

# THE FRAGRANCE

OF EAST

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# The Fragrance of East

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

More than half a century ago in 1942, Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi delivered a series of lectures on Religion and Civilization at the Jamia Millia, Delhi. These were recorded and preserved in the files of the Urdu Journal "Jamia". Later in 1980 english version of these lectures was brought out by the Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow in a book form entitled "Religion and Civilization". On going through the book one will certainly agree with the able translator of the lectures late S.G. Mohiuddin Ahmad, that like other works of the Maulana it is a work of great scholarship and erudition in which a concise yet comprehensive view of revelatory eschatology and cosmology have been presented. Maulana has very emphatically raised the distinctive features of the socio-ethical order on its basis vis-a-vis the other systems of social existence having their roots in the materialistic, so called intellectual and mystical schools of thought .

The main theme of lectures was to find out the answer of some questions which are common to Religion, Philosophy and Civilization. Maulana posed the following questions:

What is the beginning and the end of the Universe? Is there a life after death, and if there is, what sort of a life is it? And, is any particular code of conduct necessary for success in the Hereafter?

The creation of the Universe and nature's endowment to mankind, the sensory organs and their limitations form the introductory part of these lectures. Limitation of intellect, incompetence of philosophy, dia-

lectics, mysticism, its role in Islam and its fallibility are some of the delicate issues which Maulana has dealt with in a simple way. After discussing the materialistic civilization, denial of God, perversion of human nature, idol worship, moral confusion, display of power, he comes down to intellectual civilization. The epicurian ideals western materialism and their effects are explained before he proceeds to deal with Mystical Civilization and finally comes to deal with Prophethood. About Prophets, he asserts that they surpass others in moral excellence from their childhood and are always a model of virtue and righteousness save in the affairs for which they press their claim, they are like other persons, never claiming any distinction or mastery in other worldly affairs

“Say : I am only a mortal like you”  
(Al-Kah’f : 110)

Maulana explains in detail the prophethood, importance of the Prophets particularly the last prophet Muhammad (PBUH) vis-a vis the relationship between the Prophet and the Creator of the Universe.

Finally he discusses life after death. In fact the whole conduct of a Muslim in general with his firm belief that his earthly life will be adjudged finally and impartially after his death.

“And who so doeth good an atom’s weight will see it then, And who so doeth ill an atom’s weight will see it then”.

(Az-Zilzal 7-8)

The whole crux of the arguments advanced by the late Maulana is that it is only the adherence to religion and following the path shown by the Prophet a good society will come up. A firm belief in the “Life after Death” shall always keep him away from the evil deeds. Holy Qur’an has warned that :

"O mankind! fear your Lord! for the convulsion of the Hour (of judgment) will be a terrible thing! the Day ye shall see it : every mother giving suck shall forget her suckling babe, and every pregnant female shall drop her load unformed! thou shall see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk! but dreadful shall be the wrath of God" (22: 1-2)

To ward off the fears which have been haunting the Muslim society today it is suggested that our present generation should and must go through these lectures of the Maulana which are and will always be relevant as they were half a century ago.□

S.A.

Opinions expressed in the articles appearing in this magazine are those of the writers and are not necessarily of the Institution.

*---Editor*

## THE SPIRIT OF THE HAJJ

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi

There are four fundamental and practical principles of Islam: Prayers, Fasting, Poor-due (Zakat) and Hajj. Of these each one has an 'axis' round which it revolves. The axis of prayer is:

*Verily I am Allah. There is no God save Me. So serve Me and establish worship for My remembrance. (Ta-Ha: 14)*

*Be guardians of your prayers, and of the mid-most prayer, and stand up with devotion to Allah. (Al-Baqarah: 228)*

*Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayer. (Al-Muminum: 1-2)*

The spirit of prayers is politeness, humility, meekness and peace within. The Glorious Qur'an enjoins Poor-due (Zakat):

*Take alms of their wealth wherewith thou mayst purify them and mayst make them grow, pray for them. Lo! thy prayer is an assuagement for them. Allah is Hearer, Knower. (Al-Taubah: 103)*

*The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah, and (for) the wayfarers; and a duty imposed by Allah. Allah is Knower, Wise. (Al-Taubah: 60)*

The philosophy of the revealed law (Shari'ah) in respect of poor-due (Zakat) is purification of wealth refinement of soul, acquisition of Divine Pleasure and Mercy, sympathy with the indigent, meeting the needs of the destitute and guarding against parsimony, avarice and the habit of hoarding.

The axis of fasting is piety, inculcating the habit of circumspection and abstinence: *O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil).* (Al-Baqarah: 183)

We are asked to fast so that we may imbibe the fear of God, learn to regard him in the manner He should be and be conscious of Divine Superintendence all the time. It may become a habit with us. When we kept away from the permissible (*Mubahat*) for a fixed period at the Command of God we may always keep away from the abhorrent (*Makruhat*) and the forbidden (*Muharramat*).

### The "Axis" of Hajj

*Then let them make an end of their unkemptness and pay their vows and go around the Ancient House. That (is the Command). And who so mangifieth the sacred thing of Allah, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord.* (Al-Hajj: 29-30)

The main purpose of Hajj is the expression of intense love for God which is ingrained in the heart of man and which is desirable both under Divine Law and intellect.

*.... while with the faithful, their most intense love is for God alone..* (Al-Baqarah: 165)

The "Spirit of Hajj " is the expression of unstinted love for the Creator - the way moths encircle the lamp. Secondly, it signifies complete surrender and obedience to the Will of God, performing the rituals as Prophet

Ibrahim (PBUH) the friend (*Khalil*) of God, did. We have to obey and not to question why. The spirit of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) has permeated the rites of Hajj. It is the remembrance of the love of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) and the exemplary sacrifice of Prophet Ismail (PBUH).

Then Almighty God liked the way Sayyida Hajra (PBUH) ran in between the hills of 'Safa' and 'Marwa' and made it obligatory for each and every pilgrim for all times to come. The big wigs in the world may come there, they may be Ghazalis, Razis, Ibn Sinas or Farabis of their time, but they have to imitate Sayyida Hajra (PBUH). Somebody may question what is the need to run now. Sayyida Hajra ran because Prophet Ismail (PBUH) was out of sight and she had to move to a place from where she could see that he was safe and no animal had lifted him. Why should a Shaikh-ul-Islam or Shaikh-ul-Azhar Shaikh-ul-Hadith run? They have to run because this has been accepted as agreeable by God. During the first three circumambulations, the pilgrims have to stride with chest out and a particular gait in between two fixed points which is called Ramal. Why is it necessary now? When Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and his companions (Allah be pleased with them all) came to Makkah for the lesser pilgrimage (Umrah) under an agreement the Makkans had gone to a nearby hill so that they would not see the Muslims moving about freely in Makkah and circumambulate the Ka'aba. The Makkans said that the Muslims had become so weak after emigration to Madinah that they could not walk properly. The pilgrims were then asked to circumambulate in this manner to refute the Makkans.

### **Total Surrender:**

Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) was taking Sayyidina Ismail (PBUH) to sacrifice him at the command God. Satan tried to lead him away. Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) hit Satan with pebbles, being enraged at his impudence. God liked it and made it a permanent ritual of pilgrimage. It has been said in a tradition that Satan is never so humiliated, dejected and distressed as he is at

Arafat. He laments and grieves that all his labour to delude Muslims has been undone, because the salvation of the pilgrims is ordained here at Arafat.

The greatest evidence of obedience is found at Arafat. The pilgrims do not offer Maghrib prayer here. They go to Muzdalifa and offer Maghrib and Isha prayers conjointly. We are asked not to offer Maghrib prayers at Arafat though it is a highly venerated place. We had to pray at the appointed time where ever we are in the parks, hotels, trains, planes, streets, etc., all our lives. But we are asked to defer it at Arafat. We have to obey God and not to pray according to our age-old habit. We are the slaves of God and not of prayers or habit. The movements from Mina to Arafat, then to Muzdalifa and again to Mina are examples of obedience. However much the pilgrim may like the place and be enjoying it or be tired, he cannot stay according to his wishes. He has to stay where God wants him to and only for the time permitted.

### General Survey:

Shah Waliullah has written about the purpose and efficacy of Hajj at length and also in a better way than any body else, according to me. He writes that the main purpose of Hajj is to keep the Ummah linked with Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) who is the forerunner of Islam... *the faith of your father Ibrahim (is yours). He hath named you Muslims (al-Hajj:78)*. The places to keep the "ummah" thus connected are Makkah and its suburbs. The Muslims who can afford it are asked to go there and see those places and do what he did. There is the house of God which he built; there are Safa, Marwa, Arafat and Muzdalifa where he and members of his family gave evidence of their extreme love, total submission and obedience to God. The purpose behind it is that wherever the followers of Islam live they should keep up those traditions. This will preserve the trend set by Prophets Ibrahim and Mohammed (PBUH) and maintain the distinctive features and entity of the

Muslim community among different communities and nations of the world.

The second point which has been mentioned is very important. It has depth and shows Shah Waliullah understanding of the spirit of religion. It is that the Ummah had to be guarded against aberrations and it had to begin at the grass-roots. There are five daily prayers in the mosque of every locality. If any 'schism' infiltrates, the right and wrong can be differentiated and corrected in the mosque. If, however, any innovation has been imbibed at the level of the township, it can be detected and corrected at the time of weekly Friday prayers. If it occurs on a larger scale, it can be remedied at Eid mosques where Muslims of the township and adjoining areas congregate twice a year. Or if it is on a still bigger scale, say countrywide, for which the possibilities are very remote, the most appropriate time and place is the occasion of Hajj while paying homage to Allahat Makkah. The pilgrim may find out how he prays, where he is not right, which wrong beliefs and customs have been adopted inadvertently. Shah Waliullah says that Hajj is an event of annual reckoning and an occasion for general survey that the 'Ummah' is sticking to the path of Prophets Ibrahim and Muhammad (PBUH). The Ummah may then draw satisfaction that it is following in the footsteps of both the Prophets (PBUH).

Had there been no Hajj, there would have been an American Islam, a European Islam, an Indian Islam and so on. If somebody would ask a person about the different practices, he would get a reply that we had been doing these things for generations. But during Hajj where laymen and learned persons come together, everything becomes quite apparent. When harmful weeds grow in any field they are removed. Likewise, if distortions, perversions and innovations find their way in any place, they can be found and eradicated. Shah Waliullah has written that Hajj is the best means to protect the Ummah from aberrations. If any 'schims' infiltrate they may continue for long. If anybody comes for

Hajj from any place he will come to know of deviations, if any. He will go back and tell his fellowmen that what they had been doing was not correct and he saw such and such thing during Hajj.

### **Duty of Mankind:**

Words have certain implications. They have historical background also. The word Mo'tamar has also a special significance. Of course, if time permits, exchange of views on common problems is not prohibited. It would be expedient. But all these activities are secondary. If exchange of views and discussion were to be the main purpose of Hajj, then only intellectuals, economists, politicians, leaders and such other persons would be called as is done for seminars and conferences, etc. While giving a 'call' to people to perform Hajj, these words would not have been used... *and pilgrimage to the house is a duty for mankind, for him who can find a way thither. (Al-Imran: 97)*

Then arrangements would be made for lodging, boarding, etc., at a place to deliberate. But right from 8th to 12/13th Dhul Hijjah, the pilgrims move from one place to another for observance of the rites of Hajj. They halt at Arafat, stop for the night at Muzdalifa, go for *Rami* and sacrificial slaughter to Mina and to Ka'ba for circumambulation (*Tawaf-e-Ziyarah*). These rituals (*Manasik*) keep the pilgrims on their feet. These frequent movements from place to place have nothing in common with seminars and conferences.

If necessary, material, political and economic advantages of each and every tenet of Islam can be discussed within limits. Nobody would object to it in all ages. But it is not correct to mention these subsidiary benefits as the main purpose and the real aim of Hajj. It is feared that it may create purely materialistic tendency. If it was done the aspect of the acquisition of Divine Pleasure and Reward, belief in the remission of sins in the Next World, etc., which are the nuclei of all these religious rites and make them worth-while and valuable, would not only be relegated to secondary po-

sitions, but they would become non-existent in time to come. It would be an irreparable loss to the individual and the community and the beginning of distortions and perversions in religion.

### **Greatest Service:**

The greatest service to Islam in the present times is that the religion should be presented in its true form in which Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) presented it. Of course, chaste and lively language can be used and such methods may be adopted as may be easily understood and assimilated. This is the real task for thinkers, men of letters and a great need of our time.

It is also a unique opportunity for those scholars who are fired with the religious zeal, correct understanding of the Glorious Qur'an and teachings of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). They should come forward and take up this work. It is the special responsibility of those persons who are conversant with modern methods of teaching as also of scholars in the institutions of Islamic learning who are equipped with necessary qualifications, of writers speakers and preachers. □

## HEREAFTER

Abu sa'id al-Khudri reported that during the time of the Prophet (saws) some people asked him, "Messenger of Allah, shall we see our Lord on the Day of Judgement?" He answered, "Yes." Then he said, "Do you fall over each other to get a vision of the full-moon in a clear cloudless sky?"

They replied, "No, O Messenger of Allah." He said, "Similarly, you will not fall over each other over sighting Him as you do not fall over each other to sight either of the two (the sun and the moon). A caller will call out on the Day of Judgement announcing, 'Today, let every people follow those they used to worship.' Consequently, none of those who worshiped idols and stones apart from Allah would remain (in the Field) but they'd be falling upon each other in the Fire. Until, none will remain but he who used to worship Allah – the virtuous as well as the vicious ones among them, and except for the left-overs of the people of the Book.

## IGNORANCE OR MALICE

Greg Noakes

Islam and Muslims have become American media mainstays in the decade and a half since the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Hardly a week goes by without news of some breaking event in the Muslim world, and with its reams of explanations of Islam and Muslims for Americans. In spite of the air time and column-inches devoted to Islam and Islamic themes, however, the performance of the mainstream American press in the coverage of Islam, Muslims, and events in the Muslim world has been little short of dismal.

In order to understand why, it is important to answer several questions. How do the media cover Islam? What factors shape this coverage? If the performance to date has been lacklustre, how can media coverage of Muslims be improved, and are these improvements likely to be made?.....

Nevertheless, the number of sources for reporting on the Middle East and the Muslim world is limited, and there is a great deal of overlap among media outlets. The three major broadcast networks (ABC, CBEs and NCB), in addition to the Cable News Network (CNN), maintain their own Middle East correspondents and special assignment foreign correspondents. The American "newspapers of record", *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *the Los Angeles Times*, and *the Christian Science Monitor*, in addition to news weeklies like *Time* and *Newsweek*, also have Middle Eastern correspondents. Most other outlets, however, rely on either one or more of the above sources or on wire services like the associated Press, United Press International, or Reuters, who in turn often rely upon local stringers to report news.

For the most part, American media coverage of Muslims and events in the Muslim world concentrates on the sensational. Standard media fare includes coverage of political upheavals, acts of violence carried out by extremist groups claiming to act in the name of Islam, perceived threats to American national interests, poor treatment of women, and outrageous human-rights abuses. Admittedly, there are more than enough of these in the Muslim world, but they are extremes, and it is only these extremes that seem to attract the attention of reporters and editors.

### **Hunt For The Sensational**

In the hunt for the sensational, the media pass over the exciting variety of interpretation and expression among Muslims who often profess very different ideas and attitudes while still remaining within the Islamic community. Constructive grass-root attempts to build up Muslim communities and the original, ground breaking intellectual work being done across Islam are ignored, since they are neither photogenic nor particularly good for ratings or circulation numbers. The larger Muslim political, economic, and social context is largely ignored as well. One notable example that will be familiar to most Americans is the Iranian revolution of 1979. Very little mention was made in the American press of past American involvement in Iranian political and political life, particularly the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadegh and the restoration to the throne of Shah Mohammad Reza Pehlevi, or the impact of the American oil and arms industries on the Shah's ultimately disastrous domestic and foreign policies. Stripped of this background information, anti-American manifestations following the revolution seemed to most Americans to be irrational at best, fanatic at worst.

Media coverage can be characterised as sensationalist not just in the topics it addresses, but also in the imagery and language utilised in reporting those

topics. Most egregious are recurring photographic or videotaped images that tend to dehumanise and depersonalise Muslims, such as pictures of hundreds or thousands of anonymous Muslims at prayer or the ubiquitous photos of a disembodied, upraised hand clutching a Qur'an high over the heads of a protesting crowd.

