Mike King feel the need for post-secular social epoch. In this epoch, religion will not be treated as outcast or pariah. Thus it appears that in the West, total vacuum in matters of faith is causing problem. It appears that faith and rationalism both are needed to keep life on even keel.

Mike King talks of 'post-secular sensibility' and poses a question, "Does such a sensibility offer a way out from what was a detente but is now rapidly becoming a more polarized impasse; a way out from a futile struggle for dominance between religion and secularism?" The whole book is a powerful argument for such a sensibility.

And what is post-secularism? The author defines it tenta-

* Mike King, *Postsecularism – The Hidden Challenge to Extremism*, James Clark & Co. (Cambridge, 2009)

tively at the outset of the book. "Postsecularism," the author says, "can be defined as a renewed openness to questions of the spirit, but one that retains the habits of critical thought which partially define secularism". King, however, also adds, "Questions of the spirit is just one way to put it; one may prefer 'a renewed engagement with religion' or 'questions of faith' or any of a number of such formulations."

It is important to note here that secularists who reject matters of faith are no less dogmatic than those who profess faith in religion. Therefore, King makes it a point to use the words 'openness of mind' in such an engagement. Dogmatism is generally associated with religion. However, dogmatism is not a religious but psychological category. An atheist or a political ideologue or a theorist of social sciences could also be equally dogmatic.

Openness of mind and critical stance are sterling qualities of mind and it should also be acknowledged that these qualities were displayed by secularists in their struggle against domination of church. Unfortunately, those who believed, for reasons of maintaining their superiority over the others, became too dogmatic to admit any criticism and persecuted those who rejected their dogmas.

Any religion which becomes part of the ruling establishment or any political ideology that becomes the basis of political authority, tends to become dogmatic as any change in it threatens its authority and is tantamount to loss of power. Hence, they dogmatically assert their ideology or religion, and also persecute the critics.

It is well known in Islamic history that Abbasids, who adopted Mu'tazila theory of 'createdness' of the *Qur'an*, severely persecuted those theologians who refused to accept this theory and instead asserted that the *Qur'an* is co-eternal with Allah. Lot of blood was shed on this question and it became a means of asserting authority of Mu'tazila theology. Thus, dogmatism is not an innate religious quality, but human psychological trait. It flourishes for political authoritarian too.

Here it will be important to ask one question: What does religion essentially stand for? Here I am using the word 'religion' in a definite sense, not with its cultural and traditional moorings but in a sense that can be called *Deen* in Islamic terms. Thus, in this sense, we have to understand what is religion. In all major religious traditions, one of the most significant names of God is 'Truth'. In Islamic tradition, Allah's name is *Haq* or in Hindu tradition *Satya* and so on.

If God or Allah is 'Truth', then one of the most important functions of religion has to be search for and promote truth. Any search for truth in all earnestness is essentially a religious activity. In this sense, a religious person (say a mystic or a theologian in some sense) or scientist, both are engaged in search for truth. Thus a scientist engaged in search for truth is also essentially performing a religious duty.

Now the question may arise, what is truth? Can one equate a scientific truth with religious truth? Can we call Einstein (who engages in knowing the truth about our universe, its origin and growth and its fundamental laws) a prophet or a seer who dis-

covers certain spiritual truths? It can be a matter of debate, but one cannot deny certain similarities. Scientific truth has its own methodology and religious truth has its own. What is common between them, however, is truthhood.

Scientific truth is concerned basically with perceptible facts and depends on observations through sense organs. Thus, in science, truth is essentially defined as conformity with facts, observable facts. Religious truth, on the other hand, is what is often beyond observable truth. It is transcendental in nature and does not depend on sense perceptions. It is Prophetic, intuitive and has ethical dimension dealing with the realm of values.

While science deals with these worldly things and devises technological contrivances to add sense perceptions, religious truth resorts to deep contemplation, meditation and even state of ecstasy. While science uses plain language and mathematical notations, religious experience cannot be always communicable through such plain human language and has to resort to symbols and allegories, and sometimes religious experiences cannot be communicated to others at all.

However, one thing is clear. Neither science nor religious experience can be based on falsehood, be it verifiable or non-verifiable. Both science and religion need rigorous discipline to practise. Also, there can be different levels of doing science or religious experiences. Both need natural gift and talent. Neither every scientist can become a scientist like Einstein nor can anyone with religious experience become prophet. The highest levels can be achieved only by a few.

However, scientific truth is universally verifiable as it is based on observable empirical facts through sense organs or through technological contrivances to add sense perceptions. But, it is argued, it is not so in the case of religious experience. It varies from one person to another and hence finds different religious traditions based on these experiences.

These differences in religious experiences, to a keen observer of religious experience, is more apparent than real. What is different is not religious experience but its socio-cultural and linguistic experience as amply demonstrated by mystics in most of the religious traditions. Religious experience can be had only in a given culture and historical conditions and cultures, and historical conditions in which a religious experience occurs differ, and hence they are expressed differently.

The core of religious truth cannot vary. Theologians of religions are conditioned by socio-cultural expression than the core of religious truth, but mystics try to reach this core and hence they do not give much importance to these differences in socio-cultural expressions. Thus Mike King also points out, "...the mystics are assumed here to provide crucial insights into the search for what lies at the core of religion and its fate in the West."

The author also points out:

"These insights will rely to some extent on the assumption of the proposed hierarchy with religion: the specialists of religion are the mystics, the functionaries of religion are the priests, and the scholars of religion are the theologians. A further category is

provided in the philosophers of religion, who may approach the subject on a non-confessional basis, or are professional philosophers with a personal adherence to a major faith tradition. Theologians and philosophers of religion are divided as to the importance they attribute to the mystic: some ignore them altogether.”

In fact, when it comes to religion, it is priests and theologians who dominate, define and practise it, and wield disproportionate influence on the faithful. In this way, they acquire vested interest in their ‘profession’. This leads to their emphasizing differences than commonality between religions, and establishing superiority of their own tradition over that of the other.

This leads to rationalists and secularists attacking religion as a source of conflict and tension in the society. Also, another level of attack is rigidity, dogmatism and lack of freedom of thought as far as religion is concerned as opposed to secularism which promotes openness and freedom of thought. Another level on which attack is mounted by secularists and rationalists is that religion, as opposed to science, promotes superstition.

King also observes:

“Many new atheists draw on science as an argument against religion on the basis that science provides better explanations of our experience, of life and how it got here, and of our place in universe.”

