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The Fragrance of East

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Editor's Note:**The Politics of Language: The Significance of Arabic**

Language is a method of human communication. In both its spoken and written form it insists on the use of words in a structured and conventional way. In fact it is language, which distinguishes man from other living beings. The newly born baby learns to speak from mother. As he or she grows up and starts speaking we say he is talking in mother tongue.

The issue of language has sadly been much politicized. It is unfortunate that often a language is associated with a particular religion and its followers. English, the widely spoken language in the world is linked with Christians and it is popular in UK and USA and in the anglophile world. Sanskrit is known as the language of Hindus. Arabic is considered to be the language of Arabs and Muslims in the Islamic world. This concept of associating languages with particular groups or religion is not only illogical but also misleading. The issue needs some discussion, and we hope to come back to it in our later issues. The ever-increasing popularity of the Arabic language in lands where Islam spread is the subject matter of our consideration in this column.

Arabic as its name suggests is related to Arabs. It is the language, which is written from right to left, in contrast to other languages, which start from the left to right. The classical or literary language is based largely on that of the holy Quran. This was to be expected Prophet Muhammad (pbh), the last prophet of Islam, was born and brought up in Arabia and the holy Quran was revealed to him in the language he understood-Arabic. After Islam spread to Syria and Mesopotamia, Persia, North Africa and Spain, different forms of contact between members of the two faiths sparked the polemical debate between Muslims and Christians. And this contact made Arabic-the language of the conquering Arabs - the spoken language of the Christian *dimmis* of the urban centres.

There is no denying the fact that Islam helped Arabic in becoming one of the most popular languages of the world. It acquired sophistication and helped in the social and cultural development as well of Islamic civilization. The Arab historian Ibn-i-Khaldun (1332-1406) has aptly remarked that inquisitiveness to learn science is not restricted to any particular religious group. Science in Islamic societies was international; it inherited all the earlier scientific traditions and fused them into one new whole. The most important factor contributing to the universality of the Islamic scientific culture was the Arabic as the universal language of communication. It may be noted that many of the scientists who wrote in Arabic were not themselves Arabs. Yet, so much was the lingua franca status of Arabic that between 9th and 16th centuries most of the scientific works were written in Arabic.

Of late, the Arabic language is assuming greater importance because lack of its knowledge is considered a big hurdle in developing cordial relations between Arabs and non-Arab nations. Moreso, according to an Indian Social Scientist, Dr. Satish Sharma of Sagar University, after every two weeks one language of the world is eliminated. If this process is continued then by the end of this century only English, Chinese, Hindi/Urdu and Arabic will survive.

Realising the importance of Arabic in developing cordiality with the Arab world the government of USA is showing keen interest that Americans in good number should learn Arabic. Before 1998 only two percent students were taking lessons in Arabic but during 1998-2002 the percentage has risen to 92 and about 10,600 students are taking tuitions in Arabic. The American Center for Applied Languages in its survey found that Arabic is taught in 70 primary and secondary schools. Though Muslims run most of these schools, the US government is quite liberal to assist any institution, which imparts knowledge of Arabic. Apart from according all facilities in America, Americans are encouraged to go to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Tunis to learn Arabic. Presently 480 American students are on the rolls of Egyptian

Universities to learn Arabic. In Journalism too Arabic Journals and newspapers are no less than of other languages.

In India we have a better infrastructure to promote the Arabic language. With little interest and proper patronage the famous Islamic seminaries like Darul Uloom Deoband, Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema, Mazahirul Uloom Saharanpur, Jamia Salfia, Varanasi and other reputed centres can help in the popularising of Arabic learning. Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulema is playing a pivotal role in promotion of Arabic. The Arabic language and literature occupy prominent place in its curriculum. It has produced eminent Arabic litterateur and scholars. The Arabic language is not confined to only Islamic works but it helps in establishing cordial relations with Arabic speaking countries. It has a rich treasure of art, literature and culture. Now modern subjects too are being translated and assimilated in this language. In countries where Arabic is the medium of instruction books on science, medicine, philosophy, psychology and social sciences are being translated in Arabic from other languages. The importance of Arabic can be gauged by the simple fact that in international conferences Arabic knowing interpreters are engaged and automatic translation facilities are provided to delegates. Government of India, realizing the importance of Arabic has also established centres for the promotion of the language. A good number of Nadwa educated persons are proving quite helpful in this task. ■

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Mankind is conscious of the necessity of living together in peaceful co-existence. The practical realization of such an objective demands a common conceptual foundation acceptable to all on which a humane and universal system of world relations might be built. Islam believes that it can offer such a foundation, basing its conviction on certain fundamental tenets, in particular its tolerance of and identification with other faiths, notably Judaism and Christianity; its recognition of the sense of God or 'natural religion' inherent in all men; its faith in man which represents a new humanism. Islam provides a platform for constructive dialogue in the hope that this will produce a concerted effort to formulate and harness man's awareness for the creation of a new world order in the service of God and humanity.

Ismail R.al-Faruqi

THE ERA OF MUSLIM GLORY

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Characteristics

Once the Muslims were aroused, they quickly burst the bounds of Arabia and threw themselves zealously into the task of the fuller working out of human destiny. Their leadership held the guarantee of light and happiness for the world; it gave the promise of turning humanity into a single divinely-guided society. Some of characteristic of Muslim leadership were:

The Muslims had the unique advantage of being in possession of the Divine Book (the Qur'an) and the Sacred Law (the *Shari'at*). They did not have to fall back on their own judgement on the vital questions of life, and were thus saved from the manifold difficulties and perils that are attendant upon such a course. The Divine Word led illuminated all the avenues of life for them and had enabled them to progress towards a destination which they clearly envisaged. With them it was not to be a case of trial and error. Says the Holy Qur'an:

"Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life and a Light whereby he can walk amongst men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness from which he can never come out?" (Al-Qur'an, VI:122)

They were to judge among men on the basis of the Revealed Word; they were not to diverge from the dictates of justice and equity; their view was not to be blurred by enmity, hatred or desire for revenge.

"O ye who believe, stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just; that is nearer to piety; and fear God, for God is well acquainted with all that ye do."

(Al-Qur'an, V:8)

They had not by themselves leapt into power all of a sudden from the abysmal depth of degradation. The Qur'an had already beaten them into shape. They had been brought to a high level of nobility and purity by the Prophet through long years of unremitting care. The Prophet had conditioned them to a life of austerity and righteousness; he had instilled into their hearts the virtues of humanity and courageous self-denial; he had purged them clean of greed and of striving after power, renown or wealth. It was laid down by him as a fundamental principle of Islamic polity that "We shall not assign an office under the government to anyone who makes a request for it, or shows his longing for it in any other way."

The Muslims were as far removed from falsehood, haughtiness and mischief as white is from black. The following words of the Qur'an had not in vain been grounded into them night and day:

"That Home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who intend not high-handedness or mischief on earth; and the End is (best) for the righteous."

(Al-Qur'an, XXVIII:83)

Instead of aspiring for positions of authority and trust, they accepted them with great reluctance and when they did accept an official position they accepted it as a trust from God, to whom they would have to render full account of their sins of omission and commission on the Day of Judgement. Says the Holy Qur'an:

"God doth command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when ye judge between man and man, that ye with justice."

(Al-Qur'an, IV:58)

"It is He Who hath made you (His) vicegerents on the earth. He hath raised you in ranks, some above others; that He might try you in the gifts ye receive; for thy Lord is quick in punishment; yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving,

Most Merciful."

(Al-Qur'an, VI:165)

Further, the Muslims were not the agents of any particular race or country; nor were they out to establish Arab Imperialism. Their mission was a universal mission of faith and freedom. They were happily free from all the sickly obsessions of colour and territorial nationality. All men were equal before them. The Qur'an had pointedly said:

"O mankind, we created you from (a single pair of) a male and a female; and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most-righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is Well-Acquainted (with all things)."

(Al-Qur'an, XLIX:13)

Once the son of 'Amr bin-al-As, the Governor of Egypt, struck an Egyptian commoner with a whip. The matter was brought to the notice of Caliph Umar. The Caliph did not show the least regard for the high status of the offender's father, and ordered the Egyptian straightway to avenge himself for harm done to him. To the offender's father he administered this telling rebuke, "Why have you made them slaves while they were born free?"

The Arabs were not stingy in making the benefits of faith, culture and learning available to the non-Arabs. They did not care for the nationality or the family connections of the recipients when it came to the conferment of high honours and positions in the State. They were, as it were, a cloud of bliss that rained ungrudgingly over the entire world, and from which all peoples, everywhere freely profited according to their own capacity.

The Arabs allowed a free and equal partnership to all nations in the establishment of a new socio-political structure and in the advancement of mankind towards a fuller and

richer moral ideal. There were no national divisions, no clour bars, no vested interests, no priesthood and no hereditary nobility in the Islamic Commonwealth. No special benefits were reserved for anyone. There was nothing to prevent the non-Arabs from surpassing the Arabs in the various fields of life. Even as Doctors of *Fiqh* and *Hadith* a number of non-Arabs attained a distinction for which the Muslims in general and the Arabs in particular feel proud. Ibn-i-Khaldun writes: "It is an amazing fact of history that though their religion is of Arabian origin and the Law that the Prophet had brought had an Arab complexion, with a few exceptions, all eminent men of learning in the Muslim *Millat*, in the field of theological as well as secular sciences, are non-Arabs. Even those who are Arabs by birth are non-Arabs by education, language and scholarship." During the later centuries, too, the non-Arab Muslims continued to produce leaders, statesmen, saints and savants of exceptional merit. This would obviously not have been possible, had the Arabs been mean or prejudiced in sharing their opportunities with the people of other nationalities in the Islamic World.

Humanity has many sides - physical, emotional, social, moral, mental and spiritual. We cannot neglect any one of them for the benefit of another. Humanity cannot progress to its highest level unless every human instinct is brought into proper play. It would be futile to hope for the establishment of a healthy human society till an intellectual, material, moral and spiritual environment is created in which a man is enabled to develop his latent potentialities in harmony with God's plan of creation. We learn from experience that this goal must remain a dream so long as the reins of civilization are not held by those who attach due importance to both the material and the spiritual yearnings of life, and can, together with having a high moral and spiritual sense, fitly appreciate the claims of flesh and blood upon man and the inter-relationship between the individual and the society.

Any defect in the integration of the material and

spiritual elements in the inner nature of the people should inevitably be displayed in its entire social outlook and organization. Thus, if a community which believes only in one side of life-material progress-and is unaware of its spiritual side and the transcendental realities like Resurrection and Futurity, acquires ascendancy over the world, civilization will manifest itself in material objects like brick, stone, paper, cloth, steel and lead; it will revolve round law courts, battle-fields, factories, ball rooms, hotels, clubs and theatres and flourish and grow rich there. But on the domestic plane, and in the domain of morality and the other spheres of human life there will be no demarcation between man and beast. In short, civilization will be like the corpulent body which may give the impression of well-being at first sight, but is, in reality, the victim of innumerable ailments.

Similarly, if a community which repudiates temporal interests and stands for the negation of the self, cherishing only the things of the spirit, comes into power, the natural potentialities of man will be stunted and civilization will wither away. Under its influence, people will renounce the world and become hermits. They will prefer celibacy to the matrimonial life, and the life of caves and forests to that of towns and cities. Self-torture will become the highest form of religious exercise, so that the hold of the body over the soul might weaken, and the spirit of man might be "purified." Death will gain superiority over life as through it mankind would be saved from the tumult of the 'world of matter' and gain access to the tranquility of the 'world of spirit' and complete their spiritual progress.

This philosophy of life being opposed to the natural scheme of things, whenever such a society comes into being, the spirit of man does not fail to react violently against it soon after the first flush of enthusiasm is over, and to avenge itself by rushing madly towards the other extreme of vulgar material employment and debauchery.

Very few of the communities that had the privilege to

act as torch-bearers of civilization during the various epochs of history could succeed in establishing a harmonious equilibrium between the temporal and the spiritual, between the body and the spirit or between the minds and the senses. Generally speaking, they were either crudely materialistic or plainly ascetic in their mental and spiritual attitudes, and this kept mankind rocking most of the time between the two opposite ends of materialism and monasticism.

Uniqueness of the Companions

The Companions of the Holy Prophet were unique in the sense that religion, morality, social dynamics, politics, i.e. 'all the diverse requirements of a civilized society were mirrored in the most beautiful colours in their lives. There was no schism, no corroding lack of integration in their souls. Due to it, they were ideally suited to operate as stewards of humanity. We, consequently, find that no period in the recorded history of the human race has been more auspicious for it in the true sense of the term than what is known among the Muslims as *Khilafat-i-Rashida* (i.e., the reign of the first four Caliphs). During this epoch, all the material, moral and spiritual resources of man were brought into use to make him an ideal citizen of an ideal State. The Government was judged by the yard-stick of morality, and the morals were judged by their utility to life, humanity in permanent values and establishing justice in human society. Though the Islamic Commonwealth was the richest and the most powerful State of its time, the popular heroes and ideal personalities in it used to be drawn from among those who possessed, not earthly glory, but purity and nobleness of character. There was no disparity between power and morality. Material advancement was not allowed to run-out moral progress. That is why in the Islamic World the incidence of crime was very low in spite of the abundance of wealth and the great heterogeneity of its population. To put it in a nutshell, this epoch was the most beautiful springtime mankind has to this day experienced.

All this was done to the moral strength of faith,

excellence and the training of those who were at the helm of affairs in the Muslim State. In whatever capacity they served the State, they conducted themselves as the choicest perfect models of Islamic morality. Whether as administrators or petty officials or as soldiers or policemen, they performed their duties with exemplary modesty, justice and piety.

The sterling character and qualities of the Muslim soldiers were once praised by a Roman officer in these words: "At night you will find them prayerful; during the day you will find them fasting. They keep their promises, order good deeds, suppress evil and maintain complete equality among themselves."

Another testified thus: "They are horsemen by day and ascetics by night. They pay for what they eat in territories under their occupation. They are first to salute when they arrive at a place and are valiant fighters who just wipe out the enemy."

A third said: "During the night it seems that they do not belong to this world and have no other business than to pray, and during the day, when one sees them mounted on their horses, one feels that they have been doing nothing else all their lives. They are great archers and great lancers, yet they are so devoutly religious and remember God so much and so often that one can hardly hear talk about anything else in their company."

It was because of this moral background of their training that when the fabulous Crown and the 'Carpet of Spring' of the Chosroes of Iran fell into the hands of Muslim soldiers after the victory of Madain, they promptly delivered them to their Commander, who dispatched them to the Caliph at Medina. When the latter saw those articles, he was filled with admiration for the high integrity of the soldiers who had handed them over to their leader intact and for those who had brought them safely all the way to Medina.

Islamic View of Life

Islam alone, of all religions, embraces life in all its aspects. It does not stand as a barrier between man and his legitimate desire to live. It does not regard man's earthly existence as a gloomy dale of sorrows or a punishment or inherited sin. At the same time, it does not look upon this life as a fleeting opportunity for material satisfaction or a place for sensuous delight. Islam proclaims life to be a Divine gift so that man may attain nearness unto God and attain perfection by making full use of the possibilities of his body and spirit. It is an opportunity for action to make the best of oneself; there is not going to be another opportunity after it:

"He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed."

(Al-Qur'an, LXVII:2)

"That which is on earth We have made but as a glittering show for it in order that We may test them-as to which of them are best in conduct."

