

ISLAM
FACTS
VS
FICTIONS

TEARING THE VEIL OF
MISCONCEPTIONS

SYED HAMID MOHSIN


SALAAM Centre
Promotes Peace and Brotherhood
www.misconceptions.in www.salaamcentre.in

ISLAM Facts vs Fictions

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Introduction

We are living through troubled times. Nation-states have spawned umpteen divides in the human society which was already much divided along ethnic and religious lines. Inter-community relations are under constant threat from forces out to exploit religious, casteist and linguistic sentiments. Religion is being used for dividing people rather than finding them spiritual solace. Consumerism and commercialism have combined together to rob the people and the nations of their natural wealth and peace. The forces of consumerism that guide the global powers are bent upon promoting wars to keep the wheels of arms industry roaring. Academia, research institutes and media that could have exposed their designs are wary of criticizing them, dependant as they are upon their largesse. It is an irony of our times that without their support, the voice of the civil society has no scope to be heard.

Admittedly, promotion of wars have to be preceded with hate campaigns by the media, a necessity for provoking hostility through stereotypes and demonization of Muslim community. These have taken a heavy toll of social harmony around the world. So, today we see a lot of hate being spewed through globalised channels and war-mongering from seats of power. Doctrine of 'You are either with us or with the terrorists' is used to silence the ones who are undecided, neutral or merely silent unable to judge the circumstances.

The word Islam and Muslims trigger images of bearded fighters with bloodshot eyes, stinger missiles slinging by their shoulders. These images dominate our airwaves, screens and newspapers. Political discourses revolve round, *Jihad, mullah,*

Mujahideen, Fatwa, Kafir, Sharia, Shia, Sunni, Wabbabi and Madrasa. Terms like these have come handy for justifying the West's 'War on Terror'. Over the years, the steady propaganda dished out by the media has targeted Muslims. These biases are rooted in misconceptions of history, competition over resources of the poor and politics. Faith and social ethos of the poor, the powerless and the underdogs therefore come for demonization. They are blamed for all the ills around the world. Laughably, the victims of the superpower terror and economic greed are themselves being accused of terrorism. Concepts such as *Jihad* are misinterpreted as declaration of war against the innocents. There is hardly any mistaking who is behind this game of making the villains of the innocents.

There is no doubt who is eyeing the oil wells and energy resources and thereby in need of hatred and wars. It is time for us to see through the game and dissect the blatant lies. An effort at developing positive understanding of each other's faith will go a long way in bringing the people together and benefit from each other's strengths.

The West has done a good deal of work to promote misunderstandings among communities. The so-called war on terror responsible for more than a million deaths in the Middle East is rooted in spurious theories such as 'clash of civilisation', a 'Fourth World War' and supremacy of whites. Not long ago two-nation theory did the same for the subcontinent. These need to be countered at the level of thought and ideas. But the current discourse has been mainly one-sided, with no effort to make the people aware of the Western interventionism in the Third World, West-sponsored coups and foisting of dictators on weaker nations. Nor is there any talk of highhandedness of Israel which was implanted in the heart of the Middle East by way of compensating for the European crimes against Jews.

Though larger issues do come under discussion to the extent they cast shadow on the subcontinent, this book specifically targets the average Indian mind and deals with misconceptions that bedevil the Hindu-Muslim ties in India. It is purely intended to explain the basic concepts of Islam and the way Indian ethos, customs and ecology have shaped the cultural practices of Muslims in this part of the region. It deals with the mish-mash of issues and tries to separate out various strands of them that link them with strategic aims of the global powers, war on terror, electoral politics and expedient urges of such politics that lead to deliberate mischief from vested interests. It is not an exercise to prove Muslims innocent, nor to lay entire blame upon others. Delinquencies, divergences and deviant practices of Muslims too come under scrutiny just as note has been taken of compulsion of life's miseries in South Asia burdened as it is with overpopulation and attendant pressures on resources and competition for scarce resources which often assumes communal overtones.

It is quite likely that the book may be seen as an attempt at highlighting the Muslim grievances against others, particularly the West. That is indeed the case because they have largely remained unheard in the high decible cacophony raised over sporadic cases of terrorist-inspired violence which are easily blamed upon Muslims. Muslims, being largely media have-nots, have least chance of being heard and even lesser felicity and sophistication in putting up a cogent perspective. So the effort here is to make Muslim side of the discourse easier to understand and make it clear to all what they think and feel and how it gels with their worldview and where it collides with others'. It is certainly not an exercise in creating a balance sheet of the positive and negatives stacked on either side of the Islam-West divide. This is being done in the hope that this would lead to building greater understanding on either side thereby creating scope for cooperation.

If the people have to be brought closer to each other and made to live in peace and harmony by making them contribute to progress, biases and phobias have to be fought at the ideological levels. These should then penetrate down to the masses in the form of social action for the betterment of quality of life by people of all communities. The awareness about truth behind the politics behind communalism and 'War on terror' needs to be taken to broad layers of our society.

Some of us have been engaged in doing this for several years. There is a need to expedite it even further and bring in more of us, activists, teachers and concerned individuals. To help promote this crucial work we have brought out this book, *'ISLAM, Facts vs Fictions'*, Tearing the veil of Misconceptions.





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Love Binds Us

The manipulation of India's religious tensions by militants, criminals, and politicians highlight the extent to which religious sentiments are vulnerable to exploitation. These may serve their interest, but the social cost gets evident from the disturbing divide between the Hindus and Muslims

A veteran Indian political leader comments that 'there is often a tendency in India to treat Muslims as them rather than us. And this tendency does have terrible manifestations. Even today, by and large, Muslims have not been admitted to what we call the Indian mainstream?

Extremism is nourished by mistrust which in turn feeds on myths, half-truths and falsehood. Extremist forces therefore employ everything that provoke hatred and arouse passion to their service. They foment unreasonable hatred against others and foster unnecessary pride in oneself. Mocking others and exaggerating one's own importance, power, or reputation is popular pastime for them. Tools that have gained currency for the purpose have promoted distorted history, image-tarring exercises and promotion of siege mentality.

Indian Muslims, now constituting over 160 million people, have been the constant targets of the criticism and defamation campaign. Such is the atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion that it requires only a small incident to light the fuse of violence against them. Rarely did we behave as citizens of secular and plural democracy where religion acts as a positive force to bind us in brotherhood of love and mutual

respect. Questions like who did this and why, are too obvious to be answered. But the reality is that much of the mud that has been slung has stuck and requires vigorous rubbing. This is possible only if channels of communication are opened between the two principal communities in India and a concerted effort is made to foster understanding between them within the social, cultural and historical context. They have to understand and respect each other's faith, and build communal harmony and brotherhood. 'Hate divides and love binds us', should be the motto in the struggle to put the nation on the trajectory of peace and prosperity.

Popular Stereotypes

Stereotypes of Muslim image and attitude abound in the society. For example in a common man's knowledge, the Muslim Personal Law is confined to the 'facility' of four wives and three Talaq (divorces) to discard an unwanted wife. Similarly, all Muslims are generally considered to be detestful of family planning. These practices then come handy for explaining the 'prolific growth of the community' which is further projected as a 'demographic deluge out to overwhelm the majority'. Distortions of history add further fuel to fire. For instance the canard of forcible conversion of people to Islam; demolition of temples and construction of mosques on their debris; desecration of idols; paint Muslim kings in villainical light thereby justifying, if not demanding, revenge or retaliation. Myth of block Muslim voting and stray forays by Muslim parties into electoral arena are interpreted in terms of a minority's political designs. When certain political parties play gimmicks like declaration of national holiday on Prophet's birthday or even initiate measures to improve the lot of the Muslims, it is looked upon as appeasement and dubbed minorityism. Stage is then set for psychic rupture and confrontation.

Biased History

Biased characterization of historical personalities such as Aurangzeb and Tipu Sultan also serves the partisan political needs of today to widen the gap between Hindus and the Muslims. For instance Aurangzeb's demolition of Banares temple is selectively highlighted. No mention is made of the fact that he also razed the Jama Masjid of Golconda when its premises was misused for storing ill-gotten wealth by Qutb Shahi monarch Abul Hasan Tanashah. In both instances, Aurangzeb found the places of worship misused.

Polygamy

The myth of polygamy amongst the Muslims is also very firmly sustained in popular imagination. The correlation of polygamy with demographic expansion is the most simplistic concoction to have taken grip of our psyche. Overall the number of children born depends on the number of women in the reproductive age group and is limited by that. On first count it is immaterial whether a man is having one or more wives as the total number of children depends on the number of women, which does not get influenced by polygamy. If at all, this number of women has more to do with the prevalence of social practice of female infanticide and 'bride burnings' in the areas where the practice of extortion by parents of 'grooms' called dowry is prevalent.

Secondly the male-female ratio cannot permit the 'luxury' of four wives to the Muslim males unless three-fourths (75%) of them go without marriage. As per 1981 census the male/female ratio for Muslims was 1.068 and for Hindus 1.072 i.e. for every 1,000 Muslim females there are 1,068 Muslim males. One has to conceive of gigantic mental acrobatics, in the light of these statistics, to believe that all Muslim males can have four wives.

As such a slightly earlier but relevant statistics of polygamy (1961 census report) totally smashes the myth of Muslim polygamy; unless the social trends have worsened drastically, which obviously have not. As per this the incidence of polygamy is highest among the Adivasis (15.25%) followed by Buddhists (7.9%), Jains (6.72%) Hindus (5.80%) and lo and behold! followed by Muslims (5.70%); Research carried out by Mallika B. Mistry of Gokhale Institute of Pune, concludes “there is no evidence that the percentage of polygamous marriage (among Muslims) is larger than those among Hindus”.

Propaganda machine of some extremist organisations has done a ‘remarkable job’ by making Hum do, hamare do: Woh panch, unke puchchis, {We (Hindus) practice two children norm, They (Muslims) practice four wives, twenty five children norm}, a reference to permission for Muslim husbands being permitted to have four wives. This then is picked up by propagandists to tar the entire Muslim community. How erroneous could be the impression and malicious would be the impact, is only to be guessed!

A survey conducted in 1993 in eight blocks of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, covering almost the entire Muslim population of the city, found that there were only 279 cases of single individuals having two wives. Reporting the result The Hindustan Times (July 13, 2003) wrote: “While Muslims have often been jeered, that fact is that Hindus are also involved in polygamous practices. As many as 29,951 cases of Maitri Karar (friendship contract) were found officially registered at the District Collectorate in Ahmedabad at that time. The Maitri Karar was a pact between a married Hindu man and his ‘other woman’ to circumvent provisions of the Hindu Marriage Act that prohibits another marriage while the wife is still alive.” The daily further added: “It was not legally enforceable, but the Maitri Karar was meant to give a sense of security to the married man’s ‘other woman’”.

Pakistan and Indian Muslims

It is a great myth propagated by extremist groups that Pakistan is holy land for Muslims. In fact, there is no religious significance attached with Pakistan as is the case with Makkah, where Kaabah is situated and Madina where the Mosque of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is situated. Pakistan could be one of the 57 Muslim countries across the world like Malaysia, Chad or Uzbekistan. Likewise there is no importance attached to Pakistan's flag. Indian Muslims neither worship that flag nor consider hoisting it as an act of virtue. It is flag of a nation like any other. No religious, social or political leader in India ever suggested or propagated celebrating the victory of Pakistan in a cricket or a hockey match instead the refrain is to be loyal to the country they reside in and take pride in its national symbols. There is no shrine in Pakistan which is visited by Indian Muslims. Nearly all holy shrines of Muslims remained within India after Partition. Curiously, Indian Sikhs visit a Gurudwara Dera Baba Nanak in Lahore (Pakistan) and Hindus visit shrines at Katasraj near Islamabad.

786

Cross is the symbol of Christianity. Om or swastika symbolizes Hinduism. People, who are accustomed to identify religions with visual symbols, often end up considering the figure of 786 or the crescent and star as symbols of Islam. So entrenched has it become in public imagination that any appeals directed towards religious groups come to rely on these symbols. Islam itself has neither prescribed nor officially recognized any symbols for its identification.

The figure of 786 is purported to represent Bismillahir

Rahmaanir Raheem in Arabic. This is a short prayer which appears before the beginning of every chapter of the Quran. It is recommended that a Muslim should begin all his assignments with this prayer which means 'I begin in the name of Allah, Who is Compassionate and Merciful'. Arabic has this tradition of assigning a numerical value to every single of its alphabets. This is known as Abjad system of calculation. The numerical value of alphabets that go into making Bismillahir Rahmaanir Raheem totals up to 786. Some people prefer to write 786 instead of writing the whole prayer when they are recording something in writing or doing something as writing a letter. It carries no religious sanction in Islam. It is merely a literary tradition prevalent in Arabic literature. Hence no religious significance should be attached to it.

Some superstitions morph into modern forms. Likewise, the 786 too finds into modern gadgets and gizmos. Some rich Muslims would like their cars to bear registration numbers to have 786 as the final three digits. Some would like them to be final digits in their cell numbers. They do not even mind spending fancy sums to acquire them. Yet others would opt for them merely because they are easy to remember and convey to others. The celluloid industry too would like to exploit the emotive appeal of the number as could be seen in Shahrukh Khan playing the 'Qaidi no. 786 in Lahore jail' in the Bollywood blockbuster *Veer Zarah*.



Crescent and Star and Communal Campaigns

Islamic calendar follows lunar movement. Islam's Hijri calendar which was introduced in the era of second Caliph or the Head of Islamic State, Hazrat Umar, began to base itself on the lunar calendar starting with first Hijra from the date of the migration of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from Makkah to Madinah. Important rituals such as Hajj, fasting month of Ramazan, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha coincide with various phases of Moon. It is therefore very crucial that appearance of crescent is recorded accurately as it constitutes beginning of the Islamic month. The Ottoman Caliphate of Turkey which brought under its domain a vast area of Europe and Asia took the crescent and star as the symbol of their caliphate or kingdom and put this on their flag. From then on the Muslim world began to emulate the Ottoman flag. Following the traditions, several Muslim states have adopted crescent and star as part of their national emblem. It however does not bear any religious significance. Nor does it carry any sanctity.

Sometimes, ignorant Muslims take crescent and star as sacred to signify Islam. It is why we see green flags bearing crescent and star hoisted over many graveyards or dargahs (mausoleum). As such Islam has neither prescribed nor sanctified this symbol, though it is part of the flags of several modern Muslims states. The Ottoman Empire had adopted it as its official symbol and it found a place on their flag for

nearly four centuries. Even a crescent-star symbol was implanted in the garden overlooking the White House in Washington DC in recent years in recognition of Muslim presence and influence in the United States. Nothing in the holy text of Islam recognizes or recommends its use as emblem, seal or flag of a Muslim state. So no religious sanctity should be attached to it.

Mischief-mongering

Interestingly, the rightists Hindutva organizations try to confuse the general public by mixing issues such as flags bearing crescent and star with Pakistani flag. While crescent and star is associated with flags symbolic of Muslims and can be seen fluttering at graveyard or dargahs, the Pakistani flag has a white vertical strip on the left which covers about a fourth of the portion on the left side.

Pakistani Flag

Curiously, the rightists Hindutva organizations who have been in the forefront of accusing Muslims of being less patriotic have often tried to confound the general public of traditional crescent and star bearing Muslim flag being Pakistani flag. But one would not have imagined these communal bodies going a step further by themselves hoisting a Pakistani flag on a government office as a stratagem to foment communal strife. As is reported from Karnataka, the police rounded up six Sri Rama Sene activists from Sindagi in Belgaum district in January 2012. (See *The Hindu*, January 11, 2012). Curiously, the Rama Sene youth had themselves hoisted the Pakistani flag on the Tehsildar Office and had blamed the town's Muslim community of the act. One would not have expected the communalists to be so crude in their methods to incite the public sentiments and also being caught in the act.

Objectionable Meat

Close on the heels, four Hindu youths were caught for throwing pieces of beef in several temples in communally sensitive city of Hyderabad around the first week of April 2012 leading to communal violence. The police who acted swiftly, arrested four Hindu youths within the span of next week for the desecration of the temple with the intention of inciting communal trouble.

What these incidents signify is that people should not be excessively obsessed with religious symbols or their desecration. In a plural democracy like India's, there is no dearth of mischief mongers who try to cash in upon such sentiments and can set the society aflame. Extremist bodies can themselves appoint agents provocateurs to inflame passions and polarize the society on communal lines to benefit electorally. As is evident from the two incidents, the elements from rightist Hindutva bodies themselves planted the offending material in order to blame Muslims for something they did not do and could not have imagined of doing.

It also points to the desperation among these right wing outfits about the dwindling outcome of their age-old stratagems. With milch cows like Ayodhya having been sucked dry, they are up to any mischief to incite the communal passions and solidify their vote banks. The general public, the Hindus as well as Muslims should exercise great restraint in reacting to issues and should not lose their cool. If people remain vigilant, and the law and order authorities refuse to be partisan such mischievous plots would not work to the benefit of the forces insistent upon destabilizing the society.

‘Love Jihad’ :

Creation of Myth-weaving Industry

The term ‘Love Jihad’ is an oxymoron. An oxymoron is something where two words that have opposite meanings are conjoined together. A section of the media, mainly vernacular with dominant influence of saffronised writers, have been running a campaign to convince people that a group of Islamic fanatics are waging a Jihad to lure Hindu girls into matrimony with Muslim boys. The term has gained currency during the last decade due to some shrewd spadework by the saffron activists.

Plainly speaking, ‘Jihad’ is an Arabic term which means ‘to exert one’s utmost to promote a cause’ (mainly propagation of virtues and forbidding people from evils) in a society’. It does not stand for holy war as some sections would like to interpret. But shrewd propagandists would like the people to believe that some Islamic fanatics are out to wage a war to inveigle Hindu girls into marriage with Muslims males. Thus, to see a war being promoted to foster love in itself is inconceivable and needs to be rejected with the disdain it deserves.