All these attacks on religion by rationalists and atheists have their own validity, but only in a limited sense. Their criticism is valid as far as popular religious practices and role of priesthood is concerned.

However, this criticism is not valid, if we look at religion at

a higher level, not at a popular level. As to rigidity, dogmatism, superstitious practices, etc., do not apply to higher religious practices and what constitutes the core of religion. Masses, as shown by Erich Fromm in his book on *Flight from Freedom*, do not in fact want freedom as genuine freedom also requires responsibility. By accepting someone as our leader or religious guru, we transfer our responsibility to the leader or guru.

To be free to think would also mean to be responsible for our thought and its implications. Except a few with high intellectual calibre, no one is ready to own up such a responsibility. Hence we tend to follow our leader or guru who takes this responsibility on our part. Thus it is human psychological, not religious or moral problem. In fact, a religious person would consider it his moral duty to own up his/her responsibility.

In fact, faith ceases to be faith if there is no genuine freedom. If we consider true religious experience, faith and freedom are integral to each other. Blind faith is not genuine faith. It is mere dogma rigidly held. A person of genuine faith is a free agent, not bound by any rigidly held dogma. In fact, faith is a deeply spiritual experience and no such experience is possible without freedom. One who undergoes such an experience will genuinely hold its responsibility.

Also, the criticism that religion promotes conflict is also quite superficial. Religion per se is not responsible for any conflict. Religion is often used by variety of interests which are more secular than religious in nature. Communal conflict in India is more due to political and economic interests than religious or

theological differences. This is often not understood. Even conflicts in Europe between Christians and Muslims are not religious (as most Christians in Europe and the United States are indifferent to religion anyway). It is the result of security concerns as a tiny minority of Muslims react violently to certain policies pursued by the western powers in West Asia. This will change if western powers change their policies towards Israel and Middle Eastern countries. Anyway, use of violence is being resorted to not by religious personalities but by modern educated youth.

A genuinely religious person will not resort to violence, but to peaceful method of dialogue and debate. Use of violence is itself an irreligious activity. Religion is based on moral and ethical values as its core. All major religious traditions, without any exception, exhort their followers to control desire, anger, greed and feeling of revenge. To forgive is a higher moral quality in all religions.

Dawkins, one of the neo-atheists, attacks religion, as quoted by King, in the following words:

“The metaphorical or pantheist God of the physicists is light years away from the interventionist, miracle-wreaking, thought-reading, sin-punishing, prayer-answering God of the *Bible*, of priests, mullahs and rabbis, and ordinary language. Deliberately to confuse the two is, in my opinion, an act of intellectual high treason...”

It is this kind of criticism against religion which is mounted even by otherwise intellectuals of high calibre like Dawkins. Such concept of God as Dawkin has attacked is undoubtedly there at popular level. But religion is not about such concept of

God. Such concept may be necessary at lower levels of religious practices but certainly not at higher levels of religious experience as we have shown above.

At higher levels of religious experience, God experience is just not describable. Mystics who engage with God at a much deeper spiritual level, simply become silent about nature of God. Sufis often referred to God as *huwa* (that) and there is silence beyond that. But at popular level, God has to be prayer-answering, sin-punishing and virtue-rewarding or even miracle-wreaking, as Dawkin says.

There is nothing to be angry about it. Rather one has to understand reasons for this difference at a deeper, mystical and popular level rather than condemn such a concept of God in harsh language. Different intellectual and spiritual levels would necessitate existence of two different concepts of God. Scriptures also contain statements about God at different level to cater to different intellectual needs. It is for us, like mystics and people of deeper spiritual levels, to distinguish between the two.

I would still insist that there is no clash between scientific and religious truth. Both are complementary to each other. Without scientific truth, religion will become mere bundle of superstitions, and without deeper religious and spiritual truth, science would be limited to only empirical observable data which would certainly limit human freedom or explorations of mysteries of inner human world.

Chapter – 17

Modernity, Discontent and Religion

IN THE 19th Century, modernity was greatly celebrated throughout the world, particularly in the African and Asian countries colonized by the European countries. It was the hallmark of superiority of the West over the East. The West was considered modern and rational in its approach and technologically far more superior, whereas the Asian and African countries were considered superstitious, irrational, ignorant and backward.

Intellectuals, mainly the products of the western colonial education, felt embarrassed of their people's ignorance and backwardness and lack of rationality and science. They tried to reform their societies by spreading modern approach among their people. But, there was a vertical division in these societies between those who refused to modernize and preferred their orthodoxy, and those who considered modernization a must and celebrated modernity.

Almost all the religious communities in the colonized

countries faced this vertical divide, Muslims appeared slow and more resistant to modernization as their societies were deeply embedded in feudal values and religious orthodoxy.

Muslim intellectuals who came under the influence of western education and modernism welcomed modernity. But they had to adopt a cautious approach. They had to rely more on their religious text to keep pace with their societies. But those societies which took to industrialization and modern business and commerce found modernity easily acceptable.

Muslim societies, deeply embedded in feudal values, could not keep pace with the modern industrialized world. Modernity did not appeal to them. This brought them a lot of criticism. The community still faces criticism though we have gone into post-modern era. Very often people blame Islam for this backwardness.

However, modernity did not prove to be an unmixed blessing for the western countries, let alone for the eastern countries of Asia and Africa, thanks to the vested interests that used modernity for their own benefit. Modernity generally came to be associated with the capitalist system. In fact, modernity was a product of industrial system based on capitalism. It was Marx who provided great insights into the functioning of the modern capitalist system and wrote a powerful critique of it.

Capitalism was based on profiteering and it encouraged cut-throat competition. The western countries colonized Asian and African countries in search of raw materials and markets for their product. Their domestic markets were not enough for

modern machines produced on mass scale. They did not have all the raw materials they needed for such a mass-scale production. Thus, the colonies became their rich source of raw materials and provided huge markets for their industrial products.

It was this competition for markets which led to two World Wars resulting in killings of millions of people. These wars gave great impetus to armament industry. So much so that in the post-Second World War era, no American government could defy what came to be known as military-industrial complex. All American policies were fundamentally influenced by this complex. This unholy alliance depended mainly on sale of armaments on huge scale and for this, wars had to be promoted in the Asian and African countries.

This is not to say that modernization itself was responsible for all this. But what is true is that the entire modernization project was hijacked by powerful interests whose only concern was accumulating profits. That is why I maintain that modernity was not an unmixed blessing for humanity. It has its darker side too. Here we are discussing modernity, not as values, but as an instrument to promote certain interests.