(Al-Qur'an, XVIII:7)

The Companions of the Prophet considered this universe as the domain of God in which He had raised them in the first instance as human beings and then as Muslims to serve as His Vicegerents and the guardians of those who dwelt in it.

"I will create a Vicegerent on earth."

(Al-Qur'an, II:30)

"It is He Who hath created for you all things that are on the earth."

(Al-Qur'an, II:29)

"We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation."

(Al-Qur'an, XVII:70)

"God has promised to those among you who believe

and work righteous deeds, that He will, surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it of those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion - the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (live), to one of security and peace; they will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me."

(Al-Qur'an, XXIV:55)

God has granted mankind the right to enjoy the resources of the earth without being foolish, vain or wasteful:

"Eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for God loveth not the wasters."

(Al-Qur'an, VII:31)

"Say: who hath forbidden the beautiful gifts of God, which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, which He hath provided for sustenance? Say: they are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgement."

(Al-Qur'an, VII:32)

The Muslims have been appointed shepherds of mankind. It is their religious duty to keep humanity on the straight path, to remove imperfections from human society, to defend the weak and to establish justice and peace on the earth.

Says the Holy Qur'an:

"Ye are the best people raised up for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God."

(Al-Qur'an, III:110)

"O ye who believe, stand out firmly for justice and be the witness of God to fair dealing."

(Al-Qur'an, IV:135)

Muhammad Asad has admirably summed up the

Islamic conception of life as a well-balanced harmonious totality, which cannot be bifurcated into the physical and spiritual. Says he:

"..... If Islam does not share the gloomy aspect of life as expressed by Christianity, it teaches us, none the less, not to attribute an exaggerated value of the earthly life as the modern Western civilization does. The Christian outlook is: The earthly life is a bad business. The modern West - as distinct from Christianity - adores life in exactly the same way as the glutton adores his food: he devours it, but has no respect for it. Islam, on the other hand, looks upon the earthly life with calmness and respect. It does not worship life, but regards it as a passing stage in our way to a higher existence. But just because it is a stage, and a necessary stage, too, man has no right to despise or even to underrate the value of his earthly life. Our travel through this world is a necessary, positive part in God's Plan. Human life, therefore, is of a tremendous value; but we must never forget that it is a purely instrumental value. In Islam there is no room for the materialistic optimism of the modern West which says: 'My kingdom is of this world alone,' - nor for the life-contempt of the Christian: 'My kingdom is not of this world'. Islam goes the middle way. The Qur'an teaches us to pray:

'Our Lord, give us the good in this world and the good in the Hereafter.'

(Al-Qur'an, II:201)

"Thus, the full appreciation of this world and its good is in no way a handicap for our spiritual endeavours. Material prosperity is desirable, though it is not a goal in itself. The goal of all are practical activities always ought to be the creation and maintenance of such personal and social conditions as might be helpful for the development of moral stamina in men. In accordance with this principle, Islam leads man towards a consciousness of moral responsibility in everything he does, whether great or small. The well-known injunction of the gospel: 'Give Caesar that what

belongs to Caesar, and give God that what that belongs to God' - has no room in the theological structure of Islam, because Islam does not allow a differentiation between the moral and the practical requirements of our existence. In everything there can be only one choice: the choice between Right and Wrong - and nothing in-between. Hence the intense insistence on action as an indispensable element of morality. Every individual Muslim has to regard himself as personally responsible for all happenings around him, and to strive for the establishment of Right and the abolition of Wrong at every time and in every direction.

The sanction for this attitude is to be found in the verse of the Qur'an:

"Ye are the best people raised up for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God."

(Al-Qur'an, III:110)

"This is the moral justification of the aggressive activism of Islam, the justification of the early Islamic conquests and its so-called 'Imperialism'. For Islam is 'Imperialist', if we must use this term; but this kind of Imperialism is not prompted by love of domination; it has nothing to do with economic or national selfishness, nothing with the greed to increase our own comforts at other people's cost, nor has it ever meant the coercion of non-believers into the belief of Islam. It has only meant, as it means today, the construction of a worldly frame for the best possible spiritual development of man. Moral knowledge, according to the teachings of Islam, automatically forces a moral responsibility upon man. A mere Platonic discernment between Right and Wrong, without the urge to promote the Right and to destroy the Wrong, without the urge to promote the Right and to destroy the Wrong, is a gross immorality in itself. In Islam, morality lives and dies with the human endeavour to establish its victory upon earth."

Efforts of the Rise of Muslim Power

The rise of the Muslim power and the coming age of the Islamic civilization during the first century of the Hijra were events of unequalled significance in man's moral and social development. These events confronted the "World of Ignorance" with a crisis of an unprecedented magnitude. So far Islam was no more than a religious movement, but henceforth it emerges as a complete civilization-refined, progressive and full of life and energy.

Henceforth, there were two opposite systems in the world - one was a comprehensive, easy-to-understand, practical, revealed Faith, and the other a rigmarole of rigid formalism, conjecture, superstition and myth.

The superior society of Islamic ideology was envisaged and brought to life on solid spiritual foundations. The real emphasis in it was not on material prosperity but on the development of moral stamina in men and on the metaphysical orientation of life. The soul of man was, as such, free from contradictions within its framework. It was contended. There was no greed, no insatiate longing for worldly power or riches. The Government stood firmly for equity and equality and held itself as much responsible for the moral and spiritual prosperity of its people as for the protection of their lives and property. Its governors and administrators were also the finest citizens of the Islamic State; the most exalted ascetics were not unoften found among those who had the greatest opportunities of indulging in comfort and luxury of all kinds.

In contrast with the social soundness and spiritual vigour of the Islamic World were the avarice, confusion, and vulgarity of the "World of Ignorance," where everyone in authority seemed desperately resolved upon making hay while the sun shone.

Islam and Humanity

This being so, people had no hesitation in walking over from the realm of Ignorance to the Light of Islam. They stood to lose nothing, whereas there was everything to be gained.

Islam offered to them the balm of belief, the sweetness of faith, the membership of a democratic, cosmopolitan society - a society that really was without any kind of distinction - and the protection of a powerful State. The expansion of the frontiers of Islam was, quite naturally, very rapid.

The effects of the growth of Islamic power were extremely far-reaching. The path of Godliness became easy to transverse. Till yesterday it was a most perilous thing to obey the commands of God; now it was the other way round. It was no longer necessary to preach the message of faith secretly:

"Call to mind when ye were a small (band) despised through the land, and afraid that men might despoil and kidnap you; but He provided a safe asylum for you, strengthened you with His aid, and gave you good things for sustenance that ye might be grateful."

(Al-Qur'an. VIII:26)

Revival of Humanity

The people who had earned the fold of Islam could now exert themselves more effectively for the moral and spiritual revival of humanity. They could perform the duty of establishing Right and prohibiting Wrong with much greater success. The rejuvenating currents of Islam ran through the world, infusing men everywhere with a new life and an unparallelled enthusiasm for progress. The lost values of life had been discovered. Paganism became a sign of reaction, while it was considered progressive to be associated with Islam. Even nations that did not come directly under the influence of Islam, profoundly, though unconsciously, benefited by the freshness and vitality of the new creative impulses released by its impact on large parts of the world. Numerous aspects of their thought and culture bear evidence to the magic touch of Islam. All the reform movements that arose in their midst, owed their origin to Islamic influences.

A universal gift of Islam to humanity was the re-establishment of man's belief in the Unity of God. So

uncompromisingly and so energetically did the Muslims espouse the doctrine of Monotheism that even the Trinitarians and the worshippers of idols had to offer apologies and excuses for their ideas on religion and for their modes of worship.

Islam and Christianity

Formerly, they used to be shocked at the mention of the idea of Divine Unity and exclaim.

"Has he made the gods all into one God? Truly this is a wonderful thing!"

(Al-Qur'an, XXXVIII:5)

Now they took pains to explain that their beliefs and practices did not contravene the belief in the Oneness of God. There appeared a number of sects among Christians denying the Divinity of Jesus and explaining the doctrine of Trinity in a way so as to bring it within the orbit of Monotheistic teachings. The belief that the ecclesiastics acted as intermediaries between man and God was also criticised severely by Christian reformers and ultimately given up. A movement was started in Europe in the eighth century against the practice of making confessions before the priests. It was asserted that the man should address himself directly to his Maker, without the aid of intercessors. In addition to this a feeling of revulsion was created throughout the Christendom, with the support of powerful Roman Emperors like Leo III, Constantine V and Leo IV, against paintings and statues in the Churches. Emperor Leo III issued a decree in 726 A.C. prohibiting the adoration of the images. In 730 A.C. he proclaimed the arts of painting and sculpture to be the remnants of Paganism. This new development in the very heart of the Graeco-Roman cultural zone was indisputably an echo of the message of Islam that had reached Europe through Spain. Claudius, one of the pioneers of the movement, had actually been born and brought up in Muslim Spain. It was his custom to set fire to any image or painting that was found in his diocese. The

Reformation itself, in spite of all its shortcomings, was inspired by Islam.

Islam and Europe

It was not, however, in the field of religion alone that Islam imparted a new glow of life to Europe. There is not a single department of European revival which is not indebted to Islamic thought. We will quote the following passages from Robert Briffault:

"For although there is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic civilization is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the permanent distinctive force of the modern world and the supreme of its victory - natural science and scientific spirit."

"Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab Civilization to the modern world.....It was not science only which brought Europe back to life. Other and manifold influences from the civilization of Islam communicated its first glow to European life."

Islam and India

The contribution of Islamic civilization to the culture of the different peoples of India has also been of very great importance. Many progressive features in the socio-cultural structure of the different Indian communities, like respect for women and their rights, can be traced to the influence exercised upon them by Islam through various channels. It can safely be claimed that after the dawn of Islam no cultural or religious system in the world can honestly deny its indebtedness to Islam and the Muslims.

Islam's Influence in Decadence

Several characteristics of the Muslim faith and civilization continued in operation even after the huge Islamic and social structure had started to disintegrate, one of these being the belief in God. Islam has planted the idea of God

so firmly in the minds of its followers that the vicissitudes of time could do no harm to it. The followers of Islam could indulge in immorality - as they wholeheartedly did during the period of their decline - but it was just not possible for them to shake off their belief in God. The moral sense of right and wrong, the faith in the Omnipresence of the Almighty, and the solicitude for the After-life would pinch their hearts in the midst of their follies, and, sometimes, it would do the trick and transform their lives in the twinkling of an eye. Not infrequently would it happen that people abandoned their wicked ways and took to a life of piety in response to a sudden call of the conscience. A simple heavenly warning would in a moment stir up princes to renounce their kingdoms and turn ascetics, while we see daily that warnings a thousand times more severe fail to make any impression if the hearts are frozen spiritually. Many a time, on hearing a Qur'anic verse like the following the people suddenly felt that they had awakened to a new life:

"Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of God and of the Truth which has been revealed (to them), and that they should not become like those to whom was given Revelation aforetime, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard, for many among them are rebellious transgressors?"

Such incidents were of common occurrence in the seminaries of religious leaders in Baghdad even when that city had slipped into moral stupor. It has been reported by Ibn Jubair al-Andalusi that people used to weep during the sermons of Sheikh Raziuddin Qazwini and they swarmed around into him to ask God for forgiveness of their sins.

During the sermons of Hafi Ibn Jauzi, "people cried and fainted and had to be carried away. They would give their forelocks in his hands (as sign of submission), and he would caress their heads." According to his own estimate,

about a lakh of persons repented at his hand. At the sermon assemblies of Sheikh Ismail Lahori, an Indian Traditionist of the 5th Century A.H., it is stated that thousands embraced Islam. Ibn Batuta has enumerated numerous incidents of a like nature in connection with the achievements of Muslim missionaries in India.

In the end it may be pointed out that the language of Islam has gained free currency in the languages of the world. Modes of expression that are peculiar to Islam were widely used by non-Muslims. Many non-Muslim scholars learnt the Qur'an by heart. Ibn Ishaq the Sabian, one of the most celebrated of non-Muslim calligraphists and literateurs of his age, is reputed to have been in the habit of observing the Ramazan fasts.

People travelled in the Islamic world from one end to the other, across forests, mountains and rivers, in search of spiritual guides. The saints and the 'Sufis' were the refuge of the world. Their dwelling-places were overcrowded with devotees and sparkled with life more than the palaces of the high dignitaries of the State. The sermon-assemblies of Sheikh 'Abdul Qadir Jilani inspired greater awe than the courts of the Abbasid Caliphs. ■

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JIHAD

Syed Sulaiman Nadwi

The word *Jihad* is derived from the word *Jahada*, which means "lie exerted himself." Thus literally *Jihad* means exertion, striving; but in the juridico-religious sense, it signifies the exertion of one's capacity in the path of Allah. This is why the word *Jihad* has been used as antonym to the word *qu'ud* in the Holy Qur'an:

Not equal are holder-back among the believers save those who are disabled, and the strivers in the way of Allah with their riches and their lives. Allah hath preferred in rank the strivers with their riches and their lives above (he holders-back and unto all, Allah hath promised good. And Allah preferred the strivers above holders-back with a mighty reward.

(4:95)

The above quoted verse speaks eloquently of the fact that *Jihad* (striving) is just the opposite of idleness.

It is necessary to remove the misconception in the minds of so many people about *Jihad*. The word *Jihad* is often confused with the word *qital* (fighting) and these are used in the same sense. Whereas the Qur'an has made a clear distinction between them. *Jihad fi sabillil Allah* refers to all round struggle in the path of Allah, while the other signifies only one aspect of that struggle i.e. fighting. The verse mentioned above bears ample testimony to this fact. The Holy Qur'an has clearly pointed out that *Jihad* denotes striving with the help of God-given faculties, both mental and physical, and striving with the help of resources which one has at one's command.

Ibn Rushd maintains that *Jihad* is all-round struggle and makes it obligatory for a Muslim to exercise all his powers may be in the form of intellectual or physical capacities or his gift of speech or his moral strength, courage and steadfastness in the face of hardship and his

worldly riches. The Holy Qur'an has elucidated in various *surahs*, that *Jihad* is an all-round struggle.

The believers are only those who believed in Allah and His Apostle and thereafter doubted not and struggled hard with their riches and their persons in the cause of Allah. Those! they are truthful.

(51:15)

And strive hard for Allah, as is due unto Him.

He has chosen you, and has imposed no hardship on you in the matter of the religion, the faith of your father Ibrahim.

(22:78)

This verse of the Holy Qur'an sums up the spirit of *Jihad*. It is a striving in the way of Allah, and has far wider scope than mere fighting. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once explaining the true qualities of Mujahid, (the one who strives in the path of Allah) significantly remarked:

The *Mujahid* is one who tries to struggle his self i.e., evil self.

Ibn al-Qayyim in his explanation of this aspect of *Jihad* has observed:

The *Jihad* against the enemies of Allah with one's life is only a part of the struggle which a true servant of Allah carries on against his own evil self for the sake of his Lord. This striving against the evil tendencies which have dominated his mind and heart is more important than fighting against the enemies in the outside world. It is in fact the basis on which the struggle in the path of Allah can be successfully launched.

Since *Jihad* is an all round struggle which covers so many aspects, it necessitates the employment of different methods to acquit oneself creditably of its wide and varied responsibilities. According to Imam Raghīb, Muslim is required to fight against three foes:

- 1) against the visible enemy
- 2) against the devil,
- 3) against the self (*nafs*)

Ibn Rushd maintains that the believer may fulfil this struggle four ways: by his heart, by his tongue, by his hands, and by his sword. The first of these implies that a Muslim should develop his sensitivities to the point of excellence so much so that nothing evil should find its way either in his heart or in his mind. He should have a deep-rooted aversion to everything ignoble and a strong desire to fight it tooth and nail, whether it is found in his own self or in the world outside.