Urges of Patriarchy

Interestingly, it is aided by other myths prevalent in the society. Since the Indian society is patriarchal (i.e., male dominated and lineage being traced from men), it is popularly perceived to be a stratagem to convert women to Islamic faith. More sinisterly, it also strengthens the belief that the offspring from such alliances would be naturally Muslim. It fans fears of someone doing it with the objective of growth in numbers of Muslim. Similarly, since girls become part of

husband's family, in popular perception they lose their individual identity, which is interpreted as a loss to the community she hails from. Multiple layers of misgivings therefore weave a cobweb of myths which lead to fear of Islam and Muslims. This is no new technique. Germans were similarly brainwashed into believing that Jews would ultimately take over Germany. This led to mass hate campaign and holocaust with six million innocent Jewish people being massacred in the heart of mature, adult and 20th century Europe.

Communal Polarisation

The self-styled guardians add spice to the entire affair. They have also come up with theories that an organized syndicate supplies two-wheelers and attractive cellphone instruments and even cash to Muslim youth to attract the Hindu girls towards them. General masses, be they Hindu or Muslim being gullible, buy these myths and come to believe the conspiracy angle. Certain organizations have been founded to specifically spread this sort of myths and create ill-will among the communities. Muzaffarnagar riots were sparked as such rumours triggered by some vested interests fuelled rage among a section of Hindu brethren. Curiously, these were done on the eve of 2014 General Elections and did work well to polarise the voters on the religious lines.

Courts Throw out Cases

Some such interfaith marriages in the coastal belt of Karnataka were lent the controversial angle by a section of the regional media. Shri Ram Sene even took some such cases to the court alleging coercion as well as conversion to Islam. In one case where a person by name Asghar had married a Hindu woman Sajal Raj, judge of the Karnataka High Court

asked the Director General and Inspector General of Police to probe the incident. The Police investigation team debunked the entire myth spun by the hate-mongering activists and completely ruled out the element of coercion into the affair. Even the Kerala High Court passed a similar ruling when incidents of interfaith marriages came up before it.

Love is spontaneous

Love is a spontaneous act. It cannot be foisted or fostered between two individuals by external forces. It is normal to expect that in a plural society some individuals from diverse faiths, castes and linguistic communities would fall in love, decide to lead a life together and end up marrying. To see a conspiracy behind each of these acts, is to deny the natural human proclivities and inclinations. No one can feign love in order to promote a religion or deprive another community or to cause decline in numbers of another community or even as a planned strategy to bring about dominance of a community or to dilute influence of another community. 'Love Jihad' could therefore be termed creation of some fertile imagination.

No Scope for Conspiracy

Such cross-cultural alliances are certainly not part of a conspiracy. Those who smell conspiracy in them need to look inwards, within their own rank and file. They need not go any far. Mr. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, a Union Minister of state rank in the current government is himself married to the daughter of late Mr. Ashok Singhal, the leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Another of the BJP's veteran leaders Shahnawaz Hussain has a Hindu wife, Renu, a teacher in Delhi hailing from Kishenganj in Bihar. Veteran leader L. K. Advani's daughter has married a Muslim. Subramaniam

Swamy's daughter too has a Muslim husband. Late Balasaheb Thackeray's granddaughter Neha Thackeray too married a Muslim. If indeed, every interfaith marriage is an outcome of a conspiracy, how could women from these high profile Hindutva homes could end up in households of Muslim men? Did they not smell a 'Love Jihad'? If indeed these leaders reconciled their daughters to be daughters-in law of Muslim families, why target the simple mortals who have tied up knots with Muslim spouses?

No One-way Traffic

One would be wrong, if he thought such marriages are just one-way traffic i.e., Hindu women and Muslim men. There are prominent Muslim women who married Hindu men from equally prominent families. World famous beauty expert and entrepreneur Shahnaz Hussain is married to a Hindu businessman R. K. Puri. Famous ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas married Fareeda. One of the three daughters of Najma Heptulla has married a Hindu man. Choreographer Farah Khan is married to director-editor Shirish Kumar. Yesteryear beauty queen Nafisa Ali is married to a Sikh gentleman.

No wonder then why marriage of Akshitha and Shakeel both MBA graduates in Mandya, Karnataka, received so much of media attention in April this year (2016). But even as the din in the media had died down, there were reports of one Neha Anjum in Hassan entering into the wedlock with Pradeep in May this year (2016). These incidents essentially drive the point home that it is diabolical to see conspiracy, extremist agendas and grand conversion strategies in such alliances. They have happened in the past and will continue to happen in the future, no matter what the religious Puritanism demands.

Vande Mataram

More Politics than Nationalism

This song has a complex history. It was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and, later was made a part of his novel Anand Math. This novel has strong anti Muslim rhetoric. This song was very popular with a section of the society. Islam is a monotheistic religion. It does not recognize any other god-goddess than Allah. Islam does not permit worship of anyone except one God. But some elements eye an opportunity in this refusal to browbeat the community and dub anyone refusing to sing Vande Matram as anti-national.

Muslim recognize that being citizens of nation-states they are bound to be respectful of nationalism and prove their patriotism by faith and action. But for them their scope does not extend to worship of the nation. The difference is maintained between love for the nation and worship of the nation. Whether it is Saudi Arabia or Iran, citizens there are not asked to worship the nation. Loyalty to the nation does not elevate the nation to the status of godhood.

Jana Gana Mana... written by Rabindranath Tagore was selected as the National Anthem as it celebrated the diversity and plurality of India. It is useful to remember that only the first two stanzas of the song Vande Mataram were adopted as the national song, not the latter part wherein the motherland has been compared to Hindu goddesses.

Simultaneously some elements have been in the forefront of denigrating the Jana Gana Mana... describing it to be written in the praise of arrival of King George V in India.

This is a myth that has been fabricated recently in order to defame the Nobel Laureate whose anti-colonial credentials are well known.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauj adopted Jana gana mana... as national anthem and Gandhiji went on to say, "Jana gana mana... has found a place in our national life." It is one reason why some elements are keen for replacement of Jana gana mana... by Bankim Chandra Chatterji's Vande Mataram.

Muslim opposition to singing of Vande Mataram is less significant than the attempt to downgrade the Jana Gana Mana... by some elements in India. The issue has overtones of communal politics where focus on pushing a community into a tight corner rather than choosing the manner of saluting or celebrating the national glory.

Supreme Court had also to deal with this issue. School-children from the Jehovah's Witnesses had refused to sing the national anthem because their religion forbade them to sing it. School expelled the students. The matter went to Supreme Court, which observed that a secular court cannot enquire into the correctness or otherwise of religious beliefs. The ground on which court gave its verdict was the assessment whether the belief is genuinely and conscientiously held by a sizable section of the community, and that the belief is not opposed to public order and morality. The Supreme Court struck down the student's expulsion as violative of their freedom of religion guaranteed by Article 25 of the Constitution and students were taken back.

Soli Sorabjee one of our celebrated legal luminary takes the cue from Justice Chinnappa Reddy to explain the rationale of the judgment, "Our tradition teaches tolerance; our philosophy preaches tolerance; our constitution practices tolerance; let us not dilute it."

Indianness or Indian Nationalism

Nationalism and Nation worship have been two distinct trends in the world since long. These have excesses and exaggerations through all ages, primitive, modern and the post-modern. Racism and Nation worship led to a lot of bloodshed in Europe and creation of several smaller states. It is rather lamentable that today we are trying to hang to the coattail of the same nationalism and nation worship in India. With the advent of the present government in the saddle of power, the race for the ascendancy of Hindu Nationalism has intensified. The question is what to be followed: Indianness or Indian Nationalism. Should the citizens of India need to furnish the proof of their love for the nation repeatedly and should some people belonging to a particular community need to be put in the docks on this score. What should be the yardsticks for measuring one's love for nation? What should be the mode of expression for the same and how frequently it needs to be furnished? Who would determine these, the Constitution of India or a group with a particular ideology with the penchant for a holier than through attitude.

Nation and Nation Worship

India is a democratic state and our Constitution provides the framework for the law. The current debate is centred along the axis of what should prevail, the Constitution or the non-state actors who want to press their own mode of nationalism down the throats of the people. The Muslims are snared into political debates rather than the core legal issues. Some of the Muslim leaders too become pawns in the hands of some invisible forces and complicate the matters. No one is asking as to who conferred the right on some people to question the nationalism of some other individual or group. Political leaders, political parties and votebank politics are real culprit in this regard.

Talaaq (Divorce)

Islam was first among the religions to lay down elaborate yet simple procedure for marriage and divorce. According to the Quran, marriage is solemnized between a male and a female by entering into a social contract. The man and the woman make an undertaking before a set of persons. An individual from each side proposes an alliance. Two persons stand witness and a qazi writes down the contract, recites a few verses of the Holy Quran called the sermon of Nikah and gets the signatures affixed by the spouses. This is acceptance of the contracts and conclusion of the ceremony.

But Islam understood the facts and details of human nature and made provision for separation if the two partners find that their nature is incompatible and they cannot live together despite their having sired children. There is a much more elaborate procedure for parting of ways. It is called talaaq or divorce. Somehow an impression has gained ground that a Muslim man can divorce his wife by simply uttering talaaq thrice. Now much fun has come to be associated with the procedure. Some ill-informed moulvis (clerics) have issued some fatwas regarding Talaaq being effective even when one utters it on phone, mobile, or sends SMS or email to this effect. Adding more spice, a few reports have even quoted moulvis endorsing its validity even when uttered under the influence of liquor or while seeing dreams. These have also been stuff for a few Bollywood films.

Similarly, it is worth pondering as to how Islam would validate a divorce administered under the influence of liquor while even prayers done in an intoxicated state are not accepted. It is therefore fair to suspect that some interested quarters are fanning such misconceptions against Islam and its family laws. No sane mind would accept such a proposition.

This playing up by some prejudiced media is totally mischievous, to say the least. First the Muslim marriages rarely end in Talaq as is made out in the press and media. Second, it is quite possible that some such cases are stagemanaged to boost their TRP (Television Rating Point) and fatwa is procured from ill-informed clerics to defame the sharia and its provisions. Third, unfortunately for Islam, the irresponsible behavior of some Muslim individuals announcing Talaq thrice, due to lack of knowledge or in a fit of temper, ruins the life of women, does, considerable damage to the image of Islam and provides colourful material for slander to criticise the concept of Talaq in Islam.

Islam recognizes the diversity of individual nature of men and women. While Nikah joins them as husband and wife, scope for separation too has been envisioned by the Almighty God who is the Creator of the human beings. Had this not been done, life would have been hell for several couples who simply cannot pull together. Men could have resorted to killing of women or the latter may have resorted to suicides to get out of the inharmonious marriages. Islam certainly does not intend to bind a man and a woman into a union they intensely hate to sustain after having failed to bring about compatibility between their tastes, dispositions, and nature. It is why an honourable way to get out of this relationship was provided. This is called talaq. In those communities whose religious laws do not allow the marital bonds to be dissolved at any cost, women are subjected to harassment, torture and even burning.

Now, this instrument of talaq has come to be grossly misused by certain Muslim men and over the years misinterpretation of the Islamic law has made its misapplication and validation possible.

But the fact remains that Talaq is an extremely detestable act in Islam despite it being on the statute book as a legal instrument for dissolution of an inconvenient marriage.

The Quran permits divorce, though the Prophet had said that 'of all the lawful things, God hate nothing more than divorce.'

The manner of divorcing the wife by the husband is explained:

“Divorce may be pronounced; then either your mate should be sent away decently or you should part with her decently.” (Quran 2:229)

Again it is prescribed: “A divorce is only Permissible twice: after that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness. It is not lawful for you, O Men, to take back any of your gifts [from your wives], except when both parties Fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by God.” (Quran 2:229)

The above verses read together with verses 34 and 35 of the 4th chapter (i.e., Nisaa) lay down a 7-stage procedure for divorce. But somehow, this process has come to be ignored and rulings by qazis (judges of Islamic family courts that are not legally recognized in India) have validated annulment of marriage by triple utterances of word talaq.

The Prophet had declared people who resorted to such divorce as those playing with the commandments of God. Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) companion Umar had punished the ones who did this.

Khula

Women's Right to Obtain Divorce

Islam also empowers women with the countervailing right to seek a divorce from the husband in circumstances when they are not willing to continue the partnership. A Muslim woman may approach a qazi to grant her divorce if the husband refuses to give divorce:

But the parting cannot be sudden; there has to be the iddat, or waiting period, 'a supreme innovation of the Quran', as Professor Coulson describes it. The period has to last until the wife completes three menstrual circles or, if she is pregnant, until she delivers.

During this time, she is entitled to the husband's financial support. This period can also be used for reconciliation. The Prophet was clearly told in the Quran:

"Whenever you or other men divorce women, take care of them during the waiting period fear the Lord and do not turn them out of their homes. Nor should they be made to leave, except if guilty of sexual misconduct." (Quran 65:1)

Quran's warning to the Husbands

Another warning given to the husband is that he should not obstruct his divorced wife from marrying someone else:

"That is purer in conduct and more orderly, for God knows while you do not What is best for you."
(Quran 2:232)

Fatwa

A fatwa is a juristic opinion in Islamic theology. But most people have come to construe it as a ruling of the religious court, thanks mainly to the publicity given to certain ridiculous fatwas. It has led to the belief among general masses that most Muslims live and comply by these kinds of fatwas. Far from that, hardly ever a common Muslim approaches a cleric to seek a legal opinion in any matter.

Even if a fatwa looks odd and does not look compatible with the norms of justice and fairness, it should not gather the kind of controversy as is witnessed today. The media, in its pursuit of the odd and the absurd and in its zeal to malign the Islamic religious establishment goes gaga over when it lays its hands upon any such document. There being thousands of madrassas and even arbitration panels in madrassas, there can be any number of religious opinion, on a particular subject. It is rather bizarre that some fatwas catch the fancy of the prejudiced media and branded as rulings and later tom-tommed as specimen of fanaticism. Even more outrageous is the thought that most Muslims have deep attachment to such opinion.

To set the record straight, a fatwa is not a judicial ruling. It is merely a juristic opinion. A Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam defines fatwa as: 'A formal legal opinion given by a mufti, or canon lawyer of standing, in answer to a question submitted to him either by a judge or private individual'.

Fatwas are mere opinions and are not binding. They could be accepted or rejected. Not even those who offer this opinion insist on their being complied with. They themselves would suggest: 'Take it or leave it, as you please'. People who face issues of complex nature seek juristic opinion from several theological bodies at the same time and are not surprised when they find them contradictory in nature.

Kaafir

Objections have been raised against the word Kaafir. Some sections of the prejudiced media have presented it in controversial light as if this is used by Muslims as an abuse or to insult the non-Muslims. The word and its implications have been thoroughly misunderstood.

Kaafir has been derived from root word Kufr. Kufr means 'to cover', 'to conceal'. Night is referred to as Kaafir as it covers what is visible. Thick clouds too are referred to as Kaafir as they cover the bright sky and the sun. Even farmer is often referred to as Kaafir as he covers seeds with mud in the farm.

There are no negative connotations associated with Kaafir or Kufr. It should therefore cause no offence to anyone. Kaafir is not a substitute for non-Muslims, nor are all non-Muslims Kaafir. In religious terminology, a Kaafir is one who denies, rejects or refuses to accept something. So people of one religion are Kaafir of another religion. Communists and capitalists are mutually Kaafir to each other. However, in Islamic terminology, one who denies or refuses worship of any deity other than Allah is a believer. Kaafir is of course a denier, but does not carry any abusive meaning.

It has to be understood that God has given the freedom of choice in matters of religion. The Quran says:

“There is no compulsion in religion, truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error...”
(Quran 2: 256)

So there is no scope for Islam or Muslims being derogatory about those who do not have faith in one God and his messengers.

Why do Muslims Consume Non-Veg. food ?

The mankind has traditionally depended on food from two sources, 1- Farms, fields and gardens on one hand and 2- Animals, basically that from the cattle and some other living beings from the sea, on the other. Those who survive only on foods from plants are known as vegetarians while the ones sourcing their nutrition from animals—besides of course plants—are called non-vegetarians. Followers of a third category of dietary regimen are known as Vegan. Vegans avoid all kinds of animal-derived products such as milk, honey, eggs and all dairy products.

Vegetarianism and veganism have become worldwide movements in recent years. They are based on the philosophy of respecting animal rights and avoiding anything that leads to killing of animals or profiting from them in any manner.

Islam like Christianity and Judaism took birth in a land and a society which was basically pastoral or rural. The long lines of prophets that are shared by these three faiths radiated from the common pivot in Palestine and flourished in lands that were largely parched and dry and animal-rearing and breeding was the major occupation for the people. Followers of the three major faiths had therefore inherited the nutritional traditions from people who depended on animal proteins in a major way. It was not that these faiths made it obligatory for them to hunt or kill animals and compulsorily

make meat a part of their food.

Secondly, killing animals for food is considered perfectly acceptable in most faiths. However, a few others do consider it unethical, if not barbaric. Kindness and compassion are not linked with food habits. One could be kind and compassionate despite being a meat-eater and contrarily, a person depending on completely vegetarian food could be unkind.

Thirdly, modern researches establish that even plants have life and they feel pain, react to music and other such external influences and are happy or sad and cry for water. American farmers have invented machines that amplify the cries of the plant when they are in need of water and are in the process of devising irrigation system that get activated by such cries.

Islamic doctrine is based upon the philosophy of man being the supreme creature on the earth permitted to and endowed with the capacity to use all the earth's resources for his benefit. Of course he is commanded to use them in a way that nothing gets wasted. In the modern saying, such use is called 'sustainable' i.e., to use the resources in such a manner that the nature is able to refill all the resources in the natural process.

Islamic philosophy requires the human beings to act as custodians of all that the earth contains and produces, not as the owner. Owner is God and the custodian has to act with full honesty and use the resources just to fulfill his needs rather than amass them to fulfill his greed.