Modernity essentially represents important values like rationality, objectivity, respect for human reason and values, and conformity with fact. It was this respect for reason and not authority that led to progress of science and technology through which the West acquired superiority over the Asian and African countries. The modern bourgeoisie in the West challenged the authority of the church and succeeded in establishing superiority

of reason, the hallmark of modernity.

Reason is the highest value in modernity. Modernity relies solely on reason and has no respect for any tradition. The Afro-Asian societies were based mainly on respect for tradition whether they conformed to tradition or not. However, sole reliance on reason without wedding it to values and without making reason and values two sides of a coin, reason can and does become problematic.

Reason is a two-edged sword without values and this is what happened with modernity when powerful vested interests, mainly capitalists, hijacked modernity for their own purposes. Modern weapons and modern technology developed by western countries were used for enslaving the Afro-Asian countries which were reduced to mere sources of raw materials and markets.

Reason could be used for promoting science, technology and deeper understanding of the universe, but also for developing disastrous weapons which caused great destruction. Humanity saw this destruction in the two World Wars. But it was reason again which developed pure science that enabled us to understand infinite vastness of our universe and how it evolved. This changed our extremely limited understanding of our universe. The *Qur'an* says it is the Ulema, who deeply reflect on the creation of Allah and who can really worship Him.

But the problem is that rationalists disregard the importance of faith and values and begin to worship reason. They do not appreciate limits of reason. This attitude developed among rationalists as reason was totally disregarded and devalued in tra-

ditional societies, and those who accepted reason and challenged superstitions or traditional authority were severely persecuted.

Rationalists came to reject faith as blind and irrational. Thus as modernity solely relied on reason and ridiculed faith, traditionalists totally relied on faith in the traditional authority. They rejected reason. Both rationalists and faithful became exclusive categories. There was no meeting point. Thus faithful became blind and derided reason and rationalists dubbed faith as blind.

This mutual exclusivity caused greater problems. Sole reliance on reason can give birth to discontent as sole reliance on faith. We find interesting debate in Islamic history between Imam Ghazzali and Ibn Rushd (known as Averros to the western world). Ghazzali was a rationalist too. He even became an atheist at one stage. However, he soon discovered that reason does not lead to inner peace and meaning and significance of life. He then turned to faith (though it is evident from his writings that he retained elements of reason too) and attacked philosophers like Ibn Rushd. He wrote a book titled *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, Bewilderment of Philosophers.

Ibn Rushd replied to Ghazzali's *Tahafut al-Falasifa* by writing *Tahafat Tahafut al-Falasifa*, Bewilderment of Bewilderment of Philosophers. Thus this lack of mutual understanding led to exclusivistic attitudes. Reason creates more doubts and raises more questions and leads to discontentment. Faith which depends on authority gives inner contentment.

Modernity has thus led to discontentment in two ways: one,

being hijacked by capitalists, it leads to more inner discontentment as capitalism is hell-bent upon selling its products and creating illusion of 'material happiness' while failing to actually provide such happiness (as more consumption leads only to still more consumption); two, rationality lacks faith and for inner peace one needs faith which provides 'final' answers and hence inner contentment.

Thus rationality (that is, modernity) or faith, when disjoined, faces problems. For centuries, faith in authority created total stagnation and superstition. No change or progress was possible. Human beings entertained so many superstitions about creation and about our universe. Diseases thrived and mortality rose.

Similarly, reason too failed to satisfy many questions though it too became absolute and wanted to displace faith altogether. Thus many questions about the meaning and significance of our universe could not be answered by reason alone. Reason, in a way, gave rise to its own superstitions. Reason claimed all the space which so far faith had occupied. Blind faith also led to exploitation of ignorant human beings and now modernity too, in the form of emphasis on material happiness, led to discontentment.

Thus, either way, dilemma remains, and there is no solution in sight. But discontentment with modernity has far exceeded that of faith. As religion has been hijacked by priesthood (reducing it to mere rituals devoid of values) and other vested interests like politicians with which priesthood often (though not always)

collaborated, modernity too has been hijacked by power-vested interests and it has become almost a part of capitalist system. Today, modernity cannot stand on its own and has become almost an adjunct of capitalist system. Capitalism in our own times is promoting limitless consumerism. It has used reason to promote consumerism in various ways which leads to more and more violence.

Colonial violence was also part of capitalist expansion and led to wars and bloodshed. The colonized countries had to struggle hard, in most cases violently (India was an exception to a great extent), to free themselves from colonial bondage. However, in several newly freed countries, the western capitalist powers managed to install puppet governments and thus people could not enjoy fruits of freedom.

Thus ritualized religion and capitalist-based modernity created more discontent in the modern world. Democracy, though very necessary for ensuring freedom to common people, has also been hijacked by vested interests. In most of the countries in Asia and Africa, we find one ethnic group or one religious group at the throat of the other. Ethnic, caste and communal violence is rampant in most of the democratic countries in Asia and Africa today.

All modern means are being used to exacerbate these differences including means of modern mass communications. Mass communication with its most modern techniques is a powerful instrument to promote prejudices and misinformation. The 21st Century has already witnessed unprecedented violence. Attack

on New York towers and the resultant wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and consequent terrorist attacks has already killed millions of people during the first decade itself.

Modern technology, again a part of hijacked modernity, has produced weapons of mass destruction. During the Medieval Ages, a sword could kill one person at a time. Today, modern technology has produced such weapons which can kill thousands at a time merely by pressing a button. Whole cities can be blasted out of existence. America invaded Iraq and tried all its latest weaponry on the poor people of that unfortunate country. More than half-a-million people lost their lives.

Terrorists, not product of Islam as usually propagated but a violent response to a much greater violence being perpetrated, are also killing thousands of innocent human beings. These killings, it appears, has no end. Communal and ethnic violence and international wars within and between nation states has robbed the modern world of peace and tranquility.

Most important question is, can we free religion and modernity from the clutches of vested interests? It seems to be a very difficult and complex problem. What we need is a creative synthesis of religion and modernity. But to get it accepted is itself very difficult. Religion in its spiritual sense and modernity with emphasis on reason can be very liberating for human beings.

Islam, many people would not believe, was such a creative blend of the two. But unfortunately, it lost its liberating thrust in the hands of vested interests, particularly the feudal ruling class and medieval values. It was very difficult for Islam to escape this

fate. However, now is the time to rediscover the Qur'anic Islam, though it would be very difficult to make it acceptable.