Then comes the function of the power of expression which has vital role in the establishment of a sound and just social worker; free from all kinds of exploitation. The Holy Qur'an shows the way how the power of expression is to be used for inviting the people to the path of Allah:

Invite (all) to the way of their Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them that which is the best.

(16:125)

In this verse are laid down principles of religious teachings which are good for all times. We must invite all to the way of God, and expound His universal Will; we must do it with wisdom and discretion. Our preaching must be convincing, not self-regarding, not offensive, but such as would attract attention. It should be the most polite and the most courteous so that the listener may say to himself: This man is not dealing merely with dialectics: he is not trying to get a rise out of me; he is sincerely expounding the faith that is in him and his motive is the love of man and the love of God.

In his characteristic style, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has explained that *Jihad* consists not only in using the sword, but that even when a Muslim uses his tongue for protesting against the atrocities

of tyrants, he is waging Jihad. He once said:

Whoever amongst you sees something abominable, he should endeavour to change it with his hand, in case he has the power to do it; but if he lacks the requisite power, he should then use his tongue, and if he is powerless in this also, he must then hate it from the heart, and this is the weakest (state) of faith.

Then another tradition which is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (Allah be pleased with him) the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have significantly remarked:

The best of *Jihad* is the uttering of the word of truth in the face of tyrant ruler.

This would make it abundantly clear that *Jihad* in Islam is not an act of violence. It is, an all round struggle in the path of Allah.

In this all round struggle Islam has assigned a special place to *qital* (fighting) as well. There do arise such occasions in which the use of arms becomes a dire necessity and even a slight show of weakness under these circumstances leads to disastrous results. Islam has stressed the need of rising to such occasions and has exhorted its followers to face the danger bravely and manfully. But it should be made clear that *qital* in Islam is not an end in itself, but a means to higher and nobler end - the welfare of humanity. That is why Islam has exhorted its followers to raise arms not in a spirit of brutality but in a spirit of love for humanity - a spirit in which the surgeon applies the knife to the blistering sores of the human body. An individual or a community is no benefactor of humanity if it becomes a silent spectator to the atrocities which are perpetrated on innocent people by those who have no feeling for humanity and no consideration for moral principles. A person does not fulfil his responsibilities towards mankind if he does nothing to support the moral order which forms the bedrock of justice in the human race. A man, or a nation,

who tries to exterminate evil in all its forms, is the benefactor of humanity in the true sense of the term, for it is even a greater evil to commit injustice with impunity than to be punished for it. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has beautifully summed up the responsibility of man towards his fellowmen in the following tradition.

It is narrated on the authority of Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once said: Help your brother whether he is the wrong doer or the oppressed one. Thereupon people said to him: O Messenger of Allah, we can help the man when he is wronged, but we fail to know a wrong-doer can be helped. Upon this the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied: You can do this by holding his hand from an act of oppression.

None having a grain of common sense can favour the granting of licence to the wicked people for committing crimes and then letting them to go scot free. It is not love for humanity but act of enmity towards it that the weaker elements of society should be subjected to wrongs and injustices and no check should be imposed on the wrong-doers. Herbert Spencer declares:

The doctrine of non-resistance is anti-social as it involves the non assertion, not only of one's own rights; but of those of others, while it holds no prospects of leading to the desirable end of international peace.

The use of force is essential in certain conditions in order to maintain the sanctity of human life and to preserve the moral order in the world. The very first passage of the Holy Qur'an which gave the sanction of *qital* to the Muslims makes a pointed reference to all these noble ideals:

Permitted are those who fought against, because they have been oppressed and verily to succour them, Allah is potent. Those who have been unjustly driven forth from their abodes merely because they say: Our Lord is Allah. And

were it not for *Allah's* repelling or by means of others, cloisters and churches, synagogues and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is mentioned much, would have been pulled down. Surely Allah shall succour whosoever succoureth Him. Verily Allah is Strong, Mighty.

This passage sums up in clear terms the aims and objects of qital in Islam. It is neither the acquisition of wealth or land, nor of power and not of privilege nor are there the passions of hatred and revenge.

The Muslims were permitted to use force because their very existence had been made difficult due to persecution by the pagans of Arabia. They had been subjected to unspeakable tortures at their hands; beaten and insulted, and then driven away from their homes for no other reason that they worshipped Allah. They had as much right to be in their native town and worship in the Ka'bah as the other Arabs, but nobody was tolerant towards them. The animosity of the Quraish did not even end after having driven the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions out of the native place. The unjust men of Makkah had not only given no ear to the heavenly Message delivered by Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) but would not even let him live if he kept on preaching it. The pagan Arabs had evil designs in their minds to pursue the innocent souls who left Madinah and to exterminate them in their new abodes. If one were to reflect calmly even this state of affairs one would be convinced that the verdict of all religions and ethical philosophers, both ancient and modern has been that under such circumstances war is not only justifiable but a basic necessity, and non-resistance is blameworthy and even immoral as to the moral justification of self defence when one nation is assailed by the ambition and cupidity of another.

Then the Qur'an also explains the function of war as a moral necessity. It is with the help of force that the ever mounting evil in human life is curbed for if it continues to

spread unchecked, it would brutally shake the moral order and justice in human society so much that even the places of worship would not be safe at the hands of the wicked elements of the human race. It deserves to be noted that the Muslims have been asked to lay down their lives not only to save their own skins from the atrocities of the opponents and to save their own mosques, but to save churches, synagogues, and cloisters as well. This means that Islam wants to protect the moral order vouchsafed to humanity through the Messengers of God at different stages of human history. The same idea has been expressed in another verse.

And were it not for Allah's repelling people some of them by means of others, the earth surely would be corrupted, but Allah is Gracious unto the worlds. ■

(2:251)

My prophethood and that of other prophets can be likened to a building that had a splendid structure, but space for a single brick was left out in a wall. People walked round this building and showed great surprise on seeing the empty space. I am the one to fill that space for the final brick and thus, I am the one to complete this building and I am the last of the prophets.

Hadith-e-Nabvi (Bokhari, Muslim)

MADARSAS IN BANGLADESH: RELEVANCE FOR INDIA

S. Shahbuddin

Recently I read the Urdu translation of a paper on madrasas in Bangladesh by Dr. Mumtaz Ahmad of the Department of Islamic Studies, Hainpton University in the USA. The paper was presented at a seminar organised by the, Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad.

What excited my interest was the employment by a bank Al Arafa Islamic Bank of 60 madarsa graduates who had not studied English, had not been to a college or university, had not done B Com or MBA, but only completed the much maligned Dars-e- Nizami from private, unrecognized, unaffiliated madarsa. The Managing Director placed it on record that after six months training, their professional performance was much superior to those with modern education. Does it say something positive about the quality of madarasa education and its impact on the character of its products?

Through the Bangladesh High Commission, I obtained authentic information about the system of madarsa Education in Bangladesh. Briefly the situation is that there are government and government aided madarsas which are affiliated to the Bangladesh madarsa Education Board, Dhaka which was established in 1978 by an Ordinance which remains in force and has not been replaced by an Act. The purpose of the Ordinance was to reorganize madarsa Education in Bangladesh. Under the ordinance, all public madarsas established and managed by the Government or private madarsas established and managed by private individuals or organisations from the *Dakhil* level to the levels of *Alim*, *Fazil* and *Kamil* have the option to register and affiliate themselves with the Board. If affiliated, they adopt the prescribed curriculum, syllabi textbooks and their students can take the examinations conducted by the Board.

Posts of teachers are sanctioned, subject-wise, by the Board/Government and the Government pays the teachers.

In the year 2000, the number of government madarasas was only three. The curriculum and syllabi of these madarasas provide both religious and general education. According to Prof Mumtaz Ahmad, the number of government madarasas called *Alia* madrsas is 4, not 3 and the number of students is about 12,000.

Private madarasas affiliated to the Board receive government aid to the extent of 80 per cent of the salaries of teachers and 75 per cent of the development budget. The number of such private but affiliated madarasas is 7,276 according to the madarsa Board. Prof. Mumtaz Ahmad gives the number as 6,906 with 1,17,200 teachers and 18,78,300 students. The private madarasas which are not affiliated to the Board and follow Dars-e-Nizami are called Qaumi Madrasas. Prof. Mumtaz Ahmad gives the number as 6,500. Nearly 30 per cent of these madarasas have *Dars-e-Hadith*. This is a phenomenal rise since 1993 when the number of such madarsa with *Dars-e-Hadith* was only 12-13. This change came about because the Government of India stopped the admission of Bangladeshi students in the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband. Prof. Mumtaz Ahmad gives the number of teachers as 1,30,000 and of students as 14,62,500. The Qaumi madarasas have introduced English as a Compulsory subject. Also at the primary level, all Qaumi madarasas follow the government primary system. Only those who pass the primary school examination can be admitted to the Dars-e-Nizami. Thus students learn Bengali, English, Civics and Geography before entering upon the religious syllabus. At a higher level, the madarasas have included Comparative Religion in their curriculum. These Qaumi madarasas are a affiliated to one of the two Federations of madarasas called Waqf-al-Madaris and Anjuman Ittehadul Madaris. They coordinate academic aspects, conduct examinations and issue Sanads. The Sanads awarded by the Board have been recognized by the government as

equivalent to Secondary and Higher Secondary Certificates. Equivalence of Fazil with BA and Kamil with NIA is under consideration. Thus at each stage, the product of the Alia madarsas may enter the universities and take B.A. and M.A.

Some madarsas have facilities for technical education including course in para-medicine such as pharmacy. Many madarsa products are working as rural doctors.

Thus madarsa products have entered civil service and army and universities as well as the private sector. Most university teachers of Persian, Urdu, Arabic, Islamic History, Islamiyat are products of madarsas. Some of the renowned intellectual of Bangladesh have been produced by the Alia Madrasa.

A unique madrasa in Dhaka, Dar-ul-Uloom Irshad, admits only University graduates. Only those, holding BA degrees can be enrolled for Dars-e-Nizami. There is another madarsa in Dhaka called Cadet madarsa where Islamic subjects are taught through the medium of Arabic while general subjects are taught through English. The products of these madarsas speak and write better English than average university graduates.

Prof. Mumtaz Ahmad's overview is that Bangladesh has the largest number of Arabic madarsas in the Muslim world catering to about 6,00,000 individuals as teachers and students. This excludes the maktabas in and attached to Masjids which number about 18,000 with about 85,000 teachers and 20,00,000 students.

Situation in India

Bangladesh is a Muslim country with about 85 per cent Muslims in its population. India is a non-Muslim country with 12.5 per cent Muslim population. The population of Muslims, in the two countries in absolute terms is roughly equal. As in Bangladesh, we also have government, aided and unaided private Madrasas. We prefer to call the last as Azad Madaris because they wish to have complete autonomy in

curriculum, syllabus and management free of government influence or interference. Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband, set the tone by refusing government aid even after independence though the Ulema of Deoband had played a glorious role in the freedom movement.

Why are the products of our Sarkari Madarsas so poor in quality? Madarsas affiliated to the Government madarsa Boards which exist in several States like Bihar, UP and West Bengal have not produced any outstanding scholars in any branch of Islamic Learning. The reasons are manifold. Students have been burdened with a double load complete Dars-e-Nizami and on top of that secondary school syllabus. They cannot do justice to either; they collapse under their weight. The management pockets most of the official grant and recruits teachers of poor quality not on merit but on how they are prepared to share their salaries (paid by government) with the management. The Boards are dens of corruption like any government office and their examinations are rampant with malpractices as the school examinations are. So is the system of evaluation. The Sarkari schools are no more than a political subsidy by the party in power to have a drumbeater in every village.

On the other hand, our private madarsas lack standardization. Each of them generally conducts examination and awards sanads except in UP where many madarsas are affiliated to UP Deeni Talimi Council and follow the syllabus of Nadwatul Ulama. In any case their sanads are not recognized by the government. Even maktabas are sometimes designated as Jamias. There is also a sharp sectarian division in India, while in Bangladesh, there is much greater uniformity. Surely in India also, the various sects could establish a centralized madarsa system for standardization of curriculum and syllabus as well as textbooks, grade the Maktabas and Madarsas, and recognize them up to specified level and accredit them for equivalence to primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary schools and the basic university degree. The

central authority of each Maktab could conduct common examination at the end of various levels throughout the country, evaluate the answer books with transparency and publish the results with efficiency and punctuality.

Our madarsas no doubt build character but they do not build the capacity to compete with university graduates in the private sector. Surely the society needs professionals, with high moral character. So the central authorities of the madarsas could also guide the leading madarsas of the system, on a district or regional basis, to establish technical training institutions which could take in Madras products after becoming Alim or Fazil and give them a skill with which to enter life and not restrict themselves only to recycle as madarsa teachers or Imam of Masajids. Some madarsa products could also join university courses or enter other professions.

After all, Masjids and madarsas cannot, absorb all the products of Madrasas, Sarkari or Azad.

Immediately two steps are suggested. Firstly, as in Bangladesh, every Masjid should be or have a Maktab. All Muslim children should also study basic Islam at the Maktab, while they attend primary schools or they should be enrolled in madarsas which combine Islamic instruction with the primary school course. On passing primary schools some may decide to join the madarsa for Dars-e-Nizami. Others may change course and study in middle and high schools. Secondly, Dars-e-Nizami should be revised to eliminate archaic subjects and to introduce some modern subjects like English, Hindi, Mathematics and Science but without altering the basic character or the madarsas and giving more than 1/3 of the teaching time for non-religious subjects. Again, those who wish to take secondary or higher secondary examination may do so as private candidates and enter the college/university and embark upon a career, beyond the Masjid, Madarsa or Khanqah. With their religious background and moral training they can be an asset for

any government department, public sector undertaking or private concern. In short, a Muslim student should be able to switch from Maktab/Madarsa to schools/college and vice versa, according to his inclination and prove his usefulness for the society either as a religious scholar or as a full participant with a moral base in the socio-economic and intellectual life of the country.■

(Courtesy: Nation and the World)

MINORITY EDUCATION

Faizan Mustafa*

The rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice have been in the news for the past one year or so first due to the full bench decision of the apex court and then due to the clarification of that decision by a five-judge bench, followed number of authoritarian regulations of the University Grants Commission, Ministry of Human Resource Development which have now been withdrawn. The issue of minority's education rights is again at the centrestage because of a hurriedly promulgated ordinance, establishment of national commission for minority educational institutions and introduction of a bill in parliament.

Minority education was certainly not such an urgent matter that emergency provisions of Article 123 of the Constitution should be used for promulgation of an Ordinance. The government should have waited for the winter session of Parliament.

Window dressing

Moreover, the Ordinance and Bill do not address any vital issue of minority education. It looks like an exercise in window dressing. It is indeed shocking that the Left parties which are otherwise self-appointed champions of the minority cause are also not interested in ensuring that the minority education is not given such a poor window dressing. Why are they not mounting pressure on the government to help it pass an effective law on this issue and constitute a commission which has some real teeth?