The Quran says:

“O You who believe! Fulfill your contracts!
Permitted to you (for food) are four-footed grazing
animals, except what will be described to you.”
(Quran 5:1)

At another place the Quran says:

“Verily there is a lesson for you in the cattle: We provide you with milk from what is in their bellies, and there are benefits for you in them in abundance, and of them do you eat.” (Quran 23:21)

Nutritionists agree that meat or animal proteins make complete food and supply all the eight essential amino acids that are synthesized by the body and should be supplied in the diet. Meat also contains iron, vitamin B-1 and Niacin. A diet merely consisting of plant based food creates serious deficiency of proteins and may lead to anemia which is the case with general Indian population which does not get enough protein-based nutrition.

Even a cursory glance at the oral anatomy reveals that the human beings have been provided with teeth that are suitable for both biting and chewing. Hence a man has been designed to be both herbivorous and carnivorous by Nature. But a similar observation among animals would reveal that while cattle have merely flat teeth i.e., fit for chewing, the beasts have only sharp or biting teeth, i.e., suitable for tearing and biting their food. What could be concluded is that human beings were expected to consume both kinds of food, plant-based as well as animal-based. Similarly, the human digestive system is also endowed with the capacity to digest and absorb both vegetative and animal based food.



Halaal and Haraam

(Lawful and Prohibited)

Islam lays down a code of discipline to be followed in life for its followers with broad guidelines. The things that have been permitted to be done, eaten or performed are called Halaal or lawful while those things which have been prohibited under the religious discipline are known as Haraam or unlawful. Eating Haraam things or committing Haraam acts displeases God and such people have been severely chastised in the holy Quran. These are known as sins and a Muslim must stay away from them. For instance in matters of consumption, pork and liquor or any other intoxicating material is prohibited.

In matters of wearing, Muslim men have been advised not to wear gold and silk. While gold cannot be worn, silk is permitted to be used in clothes when mixed with other fibres like cotton or wool.

Halaal and Haraam extend to behavior and earning too. A Muslim must not earn his livelihood through illegal means such as stealing, cheating, corruption, bribery, extortion, usurpation of other's resources, or usury. Any believer who benefits from or lives off wealth obtained through Haraam means is a sinner. Similarly, a believing person should not indulge in adultery. Backbiting, lying, homosexual liaisons, spying on others, taunting, making fun of others too are traits of behavior that range from undesirable to prohibited.

Halaal

The Islamic manner of Slaughtering Animals

Muslims and Jews insist on slaughtering religiously permitted animals for eating, from lower side of the neck which is helpful in draining out the entire blood from the slaughtered animal. This ensures that the blood does not get stagnated within the veins of the dead animals and is ritually clean. This is called Halaal or Lawful when done by Muslims and is part of the acceptable food that the Muslims eat.

Islam and Judaism prescribe the animals to be cut from the lower side of the neck rather than the upper side of the neck. In this method, the body's connection with the brain of the animal is not severed at once. The brain therefore allows the blood to flow out and the carcass of the animals to be free from blood. Flesh free from blood is healthy and stays fresh for longer time. In this method, the windpipe, vessels and throat are cut but the dorsal nerve cord functions till the last moment and draws out the last drop of blood from the body. Only after the animal is completely dead and the body stilled, the head is removed from the carcass for further processing of the meat.

Blood is considered to be a medium for culture of germs, bacteria and toxins etc. Therefore the Muslim way of slaughtering is held to be healthier, hygienic and bacteria-free compared to other methods of slaughtering.

Islamic state and Muslim country Is there a difference ?

The major misconceptions that exist today amongst many people is the belief that 'Muslim countries' are places where Islam is the rule of law from both a personal and governmental perspective. This leads people to equate whatever is going on in such 'Muslim' countries with the practice of Islam, something which in most cases couldn't be farther from the truth!

However, since independence of Muslim countries from the colonial powers, Islamic movements all over the Muslim world have been working for the creation of an Islamic state in their respective countries. An Islamic state means a state where the Shariah, or 'Islamic law', is established and the religious scholars, or the leaders of the national Islamic movement, either have some say in the government or have total control of political power.

In recent times, a number of Muslim countries declared themselves to be Islamic states and ostensibly established the Shariah. But what is actually put into practice is a small number of classical juristic rulings concerning punishments, status of women and other spectacular aspects of classical jurisprudence. Thus, great show is made of 'Islamic punishments' or hudood laws, and floggings and amputations were advertised. These were, in fact, 'outer limit' laws to be carried out only under extreme conditions and after certain

basic requirements of social justice, distribution of wealth, responsibilities of the state towards its citizens, mercy and compassion were fulfilled. What we thus get is an austere state operating on the basis of obscurantist and extremist laws, behaving totally contrary to the teachings of the Quran and spirit of Islam, yet justifying its oppressions in the name of Islam! The self-declared Islamic states are thus nothing more than cynical instruments to justify the rule of a particular class, family or the military.

In fact, the vast majority of these “Muslim” countries are run by severely tyrannical, oppressive dictatorships similar to, and in many cases worse than, governments like that of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. A brief look into the policies and practices of countries like Algeria, Syria, Jordan and Pakistan, just to name a few, will reveal severe and regularly practiced human rights violations and curtailed civil liberties. The dictators in these countries regularly rig elections, jail or murder any opposition party leaders and/or their followers, arrest entire families and keep them indefinitely in jail without anything resembling due process and regularly practice acts of physical and emotional torture on prisoners, among other grave injustices and human rights violations.

But don't make the mistake of thinking that Islam has anything to do with the oppressive conditions. A basic understanding of Islamic law would show that Islam is the absolute opposite of what is being practiced in these countries.



Muslims or Mohammedans ?

Muslims do not worship Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, in any way. 'Muslims believe that he was the last messenger sent by Almighty God and like all other prophets who came before him, he was a human being. However, some people mistakenly assume that Muslims worship Muhammad and this is one of the reasons that Muslims were erroneously called "Mohammedans".

Prophet Muhammad, like Jesus, never claimed divine status. He called people to worship Almighty Allah alone, and he continually emphasized his humanity. In order to prevent his deification, Prophet Muhammad always asked his followers to refer to him as "Allah's slave and messenger". He said: 'Do not adulate me as the Christians adulated Jesus, son of Mary. I am Allah's slave and messenger.'

Muhammad was chosen to be Allah's final messenger and to communicate His message to entire mankind, not only in words, but also as a living example of its practical application. Muslims love and respect him because of his impeccable and upright moral character and because he conveyed the truth from Allah — which is the pure monotheism of Islam.

Muslims strive to follow the great example of Prophet Muhammad but do not worship him in any way. Islam teaches Muslims to respect all of God's prophets. However, respecting and loving them does not mean worshipping them. Muslims know that all worship and prayer must be directed to Allah alone.

In fact, the worship of Prophet Muhammad—or anyone else—along with, or instead of Almighty God is considered an unpardonable sin in Islam. Even if a person claims to be Muslim but worships or prays to anything other than God, it invalidates one's claim to Islam. The delegation of faith makes it clear that Muslims must worship Allah alone.

Islam and Muslims are words used in the Quran. The Quran says, "Surely, the way of life acceptable to Allah is

Islam.”(Quran 3:19) “He named you Muslims before and in this.”(Quran 22:78). The message of all the prophets from Adam to Muhammad is the same: Obey Allah and none other. This message, sent through prophet, was completed at the time of Muhammad who was the last in the chain of prophets. This is mentioned in the Quran: “This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you and Have chosen for you Islam as your way of life” (Quran 5:3). It is wrong, then, to call Islam ‘Mohammedanism’ and Muslims ‘Mohammedans’. And Muhammad as founder of Islam, instead Muhammad was the last Prophet of Islam.

No Priesthood in Islam

People tend to confuse the position of imam, mufti, qazi or moulvi in Islam with the concept of priesthood. An imam is merely the prayer leader while the mufti is one who offers opinion or advice on the basis of his religious scholarship on issue of religious interest. Qazi heads a court and settles disputes while moulvi is religious scholar who may teach or recite Quran. None among them have anything to do with any superhuman status. They are not considered intercessor or mediator between God and the man. No confessions need be made before an imam. An individual can supplicate before God and seek forgiveness for his sins. Anyone who has memorized a part of the Quran and is seen as a practicing Muslim can lead prayer in a mosque. No one need be called for household ceremonies such as sunnat, maktab, inauguration of house or business. No seats are reserved for anyone in the mosque. Place has to be claimed on ‘first come first served basis’. There are no holinesses in Islam. All stand on the same plane and eat from the same plate. It is useful to bear in mind the Quranic dictum: ‘The most honourable among you in the sight of God is the one who is most pious.’

Shia and Sunni Muslims

The sects within Muslims like Shias and Sunnis raise queries among non-Muslim brothers and sisters. These remain unanswered as several Muslim themselves lack the knowledge of history or are not articulate enough to put the issue in the correct historical perspective.

Both Sunni and Shia Muslims share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith; prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage and so on. The differences between these two main sects within Islam were mainly political and began two decades after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Over the centuries, however, these differences have spawned a number of varying practices and positions which have come to carry a spiritual significance too for their followers.

Origins - A Question of Leadership

The division between Shia and Sunni owes itself to the question of succession to the Prophet and as to who was the rightful successor to him. Sunni Muslims agree with the position taken by many of the Prophet's companions, that the new leader should be elected from among those capable of the job. This is what was done, and the Prophet Muhammad's close friend and advisor, Abu Bakr became the first Caliph or president of the Islamic nation. The word "Sunni" in Arabic comes from a word meaning "one who

follows the traditions of the Prophet.”

On the other hand, some Muslims argue that leadership should have stayed within the Prophet’s own family, among those specifically appointed by him, or among Imams appointed by God Himself.

The Shia Muslims believe that following the Prophet Muhammad’s death, leadership should have passed directly to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. Throughout history, Shia Muslims have not recognized the authority of elected Muslim leaders, choosing instead to follow a line of Imams which they believe to have been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad or God Himself. The word “Shia” in Arabic means a group or supportive party of people. The commonly-known term is shortened from the historical “Shia-t-Ali,” or “the Party of Ali.” They are also known as followers of “Ahl-al-Bayt” or “People of the Household” (of the Prophet).

Distribution

Sunni Muslims make up the majority (85%) of Muslims all over the world. Of the nearly 56 Muslim majority countries in the world, four i.e., Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan, are Shia majority states. But significant populations of Shia Muslims can be found in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon.

Differences in Religious Practice

From this initial question of political leadership, some aspects of spiritual life have been affected and have led to differing practices, rites and rituals among the two groups of Muslims.

It is important to remember that despite these differences in opinion and practice, Shia and Sunni Muslims share the main articles of Islamic belief and are considered

by most to be brethren in faith. In fact, most Muslims do not distinguish themselves by claiming membership in any particular group, but prefer to call themselves simply, "Muslims."

Religious Leadership

Shia Muslims believe that the Imam is sinless by nature, and that his authority is infallible as it comes directly from God. Therefore, Shia Muslims often venerate the Imams as saints and perform pilgrimages to their tombs and shrines in the hopes of divine intercession.

Sunni Muslims argue that there is no basis in Islam for a hereditary privileged class of spiritual leaders or priesthood, and certainly no basis for the veneration or intercession of saints. Sunni Muslims contend that leadership of the community is not a birthright, but a trust that is earned and which may be given or taken away by the people themselves.

Conflicts and Clashes

The Shia-Sunni sectarian division extends to social and political spheres in several countries such as Pakistan, India and Saudi Arabia. Wherever there is democracy, e.g., in Lebanon, India Pakistan etc, such differences manifest themselves in divergent political perception or groupings. In places like Saudi Arabia and Syria tension between the two is ever present. There have been armed clashes in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan which have witnessed war during the last one decade and social turbulence is ever eager to cash upon any kind of differences. Even in places like Lucknow in India clashes do take place on petty issues such as route for the Muharram procession to be taken out on the eve of Muharram. These get exploited at the hands of the vested interests too.

What could be essentially gleaned from the above is that Islam also shows the diversity expected of a widely followed religion. It does not imprison its adherents into a straitjacketed monolithic community out to overwhelm other faiths. Islam has creatively engaged itself with diverse ethnic, linguistic, social and political entities and emerged as a tapestry of divergent cultures. This should not be surprising. Rather its absence should have made it an object of fear. No faith or religion that extends from Casablanca in the Mediterranean to Brunei in the Pacific can afford to retain the social and cultural homogeneity over such a wide geographical expanse. Nor does Islam lay any claim to it. The only cord that runs central among them all is the doctrine of Islam. Shia and Sunni differences deserve to be seen in this perspective.

Personal Law

Some sections even highlight Muslim Personal Law as a privilege for the Muslims. But they do not explain the fact that such 'privileges' exist for all communities. The Hindus and the communities within the Hindus, have distinct laws which are recognized at some or the other legal level. The Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) is recognized for alienation of property and taxes. The various tribes in the North Eastern states have been guaranteed regulation of family affairs under their customary laws. Goa follows the Portuguese law. Hindus in the southern states follow a set of family laws that are totally at variance with the ones in the Northern states. Yes, of course, need for constant reform is felt by all sections, but jump-starting a nation by imposing a uniform civil code will be much more inconvenient—and likely to be opposed more fiercely—by the Hindu majority than Muslims.

Is Urdu a Foreign Language ?

Measures to help promote Urdu are often held out as incentive to a foreign language. This is also among a modern myth. Urdu may have been an essential ingredient of Indian Muslim identity in the Indo-Gangetic plain. But it is purely an Indo-Aryan language with its grammar embedded in Sanskrit. Urdu developed in military cantonments of Mughal India with several ethnic groups mixing there and shows strands of Hindi, Sanskrit, Braj Bhasha, Prakrit and Pali.

Neither all Muslims in India speak Urdu, nor all those who use it (or have contributed to it in the past) are Muslims. Urdu's literary heritage has robust secular credentials with innumerable Hindu poets, writers, playwrights and essayists having contributed to it in enormous proportions. Bhagwad Gita has more number of translations in Urdu than any other Indian language. Several leading Urdu writers such as Anand Narain Mulla, Malik Ram, Krishen Chander, Bisheshar Pradeep, Manorama Diwan, Premchand, Raghupathi Sahay Firaq Gorakhpuri, Brajnaraian Chakbast and Gopichand Narang belonged to Hindu community. Urdu has got nothing to do with the Middle East or the Arabs. Pakistan has of course adopted it as its official language at the national level, but people residing in all the four states of Pakistan speak their respective regional languages i.e., Sindhi, Baluchi, Punjabi and Pashto. Similarly, Sindhi, one of the four regional languages of Pakistan finds a place among the India's national languages. This mutuality is extension of our common legacies rather than being a reason to suspect each other. Not even its Persian script makes it foreign. Three other Indian languages i.e., Sindhi, Punjabi and Kashmiri also use the Persian script. If any proof is needed, turn over a Rs. 100 note issued by the Reserve Bank of India and take a close look at the script of the various languages.

Madrasa Education

In India madrasas came under fire especially from those who were politically motivated and also from a section of the prejudiced media which took a biased view. Most of the views about madrasas were expressed by those who hardly had any firsthand knowledge of madrasa system or what is taught in these madrasas. They just presumed that since these are Islamic institution they must be teaching about Jihad and war.

Islam entered into India from earliest time, some maintain even during Prophet's lifetime through Kerala, and a century later through Sindh in North India. Both in South and North India hundreds of people converted to Islam and hence right from earliest time there was need for madrasa institution to teach religion and also to create Ulama (literally scholars) who in turn could teach others and also help perform prayers and other religious rites.

Madarasa literally means 'a place where learning and mentoring are done'. The word madrasa is like the term school in British / American English. Madrasas are divided into all categories from primary to secondary to university-level or post-graduate school as well. In Islamic countries even institutions of higher learning are known as madrasas. In Kolkata there is Madrasa Aliyah i.e., higher institution of learning to which now West Bengal government has given university status. It is interesting to note that these madrasas were open to students of other communities as well. Raja Ram Mohan Roy studied in Madrasa Aliyah and was as much a scholar of Persian and Arabic as that of Sanskrit and Hindu religion.

In many cases these madrasas, in fact, imparted instructions in religious and secular sciences.

Today, around 20,000 Madrassas educate over 1.5 million

students per year. As per Sachar Committee report presented to the Government of India in 2006, about 3% Muslim children go to madrasas. What is important is that madrasa continues to be an important institution for poorer rural and to some extent urban Muslims. A large number of Muslims in India, in fact a vast majority, is of poor and illiterate variety. These poor Muslims cannot afford, even if they have the urge, to send their children to institutions of secular education.

Moreover they have religious needs and madrasas can fulfill not only religious needs but also provide free education, food, hostel facilities and what is more, are conveniently located. Also, we should not homogenize all madrasas. They need to be divided into different categories i.e., preliminary known as maktabas where only preliminary religious teaching is imparted. Then comes middle level madrasas where Arabic language, Quran, commentary on Quran, hadith etc. are taught. Then higher madrasas which can be compared with graduate and post-graduate level studies. In parallel with the evolution of colleges emerged Jamia or Universities. The oldest university in the world is Qarawiyyin University of Fez in Morocco which was established in 859. A little later al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt came up in 970. Apart from religious sciences, the university students learned logic, metaphysics, philosophy, mathematics, physics, astronomy, rhetoric and tool-making.

A preponderant majority of the madrasas still follow a curriculum which was formulated 400 years ago which has outlived its utility and relevance today. Any talk of change in curriculum greatly upsets the managements of these madrasas as they fear loss of employment for the old hands which still manage their levers. Though some of them have introduced preliminary English and computers in their syllabus, the urge to overhaul it cannot be overemphasized. Under the fierce resistance, the Government of India has begun financial assistance to those madrasas which bring about changes the

curriculum and introduce modern sciences. Parallel to these official moves, even within the community, there is a movement for modernization of madrasas and many madrasas have gone for modernization.

Recently NCERT (National Council for Education Research and Training), a premier government institution has conducted a study which has revealed that the modernisation in madrasas has been going-on in many states, most particularly in Kerala and Kolkata. The study could not notice any anti-national element in Madrasa syllabus.

The reasons for preference of madrasa education among Muslims are:

1. Paucity of modern schools in Muslim majority areas.
2. Lack of separate girls' schools and even female teachers in common schools.
3. Cost of modern education and the poor quality of government schools.
4. Poor quality of education in government schools.
5. Grievance of orthodox Muslims is that there is a Hindu bias in school textbooks.

