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The Fragrance of East

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Wisdom of Qur'an

Those who went before them did also plot So Allah came to their buildings from the foundations, the roof fell down on them from above them and the punishment came from a quarter they did not perceive.

(Surah-Al-Nahal -26)

Commentary:

That is, the past nations also tried similar plots to thwart the entry and growth of truth in the hearts of the people. But Allah (swt) failed them and destroyed them by striking at their foundations (Au.)

In the Arabic language the idiom, "He came to their buildings from the foundations" refers to a total destruction (Ibn Jarir).

When a roof falls, it falls from above. Why then did Allah (swt) say, "and the roof fell down on them from above them?" That is because, Razi and Qurtubi explain, in Arabic they say, "The roof fell upon us" whether the speakers were under it, then they will say "the roof fell down on us from above us."

Asad comments: "This is obviously a metaphor (Razi) describing the utter collapse of all endeavors—both individual and social—rooted in godlessness and false pride."

Then, on the Day of Judgement He shall humiliate them, and ask them, 'Where are those that you associated with Me, concerning whom you used to vehemently dispute (with the believers)?' Those who were given knowledge will speak out, 'Assuredly, this day humiliation and the (accompanying) evil is upon the unbelievers.'

(Surah-Al-Nahal -27)

Commentary:

"Shaqqā" of the original denotes (acrimonious: Alusi) argumentation between two individuals or parties (Ibn Jarir).

Those are meant who, in the words of Asad, "availed themselves of the knowledge of good and evil, which God offers to mankind through His prophets."

Pearls From the Prophet Muhammad (S)

Days on which supererogatory fasts are prohibited

There are certain days in a year on which it is forbidden to observe fasting. God is the Absolute Monarch, the Supreme Being, the knower of all things. He declared Namaz be the worship of highest order and yet forbade the offering up of it at some particular hours like those of the rising, setting and declining of the sun. Likewise, he proclaimed fasting to be a particularly favoured form of worship but, at the same time, prohibited it on certain days. We are but to carry out His commandments. It is not for us to reason why.

Abu Sa'eed Khudri narrates that "the Apostle of God has forbidden the fast of Yaum- ul Fitr and of the day of the sacrifice (of animals) (i. e. Yaumul Azha) Bukhari and Muslim

Abu Obaida Maula Ibn Azhar Tabee narrates that "I offered the Id prayers behind Omar bin Khattab. He led the service, and at the conclusion of it, delivered the sermon in which he said: The two days of Id are such that on them the Apostle of God has forbidden fasting. Of these, one is the day of your breaking lent (after the fasts of the whole of (Ramzan) and the other is the day of eating the flesh " of the animals sacrificed by you." -Muslim

It is related by Nubaisha Huzali that the Apostle of God said that "Ayyam- I -Tashriq (i. e. the 11th, 12th and 13th of Zil Hijja) are the days of eating , drinking and remembering the Lord." -Muslim

Editor's Note:

A Biased Media

A former Union Minister Chatrunan Mishra writing in a national weekly has displayed his anguish on the present chaotic situation in the country. He says that last time the partition of India and formation of Pakistan took place because of Muslim communalism but this time it is Hindu communalism that is leading us to a division of the country. The recent agitation in Jammu where road to Kashmir was blocked and buses going to Muslim areas attacked gave rise to mass anger of Muslims in Kashmir. Mishra further argues that though Indian Muslims were very angry after the demolition of the Babri masjid, Indian terrorists were not active at that time. It is after the Gujarat massacre of Muslims in 2002 that Indian terrorists groups have come up with blasts after blasts killing hundreds of innocent people, both Hindu and Muslim. The communal unity still prevails; heart burning is there all around. Muslim religious leaders have openly condemned terrorism saying it is anti Islam but the media including the TV does not flash it nor have discussions on this issue have been held to create mass awareness. Hindu religious heads like those of Bajrang dal, VHP, offshoots of the RSS and BJP, have so far not condemned the killings of Muslims and Christians.

It is unfortunate that media both in print and electronic is playing a *negative* role. The lumpen elements and destructive forces of majority groups who create havoc and indulge in killing of innocents and committing arson are hailed as 'nationalists' and 'saviours' of motherland. The poor victims if they ever retaliate are branded as 'anti-national' and a threat to the country. The most objectionable term which is used by the media is 'Islamic Terrorism' or 'Islamic Extremism' whereas the fact is that terrorists do not follow any religion. Islam like other religions prohibits and condemns killing innocent people. Indian Muslims in general condemn terrorism and have a strong opinion against it. But unfortunately their voice is never highlighted. Muslims

are victims of terrorism and also of media bias. They suffer in restrained silence. Almost all Muslim countries are victim of this menace. Like people of other religions, Muslims are equal sufferers of terrorism still for such nonsensical acts the term Islamic Terrorism is used. On this analogy why terror activities of the Irish Republican Army or the acts of LTTE, Ulfa, VHP and Bajrang Dal are not called Christian and Hindu terrorism.

In an enlightened and educated society the role of media should be sympathetic and peaceful and not biased, distorted and embittered. They should be fair in their reporting. Involvement of Bajrang Dal in manufacturing and hurling bombs in Nanded, Kanpur and at other places was downplayed. The blast in the mosque in Malegaon, Mecca Masjid Hyderabad, Dargah Ajmer Sharief and outside Jama Masjid Delhi where only Muslims were the targets/victims could never be acts of Muslims. But this escaped the attention of media perhaps deliberately.

S A

We solicit articles for publication in The Fragrance of East. Suitable remuneration will be paid to writers. We prefer receipt of articles on e-mail:
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Concept of Human Unity and Equality

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Historic Declaration of Man's Brotherhood

The second great favour conferred by the Messenger of God on human beings was the concept of equality and brotherhood of mankind. The world before him was divided by manifold divisions of castes and creeds tribes and nations some claiming the ranks of nobility for themselves and condemning others to the position of serfs and chattels.