### **Prejudice:**

Other group shots which might show a different, less angry, and more human side of Muslims are hard to find. Funerals for Israeli dead, with crowd of sobbing mourners, are a staple of network newscast coverage of the Middle East, yet similar ceremonies for the more numerous Lebanese Muslim (and Christian) victims are almost never filmed, and the pain and suffering of their loved ones do not make the evening news.

When individual Muslims are shown, they are typically radicals. Few Americans could fail to identify a photo of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini or Shaikh 'Umar' Abd Al-Rahman, whose images come to represent all Muslims for the uninformed reader and viewer.

The media's use of terminology is similarly reductive, relying on certain ill-defined words both to convey certain concepts to an audience and to avoid closer scrutiny or definition of groups, individuals, and events. The most obvious example is, of course, "Islamist Fundamentalism". The term "fundamentalism" was first applied to a strain of nineteenth-century evangelical Protestant Christian thought which upholds the inerrancy of the Bible. The term is meaningless when applied in its strictest sense to Islam (since all Muslims believe, as an article of faith, that the Qur'an is the Word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and yet it has assumed great currency... "Fundamentalist" is a loaded term, pregnant with sinister overtones and imbued with fanaticism and radicalism, which again obscures more than it reveals. But loaded terms such as these are of little use when trying to pick out small details, one of the main tasks of a good journalist.

One recent example demonstrate how quickly and easily such nonsensical buzzwords come into being, and how they can shape and at times dominate public debate. "Ethnic cleansing" is a term that grew out of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it is used constantly in reference to the tragic events in that nation. The media picked up on the term and have used it to describe the Bosnian conflict without having a dig too deeply into messy details (such as who is doing the "cleansing" and to whom). It enables journalists to gloss over subtle trends and breaking events, jumping one horrible atrocity in with all the others. The question remains unasked and unanswered by the media: is there any difference between "genocide" and "Ethnic Cleansing"? The latter, like "fundamentalism" is reductive, ultimately non-descriptive and, alas, used constantly.

### **Unhealthy Reliance:**

There is also an unhealthy reliance by the American media on editorial pieces to convey information about Islam and Muslims. The topped page too often is the only place to find in-depth analysis of the Islamic world. By definition, persuasive writing is designed to convey only one side of an argument; seldom is it the Muslim perspective that graces the editorial pages of the *Times* or *Post*. The debate on Islam and the Muslims viewed in light of the American media tends to be somewhat lopsided.

Given this kind of coverage, it is apparent that the media are presenting only one part of the story when it comes to Islam and a small part at that. The media hit only the highest of the high points, without any discussion of one event's relationship to another or the ties which bind (or the issues which divide) one organisation or personality from the next. The reader or listener is left to make sense of such a situation; like an archipelago, above the water the myriad islands seem to be scattered haphazardly across the surface, but

seen from below they form part of a single geological body, and are clearly interrelated.

The average news consumer is presented with an image of Muslims as irrational and confused, and vaguely threatening in their unpredictability. Iran enforces the Shari'ah, Saudi Arabia enforces Shari'ah, and Sudan enforces Shari'ah. Why then is Sudan so different from Saudi Arabia, and why are the "fundamentalist" governments in Riyadh and Tehran so often at one another's throat? Why does the United States count one of these countries as a close ally and brand the other two as international pariahs? There are justifications for these seeming inconsistencies, but they are complicated and thus judged to be beyond the scope of straight journalism. It is not the media's job, it is thought, to chart the archipelago.

### **Simplistic View:**

The media present Americans with a simplistic view of Islam and then leave to press that fifth of humanity which is Muslim into his oversimplified mould. It is no doubt unrealistic to expect the mainstream media to convey the Muslim world in all of its rich diversity, yet their present performances fall well short of even reasonable-and achievable-expectations of accuracy and fairness.

The reasons for this substandard coverage can be broken into subjective factors, which are relatively easy to overcome, and objective factors, which have grown up over time, are much less susceptible to change, and in a sense set the parameters for what realistically can be expected from the media in terms of improved reporting of Islam and the Muslim community in future. The first of these subjective factors is the political sensibility of the Muslim world. The Arab-Israel conflicts, while easily the most sensitive topic for the American media, is only one of several contentious issues; Bosnia, Kashmir and Cyprus are all subject to vigorous debate among sectors of the American public as are the larger topics of north-south economic rela-

tions and the so-called clash of civilisations between Muslim and non-Muslim societies, cultures, and economics. Because so much of the Muslim world is so politically sensitive, coverage of Islam can be a manifold into which reporters and editors venture with caution—some would say timidly.

In extreme cases, “impolitic” coverage of events in the Muslim world can result in economic (and in a very few cases, physical) threats directed against media outlets or personnel. The most intense pressure is exerted by well organised special interests who can mobilise important groups of consumers or advertisers. Since newspapers depend on advertising revenue for their survival, and much of any daily paper’s advertising business comes from a few select customers, such as local car dealerships, grocery chains, and department stores, decisions by a few of them to pull their ads can be devastating to a paper. Veteran journalist Charles Arnot, for example, wrote that he once asked his boss, press mogul William Randolph Hearst, why his reports from Cairo never received the same favourable treatment as those from his colleague in Tel Aviv. “Well, Charlie, look at it this way,” Hearst replied, “just how many Arabs own big department stores that spend money advertising in our papers?”

### **Financial Interests:**

Under such circumstances a kind of self-censorship quickly develops. An editor who receives a toughly worded opinion piece backed with solid, factual information must decide whether to run it knowing it will offend important people in the community who would inflict economic losses on the newspaper or station in question. The editor’s decision probably depends on the subject at issue, the financial state of her/his business, her/his relations with the owners, the power of the special-interest group and the editor’s past experience in similar situations. A little controversy sells papers and attracts an audience, but too much can sink one, or at least its editor.

A second and even more common problem is the subtle manipulation of media outlets by interested parties. The problem is compounded by the narrowly restricted pool of "experts" who turn up time and again on both the television screen and the editorial pages. Fouad Ajami, for instance, writes regularly for *Newsweek*, *The News Republic* and *Foreign Affairs*; he is the in-house Middle East expert of CBS News, and he appears often on the "Mac Neil/Lehrer News Hour". One talking head who has drawn considerable criticism for his comments about Muslims is self-styled terrorism expert Steven Emerson, who traffics in innuendo and unprovable accusations, yet continues to enjoy ready access to both the airwaves and the newspapers. Emerson's broadcast commentary in the two days following the April 19, 1995, bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, when he relentlessly (and incorrectly) pounded away at the presumed involvement of "Muslim terrorists", was particularly egregious and drew criticism from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Emerson's replies to his critics was uncontrite. Another good example of an often used but biased commentator is former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who once served as United States Ambassador to Yugoslavia and has long-standing professional, financial, and personal ties with Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic. Despite these links to the Serbian president, Eagleburger regularly offered his views on events in the former Yugoslavia in the American media (on the "Mc Neil/Lehrer News Hour," for instance) with no mention or disclaimer of his personal interests and involvement.

### **No Background:**

Most journalist assigned to the Middle East beat have no particular background or training in the area; have no personal contacts in the region; and do not speak Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Turkish or Hebrew. Thus they must spend their first twelve to eighteen months on the job simply getting their bearings and painstakingly building up a network of reliable sources. By the time

this is in place, they often are reassigned to other beats, since media outlets also want to move fresh faces into sensitive postings periodically.....

Put unprepared journalists in touch with axes to grind or interests to protect and the product is substandard journalism. Reporters expect their sources to put some kind of spin on the information they provide; a "high-ranking State Department official," for example, is supposed to give the State Department's official line, even if it is not his or her own opinion or if it fails to jibe with reality....

The net result of these factors - self-censorship and outside pressures, a small number of "experts" and commentators, and a heightened susceptibility to misinformation - is what is regarded as "conventional wisdom". Inexperienced reporters who are able to draw only a few recognised sources for information about a topic where the ideological stakes are high - and the potential professional and personal costs to be paid for rocking the boat are similarly high - are unlikely to stray very far from this conventional view of people and events. Thus, the parameters of the debate on Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim world are very narrow, and very difficult for most individuals and organisations within the mainstream American media to transgress without fear.□

# MUSLIM PERSONAL LAW - FACE TO FACE WITH MAULANA SYED NIZAMUDDIN

Aminuddin Shujauddin

Muslims in India are confronted with problems galore, one of prime importance being crisis of identity. Attitude of the government, posture of the forces of fascism and abatement by some self-proclaimed progressive Muslims, aggravates the crisis, with attempts to tamper with Muslim Personal Law, off and on and to usher in a Common Civil Code. Muslim masses, overall, are alive to such forays but not conversant with basics and nature of threat. Consequently, they are themselves prone to violation of MPL, obviously out of utter ignorance of stipulations. Muslim Personal Law Board was constituted in 1973 to serve as an undisputed repository of faith and trust of the community and a platform for asserting their stand-point.

A need was felt to expand the logic behind formation of the Board and bring to light the dangers, existing and impending. The person most suited for such elucidation could be none other than Hazrat Maulana Syed Nizamud-din, general secretary All India Muslim Personal Law Board, who is also the head of Amarat-i-Shariah, Bihar and Orissa.

An interview conducted with the Maulana in this context follows:

**Question:** What exactly is Muslim Personal Law and what was the objective behind setting up of the Board?

**Answer:** An apt question that, considering that very few are really aware of the specific provisions of this Law. Muslim Personal Law is a coveted part of the divine law, encompassing the personal and family affairs of every Muslim. The law does not interfere with the affairs of any other faith or their tenets. Divine Law (*Sharia*) while dealing with religious conduct and rites, also lays down precise guidelines for cultural, social, educational and commercial activities, adherence to

which is inevitable for all believers. As the codes are based directly on the Holy Book and Traditions, the Muslim clergy took serious note of attempts to interfere with the Law. The country's constitution, framed subsequent to attainment of freedom, provides for full liberty to citizens in pursuing their own religion and for its propagation. However, section 44 of guiding principles advises the government to enact and promulgate a uniform Civil Code, applicable to all communities in respect of individual and collective affairs. Ciamour for a uniform civil code started in 1960, which some pretentious Muslims like Mohammadally Caurrim Chhagla and Abdul Hameed Dalvai contending that MPL was infested with lacunae, requiring eradication. They quoted, rather mis-quoted, the example of subjugation of women's rights and joined hands with advocates of common civil code. A conference of Muslim clergy was convened by Maulana Minnat-ullah Rahmani and was held under the presidentship of Maulana Abdur Rahman. A sort of cold war swayed, intensifying in 1972, upon introduction of Children Adoption Bill in the parliament, when Mr. Asoke Sen was the Law Minister. He declared that this would be the first step towards a uniform civil code, leading to natural apprehensions in the direction. The Bill provided parity to an adopted child with a natural off-spring, delinked from parents and becoming entitled to full legacy of adopted family. By virtue of authority vested in me as the organiser of *Amarat-i-Shariah*, I along with *Qazi of Amarat*, raised the first voice in defence of MPL and communicated our *locus-standi* to Government of India. Maulana Minnatullah Rehmani, Ameer-i-Shariah, considering the action inadequate, advised for rallying of Muslim intellectuals and clergy's opinion. All this while, media harped eloquent, berating MPL; parda system, divorce procedure being the main targets. The thrust was towards creating doubts and scepticism among Muslim masses, and was aimed at augmenting the dangers posed from authorities towards MPL. Logical and rational rejoinders also poured in.

In consultation with Maulana Atiq-ur-Rehman Usmani, a comprehensive questionnaire was distributed widely and in a meeting held at Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband, it was decided to enlighten the whole country on the reality of Muslim Personal Law and about the genesis of threat looming before it. After great efforts and alacrity on the part of Muslims of Bombay, a convention, under the presidentship of Hazrat Maulana Qari Tayyab, was held in Bombay on 27th, 28th of December 1972. It was heartening to find all Muslims rising above the differences of jurisprudence, culture and resolving unequivocally and unanimously that they would brook no tampering in MPL, even if some Muslim pretenders do bring a bill to this effect in any legislature.

**Question:** What was the extent of success of the convention and how did the government and media react?

**Answer:** The likes of Hameed Dalvai enjoyed the backing of medial and officialdom. Dalvai organised a procession to coincide with the convention, participation being a meagre thirty-fourty persons, full police protection notwithstanding. Next morning, media highlighted the procession with fan-fare. By the grace of Almighty, the convention proved to be a milestone, eliciting an attendance of well nigh five lakhs, announcing to the whole country, government, media, Muslims, non-Muslims, that MPL was sacrosanct to them and the extent to which their sentiments could be injured on attempting any meddlesome act. The media however played down the convention, with brief obscure column.

The convention also brought home to the government that in a vast, multi-religious, multi-cultured country a uniform civil code is a mere hypothesis, not amenable to implementation and the idea had better be given up. What is more, it would in no way contribute to progress nor would any tangible gains accrue out of it. Barring some misdirected, so called intellectuals, none is keen on it.

As for the guiding principles in the constitution, hardly any thought is given or any earnest demand discernible for enforcing prohibition of intoxicants and alcoholism, which is also a notable guiding principle.

The convention also apprised the government of a divisive mentality, inimical to Muslim identity backing the vendetta. This led the government to declare non-interference with MPL. This announcement however, had a rider that it would hold till such time as Muslims themselves do not ask for a modification. This was tantamount to a tacit encouragement for elements ignorant of Islamic covenants and who advocate a libertine culture and could anytime be a tool for detractors of Muslim Personal Law.

**Question:** In what way did the convention prove to be a precursor to Muslim Personal Law Board?

**Answer:** Even with success of the convention and declaration of non-interference by the government, the errand appeared short of completion, and the danger survived. The situation called for a permanent body, for which a Muslim Personal Law Conference was held at Hyderabad in 1973 and MPL Board was duly constituted. General council comprised one hundred and fifty one (151) members and the executive forty one (41). Maulana Qari Tayyab and Maulana Minnatullah Rahmani were elected president and general secretary respectively, the latter of course having been the moving spirit.

Since the very outset the Board was seized of the fact that the danger to MPL was two-pronged: one from the government and the other internal which, by and large evolved out of ignorance and lack of awareness in the community itself. MPL encompasses fourteen subjects, such as matrimony (*nikah*), divorce, inheritance (*virasat*), endowment, patronage (*kifalat*), for which dissemination of adequate knowledge was the demand of the day.

**Question:** Muslim Personal Law is an English nomenclature. What could be the background and history for this?

**Answer:** It would be relevant to recall that during British regime, the decisions of the court were in accordance with the customs prevailing in the region to which an issue pertained. For instance, if in a particular region, the accepted practice was to deprive the daughter of any share in parents' legacy, the court in case of a dispute, would uphold the custom. One such case, however, was pursued right up to Privy Council, with the learned clergy basing the argument upon Islamic divine law, which is applicable to all Muslims and not susceptible to nullification and modification by any custom or enactment and which confers upon the daughter a right to her part in inheritance. The Privy Council concurred and adjudicated in favour of the girl. Around this time, in 1938, Shariat Application Act was passed, stipulating that Civil cases involving Muslims would be judged on the basis of this law. The Act incorporated the names of books, to be treated as reference base and these were translated into English. Legal practitioners and counsels studied Muslim personal Law, which was included in syllabi for law courses. The present government has sustained and promulgated the Act. Consequently, our representation to the government is that not only did the British maintain the personal law of various faiths in India but the Muslims in eight hundred years of their rule made no alteration in the law of any religion. In a secular set up there is no rationale for interference in Muslim Personal Law, what with copious explicit safeguards for the right of minorities embodied in the constitution.

**Question:** What would be the nature of internal hazards indicated in your foregoing surmise?

**Answer:** The danger stems from widespread ignorance among Muslims. Although the procedure prescribed for solemnisation of marriage (*nikah*) is palpably simple, it has been encumbered with superfluous, even nefarious practices like tilak, demanded dowry and con-

cept of grooms' family being superior to that of brides'; pronouncing divorce in a state of anger or inebriation, with undue haste, or triple declaration in one breath leaving no room for reconciliation; abandoning a wife without proper divorce and enacting another marriage; deprivation of daughters of their rightful dues; splurging from endowments on unauthorised heads or for personal ends; non-compliance of testament. All under influence of neighbouring cultures. Rules and implications about two or more children, not natural siblings, having been nursed by a common woman, as also about foster guardianship, are hardly studied, much less cared for. Abandonment of veil by Muslim women is fraught with social and moral complications. Elders have rated the internal threat as the more severe. The main endeavour with the MPL Board is not only the protection of the Law but more so eradication of mal-practices infesting the Muslim society. This is proposed to be met by dissemination of correct knowledge through books, hand-outs, addresses, with several organisations at various levels, in their own style, working already.