Madrasa and Maktab

A lot of people confuse the Madrasa with Maktab and going by the growing number of children attending the latter feel that the conservatism is on the rise within Muslims. While Madarsas provide education (religious and/or regular), Maktabs are neighbourhood schools, often attached to mosques, that provide religious education to children who attend secular schools to get mainstream education. Thus Maktabs provide part-time religious education and are complementary to the formal educational institutions.

Do Muslims worship the Kaabah ?

The central mosque in the world is Harem Mosque in Makkah. The Kaabah or the cubic box like structure sits in the centre of it.

Kaabah is a sanctuary where no one should kill any living being. One should not even swat a fly or a mosquito. Even if one finds his father's killer, he is not supposed to kill or harm him. One is not supposed to enter any duel, debate or argument after entering the Harem mosque.

A common query often directed from the non-Muslims brothers is as to why Muslims worship and bow down to the Kaabah in their prayers.

The answer is very simple.

Kaabah in the city of Makkah is the Qibla i.e., the direction towards which Muslims turn their face during the prayers. It is important to note that though Muslims face the Kaabah during prayers, they do not worship it. Muslims worship and bow to none but Allah.

It is mentioned in the Quran:

“We see your face turning to the heavens: (for guidance). Now shall We turn you to the Qiblah (the direction of Prayer) that shall please you. Turn then your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (in Makkah): wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction.” (Quran 2:144)

1. Islam believes in Fostering Unity

Had they not been instructed to face the Kaabah, Muslims may have been praying facing all the directions. In order to foster unity among them through their worship of the one God, Muslims, wherever they may be, are asked to face in only one direction i.e., towards the Kaabah. If some Muslims live towards the west of the Kaabah they face the east. Similarly if they live towards the east of the Kaabah, they face the west. If one were to observe them praying from above in the space, he would find them standing in concentric rings converging on Kaabah in Makkah.

2. Tawaf around Kaabah for indicating One God

When the Muslims go to Masjid-e-Haram in Makkah, they perform tawaf or circumambulation around the Kaabah. This act symbolizes the belief and worship of One God, since, just as every circle has one centre, so also there is only one Allah worthy of worship.

3. People stood on Kaabah and gave the Azaan

During the time of Prophet, people would stand on the Kaabah and call the Azaan. This practice shows that Prophet has not prayed the Kaabah but prayed facing towards it.



Do Muslims Worship the Black Stone ?

The Black Stone or Hajar al-Aswad is the eastern cornerstone of the Kaabah. It is admired by Muslims as an Islamic relic which, according to Muslim tradition, dates back to the time of Adam and Eve. Islamic tradition holds that it fell from Heaven to show Adam and Eve where to build Kaabah, a house of God.

According to another Islamic tradition, the Black Stone is one of the stones of the Kaabah. Its significance is that it is the only surviving stone from the original structure built by Abraham and Ishmael (peace be upon them both). The Kaabah had been destroyed and rebuilt many times in its history, even before the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Black Stone is the single stone that has survived all the mishaps that have taken place since the time of Abraham and Ishmael.

When Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) offered his Pilgrimage after years of exile from Makkah, he started circumambulation of Kaabah by kissing the Black Stone. It was a poignant homecoming for the Prophet who had years earlier been driven out of his beloved city on account of his religion.

Caliph Umar made this clear to the people when he led them in the pilgrimage. He used to kiss the Black Stone when he walked around Kaabah and said: "I know that you are nothing but a stone. You cannot hurt or help anyone. And if I had not seen the Prophet kissing you, I would never have

kissed you”.

The Black Stone requires a particular mention on account of the many misunderstandings on its score. It is not a meteorite, but simply a black stone. Its practical importance is to show the starting point of the circumambulation, and by its colour it is conspicuous in the building. Secondly, this stone is not worshipped, nor do Muslims prostrate in the direction of this stone, prostration being done towards any and every part of the building of the Kaabah, and more often than not, one turns to directions besides the Black Stone. It may be recalled that once when the Qaramitah ravaged Makkah, they carried the Black Stone to their country as booty and it remained there for many years. During the course of its absence, Muslims did not turn to the place where it was kept (in ‘Uman), but continued to turn towards the Kaabah in Makkah. Even the building of the Kaabah is not essential. For instance, if it is demolished for repairs or new construction, Muslims will turn to the same spot, whether the Kaabah and its Black Stone is there or not. As has been said, the practical importance of the Black Stone is that it indicates the point from which the circumambulation begins.



Why non-Muslims not allowed in Makkah ?

Some non-Muslims are also critical of people from other faiths not being allowed to visit the sites of Islamic pilgrimage, i.e., Makkah and Madinah. It is true that non-Muslims are not allowed in the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah by law. The following points will serve to elucidate the possible reasoning behind such a restriction.

Makkah and Madinah are holy cities of Islam. Muslims go there to perform pilgrimage. Nobody goes there for mere visit or to make fun or for entertainment. So only the believers in the faith they represent are allowed to go there. Centres of various other faiths too apply such rules. If one intends to visit the sacred area of the Tirupati Thirumala Devasthanam, he must declare his faith in Hinduism. Non-Hindus are barred from the visit as the Temple is not a place for visit or entertainment.

There are many places of worship where Dalits are not solicited, women are not allowed, and non vegetarian persons have certain restrictions.

There are areas within one's own country where entry of common citizens is barred. People other than Defence personnel cannot go inside the Cantonments. Nuclear reactors, laboratories engaged in research in sensitive areas and headquarters of intelligence are barred for commoners.

People who have genuine necessity can only go there with prior permission from the appropriate authorities. It would be illogical for a common citizen to object to the restrictions on entering a cantonment area. Similarly it is not appropriate for non-Muslims to object to the restriction on non-Muslims for entry into Makkah and Madinah.

All countries apply certain rules and norms for allowing entry of foreign nationals. Visas are issued only when they undertake to abide by those rules. Similarly, Saudi Arabia allows entry of people to the pilgrim centres only after confirming their faith. Non-believers are kept away from the holy areas but allowed to go to other cities for purposes of trade, employment and, tourism.



Difference between Dargah and Mosque

Mosque is the place of worship in Islam. Muslims gather there five times in a day to do Namaz. Dargahs are basically mausoleums of Muslim saints and mendicants. At some places the dargahs stand by the side of the mosques. These saints won the devotion of masses during their lifetime. People were attracted with their pacifist nature and message of love and compassion and service to the community. When they died, their followers turned into devotees of their grave and raised buildings over them which came to be called dargahs or mausoleums.

Some even started attributing healing properties to such places. All these led to mausoleums becoming pilgrim centres. The dargah of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti (1141-1230 AD) in Ajmer is one such major pilgrimage centre in India. Graves of great many Muslim saints such as Khawja Bakhtiyar Kaaki of Delhi, Baba Fariduddin Ganj Shaker of Punjab, Nizamuddin Aulia at Delhi, Khawja Bande Nawaz at Gulbarga and Yusufain at Hyderabad are some of the more important saints who preached peace and love in India. Their mausoleums have turned into dargahs and attract a large number of devotees. They are syncretic in nature as often Hindu brethren outnumber Muslims. Though they may be disapproved by the mainstream Islam, they could be called cultural offshoot of Islam in the subcontinent as they depict Islamic architecture

(domes and minarets), host qawwali soirees (singings of poems composed in Urdu in praise of the saint in accompaniment of music).

Grave worship was not only disapproved and discouraged by Islam but was even condemned because it amounts to making partners with God and is viewed as incipient polytheism. Islamic doctrine is strictly monotheistic and no accretions and corruptions are accepted. Islam is very definite about the borders between godhood and sainthood. The two do not merge. Even Prophets do not qualify for worship. Prophets themselves declared that they were nothing more than human beings and as fallible as any other human beings. In the Quran, the first chapter 'Al-Fatiha' itself teaches the manner of supplication to the followers of Islam in the following words:

'You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help.' (Quran, 1:4)

Thus there is no fusion or confusion of boundaries.

Secondly, Islamic doctrine puts the individual human being in direct touch with God. A man supplicates directly before God and should seek no intercessor or mediator. No brokers are accepted in between God and the man. The grave worship seeks to put the departed saint between God and the man. Islam detests this practice. While no living saint or prophet could intercede on behalf of the man, how could a dead saint do this.

The Quran says: And you cannot make those hear who are in their graves. (Quran 35: 22)

It is one reason why dargahs do not qualify for places of worship. That some sections attach some sanctity to the mausoleums does not alter the basic doctrine of Islam.

Visit to Dargahs :

Some Muslims who visit dargahs and mausoleums often misrepresent Islam which is a strictly monotheistic faith, i.e., belief in one supreme God. This corruption in Islamic faith has come about in South Asian countries where mausoleums were raised over the graves of Sufis, Saints and Dervishes. They were preachers of love and harmony and were extremely selfless. But the love they won from the people soon graduated into adoration and reverence. Later it metamorphosed into some kind of worship. The dead became cult figures. Tales and legends kept growing around their persona and superhuman achievements and powers were attributed to them. The exclusive group of persons with a unifying common interest or purpose cashed in upon their image and elevated them to almost demi-gods. That the simple creed of Islam should gather all these was in itself a proof that few faiths and ideologies can remain pristine pure long after their founders have departed. This grave-worship is today part of cultural Islam in the Indian subcontinent, although it has no role in the doctrine.

No Prophet ever asked people to raise mausoleums over the graves, illuminate them, burn incense sticks, offer flowers, chadors and celebrate Urs (death anniversary) and organize musical soirees in the form of marsiya and qawwali. Islam is totally opposed to all such practices and firmly rejects them as corruptions or distortions.

Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said:

“Woe unto them that they turned the graves of their Prophets into the place of worship; Do not turn my grave into a place of worship.”



Why no images of God and the Prophet ?

Most of the followers of various faiths have either images or idols of their gods and holy men adorning their places of worship or sacred corners of their homes. Mosques and Muslim homes do not have any pictures of God or the Prophet. It makes people to ask as to why Islam does not allow images or idols.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the last messenger of Allah sent to the mankind for guidance. He preached the faith of Islam based on three fundamentals: 1- Belief in one supreme God, 2- Prophethood i.e., belief in all the prophets sent by Allah from Adam till himself, and 3- Accountability on the Day of Judgment.

Prophet made it plain to the people that he was nothing but a human being like all others and warned against assigning any element of divinity to him. Islam was therefore very specific about separating God and his messengers. The prophets were never mistaken with the concept of avatars (incarnations) as is believed in some other faiths. They stood separately. God was eternal and everlasting while prophets were mortals like all other human beings and were bearers of Divine message for their guidance. It is why Prophet Muhammad prohibited elevating his persona to the stature of God. The Quran declared that the Prophet would die and God is ever alive. He does not sleep nor does he suffer from even a wink.

Islam therefore made God as the sole centre of all worship and prayers. Nothing that diluted the concept of divinity was accepted or allowed. It is in this spirit that making of images and idols of God and the prophets were strictly prohibited under Islam. There were precedents of idols leading to idolatry and the real God being forgotten. The Kaabah, a house for the worship of Allah raised by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), nearly four thousand years ago, had suffered decline because of this. It had become a pantheon of various gods; each being attributed a particular function. Islam restored divinity of God and completely prohibited idolatry.

Similarly, making images or idol of the Prophet too was prohibited. There was this fear that given the human tendency of raising the holy men to the status of God, people who had seen and interacted with the Prophet would be tempted to make his image soon and would start worshipping it and abandon God.

The mosques all over the world bear no images or idols. They are plain spaces for devotion to one Supreme God and focusing on him and directing all the prayers, supplications, wishes and desires to Him. Even Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) does not come into the picture of the divinity. He stands apart from God. His place is that of the guide, spiritual leader, an ideal human being, reformer and harbinger of glad tidings and a warner. No idols of him could be made. Nor his imagery can be turned into statues, busts, friezes, photographs, sculptures and idols. This being the position, there is no question of gods or prophets being represented through cartoons or caricature which have an element of contempt and disrespect.

Often the visual images of the Prophet raise storms of protest. In recent years there were massive protests when cartoons depicting Prophet were made by a Dutch cartoonist

and published by Dutch newspaper Jylland Posten. Muslims view these acts as deliberately provocative and would like such actions to be covered under laws of blasphemy just as showing disrespect to holy figures such as Jesus Christ is prohibited in the West. The West has maintained double standards in such issues. Several dramas making fun of Jesus Christ have been banned in the Western countries. This, in their knowledge, does not constitute any restriction on freedom of expression. Holy men and sacred symbols of religion are to be respected.

The freedom to expression does not and should not include freedom to commit sacrilege. In fact freedom of expression does not give right to depiction of obscene images, indecency, produce libelous writings and sedition. All nations have enacted laws to respect privacy and dignity of individuals. How could a Dutch cartoonist indulge in producing sacrilegious cartoons of the holy Prophet?

In the Muslim world, nobody can even draw pictures of any of the Prophets, let alone ridiculing them. Islam accords highest respect to Mary, holy mother of Jesus Christ even though he was born without a father. The holy Quran forbids its followers from reviling, abusing and showing disrespect to others' gods, deities and religion, lest they also return the same and the situation becomes worse than before.



Did Islam Spread by Force ?

The unequivocal and emphatic answer is, NO!

The Quran declares:

“Let there be no compulsion in the religion (Islam).
The right direction is distinctly clear from error.”
(Quran 2:256)

A popular myth that has gained currency around the world links Islam’s expansion to the force of the sword. History textbooks and some section of prejudiced media lend credibility to such propaganda motivated by politics. In India it became a necessity for extremist organisations and some political parties who were out to polarise votes on communal lines. Hate-mongering therefore needed certain fodder which was dug out from the history.

They were however only following the footsteps of the British colonial historians who had followed the principle of ‘Divide and Rule’ in a country whose diversity was bewildering. The very fact that Muslims ruled India for over 650 years and therefore had the power to force every Non-Muslim resident of India to convert, but they did not and thus more than 80% of the Indian population remains Hindu. This is enough to debunk the myth of Islam being spread at the point of sword.

A cursory look at the current world and the location of Muslim majority states would reveal that nearly 1.7 billion of

the total seven billion people today profess Islam. Arabs constitute merely 22% of them. Country with the largest Muslim population i.e., Indonesia is situated almost half the globe away from the Islamic heartland of Arabia. The South Asian countries have nearly 400 million of Muslims, India itself having 150 million of them. A country like Bangladesh whose culture is embedded in Hindu-Sanskrit tradition has another 120 million Muslims.

Nearly 30% of the world's Muslims live as minorities in the world's major democracies such as India, the United States, the United Kingdom, the nations of Europe and Russia. A good many African states have Muslim populations that were never had any Muslim ruler. Similarly, some countries such as Spain and the Philippines which were ruled by Muslims in the past have no sizeable Muslim communities today. More interestingly, in several of the developed democracies of the West, such as the US, the UK, Scandinavian nations and France and Germany, Islam is considered 'the fastest growing religion'.

Study of history suggests that Islamic forces never entered the regions like Indonesia and Malaysia. Islam reached there through maritime routes, made inroads into the local culture and traditions and got lodged into the people's hearts. It did not alter the cultural mores, dresses, food and languages.

Islamic history bears witness that most lands where Islam entered by way of conquest turned over to Islam and remain so till date. Islam conquered not merely their lands but the hearts of the people. It ensured religious freedom to those who wanted to retain their non-Islamic faith such as Coptic Christians in Egypt or Maronites in Lebanon. It did not devastate the cultural property of heritage value or interest. Sphinx and Pharaonic temples of Abu Simbel and pyramids stand as sentinels of the history even today. Persepolis in

Iran is preserved even today. Hindu temples of Borbudor and Bali in Indonesia continue to attract tourists. It was mainly the oppressive rule of their former monarchs that made Islam a liberative force.

Now take the case of the Indian subcontinent, a region whose north-western borders are contiguous to the Arab dominated Middle East. It is true that the early advent of Islam was through the Islamic army conquering the region of Sind. But look at Kerala where Islam had made an early foray almost within the lifespan of the Prophet Muhammad. There were thriving communities of Muslims all through the coast of the Peninsular India during the 11th to 13th century when Ibne Batuta visited these parts. Even Mughals ruling Delhi were unaware of the presence of these Muslims and said to have granted rights to the Portuguese to deal with 'Pirates' (read Muslims) at their own terms. In Kerala, where Islam came through Arab merchants, Travancore Rajas helped Muslims because they were conduits for maritime trade which was prohibited under traditional belief. Since the Kingdom's prosperity depended upon sea trade, they allowed rather facilitated and even encouraged fishermen to convert to Islam in order to have a team of expert navigators among the natives. They even ordered that all fishermen families must bring up one son as a Muslim. Ibne Batuta thus witnessed a lot of Muslim colonies along the Malabar Coast in 8th century AD when he came to India and proceeded to the Maldives.

Even in the north where major chunks of people came under the influence of Islam, there were no forcible conversions. Mohammad bin Kasim who conquered Sind, was loved by the people of Sind. The people under the tyrannical reign of Raja Dahir welcomed him. When Muhammad bin Kasim was sent as a prisoner with Muawiya ibn Muhallab to Damascus on the orders of caliph Sulaiman ibne Marwan, the people of Sind wept for Muhammad bin Qasim and preserved his likeness (made an idol of him) at Kiraj. (Ref: William

Jackson A.V., (ed) History of India, Vol. 5, The Grolier Society, London, Baroda edition 1907, page 14). Muhammad bin Qasim recruited Jats and Meidis in his army who were so disgusted with the rule of Dahir that they joined the forces of a stranger. They were being ill-treated and humiliated under the rule of Dahir. They were prohibited from riding horses, wearing headgears and putting on decent robes. They had been reduced to woodcutters and water drawers. (Ref: Prof. Eswari Prasad, History of Medieval India, page 55-56)

Islam spread fast in those areas where Buddhism was prevalent, though weakening. In Sind also people were largely Buddhist and were highly disgusted with the Brahmin king. Similarly, Bengal, North Western frontier provinces (NWFP), and Punjab were the areas of Buddhist predominance facing persecution from Brahmanical religion. Buddhism did not disappear from India mysteriously. In the face of persecution, Buddhists either left the country or sought refuge in Islam as soon as they got the opportunity. When Omar bin Abdul Aziz became the Umayyad caliph, he wrote letters to princes and princesses of Sind inviting them to embrace Islam. Jaishiya, son of Raja Dahir, had heard about the character and creed of Islam, accepted the offer and turned a Muslim. (Ref: William Jackson A.V., (ed) History of India, Vol. 5, , page 15).