These differences were by no means less sharp than those existing between the free-born and the slaves or between the worshipper and the worshipped . It was for the first time amidst the gloom overshadowing the world for centuries that the world heard the clarion call of human equality from the prophet of Islam.

O Mankind Your God is One and you have but one father. You are all progeny of Adam and Adam was made of clay . Lo! The noblest among you in the sight of God is one who is best in conduct . No Arab has any preference over a non - Arab nor a non - Arab over an Arab save by his piety.

His announcement was in fact a twin declaration of unity of God and unity of mankind . These are the two natural foundations for raising the edifice of peace and progress friendship and co - operation between different peoples and nations . It created a twin relationship between *human beings* that of One Lord of all mankind and the other of one father of all of them . Oneness of God was the spiritual principle of human equality just as a common lineage placed them on the same plane of humanity .

“Mankind, fear your Lord who created you of a single soul and form it created its mate and form the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women and fear God by whom you demand one another and the wombs surely God ever watches over you .”

“O mankind, We have created you male and female and made you races and tribes that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God - fearing of you. God is All knowing, All - aware.”

The prophet of Islam simultaneously announced:

“God has put an end to the convention of pagan past taking pride in your fathers; now there will be pious believers or unbelieving wrongdoers . All are sons of Adam and Adam was made of clay. No Arab excels a non - Arab but by his piety.

These were the teachings which made Islam consisting of widely different tribes, races and nations, a commonwealth of the believers hailing from many countries and regions. It conferred no privileges at all: no Bani Lavis and Brahmins of Judaism and Hinduism. No tribe or race could claim any preference over another nor any blood or lineage could lay a claim to nobility for its own sake. The only criterion recognized for preference over others was an individual's endeavour to improve his morals and character. Musnad of Imam Ahmad reports the prophet as saying: “Iranians would attain knowledge even if it were to be found in Venus.

Arabs have always showed highest marks of respect to those non-Arab scholars who have excelled them in religious disciplines and taken them as their teachers and guides. Strange though it may seem they have not conferred such titles of honour on Arabs as they have on certain non-Arab. Imam Muhammad bin Ismail-al-Bukhari was called by them as Amirul-Muminin fil Hadith (Commander of the faithful in hadith) and his Al- jami -al- Sahih was regarded as the most authentic book next only to the Quran. Imam Abul Ma ali Abdul Malik al-juwaini of Nishapur was known as Imam -ul-Haramayn (Leader of the two sacred cities) and Imam Abu Haimd Muhammad b . Muhmmad al-Ghazzali as Hujjat- ul- Islam (proof of Islam)

By the end of the first century of Islamic era non Arabs had attained distinction in almost every branch of learning and attained prominence even in such sciences as fiqh (jurisprudence) and Hadith (Traditions). Any work on literary history of the Arabs or biographies

will bear witness to this development. All this happened in the golden era of Islam when the Arabs held political power in their hands.

An eminent Arab scholar Abdul Rahman b. Khaldun expresses surprise over it. He says:

“It is a strange historical fact that most of the scholars of religious and intellectual sciences were non-Arabs. The contribution of the Arabs was extremely meagre although it was an Arab civilization and its founder was also an Arab Saibuyah held the most prominent position in Arabic .Syntax then it was Bu Ali Farsi and then Az-Zajaj and all these were non -Arabs. Same is the case with the experts in the field of hadith (Traditions) usul fiqh (principles of jurisprudence) and ilm Kalam (theological dialectics)

The announcement made by the prophet of Islam cited in the beginning was made on the historic occasion of his last Hajj. When this announcement was made perhaps . it would have been difficult for the world to fully appreciate its practical significance. It was a revolutionary call signifying release of man from the current pressures of society, its values, standards, traditions and practices.

Man always accepts any change gradually and indirectly. We can touch a covered electric wire but not a nacked one since it would hive a shock which may even cause our death. And, this declaration was then more appalling than an electric shock.

The long journey of knowledge, thought and culture has now made this revolutionary call so acceptable to us that today every political and social organization swears by the Charter of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. Now nobody is taken aback by it, but was it the same when the prophet proclaimed?

Humanity before Islams

There was a time when superiority of blood and clan was accepted as a matter of fact. There are still people who trace the descent of their forefathers from the sun or the moon.

The Quran quotes the belief then held by the Jews and Christian in these words: “The Jews and the Christians say: We are the children of God, His loved ones. The pharaohs of Egypt claimed themselves to be

incarnation of Ra, the Sungod, while India had several ruling families who arrogated themselves as the progeny of the sun (suryavansi) or the moon (chandravarsi). The emperors of Iran called themselves kesra or Chsroes which meant that Divine blood flowed in their veins. Chosroes II (khosrau parvez) had levished himself with this grandiose title: "The immortal soul among the gods and peerless God among human beings: glorious is whose name dawning with the sun- rise and light of the dark- eyed night.

The Caesars of Rome were called Augustus which meant majestic, venerable, since they were entitled to receive divine honours. The Chinese rulers deemed themselves to be the sons of Heavens. They believed that the Heaven was their God, who, with his spouse, the goddess earth, had given birth to the human beings and pau ku, ku, the Chinese Emperor, was the first born son of Heaven enjoying supernatural powers. The Arabs were so proud of their language that every nation besides their own was an ajami or dumb to them. Likewise, the Quraysh of Mecca being conscious of maintaining their superiority claimed a privileged position even during the Hajj. They never went to the plant of 'Arafat with others. They stayed in the Mosque at Mecca or went to Muzdalifa claiming that privilege on the ground that they belonged to the House of God. They also claimed themselves to be the elites of Arabia.