Today Islam is so encumbered with medieval practices and web of cultural and traditional practices that it is very difficult to disentangle it from this complex web of medieval culture and ruling class interests. I would like to throw some light as to why the Qur'anic Islam could be really so liberating. I do not think war against terror can ever succeed without rediscovering this Islam and also without disentangling modernity from the clutches of capitalist interests.

The *Qur'an*, through the Prophet (PBUH), addressed itself to rid society of its ills. Mecca was in the primitive stage of capitalist accumulation and so the *Qur'an* strongly denounced accumulation of wealth and luxurious living. It created sensitivity towards the suffering weaker sections of the society. It gave the ideal of human dignity. No human being should be disrespected or robbed of dignity given by Allah.

It also gave awareness to its addressees that when it comes to human dignity, both men and women are equal and one has no right over the other. The *Qur'an* even avoided the use of the word husband and wife but called them *zawjain* (couples) so that a man cannot claim superiority over his wife. It also sensitized believers to indignity a slave suffers as he/she is also human and hence should enjoy equal dignity.

Thus freeing slaves was considered the most meritorious act and also exhorted believers that if they cannot immediately emancipate their slave immediately (though they should), until

such time they should treat them as their equal in every respect. It was for this reason that many slaves were attracted initially to Islam and Bilal Habshi, an Ethiopian slave emancipated by his master after accepting Islam, became an icon of these slaves.

Also, like in modernity, it tried to do away with discrimination between ethnic or linguistic or national groups, and declared colour, race, languages and nations are Allah's signs (*Surah:Rum Verse: 22*). Basic humanity and human dignity is above all these considerations. It denied superiority for any group, race, colour or language, and declared that only distinction could be on the basis of *taqwa*, that is, purity of actions and God-consciousness.

These were revolutionary declarations and humanity fails to realize these ideals even in post-modern period. The Prophet (PBUH) faced stiff resistance from Meccan tribal chiefs because they were not prepared to accept such a revolutionary transformation of their society which will, in one swoop, fell their status, their pride of wealth, their superiority of Arabic language and their belonging to the tribe of Quraysh.

All this was not acceptable to them at all. They identified their ancestral religion with all their privileges and would not accept the new religion that promoted socio-economic justice. In this new religion, neither language, nor race, nor colour of skin nor wealth would guarantee nearness to Allah, but only one's piety, ethical and moral conduct. They did not mind demolishing physical idols kept in Ka'aba, but were not prepared for demolishing idols of social, economic, linguistic, and ethnic

pride. These idols were real objects of worship which put them above the others.

In this sense, modernity, with the due role of reason, is the hallmark of Islam from the beginning. But Muslims brought back all these idols installed in their hearts and never removed them. History of Islam shows that with the passage of time, these idols carved out deeper and deeper niches. Ka'aba was purified of physical idols but the hearts of Muslims were never purified.

Even today, many Muslims have accepted modernity in superficial sense by accepting modern technology, and like western countries, have instrumentalized role of reason. They, however, have not accepted the role of reason in fundamental and philosophical sense. Modern western civilization is wholly materialistic and soulless, and hence modernity has created more discontents. Its hallmark is more and more consumption, material standards of life, and hence fighting for others' resources leads to wars and bloodshed. America, though apparently modern and civilized, is the most barbarous in waging wars on others' territories with its ultra-modern weaponry.

Real modernity, as expounded in the *Qur'an* and in other scriptures, does not use reason in instrumental sense but in fundamental and philosophical sense. It encourages cooperation, not destructive competition. It does not chase illusory goal of happiness based on consumption, but promotes social justice, unconditional equality, inviolable human dignity and balanced approach to inner and outer happiness. Modernity cannot be judged through material progress alone.

Spiritual joy and material happiness must go together. Reason should not be devoid of values. Reason without higher goals, without its attachment to meaning and significance of life, is a two-edged sword. Truth should not be mere conformity with facts, but also beyond and above it, transcendent and all-inclusive. Otherwise, modernity will remain the handmaiden of powerful vested interests, which is what it is today, and will generate more and more discontent.

Chapter – 18

Hindu-Muslim Unity Through Religion?

FOR DEMOCRACY, all secularists agree that secularism is a must, and that unity in diversity in countries like India is possible only through secular polity. Religion, in secular democracy, should, at best, be a private affair and should have no role in the political affairs of the state. Nehruites also maintained that schools supported by the government should not teach religion and that education should be strictly secular.

Of course Gandhians had a different viewpoint. Gandhians do not de-emphasize religion while supporting secularism and secular democracy. Rather, they believed in promoting religious values with a proviso that one should respect all religions equally. Then there are those who reject religion altogether and for them secularism means atheism. They believe religion should have no role in any sphere of public life. Thus these are different shades of secularism, that is, Nehruvian, Gandhian and atheistic.

However, it appears that none of these models is succeeding.

Nehruvian model should have been more successful as it partly meets the Gandhian approach and partly the atheistic. However, given the way the political class is behaving (they are only interested in power, not in principles and values), it has failed as it neither remained Nehruvian in spirit nor Gandhian, much less atheistic. In traditional society like India, the Gandhian model should have had greater chance of success, but even Gandhians did not follow Gandhi's principles. Though they did not oppose them, they never practised them either.

What is now happening in the name of religion is purely communalism, gross misuse of religion for political purpose. The Sangh Parivar (that is, those belonging to the family of BJP), taking advantage of majoritarian ethos, politicized Hindu religion. Communalism infiltrated not only in political but also in educational institutions, and it deeply polarized the society on religious basis. Hindus and Muslims and other communities, who had lived together for centuries and had influenced each other, began to lose the warmth of relationship or even began to hate each other. Thanks to the vitriolic propaganda by the Sangh Parivar, even Christians, who gave so much to modern Indian society, are under attack from Hindu fanatics and are, like Muslims, feeling intensely insecure.

It is in these circumstances that my friend Mr Prakash Narain is passionately advocating revival of religious values and spirit in modern India. I wonder at his passionate efforts at this age (he is more than 90-year old) to infuse true spirit of religion, especially Hinduism, among people and revive brotherly rela-

tions between Hindus and Muslims.

He wants religion to be taught in schools so that people develop truly the spirit of humanity. He is against atheistic secularism and wants his message to reach large number of people. He has written a book tentative titled *Indian Heritage—Oneness in Masses of Hindus and Muslims Through Vendanta, Vahdat and Vivayka*. He tried his best to get the book published but for a variety of reasons did not succeed. He has now put it online and wants Hindu and Muslim masses to read it.