Much against the charge of Muslim sultans of Delhi forcibly converting Hindus to Islam, Allauddin Khilji banned conversions to Islam. It was not because he was highly secular. He found that the state revenue from jizya (Social tax on non-Muslims) was coming down as a lot of Banias were converting to Islam.

Emperors like Akbar instead of converting the people to Islam tried to reform the customs within the Hindus by abolishing oppressive laws. He introduced several reforms which may be construed as interference in Hindu customs.

Whatever he thought offended his human sensitivities, he tried to change, for instance he forbade child marriages, trial by walk on fire and animal sacrifice. He permitted widows to remarry and made Sati voluntary. He did not ban sati as he thought abolition would cause widespread resentment. He made it compulsory to seek consent of bride and bridegroom in marriage. (Ref: Jackson (ed.), History of India, Vol. IV, page 15, 18,)

Statecraft does not endear emperors with their subjects. No Muslim emperor could win any converts to Islam. More people were attracted by the Sufis and saints whose hospices or sanatorium gave asylum to the sick, the poor and the needy and the despondent folk. These hospices such as the dargahs at Ajmer, Mehrauli and Basti Nizamuddin won the love and respect of the vast number of devotees. The saints lived ordinarily, fed the poor insofar as nothing was left in store by the end of the evening for the next day, and employed healers who treated the sick free of cost. Historical records say, Delhi was sacked several times by opponents of the Sultanate regime during the lifespan of Hazrath Nizamuddin Aulia but no one touched his Khanqah (hospice or sanatorium).

Jammu and Kashmir, the Muslim majority state under Indian union was converted to Islam by Central Asian Sufis and was ruled for centuries by Hindu kings.

The Nizam's state of Hyderabad had only 12% Muslim when it joined the Indian Union in 1948 even though Muslims had ruled it for about four centuries by then.

There is a community of Hindu Jats in Jalandhar who are known as Sultani Jats because they are devotees of Sultan Sakhi Sarwar, a sage whose mausoleum is in Shahkot, now in Pakistan. They eat only halal meat and smoke huqqah even today. They are mostly peasants. They set up Sultan Ziyarat in the outskirts of their villages which they clean every

Thursday and light up lamps. They used to take out jatras to mausoleum of Sultan Sakhi Sarwar in Shahkot.

During Sikh rule, Governor of Multan, Savanmal tried to stop this Jatra. He levied a fine of Rs. 100 as penalty for all such Hindus who went on sultani jatras. But they continued till end of 19th century when Ludhiana and Jalandar Gazetteer were started to be compiled. That is all about India.

States like Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar were never invaded by any Muslim forces, yet they host sizeable Muslim communities.

1. Tanzania's 70% people are Muslims, but they have always been ruled by Christians.

2. Islam made deep inroads into the heart of Europe too. Balkan states of Eastern Europe were ruled by the Ottomans of Turkey for over five centuries, but never converted to Islam except the ones in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Albania was a 90% Muslim nation while Bosnia and Herzegovina were a Muslim dominant province under the Yugoslavian federation till recently when it broke up and Bosnia became a sovereign state.

3. Contrastingly, Spain which was ruled by Muslims for nearly eight centuries (from 712 to 1492 precisely) never had a Muslim majority. During this period, the Christians and Jews enjoyed freedom to practice their respective religions. This is a documented historical fact. Muslims and Jews living there were then forcibly converted to Christianity after establishment of Christian Rule. Those who did not convert were asked to leave or expelled.

Similarly, in the Arab lands presence of sizeable Christian communities serves to indicate that Islam was not forced upon people.

4. Coptic Christians make up 10% of Egyptian population.
5. Indonesia is the country that has the largest number of Muslims in the world, Bali is Hindu dominated Island of Indonesia and ancient Hindu temples dot the Indonesian landscape generously.
6. The majority of people in Malaysia are Muslims. But, no Muslim army ever entered, Islam spread not due to war, but because of its moral message. Malaysia's 45 per cent people are non-Malays and they have a dominant role in business, education and governance inasmuch as there is reservation for Bhumiputras (sons of the soil).
7. Lebanon, where the Muslims are in majority, President is always a Maronite Christian according to law, Prime Minister is Muslim, Speaker is a Shia and all other posts are distributed according to the multi-ethnic demography of the country.
8. Old communities of Christians still exist in Syria, Jordan and Iraq.
9. Jews still live in Tunisia and Iran. Jews play a dominant role in business and industry in Tunisia.
10. Around 12% of Bangladesh population professes Hinduism. They dominate the sectors of art, literature, media and Bengali cinema. Dhaka, the capital of the country is named after Dhakeshwari temple and no attempt has been made to Islamise the name of the capital. Bangladesh is still following several Hindu customs which do not clash with Islamic doctrine. Bangla is a highly sanskritised language. Islam does not put people in uniform, it tolerates multiculturalism.

11. It is also interesting to note that when the Mongols invaded and conquered large portions of the Islamic Empire, instead of destroying the religion, they adopted it. This is a unique occurrence in history - the conquerors adopting the religion of the conquered! Since they were the victors, they certainly could not have been forced to become Muslims! So where was the sword? How could someone be forced to adhere to a spiritually rewarding and demanding religion like Islam?

These mixed strands of history made Sir Thomas Arnold to write that 'Islam was spread, not by the exploits of that mythical personage—the Muslim warrior with the sword in one hand and Quran in the other, but by the force of the teaching of the Quran and the character of the Prophet'. (Ref. Preaching of Islam)

Islam's appeal to the people in the West is clearly on the rise. Thousands have joined the fold of Islam following personal study of the religion after 9/11 episode. And studies suggest that 70% of these neo-converts are women. These facts should effectively debunk the myth that force was integral to the spread of Islam. Had it been so, there should have been a reverse trend today, given the attempts to project the misogynist and violent image of the Islamic faith. It is time that Islam-baiters assessed their own folly of misrepresenting Islam and skeptics refused to be led (or misled) by anti-Islamic forces.



Demographic Demon

Is the growth of Muslim population really alarming ?

There is a misconception that the rate of population rise is higher amongst Muslims, that they marry four wives and shortly their population will overshoot the population of Hindus and this country will become a Muslim state. Some say 'Muslims don't practice family planning; indulge in polygamy to increase their population'.

The truth is that some extremist organisations over the years have propagated these myths. They have on purpose projected the fear of Muslim population growth to consolidate their own electoral majority and towards this strategy they have effectively combined half-truths, ideological concoctions and rumour-spreading techniques to entrench these myths in popular psyche.

The Census surveys by religion totally negate this firmly held popular belief. Religion is one of the markers used in these surveys. As per 1971 survey Hindus constituted 82.7% and Muslims 11.2% of the population. The corresponding figures for 1991 census are Hindus 82.6% and Muslims 11.4%. (Malayala Manorama Yearbook 1992). The rate of growth of Muslims is only slightly higher, that is 2.7% annually against 2.3% for the Hindus, as per the 2001 Census. But this is

because low socio-economic status and higher illiteracy. Given the same socio-economic status, the Muslims and Hindus have common growth rate. In this context Kerala serves as an example where all three major communities i.e., Hindus, Muslims and Christians have identical growth rate of 1.8% due to general spread of literacy. In contrast, in Jammu and Kashmir, the Hindus have a higher rate of growth than Muslims, nearly 3.7% against 2.6% among Muslims.

Overall, this statistics shows a reasonably 'stable' (religion wise) population. That apart, even if the current differentials persist, it is not only unlikely, but impossible for Muslim population to overtake the Hindu population for the next century or so. On the contrary, if the prevailing growth rates are analysed, it will be clear that between 1961-71 and 1971-81, Hindu population increase went up from 23.71% to 24.42%, while between the same period Muslim population increase went down from 30.85% to 30.20%. If these rates of growth are frozen at same level hundred years from 1981 Hindus and Muslims will record a decadal growth rate of 30.71% and 30.55% respectively i.e. growth rates of Hindus will be higher.



Muslims Appeasement

It is staple for some extremist organisations to propagate that some political parties appease the Muslims and they give more than their due share in Nation's economy and resources. It was proved wrong by the Rajinder Sachar Committee, which was appointed in 2005 by the Indian Government to prepare a report on the latest social and educational condition of the Muslim community of India. The committee submitted its report in 2006. The committee concluded that the socio-economic and educational status of Indian Muslims has slid to levels lower than that of the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes. The committee has come out with astonishing data. As a matter of fact, status of Muslims in employment and other socio-economic parameters are the real parameter for judging their social condition, to assess 'appeasement'. Let us see where they stand when compared on these parameters. Remember Muslim population is around 13%.

1. The literacy rate among Muslims is far below the national average. 25% of Muslim children in the 6-14 year age group have either never attended school or have dropped out. Expansion of educational opportunities since Independence has not much benefitted the Indian Muslims. In premier colleges only one out of 25 under-graduate students and one out of 50 post-graduate students is a Muslim. Unemployment rate among Muslim graduates is the highest among all socio-religious communities. Only 3% of Muslim children among the school-going age go to the Madarsas. The Committee also pointed out that the affirmative action taken for the uplift of the SCs and STs has "reaped at least some advantages" and similar affirmative action is required in the case of Indian Muslims too.

2. In Government sector's higher cadres their representation is very meagre, class I—3.19%, class II—4.30%, and in class

IV it is just 8.16%, while in private sector this figure is much lower.

3. The overall percentage of Muslims in bureaucracy is just 2.5% where as Muslims constitute about 13% of Indian population.

4. Jobs: The representation of Muslims in the IAS is just about 3%, 1.8% in the IFS and 4% in the IPS, though 13% of the Indian population is Muslim. The Muslim community has a representation of only 4.5% in Indian Railways and 98.7% of those employees are positioned at lower levels. Representation of Muslims is very low in the universities and banks. In no state does the representation of Muslims in the government departments match their population share. Their share among police constables is only 6%, in health 4.4%, and in transport 6.5%.

5. In High Courts, out of 310 judges (as on April 1, 1980), only 14 were Muslims.

6. In terms of financial assistance, Muslims borrowers were 4.3%, and the volume of loans paid out to them was 2.02%. The total financial sector disbursed only 3.76% differential interest rate credit to Muslims.

7. Industry: Among the country's top industrial houses, not many are owned or controlled by Muslims. Industrial licenses issued to the individuals from the community make up only 2%.

Muslims are predominantly engaged in the handicraft sector as 52% skilled artisans and artisans employed in the sector were Muslims. But Muslim ownership accounted for only 4.4%.

Most shockingly, the Committee also found that there is some truth in the allegation about a systematic conspiracy to deny Indian Muslims any meaningful political participation.

For example, in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and most of the other Indian states, Assembly constituencies with high Muslim concentration were declared 'reserved' for the Scheduled Castes(SCs). And no Muslims are categorized under SCs.

Appeasement ?

The results of a survey conducted among Indian Muslims shows that various governments "took little or no heed to these suggestions [made by various commissions], using the commissions simply as vote-grabbing gimmicks in order to give the impression of being serious about Muslim 'backwardness', but, in fact, doing precious little about it."

The survey shows that the economic condition of the Indian Muslims is pathetic indeed. "30.4% reported an annual household income of less than Rs.10,000, 24.4% between Rs.10,001 - Rs. 20,000, 7.5% between Rs.20,001-Rs.30,000, 3.8% between Rs.30,001-Rs.40,000, 1% between Rs.40,001-Rs.50,000 and 5.6% above Rs.50,000. A significant 27.6% live in jhuggis in slums.... 46.1% respondents live in one-room tenements"

If the Indian Muslims were "appeased" by various governments why is their economic condition so pathetic? The answer is that they were not appeased; but only made to look like so! Vested interests had ulterior motives in doing that.

Vote bank politics is the arch villain among the motives found in Indian politics. When the Mandal recommendations on reservations were implemented, they were to benefit the backward communities among Hindus. Not the Muslims. They had nothing to gain from Mandal. It were the Hindu backward communities who were being "appeased". About 20% of the populations in North India are upper caste Hindus. Their interests were being undermined by Mandal. It is they who led the violent protests against Mandal recommendations;

against the less privileged sections of their own religion.

The Rajinder Sachar committee report about the status of Muslim minorities in India makes one sit up with deep sense of anguish. The current socio-economic status of Muslim minorities in particular, has slipped down in the human development index. Also their representation in jobs is abysmal and more of them are living below poverty line and are illiterate. Without serious affirmative action, it is feared that they will suffer more deprivation in socio-economic and political spheres. Their political representation started declining massively. Due to insecurity and lack of equity, they felt threatened and resorted more to the minority identity. The communal violence unleashed against them with sickening frequency leads to ghettotization. Civic conditions in the ghettos are pitiable and denies them frequent interaction with other communities and makes the youth vulnerable to parochial ideologies and partisan appeal. Thus further enhances the distance between communities.

The attitude of civic authorities towards areas inhabited by the Muslims is one of total neglect, paving the way for relegating them to second class citizens. Gradually two sets of norms and attitudes started becoming rooted, one for the affluent and powerful among the majority community and the other for the underprivileged classes and the minorities. Indeed, some of the extremist organizations have been pursuing the objective of relegating the minorities to 'second class citizens' through formulation of policies and execution of programmes.

Muslims are not the 'appeased folk' the right wing bodies would like to believe. Even a cursory look at their existence would make it abundantly clear that by no stretch of imagination the Indian Muslims have enjoyed any iota of privilege. Rather what is clear is that they are not able to exercise even the normal rights and access the ordinary entitlements due to a citizen.

Misuse of Religion

A frequent explanation for dubbing the violent acts committed by the Muslim radical groups is that these groups invoke religion while carrying out violent activity. 'Since the reference is made to religion, the religion gets tagged with violence and terrorism', is how it is explained.

It is not unique to Muslim groups alone but is a wider phenomenon. Even nationalist movements and struggles for freedom seek to depend on certain religious slogans or symbols as religion strikes deeper chords with people as it has been there with them for millennia while nation-states have emerged only during the last two centuries. So Islamism with its deep roots in regional culture and ability to stir up popular support in the name of the regional cause is the most recent and most potent ideological vehicle for action. As said before, this did not happen with Islamic groups alone.

Consider the following quote taken from the book *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye Witnesses and Participants* by August C. Krey. In November of 1095, pope Urban II initiated the first European attempt at colonizing the Muslim world, known in the West as the Crusades: Herein he calls Muslim people infidels and barbarians, and he commands the Christian people of Europe to empty their lands to go and murder them — one and all — in the name of Christ, in fact as a command of Christ. The book goes on further to describe the scene... Jerusalem was conquered on the 15th of July 1099 by the Crusaders who were also known as the Christian Knights, more than 70,000 inhabitants, both

Jewish and Muslim, were slaughtered in cold blood.

It should be further understood that no one survived this carnage on the side of the Muslims, or the Jews. Babies, children, women, and the elderly all fell under the swords of the Christian knights who then went to say “thank you” before the tomb of Christ. Should Christianity be judged by such events? Of course no Christian, in fact not even a civilized and just non-Christian, would agree to that. So then it can only be fair that Islam should not be judged for the far-smaller minority of extremists who kill innocent people in the name of God.

Another point which is worth remembering here is how the killing and looting in the name of Christianity has in most cases been initiated, instituted and supported by governments and the Church alike — what would be termed “institutional terrorism”. On the other hand, the acts carried out in the name of Islam are most often the work of individuals without the support of any recognized or established government and likewise without the support of Muslim leadership.

- Some members of the Baptist Christians denomination twisted their scriptures to support and carry out numerous abortion clinics bombing wherein many innocent people were killed?
- When Stalin found himself under assault from the army of the Third Reich in World War II, he certainly knew that Marxism-Leninism could not stir the hearts of the people to resistance. He turned to Russian nationalism, and later, in desperation, ended up embracing the Orthodox Church itself as a rallying point, the symbol of Holy Mother Russia.
- The Japanese Empire prior to World War II sought a vehicle to gain Japanese public support for its expansionist and imperial policies in Asia; the sacred character of the

Shinto religion and even forms of Buddhism were invoked to stir the Japanese soul.

- In Sri Lanka, the dominant Buddhist Sinhalese, in their struggle against the Hindu Tamil separatists, employed Buddhist monks to mobilize Sinhalese public support against Tamil insurgents.
- Nazi Germany dictator Hitler, who happened to be a devout Christian acting out on what he believed, was God's plan, carried out the genocide in which nearly six million Jews were killed; he worked to gain church support for the German war effort.
- Even in the United States in times of war, most mainstream churches and clergy—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—are pressed into service to lend religious legitimacy to the national struggle.
- On similar lines in India, the extreme right forces have relied heavily on Hindu symbols and tried to fuse the nationalist causes with religious ones and vice versa in times of elections. Still worse it kicks up canards and controversies such as Minority appeasement to polarize the majority community.

Thus, religion will always be invoked wherever it can to galvanize the public and to justify major campaigns, battles and wars. But the causes, campaigns, battles and wars are not about religion. Take away the religion, and there are still causes, campaigns, battles and wars.



Tipu Sultan

A Patriot Maligned

There have been constant efforts to malign the persona of 18th century Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan by biased historians. He has often been projected as a tyrant and more painfully, as a bigoted Muslim ruler. Certain incidents such as punishment imposed on people who collectively sided with the British colonial rulers have been employed for the purpose.

Mostly such efforts have been part of historians who are out to cast the Muslim rule in India into negative light. A few instances of their antipathy against political foes therefore come handy to communalise the history of certain periods and project non-Muslim people or rulers as victims. More of such efforts in historiography were blessed by the British colonial rulers who were following the 'Divide and Rule' policies to ensure longevity for their own reign.