**Question:** What is the attitude of judiciary towards MPL? Has there been any legislation tanta-mount to interference; if so, what is the counter-action by the MPL Board?

**Answer:** Purview of the board is limited to protection of Islamic covenants and moral code, upon which rests the structure of Muslim identity. The demand of the Muslims through MPL Board to the government is entirely within the ambit of the constitution. Other problems confronting the community are dealt with by organisations established for each specific purpose. Till date no law interfering with MPL has been enacted, the ones in force prior to formation of the Board excepted. Even last mentioned are of optional nature and not binding, such as Civil Marriage Act, Special Marriage Act. With proper awareness among Muslims,

such Acts would be ineffective (at least for the discerning class).

The proclivity of judiciary to verdicts encroaching upon MPL is of-course irksome. One example is of Shah Bano case, which was taken up by the Board, leading to enactment of regular law on subsistence to a Muslim divorcee; a slight lacuna persists though, needing eradication. It has nevertheless been acknowledged that consequent upon divorce, the woman does not remain a wife, is not entitled to maintenance in that capacity, on expiry of probation period(*iddat*). However if the upbringing of children, upto seven years of age for a male and till adulthood in case of a female, is her responsibility, the father is liable to provide for their maintenance. If there is a suckling, father's liability is till weaning at least. Goes without saying that these provisions date back prior to current enactment also.

At times, judgements provide for treating a divorcee as a wife in regard to entitlement for maintenance allowance from ex-husband, till she re-marries, blatantly ignoring the fact of the law having already been modified. Another irritant is misrepresentation of a correct judgement by the media, amounting to a covert excitement of Muslim feelings. In a recent case Supreme Court awarded maintenance for a male child upto two years of age and to a female child till adulthood, in line with MPL, which even a Qazi would have pronounced. The quantum of maintenance allowance is commensurate with the financial and social status of the concerned parties. The media misquoted the judgement as if it contravened MPL.

**Question:** Would you please elucidate upon the steps proposed to ameliorate the unfortunate situation arising out of prejudicial approach of even the judiciary?

**Answer:** The position is pathetic really, with the honourable judges not keeping MPL in proper perspective while deciding a case. The Board proposes to publish a reference book to appraise the learned lawyers of provisions of MPL.

**Question:** What are the plans for addressing the decadence in Muslim culture and prevailing environment?

**Answer:** A committee has been formed by the Board, which in a meeting at Nadwa decided to include an awareness about topics like matrimony, divorce etc. by publishing and distributing booklets. An example is of Sharda Act, dating back to British times, which prohibited marriage between minors. Reaction of other communities is beyond our scope, but Muslim parents under certain circumstances, did feel constrained to decide about a betrothal during their lifetime. Divine Law (*Shariah*) allows for such action. Hence Sharda Act could never really take effect.

**Question:** What according to you, could be the ulterior motive for foisting a uniform Civil Code?

**Answer:** In 1956, Hindu Code Bill was moved, despite a majority being averse to it. It was explained to them that in the absence of any provision for divorce or share in legacy, a Hindu woman if harassed by her husband resorts either to suicide or conversion to other faiths. Hindu Code Bill was passed after great pursuance. Subsequent efforts were to transform it into uniform civil code, one specific attempt coming in 1972. This is despite the Hindu Code Bill being followed more in violation than in compliance, both in regard to inheritance and divorce. Time honoured tradition in Hindu society is that a girl is entitled only to what is doled out as tilak and no more of her share in parents' assets; all her links with parental family stand severed and she merges completely with her husband's family. Concept of divorce does not exist. MPL and *Shariah* stipulate a rational apportionment of inheritance between male and female off-springs.

**Question:** The pity is that as on date, even Muslims are practising the customs of other faiths. What could be the remedial measures?

**Answer:** The obvious malady is utter ignorance about covenanted provisions and lack of Islamic spirit. So much so that a lay Muslim is oblivious to mutual duties and rights. The lust for material gains has worst confounded the matters. The Board has launched a drive to disseminate knowledge through easily assimilable literature in all prevalent languages, in the fervent hope of restoring the Muslim community to its exalted status and to thwart the external and internal threat to their culture and faith.□

**Rendered into English by Mashoon Ahmad**

## HONOURING THE GUEST

Honouring the guest : According to a report in Bukhari, a day and night (of rest in your house) are the guest's right. If you did it up to three days it would be, diyafah i.e. honouring him. Beyond that is charity.. 'Ayni has said, The ikram (honouring) of the guest will differ from situation to situation and person to person. Sometimes it might be an unconditional obligatory (fardh 'ayn) act; at others, conditionally obligatory (fardh kifayah). The least that can be said is that it is a sign of good character to treat the guests well, for, it is a Sunnah of the Messengers and Prophets. When the Prophet said that good care of the guests should be taken for three days, (as stated in many ahadith), he spoke of what is apart from the first day which is obligatory. That is the opinion of some scholars including Malik. Ibn Battal has said that on the first day the guest might be offered just the best. On the second day, the treatment might be better than the normal and the average. On the third day he eats the normal food, as everybody else in the house. From the third day onward, in fact, it is a charity. Some scholars have expressed the opinion that if the host refuses to provide, then it might be forcibly extracted from him. It is also pointed out that hosting is Wajib (obligatory) on the people of the small towns and villages, and not on those of the big cities. That is because, in big cities a traveller can find hotels and guest-houses to stay in. □

# SHAYKH MAHMUD SHALTUT: BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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The significance of Shaltut's contribution to Islamic scholarship is enhanced by the fact that he held the post of Shaykh al-Azhar, and the Azhar, despite vicissitudes in its fortunes, continues to be esteemed as one of the most prestigious centres of Sunni authority in the Islamic world. It hosts pan-Islamic conferences and receives international student missions, and its Fatwa Commission, inaugurated in 1935, answers the queries of Muslims all over the Islamic world.

Shaltut was Shaykh al-Azhar at a pivotal time for Egyptian affairs and for the Azhar, from 1958 to 1963. It had long been clear in Egypt and elsewhere that the forces of modernisation were outpacing the forces of traditionalism, and the prestige of the '*ulama*' was not what it had been. The free Officers' 1952 Revolution was to have far-reaching implications for the Azhar and for other Islamic institutions in Egypt. For various reasons the '*ulama*' were generally supportive of the new regime and its socialist policies. From the government's point of view, the moving force of Islam was too great a potential threat and too valuable a potential ally to be disregarded. Jamal 'Abd al Nasir embarked on a series of measures to exert control over the forces of Islam in Egypt. One of the first priorities was the suppression of the Muslim Brothers, who represented the ideological threat to the new government, which in the eyes of the Brothers fell short of being a truly Islamic regime. This was followed by the abolition of the autonomous *Shari'a*

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courts in 1956 in order to achieve a unified judicial system under state control. Finally, in 1961, the regime felt confident enough to tackle the Azhar itself, and a reform law was imposed upon it. This law represented a radical reorganisation of the Azhar; in the Supreme Council and other new organs it was the government which held the balance of power, and the powers of Shaykh al Azhar were greatly circumscribed. This reform came after a sustained attack on the '*ulama*', primarily through the press, as at best hidebound reactionaries out of touch with the modern world, and at worst corrupt individuals interested only in their own gain.

Shaltut himself had been one of a small group of reform-minded '*ulama*' who were expelled from the Azhar for their campaigning activities as early as 1931. Doubtless his appointment owed something to his progressive attitude towards the question of reform of the Azhar. Although the imposition of this reform from above was something of a humiliation of the Azharites, Shaltut publicly endorsed the reforms. One may conjecture that this was the only practical way of maintaining his position and making the best of a difficult situation, but he must have also realised that the '*ulama*', through their continued resistance to reform attempts throughout the century, had deprived themselves of the opportunity to influence the reform that was fully imposed. Moreover, while some aspects of the reform could be seen as a threat to the autonomy of the Azhar, other aspects were in accordance with what Shaltut and others had been calling for. These included the desire to break down the isolation of the Azhar and strengthen links with the other institutions and nations, the modernisation of the curriculum, the removal of the educational dualism which had grown up between the system of religious schools and colleges and the largely secular state system of education, and the provision of employment for Azhar graduates.

Shaltut received a wholly traditional religious education, with no foreign-language training. In this he

differed from the earlier reformers Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida, and as a result was more insulated from the direct impact of Western ideas. Perhaps it is partly because of this that his works convey a greater sense of the self-sufficiency of Islamic society and culture; at one time he expressed the view that Muslims should postpone the study of foreign languages and cultural heritage; otherwise such study could lead to a weakening of self-confidence and sense of identity. In view of the profound political, economic, social, and cultural Western influence already obtaining in Egypt and elsewhere, Shaltut may have underestimated the urgency of undertaking the daunting intellectual task of confronting Western thought and institutions in order to weed out that which was Islamically unacceptable, but his sentiment is an understandable one. His ignorance of Western languages and culture may have meant that he was not ideally suited to address those who had already been seduced from their religion by the attractions of Western civilisation (notwithstanding his painful awareness of this phenomenon). But it may have had the advantage that his work, unlike that of some of his contemporaries, is not dominated by the need to try to justify Islamic precepts in the light of the values and social patterns prevalent in the West. We shall not find Shaltut guilty of producing 'third-rate apologetic literature'.

Shaltut's best-known published works are: *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim: al-Ajza' al-'Asharat al-Ula*, a Qur'anic commentary which follows the 'thematic' style of *tafsir* (*tafsir mawdu't*); *Al-Fatawa*, a collection of *fa-tawa* grouped under subject headings; *Al-Islam: 'Aqida wa Shari'a*, most of which is devoted to the *Shari'a*, dealing with various legal topics as well as the sources of the Islamic law; and *Min Tawjihat al-Islam*, which consists of collective writings and articles on miscellaneous Islamic topics. All of these works have run into several editions, varying from eight to thirteen at the last count. In addition to these there is a collection of monographs on Qur'anic topics entitled *Min Huda al-*

*Qura'n*, and a specialised work on comparative jurisprudence intended as a textbook for students at Kulliyat al-Shari'a, the law school of the Azhar, entitled *Muqaranat al-Madhahib fi al-Fiqh*. Shaltut was a regular contributor to *Majallat al-Azhar* and other Islamic journals, and not infrequently gave interviews to various newspapers and magazines. He also broadcast radio talks on religious topics; some of these are preserved in his published works.

Shaltut was a popular Shaykh al-Azhar, and although he figures very little in Western scholarship, his name is still well known to educated Muslims from all over the world. He was a *mufiti* and a scholar of high-standing before he became Shaykh al-Azhar. In his legal opinions he made a sincere attempt to confront some of the particular problems faced by Muslims in the modern age, while articulating a deep conviction in the eternal values of Islam and helping to preserve the element of continuity which safeguards the distinctive identity of Muslims, and in this lay much of popular appeal. He is quoted often in religious and scholarly works, and in two cases I have seen his work reproduced verbatim without acknowledgement. Among his pupils who have undoubtedly been influenced by him are Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Muhammad al-Madani, both renowned scholars. He received visits from many figures of international standing including heads of states and religious authorities, and he himself visited several countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

Like 'Abduh, Shaltut felt he could best achieve reform from within the system. He devoted much of his time to sitting on committees which concerned themselves with various areas of academic study and research, reform of the Azhar, and Muslim welfare. He was concerned to strengthen the pastoral role of the '*ulama*' by increased communication with ordinary Muslims in need of guidance. This concern emerges clearly in his own writings which combine straightforward non-technical language with homiletic eloquence, not only in

general religious writings but in his *tafsir* and *fatawa* also. One of his greatest contributions was to continue the work of 'Abduh and others in the demystification and popularisation of the religious sciences.

Shaltut's work is dominated by the desire for Muslim unity. For the last twenty five years of his life he was closely involved in the pioneering work of *Jama'at al-Taqrīb bayna al-Madhahib*, an organisation established by a group of eminent Sunni and Shi'i scholars with the professed aim of bringing Sunnis and Shi'is closer together and eliminating the sectarian spirit (*madhabiyya*) in the schools of law, without abolishing the schools themselves. As Shaykh al-Azhar, Shaltut issued a controversial *fatwa* in 1958 declaring that worship according to a Shi'i *madhab* was as legitimate as to a Sunni *madhab*. He was also instrumental in introducing the study of Shi'i law into the Azhar curriculum. This ecumenical spirit pervades his work; his legal writings contain routine references to the opinions of jurists from the different schools of law, including, where appropriate, the Ja'fari.

Like other reformers who worked for Muslim unity, Shaltut made a deliberate attempt to narrow the sphere of essential beliefs (the denial of which renders someone a *kafir*), thus broadening the area of the legitimate difference of opinion. When he published the opinion that it is not essential for a Muslim to believe that Jesus has been physically raised up to be with God in heaven, where he now lives, awaiting the end of the world when he will descend, the ensuing storm of protest obliged him to write further articles in defence of his position. In a rare display of concentrated polemic, Shaltut embarked on a detailed linguistic, grammatical, contextual, and syntactical *tafsir* of the relevant Qur'anic verses in order to demonstrate that they were open to interpretation (*mutashabih*). He also argued that the type of source upon which matters of essential creed can be based does not include *ahadith ahad* (those with an insufficient number of independent *insads* to guar-

antee their authenticity) or *ijma*, both of which were cited by his opponents.

History has shown that theological controversy is a breeding ground for sectarianism, and although this is less the case in the modern age it is felt that this is still potentially hazardous for Muslim unity. Shaltut refrains from any detailed discussion of theological questions, preferring a straightforward, almost common-sense attitude to matters such as that of God's decree versus man's free will (*al-qada' wa' l-qadar*). He simply states that it is obvious that man is responsible for his own actions since the concept of accountability and Divine Judgement is predicated upon man's choice between good and evil. Those Qur'anic verses which some interpret as God causing people to be misled, should be taken as meaning that He does not stand in the way of their being misled if that is what they choose; and God's perfect foreknowledge has no coercive presence *vis-a-vis* an individual person's freedom of action. In this issue, as in the question of God's bounty versus good works (*al-fadl wa'l-a'mal*), Shaltut denies that there is any inherent contradiction between the two concepts by drawing a clear distinction between man, who is limited, and God, who is infinite.

Once the central core of essential beliefs is agreed upon, difference of opinion in other matters is a commendable sign that the 'spirit of *ijtihad*' is alive among contemporary scholars. Some of Shaltut's own legal opinions are followed by the words: '*li-kulli mujtahid nasib*' ('every mujtahid will have his reward'). Related to the sphere of legitimate belief in the sphere of the lawful and the prohibited (*al-halal wa'l-haram*). In order to avoid mutual condemnation and *takfir* (accusing others of unbelief) among Muslims the *haram* area must be circumscribed as far as possible, on the traditional Islamic premises that things are lawful unless the contrary is proved. Although a *mufti* himself, Shaltut was able to recognise that an excessive seeking of *fatawa* could have undesirable results, giving rise to a profusion of (probably conflicting) *fatawa* which might

confuse and divide. He recommends that they concentrate instead on the general principles of the Shari'a, bearing in mind the *hadith*: 'Righteousness is that with which the soul feels comfortable, and wrongdoing is that which wavers in the breast....' He deplores the obsession of Muftis and Muslims generally with minutiae that may affect the validity of the fast; he urges an observance in the *spirit* of the fast which will raise the soul above with reoccupations.

In one of his fatawa Shaltut argues that the pleasure which man feels in listening to music can only be an innocent one, as it is part of human nature to be attracted to that which is essentially pleasing; therefore, music cannot be intrinsically *haram*. This essentially positive attitude contrasts with the stern tones of some 'ulama' on this subject. One scholar, whose fatawa is published in *Majallat al Azhar*, quotes with approval the Hanafi opinion that the playing of music, as well as games such as backgammon, chess, and dominoes, is *haram* because they are a waste of time and preoccupy the believer, causing him to forget about God.

Occasionally Shaltut's desire to minimise the *haram* by implementing the principle of *yusr* (ease, or lack of hardship) leads him to issue an opinion which seems to contradict a recognised *hadith*. This is the case when he argues that men whose work entails loading and unloading wine do not come under the prophetic curse which embraces all who deal with wine, including the one who carries it. These men, argues Shaltut, do not intend to abet anyone in sin, but are simply doing it to earn their living. This is a rather surprising inversion of the well-known Islamic precept that one should earn one's living by legitimate means.

Shaltut is similarly lenient in his definition of what makes a person *Kafir*. He restores to a flexible, non-literal interpretation of the *ahadith* which state that the omission of the obligatory ritual prayer entails *kufr*, in order to avoid branding someone a *kafir* for matters other than those of essential creed (a distinction being drawn between one who denies the obligation to pray

and one who admits the prayer while acknowledging its obligatory nature). He interprets the *ahadith* as being a strong reprimand, intended to act as a deterrent, rather than literal statements of fact.