The most glaring peculiarity of the religio-social structure of India of the olden days was the all-powerful caste system. This rigid social order having the sanction of religion behind it allowed no inter- mixing of races for it was meant to protect the privileged position of Brahmins. It classified the population of India into four classes with reference to the vocation followed by a particular family in which an individual was born. The system which covered the whole gamut of social life in India divided the people into four caste, namely, the Brahmin or the learned and priestly class, the kshatrikyas or the fighting and ruling class, The Vaisyas or trading and agricultural people, and the Sudras or the lowest caste, created from the foot of God, in order to serve the above three classes.

This law of caste distinctions gave to the Brahmin the distinction, superiority and sanctity not enjoyed by any other caste. He was sinless and the saved even if he destroyed the three worlds; no impost could be levied on him; he could not be punished for any crime; while the Sudra could not accumulate wealth or touch a Brahmin or a sacred scripture.

The Vaisyas, or the working classes like weavers, boatmen, butchers etc, and the Sudras like scavengers were not allowed to live in a city. They came into the town after the daybreak and left it before the sun-set. Not allowed to enjoy the amenities of urban life, they lived in the rural slums.

The most precious gift that Muslims brought to India was the concept of human equality which was completely unknown to India. The Muslim society was not divided into castes and no trade was allocated to any particular class. The Muslims mixed freely, lived and dined together, all were free to read or write and carry on any occupation. The Muslim social order posed a challenge to that obtaining in India, but it also proved a blessing for it. The rigour of caste distinction was weakened and movements of social reform were able to concentrate on the shortcomings of Hindu society and consequently untouchability was removed to a large extent.

Jawahar Lal Nehru, the ex-prime Minister of India, has acknowledged the debt India owes to Islam. He writes in the Discovery of India.

The impact of the invaders from the north-west and of Islam on India had been considerable. It had crept into Hindu society the *patrifaction* of caste, untouchability, exclusiveness carried to fantastic lengths. The idea of the brotherhood of Islam and of the theoretical equality of its adherents made a powerful appeal, especially to those in the Hindu fold who were denied any semblance of equal treatment.

Impact of Islam on Hinduism can be seen in the movement of Bhakti (love and devotion) which began in South India during Muslim rule and spread to the whole country. Describing this movement Dr. Tara Chand writes:

".....along with them marched a goodly company of saintly men who addressed themselves to the common people. They spoke the common people's dialects and in the main imparted their message through word of mouth. Many of them were endowed with the gift of poetry and their homely memorable verse went direct into the heart of their listeners. Their avoidance of the learned jargon, their simple teachings stressing the love of God and of man, their denunciation of idolatry and caste, of hypocrisy, inequality and the externalia of religion, their sincerity, purity and dedicated life appealed to wide circles among the masses.

"Their utterances gave shape to the modern Indian languages. Their enthusiasm stirred the springs of life and moved men to high endeavour and unselfish behaviour. There is a strange exaltation in society in every region during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which cannot be accounted for without taking into consideration this sudden outburst of spiritual energy. These centuries are filled with voices - at once warning and encouraging - of truly noble and large-hearted men in surprisingly large numbers. Yet most of them were of humble origin and they destroyed the myth of aristocracy based on birth."

The spirit of human brotherhood built up by Islam is not hampered by concepts of racialism or sectarianism, be it linguistic, historic, traditionalistic or even of dogmatic nature.

Its power to unite different races and nations in one brotherhood has always been recognized. A noted orientalist H. A. R. Gibb says:

"But Islam has yet a further service to render to the cause of humanity ... No other society has such a record of success in uniting in an equality of status, of opportunity and of endeavour so many and so various races of mankind. The great Muslim communities of Africa, India, and Indonesia, perhaps also the small Muslim community of Japan, show that Islam has still the power to reconcile apparently irreconcilable elements of race and tradition. If ever the opposition of the great societies of the East and West is to be replaced by co-operation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition."

The British historian A. J. Toyanbee agrees with Gibb that Islam alone can efface race consciousness.

"The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue...."

"Though in certain other respects the triumph of the English-speaking peoples may be judged, in retrospect, to have been a blessing to mankind, in this perilous matter of race feeling it can hardly be denied that it has been a misfortune."

Islam was the first religion which preached and practiced democracy. The well-known Indian freedom fighter and poetess Mrs. Sarojini Naidu witnessed and affirmed this quality of Islam.

"It was the first religion that preached and practiced democracy; for, in the mosque when the call from the Minaret is sounded and the worshippers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and the king kneel side by side and proclaim, "God alone is great." I have been struck over and over again by this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man distinctly a brother. When you meet an Egyptian, an Algerian, an Indian and a Turk in London, what matters that Egypt was the motherland of one and India the motherland of another."

Malcolm X was a racist for whom devil white man' was a Satan. He shed all his prejudices on coming in contact with the Muslims. He recounts his own experience:

"During the past eleven days here in the Muslim World, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug) - while praying to the same God - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were bluest of the blue, whose hair was blondest of the blond, and whose skin was the whitest of the white. And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the white' Muslim, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana.

“We were truly all the same (brothers) - because their belief in one God had removed the white’ form their minds, the white from their behaviour, and the white, from their attitude.

“I could see from this, that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in reality the Oneness of Man - and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their differences in color.” ●

Exhortation to charity

It is related by Abu Hurairah that the Apostle of God said: “It is the message of God to every bondsman: O son of Adam! Go on spending the wealth I have given thee (on the poor, the needy and the destitute). I shall give thee more from My treasure.”