The question of what is a minority status of an institution and how the same is to be determined is not answered both in the Ordinance and the Bill. Similarly, if any state government refuses to give minority status, what role the newly established commission can play is not clearly defined. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, there have been

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instances when minority status was refused even in spite of the decision of the High Court. In fact, the Bill must clearly lay down that if an institution has been established by a minority community, it shall be deemed as having the minority status and no declaration to that effect is needed from the concerned state government.

As to the right of a minority institution, the Bill in Section 3 lays down that "a minority institution may seek recognition as an affiliated college of a scheduled university of its choice". It is disgusting to note that the Bill merely deals with the issue of affiliation of a minority institution with any of the six central universities. Out of these, four are from northeast, one from south and one from Delhi, i.e. Delhi university. Minority institutions will find it extremely difficult to deal with these universities which are situated so far.

Ideally speaking, minority institutions should get affiliation from nearby universities. It will not only save the time, energy and resources of management but will also help maintain desired academic standards in minority educational institutions. One is also amazed to note that the list of scheduled universities does not include any minority university of the country. It clearly shows how half-heartedly the Bill has been rushed through. The central minority universities, including Aligarh Muslim University, have their own Acts which were passed by Parliament. Amendments to such Acts will have to be made if such universities decide to become affiliating universities.

The Bill says nothing about the administration of minority institutions. The management of minority institutions must be free from government control so that the founder or their nominees can mould the institution as they think fit, and in accordance with their ideals of how the interests of the community in general and the institution in particular will be best served.

Preferential right

The Bill is also completely silent on the crucial issue

of admission, reservation, recruitment and funding of minority institutions. The apex court has clarified that non-minorities cannot be treated at par with minorities, as they do not have a preferential right in the admission procedure. Unaided private minority institutions would have maximum autonomy. A minority professional college can admit, in their management quota, a student of their own community/ language in preference to a student of another community even though that other student is more meritorious. No such right exists for non-minorities.

On the question of reservation, the guidelines from the ministries lay down that the state governments can decide on the reservation of minorities in minority institutions not exceeding 50 per cent. Thus even unaided institutions can not reserve more than 50 per cent of the seats which goes against the very rationale of the Supreme Court decision. The executive has thus brought the distinction between the minority and non-minority institutions to an end.

The apex court has explicitly overruled the rigid limit of 50 per cent reservation as laid down in St Stephen's case. The court has said that the non-minority institution cannot be in such numbers as to defeat the basic purpose of establishing such institutions.

Another major problem which minority institutions are facing is due to the extremely wide and liberal definition of the term "aid" in government regulations. Since the apex court has given maximum autonomy to unaided private minority institutions, the guidelines have so defined "aid" that no institution in the country can remain an unaided minority institution.

Every aspect of support such as financial grant/equity, land, subsidised land, subsidised leased land or building, free or subsidised attachment with government hospitals or any such facility given at a concessional rate has been treated as "aid" to deny autonomy to the minority institutions. As a matter of fact "aid" should mean non-plan grant and

maintenance grant for salaries. Plan grant for development is not aid. The court has clearly laid down that any grant given by the State cannot have such conditions attached to it. The real intention of the court was that minority institutions are basically meant for the minorities and no regulation is valid if it goes against the interest of minorities.

On this touchstone, it is submitted that in the minority institutions which are receiving 100 per cent non-plan grant, at least 65 per cent of the seats should be reserved for the minority community which has established that institution. The unaided minority institutions should be allowed to have 85 per cent of the seats reserved so that the educational rights of minorities become a reality. The Bill must clear the confusion on the question of reservation. If a minority organisation is investing its own money and resources by establishing a minority institution, the government must not impose conditions in the name of regulations on their reservation policies. By establishing a minority institution, government resources are saved.

It is surprising that the national commission for minority educational institution seems to be just ornamental. It has not been given any real powers. Ideally speaking, the government should announce a big funding package. So-called minority institutions are commercial ventures and they charge heavy fees which poor and disadvantaged members of the minorities cannot pay.

Funding Agency

Indeed, the problems of poor Muslims are identical to the problems of poor Hindus. Unless the government gives financial assistance, no good will be done to poor sections of minorities. The commission should be the main funding agency of the government in case of minority institutions. The commission should also have power to make regulations regarding the maintenance of standards in minority educational institutions.

The commission consists of a chairperson and two

members. Today we may be having a secular government but no one can ever be sure of the future in a democracy. To give credibility to the commission, its chairperson and members should be selected by a committee which may consist of the HRD minister, Chief Justice of India, leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha and chairman of minorities' commission.

The idea of giving some special rights to minorities is not to have a kind of a privileged or pampered section but to give to minorities a sense of security. The government should encourage establishment of more and more minority educational institutions. It is due to the lack of farsightedness of state governments of the northern states that the problem assumes communal overtones. In the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala, one finds hundreds of minority professional/technical colleges.

Rather than doubting the credentials of the UPA government, efforts need to be made to incorporate useful amendments in the Bill when it comes for discussion in the Lok Sabha. The Muslim leadership should exercise restraint in its criticism of the Bill and must keep in mind that no central legislation can take away all the powers of state governments and give it to some commission as it will have an adverse impact on the federal character of our Constitution. Minorities are not super citizens. They must make only realistic demands within the framework of the Constitution. ■

Courtesy: The Statesman

There are some who by kindness, gentleness and forgiveness acquire the rank of the people who fast and pray all the time; and there are others, who are written as cruel though they rule none but their families.

Imam Ghazali

ABU HURAYRAH (RA)

"An Abi Hurayrata, radiyallahu anhu, qal. 'qala rasul Allahi, saliallahu alayhi wa sailam..."

Through this phrase millions of Muslims from the early history of Islam to the present have come to be familiar with the name Abu Hurayrah. In speeches and lectures, in Friday *khutbahs* and seminars, in the books of *hadith* and *sirah*, *fiqh* and *ibadah*, the name Abu Hurayrah is mentioned in this fashion: "On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, may God be pleased with him who said: The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said..."

Through his prodigious efforts, hundreds of *ahadith* or sayings of the Prophet were transmitted to later generations. His is the foremost name in the roll of *hadith* transmitters.

Abu Hurayrah became a Muslim at the hands of at-Tufayl ibn Amr the chieftain of the Daws tribe to which he belonged. The Daws lived in the region of Tihamah which stretches along the coast of the Red Sea in southern Arabia. When at-Tufayl returned to his village after meeting the Prophet (PBUH) and becoming a Muslim in the early years of his mission, Abu Hurayrah was one of the first to respond to his call. He was unlike the majority of the Daws who remained stubborn in their old beliefs for a long time.

When at-Tufayl visited Makkah again, Abu Hurayrah accompanied him. There he had the honor and privilege of meeting the noble Prophet (PBUH) who asked him: "What is your name?" "Abdu Shams - Servant of a Sun," he replied.

"Instead, let it be Abdur-Rahman - the Servant of the Beneficent Lord," said the Prophet (PBUH)

"Yes, Abdur-Rahman (it shall be) O Messenger of God," he replied. However, he continued to be known as Abu Hurayrah. "the kitten man", literally "the father of a kitten" because like the Prophet he was fond of cats and since his

childhood often had a cat to play with.

Abu Hurayrah stayed in Tihamah for several years and it was only at the beginning of the seventh year of the Hijrah that he arrived in Madinah with others of his tribe. The Prophet PBUH had gone on a campaign to Khaybar. Being destitute, Abu Hurayrah took up his place in the Masjid with others of the *Ahl as-Suffah*. He was single, without wife or child. With him however was his mother who was still a *mushrik*. He longed, and prayed, for her to become a Muslim but she adamantly refused. One day, he invited her to have faith in God alone and follow His Prophet (PBUH) but she uttered some words about the Prophet (PBUH) which saddened him greatly. With tears in his eyes, he went to the noble Prophet (PBUH) who said to him: "What makes you cry, O Abu Hurayrah?" "I have not let up in inviting my mother to Islam but she has always rebuffed me. Today, I invited her again and I heard words from her which I do not like. Do make supplication to God, Almighty to make the heart of Abu Hurayrah's mother incline to Islam."

The Prophet (PBUH) responded to Abu Hurayrah's request and prayed for his mother. Abu Hurayrah said: "I went home and found the door closed. I heard the splashing of water and when I tried to enter my mother said: "Stay where you are, O Abu Hurayrah." And after putting on her clothes, she said, "Enter!" I entered and she said: "I testify that there is no god but Allah and I testify that, Muhammad (PBUH) is His Servant and His Messenger."

"I returned to the Prophet, peace be on him, weeping with joy just as an hour before I had gone weeping from sadness and said: "I have good news, O Messenger of Allah. God has responded to your prayer and guided the mother of Abu Hurayrah to Islam."

Abu Hurayrah loved the Prophet (PBUH) a great deal and found favor with him. He was never tired of looking at the Prophet (PBUH) whose face appeared to him as having all the radiance of the sun and he was never tired of listening

to him. Often he would praise God for his good fortune and say: "Praise be to God Who has guided Abu Hurayrah to Islam." Praise be to God Who has taught Abu Hurayrah the Quran."

"Praise be to God who has bestowed on Abu Hurayrah the companionship of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace." On reaching Madinah, Abu Hurayrah set his heart on attaining knowledge. Zayd ibn Thabit the notable companion of the Prophet (PBUH) reported: "While Abu Hurayrah and I and another friend of mine were in the Masjid praying to God Almighty and performing *dhikr* to Him, the Messenger of God appeared. He came towards us and sat among us. We became silent and he said: "Carry on with what you were doing."

"So my friend and I made a supplication to God before Abu Hurayrah did and the Prophet began to say Ameen to our dua. "Then Abu Hurayrah made a supplication saying: "O Lord, I ask You for what my two companions have asked and I ask You for knowledge which will not be forgotten"

"The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Ameen.' "We then said: 'And we ask Allah for knowledge which will not be forgotten, and the Prophet (PBUH) replied: 'The Dawsī youth has asked for this before you.' "With his formidable memory, Abu Hurayrah set out to memorize in the four years that he spent with the Prophet (PBUH), the gems of wisdom that emanated from his lips. He realized that he had a great gift and he set about to use it to the full in the service of Islam.

He had free time at his disposal. Unlike many of the Muhajirin he did not busy himself in the market-places, with buying and selling. Unlike many of the Ansar, he had no land to cultivate nor crops to tend. He stayed with the Prophet (PBUH) in Madinah and went with him on journeys and expeditions.

Many companions were amazed at the number of hadith he had memorized and often questioned him on when

he had heard a certain hadith and under what circumstances.

Once Marwan ibn al-Hakam wanted to test Abu Hurayrah's power of memory. He sat with him in one room and behind a curtain he placed a scribe, unknown to Abu Hurayrah, and ordered him to write down whatever Abu Hurayrah said. A year later, Marwan called Abu Hurayrah again and asked him to recall the same ahadith which the scribe had recorded. It was found that he had forgotten not a single word.

Abu Hurayrah was concerned to teach and transmit the ahadith he had memorized and knowledge of Islam in general. It is reported that one day he passed through the *suq* of Madinah and naturally saw people engrossed in the business of buying and selling.

"How feeble are you, O people of Madinah!" he said. "What do you see that is feeble in us, Abu Hurayrah?" they asked. "The inheritance of the Messenger of God, peace be on him, is being disturbed and you remain here! Won't you go and take your portion?" "Where is this, O Abu Hurayrah?" they asked. "In the Masjid," he replied.

Quickly they left. Abu Hurayrah waited until they returned. When they saw him, they said: O Abu Hurayrah, we went to the Masjid and entered and we did not see anything being distributed." Didn't you see anyone in the Masjid?" he asked. "O yes, we saw some people performing *Salat*, some people reading the Qur'an and some people discussing about what is *halal* and what is *haram*." Woe unto you," replied Abu Hurayrah, "that is the inheritance of Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace."

Abu Hurayrah underwent much hardship and difficulties as a result of his dedicated search of knowledge. He was often hungry and destitute. He said about himself:

"When I was afflicted with severe hunger, I would go to a companion of the Prophet and asked him about an *ayah*

of the Quran and (stay with him) learning it so that he would take me with him to his house and give food. "One day, my hunger became so severe that I placed a stone on my stomach. I then sat down in the path of the companions. Abu Bakr passed by and I asked him about an ayah of the Book of God. I only asked him so that he would invite me but he didn't.

"Then Umar ibn al-Khattab passed by me and I asked him about an ayah but he also did not invite me. Then the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, passed by and realized that I was hungry and said: "Abu Hurayrah!" "At your command" I replied and followed him until we entered his house. He found a bowl of milk and asked his family: "From where did you get this?" "Someone sent it to you" they replied. He then said to me: "O Abu Hurayrah, go to the Ahl as-Suffah and invite them." Abu Hurayrah did as he was told and they all drank from the milk.

The time came of course when the Muslims were blessed with great wealth and material goodness of every description. Abu Hurayrah eventually got his share of wealth. He had a comfortable home, a wife and child. But this turn of fortune did not change his personality. Neither did he forget his days of destitution. He would say "I grew up as an orphan and I emigrated as a poor and indigent person. I used to take food for my stomach from Busrah bint Ghazwan. I served people when they returned from journeys and led their camels when they set out. Then God caused me to marry her (Busrah). So praise be to God who has strengthened his religion and made Abu Hurayrah an imam." (This last statement is a reference to the time when he became governor of Madinah).

Much of Abu Hurayrah's time would be spent in spiritual exercises and devotion to God. *Qiyam al-Layl* (staying up for the night in prayer and devotion) - was a regular practice of his family including his wife and his daughter. He would stay up for a third of the night, his wife

for another third and his daughter for a third. In this way, in the house of Abu Hurayrah no hour of the night would pass without *ibadah*, *dhikr* and *Salat*.

During the caliphate of Umar, Umar appointed him as governor of Bahrain. Umar was very scrupulous about the type of persons, whom he appointed as governors. He was always concerned that his governors should live simply and frugally and not acquire much wealth even though this was through lawful means.

In Bahrain, Abu Hurayrah became quite rich. Umar heard of this and recalled him to Madinah. Umar thought he had acquired his wealth through unlawful means and questioned him about where and how he had acquired such a fortune. Abu Hurayrah replied: "From breeding horses and gifts which I received." "Hand it over to the treasury of the Muslims," ordered Umar.

Abu Hurayrah did as he was told and raised his hands to the heavens and prayed: "O Lord, forgive the Amir al-Muminin." Subsequently, Umar asked him to become governor once again but he declined. Umar asked him why he refused and he said: "So that my honor would not be besmirched, my wealth taken and my back beaten." And he added. "And I fear to judge without knowledge and speak without wisdom."

Throughout his life Abu Hurayrah remained kind and courteous to his mother. Whenever he wanted to leave home, he would stand at the door of her room and say: *As-salaamu alaykum, yaa ummataah, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu*, peace be on you, mother, and the mercy and blessings of God." She would reply: "*Wa alayka-ssalaam, yaa bunayya, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu* - And on you be peace, my son, and the mercy and blessings of God." Often, he would also say: "May God have mercy on you as you cared for me when I was small," and she would reply: "May God have mercy on you as you delivered me from error when I was old." Abu Hurayrah always encouraged

other people to be kind and good to their parents. One day he saw two men walking together, one older than the other. He asked the younger one: "What is this man to you?" "My father," the person replied.

"Don't call him by his name. Don't walk in front of him and don't sit before him," advised Abu Hurayrah.