The desire to give the benefit of doubt extends to non-Muslims. No matter how aberrant Christians' beliefs about Jesus, they retain their status of *ahl al-kitab* (the 'people of the Book', who, having their own divine scriptures, are granted a status superior to that of unbelievers and polytheists), by virtue of their basic belief in God and in revelation; in the face of this even the belief that God is 'the third of three' does not make them polytheists. This contrasts with the view held by some Muslims that Jews and Christians enjoyed the status of *ahl al-kitab* during the prophet's age, but subsequently, through their rejection of Islam and further aberrations in their beliefs and behaviour, have become '*kafirun*'.

Shaltut further maintains that even those who have no religion cannot be labelled '*kafir*' unless they have had the message of Islam presented to them in a sympathetic and clearly understandable manner, i.e. unless they have actively turned away from guidance. As long as they refrain from harming Islam or the Muslims, non-Muslims can be considered 'brothers in humanity', all working together for the general good and each propagating his own religion non-aggressively. Treaties and alliances can be concluded with them, and the Qur'an explicitly enjoins or permits justice and kindness (*birr*) towards them. The permission for marriage with the womenfolk of *ahl al-kitab* is seen as highly significant in view of the intimacy and sacredness of the marriage relationship.

In his legal rulings Shaltut goes against traditional opinion concerning the status of *ahl al-kitab* as regards *qisas* (talion) and legal testimony. He is of the opinion that *qisas* is applicable where a Muslim kills a *dhimmi*, and that the testimony of a non-Muslim is valid in a Shari'a court. In the present socio-political climate where many Muslims live in nation-states where all citizens are theoretically equal, it is not uncommon for

Muslim scholars to express the view that all human lives are of equal worth. That a Shaykh al-Azhar should derive this view in a scholarly manner from the original Islamic texts may authenticate it from within Islam.

So far I have highlighted various aspects of religious tolerance in Shaltut's thought, in accordance with the prevailing tone of his writings. However Shaltut was a man whose mind and spirit were immersed in the Qur'an, which is not free from polemic against Jews and Christians; it points out for example that Jews and Christians are capable of employing various ruses to lead Muslims astray. The reverse side of the coin of Muslim unity may be a cautious attitude towards inter-faith relationships; the Qur'an warns of the dangers of following some of the Jews and Christians as close friends or allies (*awliya'*) becomes one of them (5:51) is quoted in a list of Qur'anic warnings against 'enemies of Islam'; possibly Shaltut takes it to refer specifically to those Jews and Christians who are hostile to Islam.

On the rare occasions when Shaltut attacks 'Christianity', however, it is clear that what he is in fact attacking is the imperialist spirit. This is clear in a bitter tirade against the self-proclaimed guardians of so-called world peace, 'whose anniversary is celebrated every year by the liars and slanderers who claim to follow the messenger of peace [ i.e. Jesus]... He resents the claim of Christians that theirs is the only peace loving religion and their accusation that Islam was spread by the sword, while it is they who are propagating destructive wars in the modern age.

Shaltut displays a keen awareness of the evil consequences of the age of imperialism, including Muslims' loss of the moral initiative due to a natural tendency to respect the beliefs of the powerful. This, together with the perceived threat to the coherence and integrity of the Muslim community, leads him to express opinions which may appear reactionary. Shaltut points out that the Qur'anic permission to marry women from *ahl al-kitab* was given on the assumption that the male predominates on the family, and that therefore this

would be a means of propagating Islam peacefully, giving Jews and Christians the opportunity to learn about Islam at first hand in an atmosphere of love and friendship. Therefore, when such marriages become a means for the contrary to take place, with men becoming Europeanised and allowing their children to be brought up as Christians, this represents an abuse of the permission. If such abuse becomes widespread, as Shaltut believed it to be, governments should outlaw such marriages altogether, even though this would be prohibiting (albeit temporarily) something which is expressly permitted in the Qur'an, and which, as we have observed, Shaltut himself admits to be of potential benefit.

It is clear that this is a particularly sensitive issue for Shaltut, and one that provokes an emotional reaction:

Often as a Christian or Jewish wife, living in a Muslim country and enjoying the benefits of life there under the auspices of a naive Muslim husband, served her own country or government, deceiving her husband and using him as a means to inflict disaster on his country and to give her own country a foothold in it.

His bitterness again leads him to express himself in strong terms when he states that restricting the permission to marry Christian and Jewish women is more urgent than that which some Islamic governments are doing, or attempting to do, in the way of setting a lower age-limit for the marriage of girls, or restricting polygamy, or placing checks upon divorce and other similar legislation which many of the politicians are promoting in their attempt to catch up with the dismal civilisation of the West.

Many Muslim scholars have, like Shaltut, expressed reservations about Muslim men marrying women of other religions. Since inter-religious marriages most often involve Christian women, it is these which are most often discussed, and often in the context of what is perceived as an infatuation with Western civilisation. Shaltut, however, did not go as far as those

who have sought to represent Christian women as morally inferior in order to reinforce their disapproval.

Having observed Shaltut's views in some areas of religious tolerance, I shall proceed to survey his opinion on certain issues which are particularly sensitive in the modern age: polygamy, birth control, financial transactions involving interest, and the value of female testimony.

Shaltut feels that modernist legislation on polygamy is directly Western-inspired, and his reaction to it is accordingly vehement. He recommends that, instead of placing a lower age-limit on marriage or trying to prohibit or restrict polygamy, those in authority should on the contrary be imposing an upper age-limit on celibacy and passing laws to facilitate rather than hinder the practice of polygamy. He opposes any attempt to integrate the Qur'anic exhortation to men to restrict themselves to one wife if they fear they cannot be just to their wives (4:3) into an effective ban on polygamy due to the impossibility of absolute justice in this regard (4:129). Shaltut sees that as tampering with the wording of the Qur'an which explicitly permits polygamy, and which does not mention any conditions such as the illness or sterility of the wife. With regard to legislation requiring that a man prove his financial ability to support an additional wife before being granted permission to practise polygamy, Shaltut observes dryly that if poverty and wealth are to be taken as criteria for the permissibility of polygamy, then one had better allow it for the poor and ban it for the rich, since in a rich household the husband can afford presents and luxuries which arouse jealousy among co-wives. The poor, on the other hand, are accustomed to contenting themselves with what little they have and to living in a spirit of mutual support and co-operation. This legislation, in which Shaltut saw a tendency to make polygamy a prerogative of the rich, must have offended his sense of the social justice and egalitarianism of Islam.

Shaltut's attitude to polygamy contrasts with that of many reformers in the modern age. Ameer 'Ali of In-

dia and Qasim Amin were among the first to juxtapose the two Qur'anic verses (4:3 and 4:129) in the way that Shaltut described and deplored. Even Muhammad 'Abduh waxed eloquent on the potential evils of polygamy in this day and age, as opposed to the age of the prophet. Others have drawn a parallel between slavery and polygamy. Fazlur Rahman argues that slavery and polygamy were permitted because it was not possible to remove them at one stroke, but their ultimate abolition was 'a moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move'.

Furthermore, Shaltut's attitude with regard to the Qur'anic verses on polygamy contrasts with his willingness to compromise on the explicit Qur'anic to marry the women of *ahl al-kitab* where abuses arise. This appears to be for largely pragmatic reasons, since Shaltut regards any domestic upset arising from polygamy as far less of a threat to Islam. However, a guiding principle is also discernible, since Shaltut argues that the possible benefits of permitting polygamy outweigh its potential problems, and the extreme cases where grave problems do arise do not justify its total prohibition.

The subject of family planning or birth control is one in which '*ulama*' - government co-operation cannot in general be ruled out as an influencing factor, since some governments blame overpopulation for various economic ills. It has been observed that some scholars have declared themselves 'in favour' of birth control despite continuing strong opposition among the other scholars. Shaltut himself could not be described as an advocate of birth control, and in his writings on the subject in general there is no evidence to suggest a response to government pressure. On this subject Shaltut takes a moderate stand, seeing birth control as legitimate in certain circumstances. He feels that ideally the mother should have a two year interval between births, during which she can complete the suckling of the first infant and regain her strength before giving birth again. Moreover, a small number of well-brought up healthy children is preferable to a large number of physically or

morally weak children, and if the parents anticipate difficulty or hardship in raising their children, due to ill health or poverty, and receive no financial help from the government, then they can justifiably resort to contraception.

In the context of modern Muslim thought, Shaltut's position lies between two extremes: a strictly 'traditional' attitude, which regards contraception as tantamount to abortion or infanticide, justifiable only in case of demonstrable danger to the health of the mother (a minority position generally taken by those who associate the spread of family planning with Western influence and Western-inspired moral laxity), or at the other extreme a willingness to condone birth control unconditionally, some times expressed by religious scholars at the behest of governments wishing to restrict population growth. Within a narrow frame of reference, his views on the subject compared with those of other 'ulama' of his time, who were more outspokenly opposed to contraception, are relatively 'liberal', as is his view on artificial insemination, which he considered permissible from husband to wife.

Probably the greatest accommodation to contemporary realities is discernible in Shaltut's attitude towards certain types of financial transaction which may or may not be considered usurious, such as Post Office savings, and towards bank loans with interest, which generally are considered to be usurious. The accommodation is the more marked because Shaltut's own position undergoes a marked change with the passage of time.

Shaltut expresses his earlier opinion in his *Tafsir*, where he advocated a strict interpretation of what constitutes unlawful interest (*riba*). He disagrees with those who interpret the phrase *adafan muda afatan* (doubling and quadrupling - Qur'an 3:130) as qualifactory, implying that only exorbitant interest is forbidden, and he explicitly denies as exceptions to the prohibition of interest. He denies also that interest is an inescapable feature of modern economic life, or that the ban on *riba*

has been detrimental to the economics of Muslim countries. He sees such beliefs as a symptom of disillusionment with the Sharia as a whole, and of infatuation with Western civilisation. He expresses the belief that if transactions involving interest were to be prohibited in Egypt, then people would seek other forms of transaction; the economy could be reorganised in accordance with Islamic principles 'if people sincerely desired it', and the economy would not suffer as a result. Because he sees *riba* as non-essential to the welfare of Muslim countries, he does not accept the use of the principle 'necessity makes forbidden things permissible (*al-darura tubihu al-mahzuraf*) to justify *riba* transactions.

In Shaltut's *fatawa* on financial transactions, probably issued several years after the foregoing opinions expressed in his *Tafsir*, he appears to have considerably modified his views. Like Muhammad 'Abduh before him, Shaltut declares Post Office savings to be lawful. He concentrates on the benefits for all concerned which accrue therefrom, and the fact that both parties enter into the agreement willingly, so that there is no hint of exploitation or injustice; he appears to consider this the determinative factor. The man who invests his savings in the Post Office is on the one hand displaying a laudable frugality and on the other hand contributing to the overall notional propriety by providing employment for Post Office workers and supporting government investment. Shaltut has no particular objection to the fact that the rate of return is fixed. He side-steps the objection that fixed rates cannot reflect profit and loss by arguing that, since these institutions are entirely new and do not come under any of the classical categories of financial transaction such as *mudaraba*, the stipulations laid down concerning those transactions do not apply here. The principle is backed up by the practical consideration that the Post Office achieves a high degree of financial stability, so that the risk of loss is almost negligible.

Bank loans with interest are less easy to defend, but more vital on a national scale to the economics of

developing countries such as Egypt. Religious scholars of this century have shown themselves to be acutely aware of this dilemma, particularly before the rise of Islamic banking movement in the seventies and eighties which led out some hope of a solution to the dilemma, at least on a national scale. Many religious scholars concede that, if a Muslim country is faced with a choice between economic isolation and regression on the one hand, and borrowing on interest in order to develop its economy on the other, then the latter is lesser than the two evils; this is generally seen as a concession to a particular set of circumstances and not as an acceptance of interest as an unavoidable feature of the world economy.

Despite Shaltut's unwillingness to make such a concession in his *Tafsir*, in one of his *fatawa* he states that the one who borrows on interest out of necessity does not share in the guilt of the usurious transaction, since he is in effect constrained to do so, and is thus covered by the Qur'anic pronouncement: 'God has plain to you what is forbidden, except when you are constrained' (6:119). The way in which he goes on to reason that this can apply to nations as well as individuals, enumerating the various essential heads of expenditure such as agriculture, defence, trade, and industry, indicates that it is principally the interests of the national economy that he has in mind. This represents a departure from his former objection to the use of the principle 'necessity makes forbidden things permissible' to justify usurious transactions.

One may conjecture that in the interval between the two opinions expressed Shaltut became more directly concerned with, or simply more knowledgeable about, the practical problems of running the country's economy; the passage in his *Tafsir* was no doubt written with the primary aim of urging Muslims not to be cynical or defeatist about the viability of an Islamic, interest-free economy, and this sentiment is not contradicted by his later *fatawa*. The real contrast lies in his later willingness to concede to 'necessity', or rather his

acknowledgement that such a necessity existed. Taken together, the two passages provide an illustration of Shaltut's two, sometimes conflicting, sides: the idealist and pragmatist.

Another issue on which Shaltut demonstrates a willingness to come to terms with present-day realities is that of female testimony. His views on women in general are in accordance with the Qur'anic vision, including the traditional role distribution where ultimate authority rests with the husband, within a loving and mutually supportive relationship. He stresses the equality of the sexes as regards their inherent worth as human and spiritual beings. On the basis of the Qur'anic verse on the subject of credit transactions (2:282), some classical jurists had determined that a woman's legal testimony is worth half that of a man *in general*, regardless of the subject in hand. Shaltut rejects such an interpretation as implying that the woman has a weaker mind, which in turn implies that she is inferior as a human being. He makes the point that the Qur'an has revealed at a time when women were not accustomed to taking part in financial transactions; since one's memory is more reliable concerning that which one understands, a woman's evidence in such matters would be less trustworthy than that of a man. Although Shaltut feels that it is still largely the case that it is men rather than women who undertake such transactions, he believes that in an environment where women are routinely involved in such transactions, their testimony should be considered equal to that of men. He mentions that, conversely, in domestic matters, where women can be presumed to have superior knowledge, their testimony would be likely to be more reliable than that of men.

The view that Qur'anic rulings should be regarded in the light of the environment in which they were revealed implies some distinction between contingent 'interpretations', specific to the age of revelation, and eternally valid 'commandments', which is the hallmark of the so-called 'modernist' scholars. Despite

Shaltut's willingness to understand the Qur'anic ruling in the light of changed circumstances in this case and in the case of marriage to the women of *ahl al-kitab*, he nowhere recommends such a distinction, and is infact unwilling to countenance any modification in other cases, such as that of polygamy.

In the light of this observation, some concluding remarks on Shaltut's position in the conservative-modernist spectrum are in order. The inclination towards leniency and flexibility which is apparent in his treatment of several social and religious issues would appear to arise more from an instinctive desire to facilitate for Muslims the practice of their religion than from any stated intellectual framework or methodology. Shaltut's writings in general show him to be a conscientious scholar, working for the most part within the parameters dictated by his traditional religious education. His work is pervaded by a deep religious and moral sentiment, and the expression of this may take precedence over any purely intellectual justification of his rulings.

In this context of traditional Islamic scholarship, and not forgetting his position as head of the main bastion of that scholarship, Shaltut is forward-looking in his views on Muslim unity and ecumenism, the avoidance of theological controversy, the desire to restrict the sphere of the *haram* and the application of the word *kafir*, and the desire to make Islamic scholarship accessible to all Muslims. In these matters he continued and furthered the pioneering work of Muhammad 'Abduh and others. □

**“THE WORST FOOD IS THE FOOD  
SERVED AT A WEDDING FEAST  
TO WHICH THE RICH ARE INVITED  
AND FROM WHICH THE POOR  
ARE LEFT OUT”**

**Saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)**

# FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND ISLAM

Khalid Safiullah Rahmani\*

First half of the 20th century has been very painful and unforgettable because of ruthless and lavish bloodshed of human race. In this period there have been two major devastating wars that are known as World Wars. These wars affected all countries, including the United States in the West and Japan in the Far East. The flames of the war did not die till they had consumed millions of men, women and children. When this war-craze reached its height and mankind cried out, a ray of humanity emerged out of the dark barbaric night. Different countries started making laws trying to safeguard human rights. Sober and justice-loving people from all over the world voiced that there ought be some fundamental human rights that should be honoured both in war and peace. Consequently, the UN General Assembly successfully drafted and adopted a manifesto of human rights on the 10th of December 1948. Hence, this day is celebrated as International Fundamental Human Rights Day. But it is an irony that this manifesto is, in effect, no more than a toy because of two basic reasons. Firstly, member countries are independent to sign or not to sign the manifesto. Secondly, the manifesto does not give an individual a right to move the International Court of Justice. Nevertheless, it is a big success, and it is hoped that its shortcomings could gradually be overcome.