-Bukhari and Muslim

The Rights of Orphans

S. Sulaiman Nadwi

The term yatim, plural yatama in Arabia is used for the child who is deprived of the love and affection of his father due to his death. It is the duty of every member of the Muslim community to love and serve him and accord good and kind treatment to him. Islam emphasizes the need of bringing up the orphans property, taking full care of them, educating them well, handling their (orphans) properly honestly to their best interest and transferring to them their inheritance without misappropriating anything out of it. When they reach the age of competency it is also the responsibility of the members of the family to look after the female orphans and arrange for their marriages when they attain the age of maturity. These are the special instructions which the Holy Qur'an gives as to the treatment of orphans:

And give the orphans their property and substitute not the bad things (things of yours) for the good things (things of the orphans) and devour not their property (by mixing) with your property. (4:2)

Your treatment with the orphans should be based on God-consciousness and being fully aware of the fact that Allah is ever watchful of what you do and it is, your bounden duty to give the orphans their due share and avoid all such tactics by which you may be able to devour any part or the whole of their property. The care-takers are, however, permitted to mix the orphans' property with their own (2:220) when the intention behind is good but where the intention is to misappropriate the property of the orphan, it is a heinous crime, least expected of a believer. He should spend thinking well on his immediate needs and his requirements keeping in view that he is accountable for his deeds in his life in the Hereafter.

Due to constant tribal-wars and bloodshed, and lawlessness the number of orphans in Arabia was very large. There was no proper arrangement for their upbringing. Generally they were left uncared of, their being no soft corner of love and affection in the callous hearts of the Arabs. They were deprived of their share in the inherited property. The Holy Qur'an makes a mention of this malevolent treatment to the orphans in many verses:

Have you thought of him that denies the Last Judgement? It is he who turns away the orphan and does not urge others to feed the poor.

Woe to those who pray but are unmindful of their prayer; who make a show (of piety) and give no alms to the poor (107:1-7)

In another verse of the Holy Qur'an it has been said about the caretakers of the orphans who devour the wealth and property of the orphans by squandering and in haste as they should grow up.

And test well the orphans (under your charge) until they attain the age of marriage, then if you perceive in them maturity of mind, hand over to them their possession; and devour them not in extravagance and haste ere they grow up. And whosoever is rich, let him abstain (form) consuming his ward's property and whosoever is needy, let him partake thereof in a fair manner. And when you hand over the possessions unto them, call in witnesses to them, and Allah is sufficient as a Reckoner. (4:6)

And when he tests Him by restraining the subsistence, he says: My Lord humiliates me.

No! But you show no kindness to orphans, do your urge one another to feed the poor. Greedily you lay hands on the inheritance of the weak, and you love riches with all your hearts. (89:15-17)

Sahl b. Sa'd reported that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in Paradise like this, putting his index and middle fingers together.

It is forbidden to oppress the orphans, to treat them harshly. Therefore, oppress not the orphan. (93:9)

One of the most excellent qualities of the pious man is that they feed the orphans and regard them like their own children. The Holy Qur'an affirms:

And feed with food they needy, the orphan and the prisoner, for love of him.

(Saying): We feed you, for the sake of Allah only. We wish for no reward nor thanks from you. (76:8,9)

It is reported on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: The best of houses of the Muslims is that wherein there dwells an orphan who is treated well; and the worst of houses of the Muslims is one wherein there lives an orphan and is ill-treated.

An orphan made a claim to a *nakhlistan* against a person but he could not establish his claim and so the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave his decision against the orphan whereupon he began to weep. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) felt pity on him and said to the defendant: if you give this *nakhlistan*, to him your reward with Allah for this act will be Paradise; but he did not agree to make this sacrifice. A companion who was there said to the owner: Will you exchange your *nakhlistan* with such and such garden of mine. He showed his consent. The companion exchanged his garden with him there and then and gave it as a gift to the orphan. ●

Hearken Ye The Enlightened Clan

S. M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi

The following purports to be a gist of key-note address delivered by Maulana Rabey Hasani Nadwi, President Deeni Taleemi Council UP, at the conference held in distt. Pratapgarh UP on 28th of November, 2005.

The most invaluable wealth bestowed upon us by the Al-mighty is Islam, the bounties of which are available to us in this and in the life hereafter. As is the case with mundane wealth, this the most precious of all, can also be stolen from us, and hence requires as much, even greater, care and attention.

A tradition of the holy Prophet (PBUH) is explicit on this subject "Each human is born in accordance with a set natural pattern; it is the subsequent upbringing that makes for a Judaist, Jesuit or Zoroastrian." It is upto the parents or guardians to see that a child develops and grows up to be a Muslim with noble, pure character. Any laxity is likely to lead the child astray whereas, with due care and proper guidance the resultant shall be a true Muslim with noble traits.

Hadeeth (tradition) is explicitly eloquent on the subject of the onus for preserving the basic pattern created by Allah rests upon the parents. The period a child spends in the sole care of the parents is vital in laying the foundation upon which would rise the edifice of personality. The matter does not end here but is followed by formal education, dovetailed with preceding parental upbringing of course. Education normally comprises primary, secondary and higher levels and each stage needs a purveyor to be totally focussed. It needs hardly any insight to realize that life can be made purposeful, in deed and word, only by acquiring education, to which end educational institutions with properly designed, systematic syllabi are established. It is the bounden duty of all and sundry to avail of the benefits of prevailing systems. However, to any level, importance of moral education can which keeps this aspect in focus, specially as in formative years the child is influenced by all that, he or she, sees and hears, to lasting effect.

Poet Akbar Allahabadi who besides being a high ranking Civil servant and well educated in contemporary social sciences, was fully seized of the paramountcy of religion and influence of contemporary (British system) education upon nascent and developing minds, aimed a slant upon the barbaric acts of Pharaoh of Egypt, perpetrated upon Israelites by way of slaying of each new born male:

*Yoon qatl se bacchon ke who badnam no hota
Afsos ki Firaun ko college kee na soojhi*

(Pharaoh would not earn the ill repute of being a murderer of children had he just re-oriented the education to his liking.)