He has been in touch with me for a long time. He lives in New Jersey, USA, and corresponds with me through e-mail. We met once briefly in New Jersey when I went there for some lectures. I found him quite sincere and enthusiastic. He is sincerely engaged in promoting his mission. He approached a number of people seeking support for his project and still continues to do so. I fully endorse the spirit of his efforts which is of immense value today in contemporary India wherein communalism is being injected in public life.

Prakash Narain's efforts are like those of Dara Shikoh, who was appointed heir apparent by Emperor Shahjahan, wrote a book *Majma'ul Bahrayn* (Co-mingling of two Oceans) and tried to show that Hinduism and Islam are complementary and not contradictory. Since he was a scholar of Sanskrit and Hinduism, in addition to that of Islam, he compared teachings of both the religions to prove his point. He also translated the *Upanishads* into Persian and called it *Sirr-e-Akbar*. He would have proved a great boon for India had he succeeded to the throne of India.

Mr Prakash Narain, who is making herculean efforts to promote unity between Hindus and Muslims in contemporary India, may not be a scholar of Islam as Dara Shikoh was of Hinduism. But he had the benefit of studying under a Muslim teacher during the 50s of the last century and certainly imbibed the true spirit of Islam and learnt Urdu and Persian as students in those days had to learn. That infused in him the right spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity, that partly explains his passionate commitment to his project.

He complains that Nehruvian secularists banned study of religion in schools and thus deprived Hindu students of knowledge of true Hindu religious spirit. But Muslims showed the wisdom of teaching Islam to their children through a network of madrassas. Hindus, on the other hand, in their enthusiasm for 'secular' education, closed down all their *pathshalas* and deprived their children of religious education.

Mr Narain, therefore, passionately advocates that Hindus should also be given a chance of studying their religion in schools and thus chance to imbibe true spirit of their religion. This, in turn, would help strengthen the spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity. I think he says so under the strong influence of his vision of religion as a means of strengthening Hindu-Muslim relations. But even if Hindu religious studies are introduced, the real question is who will control it? Will it be controlled by noble souls like Prakash Narain, or those who want to promote Hindu-Muslim animosity through the misuse of religion?

Is religion, as rationalists often maintain, a source of con-

flict, or a resource for peace as people like Prakash Narain feel? I have my doubts that given the contemporary situation in India, where majoritarian rather than democratic ethos prevail, thanks to the communalization of politics, teaching of religion would indeed help. Had it been so, Gandhism would not have failed. Most of the Gandhian institutions, though not communalized, certainly have been Hinduized completely, losing the Gandhian spirit of equal respect for all religions.

The RSS today has much greater control over most of the educational institutions, in many cases even over professional institutions than the government. What Prakash Narain says was advocated by profound Gandhians like Pandit Sunderlal and Bishambarnath Pande whom I had privilege to know. I had worked for several years for promoting communal harmony with Bishambarnathji. Both Pandit Sunderlal and Bishambarnathji were profound scholars of Islam and Hinduism. Both were passionately committed to Hindu-Muslim unity.

But unfortunately, they could not produce any other Sunderlal or Bishambarnath as Muslims could not produce any other Maulana Azad or Zakir Hussain. Both Azad and Zakir Hussain were soaked in Islamic tradition and yet were great champions of Hindu-Muslim unity. As Sunderlal and Bishmbarnath had imbibed the best of Hinduism, its tolerance and universality, Azad and Zakir Hussain too represented the best in Islamic values. However, subsequent generations lost these traditions.

Today, religion is being used to promote political benefits and such politicized religion can never represent best of its

tradition. But one may argue, and rightly so, that Nehruvian secularism too lost its real spirit and secularism itself has been reduced to pseudo-secularism. Indeed, secularism too has lost its secular spirit. Secularism, like religion, itself has been 'politicized' in the wrong sense.

There are many reasons. In this age of globalization and consumerism, to talk of values and principles is considered to be outdated. Today's generation is achievement-oriented and is naturally obsessed with success whatever be the cost. Both politics and capitalism are highly competitive and competition unfortunately is not to excel but to achieve and succeed at other's cost. Now not only individuals but even communities and castes compete.

Our education system is itself part of the problem rather than part of solution. The education system controlled by politicians infuses conformism on one hand and competitiveness on the other. Also, education system is being used to create a sense of belonging to one religion and one particular caste, and identities so created are used for promoting identity-based politics. Education system, if it has to be really education in true sense, must create a critical rather than conforming mind and spirit of cooperation and compassion rather than competition.

In this achievement-oriented age, who will think of values like compassion and cooperation? Prakash Narain can succeed in his objective only if our education system is transformed and is used to promote best values of religion. His Vedantic vision can come into being only when our politicians first change their

own vision and accept the vision of persons like Gandhi or Azad or Pandit Sunderlal or Prakash Narain.

The prevailing atmosphere in the country and the way our education system has been tempered with and controlled by power-vested interests negates all such expectations. However, one should not despair and I believe to despair is to be disbeliever (*kafir*). We must keep hope and strive in keeping with our conscience, and it is in this sense that I admire Prakash Narain's efforts. His optimism in his vision and his efforts to realize what he thinks is worthwhile for humanity is indeed very valuable.

I would now like to throw light on what Prakash Narain believes could help promote Hindu-Muslim unity in India. Firstly, I must say Prakash Narain is a devout Gandhian. Author's Note in his book states:

“My above experience made this book necessary to reach Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual India of 400 million (now over a billion) of eight religions that alone can save India. Mahatma Gandhi's India secured us freedom. We must get rid of our *avivaykee* and *bideshi* (that is, unwise and foreign-oriented) mind in just three years. We can start replacing this with a powerful *vivaykee* mind as that of Mahatma Gandhi by the defined and detailed strategy in Chapter 5 of this book.”

What the author means by '*vivaykee* mind' is wise spiritual mind based on Vedic values and well aware of spiritual heritage of India. He considers Nehruvian model of secularism as *bideshi* (foreign origin) and Gandhian secularism as *swadeshi* (of Indian origin). Nehru, according to Prakash Narain, was under western influence and he preferred western model of secularism over

Indian model and hence was *avivekiya* and must be rejected.

One may find it difficult to agree with the author as everything foreign may not necessarily be bad. Similarly, everything foreign is not good so as to be uncritically imitated. I think Nehru was not among those who rejected everything Indian and accepted everything foreign. A critical reading of Nehru would show that he was very much Indian in ethos and was proud of Indian spiritual heritage but was impatient with empty ritualism and superstitious approach to religion. Nehru was also Gandhian in his own way. Gandhi considered him more suited for Prime Ministership than Sardar Patel and others as he combined both modern scientific approaches with what is spiritual.