Muslims owe a debt of gratitude to Abu Hurayrah for helping to preserve and transmit the valuable legacy of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. He died in the year 59 AH when he was seventy-eight years old. ■

Maturity is the ability to handle frustration, control anger, and settle differences without violence or destruction, maturity is patience. It is the willingness to pass up the immediate pleasure or profit in favour of the long-term gain. Maturity is preservance, facing a situation boldly in spite of opposition and discouraging setbacks. Maturity is unselfishness, responding to the needs of others. Maturity is the capacity to face unpleasantness and disappointment without becoming bitter. Maturity is the gift of remaining calm in the face of complete confusion. This means peace, not for ourselves but for those with whom we live and those whose lives touch ours. Maturity is the ability to disagree without being disagreeable. Maturity is humility. A mature person is able to say, "I was wrong". He is also able to say I am sorry".

THE STORY OF MOSES (MUSA)

Moses prayed to his Lord and He relieved the suffering caused by the flood. The surging water ceased and withdrew from the land, and it became cultivatable. But when Moses bade them to fulfill their promise to release the children of Israel, they did not respond.

Then Allah sent swarms of locusts which ate whatever crops they had grown. The people hurried to Moses, asking him to invoke Allah to remove this affliction and promising they would send the children of Israel with him this time. The locusts departed, but they did not fulfill their promise.

Then another sign came, the sign of lice, which spread amongst the Egyptians, carrying diseases. Their refuge to Moses and their promise to him were repeated. His prayer to Allah was repeated and so, too, their breach of promise, as usual.

A sign of frogs was revealed. The land suddenly filled with frogs. They jumped on the food of the Egyptians, shared their houses, and distressed them greatly. The Egyptians went to Moses again, promising him to release the children of Israel. He prayed to his Lord, and Allah relieved them of the problem of the frogs, but they again broke their promise.

Then the last sign was revealed, the sign of blood. The Nile water was changed into blood. When Moses and his people drank the water, it was, for them, ordinary water. However, if any Egyptian filled his cup with the water, he discovered his cup full of blood. They hurried to Moses as usual, but as soon as everything returned to normal, they turned their backs on Allah.

Almighty Allah said: *"And indeed We punished the people of Pharaoh with years of drought and shortness of fruits (crops, etc.), that they might remember (take heed). But whenever good came to them, they said.. 'Ours is this.' And if evil afflicted them, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Moses and those with him. Be informed!*

Verily, their evil omens are with Allah but most of them know, not. They said (to Moses): 'Whatever Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) you may bring to us, to work therewith your sorcery on us, we shall never believe in you.' So We sent on them: the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, and the blood: (as a succession of) manifest signs, yet they remained arrogant, and they were of those people who were Mujrimeen (criminals, ploytheists, sinners, etc.)" (Surah 7:130-133)

Almighty Allah also said: "But when We removed the punishment from them to a fixed term, which they had to reach, behold! They broke their word!" (Surah 7:135)

Pharaoh became ruder and more arrogant. He proclaimed his people: "Pharaoh is the only god. Has he not the kingdom of Egypt and rivers flowing under it?" He declared that Moses was a liar, a magician, and a poor man who did not wear even one bracelet of gold.

Almighty Allah declared: "And indeed We did send Moses with Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) to Pharaoh and his chiefs (inviting them to Allah's Religion of Islam). He said: 'Verily, I am a Messenger of the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists). But when he came to them with Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations etc.) behold! They laughed at them. And not an Ayah (sign etc.) We showed them but it was greater than its fellow, and We seized them with torment, in order that they might turn [from their polytheism to Allah's Religion (Islamic Monotheism)]. And they said (to Moses): 'O you sorcerer! Invoke your Lord for us according to what He has covenanted with you. Verily, we shall guide ourselves (aright).' But when We removed the torment from them, behold! They broke their convent (that they will believe if We remove the torment from them). And Pharaoh proclaimed among his people, saying: "O my people! is not mine the dominion of Egypt, and these rivers flowing underneth me. See you not then?

Am I not better than this one (Moses), who is Mahin [has no honor nor any respect, and is weak and despicable] and can scarcely express himself clearly? Why then are not golden bracelets bestowed on him, or angels sent along with him?' Thus he (Pharaoh) befooled and misled his people, and they obeyed him. Verily, they were Fasiqeen (rebellious, disobedient to Allah). So when they angered Us, We punished them, and drowned them all. And We made them a precedent (as a lesson for those coming after them), and an example to later generations." (Surah43:46-56). ■

NEIGHBOURLINESS

The good companions of the beloved Prophet (PBUH) are called Sahabas (the faithful companions). There was a companion of the Holy Prophet named Hazrat Abdullah. He was very pious and extremely obedient to Allah and His messenger (PBUH).

One day a goat was sacrificed in the house of Hazrat Abdulah. His next door neighbour was a Jew. By chance Hazrat Abdullah had gone out of the town that day. When he returned by evening, he asked his inmates: "Did you send meat to our neighbour?" "He is a Jew. Why should we send meat to him?" "Was the curt reply of the inmates of his house?

"So what? If he happens to be Jew, how does it matter? said Hazrat Abdullah: "He is, after all, our neighbour:

"Be kind to your neighbour; it matters little whether he is a jew or a Muslim."

Then he did not eat the meat till it was sent to the Jewish neighbour.

HAZRAT ALI (AS) AND SCIENCE

Mahdi Hasan

Hazrat Ali (a.s.) embodied a multifaceted personality in its widest sense, truly speaking a man of parts. Rarely in the living history of mankind, unparalleled valour in the battle-fields has been matched with equally exalted intellectual attainments, as Hazrat Ali (a.s.) so splendidly personified. He was not only the commander of the faithful but also codified the grammar of Arabic language and discovered a new script. His spontaneous judgements of complicated civil cases comprise the theme of a voluminous book. No less an authority on law and justice than Mr. Justice S.H.A. Raza (currently Lok Ayukt of Uttaranchal) is on record that the contemporary method of recording the evidence of each witness in isolation from other witnesses, was originated by Hazrat Ali (a.s.)

His sermons, letters and sayings have been meticulously preserved for the posterity and Allama Syed Razi has arduously collected them in a book known as "The Peak of Eloquence" (Nahj-ul-Balagha). True to the saying of Hazrat Ali (a.s.) "The learned is alive even after his death; the ignorant is dead even when he is alive." His exceptional qualities of head and heart have been elegantly documented by numerous historians, including the well-known Edward Gibbon and Thomas Carlyle. Hazrat Ali (a.s.) is credited with the initiation of not only the 'road-building' but also for demarcating distances with milestones. Coupled with his pioneering contributions in civil engineering, he conceived the idea of deriving energy from waterfalls for lighting houses. On the other hand, his uncanny insights into the fundamentals of the science of zoology comprise the theme of sermons No. 153 and 183. In the former, he focuses on the intricate physiology of the eyes of a bat, including its reactions to sunlight and darkness and further elaborates the structural functional correlation of its wings. In the latter

sermon (183), what includes many contemporary scientists to shake their heads in disbelief is the minutest details as to how ants crawl and search for food to satisfy their hunger and the arduous manner in which they carry and store grains during summer months for consumption in the harsh winter. Also how they work hard during their early life to set aside a reasonable store of food for their old-age. In sum, through his numerous discourses he used to educate the masses in the manifold areas of knowledge pertaining to the creatures of the universe in order to invite attention to the exalted wisdom of Almighty Creator.

One who worships without knowledge is like a mill's donkey who is always going around without progress. Often he used to implore one and all to ask questions. "Whatever you wish to ask, ask me until I am no more amongst you"! One interesting instance is recorded that a resident of Medina asked him: "Which animals lay eggs and which one's give birth to their off- springs?" On that occasion he was about to embark on a journey and his one foot was already in the stirrup of the saddle of his horse while the other was airborne. "Those animals who have hidden ears lay eggs whereas the ones with visible ears are viviparous.

Prompt came this answer before his other leg could reach the opposite stirrup. "Knowledge is a treasure that is never exhausted, wisdom is a new dress that is never worn out." The unfathomable depth of his knowledge in practically every known area of science and art left one speechless. No wonder that Allawis (Nussairies) trespass the limits, set by Islam. ■

BACKBITING IS HEINOUS

Tariq Rasheed

What impressed me most when I reached the United States of America over ten years ago, was the quality of forthrightness in the people of that country. Initially, it was a culture shock for me to hear the frank, in-your-face opinion that people are used to expressing there, but gradually, I came to admire the quality, moreso, because in the course of my Islamic studies I had read and heard so much about the virtues of being honest and forthright.

On the other hand, I, noted with regret, people of my community / country indulging habitually in backbiting. Every time I heard the conversation of two persons, it was something foul being said about a third or fourth person. What made it even more abhorrent was the fact that people were not conscious even of their being in chaste environs of a masjid before bad-mouthing about others.

Being in Oriando, Florida, I contributed an article to the Orlando Sentinel on the subject, which was widely appreciated by the readers and many members of the community.

A gentleman called Ali Quraishi, who had read the piece encouraged me to compile sayings, anecdotes and quotes from the holy book that highlight the ills of backbiting or '*ghibat*', as it is called in Arabic. I prayed for Allah's blessings and started on the compilation work, only to find myself on shores of the ocean of wisdom.

I came across this beautiful Hadith (set of words and deeds of the Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him) that quoted him as saying: "Muslims In the their mutual love, kindness and compassion, are like the human body. When one of its parts is in agony, the entire body feels the pain both in sleeplessness and fever." This implies that when a member of the community / humanity speaks ill of another

behind his back, everyone should feel bad or humiliated because we are like parts of one body.

The Prophet said: "When I was taken on the nocturnal journey (meraj), I passed by a group of people who were scratching their faces and chests with nails made of copper. I asked Gabriel who these people were and he replied, 'These are the people who practised backbiting and humiliated others'." This will be the punishment of backbiters.

Under the Islamic law, talking ill behind the back is forbidden even about a disbeliever, prisoners of war children, or insane persons.

To make my book *Backbiting: An Islamic Perspective* ready, I quoted liberally from texts by Imam Ghazzali, who studied into the mindset of those who spite others behind their backs. Factors pointed out by him that cause people to backbite include envy, anger, mockery and ridicule, pride in knowledge, beauty, Lineage, or wealth and sometimes even the urge to win the praise and confidence of others.

The habit of making unkind remarks about others behind their back is a vicious circle. When you are among A, B and C and saying nasty things about D, you are very likely to speak ill of A, B and C when you are in the company of D, though the former may be the best of your friends.

But Islam being the guidebook of right conduct, there is even advice on how to atone for the sin of backbiting. The Prophet said, "The atonement for backbiting is that you should ask for the forgiveness of the person against whom you backbite." And if you have spoken ill about someone whom you cannot meet, pray to Allah to forgive sins committed by that person.

By the grace of Allah, when I finished compiling, the work, it was picked up for publication by a Chicago publisher. Vice president of the Islamic Fiqh Academy, Jeddah Maulana Taqi Usmani wrote in his foreword for the book: "Backbiting spreads malice and causes serious

differences among people ... I have greatly benefited from the book and found it useful In persuading readers from avoiding this major sin in their daily lives." Let us resolve to stop others and ourselves from backbiting and thus become the beloved children of Allah. ■

(The writer is Principal of Al Huda Islamic School at the Islamic Centre of Orlando, Florida. Hailing from Lucknow, he is a Hafiz, Alim and Mufti who passed out from the Darul Uloom Nadwat Ulama, Lucknow)

'NDA WANTED ME AS A HATCHET MAN, GUJARAT RATTLED MY BONES'

■ At several points, Dhar writes on how he was ideologically inclined towards the BJP and names K Govindacharya and Murli Manohar Joshi as his special friends.

■ When NDA came to power he was approached to accept a position in the PMO but declined the offer after two meetings with Bhure Lal. "His idea of the job that waited me involved digging out skeletons of corruption in the cupboards of the former Indira Congress leaders, including Rajiv Gandhi. I could never bring myself to accept the position of a hatchet man."

■ Videotaping of the Feb 1992 meeting of the BJP/ RSS "rattled my emotional attachment to the Hindutva protagonist organisations. The tapes disillusioned me. The contents proved beyond doubt that the high priests of hatred had helped the Sangh Parivar to adopt a strident Hindutva programme soon after the assassination of Indira Gandhi."

■ The recent "Gujarat pogrom rattled my bones. I wish there were some mad people like me to gather audio and video evidence of the scheme of minority annihilation by Narendra Modi....Anyways, history has the bad habit of re-running like a stuck film spool."

CONFESSIONS OF AN INTELLIGENCE MIND

Ritu Sarin

Certain truths are better protected when buried under permafrost.

That's what the author writes in his 519 page yet-to-be released book on the functioning of the country's Intelligence Bureau (IB). And then Maloy Krishna Dhar, former Joint Director of the agency, goes on to do the exact opposite.

His book titled *Open Secrets* (Manas, Rs 795), can best be described as the stringing together of startling secrets as a rare narration of why the IB is called the Government's dirty tricks department.

There are tales of skulduggery, of the IB working as a handmaiden to successive political regimes, of counter-intelligence operations ending in fiascos - controversial revelations on operations some of which Dhar himself calls "immoral and illegal."

Asked about the propriety of an IB officer revealing what are official secrets, Dhar told *The Sunday Express*: "I am prepared for any resultant action, even a case under the Official Secrets Act. People in the IB now may think I have revealed too much... But I feel the public need to know how blatantly the IB has been used by political masters right from the time of Indira Gandhi."

A sample of what Dhar has to offer, nine years after he retired:

- As head of the IB's Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB), Dhar was first assigned to rummage through old records and collect papers on Indira Gandhi and her family which the IB had prepared during the Janta Party regime.

- He was then assigned to monitor the goings-on in the "parallel PMO" which cronies of Sanjay Gandhi were running from 1 Akbar Road and which was opposed to RK Dhawan.
- After Sanjay Gandhi's death, Dhar was asked to mount surveillance on Maneka Gandhi and her activities, he calls it a "detestable task." He admits to having "wired up" a few of Maneka's friends which produced "tonnes of appalling information." He says, along with another senior IB officer, he was "steamrolled" into breaking into the offices of Surya magazine at night to steal the original copy of 'SHE' the censored chapter of the autobiography of MO Mathai.
- When Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, he worked on the "Punjab peace policy" guided by Satish Sharma ("a big blunder"), Home Minister Buta Singh and the police chief KPS Gill. In 1988 Bhindranwale's nephew, Jasbir Singh Rode and three high priests of the Golden Temple were first released and then Dhar smuggled a cache of arms to Rode inside the Temple. The weapons were loaded in a special flight and carried to Rode's den hidden in fruit baskets to enable him to fight terrorists.
- Another Punjab operation, partly botched up, was the induction of a group of 50 "recruits" and to arm them with Kalashnikov rifles to help Rode. But even as the modalities of shifting the weapons were bringing out, a DIG of police was attacked inside the shrine by Babbar Khalsa militants. Dhar was given a "safe passage" out of Punjab along with the arms. He says he was later confronted by Buta Singh as to how 69 "unlicensed and unauthorised" weapons were being supplied by the IB.
- As head of the IB's technical wing, Dhar says, he handled some interesting "coverages." Like a February 1992 meeting of the BJP/RSS attended by

its top brass. "The meeting proved beyond doubt that they had drawn up the blueprint for the Hindutva assault in the coming months and choreographed the dance of destruction at Ayodhya in December 1992." He retrieved the tapes breaking into the avenue after two days and adds that he had no doubt the "chilling contents" were later shared with the Prime Minister and Home Minister.