The human rights manifesto consists of 40 articles. It includes right to live; equality in matters of independence and honour; non-discrimination on the basis of race and colour, sex, language and religion; law of equity; right to move a court of law; prohibition of un-

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\* Courtesy : The Munsif Daily, Hyderabad.

warranted arrests; restriction on someone's expulsion from his country; right to defend oneself against allegations; right to protect one's private and personal life; total freedom to move about and settle in any part of one's country. Further, it also covers rules and regulations of going abroad and returning; freedom of acquiring citizenship of any country; owning movable or immovable property, individually or jointly; religious issues including conscience and beliefs; expression of opinion and formation of parties and organisations; taking part in politics of one's country; choice of any profession one desires; acquiring education etc. Besides, from time to time, supplementary to this manifesto, the UN has passed resolutions regarding rights of women and children and elimination of racial discrimination and slavery.

If, in fact, there be an honest implementation of this manifesto, it would be a blessing and mercy for mankind. But, alas! it is not so. Firstly, this move is voluntary. Secondly, different countries have set up different standards of human rights. The world has witnessed clear evidence of helplessness of the UN in the case of Bosnia, right in the heart of Europe. Besides, on the 30th of November 1973, when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution seeking to make racial discrimination a punishable offence, the US and the UK opposed the resolution. From this fact, the value of these human rights, in the eyes of the lawmakers themselves, can be clearly judged. The fact is that, today, it is no more than a means of bullying and exploiting developing and under-developed countries by the developed ones.

Today the image of Muslims has been distorted in such a way people are regarding *Muslim* and *terrorist* as synonyms. People believe that in Islam there is no regard for human values. On the other hand, the fact is that Islam has given the first lesson of human rights to the present day world of knowledge and intellect. Whatever we talk and hear about human rights today is just an echo of Islamic beliefs of monotheism and equity

of human race. The comprehensive sermon on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage delivered by the Prophet of Islam (SAWS) serves as the basis of fundamental human rights. Some of the excerpts of this sermon are as follows:

“O People! Your God is One. Your father is one. All of you are children of Adam, and Adam was made of clay. The more honourable among you with Allah (SWT) is the one who is more (pious and) fearful of Allah (SWT). There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, except for *taqwa* (fear of Allah). Yes, all the customs and practices of the days of ignorance (pre-Islamic days) are under my foot (i.e. I cancel all of them). All the official and administrative posts of the days of ignorance (for the maintenance of the *Kabah* and performance of the *Haj* and *Umrah*) are hereby brought to an end. Only the posts of *sidanah* (protecting the *Kabah*) and *siqayah* (providing water to pilgrims) will remain effective. The penalty for deliberate murder is death-sentence. Similar to deliberated murder is the one in which stick or stone has been used. Its blood-wit is fixed at 100 camels. Whoever wishes for more will be from the people of ignorance. O People of Quraish, lest you come to the court of the Lord while your necks are burdened with worldly affairs; whereas other people reach there with deeds beneficial in the Hereafter. If it so happens, then I cannot help you a bit against the Lord. O People of Quraish, the Lord has destroyed your false pride, and He has left no scope for you to boast on the deeds of your forefathers.

“O people, your blood and your wealth are sacred to you, until you are brought in front of your Lord on the Day of Judgement. As the holiness of this day and this month is indisputable for you (and very soon you will meet the Lord), so also He will ask you about your deeds.

“Today, all the interest-based business is made forbidden. But you are entitled to get back the principal

amount, in which there is no loss either to you or to others. Allah (SWT) has ruled that there is no scope for interest. And as far as Abbas (ibn Muttalib's) interest is concerned, I declare all of it unlawful. And all cases of blood-revenge of the days of ignorance are null and void. The first revenge (from my family and tribe), which I hereby forgive, is that of milk-feeding child of Rabee's ibn al-Harith who was murdered by Banu Huzail.

"Debts must be paid off. Anything borrowed should be returned. There ought to be a retribution for gifts. Whoever guarantees on someone's behalf should recompense any penalties thereof.

"From now onwards a criminal himself is responsible for his crime. A son will not be held responsible for the crime of his father; nor a father will be held responsible for the crime of his son.

"O people as you enjoy some rights upon your women, so also they enjoy some rights upon you. Your right upon your women is that they shall not allow someone you don't like into your house or do any shameless act. So, if they do any such thing, then Allah (SWT) allows you to leave them alone in their beds and beat them up lightly (avoiding the face) and without hurting them deeply. And if they redress themselves, then their bread and shelter is upon you according to your status and income. Hence, fear Allah (SWT) in the matter of women and treat them well, because they are dependent upon you and they cannot support themselves independently. You have acquired them as a trust from your Lord and they have been made lawful to you only in His name. And it is unlawful unto a woman that she gives anything of her husband to someone without her husband's permission.

"O people, listen to me with utmost attention. Beware, every Muslim is a brother unto another Muslim. It is not

lawful for anyone to take anything from his Muslim brother except what he gives of his own free will. Do not put an undue burden on yourself or on others.

"And as for slaves, take care of them. Feed them out of what you eat. Provide them clothes as good as yours. And if they commit any mistake that you are unable to forgive, then O! slaves of Allah! Sell them out and do not punish them.

"O people listen to your *ameer* (leader), even if a flat-nosed Ethiopian (black) slave has been made your *ameer* who commands you by the Book of Allah (SWT)."

It is evident that this sermon of the Prophet (SAWS) is in fact the manifesto of fundamental human rights. It explicitly and very unambiguously declares the following:

- a) equality of human beings
- b) uniformity in criminal penal code
- c) due regard to human life
- d) prohibition of economic exploitation
- e) protection of wealth and property
- f) an individual's total acquaintance of crime committed by others
- g) women's rights
- h) rights of slaves and
- l) political equality.

Islam did not just lay down these rights on paper, but it put them to practice too. It protected weaker sections of society and uplifted the downtrodden. The Qur'an and *Hadith* (tradition of the (Prophet SAWS)) chalk out very clearly the fundamental human rights. Further, through jurisprudence, an unmatched legal structure has been built up that explicitly defines the fundamental human rights with minute details. Islam did not suffice at confining these rights just to this world, but it related the fulfilment of the rights to one's result on the

Day of Judgement in the Hereafter. This belief makes Man utterly serious regarding rights and duties. Hence, if we really want to honour human rights, we must turn to the teachings of Islam; for Islam is just not a heritage of some nation or the other - it is the guardian, custodian and trustee of entire mankind.□

# PRINT, ISLAM, AND THE PROSPECTS FOR CIVIC PLURALISM: NEW RELIGIOUS WRITINGS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

DALE F. EICKELMAN and JON W. ANDERSON

Recent shifts in religious consciousness throughout the Muslim world have increasingly blurred the line between religion and politics with major implications for how politics are imagined. In a positive sense, this trend augurs a heightened political consciousness and desire for participation; the growing fragmentation of political and religious authority - associated at least in part with the rise of mass higher education and the inexorable growth of mass communications - enables more voices and views to be heard in the political arena. On the negative side, some of the most popular religious and political messages are intolerant of competing points of view. The recent experience of countries such as Indonesia suggests that a religiously oriented moral vision can capture significant elements of the middle class and form the basis for a 'civic pluralism'. By 'civic pluralism' we mean both state tolerance for the growth of legally recognised non-governmental organisations and the less formal, but equally significant, strengthening of values which affirm that individuals should be more civil to one another, regardless of political and religious differences. For the Middle East, Islamist discourse and practice offer examples of movements which both accommodate (as in Jordan) and reject (as in Sudan and Algeria) 'civic pluralism'.

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How messages and religious and political content get listened to in the 'new' Middle East and the Muslim world and the limits to their form and content within different channels of communication are issues with significant political implications. Participants in a workshop on 'Print, Islam, and Civic Pluralism: New religious Writings and their Public' in Milan and Bellagio, Italy, sought to address these questions by bringing together publishers, editors, government press advisors, religious activists, foundation officials, and scholars interested in print and publishing throughout the Muslim world and Europe. Our aim was to look at incentives and obstacles to the flow of ideas and how the 'intellectual technology' of various media - print, broadcast, and interactive - shapes audiences' concepts, practices, and authority. Thus the focus was on markets, audiences, and the strengths and weaknesses of various modes of dissemination. Analyses of the writings of contemporary religious thinkers, including Islamists, are relatively abundant, but only a few studies focus on what is read, viewed, and heard and by whom. Rather than concentrating on those who create texts, our focus shifted to those responsible for distributing, marketing, monitoring, and censoring various messages, along with religious and political actors and analysts concerned with how issues and messages are framed and contextualised for various audiences.

We did not anticipate a convergence of views among the participants but succeeded in comparing the contexts of competing, overlapping, and increasingly self-aware ways of writing and speaking about Islam and the role of Islam in political thought and action on the part of persons and groups with widely varying backgrounds. The depiction of these perspectives facilitates an understanding of current trends and an awareness of what can be said and how it is likely to be understood. Since such perspectives may differ significantly in how issues are framed or contextualised as historic phenomena, bringing together representatives of these perspectives from various Muslim communities

aids an understanding of the local and trans-regional limits of what is said and how it is communicated effectively. The Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the 'excess of seeking' that results from such shared perspectives overcomes limitations created by being situated in a particular place and context. We aim to suggest comparisons in this article, but we also hope to adjust our instruments of observation to understand better how changes in publication and communications facilitate new trends in political and religious expression.

### **New Forms Of Publication, New Boundaries Of Debate: The Rise Of 'Islamic' Books**

Throughout the Muslim world the printed word remains the privileged cultural vehicle for shaping religious beliefs and practices. Books and pamphlets, including banned ones, are talked about and invoked as authority in sermons, cassettes, lectures, reviews and conversations. In seeking to ban or confiscate them, censors often increase their circulation. But radio, cable, satellite, conventional broadcast television, fax, video and audio cassettes, the Internet, and other forms of electronic communications are rapidly changing the context and role of print media. Moreover, the relation of the various media to one another rapidly fluctuates for political and technological reasons. Views suppressed in one medium emerge in another, and new or newly available media provide outlets for new voices and create new public arenas. Typically, less monitored or controlled media take the place of those that state or religious authorities control or censor. In the 1978-79 Iranian revolution, for example, audio cassettes containing taped sermons often reached Iran from international, direct-dial telephone calls with decisive effect. Today's equivalent, in wealthier states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, is more likely to be the fax machine or electronic mail, while in almost all other countries the ubiquity of photocopy machines and video and audio-tape copying machines facilitates the rapid

and almost untraceable dissemination of forbidden messages.

The multiplication of voices and outlets makes persons or groups who are minorities or outnumbered dissidents in one context feel less isolated than they would have in earlier decades when the 'small media' were less rapid and pervasive, educational levels lower and populations less politicised. This is because they now can be in contact with their counterparts elsewhere. As a consequence, these new forms of communicative communities also contribute significantly to a fragmentation of political and religious authority. Thus, in nineteenth-century India, traditionally educated religious elite's, who initially approved the dissemination of inexpensive printed texts, gradually found their authority weakened, as readers gained direct access to authoritative texts. Similarly multiplying the media through which messages can be transmitted diffuses political and religious authority. The state may continue to offer an 'official transcript', in James Scott's phrase, but it may not be considered authoritative or legitimate, even if it is seriously heeded. With the proliferation of media and weakened controls over many of them, 'hidden' transcripts are now more likely to be 'spoken directly and publicly in the teeth of power'. Lastly, the globalisation of media blurs the boundaries between local, regional, and international perspectives and between elite and popular culture. These changes lead to a *de facto* pluralism of political and religious views, even where state authorities, as in Saudi Arabia or Iran, seek to circumscribe what is said in public.

These transformations in how the printed and spoken word is communicated have taken place concurrently with the rise, since the late 1970's of Islamists movements throughout the Middle East and other regions of the Muslim world, along with demands for greater political participation. When the opening towards enhanced political participation are highly restrictive, as in many Arabian peninsula countries, state rhetoric and the establishment of consultative bodies -

often appointed or selected by carefully managed committees - can be read as responses to domestic and foreign pressures for wider political participation. Mass education has expanded potential readership, and mass communication has enhanced exposure, albeit selectively, to images of the world, but these vehicles of communication have produced readers and listeners who often lack the critical skills of the smaller cohorts who received advanced education in earlier generations.

Media studies in the Middle East remain in their infancy. A recent study from Egypt, however, suggests that changes are under way. In a shift that began in the Sadat era to a more market-driven production of books and pamphlets, the most significant growth has been in 'Islamic books' - inexpensive, attractively printed texts written in a style accessible to readers who lack the literary skills of the educated cadres of an earlier time. Often disregarding the vocabulary and grammar of formal Arabic in favour of colloquial diction, these books are available to a mass-educated public. They command press runs in the hundreds of thousands, while a book by Egypt's Nobel laureate is considered successful if it sell 5000-10,000 copies annually.

'Islamic' books include advice manuals, tales of religious heroes, fictionalised morality tales (including teen-age 'Islamic' romances), and practical guides on how to raise children as Muslims in the contemporary world or how to live as a Muslim. Often more readily available in street kiosks than in conventional bookshops, the short chapters and gripping graphics of these works appeal more to a new, younger, mass-educated audience than to the better-educated readers of 'liberal' and secular publications.

Recognising the market potential for 'Islamic' books, business place advertisements in them. Other books carry testimonials from well-known popular preachers, and many replicate in printed form messages available on video and audio cassettes. A common phenomenon is the 'migration' between media, in

which video cassettes are rapidly replacing audio ones and books are often the published counterpart of material which first appeared in audio or video. although the authors of Islamic books are derided by some conventional writers, as journeymen producing works for the semi-literate, others realise that they must go 'down market' or see their audiences shrink. Recognising this some secularists and leftists writer have migrated to writing books for these new audiences.

At the same time, technological changes have multiplied the means of publication. The printing press of half a century ago - relatively easy for governments to regulate and control - have given way to cassettes copy machines, and desktop publishing, a change as important to the late-twentieth century as the Gutenberg revolution was to fifteenth-century Europe. Publishers and editors point to the expansion and popularisation of the book market, where there are many more readers than a decade or two earlier and more outlets for the books, pamphlets, or pirated photocopies. Desktop publishing means that the start-up cost for newsletters, magazines, and pamphlets has dropped significantly. The shift to the vernacular heightens this accessibility, with subtle political consequences for all the languages of the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim world. In Turkey, beginning in the Ataturk era (1923-38), secularist writers celebrated the triumph of the notional vernacular over the Ottoman Turkish and relegated words and phrases with religious connotations to the periphery of public writing and speaking. Over the past decade, the use of public language with religious connotations has returned to the mainstream of communications. Some religious groups have their own television stations, and commercial printing for religious purposes is expanding.

'Migration' of messages, media, writers, and style of discourse mark a fragmentation of authority. 'Islamic' books set aside the long tradition of authoritative discourse by religious scholars in favour of a direct understanding of texts, so that chemists and medical doctors,

for example can interpret 'Islamic' principles as equals with scholars who have graduated from a traditional centre of learning. In Saudi Arabia critics draw equally on the memoirs of Henry Kissinger and the sayings of the Prophet to challenge regime legitimacy. This multiplication of voices in public discussion of religious and political belief further erodes the boundaries between kinds of sources of authoritative speech.

Religious discourse need not directly criticise state and established religious authority to be considered opposition. Direct interpretations of religious texts un-mediated by 'authoritative', often regime approved, scholars are seen as criticism of state authorities. In this respect 'Islam' is both a major source of social justice and a means of contesting entrenched claims to authority. The view that Islam needs only the renewal or replacement of those authorised to interpret it recalls the nineteenth-century reformist movements which emerged in the context of colonial domination. Where religious scholars once fiercely debated how to interpret legal traditions, such scholars are now often at the margin of today's debates, which concern how to mobilise and interpret Islamic traditions and themes to support political actions involving large numbers of people, as in the case in countries as diverse as Algeria and Morocco, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The contexts in which these debates vary throughout the Muslim world, so one cannot reduce 'Islamist' tendencies to a few common criteria or, as some would have it, an 'Islamic International' analogous to the Comintern. Kinds of books and other publications, publishers and other intermediaries, and 'markets' for ideas and audiences frame both possible messages and settings.