The British, upon assumption of power in India, achieved great success in moulding the brains of Indians to their pattern, alienating them almost, from their pristine culture, by establishing the supremacy system of education.

A person or a clan inhabiting a land with an environment not averse to indulgence in nefarious activities and unbridled indulgence, is open to attraction to glitter and glamour, and tends to develop an aversion to pious ways of Islam. This tendency needs to be thwarted by careful steadfastness in all spheres and at every level. Even if there were no guarantee under a secular system for each one to pursue his own religion, Islam is a religion based upon the promise by the Almighty that the fruits of a noble life are not confined to this world but extend externally in the after-life.

The hazards of living in a polluted environment and the steps required bulwark against them are best exemplified by the following events: As great a person like Prophet Hazrat Yaqub did not feel comfortable during the last moments of his life till he ensured that his sons (and those relinquish their true religion on any account. Hazrat Yaqub was aware of the fact that his progeny had to inhabit Egypt for ages to come and what with delinquent ways of people around, shall be open to the hazard of going astray.

And it so turned out that Israelites (descendants of Hazrat Yaqub), did continue in Egypt for several centuries. When, at last, they were led out by another great Prophet Hazrat Moosa (Moses), on their

way, chanced upon a celebration of idolatory and taken in by the pomp and hilarity, requested their Prophet for holding a similar feast. This desire was obviously a legacy of their exposure to similar festivities in Egypt. Moosa was obviously furious and admonished them to the effect that being believers in one and only God, such indulgence did not become of them. Ultimately, better sense prevailed and Israelites repented, begged for mercy from Allah.

The above two instances should forever be kept in view this day as the atmosphere in which we live is akin to the days of Israelites in Egypt, in several aspects. Specially those undergoing institutional education, while deriving full advantages, need to be appraised continuously of the basic fact that Muslims, being the chosen lot (*khair-I-ummat*), owe it to themselves not to fall out of the prescribed way of life. And they, in fact owe it to the entire humanity by presenting an example. The action to inculcate and ingrain such characteristics is to be performed in every home, family and at all levels, so that success comes our way on the Day of Judgement, for there is no pleasure greater than that of Allah and his holy Prophet (PBUH).

The preacher would have fulfilled their bounden duty in having conveyed the Divine message to all and sundry. ●

Auspiciousness of charity

It is related by Anas that the Apostle of God said: "Charity cools down the fire of Allah's wrath and wards off an evil death."

-Tirmizi

UK gets Sharia Courts to decide Muslim cases

London. Five Sharia courts in Britain now have "official" powers to rule on Muslim civil cases, according to a report.

The rulings made by the five courts in London, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, and Nun-eaton in Warwickshire are enforceable with the full power of the judicial system, through the county courts or high court, according to the Sunday Times. The issues that the "official" Sharia courts can rule on range from financial rows to divorce and domestic violence.

Two more Sharia courts will be started in Edin burgh and Glasgow son, the report said.

Till now, the rulings of Sharia courts in Britain could not be enforced and depended on voluntary compliance among Muslims.

The Sharia courts are run by Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, which was set up in 2007 to provide a viable alternative for the Muslim community seeking to resolve disputes in accordance with Islamic law. UK Muslim lawyer Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi, is chairman of the governing council of the Muslim Arbitration Tribuna.

Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi, according to the report, had taken advantage of a clause in the Arbitration Act 1996 to give rulings of the Sharia courts legal backing. Under the Arbitration Act 1996, the Sharia courts are classified as arbitration tribunals.

(Asian Age 16. 09. 2008)

Restoring the confidence of Muslims

Vidya Subrahmaniam

India's battle with terrorism is not new. Far from it, our ears have become attuned to hearing about bomb blasts and our eyes accustomed to seeing images of death and devastation. Yet something has materially changed this time. The recent serial blasts in Delhi and the police encounter that killed two alleged terrorists and injured a third in Jamia Nagar, have opened up a debate, raising an avalanche of questions. There is an explosion of anger at the increasing frequency and boldness of terror creating frequency and boldness of terror strikes, a frightening state of affairs magnified by the helplessness of the government.

Alongside, there is growing concern at the methods used by the police and the investigating agencies and their effect on Muslims - a community increasingly feeling under siege. More and more voices are also asking why the Bajrang Dal, which has a proven history of bomb-making, and which, in tandem with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, has been on an orgy of murder and mayhem in State after State, cannot be banned.

Television channels have traditionally run with the police stories. These make for riveting viewing - sensational footage of hooded and chained terrorists paraded before a sea of voracious cameras; pen sketches of shadowy men forging links across the country and beyond the borders; tales of myriad masterminds working to undermine the Indian state and so forth. There had been no let-up in this - the blasts and the alleged terrorists continue to appear in endless onscreen loops, with many channels embroidering and enlarging the official accounts with their own in-house art work, graphics and re-enactments.

Nonetheless, there are station heads who have pushed the envelope - asking inconvenient questions and exploring sensitive areas previously avoided by an unwritten consensus. Sections of the print media have dared to go even beyond, raising taboo questions, chasing police and other leads, crosschecking the minutes detail and uncovering the real, human stories behind the hooded faces splashed on television and front-paged by newspapers. The pictures that have emerged from these efforts are often dramatically different from the accounts put out by the police.

It can be nobody's case that the police-intelligence versions are all concoctions. To allege this would be to undermine a force that works under the most trying conditions and that is almost always stretched to a breaking point. Yet policemen are fallible, and under ceaseless pressure to show quick and visible results. Police departments in different States also compete to claim credit. The disastrous effect of all this has been illustrated time and again - in the form of encounters that have proven to be staged, by hasty investigations that have led to innocent people being framed. A recent example of this is the Aarushi murder case which saw the Uttar Pradesh police making the crudest accusations against the murdered girl and her father. The media exaggerations and lies forced the Supreme Court to issue warnings against irresponsible journalism. The apex court also ordered an investigation into the encounter of alleged gangster Sohrabuddin, which resulted in the Gujarat government admitting that the encounter was fake.