- He got another "techint (technical intelligence) operational coup" when he was asked to sweep the Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's office with bug-detecting devices in January 1992. He stumbled against a forgotten microrecording monitoring machine, implanted inside the phone of an aide to the PM, palnted by the IB during VP Singh's regime. "The end products, I understand, were delivered to Rajiv Gandhi even when Chandrashekhar warmed the seat for the former."
- Dhar chronicles how bugging devices planted inside Rashtrapati Bhavan when the Prime Minister and Zail Singh had developed irreparable hostility. The device mounted somewhere on top of the PMO picked up telephone conversations from certain "treated phones" inside Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The recorded tapes were regularly made available to Rajiv Gandhi, which provided him with "deep insight" into the machinations inside the walls of the Luytens Palace, he writes.

In his three-decade long career in the IB, Dhar reveals he was variously described as "rogue officer" or a "suspicious" character. And what is interesting, is that as he cultivated politicians, terrorists and fixers alike he says he was offered several bribes - from money to plum postings and post-retirement positions. His book reveals the curious friendships, he developed along the way, from KM Govindacharya (there are several references to the RSS

leader's relationship with Uma Bharti) to RK Dhawan (the two were obviously closely identified), even industrialists like Dhirubhai Ambani. The book also has an entire section on the mismatch of intelligence gathering by the IB and the country's external intelligence agency, RAW.

For the first time also, it provides the IB's viewpoint on handling the ISRO spy case, in which the agency had been much maligned. Dhar's final thesis in the epilogue of the book: "I shall be happy if *Open Secrets* raises a national debate on the vital issue of making intelligence agencies accountable to the elected Parliament under appropriate Acts. After 57 years of Independence a time has come to liberate the intelligence and investigation establishments from the strangleholds of petty and visionless politicians."■

Courtesy : Indian Express

GODHRA DECONSTRUCTED

HT exclusive: The what, where, when of the train fire according to the Banerjee report.

Stone Throwers: Testimonies talk of argument at station, also a rumour that a Muslim girl had been forced into the train. Mob of 800 came from Muslim mohalla close by.

Yard Side: Police got message from guard, driver, but sent only 4-5 personnel around 8.20 a.m.

No doctor was there before 9.00 a.m.

Firemen arrived on the scene only at 9.15, with too little water.

Post-mortems conducted on tracks without proper equipment

Mosque: DRM Western Railway B.B. Modgil's report says there were calls of "Kill the Kafirs" from here. Banerjee says DRM put "rumours on record," and arrived only at 6 p.m. so couldn't have had "personal knowledge."

No Evidence of canvas being ripped to throw petrol/kerosene in the vestibule connecting S7 and S6.

Kar Sevaks told passengers to lock all doors and windows, said witnesses. Several windows were broken by stones. Later, a few people also escaped through yard side.

Hari Prasad Joshi: Sitting at numbers 42-43. He fell down and then crawled to the exit at the rear of the coach near the fire. Tried to get his wife to do the same, but she couldn't come out and died. The back of his jacket was burned, nothing else.

Jamuna Prasad: Was sitting on seat 25. He said it took 10 minutes from the detection of the smoke to the flames. He didn't see anyone lighting the fire.

Savitaben: Was sitting near seat 20. Her ticket was brought by VHP leader Prahladbhai Patel of Mehsana. Said Ram

sevaks asked them to close doors and windows. Noticed smoke first and then the fire. Says "some chemical was on the floor." Banerjee says her statement has no credence: "Would a petrol fire wait for the escape of this lady?"

LP Chorasia: Had reserved the birth no. 72, but was forced to go to number 8 by kar sevaks who had occupied his seat. He said they "were carrying small plastic trishuls and knives, they were carrying as symbols." He didn't see anyone lighting the fire.

The Smoke: "Thick, black smoke," is how survivors describe the scene at the guard's end of coach S-6. Most survivors suffered severe breathing and lung problems. With all doors and windows closed, the hot burning gases would have quickly consumed all the oxygen inside the coach. When the doors or windows were opened, the fresh supply of oxygen fanned the fire. ■

GODHRA: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED...

Ratin Das, Narendra Nag & Avirook Sen

If there is one thing that stands out in the investigations into the fire on the Sabarmati Express, it is that the Narendra Modi government and all of its agencies have a completely different take on it to anyone from outside the state. The U.C. Banerjee committee report, which the Hindustan Times has access to, is the latest example.

Who or what started the fire?

Banerjee cannot say for certain. All he concludes is that the petrol theory and the 'miscreant activity' story both being totally absurd, the fire on the Sabarmati Express on 27th February 2002 cannot be ascribed to an accidental fire.

He bases this on the largely consistent testimonies of witnesses before the committee. None of them say that they saw anyone set fire to the coach. Neither do they say anyone boarded the train. In fact, they saw all the doors were locked. Banerjee speculates that it could have even been a carelessly thrown cigarette butt.

Miscreants, says the Gujarat police. "Without thinking of the consequences of communal hatred and violence by instigating and exciting hatred, they (a large mob) attacked the passengers and the coaches of Sabarmati Express with stones and set on fire coach S-6 by putting inflammable liquid like petrol and as a result 59 passengers....", said the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in its first charge-sheet. After the State Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) report conclusively stated that no inflammable fluid was thrown at the ill-fated coach at Godhra the SIT 'found' one Ajay Baria, a tea vendor at Godhra, whose statement to the police formed the basis of the revised charge-sheet which said that some Muslims had cut open the canvas in the vestibule to enter the coach, pour petrol and set it afire.

Was petrol used?

No, says Banerjee categorically. All witnesses

consistently told him that the fire started between 10 and 15 after smoke was detected. He concludes that it cannot have been a petrol fire, in which flames leap out right away.

Banerjee also says that petrol wasn't thrown inside the coach, as the Forensic Science Laboratory had said. Banerjee counters: "60 litres of petrol or any other inflammable would be thrown out in an overcrowded coach from the entry point of the coach to deep inside..and not one whisper would be raised by anyone of the persons in the bogey-it is not only improbable, it is absurd."

No, says the state Forensic Science Laboratory. After testing nearly 550 kilograms of samples of burnt out portions of the coach, its berths, passengers' luggage and other items no traces of petrol were found.

No, say a number of witnesses who deposed before the Nanavati-Shah commission. Testimonies of about 60 witnesses - including Railway and police officials, passengers and surviving 'kar sevaks' - state that no one had thrown petrol at the coach and that no Muslim had entered the coach.

Jayantibhai of Gamanpura village of Mehsana district - a 'kar sewak' listed as witness No. 38 in the Commission records, said, "I did not see any material burning on the floor. ...I did not see anyone pouring any fluid inside the coach.... People at the back of the coach were saying that the coach was burning from inside... The smell was like that of burning rubber."

No, says **Panchmahal District SP Raju Bhargava** who reached the spot at around 8.30 am. He told the two-judge commission that he had neither noticed any flames on the floor of the coach nor smelt any inflammable fuel like petrol or kerosene. Bhargava was transferred from Godhra in the first police reshuffle.

Did a mob attack the train?

Yes, says **Banerjee**. His report is clear that there was

an attack on the train by a stone throwing mob. The testimonies of the people on the train, and the hard evidence of the damage of the bogey clearly suggest there was, though how big the crowd was isn't clear.

The presence of the mob prevented people from escaping from the platform side of the train. It is fair to infer that had there not been an attack, there would have been fewer fatalities.

Yes, says the police. Chargesheet number one alleged nearly 900 to 1000 people armed with deadly weapons and inflammable fluids formed an illegal assembly with the intention of killing 'kar sewaks'. It also said that the mob was shouting slogans like 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Hindu kafero ko jala do'.

Stone pelting, but no one tried to stop us from leaving the coach, say **witness** deposing before the Nanavati-Shah commission. "I was not beaten by anybody nor was I threatened," says Witness No 34 Maheshbhai, a 'kar-sewak.'

Did officials do their job?

No says **Banerjee**. He points out several instances of failure. The fire station at Godhra, for instance, had only one working tanker. Assistant fire suprintendent P.F. Solanki arrived on the scene only when someone picked him up on a scooter.

Firemen came at 9015 with just 4,000 litres of water. A fire that would have taken four to five minutes to douse, therefore took hours to to put out.

No doctor was at the site before nine. And the first police party of just four or five men who came to the scene just after eight was way too small to control the mob.

No, say legal experts who point to the different versions of the chargesheets filed by the Gujarat police.

No, say witnesses before the Nanavati-Shah commission who allege the cops arrived late and did little. ■

Courtesy Hindustan Times

PROPHET (PBUH) SAID

Paradise lies at the feet of thy mother.

Muhammad (PBUH)

Whosoever visits a sick person, an angel calls from Heaven: "Be happy in the world and happy be your walking; and take your habitation in Paradise."

Muhammad (PBUH)

The best thing you can do is to serve your mother, your mother, your mother, your father and then your relatives."

Muhammad (PBUH)

He who travels in the search of knowledge, to him God shows the way of Paradise.

Muhammad (PBUH)

Whoever loves to meet God, God loves to meet him.

Muhammad (PBUH)

The love of the world, is the root of all evils.

Muhammad (PBUH)

No one who keeps his mind focused entirely upon himself, can grow large, strong and beautiful in character.

Muhammad (PBUH)

A virtuous wife is a man's best treasure.

Muhammad (PBUH)

All Muslims are like one wall, some parts strengthening others; in such a way they must support each other.

Muhammad (PBUH)

Allah loves not the tyrants and he desires not tyranny in the world.

Muhammad (PBUH)

GODHRA'S INCIDENT : MEDIA ON BANERJEE REPORT

THE HINDU (19-1-2005)

Seeking the truth on Godhra

The Interim report of the Justice U.C. Banerjee committee represents the first time that some light has been shed on the "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" that is the Godhra train tragedy. A total of 59 passengers, mostly Vishwa Hindu Parishad supporters and including women and children, died in the poisonous smoke and horrific fire that engulfed coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express on February 27, 2002. Chief Minister Narendra Modi and other senior Bharatiya Janata Party leaders blamed the incident on a pre-planned "jihadi" conspiracy. In the days and weeks that followed, as many as 2,000 innocent people, most of them Muslims, were killed in "retaliatory" riots across Gujarat that had the clear sanction of the State authorities. In the Hindu Right's highly divisive, morally corroded world view, the killings were an understandable and even justified response to what happened, at Godhra. Even Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee could not resist the pull of this twisted logic. "If a conspiracy had not been hatched to burn alive the innocent passengers of the Sabarmati Express," he told a party conclave in Goa on April 12, 2002, "the subsequent tragedy in Gujarat could have been averted. But this did not happen." The developments that followed were condemnable, he said, "But who lit the fire?"

So certain was the BJP and its leadership of a well-planned conspiracy that it never occurred to them to consider the possibility that the fire could have been caused accidentally. The idea of a conspiracy was politically convenient, because it could serve as a cover for the genocidal violence that was unleashed almost immediately. Thus, from day one, neither the police nor the Railways paid

any attention to investigating the case in as comprehensive a manner as the gravity of the tragedy warranted. Depositions of passengers and witnesses were not collected in a systematic way, the postmortem of the victims was conducted hastily and the site of the tragedy was not quarantined. Finally, forensic samples were not lifted in a timely or schematically rational fashion. While the Gujarat police cannot be faulted for initially pursuing the conspiracy angle, it is shocking that virtually no attention was paid by the Railways to probing the cause of the fire and the dynamics of its spread. More than a million Indians travel by train across the country every day. Even if the fire were not accidental, a timely technical probe would have yielded valuable suggestions for improving the safety of railway coaches. The Central Government of the day erred in not conducting such an investigation. By objecting to the work of the Banerjee committee and politicising its interim findings, the BJP and its National Democratic Alliance partners are today only compounding their original sin.

Although the substantive logic of the Banerjee report can be commented upon only when it is made public, its suggestion that the fire was not the result of flammable liquid thrown on the floor by miscreants who entered the coach forcibly squares with the technical findings of an independent panel of engineers released on Monday. The similarity between the burn patterns on S-6 and other coaches that have accidentally caught fire is interesting, as is the fact that none of the survivors had burn injuries below the waist. It is also well established that the toxic smoke appeared first, well before flames engulfed the coach - a sequence that is inconsistent with the police's petrol theory. While a murderous conspiracy cannot still be ruled out, it does seem, on the basis of what we know so far, that the Gujarat Government is barking up the wrong tree. ■

THE INDIAN EXPRESS (19-1-2005)

Feb 27: fact/fiction

Truth, it is often claimed, is not just about what is said,

but how and when it is said. By this token, Justice Banerjee's premature announcement of the interim conclusions of his inquiry will turn out to be, at best, a mixed blessing. At its worst, it could unleash the kind of callous politics that so polarised the country along communal lines in the past. It was morally vital that truth of the gruesome events that occurred on February 27, 2002, be fully revealed. It was also palpably clear that many of the investigations conducted under the auspices of the NDA regime or the Modi government in Gujarat were unlikely to reveal the truth. Therefore, it was all the more important that any commission subsequently appointed, examine all the available evidence as thoroughly as possible, and nail the barrage of insidious speculation that has surrounded Godhra. This speculation was the basis of the murderous politics of recrimination against Muslims that became the tragedy we now call Gujarat.

The Banerjee Commission probably has raised enough questions to cast doubt on some of the wilder conspiracy theories that surrounded Godhra. But the unseemly haste with which a press conference was called to reveal the interim findings of the commission will inevitably feed new conspiracy theories about the commission itself. Why the urgent need to reveal the findings just weeks before the final report was due? Why time the press conference to coincide with the Bihar elections where two of the main actors in the report, the railway minister who had commissioned it, and the former railway Minister, who is criticised in the report, are key players? Justice Banerjee ought to have realised that in all matters relating to Gujarat, credibility is at a premium. He ought to have gone to greater lengths to ensure that the Commission did not give the appearance of being tainted by political partisanship. The manner and timing of his press conference have given grist to the mill of those who will want to impugn his findings.

The BJP has such an ideological investment in Godhra, and in obscuring the truth, that no one would have

been surprised by its reaction to the Commission's findings. But the truth is that large numbers of citizens were genuinely agnostic about what happened at Godhra. The task of a commission would have been to lay the doubts of these citizens to rest by appearing to carry the imprimatur of impartiality. Even if the Commission is revealing the truth, its impartiality has been, put into doubt. What the victims of Gujarat - Godhra included - require is truth and justice. But truth and justice can be destroyed by inept judgement, as much as it is destroyed by fanaticism. It is doubtful whether any of our political parties will have the self-restraint not to callously use this report. Justice Banerjee may or may not have revealed the truth, but he has certainly ensured that truth remains hostage to politics. ■

THE STATESMAN (21-1-2005)

Salt into the wound!

The crucial problem of establishing the truth in respect of the fire on the Sabarmati Express in Godhra that claimed 59 lives in February 2002 remains unclear after the Banerjee Commission's interim report. The carnage engineered after that in Gujarat left a trail of huge suffering. The question is whether those who unseated the NDA at the Centre in last May's parliamentary election are as concerned about the suffering as about using it as a convenient tool to woo the minority vote-bank. They have reason to be delighted with the Banerjee Commission, set up by Union railway minister Lalu Prasad for purposes which are all his own. It is a different matter that, in a hurry to bring out an interim report, this Commission leaves important questions unanswered and rubs salt into festering wounds.