Tipu Sultan and his father Hyder Ali have been major victims of attempts at such portrayals. The British had an obvious bias against these formidable foes who had chased them till their bastion in Fort St. George, Madras in First Mysore War (1767). But for a treacherous treaty, the British reign in South India would have come to an end. Evidently, these setbacks only encouraged the British to pursue their hate-mongering agenda with greater zeal and see that a

Muslim ruler in a predominantly Hindu territory comes to be despised by its subjects. Though they did not succeed in their project instantaneously in the 18th century, the haze of communalized history has hung heavily over the centuries. Thanks to the emergence of a small coterie of saffron historians in the post 1980 decades, lengthening reflections of such partisan interpretations seek to smudge the fair image of certain rulers in the mainstream media and the textbooks. No wonder, more of such efforts have been successful in the last two decades with context to Tipu Sultan.

It is rather bizarre to find voices opposing inclusion of Tipu Sultan among those who fought for the freedom of India. Tipu stands tallest among them as he not merely fought the expulsion of the British from the Peninsula, but laid down his life for the cause of keeping the land free from anything British. Not alone this, he agreed to British keeping his two sons hostage with them till he paid Rs. 2.30 crore in pursuance of a treaty towards indemnity cost of the 1793 Third Mysore War in which the British had taken an upperhand. (Ref. Wikipedia).

No doubt, Islamic traditions were important for Tipu Sultan. His kingdom was called "Sultanat-e-Khudadad" or 'God-given Government'. But there should be equally no doubt that he was an ardent believer in religious coexistence and strove for the welfare of his subjects regardless of Muslims or Hindus and Masjid or Mandir. He not merely employed Hindus in his administration but had placed some of prominent Hindus on high positions in his court. He appointed Purnaiah as his 'Mir Asaf' (or Dewan) and Krishna Rao as Minister of Finance. Shama Rao was appointed as incharge of Post and Police; Srinivasa Rao was ambassador in Madras, Appaji Rao in Poona; and Moolchand in Delhi. His personal attendant was Subba Rao; His confidants were Nayak Rao and Nayak Sangana, his Munshi (Accountant) was Narnaiah and Nagappaiah was the commandant of Coorg, Harisingh was a

commander of a division in the army; Shivaji was the commander of his cavalry with 3,000 horses. Evidently, no king who oppressed people of other faiths could afford to employ members of the very same communities in such large numbers and in such key positions.

Tipu's gifts to the temples could also be explained in detail. But this short essay does not bear such elaboration. It is adequate to say that Tipu did not do that in order to exhibit his secularism as such concepts were still not current then nor were essential to be displayed. It was just part of a ruler's scheme to keep his subjects happy and not to deviate from what they traditionally owed.

Obviously, what these narrow-minded historians miss out is the larger picture of a political tug of war in which friends and foes were identified in terms of those who sided with the British and the ones committed to remaining free from the clutches of the British colonial rulers. If wars were necessary to subdue the Coorgis and the Nairs of Kerala, wars were also fought against the Nawabs of Carnatic who were Muslims and were stooges of the British. Writes Dr. B. N. Pandey in his book titled *Aurangzeb and Tipu Sultan: Evaluation of their Religious Policies*, (Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi): "If he crushed the Hindus of Coorg, the Christians of Mangalore and the Nayars of Malabar that was due to the fact that they wished to undermine his authority by joining the British. He did not spare the Mopillas of Malabar or the Mahadevi Muslims or Nawabs of Sawanur or Nizam whenever he suspected such tendencies among them."

Therefore, to dub Tipu an extremist is highly erroneous. His harshness was only towards those who had joined the British to overthrow his regime, and hence it was politically motivated and not religiously inspired.

Had this not been so, Mahatma Gandhi would not have extolled Tipu as "an embodiment of Hindu-Muslim unity".

A classic case of history's distortion was highlighted by later Dr. B.N. Pandey, (then Governor of Orissa, who also headed the AICC's History Research Cell), who on finding a reference of killing of people in Coorg, sought their verification from Mysore Gazetteer.

Dr. Pandey had come across a history textbook taught in the Anglo-Bengali College, Allahabad which claimed that 'three thousand Brahmins had committed suicide as Tipu wanted to convert them forcibly into the fold of Islam'. The author was a very famous scholar, Dr Har Prashad Shastri, head of the department of Sanskrit at Calcutta University.

Dr. Pandey wrote to the Dr. Shastri immediately and asked him to furnish the source from which the instances have been quoted. After several reminders, Dr. Shastri replied that he had taken this information from the Mysore Gazetteer. So Pandey requested the then Mysore University vice chancellor, Sir Brijendra Nath Seal, to verify for him Dr. Shastri's statement from the Gazetteer. Sir Brijendra referred his letter to Prof. Srikantiah who was then working on a new edition of the Gazetteer. Srikantiah wrote to say that the Gazetteer mentioned no such incident and, as a historian himself, he was certain that nothing like this had taken place. Srikantiah added that both the prime minister and the commander-in-chief of Tipu Sultan were themselves Brahmins. He also enclosed a list of 156 Hindu temples which used to receive annual grants from the Sultan's treasury. A Linga donated by Tipu is worshipped even today in the Nanjangud temple. Ranganatha temple at Srirangapatana was hardly a stone throw from his palace from where he listened with equal respect the ringing of temple bells and the call of the mosque. (Impact International, London, Vol. 28, July 1998)

It was later discovered that Shastri had lifted this

'Brahmins Suicide' story from Colonel Miles' History of Mysore in which Miles claimed he had quoted this from a Persian manuscript in the personal library of Queen Victoria. When Dr. Pandey checked further, he found that no such manuscript existed in Queen Victoria's library. Yet Dr. Shastri's book was being used as a high school history textbook in seven Indian states, namely Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. So he sent his entire correspondence about the book to the vice chancellor of Calcutta University, Sir Ashutosh Chaudhary. Ashutosh promptly ordered Shastri's book out of the syllabus. Yet years later, in 1972, Pandey was surprised to discover the same suicide story was still being taught as 'history' in junior high schools in Uttar Pradesh. The lie had found currency as a fact of history.

Tipu's grants of land (jagir) and gifts to temples are plentiful enough to require a few volumes. Documents discovered in recent decades from archives of famous temple at Sringeri reveal that he was deeply grieved at the vandalizing of the temple by the armies of the Peshwas and restored the idol at the venerable spot from the official funds of the 'Sultanat e Khudad'. He gave 10,000 huns (Cash) to complete the temple at Kanjeevaram in Tamil Nadu and participated in its chariot festival when the temple was completed. He settled the dispute between two sects of Melkote temple and both parties accepted his decision as final. In a campaign at Dindigul he ordered not to fire from the south, for the Raja's temple was located there. Old Kannada literature is replete with elegies to the Sultan and these have also found expressions in frescoes on the ceiling of the famous temple at Seebi (in Tumkur district in Karnataka). Ballads extolling Tipu Sultan are still sung in rural areas of Old Mysore State. The fact that the frescoes were painted fifty years after the martyrdom of the legendary ruler testifies to the popular affection the ruler commanded among his people much after

he had passed away.

A ruler despised by his Hindu subjects would not have deserved the very same people prostrating before his bloodied corpse at his funeral. But history records that even while the victorious British troops were pillaging the homes at Srirangapatnam, his Hindu subjects had lined at his palace to prostrate before the body amid loud expression of grief and lamentation. (Beatson 1880 quoted by Md. Moienuddin, *Sunset at Srirangapatnam*, Orient Longman, 2000). This should not be expected of subjects ruled by a bigoted tyrant.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar, a prominent Indian Bengali aristocrat and historian held Tipu in high esteem and appreciated his work and said: "Tipu sultan was a great freedom fighter, an able administrator and an innovator in social, economic and political sectors."

If we were to quote an eye-witness account of Tipu's adversary, Edward Moore, who was marching with Bombay detachment to fight against Tipu in the Third Mysore War, it would be more objective in knowing the reality of Tipu's regime. Moore wrote:

"When a person travelling through a strange country finds it well cultivated, populous with industrious inhabitants, cities newly founded, commerce extending, towns increasing and everything flourishing so as to indicate happiness, he will naturally conclude to be under a form of Government congenial to the minds of the people... This is a picture of Tipu's country, and this is our conclusion in respect of its Government."



WARS of Prophet's Era and Modern Era

True to its meaning, Islam establishes peace and invites people to believe in one God, obey Him in all quarters of their lives, establish justice and equality, engage in welfare and development of fellow human beings, protect and preserve Nature, not to differentiate on the basis of colour, race, caste and community and observe piety throughout life.

These being central to the doctrine, Islam fashions the human life in a way that each action of the human individual contributes to peace and order. But one could very well question as to why Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, fought several battles through his 23 years of prophetic tenure. Such queries are quite natural and need a well-reasoned response.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) preached Islam for 13 years in the city of Makkah, the holiest city of Islam. He migrated to Madinah after Makkans in general rejected his message, persecuted him and his companions, dissuaded people from listening and following him, hatched conspiracies to kill him and ultimately forced him to leave his place of birth and migrate to Madinah. In Madinah, where he found fertile ground for acceptance of his message, he strove to raise a society in conformity of the Islamic principles.

Only Defensive Wars

But Makkans, and more specifically the members of the Quraysh, the tribe to which he belonged, would not allow him to sit quiet and establish the Islamic society. These led to conflicts leading to wars. These were not initiated by the

Prophet or the people of the Madinah. The aggression came from the Makkans who were afraid that Islam would become the dominant faith of the Arabian Peninsula and their power, position and prosperity that rested on the commerce stemming from the historic house of Allah, the Kaaba, would be eclipsed. The Prophet never invaded Makkah. He merely defended himself and the city of Madinah which acted as the incubator of Islamic caliphate. Indeed, all these battles were of defensive nature. Had the people of Madinah led by the Prophet not defended, the nascent state that Islam envisioned, would have collapsed and chaos and disorder that characterized the Peninsula prior to his advent, would have prevailed.

Varied Objectives

It must be understood that all prophets who brought Allah's message were sent to different lands and with different challenges. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was ordained to raise a society, rather than just creating a body of followers. Other prophets were not assigned the same task or objectives. Prophet Muhammad had come into an age when powerful empires already existed and people were under varied kind of monarchs and despotic rulers. The Divine objective was therefore to raise a society that was based on principles rather than on dynasties. He therefore began to build a society on the basis of godliness, piety, justice and equality. He had come to the world in the full memory of civilization, hence the need to establish a firm legacy of solid principles of governance and a model.

Repulsing Aggression

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was therefore called upon to defend this society by all means at his disposal. The Makkans were not only openly threatening the security of

Muslims, they were out to create internal divisions in the society by supporting a band of hypocrites. Battles therefore became inevitable.

The entire operations were therefore designed to protect Madinah, resist the aggression and repulse the invasion. There was no plan to lead a retaliatory attack against Makkah. So the Prophet chose to organize the people of Madinah for the purpose. There was no alternative to what he did.

No Standing Army

These military engagements therefore need to be viewed in the context in which the Prophet was operating. He did not raise a standing army as was the rule then with Byzantine and Persian empire on the two flanks of Arabian Peninsula. So he cannot be accused of war-mongering. For every single engagement, he would gather the able-bodied people who could put up resistance to the Makkan fighters and other warring tribes.

Madinah did not have any permanent army and the cantonment as was the norm. The able-bodied followers mustered all the arms and meagre resources to push back the Makkans.

He did not prescribe war as a natural state of affairs. Peace was the general norm and war was an exception and had to be fought when circumstances demanded it. Going by the Divine commandment, he and his followers were to repulse the attacks and not turn the other cheek.

Look at Three Wars

Just look at the first three wars. The first war is known as the Battle of Badr. The Makkans had arrived with 1,000 strong army to crush the followers of Prophet Muhammad

(peace be upon him) who had migrated to Madinah just two years earlier. The Prophet could gather just around 313 men, who were measly armed. But such was the stiff resistance that the Makkans were totally uprooted within a day's fight and were forced to flee while leaving their dead in the battlefield.

The second battle is called Battle of Uhud as it was fought in the foothills of Uhud Mountain. Though Muslims had an army of about 1,000 men, the hypocrites deserted their ranks at the eleventh hour. The Prophet's followers dominated the field for the first few hours. But then a contingent of believers posted at a strategic post, left their place after seeing the Makkans retreating. This led to a serious debacle for the Prophet's army and they could retrieve their position from the jaws of complete rout with great difficulty and enormous cost of human lives. The Makkans again returned to Makkah with only a partial satisfaction.

Avoiding the Engagement

In the third battle which is known as the Battle of Trench, the Prophet found his men totally outnumbered and outgunned. He was advised by a companion who was of Persian origin, to avoid a direct military engagement with Makkan army by digging a wide trench around Madinah. This was a totally unexpected scenario for the Makkans who had not faced such a situation earlier. Makkan invaders stayed beyond the trench for over a fortnight with some daredevils occasionally trying to jump across the trench and getting killed at the hands of alert fighters on the side of Madinah. The strategy paid dividends and the Makkans ran out of their food and other perishables and returned to Makkah in a totally demoralized state. Exhausted, they vowed never to lead an assault against Madinah again. Thus the principal enemy of Islam was totally weakened through a series of

skillfully devised defensive engagements as well as avoidance. They thus gave up their aggressive designs against Madinah. The Battle of Trench minimized the loss of human lives.

All his military campaigns involved loss of 255 against the enemy's loss of 759. The prisoners taken by the Muslims numbered 6,564, but they were all released except two, who were charged for criminal offences. With the loss of 1,014 lives, he established peace and order in the whole of the Arab Peninsula. Tribalism was replaced by civic order. Chaos yielded place to rule of the law. Justice was established in a society that had never seen a modicum of it earlier. Arab society began to change. Three years after the Battle of Trench, Makkah was captured in a totally bloodless mission. General Amnesty was granted to the people who had fought with the believers for nearly a decade. The world had never witnessed a magnanimity of this scale at hands of a victor. Altogether, the military engagements took only 95 days out of the 8,395 days of the Prophetic tenure. Rest were dedicated to reform and peace orientation of the people. How could one gloss over these statistics?

Humane Norms

Not merely this. The Prophet introduced enormously humane norms in warfare. He asked each of the captives who were literate, from the Battle of Badr to secure their release by imparting literacy to two believers. He asked the families under whose custody the prisoners were given, to feed and treat them well. He prohibited mutilation of the corpses of the enemy side. He forbade the believers from killing non-combatants, women, children, old aged people, the disabled ones, and those who confine themselves in their home. He prohibited the believers from cutting down trees, demolishing the dwelling homes, setting beehives on fire, poisoning the water bodies and reserves, destroying crops, killing cattle and

birds and harming the places of worships of other religions.

The great historian H. Lammens points out,

‘In the Middle ages, when wars consumed thousands of men on either side, these figures (1,014) indicate the restraint, compassion and consideration for human life that Prophet Muhammad exercised. He cannot, therefore, be termed a warrior. He held every life sacred, and he abhorred the shedding of blood unless for a just cause. His life was dedicated to peace.’

Baseless Accusations

Today, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) faces baseless accusations from those who have been waging wars around the world. Look at their record and judge by yourselves who is war mongers:

The earth has undergone two World Wars in the last century. The toll of deaths in the World War I was 10 million people; 21 million wounded; 70 lakh missing or imprisoned.

The World War II killed 60 million; Holocaust claiming lives of six million Jews; US bombing Nagasaki and Japan killing 200,000 people in the first experiment of atomic bomb.

Virtually millions being killed by dictators like Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin, Stalin, Hosni Mubarak in a variety of revolutions, suppression of popular revolts and takeover of countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina witnessing mass rapes and genocide in modern Europe in 1990s.

NATO forces killing more than two million people in Iraq and Afghanistan in the name of War on Terror.

Quranic Commandment

The Quran accords importance to the Inviolability of the human life. It says: Whoever kills a person—not as retribution for killing a person—or fosters division and rancor on earth is as if he has killed the entire human race. And whoever saves the life of a person is as if he has kept alive the entire human race. (ch. 5, v. 32)

Benefactor of the Humanity

The words and actions of the Prophet rather call for naming him the 'Benefactor of the Humanity'. It was this exemplary character that made the Middle East a haven of peace, creativity and abundant progress and enlightenment for the next seven centuries.

Famous American historian H. Lammens writes:

Even at the zenith of his glory and success, when at the time of the great conquest of Makkah, the Prophet looked and behaved a very humble soul. Makkah lay at his feet and the defeated Quraysh came forward one after another to take the oath of loyalty, he saw an old man approaching him rather timidly with faltering steps. Muhammad the conqueror of Makkah in a very humble manner consoled him, and said: 'I am not a king; I am an ordinary man, humble as you are. I also eat what you eat; the same sun shines upon me as on you.'

When this most successful statesman, Prophet Muhammad departed from this world, he was the custodian and ruler of thirty lakh square miles of the Arabian Peninsula. During his ten years of stay in Medina, on an average 845 square miles of land had been added to the Islamic state every day. When this greatest saviour of humanity left this world, he did not even have oil to light a lamp in his house.

Rights of women under Islamic Law

From the start of the Quranic revelation, Islam restored the rights of the woman and ensured her full spiritual equality with man. In Islam, men and women are described as partners in life, each having different but complementary roles and responsibilities, suited to their unique abilities and strengths.

In Islam, women were freed from the shackles of oppression that were, previously placed upon them. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) defended and reinforced women's rights throughout his mission even till the very end when he stated in his farewell sermon:

“O People, it is true that you have certain rights in regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives, only under God's trust and with His permission.”

After reforming the society, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) applied strict punishments for rape, murder and killing of new-born girl child, and initiated such measures that would end prostitution, gambling, dance and consumption of liquor. Prophet Muhammad also prohibited extravagance and sexual promiscuity (promiscuity refers to the practice of casual sex with multiple sexual partners). He did not allow females to be looked upon as economic burden or plaything or object of lust.

Islam views marriage as a means of emotional and sexual gratification, legitimate procreation and inter-familial alliance and solidarity. The contractual rather than proprietary nature of marriage in Islam has a positive bearing on the status of women.