Today, such is the distrust in the investigative arm of the government that any encounter is automatically assumed to be fake. However till now the media have hesitated to question the police claims, especially when these have related to terrorism. This is mainly on account of the association between counter-terrorism and nationalism. The aftermath of a bomb blast is an extraordinarily delicate moment given the very real suffering experienced by those at terror's receiving end. For the journalist to raise even the faintest doubt when a terror case is projected to have been solved at such a time is to risk being called anti-national.

The recent vigorous discourse in the media suggests that this burden may have been lifted. What explains this? Probably one significant realization: that unvetted police claims can have the unwitting effect of tarring an entire community when only a minuscule section is involved in terrorism.

Terrorism is a reality as much as the fact that there is a Muslim connection to it. The new trend of young educated Muslims taking to terror cannot be dismissed as fiction. However, the vast majority of Muslims are ordinary citizens, the bulk of them poor and illiterate. Importantly, a section among the community is just beginning to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty and joblessness. Aspirationally different from their parents, these young people want higher education, a career and integration with the mainstream. If the confidence and self-respect of these young adults are undermined, they will return to their familiar world of obscurantism and backwardness. This will hurt Muslims, of course, but the collective grievance

of a 150-million strong community will hurt India even more, tearing its already frayed social fabric beyond repair.

Jamia Nagar, the scene of the September 19 police encounter, underscores this point. The raid killed two alleged terrorists, Mohammad Bashir Atif and Mohammad Fakruddin Sajed, and injured a third, Saif Ahmad.

Disputed claims

Residents of Jamia Nagar simply do not buy the police version that the youths were hardcore terrorists who plotted and executed all the recent bomb blasts. Nor do they accept that the several young men picked up subsequently were all part of a lethal terror network that struck at will in places as far apart as Mumbai, Varanasi, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Delhi. For every terror story put out by the police, residents offer a counter story of innocence that is *prima facie* hard to disregard.

The police might insist that Atif and his flat-mates formed the backbone of the Indian Mujahideen's nationwide operations. But for Jamia Nagar residents, they were simply *masoom bachche* (innocent children), who, like so many other Muslim boys from the Hindi heartland, had come to Delhi with a dream: to work hard, earn a degree and achieve social status and respect. Atif was enrolled as a student at the next-door Jamia Millia University, as were the subsequently arrested Zia-ur-Rehman and Mohammad Shakeel. The Orkut profile of Atif reveals a youth like any other - friendly and nonpolitical. His favourite films: the ultra-national Mother India and Rang de Basanti!

Of course, the Orkut profile could have been a clever disguise. But there are other niggling questions. Police reports said Atif had stashed away erores in his bank account in Azamgarh. He had a little over Rs. 1000. One of Atif's cousins told India Today's group paper, Mail Today, that he had dropped a few examination papers because he could not afford the fee. The cousin bought him a cell phone, the bills for which Atif could not pay.

More relevantly, Atif submitted his tenant verification papers, complete with his correct personal details, to the Jamia Nagar police station details, to the Jamia Nagar police station on August 21. The police charge that the papers and the police seal were forged is contested by Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan who examined the papers and the seal. After the encounter, Zia-ur-Rehman, the caretaker of Atif's apartment, took the papers to a television station. He was picked up by the police and instantly labelled an IM

operative. Sajed, who was enrolled in a Delhi coaching class, was only 17. He left his Azamgarh home as recently as July 10. His father recalls a shy, reticent son, reluctant to leave his mother's embrace.

Jamia residents ask to know if hardcore terrorists would voluntarily go to police stations and television studios to present their correct personal details. Atif's mobile phone forms also carry his correct personal details.

The police claims regarding Atif and his friends may well be true. There may be perfect explanations for the details unearthed by the media and incessantly thrown at visiting journalists by Jamia Nagar residents. If so, that is all the more reason for terror investigations to be rigorous, clean and transparent. This is necessary as much to protect the innocent as to establish the reliability and credibility of the police. The case of Australian resident Mohammad Haneef, described by the police and the Indian media as the mastermind of the 2007 Glasgow blasts, is a lesson worth remembering. Thanks to transparent investigation by the Australian police and relentless scrutiny by the Australian media, Haneef was shown to be completely innocent.

The alternative to transparency is doubt and suspicion - a situation we simply cannot afford. Today, Indian Muslims are in denial of terrorism: Every encounter is fake and every bomb blast is the handiwork of the establishment. Of course, this is absurd. But for Muslims to be convinced of this truth, the innocent among them must be protected - and with the entire resources at the command of the Indian state. The community must be also be assured that the state will not measure the Bajrang Dal by a different yardstick.

To question Jamia Millia University Vice-Chancellor Mushirul Hasan's offer of legal aid to terror suspects - as the Bharatiya Janata Party has done - is to strike at the presumption of innocence which is a sacred law of the land. To show leniency to the Bajrang Dal, which has been caught red-handed making bombs and spreading terror, is to compound this error.