How could a departmental inquiry pre-empt the criminal trial and the Nanavati Commission? Why was the report timed to help Lalu make it a campaign issue for assembly election that has invited criticism from the Election Commission? What evidence did his Commission have and who were their witnesses? The retired judge did not help

matters by refusing questions after releasing the report. He did say with disarming simplicity, In a television interview, that he was unaware of political nuiances.

Whether he thus played into the hands of the minister, appears to be a question which perhaps, his great friend, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, might care to answer. The question that survives is why, if the Commission is not considering extraneous purposes, it chooses this precise time to rule out a conspiracy, suggest an "accident" based on demonstrably inadequate premises and help Lalu regain the confidence of minorities just when he needs it the most.

The RJD leader's camp is cheerful. The railway minister, who did not wait for a court verdict or the Nanavati Commission's findings, ordered this departmental inquiry, knowing that another commission was on the job and a criminal trial was in progress. What the Banerjee Commission now does is to come to conclusions on the Godhra incident that make the other commission and trial somewhat superfluous.

It leaves a bad taste for those who have an implicit faith in our retired judiciary and who watch Lalu indulge in one gimmick after another. But even after these calculated games the man under scrutiny in the huge fodder scam, may still not be out of trouble. His main rival, Ram Vilas Paswan and the Congress are still relying on the possibilities of staging a comeback in the Bihar assembly election.

The irony is that Paswan and Congress are singing the same tune on the report while hoping at the same time that the minorities will desert Lalu. If in the midst of all this, Godhra remains an unsolved mystery, none of these parties may have any regrets. The rest of the country must regret that institutions are targeted, that confidence is shaken by willing tools of politicians, and that these scars will take longer to heal - if at all. ■

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Wrong Track

The U C Banerjee committee interim report on the Godhra train tragedy is being used as a red herring by the BJP. The party has predictably questioned the findings of the report and the timing of its release. The report blows up the edifice that the sangh parivar has constructed to justify the carnage that followed the fire in Sabarmati Express that killed 59 passengers, including some kar sevaks; it says the fire was an accident. The parivar, even before any formal inquiry was conducted into the incident, said that local Muslims has hatched a conspiracy to set the train on fire. The merits of the findings can be debated when Justice Banerjee submits the final report. But let us not for a moment think that it is central to the investigations and trials concerning the riots that rocked Gujarat. Irrespective of what Justice Banerjee has to say on the train incident, the Narendra Modi government must explain its collusion with religious fanatics in targeting Muslims across the state. No amount of evidence indicating a conspiracy to target kar sevaks can absolve the Modi government, or the BJP, from the culpability of abetting - or at least condoning - mobs who for days went on a killing and looting spree in Gujarat. Gujarat 2002 is about much more than what happened in Godhra; it is a case of the state abandoning its moral and legal role as protector of its citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

The BJP's fear that the report will be used for political gains in Bihar is valid. No one understands better than the parivar the potential of an emotive issue in rallying people in times of elections. Even before Modi used Godhra to win office, the BJP had ridden on Advani's blatantly communal Ayodhya campaign to the centre stage of Indian politics. Communal agendas - be they of the Hindu nationalism variety or of minority ghettoism - have always been a milch cow for our political class. Lalu Prasad Yadav has

emphatically indicated that he will flaunt the Banerjee committee report to consolidate Muslim voters in Bihar. Such cynical tactics, evident in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh as well, expose the hollowness of the 'secular' politics preached and practised by the likes of Lalu. The biggest casualty in Gujarat was the credibility of the Indian state and its institutions. Retrieving it should be an important part of secular politics. This is possible only when the players are scrupulous about the idiom and the subtext in which political discourse is conducted. That includes the use and abuse of investigations like the Banerjee committee report. ■

THE TELEGRAPH (21-1-2005)

Root Cause

The smart machinery has moved into place, but is looking rather tatty. With its renowned precision, the Bharatiya Janata Party has allotted days, places, jobs and the people to go with each in the campaign for the forthcoming assembly elections in three states. But its platform is limited. The party is depending almost entirely on playing up the communal divide. Perhaps it is caught in its own dizzying circle, because if the Lok Sabha elections taught the BJP anything at all, it should have been the lesson that religion does not always pay. In Bihar, where the Union minister for railways, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, is trying to make as much hay as possible from the recent Godhra investigation report, the BJP has found Mr Narendra Modi to fall back on. The BJP's loud protestations - and repeated depositions by policemen in charge when Godhra broke - about conspiracies and gallons of petrol are sounding a bit thin against the report submitted by the judge, Mr U.C. Banerjee, which is also consistent with earlier independent forensic findings. The truth is now lost in a mist of unscrupulous politicking, but defiance and arrogant repetitions of lies are the BJP's only face-saving strategies. By the same logic, only the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, who has perfected the art of blank arrogance in the face of the most shameful exposures of

various truths after the Gujarat carnage, can be the BJP's mascot in Bihar.

India's people cannot be glibly read off with one formula, as political parties, most recently the BJP, have always found. Therefore, if the BJP hopes to repeat its assembly successes of December 2003, it should be on the basis of this sense of humility, and not by trying to stir up communal divisiveness. But it seems that the party has nothing else to show. Even if it had planned to play up Ms Uma Bharti's "backward class" identity in Bihar, it would have been rather pointless, since her caste is a rare presence in that state. But she is a firebrand "Hindu", and with Mr Modi on the rampage - frantically covering up Godhra - the Hindu line might just catch on. The BJP is also going to rake up the communal refrain along the tribal belt, rehearsing its old line about Christians proselytizing tribal people. It is interesting that the BJP is no longer differentiating itself from the more extreme *Hindutva* groups in the *sangh parivar*; defeat has returned it to its roots. ■

HINDUSTAN TIMES (19-1-2005)

Charred by Politics

From the outset, the Godhra calamity has been used politically - first by those who deemed the incident to be an attack on Hindus and launched a horrific pogrom aimed at the Muslim community in Gujarat, and now by Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Justice U.C. Banerjee committee's interim report on the Godhra train fire that killed 58 people is entirely divorced from politics. The committee - *not* commission - was constituted by Mr Yadav allegedly because his predecessor and Bihar *bete noire* Nitish Kumar had not prosecuted the inquiry effectively.

The timing of the report, on the eve of the Bihar elections, is suspicious especially since it only covers the first of the seven issues it was supposed to look at - to

ascertain the causes of the fire. The committee is supposed to look into the entire fateful journey of the Sabar- mati Express, the causes for overcrowding in coach S-6, whether the behaviour of its passengers or the possibility of neglect in the Railways' handling of the event was a contributing factor. The value of the Banerjee committee report is that it has firmly placed the possibility of an accident into the public debate of what still remains a mystery - the precise sequence of events at Godhra. But they have by no means answered all the questions. The initial narrative had it that burning rags were thrown into the compartment igniting petrol that had been poured on the floor. Forensic reports, including a private study released by four specialists on Monday, indicate that this does not tally with the physical evidence available.

The Gujarat government and its special investigation team, that has strongly refuted the report's findings, have little credibility given their history of trying to undermine the prosecution of the killers and slipshod investigation into the Godhra incident. All this suggests that it may never be possible to determine the entire truth. More than anything else, Justice Banerjee's efforts should be welcomed for throwing additional light on the terrible events that have become a blot on the reputation of the nation. ■

SAYINGS OF THE HOLY PROPHET (PBUH) ON TOLERANCE

It is not rightful for any Muslim to be angry with another Muslim for more than three days; better of the two is the one who greets the other first. A person, who is angry with his Muslim brother for one year and does not reconcile is like his murderer.

- Bukhari, Muslim

Do not be angry; a strong man (wrestler) is not he who defeats his opponents, but strong is the one who controls his anger.

- Bukhari, Muslim

The best among you is he who gets angry and then calms down slowly.

- Tirmizi

A beloved of Allah is he who forgives people inspite of having power (to revenge).

- Baheeqi

Anger spoils faith like aloe spoils honey.

- Mishkat

PARAGON OF DEVOTION

Anis Ahmad Nadwi

Haj, one of the pillars of Islam, is a practical manifestation of Islamic fraternity whereby a Muslim observes universal Islamic brotherhood. It is an Islamic congress attended by Muslims from across the world in a humble uniform, trying to get the same objective. It is the real expression of Islamic unity, integrity, cohesiveness and equality regardless of race, colour and homeland. It is a school which teaches the Muslim lessons of perseverance, generosity, co-operation, forbearance and love.

It constitutes a declaration against Satan and his accomplices on one, hand and opens a new page in dealing with Allah through sincerity and repentance on the other. It is the commemoration of obedience, and devotional dedications of prophet Ibrahim (MPBH) who was favourite of Allah.

Haj is the visitation to the House of Allah during the definite period with accomplishment of certain rites besides avoidance of prohibitions. It had been made conditional obligation on Muslims in the 9th Hijri. The favourite of Aala Hazrat Ibrahim (PBUH) had built a small house for him in the vicinity of Mecca. His devotional prayers and loyalty pleased Allah so much that he related it to Himself and made its visitation (who are able to reach there) compulsory for his bondsmen. This is why Haj is a season of expressing loyalty and passionate love towards Allah.

Haj is like 'Hijrah' in some ways though it is only for a very short period. The pilgrim travels to Mecca to visit the House of Allah from far-off places, suffers difficulties of the journey, leaves his home, family, relatives, business, near and dear ones, luxuries of life and the climate accustomed to: only to obey Allah, to earn his pleasure and forgiveness from sins. The tradition of the great prophet Mohammad (MPBUH) states the same aim of Haj: who visited the House of Allah (went for pilgrimage) committed neither any

lewdness nor abused and misbehaved with anyone during its period.

Will return from his holy trip purified and sinless as the day he was born. Haj is the conditional obligation on Muslims and only once in a lifetime. It is obligatory only on those who could afford the journey excluding the expenses of the family. Such people must hasten to perform it as soon as possible. To delay it after being capable to perform it, till old age or until the fulfilment of all family related responsibilities, is a mis-conception of Islamic tenets and a great sin.

Performing the pilgrimage is a duty imposed immediately upon those who can afford it, as it is evident in the Quranic Verse (Al-Imran 97). Pilgrimage there to is a duty men owe to Allah those who can afford the journey. Allah stands not in need of any of His creatures".

Prophet Mohammad (MPBR) had made it clear in one of his speeches. "O people, Allah has imposed the pilgrimage upon you. So do it."

The entire trip of Haj is a prayer. As the pilgrim leaves his home, the prayer begins. He will be continuously in the prayer till he returns to his home. His sleep, awake, walk and even search for food and water is a prayer. When the pilgrim wears Ihram (the two unsewn towels wrapped round the body during Haj) on reaching 'Meequat' then his real pilgrimage starts. They must abide by its rules and fear Allah more than a common man. The Mohrim should co-operate with people around him and must avoid inconvenience and misbehaviour to others, even to birds.

Haj is a worship and in Islam the worship must be directed to Allah alone. It must be clear that all the worship performed during Haj or its rites such as circumambulating round 'Kabah', attending Arafat, staying in Muzdalifah and for several days in Mina have only one objective, that is to worship Allah alone and to please him. The worship is neither dedicated to 'Kabah' nor to any of these places which are mere objects created by Allah that can never benefit or harm

anyone.

After completing the Manasik' (obligatory rites of Hajj), pilgrims must remember Allah as their forefathers. They pray to Allah seeking the good things in this world and in the Hereafter and security from the doom of fire. For such people Allah has promised goodly portions out of what they have earned, because Allah is swift at reckoning. Pilgrims should make provision for themselves and the best provision is to ward off evil.

The successful pilgrims on returning their homes are called Hajeess. They are respected in the Muslim as well as in non-Muslim societies. The Hajis are expected to reflect more than non-Hajis, upon the Quranic verses which deal with the reality religiosity honesty, truth, faithfulness and probity. Therefore they must strictly adhere to Islamic faith and beliefs and must avoid commission of sins. ■

Continued from page 100

unique to Islam, men can easily get enough time to involve themselves in other external duties. The duties of women require full attention and time. Hence they have been exempted from any extra burden.

The rights of women in Islam greatly surpass all other systems granting women their due place in society. But when we look around in our society, we find Muslim women in a woeful condition. This is mainly because Muslims on the main have begun being dominated and controlled, not by the Qur'an, but by pagan customs that have become prevalent in their society. Most of these customs originate from un-islamic societies and Muslims have picked them up to incorporate them in their own social customs in such a way that they appear part of their own religion. This has brought in lapses of the worst kind and sanctioned detrimental values. Hence dowry system is common in Muslim societies. Widows are shunned, girls are married without their consent, divorce has become plaything, women are prohibited from many important issues as decision-making factors in the family. Most of the time they are not even asked for their opinion in any matter. The girl-child is held in indiscrimination. Thus the prevalent condition speaks in utterly negative terms about Muslims and Islam. But this situation has arisen because of the Muslims shunning Islam and the Qur'an. Controversial issues are raised through wrong interpretations, but the remedy is not sought. There is a dearth of popular literature to educate Muslim women on their rightful place in society. There is also a dearth of sound knowledge about Islam. The Muslim masses at times get swayed by the controversies in the interpretation of Islamic law and this also deters the progress of women.

If at all Muslims wish to present Islam in its rightful context they have to first cleanse their own minds of all stagnations and wrong notions they hold. It is their duty to pick out the dross that has crept in their society so that the world may know that Islam is what the Muslims practise. ■

Courtesy: Radiance

A PROMISE KEPT

Mukul Dube

South Africa abolished apartheid many years ago, and Blacks and Whites became equal citizens. How would Black people react if they were now prevented from entering particular areas unless they had passes which are no longer issued because the rules which required them have been scrapped?

During the British Raj, there were several places - clubs and so on - in our towns and cities where people congregated: but only the rulers, since notices were displayed which read "Indians Not Allowed". Today all Indians are free to go anywhere - though only in theory, since the unwritten exclusion of Dalits persists. How would an Indian citizen, for example, a non-Dalit, such as N.D. Modi or L.K. Advani, react on being denied entry to a club which no longer displayed a notice debarring them on grounds of skin colour?

What if a woman of today were compelled by her husband-an Ideal Man, for instance-to prove her innocence by walking on burning coals because people had cast aspersions on her chastity?

In Gujarat, still ruled by the Vedic Taliban, what would be the height of ridiculous injustice anywhere else remains the harshest possible reality.

POTA was repealed by an ordinance on October 27, 2004. It was removed from the statute books, it ceased to exist. Yet, in a land in which so many laws are toothless, a law which has been done away with still has lethal fangs-fangs already dripping blood and which daily come to have fresh blood on them.

On November 23 two lawyers--H. N. Jhala and his junior, Mustak Ahmed (also called Mushtaq Ali Saiyed by some newspapers)-were arrested by the Crime Branch of the Gujarat Police, at dead of night, under this law which had supposedly been relegated to history. Jhala is a respected advocate who has practised for over five

decades. His recent work had included the defence of many persons accused in such POTA cases as the Haren Pandya case, the Tiffin Bomb case and what is popularly known as the ISI Conspiracy case. Jhala had in fact sought anticipatory bail in view of a land transaction matter which involved a person described as a POTA absconder but had withdrawn his application on being assured by the Gujarat Police that they did not plan to take any action. This would appear to have been unwise, since earlier in the year the Crime Branch had harassed Jhala through surveillance, had threatened him, and had detained two of his juniors. Jhala had then filed a case against the Crime Branch which is still pending.