Anyway, one may not delve deeper in this controversy as the book written by Prakash Narain is much more than this. Prakash Narain is also a fervent advocate of religious education for Hindu children in schools of. According to him, it is necessary to teach Hindu children Vedic teachings to empower and spiritualize their minds. He feels, "Without knowledge of dharma for conviction in faith in the reality of God as our constantly available succour no Hindu has the only reliable security a human being has to encourage him to live in love and virtue."

Well, many would agree that our education needs more spiritual content in the form of values so that we can produce students with strong foundation of values like tolerance, respect for other faiths, proud of Indian composite spiritual heritage, truth and compassion for fellow human beings. These values can be imparted through teaching of one or also through compara-

tive religion to inculcate respect for other faiths as all religions stress more or less same values.

But in government-funded schools in a secular democracy, no single religion can be taught as it would lead to legal and constitutional questions. Either those desirous of teaching one religion like Vedic religion or Islamic education separately can establish privately-funded schools or essential teachings of all religions through carefully drafted syllabus could be taught. I agree with Prakash Narain that today our education system is too competitive and materialistic that it totally ignores spiritual aspects of life-promoting values.

Also, there has to be emphasis on creative and dynamic relationship between reason and wisdom. Reason is a double-edged sword and can be used both for creative and destructive purposes. Wisdom, on the other hand, is based on combination of reason and values and is superior to reason. Also, reason is more theoretical and deductive, whereas wisdom is more practical based on years of human experience. Our education system is more reason than wisdom oriented. We must relate our reason to our values and collective spiritual heritage and in a way it amounts to marry Nehruvian model to Gandhian one.

That Prakash Narain is not a bigoted Hindu but a man with universal outlook is amply borne out from his book. The very essence of this book is unity of all religions, a theme so necessary for our polarized country today. We are more divided along religious lines as never before, thanks to sectarian politics being pursued by a section of politicians with great gusto. Apart

from Dara Shikoh, Maulana Azad also devoted first volume of his commentary of the *Qur'an* to the theme of unity of religion (*wahdat-e-deen*). Prakash Narain has made similar attempt from Hindu scriptural viewpoint.

I think the most valuable chapter of the book is the fourth chapter in which the author discusses commonalities between Tulsidas' *Ramayana* and the *Qur'an*. It is quite a detailed chapter. The purpose of the chapter is stated here in author's own words, "This chapter is based on the search in the *Qur'an* for quotations that accord with the basic in Sanatana Dharma for understanding and mutual respect between Hindus and Muslims."

The whole chapter is full of quotations from the *Ramayana* and the *Qur'an*. Of course, since Prakash Narain does not know Arabic, he has used Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English translation. Since Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation is universally accepted by Muslims, one can accept what the author quotes from the Holy Book of Islam.

He makes a significant observation which will help dispel many misunderstandings. He says:

"With these handy definitions we realize that Dharma is *roohaneeyat* or spirituality and not religion. Religion also includes rituals, individual, family and social regulations, customs and visible practices. These have no bearing upon *roohaneeyat* in our religion. Religion is *mazhab* and not *roohaneeyat* alone.

Maulana Azad too makes distinction between *Deen* and Shari'ah which differs from religion to religion since Shari'ah depends on cultural values and practices, customs and traditions.

I do not know whether Prakash Narain has read Maulana Azad or not (most probably not) but he too draws similar conclusion and makes distinction between Dharma and religion. Dharma, according to him is pure *roohaneeyat*.

If one develops this kind of understanding we can greatly reduce our differences and easily build bridges between polarized religious communities in India. It is not only the question of reading this book. It is important to read this book along with Maulana's volume on *wahdat-e-deen*. If read together, it can really be much more effective. But even more important is to refashion school syllabi on these lines.

In these days of hate politics, it is increasingly important to read such works which try to build religious unity on the basis of religious scriptures. Yes, there are other interpretations of religion and many who have aversion to religion or consider religion as root of all evil may deride such an approach. Well they may do so. But those who can indeed make distinction between Dharma (*Deen*) and ritualized religion, can appreciate the efforts to build unity on the basis of spiritualism.

This work was done in the Middle Ages by Sufi and Bhakti saints and they greatly succeeded in building bridges across religions. They also richly contributed towards our composite culture. What we need is to re-emphasize these efforts. An attempt is also being made through our constitutional secularism but it is not enough. Constitution is after all a legal document based on certain modern fundamental rights.

We also need to supplement these efforts through pro-

moting spiritual values as our people are soaked in religious practices and traditions. We need to make multi-dimensional efforts to keep our people united. After all, our democratic polity is competitive and in multi-religious countries like India, religion provides the fault line of division. Competition takes place along this fault line. In secular democracy, religious and cultural diversity should provide enriching public experience, but political competitiveness has reduced it (diversity) to our weakness rather than our strength.

However, books like these are usually written in English and reach only a few chosen people, whereas there is great need to make them available in Hindi, Urdu and other Indian languages so that they have much wider reach. That is, however, another problem. What is important for me is that still we have people like Prakash Narain around who can try passionately to promote unity among the people of diverse faiths.

I congratulate Prakash Narain for writing this book. He is doing so not to make profit or earn name and fame but to fulfil a mission in life. I am in touch with him for a few years now and I have seen his passion, his restlessness to get across this message of unity. Though we may differ on some points, that is least important. His passion for unity of Hindus and Muslims is something to be experienced. And I am his great admirer in this respect. I can only pray for the success of his mission as this is my mission also in life. Inspired by his passionate desire to promote unity and spiritual values, I have joined hands with him in my own humble way.

Chapter – 19

Religion and Conflict

WHAT IS the relation between religion and conflict? Does conflict become inevitable if religion plays a greater role in public life? According to the Global Peace Index, countries where religion has greater role in public life are at the bottom of the index, which means they are less peaceful. This index will lead us to the conclusion that religion and conflict go together, and that religion plays a negative role in public life. It must make all those who advocate role of religion in public life sit back and think.

In view of the adverse role of religion, one must first discuss what in fact religion is. What was its origin and social need? Is religion bound to play disruptive role and give birth to conflict and violence? Or there are other factors which generate conflict using religion as a tool? Is violence rooted in society, social conflict or in religion and religious differences? Also what precisely is the role of religion in human life?