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The Impact of Islamic Arts on The West

Bilal Ahmad Kutty

The expression of spirituality and religion in relation to culture is often sought in the form of art and creativity. The aesthetic dimension undoubtedly has a profound significance for Muslim cultures, and it springs naturally from the celebration of divine creativity. As the prophet observed in a celebrated hadith, "God is beautiful and loves beauty". Islamic art as such is hard to define. As two prominent art historians have pointed out, "It is easier to say what Islamic art is not what it is... Islamic art refers neither to art of a specific era nor to that of a particular place or people... Islamic art is neither a style nor a movement, and the people who made it were not necessarily Muslims... Whereas some Islamic art was undoubtedly made by Christian and Jews for Muslim art was undoubtedly made by Christian and Jews for Muslim patrons, some Islamic art made by Muslims was intended for Christians or Jews." 1

The idea of a traditional Islamic art and architecture that began in 7th - century Syria and grew to encompass the art and architecture of the lands from the Atlantic to the Indian Oceans is a creation of late 19th and 20th century western thought. According to Blair and Bloom, there is no evidence that early Muslim artists ever thought their work as Islamic. Nor can it be said that there is a dominant style or influence that defines Islamic art. The Moorish Alhambra and the Indian Taj Mahal show that Islamic art and architecture has definite regional variations. However, scholars have devoted much effort to the identification of unifying principles in Islamic art - geometric design and arabesque, for example. It can however be said, that the art and architecture of Islamic countries has long influenced the west. Painting such as The Reception of a Venetian Embassy in Damascus, attributed to the school of Belling in the early 16th century, was undoubtedly the work of an artist familiar with the topography and monuments of Damascus. And the 17th century Dutch painter Rembrant owned a collection of several dozen Mughal and Deccani painting which he copied.2

The influential Viennese publication of John Bernhard Fischer Von Erlach's general history of architecture in 1721 included Arab, Turkish and Persian architectural representations. The book lead to the design of several European structures in a quasio-o-riental manner. According to Bloom and

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Blair, "Although Fischer von Erlach's sources were such public monuments as mosques, the resulting designs were almost exclusively for such civil structures as Kiosks, pavilions, palaces, and theaters, all pertaining to an architecture of leisure with which the Orient was invariably associated. 3

In 1750, Frederick, the Prince of Wales, commissioned the English architect William Chambers (1723-1796) to design an "Alhambra" for the gardens at Kew. The resulting design had little in common with the original Alhambra in Spain except for the paired slender columns used for support. Chambers followed this design with an octagonal pavilion in the form of a mosque. It was based on a free improvisation on the domed Ottoman mosques flanked by minarets illustrated by Fisher von Erlach.4

As European visitors to Turkey became familiar with the Kiosks in the public gardens where coffee and other beverages were served, the visitors brought home their interest in the structures. And the new Kiosks built in Europe not only served their original function as garden pavilions but also developed into band - stands and news - stands.

British artists and architects also found inspiration in the monuments of Muslim India. One of the first British artists to visit Agra, William Hodges (1746-1797), drew and painted the beauties of the Taj Mahal. And English landscape painter Thomas Daniell (1749-1840) published Oriental Scenery in six folio - sized parts between 1795 and 1808. Blair and Bloom write that each part had 24 hand - colored aquatint plates that brought Indian scenes to a wide audience. The popularity of the prints led Daniell to publish a separate volume dedicated exclusively to the Taj Mahal. Daniell later was hired as a consultant to help design a British residence with such features as bulbous dome with corner chatris and overhanging eaves, cusped arches and pinnacles.5

George IV commissioned architect John Nash (1752-1835) to remodel an unfinished structure at the Royal Pavilion. With inspiration from Daniell's publications, Nash designed a pavilion with a large central ogival dome offset by four subsidiary domes. The Orient fantasy, write Blair and Bloom, extended as far as the kitchens, where iron palm trees with copper fronds support the roof, but Nash used the latest technology, such as cast-iron ceiling frames and columns. In addition to giving the royal nod to the Oriental mode, the building set the style for glazed conservatories with bulbous domes.6

Alhambra also drew attention of the visitors from Europe and America. After visiting the site, British architect Owen Jones designed two palatial

houses in Kensington Palace Gardens in the Moorish style. And in 1854, he created an Alhambra Court, following the Court of the Lions, for the reconstructed Vrystal Palace in Sydenham. Some of the earliest and finest examples of Orientalism in Western painting were produced by French artist Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) who had been to Morocco in 1832. Delacroix's opportunity to visite a harem, resulted in a picture such as his Femmes d'Alger, painted two years later in 1834. 7

After touring Syria, Palestine and Europe, American landscape painter Fredric Church (1826-1900) did a series of Mediterranean compositions that included scenes from Jerusalem and Petra. Church also returned from his trip with an enthusiasm for Islamic architect. And after 1870, he devoted most of his efforts to the design and construction of his estate at Greendale-On-Hudson, New York. The mansion was called Olana, from the Arabic word for Our place on high. The house combined Alhambra motifs, simplified Hindu detail and Persian tilework says Blair and Bloom. 8

A number of 19th century international exhibitions further introduced the West to Islamic arts. The great Exhibition of 1851 at London's Vrystal Place included Persian exhibits of carpets and carpet design that held influence over William Morris (1834-1896), the poet, designer and theorist of the Arts and Crafts movement. Morris did not imitate the Persian designs but found inspiration in their geometric patterns. Morris' own carpet design - with their rich colors, coherent patterns and planar surfaces - show the impact Persian Vase carpets had on the English artist. 9

Decerning European collectors were drawn to ceramics from the Islamic world. British collectors amassed collections of Ottoman ceramics known as Damascus or Rhodian wares, as well as Persian luster tiles and vessels and, according to Blair and Bloom, this interest led to a revival of luster techniques in Europe. The designs of ceramicist-artist William De Morga (1839-1917) says Blair and Bloom, exemplify the Islamic mood that began to appear in the 1880s, partly as an expression of the Near Eastern romanticism and partly because of the affinity of the arabesque with the sinuous forms favoured by the Art Noveau movement. 10

According to Blair and Bloom, the French painter Henri Matisse (1869-1954) may be the greatest Western artist to integrate his own work with the influences of Islamic art. Matisse not only attended a number of exhibitions of Islamic art, but he also traveled to southern Spain, Morocco, and Algeria. Matisse's predecessors had added Oriental motifs to give their works an exotic

flavor, Matisse actually incorporated the lessons he learned from viewing Islamic art into his paintings. In the Painter's Family, for example, Matisse's tripartite composition and the flattened perspective are devices common to Persian manuscript paintings, as are figure that seem to float in space. However, it should be noted that while the arts in 19th-20th century European and American countries were feeling the influence of Islamic arts and architecture, the reverse was occurring as well. Islamic arts and architecture began to experience the influence of Western artistry - and technology. ●