### **Books, Publishers, And Audiences: Defining Issues And Competing For Audiences Across The Muslim World**

#### ***Turkey***

The explosion in Islamist publishing in Turkey since the 1980's takes place in a context of aggressive

and conscious cultural construction that has alternated between a secularist elite and vocal religious organisations and parties, political struggles between right and left, and a fading spectre of military intervention, which ended with an easing of religious censorship and control in order to foster conservative political forces against the secular left. As in Egypt, the exposure of Islamic publishing in the 1980's coincided with the growth of the private economic sector, as the state, pursuing liberalisation policies, relinquished direct control of parts of the economy. Because Turkish intellectuals claim that their nation is the most 'Westernised' of Middle Eastern countries, developments there are especially interesting to compare with trends elsewhere in the region.

At one level, the rise of new Muslim intellectuals in Turkey, often from provincial towns and villages, mirrors the rise of their secular counterparts in an earlier generation. Islamic intellectuals are the products of state schooling; many know European languages and have been exposed to Western influences. Many are media personalities rather than Islamic scholars and are regularly called on by the press and the broadcast media to represent the Islamic view and thus to take part in a Turkish 'national conversation' concerning how to be simultaneously Turkish and Muslim.

Turkey is permeated by the mass media, both state and commercial, so that publishers and broadcasters act as intermediaries between the producers and consumers of ideas. As elsewhere in the Middle East, mass education has profoundly influenced the tensions between liberal, national, and Turkish-Islamic traditions, and these tensions are played out in competition among publishers for markets. In the 1980's this 'national conversation' centred on the proper role of the state; now it concerns how the state relates to society and individuals. Outside Istanbul this conversation includes the members of Sufi groups with technical and engineering backgrounds, some of whom use print and the broadcast media to disseminate their ideas. From

the vantage of participants in these debates, participation in Sufi movements fills the gap left by the Kemalist abandonment of ethics, moral issues, and questions about how to live.

As an example of the need to adjust the conventional frameworks by which publishing trends and the rising appeal of Islamic publications are considered, several workshop participants suggested that the European distinction between popular and intellectual culture was less helpful in Turkey, where there is no such hard and fast line. Some Turks see the space created through media debates as a public middle ground between those who wish to solidify ties with Europe and those who see Turkey's quest for participation in Europe as turning away from Makka. Attitudes towards the Bosnian crisis have sharpened this debate. Other Turks see the polarity not as between Makka and Europe, but as away from Istanbul and towards a Turkish society in which all Turks participate as equals. The nature of Islam is not being debated; rather, Islam is being brought into debates about personal morality, social relations, and politics, although such debates remain circumspect on direct discussion of the legitimacy of state authority.

### **Indonesia**

Islamic publishing in Indonesia, broad in market appeal and diverse in content, is closely tied to civic pluralism, an element of which is the belief among some Muslim thinkers that *tauhid*, or belief in the oneness of God, requires an ongoing effort to 'to distinguish what is divine from what is merely human in Islamic tradition' and hence a commitment to secularisation - 'reason, knowledge, and science'. In this view, the Indonesian government might place restrictions on 'political' Islam but not on religion's role 'to serve as a source of ethical and cultural guidance'. Since independence - *de facto* since 1946 and acknowledged by the Dutch in 1949 - Indonesia has known only two presidents, but the unity over 1700 islands and hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups has been achieved at a price. Indonesians worry about what will happen after Suharto, who seized

power in 1967 and was elected president in 1968. Some fear that Indonesia may suffer the same as Yugoslavia, although others argue that Indonesia has been more successful than other ethnically and linguistically diverse countries - including India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka - in forging a national culture. Many also acknowledge a distinctively 'island' - meaning South-east Asia - form of Islamic expression, distinct from that of the Middle East and continental Asia.

Islamic Publishing in Indonesia has been part of long-standing private efforts to create and sustain religious schools (*pesantaren*) and the Islamic student movement. Both have strong support in Indonesia's growing middle class. The *pancasila*, Indonesia's official ideology, sets forth five moral and religious principles which encompass all of Indonesia's recognised religions - Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. Even if regarded with scepticism by some intellectuals, the *pancasila* has officially encouraged religious pluralism in a country 90 per cent Muslim.

Religious pluralism in Indonesia has been encouraged by the lack of a clearly defined hierarchy among religious scholars - including Muslims Christians, and Hindus - and by a recognition of the varied form of religious tradition among Muslims themselves. Exposure to religious pluralism and the openness of many Muslims, especially those of the middle class, to innovation also encourage receptivity to outside currents. Fazlur Rahman, who called for a fresh look at Islamic scholarship, including the incorporation of social scientific inquiry, found his strongest audience among Western-educated Muslims. By comparison, Indonesian Islamic thinkers - including those who have read Rahman's works in Indonesian translations - have shown a strong interest in the social sciences. They have translated the writings of Western commentators on Islam and argue that religious pluralism forms part of an established Islamic tradition of interreligious dialogue. In recent years the abstract commitment to religious tolerance has been joined with concrete issues

of human rights and freedom of the press. The audience for these ideas is principally among the urban middle classes, which are attracted to the idea of civic pluralism - a notion sometimes castigated as a Western creation - in which Islam remains at the centre of social and political life.

## **Pakistan**

Religious scholars who command traditional competence in Islamic law and doctrine in Pakistan are not at the forefront of popular Islamic discourse. Taking other Islamic scholars as their primary audiences, they have a mistrust of wider communication, leaving this field open to new Islamic intellectuals who work closely with newspapers. Abul-'Ala' Mawdudi (1903-79) is perhaps the best known pioneer of this trend, and his influence extends far beyond Pakistan. In Pakistan, however, the audience for such 'new' religious intellectuals appears to be predominantly urban Muslims with family backgrounds in towns and villages.

It is difficult to track publication, sales, and audiences in Pakistan. There is no obligatory legal deposit (copyright) system for books or other publications, and the distribution of books is often done through networks of political or religious allies rather than through periodical or book distributors. The direct market for popular Islamist writing is further restricted by an illiteracy rate of 65 per cent and by the consequences of an educational system that compartmentalises students into incompatible educational tracks: Urdu-language madrasa education, with an emphasis on traditional religious education; Urdu-language state schools that separate students into science and arts tracks; and English-language schools, mostly private, that also separate students into tracks. Of these various schooling choices, the strongest audience for Islamist literature seems to be among students and graduates of the Urdu-language science track.

Books and pamphlets appear less to persuade new audiences than to reconfirm party and sect sup-

porters in their ideas. Many are unsigned, identified only by a graphic or typographical cover style associated with the sponsoring group. Many publications are subsidised, although it is difficult to ascertain their scope and extent.

Despite subsidies and the pervasive sponsorship of publications by interest groups, publishers are aware of shifts in audience interests and concerns and local preferences. Women's and rights issues have become increasingly important, as suggested by a 1995 survey of seven Islamic book-shops in Lahore and three in Islamabad. In both cities the best sellers included Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), history and biography, religious fiction and short stories, Islamic medicine and magic, apologetics, and books on women and women's issues. In Islamabad Qur'anic commentaries - especially Mawdudi, the Deobandi religious leader Mufti S.Shafiq, and the Barelwi leader Karim Shah - led other types of books in sales, followed by Islamic history and biography, and short stories and novels with Islamic themes. In Lahore, an old commercial and industrial centre, the best-selling books were Islamic history, followed in descending order of novels and short stories with Islamic themes, general histories and biographies, Islamic jurisprudence, Qur'anic commentary, and books on Sufism and Islamic medicines.

## Bangladesh

Secularists and Islamic publishers compete for the same audience in Bangladesh, and the organisations that sponsor publications are also active in the broadcast media, audio cassettes, and video rentals. At the National Book Fair in Dhaka in February 1995 Islamists and secular publishers exhibited side by side, although, in general, Islamic publishers lack the resources of their secular counterparts. Many religious publications reach small audiences in Bangladesh because they are expensive, although short devotional (*masalla*) texts enjoy wide popularity. A recent development in Islamic fiction, which, since the early 1990s,

has competed head-on with works by secular writers, including Tasleema Nasrin, a Bangla writer perceived as hostile to Islam who is living as a political refugee in Europe. Accentuating this competition for audiences, the cover designs of secularist and Islamic romances often converge. Glossy covers and dramatic designs predominate in both, but the Islamic designs are less provocative, and the calligraphy usually incorporates religious features. Secular and Islamic books circulate in separate book-shops, however, suggesting a compartmentalisation of reading habits and audiences similar to that prevailing in Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt, and perhaps an appeal to distinct groups. Even if this is the case, the partial convergence of Islamic books with their secular counterparts suggests a 'crossover' into a larger market and, as in Turkey, the emergence of a shared social space.

### **Morocco**

Islamic books have the most readership among University students and recent graduates. In the 1960s leftist student movements predominated, but as Arabization of higher education expanded in the 1970s, Islamic and Islamist-groups came to the fore. Islamist student groups are divided between those that stress the need for radical and imminent change to achieve social justice and those that stress reform and renovation through persuasion. Both tendencies are represented in the science and medical faculties, as well as in the departments of Islamic studies, founded at each of Morocco's thirteen regional universities in the 1980s. Of Morocco's public universities, only the oldest - in Fez and Rabat - have departments of philosophy which teach non-Islamic themes, including European philosophical traditions, and the number of students in these two departments has dropped precipitously. When students could hope for secondary and university posts, these departments had hundreds of students; in 1994 each had fewer than a dozen.

Three kinds of religious books circulate in student milieu: Qur'anic commentary (those of Syed Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood, executed by Nasser in 1966, remain the most popular); pamphlets that explain as a religion, way of life, and form of government; and books which address family problems and the role of women in society. Outside university circles, religious books which challenge or defend certain Sufi practices continue to enjoy popularity.

While universities are a locus of growing Islamist movements, which might best be characterised as projects of Islamist interpretation, Morocco's popular Islam, including its focus on the Sharifian monarchy as the authoritative interpreter of Islamic tradition, maintains a strong hold outside the universities on the religious imagination of an older generation and mutes the direct political appeal of Islamism. What seems significant in this context is that the rise of the Islamic book in Morocco, as elsewhere, is related to the audiences created by mass education and the conjecture with the fragmentation of religious and political authority associated with them.

## COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

As mentioned above, the economics of publication have radically changed in the last two decades. While the start up costs for publication remained formidable even at mid-century, in recent years it has become possible to compose newspapers on personal computers. In Morocco, for example, some regional Islamist newspapers are produced almost single-handedly by their proprietors, who distribute them as a sideline, although most have wider backing. Larger-scale newspapers and printing ventures are able to aim for a middle-class readership with sufficient disposable income to purchase periodicals and also attract advertisers. Often paper, production, and distribution costs, in which distributors receive at least half of the retail cost of publication, become the most formidable expenses.

While advertising, market forces, and technological change facilitate the entry of new voices into the public sphere, censorship continues to disable or circumscribe them. Censorship takes many forms. Some Gulf states have as many as three organisations for censoring books, periodicals, and videos, and the action of any one organisation suffices to block an import, delete an article, or alter a word. Yet the direct control of writers or their products is only one device available to censors. As in the case of pre-publication review, censorship ceases to be effective when producers 'migrate' to the smaller media of photocopied broadsheets, such as the *shab-name* ('night letters') prevalent in Iran's and Afghanistan's revolutions or to other, less formal means of distribution. The accelerated speed of publication (in computer composition compared to lithography, for instance) also limits opportunities for pre-publication censorship. A second censoring mechanism is the threat to seize offending literature, which obliges publishers and importers to exercise caution in committing themselves to controversial titles, since the seizure of an entire press run to shipment of imported books or periodicals may entail substantial loss. More subtle controls include limiting the supply of newsprint or offering 'guidance' to editors on how to handle news stories and themes. Usually the limits of toleration are negotiable - wide-circulation newspapers, for example, are often more strictly controlled than small journals.

Censorship decisions are often capricious. Thus a collection of articles on Islam which appeared uncensored in Lebanon during the author's lifetime was banned when gathered into a posthumous edited volume. And books once banned, such as Muhammad al-Shahrur's *al-Kitab wa-l-Qur'an* [The Book and the Qur'an], become 'unbanned' with a change in the political situation, which, in the case of Egypt, followed the assassination of journalist Faraj Fuda (d.1992), for which Islamists claimed responsibility.

As channels for communication have multiplied, printed messages, broadcast messages, and those cir-

culated via video and audio cassettes, fax, and computer disk increasingly reinforce one another. Governments and religious authorities which seek to ban messages in one medium find them reappearing in others, especially when censorship efforts call attention to them. Books that go underground, and forbidden literature in general, necessarily imply networks of complicity; prior to the Iranian revolution, sermons circulating on audio cassettes attracted more serious notice when the security forces began monitoring congregational sermons. Faxes make possible the international transmission of religious and political tracts and, in the case of affluent Saudi Arabia, become a significant channel for internationalising religious protest by allowing dissidents within the country easy access to supporters elsewhere.

As messages migrate between media, they take on new life and change the market of public discourse, even reconfiguring the boundaries of what is 'public'. Faxing a *fatwa* places it outside the conventional frames of interpretation that man consider essential. Just as the switch to more accessible styles of writing, exemplified in the writings of Qutb increases their audience or reaches new ones, so do switches to other media, such as audio cassettes and computers. A shipment of books is more easily stopped by alert customs officials than a diskette with a banned text, and as the Middle East becomes 'wired' to the information age of networked computers, the 'craft' of censorship becomes increasingly overwhelmed.

Middle Eastern governments and elite's already struggle with the issues of controlling the flow of information via international satellite based broadcasting. The issue is becoming more acute as research-based international computing networks become central to various medical and scientific fields in which professionals must participate to maintain their skills. These challenges include both culture (pornography and other 'foreign' entertainment) and political threats.

Throughout much of the Middle East there is much political discussion in private; discussion in 'open' media, however, remains circumscribed. Particularly in the Gulf a 'politics of silence' prevails, where political dissent and criticism are channelled through networks of trusted friends, rarely to emerge in public media. The only public response to political events is silence or muted praise, which carry clear messages in their narrow publics. Even in the Gulf context, however the facility with which messages can cross borders means that religious and political debates become increasingly public, exposing their participants to wider audiences, even if 'publication' is limited to smuggled documents or multiple faxes. Modern, especially electronic, communications of all kinds overcome limitations of time and space and vastly extend the reach of private communication.

The multitude of channels created by satellite broadcasting turns passive viewers into consumers; similarly, computer networking fosters 'virtual' communities that also attain an international arena in which exiles and expatriates are active. Governments and religious authorities are not the only groups to evince reservations about new media for this reason: traditional and liberal elites, whose privileged positions are tied to particular intellectual technologies and practices, are equally uneasy about having their positions undercut by the democratisation or 'massification' of communications.

The 'tabooing mentality' (*dhihmiyya al-tahrim*) derives not from the state or the religious establishment alone but is potential in any claim to authoritative interpretation. Secularists often emerge as hardly less doctrinaire than religious extremists, both of whom claim the authority to interpret or condemn. In such contexts socially 'tabooed' literatures are often indistinct from officially forbidden books, and a sort of privatised censorship prevails. Traditional educated religious scholars, like the beneficiaries of elite education, see a threat in popular books and pamphlets, which encourage toler-

ance, just as those 'from below' resent elite efforts at 'guidance' as unjustified censorship or control.

## Conclusion

'Islamic' books do not 'catch on' simply because their producers have found themes that resonate with the new audiences created through mass education and mass communications. The shifting mix of print, broadcast, audio, video, electronic media, poster art, and word-of-mouth communications entails a complex array of personal and institutional intermediaries and disseminators. This is so even when messages appear direct. (By 'institutional' we mean conventional and accepted means of achieving certain tasks in a given society and not necessarily formally established, legally sanctioned arrangements for communicating and distributing messages.) Some intermediaries in disseminating messages build on conventional and established vehicles of communication, although audiences listening to state-controlled radio and television or to government-provided cinema newsreels often respond with irony to the messages communicated. A shift to assessing the means by which messages get transmitted, disseminated, and understood can offer insight into the range of possible messages and the potential for persuasion.