Before we answer this question, we should ask one more question. Is religion prior to human being and human society, or human life and human society is prior to religion? These questions seem to be simple and elementary but can have profound implications one way or the other. Religion, howsoever important for society, cannot be prior to it. Religion came to answer certain human and social needs. It is my considered opinion that religion in some form or the other would be needed even in the most scientifically and technologically advanced society.

Before proceeding further, first let us first try to understand what exactly religion is. It is apparently a simple but quite complex question. There can be all sorts of differences in defining religion. Rather than defining it, we can answer this question by answering what it consists of. A religion comprises set of rituals, theological doctrines about the other world, a world beyond this world, an institutional system and a value system.

While rituals, theologies and institutions of each religion differ from each other, value system often coincide. But in practice, value system has last priority in every religion and ritual; theological and institutional systems acquire priority and of these three, ritual system acquires top priority for masses. While common people are preoccupied with rituals, theologians indulge in challenging each others' theologies leading to conflict in society.

Also, it should be understood that ritual system and theological doctrines evolve in a particular cultural milieu though theologians would claim they are of divine origin. No religion

origins in cultural vacuum and all religions carry their birthmark. Despite divine origin of a religion, one should not ignore its historicity. If this is acknowledged, many disputes about rituals and theological doctrines can be more easily resolved.

Every religion throws up institutions which occupy material space and thus it leads to possession of properties. Also, organizations come up to control these properties, and more often than not, theological disputes are the hidden form of property disputes. Once a religion gets organized, it can result in various forms of struggles, reconcilable or irreconcilable. Here lies the dilemma. Religion tends to get organized as it operates in a society, not in vacuum. Once it gets organized and it is bound to, when it has large number of followers, it becomes a powerful establishment and that, in turn, results in struggle for power to control that establishment.

No religion can escape this fate. All major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam have suffered this fate. All these religions were founded by persons who were dissatisfied by social conditions around them and they went out in search of truth. After years of intense quest for truth, they were enlightened or received revelation and set about disseminating what was revealed to them and how they were enlightened.

This was the beginning of these religions. Since these religions were a result of intense quest for truth, there cannot be anything inherently wrong with them. They came into existence to guide human beings. They answered both social and spiritual

needs of the people among whom these religions originated. All these religions stressed inner peace, controlling one's desire and greed as these are root of all evil in the world. Some religions like Buddhism and Islam also laid stress of compassion. Some religions like Christianity laid emphasis on love and peace.

By preaching compassion, love and peace, these religions tried to curb individual as well as social conflict. Also, these religions devised ritual systems, prayer, fasting, giving alms, etc., to give a concrete shape to their value system. But since these rituals were deeply influenced by their given culture and social ethos, they happened to be different from each other. They were different but not conflicting in any manner.

Similarly, in course of time, each religion developed its own theologies, which were developed more by followers rather than founders themselves. For example, Buddhist theologies were developed by the followers of Buddha rather than Buddha himself; of Christianity by its followers than by Christ himself, and of Islam by the followers rather than the Prophet himself.

So far so good. Each theology developed autonomously or independently, and though different from the other, was not in conflict with the other. What was then the source of conflict between two religions? It is not difficult to see that the source of conflict lay not in religion per se but in human nature and human needs. In fact, religion came to provide divine guidance for peace and conflict-free society, and to liberate human beings from excessive desire and greed and thus to eliminate sources of conflict.

But human beings, aspiring for domination and more and more desire to control, reduced religion to a source of conflict. They used religion as a legitimizing tool for their domination over others. When religions got organized, two organized religions tried to dominate over the other and that could be done by proving the other false. Those human actors who sought to control religious organizations tried to prove the superiority of their own religion over the other and thus vanquish and control the other.

Thus, thanks to human nature and interests, religion which came to liberate human beings from conflict became a powerful source of conflict. But it would be wrong to maintain that religion per se is a source of conflict. Also, it is this desire to dominate the other which resulted not only in inter-religious but also intra-religious conflicts. No religion is free from intra-religious conflict.

Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all developed cleavages and even conflicting and differing theologies. Again human nature plays its own role. Some religions split along ethnic lines and some along cultural lines. One ethnic, cultural or linguistic group wanted to dominate or compete with the other. The religion which was a result of quest for spiritual truth became an instrument of power.

Today, all major religions are not only identified with some or the other national and ethnic groups but also are being used by these national and ethnic groupings for promoting their own interests. Thus all major religions are responding more to mate-

rial needs than spiritual needs of human souls for peace and inner contentment. Religion can serve spiritual needs and needs for higher truth only if it does not get organized and no major religion can remain unorganized. Thus tension between organized and unorganized religion would continue unresolved.

Well, such a tension can also result in creative efforts, given sincerity of some truly religious people. Religion as identity plays greater role in our modern lives for various reasons. This is both psychological as well as political need. Every human being has psychological urge to belong and this is a very powerful urge. One feels emotional vacuum without a sense of belonging. One feels great emotional warmth and greater the sense of bondage, greater the satisfaction. This can be true of ideological and linguistic groups too but this sense of bondage tends to be strongest in the case of religion.

Naturally, this emotional bondage and sense of identity can easily translate into political struggle for domination. This potential is much higher in modern competitive democratic politics. This competition tends to be much more intense in developing countries where religious appeal is much more intense. Different religious, linguistic and ethnic groups use religious ethics and linguistic identities for political competition and thus religion becomes a source of powerful conflict.

Also, as Freud, Carl Jung and other psychologists have stressed that religious symbols have great appeal and this appeal arises from the subconscious mind. Politicians use these religious symbols for mobilization of political support. These religious

symbols have all the more appeal in backward and developing nations. Though no nation or country is free of conflict in the world, there appears to be greater religious conflict in the backward or developing countries.

We have to consider one more dimension of religion which plays very important role in human life, that is, sense of solace, inner peace and security. This further enhances the appeal of religion for the poor who live with a constant sense of insecurity and fear. Even Marx acknowledges this aspect of appeal of religion when he says that it is the sigh of the oppressed and consolation for the distressed in the vale of tears. And he describes religion as the 'opium of the people, not in negative sense but as it acts as painkiller for them'.

Religion in both its roles, that is, its role to provide an identity and inner solace and security will remain irreplaceable no matter how much science and technology progresses. Also, religion provides a transcendental dimension to life. This transcendence gives meaning to life. Religion also provides a higher purpose in life. Human person is not borne simply to eat, drink and die. No human being will be satisfied with such life.