Note and References:

1. Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Art*, (London : Phaidon Press, 1977), 1, introduction.
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The Dignity of Humanity

Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

Allah is the Lord of the Heavens and of the earth and of all that between them. "To Allah belongs all that is in the Havens and earth: to Allah do all matters return." But out of all creatures mankind has been endowed with highest rank, status and dignity. He Himself says: "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 (S. 17, A70). We may easily comprehend the position of mankind through the following verse of the holy Qur'an. "And when thy Lord said unto the angels! Lo! I am about to place a vice-regent in the earth, they said: 'wilt Thou place therein the earth one who will do harm and will shed blood. We hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee. He said: Surely I know that which ye know not". (S.2, A, 30)

The above mentioned two verses of the holy Qur'an indicate that God bestowed upon human beings the highest position as compared to other creatures of Him.

The dignity of mankind has been emphasized by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in a hadith which runs: "Allah will ask on the Day of Judgement : "O Children of Adam, I fell ill but you did not come to see Me? Man will say in reply, 'Allah! Thou wert the Lord of the worlds! How could have I attended Thee? God will then say; Did you to know one of my servants had fallen ill, but you did not come to attend him. Did you not know that if you had attended him, you would have found Me by his side?

"O Children of Adam, I asked for water from you, but you refused it to Me, God will ask. Man will again say in reply, Thou wert the Lord of the world, How could have I quenched Thy thirst?" God will answer, one of my servants demanded water from you but you refused. Had you given him water you would have found Me near him.

Late S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (RAH) says regarding this saying of the Prophet: "Can there be a better concept of human dignity and nobility? Has man ever been granted this honour in any religion or social philosophy?"

Needless to add that God has put every thing in the Heavens and the earth in the service of mankind. Besides mankind was endowed with the faculty of knowledge. This is the biggest divine bounty and greatest asset for

mankind. Knowledge is such an essence through which human beings may distinguish between good and evil and Halal (permitted) and Haram (Prohibited) and may live with peace and amity by restoring human dignity, nobility and grandeur.

It is obvious that with whom we love we do not harm him and always try to keep him happy and cheerful. The same is the treatment of God with His creatures and servants. Accordingly, God taught us various ways and devices to perpetuate human dignity and as to how we live with each other with peace and serenity. He says: "O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others; it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others; it may be that the latter are better than the (former) not defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) wickedness, (to be used of one) after those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong. (S49, A.11) He further says: "O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it.... But fear Allah : for Allah is oft returning, most merciful", (S49, A. 12). God further lays great stress on human dignity by declaring that "If any one slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one save a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people." (S. 5.A32)

He further warns us saying that "The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His messenger, and strive with his might and main for mischief through the land is: execution or crucifixion, or the cutting off hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land : that is their disgrace is this world and a heavy punishment is their's in the hereafter." (S.5.A 33)

In this context it should be kept in mind that God sent Prophets and messengers to show people the path of salvation. All Prophets performed their duties with integrity and honesty.

But a long time had passed since the raising of Jesus by God, humanity had reached the edge of precipice. People had gone astray. Even divine books were not intact. Hence God sent Muhammad (SAW) to extricate people from the darkness to lead the right path and enlightenment. It is Muhammad who first taught people the lesson of brotherhood, fraternity, love and equality. Besides he first introduced Human Rights and stressed its importance. Indeed the last sermon of the Prophet was the first Charter of Human Rights. Maulana S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (RAH)

says: "The world before the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was divided by manifold divisions of castes and creeds, tribes and nations, some claiming ranks of nobility for themselves and condemning others to the position of serfs and chattels. It was for the first time that the world heard the revolutionary message of human equality from the Prophet of Islam."

O" mankind, your God is one and you have but one father. You are all progeny of Adam and Adam was made of clay. Lo! The noblest among you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct. No Arab has any preference over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab save by his piety." The Prophet said: "The entire creation constitutes the family of God and he is dearest to Him who is the best in his dealings with God's family." Narrated Anas: The Prophet (SAW) said: "none of you will have faith till he wishes for his brother what he likes for himself. He said: "A person whose neighbour is not safe from his acts of misdemeanor shall not enter Paradise".

"He who has had a full meal while his neighbour sleeps at night on an empty stomach is not a true Muslim" Narrated Musa ®: some people asked Allah's apostle (S) whose Islam is the best? i.e. (who is a very good Muslim?" He replied. "One who avoids harming the Muslims with his tongue and hands."

Despite these instructions and advice of the holy Qur'an and Sunnah, if any Muslim gets involved in unholy and anti-social activities, he is not a good Muslim. What to speak of harming and killing any one, a true Muslim can not even call anyone names.

It is imperative that we must keep away from inhuman and terroristic acts. No religion allows such sort of atrocities and offences. If anyone commits such kind of heinous crimes and wrong doings, he is not true follower of his faith. He is reprobate, malevolent and not loyal to his religion.

The need of the hour is that we should abide by the teachings of our respective religions in letter and spirit. Moreover, we must develop humanitarian attitude and come forward to render welfare and charitable services for the poor and down-trodden sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed, colour and region.

To sum up the argument it will be apt to quote the Prophet "God shows His mercy on those who show mercy to others." Maulana Hali has beautifully and ably composed the above tradition of the Prophet in this couplet.

*"Karo Mehrabani tum Ahle Zamī par
Khuda mehraban hoga Arshe-Barīn par"*

(Be kind to man on earth God will be kind to you on the Emyprean). ●

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