Indeed, even the repressive apparatus of state censorship is limited by the ways that messages get labelled. Egypt's Shaykh 'Umar 'Abd al Rahman, tried in Egypt for incitement to assassinate Anwar al-Sadat, was acquitted because his messages were labelled as religious and not as calls to political action. Similarly, messages and texts may serve as symbols for styles of religious and political expression, as much valued for display - copies of Sayyid Qutb's Qur'anic commentary in a book-case or a Qur'an on top of a television set, for example - as for their content. These display items, like a cassette religious sermon in a taxi, may exemplify a particular religious orientation. Few Middle Easterners purchase books with matching colours for interior deco-

rating, as did Imelda Marcos, but many liberals are likely to purchase large books such as Muhammad Sharrur's *Al-Kitab wa-l-Qur'an* to display rather than to read. Becoming a 'better' Muslim may also be signified by media consumption profiles. There are no publicly known Middle Eastern or Muslim counterparts to such US political media consultants as Roger Ailes or Ed Rollins, but some Muslim and Middle Eastern communications 'specialists' show a brilliance for orchestrating different media - including the small media of informal, 'deniable' communications - to achieve their goals.

Governments and propagandists recognise these connections, even if they are reluctant to disclose exactly how they accomplish their task. State efforts to control or influence the international media are known in some details; less well known are efforts to control domestic media, especially those used when states succeed in blocking formal channels of communication. On occasion, state authorise experiments in transmitting messages, as in the case with Moroccan efforts to heighten AIDS awareness and prevention through private committees, survey research, and person-to-person outreach.

Despite the diversity of contexts suggested above, the dynamics of communications among exiles, refugees, and Muslim communities in Europe and North America suggest certain 'family resemblances'. Thus, Egypt's economic liberalisation (*infitah*) resembles the Ozal period in Turkey: both set the stage for an explosion of Islamist publication (albeit with rather different causes and dynamics) and broadcasting in Turkey's case. Print plays a major role in all contexts, but broadcasting, with greater expense and organisation, implies access to a wider public. This induces moderation in what is said and, in turn, influences the predominant forms of political action. Lebanon's Hizbullah, for example, now has al-Manar television, a commercial service reputed to be Beirut's most popular. By entering a wider public arena, party and sect-based broadcasters are obliged to speak in terms of self-consciously

constructed national styles to win approval for their messages. In Indonesia, where schools and religious institutions are the principal setting for Islamist discourse and publication, discussions of how to lead a Muslim life entail an effort to relate to a state-directed Indonesian nationalism, more than would be the case if such discussions were banned or outlawed.

These cases also underscore a point evident in preliminary surveys of Bangladesh and Moroccan readerships: the objects and contexts of Islamist impulses and expressions focus on social and moral issues, not narrow political ones. The search for Islamic answers and Islamic consciousness is not state-focused but more general, although states are aware that any form of organisation not directly under their control or authorised by them has political implications. In 1992 a Moroccan official confidently asserted to one of the authors that Morocco had no Islamist movements because none had been authorised by the Ministry of the Interior. By 1994 the same official recognised that movements with important political ramifications could exist, even if not recognised in the narrow legal sense of prevailing Moroccan legislation.

Pluralism is already a practical reality. Liberal theorists who rejoice at this development must still be troubled by the seeming intolerance and absolutism of some expressions of religious and political beliefs and values. Liberals, radicals, and conservatives alike search Islamic texts, tenets, practices, and conventions for affirmations and rejections of pluralism. Practical participation in a plural, multi-vocal world is not the same as acknowledging or even embracing it. Liberals can thus misread Islamist tendencies, in part because of their own conventions of expression. They prematurely assimilate Islamist messages and their significance to known frames of references, when they should be looking more intently at the means by which messages are disseminated. This requires attention to the middle ground between thinker-creators of ideologies and their audiences - those intermediaries who channel

communication, the media that carry messages, and disseminators who shape the 'market appeal' of ideas which otherwise might reach only a limited number of persons. We need to identify these intermediaries, but we also need to identify how the messages are read, heard, and understood.

Many voices may be heard without implying development of civil society and pluralism as culturally valued in its own right. The sensitivity of this debate is registered in the anxiety of both state and non-state boundary-keepers, government censors and self-liberals, over the advantages of unrestricted expression against those restrictions 'necessary' to preserve personal and collective morality and integrity.

Identifying and understanding these processes of communication and their relation to how political and religious authority are increasingly fragmented require focusing on intermediaries and disseminators, as well as the conditions in which messages are created, circulated, and understood. These conditions include the exigencies of publishing in liberalising economies, the emergence of previously dormant or suppressed non-elite religious understandings into the public sphere, the implications of newly available and expanding technologies, and the transference of authority from one medium to another that accompanies the migration of messages and messengers.

Awareness of the understandings made possible through the multiple perspectives suggested by Bahtkin's 'excess of seeing' may not establish or advance the prospects for civic pluralism. It does, however, provide a context in which practices are made more apparent, so that they can be compared and put together with the 'larger' but more evanescent variables of ideology, on the one hand, and forces of political economy, on the other. Focusing on the intermediaries, the practicalities of publication, and audiences moves us away from generalising from ideological and political trends on the basis of text and is a step away from texts

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alone and towards finding out how ideas are successfully conveyed and understood.□

## BABRI MASJID ISSUE

Akshay Brahmchari

*Mr. Akshay Brahmchari, an ardent Gandhite and an emblem of Hindu-Muslim unity has always been in the forefront to plead the cause of Muslims. He observed fast in front of UP Congress Committee office from January 26, 1950 to February 4, 1950 to impress upon the Government that a great injustice has been done to Muslims by the forcible occupation of Babri Masjid by some fanatic Hindus. Mr. Brahmchari had submitted a memorandum to the then Home Minister of UP, Lal Bahadur Shastri. We reproduce below the English version of his letter of February 20, 1950 with which the memorandum was annexed.*

Dear Brother,

Due to the fire of communal frenzy fanned by some people in Ayodhya and Faizabad subversive views are getting increasingly widespread throughout the country. On having failed to draw the attention of the government and the responsible leaders to the gravity of the situation, I was compelled to go on fast unto death commencing on the death anniversary of Bapu that is 30th January. I called this fast off on the 4th of February when you assured me that the government would take appropriate measures to put an end to communal riots in Ayodhya and Faizabad, governments determination being further strengthened by this fast. You also confessed that the local authorities had encouraged those who had fanned the flames of communal fire and the situation could have very easily been brought under control at the very outset. It was because of the attitude and speeches delivered by leaders like Bishamber Dayal Tripathi that the situation was made difficult for the government to tackle and the issue

got further complicated. Honourable Pandit Pant also confessed to me all this while talking to me he said the people were obviously least co-operative in resolving the issue..... After calling off the fast for the time being, I fell sick and have till recently been confined within the Provincial Congress Committee Office. Due to that I could not bother you over this issue for some time. But unfortunately and to my great grief, I learnt that the situation in Ayodhya and Faizabad is getting, day in and day out, further deteriorated. Some respectable Muslims were even killed for having refused to say that what is known today as Babri Mosque was once a Hindu temple. The propaganda to socially boycott the Muslims is continuously behind made. Muslims are increasingly getting tempted and keep on sending their dependants and children to their relatives at safer places. Some of them have even taken to exile.

Even my house has, having broken the lock, been ransacked and taken possession of by some people. To hearten those who assaulted at me, a public meeting was held. The violence was boosted that night. It was announced in public that whoever Hindu would not kill me at sight would commit an offence against the Hindu religion. I am not mentioning all this in order to seek from you security for my life. But I do want to certainly that the terror being created owing to the violent activities must be stopped at the earliest. It may be recalled that the responsible people in the Congress had collectively as well as individually, decried these preparations of the Communalists. They had, while submitting their viewpoint to the Government, emphasised that the peace must be restored at the earliest. They were, owing to that insulted in public and were thus forced to keep their mouth shut.

I am sorry to say that till the moment of writing this note, nothing has come to my knowledge to indicate that any steps have been taken to improve the situation. What is happening in Ayodhya is certainly not on the basis of any historical or religious belief. It is all meant, instead, to achieve merely political objectives. If any

let-up is shown in efforts to combat these severe threats many more complicated issues of similar nature would be created by these people. The Congress would owing to them, lose its strength and they would achieve their goals.

I am at the moment enfeebled and my health is getting worse. To improve my health, therefore, I am going, for some time, abroad. I would inform you, later, where I would be. In the end, I hope, from the very core of my heart, that the Government would take immediate and effective measures on this memorandum that I am handing over to you.

Rest is OK

Yours

AKSHAY BRAHAMCHARI

**Memorandum Submitted by Shri Akshay Brahamchari:**

The memorandum submitted by Shri Akshay Brahamchari under this letter to the Home Minister and the government of UP is worth being reproduced hereunder:-

The events of Ayodhya and Faizabad and the Babri Masjid issue should not be considered merely an issue of a mosque or temple or merely a dispute between Hindus and Muslims. There is in fact behind these disputes the retrogressive conspiracy which aims at extirpating the sublime principles of Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress. These are meant to instigate communal and religious feelings during the elections with a view to win the elections and to have the Congress Government overthrown. Local Administrative authorities have also been party to the conspiracies. As a result of all these occurrences, there is in Faizabad and Ayodhya a sort of anarchy all over. These retrogressive elements have made even myself the target of their assault thrice. Once they entered my house and beat me.

Second time, they surrounded me in front of the houses of the District Magistrate and the SP. Police was informed but they did not take any action against these people. Other respectable members of the Congress were also reviled at in front of Government officials. Even the public were instigated to indulge in hitting and hurting. Notwithstanding that, the people who committed additional favours from the authorities.

When the martyrs cemetery and other graves that were near the Babri Masjid were being dug up and a platform was being put up in their place an application under section 145 of IPC was submitted on behalf of some respectable Muslims. But, the authorities paid no heed to it.

Today IPC section 144 is in force in Ayodhya and the government has under section 145, taken possession of the mosque. Notwithstanding, these instructions are continuously being contravened.

The instance of the Star Hotel incidence is unique of its kind. This hotel was owned by a Muslim. the DM got their hotel premises vacated per force, and handed it over to someone else, who got another hotel by the name of Gomti Hotel started there.

Such occurrences have sent wrong signals among the public about this secular democracy of ours and the Congress government. People have started believing that the Congress does not have the guts to combat retrogressive forces and that the communalism and religious bigotry would very shortly achieve dominance in this country.

They believe that the Hindus account for 85% population of the country, that they can do whatever they want, that the law rests on their evolution. Because of this wrong notion, the people who were so far opposed to communal and reactionary views have now started favouring them. They feel that when all this has to happen any case, why should they then be opposed to it. On the other end, having achieved success in their attempt to create this situation, the retrogressive elements have made themselves self-confident and

they feel that they have attained such a position from where they can make the Congress and its principles infirm. I am afraid these people would out this sort of issues into other cities also, and would create through them such a situation wherein the Congress by toeing their line, becomes a part of them, or having lost to them, would become extinct.

I, therefore, believe that we should counter the attack of the reactionaries with all our might and exterminate poisonous atmosphere before it gets thoroughly spread all around. As regards the circumstances prevailing in Ayodhya, I want to make them fully exposed:

On November 13, 1949 last I came to know that the graves adjacent to Babri mosque were being dug up en-bloc. The graves were being dug up and in the midst of the cemetery, a platform was being erected on an old foundation which is called by the Muslims 'Qanati Mosque'. The Muslims were overtaken by fear and were terror stricken. It was learnt from Muslims that they in order to control the situation submitted an application in accordance with Sec 145 of IPC, to the City Magistrate, requesting therein that since such acts are likely to cause breach of peace, they should therefore be got stopped. No action, however was taken though. I talked to DM in private.

On November 15, 1949 three men made an entry into my house in the night and beat me up. It is a wonder that the conversation that took place between the DM and myself in private was repeated verbatim by them. Later they passed it on to others also.

On the site of the graves that were dug up and pulled down, recital of Ramayan was kept carried out for nine days and free meal mass-serving mess was run for days on end. Large scale assemblies were held. It was announced from running 'Tangas' and motor-vehicles on loud-speakers that the birth place of Ramchandrajai was being retrieved. Yagna was on. People from places miles away started coming in, in thousands on motor-vehicles for a view. Inflammatory speeches were being made and people were told that the Babri

Mosque to be made Shri Ram Mandir. Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress and the Congressmen were reviled at. Very highly hostile passions were aroused and made wide-spread against Shri Sudheshwar Prasad and myself. People were called upon to assault on us and notices to that effect were circulated. Public passions were inflamed by false propaganda made through local weekly newspaper, 'Durgat'. All that kept happening while the recital of 'Ramayana' was carried on with the Government officials present. In addition to that, ancient graves and holy shrines of Muslims were pulled out and idols of Shivji and other Hindu deities were installed in their places. The communal virus was thus diffused in a planned manner. People were given to understand owing to the attitude of authorities that whatever happening was as per the governments desire or the government had capitulated to the communalists.

On the morning of Dec. 23, 1949, the preceding of which Ramchandrajis idol was installed in the Babri Masjid the DM informed me at about 9:00 am, that he was told by Sri Bhailal at about 6:00 am that the idol was installed in the mosque and that he had gone there to see that and had just returned.

It is remarkable that in the mosque that was under Police protection, none of the Security men present there could come to know of it whereas Bhailal had the information so early and that the DM did not feel it necessary to find out how Shri Bahilal got this information that early. It is also worth being noticed that according to DM the source of most of this sort of reports to him is Shri Bahilal.

At about 12:00 noon, I alongwith the DM, went to Babri Mosque where the idol was installed. A few people were assembled there near the mosque. At that time, mosque could have been protected very easily and the idol could have been removed. But the DM did not deem proper. It had started being announced on loud-speakers, from the morning itself that Bhagwan Ram had appeared and that the Hindus were called upon to come over for 'Darshan'. On our way to the site

I drew attention of the DM accompanying me to these announcements made in Faizabad and Ayodhya. The ebullition kept on growing and the notices were being circulated. People in thousands started coming over in motor-vehicles for 'Darshan'. There were favoured speeches made to the effect that the Congress was destroying the Hindu religion that there existed no temple anymore in Pakistan, why then there should remain the mosque and the graveyard in Ayodhya. We should all jointly erase the existence of Muslims from Ayodhya. It may be possible only when the Congress is overthrown, it is, known that Pandit Jawaharlal and some other people, too who are siding with Muslims. They have to be annihilated. Akshay Brahamchari and Sudeshwar Prasad should not be allowed to live in Ayodhya. They would not let the Hindu religion progress. Slogans were raised:-

May Akshay Brahamchari and Sudeshwari be perished. Kill Akshay and Sudheshwari. They are the foes of the religion. They have converted to Islam and have turned Muslims. They are bringing the influence to bear upon the Congress Government to protect Muslims..... so on and so forth. Holding the Parliamentary Secretary, Govind Sahai, they said all this at a huge assembly and instigated the crowd by raising the slogans.

Congress leaders like Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi and Shri Raghudas and others too could not retain their senses on the occasion. At the public meeting regarding Ayodhya mosque they spoke in support of the actions of the reactionaries. He said: "Democracy means only that whatever majority desires should take place. I notice that the local people do not like the mosque here. So no one can restore it (to Muslims). If the government interfered in this matter, I would resign. I am here on behalf of the government and I am saying so on authority.

The leaders of the RSS and the Mahasabha threatened the Congress Government at the meeting and said that the mosque cannot be here. Despite the promulgation of Section 144, these people took out

many a huge processions and held public meetings without governments permission. Observation of Section 144 was restricted upto Muslims only. Due to which they were prevented from offering 'Namaz' in the Babri Mosque. For many days entry of Muslims into Ayodhya was prohibited. But on Hindus who had perpetrated aforementioned acts in order to arouse and fan the passions, there was no effect of this Section. Although the government had taken possession of the Babri Mosque under Section 145, Hindu idol-worshipping was kept carried on therein while Muslims were prevented from offering 'Namaz' there.

The issue of 'Star Hotel' is also very grave. Shri Bhailal told the DM that some Muslims from outside have come and stayed at the hotel and that they had arms etc. The hotel was searched. There were no arms found. They found only four men. One of them was a resident of Sultanpur and ran the business of biscuits. He had come to Faizabad to buy the biscuits. A prosecution case was made against him under section 109 IPC and the hotel was immediately got evacuated from the innocent hotel-owner by the DM in his own presence. Later, that hotel premises was handed over to another person. It is now learnt that another hotel by name of 'Gomti Hotel' has been started running there with great fanfare. It was inaugurated by the District Judge. Other officers also attended this ceremony. This incidence have made the local people think that the Muslims had in fact hatched some huge conspiracy. The Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS have coincidentally found in it an implement to justify their violent acts. the reputation of DM's religiously is boosted, and it is talked about that for the preservation of religion he imperilled his life and by confronting the circumstances with prudence, saved the lives of the Hindu leaders.