Modern scientific discoveries also reinforce our need for such transcendental beliefs. The vastness of the universe, its millions of stars and planets and galaxies, each several million or billion light years away, create a sense of awe in human beings. They feel too insignificant in this vastness of universe in material sense and hence it is spiritual purpose which elevates them out of this miniscularity and insignificance.

Thus seen from these perspectives, religion is potential for lifting us from simple material existence, providing us a sense of higher purpose and potential for divisiveness and conflict. But basically, it depends on us how we look at the religion: as something necessary for our spiritual development and inner joy and contentedness, or as a divisive conflicting force; whether we use it for leading life of spiritual growth and transcendental achievements or as a tool for establishing our hegemony over others.

We find both the trends among those who believe and practise religion. Same is true of reason. Rationalists often attack religion as mere superstition and a powerful obstacle for change and growth. I think it is a very superficial approach to religion. Religion by itself is not irrational or opposed to change. Religion never conflicts with reason if we understand religion in proper perspective. Religion, of course, tends to be transcendental in certain aspects and hence to that extent it is beyond but not anti-rational. Buddhist, Vedantic and Islamic philosophies provide ample proof of significance of reason in religion.

It is true that levels there are practices which are superstitious and irrational, yet popular. But such practices are not an essential part of religion in any sense. Religion or no religion, they will be found for sociological and psychological reasons. Even in primitive and tribal societies, where none of these religions exist, these practices are found. Miracles too are not a part of advanced religions. They can only be explained psychologically.

Thus religion plays many complex roles in human life. It is

used in many ways by human beings. It can enhance and enrich our spiritual life and also be used for enhancing our personal or group powers. It can become a rich resource for peace and also cause bloodshed and wars among people of different religions. What role we make religion to play depends on our interests and aspirations.

One needs to analyse these complex trends before we conclude whether religion leads to conflict in the society. It should be borne in mind that the masses want to lead peaceful life, and for them religion is nothing but inner solace and a sense of belonging and security in this merciless world or 'vale of tears' as Marx describes it for the poor and oppressed.

Then there are monks, yogis, mystics and Sufis in different religions. They all are basically interested in spiritual enrichment and transcendental aspects of life and engage themselves in spiritual practices. Their whole exercise is to control their desire or greed and keep themselves aloof from all worldly struggles. They become role models for millions of people who bow before the sacrifices of mystics. However, there can be some unscrupulous elements here too who exploit masses but that cannot prove the whole trend as being exploitative.

Islam, which is being associated with violence and jihad in political arena, has a very strong Sufistic trend and many great Sufis have brought peace and solace to millions of people across the world. Maulana Rum, a great Sufi from Quniya, Turkey, is considered as high priest of love and peace. His epic poem called *Mathnavi Maulana Rum* is considered a scripture of love. He

loves all—Muslims, Christians, Jews and even those who are sinners. His Islam is beyond identity and his whole approach is human. And Maulana Rum is not alone. All Sufis stress love and peace and busy themselves with spiritual enrichment. Their basic doctrines are *wahdat al-wujud* and *sulh-i-kul*.

Wahdat al-wujud implies real existence is of one Real Being and all of us are its manifestations, and hence there should be no wall of separation among them. Dara Shikoh, son of Shah Jahan, the Mughal Emperor of India, was a Sufi and wrote a seminal work *Majma'ul Bahrayn* (Co-mingling of Two Oceans) in which he compares teachings of Hinduism with those of Islam and concludes that difference, if any, is of language, and not of content. The doctrine of *sulh-i-kul* means total peace and peace with all. Thus both these Sufi doctrines are of great importance for building peace in the world.

All this does not mean religion and conflict have no mutual relationship. But what it implies is that religion by itself is not the source of conflict. Real source of conflict is not religion but human interests of varied kind. Religion has been often exploited by all sorts of vested interests including priests, politicians and other social and cultural leaders. When politicians and priests collude with each other and religion becomes subservient to political interests, it can become a great source of conflict. Real source remains human and political interests. Priests who collaborate with politicians do so to serve their own selfish interests. In Islam, there is a concept *Ulama-i-su'*, ulema of evil character who serve rulers rather than Islam.

In democratic countries too, we find many instances of politicization of religion and it is my considered opinion that whenever religion is politicized, it loses its sanctity and politicians gain their ambitions. One who cares for one's religion and its sanctity would never allow religion to be politicized. Of course, in competitive democratic politics and multi-religious societies, the potential for politicization of religion increases infinitely.

Religious identity can play both destructive and constructive roles, but on the whole, it has potential for conflict. In case of weak minorities, religious identity can be used to deliver justice but then in competitive polity, a section of majority community politicians can also use religious identity in mobilizing their own people and can have devastating result.

The Global Peace Index, referred at the outset of of the chapter, shows that in developing countries religion plays greater role in public life and hence there is more conflict. The reason is obvious. In such countries because of low levels of educational and intellectual developments and greater role of religion, scarcity of resources and tendency of powerful to grab these scarce resources, religion has much greater tendency to be politicized and hence become source of conflict.

It should also be noted that religion alone has not been a 'source of conflict' in the world. In advanced European countries, nationalism has been a much greater source of violence and destruction. Two World Wars put together in the last century, mainly inspired by nationalism, brought about so much violence and destruction that preceding centuries hardly did. Europe,

which witnessed 'religious' war when Protestants broke away from the Catholic Church, was not simply religious in nature as it is often made out to be.

There were complex factors involved. Many princes who wanted to break loose from political stranglehold of the Church backed the Protestant movement. Church too was not exercising religious authority. It had monopolized political power and exercised political hegemony over all European rulers. The Protestant movement challenged the Church's authority, both religious and political, and tried to liberate people from its exploitative grip and hence so much wars and bloodshed.

In America, civil war was not inspired by religion but by slavery, as South wanted to retain it and North wanted to abolish it. The 21st Century wars against Afghanistan, Baghdad launched by America are not because of 'Islamic Jihad' but mainly due to protect American interests in Middle East, especially oil. One must distinguish between perception and reality, and rhetoric and truth. Both sides use rhetoric which is more deceiving than real. One side uses rhetoric of protecting world from terror and the other side that of jihad. Both are deceiving the world.

Thus one should learn to see beyond perceptions and discover reality to understand play of various vested interests. Blaming religion for all these conflicts would be more deceptive and would only serve vested interests. Religion, in the conflict-torn modern world, can become a seminal resource for peace, if understood in proper perspective. Religion would liberate us if we liberate it from clutches of vested interests.