1. When a Muslim woman gets married, she does not surrender her maiden name, but keeps her distinct identity.
2. The woman has freedom to choose her husband. Her consent for marriage and choice of husband is a must.
3. Islam forbids dowry being demanded from the bride or her parents.
4. In a Muslim marriage, the groom gives a dowry (Meher) to the bride herself, and not to her father: she can demand, fix, and receive dower (Meher) at the time of marriage. This becomes her own personal property to keep, invest or spend, and is not subject to the dictates of any of her male relatives.
5. She is absolute owner of whatever she receives by way of inheritance or gift from her parents and she does not have to share or give it to her husband or in-laws. Thus, she is entitled to inherit husband's property as well as that of her parents. (Quran 4:7, 32, 176)
6. The Quran places on men the responsibility of protecting and maintaining all of their female relatives. It means, as well, that a man must provide for his wife and family even if she has money of her own. She is not obligated to spend any of her money towards the maintenance of her family. Women in return, are expected to remain loyal and chaste. (Quran 4:34)
7. A women can get divorce (Khula) if she is convinced that it is difficult to carry on partnership with her husband and he refuses to divorce her.
8. Widows and divorcee women can re-marry.
9. Contrary to the popular stereotype, Islam does not confine the role of women to the four walls of the house. It places no restrictions on women who wish to take up an occupation:

A women can work and earn, if she chooses to do so or if her circumstances warrant it.

10. A woman can earn and spend money as per her wish, she can help her parents or siblings with money earned by her parents or donate it in charity; for this permission from her husband or in-laws are not required.

11. After marriage if a husband gifts anything in kind or cash to his wife and makes her owner, he cannot demand its return if he divorces her.

12. Islam considers men and women equal in respect of the pursuit of knowledge and emphasizes that it is an obligation on both men and women to acquire knowledge.

All this is not by way of favour from the society which can be withdrawn any time by somebody's whims or fancy. All of it is guaranteed by the Islamic law which is permanent and beyond the modifying power of any authority on earth. Thus Islam protects the dignity of women. Women were given all these rights, this too, at a time when in the Western world they were considered chattels and it was seriously doubted whether they possessed a soul.

Islam regards women as precious and valuable not to be disrespected or disgrace. It must be borne in mind that the mistreatment of women, in some Middle-East nations or the or the Indian sub-continent or in Muslims families, owes itself to cultural factors that Muslims have absorbed from the native cultures, be it dowry, confinement of women to homes, denial of opportunities for education and employment and have got nothing to do with Islam. It could also be juxtaposed with the fact that most converts to Islam in the West are women. If indeed Islam would have been oppressive, why would they make a beeline for the fold of Islam?

Some Controversial Issues of Muslim Women

Questions & Answers

Q: Under Islamic Law, why is that a woman inherits from her parents a share only half of that her brothers inherits?

A: In the pre-Islam Arab society only sons bequeathed the property from their fathers. But the Quran enjoined that the daughters be given shares in property equivalent to half of what the sons inherited from their fathers. It was a revolutionary step in the then society where women themselves were considered a property and were handed down to the sons from the fathers. It had twin objectives: first to recognize the identity of women as free and independent human individuals and second empowering them financially.

The Quran enjoined that the women be given shares in property from fathers, husbands and sons and even childless brothers. The three verses that broadly describe the share of close relatives are found in Chapter an-Nisaa, (ref. verses 11, 12 and 176). In these verses, Allah established the right of children, parents and spouse to inherit a specific share without leaving the matter to human judgment and emotions. The Islamic system of inheritance is a perfectly balanced product of the Creator's knowledge of human needs.

Looked at from the today's context, it might appear unjust if women are given just half of what a male heir inherits from father. This is because her inheritance kitty includes shares of her parents, husband, children and childless brothers as mentioned above. But if one were to consider the situation prevailing in 7th century Arabia, it was a unique initiative as

Prophet and Islam were taking a step towards making women owner of assets and resources they could never imagine to own, possess, control, use, spend and invest. Let us acknowledge the fact that women were being entitled to more than half of what their brothers were inheriting rather than their share was being halved. Viewed in this context, one cannot but admire this initiative.

Now let us turn our attention towards the women's role and the justification for the share of inheritance for women. Looking from the women's role in the society even what was designated for them by Islam and the Quran was not unjust. It was logically commensurate to their financial and economic responsibilities which were far less than the male heirs. Islam places the responsibility of sustenance and maintenance of the family on men. It is for men to look after the wives, children and parents. It is they who pay for their food, clothing, shelter and education and even marriage. So women are exempted from any real life expenses compared to men. In such circumstances if they receive half of what their male siblings receive, it could be held more than their legitimate and fair share and quite just and equitable. So when we look at many roles of women, they will be maintained as daughters by their fathers, as wives by their husbands and as mothers (if they are widows) by their sons. Their financial liability being nil, what they were enjoined to receive was quite substantial.

So the allegation of gender disparity or bias does not hold much water. All it denotes is that Islam was trying to strike a balance between the financial rights and duties of men and women. While women could save and invest their assets and properties, the men were obligated to spend off their assets and incomes on their women and kids. Over and above the share in property, men were being asked to give Meher (dowry) upon marriage to their wives.

Suppose someone died leaving a son and a daughter. The son's shares of inheritance will be depleted when he gives a

dowry to his wife and supports his family, including his sister until she marries. Any additional income will have to be earned through his work. However, his sister's share remains untouched, or might even increase if she invests it. When she marries, she will receive a dowry from her husband and will be maintained by him, having no financial responsibilities whatsoever. Thus, a man might conclude that Islam has favoured women over men!

Q: Although women in virtually all the Western nations have now secured the right to vote, why is it that women in a number of predominantly Muslim nations have yet to be given this right?

A: All Muslim nations that practice democracy have provided equal rights for both men and women to vote as well as contest the elections. Women have not only voted but even headed the countries such as Turkey (Ms. Tansu Ciller was Prime Minister from 1993 to 1996), Bangladesh (constantly being headed by two famous begums since 1991), Pakistan (Benazir Bhutto twice became prime minister) and the largest Muslim nation Indonesia (where Megawati Sukarnoputri was President for four years). It is only in the six Gulf Kingdoms which are absolute monarchies and no one—both men as well as women—can vote. However, Kuwait has an elected Parliament where women are allowed to vote as well as contest. However Kuwaiti Parliament has limited rights and its decisions can be revoked by the Emir (King) of Kuwait. Saudi Arabia has begun the democratic process from civic bodies where only men can vote. The women have been promised voting rights after 2015. It is expected that these Kingdoms would soon be falling in line as pressure is mounting to accord the voting as well as contesting rights to women. However, democracy has to precede the voting rights are granted to the people.

It is useful to remember that women in most of the

Western democracies got the voting rights only in the beginning of the last century.

But autocracy is not unique to Muslim nations alone. China despite being a world power is still under the Communist Party dictatorship and no one has a right to vote.

As far as Islam is concerned, it does not differentiate between men and women in matters of political consultation. During the caliphate after the death of the Holy Prophet, caliphs were appointed after a process of consultation (shoora) in which both men and women were consulted. Once the caliph was appointed, both men and women would come and do bayt (swearing allegiance) to the caliph.

Looking into the earliest part of Islamic history, we see that during the election process of the third Caliphate the famed Companion Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf took it upon himself to poll every person living in Madinah as to their opinion regarding who should take charge of the Islamic state. This process of course involved him asking every woman living in Madinah as well as a large segment of the young people too. As a result of his efforts he declared:

I have sought the opinion of every person in Madinah
— man, woman and youth — and have found that
all of them prefer Uthman as Caliph before Ali.
(*Awasim min al-Qawasim, ibn al-‘Arabi*)

This indicates to us that even those women who remained concealed in their homes were consulted on the matter. So to deny a woman the right to vote cannot be based upon any Islamic evidence, and is in fact contrary to the established practice among the Companions which would herein qualify as consensus (ijma’a). However, things did not remain as they were in early Islamic society. Women’s status was downgraded after the first two centuries of Islam leading to their being consigned a secondary role.

Women's Education and Right to Driving

It has come to observation that Muslim women are not allowed to attend schools or attain higher education in certain societies while some countries do not allow them the right to drive cars. Has it got something to do with Islamic Sharia?

Contrary to restricting the right to education, Islam recognizes the right of attaining education for both males and females. The Prophet is reported to have said: It is obligatory for both Muslim men as well women, to attain education. In most of the Gulf States and in Egypt, women outnumber men among university students and among the degree-holders in general population. This has been possible over the last few decades due to creation of huge facilities for women. It is only the fundamentalist Taliban in Afghanistan who had been blasting girls' schools. Their version of Islam does not find endorsement from any Islamic quarter.

As far as the question of allowing women to drive cars, it is only Saudi Arabia which has sat tight over this matter. Saudi Arabia is a conservative monarchy. Its rulers fear that allowing driving license to women will lead to free intermingling of sexes. But the Islamic sharia does not disallow women from riding. In the Prophet's era, women used to travel on horseback or camelback. By this token there should not be any restriction on women's movement. Mere apprehension of free mixing of sexes, should in no way lead to a blanket ban on their use of vehicles by themselves. Whichever country is doing it; it is doing it out of its own will and certainly negates sharia on this score. To blame Islam for such restrictions is improper.



Polygamy and Monogamy

Strictly speaking, polygamy means the plurality of mates. More specifically, if a man has more than one wife at the same time, this is called polygamy. Monogamy is the practice of having only one marital partner at a time.

Polygamy, a Western Weapon

Ignorant people have criticized Prophet Muhammad over his multiple marriages without ever seriously studying the nature, manner and purpose of these marriages. All the criticisms are made without any historical support for it. Nor any rational grounds are cited for such criticism.

It is from sheer ignorance, religious prejudice or hatred for the Prophet of Islam and his unique philosophy of life, from which the critics are benefitting without recognizing it, that such controversy is raised now and then to overshadow and undermine the Prophet's true contributions to human culture and civilization.

At the outset, we must not forget that monogamy, a western weapon for enforcement of morality, is a recent phenomenon; in the middle ages, polygamy was the prevalent norm in most parts of the world. Men took hundreds of wives as a measure of social status. Except for Christ, who was celibate, most prophets were much-married men – even saints kept concubines.

In Arabia, women were treated worse than chattels; fathers buried their new-born daughters alive. Marriages were contracted for social convenience, and divorces were common and were not looked down upon.

In today's West, sexual promiscuity (Indiscriminate casual sex with many sexual partners) has become a norm.

Even today, polygamy is practiced among Muslims and non-Muslims of the West and the East, some of which are legal, and some illegal and hypocritical; some in secret and some in public. It does not require much research to find out where and how a great number of married people maintain private mistresses, or spare sweethearts, or visit their beloved ones, or simply go around with other women. Whether moralists like it or not, the point remains that illegal polygamy is in practice and it can be seen everywhere.

Polygamy in Judaism

Biblical and Talmudic times show that ancient Israelites were polygamous, some having hundreds of wives. The Talmudic Law and Mosaic Law encouraged it and most of their prophets had more than one wife. According to the Wikipedia, Prophet Abraham had two wives (Sarah, and Hajar), Prophet Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, Prophet Jacob had four wives. Prophet David had eight wives and Prophet Moses had four wives (Safire, Gibshia, bint Kini, bint Hubab).

According to the Encyclopedia Biblica, "A common Jew could take as many as four wives, and a king up to eighteen."

The practice of polygamy continued till Rabbi Gershom bin Yehudah (960 C.E. to 1030 C.E) issued an edict against it. The Jewish Sephardic communities continued the practice till as late as 1950, until an Act of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel extended the ban on marrying more than one wife.

However, it is not right that Judaism and Christianity have always been monogamous or categorically opposed to polygamy, not even today, we are informed by some prominent Jewish scholars. (For example refer to S. D. Goitien, *Jews and Arabs*: L.T.Hobhouse, *Marals in Evolution*: E.A.Westermark, *A Short History of Marriage*). It is also reported that polygynous Jewish immigrants caused the Israeli housing authorities a great deal of both difficulty and embarrassment. The position of the Christian Mormons is well known. So is the view of Afro-Asian bishops who prefer polygamy to infidelity, fornication, and mate-swapping.

It will be revealing to examine the high correlation and link between strict formal monogamy and the frequency of prostitution, homo sexuality, illegitimacy, infidelity, and general sexual laxity. The historical record of the Greek-Roman and the Jewish-Christian Civilizations is even more revealing in this respect as any standard sociological history of the family will show.

Polygamy in Christianity

During the time of Biblical revelations, polygamy was commonly accepted and practiced. Prophet Jesus was not known to have spoken against polygamy. It was accepted religiously, socially, and morally; and there was no objection to it. Perhaps this is why the Bible itself did not deal with the subject. The Bible does not forbid it or regulate it or even restrict it. Some people have interpreted the ten-virgin story of the Bible as a sanction for maintaining ten wives at a time. The stories of biblical prophets, kings, and patriarchs in this regard are incredible.

There are many examples of Christian kings marrying more than one woman. Fredrick Wilhelm II and Philip married more than one wife with the approval of the church

and St. Luther himself. The Nuremburg Conference of 1650 agreed to allow people to marry more than one wife in order to solve the problem of under-population.

As recent as the 17th century, polygamy was practiced and accepted by the Christian church. The Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints) has allowed and practiced polygamy.

This shows that the institution of polygamy has always been practiced as a lawful institution by all nations in all times, even the Prophets of Jews had several wives and Prophet Jesus also did not forbid it.

Monogamy was introduced in Christianity at the time of Paul when many revisions took place in Christianity. This was done for the Church to conform to the Greco-Roman culture where men were monogamous, but owned many slaves who were free for them to use: in other words, unrestricted polygamy.

Early Christians invented ideas that women were “full of sin” and man was better off to “never marry”. Since this would be the end of mankind, these same people compromised and said “marry only one”.

Polygamy in Hinduism

Since ancient times, polygamy has been an established institution of human society and part and parcel of every known civilization in history. In ancient India, having multiple wives was not only permitted by common custom, but was commonly practiced. Many Hindu religious personalities, according to Wikipedia, Rig-Veda and other Hindu religious books, mention the multiple wives, of King Dashrath, father of Lord Rama, had more than three wives namely, Kaushalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi. Lord Krishna had 16,100 wives,

prominent among them are, Radha, Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Satya, Lakshmana, Kalindi, Bhadra and Mitravinda.

Hindu scriptures whether it be the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharat, or the holy Geeta do not mention any restriction on the number of wives. According to these scriptures, one can marry as many as one would wish. It was only in 1955 when the Hindu Marriage Act was passed that it became illegal for a Hindu to have more than one wife. At present it is the "Indian Law" that restricts a Hindu man from having more than one wife and not the "Hindu scriptures."

Polygamy in Western Society

In Western society, often when relations are strained, the husband simply deserts his wife. Then he cohabits with other women without marriage. There are three kinds of polygamy practiced in Western societies: (1) serial polygamy, that is, marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce and so for any number of times; (2) a man married to one woman, but having and supporting one or more mistresses; (3) an unmarried man having a number of mistresses.

The West does not admit it, but in practice, it is a polygamous society. In the words of Dr. Annie Besant, a prominent British socialist and women's rights activist.

"There is pretentious monogamy in the West, but there is really a polygamy without responsibility; the mistress is cast off when the man is weary of her, and sinks gradually to be a woman of the street, for the first lover has no responsibility for her future and she is hundred times worse off than the sheltered wife and mother in a polygamous home. When we see thousands of miserable women who crowd the streets of Western towns at night, we must surely

feel that it does not suit the westerners' mouth to reproach Islam for polygamy. It is better for women, and more respectable for women, to live in polygamy, united to one man only, with the legitimate child in her arms, and surrounded with respect, than to be reduced, cast out in the streets – perhaps with an illegitimate child outside the pale of law – unsheltered and uncared for, to become the victim of any passerby, night after night and rendered incapable of motherhood and despised by all.”

The present Western society which permits free sex between consenting adults has given rise to irresponsible sexual relationships, an abundance of “fatherless” children, many unmarried teenage mothers; all becoming a burden on the countries' welfare system.

Some western men take the position that monogamy protects the right of women. But are these men really concerned about the rights of women? Their society has so many practices which exploit and suppress women, leading to women's liberation movements from the suffragettes of the early twentieth century to the feminists of today.

In Western societies, the truth of the matter is that monogamy protects men, allowing them to “play around” without responsibility.

Easy birth control and easy legal abortion has opened the door of illicit sex to women and she has been lured into the so-called sexual revolution. But she is still the one who suffers the trauma of abortion and the side effects of the birth control methods. Taking aside the plagues of venereal diseases, like herpes and AIDS, the male continues to enjoy himself free of worry.

Men are the ones protected by monogamy while women continue to be victims of men's desires. Polygamy is very

much opposed by the male dominated society because it would force men to face up to responsibility and fidelity. It would force them to take responsibility for their polygamous inclinations and protect and provide for women and children.

Polygamy in Islam

Turning to the case of Islam, we find many people in the western and eastern world who think that a Muslim is a man who is possessed by physical passion and is himself in possession of a number of wives, limited or unlimited. They think that the Muslim is at full liberty to shift from one wife or a number of wives to another, and that this is as easy as shifting from one apartment to another, or even as changing one's suit. This is aggravated partly by sensational motion pictures, TV serials, cheap paperback stories, wrong portrayal in media and partly by the irresponsible behavior of some Muslim individuals.

Unfortunately for Islam, what the Quran prescribed and the Prophet practiced, most Muslim rulers defied with impunity (exemption from punishment, harm, or recrimination) and to ease their conscience, had traditions concocted in Prophet Muhammad's name, which did considerable damage to his image and provided colorful material for slander.

The inevitable result of this situation is that stationary barriers have cut off millions of people from seeing the brilliant lights of Islam and its social philosophy.