It must be recalled that the owner of the Star Hotel is a nationalist of long standing. For his nationalism he was boycotted by Muslim in the recent past running the elections. A sit-in protest was made by them at the hotel. It may also be taken note that of that four

communal riots had prior to his taken place in Faizabad in which Muslims had had to suffer losses of lives and properties but no action had been taken by the government. The way houses of Muslims were looted and burnt down and they were beaten up on occasion of last (Id-ul-Baqar) and the way women and children were brutally assaulted and butchered was not an incidental event. In this regard the President of Distt. Congress Committee, Shri Raja Ram Mishra and President of City Congress Committee, Shiv Sudheshwari Prasad and President of the Distt. Board, Shri Lalanji were called names and abused. People were instigated to assault at them. Notices were circulated to justify these acts. The government is aware of all this. But, the pity is that because of inaction on the part of the Government the miscreants were getting more and more emboldened while the Muslims were compelled to keep mum having their sorrows buried within themselves. The honourable Home Minister had promised me that he would come to see with his own eyes the victimised Muslims and their looted and burnt houses. But he did not do so.

As on date Muslims in Faizabad and Ayodhya are seized with very great terror and fear. Many of them have sent their women and children to their relatives elsewhere. Some of them have emigrated with their entire families. I tried very hard to draw attention of the Government to this aspect but failed. It is thus understood that the Muslims of Ayodhya are pressurised to declare that the Babri Mosque is a Hindu temple. They are even threatened for their shops. Non-cooperation with them is being propagated. Some respectable Muslims have been assaulted and wounded.

It is also learnt that my house located in Janki Ghat, Ayodhya, broken into by breaking the lock and all the goods were looted. Some people, having taken possession of the house have started living there. It has been preached at public meetings that I should not enter Ayodya, and whoever Hindu does not assault me on sight would be as big a sinner as a cow-slaughterer, etc. I do not look at this issue from the viewpoint of

protection of mosques or Muslims. I have instead in front of me those lofty principles of the Congress and the Mahatma Gandhi which we have so far been fighting for. If we did not redress these reactionary tendencies with all the force at our command, the goal of the Congress would vanish and the reactionary views would get dismissed among the masses. Drawing the attention of leaders and the Government to the situation in Ayodhya, I beseech him to have the situation there recouped. They should take stern action against the elements who unleashed the riots and against this government officials who assisted them by taking due action against the assailants, Muslims may be given a chance to feel that they live in a country where their lives and wealth are protected by restoring their places of worship and holy sites, their religious sentiments be safe guarded. And by preaching the principles of Mahatma Gandhi in the country in this manner, they should achieve success in establishing the true Ram Raj. To say in regard to Babri Mosque, that since it is built after demolishing the temple at the Shri Ram Chnadraji's birth place it should therefore be returned to the Hindus is historically a moot point. Even however, after having the issue decided from historical point of view, what should be the course of action to be adopted in respect of such places is so basic a question as needs to be meditated upon as a matter of principles. I request our leaders to come out with some clear and permanent solution in this respect to serve as a central point. By taking to reference in such matters, expression to their acquiescence should not be made. □

Dated : 20th February, 1950

Akshay Brahmachari,  
Member Pradesh Congress Committee,  
Faizabad.

## KSA'S HELP TO PALESTINIANS

The support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Palestinian people in their sufferings and their struggle for getting back their legitimate rights represents one of the firm principles of the policy of the Kingdom since its unification by His Majesty the late King Abdul Aziz. This policy was translated into practical initiatives and support in various political, economic and social fields and at various local, regional and international levels. The Saudi support was unlimited.

In the field of financial and economic support, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia extended a lot of governmental and non-governmental assistance to the Palestinians which has, until now exceeded 8900 million riyals, of which 2,197,084,631 (two billion, one hundred ninety seven million, eighty four thousand and six hundred thirty one riyal) represent the assistance offered after the Madrid Conference. Out of this, a sum of 1,125,000,000 (one billion & one hundred twenty five million riyal) which is equivalent to US dollars 300 million represents the donations by the Kingdom announced in international conferences for the support of Palestinian Authority which is being disbursed through Saudi Development Fund for developmental Bank. A portion of that amount is also spent to support the Palestinian budget.

In continuation to the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Palestinian people and in order to help them sustain their latest Intifada (uprising), the Kingdom was the first to offer support and backing for the Palestinian brothers. Among other things, the emergency Arab Summit, held in Cairo in October 2000, adopted the proposal of HRH Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Premier, to set up Al-Quds Intifada Fund with a sum of \$200 million (with a contribution of \$50 million from the Kingdom) for the benefit of the families of the martyrs of Intifada and to educate

their children and rehabilitate the wounded and also to set up Al-Aqsa Fund with a sum of \$800 million (with a contribution of \$ 200 million from the Kingdom) to finance projects in order to preserve the Arabian and Islamic identity of Al-Quds and to help the Palestinian economy develop its capabilities and disengage from the Israeli economy. The Islamic development Bank (IDB) with its vast experience and expertise is managing both the funds. A sum of \$130 million from the share of the Kingdom in the two Funds has been remitted to IDB. The IDB has sanctioned and disbursed some amounts for various schemes designed to provide sustenance and educational care to the families of the martyrs, rehabilitation of the injured, training of martyrs' families, support to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, equipping hospitals and nursing homes, repairing and reconstruction of damaged homes in Palestine and urgent assistance to the students of Palestinian universities. It has also sanctioned amounts for a number of developmental projects in Palestine. The supervising authority of the two Funds recently decided to accept the request of the Palestinian Authority for an interest free loan of \$60 million for the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

The Saudi financial support to the Palestinian people in their recent ordeal also included carious assistance at direct bilateral level, such as:-

- Remittance of \$30 million to the Palestinian Authority.
- Remittance of \$10 million to the Palestinian Authority in February, 2001.
- Donation of 20 ambulances.
- Medical stuff, first aid, medical equipment and medicines worth 13.5 million riyal.
- Medicines worth 11.25 million riyal.
- Sending of medical planes to bring 105 injured Palestinians for their treatment in Saudi hospitals.

In addition to the governmental aid, the custodian of the Holy Mosques instructed to collect donations

from Saudi people to support the struggle of the Palestinians. Inspired by their emotional bonds of Arabian and Islamic brotherhood with the Palestinians, the Saudi people's response was unlimited. The cash donations, until now, amounted to over 240 million riyals in addition to contributions in kind such as cars, ambulances, real properties, jewellery and medical stuffs. The donations are still coming constantly to the committee formed for collecting donations under the supervision of HRH the Interior Minister. The Committee has already dispatched some ambulances and medications. It has allocated 20,000 riyals as assistance to each family of the martyrs of Intifada while 124 million riyals have been remitted for the benefit of the needy among the families of the martyrs and the wounded etc.

As a part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's support to the struggle of Palestinian brothers, the Kingdom utilised its presence in regional and international financial institutions to support and adopt the demands submitted by the Palestinian Authority for the development of the Palestinian economy. At the level of bilateral support to the Palestinian economy, the Kingdom exempted the Palestinian products even before the decision of the emergency summit and thus enabled the presence of the Palestinian products in the largest Arab economy, something which is considered an important contribution to the Palestinian economy in developing its own capabilities.□

**Press note from  
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, New Delhi**

Contd. From page 100.

I have prayed in Hindu and Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, Christian churches and Sikh gurudwaras, apart from Parsi temples because I respect them all and believe that all paths lead to the same God. Prayer is thanksgiving to the divine for what we have received, it is not to bargain for one's advantage nor a plea to ask for more. When religion descends to the level of asserting superiority it becomes an instrument of oppression and as a student of comparative religions, I am outraged as I was when the Babari Masjid was brought down. If you were rabid, you would agree with Swami Vamdev who asserted that the Babri Masjid fell down on its own and went on to claim that as the demand was for the destruction of three mosques, the Jama Masjid in New Delhi should take the place of the mosque that forgot to stand up. No religion teaches you to use it to build a power base.

In phrase dear to Mahatma Gandhi, may I suggest that the time has come to turn the searchlight inwards. We will be surprised at what we find. I plead for the wonderful mosaic that is India and I plead with all my countrymen. Chief Justice J S Verma began his judgement in Writ Petition (c) No 186 of 1994 with these words from Swami Vivekananda and they bear repetition - Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is in being and becoming, it is realisation.□

## PATH OF PEACE

Mohammad Shamim

In order to determine the role of Islam in the 21st century, we have to first identify the problems which the millions of Muslims are facing world-wide, or are likely to face, in the near future. The first problem that comes to my mind is with regard to peace. Everyone dearly wants it, yet it remains elusive, being a religion of peace, has a very vital role to play in man's search for the same. A Muslim on meeting another Muslim conveys his greetings with "assalamalikum". Translated into English it means, "let peace be on you". More elaborately, while making this wish, a Muslim assures his interlocutor that he would remain free from causing harm to anybody. The other person in reply too assures him likewise.

Islam condemns war in all forms and it is only permissible in defence. As a first step, Prophet Mohammad always tried to avoid confrontation. The treaty of Hudaibiyah is a fine example of how he tried to buy peace at all costs. While going to Mecca to perform *umra*, Mohammad was confronted by an army of non-believers who tried to prevent him from going there. Instead of fighting them, much to resentment of his companions, he entered into a treaty. The terms of the treaty, *prima facie*, were most humiliating. However, Muhammad honoured these. According to the terms, he agreed not to perform Haj for a certain number of years.

The non-believers then insisted that he should not shoe himself in the documents prepared for signing the treaty as a prophet, and that he should be simply identified as Mohammad, son of Abdullah. Mohammad agreed to even such humiliating terms because he wanted to have peace. The other terms of treaty were,

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\* The Writer is Chairman, National Commission for Minorities.

one, if any Meccan accepted Islam and wanted to settle in Madina, he must be surrendered to quraish; two, if any of the Madinian Muslim go to Mecca, the Meccans would not send him back.

The Prophet, in the early days of preaching Islam, not only faced vehement criticism and opposition but was threatened with dire consequences. He had two options: Either to fight in self defence or to leave Mecca. He exercised the latter option and quietly left Mecca during the night for Medina and made it his abode. Indeed, he considered peace above all things and completely shunned violence and confrontation. Later, after the conquest of Mecca, Mohammad showed benevolence to one and all and pardoned the non-believers. No persecution was meted. Only 17 persons, who were found guilty of unpardonable crimes, were sentenced to death. There is no other parallel in world history when, after the conquest of a particular place, no action was taken against any one of the opponents.

The Qur'an call this way the "path of peace". It prescribes reconciliation as the best policy and says that God abhors violence. The Islamic revolution that occurred during the time of the prophet was achieved at the cost of only 1018 lives. During the 23 years in which this revolution took place, 259 Muslims and 759 non-Muslims died. It can rightly be called a bloodless revolution. In comparison, the Russian revolution of 1917 saw 13 million people losing their lives. Similarly, thousands of people lost their lives in the French revolution. The Islamic revolution is indeed an eye-opener and if we tread the path shown by Islam, we can certainly attain the goal of peace.

The other problem besetting the world is with regard to discrimination and inequality. All men are born equal, yet they are treated unequally. they are discriminated against on grounds of cast, creed, colour or race. But Islam treats all human beings as equal. According to its tenets nobody is better than or superior to the other. Islam, however, recognises one distinction,

that is a man can be better than the other on the ground of his piety and conduct.

In his farewell address, the prophet observed: "You are all brothers and are equal. None can claim any privilege or any superiority over any other". an Arab is not to be preferred to a non-Arab, nor is a non-Arab to be preferred to an Arab, nor is a white man to be preferred to a coloured one, or a coloured one to a white except on the basis of righteousness". (Masnad Ahmad).

This achievement of Islam has been recognised the world over. According to writer HG Wells, Islam did not merely preach justice and equality but implemented it in an exceptional manner. "They (Muslims) created a society more free from widespread cruelty and social oppression than any society had ever been in the world" (*The Outline of History*). Social reformer Swami Vivekanand too acknowledged the practice of equality and indiscrimination in Islam. He said: "My experience is that if ever any religion approached equality in appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone" (*Letters of Vivekanand*).

This message of equality among human beings was conveyed by the prophet through his own actions. Hazrat Bilal, who was a Negro slave, was one of the closest to the prophet. He was appointed, after the conquest of Mecca, a *muezzin* (a person who calls Muslim to prayer) of Masjidul Haram.

The prophet once saw a wealthy Muslim gathering up his loose garment to maintain a distance from a poor Muslim sitting next to him. Seeing this, the prophet observed: "Are you scared of his poverty clinging to you?" There is no action of Mohammad greater than marrying his cousin, Zainab, daughter of Hajjash, a slave. Arnold J Toynbee is of the following view: "The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one the outstanding moral achievements of Islam and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue."

Islam accords to women the pride of place; there is no gender bias. Islam is the first religion in the world that allowed women a share in the property left by her parents/husband. Again, Islam is the first religion to have conferred on the womenfolk the right to divorce their husbands. Of course, there is a division of labour, in that a woman is enjoined to look after the affairs of the house, whereas a male is asked to look after the outside matters. The prophet held women in high esteem. He said: "One who brings up one's daughter, teaches them good manners and morals, arranges their marriages and treats them with fairness, deserves to be ushered into paradise" (Abu Dawud). He then observed: Paradise lies at the feet of mothers (As Suyuti)."

One day, a stranger approached Muhammad with a request to let him know as to who was supreme. The prophet replied: "Your mother." The man then asked who followed next. The prophet again told him: "Your mother." The same question was put again and the answer was the same. On being asked for the fourth time, the prophet said, "Your father."

The above discussion clearly demonstrates that Islam can play a vital role in redressing the grievances of people, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections of society. If we follow the path shown by Islam in true spirit, then this world would be a better place. A world where peace would permeate and where there would be no discrimination.□

## MISUSE OF RELIGION IS ENDEMIC

C. R. Irani\*

L. K. Advani is in difficulty before the Liberhan Commission. On 10 April 2001 he appeared in sack-cloth and ashes and said he regarded the demolition of the Babri Masjid as *an unfortunate and painful event, which distressed me greatly that day*. Of course he also made excuses for the kar sevaks who had hoped to get a Ram temple built by due process of law. Impatience with due process of law is not a recognised defence for committing a crime. Nor does characterising the Masjid as a *disputed structure* help to justify the vandalism. India does not recognise anyone's right to destroy any structure, disputed or otherwise, which does not belong to him. He balanced this by stressing that the BJP believed that constructing a Ram temple at Ayodhya was a *symbol of national self-respect*. Without necessarily agreeing with the proposition to ask why the Ram temple was not built elsewhere in Ayodhya; there is plenty of space. Why does it have to be at the very spot where the Babari Masjid stood? Advani did not address this issue but on earlier occasions he has sought to dismiss it as a matter of faith.

Advani then proceeded to rely on the White Paper of the Rao government whose hands were not exactly clean. Even that paper records that the Masjid was a functioning mosque until the night of 22 December 1949. The affidavit of the UP government says so and adds that the Masjid stood on the wakf land and the mosque and the land were notified as a Sunni Muslim Wakf by 1944. In the light of this evidence it is not understood why the White Paper should insist that all references to the Babari Masjid should be Ramjanambhumi-Babari Masjid structure and Ramjanambhumi-Babari Masjid complex. For the benefit of Mr. Advani

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\* Chief Editor The Statesman, Calcutta / Delhi

and the Commission before whom he appeared, the Babari Masjid was a functioning mosque until 22 December 1949 when it was desecrated by the introduction of idols by stealth and deceit after which namaz could not be performed because of the presence of the unwanted idols.

With all its careful phraseology, Advani's evidence marked an advance on the untenable positions he held earlier and there was hope that it represented a change of heart. Hope was promptly dashed the next day when he appeared before the Commission again. Whether he has got at by predictable elements in the RSS overnight is not known; if he was, it was his affair. What I am concerned about is the volte face. He now describes the desecrated Babari Masjid - before demolition - as a temple, *de jure*. Why? Because of the idols inside. This is to justify strong-arm methods, trample upon ownership rights, put a premium on dishonesty and vulgarity of the worst kind and when caught out insist that it is all covered by the expression - faith. Faith is not a preserve of one community; the Sangh Parivar are mistaken if they confuse faith with brute force of the majority.

Advani is in another difficulty if he insists that the desecrated temple was already a *de jure* temple. What was demolished was, by this logic, a functioning temple. This is a new one for the Sangh Parivar. Religion is being reduced to the level of tactics. It has been urged that once idols are installed, they may not be moved. Now Advani is party to the proposition that idols could be removed from functioning temples because this was undoubtedly done when they were removed for the duration of the demolition and brought back later to adorn the make-shift temple that stands where the Babari Masjid stood.

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