It is well known that in the violence in Gujarat in 2002, of the thousands who were killed, raped and maimed, who had their property destroyed, who were rendered homeless and whose means of livelihood were snatched away from them, all but a handful were Muslims. It is also well known that in Gujarat, POTA has been used exclusively against Muslims. What is perhaps not so well-known is that even the families of persons arrested under POTA have been systematically terrorised by the arms of the State. Since almost all of those arrested were the main or sole bread-winners of their families, the economic hardship that has resulted is incalculable.

POTA, thus, has not been used only against those who have been arrested under it - but whose trials, even after two years and more, have still not begun. It has been used against the entire Muslim community, not just against those of its members who are in custody and against whom there are charges. In Gujarat, proudly proclaimed to be a *Hindu Rajya* by the *Sangh Parivar*, to be innocent is to invite retribution. The Muslims of Gujarat are being punished for having had so many of their number butchered.

We must never forget that it is the State which is responsible for seeing to the welfare of its citizens and to the punishment of the wrong-doers among them. But it is a

fact of history that in Gujarat, the State not only did nothing for the tens of thousands of Muslims - citizens in exactly the same way as Pravin Togadia and Maya Kodnani are citizens-who had to seek shelter in squalid, crowded camps, it actively obstructed those who sought to provide relief. And it is also a fact of history that the State in Gujarat has consistently sought to protect those whom it was duty-bound to have brought to book-those who were responsible for the deaths of two thousand and more Muslims and for the rape of uncounted Muslim women and girls. And it is also a fact that the State has been responsible for the torture of those in custody and for compelling them to sign "confessions" which were prepared for them. And it is also a fact that the economic hardship to which their families were and are subjected is the creation of the State, which in theory should have been looking to their well-being.

In Modi's Gujarat, the very bases of democracy and of justice have been turned on their heads. Those who should have been protectors have been, and remain, predators. While the BJP ruled in New Delhi, it did nothing to set things right - although there are specific provisions in the Constitution which authorise the Centre to act when something goes badly wrong in a State. The "soft" Prime Minister and his "iron" deputy (who was also the Home Minister) sat back and, from time to time, made statements which were at once mealy - mouthed and self-contradictory. The one thing for which they can be praised is that they did not applaud Modi's butchery publicly: but neither did they take action against those of their Parivar who did hail the successful "experiment", people like Togadia and Ashok Singhal being the loudest, though many others who were quieter were no less venomous. The RSS was seldom heard. The nervous systems of all living creatures, even the lowest, carry the brain's orders in silence.

The State in Gujarat has been held guilty of, at the very least, complicity in the genocide of 2002. More and more evidence has been coming to light of the way in which

the administration and the police either looked the other way when the soldiers of *Hindutva* were on the rampage- or else actively assisted those fine warriors. There is also a growing body of indications that what were and are described as riots were not riots at all but a carefully planned and orchestrated pogrom. Printed lists of Muslims' homes and businesses, efficiently organised motor transport for large numbers of marauders, an unending supply of gas cylinders to be used for destruction and, above all, continuous communication via cellular phones between functionaries of the VHP and the BJP on the one hand, and the higher reaches of the administration and the police on the other- these are not hall-marks of sudden, uncontrollable fury.

It is against this background that we must look at how POTA has been used in Gujarat. POTA never was the defence against terrorists that it was described as being. Instead, it was a powerful weapon to be used against the Muslim minority- with its use for this purpose being justified by the labelling of all Muslims as "terrorists" and "agents of Miyan Musharraf". The State in Gujarat has presented no evidence to show that these labels have any truth in them. Why should it bother? It is answerable to no one, not even to the Constitution of India under whose provisions it came to wield power. The foundation of the legal systems of the civilised world is that a person accused of having committed a crime must be presumed to be innocent until proven guilty. Such a person must also have certain rights, starting with the right to legal defence. These principles are clearly laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which India is a signatory. Our Constitution and our laws explicitly give rights to persons charged with wrong-doing and place curbs on the powers of functionaries of the State.

Possibly the most dangerous weakness of this system is that it relies almost entirely on those very functionaries of the State not to exceed the powers given to them and to ensure that all accused individuals may freely exercise their statutory rights. This weakness has revealed itself time and

again where ordinary laws have been involved but extraordinary laws such as POTA can bring about the unbridled use of power by the police and the denial of any rights whatsoever even to persons whose alleged crimes are complete fabrications. I have named the police because that is the arm which holds the stick and the gun: but we all know that limbs do not act of their own accord, without orders from higher organs.

There is overwhelming evidence that POTA has been misused in Gujarat and that it continues to be misused there. Ours is a federal republic in which individual States have considerable autonomy. But the nation is held together by the Centre, which has not only the authority but also a duty to ensure that everything in it functions smoothly and, above all, that no one treats the Constitution as waste paper.

Before the general election, the Congress party and the rest of the UPA had promised to repeal POTA. This, they said, was because POTA was a draconian law which was amenable to misuse. After the Congress came to head the coalition at the Centre, it kept its promise. POTA was repealed by an ordinance not too long before it was to lapse, and on December 9 a Bill was passed by Parliament. But while the letter of the law has been waved about with much fanfare, its spirit has been thrown into the sewer.

In order to have had any meaning, the repeal of POTA should have been retrospective. It has been repealed only on paper: its victims have been given no relief. Citizens' groups offered an alternative: that confessions made to the police should be inadmissible as evidence, that Special Courts should be abolished, that all trials should be conducted by Sessions in the normal manner, that the provisions for bail should be those set out in the Criminal Procedure Code, and that Review Committees should have only judicial members appointed by the Central Government. But the Central Government paid no heed to this, just as the vague promises made on July 5 to a delegation by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister were pushed under the carpet.

And what of the stated reason for the promise to repeal POTA? Was POTA misused during the years over which it was in force? Did the Congress party look into this, as reason demanded that it should have done? Had it done that, it cannot but have identified those who misused POTA and those who suffered on account of that misuse. But this is meaningless rhetoric. The fact is that everyone in Gujarat knows that POTA was misused there and that it continues to be misused there. A good many people outside Gujarat, also know this. The Congress party is neither blind nor deaf. It sees and it hears. Since it is a long established, major political party with a network of members, supporters and sympathisers, many of them in positions which give them access to information which is not available to ordinary people, it must know in great, detail what has been going on.

But the Congress party, neither, blind nor deaf, has chosen to play dumb. It does not speak and it does not act. Should we not conclude that it did not really give a damn about POTA, that it wanted only to promise to repeal it? Having ruled the country for decades, the Congress knows that votes are what count in elections, while principles can go to hell after they have been printed in manifestos to keep up the charade.

The organised denial of justice to the victims of the Gujarat genocide of 2002 goes on. Offenders were not booked because the complaints sought to be filed by victims were not accepted or were watered down, witnesses in the few cases which are in progress have throughout been intimidated, and those lawyers who took up the cases of the victims have been living through a nightmare. The arrests of Jhala and Mustak Ahmed, only show that a rifle whose barrel has been destroyed, if we are to believe the high and mighty, can go on firing lethal bullets.

But who can deny that the Congress party and its partners in the UPA have kept the promise they had made in the Common Minimum Programme? Those who support it from without have also shown themselves to be civilised people who like peace and quiet. ■

Courtesy: Mainstream

RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

Shahnaz Begum

The general view held by the western world is that the concept of human rights is exclusively theirs. But this view is not correct because the idea of human rights had already taken shape under the Islamic law in the 7th century itself. In fact, the west could develop its concept of human rights only as late as the 17th century and then too, the charter remained incomplete. Eventually, it was not until the 20th century that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could be completed.

The Rights that Islam confers to human beings have been clमितied under two categories:

The basic rights as laid down by Islam for all human beings, and the special rights endowed to those different classes of people in accordance with their peculiar situation, status and position, etc., (e.g. non-Muslims, women and children).

The rights of women in Islam were evolved in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). That was an age of sheer injustice particularly to the weaker sections of society, i.e. women and slaves. It was an age when women were bought and sold in open market, when they were treated worse than chattels, when there existed a system of variety of marriages and divorce practices and unlimited polygamy. Women had no rights whatsoever, nor any defined place in society. The Prophet of Islam extricated them from this extremely inhuman condition and elevated them to the highest pedestal of human glory.

A remarkable fact about Islam is that it does not distribute rights mechanically, but connects the rights and duties of individuals with a strong belief. Adherence to this belief is strong, and is further strengthened by the concept of accountability in the Hereafter. The believer is exhorted

first to fill his/her heart with unflinching faith in one God, in His Sovereignty and in the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Rights and duties are not man-made in Islam. They emanate from the same Divine source on which the believer puts his trust. Hence the viewpoint of the believer does not stay focussed only on worldly gains but rises higher than the material aspiring to achieve success in the Hereafter. This ideology of Islam has always to be kept in mind while examining the system of Shari'ah which is divine and cannot be questioned. All rights are controlled by God because they have been conferred by Him. Hence the supreme authority in this regard is God and all believers are bound to follow the injunctions as enunciated in the Revealed Book.

This point usually gets eclipsed in the face of the prejudice, which is thrown by the media particularly of the west, in order to taint Islam and the Muslims. Women in Islam are shown as a subjugated lot, as subservient to the men, as second-class citizens, segregated from the male world, always to bear the cruelties of their husbands. It has been the habit of Europe to blame Islam to suit their own purpose. Karen Armstrong sees this point very clearly when she writes in her book *Muhammad, A Biography of the Prophet*: "During the hierarchically minded Middle Ages, some critics of Islam had blamed Mohammad for giving too much power to menials, like slaves and women. This stereotype has now been reversed not because people necessarily had a fuller knowledge of Islam but because it suited our needs and always a foil against which we could measure our achievements."

Rightly said, this comment is enough to show the bare face of the west, which is still at loggerheads about how much to concede to women. Most of the rights that Europe wishes for women are given only by snatching away their femininity. Women in the west today are a battered, assaulted, misused overburdened lot. They are undergoing the worst kind of identity crisis, either being treated as a

lucrative commodity or being taught to shed every speck of their femininity. In the wake of this crisis, when women have lost their value even as human beings, tortured till they, become neurotic victims, it is quite natural that women desperately want to come out of this predicament. And it is therefore not unnatural that many of them are ready to embrace a system of life that can guarantee them freedom and dignity.

The position of women is derived from the two basic sources of Islam - i.e. the Qur'an and Sunnah. Under the social system of Islam, no human being is discriminated on grounds of sex, power or wealth. Men and women are like the two wheel's of society, working with each other for its efficient functioning and welfare. Hence the Qur'an states: 'O Mankind! Reverence your guardian Lord Who created you from a single person. Created, of like nature his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women.' (Nisa)

Equality is conceded to both the sexes. Surah Nahl states: 'Whoever works righteousness, man or woman and has faith, verily to him will We give new life, a life that is good and pure...' Allah has promised full returns to both men and women according to their labour: 'To men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn but ask God of His bounty.' (Nisa)

Personal development and intellectual pursuits are human rights conceded to both alike. Islam allows for equal opportunities in the field of acquiring knowledge. There is nothing of the reaction of hatred, derision or under-estimation that the Muslim society preaches. Women's guardians are advised by the Prophet (peace be upon him) not to obstruct their pursuits in education but to encourage and assist them. Examples exist of a number of dedicated women scholars during the Prophet's life and after, who have contributed immensely in the field of education. The wives and daughters of magnates and sovereigns have been

known to patronise knowledge, lavishing endowments and grants to institutes of learning.

Islam presents women in four roles - that of the mother, the (daughter, the wife, and she individual. These are exactly the roles which are being abhorred in the modern society, the repercussion of which is definitely being felt and observed. Islam exalts women's position as mother recognising the pain and hardship: 'In travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in two years twain was his Weaning' (Luqman: 14). Keeping this noble service in view, the mother is evaluated to the highest pedestal of human glory. 'Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.' Islam makes it compulsory for children to obey their parents, particularly their mother. Mother's interest and welfare must be preferred thrice before a father's. A mother deserves gratitude, respect, love, kindness and obedience.

Islam builds up a very positive feeling for daughters and exhorts its followers to treat them kindly and with fairness, paying full attention to their upbringing, and physical and mental growth. Marriage does not cut off their personal ties and they inherit from the property of their parents. Daughters are not supposed to be killed or be ashamed of. The Prophet considers daughters as blessings.

As wife, a woman retains her independent entity and marriage does not dissolve or merge her personality with that of her husband. Together with bringing new responsibilities, marriage empowers the wife with new rights. She must bear and rear children, and manage the home front. She is not deprived of anything like owning her own property or having a bank-balance or even earning money. The wife has an equal say in family affairs. Acknowledging the husband's managerial status and veto power in domestic life, the wife retains and enjoys her rights of maintenance allowance, residence, alimony, education and training.

But marriage may not always be bound to a life-long tie. Although family bonds are, well-knit in Islam and

occasions of distrust rarely occur. But if at all there is any such chance, the husband can use the provision of divorce (talaq). Likewise, the wife can resort to khula (right to seek separation) if she is driven to that extreme when she finds it impossible to live with her husband. Of course, the Qur'an has repeatedly condemned talaq as the most detestable of permissions, yet it has been permitted so that society may not undergo any imbalance. In societies where divorce is not a permission, other more cruel ways are resorted to get rid of the unwanted element.

Women as individuals have been taken care of properly and the Qur'an requires Muslim men and women to safeguard their dignity and chastity. Where men are exhorted to "lower their gaze and guard their modesty", women have to fulfil certain conditions of dressing while venturing outside, so that this may further protect them from evil intentions and satanic designs. The Qur'an states: 'O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their person (when out of doors), that is most convenient that they should be known and not molested.' (Ahzab)

This is naturally a positive way of safeguarding women. Women are prevented from showing themselves as sex objects and Islam totally disapproves of obscenity and indecencies. Men and women are further advised not to stay unmarried without any reason, just to guard them from going so astray and fall a prey to degeneration and spiritual bleakness.

Child marriage like that practised by some societies in which infants and very small children are betrothed, finds no sanction in Islam. Although Islam has not fixed any age for marriage, the puberty age of the girl and boy is considered mature enough for marriage.

Our society today is full of hatred for widows and they are considered inauspicious, having no right to remarry. Islam provides a fair management for widows and

encourages their remarriage. The permission to men for polygamy is considered to be unfair to women. But considering matters of greater evil that are happening in this male dominated society, the incidents of infidelity in marriage and hypocrisy, it may be said that Islam prevents society from this hypocrisy by finding a dignified outlet, so that responsibilities may be shared, not shaken away. Moreover, polygamy is permitted under certain conditions, but monogamy is preferable. The Qur'an is very explicit about this: 'Marry women of your choice, two..or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one... that will be more suitable, to prevent you from injustice.' (Nisa)

The permission for polygamy under certain circumstances can be beneficially utilised in times when the ratio of females to that of males becomes higher, as during wars and other such calamities, when a large number of widows and orphan girls are left behind alone, homeless and without any social and financial security. Very often barren wives become unwanted and in a strictly monogamous society such a wife has either to be divorced, abandoned or even killed if the husband wishes to take another wife. Under the permission of polygamy many such lives can be saved.

Under the Islamic political system, Muslim women enjoy vast privileges. They can participate in elections and be nominated to a political office. They have a right to participate in public affairs and during the Prophet's period and that of his immediate Caliphs, women used to engage themselves in performing various legislative, advisory, executive and judicial duties. But the basic structure of Islam is such that women have been assigned the most important task as homemaker. This itself suggests that all their other activities come only after this task has been accomplished. The more burdensome task given to men is that of the breadwinner. Under this order of assignment, which is

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