When the religion of Islam was presented by Prophet Muhammad, the practice of polygamy was common and deeply-rooted in the social life. The Quran did not ignore the practice or discard it, nor did it let it continue unchecked or unrestricted. The Quran could not be indifferent or tolerant of the chaos and irresponsibility associated with

polygamy. As it did with other prevailing social customs and practices, the Quran stepped in to organize the institution and polish it in such a way as to eradicate its traditional evils and insure its benefits. The Quran interfered because it had to be realistic and could not condone any chaos in the family structure which is the very foundation of society.

Quran is the only religious book that says 'Marry only one'.

The context of this phrase is the following verse from Quran's chapter 3 (An-Nisa):

"Marry women who seem good to you, two or three or four, and if you fear that you shall not deal justly (with many) then (marry) only one."

Before the Quran was revealed, there was no upper limit for polygamy and men had scores of wives, some even hundreds. The Quran, in any case, restricts the number of wives to four, and that, too, is hedged with several conditions. A man must treat all his wives equally, even in love and this instruction was accompanied by an explicit assertion that it was not possible to do so.

"You will never be able to deal justly between wives however much you desire (to do so). But (if you have more than one wife) do not turn all together away (from one), leaving her as in suspense..."(Quran, 4:129)

This further emphasizes fair treatment. But in special circumstances, Islam allows polygamy. These situations are:

1. When a wife is barren and cannot bear children, but the husband wants children. It is better to have a second wife than to divorce the childless one. However, a barren wife has the option to seek separation from her husband if she wishes on the grounds of the second marriage of her husband.

2. If the first wife is chronically ill and she is unable to carry out her marital and household chores, the husband may marry another woman and thus help restore family stability.
3. Polygamy may be the solution to the problems of a society which has more women than men. This happens especially after a war. The above verse of the Quran were revealed after the battle of Uhud in which many Muslims were killed, leaving widows and orphans for whom due care was incumbent upon the Muslim survivors. Marriage was one way of protecting those widows and orphans.
4. The proportion of women to men increased considerably in the countries which took part in the First and Second World Wars; during and after First and Second World War, the world has seen thousands of widows displaying "Wanted Husbands" boards outside their homes. A solution to such a situation is marriage or more than one wife by those men who are able to and can be fair to each wife. This is better than leaving a large number of unmarried women.
5. Islam strictly forbids any sexual relationship outside marriage. There is no such thing as a mistress in Islamic society. Islam has given dignity to men. Having more than one wife is better and more dignified than having a number of mistresses. Islam holds one responsible for his or her actions. Men cannot just multiply the opportunity for sex and avoid the responsibilities of fatherhood. This is inhuman and unjust.
6. A woman who is going to be a second wife can refuse to marry the man on the grounds that he

already has a wife. But if a woman happily consents to her husband marrying again and the second wife agrees, why should anyone else object to it?

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that if a man has two wives and if he is unduly inclined towards one at the expense of the other, half of his body will be dangling on one side (as in disability) on the 'Day of Judgment'. Thus Islam regards monogamy as the rule and polygamy as an exception, permissible under extraordinary circumstances. Islamic Jurist Imam Abu Hanifah quotes that Prophet said:

“A person who has one wife leads a happy, contented life, while a man with two wives falls prey to afflictions and tribulations.”

The overwhelming majority of Muslims are monogamous – they have only one wife. The fact that some Muslims have more than one wife has become a matter for propaganda and leads to a misleading impression of the Islamic way of life. This is especially so when non-practicing Muslims are given prominence in this propaganda.

With this background, it is apparent that Islam did not invent polygamy and that by introducing the said regulations; it does not encourage it as a rule. It did not abolish it because, if it were abolished, that would have been in theory only, and people would have continued the practice as it is observed today among other people whose laws and social standards do not approve polygamy.

Islam came to be lived, to be practised, and not to stay in suspense or be considered a mere theory. It is realistic and its outlook on life is most practical. And that is why it permits conditional and restricted polygamy; because, had it been in the best interest of humanity as a whole to do without this institution, God would have certainly ordered its termination. But who knows better than God?

Misunderstood Quranic Verses

Islam has its own fair share of critics as well as enemies. A popular sport for them is to accuse Islam of advocating violence against non-Muslims. And most of them come from those quarters of the world which are engaged in committing the worst crimes against the humanity. Their cannons have not fallen silent even after having caused two World Wars, Bosnian genocide, Stalinist terror, nuclear attack on Japan and complete devastation of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Lebanon. To paint Islam in the darkest colours, their media is ever engaged in distorting the Quranic verses to make them appear preaching violence. This is done in order to manufacture justification for war against developing yet resource-rich Muslim countries.

The Quran is the principal text of guidance for Muslims. It is well known that it was not revealed at once. It was rather sent over a period of 23 years to guide the course of the transformation of a small society of early followers of Prophet Muhammad in cities of Makkah and Madinah. The audience at these two places was quite different from each other. So was the nature of circumstances. In Makkah, where the Prophet preached Islam for early 13 of the 23 years of his tenure as prophet, he faced a hostile atmosphere. The hostility began from opposition from the Quraysh and gradually turned into criticism, harassment, torture, persecution and attempts at assassination. Prophet Muhammad and his followers shifted to Madinah where they could live in peace. Several of them

were even expelled and asked to go leaving their families and property. Some other had to leave under the darkness of night fearing for their lives. Some were brave enough to declare their intent to migrate. In Madinah, they had a large number of followers who were devout in their obedience and keen to order their lives in accordance with the commandments from God and his Prophet.

But in the very second year of the migration, enemies of Islam Makkan Quraysh, attacked Madinah and the battle of Badr took place in which the infidels, Quraysh were roundly defeated by Muslims. In the third year too, the Makkans again led an assault against Madinah. The Muslims suffered heavy losses but were able to avert a complete rout. In the fifth year of Hijrah (or migration), the Makkans led a huge army of nearly 10,000 troops. The Prophet and his followers finding themselves too outnumbered and underequipped, dug a huge trench around Madinah and avoided a direct confrontation. Tired of war, the Makkans never returned. In the 7th year, the two sides reached a pact which was violated by the Makkans within a span of six months. In retribution, the Prophet himself led an army of 10,000 persons to Makkah in the 8th year and conquered Makkah without a fight and any bloodshed. The enemies of Islam and the Prophet were given amnesty. In short, this is the history of military engagement of early Islam. The Quran continued to guide the Prophet during all these years.

What could be seen from the above history is that these battles were imposed on the Prophet. He did not initiate them. But when attacked, he repulsed with full force. And when pacts were breached, he declared his intent to fight against the violators but announced amnesty for all non-combatants.

This being the historical pattern, the Prophet was guided accordingly. Now in understanding the verses the Quran, it

is essential that each of them is related to its context. The critics of the Quran precisely err on this account and tear them out of context to support their prejudices against Islam.

There has been an attempt in India and other parts of the world to create confusion about a few verses of Quran. Writers with ill intentions misquote the verses out of context and write the commentary with their own perceptions. Quran should be read in context. If anyone just chooses a verse and ignores the perspective, he will many a time go astray. The pre-condition to read Quran and its verses is to have sincerity of faith. If one read with bad intention he will not find guidance.

Those explanations and commentaries shall be accepted which are authentic, written by persons having knowledge of Quran, historical perspective and life of Prophet Muhammad.

Here we are presenting such verses of Quran which are used by some writers whose intention is to create confusion and mislead the people:

2:190: "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression: God loves not the aggressors."

2:191: "Slay them wherever you may come upon them, and expel them from where they had expelled you; for oppression (persecution) is worse than slaughter; but fight them not near the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you therein; but if they fight you therein, slay them. Such is the reward of unbelievers."

2:192: "But if they desist, then God is All-forgiving, Compassionate to each."

2:193: "Fight them until persecution is no more; and religion is for God. But if they desist, then all

hostility shall cease, except against those who willfully do wrong.”

2:194: “A Holy month will substitute for a holy month, and sacrilege calls for retaliation. Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you; retaliate against him in the same measure. But fear God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.”

The aforementioned verses from the Quran are, in many ways, an indicator of the predicament and dilemma of our modern times. By misinterpreting these verses the critics of Islam and prejudiced people say that Islam is inherently violent.

These verses indicate the guidelines that regulate relations between Muslims and other communities; therefore, they demand a careful analysis and a clear understanding by all. The verses are critical to our understanding of what Muslims should demand of themselves and how other communities ought to hold Muslims to account.

Now, the question is simple: how does one deduce from the definitive declarative statement that opens this passage – ‘but do not commit aggression: God loves not the aggressors’— to a blanket warrant for violence?

Answer: Only by distorting one’s reason and ignoring how this passage fits within the whole of the Quran’s moral and ethical framework.

Of course, in reading these Quranic verses, it is absolutely essential to keep in mind not one, but several, notes of caution. Firstly, no verse must be read out of context; all must be read in conjunction and in the light of their relationship to the whole of the Quran. Secondly, it must not be forgotten that the Quran was revealed over a span of 23 years and addresses itself not only to the actual

circumstances of a real and living community of ordinary people, but also to the rest of mankind for all time to come. What this obviously means is that quite apart from knowing the problems that confronted the Muslims at the time of the Quranic Revelation, some 1,500 years ago, we also have to consider the mindset, indeed, the outlook the Quran seeks to promote.

The context in which these verses were revealed calls for particular study; the emerging Muslim community—of no more than a few hundred people—is under siege; caught in terrible circumstances of life and death. Open hostility prevails between the Muslims and various Arabian tribes, particularly the Quraysh of Makkah. Having failed to suppress Islam in Makkah, and knowing that the Muslims have found refuge and an ever-growing and gaining strength in Madinah, the enemy Quraysh have taken up the swords and arms to destroy the Muslims once and for all.

The Quraysh are preparing for a major battle which will decide whether Muslims survive or perish [this encounter would finally result in the famous Battle of Badr. (Quran, 2:624)]. The Quraysh are, thus, committed to the complete destruction of the Muslim community, as a later Quranic verse makes clear:

“They will persist in fighting you until they turn you
away from your faith, if they can.” (Quran 2:217)

So what should immediately become clear is that God is guiding the believers in this verse on how to deal with oppression and persecution; how to deal with those that would attack you!

So the valid question then becomes, should God have instead said, “Hug them wherever you find them, and kiss them in return for them evicting you from your homes and trying to murder you”? There is no law on Earth, nor logic

that would support this, and this is quite clear in today's world where some nations even attack others based on the possibility that they will be attacked, not even waiting for hostilities to start what has come to be termed the American jingoistic lexicon as pre-emptive war.

So what options do the Muslims have? In these ultimate circumstances permission is given by God to the Muslim community to fight to defend their faith, who up to this point had refrained from fighting. Thus, the Quranic verses were revealed at a time when hostilities between Makkan Quraysh and Madinah Muslims were in progress and the very survival of the Muslims as a community was at stake.

And there are specific instructions in these verses which indicate the historic situation. For example, 'slay them' makes it clear that the Quran is referring to action that must be taken against those who are engaged in hostilities against the Muslims, specifically the Quraysh. These persecutors, the Quraysh, had driven Muslims out of their homes in Makkah. So the followers of the Prophet are given permission to 'expel them from where they had expelled you.' They occupied the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, and the Muslims are asked not to fight within the boundaries of Sacred Mosque if possible.

And yet, in these difficult, trying, circumstances, Muslims are asked not to 'transgress limits' – i.e., they are not to commit atrocities, kill women, children or non-combatants, or burn down property or destroy cattle and crop, or respond disproportionately to aggression — for transgression could lead to self-destruction:

“Do not, with your own hands, hurl yourself to destruction.” (Quran 2:195)

And, if the enemy ceases and stops fighting, Muslims must lay down their arms; only hostility is to be met with hostility. Thus, the Muslims' fight is, in reality, an act of resistance

against hostilities.

There are, then, general principles here which have broader applications. According to the Quran, war in self-defense; is of course justified against the legitimate enemy if they wage war against Islam and its community—a principle that is also laid down in the Quran [‘Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged’ (22: 39). Also see: Quran 60: 80 and 4: 91]. This is why the three battles of the Prophet—the Battle of Badr, the Battle of Uhud, and the Battle of the Trench—were all defensive in character. The last one was in fact not a battle at all: the defence, i.e., a trench around Madinah, was so good that the enemy was unable to cross it and turned back after a month of laying siege out of sheer boredom. The underlying lesson here is that aggression is forbidden, Muslims are not to begin hostilities:

‘Do not commit aggression’ For ‘God loves not the aggressors’.

Defensive fighting in the Quran is related directly to oppression. Oppression, persecution, the Quran says; is worse than ‘slaughter’. As history shows, oppression can lead to unspeakable atrocities, the ongoing defamation and humiliation of human dignity by denying people their freedom and right to flourish and prosper. Oppression and persecution degrade both the oppressor and the oppressed. They fuel hatred and generate new conflicts by denying the rightful liberties and opportunities to thrive that should be enjoyed by all people. They are the living death of the spirit inflicted on the innocent. It was to prevent just such an occurrence that the Quran permits the Muslims of Madinah to stand up and fight against the oppressors of Makkah who are torturing, abusing and suppressing Muslims of Madinah.

In a later verse, the Quran considers the nature of oppression:

‘If they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands’; in other words, oppression is continuous suppression, that denies the right and freedom to live according to one’s conscience and identity and allows no option for peace. The word often translated as ‘oppression’ is *fitna*. It incorporates the idea of persecution, suffering, slaughter, sedition and constant distress. It is also synonymous and identical with hindering people from practicing their faith. It is in these circumstances that war, which the Quran later in this chapter describes as a ‘heinous thing’ (Quran 2:217), becomes legitimate and justifiable.

It is this fight against oppression and this struggle for survival that the Quran sees as just war ‘In the cause of God.’ The phrase and expression ‘in the cause of God’ has nothing to do with fighting for the propagation of faith, which is not mentioned once in the Quran. The ‘cause’ here is strictly liberation from persecution and oppression. Neither does the verse ‘until persecution is no more and religion is for God’ (Quran 2:193) have anything to do with the domination of Islam and the subjugation and suppression of non-believers.

Rather, this expression only serves to emphasize the fruits of a social order free from the slavery of man under man, and also, it points to the end result of freedom from oppression: God can be worshipped without fear of persecution. Indeed, the phrase religion is for God implies worship in general by all Faith communities. This is made clear in Quran, chapter 22, verse 40 where those who fight oppression in ‘the cause of God, liberate cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which God’s name is much remembered and which otherwise ‘would have been pulled down’. The words used are exactly the same: ‘religion is for God.’

The message of these verses is that the final outcome of the fight against oppression should be that there is no persecution on the basis of religion. And everyone is at liberty to hold their chosen beliefs. Clearly, therefore, there is no tension between these verses and the pluralist outlook that is found in all the earlier Quranic verses.

In fact, the opposite interpretation – that fighting should continue until all people accept Islam under compulsion – goes against the very spirit of the Quran. It makes several other verses [like ‘There is no compulsion in religion’ (2:256)] seem contradictory. It also renders pointless all those verses where the Quran exhorts and encourages the Muslim believer to make agreements, and enter into peace, treaties, whenever possible.

These Quranic verses (2:190-195) are usually read together with a number of other verses (such as 4:76, 4:34, 4:89, 4:91 and 9:5, 9:12, 9:14, 9:29, 9:36, 9:123) all of which speak of the injunction to fight. But the verses that have attracted the most attention, both from the classical commentators and from critics of the Quran, are 9:5 and 3:151. Given their particular relevance here, it seems worthwhile to discuss these verses here.

The verse 9:5 ‘Kill the associators’ (Mushrikin) wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush’, cannot be seen as a command for all times. Once again, it is a specific instruction to those who violated the peace treaty. The verse speaks of the ‘sacred months’ when a truce of sorts was supposed to be in operation. But actually with the exception of the tribes of the Bani Damrah and the Bani Kananah, (who respected the treaties they made with Muslims) all other tribes in, and around, Madinah frequently violated the agreement and continued to kill and persecute the Muslims. Indeed, such violations were a common characteristic of the Arabian tribes

in their relations with Muslims. Here again, the survival of the Muslim community was at stake. Muslims are, therefore, urged to adopt war methods to defend themselves till the hostilities cease. On the battlefield too, the enemies of Islam did not play fair and did not abide by widely accepted tribal agreements. Muslims followed the injunction to desist from fighting, and would sheathe and wrap their swords when the enemy laid down their weapons. But the Quraysh of Makkah often took advantage of this Muslim policy and practiced deception, dishonesty, thus, killing many Muslims. This Quranic verse, therefore, expresses total annoyance and anger against 'those with whom you make an agreement, and then they break their agreement every time' (Quran 8:56). These are the specific people to whom this verse refers.

We now consider the verse i.e., "We will put terror into the hearts of the unbelievers; they serve other gods for whom no sanction has been revealed" (3:151). This verse has remained the favourite tool of the real as well as imagined antagonists of the Quran.

Much against what these Islamophobes and critics of Islam propagate, this verse is actually a statement of fact. Look at the context. This verse was revealed when the Prophet was confronting aggression for the second time from the enemies from Makkah within a year after the battle of Badr had been won by the Muslims. As the Prophet prepared for the battle of Uhud, the Quran, here reassures him that the enemy 'will be terrified' even though the Muslim army is unprofessional as well as underequipped. It talks about the perception in the enemy camp rather than a commandment to the Muslims.

People who are eager to see terror even in the most normal defensive action tend to read more sinister implications in this kind of text. Their eagerness to tar the scripture with a black brush can even find encouragement and instigation in

instances related in Bhagwad Gita. Gita prescribes fighting for self defense and fighting against oppression and for Justice. When Arjuna prefers to be killed unarmed rather than fight his cousins Kauravas, Krishna exhorted Arjuna in the following words: “How these impure thoughts have come to you, which prevent you from entering heaven. Give up this degrading impotence and weakness of heart and arise, O defeater of enemy. (Bhagwad Gita, ch.1 v.43-46 & ch.2 v.2-3)

Imagine if someone were to interpret these verses of Bhagwad Gita as encouragement for violence and unjustified killing! Won't such a deliberate attempt sound devilish and totally out of context? Understood with proper context, Gita makes a recommendation for taking up the cause of justice and fighting against the evil. It therefore makes abundant sense.



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